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COMMUNITY AND STRUGGLE:
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF A MINING VILLAGE IN THE 1980s

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COMMUNITY AND STRUGGLE: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF A
MINING VILLAGE IN THE 1980s.

John Murphy,
Warwick University,
1989.

This study is concerned with the process by which community among working class people is defined and redefined in the course of collective political activity. Specifically it analyses the potential role of trade unions in the development of community in residential settlements where the labour market is shaped by a major workplace. The empirical research was carried out in two Yorkshire mining villages in the three years following the 1984/85 Miners' Strike. A range of research techniques were employed to investigate the nature of 'community' in the villages before, during and after the Strike. The first part of the thesis provides the necessary historical and political context, investigating the development of the miners' union and the issues involved in the 1984/85 Strike. The second part consists of an ethnographic study of Armthorpe, a village with an open pit. I describe the process by which the union branch, as the vehicle through which the coalmining population collectively encountered their employers and the state, provided a core around which a democratic and dynamic village community could be developed. I outline the population's mobilisation in 1984/85 and analyse the effects of their Strike involvement on the village community. A central platform of the NUM in 1984/85 was the defence of 'jobs, pits and communities'. In order to investigate the impact of pit closures on community, the final part of my thesis consists of a subsidiary study of Moorends, a nearby village where the pit was closed in 1957. I describe the very different experience of its population in 1984/85 and analyse the nature of social relationships in the Strike's aftermath. I conclude by suggesting that the 1984/85 Miners' Strike illustrates the potential of collective struggle for creating 'community' among working class people on a variety of levels.

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John Murphy 1989

Abbreviations

AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
ASLEF	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
BACM	British Association of Colliery Management
COSA	Colliery Office Staffs Association
CP(GB)	Communist Party of Great Britain
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
JCSG	Joint Communities Support Group
MFGB	Miners Federation of Great Britain
MINOS	Mine Operating System
MMCWTS	Markham Main Colliery Workmen's Trading Society
NACODS	National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers
NCB	National Coal Board
NEC	National Executive Committee
NHS	National Health Service
NPLA	National Power Loading Agreement
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
SWP	Socialist Workers Party
TUC	Trades Union Congress
WAG	Women's Action Group
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WSG	Women's Support Group
YMA	Yorkshire Miners' Association

Interview Abbreviations

M = Miner, W = Woman, YP = Young Person,
SC = Senior Citizen, AI = Additional Interview.

VOLUME ONE

INTRODUCTION.

"The best of all possible moments to achieve insight into the life of a human being is during a fundamental crisis when he is faced with grave decisions which can mean ruin or despair or success and happiness for him. In such crises men reveal what they are and often betray their innermost secrets in a way they never do and never can when life moves placidly and easily. If this is true for the study of men as individuals, it applies even more forcefully to the study of men in groups. It is when hell breaks loose and all men do their worst and best that the powerful forces which organize and control human society are revealed. We learn then, if ever, why groups of men must do the things they do and be the things they are. It is in these moments of crisis that the humdrum daily living of the thousands of little men going to work with their lunch boxes and the prosaic existence of the big man in the top office reveal themselves as human dramas of the utmost significance; more importantly, behaviour in such crises tells us the meanings and significance of human society. (Warner and Low, 1947: 1)^[1]

In the first and second weeks of March 1985, over 80,000 miners returned to work after a year on strike. The 1984/85 Miners' Strike represented the most significant industrial dispute since the General Strike and lockout of 1926, resulting in the loss of over thirty million working days.^[2] Like the General Strike and lockout of 1926, the miners' dispute had assumed the character of a historic battle between capital and labour. The miners' stated reason for persisting in what became a very uneven struggle was the defence of 'jobs, pits and communities'.^[3] The potential of this call to inspire its participants seemed to grow as the dispute lengthened from weeks into months, but was it merely a slogan, or did it contain sufficient substance to justify all the energy and enthusiasm, all the sacrifice and suffering endured in those twelve months? To answer this question, it is necessary to ask a series of preliminary questions; how important are pits in providing jobs in those areas that used to be described as 'coalfields'? Is there such a thing as 'community' in the coalfield towns/villages, how important is it and how vital are jobs and pits to it's survival? Once these have been addressed it may be possible to answer the more general question.

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My thesis addresses these issues through a community study centering on Armthorpe, a large village on the eastern edge of the Doncaster coalfield. Essentially it is concerned with an analysis of the institutions, attitudes and social relationships present in this village prior to, during and in the aftermath of the 'Great Strike' of 1984/85.^[4] It addresses several broad themes concerning the relationships between work, collective struggle and 'community', both as they affect the miners themselves and as they affect the 'community' experience of other local people; women and men, young and old. This involves an investigation of the process by which the collective experience of work and conflict in a workplace that defines the local labour market can, under certain circumstances, help define the collective experience of the broader community.

In choosing to undertake a community study, I am aware of its limitations. There are major problems involved in the use of the concept 'community', not least of which are those concerning the definition of physical and sociological boundaries. An investigation of contemporary social relations within these 'boundaries' can tend to obscure the fact that they extend beyond the localised community in both space and time. As Fernando Henriques, one of the authors of *Coal is Our Life* suggests:

'By itself the community study technique provides no way of measuring the significance of its findings against what may be crudely described as these "external" factors'. (Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, 1969: 7)

This suggests that a community study be placed both in its historical and in its broader social context.

One of my aims is to outline the process by which major political events and political traditions mould and shape the web of social relations that define a community and how, in turn, the community responds in terms of preserving or developing these traditions. An investigation of the local population's involvement in the 1884/85 Strike, a 'fundamental crisis' (Warner and Low, 1947) of a year's duration, with a massive impact far beyond the

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national coal industry, has an obvious importance. It is not merely that, as Warner and Low point out, the Strike acts as a window on society, allowing us to investigate the ligaments of the local community. It also constitutes one of those moments in history when village inhabitants are forced to make fundamental choices and in the process redefine their social relationships on many levels. The Strike therefore becomes both an essential part of the local historical tradition *and* helps place the community study in its broader context.

A study of a community study in the aftermath of a twelve-month strike allows us to study its impact not just on the miners themselves, but on the ideas, attitudes and behaviour of other sections of the local population. It enables us to investigate not only whether the Strike was instrumental in the creation/renewal of the local community, but also what type of community was encouraged by this kind of momentous struggle. It allows us to address, among other issues, gender relationships in an occupationally-based community. In *Coal is Our Life*, the authors argued that exclusion of women from the collective work situation of the coalmine resulted in their occupying severely segregated and subordinate roles in the local community (Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, 1969:201-212). This suggests three questions that will be considered in this thesis. What form did the local womens' involvement in the 1984/85 Strike take? Did it lead to any fundamental changes in their own social relationships, or those of the Armthorpe population at large? If so, have these changes survived in the post-Strike period? In short, what effect has the 1984/85 involvement of local women in collective struggle had on their roles and status in the local community?

Even when a community study is placed in its broader context there remain limitations. A micro study of the social relations in any single pit, union and village cannot provide an overall account of the state of the coal industry's industrial relations in 1986. This is particularly true in the case of Armthorpe. One of the reasons I chose to centre my study on this village was

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its population's high level of involvement in Strike-related activity in 1984/85. If the Yorkshire coalfield provided a central axis for the dispute, the Doncaster Panel^[5] of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) played a key role in its strike mobilisation and the Armthorpe NUM branch was a chief instigator of this role. For these reasons the village therefore provides the most favourable setting for studying the role of collective struggle in the development of 'community'. In this I was following the example of Goldthorpe (Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt, 1969) in selecting a research setting that could act as a prototype for community mobilisation and subsequent developments.

The principal thesis of *Coal is Our Life*, that the collective organisation of miners in the workplace is crucial in providing a focus and a framework for a tight-knit, locally-based community, has obvious implications for the population of pit villages, given the defeat of their 1984/85 struggle. The issue is what happens to those who, having been through the collective experience of the Strike, still find themselves excluded from the central workplace. Is their exclusion from the pit, and employment opportunities generally, mirrored in their status and role in the local community? And what of the villages which were built to service the seventy pits that were closed in the three years following the 1985 defeat?^[6] The *Coal is Our Life* thesis would suggest that the maintenance of 'community' in these pit villages becomes extremely problematic. In the introduction to the 1969 edition, Fernando Henriques suggests that, with the closure of the pit and the consequent removal of this local focus of collective identity and struggle, the mining village can easily become 'merely an aggregate of socially isolated and culturally condemned human beings' (Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, 1969: 10).

It is in order to investigate the accuracy of this prediction that I introduce a secondary study of how pit closure has effected the local community in the nearby village of Moorends. I describe the central role of the miners'

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union in providing a basis for the construction of a lively and close knit community over three decades. I then outline the long-term impact of the 1956 pit closure, which, while not depriving the miners of jobs (in other pits), undermined the basis of the union branch and all its related institutions. The 1984/85 Strike experience of the Moorends' mining families is described and finally their post-Strike social relationships. In each of these areas, contrasts with the experience of Armthorpe's mining population become evident, which I argue can largely be attributed to the closure of the pit and disappearance of the miners' union branch, which previously constituted the heart of the coalminers' community.

Both the Armthorpe and Moorends studies suggest that a key aspect of community construction is the involvement of the local population in collective political activities. In locking a large proportion of the village inhabitants into a common wage relationship, the pit provided the basis for the union to become the main vehicle for this activity, a power centre in the community. The closure of a pit, by removing the basis on which the union articulates the collective concerns of local workers, also threatens the community that has been built around it. But although the local union branch may be the *main* focus for collective activity in many pit villages, it is not necessarily the only one, and this is particularly true in the aftermath of a strike that, as I will demonstrate, has served to redefine community on several levels.

Indeed the *nature* of some of the Strike-based collectives that were established, in order to defend jobs and pits in 1984/85, indicate other potential sources of 'community' available to miners and other working class people, sources only hinted at by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter. Neither is this a new phenomenon. As I will illustrate, the nature of the communities in both Armthorpe and Moorends reflected the nature of the union organisation at their core. Both villages embraced a political tradition which combined struggle over local sectional issues with involvement in radical politics and the

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broader, class-based community. In 1984/85, as in previous times of major political conflict, it was the dual involvement of Armthorpe activists in both local and class-based communities which shaped the village's Strike experience and the community that emerged as a result. Although the absence of pit and union branch caused the Strike experience in Moorends to be very different, other potential sources of 'community' among the local population were still indicated.

An Outline

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part aims to set the village studies in their historical and political context. In Chapter One, I examine some of the problems involved in the use of 'community' as a sociological concept. I argue that the idealized version of 'community' suggesting a 'natural', self-contained and totally harmonious segment of society, uniting those within its geographical boundaries in an all-inclusive identity, is frequently employed in order to encourage nostalgia and underpin reactionary ideologies. The looseness and imprecision involved in the use of the concept are therefore rarely accidental, as they are often meant to disguise rather than illuminate reality. Developing Ray Pahl's assertion that, whatever their geographical situation, populations had 'their lives shaped by a combination of national and local influences and processes' (1968:293), Meg Stacey (1974) outlines what I believe is a more precise and, in some ways, more flexible alternative to the concept of 'community', that of 'social systems' operating at various levels.

I suggest that various historical and community studies focussing on pit villages have illustrated how the coal industry and its underground work process required the residential settlements established near their pitheads to combine many of the factors which Stacey considered vital in the development of strong local social systems. For example the geographical and occupational

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isolation often encouraged a stability in the local population and extensive inter-generational kinship networks. The presence of a central workplace tended to stimulate the development of new institutions, which, in turn acted as 'power points' in the village's economic, political and cultural sub-systems, thereby encouraging multiplex role playing and strengthening the local social system.

Having suggested that Stacey brings a welcome rigorousness to our analysis of 'community', I then describe what I consider to be weaknesses in the concept of 'local social systems'. I suggest that, despite her argument for the need to incorporate change and flexibility into the model of local social systems, the concept itself tends to present society as a somewhat static entity. There is a need to incorporate Stacey's insights into an equally rigorous, yet more dynamic, analysis of 'community'. Another problem which I feel that Stacey and others have tended to avoid is that of the complex relationship between community and state. In describing the part played by collective political activity in the construction of local community it is important not to lose sight of the major role of the state in the definition of social relationships.

If 'community' is seen as a matrix of social relationships operating at various levels, the importance of placing the (local) community study in its broader historical perspective becomes evident. I have argued that a key reason for the strength of community in the pit village is the local population's regular involvement in collective activity in order to assert control over the economic and political forces which shaped their lives. Whereas the struggle for control sometimes took place over power points that appeared to be located around the local pit, they were nevertheless part of a national and international economy, often requiring that struggle take place at a broader level. So although the local branch of the Mineworkers' Association might

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invariably be referred to as 'the Union', its value as a local vehicle of communal activity stemmed partly from it's being part of a much wider framework.

In Chapter Two I outline the origins of the mineworkers' union. I focus on some of the key landmarks in the union's development and attempt to draw out their implications for the development of community in the coalfields. I describe the tendency, apparent from the first establishment of a national union through to the national disputes of the 1970's, for the peaks of mineworkers' struggle to reflect periods of broader industrial and political unrest. I demonstrate how the political activities of the miners' union tended to be mirrored, even before nationalisation in 1947, by an intense concern and regular intervention by the state in their industry. I suggest that especially when, as in the 1926 strike and lockout, these interventions led to protracted and decisive defeats, they tended to act as foundations for a collective political consciousness among the working class of the coalfield, strengthening the bond between 'community' and union at both local and national levels.

I then describe how the state takeover of the coal industry, a major goal of miners' political activity over a long period, had a contradictory impact on the miners, their union and their communities. I suggest the subsequent incorporation of the national union leadership contributed to a weakening of the position of grass roots miners, who, caught in a pincer movement of falling demand and and rapid introduction of new technology, were forced to witness the closure of almost two thirds of their pits within a decade. Apart from the widespread destruction of mining communities, new technology also facilitated the introduction of uniform national wage rates and caused mineworkers to shift their focus from localised struggles at face and pit to those at area and national level. This resulted in elements of what Alan Drabble has described as 'pit politics' (1987:11) making an impact at a national

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level, disturbing the institutionalised collaboration and compromise that had characterised 'mineworkers' politics' for over 22 years.^[7]

The meshing of the miners more sectional struggles with a period of heightened class struggle was once again revealed in the national strikes of 1972 and 74. Their occurrence in a period when the post-war economic boom was faltering and a Conservative Government was attempting to curb the power of the trade unions gave them a wider political significance. I outline the way that pit political tactics were used in 1972 in order to mobilise widespread, class-based solidarity action, while the 1974 dispute acted as a catalyst for a General Election and the subsequent removal of the Heath Government.

I deal with the national disputes of 1972 and 1974 in some detail, as the NUM's success in challenging government and state made them prime targets for those who saw themselves as the guardians of state power. As a result, many of the main issues in the 1984/85 Strike had their origins in this period of heightened conflict. The NUM victories were, for example, a major contributory factor in the Labour Government's decision to reintroduce local productivity schemes in 1976. They also provided the stimulus for a number of state agencies to prepare for industrial 'intervention' and for the new Conservative leadership's adoption of a long-term strategy incorporating the lessons of Heath's defeat.^[8]

The election of the Conservative Government in 1979, pledged to a radical reshaping of Britain's economic and political structures, posed a major threat to all organised workers, not least to those working in the nationalised coal industry. In Chapter Three, I describe the run-up to the 1984/85 Strike, contrasting the increasingly confident preparations of the Government for a major intervention in the coal industry, with the repeated failure of the NUM leadership to rebuild a cohesion in the national mineworkers' community. I then go on to outline some of the major issues raised in the course of the dispute. I

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suggest that the government strategy of isolating the striking miners and preventing the use of 'pit political' tactics had a contradictory effect in that it encouraged a renewal of the bonds between local community and union that had provided the basis for resilience in former miners' struggles.

The second part of the thesis consists of the main community study. In Chapter Four, I focus my attention on the history of Armthorpe, outlining the intertwined development of pit, union branch and village. Echoing the arguments advanced in *Coal is Our Life*, I suggest that the collective organisation and struggle needed to exert control in the underground work situation was reproduced above ground in the life of the village. I investigate the process by which the pit and the local branch of the mineworkers' union served as a matrix for other institutions, which acted as power points in the local economic, political and cultural sub-systems.

Of primary importance in the initiation and development of a cluster of locally-based institutions under the democratic control of the working class population was the growth of the Armthorpe branch of the Yorkshire Mineworkers Association (YMA). A significant part of the chapter is therefore concerned with tracing the branch's development from its 'baptism of fire' in the General Strike and seven-month lockout through to its prominent role in the district, area and national union in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's. However Bulmer's observation that 'sociological factors are often mediated through particular individuals and groups in a quite distinctive way' (1974:75) seems particularly relevant in the case of Armthorpe and I illustrate how the political and cultural life of the village were heavily influenced by certain prominent village figures, not all of them members of the YMA. I investigate the role of individuals and institutions in developing a distinctive political tradition,

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which, although termed 'pit politics', had a direct impact on the village community as a whole.

In Chapter Five, I describe the experiences of the Armthorpe miners, their partners and their children during the twelve months of the 1984/85 dispute. Their strike experience reveals a great deal about the strategy of the government in trying to isolate the striking communities. I explain how the Armthorpe response contained several elements: a drawing on the collective resources and experience embodied in the 'Armthorpe tradition', a challenging of the more cautious 'mineworker politics' by a combination of 'pit' and class politics, and the creation of a much-strengthened community based on the needs of the striking population. I describe how when combined with increased state intervention, these factors allowed the miners' dispute to be turned into a community mobilisation. Finally, and of key importance in the shaping of the strike community, was Armthorpe's energetic pioneering of 'twinning' - direct links between the local community and the broader, class-based 'community' established in support of the Strike.

In Chapter Six I outline the work situation of miners at Markham Main (Armthorpe's pit) after the year-long dispute. The shift in the balance of power, which affected industrial relations throughout the coal industry, made its presence felt most immediately at pit level. I describe the changes in the miners' work routine that have occurred since the Strike; changes in manning levels, workforce deployment, forms of supervision, payment systems, and in what Gouldner described as the 'indulgency pattern' (1965:18). There has been a major deterioration in workplace relationships, while sackings, voluntary redundancy and the introduction of transferees from closed/rationalised pits have caused significant changes in the composition of the Markham Main workforce. The close proximity of workplace and residence, once one of the cornerstones of the

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village's close-knit community, has become less and less common, leading, initially, to an increased 'fragmentation' of the workforce.

Nevertheless, despite a severely weakened position in the face of the management offensive, the local union organisation has continued to act as a pole for collective organisation. In being able to return to an open pit, the local miners regained access, through their union, to a number of power points that still have significance in the local community and wider society. Although the turnover in the pit's workforce has been mirrored by a turnover in branch leadership, there have been other legacies of the Strike - the involvement in the union of a layer of younger, strike-hardened activists, and the emergence of both the *Tannoy* and the *Tannoy* group.^[9] I suggest these are among the factors which allowed the Armthorpe workforce to engage in pit-wide industrial action a mere six months after their return to work. I argue that this involvement in industrial action, this reaffirmation of collective access to important local power points, proved a key factor in uniting the 'new' workforce, in integrating it into the Armthorpe 'community' and the Armthorpe 'tradition'.

In Chapter Seven I examine the impact of the Strike on the miners' situation outside work. I begin by looking at the changes in the miners' family life: the organisation of domestic work and the quality of family relations. The return to rotating shiftwork and the physical tiredness inherent in most pitwork has obviously involved the disappearance of the extreme role reversal experienced in some families during the Strike. I argue that nevertheless, in a majority of families, the Strike experience has resulted in significant changes; in an increase in shared interests and activity, in the status of women, in the division of domestic labour and in attitudes towards childcare.

Coal is Our Life suggested that, for miners, the main centres of leisure activity lay outside the home, with communal sociability providing both an escape from the constraints of work and a reinforcement of the occupational

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group. The second part of the chapter is taken up with examining the impact of the Strike, and its defeat, on the leisure and friendship patterns of the Armthorpe miners and their involvement in the local community. Finally, I investigate whether their involvement in the Strike has led to any lasting changes in the political attitudes and activities of the miners.

One of the outstanding features of the 1984/85 Strike was the prominent role of the coalfield women. Chapter Eight is concerned with the post-Strike situation of the women who were 'caught up' in the 1984/85 struggle. My starting point is the hostility shown by many core activists towards the ending of the dispute, which appeared to be grounded in their anticipation of severe pressure to return to their pre-Strike roles. I describe the womens' attempts to resist these pressures and maintain a collective identity in the aftermath of the Strike.

A more individualistic channel of resistance was through the acquisition of paid employment. I investigate the substantial increase in the numbers of women involved in waged work, the *type* of jobs available to them and their involvement in trade unions. The second part of the chapter is taken up with an investigation of women's post-Strike leisure and friendship patterns. My data leads me to suggest that there has been both a quantitative and a qualitative change in womens' friendships, with the women activists tending to have more politically-based friendships with new groups of people, both inside and outside the village. A similar phenomenon was apparent in respect of gender relationships. The closer, more 'equal' friendships that were frequently cited as an important part of the womens' Strike experience were still in evidence in its aftermath.

Eighty years ago, Rosa Luxembourgh pointed to the potential of the mass strike in encouraging the spiritual growth of its participants (1955:187), and indeed this appeared to be the case among the Armthorpe women. Although they all

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revealed a radicalisation of attitudes towards unions, NCB management, media, police and Government, it soon became apparent that, even among women who were equally committed in their strike activity, there were significant differences in the *degree* and nature of radicalisation.

I suggest an explanation of this phenomenon with reference to two interrelated but distinct Strike 'communities'; the local, geographically-based one and the broader, more politically defined support community that operated at a national and even an international level. I suggest that those women who were more heavily involved in the second 'community' (that is, those involved in flying pickets, speaking tours and 'twinning') seemed to develop a clearer, more radical political perspective, including a sharper appreciation of their situation as women in a mining village. Those women who confined themselves to the more localised, traditional and 'domestic' roles of food preparation, distribution and childcare seemed to find it more difficult to develop this rounded perspective and appeared less hostile to a return to their pre-Strike roles.

One of the key functions of the traditional mining community is the socialisation of its youth into adult roles appropriate for involvement in the coal industry. In Chapter Nine I describe the situation of the village's young unemployed, on the margins of a work-based community. My starting point is, however, the situation of the unemployed youth *during* the Strike, their exclusion from workplace and 'universal market' rendered largely irrelevant in a Strike community cut off from both. According to the unemployed they were able to discover a new identity in the Strike, a new status which was not defined negatively by state or employer, but positively by their peers, according to their level of commitment to the collective struggle.

In the Strike's aftermath a more complex situation arises. The financial dependency of the young unemployed has a marked impact on their

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involvement in economic, sports and leisure activities. Prevented from equal participation in these areas of social life, there is a tendency among the unemployed to withdraw into a more home-based, privatised routine, hampered in establishing close personal relationships or planning the adult stages of their life. The 'group withdrawal' of the unemployed is paralleled by a tendency to individual withdrawal, that is atomisation. However it appeared that the unemployed's Strike involvement played a vital role in countering this tendency. The Strike had a massive impact on their relationships and, especially among the older male youth, was responsible for the creation of tightly-knit groupings of employed and unemployed.

The final part of the chapter is concerned with the political attitudes and activities of the young unemployed. I argue that while there is evidence of a basic radicalisation (an increased hostility to the police, government and 'authority'), their unemployed status seems to confront them with major obstacles to ongoing political development or activity. As with several of the women activists, the unemployed had tended to confine their Strike activities to the local, geographically-based community, refraining from a major involvement in the broader, class-based one. I suggest this contributed to their low level of political involvement in the aftermath of the Strike.

The third part of the thesis consists of a second, more abbreviated community study, focussing on the nearby village of Moorends. In Chapter Ten I outline the history of the pit, its union branch and its residential settlement. I explain in some detail the particular work and payment system that operated in the pit, and describe how this system, and the struggle against it, were reflected in the early development of the village.

From the mid-1930's to the mid-1950's, there were strong similarities between the communities which developed in Armthorpe and Moorends. I explain how

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the working class population, organised primarily around 'the union', established a series of key institutions which gave them a degree of collective control over their lives. This encouraged a high level of economic, cultural and political activity in the village, with social ties of work, leisure, family and friendship overlapping to form a close-knit community. As in Armthorpe, the Moorends brand of pit politics encouraged an involvement in the industrial and political community beyond the village.

A major divergence in the development of the villages becomes apparent with the suspension of mining in Moorends in the late 1950's. With the closure of the pit removing the basis for their union branch, the Moorends miners ceased to have a collective identity, a collective access to local power points affecting their lives. The closure of the NUM branch and the undermining of union-centred institutions led to a severe weakening of the local community. Although, as a reaction to the decline in the village's economic and social life, there was a strengthening of Moorend's radical political tradition, this appeared unable to provide the same basis for community as the day to day participation in collective struggle around the pit and union.

In Chapter Eleven I describe the experience of the miners and their families in Moorends during the Strike, contrasting it with that of the Armthorpe activists. The task of constructing a struggle-based community in a village where the central focus of collective struggle had long been removed was one that was fraught with contradictions. The decline in community had been accompanied by a decline in collective resources which acted as an obstacle to the involvement of large numbers of people. The weakness of the local political tradition not only hindered the mobilisation of miners and mining women, but acted as an obstacle to the involvement of other village inhabitants. The young unemployed, for example, who make up a significant proportion of the village population, remained very much on the margins of the Strike community. Neither the police occupation of the pit¹⁰³ nor the bussing in of strikebreakers

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provided sufficient stimulus for the mobilisation of broader community resistance as it had in Armthorpe. The weakness of the Strike community also led to a hesitancy among its members to forge direct independent links with the outside support community and, consequently, physical hardship in the village was widespread and acute. Just as the 'fundamental crisis' of 1984/85 revealed the underlying strength and potential of the Armthorpe mining community, it revealed the major decline in that of Moorends.

In Chapter Twelve, I analyse the nature of the Moorends community eighteen months after the Strike. Although the impact of 1984/85 could still be perceived in the attitudes and relationships of sections of the population, the severe decline of 'community' was increasingly apparent. The major deterioration in conditions and work relations at their respective pits had disillusioned many miners and caused a large proportion to quit the industry. The miners' work relationships were less and less important in underpinning other social relationships in the village.

The situation of Moorends women has also changed. I investigate their increased involvement in the world of paid employment, their more equal and independent access to leisure activity and a generally higher status in the village community. The establishment of closer, more sharing personal relationships with their partner have been combined with quantitative and qualitative improvements in their relationships with other men and women in the village. The role of the Strike in stimulating the 'spiritual growth' of the women is also evident, although I suggest that the nature of their strike experience caused their politicisation to be less far-reaching than that of the leading Armthorpe activists. I suggest that, although this radicalisation has stimulated an increase in political activity among a small number of Moorends women, they, like the men, have found it impossible to maintain any kind of ongoing *collective* identity in the post-Strike period.

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This tendency to 'fragmentation' among the Moorends miners and their women partners is magnified in the situation of the young unemployed in the village. Their peripheral involvement in the Moorends Strike community and their almost total lack of participation in the broader strike support network is reflected in their post-Strike position, on the extreme margins of whatever 'community' remains in the village.

In Chapter Thirteen, I summarize my thesis, using the contrasting histories of Armthorpe and Moorends in order to investigate the reality of 'community' in pit villages. I argue that 'community' is a valuable part of the lives of village inhabitants living in a society increasingly dominated by the priorities of the mass market. I suggest the presence of one or more major workplaces is important in that it provides a material basis for the local inhabitants to participate in collective organisation and activity.

The main vehicle of such organisation, the union branch, is seen as the means of access to a series of power points in the economic and political systems which dominated the lives of the village population. By acting as a focus for collective organisation and struggle, the union plays a major role in the creation and shaping of 'community' in mining areas. I suggest that this is well-illustrated in the rôle played by the union branch in both Armthorpe and Moorends - in shaping social and political relationships among the village inhabitants.

The post-1956 story of Moorends illustrates the process in reverse, with the closure of the pit and its union branch depriving the village population of access to major power points in their lives. With the removal of the union as a key focus of collective political activity, the mining village can easily become, in Henriques' words, 'an aggregate of socially isolated and culturally condemned human beings' (Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, 1969: 10). This process is clearly demonstrated in the desparate situation of the young

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Moorends unemployed, and this, on its own, would justify the 1984/85 struggle in defence of 'jobs, pits and communities'. However I argue that this is only part of the picture. As the 1984/85 Miners' Strike showed, there are other arenas of collective identity and collective struggle and therefore other types of experience that the inhabitants of mining villages can and do relate to in their persistent attempts to create and recreate 'community'.

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FOOTNOTES

1. The use of this quote in no way condones its inherent assumption that all human beings, or at least all human beings worthy of sociological study, are male.
2. The controversy which continued throughout the strike over the number of miners who were on strike makes an accurate assessment of the number of strike days lost (or won) extremely difficult. The official statistics indicate a national total of around 33 million for 1984 and 1985 (Basset, 1987;8). The Wintertons claim that the Miners Strike alone accounted for the 'loss' of 38 million (1989:1)
3. The precise origins of this 'slogan' are difficult to ascertain, but like its counterpart, 'coal not dole', it apparently had the blessing of the official NUM leadership and was in widespread usage by the mid-Summer of 1984.
4. The 1984/85 strike is often referred to simply as "The Strike" or "the Big Strike". In order to distinguish it from other strikes I will refer to it as the 1984/85 Strike or simply the 'Strike' (with a capital S)
5. The Yorkshire Area of the NCB and NUM was divided into eight then, in 1967, four panels; Barnsley, Doncaster, North and South Yorkshire. These were semi-official delegate bodies charged with the local dissemination and execution of decisions from the official Yorkshire leadership. The Wintertons (1989) describe the panel system as a tier of union government unique to Yorkshire and from the early days of its history, the Doncaster panel carved out a semi-autonomous, and often controversial role for itself (see Chapter Four). The panel comprised of 11 working pits at the time of the 1984/85 Strike. The 1986 reorganisation of the Yorkshire NCB led to the amalgamation of Doncaster into South Yorkshire and Barnsley into North Yorkshire.
6. There were 174 pits open at the end of the Strike in March 1985. By the 1st of February 1988 there remained only 103. (NCB announcement on one day strike by NACODS). For an analysis of the post-Strike closure programme see Andrew Glynn's *Colliery Results and Closures After the 1984-85 Coal Dispute* (1988)
7. In his wide-ranging review of the literature on the 1984/85 Strike, Peter Gibbon (1988) elaborates on Alan Drabble's contrast of 'pit politics' and 'mineworkers' politics'. The 'pit politics' of the Doncaster pits involves a readiness to back local wage and non-wage bargaining with 'spontaneous' and militant industrial action, and a readiness to challenge the frontier of managerial control, especially at face or pit level. 'Mineworkers' politics', especially prevalent at a national level during the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's was based on a spirit of collaboration and compromise, a respecting of managerial control over key areas of the industry.
8. This became known as 'The Ridley Report' after Nicholas Ridley M.P., leader of the study group which produced it. Its contents were first revealed in the *Economist* of May 27th, 1978.
9. *The Tannoy* was an information bulletin first produced by a group of strike activists in October 1984. Six were produced during the 1984/85 Strike. It reappeared 6 months after the national strike had ended, during a three-day Armthorpe strike over several grievances. (See Appendices 11 and 15).
10. Although there was no prospect of coal being produced, Thorne Colliery at Moorends, with its extensive coal reserves, has been subjected to extensive redevelopment work. There was therefore a small NCB development team stationed at the pit prior to the strike.

Chapter One

COMMUNITY AND THE MINING VILLAGE

'In the vocabulary of the social scientist and the social worker there must be few words used with either the frequency or looseness of 'the community'' (Dennis, 1968: 74)

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In this chapter I examine some of the problems involved in the concept 'community', suggesting that it has frequently been used ideologically to disguise rather than illuminate reality. I then investigate an alternative sociological concept, that of 'local social system', outlining both its strengths and what I consider to be its shortcomings. Finally I describe what I consider to be an essential framework for the analysis of community in a mining village.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

Norman Dennis' observation quoted above illustrates a common frustration among sociologists with the concept 'community'. Thirteen years previously G.A. Hillery (1955) had already identified 94 distinct sociological definitions of 'community', which lends a certain weight to Stuart Macintyre's more recent allegation that 'the notion of the community is used and abused in a seemingly endless variety of contexts' (1980:176). Dennis, after outlining several of these attempted definitions, suggests the most popular model of a close knit community is:

'either the rural village, or a certain image of what working class life in the centres of towns is like at present or was like at some (usually unspecified) time in the past.' (1968:79)

This model invariably involves a heavy dose of nostalgia, a searching for a simple, self-contained and harmonious segment of society with clear-cut geographical boundaries and an equally clear, shared sense of identity. So for

example, C. F. G. Masterman suggested that many people who talk of 'community' are lamenting:

'over a past that is for ever gone. They mourn the vanishing of a vigorous, jolly life, the songs of the village alehouse, existence encompassed by natural things... the secure and confident life of 'Merrie England' (1904: 61)

Not that the popularity of the idea of neighbourhood community can be explained simply by a natural human tendency to naive nostalgia. Dennis suggests several ideological/practical reasons for its careful cultivation (1968: 79). He cites Masterman in the conclusion of the above quote that:

'To others again the change [the disappearance of local communities] is charged with a menace for the future. They dread the fermenting, in the populous cities, of some new all-powerful explosive, destined one day to shatter into ruin all the desirable social order.' (1904: 61)

Colin Bell and Howard Newby agree, suggesting that, with the growth of urban industrial capitalism, an urgent search was made by the 19th century propertied classes for 'a method of renewing the relationships of 'community'... as a social sedative that would promote new forms of integration and stability.' (1976: 192)

Leonore Davidoff and her colleagues endorse this view, suggesting that this was one of the reasons for the placing of the idealised, organic community in an unspecified 'Golden Age' in a distant, half-remembered past. They point to the interlinking of two themes, the 'ideal community' and the 'ideal home' as a potent mechanism for ideological control in the face of unprecedented changes in social relationships:

'The onset of industrial capitalism increasingly undermined the previous hierarchical economic and social structure as well as the deferential personal relations associated with it. The ideology of home and community persisted as an underpinning to traditional authority in the face of this threat.' (Davidoff, L'Esperance and Newby, 1976: 150)

This is clearly illustrated in the 1887 writings of Ferdinand Tonnies who, in his book 'Community and Society', observed:

'The house constitutes the realm and, as it were, the body of kinship. Here people live together under one protecting roof ... This common fear

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and common honour ensure peaceful living and cooperation with greater certainty.' [1]

Whereas in a direct reference to the turbulent events in France, an earlier writer had suggested 'Household authority is the natural source of much national peace: its decline is one of the causes of the reckless turbulence of the people'. [2]

Davidoff and her colleagues illustrate how, beneath the attractive appearance of the idealised 'organic' communities ("hierarchical in structure, with a head, a heart and hands to maintain the life of the organism"), there was an ugly, exploitative underside which the ideology was designed to disguise or deny. In order to maintain the effectiveness of the ideology, any hint of conflicting interests, exploitation, dissatisfaction or change had to be concealed by increasingly idealised versions of home and community, all-inclusive, self-sufficient, cut off in time and space from the reality of society at large. As Davidoff and colleagues (1976) show, although these idealised stereotypes have a major sociological significance due to their impact on reality, they should not be mistaken for, or used in order to analyse, reality itself.

Ray Pahl also warns against the dangers involved in studying 'communities' as if they were self-sufficient organisms, 'cocooned from the outside world. He argues that it may be possible to isolate rural communities 'as separate systems for the purpose of academic study, but this is an increasingly unreal exercise' in 20th century urbanised society (1968: 285). This is because 'people will always have their lives shaped by a combination of national and local influences and processes', leading Pahl to endorse H.J. Gans' assertion that factors such as age, class and residential stability are more important than 'community' in explaining ways of life in an area (1968: 110). The conclusion that Pahl draws is that 'any attempt to tie particular patterns

of social relations to a specific geographical milieu is a singularly fruitless exercise' (1968: 293).

It was these problems of vagueness, imprecision and potent ideological overtones which caused Meg Stacey (1969) to suggest that 'as a concept "community" is not useful for serious sociological analysis'. It was partly her experience of carrying out a community study focussing on the impact of a recently-established aluminium factory in Banbury that led her to this conclusion (Stacey, 1960). If the concept of 'community', proved problematic in terms of describing the Banbury of the 1920's (that is, what constituted 'the community' and who belonged to it), the establishment of the factory in 1933 made it doubly so. She discovered that, as Pahl suggests, the Banbury population had 'their lives shaped by a combination of national and local influences and processes' and that as a result, many key institutions and relationships in Banbury (for example waged labour, trade unions) were, in many respects, non-local. She revealed significant differences in these 'combinations' of national and local influences, causing major contrasts in different groups of people's experience of 'neighbourhood' and 'community'. Stacey argued that to suggest the existence of a single, all-embracing community in Banbury was to ignore this reality.

She suggested, for example, that a very real division in the Banbury population was that between 'traditionalists' and the 'non-traditionalists' (the traditionalists seeing themselves as part of the pre-multinational Banbury social structure, sharing traditional customs and values, the non-traditionalists living according to other systems and values). She discovered that, among the 'traditionalists', social, religious and political attitudes were closely linked, with their industrial and commercial relationships being closely related to the traditional Banbury social system. This was not the case for the non-traditionalist 'immigrants' working at the aluminium plant.

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However, even among the traditionalists she found that the definition, quantity and quality of neighbourhood relations differed markedly from one social class to another. For the 'traditional' working class Banburian the most important source of friendship and help was often his/her immediate neighbours living in the same or adjoining streets. For the 'traditional' middle class Banburian, friendships outside the street or, indeed, outside the immediate locality, were often as important as those with close neighbours. For a member of the upper class, who happened to have a house in the Banbury area, their recognised neighbours were those of the same class that lived within a much wider radius (20-30 miles). Stacey observed that the size of the geographical area within which regular 'face to face' contacts were maintained increased dramatically with social status, or, in other words 'community' was very dependent on class. So she suggested, for example, that 'the basis of the upper-class circle is national, with the west end of London as its 'town centre', *the Times* as its local paper and certain national events, for example Ascot, as its focal points' (1960:154).

Local Social Systems.

Stacey's alternative to the concept of community, that of 'local social systems' appears much more useful in the study of a town like Banbury. She suggests that what can be considered distinctive about a locality's population is the way in which certain institutions or groups of people ('sets') interrelate with others in a particular way. By tracing the links (or absence of links) between various social, religious, political, work and other 'sets', she suggests that the nationally-based social stratification system is overlaid by a locality-based one, with the coincidence of several social relationships leading to the formation of 'local social systems'. Stacey's concept of local social systems allows for the existence of oppositional/conflictual relationships which the concept of 'community' negates. Conflict can manifest itself either within a local social system or between two or more systems. This is an important

dimension in a study of a town like Banbury, given its post-1933 lack of a 'shared' history and the complex, often conflicting interests of its population,

Stacey suggests that instead of sociologists pursuing the endless and fruitless search for the elusive 'total community', they can construct a theoretical model of a 'complete local social system' in which all institutions are present and interrelated. She insists however, that this is merely a *theoretical* tool for measuring the strengths and weaknesses of the reality. If there are institutions that are locality based *and* interrelated there may well exist a *local social system* that is worthy of sociological attention, but she warns that it is more likely that 'there will be either no local social system, or some kind of partial local social system' (1974:17). As Stacey sees it, it is the local interaction of social relations and institutions which makes a locality a sociological entity, but she insists that these social relations 'must be seen not only in combination with each other but in the two dimensions of time and space' (1974: 18). There will be an inevitable interaction between local and national social systems, and the study of a local social system must involve not only the identification of *which* institutions are present, but the *processes* of their operation, not just the discovery of which institutions are interrelated with which others, but the *processes* involved in the relationship.

Stacey, in her essay, 'The Myth of Community Studies' (1974) makes a series of tentative theoretical propositions concerning the likely presence and strength of a local social system in a locality. She suggests the importance of the following factors (among others) in the emergence of a strong local social system:

a majority of the locality's population living together in the locality over a significant period of time. The lower their geographical mobility (i.e. the larger the proportion of the population 'born and bred' in the locality), the more likely the existence of a local social system.

the members of the locality's population playing multiplex roles to each other. Multiplex role playing tends to be encouraged by geographical, social and cultural isolation.

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the presence of a large number of (preferably long lasting/stable) institutions in the locality which, by increasing the number of available statuses and roles, increases the likelihood of multiplex role playing.

the presence of one or more workplaces (preferably stable) in the locality, which not only tend to increase the number of available roles, but by encouraging the development of new institutions, can encourage a different type of social relations and consequently a different type of local social system.

the existence in the locality of real points of power in the organisations associated with the economic, political and other sub-systems that effect the life chances of the local population.

the sharing by a significant proportion of the locality's population of common group membership, expectations, aspirations, belief and cultural systems.

I feel these propositions are obviously important in providing a purchase on the strength of community in mining villages. I investigate their relevance in more detail below, showing how the nature of the mining industry encourages an isolation and stability of its residential communities, a sharing of experiences, culture and aspirations in the village populations.

However although Stacey's attempt to bring a scientific rigour to the study of 'community' marks an important advance, I consider it important to identify some problems associated with her concept of 'local social systems'. I feel that one of reasons she emphasises the need to incorporate the dimensions of time and space is that the concept of local social systems tends to 'lock' them out. Although an identification of multiplex roles and competing social systems can add to our understanding of a residential area (especially a large town like Banbury), there is a danger that society can be presented as a static entity.

In order to avoid the danger of an over-mechanical approach, I feel it is necessary to investigate the interaction of social relationships at various levels and discuss 'community' in terms of a living collectivity which has to be continually built and rebuilt by those involved. By emphasizing the importance of collective and political activity in the construction of 'community', I feel

that Stacey's theory can be extended and enhanced. For example, I will demonstrate in this thesis how heightened political activity can provide the impetus for the creation, or destruction, of the multiplex relationships which Stacey considers to be essential in 'strong local social systems'.

An emphasis on the importance of collective political activity raises a further problem. A theory which attempts to explain how community is located in broader society should, of necessity, provide an account of the relationship between 'community' and the state. I would suggest that the absence of a theory of the state constitutes a weakness, not only in Stacey's, but indeed most other sociological accounts of 'community'. Obviously I cannot develop a comprehensive theory of this relationship, but in the course of the thesis I will attempt to illustrate the important role that the state can play in the definition of community.

Although I will use the term 'community' rather than 'local social system' I will incorporate many of Stacey's insights in my analysis and will employ the concept of 'community' in a rigorous, but dynamic sense. So, for example I will demonstrate that, in certain historical periods, a community can be broad, inclusive and intense, while at others it can be weakened, restricted and more exclusive. Having stressed this conditional aspect in my use of the term, I will outline some of the key factors which tend to shape 'community' in pit villages.

The Geographical Factor

The geographical factor appears to me to be important in explaining the sociological shape of mining settlements (more so than in most other occupationally-based localities). The fact that such a large proportion of the mining workforce still live in villages or small towns illustrates that coalmining is exceptional in the shape of its occupational settlements.

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In virtually all other occupations, groups of people 'settle' due to the area's suitability for above-ground activity of one sort or another (industrial, agricultural, commercial or domestic). In an extractive industry like coalmining all this is of secondary importance, the prime concern being the ease (and cost) of access to various geological strata. Working seams for limited periods in small units and using only the most basic of tools, until relatively recently coalmining did not act as a 'magnet' for other industries and services as was the case with other occupations.^[3] It was only with the development of deep-mining technology that the life of pits became extended and longer-term, residential settlements could be built. Yet often these were still very small and built in thinly-inhabited, remote areas. The geological needs of mining only rarely coincided with the geographical needs of other major industries and therefore rarely encouraged joint industrial development in the immediate area.

Occupational Isolation

The frequent geographic isolation of the deep coalmines caused their owners to play a significant role in the construction of housing close to their pits. In order to ensure regular production in their pits they needed to attract and hold at least a core of strong, skillful and reliable workers. The fact that many of the mining villages had little or no history of previous development - that is, they were often built 'from scratch' - and that they were constructed quickly on a purely functional basis by the coal companies, explains a great deal about their size, shape and character. Bill Williamson (1982) describes the pervasively dominant role of the Throckley Coal Company in shaping the spatial/physical environment of his grandparents' village in Northumberland. He describes Throckley as a 'constructed community' - constructed on the one hand out of the entrepreneurial impulses of the colliery owners and, on the other, out of the responses of the mineworkers and the families who had to live there.

Community and the Mining Village.

Pit villages were built to house the essential workforce of the mine and usually only the barest, if any, extra facilities were provided by the company. Housing, often scarce, also tended to be very basic and was, of course, tied to the job. This meant that, as well as miners experiencing a shared geographical isolation, they frequently shared an occupational and a social/class isolation too. This common form of housing tenure helps explain why, despite the inevitable turnover of labour at the pit (due to high rates of sickness, injury and death), mining settlements remained, at least until very recently, exceptionally occupationally homogeneous. [4]

Occupational Cohesion

The labour intensive nature of coalmining meant that the sinking of a large pit had a major impact on the labour market in an area. Men would travel daily from neighbouring villages, or stay in local lodgings, until they could find a house. Frequently, miners would not merely live next door to one another, but in the same house! (A willingness to accept single miners as lodgers was a condition of pit house tenancy in some villages - Moore, 1974:67). This, of course, was the kind of occupational homogeneity that Stacey and others suggest is important in providing a firm basis for community construction.

There is, of course, a possibility of overstating the occupational cohesiveness in mining settlements. The *Coal is Our Life* statement that 'to all intents and purposes the inhabitants of Ashton are all of the working class' (1969:37) provides an example. Dennis Warwick suggests that this 'tendency to abstracted judgement' gains:

'nothing but approbrium from those inhabitants of Featherstone and other mining towns who recognise that there always have been, in their terms at least, groups with very different life chances. School teachers, doctors, ministers of religion, farmers, shopkeepers, proprietors of small businesses, as well as pit officials may not have been numerous but were sufficiently visible' (1984:7)

Nevertheless there is the opposite danger of *underestimating* the impact of the employment of a large proportion of the economically active population in a single industry. In the *Coal is Our Life* study the authors attempted to show how, in such an industrial community, the patterns of organisation and conflict generated in the work situation formed a continuous background to other social relations. Similarly, George Evans suggests that:

to understand the basic structure of social relations in a working community we have first and foremost to study the work itself in some detail...for a man's [sic] attitude to his fellows grows, at least in part, out of the terms and conditions under which he works.

(Evans, 1976)

This observation would be an important one in any locality where, due to the common occupation/workplace of many of the population, there was a widespread sharing of history, life chances and aspirations. It is especially true in the case of deep coal mining, where the underground work situation is so different from that which confronts most other workers. Bill Williamson suggests for example that 'pit work shapes the men who have to do it. It builds a self respect and social status around such values as toughness, endurance and underground skills' (1982: 78). The work situation is unnatural, harsh and unhealthy, not to mention dangerous. ^[5] In order to stay alive, uninjured and earn 'good money' on piece or bonus rates, maximum cooperation, a collective 'bonding', is called for underground. Martin Bulmer suggests:

The continual presence of physical danger in mining leads both to a high level of involvement in the work, and a strong sense by the individual of his responsibility for, and dependence on, his workmates. Miners attach great importance to working as members of established groups of known and tried companions.

(Bulmer, 1978: 25)

In many coalfields there is a whole underground culture devoted to discouraging what Pahl (1968) describes as 'level consciousness' between workers. ^[6] The widespread underground dispersal of miners makes management communication with them difficult and has often encouraged a tradition of independent job control, with the men resenting and resisting close supervision. Nevertheless the constantly changing underground work situation and

productivity-based payment system encourages recurrent conflict between mineworkers and supervision which again tends to strengthen group solidarity among the miners.

The importance of underground teamwork and solidarity in producing occupational cohesion manifests itself in the phenomenon observed in *Coal is Our Life* 'for men to stick together through many different contracts for years on end, sometimes for a score of years and even a working lifetime' (1969:144). For Norman Dennis and his colleagues the team of colliers underground was the 'hub of the social structure of coalmining', the social relationships engendered at work being reflected in the above-ground community. In this way, the relations of production fashioned a distinctive pattern of social relationships both in mining families and in the broader village population. Close-knit social groups and networks acted as effective agents of social control, establishing strong norms and codes of behaviour - including clearly distinct and often segregated gender roles.

Social Life and Leisure Activities

One area into which underground relationships often 'spilled over' was that of the village's social and leisure activities. In *Coal is Our Life*, Dennis and his colleagues carefully outline the predominantly male character of most of Ashton's social life, centred around the male 'preserves' of the pit, union meetings, club, pub and bookies office. The authors suggest that the nature of the miners' work experience played a major role in determining the characteristics of the most popular leisure pursuits, which they describe as being vigorous, predominantly frivolous and given the insecurity of the miner, aimed at gaining immediate satisfaction, 'without giving thought for the morrow'. The most common leisure pursuits centred around drinking, sport (especially Rugby League) and gambling, all of which provided a focus for

socialisation with workmates and none of which demanded an initially high expenditure, accumulated savings or a consistently high income.

Returning to the issue of segregated gender roles, Bulmer's observation that:

'the occupational group is the focus of leisure activity to such an extent that a strong occupational community outside of work is established' (1975:86)

has obvious implications in terms of the exclusion of women from leisure activities. Dennis and his colleagues confirmed this:

'Leisure facilities for adults in Ashton cater very definitely for males, so that even if the wife escapes her household duties she has difficulty in finding opportunities for leisure on the same scale as her husband.' (1969:202)

Only rarely in collective settings, usually at Saturday night concerts, dances or visits to the cinema did Ashton men and women participate together on a more equal footing in leisure activity. Otherwise, in this area, as in others, *Coal is Our Life* suggested that men and women tended to live 'separate and in a sense, secret lives'.

Inter-Generational Cohesion

Other important developments accompanied the establishment of the stable, isolated mining settlements. Family traditions of working in the mines were more firmly established, often with several generations of males (and sometimes females) working together in the same pit. The youth, especially the males, were socialised into sharing this generational/familial tradition with suitable attitudes being encouraged and 'pit talk' being a common male obsession both inside and outside the home. In *Charity Main*, an eye-witness account written at the time of nationalisation, Mark Benney suggests:

'the double isolation of craft and geography had turned these people in upon themselves, so that they took their standards from their forbears instead of from the strangers in the city.' (1978:122)

Young girls and women would be socialised into distinct but closely interrelated roles in the sphere of social reproduction. With alternative career and educational opportunities being severely limited due to a variety of factors, an individual 'escape' from coalmining involved a major effort of will, not to mention skill and good luck.

Family and Kinship

The overlaying of work and non-work relationships was further strengthened over time by the growth of local family and kinship networks which were often seen as an important defence against insecurity, misfortune and poverty. Dennis and colleagues (1969), Williams (1981) and Williamson (1982) all draw attention to the major role played by mining women in building and maintaining these networks. One explanation for this phenomenon was that women living in the traditional mining villages often found themselves in an even more contradictory position than their women contemporaries elsewhere. In a village where extraction of coal was the predominant economic activity, the means and relations of coal production were the central fact of life for the people of the locality. An adult woman usually found herself charged with a series of responsibilities in the maintenance and reproduction of a part of the pit's labour force, and yet was herself heavily dependent on a male wage earner, working in an industry which 'uses up men and discards them to an exceptional extent'.^[7]

As a 'miners wife' she was forced to consider herself not as an individual, but as part of a wider family unit (itself part of a much wider system of production/reproduction). The position assigned to women in the coal industry's division of labour bore a strong resemblance to that of the peripheral home worker in modern industry, atomised and totally dependent for income on a lowly subcontractor. With virtually no financial or legal security independent of her husband/sons,^[8] the strength of the family became all

important. Young and Willmott's observations on kinship patterns in East London seem very relevant in describing the strength of the extended family in traditional mining communities:

'the wife had to cling to the family into which she was born, and in particular to her mother, as the only other means of assuring herself against isolation.....The extended family was her trade union, organised in the main by women and for women, its solidarity her protection against being alone' (1957)

Williamson provides an illustration of this in describing the interlinking female roles in the Brown family of the 1930's.^[9] Dennis and his colleagues also emphasize the major role of women in maintaining the family networks in Ashton. As evidence of this, they point to both the strong emotional bonding between adult male mineworkers and their mothers, and to examples of sex solidarity between daughters and mothers (the most memorable being a mother's account of her four daughters' involvement in 'dad-bashing' (1969: 230).

Women and Mining Communities

Coal is Our Life suggests a further contradiction in the traditional position of women in pit villages. On the one hand, via the family, they were expected to play a major part in reproducing a common set of social relations and attitudes, necessary for the reinforcement of the social bonds needed in the underground work situation. On the other hand, these social bonds had become exclusively male. Although the exclusion of women from British coalmines, begun in the reform legislation of 1842, had taken 130 years to complete,^[10] certain Yorkshire coalowners^[11] had been prominent in later reform agitation and women had been excluded from virtually all areas of pit work eighty years before the Featherstone research was conducted (John, 1984: 74).

Dennis and his colleagues suggested this exclusion was a key factor in relegating coalfield women to a position of a subordinate gender group in the local social system. With the immediate locality offering few alternative career or job opportunities for women, they were largely separated from the concerns of

public life and confined to more stereotyped gender roles in the privatised domestic arena, the setting for Leonore Davidoff's 'Domestic Idyll' (1976:150). Indeed, this confinement appears to have been one of the aims of Lord Ashley and the other movers of the 1842 Mines and Collieries Act. As Angela John suggests, 'At a time when Bronterre O'Brien was proclaiming that an entire transformation of society was essential, it was felt important to reaffirm the value of familial control' (1984:43).

Their exclusion from the very occupation on which the occupational 'community' was based, when coupled with the more general oppression of women, forced the working class coalfield women into a pervasively subordinate position. According to Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter (1969), the majority of the women in Ashton had to relate to the wider community not in their own right but through the family which shared with other families 'a common fate determined by virtue of their similar relationship through a wage earning husband to the coal industry'. They observed that, although the Ashton women often had an informal network of contact with relatives and neighbours, any social contact and relationships were expected to take second place to the efficient provision of domestic service to their husband and family. Ronald Frankenberg summed up their position by suggesting 'the woman pays for her dependence with subordination' (1976:34).

Frankenberg, however, also alleges that the authors of *Coal is Our Life* showed a lack of consistency in analysing the differing male and female roles in relation to the coal industry. He suggests that while 'the relations of production at work are lovingly and loathingly described, the relations of production in the home and community are ignored with equal determination.' As a consequence:

'The Yorkshire Miner of 1956 is... described as seeing in women only the object and the enemy - a passive object for the support of whom he is driven to unpleasant underground work. But the authors themselves see

her in the same way: they accept their own miners' eye view.'
(Frankenberg, 1976: 37-8)

Although I feel that Frankenberg is right to criticize the *Coal is Our Life* authors for an inadequate investigation of the women's experience of 'community', I feel he is in danger of overemphasizing the 'separateness' of the two 'worlds'.

An equally serious weakness in the 1956 Featherstone study is the failure to analyse the relationship between the 'worlds' of men and women. I would argue that it is important to see the oppressive gender roles traditionally experienced by women in mining communities within the framework of the overall exploitation of both working class women and men. In 'normal' (non-striking) times, women's confinement to the home, or poorly-paid employment outside the village, tends to disguise their collective relationship to the coal industry. However the prominent position of women in the 1926 and 1984 strike communities underlines the danger of seeing them as inhabiting a 'separate world' from the men. A study of 'community' in a pit village should attempt to indicate how the oppression of women and the exploitation of miners are interrelated in a dynamic way. In this thesis, I will demonstrate how, through their participation in collective political struggle against 'shared' exploitation, coalfield women also challenged their oppression and transformed their status in the village community.

It was the relationship between exploitation and oppression that provided the major focus for Claire Williams (1981) in her study of '*Open Cut*', an open-cast coalmining town in Queensland, Australia. In it she describes a local social system with many similarities to that of the 1956 Ashton; segregated conjugal roles, a dominant male-oriented culture and female exclusion from much of the township's public life. She seeks an explanation in the much-resented, deskilled and dehumanising work practises enforced by the American-

based, trans-national mining corporation which owns the mines and their residential settlement. So she suggests,

'Most sociological accounts of the relationship of paid production to the family have discussed the question in a somewhat piecemeal fashion.....in order to research these two areas simultaneously, sociologists need to transcend conceptually the separation of paid production from the private sphere of the family.' (Williams, 1981: 171)

Having argued that the marriage relationships found in Open Cut are 'rigidly circumscribed by the nature and types of relationships engendered in paid production', she suggests that in all aspects of the men's lives; work, leisure and the family, the strong masculine sub-culture provides a basis for the open-cast miners to bolster an otherwise severely damaged self respect.

This attempt to relate oppressive gender roles to the overall exploitation of both men and women has obvious implications for the study of British mining communities during and after the 1984/85 Strike. The situation of the miners *during* the Strike, when they found themselves 'free' from the alienations of their work routine, stands in stark contrast to their post-Strike situation where the type of work practises described by Williams are reported as having transformed their working lives. My thesis will therefore address the issue of gender relationships in the pit village: the women's position in the local community before, during and after the 1984/85 Strike.

Collective Struggle and Shared History

Accompanying the inter-generational build up of familial solidarity was the wider sense of a shared past, of a communal history among people whose parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents had lived, worked and struggled alongside one another. Clashes between the miners' union, the coal-owners and the state provided the main landmarks in this history. Moore describes the calling out of troops in 1983 by the Yorkshire pit owners which:

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'led to the shooting of eighteen men in Featherstone (two fatally). Actions such as these pass into legends which keep active a tradition of bitterness'. (Moore, 1974: 16)

The sense of shared history was not confined simply to a frequent repetition of well-known stories from the past. Responding to the harshness, danger and insecurity inherent in their work situation, and to the cultural poverty of the settlements constructed on behalf of the owners, successive generations of miners struggled to increase their control of their environment and life chances. In *Charity Main* :

'Nothing had come easily to this village. When it had felt a need, it had tried to supply it for itself, and if anyone opposed the effort, the village had fought. Every institution in the village, with the exception of the cinema, the post office and the church, the people had built themselves, or struggled for through their union.' (Benney, 1978: 122)

The nature of the coalmining industry, its power systems and employment relationships encourages its workforce to organize collectively in order to exert an influence in the underground work situation. This work situation, where on-the-spot agreements have to be made in order to cover constantly changing conditions, tends to encourage recurrent conflict between mineworkers and supervision. The miners are forced to 'form their own organisation ... and fight over the issues that stare them in the face' (Butt, 1971). The primary defence against the economic and human deprivations imposed by the coalowners was union organisation.

The drive for control of key power points around the point of production also tended to be reproduced in the residential settlement above ground. In mining there is a high premium placed on life outside the harsh and unpleasant underground environment. Key to a secure and rewarding existence was the construction of institutions, independent of the coal-owners, which could act as power points in the economic, political and cultural lives of the local population. Only through collective organisation and activity were the miners able to establish co-operatives, sick and insurance clubs, welfare institutes

and working men's/social clubs. In this sense, the shared struggles and achievements of past generations became an essential part of the community structure. They formed a framework for the collective life experience and struggles of later generations of miners and their families. So, speaking of Throckley's experience of the 1926 General Strike and seven-month lockout, Williamson observes:

'For the miners as a whole [the lockout] helped to confirm their self-definition as a maligned, exploited group. And that is an element of their collective biography which they have never forgotten. All the institutions which the miners had built up - the union, the co-operative store, the social clubs, the Labour Party and, in some ways more importantly, the networks of neighbourly help - were mobilised to conflict. So, too, were the resources of families themselves.' (1982: 168)

The 1926 experience of Throckley, which indicates clearly the importance of collective political struggle in the definition of community, was shared by other mining communities. The hardship and violence associated with state intervention did not merely etch itself onto the collective memory of village populations. It stimulated their involvement in collective political activity aimed at the strengthening and reshaping of their communities. This political activity manifested itself in a variety of institutions, but the chief initiator was the union branch.

The Union Branch and Community

I have drawn attention to several factors which would tend to encourage a similarity in pit village communities. However, as Royden Harrison points out:

'while mining communities have much in common, there were none the less, subtle but powerful differences of structure, experience and attitude, which were associated with very different political and industrial behaviour' (Harrison, 1978)

One of the key factors in explaining these differences in political behaviour and consequently in community, is the major role of the union branch in shaping village life. If work relations provide a basis for other relations in the

village, 'the union', as the institution which shapes these work relations, also becomes a primary agent in the construction of a community in the village.

The importance of the local union branch in the shaping of the various county unions has frequently been remarked on. Page Arnot suggests:

'The miners' lodge, usually based on a single pit, was the unit of democratic trade union activity ... Out of the lodges grew the unions, in some cases local unions of a few hundred miners, in other cases district unions, or ... county unions. (1949:46)

But the nature of the local community was also heavily influenced by the shape of the local union organisation. For example, in pits where the men adopted the principle of 'an equitable distribution of reward for equal and cooperative effort' the miners developed a 'highly democratic, egalitarian form of underground organization' (Drabble, 1987; 10). This facilitated their involvement in collective struggle for control of power points in the systems effecting their health and safety, working conditions and financial remuneration.

But the union did not merely encourage the men's industrial/political activity underground. Collective access also had to be won to power points which could allow miners more control over their above-ground lives. The union provided the means by which the economic and social relations fostered by the underground situation could be carried over into the economic, political and cultural relationships of the village. As well as playing a major direct role, the union branch tended to act as a matrix for a series of other key village institutions; branches of political parties, consumer co-operatives, insurance societies, health clinics, welfare institutes, social and sports clubs. The structure of these institutions also tended to reflect their origins, with officials, constitutions and 'attitudes' often being 'borrowed' from the union branch.

The situation where a highly democratic, active union branch 'gives birth' to a series of democratically-controlled, accountable institutions,

ensures a key role for the union as an initiator of political activity in the village. This underwrites the importance of looking at the union as a political form of organisation, through which the population of the village can collectively organise and act together. Although the union's original concern might be the improvement of conditions of its male waged members, the symbiotic relationship between union and community can cause its constitutional boundaries to become permeable. Collective struggle initiated by the union can involve not only miners, but a variety of other groups in the village, who then begin to define their lives in terms of union-centred political activity. This means that, under certain conditions, and especially in key moments of crisis and change, the nature of the village community can be redefined.

Although as I will demonstrate in later chapters, this close bonding of union and local community has sometimes encouraged parochial or federal divisions in the national union, it is also a key source of the exceptional resilience shown by miners' union in the face of major attacks by employers or state. This resilience has tended to guarantee the union (and its communities) not only special attention from the state, but a prominent position in the broader labour movement.

Local and Class Communities

The problems of defining what constitutes a community have already been referred to. For some sociologists, a community *must* refer to a very small geographical area, while for others, a community can be as large as the nation state. Pahl's observation that people have their lives shaped 'by a combination of national and local influences and processes' (1968:287) allows us a clearer purchase on the problem. The overlaying of locality-based social relationships in a local community does not negate the possibility of important social relationships operating at other (national or international) levels.

I have argued, in relation to the coalmining industry, that the collective conflict at the point of production tends to be reflected in political struggles in the above-ground residential settlement. But the struggle for control at the point of production cannot be considered as confined inside purely *local* boundaries. As Richard Hyman suggests:

'such controls operate in the context of a number of higher levels of decision-making: first, the detailed terms of employment; second, the structure and policies of labour force management; third, such other areas of managerial decision as investment programmes, product policy, the organisation and location of production, level of activity, financial arrangements, division of labour and design of jobs; fourth, the character and orientation of ownership and authority in industry; finally, the basic structure and dynamics of society as a whole.'

(1975: xxi)

It follows that the degree of control achievable at the lower level is limited by the higher level structure and policies. Workers organised collectively on a purely local basis may be able to resist and partially contain the unequal power relations they experience at the point of production, but they cannot overturn them.

Conversely any attempt by workers to establish greater control even on a local level, can be seen as constituting a challenge to those in a position of power and privilege. This means that serious attempts to win more democratic control of industry and society tend to involve workers in collective organisation and struggle at a variety of levels; local, regional, national and indeed international. In other words effective struggle at a local level can demand an identification with a wider, class-based community.

I have argued that the nature of the coal industry and its residential settlements - encouraging interdependency/solidarity at work, the overlapping of work and leisure relationships, strong family and kinship networks - make it 'natural' for the miner to identify himself as part of the *local* community. A key component of the local (union-centred) community is the shared sense of class, which involves a recognition of the miners' subordination and relative

lack of power in relation to the coalowners and the state. It is this experience of class relations which allows the intensely local boundaries of the miner's pit/union branch-centred community to become permeable. The village miner's sense of local community can be overlaid by a recognition of common cause with non-local miners, with other working men and indeed with the working class as a whole.

But this 'shift' in consciousness is neither a simple nor an automatic one. As Williamson points out:

'The kind of recognition which Karl Marx described - classes 'in themselves' has a firm base in the social encounters of everyday life. But the recognition implied by 'social classes for themselves' is of a totally different order. Indeed much militates against it. Dominant ideologies blurring distinctions between capitalists and labourers are only part of the problem. Social divisions among working class people themselves are equally important....' (1982:8)

I have argued the importance of seeing the union branch as a political form of organisation that can allow the local population to organise and act collectively. However in relation to its ability to counteract 'dominant ideologies' or overcome 'social divisions among working class people' I would suggest two factors are important.

First, in order to win its members to a collective identification with the wider class community, the union has to see itself as part of the class-oriented political tradition. Almost inevitably, this involves a key role for overtly political organisations, in terms of their supplying an ideology, human and material resources. But I will demonstrate how, due to the role of the union in underpinning local community, this political intervention often tends to be mediated through the local branch. This results in a situation where, as part of the process of community formation, a distinct local political tradition can also be established.

My thesis will demonstrate how prominent individuals can often play a key role in shaping these local traditions. Of equal importance were the major

political events, such as the lockouts of 1921 or 1926, which were key moments in the village histories when members of the local population were forced to redefine their politics in relation to the collective resistance to state power. Even these national landmarks had differing impacts on different villages and areas. In some they reinforced tendencies towards quiescence and moderation. In others they encouraged a greater willingness among the population to engage in collective struggle.

The incorporation of collective struggle as a part of the local political tradition constitutes the other key factor which facilitates the overlaying of local and broader class communities. The demands of the collective struggle encourage workers to relate to each other on a class, rather than a sectional basis. In the same way as heightened collective struggle can encourage the inclusion of local groups of non-miners in the union-centred community, it can also encourage the expansion of community to other non-local levels. In the course of struggle, social divisions that appear significant in 'normal times' can tend to diminish. The day-to-day 'community of interest' with other local miners can become overlaid by a perception of a 'community of interest' with other working class people involved in the same or related conflicts.

There are institutions that see their main purpose as the linking of the two communities on a day to day basis; class-based political parties and related organisations, such as the 'little Moscows' of the 1920's and 1930's, *Friends of the Soviet Union* branches (Macintyre, 1980: 185). As it is in the course of collective struggle that the identification and links with the class community tend to be created or strengthened, the union, as the main organiser of this collective struggle, can again play a vital role. The degree of identification with, and integration into, the broader class community is often of major importance in shaping the local community, so while my thesis is primarily concerned with the factors and processes that contribute to the

development of *local* community, I have also had cause to investigate the relationship between the 'local' and the broader class-based 'communities'.

In this chapter I have suggested that, while the sinking of the pit is essential in that it provides the material basis for the establishment of an occupational community, it is the union that is the key focus of collective activity among the local population as they attempt to assert control over their lives. As I have argued that the history of the local village settlements are intimately tied up with the development of the miners' union, this union history inevitably forms part of a rounded community study. In Chapter Two I describe the origins and development of the mineworkers' union, the major struggles it engaged in, and their impact on the mining communities.

FOOTNOTES.

1. Tonnies, F. (1957) *Community and Society*, Harper Torch, New York (1st edition 1887)
2. A mother and mistress of A Family (1841) *Home Discipline or Thoughts on the Origin and Exercise of Domestic Authority*. Pg 106.
3. Raphael Samuel describes the scale of quarrying/coalmining in the mid-19th century as 'extraordinarily uneven' with relatively few 'large' pits (100-plus miners) and many hundreds of smaller ones. (1977:17)
4. The N.C.B. remained the major landlord in most pit villages until the late 1970's when it began to sell off its housing stock to its tenants or the local councils. The process of divesting itself of non-work functions was a gradual one, so that the NCB was still a landlord in some villages at the time of the 1984/85 Strike (although not in Armthorpe).
5. For a 'miner's eye view' of the work situation, see Douglas & Krieger (1983).
6. In the Doncaster area, part of this culture is an incisive form of humour, known as 'pillocking', whereby the 'victim' is made fun of, and if he rises to the bait, opens himself up to even more ridicule.
7. This is a quote from *the Lancet* as recently as 1974, and is contained in the Labour Research Departments pamphlet, *The Hazards of Coal Mining* (LRD, 1989:7)
8. For example, the tenancy of a pit-owned house would usually be passed from the (male) miner/head of the household to his son, with female members of the family having no right of tenure.
9. Gathering information from his mother and aunts, Williamson paints a sensitive, detailed picture of women's domestic and other roles. (1982:Ch 8)
10. The *Mines and Quarries Act 1842* resulted from the 1840 Royal Commission into Children's employment. The commissioners were primarily concerned with the underground employment of children (average age, nine), but were so disturbed by the implications of women's employment, they decided to recommend their exclusion in order to protect the state from the growth of 'an ignorant, depraved and dangerous population' (John, 1984b:9) After several years of widespread 'evasion', women continued to work on the pit top, mainly on the screens and haulage. Having survived two major and several minor attempts to exclude them from this pit top work, their numbers decreased rapidly in the 1950's and 1960's. The last two 'pit brow lasses' were made redundant on 1st July 1972 from the Lowca pit in Whitehaven, Cumbria.
11. The first major attempt to exclude women from pit top work was initiated in 1886 by John Wilson, a Methodist and a member of parliament for Houghton, Durham, a non-female-employing area. The second major attack was launched in 1911, when Sir Arthur Markham, Liberal MP for Mansfield, attempted to prohibit the future recruitment of female labour. As the head of the Stavely Iron and Coal Company, Markham was the initiator of many of the new mines in South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, including the pit at Armthorpe (hence its name - Markham Main). A prominent coalowner in a non-female-employing area, he was concerned with the growth of female labour in other fields during a period of intense agitation for increased minimum (male) wage rates. Markham's attempt was widely opposed by, among others, the women themselves, female-employing coalowners, Lancashire mining and other trade union organisations, and the growing women's suffrage campaigns.

Chapter Two

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND to the NATIONAL STRIKE.

Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that much of the 'community' in pit villages resulted from collective mobilisation to secure control of certain *locality-based* power points. These attempts were frequently interwoven with similar struggles at other levels, implying an interaction with the broader community of mineworkers, and indeed, the class-wide community. The chief vehicle for this crucial interaction was the miners' union. So although it may appear strange, I feel the best way to approach the history of a mining community is through the history of its union.

Not surprisingly, given the social and economic conditions that prevailed in the industry, the history of trade unionism in coalmining is a long one. The importance of investigating the origins of the union lies in the fact that the manner and the terms under which it was established have had a continuing resonance throughout this history. Five themes are apparent.

First the establishment of the union was marked by bitter and protracted struggle, which often involved bloody clashes between the authorities and mineworkers. Although other union histories contain similar conflicts, in none of them did the clashes occur with such persistent regularity.

Secondly, the struggle for the union was fought out in widely-scattered towns and villages throughout the country. These were frequently constructed and controlled by coalowners, so that engagement in union activity

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automatically involved a challenge to landlord, magistrate, political and religious establishments.

Thirdly there is the ambivalent situation of women in relation to the union. Their early involvement in local union organisation has hardly been charted.¹² But the foundation of the national union coincided with a period when the church and state's ideological definition of women, as people with primarily domestic responsibilities, was underwritten by their legal exclusion from the pit. Although denied access to the underground work situation, the setting for much union organisation and activity, the symbiotic relationship between the union and local communities meant that women still tended to play a prominent role in the union's major struggles.

Fourthly, although villages in which the union had its roots might be small and relatively isolated, they were nevertheless part of a national and world economy. The pivotal position of the coal industry in this economy and the size of its workforce ensured that, even before nationalisation, it was always the object of state concern and intervention.

Fifthly, and related, this political dimension ensured a prominent position for the miners' union in the industrial and political wings of the labour movement. As a result, the offensive and defensive landmarks in the history of mining trade unionism tend to reflect periods of strength and weakness in the wider working class community.

Origins of the Miners' Union (1842-1893)

The first national mineworkers' union, 'the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland' emerged, alongside several others, in the course of the 1842 general strike, which paralysed much of British industry throughout the Summer months of that year. Although essentially a defensive strike provoked by widespread cuts in already appallingly low wages, the industrial

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revolt was closely linked to the wave of revolutionary political agitation in support of the *People's Charter*. Ray Challinor and Brian Ripley, in their study of the Miners Association, suggest:

'for the first time, many thousands of workers acted together, creating unity, cohesion and a feeling of common interest that provided a basis for building working class organisations.' (1968:24)

The Midlands miners were the first to strike in June 1842, against a ten percent wage reduction. They were soon joined by Midlands workers from other trades, then by miners and other workers in Lancashire, Yorkshire, the North East and Scotland. As the strike entered its third month virtually all the industrial areas of Britain, with the exception of London, were involved in industrial conflict. In the northern textile towns the strike became known as the Plug Plot Riots, as crowds of strikers went from factory to factory, using force where necessary to extend the strike, pulling the plugs from factory boilers, extinguishing the fires and stopping the engines.

