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A striking change: political transformation in the Murton miners' and mechanic' branches of the national union of mineworkera, county Durham, 1978-1988*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines processes of political change in the Murton miners' and mechanics' branches of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) between 1978 and 1988. During this period both branches swung from the right of the NUM's political spectrum to the left.

Recent debates in human geography - and the social sciences more generally - have drawn attention to the importance of place in analysing social developments. However, a review of the literature reveals a surprising lack of detailed studies undertaken at the local level.

In order to understand the constraints under which events at a local level take place, it is necessary to place them in context. The coal industry is therefore located at the centre of a complex set of institutionalised relationships between capital, labour and the state known as the "post war settlement" (PWS). As economic crisis deepened in the 1970's, the PWS came under attack.

In the coal industry this led to the progressive destabilisation of a characteristic "indulgency pattern" which had built up in the post war years. At Murton, this destabilisation created the room for left wing activists to build support in miners' and mechanics' branches. However, their impact was unevenly distributed among the workforce because miners from different backgrounds were affected in different ways by the crisis in the industry. Cleavages of age and residence led to significant differences in miners' and mechanics' understanding of the crisis facing the industry.

This thesis examines the interaction between local union branch leadership, the changing situation in the coal industry, and divisions within the workforce during three distinct periods: from 1978 until the eve of the 1984/5 strike; the strike itself; and the period since the strike until the end of 1988.

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DECLARATION

No material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 PREFACE

1.1.i THE MAIN QUESTIONS

This thesis is about processes of political change in two branches[1] of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) at Murton colliery in the Durham coalfield over the period 1978-1988.

During this period, both branches were transformed from bastions of the union's right wing to strongholds of the left. This dramatic shift occurred during a period of unprecedented upheaval in the coal industry, including - in 1984/5 - the longest major industrial dispute in its history. It was also a time of change and reassessment for the organised working class in Britain generally. The pace and scale of social development over the last ten years has spawned an enormous literature analysing the extent and meaning of these changes for society in general, and for "the left" in particular. These changes, and the debate they have generated, form the context for this study of the Murton branches.

Although the period since Mrs Thatcher's election in 1979 has seen a series of defeats for the working class, it has also been a period characterised by accelerating social divisions and intense class conflict. Successive Thatcher government's have been marked by an ambitious drive not just to restructure the British economy, but to alter the very notion of class as it had become crystallised in the network of social regulations which guided postwar British society. Underlying this drive was an attempt to resolve the contradictions generated by the "post war settlement" (PWS) and create a new set of conditions favourable for capitalist accumulation in Britain.

Inevitably this strategy posed an enormous challenge to trade union organisations. For rank and file trade unionists the questions it posed

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[1]The miners and mechanics branches. The NUM in Durham is split into three sections based on divisions in work tasks; the numerically dominant miners, the mechanics (skilled craftsmen) and the tiny enginemens section. Only the first two are considered in this thesis (see chapter four).

were frequently even sharper. How should they respond to attacks on their living standards and their jobs? Was there any point in resisting at all? Coal miners faced these challenges in the early 1980's, as the National Coal Board (NCB) began to apply a "Thatcherite" programme to the industry. Because of its status as a symbol of the PWS, the coal industry provides an ideal site for a study in the changing politics of trade unionism. However for workers, questions of strategy are never answered in the abstract, and this thesis therefore examines how miners at one North Eastern pit responded to the NCB's attempts to restructure the industry. In particular, it looks at the changes in union branch politics which accompanied the transformation of the industry from 1978-1988.

These then are the principle questions approached in this thesis:
What was the nature of the political changes in the Murton branches between 1978 and 1988, and how did they differ between the two branches?
What was the relationship of these changes to broader struggles within the NUM and the labour movement, and to the rise of Thatcherism?
To what extent were the changes observed in Murton determined by these outside pressures, and to what extent were they the result of place-specific factors, including the exercise of human agency?

1.1.ii ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The changes observed at Murton over the ten year period of this study emerged from a complex interaction of social, economic and political processes, operating at scales from the individual to the global. Although Murton is only a village community of about 10000 people, its apparent isolation is illusory. As part of the UK coal industry, Murton colliery is integrated into a national and international system of energy production. As part of a nationalised industry, Murton is swept into the orbit of state influence. And through its trade union branches, Murton's miners are linked to a regional and national working class movement rich in tradition, resources and struggle. All these elements need to be integrated in order to build up an understanding of events at Murton.

Fundamentally, this thesis is about struggle. It is about the way that workers respond to, and try and shape the forces affecting their lives. Nowhere was this struggle more apparent than during the miners' year long strike in 1984/5. The strike is the pivotal event of this thesis, because it was this conflict which precipitated the dramatic political shifts within the Murton branches. Yet it is also a profoundly misunderstood

event. Chapter one begins with a selective review of the literature on the strike, which shows that the relationship between the national conduct of the strike, and the local level which generated and sustained it has barely been touched upon. This failure to interpenetrate the local with higher scales of analysis exposes the gap which this thesis attempts to bridge. In other words, explaining the dynamics of political action at a national level requires detailed study of processes of political change at the local level.

This focus on the local cuts across the debate in the social sciences over the importance of "place" in understanding the development of contemporary capitalist society. It is a debate engaged in the second half of chapter one. I argue that whilst the specificities of different places are clearly important in comprehending the way in which high level changes within capitalism are actually experienced in particular localities, most published research has failed to move beyond the regional scale. This focus misses out on the enormously complex and often contradictory ways in which regional and national events are constructed at the local level.

Chapter two widens the debate to consider recent examples of struggles against restructuring to provide a context for the changes affecting the miners. Comparisons of anti-steel closure campaigns in the 1970's/80's with the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in in 1971 illustrate the need to consider the role of local union leadership, and the political-economic context for each struggle. The state is heavily implicated in determining this latter aspect, so the second half of chapter two also assesses the state's strategy for restructuring the British economy and society over the period of study. The coal industry is located at the centre of a postwar social democratic consensus which institutionalised a particular balance of class forces. Economic recession pushed the consensus into crisis, and jeopardised the position of the coal industry and the miners.

Since this thesis is about processes of political change within two trade union branches, it is necessary to examine some of the characteristics of trade union organisation in capitalist societies, in order to identify the tensions and contradictions which emerge from the unstable negotiation of interest between management and labour. In addition, unions constitute the main focus of political agency over the period of this study. Because they organise workers along the contours of capitalist organisation, unions reflect and create a separation between political and economic aspects of workers struggle. This structural tendency towards economism provokes a

drift towards sectional struggle over wages and conditions, which divides workers and deflects them from wider political challenges to capitalism.

However, this tendency towards sectionalism and economism can be undermined, particularly when economic crisis provokes management or the state to attack particular institutionalised settlements between capital and labour. The effects of these destabilisations are unpredictable, and offer the potential for the reunification of political and economic aspects of workers struggles. They can also undermine the incorporation of trade union leaderships (at all levels) which tends to develop as a consequence of the separation of political and economic elements of struggle. In this context strikes are analysed, to explore the destabilising effects which can emerge from these extreme ruptures with the everyday compromises of labour activity. Management attacks on established "indulgency patterns" are identified as significant destabilising factors, and some case studies reviewed to assess differing outcomes from these destabilisations. Finally, three local case studies of the particular relations within unions generated by the historical experience of class relations in different industries are explored, to establish the enormous complexity inherent in local capital-labour relations.

Chapter four then brings the arguments of the first three chapters together in a brief historical study of the British coal industry. This provides an essential framework in which to locate Murton, and understand the context in which political changes there were located. In particular, the crisis in the coal industry in the late 1970's is examined, and shown to provide a spatially uneven destabilising effect on management-labour relations. Although the miners were insulated from the worst effects of economic crisis in the 1970's by the "Plan for Coal", the protection it offered was only short term. With the election of a Conservative government in 1979 committed to re-establishing the rule of the market and fundamentally altering the balance of power between capital and labour, the NUM would have to either submit to the drastic reorganisation of the industry, or engage in open conflict with the NCB, and ultimately the state.

The introduction of an area incentive scheme in 1978 increased divisions within the workforce, and was part of wider strategy to prepare the ground for the defeat of the NUM. The union moved left as the complacency generated by the Plan for Coal dissolved in a new round of pit closures. In Durham - a traditional right wing stronghold - both the miners and mechanics unions saw significant leftward movement.

Chapter five picks up this leftward drift, and analyses the way in which changes in the industry were experienced and understood in the miners and mechanics branches in the period from 1978 to 1984. The period was dominated by four factors which destabilised existing management-union relations, namely; the introduction of the incentive scheme, the influx of travellers from closed pits, the changing age composition of the workforce, and the re-emergence of pit closures in an era of high unemployment. In the miners' branch, right wing control faltered as travellers and other left wing activists built on rising dissatisfaction within the workforce. Within the smaller mechanics' branch, the formerly right wing leadership moved decisively left as activists built campaigns around the issues generated by management strategies. Chapter six looks at the miners' strike of 1984/5 itself, concentrating on the divisions between different sections of the workforce. These divisions are related to the destabilisation of the pre-strike period, and the cleavages of age and residence identified in chapter five. During the strike, the left achieved a shaky dominance in the miners' branch, and consolidated its hold in the mechanics. Young miners emerged as a new political force, in the miners' branch particularly. They dominated the picketing operation, and rejected the post war politics of compromise. However, a much smaller group of older pickets became involved precisely to defend the post war compromise, and there was tension between these two groups.

A small group of anti-strike diehards are identified, split between an isolated number of travellers and a relatively coherent group based in Murton. Redundancy payments are identified as a key factor in increasing divisions in the workforce based on age, and therefore weakening collective solidarity. The same factor was important in weakening resolve in the biggest group of strikers - the non active majority. Generally they supported the aims of the strike, and whether or not they returned to work was related to specific personal and social factors, rather than fundamental opposition to the strikes principles. At Murton only about 300 strikers went back to work - mostly in the last two weeks.

Chapter seven follows the process of political change into the post strike period, showing how the left was able to consolidate its grip on both miners and mechanics branches. Management's reassertion of "the right to manage", and the demoralised state of the union placed formidable constraints on activists at Murton. Nevertheless, they were helped by the massive post strike hemorrhaging of manpower which removed many old, right wing miners, replacing them with younger, more belligerent travellers. But

managements' hard line undermined the relevance of the union branch committees to their members, and it took hard campaigning to re-establish confidence in the union. Indeed, branch leadership is identified as the crucial factor in determining the political character of NUM branches in the Durham area in the post-strike period.

Finally, chapter eight draws together the thesis conclusions, and speculates on their implications for the debate in the British left over future strategy. In particular, I review the relationship between broad social changes since the war, and the direction of political change in the two branches of the NUM at Murton. The differential impact of the post war settlement on different sections of the workforce is a crucial explanatory factor in the political changes experienced at Murton. But also vital was the action of conscious agents through the union in shaping a collective strategy, and campaigning for specific policies. These questions of strategy are now part of a widening debate within the labour movement over the most appropriate response to the political climate which has been created over the last ten years (and which was symbolised by the defeat of the miners' strike). In the final section of my conclusion I therefore engage the debate over "new realism" (a debate which miners at Murton have played an active role in), and argue that new realist arguments evade the decisive question of state power which the miners' post war experience suggests is central to any project within the labour movement.

In the second volume of the thesis, I include ten appendices which supplement the material presented in volume one. Appendix one explains the research strategy underlying the thesis, concentrating on the practical problems which were posed by my research. Subsequent appendices offer more detailed information backing up or adding to arguments established throughout the main body of the thesis.

"On 4 July 1983 Arthur Scargill declared war... It was another nine months before battle commenced: but Scargill left neither the prime minister, nor me, in any doubt that day of his intentions. His army of 'storm troopers' was ready to bring the government to its knees if it dared stand in his way." (MacGregor, 1986; 11)

"The most heroic strike that the British working class has seen for decades ended on March 5th 1985. The year long miners strike, the longest major industrial battle in British history, has changed the political consciousness of hundreds of thousands of people. The courage and determination of the striking miners, their families and communities will have a lasting impact on the working class struggle in Britain in the years ahead." (Reed and Adamson, 1985; 1)

These quotes – from the first page of each book – indicate the polemical extremes of the debate which the 1984/5 coal strike has generated. They also emphasise the point made by Winterton in his concise review of the literature on the strike:

"The greatest problem which anyone researching the strike must acknowledge is that there is no single 'correct version' of such a complex phenomenon. Inevitably no account of the strike can possibly be impartial – if nothing else the strike effectively polarised society into 'for' and 'against' the miners." (Winterton, 1987)

Given these qualifications, what justification can I offer for a thesis which pivots on this emotional event? Perhaps the clearest answer to this question emerges from a brief examination of the more significant accounts published so far on the strike[2]. Such an examination points towards a significant gap in research on the strike, which this study bridges. In particular, the absence of detailed research at the local level severely compromises discussion on the political importance of the dispute.

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[2] In this review I concentrate on literature which has attempted to provide an overview on the strike as a whole. Issues such as policing and women's involvement have generated many seperate publications. For the former see Fine and Millar (eds), 1985; Coulter et al, 1984; Scraton and Thomas (eds), 1985. For the latter see the general reviews by Stead, 1987 and Seddon (ed), 1986; and for an in depth study, Beaton, 1985). For a general bibliography on the strike (now a bit dated) see Green, 1985.

Published accounts on the strike can be divided into four categories: "insider" accounts, "leftist" analyses, journalistic investigations, and academic studies[3]. Each are considered in turn.

1.2.i "INSIDER" ACCOUNTS: THE THIN TORY LINE.

Surprisingly few books have looked at the strike from a nakedly hostile stance. The two most significant - although differing in style and content - convey a similar message (MacGregor, 1986: Ottey, 1985). For both, the strike was undemocratic because it was called without a ballot. They claim it was sustained by intimidation and violence. Arthur Scargill was using the miners to try and defeat the elected government of the day, and his tactics must not be allowed to succeed.

Ottey is less strident than MacGregor, but his hostility to the strike is clear.

> "I was shunned by men I once regarded as my friends. I was labelled a 'scab' and there were calls for my resignation. But I knew that the strike was wrong. It was undemocratic. (Ottey, 1985; 2)

But Ottey's argument is weakened by his failure to address the crisis in the coal industry in the 1980's, or what the union's response to it should have been. More autobiography than analysis, Ottey's account offers some useful insights into right wing thinking in the NUM, but his obsession with intimidation overwhelms any attempt to get to grips with a real understanding of the strike.

No-one could accuse Ian MacGregor of a lack of stridency - his part ghosted account reaches for the dizzy heights of hysteria on more than one occasion. The language is strident, the message relentless. Take this contribution to the debate on picketing:

> You didn't have to be a miner to join up. Sensing anarchy and chaos, the whole ragtag mob of the militant left was soon on the bandwaggon. They were quick to see if for what it was: a chance to coerce and perhaps bring down the government. For them it was class warfare... Right across the central coalfield the pickets' numbers were swelled by hundreds who had

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[3] Jonathan and Ruth Winterton's exhaustive account of the strike in Yorkshire (1989) was published too late for consideration in this thesis. The promised volume of area based contributions edited by Hywel Francis and Gareth Rees appears to have sunk under the weight of post strike disagreements.

nothing to do with the dispute beyond wanting to cause further trouble. A sinister mob of almost-uniformed anarchists - led by a woman [no less!] - appeared at one stage and caused a great deal of damage in Yorkshire." (MacGregor, 1986; 199)

No matter that the story of "almost-uniformed anarchists" was a media created myth (see Douglass, 1985; 24-26). Behind the rhetoric lay a thorough and consistent account of the strike.

In MacGregor's view, the strike was necessary to beat the NUM because of the need to offset declining profitability by intensive capitalisation of the industry. Since this would inevitably lead to redundancies and require abandonment of many traditional practices in the industry, the union would have to submit to the shake-up. If it didn't - and in Arthur Scargill it had a leader whose pretensions extended far beyond mere resistance - then it would have to be forced into line. In the meantime, Shangri La was just around the corner for those miners who wanted to stick around for the new era of capital intensive, high productivity, high wage coal mining.

Inhabiting a ruthless capitalist world, MacGregor gives a clear insight into the forces that the NUM took on. Not just the forces of the state - though these are documented well enough - but the economic forces which continually revolutionise capitalist production (discussed in more length in chapter 4). However, MacGregor's analysis of the strike itself (as opposed to the forces which lay the objective basis for conflict) deliberately ignores the processes which sustained thousands of people in struggle for a year. In the vanguard of a Tory offensive to re-establish the rule of the market, MacGregor vilifies any opposition to his values as based on coercion and irrationality. This thesis demonstrates - by an intensive study of one pit - that the actual processes were enormously complicated, defying MacGregor's one-dimensional treatment.

1.2.ii LESSONS FROM THE LEFT?

Most left wing factions in Britain have produced their version of the strike. Unfortunately most are written to justify entrenched ideological positions, rather than to open up genuine debate on issues the strike raised for socialists. It seems the strike was a complex enough phenomena for every political group to find evidence to support their theories. Nevertheless, these accounts do benefit from their author's closeness to miners' activists, and their close day to day involvement in, and commitment to, the strike.

Foremost among the accounts from the left is the Socialist Workers Party's (SWP) book (Callinicos and Simons, 1985). Considering the speed with which it was put together, it is a thorough and well argued publication, despite some notable errors of fact - for example Teesside's integrated iron and steel works is mysteriously missing from the discussion on steel (ibid, 85). However, whilst it is generally well researched, SWP theory allows only one conclusion to be drawn in analysing the strike. It was betrayed by a rotten bureaucracy, both in the labour and trade union movement generally, and also in the NUM.

Perhaps their most famous conclusion is that with decisive leadership, there was a moment when the Orgreave picket of June 18th 1984 could have been won (ibid, 111). But like the rest of their analysis, this conclusion is too simplistic to be credible. Callinicos and Simons don't address the question of why the vast majority of NUM members never went picketing. Divisions between areas are explained almost entirely in terms of a "failure of leadership". The complexities of the situation in each area, each pit, and each community are glossed over.

Never noted for their subtlety, the Revolutionary Communist Group's (RCG) book is based on fundamentalist materialism (Reed and Adamson, 1985). (As such it is a powerful antidote to the SWP's voluntarism!) It consists of a collection of reports from the groups paper ("Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism"), augmented by an introductory chapter, and several additional review articles. The burden of their argument is that the split in the NUM was not only fundamental, but also necessary (ibid, 2). This was because the NCB had deliberately created a privileged elite of miners (concentrated in high productivity, high investment pits) via the incentive scheme (see chapter 4). The strike failed not because of a simplistic division between the rank and file and the bureaucracy. In reality the split

> "goes down deeper into the ranks of the working class. Key workers, dockers, power and steel workers, lorry drivers and sections of miners themselves - on the whole the better paid in more secure jobs - were scabbing on the miners' strike." (ibid, 8)

Socialist victory therefore depends on the defeat of privileged sections of the working class (defined almost tautologically as those who refuse to fight), as well defeat of the ruling class.

Reality defied such simplistic materialism. Many of the highest paid miners were at the most militant pits in Yorkshire. Earnings differentials were often as high within a pit as between different areas. Furthermore, whilst

politicisation of activists was undoubtedly a vital gain from the strike, the RCG - in common with the SWP and the Revolutionary Communist Party - exaggerate the extent to which activists absorbed their message. In short therefore, whilst the RCG have an acute understanding of the power of the British state, and the relationship between the miners strike and other struggles against the British state (eg Ireland), they add little to an analysis of divisions and development within the miners. By celebrating divisions within the miners (and working class), the RCG miss the processes which led ordinary men and women to respond in startlingly different ways to similar situations.

Finally, the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) issued a short pamphlet offering their verdict on the strike (Freeman, 1985). Like the SWP's book, strident cries of "sell out" pepper their analysis. Scargill is heavily criticised, for example for his failure to campaign among the rank and file at the start of the strike. However, the RCP discusses criticisms and tactics in a vacuum. Pressures on the NUM leadership are not discussed, so their actions are presented out of context. This is particularly so in their analysis of the end of the strike, where Scargill is slammed for selling out. Nowhere is there an acknowledgement that by this time the strike was all but beaten.

Freeman argues that if only the NUM leadership had campaigned on an openly class basis, then miners in Nottingham, and workers elsewhere, would have supported the strike (ibid, 37). Little evidence is advanced to support this optimistic assertion. So by failing to root out the real attitudes of the rank and file, and their basis in a complicated and spatially specific history, the RCP reduce their argument to an all embracing failure of leadership.

All the accounts from the revolutionary left lack a sense of perspective. By concentrating on the two minority layers of committed activists and anti-strike die-hards, they ignore the diversity between and within regions which was one of the strikes decisive characteristics. This fault is symptomatic of a one-dimensional approach to the politicisation process which has scant regard for the historical contradictions embedded in the experiences of so many miners.

Three important books have set out to offer comprehensive investigative accounts of the strike (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986: Goodman, 1985: Wilsher et al, 1985). Since they are all written by journalists it is not surprising that they share an important journalistic trait: they fail to explain their assumptions. Indeed, to a greater or lesser extent they indulge an illusion that it is possible to investigate political phenomena impartially, and without "bias". In his introduction to the Insight Team's book, Andrew Neill (editor of the Sunday Times) claims:

> "In classic Insight style [this book] merely relates, dispassionately and impartially, the inside story of a cataclysmic battle whose outcome will affect this country for years to come." (Wilsher et al, 1985, xi)

But all three books are as value laden as Ian MacGregor's or the SWP's accounts. The difference is that the journalists assumptions lie hidden within the everyday "commonsense" of capitalist values.

Goodman's account offers more sympathy to the miners than the other two books (1985). His view is that regardless of the need for strong policing in - for example - Nottinghamshire, nothing justified "the abandonment of civil liberties to the extent that they were disregarded when it came to the state's fight against the miners" (1985; 133). Alone among the journalists, Goodman squarely blames the government for creating the conflict (ibid, 204). And he understands the passionate commitment born of a profound fear of the future, which the strike generated in hundreds of pit villages (ibid, 16). But in common with other journalistic accounts, Goodman offers only limited insights into the complex driving forces behind the strike. And his lack of awareness of the fundamental issues of the strike comes through in his characterisation of the NACODS deal as a "missed opportunity" for the NUM (154)[4].

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[4] On September 29th 1984 members of the pit deputies union NACODS (National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers) voted by an overwhelming majority to go on strike. The ballot vote precipitated intensive negotiations, which resulted in the threatened NACODS strike being called off a month later, following the creation of an "Independant Review Body" to act as a final court of appeal over pit closures. The NUM rejected this settlement because the IRB would only produce non-binding recommendations. In common with some other commentators, Goodman regards this deal as the best chance the NUM had to settle the dispute favourably. However, when the NCB closed Bates colliery in Northumberland in February 1985, despite an IRB recommendation to keep it open, the NUM's rejection of

The Insight Team's book amounts to a fairly conventional history of the strike, which would be familiar and acceptable to those who accepted - for example - the BBC news presentation of the dispute. Hence it is critical of the decision not to have a ballot (p 56); places the burden of guilt on the miners for picket line violence (see for just one example p 99); and endorses the assessment that the strike was a battle between the forces of revolution and democracy (266). This latter position is also adopted by Adeney and Lloyd, in a book which has been heralded by many as the most authoritative account of the strike so far (see for example, McKibbin, 1986; Heery, 1987).

