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**When Our Ghosts Meet Our Demons:  
Nottinghamshire NUM Area in the 1984-5 Miners'  
Strike**

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## **Introduction.**

On June 9 1983, the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher was re-elected with a simple majority of 144 seats (Zodgekar). The landslide victory that her party's 397 seats ("House of Commons" 2) granted her, established her government with more power and legitimacy for its second term, and, having returned victorious from the Falklands, she was ready to use that renewed power and strength to fight "the enemy within" (Thatcher 8) at home; the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was her target.

Just nine months later, on 6 March 1984 the so-called miners' strike would be triggered in what it is now known as one of the most important industrial struggles of British 20<sup>th</sup> century, famously ending with the defeat on the miners' part and with a well-publicised victory of the Thatcher administration (most notably by her allies in *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *The Economist*, and *The Sun* [Jackson 55] ). Of this struggle, many chapters would be engrained in history, some as striking as the Battle of Ongreave, or May Day 1984, others as empowering as the role of the miners' support groups and the international solidarity to the striking workers from all around the world. In this context, the failure of the strike in Nottinghamshire and the role of the Notts Area of the NUM in the defeat of the national union have become of especial importance for many commentators and historians, for it is true that in this significant blow, not only to the miners' movement but to the entire labour movement, Nottingham did have a role to play. Over the different debates we might note various lines of argument that try to explain the position that the Notts Area took during the strike. Peter Gibbon proposes a division in two groups; the first, those arguments that consider that there was no integral difference between the Notts Area and other areas from the NUM, and therefore place the responsibility on external factors, such as the NUM leadership, the system of ballots of the union or on external

state factors. The lines of argument of the second group focus on more entrenched causes for the Area's position and bring to the table theories of "embourgeoisement" (qtd. in Lawrence and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite 137) or "bourgeoisification" (Francis 30) of the miners or consider pit culture and the region's labour relations (Gibbon 170).

In this dissertation I am going to argue that the situation in the Nottinghamshire Area of NUM constituted, in fact, a combination of several factors, both external and internal to the coalfield, and not just one of them as many commentators sustained in their analyses. First, Nottinghamshire's tradition of reactionary unionism, represented and deeply marked by the practices of George Spencer, tightly tied with the "butty" system, the distinctive system of production of the coalfield, that historically promoted individualism among the miners, as will be later explained. Second, the deeply federated structure of the NUM, which allowed the right-wing opposition in the Notts Area to defy the NUM's National Executive Committee (NEC) and refuse to join the rest of coalfields on strike. Third, the existence of a neo-liberal offensive carried out by Margaret Thatcher and her Policy Unit (PU) alongside other political allies and some great businesses and fortunes of the country, against the miners, seeking to dismantle the labour movement, the structures of worker defiance and the "militant" left wing of the country.

To explore these factors, I am going to set them in the backdrop of the establishment and evolution of the different fronts of the conflict in the Nottinghamshire Area and, whenever necessary, nationally, first exploring their background, and then exploring the different phases of the strike in Nottinghamshire, culminating with the secession from the NUM and the formation of the Union of Democratic Miners (UDM).

**A background to the conflict: the NUM and the Ripley Report, an urge for revenge.**

The successful national strikes of 1972 and 1974 laid the ground for the conflict of the 1984-5 strike inasmuch as they announced the sides in the future conflict. Firstly, they were a defeat of the Conservative government of Heath, who had to call for general elections after the 1974 strike and subsequently lost the government to a minority Labour executive. Secondly, it showed the strength of the labour movement in the country, embodied in the miners' struggle and the vast web of solidarity that they obtained from different industries (rail workers for example).

These two consecutive victories on the miners' part also signified the power and influence of different left-wing organizations, in particular those networks that functioned around the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) (Darlington 77). From the start of the 70s, the situation in the NUM had changed, and the organization, previously controlled by right-wing officials (both in the NEC and in the Annual Conference), started to turn leftwards. Following some unofficial strike actions at the turn of the decade (1966 and 1970) (Wray and Allsop 152), the left gained a majority in the Annual Conference, making it more difficult for Joe Gormley's NEC, still controlled by a moderate right-wing majority, to smoothly control the entirety of the union's actions (Darlington 76; Wray and Allsop 152). As Ralph Darlington argues, the strength of the rank-and-file sector of the NUM, mostly mobilised by left-wing militants in their coalfield, was essential for the success of both strikes, as they managed to reach a profound organization that allowed them to defy the official guidelines sent by the NEC or the Area officials (mostly loyal to the right-wing Committee), secure a web of industrial solidarity and propose an effective

method of mass picketing to spread the strike to other parts of the country and other guilds (71-77).