The North Staffordshire and Black Country miners were among the most obdurate in resisting wage cuts. Among their demands were an eight-hour day, four shillings a day wages, and an end to both the truck system and 'buildas'.^[2] Thomson Cooper, a Wolverhampton surgeon, told *The Midland Mining Commission*:

'Many miners were reduced to the greatest distress and almost to actual starvation. I could not but admire the staunchness with which they endured privations, which were very great indeed ... The women particularly, were exceedingly inveterate in urging their husbands to hold out, saying they would rather live on potatoes and salt than give in. I have known the country for some years, but never saw the people in so distressed a state as they are now in. During the strike they sold everything they could turn into money, and I could take you to dozens of families who are lying on the floor, having no bedstead' (quoted in Challinor and Ripley, 1968:26)

According to the *Newcastle Journal* it was 'the agitation of Chartism' which 'brought to the surface of society a great deal of the scum that usually putrefies in obscurity below'. The Chartists provided support and much leadership to the strike, which was, in turn, instrumental in causing a major

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shift in their attitudes towards trade unions. As the strike wore on, begging, poaching and the stripping of vegetable fields became common. The *Manchester Guardian* observed, 'the colliers seem to be abed the greater part of the day and bestir themselves at night to a very bad purpose' (Challinor, Ripley, 1968:37). Intent on starving the strikers into submission, the government decided on a policy of 'energetic repression' and ordered infantry, cavalry and artillery into key, strike-bound districts. Over a thousand strikers were arrested and 749 imprisoned. One was killed and many wounded in Burslem as their demonstration was fired on. The Potteries strikers took retribution on the property of local coalowners, clergy and magistrates, and this led to even greater government repression. The struggle demanded a collective involvement and shaped the collective identity of the miners. As Challinor and Ripley suggest:

'the government retaliatory actions had a profound effect on the working class, and not entirely in the way the government had anticipated. It helped to make workers discard their narrow horizons; a bond of suffering united them with their brothers [sic] in other parts of the country. Thus, the repression helped to develop a feeling of class consciousness. This was especially true among the miners. They bore the brunt of the strike itself and of the subsequent jail sentences. As a result, when miners heard of their fellow miners, from other coalfields, being arrested and imprisoned, they did not regard it as a matter of no concern to themselves. They held protest meetings, collected money for the victims, and - crucially important for the formation of the Miners Association - began to think of themselves as a separate and distinct entity in society.' (1968:37)

The Miners Association, founded on 1st August 1842 in Halifax, Yorkshire, grew to national proportions by August 1843. Page Arnot describes this growth:

'It was based on miners' county unions that had sprung up in Durham, Northumberland, Lancashire and Yorkshire and also in Staffordshire and Scotland. Under the leadership of Martin Jude (1805-60) the Association carried on a wide propaganda in the principal coal-fields. Its membership grew rapidly: at its national conference held in Glasgow on March 25, 1844, upwards of seventy thousand miners were represented.' (1949:41)

It was not just the appalling wage rates that encouraged the growth of trade union organisation among miners in this period. Although there were

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regional variations, many miners in the early part of the 19th century had to endure not only truck and buildas, but also the butty system and 'working under bond' to a master.^[23] In 1843 the Durham-Northumberland Association spent £1,000 in engaging a prominent Chartist lawyer, William Roberts to champion the cases of union men suffering abuse under these semi-feudal practises. The Miners' Association's growing strength enabled it, in 1844, to sustain major two-month strikes in Lancashire and Yorkshire as well as a five-month strike in the massive Durham and Northumberland coalfields. The latter, aimed at the abolition of the yearly Bond, paralysed industrial life in the two counties. Richard Fynes, the coalfield historian, explained:

'the men seemed to have made up their minds to 'conquer or die' in the struggle, and they were supported in this resolution by their wives, who were equally determined.' (1873:70)

The north-eastern coalowners who had been fixing output, prices and wages at annual meetings since 1771, resolved to use all the means at their disposal to preserve the old type of yearly, legally enforcable Bond. They were led by Lord Vane Londonderry, who apart from being the largest coalowner was, as Lord Lieutenant of Durham, also responsible for maintaining law and order in the area. Special constables were sworn in and three companies of troops were prepared for action. In the third month of the strike, the coalowners' special committee began issuing detailed statements about men returning work, a total of 215 out of more than 20,000! In response to the solidarity of the miners, the owners resorted to the mass importation of 'strangers' (strikebreakers) from other areas and the eviction of families from their company owned houses. Fynes described the scene:

'Wholesale turning to the door commenced in almost every colliery village; pregnant women, bedridden men, and even children in their cradles, were ruthlessly turned out.' (1873:74)

Lord Londonderry, 'regretfully obliged to punish [his miners] like wayward children' (Londonderry, 1938:235), issued letters to his evicted colliers:

'I have pointed out to you the misery, the destruction awaiting you, by your stupid and insane union. I gave you two weeks to consider whether

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you would return to work before I proceeded to eject you from your houses. I returned ... and I found you dogged, obstinate and determined - indifferent to my really paternal advice ... I was bound to act up to my word - bound by duty to my property, my family and my station. I superintended then many ejections - it had no avail.'

and just in case 'his' miners had forgotten the connection between coalowners and state, he continued:

'I will be on the spot [of further evictions] myself; the civil and military power will be at hand to protect the good men and strangers; and you may rely upon it the majesty of the law, and the rights of property, will be protected and prevail,'

(quoted in Challinor and Ripley, 1968: 133)

The miners and their families were not the only one that had been caught up in the 'insanity' of the union and its struggle to break feudal shackles. Other sections of the village populations had chosen to side with the miners. Shopkeepers and tradesmen made agreements with the Miners' Association to support the strikers with credit. They were invited to attend strike meetings where they were given votes of thanks. Lord Londonderry issued a manifesto aimed at redefining 'community' along more acceptable lines in the towns and villages that he owned:

'Lord Londonderry again warns all the shopkeepers and tradesmen in his town of Seaham that if they still give credit to pitmen who hold off work and continue in the union, such men will be marked by his agents and overmen, and will never be employed in his collieries again, and the shopkeepers may be assured that they will never have any custom or dealings with them from Lord Londonderry's large concerns that he can in any manner prevent.....

Because it is neither fair, just nor equitable that the resident traders of his own town should combine and assist the infatuated workmen and pitmen in prolonging their own miseries by continuing an insane strike, and an unjust and senseless warfare against their proprietors and masters.'

(quoted in Page Arnot, 1949: 42)

Although the strike was eventually defeated, it delivered the death blow to the Yearly Bond which was soon replaced by fortnightly contracts. Although the Miners Association was severely weakened by the 1844 strikes and persecuted by the coalowners in virtually every area, the Association remained a force until the depression of 1846-47. The eventual breakup of the national union led to the setting up of several small, independent unions which operated

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on a coalfield or county basis until the reformation of a national union in the 1860's.

Another major concern of both Miners Association and county unions was the appalling conditions which miners, men, women and children had to work under. The deeper mining operations brought an increased threat of dust, heat, flooding, poor ventilation and, of course gas explosions. Safety lamps, although invented twenty years earlier, were rarely made available and the 1830's and 1840's witnessed a series of increasingly major disasters with scores and sometimes hundreds of lives being lost in single 'accidents'. It was the growing death toll among children,^[4] especially vulnerable due to their inexperience, that encouraged the Children's Employment Commission to recommend the prohibition of all children under the age of thirteen from underground work.^[5]

Charged with reporting on the physical and moral condition of young boys and girls, the investigators extended their terms of reference to include the adult women they discovered underground. Their reports provided graphic accounts of grimy, bare breasted women working alongside even more naked men. Although little evidence of immorality was actually discovered, the underground situation was variously described as a 'nursery for juvenile vice', a setting for 'shameless indecencies' and 'filthy abominations'. Moral shock and outrage were combined with broader political concerns. One of the sub-commissioners, Kennedy, feared that 'a large proportion of the evils that prevail in the class of colliers' could be attributed to the women being absent from their homes. He argued that they must be stopped from working in order to protect the state from 'the growth of an ignorant, depraved and dangerous population' (John, 1983:44). This kind of argument obviously found its mark in a period of Chartist unrest. Total female exclusion from underground labour became the first clause in the 1842 Mines and Collieries Bill and, unlike many of the

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clauses concerning protection for young children, escaped largely unammended by the powerful coalowners lobby in the House of Lords.⁶⁶

Legislative proposals sponsored by county miners' associations, fared less well, either being lost due to opposition from the coalowners' lobby, or remaining largely irrelevant in the absence of a union organisation strong enough to ensure their enforcement. A partial exception was the passing of the Mines Regulation Act, 1860, which allowed the men to appoint a justice- or checkweighman to 'oversee' the calculations of the colliery weighmen, key figures in the owners' 'genteel and cowardly mode of thieving' (Page Arnot, 1949:42). Although it was many years before the checkweigh system was properly established with legal protection, it constituted a key power point in the miners lives. Checkweighmen gradually emerged as the first permanent officials at branch level and therefore key figures in stabilising local union organisation. Page Arnot argues:

'If trade unionism, suppressed in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, comes in waves that advance and recede in the second, in the third quarter it takes firm root in the miners' lodge.' (1949:46)

The next major advance in national organisation coincided with another period of forward movement in the trade union and political movement. The Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) was founded in 1889, a product of a national wages movement which between 1888 and 1890, raised miners' wages by an average of forty percent. The MFGB, recruiting all grades of male workers⁶⁷ across the country, grew rapidly to over 90,000 members. Shortly afterwards the coal-owners counterattacked and 1893 saw miners from many coalfields participating in a 3-month strike against the owners' imposition of wage cuts. Again the troops were called out, leading to the deaths of two miners and the wounding of many more.

Nevertheless the MFGB survived and was involved in major national struggles in the early part of the 20th century. In 1912, in a period of

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widespread industrial struggle, there was the miners engaged in a 6-week national strike in pursuit of a guaranteed minimum wage for all underground workers. Fearing widespread damage to other industry, the government were forced to intervene and guarantee the payment of a minimum wage.

It was in the latter part of this decade, when 'British trade unionism was more clearly on the offensive than in any other period of its development' (Hyman, 1975: viii) that the Miners Federation launched their campaign for public ownership and 'joint control' of the coal industry. These were among a programme of demands which received an unsatisfactory response from a government intent on relinquishing its wartime control of the industry. A ballot among the Federation's 800,000 members led to a six to one majority in favour of industrial action with solidarity action pledged by the rail and transport unions, the miners allies in the Triple Alliance. Coal stocks were critically low, unofficial miners' strikes were widespread leading to a 'practically unbroken series of successes' (Rosenberg, 1987: 43). The forces that the state felt it could rely on were few in number, with discontent among the police and widespread mutinies in a war-weary army. As Winston Churchill admitted three months later:

'The situation was extraordinarily difficult. We had a considerable number of mutinies in the Army ... We had a number of strikes and a great many threats of strikes. There was a threatened railway strike, and the actual strike which took place all over the tube railways in London. There was the threatened strike of the electricians ... There were serious riots in Glasgow, which required the presence of a large number of troops. There was the threatened strike of the Triple Alliance...'

(Rosenberg, 1987: 41)

The government decided to avoid conflict on too many fronts by setting up two top level commissions, the National Industrial Conference of employers and workers representatives and the Coal Industry (Sankey) Commission. The latter, with half its members nominated/agreed by the MFGB, was required to inquire into wages, hours and conditions in the pits and 'any scheme ... for the future organisation of the coal industry, whether on the present basis, or on

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the basis of joint control, nationalisation, or any other basis'. Only with the greatest difficulty did Robert Smillie and Frank Hodges, president and secretary of the MFGB respectively, persuade the miners to suspend their strike action, while in the House of Lords private ownership of the mines was put 'in the dock....on trial for its life' (Hutt, 1972:22) The three MFGB-nominated intellectuals:

'publicly tore the pretensions and performance of the mineowners into such small fragments that no intelligent person could doubt, thereafter, that nationalisation of the mines was sure to come' (Cole, 1961:175)

This was indeed the implication of both the Interim and the Final Report which the Government had pledged themselves to adopt 'in the spirit and the letter', but as J.T. Murphy, the Sheffield engineering workers' and future Communist Party leader remarked:

'the moral condemnation of the system did not worry the Government. They were more concerned about the mass attack of the workers upon the system. The talking time of the Commission they regarded as profitable time....So long as the miners were kept at work, each day was a gain to the Government and the mineowners' (Murphy, 1973:181)

In August 1919, Lloyd George refused to implement the nationalisation proposals. His blatant out-maneuvering of the MFGB and other unions set the scene for major defeats less than two years later.

The 1921 Lockout

On the 31st March 1921, all government controls were lifted from the mines and the coal owners insisted on the immediate imposition of wage cuts. 'Black Friday' (15 April) witnessed the MFGB's two partners in Triple Alliance renege on their pledge of support, leaving the miners to endure the lockout in isolation.

Strengthened by the Emergency Powers Act, the coalition government first sent police reinforcements and then troops into the coalfields to protect the pits and curtail strike activities. Thrown back on their meagre resources,

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the mining communities did their best to resist the owners' offensive setting up communal soup kitchens and credit voucher schemes. After enduring three months of the lockout, there was a national vote to return to work on the owners' terms. The miners suffered wage cuts, worsened conditions and victimisation. Not that they were alone in their suffering. Workers in the engineering, shipbuilding and cotton industries also suffered wage cuts, lockout and victimisation at the hands of their employers. The 1921 defeat was followed by years of defeated strikes, growing unemployment and falling trade union membership.

The 1926 General Strike and Lockout

As one of the key moments in the history of the mineworkers union, this protracted struggle played a major role in defining the nature of local mining communities over a very long period. There are numerous points of comparison with the 1984/85 Strike, but there are three which I feel are important in terms of our understanding of community in the more recent dispute.

The Strike and lockout again illustrate the key role of the state in terms of its concern with the coal industry and its readiness to intervene, brutally and decisively, on the side of the employers. Secondly, the situation of the conflict, fought out in scattered, isolated villages, determines its nature. The bonding of community and union, which increases over time, not only encourages a protracted resilience among miners in the face of overt state repression, but allows other sections of the population, coalfield women and non-miners to participate in the construction of a strike-centred community. Finally the strike and lockout illustrates the potential of collective struggle in revealing a wider 'community of interest' and encouraging an increased interaction between local and class-based communities. The ambivalent role of

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the Labour Party and TUC leadership only serves to emphasize the underpinning of local pit communities by the national and international class community.

Early in 1926, after repeated delays, the Government withdrew its subsidy of coal and the owners insisted on the miners suffering a wage reduction, a lengthening of their working day and an enforcement of district rather than national agreements. This, of course struck at the heart of the broader mineworkers community. The determination in the ranks of the Miners Federation, led by A.J Cook, was matched by that of a well-prepared government, but not by that of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The General Strike itself was marked by its partial nature, its rigid control by the official TUC leadership and a consequent widespread passivity (Cliff, Gluckstein, 1986; 185). After nine days the TUC surrendered and called for the miners to concede to the owners' demands. The miners refused and continued to struggle on for a further seven months. Unemployment benefit was refused and the miners and their families were forced to rely on the collective resources of local community and labour movement in order to survive. In South Wales for example:

'Within the community under siege, the miners and their families armed with their essentially proletarian institutions of the 'Fed', the 'Co-op', the Institute and the Chapel, along with the Independent Labour Party, Communist Party of Great Britain, Labour Party and the remainder of the trade union movement, were ranged against the Government, the coalowners and their officials, the police, the judiciary and the 'blacklegs'...These communities seemed prepared, in lemming-like fashion, to rise to the challenge of the overwhelming odds against them rather than accept the inevitable defeat with equanimity.'

(Francis and Smith, 1980: 55)

Communal kitchens, fuel distribution and boot repair centres were established alongside fundraising choirs and bands in order to maintain the strike communities. In isolation, the resources of the local coalfield communities would have proved woefully inadequate. National and international solidarity networks proved vital in sustaining the local communities, with the Russian trade unions in particular donating a massive amount of funds, 'e'

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fondly referred to by many miners as 'Russian money' (Carr, 1976:349). The close interaction between local and class-based communities had its impact. Internationalism was one of the elements involved in the more polarised, radicalised politics that made up part of the counter-culture that emerged in many strike communities. In the first six months of the lockout, the membership of the British Communist Party more than doubled, from around 5,000 to 10,730 (Cliff, Gluckstein, 1986:280), with the coalfield branches allegedly constituting 80 percent of the membership (Francis, Smith, 1980:67).

Another factor in the radicalisation of the local communities was the role of the state. As the lockout continued into Autumn large squads of 'outside' police and special constables were drafted in to mining areas in order to break the spirit of the local strikers and protect would-be strikebreakers, themselves usually people living outside the pit villages. In the battles against 'blacklegs' and police, as in the maintenance of the strike communities generally, the women played a prominent role:

'What emerged was in the manner of an alternative culture with its own moral code and political tradition: it was a society within a society ... which saw the political prisoner as having some significant status and prestige within the community. When nine men and two women were released from prison after serving sentences for their parts in a riot, a meeting was held in their honour at Fochriw's Carmel Congregational Chapel ... Mrs. S.O. Davies [wife of the South Wales Miners Federation's vice president] and the Rev. D.M. Jones presented the men with gold cigarette cases and the women with necklets and gold pendants, all suitably inscribed.'

(Francis and Smith, 1980:66-67)

The massive flow of resources needed to support a million miners and their families could not be sustained indefinitely. By November many kitchens had been forced to close and the miners were driven back to work through abject poverty. Apart from the longer hours, wage reductions and abolition of national agreements, the latter months of the strike saw an early return to work and the establishment of a major company-supported union in Nottinghamshire, led by an NMA-sponsored Labour MP, George Spencer.^[2] The coalowners took advantage of the weakness of the Miners Federation: victimisation of union activists was

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rife and local agreements were scrapped, while productivity was increased at the expense of safety provision and conditions.

The late 1920's and 1930's constituted an extremely difficult period for the miners and their union. The 1926 defeat of the miners was followed by the economic recession after 1929. Alongside mass unemployment there were protracted periods of short time working which effected most of the coalfields. Union membership fell considerably, only recovering in the latter part of the 1930's (Macintyre, 1980:36-39). While grass roots militants pursued an uphill struggle to rebuild the unions, the Communist Party engaged in sectarian adventures and the right-wing strengthened its stranglehold on the industrial and political wings of the labour movement.

Nationalisation

The placing of the coal industry under 'popular', collective ownership, administered by a 'transformed' state apparatus controlled by a sympathetic Labour government, appeared to constitute the fruition of two of the most cherished political projects of the miners' union, the economic and political dispossession of the coalowners. But the terms of the state takeover and the survival of the essential power structures, laid the basis for major conflict in the future, climaxing in the 1984/85 Strike, in which the government put the whole project of state ownership under political scrutiny.

Most of the British coal industry was formally nationalised on the 1 January 1947. During the 2nd World War, as in the 1st World War, the coal industry, along with many others had been taken under state control. In 1940 a Coal Production Council was established and in 1942 full state regulation was established, with the Minister for Fuel and Power chairing the newly established National Coal Board (although ownership was left in the hands of the 800 plus private coal companies). Regional committees comprising of representatives of the owners, managers, technicians and unions were set up,

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while at the pit level joint production committees were established to maximise production of the vital war commodity. Brian McCormick suggests:

'The coalmines were nationalised because the miners were no longer prepared to work for the private coal-owners. Various reasons could be found to account for the nationalisation of the mines, but it was the miners' attitude that was fundamental.' (1979:47)

As if to underline this determination not to return to the old system of ownership, the foundation of the National Union of Miners (NUM) had taken place in 1944. Although formally an industrial union, representing the whole national community of mineworkers, it was, in reality, little more than a loose confederation of the 36 county unions that had been affiliated to the MFGB. It therefore brought together in uneasy coalition the very different industrial and political traditions that had developed in the Welsh, Scottish, Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire coalfields. The ability of the national union to minimize the divisive impact of these different traditions was to constitute a major factor in future conflicts. The political implications of a federally-structured union having to engage a heavily centralised management in a state owned industry were a source of preoccupation to Arthur Horner, President of the South Wales Miners Federation (1936-46) and prospective General Secretary (1946-58) of the new national union:

'Twenty five years ago I wrote a pamphlet. I made a beautiful draft with diagrams of one Mineworkers Union. I drafted it believing I had a nice flat floor on which to build a lovely union. I have learned from bitter experience that it is not a flat floor; it has different District interests with different District conceptions, different degrees of development. This we are now proposing is an attempt to make a superstructure over what already exists, and we cannot do it independently of what exists ... the interests of the men would drive me to one all-out Mineworkers Union, involving the liquidation of the District Unions, but we have to be realists and take into account the vested interests of the Districts.'

The newly-elected Labour Government was committed to nationalisation with full compensation for the coalowners. Their commitment to the introduction of workers participation in the running of the newly-nationalised industries was less clear. The 1935 conference, after much debate which

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appeared to favour some degree of workers' control, had finally decided on the minimal guarantee of the statutory 'right of the workers' organisations to be represented on the governing board of socialised industries' (Coates, Topham, 1970: 279)

On 1 January 1947, signs were erected at the entrances of the pits with the legend, "This colliery is managed by the National Coal Board on behalf of the people of Britain."^[12] A fund of enthusiasm and goodwill was opened up with many miners prepared to work hard in order that 'their' industry could succeed and their great expectations realized. The NUM encouraged the miners in this attitude and embarked on a policy of virtually total collaboration with the government and National Coal Board (NCB) which was to last for almost twenty five years.^[13]

Almost immediately, however, the doubts of many miners who had hoped that nationalisation would bring 'a new order in the pits' began to be confirmed. From the start, 'their' coal industry was crippled by huge compensation payments to former coalowners. The compensation for collieries amounted to £164,660,000, while that given to the former royalty owners was £78,457,000 (Allen, 1981: 104). There were also massive debts incurred in the modernisation of long-neglected pits (Allen, 1981: 103). But most galling were the major elements of continuity with the old coalowner regime in both NCB personnel and policy, the 'well feathered nests for the tyrants of the past' (Coates, Topham, 1970: 304). Despite the 1935 Labour Party policy, there was no provision for worker *representation* on the National Coal Board. The majority of the Board was made up of ex-mineowners and others 'who had never supported nationalisation in their lives' (Coates, Topham, 1970: 308). Apart from the Labour Director (Ebby Edwards, National Union of Mineworkers' General Secretary), only Sir Walter Citrine, general secretary of the TUC (and a leading figure in that body's 1926 betrayal of the miners) had a labour movement background. These, along with the Divisional Labour Directors, who tended to be leading figures in

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the NUM, were expected to 'surrender any position held in, or any formal responsibility to, the trade union' (Coates, Topham, 1970: 303). Their responsibility was confined to:

'labour and welfare matters. The fundamental production, financial and economic questions are left in the hands of the former directors of colliery and distribution concerns...In practise the one trade union member is subordinated to the capitalist 'production' side, even where labour questions are concerned.' (Pollit, 1948: 14)

Added to which, the Labour Government allowed private enterprise (often the old coalowners) to continue to dominate the increasingly lucrative sectors of the industry, the manufacture and distribution of mining machinery and equipment. They also insisted on a very low fixed price for coal which severely retarded the planned development of the industry.' (McCormick, 1979: 94). The state takeover of coalmining did not bring fundamental changes in the power relations of the industry. Indeed, nationalisation tended to fulfill the prediction of the Welsh syndicalist, Noah Ablett, speaking in the Rhondda thirty five years before, when he suggested nationalisation would:

'simply place an important section of the working class in the hands of a state servile to capitalists' interests, who would use their opportunity to increase the servility we abhor' (Quoted in Holton, 1981)

In the ten years that followed nationalisation there was a growing demand for coal, and the industry expanded. Despite consolidation and a net closure of 158 pits (1947: 980, 1957: 822), coal production rose from 184 million tonnes in 1947 to 210 million in 1952, with the NCB's 1950 *Plan for Coal* predicting 240 million tonnes by 1965. There was full and continuous employment in the mining industry. Despite this strong bargaining position, most of the national and area NUM officials were locked in a close, conciliatory relationship with their NCB counterparts. This collaborative relationship was based on a shared commitment to the achievement of maximum efficiency in the newly-nationalised industry, the privileged position of many full-time union

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officials and their respect for managerial prerogatives in a 'socialised' industry. There were no official strikes and little improvement in basic wages.

In contrast to the 'mineworker politics' that underpinned this relationship, a more aggressive, confrontational tradition, described by Drabble (1986) as 'pit politics', developed in several areas, including the Doncaster coalfield. Gibbon suggests:

'By pit politics is meant a combative tradition of local pit bargaining over both wages and working arrangements, where withdrawal of labour is used not as a last resort (...) but as a precondition for negotiation and conciliation, and with the intention of extracting whatever gains and concessions the balance of forces within the pit enable to be extracted.'

(Gibbon, 1988:152)

The development of a successful pit political tradition usually involved a high level of grass roots organisation, involving underground democracy and an assumption of solidarity. It also tended to encourage a high degree of participation in branch meetings and elections, often resulting in assertive, accountable branch leaderships. The growth of localised militancy is demonstrated in the high level of short disputes, involving relatively small numbers of miners which characterised the late 1940's and 1950's. This is shown in table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Strikes & striker-days in coal mining: annual averages, 1948-82

	<u>Strikes</u>		<u>Striker-Days</u>	
	Number	% of total	('000)	% of total
1948-52	1,026	64.5	288	10.1
1953-57	1,771	75.9	598	15.8
1958-62	1,520	62.7	470	11.4
1963-67	746	33.6	253	10.4
1968-72	185	6.5	2,608	21.7
1973-77	240	9.4	1,185	15.0
1978-82	329	18.8	214	1.8

Source: Department of Employment Gazette.

There were exceptions to the pattern of localised, short strikes in this post-nationalisation period. The two most prominent were the 1947 Grimethorpe Stint strike, which lasted five weeks and paralysed a third of the Yorkshire coalfield, and the 1955 Armthorpe fillers dispute, which lasted a

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month and, in an early demonstration of the potential of pit politics in a wider arena, spread the strike to over a hundred pits, winning the first major revision of Yorkshire pricelists since nationalisation. (See Chapter Four)

The Pit Closure Programme (1958-69)

This programme was encouraged by the rapid spread of mechanisation in the coal industry, leading to the increased concentration of production in the central coalfields and laying the basis for the later policy of 'superpits'. In revealing the potential of new technology to destroy long-established communities, it illustrated the need to control its introduction and therefore provided the miners with a vivid illustration of one of the key issues in 1984/85.

In 1957 the demand for coal started to fall, due to a contraction in major coal-using industries (such as the railways), energy conservation measures and the emergence of oil and natural gas as cheap, clean and efficient alternatives. The reduction in demand allowed and encouraged the NCB to speed up both its rationalisation plans and its plans for major, advanced mechanisation in the thick seamed coalfields. The introduction of powered roof supports allowed the introduction of the integrated power loading system at an unprecedented pace. Rather than having to win and load coal by hand, it was cut by machine and loaded directly onto conveyor belts. Whereas in 1955 only 9.8% of coal production was powerloaded, by 1968 92% was won by mechanised methods, with the most favourable geological fields (Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands) getting virtually 100 percent of their coal by the new system.

The effects on the mineworkers were dramatic. In the eleven years between 1957 and 1968, five hundred and five pits (63 percent of the total) were closed down, leaving only three hundred and seventeen open. As illustrated in Table 2.2 below, more than half the 1957 workforce of 710,000 was made redundant, leaving 321,100 employed in the coal industry.

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Table 2.2 Miners employed in Coal Industry, 1922-1975

1922	1,095,000	1948	724,000	1968-69	321,100
1923	1,137,000	1949	719,500	1969-70	297,800
1924	1,171,896	1950	687,900	1970-71	286,400
1925	1,086,103	1951	697,100	1971-72	274,000
1926	<i>Strike/lockout</i>	1952	718,9000	1972-73	263,600
1927	999,941	1953	706,500	1973-74	242,500
1928	923,092	1954	705,500	1974-75	248,800
1929	932,330	1955	700,200	1975-76	243,700
1930	916,809	1956	703,700		
1931	848,455	1957	710,000		
1932	802,705	1958	687,400		
1933	790,868	1959	640,200		
1934	774,866	1960	587,500		
1935	758,587	1961	565,900		
1936	756,323	1962	540,900		
1937	777,791	1963-64	509,600		
1938	781,865	1964-65	481,200		
1939	777,950	1965-66	439,600		
1940-46	<i>War years</i>	1966-67	412,700		
1947	711,400	1967-68	367,500		

Source: Bulmer, 1978: 151.

Nor was the job loss evenly spread. The old coalfields of Lancashire, Durham, Scotland, North and South Wales were worst hit in the pincer movement of falling demand and rapid mechanisation. Production was concentrated in the newer, thick-seamed coalfields of Yorkshire and the Midlands in which advanced mechanisation could be introduced most easily. The uneven impact of the pit closure programme can be seen in the changes of NUM area membership, outlined in table 2.3

Table 2.3 NUM Membership by Area 1947 and 1974

AREA	1947	1974	% cut	AREA	1947	1974	% cut
South Wales	96,299	28,460	(70)	Power Group	12,602	4,900	(61)
Yorkshire	85,816	62,214	(28)	Group No 3	10,399	18,306*	(+76)
Durham	71,073	18,420	(74)	North Wales	6,691	1,766	(74)
Scotland	48,424	21,577	(55)	Kent	4,953	2,471	(50)
Midlands	40,190	14,063	(65)	Cumberland	4,710	1,253	(73)
Lancashire	31,359	9,309	(70)	Leicester	4,285	2,656	(38)
Nottingham	31,078	30,300	(3)	Cokemen	3,214	4,959	(+54)
Derbyshire	28,239	11,261	(60)	Somerset	2,194	----	(100)
Northumberland	27,707	8,842	(68)	Power Group 2		2,087	
Group No 1	16,727	11,033	(34)				
Group No 2	15,895	4,767	(70)	TOTAL	547,567	261,171	(52)

(* = COSA)

Source: Taylor, 1984: 171

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Pit closure followed pit closure, leading to a major migration of much of the mining population. Some gained transfers to other pits in the same coalfield, but most were forced to 'emigrate' to the more secure pits in the central coalfields, or leave the industry altogether. The miners were obliged to become 'industrial gypsies', often experiencing two or three pit closures and the consequent disruption of their own and their family's lives.

While this jobs slaughter was going on most of the regional and national leadership of the NUM remained committed to 'mineworker politics', locked into a collaborative relationship with the NCB. Whereas pit politics, by constantly contesting the authority of first line management, tended to push back the frontier of control, mineworker politics, by acceding the 'right of management to manage' were constantly reinforcing it, particularly in areas like pit closures. The principles of mineworker politics were most clearly expounded by the right wing union officials. For example Joe Gormley, an NEC member for Lancashire and president of the NUM (1971-81) explicitly endorsed the approach of John Lewis, the American mineworkers' leader:

'I became quite a disciple of John L. Lewis (...) His theory was that it wasn't his job to decide the size of the industry, but it was his job to fight like hell for the best wages and conditions for those who worked in it... the fact is that we are not able to decide the size of our industry. Its being decided by pressures from outside. We can't say that it will be any bigger than other people are allowing it to be. So we should be concentrating on getting the right wages.' (Gormley, 1982)

Although Gormley recounts a debate with Will Paynter, Communist General Secretary of the NUM, who argued that the union was, as a matter of principle, pledged to oppose the closure of pits on purely economic grounds, in practice it appeared that the NUM national leadership were united in acquiescing to the management's pit closure programme. The Communist Party, having established strongholds in Scottish, South Wales and Kent coalfields, due to its role in the 1920's and 30's, was able to get two of its members elected in succession to the position of NUM General Secretary, Arthur Horner (1945-59)

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and Paynter (1959-68). In reality it did not offer a different strategy to that of the NUM's right wing. Vic Allen suggests:

'The political divisions amongst miners reflected differences in emphases not basic attitudes. Communist Party members (...) in official positions around the coalfields continued to advocate continuity in the union's policy of co-operation with the NCB (...) The union revealed no significant sectional differences over the important issues which faced it. On the question of contraction it insisted that the decisions to close pits, when and where, were the prerogative of the management. The union intervened only to facilitate the closures by assisting to alleviate the hardships which might result from them.' (1981:63-4)

'Mineworker politics' were strengthened by the election of a Labour Government in 1964. Committed, prior to the election, to achieving an annual production of 200 million tonnes, it reneged on its pledge and accelerated the rate of closures.^[14] Between 1965 and 1969, the Coal Board closed down a further 200 collieries, an average of almost one pit a week over four years. Sidney Ford, the NUM's national president, defended the NCB policy and argued:

'What we have to ensure is that the industry's capital equipment and its manpower are utilised to the best possible advantage. This can be achieved in two ways. First by concentrating production on the more efficient collieries and secondly, by the more intensive utilisation of the available mechanical aids and equipment within each unit.'^[15]

And indeed, during this period of falling demand, rationalisation and mechanisation allowed a dramatic improvement in productivity. Average output per manshift at the coalface rose from 65.8 cwts in 1955 to 132.4 cwts in 1970. Moreover this was achieved despite the fact that, by 1970, the piecework system had been virtually eradicated. From its very early days the NCB management had wanted to abolish this payment system, with its lack of centralised control, its constant bargaining and its frequent disputes over rates at each and every face. But only an integrated process of mechanisation in the form of the power loading system allowed them to dispense with piecework payments.

The National Power Loading Agreement (1966-72)

The significance of this national wages agreement was threefold. Its guaranteeing of centralised control of wages to higher NCB management/NUM

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leadership inevitably removed a key power point from the local branch (and community) level. This blunted a cutting edge of union activity underground and thereby restricted the basis for localised pit politics. But it also provided a firm basis for a broader national unity among miners, leading to increasing coordination among radical NUM activists and their adaptation of pit politics to meet the new situation.

In 1966 the National Power Loading Agreement was signed, establishing standard shift rates for power loading teams on new faces in each of the NCB's wage districts. It was further agreed that national uniformity of these rates would be attained only gradually, over a five-year period (that is, by 1972).

According to Will Paynter, although the the NCB wanted to rid itself of pit-based wage bargaining, it would have preferred to maintain distinct rates for each wage district and did not want the element of national uniformity written into the agreement. This attitude was, of course, reminiscent of that of the coalowners in 1926. As can be seen in Table 2.4, the NCB management extracted a heavy price for this uniformity. When inflation is taken into account, many of the better-paid pieceworkers were faced with reductions in their real earnings over a period of 5 years.

Table 2.4 District Power Loading Rates and Changes

WAGES DISTRICT	June 1966 Rates £	Nov 67 £	Annual Increase			Dec 71 £	1972 Rate £
			Nov 68 £	Nov 69 £	Nov 70 £		
Cumberland	22,50	0,55	0,60	1,20	2,37½	2,77½	30,00
South Staffs	22,50	1,10	0,75	1,20	2,37½	2,07½	30,00
North Staffs	23,07½	0,82½	0,75	1,20	2,37½	1,77½	30,00
Leicestershire	23,77½	0,90	0,75	1,20	2,37½	1,00	30,00
Northumberland	24,30	0,42½	0,42½	1,20	2,37½	1,27½	30,00
Yorkshire	24,75	0,40	0,40	1,20	2,37½	0,87½	30,00
S. Derbyshire	24,92½	0,42½	0,42½	1,20	2,37½	0,65	30,00
Warwickshire	24,95	0,40	0,40	1,20	2,37½	0,67½	30,00
Lancs & N. Derby	25,32½	0,35	0,35	1,20	2,37½	0,40	30,00
Notts	26,02½	0,30	0,30	1,00	2,37½	--	30,00
Kent	26,82½	0,17½	0,17½	0,45	2,37½	--	30,00

Source: McCormick, 1979: 127

Whereas the average weekly wage of (all) miners in 1956 had been

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£14 14 11d compared to the average manufacturing wage of £12 2 2d, it had increased, in real terms, by less than one percent a year, so by 1969 the mining average was £24 9 9d compared with the manufacturing average of £25 10 10d (Allen, 1981: 169)

The introduction of the national day wage system removed one of the key areas of collective struggle and control from the local pit workforce. Unable to negotiate directly over wage rates, the local miners and their union branch were forced to concentrate on manning levels, conditions and compensatory payments. Nationally determined wage rates, the rapid, largely unopposed contraction of the industry, and the consequent demoralisation among miners resulted in a dramatic fall in the number of localised mining disputes. In 1956, of the 2,648 strikes officially recorded in Britain, 2,074 (78 percent) were in coal mining, but, by 1970, although the overall number of recorded disputes were up (3,906), only 160 (4.1 percent) were in mining.

Pit closures, insecurity, low morale and relatively low wages, combined with the increased job opportunities elsewhere, led to a steady exodus out of the industry. But as the contraction process intensified, there were an increasing number of compulsory redundancies imposed, which eventually began to effect previously untouched coalfields like Yorkshire. Whereas upto 1967, the NCB had never declared more than 2,000 redundancies in any one year, in that year they made 12,900 (compulsorily) redundant and in 1968 this rose to 21,178. At the same time the 'individualistic' solution of getting out of coalmining became less viable as unemployment outside the industry started to rise. The worst-hit coalfields were often situated in areas with high, general unemployment rates.

In these circumstances, the debate on whether there was any alternative to the vicious circle of industrial decline and demoralisation began to involve a larger number of NUM activists. In 1968 a pamphlet, 'The Miners and the Nation' was issued by Lawrence Daly, general secretary of the Scottish NUM and the left wing's candidate to replace Will Paynter. It was a

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document that openly challenged the collaborationist attitudes of the NUM leadership and advocated militant industrial action as an answer to the problems facing mineworkers. Daly summarized his arguments:

'By adopting more militant attitudes to secure a change in fuel policy we could save Britain from over-dependence on foreign fuel supplies. But we could also protect our mining communities from the worst effects of redundancy and win conditions and rewards that would attract and hold young, skillful and intelligent men in our modern coal industry.'

(Daly, 1968)

These new policies struck a chord. New generations of union activists were emerging, whose formative experience was not the long-awaited achievement of nationalisation, but rather disillusionment with its results. Prior to 1966, much of their energy was absorbed in struggles at pit or panel level, leading to localised traditions of militancy which Drabble describes as 'pit politics'.

The removal of wages from local control, the insecurity and devastation of mining areas caused by the massive pit closure programme and the extraordinary compliance of the NUM leadership in this process, all encouraged these activists to carry the strategy and tactics of pit politics to other levels. In 1967, NUM militants in the Barnsley area set up the *Barnsley Miners Forum*, modelled on a similar grouping of Communists and Labour left wingers which had gained prominence on the Doncaster panel of the NUM. Assisted by Frank Watters, a Communist Party fulltime organiser, the Left extended its organisation, bringing together militants from all four Yorkshire panels under the banner of the *Yorkshire Miners Forum*. At national level the broad left was reorganised around Daly's election campaign, and the Yorkshire coalfield was for the first time the setting for a concentrated and successful left wing campaign. But the late 1960's also witnessed the emergence of 'pit politics' in a much more dramatic form, with the occurrence of the major, unofficial national strikes of 1969 and 1970.

The 1969 strike took place over the demand for a 7½ hour day for surfaceworkers, who were traditionally a minority, low status group in the coal

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industry. In a major reassertion of the community of interest between miners, the 'pit political' tactics of highly mobile or 'flying' pickets were extended across county borders. With 140 pits and 130,000 colliers involved at its height, the two-week strike involved miners from Yorkshire, Scotland, South Wales, Derbyshire, Kent, Nottingham and the Midlands (Allen, 1981; 156). Although it took another year before the surfacemen got their reduction in hours, the first national-scale strike since 1926 seemed to have an impact on the NCB, who granted the NUM's 1969 wage demand in full. The 1970 strike involved just over 100,000 miners and took place after a 55 percent ballot vote for a substantial wage rise - in opposition to the newly-elected Conservative Government's 12 percent public sector wage limit. Alarmed by challenge to their autonomy posed by the flying pickets, union officials from nine 'moderate' coalfields met and issued a press statement condemning the 'unconstitutional methods being employed by certain Groups in the NUM'. Under Rule 43 of the NUM rulebook, a 67 percent vote was needed before a national strike could be called. (17)

THE 1972 & 1974 STRIKES

As we enter the 1970's the significance of events for the 1984/85 Strike increases. In a very real sense, the disputes of 1972 and 1974 form a political backdrop for the strike a decade later. The apparent difference in the 'central' issues (wages rather than pit closures) masks an underlying connection: the growing willingness of the state to play a major, overt role in the economy and industrial relations. In a sense, the major double victory helped purge the memory of the 1926 defeat - revealing a united miners' union supported by a united working class. But as well as galvanising the national community of mineworkers, the disputes provoked a series of preparations by NCB, political parties and state, which meant that the 1984/85 dispute was to be fought out on a very different terrain. The strong points of the NUM's strike strategy were countered, their weak points accentuated.

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The background to the 1972 strike was one of deepening recession, growing unemployment and the introduction of legislation by the Conservative government designed to curb both wages and the power of the unions. The miners' demand for substantial wage increases (£5-£9) had been met by a unsatisfactory offer (£1.60p), and a national ballot had resulted in a 58.8 percent majority for strike action. Outside the NUM there was a growing movement of resistance to government policy, with the Communist Party playing a major role both in the protest strikes against the Industrial Relations Act and in the occupation of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilding yards.

As in the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970, the 1972 strike was characterised by the NUM's adoption of a 'pit political' strategy. In Yorkshire, the recent death of Sammy Taylor (NUM Compensation Agent) and the ill health of the President and General Secretary placed Jock Kane (Yorkshire Financial Secretary) in a key position of leadership. Kane, an Armthorpe miner and lifelong Communist, had previously played a major role at pit, panel and area levels. The tactic pioneered by Armthorpe NUM in the 1955 fillers' dispute, namely the rapid deployment of highly mobile or 'flying' pickets, was immediately revived. According to Scargill, then candidate for compensation agent:

'We had to declare war on them and the only way you could declare war on them was to attack the vulnerable points....the power stations, the coke depots, the points of supply.' (1975; 13)

There was a very high level of participation in picketing activities. Vic Allen estimated that around 75 percent (200,000 out of 263,000) miners were involved in strike duties (1981:200). By the second week of the strike the NUM pickets were having a serious impact at power stations, ports and steelworks. Power stations began to close due to a variety of shortages (hydrogen, chemicals, lighting-up oil), power cuts became common and widespread layoffs began to occur. The support given by the main rail unions was immediate and

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total. Fuel train drivers were prepared to respect even a solitary NUM picket on a railway bridge.

The miners had a lot more difficulty with road transport. The major financial rewards available to those prepared to drive through picket lines inevitably attracted the 'cowboys'; the owner-drivers, the small non-union operators and the unionised contractors who were prepared to take the risk for the right price. This problem led to a form of 'tertiary picketing' being carried out in many workplaces, although it demanded a high level of inter-union organisation. For example, the shop stewards committee at the Baglan Bay petro-chemicals site, voted to black all lorries of any contractor whose vehicles had crossed an NUM picket line elsewhere in Britain. The steel unions also played an important role, with, for example, the Iron & Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) in Scunthorpe, instructing its members not to move coal on the British Steel Corporation's private railway system *inside* the complex. As the Strike entered its third week, Jock Kane summarised the strike's progress:

'Though we have faced some tough picketing, mainly from 'nonners' driving lorries, we have been enormously encouraged by the solidarity shown by other trade unionists. This clearly demonstrates that the British trade union movement is learning one of the lessons of the postal workers strike.

As an increasing number of trade unionists are beginning to understand, something more than the miners' living standards are involved in this struggle (...) Every one of these trade unionists must understand, either we stand together and win - or we hang apart and are crushed, with serious consequences for the ordinary folk.

We have a tradition second to none in the history of the British trade union movement. I know the present generation of miners will never besmirch it.'

(Morning Star, 22/1/72)

A key role in this generation of inter-union solidarity was played by the political minority in the workplaces, who sought to emphasize the general implications of the miners sectional struggle for the broader, class-based community. The intervention of the radical wing of the labour movement, although small in number, was particularly important in this process, with

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communist and socialist organisations working hard to strengthen the links between miners and other workers.

Full time political organizers, like Frank Watters (a close friend of Kane but based in the West Midlands since 1967), often played a key link role between the flying pickets and groups of local workers. Trades councils also played an important part in providing practical assistance and information about the local labour movement. The strike support community was not limited purely to workers. Miners were invited to address student union meetings in various parts of the country, which invariably voted to give them moral, financial and sometimes physical support (Allen, 1981:197). Some universities took out High Court injunctions in order to prevent students from housing flying pickets in university accomodation (*Morning Star*, 26/1/72).

This solidarity action was generated in the face of government and media opposition; the broader, national interest being counterposed to narrow sectional concerns. However, in 1972, the state appeared to have underestimated 'the opposition' and was unable to isolate, criminalize or starve the miners back to work. As well as the physical solidarity from the wider trade union movement, there was support from inside the mining communities. By the third week of the strike, coalfield women were developing an independent political presence, and 'embryonic womens' support groups began to form.^[10] But in many areas, mining families, in receipt of owed wages, tax rebates, and some DHSS payments,^[11] were able to survive the seven-week strike without recourse to communal kitchens or food parcels. This is not to say there was no hardship. In some areas, miners, their wives and children occupied DHSS offices in order to demand emergency payments. In others, midday meals were distributed at miners welfares (*Morning Star*, 25/1/72). In the fifth week of the strike, the 'tradition' of digging for scraps of coal claimed two lives on a Barnsley pit

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heap (*Times*, 14/2/72). Ad hoc financial and physical support began to give way to an embryonic support network. [20]

The fifth week of the strike saw a build-up of pickets at Saltley Coke works - the last big fuel depot open in the West Midlands. The West Midlands Gas Board had insisted that it should remain open and the local police chiefs had given a public commitment that their wishes would be upheld. Saltley therefore rapidly became a symbol of the state authorities' willingness to challenge the effectiveness of the pickets.

By Sunday, 6 February, Barnsley Panel's 'East Anglian Brigade' under the direction of Arthur Scargill arrived to join picket reinforcements from other areas. The secretary of Birmingham Trades Council called for local trade unionists to support the miners at Saltley and well-organised workplaces began to respond. [21] Tuesday saw 24 arrests which, in 1972 terms, was an exceptionally large number. [22] That evening two hundred Birmingham East District AUEW shop stewards issued a call to engineering workers for a protest strike and mass picket of Saltley on the Thursday morning. Ironically it was the *Financial Times* which, before the Strike, had used the defeat of the postal workers to illustrate the futility of striking, that quoted the District Secretary, Norman Cartwright, as saying:

'We saw what happened to the postal workers last year. We are not going to let it happen to the miners. We are making a unanimous call to fetch our members out to join members of the NUM at the Saltley coke depot. Our aim is to cut off the supply of coke to industry.' (*FT*, 9/2/72)

Thursday, 10 February, saw over 30,000 Birmingham workers from a variety of industries strike work in solidarity, with whole workforces marching miles to join the miners in their picket of the Saltley cokeworks. Confronted by around ten thousand pickets, even the heavily reinforced police were unable to keep the fuel lorries moving and ordered the symbolic locking of the gates 'under NUM scrutiny'. [23] The mood of the pickets, their placards and slogans were heavily political. There was a widespread conviction among them that, by

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providing class solidarity with the miners, they were making an important contribution at least to the defeat of the government's incomes policy, if not to the defeat of the Heath Government itself. The local newspaper quoted Scargill's victorious address to the assembled pickets:

'It will go down in history as the battle of Saltley Gate. The working people have united in a mass stand.' (*Birmingham Evening Mail*, 10/2/72)

The majority of the national media reacted with disbelief to the success of the 'intimidatory' mass picket.^[24] Saltley had become symbolic of the state's ability to respond to the 'pit political' tactics of the NUM and its abject failure demonstrated its helplessness. The fact that this humiliating defeat had been inflicted by an extreme case of non-sectional (secondary) picketing - with thousands of workers not 'officially involved' hitting a target not 'officially involved' in the dispute - left a deep and lasting impression on those in a position of government and authority. The day after Saltley, Douglas Hurd, then Political Secretary to Edward Heath, wrote in his diary:

'The Government now wandering vainly over the battlefield looking for someone to surrender to - and being massacred all the time.' (1979:103)

On the day of the Saltley closure the Government announced the setting up of a 'Court of Enquiry'. Eight days later it recommended substantial increases, averaging 27 percent on basic rates, with few strings. The National Executive of the NUM voted by 13 votes to 12 to continue the strike. Jock Kane, was alleged to have argued, 'we have the Government on the run, so let us keep it running' (Allen, 1981:217). The following day the NCB conceded a further fifteen significant improvements in fringe benefits, and the next week the miners returned to work after seven weeks on strike. As the strike came to an end, Kane took the opportunity to emphasize the political implications of the miners' success:

'This tremendous victory was made possible by the support of our trade union comrades in other industries, not forgetting the students, housewives and pensioners.

The lessons are clear: when the working class is united on its

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objectives then it can impose its will even on governments. This government is now rocking.

(...) The fight against government policies must now be intensified. If the trade union movement tackles the issue of unemployment as the miners tackled their problem, then this government can be destroyed in the process of the fight for work.' (*Morning Star*, 21/2/72)

The employers and state authorities were not insensitive to this message. Three days after Saltley, Robert Carr, secretary of State for Employment, epitomised the despondency of the Heath government when he suggested in a radio interview:

'If there has been any miscalculation, it has only been that we did not allow for the quite unprecedented picketing which has gone on, and which I believe was not what was meant by picketing in the past. I do not want to argue whether it is strictly legal or not' (*Times*, 14/2/72)

an attitude which inspired a *Times* editorial the following day:

'it was for this toughness of character that the Conservative Party chose him [Edward Heath] rather than Mr Maudling as its leader and probably for this the country chose him rather than Mr. Wilson as Prime Minister. People thought the historic situation of Britain required a more ruthless type of statesmanship than before.

(...) We had come badly to need the virtues of determination and not theatrical pseudo-action at that. Yet the policy of decision is a high risk policy by its nature (...) The tougher a government's line the less it can afford mistakes. (*Times*, 15/2/72)

The fact that the government and state took this message to heart can be seen in the series of initiatives (for example, the Government's National Security Commission and the police's National Reporting Centre), the full extent of which only became apparent some years later (see Chapter Five). Nevertheless, the 1972 defeat cost the government dearly. It marked an important stage in the ongoing battle of unions against wage controls and anti-union legislation. In its aftermath, several other unions breached the Government's incomes policy, the state was forced to release the five rank and file dock workers' leaders from Pentonville Gaol because of the threat of general strike action, and the AUEW defied the Industrial Relations Court. [25]

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The Miron Report

The NCB management were, of course, extremely sensitive about the new-found role of the NUM in the vanguard of the anti-government offensive. In 1973, Sir Derek Ezra, the NCB Chairman, commissioned a report on the prospects for industrial relations from Wilfred Miron, NCB member and former chairman of the East Midlands Division. The status and sensitivity of the report were indicated in Miron's covering letter to Ezra:

'For reasons which will become obvious to you when you read the enclosed, I am sending this to your private address... The enclosed paper is anonymous... How far, if at all, any of the observations should be exposed to Peter Walker... is debatable' (Winterton and Winterton, 1989: 9)

Having described the political affiliations of the actual and potential area leaders ('Scargill, in his mid-thirties, is a key figure - he aims to succeed Gormley as President'), Miron suggested that:

'We must keep in mind that the strategy of the NUM's Executive will become increasingly politically oriented and that its Left Wing (Communists, Marxists and their ilk, however organisationally fragmented) will maintain a unified strategy towards the ideological end, the overthrow of the present 'system'.

(Winterton and Winterton, 1989: 10)

His strategy was aimed at encouraging disunity, both inside the NUM leadership and between the leadership and the members:

'(5)... the traditionally 'moderate' elements in the NUM... should be reinforced and restored to their basic anti-Left position. The Left-Wing authority of the NEC should be more and more emasculated. (.....)

(9) The large majority of the membership of the NUM are Labour Party members who eschew Marxism of any form... the aim should be to ensure that such membership has satisfactory, secure and progressive levels of wages and conditions... so as to constrain or neutralise the political ammunition of the Left and the influence of the Marxist.

(10) One step in this direction would be to revert to some form of local pit or district incentives based upon Agreements negotiable locally which would restore to some of the traditionally moderate leaders the authority and influence they have increasingly lacked since the NPLA...

He then went on to discuss the potential of new technology for weakening the NUM:

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(13) So, it should be the endeavour to get coal, or energy from coal, either without or with a minimum of mineworkers, or with skilled engineers or supervisory staff on the one hand, or by processing and conversion without extraction on the other.

(14).... ROLF [Remotely Operated Longwall Face] or likewise operations, manless at the coalface, would or could involve only supervisors, engineers, craftsmen, WPIS [weekly paid industrial staff], so as to reinforce non-coalmining trade union membership but membership of BACM or at least NUM Power Group (Ottey) or COSA (Storey).

(15) ...The aims should be to:

- a) limit the future manning of the industry to restrict, to neutralize, alien or subversive political influences;
- b) ensure that of those employed in the mining industry the maximum number should be outwith the NUM.

(Winterton and Winterton, 1989:10-11)

Ezra replied by arranging an unofficial meeting with Miron on the 19 December. He had read the report 'with great interest and would very much like to discuss the implications' (Winterton and Winterton, 1989:10). Although it is an open question as to whether the Miron Report was ever adopted as 'official' NCB policy, as the Wintertons suggest:

'There is a remarkable congruence between the content of the Miron Report and key features of NCB strategy after 1973, particularly in relation to NCB industrial relations and wages policy.' (1989:11)

The report, submitted to Ezra in December 1973 could do little to prevent the miners embarking on another national wages campaign that was to have equally dramatic consequences to that of 1972. The 1973 rise in OPEC¹²⁰¹ 'militancy' and the consequent high price of oil strengthened the NUM's industrial position. In November 1973, as the miners began to operate a national overtime ban, the Government declared a *State of Emergency* to conserve fuel supplies and launched an attack on the 'political motives' of the miners' leadership. This attempt to split the membership from the more militant NUM leaders failed, with a national ballot resulting in an 81 percent vote for strike action. The government then decided to opt for battle in the electoral rather than the industrial arena. Two days before the strike was due to start, Edward Heath announced the dissolution of parliament and a General Election, posing the question, 'Who runs the country?' He then made an appeal, via a

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personal letter to Joe Gormley, for the strike to be called off, but this was turned down in a 20-6 vote by the NUM's National Executive Committee.

There were similarities with the 1972 dispute; the unity of the mineworkers and their communities freed them to take their message out to other trade unionists and put the arguments for solidarity. Although formal bilateral picketing agreements were made between NUM and other union officials, the emphasis was on active solidarity at a grass roots level. (The top TUC leadership were confined to a support role as they had been in 1972)

However there were also differences. Whether it was from a fear of providing the Conservatives with election propaganda, or from a fear of prosecution under the Industrial Relations Act, the 1974 strike involved fewer miners in less dramatic forms of activity. There was a heavily centralised, almost hierarchical national strike organisation which controlled most of the picketing funds, authorized targets and insisted that picketing be severely restricted (to six pickets per site). Miners reported that the police were better organized and more willing to harrass pickets involved in secondary picketing. In 1972, this would automatically have led to mass picketing, but in 1974 ASLEF had to instruct its members not to cross 'symbolic', unmanned picket lines, an instruction they adhered to.

The election results proved inconclusive.^[27] The Labour Party, with just five more seats than the Conservatives, formed a minority government with the support of the Liberals. Within days the new Secretary of State for Employment, Michael Foot, initiated a settlement with the miners which granted them major pay increases and improved conditions. The miners returned to work victorious after a month on strike. Apart from major material gains, their industrial action had 'forced' an early election and therefore, indirectly, the removal of the Heath Government. Once again the pit political strategy had been able to fuse a unity in the national community of mineworkers (rooted in

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uniform NPLA rates, a demand for coal and the 1972 success), with its equivalent in the broader class community; a confidence based on lack of major defeats, significant political and industrial grass roots organisation and a perception of an unwarranted government attack on organised workers.

But in the very success of these strikes, there lay the seeds of the destruction of this unity. The Heath government had fallen due to its determination to enforce wage restraint in the face of union opposition. The narrow election of two Labour governments in 1974, committed to dealing with the growing economic crisis through a further restriction of workers' incomes, meant that the unions had to either be won round to supporting wage restraint (thus the *Social Contract*, pioneered by Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones) or at least be prevented from destroying it. The NUM, committed to 'leading the field' in wages and enjoying a newly-established role in the 'vanguard' of the union movement, posed a particular problem for the newly-elected Labour governments.

The Productivity Bonus Scheme

The late 1970's witnessed a growing economic crisis, rising unemployment and an increasing number of serious defeats for the trade union movement in Britain. The falling fuel demand of recession-hit industry and a significant easing of the oil crisis affected the optimistic plans of the 1974 tripartite *Plan for Coal* and the Coal Industry Tripartite Committee's *Coal Industry Examination Interim Report* (Allen, 1981:286). The steady contraction in the demand for coal and the lack of progress on the basic wages front undermined the unity that had characterised the NUM in the early 1970's. But undoubtedly the most important factor in destroying this unity was the reintroduction of localised productivity bonus schemes along the lines recommended by the Miron Report, after a bitter three-year struggle.

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The Labour Government had a major interest in persuading the miners to accept a flexible productivity scheme. NPLA, the major attempt to rationalize the wages structure, allowing central management more control in a regionally diverse industry, was alleged to have gone badly awry. In return for guaranteeing a uniform wage rate irrespective of machine breakdown or geological conditions, the NCB hoped it had 'won the right to establish full management control over the direction of the labour process (Krieger, 1984:8). In reality the NPLA seemed to give the miners *more* control over the underground work process. By breaking the link between pay and physical effort, NPLA had tended to raise manning levels, lower the rate of productivity and encourage a resurgence of localised industrial conflict (over methods and conditions of working).

Apart from reversing this trend, a productivity deal allowed the government to make pay concessions to the NUM, while holding down the real wages of less powerful groups of workers (McCormick, 1979:228). As Miron had forecast, this was an anathema to the left wing of the NUM. Not only had the NPLA got rid of localised piecework with all its associated problems, but, more than anything else, it had tended to encourage a national identity between miners from the various coalfields, with their separate traditions and levels of development. It had, in short:

'provided the basis for national political unity which would defeat a government'.
(Krieger, 1984: 18)

The debate over the reintroduction of productivity schemes was long and acrimonious. Despite a conference decision and two national ballots to the contrary, the right-wing majority on the NUM's National Executive Committee (with the help of the NCB and the law courts) succeeded in reintroducing area incentive schemes in December 1977. There is no doubt that the Labour leadership was aware of the impact the day wage system had had in unifying the miners and concentrating their militancy at a national level. Whether the

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Labour Government and its Energy Minister, Tony Benn, made a conscious decision to undermine this militancy is a more open question, but this was the result of their continual pushing of the area bonus schemes.

The Ridley Report

While the material basis of the NUM's unity was being undermined, the *Economist* published a summary of the final report of the Conservative Party's Policy Group on the nationalised industries. It was drafted by Nicholas Ridley M.P., and showed that the party leadership under Margaret Thatcher were intent on learning the lessons of the 1972 and 1974.

Alongside a variety of proposals aimed at rationalising, fragmenting and privatising nationalised industries, the 'Ridley Report' mapped out a path through the minefield of anticipated trade union resistance. The nationalised industries were 'graded' according to the government's vulnerability to strike action in that area. Fearing a major challenge over wages or job losses in a 'vulnerable' industry (Ridley showed an understandable fascination with coal) that would have 'the full force of communist disrupters' behind it, the Report suggested a five-part strategy. The *Economist* summarized it as follows:

'1) Return on capital figures should be rigged so that an above-average wage claim can be paid to the 'vulnerable' industries.

2) The eventual battle should be on ground chosen by the Tories, in a field they think could be won (railways, British Leyland, the Civil Service or steel

3) Every precaution should be taken against a challenge in electricity or gas. Anyway redundancies in those industries are unlikely to be required. 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 in the power stations;

b) make contingency plans for the import of coal;

c) encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage contractors to help move coal where necessary;

d) introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible.

4) The group believes that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be to "cut off the money supply to strikers and make the union finance them".

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5) 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 overall 'mood' of the Ridley report was as important as its detailed suggestions. Learning the lessons from the Heath period, it rejected rigid adherence to dogma and set-piece battles in favour of a more flexible, 'guerilla-warfare' approach. It avoided setting up large, easy targets such as the National Industrial Relations Court or statutory incomes policy which could provide a focus for unification of the trade union movement. Instead it emphasised precise, but flexible forward planning and the need to divide and weaken the unions until victory in a major conflict was virtually guaranteed.

Due to the obvious importance of the Ridley Report in the eventual strategy of the Conservative Government, the run-up to the 1984 dispute has to be seen as a long one. With growing unemployment, social service cutbacks, privatisation and the Falklands War providing the backdrop, the Conservative Government inflicted increasingly major defeats on a trade union movement already weakened by years of incorporation and passivity under Labour. [20] The victimisation of Derek Robinson, a leading union convenor at British Leyland, (in which Ian MacGreggor is alleged to have played a key role), the defeat of the steel workers, hospital workers, train drivers and others laid the basis for more radical attacks. The dramatic use of riot police and anti-union legislation to break the strike of the National Graphical Association at the *Stockport Messenger* plant in Warrington (Dickenson, 1984) was soon followed by the banning of trade union membership at GCHQ, with these defeats leading to increased demoralisation among trade union activists and growing divisions between trade union leaders.

While the more right-wing trade union leaders theorised about the need for a 'new realism', suggesting that the Government would be prepared to tolerate a moderate, 'responsible' trade union movement, the NUM membership

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were electing their most prominent militant as successor to Joe Gormley. For two months Arthur Scargill campaigned on a platform of opposition to pit closures and a shift of power from the 'unrepresentative' National Executive to the national delegate conference (Allen, 1981:268). In December 1981 he was elected on the highest percentage of the vote ever recorded in an NUM national election - 70 percent (53 percent clear of his nearest rival, Trevor Bell, who stood on a 'common sense' ticket). Over the next three years, Scargill issued statement after statement on the need for unions to defy the Tory Government's policies, by industrial action if necessary. In 1981, it appeared that he was speaking for the majority of his membership. In January of that year, while still Yorkshire President, Scargill campaigned around a ballot of the 66,000 members in that coalfield which asked:

'Are you in favour of giving the NUM Yorkshire Area authority to take various forms of industrial action (including strike action, if necessary) to stop the closure of any pit, unless on the grounds of exhaustion?' [29]

The result was an overwhelming 86 percent vote to resist closures. A few days later the existence of a national 24-pit closure programme was discovered. The NUM executive gave seven days notice of a national strike ballot, but were overtaken by a rapid snowballing of unofficial strike action, launched from South Wales but being spread by flying pickets in several other coalfields. An emergency meeting between Derek Ezra, NCB Chairman, David Howells, Thatcher's Energy Secretary, and Joe Gormley resulted in extra subsidies to the coal industry and a cancellation of the closures. For the third time in less than ten years, the miners had succeeded in inflicting defeat on a Conservative Government.

CONCLUSION

My aim in this chapter has been to establish the broader historical context of the community study. I have argued that the construction of 'community' among miners has been closely associated with the development of their union at local and national levels. In turn the development of the national mineworkers' union has involved an extremely complex and often contradictory process.

The national union's strength has depended on its roots in thousands of pit village communities, with extremely diverse industrial and political traditions. Yet the pivotal position of the coal industry in the national and world economies has meant that the industrial activities of the miners have invariably involved a major political dimension, encouraging repeated state intervention and an interweaving of miners struggles with those of the broader working class community.

Victories and defeats on a national scale punctuated local histories and acted as the foundations of an exceptional form of collective consciousness among the coalfield population. Major, protracted struggles in particular, fought out in isolated villages, where coal production was the central fact of life, served to strengthen the bond between mining community and mineworkers' union, allowing women and other sections of the village population to become involved in union-centred political activity. The more critical the attack, the more fully the mining community felt obliged to mobilise in defence of the institution that was seen as key to empowering the local population

The 1947 nationalisation of the coal industry only served to underline the tensions and contradictions involved in the newly established National Union of Mineworkers, formally an industrial union, but in reality a loose confederation of 36 county unions. The 'removal' of control from the private coalowners to a centralised, bureaucratic level was hardly calculated to

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empower the grass roots mineworkers or their communities. The local devastation caused by the uncontrolled introduction of new technology in the 1960's underlined their powerlessness, accentuated by the incorporation of the national union leadership into a complacent collaboration with the NCB.

One important result of the national leadership's adherence to acquiescent 'mineworker politics' was the continuing development of 'pit politics'. Although the 1966 achievement of a 'uniform' national wage scale (NPLA) removed one of the key *local* sources of pit politics (piece rate bargaining), it also provided the material basis for its pioneering in a much broader arena. The culmination of this process lay in the victories of 1972 and 1974. After 25 years of post-nationalisation acquiescence, the miners' union engaged in lengthy national strikes in the face of government opposition. The high degree of cohesion apparent in the national 'community' of mineworkers was mirrored by a similar cohesion in the broader class community, allowing an extensive and powerful interaction between the two.

But by succeeding in the galvanising of national mineworkers' and class communities, the disputes stimulated a reaction from those who felt threatened by such action. While state agencies prepared themselves for more dynamic intervention, the NCB and Labour government set about undermining the new-found internal cohesion of the NUM and the Conservative Party drew up a long term strategy aimed at isolating the miners from the kind of class solidarity that had brought them victory in 1972 and 1974..

Given the extent of this intervention and preparation it was inevitable that the 1984/85 dispute should take place around different issues and in the context of a very different balance of class forces. These are the issues I address in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

1. Although there are indications of women's activity in county and national histories, I could find no study on women miners' involvement in the unions. Likewise the sparse coverage of the Miners' Association in Page Arnot and other general studies has made me heavily reliant on Challinor and Ripley's (1968) specialised study of that organisation.
2. Under the *truck* or *tommy* system, workers were obliged to buy food, fuel and materials at shops run by the owner or his agents, where quality might be inferior ('tommy rot') and prices tended to be higher than elsewhere. Wages were often paid in company tokens or at protracted intervals, to force people into debt at the company shop. Miners were especially vulnerable because of the geographical isolation, shift patterns and expendable materials they used in their work; candles, picks, powder, shovels, wood etc. Made illegal by the *Truck Act 1831*, the practise was still a problem for miners twenty years later. '*Buildas*' was a form of casual labour, where a miner might only be allowed to work a quarter or half a day and, in return, received only a token payment such as a pint of beer.

See Challinor and Ripley (1968:28) and Machin (1958:7).

3. The *Butty System* or *Buttyism* was a form of subcontracting where the colliery company would agree a contract for coal getting and ancillary tasks with the small boss or buttyman. On completion of the work, payment was made direct to the butty to dispose of among his work team as he saw fit. At the mercy of the butty for regular work, colliers might earn the buttyman a small fortune and receive a minimum wage in return. Often butties would become keepers of (tommy) shops or public houses and hire underground agents, *pufflers* or '*monkey puffs*', to supervise their pit contracts. Wages were often paid in the pub, with heavy drinking being 'encouraged' by the butty. In areas where the butty system was employed, it was obviously a major factor in shaping the village communities and union traditions. (See *History of Moorends, Ch 10*)

The yearly Bond was an agreement between masters and men, legally binding on both sides, that was most commonly employed in the coalfields of Northumberland and Durham. Technically an agreement freely negotiated between equals, the state of the labour market made this a grisly fiction. Tying the miner to his job and making resistance of any kind illegal, the Bond was buttressed by an elaborate system of fines, with the employer entitled to make deductions from miners' wages virtually at will. Any attempt at resistance, collective or otherwise constituted a breaking of the Bond and a three month prison sentence. Unable to leave his job, the miner under bond was forced to endure the poorest and most dangerous of conditions. It was the Miners Association's work against the Bond that won them such high membership levels in the North East. See Challinor and Ripley (1968, Chapter Six)

4. On 4 July 1838, for example, twenty six children and young people (boys and girls) were drowned in the Huskar Colliery, Silkstone, near Barnsley. The average age of those who were killed was eleven. See Machin (1958:8-9)
5. The second major clause in 1842 Bill was complete exclusion of all children under thirteen from the pits. On the insistence of the coalowner lobby in the House of Lords, led by Lord Londonderry, Lord Durham, Lord Melbourne and Lord Granville, only children under the age of ten were excluded.
6. The great Northern coalowners, in particular Lord Londonderry voiced opposition to all the five main clauses in the act, and vociferously challenged Ashley's right to interfere in their industry at all. However, in

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contrast to Yorkshire, Lancashire, Pembroke and the Scottish coalfields, the North East were the employers of children rather than adult women, so it was on the four clauses aimed at preventing excessive exploitation of youth that they (successfully) directed their attention.

See Challinor and Ripley (1968:210-12) and John (1984:48-50)

7. By 1914 the Lancashire 'pit brow lasses' were being recruited into the *National Federattion of Women Workers* and by 1919 into the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation. See John (1984:226-7)
8. The total Soviet contribution to the British Miners' Relief Fund, amounted to £1,161,459 2s.6d. or 87 percent of all overseas donations. Most South Wales lodges were quite open in letting people know about the origins of their grants and this led to a clearly internationalist dimension to the Strike cultures that developed in these villages. Some lodges affiliated to *International Class War Prisoners' Aid*, while others called for the MFGB affiliate to the 'Third' or 'Red International of Labour Unions' (RILU)
See Francis and Smith (1980:52-4)
9. Apart from the intervention of Spencer, one of the reasons for the early return to work in Nottinghamshire was the coalowners' threat to cancel all the pre-strike 'butties' contracts and appoint new butty-men in their place. Their prominent position at all levels of the county union made it relatively easy for them to organise a major return to work. Receiving major financial backing from the owners and Havelock Wilson's Seamen's Union, Spencer's *Nottinghamshire Non-Political Union* had links with a company union in South Wales, the South Wales Miners' Industrial Union, and attempted to set up a National Miners Non-Political Union. With little grass roots membership or support, Spencer suffered a major blow in the eight-month Harworth Strike of 1936 and was eventually reconciled with the MFGB executive in September 1937.
10. Report of the MFGB Annual Conference, July 1943.
11. The 1935 Labour Party Programme had, for example, specified that 'the acquisition of industries and services will involve fair payment to existing owners.' See Coates and Topham (1970: Chapter 2)
12. The scarcity of photographic evidence of these signs is partially explained by their extremely short life span. Retired Armthorpe miners informed me that the Markham Main sign was removed within a month of nationalisation. (Armthorpe Interviews: 81 & 84SC)
13. This collaborative relationship was not matched at a local level however. Between 1953 and 1957, coalmining there were on average, 1,771 (recorded) strikes annually, accounting for 75.9 percent of all the recorded strikes in Britain (See table 2.1). Some of the major disputes, the *Grimethorpe Stint Strike* (1947), the *Armthorpe Fillers' Strike* (1955) and the *Brodsworth Dispute* (1961) are outlined in McCormick (1979:Chapter 6)
14. The Labour party's Home Policy Committee was committed to a minimum target of 200 million tonnes of coal. The Labour Government's 1965 'Plan for Coal' predicted that production would have to fall to between 170-180 million tonnes by 1970. In November 1967 this estimate was revised downwards to 120 million tonnes by 1975, due to the development of North Sea Gas.
See Francis and Smith (1980:451-2)
15. Presidential Address, 1965 N. U. M. Conference Report.
16. Yorkshire Area NUM adopted a four panel structure in 1950, corresponding to the NCB coalfield structure. Set up to receive and transmit information from

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the Yorkshire Council and executive committee, they developed a more independent role as initiators and coordinators of (frequently oppositional) activity among the local branches. For an outline of the potent relationship between Armthorpe's 'pit politics' and the Doncaster NUM Panel, see Chapter Four. The Armthorpe Fillers' Dispute was seen as the major cause of the NUM deciding to create a new layer of elected officials, the 'area agents', whose constituencies corresponded to those of the area panels.

17. This rule was amended at the 1971 Annual NUM Conference to require only a 55 percent vote to sanction an official strike. Vic Allen (1981) *The Militancy of British Miners*, Moor Press, Shipley, pg 166. A further amendment to Rule 43, allowing the sanctioning strike action on a simple majority was finally passed in 1984.
18. For example on the tenth day of the strike, a group of fifty coalfield women from Clowne, Derbyshire, were on their way to a London demonstration when they spotted a lorry carrying coal. They insisted on pulling off the main road to follow it. Councillor Doris Ashley, aged 59, explained:
'We decided to follow it and picket the driver. We, miners' wives, widows, sisters and daughters have come to show the country that we are 100 percent behind the men. We are determined to show that we are not going to nag them back to the pit.'
Anna Cullen: 'The miners have not grumbled for 15 years, Now we will fight on even if we have to eat grass!'. The *Morning Star* carried reports of the setting up of women's support groups in Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Yorkshire, Kent and Coventry
19. The Heath Government had taken steps to reduce the amount of social security payable to strikers' families. Prior to the 1971 Social Security Act, £4.35 of tax rebate and strike pay were ignored when calculating DHSS entitlement, by 1972 only £1 was. Strikers families were also 'entitled' to emergency grants, but frequently had to fight for them. In Rugeley, for example, 200 people including children, occupied the council buildings until they won a pledge from the Staffordshire Director of Social Services that an emergency welfare centre would be set up to provide heating, food and clothing for those who needed it (*Times*, 11/2/72). Nevertheless the tendency among women to see the Government's curbing of DHSS as 'unreasonable' and 'political', encouraging them to identify with the miners' cause was visible in 1972. One woman on the Rugeley occupation suggested:
'Some families believe they are in the middle of a clash with the government, determined to starve them back to work' (*Times*, 16/2/72)
For an outline of the mining families' experience of the DHSS in 1984, see Jones and Novak (1984)
20. For example in the week after Saltley, the *Morning Star* carried the following reports: Dagenham housewives collecting £15 from Saturday shoppers, Canvey Labour Party setting up a food collection point in a local hall and sending four van loads to the Kent miners. Over a hundred professors, lecturers and research staff at London University pledging a days pay. Meat haulage drivers at Smithfield donating £92 and threatening industrial action if the miners were still out by the end of February. £375 plus 30 tons of food being sent by Covent Garden porters and London printworkers. Doncaster miners claiming they had raised over £5,000 from the major cities.
21. The government's strategy of threatening power cuts and layoffs only made solidarity action more likely. Birmingham lorry drivers were among the first to take industrial action and join the miners at Saltley. Large delegations of building workers, involved in their own pay dispute, joined them. Perhaps most prominent were engineering workers from S.U. Carburettors. They staged a

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- 24-hour strike on Tuesday 1 February, and joined the Saltley pickets, threatening to repeat their action every Tuesday till the depot was closed.
22. There were 180 arrests at Saltley and a total of 263 arrests for picketing offences throughout the 1972 dispute. Crick (1985:61) This compares with a total of 11,312 strike related arrests during the 1984-85 Strike.
See Percy-Smith and Hillyard (1985:345).
23. Reginald Maudling, then Home Secretary suggested in his memoirs: :
'the then Chief Constable of Birmingham assured me that only over his dead body would they succeed [in closing Saltley]. I felt constrained to ring him the day after it happened to enquire after his health!'
Maudling (1978:160).
24. The *Times*, for example had their Saltley report as a secondary article to Robert Carr's announcement of a 'Court of Enquiry'. They reported the closure under the headline 'Gas Board Insists on Reopening Coke Depot' and continued:
'From an unlikely perch on top of a municipal public lavatory at 10.43 this morning, union officials signalled what appeared at first sight to be a potent trade union victory (....).
By evening however, the pre-lunchtime champagne feeling had gone flat. The West Midlands Gas Board after a full meeting went most of the way to meeting the miners' demands over supplies, but insisted on re-opening the depot tomorrow (...) A public relations official said that Mr Beavis [WMGB] was waiting with an open telephone line to London for a 'decision from a higher authority' (Times, 11/2/72)
This kind of reporting, which undoubtedly encouraged later myths suggesting that the Saltley closure was merely a 'one-off' protest (i.e. it could have been re-opened the following day), ignored pledges from all the local union spokesmen that suggested if the depot was re-opened against the NUM's wishes, there would be an immediate stoppage of even more workplaces. Norman Cartwright (AEUW), Alan Law (T&GWU) and others joined George Evans, district organiser of the National Union of Vehicle Builders, in suggesting:
'If they are foolish enough to open we shall have to mobilize a force greater than today to make sure they do not keep it open. I would hope that they would not be so foolish' (Times, 11/2/72)
25. Due to its steadfast refusal to recognise or appear before the NIRC, the AEUW had major fines imposed on it, for contempt, and eventually had funds compulsorily sequestrated. A national strike of engineering workers in protest against the courts actions was avoided when an anonymous group of business men paid all the AUEW's court costs (stemming from it's dispute with the court over an 'illegal' recognition dispute). Coates & Topham (1982:274).
26. OPEC = Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries)
27. The results were as follows,
- | | | | |
|--------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Labour | 301 seats | Liberals | 14 seats |
| Tories | 296 seats | Others | 23 seats |
28. There were, of course, industrial struggles under the 1974-97 Labour Government, but these were often protracted and ended in defeat - Grunwicks, Firemen, and finally the series of strikes against wage curbs in the public and private sectors that were labelled the 'Winter of Discontent' (1978-79) The period of the Social Contract saw major cuts in public expenditure and wages. Average real wages fell by 2 per cent in 1974-75, 4 per cent in 1975-76 and 5 per cent in 1976-77. For contrasting views of the Social Contract, see Panitch (1981), Crouch (1982) and Callinicos & Simons (1985:32)
29. Yorkshire Area NUM Ballot Paper, 29-31 January 1981.

