

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Coal was our life

### Thesis

How to cite:

Jones, Nerys Anwen (1997). Coal was our life. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 1996 The Author

Version: Version of Record

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

NERYS ANWEN JONES BA MA

COAL WAS OUR LIFE

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

NOVEMBER 1996

Author no: M7168559  
Date of submission: 21<sup>st</sup> November 1996  
Date of award: 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1997

# CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTERS</b>	
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> The North East Coalfield	<b>26</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> Having It All Their Own Way	<b>47</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> Colliery Closures and the Miners' Strike 1984-85	<b>66</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> The Final Phase	<b>95</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> Methodology	<b>118</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b> The Employment Effects of Closure: South Tyneside	<b>147</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN</b> Employment History, The Experience of Closure and the Search for Work	<b>176</b>
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT</b> Summary and Conclusions	<b>243</b>
<b>TABLES</b>	
1. Increase in Coal Shipments from the Tyne	<b>28</b>
2. Phases of Colliery Closures 1947-87	<b>67</b>
3. Decline of the North East Coalfield 1947-94: British Coal Deep Mines	<b>72</b>
4. Decline of the North East Coalfield 1947-94: British Coal Employees	<b>73</b>

5. British Coal Operating Collieries at 1 March 1994	105
6. Employment Prospects of Ex-miners in Two Communities	152
7. Change in Unemployment by Travel to Work Area	154
8. Duration of Unemployment on Tyneside July 1995	161
9. Estimated Unemployment by Age on Tyneside	161
10. Changing Structure of Employment on Tyneside	163
11. Occupation Sought	164
12. Expected Scale of Job Losses Overall Based on National Characteristics	165
13. Expected Scale of Job Losses Based on Known Local Circumstances	166
14. The Impact of Closure on Job Losses Locally and Elsewhere	166
15. Age of Men Leaving Westoe	167
16. Employment Status of Men One Year After Closure	168
17. Average Age of Men by Employment Status	169
18. Training and Education	170
19. Employment	170
20. Unemployed	172
21. Reduction in Weekly Incomes of Men in Employment	174
22. Reduction in Weekly Incomes of Men not in Employment	174
23. Geographical Distribution of Sample by Residence	180

## **APPENDICES**

<b>APPENDIX ONE</b>	
Survey Questionnaire	287
<b>APPENDIX TWO</b>	
Training Available at BCE's Horden Skills Centre	289
<b>REFERENCES</b>	290

## PREFACE

This study had its origins in a research proposal submitted to the Open University by Dr Eric Wade, the provisional title being "The North East Coalfields Facing Change: the Social and Economic Consequences of Pit Closures". The proposal was accepted and an Open University Regional Research Studentship awarded. The research was conducted between October 1993 and November 1996.

This study would not have been possible without the help and support of a number of people. In particular I would like to thank Mike Peel, Kel Beavan and Jim Perry of the Westoe Colliery Campaign Group; Eric and Marlene Wade, Kath Avery and Christine Clark for their support, help and friendship over the last three years. Finally, thanks to the men from Westoe who agreed to participate in the research.

The study describes the experiences of a small sample of men from Westoe Colliery in South Shields within a comprehensive conceptual framework, that is rather than taking the closure as its starting point this study attempts to understand the importance and relevance of redundancy in terms of the men's life experience. For this reason the men's reasons for entering mining and their subsequent attachment to work are considered as is the increasing dissatisfaction with work experienced following the closure announcement. This study seeks to add to our understanding of the process of redundancy and the way in which redundancy was achieved with relative ease. As Wood and Dey (1983) have noted reactions to redundancy are, of course, affected by the current state of the labour market but they are also affected by other factors. The role of redundancy payments is examined and it is found that such payments have an extremely important role in easing the process of redundancy, however they cannot be considered in isolation from other factors that served to constrain the workers' choices. Redundancy is a far more complex process than many studies have suggested and cannot be understood without considering how previous experiences influence workers' perceptions of events and their reaction to them.

The labour market experiences of the redundant men and the role of British Coal Enterprise are also examined and this study, in common with others, questions BCE's claims of success in 'outplacing' redundant miners. The men's experiences are considered in the context of Government and employers' attempts to increase flexibility. It is found that redundant miners, like an increasing proportion of Britain's workforce, are experiencing increasing insecurity both in and out of employment.

## INTRODUCTION

On 13 October 1992 British Coal announced its intention to close thirty-one of its fifty remaining deep coal mines with the loss of 30,000 jobs, the biggest mass closure since the industry was nationalised in 1947. In a statement to the House of Commons, Michael Heseltine, President of the Board of Trade, blamed British Coal's decision on the collapse of demand for British coal.

The pits under threat in the North East were: Vane Tempest and Easington in County Durham, Westoe in South Shields and Wearmouth in Sunderland. Only Ellington in Northumberland, the 'Big E' remained unscathed. Between the first closure announcement and the end of 1993 the four pits closed, leaving only one British Coal deep mine in what was once known as the Great Northern Coalfield. Ellington Colliery closed on 18 February 1994.<sup>1</sup>

The decline in British deep mining from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1990s (see chapter 3) was dramatic,<sup>2</sup> but it was greater in the North East than in the country as a whole. When the industry was nationalised in 1947 there were 201 pits in the North East coalfield employing 148,000 men, in 1980 there were 28 pits employing 33,500 men. In 1993 there were only two remaining British Coal deep mines, during the period of this research both Wearmouth (Sunderland) and Ellington (in Northumberland) closed.

The decline of the Durham coalfield has been both lengthy and severe (see chapter 1). The severity of this decline when measured from the period of Durham's dominance in the coal industry can easily be seen in employment figures. The number of men employed in Durham collieries dropped from a peak of 165,807 in 1913 to 109,721 when the industry was nationalised. In 1975 the industry employed 26,072 men (Krieger, 1984). The Durham Miners' Association endorsed NCB regional policy for the North East

---

<sup>1</sup>Ellington Colliery has since reopened as a private mine owned by RJB Mining, 1,200 men were employed there in 1994, the colliery now employs just 350 men.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter 2.



despite the severe consequences for its membership. In County Durham whole communities, which had lost their "economic rationale for existing" were simply allowed to decline (Hudson, 1989: 360). The decline in coal mining in the North East can be attributed mainly to the exhaustion of reserves in the western parts of the Northumberland and Durham coalfield and the opening of new collieries in other parts of the country. Since the 1984-85 miners' strike however, there have been accelerated colliery closures for purely economic reasons (NECC, 1986). The North East Coalfield Communities Campaign<sup>3</sup> predicted in 1986:

[if the] dramatic decline of the last forty years continues, this could mean that the 1990s would see the last colliery close in a region where 'the pit' once dominated life and landscape (NECCC, 1986).

The National Union of Mineworkers, like the Durham Miners' Association, also continued to acquiesce in closures despite a 1972 Conference commitment to a policy of 'no pit closures unless through exhaustion'. However, the issue of colliery closures became increasingly explosive in the early 1980s as unemployment grew and traditional industries in which energy use was high contracted. The twin consequences were a slump in the demand for coal and the elimination of alternative job opportunities in many mining areas. Thirdly, the NCB's goal of concentrating production in new 'super-pits' employing advanced technology implied that even substantially increased output in the 1990s would be no guarantee against serious job loss (Hyman, 1985: 337).

In 1981 the NCB proposed a massive pit closure programme, the miners threatened a national ballot on strike action and the government backed down, at this time the National Union of Mineworkers appeared invincible. In 1984 the announcement of the closure of Cortonwood Colliery in Yorkshire led to the longest and costliest strike in

---

<sup>3</sup> The North East Coalfield Communities Campaign is the North East regional group of the Coalfield Communities Campaign comprising Alwick, Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth, Darlington, Durham City, Durham County, Easington, North Tyneside, Sedgfield, Wansbeck and Wear Valley councils.

British history, on this occasion the government and British Coal refused to back down and the miners were forced to return to work. Between the end of the strike in March 1985 and June 1987, 66 pits closed and the workforce was reduced by a third. In 1992 there were just 50 collieries remaining.

The strike, from the National Union of Mineworkers point of view, was about saving jobs. As the strike progressed the NUM placed more emphasis on the social and economic costs of closure and the consequences of closure, not only for individuals, but for whole communities dependent on coal mining for their livelihood. Scargill suggested that the strike was a battle not only for mining jobs but for all working people and the future. Whether as has been suggested, (see Chapter 3) Thatcher was determined to break the National Union of Mineworkers in order to break the working class as a whole is debatable, however, the reality is that 10 years after the miners were defeated British workers have seen their individual employment rights weakened dramatically, Britain now has the strictest anti-trade union laws outside Turkey (Owens, 1994) and an increasing proportion of British workers, including former miners, is experiencing insecurity, both in and out of employment. As Beynon (1985) has suggested, the strikers and their families endured almost a year of hardship for two main reasons; the attachment they felt towards their communities and their realistic assessment of the likelihood of continuous employment in the mines or elsewhere. As one woman said the 1984-85 strike: "...was different. Before they've all been about money...This was totally different - it was about jobs and communities" (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992: 1). The idea that it was not only jobs that would be lost became increasingly evident following the closure announcement of 1992, as illustrated by the banner hanging outside Red Hill, the NUM headquarters in Durham, it reads 'Save our Pits and Communities'.

Christian Tyler, writing in 1994 about the recent round of pit closures suggests:

..it is not only coal that has been lost. A whole culture is disappearing with it and it is a loss that many non-miners

nostalgically regret. The public may have been outraged by the sight of picket line violence and fearful of the revolutionary rhetoric of union leaders, but has shown remarkable tolerance of the miner's demands and sympathy for their decline...Some of this support is based on romantic sentiment, owing more to the books of D.H Lawrence and George Orwell than to familiarity with modern mining.

Coal miners form, or rather did form, one of the most important and distinctive occupational groups in British society and mining villages and mining society have been of public and literary interest for more than two hundred years. For Gilbert (1995) the fascination with miners and their society is linked to the place of coal in the history of industrial economies and, in particular, to miners themselves and the forms of cohesion, separateness and otherness they have historically exhibited. Hall (1981) suggests that the interest in miners and their society is not so much to do with the geographical isolation of mining communities but with the fact that the pit, and the work done there, dominates life in a way that few other jobs do. However, the geographical isolation of mining communities has served to add to the perceived apartness of miners and their communities.

Gilbert (1995), suggests that in reactions to the 1984-85 strike there has been a tendency to re-imagine contemporary and historical mining communities and to romanticise them. He notes how "stereotypes of mining communities remain dominated by images of certain places in certain coalfields: tightly knit single industry communities, socially and often geographically isolated and distinctive" (Gilbert, 1995: 51). The similarities between mining communities of different types and at different stages of economic development in different societies have often been commented upon by sociologists and anthropologists (Bulmer, 1975). Gluckman suggests:

The African miner, newly arrived from his rural home, is first of all a miner (and possibly resembles miners everywhere) (quoted in Bulmer, 1975: 61).

Although Gluckman recognises that there are local variations and distinctive local features he points to the fact that mining tends to be organised on similar principles everywhere and that mining development has been marked by the migration of labour (cited in Bulmer, 1975). Similarly Dennis *et al.* note:

The basic geological facts of coalmining as an industry have made for the agglomeration of smaller communities than have other aspects of Britain's industrial growth. Now therefore, miners live in communities of a different character from those industrial towns characterised by diversity of occupation, social class, and varied social and cultural amenities. This is the basis for a certain autonomous life in such small towns or villages as Ashton (Dennis *et al.*, 1956: 27).

The stereotypical close knit, industrially homogenous and class-conscious mining community has been immortalised in Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter's 'Coal is our Life' (1956). This work describes a quite large and socially complicated mining town in language that stresses similarities with much smaller mining communities elsewhere and, the authors claimed, the town was typical of mining communities. Ashton was once a rural village with a history going back to the Domesday Book, this changed with the opening of the first pit in 1868, that year, Dennis *et al.* say "decided the town's destiny" (Dennis *et al.*, 1956: 11). At the time of the study 60% of Ashton's male working population was employed in the coal industry.

For Dennis *et al.*, the social relations and most intimate details of Ashton, and the typical mining community, are explained as reactions to and interactions with, a specific form of

wage labour. Dennis *et al.* conclude that although Ashton's life is influenced by innumerable factors which derive from 'outside' of itself: "the principle lines of Ashton's institutions show an inner consistency and structure, one with another...this consistency derives from the social relations of work in the coalmining industry in Ashton" (Dennis *et al.*, 1956).

Howard (1995) in a review of mining autobiography notes how the accounts of miners and miners' wives point to work and the organisation of work as the primary conditioner of consciousness. They also point to how the vicissitudes of mining life create a sense of fraternity that defines them as people. Howard (1995) quotes from the work of Jack Lawson who describes a serious underground accident and rescue pointing to the ways in which danger "forged intensive and cohesive social relationships between miners". Rescued and rescuers were "linked in the common brotherhood which has been the dream of poet and preacher throughout the ages" (Lawson quoted in Howard, 1995: 93). This pattern of co-operation and mutual aid, characteristic of mining work, is reflected in the patterns of mutual aid and co-operation between members of the community at times of domestic crises (Bulmer, 1975). These features of mining life are seen to be typical of all mining communities, fostering a specific set of social relations based on co-operation, mutual aid and a sense of apartness: a working class culture. As Kirk (1991) notes, the conventional wisdom among historians and other commentators concerning the main features of working class culture:

has emphasised the collective, oppositional and class-conscious aspects of workers' lives: 'the sense of difference and conflict between "us" and "them"; the 'profound sense of the separateness of manual labour'; an 'unformulated but powerful moral code based on solidarity, fairness, mutual aid and co-operation'; and the readiness to fight for just treatment (Hobsbawm quoted in Kirk, 1991: 203).

Thus the miner is seen as the 'archetypal proletarian': "Shaped by occupational solidarities and communal sociability the proletarian social consciousness is centred on an awareness of 'us' in contradiction to 'them' who are not part of 'us'" (Lockwood, 1966: 251). The readiness to fight for just treatment is also seen as a product of geographical isolation and apartness. As Gilbert (1995) has noted miners and their communities have, at times, been seen as almost "unEnglish" and their patriotism was often doubted.<sup>4</sup>

Newman, seeking to find an answer to why miners strike in war-time, suggests:

Miners are a tribe apart from the rest of the population. In this lies the foundation of their tragedy. Their villages are occupied only by miners, save for the few local tradesmen. The one-class town is disastrous to moral...The community feels itself socially ostracised, a race apart...After generations of life in a partly sealed community, bounded by a narrow view, his outlook can scarcely be expected to expand at a moment's notice (quoted in Gilbert, 1995: 48).

In a similar vein Kerr and Siegel in their international comparison of industries such as dock work, lumbering, seafaring and coal mining, suggest that miners, like other isolated and homogenous industrial groups are culturally prone to strike:

The strike for this isolated mass is a kind of colonial revolt against far removed authority, an outlet for accumulated tensions, and a substitute for occupational and social mobility. The industrial environment places these workers in the role of members of separate classes distinct from the community at large (quoted in Bulmer, 1975).

---

<sup>4</sup>This view of the miners reached its apotheosis during the 1984-85 strike when Thatcher described them as 'the enemies within' and the striking miners replaced the 'Argies' as the number one threat to the state (Gilbert, 1995).

Rimlinger (1959) in his comparative study of the strike propensity of coal miners also points to the organisation and conditions of work as important influences on labour conduct and cohesiveness. He suggests the mining environment influences labour conduct in two ways:

...first it constitutes a source of discontent and tension; second it helps to mould the workers' conduct in response to these emotions...The elements of the industrial environment which may be considered sources of tension and discontent are the nature of the work, the danger surrounding it, the economics of the industry, and its communications problem (Rimlinger, 1959: 393).

"What miners have in common is the bearing of similar psychological and physical burdens which stem from the nature of their job and the industrial environment" (Rimlinger, 1959: 404). Rimlinger goes on to suggest that all miners will experience these tensions because of the very nature of their work but that sociocultural factors that affect responses to the environment. In the case of British miners, for example, two historical facts stand out. First they were able to develop, even before the country's industrialisation, a sense of group solidarity, a certain spirit of independence, and habits of self-defence; second during industrialisation sociocultural factors reinforced rather than counteracted these early inclinations. In Britain, unlike France and Germany, the state did not interfere in the coal industry as coal mines were regarded as the property of the landowner rather than that of the state. Neither the state nor the employers accepted responsibility for the workers' welfare during industrialisation (Rimlinger, 1959: 403).

Rimlinger concludes by suggesting that any general tendency towards strike-proneness among miners, on the grounds of the industry's peculiar character may be counteracted or reinforced by sociocultural forces. Similarly McDougall (1978) in her study of Lyon workers suggests that:

consciousness could most easily have been engendered in neighbourhoods settled by workers in one industry, and in neighbourhoods physically isolated from their elite...Economic and social preconditions for class consciousness are inextricably linked (McDougall, 1978: 129).

Although, as seen above, some commentators have emphasised the importance of sociocultural and historical factors many accounts of miners and their communities have tended to stress similarities in the organisation and social relations of mining communities and have emphasised the way in which these shape consciousness and contribute to the formation of 'typical' mining communities. The similarities between mining communities as suggested above, stem from the geographical isolation of the stereotypical mining settlement, dependence on one occupation, the nature of the employment relation and the nature of work itself.

Classic accounts such as 'Coal is our Life' (Dennis *et al.*, 1956) have strengthened this dominant account of distinctive mining communities and, Warwick and Littlejohn (1992) suggest no systematic attempt has yet been made to revise this ideal type. Gilbert (1991) also questions the common stereotypes of mining villages found in sociological and historical literature and argues for histories that emphasise the constructed nature and diversity of mining communities.

As Gilbert (1995) points out, the 'ideal type' draws upon popular images of South Wales and the North East and to a lesser extent of the Scottish and Yorkshire coalfields (although 'Ashton' is a Yorkshire mining town) but largely ignores the experiences of mining people in other coalfields in Lancashire and the Midlands. Mining communities were not always geographically isolated, coal mines also existed in urban areas such as South Shields that was not occupationally homogenous (see chapter 1). He shows how the mining towns of Nottinghamshire were integrated into the developing regional society as the urbanisation of secondary towns such as Mansfield and Kirkby-in Ashfield



concentrated miners and their families into places with pre-existing social orders and characteristics. These towns were large and complicated and too integrated into the regional society to allow either the close paternalism that was later attempted in the Dukeries,<sup>5</sup> or the development of popular working class institutions capable of playing a direct role in local society. They were very different from the archetypal mining community. In the nineteenth century miners all over the country lived in large towns and cities. Many Yorkshire miners commuted to work from Bradford, Barnsley and Leeds and for years 500 men travelled every morning from Barnsley out to Carlton and Monk Bretton (Benson, 1980).

By 1911 more than a third of all Lancashire mineworkers had their homes in the large towns and cities of Manchester, Burnley, Oldham, Bolton, Blackburn, Wigan and St Helens (Benson, 1980: 83). In the 1920s as many as one in five British miners lived in mixed industry towns like South Shields or on the outskirts of large cities and the proportion of miners who had to travel outside their immediate locality to work increased as pits closed. As Gilbert (1995) notes the links between tightly knit communities and solidaristic collectivist politics have been explored endlessly but little has been written about the attitudes of urban, suburban and commuting miners.

Coalfields differed, South Wales pit communities have been celebrated for their radical independence, their traditions of self-education and "heroic collective struggles in the great strikes" (Gilbert, 1995: 52). The miners of the East Midlands are remembered for their political moderation and inability to sustain solidaristic collective action. It is also important to remember differences within coalfields. The mining towns and villages of the anthracite district in the western part of the South Wales coalfield differed from what Gilbert describes as "the more familiar pit communities" of the central and eastern valleys, even within apparently uniform and monotonous urban landscapes like the Rhondda there are important differences between communities" (Gilbert, 1995: 52). In

---

<sup>5</sup>The company villages of the Dukeries can be seen as sophisticated versions of the Durham system. Employment at the pit was a condition of occupation, the companies ran their own shops and pubs; they helped build churches, sponsored sports and colliery bands and so on (Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 335).

the Durham coalfield Chopwell, like Mardy in South Wales, acquired the status of a little Moscow, "the reddest town in England", whilst nearby Kibblesworth was known as a moderate town (Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 330). Moore (1987) in his work on the effects of Methodism on Durham mining communities shows how varying religious affiliations account for differences in consciousness and trade union practices.

As has been seen the stereotypical mining community is characterised by geographical isolation and occupational homogeneity, these characteristics served not only to shape consciousness and to set miners and their communities apart but also to constrain the choices of members of such communities. Men entered mining because they had no other choice. However, in later years and in communities that were occupationally diverse men did have some choice and yet they chose to enter and remain in an industry that was dirty, dangerous, injurious to health and where fatal accidents were common place. This as Hall notes, is one of the great paradoxes about miners:

they will describe at length the horrors and the hardship of mining. They will encourage and even plead with their sons to find another job. Yet at the same time there can be no other group that would fight as hard for their traditions, collieries and industry (Hall, 1981: 46).

The question 'why did men enter mining originally?' is raised in the case study of Westoe Colliery that, as will be seen, was situated in a large and occupationally diverse town. A review of the literature and evidence from the study suggest that a number of factors including the lack of alternative employment, cultural conditioning, family tradition and the relative prestige of coal mining were influential in the past and continued to be so.

Howard (1995) notes how miner autobiographers frequently stress the pervasive influence of their environment on their personal development and many remember how, as children, they saw the pit as representing their future. George Strong (former President of the Mining Association) suggests that in any mining biography it is essential

to understand the early environment that plays such a part in determining the future. Howard notes how one man saw the pit as having a 'hypnotic compulsion' on village children "because we knew no matter what we did that someday it would claim us" (Bullock quoted in Howard, 1995: 93). George Strong remembers his childhood in Ashington:

Being born and bred in a mining village immediately following the First World War implants in one's earliest memories times of hardship shared by family, friends and neighbours, scenes of dirty and often unkempt miners streaming from work down the High Street, the savoury smell of dinners awaiting them and the tin bath for washing in front of the roaring coal fire (Strong, 1984: 27).

For young children growing up in mining towns like Ashington, this was life. The demands of the pit shaped their parents' lives and would shape theirs. It was not only the physical environment and the everyday experiences of life in a mining community that shaped children's expectations, they were educated to expect little more. Bill Williamson shows how education was a major factor in shaping his grandfather's class position in the 1880s:

it embodied massively dominant assumptions about the status of working class people, conceiving no other role for them than that of subordinate workers...He got little from his education and expected even less, and throughout a long life he never really changed his view that being able to work hard mattered more than 'book learning'. At the same time, however, he never thought of himself as a 'dud' or a failure. For his generation of pit lads, doing well at school or doing

badly were not things that mattered much (Williamson, 1982: 26).

Williamson goes on to quote a verse from *The Pitman's Happy Times* by Joe Robson that sums this attitude up:

We didn't need much lairnin' then,  
We had no time for skyul;  
Pit laddies work'd for spendin's sake  
An' nyen was thowt a fyul.

Although children might well have been conditioned to expect that the pit would claim them someday, as Williamson suggests, there was also a sense of pride in doing a man's work. As Dennis *et al.* note "Pride in work is a very important part of the miner's life. Old men delight in stories of their strength and skill in youth." (Dennis *et al.*, 1956: 73). Bulmer quotes an observer writing at the end of the last war who noted: "More than most men, too, the miners had a sense of the past. Their fathers and grandfathers had been miners, and had talked to the of their craft...and out of the long evenings of pit talk reaching back through generations had developed something like a tribal memory" (Bulmer, 1978: 26). Young children were well aware of the dangers of mining<sup>6</sup> but the stories of strength, skill and examples of bravery would also have been influential. Further, as Beynon and Austrin (1994) point out the structure and fabric of a mining village had a way of making the unbearable normal; even desirable. The first shift underground was a *rite de passage*, an induction into the adult world. George Parkinson, writing about his first descent in the 1830s welcomed the transition to manhood:

I looked down with pity on the poor boys who had to continue at school and struggle on with vulgar fractions, whilst I should not only earn some money but be initiated into what seemed to me the mysteries and the manly phraseology of a pit-boy's life (quoted in Williamson, 1982: 31).

---

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Beynon and Austrin 1996 on childhood memories of accidents, fatalities and sheer exhaustion.

Similarly, far from being afraid on the day of his first shift, Jack Lawson was thrilled at the prospect:

The sensation of the traveller who starts on his journey to Central Africa is nothing compared to the thrilling realisation that I was commencing work in the mine that day...I wanted to see that Aladdin's cave, the pit (Lawson quoted in Williamson, 1982: 30).

Jack Lawson saw the pit as a test of manhood. He informed his readers that the prize for spending ten hours in the dark for ten pence at the age of twelve was that "I was a man and I knew it" (Howard, 1995: 94). As a wage earner he enjoyed a new freedom: "I could go out at night for as long as I liked and where I liked. Thus ten hours a day in the dark prison meant freedom for me" (Williamson, 1982: 31). Young boys would return home from the pit, then, to a new status, as men; to cooked meat dinners and baths in front of the fire and a new respect (and often pity) from younger siblings.<sup>7</sup>

Jack Lawson may have been thrilled at the prospect of working down the pit but, of course, many boys were not, nor did their families want them to enter the industry, but they had little choice. Beynon and Austrin quote a former miner George Alsop, who as a child of eleven or twelve had seen the corpse of a man wheeled through the streets of Chopwell on a cart:

I didn't want to go down the pit, I really didn't, but I hadn't any other option...I always remember my father. With it being a big family he used to point at me and say 'he's not ganning in the pit', being the youngest, 'your not ganning in the pit'. But I had to. There wasn't any other jobs available...(Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 134).

---

<sup>7</sup> See Howard (1995) for a review of miners' autobiography and the accounts of miners' wives and daughters.

Although there was no legally sanctioned 'life-binding' system in the North East coalfield as there was in Scotland (where in extreme cases brass collars were worn by the 'serf colliers' and the payment of 'arles' to the parents of a child could also commit an individual to life-long work in the colliery). Beynon and Austrin (1994) show how the system of patronage served to 'bond' men to their masters long after the bond<sup>8</sup> had been abolished.

You used to complain every day about going to the pit. You'd complain about the conditions that you were working under, and you were seeing that your family wasn't brought up properly. But it seemed as if you were shackled. You thought 'wey if I gan and get another job I'll have to get oot the hoose; forst thing I'll have to do when I gan for a job is to be sure that I get a hoose'. So you were more or less tied. Tied cottages, that's what they are...The colliery dictated our life. And this is the fallacy in what some lads say: 'wey what made me stop in the pit was the comradeship'. That's bloody nonsense to me. It was just necessity" (Alsop quoted in Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 37).

Benson notes how, during the boom of the 1870s the Larkhall Miners' Mutual Provident Association advised miners in company houses to form co-operative building societies "so that they might be independent of their employers for homes" (Benson, 1980: 109). In Durham in 1925, 147,000 miners were employed in the county and nearly 49,000 houses were provided free to miners (Bulmer, 1978). As Bulmer (1978) has noted, "If colliery owners controlled both jobs and housing, was not their power in such company towns not much greater than if they just controlled jobs?" (Bulmer, 1978: 30).

---

<sup>8</sup>See chapter 1.

The hold of the coal-owners was weakened with the provision of affordable public housing as the following quotation demonstrates, people began to have a choice:

A lot of men decided never to let their sons go down the pit. But in those days you had to leave a record of your family with the pit manager. And on the fourteenth birthday the manager would say "Send your son along to see me tomorrow". "No, I'm sorry, he's not going down the pit." And then, "Look you have a colliery house? You work in the colliery? If you want to keep your house and your job just send him along". That's how it was, you see, they had to produce the next generation of miners. I remember the last time it happened. It was during the last war and the chap was able to reply: "I don't live in a colliery house-I live in a council house". And his son didn't go down the pit (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 136).

Nevertheless, men continued to be miners and young boys still left school and went down the pit. For Dennis *et al.* cultural conditioning remained an important influence. At the time *Coal is Our Life* was written, there was a shortage of workers in the coal industry: "this was partly assuaged by the tendency of mining households to socialise their young men into the local culture and to provide opportunities for their daughters to marry miners. Dennis *et al.* report that 70 per cent of parents in mining households claimed that they 'would not encourage their sons to be miners' but they did nevertheless tend to become miners (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992: 25).

Dennis *et al.* suggest that:

Clearly the function of the family is as a mechanism for perpetuating the social structure, not only in terms of biological reproduction, but in terms of the production of the

social personalities required by such a community as Ashton  
(Dennis *et al.*, 1956: 245).

Warwick and Littlejohn (1992) also point to the importance of the family in social reproduction, that is: "the whole set of processes which lead to the formation, renewal and socialisation of a potential workforce, imbued with the knowledge, skills and values which enable it to be employable"(Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992: 91). The authors stressed the importance of an identity based in a local culture, the learning of which commences in the household.

Boys, as we have seen, expected and were expected to enter the coal industry. Neil Greatrex, leader of the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers recalls that he wanted to join the army as an engineering cadet. His mother was keen but his father refused to sign the papers, saying "what's good enough for me is good enough for you" (Tyler, 1994).

Burton recounts the tale of a miner in the 1930s:

When I left school, my mother didn't want me to go down the pit, so I went to the hosiery factory. I'd been there two weeks when I was called up to the manager's office. My cards were on the table. "What's up?" I asked. "You're dad's down the pit." "I know that." "Aye well, what's good enough for your dad's good enough for you." "So I came down the pit."  
(Burton, 1977: 11).

For others mining was simply the natural thing to do "Just the understood thing. Followed our father" (Bulmer, 1978). In other cases men were influenced by their peer groups, one Ashington miner put it quite simply: "Why do I work in the pit? Because that's where my mates work". Beynon and Austrin cite cases of young men who had a



choice and did not have to enter the coal industry, but against their families' wishes did so anyway. One man explained:

All the lads that I was going around with were in the pit. All the talk was about the pit. I was outside it. So I was fifteen when I started. I went and asked the manager for a job, and I didn't tell my mother until the Sunday that I was starting work on the Monday at the pit. She played hell! (Burton, 1977: 136).

The pit shaped women's lives and expectations too, as Howard notes accounts by miners' wives demonstrate "how a woman's life and 'woman's' work was shaped by the rhythms and demands of the pit" (ibid.: 94). Mining communities provided little employment for women, women who were widowed, having no other form of support, often had to return to the family home or, if they were lucky, kept house for single or widowed men. There was a little shop work for some, others did casual work, taking in washing, working as housekeepers for other families, or even as decorators. But, as Hilda Ashby explains:

Although a lot of women would have liked the extra work but there was no work. Not like the mill towns. Some women would take in washing or do papering, but in a colliery village there were no prosperous people either. Maybe a doctor or a colliery manager (Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 156).

In the Durham coalfield, as in other areas, this led to the break up of families as girls and young women left the area to enter domestic service, this was seen as the norm for girls in Durham mining villages. Some families had greater expectations for their daughters, but, as in the case of young men who had no option but to go down the pit, young women had to contribute something to the household income-or at least not be a drain on it. "I had to go into service, more or less like the men had to go down the mine"

(Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 159). Dennis *et al.* (1956) make a similar point, in Ashton in the period before the First World War 34% of the female population were employed in domestic service. As Ashton was predominantly working class it is assumed that most of these women would have been working away from Ashton.

As Gilbert (1995) notes, work on women's experiences in mining communities have placed emphasis on communities "not only as a set of social relations rooted in a particular place, but also as a set of exclusions and absences....A mining community may have appeared to be contained and mutually supportive, but in some senses extended to frightened young women in lonely rooms in south and west London" (Gilbert, 1995: 52).

In later years as Houston notes:

if there was a choice of other work, miners often looked for it. A boy who tamely followed his father down the pit was not necessarily seen as a recruit to the praetorian guard of the proletariat-he might just be too thick to get a job anywhere else...But escaping was never easy (Houston quoted in Tyler, 1994).

As one man said: "there are only two things that bring men down the pit, better pay and shorter hours." 'Anyone who comes down here because he likes it doesn't belong in pit. He belongs in t'bloody loony bin' (Burton 1977: 12). Yet, as noted earlier, there was a certain pride in being a coal miner and, Bulmer suggests:

The miners' work obsessed them. They loved and hated it, were proud and ashamed of it, fascinated and repelled by it...'They's more cowels won in t'Club than they is in t'pit', they would confess of their inability to leave work behind them at the end of the shift. And one man solemnly said that whenever he went to the local cinema he took good care to sit next to a

woman-'If Ah sits next a man, he'll start tahking pitwark an' spoil t'show'" (Bulmer, 1978: 26).

Bulmer (1978) also asked what men would advise somebody to do who was thinking of going into mining and came to them for advice. Thirty-four of the sample of 49 men were "emphatically against, without any qualification".

The men suggested that people would be mad to go into the pit, it was dangerous, dirty and there were no prospects. One man made the point that: "There's no need. Reason pits have been so full, there's no other work. Don't know why young lads go into the pit. They say the money's good-not worried about the future" (Bulmer, 1978: 270). About two-thirds of the sample had been miners at some time in their lives and about 60 per cent had been miners all their working lives.

When asked 'Why did you originally go into mining? the replies included the fact that there was no alternative work available (19, the most frequently cited reason) family tradition (7), best paid work (5), influenced by people of the same age (4) and the 'natural thing to do' (3). Typical comments from the men were:

No work around here. Nothing else at the time.

Like father, like son. In war years, started work with father and brothers. What else was there?

Bulmer quite reasonably concludes that this was partly because mining communities have tended to be physically isolated and occupationally homogenous. Mining also enjoyed higher status and higher wages than comparable jobs in the area although only 5 men gave this as a reason for entering mining. A third factor is that occupational choice is culturally conditioned and bound up with educational opportunities, or the lack of them. Family tradition was not the most important reason given for entering coal mining, nevertheless Bulmer found a very strong family tradition, in the case of three-quarters of his sample (32) the man's father had been a miner in most cases working for most of his

life in local collieries (30). As Bulmer remarks it would not be reasonable, *ipso facto*, to assume that family tradition is the main reason for men taking up mining. Given the other reasons cited for entering mining it would be reasonable to assume that the men in Bulmer's study, like their fathers and in some cases their grandfathers, had little choice of alternative employment in the locality and that alternative employment was not as well paid. Thus it would appear that the physical isolation and occupational homogeneity of mining communities and the relative prestige of coal mining and relatively high earnings were the most important factors at the time when the miners in Bulmer's study entered mining. Many of these men would have entered the industry during the 1940s and 1950s a time when, as noted by Dennis *et al.*, (1956) miners saw great improvements in their industry and working conditions:

In his every day work the miner has seen great improvement in the physical conditions of his labour; the reward for his labour has been comparatively great since 1939; mining offers complete security of employment in the West Yorkshire and most other coalfields. Nationalisation, a long standing aim of the miners, has been achieved. The prestige of the miner in the working class is higher than it has ever been (Dennis *et al.*, 1956: 76).

Bill Williamson's grandfather might have been educated to expect little more of life than his father before him but young men in later years were encouraged to widen their horizons and education was seen as a means of escape. For Robert Colls (1995), 'getting on' meant adopting different ways and rejecting or at least repressing one's culture. Colls attended South Shields Grammar Technical School for Boys in the 1960s and he describes how he first realised that his street was "a community with a culture as rich and strong as anybody else's...This street of families who earned its living in the shipyards, coal mines, and small workshops or factories of the town, lived coherently and, so it

seemed, pleurably". Success at school, as Colls saw it, meant the repression of identity: "who we were, what we liked, and how we talked."

"Those of us who showed any talent were pushed into performance by stories about all this which, someday, it would be our pleasure to escape from: 'See all this culture and community, lad? Well someday it *won't* be all yours.' Fail, and you stay. Succeed and you leave" (Colls, 1995: 56).<sup>9</sup>

This is a case study of the closure of Westoe Colliery, a pit situated in a large and occupationally diverse town, South Shields. South Shields, formerly in County Durham but now part of the Borough of South Tyneside, is very different from the stereotypical mining community described above (see chapter 1). This study is contrasted with an earlier study by Bulmer (1978) of the closure of Tudhoe Park Colliery in Spennymoor, County Durham, a closure that took place in a very different area and under very different circumstances to that of Westoe Colliery (see chapter 1 and chapter 5).

Chapter 1 provides a short history of coal mining in the North East. This chapter also considers the way in which the coal industry dominated life and landscape and how the development of the industry resulted in the growth of isolated mining communities. A brief history of the town of South Shields is also included which demonstrates the contrast between the town and the stereotypical mining community described above.

Chapter 2, *Having it all their own Way*, examines changing industrial relations and deteriorating employment conditions under the Conservatives. The deregulation policies of the Government and their anti-trade union legislation are considered with particular reference to the role of the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974, a popular view being that the Conservatives under Thatcher sought revenge for the defeat of Heath. This question

---

<sup>9</sup>The reasons for entering the coal industry are discussed in some depth in the interview findings and conclusion.

is considered further in Chapter 3 which provides a short account of the phases of colliery closures in the post-war period and then goes on to discuss the miners' strike of 1984-85. The 'big strike' has been well covered elsewhere but to have omitted some discussion of the strike would have meant leaving out a very important part of the Westoe men's experience. The Final Phase, Chapter 4, is an account of the Government's 1992 closure announcement and the public reaction to it. The Government and BC's economic case for closure and some of the counter arguments are considered. Chapter 5 describes the methodology adopted in this study and introduces the comparison between Bulmer's study in 1969-70 and the study of the closure of Westoe in the early 1990s. This chapter also contains accounts of fieldwork, for example at the Northumberland Miners' Picnic and a pit visit.

The social and economic case against closure is discussed in Chapter 6 which also provides a profile of the Tyneside labour market and presents the survey findings which give an early indication of the fate of some of the Westoe men. Chapter 7 presents the interview findings which are summarised in the final chapter. Here an attempt is made to relate to and compare with the findings of earlier studies, in particular Bulmer's study of Tudhoe Park. An evaluation is made of BCE's activities and suggestions made for further study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE NORTH EAST COALFIELD

The North East coalfield<sup>10</sup> occupies a triangular area of about 800 square miles, the apex of which is near the mouth of the River Coquet, in Northumberland, and on the base along a line extending eastwards from the vicinity of Middleton-in-Teesdale to just north of Hartlepool. The coal beds rise towards the north-east or in a seaward direction. The deepest part of the basin is near the mouth of the River Wear, and the eastern limb is mainly under the sea. The Durham coalfield is divided into two parts: a western exposed field and an eastern concealed field (Garside, 1971: 15).

Coal was dug from the outcrops possibly before Roman Britain and has been mined continuously in the North East since at least the thirteenth century when King Henry 111 granted to the "good men of Newcastle, licence to dig coals in the common soil of the town, without the walls thereof, in the place called Castle Field and the Forth" (Fynes, 1985: 2). In areas where coal was easily obtained it was used by smiths in their forges and many peasant farmers got a little for their own domestic use. In the later medieval period there were outcroppings and shallow drift mines in all coalfields worked today, except for Kent.<sup>11</sup> Some coal was produced for the market but it was a restricted market. There were few industrial uses for coal and the cost of transportation was prohibitive, thus the market was usually a local one. Wood was generally preferred for domestic fires, few houses had chimneys and there was a strong prejudice against the use of coal. According to Stowe (quoted in Fynes, 1985), in the early part of the sixteenth century,

---

<sup>10</sup> For detailed histories of the North East coalfield see, for example: Colls (1987); Fynes (1985); Beynon and Austrin (1994); Garside (1971); Ashworth (1986).

<sup>11</sup>The Kentish coal measures lie at considerable depth, and are completely concealed below later formations. There were, therefore, no coal mines in Kent before the present century (Griffin, *op cit.*). Coal was discovered when work started on the English side of the Channel Tunnel in 1882, test boreholes were made, almost as a matter of academic interest, in the tunnel opening at Shakespeare Cliff near Dover and a number of seams were found (Pollard, 1984).

the nice dames of London: "would not come into any house where sea-coales are burned; nor willingly eat of meat that was either sod or roasted with sea-coale fire."

By about 1500, Britain's forests had become seriously depleted, wood for fuel was in short supply and became increasingly expensive. It was also protected by legislation designed partly to preserve the hunting forests, but also to conserve timber supplies for the navy. As demand for coal grew the Northumberland and Durham coalfield became increasingly important. Nef, in his study of the rise of the British coal industry states: "The growth in the absolute importance of Durham and Northumberland as coal producing and exporting counties was one of the most striking developments in the industry during the period 1550-1700" (Nef quoted in Garside, 1971: 16).

Much of the coal bearing land in the North East was owned by the church, there were mines at Gateshead and Whickam, owned by the Bishop of Durham and at South Shields, owned by the priors of Tynemouth. Under their control output was restricted and the development of coal mining slow. Coal shipments from the Tyne date from the thirteenth century but the great expansion of the industry began about 1550. At the end of Henry VIII's reign almost all coal came from the pits at Whickham and Gateshead, in Elizabethan times new collieries were opened nearly every year. New mines were developed at Whickham and Gateshead and other collieries set up farther west at Winlaton, Stella and Ryton. In 1582 Queen Elizabeth obtained a 99 years' lease of the manors of Gateshead and Whickham at the yearly rental of £90. The 'Grand Lease' was followed by a very rapid increase in coal production.

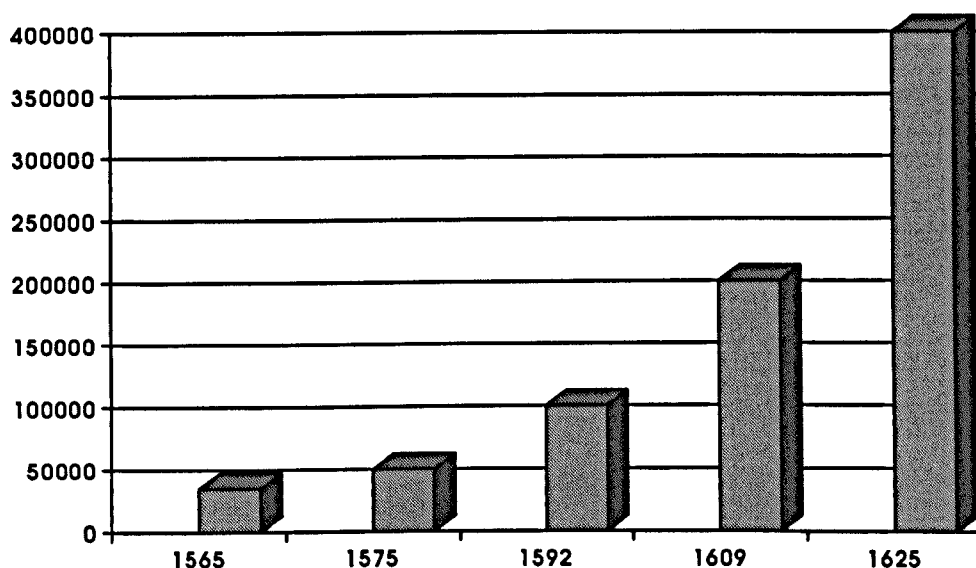
During the sixty years from 1565 to 1625, the shipments of coal from Newcastle probably increased at a more rapid rate than at any other period in their history. Port records show that they jumped from about 35,000 tons per annum in the 1560s to more than 200,00 tons in 1625. William Gray, referring in 1649 to the North East coal trade wrote:



Which trade of coal began not past fourscore years since. Coales in former times was onlly used by smiths, and for burning of lime; woods in the south parts of England decaying, and the City of London, and other cities and townes growing populous, made the trade for coale increase yearely, so that there was more coales vented in one yeare, than was in seven yeares, forty yeares by-past; this great trade, hath made this part to flourish in all trades (quoted in Griffin, 1977: 12).

Table 1

### INCREASE IN COAL SHIPMENTS FROM THE TYNE 1565-1625



The North East enjoyed easy access to the Tyne and a cheap form of transport, the coastal collier. Coal was shipped from the Tyne to London and the rest of England but Newcastle also enjoyed a fairly extensive trade with France; coal was exported for Picardy, Normandy, Bretagne and other French ports (Fynes, 1985). The industry was almost brought to a standstill during the Civil War when parliament forbade any trade

with the Tyne Valley while Newcastle was in Royalist hands. This was made up for by the rapid expansion of Sunderland and the Wear, and the opening of pits on the coast of Northumberland based on Blyth as a port. One of the most important developments of this period was the use of wooden rails to provide wagon ways on which to move the coal carts. This made the transportation of coal considerably quicker and cheaper and enabled pits to be opened further from the banks of the rivers. During the late eighteenth century a new generation of deep pits began to be sunk along the Tyne, beginning with Walker, east of Newcastle, in 1765 and reaching a peak in the first Decade of the nineteenth century with the opening of Percy Main near North Shields (1802), Jarrow (1803) and Templetown Colliery (also known as Chapter Main and Manor Wallsend) in South Shields (1805), all over 600 feet deep. Coal dominated life and landscape. Daniel Defoe visiting Newcastle in the 1720s wrote of:

The prodigious heaps, I may say mountains of coal which are dug up at every pit, and how many of those pits there are; we are filled with equal wonder to consider where the people should live that can consume them (quoted in Burton, 1977: 28).

The scene would have been similar across the river; in 1750, for example, the term 'Jarrow Colliery' actually referred to 38 pits that were co-ordinated into a single enterprise. In 1773 a square mile of Gateshead contained 20 collieries (Krieger, 1984). The North East benefited greatly from the demand for coal brought by the Industrial Revolution, contributing significantly to both the domestic and export markets. Durham and Northumberland dominated both the London and export markets. By 1826 it was estimated that all but 125,000 of the two million tons of coal imported annually by London came from Northumberland and Durham. By 1913 coal output in the Durham coalfield alone was over 41 million tons compared to 28 million tons in 1880. Employment in the coal industry in this period increased from 72,000 to 166,000. At its

peak, just before the First World War, the British coal industry employed 1 million men, a tenth of the male working population. Britain was the world's biggest coal exporter and its 3,000 mines produced half the coal in Europe, a fifth of world output. In Northumberland in 1911 one in five of the working population was a miner, and in Durham almost one in three.

As Hudson (1989) has noted, within the course of a few decades the North East was transformed from an area firmly rooted in agricultural production and a feudal social structure to one that was the centre of international capitalist production.

The transformation was a decisive and profound one, with an all-embracing impact: class relations, hegemonic ideas and political practices, and the patterns of economic activity were all radically altered (Hudson, 1989: 1).

The North East contributed to and benefited from industrial expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "without doubt, the origins of industrial growth in the Northeast of England are to be found within the coal industry and its trade with London, which predated the rise of industrial capitalism" (Hudson, 1989: 3). The Northern region is a textbook example of nineteenth century industrialisation based on 'carboniferous capitalism' (Townroe and Martin, 1992). The coal industry stimulated the development of related industries; shipbuilding, steel, railways and machine engineering and smaller industries such as glass, pottery, salt, rope and nails. At the beginning of the nineteenth century County Durham had a world-wide reputation for pottery, glass, carpets, worsteds, linen, leather mustard and nails, today these industries are almost extinct. From the mid-nineteenth century until the end of the post-war boom in the early 1920s the North East's economic power was virtually unparalleled. In the first decade of the twentieth century the region's shipyards produced 25 per cent of the global output of

ships, it was also a world leader in heavy engineering and the North East coalfield was one of the most productive in the country (Hudson, 1989; Townroe and Martin, 1992).

The coal industry, as Ketelaar (1989) notes, was not just a feature of the North East's economy, it shaped the whole way of life. The growth of the coal industry attracted new workers to the area and communities were built and grew up around the industry.<sup>12</sup> For example, Coxhoe in south Durham was built in the 1830s to provide labour for the newly opened Clarence Hetton pit.<sup>13</sup>

Mining development almost everywhere has been marked by migration (Dennis *et al.*, 1956; Gluckman cited in Bulmer, 1975). In the North East coalfield this was usually over short distances. As new pits opened and then closed as they exhausted their reserves, miners and their families would move around the area. Miners had few, if any, transferable skills and there was little opportunity of gaining alternative employment. This mixture of geographical mobility and occupational immobility left little opportunity for outsiders; miners' daughters married miners' sons leading to the creation of mining families and to the isolation of mining communities both in geographical terms and in the sense that they came to be seen as a 'race apart'. As Gilbert has noted:

From the earliest days of industrial mining, metaphors of darkness, difference and racial otherness spilled out from below ground onto the face of the earth, marking off mining settlements from the rest of the nation (Gilbert, 1995: 48).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Burton (1977) suggests, it would not be unfair to say that most people in Britain knew as much about the life and conditions of the British miner as they did of tribes in Central Africa. Early accounts of mining society were written for local consumption, for example Chicken's *The Collier's Wedding* (1720)

---

<sup>12</sup>See Austrin and Beynon, 1994.

<sup>13</sup>Coxhoe colliers' wives were required to stay at home 'to perform their domestic duties and to attend to the happiness of their own families' (Pollard, 1984).

and "by the curious for the curious" for example Defoe's 'Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain' and its account of the Tyneside collieries (cited in Howard, 1995: 89). From the early eighteenth century works in this genre, what Rosalind Williams calls the 'tradition of British travel literature', described mining areas as distinctive and disturbing, populated by "dark demonic figures" (Gilbert, 1995: 47). Williams (cited in Gilbert, 1995), notes how as late as the 1930s' commentators such as Priestly and Orwell were still describing miners and their towns and villages as isolated and somehow strange. Malcom Pitt, in his book on the Kent coalfield describes how, when the collieries first opened, notices went up in Deal saying 'rooms to let-miners need not apply' or 'no miners or dogs allowed'. Another famous newspaper headline read: 'Miner in fight with man' (quoted in Hall, 1981: 46) For Hall (1981) the nineteenth-century image of the irresponsible, hard-drinking, foul-mouthed miner lives on today. Allen suggests that the popular image is of:

...hard, unrefined men, distinct and separate from other workers, hewing in mysterious dungeons of coal; of dirty, strange men, in some ways frightening, and for this reason repellent, yet attractive because they are masculine and sensuous (quoted in Tyler, 1994).

During the nineteenth century more sociologically based accounts appeared, for example the reports of Royal Commissions and Engels' *The Condition of the Working Classes in England* (1987). These too presented a negative portrayal of mining communities<sup>14</sup> and, on the whole, tended to reinforce the idea of miners as a race apart. For example, Engels (1987) wrote:

As to the education and morals of the mining population...in the coal districts, in general, they are...reported as on an

---

<sup>14</sup>During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries life accounts of miners began to appear in print. These, Howard suggests, "were clearly intended to counter the negative accounts of the group and to inspire pride and activism within the communities" (Howard, 1995: 90).

excessively low plane. The workers live in the country in neglected regions, and if they do their weary work, no human being outside the police force troubles himself about them. Hence, and from the tender age at which children are put to work, it follows that their mental education is wholly neglected...few can read and still fewer write...The categories of religion are known to them only from their swear words. Their morality is destroyed by their work itself. That the overwork of all miners must engender drunkenness is self-evident. As to their sexual relations, men, women and children work in the mines, in many cases wholly naked, and in most cases, nearly so...and the consequences in the dark, lonely mines may be imagined. The number of illegitimate children is here disproportionately large and indicates what goes on among the half-savage population below ground (Engels, 1987: 255).

An official report of 1842 noted the separateness of the typical pit village, and illustrates how other classes reacted to the arrival of the miners and their families:

Wherever a colliery has been opened a large village or town has been instantly built close to it, with a population almost exclusively of the colliery people, beer-shop people, and small shopkeepers. If, by chance, there were members of other classes in the vicinity, they made haste to leave, even if they were members of long-established families (Pollard, 1984: 18).

Pollard goes on to describe the scene when a new colliery opened in the North East:

the erection of long rows of unpicturesque cottages, the arrival of wagons piled with ill-assorted furniture, the immediate importation of the very scum and offscouring of a peculiar, mischievous and unlettered race...The arrival of the pitmen is a signal for the departure of the gentry and henceforward few indeed visit that district but they who traffic with the coals or the colliers (Pollard, 1984:19).

Colls (1987), also notes that the ruling class chose not to be near mining villages and suggests a distaste for the pit mingled with ignorance about its workings. In 1786 the pit had been suggested as a suitable body and soul punishment for convicts. "There the convict would be removed from view; the blackness would invite reflection on his soul, the labour would punish his body, and he would 'Sigh in Perpetual Darkness and the whole length of [his] Slavery, will be One mournful Alternative, of insensibility and Labour'" (Colls, 1987: 123).

The rest of the population began to fear the miners, they seldom saw or heard about the men who spent their lives underground except during the sudden outbreaks of rioting or strikes, and so came to regard them as a black and heathen tribe living among the civilised world but apart from it (Burton, 1977). This idea of the miners as a different breed, a breed which provided the kind of labour force the coal owners required is reflected in a submission to the Poor Law Commission of 1834 to the effect that in Durham:

Pitmen must be born and bred to their work from childhood. Their number cannot be recruited from any other class...the increase of the pit population comes solely from internal sources (Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 27).

The view of miners and their families as a race apart is also evident in the letters of John Buddle, colliery viewer and right hand man to Lord Londonderry, a nineteenth century

Durham coal owner. In the North East the old aristocratic order sought to exploit the opportunities of capitalist production whilst maintaining critical elements of the old paternal order (Beynon and Austrin, 1994). Buddle's writings clearly illustrate the pattern of dependency central to the paternal system and the role of patronage in subjugating and pacifying the workforce. The following extract was based upon a reference to the miners as his Lordship's 'Little black family':

...if the high aristocracy of the country were more frequently to find occasion to bring themselves into personal intercourse with the working classes and show them a little countenance and kindness, Chartism and all the other absurd causes of political excitement would evaporate like the white mist in September before the sunbeams (Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 27).

The dependence of mining communities on one employer is something noted by E.T. Thompson who compares the mine to the plantation:

The special dependence that imported labour has upon the providence of the employer subjects it, perhaps even in the face of liberal legislation to some degree of compulsion greater than that applied to native or 'free' labour. All the way from slavery to vaguely felt and undefined 'forced' labour, the mine and the plantation tend to get similar reputations with respect to the status of their labour (quoted in Bulmer, 1975: 61).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>The "special dependence upon the providence of the employer" is examined in Beynon and Austrin's history of the Durham Miners, 'Masters and Servants' (1994). Of central importance in this work "is the presence of an aristocratic, capitalist class employing miners as bonded labourers" (Beynon and Austrin, 1995: 5). Like Thompson, Beynon and Austrin note the similarities between slavery and the employment relation in coal mining in County Durham. The authors cite Storobin who commented that during the slave period in the United States "black bondsmen, both owned and hired, constituted the chief source of



Beynon and Austrin also note an allusion to slave plantation systems in the Southern states of the USA and quote from a letter Buddle wrote to Londonderry at the time of the Coal Commissioner's enquiries that led up to the 1842 Coal Act:

...what we have to guard against is any obvious legislature interference in the established customs of our particular race of pitmen. The stock can only be kept up by breeding - it never could be reinvented from an adult population...but if our meddling, morbid, humanity mongers get it infused into their heads that it is cruel and unnatural slavery to work in the dark and to be imprisoned twelve hours a day in the pit, a screw in the system will be let loose (Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 27).