In 1981, seven years after the miners' ultimate victory against the Heath government, Arthur Scargill, a big name in the strikes that brought it down, was appointed as leader of the union, and in 1984 the left achieved, for the first time in the union's history, a majority in the NEC, culminating the already announced rise of the left within the NUM's institutions. (Howell 150; Darlington 85)

The 1974 strike meant, on the other hand, a major defeat for the Conservative government, which had already shown its weakness against the organised miners back in 1972. Defeated and, some would say, humiliated, Edward Heath had no choice but to call a general election, in a desperate attempt to gain legitimacy and "retake" some of the political strength that he had lost through the industrial conflict. Instead of that, the Labour government managed to form a minority government.

After this blow to the Conservative Party, a group within it took advantage of the lack of real leadership and the low morale that the party was suffering, to gain more and more influence in their open critique of the Heath executive. The monetarist faction considered that the weakness, and subsequent defeat of the Heath Conservative government laid in its adherence to the Keynesian post-war system and the obstruction that its state economic intervention, and its nationalization of industries (the coal industry being among them) meant to the full expansion of the country's economy (Jackson 50-51; Rawsthorne 158). They advocated the expansion of a real free-market, without any intervention from the state, and in order to do so they had to break apart the welfare state and its monopolies, like the National Health Service (NHS), the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) and the National Coal Board (NCB) (Jackson 52; Rawsthorne 172) , favouring the privatization of different sectors. When in 1975 Margaret Thatcher

reached the Leadership of the Conservative Party, the neo-liberal faction took control of the party for the first time, and criticising all that did not fully commit to monetarism (who were often referred to as “wets”), they started their crusade for a fully privatization of the national industries (Rawsthorne 159-160).

From the very beginning, they marked the working-class institutions, mostly the unions, as an obstacle to their plans, an “enemy within” (Thatcher) who had been given too much liberty and strength on the past few decades. In both their public speeches (Lawrence and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite 134) and in their private political activities they expressed their hatred towards unions and socialism, at the same time that they remarked on the importance of defeating these political rivals in order to save “the quiet majority” they represented (Lawrence and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite 140). But if they were to defeat them, they would have to be prepared. In 1977 Nicholas Ridley, a loyal enthusiast of the monetarist cause, was asked to draw a plan for the privatization, and so the so-called Ridley Report was born. The Report was far from being “a vague proposal to be taken or left. Rather, it was a detailed stratagem that gave precise recommendations on how to prepare for and win the battle, once provoked” (Rawsthorne 161). In it, Ridley proposed several steps that had to be taken in preparation to the imminent conflict if they wanted to have the leading hand throughout the strike; first, he recommended to recruit ideologically-aligned allies in the energy sector that had interests in the bringing down of the coal industry (Ridley 26). As such, Thatcher invited senior officials of British Petroleum (BP), Shell and British Energy to sit in her Policy Unit. Second, he advised to “operate with the maximum quantity of stocks (...) at power stations”(Ridley 27), advising to import foreign coal in order to do so. Third, he suggested the employment of non-union haulage companies to supply the power stations and transport other goods when the conflict had started. Fourth, he suggested a transformation of the police, which

effectively turned the security bodies into a coordinated paramilitary force (Gibbon 171) to deal with the strike and the containment of the pickets (Ridley 27). And finally, he urged to the passing of anti-strike policies that would weaken the position of the striking miners (Ridley 28).

By 1984, after a first term of preparing the terrain for a successful confrontation against Scargill's NUM, following the steps and recommendations drawn by Ridley in his report, Thatcher and her Policy Unit (PU), completely constituted by ideological allies for the neo-liberal cause, were prepared for the battle.

### **Spencerism and pit culture: reactionism in Nottinghamshire.**

When commenting on the overt opposition to any strike action that grew in the Nottinghamshire coalfield during the miners' strike of 1984-5, David Amos calls upon two main causes; the harassment and the negation of their constitutional rights as members of the NUM by the union's leadership (embodied by Scargill in the NEC), their own branch officials and the left militant picketers. On the other hand, Callinicos and Simons argue, in their book, that the evolution of the opposition in the Notts Area revealed the weakness of the NUM's leadership to guide the miners into the strike, and the great power and efficiency of the paramilitary police, instrumental in Thatcher's plan to bring down the strike. Although from different perspectives and for different purposes, both of them argue that there was no basic difference between Nottinghamshire and other coalfields at the start of the strike, and that the position of the Area was a turnout of external forces; whether it is external provocations or a neoliberal complot. Therefore, the aforementioned authors omit the importance of the coalfield's historical labour relations and its pit culture and politics. The role that Nottinghamshire played during the



miners' strike cannot be fully understood without looking into the vast tradition of Spencerism that existed in the region, and the so-called "butty" system that made it possible.