Chapter Three

ISSUES in the NATIONAL STRIKE

Introduction

The relationship between capital and labour is a complex one. Even brief conflicts that have fairly straightforward beginnings can generate a number of different issues as they progress. This led Alvin Gouldner to suggest:

'a "strike" is a social phenomenon of enormous complexity which, in its totality, is never susceptible to complete description, let alone complete explanation'. (Gouldner, 1955:65)

Due to its duration, the scale and compass of its activity, the 1984/85 Miners Strike emerged as an extreme example of this phenomenon - a multiple-issue generating dispute. As it continued, there was a *development* of issues, demanding more questioning and more understanding from both participants and observers. But other issues began to emerge in the run up to the dispute.

The February 1981 government 'climdown' was later explained by Thatcher's Energy Secretary, David Howell, as 'entirely' a tactical one:

'Neither the Government nor I think society as a whole was prepared to get locked into a coal strike ... In those days the stocks weren't so high. I don't think the country was prepared, and the whole of the NUM and the trade union movement tended to be united all on one side'
(ITN Channel 4 News, 14/11/84)

The tactical retreat was followed by a period of renewed preparation by the government and evidence of growing disunity among the miners. This chapter outlines the process in some detail. I describe how the NCB continued to close pits through the local colliery review procedure^[1] and the government continued to implement the Ridley strategy, in terms of anti-union legislation, calculated attacks on selected trade union targets, and the building of coal stocks. As the Government inflicted a series of damaging defeats on the broader trade union movement, the efforts of the NUM national leadership to rebuild a

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national cohesion among their membership met with failure. The Tories, taking advantage of a changed balance of forces; their 1983 Falklands/election victories and disarray among their political and trade union opponents, sharpened their intervention in the field of energy.

I then outline some of the major issues that were raised by the national dispute. I begin by looking at the objectives of the NCB and government and the strategy they adopted to achieve them. I suggest that the behaviour of the NCB, police, law courts, DHSS and media only make sense in terms of the overall government strategy of isolation of the striking miners, prior to breaking their resistance. Fundamentally this necessitated the prevention of face to face contact either with working miners or workers in other industries (thereby preventing the full operation of pit political tactics). The geographic isolation of many mining villages facilitated this strategy. However, I suggest that the Government's success in cutting the miners off from the kind of solidarity they achieved in the 1970's had a contradictory effect in that it threw them back on their own resources and therefore encouraged the renewal of the close bonding between community and union that had underpinned the resilience of the miners in the past.

Although the local strike-based communities were usually set up around essentially defensive demands of preserving jobs and communities, in order to withstand the government's offensive the strike activists were often forced to pioneer new institutions, new roles and new relationships. I describe this contradictory process, whereby a strike in defence of the old pit/NUM-centred community allowed non-miners: women, young and old to assume an unprecedented prominence in a new strike-based community.

The government strategy of isolation and repression of the miners also encouraged the establishment of a second, much wider community, based on the political and trade union minorities who found themselves unable to win the

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majority of their workmates to major physical solidarity. I argue that the political backgrounds of many members of the strike support network, and their 'distance' from the coalfield, enabled them to perceive the underlying issues of the strike more sharply than a many of the strikebound population. For them the strike represented the first serious challenge to the 'irresistible' rise of unemployment, a veto of managerial prerogatives and, by implication, a repudiation of both increasingly authoritarian government and the 'free market' priorities it championed.

It is in the context of the relationship between these two strike-based communities that many of the other Strike issues can best be investigated. I pose questions concerning the potential of collective struggle to reshape community at various levels, to transform attitudes towards society, to politicise its participants. These are the issues that will then be taken up in the course of the studies of Armthorpe and Moorends.

Ballots and Disunity in the NUM

Despite the demonstration of widespread militant opposition to pit closures in February 1981, the strategy adopted by NCB management and government in encouraging disunity in the NUM was largely successful. During 1982 and 1983 there were distinct signs of growing divisions inside the NUM, both between the areas and between the more moderate members and the leftward shifting national officials. Evidence of this centres on the results of three national ballots. In January 1982 while Joe Gormley was still NUM President and Scargill President-Elect, 55 percent of the membership voted against the Executive's recommendation to take industrial action in pursuit of a 23 percent wage claim. In doing this they appeared to listen to the voice of 'new realism', articulated by Joe Gormley in a *Daily Express* article the previous day. He had suggested:

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'I have no false hopes that Maggie Thatcher will cough up for us ...
There's not much likelihood of a strike producing more than a few quid
in my judgement' (Daily Express, 13/1/82)

In the October 1982 ballot, wages were again the immediate issue, but the Executive decided to combine the pay question with the issue of pit closures. 61 percent of the national membership voted against strike action. Scargill then revealed, via *The Miner*, an NCB 'hit-list' of 55 collieries. The NCB claimed their confidential documents had been 'misinterpreted'. Although 69 percent of the Scottish miners had voted for strike action in October, when, in November, pickets from the threatened Kinneil Colliery brought out the Scottish pits, their area executive recommended they abide by the national ballot and accept the closure. Although the Kinneil miners then staged an unofficial stay-down strike over Christmas, they failed to spread the action or save their pit, the first NCB target in an extensive Scottish closure programme.

In February 1983, a group of twenty eight South Wales miners also adopted the tactic used in the desperate struggles against company unionism in the 1930's, and staged a 'sit-down' strike underground at their threatened colliery, Tymawr Lewis Merthyr. Flying pickets brought the rest of South Wales out and sent delegations out to seek support from other areas. Scotland and Yorkshire Area Councils voted for strike action and area ballots were proposed in other areas. At an emergency meeting of the National Executive called by Scargill, he appealed for it to authorise area strikes under the NUM's Rule 41.^[2] The right wing caucus opposed him and a majority of the NEC voted against the Yorkshire resolution, insisting on a national ballot prior to any spreading of the strike action.^[3]

The South Wales miners, who had intended to spread the strike by picketing every other pit out, found themselves hamstrung by this decision. Rather than meeting their fellow miners at the pit gates, confronting them with the issues and attempting to win collective support, they found themselves

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'lobbying' area and branch officials. They were amazed at the affluence of the Midland miners and felt they were given the 'Public Relations' treatment. As one Welsh miner put it:

'I stayed with a Nottingham miner and he was telling me the bonus that they earn at his pit was £24 a shift. We don't get that in a month at our pit.....I think a lot of it was guilt money. They made promises and they treated us well but I don't think they really went out to argue our case for us. They said they would, but I don't think they did.'

(Beynon, 1984:11)

The reinforcing of the moderate traditions and 'area autonomy' envisaged in the Miron Report is clearly revealed in the series of ballot results outlined in table 3.1:

Table 3.1 Per cent votes for strike action by area 1982-84

Area	January 1982	October 1982	March 1983	March 1984	Members '84 (approx)
Cumberland	52	36	42	22	650
N. Derbyshire	50	40	38	50	10,500
S. Derbyshire	16	13	12	13	3,000
Durham	46	31	39	--	13,000
Kent	54	69	68	--	2,000
Lancashire	40	44	39	41	7,000
Leicester	20	13	18	--	2,500
Midlands	27	23	21	27	1,200
Northumberland	37	32	35	52	5,000
Nottingham	30	21	19	26	32,000
Scotland	63	69	50	--	11,500
North Wales	18	24	23	--	1,000
South Wales	54	59	68	--	21,000
Yorkshire	66	56	54	--	56,000
Colliery Officials	14	10	15	--	16,000
Cokemen	32	22	39	--	4,500
National Average	45	39	39	--	

Source: Callinicos, Simons, 1985:44

The March ballot returned the same result nationally as the October linked-issues one. Again only 39 percent of the national membership voted in favour of taking action in defence of jobs, and again certain groups were prominent in their opposition. Whereas 68 percent of South Wales (and Kent) miners voted to strike, only 19 percent of Notts miners, 18 percent of Leicester miners, 15 percent of COSA members, and 12 percent of South Derbyshire miners voted to support their fellow union members in South Wales.

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These ballot results revealed the degree and persistence of the disunity among NUM members that had developed since the mid-70's. It seemed as if the strategy advocated by Miron was bearing fruit and the cohesion of the early 1970's had disappeared. The massive wage differentials produced by productivity bonuses appeared to be interacting with local traditions of moderation and quiescence in certain coalfields and thereby creating an entrenched obstacle to effective resistance against pit closures.

Each ballot result revealed the deep divisions in the national community of mineworkers and confirmed the lack of an effective national union. Miners unaffected by closures were, in effect, deciding the fate of those that were threatened. To the men in the peripheral, disadvantaged coalfields of Scotland, Wales, Kent and the North East, it appeared as if the Notts and Midland miners would never vote to support threatened miners elsewhere. The tyranny implicit in a comfortable majority being able to vote a minority out of their jobs was deeply felt. As one Welsh miner put it:

'only twenty percent of the fuckers would vote to help save the job of another man - that's fucking disgraceful that. It is mind. It's disgraceful.'

(Beynon, 1984: 11)

and another:

'Everything that was done upto the ballot was done right. It was the ballot that was wrong. The NEC should have left South Wales to carry on the fight for jobs.'

(Beynon, 1984: 12)

and another:

'If they are going to start holding ballots again, then I'm afraid we're going to lose...Forget about your ballots, forget about all the talking, the only strategy if the pit is nearing to close...is to come out on strike and get the rest of the coalfield and start picketing the pits out. That is the only way you will get miners out on strike now. The same as we done in 1981, we went out picketing and they came out and supported us. That was the one comradeship that we have got left is that a miner won't cross a picket line.' (Samuel, Bloomfield, Boanas, 1986: 65)

The abject failure of the 'constitutional', national ballot strategy for combatting pit closures was encouraging miners to reach back to 1969-1972 when

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a national community of mineworkers had been created on the basis of uniform wage scales and a pit political strategy. With the unifying impact of NPLA eroded by local productivity deals, the NUM militants were forced to put more and more reliance on the effectiveness of pit political tactics.

Run-Up to the Strike

Eighteen days after the March 1983 ballot result was announced, the rumoured appointment of Ian Macgregor as Chairman of the National Coal Board was confirmed. As head of the AMAX mining corporation, he had established its reputation as a union busting concern. The *United Mineworker of America* had suggested:

'We all know AMAX for what it is - a leader of anti-union activity throughout the nation and especially in the West.'

(Beynon, McMyllor, 1984: 42)

Arthur Scargill had already drawn his members attention to MacGregor's record at British Steel where he had made more than half the workforce redundant. He had written in the March 1983 edition of *the Miner*:

'Waiting in the wings, waiting to chop us to pieces is Yankee steel butcher, MacGregor'

By the Summer, Thatcher had won a landslide election victory. With a 141 seat majority behind her, she is alleged to have told Peter Walker^[4] on the day after the election, 'Peter, I want you to go to Energy, we're going to have a miners' strike' (Crick, 1985:96). In July 1983, the Annual Conference of the NUM passed an emergency motion instructing the National Executive to:

'immediately embark on a campaign to win the whole-hearted support of Miners not only to oppose pit and works closures, but all reductions in manpower.'

In the debate on this resolution, Scargill called for unity in the NUM:

'For God's sake, I ask members of our Union to stop knocking C. O. S. A., stop knocking the Midlands or Nottinghamshire and start winning them for support for the N. E. C. motion.'^[5]

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MacGregor took over at the NCB on 1 September. A special NUM delegate conference imposed an overtime ban from the 31 October, linking rejection of the NCB's 5.2 percent wage offer with the issue of pit closures. Six months after MacGregor had taken office, on Thursday, 1 March (the first day of Spring!), George Hayes, NCB director for South Yorkshire announced that Cortonwood Colliery was to be shut down within five weeks. On Sunday 4 March the Cortonwood miners voted unanimously to strike and call for support from the rest of Yorkshire. On Monday the NUM Yorkshire Council called on all its members to strike from that Friday, citing the 86 percent vote in the January 1981 area ballot as binding on them.

The following day, Tuesday 6 March, the leaders of the three mining unions were informed at a National Consultative Council meeting that Cortonwood was only part of a much larger programme of closures. The proposed four million tonne cut in production in 1984-85 meant that some 20 pits and 20,000 jobs would have to go (Crick, 1985:99). Scargill publicly accused Macgregor of concealing the full extent of his butchery, suggesting the real targetted cuts were 70 pits and 84,000 jobs in the next 3 years. Bradford University academics estimated that the combined effects of new technology and the announced closures would be the loss of 100,000 jobs in five years. When this suggestion - that by March 1989, there could be 79,000 miners concentrated in 94 pits - was put to Ian Lloyd, Conservative Chairman of the Select Committee on Energy. He replied, 'Yes, something of that order' (Winterton, 1984a). What was being planned was the virtual eradication of several of the coalfields, and the decimation of hundreds of coalfield communities.

NCB and GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES

As can be seen from the above description, it was the government and NCB who decided the overall context and the issues at the root of the conflict. It was not simply a matter of MacGregor and the NCB insisting on a careful choice

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of the 'initial' issue - 'uneconomic' pit closures. The high level of preparation on the part of the state strengthened its ability to mould and shape the dispute. The roots of many of the Strike issues can therefore be traced to the objectives of the Conservative Government and the unprecedented levels of state preparation and intervention.

Repeatedly spokespeople for the NCB insisted that their overriding concern was for increased efficiency, modernisation and competitiveness in the British coal industry. However a cursory glance at the Ridley Report, [6] or at the developments in other sectors of nationalised British industry immediately inspires a series of questions as regards the nature and purpose of achieving maximum efficiency.

The *Plan for Coal*, drawn up in 1974 and reaffirmed in 1977 and 1980 put coal at the centre of the national energy policy. The maintenance of the industry was seen as of major importance given the major fluctuations previously experienced in the worlds energy markets. But, as Gamble points out:

'dependence on one fuel and one source of supply was anathema to the principles of the Ridley report, particularly since it underwrote the political and industrial power of the miners. With the recession all forms of energy were now in potential over-supply and this pointed to the need for a major contraction of energy industries to eliminate high-cost capacity.' (1985: 16)

A series of NCB/government reports were released in 1983 attempting to illustrate how uneconomic coal mining had become. For example the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's Report on NCB efficiency and costs defined 141 of Britain's 198 pits as unprofitable (Winterton and Winterton, 1989: 59). Walter Marshall, a champion of nuclear power from the Atomic Energy Authority, [7] appointed head of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) in 1982, suggested '70 per cent dependency on coal is excessive' (Gamble, 1985: 16) It became apparent that the government was heavily committed to a cheap energy policy, buying large supplies from the cheapest sources, in order to minimise the energy costs of British industry and reduce the burden of government

subsidies. Inside the coal industry this implied the closure of high-cost pits and the concentration of new technology in the more efficient ones.

Jonathan Winterton argued that the chief consequence of an unbridled introduction of new technology (associated with the Mines Operating System - MINOS) was an inevitable and major reduction in the size of the workforce needed to produce coal for the NCB's static (or declining) share of the energy market. He suggested that the productivity gains made possible by MINOS were so great that its introduction would allow the NCB to plan manning levels for automated pits at only 53 percent of the 1984 levels (Winterton, 1984: 237). A policy of selective introduction of this technology in the central coalfields therefore tended to encourage an increased differentiation between high-cost and low-cost production pits, raising the spectre of further decimation of the more peripheral coalfields. Glynn estimated that the elimination of high cost capacity to 'make room' for new capacity would result in the closure of seventy pits and the loss of around 70,000 jobs by 1988-90 (1984: 11)

Assertion of Managerial Prerogatives

Given what Gibbon has described as the 'increased politicisation of mineworkers' politics' (1988: 154) and the emergence of regional and national leaders who owed their prominence to their successful advocacy of a certain kind of 'pit politics', the NCB knew that they would encounter serious opposition to an efficiency drive that involved this kind of pit closure programme. The NUM had begun to push for major issues, such as the NCB's investment, marketing and new technology policies, previously regarded as subjects of managerial prerogative, to be placed on the agenda for negotiation/contestation. By 1983 the NUM were asking the NCB to concede a comprehensive new technology agreement which would allow the union some control over its introduction (Feickart, 1984: 246). The management's 'right to manage',

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a key component in the post-nationalisation corporatist ideology and structure was being questioned by a significant section of the NUM national leadership.

This phenomenon was especially unwelcome in that it ran counter to the trend of increased managerial assertiveness that had characterised British industrial relations since 1979. With MacGregor as his deputy, the reassertion of the 'management's right to manage' was championed by Michael Edwardes as an essential part of his British Leyland 'survival plan'. As Gibbon suggests:

'Nominally these [non-negotiable 'survival plans'] involved a reappraisal of product strategy, decentralisation of operations and elimination of non-mainstream activities and high-cost capacity. Their central element though was 'revolutionising labour relations'. This was to occur through management taking 'hard decisions' on pay and working practises, by-passing local union structures by communicating the reasons for them direct to the workforce ...'. (1988:155)

If the NCB were to reap the full benefits of their modernisation/rationalisation of the coal industry it became obvious that their 'survival plan' would have to include a 'revolutionising' of labour relations and an 'establishing' of their unimpeded 'right to manage'. As Ian Macgregor put it:

'I had a job to do, which was to make sure we recovered the right to manage the coal industry...'. (1986:284)

This reassertion of managerial prerogatives involving a disengagement from the close institutionalised relationship with the NUM and its 'cutting down to size', has to be analysed in the light of the wider aspirations of the government and the private energy lobby. Colin Sweet has suggested that one of the major flaws in the *Plan for Coal* was its gross overestimation of the demand for fuel (1984:207). The steady reduction in annual coal production targets was accompanied by pressure (on a not unsympathetic government) from the 'energy establishment', consisting of the nuclear lobby, sections of the NCB and the privately-owned, international oil-coal companies.

The policy of diversification of energy supply, especially by increasing nuclear capacity, had two further advantages; removing energy supply

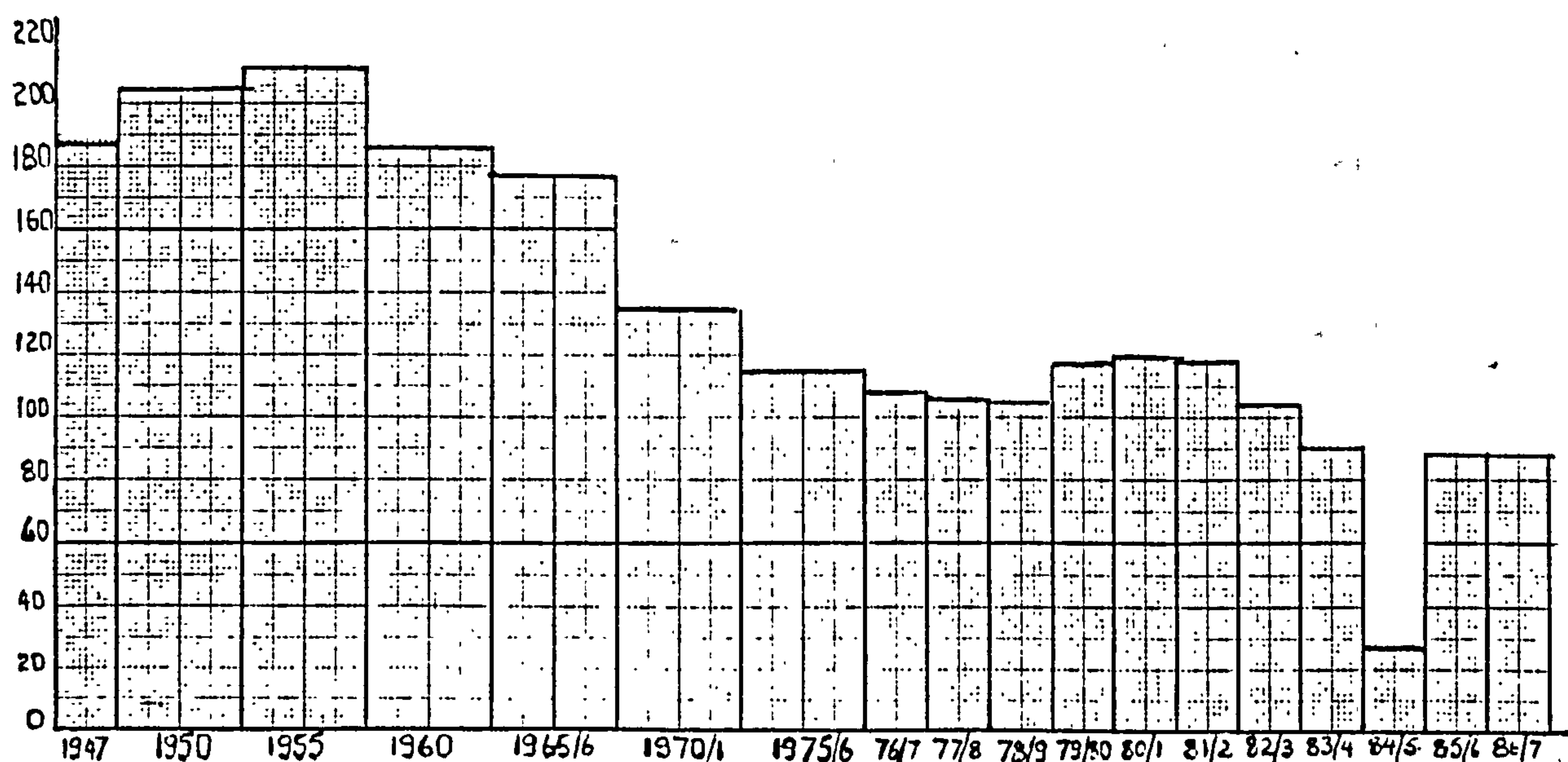
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from the influence of large numbers of trade unionists with a history of militancy, and supplying the nuclear requirements of the military. Sweet (1984) suggests that the central preoccupation of Margaret Thatcher and her backers in the energy establishment was to attack the strength of the unions and pluralistic industrial relations structures, with the eventual aim of widespread privatisation in the coal industry and energy sector. Due to the political sensitivity of this issue, these plans were not made explicit.^[2] But for the first time, senior NCB management were summoned to monthly accountability meetings at the Department of Energy and, as early as 1980, one of them confided, 'Major decisions are being made by the government' (Krieger, 1984:277). Thatcher's 1983 appointment of MacGregor, formerly head of the AMAX mining corporation, as NCB chairman, following her 1982 appointment of Marshall, tended to confirm the government's intentions.

Weakening the NUM's Industrial Position

The government policy of diversification of fuel was one of the factors which led to a fall in the demand for coal illustrated in table 3.2:

Table 3.2 National Output - Deep-Mined Coal 1947-87 (million tonnes)

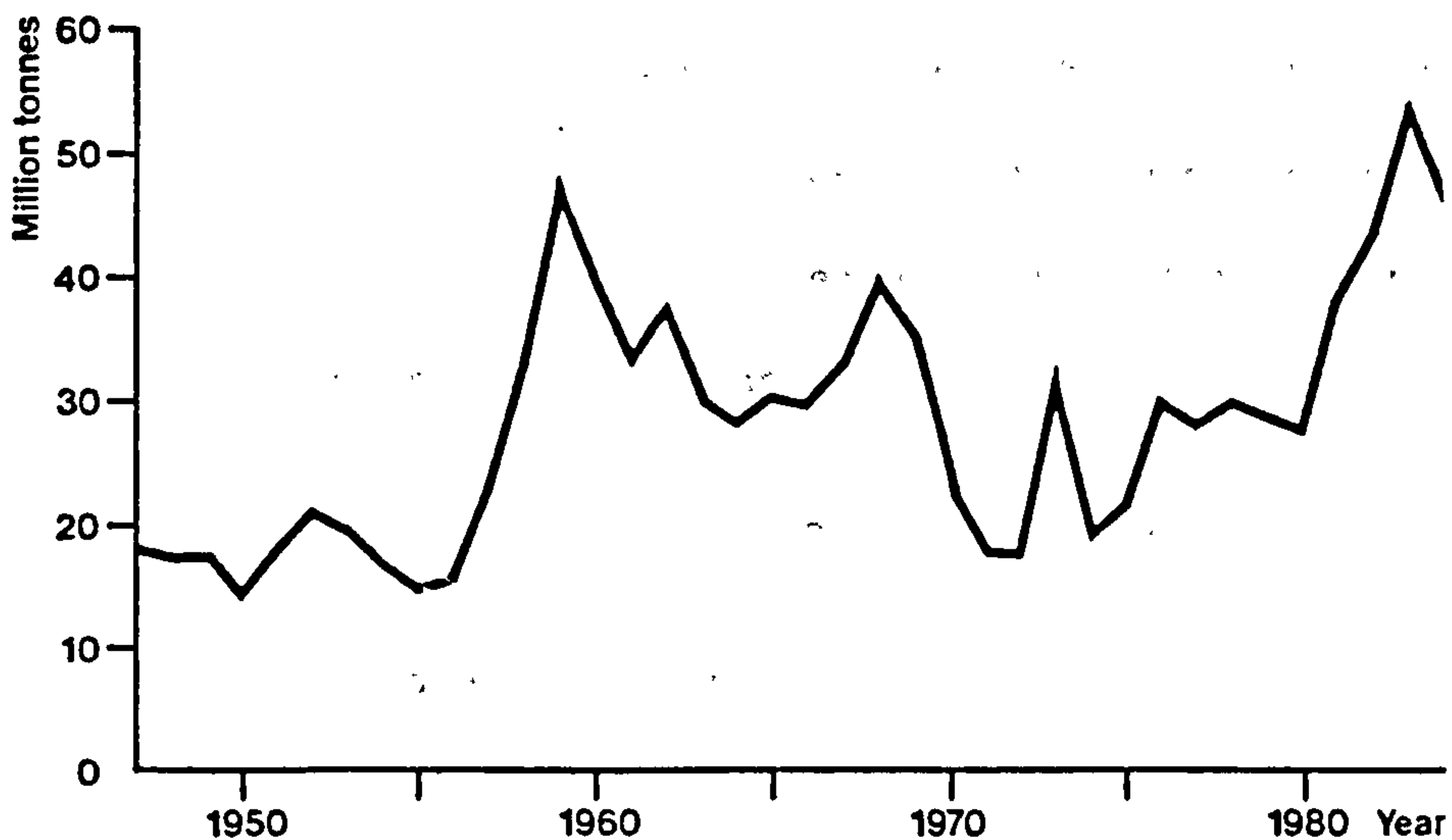


Source: NCB Report and Accounts, 1983-4

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Despite the high cost of, and problems with, alternative fuels, by 1984 there had already been an significant reduction in the British economy's dependence on coal. It was not merely a question of a falling demand. The decline in production in the years 1980-83 made more gradual because the NCB and CEEGB were building up their coal stocks to unprecedented levels. Since the first Thatcher Government had taken office, total coal stocks had risen by one hundred and sixteen percent, while power station stocks had been increased by one hundred and seventy one percent. Table 3.3 indicates the variations in national coal stocks since nationalisation:

Table 3.3 National Coal Stocks 1947-84



Source: Winterton and Winterton, 1989: 148.

At the time of the 1981 strike against pit closures, stocks stood at 37.2 million tonnes. When the NUM overtime began at the end of October 1983, coal stocks had reached a post-war record of 59.9 million tonnes, with 33.7 million held at the power stations. Some of these stocks had been built due to an increased importation of coal, and there was also a significant stockpiling of coal at Rotterdam (Winterton and Winterton, 1989: 148)

Electricity generation was made more secure by a policy of fuel substitution. The new, oil-fired stations at Grain, Ince and Littlebrook supplied eighteen percent of the electricity used during the strike. There was

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a mothballing of the older, oil-fired power stations in the South of England and a conversion of some coal-fired stations to dual, coal/oil firing. These preparations allowed a major increase in oil burn at power stations from around 10 per cent to over 50 percent during the 1984/85 Strike (Beynon, McMylor, 1984:38). The computerisation of the national grid also allowed the CEGB a greater control of national supply.

As a result, neither the rapid exhaustion of stocks, nor the dependence of the CEGB on coal that led to the vulnerability of the Heath Government were in evidence in the 1984/85 Dispute. In the early 1970's it was the co-operation of other organized workers that enabled NUM picketing to be so effective. The successful execution in 1984 of a massive fuel substitution programme, involving thousands of trade union members, seriously weakened the industrial position of the NUM and indicated the degree of pre-Strike preparation undertaken by the Conservative Government.

State Intervention on an Unprecedented Scale

Government preparation was not, however, limited to the planning and execution of a 'flexible' energy policy. Within weeks of the outbreak of the Strike a range of government preparations and interventions began to reveal themselves. Most of these activities were coordinated by the Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU), which worked under the Civil Contingencies Committee (CCC) in the Cabinet Office. The CCC, formerly known as the National Security Committee, was set up by the Heath Government after their 1972 defeat at the hands of the miners. Its main reason for existence is to assess and counter the harmful effects of strikes, bringing together representatives from all the relevant government departments, as well as the police, the military and the security services.

Perhaps the most important, and certainly the most visible operation it was responsible for was the intervention of the police. Within 48 hours of

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Yorkshire strikers launching flying pickets, a well-prepared policing operation began to be put into effect (see Chapter Five). Their main priority appeared to be the prevention of all communication between striking and working miners. This resulted in the first, well-publicised, scenes of violence at Ollerton in which a picket, David Jones, was killed on Thursday 15 March. Four days later, the extent of police preparation became evident with the implementation of a nationally-coordinated, mass policing operation directed from the National Reporting Centre on the 13th floor of New Scotland Yard (Kettle, 1985:30) Again, the primary objective appeared to be to prevent effective picketing and isolate striking miners in their already geographically isolated communities.

Other state controlled agencies were involved in this process of isolation and coercion. Increasing evidence of phone tapping and letter checking meant that the postal and telephone systems had to be treated with care or bypassed altogether (Coulter, Miller, Walker, 1984:47) This led to the widespread use of the 'sealed envelope' system for written communication and a variety of codes for telephone conversations.

The Inland Revenue withheld tax rebates indefinitely.^[9] Within weeks it became evident that the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) were not going to perform their essential duties with regard to the striking section of the mining population. Not only were the strikers unable to claim anything for themselves, but under the 1980 Social Security Acts their dependents were also deprived of most of the benefits due to them. Clause 6 ordered compulsory deduction of non-existent strike pay (first £15, then £16) from dependents benefit, leaving a couple with £6.45 a week to live on, plus £2.75 for each young child. The Act also forbade the making of urgent needs payments to strikers or their dependents. Reg Prentice, Social Security Minister, stated on its introduction:

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'If it is suggested that in certain circumstances the individual cannot afford it, the answer is simple. There is the choice not to strike, to go back to work and earn the living that is available.'

The calculated political role of the DHSS became even more evident when, after the government had sequestered or frozen all the NUM's funds, it continued to make the deductions on the basis that 'strike pay' was still being paid! The tactical use of benefits was further apparent in the way that they were administered. Although the striking mineworker was a 'non-person' when it came to receiving assistance, only he/she was permitted to receive, complete and send off the extensive weekly application form on the appropriate day, in order that their dependents would be entitled to anything. Strikers pointed out that this was a further way of curbing their strike activities and mobility.

The progressive restriction of civil liberties in order to prevent the phenomenon of mass flying pickets was sanctioned by the courts and reinforced by means of draconian jail sentences, restrictive bail conditions and bind-overs. The flagrant abuse of the 1976 Bail Act led Louise Christian, ex-legal adviser to the Greater London Council Police Committee to suggest:

'The miners' strike is the first example of bail conditions being used systematically to break a strike or indeed any other large scale form of political protest.' (1985:126)

In carrying out over eleven thousand strike-related arrests, the state attempted to confine several thousand of the NUM's most active members to their own pits and villages. By denying the pickets any possibility of communication with their fellow union members, the state was able to bring about a fundamental change in the nature of the dispute.

The later phases of the Strike saw the courts intervening more and more heavily in the internal affairs of both national and area NUMs, making 'illegal' those decisions they disapproved of, and denying the right of elected leaders to speak for the union or conduct union business on behalf of their members. On 28 September 1984, Mr. Justice Nicholls ruled that, in the absence

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of a national ballot, NUM strikes were 'unlawful', and forbade their description as 'official' (*Guardian*, 29/9/84). This process reached its logical conclusion on the 30 November when Justice Mervyn Davies removed the three elected leaders of the NUM as trustees of its pension fund and replaced them with Herbert Brewer, Chairman of the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire Institute of Directors and Tory Party councillor of 30 years standing. Two days later he was declaring, in front of the T.V. cameras, 'I am the NUM' - something no elected NUM official had ever done. [12]

Brewer also symbolised the state's interference, via the courts, in the union's finances. They began by imposing heavy fines and sequestering South Wales NUM's funds (3 August). By the end of October they felt confident of the acquiescence of the rest of the labour movement and seized all the funds of the national union. The 'cutting off of funds' suggested in the *Ridley Report* eventually had the desired effect. By the Winter of 1984, many of the Strike communities were faced with a crisis of resources; with virtually no roadworthy cars and even fewer working telephones. The 1984/85 Strike became less and less like those of the early 1970's and more like that of 1926.

By late Summer the Government felt confident in launching its own, well-equipped, flying pickets into the communities at the heart of the Strike. August saw scenes of extreme brutality as large numbers of police invaded and then occupied these 'core' communities, establishing close surveillance of the local population and, with NCB co-operation, organising military-style operations in order to get strikebreakers into the strikebound pits. In 1974 when Edward Heath portrayed the miners' leaders as irresponsible, politically-motivated wreckers, he had been careful to distinguish between them and their overwhelmingly decent, law-abiding membership. In 1984 with a general shift to more authoritarian forms of rule, the state was forced to use large amounts of physical force in order to suppress an extremely resilient section of the population, and Heath's line of argument was no longer convincing. Instead of

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the 263 strike-related arrests of 1972, 1984 witnessed 11,312 (Percy Smith and Hillyard, 1985:345)

In order to justify the activities of police, magistrates, sequestrators and others, the majority of the NUM's striking membership had to be portrayed either as bullying, brutal criminals or as pathetic intimidated wretches, cowering in their homes and waiting for the police to deal with the 'bullies' on the picket lines. [13] The 1984/85 Strike therefore witnessed the systematic criminalisation of the striking miners, their union and their communities. This was a particularly painful experience for many people (especially in the earlier stages of the Strike), given that pit villages tend to be law abiding places and there was a consequent 'moral approbrium associated with arrest, and "getting into trouble"' (Beynon, 1985c:307).

The scene for 'blanket' criminalisation was set by James Anderton, Chief Constable of Manchester. In a speech to a 1984 housing conference he redefined collective activity in a dispute situation by condemning 'mass picketing and violent demonstrations' as 'acts of terrorism without the bullet and the bomb.' In July Thatcher addressed the backbench M.P.'s of the 1922 Committee, suggesting:

'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' (Parker, 1986)

On 21 August, Ian Macgregor called for stronger action from the courts, claiming, 'I see evidence of an orchestrated conspiracy' (*Guardian*, 22/8/84). The way was being cleared for a renewed campaign by Thatcher and her home secretary, Leon Brittan, to link the NUM and its supporters with the IRA and Libyan 'terrorists':

'At one end of the spectrum are the terrorist gangs within our borders and the terrorist states which finance and arm them. At the other are the hard left, operating inside our system, conspiring to use union power and the apparatus of local government to break, defy and subvert the laws' (Guardian, 27/11/84)

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This association of militant miners with terrorists was not accidental. The Thatcher Government was pledged to restructuring the British economy, curbing public spending and restoring profitability in the private sector. Trade union resistance was anticipated and although anti-union laws were a key part of the government's armoury, the Ridley strategy assumed that, before the trade union movement would accept a new, severely constrained role, its militant wing would have to be taken on and crushed. As Andrew Gamble suggests:

'Although it emerged fully only when the strike was already some months old, the importance of winning the strike and being seen to win it [was] central to the government's strategy for its second term. (1985:17)

For a government that was pledged to strengthening the state and undermining the legitimacy of trade union activity, the pit political tactics of the miners were seen as an equal, if not greater threat than that posed by the IRA. Having done their best to isolate the miners from the rest of the population, the Conservatives had reason to hope that their vanquishing of the Scargillite 'enemy within' would prove (almost) as electorally popular as their defeat of the Argentinians or Libyans.

THE MINERS OBJECTIVES

The more men and women were drawn into the long-running , the more issues were raised. Given the intervention of the government in so many areas, it was hardly surprising that *their* objectives were seen as the ones that 'defined' the Strike. The government's economic objectives of ridding itself of uneconomic pits and privatising the industry were seen as closely tied up with their political aims of using mass unemployment to tame or smash the unions.

The key issues for the miners were therefore the twin ones of the right to work and the fight to protect their union. The Miners Strike was the first national strike against the apparently irresistible haemorrhage of jobs in manufacturing/extractive industries. Several commentators supposedly sympathetic to the miners (including Neil Kinnock) chose the setting of the

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strike to philosophise on the undesirability of people having to work half a mile underground. Apart from giving succour to the nuclear energy lobby, these contributions often tended to encourage a conception of the strike as essentially Luddite. This characterisation was far from accurate. As Gibbon points out:

'British Mining has been subject to an uneven but continuous technological revolution for over 50 years, which has been generally welcomed rather uncritically by the workforce. Mining is now an irreversibly industrial process with less and less hand-labour and a rapidly diminishing craft content.' (Gibbons, 1988:152)

The fact that miners were prepared to sacrifice so much in order to safeguard jobs that, in many ways, they hated was of course only one of several major contradictions in the strike. People who have to work every day in dangerous and filthy conditions underground, hardly need politicians and journalists to point out the unpleasantness of their job. The miners did not have to love the jobs they did in order to fight for them. With few alternatives available, they fought to preserve 'their' jobs, 'proper' jobs, along with all the compensations that they'd struggled for in order to make them more bearable; collective agreements, comradeship, culture, a reasonable standard of living and a sense of security. Their ambivalent attitude towards pit work made the second aim, that of ensuring the survival of the union, even more important. It was not just a matter of 'a right to work down a pit', but of a right to a decent job, with a strong union that allowed them some control of their lives.

As pointed out in Chapter One, when the presence of a well-established local workplace is combined with a powerful collective organisation among its workers, this can provide the local population with a rare access to various types of economic and political power. It can provide them with substantial roles, a social identity, a firm basis for a close-knit community. This was recognised in the NUM's main Strike slogan, 'Jobs, Pits and Communities', which emphasised the wider social dimension involved in the struggle for jobs. So

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overlaying the issue of the right to work was the right to live in the community they had grown accustomed to, of not having to constantly uproot themselves and their families in order to pursue transitory employment opportunities elsewhere. For many of the older miners, who had themselves experienced forced migration in the 1960's, the Strike was about preventing a return to the days when they had been 'industrial gypsies', forced to quit their communities, before seeing them destroyed by unemployment.

By demanding that pits like Cortonwood should be kept open until their resources were exhausted, the NUM laid itself open to the accusation that it was encroaching on the management's right to manage, on their right to take major decisions purely on economic grounds, whatever the social consequences. In other words, by embarking on a struggle for jobs, crucial for the life of the local communities, the NUM was seen to be 'stepping out of line', 'breaking the rules', and challenging the established power structure.

Division in the NUM

I have already described some of the difficulties faced by the NUM in creating a national cohesion among their membership in the years preceding the Strike. Just as the exceptional unity displayed by the miners in 1972 and 1974 constituted one of their most formidable weapons, so their inability to achieve it in 1984 constituted their main 'Achilles heel'. The division had several roots. There were, of course, the factors which had underpinned the varied traditions in different coalfields; geological, historical, economical and political. Then there was the negation of the unifying effect of the NPLA by the reintroduction of pit productivity bonuses. The latter could account for upto 30 percent of the gross wage in a high productivity area and virtually nothing in others. The NCB's investment policy tended to increase these differentials by boosting production in the central coalfields at the expense of the less profitable pits in the 'peripheral' areas. The favouring of the

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central fields and super pits in investment, bonuses, conditions and job security had an inevitable impact on the national unity of miners. It was this impact that Dave Douglass, NUM delegate at Hatfield Main, was describing when he argued:

'When we had a sliding scale, we had a county union. When we had the NPLA we had a national union. Now with pit-based incentives we have no union at all. The paraphernalia of the union still exists, but I wonder if the motivation of the union is still here.' (Krieger, 1984:276)

This observation, made in 1980, clearly identifies the bonus scheme as a major agent for fragmentation which penetrated to the heart of the national community of mineworkers.

Another was the issue on which McGregor and the government chose to provoke the dispute - pit closures. As has already been outlined, this issue had always proved a difficult one to organise around. It seemed to reveal a major contradiction in the modern NUM; formally a national, industrial union, facing a single employer, but still incorporating all the old federal structures, traditions and divisions. Three years before the Strike, Vic Allen had observed that:

'Pit closures were not an issue which could excite, unite and generate action. Like unemployment they divided miners from each other and demoralized them.' (Allen, 1981:126)

The union's attempts to create a national consciousness over the issue only showed signs of major success once, in 1981, and after this experience the very existence of a national closure programme was vehemently denied by the NCB. Instead, under close government supervision (Krieger, 1984:277), the coal board preferred to pursue the 'salami' tactic, picking off one pit after another. The effectiveness of this tactic was clearly shown when on the eve of the Strike, the absence of any Welsh pit among the five targetted, led to this traditionally militant coalfield voting *not* to join the strike.¹⁴ Another contributory factor in the NUM's internal divisions was the phenomenon of the

ever-increasing severance and transfer payments which inevitably encouraged a more individualistic, sectional response to the threat of job loss.

Division in the Trade Union Movement

The divisions inside the mineworkers community were accompanied by serious divisions inside the broader trade union movement, making it difficult for the majority of organised workers to perceive a 'community of interest' with the striking miners. Central to the success of the Thatcher Government in the Strike was its understanding of the sectional nature of the British trade union movement and its ability to exploit it. The Ridley Report's strategy of avoiding disputes with the more powerful unions while defeating the weaker ones proved extremely effective. The results of this 'softening-up' process were seen when major unions, previously committed to opposition to the Tory Government (or at least its anti-union legislation), started to reassess their position. The 'new realism' adopted by the more right wing unions became more and more pervasive, leaving the NUM in a shrinking minority in its opposition to government policy. The NUM's open acknowledgement of the political dimensions of industrial struggle, a source of strength in the early 1970's, became a factor in its isolation in the mid-1980's. Scargillism was portrayed as a psychopathic, Luddite aberration, not only by its 'natural' class enemies, but by prominent figures in the labour movement. Neil Kinnock, rather than making open statements, tended to use the discreet workings of the lobby system to distance himself from Scargill. He is alleged to have suggested in 'private':

'He's destroying the coal industry single-handed. He's the labour movement's nearest equivalent to a First World War General.'

(Harris, 1984: 164)

Just as those miners who had suffered the trauma of pit closures were more likely to resent being called on to strike for pits which had not supported them, so trade unionists who had seen their workplaces and industries

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decimated were more easily persuaded to see the miners' battle for jobs as an unreasonable, sectional and even selfish struggle against the inevitable. And the NCB/Government's offering of extremely high redundancy payments (relative to other workers') served yet another useful purpose in that they often tended to reinforce this hostile, 'sectional' response among non-mining trade unionists.

Apart from a few notable exceptions, namely the rail unions, the seamen, and the Fleet St. printers, the miners appeals for collective, industrial solidarity met with either verbal promises, excuses or open hostility. The contrast with 1972 could not have been starker.^[16] The existence of outstanding exceptions, such as the Coalville railworkers who refused to move a single coal truck, even though they were situated in the heart of a working coalfield, showed the potential for solidarity still remained. The Government could not afford to become overconfident. Even during the Strike they continued to use the flexible, 'divide and rule' tactics, buying off workers who constituted a serious threat and refusing to contemplate battle on too many fronts.^[17]

Local Strike Communities

The intervention of the government, either through its own efforts or those of sympathetic agencies (for example the media), largely achieved its purpose of throwing a *cordon sanitaire* around the striking mining areas. However by cutting the strikers and their dependents off from normal contact with other sections of society, the government strategy also had the effect of throwing them back onto their own resources. As opposed to the pre-Strike period when aspirations, crises and problems had increasingly been experienced on an 'individual' basis, a series of massive dramas, problems and crises were now experienced on a collective basis. People who had previously been leading largely 'separate' lives, suddenly found themselves 'in the same boat'.

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As the strike to safeguard the pit developed into a war of attrition with the government, the strikers' appeals for solidarity evoked a response nearer home. Sections of the coalfield population; young unemployed, retired miners, young and old women, who had previously tended to be more politically passive, began to mobilise alongside the miners. The actions of the DHSS in depriving strikers' families of much of the benefit due to them, forced a new identity, 'wives involved in the strike', onto coalfield women and supplied them with a potent focus for collective action. The state's perceived persecution of miners and their families revived local traditions of community mobilisation in support of 'its' union. The 'confinement' of miners to their villages encouraged a renewal of bonds between community and union, a key source of the latter's resilience throughout its history.

New initiatives and new skills were needed, whether it was to provide fuel for old age pensioners, hot meals for children during the school holidays or sustenance for the young 'single lads' who, while providing the backbone of the strike effort, were receiving little assistance from anywhere. In the new strike-based communities, the older, established village institutions - parish councils, union committees etc. - were tested against the communal need and were either supplemented or 'replaced' by new collective institutions - communal kitchens, advice centres, food, clothing and fuel distribution networks.

The widespread adoption of new roles by village inhabitants encouraged the setting up of multiplex role playing, with new and closer relationships developing between people facing similar problems and a common enemy. In the process of rediscovering the reservoir of inventive and organisational abilities that existed in the village populations, a culture and community based on mutual caring and cooperation was developed, which stood in stark contrast to the dominant 'cult of the individual' and the 'rule of the market' encouraged by the Conservative government.

The Broader Strike Community

Despite all the hard work and self sacrifice in these Strike-based local social systems, it soon became evident that the local resources available would be insufficient to sustain the striking community in a prolonged struggle. Just as the needs of the Strike had demanded that new roles and relationships be adopted *within* the local community, so it demanded that new roles and relationships be developed in relation to the 'outside world'.

The government's strategy was premised on their ability to isolate the miners, prior to 'breaking' them. The coalfield population felt this isolation keenly, especially in the early months of the Strike. The police deprived them of civil liberties, the DHSS deprived them of physical sustenance, the mass media went through the motions of interviewing them, only to produce their own inverted version of 'reality'. Although it impinged on their efforts to build mass picketing initiatives, the strike activists realised that Thatcher's resources blockade had to be breached, her misinformation campaign countered. Again the tactics adopted to meet this problems tended to be based on 'pit political' principles.

Initially delegations were sent to sympathetic political and trade union bodies. A priority was to establish face to face contact with as many workers as possible and raise the level of solidarity. These initial delegations often developed into regular contacts and gave birth to the phenomenon of 'twinning', the 'adoption' of strikebound communities by groups in the broader support network. Twinning not only encouraged and sustained a much higher level of financial/resource solidarity. It encouraged a major personal and political cross fertilisation between the local pit communities and the broader support communities. [163]

The two way twinning links tended to be supplemented by the setting up of miners support groups in all the major towns and cities in Britain. These

brought together the often-isolated, pro-strike minorities from various workplaces or areas. Like the local and area strike communities in the mining districts, these support groups saw their main function as encouraging and co-ordinating solidarity, but also allowed people to share their problems and successes, thereby raising morale. They also acted as a meeting ground between the strikebound and the outside support communities, with NUM and women activists seeing them as an essential focus. The twinning and miners' support group networks gave them the opportunity to 'break out' of the government-imposed isolation. By encouraging regular personal contacts and friendships they also allowed non-miners to share in the strikebound population's experience. As a key element in sustaining the miners resilience, the support community was seen as part of 'the enemy within' and shared many political and emotional experiences with the miners.

The Role of Women

Women tended to play a prominent role in the establishment and running of many of the institutions that formed a focus for the strike-based communities. Often accustomed to seeing themselves in a more individual roles of wives, mothers or 'housewives' the demands of the collective struggle required them to take on new roles and a new public status. Bea Campbell's insistence that the women were both 'struggling for the right to organise autonomously' (1986:252) and also challenging the NUM's tactical priorities (1986:263) seems to miss the point. For example, most of the communal kitchens were set up, with the co-operation of the NUM, in order to meet the needs of the flying pickets.

Again it was largely the government's policy of isolating the villages and restricting the men's picketing activities that caused the women to carve out new roles for themselves in the broader support community and on the picket

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lines. In the process of trying to strengthen the strike-centred community the women found themselves taking on new and prominent political roles which gave them a new status in the local community.

Their new strike roles often took the leading women activists outside the village communities. Their prominent role in pioneering and maintenance of twinning relationships meant that the women became closely involved in the broader, politically-oriented support 'community'. They discovered, that unlike the old divisions and hierarchies of sex or job commonly found in mining villages, the key determinant of their position in these strike-based communities was their level of commitment to the collective struggle. In the interrelationship between the two communities, women activists were able to discover a space in which they could explore the deeper political aspects of their situation.

CONCLUSION

Given the extent of government preparation, it was inevitable that the 1984/85 dispute should take place around different issues and in the context of a very different balance of class forces than the 1972 or 1974 strikes. The divisions inside the NUM and the broader trade union movement meant that it was the government that decided the initial agenda of the year-long conflict. Their level of intervention and their determination to throw a '*cordon sanitaire*' around the striking areas determined that, as in the defensive dispute of 1926, much of the conflict was situated in the coalfield villages.

The confinement of the conflict to the villages caused the union to renew its links with the local community and encouraged its boundaries to become more permeable. Sections of the local population constitutionally excluded from membership of the NUM were able to become involved in collective,

union-centred, political activity. But the nature of the dispute not only demanded a transformation of the local communities, it required that members of the village population became involved in the national Strike support community that grew up in the course of the Strike.

Some of the issues which I see as fundamental to an understanding of the Miners Strike in Armthorpe, for example the role of the unemployed in a major 'right to work' dispute are located, by and large, in the village. Others concerning, for example, the political radicalisation of men and women Strike activists, require an appreciation of the rich and complex relationship that developed between the local and the broader, class-based communities as the Strike wore on. In the case of Armthorpe, both the nature of the local Strike community and its complex interaction with the broader class-based community were vital in shaping its population's Strike experience, but neither appeared 'overnight'. This requires that I place Armthorpe's strike experience in its local, as well as its national, context. This is my object in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

1. For example nine months after the government's 'U-turn', half of the twenty three pit closures on the February 1981 list had been implemented. By July 1982 fifteen had been closed by the local Review Procedure and a further thirty pits were being 'investigated'.
2. Rule 41 reads, :
'In the event of a dispute arising in any Area or applying to the workers in any Branch likely or possible to lead to a stoppage of work or any other industrial action short of a strike, the questions involved must be immediately reported by the appropriate official of the Area in question to the National Executive Committee which shall deal with the matter forthwith, and in no case shall a cessation of work or other form of industrial action short of a strike take place by the workers without the previous sanction of the National Executive Committee.....' N. U. M. Rulebook as at 1 March 1984.
3. In statements that foreshadowed their 1984 stance, the moderates claimed that their achievement of a national ballot was a major victory for democracy, although in reality, it had the effect of over-ruling the wishes of those miners whose lives were effected by the closures. Their claims were elaborated in *the Scotsman*, 7/3/83.
4. Walker had been industry secretary under Heath, and had therefore been through a 'baptism of fire' during the 1972 and 1974 disputes. Whether officially or unofficially, he was almost certainly involved in the discussions around the Miron report.
5. NUM Annual Conference Report, July 1983.
6. 'Appomatox or Civil War' in *The Economist* 27th May 1978.
7. Previously Marshall was chief scientist at the Department of Energy, but he was sacked by Tony Benn when it was discovered that he was promoting sales of the American Pressurized Water Reactor to the Shah of Iran and others for the Westinghouse Company. Colin Sweet (1984:201).
8. Colin Sweet outlines a series of comments by leading figures in 1984; Norman Tebbit, John Moore and Ian MacGregor, who from the pulpit of a City of London Church described the idea of private pits as 'wonderful'. (Sweet, 1984:205).
9. Changes in the system of paying tax rebates to people who were on strike were mooted in the 1970's, but in the early 1980's, legislation was introduced which prevented the Inland Revenue/employers from paying tax rebates until the strikers had returned to work.
10. Reg Prentice, former Labour M. P., then Conservative Minister for Social Security in the debate on the Social Security Act No 2, *Hansard*, April 1980
11. One picket described his experience in a Notts police station early in the Strike: 'I was told that my picketing days were over because the court would impose conditions of bail. I was told that they hoped for adjournments and postponements and said that the bail conditions would keep us away from the pickets.' (Coulter, Miller and Walker, 1984:44).
12. He resigned three days later on the 6th December. *The Guardian*, 7th Dec. '84

13. The success of the media in putting this message across and pressure from the NCB, emphasising how a majority of miners were just waiting for leadership, played a significant part in persuading the initial strikebreakers to 'volunteer'. Whereas there was little intimidation of miners who put their case and then stuck by the majority decision of the branch, members of Strike community, described by the Wintertons as the 'dissuaders' sometimes used physical force against men who went against the collective will.

An example was Michael Fletcher, a Yorkshire miner who was severely beaten up at his home on the 23 November, having crossed the picket line. In certain areas (e.g. Notts) the strikebreakers used similar methods to try and intimidate the strikers, but were rarely successful. The ideological confusion produced in the strikebreakers is well illustrated in Tony Parker's interviews with one in 'Redhill', after the Strike:

'I thought the Board would have moved me like they promised they would. I don't reckon they've been fair with me. No one from the Board has given me so much as a thank you for being one of the first to go back to work ...

Everybody knew the strike was coming to an end. I just jumped the gun a bit, that's all. But the way they treat you at the pit, you might be a bloody leper or something ... It's changed my feelings towards the Union. They're always on about how you should stand by your mates, but they're not standing by me, they treat me as though I wasn't a proper human person.'

(Parker, 1986:53-4)

14. As can be seen in Table 3.1, there was no single area-wide ballot in South Wales in 1984. Votes were taken on a pit basis, with six pits voting for action and fifteen opposing it (Sunday 11 March). When the arguments were put over on the picket lines, this situation changed radically. On Monday 12th, the NCB had to announce that twenty five workplaces were out and the three remaining were picketed out that evening. *The Guardian* and *The Times*, 12 & 13 March 1984

15. Often the most vitriolic attacks on Scargill came from ex-Communist Party member and leader of the 1971 UCS work-in, then Labour councillor, Jimmy Reid. There were, however, open rebuttals by members of the national Labour Party leadership. For example, on 5 November 1984, Kinnock informed the NUM that he was too busy to speak at the major rallies they were planning, in order to raise morale. *The Guardian*, 6 November 1984.

16. For example, on Thursday 28 June 1984, Tommy Brennan a leading 'left-wing' I. S. T. C. convenor made an agreement with the British Steel Corporation management welcoming picket-breaking convoys of lorries into the Ravenscraig plant, and was quoted in *the Guardian* as being 'disappointed' with the ASLEF train drivers' blacking of materials into Ravenscraig. He announced to the press,

'we will work with any iron ore, coal and coke brought in from anywhere and by any means.'

The Joint Union Committee at the Llanwern B. S. C. plant made an identical statement the following day as 100 lorry loads of iron ore were driven through the picket lines under police escort. *The Guardian*, 29 & 30 June 1984.

17. On Wednesday 6 June, Paul Foot publicised confidential government documents showing top-level government involvement in the increasing of a British Rail wage offer in order to prevent industrial action by the National Union of Railwaymen. This disproved the Government's repeated claims of non-intervention. *Daily Mirror*, 6 June 1984.

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18. In the Labour Research Department's post-Strike survey of 321 support groups in Britain, 97 percent of those groups that had twinned, were enthusiastic, listing personal contact and involvement as key advantages. Only 36 percent perceived that there could be disadvantages with 'twinning'. (LRD, 1985:37)

PART TWO

ARMTHORPE

Chapter Four

ARMTHORPE - THE HISTORY OF THE PIT, THE UNION and THE VILLAGE.

Introduction

In Chapter One, I suggested that, although the sinking of a pit provided the the material basis for the building of an occupational community, it was the union that, as the key focus of collective activity, was the crucial agent in terms of shaping that community. I argued that the development of village communities were intimately tied up with the miners union and its struggles with the employers and the state.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the histories of the pit, the union and the village in Armthorpe. I demonstrate how the development of a collective, democratic underground organisation was intertwined with the emergence of a close knit, egalitarian community in the village, with the union acting as an anchor in both.

I draw attention to four themes which illustrate the strong element of continuity that runs through the local history. There are the violent clashes which etch the power of employer and state in the population's consciousness. There is a 'fusing' of union with local and class communities in the course of protracted struggles. There is the involvement of the local working class population in collective activity and organisation which allows them an increased independence and control over their lives. There is the very active and prominent role of women: their participation in collective struggle and their contribution to the shaping of the local community. Although circumstances and conditions change, these are some of the elements which contribute to the

formation of a distinct local political tradition, which alongside other collective resources, the local population could draw on in times of crisis.

I begin by outlining how the construction of the village was part of an integrated scheme for the exploitation of a particularly rich seam of coal lying under South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire. Although pit and village were constructed in the interests of the Markham coal and iron owners, the attempts of the local working class population to shape the local community become apparent at an early stage. I describe the way in which struggles for collective control of underground power points were reproduced in collective efforts to assert control over power points in the village's economic, social and political systems.

In outlining the major physical, social and political developments in the village's history, I reveal the growth of a close knit community, a network of relationships constructed around a series of institutions serving the particular needs of the working class population. The involvement of the village population in a strong *local* community, especially one with a branch of a *national* union at its core, does not, of course, preclude their involvement in national or indeed international communities. What the history of Armthorpe shows is that participation in broader, class-based communities can be an essential component of the pit and village traditions, and that, in certain circumstances, such local traditions can have a major impact on the broader community. Gibbon has argued that:

'NUM strategy and tactics during the 1984/85 strike are best understood as the transposition of typical pit politics strategy and tactics to a national arena.'
(1988:190)

If this argument is correct, an investigation of the development of Armthorpe's 'pit politics' and their role in shaping a particular type of community, should enable us to gain a much clearer insight into the processes involved at a variety of levels in the 1984/85 Strike.

CONTEMPORARY ARMTHORPE

Armthorpe is better described as a large village than a small town. It is situated in South East Yorkshire, three and a half miles to the East of Doncaster. Although it lies close to a major town, it remains a geographically distinct settlement, being separated from the Doncaster overspill housing estate of Intake by a narrow strip of countryside and a railway line (See Appendix 6).

It is surrounded to the North, South and East by agricultural land, although in 1980 a motorway, the M18, was constructed along a North-South axis some few hundred yards from the eastern tip of the village. For most of its recorded history Armthorpe was a small agricultural settlement consisting of a single street with a small parish church at its highest point. In 1743 there were 29 families in the parish with neither licensed house or meeting place. By 1811 there were 62 inhabited houses with 65 families and a total population of 273 people. A hundred years later, in 1911, the population had increased by a mere 108 to 381, living in 86 houses (See Appendix 9). By this time the village had a national school (1842) and a Parish Room (1887) (Dodson, 1984)¹

The village has a single pit, Markham Main, which is situated 200 yards off the Doncaster Road, close to the centre of the village. Largely screened from the main road by a row of houses (originally built for the pit's officials), Markham Main does not 'dominate' the village in terms of towering spoilheaps or buildings. There is little doubt however that over much of the last 60 years, the pit has been the dominant factor in deciding the physical growth and character of the village.

The Sinking of the Pit

Markham Main was the second 'youngest' of the fourteen pits which comprised the Doncaster coalfield until the mid 1950s.² It lies on the Eastern side of the concealed South Yorkshire coalfield, the commercial exploitation of

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which became possible in the early years of the 20th century, due to a series of technological and economic factors.^[3] The company that initiated the pit sinking was the *Stavely Iron and Coal Company*, headed by Sir Charles Markham, who, as well as being a major coalowner, was the Liberal Member of Parliament for Mansfield, and in 1911, attempted to introduce legislation prohibiting the recruitment of women for manual employment in the coal industry (John, 1984:224). Markham's concern with women's employment was not unrelated to the growing pressures for a minimum (male) wage and the rapid expansion of his coalmining enterprise.^[4]

The Stavely conglomerate had its origins in the exploitation of the shallower coal and iron deposits of north Derbyshire, but, at the turn of the century, turned its attention to the large scale exploitation of the recently-proved Barnsley Bed seam, which lay deep under South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire. Concentrating large scale production at several South Yorkshire pits, the coal produced by Doncaster Amalgamated Collieries Ltd. (DAC) was marketed by another Stavely firm, Doncaster Collieries Association Ltd. Prior to the initiation of mining in Armthorpe, DAC already had five South Yorkshire collieries in operation; *Hickleton*, *Firbeck*, *Brodsworth* (1905-8), *Bullcroft* (1911) and *Yorkshire Main* (Edlington) (1911). *Markham Main* was to be the last Stavely pit sunk in the area, and it underwent a prolonged period of development prior to coal production. Charles Markham took a land lease off the Fitzwilliam Cantley Estates and the Doncaster Corporation Race Common, and the first borehole was sunk in 1913, the second in 1914, both proving sufficient, workable coal measures.

Because of the depth of the *Barnsley Bed* seam, DAC were confronted with several major engineering problems, and they were obliged to bring over a firm of German engineering contractors, Francois, to supervise the sinking of the pit. The engineers' internment at the outbreak of the First World War caused a suspension of underground operations, although the rail link and other surface

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work continued. The immediate post war period witnessed a period of industrial militancy in the Doncaster coalfield and it was only in 1922, the year following the miners' defeat in the national three-month lockout, that underground work recommenced. On the 2 June 1922, the *Doncaster Gazette* reported the official resumption of 'pit sinking' in Armthorpe:

'After many disappointments and delays due to high wages, labour troubles, coal trade depression and other causes ... it is expected coal will be reached in 3 years.' (Doncaster Gazette, 2/6/1922)

The sinking was completed ahead of time by the Yorkshire engineering firm, *Cementation*, but *Doncaster Amalgamated Collieries* faced a further problem.

As Drabble suggests:

'... since Doncaster's indigenous labour force did not have a mining background and, since all of the other local mines had already established workforces, the only way that the supply of labour for Markham Main could be guaranteed was for it to be brought in from outside the area.' (Drabble, 1986:6)

In order to attract a stable workforce, Markham decided that a 'model village', *New Armthorpe*, would have to be grafted onto the existing hamlet, (Old Armthorpe). Its construction was part of an extensive housing programme involving an estimated 12,000 homes and spanning the 'Barnsley Bed' coalfields of South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire (Tudor Walters, 1927). So, after a brief description of pit-top workings, the 1922 *Gazette* article continued,:

'With the housing too, a fair amount of progress has been made, although it will be some time before the Markham garden village project can be realized. 52 (houses) have already been erected and these have, for some time been occupied by employees of other Markham pits, mostly from Bullcroft. These men, however, are having to make room for the Armthorpe pit sinking workers, of whom there are expected to be about 150... Since the news of the resumption of sinking operations leaked out early this week, the colliery has been besieged with applications for employment.' (Doncaster Gazette, 2/6/22)

In July 1923 articles of agreement were signed between the *Industrial Housing Association* and *Doncaster Collieries Association* for the construction of one hundred houses and in 1925, for the construction of a further 295.^[5] The houses were actually owned and maintained by another Markham company, the *Doncaster Collieries Housing Association*. The inhabitants of the village were

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unlikely to forget the name of their 'benefactor', Charles Paxton Markham, M. P. for Mansfield, as the fact of company ownership was built into the early road names; *Charles Crescent*, *Paxton Crescent*, *Markham Avenue* and *Mansfield Crescent*. When the first coal was eventually brought to the surface in 1924, the pit's opening was advertised with the slogan 'A Job and a House'. This drew miners to Armthorpe from virtually every coalfield in Britain - from Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland, South Wales and Scotland, alongside men from the West Yorkshire, Doncaster, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire fields, seeking a house and better, more regular, wages. (See Appendix 8)^[6]

After a great deal of preparatory work by a core of experienced union activists, the Armthorpe Branch of the Yorkshire Mineworkers Association (YMA) was set up on the 26 July 1924. The pit sinkers and YMA militants from the DAC colliery of Bullcroft (seven miles to the west of Armthorpe) played a key role in the establishment of a union branch. Recognition of the union was not a problem. *Stavely* were considered a progressive company and the Yorkshire Miners Association had won an agreement guaranteeing it negotiating rights in new pits as they opened. Although several of the leading members of Armthorpe YMA, Jake Martin, Harvey Ford and Fred Noble were from Yorkshire, the cosmopolitan nature of the workforce was reflected in the leadership of the branch. Bill and Harry Paling, younger brothers of Bullcroft's checkweighman, Wilf Paling,^[7] arrived from Nottinghamshire and took up leadership positions alongside militants from Wales, Lancashire and Derbyshire. Once the sinking had been completed and volume coal production started, the pit's workforce expanded rapidly, and by 1925, there were 2,154 men and boys employed at the pit,

With no royalties due to the landowner, Lord Fitzwilliam, on coal raised in the first two years, much was sacrificed in order to maximise production. Coal was cut and raised on a continuous basis, using both shafts on all three shifts. In their drive to increase production, the company tended to cut corners and ignore essential safety regulations. The men had to insist on

their right to elect two pit inspectors to carry out comprehensive monthly inspections. They chose Harvey Ford (Armthorpe YMA's first branch secretary) and George Needham, an experienced union committee man from Bentley.¹⁹ As volume production started, a checkweighmen's fund was established, and three checkweighmen (or justice men), plus three subweighmen were elected to ensure the men received fair treatment at the hands of the company weighmen. These were posts of key importance. Because of his reputation for standing up for the men (he had already been sacked from the pit in 1923, for refusing to back down in an argument with the manager), Bill Paling was elected chief checkweighman. The prominent role of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire miners in the Armthorpe union was not accidental. Many of them who came to the Doncaster coalfield had learnt their union skills in the process of fighting against the 'butty system' which was prevalent in North Wales, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.²⁰

This system required that certain experienced workmen agreed contracts with their employer and then acted as small bosses over their fellow miners. Although formally employed by the colliery company, the miner had to be 'hired' to work on a certain contract, where his skill and effort were assessed by the buttyman. Although he might play a key role in the completion of a lucrative contract, the miner was only paid the statutory minimum wage, plus whatever 'extra' the butty saw fit to give him. There was no guaranteed employment, with the butty hiring his labour on a daily basis in the 'market place' of the pit bottom (which, due to the underemployment of the inter-war years, was usually over-subscribed). The men were therefore totally reliant on the buttyman who could hire and fire them at will from his contract. This had major implications for the social relations in the workplace. As Alan Drabble explains:

'...everyone, save the butty, presented himself for work as a 'market man'. In these circumstances, any expression of dissent over the terms and conditions of the exchange bargain being offered....was sufficient to call up the spectre of poverty which haunted the pit bottom.'

(Drabble, 1986: 8)

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The employment system adopted at Markham Main, Armthorpe, stood in stark contrast to this. From the earliest days the coal face workers established a non-hierarchical system which entitled them to an equal reward for participation in the coal-getting contract. The 'all throw in' or 'sharing' contracts were based on a price list, collectively negotiated and safeguarded by the union. There was not the hierarchy of the butty system, each member of the work team being counted a skilled collier, there was not the opportunity for intra-group exploitation with all the team dividing the rewards equally, and neither was there the insecurity, with teams of colliers winning employment on the basis of seniority and skill. Any negotiations with undermanagers, overmen or deputies were usually undertaken by the most senior collier in the stall, the chargeman, although he received no extra payment for this.^[10]

The combination of 'sharing contracts', price lists and checkweighman, all essential results of union organisation, significantly curtailed the power of management over the men 'standing in the market', and through them 'the totality of underground labour market conditions' (Drabble, 1986:9). The possibility of unfair treatment, or victimisation of union activists, was therefore much reduced. The rules governing the organisation of the sharing contracts were agreed and supervised by the union branch, and the colliers' access to secure and remunerative employment therefore depended on the strength of their collective organisation rather than their individual relationships with 'the butty'. The 'all throw in' system, which was practised at most Doncaster pits,^[11] therefore tended to attract those miners who were unwilling, or unable, to work under the butty system. From the earliest days of the pit's operation this form of work organisation constituted an important part of the Armthorpe tradition, shaping both pit and community.

Despite the strenuous efforts of the union pioneers, the Armthorpe organisation was still struggling to 'find its feet' when it was confronted by the challenge of the General Strike and seven-month lockout. Due to the recent

development (and therefore low production costs) of the *Doncaster Amalgamated Collieries* pits, and their supplying of the home market, the miners were not immediately threatened by such severe wage reductions as were faced in other coalfields. The *Yorkshire Post* of 1 May 1926 reported that the owners had not issued lock out notices and were prepared to keep their pits open. Although many *DAC* colliers (correctly) anticipated a reduction in wages and a lengthening of working hours, there was a significant element of voluntary solidarity contained in their decision to enter the dispute alongside the rest of the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB).

THE GENERAL STRIKE AND LOCKOUT

Around a million miners struck work or were locked out on the 30 April 1926. Their insistence on preserving the gains they had made since 1912 was distilled into the famous negotiating position of the MFGB's general secretary, Arthur J Cook, 'Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay.' Three days later, citing the refusal of the *Daily Mail* workers to print an editorial 'for King and country' as their reason, the government broke off all negotiations with the TUC, who then called for an indefinite stoppage in a limited number of industries. According to *the Plebs*,^[12] over ten thousand workers, apart from the miners, joined the strike from the first day, with their performance described as 'Class One' or 'an unexpectedly and amazingly fine response'. Wilf Paling, responsible for reporting on the local situation to the TUC General Council Intelligence Committee, wrote:

'All means of transport in and around Doncaster are entirely suspended.... The strike committees are working splendidly and have matters under excellent control ... but they would be delighted if it were possible to send a few copies of the *British Worker*.'

(Postgate, Wilkinson, Horrabin, 1927: 27)

Elsewhere in the report, however, Paling admits that 'a very few trains are running into Doncaster, but they are worked entirely by members of the staff'. Government efforts to keep roads and railways open led Armthorpe and

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the neighbouring village of Hatfield to become the settings for some of the most violent confrontations in the Yorkshire area (Walentowitz, 1986:12-13). In the second week of the strike, an open air meeting of Armthorpe strikers was held on a piece of ground known as the 'flatsheets' by the pit. It was called by Jake Martin, a huge (20 stone) miner who had been highly decorated during the First World War for his heroism in tunnelling underneath the German lines. The meeting resolved to stop the increasing number of food convoys, and other strike-breaking transport, travelling along the Thorne Road, which connected Doncaster with the North and the Humber Estuary.

This led to two major incidents on 12 May, the tenth and final day of the General Strike (May 12th). The first occurred at Edenthorpe, where a crowd of some three hundred pickets, many armed with pickhandles, had assembled at the junction and were checking all vehicles. According to the *Doncaster Gazette* (13/5/26), a lorry driver was hauled from his cab and roughed up. A large squad of police (including reinforcements drawn from the Devon and Cornwall force) arrived and attacked the pickets. After some fighting fourteen were arrested and the rest were driven off the road.

The pickets then sought reinforcements and regrouped two miles further along the road, at Hatfield. Around a thousand pickets, mostly miners from Stainforth and Armthorpe, but now joined by local women, ¹³³ blocked the road with a large tree trunk and vetted the long lines of stationary vehicles. The pro-government media provided a major target, with a newspaper van being overturned and set on fire (its occupants having been allowed to escape). A large detachment of police soon arrived, many of them on horseback and accompanied by 'black marias'. They were met with a hail of stones and other missiles. The police then baton-charged the men, beating them with truncheons. Hand-to-hand fighting ensued and this continued for some time before the police were able to disperse the crowd. The police pursued the Armthorpe miners through Shaw Wood

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and into the village itself, where they sought refuge in the houses. More than eighty pickets were arrested and many of them were badly hurt.