From the start, Adeney and Lloyd attempt to raise their book to a higher plane than the other two. They begin:

> "The job of this book is not to give a chronological account of the mineworkers' strike of March 1984 to March 1985: others have done that. It is rather to understand it." (1986; 1)

Sadly, the result does more to mystify the causes and development of the strike than illuminate them. Their thesis is based on the personalities of key actors - especially Scargill and MacGregor - and their irreconcilable opposition. But

> "the argument would be more convincing (if less popular) presented as irreconcilable _conflict_, over which the leaders, as products rather than causes of this, could not compromise without acknowledging their side's defeat." (Winterton, 1987; emphasis in original)

Samuel has shown (1986; 2-4) that this kind of conspiracy theory, and the characterisation of strike leaders as "folk devils", has been typical of strike reportage throughout this century.

Howell's (1987) critique shows how Adeney and Lloyd build their account on sloppy conceptualisation and "dubious interpretations" (402). These problems stem from an unstated but pervasive theoretical framework. By failing to analyse the real and massive support which Scargill received in the early 80's in any terms other than a personality cult, they fatally privilege the individual as an explanatory factor. They fail to root the conflict in the wider social forces which helped determine its development. Their discussion of the strike itself - in common with other journalistic accounts - fails to relate the actions of miners, and the divisions within

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(Footnote Continued)
the NACODS settlement as a cosmetic exercise appeared justified (Feickert, 1986).

their ranks, to historical and regional variations in experience and culture (a theme taken up by Rees, 1985).

Without a theory acknowledging the material basis for conflict then the strike inevitably comes to be seen in terms of individuals or groups manoeuvring to defeat each other. The historical development of the crisis in the coal industry, and its varying spatial impact must be integral to an understanding of the dispute. Recognition of the deliberate strategies of the state and the NCB to divide the working class and the miners must also be a fundamental part of any explanation, both of the overall development of the strike, and of developments at a regional and local level. Blaming it all on the lack of a ballot, or the belligerence of the two principle protagonists simply obscures the the real issues raised by the strike.

None of the three journalistic accounts set out to provide detailed pit-based studies of the strike. However, their analyses are all weaker for the absence of research of this kind to draw upon, because they tend towards regional and national generalisations which fail to reveal the variety of local factors affecting the course and conduct of the strike. They also fail to appreciate the nature of the forces that generated an inevitable conflict in the industry. Without an assessment of the complex and spatially differentiated forces moving through the coalfields before and during the strike, complicated political developments tend inevitably to be reduced to the charismatic intervention of a single figure.

1.2.iv ACADEMIC ACCOUNTS: EMPHASISING PLACE

Several academic analyses have begun the process of exploring spatial aspects of the strike. Of these, Rees has perhaps come closest to articulating a research agenda (1985; see also Sunleys, 1986 and Rees, 1986). Rees's focus is regional. Variations in the "careers" of each region during the strike need to be located in: the historical development of the coal industry in each area; the recomposed class structure of the coalfield regions; and the active strategies of agents such as the area NUM. By examining the relationship between these three dimensions, it is possible to specify "the processes by which class and other political actions actually come about" (Rees, 1985; 390).

Undoubtedly differences in the strike profile of the NUM areas were considerable, and explaining these differences will throw light on some of the key political and theoretical issues raised by the strike. But if the

aim is to understand why and how people move into struggle, and what determines the course of that struggle, then there is a danger that regional generalisations will obscure some of the most important processes.

Taking the Durham coalfield as an example, any attempt at regional generalisations must cope with a remarkable diversity between the 11 pits on strike in 1984/5[5] (see map 1). At one extreme there were Horden and Sacriston, with just one or two miners back at work, even at the end of the strike. At another extreme there was Wearmouth, with close on 80% back by the end. In the middle there were Westoe and Dawdon with about 25% back. Diversity on this scale is also apparent in Yorkshire (see Winterton and Winterton, 1989) and Scotland.

Quickly it becomes apparent that whilst the region might be the appropriate level of analysis in South Wales (and maybe Nottinghamshire), elsewhere sensitivity to the enormous variations within regions must be maintained. This is not to argue that analysis at the regional level is invalid. On the contrary, the regional context is still fundamental to understanding the way the strike developed. But regional analysis must specify the processes by which developments within each region worked to create diversity as well as similarity. Perhaps what needs explaining in South Wales is just why regional identity transcended local variations created by restructuring of the economic and social fabric of the region.

Without doubt the collection edited by Samuel et al (1986) goes furthest in giving expression to the strikes local base. It uses the words of miners, their wives and supporters to build up a montage of images and impressions of the strike. It is an eclectic volume, containing a wide variety of voices - but there is a pronounced focus on the central coalfield, particularly South Yorkshire. In the main, the editors simply present their material, offering only an introduction by way of editorial comment (Samuel, 1986). However, this introduction is significant, since it offers a sharp analysis of the issues behind the strike. In particular, Samuel directs attention towards the local focus of the strike. He cites four key

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[5]Murton, Eppleton, Horden, Sacriston, Easington, Seaham, Vane Tempest, Dawdon, Westoe, Herrington, Wearmouth. I have not considered the two NCB workshops in Durham which were also on strike (Tursdale and Philadelphia) as these employed mechanics only, and enjoyed a labour tradition slightly separate to that in the pits.

concepts which help explain the dispute: loyalty to the union, kinship, demography and community. Leadership is seen as the product of complex and contradictory forces, not as part of a machiavellian plot by dictatorial leaders. All of these ideas are explored in later chapters.

But perhaps the most interesting feature of Samuel's account is his use of the complementary notions of "village radicalism", and "radical conservatism". With both of these, Samuel focuses on the overwhelmingly local nature of the dispute. In profound opposition to most strike accounts, he rejects the notion of centralised control by the union. Village radicalism emphasises instead the myriad ways in which initiatives from the communities dominated the conduct of the strike. "Radical conservatism" on the other hand expresses the underlying philosophy of the strike. It was a defensive action - a last ditch attempt to preserve jobs, communities and a way of life.

> "Beneath the rhetoric of 'victory' - the 'death or glory' perorations at the public rallies - they were engaged in a desperate battle for survival, and bewildered that a cause so obviously just and demands so essentially modest should bring down on them the organised might of the state." (ibid, 23)

And yet, unmistakably the strike was a challenge too. Although the demands were apparently defensive and "conservative", they challenged the "rights" of management and ultimately the state to define the future of the industry, and the way that future would be decided.

However, for the most part Samuel's focus is on the uplifting elements of the strike, and this concentration misses many of the divisions between miners. His concepts are universal - he does not distinguish the differential effects of elements such as "radical conservatism" and "village radicalism" on miners living in different places, or miners of different ages. By not drawing out the contradictions inherent in the miners situation, he fails to show how for example, similar ideologies generated differing responses from miners in similar communities.

Some community based studies have begun the task of relating the varying and often contradictory experiences of the strike at local level. Parker's (1986) collection of interviews with strike participants at "Redhill" (Horden) in County Durham, offers a particularly gritty and eclectic range of voices. However, Parker's refusal to comment on his interviews leads to a lack of context, which in turn makes interpretation of his material very difficult. The volume on Thurcroft in Yorkshire (The people of Thurcroft,

1986) builds up an absorbing picture of what the strike meant in one pit village.

Yet only two studies have explicitly tried to _analyse_ political developments at particular NUM branches (Rigg, 1987; Cliff, 1986). Rigg's paper sets out to test Allen's (1981) argument that "militancy is determined by the miners' level of consciousness which in part is created by the campaigning undertaken by left-wing activists in the Union" (Rigg, 1987, 191). Comparisons of two similar collieries, one "moderate", the other "militant", were used to test three different hypotheses about the significance of differences in branch leadership. It was found that there was no significant difference between the two in terms of their commitment to democratic procedures and their knowledge of the conciliation scheme, but the militant colliery had a far more class conscious leadership. On this basis Rigg argued that the quality of branch leadership was an important determinant of militancy in the British mining industry.

Whilst this thesis to an extent supports Rigg's conclusion, serious reservations must be expressed about his research. Leadership is viewed in a static and one dimensional manner - for example, no account is taken of changes in the workforce over time, or of the inter-action between different management regimes and union strategy (see Cliff, 1986). Furthermore, Rigg adopts a highly flawed methodology. To test his hypothesis that branch leadership is the crucial determinant in establishing levels of militancy in the branch, he chooses a number of indices indicative of the "quality" of branch leaders, and further, examines the level of "democracy" present in each branch. However, for the purposes of explaining differing levels of militancy, this methodology is inappropriate.

To begin with, Rigg is incorrect to assert that branch leadership was the only significant difference between the pits. It is clear for example that the two pits were located in different NUM areas (probably Nottingham and Yorkshire), and therefore had vastly different traditions, coupled with very different area leaderships. Secondly, simply establishing correlations between various indices cannot tell us anything about the actual processes which create, sustain or undermine militancy (or any other political phenomena). For example, the coexistence of a militant branch and a militant branch leadership does not identify the direction of causality between them. Nor does it rule out the possibility that militancy was due to some other third factor. In short, for the purposes of explaining the

development and inhibition of political consciousness, Rigg's paper says little of any value.

In contrast, Cliff's brief paper begins the difficult process of analysing the specific local factors which affected political development at different collieries (1986). By comparing two Staffordshire pits - relatively militant Hem Heath and moderate Florence - Cliff identifies aggressive management and more effective branch leadership as the two reasons why Hem Heath was more supportive of the strike than nearby Florence. Although only fragmentary, his comments show how the particularities of management-labour relations, and relations within the union branches, were crucial in affecting the workforces commitment to the union.

1.2.v CONCLUSIONS

The strike is the pivotal event of this thesis. Yet it is clear from this review of the strike literature that the absence of detailed research concerning political developments at the local scale leaves serious gaps in our understanding of the dispute. Some academic studies have begun to orientate research in this direction, but as yet with scant results. Yet an understanding of the strike - as well as a wider understanding of shifts in workers' consciousness - clearly calls for the interpenetration of different levels of analysis. In particular, this review demonstrates the need for a historical analysis of changing branch politics within the union.

It is perhaps surprising, given the public profile of the strike, that there is so little published evidence based on detailed research at the local level. There is however a more general paucity of research relating to NUM branch politics[6]. Most recent research on the NUM has concentrated on a regional scale (see Taylor, 1984; Garside, 1971; Griffin, 1962; Francis and Smith, 1980; Waller, 1983). This reluctance to explore the

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[6]Krieger's (1983) study of the differential impacts of the 1966 National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) in Durham and Nottinghamshire is one exception. The powerful analysis by Dennis et al of the pit village of "Ashton" is another. An enormous literature has built up around the history and nature of life in mining communities (see for example Douglass, 1972; Williamson, 1982; Wade, 1984; and for analysis, Lockwood, 1966; Kerr and Siegel, 1954; and Bulmer, 1975).

local level is mirrored in studies of other industrial sectors (chapters two and three review some important exceptions). As a consequence, there is a general lack of knowledge about processes of political change at a local level.

This empirical gap has occurred despite recent efforts to integrate space with the study of social processes. However, as the following section shows, for all the theoretical hot air, there have been few attempts to translate this concern into effective research strategies.

1.3: CLASS AND PLACE

1.3.i PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

Underlying the research agenda set out in 1.1 above, is a central concern with class[7]. Although the structural relationship between capital and labour is the driving force behind capitalist societies, some further mediating concepts are necessary in moving from high level movements in the capitalist space economy, to the role and significance of workers living and working in particular communities in the Durham coalfield. The most relevant literature concerns the debate on "locality" and the significance of "place", which sprang up in the 1980's creating (and to some extent reflecting) a significant cross-fertilisation of ideas between geography, marxism and sociology. This debate offered the chance to integrate marxist insights on the forces shaping society with the active role of "place" in shaping and adapting the way in which those forces came to be experienced and understood by people.

1.3.ii SEARCHING FOR A SPACE FOR PLACE

The theoretical convergence between certain branches of geographic and marxist thought in the 1980's has frequently been remarked upon (Jackson, 1986; 1987; Massey, 1984). Essentially this convergence stemmed from Geographer's increasing concern with social processes, and Marxists recognition of the spatiality inherent in many social practices. It was no longer enough for Marxists (and many other social scientists) to talk about industrial restructuring, class recomposition and anti-closure campaigns, without recognising the spatiality inherent in such notions. Abstract class forces may generate pressures for change, but the way in which they manifest themselves depended on national and local characteristics. In

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[7]Class is defined here as being based on a relationship of exploitation between capitalists and workers (Marx and Engels, 1968; Thrift and Williams, 1987). This simple, abstract model is mediated by the complexity of class relations as they appear in concrete social formations (for Britain see for example Westergaard and Resler, 1975; Newby et al 1988; and more generally Wright, 1978; 1985; Abercrombie and Urry, 1983). Within different social formations, class does not determine all aspects of social and political life. Indeed, classes themselves are constantly being formed and reformed (Thrift and Williams, 1987, 7; Przeworski, 1977; see also chapter 2), their relative significance a matter of continual struggle.

other words, as consideration moves from Marx's abstract two class model to the complex articulation of class forces with concrete social formations, place moves into focus as a central concept. Likewise, more "orthodox" Human Geographer's began to temper their frequently fetishistic concern with space with a (somewhat belated) interest in the social processes underpinning the creation of "place".

But what are the significance of "place", "space" and "locality" in this context? And of what relevance is this debate for this thesis? As Smith pointed out (1987), the move into "locality" studies in the 1980's reflected a serious attempt to avoid the pitfalls of impenetrably abstract theorising on the one hand, and vacuous empiricism on the other. "Locality" was a new theoretical concept, charged with the task of marrying two previously separate traditions within social science: theoretical marxism on the one hand, and empiricist case studies on the other. Within Marxism, the aim was to move away from the excesses of the anti-spatial backlash of the 1970's, and begin to integrate place as a constitutive element in social relations (Massey, 1984).

Locality received attention as capitals increasing mobility (due particularly to developments in communications and transport technology) enhanced the significance of local differences - especially in the labour market - for locational decision making (Urry, 1981; see also Storper and Walker, 1983). This was expected to undermine national class formations, as workers were forced to organise locally in non-class based alliances to defend and promote their locality, in competition with other areas. However, it is not at all clear that local organisation means that class is no longer the appropriate basis for political mobilisation at the local level (Harris, 1983). Indeed the miners' strike provides clear evidence of the mobilising power of defending locality along explicitly class lines. The miners' strike also points to the central role of the state in stimulating divisions between localities. Certainly with regard to this thesis the state played a far greater role in enhancing and defining the importance of place than did private capital (see chapter two).

Much of the work on place has tended towards the abstract (see Thrift, 1983; Gregory, 1978; Giddens, 1984 and contributions to Gregory and Urry, 1985). There is a surprising paucity of published work putting theory into practice. Where attention has shifted to the concrete, there has been a concentration on the regional scale, with attempts to explain economic and political development building in space along with class factors (Cooke,

1982; 1985; Hudson and Sadler, 1986; Hudson, 1989). Whilst these contributions yield important insights, they are limited because - lacking deeper evidence - they make assumptions and generalisations about local practices and beliefs which affect developments at a regional scale. Exceptions can be found (for example, Mark-Lawson et al, 1985), but in general the dynamic negotiation of struggle at the local level - so important in defining regional characteristics - goes unremarked.

Despite attempts to penetrate the sub-regional level, locality studies have in general assumed a distinctly "top down" approach. Researchers seem to have headed into their target locality, and dived straight for the reassuring certainty of official data, of one type or another[8]. Hence, data collection has focused on official institutions, for example, the state or the company. The conception of change which has emerged from these studies has reflected the definitions, the assumptions and the scope of these organisations. By focusing on "official" data, this research makes no headway with one of the key pretensions of locality studies; namely the way in which people make sense of and affect the changes observed in their locality. Therefore paying more than lip service to the idea of the working class as active agents in the constitution of space (and in the class struggle), requires beginning the examination from below, with workers, their organisations, their families and their communities. In doing so more profound comments about the extent to which the working class is formed and reformed, not just by the strategies of capital, but also by the actions and beliefs of workers themselves, can be made[9]. And it also possible to begin to address the extent to which "places" are able to influence social processes.

Research which begins "at the bottom" in this way offers unparallelled opportunities to both observe and test socialist practice (Beauregard, 1988). As such, it is also an essential prerequisite for any attempt to

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[8]The Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) "Changing Urban and Regional System" (CURS) research initiative appears to have fallen into this trap. See for example Smith (1987), Cooke (1987), Beauregard (1988).

[9]This task was eased considerably in the case of this research by the proliferation of existing research concerned with the restructuring processes within the British coal industry. This meant that more time was available to concentrate on workers strategies and ideas than would normally be the case.

integrate human agency into an understanding of the construction of place. Neither is this merely an academic concern - for socialists it offers the opportunity to examine the dialectic of class struggle at the scale at which it is experienced, and relate this to higher level changes within the capitalist space economy.

Understanding the role of human agency is one of the key ambitions of the new Human Geography. And yet surprisingly little work has actually studied the complexities of the relationships between structure, agency, class and place in concrete case studies. One attempt was Cooke's (1985) account of class practices prevalent in South Wales; their significance in constituting the region; and how these place specific characteristics in turn influenced the development of class relations. In a sensitive analysis, he emphasised the importance of working class agency through institutions such as trade unions and their related educational activities. Similarly, Massey's work highlighting the development of distinctive spatial structures arising from successive "rounds" of capitalist investment or disinvestment directed attention to the causative role of regional class practices (1984). And yet generalisations in both studies concentrated on the regional level, when there is ample evidence that finer grained research is needed to understand the complex role of working class agency in affecting development within localities.

Central to this project is the need to understand working class resistance and struggle. To do this it is necessary to problematise the extent to which institutions accurately reflect the experiences, attitudes and practice of people at the level of locality. What is being suggested here is the need to disaggregate the region, and recompose it from the level of everday experience. Studying struggle _within_ regions is essential for an understanding of change at the regional level; without struggle there is no possibility of overturning established leadership, challenging strategy and generating change. Class resistance is often not located in the first instance at a regional level, and indeed the first part of this chapter has established the central significance of local initiatives both in the background to and conduct of the 1984/5 coal dispute. It is the ways in which _local_ class practices help construct regional and national class struggles which this thesis addresses.

1.4: CONCLUSION.

This chapter has had three objectives. First, I set out my principle research questions. These were centred around the processes of political change in two branches of the NUM at Murton between 1978 and 1988. In particular, they were concerned with the nature of these political changes, the forces propelling these changes, the relationship of these struggles to the wider political context, and the relative significance of agency in directing them.

Secondly, I reviewed some of the major published material on the 1984/5 miners' strike. In many ways the strike is the pivotal event in this thesis – the event which precipitated Murton's dramatic political shift. Reviewing the literature focused attention on the lack of research based on the dynamics of political action at the local level. In particular, there was a failure to explain the highly spatially specific development of the strike. This spatial specificity needs to be related to the historical development of the industry, and to regional and sub-regional variations in class practices.

To amplify these considerations, part three situated these considerations within recent research in and around Human Geography. Although there has been much talk about the need to integrate space into class analyses, most has been at the theoretical level. Where class practices have been taken seriously as constitutive of localities, the regional scale has invariably been adopted. This has led naturally to a focus on regional institutions as the best expression of class action, but this has the effect of obscuring the processes which create and sustain working class action. It therefore also obscures the impact of class agency, since it reduces agency to the apparently uncontested policies pursued by organisations.

Chapter two picks up from this point by examining the literature on recent working class struggles, taking as a starting point recent anti-closure campaigns outside the coal industry.

MAP 1
Durham Coalfield 1989
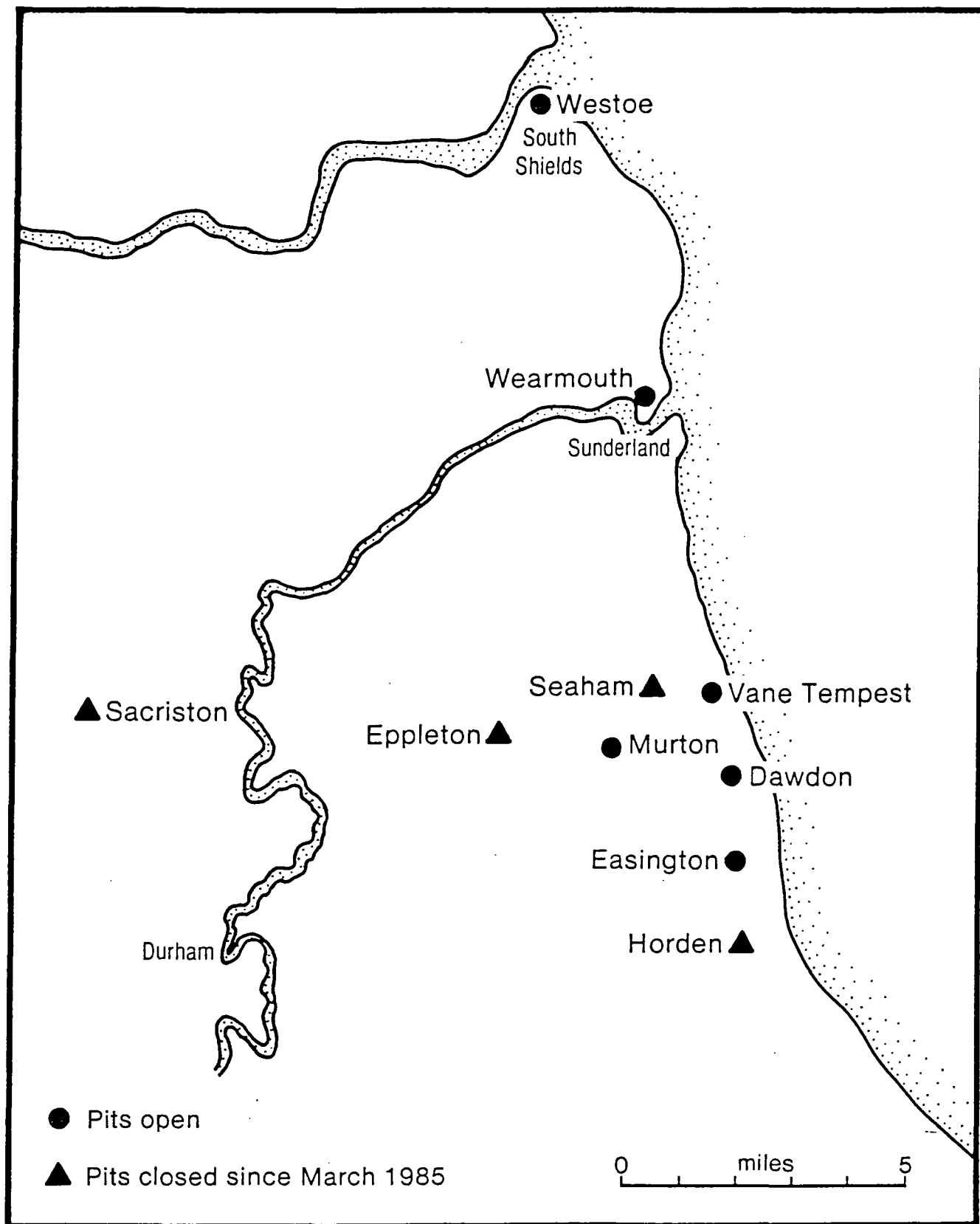
Westoe

South
Shields

Wearmouth

Sunderland

Seaham ▲

● Vane Tempest

Sacriston ▲

Eppleton ▲

● Murton

● Dawdon

Easington ●

Horden ▲

Durham

● Pits open

▲ Pits closed since March 1985

0   miles   5

CHAPTER TWO: ANTI CLOSURE CAMPAIGNS AND THE
DISINTEGRATING POST WAR SETTLEMENT

CHAPTER TWO: ANTI-CLOSURE CAMPAIGNS AND THE DISINTEGRATING POST WAR SETTLEMENT.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one established a research agenda for this thesis, and suggested the need for further research on the local dynamics of political change. Chapter two starts by examining some examples of struggles similar to that faced by the miners from the late 1970's. In particular, it examines campaign to save the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in the early 1970's and compares this with the case of steel workers resistance to closures in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Research on both of these campaigns has touched upon some of the key issues identified in chapter one; notably the importance of "place", and the role of trade union leadership in affecting the conduct and outcome of the struggles.