The Northumberland and Durham miners were bonded<sup>16</sup> to their employers in much the same way as slaves were bonded to their masters and Buddle's determination was to keep the various screws of the system tight. "A little countenance and kindness" might mollify the workforce but he strongly opposed any legislation that might free labour in the coal mines. The bond had its origins in the traditional method of bonding farm labourers and servants, it was fought long and hard by the Northumberland and Durham miners and was finally abolished in 1872 (see Fynes, 1985; Beynon and Austrin, 1994).

Under the Durham system employers also provided welfare for their workforce and their families. The new coal owners extended the Durham system, which had provided houses and coal to include free medical attention, schooling and education, they gave dances and

---

mine labour". In County Durham, the authors note, "the miners were not 'blacks', but neither were they free. They too were bonded" (ibid: 29).

<sup>16</sup>Engels explains the bonding system thus: "In many districts in the North of England, it is customary to engage the workers by the year; they pledge themselves to work for no other employer during that time, but the mine-owner by no means pledges himself to give them work, so that they are often without it for months together, and if they seek elsewhere, they are sent to the treadmill for six weeks for breach of contract...And to complete the slavery of these enthralled workers nearly all the Justices of the Peace in the coal districts are mine-owners themselves or relatives or friends of mine owners and possess almost unlimited power...It is almost beyond conception how these poor coal miners have been plundered and tyrannised over by the Justices of the Peace acting as judges in their own cause" (1987: 256).

organised flower shows, opened halls and schools and made donations to colliery bands.

As Beynon and Austrin (1994) note:

To the extent that this provision was accompanied by the encouragement of other practices among the pitmen (allotments, pigeon fancying and so on) it can also be seen as fitting into a complex system of regulation and control. Within this system, the miners and their families obtained certain advantages; but these were entirely dependent upon acceptance of the defined rights and duties of the coal owners' society (Beynon and Austrin, 1994: 22).

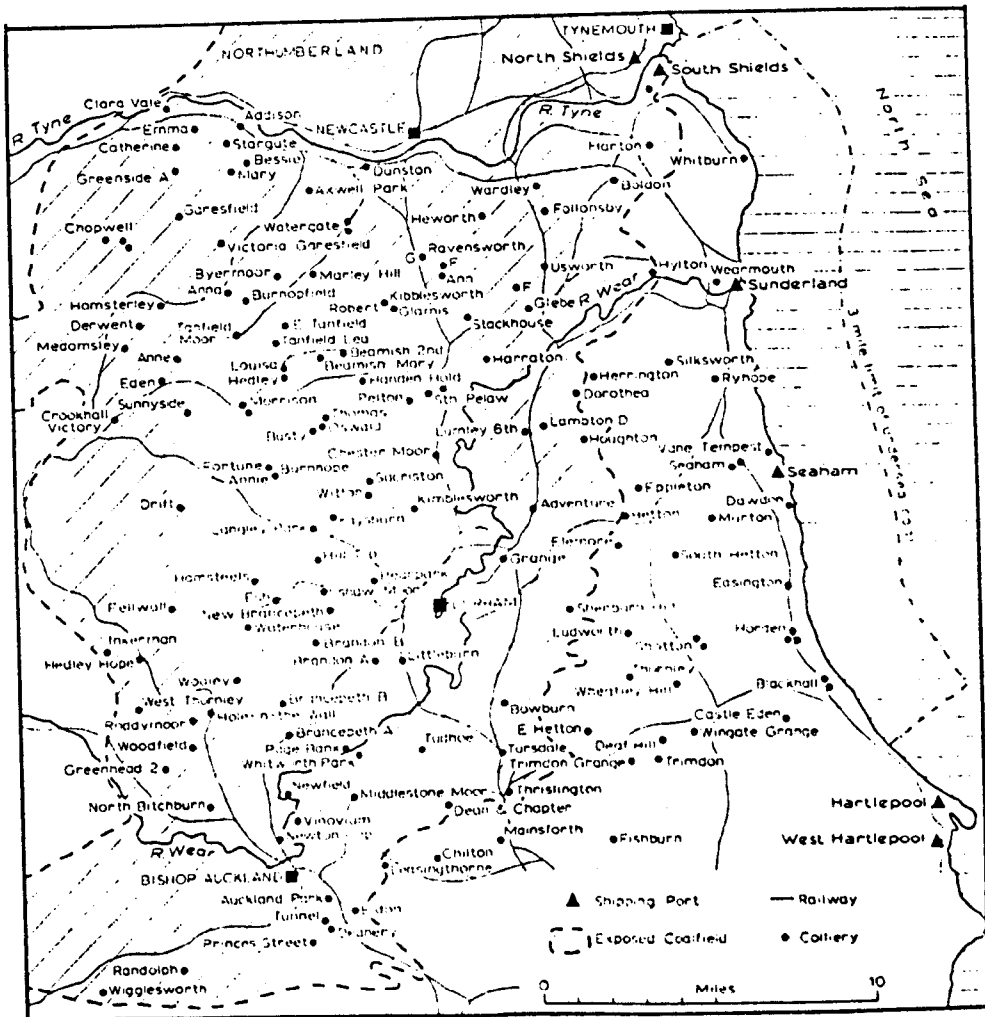
The Durham coalfield, then, had its own particular set of social relations and was distinguished, "as an area of Britain with its own particular character, by the existence of a large number of mining or former mining settlements dispersed over the county, (see map below) and by the predominance of the working class in the population" (Bulmer, 1978: 17). Bulmer goes on to note that at the time of his study "Small and medium-sized mining and former mining settlements, where formerly (if no longer) work and non-work ties were closely integrated, remain the most unusual feature of social structure in County Durham" (Bulmer, 1978: 23). Durham mining communities, as seen above, can be seen to be typical in the sense that they were geographically isolated, occupationally homogenous and dependent upon the "providence of the employer" (Thompson quoted in Bulmer, 1978: 61). In the typical mining settlement more than two-thirds of the male working population were miners, and numerically miners formed the dominant occupation in the area. As late as 1946 Benney described the Durham coalfield thus:

There are a hundred and ten villages and towns with a predominantly mining population scattered fairly equally over the five hundred square miles of this county (Benney in Bulmer, 1978).

Spennymoor in south west Durham, where Bulmer carried out his study of the closure of Tudhoe Park, was a typical mining town. Bulmer suggests it was a close-knit, occupationally homogenous and class conscious mining community. Coal mining originally began in Spennymoor in the 1860s to supply coal to the Tudhoe iron works, even as late as the mid 1960s there were 9 pits within four miles of Spennymoor town centre. However, as noted in the introduction, there were differences both between and within coalfields and the Durham coalfield was no exception.

### The Durham Coalfield

Map showing collieries operating in 1942



Source: Garside, 1971.

As Bulmer has noted: "Work in the mining community is dominant. The locality is centred on the pit, and the community is to a large degree occupationally homogenous though there are a number of exceptions to this, where the pit is or was sited in or near a conurbation-for example, the Rising Sun Colliery in Wallsend, Monkwearmouth Colliery in Sunderland, and Westoe Colliery in South Shields" (Bulmer, 1978: 26).

South Shields occupies the north-eastern angle of what was the County of Durham and is bound on the east by the North Sea and on the west and north-west by the Tyne. South Shields' first major source of income was the manufacture of salt, this trade was probably established in the thirteenth century to preserve fish landed at Shields and so ensure a supply of fish to the Monastery and the public during Lent (Hodgson, 1924). By the beginning of the sixteenth century South Shields had gained considerable importance as a port and South Shields' fisheries and salt-making continued to flourish. At the beginning of the nineteenth century South Shields had a population of 11,000 (compared with 33,000 in Newcastle and 12,000 in Sunderland). During the census period 1881-1891 the total population rose by 38 per cent to 78,391, a larger proportional increase than any other town in the UK with the exception of Cardiff. Although the salt trade had declined new, and not so new, industries developed. These included a number of glass works, and chemical works, ship-yards and repair-yards. As the demand for wooden ships declined the Shields' shipbuilders were quick to adapt themselves to building iron steamers. South Shields' importance as a shipping port had grown with nearly 300 ships belonging to the port, mainly employed in the coal trade. There is no proper account of the development of the coal industry in South Shields before the introduction of the steam-engine (which allowed pits to be sunk at much deeper depths) but it is known that shallow outcrops were worked from the thirteenth century and that in 1618 a colliery about 90 feet deep was working the Monkton seam at Hebburn. Between 1792 and 1794 the Hebburn Colliery was opened. In 1805 the Chapter Main colliery (also known as the Manor Wallsend pit and, more commonly as Templetown) near South Shields was won and

worked by Simon Temple who had opened Jarrow Colliery in 1803. In 1822 work began on the St Hilda Colliery in South Shields that opened in 1825.

St Hilda's Colliery, as the WCCG (1994) note, is probably most famous for the terrible explosion of 1839 that killed 51 workers, the youngest being nine years old. At a public meeting following the accident the South Shields Committee for the Prevention of Accidents in Mines was appointed. Its remit was to consider "the frequent occurrence of these melancholy events, with a view to enquire if any and what means can be devised for their prevention" (Hodgson, 1903: 378). The Committee's detailed investigations took three years to complete and their report became a text-book for the scientific mine-manager. Almost all the Committees' recommendations were subsequently enforced by Parliament.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1840s St Hilda Colliery was acquired by the Harton Coal Company which sank Harton Colliery (1845) and Boldon Colliery (1869). The sinking of Whitburn Colliery was commenced by the Whitburn Coal Company in 1874 but the presence of quicksand and water (12,000 gallons a minute) made the operation exceptionally difficult and the first coal was not won until 1879. In 1891 the Harton Coal Company bought Whitburn, at the beginning of this century the Company employed 10,000 men in the 4 collieries they owned until nationalisation. Whitburn's workings extended a considerable distance under the sea and it was intended to work the coal seaward of the fault in the St Hilda Pit from a new colliery at the Bents (near the coast). The new shaft, sunk in 1909, was to be used for man riding while coal continued to be drawn from St Hilda. The pit had all

---

<sup>17</sup> Following the St Hilda explosion and many similar incidents elsewhere Lord Ashley (later Lord Shaftesbury) initiated a Joint Committee to inquire into safety in the mines and, particularly, into the employment of children. In 1842 The Mines Act was passed. This, prohibited: the employment of women and girls and boys under the age of ten underground; the employment of boys under fifteen in charge of winding gear and the paying of wages in public houses. The idea of a mines inspectorate had been widely canvassed but the Government had been reluctant to intervene, This was finally achieved, albeit after a number of disasters in the 1840s, in 1850. The Coal Mines Inspection Act 1850 provided for statutory inspection of the mines and imposed minimum standards of lighting and ventilation. This was something less than the miners had wished for, only 4 inspectors were appointed to cover the whole of Britain and the mine-owners were under no obligation to follow their recommendations (Burton, 1977:116).

electric power, this, it was hoped, would reduce the noise so that promenaders enjoying the newly laid out parks and sea front would not be disturbed.<sup>18</sup> This new colliery was originally known as Bent House Colliery, then as the Westoe pit of St Hilda Colliery.

Coal continued to be produced at St Hilda until 1940. As most of the coal produced at the pit was exported to Italy it was decided to close the pit when Italy entered the war. A thousand men and boys were made redundant, some were able to find work at Harton, Whitburn and Boldon and some of the men moved to other parts of the country. The Harton Coal Company, believing that the Durham coalfield would enjoy better times again in the future, pledged that the pit would not be abandoned. A small workforce was retained to maintain the pit. After nationalisation it was decided to re-open the pit as Westoe Colliery, the Westoe Shaft was used for coal drawing and man riding and the Hilda Shaft for ventilation and occasional man riding.

Although Westoe was re opened after the war the decline of the Durham coalfield continued. As Bulmer (1978) notes, the decline of mining has been a national phenomenon but the region's dependence on the coal industry meant it had more serious effects in the North East. For Atkinson:

Coal was the making of the North East in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and has been its biggest tragedy in the mid-twentieth...If economic security lies in diversification, then the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the North East heading inevitably towards disaster. Losing industry after industry, till eventually too much depended on

---

<sup>18</sup>Writing in the 1930s Johnson and Aughton (reference unknown) noted that within recent years "South Shields has become a popular seaside resort and the Corporation have spent considerable sums of money in improving and developing the very fine sea front..during the summer thousands of visitors are attracted to the town".

coal mining and shipbuilding (Atkinson quoted in Ketelaar, 1989: 2).<sup>19</sup>

Durham and Northumberland's supremacy as coal producers had begun to be challenged with the introduction of the railway in the mid-nineteenth century. This was more than compensated for by the removal of export duties in 1850 that allowed the northern export trade to expand. Production and employment in the Durham coalfield increased steadily between 1880 and 1913. The First World War, however, brought a definitive end to coalmining prosperity in the region (Krieger, 1984). World capacity in the coal industry was increasing while world demand was decreasing, this resulted in surplus capacity. The impact of depression during the 1920s and 1930s served to emphasise these tendencies, coal exports declined as did domestic demand in staple coal consuming industries. Total North East coal exports in 1925 were 4.2m. tons fewer than in 1924. As demand for coal declined and export markets for northern coal failed, it became cheaper for owners to write off collieries rather to invest in productivity improvements. As Krieger notes: "A capitalist strategy which once again focused on restriction of output in response to failing market conditions led in the inter-war period to the worst incidence of closures in the history of the North East. In Durham, in eleven months from 1925 to 1926, 42 pits were closed by the private coal owners" (Krieger, 1984: 104).<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s there was serious unemployment in County Durham and the North East as a whole, some parts of the region however, were affected more severely than others. In 1932, for example more than half the south west Durham's insured population was unemployed and it was only Consett's ability to withstand the depression that prevented the unemployment rate in north west Durham from averaging over 60 per cent. Stanley, Lanchester, Shildon and Bishop Auckland had an unemployment rate exceeding 60 per cent in 1932 and five others, Wolsingham, Crook,

---

<sup>19</sup>See Hudson, 1989; 1986; Beynon, Hudson and Sadler, 1986; Krieger, 1979 and Bulmer, 1978 on nationalised industry policies and regional change.

<sup>20</sup>See Daysh, Symonds *et al* in Bulmer (1978) on Inter-war unemployment in West Durham, 1929-39.

Cockfield, Chopwell and Spennymoor had rates exceeding 40 per cent. An unemployed miner from Crook recalled his experience of depression:

It's just over seven years since I was stood off and we've lived on about thirty-six bob during that time, that's me, the wife and six kids. The rent's not bad, eight and six, but it's replacing breakages, clothing, extra nourishment for the kids and furniture that we find difficult to get. I've a bit of an allotment that brings us potatoes and cabbages but we don't often get meat...The worst thing of all is that you get used to it (Garside, 1971: 284).

As Bulmer notes "Measured in terms of unemployment rates, the incidence of death and disease, housing, or conditions of income maintenance, County Durham was a depressed, deprived and distressed area between the wars" (Bulmer, 1978: 152).

The Second World War finally provided a solution to the problem of unemployment. The problem of the coal industry now was one of finding workers not jobs as men left for fighting, Bevin introduced a scheme to recruit young men to the pits by offering mining as an alternative to the armed services. As Burton suggests it was an indication of general attitudes towards the coal mining industry that few men could be found who preferred the coal-face to the front (Burton, 1977).

The war brought other changes to the coal industry as the growth of national negotiations necessitated a much stronger central trade union organisation than that provided by the existing loose federation of district mining associations.<sup>21</sup> The question of the reorganisation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain again came into prominence as the need for effective representation in national negotiations became more obvious (Garside, 1971). In 1943 Federation delegates were told:

---

<sup>21</sup>See Garside (1971) for a detailed History of the Durham Miners and the formation of the national union.



Has not the war experience taught us...that you have only been able to get satisfaction from a national angle and on a national basis?...The industry is tending not towards control by private enterprise, but towards public or state ownership. We happen to be the only industry in this country at the present time who have the assurance of Parliament that when this war is over they will discuss in Parliament the future of the mining industry and the organisation necessary in the country for the mining industry. I submit to delegates that if when that discussion takes place in Parliament we are divided into districts...we will not be able to bring to bear upon the people of this country, through our Members of Parliament, the force we could bring if we were organised into one Miners' Union (Watson quoted in Garside, 1971: 383).

On 1 January 1945 the National Union of Mineworkers was finally established, with the former Durham Miners' Association becoming the Durham Area of the NUM.

The end of the war brought a coal-production crisis and this was quickly viewed by the miners and the public at large as a test of the efficacy with which the newly elected Labour Government could tackle the industrial problems of the post-war economy. For Garside the production crisis and the advent of Labour to power once more brought the nationalisation of the industry to the fore. In Durham meetings were convened between management and workmen at every Lodge in the County "to help foster increased coal output and thus, as they later claimed, 'expedite our claim for the nationalisation of the industry'" (Garside, 1971: 381).

The miners' determination to rid the industry of private ownership sprang from their belief that under nationalisation profits could be pooled, uniform rates of wages paid

throughout the country and any surplus used for industrial reorganisation. In this way the disparities in costs, profitability and living standards between the coalfields could be substantially reduced. In Durham, the marked variability in the level of district proceeds, and the tendency towards increased costs and low productivity emphasised the worst evils of district autonomy and strengthened the workmen's resistance to any attempt at economy or reorganisation which fell short of public ownership of the mines (Garside, 1971: 61).

Within six months of Labour taking office a Bill was introduced to nationalise the coal industry, the Bill received Royal Assent on 12 July 1946, the eve of the first post-war Durham Miners' Gala.

Durham miners bitter experience of the coal industry under private ownership served to increase their determination to make nationalisation a success. In the immediate post war period demand for coal was high but the rationalisation of an industry that had become grossly inefficient under private ownership would lead to many closures (see chapter 3).

The mood in 1947, however was one of optimism, as Garside notes:

Implicit in the whole proceedings was the assumption that the [National Coal] Board's activities were at least destined to be implemented in a context psychologically favourable to the miner. The immediate problems of the post-war economy, especially the search for full employment, were in large part instrumental in effecting the change in industrial ownership for which the miners had campaigned for so long (Garside, 1971: 389).

On 1 January 1947, vesting day, the industry passed into public ownership and more than 200 collieries in Durham, Northumberland and Cumberland became the responsibility of The Northern Divisional Coal Board. The nationalisation of the coal industry, a long time aim of the miners, was celebrated by nearly every Lodge in County Durham and at each pit a notice was displayed which read 'This colliery is now managed by the National Coal Board on behalf of the people' (Garside, 1971).

## CHAPTER TWO

### HAVING IT ALL THEIR OWN WAY

When I see Ma Thatcher talking about her nuclear power stations, I know what she really means. She wants to replace dependency on coal with nuclear power because she wants to bust the power of the miners. Once she's done that, she's destroyed the heart of the working class. That's what she's all about. Make no mistake about it. They want to break us. Then they'll have it all their own way won't they? (Seabrook in Crick, 1981: 15).

The miners were as beloved by the most notoriously sentimental in the labour movement as they were hated by the bowler hats in the City and the pinstriped zealots in the Cabinet. Taking them on was a quite simple calculation; defeat and humiliate the trade union's 'Brigade of Guards' and the rest will lie down and play dead....These were indeed to be New Times, but not the kind envisaged by the political toddlers from the end of history, death of socialism, birth of the post-modern illusion kindergarten. These times would come to be characterised by the 'management's right to manage', telephone digit salaries for the chairmen of privatised natural resources and the abolition of wages councils; the return of mass unemployment and the emergence of Guinness as a cure for dementia; the marketing of UK plc as the home of low wages and the strictest anti-trade union legislation outside Turkey (Owens, 1994: 3).

The Conservative government that came to power in 1979 challenged all the orthodoxies accepted to a greater or lesser degree by post-war governments. The operation of long-established institutions was questioned and for Millward *et al.*: "nowhere was that questioning more vigorous and more challenging than in the field of employee relations" (Millward *et al.*, 1992: 349).

From the end of the Second World War until the mid-1970s, the consensus in advanced industrial societies was that an effective floor of employment rights was both socially and economically beneficial. Decent working conditions and standards of pay were regarded as having a central role to play both in reducing exploitation and poverty and in encouraging the more productive use of labour (IER, 1995). In Britain, public policy on industrial relations up to 1979 enjoyed a considerable degree of continuity and consensus. This consensus upheld: "a belief in a minimum degree of State and legal interference in industrial relations, or the voluntarist tradition,<sup>22</sup> the involvement of the TUC (Trades Union Congress) and the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) in government management of the economy; the commitment to full employment policies; and the public support for collective bargaining" (Farnham and Pimlott, 1990: 240). Although, of course, conditions differed within and between industries, for thousands of skilled and semi-skilled workers the 1960s and 1970s were years of significant material advance (Bélanger and Evans, 1988; Lyddon, 1994; cited in Edwards, 1995).

The Conservative Government almost completely rejected the search for national compromise in industrial relations that had characterised the policy of all parties since 1940 and, arguably, since the early twentieth century. Further, the Conservative governments of the 1980s introduced a series of tough anti-union legislation, marking the

---

<sup>22</sup> In Britain the voluntary regulation of employment was more important than the law. Employment legislation was confined to those outside the framework of collective bargaining e.g., the employment of women and children and to supporting collective bargaining. The fullest expression of voluntarism was the Trades Disputes Act of 1906 which prevented employers taking legal action against trade unions and protected the organisers of disputes from common law liabilities. This was the 'golden formula': a negative immunity from common law liability, in contrast to other countries' positive right to strike (Edwards *et al.* 1992).

final end of the so-called 'voluntarist tradition' that dates back to 1871 (Crouch, 1990). For Crouch the rejection of compromise can be seen as the consequence of the dramatic events of industrial relations in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s:

the gradual and insistent spread of shop-floor power within the labour movement, leading eventually to widespread militancy; the frantic and only occasionally successful search by governments for some kind of neo-corporatist framework for achieving order in wage bargaining; since the end of the 1970s, the double defeat of organised labour in the simultaneous growth of mass unemployment and near collapse of the Labour Party as a serious political force (Crouch, 1990: 11).

Both Labour and Conservative administrations used tripartite mechanisms to try to promote industrial regeneration and to gain the compliance of union leaders in restraining wage demands. In retrospect British corporatism can be seen to have been a very partial and ramshackle affair (Regini, 1984; Cameron, 1984; cited in Edwards *et al.*, 1992). Its practices emerged out of attempts to manage economic crises, and not out of any deeper commitment to long-standing structural change. For Edwards *et al.* difficulties of economic management were perhaps most apparent in attempts to establish incomes policies. The first attempt was made by the post-war Labour government in 1948 and this set the pattern for the more ambitious efforts of the 1960s and 1970s (Edwards *et al.*, 1992).

Incomes policies had some success in the 1960s but, repeatedly, it proved impossible to regulate private sector pay settlements and in the public sector, pay restraint provoked discontent; hitherto quiescent groups began striking, a development that accelerated in the 1970s (Edwards *et al.*, 1992:8). Many groups of workers in both the public and

private sectors were involved in the wage disputes of 1972-3 but it was the miners who had the greatest political impact. For Kernot: "One of the great sagas of mining folklore covers the time from the election of the Conservative government under Edward Heath in June 1970 until its demise in February 1974" (Kernot, 1993:68). The 1972 miners' strike was the first national strike in the history of the NUM, although there had been many pit level and local disputes. The miners had become increasingly dissatisfied with their pay and conditions, and "were beginning to bristle at 'jam tomorrow' promises coupled with the threat of pit closures" (WCCG, 1994: 91). Jim Perry, Secretary of the Durham Mechanics, employed at Westoe colliery at the time of the 1972 miners' strike recalls:

The mood of the men was beginning to change towards the end of the sixties. Miners had been exhorted to perform for the country's good and for the benefit of the industry; we had acquiesced in the massive contraction of the industry and were persuaded to accept rises that neither equated with increased productivity in the industry nor kept pace with the cost of living. Beyond entreaties for greater effort lay something implicitly more unsavoury, it was that if we did not toe the line the pit would be closed. The threat of closure was sufficient to hold most of the miners in tune with the moderates' refrain (quoted in WCCG, 1994: 91).

In January 1972 the NUM rejected the NCB's pay offer of 8 per cent and launched an all-out strike. It was during the 1972 miners' strike, Hanson notes, that a young NUM official, Arthur Scargill, "made his name by closing the Saltley Coke Depot, Birmingham, with thousands of flying pickets. The police were simply overwhelmed" (Hanson, 1991: 70). Similar tactics were used elsewhere, the movement of coal to power stations was successfully blocked leading to widespread power cuts and the economy almost brought

to a standstill. The government was forced to introduce a three-day week. The miners won their increase (as much as 24 per cent in some cases) and the government's pay policy was in tatters (Powell, 1992). In February 1972, A.J.P. Taylor wrote in *The Times*: "Fifty years ago the miners were driven back to the pits by the lash of hunger. Successive governments combined indifference and brutality...Now the miners have avenged the defeats of 1921 and 1926" (quoted in Beynon, 1985: xi).

The following year, encouraged by their earlier success, the NUM imposed an overtime ban and in January 1974 voted for a strike in February if their wage claims were not met. The government reimposed the three-day week, took measures to conserve fuel, including cutting television transmission times and introducing a 50 mph speed limit. Although the TUC and others worked towards a compromise to end the dispute Heath preferred to go to the country:

Edward Heath [hoped] that the electorate would give him a clear mandate for upholding the authority of parliamentary government against what he saw as the dangerous sectionalism inherent in the exercise of trade union power (Powell, 1992: 131).

The Tories ran an anti-union campaign with their slogan of 'Firm Action for a Fair Britain'. Labour promised to 'Get Britain back to Work' by settling the miners' strike and working with the trade unions on the basis of a 'Social Contract'. Heath lost and the new government kept their promise, bringing the dispute to an end by the "simple expedient of conceding virtually to all of the union's demands" (Powell, 1992: 133).

The new Labour Government, as part of the settlement of the strike, set up a steering committee composed of the NCB, the Government and the unions to examine the future of the coal industry. The ethos of the plan for coal was expansionist and deeply



optimistic about the future of coal as an energy source, and it provided the basis of high paid employment in coal mining areas (Beynon, 1987). The committee endorsed the NCB's plan, maintaining that production had to be stabilised and then increased, setting an output target of at least 135 million tonnes by 1985. About half of the new capacity would come from new mines, most of the rest from major improvements at existing collieries and some from extending the life of otherwise exhausted collieries. The Government promised financial assistance and made grants to finance stocks of coal and coke, so protecting the industry from short-term fluctuations in demand. In 1977 the Government reaffirmed this commitment and the feeling in the mining union was that as long as the industry was secure and jobs were preserved, there could be no repeat of the strikes of the early 1970s (Hall, 1981: 223-224).

During the administration of the 1974-79 Labour Government the framework of collective labour law was reconstructed through a series of Acts of Parliament. The Labour Party in opposition had reached an agreement with the TUC that the unions would: "assist the next Labour Government to resolve the country's economic problems in return for the restoration of full employment, further moves towards economic equality and a programme of legal and social reforms desired by the unions (Clegg, 1979: 312). Under this 'Social Contract' the Labour Government restored some of the principles of non-intervention by repealing the Conservative's Industrial Relations Act 1971. Further, it gave individual workers and trade unions new protection and extended rights, for example against unfair dismissal, equal pay, maternity, and health and safety at work. Trade Unions were also given rights to information, union representatives were given time off for union activities and training and facilities for collective bargaining; and provision was made for claiming recognition from employers. Though the recognition procedure lacked means of enforcement and was limited in its effects, it was seen by its opponents as a major concession to the unions (Dickens and Bain, cited in Edwards *et al.*, 1992). The Labour Government also set up the Advisory, Conciliation and

Arbitration Service (ACAS) and established the Bullock Committee to investigate the introduction of industrial democracy in British industry.

The Social Contract fell apart from 1977, as in the past it proved impossible to regulate private sector pay settlements. Public sector employees grew increasingly discontented and the unions found it impossible to hold back their members' pay demands. Particularly damaging for the Labour Government was a series of public sector disputes that culminated in the 'winter of discontent' of 1978-79. By its end almost 20 per cent of the British work force had been on strike and the number of days lost soared to 29 million - the highest since 1926 (Bassett, 1986).

As Edwards *et al.* (1992) note, the labour laws of the 1970s, together with other developments under the Social Contract, were seen as making the unions "over mighty subjects" (Edwards *et al.*, 1992: 12). The trade unions had abused their privileges, their strength was used to the detriment of the economy and the national interest. The balance of power now favoured the trades unions. Union membership had risen through the decade and by 1979 there were 13.2 million union members in Britain, giving a union density of some 55 per cent. In terms of the ability to raise wages, improve working conditions and influence the decisions and legislation of government, trade union power reached its peak in the late 1970s and the exercise of that power became a major political issue (Farnham and Pimlott, 1990). Hanson describes the industrial relations situation in 1979 thus:

Weren't the trade unions to all intents and purposes above the law by 1979? Couldn't the closed shop now be enforced without regard to the protests of those who preferred not to join a trade union? Wasn't it now possible to take an employer to court for not recognising a trade union? Didn't employees have a range of employment rights without any mention of

duties, which would have been unthinkable in the 1960s? Didn't the members of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress regularly spend so much time in 10 Downing Street that they must sometimes have thought of it as their own home? And couldn't the electorate have been forgiven for thinking that the trade union leaders had taken over the job of government?" (Hanson, 1991: 3).

It was against this background that the first Thatcher administration came to power in 1979. As Will Hutton (1995) notes, trade union reforms were crucial to Thatcher's larger aim of revitalising capitalism. Post-war governments had tried to make unions 'responsible' or to find some way of transforming collective bargaining in order to improve the trade-offs between inflation, growth and unemployment. Unlike any of her predecessors Thatcher:

wanted to abolish collective bargaining altogether, along with all its baggage - Keynesian economics, industrial policy, state intervention, incomes policies and even aspects of the welfare state. She would proceed cautiously, recognising that every attempt to attack trade unions in the twentieth century had been beaten back-but her direction from the very beginning was unmistakable (Hutton, 1995: 89).

A central tenet of Thatcherism was a "deep distrust of the ideology which underpins an interventionist state with a large workforce" (Fredman and Morris, 1989a). The public sector was seen as inherently inefficient and wasteful and as "providing the breeding ground for over-mighty trade unions, out of touch with their members and unconstrained by the threat of their companies' bankruptcy" (Ferner, 1989: 1).

Thatcherism, building upon the 'British Disease'<sup>23</sup> and 'over mighty subject' theses, argued that poor industrial relations were a major cause of Britain's poor economic performance after the Second World War. Britain's poor economic position was blamed on the excesses of the past, on weak governments, profligate public spending and the restrictive practices of over-powerful trade unions.

For Gamble:

The state had to be strong firstly to unwind the coils of social democracy and welfarism that had fastened around the free economy; secondly to police the market order; thirdly to make the economy more productive; and fourthly to uphold social and political authority...The idea of a radical rupture in public policy, and therefore the need to be prepared to deal with resistance whether from the central bureaucracy or from organised interests, were central themes in the New-Right deliberation during the 1970s (Gamble, 1994 :40).

Gamble also makes the point when explaining the assumptions behind the new free-market Toryism: "if the economy is to remain free, the state has to become strong, and nowhere stronger than in the dealings with organised labour" (quoted in Beynon, 1985: 34).

It is true that the outgoing Labour Government had eroded welfare spending and had abandoned any attempt to secure full employment following the International Monetary

---

<sup>23</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s Britain gained the reputation for poor industrial relations, characterised by low productivity, high absenteeism, inter-union disputes, high labour turnover and an alleged proneness to strike. This became known as the 'British Disease' (Brown, 1988). As Edwards *et al.* note, the attention given to strikes in Britain is curious as the country has never been at the top of the international league table of days lost through industrial action and most strikes have been small and short (Edwards in Ferner and Hyman, 1992: 54).

Fund loan in 1976, but the new Conservative administration went much further and attacked such policies as a matter of principle. The corporatist approaches of the 1960s and 1970s were rejected, wage regulation was to be left to market forces, and the government refused to become directly involved in industrial disputes. Gamble (1994) suggests there were wide misgivings about abandoning any co-operation with the trade unions and relying on a revival of the disciplines of bankruptcy and unemployment to curb prices but this pressure was resisted. Given Thatcher's rejection of statutory incomes' policy the party was by 1979 committed to a return to free collective bargaining, trade union power would have to be curbed by other means. Thatcher's aim was to remove the problem of union power by attacking the source of its strength and so to fragment the labour movement into powerless, atomised units (Hutton, 1995: 84).

There was no blueprint for industrial relations reform. The policy documents, *The Right Approach* (1976) and *The New Right Approach to the Economy* (1977), promised very little new legislation on unions and the Conservatives in opposition spent a lot of time trying to dispel the idea that any future Tory government would become embroiled in confrontations with the unions. There was no doubt in Thatcher's mind that a major curb on trade union power was necessary but in opposition she trod carefully, preparing the ground rather than devising a detailed plan (Gamble, 1994). However, the Conservative's commitment to curbing trade union power was made clear in their 1979 election manifesto. One of the aims outlined was:

the restoration of the health of our economic and social life, by controlling inflation and striking a fair balance between the rights and duties of the trade union movement...by heaping privilege without responsibility on the trade unions Labour has given a minority of extremists the power to abuse individual liberties and to thwart Britain's chances of success (quoted in Lewis and Simpson, 1981: 1).

Labour had: "enacted a militants' charter of trade union legislation. It tilted the balance of power in bargaining throughout industry away from responsible management and towards unions, and sometimes towards unofficial groups of workers acting in defiance of their official union leadership" (quoted in Brown, 1988: 9).

The 'Thatcher project' was neither a completely pre-planned strategy nor an opportunistic reaction to events. There were strong elements of opportunism; specific legal provisions were "greatly influenced by the immediate experience of contemporary disputes" (Brown and Wadhvani cited in Edwards *et al.*, 1992). There was, however, a broad set of ideas guiding opportunistic action. The governments of the 1980s were the first since the war to pursue a policy on industrial relations that was integrally geared into their overall economic policies (Wedderburn cited in Edwards *et al.*; 1992; Hakim, 1990; Brown, 1988). The Conservative governments since 1979 have been principally concerned with changing hitherto existing power relations within the economy by shifting power away from the trades unions to employers, changing attitudes to work, and freeing market forces (Brown, 1988).

The labour market policies [of the Thatcher administration]...can be seen as consistent and mutually reinforcing. They are all directed to changing the economy and its institutions in the way required by Monetarist theory...Whether intended or not, they provide a greater degree of consistency and coherence than has been provided by any other government since the war (Robinson quoted in Brown, 1988: 36).

These policies had their intellectual origins in the New Right, with an emphasis on the free working of the market and the need to minimise state interference, as expressed in particular by Hayek. For Edwards *et al.* (1992) this renewal of ideology was able to build

on the decay of corporatism and to present itself, not only as a break from Labour governments' concessions to the unions, but also as distinct from former Conservative approaches. As Hall and Jacques (1983) note: "Thatcherism did not advance in an empty space. It invaded and seized territory from a Labourism which had lost its popular democratic connections and which appeared increasingly, as, simply, a less and less efficient or convincing manager of capitalist crisis" (Hall and Jacques, 1983: 14). "The 'winter of discontent', provided the opportunity: corporatism had failed and the public popularity of the unions reached unprecedented lows" (Edwards and Bain quoted in Edwards *et al.*, 1992: 12).

Although Conservative ideology and rhetoric were anti-statist and non-interventionist, the 1980s saw a revolution in labour law. The Conservatives introduced a series of Acts of Parliament backed by statutory Codes of Practice. The most notable of these were the Employment Acts of 1980, 1982, 1988, 1989 and 1990; the Trade Union Act 1984 and the Wages Act 1986.

In all there have been nine pieces of legislation that together have revolutionised the British labour market. For Edwards *et al.* (1992) the key provisions of these measures can be seen as having a number of distinct but complementary objectives: the legal regulation of industrial action; the eradication of the closed shop; the regulation of internal union government; the dismantling of support for collective bargaining and the curtailment of individual employment rights. Since 1979 Conservative employment policy has been aimed at 'freeing up' the labour market. Labour market regulation, trade union immunities and individual employee rights were seen as 'barriers to business', such regulations impeded the working of the labour markets, thereby preventing necessary adjustments to changed economic environments and causing unemployment (IER, 1995). Deregulation has been seen as a response to Britain's long-term economic problems and, in particular to perceived inflexibility and rigidity in the supply side of the labour market. According to the 1985 White Paper, *Employment: the Challenge for the Nation* (D of E,

1985: 5.2): "The biggest single cause of high unemployment is the failure of our jobs market, the weak link in our economy".

Regulation is viewed by the Conservative government as an obstacle to efficient exchange within a market order. There is an economic and theoretical approach behind recent legal developments in Britain which focuses on what Mückenberger and Deakin (1990) call the 'market paradigm'. Implicit in this approach is the notion that economic relations take place in what can be describes as a 'state of nature' which is independent of all but the most minimal forms of state regulation. The market, as a 'state of nature', reproduces the conditions of its own existence, allocating resources to their most efficient use by establishing through competition a general set of prices against which individuals decide whether to trade and how much. Market clearing, in the sense of each individual wanting to trade and being able to do so, is then automatic. According to this approach "the developed system of labour market deregulation is becoming more and more dysfunctional, an obstacle against the free flow of goods and services, and thus, at least to some extent is responsible for mass unemployment" (Mückenberger and Deakin, 1990: 171).

In Britain, as Mückenberger and Deakin (1990) note, there is a reasonably direct connection between the deregulation theory which originated in the USA, the domestic legal theory developed by Hayek and the philosophy behind the Conservative's actions and attitudes. Hayek links Keynesian style demand-management with trade union control of labour markets as the twin causes of high unemployment and chronic inflation. Trade union control over wage rates prevents the efficient working of the market, wages are determined not by supply and demand but increasingly by sheer power. trade union immunities and collective bargaining rights allow unions to push up wage rates for their members above the competitive rate thus creating an artificial floor to wages. Employers are prevented from paying their workers their true worth and this is said to lead to the destruction of jobs. Similarly, procedures to extend collectively bargained rates of pay to



comparable groups of workers, for example the Fair Wages Resolution, were seen by the government as "creating rigidities and inflexibility in pay" (D of E, 1988, quoted in Ferner and Hyman, 1992: 13). The Wages Council system "...impedes the freedom of employers to offer, and job-seekers to take, jobs at wages that would otherwise be acceptable, and so restricts job opportunities..." (D of E, 1985, 7:18). Over the past sixteen years, then, one of the most important tenets of neo-classical economics has become firmly embodied in official thinking-namely that the level of employment is largely, if not exclusively, determined by the price of labour.

Employment protection provisions were viewed by the government as burdens on business which acted as a deterrent to the employment of more people: "too much regulation can make employing people not only expensive but also time-consuming and complicated". Further, "Concern about burdens imposed by employment protection law can make employers reluctant to take workers on" (D of E, 1985, 7:16-19).

The aim of Conservative governments' labour market policies, then, has been to improve 'flexibility'. At the macro-level flexibility has been stressed as an essential ingredient of economic progress by the OECD: "Greater flexibility in the labour market is no panacea, but it is nevertheless a means for quite substantial amelioration in current problems" (OECD, 1986 quoted in Pollert, 1988b: 281). Throughout Europe in the 1980s the key themes of debates about the labour market were flexibility and new forms of employment. By the end of the 1980s 'flexibility' had become "indelibly fixed as the solution to recession, heightened competition and uncertainty, informed the reconstitution of European labour law and in the British case, dominated employment and economic policy" (Pollert, 1988b: 281). The background to the flexibility debate consists at micro-level of developments in new technology and reorganisation of work and, at macro-level, a restructuring of labour and product markets. These tendencies are common to all western countries but political responses have varied. In Britain the response has been to substantially deregulate the labour market and labour relations.

Three routes to greater flexibility are identified by Rubery *et al.*, (1987); financial, numerical and functional. Financial flexibility relates to the ease by which wage levels can be adjusted according to labour market conditions. Numerical flexibility results from closer tailoring of the size of the employed workforce by a greater use of part-time work, labour only sub-contracting, short-term contracts and temporary employment agencies. Functional flexibility involves the more efficient utilisation of permanent full-time staff by varying the tasks they undertake to the changing requirements of production. The more optimistic analysts see functional flexibility or flexible specialisation as providing a path to a new interest accommodation between capital and labour; indeed "flexible specialisation is predicated on collaboration" (Piore and Sabel quoted in Hyman, 1988: 53). Employers adopt systems of production best suited to commercial success and workers, through their willingness to train for new jobs and move between jobs, will enjoy greater security as well as more challenging work and responsibility. The question that immediately springs to mind is *which* workers? "The essence of this thesis is the consolidation of internal labour markets. Yet there are simultaneously mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion; for those outside the havens of security, the obstacles to favourable employment status are made even greater" (Hyman, 1988: 53). Those workers who are adaptable may possibly benefit in terms of conditions and security of employment, but firms in unstable product markets are also concerned to obtain numerical flexibility. The main objective here is to render workers disposable rather than adaptable. Among the means adopted here are the use of short-term contracts; the use of subcontractors; resort to hire-and-fire policies and the employment of part-time workers who fall outside job protection legislation. "Flexibility thus entails intensified segmentation within the workforce, between the relatively sheltered and advantaged, and the vulnerable and oppressed" (Hyman, 1985: 56).

As Edwards (1995) notes, much of the recent literature has emphasised the objectives and policies of employers but the pattern of labour market segmentation has also been shaped by the changing fortunes of trade unions and the character of state policy.

Employers have been aided and encouraged by the Government. The weakening of trade unions and their diminishing influence, the government's anti-trade union legislation and deregulation policies have "helped to create an environment in which the retreat by employers from employment policies that were once judged 'best practice' has come to be considered unexceptional" (Edwards, 1995: 65). For millions of workers, increasing inequality, reduced job security, and poverty wages have been the most telling expressions of the state's deregulation and privatisation policies and employers' quests for increased flexibility in production.

The law was a major weapon in the Conservative's attack on the unions but direct changes to employment law and industrial relations are, as Edwards (1995) suggests, not the government's only means of influencing developments. The State can also intervene in industrial relations through its economic policies and its role as an employer. The role of the state as an employer is highly significant for two reasons: firstly because the public sector employs a very large number of people and, secondly, because employment practices in the public sector can serve as an example of what the state considers 'good' practice in the private sector (Fredman and Morris, 1989a). In the past governments have sought to set a 'good' example to the private sector, trade union membership was encouraged, collective bargaining supported and high job security offered. The state also used its influence as a consumer in requiring that private contractors recognised their employees' right to join unions.

Conservative governments have: "turned the picture on its head by seeking to adapt private sector, free-market ideas to its own employment practices" (Fredman and Morris, 1989a). Since 1979 there has been an emphasis on individualism and a rejection of collectivist organisation as a means of protecting workers and achieving industrial stability. Official support for trade unions has been withdrawn and collective bargaining institutions undermined. Further, there has been an extensive programme of privatisation and contracting-out of services traditionally provided by the state. The government has

also pursued its objectives by tightening the framework of control of the public corporations, by forcing them to confront greater market competition and act as 'commercially' as possible, and ultimately by returning as many of them as possible to the private sector. Ferner (1989) suggests that the Conservative governments of the 1980s changed the rules of public sector management by making confrontation possible as a management strategy for getting change:

While there is little evidence that the government has provoked or planned such major disputes as the coal strikes, it has been implacable in its refusal to mediate once hostilities have broken out (Ferner, 1989: 17).

For Hutton "fifteen years after the Conservative's election the scope of labour reform exceeded even the wildest dreams of the New Right in the 1970s" (Hutton, 1995: 95). There were now no legally protected conditions for labour hired or fired under fixed term contracts, no regulation of working time, no Fair Wages Resolution or Wages Councils to protect the lowest paid, minimal employment protection and no legal right to representation in the workplace. Virtually all the obstacles to a "free and flexible" labour market have been removed. In 1979, 5 million people worked in the closed shop, it is now outlawed. About 75 per cent of employees had their pay deals settled by collective bargaining, it is now about 50 per cent and falling fast. All the private sector's industry wide negotiating bodies have been scrapped and pay bargaining has been decentralised to more than 10,000 bargaining points. Membership of the TUC stood at 12 million in 1979 in 1993 there were 7.25 million members. The single most potent means of success in pursuing a strike, secondary industrial action, has been outlawed. (Hutton, 1993) As Hutton (1995) notes a composite index of these measures, compiled by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation), in the summer of 1994 ranked Britain at zero-the lowest in the industrialised world apart from the USA. "The lack of employment protection legislation means there is no obligation on employers to

treat their workers other than as disposable commodities, or even to pay them a decent wage" (Hutton, 1995: 95).

Wage inequality in Britain is now greater than a hundred years ago and by 1990 the level of wage inequality in the UK was one of the highest in Europe, with only Spain and Ireland having a comparable magnitude of low-pay incidence (Machin, 1996). The post-war trend towards greater equality has been reversed and since 1979 the real income of the bottom 10 per cent has fallen by 14 per cent. The main cause of poverty is still unemployment (i.e. zero market earnings) but low pay is increasingly significant. Machin (1996) points to a number of possible explanations of the trends in wage inequality including changes in the structure of employment.

Machin (1996) suggests that one important part of the 1980s rise in wage inequality can be attributed to the weakening of labour-market institutions, when one takes an international perspective, the countries which have seen the largest rises in wage inequality are those where the influence of labour-market institutions in wage setting has declined most. This is demonstrated by the demise of unions in the US and the collapse of the British Trade Union movement in the 1980s as compared to other countries where unionisation has remained stable. Leslie and Pu (1996) consider some of the competing explanations for the rising levels of earnings inequality in Britain, such as skill shortages, demographic factors, globalization, rising unemployment and inflation. They suggest that although "there is no plausible *deus ex machina* mechanism to explain the rising inequality of the 1980s and early 1990s...the legislative background-the general tone set by the government-is about the best way of making sense of the facts" (Leslie and Pu, 1996: 112). They go on to conclude that the main driving force behind rising wage inequality has been the change in pay settlement arrangements. "The move towards a more atomistic market-based approach with a much weakened and chastened union sector has led to a deterioration in the relative position of the lower-paid" (Leslie and Pu, 1996: 126). Others, Machin (1996) notes, have stressed the erosion of minimum wage

policies for those at the bottom of the earnings distribution with the changing nature of work (including employers' changing human resource strategies and the divergence of management styles) has led to increasing wage inequalities. On balance, Machin concludes, "it seems that one can explain much of the rise in wage inequality as a combination of these factors. What we remain less certain about is the magnitude of the effects attached to each of these factors (Machin, 1996: 63).

For Hutton the 1984-85 miners' strike "was perhaps the seminal act in this drama of labour decline; the union whose solidarity and industrial importance had made it seem invincible was beaten savagely" (Hutton, 1995: 94).

## CHAPTER THREE

### COLLIERY CLOSURES AND THE MINERS' STRIKE 1984-85

Throughout mining history closures and depressions have hit particular localities, perhaps relieved here and there by the migration of those out-of-work to new sinkings and growing prosperity elsewhere. There has long been a tradition of settlements which have lost their original mining function and have declined or decayed, the landscape has often been scarred and the miner's family has been accustomed to all this as a part of life in the coalfields (House and Knight, 1967).

As House and Knight note closures are nothing new in the mining industry, pits have been closing at a rate of ten to fifteen a year, or more, for decades. Between 1963 and 1970, for example, 277 pits closed. Pits in the older coalfields and in the older sections of new coalfields have closed as they exhausted their reserves or, for some other reason, became unprofitable.<sup>24</sup> During the period of private ownership of the mines, as Allen (1992) notes, bitter competition caused many closures. Between 1913, the peak production year, and the end of the Second World War, the number of pits fell from 3,024 to 1,871. Closures continued after nationalisation in 1947.<sup>25</sup> Although the demand for coal was high the National Coal Board was compelled to rationalise an industry that had become grossly inefficient under private ownership. Following the recommendations of the Reid Report (1945) the NCB set about eliminating small inefficient pits. The first decade of nationalisation was marked by a shortage of energy, with coal providing 90 per cent of the UK's energy requirements the NCB's main objective between 1947 and 1956

---

<sup>24</sup>Pits have more often been closed because they were deemed 'uneconomic', either because extraction costs were more than could be recovered from the sale of coal or because production was higher than demand. It is worth noting that the NCB could, through its management practices, deliberately or inadvertently, place a colliery in a position where it could be defined as loss making (Beynon, Hudson and Sadler, 1986).

<sup>25</sup>For a history of the British coal industry since nationalisation see Ashworth, 1986; Kernot, 1993.

was to maximise output. This was to be achieved initially by maximising production in existing collieries and, in the longer term switching production to collieries where major investment had been made. One hundred and seventy four collieries (almost a fifth of the total) were closed in the first ten years after nationalisation (O'Donnell, 1988: 65-66). Not all coalfields were affected equally, Durham saw only 15 closures between 1947 and 1957 and almost all of these were through genuine exhaustion of reserves. Yorkshire and the central coalfields escaped largely unscathed; Scotland faced many closures and the Lanarkshire coalfield was almost obliterated (Turner, 1985: 168).

Table 2

**PHASES OF COLLIERY CLOSURES 1947-87**

	1947-57	1957-73	1974-85	1985-87
Annual Average	16	35	9	33
TOTAL	174	517	115	33

Source: O'Donnell 1988: 66.

From the NUM's point of view it was of paramount importance to ensure the success of the nationalised coal industry, and if rationalisation and restructuring were necessary to ensure success then they were happy to accept it. As the NUM President Will Lawther



told Conference in 1947: nationalisation meant "There are no opposing sides in the industry" (Turner, 1985:168-169).

The first real programme of systematic closures began in the late 1950s when coal began to be displaced by oil and gas as an energy source and the post-war fall in demand occurred. Central planning to increase production was converted into a scheme to reduce production and conduct an orderly retreat. In the 1960's production was increasingly re-organised around fewer collieries with mechanised systems for cutting and transporting coal (Beynon, 1987). The strike rate was high during this period but there was very little opposition to closure (Allen, 1992; Chakravarty, 1988). All kinds of pits were closed, new ones as well as old ones. In the 1950s and 1960s when conditions of full employment obtained, pits were closed to release manpower for more efficient collieries. This happened at the Devon colliery in Alloa that closed in 1959 to provide labour for the new Glenochil pit, which had opened in 1956.

From 1958-1965 the national decline in the mining labour force was 32.8%, with a decline of 43.2% in Scotland, 35.3% in Northumberland and Durham and 41.7% in the North West. Even in the developing coalfields with assured long-term futures the decline was substantial: East Midlands 41.9%, Yorkshire 23.4% and West Midlands 41.9%, an indication of high wastage rates and competition for mining labour by other industries as well as the reduction in manpower requirements resulting from increased productivity (House and Knight, 1967). Closure through exhaustion was hardly mentioned at this time.

As House and Knight (1967), note this transformation was relatively painless in sharp contrast to the more turbulent outcome in the Ruhr, the Borinage of Belgium or the Central Massif coalfields of France. For Pagnamenta and Overy (1984) it was a tragic irony that the improved relations built up between the NCB and its employees over the first ten years then allowed the Coal Board to dispense with them more easily in the

second decade. Allen (1992) suggests that one reason for the lack of opposition to closures was that the National Coal Board and the Government explanation was convincing and not easily contradicted:

Rational, irrevocable market forces were working (the government stated) against the interests of coal, and neither the NCB nor the government could do anything about it. Union leaders, like politicians, were convinced that coal was being displaced as permanently as canals by the railways. Why strike against the inevitable, particularly when strikes might simply expedite the closures? (Allen, 1992: 13).

Between 1967 and 1969, with a Labour Government in office, 121 mines were closed, involving 63,600 miners. There were few protests and almost no strikes. This in part was due to the co-operation of the unions as Sir William Reid, Chairman of the Durham Division of the NCB explained:

We discussed with the miners' union how far we should go and which collieries we should close, and sometimes changed our programme to help the union. We carried out the closure of over 80 collieries in the sixties in Durham without a single strike or go-slow, by properly explaining to the men what we were doing, and by using vacancies in neighbouring collieries (quoted in Pagnamenta and Overy, 1984: 189).

This dependence upon traditional industries was one that was positively encouraged by nationalised industry policies. As Beynon *et al.* (1986) have noted: "Conceived at one time as a way of furthering working-class interests, nationalisation has in practice become a mechanism to destroy jobs and communities" (Beynon *et al.*, 1986: 28). In the

early period after nationalisation the NCB was instrumental in discouraging the introduction of new industries into the coalfields. The NCB's main objective at this time was to increase production. Balance of payments constraints prevented any major investment in machinery so in the short-term increasing and maintaining output depended upon increasing and retaining the mining workforce. The NCB, supported by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, successfully argued that new male-employing industries should not be introduced into the coalfields. "To do so would be to invite an exodus from the mines to better-paid jobs in healthier and safer environments" (Hudson, 1989: 357). The local authorities and trade unions largely supported this policy as coalmining seemed to offer a stable economic base. New industries were introduced into the region but to locations off the coalfield and these mainly employed married women (Hudson, 1989). These labour market policies and the belief in the future economic prospects of traditional industries informed the formation and implementation of state housing and settlement policies in County Durham.<sup>26</sup> Local authorities decided to concentrate investment in 'growth settlements', the criteria for assessment were the employment prospects in the vicinity, the physical conditions of property and services and the siting of the settlement. All settlements in the County were placed in one of 4 categories, A, B, C or D. Category D settlements were, basically, allowed to decline and their former inhabitants were displaced to new towns such as Newton Aycliffe and Peterlee, which was established specifically to provide centralised development for the former mining villages (see Bulmer, 1978). The justification for such policies was that the former colliery villages "would never again be integrated into the mainstream of capitalist production and so had lost their economic rationale for existing" (Hudson, 1989: 360).