In response to the police attack, and with the police arresting any adult males on the street, Gladys Paling, wife of Bill Paling (Markham checkweighman) went round the village with the union handbell, summoning the rest of the population to an open-air meeting on the flatsheets. It was decided that the women of the village should march to the Doncaster Police Station and demand the release of all the arrested men. They had only travelled about half a mile when they were met by a 20-strong squad of mounted policemen. Despite the efforts of Mrs. Paling and others to get past the horses, the demonstration of women and youths was eventually driven back into Armthorpe. (Armthorpe: 81 SC)

The following morning another meeting was held and both men and women decided to march to the magistrates court in Doncaster. Although unable to go because she had given birth to her first baby eleven days before (on the first day of the Strike!), Catherine Parrender recalled her mother's first hand account:

'Although the police managed to stop most of the men who were marching to the court appearance, the women had armed themselves with sticks, and managed to get round the side of them and get through. They got in to the court and Mrs Paling was nearly arrested for bad behaviour!'

(Armthorpe: 83 SC)'

Although all the arrested men were brought before the magistrates, none of them was able to secure legal representation, local solicitors having refused to represent anyone charged with offences under the Emergency Regulations. A process of 'conveyor belt justice' saw all of the eighty people arrested convicted of breaches of the Emergency Regulations and sentenced to the maximum three months in prison, with the 'ringleaders' (including Jake Martin, hero of the First World War) also receiving substantial fines.^[14] When their appeals were heard almost three months later, only seventeen had their sentences confirmed, five had their appeals allowed, five received reduced sentences, and

forty nine were bound over to keep the peace. (A similar process of automatic conviction followed by belated 'justice' for strike activists was seen in the aftermath of the 1984/85 Strike).^[15]

The Strike-Lockout Community

The heavy police presence continued as the General Strike turned into a seven-month lockout of the miners. The Armthorpe population organised themselves to withstand the lockout, setting up a soup kitchen in a makeshift marquee tent situated on some open ground between Charles and Paxton Crescents. The kitchen, run jointly by men and women, only opened up for an hour at midday. The soup was prepared in a big boiler and opening time was announced by one of the cooks touring the village streets ringing the union handbell. People arrived with their empty jugs and bowls, queued up, filed past the tent and returned home with portions of soup for their children. The latter were divided in their opinion of the soup. Bill Paling's son, Roy (seven in 1926) told me, 'it was damn good I can tell you!' whereas Ethel Caffin (twelve at the time) suggested:

'I used to go up to the soup kitchen on Charles with my jug. I used to get soup and bread, but very often the soup didn't taste very nice. We had a fox terrier and we said, 'Lets give it him'. He just sniffed it and turned and looked at us with such a disgusted look!'

(Armthorpe: 98 & 84 SC)

The ingredients of the soup were usually generated through the strike activists (men and women) visiting the local farmers and asking for donations. With few shops and no co-operative store in the village, help had to be sought from further afield.^[16] Bill Paling and others made regular tours of Norfolk in an old Ford speaking for the strike and coming back with it full of vegetables and financial donations. The trawler men and dockers in Hull provided regular consignments of cheap fish, which was then sold to strikers for tuppence a pound from special stalls set up on street corners.^[17]

A male voice choir was inaugurated which used to go 'tramping' in order to raise funds. Ethel suggested:

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'As well as being a strong union man, my dad was very interested in music, so he was one of the first to join the choir that Mrs. Paling set up. The choir went walking and singing for the soup kitchen. Once they walked that far and they weren't doing too well and they ended up stranded in Cleethorpes!' (Armthorpe:84SC)

The strikers also launched a marching jazz band, which toured the surrounding areas. According to an 'earwitness', whatever they lacked in musical finesse they made up for in enthusiasm and sheer volume! (Armthorpe:81 SC) In order to keep up morale, there were processions round the village behind a makeshift union banner (a tradition which has been maintained, on both Mayday and Gala day, for 62 years [upto the present-1988]). There were also penny whist drives and dances organized, as well as football and cricket matches in which 'married' would play 'singles' or one street would field a team against another. Most of the younger strikers, freed from the drudgery of underground labour, appeared to enjoy the experience. The same applied to their pit ponies ! As John Ellis Junior, then 15 year-old and employed as an underground pony driver for his father, put it,:

'We really enjoyed it. We used to go out exploring in the woods or swimming in the River Idle. There were about a hundred ponies in the pit and they were all brought up at the beginning of the strike. I used to drive a pony called Wilkes. I used to stand on the gate and call him, then jump on his back and ride him all the way up the big field to Mere Lane. We also did a lot of thieving and scrumping.' (Armthorpe:81SC)

Not that the strike consisted purely of idyllic hours by appropriately-named rivers (John later explained that the River Idle was, in fact, a 'filthy canal!'). Fuel (needed for heating and cooking) was in short supply and, as there were no resources for collective logging teams or woodyards, strikers and their families had to fend for themselves. Roy Palin remembered:

'Everyone, men, women and kids used to go onto the pit tip which was really small. One day there was a police raid. This three wheeler trike and about 150 police came charging onto the tip from Sandal Beat Wood, chasing people off and arresting them. It was virtually marshall law that night in the village, there were dozens of police patrolling the streets. The next day, most of them just disappeared as if nothing had happened, just like they did in the last strike.' (Armthorpe:98SC)

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Young John Ellis was among the many 'copped' for pinching coal and he was taken in front of the pit manager by a special constable, who later apologised to John Ellis Senior, explaining that he was on the dole himself and earning ten shillings a day for 'strike duty'. Charged at Doncaster Magistrates Court with 'feloniously stealing and carrying away coal to the value of 2 shillings', he was fined £1, which had to be paid by a busdriver uncle in Leeds.

The sustained police occupation of the tiny village left a deep impression on its inhabitants. Sam Gethin recalls:

'The police were all round the village spying on you. We weren't allowed to gather or talk in groups of threes. One day, we were coming onto the main street, when these two detectives jumped out on us and grabbed my elder brother, Levi. They said, "We want you, we've had binoculars on you!" and hustled him into a car with Bill Roe and just disappeared! They spent a fortnight in the cells.' (Armthorpe: 85SC)

As the Autumn drew in, the strikers, their wives and children had to spend more and more time digging for scraps of coal in Armthorpe's tiny waste tip. One rainy night as John kept watch over a deep hole that he and his mates had dug, the sides collapsed on him, burying him upto his neck. The following morning forty of the villagers turned up at the tip to dig him out (Armthorpe: 81SC)

By late Autumn the employers were bringing in strikebreakers from outside the area (mainly from Derbyshire and Notts according to the 1926 veterans I spoke to) in order to restart coal production at Markham. Because it was a new pit it was possible to turn coal with relatively few men. The coal was loaded into railway wagons which then had to be pulled up the incline as the track ran through Basil (now Shaw) Wood. John Ellis described the strikers reaction:

'We had some great lads in the village. They'd put grease on the lines on the incline and hide in the wood. The engine would be pulling sixty waggons full of coal and wouldn't be able to get a grip. While train was stopped, the lads would jump on top of the waggons and throw big lumps of coal off for us. Gallant lads, weren't they?' (Armthorpe: 81SC)

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The strikebreakers were lodged with the deputies (who the strikers assumed were also directly involved in coal production) or accomodated in the newly-completed houses in Elm Road, which the strikers immediately nicknamed 'Scab Alley'. There was no attempt at open picketing as the heavy police presence made this impossible. Teams of young strikers went out at night painting anti-scab slogans on the doors, gates and pavements outside the offenders' houses. People suspected of strikebreaking were denounced as they left their houses or walked along the street. The women often took the lead in 'shaming' the scabs. Ethel Caffin:

'There was one man live on the fourth house on *Mansfield*, Every day all the women and kids would come out and wait for him. They'd shout to my mum, 'Mrs Wright, he's coming home!' and then they'd play him home with sticks and dustbin lids, calling him names.' (Armthorpe:84SC)

If the strikebreakers were unguarded by police, these denunciations sometimes led to 'incidents', but these were inevitably and swiftly followed by police raids and arrests. Catherine Parrender recalled:

'One night, two women attacked a scab and pinched a bag of coal off him as he was crossing the green. Everyone knew who did it but nobody would talk to the police. They had my mother up for defamation of character, calling 'scab' at a man who'd broken the strike.' (Armthorpe:83SC)

As the strike wore on, the union branch made a couple of emergency payments to its members from the Miners' Relief Fund, but the 'Russian Money' was insufficient to prevent acute hardship among the miners (Armthorpe:81 & 87SC). The strike committee had to petition the local authorities to open up a subsidiary food kitchen to provide young children with a breakfast. This was situated at Mere Lane School, which consisted of a big wooden hut and before the children were given their cocoa, bread and dripping, their mothers had to sign a piece of paper promising to pay for it after the strike. As their financial difficulties became acute, many families were forced to apply for 'relief' from the parish council, while other Markham miners, living outside the village,

chose to take their families into the workhouse rather than break the strike (Armthorpe: 83 & 89SC).

Nevertheless, the 'obdurate loyalty' (McCormick, 1979: 40) which allowed most of the Yorkshire coalfield to remain solid in support of South Wales and Durham, the most threatened coalfields, was hard to sustain in Armthorpe's embryonic and cosmopolitan settlement. The kind of stable kinship and neighbouring networks that characterized the long-established pit villages in other parts of the Yorkshire coalfield, were not yet fully developed in Armthorpe. This led to a high level of strikebreaking towards the end of the lockout. During the last three or four weeks the number of strikers dwindled rapidly, leaving a relatively small core of union loyalists on strike till the end. [19] It was a serious defeat, combining a wage cut with an extra unpaid half hour on each working shift. On top of this the strikers were forced to pay 50 per cent extra on their rents for fourteen months, plus the parish relief and other debts they had incurred. Most of the union men were, however, re-engaged after the lockout and they set about re-establishing the union organisation at Markham Main in the wake of their defeat.

This proved a laborious task. Although the pit and the village continued to grow (see Appendix 9) the recession brought low wages and long periods of unemployment and short-time working. Given the weakened position of the national miners' union, most of the disputes in the late 1920's and early 1930's tended to be localised and of comparatively short duration. Unable to contemplate major confrontation in the underground situation, the miners struggled to improve the quality of life in other ways; to establish some security for themselves and their families. Just as the Doncaster Collieries Housing Association were engaged in the *physical* construction of the village, the local mineworker population attempted to shape its social structure.

THE COMMUNITY TAKES SHAPE

Although already constituting a majority of the village population by the mid-1920's, amenities for the miners and their families remained in short supply. In several areas; medical, educational, cultural and recreational facilities, Markham's 'model village' was more like a 'frontier settlement' in the Klondike (Drabble, 1986:5) The power and wealth of the coalowners ensured that they or their agents quickly assumed leading roles in the older (agricultural) village hierarchy. The pit manager and undermanager played a prominent role in church services and festivals, St. John's ambulance and remembrance day parades. But the miners found themselves in a heavily dependent position. They depended on *Doncaster Amalgamated Collieries Ltd.* for work, housing and fuel. They depended on local farmers for transport, fuel delivery and sports facilities. [20] They depended on commercial enterprises (many of them in Doncaster) for food, clothes and other provisions.

The prominent union men, especially those who had come to Armthorpe in order to escape obligation to the butty, found this degree of dependence in their non-working lives difficult to tolerate. The type of social institutions they (and their partners) set up in the village shared many features with the underground organisation they had previously adopted in order to gain some control of their work situation. In many cases the miners' union played a key role in providing the initiative or the resources for these above-ground institutions. Although the institutions often had a large degree of organisational autonomy, the local union branch acted as a central link and thereby provided the core of the miners' community.

Due to the hazardous nature of the industry, the sick club was one of the first major institutions to be set up, established prior to the 1926 strike by the union. All working miners contributed 3d a week into the fund. This allowed the union branch to secure the services of a sympathetic Doncaster GP,

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Doctor Harte, who moved into the pit village and held his surgeries in a wooden hut in his back garden. The sick club also allowed the men to claim ten shillings per week when illness prevented them working. In later years the sick club evolved into an insurance scheme known as '*the Death and Divide*', which helped out with funeral and other expenses.

Given the weakness of Communist Party organisation,^[21] it was the Labour Party which strengthened its base in the village in the wake of the 1926 defeat. Although it drew much of its strength from leading YMA men such as Bill and Harry Paling, Fred Noble, John Ellis (Senior) and Harvey Ford, the women in the village played a key role in building its membership and organising its activities. At the time of the setting up of the Labour Party branch in 1925, several of the leading women; Mrs. Paling, Ellis, Wright; Ford, Noble and Potter decided to set up a *Labour Party Womens Section*, which initially used to meet in the women's houses.

They also set up a branch of the *Cooperative Society* and the *Women's Cooperative Guild*, which was influential in the setting up of a cooperative store across the road from the pit.^[22] By 1929 the village had a core of shops at its centre on King Street. including a dairy, butchers, grocers and fish shop. In the same year, the union set up the '*Home Coal Scheme*' a form of retail cooperative which was run by elected officials and ensured the regular delivery of cheap coal to the miners coalsheds. Previously the miners had been dependent on the local farmers for their coal deliveries, paying the underground cost price of 2/9d plus a 'lead in' of 1/3d (4/- per ton). Although the Home Coal Scheme charged the same basic price, ordering, payment and delivery became easier:

'Old farmer Drury had the contract for it and he used to just dump it in the road in front of your house. Can you imagine that, coming back after a shift down below and having to shift a ton of coal. Bloody terrible it was. The *Home Coal* used to bag it and deliver it right into your coalhouse.'

(Armthorpe: 98SC)

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As with the union branch, the home coal scheme was democratically controlled, provided secure, regular employment for some of the local miners and distributed any profits among the membership at the end of each year.

In 1929 the Miners Welfare Grounds were established, under the joint control of management and union nominees, in order to provide sports and leisure facilities for the village. Apart from a park, there were facilities for football, cricket, tennis and bowls. Although most of these sports tended to be enjoyed by the miners, the Welfare grounds and pavillion was seen as an important facility for all the village population. For example, the Labour Party women, supported by Mrs Harte and Mrs Dearden, negotiated the use of the sports pavillion and transferred the mother and baby clinic out of the tiny parish rooms. The clinic was held weekly and became a focal point for Armthorpe women.

Catherine explained:

'Mrs Paling and Mrs Harte were the instigators. [23] The new clinic was great. There was a doctor's room, a weighing room and a room where we had visiting speakers, or just sat and talked. We'd pay a few pence for tea and biscuits and a raffle ticket, and the proceeds would go to pay for clinic trips to the seaside. We used to take all the kiddies to Skegness and we used to hire prams when we got there.'

(Armthorpe: 83SC) [24]

By the end of 1930 the pit village also had its own public house, the *Tadcaster Arms*, which joined two smaller ones, the *Plough* and the *Wheatsheaf* that had been 'established' earlier at the lower end of the village. [25] The *Tadcaster* rapidly became a major venue for union and political meetings as well as social events. A farmers' club, housed in an old, delapidated wooden hut, was resurrected as a social club called the *Coronation Club* (usually referred to as 'the Coro' or 'Bottom Club') In the late 1920s the miners also built their own working men's club, a large wooden building on Mere Lane. Democratically controlled by the miners, it fulfilled some of the educational functions of the original working mens clubs (Williamson, 1982: 108) in that it had a reading room which carried a range of the most popular newspapers and books.

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The Armthorpe YMA branch also negotiated access to Mere Lane School. They persuaded a Doctor Marshall Skellen, of the *Workers Educational Association* (WEA), to provide morning and evening classes one day a week on a variety of subjects; economics, psychology and civilisation. Adults were also allowed to register as users and borrow books from the school's library. The WEA also provided tuition on musical instruments for adults and children and supplied people with inexpensive written music. Mere Lane school was also the setting for choir practise. The male voice choir, set up by Gladys Paling during the 1926 Strike, was soon followed by the *Armthorpe Ladies Choir* and finally the *Armthorpe Mixed Choir*. All of these choirs, but especially the last one, were a major success and were called on to perform all over the country. By the mid-1930s the village was staging its own, week-long music and drama festival. As in so many of these initiatives, Gladys Paling was the key figure. Ivor Smith recalled:

'She was the instigator of this village, Labour Party and everything. She fought for everyone. She was parish councillor, choirmaster, rural district councillor, chairman of the magistrates. There were eight Welshmen in Mrs Paling's choir. It had at least forty in it, and the mixed choir that was massive too. Its still going today. We sang all over the country, even at *the Gaumont* for a week. We all loved her. She was a leading figure, no doubt. And Mrs. Potter, who lived just by her on Briar Road. And Mrs Swift. Most of the leading lights were in the Labour Party.'

(Armthorpe: 87 SC)

The Armthorpe women did not tend to use the pubs and clubs as much as the miners, with young families making even weekend visits something of a luxury. However it would be wrong to assume that the women were all confined to domestic isolation. Apart from the various political and cultural activities already mentioned, there appears to have been a considerable amount of home-based socialising. Ada described her social life in the 1920s and 1930s:

'Perhaps it was because we'd all been through the hardship together, but people in the village were very friendly. You couldn't be lonely. Everybody used to talk to each other, even if they didn't know them. Everybody used to leave their doors open to neighbours and we used to have regular do's in houses.

We used to have domino handicaps in our house for Poplar [Road]. Anyone could show up and chip in a penny for the kitty. And the women used to get together regular to play cards. Oh aye, we used to keep open house, everyone would pop in from time to time. There were beetle, whist

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drives, then 'housey housey' evenings. Everybody neighboured. It was lovely, really.' (Armthorpe: 905C)

The collective involvement of the YMA and Labour Party was very apparent when it came to recreational activity for the children. There were many young families in Armthorpe; the 1931 Census revealed an average age of 27 years 3 months for males and 26 years 9 months for females (Vine, 1986:3). Because of the brevity of their (unpaid) holidays, the constant fluctuation in wage levels and the problems of shiftwork, family holidays were virtually unheard of among miners. A major *collective* effort was therefore made by the union and the local clubs to provide the children with regular Summer daytrips to the seaside. Armthorpe YMA set up a benevolent fund for the purpose and all the working men's clubs had their own funds which paid for annual children's outings. Everything; fares, nourishment and spending money was paid for by the club concerned and, as the number of children in the village grew, it was not unusual to see thirty or forty buses lined up outside a working men's club on the day of the outing. The Labour Party took it upon itself to provide the local children with an annual Christmas party, and festivities were also organised for the kids on Bonfire night. The other big festivals when both children and adults were 'treated' by the union branch were Mayday, and of course, the Yorkshire Miners' Gala. [263]

These activities illustrate how, in the first five years of the village existence, sections of the local working class population strove to construct a close knit community, with institutions and power points to which they were guaranteed access. At its core was the union branch, linking the struggle for control in the underground situation with its campaign for influence in a whole range of welfare, social and cultural activities above ground. The fact that a main factor motivating the construction of a union-centred community was the desire for independence from company control indicates that it was not the *only* major social network operating in the locality. The

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powerful position of *Doncaster Amalgamated Collieries* was reflected in their dominant status in the 'other' community.

I gained the clearest insight into the workings of this social network during an interview with Dorothy Vine, daughter of one of Markham Main's first undermanagers. The key institutions in their 'community' were the company hierarchy, the parish church, Saint John's Ambulance Brigade and later, the church-based Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. Her father and mother were expected to be prominent in the local church, to be leaders of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and to preside over all the appropriate functions; monthly church parades, First Aid classes and competitions, remembrance day parades and the annual 'beating' of the pit boundaries by the DAC chairman.

There were of course no rigid boundaries between the two 'communities'. They co-existed and there was co-operation between them as well as conflict. There were cross-currents and contradictory ideologies evident in both, and although certain institutions might be seen as forming an essential pole of one or other systems, there were others (churches, choirs and clinics to name but three) that were less obviously aligned. That numerous individuals managed to 'straddle' both systems was evident from the older people's interviews, but that it was not just the more politically conscious miners that perceived that there were two systems, was evident from my interview with the undermanager's daughter:

'The officials had their own houses, separate from the men. Early on they set up an officials' club. They had to be weaned away from the mens' company. Deputies weren't allowed to join unions, they had to obey orders and go where they were told.' (Armthorpe: 97SC)

The DAC management were obviously concerned that their officials did not identify too closely with the union-centred social system that was developing, with its collective interests, institutions and culture.

DEVELOPMENTS IN UNION & POLITICAL LIFE.

Through the late 1920's and 'slump days' of the early 1930's the union tried to improve conditions and strengthen its organisation at the pit. This proved difficult as there were extensive periods of short time working, with only three days or less being worked. The men used to stand on the doorstep in the evenings, listening for the pit buzzer. If it sounded at six p.m., there was no nightshift, if it sounded at eight p.m., there was no dayshift. After rent and other deductions, miners were sometimes left with virtually no wages to take home. By 1930 the YMA and Labour Party activists had gained a prominent position on the local parish council and the local Board of Guardians, on which they served with Doctor Harte and the vicar, Rev. Duckett. Confronted with widespread and deepening poverty in the village, the guardians issued substantial amounts of relief. In 1931, the government authorities accused them of giving out too much relief and supercharged them for the amount they had 'overpaid', some £1,400. All of the guardians refused to pay, pledging they would rather go to prison. In the end, their 'fine' was paid by the Yorkshire Mineworkers Association and the Labour Party, and the issuing of relief was taken out of the hands of the local guardians (Armthorpe: 98SC)^[27]

The elements of industrial control that the men had won were not removed so easily. In 1934 the first large-scale conveyor units were brought in, allowing the development of longwall mining, and causing a much increased division of labour. The Armthorpe tradition of egalitarian and independent organisation was maintained with the stall chargemen being replaced by elected chargemen representing larger teams of men. Jobs on the face were allocated according to a complex, democratically controlled system known as 'priority',^[28] which ensured that all miners had equal access to the more remunerative contracts.

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After a period on a standard day wage, the colliers set about winning a return to piecework on a new, improved price list. In 1935, men from another local Markham-owned pit, Brodsworth, entered into dispute over the same issue. They called for and received Armthorpe's support. The strike lasted three weeks and although there were still a few strikebreakers, unlike 1926, they found themselves in a vulnerable position. They were immediately shunned and harassed by other miners, and within two months, were persuaded to leave the pit and the village (Armthorpe: 81, 85 & 87SC)

By the mid-1930's there was also a strong and growing Communist Party presence in the village. In July 1938, two of the local communist miners, Herbert Tag and Stan Codlin, who had volunteered to fight in the International Brigade in Spain were killed in action (Armthorpe: 99SC). It was in this situation of growing union and political activity that the Markham Main workforce was joined by one of its most famous militants. His political and union activity were to play a major role in the development of Armthorpe's political tradition.

Jock Kane (1907-1977), born in Ireland into a large, staunchly republican family, started work in the West Lothian coalfield at the age of 14, joined the recently-established Communist Party the following year, and at the age of 19 was victimised, along with his father and brothers, for their prominent role in the 1926 Strike. Evicted, alongside all the other militants from their company-owned Stonyburn houses, the Kanes were again forced to migrate in search of work. They moved to Hatfield near Armthorpe, then on to Ireland pit in Stavely, Derbyshire. In 1929, having led a major dispute at the pit, the Kanes were again victimised and evicted from their pit house, along with 12 other pro-union families. By 1936 Jock was working as a full-time Communist Party^[29] organiser in Sheffield, although he spent a lot of time in Harworth (Notts), where one of his brothers, Mick, was branch president of the Nottinghamshire Miners Association and leading the bitter ten-month struggle

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that finally broke the stranglehold of George Spencer's company-sponsored, 'non-political' union.^[30] It was as a Communist Party organiser that he first met Betty, his future wife and lifelong comrade, a party activist in the engineering industry. Unable to start a family on his subsistence allowance, in 1937 Jock managed to get a job at Markham Main. In 1938, he was involved in a two-week strike over a new price list covering the introduction of mechanised coal cutters onto the face (Armthorpe: 81, 85 & 91SC).

A year later, in 1939, he was elected branch secretary and in 1941 he moved from Doncaster into the village with Betty and their first baby. Communist Party membership and union activity among Markham Main miners grew significantly during this period, and although there were some arguments over the Communist Party policy of complete cessation of class struggle during the War, by 1945, Armthorpe had become one of the Communist Party's strongholds in the Doncaster area. The village branch had over thirty members, and several of the YMA branch committee members and chargemen^[31] were either full members or close sympathisers. There were several active women members, who took responsibility for selling the *Daily Worker* and distributing party literature on the pit gates. On a 'good' day, 90-100 copies of the *Daily Worker* would be sold (Armthorpe: 81, 83, 91, 96 SC)

By 1945, Armthorpe had lost Bill Paling as its checkweighman, after he was elected as Labour M.P. for Dewsbury. When, in 1947, the coalmines were nationalised, there was one area, labour relations, where the government sought to incorporate the talents of prominent trade unionists. This created major tensions inside the miners union and the Communist Party, which was committed to total cooperation with the Labour Government and maximum efforts to boost production, especially in the nationalised industries (Coates and Topham, 1970: 299). Although communists of national standing such as Arthur Horner and Abe Moffat^[32] refused to follow Ebby Edwardes, NUM General Secretary, and

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Walter Citrine, TUC General Secretary, [233], into top National Coal Board (NCB) jobs, others were encouraged to take up posts as area labour officers.

Jock Kane was offered a post as an NCB labour officer for the Yorkshire area, and, after much soul searching, eventually accepted (Armthorpe: 96SC). By 1948, the party's attitude towards the Labour Government had been transformed by the onset of the Cold War and communists inside the NUM were allowed to voice their criticisms of the 'right wing leaders of the Labour Government, which is making the nationalized coal industry into a typical State capitalist trust' (Pollit, 1948: 16). Kane, who had never come to terms with his NCB role, [234] became increasingly disillusioned, and in 1950, went back to work down the pit at Armthorpe. His poor health worsened considerably following his return to underground work, which compounded the substantial drop in income suffered due to his principled resignation. Nevertheless, with Betty's help, [235] he resumed his activity as a grass roots union and political organiser. In the early 1950's the Communist Party presence at the pit was strengthened by the arrival of several communist miners from the Lancashire and Scottish coalfields. [236] In 1955, following his re-election as Armthorpe branch president, Kane was elected president of the NUM's Doncaster panel. [237]

The Armthorpe Fillers Dispute

By 1955, underground miners in Armthorpe, and other Yorkshire pits were still being paid according to price lists that had not been comprehensively revised for almost 20 years. The growing number of pit-level disputes (see Table 2.1) usually took place in an effort to secure additional 'allowances'. Local pit managers, whose performance was evaluated by superiors on the basis of their meeting output targets, were entitled to grant allowances and were vulnerable in the face of damaging, unofficial strikes. This provided a basis for the development of a combative militant tradition at Armthorpe and elsewhere, termed 'pit politics' by Drabble (1987). In order to guarantee substantial allowances,

the union organisation at the pit had to be able to mobilise the maximum number of members rapidly and decisively, leaving the local management little option but to give way.

However the achievement of a decent wage through manager-sanctioned allowances involved insecurity and a recurrent loss of wages through disputes. The basic price lists, whose importance was increased by the continuous inflation of the mid-1950's, were negotiated at an area level. The issue of their re-negotiation had been formally raised by several Doncaster branches, via the NUM Panel, in 1951 and 1953, but negotiations between Yorkshire NUM officials and the NCB had proved protracted and inconclusive. (Taylor, 1984: 176).

In mid-March 1955, following numerous complaints over wage packet anomalies, the Armthorpe NUM branch resolved that in the event of any more wage-disputes, the officials should be given the opportunity to find a negotiated settlement and failing this, the whole workforce should be called together to vote on indefinite strike action until a satisfactory outcome was achieved. In early-April, the chargemen at Armthorpe initiated a go-slow campaign for a revision of the price lists and leafletted the other Doncaster pits calling for support. [32] On 21 April 1955, the Markham Main face workers (fillers) struck work over three issues: the revision of the fillers' price lists, the empowering of deputies to negotiate binding settlements on the spot, and the right to negotiate local day wage agreements to cover abnormal conditions. The rest of the workforce voted to support them. As Cliff Slaughter suggested:

'The issues chosen for a showdown in fact summarise well the underlying disatisfactions: a frustration at the constant bickering over all allowances, the consequent uncertainty of the weekly wage over a minimum level, and the growing impatience of the men with the cumbersome negotiating machinery.' (1957: 253)

This last issue was a key one. Previous disputes over price lists had been fought against private coal-owners at pit or combine level. With the introduction of state ownership, the power points for major wage adjustment had

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been removed from a local level and placed in the hands of the higher union officials, engaged in a collaborative and conciliatory relationship with the NCB. The object of the 1955 Strike was essentially to interrupt this process and bring wage determination back into the grass roots arena where the power of collective organisation could be brought to bear. In a major dispute that foreshadowed the national ones of later years, the effectiveness of Armthorpe's *pit politics* was tested against the weight of *mineworker politics*, urging bureaucratic restraint and compromise.

On 22 April 1955 the Doncaster Panel endorsed the Armthorpe workforce's action and gave a week's notice of sympathetic strike action by all the Doncaster branches. On 30 April 1955, the NUM's Yorkshire Council accepted a compromise solution from the NCB and threatened disciplinary action if the Doncaster Panel met to consider the expiry of its strike notice. The Panel ignored the threats, met and resolved to accept the verdict of the Armthorpe miners (meeting the following day, 1 May) as binding on the rest of the Doncaster Panel. The strength of the local pit political tradition was evident at the Armthorpe mass meeting, where, despite his official position, the Yorkshire Area President, Alwin Machen was seen as speaking in support of the Armthorpe strike! (Armthorpe 81, 85, 87 & 91SC) The twelve-hundred strong meeting resolved to defy the instructions of the Area Council and voted unanimously to continue the strike.

There was no question that all fourteen pits in the Doncaster coalfield would strike work the following day. However, several of the Doncaster militants knew that, in order to put maximum pressure on the NCB, they would have to spread the strike to the rest of the Yorkshire coalfield. Given the degree of official opposition at both area and national level, they felt that the only way they would persuade other miners to join the dispute was to achieve direct, face-to face contact with them as quickly as possible. Several of the union activists in Machen's old pit, Thorne, were enrolled on the Yorkshire NUM

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day release course at Sheffield University, which had been established by Machen the previous year (Woodhead, 1987: 19). There they had made contact with Jim McFarlane, a Labour Party militant from Denaby in the South Yorkshire area. [39] They phoned him up and arranged to drive over on to Denaby early on Monday morning. On arrival they met up with McFarlane and Denaby's delegate, Abe Collins, who held a mass meeting of the dayshift and nightshifts to explain the issues behind the Armthorpe strike. The men voted to strike in support and the strike 'spilled over' into the more moderate South Yorkshire coalfield. [40] On the way back the triumphant Thorne pickets called in at Jock Kane's house in Armthorpe to tell him the news. According to Johnny Weaver, one of the pickets, they greeted a bewildered Kane with:

'Ey-up Jock, Denaby's out! You'd best get your lads on the go, adn't yer?' (Moorends: 45 SC)

In Armthorpe there were several private cars available for use, but little or no petrol in their tanks. As on previous occasions, collective resources of the village, set up for completely different purposes, were placed at the disposal of the central institution, 'the union'. On Monday night George Moore, the manager of the Home Coal Scheme, was approached in the *Tadcaster Arms* by his son-in-law, John Ellis, a Communist Party member on the NUM Branch Committee:

'George, have you got any petrol in your tank ? We can't go picketing if we've got no petrol..' (Armthorpe: 81SC)

A meeting was quickly convened by George Moore and Jake Martin (by now the treasurer of the Home Coal Scheme), and within 10 minutes, the verdict was announced:

'Queue up by the tank and get loaded up with petrol..' (Armthorpe: 81SC)

The following morning, Tuesday 3 May, ten cars were put on the road and the first mass 'flying picket' was launched. They succeeded in bringing out another ten pits. On Wednesday morning they linked up with pickets from Thorne,

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Hatfield, Rossington, Bentley and Brodsworth, and picketed out another twenty five pits. The Doncaster Panel again defied a 93-14 vote at the NUM Yorkshire Council instructing them to go back and reaffirmed their support for the strike. By Thursday 5th the strike had grown yet again involving sixty five pits and 89,000 men. The mass media launched a 'red scare', the newspapers suggesting that the communists were solely responsible, while the BBC claimed that only 8,000 wished to strike and the rest were being intimidated. The NCB put out a statement suggesting:

'The action taken at Markham Main and the sympathetic action now being taken at other collieries in Yorkshire is an attempt to use power instead of reason.'
(Daily Worker: 6/5/55)

On Friday, in direct defiance of area and national NUM instructions, Armthorpe and the Doncaster Panel voted to reject another compromise solution and continue the strike. In response to the red scare, Joe Cole, Armthorpe branch secretary, claimed that it was he, 'a left-wing socialist' that had advocated the strike, and not Jock Kane. Hearing reports of increasing pressure on branches from full-time officials, Armthorpe arranged for a renewed wave of flying picketing on the Monday morning. Having emptied the *Home Coal Scheme* tank of petrol, the pickets negotiated access to another collective union resource, the *Markham Main Checkweigh Fund*.

The flying pickets were again effective and by Tuesday, the number of pits on strike was growing again. Over a hundred of Yorkshire's 114 pits had taken some form of action and the strike was threatening to spread into other coalfields.⁴¹ In Armthorpe, the independent resourcefulness of the union-centred community, when confronted with a major collective struggle, was underlined by the decision of the '*Death and Divide*' Society to pay out £1,600 to its members. All 2,500 of the Armthorpe strikers received 12s 6d each with the trustees explaining 'this is not NUM cash, it is a private sick and death fund' (Daily Worker: 11/5/55). The union branch also came to an agreement with

the local schools that strikers' children would receive free meals for the duration of the strike.

Only on Monday 16 May, after the NCB had informed all the Yorkshire NUM branches in writing that it would concede to all three of Armthorpe's demands, was there a return to work.^[42] Negotiations on new price lists were begun immediately and, of the 301 Yorkshire price lists, 291 were revised upwards following the strike (McCormick, 1979: 186-7). The transposition of Armthorpe's brand of pit politics to panel, and then area level, had resulted in the most extensive industrial action in the post-nationalisation period and the successful resolution of deep seated problems, where protracted negotiations at the bureaucratic, 'mineworker' level had failed. Carried out in defiance of management, media and union leadership, the 1955 strike again revealed the strength of bonding between Armthorpe's union branch and the village community. The potential of 'pit politics to have an impact in a much wider arena was also evident. Referring to the impact of the Armthorpe strike on the perspective he had developed in Featherstone, Slaughter commented:

'The transformation in scale of the strike problem is essentially a result of the organising role of the squads of picketing miners who were the real core of the week's strike.....the success of the pickets, the prominence achieved by the local and county strikeleaders, provided the beginnings of an alternative to that bureaucratic overgrowth that had appeared completely immovable when viewed at colliery level only a year or two before.....In more than one sense, the Fillers' Strike of May 1955 marked a new stage in the development of industrial relations and of the NUM in the Yorkshire mining industry.' (1957: 256-7)

As evidence of this, Slaughter detailed the impact of the Armthorpe Strike on the NUM elections that took place a few weeks after its conclusion, resulting in the election of thirty one new branch secretaries and twenty six new branch delegates to the Yorkshire Council. This new leadership presided over a continuing high level of militancy throughout 1955 and 1956 before being confronted with the recession of 1957.

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The falling demand for coal brought new problems and led to another major dispute over the price lists in 1961, in which the high wage pits sought to establish a minimum guaranteed fallback rate for all pits. Known as the Brodsworth Dispute, it saw Armthorpe and Doncaster flying pickets out in force again. The right wing Yorkshire officials managed to isolate the Doncaster Panel, and, after two weeks, the strikers were forced to return to work without any major concessions.

Nevertheless it was during this period of the late 1950's and early 1960's that the political complexion of the traditionally conservative Yorkshire coalfield began to undergo a radical change. In 1963 Jock Kane was elected as full-time NUM agent^[43] for Doncaster and in 1966 he was elected Financial Secretary for the whole of Yorkshire. In the mid 1960s, together with another Armthorpe activist, Owen Briscoe^[44], Sammy Taylor, Yorkshire Compensation Agent, Frank Watters, a Communist Party full-time organiser, Arthur Scargill and others, he played a key role in the setting up both the *Yorkshire Miners Forum*, and the national Broad Left Forum (Crick, 1984:20-3 and Allen, 1981:126-135). In the unofficial 1969 strike for a reduction in surfacemen's hours, Armthorpe's brand of pit politics was again demonstrated on an even broader scale. The key role of Kane and Briscoe at Panel and Area level was clearly visible, with all four Yorkshire panels coming out in unison and forming a joint strike committee, which effectively ran the strike in defiance of the area officials. In comparison to the traditionally militant areas of Scotland and South Wales, Yorkshire was a 'model of organisation' (Allen, 1981:158). Armthorpe NUM again played a major part in this, immediately sending out flying pickets around Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. The 1969 strike, involving 140 pits and 130,000 miners, marked a watershed in the emergence of Yorkshire as a leading area of militancy in the NUM.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE VILLAGE

The physical growth of the village slowed during the late 1930s and 1940s along with a slow-down in population growth (See Appendix 8). In the 1950s more facilities were introduced into the village. The Mere Lane school was expanded, another working men's club was built, as were two new churches, a post office and a police station. The newly-created NCB's drive for increased coal production coincided with an acute post-war housing shortage and led to serious conflict, with the union again acting as the focus for political action among the village population.

The Housing Dispute

The old Doncaster Colliery Association houses had been taken over by the Coal Board, but were insufficient to meet the requirements of the growing number of second-generation Armthorpe families. The Coal Board was compelled to build its own houses, via the Coal Industry Housing Association (CIHA) and this led to the establishment of a new miners' estate at the bottom (eastern) end of the old village (See Appendix Six). The NCB planned to use this housing to attract new labour to the pit, but their 1954 allocation of a hundred new houses (out of 200) to 'outsiders' led to a protest meeting in the village, and a strike at the pit. The union branch insisted that the Coal Board prioritise the housing needs of the established Armthorpe families, before bringing in new labour. This resistance eventually led the reallocation of the CIHA housing on a 75:25 basis and to an increased programme of house building, both by the Coal Board and by the council.

Nevertheless, the mid-1950s saw the arrival of a major, second wave of mining 'immigrants', seeking regular wages, housing and job security. The new immigrants, mainly young families from Lancashire, Scotland and the North East brought a renewal of Armthorpe's cosmopolitanism. The lower end of the village soon became nicknamed 'nappy valley', due to the large numbers of babies and

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small children. Several of the newly-arrived miners were also leading political and union militants, attracted to Armthorpe as much by its political reputation as by its new housing. Many were to play an important role in the consequent development of Armthorpe's radical traditions.

The Rent Campaigns

The involvement of the NUM, Labour and Communist parties in pit and panel-centred activities was matched by a similar involvement in other areas of village life. The union branch had always been one of the agencies through which miners and their partners complained about, and got repairs done to, their housing. It was also the agency which had represented the mining families in negotiations with the *Doncaster Amalgamated Collieries* over the cost of company housing. Nationalisation and the creation of CIHA meant that, as with wages, the fixing of rents tended to be done at a more remote level, and was increasingly effected by government legislation. In 1956 the first of a series of rent acts was introduced, which allowed the NCB, as a 'private' landlord, to remove previous controls and charge 'economic' rents. The first signs of collective resistance came from Thurnscoe (another ex-DAC village) where Percy Riley, a communist miner, organised all the NCB tenants in an imaginative and highly successful campaign of opposition. Communist Party militants insisted that their union branches should get involved and the campaign spread throughout the coalfield villages. [45] A combination of collective protest and legal action curbed the increases and actually won many Armthorpe tenants significant amounts of rent rebate. (Armthorpe: 66M)

In 1960, another Rent Act was introduced and the NCB expressed its intention of raising rents by between five and eight shillings (their actual target in Armthorpe was discovered to be between ten and fifteen shillings). Again the Communist Party played a key role in getting the NUM, at branch and area level, to initiate a major campaign across the Yorkshire coalfield. In

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Armthorpe a tenants committee was set up which exposed both the NCB intentions and the politics behind the 'Fair Rent Act'. The local NUM were seen as the driving force behind the tenants committee, with one of the 1954 wave of communist miners, Eric Browne, acting as treasurer and Owen Briscoe acting as president.

Neither was the involvement of Armthorpe NUM in housing affairs restricted to NCB tenants. In response to the 1971 'Fair Rents' Act, the Yorkshire NUM Joint Tenants Association initiated joint work with council and other private tenants' groups. The broad dimensions of the 1971 campaign again revealed the sharp divide between 'pit politics' and 'mineworker politics'. Fred Coleridge, secretary, and Sid Schofield, president of Yorkshire NUM, both opposed union involvement in the campaign against the Act, arguing that rent levels were private matter between tenant and landlord and therefore not a legitimate union concern. Proponents of the Armthorpe-pit political tradition, which saw it as important for the union to involve itself in all kinds of collective working class struggle, played an important part in winning the Yorkshire Area in support (Armthorpe: 48 & 66M).

Improving Village Resources

Union activists, frequently members of the Communist or Labour parties were prominent in agitation for improved facilities for miners and their families. In certain cases, for example the pit baths and canteen (1939), the provision of facilities at the pit clearly had a major impact on the lives of the majority of the village population (men and women). But with the union office also fulfilling the role of a citizens advice bureau, ⁴⁶ the NUM also became involved in a most of the lobbying exercises aimed at improving the collective resources of the village. By the mid-1950's, Armthorpe had a full complement of modern junior and senior schools in the village. Following the

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tradition of Labour Party and YMA agitation in the days when widows of miners were expected to quit the pit houses, the NUM successfully lobbied the council to build two complexes of pensioners flats and bungalows near the centre of the village. Another of Gladys Paling's and Mrs. Potter's aspirations was realized in the building of a modern, purpose-built, mother and baby clinic in the centre of the village. The relative prosperity of Armthorpe's mining population also attracted more commercial investment. A modern shopping precinct was built at the bottom end of the village and several new public houses were constructed.

In the early 1960s, a Welfare Institute was erected in the Welfare grounds, not as another working men's club, but as a centre of recreation for all the village population, especially the village youth. The task of running it as an alcohol-free teenage youth club and dance hall proved too much for the trustees however, and, after a major debate, a Welfare General Meeting voted to turn it into a licensed premises. Despite this decision, the 'Welly' still retained many of its former features, such as its accessibility to young people. So, for example, when the commercial picture house, the *Scala* was closed down, the Welfare took on the job of running weekly film shows for both its adult and its junior clientele. [47]

Soon after the Welfare had been built, two of the village's leading union activists, Eric Browne (CP) and Wilf Smith (LP) raised the issue of the need for a swimming pool with the Welfare Committee. The fund-raising campaign that ensued lasted some five years, with Eric and Dot Browne (CP), Wilf Smith and a few others conscientiously carrying out a weekly tour of the village, selling tote tickets that raised £75 per week for the funds. Due to their herculean efforts, sufficient funds were raised to pay for the building of a large open air pool by Shaw Woods. With this success under their belt, the same activists then launched a campaign for the provision of a sports complex with an indoor swimming pool in the centre of the village. Petitions were raised, councillors were visited and council meetings lobbied. Once again the

agitational skills of the activists were successful in mobilising the village population and the sustained campaign achieved its aim, namely the opening, in 1974, of a modern and well-equipped sports complex next door to the senior school on Mere Lane (Armthorpe: 65M & 17W).

The Village prior to the Strike

There were major physical changes in the Armthorpe of the 1970s and early 1980s. Although one major piece of investment, the 1960's construction of two smokeless fuel plants next to the pit head, eventually proved to be unviable, [48] the 1970s saw continuing investment in the pit and in its coal distribution centre. As well as another complex of specially-designed old people's bungalows, three recreational centres were built near to their homes. Other important facilities, such as a modern and spacious public library and a new doctor's surgery were constructed.

But the main changes were not so much in the old pit village as on its outskirts. Around much of the old 1960s village boundary there was a mushrooming of privately-owned housing, mostly detached, semi-detached or bungalows. Some of these houses were occupied by people connected with the pit, moving out of the 'old' pit village to more modern, spacious housing. But the village's proximity to Doncaster, on the one hand, and the M18 motorway on the other, encouraged a new wave of immigrants to settle in the village. Unlike the vast majority of previous immigrants, this 'third wave' saw neither the pit or the pit village as a central focus in their lives. A population survey conducted by Jeffrey Wild, a local college student, in 1979, revealed the development of a major sociological division. Whereas 85 percent of working heads of households living in the old mining village still worked in the village, 90 percent of the heads of household in the new private housing sector worked outside the village with 79 percent travelling to work by car. (Wild, 1979)

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The 'new' Armthorpe that emerged in the 1980s was an uneasy amalgam of the old, occupationally-based pit village and a residential-dormitory centre, what was described by Wild as a 'low status metropolitan village'. Dividing the population according to three housing types; pit, council and privately-constructed, Wild discovered a series of significant social differences between the population in the former and latter sectors. Apart from the fact that the occupants of the mining houses tended to be older with a much longer period of residence in the village, there was also a stark contrast in the social class of the occupants (as defined by the Registrar General).

This meant that, unlike the immigrants of the 1950s, the newcomers did not tend to integrate into the established work and class-based community. In contrast to the mining sector where only 38 percent of the households owned a car, 81 percent of the households in the privately-owned sector possessed cars. A clear separation was even more evident when shopping habits and club membership were considered. Whereas 46 percent of households in the mining sector did most of their shopping locally, only 18 percent of those in the 'private' sector depended on the village shops. And the 53 percent of the adult males in the mining sector who were members of the village's social clubs, contrasted starkly with the 8.5 percent of males from the new, private housing areas.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a steady growth in Armthorpe's population, which by 1984 numbered approximately 12,300. According to the 1984 branch secretary over a thousand of these still worked at the local pit, although many more were ex-miners, retired miners or their widows (Armthorpe:77 M). Apart from a growth of housing specifically built for private ownership, the NCB and Council's policy of selling off houses meant there was an increase in owner occupation in the older part of the village. The shrinking job opportunities in the pit^[49] encouraged increased occupational (and often physical) mobility among the younger generations in the village. Nevertheless the presence of an

open pit meant that the levels of employment and economic activity in Armthorpe never plumbed the depths they did in villages where the pit had been closed down. [50]

TRADE UNION & POLITICAL ACTIVITY PRIOR TO 1984

The growing influence of the kind of 'pit political' tradition that Kane and others had built in Armthorpe was reflected in the 1972 national strike. Despite the persistence of a right wing majority on the National Executive Committee, and the 1971 election of Joe Gormley as NUM President, the left wing areas, and especially Yorkshire, played the key role in determining the content and prosecution of the wage claim (Taylor, 1984:214).

The organisation of picketing was entrusted to the panels, with power stations classified according to their output and picketed accordingly (Taylor, 1984:222). Doncaster Panel was given the key task of closing the major Yorkshire power stations, which supplied almost seventeen per cent of the total output of the Central Electricity Generating Board (Taylor, 1984:221) Armthorpe was given responsibility for the round-the-clock picketing of the East Yorkshire wharves and two of nearby power stations; Keadby and Thorpe Marsh. It was outside Keadby power station that Fred Matthews, the one picket killed in the 1972 dispute, was run down by a lorry. He was a Communist Party member from Hatfield Main, which after the closure of Thorne in 1957, had become Armthorpe's 'sister pit' and closest ally. [51]

Although the picketing of power stations received less publicity than the events at Saltley, it was highly effective, causing the total shutdown of twelve major power stations by the fourth week of the strike, the rationing of electricity and the laying off of 1,400,000 workers. The progressive closure of the power stations was one of the key factors in undermining the Heath

Government's hopes of withstanding the strike. Armthorpe also had a direct input, via Jock Kane, in the strike's prosecution at a national level (see Chapter Two). Pit political tactics; decisive and widespread mobilisation of rank and file cadre, combined with an open appeal to class consciousness, had placed the miners in a strong position vis a vis a weakened opponent. As in 1955, Kane was prominent in rejecting compromise and insisted on pressing home the miners' advantage, leading to an exceptionally clear-cut victory.

As already mentioned, the Heath government was better prepared and adopted a far more calculated, aggressive political stance in 1974, immediately declaring a State of Emergency, mass layoffs and then an emergency general election. The Armthorpe experience in the 1974 strike reflected the hesitancy and uncertainty felt by the leadership of the NUM, forced to conduct a strike in a situation of unprecedented political pressure. The autonomy of the areas and panels was severely restricted by the NUM national executive (through its National Strike Committee) and branch initiatives were even more circumscribed. The grass roots mobilisation that had been key to the 1972 victory was discouraged, and instead of solidarity being sought through rank and file contact, more passive 'cooperation' was arranged between union officials. Although Armthorpe was again involved in twenty-four hour picketing of wharves and power stations, numbers of pickets were much smaller and they were more passive. This had been anticipated in the NEC circular to branches instructing them to restrict picket teams to six:

'We know that this might dampen enthusiasm, but be assured, there are very good reasons' (National NEC Circular to branch secretaries 9/2/74)

Even the leading advocates of mass picketing in 1972 appeared constrained.

Arthur Scargill sent a message to the area strike committees suggesting:

'There is now no need for railway pickets to be on bridges, crossings, embankments. ASLEF drivers will (if informed by their officials that there are NUM pickets in the vicinity) stop the train.'

(Area Circular to strike HQ's 15/2/74)

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This self-imposed constraint led to serious problems and demoralisation among the pickets. A team of eighteen Doncaster pickets, sent to the British Steel Corporation Anchor Works at Scunthorpe complained that with so few of them, they were incapable of having any impact. Local ASLEF members reported fuel trains being taken out of sidings by BSC employees because there were no pickets present (Taylor, 1984: 254).

The weakening of grass roots political and union organisation apparent at a national level also manifested itself locally. By the end of 1974, the need for a renewal of the trade union and political life in the union and village had become apparent to a core of Armthorpe's grass roots militants. The new political forces that began to make their presence felt from 1975 onwards consciously drew on the earlier Communist Party traditions and saw their task as twofold - rebuilding a significant core of committed socialists in the pit and village and stimulating rank and file activity and organisation throughout the NUM.

The leading militants were originally concentrated in a single underground district, and comprised a small core of members/sympathisers of the International Socialists, [52] some of the older communist transferees from Thorne, and other politically non-aligned militants. The dominant politics of the group was the revolutionary socialism of the International Socialists, but this tended to dovetail with the local pit political tradition in that it sought the maximum mobilisation of grass roots membership around both industrial and political aims. Both inside and outside the pit, the International Socialists of the mid-1970s made an effort to involve Labour Party, Communist Party and other militants in their activities. [53]

The mid-1970s witnessed a further wave of 'immigrants' from Scotland and the North East many of whom were attracted by the pit's reputation. Bob, originally from a Durham village, explained:

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'By the time I came to Markham, I'd seen four pits closed and we'd had to live in a caravan for two years. I was forced to come down here, there just weren't any more pits left in Durham to take us. I first saw the Markham men on the T.V. during the 1974 Strike. In every area, there's always one pit more militant than others. And as soon as I saw them, I thought 'That's my type of pit'. It wasn't just the pit, it was the village; right friendly, it reminded me of Houghton.'

(Armthorpe: 65M)

The political vacuum felt by the Armthorpe militants was also felt in other pits. In the mid-1970s the International Socialists launched a rank and file miners' magazine, '*The Collier*', with the aim of building a national rank and file organisation of NUM members around it. In the six years of its existence, it established the beginnings of a base in the Yorkshire coalfield and played a significant role in several important disputes and campaigns. [54] Armthorpe was one of the main bases of *the Collier*, providing a major part of its editorial board and many of its regular contributors. [55]

The participation of the Armthorpe miners in the production of the *Collier* undoubtedly served to commit them to a high level of local union activity. An active concern with the conditions in the pit and the local community was combined with a concern for the life of the broader community of miners (via the area and national NUM) and the broader class community (via solidarity with other groups of workers struggling against exploitation or oppression). Sectional issues were placed in a wider, class context, as will be explained below.

'Sectional' Branch Activity

The new 1976 branch leadership, especially the branch secretary, Jimmy Millar (a non-aligned socialist but closely associated with the leading I.S./S.W.P. militants), established a reputation for a 'determined, uncompromising' pursuit of the membership's interests (Armthorpe: 48 & 67M). Improvements in health, safety, wages, contracts and conditions were fought for as a matter of course. If there were local problems that the management refused

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to address seriously, men were encouraged to take industrial action in pursuit of their resolution. Advice and representation in common law claims and disciplinary cases were of a high standard. An outstanding example of the branch's active concern for all its members was the May 1978 Rescue Brigadesmen's Strike.

There were only 36 men with specific responsibility for rescuing miners after major pit accidents in the Yorkshire coalfield. They were divided into three teams of twelve, based in Rotherham, Wakefield and Doncaster. In 1978 the Doncaster rescue men were members of the Armthorpe branch, but despite resolutions, negotiations and lobbying, they had become a 'Cinderella' section of the NUM with their wages and conditions lagging behind those of other miners. Eventually the Armthorpe branch decided to strike in support of their three demands; a reduction in the number of 'standby' hours required, an increase in payment and a more equal entitlement to bonus payments with other underground workers.

Immediately Markham Main struck work, they sent out over sixty flying pickets across the Yorkshire coalfield. Despite opposition from some branch secretaries, Yorkshire and national NUM leaders, these pickets brought out over 30,000 men in two days. The teams moved from pit to pit, linking up with the local activists (usually *Collier* supporters or contacts), addressing the workforce collectively at pit gate and canteen meetings or picketing them out through individual arguments. The effectiveness of their flying pickets and the spectacular spread of the strike surprised even the Armthorpe branch. The Yorkshire Council of the NUM refused to back it and Arthur Scargill, then Yorkshire Area President, persuaded the strikers to return to work pending immediate negotiations. The national NUM leaders then stepped in, broke off the local negotiations and insisted on an immediate compromise solution with the NCB. Although the rescue brigadesmen won a reduction of fifteen standby hours and a £14 per week wage increase, the bonus issue remained unresolved. Only when

outvoted by the Rotherham and Wakefield teams did the Armthorpe rescue men accept the deal. (*Collier*, June 1978:3)

Branch and Community Welfare

Armthorpe NUM continued to pride itself on looking after the welfare not only of its members, but of other sections of the village population. As with other miners union branches, it made major contributions to the running of convalescent and retirement homes. It campaigned for the rights of the local disabled (who are integrated into the social life of the village - especially the *Miners Welfare*)^[56] It lobbied continually for improvements in the housing and other facilities for Armthorpe's senior citizens, and, of course, it continued to lay on parties, outings, and Xmas grants for retired miners or their widows.

With the number of retired miners increasing in relation to the number of working miners, the cost of financing a major welfare programme became a problem. In 1977 the NUM branch initiated the 'Markham Main Workmen's Trading Society' and gave it £500 to open up a pit shop adjacent to the union office in the pit yard, where miners could buy clothing and other goods on a credit basis and at a discount.^[57] Registered as a charity, and run by one of the branch officials and retired miners themselves, profits from the shop were used to help finance Armthorpe's welfare programme for its pensioners. By the early 1980's the branch had 1100 retired members on its books, 500 of them attending the Summer treat (costing over £10,000), and 900 picking up their £5 Xmas grant (£4,500).^[58]

The branch also continued to look after the welfare of its working members and their families. In 1976 for example, the wife of an Armthorpe miner died while they were on holiday in Spain. The branch used £1,000 from the pit shop in order to bring her body back for burial. Similarly in 1981, Violet Conn, the wife of an NUM member, was found to be suffering from terminal cancer and

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could not get the necessary specialist treatment in time from the National Health Service. The branch officials immediately launched a programme of concerts, collections, raffles and totes in order to raise the necessary £2,000. Within a month the money had been raised, the operation had been paid for and Violet's life had been saved. [59]

Broader Trade Union and Political Activity

The involvement of the Armthorpe NUM in the broader trade union and political communities was vital for the shaping of its 1984/85 experience. Because of the breadth of activity involved, I have broken it down into three areas; campaigning work in the NUM, solidarity work with other trade unionists, and overtly political activities. I will provide an illustration of each.

In terms of internal union campaigns, the protracted resistance to the reintroduction of productivity bonuses provides an example of the branch's interventionist role. In 1976, all NUM branches were circulated with a letter from the national leadership; Gormley, Daly and McGahey, reminding them that previous wage settlements had included a commitment to increased productivity. The following week saw the Armthorpe delegate, Sammy Thompson, [60] with three pit shovels, standing outside the NUM headquarters in Euston Square surrounded by journalists and photographers. He announced that he was there on behalf of the Armthorpe branch to make a presentation to the three above-mentioned NUM leaders. The three brand-new shovels had a clear message emblazoned across their front:

'FROM THEM THAT DO ... TO THEM THAT DON'T' (Armthorpe 48M)

The Armthorpe branch then played a key role in the *Collier's* anti-incentive campaign which was launched in October 1977, helping to organise leafletting drives in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. Night after night Armthorpe and other NUM activists visited the different collieries until almost every pit or village had been covered (the 40 percent vote by Notts miners, while comparing

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unfavourably with Yorkshire's 76 percent, contributed to the 56 percent national majority which surprised so many) (Allen, 1981:278).

Union Solidarity

There were few local or major national disputes which the Armthorpe branch did not support. The involvement of its active members in class-struggle oriented politics meant that solidarity was provided in the national Firemen's dispute, Solar Tubes (Doncaster), Adamsons' (Stockport), Gardners' (Manchester), Sandersons' (Skegness), the DHSS dispute at Brixton and countless others.

In the two-year long union recognition dispute at Grunwicks, Armthorpe branch organised three major branch delegations. On the first occasion, the police attacked the pickets and the Armthorpe contingent suffered eleven arrests, including the branch president, the branch delegate and a committee man. When it came to the third, and largest, of the mass pickets, the branch sent over a hundred pickets in two coaches. Having been in the thick of the struggles with police throughout the morning, they refused to follow Scargill, Jack Dromey and others in acceding to TUC pressure and abandoning the picket lines. [61]

During the thirteen week steelworkers strike in 1980, Armthorpe NUM held regular pit head collections, sent large contingents on the mass pickets, blacked all steel deliveries and asked local steelworkers to come and put pickets on the pit gates in order to make the strike bite. [62] However they failed to step up the level of solidarity, and in the final week of the strike, Dave Barker, a prominent SWP member at the pit, argued in the *Collier* that this failure would rebound on them:

'What it amounts to is that anything we do to assist the NCB break the steel strike will rebound on us later. It's like hammering nails into your own coffin.'

(Barker, 1980: 10)

THE COLLIER

RANK AND FILE MINERS PAPER 15p

April/May 1980

No. 31



HORPE DELEGATION 'LOBBYING' THE T.U.C. ON 1980 STEEL STRIKE SUPPORT DEMO

ALL OUT MAY 14

KILL THE ANTI UNION BILL

Inside: Radiation hazards in the pits

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A prophesy that was borne out in 1984/85. In the protracted 1981 dispute of the Lawrence Scott (Manchester) workers, Armthorpe defied the Conservative's anti-union laws by joining mass solidarity pickets outside Arthur Snipe's *Mining Supplies* factory in Doncaster^[63] and then launching what Norman Tebbit might have described as 'tertiary picketing', pursuing the firms delivery lorries into the Notts coalfield and demanding their blacking by NUM members in the receiving pits (Armthorpe: 48 & 73M).

In 1981 the NHS dispute saw the branch organising three 24-hour solidarity strikes. In 1982 it provided physical and financial solidarity with the train drivers. On 30 November 1983, a 45-strong Armthorpe delegation crossed the Pennines to attend a rally and picket in support the National Graphical Association (NGA) strikers involved in a 22-week old dispute with Eddie Shah at the *Stockport Messenger* printing works in Warrington. (Dickinson, 1984) It was the night after the most violent clashes on the picket lines. The brutalised condition of the NGA pickets and the destruction of their strike organisation shocked the Armthorpe delegation (Armthorpe: 48 & 63M).

The Armthorpe activists' conception of their broader, class community was not confined to unionised workers. For example, when, in 1979 the Trades Council asked for funds to set up and equip an Unemployed Workers Centre, Armthorpe NUM organised a 50p levy and donated £700 to the fund. It also sponsored and participated in all the campaigns and marches against unemployment, especially the *Right to Work* and the *People's Marches*. At one TUC Conference, the NUM president, Joe Gormley rebuked the young *Right to Work* marchers, saying he could get them all jobs in the pits (and, by implication, suggesting there was no unemployment problem). The Armthorpe branch voted to send him an official letter reminding him not to overlook the thousands of unemployed West Indian girls in Brixton when he was arranging jobs with the NCB! (Armthorpe: 48 & 73M)

Political Solidarity

The Armthorpe NUM activists saw themselves as part of a much wider community of struggle. For example, following a major involvement in the big anti-National Front mobilisation in Lewisham, Armthorpe SWP/NUM activists played a key role in the setting up and building of both the Doncaster Anti Nazi League and a national 'Miners Against the Nazis' grouping.^[64] This branch commitment to the fight against racialism almost certainly helps explain a pre-1984 phenomenon - the leading role of two black miners on the 10-man branch committee, although there were only six black miners in Markham's 1,512-strong workforce.

The branch was also affiliated to the *Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, the *Anti-Nuclear Campaign*, *Anti-Apartheid*, the *Chilean, Nicaraguan and Palestinian Solidarity Campaigns*. They gave financial support to the Polish trade union *Solidarnosc*, sponsored the *Red Ladder* and other socialist theatre companies, and affiliated to the *Troops Out (of Ireland) Movement*. The socialists on the branch committee also insisted on a letter requesting support for the *Irish Political Prisoners Campaign (Charter 80)* being put to a full branch meeting. The issue of the hunger strikers had caused a great deal of argument among the membership and the branch meeting was both packed and overwhelmingly hostile as the letter was read out. One after another the hard core of the branch's socialists got up and spoke out on the Irish situation and on why workers in Britain should support the hunger strikers in their demands. The meeting voted by a 3 to 1 margin to affiliate to the *Charter 80 Campaign*.

Similarly although, at the start of the Falklands War a resolution condemning the approaching war as a waste of lives and a vote catching exercise was voted down, the fact that a debate on the withdrawal of the fleet could take place at the height of pro-war hysteria, shows how radical socialist politics were seen as a legitimate and essential part of the branches concerns.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have described how the exploitation of the rich South Yorkshire coal seams entailed not only the sinking of deep, large scale pits around Doncaster, but the construction of residential settlements by the coal-owners. I have suggested that the late development and the geographical situation of Armthorpe meant that, of the many trade unionists attracted to the new pit, a significant minority had previous experience of struggle against the poverty and insecurity caused by the butty system in the Notts and Derbyshire coalfields. In response, they sought to construct a union organisation and a local community which centred around their interests and allowed them more control over their lives.

The collective experience of struggle, hardship and state repression in the 1926 General Strike-lockout only served to reinforce this aim. Not sufficiently developed to withstand the prolonged state and coalowner offensive, the embryonic community nevertheless emerged from the traumatic experience with clearly-established principles, a 'shared' history and tried and tested leaders. Another important dimension of this community was the emergence of a distinctive political tradition, again reflecting the origins of the population and their 1926 experience. Fiercely egalitarian, democratic and collectivist, it placed a premium on the achievement of solidarity at the level of both local and broader class communities. Although 'the union' resumed its central role in the local social system, the prominent role of women in the collective struggle also left a lasting imprint on the village's political culture.

My analysis suggests that a prerequisite of the union assuming a central role in the local community was its prior intervention in shaping and regulating the underground labour process. Its ability to challenge the local hegemony of the *Stavely Coal and Iron Company* depended on its ability to establish its bargaining strength underground, to transform the mineworkers'

numerical superiority into a strong collective identity. The Armthorpe miners' insistence, through their union branch, on 'All-Throw-In' contracts, negotiated price lists and accountable checkweigh and chargeman systems encouraged the cooperative and solidary work relationships that were crucial to such an identity.

The principles which underpinned this underground strength were embodied, not only in the YMA branch, but in the other institutions it gave rise to. Despite the frequent description of 'New' Armthorpe as a 'model village', it was very much a frontier settlement, constructed by the coalowners in the interests of coal production and maximised profits. The response of the coalfield men and women was to pool their meagre resources and construct their own social networks around institutions that would improve the quality of life for themselves and their families. The institutions were shaped by the tried and tested principles embodied in their union (and 1926 lockout) organisation - they were accessible, non profit-making and under the democratic control of the membership.

The cross fertilisation process in operation between the union and other village institutions was considerable. In some cases the union branch provided both the initiative and the human and material resources. In others the initiative came from other sections of the population (usually the local women) with the union simply lending its support. Although the women's exclusion from pit and union resulted in a parallel exclusion from many work-related social and political activities, the collective 'foothold' in local public life that they had established in 1926 did not simply disappear. Village women set up a series of political and social institutions, either catering specifically for the needs of women or breaking down the segregation between themselves and the men.

The significant interaction between union and local community, was accompanied by an interaction between union and the broader, class-based

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community. The three-way, cross-fertilisation process formed an essential part of the village's distinctive political tradition. This tradition combined immediate tasks of improving the quality of life and strengthening the local and class-based communities with more radical, long term goals of empowering workers to control and reshape society. The Armthorpe approach to achieving either long or short-term objectives involved the broad mobilisation of working people's skills and energies on as many levels as possible.

Rigid boundaries between trade union and political action hindered this mobilisation. Although formally there remained a separation of roles between the union and political parties, in practice the union branch became the major focus for the local population's political involvement. This was demonstrated in the combination of union and political leadership roles by a series of prominent Armthorpe figures. It was further illustrated by the branch's consistent involvement in trade union and political solidarity work. Finally, on a local level, it was demonstrated in the branch's willingness to mobilise its industrial strength in the political service of local inhabitants, as in the 1954 CIHA housing allocation dispute.

I have suggested that this local political tradition meant that although the local community was inevitably affected by developments in the wider social systems, it, in turn, had an impact on them. For example the contradictions involved in the introduction of state control of industry (without a change in the political role of the state) were clearly illustrated in the impact that nationalisation had on Armthorpe's miners.

Anticipated by many mining men and women as a watershed that would lead not only to an improvement but to an empowering of their lives, nationalisation left control concentrated in similar hands, but at higher, even less accessible levels. The development of 'mineworker politics', reflecting the incorporation of the higher NUM leadership, eventually encouraged a renewal of

'pit politics' at a local level. The strength and openness of the Armthorpe political tradition allowed its miners to develop their brand of 'pit politics' in line with a rapidly changing situation, devising new strike strategies and transforming the scale of their intervention. The impact of Armthorpe/Doncaster 'pit politics' can be traced from the 1955 Fillers dispute, through the unofficial strikes of 1969/70 to the national strike of 1972, and, I will argue in the next chapter, the year-long dispute of 1984/85.

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Armthorpe, A Farming Village* (B & B Press, Parkgate, Yorkshire) is a pictorial history of the pre-pit village which was produced by Alan Dodson, an ex-miner and local historian, in order to raise funds for the 1984/85 Strike.
2. I have used the 1984 NCB boundaries in defining the Doncaster coalfield. The popular definition of the Doncaster coalfield is slightly smaller, covering only eleven pits (ten after the 1957 closure of Thorne. Because of the capital expenditure involved in mining the Barnsley Bed, the pits tended to have a bigger take area, with a longer life. (See Appendix 10) This fact, plus their relatively recent development, explains why the Doncaster field has not suffered from pit closures in the way others have. In the three years after the Strike, three of its pits were closed or amalgamated with others.
3. The Barnsley Bed slopes from west to east, lying around 900 yards below the land surface at Armthorpe and Thorne, and 1,000 yards at the eastern extreme. Below the magnesium limestone escarpment which crowns the concealed coalfield, lies a series of Permo-Triassic rock layers, heavily laden with water. Mining technology had developed so that the major coal companies felt they could overcome the water problem and tap the deep seams. The demand for steam coal was expanding, and water and rail transport systems in the area had improved significantly.

The smaller pits in the western, exposed coalfield were showing signs of exhaustion, and most important, capital accumulation in the industry had developed rapidly. Conglomerates with diverse interests now possessed the capital necessary to engage in major sinking and development programmes. The *Stavelly Iron and Coal Company* was such a conglomerate. By 1913 it had interests in twenty-seven and a half thousand acres of coal and was also heavily involved in the iron industry and its by-products. Under the direction of Charles Markham, *Stavelly* was linked up with the Parkgate Iron & Steel Company of Sheffield, and later with Cammell Laird, which eventually became part of the Vickers Combine.
4. The number of pit brow lasses, although very small, was on the increase in this period, numbering 6,168 by 1909. Yorkshire was one of the coalfields that did not employ any women surface workers in the Yorkshire coalfield, and there was a fear that the Lancashire and Scottish coalowners would escape the added burden of the minimum wage by employing more women. Angela John (1984:224)
5. Signed on the 24 July 1923 in London *NCB 1191 Industrial Housing Association Ltd.*, Archives Department, Sheffield Central City Library.
6. No precise breakdown of the regional origins of the early workforce exists. The information for this map was drawn from the employment cards of the 1943 workforce, held by the Markham Main colliery office, and recording the last Labour Exchange that the miners were registered at, prior to starting at Armthorpe. The 1943 map forms part of a fascinating study carried out by Dorothy Vine (nee Dearden) daughter of one of the first, and most popular, Markham undermanagers, Joe Dearden. Vine D. (1987) *Notes on development of the community in the colliery village of Armthorpe*. copy of unpublished paper supplied by author.
7. Wilf Paling became the Labour Member of Parliament for Doncaster in the late-1920's until 1932, then MP for the Dearne Valley from 1936, being appointed Postmaster General in the 1945 Labour Government.

8. This may have been significant as the trade union at Bentley was the only one in the Doncaster coalfield which, in 1925, had had to wage a protracted struggle against the Butty system. (See Chapter Ten for a description of the later YMA struggle at Thorne Colliery)
9. For an explanation of the butty system, see Chapter Two, footnote 3.
10. In later periods, the chargemen received a very small (token) payment for his work, which could often involve him in protracted negotiations with management outside normal working hours.
11. The Doncaster Sharing Agreement of 1918 covered nine collieries. Very often the work/payment system at a pit was heavily influenced by the undermanager responsible. This was clearly shown in the development of the new Kent coalfield, see Goffee (1978)
Several older miners suggested that buttyism was rife locally in Bentley Colliery, which, alongside Harworth, was owned by the powerful Notts company, *Barber Walker*. Others suggested that it was also practised at a *Doncaster Amalgamated Collieries* pit, Brodsworth, where the management, on opening the pit, were alleged to have put up a sign suggesting 'No Yorkshiremen need apply'. (Armthorpe: 85SC & 101AI)
12. The *Plebs* was the journal of the National Council of Labour Colleges, an independent educational body with both individual and national trade union affiliates.
13. According to one eyewitness, there were around sixty women in the crowd, mostly from Hatfield but with around twenty from Armthorpe. Another confirmed that his mother and six other women took refuge in their house, having run all the way from the Thorne Road as the police attacked the crowd. (Armthorpe: 84 & 98SC)
14. Further arrests followed in the days following the 'disturbances' on Thorne Road, with some of those arrested facing even more serious charges. One Hatfield miner was charged with 'an act likely to cause disaffection among the police force'. When confronted in his home by three police officers making investigations into his role in the disturbances, he is alleged to have appealed to them:
"You are only human, the same as myself: we are the same flesh and blood. Why don't you join us and rule yourselves. the world was given to the people not the select few. I want to see you come with us, we can rule without a king. I have lived under two republics and shall live under one in this country yet, and may God speed the day when we live under Labour rule and the workers who are the producers govern the country."
He was jailed for three months with hard labour and fined £100, the maximum the law allowed. (Walentowicz, 1986:14)
15. For example on Tuesday 16 July 1985, thirteen miners, including one from Markham Main were cleared of the Doncaster Coal House 'Riot' after 13 months of waiting and a £250,000 trial. Two days later, fourteen miners arrested and charged with a variety of offences at Orgreave on 18th June 1984 were cleared of all charges and set free.
16. In 1984, Miners' Support Group members in Birmingham expressed surprise and anger at the hostile reaction of the local superstore manager, who called the police to remove a food collection point from the store's car park (Mackney, 1986:217) Higher management were equally unhelpful.
There was of course, a precedent for this in 1926. At a local level, the stores often provided a large amount of help to strikers, both

during the General Strike and more crucially, the 7 month lockout. A 1926 Labour Research Department survey discovered that half the trades councils reported help from the local Co-op stores, usually in the form of credit. This however was in contravention of a circular issued to local societies on 23 April 1926, which warned them not to give strikers credit. There was mutual distrust between the higher levels of the TUC and the Co-operative Society. On the 8 May, a deputation of Co-operative directors met Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, President of the Board of Trade, to ask for the assistance of government agencies in order to enable it to 'maintain services'. (Cliff, Gluckstein, 1986: 216)

17. Hull was the only town in Yorkshire where there were violent clashes on the scale of those near Hatfield/Armthorpe. The close relationship between the Hull seafarers and dockworkers was maintained over the years and they provided Armthorpe and other Doncaster pits with a lot of support in 1984/85. They were especially helpful to the womens' support groups in Moorends and Thorne (see Chapter Eleven and Appendix 21)
18. Although men and women were reported as being involved in a lot of joint activity during the strike and lockout, and boys and girls of school age reported that they played out together, the adolescents of 1926 still tended to give gendered accounts of life during the lockout. Most detailed descriptions of adult men's activities came from young males, most detailed descriptions of women's activity from their daughters. (Armthorpe: 81, 85, 89 & 83, 84, 90SC)
19. There was a crumbling of the strike at many pits in many areas in the last week in October and the first fortnight in November. See Bill Williamson, 1982: 191 and Bill Carr, 1976: 350. The number of strikers still out in Armthorpe at the end of the strike was estimated at 500-600 out of 2,200. (Armthorpe: 81 & 85SC).
20. For example, the first colliers' football team, 'Armthorpe Unity' was set up in 1925 and used to play in Adamsons' field, belonging to Brown's Farm. The goalposts were made by the local undertaker, Mr. Crabtree, and they used to travel to away games in the lorry of Mr. Belks, the coal delivery man. (Armthorpe: 81, 85 SC)
21. There does not seem to have been a Communist Party branch organised in the village. This may have been because communists were allowed individual membership of the Labour Party, or that they kept a low profile due to the possibility of victimisation in a period of extreme vulnerability. I was told of one prominent, victimised communist, Jack Woolley, who was forced to take up employment in Doctor Harte's surgery and elsewhere. There was a tendency among some of the retired miners (teenagers in the 1920's) to suggest that virtually all the prominent men and women were in the Labour Party. However they then described certain people as 'rock bottom working class', meaning they were class conscious or radicals. (Armthorpe: 85, 89, 91 SC)
22. Alwin Paling, a younger brother of Bill and Harry also played a part in setting up the Cooperative Store and was an official of the *Armthorpe Cooperative Society*.
23. This was only partly true, and perhaps another example of a gendered account. According to other (women) informants, the clinic, which used to have two district nurses in attendance as well as the doctor, received a lot of support from Mrs. Dearden, the undermanager's wife, Bill Paling and Doctor Harte himself. (Armthorpe: 86 & 97SC)

24. For an illustration of how coalfield women put Welfare Grounds' sports pavillions to good use in the 1984/85 Strike, see Chapter Eleven and Appendix 21.
25. These were not custom-built public houses, but adaptations of private houses into beer shops. The *Tadcaster Arms* was very different, custom-built and very spacious.
27. The Miners' Gala is still a major event in the life of pit communities. They are usually organised on a county or area basis and were begun in the last century (the first Yorkshire Gala was in 1887). In Armthorpe, Gala day begins with miners and their families marching from the Miners' Welfare Institute around the village behind the branch banner. They then travel in hired buses to one of the four main pit towns and, after marching with all the other Yorkshire branches, spend the afternoon listening to speeches from union/political leaders, and enjoying side shows, sports, competitions and fashion shows. The union branch covers much of the expenses.
27. Stuart Macintyre describes a similar process occurring in the Vale of Leven and other areas where the working class established their hegemony over the parish councils. In describing the process by which decision making on unemployment relief was increasingly removed from local, to county council, and national levels, he suggests this encouraged a generalising of the issue, encouraging for example, more widespread organising for marches on county council offices.