There are three further reasons for choosing these two examples. In the first place, miners are in many ways comparable to shipbuilders and steel workers. They have tended to live in isolated, single class communities, dominated by strong traditions of union solidarity (Lockwood, 1966). There are therefore some constants when it comes to comparing class struggles based in these communities. Secondly, like the miners, shipbuilders and steel workers faced a crisis of over-capacity which led to determined strategies by management to break up the workforces' unity, and break the power of organised labour as a prelude to economic restructuring. In all cases, the announcements of closure or capacity rundowns were preceded by periods of destabilisation and increasing crisis.

Thirdly, the success of the UCS work-in and the failure to resist BSC's capacity rundowns stand to some extent as paradigms for their respective periods. In the early 1970's, the consensus commitment to full employment enabled mass mobilisation behind a campaign to protect jobs. By the early 1980's the state had abandoned commitment to full employment, and largely succeeded in pushing its "TINA" (There Is No Alternative) argument into the public consciousness. Nevertheless, it was still a contested ideology - nowhere more so than in the miners' strike in 1984/5.

These comparisons highlight the role of the state as a principle player, both in affecting the course of struggles over industrial closure, and in determining the terrain over which they were fought. The rest of the

chapter therefore explores state strategy in the 1970's and 1980's. In particular, it focuses on the breakdown of the post-war settlement (PWS) in Britain. This is significant because the interlocking web of relations between labour, capital and the state in the post-war period were both decisively affected by, and at the same time reflected in, the particular settlement over the coal industry. Miners' struggles in the 1980's, in Murton and elsewhere, were inextricably linked to the politics which emerged around the PWS.

The section on the state therefore falls naturally into three parts. In the first, the PWS is described, along with the pressures that gave rise to it, the particular role of the coal industry within it, and the effects of this class compromise on working class struggle. Secondly, the contradictions within the PWS are explored, showing its disintegration into crisis. Finally, the Thatcherite programme to destroy the PWS and attempt to replace it with a new settlement between capital and labour is examined. Only by understanding how the politics of the old (the PWS) were interpenetrated with a new strategy by capital and the state can the miners struggles throughout the 1980's be understood.

Capitalism provokes conflict between workers and employers in three different but related dimensions. These are over wages (the share of the product accruing to the producers); over the "frontier of control" (Goodrich, 1975); and over job loss (see Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980, 82; see also Hyman, 1987, 102 for the first two). In practice, although conflict may focus on one dimension, it is rare for the other two to be unrelated[1]. In this section therefore, although the focus is ostensibly on conflict over job loss, in reality it also involved struggle over control, and through this over pay.

Arguably, conflict over job loss provides the most fundamental challenge to capital, because it challenges the very existence of the working class. Yet anti-closure campaigns exhibit big differences in their level of mobilisation and in their outcomes. These differences are illustrated by comparing the 1971/2 campaign to save UCS (Upper Clyde Shipbuilders) from closure with attempts to prevent steel closures in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Research on both cases has drawn out the importance of union strategy (agency), whilst at the same time emphasising the constraints provided by historical conditions. This tension - which is so evident in studying political development in the Murton NUM - needs to be analysed if the struggles of Murton miners in the 1970's and 1980's are to be located in a wider framework of working class action.

2.1.i UCS AND THE STATE "U" TURN

It is only 18 years since the UCS work-in played a key role in forcing Edward Heath's Conservative government into a politically damaging policy "U" turn. Compared to the 1980's, this campaign against job loss inspired a mass mobilisation of the working class, forced the state onto the defensive, and won - at least in the short term - significant concessions (Foster and Woolfson, 1986; see also Thompson and Hart, 1972; McGill, 1972; Murray, 1972). Why was this campaign so different to the limited,

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[1] Later chapters show how at Murton colliery initial conflict over wages merged into a general struggle over the frontier of control, which finally exploded in the 1984/5 strike into a conflict over job loss. Even after the strike, struggle continued in all three dimension.

unambitious and generally unsuccessful attempts to resist mass redundancy in the 1980's?

When Edward Heath's Conservative government decided in June 1971 to refuse to "bail out" Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, it was part of a determined attempt to break with the post war consensus which had dominated British politics for 25 years. Yet after almost a year of struggle, the government was in retreat, forced to return to 1960's style class compromise as the apparently unavoidable price of defusing working class unity (Foster and Woolfson, 1986). Not only did the UCS work-in force a retreat on the immediate issue of yard closures, but it also spurred on working class resistance to the anti-labour stance of the Tory government. Just at the moment when resistance to the Industrial Relations Act was weakening, the gritty determination of the Clydeside workers and communities fired the imagination of workers across Scotland and the rest of Britain, providing an inspirational focus for the gathering campaign against rising unemployment.

In their wide ranging account of the work-in, Foster and Woolfson place great emphasis on the importance of the wily and committed shop steward leadership in the yards, whose abilities condensed the experiences and knowledge of generations of struggle on "Red Clydeside". Through the determination and ability of this shop steward leadership, the workers were able to seize and keep the initiative for most of the fifteen month struggle. Strong local and regional links were established by the stewards, building mass rank and file support for their struggle. This concentration on local trade union leadership is highly significant. It allows Foster and Woolfson to investigate in depth the relationship between workers in struggle and the development of consciousness, whilst situating these changes within an understanding of the historical and contemporary limits posed by developments in the sphere of production. Although not developed explicitly, the authors build up a sophisticated notion of "place", understood as the historically grounded nature and experience of social relations (not just class relations) working through a particular physical space.

This historical perspective is important, because it shows that at the time of the work-in the balance of forces favoured workers far more than they did when the steel workers tried to prevent closures seven years later. Compared to the 1980's, working class organisations were confident and

defensively powerful (Dickson and Judge, 1987). There were still strong elements of consensus within civil society, which led to concern over the deliberate rise in unemployment which Heath was engineering. The state was consequently far more circumscribed in its possible strategies than was the case ten years later. Trade union leadership was able to exploit this strength, but it is clear that the course of struggle depended on the particular balance of forces as well as on the strategies of conscious agents.

2.1.ii THE LESSONS FROM STEEL

When the announcement was made, in December 1979, that Consett steel works was to close with the loss of all 3700 jobs, it provoked an unsuccessful nine month anti-closure campaign. The campaign failed because it became sidetracked into an irrelevant argument about the profitability or otherwise of the plant (Sadler, 1985). And yet, on the face of it, massive redundancy in an essentially single industry town provided the perfect background to mass mobilisation and politicisation of workers and their community, of the type experienced at the UCS work-in eight years earlier. Why did the Consett campaign subside with barely a whimper? Was its failure inevitable, given the hostile economic climate of the late 1970's? Or was the outcome contingent, a unique product of particular circumstances and decisions which need not have taken their eventual path?

Hudson and Sadler have investigated in depth the circumstances surrounding anti-steel closure campaigns in the 1970's and 80's (see Sadler, 1985; Hudson and Sadler, 1986; Hudson and Sadler, 1983; Robinson and Sadler, 1985). Their work provides an important background to this thesis, because it attempts to relate the politics of class and place, taking seriously the particularities of the different campaigns which emerged in different places at different times. There are also strong reasons for comparing political action between coal and steel workers: they both involve single industry, single class communities, relatively isolated, and highly male dominated. Many authors have remarked on the high levels of solidarity and propensity to strike generated by such conditions (Kerr and Siegel, 1954; Lockwood, 1966).

What emerges as central to Hudson and Sadler's analysis is the debilitating and divisive effect of basing anti-closure campaigns on narrowly conceived attempts to defend a particular place, rather than challenging the logic

which defined any community(s) as surplus to requirements. However, the question then emerges as to why such limited campaigns appear so seductive to people faced with catastrophic works closure.

For Hudson and Sadler, the recession and the failure of state sponsored re-industrialisation policies have been the background to a situation where place specific campaigns appear to the workers involved to be the "only feasible solution" to the threat of mass redundancies (Hudson and Sadler, 1986).

> "Accepting the competitive ethic of capitalism in this way as a legitimate terrain, and fighting on a territorially defined basis within it, rather than posing broader questions as to why restructuring is regarded as either necessary or justified given its extensive social costs, has the precise (albeit unintended) effect of reproducing the basic structural relationship of capitalism." (Hudson and Sadler, 1986, 179)

But how did this strategy emerge as the "only feasible solution"? After all, Hudson and Sadler acknowledge that closure decisions have generally been regarded as "transparently political", in much the same way as the state decision to refuse to bail out UCS in 1971 was. Answering this question involves delving deeper into the specific circumstances surrounding each campaign.

At Consett, a divided union structure devoid of radical traditions was faced with the perceived need to unite the workforce around the campaign. Faced with a national union leadership hostile to generalising the campaign, the only available option seemed to be to appeal to the lowest common denominator, which was to argue that BSC's stated reason for closure - the plants unprofitability - was invalid. Once this was decided, BSC could comfortably outflank opposition, secure in the knowledge that the unions were barking up the wrong tree. BSC's real reason for closing Consett was corporate over-capacity (Sadler, 1985).

Arguing on grounds of profitability effectively isolated Consett from other BSC plants, because the implication of Consett's success was that a different plant would have to close to achieve the required capacity reductions. The tactic also hindered attempts to build local linkages with other anti closure campaigns, since it offered no common ground with workers engaging in similar struggles elsewhere.

> "[A]n anti-closure argument on profitability terms isolated the campaign from broader support either

within the North East or from workers at other plants within BSC. By reinforcing and replicating the claim for decisions to be made only within the context of one plant, the campaign failed to consider the broader issues in a fashion which would have invited support from other sources than just steel workers at Consett."
(Sadler, 1985, 157)

At Ravenscraig in Scotland however, an anti-closure campaign developed in 1982/3 which proved - temporarily at least - successful. According to Sadler, it was successful because of the cross class alliances which were constructed to defend the plant. These alliances were in turn based on the distinctive ability to appeal to the national question.

> [T]he Ravenscraig campaign focused on broader social issues, in particular the degree of linkage between steel and other industries in Scotland, thereby actively encouraging broader support within the region. Profitability was not an issue, forestalling likely active opposition from workers at other steel plants in pursuit of their own short-term interests. At the same time the degree of support for Ravenscraig, drawing on and reinforcing a reservoir of longer term Scottish identity, forced the BSC decision to be seen as a purely political rather than narrowly economic one. As part of the complex series of checks and balances within the British state, in particular the perceived need to maintain a degree of support from all regions, closure of Ravenscraig was seen to be politically unacceptable by Government. (Sadler, 1985, 171-2)

Success in this case depended on very specific spatial and temporal circumstances - in particular the states' perceived need to maintain political legitimacy in Scotland.

In contrast to Ravenscraig, when a regional campaign threatened to emerge in South Wales over unparallelled planned reductions in the steel labour force (contained within the BSC's 1980/81 Business Proposal), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) actively sought to prevent the emergence of a regional campaign which would have questioned the general ethos of mass redundancies (Morgan, 1983). This wasn't simply due to a remote and compliant labour leadership; it drew strength too from sections of the workforce who "pleaded" with the union not to try and universalise the anti-redundancy campaign (ibid). Furthermore, the union was severely weakened by the failure of the 1980 pay strike.

In France however, anti steel closure campaigns in the late 1970's became generalised into a wider challenge to the government of the day. In the

Lorraine region, massive job losses provoked formidable protest action, including "the most serious break-down in public order in France since May 1968" (Sadler, 1985, 212). Because the state was heavily implicated in the job losses (through de facto nationalisation of the industry), because the French unions (especially the Communist CGT) had a tradition of challenging strategic economic decision making, and because the opposition parties (which historically were committed to socialism - see Gallie, 1983) were able to use the opportunity to broaden the campaign into a pre-election attack on the government's deflationary handling of the economy, the steel workers battle was rapidly politicised. Ultimately it was a significant factor in the election of a socialist government.

However, this government was no less able to prevent the decline of the steel industry than its predecessor had been. Protests were dissipated by the state's exploitation of divisions between the Communist and Socialist unions. Massive redundancy payments and re-industrialisation measures drove wedges between protesting workers, defusing the crisis, although at considerable fiscal cost.

> "[B]it by bit, during the five months of exhausting
> negotiations, the protestors were bought off until only
> a few isolated pockets of dissent remain." (Financial
> Times, 13 March 1980: quoted in Sadler, 1985; 213)

What then do these examples say about the reasons for the success or failure of anti-closure campaigns?

The key lesson drawn by Hudson and Sadler was that an unintended consequence of many campaigns against closure was to reinforce the wage relation as the basis for society. In Lorraine, attempts to defend the locality foundered as the state used differential redundancy and re-industrialisation packages to split the workforce. Opposition was channelled into political opposition to the government, but the new government was operating within the same capitalist framework, and was ineffective in preventing further job losses. In Consett, the campaign itself divided the working class, since it was based on narrowly sectarian interests. Profitability might have been possible for Consett, but the price would have been closure elsewhere - hence the Consett workforce was isolated. Only in Scotland, at Ravenscraig, was closure prevented. This was a contingent success, dependant not so much on the intrinsic merits of the campaign - although it undoubtedly was well organised - but because of the need to maintain political legitimacy. The success was contingent because a

changed balance of class forces may render keeping Ravenscraig open irrelevant for these aims.

Two issues are raised by this review of anti-steel closure campaigns. First, it is clear that the state has played a pivotal role in all three cases (see section 2.2 below). Secondly, very little has been said about the way in which the different anti-redundancy strategies emerged. These two issues need to be examined in turn. Starting with the second, although there is a wealth of material exploring the twists and turns of different campaigns, and what the effects of various decisions were, the processes which generated different strategies are largely consigned to a "black box". Why, for example, were there such strong pressures from the Consett workforce to adopt a "lowest common denominator" campaign, compared to Ravenscraig where cross class alliances were favoured? Did the different campaigns both emerge from the rank and file, or were they largely the product of union leaderships (McNulty, 1987)? It is clear that there is a major area needing exploration here - the processes generating different strategies, different levels of militancy, different types of leadership have not been investigated. They are taken up in the following chapters about Murton, where the processes generating struggle are investigated in detail.

Secondly, state strategy with regard to the steel industry bears closer analysis, given the similarity in many important respects with the tactics deployed in the coal industry a few years later. With the state committed to slashing intervention in the economy and reducing the power of organised labour, the development of particular strategies with regard to the nationalised industries forms the background to conflict in the coal industry. This is a point developed in part 2.2 of this chapter.

Throughout the examples discussed here, the role of the state emerges as central. In the first place this centrality derived from state ownership (coal and steel) or heavy state involvement (shipbuilding). In the second place, it relates to the state role as guarantor of the wider mesh of interlocking class relations in the post war settlement. Thirdly, the state has played the key role in leading attempts to reorganise capital-labour relations in Britain. Restructuring in shipbuilding, steel and coal was related to this strategy. In the following section the state is considered, in order to provide a theoretical and historical underpinning for the

struggles which took place in the UK coal industry from 1978, which in turn provides the context within which developments at Murton occurred.

2.2 STATE STRATEGY[2] AND THE DECLINE OF THE POST WAR SETTLEMENT

A key factor in the way anti-closure campaigns developed from the 1970's was the close involvement of the state in many of the worst affected industries, usually (although not always) directly through nationalisation. This meant that closure decisions were politicised to a hitherto unprecedented degree. Furthermore, closure often took place in already relatively deprived localities, which had attracted quite considerable state intervention in the post war decades. Indeed, the absence of resistance to closures in the 1950's and 60's owed much to the state commitment (however weak in practice) to regional development in the regions (Hudson, 1986). In other words, people in these localities expected the state to intervene on their behalf. When - under drastically changed political economic conditions - the post war settlement (PWS) which had sanctioned intervention broke down, the state faced potential legitimation crises in the affected regions.

Heightened struggle over major works closures in old industrial regions used to a high state subsidy was an unintended consequence of the incorporation strategy pursued by the British state in the post war era (Jessop, 1980). It was an outcome of attempting to defuse class struggle by negotiation with the peak representatives of labour. The strategy failed because it internalised the contradictions between labour and capital within the state itself. However, incorporation also helped disorganise the working class response to the crisis, because labourism - the dominant form of the compromise in the affected localities - accepted the basic logic and imperatives of capitalist accumulation. In effect, all working class institutions were left to fight for during a recession, having accepted the basic right of capital to manage itself profitably, was a strategy to increase profitability (which could only be at the workers expense), which even if successful, implied that somewhere else less profitable (either in the same enterprise or not) would have to bite the bullet.

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[2] This section focuses on the particular historical development of the post-war state in Britain. For a more abstract and theoretical discussion on general theories of the capitalist state, see the reviews by Jessop, 1977; 1982; Frankel, 1979; Held and Krieger, 1984; Held, 1983. See also Poulantzas, 1976; 1978; Laclau, 1975; Miliband, 1969; Offe, 1984; Holloway and Picciotti (eds), 1978.

Despite the incorporation of the peak representatives of labour, workers frequently fought on a broader front than their leaders, as the UCS work-in (among others) amply demonstrates. But by the 1980's the state was clearly reasserting its authority. Turning the tables was not a matter of accident however. The state modernising strategy emerged over a period of at least fifteen years. The following sections analyse the development of Thatcherite strategy, locating its roots in the contradictions which were internalised in the PWS.

2.2.i THE POST WAR SETTLEMENT (PWS) IN BRITAIN

It is easy in retrospect to overemphasise the coherence of the PWS (Jessop et al, 1984). But what it certainly did mean was "a general movement in favour of class collaboration and state intervention in the interests of economic growth and improved social conditions for the whole people" (Jessop, 1980, 28; see also Crouch, 1982). In this underlying principle lay the degree of continuity between Conservative and Labour administrations until the 1970's.

Up until the late 1960's, post war UK governments (ostensibly at least) pursued "full employment" policies. Keynesian demand management was applied, with varying success, to ensure national unemployment never rose above a low single figure percentage rate. This did not prevent regional unemployment rising significantly above national norms, but it did ensure that protest was manageable, with the application of regional aid offered as a palliative for deprived areas (Hudson, 1985). These consensus policies grew out of prewar experiences, when ad hoc intervention in the economy gradually increased (Dickson and Judge, 1987). They were consolidated during the war itself, when the the labour movement was accepted into the state as an equal partner (Panitch, 1976). This had the effect of inextricably linking the war effort to the goal of post-war reconstruction (Gamble, 1985, 100-103).

The government's commitment to job creation in the regions was maintained through a modernisation strategy which was supposed to reconstruct the employment base of deprived regions around modern manufacturing (Hudson, 1983). Despite the weaknesses of the state measures in practice, they were largely successful in buttressing a consensus ideology for the future of regions such as the North East (see Carney, Hudson and Lewis, 1977).

Nationalisation was a key aspect of the consensus, both regionally and nationally.

Nationalisation of the coal industry symbolised the PWS (Beynon and McMylor, 1985). Miners hoped that it would signal the end of brutal exploitation by the coal owners, and usher in a new era of planned production for the common good. The NUM was reorganised to play a key partnership role with the NCB - union nominees sat on industry committees, and there was frequent movement from NUM ranks into "the Board"[3]. Yet the terms of nationalisation - accepted by the Labour and Conservative Parties, and by the NUM's leadership - implied that nationalisation was aimed at socialising the costs of production of basic raw materials in the interests of maintaining industrial competitiveness, rather than beginning the transition to socialism (see Carney, 1980; Hudson, 1986; and Appendix 2). There was therefore a fundamental difference in understanding between miners and the state as to what nationalisation meant, and this contradiction had important implications for the development of NUM politics in the following years.

Despite Britain's rapid post-war recovery (assisted by the relatively limited wartime destruction of infrastructure, and aid from the USA) by the mid 1950's it was apparent that other countries similar in size and resources were beginning to outperform the British economy. Although Keynesianism was adopted in Britain, the actual level of state intervention in the economy was low. Essentially it depended on macro scale manipulations to bring demand into line with the productive level of the economy (Gamble, 1985, 115-116). As the failure of this strategy became apparent, calls increased for more direct, supply side intervention and systematic planning. Nationally, within the full employment framework, a range of policies were tried in attempts to modernise the economy, and improve its relatively sluggish performance. However, these tended to be reactive or intermittent in nature (see Dickson and Judge, 1987). Micro scale planning was consistently thwarted by the subservience of economic planning to the priorities of the finance sector, as embodied in the Bank of England (ibid, 1987).

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[3] In Durham, where Sam Watson utterly dominated the area union, several key NCB employees at area level were Watson's personal nominees (interview, ex NCB colliery personnel manager).

2.2.ii THE PWS IN CRISIS

Although the PWS delivered generally rising living standards throughout the 1950's and 60's, it could not resolve contradictions inherent in the capital-labour relation. Instead, a particular balance of class forces became institutionalised, internalising the contradictions within the state itself. For example, despite incorporating both the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracies, the PWS failed to snuff out conflict at the point of production. Indeed, during a period of full employment, it boosted the defensive ability of well organised workers to resist encroachments along the "frontier of control" (Goodrich, 1975). Also, in consolidating a commitment (over a generation) to rising living standards, it raised working class expectations to the point where resistance to attacks on living standards would inevitably be intensified. And more fundamentally, it failed to resolve the long term relative decline in the British economy.

This decline continued to preoccupy successive government's, both Labour and Conservative[4]. By the late 1960's, the conditions for the success of the PWS - namely a continuing increase in real wages which did not threaten accumulation - were already being undermined (Jessop, 1980).

The general failure of attempts at planning and direct industrial intervention in the 1960's increased the pressure on the state to secure improved conditions for accumulation in other ways, leading to attempts to develop corporatist structures (see Panitch, 1981, 24 for a definition of corporatism). In part this was a response to the British "problem" of workers militancy at the point of production. By incorporating the trade union and Labour leadership, the PWS encouraged the bureaucratisation of workers organisations, separating them more clearly from their members (see

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[4]Many arguments have been advanced to account for this decline (see for example; Nairn, 1982; Gamble, 1985; Jessop, 1980; Dickson and Judge, 1987). It sprang from the historical separation of finance capital from British manufacturing, and the dominance of the former (through the agency of the Bank of England) in policy formation. Also important was the determination (related to the interests of finance capital) to maintain Britain's international role, including the role of sterling as a major world currency. These commitments severely restricted investment at home, and internationalised British capital to an extent second only to the USA (Dickson and Judge, 1987, 10-12). This in turn weakened the commitment of the dominant fractions of British capital to their country of origin.

chapter three). As the price of admission into the state structure, unions were expected to discipline and control their members.