George Spencer was a Labour politician (MP for Broxtowe) and unionist from Nottinghamshire, member of the Nottinghamshire Miner Association (NMA), of which he was the general secretary in 1926, until he was expelled from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB, the predecessor of the NUM as a national union) after he led his District back to work during the general strike of 1926. Following his expulsion, he created the Nottinghamshire Miner's Industrial Union, or as it would be known the 'Spencer Union' (Krieger 179). The Industrial Union was effectively a company union (or yellow union); an instrument of the employers to take control over their workers' (in this case mineworkers) organization and industrial activities. And as such it was enforced on the Notts mineforce. Krieger collects the memories of several miners from the time the Spencer Union was active: "(the) management stipulated that if you were not in the Spencer Union, you did not have a job" (qtd. in Krieger 183). As it could be expected, the tandem between the employers and the yellow union quickly showed results; as time passed the membership of the Industrial Union rocketed, while that of the NMA plummeted:

It was the alarming fall in membership of their own Nottinghamshire Miners' Association. In 1925 it had 32,500 members. The membership in 1928, following the 1926 stoppage (after the creation of the Spencer Union), was 15,740; in 1930, 13,475; in 1931, 13,315; in 1932, 12,295; in 1933, 9,985 ; in January 1935, 8,500; at which date 43,600 were employed in this area (Nottinghamshire). (Page 205)

Soon enough, the NMA was crushed and the Industrial Union, with its new hegemony, was the only option for “organization” in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. The yellow union dug its roots deep inside the region’s historical labour relations, the ‘butty’ system, and was enforced through its methods as well.

The “butty” system was a method of subcontracting, in which the mine-owner hired a subcontractor for the extraction of the coal, who would hire, at the same time, other miners that worked for them. The “butty” directed the action of his 30-50 men team inside the mine, was greatly responsible for the productivity, and also had control over the wages and discipline of the miners who worked for him (Church and Outram 27; Gibbon 175). Ultimately, they controlled who worked and who did not, creating a constant sense of uncertainty for every collier. These managers would search for people that did not have any ties with the NMA, they would discharge those that did or those that showed any signs of criticism towards the employers. When in 1936, some industrial dispute hit Harworth Colliery, the ‘butties’ exerted their power:

The manager (...) now wanted to punish those whom (...) had been the ringleaders in the stoppage. For this he drew up certain conditions which they must sign before he would reinstate them. They refused to do this and, therefore, they were not re-employed. (Page 206)

It also seemed that, after the miners had subordinated to the Industrial Union, favoured by the employers and the “butties”, they were alienated from its running, and would be excluded from their meetings: “It was the Spencer Union... and even then you couldn’t attend meetings. You didn’t know when they were held. There were lots of committee meetings, but not many political meetings” (Krieger 185).

The “butty” system promoted a high degree of individualism inside the colliery (and even within the teams), alongside with competitiveness in their incentive-oriented structure, values that, as both Gibbon and Krieger argued, were engrained in the region’s tradition, and favoured the sustainment of “Spencerism”’s hegemony in Nottinghamshire’s pit politics.

The Spencer Union lasted as such until 1937 when “under the threat of a national strike, it was reabsorbed into the Nottinghamshire District of the MFGB” (Wray and Allsop 149) Spencer himself becoming the President of the new organization in MFGB, with the District official posts completely taken by his former allies (Gibbon 174). Even with the Industrial Union out of first sight, Spencer made great advances in diminishing the MFGB’s influence, and deeper planted the roots of yellow unionism in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. The federal system of the union did, in fact, benefit this ideological entrenchment of “Spencerism” in the coalfield, as districts remained vastly autonomous, and the power of the central Executive was indeed quite limited in their influence over the different districts. The union’s organization made it difficult for any sentiment of national solidarity to arise, and even less in the company-influence Nottinghamshire, where any step towards centralization or joint action by the MFGB Executive (or any proposal of such a thing by any other District) met instant critique and opposition (Wray and Allsop 149). In 1944, after a decade long movement for the reformation of the federal structure of the MFGB, the NUM was created to replace the previous union in an attempt to create a truly national union, where solidarity could emerge between the previous districts, in order to face industrial conflicts with real unity and organization (Baldwin). Yet, as Allsop and Wray argue, contrary to the initial aims to replace the sectionalism that existed in the MFGB, the new union loosely adapted the previous federal system in the transformation of the previous Districts into Areas (150).

In Nottinghamshire, an Area that pressed for maintaining as much of their independence as possible during the negotiations for the NUM's "constitution", the "butty" system and "Spencerism" were adapted into the new organization, as can be seen in the 1953 introduction of the first District Power Loading Agreement (DPLA) in Nottinghamshire, in which the aforementioned labour system was adapted and further institutionalised (Krieger), maintaining a high incentive-lead production, and the loose figure of the 'butty'. Therefore, individualism, competitiveness and a localised identity still had major significance in the coalfield's pit culture, and, in its pit politics.