In 1969 the general secretary of the Durham Miners' Association, having just witnessed 15 closures in the previous year - the worst figure since 1926 - wrote to his members:

---

<sup>26</sup> See also Bulmer, 1978.

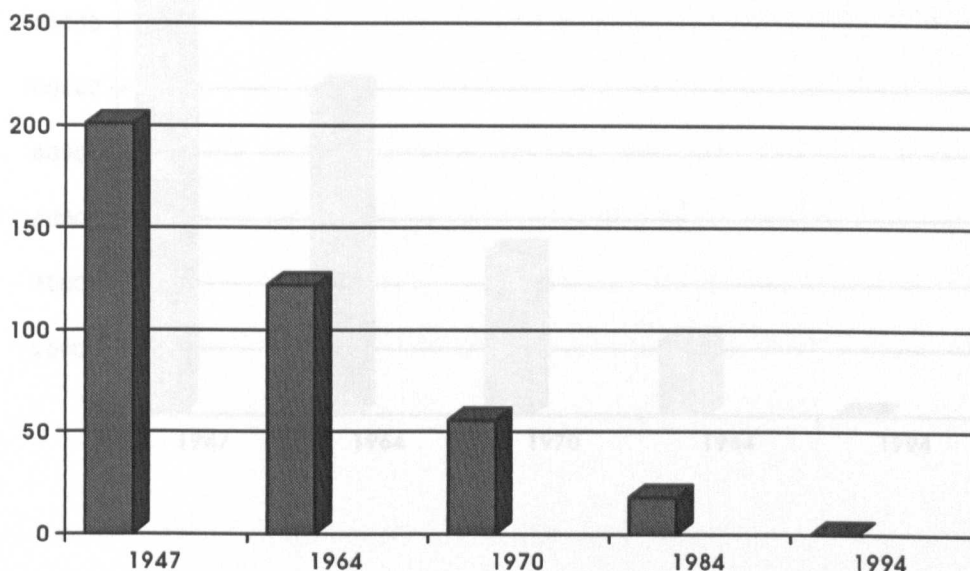
The record of our union in the sphere of industrial relations is second to none, and a shining example to members of some other great unions in this country. If the workers in all industries showed the same fair-minded attitude towards the acceptance of change and undertook the same degree of joint responsibility for the efficient running of their particular industry...It is true that we have been subject during the last few years to a manpower reduction which has caused the closure of many pits, the uprooting of families and the necessity for many men to travel long distances to their work...But the Durham coalfield is by no means finished...the programme of closures has resulted in the industry achieving the transition from a losing coalfield to a profitable one...Durham could emerge as one of the most compact, streamlined and prosperous coalfields in Britain (Krieger, 1984: 105).

In the 1960's closures took place within a relatively buoyant economy, they were made easier to accept because there was full employment and miners could slip into lighter and sometimes better-paid jobs (O'Donnell, 1988; Beynon, 1987; Allen, 1992; Chakravarty, 1988). The transfer of miners to other collieries and the adoption of early retirement schemes also helped to ensure that the closure programme met with little opposition. House and Knight's study in the mid-1960s showed about 70% of miners affected by closures at that time transferred to other pits in the area and the proportion made redundant was as low as 17%. The study of the Ryhope closure in 1966 showed that there 64% of the men affected were transferred to other collieries, and not more than one third was made redundant (Bulmer, 1978: 8). In the ten years after 1959, 57 per cent of

all those who left the industry volunteered to do so.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, as Beynon notes unemployment rates in coal mining areas did increase and many mining communities were destroyed (Allen, 1992).<sup>28</sup>

Table 3

### DECLINE OF THE NORTH EAST COALFIELD 1947-1994 BRITISH COAL DEEP COAL MINES



The National Union had followed Lawther's lead since nationalisation and co-operated with management. The role of the union, as far as pit closures were concerned, was to accept the hardline - management's right to manage was unquestioned. Another factor that helped against resistance at this time was the NUM's loyalty to Labour and the fear that disruption might result in the return of a Conservative government (Turner, 1985: 170-171). The NUM also accepted much of the logic of the case for deindustrialisation and the NUM leader Sidney Ford shared the Labour Government's vision of a smaller and more competitive industry.

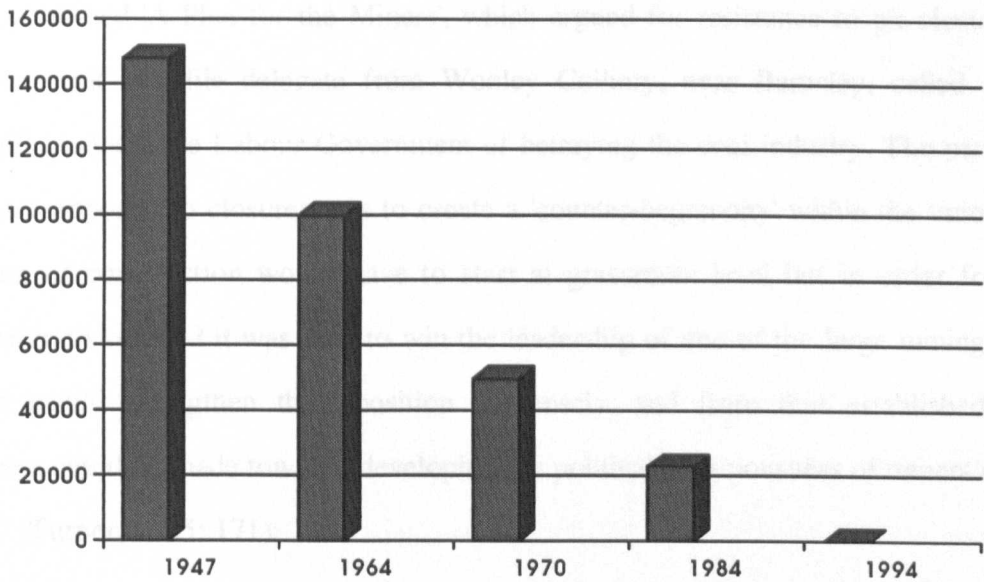
<sup>27</sup>See Knight (1968) and Bulmer (1978) on redeployment of miners after closure in the 1960s and early 1970s.

<sup>28</sup>See Bulmer (1978).

Table 4

**DECLINE OF THE NORTH EAST COALFIELD 1947-1994,  
BRITISH COAL EMPLOYEES**

**MEN**



The National Union had followed Lawther's lead since nationalisation and co-operated with management. The role of the union, as far as pit closures were concerned, was to alleviate hardship - management's right to manage was unquestioned. Another factor that militated against resistance at this time was the NUM's loyalty to Labour and the fear that disruption might result in the return of a Conservative government (Turner, 1985: 170-171). The NUM also accepted much of the logic of the case for deindustrialisation and the NUM leader Sidney Ford shared the Labour Government's vision of a smaller and more competitive industry:

Between 1975 and 1980 the Union accepted the closure of 37 pits, involving 14,000 jobs. Initially at least, this was in the context of the overall expansion of the 1974

If we are to obtain the reforms and improvements to which we believe our members are entitled, the industry will have to sell its product, and this will have to be done in the face of keen competition especially from oil (quoted in Turner, 1985: 171).

At this time, however, a minority faction began to develop within the NUM, its object was to mobilise against contraction of the industry. In 1964, for example, the Derbyshire Area published 'A Plan for the Miners', which argued for resistance to pit closures. In 1967 a rank and file delegate from Wooley Colliery, near Barnsley, called Arthur Scargill, accused the Labour Government of betraying the coal industry. The main task of those opposed to closures was to create a 'counter-hegemony' within the union. The process of construction would have to start at grassroots level but in order for their campaign to succeed it was vital to win the leadership of one of the large mining areas. "That would strengthen their position immensely, and from that established base, progress could be made towards developing the political consciousness of miners nationwide" (Turner, 1985: 171).

Closures continued throughout the 1970s, although unemployment was rising at this time, miners were unaffected by it. The National Coal Board continued to be short of experienced labour and those miners who had been displaced could usually be re-deployed. In 1977 an early retirement scheme was introduced and 9,000 miners took advantage of it in the first seven months after its introduction. This led to a recruitment campaign in the national press.

Throughout the 1970s the NUM had continued to acquiesce in closures despite a 1972 Conference commitment to a policy of 'no pit closures unless through exhaustion'. Between 1975 and 1980 the Union accepted the closure of 27 pits, involving 14,000 jobs. Initially at least, this was in the context of the overall expansion set out in the 1974

Plan for Coal.<sup>29</sup> For Allen (1992), closures like unemployment, were divisive. Individuals and communities, for the most part, sought to protect their own interests. There was a change in attitude, however, in 1979 when Deep Duffryn in South Wales was threatened with closure. The opposition to closure was supported by union leaders in the South Wales coalfield, Scotland and Yorkshire. The National Coal Board relented and the pit won a 6 week reprieve. Deep Duffryn was beset by geological problems and eventually the miners agreed to closure. The successful challenge over the South Wales pit, Allen suggests: "Set the mood for the early 1980s, when the miners forced a retreat from closures on the Thatcher government. By 1984, though, the government and the NCB were better prepared; the rest is well known" (Allen, 1992: 13).

For Hyman (1985), three developments, apparent in the 1970s but more starkly highlighted under Thatcher, transformed matters. The first was growing unemployment and the contraction of traditional industries in which energy use was high. National energy consumption fell by 12 per cent and coal consumption declined in turn by 15 per cent (O'Donnell, 1988). The twin consequences were a slump in the demand for coal and the elimination of alternative job opportunities in many mining areas. Secondly, world trade in coal became more competitive and foreign coal gained a price advantage as the Thatcher government pursued a 'strong pound'. Thirdly, the NCB's goal of concentrating production in new 'super-pits' employing advanced technology implied that even substantially increased output in the 1990s would be no guarantee against serious job loss. Thus, the issue of pit closures became increasingly explosive towards the end of the 1970s (Hyman, 1985: 337).

The election of the Thatcher Government in 1979 heralded the fifth phase of pit closures, the longest strike in a basic industry in British history and a sea change in British politics.

---

<sup>29</sup>See *Having it All their Own Way* and Kernot 1993; Adeney and Lloyd, 1986.



## **The miners' strike of 1984-85**

On 1 March 1984 the National Coal Board announced the closure of Cortonwood Colliery in Yorkshire, 8 days later the longest and costliest strike in British history began.

In the preface to Beynon's *Digging Deeper* (1985) Eric Heffer suggests:

In considering the 1984-5 dispute, which is basically about the fight to save jobs, one is bound to look back to 1926 to contrast the situation then and now. In 1926, as today, the miners were fighting for the entire trade union and labour movement. John Wheatley, the Catholic left-wing socialist put it well when he wrote at the time: 'The miners are fighting alone, but they are fighting the battle of the whole nation. If they lose we all lose'. Time proved Wheatley correct. The defeat of the miners after the collapse of the General Strike became a defeat for the whole working class" (Beynon, 1985: xii).

Scargill too saw the 1984-5 strike as a battle of the whole nation:

The miners have no choice but to oppose pit closure plans. Alongside workers in all of Britain's once- proud basic and manufacturing industries, we will fight not just for ourselves and our families, but for the entire nation and the future (Scargill quoted in Hyman, 1985: 337).

Scargill and the NUM demanded a radical revision of production targets, in line with the most favourable of the scenarios envisaged in the 1974 Plan for Coal; a massive

programme of investment in coal-getting and coal-using facilities; and an end to all pit closures on economic grounds (Hyman, 1985: 337). The strike, from this perspective, was about saving jobs. Scargill made this clear at the 1982 NUM Conference:

Protection of the industry is my first priority, because without jobs all our other claims lack substance and become mere shadows. Without jobs our members are nothing - they have no power or means of subsistence, because we live in a society which penalises people who have no jobs. I hope, therefore, that this conference will endorse my call to make opposition to pit closures its *central task* (quoted in Lloyd, 1985 :19).

The Government, both in the Ridley report and the 1980 Coal Industry Act prescribed that mining should conform to Tory notions of profitability (Hyman, 1985: 337-338). The NCB, faced with heavy interest payments and government directives to break-even (in the Coal Industry Acts of 1980 and 1983) in a short time period, had little option but to begin reducing capacity again. In particular this meant closing 'uneconomic' pits. The industry's room for manoeuvre was further restricted by the Tories pricing policy which cut the price of coal by £2.55 a tonne and resulted in a revenue short-fall of £150 million per year (O'Donnell, 1988).

As Chakravarty (1988) states the 1984-5 strike is often portrayed as a clash between two approaches to running the economy; the government view that 'uneconomic' pits should be shut down versus the NUM insistence that mines should remain open even if they made a loss. For the government and the NCB, the 'uneconomic' pits were an intolerable public burden, a brake on modernisation and progress: whether or not a pit was economically viable was a simple matter of profit and loss. The miners, on the other hand, said that an industry exists for the sake of the livelihood of those who work in it.

Their jobs were a patrimony, an inheritance to bequeath to their children, and for that reason they could not be traded off. They argued that no pit could be regarded as uneconomic until geologically exhausted (Samuel, 1985). The concept of community remained a potent force, as one woman said this strike: "...was different. Before they've all been about money...This was totally different - it was about jobs and communities" (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992: 1).

As Hyman notes: "In one sense the objectives of the strike were clearly defined. In another they were deeply ambiguous and remained so throughout the dispute" (Hyman, 1985: 337). Gibbon (1988), in his analysis of the miners' strike notes that if there is anything approaching a consensus on any aspect of the strike, it is that its central cause was the 'anti-statist' offensive of Thatcher's governments, and by implication the class they represent.<sup>30</sup> Here, the NUM is depicted as being deliberately cornered into a strike it could not win via a game-plan laid down by Ridley in 1978. This plan came to fruition "in a cunning decision to use Scargill's 'obduracy' against the NUM's own interests. The closure of Cortonwood is seen as representing a calculated provocation aimed at 'bringing Yorkshire into the strike'. And so on" (Gibbon, 1988: 145-146). This is a view shared by a number of commentators including McGregor (1986); (Goodman, 1985); Beynon and McMylor (1985) and Gamble (1985).

Another popular view of the cause of the strike, certainly one shared by many in the industry, was that it was deliberately provoked in order to avenge the defeat of the Heath Government following the miners' strike of 1974. Not all commentators agree that the government planned the confrontation with the NUM but there can be no doubt about the government's preparedness to do battle-and win. For Adeney and Lloyd :

---

<sup>30</sup> Gibbon discusses a number of perspectives on the causes of the strike and themes that have been taken as central in accounts of the strike e.g. the break with consensus corporatism; an energy establishment/government conspiracy to break the miners and/or the labour movement; a means of forcing through new technology; the vanguard role played by the NUM and the role of women in the strike. Gibbon provides an alternative explanation arguing, against prevalent interpretations, that the strike was centrally a dispute about managerial authority.

Every piece of contingency planning, every appointment made by the government in the period between early 1981 and early 1984 has been seen in retrospect as part of a wholly conscious plot leading to the miners' downfall. It clearly was not: rather it was a series of zig-zagging, often opportunistic, sometimes accidental moves, though deserving the name of strategy because imbued with a common purpose: to render the government and state as protected as it was possible to be from a miners' strike. But it was still an object of real and present dread (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986: 79).

Ferner (1989) does not believe that the coal dispute of 1984-85 was deliberately provoked but he does agree that the Conservatives sought to avenge the miners for the defeat of Heath in 1974:

In opposition, the Conservatives had been haunted by the spectre of the miners, as was made clear by the 'Ridley Report'...Expunging the humiliations inflicted on the Heath government in the early 1970s was an underlying motif of government thinking (Ferner, 1989: 1).

Obviously the Tories had been preparing to take us on, as far as I'm concerned, as revenge for '74...There's naebody'll ever know the true cost o' the miners' strike. The truth o' the matter is that the Tories wanted revenge for the Seventies, Maggie Thatcher and her cronies...At the end o' the day it wasnae just solely about pit closures or economics" (former miner quoted in Owens, 1994: 64)

During its period of opposition from 1974 to 1979 the Conservative Party reflected on the lessons of the 1971-74 Heath Government. And it was determined to be prepared for the battles that might be necessary to press through its approach. For Edwards *et al.*: "The spectre of industrial militancy haunted party thinkers, and they were determined to exorcise it" (Edwards *et al.*, 1992: 12). There was talk in Margaret Thatcher's circle of advisers of the need for the next Conservative Government to "prepare for a confrontation with the trade union left" (Moss quoted in Gamble, 1994: 40). For Beynon breaking the miners held "a central place in the overall strategy of Thatcherism - the dismantling of key areas of the public sector, and the imposition of a strong state" (Beynon, 1985: 51). The experiences of 1974 weighed heavy and: "Without doubt the power of the miners and their union burned deep into the psyche of those directly involved in that Tory administration (Beynon, 1985: 34).

For Eric Heffer:

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 Mrs Thatcher, they determined to bring the miners to heel and, if possible, inflict a major defeat on the entire trade union and labour movement (Beynon, 1985: xi).

The Tories were sure that their time would come and they were determined to be prepared. Carrington, who had been Energy Minister under Heath, prepared a detailed report on the lessons to be drawn from the confrontation with the miners in 1972 and 1974. Carrington's report: "dispelled the widely held view that the debacle could be explained in terms of the personal frailties of Heath's inner circle. Instead it pointed to the enormous power available to workers in key industries if organised in strong unions" (Beynon, 1985: 34-35). The report stressed Britain's economic dependence on

electricity, the central role played by coal in the economy and its dependence on workers in key industries. Armed forces' personnel did not possess the skills necessary to take over the running of power stations. A power workers' strike could be decisive (Beynon, 1985).

The next step was to draw up a strategy for dealing with such a dispute. In 1978 Keith Joseph asked Nicholas Ridley to produce a report: "analysing how a future Tory government could defeat the NUM if it were ever again to try another frontal assault upon it" (Ridley quoted in WCCG, 1994). The report was widely leaked in the press in May 1978. The Economist reported:

A copy of the final report of the Conservative party's policy group on the nationalised industries has reached the Economist. It has been drafted by the radical right-wing MP, Nicholas Ridley, and is likely to cause a humdinger of a row...The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry. They would like a Thatcher Government to: a) build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations; b) make contingency plans for the import of coal; c) encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary; d) to introduce dual oil/coal 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 (The Economist, 27/5/78).

The report did cause a furore according to Ridley but no-one, including the Tory press, saw it as a sensible set of precautions (WCCG, 1994:122). Goodman suggests that: "At the time the Ridley plan was regarded, even by the Tories, as the ideas of a remote and unworldly extremist. No one in the political establishment gave it more than a moment's attention (quoted WCCG, 1994: 122) Thatcher, however, did. "She wasn't the least put out, and proceeded to file the necessary precautions in her mind against a confrontation which she seemed to know must inevitably come one day (Ridley, quoted in WCCG, 1994: 126).

In 1979, Hanson (1991) suggests, the miners were seen as invincible and naturally this myth gained ground in February 1981 when the NCB proposed a massive pit closure programme in order to return the industry to profitability. The miners threatened a national ballot on strike action and the government, much to the NCB Chairman Derek Ezra's surprise, backed down. Here was a moment of critical historical importance. This was made clear by John Biffen in his interview with Brian Walden on *Weekend World*. Frankly, he admitted that he 'didn't come into politics to be a Kamikaze pilot', and that to take on the miners at this time would be just such a suicide mission" (Beynon, 1985: 36). Similarly, The Secretary of State for Energy, David Howell later explained: "neither the government, nor I think, society as a whole, was in a position to get locked into a coal strike. I don't think the country was prepared and the whole NUM and the trade union movement tended to be united on one side. (McIlroy, 1995: 213).

For Kernot (1993): "This humiliation, probably more than the loss of the 1974 election, put her on a confrontation course with the newly elected President of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill, in 1983" (Kernot, 1993: 73). Similarly, Adeney and Lloyd (1986) suggest that this 'defeat' galvanised the government." As Hoskyns puts it,

the Macmillan dictum-never tangle with the Catholic Church, the Guards or the NUM-began to be questioned for the first time. Within months of the illusory U-turn, moves had been instituted which would ultimately render the next engagement one fought very largely on the government's terms" (quoted in Adeney and Lloyd, 1986: 77). It seemed clear, according to Hanson (1991) that there would be no resolution of the trade union problem without a confrontation between Scargill, who was dedicated to fighting the class war, and the Thatcher government.

That the government was expecting a strike there can be no doubt as it spent some time preparing itself for a confrontation. Coal stocks at the power stations and pitheads were built up from around 29.9 million tonnes in 1979 to 58 million tonnes in 1983. Over half of that stock was held by the Central Electricity Generating Board. John Moore, the former Coal Minister has since commented: "We made the argument that we were building up the stocks to ensure the viability of the industry, to take the coal off the industry's hands. And the NUM's leaders went along with it. I couldn't believe it as it went on month after month, that we weren't rumbled: I still can't" (quoted in Adeney and Lloyd, 1986: 77).

Power stations were switched to dual coal/oil burning and private, non-unionised, road haulage companies were increasingly introduced to transport coal with the aim of neutralising any potential solidarity from the transport workers (Owens, 1994). At the same time a whole raft of anti-trade union legislation had been introduced which disallowed secondary picketing and sympathy action among related unions. The Employment Act of 1982 also removed legal immunity from the trade unions in particular cases<sup>31</sup> and (importantly for the miners' strike) opened union funds to civil action. This "was distinctly the most radical element in the whole programme of Conservative reform, and the part most feared and hated by the trade unions. For the

---

<sup>31</sup> Under the Trade Disputes Act 1906 workers engaged "in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute" were protected against court actions by employers. For a detailed review of Conservative Trade Union and Employment legislation in the 1980s see Hanson 1991; Towers 1989.



first time since 1906 they were brought fairly and effectively under the law instead of being above it" (Hanson, 1991: 17-18).

For Beynon (1985): "There was one crucial ingredient still to be added: the reorganisation of the Coal Board. The whole conception of the government's preparations depended on there being a strong, indeed an unbeatable, management at the NCB" (Beynon, 1985: 55). This, Beynon notes, was necessary to create and sustain the illusion of the government's non-involvement: any dispute in the coal industry was to be seen as simply an internal matter between the NCB and its employees.

The final move was the appointment of Ian McGregor as Chairman of the NCB in September 1983, this was seen by Mick McGahey, the Vice President of the NUM, as the most provocative appointment in British industry: "The appointment of McGregor was a declaration of war on the British miners and the mining industry by the government" (quoted in Adeney and Lloyd, 1986: 83).

McGregor had been the head of the US mining company AMEX that had gained the reputation of 'leader of anti-union activity throughout the nation' following its strike breaking activities. As Chairman of British Leyland and subsequently British Steel, McGregor built on his reputation for toughness. At British steel, within days of his appointment, he was christened 'Mac the knife' by the unions (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986: 53) Both companies, under his guidance, were cut back, and over half their labour force paid off. For Ferner (1989), the appointment of McGregor can only be understood in terms of the government's wider political priorities, he "publicly embodied a clean break with the cosy, consensual past tradition of public enterprise management" (Ferner, 1989: 15). McGregor's appointment by Thatcher as NCB Chairman convinced many that confrontation was inevitable and signalled the approaching confrontation (Hyman, 1985; Beynon, 1984, 1985; Kernot 1993; McIlroy 1988). In the Durham coalfield the

appointment of Ian McGregor as NCB Chairman dominated conversation. One man put it like this:

I think if I had to put a date or time on when I decided Scargill was right it was when Thatcher appointed McGregor. Let's face it, we knew then. It was obvious we were either going to have one hell of a fight or go the way of the steel workers (Beynon, 1985: 104)

On 1 October, just one month after McGregor's appointment, the NCB announced its offer of a 5.2 per cent pay rise linked to an agreement on the closure of uneconomic pits. An overtime ban went into effect on 1 November 1983. It bit into production- but the Coal Board's attack on 'uneconomic' pits continued. In Scotland, Monkton Hall was scheduled for closure, followed by Polmaise; in Durham, the New Herrington pit and then Sacriston (Beynon, 1984). On 1 March 1984 George Hayes, the NCB's South Yorkshire area director announced the closure of Cortonwood near Rotherham and then on 2 March, the closure of Bullcliffe Wood pit near Barnsley. The Yorkshire Area NUM Council met on 5 March, and called an area strike from 9 March. Meanwhile, on 6 March, the NCB at a meeting with the NUM, under the aegis of the Coal Industry Consultative Council, outlined its plans for closures (Kernot, 1993). Four million tonnes of capacity was to be cut; 20 pits to close and 20,000 jobs to go. Over a third of the cuts were to be made in the North East. On 8 March the National Executive Committee of the NUM agreed that the Areas of Scotland, Yorkshire, South Wales and Kent could have official Area disputes, with immediate official status for any other area which wished to join the dispute. The announcement of Cortonwood's closure, followed by the national plans to cut jobs, proved that the government and the NCB were now ready for

the clash. (Hyman, 1985: 337-338). By Saturday 10 March only 11 of the NCB's 191 collieries were working.<sup>32</sup>

For Samuel all political philosophies carry a notion of the public good:

As a mobilising cry, it is defined by opposition to *particularism*- those "vested" or "sinister" interests against whom reformers take up arms, those "over mighty subjects" whom rulers attempt to put down (Samuel, 1985: 367).

The miners were seen as such "over mighty subjects" and the miners' strike was seen as against the "national interest". This Samuel suggests, is an unsatisfactory term; the national interest sometimes refers to the policies of government, sometimes to the interests of the state and is often used as a synonym for the majority opinion of the moment. "It is nevertheless a talismanic term of appeal, and it can make even limited opposition appear as second cousin to treachery" (Samuel, 1985: 367). It was on this view that the miners, in challenging the government, were thus transformed into the enemy and the strike, like those of 1974 and 1926, seen as a threat to constitutional order (Samuel, 1985: 367). In Oxford colleges motions were seriously debated which called for the arrest of Scargill for treason (Schwarz in Beynon, 1985). Thatcher did not hesitate in exploiting the view, in her (often quoted) speech to the 1922 Committee in July 1984:

In the Falklands we had to fight the enemy without. Here the enemy is within, and it is more difficult to fight, and more dangerous to liberty.

---

<sup>32</sup> The issue of the strike ballot and the decision to strike in March has been well covered elsewhere, see for example: Adeney and Lloyd, 1986; Beynon, 1985; McGregor, 1986; Hyman, 1985; Crick, 1985.

Nigel Lawson, then Energy Minister, told the House of Commons in July 1984 that the defeat of the strike was a "worthwhile investment for the good of the nation". Whatever the cost of the strike the government was prepared to write it off for the long-term benefits it expected from a clear cut miners' defeat. For Gamble: "This was not only the effects on the running of the coal industry, but the wider, symbolic effects of defeating the group of workers who had successfully resisted the Heath government" (Gamble 1994: 191).

The miners' strike of 1984-85 was the longest and most aggressive strike that has ever taken place in Britain. In the 51 weeks of the strike: two working miners died, 255 were injured, two working miners committed suicide and 790 police officers were injured, two seriously (Kernot, 1993). The financial cost of the strike was also very high - estimates ranging from £2.5 billion to £3.75 billion, (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986; Kernot, 1993). £140 million was spent on police overtime. In the 1972 miners' strike, notably at Saltley Gates, the police had backed down before mass picketing. This time the government was determined to use the full force of the law to outnumber pickets and to aggressively break picket lines. As McIlroy notes, any such dispute would require intensive direct policing but in the 1984-85 dispute the police and the criminal law were used in a fashion unprecedented since 1926 (Beynon, 1985: 104). By the second week of the strike 20,000 police from 43 forces were available. "Now the restraint of the post-war consensus went overboard. *If mass unemployment was key to the impact of Thatcherism so was taking the gloves off the power of the state*" (McIlroy, 1995: 214).

The union leadership was monitored by MI5 and police operations were co-ordinated by the Association of Chief Police Officers through the National Reporting Centre<sup>33</sup> at Scotland Yard. The extensive use of civil law against the union was an essential complement to criminal actions against activists in disorganising and eventually breaking

---

<sup>33</sup> The National Reporting Centre had grown out of discussions between the Association of Chief Police Officers following the 1972 miners' strike. See Coulter *et al.* on the role of the police in the dispute.

the strike. Nearly 10,000 people were arrested during the 51 week strike (McIlroy, 1995: 214).

For Hyman:

The odds ranged against the miners were...unprecedented: an arrogant and vindictive government; a paramilitary police force established by stealth and unaccountable for its often brutal conduct; a judicial system systematically hostile to the strikers and their union; agencies of public 'welfare' thoroughly subordinated to the repressive purposes of the state; press and television largely dedicated to distortion and abuse (Hyman, 1985: 330).<sup>34</sup>

The government was prepared for the strike and had some key strategic advantages over its opponent and it benefited sometimes from the NUM's tactical errors, but even so it required all of Mrs Thatcher's single-mindedness, above all in nurturing the Nottingham miners (see, for example, Adeney and Lloyd, 1986) who worked through the strike, to win the victory she required (Hyman, 1985).

On 3 March 1993, at a special delegate conference, the delegates voted 98-91 in favour of a South Wales resolution calling for an orderly return to work without agreement. The outcome was a crushing defeat: The miners returned to work having gained nothing and lost almost everything but their dignity. (Hyman, 1985). For Field, "the miners' strike turned out to be the labour movement's Dunkirk: the union has withdrawn from the fray, at terrible cost to its own ranks and those of its allies, in the hope of surviving to fight another day" (Field, 1985: 11-12). For McIlroy (1995), the consequences of the miners'

---

<sup>34</sup>See Jones and Novak; Schwarz and Fountain, in Beynon, 1985 on the role of the DHSS and the media during the strike.

defeat were mixed. It was rather catastrophic to describe it as Norman Tebbit did as 'the last battle in the struggle against the unions'. "Nevertheless, the miners' strike was a watershed; if the strikes of 1972 and 1974 symbolised the surge of union power, the strike of 1984-85 demonstrated its ebbing" (McIlroy, 1985: 214).

Peter Jenkins predicted all too accurately, a few weeks before the return to work, that "the reality at the end of the strike will be that the balance of power has shifted decisively from union to management...In the new circumstances the closure programme is likely to be more radical and more costly in jobs than the programme put forward at the beginning of the dispute last March" (The Guardian, 13 February 1985). As Jenkins anticipated the announcement of far more drastic proposals for closures and job loss followed. Hyman suggested in 1985 that "Tory confidence after the humiliation of the NUM may well lead to yet more radical attacks on coal industry financing, quite possibly followed by the first steps towards privatisation" (Hyman, 1985: 342-343).

For Hyman (1985) the policy of 'fighting to the finish' extended the sacrifice and deprivation of the strike and intensified the divisions within the union. Thousands of reluctant miners were turned into blacklegs<sup>35</sup> and the NCB and government were encouraged to enter into a new phase of intransigence resulting in the return to work without a settlement. As Gibbon (1988), notes the feeling in the coalfields after the strike was that the atmosphere, the 'crack', the ambience had gone. In Thurcroft this feeling was attributed to a high level of strike breaking, in Doncaster, however, where there was very little strike breaking, the mood was attributed to heightened managerial aggressiveness (Gibbon, 1988: 188). For Hyman (1985): "Management at area and pit level displays a ruthless assertiveness unknown since nationalisation: a new disciplinary approach to workers, the removal or restriction of many of the customary facilities for trade union representation" (Hyman, 1985: 342).

---

<sup>35</sup> For a moving account of a strike-breaker's experiences see Parker, 1986: 51-57.

For McIlroy: "Thatcher had revenged Heath's defeats and faced down the praetorian guard of the Labour movement" (McIlroy, 1995: 212-215). The impact of the strike on other groups of workers contemplating industrial action is questionable but the combination of the government's response to the strike, its anti-union legislation and the economic situation served to strengthen caution and constitutionalism in industrial action and facilitated the resurgence of the now not so new realism in unions such as the GMB (General, Municipal and Boilermakers), and the TGWU (Transport and General Workers Union).<sup>36</sup> One North East 'union man' commented after the strike:

..as a union man, you know, I have to say this is how the Tories came to power. At the time of the last Labour government they said if they got back in, they'd bring in legislation to reduce the power of the trades unions. And they've certainly done it all right. It's my opinion, and I think of a large part of the working class of this country, certainly the four million or so that's unemployed, they've gone so far now in breaking the power of the unions they've put the country back into the 1930s (Parker, 1986: 38).

For Adeney and Lloyd: "The strike cauterised all illusions that the leadership and activist groups who run unions necessarily speak for their members. The Tory challenge to the unions' hegemony over the working class, for so long unquestioned, met its greatest test in the pit dispute and won" (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986: 291). Hanson (1991) suggests that the use of the new employment legislation was not a major factor in Scargill's defeat; "But what cannot be gainsaid is that his defeat was a vital part of the government's overall employment strategy" (Hanson, 1991:70).

---

<sup>36</sup>See McIlroy, 1995: 212-215.

Samuel (1985) has argued that "the coal strike, when its ethical issues are addressed, appears as the contest in which economics is assembled on one side, humanity and compassion on the other. The public was asked to make a choice between hard-headed realism and sentimentality". Pit closures, he says, must be assessed in terms of "the waste of human resources, the undermining of cultural autonomy...The destruction of a whole heritage of non-transferable skills...the closure of "uneconomic" pits creates "uneconomic" communities. Pit villages do not disappear but enter into a period of decline whose consequences take a long time to disclose their worst effects" (Samuel, 1985: 367). As the strike progressed the NUM placed more emphasis on the social costs of closure, and came increasingly to rely on Glyn's (1984) redefinition of the viability of collieries in terms of a social cost-benefit analysis (Beynon, Hudson and Sadler, 1986). For Beynon (1985) the striking miners and their families endured the problems and hardship of the strike for two main reasons; the attachment they felt towards their communities and their realistic assessment of the likelihood of continuous employment in the mines or elsewhere. Workers, Beynon (1985) suggests, only have to look at areas where traditional industries have disappeared, to Ebbw Vale, to Consett, or to Sheffield and see the aftermath of steel closures. For Hyman: "If the most fundamental issue is the social and economic viability of communities *above* the ground, overriding stress on the continued operation (at *any* cost?) of the pits underneath unduly restricts the terrain of argument. Greater emphasis on the social costs of closures-whatever their cause-and proposals for counteracting policies could have assisted a more broadly based social and political campaign" (Hyman, 1985: 140).

The miners' strike of 1984-85 cannot be described as a victory, at least not in terms of the objectives of saving pits and jobs, however, many commentators have pointed to the positive achievements of the strike. The striking miners and their families certainly endured hardship but the strike also enriched many people's lives: As Field (1985) notes the dispute renewed the cultural lives of the communities. Many children at Cortonwood thought Christmas 1984 the best one of their lives. Adult educators in South Yorkshire



were overwhelmed by the numbers of men and women who have turned to writing during the dispute. "In all these ways, and in countless others, the strike has been enormously positive" (Field, 1985: 11). The strike changed people's lives:

Oh, nothing like the strike had ever happened to me before in the whole of my life. It changed me completely. I was very quiet before, I wouldn't say boo to a goose...The strike changed it all. It made me stronger and have a lot more confidence in myself and my own opinions. For all the dreadful things that happened and all the terrible hard time we went through, there were some things about it that I did, I thoroughly enjoyed (Parker, 1986: 117).

The social and political skills of organisation and communication during the strike were for Francis (1985), akin to the experiences of people during a social revolution. The strike taught people about their individual and collective potential and the problems of building working-class solidarity. New alliances were formed, with and between coalfield areas, with non-mining areas in Britain and abroad. For Francis the strike was not just about mass picketing: "It has been about how people take control of their lives. It has been about women and men from all the coalfields learning about the many-sided role of the state in industrial battles and that the fight for communities was and is the experience elsewhere in Britain and abroad". These new links, Francis suggested, were "all pregnant with political possibilities....What emerges is a network of unexpected alliances which go far beyond the traditional labour movement. It is a broad democratic alliance of a new kind-an anti-Thatcher alliance" (Francis, 1985: 15). Francis' talk of building an 'anti-Thatcher alliance' proved to be over optimistic. For Hyman, "this kind of view totally misreads the political climate, in particular ignoring the degree of passive working-class assent to the government's economic project, in the absence of an alternative perceived as credible (Hyman, 1985: 342). Other commentators, whilst recognising many positive

aspects of the strike, see the 1984-85 strike as 'Labour's Dunkirk' (Field, 1985). For Field the outcome of the strike forced people to face up to what is happening to the British working class:

Our society is riven by mass unemployment, partly as a direct result of conscious government policy; union-busting is the order of the day, union membership is slumping...In the lifetimes of most of us, there has never been such intense insecurity in working class existence. These may be "interesting times", but they are not times which breed solidarity (Field, 1985: 12).

As Kernot (1993) notes, Britain's coal industry was transformed under Thatcher and this transformation was achieved at the cost of mines and jobs. Privatisation was the ultimate goal and the pursuit of this goal during the Thatcher years led to marked improvements in British Coal's international standing. Productivity had improved before the strike<sup>37</sup> and continued to do so afterwards. Sadly for the miners who increased productivity (by 15 per cent in 1986) these improvements meant more job losses and more closures. Between March 1980 and the beginning of the strike in March 1984, 42 of the NCB's 180 collieries were closed and 54,000 mining jobs lost. Between the end of the strike in March 1985 and June 1987, 66 pits closed and the workforce was reduced by a third. In 1992 there were just 50 collieries remaining. Although the contraction of the industry was dramatic Thatcher failed to create a smaller and profitable, but still relatively large coal industry, the industry had been transformed but:

the task was incomplete when Mrs Thatcher was unceremoniously dumped by the Conservative Party in

---

<sup>37</sup>A large part of this increase in productivity is related to the long term nature of the improvements wrought by the 1974 Plan for Coal (see Kernot, 1993:153).

November 1990 and it was up to her successor, John Major, to attempt to finish the task that she had started (Kernot, 1993: 85).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FINAL PHASE 1992-1994

He's a bastard  
He's a swine  
What's his name?  
HESELTINE!<sup>38</sup>

It has been suggested that Michael Heseltine had calculated that the 1992 closure programme would arouse little opposition. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was but a pale shadow of its former self; it was divided, demoralised and shrivelled, with a deeply discredited leader (Sunday Times, 27/12/92). In fact British Coal's announcement in October 1992 caused public and political outrage and the threat of rebellion among Conservative backbenchers. So great was the public show of support for the miners that the Socialist Review (in hindsight somewhat over optimistically) proclaimed "the return of the working class" (11/92).

People from all parts of the country, and from all walks of life, struck or marched in support of the miners. Car workers, postal workers, council and health workers; employees from Swan Hunter, the D.V.L.C, Swansea; British Rail workers; fire-fighters, school-teachers and college staff, company directors, lawyers and City workers; Tory councillors, Rotarians in green Barbours; pensioners, children, church leaders and ladies in blue rinses, all demonstrated against the decision. These protests were not confined to mining areas. Nearly 3,000 residents marched through the centre of Cheltenham to protest at the planned pit closures. Local police could not recall a bigger demonstration ever disrupting Cheltenham. This demonstration of support in what was once a Tory stronghold caused The Times (19/10/92) to comment: "When even Cheltenham begins to choke on its sherry at the fate of Britain's miners, John Major may wonder if it is not time

---

<sup>38</sup>Protesters' chant at one of the October demonstrations (New Stasman and Society, 30 October, 1992).

to roll up that political map of Britain: he might not need it again in this Parliament's lifetime".

Two London demonstrations were organised; one held on the 21 October was the largest on a weekday for over twenty years. The Trades Union Congress had hoped that over 100,000 people would support the miners at a Hyde Park rally on the 25 October. On the day, the largest demonstration in the Capital's recent history saw up to 200,000 people marching through the rain for the miners. The UK Coal Review described the mood in Hyde Park on 21 October as "strangely moving" with marchers being warmly welcomed by most people they met on the route. Supporters included a Chelsea Pensioner, wearing his medals and a 'coal not dole' sticker (UKCR, October 1992). The Times described the scene thus:

As the marchers reached the five star Royal Garden Hotel, guests ran from the foyer to applaud. Posters proclaiming support for the miners could be seen in the windows of exclusive antique shops. Lunch-time drinkers left their pubs to toast the pitmen, office workers appeared at windows to wave and cheer Arthur Scargill and his slightly bewildered comrades. Affluent promenaders on Bayswater Road gave the thumbs up sign to the miners as they passed; children on half-term holiday cheered, and baffled tourists waved. The miners, by now warming to their unaccustomed celebrity status, shouted back greetings and expressions of gratitude (The Times, 22/10/92)

The NUM's President Arthur Scargill's initial reaction to the 1992 closure announcement was to recommend that the union should hold a ballot over the "senseless slaughter" of the mining industry. A day later he said that he would only support strike action if the government refused to accept: "the logical arguments supported by a wide breadth of public opinion". Two developments persuaded Scargill to back away from striking according to a close colleague, who wished to remain anonymous. First was the

realisation that public opinion was rallying behind the miners. Second, he realised that he could challenge British Coal in the Courts (The Times, 19/10/92).

The mineworkers' unions took the issue of pit closures to the High Court in an attempt to prove that the decisions made by British Coal and Michael Heseltine, as President of the Board of Trade, were unlawful. They claimed that British Coal was in breach of colliery review procedures, the 1975 Employment Protection Act and European directives that required consultation with employees and their union representatives. The only remedy in English law for such a breach was after dismissal had taken place. That was a useless and ineffective remedy, in this case the only effective remedy would be an injunction to stop the closures going ahead. An emergency injunction was granted and the miners won the right to seek a judicial review on the closures.

In response to public pressure, the threat of an embarrassing government defeat and legal constraints imposed because of lack of consultation, the Government and British Coal were forced to reconsider the closure programme. On the 19th October Michael Heseltine, suddenly realising that the closures would cause very great difficulties for the communities involved, announced a moratorium. British Coal would be allowed to proceed with the closure of only 10 pits, no pit was to close before the end of the statutory consultation period, except for those which might be agreed by the work force. There were to be no compulsory redundancies.

During this moratorium, the Government and British Coal will set out the full case for the closures which British Coal planned and to which I agreed...we will carry out widespread consultation with all those concerned over the next three months. We will then announce our conclusions following these consultations to Parliament in the new year. If, following this process, the Government and British Coal's judgement is confirmed, the British Coal will proceed with a phased programme of colliery closures aimed at reducing surplus capacity as soon as possible (Hansard, 19/10/92: 205-206).

On 21 December 1992 the High Court ruled that the decisions were unlawful and the subsequent selection of 10 pits for immediate closure was ruled irrational and illegal and was quashed. Under section 46 of the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946 the National Coal Board (now the British Coal Corporation) has a duty to “consult with the miners’ unions and conclude an agreement with them for the establishment and maintenance of a procedure for consultation on matters which included the closure of mines and resulting redundancies”<sup>39</sup> (The Times, 22/12/92).

Lord Justice Glidwell ruled that the announcements of 13 October 1992 were made without any consultation and were therefore in breach of Section 99 of the Employment Protection Act 1975 (from 16 October 1992, Section 188 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992) and the EC directive No. 75/129, which place an obligation upon employers to consult with union representatives when considering redundancies. The judges ruled that miners had: a “legitimate expectation” that they would be consulted under the procedure, British Coal’s decision to dispense with the New Modified Colliery Review Procedure invalidated the decision to close 31 pits. Similarly: “Michael Heseltine’s announcement of a moratorium on the closure of 21 pits as part of a government energy review and the closure of 10 other pits after a 90 day consultation period, was also illegal because it failed to follow the established review procedure, and, in particular, its independent element” (The Guardian, 22/12/92).

---

<sup>39</sup>The Colliery Review Procedure, which involved such consultation on both national and local levels, had been established in 1972. Following an agreement in October 1984 between the National Coal Board (NCB) and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS), a further agreement was made for a New Modified Colliery Review Procedure. The parties to the latter agreement were the NCB, NACODS, the British Association of Colliery Management (BACM) and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The New Modified Colliery Review Procedure, among other things, provides for references to an Independent Review Body (IRB) to make a report. The agreed terms of reference of the IRB are as follows: “To consider arguments put forward by the parties to the Colliery Review Procedure relating to:

- i) the proposed closure of a colliery;
- ii) proposals in regard to major decisions which, in the view of one or more of the parties, would significantly shorten the prospective life of the colliery and to report its views”.

It was agreed that in relation to each reference the IRB should consist of one person from a panel of six individuals agreed upon by the parties and appointed for three years from December 1985. It was further agreed that **the final decision on any matter referred to the Independent Review Body shall rest with the National Coal Board who, in taking their decision, shall give full weight to the view expressed by the Independent Review Body (Bowsher, 1986).**

The ruling meant that the mining unions could exercise their full legal rights over the ten pits and when the 90 day consultation period ended could use the six month Modified Colliery Review Procedure. Following the High Court ruling, Mark Stephens, the solicitor representing the NUM and NACODS stated: "The decision to shut the 31 pits has gone. We are back in the same position as we were on 12 October, a quite astonishing position" (The Guardian, 22/12/92).

The miners' High Court victory was short-lived. Shortly after Lord Justice Glidwell's ruling British Coal announced that even more mines might close as a result of the High Court decision. The cost of essential maintenance at the ten pits, BC argued, would jeopardise British Coal's chances of reducing the cost of its coal to undercut foreign rivals and winning crucial long term orders from the electricity generators. "The unions have shot themselves in the foot" said one manager. A defiant Michael Heseltine insisted that mining would not restart in the ten pits and stressed that there was not a foreseeable market for coal from the present number of pits. "What the court was concerned about was the independence of consultation process that is under way, which is the subject of the 90 day procedure" For Mark Stephens: "The whole purpose of the judgement was to resume the status quo, so that the miners didn't lose out. It follows that coaling should resume and these men should be put back to work." He warned Heseltine to reconsider his position very carefully, with a view to consideration of contempt of court (Daily Mail, 23/12/92).

In May 1993 the High Court gave British Coal approval to close the ten pits. Lord Justice Glidwell was satisfied that BC had "consulted genuinely with a view to seeking agreement" with the unions on procedures which included an independent review but that no such agreement had been reached (The Independent, 27/5/93).

Two months earlier, in March 1993, the Department of Trade and Industry presented the conclusions of the Government's own review of the coal industry. The White Paper, "The



Prospects for Coal", which sets out the results of the review and explains the background to the original closure announcement explained that there was no demand for British coal:

It is self-evident that the United Kingdom mining industry cannot continue to produce coal for which there is no market. By the time of the October 1992 announcements the market for coal had been in decline for decades..

While these changes were taking place in its market, the state-owned coal industry was largely protected from competition from other coal producers. In the key electricity generation market it was also largely protected from competition from other fuels. This provided no real incentive to achieve the highest standards of productivity and management. There have been substantial improvements since the coal strike of 1984-1985, but British Coal nevertheless failed to improve performance as swiftly as it needed to.

The process of privatisation and increasing competition in electricity generation and supply freed the electricity industry to seek competitive fuel sources, thus putting greater pressure on the United Kingdom coal industry to reduce costs (HMSO, 1993, 4.2-4.5).

Although the White Paper acknowledges that productivity had improved and costs cut it states that this was not sufficient: "British Coal proved unable over this period [1990-1993] to achieve costs fully competitive with world coal prices and this lies at the heart of the current difficulties" (HMSO, 1993: 4.6).

Prospects for Coal", which sets out the results of the review and explains the background to the original closure announcement explained that there was no demand for British coal:

It is self-evident that the United Kingdom mining industry cannot continue to produce coal for which there is no market. By the time of the October 1992 announcements the market for coal had been in decline for decades..

While these changes were taking place in its market, the state-owned coal industry was largely protected from competition from other coal producers. In the key electricity generation market it was also largely protected from competition from other fuels. This provided no real incentive to achieve the highest standards of productivity and management. There have been substantial improvements since the coal strike of 1984-1985, but British Coal nevertheless failed to improve performance as swiftly as it needed to.

The process of privatisation and increasing competition in electricity generation and supply freed the electricity industry to seek competitive fuel sources, thus putting greater pressure on the United Kingdom coal industry to reduce costs (HMSO, 1993, 4.2-4.5).

Although the White Paper acknowledges that productivity had improved and costs cut it states that this was not sufficient: "British Coal proved unable over this period [1990-1993] to achieve costs fully competitive with world coal prices and this lies at the heart of the current difficulties" (HMSO, 1993: 4.6).

The White Paper announced that twelve of the 31 threatened pits were to be reprieved for up to two years as part of a £7 million rescue package announced by Mr Heseltine. This would give the reprieved pits a new chance to compete against cheaper imports. However, the White Paper gave warning of a substantial risk of further decline in the market for coal and it also ruled out action to boost demand for coal by halting the expansion of gas fired power stations; cutting back on nuclear power, or ending the importation of electricity from France. Labour's Robin Cook accused Mr Heseltine of mixing "short-term subsidy and long-term betrayal" to buy off Conservative rebels. But it would not buy off the nation. The two year subsidy was not a rescue plan, "only a stay of execution" (Daily Telegraph, 26/3/93). For Doug Blumer, President of the British Association of Colliery Managers, the White Paper was a sham:

Mr Heseltine is offering the coal industry nowt for breakfast, nowt for lunch and nowt for dinner. This is a cynical exercise in short-term expediency, aimed at securing his own political survival while he abandons yet another vital national industry (Daily Telegraph, 26/3/93).

The proposals offered no guarantees that any extra market for coal would be found which would secure a long-term future for the pits saved from closure. Underlining the difficulties the coal industry faced, Mr Heseltine approved three new gas fired power stations. He concluded that he had done:

...all that I reasonably could, consistent with economic realities and legal constraints, to increase the opportunities for British Coal. It is now for British Coal to make the most of these opportunities. The outcome will be settled, as it should be, in the market place (Daily Telegraph, 26/3/93).

For the Mining Journal (5/11/93), however, British Coal's problem lay not so much with the price of its product but with the market. The Mining Journal describes the productivity improvements achieved in Britain's deep mines since 1990 as spectacular. They are now the lowest cost and most productive in Europe (Mining Journal, 29/10/93). In what it described as its best performance since nationalisation British Coal increased its overall profits to £170 million in 1991/92 (Mining Journal, 24/7/92). The following year BC was able to report a £123 million increase in profit at the operating level to £543 million. However, redundancy payments, pit closures and other restructuring costs totalled £1,021 million, contributing to a net loss of £588 million, compared to a £185 million profit in 1991/92. Neil Clarke, BC's Chairman, had also paid tribute to the efforts of the workforce in driving down costs. Productivity in 1993 was 25% higher than in 1992 (Mining Journal, 26/7/93).

British Coal North East Group, reporting in 1993 appeared to be fairly optimistic about the future of the coalfield:

Despite being among the oldest and most intensively worked coalfields in Europe, the North East has some of the best equipped and technologically advanced collieries in Europe. Up to £30 million a year has been invested in new projects in the coalfield. Our collieries are mining up to 12 kilometres under the North Sea. The coastal pits are achieving higher standards of output and productivity each year...The North East is one of Britain's important operating groups with five collieries employing 4,700 miners, a yearly turnover of almost £300 million and output of over 6 million tonnes (BC, 1993).

Eddie Hindmarsh, Head of Operations at BC commented:

privatised regional electricity companies and generators and the growth in gas-fired power generation. Mr Horsler said that British coal was doing its best to improve productivity further, retain its market and seek new customers. Unfortunately, in the final analysis, whatever cost improvements are achieved and passed on to customers, the opportunities for additional coal use are contracting because of the squeeze from other fuels enjoying more favourable protection in the power station market (Mining Journal, 5/11/93). Similarly, Ian Routledge (The Guardian, 29/3/93) argues, if miners lose their battle to save the British coal industry it will be due more to the successful campaign by the gas lobby to prevent any restraint on the "dash for gas" than any other factor. The gas lobby has argued that any restrictions would reduce government revenue, damage the offshore industry, threaten jobs and, as Routledge suggests, perhaps more importantly, would represent an unjustifiable interference in a free market. In fact the UK North Sea oil and gas operators have been beneficiaries of one of the most generous petroleum tax regimes in the world. "The relevance of this for the current debate on coal and energy policy is as follows. The gas which is being explored for and developed offshore for the new power station markets has in many cases only been developed because of these substantial tax benefits and effective subsidies of a kind which are not available to other industries.." (The Guardian, 29/3/93).

In an article entitled 'Government Fiasco over British Coal', Mining Magazine (12/92) suggests that Great Britain appears to have no energy policy, if it does it is a contradictory one. The reasoning behind the 'dash for gas' is that gas resources are currently plentiful and gas fired plants are cheaper to build. Once operational, however, gas-fired power is more expensive than coal-fired power. Furthermore, Britain's known natural gas resources are limited; they will only last about twenty years while there are sufficient recoverable coal reserves for 25 times that length of time. "Mining", it is noted, "is the loser in this disgraceful mess- the same miners who have more than doubled productivity in the past six years" (Mining Magazine, 12/92: 387).

A year after the original closure announcement the prospects for the industry looked even bleaker. Around 20,000 miners had left the industry and it was widely believed that less than 15 pits would be in operation by the time of the planned privatisation of the industry in 1994. In October 1993 Robin Cook, Labour's industry spokesperson, predicted that under present plans the number of mining jobs in Britain would fall to about 10,000. "At 10,000 jobs there will be one miner for every 18 accountants working on the bankruptcy of companies; one miner for every three economists in Britain charting the decline of the British economy; one miner for every four debt collectors policing the personal debt mountain created by the Government's policies "(Mining Journal, 5/11/93): 842).

Table 5

**BRITISH COAL OPERATING COLLIERIES AT 1 MARCH 1994**

<b>COLLIERY</b>	<b>MEN ON BOOKS AT 4 DEC. 1993</b>
KELLINGLEY	625
KIVETON	474
SILVERWOOD	593
MALTBY	219
PRINCE OF WALES	425
NORTH SELBY	400
STILLING FLEET	549
RICCALL	535
WHITEMOOR	280
WISTOW	674
POINT OF AYR	192
BILSTHORPE	540
DAW MILL	744
HARWORTH	835
THORESBY	851
WELBECK	757
LONGANNET	1,040
TOWER	281
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10,014</b>

Source: UK Coal Review, February 1994.

On 4 February 1994 British Coal announced the closure of a further four pits; Manton, near Worksop; Ollerton, near Newark; Annesley, near Mansfield; and Ellington, the last British Coal deep mine in the North East. Ellington was to close on the eighteenth of February with the loss of 1,100 jobs. The future of Ellington had seemed relatively secure. In October 1993, Tim Eggar, the Minister for Energy, had announced the offer of a subsidy (subject to EC clearance) to British Coal and Ellington had won a contract to supply the nearby Alcan smelter.