> "Trade union involvement has been promoted less to obtain technical information and detailed advice than to secure active support or at least passive acquiescence in measures intended to facilitate accumulation." (Jessop, 1980, 48)

But the PWS could not legislate away conflict at the point of production, and the strong workplace organisation of many workers intensified as acquiescence at the head of the movement provoked militancy on the shop floor, leading among other things to the problem of "wages drift" (Donovan, 1968).

Corporatism failed because the trade union bureaucracy could not deliver the required level of internal discipline, and because capital too lacked sufficiently powerful peak organisations (Jessop, 1980; Jessop et al, 1984). Government's nevertheless persisted with corporatist experiments. In 1969 Barbara Castle introduced the Labour government's "In Place of Strife" White Paper, as an attempt to strengthen union leaderships and reduce the power of unofficial workplace organisation. The Donovan Report on industrial relations had identified the latter as a serious barrier to accommodative industrial relations, and consequently recommended the institutionalisation of shop steward movements (Donovan, 1968; Coates and Topham, 1988). However, union rank and file resistance eventually defeated both "In Place of Strife", and the Conservative government's subsequent frontal assault on union power - the 1971 Industrial Relations Act.

The early 1970's were a period of intense class struggle, as the long post war wave of expansion broke up, plunging most of the advanced capitalist economies into recession (Mandel, 1980; see also footnote 6 below). In Britain, Prime Minister Heath's attempts to break with the post war consensus were thwarted as working class resistance to his attacks built up (see section 2.1.ii above). Heath was forced into a significant policy "U" turn when unemployment climbed past the psychologically critical one million mark. Heath's tarnished government was replaced in 1974 (following the NUM's second successful strike over wages - see chapter four) by the Wilson administration, which attempted once more to rework the post-war themes of class compromise.

Labour's strategy was encapsulated in the "Social Contract". This agreement between the TUC and the government was based on the latter agreeing to

legislate social benefits for the working class as a whole, in return for voluntary wage restraint on the part of the unions. It was hoped that as workers on the shop floor saw and experienced increasing social benefits, then their wage demands would moderate accordingly (Coates, 1980, 60). At the same time as the Social Contract was negotiated, tripartite discussions between the government, the NCB and the NUM yielded the "Plan for Coal" agreement (see chapter 4). Once again therefore, the coal industry symbolised the peak of social democratic planning. The miners' interests were further institutionalised, with the state acting as guarantor of the settlement.

However, by the mid-1970's the economic conditions necessary for the continued operation of the PWS were crumbling (Coates, 1980). British industry's uncompetitiveness was increasing, and "neither capital nor labour, whether acting alone or together, could accomplish the necessary restructuring of industrial relations to facilitate accumulation" (Jessop, 1980, 47). Essentially, the economic crisis was manifested as a crisis of control, because the defensive strength of labour, built up during the PWS led to resistance to restructuring policies (Holloway, 1987). For capital and the state, the whole basis of managerial authority was under threat. In many industries, the shop steward movement had built up a considerable veto power over the introduction of new technology and new working arrangements. Competitive pressures forced an assault on union power.

Faced with a financial crisis (precipitated by the imposition of loan conditions by the International Monetary Fund in 1976), the Labour government began to pursue austerity measures. With the working class still relatively strong, the result was conflict, as low paid public sector workers fought to defend their living standards. At about the same time, the first sporadic attempts to redefine the power relationship between capital and labour which had been institutionalised in the PWS were also initiated by the Labour government. The Social Contract dissolved into a series of running battles between workers and the state.

On the industrial front, the state began to try and lead the restructuring process, attempting to resolve the crisis of control by using the sectors under its direct control. British Leyland (BL) was the first big target, and serves as a metaphor for the changes about to occur in the wider economy. But the "correct" management strategy was not obvious, and its effects could not be predicted with any degree of certainty by the state.

Initially, management at BL attempted to incorporate the steward leadership, to gain their active cooperation with the modernisation strategy (the so-called "Ryder Plan"). Although partially successful in beginning the introduction of some new working practices, the Ryder Plan was insufficient to decisively reassert managerial authority. The concept of "mutuality" (under which the introduction of any new technology or working practices first had to be discussed with the stewards) undermined managerial authority. It was at this point (in 1977) that the Labour government approved the appointment of Michael Edwardes as Chairman of the BL Board (Holloway, 1987).

Edwardes' aggressive reassertion of management authority - including the sacking of the Longbridge convenor, Derek "Red Robbo" Robinson - culminated in the unilateral termination of mutuality. Edwardes won the showdown with the stewards, formally ended mutuality, and effectively destroyed the steward leadership, reasserting management authority to impose new working practices. The key word in these new arrangements was "flexibility".

> "Flexibility means essentially the removal of barriers
> to management's right to tell the workers what to do,
> where to do it and at what speed." (Holloway, 1987,
> 150)

Edwardes success built on the discrediting of the stewards, following their decision to cooperate with the Ryder Plan.

Holloway points out the similarity between the crisis of control facing individual companies like BL and the authority crisis simultaneously facing the state. "Keynesianism" was the states equivalent of mutuality. It was a trade off whereby the organised working class secured an important role in the determination of wages and conditions, in return for accepting capital's domination. Capital's descent into crisis meant that the old pattern of domination and compromise now constituted a block to the resolution of crisis. Successfully resolution of the problem was by no means inevitable. The first attempts - In Place of Strife, and the Industrial Relations Act - both failed. The state's equivalent of the Ryder Plan was the Social Contract - the full incorporation of the trade union leadership. This too was only partially successful, and in particular failed to decisively re-establish the authority of the state. The task was taken up by the new Conservative government.

2.2.iii THATCHERISM AND THE REASSERTION OF CONTROL

The experience of the early 1970's - when organised labour was able to successfully defend its interests in several key confrontations with the state - problematised the extent of the state's authority (Foster and Woolfson, 1986). Events such as the freeing of the Pentonville five in 1971, the UCS climbdown, and the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes explicitly revealed the limits to state power. Instead of incorporation leading to the regulation of rank and file struggle by the unions, in a period of recession national labour leaders were themselves forced to adopt militant positions to maintain their credibility with their members. Institutional recognition of the legitimacy of workers interests within the framework of the PWS clearly circumscribed the boundaries of state action.

To cope with this situation, the state began to take measures to boost its operational capability to resist public protest. For example, the Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) was created to deal with civil unrest and major strikes, and the police began to reorganise so that they would never again be beaten as they were during the 1972 miners' strike at Saltley Gate (see Jeffery and Hennessy, 1983, for a detailed assessment of the changes within the state). Whilst out of government, Conservative ideologues began formulating detailed strategies and tactics for the restructuring of capital-labour relations in the UK, in an attempt to create a "strong state", and establish a new pattern of domination (see Gamble, 1985; Jessop et al, 1988).

Their first attentions turned towards the need to boost state power, to ensure that the state could win confrontations with organised labour (Jeffery and Hennessy, 1983). They prepared a blueprint to guide implementation - the infamous Ridley Report (The Economist, 27-5-78). In it the steel industry was singled out as representing the ideal testing ground for the new Tory strategy (Morgan, 1983, 189). Historically accommodative labour relations and a supine trade union leadership could be relied on to weaken resistance. Furthermore,.

> "[t]here can be no doubt that the correct perception of the steel industry as one where the work force is particularly fragmented by inter-union, inter-regional, and inter-plant rivalries was a crucial factor in its being chosen by the government as the premier example on which first to practice its various economic doctrines. (Hudson, 1986, 19)

When they achieved power they sharpened the weapon of redundancy payments, realising the powerfully divisive effect they had on workers facing closure. As Morgan commented with respect to anti-steel closure campaigns, the lack of labour leadership in opposing closures meant that "without any alternative reference, steelworkers were forcibly obliged to minimize their losses through the individualist 'solution' of redundancy payments" (Morgan, 1983, 193). In an annex to the Report, the authors predicted that the biggest challenge to the government would come from the miners, and they suggested a range of measures to defeat such a challenge (see chapter four).

Simultaneous with the frontal assault on organised labour came a legal and ideological campaign against the PWS (see for example Beynon and McMylor, 1985). Just how far reaching a rupture with the past Thatcherism aspired to be can be gauged by the extent of the debate which it has generated[5]. But from the point of view of this thesis, the most significant developments were the clear break with the post war commitment to full employment, the assault on union power, and the attack on state intervention in the economy. Ideological aspects were subordinate to this general strategy, which aimed to fundamentally alter the balance of power between capital and labour in Britain, and so establish a new pattern of class domination[6].

Conservative strategy followed these paths relentlessly. Unemployment was allowed (indeed encouraged) to rise to hitherto unprecedented levels.

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[5] On the left this has focused around the political/ideological uniqueness of Thatcherism. See for example; Hall and Jacques (eds), 1983; Jessop et al, 1988; Hall, 1988; Atkins, 1986; Krieger, 1986; Gamble, 1988. For a general bibliography on Thatcherism, see Jessop et al, 1988, 195-207.

[6] Considerable dispute surrounds the causes of the crisis, and the extent to which capitalism is undergoing or has undergone a shift from a "fordist" to "post fordist" regime of accumulation. For the "regulation school", the crisis was caused by consumption falling out of line with production. This was the starting point for a drive by capital to develop a new "regime of accumulation", replacing the Fordist attempt to coordinate mass production with consumption with a "postfordist" drive to a regime of "flexible accumulation", for which there is some evidence in Britain (see for example, Aglietta, 1979; Schoenberger, 1988; Leborgne and Liepitz, 1988; Harvey, 1987; Cooke, 1988; Scott, 1988). This view has been criticised by Clarke (1988), who claims that the crisis derived from the inherent tendency towards overaccumulation within the capitalist system, and the state strategy to cope with it did not represent a shift towards a new accumulation strategy (see also Tomaney, 1989; Gertler, 1988; Pollert, 1988).

Manufacturing industry was exposed to fierce deflationary pressures, which hastened the UK economy into recession a year ahead of its competitors (Jessop et al, 1984, 48). The scale of contraction was awesome (Beynon, 1987). Between 1979 and 1982 manufacturing employment fell by 20% (Dickson and Judge, 1987, 28), unemployment doubled to three million, and in 1982 alone there were 12000 company liquidations (Gamble, 1985, 194).

No less than three major rounds of trade union legislation were enacted to withdraw immunities from union action, and closely regulate union's internal affairs (see appendix seven). These processes helped separate union bureaucracies from their members by ensuring that the state increasingly defined the legitimate boundaries of union activity before their members, as in the USA (Gilharducci, 1986; see also chapter eight). In particular, the 1980 Employment Act removing immunities from unions engaged in "secondary" action effectively outlawed class conscious trade unions (ibid; Scraton, 1985). This was combined with an orchestrated "moral panic" (Hall et al, 1978) against the "intimidation" practiced by pickets, which created a climate to justify repressive policing (Scraton, 1985). For the new right therefore,

> "trade unions are voluntary associations which have a legitimate purpose in providing insurance and welfare for their members. When, however, they seek to interfere in contracts in the labour market, and to influence the attitudes and behaviour of employees at work, they cease to be voluntary associations and become coercive groups and private monopolies."
> (Gamble, 1985, 149)

In order to cope with these barriers to the operation of the free market, a strong state was necessary to curb the exercise of union power.

Finally, state withdrawal from industrial intervention was a fundamental part of Conservative ideology. State disengagement from industry was necessary in order to expose industry to the undistorted operation of the market, wherein lay true economic salvation. The market referred to was the international market, which British industry was forcibly exposed to (Dickson and Judge, 1987). Subsidies were removed, and regional policy pruned dramatically in the drive to remove economic "distortions". The government's

> "strategy has been successful in gaining a widespread acceptance that the market, not governments, carries the responsibility for employment. The recession and unemployment have often been presented as "acts of God", as world forces beyond the control of government... Importantly, at the level of public

perceptions and ideology, Thatcherism has successfully attained the goal of linking external and internal policy - of linking the operation of the domestic labour market to the vagaries of the international trading markets." (ibid, 25-26)

The overall effect of the strategy has been summed up well by Clarke (1988, 86).

"The past decade has not so much seen a restructuring of the regime of accumulation, based on the development of neo-fordist forms of production, as a sustained offensive against the working class, aimed primarily at the destruction of the institutional forms of the Keynesian welfare state which underlay the ability of the organised working class to realise a consumption norm based on a generalised expectation of rising living standards... While Keynesianism was the ideological expression of the attempt of capital and the state to respond to the generalised aspirations of the working class in the post-war boom, neo-liberalism is the ideological expression of the subordination of working class aspirations to the valorisation of capital."

Much of the change pioneered by Thatcherism simply gave employers more power to increase the rate of exploitation of their workforces (Tomaney, 1989).

Indeed, Thatcherism elevated the politics of fear to the status of an economic planning principle. It was fear of unemployment and fear of poverty more than ideological commitment to Thatcherism which cowed workers into submission (Beynon, 1983; 1987). Yet this submission also had ideological effects, because it served to legitimate the Conservative "common sense" that there was no alternative to the market. Restructuring could not be resisted (Dickson and Judge, 1986). But for all the rhetoric, the Conservative government moved relatively cautiously in its dealings with powerful unions, avoiding major set piece confrontations until the miners' strike itself. The nationalised coal industry stood as the quintessential example of state intervention and protection, and the NUM as a symbol of the power of organised labour, so defeat of the union would both symbolically rupture the link with the PWS, and at the same time decisively shift the balance of power against trade unions (see chapter four).

Implicit in Conservative strategy therefore was an attempt to transform the experience of class in Britain. The PWS had institutionalised a set of relations between the classes, crystallising into the state form a

particular balance of class forces. This settlement effectively reproduced a shared understanding of class, and in the process legitimated a set of expectations which all sides - the state, capital and labour - participated in. For the new right Conservatives, that settlement was anathema. The working class should no longer be conceived of as a corporate body (or bodies), but instead should be conceived of as a mass of individuals defined as much by consumption standards as by their place in production. Collectivism would be replaced with individualism.

2.3 CONCLUSIONS

In the first part of this chapter I compared major working class struggles against closure in the steel industry in the late 1970's/early 1980's with the UCS work-in on Clydeside in 1971. Research on anti-steel closure campaigns has highlighted the significance of place in affecting the direction that struggles took. Campaigns narrowly based on defending a particular locality - as at Consett for example - tended to be isolated and ineffective. However, it is important to ask the question as to why some campaigns offer only a limited challenge to corporate restructuring, whereas others pose a more generalised challenge (as in the case of the UCS work-in).

Comparisons between the two anti-closure campaigns suggested that two factors were crucial in determining the course of these struggles. They were the active strategies of conscious agents - in particular local trade union leaders - and the political-economic context within which the struggles were fought out. In the case of campaigns against BSC's corporate restructuring, the loosely organised union (the ISTC) refused to generalise campaigns beyond the plants concerned. At Ravenscraig, where a temporarily successful campaign _did_ develop, it was able to build on a strong cross class national identity, which the government yielded to in order to sustain legitimacy north of the border. At UCS the broadly representative shop steward leadership of the work-in fought an imaginative campaign which gained wide working class support.

But leadership was clearly not the only significant factor. In particular, the political-economic context provided a context which was very different at the end of the 1970's to the beginning. The second half of the chapter therefore explored this variable via an analysis of the reorganisation of the state in post war Britain. This reorganisation had fundamental implications for the coal industry, which formed a key pillar in the transformations carried through by the post-war Labour government, and subsequently endorsed by later administrations. The miners became embedded in a social democratic consensus which conceded representation for the union in the corridors of power, but only in exchange for adopting national consensus. In practice this involved subordinating the miners interests to the need for cheap fuel.

However, the PWS moved into crisis in the late 1960's as rising consumption standards became incompatible with the growing recession. Initially the working class fought successful defensive struggles, with the miners strengthening their representation within the state apparatus following the 1974 strike, and the "Plan for Coal". However, the Conservatives regrouped outside government, and when returned to power in 1979 pursued an aggressive strategy to destroy union power, and re-establish the rule of the market. In their way stood the NUM, as perhaps the definitive symbol of the PWS.

So far however, little has been said about the active strategies of labour faced with these attacks on them. I noted earlier that discussion of anti-steel campaigns did not fully interrogate the reasons why different strategies emerged in different places. For example, why do workers accept and/or create campaigns based on the limited defence of place in one case, and on a more general challenge to capitalist restructuring in another? There is nothing inevitable about a drift to limited, fragmented, local, non-class based campaigns. Nevertheless, before investigating the actual scope for initiative and the role of place specific factors in generating miners' struggles in the 1980's at Murton, the argument must embrace the very real constraints which workers organising as workers must face. This task is taken up in chapter three, which discusses the limitations of trade union action under capitalism.

CHAPTER THREE: TRADE UNIONS IN CAPITALIST SOCIETY:
LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

INTRODUCTION

Chapter two showed that labour - when confronted with mass redundancies - sometimes appeared to lend a hand in its own subordination by adopting strategies which fragmented resistance rather than consolidating it. Similarly, it was also clear that at other times labour had adopted strategies far more challenging to capital and the state. However, it had rarely been questioned why such policies emerged, and why and under what conditions they were supported by workers. As well as the need for historical sensitivity in explaining these differences, it was also clear that there were certain factors internal to labour organisation which affected the choice of strategies, the degree and "quality" of working class mobilisation, and the outcome of struggle.

In this chapter I look at the limits to workers' action, and the room that exists for conscious agents to challenge the imperatives of capitalist production. For workers, organisation is essential for the effective expression of agency, and trade unions are the most basic form of formal workers organisation. As Anderson put it (1967, 342), "[the working class] experiences itself as a class only through its collective institutions, of which the most elementary is the trade union." There is a danger in pursuing this focus of placing too great an emphasis on the significance of the union as the source of workers' political consciousness. Reference is therefore made to the wider political context, but the effect of other aspects of national political culture is considered more fully in chapters two and four.

For Murton miners and mechanics, their union branches were the major focus of their political experience and understanding. This dominance was strengthened by the long tradition of NUM involvement in most aspects of community life, to that it performed far more than a role as the miners representative at work. The union's significance was also enhanced by the high degree of interpenetration between the NUM and the Labour Party, which dominated the formal political life of the region during the period of the PWS. Clearly therefore to understand processes of political change in Murton it is necessary to explore the constraints which unions such as the NUM operate under, and the implications for their organisation of their

insertion within post 1945 British society as it was examined in the previous chapter.

In this chapter therefore, I study the relationship between workers organisations and their members. Several key questions need to be approached. For example, are their structural limits to the challenge that workers organising as workers can pose to the capitalist system? Under what circumstances can trade unions become functional for capital and the state? How can the relationship between "leadership" and the "rank and file" be understood?

The key to understanding the role of trade unions both historically and contemporarily, is to appreciate the contradiction inherent in their existence. This contradiction is a reflection of the contradictory nature of the working class itself, in both depending on capitalism for its survival, and yet suffering continuous exploitation within the capital relation. However, this contradiction and the struggle that it generates ensures that there is no stability in capital-labour relations. In analysing trade unions therefore, ahistorical generalisations must be rejected. Instead, the specific conditions under which they act in ways which challenge capitalism, and the circumstances under which their role is more limited, or even functional for capital must be investigated. In this way a complex theory which acknowledges multiple outcomes, complex determinacy, and builds in the exercise of (constrained) agency can be built up.

To develop these points, this chapter is split into three parts. In the first, I examine attempts to provide a general explanatory framework for the operation of trade unions in capitalist societies which focus on the limited, economistic ambitions implied by union's existence. In the second, I survey the literature on strikes, to assess the factors which destabilise relations within unions between the bureaucracy and the rank and file. Finally, I concentrate on small scale analyses of capital-labour relations, which show how the strategies of conscious agents can push unions in different directions, although still within the broad structural framework established in part one.

3.1: TRADE UNIONS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF CAPITALISM.

Two levels at which the questions of trade union activity and class consciousness operate can be recognised. At the higher level, debate has concentrated on the general effects of trade union activity on overall class consciousness. In other words, the focus has been on identifying the general effects of trade union organisation on workers and capital, and ascertaining the limits to trade union action. This debate is engaged in this section (3.1). At the second level, attention centres on the local scale, with analyses of particular trade union branches, or particular historical events - for example, strikes - which establish the dynamic processes giving rise to mass changes in union politics (sections 3.2 and 3.3 below).

It is by now a commonplace that trade unions by themselves cannot overthrow the capitalist order. The first part of this section (3.1.i) explores the arguments used to justify this proposition, concentrating on the structural limitations imposed on union activity by their organisational origins in the capitalist division of labour, and the incorporation of union bureaucracies which this tends to produce. The consequences of this are examined in the following section (3.1.ii), which argues that theories suggesting that sectionalism is an inevitable product of incorporation are overly deterministic. This position is elaborated in the final section (3.1.iii), which uses Offe and Wiesenthal's theory of opportunism to suggest that instability rather than stability characterises relations within unions, as well as relations between organised labour and capital.

3.1.i INCORPORATION THEORY

Although Marx himself never offered a comprehensive theory of trade union activity, his fragmented comments have guided many marxists since. Perhaps his most important recognition was that unions tended towards defensive, economistic activity, when ultimately more ambitious working class organisation was necessary to challenge the power of capital.

> "Trades unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say, the ultimate abolition of the wages system." (Marx and Engels, 1968, 229, emphasis added)

In his polemical tract "What is to be done?", Lenin developed a more comprehensive theory of the effects of trade union action on consciousness, as part of his attempt to prove the necessity for a powerful, revolutionary working class party capable of providing decisive leadership for the class (Lenin, 1988)[1]. In its most fundamental form, Lenin's argument was that workers organised in trade unions could never transcend the politics of capitalism.

> "The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, ie the conviction it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc." (Lenin, 1988, 98)

Even explicitly political work by trade unions was condemned; "trade unionist politics of the working class is precisely bourgeois politics of the working class" (Lenin, 1988, 148; see also Anderson, 1967).

But what were the reasons offered by Lenin and those who have followed him to account for the relative impotence of the unions? This is a crucial question since Lenin's argument constitutes little more than a forceful assertion based on his historically specific observations. Curiously perhaps (given the usual polarity between "Leninist" and "Gramscian" perspectives), it was Gramsci who developed some of the most cogent arguments to stiffen the theoretical content of Lenin's polemics.

Taking as his starting point the view that under capitalism workers are organised first and foremost by capital, Gramsci argued that because unions followed this basic pattern of organisation they cannot escape the imprint of capitalism embedded in their constitution.

> "Trade unionism is evidently nothing but a reflection of capitalist society, not a potential means of transcending capitalist society. It organises workers, not as producers but as wage-earners, that is as creations of the capitalist system of private property, as sellers of their labour power. Unionism unites workers according to the tools of their trade or the nature of their product, that is according to the contours imposed on them by the capitalist system." (Gramsci, quoted in Hyman, 1971, 12; see Gramsci, 1977, 110 for a different translation)

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[1] Several authors have pointed out that Lenin's other works contribute to a more balanced view of trade unionism - see Kelly, 1988, 26-34 and Hyman, 1971, 12.

In other words, trade unions are inherently reformist organisations. Because of their origins and nature, they are bound to pursue their own members short term economic interests, rather than the interests of the class as a whole.