The introduction, in 1966, of the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) meant the implementation, for the first time in the country, of a national wage system, that sought to eliminate the differences between the Areas. Under this new agreement the different Areas could no longer bargain their wages directly with the employers; that competence was now of the national union. This measure met with instant opposition in Nottinghamshire, where the ability of drawing their own labour agreements (as they did with the DPLAs) was essential to maintain their productivist approach to labour. This meant that under the NPLA the still powerful 'Spencerism' of the Area could not maintain the "butty" system that sustained it, and therefore, saw itself weakened. This led to the advance of a new feeling of national solidarity in the coalfield, that itself laid the ground for the rise of the militant left in the Area, mirroring the 1970s national trend. If it is true that such rise was relatively moderate in comparison with other coalfields such as Yorkshire (Amos 45), it becomes apparent in the election of Joe Whelan, member of the Communist Party, as General Secretary of the Notts NUM Area in 1977 (46) that 'Spencerism' suffered a blow.

All the national unity and solidarity built up from the implementation of the NPLA, and shown in the 1972 and 1974 strikes, was lost when the incentive payment system was

reintroduced via the AIS (Area Incentive Schemes) in 1977 (Wray and Allsop 155-157). Then, the ‘embittered’ right in Nottinghamshire remembered the 15% cut that the implementation of the national agreement meant for their wages (Wray and Allsop 151; Krieger 176), and the attack that it constituted to their ‘rights’, and when the NUM called for strike action in 1984, they were certain of their opposition.

### **Pickets and ballots: the game begins.**

The announcement, in February 1981, of major pit closures all over the British coalfield by the National Coal Board (NCB) anticipated the main causes of the 1984-5 conflict three years before its outbreak. Directly after such announcement, different unofficial strike actions spread throughout the different, mostly left-wing Areas affected by the closures, showing the strength and degree of solidarity that still existed within the NUM. Fearing that the miners’ actions would escalate into a bigger conflict, the NCB quickly withdrew the plan on redundancies in what many saw a humiliating moment for the Conservative government of Thatcher (Allsop and Wray 155; Arnold 104; Francis 28; Gibbon 165). Scargill’s NUM showed once more the influence that the left kept in the miners’ movement.

In Nottinghamshire, the untimely death of Joe Whelan brought Henry Richardson, a supporter of Scargill, to the position of the Area’s General Secretary in 1982, perpetuating the left’s representation within the Area officials. As Amos states, the early 80s sought a moderate advance of the left, exemplified in the Area Executive elections of 1983-1984, with 9 out of the 10 elected members supporting the strike at the beginning of the conflict (48-49). Another Area official, Ray Chadburn, Chairman and, like

Richardson, member of the NEC, would complete the block in support of the strike despite him being “a typical representation of the Area’s (moderate) culture” (Howell 155). The other two officials of the Area, the conservatives Roy Lynk and David Predergast (Area Financial Secretary and Area Agent, respectively), believing that the Nottinghamshire coalfield was “under little threat (of) closures”, rallied in opposition to any action when the threat of closure and redundancies returned in 1983, showing the lack of solidarity and the productivism engrained in the Area’s pit politics, directly inherited from Spencerism. As Howell said:

the unity often seemed that of the Area rather than any wider solidarity and was expressed in pit culture of cooperation with management (and employers) in pursuit of a high productivity and high earning, un hindered by what many Nottinghamshire men dismissed as the restrictive and archaic customs of other, less productive Areas. (154)

The Spencerist right-wing rallied behind the idea of ‘non-political’ opposition in contrast with the ‘Scargillist’ left-wing militants, who were the enemies of the common people, the enemies of progress, and most importantly, the enemies of democracy (Arnold 104). They combined the discourse of the Spencer Union, also promoted as a ‘non-political’ union, with Thatcherite mainstream discourse, manufactured since Thatcher’s holding of the opposition leadership during the mid-70s, and displayed in the media to ideologically attack those that supposed any opposition to the advance of neoliberalism; socialist, trade unions and Scargill personally (Lawrence and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite 137-143).

When in September 1983, the infamous American strike-breaker, Ian MacGregor, was appointed as the head of NCB, Scargill claimed that Thatcher and her government were trying to “(operate) a pit closure program by stealth”(qtd. in Rawsthorne 173).