When British Coal called a meeting on 3 February, David Hopper, General Secretary of the North East NUM, said he would be amazed if British Coal announced Ellington's closure. However, as Hopper admitted, these meetings are always a cause for concern; Ellington, he said, has geological problems, but not particularly serious ones. "But", Hopper added, "you never know what BC is planning these days and we are very much in a pot luck situation". The best scenario Hopper could envisage was the confirmation of major job losses (The Newcastle Journal, 3/2/94).

Hopper had been right to be concerned. At the hour long meeting in Durham on 4 February, BC chiefs told NUM officials that Ellington was to close. Eddie Hindmarsh, BC's Head of Operations, told the Union that the decision had been taken because there was no prospect of viable operations in the present, near, or long term future. "I can see no justification for the continued operation of the colliery" (The Newcastle Journal 3/2/94).

Although the future of Ellington had seemed relatively secure it is clear that the men who worked there had not felt secure for some time and had been expecting a closure announcement. Nevertheless, when it actually came many of the men were devastated. Following the closure announcement Radio Newcastle reported the reaction of the men at Ellington: "workers who had a few minutes earlier had appeared resigned to the closure found the news that the pit was to be mothballed in a fortnight hard to

take...words like sick, shocked and gutted are now being used". The latest closure announcement caused more outrage in the press than had earlier closures. The Daily Mirror's front page on 5 February read:

"THE BIG E, 'Genocide' fury as Pit Chiefs axe 3,000 jobs. "On the same day the Evening Chronicle reported the "Death of an Industry" and bade "Goodbye to a Proud Era." Arthur Scargill, President of the NUM said: "The Government has committed industrial genocide. Whole communities are destroyed as the Tories pursue their ideological hatred of the NUM.

Two days after the closure announcement the NUM held a meeting at the Hirst Welfare Hall in Ashington to decide whether to accept or fight the closure proposal. Ian Lavery, the local NUM Secretary, believed that many men would be willing to accept British Coal's redundancy package. "People have had enough", but he added, "it's up to the union to try and pull it back together and advise the men on which way they believe is the best way forward." Among the men views were mixed. One miner, one of four brothers working at Ellington, believed that the men should "fight it all the way". Other miners agreed, adding that there was nothing to lose. With a male unemployment rate of 20% there is little prospect of work for most men, all they would have to look forward to was a life on the 'dole'. There were men who were tempted to go quietly arguing that there was too much money at stake and that it was best to "call it a day", they believed the men would accept closure.

The 700 Ellington men who attended the meeting on the 6 February, however, decided almost unanimously to put the pit through the Modified Colliery Review Procedure. In theory this could have delayed the pit's closure for up to nine months. The decision presented British Coal with its first serious problem in the current round of pit closures but, as The Guardian (7/2/94) suggested, "BC will almost certainly try cajoling the miners with better final terms".



As expected, BC soon offered the workforce an improved package of redundancy payments. The enhanced redundancy payments tabled by BC would add between £9,000 and £13,000 to the basic package. Average payments were expected to be £35,000.

Redundancy payments have been seen as an important factor in helping BC cut jobs. On the 26 November 1992 The Times reported that 4,600 mine workers had taken voluntary redundancy and either left the industry or were in the process of doing so. The NUM said it was not surprising that so many miners had applied for voluntary redundancy, since miners were "fed up" with the coal industry. "Morale is low and many miners just want to get out rather than wait for the outcome of the Review" [the Government Review]. Arthur Scargill accused BC of blackmailing miners into accepting redundancy.

A British Coal tactic had been to write individual letters to miners and their wives. These letters explained what they could get in redundancy money, then BC threatened to withdraw the money if the men did not accept closure by a certain date. The redundancy package was worth up to £37,000 depending on length of service. Although the Ellington men were young (average age being 35 with most men aged 25), and therefore would not be entitled to the full package, the threat of having any offer withdrawn must have been influential when deciding whether or not to accept closure. Should the workers have decided to go through the Colliery Review Procedure they would have been kept on the pay roll on basic pay. This would affect their redundancy payments since these are calculated on the final twelve weeks' pay. Productivity payments could boost earnings by as much as 30%. Weekly earnings were subject to a maximum of £300 a week, lower paid BC miners earned about £140. By accepting closure all miners would receive a redundancy package based on the higher weekly earnings limit, irrespective of previous earnings.

Another important factor was the lack of confidence in the Review Procedure. According to British Coal, only a handful of pits had ever reached the Independent

Review and in most cases the Chairman had backed the closure plans. In fact BC did not have to accept the recommendations of the chairperson and not one pit had been saved through the New Modified Colliery Review Procedure. Bates Colliery in Northumberland was one of the handful of pits to go through the procedure.

In May 1985 the NCB announced the closure of Bates Colliery in Blyth, Northumberland. Blyth Valley Council had been concerned about the future of Bates for some time, particularly after November 1984 when a document leaked from the NCB listed Blyth as being scheduled to close within 2-3 years (Blyth Valley 1986). In response to the information the Council commissioned a study by Dr Eric Wade of the Open University. The study had two major aims:

- i) to make a case for continued production at Bates Colliery
- ii) to examine the social and economic consequences of the proposed closure.

In February 1986 Bates went into review and both sides put forward their case. The NUM and NACOD's submissions included a mining engineering report by Mr Blumer, evidence from the Plan for Coal, two reports by Dr Wade and one by the Borough of Blyth Valley (1985; 1986). The arguments put forward by both sides were examined by an independent QC, Peter Bowsher. Bates had severe marketing problems but Bowsher felt that the pit should be given a chance, he also believed, as the union did, that the social consequences of closure should be taken into consideration. The NCB did not agree. Bowsher backed the Union's case and recommended that Bates Colliery be kept open for two years to give it a chance to prove its viability:

Bates Colliery [should] be kept open for two years from now on the lines of the 'Bulmer Plan' and if results then show that the 'Bulmer Plan' is to a reasonable degree on course

and there is then a reasonable expectation that a contribution will be made to overheads, the colliery should remain open thereafter (Bowsher, 1986: 49).

It had been agreed between the unions and the NCB that: "The final decision on any matter referred to the Independent Review Body shall rest with the NCB who, in taking their decision, shall give full weight to the view expressed by the Independent Review Body" (Bowsher, 1986). However, despite a previous pledge by Energy Minister Patrick Walker that the Government would abide by the Review decision, the NCB chose to ignore the recommendation and close the pit. The Newcastle Journal commented:

The National Coal Board's decision to close Bates Colliery at Blyth will attract little else but condemnation...Whilst there is no requirement for the NCB to abide by the recommendation, it should have been accepted as a matter of good faith. What is the point of holding such proceedings if their decisions are then to be tossed aside with the Coal Board effectively deciding to go its own way irrespective of what the review body may say? Social considerations, says the NCB, sounding like a nineteenth century pit-owner, are not its concern. But they are the Government's. Energy Secretary Mr Peter Walker has to decide whether or not to allow the NCB to be judge, jury and hangman. He should intervene - in the interests of fairness and the NCB's reputation (The Newcastle Journal quoted in Beynon *et al.*, 1991: 82).

For Beynon *et al.* this view was shared by many people in the coalfield district. The authors suggest: "What it confirmed...was the logic of the new strategy for coal" (Beynon *et al.*, 1991: 82).

Given the fact that no pit has been saved by the Review Procedure, it is not surprising that miners believed closure to be inevitable. This certainly seemed to be the case at Wearmouth in Sunderland. In November 1993 British Coal announced the closure of the colliery, the last remaining pit in the Durham coalfield and the oldest colliery in Britain

(sunk in 1826). Wearmouth had been undercutting the price of imported coal as well as gas and nuclear power. Nevertheless, BC managers told union officials that the pit had to close immediately and blamed the decision on overall market squeeze (The Guardian, 25/11/93). Wearmouth had been on the original closure list but had been reprieved following the Government review for further market testing.

Union meetings were held on Saturday 27 November at the Miners' Welfare in Sunderland. As expected, Wearmouth's 670 men voted to accept closure. Watching the men leaving the meeting it was not immediately obvious which way they had voted. At first they appeared quite cheerful. Later in the evening the atmosphere had changed, the men were quieter; a few looked very worried, some sad and some resigned, but no-one looked angry. They looked beaten and yet there was a strange sense of relief.

It was not what one would have expected. The men had just agreed to the closure of the last pit in the Durham coalfield. Unemployment in the area stood at 13.7 per cent (D of E 1993). The estimated effect of 1,282<sup>40</sup> Sunderland residents being made redundant from the coal industry would be to push up the male unemployment rate above 20 per cent and add a one per cent increase to the total unemployment figure (CGC, 1993). Long term unemployment in the area had increased 33 per cent between October 1990 and April 1992 when 40 per cent had been unemployed for more than one year, 12 per cent for over three years and 6 per cent for over five years.

Why then did the men decide to accept closure? The explanation given by Terry Watkin, the Branch Secretary of Wearmouth Colliery Mechanics, was that financial incentives combined with the effect of months of uncertainty about the future of the pit, had the effect that BC and the Government had intended. Most of the Wearmouth miners "had never seen so much money" as BC was offering, "and were hardly likely to ever again".

---

<sup>40</sup>This estimate was based on men working at the pit in October 1992, and includes miners, sub-contractors and other BC staff. Since that date 375 men had taken voluntary redundancy.

The feeling was that over the 13 months since the original closure announcement the men had given up hope, they had been "worn down". They believed closure was inevitable. With morale so low, most were willing to accept the relatively large amount of redundancy money on offer. This was regarded as a well thought out strategy on the part of the Government and BC. In the words of Terry Watkin: "This Government must have some fucking psychology department".

The Ellington workers returned to Ashington's Hirst Welfare on 11 February to decide whether to continue fighting BC's plans to close the pit. NUM officials brought the men up to date with progress made in two days of talks with BC management following the men's decision to put the pit into the Modified Colliery Review Procedure. The NUM recommended that the fight should continue. The Newcastle Journal (12/2/94) reports that feelings ran high at the meeting as NUM officials and union members clashed over whether to continue the fight or to accept the pay-off. Before the result of the secret ballot most miners confidently predicted that the vote would be in favour of closure. Many said they had little faith in the review procedure; if the fight was lost, and given the history of the review procedure this seemed almost certain, the men would have no work and would have lost the extra redundancy payments.

The men voted 458 to 194 to drop their fight and accept BC's offer. As the Newcastle Journal (12/2/94) reported, the enhanced packages:

were too much of a temptation for miners to resist. Fears that coal chiefs would simply ignore the recommendations of an independent review convinced many men to take the money on offer.

Ian Lavery, the NUM Branch Secretary, said he was disappointed but that he understood the reasons for the men's decision. Several miners left the meeting close to tears, NUM

Assistant Secretary, Mike Scullion said: "We did not really expect to win the vote but this is still just about the saddest day of my life" (The Newcastle Journal, 12/2/94).

Just three weeks after the pit closed many men were regretting their decision to accept redundancy. The unemployment rate stood at 15.5 per cent and male unemployment at 28 per cent. There were approximately 40 people fighting for every job vacancy in the Ellington area (The Newcastle Journal, 9/3/94).

In September 1992 a confidential list of 30 pits that the Department of Trade and Industry expected British Coal to close, with the loss of 25,512 jobs, was leaked. The North East pits included on the list were Ellington, Easington and Vane Tempest, Westoe was not included. When the October announcement was made the Westoe men were, understandably, shocked. As one man later told me:

...it was a complete and total shock because we thought Westoe would go on forever. Since the strike, the number of men had been reduced and we increased production every single year. It never showed a loss, it always showed a profit. I felt the same as the majority of men, that they wanted the pit closed regardless of what state they were in, they just wanted rid of the coal industry up here, they just wanted rid of us (P.M).

### **Reaction to the Heseltine announcement on South Tyneside**

On 29 October 1992 a public meeting at South Shields town hall was called in response to the closure announcement. Following the meeting Westoe Colliery Campaign Group was established. It's chairperson, Malcom Peach recalls:

A huge wave of feeling engulfed the town and there was the belief that a great case could be made out to save the pit. Even among the few more pessimistically disposed there was a determination to campaign for South Tyneside's last pit (WCCG, 1994:193).

The Campaign Group's members represented every facet of the local community including the churches, business, trade unions and the Council. The Campaign Group's first task was to make a convincing case for keeping Westoe open, and by November the Campaign Group had produced a preliminary report for submission to the two Select Committees and to the Government Review body. In January 1993 a more detailed report was produced (WCCG 1993) This report considered the viability of the pit and the social and economic consequences of closure. The economic case for Westoe was prepared by Dr Eric Wade of the Open University, a co-opted member of the Group. Having considered the pit's viability in terms of geology, the costs of production and the market for coal, Dr Wade concluded:

The trend in Westoe Colliery's price is downward, as compared to the upward trend in imported coal prices. Westoe Colliery has the further advantage of at least 60 million tonnes of coal reserves and a guaranteed quality product...If we had a national Energy Policy where domestic UK coal had a secure market of 50-60 million tonnes a year, Westoe Colliery could make an invaluable contribution for many years to come (WCCG 1993:36).

In its consideration of the social and economic costs of the closure of the colliery the Campaign Group presented a strong case against closure. However, the employment effects of the massive pit closure programme did not concern Heseltine. He later told the Employment Committee (1993) that no considerations of the employment consequences

of the policy relating to the pit closures could be allowed to interfere with the decision about whether to shut down coal producing capacity (Employment Committee, 1993).

South Shields, as noted earlier, is not a stereotypical mining community. Nevertheless, before the closure of Westoe, British Coal was, by a large margin, the fourth largest employer on South Tyneside, after the Council, Area Health Authority and NEI Reyrolle. Ironically, as the WCCG (1993) note, the fifth largest employer in the Borough was the Department of Social Security. Further, in relative terms, coal industry workers were well paid and miners' pay made a significant contribution to the local economy. The WCCG (1993) estimate that Westoe miners injected, in personal expenditure and/or savings, some £1 million per month into the economy, discounting any investment generation or capital accumulation in pension or welfare funds.

The Westoe Colliery Campaign Group, using the CCC model (see Effects on employment) estimated that the closure of the pit would result in direct job losses of 2,580 and a further 2,580 indirect job losses as a result of the income multiplier and economic base multiplier effects of closure (see chapter 6). These figures include job losses in companies supplying the coal industry and the loss of contract work. The Campaign Group recognised that the proportion of contract workers in North East pits was lower than the national average and that there were fewer 'other British Coal employees' (technical and clerical, machine workshop and maintenance workers, etc.). Further, many suppliers were not located in the Borough. Given these factors the WCCG produced an estimate of job losses based on known local circumstances in an attempt to distinguish between the impact of closure on South Tyneside and on the economy generally, nevertheless the WCCG estimated that a total of 4,500 jobs would be lost as a result of the closure.

Despite the efforts of the Campaign Group and a great deal of public support for the campaign, the decision to mothball Westoe was made on 26th March 1993. This was not



to be a long term reprieve, it was to be a short stay of execution while the pit was offered for lease or license to the private sector. Only a few weeks after Heseltine announced that the pit was to be kept under care and maintenance, however, the Shields Gazette reported that contingency plans had been made to flood the pit if a buyer could not be found:

This allegation followed a private meeting between union leaders and colliery management. They claim that the pit will be closed for good if a buyer is not found 90 days after production ceases on May 9...Both NUM and NACODS officials said machinery is being stripped from the pit. (Shields Gazette 22/4/93).

According to former miners at the colliery, asset stripping started and development work ended immediately after the closure announcement was made in October 1992:

In October, when the list was first announced, I went to work on the Wednesday morning, the first thing to do was to cut the belts and bring all the machinery back. They'd thrown in the towel then (K.A).

As far as privatisation is concerned they could have privatised Westoe but before the papers arrived they were already flooding districts and had been for years. Just before we closed we'd broken into 20 million tonnes of coal through the Wyndyke but there was about two million gallons of water being pumped out every day. They just left it to rack and ruin, they left £2 million worth of machinery down there, they didn't salvage it, just bricked it up to make sure they couldn't use the pit again (H.W).

When production ended about 150 men, the deputies apart, were employed by contractors and stayed on at the pit to carry out salvage and care and maintenance work. On 25 June BC advertised the colliery, inviting bids for licensing on the open market. The terms under which the licensing of the pit was offered restricted any prospective buyer to employ a workforce of no more than 150 men, the legal maximum number of employees in any licensed deep mine. Interested parties had to submit the appropriate documentation and a bond of £10,000 by the 18 July. Tenders, accompanied by a bond of £50,000 had to reach British Coal by 25 July. As Mike Peel, a member of the Campaign Group says: "it would have been difficult to sell an attractive home in that space of time" (WCCG 1994). On the 27 August 1993 BC reported that no tenders had been received in respect of Westoe. On the 19 November 1993 the main underground pumps were turned off, it was calculated that within 150 days the pit would be flooded.<sup>41</sup>

This was the general context of closure, the experience of those directly affected, their reaction to closure and their interpretation of events is considered in detail in chapter seven.

---

<sup>41</sup> Dr Wade had said a few weeks earlier if pumping stopped at Westoe then BC must have decided to close Wearmouth. Wearmouth Colliery coal was at the deepest part of the Durham coal seams and the water from Westoe would have drained down to it via Whitburn Dome (WCCG 1994).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### METHODOLOGY

The most widely accepted view amongst social scientists is that different kinds of information about man and society are best gathered in different ways, and that the research problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation (Bulmer, 1984:15). There are other important considerations such as the availability and accessibility of data, the resources available (funding, time, equipment and assistance) and the research strategies, methods and data traditionally thought to be appropriate to a particular problem or topic.

These considerations, as Layder (1993) notes, are not listed in order of priority, one may be more important than another depending on different circumstances. The researcher will be constrained by certain factors over which she or he has little or no control such as resources and accessibility and availability of data. The researcher does have some control over the choice of strategies or methods and it is the research problem that determines these. The research problem, in essence a statement about what one wants to know, is the driving force behind the research endeavour. "The problem must precede the selection of a research method to avoid the trap of having a method in search of a problem—a situation that produces frustrating and imprecise results" (Fetterman, 1989: 13).

The research problem was not simply to discover what had happened to the men made redundant from Westoe Colliery in May 1993, for example, whether or not they had found work and if so what type of work. Wood and Dey (1983) note that studies of redundancy have generally focused on how redundants fare in the labour market. Seglow (1970) notes how studies of redundancy have often taken the actual dismissal as their starting point:

None of them go further back and investigate, for instance, whether the opinions and attitudes of the workers interviewed are related to their former position, job or status in the factory. Indeed, had they been interested in *why* men think as they do, rather than purely in *what* they think, they would have had to approach the problem from a different level. In other words, if one wishes to explain, and account for, the reasons which lead workers to believe and think as they do about specific work problems, then large-scale general surveys are not the best means a researcher has at his [sic] disposal. They are too broad and general to be of much value (Seglow, 1970: 8).

Seglow (1970) suggests that in order to "understand completely the way in which workers react to, and feel about, the advent of redundancy, demands a much more comprehensive conceptual framework. It would need to consider the importance and relevance of redundancy in terms of a worker's total life experience, which would, in turn, involve consideration of his general social imagery, the significance of paid employment, work as an activity in his life, and many other factors". As Touraine has said when considering workers' attitudes to technological change:

Workers' attitudes to change are both complex and dynamic. They involve an appreciation of the direct personal and social effects of any change...an appreciation of what it symbolises in terms of outside control and of the individual's activities and prospects. At all these levels change will be judged according to the worker's total life experience, his social and economic environment, his commitments and aspirations, the picture he

has formed of his employers, and the value that he puts on his working career (Touraine quoted in Seglow, 1970: 21).

For Seglow, (1970) the same process applies to redundancy, which is a change in its own right. Reactions to redundancy are, of course, affected by the current state of the labour market but they are also affected by other factors (Wood and Dey, 1983). "Not only can the advent of redundancy not be isolated from the work situation in which it arises but it cannot be totally isolated from structural factors in society as a whole" (Seglow, 1970: 21). Further, as Wood and Dey (1983) suggest, reactions to redundancy are much more complex than a simple accept/oppose dichotomy implies, we must look, therefore, at the ways in which the issue of redundancy is conceived and pursued in practice.

Studies such as those by Eldridge and Fox (cited in Wood and Dey, 1983) which are concerned with the process and conflictual aspects of redundancy are the exception rather than the rule. The accent has tended to be on the wider economic causes and effects of redundancy and correlations have been sought between the characteristics of those made redundant, for example, their age and skill, and such variables as duration of unemployment. Kahn and Wedderburn (1964; 1965, cited in Wood and Dey, 1983) were partly concerned to understand the roots of worker's resistance to redundancy, however, this resistance was interpreted in terms of 'the repercussions of redundancy' and research exploring the problem of redundancy has focused largely on its impact on subsequent employment (Wood and Dey, 1983: 6).

This emphasis on the consequences of redundancy in terms of employment and its economic and social costs was increasingly evident in the arguments against pit closures during the 1984-85 miners' strike and has informed most recent campaigns against colliery closures (Wade, 1985; WCCG, 1993; Glyn, 1984). The Coalfield Communities Campaign provides detailed information on employment status, earnings and duration of unemployment (see for example Witt, 1990; Guy, 1994a and 1994b on the experience of

redundant miners from Vane Tempest and Grimethorpe). This study examines redundant workers' labour market experiences and the process of closure and subsequent redundancy. As Wood and Dey argue: "we must be sensitive to the basis and context of workers' responses to redundancies" (Wood and Dey, 1983: 1). The politics of redundancy, they conclude: "should be informed by an understanding of the aspirations, the choices and constraints experienced by those whom redundancy affects" (Wood and Dey, 1983: 113).

This work represents an attempt to gain an understanding of the experience of closure, how the men perceived and reacted to closure and their experience of life outside the pit. How did the miners experience redundancy and re deployment or unemployment? What is the experience of ex-miners who go to work in new industries? These are not new questions (see for example Bulmer, 1978 and Knight, 1968) but the recent rounds of pit closures have taken place in very different circumstances from those of the 1960s and 1970s discussed earlier. This study is contrasted with Bulmer's study of the closure of Tudhoe Park Colliery in Spennymoor, south west Durham in 1969.

The area of south west Durham was, up until the mid 1960s, one of significant coal mining employment. In 1964 there were nine pits within four miles of Spennymoor, Tudhoe Park was the seventh colliery to close in the area in four years. Tudhoe Park was a typical west Durham drift mine and one facing severe geological problems, with thin seams, low output and poor quality coal it was at the opposite extreme to the modern, highly mechanised pits on the coast with thick seams and high output, such as Westoe. Tudhoe had been reprieved on at least one previous occasion, a threatened closure may have been put off for a year or two but Tudhoe was bound to close and most of the men surveyed by Bulmer believed that closure was inevitable. There were four other collieries outside the immediate locality but none of these were expected to have a long term future.

Westoe Colliery, as suggested above, was a modern coastal pit, (one man who transferred to Westoe from an older colliery, Morrison Busty, described Westoe as being like America, everything was so big). Westoe had undergone a major modernisation scheme which cost £6.6 million and was completed in 1966. This included deepening the Westoe shaft; sinking a new shaft (the Crown Shaft) at a depth of 1,606 feet and installing skip winding. A coal preparation plant (washery) and a 10,000 ton storage bunker completed the modernisation. All the coal was cut and loaded mechanically. At the beginning of the 1970s 2,180 men were employed at Westoe, producing more than 1 million tonnes annually from undersea workings in Main, Maudlin and Brass Thill seams (WCCG 1994; DCSG 1972). Between 1963 and 1992 the total output of the colliery was 36.25 million tonnes, an average annual output of 1.25 million tonnes (WCCG 1993). The workforce decreased through the 1980s, from 2,204 in 1985-6 to 1,356 in 1991-92, during the same period output per man shift increased by 2.06 tonnes. Although the colliery had accessible coal reserves and could have provided employment for many years Westoe ceased production in May 1993.

Bulmer's study then, was set in an area that had been dominated by coal mining but where, quite suddenly, the industry was disappearing. As Bulmer notes his study differs from earlier studies such as House and Knight's work on the effects of closure in the Houghton-le-Spring area of north Durham in 1957-65 and the DEP study of the Ryhope closures south of Sunderland in 1967. These closures were carried out in areas where there was still significant mining employment available in the immediate locality.

The importance of coal mining employment in the Spennymoor area is reflected in the fact that almost four-fifths of Bulmer's sample (of 44 men) had spent all their working lives in the colliery and the total in mining altogether was even higher (this was because a number of men had transferred from other collieries as they closed). Over two-fifths of the sample had worked at Tudhoe for over 10 years and most of the young recruits (aged under 25) had started work there. Although the men described Tudhoe as 'cosmopolitan' only a quarter of the workforce came from outside the immediate locality, the men were

referring to men coming from other nearby pits which for Bulmer reinforces the importance of shared experience of working together over a period of time. Bulmer found evidence of a strong attachment of miners to their industry: "this undoubtedly reflects their lack of experience of other work, and their integration into a settled stable pattern of work and leisure social relationships...What was valued was to work among people you knew in an industry you knew and there was a great reluctance to make the break" (Bulmer, 1978: 255). As Bulmer notes, there may be a tendency to idealise what is passing away in describing Tudhoe as a 'family pit', clearly there was shared consciousness of common work experience, which was threatened by closure.

Parallel to the decline of coal mining and other traditional heavy industries in County Durham had been the rise of factory industry. At the time of Bulmer's study (1969/70) a number of companies had set up in Spennymoor. The two largest companies were Black and Decker that employed 1,600 people (half men and half women) and Courtaulds' Worsted Spinning Division factory employing eight hundred (all men except for about forty office staff). Both concerns were expanding, Black and Decker expected to increase its labour force to three thousand by the end of 1971 and the number employed at Courtaulds was expected to double to 1,600 by the end of 1971. Further expansion beyond that was projected for the early 1970s (Bulmer, 1978). The labour market situation in Spennymoor in the late 1960s then, is in sharp contrast to the situation in South Tyneside in the early 1990s (see chapter six).

Although Bulmer's account is primarily empirical the data is analysed within a frame of reference that treats social action as the basic unit of analysis.

Action is analysed in terms of external conditions, internalised constraints and normalised orientations, as a necessary corrective to theories which postulate free choice of employment, according to criteria of economic rationality...the approach here consists in delineating the course of events



leading to the closure of the pit and analysis of social influences at work. Although some attempt is made to relate the discussion to the wider social structure, it is *primarily* an attempt to analyse a particular situation and course of events (Bulmer, 1978: 238).

The conditions of action refer to factors external to the social actor and over which he has no control, for Bulmer the first condition of action is the closure itself, the second is the employment context in which closure takes place and what provisions are made for those made redundant. A third condition of action was the employment situation in mining in the south Durham Area of the NCB. Before 1966, approximately seven-tenths of men affected by pit closure were provided with alternative colliery jobs, by the time of the Tudhoe Park closure, however, there were fewer local pits to which men could be transferred. Nevertheless, there was some alternative coal mining employment available. The NCB's aim was to make 73 men redundant and persuade another 102 to transfer to alternative work within the area. In the event, 43 men either refused, left early or took redundancy, only 58 men transferred, 27 went to local pits, 12 to Tursdale Central Workshops (four miles away), and only 19 to pits further afield in the County.

A fourth condition of action was the availability of employment other than mining in the area, as seen above there were new factories opening or about to open in the locality creating vacancies for male operatives, this fact, Bulmer suggests, undoubtedly influenced the outcome of this particular closure. Indeed eleven men at Tudhoe forfeited their redundancy payments by leaving voluntarily before closure and most did so to start work immediately in local factories.

There are then, a number of important differences between the situation in Spennymoor and South Shields, first Westoe had a future in the sense that it had accessible reserves of coal, Tudhoe Park was bound to close; second, although coal mining in County Durham had contracted considerably at the time of Bulmer's study the NCB was able to offer the

majority of the men alternative work in the industry; there were no alternative jobs in coal mining in South Tyneside,<sup>42</sup> Durham, Northumberland, or any other part of the country in 1993; third, in Spennymoor there was alternative employment available outside the coal industry and the labour market situation was expected to improve further as the new industries began to expand. The labour market situation on Tyneside in the early 1990s was very different. Tyneside suffers severe and long-term unemployment (see chapter six). It would be expected that the lack of comparable employment and the fact that Westoe had accessible reserves of coal would influence the men's reaction to redundancy.

Tudhoe Park was described as a 'family pit', although men had been transferred to Tudhoe from other collieries two-fifths of Bulmer's sample had worked there for over 10 years. Many men working there had kinship ties, everybody knew everyone else and the men lived in the locality. Work, as evidence suggests it would (see Introduction) also carried over into leisure activities and many of the Tudhoe miners saw other Tudhoe men out of work. Bulmer's sample also demonstrated a strong attachment to locality that was seen as a significant internalised constraint on freedom of action: "A pattern of social relations carried on within a narrow geographical area further limits the extent to which choice is likely to be exercised.." (Bulmer, 1978:245). This, as Bulmer (1978) notes, is very important as one economically rational solution for the miner faced with closure would be to transfer to a coastal colliery and move house. Westoe Colliery drew its workforce from a far wider area, this was mainly due to the fact that men had been transferred from other collieries in the area which had closed, as more and more pits closed the workforce at Westoe became more cosmopolitan and many men travelled some distance to work, for example from Blyth in Northumberland.

Although primarily a study of closure, the aim of the research being to follow the course and effects of this particular closure, Bulmer considered a number of questions. For

---

<sup>42</sup>A number of men did find temporary employment at Westoe and Wearmouth doing salvage or care and maintenance work (see chapters 6 and 7).

example why men entered mining originally, he considered their attachment to work in the coal industry and the men's attachment to the locality as well as their experience of life after closure. These questions are also addressed in the case study of Westoe, as suggested above this type of approach to the study of redundancy places a great deal of importance on past events, employees' attachment to work and the view they have formed of their employers, as well as the actual process of redundancy and the consequences of closure.

In some ways the experience of life after the pit closed might be considered more important than the experience of closure, for example as an indication of the success-or failure-of job creation schemes or the adaptability of ex-miners to new employment. Again these issues are considered but the actual process of closure is given equal, if not more, attention. There are a number of reasons for this: first when I spoke to the people directly affected by the closure I came to realise that the process of closure, the reasons for closure and how the closure was actually achieved were equally significant and no less important to the men involved; second, many of the men I spoke to wanted someone to 'set the record straight', to tell their side of the story. I was interested in understanding and describing events from the emic, or insider's, perspective, in their subjective experiences of events. The research problem necessitated the adoption of an interview based qualitative methodology. As Kvale (1996) quite simply suggests: "If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them?" For Bulmer (1978):

Man is not only (or even) the object of social action; he is first and foremost the subject of social action, and his subjective experience must be understood (however imperfectly) if adequate understanding is to be achieved...Even if the more extreme tendencies in this tradition or approach [first person accounts] are resisted, it surely directs attention to the

sociological importance of *lived experience* (Bulmer, 1978: 303).

The qualitative approach follows Thomas's (1949) proposition that it is essential in the study of people to know just how people define the situation in which they find themselves. "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (quoted in Marshall and Rossman, 1989). The main sources of data in this study are the accounts of the men: "account[s] of individual experience which reveal the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life" (Blumer, quoted in Marshall and Rossman, 1989: 2). Plummer (1983) in his work on life accounts notes:

All this research is characterised by a lack of pomposity and pretension about methods: the researcher is merely there in the first instance to give 'voice' to other people. Methodology and theorising are something simply to be done with a firm problem in mind; it is not something to be endlessly pontificated about (Plummer, 1983: 1).

However, as Bulmer (1978) notes, the methodological value of such qualitative data does not exempt them from being scrutinised for reliability and validity. Indeed, Bulmer (1978) suggests in his discussion of the use of personal accounts, scepticism about the kinds of answers that can be given to questions of reliability and validity probably explains why personal documents were so little used in the past and why studies based on their use have been severely criticised as lacking in precision and vigour. Plummer (1983) concurs, one reason for the neglect of human documents is the still prevailing trend towards positivism, whilst they are "certainly concerned with the observable facts of social life, they are rarely committed to the 'unity' of science, the search for generalisable laws and the quantification that characterises positivism" (Plummer, 1983: 2).

For Howard (1995):

the 'problem' of the representative quality of texts which has bedevilled the study and use of life accounts has always been, at least in its broadest sense, something of a red herring since, as E.H Carr pointed out many years ago, each man is "the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs" (Howard, 1995: 93).

Nevertheless, the debate about the role of qualitative and quantitative research methods in the social sciences is almost as old as the discipline itself, certainly it is one the Chicago School and other US sociologists would have been familiar with in the 1920s. The social sciences have long been dominated by methods borrowed from the experimental sciences although qualitative research methods have become increasingly important modes of inquiry for the social sciences, for example the use of autobiography, oral history and qualitative interviewing. Kvale (1996) argues that narratives and conversations are today regarded as essential for obtaining knowledge of the social world, including scientific knowledge. Yet, despite such arguments, the expanding methodological literature on qualitative research and the growing use of various forms of qualitative methods, the approach is still seen as somehow 'new', and more importantly, as unscientific. Kvale (1996) notes how despite the conceptual and practical interweaving of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of social science research, "a dichotomised conception with the hegemony on the quantitative side may still prevail"(Kvale, 1996: 69).

For some the issue involves a choice between competing paradigms, only one of which is scientific. Qualitative studies have been variously described as descriptive, too subjective, too arbitrary to help in any scientific advance. The qualitative research interview may produce interesting results and serve as a preparation to scientific investigations, but the interview itself is not a scientific method. For Kvale "The automatic rejection of qualitative research as unscientific reflects a specific, limited conception of science, instead of seeing science as the topic of continual clarification and discussion...the

qualitative research interview can produce scientific knowledge in the meaning of methodologically secured new and systematic knowledge" (Kvale, 1996: 61).

The qualitative/quantitative debate can be seen as a matter of different methods with characteristic strengths and weaknesses that suit different research problems. Qualitative and quantitative methods are tools, and their use depends on their appropriateness to the research problem. Depending on the research aims, it may sometimes be more profitable to study intensively a handful of available cases rather than a representative sample; to use conversational rather than formal interviewing; not to aim at a set of statistics about a group as much as a full description of each individual. For Layder (1993) this macro-micro or quantitative-qualitative division is a false one that should be overcome. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have a place in social research and can be complementary.

Nineteenth century investigators such as Mayhew, LePlay and Booth treated quantitative and qualitative techniques as complementary. Even the Chicago School, often represented as thoroughly interactionist in outlook and arch-exponents of participant observation, employed both case-study

and statistical methods. Most researchers would now accept that it is sensible to use a mixture of methods and to use the strengths of one method to compensate for the weaknesses of another in the overall research design (McNeill, 1990). A multi-strategy approach or triangulation actively encourages the use of quantitative data in order to complement the central core of qualitative analysis. This can also add to the accuracy and strength of findings based on qualitative data and analysis. Silverman (cited in McNeill, 1990) has suggested that qualitative studies often rely on only a few selected examples and the reader may wonder to what extent these examples have been selected because they support the researcher's argument. Silverman argues that simple counting techniques can give a sense of the whole body of data from which the examples are taken and provide a check on the accuracy of the researcher's impressions of the data. Similarly

Bulmer (1978) suggests that the best check upon the validity of interpretation of a personal account is either to compare it with similar accounts from others in a similar situation or to supplement it with data gathered from other sources such as the written record, the observation of behaviour, or the social survey. As Fetterman notes: "One articulate individual may provide a wealth of valuable information. The ethnographer must then cross-check, compare, and triangulate this information before it becomes a foundation on which to build a knowledge base" (1989: 19). Fetterman also points to the use of verbatim quotations (of which there are many in this study):

Verbatim quotations are extremely useful in presenting a credible report of the research. Quotations allow the reader to judge the quality of work-how close the ethnographer is to the thoughts of natives in the field-and to assess whether the ethnographer used such data appropriately to support the conclusions. The ethnographer must therefore select quotations that are typical or characteristic of the event described (Fetterman, 1989: 22).

Bulmer (1978) draws on Becker's image of the mosaic:

Each piece added to a mosaic adds a little to our understanding of the total picture. When many pieces have been placed we can see, more or less clearly, the objects and the people in the picture and their relation to one another. Different pieces contribute different things to our understanding (Becker quoted in Bulmer, 1978: 308).

The multi-strategy approach or triangulation also has a long tradition in ethnography. Although ethnography is sometimes described as a purely qualitative methodology, for example, "ethnography is a form of qualitative research which combines several methods, including interviewing and observation" (Fielding in Gilbert, 1993: 154). For Denzin it is

"a curious blending of methodological techniques" (quoted in Gilbert, 1993: 157). McCall and Simmons broaden the scope of ethnographic techniques further, to include both quantitative and qualitative methods:

...some amount of genuinely social interaction in the field with the subjects of the study, some direct observation of relevant events, some formal and a good deal of informal interviewing, some systematic counting, some collection of documents and artefacts; and open-endedness in the direction the study takes (quoted in Gilbert, 1993: 157).

As an 'outsider', that is not being from the North East or a mining area, I had to learn something about the area and its people; to learn something of the history of the coal industry nationally and to gain some understanding of the nature of work as well as the culture and traditions associated with the coal industry. A wealth of such information can be found in the extensive literature on coal mining, occupational communities, trade union histories, mining autobiographies and so on. Other sources such as the reports of review bodies, government reports, newspaper articles and television programmes were also informative. These were useful in providing background knowledge and familiarising myself with the above and with more recent events such as the miners' strike of 1984-85, the 1992 closure programme and contemporaneous events (Wearmouth and Ellington Collieries closed during the early stages of the research). However, in order to gain a greater understanding of all the above and the issues concerning the people most directly affected, an ethnographic approach was adopted. Fetterman suggests:

Fieldwork is exploratory in nature. The ethnographer begins with a survey period to learn the basics...During [the] post-survey phase, the ethnographer identifies significant themes, problems or gaps in the basic understanding of the place or program....The most important element of fieldwork is being



there, to observe, to ask seemingly stupid yet insightful questions, and to write down what is seen and heard (Fetterman, 1989: 19).

Simon (1969) also provides useful advice for researchers, particularly to those who are unfamiliar with their subject:

First work objectively. Describe what is really out in the world and what could be seen by another observer. Avoid filtering what you see through the subjective lens of your own personality. Secondly, constantly reassess what is important and what is unimportant. Follow up and record what seems most important. Constantly exercise your judgement on this issue. Third, work long and hard. Saturate yourself in the situation, and keep at it (Simon, 1969: 276-277).

Visits to the Big Meeting and the Picnic (see below) and to the NUM headquarters at Red Hill in Durham; conversations at meetings and in clubs and pubs and even in church; and eventually a visit to a coal mine, as well as the more formal interviews, all provided the opportunity to observe and to ask 'seemingly stupid yet insightful questions'. These occasions also impressed on me, a sense of history, of a distinct culture and immense pride in the past.

### **Gaining access**

Before the researcher can begin the exploratory work described above, access has to be negotiated. Gaining access to sources of data can be problematic, respondents, informants and documentary sources vary in their accessibility, some are protected by the administration of official forms of secrecy (e.g., British Coal was unable to disclose information covered by the Data Protection Act), others by gatekeepers who safeguard the privacy of individuals or institutions. Others may be fairly easily accessible and

entirely open to contact from outsiders. There are a large variety of research situations, each with its own particular problems of access to the researcher (Gilbert, 1993: 53). The negotiation of access can take months, even years. Cassells (cited in Gilbert, 1993) for example, describes the difficulties she experienced in negotiations lasting well over a year in gaining access for a study of surgeons. Eventually she gained access through a surgeon friend of her husband. I was fortunate to have such a contact from the outset.

Although access to some sources of data for this study was denied at the outset gaining access to key actors, some of who were to become gatekeepers, was relatively easy. My supervisor, Dr Eric Wade (a former miner) has for many years worked closely with the National Union of Mineworkers. Dr Wade has been involved in campaigns against pit closures in the area, including the Westoe Colliery Campaign and has produced reports on the economic viability of pits and the social and economic consequences of closure (WCCG, 1993; Wade, 1985; Blyth Valley 1986). Given his connections with significant groups and individuals he was able to act as my 'bridge' or 'patron' with them (Gilbert, 1993). However, I was not always welcomed. When the closure of Ellington was announced a self-help group was formed by the wives of Ellington miners and a meeting arranged, this was advertised in the local paper. I contacted the group and explained my interest, after discussing the matter with group members it was agreed that I could attend the meeting. I duly turned up but was told I could not attend the meeting after all but that someone would speak to me afterwards. Having introduced myself and explained my interest, again, I was thanked for coming, told that nothing much had been decided and I took the hint and left. Perhaps I should have pressed for more information but I felt very much an outsider there. Despite my reassurances the women seemed very suspicious of me and I was very conscious of being different, of not being a miner's wife, not being local and, worse, being a student. This was my least successful observation, after hanging around for nearly two hours I came away with no information.

My first meeting with Campaign Group Members and other key actors was at a service at St Hilda's Church in South Shields in the second week of my studentship. The service

was held to mark the first anniversary of the announcement of the closure of Westoe and the presentation of the Westoe Mechanic's banner to the Church. The service was followed by a reception in South Shields' town hall that gave me the opportunity of discussing my plans for the study with members of the Campaign Group, union members and council officials. This also gave me greater understanding of the issues as people related their experience, knowledge and version of events. My initial understanding of events was therefore, drawn from contacts with union officials and active members of the campaign group. Later I was able to produce a more specific set of questions that arose from these preliminary discussions, a review of the literature, newspaper reports and television and radio broadcasts.

Some direct observation of events took place in formal settings, for example, at meetings of the Westoe Colliery Campaign Group (albeit after the closure); at union meetings at Ellington (when the closure of the colliery was first suspected to be more than a rumour) and at the House of Commons when the Ellington miners' representatives met with their MP to discuss the closure. It was not possible for me to observe the union meetings at Wearmouth when the vote was taken to accept the redundancy offer and, thereby, to agree to the closure of the pit. I arranged to meet Terry Watkin (Branch Secretary of Wearmouth Colliery Mechanics) in the Miners' Welfare and was able to see the reaction of the men as they left the meeting and to talk to some of them afterwards.

### **The Picnic**

Other events were far less formal but just as informative. Having heard so much about the Northumberland Miners' Picnic and the Big Meeting (The Durham Miners' Gala) I attended both in 1994 and the Gala again in 1995. At the Northumberland Miners' Picnic I was simply one of the crowd, there to enjoy the music and the marching and then to listen to the speeches of the politicians and union leaders. The day's events began with a band competition (I was pleasantly surprised to see that a number of colliery bands had survived some time after the collieries) before the procession marched through

Ashington to Woodhorn Colliery (now a museum). At the coal industry's peak 10,000 men were employed in the town's five pits. In June 1994 there were no pits. This made the occasion all the more poignant as the procession of bands and banners, men and their families marched through the streets representing collieries that no longer exist.

I met one of the Ellington NUM officials who was selling programmes in aid of the Northumberland Aged Mineworkers' Home, as the procession was not due to leave Station Road until 11-30 am he suggested that I should go for a drink (he provided a ticket that entitled me to a free pint), told me which club to go to and where to meet for the beginning of the march. This conversation took about 10 minutes, the Ashington accent being much broader than the Newcastle accent I could not understand his directions, eventually I realised that the "stir" I had to pass was the Co-Op, 'the store' and I found the working men's club.

It was only 10-45 am but this did not seem to matter, there were already a number of men drinking in the club and I got my free drink. I then met up with the others as arranged and was invited to march behind the Vane Tempest banner to Woodhorn Colliery to listen to the speakers. It was the time of the Labour leadership election. I remember that Alice Mahon spoke and Ken Livingston (he received rapturous applause and the next day put himself forward for the Labour leadership contest-whether it was anything to do with his reception at the Picnic I am not sure). John Prescott joined the procession and made an impromptu speech, he also enjoyed a noisy reception. I don't remember exactly what was said, but I do remember that the audience loved it.

After the speeches we returned to the club I'd been to that morning, not that our choice was restricted, there are 7 clubs to every pub in Ashington.<sup>43</sup> These are the clubs that brought us Jackie Milburn and Bobby and Jackie Charlton (they used to say that if you wanted a good football team in the North all you had to do was go and shout down the

---

<sup>43</sup>Leighton, writing in 1981 noted that in Ashington "there is not one passable hotel and only two pubs. The reason for this is the town's most noteworthy historical fact: that Lord Portland, once owner of the colliery and a local magistrate, was a strict teetotaler. When some enterprising person built the North Seaton Hotel he refused it a liquor licence. It is still known locally as the white elephant.

nearest pit shaft). A buffet had been laid on for the visitors in the function room upstairs. It was in the public bar that I suffered the embarrassment of being asked to leave, not because of my behaviour but because I was a woman. The gentleman who asked me to leave assured me "If it were up to me pet, well, but it's the committee you see". I suspect that some of my companions (all male), were expecting this to happen and had quite a laugh at my expense. The afternoon soon passed, one of the group had acquired pocketfuls of tickets for free drinks and everyone seemed determined to sink as much as they could before the minibus arrived to take them back to South Shields and to Easington (most were planning a night out in town). This was very informal observation, I did not have any recording equipment, apart from a camera, with me. Nevertheless the day was interesting and informative, I spoke to miners from other pits that had been closed for some time. I also met a former miner who had the strangest North East accent I had ever come across. Eventually I recognised a scouse twang. He later explained that he had moved to Easington from Liverpool during the early 1980s to work as a miner because he could not find work at home. He had only been working at Vane Tempest for a short time when the strike broke out and now he was unemployed again but he had made Easington his home and what was the point of going back to Liverpool?

The Picnic, the marchers, the bands and the banners, the political speeches and the celebrations afterwards also served to broaden my understanding of the culture and tradition of the North East and to realise what had been lost along with jobs in the coal industry.

One of the saddest occasions I attended, and there were a few, was the demolition of Westoe's Crown Shaft. The chance to detonate the explosives that would bring down the shaft was won by a South Shields publican and the event attracted quite a crowd but a very subdued one. I remember one little boy, having his photograph taken in front of the Westoe Mechanics' banner (its legend reads The Past We Inherit, The Future We Build). He was dressed in a cloth cap holding a miner's lamp, he was only about two years old

and probably had no understanding of the occasion. Others did, looking around at the faces of the men and women there was no doubt what the occasion meant to them.

## **The pit**

Most of the things one imagines in hell are there - heat, noise, confusion, darkness and foul air, and above all, unbearable cramped space (Orwell quoted in Hall, 1976: 33).

Modern pits are rather different- or so I was told. Confessing my fear of confined spaces to a Sunderland miner I was reassured that the modern coal mines are huge. "Have you ever been on the London Underground?" He asked, I told him I had. "Well, that's just what it is like." As noted earlier Allen has suggested that the popular image of coal miners is of "hard, unrefined men...hewing in mysterious dungeons of coal" (Allan quoted in Tyler, 1994). The hewer "by means of a pick...felled the whole area of coal and filled it into tubs" (Douglass quoted in Krieger, 1984: 161). Working directly to extract the coal, Krieger (1984) suggests, the hewer represents the outsiders' image of the miner. The task of the putter, typically young miners, was to provide the empty tubs for the hewer and to lead the full ones away. Today there are no drills, shovels or pickaxes. Huge machine cutters and loaders now do the work of the hewers and putters. The men who now work on the face are technicians just as mechanical fitters in factories are technicians, although, as Burton (1977) notes, the conditions in the pit are very different from those of a factory. The division of labour in the modern coal mine is far more complex, few men actually work on the face getting coal. The modern mine demands highly trained labour and the Westoe sample includes mechanics, electricians and engineers as well as unskilled labour (although many of these men possess colliery specific skills) such as rope men, transport workers, power loaders, locomotive drivers, track inspectors and even a medical centre assistant. Within the industry unskilled men tend to be referred to as miners, skilled men are described by their trade, e.g., electrician,

fitter and so on. Many 'miners' have never worked underground, as one Westoe man, a blacksmith, told me, the only time he had been underground was on a visit from school.

Tony Hall in the introduction to *King Coal* (1981) starts with a disclaimer, stating that his research was a perilous task because he had never worked down a pit he could never 'know' the industry. Although a few hours visit underground could only give one a glimpse of work in the coal industry I felt that this would be worthwhile. This was not in order to gain any credibility, would anybody who had worked underground for years be impressed with the fact that I had spent a few hours down a pit? I doubted it. Nevertheless, as my only experience of a coal mine was a twenty minute tour of a drift mine (one that you can walk into) at Beamish Open Air Museum, I decided I had to see for myself the conditions under which the 'hardest work under heaven' is performed. Unfortunately Westoe had already closed when this research began and requests to visit one of British Coal's remaining deep mines were refused. The Ruhr Coal Company was far more helpful (again Dr Wade had useful contacts) and a visit to the Hugo/Consolidation Pit in Gelsenkirchen was arranged for September 1995.

Descending the pit shaft I imagined I would experience some sensation of dropping, of falling into the bowels of the earth, instead in the dark cage I lost all sense of direction, we could have been travelling forwards, backwards, up or down. Once we reached the pit bottom we continued our journey to the face in a paddy wagon. This had to be one of the most uncomfortable forms of transport I have ever experienced, I am not tall but even so found the compartments cramped, sitting on hard seats you could feel every jolt and it was impossible to move around or change your position as your legs are stuck between those of the person sitting opposite. It soon became more uncomfortable, as we travelled further away from the pit shaft and nearer the face the air began to change, in the dim light of my lamp I could see dust, then I could smell it and, as it grew thicker, I could actually taste it.

We then had to walk the rest of the way to the face, at first this seemed a good opportunity to stretch my legs and relax after the confined space of the train. The roof was high above our heads and the tunnel wide. However, I had to concentrate on every step I took, the experience was similar to hill walking on a scree, the ground beneath my feet was uneven, there were pools of water, pieces of equipment, planks and cables to watch out for and the ground seemed to move under my feet. I also had to keep my head down to avoid bumping it on equipment or catching my lamp on an overhead cable. It would not have been quite so difficult had it not been for the pace set by our hosts. I'm not sure whether they walked as quickly normally, possibly they were able to because they were used to the conditions but I have a feeling that increased their pace as part of some shared joke at our expense. It also became very hot, this is mainly due to the geothermal gradient but was made worse by the physical effort simply of walking in these conditions and the encumbrance of the clothing and equipment we had to wear. This consisted of a heavy white cotton jacket and trousers, white scarf, blue striped shirt, lamp and power source, carbon monoxide filter and unfamiliar and oversized work-boots (I was even supplied with vest and underpants).

Every now and again we would meet a group of miners walking towards us, in the dark and the dust it was impossible for them to see who we were but our white helmets indicated that we were either management or visitors, they politely greeted us with a nod and said "Auf". As this seemed to be the customary greeting in the pit I said "Auf" and nodded at the next miner I met, his voice when he returned my greeting gave away his surprise at hearing a female voice.

The further we walked the worse the conditions became, then we passed through a ventilation door and got a blast of cold fresh air, this only made the conditions seem worse again afterwards. They were getting worse. It was hotter, dustier and noisier, we were getting very close to the face. It became more cramped, by now we had to bend double for much of the time to avoid machinery and cables, all the time still watching where we put our feet. The noise of the machinery was almost unbearable, the dust was



now so thick that I wanted to close my eyes as the dust stung and burnt. The cutting machines threw out dust and bits of coal, they were so noisy that you could just hear the person next to you if they yelled. It really was hellish. Our party left the pit after a visit lasting a couple of hours, we were soaked in sweat, filthy, terribly thirsty and tired, and all we had done was walk to the face and back.

As Hall (1981) says almost everyone who visits a pit comes up and says "Pay them whatever they ask". I understand his point but after going underground I really doubted whether, whatever the men were paid, anyone should have to work in such conditions. Still, however dangerous, whatever the conditions, mining is a job, as one Westoe miner later told me:

I don't think anyone could miss the pit, the conditions were horrible. I couldn't, with my hand on my heart, say I liked it, but it was a steady job.

## **The survey**

As Westergaard *et al.* (1989) note, the opportunity to carry out a study of this kind is fairly rare. Samples can be drawn from the unemployed, or at least those registered as unemployed; and even, as in one major official study (Moylan, Miller and Davies, 1983 cited in Westergaard *et al.*, 1989) from among those registered at a particular time to follow up their later experience. Nevertheless, the story that can be told will miss out those people who walk more or less straight into other paid work, or, conversely, pull out of the labour market altogether. There are no official records kept of redundancies, with the names and addresses of those involved, from which a sample might be drawn in order to follow through how they all fared. But occasionally such a list can be constructed or it comes to hand by good fortune. As noted earlier, BC refused to release the names and addresses of former Westoe employees. Unfortunately neither the National Union of Mineworkers nor the Durham Mechanics' union were able to provide

details of their members. This was somewhat surprising but union officials explained that under the check off system union subscriptions were automatically deducted from the members' wages and there was, therefore, no need to keep a record of members. The WCCG provided an incomplete list of Westoe employees (960 men) which had been compiled by David Clarke MP from data supplied by BC. The sample frame, then, consisted of 80% of the Westoe workforce. It was not possible to test the representativeness of the sample in terms of age, skill and residence as the list of Westoe employees was incomplete and provided only the names and addresses of employees. However, the sample over-represents skilled workers and under-represents unskilled workers. This should be borne in mind in interpreting the results as all evidence suggests that skilled workers will find it easier to gain new employment than unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers. Further, the interview sample over-represents former Westoe miners living in South Tyneside and under-represents those living outside the Borough. It is known that 771 Westoe employees (64 per cent) lived in South Tyneside and the remainder of the workforce (36 per cent) lived outside the Borough. The interview sample consists of 26 men, 21 (just over 80%) who live in the Borough of South Tyneside and just 5 (19 per cent) from outside.

A sample of three hundred men was drawn by simple random sampling and postal questionnaires were sent out in May 1994, one year after the pit closed. Questionnaires (see Appendix 1) were used to gather quantitative data on, for example, the age, employment status and income of the redundant men. The survey was conducted for a variety of reasons, first quantitative data can complement the core of qualitative data and helps to give a picture of the wider scene, second this was a means of establishing contact and of drawing a smaller sample to be interviewed in depth at a later date; third respondents were invited to make comments that allowed them to raise issues concerning them.