Gramsci identified two important consequences for trade unions arising from their origins within the capitalist system. In the first place, their origins imbued them with an essentially capitalist operating ideology

> "Objectively, the trade union is nothing other than a commercial company, of a purely capitalistic type, which aims to secure, in the interests of the proletariat, the maximum price for the commodity labour, and to establish a monopoly over this commodity in the national and· international fields. The trade union is distinguished from capitalist mercentalism only subjectively..." (Gramsci, 1978, 78)

In organising only a section of (usually privileged) workers in pursuit of economic gain, they cannot organise and represent the working class as a class.

Secondly, this structural function also has implications for the internal organisation of the unions. Their role in improving the immediate material interests of their members means a reliance on seeking agreements with the employer. Unions achieve legitimacy and "legality", but at the cost of being compelled to deliver internal discipline, and a day to day acceptance of the fact of exploitation at the point of production. Engaging in the "economic guerrilla war" has the effect of reproducing the capital-labour relation, because it endorses the separation of the economic struggle for better conditions from the political struggle for socialism, and implies that the former is possible without the latter (Anderson, 1967).

Increasing reliance on collective bargaining becomes a key factor in the creation of a layer of trade union bureaucrats, specialising in ever more complex negotiations which revolve more and more around legislation and agreements with the employer, rather than the real conditions of the workers. Furthermore, instead of seeing these negotiation and compromise as a merely temporary compromise, "union officials [come] to see it as a more or less permanent, normal and desirable state of affairs" (Kelly, 1988, 57). But how do the bureaucrats become separated from their members?

Possibly the most enduring explanation of the conservatism of union leadership is materialist; their earnings, perks, working conditions, and close relationship with management distance them from their membership. But

unions in which the pay of officials is linked to the pay of their members show no signs of being more militant than those with open ended salaries. More importantly, there is no necessary correlation in the working class generally between high wages and lack of militancy, or the reverse. Indeed, historically relatively privileged sections of the working class have often shown great militancy (for example, some print workers). Finally, struggle can radicalise even well-paid union officials in the same way it can radicalise relatively privileged workers.

All that can be said therefore is that there are strong structural tendencies towards the incorporation of trade unions into the service of capitalist relations. This derives from the seperation of the economic and political aspects of workers struggle, with unions diverted into the day to day business of winning economic concessions for their members within the capitalist system. Nevertheless, as section 3.2.i below suggests, this seperation can be difficult to maintain, and workers sectional, economic battles frequently threaten to raise political questions, with implications for union members _and_ their leaders.

3.1.ii SECTIONALISM

One of the most important implications of the seperation between the economic and political aspects of workers struggle is that sectionalism is an almost inevitable accompaniment of trade union organisation[2]. In an influential work, Hobsbawm argued that sectionalism had been on the increase in Britain since the last war - citing the national pattern of strike activity as a key indicator (1981, 12-14; see Durcan et al, 1983, for the pattern of strikes since the war). He suggested that workers began to take action without regard for its effect on other workers and on consumers - a disregard which he took to be a defining principle of sectionalism. Furthermore, most major strikes in Britain, particularly in the recent period, were characterised by a complete absence of solidarity action from other workers.

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[2]Sectionalism is a notoriously difficult concept to define. In this work I follow Gramsci, and define _sectional_ consciousness as denoting identification of a common cause between workers in the same organisation of trade. This in in contrast to _corporate_ consciousness - the perception of a common class interest - and _hegemonic_ consciousness - the perception of the need to overthrow the existing capitalist order. (See Ollman, 1987 for a discussion of class consciousness.)

Hobsbawm's thesis has been widely debated (Jacques and Mulhearn, 1981), and some of the criticisms of it are important for the development of my argument. For example, it is not surprising that most strike action takes place on a "sectional" basis - this is after all where most workers immediate grievances are generated. Also, it is naive to argue that strikers have shown an increasing disregard for fellow workers and consumers. In most economic sectors any effective strike action will hurt workers and/or consumers. And although lack of solidarity support seriously hinders chances of success in strike action, it can be due to factors other than a lack of identification with other workers (for example, fear of becoming unemployed).

More serious is the argument that sectional action (which would predominate no matter how workers organised themselves under capitalism), inevitably produces a sectional form of class consciousness. Feminists have advanced some of the most persuasive critiques along these lines, as Kelly points out.

> "Skilled, male workers have been anxious to protect
> their pay differentials over unskilled (often women)
> workers, and have been hostile to the entry of women
> into their trades." (Kelly, 1988, 130)

This attitude combines the reactionary elements of craft unionism with deep running gender divisions utilised and reproduced by capitalism (see Cockburn [1983] for a potent example of this mixture). Certainly therefore there is a tendency for workers organised in unions to develop sectional consciousness, but this simply reflects an inevitable tendency within capitalism, which would be produced by the division of labour whether unions existed or not.

In any case, none of this necessarily precludes the development of wider class consciousness. It is entirely possible for example that the pursuit of short term, "sectional" interests might provide the spur to the development of a more general class consciousness.

> "For revolutionaries the problem of trade union
> sectionalism is not its existence per se, but its lack
> of articulation with corporate and hegemonic
> aspirations. The problem is not so much how to overcome
> or suppress sectionalism, but how to articulate
> different levels of consciousness among different
> groups so that large numbers of people will come to see
> that their own sectional interests are compatible with,
> and indeed depend on, the promotion of socialism."
> (Kelly, 1988, 146)

Whether or not this happens is dependant upon a variety of other interconnecting processes such as the attitude of trade union leadership, the historical context, and the specific material situation[3].

In summary therefore, it is clear that because workers are organised "according to the contours imposed on them by the capitalist system", there is a tendency for their action to be sectional in character. This sectionalism derives from the economic basis of trade union activity. However, this does not exclude the development of corporate or hegemonic consciousness, and hence the possibility that trade union action might provoke a situation in which the basis was laid for the reunification of political and economic aspects of workers struggle. (Section 3.3.i introduces Luxemburgs theory of the "mass strike" to help explain how the transition might take place.)

Several questions then are still unanswered. Under what conditions might sectional, economic, defensive trade union struggles provoke a more general questioning of the type Marx clearly regarded as essential if unions were ultimately to realise their radicalising potential? Given that unions are apparently inevitably caught in the trap of capitalist social relations, what practical limits does this set for the effectiveness of their action against capital? One way of approaching these questions is to look at the internal dynamics of unions, and see if any deductions can be made from this about the conditions under which unions perform different roles.

3.1.iii A THEORY OF OPPORTUNISM

A useful framework for such an analysis has been provided by Offe and Wiesenthal (1980). They argue that structural asymmetries in the relationship between capital and labour (for example, labour's structurally greater reliance on the well being of capital rather than vice versa), have significant implications for the organisation and action of both classes in collective groups. They suggest that because capital has a structural power advantage over labour, the only way labour can be successful in conflict with capital is if it forges a collective identity based on non-instrumental evaluation of collective action. This is because any

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[3]It is precisely this relationship which I examine in my study of the miners' unions in Murton - see chapters 5, 6 and 7.

collective action undertaken by labour will almost inevitable cost more in material terms than will be gained by taking the action.

> "[T]hose in the inferior power position can increase
> their potential for change only by overcoming the
> comparatively higher costs of collective action by
> changing the standards according to which these costs
> are subjectively estimated within their own
> collectivity... No union can function for a day in the
> absence of some rudimentary notions held by the members
> that being a member is of value in itself, that the
> individual organisation costs must not be calculated in
> a utilitarian manner but have to be accepted as
> necessary sacrifices, and that each member is
> legitimately required to practice solidarity and
> discipline, and other norms of a nonutilitarian kind."
> (ibid, 79; emphasis in original)

Before anything else therefore, a union must struggle to establish this collective identity, and an ideology of nonutilitarian demands[4]. For trade unions to be able to counter the superior power of capital, it is essential that they base their activity on criteria, which in the short term at least, are often non-instrumental for the individuals concerned. Offe and Wiesenthal call this the struggle to establish "dialogical", as opposed to "monological" interests.

For capital, interest definition is relatively unproblematic - their interests are defined monologically by the operation of the market. On the other hand, the problem for workers is that they

> "can neither fully submit to the logic of the market
> (first of all, because what they "sell" on the market
> is not a "genuine" commodity), nor can they escape from
> the market (because they are forced to participate, for
> the sake of their subsistence). Caught in this trap,
> workers and workers' organisations are constantly
> involved in the immensely complicated process of
> finding out what their interests are and how they can
> be pursued in a way that does not turn out to be
> self-contradictory and self defeating." (ibid, 104)

In contrast to capital therefore, workers real interests are often obscured, and establishing the primacy of "dialogical" over "monological" criteria on which to base action is constantly problematic.

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[4]It is precisely this struggle which the British state is engaged in now - an attempt to redefine union behaviour in individual utilitarian terms (chapter two). The miners' strike constituted an important moment in this battle, as the state sought to further undermine workers collective solidarity by encouraging action which undermined non-instrumental behaviour.

This model allows Offe and Wiesenthal to develop a theoretical explanation of trade union opportunism. They propose a five stage theory of trade union growth and development. In the first stage, dialogical collective action is dominant. This is the stage of the unions formation, dominated by the forging of a strong collective identity in the process of militant struggles against the employer(s). Its relatively small size minimises the conflict between bureaucratisation and democracy. Problems arise however at stage two, where monological and dialogical patterns of interest definition begin to conflict. By now the organisation is strong enough to command respect, and can win concessions simply because of the _threat_ of taking action. Their now emerges a contradiction for the union because to get the most out of its new position, it must simultaneously be able to generate a willingness to act in its members, and yet be able to control this willingness to act.

By far the most favourable resolution of this conflict for the union is a move to stage three.

> "The strategy leading to stage three... is one that attempts to make the organisation's survival as independent as possible of the motivation, the solidarity, and the 'willingness to act' of the members... The only way of doing so is to substitute external guarantees of survival for those internal ones for which the union organisation depends upon its members. Consequently, the union will try to gain as much external support and institutional recognition as possible. (_ibid_, 106-7)

But the price of stage three is the descent into opportunism. In seeking out external guarantees the union bureaucracy must increase its independence from the membership - by for example professionalising and bureaucratising decision making processes. Instead of relying on the unstable tension of power generated by the willingness to act of the membership, the leadership attempts to have its powers legalised and institutionalised by the state.

Opportunism is now enshrined in the unions very existence.

> "[E]xternal support can only be won if the organisation does not put into question the established political forms, if it does not raise suspicions about its long-term goals. And it will achieve relative internal independence from members only by emphasising quantitative and individualistic, instead of qualitative, criteria in its interaction with members" (_ibid_, 107)

In other words, monological criteria dominate over the dialogical criteria needed to form a united class interest. However, this situation is

unstable. In times of economic and/or political crisis, the powers ceded to the unions come under threat (see chapter 2), leading to stage four. And because the unions have successfully withdrawn from the need to mobilise willingness to act, "the organisation <u>no longer has any capacity to resist attempts to withdraw external support</u>" (<u>ibid</u>, 108, emphasis in original). In this new situation, the union is faced with the threat that if it fails to behave in the manner required by capital, then it will lose institutional support.

So finally stage five is reached. The disastrous effects of the opportunistic policies pursued by the leadership are increasingly realised by the membership, and a new wave of mobilisation is stimulated. This situation may differ from stage one in that a more thorough going politicisation is possible, as many institutional, political and legal structures will now be under examination and criticism.

Because it is based on the structural contradiction of labour - in being both part of, and yet antagonistic to, capital - this model captures the dynamism of relationships between organised labour, the rank and file, and the state. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to read it as a simple prediction of the pattern of development of these relationships. In particular, it is important to appreciate that although Offe and Wiesenthal frame their theory ahistorically, it is best understood as a historical model, referring to the development of trade unions in Europe since the last century, with stage five seen as one possible outcome of the crisis of corporatism. It does show however, that the economism which drives unions into corporatist relations can - under certain material conditions - be countered by pressure from the rank and file (see Panitch, 1981; Anderson, 1967)

The central tension between the problematic interest definition of labour, and the difficulty of creating and sustaining "dialogical" principles of collective action, provides a useful tool for analysing the large scale ebb and flow of relations between capital, labour and the state. It shows the kinds of pressures that push union bureaucrats towards the path of "opportunism". It demonstrates too the kind of pressures which separate sectional economic struggle from the wider political struggle against capital. However the five stage model described above represents only one possible, "ideal", outcome of these pressures. Rank and file pressure can interrupt the progression of the model, as can the strategies of the state.

Offe and Wiesenthal's scale of analysis allows little space for the development of active strategies by workers which can place pressures on union bureaucrats from unexpected directions. Bureaucracies cannot always remain aloof from their members, and at times they are forced to move with the rank and file if they are to retain their credibility (and ultimately their jobs). Offe and Wiesenthal's achievement is to indicate under what theoretical conditions union leaders are forced to be more responsive to their members.

In order to elaborate on this point, I turn now to consider some of the mechanisms by which the activity of ordinary workers can affect the conduct of their bureaucratic leadership. To do this I look at strikes. Strikes take place when "normal" trade union activity has failed, or broken down. It is under these conditions of management-labour conflict, that the seperation of economic struggle by trade unions is called into questions, because in some sense at least, a strike means the failure of the bureaucratic method of advancing workers interests. As such, strikes virtually compel a reworking of relations between union bureaucracies and their members. At the same time, they provide conditions for dramatic changes in consciousness among workers.

In the previous sections I argued that while unions insertion into the capitalist system may preclude a role as vehicles for revolution, the exact extent and character of the challenge they pose to capital and the state is open. One reason for this openness is that the structural tendency of union bureaucracies to be incorporated within institutions of the state and capital is continually mitigated by the complex relationship between workers and their employers. Conflict at the point of production ensures that there is no simple relationship between trade union bureaucracies and the rank and file. Leaders do not always subordinate their unions interests to capital, and even if they are caught day to day in relationships with employers that suggest incorporation, they are still subject to general movements in the class struggle, which compel changes in their attitudes and actions. (Chapter two explored this process at the macro scale with reference to the break-up of the PWS in Britain.)

Strikes constitute the most obvious conscious intervention of labour in the relationship between capital and labour. Many authors have commented on the exhilaration and self-discovery which workers on strike can experience (eg Hiller, 1969; Brecher, 1972). Strikes are therefore a good place to start integrating the conscious action of the rank and file into an understanding of trade union development[5]. I begin with Luxemburg's macro scale theory of mass strikes (3.2.i), because it attempts to link the breakdown of union incorporation with the dissolution of the split between the political and economic aspects of workers struggle - a process which can move out of the control of union leaders and the state. This is followed by smaller scale examination of the way that strikes can break down the consensus between management and labour, and in the process transform union politics (3.2.ii).

In section 3.3 I expand the analysis, with the recognition that although strikes are the most visible expression of workers political involvement, day to day relations at the point of production constitute the more

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[5] For a general discussion about strikes in capitalist society, see Hyman, 1977; Knowles, 1982; Kornhauser et al, 1954; Leeson, 1973. For more specific UK based discussions, see Hain, 1986; Wigham, 1976; Durcan et al; 1983. For studies of particular recent strikes, see Dromey and Taylor, 1978, Batstone et al, 1978, and the discussions in chapter one part 1.2 and this chapter part 3.2 above.

significant site of workers developing consciousness. It is only with this finer grained resolution that a picture of workers active (although constrained) involvement in the strategies of the trade union movement can be built up.

3.2.i THE MASS STRIKE

One of the boldest theories of workers mass action was developed in the early years of this century by the German revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg. Her concept of the "mass strike" placed the activity of ordinary workers at the centre of analyses of political transformation. Although her theory related to "mass strikes" - which she defined as the characteristic form of action of the working class during revolutionary periods - it has a wider applicability based on her general comments about the way in which strikes develop, and the conditions under which they achieve different outcomes (Luxemburg, 1971).

Distinguishing between "normal" and "revolutionary" situations, Luxemburg argued that during the former, class struggle is characterised by a formal (though false) seperation between workers political and economic activity. During "normal" periods there is an endemic tendency for the trade union bureaucracy to become entangled in the "economic guerrilla war", to the extent that they lose sight of the real unity of the political and economic struggle against capitalism. Similarly, political leaders fall prey to the illusion that they can conduct a separate, struggle through Parliament, complementary to the unions economic battle. "Mass strikes" tear through these distinctions, revealing to workers the political moments inherent in every economic conflict (Luxemburg, 1971, 78-80; Kelly, 1988, 36).

Significantly however, the radicalising potential of "mass strikes" derives not just from the mass involvement of workers, but also from the actions of the state. A strike wave is transformed into a "mass strike" when the state realises a crisis situation exists, and intervenes to crush what until then had been a largely economic action. Workers are dramatically radicalised as the apparent separation of politics and economics collapses beneath a ruthless state offensive against the working class. It is the state's involvement therefore, which can transform a solid corporate consciousness into a developing hegemonic consciousness.

This theory has obvious difficulties. Kelly points out that Luxemburg "characteristically conflated the state and government". Workers locked in

combat with the state might well come to despise a particular government, but similar disillusion with the state does not automatically follow. In other words, workers under attack might develop a _collective_ but not _hegemonic_ consciousness (Kelly, 1988, 39).

Despite this weakness, Luxemburg's theory delivers an important tool for understanding the variable impact of strikes on consciousness. In particular, "[t]he consciousness-raising effect of strikes cannot be predicted from their content or demands alone." (_ibid_, 93). Economic crisis can turn defensive strikes into major challenges to the authority of the state and capital. In doing so, they can rapidly radicalise workers (and sometimes their leaders), and collapse the distinction between the economic guerrilla war and the struggle for political transformation. In short, defensive economistic action by unions can undermine the belief in the ability of the unions to deliver economic improvement through reformist struggle within capitalism. At a mass scale this is palpably a rare occurrence. Yet whilst the transition to revolutionary consciousness may prove elusive, it is equally clear that at the micro scale, strikes continue to shatter established patterns of union behaviour in many different ways. Some examples of this destabilising effect are discussed below.

3.2.ii MICRO SCALE STRIKES

On a smaller scale strikes are just one aspect of workers challenge to the rule of capital (Hyman, 1975, 151; Lane and Roberts, 1971, 16). They are important because they can shatter the often carefully nurtured ideology which suggests that the interests of workers are coincident with the interests of the employer (Hyman, 1977, 153-155). For example, in his justly famous analysis of a "wildcat strike" in 1950's America, Gouldner observed the traditional social relations of a large gypsum mining plant disintegrating under a new management regime (1955). He located the cause of the strike in the break down of the old "indulgency pattern", under which management and workers had grown used to a certain accommodation of interests.

Of particular interest is Gouldner's analysis of the different views of management and men to the dispute. For most higher level management, the strike was a "struggle for control of the plant". In other words, they defined any complaint from the workforce as containing the seeds of a fundamental challenge to their authority. This approach was expedient

because it absolved management from any need to confront the moral issues behind the strike, since any solution was justified if the issue was maintaining management's right to control (see chapter two). More importantly however, it also reflected the tendency within capitalism for any profitability crisis to become a crisis of control. Authority relations which were functional at one time became major barriers to accumulation, as the drive for increased productivity demanded the dissolution of established workplace relations, and the "negotiation" of a new "effort bargain".

The build up to the strike witnessed the emergence of conflict as this drive gathered pace. New management, the replacement of accommodative foremen with more aggressive supervisors, and the introduction of new machinery leading to alterations in line speeds and work tasks, all contributed to the destabilisation of existing "relations in production" (Burawoy, 1979; 1985). As management struggled to exploit fully the potential productivity benefits of the new machinery, they inevitably disturbed the established "indulgency pattern". In doing so, they carried the risk of disturbing an essential requirement for capitalist production - the willingness of the workers to work. This is what transpired, as the mens' rapidly rising frustrations turned into isolated non-cooperation, before finally accelerating into a strike.

For the men, the overwhelming feeling was that the strike was wholly justified, on moral grounds. Two distinct views emerged within this perspective. The "traditionalists" sought the restoration of the old "indulgency pattern".

> "For these "traditionalists", the strike was an expression of resistance against the prolonged and continued violation of their old beliefs. In another respect, it was a demand for increasing the predictability with which their established privileges would be satisfied; that is, for the cessation of "broken promises". In greatest measure, their hostility was directed against changes which had affected the informal organisation of the plants social system, for it was in this sphere that their customary rights resided." (Gouldner, 1955, 62)

On the other hand, "market men" saw the strike as an opportunity to pressure management into formally locating and defining their authority, and its limits. They saw the strike as a means to extend contractual agreements to new areas, and wanted new powers for the union to be formally recognised.

Gouldner's analysis is also important because it exposes some of the tensions in internal union affairs which strikes often generate. Workers are not simply commanded by their union, and indeed, at the plant level, several competing strategies can emerge from the workers, more or less backed by competing sections of union leadership. During this particular strike, the official leadership was effectively bypassed and then replaced with a more militant clique. The official leadership did not believe the strike was legitimate, and withdrew from the scene when it began. The militant clique championed the "traditionalist" view, and sought to defend their "rights" through militant action. This shows how varying interpretations can emerge from the same situation, even among the same workers[6].

The internal tensions generated within trade unions by strike action are emphasised by Lane and Roberts in their detailed report on the 1970 Pilkington's glassworks strike in St Helens (1971). Here, the workers revolt against the company quickly came to encompass an almost equally passionate revolt against the union (ibid, 190-195), which led in the end to an attempt to set up an alternative union. There was an almost complete dislocation between the union bureaucracy and the rank and file leadership (the Rank and File Strike Committee), as the former collaborated with management against the strikers (ibid, 96-99). However, attitudes towards the strike among the rank and file were highly dynamic.

> "Our survey shows very clearly that it was impossible
> to divide all the strikers into opposing camps of
> supporters and opponents. There were some who had been
> consistently opposed - 33% and some who had been
> consistent supporters - 11%. But 56% had at some stage
> changed their minds..." (ibid, 100)

Although there was apparently rarely, if ever a majority in support of the strike, it was prolonged for 7 weeks. This was because to be effective, the rank and file had to be organised and mobilised in groups. Non-supporters of the strike were not organised, because they had no leadership[7]. Effective action was dependant on the ability to organise and lead dissent.

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[6]In chapter five differing interpretations of the breakdown in the post war indulgency pattern at Murton colliery are related to miners' age, and their different experiences of the PWS.

[7]During the 1980's, the state began to intervene much more systematically and effectively to organise and mobilise anti-strike and anti-militant opinion among workers. This process reached a new peak in the
(Footnote Continued)

The most recent detailed analysis of a strike outside the mining industry is Hartley _et al_'s thorough account of the 1980 steel strike in South Yorkshire (1983). The author's privileged access to the Rotherham Strike Committee (RSC) allowed a deep investigation of the behaviour, attitudes and strategies of the strikers and strike organisation. They deploy some useful concepts in their analysis, which can be transferred to the 1984/5 coal strike (see chapter 6). In particular, they found that the rank and file - even the most active during the strike - had sharply conflicting ideologies of picketing, reflecting varying "boundaries of legitimacy".