Knowing the existence and contents of the Ridley Report, we know that he was in the right. Indeed, Ridley recommended caution in the displaying of his plan, and, looking in retrospective, we see that the only thing that prevented the conflict from starting in 1981, in the light of the plan of pit closures, was that his recommendations were not met, and the risk, therefore, was too high. The appointment of MacGregor was, in fact, also on recommendation of Ridley, as he was a known anti-trade-unionist who had shown his worth back in his native America, and therefore, was a worthy ally (Amos 51; Rawsthorne 172-173; Ridley 22), ideologically aligned with the neo-liberal offence.

When on 6 March 1984, MacGregor announced the closure of 20 pits across the country, the miners, that saw twenty thousand of them being dismissed from their jobs, and already weary of the plans that Thatcher's executive had for 'Mac the Knife' (as MacGregor was called), started to rally for a strike in response to such an attack. No more than three days later, the first Areas to go on strike, Yorkshire and Scotland, were out in the streets. Now, several decades after the start of the strike, we know that the extent of MacGregor's NCB plans far exceeded the closure of 20 pits, but that he intended that "over the three years 1983-1985 [...] 75 pits would be closed [...] reduc(ing) the workforce by 55,000" (Higham).

On 9 March, the strike had started in Yorkshire and Scotland, both Areas deeply castigated by the ruling of the NCB, and both with a left majority that manage to lead the whole coalfield to the strike. The NEC decided that, should any other Area of the union engage in industrial action, as a response to the NCB's decision, it would be declared official action by the NUM's Rule 41 (Allsop and Wray 155; Amos 63). Probably believing that the solidarity endorsed in previous strikes was intact, the Scargill's NEC decided to let the expansion of the strike be gradual, letting the Areas take their own internal ballots instead of calling for a national ballot from the very moment that any

Yorkshireman and/or Scot decided to move on to strike action. This decision was a mistake in the long run, a mistake that would be used by the Notts right-wing to gain power and diminish the influence of the NEC and the left.

In Nottingham, the officials reacted hastily to the development of the strike in the north and the response given by the NEC:

[an] area ballot would take place over a twenty-four-hour period from 6pm on Thursday 15 March to 6 pm on Friday 16 March 1984. The count was planned for Saturday 17 March 1984 at the Nottinghamshire NUM Headquarters [...] the result being announce [...] on Sunday 18 March 1984. (Amos 63-64)

With the action starting with heated passion in their northern county neighbour, Yorkshire, the Notts Area decided to advise other Areas to avoid any picketing before a resolution was reached in the ballot. Many in the British coalfield could remember the times that Nottinghamshire had wavered in the past, and they were sceptical of the possible decision of those who many considered as “endemic scabs” (Howell 154). In an attempt to extent the influence of the starting strike to the Notts Area and trying to persuade the miners to vote to join industrial action, the Yorkshire Area overlooked the advice and flying pickets entered into the Area from the north on the morning of 12 March. The role they had in the widening of the division between the Notts Area and the NEC has been the source of abundant debate between commentators from different ideological tendencies, as they would be essential for the future development of the ‘working miners’ movement, and the strengthening of Notts right. First, we have to understand them against the backdrop of the Ridley Report and of the neoliberal offence.



We must be prepared to deal with the problem of violent picketing. This again is a matter going beyond policy for nationalised industries. But it is also vital to our policy that on a future occasion we defeat violence in breach of the law on picketing. The only way to do this is to have a large, mobile squad of police who are equipped and prepared to uphold the law against the likes of the [...] mob. (Ridley 25)

Ridley and the PU were aware of how essential pickets were in expanding and maintaining the strike active. As Darlington argues, pickets played an essential role in the miners' victories of 1972 and 1974, as they not only spread industrial action from one Area to another, but it also spread the strike to other guilds, provoking a much feared national standstill (80-84); if they wanted the strike to fail categorically, the containment and undermining of pickets would be of essential importance. The police force was transformed from a fairly decentralised entity to a paramilitary force built on techniques of repression brought from the occupied Northern Ireland and from the colonies (Rawsthorne 166, 173). When the strike started, the police was quick to enclose the whole county to stop any outside influence from getting into the working Area:

The effect of these reforms was to create a highly mobile and versatile policing unit that could be deployed to any required area or situation, quickly. [...] just eight days into the miners' strike, 3000 police, drawn from 17 forces across the country, were already stationed in the Nottinghamshire area of the NUM. (Buckley 425)

After the result of the Notts ballot resulted in a negative to engage in industrial action, a new wave of pickets that came from the north could barely get close to the working miners, and while the clashes between the police and the pickets became more

and more violent, “the mining communities and villages were under police siege”(Hopper 19). The representation of this pickets in all sorts of media became distorted, and the versions changing from commentator to commentator.