(Macintyre, 1980: 120)
28. Essentially, 'priority' meant that, if one or more miners found themselves without jobs at the face, they could put their names on the priority list which was maintained by the union branch. When a new face opened up, or positions became available, the miners at the top of the list would have priority in terms of taking it up.
29. I have avoided a constant shortening of political party names to their initials. Although I sometimes refer to the Communist Party as simply the 'C.P.', I feel that consistency demands that if I refer to the Conservative Party and Labour Party by their full name, I should also refer to the Communist or Socialist Workers Party in a like manner.
30. An August ballot of the Harworth workforce resulted in a 1,175 for the Notts Miners Association and 145 for Spencer. *Barber Walker* refused to recognise the MFGB union. In December, the Harworth workforce struck and despite much physical intimidation by police and company agents, they remained out for six months. In June 1937, Mick Kane was charged, along with fifteen other men and a woman, with riotous assembly after a major picket line battle with police. One striker was jailed for four months, one for six months, six, including Margaret Haymer, for nine months, one for twelve, two for fifteen while Kane himself received two years hard labour. Dave Barker, 'When Spencer Divided the Miners', *The Collier*, December 1977.
31. Although responsible for organising the job, Armthorpe chargemen, unlike those who were the underground agents of the butty men in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, were elected by the men themselves and acted as their spokesmen. They therefore performed a similar role to shop stewards. They were, and (at the time of writing - 1988) still are, immediately recallable by the men they represent.

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32. Both Horner, who was elected General Secretary of the N.U.M. in place of Edwardes, and Moffat, President of the Scottish Miners' Union, describe the pressures that they came under in their autobiographies. Horner suggests his wife, Ethel, was a major influence in him not taking up the NCB post.
Arthur Horner (1960:182). Abe Moffat (1965:86).
33. Citrine had been assistant secretary of the Trades Union Congress during the 1926 General Strike. As General Secretary he was given a knighthood before being given a post in the newly-nationalised coal industry
34. Although he had to work in Doncaster and Barnsley, Jock still lived in Armthorpe staying in contact with his pit workmates and union branch. In this he differed from most of the higher union officials who are described by Cliff Slaughter (1957:243-4) and also the ex-union officials who took up NCB posts, described by Abe Moffat (1965:88).
35. She returned to work in engineering at the nearby *International* Harvesters plant in order to help maintain a tolerable standard of living.
36. Among these were Eric Browne, who held a variety of positions in the NUM branch in the 60's and 70's, Ted Hall, who eventually became a leading figure in the Armthorpe Labour Party, and Jimmy O'Kane, who as well as being a prominent member of the NUM, also played a key role in the Doncaster Trades Council, and, although retired, was the chief organiser of its miners' support activities in 1984/85.
37. Until 1986, the Yorkshire Area NUM had 4 panels; North and South Yorkshire, Doncaster and Barnsley. Set up to receive and communicate information from the Area Executive, they provide the opportunity for discussion and joint activity between branches. The leading role of Armthorpe and the Doncaster Panel is described by Andrew Taylor (1984:166-70).
38. The 5,000 leaflets cost £5 to print and two Communist Party chargemen, Joe Bolden and John Ellis, had to conduct a bucket collection on the pit gates at Markham Main in order to meet the cost. (Armthorpe:81 SC).
39. On leaving school at the age of fourteen, Jim MacFarlane spent two years in the pits, six years at sea before returning to Denaby pit. In the 1960's he went to Ruskin College, and then studied and worked in Southampton, Sussex and Strathclyde Universities, before returning to teach on the NUM day release courses at Sheffield. He became a Doncaster Labour Party councillor in 1981 and leader of the Labour Group in 1983. He was known for his efforts in support of the miners in 1984/85 and tried to help the Armthorpe Womens Action Group in the aftermath. (See Chapter 8) He also wrote several studies on Denaby pit and village life. He died in November 1985.
40. Johnny Weaver described the more moderate Denaby men as 'in a state of shock':
'The vote was overwhelming, one of the nightshift kicked his dudley [water bottle] over the fence into a field.' (Moorends:45SC)
41. As the Doncaster Panel was recommending a return to work on Friday 13 May, there was an initiation of coordinated strike action in eight Scottish pits. *Daily Worker*, 14 May 1955.

42. Slaughter suggests, 'The delivery of this letter by special taxi lent an atmosphere of luxury to the victory won'. See Cliff Slaughter (1957:255).
43. The creation of the posts of 'N.U.M. area agents', aimed at resolving industrial relations problems before they developed into industrial disputes, was another result of the 1955 Armthorpe strike. Brian McCormick suggests that whereas the West Yorkshire coalfield welcomed the introduction of agents, in the Doncaster area, miners suspected them of being tools for the county officials. (McCormick, 1979:186)
44. A leading member of Armthorpe NUM and Labour Party, later secretary of the Doncaster Panel and General Secretary of the Yorkshire Area NUM.
45. Percy Riley was a Communist Councillor on the Dearne Valley Urban Council between 1947 and 1950. In 1946 he led homeless squatters in the takeover of empty army camps. In 1957, he and Bill Carr (see Chapter Ten) challenged the NCB in court over rent levels, and led the mass refusal of miners to accept the new tenancy agreements. In 1958 he again challenged the NCB in court, led protest delegations to Lord Robens and recovered over a quarter of a million pounds of rent for local NCB tenants. As NUM branch delegate during the national strike, he was still involved in organising tenants resistance to the Tory's Rent Act. (Kahn, 1981:58)
46. The NUM has a small office opposite the pit canteen, next door to the pit shop. Either setting is an ideal place to witness a steady flow of working or retired miners, or their partners, coming to sort out a wide range of problems. Another place to find out what is going on in the village is to sit in on an NUM meeting as the correspondence is read out. On the two occasions I attended the branch, almost half the correspondence came from non-union sources and concerned local problems or charity appeals. I was assured this was typical.
47. Several of my interviewees were regular visitors to the Welfare on a Wednesday evening, with quite modern films being shown at a very reasonable price. On Saturday morning it was the childrens turn to visit the Matinee at the 'Welly'.
48. The *Roomheat* smokeless fuel plants were designed by a Professor Bronowski, specifically to process Markham Main's coal. Costing some £12 million to establish, they provided a lot of work for residents at Armthorpe. When they were eventually closed and demolished, the *Roomheat* workers were offered jobs at the pit. (Armthorpe:32M).
49. See Chapter 8.
50. See Chapter 8 and 11 for contrasts in the economic activity of young unemployed in Armthorpe and Moorends.
51. The alliance was based on political and personal ties. For example, the three Matthews brothers were originally all Thorne miners, but whereas Fred and Billy transferred to Hatfield, Jimmy transferred, with many other Thorne colliers, to Armthorpe. Although retired, Billy Matthews was able to use his long involvement in the Communist Party and NUM to help pioneer many of Hatfield's twinning relationships in 1984/85. At the time of writing he remained very active in politics and the local trade union movement.
52. In 1975, the International Socialists, who had their origins in the *Socialist Review Group* (1952) changed their name to the Socialist Workers Party.

53. This joint activity took place over a large number of issues; some concerning sectional or pit problems, some involving solidarity with other trade unionists, some concerning broader political campaigns (over Ireland, South Africa or Nicaragua) and some constituting more formal attempts at united front work as in the *Anti Nazi League* and *Miners Against the Nazis*. (Armthorpe: 48, 52, 63, 76M)
54. It was very active on health and safety issues, for example ensuring the blacking of a toxic packing substance, 'pack-bind' from Yorkshire pits and bringing an awareness of the potential radiation hazards of nucleonic probes at the coalface. It helped organise campaigns against incentive schemes, pit closures and unwarranted transfer payments. In 1978/79 it was instrumental in the launch of the *Miners Against the Nazis* grouping.
55. More than a score of Armthorpe NUM members contributed articles on a wide variety of issues; wages, conditions, union democracy, incentive schemes, the Anti Nazi League, trade union solidarity, international issues, nuclear energy, Spencerism, pit closures, the history of the Triple Alliance.
56. This integration was evident from a reading of local newspapers and noticeboards in the Welfare or pit canteen. Every time I saw people with physical handicaps in the pubs and clubs, they were treated 'normally', included in discussions and activity, helped if they required it, but not patronised. The surprise I felt at this showed how conditioned I was to expect a different kind of treatment. Apart from reflecting a real sense of 'community', I felt this sensitive treatment of the handicapped might stem from the frequency of underground accidents and the vulnerability of miners to physical disablement.
57. The NUM branch leadership and founders of the pit shop made an agreement with the management that the cost of goods purchased should be deducted by weekly subscription from the purchaser's wage packet, with no interest charged.
58. The 'pit shop', although set up for this purpose became another of the collective resources of the local mining population, managed by an elected and accountable committee. Just as the Home Coal Scheme and Checkweighmen's Scheme supplied crucial resources for the 1955 strike, so the *Markham Main Workmen's Trading Society* played a crucial supportive role in the 1984/85 Strike. See Chapter Four.
59. Although she was again seriously ill, Violet was a witness to numerous police attacks on Armthorpe pickets on the 22nd August and volunteered to act as a defence witness for them when they had to appear in court.
60. Sammy Thompson was an Armthorpe surface worker. He became Armthorpe's NUM delegate, was key to the initiation of the pitshop and the *Markham Main Workmen's Trading Society*. He was secretary of Doncaster Panel, prior to being elected vice president of Yorkshire NUM. In the aftermath of the 1984/85 Strike he was elected vice-president of the national NUM, but he died of cancer soon after in 1988.
61. Jack Dromey was the secretary of Brent Trades Council, and a leading member of the local Communist Party. Although not a member of the women's union (APEX), the *Grunwick* strikers (and therefore all their supporters) looked to him as their chief 'outside' advisor. In the latter stages of the strike he acted as a go-between for the TUC, and on the mass picket in question, persuaded Mrs Desai, the leader of the strikers, to ask all the pickets to follow TUC instructions and leave the picket. A major

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boost to morale, which might have given key groups of workers the courage to reimpose blacking in the face of official opposition, was therefore thrown away. Dromey later became a Transport and General Workers Union full-time official.

62. The ISTC at Stocksbridge contacted the Yorkshire NUM officials in Barnsley who opposed the idea. (Armthorpe: 48, 63, 67 M)

63. Armthorpe miners had made direct contact with the strikers and put them up while they were picketing the Doncaster plant. (Armthorpe: 48, 61, 63M)

64. Armthorpe NUM provided both the secretary and the president of the Doncaster Anti Nazi League, namely Bert Whittle and Dave Barker. They also played a key role in the setting up of the national union group, *Miners Against the Nazis*.

Chapter Five

THE STRIKE EXPERIENCE IN ARMTHORPE:

'Ours is a Unity that threats can never breach,
Ours an education books and schools can never teach.
We faced the taunts and the violence of Thatcher's thugs in blue,
When you're fighting for survival you've got nothing,
nothing left to lose'
Women of the Working Class, Mal Finch, 1984.

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the major role that the miners' union branch at Markham Main Colliery played in the development of a local community in Armthorpe. As a consequence, in 'normal' times, the village community tended to have certain characteristics which reflected the nature of the central workplace and its union branch (for example a marked gender segregation of certain village activities). These tendencies are not constant throughout all pit villages - a crucial factor being their particular social and political history. The development of an egalitarian, democratic underground organisation can encourage not only a certain type of pit-based collective struggle, but, chiefly through the union branch, a distinct political tradition in the village.

However, as described in previous chapters, there are occasions when collective struggle takes place at a different level, around issues which invite a more general involvement. This allows the possibility of the conflict 'spilling over' to involve other sections of the population, and becoming, in effect, a 'community struggle'.

The suspension of 'normal' attitudes, activities and relationships in order to facilitate the effective prosecution of a collective, community struggle can have a major impact on the community involved. The public, political activities of individuals or groups can challenge everyday attitudes

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and roles, thereby bringing about changes in the social relationships. Moreover, participation in a collective struggle on a scale which reveals 'the powerful forces which organise and control human society' (Warner, Lowe, 1947: 1) can also to reshape people's involvement in non-local 'communities'. As a consequence, changes *inside* the local community can find their reflection in changed relationships *between* local and broader, class-based communities.

In this chapter I outline the origins of these processes in the 1984/85 Strike experience of the Armthorpe population. I explain how the branch's pit political traditions and the intervention of an organised core of politically-aware miners allowed the Armthorpe NUM to adopt a leading Strike role at a variety of levels. I illustrate how the government's strategy, aimed at isolating the striking miners and promoting internal divisions, had the opposite effect in Armthorpe, encouraging a renewal of the bonding between union and village community, thereby laying the basis for a community strike. This was not a chance development. The origins and development of community involvement in the Strike owed a lot to the interaction of three key factors; the recurrent and increasingly repressive activities of the state, the village's political traditions, and the intervention of a core of 'good trade unionists who [were] also good socialists with a high level of political consciousness' (Barker, 1978: 5). In their efforts to dissuade the village population from giving passive support to the miners, the government inadvertently forced them into a more active participation.

I describe how, although many of the long-established institutions were placed at the disposal of the collective struggle, the scale of the government offensive proved too great for them to cope with. They had to be supplemented by a series of new institutions, designed to harness the collective resources, skills and energies of the maximum number of people. The emergence of different types of activities, roles and relationships led to the formation of a new Strike-based community in the village. This involved

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sections of the population such as women and unemployed youth who normally occupied a subordinate position in the pit-centred, wage-oriented community.

The intensification of the state's offensive was again important in encouraging this involvement. I describe how the 22 August police occupation, apparently designed to brutalize and cow the pit village population into submission, encouraged a collective response from the wider community, resulting in their increased participation in the Strike. The brutalising and criminalisation of the village population created a culture of community resistance. Extended family and neighbourhood networks were mobilized in order to sustain the threatened community. The more traditional divisions of gender, age and occupation were much reduced, with a person's commitment to the Strike being the major criteria in deciding their status in the village community.

Even with other sections of the population committed, local resources were insufficient and the broader class-based networks had to be mobilised in support of the strikebound villages. Again the local political tradition which had encouraged involvement in class-based political organisations was crucial. I describe the role of these organisations and village institutions in the pioneering of a 'twinning' network: encouraging ongoing, close relationships between the striking local communities and the broader Strike support community.

In outlining the later, defensive stages of the Strike I detail the strategies undertaken to sustain the Strike community; the satisfaction of physical and emotional needs, the establishment of alternative information networks, the ostracisation of strikebreakers and the setting up of similar communities in nearby villages, where the strikers constituted a small minority of the population. I end the chapter by describing the Armthorpe reaction to the national union's decision to end the dispute.

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EARLY STRIKE ACTIVITY.

Preparation

The mood at Markham Main Colliery during the seventeen weeks' overtime ban was one of expectancy. In the third week of February, Sammy Thompson (vice-president of Yorkshire Area NUM) contacted two of Markham's leading rank & file activists and asked them to attend a meeting. Along with militants from several other Yorkshire pits they were briefed on three issues; the NCB's (as yet unannounced) intention to close Cortonwood, Bulcliffe Wood and another three pits, the proposed privatisation of the new washery plant at Ferrymore Riddings and the South Yorkshire dispute over snap time and overtime working.^[1] Thompson asked the assembled activists to organise a campaign in their pits over these issues, suggesting that the NCB had targetted these pits because of their reputation for a low level of militancy.^[2]

The information was taken back to Markham Main where a discussion was opened up among union activists on the need to back the South Yorkshire dispute and prevent the closures. The next meeting of the Armthorpe NUM branch (Sunday 4 March, the same day as the 500 Cortonwood mineworkers voted unanimously to strike against closure) was packed. After hearing the official report, Dave Barker, an underground miner with considerable experience in political and trade union activity, successfully moved a resolution calling for the branch to stand by the 1981 Yorkshire ballot and support any action taken by the threatened pits. The following day three Armthorpe miners joined men from Bullcliffe Wood and Cortonwood in lobbying the Yorkshire Council meeting in Barnsley. Only one delegate, John Walsh, North Yorkshire protégé of Sid Schofield, and recent opponent of Peter Heathfield in the General Secretary's election^[3] argued for a ballot, the rest insisting that the 1981 (86%) ballot gave the Council a clear mandate.

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A larger Armthorpe delegation joined the lobby of the National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting on Thursday 8 March, where there was a 22-3 vote in favour of sanctioning area-based industrial action. On Sunday 11 March a special meeting of the branch was held in the Miners' Welfare. Before the branch committee put their motion for strike action to the vote, several speakers, both officials and rank and file, outlined how well prepared the NCB and Conservative government were, having implemented major parts of the Ridley Report. Dave Barker and others argued that, in order to get their message across to other workers, they would have to use mass flying pickets on an unprecedented scale. Acknowledging that this would be in open defiance of the government's anti-union legislation, he explained the need for this commitment:

'We're in for an uphill struggle. If we are going to win this one, we're going to have to ask people to give us illegal support. So we have to show the way ourselves' (Armthorpe: 48M)

The resolution for an all-out strike and extensive picketing of the Nottinghamshire coalfield was put to the vote. Only eight miners, out of an estimated 900, voted against strike action. Picketing times and lists were drawn up for the following morning.

At 4 a.m., Monday morning the pickets assembled outside the Welfare. Most were asked to wait and see whether all of Yorkshire had come out, but an 'exploratory' four-man picket was sent to intercept the dayshift at Harworth, twelve miles away in North Nottinghamshire. On their arrival they were met by a man carrying an empty, perforated oil drum, who went back into the pit yard and then drove a J.C.B. out with its dumper full of coal, suggesting:

'Set up a fire lads, you'll be needing it. These bastards wouldn't strike to support their own Granny!' (Armthorpe: 50M)

It was later discovered that this individual was the pit manager! His estimation only proved to be partly correct however. The Armthorpe pickets discovered a major lack of awareness on the issue of pit closures among their Harworth colleagues. Nevertheless after discussions, most of the dayshift

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refused to cross the token Armthorpe picket line, although they informed the pickets that their branch officials had instructed them to do so at a branch meeting the previous day. When questioned about this, the NUM branch president denied it, but declined to stand on the picket line alongside the Armthorpe men. The men returned to Armthorpe to explain the situation and by midday there was a large Armthorpe picket on the gates to meet the Harworth afternoon shift.

Defying the Area Leadership

They were having considerable success in persuading the afternoon shift to respect their picket when Frankie Cave, the NUM's Doncaster Area Agent arrived and told the pickets to return to Yorkshire. He informed them that the fulltime area officials had come to an agreement that if the pickets were pulled out of Nottinghamshire, Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn (Secretary and President of 'Notts' Area NUM) would recommend a strike vote in an area ballot at the end of the week. Cave further announced that a meeting had been arranged at the Armthorpe Welfare that evening and begged the Armthorpe pickets to leave Nottinghamshire. They refused.

That evening Sammy Thompson put similar arguments over to the packed meeting at the Armthorpe Welfare. He suggested that the 'Notts' picketing should be called off and that the Armthorpe miners could rely on Richardson and Chadburn to convince their members of the need to fight pit closures. The pickets replied that, even from their limited experience that day at one of Nottinghamshire's more militant pits (see Chapter Three), it was evident that the rank and file Notts miners were very badly informed on the issues around pit closures. The NCB appeared to have succeeded, through a variety of means, in convincing them that pit closures would not affect the central coalfields, so that a lot of work had to be done to get the arguments across. The most effective way for workers to communicate, they argued, was to picket, which was

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why the Tories had tried to outlaw it. Thompson then threatened that if the pre-ballot picketing continued, there would be no financial support and no legal representation for the Armthorpe membership. They replied that if the funds were cut off, Armthorpe could and would finance itself. Alan Bell, the branch president pointed out that Sammy Thompson, one of the leaders of the 1978 Rescue Mens' Strike would have been arguing a diametrically opposite line had he still been Armthorpe's delegate. Jimmy Millar (branch secretary) announced that 200 Hatfield pickets were on their way to join Armthorpe's flying pickets into 'Notts', so the meeting would have to make a decision. No one supported Thompson's position and the meeting closed with some 300 pickets going back into Notts.

The threats of the Yorkshire Area leadership were not taken lightly. A fundraising and finance committee was immediately set up, consisting of two SWP members and a Labour Party county councillor. They were charged with making Armthorpe financially independent as quickly as possible. Apart from local branch funds, which tend to be quite significant in the NUM, the obvious source of immediate finance was the pit shop, the brainchild of Sammy Thompson! Jimmy Millar phoned Jack Taylor, Yorkshire president, and told him that if his members were prevented from doing useful picketing he would personally lead them back to work immediately:

'If you're not prepared to fight the battle, don't start it in the first place!'
(Armthorpe: 48, 77M)

Harworth was shut down that night with the Harworth miners agreeing to mount their 'own' picket lines (Armthorpe: 76, 79M). The Armthorpe and Hatfield pickets moved on, picketing the nightshift workers at Bevercotes and Ollerton. One non-Armthorpe picket, a young Hatfield miner described one effect of 'flying':

'A lot of lads that had not really took any notice about the strike, opened their eyes...'
(Samuel, Bloomfield, Boanas, 1986: 70)

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Several more South Yorkshire pits began to send picketing teams through with Armthorpe and Hatfield, and the following afternoon (Tuesday 6 March), at an emergency meeting, the Yorkshire Area executive bowed to the inevitable and 'sanctioned' the sending of flying pickets into Nottinghamshire.

The Early Picketing Experience

The police seemed to be taken off their guard by the sudden growth of flying picketing. On Monday evening at Bevercotes (where there is no pit village) there were only a few police and they allowed the pickets to stop each coach and car and put their case. Only one car crossed the picket lines that night. The following morning the police attitude had changed completely. A large number of police marshalled the pickets into a corner and confined them there, preventing any direct, personal communication with the Bevercotes miners.

Nevertheless the Armthorpe pickets were joined by Paul Whetton, the Bevercotes branch secretary, while most of the dayshift gathered in the pit canteen and agreed that a couple of the Armthorpe pickets should come and address them. As the Armthorpe spokesmen left the picket 'pen' and approached the pit gate, they were stopped by the police and threatened with arrest (for intimidation!). Paul Whetton was asked to go in and address the Bevercotes men, but refused to cross the picket line on principle. Instead, he attempted to set up his own, Bevercotes picket line. The police threw him into the Armthorpe corner and threatened him with arrest. [5]. The whole episode was filmed by a Channel 4 News team, only to be edited down and shown that evening as a 10-second 'background image' clip, with no explanation or reference to what had happened. [6]

At the pits where the pickets managed to get to speak to the Nottinghamshire miners, the response was very good. The Armthorpe pickets did not encounter any verbal or physical abuse, nor did find they had to give any.

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Many 'Notts' men stood with the Yorkshire pickets, discussing the issues and often joining in the picketing (although they had been instructed not to by the area leadership). 560 pickets were successful in bringing out over a third of the 25 Nottinghamshire pits. [7]

However the early picketing operations were not without their problems. The long periods of inactivity at many Yorkshire pits had taken its toll and many of the younger miners had to be taught how to picket. On the morning of Wednesday 14 March (the day the NCB obtained its first injunction under the 1980 Employment Act instructing Yorkshire NUM to call off their flying pickets) a group of Armthorpe pickets left the main gate at Bevercotes, where almost all the dayshift were refusing to cross their lines and went round to the back gate. Here they discovered Bevercotes men walking into work past a group of Brodsworth (Doncaster) strikers. When asked what was going on the Brodsworth men replied that they weren't so much picketing, as canvassing for a strike vote in the forthcoming 'Notts' Ballot. One of the more experienced Armthorpe pickets, a Socialist Workers Party member, was brought off the main gate to explain why serious picketing was essential in getting the message across and in building the strike. The Brodsworth men agreed, followed his advice and were soon surrounded by groups of Bevercotes miners arguing over the issues behind the strike. By the evening Bevercotes was closed.

As well as the physical prevention of this kind of picketing, the police seemed to pursue other tactics of discrediting and isolating the pickets. With the media, the NCB, the courts, the prime minister and the top level 'Notts' NUM leadership describing the pickets as alien and threatening invaders, the police either tolerated or actively encouraged any aggressive reaction among the local population. At Ollerton this process led to the first death of a picket, David Jones, an Acton Hall, North Yorkshire, miner who had joined his friends from Frickley, Doncaster on his first day of picketing.

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Armthorpe members were involved from the earliest stages of picketing at Ollerton and saw the development of the police strategy.

On Tuesday morning (13 March), the pickets had been successful in persuading the vast majority of Ollerton miners not to go to work. That evening the police were out in force marshalling the 'would-be-workers' together at a distance and acting as a 'wedge' against the pickets who then formed solid ranks across the pit gates to stop them. No Ollerton miner went through, but the branch secretary appeared on the T.V. and radio, insisting that his members should be allowed into work without being 'intimidated'.

The following morning the police again succeeded in preventing all peaceful contact between the 200 pickets (including several Ollerton miners) and the would-be workers. After four hours of 'pushing and shoving' between police and pickets, they managed to drive a passage through the pickets and then informed them that, as long as there was no outright physical violence, they could jeer, abuse and even spit at the ten or twelve men who were prepared to cross their lines. On the afternoon shift, the police were further reinforced, made a large number of arrests and encouraged the 'local' miners and others in threats of, and actual, physical violence against a reduced number of pickets (Armthorpe: 50, 79M). On Wednesday evening 200 - 300 pickets were prevented from getting near the pit gates by over 600 police. Penned in by police, they became easy targets for an aggressive 'vigilante' element, many of whom had emerged from a nearby pub, who proceeded to bombard them with bottles, beer glasses, stones and pieces of brick over the heads of the apparently-unconcerned police. After a half-housebrick had felled David Jones, pickets tried to persuade the police to arrest the man who had thrown it. They refused and when one of the pickets attempted to make a citizen's arrest, they prevented him from doing so (Armthorpe: 50M).

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The police used the 'locals versus invaders' street confrontations that followed to arrest over a score of pickets, who were taken to the local police stations. When the news of David Jones' death was announced the police appeared to get very worried. Perhaps fearing the multiple arrests would serve to expose their heavily partisan role at Ollerton that night (that is, one picket killed, twenty pickets arrested), they cancelled the 'affray' charges and released all the arrested pickets at 3.30 am, explaining to them that things had got a bit 'out of hand' (Armthorpe: 50, 75M).

In fact, David Jones' death caused no major outcry or response from the broader labour movement (unlike the death of Fred Matthews in the 1972 Miners strike) and the police regained their confidence very quickly. On Thursday morning at Thoresby, as Armthorpe and local pickets stood for a minute's silence as a tribute to David Jones, they were charged by the police (Armthorpe: 48, 61, 79M). As more pits had become involved, the picketing had begun to have an increasingly serious effect with pickets reporting over half the 'Notts' pits completely closed that morning. However David Jones' death did not lead to an increase in picketing but rather an agreement between the Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire leaderships. All 'Notts' miners would be called out on strike till the weekend in return for a complete withdrawal of Yorkshire and other pickets from the coalfield, pending the results of an area ballot.

By midday, the Yorkshire pickets had obeyed their area officials' instructions and left Nottinghamshire. That evening a hundred and fifty pickets were despatched to the South Midlands and at eight o'clock they arrived at *Coventry Colliery*, Keresley. Helped by the Keresley branch officials, and local socialists, they persuaded the Thursday nightshift not to go to work. The following morning they repeated their success and the pit was stopped on all three shifts. Along with the rest of the Warwickshire coalfield, Keresley had voted heavily against strike action in a branch ballot the previous Sunday (their 70 percent vote mirroring a 72 percent Midlands Area vote). It was the

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only Midlands pit where a majority of the membership came out on strike. A year later, there were still over 300 of the pit's 1,400 workforce on strike.

Police Curtailment of Picketing

Although the areas that had been picketed extensively revealed a larger increase in their pro-Strike vote (North Derbyshire, 12%, Notts, 7%,) than those which hadn't (Midlands, 6%, Lancashire, 2%, Cumberland minus 20%), only in North Derbyshire did the ballot make a fundamental difference, with the county officials calling an official strike. The majority of Armthorpe pickets were not, however, dissuaded from their attempts to picket the 'Notts' miners out by the 74 percent ballot result against strike action. Their experience on the 'Notts' picket lines had led many of the leading activists to expect this result. Far more influential was the ballot's indirect result of 'legitimising' a nationally-coordinated, anti-picketing police operation of unprecedented scale and severity. The response of the organised labour movement to this massive infringement on their civil liberties was again negligible and appeared to further increase the confidence of the police. [5]

The initial response of the Armthorpe pickets to being turned back at Nottinghamshire's borders was to seek picketing targets elsewhere. After joining the 19 March mass blockade of their Yorkshire Headquarters in Barnsley (to defend it from threatened sequestration) they returned to their 1972/74 targets of Guinness Wharf, Keadby and Flixborough power stations. Their initial success in getting an assurance from the TGWU shop steward that no more coal would be unloaded at Guinness was dampened when his members refused to accept his advice and he resigned on principle. They only had slightly more success in stopping lorry drivers transporting coal. Haulage firms whose drivers refused to cross picket lines were quickly replaced by others whose drivers had less respect for them. It became apparent to the Armthorpe pickets that the continued working of the majority of miners in the 'Notts' coalfield would

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prove to be their Achilles' heel when it came to winning support from other trade unionists.

Despite police roadblocks and the massive police presence around the 'Notts' pits which prevented any real communication with the working miners, Armthorpe pickets began to find ways of crossing the 'border' into 'Notts'. Regular picketing teams emerged, sometimes based on where people lived, sometimes on workplace acquaintance, sometimes on common interests, attitudes or simply picketing strategies. New driving, navigational and other skills were learned, while picket's cars were 'customised' to make them more suitable. There followed a period of three months of 'gypsy picketing' with daily targets being identified at the last moment via a sealed envelope from the Yorkshire Strike Coordinating Committee in Barnsley. Usually the vast majority of pickets would not reach the official target, many were lucky to get within two miles of any 'Notts' pit. Nevertheless at this stage the Armthorpe pickets still found that even a handful of them appearing at a pit would serve to decrease the isolation of the 'Notts' strikers, raise the morale of the local pickets and succeed in turning significant numbers of NUM members back. Although they concentrated most of their efforts on 'Notts', they were also involved in picketing operations in Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Lancs.

EARLY STRIKE ORGANISATION IN THE BRANCH

There was no election of a strike committee in Armthorpe. It was assumed that the official NUM branch leadership (four officers plus a ten-man branch committee) would assume the role of strike leadership. The branch committee held a special strike meeting every Wednesday and then had their usual fortnightly meeting just before the full branch meeting. All major decisions were then put to the branch meetings for discussion and approval. The strike leadership saw three areas of work as immediately important in order to

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prosecute the strike successfully; the organising of extensive picketing; the raising of sufficient funds to allow them room for independent initiatives and the winning of support from other trade unionists. It was Armthorpe's commitment to mass and flying picketing (the strike leadership aimed to keep between forty and fifty picketing cars on the road) which led to many of the other strike activities.

Fundraising

From the first week of the strike the more experienced socialist activists in Armthorpe were being invited to address political meetings in the Yorkshire area, from which they brought back collections. Towards the end of the first month three of them, (the fundraising and finance committee) went to London and, using contacts from their previous activity in the Socialist Workers Party, plus the disputes and campaigns that Armthorpe had been active in, they started to build up a fundraising circuit (political meetings, union meetings and workplace collections). After a week they returned to Armthorpe while Rex Thompson (brother of Sammy) took another team down and conducted a similar exercise, mainly around Fleet Street.

For all British fundraising expeditions this maximum weekly duration was strictly adhered to. At the suggestion of the fundraising and finance committee, the Armthorpe branch decided that it was important for their fundraisers to be regularly involved at first hand in other strike activity, primarily picketing. Although it increased travelling costs, the weekly 'shift' system meant that the fundraisers never became out of touch with, and could therefore speak directly for, their fellow strikers in the coalfields.

A similar policy of regular 'renewal' was followed with international fundraising expeditions. In early April a group of Armthorpe strikers attended a Socialist Workers' Party rally at the *Grove Cinema* in Sheffield where one of them was speaking alongside Paul Foot. The chairman was a leading activist in

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the steelworkers union (ISTC) in Stocksbridge, Sheffield. After the meeting he told the Armthorpe strikers about his experiences on a very successful fund raising tour of Germany during the 1980 strike, organised by the SWP's sister group, the *Socialistische Arbeiter Gruppe* (SAG). He explained that they still had some of the local strike fund left which could perhaps be used to fund a similar trip for the Armthorpe NUM. At the end of April a group of four Armthorpe strikers (the fundraising committee and the NUM youth rep) left for a two-week tour of West Germany.

The SAG had arranged a full schedule, and they were often expected to address five or six meetings in a day. As in their British meetings, they pursued a policy of asking for physical solidarity, as well as financial assistance, and discussed with German trade unionists the need to prevent all coal exports to Britain. They found themselves speaking at a 30,000 strong Mayday Rally in Cologne and everywhere they went they attempted to explain the political issues behind the miners strike. Because of their ability to bring out the wider political implications of the strike, and because they were the first striking miners to visit Germany, their schedule kept on growing. They agreed to extend their trip by one week, but refused to make any further extension because of the renewal policy. They brought back over £5,000 for Armthorpe and other needy branches in the area, with some of the money helping to equip the Armthorpe communal food kitchen that was then being set up. Of equal importance was the setting up of an ongoing relationship with German political and trade union groups which allowed an interchange of information and a steady flow of material resources to the branch. This first international expedition was followed by several others, with Armthorpe sending delegations or individuals to France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Canada and the U.S.A. "11"

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Winning Trade Union Solidarity

The generation of trade union solidarity had, of course, been a major preoccupation of the leading socialist militants in the Armthorpe branch for years before the Strike. Knowing how vital this solidarity had been in the 1972 and 1974 disputes, they argued for it everywhere they went. By the end of the third week they managed to pull together many of their rail union contacts and held a joint meeting at the Armthorpe Welfare. At this 400 strong meeting there were rank and file militants and branch officials from ASLEF, NUR and NUM, plus Sammy Thompson and some other full time union officials. This meeting laid the political and organisational basis for ongoing support from the local railworkers throughout the strike. During the twelve months of the dispute, all coal movement in the Doncaster Area was effectively brought to a halt. Prior to the meeting local railworkers had driven coal trains, but had refused to cross NUM picket lines. They had informed the NUM of the intended coal movement and had told them where to situate picket lines. This arrangement had sometimes led to problems.

One ASLEF driver attending the Armthorpe meeting described how, pulling a full load of Coalite, he had approached a level crossing where there should have been an NUM picket line. On discovering there was not one, he stopped the train, 'explained' to the guard that it had developed serious transmission trouble, then walked one and a half miles to Askern village, grabbed hold of three local miners, dragged them back to the level crossing and got them to act as a picket line! The transmission problem miraculously cured, he was able to drive the train all the way back to the Coalite plant. Unlike some other areas, when the Doncaster railworkers decided they would not move coal, they also informed the management that, if any of them were sent home, the whole region would be brought to an immediate standstill (Armthorpe: 48, 79M).

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Doncaster ASLEF 'adopted' Armthorpe NUM, with railworkers addressing the Armthorpe membership after some of their branch meetings. Later in the strike, two Armthorpe activists received an invitation to address the Doncaster NUR Annual General Meeting, the first outside trade unionists ever to be allowed to do so. On the 27 March, after several hundred strikers had picketed Coal House (the Doncaster NCB Headquarters), it was Dave Barker who was chosen to address the 600 assembled staff (COSA, APEX and BACM) on the need for strike action and solidarity. He won prolonged applause but only four young clerical workers felt confident enough to join the strike after his speech. Following this mass picket (which was organised by the Doncaster Panel) the miners used a tactic that they had seen the French lorry drivers use some months earlier and blockaded the A1 for one and a half hours - using around 140 of their own cars and the lorries of sympathetic drivers. Building on their close links with the local steelworkers it was an eight-man Armthorpe delegation that lobbied the ISTC National Conference on the 19 June and won the right to address it, appealing for physical solidarity between steelworkers and mineworkers.^[12] This leading role in the attempt to inspire and organise trade union solidarity foreshadowed another, later one - the advocacy and initiation of 'twinning'.

EARLY STRIKE ORGANISATION IN THE VILLAGE

In the first few weeks of the strike, non-picketing activities tended to be organised very much on an ad hoc basis. Striking families still had adequate supplies of clothing, footwear and fuel, many had access to some money and it only gradually became clear how well prepared and determined the government were in their strategy of 'cutting off the money supply to strikers'^[13]. Initially, most fundraising and food provision were simply aimed at keeping the pickets fed and on the road. The government's policy of isolation and attrition had a contradictory effect. The union appeals for

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solidarity, largely rejected by workers elsewhere, evoked a response in the villages themselves. Although there was a significant reduction in the material resources of individuals and their families, this was accompanied by an increase in human resources and resourcefulness at the disposal of the strike organisation. As the makeshift arrangements proved inadequate they were gradually replaced by a welfare network that surprised everyone in terms of its extent and effectiveness. This process can be seen more clearly if we look at the development of specific areas.

The Provision of Food

It was the branch secretary, Jimmy Millar, who first suggested that the NUM branch lay on sandwiches for the pickets who hadn't got time to sleep, never mind shop, cook or eat properly. The branch funds were running low and, while he and his wife, Margaret, emptied their freezer, the *Markham Main Colliery Workmen's Trading Society's* committee met and resolved to commit the pit shop funds to supporting the union in its Strike effort. The first step in this commitment was a supplying of food, drink (and, initially, cigarettes) to the pickets. Due to the size of the Armthorpe picketing operation, the expenditure was considerable.

Table 5.1 Pit Shop Funding of Strike Organisation

<u>Period ending</u>	<u>Amount (£)</u>	<u>Period ending</u>	<u>Amount (£)</u>
20 April 1984	166.38	25 June 1984	25.89
27 April 1984	409.89	1 August 1984	45.22
4 May 1984	114.55	1 September 1984	32.00
18 May 1984	166.93	1 October 1984	36.22
26 May 1984	135.89	1 December 1984	20.00
		TOTAL	1152.97

Source: *MMWTS Pit Shop Accounts, 1984-85.*

Although the burden of financing the Strike organisation was progressively reduced due to the efforts of the fundraising committee and the Women's Action Group, the importance of the democratically-controlled collective resources

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embodied in the *Markham Main Colliery Workmen's Trading Association* was obvious from an early stage of the dispute.

Early Women's Involvement

In the second week of the Strike a number of women from the village approached the NUM officials and offered their help in the strike effort. Among the first were Irene Fretwell and Liz Finney, next door neighbours, both married to Markham Main miners and with young families. Irene had seen her husband, Wes, on the TV News, engaging in a picket line argument with some anti-strike coalfield women in Notts. Extremely angry, she had talked to Liz about organising a busload of women so that they could :

'go rallying, and show that we backed our husbands in the strike'
(Armthorpe: 1W).

But it was the material needs of her youngest son for a daily hot bath (having come out of hospital after an operation on his shoulder) that finally pushed her into activity. Refused a special need fuel note by her local doctor, Irene and Liz, neither of whom had any previous experience of political or union activity, went down to the embryonic strike centre at the Welfare to ask for help. They ended up volunteering *their* assistance - helping out with the hot drinks and sandwiches for the pickets.

At first they used the local NUM branch funds, then they called their first group meeting which attracted about a dozen women to it, and which was addressed by two women from Hatfield. The chief purpose of setting up the kitchen was to provide sustenance for the single pickets. As Gibbon observed:

'The [coalfield women's] movement was to a high degree shaped and conditioned by the manner in which the NUM chose to conduct the strike and in no way contested it'
(Gibbon, 1988: 183)

The women decided that, rather than having to rely on the hard-pressed NUM, they should try and raise their own funds. They started by going around the local shops, asking for donations or prizes for a raffle and organising jumble

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sales. As the Strike continued, they began to have regular, formal meetings at the Welfare on the alternative Sundays to the NUM branch meetings, and called themselves the *Armthorpe Ladies' Action Group*, a name that was later changed to the *Armthorpe Womens' Action Group* (W.A.G.).^[14]

By the end of April, reports were coming in from nearby Hatfield and elsewhere that the womens' groups were helping to provide hot food for pickets and food parcels for miners families facing exceptional hardship.^[15] Initially just the nine families in Armthorpe that had both parents out on strike were given a £7.00 food parcel. Then single strikers were given a parcel and then all strikers with less than £20 per week coming into their homes were given one. This meant that Armthorpe was eventually providing over 900 food parcels every week. Most of the cost of this operation was met by the Womens Action Group with the NUM branch guaranteeing them £200 per week.

Similarly dramatic progress was made with the provision of hot food. £800 was spent on a Calor Gas catering range. Then a chip fryer was bought (with the fish and chip shop near the Welfare agreeing to peel all the potatoes!). A bulk freezer was donated and two others bought to facilitate bulk buying and food storage in the Welfare. Soon the kitchen was providing a round-the-clock food service to the pickets and offering midday meals to all the strikers and their families. Initially pride kept many people away. Irene explained:

'It was terrible to see the men crying. There was one who'd walked from outside the village. I had to go outside to bring him in. He was ashamed. Pride had kept him away, but he'd come with hunger. He said he felt degraded coming to beg a food parcel. The old blokes suffered most, they didn't think in terms of rights.'

(Armthorpe: 1W)

By the end of the strike, hundreds of people would cram into the Welfare everyday. As Dot put it:

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The Kitchen were the heart of the community. It used to be packed every day. It kept everybody going for twelve months. It were a great morale booster for us.' (Armthorpe: 17W)

The Provision of Fuel

Over the years the miners' union had won an entitlement for working miners to fourteen tons of free coal every year. Further negotiations led to five of these being given up to provide retired miners and miners widows (not previously entitled) with a regular free supply. As a result of their free coal allowance (which they are not allowed to sell), Armthorpe mining families tended to be heavily reliant on solid fuel rather than gas and electric. At the beginning of the dispute, 147 doctors notes were submitted by the NUM to the Markham Main Colliery Manager on behalf of families with babies, young children or invalids. He only authorised coal delivery to a small percentage of these, so the *Armthorpe Home Coal Scheme* had a meeting with the NUM strike leadership and decided it should deliver wood to all those in need (Armthorpe: 48, 73M).

Even during the Summer, when there was not a great demand for fuel, the strike leadership could see that it would become an increasingly serious problem. The Labour-controlled Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council was contacted and agreed to the collection of dead and diseased wood around Armthorpe. In collaboration with the *Home Coal Scheme*, two industrial chain saws were bought, two delivery lorries, and their petrol supply (again!), were 'commandeered' and a woodyard with two power saw benches, storage shed and rest hut was set up in a corner of the Welfare Institute's football pitch. When local supplies of dead wood began to fail, the two collection teams went further afield in their search for wood, and the railway unions arranged for the branch to buy large quantities of old railway sleepers (at £1 each). The wood was bagged and either collected by, or delivered to, every miner's family in Armthorpe, every Markham Main miner in neighbouring villages, every retired miner, plus many old age pensioners who had no direct connection at all with Armthorpe or its pit. As one outside eye witness, Mike Brogden, reported:

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'..towards ten o'clock, a remarkable scene unfolds. From all over the village, the wheelbarrows emerge. A trickle at first, then a stream, and then a huge deluge as miners head for the woodyard behind the Welfare.....Ten o'clock is log time - the daily sack of logs from the woodpile.'

(Samuel, Bloomfield, Boanas, 1986: 11)

Over 2,000 homes were provided with a regular supply of fuel by the Armthorpe woodyard.

The union branch also helped make arrangements for the delayed payment of fuel bills. The local gas and electric workers had declared that they would not disconnect strikers' heating under any circumstances. However many families were either already on or put on coin meters during the Strike and the strike leadership had to respond to urgent fuel demands by helping to feed these meters. As the strike wore on this became one of the major demands on strike funds, with the branch eventually having to feed around 150 meters at between £3.00 and £5.00 per week each (Armthorpe: 77M).

Meeting Other Hardship

According to the branch secretary, hardship came in two forms, the predictable and the unpredictable. Inevitably clothes and shoes wore out and had to be replaced. As it became obvious that the Strike was going to be a long one, the pit shop committee decided that it would open the shop up and allow miners to 'buy' goods on credit, even though it was obvious that repayment would be impossible till after the Strike. The items in demand were trainers, shoes, jeans, shirts and jumpers, sometimes for the strikers, but often for their partners and children. Basic household goods, kettles, pans, plugs, fires and gas cookers were also needed as the Strike continued (Armthorpe: 67M). The cost of the goods 'purchased' from the pit shop came to £21,282 and 39 pence (Pit Shop Accounts, 1984-85). The shop's role as a supplier of goods was cut short when the police invaded the village and took over all the pit yard premises, preventing access to the union office and pit shop.

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Even before this the *Womens' Action Group* had begun to supply cheap clothing for the strikers and their families. At first they organised jumble sales, then, as the supply of decent second-hand clothes and shoes from outside the village increased, they set up free distribution days at the Welfare. People who fell ill (and there were more than usual, due to the poor diet and shortage of fuel) received extra money for fuel, medicines, hospital trips, special diets and baby foods. The strike support network also began to help out with major tragedies. For example, there were the inevitable deaths among the families of the strikers. As savings were used up and more and more insurance policies were cashed in, these caused massive problems. The *Armthorpe Death and Divide Society* did their best to cover the costs of the funeral but if, after the essential funeral expenses had been paid, the bereaved had no funds left for the 'extras' - flowers, funeral teas and drinks - the union branch or the *Womens' Action Group* stepped in (Armthorpe: 1, 3W & 77M)

But it was the unforeseen 'accidents' that often placed the heaviest demands on the strike support network. There was the young Armthorpe striker who was knocked off his motorbike and killed, leaving his striking father with £600 of funeral expenses; the father who came into the Welfare asking for a loan so that he could 'provide' a few extras for his daughter as she went into hospital for a kidney operation, the family whose house burned down after they had been forced to let their insurance policy lapse. Initially small loans were made to individuals out of branch funds, but these were severely limited and, as serious hardship began to appear, the pit shop manager, Jimmy Gallagher, took the unprecedented step of issuing loans from the pit shop funds to miners facing severe financial difficulties. Although this was to incur the wrath of both the (sympathetic) pit shop accountant and the (unsympathetic) Charities Commission, Jimmy refused to give way, issuing, between 20 April 1984 and 3 March 1985, a total of £14,682. His action, which had to be carried out in secret, won the support of the pit shop committee and the official strike

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leadership. Overall the financial commitment of the *MMCTS* to the Strike amounted to over £36,000.

The men and women activists, responsible for the creation of an alternative social support network around the strike, felt it vital that they should be able to provide real assistance in any type of emergency. One of the tests of their local social system was whether it could give aid to those facing individual crises while participating in the collective struggle for 'jobs, pits and communities'. In a very real sense, individuals' problems became the problems of the community to be dealt with collectively. By falling back on the collective resources that were an essential part of the Armthorpe tradition, the strike activists were able to strengthen the material base of their Strike-centred local social system. This in turn made it possible to win the massive amounts of internal and external support necessary for the prosecution of the Strike.

INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER VILLAGE INHABITANTS

The Armthorpe Women's Action Group, although essential in engaging the community in support for the Strike, were not the only section of the non-NUM population to get involved. The Armthorpe strikers had decided, at an early meeting, to try and mobilize the maximum possible support from all sections of the village's population. The miners' awareness of the issues and the level of collective commitment made the winning of this support easier. Village shopkeepers and tradesmen, understanding how important the pit was in the economic life of the village, responded to the womens' appeals for donations of money, food or raffle prizes. They also showed their support by lowering their prices or extending credit to strikers and their families. One T.V. Rental shop, *C. J. Wright's*, took this credit process to its extreme and allowed striking families to keep their sets without paying any rent at all! Milkmen,

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hairdressers and club stewards, all offered special deals to their striking customers.

Although there was widespread support, there were two figures that were especially prominent in their efforts to sustain the strikers. One was Dave Evans, the landlord of the pit village pub, the *Tadcaster Arms*, who lowered his prices significantly for the duration of the Strike and put his premises at the disposal of the strikers. The other was Howard Hardy, a local man who had spent two years down the pit, but who had, for five years, run a small bakery/grocers' shop, forty yards from the Miners Welfare. As soon as the Strike against pit closures was begun, he offered his support, without being asked. Not only did he provide huge quantities of fresh food (either at rock-bottom prices or completely free), but he also supplied vital equipment, (slicing machines, crockery, cooking tins and utensils) and helped in the daily manufacture of hundreds of sandwiches.

Young Unemployed

There were two areas of involvement for the young unemployed; the individual and the collective. On an individual level, their feeling of subordinate status attached to being workless and wageless in a work and wage-oriented community tended to lessen considerably. Their exclusion from the 'gigantic marketplace' that Braverman suggests modern capitalist society has become (1974:271) was shared by a large proportion of the strikebound village population. For the first time in their lives, many of them were able to offer some financial assistance to their striking parents or friends.

On a collective level, the insistence of socialists in the branch leadership on putting the Strike into its overall political context allowed them to argue for the involvement of the village's unemployed youth. A decision was made at a branch meeting that the branch should encourage their involvement in the fight for jobs, and guarantee them legal cover and expenses along with

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NUM pickets. With young miners playing a key role in strike activity, sections of the village's unemployed youth were more easily integrated into the Strike-based 'community'. Although they rarely took advantage of picketing expenses or other free services, the fact that the NUM was prepared to treat them like honorary members was sufficient for a significant number of young unemployed to adopt the strikers' cause as their own. In the early days of the strike, some twenty young unemployed men were involved. They became an integral part of the flying picket teams, or took their turn picketing the Armthorpe pit gates, alongside those miners who, for whatever reason, were unable to go 'flying'. There were also a smaller number of young unemployed women who became heavily involved in the early stages, mostly at the Welfare, but some on the picket line.

Women

They were not the only women on the picket lines. Some of the women strikers from the offices and canteen were regular picketers on the pit gates. By May several other women who had become active in the strike in the kitchen/fundraising areas were 'flying' with women from other villages and areas. Although they liaised with the area Strike leadership, the women used to organise their own picketing expeditions. The area leadership of the women's action groups would target a working pit and put out a last-minute, cryptic phone call to leading village activists. These activists then took responsibility for organising any other women who were interested in attending the 'hen party', 'womens darts match' or whatever. As a rule they picketed the nightshift at Nottinghamshire pits, travelling with the Hatfield women in seatless transit vans (which were the cheapest to hire). The older women used to travel in the front and, as women, found they enjoyed a higher success rate in getting through the police roadblocks.

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As with the early miners' flying pickets into 'Notts', the police seemed to be taken off their guard by the first all-womens pickets. The local 'Notts' NUM pickets were extremely welcoming to them and, initially they were successful in turning many of the local strikebreakers back. The police's surprise did not, however, last very long, and soon the women were getting similar treatment to the men. [16] By their second visit to Calverton the verbal abuse, "Shut your effin', whorin' gobs you dirty slags" (Armthorpe:3W) had been supplemented crude physical violence:

'We'd agreed that if any of the lasses got arrested, we'd try and pull them back. Anyway they'd already arrested some of the lasses and I was just talking to this lass from Upton, and next thing this copper comes in, barges into her and pulls her out. We weren't even shouting at the scabs at this particular time. Anyway we tried to pull this lass back and as he went to thump her, she went down and I got it in the mouth. He punched me in the mouth here. I lost a tooth as you can see and all me mouth were busted and me nose were busted, and when all the bruise came out I had a big black eye. I went to put me hand over me mouth and he hit me again and I thought he'd broken me fingers. Anyhow this young lass went down and his boot went straight into her thigh. You could hear the bone crack, no wonder it were broke, she had a badly broken thigh.'

(Armthorpe: 3W)

As well as physical intimidation the police used psychological intimidation in order to deter the women from picketing. They were subjected to constant pushing, herding, penning in, crushing, having to ask permission to go and have a pee:

'They arrested one lass that night. I think her baby was six weeks old and she were breast fed as well, so she had to get home, but the coppers refused to let her go. They said, "Well, let your husband do it. You're doing his part so let him do yours." It were just disgusting, they were degrading us all the time.'

(Armthorpe: 3W)

Their personal experiences on the picket lines had a major impact on women's attitudes, serving to strengthen the women's understanding of, and solidarity with, the NUM's flying pickets. Although they admitted to being frightened, the women continued to go picketing, insisting that the police violence had failed to intimidate them off the picket lines:

'On the picket line, it were that frightening, yet when you were coming away, you wanted to go back for more. It were a reet strange feeling, you were thinking "I've got to get back and stand up to them cops." You didn't want to go, 'cos you hated them that much for what they'd done.

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And, to this day, if I hadn't gone on picket line duty I'd have believed that the pickets asked for what they got, so I'm glad I went on the picket lines, 'cos it proved to me that it wasn't the pickets, it were the cops.'

(Armthorpe: 4W)

Senior Citizens

As well as this increased solidarity between the sexes generated by their experiences on the picket line, there was also a great deal of inter-generational solidarity. The Strike served to revitalise extended family networks. Paralleling the situation where the young unemployed were able to help out their striking parents, the older retired generations were to the fore in helping out their children, nieces, nephews and grandchildren, either through financial assistance or regular invitations for Sunday dinners or long weekends. This intra-family involvement was often matched by an involvement in more public Strike activities. Several of the retired miners who lived in the village were regular attenders at the pit gates, standing and chatting with the younger pickets. Others used to go down the Welfare, lending their assistance in a variety of ways. Similarly the older generation of mining women played an important part in local fundraising and welfare organisation.

As the strike wore on, the systematic imposition of draconian bail conditions hit the active branches hardest. Again, this had a contradictory result, with many of the welfare activities undertaken by the Armthorpe branch being the by-product of the thwarted primary objective - the involvement of the maximum number of strikers and supporters in picketing. The woodyard was an excellent example of this, with fifteen to twenty men being fully employed in a highly visible and widely appreciated activity. The activity of leading union militants in building this major welfare programme appeared to act as a catalyst for the involvement of large numbers of non-miners in the strike. The new strike-based 'community', based not on sex, or job status, but on degrees of commitment to the Strike, was being created in the process of the struggle.

MIDDLE AND LATER STRIKE EXPERIENCE

In the first few months of the Strike there was an overwhelming commitment among the Armthorpe activists to winning the Strike through mass picketing and the generation of physical solidarity. There were two major confrontations which occurred in the Summer of 1984 and which acted as turning points in the experience of the Armthorpe strike-based community. The first one was the series of violent clashes at the Orgreave coking plant, the second the police 'invasion' and occupation of Armthorpe on Tuesday, 21 and Wednesday, 22 August. Although these watersheds were symbolic of a more general forcing of the dispute 'onto the defensive', the results were contradictory. As in 1926, the beleaguered isolation of the pit villages strengthened the involvement of other sections of the local population and made it even more a 'community strike'. It also stimulated the growth of the relationship with the broader, class-based community through the initiation of 'twinning' networks.

Orgreave

The experience at Orgreave in May and June made its biggest impact on the male Strike activists. The BSC management had successfully pioneered the use of lorry convoys to break the miners' picket lines at the Ravenscraig BSC plant in the first week of May.¹⁷ Their decision to organise a similar strikebreaking operation in the heartland of the strike, moving 5,000 tonnes of coking coal per week from Orgreave to their Scunthorpe plant constituted an open challenge to the effectiveness of the NUM's strike operation. The *Observer* reported that the BSC had 'approached the government early last month for the go-ahead, but it was only two weeks ago that the Cabinet committee looking after the crisis gave British Steel the green light.' (*Observer*, 3/6/84)

The South Yorkshire strike centre at Silverwood was alerted first, but soon Armthorpe, Hatfield and other Doncaster area strikers began to join the growing, unofficial pickets at the coking plant near Rotherham. A campaign was

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initiated among rank and file miners in order to pressurize the NUM leadership to give official backing to the mass pickets. On Sunday 27 May Arthur Scargill came out in support, calling for the building of mass pickets as he spoke alongside Jack Taylor, Yorkshire president, at a strike rally in South Kirby. The following morning, Monday 28 May, Armthorpe and other Yorkshire pickets were sent directly to Orgreave for the first time. There were over 2,000 pickets and, outnumbering the police, they succeeded in putting a complete blockade on the plant for several hours.

That evening the Armthorpe strike leadership put out an appeal for more pickets. There was an anticipation of an increased level of violence and the local women activists agreed to accept the NUM's advice and stayed away from the mass picket (Armthorpe: 1, 3, 4W). (Other women did not, so there were a number of womens' contingents on the Orgreave mass pickets.) The following day, Tuesday 29, an enlarged contingent of 180 Armthorpe pickets were involved in some of the most violent confrontations seen in a British industrial dispute since before the First World War. Many of the 5,000-6,000 pickets allowed themselves to be corralled into three police 'holding areas', but a sizeable minority attempted to surround the entrance to the coking plant, defended by several thousand police, many of them in full riot gear. The police, under severe pressure, reacted ferociously, making a series of baton charges, using dogs, horses and long riot sticks not used since the death of the anti-Nazi demonstrator, Kevin Gately in Red Lion Square in June 1974. There were thirty pickets 'officially' injured and eighty three arrested.

Many Armthorpe pickets admit being severely shocked by the scale of the police violence, but claim that their experience that day did not dishearten them. Anticipating that Scargill's appeal to the wider trade union movement would result in an even larger mass picket the following day, there was a canvassing of inactive strikers and local unemployed youth to come to Orgreave. On the Wednesday morning however, they discovered that instead of

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being sent to Orgreave, they were being redirected to the 'gypsy picketing' of Nottinghamshire pits again. Despite the implicit problems of lack of legal and other union cover, the majority of Armthorpe pickets ignored the Yorkshire area leadership's instructions and went to Orgreave anyway (Armthorpe: 50, 51, 53M).

Scargill, responsible for much of the organisation and leadership the previous day, was arrested early in the morning for refusing to lead 70 pickets into one of the 'holding areas' so successfully used by the police the previous day. Although Wednesday saw bitter confrontation at Orgreave, it was not on the same scale as the previous day and, with only around 2,500 pickets present, the police had the upper hand from the outset. There were 35 pickets arrested. Armthorpe pickets were again heavily involved in the pitched battles, with the young unemployed element playing an equal role in the face of mounted police and riot squad charges. The unemployed were however, both surprised and angered by a carefully staged T.V. denunciation of the involvement of 'non-miners' by a middle-aged Yorkshire miner, who had previously been heavily involved in the fighting himself. "We'd never heard that kind of stuff before" commented one young, unemployed Armthorpe picket (Armthorpe: 36YM).

A large number of Armthorpe's pickets were among the 2,000 that again defied the area leadership's instructions on Thursday 31 May, but once again the picket lacked organisation and direction. Scargill, released on bail on the Wednesday afternoon, did not return to the Orgreave picket line that week, being involved in 'negotiations' with the NCB. Coming out of the talks he expressed optimism, but the same day Margaret Thatcher was informing a 'Times' interviewer that she did 'not see an immediate end' to the strike. (Times 1/6/1984)

Many of the Armthorpe pickets were convinced, in hindsight, that their failure to sustain and build on the mass pickets of Monday and Tuesday constituted the major turning point in the strike. They believed that the NCB,

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the government and the police saw the NUM's retreat from mass picketing as a sign of fundamental weakness which allowed them to move more decisively onto the offensive. Although Armthorpe continued to send out pickets into 'Notts' and elsewhere, the fragmented 'gypsy picketing' now yielded fewer results and morale suffered. [18] There was a re-occurrence of mass picketing at Orgreave on Monday 18 June, three days after the death of a 55 year-old NUM picket, Joe Green, outside Ferrybridge power station. Large numbers of pickets succeeded in penetrating the police lines and took over parts of the coke works, but the police counterattack was even more ferocious, with 93 pickets arrested. Scargill was again 'put out of action', being one of the 51 pickets badly injured. The following day the pickets were once again redirected by the area leaderships, causing the mass picket to fade.

It was eight weeks later that the first two scabs went back to work in Yorkshire, on Thursday 16 August at the Selby 'superpit', ten miles to the west of the North Yorkshire coalfield. But there was a much earlier attempt (or dress rehearsal) on the 9 July, which centred on Walter Sharp, an inhabitant of one of Armthorpe's private housing estates, who worked at Rossington pit, five miles from the village.

The spotting and following of a meshed-up police transit van from Sharp's house to Rossington police station coincided with the police 'bussing' the local colliery management through the picket lines at high speeds. These incidents led to an immediate mobilisation of strikers and supporters from both villages outside the Rossington pit gates, where the pickets constructed extensive barricades of trees and barbed wire, imprisoning the colliery management in their offices. Only the persistent, personal intervention of all three Yorkshire area officials, Jack Taylor, Sammy Thompson and Owen Briscoe enabled the police to eventually rescue the trapped management team. A similar intervention by leading Armthorpe pickets was required to save Sharp from an even worse fate after he left the Rossington police station and was physically

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attacked, close to the pit, by a crowd of incensed local women. (The pickets involved were later very reluctant to admit to their 'life-saving' activity, due to Sharp's eventual re-emergence as the Doncaster coalfield's most prominent scab and a leader of the Yorkshire back to work movement.)

Police Invasion - 21st and 22nd August

The first sign of a breaking of the strike at Markham Main came in the same week as the two Selby miners went back. Up to this point there had been an agreement between pit management and NUM which allowed unhindered management access to the pit, in return for NUM access to the union office and pit shop. On Friday 17 August, the management, without warning and under police supervision had the two iron pit gates cut from their hinges and removed. On the following Tuesday (21 August) there was a major police operation at Markham and several meshed police transits escorted a 'working miners' coach' into the pit yard at high speed^[19]. The rapid growth of a hostile crowd at the pit gates caused the police to call for reinforcements (Humberside and West Midlands Police Support Units^[20]) These reinforcements came under heavy attack as they drove through the pickets and barricades were built to prevent them from getting back out of the pit with the 'scab bus'.

The resources of the *Home Coal Scheme* were once again put to good use with one of its lorries being driven across the pit entrance and immobilised. Further police reinforcements, consisting of more heavily equipped riot squads, eventually cleared a path for the exit of the 'working miners' (who had by this stage, according to the official police report, mysteriously decreased in numbers from three to one!^[21]) Three men and a woman were arrested and late that night, the police were still reporting sporadic attacks on the police station and the police presence at the pit by 'a group of 30 to 40 marauding people'. Similar occurrences were reported in several other nearby villages; Hatfield, Bentley and Edlington.^[22]

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That evening an emergency meeting of NUM and Women's Action Group members was called attended by some three hundred people. It appealed for a mass picket at the pit the following day. Early on Wednesday morning a picket of around twelve hundred miners, mining women and supporters from around Armthorpe gathered at the pit entrance, which, for the first time in six months, the police had left in the early hours of the morning. [23] The pit security cameras were put out of action allowing the pickets to 'borrow' an NCB mobile crane to help in the building of a barricade of concrete blocks, railway sleepers and telegraph poles. Local County Council workers were persuaded to allow their mechanical shovel and road laying vehicle to be put to similar use, ending up as a key part of the barricade across the pit entrance. [24] The NCB crane was eventually driven across the gates and 'immobilised' by being set on fire. [25]

At 8.15 a.m. two motor bike police drove onto the railway bridge and gave a signal to forces behind them. According to the police report:

'Radio messages were passed to the convoy by Headquarters Control with instructions to advance on the colliery, retake and hold the ground.' [26]

Over 40 transit vans drove into the village and upto the barricaded pit entrance with their doors open. Even before the vans had stopped, fully-equipped riot police began jumping out and launching attacks on groups of pickets with their riot sticks and round shields. [27] The pickets fought back but as more police reinforcements were brought in, it became more of a hunt than a battle. There appeared to be no escape from the pit village as it had been completely sealed off, with road blocks on the main roads and scores of police spread out in the woods and fields around the village. Pickets trying to escape through the woods were therefore caught in a police sweep operation. There were 22 pickets arrested and many more severely injured by the police. Armthorpe was virtually cut off from the outside world for some four hours, with ambulances, buses and cars prevented from entering the pit village and

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most of the population discovering that their telephones were 'out of order' (Armthorpe: 48M, 50M, 77M, 3W, 7W).

Violet Conn, a miner's wife in her late 50's described what she saw:

'It was hot. I went out with me two sticks. They were coming up with these helmets on and the things pulled down and baton sticks and these shields. And there were about six or seven running up here and then all the pickets run through the gardens over there. I shouted "*It's no good going through there, they're waiting for you!*" They were waiting for them in the woods. So I said "*Get round the back of the garages*" ...if the garage door had been left open, I would have put them in there. But anyway the police came. They were charging all over. We were locking the gates and they were jumping over the walls. They pulled all my railings down there.

They collared one lad here, by the scruff of the hair and they batoned him something shameful. He only looked a bairn..he had a blue jumper on but you couldn't tell what colour it was for the blood. And I said, "*Get away, yer cruel devils!*" I said, "*Yer like Gestapo, yer nazi stormtroopers!*" And one says, "*Get in you!*" I said "*I won't get in, I live here... you don't!*" And the kid was shouting, "*Help, help!*" but I couldn't do anything. They'd got him on the floor with their fingers up his nose and they were kicking him, kicking him. We couldn't do anything, there were five of them, big, heavy men, and the blood was running all over that kid. And then they picked him up with his nose like that and in between his legs and they just threw him into the van ...like a hunk of meat!

They come up much later in the afternoon without their coats on and they said "*Good afternoon*" and what did I say, "*Get stuffed, yer Nazis!*".... Things I never came out with before. I don't know where it came from, but I was that boiling over ... All the streets were barred to 'em after that, and all the neighbours were having a go at the police. One down the road was asked for a drink, and she said to 'em "*I wouldn't give you a drink of piddle!*" '

(Armthorpe: 20W)

Virtually everyone in the old pit village that day either experienced or witnessed verbal abuse, intimidation and physical attack. Pickets were forced to seek refuge from the local population, miners and non-miners alike. Doors were left open for them, they were hidden under beds, in lofts, garages, sheds and gardens. Police trying to force entry into gardens and houses were openly abused by the owners/occupants and had doors and gates slammed in their faces. Irene Kennedy, a fifty nine year-old widow who had come to Armthorpe with her collier husband twenty one years before, received a head injury as she tried to stop the police breaking into her house:

'All of a sudden we heard 'em all running down the street. I seen a ginger lad run down there - through the backs. This front door was open



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and the back door was too. Well the son shut the front door and the police tried to kick it down and he said, "*Mother, gan shut the back door!*". When I went through I wasn't quick enough, was I. A big riot van swerved onto the grass by the side of the house, and all the police came round the back, using filthy talk, "*Send the bastards out!*" It were terrible. They were like wild animals. The door was open a bit and I was trying to shut it, and they could have pushed it, but they didn't, they pulled it towards them and trapped my head in it on purpose.

They got in. I couldn't stop them, I was all dizzy. They dragged one of my son's mates out, who had been in here for over an hour.... Later I went down to my other son's, George's. There were riot police all down the street, stopping people and asking, "*Where are you going?*" You couldn't get out and you couldn't get into the village.'

(Armthorpe: 21W)

In a matter of hours the attitudes of the previously uninvolved village population towards the strike and the police were completely transformed. The stories of police violence told by flying pickets were being re-enacted in their roads, gardens and homes. Margaret Paul, a thirty year-old woman, married to a council worker and with a six month-old baby, described her experience:

'I have to admit that before that day, although I supported the Strike, I wasn't involved and from everything what I'd seen on the television, I thought the police were in the right and it was a minority of miners that were causing the trouble. The media had put it over so well. Although I had a brother who were very active in the strike and he'd told me that it wasn't like that, he'd been to Orgreave and said how bad it was. But he lived in Edlington and we didn't see much of him. Our next door neighbours were on strike and I was just helping her out with weekly groceries and stuff.....

That morning my husband was at work. I had a friend of ours, Mick from Hatfield, off the picket lines for a cup of tea.... Suddenly the eruption started. The pickets flew from the pit gates through these backs, and through our back gardens trying to get away from the police. A couple of pickets came straight through our house, in the back door and out the front. And of course behind them there were the police force, about twenty or so, all in their riot gear. I heard a window smash. I was stood at that door, cos I didn't want police in here for Mick's sake. It was the police who had smashed the back door in, they were already in the kitchen. I stood in front of the door, and told them, "*You're not coming in here, I've got a baby!*" Then the whole lot of 'em were through the house, truncheons blazing.....

I was shakin', I was frightened to death. I stood by the bay window and watched em beating one young lad up on our lawn, another next door. They were only young lads in tee-shirts and jeans with five great coppers over them killing them You wouldn't have believed it if you hadn't seen it. I just couldn't believe what had happened, I was horrified, and petrified. The violence was unbelievable.'

(Armthorpe: 22W)

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Although the worst of the violence only lasted half an hour, the harrassment and abuse continued for some time. Margaret Paul explains:

'After a few minutes I got that mad. They'd got rid of all the pickets. There must have been about forty riot police out there. And I went out, and I didn't used to swear or anything - I do now, but I didn't then [laughs] and I went out and I just said to one of the policemen "Right, can you tell me who's going to pay for the damage?"

And all you could see was a crowd of heads over the top of the hedge, and they all set about shouting at me like I've never heard. A fella has never ever spoke to me like that, "Get back in effin house, you dirty slag!" and all the rest. The abuse that I got were unbelievable, I still can't believe it. I couldn't believe that thirty or forty bobbies as I used to call 'em could speak to me like that. And the swearing just left me speechless. I just came back in and slammed the door.'

(Armthorpe: 22W)

It appeared to many of the eyewitnesses that the police were intent on brutalizing and humiliating the local population. Several shared the view of Margaret Kennedy when she suggested:

'They were just like wild animals, running anywhere and beating people up with them baseball bats. It was just like Northern Ireland, that's just the way it was, if not worse.'

(Armthorpe: 21W)

Others went further, claiming that members of the armed forces were actually involved in the operation, dressed in numberless police uniforms. [28]

It took the police over two hours to clear the barricade but by 12 noon, the pit entrance was clear, allowing them to drive Armthorpe's first hooded strikebreaker into the pit in a meshed-up transit. [29]. The symbolic taking over of the most militant pit in the Doncaster coalfield was complete. The police established their main base for West Doncaster operations in the pit yard. They occupied virtually all the colliery buildings and kept a highly mobile force of some 600 police stationed there for the duration of the strike. They set up offices, cells and a question room. The Deputies' Social Club was taken over as a kennel for the police dogs. [30]

At three o'clock in the afternoon, after the violence had subsided, the media arrived. Again, despite all the stories that the miners had told them about media distortion, most people in the village thought they would be able

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to use them to tell people outside what the police had done that day. Margaret Paul was one of several people persuaded by neighbours to give an interview to the local T.V. news programme, *Calendar*:

'I didn't want to give them an interview. But the neighbours all came round and said, "Margaret, you must. You owe it to people to let them know that it isn't the pickets that are causing the violence". So I went on. It was a long interview and they did a brilliant editing job.

I had said, 'And I went out to the police and asked them - Who's going to pay for the damage?' - and they all started swearing at me', and they'd edited all references to the police out, so it seemed as if I had asked the miners - "Who's going to pay for the damage?" - and then I'd got all the foul-mouthed abuse from the miners. I couldn't believe it. There were people round here the next day who wouldn't talk to me, cos they reckoned I had been telling lies about what had happened. I was amazed how they'd twisted it round.' (Armthorpe:21W)

Luckily there had been a sympathetic (Communist Party) photographer, Ronald Richardson, in the village who risked arrest in order to record some of the scenes of police brutality. This made it difficult for the media to carry the police version of events. Nevertheless, having experienced the brutality, the non-mining village population had to endure the frustration of seeing a distorted account of the invasion conveyed to the outside world. The process of convergence between the experience of the village population and the NUM activists did not end on the 22 August. Intimidation of the local population continued for several days, with large squads of riot police making aggressive, noisy patrols around the village at frequent intervals especially in the middle of the night. Strike activists and their families, in particular those living in the old pit village were singled out for regular visits, questioning and general harrassment. In the face of this police behaviour, not only the strikers and their families but the rest of the community (particularly in the older parts of Armthorpe) closed ranks against them.