A covering letter was sent with the questionnaire explaining the nature and purpose of the research and giving assurance of anonymity. A stamped addressed envelope was

included for the return of the questionnaire. One hundred and eleven questionnaires were returned, 89 were completed. Seventeen were returned because the address or person was unknown, 2 men had died and 3 questionnaires were returned opened but uncompleted (no explanation). Although the response rate was low (less than 30%) Letters of reminder were not sent, this was partly because I believed that had people not been persuaded to co-operate by the original letter (which stressed the importance of their views to the research) then they would probably not be by a second, a reminder might have produced a few more responses but this would also have added to the expense of the survey. The fairly low response rate was not regarded as problematic as the collection of quantitative data was not my main aim (see above).

### **The interviews.**

The difficulties of deciding when to carry out research in redundancy have been noted by Wedderburn:

The research worker has to reconcile various objectives; of obtaining data about immediate reactions and experience without over-great reliance upon memory and also of obtaining data about some new 'equilibrium' position (which is almost impossible to define) when the immediate effects have worn off. At the very beginning of the enquiry, therefore, we decided to use two interviews, the first within a few weeks of the closure...and the second perhaps six months to a year after closure (Wedderburn, quoted in Bulmer, 1978: 257).

Bulmer adopted a different approach, interviewing his sample both before and after closure. The aim of the early interview was to illuminate their view of the situation before becoming unemployed while that of the second interviews, eleven months after the closure, was to gauge the effects of closure and to attempt to study the new 'equilibrium' position. This would have been the preferred approach here but Westoe had

closed five months before the research began and in this case it was necessary to rely on the men's memory of events. The interviews took place between October 1994 and January 1995.

Having drawn a sub-sample of 26 men<sup>45</sup> from the questionnaire respondents who had agreed to be interviewed the respondents were contacted on the telephone and a time and date for interview was arranged. The size of the sample was determined by two main factors, cost and time. First the time available to interview respondents and second the time it would take to transcribe the taped material (cost was also important here, given the limited resources I transcribed the tapes myself). Most of the interviews lasted about an hour and a half, some time was also spent in making introductions, explaining the purpose of the research and generally chatting. A common problem in the interview situation is when respondents, eager to please or impress, give those answers they anticipate the researcher wants to hear (Gilbert, 1993: 139). In explaining the purpose of the research and the interview I reiterated the point I had made in the introductory letter sent with the questionnaire. That is, I was interested in their views, what they thought and how they experienced events.

Some interviews took longer and in total they generated 62,000 words. In view of the cost of travelling, both in terms of time and money, it was hoped that the interviews could be arranged so that a number of men living in the same area could be interviewed on the same day. This was rarely possible as many of the men in employment worked shifts and others lived outside the town, for example in Annfield Plain, Jarrow and Hebburn.

The majority of men were interviewed in their own homes but the choice of venue was theirs, one unemployed interviewee chose to be interviewed in my home (saying that this would give him somewhere different to go). Sometimes family members were present although most men chose to be interviewed alone. Again this was left to the individual, if

---

<sup>45</sup>See chapter 7 for a profile of the men.

wives or other family members chose to join in then they were included in the conversation and any contribution was noted. For the most part they tended to listen and only occasionally joined the conversation.

The method of interviewing for the most part followed a symbolic interactionist approach in the sense that "the interview is a social event based on mutual participant observation" (Fielding in Gilbert, 1993: 151). In practical terms this meant that the interview schedule was semi-structured, the schedule contained a list of topics for discussion and a number of more specific questions, most of which were open ended. This allowed respondents to use their own particular way of defining and describing events and their feelings and allowed them to raise considerations that I had not thought of. This approach also assumed that no fixed sequence of questions is suitable to all respondents (Gilbert, 1993: 151). Further, the questions asked depended on the men's current situation, for example those who had been unemployed for some length of time were asked about this experience. More importantly, as mentioned above, some interviewees will converse quite happily and give all the information one requires-and more, without actually being asked many specific questions. As Lofland (cited in Gilbert, 1993: 136) has put it, the essence of the research interview is the 'guided conversation'. This is also a far more relaxed approach. Lofland has summarised the objective of the non-standardised format as being "to elicit rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis. Its object is to find out what kinds of things are happening rather than to determine the frequency of predetermined kinds of things that the researcher already believes can happen" (Gilbert, 1993: 137). The preferred approach, then, was an interactionist one where the interview would be an exchange or a 'guided conversation'. However, in reality the conduct of the interview depended upon the subject, that is in some cases where the interviewee was reluctant to volunteer information without being questioned (the 'what do you want to know?' interviewee) it was necessary to refer to the schedule and prompt the interviewee.

Characteristics such as class, race, age and gender, the behaviour of the interviewer and the conduct of the interview, have all been shown to have an impact on the interviewer-interviewee relationship and on the responses made (Gilbert, 1993: 145). Shapiro and Eberhart (cited in Gilbert, 1993) showed that variations in respondent verbosity resulted from the willingness of the interviewer to probe, aggressive interviewers elicit more information as do experienced interviewers. In this case most men were relaxed and spoke quite frankly, it was necessary to probe occasionally but this could not be described as 'aggressive' interviewing. For the most part we conversed quite easily, I was interested in what the respondent was telling me, if I wanted to know more I simply asked. If my gender or my being a student had any impact I was unaware of it. Some men were very open about their experiences, for example their emotional state when the pit closed or when they had been unemployed for some time. Here my being female might have been a factor, as it is suggested that people find it easier to confide in strangers, especially females who are seen as less threatening (Gilbert, 1993). The main reason the interviewees conversed in a fairly relaxed, (sometimes heated) way was probably because the majority of men were interested in the questions asked and in giving me their version of events. The questions related to their recent or current experiences and many answered at some length so that most interviews, as I had hoped, became extended conversations.

The interviews were tape recorded as it would have been impossible to take reliable notes and keep the conversation flowing. The interviewees were reassured that they would remain anonymous and that the tape would be turned off at any time if they so wished. Interviewees were also told that they would be sent a transcription of the interview so its accuracy could be checked, this would also give them the opportunity to retract information (only one person asked me to omit a remark). This was felt to be a useful way of gaining co-operation and as only fair to the interviewee. Nobody seemed inhibited by the tape recorder (I was probably more aware of the recorder than the interviewees), the only difficulty with tape recording in this case was that some of the

men spoke very softly and/or had very broad accents (it has to be said that they didn't always understand my accent either). Brief written notes were taken, these helped to keep a check on the questions covered and clarified some queries on the questionnaire. Occasionally it was necessary to ask supplementary questions, to repeat or rephrase questions. For example when asked why they had originally entered the coal industry many of the informants described their work experience at the pit, what they liked and disliked about the coal industry and so on.

This flexible approach, sometimes structured, sometimes semi-structured, produces less easily categorised data but richer and more varied qualitative material. The interviews were transcribed verbatim between November 1994 and January 1995.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE EMPLOYMENT EFFECTS OF CLOSURE: SOUTH TYNESIDE

The closure of any industry employing large numbers of people has both direct and indirect effects on levels of employment. The direct effects of pit closures include the redundancies in the coal industry, British Coal employees and contractors and the consequential redundancies in dependent companies, for example, suppliers and railway and power station workers. The indirect job losses are those in any area which result from the reduction in income and expenditure following redundancy. The Coalfield Communities Campaign (CCC) distinguishes between two indirect effects that operate on different time scales: the income multiplier effect and the economic base multiplier effect. The income multiplier effect impacts on reduced demand for local goods and services, it is relatively small and takes 18 months to two years to work its way through.

Redundancies can affect the local economy in a more extensive way, albeit over a longer time scale. This effect is termed the economic base multiplier effect. This can result in lower investment in service and construction jobs where the local economy is in decline and developers perceive limited investment potential. Outward migration can also occur and this further depresses the demand for local goods and services (WCCG, 1993). The Coalfield Communities Campaign,<sup>46</sup> in evidence to the Employment Committee, stated that these longer term effects might take ten to fifteen years to work through.

---

<sup>46</sup> The Coalfield Communities Campaign (CCC) is an all-party association of local authorities in Coalmining areas. More than 90 local authorities are CCC members, and these include almost all the present and former coal mining areas in England, Scotland and Wales. The CCC campaigned for energy policies which made full use of UK coal and was one of the first to warn of the implications of the 'dash for gas' and it has led opposition to the expansion of nuclear power and to the development of coal importing facilities. CCC has been centrally involved in efforts to secure funding for the economic, social and environmental renewal of coal areas, notably the multi-million pound RECHAR programme of EC aid.



The Henley Centre has estimated nationally that for each mining job lost there will be a further 1.5 jobs lost in firms supplying the coal industry and a further loss of 0.5 jobs due to the effects on consumer spending (WCCG, 1993). The Department of Employment, whilst recognising the local income multiplier effect, did not examine the long-term effects on employment opportunities in mining areas (Employment Committee, 1993: 48, xiv). The Government felt unable to make precise estimates of the wider overall impact of pit closures on employment (beyond direct losses in the coal industry), either in supplying industries, or in mining communities and added "Even in industries that supply directly to coal deep mining, relatively few firms are entirely dependent on given pits" (HMSO, 1993: 5:3).

Estimates of the employment effects of closures, as the Employment Committee observed, reflect the relative optimism or pessimism of different witnesses about Britain's future economic performance. The Department of Employment, for example, argued that the British economy has a propensity to self-equilibrate, that is job losses in one industry and area tend to be offset by the creation of new industries and jobs in other areas. Similarly the Department of Trade and Industry stated in the conclusions of the Government review of the coal industry:

Over time, as the economy adjusts and redundant workers find new employment, the loss of jobs from pit closures would be broadly matched by compensating developments elsewhere. New jobs might be in different industries, and to some extent in different areas, but overall employment would return broadly to its previous level. (HMSO, 1993: 5:14).

While agreeing that unemployment is "a traumatic and distressing experience for the individuals concerned and their families", the Government suggests that it is not a long term problem for most people will find work within a year:

Constant turnover in the labour market itself gives rise to opportunities as up to 40,000 individuals come onto the count each month and a similar number usually leave. Moreover, on a national basis four out of five people who become unemployed cease to be unemployed within a year, and most do so more quickly. It follows that for the majority of those who become unemployed, this is unlikely to lead to permanent exclusion from the labour force (HMSO, 1993, 5:13).

Other witnesses, including Andrew Glyn and the CCC were far less optimistic given the already high rates of unemployment and the long term decline of many coalfield areas. Andrew Glyn, arguing that the Department of Employment's equilibrium theory was "well outside the mainstream of economic theory", stated that the effect on employment would not be temporary. "On the contrary, the unemployment would persist into the foreseeable future" (Employment Committee, 1993: 28, ix).

The Government recognised the serious impact of pit closures and the concentration of redundancies in particular localities that would result from them. However, change is inevitable in a modern industrial economy. "Companies and industries rise, flourish and decline; and others take their place. Mining and its associated activities cannot be exempt from this process, which has been seen many times and in many places". The Government did accept the need to assist this process and announced measures which would "aid the process of change in closure areas and help to sustain existing activity as adjustment takes place" (HMSO, 1993 5:19). The Government agreed to fund a redundancy package worth about £23,000 to the "average miner with 15 year's experience".

In addition to the redundancy package, the Government announced in October a substantial and wide-ranging package of new measures to assist the coalfield

communities. Measures included the advance commitment of Assisted Area status for Doncaster, Barnsley and Mansfield; assistance from European Community Structural Funds; a major programme of premises and sites provision by English Estates; a major Employment Department programme of training, counselling and job finding support from the Employment Service and the Training and Enterprise Councils; a Coalfield Areas Fund to provide immediate benefit to the communities; the introduction of new Enterprise Zones in areas where they would be most effective; extra help for inward investment promotion and additional activity in British Coal Enterprise.<sup>47</sup> In 1993 the Government decided to increase the amount available for regeneration measures to £200 million (HMSO, 1993: 5:28).

As Ross Tieman notes (*The Times*, 7/7/93), there is little new about such measures. In physical terms they are exactly the sort of measures that have failed to bring about regeneration in other areas hit by the decline of traditional industries.<sup>48</sup>

Lord Walker, appointed by the Government to oversee the restoration of local economies blighted by pit closures, was optimistic about the employment prospects of redundant miners: "The workforce from the mines is an incredibly good workforce. Many of them have electrical or engineering skills. They are highly disciplined and trained and they work extremely hard" (*The Times* 7/7/93). Lord Walker's view, shared by the Employment Department and the Government, that many of the younger and skilled miners would find new employment was contradicted by the CCC. The CCC agrees that many miners are highly skilled but "within the context of their own industry [and] find that their expertise is not easily transferable" (CCC, 1990). Research findings have shown that most miners experience considerable difficulty in obtaining new work and those who succeeded usually had to take lower paid jobs, often with private

---

<sup>47</sup>British Coal Enterprise Ltd was set up in October 1984 to create new long-term jobs in areas traditionally associated with coal mining. It followed the model established by British Steel (Industry), which was set up in 1975 (Turner, 1993).

<sup>48</sup>See Turner's study (1993) of coalfield regeneration policies.

contractors working at British Coal collieries. Few moved into radically different employment or self-employment (Finn, 1993). The CCC also notes the need for advice, financial assistance and re-training in order for miners to adapt to appropriate work beyond mining.

Those leaving British Coal as a result of closures can receive help from British Coal Enterprises (BCE) a subsidiary of British Coal. According to the Government BCE has been operating successfully for a number of years. BCE's activities include financial support to job creating businesses, the provision of managed workspace for new or expanding small businesses and the Job and Career Change Scheme (JACCS); a comprehensive job resettlement programme for ex-British Coal employees. Through JACCS, some 29,000 people - 85 per cent of former British Coal employees actively seeking jobs during the period-have been resettled or retrained for identified jobs.

British Coal Enterprise<sup>48</sup> has described itself as "the most successful job-help organisation in the country" (BC, 1993), claiming to have created some 83,000 employment opportunities since October 1984 (HMSO, 1993). In January 1994, in a letter to Gordon Adam MEP, Roland Stevenson, Regional Manager of BCE announced their achievement of having helped to create 12,600 new jobs in the North East and a total of 100,000 new jobs in Britain's coalfield areas. BCE (1995) also claim that in 1994-95, 100 new jobs were created each week through BCE's business funding activity. "Long term, viable jobs that probably would not exist had BCE not stepped in with vital funding packages" (BCE, 1995). BCE claims to have had great success in helping former miners back into work but research (Guy 1994a, 1994b; Critcher, Dicks and

---

<sup>48</sup>When asked for information on their activities BCE replied "As you will appreciate, at the present time we are directing all our efforts into our main activity, the outplacement of former mineworkers. Thus I regret to inform you that we are unable at the moment to redirect resources from this activity." Although BCE felt unable to give me any information on their success in 'outplacing' former Westoe workers they did provide me with some glossy brochures proclaiming their successes in more general terms.

Waddington, 1992) suggests that the men are experiencing some difficulty in finding work as the following table shows.

Table 6

**EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS OF EX-MINERS IN TWO COMMUNITIES**

<b>STATUS/JOB</b>	<b>SIX MONTHS AFTER CLOSURE</b>	<b>TWO YEARS AFTER CLOSURE</b>
UNEMPLOYED	46.25	45.7%
IN MINING	23.1%	17.4%
GENERAL		
LABOURING/MANUAL	11.6%	24.0%
OFFICE/SHOP WORK	3.8%	-
OTHER EMPLOYMENT	5.7%	6.5%
RETIRED	5.8%	2.2%
STUDENT	3.9%	-
SELF-EMPLOYED	4.4%	

Source: Critcher, Dicks and Waddington, 1992.

Early indications suggested that redundant miners in the North East would have even more difficulty finding work. Many of the men in Critcher *et al.*'s study were able to find work in other pits, the CCC emphasised that this option would be virtually ruled out by the scale of the proposed closure programme (Finn, 1993). A Shields Gazette report suggested that as few as one in ten redundant miners from Westoe had found work eight months after closure. Of the 860 men who registered with British Coal Enterprise (BCE) 151 had found employment:

137 pitmen had found new employment with firms

14 were self-employed

156 were retraining

Of those who did not register, it is unknown how many have opted for a Government training scheme, retired or even left the area. Sources suggest that of those who registered with the Employment Service, just a handful has found work (Shields Gazette 27/1/94).

Structural change, as the Northumberland Task Force (1993) reports, has not only left a legacy of high unemployment. Those who are in work have seen a progressive fall in pay levels as mining jobs have been replaced by lower paid, often part-time employment. Northumberland was the third lowest paid county in England in 1989, with an incidence of low pay (proportion below the Council of Europe's Decency Threshold) over 40 per cent higher than the national average. Low incomes mean fewer funds available in the local economy to support employment. This combination of high unemployment and low pay is evident in other areas affected by pit closures. Nearly a year after closure, only one in four former Vane Tempest miners had found work. A survey of 167 of the 900 men from Vane Tempest found that 70% were still not working, with 52 per cent unemployed and 18 per cent in education or training. More than 90 per cent of former miners were financially worse off (Northern Echo, 23/9/94; Guy, 1994b). The CCC carried out a survey of what happened to the men at five pits that closed following the October 1992 closure programme. The first report (Guy, 1994a) presents an analysis of the returns from 164 men who were employed at Grimethorpe, a pit that produced its last coal in October 1992. The CCC survey found that 44 per cent of the men were still unemployed, around 46 per cent were in paid employment or were self-employed. The majority of men who were working experienced a drop in their earnings, often a very substantial one (average drop in income £65 per week). Only 2 per cent were better off, 85 per cent were worse off, either because they were still unemployed or because they had less well paid jobs. The CCC concluded that the local economy will continue to feel the effects of

closure for some time to come. Many mining families face hardship and this will have a 'knock-on' effect throughout the community. Local shops and services will experience lower turnover and, in the longer term, high unemployment rates may drive young people to leave the area, thereby reducing demand for public services such as education and health, libraries and social services. "A downward spiral of local economic decline will set in unless there is a dramatic improvement in the area" (Guy, 1994a: 15).

Table 7

**CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT BY TRAVEL TO WORK AREA**

	<b>JUNE 1992 % RATE</b>	<b>APRIL 1994 % RATE</b>
<b>SOUTH TYNESIDE (WESTOE)</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>19.1</b>
<b>SUNDERLAND (WEARMOUTH)</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>13.6</b>
<b>MORPETH AND ASHINGTON (ELLINGTON)</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>15.1</b>

Source: Department of Employment, 1993 and Employment Gazette, June 1994.

**The cost of closure**

The problem for the British public, according to The Times (3/11/92) remains the same, the closures may ultimately cost us more than it would have cost to keep the mines open. The Westoe Colliery Campaign Group estimated that the cost of closure in the first year was £33,503 for each redundant miner. This figure is made up of the average redundancy payment, Exchequer costs and unemployment benefit. The total Exchequer cost for all Westoe's redundant miners (1,200) was £40,203,600. The cost to the Exchequer in the

second year for all redundant miners was estimated to be £23,534,100. A total cost over two years of £63,737,700.

Although the financial consequences of unemployment, for the tax payer, the community and the individual, are important, there are other costs to be considered. Being unemployed is not as simple as just not having a job. The unemployed suffer a number of social, economic and psychological stresses which make being out of work a state of mind as much as an employment issue.

Earning one's living is more than an economic matter, for it pervades a whole range of cultural and political relationships. These become visible when individuals are no longer able to earn their own living. Their immediate loss of income is accompanied by a loss of status, identity and rights through the multiplicity of rules and regulations to which the unemployed and their families are subjected. Additionally, those without jobs are frequently denigrated and their abilities and motivation openly questioned (Allen *et al.*, 1986: 1).

There is a widespread consensus that unemployment has deleterious effects on the individuals affected, and on the community as a whole, as well as being a key indicator of malfunctioning in the economy. However, this belief in the social damage caused by unemployment is at variance with the fact that there has been no widespread breakdown of the social and political order despite high levels of unemployment and long-term-unemployment over the last two decades (Hakim, 1982). Hakim suggests that one explanation for this is that our attitudes to unemployment are based firmly on the experience of the 1930s and one consequence of this is that unemployment is not regarded as the problem it once was. For example, supplementary benefit has eliminated the social consequences following from dire poverty<sup>49</sup>. Westergaard *et al.* (1989) suggest

---

<sup>49</sup>See Hakim 1982 for a fuller discussion.



that attitudes towards unemployment have hardened as the notion of a 'natural' level of employment has taken root.

There has also been an increasing tendency to blame the unemployed and/or the Welfare State for their predicament. The income maintenance system, it is argued, creates an incentive for people to stay voluntarily unemployed as it erodes the financial incentive for those who would only be marginally better off in work. Although there is some evidence that the income maintenance system has some effect on the work ethic there is also evidence that the non-financial benefits of employment are sufficiently important for people to return to work despite a drop in income (Hakim, 1982). The non-financial benefits of work, or the 'non-latent functions of employment' (as opposed to the manifest function of making a living), identified by Jahoda (cited in Marsh, 1988) are activity; a time structure for the day; the social contacts work brings; social status; personal and group identity and participation in collective social endeavours, and thus a sense of wider purposes and goals in life. Thus, Jahoda argues, while many of the aspects of unemployment as economic deprivation have changed since the 1930s, being out of work denies people these functions and is still extremely painful (cited in Marsh, 1988: 363).

Similarly, Ritchie (1990), in a survey of living standards during unemployment, found that self-esteem appeared to be more affected by the lack of employment status and occupation than by the financial consequences of unemployment. The study left no doubt about the anxiety, depression, stress and low morale that unemployment can bring (Piachaud, 1991). Research has shown that unemployment makes people sick and at the more extreme can take them to an early grave. Area studies have shown that areas with high unemployment rates have significantly higher mortality rates and, by implication, sickness rates, among both the young and people of working age (Hakim, 1982).

Unemployment causes physical and emotional problems for whole families when one member is made redundant. A study in 1984 found during two years when families lived with the threat of redundancy and the two years after they lost their jobs, GP

consultations went up by 20 per cent, episodes of illness increased 11 per cent, and visits to outpatient clinics rose by 60% (WCCG, 1993).

The suicide rate has been increasing steadily since the 1970s and evidence suggests that unemployment may be a factor. Unemployment is certainly a feature of about half of male parasuicides and suicide deaths are highest among young males in Social Class V, the group that is also most vulnerable to unemployment (Hakim, 1982).

The severity of the psychological consequences of job loss is determined by the degree of attachment to paid work and/or occupation as a central focus of personal identity. It follows that the impact of job loss is generally greater for men than for women and it is greatest among men aged between 45 and 54 years than among the young and generally greater for married men than for single men (Hakim, 1982). Men approaching retirement age are less affected and the least affected are young people aged under 25 (but see Hakim above on suicide rates amongst this age group). Although the response to job loss will be influenced by a number of factors (age, the likelihood of finding new employment, financial security and so on) it is usually a traumatic experience and often comes as a shock to people (Sinfield, 1981). Archer and Rhodes (cited in Marsh, 1988) point to the many similarities in response to unemployment and bereavement such as anger and guilt, loss of self-identity and greater stress the more the job is loved. Similarly Parkes (cited in Marsh, 1988) has noted similarities in the process of coming to terms with the loss of work and the process of grieving and coming to terms with the loss of any other valued person or object.

Marsh (1988) suggests that becoming unemployed is not like being bereaved, it is not final in the same way, and it is certainly not experienced as final. Even the long term unemployed, the old and workers in areas where the chances of finding work are the smallest, sustain hope that they will find work, even if it is casual or temporary work and that there will be an economic upturn. Moreover, she says, "the actual object lost, the

particular job is not the stimulus for grief as it is in bereavement; people hope to find another job, but not the one they actually lost" (Marsh, 1988: 362).

Evidence suggests, however, that the intensity of job search and the likelihood of regaining work decline with the duration of unemployment. Some unemployed people descend into apathy which may border on clinical depression. More generally, self respect, social, working and personal skills are eroded by long spells of unemployment (Hakim, 1982). Harrison, drawing on evidence from studies of unemployed men in the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, concludes that: "prolonged unemployment is for most people, a profoundly corrosive experience, undermining personality and atrophying work capacities" (Harrison, 1976:347).

Harrison (1976) quotes from a 1938 study of unemployment during the depression which describes three stages in the course of unemployment:

We find that all writers who have described the course of unemployment seem to agree on the following points: first there is shock, which is followed by an active hunt for a job, during which the individual is still optimistic and unresigned; he still maintains an unbroken attitude. Second, when all efforts fail, the individual becomes pessimistic, anxious and suffers active distress; this is the most crucial state of all. And third, the individual becomes fatalistic and adapts himself to his new state but with a narrower scope. He now has a broken attitude (Eisenberg and Lazarsfield, quoted in Harrison, 1976: 339).

As noted above unemployment affects individuals, families and communities as well as wider society. Critcher *et al.* (1992), in a study of a mining community six months after the pit closed, described a community struggling to come to terms with a total

disorientation of its established patterns of life; work, family and communal. They found that redundant miners and their wives experienced unprecedented levels and forms of stress:

It is not merely the loss of a job and its camaraderie and support that is so debilitating. It is also the lack of alternative employment. Miners had varied experiences of job counselling-schemes. While they were sensitively handled some felt that they were being given unrealistic aspirations, retraining in information technology bore no relationship to the actual jobs available locally. As one miner said: 'I know lads that have been on these courses, but I don't know any that have got a decent job through it...They're either on low-rate jobs or some are outside contracting'. The rates of pay, often around two pounds an hour, could not replace a miner's wage. Even when supplemented by wives' earnings they barely achieved subsistence level (Critcher *et al.*, 1992:16).

The picture in a second community, where the pit had closed two years earlier, was worse. Work was still scarce but the evidence of long-term unemployment was more stark. The residents of these two communities referred to another former mining community nearby, here crime rates had risen 27 per cent in the last year, there was also evidence of an increase in drug-taking by young people who, according to a local policeman, saw no prospect of any enhancement or furtherment in their lives (Critcher *et al.*, 1992).

### **The Tyneside labour market**

Tyneside<sup>50</sup> experiences persistently higher levels of unemployment than the country as a whole, the level of unemployment is not distributed evenly and the area has pockets of severe deprivation. Some wards have unemployment rates as low as 5%, at the other extreme some have rates of more than 38%. In South Tyneside 3 wards have unemployment rates of 20-45% and 14 wards have unemployment rates of 9-20%, only 3 wards have unemployment rates of 4-9%. This is a result of economic restructuring and the decline of traditional manufacturing industries and coal mining. In an attempt to overcome these problems the area has become the focus of a number of urban, regional and European policy initiatives, part of South Tyneside is designated a Task Force Area and part of South Tyneside's riverbank is designated an Urban Development Area. These initiatives are expected to end in 1998 but the recently announced enterprise zones in North and South Tyneside will run for up to ten years (Tyneside TEC, 1996).

Unemployment is a deep rooted, long term problem on Tyneside and it remains a more severe problem than nationally. It is estimated that employment on Tyneside declined by around 1% between 1991 and 1994, which is slightly lower than the 1.1% nationally. This, in part, reflects that the south was more badly affected by the recession of 1991-1992 than the north. Although the recent economic performance of Tyneside has been quite good relative to the national economy, looking to the future, local performance is forecast to lag behind national growth rates. Future projections suggest that employment on Tyneside will increase by about 1% by the end of the decade, this compares to an estimated employment growth rate of 1.6% nationally. Since July 1994, unemployment nationally has declined by 1.1 percentage points to 8.2%, in the same period unemployment in Tyneside has declined by 0.7 percentage points to 11.8%. Seventeen per cent of the unemployed in the area have been unemployed for over 3 years, compared to 14% nationally (see Table 8).

---

<sup>50</sup>The Tyneside TEC area comprises the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and the Metropolitan Boroughs of Gateshead, North Tyneside and South Tyneside an area covering about 155 square miles with a population of 840,000 (Tyneside TEC 1996).

TABLE 8

**DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT JULY 1995**

Duration	Tyneside	Great Britain
<6 Months	41%	45%
6-12 Months	19%	19%
12-24 Months	16%	16%
24-36 Months	7%	7%
36+ Months	17%	14%
Total	46889	2244257

Source: Tyneside TEC, 1996

Table 9

**ESTIMATED UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE**

Age Group	Under 25	25-34	35-49	50+
<b>Tyneside</b>	22.1%	11.9%	10.3%	11.3%
<b>GB</b>	14.3%	8.9%	6.0%	6.7%

Source: Tyneside TEC, 1996

Local economic activity rates remain below the national average; nationally 71% of the working age population are in employment compared with 65% on Tyneside. The trend of declining male economic activity rates continues. In 1981, male economic activity rates stood at 76%, but by 1991 it had declined to 69%. This long term trend has

continued with male rates standing at 66% in 1995. The decline in male economic activity rates is an indication of the level of decline of full time employment opportunities available within Tyneside and surrounding areas.

There has been some growth in female participation rates but this in no way compensates for the decline in male labour market participation. In 1981, female economic activity rates stood at 45% and by 1991, it increased to 47%. The level of labour market participation for females remains at the same level in 1995. The increase in female economic activity rates is far less than the enormous decline in male rates. Further, it is estimated that around 17% of Tyneside women (78% of which are married women) and 15% of women nationally are not actually part time workers, but marginal workers, i.e., they work less than 16 hours per week, and will therefore, only make a small contribution to household income.

There has been a growth in part-time employment nationally but a higher proportion of local residents are employed on a part-time basis. In 1992, 23.2% of Tyneside residents were employed on a part time basis, by 1995 this had increased to 26.2%. Nationally, the level of part time employment has increased from 23.8% to 25.1% over the same period. This trend suggests that part time employment is being substituted for full time employment at a greater rate for Tyneside residents, than is the case nationally. This has important implications for household income, in an area where wages are already lower than the national average.

It is estimated that around 34.8% of full time employees earn below the Council of Europe's decency threshold in Tyne and Wear, compared with 30.5% in Great Britain. In Tyne and Wear in 1994, the average full time employee earned £15,304 compared with the Great Britain average of £16,936. This shows that on average employees on Tyneside earn almost 10% less than the national average. In 1993/94, overall average earnings rose more slowly in Tyne and Wear (2.5%) than in Great Britain (2.8%). Over the last 6 months, around 60% of firms on Tyneside have concluded a wage settlement,

with average pay increases being around 3.7%. The pay settlement for engineering has been well above the average at 4.7%, whilst other manufacturing sectors have had significantly lower increases of around 2.6% on average. Tyne and Wear Research states that the trend in earnings relative to Great Britain reflects the long term imbalances of demand and supply and the recent loss of relatively high paid jobs which have tended to depress wage rates locally (Tyneside TEC, 1996).

South Tyneside is the most heavily deprived district in an area of marked deprivation and ranks as one of the most impoverished areas of the country. Half the population of the Borough were wholly or partly dependent on welfare benefits in 1993 and 13,000 households were wholly dependent on Income Support and 21,124 households out of the 31,000 (private and public sector) rented homes qualified for housing benefit (WCCG, 1993).

Table 10

**Changing Structure of Employment on Tyneside (Percentage of Total for Respective Year)**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>Change 81-94</b>	<b>Change 91-94</b>
<b>Primary Industry</b>	16000 (4.6%)	9600 (2.9%)	7300	5400	-66%	-16%
<b>Manufacturing</b>	100500 (29.1%)	69900 (21.2%)	62900 (18.9%)	61600 (18.7%)	-39%	-2%
<b>Construction</b>	20700 (5.9%)	20000 (6.1%)	19800 (6.0%)	19200 (5.8%)	-7%	-3%



Table 10 continued

Services	208500	225300	242100	242600	16%	+0.2%
	(60.3%)	(68.2%)	(72.9%)	(73.8%)		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>344200</b>	<b>330300</b>	<b>332100</b>	<b>328800</b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>-1%</b>

Source: Tyneside TEC, 1996.

Table 11

### OCCUPATION SOUGHT

Managers	3.1%
Professionals	2.8%
Skilled Technical	4.5%
Clerical	12.3%
Personal and Protective Services	7.7%
Machine Operatives	9.7%
Other Occupations	30.7%

Source: Tyneside TEC, 1996.

The table above shows the occupations sought by the unemployed, the other occupations group is predominantly unskilled work but those looking for skilled work account for the second highest proportion of the unemployed, this again reflects the decline in traditional heavy industries and engineering. Employment growth in this area is expected but it is unlikely to be sufficient to compensate for the volume of jobs lost previously. There are skill shortages, these exist among managers, skilled technical workers, skilled trades and

machine operatives and the demand for people with management and information technology skills continues to grow. The major cause of the problem is a lack of people with relevant experience. Tyneside TEC (1996) notes that product knowledge is a key area for skill enhancement across all occupational areas.

Lower proportions of Tyneside residents are employed in higher level occupations, for example, managers, professionals and skilled technical workers than the national average and the level of self-employment remains below the national average. A higher proportion of Tyneside residents are employed in clerical, personal and protective services and sales. This reflects the job opportunities in the area.

Table 12

**EXPECTED SCALE OF JOB LOSSES OVERALL BASED ON NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

<b>DIRECT LOSSES</b>	
Miners	1,200
Other British Coal Staff	400
Contractors	180
Suppliers	565
Railway and Power Station Workers	235
<b>INDIRECT LOSSES</b>	
Income Multiplier	516
Economic Base Multiplier	2,064
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,160</b>

Source: WCCG,1993.

Table 13

**EXPECTED SCALE OF JOB LOSSES OVERALL BASED ON KNOWN  
LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

<b>DIRECT LOSSES</b>	
Miners	1,200
Other BC Staff	200
Contractors	50
Suppliers	565
Railway and Power Station Workers	235
<b>INDIRECT LOSSES</b>	
Income Multiplier	450
Economic Base Multiplier	1,800
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,500</b>

Source: WCCG, 1993.

Table 14

**THE IMPACT OF CLOSURE ON JOB LOSSES LOCALLY AND  
ELSEWHERE**

	Job Losses in South Tyneside	Job Losses Elsewhere	Job Losses Total
<b>DIRECT LOSSES</b>			
Miners	771	429	
Other BC Staff	130	70	
Contractors	32	18	
Suppliers	0	565	
Railway and Power Station Workers	75	160	
	1,008	1,242	2,250
<b>INDIRECT LOSSES</b>			
Income multiplier	302	148	450
Economic base multiplier	806	148	450
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,116</b>	<b>2,384</b>	<b>4,500</b>

Source: WCCG, 1993

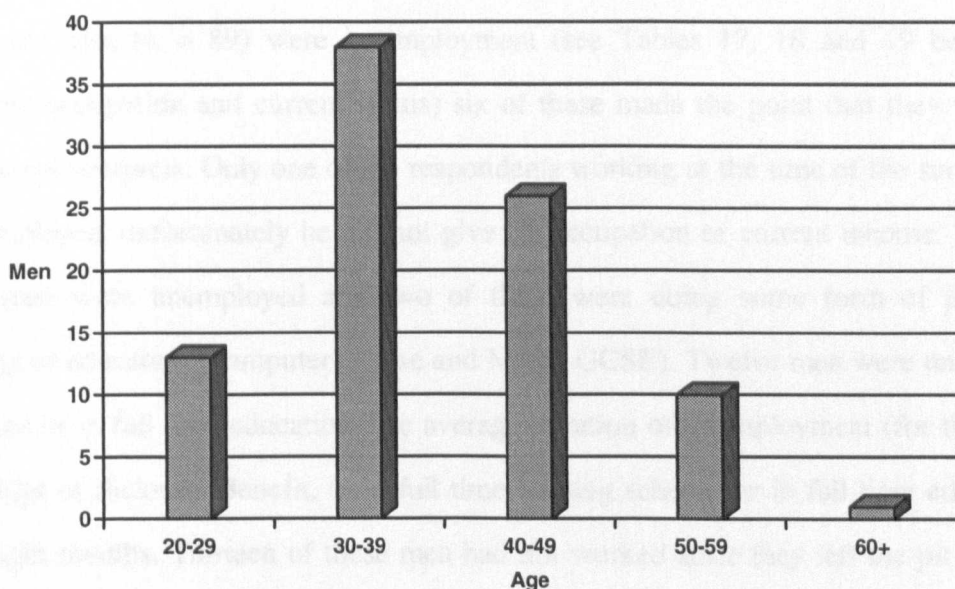
As noted above early indications suggested that miners in the North East are experiencing great difficulty in finding comparable employment and the survey of former Westoe miners (conducted a year after the closure) suggests that this is the case, less

than half the men were in employment and the vast majority of the sample were considerably worse off in terms of income.

Eighty-nine men completed and returned postal questionnaires.<sup>52</sup> The average age of men on leaving Westoe was 39, their ages ranging from 27-61. The majority of men were aged between 30 and 50. Only one man was aged over 60.

Table 15

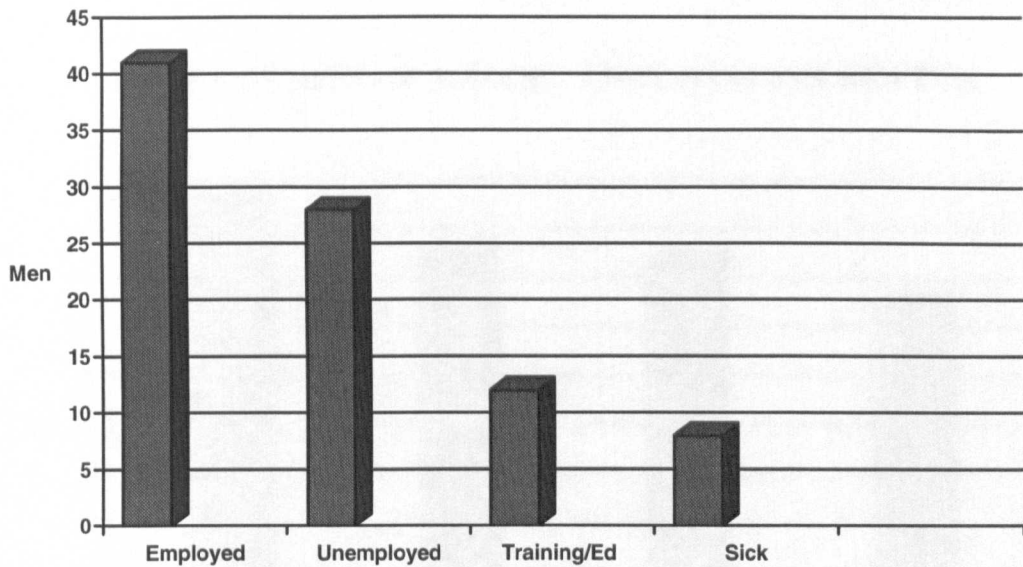
### AGE OF MEN LEAVING WESTOE



<sup>52</sup>See Methodology.

Table 16

**EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MEN ONE YEAR AFTER CLOSURE**

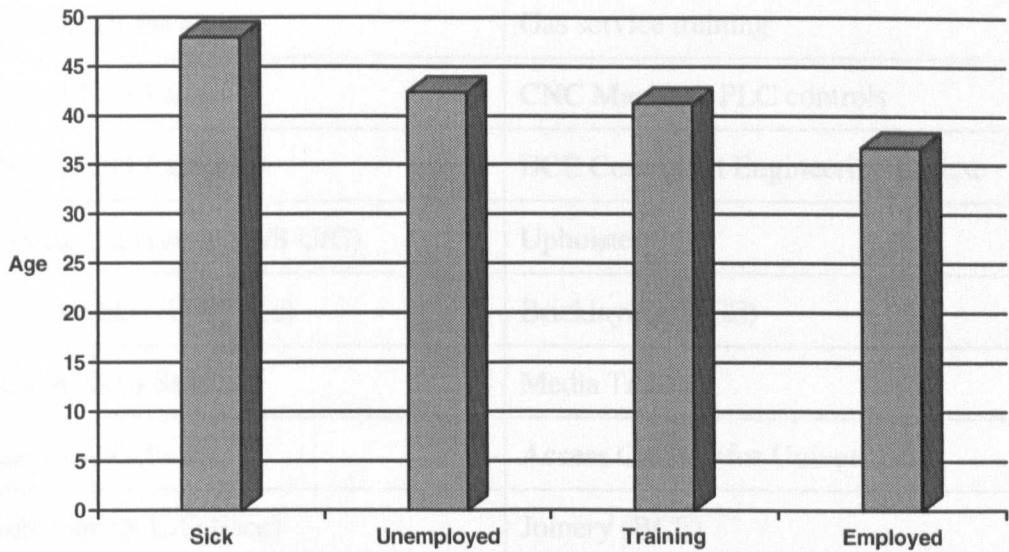


Forty-one men (n = 89) were in employment (see Tables 17, 18 and 19 below for previous occupation and current status) six of these made the point that they were on short-term contracts. Only one of the respondents working at the time of the survey was self-employed, unfortunately he did not give his occupation or current income. Twenty-eight men were unemployed and two of these were doing some form of part-time training or education (computer course and Maths GCSE). Twelve men were on training schemes or in full time education The average duration of unemployment (for those not in receipt of Sickness Benefit, on a full time training scheme or in full time education) was eight months. Thirteen of these men had not worked since they left the pit and had been unemployed for over a year. Six of the unemployed respondents had been kept on at Westoe (doing salvage and/or care and maintenance work). Two respondents stated that they had recently completed British Coal Enterprise training and were now back on the 'dole'. Eight of the twenty-eight unemployed men stated that they had no contact with British Coal Enterprises.

Eight men received Sickness Benefit and one man (who described himself as unemployed) was awaiting an award of Sickness Benefit.

Table 17

**AVERAGE AGE OF MEN BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS**



The average age of men claiming sickness benefit was 48; unemployed men 42 years and 3 months, those in training or education 41 years and 4 months and those in employment, 36 years and 9 months.

Table 18

**EMPLOYMENT**

Previous occupation	Present occupation
Underground transport pumpers (U/S U/D)	Chemical plant worker
Electricians (S U/D Pwr)	Regional supervising construction worker

\* A skilled worker as specified with NCEPC  
 † Unskilled  
 ‡ Non-union worker  
 § Underground worker

Table 18

### TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Previous occupation <sup>53</sup>	Training
Transport Worker (U/S Datal)	Scaffolding
Mechanic (S Face)	Gas service training
Fitter (S U/G Face)	CNC Machine, PLC controls
Fitter (S U/G Face)r	BCE Controlled Engineering Course
Training Supervisor (U/S U/G)	Upholstery
Power Loader (U/S Face)	Bricklaying (BCE)
Blacksmith (S Surface)	Media Training
Fitter (S U/G Face)	Access Course (for University)
Electrician (S U/G Face)	Joinery (BCE)
Mechanical fitter S U/G Face)	Electronic servicing (South Tyneside College)
Fitter (S U/G Face)	Diesel and HGV Fitting course (BCE)
Fitter (S U/G Face)	Bricklaying

Table 19

### EMPLOYMENT

Previous occupation	Present occupation
Underground transport, pumps, compressors (U/S U/G)	Chemical plant worker
Electrician (S U/G Face)	Flagstaff supervising demolition Westoe

<sup>53</sup> S-Skilled, served an apprenticeship with NCB/BC  
 U/S-Unskilled  
 Datal-non-face worker  
 U/G underground worker.

Table 19 (continued)

Electrician (S U/G Face)	Factory worker
Fitter (S U/G Face)	Service engineer
Coal Face worker U/S U/G Face	Process operator
Electrician (S U/G Face)	Flagstaff, care and maintenance, Westoe
Fitter (S U/G Face)	Boiler House Maintenance
Underground locomotive driver (U/S U/G)	Labourer (scaffolding, docks)
Supervisory electrician (S U/G Face)	Street lighting attendant
Power loader (U/S U/G Face)	Security guard
Underground Datal worker (U/S U/G)	Associate Postman
Datal worker (U/S U/G)	Trimming in metal casting company
Underground mechanical fitter (S U/G Face)	Maintenance foreman
Fitter (S. U/G Face)	Fabrication fitter
Welder (S. Surface)	Welder (£166 less per week)
Fitter (S. U/G Face)	Maintenance technician
Maintenance fitter (S. U/G Face)	Service technician
Power loader (U/S U/G Face)	Security officer
Face worker (U/S U/G Face)	Process operator
Power loader (U/S U/G Face)	Vending
Belt maintenance (U/S U/G Datal)	Warehouse operative
Dust sampler and back bye salvage (U/S U/G Datal)	Advertising executive
Track inspector (U/S U/G Datal)	Night porter (hotel)
Colliery electrician (S Surface)	Maintenance/Caretaker South Tyneside College
Transport (U/S U/G Datal)	Plastics production



Table 19 (continued)

Previous occupation	Present occupation
Fitter (S U/G Face)	Interconnection Systems Ltd. Mechanic
Deputy (U/S U/G Face)	Trainee process operator in chemicals
Electrician (S U/G Face)	Collector engineer
Back bye worker (U/S U/G Datal	Wood machinist
Mechanical fitter(S U/G Face)	Contract mechanical fitter in mining industry (country-wide)
Medical Centre assistant (U/S Surface)	Sterile Services Assistant (Hospital)
Fitter (S U/G Face)	Fitter
Power loader (U/S U/G Face)	Trainee Bakery manager
Datal worker (U/S U/G Datal)	Driver/loader Alpha Flight Services
Miner (U/S U/G Datal)	Trainee store detective
Colliery fitter (S Surface)	HGV driver
Process operator (U/S U/G Face)	Factory work
Electrician (S U/G Face)	Assistant branch mechanic (Bank of England)

NB Three men did not give their present occupation.

Table 20

### UNEMPLOYED

Previous occupation	Number unemployed
Power loaders (U/S U/G Face)	7
Fitters (S U/G Face)	3
Electricians (S U/G Face)	8
Datal (U/S U/G)	1

Table 20 (continued)

Mechanic (S U/G Face)	1
Development Worker (U/S U/G Face)	1
Face worker (U/S U/G)	2
Rope man (U/S U/G Datal)	1
Underground Workers (U/S U/G Datal)	2
Conveyor Belt Maintenance (U/S U/G Datal)	1
Linesman measurer (U/S U/G Datal)	1

### Income

As the survey was conducted a year after the closure the majority of men were still eligible for unemployment benefit. Only one respondent said he was in receipt of supplementary benefit (Family Credit or Income Support) but he did not state how much. This suggests that remainder of the men either had a substantial amount of redundancy money left or that they were deemed to have it and therefore, were not eligible to any benefits despite their low incomes.

The vast majority of men were far worse off financially in terms of weekly income: 34 of the men in employment who stated their earnings were, on average £79.17 per week worse off. Only 3 men earned more than they had in the coal industry, one earned £100 per week more and two men earned just £10 per week more. One man earned the same amount and 3 did not state their earnings.

Table 21

**REDUCTION IN WEEKLY INCOMES OF MEN IN EMPLOYMENT**

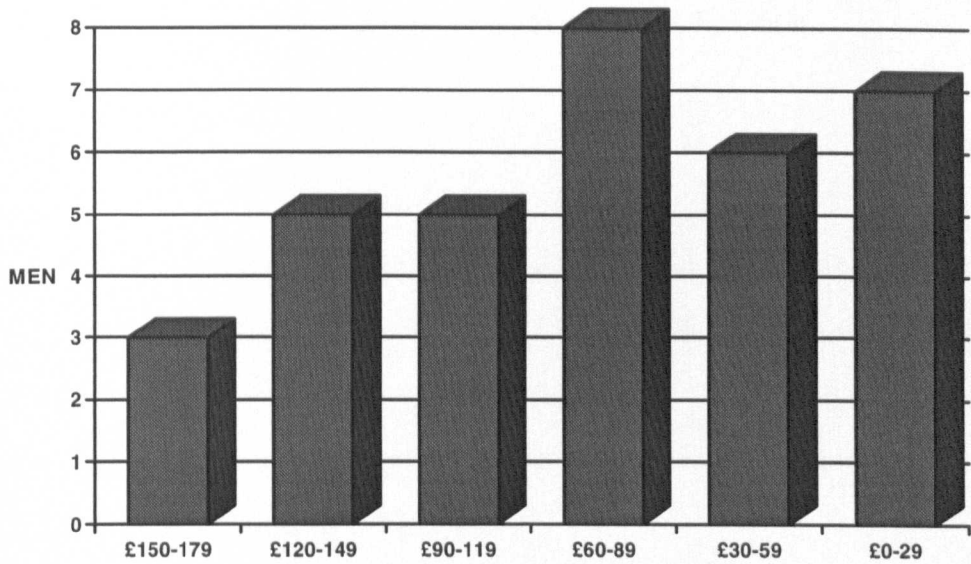
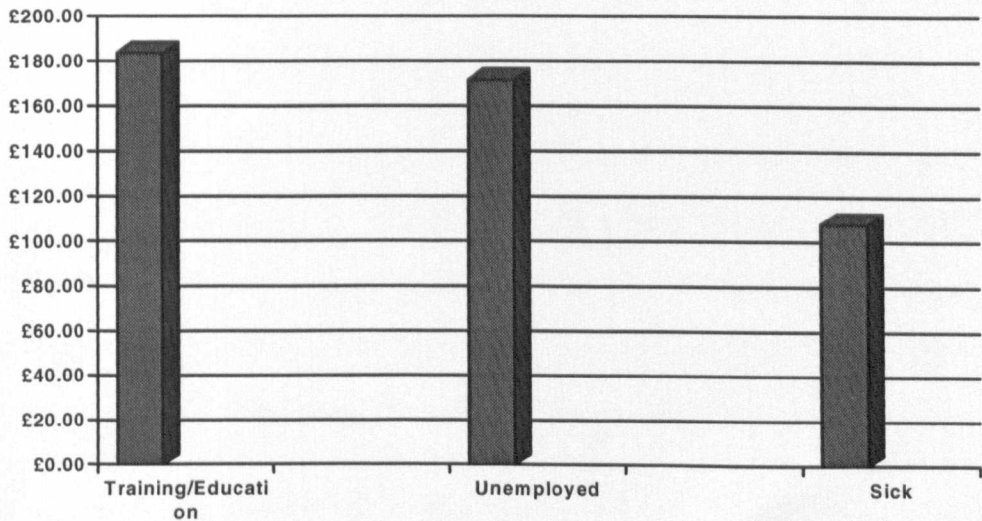


Table 22

**REDUCTION IN WEEKLY INCOMES OF MEN NOT IN EMPLOYMENT**



Those without work were substantially worse off, the men on training schemes were slightly better off than unemployed men as they received various amounts on top of their

Unemployment Benefit (Training allowance and, for some, a travelling allowance) on average they received £10 per week extra. Those in receipt of Sickness Benefit were not quite so badly off but still experienced a substantial drop in earnings.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EMPLOYMENT HISTORY, THE EXPERIENCE OF CLOSURE AND THE SEARCH FOR WORK.

#### The men

K.A. aged 35. Entered the coal industry as a 16 year old and worked as a deputy at Westoe, taking home £340 per week, until closure. Employed at Westoe on care and maintenance and salvage work for 4 months. Finally left Westoe in September 1993. Married, wife works and has done for some time. Now employed as a process operator in a chemical plant earning £195 per week.

R. B. aged 46. Entered the coal industry straight from school and worked as a power loader earning £250 a week. Presently on a BCE carpentry and joinery course at Langley Moor, receives £55.45 a week. Single.

T. H. aged 38 years. Entered the coal industry straight from school worked as a fitter at Westoe earning £200 basic with regular overtime £300. Now employed at Interconnections earning £750 per month. Married, wife works part time.

J. H. age 54. Worked in the shipyards for 3 months after leaving school and then spent 38 years working in the coal industry as an electrician earning on average £250 per week. Employed on care and maintenance at Westoe until December 1993. Presently on a BCE training course in joinery, receives approximately £80 per week (including travel allowance). Married, wife does not work (on Sickness Benefit).

P. M. age 54. Had a number of jobs after leaving school in 1955 but spent 21 years in the coal industry. Employed as a power loader, taking home £170 on average, until Westoe closed, off sick from 18 February 1993. Now in receipt of Sickness Benefit (£136 per week) due to a back injury sustained at work. Married, wife does not work.

C. P. aged 39. Entered the coal industry straight from school and worked as an electrician, taking home £250 (average). Self-employed electrician, out of work at present.

A. S. aged 42. Worked as a television engineer after leaving school then entered the coal industry. Worked as a power loader earning, on average, £200 per week. Married, wife works part time, took a job because of husband's unemployment. Unemployed for 13 months following closure. Now employed as a machine operator at Mitsumi earning £300 per week.

N. R. aged 31 Fitter, left Westoe 20 February 1993. Married, wife works as PT care assistant, 2 children. Completed an Access course, one year part-time at Newcastle College (maths and computer course). Now at Newcastle University studying accountancy, works as a care assistant in same home as wife (alternate shifts because of the children).

H. W. aged 34 Dust sampler and back-bye salvage, take home pay on average £170 per week, single. Left Westoe 7 May 1993. Now employed part-time as a tele-sales canvasser for the Newcastle Journal earning £60 per week plus commission.

D. D. aged 37, power loader taking home £250 average, left Westoe 3 April 1993 Started work 1 June 1993. Married, wife works part-time. Employed, services, repairs and installs vending machines earning £104 per week.

D. E. age 41. Employed as a fitter at Westoe earning £220 on average. Married, one son, wife doesn't go out to work. Unemployed.

P. S. aged 33, mechanical fitter taking home £309 on average. Left Westoe 7 May 1993. Married with small children, wife does not go out to work. Presently studying for a HNC in engineering and instrumentation at South Tyneside College.

D. G. aged 40, back bye worker, taking home £240 a week on average. Left Westoe May 1993. Married, wife does not go out to work. Employed as wood machinist at Be Modern, earning £160 per week net.

B. S. aged 45, track inspector taking home £250-300 a week. Left Westoe 8 May 1994. Now a night porter in a Newcastle hotel, earning £120 net. Married, wife has always worked.

M. F. aged 30, left Westoe 8/5/93. Transport worker taking home £170 a week average. Employed in plastic production at Onwa (quality control) earning £212 per week gross. Married, wife works and has done for some time.

A. F. aged 31, belt maintenance worker taking home £160 on average. Left Westoe May 1993. Employed as warehouseman at Wincantons. Married, wife works part-time. (Went back to work because of husband's unemployment, able to claim Family Credit.)

M. H. aged 35, underground locomotive driver taking home £180 (average), left Westoe 8/5/94. Has had a number of casual labouring jobs but unemployed at present.

B. G. aged 33, coal face worker taking home £320 per week. Left Westoe 8 May 1993. Employed as a process worker at Interconnections. Wife works full time as a teacher always has.