In most media, picketers were portrayed as violent extremists trying to harass the common sensical working miners. Aligning themselves with neoliberal discourse, they were antidemocratic enemies of the state and a risk to any kind of progress (Arnold 103-104, 107). “What is at stake is the future of our democracy” said the *Sunday Times* in October 1984 (qtd. in Rawsthorne 180). Even the BBC, supposedly not fully aligned with neoliberalism at the time, “inadvertently” distorted the images of a clash between the picket line and the police to make seem that the latter was attacked by the striking mob (Hopper 19). Some moderate commentators, like Amos, argued that the picketers were violent against the working miners, who were targeted and physically and verbally harassed, and that the picketing action, backed by the NUM, was an attack on their rights and their democracy (64-68). In both cases, voice was given to those miners that opposed the strike from the beginning, and they were portrayed as victims of a tyrannical rule, mistreated by Scargill’s NEC and protected by the police.

Other commentators closer to the left also vary in their interpretation of the pickets. Some overstate the calculated police operation and castigate NUM’s leadership while arguing that, was it not for the weakness of the union and the strength demonstrated by Thatcher , there would have been nothing holding Notts miners from joining the strike (Callinicos and Simons). Others attribute the failure of the pickets to their incoordination and overtly intimidatory nature towards working miners that created a sense of rejection to the strike in them (Darlington 80-82).

In reality, “pickets were normally boxed by the police out of earshot and sometimes eyesight of strike-breakers and ‘violence’ [...] almost invariably involved pickets and

police, not other miners”(Gibbon 173). This did not stop the strike opposition in the Area to use pickets for the developing of their own discourse, portraying working miners as victims of violence whose democratic rights were being denied by those favoured by the ‘authoritarian’ NEC. They called for a national ballot to be held, declaring that, until a national election declared the national strike, they would not join the strike. The political division inside the Notts Area escalated quickly, with the left and the strike supporters of the Area Executive ruling in favour of the extension of the strike, considering it official and criticising the working miners as ‘scabs’, and the miners increasingly flocking back to work as the months passed. Both sides would clash in the May Day celebrations of 1984 in Mansfield, what was considered a major victory of the right-wing opposition, and by June of the same year, all the strike supporters in the Area Executive were removed on bloc, alongside the few in the Area Council, constituting Nottinghamshire as a definite working Area, and leaving Richardson and Chadburn, and therefore the NUM’s NEC, with little to no influence in the Area (Amos 89, 100; Howell 156).

Spencerism returned with renewed strength to the pit politics, although it never fully went away. With its material labour relations being restored in 1977, a clearly Spencerist discourse grew back in the Notts right-wing, as it became apparent in many of their speeches during the strike and their campaign for a national ballot, mentioning their duty towards keeping production up, their rights as an (pseudo)independent Area, and their clear loathing of the militant left, that they saw embodied in Scargill and his supporters. As engrained as the ghost of the Industrial Union was in the Notts Area, Spencerism made a quick and certain comeback. The discourse used by the opposition, and replicated in national media, resonated with the pit culture many of the miners professed, and, growing in influence and successfully undermining the left of the Area, it was just a matter of waiting for exhaustion to lead the minority of striking miners back to work.

### **The right, the Working Miners' Committee and the courts**

On 26 April, the Notts Area Executive, still controlled by the pro-strike left, democratically extended the strike to the Area with a ballot result of “11 to 2 to make the strike official in Nottinghamshire” (Allsop and Wray 156). The right, however, decided to oversee this result, calling it undemocratic and adhering themselves to the March ballot; the only democratic result they would accept. They rallied behind their ‘right to work’ campaign, and in May Day 1984, both factions clashed in Mansfield, where it was left clear that the right held enough power to defy the pro-strikers. On 10 May they would create the Nottinghamshire Working Miners’ Committee “to pursue legal action to prove that the strike in Nottinghamshire was unofficial”(Amos 94), thus starting the legal struggle that defined the relationship between the Notts working miners and the NUM in the 10 months up until the end of the strike. Colin Clarke, from the traditional right of the Area, took an especially relevant role, as he led the move to courts and managed to obtain the £10,000 the legal expenses ascended to in less than a month (Amos 94,99; Howell 157). On 25 May the courts declared the extension of the strike illegal, and by June, the right behind the NWMC had gained control of the Area’s bodies. Victorious and strong the Notts Area and the NWMC decided to arm themselves with an able body of lawyers and legal advisors and continue their offensive in the courts.