The Strengthening of Community Involvement

This closing of ranks began in the early hours of the morning of the invasion. At 11 a.m. Dave Evans, the landlord of the *Tadcaster* informed waiting policemen that he would not serve them with cigarettes or drinks and that he

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would prefer it if they left his premises altogether. Within 24 hours virtually every shop in the village was displaying makeshift 'No Police Served Here' signs below their printed 'We Support the Miners' notices. One of the few exceptions was *Waltons/V.G.*, one of Armthorpe's small supermarkets, which had one of its two branches close to the pit gates and which had agreed to serve some of the riot police with sandwiches round the back of the shop. A spontaneous boycott campaign was established by local people and, the following night (23 August), all its plate glass windows were smashed. [32]

Local miners and others who had not been involved in picketing started going up to the pit gates for the daily protest picket as the 'scab bus' was driven in. The experience of police violence on the 22 August transformed people's attitudes towards the Strike. Margaret Paul, despite having to carry her six-month old baby, Jonothan, around with her, was one of the local women who used to assemble on the pit gate picket line every day at 2 p.m.:

'Because of what went on that day a lot more women *did* feel strongly about it. From then on, the next day, and the days after, I was on them pit gates, all the time. I would be up there every day to watch that scab bus go in and think, "*You swines, what have you done. Do you know you have caused hell for a few quid?*" They was the ones that broke the back of the Strike, weren't they?' (Armthorpe: 22W)

The Parish Council, until then relatively inactive, held an emergency meeting and organised a public meeting and march in protest at the police invasion. Around 1,500 people joined the protest march around the village and upto the pit gates where they were addressed by Sammy Thompson, Harold Walker (the local Labour MP) and Guy Bennet, a young NUM striker. The Parish Council also joined the local NUM branch in sending a delegation to the Home Secretary to demand an 'explanation' and a public inquiry into the invasion. [33]

Later that week, three Doncaster Council workers on their way to work were forced off the road and questioned by police escorting the scab bus. They

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arrived at work, called a meeting and held a 24-hour strike against police harassment, bringing the 20-strong workforce up to the Armthorpe picket line.

There was an increase in local fundraising and other support. One milkman, who had already lowered his prices significantly, dropped them even further. A hairdresser went round cutting strikers' (and their dependents') hair for 50 pence. Howard the baker supplied whatever the quantity of fresh bread that was required at completely uneconomic prices. The village's pensioners penny pinched so they could save their weekly donations to the strike fund and the senior citizens clubs organised regular raffles and fundraisers. [34] Jean Wylie, a Scottish woman in her late 50's who had to care for her husband, a miner crippled for ten years by dust-filled lungs, reported her personal reaction to the 22 August:

'It was in the afternoon. Me and Lil were passing these police men in Paxton, and one had a cut head and was saying to another, "*That picket effin hit me!*" and I must have been mad, cos I went up and said, "*Well he didn't effin' hit you effin' hard enough!*" He started to chase us, but we just ran into this woman's house - I didn't know her before - and she hid us from them.

From then on you couldn't stop us. I had to take care of my husband a lot of the time but I was on the picket lines every day. I'd be outside the supermarket every Friday collecting food and donations and me and Lil would go round from door to door at night collecting food.

(Armthorpe: 18W)

As in previous strikes, the rural situation of the village made a selection of vegetables 'available'. Several of the local farmers made direct contributions to the kitchen, while others, knowing that certain fields were being systematically stripped, did nothing to prevent it. The Doncaster Metropolitan Council also began to do more for the strikers, keeping the school kitchens open so they could supply free school meals to strikers' children throughout the holiday periods. It also issued free tickets to the swimming baths and, every five weeks, issued Armthorpe NUM/WAG with six hundred £5 hardship vouchers for distribution to those in most serious need.

FEATURES OF THE STRIKE COMMUNITY

The local Strike community was very different from the pre-Strike one. It was not merely a question of the involvement of larger numbers of people. Freedom from the normal work routines led to a lessening in the importance of wage and market relations, a diminishing of hierarchy and segregation, an intensification of social relations, while allowing an 'opening-up' of community on other levels. I investigate some of the main features of this community below.

Development of Women's Involvement

The involvement of broader sections of the village population had the effect of changing the nature of the miners' dispute, making it much more a 'community strike'. In order to safeguard the pit and its union, sources of the main power points and institutions in the locality, new local power points and institutions were needed. Although the union was still centrally important, the heightened struggle rendered its constitutional boundaries permeable, and the setting up of new, allied institutions (in particular 'the kitchen') greatly increased multiplex role playing between village inhabitants. As opposed to the pre-Strike period, when aspirations, dramas, crises and problems had increasingly been experienced on an *individual* basis, the government's Strike strategy meant that these individual 'escape routes' were severely reduced. As the Strike continued, people increasingly experienced their problems, dramas and crises on a more *collective* basis. The consequent growth of the 'community' took place on a qualitative as well as quantitative basis.

Communal kitchens, communal advice centres, communal food, clothing and fuel distribution networks were set up, with women often being the chief initiators. At first, most of the new institutions simply allowed them to fulfill their 'traditional' roles from the domestic, privatised sphere, albeit in a more collective, public setting. As the Strike progressed however these

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essentially 'supportive' roles were combined with more and more independent, dynamic functions. Although this was an extremely complex process, four broad 'stages' can be outlined.

The first saw women volunteering as individuals to make snacks for pickets using union-supplied funds. The second saw them organising at a purely local level so they could raise the necessary finances in order to supply meals and food parcels for all strikers in need. The third saw them linking up with other groups of mining women in order to organise more effective, widespread fundraising, to hold women's demonstrations and to pioneer flying picketing expeditions. The fourth saw them involved, either independently or alongside the men, in national and international fundraising expeditions, getting the message of the Strike across, winning solidarity and pioneering twinning relationships. Far from being confined to the domestic situation, a small number of women found themselves playing an indispensable role in forging links between the local and broader, class-based communities.

The transformation in attitudes, ideas and confidence that the latter stages of this process involved was a massive one. It put huge demands, not only on the women themselves, but on their partners, families, friends and relations. In Armthorpe, the initial activity of the women was undoubtedly encouraged by the majority of the mining community. The established leaderships in both union and village were publicly committed to the Strike, which made it easier for the women to gain access to important local resources and power points. There was also the local political tradition which emphasized the village's leading role in collective struggle and acknowledged the importance of women's participation. Finally there were leading figures in the local union branch, at both official and rank and file level, who encouraged the women in their rapid political development while insisting on their being allowed a

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vital independence - free from domination by the established union or village leaderships. [35]

This meant that although the NUM made a regular contribution to WAG funds, the women had complete control over them. Although forced to establish a substantial degree of autonomy due to the NUM's constitution, [36] the Armthorpe *Womens Action Group* saw themselves as facilitating, rather than challenging the NUM strike strategy. Nevertheless the establishment of major institutions, under the collective control of some of the most forceful women in the village, constituted a major challenge to the male domination of public activity and resources that had tended to evolve in the years of industrial 'calm'.

The longer the Strike continued, the more the women came to the fore and took on new responsibilities. They discovered that they were equally, if not more capable (than the miners) of breaking down the barriers erected around their common struggle. Far from being a weak link in the Strike, they developed into one of its main strengths. [37] As the Strike was forced onto the defensive, they took on more of the fundraising work, more of the speaking and more of the picketing both. [38] They played a crucial role in strengthening the 'twinning' network, putting up visiting supporters, taking them round the picket lines and showing them what was really going on. So, for example, the Armthorpe women activists formed a twinning relationship with a group of office staff at the NUJ's headquarters. On their first visit to Armthorpe, they took them on an early morning tour of four local picket lines, where they witnessed at first hand police charges, brutality and some totally unprovoked arrests. They then returned to Armthorpe where, over breakfast, they watched an unrecognisable account on the early morning T.V. news. Incensed by the distortion of the media account, they wrote up their whole experience for the NUJ Journal.

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Strengthening the Community - Dealing with Strikebreakers

The massive NCB/police operation to get the first scabs back into Yorkshire pits brought a speedy response from the strikers and their supporters. Despite elaborate attempts to conceal their identity, most of the scabs were identified within a few days of their return. An information network was set up between the villages, with potential strikebreakers and police convoys being monitored and scraps of information being pieced together. One fact that soon emerged was that the vast majority of strikebreakers had little or no mining background and tended to live outside the traditional mining communities. The Armthorpe strike activists took several important steps to counter this problem of isolated miners living outside the village and strike 'community'.

From the very first incidence of strikebreaking, the strike leadership, both official and unofficial, were aware that the colliery and area management were systematically trying to identify potential strikebreakers and encouraging them to break the strike. A minority of the leadership argued in favour of the Kent NUM tactic - winning the less hardened strikebreakers back out and then taking these 'reformed scabs' to visit others who had just gone back in or who were most likely to be targetted by the NCB. This tactic would have been far more successful except for the overwhelming presence of police. Jimmy Gallagher was the first to experience this as he went to visit one of Armthorpe's first 'scabs', Graham Smith, a 38 year-old outbye worker who lived four and a half miles away on a private housing estate in Cantley:

'I goes down to his house. There was law at both end of the street, and two police with dogs at his house. I was eventually let in and sat opposite him, one police man stood behind me, another behind him. I says to him,

"Do you realize what you've done? "

He says,

"I've burnt my bridges now."

"I'm here to talk you back out. Do you realize you've shut the pit shop. Stopped your mates getting clothes and shoes for their kids - and financial help."

"What financial help?"

"There's some financial help for you if you want it."

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Suddenly, I felt this hand come down on my shoulder. I'd got him, but then he was watching the cop behind me and started quizzing me about the money and where it came from and all that kind of thing. I just said, "If you come down our house we can talk about it and I'll get you some money to pay your bills." That was it though, the cops were just using him to pump me for information. (Armthorpe: 67M)

Several scabs either got in contact with, or were contacted by, the socialist militants. Some sought the forgiveness of the NUM branch prior to their rejoining the strike. Although there was extensive debate, the bitterness felt by the strike community to the strikebreakers meant that this 'forgiveness' was only achieved in a solitary case, and that after the end of the strike.^[33] Several strikebreakers simply came back out anyway. Eventually the majority of leading socialists adopted a policy of advising new (that is, unidentified) strikebreakers to rejoin the strike without approaching the full branch or branch committee.

Strengthening the Community - 'The Tannoy'

The complicity of the bulk of the mass media in the isolation of the miners revealed a need for alternative forms of communication. There was a significant increase in the readership of socialist newspapers (see Chapters Seven and Eight) but there was still a gap at a local level. In April 1984 the leading socialist activists had suggested that the branch produce a regular strike newsletter to keep all the membership and their families informed of national and local developments. The idea was turned down. In October several of these same activists attended an SWP miners' aggregate where their counterparts from Bentley were proudly passing round their newly-launched strike broadsheet. The Armthorpe socialists brought one back to the village, showed it around and raised the issue again at the NUM branch committee. The majority of the committee were still unenthusiastic.^[40] This time however the socialists decided that they were not going to be put off. They organised a meeting and decided to go ahead with the project on their own. The result was

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the 'Armthorpe Tannoy' (the tannoy being the main method of underground communication in the pit).

The Tannoy was a two or four-sided newsletter which was produced six times during the last three months of the strike. Planning meetings were held in the Tadcaster, or strikers homes with the numbers involved in planning, writing and distribution rising from the original six to around eighteen or twenty. It was distributed around the strike centre and to Markham Main strikers living outside Armthorpe along with their food parcels. Its major aim was to get previously inactive or isolated strikers involved in the strike. It carried pit, community and national news, informed people of the help that was available and advertised union and Womens Action Group meetings, social events, picketing and other activities (See Appendix 11).

It also took up a series of 'current arguments' and methodically dissected the only letter sent out by the Markham Main Working Miners Committee in early December (See Appendix 12). It identified the Markham Main scabs, publishing their names and their pit jobs. (Their addresses, together with their names, were painted on walls all around their villages and estates.) The Tannoy was printed by a variety of sympathetic political groups and the print order rose from 900 to 2,000. The first issue made such an impact that the NUM branch leadership immediately gave it their approval, but the rank and file activists insisted on maintaining complete control over it; collecting funds, writing and distributing it themselves.

Extention of Community - The Joint Communities Support Group

Although the visiting of isolated individuals and strikebreakers was obviously important, a far more effective way of stemming the drift-back was to get 'outside' miners to organise themselves into their own 'strike communities', despite their geographical separation from the mining villages.

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In November, at the suggestion of Sammy Thompson, a few NUM activists, (members of the Labour Party and Socialist Workers Party) living in Edenthorpe decided to organise some support for miners living in the local, non-mining villages. An inaugural meeting decided to set up a *Joint Communities Support Group* (JCSG) covering Edenthorpe, Kirk Sandall and Barnby Dun, three villages/housing estates lying a few miles from Armthorpe. An initial phone round all the local NUM branches revealed that there were 167 strikers from 11 different pits living in the area. [4] Every miner was visited personally and told about the establishment of the group and its initial aims - namely to supply a weekly food parcel, a Christmas party for the kids and a supply of winter clothing.

Initial funding came from Armthorpe and Hatfield NUM branches and local Labour Party wards. This allowed sixty food parcels to be distributed. Within a fortnight there were over forty miners attending the support group meetings, all but three of whom had previously been completely inactive in the Strike. There was no segregation with local women having exactly the same status and playing an equal role in the group. In order to become financially self-sufficient, the JCSG set up four teams and began collecting funds outside eight local factories every Thursday and Friday morning. After some shaky starts, the collections improved, in most cases dramatically.:

Table 5.2 Joint Communities Support Group Factory Gate Collections

<u>FACTORY</u>	<u>1st Collection</u>	<u>2nd Collection</u>	<u>Later Collections (aver)</u>
Inter. Harvesters	£1.50	£15.00	£28.50
Peglars	£3.00	£17.00	£38.00
British Ropes	£5.00	£18.00	£36.00
Plant Works	£5.50	£40.00	£82.00
Pilkingtons	£22.00	£58.00	£62.50
Kays Aluminium	£45.00	£50.00	£55.00
Rockware Glass	£79.00	£85.00	£88.00

Source JCSG Financial Summary 1985.

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By December, more and more people were becoming active in the support group and its activities had to be extended in order to involve them. A similar pattern of development to Armthorpe was adopted. It was decided to buy two chainsaws and an old van so that a logging team could be put on the road. Two teams of collectors were organised and sent out (on a weekly shift basis) to London and Liverpool. Between them they brought back over £1,000 per week and they acted as pioneers for twinning arrangements between a variety of workplaces and support groups in the Doncaster coalfield. The other main activity that the JCSG organised was picketing. Prior to the setting up of the support group only two miners from the three villages had been regular pickets. The picketing activities grew steadily from November onwards until in January and February there were problems in getting enough of the JCSG's eighty activists to go collecting outside Yorkshire as they were so heavily involved in picketing activities.

Over the last three months of the Strike the JCSG took care of the members of its strike 'community' far better than many pit villages did. It laid on a substantial hot meal every day, delivered a weekly supply of wood and distributed a large food parcel to every striker in the area. (The DHSS rules were circumvented by the requirement of a token 5 pence 'payment' for everything, with the money going to pay for a kids X-mas party and pantomime). When funds allowed, the JCSG distributed a cash donation along with the food parcels and also ran a special hardship fund. It also maintained six cars and the van on the road. (These were used for picketing in the morning, distributing wood/food during the day, and taking people to political or trade union meetings or demonstrations.)

Occasionally political speakers and socialist theatre groups were brought down to the support group or the support group taken to see them (so, for example, a 25-strong trip was organised by the JCSG to a Paul Foot meeting in Doncaster) By Christmas, the support group was sending out its rank and file

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members to speak at political, trade union and other support group meetings. Over the Christmas holidays it supplied all its strikers with the standard weekly food parcel; a special 'X-Mas Hamper' food parcel and a £10 cash donation. There was a party for 160 kids plus a trip to the pantomime, plus three big X-Mas presents for each child, one from the JCSG, one from the *Holborn, Finchley & St. Pancras Support Group* (who attended the party en masse) and one from the *Confederation Generale du Travailleurs* in France.

The level of activities in these non-mining villages around Armthorpe were maintained till the end of the Strike. Despite their increasing financial commitments (for example, they spent £110 taking out a half-page advert in reply to those being placed in the local press by working miners committees), the JCSG discovered they had accumulated £3,400 in their bank account. After a major discussion it was agreed that the bank deposit should be reduced and limited to £1,400 (two weeks average outlay) with the remaining £2,000 being donated to other support groups that needed the money more urgently. [42]

Extention of Community - 'Twinning'

The strengthening and closing ranks of the local village community was also accompanied by a strengthening of the ties with outside groups of supporters. As the pit villages became increasingly resourceless (in the material sense of savings, money in circulation) and the NUM's own funds became more depleted and more difficult to administer, 'twinning' emerged as a major source of welfare and sustenance. [43]

The Armthorpe branch, probably the first to set up a fundraising and finance committee and one of the first to send out fundraising teams into non-mining areas, was also one of the earliest and most vociferous advocates of twinning. Anticipating a long strike, they organised regular and frequent visits to their old contacts as well as trying to extend their fundraising circuit. Almost inevitably this developed into a network of twinning

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arrangements. Although the NUM leadership at area and national levels were opposed to these independent 'rank and file' relationships for a variety of reasons, twinning met too many fundamental needs for its rapid growth to be prevented. [44]

The miners' cause was, in their eyes, self evidently just and worthy of total support from other working class people. Their treatment at the hands of the Tory government, media, police, courts and DHSS seemed to make their right to this solidarity even more unquestionable. They were going through hell in order to prevent the Thatcher Government destroying the most essential 'rights', not just of miners, but of working people in general. And yet they found themselves almost totally isolated, offered half-hearted and unreliable promises by the TUC leadership, accompanied by similarly half-hearted and conditional support by the national Labour Party leadership. [45]

On its own, this would not have been so important, but it seemed to have a major impact on the majority of workers perception of the dispute. Instead of their fellow trade unionists being prepared to deliver the industrial solidarity that only a majority can provide, they seemed content to acquiesce in the isolation of the miners, choosing to believe the media/government/police version of events. The strike activists felt a passionate need to break through this barrier of misinformation that had been constructed around their dispute, to explain the justness of their cause and to make the plight of the mining villages known to workers outside. With 'normal' channels of communication closed to them, they had to construct their own. 'Twinning' was a key initiative and, even if it involved them in a solidarity relationship with only a minority of workers, it still constituted the most effective challenge to the government's policy of isolation.

Due to the strength of Armthorpe's striking community it became one of the major pioneers of twinning. Its fundraising teams usually included

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experienced, politically-aware cadre, confident in their own record of class solidarity.^[46] In many instances they could afford to refuse twinning relationships on Armthorpe's behalf and arrange them for villages and branches in greater need. Armthorpe's progressive politics, its high level of strike involvement, its comprehensive and caring welfare organisation, all encouraged twinning on a large scale. The collective physical resources of the community, the Welfare, Tadcaster, Social Club etc. made it possible for financial solidarity to be reciprocated with hospitality.

Outsiders were welcomed at the Welfare, shown round the kitchen, strike centre and woodyard, then sheltered and fed in one of the striker's homes.^[47] Then invariably they were taken out early in the morning to experience at first hand life on the picket lines.^[48] Twinning often involved a vigorous two-way traffic between the local populations, with mini bus and even coachloads of miners and supporters visiting each other. This involved a wide range of new experiences, a broadening of horizons for all concerned, but especially the coalfield women (see Chapter Eight). A 'twinning culture' emerged, with relationships acknowledged by impromptu ceremonies, social evenings or the presentation of symbolic tokens; miners lamps, plaques or badges.

The Last Three Months

These strategies did a great deal to strengthen the strike community in and around Armthorpe. There were relatively few people who broke the strike at Markham Main, and of the thirty three scabs that were recorded, none of them came from Armthorpe itself (although there were three or four miners living in the village who broke the Strike at other pits).^[49] November and December saw the sequestration of all the national NUM's funds, the death of David Wilkie the Merthyr taxi driver while ferrying a scab to work under police escort and the increasing isolation of the NUM in the official labour movement. With

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little sign of an immediate end to the Strike, the Armthorpe activists were haunted by the prospect of a cold, hungry and isolated Christmas on strike.

The reality was very different. The local activists made plans to provide a decent level of festivities, while the outside support community attempted to supply the necessary material resources. The result was, in the words of one woman activist, 'the best Christmas we ever had' (Armthorpe:17W). There was a series of Christmas parties, discos and presents for the children of strikers. There were extra Christmas food parcels and several substantial meals climaxing in a Christmas dinner that cost thousands of pounds and was largely paid for by Howard Hardy, the local baker. As well as gifts and supplies there was a wave of outside supporters, with mini buses and coaches being organised from London and elsewhere to join the celebrations in Armthorpe.

One of the reasons why Christmas was so enjoyable was that it was the result of the cooperative effort by the grass roots members of the two strike-based communities. By working hard together they were able to achieve their 'goal', in that they were able to control the kind of Christmas they had. But they had very little control over the industrial/political situation that faced them as the Strike entered its eleventh month in January 1985. Peter Heathfield's confirmation of Peter Walker's confident New Years statement, that there would be no power cuts in 1985, caused severe demoralisation among many strike activists.

The NCB's strategy of concentrating their strikebreaking efforts in the most vulnerable areas began to pay off and brought no serious response from the NUM at national or area level.^[50] For the first time Scargill ceased to call for victory and talked of the need to stay out in order to reach a 'sensibly negotiated solution'.^[51] Other NUM officials began to campaign for

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an immediate return to work without any settlement or reinstatement of the miners who had been sacked during the course of the Strike.

In areas like Armthorpe and the JCSG villages, where funds were made available for picketing and other activities, the level of strikebreaking remained low, but in other areas there was a significant crumbling of the resistance. [52] Attempts by Heathfield and Ned Smith to reach a compromise settlement were quashed by Ian MacGreggor who demanded 'a written indication that the union is prepared to help resolve the problem of uneconomic capacity'. The government backed this 'unconditional surrender' approach, and, in turn, the courts moved into action. A high court judge, Mr. Justice Scott granted a group of strikebreakers an injunction banning mass picketing at five South Wales and eleven Yorkshire pits. Writing the Government's picketing guidelines into law, he ruled that there could be no more than six pickets at any one colliery.

Resisting the Courts

The severest blow to the strikers' morale was struck, however, on 12 February 1985 when the Yorkshire Area executive voted to comply with the High Court ruling. The Area strike coordinating committee was disbanded and branch leaderships were instructed to abide by the 6-man-only picket rule.

In Armthorpe it was the Womens Action Group that led the resistance. Taking advantage of their independence from the NUM, they organised women pickets on the pit and then called for a mass demonstration/picket outside the pit gates at Markham Main. (See Appendix 14) They lined up an impressive array of speakers, covered Armthorpe and neighbouring villages with leaflets and posters, and invited delegations from Harworth and elsewhere to attend. Over 2,000 people attended the rally and joined the march around Armthorpe. The police, who formally had been given only fifteen minutes notice by the organiser of the rally, Aggie Currie, reacted by sending in riot squads, making

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four arrests and attempting to arrest Aggie's 54-year old mother, Mrs Jean Wiley, who was holding the Women's Action Group banner. The police were eventually forced to retreat and the rally was held, delaying the departure of the scab bus and eventually forcing it to leave by the side gate. Morale received a major boost and the level of picketing picked up again with the women providing a solid core of regular pickets.

Ending the Strike

Armthorpe activists lobbied hard against the movement for a return to work without an agreement. When the Special Delegate Conference (Sunday 3 March) decided there should be a return to work on Tuesday 5th, the strikers were angry and despondent. Sections of the Strike community who had, initially, not been involved were even more resistant to a return (see Chapter Seven). The core of socialists (some of whom had just come back from their second fundraising expedition in West Germany) decided to press for the branch to uphold a previous resolution, insisting on the reinstatement of all sacked NUM members before any return to work could take place.

On Monday the branch committee met and decided that they would recommend that the strike continue until they won reinstatement for their twelve sacked members. Later that evening, after a full discussion the recommendation was put to a 900-strong emergency branch meeting. It was carried by a large majority with only 40 voting against. The meeting also decided that it would not limit itself to a passive strike, but go out and picket the rest of the Yorkshire coalfield (all of which, bar Hatfield, had voted to return the following day). Teams of pickets were organised and destinations were agreed for the following morning. Overnight the socialist and rank and file networks were used to forewarn militants at other Yorkshire pits. In the early hours of the morning, twelve Socialist Workers Party members and supporters from the

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Kent coalfield arrived. (Kent, along with Scotland, had voted to stay on strike till reinstatement was guaranteed.

At 4 o'clock that morning, twenty two cars left Armthorpe, linked up with two from Hatfield and put pickets on at fifteen Yorkshire pits. They were highly successful in that around a third of the Yorkshire NUM membership refused to cross the picket lines, but there were harrowing scenes of disunity and despair which convinced the pickets that they could not hope to turn the Yorkshire coalfield on their own. That evening Hatfield held another meeting at which Monday night's 60-40% vote to stop out was reversed. Pickets were maintained at Markham Main, but another branch meeting on Thursday 7 March voted for a return to work the following Monday 11 March 1985.

Rather than return to work piecemeal, shift by shift, it was decided to stage a symbolic, united march-back on Friday 8th. Once again the strength of the local strike community was revealed. All sections participated. Working members of the Womens Action Group took the day off in order to march back with the Markham miners, striking COSA members and the young unemployed. Old age pensioners were accompanied by school students from Armthorpe Comprehensive who had staged a one day strike. Sections of the support community attended alongside the local strike community. There were miners from Hatfield, Harworth and other pits, delegations from various womens support groups, miners support groups and political parties. The village came to a complete standstill as an estimated 2,500 - 3,000 marched out of the Welfare's grounds onto the high street. There were no police to be seen anywhere as they marched down to the baker's shop by the roundabout. There they stood in tribute to Howard Hardy who had literally bankrupted himself in support of the miners cause. [53] They then marched back up the high street to the pit gates. Except for a total of thirty two scabs, the 1,500 strong workforce had remained solid for 52 weeks.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have described how the political and trade union traditions in Armthorpe encouraged a certain type of Strike experience for the village population. I have illustrated how the presence of a core of politically conscious and active cadre among the miners leadership encouraged a high level of preparation and early activity, placing the branch in a position where it could effect the nature of the national dispute.

Armthorpe's pit political strategy of bypassing 'official' channels and appealing for grass roots solidarity via face to face communication, while achieving major successes, [54] nevertheless faced serious obstacles. A strategy that put a premium on speed and widespread impact required a large amount of preparation and organisation, neither of which were in plentiful supply, even in the Doncaster coalfield. Neither was the Nottinghamshire coalfield, with its strong traditions of conciliatory 'mineworker politics' an ideal setting for a pit political initiative. (In this, the intervention of area and some branch officials were both true to form and exceptionally damaging). It was these factors which allowed the state to mobilize its well-prepared resources and intervene in order to prevent the face to face communication that the Armthorpe strategy relied on.

I have illustrated how the government's success in isolating the miners, that is cutting them off from access to a range of 'normal' social relationships, had the effect of forcing them to rely on local support. As in previous protracted disputes, the miners' union tended to fall back on the collective resources of the local village, which it had done so much to build in the past. The established institutions (Welfare Institute, pit shop, *Home Coal Scheme*) were put to full use, but under the exceptional circumstances, were insufficient to meet the challenge. In order to safeguard the central workplace and union, source of the majority of power points in the locality,

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new institutions and networks were needed. Unlike the old institutions, whose origins in workplace trade unionism often implied a limited access for non-miners, the new institutions were aimed at encouraging the wider involvement of different sections of the village population.

The participation of significant numbers of non-miners; women, youth, tradespeople and old age pensioners in strike activity led to a change in the nature of the 1984/85 Strike. It became not merely an industrial dispute but a *community* strike. Three factors were important in facilitating this wider community involvement; the increasingly repressive activities of the state, the village's political structures and traditions, and the sustained activities of a core of politically-aware socialists in the NUM branch. These factors allowed the breaking down of everyday divisions based on gender, wage and market relationships. By confronting sections of the village population with stark political choices while insisting that the NUM became more 'accessible' to non-members, they ensured that the Strike became the focus for local political mobilisation unprecedented since 1926.

The parallels with the seven-month lockout of that year are remarkable. As in that dispute, government efforts to dissuade the village population from supporting 'their' union only encouraged them to adopt more active political roles. In combining their August 'takeover' of the pit with an aggressive 'occupation' of the pit village, the police were, in effect, acknowledging that the 'community' had taken on a key strike role. Their tactics, designed to intimidate and brutalise the population (as they had the miners at Orgreave) had the opposite effect of increasing resilience and making it even more a 'community strike'.

There was another option, favoured by the government and anticipated by most onlookers (although given the eventual length of the dispute, this is easily forgotten). The miners could have responded to the curtailment of their

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civil liberties and inadequate levels of solidarity from other workers by learning the lessons of 'new realism', retreating into sectional isolation and returning to work after a few weeks. It was in combatting this sectional isolation that the organised socialist core proved vital. Not only did they argue (successfully) for miners to encourage other village inhabitants to become involved, but they encouraged a fuller involvement of 'outside' trade unionists and supporters. The importance of their pioneering role in linking local and class-based support communities is difficult to overestimate. Whereas the government strategy was designed to narrow down the village population's options, to atomise and impoverish individual miners and their dependents, the socialists constantly encouraged the widening of people's horizons, the boosting of collective resources and the extension of the 'community of struggle' to involve wider and wider layers of people.

The Strike-based community at Thurcroft, another South Yorkshire pit village has been described as more of a 'series of concentric 'communities' differentiated by degree of commitment' (Gibbon, 1986:22). For all those involved in the Armthorpe strike community, it involved a suspension of everyday activities and a questioning of previous attitudes. For those forming the 'most committed' core, it involved a range of new activities, experiences and relationships which challenged previously accepted attitudes and roles and which therefore led to significant changes in the local community.

In the next four chapters I look at the reality of 'community': the life experiences of different sections of the village population in the aftermath of the Strike. I investigate whether the ending of the Strike led to a total disappearance of the Strike-based community, with its egalitarianism, openness and strength. I investigate whether local connections with the class-based support community have been severed and whether the radical Strike culture has left any lasting impression on the political attitudes of the village population. Finally I enquire whether the activities of groups of

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people in the course of the year-long dispute have led to any significant change in their activities, roles, relationships and status in the village's local social system. Has there been a return to the more archetypal, pre-Strike, pit 'community', or has the pledge of many women activists during the strike, that 'things will never be the same again', been sustained?

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FOOTNOTES:

1. Snap time is the mid-shift food and rest break, 'snap' being the food itself. Miners in South Yorkshire had resisted NCB attempts to manipulate shift and snap times in order to minimise production losses caused by the overtime ban.
2. The validity of this belief was illustrated by the initial euphoria of the Cortonwood workforce on hearing the 1 March 1984 closure announcement:
'All the men were really happy about it, singing and dancing, they couldn't wait, saying "Let's get the bloody pit closed, let's go to better pit.'
Eyewitness account in Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanas (1986:67).
3. Walsh, who was seen as the 'anti-overtime ban' candidate, only lost the election by 3,615 votes, a tiny margin. See Michael Crick (1985:97).
4. It was the industrial struggles at Harworth in the late 1930's that eventually forced the Spencer union to dissolve itself and rejoin the Miners Federation of Great Britain See Chapter Three.
5. Paul Whetton's insistence on communicating with his members eventually cost him his job. Paul, still branch secretary and steadily rebuilding the N.U.M. membership in a pit that had been designated 'UDM' by the N.C.B., was sacked in 1986 for putting up a notice informing his NUM members of the time of their next branch meeting.
6. The miners involved were incensed at the crude censorship of an exceedingly newsworthy story which gave the lie to the others concerning picket line violence and intimidation. (Armthorpe:48,79M)
7. The local newspaper gave the following list of picket numbers:
Ollerton 120, Gedling 90, Calverton 60, Newstead 45, Cotgrave 40, Bilsthorpe 40, Bevercoates 30, Mansfield 30, Sutton 22, Thoresby 20, Silverhill 13, Harworth 12, Annesley 12, Linby 7, Bentick 6, Blidworth 6, Rufford 6, Welbeck 5, Babbington 2, Moorgreen 0, Pye Hill 0, Hucknall 0, Bestwood 0, Clipstone 0, Sherwood 0. *Nottinghamshire Evening Post* 14th March 1984. Nevertheless the NCB was forced to report that these small groups of picket had turned the afternoon shift back at nine collieries, while others were 'undermanned'.
See Callinicos and Simons (1985:53).
8. The Coventry branch of the Socialist Workers Party had been leafletting the pit explaining the issues and calling for solidarity. When the Yorkshire miners arrived a phone call caused the branch meeting to be cancelled and the whole branch to arrive to support them. They had some impact. Nine months later one of the SWP women was approached in a local pub by the wife of a striking miner, who said, 'You probably don't remember me, but I just wanted to thank you for explaining why we should support the Strike that night the Yorkshire pickets arrived.' (Keresley Interview 3W)
9. This was graphically illustrated by the police responsible for establishing the roadblock at the Dartford Tunnel under the Thames. On Sunday 18th a police spokesman contradicted John Moyle a Kent NUM branch officer who said he'd been threatened with arrest if he left the county, 'They were stopped, but not threatened with arrest' (*Guardian* Monday 19 March 1984) By the following day, the Assistant Chief Constable of Kent was confident enough to claim that it was 'fair' to tell Kent miners that if they moved out of the county, they would be in danger of arrest. (*Guardian* Tuesday 20 March 1984)
10. The adoption of this policy by the Armthorpe branch was largely due to the insistence of the fundraising and finance committee who, as members or

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- sympathizers of the Socialist Workers Party had a principled commitment to it. (Armthorpe: 38, 61, 73M).
11. An extended tour of the U.S.A. by Steve Shukla, a young, socialist miner proved the only exception to the renewal rule. (Armthorpe: 73, 75M)
 12. According to *the Guardian* Wednesday 20th June 1984, Dave Barker ended his appeal, "This is a common fight and a class struggle." He won a standing ovation from the ISTC delegates.
 13. 'Appomatox or Civil War?' in *The Economist*, 27 May 1978.
 14. The change in name suggests a shift in political awareness among the leading members of the women's group. All were very definite about the name being 'Womens Action Group' and none mentioned the change in their interviews but later I came across photographs which showed the old name inscribed on the banner. (Armthorpe: 1, 3, 4, 14, 18W)
 15. It appears that although Hatfield was the first pit to set up a kitchen in the Doncaster area, they got the inspiration from Keresley, where the isolation of the strikers was combined with a local, radical tradition linking the village to the relatively strong labour organisations in Coventry. Keresley's early initiatives mirrors the process in the 1972 strike, when the more isolated coalfields were the first to set up kitchens. (the *Times*, 16/2/72, p 4)
 16. Several women pickets mentioned the commanding officer's instructions on these all-women pickets, "Treat 'em like men!"
(Armthorpe: 3, 4W and Thorne: 2, 9W)
 17. For example, on Thursday 4th May, *the Guardian* reported that the previous day 700 police had escorted 60 private contractors' lorries into the Ravenscraig plant from 50 miles away, with police outnumbering N. U. M. pickets three to one.
 18. One indicator of low morale was a reduction in the numbers turning up for picketing. (Armthorpe: 48, 52, 77M)
 19. One of the pickets suggested the leading police vans were doing over 40 m. p. h. as they drove through the picket line (Armthorpe: 52M). The official enquiry carried out at the request of the South Yorkshire County Council by an Assistant Chief Constable, T. Watson, and completed 13 months after the event, merely suggested, 'There was a small number of pickets at the entrance, but no problems encountered.'
 20. *Enquiry into Incidents at Stainforth and Armthorpe on 21st August 1984* 25th September 1985, South Yorkshire County Council (SYCC) Police Committee. p 9.
 21. *Enquiry into Incidents at Stainforth and Armthorpe on 21st August 1984* 25th September 1985, South Yorkshire County Council Police Committee. p 8 & p 13.
 22. *Enquiry into Incidents at Stainforth and Armthorpe on 21st August 1984* 25th September 1985, South Yorkshire County Council Police Committee. p 14.
 23. The police explained this decision by citing an NCB message at 6.26 a.m. that no Markham miners were 'attending for work' that day. 'Under normal circumstances Mr. Hinchcliffe might have left the Unit *in situ* but, following his overall low profile policy, he decided that if no police officers were seen to be present and no workers reporting for duty then there would be no reason for a build up of demonstrators at the colliery entrance.

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'Enquiry into Incidents at Stainforth and Armthorpe on 21st August 1984', 25th September 1985, South Yorkshire County Council Police Committee. p 15.

24. The police enquiry suggested that the vehicles were 'forcibly' taken from South Yorkshire County Council employees engaged on road maintenance at Armthorpe by a number of men in possession of iron bars.' All the eyewitnesses interviewed stressed that this was totally untrue, but the pickets automatically agreed to relieve their county council colleagues of any 'responsibility' for their loss of vehicles. The SYCC vehicles were eventually returned undamaged.
25. The NCB told the police that the property damage came to £79,000. This was compounded three days later on Friday 24th, when the supports carrying Markham Main's power supply were destroyed at an (N.C.B.) estimated cost of £3,000. *Enquiry into Incidents at Stainforth and Armthorpe on 21st August 1984* 25th September 1985, SYCC Police Committee. p 16 & 19
26. *Enquiry into Incidents at Stainforth and Armthorpe on 21st August 1984* 25 September 1985, South Yorkshire County Council Police Committee. p 15.
27. These round shields are small, similar in shape to those used by Roman gladiators. Used offensively, their edge can inflict major injury. For example it was this weapon that Arthur Scargill claimed had concussed him at Orgreave.
28. The Police flatly denied that any of their men had worn these uniforms. This was disproved by the photographic evidence which escaped the 'attention' of the police and two years later a police enquiry into the Hatfield 'invasion', executed the previous day, admitted that many of those policemen guilty of 'overreacting' (i.e. assaulting arrested miners while in custody etc.) had indeed removed their identification numbers for 'safekeeping'. Disciplinary action could not, of course, be taken against any of the offenders as none of them had been conclusively identified. Doncaster Star 15th August 1986. Several eyewitnesses claimed to have recognised RAF personnel from the nearby airfield at Finningley, dressed in the police riot uniforms and participating in the police operation. (Armthorpe Interviews)
29. Many of the Armthorpe strike activists remain convinced that there were no 'genuine' scabs going into the pit on 21 and 22 of August, these being dummy runs for the police. A careful reading of the police enquiry report lends credibility to this theory. This suggests that, at 6.26 a.m. an alleged NCB message that no 'working miners' wanted to attend for work, was the reason for the police 'withdrawal' from Armthorpe. A second, contradictory message at 7.36 a.m. was given as the reason for the major, obviously pre-planned police operation which followed less than forty five minutes later!
The first strikebreaker to be identified was David Johnson a maintenance fitter on the paddies (underground trains). Prior to starting work at Markham in 1981 he had been a corporal in the RAF at the nearby base of Finningley. He was in his early 40's, and lived in a three-bedroomed, mock-Tudor detached house in the rural village of Belton, 11½ miles north east of the pit and well outside the coalfield. Prior to starting work at Armthorpe, he had registered for emigration to Canada with his wife, who continued to work at RAF Finningley.
30. The 'Deputies' Club' otherwise known as the 'pit club' due to its situation inside the pit yard, was used by the Armthorpe dancing club and pigeon club as well as NACODS members and other members of the pit's workforce. Several interviewees commented on how they could never put out of their mind the use it had been put to during the strike or the filthy state it had been left in by the police on their departure. (Armthorpe: , 81, 85 & 86SC)

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31. One aspect of this harassment that several people referred to, was the sustained attempts by the police to get information out of the local kids concerning local strike leaders, who had been responsible for certain incidents etc. This manipulation of young children caused a lot of anger among their parents. (Armthorpe: 1, 3W & 60M)
32. This belated 'reprisal' against the supermarket that assisted the police on the morning of the 22 August was cited in the police enquiry report as the reason for the openly hostile attitude of all the other shops to the police, which they obviously felt obliged to explain. So the report suggests, 'Shopkeepers in Armthorpe also received threats of violence and damage should police officers be served. One instruction passed to the shopkeepers by unknown callers was to place notices in the windows that police officers of visiting PSU's would not be served. One shop that refused to carry out this instruction was VG Stores which has two premises in Armthorpe. Both premises were damaged on 23 August at a total cost of £1,400. On 9 December, a 22 year old unemployed Armthorpe man admitted responsibility for one of the offences, his reason being the shop served police officers during the dispute. He appeared before Doncaster Magistrates Court on 11 March 1985 and was sentenced to three months imprisonment.
Enquiry into Incidents at Stainforth and Armthorpe on 21st August 1984 25 September 1985, South Yorkshire County Council Police Committee. p 19.
33. The demand for a public enquiry was never met. A local county councillor, Mick Varley, engaged in a long campaign to have the police activity investigated and, frustrated by the British legal system, attempted to have the events of 22 August investigated by the European Court. Only in 1987 did he give up the struggle to get the case heard. The practical and financial obstacles were, of course, enormous, but he claims that the main reason for him ending his campaign was the fact that, after the Government's winding up of the South Yorkshire County Council in 1986, he would have been forced to take the case to the European Court as an 'aggrieved individual', rather than as an elected representative of an 'aggrieved community'. (Armthorpe: 92SC)
34. Armthorpe's Senior Citizens had sometimes used the Pit Club for their larger social events or fundraisers. After the police invasion, they tended to use the Welfare Institute or the Social Clubs (Armthorpe: 81, 87SC)
35. This is not to suggest there was total harmony between the all the branch leadership and the WAG. Several of the women complained that certain members of the NUM leadership used to act 'clever' in the joint meetings, as though they resented the fact that the women were doing so well. This was especially so in the last three months when the NUM were severely restricted in their activities. Although several of the NUM leadership acknowledged that there were problems, only one confirmed the women's version directly by suggesting: 'I disagreed with the formation of the separate women's section. Everyone should be accountable to the branch, but they didn't even have to disclose how much they had in their funds. They *did* do a good job, an excellent job, but they started to take over everything, which was wrong.'
(Armthorpe Interviews)
36. As pointed out in Chapter Two, many women pitworkers joined the MFGB unions in the early part of this century, and therefore women were not excluded from the NUM as such. It was made clear by the branch officers that the women members of Armthorpe NUM were welcome to all branch meetings and activities. However, like most other unions, the NUM constitution does not allow for any major involvement in its meetings or activities by non-members. Only in areas where special, non-official, 'open' meetings were called did women supporters achieve 'direct involvement' alongside the miners. This

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phenomenon was largely restricted to the strike 'communities' in minority areas, one example being Keresley, Coventry. (Keresley 2M, 3W)

37. In answer to the interview question, 'What would you say was notable about the strike, its strengths and weaknesses?' 46 percent of the miners specifically cited women or their activity as a major strength, with several more citing the unity/'pulling together' of the local population.
38. On some of the fundraising expeditions, the women operated independently from the men. On others they worked together. This applied to work in Britain and abroad. So the Armthorpe Women's Action Group arranged and carried out an extensive fundraising tour in Denmark, involving two of their members. Whereas Sue Unsworth, one of the canteen workers at Markham played a key role in the second major German fundraising expedition organised by the NUM.
39. An underground miner who had been bussed in, immediately regretted his decision and sat in the office all day waiting to be bussed out (and therefore was not identified as a scab). He went into the union office shortly after the Strike had ended and 'confessed' to the branch officials. The issue was taken to the next full branch meeting where the branch committee recommended forgiveness and won a clear majority. (Armthorpe: 48, 52 73M)
40. According to a leading socialist advocate of *the Tannoy*, some of the branch committee members expressed a fear that the newsletter would be too effective in its aims. It was suggested that the strike funds would immediately be exhausted if everyone discovered and demanded all the services *the Tannoy* intended to advertise. The socialist's response was, 'If we're going to starve, let's all know that we're starving together!' He further suggested that the adoption of the former, semi-secretive attitude caused major problems in several Yorkshire pits. (Armthorpe: 48M)
41. They eventually discovered there were over two hundred N. U. M. members living in the area. Of these, nine or ten were already crossing the picket lines in mid-November. (Armthorpe: 73M)
42. £400 was given to Hatfield, £400 to Hickleton, £350 to Armthorpe, and £200 each to Rossington, Edlington and Highfields. *JCSG Minutes 1984/85*.
43. In the *Labour Research Department* survey of financial and other solidarity with the miners, a majority of all the support groups were involved in twinning relationships. Of the 148 groups that were twinned, 36 percent acknowledged there could be disadvantages alongside the advantages. The remaining 64 percent only reported advantages. This opinion seems to be supported by the large proportion of funds that were raised on the basis of twinning relationships with individual N. U. M. branches or women's groups. '*Solidarity with the Miners*' (1985) Labour Research Department, London.
44. The N. U. M. area officials who were often very hostile to direct twinning relationships could have a variety of motives for this attitude. The police interference with twinning relationships was of a different order. A fascinating account of the opposition encountered from both quarters by some of the earliest pioneers of twinning relationships in Nottinghamshire is given in Lynn Beaton (1985) *Shifting Horizons* Canary Press, London.
45. Kinnock's position is perhaps best illustrated by a speech he made in parliament on the 13th March 84. He thoroughly condemned violence: 'in pursuit of industrial disputes even when it occurs among people who feel impotent in the face of the destruction of their jobs, their industry and

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their communities.' *Hansard* 13th March 1984. A comparison between Kinnock's role and that of Ramsay MacDonald in 1926 is provided by Howell (1985:181)

46. An example was the experience in Berlin where supporters of the Irish Republican struggle were contrasting the year-long tribulations of the miners with the centuries of oppression of the Irish. Rather than being put off by their contribution, members of the delegation made a passionate speech against the imperialist presence in the North and explained Armthorpe's record on the issue. (Armthorpe: 48, 79M)
47. One of the problems in inviting people to visit a strikebound community was the severe lack of basic resources in the strikers homes. The strike centre made an immediate payment to cover the extra cost of food etc. whenever it asked a household to put visitors up. (Armthorpe: 1W & 77M)
48. The role of twinning in breaking down the boundaries placed around the miners' struggle was clearly revealed by these trips. An example was the case of four leading shop stewards from British Aerospace, Bristol, who went picketing with the Armthorpe miners at Rossington and were horrified by their experience of police brutality in and around the village. Immediately afterwards, they insisted on describing their encounter to the proprietor of a baker's shop in Edenthorpe, not previously a supporter of the miners. Their story helped transform her attitude and she soon became an enthusiastic supporter of the Joint Communities Support Group. (Armthorpe: 73)
49. As if to underly the traditional identification with pit and village, many of those interviewed would claim proudly, 'We had no scabs in the village', meaning Markham Main N. U. M. strikebreakers. Of those identified as strikebreakers at other pits only Walter Sharp remained resident two years after the end of the Strike.
50. That is at the official level. An *unofficial* rank and file grouping was quietly established in January 1985 at a meeting in Northern College, Barnsley. The aim of the grouping was to find ways of stopping, or slowing, the drift back to work, with much of their activity centring on the production and distribution of an agitational news sheet, the *Miners' Strike News*. The leading strike activists at Armthorpe were heavily involved in the establishment of this group, as they were in its re-establishment as the *Campaign Group* in the Strike's aftermath.
51. This was in the latter half of January as he spoke at a series of rallies in the North East. See Callinicos and Simons (1985:206).
52. The *Financial Times* illustrated this phenomenon in a survey of the coalfields in early February, where they had to acknowledge that there were 'substantial pockets' that were still 'nearly 100 per cent solid'. *Financial Times* 6th February 1985.
53. Howard Hardy had already received a visit from the baillifs and was due in court just after the Strike ended. He was convinced that his prosecution over a £3,600 1984 non-payment of tax was due to his support for the miners. Although he attempted to keep it secret, the Armthorpe miners found out about his court appearance, and the NUM branch used their remaining funds to pay off his tax debt. (Armthorpe: 52, 77M & 103S)
54. Questioning of the success of flying picketing usually centres on allegations that there was widespread intimidation of 'Notts' miners which resulted in a heavy 'backlash' vote against joining the Strike on 16 March. These allegations usually rest heavily on unsubstantiated accounts given by the police, who were, as was seen at Bevercotes, often engaged in a programme

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of keeping the pickets out of earshot of the local miners! Those that suggest that Yorkshire flying pickets were to blame for the 'Notts' vote ignore three important factors:

- a) Although only 26 percent of Notts miners voted for the strike, this represented a 7 percent increase from the 1983 vote, a more significant improvement than in Cumberland (- 20%), South Derbyshire (+1%), Lancashire (+2%) and the Midlands (+6%) areas where there was no major intervention by outside pickets.
- b) There is no evidence to suggest that those pit workforces which had to 'endure' regular and 'boisterous' picketing were less likely to support the strike. In fact there is evidence to support the opposite view. Pits like Harworth, Bevercotes and Ollerton, regularly 'hit' by Yorkshire pickets all ranked among the most heavily strikebound pits in Nottinghamshire throughout 1984/85
- c) The effect of the dynamic and determined picketing on other traditionally militant, but severely demoralised coalfields, such as Scotland and South Wales. Alan Baker, NUM lodge secretary at Oakdale, South Wales, suggested:
'We had had the various national ballots and we kept getting turned down. Then when in 1983 we made an attempt with Lewis Merthyr, it didn't come off, there was a ballot and that was it, the end of it. There was a strong feeling in South Wales that there was no way we were going to take any lead in the future on pit closures. Then when Yorkshire took off that was a strong argument that we'd better go now because if Yorkshire's going and we don't, then we're finished....It suggested to our men that if they didn't stand up and fight now, they were all going to go this, together with the union taking a strong lead, led to a position where enough of us made up our minds to come out on strike.' ('Strike to the Finish', 1985)

Chapter Six

THE MINER AT WORK

'to understand the basic structure of social relations in a working community, we have first and foremost to study the work itself in some detail....for a man's [sic] attitude to his fellows grows, at least in part, out of the terms and conditions under which he works.'

(Evans, 1976)

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the work situation of the miner in the first two years after the Strike. If, as George Ewart Evans suggests, social relationships are, in part, structured and develop out of the 'terms and conditions' of employment, the post-Strike experience at the central workplace can be expected to have at least some impact on the local community in Armthorpe. Further, the miners' Strike experience and the 'Strike community' it encouraged is also likely to have an impact on the work situation and thereby contribute to the definition of relations at work. I suggest there has been a shift in the balance of forces that define work relations, evidenced in the composition of the workforce, the patterns of work and the organisation of the union.

I begin the chapter with two underground miners' accounts of a 'typical' working day, before concentrating my attention on the main changes that have occurred at Markham Main since the Strike. I suggest there have been some significant changes; in the pace and organisation of work, in the relations between miner and fellow miner, mineworker and supervisor, and mineworker and management. I describe how, in order to establish a higher degree of control of the labour process, senior management were forced to

dismantle many of the established underground relationships, local agreements and indulgency patterns that existed prior to the Strike.

A similar disruption of more concilliatory, cooperative relations was also witnessed in the industrial relations situation above ground. In their determination to pioneer a fundamental change in authority relations, the NCB adopted a variety of tactics. Some reflected those adopted during the 1984/85 Strike; an unremitting emphasis on the need for economic efficiency, the pursuance of an aggressive, managerial stance at the expense of the close, corporatist relationship with the NUM, the establishment of direct channels of communication with individual miners. Others harked back to a less confrontational era; the encouraging of 'mineworker politics' among local officials, a stress on the need to achieve reconciliation and isolate militants from the pit 'community', a renegotiation of local productivity incentives in the place of national wage settlements which the NUM could not be allowed to negotiate.^[1] I suggest the NCB's determination to institutionalise the post Strike 'balance of power' was illustrated by their espousal of the 'Wheeler Plan' and their unilateral introduction of a new grievance and disciplinary procedure.

I then describe the major changes in the composition of the Markham workforce. Due to a series of interrelated factors, the workforce has been transformed in terms of age, length of employment, origins and place of residence. Redundancy, early retirement and sackings have seen a major reduction in the number of Armthorpe inhabitants working at the pit, with a proportion of them being replaced by transferees. I describe the difficulties experienced by these transferees, their 'impact' on the Markham workforce and the processes by which they were incorporated into the 'Armthorpe tradition'.

These changes had an impact on the local union organisation, both above and below ground. I describe the significant changes in the branch

leadership and the way in which the new leadership tended to be elected on the basis of their Strike role rather than the size of their sectional base. I describe how the branch has responded to management initiatives in the aftermath of the Strike, and some of the local strategies it has adopted in attempting to cope with the NUM's overall weakness. Finally I examine how well the Armthorpe branch has coped with the influx of transferees, and the undermining of its traditional membership base in the village.

The Underground Work Situation

Dennis and his colleagues, in observing that the whole of a miner's existence was dominated by his work experience, pointed out that one of the reasons for this was that 'the miner does a job in conditions which are still worse than those in any other British industry'. They suggested that 'it is invariably said by miners that pit work can never be other than an unpleasant, dirty, dangerous, and difficult job' (Dennis, Henriques, Slaughter, 1969:38). Although virtually all of the the Armthorpe miners tended to confirm this in their interviews, it has to be pointed out that the different sections of the Markham Main workforce encounter very different experiences in their daily work routines. Perhaps the most obvious difference is between the underground and the surface workers, but there are also major differences between those miners who work at the face or 'inbye' and those who work 'outbye' at some distance from the face. This makes it difficult to describe the work routine for a 'typical' miner. There are however some similarities, one of the most important being the heavy physical nature of most jobs and the rotating shift pattern.

At Markham Main, the vast majority of underground miners have to work a (5 shift) week of 'days' (6.00 am - 1.15 pm), followed by a week of 'nights' (11 pm - 6.15 am), followed by a week of 'afters' (12.00 pm - 7.15 pm). Wayne, a development man, described a typical Monday shift on days:

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'I have to get up at about quarter to five, crawl out of bed and get up to the pit and have a sit and chat to friends about what's gone off over the weekend. Round about half past five, I go through get changed, pick me lamp and self rescuer up, and go down the shaft to get on the paddy, where I meet up with more of me mates. We have to travel a long way in, we get onto the job and find out what we're doing, whether its going to be a good shift or a bad shift.

I'm a 'big hitter', on development, making the roadways. Sometimes our job is to set rings, arch girders and legs, but development usually consists of making roadways and faces, heading 'em out ready for the face teams to do their job. It's hard work and dirty. We're carting steel about, 150 or 200 pound sections. At the moment we're going through three old faces, and the conditions we're working in are really appalling, cos water has been pumped into these faces for about twelve years, so we're getting wet through. Its caused a lot of problems for the lads, getting what we call 'swamp fever'. Some lads have got bad dermy [dermatitis] from the water, others, including me, have come out of the pit throwing up. Its pretty bad working in this old water and having it trickling down on you. There's a pump that's supposed to take out the bottom water, but I've been working in wellies rather than boots and sometimes the water's been over the top of them. We've got a major battle on our hands at the moment, trying to get concessions.

Anyway, despite this, at snap time we'll have a laugh and a joke. The guys I work with are all young chaps and we have a good laugh still. We always have our snap together. Five of us share a community flask; everybody takes it home one day a week and fills it up; with soup or something. After snap we carry on us work and try to get finished. If we can, we try and get a concessionary note to ride early, so we're away as soon as we can. Ride early, get out of the mine, shower and change. Some lads go back in the canteen, but I usually say goodbye and get off to have a cup of tea and something to eat at home. I don't tend to do a lot in the afternoons and mainly I stop in of an evening, watching TV or a video, I drop my girlfriend home and get to bed early, around ten or half past cos I'm usually dead tired.'

(Armthorpe: 49M)

Several miners pointed out that although there had been some improvements in underground transport systems and mechanisation, they still had not made mining an easy job. Steve, a 23 year-old underground backup man^[23] explained:

'Mining's still hard graft, shovelling and carrying heavy weights.... On our job at the moment we're unloading prepacks, packs of four rings what are all binded together. We have to put two of the rings onto three low loaders with accessories; struts, bolts, sheets, and take 'em length of the barrier gate, unload 'em and carry forward whatever they need for that shift.

In most places the gate's eighteen inches high. Where they've dinted it down, instead of bagging all the muck and bringing it out, they put in the sides, so you've just got the width of your rail and then the bags here, all the way in. It's just like that. It's like being a rabbit. And when the loaders come off the road, you can't get 'em back on, cos you've got no height to work with. So you've got to start pulling your knackers off in order to get 'em back on....You're living in a box, plus there's all the bust rings and sheets sticking out from the roof.

The job's bad but its not exceptional. The barrier gate in 38's were worse, 'cos it were that low in places, you had to take your battery and everything off and throw it all in front of you and crawl up it.. usually you wear it on your belt with your self rescuer, but even when you laid

down you couldn't get through, cos it used to catch on top of ring, so you had to take it off and throw it in front of you. ' (Armthorpe:64M)

It is partly due to these extreme conditions; confinement, water, hot and cold temperatures, dust, stale air, darkness and hazards that the miners place such store on their ability to control their working pattern, to negotiate compensatory agreements and to maintain a considerable indulgency pattern. [23] These are some of the areas that have come under attack in the aftermath of the Strike.

CHANGES IN THE WORK SITUATION

After any major strike defeat there tends to be a period of low morale among the majority of the workforce. Not surprisingly, given the exceptional length and bitterness of the 1984/85 dispute, it's defeat had a major impact on the Armthorpe miners' morale. The massive financial and other pressures that they brought with them to work made this a long-term problem. But the problem of low morale was aggravated by another; that of management's unilateral implementation of major changes in the working situation and practises. In discussing the Featherstone miners' working conditions, the authors of *Coal is our Life* suggested that 'all improvements are seen as the result of fighting by the trade union and the Labour Party, as gains only to be preserved by maintenance of the 'whip hand'' (Dennis, Henriques, Slaughter, 1969:78). The validity of this belief was shown in the aftermath of the 1984/85 Strike. Within weeks of the NUM's return to work without a national agreement, management informed the local union officials that they were no longer prepared to allow old 'custom and practice' to get in the way of increased efficiency and productivity. What was being challenged was not merely what Alvin Gouldner described as the local 'indulgency pattern', but a whole battery of agreements that, prior to the Strike, regulated the way in which the pit was run.

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Many of these agreements were purely verbal, the much cherished products of Armthorpe's brand of pit politics, where the collective strength and militancy of the workforce forced significant concessions from local management. Others, like the water note agreements, which compensated the men for exceptionally wet conditions in terms of both wages and recovery time,^[4] were the formally recorded results of protracted struggle and negotiation at pit and area level.^[5] Whether formal or informal, these agreements were underpinned by the collective organisation of the miners; in essence they were 'compromises' struck in acknowledgement of the particular balance of forces between management and union. The NUM's defeat in the 1984/85 Strike underlined the significant shift in the balance of power in favour of the management. As a result, in the aftermath of the Strike, the management felt confident in reviewing and challenging virtually all the agreements made with the unions, especially those 'struck' at pit level.

There was a unanimity among Markham miners^[6] that the loss of the 'whip hand' to the NCB had brought a major deterioration in their work situation at the pit. The results are illustrated in Table 6.1:

Table 6.1 Markham Main miners responses to the question: *'What are the main differences at work since the end of the Strike?'*

DIFFERENCES	mentioned by	(%)
General deterioration of conditions	12	36
More aggressive management attitudes	11	33
Stricter discipline	9	27
Loss of financial concessions	9	27
Loss of other concessions	8	24
Demanning/increase in workload	8	24
Increased redundancy fever/turnover	7	21
No agreements/less control	7	21
Closer supervision/hassle	6	18
Breakup of work teams	6	18
Increased mobility	4	12
Weakened union	4	12
Lack of interest/involvement in job	4	12
Increased solidarity	3	9
Fiddling of bonus	2	6

Number interviewed: 33

Source: Interview survey 1986/87.

What this table reveals is the breadth of the management attack on conditions. The most frequently mentioned were the more general changes, worsening conditions, tightening up in discipline, an unwillingness for management to compromise. These were followed by specific examples. In some of the less militant areas (for example, surface craftsmen), the management had felt sufficiently confident to remove significant financial concessions. In more militant areas (usually underground) they were more circumspect, increasing supervision, curbing non-financial concessions, using geological conditions and 'redundancy fever' to justify the breakup of the more militant workteams.⁵⁷ Miners from all parts of the pit reported a growing management insistence on increased mobility and more flexible work practises, with management adding extra duties or responsibilities with no satisfactory compensation. Despite the weakness of the Markham miners position, the shifting of the 'frontier of control' was apparently being introduced on a sectional level. Different groups of workers; underground and surface, face and outbye, gave different examples of deteriorating conditions. One of the surface men suggested:

'The main difference is that morale is very low and the management have clamped down on us. Up to now we've not had too many major attacks on our group; there's extra work and we've lost one or two perks. Prior to the Strike we'd be able to have a bath before clocking off, but not now. If they were short of workers on one shift, we used to be called out on overtime rate and paid from the start of the shift, which might mean one and a half or two hours money. That's been wiped out now. It's the fitters who have been hit hardest. They've lost a whole series of bonuses and it's meant them losing upto £30 a week. And there's lots of redundancy fever circulating ...not only among older men, but also younger men, just 23-24. All over it's, "What am I worth, what can I do with it?"... And there's a lot of insecurity now, with job changeovers on the pit top, more men competing for fewer jobs. They've also clamped down on union officials' activity.'

(Armthorpe: 73M)

One of the chief compensations in many underground jobs, prior to the Strike, was a significant level of job interest (Dennis, Henriques, Slaughter, 1969: 56). A underground electrician drew attention to the major change that he had experienced:

'There's too much harrassment and a lack of morale. It's a grind to go into work. Nobody's bothered or shows an interest any more. You'd like to

do a bit but you just get kicked in the head. Prior to the Strike, I was 'a good worker' proud of doing the job well as an electrician, but now there's no incentive to put yourself out.' (Armthorpe: 74M)

Another underground (outbye) worker endorsed this, explaining:

'I used to get real satisfaction if I did a job well, but now I just can't get interested in the work any more. Its a big effort just to go to work, not like before. I'm just not enjoying being at work. When I get there I do as little as possible. The management are on our backs and there's always lots of arguments. There's a hell of a lot of disputes going off at the moment.' (Armthorpe: 56M)

But it was the men who worked close to the face, where difficult, constantly changing conditions placed a high premium on initiative and cooperation, who reported the most extensive deterioration in working environment. One 33 year-old salvage man^[2] suggested:

'Obviously there were going to be changes. Management started dictating to us. We had virtually no say in what we were going to do or how we were going to do it. The first few weeks weren't too bad with the deputies, 'cos they were playing it low key. After that they came over heavy with management orders, dictating terms, issuing warnings. And you couldn't afford to argue with a deputy. A lot of it had to do with the scabs and the abuse of scabs. Official letters were sent out. You'd get a 'yellow card' and then the sack. NACODS must have felt guilty over it, because they proposed meetings with the NUM.' (Armthorpe: 51M)

A major erosion of what Carter Goodrich described as 'the freedom of the miner' was confirmed by a 38 year-old development worker:

'We have four men working in the heading. ^[2] It's very hard work in very bad conditions, mainly the heat. We get to the meeting station and strip off. We walk to the heading and we'll already be wringing wet with sweat. Going back after the Strike, it were like the second world war...losing and going back under Nazi rule. You daren't open your mouth or argue. In the heading you're going where no man's ever been before. If you hit a fault, you have your own ways of dealing with it, but they'll come round and boss you around, ordering you how to do it. And they'll say, "If it fails, we'll take the blame", but we know we'll just have 'em on our backs permanently then. A lot of lads just get fed up and walk out of the pit.' (Armthorpe: 60M)

Another 24 year-old faceworker argued:

'There's a growing awareness that we're on the road back to the bad old days. The working conditions are appalling, but the management have reneged on all the old agreements. If the conditions were really bad we used to be able to claim an hour water note, now we just get a quarter of an hour note. The old atmosphere has gone, everyone is pigged off with the place and wants to take redundancy. I can't tolerate being kicked around. I was in the 'Red Army' salvage team, but we were broken up and

put onto working on different shifts with strangers. The undermanager admitted he'd broken us up for our attitudes and militancy. He put five of us on one job, but that was still too much for him, so he had to break us up again, moving us in pairs!' (Armthorpe: 49M)

The traditional colliers' insistence on 'freedom' and self supervision underground appeared to have been stimulated by a year's 'freedom' during the Strike. The conflict between the close relationships encouraged by the Strike and the alienation of the post-Strike work situation were summed up by a market man, who had witnessed developments in several units:

'The management put more pressure on the men. They're getting rid of men all the time, so there's less men doing more work. They send men home willy nilly, just pick out individuals and then pressurize them. They get really tough on some men over absenteeism, send out warnings and then dismiss them.

The men seem to want to work together and be together more; the Strike's definitely brought them closer to each other. There's less arguing and falling out, they stick together more, because of the experience they've been through in the Strike. Mind you, we're in a very weak position. There's a lot of men who have thrown the pit in, got other jobs or set up businesses rather than be abused at the pit.' (Armthorpe: 50M)

The management's behaviour during and since the Strike had led to an overwhelmingly antagonistic feeling among the miners I interviewed. Many of the Strike activists made a point of emphasizing that they had always regarded the pit management with suspicion and distrust, but the question, 'Have your attitudes to the NCB changed since the Strike?' brought forth a veritable torrent of abuse. Table 5.2 illustrates the main results:

Table 6.2 Markham Main miners' attitudes towards local NCB management

ATTITUDES (%)			CHANGE SINCE STRIKE	
Non commital	Hostile	Extremely Hostile	Same	More Hostile
0	6	94	3	97

Number interviewed: 33

Source: Interview survey 1986/87.

Apart from their hatred of the police, there was nothing which aroused such unanimity among the activists. The NCB management were variously described as vermin, scum, liars, bastards, or simply 'the enemy'. Personal

attitudes towards them were summed up in phrases such as 'total contempt', 'extreme hatred', 'complete mistrust'. It was evident that this enmity was not directed solely at the local management. Even among those who had always considered them 'the enemy', there had, *prior to the Strike*, been a significant amount of respect for the pit and personnel managers. Even the branch officials, whose frequent separation from the job encouraged more conciliatory attitudes, reported a breakdown of respect and trust.

Formal Industrial Relations

In September 1985, the NCB announced stringent economic targets, drawn up, without trade union consultation, by Ken Moses, their national technical director. The 'Moses Strategy' proposed a cost ceiling for underground coal production of £1.50 per Giga Joule, which translates (roughly) to £38 per tonne of coal produced.^[10] The methods to be used by the NCB/British Coal to achieve these targets were less well publicised.^[11] They were contained in a plan drawn up by Albert Wheeler, former Scottish Area Director, and alongside Moses (then Area Director for North Derbyshire) a key figure in the MacGregor battering ram strategy of breaking the Strike. Wheeler had been promoted to the key post of Notts Area Director after the Strike, where in the Summer of 1985 he had played a key role in bringing the Union of Democratic Miners (UDM) into existence (Winterton and Winterton, 1989:230-5).

The 'Wheeler Plan' built on many of the suggestions contained in the Miron Report, drawn up by a former Notts Area Director (see Chapter Two), but also drew from the experience of the privatised American mining industry. His suggestions included:

'Increasing coal production from five to six days; increasing shift time underground; increasing the use of new technology; cutting down the number of skilled trades and the numbers employed in general; revising mines health and safety law to permit new working practices; reducing the influence of the deputy and enhancing the role of the chargehand; using new American techniques (such as roof bolts and diesel-powered

vehicles) and increasing the use of outside contractors'

Labour Research Department, 1989:2)

The radical changes contained in the Wheeler Plan involved major implications for industrial relations in the coal industry. The highly-developed, institutionalised relationship between the NCB and the NUM, built up since the nationalisation of the coal industry in 1944, had of course been undermined prior to the Strike (see Chapter Two). With the *Union of Democratic Mineworkers* (UDM) struggling to survive even in the Midlands,^[12] and sections of the NUM leadership still adopting a confrontational stance, the type of industrial relations were seen as an obstacle to the NCB's drive to transform its labour relations.

Faced with the dogged refusal of the NUM leadership to have their weakened position written into a new industrial relations procedure, the NCB unilaterally dismantled the old procedure on 1 May 1986. Instead of a series of formal meetings with mutually recognised duties, responsibilities and progression, the NCB now insisted that any complaints, problems or disputes had to be dealt with at informal pit level meetings. Area officials of the NUM were only to have a direct industrial relations role when the management decided to request their involvement. A year later (June 1987) *British Coal* management introduced, unilaterally, a sixteen-page 'code of conduct and disciplinary procedures' which sought to regulate, in fine detail, the behaviour of its employees, inside and outside work (*British Coal*, 1987)

The scrapping of the formal procedure gave the NCB managers a great deal more license in deciding how they were to conduct their industrial relations in 'their' pits. During and after the Strike there was a major reorganisation of NCB management at national, area and pit level.^[13] The continuing closure of pits and rationalisation of the higher managerial structure closed many avenues for promotion and threatened the job security of many NCB managers. At every level; national, area, pit, undermanager, overman and even deputy there was a

great pressure to make dramatic improvements in efficiency and therefore 'demonstrate' personal competence and aggressiveness. The traditional role of deputies in promoting health and safety underground was especially under threat, with British Coal reducing their numbers and increasing their responsibilities as productivity chasers along the American chargehand model (Labour Research Department, 1989: 28).

The radical changes in the formal industrial relations procedure were mirrored by equally radical changes in the economic organisation of the NCB. In the major closure programme that developed in 1985/86/87,^[14] all the attention was focussed on the immediate economic performance of individual pits. With each pit being expected to become 'self sufficient' (that is, to cover all its expenditure and make a profit), the local management were put under severe pressure to introduce measures that would drive up efficiency in the short term. The NCB's success in 'starving' the national NUM of substantial wage rises (over a four year period) also allowed the local management to stress the need to increase the proportion of the wage paid in local productivity bonuses. It was the unremitting drive for increased productivity and the need to escape the seemingly ever-expanding category of 'uneconomic pit', that laid the basis for the planning and execution of a major revision of working practises and industrial relations at the pit.

Individual or groups of union militants who insisted on the retention of old rights and conditions found themselves pressurised, disciplined or moved from job to job. Absenteeism, poor time keeping, late arrival/early leaving from the job, arguing with the deputy/overman or other 'misdemeanors' that might have warranted an informal caution or a small fine before the Strike, now incurred a final warning, suspension or dismissal.^[15] Combined with the immense pressure of twelve months of accumulated poverty and debt, this meant there was no individualistic route of escape in terms of sickness or absenteeism. With the banks, building societies and loan companies, electricity

and gas boards expecting a 'lion's share' of each wage packet, it became vital to get a full week's work in, preferably with high bonus earnings.^[16] One underground electrician gave a full description of his personal situation:

'They're much harder on you now. As far as the electrical side, my job...they're pushing you more, you're getting told to do more, you've not got as much of a free hand really as what you had before. They're keeping a closer eye on you, what you do. Like these reports that we have to fill in. I used to just fill 'em in but now they're scrutinising them more, and like my gaffer has turned round and said, "You're not doing as much as you could. I can tell by your report." ...They're picking on shifts like. Like on our shift we have ten electricians underground and one shift chargie, shift charge engineer, he's a COSA man like, and he's in charge of the ten of us. So you all go down the pit and he hangs about on pit top a lot of time and he might only go down to a unit if its stood and they can't find out what's wrong. And its coming down on him a lot. The bloke that we've got, we've had him for a few years now and he's a great bloke, but he's changing a lot now, cos he's getting pressure put on him from above. They're telling him that he's got to be more accountable for his men underground, so as they're pushing him, and he's pushing us at the same time.

Plus things that everyone encounters down the pit, like if you're working in water and that, you'd expect a note automatic. You don't get 'em as easy now as what you used to. You never used to have problems if you left the unit five or ten minutes early or you went up the gate to get your overalls on. You never used to have problems, now you do. Me and me mate went up. We got to top of gate about twelve o'clock on days. Us overalls were there and our gaffer were there, and he stopped our time for going up early. Now they wouldn't have done that in the past. I mean you've got to go up and get dried off and get your overalls on....If you go straight into the cold air its bad for your health. Our job's bad for that anyway, we'll often be going from barrier gate to loader gate, from cold air to warm air all the time.'

(Armthorpe: 74M)

The miners reported the number of dismissals on disciplinary issues, mainly absenteeism, as having increased massively since the end of the Strike. The weakness of the union to defend them was compounded by the fact that very few seemed to see much point in attempting to fight their dismissal. The underground electrician quoted above chose to fight against the tightening discipline and described his experience:

'Since the end of the Strike, I've had three letters. Two of them for rag-ups,^[17] or 'riding unauthorized' as they call it, and one for bad timekeeping. Now every day I have off I put it in me diary, cos I knew they'd be coming down on bad timekeeping. Well I'd had somat like four shifts off. Two of them were excuse shifts, which the personell manager -who'd sent me the letter telling me to come in and see him - had authorized. The other two were odd days, this were in the space of eight months, there were two days when I'd put yellow sick forms in. Anyway he were going through my time sheets, and saying, 'What did you have this day off for?' and I said I've put in a yellow sick note for that one, and he says 'What about this one?' and I said 'I had an excuse shift in,

I came and saw you about it!'. And he must have had it all written down and he says, 'Oh, alright then.'

Anyway as I was going out I said 'Well are you taking this letter back or what, are you going to rescind it?' and he says, 'Well, you've had two sick forms in, you're making an habit of this.' I says, 'You can't call it an habit!' I'd worked out what percentage of time I'd had off over the eight months and it came to something like one percent on the sick. And in the end he retracted that letter. He says, 'Well, I'll let you off this time, I'll retract the letter.' But a lot of people wouldn't go in and see him about things like that or they wouldn't write down the days they'd had off, but you've got to do it now, just to cover your own back. And they're getting away with things like that now, and that's how they end up sacking you. It's no good waiting for your last letter, 'cos you're on the way down the road by then.' (Armthorpe:74M)

This quote reveals the degree of change that had occurred. The practise of booking 'excuse shifts', together with the practise of being allowed to 'swap' shifts allowed miners a certain flexibility in an otherwise inflexible shift pattern. Without formally abandoning the practise, the personnel manager was 'misusing' it as a tool to instigate disciplinary proceedings. His further 'challenging' of the self-certification (yellow) sick notes, introduced by the NCB (under DHSS guidance) in an industry which has a record of sickness and industrial disease, made it an extremely serious problem. The only solution to this was the individual one, described above, of keeping detailed records and refusing to be browbeaten, or the more traditional, collective one, of 'ragging up' in protest, which, under the new industrial relations regime, was recorded as a further incidence of 'unauthorized riding', a serious, discipline-incurring 'offence'.