J. N. aged 46, fitter taking home £230 on average, left Westoe 3 December 1993 (7 months care and maintenance work with Flagstaff). Unemployed for 6½ months. Now employed as a fitter at Bonas Machine Company. Married with a son, wife works part-time has done for some time.

F. F. aged 41, Electrician taking home £160 on average. Left Westoe 27 February 1993. Unemployed for 10 months. Now employed as a collector engineer (emptying, maintaining and repairing children's rides) earning £131 net. Married, wife paediatric nurse now at university (health studies).

E. H. aged 56, Electrician taking home £250 per week. Left Westoe 26 March 1993. Unemployed since closure. Receives £83 per week pension. Married, wife does not work.

K. P. aged 53 electrician taking home on average £200 a week. Left Westoe 8 May 1993. Unemployed for 19 months, did a BCE welding and pipe fitting course. Now employed as an electrician at E.P Lee earning £6.81 an hour (short-term contract). Married, wife works but has done for some time.

H. J. aged 40, Blacksmith earning £250 per week on average. Left Westoe 8 May 1993. Presently on a media training course, receives UEB plus £10. Wife works as sales assistant, 2 children.

D. F. aged 37, single, development worker earning £185 net. Left Westoe 8 May 1993. Unemployed since closure.

R. W. aged 32, Fitter taking home average £350 a week. Left Westoe 9 December 1993 (7 months contract work). Then unemployed for 8 months, did a BCE vehicle fitting course. Now employed as a fitter in a factory earning £8.75 an hour. Married, wife works has done for some time.

G. M. aged 44, Mechanic taking home £250 per week (£400 with overtime). Left Westoe 8 April 1994. Now employed as a dispatch technician at Thompson House (Newspaper). Married, wife works.

In order to maintain anonymity the respondents' place of residence has not been given here. The geographical distribution of the interview sample by residence is presented in table 23 on the following page.



Table 23

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE BY RESIDENCE**

South Shields	18
Jarrow	1
West Hebburn	1
Boldon Colliery	1
Gateshead	2
Stanley (Annfield Plain)	1

**Employment history**

Over half of the 26 men interviewed (14) had entered the coal industry straight from school and had been employed in mining all their working lives, of these, 9 were aged under 40 when the pit closed. One of the younger men (M.F) had done 8 months Youth Training after leaving school followed by 6 months unemployment so had no real employment experience other than mining. Another (P.M) had "a couple of dead end jobs first" and then worked in the coal industry for three years. He left mining to join the army and had a number of factory jobs and returned to the coal industry 14 years later, he spent a total of 23 years at the pit. One man (K.P) had entered the coal industry straight from school but subsequently left the pit for 14 years, initially to join the Merchant Navy, he then had a number of jobs before re-entering mining.

The remainder of the men had a variety of jobs, for example, painter and decorator, carpet fitter and television engineer, shipyard worker and shop and factory work, but had spent most of their working lives in the coal industry. One man had worked in the shipyards for 3 months after leaving school but then spent 37 years in mining; another

spent a few weeks working as a carpet fitter and then joined the NCB and worked for 25 years as a colliery fitter. Only 6 of the men had spent over a year in other employment before entering the coal industry; one of the men (B.S) spent 9 years in the army another spent 7 years working in various jobs before joining the NCB (D.S), the other 5 men had only 1-3 years experience of work outside the coal industry.

### **Reasons for entering mining**

Most of the men gave a number of reasons for going into mining originally and there was little difference between the responses of the men according to age or residence (but see below for one notable exception, M.F). The most frequently cited reason for entering mining was the security the job offered (14); other reasons given were: father or other relative in the industry (11); the importance of a trade or a good apprenticeship (10); relatively good money (9); little alternative employment (6); visited the pit from school and found it interesting (3 - all men aged under 40 when the pit closed). A typical response mentioned a number of influences, for example:

Mining was always something I fancied doing. I had family in mining, an uncle, and it was just something I fancied doing, I thought it would be a job for life at the time. We visited Ashington Colliery from school (K.A).

Good cash, several relations worked at the pit at the time, every one of them said don't go down the pit. It was a good chance to get a trade, underground, and I thought the pits were going to be here for ever, a job for life (H.W).

Seven men said they had been advised to join the Coal Board, one by the school careers advisor and the remaining 6 by their fathers, only one of who was a miner himself. The main reasons given for this advice were security of employment and the importance of a good apprenticeship and a trade. One man (M.H) did not receive any advice his father,

who was a miner, simply brought him the necessary forms to join the NCB. Another (M.F) whose father was also a miner suggested that mining was what you did where he came from (transferred to Westoe from Scotland):

I didn't choose it. When I left school I think that everyone...just automatically got put down. I think my father put my name down. My father was a miner and my brother and my grandfather. There were 4 or 5,000 living in the town and about 3,000 of them were miners.

Four men said they would have liked to have pursued different careers, one (P.S) wanted to join the Royal Navy but did not have the necessary GCEs, he was advised by his careers officer to serve his time in the coal industry first, he stayed in the industry until Westoe closed. The second (K.P) also wanted to go to sea but was given similar advice by his father, he served his time in the coal industry and then joined the Merchant Navy.

The third (E.H) who had worked in the industry for 40 years said:

My father advised me. I don't know why because he wasn't a miner, he was a Docker. I think probably because at that time we were exempt from the army and he had been in Burma during the war, possibly that was his reason. I fancied plumbing, I wish I'd done that now but I listened to my father.

The fourth man (R.B) said he wanted to be a joiner: "but at the time I just wanted to work so I thought I'd go there [the pit] for 2 or 3 years". He spent 31 years in the industry.

Although a few men (6) mentioned the lack of alternative employment most added that they did have some choice, albeit a fairly limited one, of the pit, the docks, the shipyards or the factories. Only one man said that there was no choice, M.F who came from a coal mining town in Scotland. Again the coal industry was the preferred option because the

NCB apprenticeships were widely regarded as superior and, the men believed, it was a 'job for life'.

It was the apprenticeship, in those days you had a choice, the shipyards or the pits. I see it now as the mentality of the working class, you went to the shipyards or you went to the pit, that was the impression I got from my stepfather (D.E).

Round here [Annfield Plain] there was a factory making ball bearings - that was a big employer; the Consett Iron Company was there-that was another place you thought would never close and then the pits. I thought I'd rather go to the pit, I used to see lads at the billiard hall who worked at Consett and the pit. Now the lads who worked at the pit were always happier, always seemed to be better trained, they knew about things, could fix cars and so on. So it seemed a better apprenticeship and it was going to be there for the rest of my life (J.N).

It was the only job going at the time, well there were the docks, yards or the pit. The factories weren't keen on taking a lot of people on, especially with the qualifications I got from school, all CSEs. I was lucky to get in as an apprentice really. I certainly thought it was a secure job, I thought it would last for life. It was a really good apprenticeship as well with the NCB (F.F).

In addition to the apprenticeship offered by the Coal Board, which most men considered superior to the training offered in other local industries, the Coal Board offered the opportunity of entering Further and Higher Education:

If you were really good you could even end up going to university. The NCB would fund it, a canny few of the lads actually did get through to university (J.H).

I went straight from school to Westoe, 13 September 1965. I think a lot of lads can remember the date they started. I didn't go to the colliery in the first year, I had a year's full time education at Hebburn Tech. I didn't get the same holidays as the college - I'd go to the pit during the holidays, Bank holidays, etc. I did day release for two years, I also did two years of an honours degree AMEME. It was a three year course but I could tell I was in over my head so I gave it up (G.M).

Five men who cited security as an important factor influencing their decision went to work at Westoe in the mid-to-late 1970s and mentioned an NCB recruitment drive:

...they were advertising on TV for people to start, they couldn't get enough workers. I'd started then, about 6 or 7 months before, but in 1977 they advertised on TV and loads started, about 20 a week at one time (D.D).

I entered the coal industry straight from school. I was 16 years old. There was a big recruitment drive going on at the time, 1975-76, I thought it was a job for life (K.A).

Security was also a reason given for returning to the coal industry by the two older men who left the coal industry and spent some years working 'outside':

I first went into the coal industry when I left school in 1955. Well, I had a couple of dead end jobs first and went into the coal industry in 1956. I worked at Harton colliery, just where

we're sitting now. I left there in 1959 and went into the army. Then I worked in engineering factories for 7 years but every where you went they were going on short-time or there were redundancies so I decided to go and see if I could get a job back at the pit. I would rather not have gone back down the pit I just went for security of employment. I went back in 1973 - to Westoe.

All the work I could get was contract work, I spent a lot of time on the continent and various parts of the country so I still wasn't at home. Then the job came up at Westoe colliery and I took that so I'd be at home. I started in 1977, we were part of the last intake into the collieries. I also thought it was secure then (K.P).

Twelve men said their fathers had been miners and 4 others said they had relatives working in the industry when they started. One man (H.W) had 7 relatives working at Westoe when he started there and 7 other members of the family working in Nottinghamshire collieries.

Although a number of men said that their families were 'not keen' on them entering the coal industry only 3 men said that they were actually advised not to enter mining by their fathers and other relatives working in the industry. However, 2 of these men said that their fathers agreed to them doing so as long as they learned a trade.

My dad was retired, he'd worked in the pits and he didn't want me to but he said I could if I got a trade (J.N).

The trade was the most important thing, my father always said he wouldn't let me go down just as a pit man, he was a

labourer in the wood yards but he wanted his son to have a better standard of life, to have a trade (G.M).

When I managed to get the job at Westoe and went to tell my mother-oh she went off it, and so did my dad. Well, I said, you did [work in the pit]. 'Aye', he said, 'and I know what it is like' (A.S).

In other cases parents did not want their sons to enter the industry but believed that it offered a secure future:

My dad, I don't think he was keen on me going to the pit but he doesn't say much anyway. I don't think my mam wanted us to, but they thought the same as me really, that it was a secure job (A.F).

One man (B.S) had been an Army bandsman and was 'poached' by a colliery band, (his father had a similar career, he was an army bandsman and then a miner at Silkworth Colliery).

I got a letter from Harton and Westoe Band saying they could get me a job. I had an interview but we were going to Germany so I thought I'd stay another 18 months. Then I got a letter from Boldon Colliery Band saying they'd got a job for me...I started in 1977.

Many of the men had spent all their time in the coal industry at Westoe (15) although some had done their initial training elsewhere. It was mainly the older men (over 40) who had worked in more than one pit, either having left the industry and returned to a different pit (2) or having been transferred because their pit had closed (8). One man (H.J) worked as a blacksmith in the Whitburn workshops after Whitburn Colliery closed and another (B.S) worked at the Monkton coal preparation plant at Hebburn before

being transferred to Westoe. Only two men had worked at three pits, one was the oldest interviewee (aged 56):

I started straight from school at 15 years old. I worked for 40 years in one industry before going on the dole-not many people can say that. I started at Whitburn and then went to Harton for about 12 months, then to Westoe. I was at Whitburn for 17 years. It was a bit worrying when Whitburn closed down because we had just got married and bought a house. I was offered a job in Nottingham, at Bevercoates but we couldn't get any help with the move so we couldn't afford to go. I ended up at Westoe because Harton closed (E.H).

The other was the youngest, (M.F) who by the age of 29 had worked at three pits, all of which had closed:

I started at Killoch and then the strike came, we were on strike for a year and about two or three months later Killoch was shut. I was one of the first to get a transfer while they were going through the closure procedure. I went to Barony, and from there I went to Westoe. They asked who wanted transfers and I think 100 asked. There were 600 working at the pit at the time. They gave you a choice, well they asked you to put down two areas you wanted to move to. A first and second choice. Obviously everyone put Selby down as first choice so there were too many. I don't know what made me think of the North East, perhaps it was because it is closer to home. We got told to be at the pit at 8 am on a Monday morning to go down to the North East, we were half way down the A69, the bus was full and we still didn't know where



we were going. Then they told us, they mentioned South Shields - there were five for Westoe, five for Wearmouth, five for Ellington, five for Easington and five for Vane Tempest-well we'd never heard of the places. I hadn't heard of South Shields. I think I'm the only one left here now.

Of the remainder who had transferred from other pits 2 had come from Whitburn (closed 1968), 4 from Harton (closed 1969), one from Marley Hill (closed 1983) one from Morrison Busty (closed 1973) and one from Boldon (closed 1982).

Men were transferred to Westoe from pits in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and, as seen, from Scotland. This was sometimes because of skill shortages at Westoe but more usually it was because of pit closures. One man who transferred from Morrison Busty (Co. Durham) explains:

I worked as an apprentice at the workshops for 2 years and then at the local pit, Morrison Busty and then I went to Westoe in 1967 because they were short of craftsmen at Westoe. They sent the apprentices who were just coming up to their time and those who had just done their time. There was a busload of us. We all went to Westoe, we didn't have a choice in the matter-it was go or you're finished. I didn't like it at first but I got used to it, you adapt...I was 20 when I went to Westoe, Westoe was totally different from Morrison Busty, that was 18" seams, everything at Westoe was huge-it was like being in America! Plus Westoe was cosmopolitan, there were people there from everywhere. There were about 8 buses going in every day, 2 from Chester-le-Street, one from Prudhoe, Whitburn, the Consett bus that I used to travel on and later from Blyth. Every 6 months a pit would close so we

were getting men from those. It got friendlier all the time with new faces coming in-it was your turn to show them the ropes like someone had done for you. It was interesting, it was good. I didn't feel it was different in that way and I hadn't really seen that much of Morrison Busty, just 2 years underground there, so I would class Westoe as my pit, not Morrison Busty (J.N).

### **Working at Westoe**

Hell, we didn't used to work for the money, we went for the entertainment (H.J).

Although the men were not asked specifically about working at Westoe their experiences of working in the coal industry cropped up throughout the interviews. They told me what they had liked, and disliked, about work and why they were sorry in some ways to leave the industry, yet glad in other ways. They were asked whether they missed the pit and, again, this prompted respondents to recall some of their experiences. A typical comment was: "One lad said when we finished 'I won't miss going underground but I'll miss the lads' and that just about sums it up" G.M).

Most men (21) said they did miss Westoe and the remaining five missed aspects of working there, mainly their work mates, although three men said they actually missed the hard work. Although their memories were not all fond, most spoke of the camaraderie and the 'crack' as well as the hard, dirty work and the widely disliked shift system:

Funnily enough, yes. If you work in a place for 17 years you get to know the people, your life revolves around your work and the people. I met some very nice people, I met some horrible nasty buggers as well. Basically we were all together,

it was a hard, dirty dangerous industry and you had to be friendly...The crowd I worked with all got on very well (K.P).

A number of men also compared their experience of working at the pit with their previous or current experience of work 'outside':

The job I've got at the moment is all right it is just that you miss the company and the daft carry on, you know. I miss it. When you've worked with the same lads for 17 years, sometimes you know them better than their wives you know. I've known some of them longer than I've known my wife. It's not the same outside (K.A).

It has to be said that few of the men were very happy or secure in their new employment (see New Employment) and those who were unemployed all said they missed the pit. The general feeling seemed to be that coal mining was a steady job and a relatively well paid one and although men missed many aspects of work they did not actually like the coal industry, the conditions and the shifts in particular. Three (J.N, A.S and R.W) of the five men who said they did not miss Westoe had settled into their new employment, interestingly none of them had worked in their new jobs for long (2 for four months, one for only 2 months).

No, I actually hated the place to be honest but when someone takes away your livelihood. Well, I didn't like the work but I liked the lads you know...The atmosphere is not nice, the conditions are not nice, but after a while I didn't notice it. People would ask how I could work down the pit and at the time you don't even think about it. Sometimes I would think, what am I doing here, when the water was dripping on my head but it was just something that had to be done. It was a job (A.S).

I don't think anyone could miss the pit, the conditions were horrible, I don't actually miss it. I couldn't, with my hand on my heart, say I liked it, but it was a steady job and I knew the job, I was quite happy there. I don't see my work mates, yes I suppose I miss them (N.R).

Up until I got the job...I missed the pit. As time's getting on and I'm established at the new place I don't miss it as much now, but I miss the men. I didn't mind the hard work, in fact I quite liked the hard work, but I do miss the men, the conversations we had (R.W).

J.N, who was also quite happy in his new job, was the most enthusiastic about working at Westoe:

I stuck it because I didn't know anything else, but although you had bad days I loved every minute I worked at the pit, it was the comradeship and once you'd been there a while and got to know your job, well then you could have a bit of a laugh, it was great. There were times I'd have gone for no pay...The comradeship, the friendship, the crack and the laugh and the carry on (J.N).

Given that he 'loved every minute' I was surprised that he had settled so well and quickly in his new job, and that he would not like to go back if the impossible happened and Westoe reopened. He explained:

I did [miss the pit] when I wasn't working, since I've had something to fill the gap-I mean I would never have left the pits but I wouldn't like to go back now. I'm out now. Not because of anything I wouldn't like to encounter if I was there

but I've had the omen, get out of the pits through no fault of my own-don't go back. (J.N).

The other two men (A.F and N.R) had never liked working in the coal industry, although both missed their work mates and other aspects of work. A.F later said that given the job he had at present he would go back to Westoe.

No. Well, I miss the lads, that's about it. I've thought about it loads of times, it's a funny thing to say. I'd much rather they hadn't shut the pit and it still makes me angry now, it really does. But if the pit hadn't shut I would have been there, I know it for a fact, for the rest of my life. I think now that I wouldn't have liked to be there all my life, it was an awful place I thought. Maybe I wasn't cut out for it. Some people, you could tell, were, they loved it, you know what I mean? It's true that you miss the hard work, especially when you're working with your friends and that and you're all working together-well you had to work together or it wouldn't have got done. That side of it I miss (A.F).

The feeling of camaraderie and dependence on work mates was expressed by a number of men, many men felt the pit was far more friendly than 'outside'. Another aspect of pit work that a number of men commented on was the degree of autonomy they enjoyed but also the need to co-operate and work as a team (see New employment).

The miners, well half the time your life depended on them and their lives depended on me...there are times when you just had to tell someone to watch out, and other times that you had to put your life on the line (R.B).

I miss the crack with the lads, I miss the camaraderie, I miss the hard work. I didn't mind getting my hands dirty, you could see a job getting done - well, even if it was just clearing a load of muck from under the belt-you could see rewards for your work (H.W).

Most of the men agreed that the work was hard, dirty and dangerous, but not all, M.F who had been a transport worker (an unskilled non-face worker):

Really it was easy money, you got the odd hard shift but really it was a doddle. I looked forward to going to work there, you didn't know what to expect, you were getting different things every day but on shifts, especially night shift, you just did enough to get by. The gaffers, well some were hard to get on with but the majority would leave you to get on with it as long as you did your job (M.F).

Some men suggested that work had become less satisfying since the strike, although not everyone agreed. It was clear, however, that most men felt that their work became less rewarding during the last year and that the atmosphere was 'not the same' (see also Reaction to Closure):

It was a thankless task working at Westoe. Ever since the strike they've always had the opinion that they have the right to manage, it didn't seem to matter what you did you never got any satisfaction. It wasn't reflected in your pay because they just fiddled you bonuses all the time. Productivity was fiddled all the time so you never felt that you were actually getting anything for it (P.S).

## Reaction to closure

The men were asked about their initial reaction to the closure announcement. The reactions were varied, ten men said they were shocked and used words such as 'shattered' and 'devastated' to describe their feelings on hearing the news, eight said they were not surprised (although most were still upset), one said he just felt angry, three said they felt sad and three men said they were pleased.

Eight men said there had been rumours for years, as one man said "I had the first inklings years ago...I was half expecting it to shut but I was still upset" (R.W). He was the only man interviewed who had actually prepared against the possibility of closure, making financial provision and learning other aspects of his job in order to improve his employment prospects (he was the highest paid interviewee).

Rumours flew around but they were rumours that Westoe was OK, that Wearmouth was going to close, to be honest I knew it was going to happen. I wasn't visibly upset, I mean I knew an electrician who committed suicide, a nice quiet lad. I was upset but nowhere near that - I wasn't in tears. I was bitter at the Government (G.M).

Others said that they had no idea that the pit might close and that the announcement had come as a complete surprise:

When the lads came in on the night shift and said that Westoe was closing-nobody would believe them. 'Ah, you're just taking the piss.' At the time I remember being asked to stay an extra three hours and thinking well, what is the point if it is going to close? Well, we spent that three hours not doing the work but just talking about the situation. We were stunned, really stunned (A.S).

At the time when we actually heard that it was going to close, well I thought what does the future hold. At first I couldn't believe it. I was devastated...in the papers and on the news they'd said there was going to be a massive pit closure plan but Westoe wasn't on the original list. When they said it was closing I just couldn't believe it, I was devastated, I thought how am I going to manage, what about the kids? (N.R)

Some of the men who had been aware of rumours said they were still surprised when the closure announcement was made:

I was shattered. For ages beforehand there were always rumours going about that Westoe was going to shut, even when I started, lads were saying "you don't want to spend too long here it's not going to last very long". But apparently that sort of rumour was rife in every pit-you know- the Tory government is going to shut us down...Despite the rumours up to 1992, I thought I still had a job for life (H.W).

All the time I worked at the colliery there had been rumours, for the last 12 months everyone was saying I've heard this, they reckon this, rumour after rumour. We got letters from the management delivered to your door saying that the colliery was not going to close, you've got a secure future (K.P).

It is not surprising that these rumours had been rife in the coal industry given the contraction of the industry over the years. The uncertainty about the future of the nationalised industry would certainly have been increased with the election of another Conservative Government in 1992 with its manifesto commitment to privatise the coal industry. However, many men still believed that their future was secure. They pointed to



the improvements in productivity and the reduction of the workforce expressing some bitterness that all their efforts had been in vain: "I was shocked and I thought they were wrong, it still had a life. All the effort that everybody had made for nothing. It had been making a loss and we turned it around and made a profit-what for? I feel completely let down, I thought I had a job for life, we all did, what were we going to do?" (D.D).

Although it has been suggested that rumours were 'part and parcel' of Westoe life the men had reason to be suspicious about the future of the colliery:

The favourite saying at Westoe if two people met-it didn't matter who they were-was: 'have you heard owt?' That's the first thing you said. When it came everyone was so sick of the uncertainty, for nearly a year there were threats there and you could see things happening. They'd close this part of the pit and that part of the pit was going to be the mainstay, and they went into the district and were going to get so many faces off and this would keep us going into the next century. And, all of a sudden, they pulled everything out and blocked it off, never touched any of the coal, but they still kept the other districts going. We thought what is going on here? We were so sick of the uncertainty, you just had to accept it at the finish, it was inevitable. The writing was on the wall by then (J.N).

Two of the three men who said that they were actually pleased when they heard the news explained that they saw the closure as an opportunity to take a holiday and then to find work. This did not prove to be as easy as they thought (see Job Search):

Great, a holiday. We had a good year in 1984-85, had a year off and quite enjoyed myself...Anyway, when it closed I thought I'd have a little holiday and then get a job. I had my

little holiday, and then another little holiday and before you knew it, I'd been off for a year (D.E).

Well, the first time I knew it was going to close I was highly delighted, I thought it was great. I thought, right, that's it I've worked all these years I'll have about a year off and enjoy myself-that was my first thought. (R.B).

One man who said he was pleased when the colliery finally closed was not too concerned about finding work, however, he, like others, saw the closure as an end to the uncertainty about the future of the pit:

Well, at the time I was all for it closing-you know, oh aye, get it shut, give us our money and you'll get us out...it was dragging on for years, you're closing, you're not closing, you are. In the end we were so sick of hearing it we were just pleased when it shut...At the time it was great, well you had so many thousands of pounds in the bank, nothing really mattered. It didn't bother me whether I got a job or not then (M.H).

M.F who had already been through two pit closures and had transferred from Scotland to Westoe was disappointed but less emotional than most of the other men. His feeling was that at least he had worked for five years, had he stayed in Scotland he believed he would have still been unemployed:

It's a bit hard to say how I felt about it. I was disappointed because I'd moved down here and I was worried at first...I was sad but I'd been through all this before-this was my third time. When I first started down here there were interviews with the personnel manager and the manager, the first

question we all asked was what's the future? They said it's got a good future, we're developing a seam that's got 20 years work in it. So we all thought champion. I mean Westoe is the longest pit I've worked in even though it's my third-I got five years out of it.

Some of the men were very worried about their future prospects, as A.S suggests the closure concentrated one's mind on the labour market situation:

You watch the news and see the unemployment figures, especially this area. But Westoe had been open for 50 years and we thought we had nothing to worry about. When you are in work and see the unemployment figures you think that is terrible but that is as far as it goes. Until you are actually one of them, then you see the figures, 3,500,001 and you think, that's me on the end-whatever the figure is (A.S).

Some, although not happy, were relieved that at last the matter had been decided. A number of men talked about the pressure of uncertainty over the years, both before and after the October 1992 announcement.

I think a lot of people, including myself, were absolutely fed up. Over the last two years with the pressures put on you, and the uncertainty-it really did drag a lot of people down. People who would never leave the industry, never leave the pit, but they did because of all the pressures (C.P).

The last year was just a nightmare, a total nightmare, it was worse than the strike that last year. It's the worst I've ever felt, how can I explain, pressure all the time, like it hurt. There were so many rumours, that it was going to shut and then it

wasn't, it is, it isn't. My head was done right in, I'm not kidding it was. I never wanted it to shut, right, but by the end I wanted it to. It was doing my head in so much, I wanted it over one way or the other. They really ground me right down into the ground. I'm not kidding. I was on the bottom line. It certainly worked on me. It was much worse than the strike, in the strike you knew where you stood, you got yourself sorted out, you got used to having nowt. But that last year was worse, much worse (A.F).

The pressure of uncertainty and a feeling that any effort at work was futile made the last few months at Westoe a very difficult time. A few men said the situation was made worse when contract workers were brought in to replace men who had been made redundant:

Mind, you've no idea what it was like working there the last three months, it was a relief to get out, at first. The tension, they got contractors in. I was working with a fellow I'd worked with for a few years and the next thing he's out, he's been made redundant. He'd been told he had to leave or take a lower paid job-that was their way out, they were driven out. Then these contract workers were brought in to do their jobs and they expected me to work with them. I wouldn't, I couldn't. I even worked with lads who went back to work during the strike, I didn't call them or throw stones at them like some did. I worked with them but I couldn't work with these contract workers because what they did was worse than strike breaking. They were worse. Those were the conditions we were working under those last three months, it was

terrible. They put people out of work and brought in contract workers who couldn't do the job as well. It was stupid (E.H).

They even got contract workers in to do the salvaging. That sort of thing just grinds you down. (K.A).

Although they had enjoyed aspects of work in the coal industry a few men were glad that they had been forced out and that they would not have to spend the rest of their working lives working under awful conditions:

No. Well, I miss the lads, that's about it. I've thought about it loads of times, it's a funny thing to say. I'd much rather they hadn't shut the pit and it still makes me angry now, it really does. But if the pit hadn't shut I would have been there, I know it for a fact, for the rest of my life. I think now that I wouldn't have liked to be there all my life, it was an awful place I thought. Maybe I wasn't cut out for it. Some people, you could tell, were, they loved it, you know what I mean? It's true that you miss the hard work, especially when you're working with your friends and that and you're all working together-well you had to work together or it wouldn't have got done. That side of it I miss (A.F)

When I actually knew it was definitely closing I felt glad and sad at the same time, it was a sort of bitter-sweet experience. Pleasure because you weren't going to work horrible shifts under horrible conditions, sadness because there was going to be very little else (K.P).

One man described the last day at the pit:

The last day at the pit really got to me, some of the men had tears in their eyes, men who were never ever soft. They were hugging each other you know when we were taking our lamps off. Some of them had been there all their lives, they'd never see each other again. It was a funny atmosphere, some were actually crying. They'd worked there all those years. You get to know all their habits, to know when they're in a bad mood or a good mood, you get very close. You trust each other, you get showered together, you had your bait together, you worked together. When someone takes that away from you it is very, very hard (K.A).

### **Reasons for Closure**

The men were asked why they thought the pit had been closed, they gave a variety of reasons, only three men simply said they did not know. "It's all politics, it's beyond me why they did it" (E.H).

This was obviously a question that most had thought about, and one that might have produced a rehearsed answer but many men thought about the question and gave considered answers, suggesting a number of different reasons. Four men mentioned privatisation and/or the Government's short-sightedness suggesting that the Government was simply after a quick profit:

I don't know really, this government, to my way of thinking, is out for a quick profit and they couldn't get it from the coal industry-I don't know why-so they wanted to get it from gas-fired power stations, what are they going to do when gas runs out I don't know. Where are they going to get the coal from then? (J.N).

The respondents often referred to the economic case put by the Government and BC and then went on to challenge this argument. Many men felt that Government energy policy favouring nuclear energy, the dash for gas and the importation of subsidised coal had left them, and the coal industry, in an impossible position. Even though the pit had made productivity improvements with a smaller workforce the Colliery simply could not compete in a rigged market:

They made such a balls up of the electricity privatisation and the way it went, they were caught in the situation of...we had a surplus of coal...The market philosophy doesn't work in a sense, when you are importing subsidised coal from other countries, we've heard the term 'level playing field' but we were certainly in a bad situation (C.P).

Others felt that British Coal management was to blame although this was sometimes seen as a deliberate part of the run down of the colliery (see Reaction to Closure):

Mind you, there was a lot of waste at Westoe, and a lot of bad management. It was rank bad. I think the management was rank bad, blunder after blunder. The district I worked in for seven years, you could have got a child off the street who could have done better-you are not talking about a couple of quid lost, you are talking hundreds of thousands of pounds (J.H).

Political reasons were thought to be important by many of the men and this was the most frequently cited reason (although most men gave other reasons as well). Men blamed the government rather than BC for the closure: "It was the government that decided, BC was just their puppet" (T.H).

The belief that the Government was responsible was common, sometimes Government energy policies were blamed, but far more men suggested that the Government had sought revenge for earlier strikes. This was a very common response. Nineteen men referred either to the strikes of 1974 and/or 1984-85 or to Government hatred of the NUM, trade unions and the working class in general. A few simply said that the Tories hate the working class or that they wanted to break the working class and the unions, for example: "The Tories don't care about us up here because we don't vote for them" (T.H) and "Hatred really, they hate the working class, especially Labour voters" (H.W). "Well, they are hammering the unions, left, right and centre, and they were going to kick them up the backside no matter what. I can see no other reason" (H.J).

They didn't like the unions, they were too strong. Was it in the 1920s that Winston Churchill said 'get the rats back down the pits'? There's bitterness there in the Tories....I think at one time the unions got too strong, they had too much power, but the Tory government had the upper hand in the end (F.F).

Interestingly most men referred to Margaret Thatcher and not to John Major who, after all, was Prime Minister at the time of the closure of Westoe. The belief that the closure, the defeat of the NUM in 1984-85 and Conservative trade union reforms were related was evident in a number of responses, for example:

There are political reasons definitely. I think she was having a crack at the unions. Well, she had to break the unions which they did in the strike, not just her, there were others. This was the last revenge, get rid of them before they rise up again. It was revenge for bringing the government down in the 1970s, that was the mainstay behind why she stuck it out in the strike. The writing was on the wall for pit closures before the



strike started. That's why the strike came about. We lost the fight in 1985...we could see we weren't going to win then. She wasn't going to back down and she had more resources than we did (J.N).

I think we were a major part of a plan. and the plan worked, because some of the unions have just capitulated to whatever the government asked of them...there is no doubt about it, if you can get the NUM down people are just going to fall in your way and one of the unfortunate things that came out of the strike was the way people actually capitulated when we wanted support, even in our own industry (C.P).

Ten men suggested that the Tories had 'had it in for the miners' since the 1974 strike and the downfall of Heath, typical comments were:

Government policy, revenge for 1972, 1974 and the 1984-85 strike (N.R).

I think the government had it in for the NUM because we made them look fools in 1974 (R.B).

I think it was just Thatcher getting her own back for the strike-the big strike and she has never forgiven the NUM for the Heath caper in 1974 (D.F).

In 1979 we had a ballot, when Thatcher first came to power, on closures. We had a hands down majority for strike action, we were going to start in Kent, Scotland and Wales, she had to back down and from that time on she picked the time and the place (K.A).

That this was a popular view is reflected in the fact that some men mentioned it although they were not convinced by this argument:

I've heard what people say about getting revenge for the strike but I can't believe that the government would do that just to get back at the miners. I do believe that we had too much power, I don't think any section of workers should be able to hold the country to ransom, so I can't blame Thatcher for getting the unions down a bit. I think they were too powerful but I am not sure why the pit was closed, I don't dwell on it, I can't see the full picture. (R.W).

As noted above (see Reaction to Closure) many men felt very bitter that the colliery was to close despite the workers' efforts over recent years:

Well, the hatred towards the miners. I think we became an embarrassment because as much as we hated the government we turned the industry around. We worked, pulled our weight and got it going. I mean there wasn't a profitable mine since the 1930s and we started making profits. Sometimes, even in the worst conditions at Westoe-it was wet and horrible-we broke even at worst. But there is some deep hatred towards us (D.D).

### **Fighting the closure: redundancy money, the NMCRP and the Government review**

The men were asked first whether they thought it was worth fighting the closure, why they thought the New Modified Colliery Review Procedure had not been invoked and

how important the redundancy package had been to them. The three issues were raised in separate questions but they can not be understood in isolation.

Thirteen of the men interviewed agreed that the closure was worth fighting but everyone said that it was a waste of time. A typical response was: "Yes at the time, but looking back no"(D.G). Nevertheless, it was hoped to discover how the men felt about fighting the closure at the time of the closure announcement and before BC offered extra inducements in the form of enhanced redundancy payments based on the maximum £300 a week (see The Final Phase). Their answers might have been different two years earlier (that is more men might have thought it worth fighting). Having said this almost all the men interviewed (only one man had not heard of the NMCRP) were well aware of events surrounding previous closures and the tactics adopted by BC in the past.

Most of the men, then, being aware of the issues, seemed to have been rather less optimistic about the future of Westoe than the Campaign Group. In hindsight it is patently obvious that the fight was doomed to failure and the WCCG admit to a degree of naïveté:

Westoe...never stood a chance against the forces ranged against it. Most of the Westoe Colliery Campaign Group will now admit to early over optimism and even a little naïveté...Clearly in spite of massive amounts of goodwill...the campaign to keep Westoe Colliery open was destined to fail (WCCG 1994).

One of the main reasons why men thought it was not worth fighting the closure by invoking the review procedure was the lack of faith in the NMCRP<sup>53</sup> and a deep distrust (not to mention dislike) of the Government and British Coal. Most of the men were well

---

<sup>53</sup> The final decision on any matter referred to the Independent Review Body rests with British Coal. See The Final Phase for more details on the NMCRP.

aware that the NMCRP had failed to save a single pit and many cited the case of Bates Colliery.

At the end of the day they got their own way. Bates Colliery went through that and they recommended that it should stay open but BC took no notice (F.F).

As seen earlier in the case of Ellington's closure the men and their unions were placed in an impossible position. Ed Malcom, NUM branch secretary at Westoe at the time of the closure announcement explains the union's position:

Of course we wanted to explore the colliery review procedure for Westoe. But every effort was made to dissuade us from even considering it. In the week before closure a high level meeting took place in which the Area Production Manager told union representatives that, come what may and regardless of any review procedure being invoked, British Coal was determined to close Westoe. As an inducement for us to cooperate they told us that if we did not invoke the review procedure all employees would have their redundancy entitlement calculated on the basis of £300 per week, the maximum weekly amount that could be used in the calculation of redundancy entitlement under the Mineworkers Redundancy Scheme (WCCG, 1994:79).

C.P who was an official in the Mechanics' union at the colliery at the time told me:

What happened was, well there wasn't much of a choice for the Branch officials at the time, at some stage we were going to have to ask the members what they thought, whether it was in the form of a ballot or whatever. I think the miners [NUM]

certainly were going to go ahead and do that and we thought we might as well give everyone a chance to have their say. We called a special meeting that everyone could get to and asked the members what they wanted. Unfortunately that is the way people were, I think the fight had been taken out of them over many years (C.P).

The unions were in a dilemma, if they advised the men to fight and to invoke the review procedure their members would have jobs for a few months longer but in all probability the pit would close whatever the Review recommended. It was highly likely that the men would lose their jobs and all the enhancements offered by BC.

Well, we didn't fight it in the end, we had a vote, the Coal Board [BC] told us if you close the colliery we'll give you the maximum money, it could make the difference of £10-15,000 for some people. It was going to close anyway, even if we had a stay of execution it wouldn't have been for long so we thought we'd take the money...It might have looked like the miners wanted the collieries to close, but the Coal Board [BC] offered us extra money to vote that way-it happened in Vane Tempest, they held out and lost money and the pit still closed (G.M).

Five men said the fight had been lost in 1985 and the closure brought back bad memories for some:

Well, we were out for a year in 1984-85...I think Westoe could well be open today if we'd won in 1985 but we were fighting a Tory government...you can't beat a Tory government, the amount of money they spent on beating us

they could have kept the pits open until the end of the century (F.F).

I did at first, during the miners' strike I definitely did, I was all for it then...And then, when they first started making those announcements, I did then, but by the end of the year I was that worn down. I thought there was no chance, what could they do really, unless everybody had come out and stuck by us, which they didn't even do during the miners' strike, we might have got somewhere then. I thought when we were on strike that year once Christmas was over we would be out until something got done. I couldn't believe it when they said go back to work, I couldn't believe it. I thought the worst was over. [*So really the fight was lost in 1985?*] I would say so, things changed...there was a lot of bad feeling. I had a lot of bad feeling but it wore off over the years, but near the end I started thinking, if they hadn't gone back to work this would never have happened (A.F).

The men were unanimous in their condemnation of both the New Colliery Review Procedure and the Government Review. The majority felt that once the decision had been made to close the pit nothing was going to stop BC and the Government. The Review announced by Heseltine was seen as a stay of execution, a public relations exercise which would persuade the general public that the Government was attempting to save some of the threatened collieries:

Just a big con. I think that was government run as well. It was just going through the motions, they had no intention of saving any of the pits that went through the procedure-no pit has ever been saved by it. If they say they are going to close a

pit it doesn't matter how many reviews there are, it will close. The [Government] review was just to pacify the middle of the road voters, they'll say, 'ah well, John Major's government did try to keep them open,' but really John Major and the government will just see it as a crap report and throw it in the bin (H.W).

A number of men felt that the Review and the redundancy package lost them public support and made it look as though the miners wanted their pit closed. There was some strong feeling about the amounts of redundancy money reported in the media:

We had to vote to close it, but I don't think people, members of the public, realise we were. Everyone in the industry knew how it was, what the score was but I wonder what they think in non-mining areas (R.W).

It [the Government Review] was just a political move by the government to pacify the unrest and anger there was in the country at the time about the pits closing. Once the government and the press started saying the miners are going to get this and that, x amount of money, the majority of public support was lost. They've closed the shipyards down and the steelworks, they didn't get this money, so people start saying 'why make a special case of the miners?' So we lost a lot of support that way. Most of the figures were grossly exaggerated, £40,000-£50,000, of course it didn't work out like that. It was all propaganda, I think they were worried that people might turn against them at election time. (K.P).

Another factor mentioned by a number of men was that they 'had had enough' (see Reaction to closure):

I don't think they'd have taken our redundancy off us-they used the threat but I'm not sure they would have. But that wasn't the reason I took it, like I say, I'd had enough...My head was done right in, I'm not kidding it was. I never wanted it to shut, right, but by the end I wanted it to. It was doing my head in so much (A.F).

I was all for it closing-you know, oh aye, get it shut, give us our money and you'll get us out. But it was dragging on for years, you're closing, you're not closing, you are. In the end we were so sick of hearing it we were just pleased when it shut (M.H).

Redundancy money was obviously very important to the men and in response to the question many men stressed its importance in terms of 'a sweetener', a 'carrot' dangled to get them to agree close the pit or as 'blackmail'.

It was very important, it made people's minds up not to fight, if the money hadn't been there it would have been a much bigger fight - not that the outcome would have been any different. It stopped people from fighting and it paved the way for them (J.N).

A number of men mentioned other redundant workers (Swan Hunter was mentioned by many) who only received statutory redundancy pay. They felt that they were very lucky in comparison but were concerned to explain that the money was not a windfall, unless you were already financially secure or in well paid and secure employment. For example:



I mean I'm 54, with my redundancy money and my investments I wasn't hard pushed (J.H).

Extremely important to people my age [54] because it gives us a bit of security, most people have paid their mortgages off so they have the security of a home. But being able to invest the money for the future is a help. The younger lads, some of them have paid off their mortgages I suppose, but they didn't have the time in to get a decent pay off. Well, they have to spend it or they can't get any benefits from the DSS (P.M).

I know a couple who got jobs straight away so their redundancy has been like a small fortune to them-but you have to have a secure job (A.S).

Two men suggested that the redundancy money enabled men to look for suitable employment and to turn down low paid jobs:

Money was a big thing, especially for the young ones, it has to be a cushion to give them a chance to get a start. We could have been as badly off as Swans...The money gives you a chance to look around. If you'd come out with nowt you'd be thinking I'm lost here and you'd end up doing exactly what the Government wants, taking jobs for £1.60 an hour working 16 hours a day (J.H).

I wrote hundreds of letters and got 10 offers of jobs but some of them I turned down at the interview because they weren't what I wanted or because the pay wasn't what I was worth. Sometimes I'd say at the interview that I didn't think I was suited-because they were demanding too much and not paying

enough. I looked for a job that I wanted. Sometimes I'd come home after turning a job down and...well, I couldn't have got the job I've got now if I hadn't had the money. My redundancy helped me because I was able to turn down a lot of jobs, well quite a few (R.W).

For the majority of men, however, the redundancy money subsidised low income from employment or benefits. Those who had found work were either using the money to subsidise their low incomes or regarded the money as 'something to fall back on' if they were made redundant again. This was a fear expressed by a number of men and reflects the fact that many of them were on short-term contracts (see New employment).

It is compensation for the loss of your job...People said 'you've got all that money' but it's only because we fought for it. I've had to use it. I've only just got Income Support...because if you've got over £8,000 you can't get any. Basically you're subsidising yourself while you're on the dole (P.S).

Some people are only taking home £109 for a full week. They are using their redundancy money to top their wages up. It is crazy, man, all their redundancy will be gone (K.A).

## **Job search**

Of the twenty-six men interviewed, fifteen were in employment, five were unemployed and five were in education or on training schemes, only one man was on Sickness Benefit (due to a back injury sustained at Westoe). Of the five men unemployed at the time of the interviews two had been out of work since the pit closed. One of those unemployed since closure was aged 56 and in receipt of a reduced pension but was looking for work and had applied for a number of jobs. Of those in training and education only two had

worked since the pit closed. Two men (N.R and P.S) were studying full time (for a degree in accountancy and an HNC in engineering and instrumentation respectively), and two men were on BCE training courses (joinery), one man (H.W) was on a media training course run by a local agency.

Although most of the men had found employment they had been unemployed for some time before finding work, for example one man (K.P, aged 53) was unemployed for 18 months before finding temporary work (8 weeks), and another (A.F, aged 31) for 14 months. The average duration of unemployment for the total sample was just under 9 months although two of the men (D.D and R.W) had turned down offers of work in the hope of finding something more suitable. Four men decided to 'have a bit of a holiday' when they were made redundant but soon became bored and started looking for work (M.H, J.N, R.B and D.E). Only one man (B.G) had found a job immediately after leaving Westoe and had remained in employment. He and seven others had temporary work in the coal industry doing care and maintenance/salvage work (at Westoe and Wearmouth), when this contract ended B.G found work in a factory. For the remainder their current employment was their first job since being made redundant.

Three men who were unemployed at the time of the interview had worked since the closure, one for a year (C.P), one for 5 months (D.E) and the third (M.H) had a number of casual labouring jobs, including one in Holland, but had spent more time out of work than in employment.

The older men, as evidence would suggest, had the least success in finding work, only one of the four men in the interview sample aged over 50 (K.P) had found work and, as noted above this was only a temporary contract.

Eight of the 13 men (61.5 per cent) aged under 40 were in employment at the time of interview, 3 were unemployed (one man, D.F had been since the closure) and 2 were in

full time education. The average duration of unemployment for this age group was just over 6 months, the average duration of unemployment for those in work at the time of interview was slightly over 5 months.

Of the 9 men aged between 40 and 49, 6 (66 per cent) were working, 2 were on training courses and only one man in this age group was unemployed. However the average duration of unemployment for this group as a whole was just over 11 months. The average duration of unemployment for those in employment (6) at the time of interview was 10 months.

Half the interview sample (13) was skilled men, of these 6 were working at the time of the interview, 2 were in full time education, 2 on training courses and 3 were unemployed. Only two men in this group had been employed almost continuously since the closure and 3 had not worked at all (E.H aged 56, J.H aged 54 who was on a BCE joinery course and P.S who, after being unemployed for 4 months entered Further Education). The average duration of unemployment for the whole group was eight and three-quarter months. The average duration of unemployment for those in work at the time of interview was just under 8 months, however this group includes one man, aged 56, who was unemployed for 19 months before finding temporary work.

In the case of the Westoe sample the younger (those aged under 40) skilled men did have more success in finding work than the older men, the average duration of unemployment for this group was just over 4 months. Only one of these men had worked almost continuously since the closure of the pit (C.P had worked as a self-employed electrician and had just become unemployed at the time of interview). It has to be noted that two of the men, P.S and N.R, decided to enter full time education because they felt they had little chance of finding employment in their trade. One man in this group (R.W), who was unemployed for 8 months, turned down work preferring to wait for more suitable employment.

Of the 5 skilled men aged between 40 and 59, 3 were working at the time of interview, one was on a training course and one was unemployed. The average duration of unemployment for this group was just over seven and a half months. Only one man in this group (G.M) had worked continuously since the pit closed

The older skilled men, as suggested above, had less success, only one of the three skilled men aged 50 or over had worked since the closure, finding 8 weeks temporary work after 19 months unemployment. One man in this group was in receipt of a reduced pension, the third was on a BCE joinery course, however, they both said they would like to work and for this reason are counted as unemployed.

Although the skilled men had more success finding employment than their former work mates without a trade (see below) only 4 of the men were working or had worked at their trade, 3 other skilled men found work that was related to their previous occupation and required some of their former skills but they described their new employment as less-skilled or multi-skilled (see New employment).

Of the thirteen unskilled men, 9 were in employment at the time of interview, 2 were unemployed, one on Sickness Benefit and one on a BCE Joinery Course. The average duration of unemployment for this group as a whole was 10 months. Two of these unskilled men had not worked since being made redundant. Six of the younger (aged 39 or less) unskilled men were in employment at the time of interview and 2 were unemployed (one of these men, D.F had not worked since closure). The average duration of unemployment for the whole group was just over 7 months and for those in employment at the time of interview, a little under 5 months.

Of the four unskilled men aged between 40 and 49, 3 were in work at the time of interview, one man had not worked since closure and was on the BCE joinery course,

the average duration of unemployment for the whole group was just over 13 months and for those in work at the time of the interview, a little over eleven and a half months.

There was only one unskilled man aged over 50 (P.M) and he was in receipt of Sickness Benefit although he said he would like to work he had effectively dropped out of the labour market.

One of the most striking findings about the sample's job search activities and successes is that only one man (M.F) found suitable employment through the BCE Job Shop. Another (R.W) who took a BCE vehicle fitting course was offered a job at the end but turned it down, preferring to wait until he found something more suitable, he found his present job himself. The remainder of the men were willing to take almost any type of work and they admitted that their expectations of finding well-paid secure work in their trade (if they had one) lowered the longer they were unemployed. Most men were willing to work for low rates of pay and in less-skilled or unskilled work:

I started on 15 December last year so I was unemployed for 10 months. The first few weeks were all right, I was writing applications and thought as an electrician I'd get a job no bother, but it didn't work out like that (F.F).

This is my first job since the pit shut. I tried but there was nothing - I tried for absolutely everything, I tried for portering work in hotels, assistant manager in Durham Pine, shop work like that (A.F unemployed for 14 months).

Although most of the men interviewed were prepared to take less-skilled work and/or low paid work many made a point of saying that they would not do security work. Many men referred to people they knew who were working as security guards or to adverts they had seen for security workers. This work (which BCE provided training for) was

regarded as the lowest status and lowest paid employment available. Most men were well aware of the employment situation 'outside' and realised that it would be difficult to find suitable employment, however some admitted that they did not realise quite how hard it would be to find work, especially for those with a trade. Even those men who were realistic about their chances of finding suitable employment work shocked by the pay on offer.

In the Gazette every night there are adverts for security guards, £1.60 an hour rising to £1.80 after three months. When I used to pop into the Job Shop I used to cringe at the jobs advertised. I thought, Christ, they can't expect anyone to work for that, you are better off turning to crime (P.M).

I'm resigned to the fact that I won't get another job. I hope I can, I probably could if I was willing to go as a security guard and work 16 hours a day and get nowt for it and bring my own dog [this is a reference to an advertisement for a security guard in the local paper - 'Security Guard required must provide uniform and dog'] (J.H).

As noted above only one man found suitable employment through the BCE Job Club. Nearly all the men had used the BCE Job Shop and Jobcentre but had become disillusioned with them (see below). Five men in employment at the time of the interviews had found work through friends or relatives and suggested that this was the only way to 'get a foot in the door':

I got the job through someone I know. I had applied but hadn't heard anything so I filled in another form and my friend took it upstairs to personnel, they asked if he knew me and he said yes and she said it's relatives and friends first. I got my

brother in the same way, my brother has just got a start there as a temp over Christmas (A.F).

Many of the men had tried extremely hard to find work, writing speculative letters, visiting firms and regularly visiting the Jobcentre and Job Club:

I always thought I'd get a job, I went everyday, well at least twice a week to the Jobcentres to make sure I didn't miss anything. I went to Shields, Sunderland, got the train to Newcastle, Gateshead, Felling and Jarrow and I wrote speculative letters-which is how I got this job. I wrote for every fitting job going and at least 10 speculative letters a day, we used to drive around industrial estates looking for suitable firms to write to the next day-I must have written hundreds but it wasn't too bad (R.W).

The nearest I came to getting a job was at Taylor's iron foundry...I went down every day for a month. I asked the secretary 'any jobs?' And she'd say 'no'. Eventually she said 'I know you are keen' and she got the manager to come through, he said he'd heard about me coming down every day...Anyway, he said he'd let me know if there was any work going....I might be in with a chance after Christmas (A.F).

Many men (14) said they found BCE helpful in providing facilities and advice, for example, the use of the telephone, free stamps, advice on interview techniques, writing speculative letters, completing application forms and compiling Curriculum vitae. The vast majority of men had not had any experience of job search or interviews for many years and appreciated this help (see Conclusions). Many of the men said that their counsellors were pleasant and seemed concerned that I should appreciate that their complaints about BCE were not directed at the counsellors. Typical comments were:



I thought they went out of their way to help you. I didn't go there a lot because I went on a course at Stockton so I didn't have much to do with them, but they helped me with my CV and that (F.F).

They were very pleasant, very helpful but there's just nothing there at the end of the day (K.P).

This was the main complaint about BCE, the main source of advice for redundant miners, 'the jobs just weren't there', this was a comment made by almost all the men. Many men said that the jobs advertised were 'out of date' (that is the positions had already been filled) and that they were already advertised in the newspaper or in the local Jobcentre.

The jobs weren't there. There was a big notice board with jobs advertised but when you rang them up no-one knew what you were talking about. Most of the jobs were in the Chronicle or Jobcentre anyway. They were just getting the same ones, they had counsellors searching them out and putting them on the board. I think it was just a case of BC saying to the public, we are doing our best to help them (K.A).

They lulled us into a false sense of security when the pit was closing, advertising hundreds of jobs but when you looked most of them were past the closing date (R.W).

One of the things I really found out about is how people were conned, how the general public were conned about how BCE were going to do this, that and the other to help us-and they were not. It was just a front, the frontage was there but when you went to the door there was nothing there, nothing at all.

And they came on saying they were going to spend millions of pounds helping people back into work so people from other industries must have been thinking look what they're getting. It was there to a certain extent but...As for people who went to BCE saying they didn't know what they wanted to do, well BCE were no help. The girls there were OK but there was nothing behind them. There was no advantage-it was just an extra Jobcentre in the pit yard. I didn't want an advantage over others but it was made out to be special help for the miners (A.S).

Most of the men commented on the type of work available, the jobs advertised were low paid and/or unskilled, a number of men described the jobs they had seen advertised as comical:

It used to amuse me when they first opened the Job Shop at Westoe, we used to go in and read the cards on the wall. There was one for Bungee jumping and a barfly team. There used to be a job years ago at the pit-filling. The men who did it were called fillers, they used to make dry stone walls when the coal had been got. So some of the old hands were saying: 'you want to get in there, there's jobs for fillers'. But when you read the job description it was for sandwich fillers. Putting sandwiches into those plastic containers! It's amusing to think of some old pit men, all knuckles and fingers putting sandwiches into containers. I saw an advert for chicken pluckers at Seaham (J.N).

I had a look at some of the jobs and thought they'd make a good comic-chicken pluckers wanted, honestly, it was £1.80 an hour, sandwich makers-that was another one (P.M).

A number of men mentioned that the counsellors at BCE seemed very keen to 'get them off their books' and some men felt that this was more important to the counsellors than finding them suitable employment or training. There was a great deal of suspicion about BCE's claims to have had success in helping redundant miners back into work. If this had been achieved, they suggested, it was by forcing people onto training courses or into short-term employment or by claiming that BCE had helped find the men employment when they had done so by themselves:

There's not one person I know who's got a job through the BCE Job Shop-I can't think of anybody. No, I'd like to see where they've created all these jobs. But I can give you an insight into it, when I went for my interview when I wanted a CV before I left the pit. They asked me what I was looking for, I said I was all right because I had a job lined up, and they said 'great, you can be put down as one of our successes, one off our numbers'. So I might be down as getting a job through them but they certainly didn't get us the job. I found it quite funny at the time but when I think about it I'm one of their numbers. It is the same as the way the Government plays with the unemployment figures, if you are on a training course you are not counted as unemployed. To be honest I think BCE are looking after their own jobs, if they can say that they've had a couple of successes getting people jobs then they are doing well (C.P).

There are lots of security guards, the coal board had a training course, my brother did it but he was forced to go...he was forced to go on that course or they would have stopped his benefit. It was just another ploy, as soon as you were on a course you went off the unemployment statistics (P.M).