A clear majority of pickets adopted an instrumental attitude to picketing, regarding it as a duty, or a job. Their boundary of legitimacy was set by conventional notions of legality and non-violence. Only a minority engaged in more aggressive picketing, but these were the most committed and active pickets. They felt no particular respect for the law and police. Finally, there was a tiny minority who expressed a "distinct readiness to use force". However, Hartley _et al_ show little inclination to investigate the possible causes for these differences, nor their political effects (except in the narrow terms of picket "success" or "failure") (_ibid_, 65-67).

As at Pilkington's, the importance of local leadership is emphasised - in this case represented by the RSC. The dynamics of local leadership emerge as crucial to the way the strike developed, and to people's experiences and attitudes. And also as at Pilkingtons, national leadership is pinpointed by most strikers as having betrayed the strike.

What these examples suggest is the need to retain sensitivity to the particular circumstances of any strike if its impact on union politics is to be understood. In particular, the relationship between different levels of the union, and the wider political-economic context in which the struggle is taking place are clearly crucial to an understanding of the development of each dispute. In Gouldner's example, the introduction of new technology persuaded management to attempt to break the old "indulgency pattern", which in turn created divisions within the workforce and a change of branch leadership. At Pilkingtons, the national leadership of the union were enmeshed in corporatist agreements, and despite massive pressure from

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(Footnote Continued)
miners' strike, when opposition to the strike was given unprecedented state and media encouragement, effectively creating an alternative union leadership, and lending credibility to anyone opposing the strike.

the rank and file, they refused to change their policies - an intransigent position deriving from a historical trend towards incorporation. In the case of the steel workers, strike activists failed to force a more militant line on their leaders, but to an extent this reflected divisions within the strikers own ranks about the extent to which militant action was legitimate.

These bald summaries all indicate that the complex historical development of class relations at the local level have a direct impact on the outcome of major conflicts. The way that class relations have come to be understood over long periods of time has a systematic impact on the type of trade unionism that develops in different industrial sectors, and on the way in which it can be challenged during periods of conflict.

What this analysis shows is that the implications of the day to day lived experience of industrial relations ripple through the struggles which develop as particular indulgency patterns are destabilised. It is the everyday and the mundane - consolidated into established patterns of custom and practice - which comes to exercise such a decisive influence on the way in which struggles between workers and management develop. Later in the thesis, the impact of long established custom and practice on workers consciousness is examined in the case of Murton NUM. In the final section of this chapter I therefore examine some examples of the continual negotiation of class conflict at the local level outside the coal industry.

3.3 CONSCIOUSNESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

As the preceding section on the development of strikes showed, the everyday experience of class relations exercises a fundamental influence over the way in which workers experience changes in their established "indulgency pattern". One way of exploring the significance of everyday experience is to examine the dynamics of class struggle and union organisation at the point of production. Union incorporation, opportunism and the like are not simply the inevitable products of structural constraints within capitalism. To an extent at least, workers help shape and replicate the "structural constraints" in which their organisations function. They also help produce and then consent to the forms of unionism which emerge[8].

So what affects the differing outcomes from these structural constraints? I explore these questions through three case studies. Using this method some of the complexities in the relationship between workers' consciousness, their material situation, and union activity can be investigated. At the same time, some important concepts emerge which are applicable to the study of political change at Murton over the last ten years. In addition, all three case studies show the need to integrate an awareness of the strategies of management with the complicated social dynamics which emerge on the "shopfloor", as workers seek to exercise control over their working environment.

3.3.i CASE STUDY 1: FACTORY CONSCIOUSNESS AT FORD.

One of the most complex and sensitive analyses of the relationship between trade unions, their members, and capitalist society is "Working for Ford" (Beynon, 1984a). Beynon examines in detail the relationship between shop stewards and the rank and file. It is a relationship shot through with tension. The stewards role contains in heightened form the contradictions of working for Ford, and of organising as trade unionists. The stewards very existence implies acceptance of capitalism, and of management. Yet they fight to defend and improve their members conditions of employment, mounting fundamental challenges to managements' "right to manage" in the

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[8] For studies on the internal operation of workplace unionism, see for example Hemingway, 1978; Boraston et al, 1975.

process. In doing so, they engage in a complex relationship with their members, the union, and the company.

Whilst the Halewood plant featured consistently antagonistic "relations in production" (Burawoy, 1985), the consciousness which emerged from the war of attrition was a "factory consciousness", only very weakly linked to hegemonic aspirations.

> "A factory class consciousness... understands class
> relationships in terms of their direct manifestation in
> conflict between the bosses and the workers within the
> factory. It is rooted in the workplace where struggles
> are fought over the control of the job and the 'rights'
> of managers and workers. In as much as it concerns
> itself with exploitation and power it contains
> political elements. But it is a politics of the
> factory." (Beynon, 1984a, 108)

Beynon found that in general the stewards had a more sophisticated and class conscious view of their relationship with management than ordinary workers. This view grew out of their role as stewards - they were not innately more active than the membership. The stewards ideology was dedicated to the principle of serving their membership. As such, they developed an acute sensitivity to the feelings of the men they represented. They understood that in the game of bluff that constituted most negotiation with management, they had to be able to count on the mens support. Without that support, they were nothing.

Most of the day to day business of the steward involved dealing with workers' day to day difficulties (manning, discipline, etc) on his part of the line. But workers were also motivated by the broader factory environment. For example, pay, and the conditions which management attempted to attach to pay deals, aggravated local disputes. Stewards therefore became involved in plant-wide and national union affairs. For example, the 1969 wages strike focused attention on the role of national union officials in the National Joint Negotiating Committee (NJNC). These officials - remote from the membership - accepted a pay deal with major penalty clauses for bad behaviour. Even when the stewards and the membership clearly rejected the deal, the officials continued to insist that the deal stood.

In effect the 1969 strike which this dispute provoked focused the workers rising dissatisfaction with the remote leadership of the union. During "normal periods" the national officials had little involvement with the stewards, and dissatisfaction with the national organisation concentrated

on what they _didn't_ do, rather than what they did. Now the antagonism came to a head.

> "[The stewards] had been coping with 'the bureaucrats'
> for a long time, and this strike had for them all the
> makings of a showdown. Of one thing they were certain.
> Kealey [national TGWU officer on the Ford National
> Joint Negotiating Committee] was finished. They wanted
> his job. As far as they were concerned he no longer
> existed. They had also had enough of the NJNC and Mark
> Young's chairmanship. Their strike had make a
> restructuring of the NJNC a likelihood. They intended
> to pressure this likelihood into an inevitability."
> (Beynon, 1984a, 274)

The stewards won representation on the NJNC, and secured the resignations they wanted. In the face of a determined rank and file, represented by a strong shop steward movement, the national union had to change.

The strike ushered in a new breed of union leaders, typified by Jack Jones and Moss Evans (TGWU), and Hugh Scanlon (Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers - AUEW). They rose to power on a tide of revolt against the authoritarian leadership of the past. They spoke of "union democracy", and championed the shop steward movement which had produced them. And yet, when it came to the crunch in the 1971 wages strike, the new leadership "sold out" too. After nine weeks on strike, they negotiated a marginal improvement in the company's offer, and recommended it to the membership by the then novel method of a (company financed) secret ballot.

At Halewood, the stewards were bitter and angry. And yet, as Beynon makes clear, this was not necessarily an example of top officials being corrupted by the material privileges of high office. As national leaders, Jones and Scanlon were caught in a genuine dilemma. After nine weeks of strike, they had very limited options.

> "[T]here was no sign of a weakening in the ranks of the
> Ford worker, nor of Ford's backing down. It could go on
> for a very long time. In this situation the union
> leader has a limited number of options. He can decide
> to sweat it out, accept the payment of more and more
> strike pay and hope that he can sell it to other
> sections of his organisation. Or he can escalate the
> conflict. Raise the stakes by drawing these other
> sections into the struggle. Such action presupposes
> preparation: that the other sections of the union's
> membership are aware of the issue involved, and are
> willing to struggle for it. It's very difficult to
> universalise a sectional pay demand. Although trade
> unionism lays stress upon the unity of workers, it is
> formed around the sectionalism of the working class...
> Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon couldn't escalate the
> struggle." (_ibid_, 301)

There are elements here of the processes Offe and Wiesenthal examined (section 3.1.iv). The union bureaucracy had become detached from its membership base as it sought increasingly to guarantee its existence independent of the action of its membership. Nevertheless, re-establishing the link between members and bureaucracy proved problematic, reflecting some of the real and powerful structural constraints analysed earlier (section 3.1). Furthermore, "Working for Ford" shows that a high level of conflict at the point of production need not generate anything more than a strong "factory consciousness", which bolsters workplace militancy and solidarity, but leaves unchallenged (at least explicitly) the structural processes which affect workers employment.

3.3.ii TRADE UNIONS AND CORPORATE CAPITAL: THE CASE OF "CHEMCO"

At the "Riverside" chemical plant on the other hand, company strategy rendered the development of any collective resistance at plant level almost impossible (Nichols and Beynon, 1977: see also Nichols and Armstrong, 1976). As part of a major restructuring of capital-labour relations, "ChemCo" introduced the NWA (New Working Arrangement) in the late 1960's. This represented a new pinnacle in capitals attempt to tame the threat posed by trade unionism, and was in line with the corporatist trend of the period (see chapter two). Although ChemCo would rather have lived without trade unions, they recognised that this was impossible. So they set about moulding unionism in ways which would be functional for them. Faced with the possibility of a militant shop floor organisation (such as had developed at Halewood, and many other major industrial sites in the 1960's), ChemCo opted for incorporation. In doing so they deliberately exploited the tension implicit in trade unionism between fighting the company (over wages, control and manpower), and the need to ensure the company's profitable survival.

With the NWA, ChemCo aimed to split its dealings with the union (the TGWU) into two separate spheres. The deal abolished all local pay variations, replacing incentive payments, bonuses etc with a nationally negotiated pay system, based on a seven fold grading classification. Henceforward all pay bargaining was removed from plant level to a managed, predictable negotiation conducted at national level.

However, the union was not simply restricted to this national role. Indeed, active local union representation was central to the NWA strategy (see also Willman, 1980, 42-43 for evidence that this was part of wider corporate

strategy in the 1970's to defuse opposition to workplace changes). But the company ensured that they controlled the way the union developed at its plants.

They instituted a "check-off" system, which, whilst guaranteeing 100% union membership, also had the effect of creating a "paper membership". There was never a struggle to establish the union at the plants, so a collective identity was never forged. Perhaps more significantly, the company took a keen interest in the election of stewards. Foremen encouraged "likely material" to stand.

> "It is undeniable that ChemCo management exercised an important - and even determining - influence over the way in which the trade union organisation developed at Riverside. Of the six shop stewards who represented the men who worked on the fertiliser plant only two had been in any way active in trade unionism before they came on the site... [Managers] privately boast that many of the shop stewards were their nominees."
> (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, 115)

Behind the rhetoric of cooperation and involvement there were definite limits beyond which the union could not go. To do so would reveal the iron fist inside the velvet glove. Management prerogatives were maintained through consent whenever possible, but if confronted with a challenge then management authority would be imposed without hesitation.

Such manipulation was facilitated by the workforce composition and plant organisation. Most of the workers came from non union backgrounds. They were drawn from a wide area - there was no "company town". At the plant, the continental shift system and the dispersed production sites split workers, ensuring that few employees ever even met their fellow workers. Because ChemCo generally brought their first experience of unionism, these "green" workers were moulded relatively easily into the docile labour force that the NWA aimed for. Nevertheless, they continued to harbour doubts about the effectiveness of their union representation at the plant. They were critical of the stewards closeness to management - a closeness emphasised by regular defections from stewardship to supervisory grades. This close identification of stewards with management ran the risk of undermining the unions apparent independence, and hence its ability to deliver discipline and compliance from the workers.

> "So incorporation is no simple process and the function of management in large corporations like ChemCo is to manage the contradictions; at all costs 'to prevent the system from running out of control'." (ibid, 130, emphasis in original)

Without a strong union capable of resolving grievances in the mens favour, revolt was expressed by individual acts of defiance.

> "Usually the struggle takes place _outside_ the union; and most often it is based upon _individual_ responses: a battle of wits in which management often turns a blind eye so long as the job gets out. And in this there is no doubt that management was _forced_ to turn a blind eye... In an important way then this covert anti-work activity represents the _strength_ of the workers... But equally when expressed in this form it can be seen as only a _muffled_ challenge to capital... Resistance established through the indiscipline of anti-work activities is of limited effectiveness. To go further - and also to correct its own iniquities - it has to be organised and disciplined." (_ibid_, 141, emphasis in original)

But it was precisely the possibility of "organised and disciplined" opposition on the shop floor that the NWA was aimed at eliminating.

The example of ChemCo demonstrates the power of capital to control and regulate the environment in which workers organise. It shows too the long term effects of unions becoming tied into the state consensus described in chapter two. Management realised that they needed to control both the local and national dealings with their workforce. The enormous practical difficulties standing in the way of the development of an effective local organisation were buttressed by the ideological barriers posed by the unions incorporation at the top.

3.3.iii STUDYING LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN DETAIL

In their detailed analysis of shop steward behaviour and beliefs at a large motor vehicle plant in the UK, Batstone _et al_ focused on the problematic questions of steward leadership and authority, and their relationship to the rank and file (1977; 1978). Unlike at ChemCo, a strong steward network (or "domestic organisation") had developed at the plant, which management was compelled to deal with. Batstone _et al_ identified two main types of steward: "leaders" and "populists". The former differed from the latter in having a strong belief in trade union principles (as opposed to sectional interests), a belief in the need for a representational rather than a delegate role, and a higher degree of integration into the shop steward network. Two other steward types were also noted: "cowboys" - who played a representational role, but in opposition to the leadership and to trade union principles; and "nascent leaders" who were sponsored by leaders but unable to sustain a leadership role (_ibid_, 1977, 32-37).

Other important distinctions were drawn within the leadership. A "quasi-elite" of experienced and knowledgeable stewards was identified (ibid, 45-53). They constituted a powerful leadership group who other stewards, and the convenors, referred to, and sought advice and support from. A stewards personal relations with his members, with other stewards, the quasi-elite, and convenors was seen as crucial in determining their authority, and their ability to act. Similarly, Batstone et al highlighted the importance of "jokers" in fostering and reinforcing a set of norms (ibid, 108). This focus is important in identifying some of the processes by which stewards achieve and maintain their authority.

However, there is also a crucial weakness in the argument advanced by Batstone et al, concerning the content of the trade unionism which emerges from the processes they identify (Willman, 1980). Because although they use commitment to trade union principles as one of the principle defining characteristics of steward types, their discussion of what this meant in practice was (perhaps understandably) diffuse. Willman suggests that an aid to this process might involve distinguishing between steward networks which have essentially been created by management (as in the case of "ChemCo"), and those which have fought for their status against management resistance (as at Halewood) (ibid, 43-45). However, even this distinction is problematic, since it suggests an unwarranted leadenness to union function. For example, it denies the possibility that a fostered union structure might over time reject its accommodative role (ibid, 48-49), or alternatively that an independent organisation might be incorporated by management strategy.

Studying "domestic organisations" therefore involves carefully analysing the "content" of the strategies followed by the principle agents involved. Also, this content has to be analysed in the context of the overall environment in which it is integrated. For example, what is negative "cowboy" behaviour in one situation (undermining trade union principles), might turn out to be "positive" in another (challenging an incorporated leadership). Furthermore, it also becomes essential to relate the various strategies and actions emerging at a local level to the wider union and management climate. Clearly there is an interaction here. For example, management attempts to defuse class struggle via national agreements with the peak representatives of labour led during a period of full employment to encroachments on management control at the local level by well organised steward organisations. This in turn prompted a management offensive, and the emergence of new strategies from labour.

3.3.iv CONCLUSIONS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

These three examples of the dynamics of local union organisation draw out some of the complexities of the relationships between workers, their union, and capital. In the case of Ford's Halewood plant, confrontational management stimulated the development of a relatively strong shop steward network, dominated by a robust "factory consciousness". In a national dispute this steward leadership - which had only limited dealings with the national bureaucracy - was driven into conflict with union leaders because of the latter's "sell out" over pay. The national leaders were forced to resign, and were replaced with "left" leaders. Yet a second strike over pay was also ended by the new national leadership, over the heads of the stewards. And this second deal reflected the genuine structural limitations of trade unions working within the capitalist system. So although the rank and file - through their steward leaders - were able to force changes in union leadership, they could not force it beyond the limits implied by its operation within the corporatist arrangements to which it was tied.

At ChemCo the power of capital to control and regulate the growth and direction of trade unionism was starkly illustrated. With the TGWU integrated into a corporatist structure at national level, management exercising a decisive influence on the development of the union at local level, and formidable practical barriers in the plant to the creation of a challenge to management's hegemony, workers were left to express their struggle in individual acts of defiance. A marriage between particular material conditions and a particular historical settlement at national level combined to shift the balance of power in management's favour.

The work of Batstone et al focuses on the importance of the quality of leaders within a steward network. Individual characteristics and allegiances can affect the development of union organisation and strategy. But - as the case of ChemCo powerfully indicates - the limits to individual agency lie in the external environment to which the workforce and its leadership is articulated. The content of different policies cannot be understood without reference to this wider context.

3.4 CONCLUSIONS: THE LIMITS OF TRADE UNION CONSCIOUSNESS

In the first part of this chapter I reviewed some of the theories which have attempted to make general comments about the nature of trade unions in capitalist societies. Because their organisation follows the contours imposed on them by capitalist organisation, and because their existence implies a day to day commitment to working within capitalism, unions face strong pressures to incorporation within the capitalist system. Economism dominates union affairs, implying day to day acceptance of the wage-labour relation. In other words, the layer of bureaucrats who become essential to the union's role tend to see the functioning of the system as more important than its overthrow. Their own survival achieves a higher priority than the defence of workers conditions.

However, such developments are not inevitable or immutable. Sectionalism for example is only a <u>possible</u> consequence of organising along the lines of the capitalist division of labour. Sectional struggle can - under certain historical conditions - break down the division between economic and political aspects of working class struggle, and therefore spearhead a move to a "higher" level of consciousness. Similarly, the extent to which union leaders are able to act apart from their members is historically contingent. Offe and Wiesenthal demonstrate that the difficulty unions have in defining their interests under capitalism leads to a tendency to seek out external guarantees of recognition from the state, but they add that economic conditions lead sooner or later to the withdrawal of these external guarantees. The leaderships relative seperation from their members is a contingent phenomenon.

Relations between capital and labour at the point of production are too unstable for any settlement between the two to persist for long. At the peak of this unpredictability stands the strike (part two of the chapter), which in challenging relations between capital and labour also inevitably challenges relations within unions. This process was examined first with regard to "mass strikes". This discussion yielded the important observation that the seperation between rank and file and leaders - which accompanies the seperation of political and economic aspects of struggle - can be shattered by strikes which start off as relatively limited, defensive actions. In other words, economic crises create instability in capital-labour relations, and hence also in the internal relations of unions. This point emerges as crucial to my analysis of the coal industry

in the following chapter, and to the process of political change in Murton in chapters five, six and seven.

To elaborate on the effects of strikes, some examples of strikes at the micro-scale were studied, to draw out the ways in which industrial conflict destabilised intra union relations. Gouldner's meticulous analysis of a wildcat strike showed that it polarised opinion within a workforce, and pointed to the destabilising effect this had on the union leadership at the plant. Gouldner also highlighted the significance of a break in established "indulgency patterns" in destabilising existing workplace relations - a concept which is applied to the case of Murton later in this thesis.

Lane and Robert's study of the Pilkington glass factory dispute in 1971 further emphasised the disruptive effect of a strike on union politics. With rank and file leadership of the strike disowned by the national union, the local organisation went so far as to try and create a separate national union. And work on the 1980 steel strike in South Yorkshire showed the divisions created even within activists as a result of a long period of docile, accommodative union politics. These examples demonstrate the divisions which industrial conflicts can reflect and create within union ranks. This point is developed in the following chapters where political change in the Murton miners' and mechanics' branches is related to contradictions which emerged between different sections of the workforce as the post war "indulgency pattern" came under threat.

The strike studies showed the importance of understanding how class relations developed over time at the local level. Union politics build on long traditions, and the way in which strikes develop clearly reflects the historical experience of class conflict as mediated by the union. Therefore in the final section of the chapter, I reviewed three detailed studies of day to day workplace union politics. Ford's Halewood plant revealed the limitations of shop steward power in a national union structure tied in to a particular relationship with the Ford motor company. Halewood was also characterised by a distinctive "factory" consciousness which emerged in response to the historical development of the plant, and militant Merseyside traditions. ChemCo's plant demonstrated the power of capital to control and regulate the growth and development of union politics in a greenfield site where the union was tied in to a national corporate structure. Finally, the work of Batstone et al on the steward network at a major motor vehicle plant showed that the particular characteristics of individual leaders exercise a decisive influence over the direction of

union politics, but these characteristics have to related to the wider political-economic context if their meaning is to be understood.

These case studies provide an important context for my research on political development within the Murton miners' and mechanics' branches. They identify some of the significant factors driving the political process within particular workplaces; for example, the role of key leaders. They also demonstrate the importance of understanding the way that workplace relations have built up over time, establishing different "indulgency patterns" which structure the environment which workers struggles take place in. This is a theme to which I return in chapters five, six and seven, which explore the political evolution of the Murton miners' and mechanics' branches.

Unions therefore operate within strong structural constraints, but within these constraints contradictions can build up, and erupt into conflict. The continual evolution of capitalist development ensures that no settlement between capital and labour, and hence within labour organisations between leaders and led, can remain stable for long. In the following chapter, the history of the coal industry is evaluated within this framework. The PWS which represented a settlement between the state, capital and labour, also implied a set of relations within the NUM. Yet these relations were unstable, and eventually burst into open conflict. Studying the coal industry at this national scale is essential to understand the context within which the miners and mechanics at Murton were located.

CHAPTER FOUR: COUNTDOWN TO CONFLICT: THE UK COAL INDUSTRY 1974-84

INTRODUCTION

This chapter integrates the discussion of earlier chapters within a commentary on the background to the crisis in the British coal industry - a crisis which finally exploded in March 1984. This provides the framework in which the subsequent analysis of events at Murton colliery is located. Chapter three showed how the particularities of a unions relations with the employer and the state affected the politics which emerged at workplace level. In this chapter I look at the destabilisation of established class relations in the coal industry relations at a macro scale. This destabilisation in turn disturbed the characteristic indulgency pattern at a local level, with unpredictable political effects at pits like Murton.

In this chapter therefore, the national process of destabilisation in the coal industry is analysed, drawing on the examination of the development of the UK state undertaken in chapter two. Having established the causes and direction of the destabilisation in the coal industry, the way is clear to begin exploring political change at Murton colliery, drawing out the way in which conscious agency was able to use the room created by economic destabilisation to shape a distinctive political transformation. In order to discuss in detail the development of the economic crisis in the coal industry, this chapter concentrates on the period since 1974. (The period before this is discussed in more detail in appendix two.)

By the end of 1974, the future for the British coal industry, and for the miners in it, seemed secure. A new Labour government had conjured an optimistic consensus agreement out of negotiations with the NUM and NCB (the "Plan for Coal") - which held out the prospect of a rapidly expanding industry. Perhaps at last the industry would be blessed with the long term investment commitment needed to maintain production into the twenty first century. Ten years later, the NUM and the state stood on the brink of conflict over what was - on one level at least - simply an attempt by the union to defend the Plan for Coal (PFC). Five years after that, in 1989, the situation had changed dramatically again, with an almost inexorable march underway to the once unthinkable privatisation of the coal industry. Sandwiched in the middle was perhaps the most epic struggle by a section of the British working class this century.