The courts had already had an important role during the strike by then. With the heavy picket action that took place in the first months of the strike, thousands of picketers had been arrested by the reinforced police service, and soon, the cases to be processed

became overwhelming. Buckley argues that the representation of miners in daily media had a huge impact on the courts ruling, even in the first stages of the strike:

In law, one was entitled to assume, in light of what had happened in similar cases, that an event was probable. As nightly reports of miner-led violence and mass picketing exploded onto the news, there was little to differentiate between miners' mass pickets on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday; the expected patterns of behaviour became the same. (Buckley 429)

The bombardment of information about miners' violence conditioned the opinion that the magistrates had of the strikers even before they reached the courtroom. The film time dedicated to miners' violence and pickets was, in fact, ten times superior to the time dedicated to show police violence against the same pickets (429). Adding this to the demonizing discourse towards Scargill, the NUM, and the militant miners, the role that the media played as an ideological weapon is. Buckley also shows that the magistrates were a group prone to accept the conservative discourse that was transmitted in media:

Of the 64 judges involved in the dispute, 66 per cent went to public school, and 82 per cent went on to Oxbridge. Their average age was 63.8 years, and 61 per cent had been appointed since Thatcher was elected in 1979. (qtd. in Buckley 429)

The overall bias derived from the ideological bombardment and the high volume of arrests did nothing but grow as time passed. After the infamous Battle of Orgreave on 18 June, when the arrests peaked, Thatcher's PU intervened the overwhelmed courts, calling on them to deliver harsher sentences and made magistrates with connections with the left or the miners unable to hear cases of strikers (Rawsthorne 182). With the courts already

inclined to rule against the miners and their organizations, the Notts Area and the NWMC launched their legal offensive against the NUM.

On 15 May, before the strike in Nottinghamshire was declared null by the courts, the leaders of the NWMC started to establish relations with other anti-strike officials of the British coalfield, from Lancaster, South Derby and Leicester, working towards a national project that would unite them in their crusade against the NUM (Amos 99; Howell 157). This cooperation would culminate in the creation of the National Working Miners' Committee (NaWMC) in August, of which, a man called David Hart would be essential. David Hart was a millionaire, the heir of a banker, educated in Eton and an advocate neoliberal and Thatcherite (Aitken 500; Amos 100; Rawsthorne 187), and as such, wanted to see the 'Marxist NUM' torn apart. He offered his full support to Thatcher and the PU. Having been an integral part of the back-to-work campaign in Derbyshire, he decided to tour around the Midlands searching for working miners that they could use to take the NUM to the courts (Rawsthorne 187). Dressed as a miner, he made his presence noticeable in some working-miners hotspots:

Hart established his presence in one or two Nottinghamshire pubs, where an increasing band of anti-Scargill rebels congregated after working their shifts in the East Midlands pits. Hart's technique was to play dominoes with them, to lose, to pay for their losses in pints of beer and [...] to take snuff (Aitken 450)

There, disguised as a fellow miner, he allegedly got in touch with the officials of the NWMC, whom he helped to organise and fund the NaWMC, alongside other big businesses like Saatchi & Saatchi, Taylor Woodrow and United Biscuits, among others (Amos 100; Gibbon 170; Rawsthorne 187). Colin Clarke and John Liptrott, both

influential in the Notts Area, were left on the leadership of the Committee, yet, the funding that Conservative organizations and businesses provided was essential to reach their objective: incapacitate the NUM by taking it to court in behalf of individual working miners.

After the June elections, the Notts Area decided to distance themselves from the NWMC, and the already in-the-making NaWMC, and continue their legal struggle against the NUM as an Area; after all, they (the working miners) had taken over the executive bodies of the Area and there was no point to continue with a separate committee. Although it is true that some officials like Chris Butcher, Colin Bottomore and Bob Copping decided to leave the NaWMC to focus on the Area, there was not real separation between both organizations until December 1984, and even then, some relevant names from the NaWMC, like Clarke and Liptrott, would still hold a great deal of influence inside the Area (Amos 100, 101, 114; Howell 159). Their power and legitimacy in the Area strengthened after the elections, and having provided themselves with a body of legal advisors of their own (Amos 111), the anti-strike Notts Area did not receive well the news of the implementation of new disciplinary measures to the NUM's rulebook. In the Extraordinary Annual Conference (EAC) called on 11 and 12 July the addition of the disciplinary Rule 51, which issued the possibility of retribution against those that acted against the NUM's national line, to the union's constitution was passed with Nottinghamshire voting against it (108-110). Fearing that the new rule was going to be used against them, the opposition they demonstrated was total, and its passing ensued legal action. The Area took the NUM to the High Court, which eventually would rule that the change in the rule book was null, alleging that there had been an error in the democratic procedure; the striking miners sit-in in the Area's Head Quarters previous to the EAC had prevented, presumably, the needed preparations to be properly arranged

(Amos 111; Howell 159). Had the preparations gone as planned, the voting of the Area in the Conference would have not been affected, as their delegates voted against the change of the NUM's constitution either way. When in August the union called a Special Delegates Conference to 'properly' introduce Rule 51, Nottinghamshire refused to participate in it, and in October, they outright refused to accept it. Clarke was essential in taking the NUM to the High Court, as he rallied with other 16 branch officials to bring the rule down, and this was not going to be the last time that the president of the NWMC would be instrumental in Notts' legal war against NUM (Howell 159).