All they wanted was to get you off their books, to get numbers off the books. As long as they could say they'd got you work and got you off their books, even if it was only 2 or 3 weeks work, you were off their books and that was it, they were quite happy. BCE's figures are a Jackanory story, a load of rubbish. They say they've got all these people jobs but they don't say that they are working as security guards and things...there aren't that many jobs around, contract work is all right, that's good money if you can get it-but it doesn't last long (H.J).

I knew this lad who used to be into motorbikes years ago and he expressed an interest in starting a courier service. BCE hounded him for months. They weren't interested that it was doomed to failure. He had expressed an interest and it was easy for them, just give him some advice and show him the ropes, once he had started his own business he'd have been off their books. They kept hounding him, wanting to send him on management and book-keeping courses and in the end he just had to tell them he'd changed his mind (A.S).

I felt I was under pressure from BCE to go on a course, I hadn't been working for Flagstaff for very long when I saw my counsellor and she said I ought to go on a course as soon as

possible as it might not be running for long, this might be your last chance. I got the impression, I don't know if I'm right, that she'd get more points the more people she got on a course or in a job...I've heard a few times that BCE asked people if they could take credit for finding people jobs that they'd found for themselves (R.W).

## **Training<sup>54</sup>**

Nine of the men had been on or were on courses run by BCE and one man found a place on a training course with the help of BCE. Six of these men were in work, 2 were unemployed and 2 men were still undergoing training. Of the men who had been on BCE courses, one left the course (Computing) early to take up employment as a hotel night porter, the others completed their courses. One man (R.W) studied Vehicle Fitting but it was not the sort of work he wanted to do, another (M.F) went on a security training course but found employment in a factory as a plastics production worker, the fourth man, a colliery fitter, completed an instrumentation course and found work in a factory but was not working at his trade (T.H). D.E, who also went on a BCE training course commented: "None of my skills from there have worked out for me." Similarly, K.P. an electrician by trade, had trained in welding and pipe-fitting but this had not helped him to find work. The men were most concerned to gain new skills and to update their old skills, the general opinion being first that employers wanted multi-skilled people and second, that the more adaptable they were the more chance they stood of finding work. P.S, who was studying instrumentation at South Tyneside college put it like this:

When I took the course last year I thought, hopefully, that next year things would pick up, and now I'm in the same position, hoping that things will pick up next year. I think this

---

<sup>54</sup>See appendix 2 for examples of BCE training courses.

will be my last year at college, I can't see me wanting to do anymore. I've got a lot of electrical background now to go with the fitting, hopefully, as they want jacks of all trades these days, that should be promising for me next year (P.S).

I did welding and pipe-fitting. The course wasn't very good at all really but I thought I'd try something different, there were jobs advertised for maintenance people but they wanted multi-skilled people so I decided to try getting more skills-it didn't prove useful but it might in future years (K.P).

However, the training they were offered by BCE did not always live up to their expectations. A number of men complained about the quality of training on offer and questioned whether the courses would enhance their prospects of finding work. The men also complained about the conditions BCE applied. Some men underwent training for work that bore no relation to what they had done previously or to their present employment. M.F for example had trained in security work but found employment in plastics production:

I was going to go for my HGV but they stopped the course just after I asked so as I didn't want to do bricklaying or joinery for 6 months when I wasn't going to get a job - some of the family have done bricklaying and joinery all their lives and they only work 6 months of the year so...I didn't do a security job, just the course but I know ex-miners who do. Even though I hate this job I'm quite glad I'm at the factory, that I'm not in security because the money is crap. I think at the factory they get £3 an hour, the others don't get much more but it's worse hours and they don't get any thanks for it (M.F).

The courses they had down there were carpentry and joinery, a security guard course for 6 weeks-which by all accounts wasn't up to much. There was welding and pipe-fitting which I thought, well there are loads of welders and pipe-fitters on the dole, and there was a course CNC, computer programming. I like carpentry and joinery but I think they could have had more courses, there were about 5 to choose from, that's all (R.B).

The rule was that if you had work with another employer you couldn't go on a course then they changed it so you could but it had to be within 6 months. I decided that if I didn't find work within 6 months I'd take up their offer of training, as it happens just before the 6 months was up, I found this job so I didn't have to go on one (J.N).

Some of the lads went on these schemes where you can be a bricklayer in 6 months, but they can't get a proper job. But it keeps them off the unemployment figures for 6 months they are doing the course. If 30,000 miners hit the unemployment figures they would have shot up (K.A).

Other men thought that the training they received was of a high standard but could not see the point of training men to become bricklayers or joiners when there were so many traded men unemployed. Three men who had considered or had taken joinery courses told me that they thought it would 'help them around the house':

This government can make a million training schemes but as far as I am concerned, joiners, electricians, plumbers, you name it, they're all on the dole anyway. It is like one big con...I think, in ten years time, we are not going to have any

craftsmen. You are going to have people who have done a course like mine, with NVQs- some are saying they are not worth the paper they're written on. The instruction we got though was first class, there is no way I'd knock him (J.H).

M.F suggested some differences in the choices people were given, a number of men told me as J.H did, that they 'were not allowed' to do the training of their choice, but M.F suggests that this was not always the case:

They'd (BCE) let you do what you wanted, I knew lads who were engineers and they went for pipe fitting and welding. Plus I knew electricians who did computers and electricals - that was sort of connected. Even lads without qualifications went for pipe fitting and bricklaying (M.F).

A number of men mentioned that their age 'worked against them' and many were bitter that their years of work experience counted for little. Some jobs advertised in the Jobcentre and Job Club stipulated an age limit and many of the interviewees suspected that other employers had similar policies but would not admit to them. Generally it was the men aged over 40 who raised this issue but age limits of 35 were mentioned. T.H, aged 38, said: "I'd like to go back to my trade but there is a lot of competition-I don't feel old but age does count against you". Many of the younger men (those in their thirties) referred to the difficulties facing older men looking for work, for example: "There are a lot of lads who will never get a job because they are too old" (R.W) and "He's 48 years of age and can't get a job because of his age". The younger men often said that they felt lucky in the respect that they had some chance of finding work. This was something that came up time and time again, the respondents almost always thought that others were worse off than them. One of the older men who was on a BCE joinery course and looking for work said:



There were a lot of young men there [Westoe]. I mean I'm 54, with my redundancy money and my investments I wasn't hard pushed. I felt sorry for the young lads though because I knew there was nothing out there. (J.H).

Although the older men were resigned to the fact that they would probably not work again this did not prevent them for looking for work or feeling despondent about their lack of success:

I think my age is against us for work. I'm 54 now, so, as soon as they see your age, I think they bin everything really....I was talking to one of the Westoe lads who was thinking of going onto the rigs, they asked how old he was, 37, too old...experience doesn't seem to count...I saw a job advertised for assistant caretaker, again it said you had to have experience, I thought to myself, what bloody experience do you need to be a caretaker? (J.H).

Nowadays most of the major employers have a cut off age of about 35, now to me I'm still in the prime of my life, I've got vast experience of work-but I'm too old. My CV looks excellent but then they see my date of birth. Your experience counts for nothing, I feel I've wasted my time, the years I went to college and that, it just counts for nothing now. Most companies won't admit to having an age policy but they do operate (K.P aged 53).

## **Moving**

The majority of the men (16) had considered or would consider working away from home, although a number saw this as very much a last resort. Eight of these men had

applied for jobs in other parts of the country or abroad. One man (M.H) had worked in Holland, if only for 10 days. A former deputy (K.A) worked for 6 weeks in Monkton Hall (a private coal mine near Edinburgh), and had applied for jobs in Vietnam and Saudi Arabia. Another (B.S) had applied for work in the Oman and was waiting for a reply, one man (C.P) had worked as an electrician for a year in London. One of the men (D.F) who had been unemployed since the pit closed had travelled to Scotland and London in search of work. Most men were willing to work away but only three said they would move their families. These men would consider moving if the job was well paid enough but one man was afraid of becoming unemployed again:

I would have gone away to work contracting but I wouldn't have moved my family for the simple reason of the pit closing- that is always on my mind. If I moved my family, moved away and got a job and then got paid off, job finished, we'd be stuck in another part of the country where we didn't know anybody and wouldn't be able to get home. That put me right off. I didn't really see any work anyway, there was tank cleaning but that would have been a last resort. It's shocking, the jobs there are are low paid, there are no good jobs really (A.F).

## **New employment**

Overall the men had settled into their new employment, although a few men had been in their new jobs for 6 months or more and still disliked them (see below). Many of the men found the atmosphere 'outside' unfriendly and disliked the discipline of the factory and the lack of control over their work which many of them said they had enjoyed at Westoe. A number of men worked with other former Westoe miners and they suggested that this made their new employment more enjoyable, they could still have the 'crack' and reminisce about old times:

I'm quite happy where I am, there are a few there from the pit so we reminisce, swap stories and everyone knows what you are talking about, even the foreman, he was an electrician at Easington and we get on great really (J.N).

Although most men claimed to have settled down nobody could be described as very enthusiastic about their new jobs, only four men actually said they liked their new jobs. Typical comments were "I quite like it" (G.M) and "I'm quite happy where I am" (J.N) although one man said he 'loved' his work. Unfortunately of the four men who were quite happy in their new employment one (J.N) was on a temporary contract and two were in very low-paid work:

I'm a collector engineer, I empty, maintain and repair children's rides, the sort of thing you find in supermarkets.....I think the work is harder, I had some hard jobs down the pit but this is constant, you are always on the go, driving, emptying machines, repairing them. There's never a dull moment and you meet a lot of people which is quite nice. I'm happy at the moment because I've got a job but the pay is not fantastic you know-and it's not so easy to look for another job when you are working. You have to take time off for interviews. I'm happy enough at the moment (F.F).

I work 37.5 hours, sometimes I do overtime but I don't get paid for it or get time off in lieu. I service and repair and also install vending machines so I travel all over the North East. I love it but the wages are crap...I get paid £3.20 or so an hour-less than a shop assistant, my wife is a shop assistant and she earns more than me. I do a course, City and Guilds electronics at South Tyneside College, I work hard and I try to get

somewhere. I pay for the night classes-well Family Credit paid this year, I paid last year....I'm taking my City and Guilds that will be three years and then I'll say, to hell with it, pack it in and go. I would love it if Samsung were coming to South Tyneside-I'd be there straight away, I'm doing an electronics course at night school, even if they just put a screwdriver in my hand I'd love to do it...I'm only going to do what I'm doing for three years, the money won't improve but I'll have three years good experience. I'm just treating it as an apprenticeship really...This job is just a stop gap until something better comes along, I am hopeful-I've got to be (D.D).

As noted earlier, a number of men said that their redundancy money had enabled them to take low paid work, they were using the redundancy money either to subsidise their low wage or had used the money to pay off any outstanding hire purchase agreements, mortgages and so on. Most men had spent part of their redundancy money in this way, some had spent the money on home improvements and a number of men mentioned the fact that they had converted to gas as they no longer received free coal.

I couldn't have paid for the house or any of my HP off, the car or anything [without the redundancy money]...I couldn't have taken a low paid job if I'd had a mortgage and I couldn't work where I work now if I hadn't got a car (D.D).

The fourth man who said he quite liked his job was G.M who worked as a dispatch technician, he felt secure but was earning less than he had at the pit:

I quite like it...I get £14,000 p.a. now, any overtime you get time in lieu for, so I've taken quite a drop in earnings-about a third. The new job is OK, the lads I work with are canny as

well...There are a few of us there from Westoe...Hopefully I'm settled, I am not looking for another job...I think it's pretty secure and they've got the new contract (G.M).

Six men suggested that their new jobs were only 'all right', typical comments were "Things have been going all right" (A.S), "I've settled in, there are a good set of lads there-not that it could ever be the same as the pit". (R.W), "I'm not complaining though, at the end of the day it's a job" or simply "it seems pretty secure" (K.A). Of these six men, one was on an eight week contract and two were looking for another job. Five men said that they either disliked or hated their work. All of these men had been in their new jobs for 6 months or more, one (M.F) for a year, and one for 17 months:

It is all pressure, quality, numbers...the pressure is stressful...I don't feel very secure. I just hope it will last. I don't like it. I dread going to work. I'm not saying I liked going to work at Westoe but I went. I didn't have any fears of going and I knew what I was doing, I knew what to expect. OK we had bad shifts but here, I hate it, I just don't want to go...Westoe was definitely more friendly than where I am now. People outside are not as friendly, there's no crack. I felt like a real outsider when I started. There was loads of pressure on you straight away, people are impersonal, there are all these cliques and clans, people who have been there for a long time-except for people I used to know at Westoe...I don't get any job satisfaction. I am still looking for something else, I'd like to go back to my trade but there is a lot of competition-I don't feel old but age does count against you (T.H).

I don't like it at all where I am now but it's a job. Actually it's getting better the more I go, you get to know the lads and a

lot of them are miners so the crack's still there...Work is getting better. It can't get any worse (M.F).

The work at Be Modern is totally different, the people are the same but management has got no idea how to treat people. You could tell the gaffer at Westoe to get lost but at Be Modern you can't, you can't go for a break. At Westoe you were assigned a task and you got it done but could have a break-at Be Modern you've got to be on the go all the time (D.G).

In total 6 men were looking for another job, the main reason was because they were on very low pay (one man was only earning £2.60 an hour), insecurity was also an important factor. Most men were working longer hours for less pay but the general feeling was that they were lucky to have found work and that a poorly paid job was better than being on the 'dole'. As one man said:

I've got a job but the pay is not fantastic...at least it's steady pay and it's more than the dole. So I appreciate that (F.F).

A number of men commented on the pressures they faced as temporary employees. The feeling of insecurity was the most common complaint:

Lots of work now is short term contract work. I think I'm lucky to have this job now, just before Christmas, but I'm only guaranteed 8 weeks. If the orders come in it could be prolonged. But it is nice to get up and go to work at the moment...The way it's going nowadays you have to take any option you can, your standards drop. I'm getting paid £6.81 an hour now-but it's only short-term (K.P).

I'm still classed as temporary [after 4 months]...I've had 3 contracts since I started this job, the first was for 2 weeks which took me up to the holidays, the second was up to the end of September and the third to the end of November. I wouldn't say they were doing this deliberately but there is a big restructuring going on at the factory at the moment and they don't know how many men they are going to keep on. They are holding interviews and taking people on but they've got a total of about 50 on temporary contracts. So it is a bit unnerving, you think by the end of the month you might be out of a job again and you are another 6 months older-I mean you are too old at 35 now. I wouldn't say that was true in every case, there are people older than me at the factory. They are the ones for whom age is no barrier, but it is difficult (J.N).

Some men also explained how, as temporary employees, they felt they had to work the hours they were asked and to accept poor pay and conditions, if they wanted their contracts renewed. However, a number of men suggested that temporary workers would not be given permanent contracts:

The thing with that company [Interconnections] is that it depends on orders and it is LIFO (last in, first out), they just start laying people off and they don't do it as a factory but as departments-so someone who got a job the same day as you could stay while you go. You get 6 month's trial and then a review, then 2 years temporary, after 2 years you get a full-time contract but then you hear rumours from the lads saying 'you're coming up to your time they'll not renew you're

contract'. I've heard a couple of stories about lads not getting their contracts renewed and being laid off, and within a couple of days new people have been employed to take their places. This saves the company from paying redundancy, full wages, etc. The new people they employ work the first 6 months for £100 a month less than a full time worker, you are classed as a temp. When I first started at Interconnections I was working 10 pm to 6.05 am 6 nights a week, my wage was basically the same as a full time worker working 5 day shifts-around £700 a month. I'll see what happens when the 2 years comes up. I don't like working there although it has got better since I came off the night shift. I did 14 months full time nights when I started and for the first 6 months I had to work 6 nights a week, it was in my contract. It's just a job and it brings in money, I now take home £175 a week (B.G).

My job is only temporary, 2 years. During the first 6 months we get two reviews to see how we are doing but you are classed as temporary for two years and then they will put you on a permanent contract. But they've got to employ temporary workers, then they can ask you to come in 2-10 for the rest of the week when you've finished at 6 am or they will say we want you in early, say 9 am-10 pm. And you can't refuse because they might not renew your contract. There are no unions or anything like that. I think the government has crucified the unions because they were good for the working man, keeping them informed and trying to help them. What they have done is to take away all their power, their rights...They certainly don't look after people as far as I'm



concerned-the way we are treated. I could have gone to Onwa but that was only £135 a week and that was no good to me with a family and a mortgage. I get a bit more where I am (£750 pm). When I was at the pit I used to work a lot of overtime, I used to work every weekend so I earned about £300 [per week] (T.H).

H.W had recently had his hours cut and was looking for another job, nevertheless he was still prepared to 'make a go' of his present job:

I'm working part-time as a tele-sales canvasser with the Newcastle Journal. I was full time until two weeks ago. I went from part time to full time and back down again, basically I am on four weeks notice-the areas of the magazine I'm working on are limited and because there isn't much trade around at this time of year I couldn't reach the targets that they were setting, which were impossible. I explained this but was put on part-time as a penalty and it looks like I'm on notice. I take a lot of stick, but I'm not the only one...I'm very fearful of the future. I want to get steady employment, if this job goes beyond the four week period that should protect us part-time. I know a bit more about advertising now than I did before, I've been doing a bit of journalism, I'm learning new trades which are valid and I'm getting help and advice from people, especially on the editorial side I have the experience in that area so I should be all right, and I'll work any hours-others won't. I'm not down but I'm pretty realistic about the future, I'll not get a skilled job. I just want to get something to survive on, I've applied for Safeway in Team Valley, basically

shelf-stacking, but they are offering decent wages, it is shift work. Team Valley is difficult to get to but if I could get a foothold in there hopefully I could transfer to another store (H.W).

Only five men said they thought their jobs were secure, but some of their comments suggested that although their employment was secure in the short to medium term they were conscious of the possibility of being made redundant again.

It's a year to the day I've been there-so that's not bad.....I hope my job is secure-the lads think I'm bad luck because I've been at 3 pits in 12 years and they've all closed! I can't see Onwa shutting in the near future. I haven't done too badly (M.F).

I'm saving for the next time. I think my job was fairly secure when I started but there have been a few announcements since and now it is even more secure...I hope my future is fairly secure. I've invested money with a view to retiring at 55 but if I do get made redundant in my mid to late forties I don't think I'd get as good a job, but by then the kids will be away so I could afford to take a poorer paid job and I know I've got my redundancy behind me (R.W).

A.S, who had been unemployed for thirteen months before finding his present job felt the most insecure:

I've got a job after over a year unemployed. I'm all right but I don't think long term anymore because I know someone could come in any time and say 'that's it, the place is closing', and I'd be back to square one. So I take it day to day. Watching the

news again, it doesn't matter who you are, what you are, what you do, somebody can come along and you'll be out-just like that (A.S).

Pay was not the most important factor contributing to job satisfaction, as seen above, two of the men who were happiest in their new employment were very low paid. When men talked about their pay they tended to compare their present wage with what they earned at Westoe (18 months earlier). Most men admitted that the pay in the coal industry was 'quite good' compared to earnings generally in the area but stressed that they did not earn as much as the general public seemed to think:

To tell the truth, the pit wasn't great money, people used to say we were getting £400 a week. I couldn't get on the face, there was such a long waiting list. I was there 15 years and I wasn't even on the last page of the list when it closed. The money was not as good as people liked to make out (A.F).

However, most of the men had worked overtime regularly at Westoe and this boosted their wages considerably. Overall the men seemed to be grateful for what they earned at present, especially if it was about the same as they earned at the pit (over 18 months earlier). The fact that they had to work longer hours, or did not get paid overtime came as something of an afterthought:

I started work in June. I'm a machine operator at Mitsumi, earning-well it varies-it is shift work but it is good money, it averages about £300 a week. Actually it is about the same as the pit but I've got to put a lot more hours in. I work four twelve hour shifts now, 11 more hours a week than I did at the pit. It's continental shifts as well so I work weekends.

nights, any time. I do get paid more for unsocial hours, your big pay is Thursday to Sunday nights (A.S).

I work night shift at B Modern. I'm a wood machinist, I work 6 nights a week for £160 take home, that includes night shift allowance...I do 8.45 pm to 7 am for £150-160 take home including £30 night shift allowance, it works out at about £2.60 an hour. We're managing but nearly all the redundancy money has gone.

I work at Wincantons at Washington, it's Asda's main warehouse in the area. I come out, if I work a flat week, with £137. I try not to work flat weeks for obvious reasons. There's loads of overtime-the whole thing is based on overtime, you get time and a half....You can work as much as you like really, now, at Christmas time you can't take any holidays, the only thing is you don't see much of your family. I'm not complaining though, at the end of the day it's a job (A.F).

D.E who had just been made redundant at the time of the interview:

I got paid off on Friday from Energy Supplies Ltd, Byker. It was a short-term contract. The job was maintenance - a call out person but general handyman cum labourer cum fitter cum welder-if the job was there, we did it-multi skilled. I worked 8-5 permanent day shift, the basic wage, £200, was higher than Westoe but they didn't pay overtime, they paid a basic rate whatever you worked but they did recognise Bank

holidays (double time). The contract was for 3 months but I worked 7 weeks longer.

Most of the men mentioned deskilling, either they were not working at their trade or they knew other men who had 'gone down a trade'. Some of the men, of course, only had colliery specific skills but others had served apprenticeships which would be recognised in other industries. Of the men who had taken courses to enhance their trades only one (R.W) had found comparable employment in his trade. One man (J.N) complained that he had lost confidence during the time he was unemployed and felt like an apprentice in his new job:

I'm less independent where I work now but that's because it is new and I don't know it as well as the next fellow who's been there for 20 years. He can go and look at a job and do it before you've thought what to do, call it being rusty...It is like an apprenticeship again (J.N).

There are quite a few at a furniture manufacturer in Sunderland, a few at Onwa-production line work mainly, like Interconnections. I know a fitter at Interconnections who was a mechanical engineer at the pit (B.G).

Seven men said they had heard that firms were being paid a subsidy for employing redundant miners, they also suggested that men were being laid off when the subsidy ended:

My younger son is a fitter and he got a job in a factory in the Team Valley and there are two ex-Westoe fitters there, he told me the reason they got jobs was because the firm had

been paid about £9,000 I think, if they employ them for a year (P.M).

I think Onwa got a subsidy as well but when that stopped the lads were finished-I don't know for sure. I can't see why, basically all the work force at the colliery-well, not all-but most were very hard workers and good time-keepers...they were very adaptable. So I can't see the point in laying them off-unless they get another subsidy for taking someone else on? (K.P).

### **If Westoe reopened would you go back?**

The men were asked "If Westoe reopened, would you go back?" This, of course, was impossible and perhaps the question was a leading one in the sense that the men would want to stress the importance of their former jobs. Few men wanted to leave Westoe but admitted that they were glad in a way not to have to spend the rest of their lives working in the coal industry. However, the men from Tudhoe Park had also been very reluctant to leave mining but were much happier in their new situation. As Bulmer (1978) notes, there is no inconsistency between a reluctance to leave mining work and a much more favourable view of the new industry when in the new situation. In the case of the Westoe men their new employment was not regarded as favourably as their jobs in the coal industry, even where men said they were 'quite happy' in their new employment or where they had never really liked working in the coal industry. Twenty men said they would go back to work at Westoe, three of these said they would if they were unemployed and three said they would go back if they could work with the same people.

As a last resort I would. I wouldn't really want to. If Westoe reopened now, in the job I'm in now, looking at it like that I probably would. I had some good times there, it was all right

sometimes, it was just the conditions and that last year sticks in my mind, when we did nothing, that was no good that last year. Before the strike it was OK, after the strike it got worse and that last year it was a nightmare. It nearly finished me off.  
(A.F).

Fourteen men said they would go back without any reservations at all. Of these four were unemployed at the time of the interview, two were on training courses and one on sickness benefit. Seven men who said they would go back to work at the pit were in employment, although four had said they did not like their new jobs and one man was on a temporary contract.

I'd go straight back down. I'd just chuck everything else out the window and go straight back down the pit (H.W).

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study describes the experiences of a small sample of men made redundant from Westoe Colliery in 1993 in terms of both their reactions to redundancy and their labour market experience following the closure. The interview and survey data on employment status, duration of unemployment and current income add to research conducted by the Coalfield Communities Campaign and, overall, support these findings.

This study has attempted to examine redundancy within a comprehensive conceptual framework,<sup>55</sup> it examines why men chose to enter the coal industry, their employment history and attachment to work and relates this to the experience of redundancy and life after the pit. It also explains the process of redundancy as experienced by those affected; the men's perceptions of the case against closure and how past experience and the process of closure affected their reaction to redundancy. Thus, this study attempts to analyse reaction to redundancy as a rather more complex phenomenon than a simple opposition versus acquiescence dichotomy. The labour market experience of the redundant men is also described with particular reference to the activities of BCE, the main source of training and employment advice for redundant miners.

The study differs from earlier works such as Bulmer's 1978 study of the closure of Tudhoe Park Colliery, although Bulmer's study was conducted at a time when the coal industry in the immediate locality of Spennymoor had contracted quite dramatically, there was some mining employment for men willing to transfer to other collieries in the county. Another important difference when we consider reaction to redundancy and the post-redundancy experience is the prevailing labour market conditions, at the time of the Tudhoe Park closure the alternative employment available compared well in terms of pay

---

<sup>55</sup> See Methodology.



levels with the coal industry. Further, whereas Westoe Colliery had accessible reserves of coal and could have provided employment for many years, Tudhoe Park had thin seams, low output and poor quality coal and faced severe geological problems that meant that the pit was bound to be closed within two years.

### **Employment history and reasons for entering mining.**

The Westoe miners entered or re-entered the coal industry at a time when it had undergone considerable contraction yet the security mining offered was the most frequently cited reason for entering and re-entering the industry. The men's perception of Westoe as a long-life coastal colliery is understandable. In the context of the 1974 Plan for Coal and the Government's 1977 reaffirmation of its commitment to increase coal production; the substantial modernisation of Westoe in the 1960s and the NCB's recruitment drive in the 1970s.

There were other reasons for entering mining and most men mentioned a number of factors as did the Tudhoe Park men (see Introduction). Bulmer (1978) concluded that men entered mining partly because there was little comparable alternative employment available and also suggested that occupational choice is culturally conditioned and bound up with educational opportunities, or the lack of them. Family tradition was not the most important reason given for entering coal mining, nevertheless Bulmer found a very strong family tradition. The Westoe respondents cited family tradition more frequently than the men from Tudhoe Park, 11 men said they had a relative in the industry but only two suggested that it was 'the natural thing to do'.

The lack of alternative employment was an important factor in Bulmer's study and 6 Westoe men cited this reason. This was not the most important reason for the Westoe men entering the industry, with the possible exception of M.F who came from a more 'typical', i.e., occupationally homogenous, mining community in Scotland. The remainder

of the men lived in areas where there were alternative forms of employment. Those who said there was little choice then went on to explain that there were factories, the shipyards and so on but that the coal industry was seen to offer better prospects. Security was the most important factor, (security was not cited by any of Bulmer's sample) followed by the importance of gaining a trade (the NCB apprenticeships were widely seen as superior). The relatively high wages ranked fairly low in the reasons given for entering mining with only just over a third of then men (9) citing pay.

Less than half (12) of the Westoe men's fathers had been miners whereas three-quarters of the Tudhoe Park men's had, although 4 men from Westoe had other relatives who had worked in the coal industry. Whether the men had been culturally conditioned to enter mining is questionable, however, only three had actually been advised not to join the industry by their families (although more men said that their families were 'not keen'). As noted earlier Dennis *et al.* (1956) reported that 70 per cent of parents claimed that they would not encourage their children to be miners but they did nevertheless tend to become miners (see *A Man's Life*). The Westoe men suggested that their parents did not object strongly because the coal industry was secure, relatively well paid and it offered the opportunity to 'get on'. This is not to deny the importance of cultural conditioning or family tradition. A number of men suggested that they were influenced, if not encouraged, by relatives in the industry but it was, overwhelmingly, non-miners who had advised the men to enter mining. Three men had visited a colliery from school but none of these men suggested that mining was their only choice of occupation. In the case of the Westoe men it appears, with the exception of M.F and D.F (who were simply presented with the necessary forms by their fathers), that most men made considered and informed decisions about their careers and that the NCB offered superior prospects in terms of training, security and income.

As Fox (1980) and Jahoda (1982) have stressed, paid work has meaning for those who do it in several important ways in addition to providing an income. Those made

redundant lose the routine of work, the activity that structured his or her life, they also lose regular and sustained social contact and this is reinforced by the reduction in socialising forced by a drop in income. Coal mining has been seen as fostering particularly close working relations and the majority of the men talked about the camaraderie, their dependence on their work mates and so on. As Bulmer (1978) noted in his study of Tudhoe Park men: "Work, in the mining community, is dominant. The locality is centred on the pit, and the community is to a large degree occupationally homogenous though there are a number of exceptions to this, where the pit is or was sited in or near a conurbation-for example...Westoe Colliery in South Shields" (Bulmer, 1978: 26).

Although Westoe was atypical many of the Westoe men had clearly formed close working relationships at the pit. Lockwood has suggested that miners are members of occupational communities, that they socialise with their work mates and are shaped by "occupational solidarities and communal sociability" (Lockwood, 1966: 251). For Salaman (1971) members of occupational communities, whether they live in isolated communities or not, are members of occupational communities, that is:

...their self-image is centred on their occupational role in such a way that they see themselves as...people with specific qualities, interests and abilities. Secondly, members of occupational communities share a reference group composed of members of the occupational community. Thirdly, members of occupational communities associate with, and make friends of, other members of their occupation in preference to having friends who are outsiders, and they carry work activities and interests into their non-work lives (Salaman, 1971: 55).

This thesis was not explored here but it would be interesting to discover how far these men could be described as members of an occupational community and how redundancy has affected their self-image. Further, as Gilbert (1995) has suggested little is known about the experiences of mining people living in communities other than the "more familiar" ideal type mining community.

No firm conclusions about the degree of solidarity, cohesiveness and other characteristics that have been seen to be 'typical' of mining communities<sup>56</sup> can be drawn from this study but there is evidence of a strong attachment to work and to work mates, many men said they socialised with other miners and had continued to do so after the closure. However, as Westoe drew its workforce from a wide area miners did not always socialise with their work mates and men did lose contact with former colleagues. For some the closure of the colliery meant far more than simply losing a job:

I see very few from Westoe now, all the lads that I worked with live in Blyth and places so I see very few now, which is very sad. Someone else drank himself to death. What he did was he got his redundancy money and went to the Top Club, and virtually never came out of there. He drank 20 pints a day until he got cirrhosis of the liver and killed himself. I know of six suicides since Westoe closed, well I've read about them in the papers. Some lads found that without the pit, without the social scene to do with the pit they had no life. If you had the whole family in mining you have your whole basis and future in mining, your whole social life is mining-which it was for some lads-you take that away and you might as well take his whole life away, it's just ripped out his soul (H.W).

---

<sup>56</sup> See Introduction.

## Reaction to closure

The announcement of the closure of Westoe came as a surprise to most of the men, there had been rumours for years but rumours, many said, were 'part and parcel' of work in the coal industry. As one man said, despite the rumours he thought he had a job for life, the men thought that other pits in the area might close but that Westoe would be 'all right'. This view was based mainly on the productivity gains made at the colliery since the strike, BC management also sent letters to Westoe employees reassuring them that the colliery had a secure future.

The Employment Committee (1993) was highly critical of British Coal's decision to make its announcement without any prior warning. British Coal admitted to the Employment Committee that they had not consulted trade unions about the proposed redundancies as they were legally obliged to do. Neil Clarke, the BC Chairman, claimed that they had broken the law to provide an advantage to those made redundant:

If we went into the consultation period, the operations of the pits would run down and the basis on which our miners, if redundant, receive redundancy pay is based on the 12 weeks prior to being redundant. Our determination was to make sure they got the maximum possible redundancy terms (Employment Committee, 1993: vi).

The Employment Committee rejected Mr Clarke's evidence that the lack of warning was to the benefit of their employees. "The upshot of British Coal's action is that the news of the pit closures was broken with little or no prior warning to mining employees or other dependent workers".

British Coal's actions were seen to have had an important effect on the morale of those affected by closures. "It was necessary to allow those affected by the closures time to understand, to absorb and, if possible, to counteract the effects on them" (Employment Committee, 1993: vi). Heseltine expressed surprise that the public and political reaction had been so fierce. He had assumed that sufficient details of the likely pit closures had been so widely leaked that people were fully aware of the "broad thrust" of the Government's plans. (Employment Committee, 1993: ix.) People were not, as one man said:

We were never told officially by BC. After showering and changing we came into the foyer and there was a pile of Coal News that said which pits were going to close-and that was it. I still can't believe they didn't tell anyone or call a meeting. Just pick it up if you want to know, just pick up a newspaper and read that your pit is closing (N.R).

Westoe had not been included on any leaked list and were not "fully aware" of these plans. Redundancy is bad news however it is broken but, as a number of men complained, it is made worse when one learns the news second-hand. Other men learned that their pit was to close from the media, or if they were at work at the time of the announcement from colleagues coming on shift. One man knew nothing about the announcement until he was asked by a newspaper reporter how he felt about the closure. Why the Government and BC made the announcement without any prior warning can only be guessed at, but it seems doubtful that this really was in the interest of the work force.

### **Reasons for closure**

When asked why they thought the pit closed the men gave a number of reasons but, unlike the Tudhoe Park Colliery, few men could accept that the pit had to close. One man suggested that the Government and BC must have had sound reasons but, like the majority of the men, still questioned their reasons: "If you are in the government it must be different-you can see the whole picture. But I can't understand why the pit, which always made a profit, was closed. I don't know why it closed" (R.W). The fact that the colliery had made productivity improvements with a reduced workforce was raised frequently and, no doubt, the lack of economic rationale, as far as the men were concerned, convinced many that this was a purely political act. Clearly the men had a deep distrust of both BC and the Government and this was based on their past experience, most notably the 1984-85 strike.

There may seem to have been much in this situation to make for militant resistance to the closure, certainly there were demonstrations (see *The Final Phase*) and many of the men interviewed had travelled to London to protest against the closures. Although public outrage delayed the closures the Government and BC achieved what they had set out to do, and more, with relative ease. Responses to redundancy, as Wood and Dey (1983) suggest:

...are often crudely perceived in terms of a simple dichotomy, opposition versus acquiescence. Resistance to redundancy is treated as a problem to be overcome; workers should be encouraged (for example, by redundancy payments) to forsake their interest in security, which is sectional and obstructionist, for the general good of the economy (Wood and Dey, 1983:1).

Reaction to redundancy is, of course, more complex and events in recent years underline the diversity of worker's reactions. The waves of protest against redundancies in the

1970s and early 1980s<sup>57</sup> including sit-ins and demonstrations are now seen to be exceptional as plant closures and mass redundancies have been achieved relatively smoothly despite the costs they impose on those made redundant. As Wood and Dey (1993) note modern methods of handling redundancy have eased the passage rather than the pain of redundancy. As two Westoe miners put it:

I think they would have had a revolution on their hands if there had not been any redundancy. I think we'd have smashed the place up and nailed the managers to the wall to be quite honest (D.D).

Well, how can I put it, it was a sweetener for a lot of people, if there hadn't been so much redundancy money then people would not have gone so quietly (E.H).

Although the 1992 closure announcement provoked public outrage, and even rebellion within the ranks of the Tory government, the protests, at national level at least, were short lived. The Government's moratorium and Review may have persuaded the general public that the economic grounds for closure were justified but this view was not shared by the majority of men interviewed. Thirteen (50%) of the men believed that it was worth fighting the closure but no-one thought the fight could have been successful. The view was that one could not take things 'lying down', even though there was no chance of winning.

This pessimistic view and lack of militancy can be understood only by considering past events, the closure of other collieries such as Bates Colliery and the 1984-85 miners' strike in particular, and the role of redundancy money. Some men believed the fight had been lost in 1985 and nearly all the men felt that once the Government had 'made up its mind' there was no possibility of changing the situation.

---

<sup>57</sup> See Findlay, 1987 on the Plessey Occupation.



We did try to fight it in 1984-85 but we were beaten by cleverer people, as simple as that. This time we were beaten by mineworkers' fears, the threat of losing redundancy money and sweeteners. Fear and uncertainty closed it. They played on people's fears (K.P).

Given the fact that all these men had been on strike in 1984-85, it is quite understandable that they felt powerless in this situation. Comments such as "Not worth it [fighting] because you can't beat this government. They would spend the earth to beat you" (D.D) were typical. Again redundancy money was a factor that cannot be ignored. Even if BC employees had a right to such pay under their employment contracts, they could have lost all redundancy payments above the statutory minimum by striking, since striking is normally deemed a breach of contract. These men, like the Ellington and Wearmouth miners, had no choice but to accept the closure, to suggest that they had a choice, that they could have proceeded with the independent review (NMCRP) which would almost certainly have resulted in them losing both their jobs and the enhanced redundancy package and bonuses, is untenable.

The process of closure also had an adverse effect on any opposition. A number of men suggested that as the closure process progressed they felt increasingly despondent so that the final decision to close the colliery came as something of a relief. This is something noted by Wood and Dey (1983), initial opposition often quickly dissipates and individuals may become disenchanted and choose to quit as the redundancy progresses.

If workers do value security, this does not mean that they will fight to stay in their jobs. Moreover, opposition, being based as it is on assumptions about the kind of circumstances in which redundancy is or is not acceptable is rarely, if ever,

unconditional and workers do volunteer for redundancies even in areas of high unemployment (Wood and Dey, 1983: 2).

Further, they suggest, with the growing prevalence of voluntary redundancy one might conclude that some people welcome redundancy. Stories circulate of people 'waiting for' their redundancy, hoping the firm will close and treating redundancy as though they had won the pools. Three of the Westoe men said that they were pleased that the colliery was closing and looked forward to a 'bit of a holiday', although they admitted that this was partly because the threat of closure had 'dragged on' and they had had enough of the situation. Other comments suggest that this was not uncommon, a number of men referred to 'the let's get finished brigade', again redundancy money can be seen as an important factor influencing the decision not to fight:

I think the thought of all that money, people thought we were going to get this and that, the carrot was dangled in front of them - you could go out with 'the max' - that's all people would talk about was their redundancy money, not trying to fight closure and I think it would be pulling the wool over your eyes if you thought people were going to stand up and fight. Going round the lads and hearing what they had to say, they were just really pissed off and fed up with it. I think the whole lot was planned-I think somebody did sit down and think about it (C.P).

Only twelve of the sample of eighty-nine men left Westoe between the 1992 announcement and the actual closure in May 1993. Most (8) of these left in April, a few weeks before the closure. Four of the interview sample took voluntary redundancy before closure, one man (E.H) explained:

I didn't leave early because of the money, it was just that 6 electricians had to go. The engineer and manager didn't want us to go but we had our pensions, there was hope that the colliery might keep going so, to stop the young lads losing their jobs, I went. Mind, you've no idea what it was like working there the last three months, it was a relief to get out-at first.

The men were not asked why they left early but the comments of the men suggest that they had either had enough and/or that they would gain a head start in looking for work by leaving before the colliery closed. None of the other respondents who left early thought that there was any chance of the colliery remaining open. One man, R.W, who had planned for the possibility of closure for years would not leave early, although he had considered doing so:

I loved the pit and didn't want to jump and then find that the pit was stopping open. Then I'd be working somewhere else, looking at the pit and wishing I hadn't gone.

This demonstrates the complexity of people's reactions and their hopes and fears. This was a man who had suspected for some time that he would be made redundant, he had made financial provisions and had widened and upgraded his skills, he was aware of local labour market conditions; he was pragmatic in every sense except when it came to the future of the colliery.

Not all the Westoe respondents were sorry to leave the coal industry, although the vast majority would have preferred the pit to stay open. They were all sorry to leave a secure well-paid job and most missed other aspects of mining - the friendship, camaraderie and so on. Bulmer (1978) also found that the men in his study of the closure of Tudhoe Park

were sad to leave mining. The Tudhoe Park men, like the Westoe men, had experienced a period of uncertainty about the future of the colliery before the final closure announcement was made. Tudhoe Park had been reprieved on at least one previous occasion and it was widely expected to close in the near future (Bulmer, 1978). The difference here was that Westoe could have continued to operate for many years, the closure was not inevitable in the sense that the closure of Tudhoe Park was (i.e. Tudhoe Park was nearing exhaustion).

The uncertainties about the future of the colliery and the miners view of the closure itself was seen by Bulmer (1978) as a further internalised constraint. "It was quite clear that the closure had not come as a surprise and three-quarters of the men thought it was inevitable and that nothing could have been done to prevent it. Seventeen men said they didn't care when they heard the news; fourteen were disappointed and ten were pleased. Half the sample had some regrets at the closing and many of these would have liked the pit to remain open" (1978: 247). Only three of the sample from Westoe said they were pleased although, like the Tudhoe Park men their reaction might well have been influenced by the uncertainty about the future and the deterioration in the working atmosphere as the run down of the colliery and the process of redundancy progressed. A number of men said that, even though they were not pleased the pit had closed, it was a relief that the matter had been decided. For others the atmosphere had deteriorated to such an extent that they were glad to get out.

Eight of the men had experienced closure before, M.F who had already been through two pit closures before moving to Westoe was the most sanguine about the closure, his view was that at least he had gained a few more years' work and that this had boosted his redundancy package (the amount of money trebled). Surprisingly, considering his experience, he was the only man who said he would apply to work in Ellington Colliery when it reopened as a private concern; only one other man had considered transferring to another pit but this had not been an option. Only one man had thought about leaving the

coal industry before the first closure announcement, however, he commented that it was rather a different matter to have the choice taken away. The remainder suggested that they would have been quite happy to spend the rest of their lives there. Even the men who strongly disliked the work had no intention of leaving voluntarily, although as working conditions deteriorated during the period between the October 1992 announcement and the actual closure they became increasingly dissatisfied with work. Industrial closure and the resulting redundancies are always traumatic experiences but these men lived with uncertainty and insecurity for some time before the actual closure announcement. This was followed by a further period of uncertainty when the Government announced its moratorium on the closures. This uncertainty was seen by the men as a deliberate means of gaining the co-operation of the workforce in the closure. In addition, no-one had any faith in either the Government Review or in the established New Modified Colliery Review Procedure. The final means of securing the men's co-operation was the offer of enhanced redundancy packages then the threat of their withdrawal if the men did not agree to closure. The men felt that this was blackmail and that this, and the reports of massive redundancy payments (the amounts reported in the press were usually the maximum) lost them the support of the general public who remained unaware of the Government and British Coal's tactics.

### **The role of the unions**

As Wood and Dey (1983) point out trade unions may have official no redundancy policies but often do not or cannot adhere to them in practice and confine themselves to negotiating the best terms and conditions on which their members leave their redundant jobs. Seglow (1970) found in his study of redundancy in two workshops in a cable making factory that these workers, as the Westoe men did, felt themselves and their union to be powerless to alter the situation. This, as Seglow points out, did not mean that the men accepted the management's definition of the position, indeed, many of them saw the situation in conflict terms, so that what was right and justified for the

management was wrong and unjustified from the men's point of view (1970: 12-13). This, as has been seen, was also the feeling of the majority of Westoe men interviewed. Here the role of the unions was confined to advising the men of their best interests:

It was like a Catch 22 situation, the union wanted to fight it but at the same time they wanted the best for their members. If they were to tell their members to vote to go into the Review procedure at the same time they would be chucking £10,000 and bonuses. They couldn't do it. (P.S).

The union just said listen, do what you like. Normally they would vote against it. It had to close, it is as simple as that (D.F).

The union still had an important role in providing advice for the men once the closure decision had been taken. The men gave somewhat contradictory accounts of the advice they had received from the unions, BC, and other agencies about redundancy, their redundancy money and entitlement to welfare benefits. Some men said that there was no help available, others said that they had received good investment advice, counselling and welfare rights advice. The evidence from this survey certainly suggests that the men needed financial advice and counselling but the best way of providing this is unclear. It seems that the main problem in the case of Westoe, and probably other colliery closures, is first; that the men who took redundancy before the pit closed missed out on advice sessions held at the pit; second, men were reluctant to take or to seek advice from BC (unsurprisingly given the context of the redundancies); third, the men suggested that they did not feel they needed advice at the time they were made redundant but were in need of advice by the time of the interviews (about 18 months after closure). "I just stuck it in the bank and drew it out gradually. Looking back I wish I'd had some advice" (M.H). There are a number of other possible explanations for some of the men's reluctance to seek advice. Some men (although not many) found work soon after the colliery closed,

others felt that they would soon find work and felt secure as they had their redundancy money behind them. Others, who were less optimistic about their chances of finding work, felt that they could not invest the money as they would need it to live on and simply put in the bank.

The union was seen as the most helpful source of advice (the Mechanics being more helpful than the NUM) and a number of men mentioned the advice sessions organised by the unions and led by Mike Peel, a Campaign Group Member and Welfare Rights Officer (who previously worked at Westoe).

### **Labour market experience**

As noted earlier most redundancy studies have focused largely on its impact on subsequent employment. The emphasis on the consequences of redundancy in terms of employment and the social and economic costs of closure also informed recent campaigns against colliery closures (Wade, 1985; WCCG, 1993; Glyn, 1984). The Campaign Group's have stressed that the impact on employment would be significant and long-term, the Government, however, suggested that most people will find work within a year as over time "the economy adjusts" (HMSO, 1993: 5:14).

Forty-one of the sample of men made redundant from Westoe were in employment one year after closure, 28 were counted as unemployed. However, 20 men had 'dropped out' of the labour market either temporarily or permanently (eight of these were registered as sick and 12 were in full time education or on training courses).

The consequences and impact of redundancy cannot simply be measured in terms of employment, that is whether redundant miners find new employment and how long they were unemployed. The quality and duration of new employment are important. Low-paid, insecure or short-term employment cannot compensate for secure, well-paid work

except to the extent that any new employment will reduce the government's unemployment statistics. It is unclear from the survey how many men in employment were employed on short-term contracts (six men made a point of saying they were) or had been made redundant again since the closure but the interview findings suggest that accelerating redundancy (see below) and the use of temporary and short-term contracts was common.

Many redundancy studies have found that many of those made redundant took up less satisfactory jobs (for example, involving a significant loss of income) and that their insecurity was amplified rather than eliminated (Daniel, 1972 cited in Wood and Dey, 1983; Westergaard *et al.*, 1989; CCC 1990; Guy, 1994a, 1994b). As Westergaard *et al.* (1989) note, economic insecurity implied other things besides difficulty in obtaining further employment. Among these was the continued risk of redundancy from new employment, what Wood and Dey (1983) call "the phenomenon of accelerating redundancy". Nearly a quarter of Westergaard *et al.*'s (1989) samples who worked at all after redundancy were subsequently made redundant again.

This was also found to be the case for the Westoe men, more than a third of the sample (ten) had become unemployed again since being made redundant from Westoe, the majority of these men had been employed on temporary contracts or had been employed in casual work (seven doing care and maintenance work at Westoe and Wearmouth). It also has to be remembered that four of the men who were employed at the time of the interview were on temporary contracts, one for only eight weeks, and few men felt that their employment was very secure in the long term. The evidence from the interviewees suggests an increasing use of temporary contracts and possibly the increasing willingness of employers to adopt hire and fire policies as Hyman (1988) has suggested.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> See *Having it all their Own Way*.



Another aspect of economic insecurity that has been seen to follow redundancy is downward mobility or occupational downgrading. New employment following redundancy may often be much less desirable (as measured by composite scales using income, other benefits and social standing) than the previous job (Westergaard *et al.*, 1989). The greatest danger in such downgrading may lie, however, in the weakened labour market position it implies for the employee. A recent study of long-term unemployment (White, 1983 cited in Westergaard *et al.*, 1989) found that occupational downgrading of a major kind had occurred to 40 per cent of those long-term unemployed who had previously had a distinct longest employment (rather than a number of essentially short-term jobs), and that there was a characteristic pattern of redundancy from stable employment in a declining industry that is followed by short-term downgraded employment outside that industry and then by long-term unemployment.

Westergaard *et al.*, (1989) found clear evidence of downgrading; in all 39 per cent of those who had been employed after redundancy had been so in a lower grade job than the one held before. In the case of the Westoe men a more detailed analysis of job content would be required to form any definite conclusions about the extent of downgrading, for example, some men who had been unskilled workers in the coal industry might be described as semi-skilled in their new employment. However, evidence from the men suggests that many former miners were not working at their trade and most 'had gone down a trade', for example a colliery electrician working as a street lighting attendant, mechanics working as fitters and an electrician working as a caretaker. Other skilled men described their new employment as multi-skilled, for example, D.E, a former fitter: "The job was maintenance- a call out person but general handyman cum labourer cum fitter cum welder-if the job was there, we did it-multi skilled." Evidence from this study suggests that many redundant miners have experienced downgrading (using measures of pay, skill and security of employment).

The downgrading of employment following redundancy can be seen to be the result of a combination of factors; personal characteristics, age and skills and, of course, local labour market conditions. It is well established that the impact of unemployment varies according to these characteristics and such variables as the length of post-dismissal unemployment (Wood and Dey, 1983). As Bytheway (1987), in his study of older men made redundant from a steelworks shows, the redundancy process entails certain expectations about alternative work. Some were confident that there was work to be found. Six months later they were still available for work and on the 'lookout', after four years those who were still available for work had settled into a routine that presumed that their only chance of gaining paid employment lay in a dramatic change in the national economy. The Westoe interview sample included only four men aged over 50, one of these was registered as sick and one man found 8 weeks work after 19 months' unemployment. The remaining two had, by the time of interview (18-19 months after being made redundant), resigned themselves to not working again. One of these men (J.H) was still applying for work, he was on a BCE joinery course but did not think this would help him find paid employment (he said the course would help him around the house). These men were more pessimistic about their chances of employment from the outset (that is before actually being made redundant) than Bytheway's sample seemed to be. As one man said: "I see young lads struggling, I can't see me getting back to work, unless there is a turn around and you get all old men working and all the young men on the dole" (J.H).

These personal characteristics achieve greater salience during periods of high unemployment when they are used by employers as initial filters to reduce the numbers of applications. Employers also try to minimise their risks in the recruitment and selection of new staff that means that they consider not only the education and work experience of the applicants, but also, for example, whether they will 'learn the ropes' quickly and remain with the firm. Since it is often difficult to obtain reliable measures on these matters employers often rely on general impressions and upon general images and

stereotypes of the groups to which they belong. The result is that various groups run the risk of being excluded from paid employment and a vicious circle develops. The average duration of unemployment among individuals in excluded groups increases and, for the employers, long-term unemployment is just another indication that there is 'something wrong' with these applicants (van den Berg and van der Veer, 1992: 178-179). This, as Westergaard *et al.* (1989) note, reinforces feelings of helplessness and resignation as individuals are powerless to influence these assumptions.

These feelings were also apparent in the Westoe sample, one of the older men commented: "Well, the point is, I think my age is against us for work. I'm 54 now, so, as soon as they see your age, I think they bin everything really". However, it was not just the older men (aged 45 or older) or the unskilled men who had difficulty in finding work, at the time of the postal survey twelve of the twenty-eight unemployed men were skilled (see Appendix 2). Although mining involves highly specific skills and many of these are not transferable many men within the mining workforce had potentially highly transferable skills, electricians, mechanics and fitters being the main examples although some further training might be required. For example, the standard electrical qualification recognised within the coal industry is one element short of that for general electrical work (Witt, 1990).

## **Job search**

Social and occupational psychologists have researched work commitment thoroughly and evidence suggests that intrinsic work commitment is a common and persistent occurrence in industrial societies (Westergaard *et al.*, 1989). Westergaard *et al.* (1989) measured work commitment by a scale drawn from responses to ten statements,<sup>59</sup> and found a high level of intrinsic worth attached to paid employment and highly negative evaluations of unemployment. Although the work commitment of the Westoe sample

---

<sup>59</sup> See Westergaard *et al.*, pp 91-93.

was not measured in the same way the men's comments and actions suggested a strong attachment to paid work and a negative evaluation of unemployment. Comments such as the following suggest, as Westergaard *et al.* (1989) found, that unemployment for many is still heavily stigmatised.

We've always worked, the whole family always has, to us being on the dole is a disgrace, it might sound wrong but there are a lot of people who will not work but those that do want to work are willing to work for low wages (K.A).

My family has always worked, my wife has got a part-time job and my daughter works full-time. I feel guilty because I'm not working (K.P).

Although there were differences in men's job search activities, some men took a holiday before starting to look for work and some men tried harder than others to find work, clearly the vast majority of redundant men were keen to find employment and required help to do so as 91% of them had sought advice from one or more local agencies; this compares to 81% of the men made redundant from Vane Tempest and 82% of those made redundant from Grimethorpe (Guy, 1994a, 1994b). Seventy-three (82%) of the sample of eighty-nine men sought advice from BCE, the Jobcentre was the second most used agency (71%), twenty-seven men (30%) had attended Job Clubs at the time of the survey, ten (11%) had contacted Tyneside TEC and two (2.2%) the N.V.Q Helpline. None of the men had any contact with Tyneskill Support or Tyneskill Access. Eight men (9%) did not have contact with any of the above agencies, four of these (50%) were in employment, two (25%) were claiming sickness benefit and two (25%) were unemployed. One of the unemployed men had been unemployed for 6 months before starting a four month construction course with a private firm and then becoming unemployed again, the second man was aged 54 and he may have decided not to look for work.

The remaining eight of the sixteen men who had no contact with BCE used other job search agencies, mainly the Jobcentre and Job Club, six (75%) were unemployed, one (12.5%) employed and one (12.5%) claiming sickness benefit. It is not clear why these unemployed men had no contact with BCE, however, none of them lived in South Shields and it is possible that they chose to use a more convenient agency, i.e., their local Jobcentre. One man explained that he had travelled around the country looking for work so had not had any contact with BCE. It is also possible that these men did not want anything to do with BCE, as Witt has noted:

The potential for help from British Coal can be totally undermined where pit closure was controversial, bitterly contested or conducted in an underhand manner by British Coal. Men simply do not trust their former employer (Witt, 1990:6).

One respondent said he would rather do without BCE's help: "It was something I could do without, I am bloody minded at times. I thought I can find a job myself, I can do without them, and I did" (A.S). A number of comments made by other interviewees suggested a deep mistrust of British Coal and this might have been a factor influencing some men's decision not to seek advice from BCE. Nevertheless, the vast majority did seek BCE's help at some stage, although a number said they had given up with BCE or that they were a 'waste of time'.