Clearly, such dramatic events played a central role in the political transformation of the Murton branches during the 1980's. This chapter explores the context for developments at Murton by relating the pressures on the coal industry to the disintegration of the PWS (analysed in chapter two), and to the contradictions within the NUM as it faced the collapse of the basis for its post war incorporation in the British state.

I approach this central theme via a four part structure. Following a brief review of the period before 1974 (covered in more detail in appendix two), I discuss the Labour government's strategy towards the coal industry up until 1979. Under the Wilson/Callaghan government, Plan For Coal was negotiated, and an Area Incentive Scheme imposed on the union. The former had the effect of seperating the miners from the bitter defensive battles fought by the unions against the Social Contract, whilst the latter had the effect of splitting the union within its own ranks. In the third section the industry's fortunes under the Conservative government are considered. For the Tories, defeat of the NUM became essential as part of their strategy first to shift the balance of power decisively against organised labour, and secondly to reinstate the market as a de-politicised instrument of economic planning. In the final section, the effect of the NCB's policies (based on government strategy) in Durham are considered. Left wing forces were able to build support in the wake of the destabilising influence of management policy.

In all sections I integrate three strands - the actions and policies of the NCB, the NUM and the state in order to show the complex relationships between these three agencies. I look at the contradictions constantly developing and subsiding in these relationships, only to evolve into further contradictions and conflict. In doing so, I continue with the theme of establishing the structural limitations to working class action established in earlier chapters. In particular, I consider the way in which the NUM's incorporation into the post war settlement (chapter two) affected the development of union politics. I also consider how the relations between union, management and the state were destabilised in the 1970's, creating the space for political changes at all levels of the union. This account will therefore form the immediate point of reference - the immediate framework - for the case material on political change in two branches of Murton NUM which follows in the next three chapters.

When the coal industry was finally nationalised in 1947, it was on terms very favourable to capital. Not only was massive compensation paid to the former owners (a final total of £394 million - Ashworth, 1986, 28), but the industry was set up as a utility to provide cheap fuel for British capital during a time of energy shortages. The state succeeded in incorporating the NUM leadership, which collaborated with the NCB in attempting to impose labour peace, and boost production (see for example Scott et al, 1963, 21-22). Nevertheless, militancy at the point of production - stimulated by a complex piece rate wages system - proved impossible to control, and miners continued to comfortably dominate the national league table of strikes (Slaughter, 1958; Dennis et al, 1955; Scott et al, 1963).

After 1958 the era of rising demand for coal slid to an abrupt end, and with it the ambitious investment and modernisation programme of the early 50's. Unable to charge the price for coal that the hungry market could have absorbed in a period of fuel shortages (Allen, 1981, 104), the NCB now found itself saddled with spiralling interest charges on investment and compensation loans as the market contracted (Ashworth, 1986, 277). Cheap oil imports and substitution of oil and electricity for coal accelerated the pace of pit closures in the 1960's (Hall, 1981). Decisions taken in the 1950's over the technologies appropriate for the industry added socially determined advantages to the geological superiority of the central coalfields (parts of Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, the Midlands and Leicestershire), at the expense of the peripheral coalfields (Wales, the North West, Scotland and the North East) (RPRU, 1979). Coal mining employment collapsed in the latter areas during the 1960's (see tables 4.1 and 4.2 and graphs 1 to 4). But with the union in the grip of the right, there was no organised opposition to pit closures.

Mechanisation provided a strong stimulus for the NCB to rationalise its archaic wages structure. With production increasingly machine led (rather than effort related), the abandonment of piece rates would end the constant disruption of walkouts at the point of production, and also eliminate

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[1] This period is covered in greater detail in appendix two.

"wages drift" (in which well organised and militant face workers forced up local wages), without deleteriously affecting production. For the left in the NUM, a national wages structure was also welcomed, because it laid the material basis for unity in the union (Paynter, 1972; Rutledge, 1977). However, when wages were reformed with the National Power Loading Agreement (signed in 1966) the new structure appeared to deliver management's objective. Accomodative national union leadership enabled the NCB to strictly control annual wage negotiations, and local disputes withered to a tiny fraction of pre NPLA days.

However, rank and file discontent rose towards the end of the 1960's, interacting with the general increase in labour unrest stimulated by the first signs of an end to the post war boom (Gamble, 1985, 168; see also chapter two, section 2.2.ii above). From 1969 to 1972, major unofficial strikes spread throughout Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland (Taylor, 1984; Allen, 1981). When the Labour government was replaced by an aggressively anti-union Conservative administration in 1970, the final psychological block to official, national strike action evaporated. The 1972 strike represented a surge in "mass militancy" (Rutledge, 1977), stimulated by low wages, and consolidated by the national unity emerging from a uniform wages structure (Winterton, 1985a) - exactly as the left had hoped. Victory marked a significant advance not just for the miners, but for the organised working class in general, as the labour movement confronted the anti-working class policies of the Heath government (chapter two).

In 1974 the miners struck again, in an attempt to close the gap on workers in manufacturing industries, who had been able to take advantage of plant bargaining strength to boost wages levels (Winterton, 1985a). Caught in an economic crisis, the Heath government called a general election on the theme of "Who governs?", hoping to cash in on public antagonism to the unions (Crouch, 1982, 83). The gamble failed, and after a second general election that year, Labour was returned with a small minority. At the same time, the left wing made noteable advances within the NUM, particularly in the previously right wing Yorkshire area. However, the success of the left wing explosion contained contradictions, carrying with it the risk that the left would prove susceptible to the same structural pressures towards bureaucratisation and incorporation which had engulfed the union's leadership in the past.

Although the miners were not to take national strike action again until 1984, all the elements which came together 10 years later were already present in embryonic form by 1974. A pit incentive scheme was on the agenda, Plan For Coal (PFC) was being negotiated, and a Labour government had assumed power and was taking the first steps to shatter the defensive power of organised workers. Two developments in particular exercised a decisive influence on the evolving crisis in the industry. On the one hand, PFC endorsed massive investment in new capacity and new coal getting technologies, without regard for future markets. On the other, a new wages system was introduced explicitly aimed at splitting the union (Rees, 1985, 399). Both of these developments are considered below.

4.2.i PLAN FOR COAL, AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF INCORPORATION

The coal strike of 1974 was fought against the backdrop of an energy crisis, precipitated by a sudden, massive increase in the price of oil. When Labour achieved a wafer thin overall majority in the Autumn General Election of 1974 (the second election that year), they recognised the transformation in energy politics, and began negotiations with the NCB and NUM to try and ensure that domestic coal production would be able to meet the country's energy demands. Agreed at a time when the future for coal seemed assured, Plan For Coal (PFC) oozed optimism. It anticipated that by 1985 the demand for coal would be 150 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa). It recognised that failure to invest in the 1950's and 60's meant about four million tonnes (Mt) of new and replacement capacity would be required a year to reach that target (or a total of 42 Mt of new capacity by 1985). This new capacity would be offset by the closure of around 2 Mtpa of old capacity (Sweet, 1985).

PFC attempted to provide a stable planning horizon for the industry, insulating it from short term market fluctuations because of its strategic importance to the economy. However, the Plan had several crucial areas of ambiguity which effectively allowed pits to be closed on economic grounds so long as both sides were prepared to fudge the issues. Exhaustion - as the following quote from a later document makes clear - was clearly seen by the NCB as an economic concept.

"Since the 1950's... three effects operated to reduce
the coal industries _apparent_ resource base [ie apparent
reserves]. First... there were the coal reserves
abandoned as a result of colliery closures: second,
there was the coal physically extracted and used; and
by far the most important, coal reserves at continuing
collieries were written down as a result of the
reducing real price of primary energy, obliging the
industry to select the best reserves, and thus reducing
the proportion of reserves recoverable." (NCB, 1976,
26; emphasis added)

Despite the ambiguities, PFC constituted perhaps the ultimate level of
corporatism and incorporation in the coal industry. Confronted with an
energy crisis, a militant workforce, and a high level of working class
mobilisation, the state needed a strategy which would neutralise the power
of the miners. In doing so it would secure energy supplies, and stop the
miners wage militancy from providing a damaging demonstration effect to
other groups of workers. By providing the miners with apparent stability in
employment, and by tying the union into a corporatist agreement with the
state and the employer, miners would (hopefully) be removed from the
increasingly intense struggle being waged by British capital against the
organised working class. Developing an incentive scheme to split the
union's wages unity was also a key part of this strategy (see section
4.2.iii below).

PFC continued the familiar practice of state subsidies for cheap energy,
endorsing massive investment in new low cost capacity. In doing this it
continued a trend established in the 1950's of concentrating on low cost
output, and orientating investment and technology around this priority (see
appendix two). This led to a circular argument. With the best resources put
into the best seams it was inevitable that capacity in the older coalfields
- which suffered poorer conditions and underinvestment - would become
"uneconomic". But it also led to a potential contradiction of epic
proportions, because if market demand did not keep up with increased
supply, then pressure would rapidly increase for new low cost capacity to
displace high cost capacity, leading to massive job loss.

Whilst PFC promised investment in new capacity, other investment
concentrated on establishing a new technological phase in coal mining. The
development of this technology evolved out of the historical experience of
class relations in the industry, and in turn had crucial implications for

the future development of these class relations. Essentially, the NCB were motivated by a desire to regain control over the rate of work - control which they perceived power loading had shifted towards face workers. In a series of papers (Burns et al, 1983; 1985; Winterton, 1985a; 1985b; Winterton and Winterton, 1985) the Working Environment Research Group (WERG) at Bradford University outlined the processes at work.

Under mechanisation (the introduction of power loading in the 1950's and 60's, replacing handgetting), the miners increased their control over the labour process (although see Clark, 1980, and Douglass, 1972 for dissenting views). In contrast to handgetting, which had involved a rigid division of labour (and therefore tended to divide the workforce), mining became a skilled job, requiring greater integration of work teams, who were all involved in the whole coal getting process. Machinery however is always prone to breakdowns, and the NCB discovered that 2/3 of potential machine time was being lost, split equally between "lost time" - delays caused by the men - and "operational and ancillary time" - delays caused by maintenance and repair.

For the next phase of their technological programme, the NCB therefore concentrated on automation, with the aim of drastically reducing machine down time. Using a systems approach, the NCB determined its principle objectives as: increased labour productivity, increasing productivity and increased control over all aspects of the work process (Burns et al, 1985, 95-8).

> "The[se] objectives were derived from the historical problems of supervision and a desire to repeat the productivity gains of the second phase of mechanisation [ie the introduction of shearers and powered roof supports]... The strategy of control chosen was one which could be seen as redressing the balance and removing the miners gains in terms of skill and workplace control that had been won or created in the second phased of mechanisation." (ibid, 96)

It was with these objectives in mind that the NCB designed the MINOS system, "a highly centralised, hierarchically organised system of remote control and monitoring in mines" (ibid, 98). Comprising a variety of electronic sub systems (introduced piecemeal and without consultation), but utilising the same mining machinery as then in use, MINOS gives management unparalleled information and control over all aspects of the underground

operation (ibid, 98-104). Even the piecemeal application of simple subsystems led to astonishing increases in productivity, as management was more able to control the pace of work (see graphs 4, 8 and 11).

In output terms, the application of the MINOS subsystems led to increased production with fewer workers. Burns et al estimated that 1985 output could be produced with just 49000 miners if faces with FIDO, MIDAS and IMPACT (ie the full MINOS package) were to produce all the NCB's output (1985). Job loss would be caused by a dual process. On the one hand, manning levels would be reduced as fewer men were needed on the face - for example IMPACT increased the reliability of face machinery and provided a diagnostic capability which drastically reduced the requirement for craftsmen on the face. Secondly, and more importantly, by increasing machine available time (MAT), production was increased at those pits which had the new technology installed. As already explained, these pits were already the most favoured geologically, and the extra investment cuts their production costs and increased productivity.

In a period of static demand, any increase in low cost capacity must displace higher cost capacity, unless some deliberate steps are taken to maintain what is, in the short term at least, surplus capacity. Burns et al summarised it like this.

> "Static UK demand, and the establishment of output targets in line with this demand translates productivity increases directly into job losses... Pits in the peripheral areas face closure and suffer from lack of investment, whereas miners in the 'central' coalfield face job losses through automation, and are experiencing adverse changes in work organisation."
> (ibid, 93)

There were therefore two ways in which MINOS destabilised existing work relations at coal mines, and their relative effect differed geographically, firstly, through job loss, and secondly through deskilling.

However, it is important to realise that technological changes are also social changes in the organisation of production. For the miners, MINOS meant an intensification of work (Tomaney, 1988). This was especially so because its introduction was matched by the imposition of a new wages structure - the area incentive scheme (AIS) - in 1978 (see section 4.2.iii and Bohen and Wroughton, 1988). So MINOS destabilised existing relations between workers and management, both at national level (where it began to

have an impact on jobs) and at local level (where it affected relations in production).

Meanwhile, surplus production was growing due to other factors too. An expanding international market in cheap opencast coking coal led BSC to replace NCB supplies with coal imports. Most pit closures in the early 1980's involved coking capacity (see Beynon et al, 1985; McCloskey, 1986 and section 4.4.i below). Stimulated by the oil price rises of the early 1970's, many oil companies began to invest heavily in coal which became again an economic fuel. The late 60's and early 70's were also a period of big expansion in the European steel sector, and consequently the same companies were also committed to big investments in coking coal mines. It was in the UK coking market therefore that the impact of these investments was first felt.

Overseas investments by energy multinationals were bearing fruit by the late 1970's, at a time when the EEC steel industry was moving into recession, and contracting. A spot market - never seen before in the coal trade - grew up, and prices tumbled. In 1979 the newly elected Conservative government lifted restrictions on BSC's coal imports, and the result was catastrophic for UK deep mined coking coal capacity. A further highly significant factor affecting deep mined coking coal capacity was the growth - relative and absolute - in UK opencast coal production. In Durham cheap opencast output competed directly with deep mined coking coal at a time when the market was shrinking (see Beynon et al, 1985 and table 4.7). Recession in the late 1970's/early 1980's caused a collapse in the demand for coal. In the power station sector, this drop was masked by the strategic build up of stocks (see tables 4.3 and 4.4), but it occured despite an increase in coal's share of the electricity generating market (and in the NCB's reliance on the CEGB market - see tables 4.5 and 4.6).

Exactly how miners would react as the market began to shrink (so threatening their jobs), was conditioned to an extent by their historic experience, and on the effect the changes would have on them. In Durham, with its reliance on the coking market, vulnerability was quickly apparent. In contrast, the Nottinghamshire coalfield appeared relatively safe, at least in the short term. I study the particular effect of historical experiences on miners' reactions in chapter five, with respect to Murton. But it is also clear that there were at this time other changes in miners'

material environment which also contributed to a major destabilisation of the corporatist agreements which the union was still enmeshed in. In particular, the imposition of the incentive scheme had a decisive effect on union politics.

4.2.ii THE INCENTIVE SCHEME IN CONTEXT: THE NUM AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

In 1974, at the same time as the PFC was being negotiated with the NUM, the new Labour government was also initiating the Social Contract. This agreement between the TUC and the government was sold on the latter agreeing to legislate social benefits for the working class as a whole, in return for voluntary wage restraint on the part of the unions. It was hoped that as workers on the shop floor saw and experienced the increased social benefits, then their wage demands would moderate accordingly (Coates, 1980, 60; see also chapter two, section 2.2.ii above). PFC and the Social Contract can therefore both be seen as elements of the same strategy, in what turned out to be the final attempt to rework the post war settlement (PWS).

The 1972 and 1974 strikes had established the miners as pacesetters in the annual public sector pay negotiations. For the state and capital it was therefore vital for the maintenance of the various stages of the Social Contract that the miners should stay within their terms. Throughout the Social Contract, the NUM voted narrowly either at conferences or in ballots to accept increases in line with government policy (Allen, 1981; Hall, 1981), although the 1976 attempt to win early retirement came close to defeating government policy from a slightly different direction[2].

The left found it difficult to mobilise the membership during this period. There seems little doubt that this reflected a mood of complacency which

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[2]The 1976 conference passed a motion calling for retirement from 60 in the new year, with a reduction to 55 by 1980. An all out strike was threatened if the demand was not conceded, and a ballot gave 78% for this militant stance. But negotiations produced a compromise which excluded surface workers (because including them would set a precedent outside the industry), and which gave men who had 20 years of underground service retirment at 62 from the summer of 1977, and at 60 from 1979. The deal was accepted by 55% (Hall, 1981, 230-231).

settled over the rank and file after two decisive victories[3]. This in turn
reflected the economistic and sectional basis on which the membership were
mobilised during the 1972 and '74 campaigns. However, although the majority
of the miners fought a limited struggle for better wages, the state
experienced the strikes as fundamental challenges to its authority (chapter
two). Whilst the wages strikes of 1972 and 1974, and the PFC, all
reinforced the economistic, sectional character of the NUM (Panitch, 1981,
32), the state was mobilising to win back the elements of control that had
been conceded during the early 1970's.

By 1977, with the government trying to impose stage three of the Social
Contract - a 10% pay limit - the pressure of opposition had reached boiling
point. Rising unemployment, spiralling prices and public sector cuts meant
that the government was manifestly seen to have failed to deliver its side
of the Social Contract bargain. Leaders on the right of the NUM however
still wanted the miners to stay within the 10% pay limit. They saw the
answer as an incentive scheme. However, an incentive scheme was also an
integral part of the state and NCB strategy to divide and weaken the NUM.

4.2.iii SPLITTING THE NUM WITH INCENTIVES

The 1972 and 1974 strikes showed how the NPLA provided the basis for unity
within the NUM. This effect was obvious by 1972. So much so that the
Wilberforce Report, which provided the basis for the settlement of the 1972
strike, recommended the opening of immediate discussions on the
introduction of an incentive scheme. But in 1974 - following intense
campaigning by both left and right - the miners rejected a scheme in a
pithead ballot (in which the NEC gave no recommendation) by 61.5% (Allen,
1981, 273: Rutledge, 1977).

In 1977, with the government attempting to impose a 10% pay limit, the
right raised the issue again at the national conference, as an attempt to
satisfy rank and file resentment at the limit, without breaking it. Despite
being voted down, the NEC went ahead and negotiated an incentive scheme

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[3]My interviews at Murton confirm this interpretation - see
chapter five.

with the NCB, which they submitted for a ballot with a recommendation for acceptance (Allen, 1981, 274; Hall, 1981, 235). The Kent area of the NUM promptly took the NEC to court, because it was acting in clear defiance of union policy, and of the union consititution (rule 8) which states that the NEC cannot act "contrary to or in defiance of Conference". Both the High Court and the Appeal Court decided that a ballot was permissible, because it "is the very essence of the democratic process" (Allen, 1981, 277).

To the surprise of almost everyone, the ensuing ballot rejected the scheme (by 55.75%). But Gormley, under pressure from the government to keep the miners out of the annual percentage wages struggle, and an ardent admirer of incentive schemes (Gormley, 1982, 66), allowed individual areas who had achieved a majority _for_ an incentive scheme to negotiate seperate Area deals, claiming that the ballot only rejected a _national_ scheme (Allen, 1981, 279). Left wing areas went back to the courts, incensed by Gormley's cavalier disregard for the result of the national ballot, and bolstered by the Appeal Courts earlier verdict on the sancticity of ballots. However, Mr Justice Watkins devised a new interpretation of the union rule book, saying that "the result of a ballot, nationally conducted, is not binding upon the NEC in using its powers between conferences" (quoted in _ibid_, 280).

There seems little doubt that the Labour government regarded the incentive scheme as vital in removing the miners from the increasingly acrimonious opposition to their stage three incomes policy (Hall, 1981, 235-237 and Allen, 1981, 278-9). In the longer term it was part of a concious strategy by the NCB and the state to weaken the power of the NUM (see details of the "Miron Report", in Feickert, 1987, 10) Stage three of the Social Contract just survived, with the help of incentive schemes, and at considerable cost. A national firemens' strike had to be crushed, and penalties introduced against firms breaking the limit.

The government then tried to impose a   urth year of pay restraint in 1978, even tighter than the year before. This time union leaders had no hope of delivering even passive support for the government. Rank and file opposition was overwhelming, especially in the low paid public sector (Coates, 1980, 77-9). The result was the Winter of Discontent, as a bitter and angry working class faced a grim and hostile Labour government.

> "Four years of wage restraint may have given British
> capitalism a breathing space on industrial costs, but
> they gave the Labour government in the end industrial
> unrest and electoral defeat." (ibid; 80.)

But the disunity engendered by the incentive scheme successfully kept miners out of the struggles of the Winter of Discontent, and paved the way to much more fundamental divisions within the NUM.

These divisions sprang from several different factors. At a pit level, the AIS divided different sections of workers, and gave management tremendous power to manipulate earnings to their advantage. It divided the areas between relatively highly paid, secure jobs in the central coalfield, and the lower paid, insecure jobs in the peripheral coalfield. In combination with MINOS, it also led to an immediate intensification in the rate of exploitation of the workforce (Burns et al, 1985, 100-101; Bohen and Wroughton, 1988).

In retrospect therefore, the Labour government took two crucial steps which contributed to the destabilisation of industrial relations in the coal industry. In the first place, the alleged security offered by the PFC, combined with repeated exhortations to sacrifice sectional interests for the national good, ensured that the NUM was seperated from the mounting wave of labour unrest which characterised the final years of the Callaghan government. Seperation led eventually to isolation. Connected to this was the reinforcement of a collective ideology within the NUM that the union's interests could be guraranteed by the state. And in the second place, the AIS began the process of internally fragmenting the union.

4.3.i COAL AND CRISIS

In the early 1970's a temporary halt in the long term decline of the coal industry seemed to offer new hope to the miners (see table 4.1). But short term advantages rapidly metamorphosed into longer term problems. The oil price rises stimulated the market for coal in the short term, but encouraged energy multinationals to invest in coal production overseas. Within Britain, potential short term energy shortages met with a similar strategy to the 1950's period of coal shortages - the NCB was subsidised by the state to provide cheap energy, and neutralise the power of the NUM.

However, conditions were very different in the 1970's. Up until the 1970's, certain sectors of the British economy remained relatively immune to direct competition from imports. Coal and steel were perhaps the classic examples. It had therefore been in the interests of British capital to support and subsidise these industries, and nationalisation provided a mechanism to supply these basic raw materials at low prices. Coal was of course threatened by imports of replacement fuels, but here again nationalisation was functional for capital in smoothing a managed rundown of the industry. By the 1970's the world economy had changed. In both steel and coal, Third World production (financed by multinational capital) was available at relatively low prices. Revolutions in communications and transport technology meant that some of this coal and steel could potentially be sold in European markets at less than the price of domestic production. But corporate agreements between consumers and producers in countries like Britain blocked imports.

In Britain, pressure built up to break down the protected markets. This in turn was related to changes within the structure of capital. Since World War Two, notions of "national economies" had crumbled, as transnational capital - operating from international finance centres - conquered branch after branch of production. Now, huge energy multinationals such as Shell and BP had assumed even greater dominance within the British economy. With their massive interests in overseas coal production, they applied their political power to break down the NCB monopoly supply of coal (Sweet, 1985, 208).