CHANGES IN THE WORKFORCE

A number of factors contributed to the radical restructuring of the Markham Main workforce in the two years following the Strike. The major increases in redundancy payments introduced on 8 March 1984 (the day the NUM executive sanctioned the Strike), were maintained until the end of 1987. The relatively lucrative voluntary redundancy package, part of the offer that NUM members were supposed to be 'unable to refuse' in 1984, contrasted starkly with the meagre rewards that mineworkers could look forward to if they managed

to survive in work till their formal retirement age of 62.^[20] During the 1984/85 Strike many older miners were compelled through pride and necessity either to spend the accumulated savings of a lifetime or to incur substantial debts. Many of these miners had a principled opposition to selling jobs through voluntary redundancy, especially after the year-long strike. However the paucity of the standard retirement package and the evident inability of the union to win any improvements in the foreseeable future made it extremely difficult for even the most principled of trade unionists to turn down the repeated offers of redundancy/early retirement.^[21]

As important as the financial inducement was the degree of demoralisation, the removal of hard-won conditions and the closely connected fear of failing health in the mining situation. More than most manual jobs, underground mining demands physical strength, resilience and fitness. For many older miners it was a matter of great pride that they could still perform well in an arduous, dangerous and difficult job. This performance often depended on being able to work on a regular job as part of a regular team, following a set routine and taking full advantage of the established practises and conditions that they have helped win over their working lifetime in the pit.

With the increased pressure for productivity increases, demanning and labour redeployment, long-established work groups were broken up. The management's unilateral overriding of pre-Strike agreements meant that any miner insisting on the maintenance of established work practises and conditions ran a high risk of putting himself in a dispute situation, with all the vulnerability that this entailed for himself and his dependants. The double pressure of financial 'enticement' and a deteriorating work situation had its greatest impact among the older miners. By the end of 1986, many of them had taken voluntary redundancy even though this entailed a significant drop in regular income and a painful compromise of strongly-held principles. As one recently 'redundant' 57 year-old faceworker explained:

'It were due to the developments at work that finished me ...under the terms that I did finish on ...that's something that I never wanted ...I didn't want to finish on them terms ...and it's something I can't ...What I have always believed inwell I was one of them that fought for retirement at 55. One of the things that Scargill has been fighting for over the last few years is 55 retirement under the same payments as redundancy payments and I think had we have won the Strike we would have got it. And then I would have been able to go out in a lot better way well anywayObviously it was the general situation at the pit that was one of the things that altered my mind to get out. The whole atmosphere, 'cos that's one thing that went from the pit, the kind of comradeship that you had underground seemed to go because you were working under a ruddy cloud all the time. The whole atmosphere had changed, and you felt you were under threat day to day.

I was genuinely ill but I didn't want to go to work anyway. I was expecting to be sacked. It's impossible to work under those condition without saying or doing something. A couple of times I fell out with the undermanagers and gave them a right rollicking. If they'd have reported me to the manager I think I could have been sacked there and then.Even before the Strike I'd been pulled up by the manager for my attitude and after the Strike people were being threatened with the sack for all kinds of things. It were going back to the old ruddy 'cap in hand' days and I knew for a fact that I could never have gone back to that.' (Armthorpe: 61M)

This was reminiscent of the older Featherstone colliers quoted in *Coal is Our Life*, who had survived the 1920's and 1930's when the employers still held the 'whip hand' to witness the reversed situation of the late 1940's and early 1950's; 'We've got the whip hand now, and we're going to make it bloody well crack!' (Dennis, Henriques, Slaughter, 1969:58). The older Markham miners could appreciate the significance of the shift in the balance of power better than their younger workmates. Knowing that they could not rely on the strength of their union to allow them to shape their working lives, they could see themselves being forced back to the 'cap in hand' days, of re-privatisation, increasing exploitation and deteriorating health and safety. The decision to quit was nevertheless extremely painful. Workmates frequently made joint decisions to 'go for redundancy' and in nearby Hatfield, whole groups of older miners took collective decisions to quit (See Chapter 12). With very few refusing the special redundancy 'offer', 546 miners left in the first four years after the Strike, and the average age of the pit's workforce dropped from 39 years in 1985 to 32 years in 1989 (See Appendix 17).²²² One faceworker explained,

'The bulk of us at the pit are between twenty two and thirty five. At thirty three I'm considered to be an old man at Markham!' (Armthorpe:50M)

Large numbers of younger miners also left Markham Main - either sacked for 'indiscipline' or quitting voluntarily, with or without redundancy payments. According to Malc MacAdam (elected branch secretary after Jimmy Millar took redundancy due to the severe pressure and deteriorating health), only about sixty percent of the pre-Strike (March 1984) workforce remained by March 1987.

There was a significant fall in the number of men employed at the pit, so that, instead of 1,529 men 'on the books' in 1983, there remained only 1082 in April 1988, and this was projected to fall to 785 the following year. A significant part of this smaller workforce (the local management's 1988 estimate put it at around four hundred men) was made up of 'transferees' from six other pits; Brodsworth, Wath, Manvers, Hickleton, Edlington and Cadeby, these pits either having closed or having suffered drastic cutbacks in their workforces (See Appendix 17). The transferees were often the younger miners from the labour-shedding pits - lacking the length of service that would allow them to stay in their old pit or the redundancy entitlement that would make it financially 'feasible' to leave the mining industry. They were young enough to be able to countenance a major disruption of their work routine and, having been heavily involved in the 84/85 strike, many had a principled objection to taking redundancy in any case. As a result they often brought to Markham their old pit traditions plus a youthful resilience and a highly developed and militant antagonism to the NCB management.

The Hickleton Transferees

The 150 miners from Hickleton Colliery comprised the largest group of post-Strike transferees to start at Markham Main. Most lived in the villages of Thurnscoe and Bolton on Dearne, some fifteen miles away on the west side of Doncaster. The *Hickleton Main* workforce had been trimmed by three hundred in

August 1983, then slashed by a further five hundred soon after, leaving only a token workforce to develop an underground link with the nearby Goldthorpe pit. Because there were still major untapped reserves and the pit was on the point of a large scale development in the rich Silkstone Seam, in 1983 the NCB had promised a major 'callback' of Hickleton transferees after two years (that is, in 1985). Widespread cynicism about this promise among the Hickleton miners had deepened over time. One of them explained:

'I don't think our pit'll ever operate again. They've give the pit offices away: they're now in the hands of the council. It's some community programme where you can go down and get a meal and there's different things going off. They've filled one of the shafts in and they've knocked several buildings down; one of them, the main stores. So although they still maintain they're carrying on with the development plan, nobody takes much notice. It was just a con to stop us causing trouble.'

(Armthorpe: 69M)

Another of those transferred to Markham explained the mechanism of the local pit's closure:

'They can make any pit economic or uneconomic. At *Hickleton* they didn't do any real maintenance on the machinery. It used to be worked 24 hours a day and then there'd be no maintenance at the weekends, not on the machines or the belts. There were always shortages of the key equipment and materials, and then they'd turn round and blame you for not getting the production. We had a big meeting at the *Docket* (Welfare) with three to four hundred people there, where I accused Richardson (the manager) of sharp practise. He couldn't answer me. He just tried to ignore me.

And nine or ten months later they went and put a key face in the wrong place. And we went and asked the manager and the people from Doncaster, and (this is where we slipped up, cos we didn't do it as a branch, we did it as workmen) we asked them to abandon it before it started, cos we knew, everyone that worked on it knew, what it was going to be like. We pulled them up and told 'em, 'Well, this is a non-runner to start with, this unit.' And he says 'What do you mean?' and we told him, 'It'll never go. Because the weight's that tremendous. It's simply situated in the wrong place, that's all.' And I'll never forget his words, he said, 'What do you mean, it won't go? It's got to go!' ... and that was when the rot set in deep, we developed that unit at a cost of Christ knows what - we're talking about a million at least - and it went for about four months and then we had to abandon it. We never got any significant ammount of coal off it.'

(Armthorpe: 68M)

During the 1984/84 Strike *Hickleton* and the other Dearne valley pits remained exceptionally solid. The militant reputation of the *Hickleton* miners was reinforced by the fact that, during the whole strike, only four

strikebreakers, all from outside the pit villages, crossed the picket lines. In the two years since the pit's closure, the Hickleton miners and their partners claimed that they had seen their village deteriorate rapidly. One of the two supermarkets had been shut down due to lack of profitability. [23] Several smaller shops had also closed and been left empty. One miner suggested:

'Now Thurnscoe used to be very, very busy on a Friday and Saturday. the market and local shops and that. But now that's all gone. We've had different shops open and then close up 'cos there's no trade for them. It's dead altogether. There's still a bit of a market down there now, but half the stalls don't get took, because they wouldn't sell 'owt anyhow. The only thing what seems to be booming is second hand stalls and second hand shops.'

(Armthorpe: 68M)

Public transport, environmental, and leisure services were all in decline. (For example the village's swimming baths, built through the Miners Welfare Scheme in the 1920's were falling into a state of severe disrepair and were facing imminent closure.) Local pubs and clubs were suffering from a lack of custom and several were threatened with closure. More and more NCB and council houses in the village (over 75 in December 1986) were being left empty, being boarded up and falling into a state of decay and dereliction.

'There haven't been any new buildings built in the village for ages. Maybe one or two sewing firms or bits of light industry. What they do is set up here while they're on free rates, then just pack up and move along! This community has sunk to a very, very low level as regards work and housing, there's that many houses up here on the coal board estate that's been left boarded up.'

(Armthorpe: 68M)

Due to the reputation of Armthorpe NUM the Hickleton transferees, hardened by previous transfers, pit closure and twelve months of virtually total solidarity arrived at Markham Main with high expectations. Many of the Markham trade unionists, aware of the Hickleton tradition of militancy and their record in the 1984/85 Strike were equally pleased at their arrival. However there were problems in addition to those that could be anticipated when a largely village-based workforce is joined by substantial contingent of 'strangers' from fifteen miles away. [24]

The 'Transferees' Issue

The defeat and attempted shackling of the national union at the end of the 1984/85 Strike led almost inevitably to a fragmentation of the membership, with local branches being thrown back on their own resources to a large extent. The adoption by the NCB of a stringent pit-by-pit accounting system, the much-publicised area league tables of pit viability etc. meant that the profit-based efficiency of a pit became a key issue among it's workforce. (This despite the widespread appreciation that the various statistics could easily be manipulated in order to justify any particular management strategy).

A pit's efficiency was calculated on coal production per manshift, its profitability on the production costs per gigajoule, its viability on the availability of a market for its type of coal, its ability to fund its own necessary investment, and its degree of profitability. So, according to the Markham Main miners there were several ways that the NCB could 'prepare' a pit for closure. It could starve it of crucial investment, it could ignore key development opportunities, or it could, by mismanagement and the withholding of equipment/supplies, seriously reduce output. Alternatively it could reduce the workforce to the point where it became impossible to work the pit to its full potential, or it could flood the pit with excess labour, thereby reducing its 'efficiency'.

In a situation which gave such scope for manipulation, it was very easy for the more-established 'local' Armthorpe miners to become suspicious of the motives of the NCB management in introducing wave after wave of transferees from other pits. Some of this suspicion fed into the attitudes of the men to the transferees themselves and the pit management, having undergone a rigorous, twelve-month 'training exercise' in how to divide the workforce were, of course, quite capable of exploiting these divisions. The Hickleton

miners' aggressive attitude towards the NCB, their militant insistence on defending both *Markham's* and *Hickleton's* earlier conditions and their willingness to use 'rag-ups' to add weight to their case, all added to their reputation as *red-raggers* or 'red-hot' militants. There was a widespread rumour around the pit that one of the *Armthorpe* branch officials had reacted to one of the 'Hicky' rag-ups by accusing them directly, 'You've shut your own effin pit, don't come here thinking you can shut ours' (*Armthorpe:52M*). The fact that some *Markham Main* miners, with their collective pride in their 'unrivalled' record of militancy, could accuse the transferees of being too militant revealed a lot about their post-Strike situation.

The Mick Silcox Dispute

A watershed in the relationship between local miners and transferees was reached with the Mick Silcox dispute. In April 1986 the NCB decided to suspend a long-established, local *Armthorpe* miner, Ray Mount, for 'riding the pit' early without his safety check. (The check is left with a friend who hands it in with his own at the end of the shift, so the practise is the mining equivalent of 'getting your mate to clock you out' - but complicated by the key function of the safety check in the hazardous underground situation. [25]) The pit management decided to sack his 'riding' companion, Mick Silcox, a *Hickleton* transferee, for the same offence.

After waiting for protracted negotiations to yield results, Mick, encouraged by his old *Hickleton* workmates and *Armthorpe* militants, turned up at the pit gates early on Monday morning, 19 May and put on a 'one-man' picket line. There was a 100 per cent response from *Markham's* miners and a two to one vote to stay out at a mass meeting in the Welfare later that morning. That evening, flying pickets were sent out from *Thurnscoe* to three other *Doncaster* pits, one of which, *Bentley*, came out for two shifts. On the fourth day of the strike a second mass meeting agreed to allow both men's cases to go to the

final stage of arbitration under an NUM-chosen referee. This process was overtaken by the NCB's abolition of the industrial relations procedure, but they eventually agreed to reinstate Ray and Mick at other Doncaster pits. (26)

Although there was some lingering resentment among some of Markham's miners at losing a week's wages over what has always been considered a dangerous practise, (27) the fact that the Markham Main men had provided 100 percent solidarity when a Hickleton transferee called for it did a great deal to overcome the 'geographical' divisions apparent in the workforce. There were several other collective struggles in 1986/87 which played an important role in 'integrating' Markham's new workforce. These included a three-day strike in support of a man who had been hit by a deputy, an overwhelming refusal to tolerate the introduction of the 'Doncaster Option' (a bonus scheme which is calculated on a very sectional (e.g. face by face) basis, and a 100 percent response to the flying pickets organised by the Kent, Notts and other sacked lads which closed down every pit in the Doncaster area on the 1 May 1987.

So, although the pit management were accused by several union activists of attempting to sow divisions in the Markham Main workforce, it proved remarkably united on most important issues. As one 'local' Armthorpe miner suggested:

'The Hickleton lads will tell you that they never really had a union. They did everything themselves. They'd go straight to the undermanager and argue it out with him, they wouldn't bother taking a union man in, 'cos they didn't reckon much to their union. And they've come to our pit with the same attitude... which in a way is a good thing, cos it keeps the union officials on their toes - they're not as complacent now as they could have been. There are still some problems but I think they've put a bit of life into the branch, especially down the pit.

People are getting used to them a bit more now...you still get the odd comment, but it's not as bad as it was when they first arrived. It's a pity more of them don't manage to get across to the branch meetings. When we have special meetings, the Hicky lads do stand up and they did thissens and us a favour at the Donny Option bonus meeting, because they were speaking from their own experience at Hickleton and people could see they were talking sense....And there's a lot more friendships developing now. We've had busses going across to Hicky and there's quite a few of them coming over here on a weekend now.'

(Armthorpe: 74M)

In an underlining of the continuing close connection between work and social life in the pit villages, several of the miners and their partners mentioned this growth of socialising, although this also led to some interesting problems (see Chapter Eight). On weekdays it tended to be on a small scale and concentrated in the *Tadcaster Arms* or *Armthorpe Welfare*. On weekends, cars, vans and occasionally even coaches were organised to bring Markham Main miners and their partners together socially in Armthorpe, Thurnscoe or elsewhere. [28]

THE MINER AND HIS UNION

When asked 'What, in your opinion, was the 1984/85 Strike all about?', 69 per cent of the Markham Main miners responses included the element, '(to prevent) the smashing of the union'. [29] During the interviews it became evident that their awareness of the union-busting component of the government/NCB's intentions had been heavily reinforced by their post-strike work experience. The attack on Markham Main's union organisation took place on two levels; that of the official branch leadership and that of the men's workplace organisation.

Post-Strike Position of the Branch Committee

Just as the branch level leaderships were a crucially important element in the 84/85 Strike, the National Coal Board seemed to regard them as a key factor in the post-Strike situation. While no effort was spared in the attempt to undermine the *national* union leadership, it soon became clear that the NCB envisaged many of the key changes in technology and working practises being brought in at pit level with the sanction, or compliance, of the union's branch leaderships. If one of the NCB's strike aims was to rid themselves of the well-established branch leaderships, [30] by August 1986 they had succeeded

to a significant extent (although less so in Armthorpe than in other Doncaster pits).^[31]

Of the four pre-Strike branch officials only one, the branch president - Alan Bell, remained in office eighteen months after the Strike. The treasurer had resigned his position, and both the delegate and the branch secretary had taken redundancy. The decision of the branch secretary, Jimmy Millar, a key influence in the branch since the early 1970's, was an especially severe blow. Three members of the old branch committee, Alan Bailey, Malc MacAdam and Jimmy Gallagher were elected into the delegate's, secretary's and treasurer's jobs.

This movement and other redundancies meant that over half the branch committee places were put up for re-election and filled by NUM members who had never held formal branch leadership positions before. This lack of formal trade union experience was obviously important given the NCB's planned introduction of major change at pit level, but, in Armthorpe, it tended to be counterbalanced by the wealth of experience that had been gained by the new branch leadership during the Strike. Elected shortly after the most intense and trying period of prolonged trade union activity ever engaged in by Markham Main's miners, the new branch committee members tended to be younger and more militant than those they were replacing (Armthorpe: 48, 50, 74M). It was noticeable that, in both interviews and general discussion in 1986/87, the branch membership still tended to describe the new branch leadership in terms of their 1984/85 strike roles.^[32]

The cancellation of the formal industrial relations procedure was only one of a number of measures introduced by the NCB aimed at circumscribing the activity of the various branch officials. The management's main strategy appeared to have been one of attempted isolation. This involved both cutting them off from major support from other NUM branches or higher officials and

weakening the relationship between them and a more demoralised and fragmented membership. So as well as stepping up discipline and overriding local agreements, the management began to exert significant pressure on the underground chargemen's system.

The Attack on the Chargemen's System

The origins of Armthorpe's charginan system have already been referred to in Chapter Three. Although charginen, like the butty subcontractors, tended to be experienced miners, responsible for liaison between management and men and also for work organisation, that was where the similarities ended. Just as the unelected buttyman was the physical embodiment of a particularly undemocratic, hierarchical and atomising form of subcontracting, so the elected charginan represented the human embodiment of the collectively controlled, all-throw-in contract and the priority system. Sharing the conditions, workload and rewards of the men that elected them, they came to play a key role as rank and file union organisers and shapers of a militant, democratic union tradition. In Markham Main, the practise of of underground work teams electing their own charginan, accountable to and immediately recallable by them, was seen as an essential part of the Armthorpe tradition. The charginan, as well as being delegate/negotiator for the team, also had to monitor delays and difficulties which could effect the earnings of the team. Because of these duties, he was not usually tied down to a specific job, but acted as an extra 'floating' worker in the team, helping out on whatever job he was most needed on (Barker, 1979: 11).

The existence of thirty democratically elected workers' spokesmen based in all the major underground units, performing the same work, under the same conditions, for the same financial reward as the men they represent, tended to provide a firm base for a trade union organisation that was both sensitive to the needs of its membership, and effective in organising activity

among them. At Markham Main the chargemen acted as unofficial union representatives, liaising with each other, the branch committee members and the officials in the union office.

For the Markham Main management, keen to establish an industrial relations system in which they themselves are seen as the sole focus of authority, this role of the chargemen involved major problems. Although there was a major role for chargemen under the Wheeler Plan, these were seen as acting as productivity drivers along the lines of the old butties. Nevertheless despite the advantages of new technology, pit management still experience difficulties in organising close supervision in the underground situation, and in the aftermath of the Strike at Markham Main they seemed intent on co-opting the existing chargeman's system rather than attempting to abolish it.

In February 1986 they began to insist that all the chargeman should have a regular job allocation, rather than acting as an additional 'floater'. This tended to put additional strain on both chargeman and his team, with the chargeman more dependent on management for release from his job. They also started to define larger areas of 'responsibility' for each chargeman - with less chargemen covering larger areas. The management also started to hold regular management briefings for the chargemen and to emphasize their right to veto the men's choice as chargeman. Although they did not use this veto during the research period, their restriction on the activities of the chargemen had the effect of discouraging some of the more militant activists from putting up for election (Armthorpe: 48 and 50M)

By end of 1986, this strategy had resulted in a reduction in the numbers of chargemen from thirty to less than twenty, a circumscribing of their freedom of action and a consequent weakening in the system of membership representation (Armthorpe: 52, 56, 66M). This also had a direct impact on the

relationship between the rank and file membership and their branch officials. The two or three branch officials who tended to spend a lot of time in a wide variety of surface meetings or staffing the NUM office/pit shop were heavily dependent on their committee men and chargemen for upto-date information on developments underground. The weakening of the chargeman system involved a weakening of contact with their underground membership and an increased pressure on them to take decisions on their behalf without direct consultation. This led to a situation of conflict which was mentioned by several miners in their interviews. As well as having to combat the management over the 'frontier of control' (Goodrich, 1920), they complained that they had, on several occasions, had to conduct subsidiary debates with their own branch officials on what it was permissible to concede to management in a period of weakness.

This weakening of the chargeman's system, when combined with the undermining of established agreements, the loss of leading militants through redundancy and the breaking up of some of the best organised work groups, constituted a serious attack on the union organisation.

The Miners' Response

The Markham miners did not take all these attacks on their union and conditions without a response. There was a period of some five months immediately after the Strike when the miners' morale hit rock bottom. With huge debts and low basic wages, overt industrial action did not appear a serious option to most miners. Another factor which acted as both an encouragement and a retarder to industrial action was the continuing presence of strikebreakers at the pit. This was a source of deep discontent, which caused management to isolate the 'scabs' and keep them under special supervision. Despite these measures, all the known strikebreakers were forced out of the underground situation during this period. [34]

As the management grew more confident, the miners witnessed an increasingly serious deterioration in their conditions. At the end of July 1985 their frustration was brought to a head by the pit management's refusal to pay adequate water money or issue water notes to the faceworkers on 51's unit. The strike was illustrative of several components of the post-Strike industrial relations situation. The men had been working in bottom and top water (that is, standing in water with more coming down on top of them from the 'roof'). The deputies informed them that higher management had instructed them *not* to issue water notes and had tried to get round the problem by issuing oilskins and erecting plastic sheeting over their heads (Armthorpe:50M). The pit manager denied that he had forbidden the deputies to issue notes, but nevertheless it was apparent that the deputies were afraid of abiding by the water note agreements (Armthorpe:48M) The Strike grew until it involved the whole manual workforce and it lasted five days, constituting the first all-out strike since the 1985 defeat. Only after the pit manager had given a formal pledge that deputies would be instructed to issue the notes as they were merited, did the men agree to return to work. [35]

The workforce's involvement in collective industrial action raised the morale of the trade union activists and blunted the management's offensive. Three workers on 51's who had been issued with disciplinary letters for involvement in localised industrial action had them rescinded and the pit manager began formal negotiations with the NUM officials over a series of grievances (see Appendix 15). In August a key management proposal to introduce the 'Doncaster Option' (Doncaster Area Incentive Bonus Scheme) in place of the Yorkshire Incentive Scheme was 'thrown out at a union meeting. [35] In September 1985 the management presented a package deal of bonus payments in return for a one man reduction in development teams and the right to appoint chargehands to organise these teams. A unanimous vote of rejection at a well-attended branch

meeting led to a maintenance of the four-man development teams and the miners preventing a serious incursion on their elected chargeman system.

The July 1985 industrial action at Armthorpe was followed in the next eighteen months by a series of disputes at the pit. Many of these strikes only involved part of the workforce, were defensive in the sense that they sought to preserve established rights and conditions, and were relatively short lived. Nevertheless they revealed a resilience among the miners which caused great concern to the NCB. Although their brevity and their frequently unsatisfactory outcomes underlined the weakened position of the NUM, the fact that they occurred at all showed that the core of the union organisation, at the pit level, remained intact. Given that the main period of fieldwork took place only some 12-20 months after the return to work in defeat, it was striking how many different strengths the miners identified at the grass roots/branch levels. Their responses are outlined in table 6.3 below:

Table 6.3 Markham Main miners responses to question: 'What would you say are the main strengths of the NUM at branch and pit level?'

STRENGTHS	at BRANCH LEVEL		at PIT LEVEL	
	Identified by Number	(%)	Number	(%)
The <i>Tannoy</i> bulletin	19	58	15	45
Armthorpe union tradition	12	36	5	15
The <i>Tannoy</i> group	8	24	10	30
Individual branch officers	6	18	2	6
Rank and file unity & solidarity	6	18	10	30
Strong branch committee	4	12		
Democracy	3	9		
Political education via 1984 Strike	3	9	4	12
Class conscious activists	2	6	3	9
Officials on same wages	1	3		
Transferees			14	42
Militancy & industrial struggle			12	36
Chargemen & underground democracy			11	33
Attitudes of youth			5	15
Miners identifying <i>no</i> strengths	3	9	1	3
Number of strengths identified	64		92	

Number Interviewed: 33

Source: Interview Survey 1986/87

These findings suggest that although miners perceived a strong connection between the branch and pit-based union organisation, they also

identified important differences. A large proportion (36 percent) identified Armthorpe's militant and political tradition as an important strength in the branch, but an even larger group (58 percent) identified the more recent developments in that tradition, the *Tannoy*, as the major strength. The *Tannoy*, and the rank and file group around it, appeared to act as a link between branch and workforce in that they also figured prominently as key strengths in the pit level organisation.

Similarly, whereas the union tradition (in the abstract) was mentioned by considerably less people as a pit level strength (15 percent), its concrete manifestations in the industrial relations system (e.g. militancy, democratically controlled chargemen, rank and file unity) were identified as strengths by a large proportion of miners interviewed. Revealing how the Armthorpe tradition remained open to development in the course of struggle, a large number (42 percent) of the Markham activists identified the presence of transferees from Hickleton and elsewhere as a source of strength. Underlining the fact that the men saw the core strength of their union existing in the pit itself, significantly more strengths were identified at this level. [27]

The role of collective struggle in the development of virtually all of these strengths was a crucial one. Although only specified in a relatively few interviews (for example, 'there's a core of young 'uns who've been trained, not crushed, by the Strike' - Armthorpe 68M), it underpinned a clear majority of the other strengths. For example it was largely their direct experience of the branch's role in the Strike that allowed young miners to speak confidently about the importance of the branch tradition. It was the performance of youth in during the Strike, as well as in its aftermath, that raised their status among the older miners. [28] The Strike performance of branch officials and branch committee men was almost inevitably mentioned when miners were evaluating their role in 1986/87. One of the factors which allowed

the 'incursion' of large numbers of 'outsiders' to be seen as a strength was undoubtedly their prominent role in the wider 'community of struggle' which had emerged in 1984/85. Similarly the importance of chargemen and 'rank and file unity' cannot be understood unless in the context of their relevance to the ongoing collective struggle. But perhaps the best example of the process by which involvement in struggle is necessary to produce key developments in a local union tradition is the story of the *Tannoy*.

The emergence of the *Tannoy* during the twelve month Strike has been described in the previous chapter. In the immediate aftermath of the Strike, during the period when overt collective struggle became impossible, the *Tannoy* disappeared completely. [39] It was only when, five months later, the level of resistance and struggle began to rise and the workforce staged their first all-out, pit-wide strike, that several of the pit's political activists who had produced the bulletin during the 1984/85 Strike, reconvened as a group and decided to 'resurrect' the *Tannoy*. (See Appendix 15)

The complaints dealt with in this (1st August) issue of the *Tannoy* provide a useful insight into how the management had been attempting to use the new balance of power in order to begin to 'claw back' the miners' previously established gains. An examination of the listed grievances shows how the NCB were making incursions on the conditions of a number of different workgroups. The *Tannoy's* response was to try and rebuild the 'community' of struggle by encouraging a concern with the particular, sectional grievances of the craftsmen, machine men, rippers and development men while combining them with others (bonus manipulation, disciplinary letters, priority list and water notes) that had had a more immediate impact on all the pit's workforce.

This strategy of combining sectional with much broader issues was maintained in subsequent issues of the bulletin (in the first fifteen months, there were twenty three issues produced). The aim was to counter the

management attempts at sowing divisions among the miners. This became even more important when, towards the end of 1985, the unprecedented degree of direct management-workforce communication developed during the Strike was resurrected by South Yorkshire NCB.^[40] Along with the monthly copy of *Coal News*, every miner received a monthly bulletin from the pit manager and a monthly bulletin from the area director, both detailing the pit's economic performance and the latter featuring an area league table of individual pit performance/viability. The other aim of the *Tannoy* was to maintain the Armthorpe tradition of encouraging solidarity between miners and other groups of workers in struggle (one example being the Wapping printers dispute which was given regular coverage).

The value of the *Tannoy* in informing, uniting and encouraging a demoralised membership was such that miners in nine other South Yorkshire pits established similar bulletins, although none achieved the consistency and influence of the *Armthorpe* bulletin.^[41] For the political and trade union activists who produced the *Tannoy*,^[42] it had three major functions: to act as a focus for the branch's political core, to act as link between this core and the broader membership, and to keep the workforce in touch with the broader political community. It was not always easy to combine these tasks. The Socialist Workers Party members believed that the *Tannoy* should attempt to further the process of political development that many miners had begun during the 1984/85 Strike. Others felt that a rank and file bulletin should be confined more rigidly to trade union issues. The inclusion of an article arguing against the Anglo-Irish Agreement and for Troops Out (of Ireland) was the cause of major arguments both in the *Tannoy* group and in the pit. One underground miner argued:

'The *Tannoy* was a major strength when it first came out. It's done a real good job keeping us informed. But just lately they've moved off pit issues onto arguments about Northern Ireland and the IRA - who most of the men see as murderers. I think the *Tannoy* should stick to pit issues.'

(Armthorpe: 51M)

One of the most important tasks the *Tannoy* group set themselves was to encourage more members to become involved in the fortnightly branch meetings. It did this by carrying reports of major debates and decisions, as well as giving the members notice of important items that were due to be discussed at forthcoming branch meetings. It was also at the centre of a campaign to shift the time of these branch meetings from the traditional Sunday morning slot (when there was no public transport operating from the transferees' villages). This attempt by the *Tannoy* group to force the branch to come to terms with its increasingly far-flung constituency was narrowly defeated. The problem of access for transferees (a number of whom had been regular attenders at their local branches), combined with the retirement of many local trade union activists, caused a decline in the attendance at the Armthorpe branch meetings. The average attendance at 1986 branch meetings was 25-30 (compared with a pre-Strike attendance of 40-50). This was, however still high, relative to most other pits in the area. [43]

The content of the branch meetings that I attended as an observer suggested a continuation of the Armthorpe tradition of concern for sectional, village and class issues. Alongside a discussion of grievances and health and safety problems at the pit, there were requests for support from a series of local charities, all of which received substantial support. There was a detailed report from the NUM's Yorkshire Council meeting and a debate over the NUM's educational programme at Northern College. This was followed by a lengthy discussion and resolution to assist the National Union of Seamen in their dispute with *P & O Ferries*, decisions to give financial support to four smaller disputes including a year-long one at *Keetons Engineering* in Sheffield and a smaller recognition dispute involving just nine Clydebank women sewing machinists.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have described the return of the Armthorpe strikers to the work routines that they had 'escaped' for a year. Denied any collective agreement and crippled by personal debt, their orderly return nevertheless promised a renewed collective access to significant power points in the industrial and economic systems effecting their lives.

I have outlined the significant shift in the balance of industrial forces which allowed the management to introduce major changes into the system of industrial relations both below and above ground. Unable to engage in overt industrial action, the miners were restricted to a peacemeal, partial resistance in the face of serious management incursions into established agreements and indulgency patterns, increased supervision and a breaking up of established work teams. This abrupt dismantling of the established work routine, considered by Zweig (1948) and others to be crucial in a miner's life, had a major impact, especially on the older Markham miners. There was a loss of identification with the job, an increase in the numbers of local miners taking redundancy and a consequent weakening of the traditional connection between workplace and local residence.

This destabilisation was compounded by the introduction of large groups of miners from other pits, with their own, often very different work patterns and union traditions. I have described how this incursion of large groups of transferees into a situation of pressure and frustration caused serious problems of division which did nothing to blunt the management's unremitting offensive. However, although some of its leading exponents had left the pit, the 'Armthorpe tradition' of engaging in struggle on a variety of levels proved extremely durable even under the most adverse conditions.

After five months of limited, covert struggle the pit workforce once again felt able to engage in pit-wide collective action in defence of local

agreements. The way in which the 1984/85 Strike had shaped the Armthorpe tradition was apparent in the way that younger miners played a prominent role and the 1984 Strike bulletin, the *Armthorpe Tannoy* was immediately resurrected in order to keep the strikers informed and united. Again, it was through engagement in further collective struggle (the Mick Silcox Dispute) that the diverse groups of transferees were able to participate in shaping the 'Armthorpe tradition' and in the process, become integrated into the Markham workforce

The continuing importance of the core of politically committed trade union activists was also very evident. At branch meetings, mass meetings and through their mouthpiece, the *Tannoy*, they explained the background to sectional problems and struggles, put them in their broader context, and encouraged support from other sections of the Markham workforce. They also kept the increasingly 'cosmopolitan' workforce informed of NCB intentions, as well as developments in the broader working class community. By emphasizing the positive aspects of the 1984/85 dispute and refusing to succumb to the increasingly prevalent trends of 'new realism' in the NUM, they acted as a reminder of the potential of collective struggle and an ongoing link to the class-based community that many miners had participated in during the Strike. Encouraging a grass roots input into union organisation from all sections of the pit's workforce, they were able to argue against the sectional attitudes and divisions that were encouraged by the weakened situation.

FOOTNOTES

1. In the post-Strike period, the NCB insisted on placing 'strings' on collective negotiations with the NUM, concerning the discussion and agreement of pit closures. Wage rises that were agreed with the *Union of Democratic Mineworkers* were therefore withheld back from NUM members. As a result by 1986, Armthorpe miners were still being paid according to national rates negotiated prior to the Strike, the last *negotiated* settlement being in 1982. (*Pitwatch 3, 1985/86*) ..
2. The backup men are responsible for supplying materials and equipment to the faceworkers, sometimes over long distances and difficult terrain.
3. An 'indulgency pattern', as described by Alvin Gouldner (1965;18), is a complex unspoken arrangement which is often a key, component in the relationship between labour and capital. Essentially, an individual or group of workers see their main obligation as 'doing the job'; obedience obligations to superiors are a secondary matter. In the underground situation where skills and physical effort are at a premium, close supervision by management is considered 'unnecessary', that is non-legitimate, and is therefore much resented. If the workers use their skills and effort to get the job done, management are expected to reciprocate.
Fair treatment, respect, freedom from close supervision, compensation for poor or hazardous working, all were traditionally expected by miners, especially in the Doncaster coalfield. Management 'leniency' or 'indulgency' was appreciated in areas of tenuous legitimacy, 'extras', rather than those where workers could make a compelling claim, 'rights'. In the aftermath of the Strike, the management were not only accused of breaking agreements, but of offences against the accepted indulgency pattern; of 'driving', taking advantage, exerting harsh discipline for its own sake, or assert their superiority, their 'right to manage' in a crude way.
4. The formal financial compensation, 'water money' is very small, although if management made a major point of taking difficult conditions into consideration when deciding the task, this could involve larger amounts. The compensation in terms of 'recovery time', early release from the underground was seen as far more important. A 'water note', allowing a man to ride the pit early, might be worth 15 minutes or an hour and 15 minutes, but it enabled him to avoid the crush at the pit bottom and in the showers. Often the 'water' that is present in the pit is filthy, so that a long shower is more of a necessity than a luxury.
5. At Armthorpe there were two water note agreements in operation; the Yorkshire Water Agreement and the *Markham Main Water Agreement*, paragraph 1 of which states
'In future the issue of water notes shall be determined by the deputy and the workmen's face representatives. Any disagreement between the two parties at this point shall be referred jointly to the Manager and the Branch secretary' (Armthorpe: 48M)
6. I interviewed thirty eight men who were Markham Main miners or had been during the 1984/85 Strike. However as five of these, living in Moorends or Thorne, formed part of the secondary study, I only included thirty three interviews in the main, Armthorpe community study. Twenty two of these thirty three Markham miners were living in Armthorpe, eleven outside the village.

7. The best organised and most prominent group of militants, a salvage team known as the 'red army' maintained its cohesion although some of its members took early retirement or redundancy. Its eventual breakup took place over their refusal to allow their floating 'extra' charginan to be tied down to a job, thus restricting his availability. They were widely dispersed across different units and shifts. (Armthorpe:51M)
8. Salvage men are face trained and responsible for the salvaging of valuable machinery and equipment from underground units.
9. Development headings are tunnels driven forward into rock or the coal seam, usually at either end, and in advance of, the coal face. Another form of heading is the 'following scour' driven behind the face in order to make it more accessible. (Armthorpe:68M)
10. NCB Memorandum 'New strategy for coal' September 1985.
11. Although it did not receive much publicity, it was endorsed by Sir Robert Haslam as the *British Coal* strategy for the future. *Guardian*, 27/11/86.
12. The UDM, like Herbert Spencer's Non-Political Union had its roots in sections of the official leadership of 'Notts' Area, but also in the *National Working Miners Committee* which was set up at the instigation of David Hart, a *Times* columnist and 'adviser' to both Ian MacGregor and Margaret Thatcher.

Although its main base was in Nottinghamshire, the launch of the UDM was designed to challenge the NUM's hegemony over the miners in various other coalfields. Its failure to establish a firm base even in other Midlands coalfields was accompanied by a significant growth of the NUM in its 'home territory'. In order to prevent the possibility of a humiliating collapse of the UDM, the NCB denied the NUM recognition, thereby designating most Nottinghamshire pits as 'UDM' only. Several NUM members (often the old branch officials) were sacked for carrying out union activity, and the national industrial relations machinery was reshaped to guarantee the presence of the breakaway union. (*Pitwatch* 3 December 1985.
13. Many of the NCB management had worked their way up through the industry in a period when there was a very different style of industrial relations. There were major disagreements at several levels and many resignations. The most publicised disagreements were those that occurred between Ian MacGregor, Ned Smith, labour relations director and Geoffrey Kirk, public relations director. Smith became openly derisive of the way the dispute was being handled by MacGregor and eventually resigned. Kirk was dismissed for publicly questioning the shadowy activities of David Hart (see above) and Tim Bell, former director of the Conservative Party's PR firm, *Saatchi and Saatchi*. Later while engaged in writing a book about MacGregor's chairmanship, Kirk was killed in a mysterious boating accident off the Isle of Skye.
14. Of the 174 pits open in March 1985, only 102 remained by the end of 1987. This rate of closure was, if anything, slightly worse than that predicted by Scargill in 1983/84, for which he was accused of wild exaggeration and scaremongering. (Glyn, 1988)
15. This type of practise was institutionalised in the new British Coal 16-page Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure which was imposed on the NUM in June 1987.
16. At Markham the weekly bonus is decided on the basis of the total amount of saleable coal produced, with outbye and surface workers sharing a

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percentage of the (100 percent) faceworkers bonus. This gives those who develop the faces and 'win' the coal a significant bonus differential, but it is more egalitarian than the bonus systems that were operating in other local pits. Under the 'Doncaster Option' bonus was decided on a face, rather than a pit basis, which in the same way as pit based productivity bonuses divided the national union, could obviously generate serious divisions inside the pit workforce.

17. 'Rag-ups' are a local term for strikes, but they usually suggest a spontaneous outburst. The right to rag up is an essential part of the pit political tradition in the Doncaster coalfield and something that worried the NCB greatly. In 1987 they introduced a special bonus payment, known as the conciliation bonus payable to those workers who had not 'ragged up' in the previous three months.
18. Being used to the less anti-social, but more rigid shift pattern of the post-Michael Edwardes car industry, when I first arrived in Armthorpe I was amazed to witness miners who had overslept on days (6 a.m.), visit the pit and arrange an excuse shift, or arrange to go to work on the afters shift instead. This degree of flexibility makes a great deal of sense in the underground situation, where sickness rates are high and, if you are not feeling 'upto scratch', you can endanger many lives.
19. The special redundancy 'offer' was maintained in stages, i.e. deadline then extension, deadline then extension, with the consequent threat of an imminent and major reduction in the redundancy 'value' of miners who 'procrastinated' over selling 'their' job.
20. An example was a miner who took redundancy at the age of 57, and received a lump sum of £8,500, plus £53. per week. He had been informed that if he waited three years to take early retirement at 60, he would receive just a £600 lump sum, plus a similar weekly payment.
21. The area of voluntary redundancy/early retirement proved an extremely painful one to discuss with those miners who had been forced into it against all their principles. In Armthorpe there appeared to be widespread sympathy for the older miners who had 'done their bit' and were faced with the unenviable choice outlined above. This was not the case with young or middle aged miners and in the aftermath of the Strike, there were major arguments over the issue. In some instances, it was evident that the miners had consulted with workmates, and one miner in Moorends described how he had taken part in a collective decision of older miners (at Hatfield) to accept the management's offer of redundancy.
22. Nationally, the average age of miners in the nationalised coal industry dropped from 42.8 years in 1976/77 to 34.7 years in 1986/7. British Coal Corporation, Report and Accounts, 1986/87.
23. The previous occupiers, *Lipton's*, sold out to *Presto's*, who allegedly discovered that, although it was profitable, it was not profitable enough. Prior to closure in 1986, Lynn Bromage and other ex-members of Thurnscoe's *Women's Support Group* launched a village-wide petition against closure and lobbied outside the shop, but to no avail.
24. The pit villagers' suspicion of 'strangers' from outside the village has got many roots. One of these is the association of large influxes of 'strangers' with very real damage to the local community. So in the 19th century, strikebreakers were often referred to as 'strangers' and often were guilty of displacing strikers not from their jobs, but from their colliery cottages (after mass evictions). Similarly in Armthorpe, in both

the 1926 lockout and the 84/85 Strike, the strikebreaking was largely confined to recently-arrived 'strangers'.

The role of 'strangers' as leaders of the back-to-work movement is revealed in Crick (1985) and Winterton and Winterton (1989). One example is that of Robert and Irene McGibbon who emerged as self-styled leaders of the Kent back-to-work movement. The Betteshanger NUM discovered that they had set up a similar anti-strike movement at the BL Cars plant, Cowley in the mid-1970's.

25. A miner's checks share some of the functions of a clock card. When miners arrive at the pit they 'get their checks out'. If the management don't want them to go down they 'stop their checks'. The miner is issued with two metal safety checks with his personal number on them and he hands one to the banksman as he enters the cage to go down the pit. This is then passed to the pit office, informing them of when the miner 'went down'. When the miner emerges from the pit he hands his second check to the banksman who sends it to the pit office. A single check shows that a man is still down the pit, and in the case of an accident, therefore provides crucial information 'at a glance'.
26. Mick Silcox reinstatement was, in fact, at Frickley, a pit closer to his home in Goldthorpe.
27. Several miners described it as 'suicidal' given the post-strike situation, although a crucial factor was the report that a similar misdemeanor by two Askern miners just before the Silcox 'incident' incurred 'only' a fine of a day's wage. The general feeling was that although the two *should* have been punished, the punishment was too harsh for the offence. The decision by management to impose a lesser punishment on Ray Mount confirmed the miners' suspicions that they were not acting legitimately, that is, according to the recognised 'indulgency pattern'.
28. Communal outings were reported as always having played an important part in village life; from the babies outings and the children's daytrips to the seaside, to adult men and women's and old age pensioner's trips. One Armthorpe woman described how, for thirty years, her husband had organised week long miners' outings to London 'around' the Wembley rugby cup final. She and five of her women friends in Poplar Road used to organise their outings elsewhere:

'The men had their trips and we had ours. You couldn't go abroad in them days, but we used to go everywhere else; Edinburgh Tatoo, Ramsgate, Blackpool - all round the coast. Jabe [her husband] used to look after the kids, with some help from Mum who lived next door. The men were very fair like that.' (Armthorpe: 90M)

But people's appetite for trips outside the village appeared to have been further whetted by their 1984/85 Strike experience (see Chapter 7 & 8).
29. The Markham Main strike activists showed slightly more concern with this than a 64 percent average across the three villages, probably reflecting the higher level of involvement in the 'local' union branch at Armthorpe. Likewise, the women's lower level of involvement was reflected in the much smaller proportion (29 percent) who mentioned the 'smashing of the union' as a main Strike issue.
30. Many of whom developed their union skills at the same time and in similar situations to the more militant national leadership, and who were therefore committed to challenging the legitimacy of the NCB's new authoritarian style of management.

31. While attending the Yorkshire Campaign Group meetings, I heard of branches that had kept only three or four of their pre-Strike leadership. At nearby Hatfield, two branch officials and over half the branch committee were newly elected after the Strike.
32. This process was not restricted to Armthorpe, or Yorkshire. Peter Heathfield, General Secretary of the NUM described the post-Strike generation of NUM branch officers as being 'educated in the university of adversity' in an address to Birmingham Trades Council, 2 April 1987.
33. Being subject to the same problems and frustrations felt by their fellow miners, the chargemen had an obvious interest in bringing the power points of the pit's economic system into the underground level. The demand that underground deputies and overmen be given the right to make on-the-spot, binding agreements, a main plank in the 1955 dispute, also became a feature in the post-Strike industrial relations situation. Not only were the deputies more 'sensitive' to the collective pressure of the colliers, but binding agreements reduced the need for the chargemen to spend long hours in the undermanagers' offices at the end of the week, 'renegotiating' terms and conditions.
34. Some of the manual workers who broke the strike were given redundancy, other were transferred to other pits, usually in Nottinghamshire, where their arrival caused several disputes. I was informed that, by the beginning of 1987, there were only two (manual) strikebreakers left on the pit top at Armthorpe. (Armthorpe: 52M)
35. Despite this pledge, over the two years that followed there were several occasions when the miners were forced to take collective action over the same issue.
36. As already outlined, the 'Doncaster Option' bonus was decided on a face, rather than a pit basis (i.e. across all the face units). The NCB made it appear very attractive in order to get the miners to accept it. Although it could result in very significant bonus payments for certain units operating in favourable geological conditions, it could obviously result in rock bottom bonuses for others, if they came across serious problems. In the same way as the pit-based incentive bonus schemes were extremely divisive of the national union, the 'Doncaster Option' (it only operated at a minority of Doncasters pits when the NCB gave it this title) could obviously generate major divisions inside the pit workforce.
37. The close association of the union branch with its role in the workplace caused several discussions on whether it was possible to separate 'branch' from 'pit' strengths. It was the role of the Hickleton transferees, inactive in the branch, but extremely active at the pit level, which usually convinced the interviewees of the validity of the question.
38. Whereas miners of all age groups described the women's activity as one of the strengths of the strike, only the older and retired miners (and the women) specifically identified the young miners as a source of strength. One explanation appeared to lie in the older miners' pre-Strike acceptance of the 'popular' ideology concerning a new breed of miners, burdened by heavy mortgages and concerned only with individual affluence. One recently redundant miner, born the year before the 1926 strike and lockout, suggested:
'I must admit I had 'em down wrong, I never expected them to perform the way they did. We used to argue before the strike that the young uns had gone soft and would never be able to stand a hard fight, but we were proved wrong and I can't tell you how bloody glad we were either.' (Thorne: 6M)

39. Various explanations were given for its disappearance, including the cost of production (post-Strike copies were all produced by a local SWP printer, with 1,500 copies costing £25). The shortage of money in Armthorpe was probably more important because of its impact on the level of collective struggle. Only when the miners were in a position to engage in pit-wide industrial action did their morale rise sufficiently to provoke the 'resurrection' of their 'Strike bulletin', the *Tannoy*.
40. Direct communications with the workforce as individuals, cutting out the collective intermediary of the unions was one of the practises that MacGregor encouraged at British Leyland and the British Steel Corporation. Prior to the Strike, most NCB management communication with the workforce was conducted through the union, with only the national monthly newspaper, *Coal News* being produced regularly and dropped, in large bundles, at the pit, where many were left unread.
41. Although the *Tannoy* group saw itself as an integral part of the NUM branch, it maintained a political, organisational and financial independence from the official branch structure. It financed itself on the basis of donations and collections among the Armthorpe branch membership and leadership.
- Because of an absence of well-organised political, or 'rank and file' cores at many pits, the bulletins were sometimes written by or at least financed by the branch officials. This obviously encouraged a different outlook; less aggressively militant, less politically controversial and less in touch with the concerns, arguments and humour that were prevalent in the pit. There is also a lot of work involved in the production of a 'good' bulletin, writing, typing, finding suitable cartoons, laying out, liaising with the printers and distribution. At Armthorpe for example several miners used to meet in between shifts in order to put a copy of the *Tannoy* in every miner's locker, a practise that the management eventually responded to by putting video cameras in the locker rooms.
42. There was a core of some six or seven miners who were centrally involved in the regular production of the *Tannoy*. There were two who were politically 'non-aligned', there were two activists and a close sympathiser of the SWP, and a miner whose political sympathies were divided between the Labour, Communist and Socialist Workers parties. All of them had played leading roles in the Strike. Around them were a further dozen or so miners who would attend the *Tannoy* meetings after the union branch, and help write or distribute the bulletin. Nearly all the core and periphery of the *Tannoy* group were regular readers of the *Socialist Worker*.
43. I heard regular reports from the nearby pits of Hatfield, Rossington and Askern which suggested that at a routine branch meetings, there might only be three or four in attendance, apart from the committee. (Moorends and Thorne Interviews)

Chapter Seven

THE MINER OUTSIDE WORK

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined the impact that the Strike had on the work situation of the *Markham Main* miners. However the residual impact of the Strike was not limited to the miners' experiences at work. One effect of a struggle involving the breadth of issues and the duration of that of 1984/85, was to release the worker from the routines of everyday life; the rigorous discipline, the pressure, the alienation which frequently accompanies employment in an arduous job like coalmining. It also gave the striker the opportunity of relating to many more people in the non-work situation. So although the central concern of the 1984/85 dispute was the defence of the central workplace, it actually served to strengthen non-work social interaction between the miner and various sections of the local village population, and indeed between the miner and a variety of people living far beyond the village.

The strike-based community, reflecting the circumstances and relationships of people involved in a major collective struggle, could not be expected to continue unaffected by a radically different set of post-Strike circumstances. An essential part of my thesis is that workplace relations help structure people's *out of work* lives, and in this chapter I outline how the miners' changed experience at work has caused changes in the village community. However the impact of a major collective struggle does not disappear immediately on the return to work. In this chapter, I describe some of the ways that the collective struggle changed social relationships in Armthorpe. As Warner and Lowe suggest:

'It is when hell breaks loose and all men do their worst and best that the powerful forces which organise and control human society are revealed.'

(1947: 1)

The experience of a year-long struggle against these powerful forces had left a deep impression on the attitudes, activities and relationships of the local population. It appeared that Armthorpe had become a closer, more discerning and serious community. It soon became evident that one of the dimensions of the strengthened 'community' was an increased awareness of shared history. In order to illustrate the importance of this dimension, I begin the chapter with some of the miners' recollections of their Strike experience.

In a similar way I use the miners' personal descriptions of the changes they experienced in their family life during the Strike in order to introduce an inquiry into their domestic life in the post-Strike period. I suggest that the pattern of family life and the distribution of domestic work has become more complex, with the residual consequences of the Strike being only one of a series of contributory factors.

Alongside an increased concern with political and social issues, the Armthorpe inhabitants, along with those of most other 'communities', are also concerned with leisure pursuits. In examining the miners' post-Strike sociability/leisure patterns, I use the more 'traditional' model described in *Coal is Our Life* as a benchmark. The description of miners' leisure activity described in *Coal is Our Life* gave an impression of a gregarious, if rather narrow, pattern, consisting largely of miners 'going down the club' for regular drinking, discussion and gambling sessions with workmates. I found the post-Strike leisure pattern in Armthorpe more complex, although there were still elements of continuity with the 'routine' described above.

These elements of continuity and change can also be seen in other areas of village life. While many miners had observed a severe weakening of

the village community before the Strike, they were unanimous that it had been recreated or strengthened in the course of the year-long dispute. I describe some of the processes at work in this reconstruction of community and outline changes in the local community that have survived the aftermath of the Strike's defeat. These not only include different patterns of friendships and relationships, but also changed attitudes and principles which stemmed from the Strike experience. The shift in social and political attitudes has an impact not only on relationships in the local community, it transforms the way in which the miners look at and participate in the wider society.

The miners' adoption of a more critical perspective on society involved a changed attitude towards the media and other key institutions. The miners' cynical view of government and state was encapsulated in their attitude to one of its institutions in particular, the police force. Two years after the Strike the hostility to the police showed little sign of abatement. Again the continuing antagonism towards state agencies appeared symptomatic of a more general shift in the miners' political attitudes. In the final part of the chapter I investigate whether this shift in attitudes has been reflected in political and union activities.

In examining these areas of the miner's non-working life, my aim is to begin to develop an understanding of the nature of the post-Strike community in the village. In what ways is the village community similar to that of the Featherstone described by Dennis and his colleagues in 1956? Has it emerged stronger or weaker than it was before the Strike? Do the work relations in the central workplace still structure the non-working lives of the local population, and are there aspects of the 1986/87 'community' which can be attributed to the 1984/85 dispute?

Recollections of the Strike

In order to appreciate the day-to-day impact of the Strike in its aftermath, it is important to be aware of the way that the majority of the activists regarded the dispute in hindsight. The apparent paradox that frequently follows major collective struggles was evident. At the end of the year-long struggle there had been a heavy defeat, but the miners insisted on referring to the scale and potential of the struggle, rather than its ending. Although few of the strike activists tried to minimize the severity of their financial and other problems, either during or after the strike, these problems were always set in the context of the overall gain in social experience. Several were adamant that that the Strike had not ended in defeat,¹³ while all referred to the sense of personal freedom and collective control that was experienced during the conflict. This was illustrated in the observations of Alan:

'Well I don't regret it. It were one of the finest years I've ever had in my life. I was proud to be associated with it. For the first time in their lives, miners were free; they weren't reliant on the state, they weren't reliant on anything else except their fellow workers.... They were free to say, "I'll get up and go on the picket line, or I'll stop in bed. I'll go out collecting or picketing or I won't." They were making decisions for themselves as to what to do and how the village was going to function. I think it was the most tremendous period in their life.'

(Armthorpe: 48M)

What is evident is that Alan's sense of enhanced freedom was closely tied up with the establishment of an exceptionally strong community which concentrated major power points and therefore 'control' at an accessible, local level.

Neither was it merely a question of enjoyment of a temporary freedom, a majority of miners interviewed suggested it had been a period of unprecedented personal growth. Wayne claimed:

'I'd go on strike for a year again. Without a doubt it was the most positive experience I've ever had. It really brought me out of my shell. My outlook on life is totally different now, my experiences in Ireland and London made me see people in struggle in a different light. For the first

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time I saw through the media propoganda. I've got a more political view and I've got friends on a worlwide basis.' (Armthorpe: 49M)

The strong connection between involvement in collective struggle and political awareness was underlined by Guy:

'I've got to put it down as a positive experience. Even now almost two years on, not one day in my life goes by when someone doesn't mention it. I wouldn't have missed it for the world, although there are some things I would rather have not done. I'd hate to think that I was as ignorant now as what I were before it, holding the same views. Some of them were diabolical. I've got a lot to be grateful for really. I should really write a letter to the *Met*, "Thank you for broadening my horizons." [laughs]...

It changed me in so many ways. I used to feel bitter, the world used to be the pit, the union and the village. So when the Strike first started it was just us, the miners against the world. But the experience has made me more aware of other peoples' struggles. Now I'm more aware of the world, I discriminate in my intake of information and knowledge; all the time I'm trying to discover what the truth is, what's really going on in the world; in Ireland, Jamaica, Israel and South Africa.' (Armthorpe: 56M)

Guy was young miner whose late entry into the pit meant that he was confined to the less skilled, repetitive jobs away from the face. His Strike experience stood in contrast to a deep-seated frustration caused by the routine of pitwork and village life. His description of the Strike as a 'positive experience' has to be seen in the context of the two lengthy prison sentences he served due to picketing activities.

It was evident that the dispute had facilitated a major personal and political growth. The Strike's role in encouraging political clarification was also mentioned by Kev:

'I don't regret it at all. It's all too easy for people to say now, "In hindsight we should have done this, we should have done that." I mean I'm all for learning lessons, but I don't think we should have had a ballot or anything. The whole thing were a really positive experience for me. What I learnt from the Strike, nowt else can take that away from me. You couldn't learn that experience in anything else but a strike, a strike of that sort of nature. It were a *political* strike, not a strike over wages or anything like that. This were openly and blatantly a strike for jobs, a strike for livelihood, a strike not just for us but for other people. It were one of the original strikes, a unique situation. I'm glad I went through it, in fact I enjoyed it. It were a laugh, we had a good time. There were hardships, but that were something that we came to expect.

It give me a better outlook on life...overall and politically especially, which I could never have learnt about any other way. I'd never have thought about sitting down and reading about it anyway... When you go

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down to the picket line, you've got a bit of power, and you're actually using that bit of power instead of just going down the fucking pit. That's why people got up at three and four o'clock in the morning, every day without fail, ran the police roadblocks, got paid a quid, and never complained about it once..[laughs].. Now they complain when they've got to go to work on days!... It was a good experience that I would never have missed. It's the same with all the lads, they still remember that feeling of having a bit of power, a bit of control.' (Armthorpe:74M)

These observations underline another major paradox. Alongside the hardship and suffering, the strike against pit closures acted as a kind of holiday from the alienation of having to go down the detested pit every day. Even though Kev had a more interesting job than Guy, his Strike experience still stood in stark contrast to the restrictive routine of pit work.

The Strike-based community allowed its members to throw off routines imposed by their 'superiors' and encouraged them to engage in the collective struggle for control over their lives. Because the community was not limited to the pit village, it also encouraged a 'broadening of horizons'. Dave suggested:

'I remember the fun. It were fun. It was interesting and exciting. Setting off at anytime between midnight and six o'clock, going out with your mates and picketing all over the country. We met new people and saw new places. We travelled a lot all over the country. I remember, 'cos my engine blew up in early July, but in them first four months, I'd already done over 40,000 miles. Then we spent a lot of time in London, raising funds. Me and me mates were stopping with three lads in the SWP, who were great. It were tough, it were a hard slog, really long days. But the reception we had down there was really good, we never had any wants or problems with digs. It was a brilliant experience.' (Armthorpe:53M)

Only when activities are self-directed towards a worthwhile object can getting up shortly after midnight be described as 'fun'! Underlying the wide range of activities was an agreed 'agenda' which united the miners and their far-flung supporters in relationships of mutual respect and friendship which would have been inconceivable in 'normal' times. Eddie valued the Strike for its 'human side', its demonstration of individual and collective human potential:

'Definitely it were a positive experience. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. The human side of it for me, that were tremendous. It were an experience you'd never get again in your lifetime. It was an amazing thing to see the different things what came out of it, the different attitudes, y'know to see the calibre of people. The regret that I do

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have is that I never put it on paper. If anyone could have looked into future and said, 'I'll write it down as an accurate day to day account', it would have lived forever as a part of history.

It's like getting second vision. Once you've been through twelve months of that and been involved, you can never be the same person again. You look at things a lot more closely...It made me realize that though you worked at your own little pit and you had your own little family to plod along with or whatever, that you were part of a much bigger thing. (Armthorpe: 74M)

The sudden reimposition of the rigorous and demanding work routine on the miners tended to encourage a return to their earlier non-work activities and relationships. The return of their pre-Strike 'routine' implied the recreation of a narrower, work-determined lifestyle, separate spheres of influence, the reinforcing of gender roles and the rigid division of labour. Whereas *inside* the pit there was at least the basis for a continuing collective identity, *outside* the pit the major financial and social pressures that accompanied their March 1985 defeat tended to encourage an atomisation of the strike-based community. It was the disappearance of this community which many male strike activists found so painful, with the deterioration of work relationships and atmosphere inside the pit compounding their misery.

The Armthorpe miners reacted in a variety of ways. There were some who simply refused to accept the return to a pit-centred existence. The routine broken, several made a 'clean break' and decided not to return after the Strike. Taking advantage of the friends and acquaintances they had made during the dispute, they took up new jobs (often a long way from the village). Some miners took every opportunity to escape the physical environment of the village,^[2] while others retreated from the public arena and sought refuge in close personal relationships. Some sought escape through over-indulgence in alcohol or other drugs,^[3] while others 'threw' themselves into increased union or political activity.

There were many more who, although they returned to the pit, could not regain any interest in the job and reacted by either 'jacking in'

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completely or simply refusing to go to work regularly, persistently going sick or absent. Due to the enormous financial pressure on them, this refusal to submit to the work routine sometimes resulted in major domestic crises, which merely compounded their problems. This was reported as a major factor in the increase of domestic break-ups among couples whose relationships had survived the twelve months ordeal of the Strike itself. [4] In the few cases I was able to 'investigate', the miners and their partners suggested that they had tried hard to preserve their relationships, but the satisfactory fulfillment of major domestic responsibilities seemed to conflict with the roles they had developed in the strike-based community. [5]

THE MINER AND FAMILY LIFE

A significant disruption of the routine of family life (during the Strike) was reported by ninety percent of the Markham men and women interviewed. The nature of the Strike change was, of course, extremely variable, with different members of families spending more or less time around the house at different stages of the Strike. Although certain types of Strike activity (such as fundraising trips) sometimes took members of the household away for several days, a more frequent experience was the presence of a larger number of family members in and around the home over longer periods. The high activity rate among Markham Main pickets meant that the men were often out of the house during the early hours of weekday mornings, but they often spent much of the rest of the day 'at home'. [6]

With women spending more time either engaged in waged labour or in collective Strike activity, there tended to be an increased sharing of domestic labour between men and women. This was reported by 55 percent of men and 58 percent of women, including 20 percent of the men and 25 percent of the women who specified 'role reversal'. As Carol, who lived outside the village and, during the Strike, combined a full time job with regular trades council support work put it:

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'It was like role reversal really. Kev did everything, apart from some of the washing and ironing. He'd get back from picketing and then he'd do the house work. He just did it off his own bat; cleaning, cooking, shopping, the lot. I used to get back home from work and everything would be done.'

(Armthorpe: 28W)

Alongside this role reversal, many people reported a reduction in the amount of domestic work done during the Strike. Shirley explained:

'Well that kind of thing didn't seem to matter much really. The house was left to take care of itself. We had proper meals down the Welly and apart from that it was just egg and chips and stuff, not really cooking, cos we tended to be too busy.'

(Armthorpe: 13W)

Childcare could not be deprioritized as easily as cooking and washing. Another woman activist reported:

'Pete was always helpful, but during the Strike he did practically everything; cleaning, washing, ironing, cooking, shopping, taking care of the kids, which was really important 'cos I couldn't have left them otherwise. As they say, "*Dad was Dad and Mum during the Strike*". I spent so much time out of the house, he just took over all my jobs. He was really good.'

(Armthorpe: 3W)

The men often spoke of their changed roles in a very 'matter of fact' way. In their interviews most appeared to take it for granted that their partners had to be helped in their strike activity. Pete, the husband of Aggie, quoted above, suggested:

'Aggie got very involved, especially halfway through the Strike. Someone had to be at home with the kids, so I dropped off some of my picketing and other activity to look after them.'

(Armthorpe: 60M)

Although several of the women were keen to discuss the improved relationships established between fathers and children during the Strike, the fathers themselves described the phenomenon more indirectly, telling stories of outings and parties they had organised for them, or relating anecdotes to illustrate what their children had had to go through, and how aware and supportive they had been during the Strike.

In a similar fashion, all of the young Armthorpe children I spoke to⁷⁷ showed a great deal of enthusiasm in relating the experiences they had

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shared with their dads and mums during the Strike. One eleven-year-old girl described her experience on the 22 August:

'As we went into the village, there were police everywhere. There were cops with shields and helmets on every corner. I were dead scared. We got right through to the pit gates. You couldn't count the police, there were that many. I counted the police vans and it came to a hundred and twenty. Dad took us through to Auntie Vi's and later came back for us, and we tried to get through to the chip shop, but the police wouldn't let us go through. Me dad asked them to let us through, but they were dead nasty, just said some really bad words and wouldn't let us go.' (Armthorpe:2YC)

Other children described how they had watched their parents in confrontations with the police, how they had refused to talk to the police,^[6] how they had enjoyed 'really good' parties, trips and demonstrations during the Strike and how they had made friends with different Strike supporters from far outside the village. Their commitment to the Strike on a variety of levels was obvious, as was their deep pride in their parents.

Although the Strike had involved major problems and sacrifice for them, because it was essentially about *their* futures, they had been encouraged to participate in the world of their parents, in the world of adult men and women and in the broader community built up around the Strike. This was a serious but exciting world, where major demands were placed on them, but where they were expected to have opinions and ideas, and where they were given the opportunity to express them and act on them. The clearest illustration of this phenomenon, among the older children at least, was their organising of the one day school strike in order that they could participate with their fathers and mothers in the collective 'march back' on 8 March 1985.^[7]

The closeness between parents and children was also mirrored in an enrichment of many adult relationships, despite the physical hardship and other suffering. So, for example, in the course of her interview, one woman strike activist described how she and her husband (of fourteen years) used to get a thrill from their long-distance phone calls, made when either of them were away on fundraising/twinning expeditions. Assuming that their

conversations were being monitored (a widespread assumption given their Strike experience^[10]):

'...we used to talk to each other in a kind of code, using nicknames and stuff. There was that much going on. We used to tell each other all the news, what we'd been up to, little secrets and adventures that we'd just had. It were just like courting again. It put a newness in, it were a real boost to our relationship.' (Armthorpe: **W)

The care of the Strike community, the generation of solidarity, the maintenance of the Strike in open defiance of Thatcher and her allies, all these became not so much shared interests, as mutual obsessions among many mining families. And, of course, individual couples' new found sharing of experiences, hardships, hopes and passions tended to find further amplification in the wider community. The link between personal and public closeness was touched on by several women:

'We felt more for each other and for each others' problems. We shared things, talked about things. We needed each other. There was an incredible solidarity and closeness. There still is, it's still there.' (Armthorpe: 4W)

While another described the shared celebration of unanticipated qualities:

'It were that rough, but then the closeness pulled us together. We shared that many new experiences (...). They, the men, thought more about us, they couldn't believe us. We were fantastic. **** is still impressed, I still feel it.' (Armthorpe: **W)

This closeness between the various members of the mining family stood in stark contrast to the situation described in *Coal is Our Life*, where the family was characterised as 'a system of relationships torn apart by a major contradiction at its heart, husband and wife live separate, secret lives' (Dennis, Henriques, Slaughter, 1969:228). Unlike that period, when the routine of the coal industry imposed a rigid division of sex roles, and tended to discourage the growth of joint interests and activities between family members, the Strike encouraged a joint involvement in virtually all of its institutions, activities and culture.

The Post-Strike Situation

If these changes in family relationships were caused by the severe interruption of routine by collective struggle, they could also be threatened by the reimposition of the work routine after the miners returned to work. However, of the ninety percent of adults who reported a major change in family life, only twenty five percent suggested there had been a return to the pre-Strike routine. In eight cases (13 percent) this non-return was due to the ending of old, or the beginning of new relationships. And of course there were other factors such as changes in individual's job situation or serious illness in the family.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, these contributed to a situation where, in a large number of families, changes that had been brought on by the Strike remained, despite the apparent return to the pre-Strike 'routine'. For example among the eighteen women who reported a more equal sharing of domestic work during the Strike,¹¹² fourteen claimed that it had been maintained since the Strike had ended.

Table 7.1 illustrates this post-Strike situation in more detail, outlining the shareout of domestic work in the families of Armthorpe and Markham activists. As I only conducted two joint husband/wife interviews, and in several cases only interviewed one member of the 'partnership', it proved difficult to provide a 'mutually agreed' version. The figures preceding the brackets represent the women's 'account' of the domestic work shareout in their households, those inside the brackets represent the men's 'version'.

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Table 7.1. 1986 Shareout of Domestic Work - Armthorpe/Markham families. (%)

Responsible for	Shopping	Cooking	Washing dishes	Washing clothes	Ironing & Mending
Mainly WOMAN	37 (36)	63 (48)	19 (20)	89 (72)	89 (80)
Mainly MAN	7 (4)	7 (8)	7 (12)	0 (0)	4 (0)
SHARED	56 (64)	30 (44)	74 (68)	11 (28)	7 (20)

Responsible for	Childcare	Cleaning	Gardening	House Repairs
Mainly WOMEN	21 (12)	63 (40)	12 (16)	12 (9)
Mainly MEN	5 (12)	0 (4)	38 (52)	54 (60)
SHARED	74 (76)	37 (56)	50 (32)	34 (31)

Number Interviewed: 52

Source: Armthorpe Interview Survey 1986

The discrepancy evident between the women's and the men's version was not totally unexpected, given that the question, "Who usually does what around the house now?" tended to encourage a distinctly subjective response.¹³³ In the eleven households where I interviewed both partners, the correlation was be slightly higher. In three cases (apart from the two joint interviews), there was an exact agreement on the division of labour. From these findings it appeared that women were, on average, largely responsible for three or four areas of domestic work: washing clothes, ironing and mending them, cooking and cleaning, men for only one or two; house repairs and (possibly) gardening. There were three areas which involved a significant amount of sharing; childcare, washing dishes and shopping.

It appeared then that the shareout of domestic work was still unequal, but the division of domestic labour was far less marked than that suggested as typical in *Coal is Our Life*.¹³⁴ There was a wide variation between various households and the shareout of domestic work seemed to be determined by two main factors: the work situation of the miner - the nature of his work, hours and shift pattern, and the work situation of his partner - her hours, shift pattern and travelling time. Both the miners and their

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partners put a great stress on the need for an overall balance across the paid/domestic work sectors. So, for example, one miner suggested:

'Things in the house should be shared if all else is equal. But if you've spent all day down that dirty hole you don't want to be faced with cooking - if your partner's been in the house all day, do you?' (Armthorpe:58M)

This kind of comment seemed to reveal the existence of a domestic 'contract' and the importance of the miner's work situation in determining its nature.

The physical exhaustion implicit in the majority of underground jobs was described most graphically by their women partners. The wife of a 77 year-old retired miner described how, in the 1930s, the harshness of her husband's work used to affect their family life. Having greeted her in his pit black:

'He'd always wash his hands, before he'd have a bath, and go into the living room to see the baby. Just a few minutes later I'd follow him in with a cup of tea, and he'd be asleep with Jean in his arms, on the rug in front of the fire. Miners have the lousiest jobs. He'd be completely tired out, too tired to get a bath, just jiggered.' (Armthorpe:82SC)

The introduction of mechanisation, pithead baths, canteens and clean overalls, although they have made a major difference to the domestic life of the miner and his partner, have not eradicated the physical and mental exhaustion brought on by the underground working conditions; the extremes of hot and cold, the dust, stale air, darkness and hazards. One 28 year-old woman, with two children and a an 18 hour per week job, suggested:

'We have a very flexible arrangement depending on which shift he's on. He's a good cook and usually we do the shopping, the washing up, and sometimes the washing together. When he's on the right shift, he spends a lot of time with the kids. (...) To tell you the truth I just wish [***] could get out of the pit before it kills him. It's just war now. All we want is £140 a week, but the management won't let us have even that. They treat my husband like dirt. They don't realize what it does to families.

He comes home sometimes and he's just exhausted, completely worn out, he can't do anything. It's still rubbish down there you know, with all the crap and the dust. It ruins your health. I just wish he could find another job. It's bad enough trying to cope with three shifts, but if they bring in four like they're threatening, it'll bugger us up completely, I'll have to quit my job and I don't know how we'll manage then.' (Armthorpe: **W)

The existence of an all-inclusive 'contract' between the man and woman, covering both paid and domestic work, is again evident. Both partners commented

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on the growth of shared activity during the Strike and, as the woman had got her part-time job after the Strike, this equal sharing pattern had been maintained. Despite the hardships, the Strike had acted to boost family life, with both the woman and her partner reporting that the Strike had brought them and their young children closer together. However, the pressures exerted by the coal industry, its underground work situation and anti-social shift patterns were also clearly evident, combining with financial problems to put major strains on family life. [15]

THE MINER AND LEISURE

From the evidence I could gather from personal observation, diaries and interviews, the 'traditional' pattern suggested by *Coal is Our Life*, of miners spending most of their time in the local pubs and clubs, is still evident but has become weaker. Assuming that the 1953 Featherstone study was accurate in emphasizing the dominance of this pattern, [16] there appeared to be a number of explanations for this phenomenon. One factor was the number of leisure activities which the miners enjoyed, illustrated in table 7.2 below:

Table 7.2 1986/87 Leisure Activities of Markham Main Miners. (%)

<i>Outside Activities</i>	claimed by <i>Village Miner</i>	claimed by <i>N. V. Miner</i>	<i>Home-based Activities</i>	claimed by <i>Village Miner</i>	claimed by <i>N. V. Miner</i>
Drinking	90	73	Reading	59	82
Betting	31	18	Television	50	55
TU/Political	18	36	Music	23	45
Pool	18	9	Conversation	14	27
Football	14	0	Gardening	14	18
Cards	14	9	Caravanning	14	0
Darts	9	0	Eating out	9	27
Visiting friends	9	18	Kids	9	18
Fishing	9	0	Walking	9	27
Running	5	9	Swimming	9	18
Golfing	5	0	Weight Training	5	18
Pigeons	5	0	Writing	5	9
Rugby	5	0	Open University	5	0
Badminton	0	9	Painting	0	9
			Photography	0	9

Number Interviewed: 33

Source: Armthorpe Interview Survey 1986

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Although drinking was still by far the most popular pastime, it was usually accompanied by several other 'hobbies'. The list would undoubtedly have been longer had it not been for the acute shortage of money available for recreational activities. Several miners reported 'giving up' hobbies (especially those that involved substantial costs) since the Strike.^[17]

Another reason for the weakening of the 'traditional' male leisure pattern was the growing numbers of miners who lived at a distance from the village. Table 7.3 reveals that these were far less inclined to spend their leisure time in collective activities outside the home than were their colleagues living in village. Virtually all the latter suggested that social drinking in local pubs was one of their major pastimes.^[18]

Associated with the scarcity of spare cash was the existence of alternative (inexpensive) home-based entertainment. From talking to older Armthorpe inhabitants, it became evident that there had always been forms of cheap, home based entertainment (see Chapter Four), but not on the same scale as that of the late 1980s. In the 1920s and 1930s the mining household was, above all else, a setting for a continual work routine, with the women in particular involved in a series of laborious chores aimed at preparing their husbands or sons for the next shift, or as Allen refers to it 'undpaid domestic labour for the coal industry' (Allen, 1981:78). With the widespread acquisition of a range of domestic appliances, home comforts and home entertainments (T.V., video, radio, music centres) the typical miner's house had become much more conducive to personal recreation and entertainment. Table 7.2 illustrates how the miners living outside the village were more likely to cite these more individualistic, home-based hobbies, such as reading or listening to music as major pastimes. The significant differences in leisure patterns can again be seen in table 7.3, which outlines the pattern of non-home sociability for village and non-village miners and its location (that is inside, or outside Armthorpe):

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Table 7.3 Markham Miners Socializing outside the Home (%) (including drinking, games, meetings, eating out. (V=in village, O.V=outside village)

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday	
	V	O.V	V	O.V	V	O.V	V	O.V.
Living in Armthorpe	18	0	13	9	36	9	23	13
Living outside Armthorpe	0	18	0	36	9	18	18	18

	Friday			Saturday			Sunday a. m.		Sunday p. m.	
	V	both	O.V	V	both	O.V	V	O.V	V	O.V
Living in Armthorpe	68	9	9	59	18	13	40	0	68	9
Living outside Armthorpe	18	9	18	0	0	64	36	9	9	36

No Interviewed: 33

Source: Armthorpe Interview Survey 1986

This table reveals not only the persistence of certain key features of leisure patterns in occupational communities, outlined in *Coal is Our Life*, but also the potential impact of the social change that has recently effected many pit villages. The close relationship between the miners' work routine and their leisure pattern is clearly revealed. Whereas relatively few miners 'went out' (except to work) on weekday evening (a partial exception being Wednesday when the Welfare put on a filmshow), as the working week came to an end, there was a veritable explosion of communal socializing. [19]

The observation made by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, that miners working in a pit and living in its pit village also tended to socialize in that village still appeared to be a relevant one. For the majority of village based miners, Armthorpe was the centre of their leisure activity. What table 7.3 also makes clear is that the majority of miners living *outside* Armthorpe did *not* see the pit village as their main centre for regular socializing. The 'outsiders' interviewed tended to use either their local pubs, or the pubs and clubs in Doncaster, rather than those in Armthorpe. [20] This stood in stark

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contrast to their 'leisure' pattern during the Strike, when the majority spent virtually all their spare time in the village. This seemed to suggest that whereas they had felt an essential part of the strike-based community, it's weakening had pushed them back out to the periphery.^[21] Their relationship with the 'old' community was only renewed occasionally, when, for example, the staging of a sacked miners' or sacked printers' benefit tended to attract significant numbers of 'outside' miners into Armthorpe. The only time when the village acted as a venue for regular socialising among the 'outsiders' was on a Sunday lunchtime, when they would have a drink in the Welfare after the fortnightly union branch meeting.