Twenty men (27%) who had sought advice from BCE were unemployed, thirty-six (49%) were employed and twelve (16%) were in education or training, the remainder were claiming sickness benefit. Although the men who sought advice from BCE fared better than those men who sought advice from other agencies, half the men who did not seek any advice at all was in employment. Three of these men had been kept on at

Westoe doing care and maintenance work so would not have been seeking advice at the time of the closure. B.G for example, explained:

I got the job through a couple we go out with on a Saturday night, I didn't have anything to do with BCE because as soon as I left Westoe I had a start at Interconnections. I stayed on at Westoe for a few weeks, that finished and I had a couple of week's holiday and started there (B.G).

What remains unclear from the survey results is how helpful BCE was in 'outplacing' redundant miners. A recent survey (Moore and O'Neill, 1996) found that the propensity to unemployment immediately following redundancy was lower among redundant miners in Mansfield and redundant steelworkers in Lanarkshire than that of the total sample in their study. Moore and McNeill state that there is no doubt that this is due to the attractiveness of the training/outplacement components of the redundancy package. They go on to add that the 'immediate' propensity to unemployment excludes those who for a variety of reasons (e.g., holidays, registration inertia), do not join the claimant count immediately but for whom unemployment is, eventually, the first formal post-redundancy destination that they enter (Moore and McNeill, 1996: xi). Most men were keen to find work immediately after leaving Westoe although four men decided to have some time off before starting to look for work. Nevertheless twelve months after the closure twenty-eight of the Westoe sample were still unemployed and twenty men had dropped out of the labour market either temporarily or permanently.

Twelve men sought advice only from BCE, seven of these men were in employment (one doing care and maintenance work at Westoe), two were claiming sickness benefit, two were in education or training (one on a BCE course, the other at college) and one was unemployed. Although the survey findings suggest that those men who sought advice from BCE fared better than those who used other agencies, the interview findings show

that only one man found work through the BCE Job Shop. This is not to say that BCE did not help people into employment, for example, by providing advice on job search activities, producing curriculum vitae and so on.<sup>60</sup> Of the remaining fourteen men who were in work at the time of the interview, nine had found employment through advertisements in the Jobcentre or newspapers and by writing speculative letters. Some of the men also used more than one Jobcentre (although they could only register at one).

Bulmer (1978) found that Courtaulds pursued a policy of recruiting relatives of existing operatives: just under half of those interviewed (23) had relatives working there. The firm thus seemed to be exploiting a feature of the workings of the local labour market, that of relatives 'speaking for' someone to be taken on. Kahn and Wedderburn (cited in Bulmer, 1978) have also found that informal means predominate for manual workers affected by redundancy. Wedderburn (cited in Bulmer, 1978) found that one half of her railway workshop sample found jobs through being 'spoken for' or known, or through relatives and friends and a further quarter found work by going 'on spec' to factories. This was also a feature of the Westoe men's job search experience, 5 men found work through friends or relatives and a number had tried to get family members and friends work in the same way. This was, for the interview sample at least, an important way of gaining employment, a third of the employed men found employment in this way and two of the men who were unemployed at the time of the interview had found their previous job through informal contacts.

As noted above, BCE was described as 'a waste of time' and the evidence from this study challenges BCE's claims that: "over 70% of the jobs we locate are never even advertised in Jobcentres or the local press!" (BCE, 1995). The BCE Job Shop was regarded by the redundant men as an 'extra Jobcentre', advertising jobs that could be found in the local paper or the Jobcentre or, worse, advertising positions that had already been filled.

---

<sup>60</sup> As BCE were unwilling to co-operate it is impossible to assess the impact of other BCE policies such as business funding (and, according to the respondents subsidies paid to firms employing redundant miners), and workplace provision.

Another complaint was that the Job Shop moved from Westoe when Wearmouth Colliery closed, this also highlights the difficulties faced by the men (and BCE), when 1,200 more men joined the competition for scarce employment.

Many of the men remarked on the quality of the jobs advertised and, not surprisingly, the positions advertised for chicken-pluckers, sandwich-fillers and bungee jumpers were often commented upon. Obviously these were the more remarkable advertisements, however, these and other comments suggest that the BCE Job Shop personnel, whilst 'doing their best', were in an impossible situation. The majority of men interviewed felt that the BCE Job Shop was simply a 'front', that BCE was there 'to make it look like miners were getting special help'. "I've got to be honest, I think they are in a pathetic, hopeless situation. They are trying to do something and are trying to provide some sort of facility but I've got to be honest, I don't think there is much chance. I've applied for a couple of jobs they had on the board and I never had replies from them" (C.P).

Another criticism of BCE concerned the time limits applied, some of the men found casual or temporary employment immediately, others chose to try to find work themselves or through agencies other than BCE:

You had nine months to apply for a course, well 9 months isn't long, I think you should have as much time as you like to apply as long as you haven't had a job in the meantime. Or if you've got a job and need skills to keep the job you should be able to train. Had I gone on a welding course I'd probably still be there [in last job] (D.E).

Overall though, BCE was seen as more helpful (but in a hopeless situation) than other employment agencies. Some of the men were critical of Jobcentre staff who seemed unsympathetic, J.H for example: "These youngsters sitting there telling me about



experience-'have you got work experience?' they ask, 'have you done this, have you done that' - and they've not done anything themselves". Given some of the comments made by the men it is unsurprising that they felt the employment agencies were a 'waste of time', a number of men said that they had registered at Jobcentres but heard nothing from them, some said that Jobcentre staff were discouraging and had little understanding of their skills and the type of work they could do, as one electrician explained: "There was a job advertised and it was local, the way it was worded - it said electrician but would suit a car mechanic so I went to ask but he wasn't very helpful at all. I explained but he just sat there looking at me saying he didn't think I'd do" (J.N). R.W continued to visit Jobcentres but eventually became disillusioned with them, he explains:

I went to 6 Jobcentres, sometimes more but they wouldn't put me on the register. I had to say what sort of fitter I was-I told them I was a colliery fitter and they said, 'well, if any colliery fitter's jobs come up we'll let you know'. And the pit was shutting! I don't know what they do, I never heard from them (R.W).

This study, in common with others (see for example, Witt, 1990) casts further doubt upon BCE's claims of success in resettling former miners. Many men felt that, although the personnel were pleasant and helpful, BCE was most concerned to 'get them off their books', by any means. Most interestingly evidence from this study suggests that BCE took credit for finding men employment when, in fact, they had found work themselves. Although only a few men mentioned this tactic it would go some way towards explaining BCE's figures and is worth further investigation.

Some men adopted more informal methods of job search (that is not through advertisements or employment agencies), some travelled around the area looking for work and two men moved to other parts of the country. One man drove around

industrial estates taking down the names of companies to apply to and another regularly visited a local foundry in the hope that there would be a vacancy.

The majority of men were willing to take almost any sort of work (although they drew the line at security work) and were almost all willing to take lower paid work. The general feeling was that they were lucky to have found work and that a low wage was better than the dole. Wood and Dey (1983) cite the work of Reid (1971, 1972), McKay (1971, 1972, 1972a) and Herron (1975), who found that individuals behaved rationally in following either of two distinct job search strategies that the authors labelled 'sticking' and 'snatching'. The stickers looked for jobs comparable with their previous employment while snatchers took whatever employment was available while continuing to search for something better. The former were single-job changers, and were more likely to experience long periods of unemployment following redundancy than the latter, who tended to be multiple job-changers. The authors stressed the rationality of both strategies; in particular, informal methods of job search were particularly important to snatchers in their search for better jobs. Only one of the interview respondents in employment could be described as a sticker, he turned down offers of employment until he found a well-paid position in his trade. The remainder of the men can be described as 'snatchers', a few skilled men may have been 'stickers' in the immediate post-redundancy period but as they became more familiar with local labour market conditions their expectations of finding comparable work lowered. Six of the men said they were looking for another job but they suggested that it would not be easy to find a better one.

### **Willingness to move**

Bulmer (1978) found that there was a strong attachment to the locality among the Tudhoe Park miners, most men lived within three miles of the pit and had lived in the area for most of their lives. Many of these men were unwilling to transfer to coastal pits in the county. The three principal reasons for this unwillingness were the travelling

involved (in some cases an hour each way), working among strangers, and pessimism about the future of mining. Asked about the possibility of transferring to a coastal pit and moving house 16 (n=44) said they would not move to another area to get work. Several gave their wife and her family as the reasons, but others were clearly attached to the locality regardless of other considerations (Bulmer, 1978: 252).

In the case of the Westoe men the majority (16) had considered moving or working away from home and eight men had applied for jobs in other parts of the country or abroad. Many of the Westoe men had transferred from other collieries (as had the Tudhoe Park men) and a number had worked in other industries or had served in the armed forces. They did not express the same reluctance as the Tudhoe Park men to move or to work with strangers, probably because they were quite used to this.<sup>61</sup> Among those who said they were not willing to move, family commitment was cited most frequently, other reasons included the fear of becoming unemployed again and the likelihood of gaining well-paid employment elsewhere. N.R explained when asked if he would or had considered moving away: "As a last resort. I would not want to. There's the family and the wife's family to consider. Anyway, there is no work anywhere, it is disgusting all over. Plus the fact that if you did move away to work the cost of living would probably be higher anyway". and R.W., "BCE advertised jobs all over the country but most didn't pay enough to make it worth moving".

There was some evidence of attachment to the locality, some men said they would prefer to work away and travel home at weekends and only three men said that they would move their families. Family ties were seen to be more important than attachment to place. All the men were willing to travel 'a distance' to work, the main constraint here was transport. Four men said they could not drive (they were not asked specifically about this and it is possible that other respondents could not drive either, this might be explained by

---

<sup>61</sup> See Employment History and J.N on moving to Westoe from Morrison Busty.

the fact that they either lived close enough to the pit to walk or cycle to work or that they travelled on the pit bus).

There was a sense of pessimism about the state of the economy generally, as NR said 'it's disgusting all over', however, there was also a feeling that South Tyneside offered less prospect of a well-paid, secure job than other areas: "South Tyneside is one of the worst unemployment blackspots in the country-there's loads of skilled labour, engineers and everything-but there's no industry here. I'd travel to Cleveland (Samsung), that's forty miles but I bet the wages are crap there as well so I'd probably be no better off" (D.D).

The willingness to move is evidence of the importance of work above other considerations. A number of men said that they had applied for work abroad and this may reflect a more general trend towards occupational mobility. Men have always moved around the country to find work, especially in the construction industry, and it is not unusual for men to work abroad as M.H did. This would probably not have been a consideration at the time of Bulmer's study.

### **Self-employment**

Self-employment has been viewed as a key element of the enterprise culture and something encouraged by BCE although evidence suggests that for most non-craftsmen self-employment does not appear a viable response to redundancy. Only a few are successful and such small businesses contribute little to the local economy. As Witt (1990) has found most men moving into self-employment do so on their own and do not create employment opportunities for others.

There was little evidence of former miners being encouraged to start up their own businesses by BCE and only two men in the study described themselves as self-employed. This may be evidence of a lack of entrepreneurial spirit among the men but

may also reflect a realistic assessment by the men and BCE of the likelihood of success. Earlier studies of coalfield regeneration measures suggest that advice and assistance on small businesses tends to be taken up by individuals who leave employment for the purpose of becoming self-employed and not by unemployed people (Witt, 1990). As Turner (1993) notes, for BCE encouraging entrepreneurship had the advantage of being inexpensive and easy to organise, but not all (or even many), in coalfield areas would see themselves becoming 'entrepreneurs'. The respondents mentioned former colleagues who had started their own businesses, one man had bought a newsagent's shop and a number had bought hackney plates and become taxi-drivers but it is unclear from this anecdotal evidence how many former miners became self-employed.

The evidence presented in this study also suggests that an evaluation be made of the relationship between training and subsequent employment. Although this was a small sample (9.25% of the men made redundant) few men who had taken BCE courses found work that required their newly gained skills, although a number suggested that they 'might come in useful in the future'.

British Coal Enterprise, as has been seen,<sup>62</sup> has described itself as "the most successful job-help organisation in the country" (BC, 1993), claiming to have created some 83,000 employment opportunities since October 1984 (HMSO 1993). Turner (1993) in his study of coal field regeneration measures, whilst recognising that the employment situation in former mining areas could have been a lot worse without BCE initiatives, points to the need for a more coherent evaluation of its job creation strategies. This, Turner suggests, need not have been expensive and "it would have guided BCE towards more efficient job creation activities. In addition, BCE appeared to be overly secretive in relation to some of its activities" (Turner, 1993: 134). As far as this research is concerned all that is known about BCE's job creation and re-deployment policies and successes has been gleaned from the press, government reports, BCE's own reports, and, of course, the

---

<sup>62</sup> See Effects on Employment.

experiences of the former miners themselves. Unfortunately BCE was unwilling to cooperate in this study, this seemed rather surprising given BCE's glowing reports of its own achievements. Given the information available BCE's claims are questionable and Turner's recommendation is supported here. Further, as Hudson and Sadler, in one of their studies of reindustrialisation measures in former coal and steel areas have argued:

...it is not clear how many of the 'new jobs' created are still in existence; how many are part-time or full-time, how many are supported by both BCE and BSCI (British Steel Corporation Industry) and other agencies, and are thus double-counted in claimed employment totals; how many pay a similar wage to that which they supposedly replace; and how many have been taken by ex-coal miners and steelworkers (Hudson and Sadler quoted in Turner, 1993: 129).

Storey (1990) has also argued for evaluation of policies and measures to create local employment. He argues that even if the main aim of these local economic initiatives is job creation, many other objectives can be seen as equally appropriate. "Other objectives might relate not just to employment but to the reduction of unemployment; they might relate to the *quality of those jobs*-their rates of pay, unionisation, working conditions, etc.; (Storey, 1990: 679). Storey goes on to suggest: "Perhaps the single most relevant test for an LEI (local economic initiative) is the impact which it has, not upon job creation, but upon unemployment in the locality". Whilst job creation and the reduction of unemployment may be the ultimate objective, the extent to which new jobs created in firms are taken up by the unemployed, directly or indirectly, depends upon the characteristics of the local labour market.

It is unclear what the displacement effects of BCE's policies were, that is what impact special provisions for redundant miners had on other job seekers' employment. If

companies were receiving subsidies for employing redundant miners then the employment opportunities for other unemployed individuals, equally in need of work, must have been adversely and unfairly affected. As one man suggested: "There was quite a lot of bad feeling among people down at the Jobcentre when we were getting priority, a lot of people were saying: 'why the hell should they get priority, they've got thousands sitting in the bank'" (M.F). Moore and McNeill (1996), asked firms who had recruited redundant workers how they would have filled the posts, if at all, in the absence of any redundancies. They found that net displacement averaged 42 per cent. That is, for every 100 redundant workers re absorbed into employment in the local economy, 42 local people who would, in the absence of the redundancies, have been employed will remain unemployed (Moore and McNeill, 1996:95).

Storey (1990), like Hudson and Sadler (cited in Turner, 1993), is also concerned with the quality of jobs created, as well paid secure employment will have a more beneficial effect on the local economy (the local multiplier effect). Following this line of argument Storey suggests that the LEI (Local Economic Initiative) may choose to support only those firms that offer appropriate Trade Union recognition, on the grounds that workers in such firms will be more secure, better-paid and have satisfactory working conditions. Further, any evaluation should take into account job duration.

In principle the equalisation of the marginal cost per job for each instrument would also need to take account of the fact that some jobs are only transitory, often because the firm itself only has a short life. This is particularly true of small firms, 40 per cent of which cease to trade within 3 years of start-up (Ganguly, cited in Storey, 1990). Turok in his study of the effectiveness of local authority assistance in the London Borough of Southwark attempts to take this into account by normalising the jobs created and their duration into a single measure of job years (Turok, cited in Storey, 1990: 682).

The evidence from this study raises important questions about the quality of new employment in terms of pay, conditions and security. Although BCE cannot be held responsible for prevailing labour market conditions their claim to have resettled former miners in "Long term, viable jobs" (BCE, 1995) is questioned. If BCE was more concerned with the quality of jobs, as Storey (1990) suggests LEIs might be, rather than, simply 'getting people off their books', as the former miners themselves suggest, then the provision of security training, bricklaying and joinery which offer little prospect of secure, well paid employment might be questioned.

### **Being unemployed**

Marsh<sup>63</sup> suggests that becoming unemployed is not like being bereaved, it is not final in the same way, and it is certainly not experienced as final. Even the long term unemployed, the old and workers in areas where the chances of finding work are the smallest, sustain hope that they will find work, even if it is casual or temporary work, and that there will be an economic upturn. Moreover, she says, "the actual object lost, the particular job is not the stimulus for grief as it is in bereavement; people hope to find another job, but not the one they actually lost" (1988: 362).

Evidence suggests, however, that the intensity of job search and the likelihood of regaining work decline with the duration of unemployment, as seen above long-term unemployment is just another indication that there is 'something wrong' with individuals. Some unemployed people descend into apathy which may border on clinical depression. Studies of unemployed people have shown that they usually showed significantly lower levels of well-being (or higher levels of distress) than people in employment, in retirement or otherwise withdrawn from the labour market (Westergaard *et al.*, 1989). More generally, self respect, social, working and personal skills are eroded by long spells of unemployment (Hakim, 1982). Although, of course, unemployment is not final in the

---

<sup>63</sup> See Effects on Employment.



way that bereavement is, it does appear that some people, albeit irrationally, mourn the job they have lost:

I pray that the pit was still open, because it is doing my head in this, every day the same. Tell you what it is, since I got finished I go into deep depressions, I'm sick, if anyone says anything I snap at them, you know (D.F, unemployed since closure).

As Marsh suggests, some men remain hopeful as D.F added:

But as soon as I write a letter away for a job it builds my hope up you know. I'm all right until I get the reply, then I'm in a depression again - I'm always hopeful when I write away.

Nevertheless a number of men expressed a sense of hopelessness that is at variance with Marsh's somewhat optimistic view of unemployed people's expectations. A number of the Westoe men admitted that they thought they would never work again and these included men in their early thirties as well as the older men. Some men said they became depressed and that this affected family relationships.

I don't know if depressed is the word but the wife used to say I was very sharp with the kids and I was under her feet all the time. Getting to the end of 13 months I was desperate...to be quite honest I had to see my doctor about it. I wasn't worried for me but for my kids, I couldn't offer them anything (A.S).

**Attachment to work**

Brown in the early 1980s, considered research since the early 1960s that had produced findings on work orientation and levels of job satisfaction of manual and/or routine clerical workers. The authors did not find evidence of changes in orientations to work but there were some signs of a greater stress on the importance of pay and security which, they suggest, was not surprising given rising levels of unemployment and inflation. They found that the most important characteristic of paid employment in general was the level of earnings. Manual and routine clerical workers emphasised pay, if anything more strongly in the 1970s than in the 1960s, also security, which tended to be the second most important consideration when looking for a job. Thus, Brown concludes, orientations to work were predominantly economic or calculative, although this did not exclude other factors being considered important. The nature of work and of social relations at work appeared frequently as sources of satisfaction whilst, depending on the situation, working conditions could be a reason for either liking or disliking a job (Brown, cited in Roberts *et al.* 1985: 462). Brown found that dissatisfaction had increased, especially dissatisfaction with perceived job security. Gallie and White, in a more recent study found that, assuming a reasonable level of pay, the four job characteristics that people attach most importance to are: work they like doing, job security, good relations with their supervisors and the opportunity to make use of their abilities. "The most marked change in preferences over the last five years has been the increased importance attached to job security and pay" (Gallie and White, 1993: ix).

The men demonstrated a strong attachment to work in the coal industry although many said that work had become less satisfying and the atmosphere had deteriorated during the last year. Some men thought that work had deteriorated since the strike and this was due to more aggressive management as Gibbon (1988) and Hyman (1985) have suggested.<sup>64</sup> Money was found to be important, more so when men compared their present earnings to their pay in the coal industry. Although a number of men said that earnings in the coal industry were 'not as good as people like to make out', the coal industry did provide a

---

<sup>64</sup>See The Miners' Strike.

relatively high wage and the opportunity to work regular overtime (most men worked overtime every week). Security of employment, friendliness and good relations with supervisors were found to be more important. A number of men said that people 'outside' were not as friendly, they disliked factory discipline, the lack of autonomy and 'always having someone looking over your shoulder', nor did they enjoy such easy relations with supervisors as some men suggested they did at the colliery. A number of men said they liked their new work because they were working with former miners and still had the 'crack'.

The Westoe men's reaction to new employment is very different to the views expressed by the men in Bulmer's (1978) study. Although most of the respondents from Westoe had settled into their new employment few could be said to like their new work. Bulmer interviewed former miners made redundant from Tudhoe Park who had become textile workers in Courtaulds. These men settled into their work very quickly, usually in about one or two weeks and the respondents were very much in favour of factory work, 17 out of 29 being very favourable and 11 favourable. Bulmer suggests that the main attraction of factory work was the relatively high pay, although the hours were longer at the factory:

A factory such as Courtaulds could compete strongly for labour even in comparison with the most modern pit...Thus, the traditional financial attraction of skilled pit-work was absent in the case studied, and there was possibly an incentive to leave mining for such factory work, taking other factors like working conditions into account (Bulmer, 1978: 269).

A further attraction of work in such a factory was that it provided prospects of secure work in the future and prospects of promotion. The physical environment of the factory compared to mining work was very favourably evaluated by the 29 ex-miners. They were

asked how they found the factory compared, as a place to work, with the pit and how they felt about the surroundings when they first started working at Courtaulds; typical comments were:

"Canna compare. Impossible! If I had my life over again, the pit would never see me and the pits are far advanced to what they were when I first started."

"No comparison. It's as different again. Better in every respect."

Although a number of Westoe men commented on the environment of the pit (saying it was dirty, dangerous, wet and so on) only two made the point that their new work was better in this respect (men in training and education also said they felt healthier). It could be that working conditions in the coal industry had improved considerably since the late 1960s, however, other comments do not suggest that this was the case:

When you hear people saying 'oh, but they worked harder in the old days', that is the biggest load of rubbish. I've been right through, from the old fashioned type of mining to the modern and I can tell you that is a load of rubbish. People used to have bad chests, everyone you spoke to did, but there was more dust and water in the mines recently, it was worse and getting worse all the time. Bad chests years ago was through the housing that they had, big families in little houses and consumption. The mines added to it, made it worse but that was the main reason. When I first went to the mines they were terrible with their chests, really bad, their voices so hoarse they could hardly speak. They had to work until 65 then, 66 some of them, they stopped an extra year. But the conditions were getting worse mind (E.H).

It would appear that miners were willing to put up with these conditions because other aspects of work provided satisfaction. Job security was the most important

consideration, both in the coal industry and in their new employment. Pay remains important but is not the most important consideration. As has been seen, almost all the men had experienced a reduction in income but other aspects of their new employment appeared to cause more dissatisfaction than pay. This is probably due to a combination of factors, firstly, in an area like South Tyneside there is little alternative employment which compares with the coal industry in terms of pay (the men simply accepted that low pay was something they could do nothing about); second, at the time of the interview most men still had some redundancy money and could afford to take low paid work. Some men said that they had not 'cut down' on anything and were using their redundancy money to maintain the same standard of living.

Bulmer (1971) in his study of the workings of the Redundancy Payments Act noted that it was difficult to assess the impact of redundancy payments in minimising hardship as it depended on the subsequent employment history of those affected by redundancy. In Bulmer's study, one in three had used some or all the money to supplement their current income. Redundancy payments, Bulmer suggests, are also a possible source from which to supplement unemployment or sickness benefit, although of course in this respect, a wasting asset since it will eventually be exhausted and quite severe hardship will probably ensue (Bulmer, 1971:21). Dissatisfaction with pay, and financial hardship are likely to increase as redundancy money becomes exhausted. The financial consequences of redundancy have simply been delayed.

Most of the men made redundant from Westoe did not regard the minimising of hardship as the main function of the redundancy package. The money clearly did minimise the immediate financial consequences of redundancy, many men acknowledged that the money enabled them to clear debts and that they would have been 'a lot worse off without it'. The main function of redundancy payments above the statutory minimum was to ease the process of redundancy, in the words of many redundant miners, to blackmail them into accepting closure. Further, they felt, the large amounts reported in the press

served to reduce public support and, some men suggested, caused some resentment from other unemployed people, especially when the miners were seen to be getting 'special help' to find work. As nearly all the men emphasised, the redundancy money was only a windfall if you were already financially secure or in secure, well-paid employment, which few men were. Otherwise redundancy money subsidised low income from employment or provided an income until the men and their families qualified for means-tested benefits:

I asked them [DSS] if they could give me any guidelines of when I could claim Income Support and they said they expect the money to last 2 years after unemployment benefit stops. So that's clever (D.F).

The tendency for new employment following redundancy to be much less desirable than the previous job has been noted above. Economic theory predicts that a large increase in the labour supply can put downward pressure on the wage that it is necessary for a firm to offer to draw forth a labour force sufficient in terms of quality and quantity. Moore and McNeill (1996) found that this was not the case in their samples. However, they note, "most importantly, it was felt that the areas' persistent unemployment meant that redundancies had only a marginal real impact on effective labour supply" (Moore and McNeill, 1996: 87). The unemployment rate in the South Tyneside TTWA (travel to work area) in June 1992, eleven months before the closure, was 16.8 per cent, 4 percentage points higher than the highest unemployment rate in any of Moore and McNeill's (1996) sample areas. The impact of Westoe's closure<sup>65</sup> on local labour market conditions is unclear but on the basis of Moore and McNeill's findings it seems unlikely that the redundancies put downward pressure on local wage rates in an area already suffering from severe and long-term unemployment. South Tyneside, as has been seen, is one of the most deprived areas in the country. Employers in areas of high unemployment

---

<sup>65</sup> Westoe drew its workforce from a fairly wide area so the impact of closure was somewhat dispersed (of the 1,200 men made redundant 771 lived within the Borough and 429 lived outside).

obviously enjoy a high degree of monopsony power. This was also reflected in comments from the men which suggested a general climate in which employers had little interest in providing decent working conditions or wages: "There's that many people on the dole they're not interested if someone packs it in. There are another 20, 30, 50 people who'll take the job on so there's no need to try and keep people on the books" (R.B).

## **Union membership**

The respondents were not asked about union membership but given the comments of two of the men who suggested that they were not allowed to join a union the extent of union membership would be worth further investigation. The WIRS study (Millward *et al.*, 1992) shows that there has been no overall decline in either union membership or recognition or collective bargaining in the largest workplaces, i.e., those of 200 employees or more. However, the number of larger workplaces has declined quite markedly, so this is an important consideration. Gall and McKay (1995) suggest that derecognition is not yet a major problem, only a small number of employees are affected and derecognition still represents an extreme in industrial relations. Many new workplaces are established as union-free but the trade unions' success in gaining recognition compares not unfavourably, in terms of claims submitted and success rates, with the early and mid-1980s. They did find, however, as the earlier Labour Research survey (1992) had, that many employees are being forced to end collective bargaining or to sign personal contracts through inducements such as higher pay and benefits or threats to their careers and job security. Although none of the Westoe men had actually been threatened B.G felt that he had to agree to work any hours and so on if he was to have his contract renewed and H.W believed he had his hours cut as a form of punishment. Gall and McKay (1995) suggest that most employers are not considering implementing derecognition: Instead, they are intent on either pushing through changes through negotiations and/or just imposing them with inducements and threats within an environment of collective bargaining and recognition. As many writers have shown, there

is a vast array of ways in which the employers have attempted to, and to some extent succeeded in, increasing the intensification of work and the decollectivisation of industrial relations (Gall and McKay, 1995: 446-447).

This has been just one small-scale study in the impact of a much larger phenomenon, the loss of many thousands of jobs in the British Coal Industry. It also examines some of the consequences of an even larger phenomenon, the growth of poor work and the experience of living with insecurity, although far more detailed longitudinal studies would be required to explore the full impact and consequences of insecurity over time.

As noted earlier,<sup>66</sup> flexibility has become "indelibly fixed as the solution to recession, heightened competition and uncertainty. The flexibility debate has been well covered elsewhere (Hyman and Streeck, 1988; Streeck, 1987; Pollert, 1988a, 1988b; Rubery, Tarling and Wilkinson, 1990). These debates, however, have too often tended to ignore the consequences of Government deregulation policies and employers' attempts to improve flexibility. Commentators have sought to measure the extent of change and have questioned whether these 'new' employment relations are new at all (Cumbers, 1996; Pollert, 1988a, 1988b). As Cumbers (1996) notes: "many of the changes ascribed to the current period are more likely to represent either extensions of longer term trends or a reversion to practices that have existed in earlier periods". Whether or not these flexible practices are, as Pollert (1988a) suggests, so much "new wine in old bottles", there is no doubt that an ever growing number of workers, like the men made redundant from Westoe Colliery, are affected by increasing insecurity and a deterioration in pay and conditions. One recent assessment is that 13.5 million workers in Britain are now in a 'primary' sector of the labour force that, on the whole, enjoys secure and well-remunerated full-time employment, with a further 6.5 million in an 'intermediate' category. Those individuals in this 'intermediate' category, while not having a full time job, are relatively well paid and secure. This leaves a further 9 million 'disadvantaged'

---

<sup>66</sup>See *Having It All Their Own Way*.



workers without secure or well-paid employment. Of this 9 million, 4.9 million are in employment and 4.1 million are without employment. The latter figure includes, besides the claimant unemployed, 'discouraged' workers. Thus, around 70% of the labour force are financially comfortable and reasonably secure, while 30% live in either insecurity or comparative poverty (Coutts and Rowthorn, cited in IER, 1995). As the European Trade Institute has argued, flexibility for many usually means "cutting real wages, cutting lowest wages most; breaking up national negotiating procedures; abolishing employment legislation; making it easier to sack people; increasing job insecurity; attacking social security systems; and dismantling health and safety and environmental protection (IER, 1995: 56). In Britain these changes have been aided and encouraged by a series of government measures deliberately aimed to foster developments of this kind.

The assertion that inequality is an inescapable product of successful market economies remains central in government thinking and the expansion of low paid work seen by the government as evidence in support of deregulated labour markets (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). However, it is patently clear that the government's 'trickle-down' theory is not true, making the rich richer does not make the poor richer too. Greater equality is held to be detrimental to efficiency yet inequality has not led to economic growth, and perhaps more importantly, the future does not look any rosier (Machin, 1996). There is no macro-economic evidence to support the case that greater equality is detrimental to efficiency. If anything, the opposite is the case as the fastest growing economies in the 1980s were the more equal societies.

This study does not claim to have discovered insecurity, low pay and poor working conditions. As Pollert (1988a) suggests, social scientists examining the consequences of flexible practices and labour market policies have 'discovered' what casual wage labourers and those outside paid employment already knew, that not all 'work' is stable and secure. What remains uncertain is the consequences of living with insecurity. Hakim (1982) suggests that the exposure to continuous economic instability and financial and

employment insecurity has an impact on health, both of the unemployed and those in work. One view is that the poverty associated with unemployment and low incomes when in work is the main factor. While unemployment can, at the extreme, produce pathological conditions, there is evidence that the threat of unemployment and the fear of job loss can produce symptoms of anxiety and stress among the employed also. Some of these effects have been described above but as noted earlier, although many men and their families are already experiencing financial difficulties and uncertainty, the full impact of the closure of Westoe Colliery is probably yet to be felt. As redundancy money dwindles and more families become dependent on supplementary benefits, either wholly, or to subsidise low incomes, then the full effect will be felt by these individuals and the local economy.

The mood of the men was generally pessimistic, they could not envisage any improvement in their situation or in the economy: "not under this government because they are out to make the working class even worse off, no minimum wage, no Social Charter, they just keep applying more pressure" (D.G). The majority of men made redundant from Westoe are experiencing, and look likely to continue to experience, economic insecurity. This is the case for most of those in employment and those who are unemployed. Although some men were trying to find secure and better paid employment few were optimistic about their chances, the most they felt they could hope for would be to stay in their current employment. Coal mining as most men said: "was a terrible, horrible job but when it was secure you put up with that" (K.P).

As has been seen reaction to redundancy varied, some men were devastated, others as Wood and Dey (1983) have found, treated redundancy like a pools win:

Some of the lads said when you asked them what they were doing with their money 'I'm going to drink myself stupid.'  
That's what they said, 'once it's gone, it's gone...I'm going to

take them on holiday and have a good time'. But other lads, you could see them, just drained, they had mortgages they couldn't pay off. People might say why were they so greedy but nobody expected this. One lad aged overnight, he had this lovely conservatory built, he thought he had his job for life...There was an electrician who set himself on fire, who knows what it does to different people. Not everybody can take it (K.A).

Most men had come to terms with their new lives but some clearly had not, men told me about other former miners who had committed suicide, about a young man wondering aimlessly around the town pushing a pram with one hand and clutching a can of lager in the other. One unemployed man said he prayed that the pit was still open and most said that they wished it was. Eighteen months after the closure of the pit one young man still had not come to terms with the fact that coal was no longer his life:

My grandfather, father and two brothers all worked at Westoe Colliery, I still feel as if I'm just on holiday and one day I'll be back (B.G).

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Questionnaire

1. Age	
2. Date Leaving Westoe	
3. Occupation when employed at Westoe	
4. Income when employed at Westoe. Weekly Take Home Pay (if this varied please give your average weekly pay after deductions).	£.....
5. Are you currently: Employed Self Employed Unemployed Claiming Sickness Benefit On a training scheme In Education Retired	Please tick <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
5. If Employed, self-employed, on a Training Scheme or in Education please give details (e.g. occupation, type of training, the course you are studying).	
7. If Employed or self-employed, what is your current income <b>from work</b> (excluding any benefits e.g. Housing Benefit, Family Credit).	£.....
8. If Employed or self-employed do you receive any benefits? (E.g. Housing Benefit, Family Credit).	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>

<p><b>9.</b> If Unemployed, Sick, on a Training Scheme or in Education, What is your current weekly income? (Including Unemployment/Sickness Benefit, Income Support, Housing Benefits, Training or Educational Grants).</p>	<p>£.....</p>
<p><b>10.</b> If on a Training Course or in Education do you receive any payment or grant?</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>If Yes, how much do you receive?</p>	<p>£.....</p>
<p><b>11.</b> If currently Unemployed, How long have you been unemployed?</p>	
<p><b>12.</b> Have you had contact with any of the following?  Jobcentre  Job Club  British Coal Enterprise  Tyneside TEC (Training and Enterprise Council)  Tyneskill Support  Tyneskill Access  NVQ Helpline</p>	<p><b>Please tick all that apply</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>If you have any comments to make please feel free to do so at the bottom of the questionnaire.  Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return this in the envelope provided as soon as possible.</p> <p>If you are willing to participate in an interview please write you telephone number in the opposite box. I will telephone or write to you in the near future.</p>	<p><b>TEL:</b></p>
<p><b>I am/am not willing to participate in an interview</b> (please delete as appropriate)</p>	

## Appendix 2

### Courses available at BCE's Horden Skills Centre

Security Training-leads to a Professional Guard Standard 7274 City and Guilds Certificate.

Bricklaying, Joinery, Welding, Pipe fitting.

Engineering Courses for time-served AND non-craftsmen.

Elements of the Engineering courses include:

Machine Tool and Mechanical Skills

Programmable Logic Control

Hydraulics and Pneumatics

Computer Aided Design and Manufacture (CAD/CAM).

Computer Numerical Control Maintenance (CNC).

Electrical and Electronic Skills.

## REFERENCES

- Adeney, M. and Lloyd, J. 1986: The Miners' Strike 1984-5: Loss Without Limit. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Allen, S., Waton, A., Purcell, K., and Wood, S. (eds.), 1986: The Experience of Unemployment. London: Macmillan.
- Allen, V. 1992: New Statesman and Society. 23 October: 13.
- Ashworth, W. 1986: The History of the British Coal Industry, 1946-82: the Nationalised Industry volume v. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Bassett, P. 1986: Strike Free: New Industrial Relations in Britain. London: Macmillan.
- BC 1993: Coal News. British Coal, June.
- BC 1994: British Coal Press Release 7/2.
- BCE 1995 A Review of Activities. Mansfield: British Coal Enterprise.
- Benson, J. 1980: British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History. London: Gill and Macmillan.
- Beynon, H., Hudson, R., and Sadler, D. 1986: "Nationalised industry policies and the destruction of communities: some evidence from the North East of England." Capital and Class Vol. 29 27-57.
- Beynon, H. 1987: "Closures: The threat and future for Labour." In T. Dickson and D. Judge, (eds.), The Politics of Industrial Closures, London: Macmillan.
- Beynon, H. (ed.), 1985: Digging Deeper, Issues in the Miners' Strike. London: Verso.
- Beynon, H. 1984: "The miners' strike in Easington." New Left Review. Nov.-Dec. 148, 104-115
- Beynon, H. and McMyllor, P. 1985: "Decisive power: the new Tory state against the miners." In Beynon (ed.), 1985.
- Beynon, H. Hudson, R. and Sadler, D. 1986: "Nationalised industry policies and the destruction of communities: Some evidence from North East England." Capital & Class, Vol. 29, 27-57.

- Beynon, H. and Austrin, T. 1994: Masters and Servants: Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation. London: Rivers Oram Press.
- Beynon, H. Hudson, R. and Sadler, D. 1991: A Tale of Two Industries: The Contraction of Coal and Steel in the North East of England. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Blower, J. 1993: 200 Years of Mining. Shields Gazette, 29 March
- Blyth Valley 1986: A Case For Bates Colliery. Borough of Blyth Valley.
- Bowsher, P. 1986: A Report on the Proposal for Closure of Bates Colliery.
- Brown, A. 1988: Labour Market Policy in Britain: A Critical View. University of Edinburgh: New Waverley Papers.
- Bulmer, M. 1971: Mining redundancy: a case study of the workings of the Redundancy Payments Act in the Durham coalfield. Industrial Relations Journal, 2,4: 3-21.
- Bulmer, M. 1975: "Sociological models of the mining community." Sociological Review, 23, 61-92.
- Bulmer, M. (ed.), 1978: Mining and Social Change. London: Croom Helm.
- Burton, A. 1977: The Miners. London: Futura Publications Limited.
- Bytheway, B. Redundancy and the older worker in Lee, R.M., (ed.) 1987: Redundancy, Layoffs and Plant Closures: their Character, Causes and Consequences. London: Croom Helm.
- CCC 1990: When the Pit Closes: The Employment Experiences of Redundant miners. Coalfield Communities Campaign.
- CCG 1993 Wearmouth: The Future for Coal in Sunderland, Collieries Campaign Group.
- Chakravarty, S.P. 1988: "Structural adjustment in Europe: the case of UK coal." Resources Policy, September.
- Clark, A. 1996: Job satisfaction in Britain, British Journal of Industrial Relations, 34:2, 189-217.
- Clegg, H.A. 1979: The Changing System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain. Oxford: Blackwell.



- Colls, R. 1987 The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture, Protest, 1790-1850. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Colls, R. 1995: "Save our pits and communities!" Labour History Review, Vol. 60, No. 2. 55- 65, Autumn.
- Coulter, J. Miller, S. and Walker, M., 1984: A State of Siege: Politics and Policing of the Coalfields: Miners' Strike 1984. Canary Press.
- Crick, M., 1985: Scargill and the Miners. London: Penguin Books.
- Critcher, C. Dicks, B. and Waddington, D. 1992: "Portrait of despair." New Statesman & Society, 23/10.
- Crouch, C. 1990: "United Kingdom: the rejection of compromise." In G. Baglioni and C. Crouch (eds.) European Industrial Relations, The Challenge of Flexibility. London: Sage.
- Cumbers, A. 1996 "Continuity or change in employment relations? Evidence form the UK's Old Industrial Regions". Capital and Class, 58: 33-57.
- D of E 1985: Employment: the Challenge for the Nation. Department of Employment, London: HMSO, Cm 9474.
- D of E 1993: North East Labour Market Review. Department of Employment.
- Deakin, S. and Wilkinson, F. 1991: Labour law, social security and economic inequality. Cambridge Journal of Economics, 15, 125-148.
- Dennis, N., Henriques, F., and Slaughter, C. 1956: Coal is our Life: An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.
- DGCSG 1972: Durham Geography Curriculum Study Group Pamphlet. Durham.
- DTI 1994 Press Notice Department of Trade and Industry (P/94/73) 9 February.
- Edwards, P. (ed.) 1995: Industrial Relations, Theory and Practice in Britain. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Edwards, P. *et al.* 1992: "Great Britain: still muddling through." in Industrial Relations in the New Europe. A. Ferner and R. Hyman (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell.

- Edwards, P. (ed.) 1995: Industrial Relations. Theory and Practice in Britain. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Employment Committee 1993: Employment Consequences of British Coal's Proposed Pit Closures. Vol. 1. London: HMSO.
- Employment Gazette 1994, March.
- Engels, F. 1987 The Condition of the Working Class in England. London: Penguin Books.
- Farnham, D. and Pimlott, J. 1990: Understanding Industrial Relations. London: Cassell.
- Ferner, A. 1989: "Ten years of Thatcherism: Changing Industrial Relations in British Public Enterprises." Warwick Papers in Industrial Relations, 27. Coventry: IRRU
- Ferner, A. and Hyman, R. (eds.), 1992: Industrial Relations in the New Europe. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fetterman, D.M. 1989 Ethnography Step by Step. California, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Field, J. 1985: "Labour's Dunkirk." New Socialist, April, 11-14.
- Findlay, P., 1987: "Resistance, restructuring and gender: the Plessey occupation." in Dickson, T. and Judge, D. (eds.), The Politics of Industrial Closures. London: Macmillan.
- Finn, D. 1993 "The pit closure programme." Working Brief, Unemployment Unit, October.
- Fox, A. 1980 "The meaning of work in G. Esland and G. Salaman" (Eds.) The Politics of Work and Occupations. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Francis, H. 1985: "Mining. The popular front." Marxism Today, February, 12-15.
- Fraser, K. 1985: Toff down Pit. London: Quartet Books Ltd.
- Fredman, S. and Morris, G. 1989a: "The state as employer: Setting a new example." Personnel Management, August 25-29.
- Fredman, S. and Morris, G. 1989b: The State as Employer: Labour Law in the Public Services. London, New York: Mansel.

- Fynes, R. 1985: The Miners of Northumberland and Durham. Whitley Bay: A.V. Petrie & Company Ltd.
- Gall, G. and McKay, S. 1995: "Trade union derecognition in Britain, 1988-1994." British Journal of Industrial Relations, September.
- Gallie, D. and White, M. 1993: Employee Commitment and the Skills Revolution. London: Policy Studies Institute.
- Gamble, A. 1994: The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism. Hampshire: Macmillan.
- Gamble, A. 1985: "The strike the Tories wanted." New Socialist April.
- Garside, W.R. 1971: The Durham Miners 1919-1960. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Gibbon, P. 1988: "Analysing the British miners' strike of 1984-5." Economy and Society, Vol. 17, No. 2. May.
- Gilbert, D. 1995: "Imagined communities and mining communities." Labour History Review, Vol. 60, No. 2:47-54.
- Gilbert, D. 1991: "Community and municipalism: collective identity in late-Victorian and Edwardian mining towns." Journal of Historical Geography, 17, 3, 257-270.
- Gilbert, N. 1993: Researching Social Life. London: Sage.
- Glyn, A. 1984: The Economic Case against Pit Closures. Sheffield: NUM
- Goodman, G. 1985: The Miners' Strike. London.
- Griffin, A.R. 1977: The British Coalmining Industry - Retrospect and Prospect. Buxton: Moorland Publishing Co.
- Guy, N. 1994a Redundant Miners Survey: Grimethorpe. Coalfield Communities Campaign.
- Guy, N. 1994b Redundant Miners Survey: Vane Tempest. Coalfield Communities Campaign.
- Hakim, C. 1982: "The social consequences of high unemployment." Journal of Social Policy, 11,4, 443-467

- Hakim, C. 1990: "Core and periphery in employers' workforce strategies: evidence from the 1987 E.L.U.S survey." Work Employment and Society, Vol. 4, No. 2, 157-188.
- Hall, T. 1981: King Coal: Miners, Coal and Britain's Industrial Future. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Hall, S. and Jacques, M (Eds.) 1983: The Politics of Thatcherism. London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd.
- Hansard 1992,19/10
- Hansard 1993, 27/10
- Hanson, C.G.H. 1991: Taming the Trade Unions. Hampshire: Macmillan.
- HMSO 1993 The Prospects for Coal: Conclusions of the Government's Coal Review. Cm 2235. London: HMSO.
- Hodgson, G. 1903: The Borough of South Shields. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Andrew Reid and Company, Ltd.
- Hodgson, G. 1924: The History of South Shields. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Andrew Reid and Company Ltd.
- House, J.W and Knight E.M 1967 Report to the Ministry of Labour Papers on Migration and Mobility in Northern England. No. 5. University of Newcastle Upon Tyne Department of Geography.
- Howard, W.S. 1995: "Miners' autobiography: Text and context." Labour History Review, Vol. 60, No. 2:89-99.
- Hudson, R. 1989: Wrecking a Region. London: Pion Ltd.
- Hudson, R. 1986: "Nationalised industry policies and regional policies: the role of the state in capitalist societies in the deindustrialization and reindustrialization of regions." Society and Space, Vol. 4, 7-28.
- Hutton, W. 1995: The State We're In. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Hutton, W. 1993: "Waging war with the wrong weapon." The Guardian, 18 October: 11
- Hyman, R. 1985: "Reflections on the Miners' Strike." The Socialist Register, 1985/86:330-353.

- Hyman, R. 1988: "Flexible specialisation: miracle or myth?" In Hyman, R. and Streeck, W. (Eds.), 1988 op cit.
- Hyman and Streeck (Eds.) 1988: New Technology and Industrial Relations. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- IER 1995: Just the Job? A Consultation Document on the future of employment law. Institute of Employment Rights, October.
- Jahoda, M. 1982: Work, Employment and Unemployment: A Social Psychological Analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kernot, C.P.H.F. 1993: British Coal. Cambridge: Woodhead Publishing Ltd.
- Ketelaar, J.P.J. 1989: The effects of rationalisation of the British coal mining industry on mining communities in the North East of England. Paper presented at the International Mining History Congress, Bochum, 1989.
- Kilpatrick, R. and Trew, K., 1985: "Life-styles and psychological well-being among unemployed men in Northern Ireland." Journal of Occupational Psychology. 58, 207-216.
- Kirk, N. 1991: "'Traditional' working-class culture and 'the rise of Labour': some preliminary questions and observations". Social History. Vol. 16 No. 2. May.
- Knight, E.M. 1968: Men Leaving Mining. Report to the Ministry of Labour. University of Newcastle Upon Tyne Geography Department.
- Krieger, J. 1984: Undermining Capitalism: State Ownership and Dialectic of Control in the British Coal Industry. London: Pluto Press.
- Krieger, J. 1979: "British colliery closure programmes in the North East: from paradox to contradiction." London Papers in Regional Science. Vol. 9 219-232.
- Kvale, S. 1996 An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing. California, London, New Delhi: Sage.
- Labour Research, 1992: "The union de recognition bandwagon." Labour Research, Vol. 18, No. 11, 6-8, November.
- Layder, D. 1993: New Strategies in Social Science Research: an introduction and guide. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Leslie, D. and Pu, Y., 1996: "What caused rising earnings inequality in Britain? Evidence from Time Series, 1970-1993." British Journal of Industrial Relations, 34:1, March.
- Lewis, R. and Simpson, B. 1981: Striking a Balance: Employment Law after the 1980 Act. Oxford: Martin Robinson.
- Lloyd, J. 1985: Understanding the Miners' Strike. Fabian Tract 504. London: Fabian Society.
- Lockwood, D., 1966: "Sources of variation in working class images of society." Sociological Review, 14, 3.
- McGregor, I. 1986: The Enemies Within. The Story of the Miners' Strike. London: Collins.
- Machin, S. 1996: Wage inequality in the UK. Oxford Review of Economic Policy, Vol. 12, No. 1.
- Marsh, C. 1988: Unemployment in Britain in Employment in Britain. D. Gallie (ed.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B. 1989: Designing Qualitative Research. California, London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- McCord, N., 1979: North East England. London: Batsford Academic.
- McDougall, M.L 1978 "Consciousness and community: the workers of Lyon, 1830-50." Journal of Social History, 1978-79, 12:129-145.
- McIlroy, J. 1995: Trade Unions in Britain Today. Manchester University Press.
- McNeill, P. 1990: Research Methods. London, New York: Routledge
- Millward, N. Stevens, M. Smart, D. and Hawes, W.R. 1992: Workplace Industrial Relations in Transition. Aldershot: Dartmouth.
- Mining Journal. 1993, 26 July; 24 September, 29 October, 5 November.
- Mining Journal. 1994, 4 February.
- Mining Magazine. 1992, December.
- Moore, R.S 1974 Pit-men, Preachers and Politics, the Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moore, B. and McNeill, D., 1996: The Impact of Redundancies on Local Labour Markets and the Post-Redundancy Experience. Department for Education and Employment, London: HMSO.

Morse, J.M (ed.) 1994 Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods. London, New Delhi: Sage.

Mückenberger, U. and Deakin, S. 1990: From deregulation to a European floor of rights: labour law, flexibilisation and the European single market. *Zeitschrift für Ausländisches und Internationales Arbeits und Sozial Recht*, 3, 3.

NCC 1986: The Coal Industry in Northumberland. Northumberland County Council Consultative Document.

NECCC 1986: North East Coalfield Communities Campaign Newsletter.

Nef, J.U. 1932: The Rise of the British Coal Industry. Vol. 1; London: Routledge and Sons Ltd.

New Statesman and Society, 30 October 1992.

Northumberland Task Force 1993: Strategy for Action.

O'Donnell, K. 1988: "Pit closures in the British coal industry: a comparison of the 1960s and 1980s." International Review of Applied Economics: 62-77.

Owens, J. 1994: Miners. Edinburgh: Polygon.

Pagnamenta, P. and Overy, R. 1984: All our Working Lives. London: British Broadcasting Corporation.

Parker, T. 1986: Red Hill: A Mining Community. London: William Heinemann Ltd.

Piachaud, D. 1991: Unemployment and Poverty. Campaign for Work Research Report, Vol. 3 No. 3 May.

Plummer, K. 1983: Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method. London: George, Allen and Unwin.

Pollard, M. 1984: The Hardest Work under Heaven. London: Hutchinson and Co.

Pollert, A., 1988a: "Dismantling flexibility." Capital and Class, 34, 42-75.

- Pollert, A. 1988b: "The flexible firm: fixation or fact?" Work, Employment and Society, 2,3, 17-35.
- Powell, D. 1992: British Politics and the Labour Question 1868-1990. London: Macmillan.
- Rimlinger, G.V. 1959: "International differences in the strike propensity of coal miners: experience in four countries." Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 389-405.
- Ritchie, J. 1990: Thirty Families: Their living standards in unemployment. Department of Social Security, Research Report No. 1, HMSO.
- Roberts, B., Finnegan, R. and Gallie, D. (Eds.): 1985: New Approaches to Economic Life: Economic restructuring and the social division of labour. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Rubery, J., Tarling, R. and Wilkinson: 1987: Flexibility, marketing and the organisation of production. Labour and Society, Vol. 12, No. 1, January.
- Salaman, G., 1974: Community and Occupation: An Exploration of Work/Leisure Relationships. London, Cambridge University Press.
- Salaman, G., 1971: "Some sociological determinants of occupational communities." Sociological Review, Vol. 19, 53-77.
- Samuel, R. 1985: "A plan for disaster." New Society, 7 March: 367-368.
- Seabrook, J. 1981: "Unemployment now and in the 1930s." in Unemployment. B. Crick (ed.), London: Methuen.
- Seglow, P. 1970: "Reactions to redundancy." Industrial Relations Journal, 1, 7-22.
- Simon, J.L. 1969: Basic Research Methods in Social Science. New York: Random House
- Sinfield, A. 1981: What Unemployment Means. Oxford: Martin Robinson.
- Smith, D. 1980: Tonyandy 1910: "Definitions of community." Past and Present, 87, 158-184.
- Stead, J. 1987: Never the Same Again: Women and the Miners' Strike. London: The Women's Press.



- Storey, D.J. Evaluation of policies and measures to create local employment. Urban Studies, Vol., 27, No. 5, 1990 669-684.
- Streeck, W. 1987: The uncertainties of management in the management of uncertainty. Work, Employment and Society, 1,3, 281-308.
- Strong, G.R. 1984: Mining Times. Nottingham University Mining Department Magazine, Vol. xxxvi. 27-31.
- Surtees, R. 1972: The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham. Vol. 11, Wakefield: EP Publishing.
- Towers, B. 1989: Running the gauntlet: British trade unions under Thatcher. Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Vol. 42, No. 2.
- Townroe, P. and Martin, R. (eds.) 1992: Regional Development in the 1990s: the British Isles in Transition. London: Regional Studies Association.
- Turnbull, P., 1991: Labour market deregulation and economic performance: the case of Britain's docks. Work, Employment and Society, 5,1, 17-35.
- Turner, R. 1985: Post-war pit closures: The politics of de-industrialisation. Political Quarterly, 56:167-174.
- Turner, R. 1993: Regenerating the Coalfields. Aldershot: Avebury
- Tyler, C 1994: The British Miner's Broken Home. Financial Times Weekend, 5/6 March.
- Tyneside TEC 1996: Tyneside Economic Assessment 1995-96. Tyneside Training & Enterprise Council.
- UKCR 1992: UK Coal Review, October.
- van den Berg, H. and van der Veer, C.G., 1992 The myth of 'unemployable' people', Journal of Social Policy, 21: 177-210.
- Wade, E. 1985: Coal Mining and Employment: a study of Blyth Valley. Borough of Blyth Valley.
- Warwick, D. and Littlejohn, G. 1992: Coal, Capital and Culture. London, New York: Routledge.

- WCCG 1993: Westoe Colliery: The Case Against Closure. Westoe Colliery Campaign Group.
- WCCG 1994: Westoe: the Last Pit on the Tyne. Westoe Colliery Campaign Group.
- Westergaard, J. I. Noble and A. Walker, 1989: After Redundancy: The Experience of Economic Insecurity. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Williamson, B. 1982: Class, Culture and Community. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Keegan Paul
- Witt, S. 1990 When the Pit Closes-the employment experiences of redundant miners. Coalfield Communities Campaign Special Report in association with Wakefield and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Councils.
- Wood, S. and Dey, I. 1983: Redundancy, Case Studies in Co-operation and Conflict. Aldershot: Gower.