Advised by their legal counsel, the Area engaged into a process of changing the Area rules to "protect the Nottingham Area from the new disciplinary rule"(Amos 112). Clarke's branch, Pye Hill, proposed to delete Rule 30 from the Area's rulebook (Howell 159), a rule that stated that "In all matters in which the rules of this union and those of the national union are in conflict, the rules of the national union shall apply" (Nottinghamshire Area NUM). The proposition of such deletion meant a de-facto constitutional breaking apart from the national union, which threatened the Area with legal actions if they continued with their 'rebellion'. In the Area Council Meeting (ACM) of December 1984, however, the Notts Area finally deleted Rule 30, and the NUM lost complete effective control on one of his most productive Areas.

Nationally, the NUM was already breaking apart in December, defeated by the legal body of the NaWMC, funded by the country's big businesses. In August, the funds of the South Wales Area of the NUM were confiscated by the High Court, and in October it ruled the fund seizing of the entire NUM. The NaWMC was in the frontline of the conflict, but behind them, Thatcher's PU was ticking another requirement of the Ridley Report:



By far the greatest deterrent of any strike, whether in the public or the private sector, is clearly to cut off the supply of money to the strikers, and make the Union finance them. (...) It is clearly vital in order to defeat the attack which assuredly will come (...) that our policy on funds for strikers be put in effect quickly and that it be sufficiently tough to act as a major deterrent. (Ridley 25)

David Hart had been sending reports of his clandestine actions in the Working Miners' Committee to Thatcher and the PU since the creation of such an organization. His advances were what encouraged the PU to issue and directly support the case for the seizing of the union's funds. In November the NUM's central fund were taken, but not the ones that had been taken outside the country, nor those that came from foreign miners' communities. In February 1985, all the union's funds finally fell, announcing the end of the strike a month later (Rawsthorne 187-190)

With the support of their allies in the NaWMC, the Notts Area had finally gained the independence they so desired. The courts, aligned with the neoliberal offense against miners, played an important role in the financial and legal war of the second part of the strike; helping the Notts Area to break through NUM's superiority, and the NaWMC to put the union on check in the courts, saturating it with dozens of trials and cases, and accumulating fines and other sentences on its crippled back.

### **The end of strike: Secession and the UDM. Conclusion.**

The NUM was defeated nationally; the strike came to an end at the beginning of March 1985. The Nottinghamshire Area of the NUM effected its secession from the national

union on 6 July 1985, which would later constitute a grossing part of the Union of Democratic Workers (UDM) alongside other organizations of working miners' (Amos 117). "From that time onwards miners' in the Nottinghamshire coalfield would be represented by two trade unions" expresses Amos, "as was the case from 1926 to 1937" (117). Yet, as was the case in that decade, such a claim is, at least, imprecise. As the Spencer Union did back in the day, the UDM claimed the exclusivity to negotiate with the employers (first the NCB, and later the privatised British Coal Corporation), leaving the NUM with no power in the area (Howell 161).

Thatcher's neoliberal enterprise had been successful, and the fall of the NUM was greatly celebrated by the monetarists of her Policy Unit. They had successfully defeated the enemy within and, as Ridley stated in his Report, they were successful in making the defeat "irreversible" (Ridley 17); the entire labour movement had suffered "a shattering blow from which it had yet to recover" (Rawsthorne 193).

The Nottinghamshire Area of the NUM played, in this enterprise, a relevant role, as there converged different internal and external factors that favoured the establishment of a powerful opposition to the union. Internally, the labour relations of the butty-system, and the ideological mark left by Spencer's Industrial Union, made the Area prone to oppose industrial action and align itself with Thatcher's plans. Externally, the neoliberal offense created the appropriate context in the Area for the thriving of the anti-strike right wing; the police, the biased courts, the ideologically charged media, all provided the opposition with the security and tools necessary to succeed in their struggle against the left wing NEC. Taking into account the combination of these internal and external factors, we can but conclude, that the role of opposition that Nottinghamshire played in the defeat of the NUM was not one-sided, as many commentators maintain, but a combination of different allied forces that supported one another in their fight against a common enemy.

With no opposition left, the government's plans for privatization started to take shape; coal, iron and steel, gas, electricity, water supply, trucking, airlines, telecommunications and public housing, all were privatised (Rawsthorne 194; Watkins). One by one, the supposedly secure mines of Nottinghamshire ceased production with no major opposition; there was no movement to protect the miners this time.

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