Given the marked differences between the leisure patterns of Armthorpe miners and 'outside' miners, the massive turnover of the pit workforce (due to redundancy and pit closure programmes) had obvious implications. Both the influx of transferees from distant villages and the redundant status of more and more local miners tended to weaken the traditional, occupationally-based patterns of social life in the village. Not that this was a completely new phenomenon. The major increase in both home and car ownership in the late 1970's and early 1980's had allowed many Markham miners the choice of living well outside the village. It was the speed and scale of these developments in 1985/86 which meant the disruption of established work relationships, described in the previous chapter, was accompanied by a disruption in social relationships outside work.

For example, 'redundancy fever' led to a major increase in the number of men in the village who, while sharing the background and culture of working miners, no longer shared their daily involvement in the intensely social work situation, their work problems or their shift patterns. With a large amount of time on their hands and a strictly limited amount of money, many of them appeared to have withdrawn into a more privatised existence. Four of the five miners who had taken redundancy prior to being interviewed reported spending a

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lot of time on their own or with relatives, having to be more careful with their money and cutting down on their socialising since leaving the pit. [22]

The same number reported that, despite attempts to maintain contact with their workmates and friends from the pit, this had proved far more difficult than they had anticipated. Although they had formerly played an active role in the NUM branch, all confessed to feeling uneasy about attending the fortnightly branch meetings, where a wage relationship; in which they were no longer involved, tended to be the central concern. The abrupt removal of what had previously been the dual focus of their lives, the pit and union, seemed to cause them major problems. Unused to finding themselves outside the mainstream pit life, some of the redundant miners had tended to form their own distinct groups in the various pubs and clubs. [23]

It was not just among the older generations that the close relationship between work and leisure was coming under attack. Although Table 7.3 might suggest that among those miners living in the village the traditional pattern remained very strong, there were certain important developments. Friday and Sunday evenings remained, by and large, 'local' nights which most miners spent in the village, usually with their workmates. Although 59 percent of the Armthorpe miners described a similarly traditional Saturday night, spent in a tour round local pubs and/or a session in their favourite club, 18 percent explained that they preferred to 'get out of the village'. to drive somewhere 'different', before returning at a later stage. Several of the younger miners expressed a similar desire. Having experienced both a massive strengthening and expansion of their community during the Strike, and its decline in the aftermath, many younger miners chafed at their confinement in the village. Charlie explained:

'I generally go out with single lads from the pit. Although most of them live in the village, we always meet up in town (Doncaster). More now than before Strike, they all just seem to want to get away from the village, every night if they can. The pit's in the village and we can't stand the pit, and we don't like the atmosphere in the village. Every time we go by the pit on the bus, we look the other way. It's just a part of our life that we don't like. Cos the atmosphere's changed down the pit now and when

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we go out and anyone does talk about pit in the social circle in town, we just give them a bollocking about it and say, "Shut up about it, we don't want to know until we get there Monday." (Armthorpe: 50M)

This increased hostility to pit talk in leisure venues (inside and outside the village) was reported by several miners, both young and old. This stood in stark contrast to its popularity in 1953 Featherstone where it served to cement the organic relationship between work and leisure in the pit village. The decline in pit talk seemed reflect the growing alienation from work felt by the miners. Charlie's comments reminded me of Braverman's observation:

'In a society where working power is purchased and sold, working time becomes sharply and antagonistically divided from nonworking time, and the worker places an extraordinary value upon this "free" time, while on-the-job time is regarded as lost or wasted.' (Braverman, 1974: 278)

Other miners tended to escape from the village more completely. Usually this involved more 'traditional' breaks (for example, a caravan weekend on the East Coast), but several of the miners interviewed had maintained close contact with friends and acquaintances who they had met as members of the broader Strike support community in 1984/85. As well as encouraging their letter-writing skills, this allowed them to get away for weekends to London or other cities. Guy, who had travelled extensively during and since the Strike (as a sacked miner), described his typical weekends:

'I like to get out of the house and the village. I can go down the Welfare on a Sunday night with my mates and they'll be getting drunk, and I end up thinking, "There has to be more to life than this." I like to keep in touch with the mates I met in Israel on the kibbutz. I spend a lot more time chasing them up... Or I head up to stay with Sue and her mates in Leeds. They were all heavily involved in the Strike. I stay up there a lot, we have a good laugh and lots of political argument. Or we get away to the coast or somewhere, just me and Sue on our own. I can't stand being stuck in the house. I spend too much time stuck in here, just waiting to go to work. Since the Strike, I like to get right away from the village and the pit.' (Armthorpe: 56M)

This strengthening of contact with the broader political community that supported the local pit communities during the Strike was not the only feature of the miners social life to emerge from the dispute. Table 7.4

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outlines the reponse of Markham miners when asked, 'When out relaxing, who do you spend your time with?':

Table 7.4 Markham Miners Pattern of Leisure Association outside home. (%)

associate with	Partner	W'mates /ex-w'm	Strike mates	Family/ Relatives	Politic- al assoc	Partners' w'mates	Others	Few
Living in Armthorpe	64	72	27	27	14	14	18	0
Living outside Armthorpe	72	18	55	18	36	27	46	18

No Interviewed: 33

Source: Armthorpe Interview Survey 1986

When contrasted with the 'outside' miners, the more 'traditional' leisure patterns of the village miners emerge quite clearly. Although a high proportion went out with their wives and girlfriends (of the eighteen involved in 'steady' relationships, fourteen went out with their partners) this was still a lower rate than among the 'outsiders' (of the nine that had 'partners', all suggested they went out together on a regular basis). The presence of well-established, close-knit kinship networks in the village was reflected in the higher percentage of Armthorpe miners socializing with

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relatives. A close relationship between leisure association and association in the central workplace was also evident. Whereas sixteen of the Armthorpe miners socialized with *their* workmates (or, in the case of the redundant miners, ex-workmates), only three socialized regularly with their partner's workmates. This occupational basis of sociability was also confirmed by the small number of Armthorpe miners who shared their leisure time with non-miners, and the relative infrequency of specifically political association.

The geographical localism involved in the Armthorpe miners' association pattern is also clearly revealed in table 7.5

Table 7.5 Geographical basis and length of friendships for Markham Miners

Main Associates	Live locally	2-5 miles	over 5 miles	Known 1-3 yrs	Known 3-10 yrs	Known 10-50 yrs
Living in Armthorpe	91	23	9	27	18	82
Living outside Armthorpe	36	73	36	55	27	36
No Interviewed:	33					

Source: Armthorpe Interview Survey 1986

91 percent reported that (the majority of) their regular social associates lived locally (within a mile). Only 23 percent socialised regularly with people living between two and five miles away, and only nine percent went out regularly with people living over five miles from the village.^[24] The comparative stability of the village population was clearly reflected in the length of association, with many people reporting that they had known their drinking partners since they were kids or simply 'ages'. The majority of the shorter friendships (1-3 years) had emerged from the Strike experience, although some were due to the post-Strike influx of transferees.

The involvement of the Armthorpe miners in a strong, workplace and union-centred community stands in marked contrast to the situation of the 'outside' miners. They tended to have far fewer close associates in the

immediate locality. Friendships were maintained over longer distances, with the majority of associates living between two and five miles away, and an equal number living at an even greater distance as lived locally. Far fewer of the miners living outside the village went out regularly with their workmates, and fewer went out with relatives. A total absence of 'community' (that is, a situation of perceived 'isolation') was reported by two of the outside miners. For others, friendships centring on their partner's work relationships were more frequent, as were friendships based on common political beliefs or activity. Perhaps the lack of a local 'community' was most clearly demonstrated by the number of outside miners who reported maintaining close friendships that were first formed during the 1984/85 Strike. Although 27 percent of miners living in Armthorpe also specified 'mates from the Strike' as continuing to be an important group of associates, a much larger proportion (55 percent) of 'outsiders' hung on to them, suggesting that these friendships constituted a real link with the Strike-based 'community' they had been a part of two years previously.

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Although the miners living outside the village did not tend to participate in its social life to the same degree as the miners who lived in the village, they were at one with the Armthorpe miners in viewing the village as a 'community'. Whereas nine out of the eleven (73 percent) specified that there was no community in the areas where they lived, all replied in the affirmative when asked, 'Do you think there is such a thing as 'community' in Armthorpe?' After a follow up question as to whether the Strike had strengthened or weakened 'community' in Armthorpe, I invited them to describe any changes and what they now saw as their 'community'. Some of the results are shown in table 7.6

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Table 7.6 Effects of Strike on Markham Miners 'community' (%).

	Is there a local Community?	Strengthened by the Strike	Change in perceived 'community'		
			Closer	Expanded	Class-based
Yes	100	100	64	48	18
No			6		
Neutral				15	

	Friendships			Neighbours	Relatives	Shopkeepers etc
	More Closer	+ Widespread	Closer	Closer	Closer	Closer
Yes	94	61	88	58	61	55
No		6	9	12	18	12
Neutral	6	33	3	30	21	33

No Interviewed: 33

Source: Armthorpe Interview Survey 1986

Although all the miners interviewed were confident that there was a community, several of the older ones suggested that it was not as strong as in previous decades. Some went as far as to suggest that, prior to the Strike, the sense of community had almost disappeared in the village. Bert reported:

'Before the Strike, there was a community, the miners worked and socialised together, but it was much weaker than in days gone by. The old community was very strong; doors were always wide open to neighbours, there was no knocking on them and waiting to be asked in. It was accepted that you could just go in. There was very little money about, all the village were in the same boat, all hard up and this encouraged a right neighbourly attitude. It was assumed if you were short you would go next door to borrow a few slices of bread or a cup of sugar. And virtually nobody went on family holidays, so we used to organise our day trips collectively. All the clubs used to organise kiddies' trips to the seaside. With one and a half thousand members, Mere Lane used to have a fleet of buses to take them to the station and special trains laid on. It used to be very close-knit, everybody used to know everybody else [laughs], or be related! .

Before the strike the village grew and there were a lot more non-miners, but I think the thing that tended to divide people was the materialism. When people started to get a lot of material possessions, their outlooks seemed to change, they didn't spend so much time together or get to know one other so well. And a lot of miners bought their pit houses and sold them off to people who had no connection with Markham.

(Armthorpe: 61M)

Bert's observation, that 'materialism', the increasing penetration of 'the market' into everyday life, had a major impact on intimate, neighbourly relationships, is obviously important. It would confirm Stacey's observation that the more the needs of a population are catered for by non-local social systems, the less need there is for multiplex role playing at a local level and the weaker the local social system/community becomes (Stacey, 1969). A similar observation was made by Braverman:

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'the population no longer relies upon social organisation in the form of family, friends, neighbours, community, elders, children, but with few exceptions must go to market and only to market, not only for food, clothing and shelter, but also for recreation, amusement, security, for the care of the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped. In time not only the material and service needs but even the emotional patterns of life are channelled through the market.' (Braverman, 1974: 276)

If the dominance of 'the market' was a factor in the weakening of the pre-Strike village community, it also had implications for the re-emergence of community during the Strike, and, indeed, its decline in the aftermath. The government's strategy of 'cutting of the money supply' to strikers also cut the miners and their dependents off from access to 'the market'. Collective organisation, initially at local level, both shielded the striking population from extreme 'market pressures' (such as house repossessions/fuel cut-offs) and also started to provide an alternative focus to 'the market' in people's everyday lives. The reestablishment of close, local social networks in order to protect strikers and facilitate their involvement in the collective struggle was outlined by Wayne:

'Well, before the Strike, the community had grown much weaker, but the Strike itself brought it together very strong. Everybody was in struggle together, we had no money and we learnt how to knit together in order to survive. It was total friendship, like a big family facing their problems together. (Armthorpe: 49M)

The replacement of 'the market' by close personal relations, mutual assistance and collective organisation was, of course, a highly political process. This tended to reinforce the overtly political context of the dispute. Eddie explained the strengthening and politicisation of the community as a response to Government strategy:

'The Government tried to break our community, like they did in Notts. But the vast bulk of this village pulled together and refused to be weakened. The community was centred round the *Welfare* and the *Tadcaster* mainly. Its eased off a bit now, but its still better than before the Strike. I've a lot more friends now, we've got to know each other and relate to one another more now. We still remember what we did and the excitement of it. And its a lot more political community, I was never really involved before, not like now. (Armthorpe: 59M)

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As well as strengthening and politicising the community, many miners commented on how it had expanded and broadened it to include non miners. The wider community embraced sections of the village population, for example housewives and unemployed youth, who previously tended to be marginalised by their exclusion from the workplace or the marketplace, as well as strikers/Strike supporters from far beyond the village. Bert outlined the process:

'The Strike brought us a lot closer, created a new community in a way. And the community wasn't confined to Armthorpe, it included all the villages around, and it also included a lot of non-miners. The Strike opened the village up and got us mixing a lot more. There were constant visits between mining areas, meeting people at demos, and twinning of course. And international solidarity, that was brilliant. It opened up a new dimension, a wider community and better I'd say.' (Armthorpe:61M)

Bert's description of a strengthened community, tied into a much broader social network, was confirmed by the miners' replies to the more detailed questions on friendship patterns and locally based relationships. As table 7.6 shows, the Strike was reported as strengthening relationships with close relatives, neighbours and local shopkeepers/tradespeople. Again, this was not a simple process; the highly political nature of the Strike involved a 'politicisation' of relationships. People were faced with stark choices and political decisions had to be made. The majority of people living in the pit village, including shopkeepers, sided with the miners in their struggle against the state. Relationships with those that did not became very strained or were broken off completely.

A similar process affected the Strike activists' friendship patterns. The Strike was sometimes reported as causing the abandonment of old friendships in favour of new, more political ones. Overall it was reported as leading not only to an increased number and closer friendships, but also to a significant expansion in the geographical basis of friendships. Twenty nine (88 percent) of the miners interviewed mentioned that they had established more widespread

friendships. As well as friends in far-flung mining villages, Pete reported new friendships on a national basis:

'A lot more and from a wider area. People from other villages phone and pass over the latest info from friends in London or Liverpool. Last Saturday, three friends from London dropped in for a visit. They were Fulham supporters taking their kids to the Doncaster match. If it hadn't been for the Strike we'd never have had friends like this.

(Armthorpe: 60M)

While another described an international dimension:

'They're much expanded, I've got friends all over; Ireland, Sweden, France, Denmark. There's people like Kip Dawson and Cecilia Moriarty, women coal miners from America, who stopped over during the Strike. We've kept in touch ever since. Friends in the KPD write regularly and recently sent £500 for five of us to go over and explain the situation to comrades in Holland. And the friends I made in Northern Ireland, I can never forget them. They're an amazing bunch of people.'

(Armthorpe: **M)

The suspension of overt collective struggle, the reimposition of the rigorous work routine and the exposure of individuals/families to the full force of market (and other) pressures, all tended to undermine the basis of the Strike community both at local and other levels.^[25] The survival of significant elements of the strengthened community tended to be revealed most clearly in political, trade union or social settings, especially those which brought the Armthorpe population into contact with their 'outside' supporters (for example rallies, sacked miners' socials, Miners' Galas) or with the authorities (court appearances for overdue rates). The survival of the 'alternative' local community was also revealed in the resilience of attitudes which had underpinned the Strike-centred community. The dispute had transformed the way that its activists looked at the world. It became increasingly evident that they had developed a more critical perspective on society and their place in it.

THE MINER AND THE MEDIA

If the experience of collective struggle involved a major shift in people's attitudes on a wide range of social and political issues, one of the

first areas where this shift became evident was in their relationship with the main shapers of information and attitudes, the mass media.

Attitudes towards Television

The role of the media in assisting the isolation of the strike-bound community was not easily forgotten. So when asked 'What did you think of the T.V. coverage of the Strike?' only two miners expressed a moderately critical opinion ('pretty poor' and 'a bit biased'). The other 31 Markham Main miners were *extremely* hostile. The majority of responses consisted of straightforward description; 'rubbish', 'crap', 'a sick joke', 'all one-sided', 'appallingly biased', but several offered considered analysis; 'it was directed from Downing Street', 'there was a concerted policy of misinformation and propaganda that Goebbels would have been proud of', while listing notable exceptions such as *Open Space* and *Diverse Reports*. Tex voiced a widely held view when he suggested:

'It were that heavily biased. There were no coverage on our side to speak of. Channel 4 was the best, but I think the T.V. beat us.' (Armthorpe: 68M)

Charlie described how many miners had felt the impact of the media offensive:

'It was so biased. It surprised me, the amount of bias. Every time I used to watch it, it used to upset me, it used to hurt inside. 'Cos every day I used to see things that police used to do to the men, but it never got on television, it never got as far as television.....They used to show parts of things that happened, so all you ever saw was miners throwing bricks at police, they never used to show the other side. It seemed to be aimed at cutting us off from any support.' (Armthorpe: 50M)

The degree of pain caused by the contradiction between what was witnessed on the picket line and what was portrayed on television is apparent here. In contrast to the controlled anger expressed by the more politically experienced activists, the expression of personal betrayal appeared to stem in part from the realisation of previous naivety on the part of several miners.

The power of the media in cutting the miners off from the vital areas of support was experienced almost daily on picket lines, workplace meetings or

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street collections. The latter were the most difficult situation to cope with, requiring a lot of restraint. Steve explained:

'Sometimes people would be really abusive, coming out with really stupid accusations. I used to feel like giving them some verbal and then I used to think, *'No, it's not their fault, they're only coming out with the crap that's been pumped into them.'* I'd control myself just by remembering how I used to accept all the news as 'gospel'.'

(Armthorpe: 64M)

Before the Strike most of the miners had been, in the words of Anna Pollert, 'interested in what went on in the world - but as spectators.' Although they were obviously aware of occasional bias, few of them had acknowledged the possibility of systematic political distortion, especially on the television where 'you sees it actually happening' (Pollert, 1981:137). Table 7.7 outlines the widespread nature of the change in attitudes towards television that took place during the strike:

Table 7.7 Markham Miners Reaction to TV Coverage of the 1984/85 Strike(%)

	<u>TV Strike coverage</u>			Surprised-ex tent of bias	More critical since Strike	<u>Current TV viewing</u>	
	Fair	poor	rubbish			same	more serious
Village	0	4	96	77	82	9	91
Non vill	0	9	91	63	91	18	73
Average	0	6	94	70	85	12	88

No interviewed: 33

Source: 1986 Interview Survey.

The table reveals the large proportion of miners who expressed surprise at the extent of T.V. bias, the Strike's impact on their attitude towards T.V. and the basic change in viewing patterns since the Strike. What also became evident in the interviews was that, despite their perception of premeditated and orchestrated bias, many of the miners had become 'news addicts' during the Strike. Several confessed to having watched as many as six news reports per day, in an attempt to gain an insight into the 'broader' picture, to disentangle 'what was really going on' from the official version.

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This 'addiction' to news and current affairs programmes was still very much in evidence in 1986. Every miner, irrespective of shifts, claimed he watched at least one news broadcast every day, with many claiming to watch several. Tex explained how the Strike had left an impact on his viewing patterns:

'Put this down, I don't like American programmes. I do *not* like American programmes, the *bullshit* that they put out from that country. I'm talking about their soaps; Dynasty and Dallas, and those bestseller series, they're ten times worse than anything we do. I'm not a great T.V. watcher, but since the Strike what I *do* watch is a lot more serious... not just a bit more, a bloody lot more. I watch every news. I like breakfast T.V. - I don't always agree with it, but I do like it, cos the news comes on all the time....I watch every news [wife laughs and interrupts, "six and seven o'clock, nine o'clock, ten o'clock, the lot!"]....[Tex, laughing] That's about right!' (Armthorpe: 68M)

Their participation in a struggle of major political dimensions appeared to have made the miners far more interested in similar struggles and world affairs. Their increased appetite for news broadcasts appeared to be matched by an increasing intolerance of trivial or low quality entertainment.

Table 7.7 reveals little difference between the attitudes of village and non-village miners, although the former, less reliant on T.V in normal times (due to their social/kinship networks) appeared to have been more shocked by the extent of television bias. Again it was the miners who had been more politically active prior to the Strike that were able to claim that their viewing patterns had not undergone a radical change. So Jimmy suggested he had always been discriminating in his viewing habits:

'There's very little change, most of it's trash. I tend to watch even less now because the soap operas are increasing all the time. Thirty odd years ago they started producing programmes that were specially aimed at children, now they still produce the same programmes but aim them at adults. They've done it on purpose.' (Armthorpe: 77M)

This view was a common one and left little room for doubt. Television was seen as controlled by those in government, used by them in a consciously manipulative way, feeding adults on a diet of trivia and slanted news broadcasts. In a time of crisis such as the Miners Strike of 1984/85 the TV

controllers were seen to act just as much as a tool of the government as the police, the courts or the DHSS.

Attitudes towards the Press

The slightly wider range of choice in newspapers allowed a slightly different angle on the miners attitude towards the media, while confirming that they had indeed been transformed by the miners' involvement in collective struggle. Although the shortage of money and the consequent cancellation of regular daily newspapers acted as a complicating factor for many of the miners, a basic pattern emerged. Table 7.8 illustrates the verdict of the miners on their pre-Strike newspapers, and subsequent change.

Table 7.8 Markham Miners Reaction to their pre-Strike daily papers' coverage of the 1984/85 Strike. (%)

	<u>Old Paper's coverage</u>			<u>Action taken</u>		<u>Post Strike Change</u>	
	Good	Poor	Terrible	Cancelled	Changed	Same	More serious
Village	5	5	90	65	15	55	45
Non vill	0	10	90	50	20	40	60
Average	3	7	90	60	16	50	50

Number interviewed: 33

Source: 1986 Interview Survey

The only miner who thought that his pre-Strike daily paper's coverage of the Strike had been good, ("*Second to none, all the rest were appalling*") was a *Morning Star* reader. All of the others thought that their paper's coverage had been biased, with the overwhelming majority suggesting that it had been 'complete rubbish', 'totally biased' or 'disgusting crap'.

In the majority of cases it was clear that their disillusionment had not been a casual one. Their total involvement in the local Strike had been matched by their thirst for information about developments elsewhere. Their relationship with the media had therefore been an active one, but one fraught with tensions and contradictions. On the one hand they had been totally involved in a principled struggle which they saw as having major implications

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for other working people, and on the other they had consistently been portrayed in the newspapers as selfish, greedy, mindless militants, easily manipulated by their machiavellian leader, Arthur Scargill. In reality they had had most of their civil rights removed and been subject to surveillance, intimidation, assault and arrest in their villages, at road blocks and on picket lines. The press account portrayed them as bunch of lawless hooligans - violent criminals intent on destroying everything decent and civilised in society. In the real world they had turned out every day, penniless, poorly clothed and fed, to face inevitable confrontation with a well-paid, nationally-organised riot force, trained and equipped along military lines. According to the Fleet Street version they had constituted a well-organised army of brutal thugs, posing a constant threat to the genuine miners' 'right to work' and the 'thin blue line' of bobbies that protected it.

Due to their appetite for making and receiving news, many of the Strike activists were initially very friendly to the news teams. They imagined that they could use the press to explain their case to a wider audience. Coming to terms with the role of the mass media also involved a coming to terms with their own naivety. Within weeks, they became more wary of, and more hostile to, representatives of the mainstream press. Certain journalists that arrived with good recommendations were given assistance, but the overriding power of the editors and proprietors was soon appreciated by the majority of Strike activists. Rex, who had put a lot of time and effort into developing twinning relationships in Fleet Street, recounted his experience:

'Prior to the Strike, I used to have various newspapers, I must confess I even used to get the *Sun*, which is a right comic. All the newspapers were crap. I finished up reading the *Guardian* for a time, I used to get a free copy off the printers. Although it was still biased, it gave better coverage than any of the others. ... After what me and my mates went through, I don't believe owt in the papers whatsoever - you can't get owt right from them. For example I once did an interview for Rod Gibson from the *Daily Star*. He did a real good write-up, an honest write up, and because it were an honest write up, they wouldn't let him print it. I never buy a paper now, cos they're all lies.'

(Armthorpe:54M)

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The press were seen as part of the enemy, allies of Thatcher, another tool to isolate and weaken the miners.

In this situation, many Strike activists began to turn to the 'alternative' press for information and answers. Daily newspapers like the *Newsline* and the *Morning Star* found a readership when they were made available at the Welfare (or in the case of the *Newsline*, delivered free to the homes of leading activists). The readership of the main socialist weeklies, in particular the *Socialist Worker*, rose dramatically. This was particularly so as the fundraising and twinning operations began to involve more of the younger activists, who began to feel more at home in the outside political 'community'. In the aftermath of the Strike, most of these papers became relatively unavailable. Only the Socialist Workers Party, with active members at the pit, were able to maintain a regular supply of their publications.

These developments are illustrated in table 7.9. The changes in newspaper readership that effected 50 percent of the activists interviewed are illustrated in more detail. Some had shifted 'leftwards' (including seven of the eight *Sun* readers). Several, like Rex, had simply stopped buying any of the mainstream newspapers, while others (more frequently those living outside Armthorpe) had quit the tabloids and took up more 'weighty' papers like the *Guardian*.

Table 7.9 Papers regularly read by interviewed Markham Miners (%)

	BEFORE STRIKE	DURING STRIKE	AFTER STRIKE (1986)
<i>DAILY MIRROR</i>	67	15	52
<i>SUN</i>	24	0	3
<i>DAILY STAR</i>	15	6	12
<i>GUARDIAN</i>	9	18	24
<i>MORNING STAR</i>	3	9	3
<i>DONCASTER STAR</i>	27	6	21
<i>YORKSHIRE POST</i>	6	3	6
<i>NEWSLINE</i>	0	30	6
<i>SOCIALIST WORKER</i>	15	73	45
<i>COAL NEWS</i>	*	*	48
<i>MINER/Y. MINER</i>	*	*	91

No Interviewed: 33 Source: 1986 Interview Survey *=Information not asked for

Often these shifts in reading patterns interacted with each other. The thirst for news and information caused several miners who regarded themselves as supporters of the socialist weeklies, to read the more 'substantial' dailies. Jeff explained how the Strike experience had effected his attitude to the press:

'Prior to the Strike, I used to read the *Daily Mirror* or the *Star*. Their Strike coverage was terrible, I suppose that's what turned me against them. I was getting really depressed with the crap politics in them, all the spouting about new realism - in the *Mirror* especially. I've been reading the *Guardian* and the *Observer* for eighteen months or so now. They're still biased of course, but not as crude as Maxwell. I rely on the *Socialist Worker*, which I started reading in the second week of the Strike but I also like to read the *Militant*, the *Miner*, *Yorkshire Miner*, and any other trade union newspapers, like the *Durham Miner*, or the *T & G Record* if I'm lucky enough to get hold of it.' (Armthorpe: 69M)

The socialist and trade union press was seen here as a key link with the alternative class-based community that many miners only discovered during the Strike. As in the case of television, the lack of a popular socialist 'alternative' caused miners to look to areas of the pro-establishment media in order to satisfy their increased appetite for detailed information. The 'settled' relationship that had existed between many miners and their chosen media had largely been replaced by a tension, a new critical awareness of the role of mass media in society.

THE MINER AND THE LAW.

The massively increased hostility of the miners' towards the National Coal Board/ British Coal management has been mentioned in the previous chapter. There was only one area where the miners showed more consistent hostility and that was in their attitudes towards the police force. Their treatment of the miners during the Strike had, in the words of one of the branch officials:

'left a scar that will never heal. It's an experience that'll stay in our minds for generations,' (Armthorpe: 48M)

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None of the Markham Main miners interviewed could find a good word to say about the police, and the question, 'What did you think about the policing of the Strike?' opened up a flood of suppressed pain and anger that was quite overwhelming. Eric exclaimed:

'Oh Jesus ... Well for me they weren't police anyway. They were a paramilitary mob. Some of them were in groups that had been specially trained to injure rather than arrest people ... One of the days at Orgreave I remember, there must have been about five or six thousand lads there and they arrested, I think, eighty four of us. But they must have hit at least three thousand men - men who had some kind of injury, whether it be just a glancing blow or been knocked on the ground. In my opinion on that day they were out to injure as many as they could and it was a deliberate policy, no doubt about that.'

(Armthorpe: 62M)

Every one of the thirty three Markham miners interviewed had had personal experience of abuse at the hands of the police and were bitterly critical of their role. Although only fourteen specified police harassment, these reported it as though it were such a commonplace phenomenon that it was hardly worth mentioning. Bob explained:

'When I talk about harassment, I was stopped and questioned every day as a matter of course. It was just run of the mill to all of the active strikers.'

(Armthorpe: 72M)

Six of the Strike activists reported that they had been arrested once. Three reported being arrested twice, four reported triple arrest and one listed arrests on four separate occasions. A few of these arrests were due to hardship-related 'crime'. So Dave explained how he was arrested for pinching coal behind the pit:

'There were six of us. As the cops came for us, we all did a runner. At the back of the pit there's a graveyard. And I was jumped by a security man and a Met copper and they whacked me over the head with sommat..I don't know what it was. Anyway they dragged me down to the cop shop and they says to me, "Come on, you've took the rap before, let us know who else is doing it now." and I wouldn't say owt, and they were doing that for about forty minutes, asking for names and descriptions. And I said "I'll give you their description they've all got balaclavas on with one eye stitched up!"...and all hell let loose, the one cop went crazy. He put cuffs on me....dead tight like that...and he said, "You're going to Rosso you ! ".

And we'd gone about a mile and an half and I asked him if he could loosen the handcuffs, cos me hands were going numb with lack of blood supply. And he stopped the car and said, "If you tell us who else were with you, we'll let you go." And I said "No way " and we carried on. I'll

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never forget them cuffs. If it'd have been any further to Rossington, my hands would have fell off.' (Armthorpe: 57M)

More often the arrests took place on or near the picket lines. While the police inflicted the most physical damage, the partisan role of the law courts was crucial in long-term restriction of civil liberties. As McIlroy suggests, 'far from acting as a curb on the police, the criminal courts acted to ratify, legitimize and amplify their actions' (1984:110). Jumbo described the way the two agencies cooperated in the prevention of effective picketing:

'My second arrest was at Harworth. We'd come up from the bottom end and when we got there, they'd herded all the lads onto this field and they were charging them with hosses. Behind them there were about twenty busses pulled up, full of Mets and they just came charging down with sticks out and the lot. This copper just dragged me mate out of the bus stop, so I went over and was trying to pull him away and the next thing you know I had another two on me back, and they put me on the floor and that were it. When we were on the bus, they were still giving a couple of lads some stick, punching 'em and that. Then they took us into the pit yard, photoed all of us, kept us there all day and eventually released us on bail.

A month later we had to go to Mansfield and it were just a kangaroo court. We were there all day again. Mine were the last case to get done with and by that time I'd got pissed off with it. No matter what the solicitor was saying, they were sticking all these restrictive bail conditions on us, so I just blew up.

I stood up and said, "*In this country, you're supposed to be innocent till proven guilty aren't you?*" and the magistrate says "yes". And I says, "*By you putting me on these bail conditions, you're saying I'm guilty till I prove myself innocent*". And he said, "No" and I said "Yes you are". I said, "*I'm pleading not guilty, so that means I'm not guilty until you can find out otherwise.*" And magistrate says, "*Look, I'm not bothered, here's your bail conditions, you're on bail*". I says, "No I'm not". He says, "You are" I says, "*Look, I'll be on that picket line tomorrow, there's no way you'll get round that, so you'd better lock me up now*". I just walked up, grabbed me bail sheet and ripped it up in front of him and says, "*There, that's what I think of this court*". And they just stood there and I walked out of the court and they never said nowt.' (Armthorpe: 69M)

By September 1984, 95 percent of the 1,745 people charged before the Mansfield Magistrates Courts had had restrictive bail conditions imposed on them (Blake, 1985: 114).

But it was the police role in intimidating the pickets that remained most firmly in the minds of the Markham miners. Nineteen of those interviewed claimed that they had received serious beatings or 'stick' at the hands of the police. Charlie suggested:

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'I had a good few beatings on the picket lines. At Orgreave I were running across the field and a copper comes up on this horse, struck me on arm with a long baton, and knocked me to ground. Then he rode his horse at me as I lay on the ground. I were in pain, I thought he'd broke my arm. And someone ran up and dragged me off the floor and as I looked round I saw hundreds of police running up the road towards me, so I just legged it... ran straight ahead past the horses and escaped down the side of the banking.....

I got quite a few beatings at Armthorpe pit gates. I remember one day when the inspector had said that if we didn't push, the police wouldn't come into us. And all over sudden the Met just come in, and one of them punched me straight in the kidneys and then in the mouth and just knocked me to the ground. And as I lay on the ground, he tried to kick me, but lucky enough me brother Steve was there and he hit the copper to stop him from kicking me. So they all jumped on Steve and dragged him to the floor and beat shit out of him and then arrested him. They tried to arrest me, but the lads picked me up and pushed me to the back and stopped me getting back through. Most of the picket lines we went on we'd have some of the lads getting kicked or beaten. It were just like a sport to them. But it didn't stop us, we just kept going.' (Armthorpe:50M)

Eddie, who had been arrested along with Arthur Scargill at one of the Doncaster mass pickets during the 1972 Strike, emphasized the contrast with 1984/85:

'The violence on the picket lines will always stay in my mind. I've never seen anything like it, the brutality of the cops. They were well organised, well-organised bullies. The army were in with them as well. They went beyond the limit, the violence on their part was out of this world. We had to do something about it, but we could only go so far, cos we lived under the constant threat of prison, and a lot of people were very frightened by it. But it was just getting like a police state. They were a law unto themselves, they could do anything. I seen the police in action in the village and I seen the police at Orgreave. South Africa is a lot worse I know, but in this country we're getting there. They're adopting the same tactics as they do in South Africa. (Armthorpe:59M)

These statements reveal a clear understanding of the role of the police force as part of a repressive state apparatus. The personal abuse and injury suffered by individuals was mirrored in the sheer scale and comprehensive nature of the police operation. So Guy, whose brother had also been jailed for Strike-related 'crimes' and who remained sacked in 1987, could combine a personal account:

'I've suffered and my family have suffered. They have ruined my life. I was never their friend, but prior to the Strike I always thought they had a job to do. It goes without saying that prior my Mam and Dad always took

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the side of the coppers. But now my Mam hates them and is scared of them and what they can do to us. The same with Dad.'

with a matter of fact analysis:

'They were guilty of organized brutality. The government wanted to shift the balance of power and smash the union in order to privatise the industry. The police were doing a job for the government, so practically everyone in a village like Armthorpe were seen as the enemy.'

(Armthorpe: 56M)

Similarly after a detailed description of his three arrests and a severe beating, Jumbo passed judgement on the police role:

'Thatcher's private army I call 'em now. They're there to protect the ruling class, that's all. There's no way we'll ever trust them again.'

(Armthorpe: 69M)

When the Conservative government revealed the first stage of their pit closure programme on 1 March 1984, they undoubtedly anticipated the possibility of serious localised conflict in certain mining areas. They had taken account of the *Times* editorial in the aftermath of Saltley:

'the tougher a government's line, the less it can afford mistakes.'

(15/2/1972)

and were prepared to counter any challenge that the miners could put up. As it turned out, the strength of the miners' resistance required that 'every possible component of the system of law and order was utilized to defeat the miners' strike' (McIlroy, 1984: 119). The scale of police mobilisation, the brutalisation and criminalisation not only of the miners, but of whole pit village populations, meant that the traditional attitude towards the police was severely undermined. For virtually all those interviewed it was no longer a case of the police and law courts having a basic legitimacy, despite faults and weaknesses. The whole legal system and, in particular, the police had demonstrated that they were neither independent nor impartial, but rather a willing political tool of the employers and their government.

The miners were well aware of the implications of this attitude. One of the branch officials explained his unremitting hostility:

'People say, "Well you say you hate the police, but you'd be the first to call 'em in if your house was burgled." But during the strike, for a whole year they daren't come into the village - except in convoy - and yet me house wasn't burgled. In fact there was less burglary then than there is now, less trouble in the streets and there were no cops at all in the village. We existed without the state; policemen, courts, dole, everything - we just put two fingers up to them.' (Armthorpe: **M)

What is evident in these few sentences is that the Strike had not only served to transform the miners' attitude towards the state and its agencies. By encouraging the miners and their supporters in the building of a Strike-based community, it had also provided a pointer to a possible alternative.

THE MINER AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY

This personal and political hostility towards the role of the police was indicative of a radicalisation of attitudes among the Strike activists on a range of other major issues. This transformation of attitudes is indicated in Table 7.10:

Table 7.10 Attitudes of Markham Miners on Major Issues. (%)

	Hostility towards role of police	Increased respect for women	Anticipate changes in q's lives	More aware of unions & Labour party	Overall radicalisation
Yes	100	100	85	91	94
Neutral	0	0	15	9	3
No	0	0	0	0	3

No interviewed: 33

Source: 1986 Interview Survey

The unanimous condemnation of the police role was accompanied by a similarly unanimous appreciation of the women's role in the Strike. Not only did all the miners voice their own appreciation and respect for the women Strike activists, but 88 percent suggested that an increased respect/equality between men and women was the most visible legacy of the Strike. Almost as many (85 percent) felt that the Strike experience would result in significant and lasting changes in the lives of local women, especially those who were most active in the Strike. However a much smaller proportion of the miners

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interviewed (36 percent) thought that substantial numbers of women were likely to overcome their relative 'exclusion' from Armthorpe's public life in the immediate future.

A large proportion (91 percent) suggested that the Strike had increased their awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of their own union and the labour movement in general. (Almost half specified that their most important lesson concerned the weakness and treachery of the trade union bureaucrats). Seventy percent considered themselves active in the union (either in the branch or the workplace) with over half suggesting that they were more active in the NUM since the Strike. All of the miners felt that the Strike had been justified. Only two of those interviewed (both sacked miners) suggested that, due to the bitter aftermath, they regretted the Strike and felt it had been a negative experience. The other thirty one miners considered the Strike to have been a positive experience in their lives which they could not regret (notwithstanding the result).

When asked, 'Would you say the Strike has changed you as a person?' all the miners replied in the affirmative. One of them suggested that it had made him a more negative, bitter person, one suggested that although the Strike had developed his politics considerably, it had boosted his overall cynicism. The remaining thirty one replied that they had benefitted from the Strike, in terms of personal and political development. The changes they listed were many and diverse, but they invariably indicated a major political radicalisation, a getting to grips with fundamental political issues. So Kev suggested:

'You've got to go through something like that to realize what the Tories are doing to you. It was an experience that I wouldn't have missed at any price. It showed you how the establishment were always knitted together; cops, judges, bosses. This is the fact of the matter. How long will it take people to realize this? I just hope its sooner rather than later. Striking is one of the main weapons we've got to use. It gives us power. People have got to take power into their own hands. By not questioning the system, passive people are pulling me down as well.' (Armthorpe: 74M)

Tex felt his radicalisation was rooted in his clearer understanding of ruling class strategy:

'It's made me more aware of what lengths and costs the ruling class are prepared to go to to keep the workers down. It's hardened me up for the future. All the contacts and the friends that we made are going to prove very valuable. We're still in touch with them all - in all the different areas. The Strike broadened my horizons. I'm a more political person. I used to side with the Labour Party, but now I agree with Dot when she says, "They're all pissing in the same pot!" ' (Armthorpe: 68M)

Another miner was equally sure about the beneficial nature of the change and commented on how he and his partner had developed their political awareness together:

'It's changed my thinking, in everything I do. I always think before I do owt now. If I find something that's in the NCB's favour, it's out. I'm less naive, I'd say I were class conscious now. My home life reflects on this change. Me and [***], we've changed along these lines together. We've even commented to each other about our mutual development. I've got more outlet than she has in her union, but she does what she can, fighting the local authority's cutbacks in wages and conditions....' (Armthorpe: **M)

Steve had travelled extensively during the Strike and felt his political awareness had developed a lot:

'Yes, I'm a lot more political. More for the working class. Although with being on afters, I tend to miss out on the meetings, I still get information about the situation in Ireland. I'm more aware, more confident due to the German trip, speaking in front of 5,000 people and stuff. But it's not just the NUM anymore. I'm a regular attender at trades council and I'm enjoying life a lot more now I'm involved. I reckon I'm a pleb, a class-conscious pleb, cos you'll never meet a better class of people than the working class.' (Armthorpe: 64M)

Although Dave had not travelled as much as Steve during the Strike, his political development still had a strong international dimension:

'It's changed me. I know a lot more about what's going off round the world. Before I just got on with me own life and wasn't really bothered about owt. Now I feel more part of a movement. I know all about the American interference in this country now. Reagan should get lost and we should get rid of all these nuclear weapons that they've got based here. I don't hate the American people. I hate the American government. They're the warmongers, not the Russians. Reagan and co. are reet warmongersAnd I'd like us to get our nose out of Northern Ireland. I didn't use to be political you know, but I can't avoid it now. It's got to me, it really does my head in.' (Armthorpe: 53M)

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The role of the Strike in broadening the political horizons of its participants, of encouraging them to relate to the much wider, class-based community, is clearly demonstrated here. However grappling with new ideas and concepts (that 'do your head in') is one thing, committing yourself to regular activity in the political community is another.

Involvement in Political Activity

Although twenty seven of the miners interviewed suggested they had become more politically aware during the Strike, only ten out of the thirty three Markham Main activists interviewed (30%) were full members of a political party in the latter half of 1986; six in the Labour Party, three in the Socialist Workers Party and one in the Communist Party. A similar number were active in political and trade union campaigns, but this still left thirteen who were not active in any party or campaign. The details are illustrated in table 7.11 below:

Table 7.11 Markham Miners Involvement in Organised Political Activity during/after the 1984/85 Strike.

ORGANISATION/ CAMPAIGN	Joined	Left	Joined & Left	More Active	Less Active	Members	Supporters
Labour Party	2	4	1	0	3	6	*
'Militant'			1				
Socialist League			2				
Communist Party				0	1	1	1
SWP	2		1	1	0	3	6
Anti-Apartheid	2			2		4	5
C. N. D	2			1		3	4
N. C. C. L.	1					1	
Anti-Nuclear Cam	1					1	
Trades Council	2			1		4	
Tannoy Group	5					5	4
Campaign Group	3					3	2
National Justice for Mineworkers	2					2	*
T. O. M.							4
Printers Support							4
Silentnight							2
Members of neither party nor campaign						13	

No Interviewed: 33

Source: 1986 Interview Survey

*= Not mentioned as such, but 'support' evident in several interviews.

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This table illustrates a number of important developments concerning the political activity of Strike activists. In one sense it indicates the breadth and depth of their political radicalisation. Among those miners who were not members of either party or campaign, there were several who acknowledged the dissatisfaction they felt due to their lack of political activity. Above all it indicates a serious attempt by many activists to continue and consolidate their involvement with the class-based 'community' operating beyond the pit villages. But it also reveals the existence of major problems and frustrations in this project.

Perhaps the most revealing statistics concern the complex relationship between the Strike activists and the Labour Party. Due to its size, its extensive local organisation, its control of the vast majority of local elected bodies and its extensive connections with the NUM, the Labour Party would appear to be the political organisation best placed to reap significant benefits from increased political interest and involvement among the mining activists. This was not the case among Markham Main's miners. Whereas only two of those interviewed had joined the Labour Party during or after the Strike, four had left, and of the four 'pre-Strike' members remaining, three specified that they were less active in the Party than they had been previously.

There were several subsidiary factors which helped explain this phenomenon. There were general problems associated with the Strike's aftermath. For example, there were several miners who said they had felt exhausted and drained by the defeat, while others mentioned the problem of paying an extra set of 'subs' given their severe hardship and debt problems.^[26] There were other, more localised problems, one being the major divisions inside the local party branch due to the presence of large, well-established and influential 'family' cliques. However the reason that was cited most often for both not joining or leaving the Labour Party was the

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major political one, namely the failure of the Labour Party to provide the miners with 100 percent support when they most needed it. Although the local party branches were not immune to criticism, the most damning indictments were usually levelled against the national Labour Party leadership. So Rex, one of the miners who had left the Labour Party explained:

'I joined the Labour Party two or three years before the Strike. I packed in during the Strike, mainly because of the national leaders like Kinnock. I don't like a man who sits on the fence and barter round things like it were a game. It were disgraceful.'

(Armthorpe: 54M)

and Bert, who had been Armthorpe's elected representative on the South Yorkshire County Council suggested:

'I was one of the few miners who became active in politics due to the '72 and '74 strikes. Prior to that I was only involved in the union at a local level. After those two strikes, I couldn't go back to the old routine. I got heavily involved not only in the union as a whole but the political movement as well..... Although I was active, I wasn't happy with the way the Labour Party was going. I did at one time have hopes that we could change it, but the shift to the right under Kinnock was making me think about resignation some time before the Strike. It was the performance of the national leadership during the Strike that finally made up my mind though.'

(Armthorpe: 61M)

It was obvious that the Markham Main miners' experience during the strike tended to bear out David Howell's observation that:

'The modern Labour Party at local level often seems a credible force. But as a national organisation, the party has presented a very different image..... 'Ramsay McKinnock' points not to a composite figure, but to a cramping, narrowing set of political assumptions - about class, about industrial action, about the neutrality of the state.'

(Howell, 1985: 197)

If their radicalisation made it difficult for strike activists to consider joining the Labour Party, the political organisations embracing a more radical view of the world might have been expected to benefit. This is what happened in the immediate aftermath of the 1926 strike/lockout, when the Communist Party reached its 1920's membership peak (McIntyre, 1986), and when, in certain coalfields it grew massively. ²⁷ Although it was numerically small, the Communist Party of 1926 was active, confident and responsible for generating much of the solidarity received by the miners in certain areas. It

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was also the 'local' representative of Soviet Russia, whose trade unionists donated £1,161,459, or 87 percent of all overseas donations to the locked-out miners.

There was no class-based organisation of equivalent strength in the aftermath of the 1984/85 Strike. The Communist Party, although its numerical strength was roughly equivalent to that of 1926,^[29] had suffered a major shrinkage in its industrial base^[29], and was seriously divided on a wide range of major issues, not least of which was the bitter argument which broke out over the party's role in the the Miners Strike itself.^[30] The degree of debilitating division was symbolised by large scale expulsions of leading members in 1984, including that of Frank Watters, who had played such an important role in building the Yorkshire Broad Left and organising the solidarity action at Saltley. Although the strike activists interviewed still had a lot of respect for the remaining Communist Party members and sympathizers in the village, as a national organisation, the Communist Party did not appear as a serious pole of attraction to them.

The socialist groups inside the Labour Party seemed, at least initially, to provide a more attractive alternative. Groups like the Socialist League and Militant framed their unconditional support for the miners' strike in a radical world view that could make sense of the experience, and yet combined this with an 'input' into the major political organisation of the working class.^[31] The period of the miners' strike saw a temporary suspension of the Labour Party's rightward drift, but in its aftermath the move to consensus politics under the banner of 'new realism' continued apace. This was illustrated by the collapse of the fifty five Labour councils that had, during the miners' strike, pledged themselves to defy rate capping. Their capitulation led to the isolation and prosecution of Liverpool and Brent councillors. Inside the Labour Party, the depth and scope of the witchhunt increased, forcing the 'hard left' groupings, such as the Militant and the

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Socialist League, to lower their political profile and reduce their criticism of the national Labour leadership.^[32] As a result, all three of the miners interviewed who had joined the entrust groups had drifted out of membership within eighteen months of the Strike. The two who had left the Socialist League complained about the lack of local activity. One suggested:

'I got my political education through my experiences during the Strike, and also through reading, because before the Strike I wasn't politically active or involved. My views have totally changed. They've made me want to reach out and get control of things and learn more. Like I've applied for the union course in Sheffield. I don't want to stand still any more, I want to carry things forward all the time. Before I wouldn't even think about joining parties or going to political meetings, whereas now I'm quite happy to.

I've just left the Socialist League. The main problem was having to travel to Rotherham all the time.^[33] It was a very long way when you were on shifts and then, when you got there, you had to leave early in any case to get back home on the bus. Also they used to hold the meetings on Sunday nights which is when we tend to stay drinking locally and I just thought some of the meetings were aimless. I liked going to the forums - the educationals - cos it was like a schooling class for me, I was learning stuff. But when we went to the branch meetings, it was just internal and Labour Party business.' (Armthorpe:49M)

The miner who had left the Militant had had similar problems fitting in meetings with his working shifts and traditional leisure pattern, but also complained about the fragmentation of the socialist organisations:

'I left the Militant after the Strike, mainly because I didn't agree with all their views about staying in the Labour Party. I also used to get angry about all the arguing between the different groups. Personally I think every left-wing group should get together as one.' (Armthorpe:50M)

This miner had become heavily involved in the NUM branch committee and, along with the two ex-Socialist League members, had applied for a place on the three-year education programme run by Yorkshire NUM at Sheffield University.^[34] It seemed that there was little fundamental disagreement with the type of politics put forward by the socialist groups, but more a questioning of their political methods and impact. The low profile of the entrust groupings only served to underline the prominent role of the union branch, at least in the more localised, pit/village setting.

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This helps explain the relative success of the Socialist Workers Party, the only political organisation which had, at the time of the interviews, managed to win and hold an enlarged membership among the Markham miners. One of the long-term SWP members explained:

'Although our membership in the pit hasn't grown massively, we now have an active core. We have a much larger readership of the paper, more supporters, people with a lot of respect for the SWP due to our work in the Strike (...) You know how difficult it is in the pits at the moment, so the geographical branch is very important. We didn't really have a branch in Doncaster before the Strike, now we've got a good one, and it's growing. There's a lot of activity and a lot of confidence in the membership. Personally I feel much more confident in what I'm doing.'

(Armthorpe: 73M)

Although the anchor role of the geographical branch of the SWP is stressed, the importance laid on the party's industrial intervention at the pit is also evident. One of the newer members suggested:

'Yes, I joined the SWP and I'm very active in it. Unfortunately I'm one of the few that have got more involved with a political party. I first came across the SWP during the Strike and apart from reading the paper, I used to attend the miners' meetings and public rallies. You can't fault the party's performance during the Strike, but what really decided me to join was what they were doing in the pit after the Strike; helping to organize the rank and file newsletter, holding the union membership together and counteracting all the crap the NCB were putting out. It's the SWP core that makes Armthorpe different, that's what gives the *Tannoy* its politics....although there's not enough politics.'

(Armthorpe: **M)

Again the symbiotic relationship between the revolutionary, class-struggle oriented party and the union, so crucial in the development of the Armthorpe tradition, is clearly evident. There appeared to be four factors which underpinned the Socialist Workers Party's ability to strengthen their base in the period of demoralisation. The first was their history of membership and involvement at the pit prior to the Strike. The second was the central role they played in helping the Armthorpe miners/women to build their Strike support network. The third was the SWP's broader role in the Strike, their wholehearted support for rank and file militancy, mass picketing and twinning. The fourth factor was their maintenance of a profile, both in the pit and in the local area in the aftermath of the Strike. By being seen as an important factor in

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shaping and strengthening the union branch, the Socialist Workers Party, like the Communist Party before it, was able to attract a broader audience among the waged workers who saw a strong union as vital to their lives in the pit.

The symbiotic relationship was not without its problems. Although all three of the SWP members interviewed showed a large degree of optimism over their political activity (in contrast to virtually all the other Markham miners), they also acknowledged the pressures they faced as members of a small group, heavily dependent on class activity, in a period of widespread demoralisation and passivity. Some of these pressures were indicated by the account of a miner who had joined the Socialist Workers Party during the Strike, but suggested he had never felt like a full member:

'I joined the Socialist Workers during the Strike, but I was never fully integrated into the party. I probably jumped too fast, cos I was just reading and finding out about the SWP's views when I joined. I still agree with the bulk of their politics but I was never properly involved as such. Now I'm too tied up with the union. Thinking back I must have thought I could do more as a union man than as a member of a political party.'

(Armthorpe: **M)

This young miner had been a part of a major, overseas fundraising tour, organised by one of the SWP's sister organisations. During the period of heightened, overtly political struggle, the need for an unbroken union had implied the need for an international, class-oriented combat party. As the Strike-based connections with the 'outside' political organisations became less immediate, many Strike activists began to see the more localised, union-centred struggle as the arena in which they could do the most useful work. The 21-year old miner quoted above had stood for, and been elected onto, the branch committee soon after the Strike ended.

Although the rich, class-conscious approach of the Armthorpe branch had been nurtured, in the main, by members of overtly leninist organisations, the prominent political profile of the union branch in the locality sustained a more syndicalist element among the union activists. So when asked whether he

had become a member or supporter of any political party, another young branch committee man simply replied, "No, the NUM is my party" (Armthorpe:25M). The belief that a union could also fulfill the role of a workers' political party was shared by several activists and was reflected in their attempts to combine more sectional and broader political activity inside a local union framework.

This became apparent in the two NUM branch meetings I was allowed to attend. Although they dealt with several sectional (pit and community-based) issues, they spent an equal amount of time debating wider NUM business and a further period discussing developments in the broader labour movement. The role of the 1984/85 Strike in renewing the Armthorpe branch's political role is also indicated (in a negative way) in the lower section of table 7.11, which reveals the Markham activists' involvement in political and solidarity campaigns. A few of the miners were individual members of Anti-Apartheid or CND, but most regarded their collective affiliation through the branch as making them either 'members' or 'supporters' of these campaigns. The basic message was clear, that as an active member of the Armthorpe NUM branch, you were automatically involved in a range of political campaigns and struggles, and therefore you did not need to make an extra personal commitment to the broader political community.

Even in the 1930s and 1940s, when a majority of the male population were union members, this attitude had rested uneasily with Armthorpe's political tradition, which aimed at the maximum mobilisation of people on a class basis. In a period when not only local women, but a growing number of men in the village were excluded from the wage relationship which allowed full participation in the union, this attitude had increasingly narrow implications.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at how the Strike and its defeat have had an impact on Markham Main miners' lives outside work. Although my initial concern has been with the way they perceive and relate to the local community, I have also attempted to investigate their attitudes towards, and participation in the broader class-based community.

I have suggested that the miners' work situation and relations still structure their out-of-work lives, although not to the same extent as in previous times. The more traditional type of leisure and sociability patterns, which were reported as a key dimension of the Featherstone community in *Coal is Our Life*, can still be perceived among miners living in Armthorpe. However the process observed by Braverman of 'working time becoming sharply and antagonistically divided from non-working time' (1974:278) appears to be having an increasing impact, seen most clearly among the Markham miners living *outside* the village. This would suggest that the pit- and union-centred community situated in the village will be significantly weakened by the growing number of local miners who are taking redundancy from the local pit. The increasingly rapid turnover of a smaller Markham Main workforce may well serve to break down the organic relationship between pit and community, work and nonwork activities.

Nevertheless the year-long dispute, involving various sections of the village population, appeared not only to have renewed and strengthened the local community, but to have caused significant changes in it. Although formally dismantled with the ending of the dispute, the community which flourished *during* the Strike seemed to have left its mark on the one that followed. With large sections of the population having collectively undergone an unprecedented social experience, the 'community' that emerged in the

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Strike's aftermath appeared to be a more aware and discerning one, concerned with more serious political and social issues.

Despite the reimposition of the work routine, wage and market relations, the principles which underpinned the Strike community remained in evidence in many of the miners' attitudes and relationships. The 'positive' side of this was seen in the more egalitarian, sharing relationships reported between men and women, in the closer relationships with neighbours and shopkeepers, and in the increased number of acquaintances and close friendships. There was also a continuing identification with the broader class-oriented community, with links being maintained on the basis of shared political attitudes and personal friendships.

In the sense that one of the catalysts for the construction of the Strike community was a determined opposition to the ideology and priorities of the Thatcher government, the prevalence of an overwhelmingly negative and cynical attitude towards the government, mass media and the legal system could be said to constitute the continuance of an important (if negative) component of the Strike community. However, although there remained many ties between the strike activists and the broader political community, there was a significant discrepancy between radicalised political attitudes and political activity, as indicated by membership of political organisations.

I have suggested that despite the manifest weakness of the more radical political organisations in the post-Strike period, the sustained intervention of their members, in particular around the *Tannoy*, has encouraged a significant renewal of the Armthorpe branch's political tradition. This in turn has led to the NUM branch's re-occupation of its traditional role as the central institution in the lives of Markham miners, allowing it to act as a vehicle for their broader political, as well as their trade union activities.

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The Strike's role in renewing Armthorpe's political traditions was clearly evident. The majority of union activists interviewed saw their union work as playing a part in strengthening *both* the local village community *and* the broader working class community. However the the majority's channelling of their political activity through the union branch in a period when less and less of the local population, or indeed the Markham workforce, felt able to participate fully in it, posed major problems in terms of the continuation of the 1984/85 'experience'. In their interviews, even veteran NUM activists who had taken redundancy confessed to feeling extremely uneasy about playing any role in an organisation whose primary concern was the wage relationship. But it was to the broader Strike-centred village community, to the involvement of women, unemployed youth, children and old age pensioners, that the reimposition of the traditional NUM 'framework' posed the greatest threat. The implications for the post-Strike situation of women is one of the issues I address in the next chapter.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Because of the strength of the Strike community, the Armthorpe miners were justified in arguing that they had returned to work in good order, and of course Scargill refused to acknowledge defeat in public. Nevertheless I was somewhat taken aback the first time I heard a miner argue there had been no defeat and was greatly relieved to find that the interview schedule was sufficiently 'open' to cater for this viewpoint.
2. Armthorpe is relatively close to the East Coast, with resorts like Skegness, Mablethorpe and Bridlington within a few hours drive. Several of the miners either owned or rented caravans on the coast and regularly spent weekends there. Although during the Strike a number had to sell their caravans, others confided in me that, since the Strike, they had a constant urge to get away from the village to the coast.
3. Although there were various drugs available in the area, it appeared that the young unemployed were more heavily 'into them' than were the young miners. Alcoholic over-indulgence continued to be the most popular 'escape route' for miners, although even this was not particularly common, except on Friday and Saturday nights
4. Although the number of marriage break-ups was a fairly popular topic of conversation, there was little evidence of an 'epidemic' of separations, and I could see no way of getting the relevant data without spending a lot of time asking intrusive questions. I was unwilling to do this, and although, inevitably I had several discussions about personal issues, these were always in confidence. What struck me forcefully was the resilience of personal relationships during the Strike. In spite of extensive hardship, financial insecurity and prison sentences, only four of the 66 armthorpe interviewees had seen their relationships break up during the year-long dispute. A further five experienced such a 'breakdown' in the two years that followed the Strike.
5. In industries such as mining there always tends to be a high absentee rate. In a book where this tendency appeared to be seen as a central issue, Zweig (1948) pointed out that any break in the work routine immediately reflects itself in high absenteeism. Yet in the aftermath of the Strike, the level of debts and weekly outgoings were so considerable that even the slightest absenteeism counted as a domestic disaster. Miners who had enjoyed an unprecedented freedom from 'wage slavery' for a year were suddenly confronted with the prospect of unremitting confinement in an alienating environment, with no excess funds for recreation. Miners who had become prominent activists/'union men' in the course of the dispute found it impossible to shed these roles. The herculean task of putting the union back on its feet demanded effort and time, especially on weekends. Strike friendships also had to be maintained. This led to a conflict of priorities with partners who wanted them to devote their spare time to themselves and their children.
6. Few of the miners had a fixed schedule, sharing their time between their home and the Welfare. Often the time they got back to the Welfare would depend on what time they set out picketing, where the target was, and whether they got through. One miner described a typical day as follows:
4 a.m. Welfare, meet up with everybody.
Get directions on the Q.T. and get off quick.
Get through road blocks, hiding in boot or under the back seat.
Eventually get through, nearly every time! Arrive for dayshift.

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- 9 a.m. Come back, wait for instructions in Welfare, or go up on pit gates.
9.30 am Go home, tidy up, get head down for a bit.
12 p.m. Go upto Welfare for dinner, sit round talking.
Helping each other out with money and stuff, planning for evening.
3 p.m. Back upto the pit.
Back home, do some cleaning around the house, cook some tea for ***
and the kids.
8 p.m. Back to the Welfare, see what's going off, sit round talking.
11 p.m. Upto the pit gates, chat with the lads, pinch a bit of coal for the
house and then home to bed for a few hours.
7. The children's experience of the Strike could almost certainly constitute a thesis on its own, and as I was not about to embark on this project, I had decided *not* to interview young children. However, they appeared to have enjoyed the Strike and were so keen to 'chip in' their experiences, I ended up organising short, impromptu interview sessions with several of them around Armthorpe: three boys and four girls.
 8. There were widespread stories circulating in Armthorpe, concerning the police's attempts to get information from young kids about their parents, their friends and neighbours. Three parents reported how their young children had returned home with sweets allegedly given them by policemen. This caused a fury among the parents and led to the children being warned off speaking to strangers, in or out of uniform!
 9. This strike involved large sections of the fifth and sixth forms as well as some of the younger students. Victimisation in the form of suspension followed with the headmaster accusing certain students of setting up picket lines. Apart from allowing the students to participate in the march back, the school students put forward their own sectional demands, around the issues of school uniform and unreasonable discipline. (Armthorpe: 101NM)
 10. Detailed evidence concerning surveillance, intelligence gathering, telephone tapping and interception of correspondence is given by Jim Coulter, Susan Miller and Martin Walker in *State of Siege* (1984:229)
 11. Due to the poor diet, the shortage of fuel and the shortage of money for medicines many people suggested there was a higher level of illness during and immediately after the Strike. Perhaps connected with this was the significant number of deaths which occurred among the older members of the mining families. The hardship and consequent ill health was not as high as that reported in other pit villages. For details on how ill health impacted on local women's assertiveness courses, see Edna Woodhead (1987) *Womens Groups in Mining Communities*, University of Sheffield.
 12. This came to 58 percent of the women in steady relationships (31). This may well have underrepresented the degree of sharing, because, as the question asked was an open 'Were there any changes (to the shareout of domestic labour) during the Strike?', several replies focussed more on more obvious items, such as the absence of partners for long periods.
 13. Although I tended to discourage it, if the 'interviewee' was agreeable, the other member of the partnership sometimes sat in on the interviews. Often this had the effect of 'cramping styles' or restricting the openness, and accuracy of response. If someone suggested they shared or did 'some' of the childcare/ cooking/cleaning, I usually followed this up with a question on the amount. If the partner was present, this frequently led to a debate, and very often this provided me with an opportunity to mention to the partner that it might be better if they conserved their opinions for their own interview.

14. There are possible dangers in overusing a particular study like *Coal is Our Life* as a totally accurate benchmark. Several of the older members of the Armthorpe population (men and women) described egalitarian domestic relationships, in which the men rarely went out on their own, but *did* share housework and childcare. These were, of course, hardly mentioned by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, who were accused (by some local dignitaries) of generating too much of their data from inside Featherstone's *Green Lane Club*. (See Dennis Warwick (1984) *Talk of the Village*, University of Leeds, pg 5-6). In order to get a more accurate idea of the historical trend, I invited interviewees to compare their pattern of domestic work sharing with that of their parents. 72 percent of the miners and 70 percent of the women involved in relationships felt that they had a more equal sharing of domestic work than their parents.
15. It was a common occurrence for people to casually refer to their severe financial problems and then illustrate them by providing letters from building societies and banks refusing help or threatening action. In order to avoid the incessant pressure from a number of sources, many people attempted to concentrate all their debts into a single loan or a second mortgage. At the end of the process there was always the 'spectre' of selling job or house in order to get on top and prevent the breakup of relationships.
16. Again my interviews with retired miners, their partners or widows, tended to suggest that although *Coal is Our Life* was almost certainly justified in describing men-only drinking, gambling and sports sessions as 'dominant' pastimes, there was a lot more variety. Several miners preferred involvement in cultural or family leisure activities. One 60 year-old woman, whose husband had died during the Strike, described their 1950's recreation pattern:
'My husband would have Friday night out. He'd go out till half past nine, and I'd be ready to go out dancing from ten till two in the morning. He'd look after the young uns and I'd go out with four women and a couple. He didn't go out drinking during the week. Depending on his shifts, on Monday and Wednesday night we'd go out to the pictures with the five kids. I used to enjoy that. He was on a good wage then, so we could afford it.'
17. Miners also reported the 'giving up' of well-established pastimes due to a sudden loss of interest, a desire to do something new. Two miners had sold their caravans, one had stopped breeding dogs, another had sold his golf clubs and another a full set of fishing tackle.
18. Very often the venues for these drinking sessions were the Welfare or the Tadcaster, which had been at the core of the Strike-based community. The miners I interviewed did not, however, 'go down the club' every night of the week. Their drinking pattern tended to reflect their work pattern, with several stressing the incompatibility of their underground work with alcohol over-indulgence. The younger miners were more likely to go out during the week, but they often preferred to go into Doncaster.
19. Even though as a researcher on a limited budget, I had to treat Saturdays and Sundays as working days, I regularly found myself getting caught up in a feeling that there was something 'special' about an Armthorpe weekend! The number and democratic control of the clubs meant that the management committees could not afford to take attendance for granted. Large amounts of money were spent on professional entertainment, attractive bingo or raffle sessions. However, 'competition' between clubs did not appear to be of the 'cut throat' variety. There seemed to be informal arrangements which encouraged certain pubs and clubs to cater for certain age groups on

- different nights of the week. Due to the general friendliness of the population and the number of people 'out' on the weekends, groups tended to be large and open. To be in certain clubs on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday, was to be guaranteed a 'good night'.
20. For the 'outsiders', mobility plays a large part in shaping their leisure patterns. The use of private cars tends to restrict people's consumption of alcohol and with the shortage of funds curbing people's use of taxis (the main taxi operator in Armthorpe nearly went out of business during the Strike), public transport was often the only way of travelling any distance. Although there were good and relatively late bus services into and out of Doncaster, there was, of course, no transport network linking the outlying villages directly. McCormick actually cites the tendency of miners in the Doncaster coalfield to 'use Doncaster as the social centre' as one of the main reasons for its very high levels of militancy (1979: 185).
 21. Another contributory factor was, of course, their possession of money. The lack of funds during the Strike had largely cut them off from leisure activity in the profit-oriented, commercial sector. Only in pit villages like Armthorpe were people able to go out and enjoy an evening out in the pubs and clubs 'with only a quid in [their] pockets'. The key reward for the miners' re-entry into wage slavery was the possession of a wage which reopened access to the wider 'market' of Doncaster pubs and clubs.
 22. Apart from the initial lump sum, the schemes which allowed the miners to leave the pit usually entailed a significant reduction in weekly income. People who had been accustomed to picking up between £100 and £130 on a regular basis had to survive on £60 or £70. Even miners who considered themselves 'careful' with their money discovered they could not survive on this income and whatever remained of the 'nest egg' (after paying off personal or family debts) was rapidly eroded.
 23. Although this tendency was initially pointed out to me by miners in Armthorpe, the development of a redundant miners' group was most visible in the *Coronation Club*, Thurnscoe, where the redundant miners used to sit together in the bar at what became known as the 'millionaire's table'.
 24. The question, 'When relaxing, who do you spend your time with?' obviously tended to pick up only those friends who were seen regularly, so the replies do not reflect the trend towards more long-distance friendships in the broader Strike support community. As Stacey observed, restrictions on time, money and other resources make it more difficult for working class people to enjoy regular, direct contact with friends over long distances, which is one of the reasons that their friendship networks tend to be more locality-based.
 25. For example, the winding up of the Strike community meant that the hierarchy of the market place was reestablished again. The earning of a regular wage allowed (in most cases) the miners' debts to be gradually cleared, whereas the unemployed youth were left marginalised once more, stranded on the bottom rung of the market with a totally inadequate income and no prospects of major improvement. (See Chapter Nine)
 26. This tended to be more of a problem in the smaller socialist groupings which normally expect a much higher level of financial contributions from members. In the Labour Party, where local and national dues are much lower, some of the established members took it upon themselves to pay the newcomers' subscriptions. In the long running conflict that enveloped the

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- Armthorpe Labour Party after the Strike, this practise led to allegations of corruption and clique-building.
27. In South Wales for example, the Communist Party membership grew from 1,500 in September 1926 to 2,300 in September 1927. In certain villages such as Mardy and Maesteg the growth was even more dramatic. See Francis and Smith (1980: 66)
 28. Although it may have been slightly exaggerated, the 1926/27 membership peaked at 10,730. In 1984, paper membership was estimated at around sixteen thousand, but this almost certainly included a larger proportion of inactive members in a much larger working class.
 29. Apart from a major shrinkage in claimed industrial membership, a useful yardstick was the strength of the CP's industrial campaigning organisation, the Liason Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. In the early 1970's the LCTDU conferences attracted well over a thousand delegates representing a significant section of the organised working class, and able to organize unofficial 'Kill the Bill' strikes involving half a million trade unionists. By the mid-1980's, the LCTDU was a shadow of its former self, attracting a few hundred delegates, and reluctant to attempt to mobilise its supporters in industrial action. The Liaison Committee therefore played no major role in the 1984/85 Strike.
 30. On the 15 June 1984, the *Morning Star* management responded to the attempts of the national (Eurocommunist) CP leadership to regain 'control' of the paper by purging several party loyalists from key positions. The *Morning Star* came under the firm control of more old-fashioned Stalinists (nicknamed 'the Tankies'), organised around the Peoples Printing and Publishing Society. The Communist Party found itself without a daily paper for the first time in over fifty years, and leading members made public statements threatening action in the same law courts that were beginning to cripple the NUM. Prominent members of the Communist Party (or contributors to the party's monthly magazine, *Marxism Today*), such as Kim Howells and Bea Campbell became increasingly prominent in their public criticisms of the NUM national leadership for their 'obsession' with aggressive, mass picketing.
 31. Several of the revolutionary groupings that had an independent profile in the labour and student movement between the late 1960's to the mid 1970's had, by the late 1970's, joined the *Militant* grouping in pursuing a 'deep entry' strategy inside the Labour Party. Some played a prominent role in building the 'Bennite' movement and several rose to positions of prominence in local councils - advocating the construction of 'municipal socialism' as a barrier to the Thatcher government. The Miners' Strike undoubtedly raised the confidence of many Labour Councils, and, unlike the national Labour Party leadership, some gained a reputation for being unstinting in their support of the NUM. As the Miners Strike came to an end, the Labour left and left Labour Councils, especially the one in Liverpool, were still in a buoyant mood, seeming to challenge the hold of Kinnock and new realism on the party.
 32. This was a period which saw Kinnock re-establish his hegemony inside the Labour Party. There was a major investigation carried out into the activities of the *Militant* tendency and several of its leading members were eventually expelled, despite appeals to the law courts. Leading Liverpool city councillors, having been prosecuted and bankrupted by the courts, found themselves witch-hunted by the Labour Party's National Executive. Socialist activists in certain wards or constituencies were disciplined if they were seen selling or even reading socialist newspapers. The nearest

Labour Party Young Socialist (LPYS) group to Armthorpe (at Hatfield) was closed down because of it was under the influence of Militant, forcing the leading Militant members to adopt a very low profile. At an anti-apartheid social organised by the Hatfield NUM, I watched in disbelief as a young Socialist League member went surreptitiously to carefully-targetted people, concealing his newspapers under his jacket before taking them out - while keeping the title well hidden.

33. There was no Socialist League branch in Doncaster, so the nearest meetings were held in Rotherham, some eighteen miles away.
34. These courses, run on a day release basis over nine terms by Sheffield and Leeds University, provided a solid grounding in economics, politics and trade unionism. Open to all NUM members, the successful candidates were selected by an NUM panel, with full wages being paid by the NCB. They were initiated in 1954 by a Thorne miner, Alwyn Machen, then president of Yorkshire NUM (see Chapter Nine) and are exceptional in the trade union movement, in terms of length, depth and scope. Virtually all of the branch and area officials in Yorkshire have attended the courses and they almost certainly played a role in the rise of the left in the 1950's and 60's (see Chapter Two). The co-operation of the NCB in the running of these courses was another indicator of the degree of accomodation involved in the old, post-nationalisation relationship. In contrast, in the aftermath of the 1984/85 Strike, the NCB began to place restrictions on how many and which miners could be paid to attend the course. (Armthorpe, 48, 50 & 56M)