Pressure for an attack on the coal industry came from other multinational conglomerates in the energy establishment too. Since the 1960's, the state had been attempting to get out of coal and into nuclear power. So vital is energy to the functioning of a modern capitalist economy that the overriding aim became to provide a centralised industry insulated from all external forces. Nuclear power fitted the bill. Huge construction multinationals (like Taylor Woodrow and Wimpeys) and energy conglomerates (like GEC, NEI and Babcock Power) have billions of pounds at stake in Britain and internationally, and their pressure was instrumental in insulating the nuclear industry from political and economic attack (Sweet, 1985; see also tables 4.3 and 4.4).

In these two areas the economic pressure on the UK coal industry is encapsulated. These pressures in turn relate back to one of Marx's most fundamental concepts, namely that the price of a commodity relates to the amount of socially necessary labour time needed to produce it (Marx, 1968). Coal is a commodity which can be produced not only by different technologies, but also by totally different techniques. There are therefore massive variations in the socially necessary labour time required to produce coal. No matter what the level of sophistication involved in deep mining, opencast coal mining requires intrinsically less labour time than deep mines. Furthermore, within deep mining - as section 4.2.i showed - there are great variations in socially necessary labour time required per tonne, dependant on levels of investment, and on geological conditions. Heavily worked out underground districts require greater labour intensity, and most British pits work in partially mined workings. This production is increasingly forced to compete with virgin overseas opencast workings in almost unlimited supply (Beynon, 1987). Overseas mines have one further advantage - the price of labour is often relatively low because the price of labour reproduction is much lower than developed countries.

Faced with such competition, the British coal industry's historic decline begins to assume a character of inevitability. But added to the economic pressures on the industry was a political strategy engineered by the Tory government to win back areas of control which had been ceded to labour during the PWS - particularly via corporate agreements in the state sector. The rule of the market was to be imposed as a supposedly depoliticised mechanism for economic restructuring (chapter two). Given the historic strength of the NUM, the scene was set for an almost inevitable conflict.

So long as the union was committed to defending members jobs – and therefore implicitly challenging the market mechanism – then a conflict was inevitable. This political dimension to the emerging conflict is examined in the following section.

4.3.ii THE ORGANISED STATE OFFENSIVE AGAINST LABOUR

With the election of the Conservative government in 1979, attacks on the defensive strength of the working class rapidly built up. The scale and success of resistance to the Heath government had rocked British capital, and the state. In particular, the impact of 2 successful miners strikes sent shock waves through the establishment. Of the 1972 strike, Brendan Sewill (then special advisor to the Chancellor) wrote:

> "At the time, many of those in positions of influence
> looked into the abyss and saw only a few days away the
> possibility of the country being plunged into a state
> of chaos not so very far removed from that which might
> prevail after a minor nuclear attack." (Quoted in
> Jeffrey and Hennessy, 1983, 238.)

The defensive strength of the working class had to be broken, and it was the state that led the assault.

This in a way constitutes the final strand in the states' offensive against the coal industry. Defeating the NUM became one big step on the road to defeating the resistance of the organised labour movement in Britain. In the long term, the state aimed to redefine trade unionism in Britain along the purely instrumental lines described in chapters two and three. Defeating the NUM would constitute a milestone along this road.

In this context, the notorious Ridley Report on the nationalised industries deserves attention. Conceived when the Tories were still in opposition, the Report laid down a blue print for dealing with the nationalised industries under a future Conservative goverment. In an annexe to the main report, a detailed strategy was outlined for dealing with a "political threat" from enemies of the next Tory government in a "vulnerable industry" such as coal, electricity or the docks (see Beynon and McMylor, 1985, 35-36). It predicted that the most likely major threat would come from the NUM. The Conservatives understood clearly that their strategy would require the deployment of massive resources in order to break the NUM's resistance, and consequently they planned thoroughly and acted cautiously.

The 1984/5 strike showed that the Tories had made their preparations well. In the first five years of the Thatcher government, successive battles were fought against the labour movement. In 1979 it was BL, in 1981 civil servants, and in 1982 health workers and train drivers. Each union fought alone; partly a legacy of the economism unions structurally tend towards (chapter three), and partly because this tendency was accentuated by the legacy of corporatist agreements in the post war years. The TUC stood by as unions came under attack, unwilling to fight back.

> "But the trade union leaders had played much the same role in the early 1970's. The impulse to fight had come then from below, from the rank and file. Thatcher benefitted from the effect of 5 years of Labour government, from the erosion of shop floor organisation. Militants no longer felt confident enough to fight independently of the union leaders. To this was added the effect of mass unemployment. For the first time since the 1930's the threat, and only too often the reality of the dole queue, faced every militant trade unionist." (Callinicos and Simons, 1985; 37.)

As was noted in chapter two, one of the main methods adopted by Thatcherism to achieve its aims, was to use its control over the state sector to provide a high profile "demonstration effect" to the private sector. The new government understood well the dynamics of class struggle. In particular, they knew the value of divide and rule, and the demoralisation which spread throughout the working class when a major defeat occurred, even if it involved relatively few workers. So the state sector was attacked hard, through British Leyland, British Steel, civil servants, health service workers, and so on. The state was able to stand the financial cost of such disputes, where capital might have been forced onto the defensive if it had born the financial brunt of the attack. At the same time, attacking the state sector served the ideological purpose of reinstating the rule of the market as the basic principle of production and distribution. This in turn related to the attempt to remove the operation of the market from the political sphere, and establish its unimpeded operation at the centre of a new consensus.

4.3.iii HEADLONG TOWARDS CONFLICT

However, the NUM still seemed to have the answer to the Tory strategy. In 1981 the passage of the government's Coal Industry Act threatened an

acceleration of pit closures. Subsidies were to be removed, and the industry instructed to break even by the end of 1984. Job losses seemed inevitable. However, left and right on the NEC showed a rare flash of unanimity, and threatened national strike action. Within days pickets had closed down the Yorkshire and South Wales coalfields, and the action looked certain to spread (Hall, 1981). Realising they were unprepared, the government pulled back from the brink of confrontation (MacGregor, 1986, 116).

Following the 1981 skirmish, the NCB opted for a less confrontational approach. Pits continued to close, and manpower to rundown (see tables 4.8 and 4.9), but they did so quietly, within agreed procedures. Ned Smith, former Industrial Relations director of the NCB described at a public lecture in Durham in 1986, how the issues involved in pit closures could be fudged. He claimed that the NCB had closed 800 pits without mentioning economics. They were closed because they were "old and buggered". Since exhaustion and geological difficulties are ultimately economic concepts (as recognised in PFC, which acknowledged that lack of investment had decreased colliery reserves, and that investment would increase them), then fudging was easy, especially if the union accepted the blurred distinctions.

Nevertheless, the government was not idle. Defeating the NUM was still high on the agenda. Government strategy was set by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) Report on the future of the industry (1981). It spoke in terms of cutting out the "high cost tail" of loss making pits. Management should be reorganised, and the industry subjected to the "free market". Subsidies would gradually be removed, returning the industry to profitability (see Glyn, 1984; O'Donnell, 1985; Fine, 1984 and Cutler et al, 1985 for critiques of the economic rationale behind the NCB/government strategy). This strategy linked with the policy of subjecting state industries to the rule of the market (as a prelude to privatisation), and of defeating one of the strongest unions in the country. Imposing the strategy would require defeat for the NUM, whether in an all out conflict, or by gradually destroying the unions credibility - for example via a series of failed attempts to mobilise the membership over individual pit closures. To this end, redundancy payments were developed to divide and weaken opposition to pit closures within the union (see chapter five).

Opposition to pit closures among rank and file miners began to mount in the 1980's. Massive unemployment fuelled a determination to prevent the seemingly relentless subjugation of people to abstract economic laws. Whilst the NCB strategy from 1981 until 1984 was successful in the sense that it avoided an all out confrontation, it was neither uncontested nor smooth. However, the opposition that emerged was not consolidated. Closures proved highly divisive, with miners in relatively secure employment reluctant to make sacrifices for those under threat. The issue affected miners of different ages, and those living in different places, very differently. The union became increasingly divided and weakened as three successive ballots failed to win a majority for strike action (see table 4.10). The unity of right and left in 1981 slipped away in a series of bitter and humiliating retreats and defeats. It began to look as if the government would get a victory over the NUM without having to engage in open battle.

In April 1982 Arthur Scargill replaced Joe Gormley as national President. He had been elected the previous year with an overwhelming 70.3% of the votes cast[4], and his campaign had galvanised activists across the country. People voted for Scargill _wanting_ a leader who would stand up to the NCB. Several men I interviewed who broke the strike started off as _supporters_ of Scargill[5]. Armed with conference policy asserting uncompromising opposition to pit closures, Scargill arrived with a clear mandate to fight closures. But the next two years were frustrating[6]. In November 1982 a national ballot was held, linking pay and pit closures, and recommending industrial action if demands were not met. Only 39% supported the call (in Durham, only 31% - see table 4.10).

The following month came the controversial closure of Kinneil in Scotland. When the agressive Scottish Area director Albert Wheeler announced the pits

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[4]Scargill's oppents were: Bell (17.3%), Chadburn (9.1%), Donaghy (3.3%).

[5]One Murton activist speculated plausibly that many right wingers hoped that Scargill would frighten the NCB into conceding better pay and conditions, as they thought he had in Yorkshire.

[6]Even before Scargill assumed office, a national ballot on pay accepted an NCB offer by 55%.

closure on December 17th, the men launched a sit down protest over Christmas. The recent ballot, although rejecting strike action nationally, had returned a 69% vote for action in Scotland. The Kinneil miners were acting in line with conference decisions. The Scottish Area officials however persuaded the area executive and council that Scotland would be isolated if they took action (Temple, 1983; 31, Callinicos and Simons, 1985; 43; McCormack, 1989). The NCB's "salami tactics" - taking out a pit and an area one at a time - seemed to be working. Scottish opposition appeared to be neutralised.

The next defeat for the union came in South Wales over Tymawr Lewis Merthyr. After its closure was announced in early 1983, the men staged a stay down protest. The South Wales Area had won an overwhelming endorsement for strike action in a ballot for strike action in the event of failure to invest in the coalfield, and had consistently voted for strike action over pit closures in national ballots (see table 4.10). Yet amid angry scenes at a South Wales delegate conference, the delegates decided to hold an Area ballot. The Guardian reported:

> "As the delegate conference at Bridgend concluded, striking miners marched in demanding an immediate coalfield strike and halted a press conference being given by the South Wales miners' President Mr Emlyn Williams with loud chants of 'out now' and cries of 'sold down the river'... There were angry scenes however, as Mr Williams left the hall, amid boos and insults. He was confronted by strikers demanding to know why he had not implemented a mandate to strike once the Board confirmed plans to close another pit." (Guardian, February 24th 1983, quoted in Temple, 1983; 35.)

An emergency NEC meeting was called on March 3rd, with Scargill apparently arguing for a strike under rule 41, which allows the NEC to authorise Area strikes (Callinicos and Simons, 1985; 43). However the NEC voted for another national ballot, and again only 39% supported action (see table 4.10).

By now many rank and file activists were questioning the validity of a national ballot on the closure issue (see appendix three for a discussion of the ballot issue). Certain sections, notably in the Midlands and the white collar workers (COSA) were consistently voting less than 25% for strike action (see table 4.10). As Beynon points out, the March ballot was a decisive event in this context.

> "Nottingham and the Midlands, so many people argued,
> would never support threatened miners in South Wales,
> Scotland and the North East." (Beynon, 1985a; 11.)

In the left, the argument about "the ballot" began to gather momentum.

On October 31st the NUM began a national overtime ban over pay, following the decision of a Special Delegate Conference, and also following close on the heels of the appointment of Ian MacGregor as NCB Chairman (on September 1st). There followed a four month low intensity war of attrition between union and management, with most of the skirmishes taking place in the explosive Yorkshire area. In March 1984, battle was joined.

This section has reviewed the pressures closing in on the miners at a national scale. It has shown that the government became committed to defeating the NUM as part of its strategy of reasserting the rule of the market as a de-politicised basis for economic decision making, and for decisively re-establishing capitalist power over labour. The NUM was unable to mobilise effectively against pit closures because of the divisive effects of the AIS, and also because at a deeper level the legacy of post war corporatism was a complete failure to challenge the social relations which subjected miners to the harsh consequences of capitalist restructuring.

It has however already been pointed out that there were sharp regional differences in the way that the NCB's restructuring was experienced and understood. In the following section, I focus on Durham, showing how the political and economic pressures building up on the union were experienced in this traditionally moderate coalfield. Left wing forces gathered strength as the arrangements of the PWS were increasingly seen to have failed the pits and communities of the coalfield. The NCB's offensive destabilised relations at pit and area level, creating a political gap which the left began to fill.

4.4: THE DURHAM COALFIELD 1947-1984

4.4.i TO THE EDGE OF EXTINCTION - THE DURHAM COALFIELD UP TO 1978

In many ways Durham today represents the archetypal "peripheral" coalfield, although in the nineteenth century it was one of the centres of the world coal industry. Perhaps the earliest coal workings in Britain were found along the banks of the Tyne - going back to Roman times. In the nineteenth century the Durham coalfield was the biggest in the world, and the industry formed the backbone of an integrated economy; coal, coke, steel, shipbuilding, engineering and railways. As well as helping make them, coal also fuelled the ships and trains. In common with the rest of the British coal industry, peak output was reached in 1913 (see table 4.11). Since then it has been in almost uninterrupted absolute and relative decline, whilst the relative significance of the late-developing "central" coalfields has grown.

Trade unionism has a long history in the coalfield, with bitter battles being fought between owners and miners in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see Douglass, 1972). But when the Durham Miners Association (DMA) was finally established in 1870, it was more in the tradition of a craft union than an industrial union (see Hyman, 1975, 45-47). Its leadership was politically liberal, steering a path of compromise with the owners in the face of repeated rank and file revolts.

> "From its very inception the Durham Miners Association leadership adopted a policy of conciliation and accordingly it spent a large part of its time in struggles not with the owners and their agents but with the rank and file." (Douglass, 1972, 45-46)

(See Wilson, 1907 for an opposing view).

Nine years later, the Durham Colliery Mechanics Association (DCMA) was formed as a small, breakaway craft union. The split originated in the belief that craft workers "could make better terms for themselves as a separate body" (Hall, 1929, 1). Not surprisingly therefore, the mechanics maintained a strongly conservative and sectional tradition. This formal organisational division between miners and mechanics has remained until the present, unique to Durham, Northumberland and Scotland, and it has had important implications for political development within the coalfield. (A further breakaway group - the winding enginemen - also formed a separate

Association, but their political impact has been relatively slight, and I have chosen not to study them in this research[7].)

Although one of the most militant areas in the 1926 strike, (when the membership voted to continue the strike after nine months despite suffering appalling hardship), following this defeat the union adopted a conciliatory profile. Taking advantage of the rank and file's collapse in morale, the right wing secured control of the union, and steered it in an openly collaborationist direction. Sam Watson, who dominated the DMA from before World War Two until the end of the 1950's, was also a senior member of the Labour Party, and fervently opposed both to Communism and rank and file militancy. He ruthlessly crushed opposition within the union to maintain its right wing Labour profile (Durham NUM, 1987)[8].

When nationalisation was finally achieved in 1947, the Durham coalfield was still the largest in the country with over 120 pits and 100000 miners (Garside, 1971). But it was in historical decline, and this decline accelerated to the point where the 1984 strike involved just 15000 thousand miners from eleven pits in Durham (see table 4.9 and 4.11, and graphs 5-11). Initially however, the coalfield benefitted from the insatiable post war demand for fuel. And the 1950 Plan For Coal was relatively optimistic about the future, forecasting similar output for the Durham coalfield in 1961-65 as in 1949 (RPRU, 1979).

However, the West of the coalfield was described as "one of the industry's biggest problems" (quoted in RPRU, 1979, 19). Nevertheless, the NCB implied that these problems were not insurmountable, but depended on sufficient investment being committed. The 1944/5 Survey of the coalfield confirmed that although easily accessible reserves had been depleted, there were 592 Mt of economically and physically recoverable coal in the West Durham

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[7]At the end of 1988 the NUM reorganised the various North East unions into a single "North East Area" of the NUM. However, at pit level miners and mechanics continue to be organised into seperate branches, with seperate committees.

[8]My interviews with older miners at Murton, and with other miners in the Durham coalfield supported this interpretation.

coalfield, of which 226 Mt were "prime coking coal"[9]. Despite these high quality reserves, pits in West Durham were the first to close when the national demand for coal began to collapse in the late 50's.

There were sporadic attempts to resist pit closures in the 1950's and 60's in Durham, but the union squashed any signs of militancy. The unions and Labour Party were deeply enmeshed in a class collaborationist policy with the regional bourgeoisie. Indeed, the latter were remarkably successful in consolidating a profound consensus around the policies and expenditure required for regional modernisation, which was vital for them given the dominance of Labour administrations in the region (Carney et al, 1977, 65). The Labour Party remained hegemonic in the region despite (or because of) the decline of traditional industries. Union and party were very closely linked, with the DMA retaining significance well beyond its declining membership.

As markets contracted in the 1960's, and it became clear that the Labour Party's pre-election commitments to maintain the industry would not be honoured, the pace of pit closures in Durham accelerated (see appendix two and table 4.2). As government policy increased the pressure on the NCB, closure decisions became haphazard and arbitrary (Krieger, 1979). Demoralisation swamped the coalfield. After 1966 the NPLA added to dissatisfaction, because for many miners - especially the highest paid face workers - wages began to fall. Miners left the industry in thousands (encouraged by growing government sponsorship of redundancy schemes), or headed down to the more secure central coalfields (aided by NCB transfer grants). In other words, because there were no collective responses available, miners pursued individual solutions (a strategy consciously encouraged by the state) - either by leaving the industry altogether, or transferring to safer, better paid jobs.

However, as section 4.1 above showed, by the late 1960's these individual solutions were increasingly unavailable. Unemployment was rising, and fewer

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[9]With the decimation of the West Durham coalfield in the 1960's, it is estimated that at least 100 Mt of prime coking coal was abandoned, along with approximately 300 Mt of other physically recoverable coal (see RPRU), 1979, 100).

jobs were available in the central coalfield. Although the pre-1972 strike wave only penetrated very briefly into Durham, the 1972 strike was very solidly supported. This strike had a crucial impact on union politics. It ended a chain of events unbroken since 1926. The ideology, deeply embedded and promoted since then, that "striking gets you nowhere" was toppled. Confirmation came in 1974 when Durham miners voted by an unprecedented 85.7% for strike action.

Rank and file militancy in 1972 seemed surprising given the long slumber of union activity since 1926. But Durham too witnessed an explosion as the pent up frustrations of years of declining wages, pit closures, and rising unemployment at last found expression. The depth of feeling was demonstrated by the uncompromising and relentless picketing of NACODS (National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers - the supervisors union) members at many pits[10]. So hostile was this picketing that some deputies suffered psychological problems after the dispute, and left the industry. At pit level, miners and mechanics cooperated extensively, beginning to wear away some of the entrenched historical suspicion (evidence from interviews).

Although there were major gains in consciousness achieved by way of the 1972 and 1974 strike action, it is important to recognise the limits to this process. Mobilisation was based on a sectional demand (notwithstanding the significance of the miners' victory for the advancement of other workers interests). As such, it was not surprising to see the majority of Durham miners - in common with miners across the country - subside into complacency and isolationism following the apparent victory represented by the PFC (see chapter five). The 1974 strike and subsequent signing of PFC confirmed miners in their belief in the legitimacy of pursuing their interests through the state, emphasising the continuing power of the PWS to influence miners ideology.

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[10]NACODS were not involved in the strike, and their members attempted to work during the strike, where they performed safety work.

My interviews indicate that perhaps the crucial event which set in motion a challenge to the existing area union leadership, culminating in left wing control of both miners and mechanics unions in 1984, was the imposition of the AIS (Area incentive scheme) in 1978 (see section 4.2.iii above). It is certainly fair to say that the AIS revolutionised union politics. Its immediate impact was at a local level - in colliery union-management relations - but this impact soon filtered back to area and national level. In Durham, one immediate effect of the introduction of the AIS was to stimulate the growth of a loosely organised left wing pressure group - the "Broad Left" (BL). Anger at the manner of the imposition of the AIS, in defiance of a national ballot encouraged a small group of activists to begin vigorously campaigning for left wing policies.

The incentive scheme provided them with raw material - it immediately increased discontent in the pits. In many ways its impact was similar to that of piece work. It returned wages militancy to the point of production. Lodges which had been nodding off for lack of work suddenly found themselves deluged with complaints. Within a couple of years the return of Tory government provoked recession, and the market for coal began to fall. Pits in Durham again came under threat. As job hierarchies fossilised and redundancies increased, so discontent spread beyond wages.

Pit closures in Durham resulted from two processes. In part they derived from differential patterns of investment - as they had done in the 1960's. Under Plan For Coal investment was again concentrated in the most geologically advantageous conditions, and even the previously advantaged East Durham pits lost out as money went to develop new capacity in the central coalfield - most notably at Selby. As in the 1960's this led to underinvested pits being defined as uneconomic. However a second process defined large parts of Durham output as "surplus capacity", and this was the collapse in the market for coal, and in particular, for coking coal (see section 4.2.i above).

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[11] Much of the material on Durham in this section comes from my interviews and research.

Most of the pits which shut in the late 1970's and early 1980's (other than those closing because of exhaustion), did so because they had lost the BSC market. In Durham they included South Hetton, East Hetton, Houghton, Blackhall, Marley Hill, Eden and Boldon[12] (see table 4.9 and graphs 9, 10 and 11). The exact impact of these closures, and how they interacted with the operation of the incentive scheme, and other processes of political change is related in the following chapter. (It was also the loss of coking coal markets which indirectly ignited the spark which caused the Cortonwood walkout in March 1984.) At a coalfield level, the period from the introduction of the incentive scheme was one of growing political turmoil, in both the mechanics and miners unions. Complacency gave way first to uncertainty, and then to growing opposition.

After several years in abeyance, pit closures began again in the late 1970's (see table 4.9). Unease grew as unemployment climbed, and the other mainstay industries of the North East began to collapse. The closure of Consett steelworks (see section 2.1.i) left a deep mark on the collective psyche. Shipyards were closing down, the banks of the Wear grassed over for Sunday walkers. Small factories came, but many more went as the manufacturing base of the North East was swept away. The young gathered on street corners, condemmed it seemed to eke out an existence on government schemes and social security. Communities felt a very real sense of being under threat (Barker, 1984).

With this background, and an openly hostile Conservative government, the scene was ripe for political change. Growing out of the incentive scheme, a small group of activists - the Broad Left - began to form themselves into a pressure group within the DMA. Capitalising on increasing dissatisfaction and distrust within the workforce, the BL grew steadily in strength and influence. Arthur Scargill's election was an important catalyst in raising consciousness. His star quality, high profile campaign, dazzling election addresses to thousands of miners, and strident warning made people aware of the grim realities of the future. Most important of all however, his

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[12] See the NCB's submissions to the European Coal and Steel Community for readaptation aid in 1980 and 1981, quoted in Beynon et al, 1985, 50. See ibid for a thorough examination of BSC's purchasing policies and their effects of the East Durham coalfield.

campaign focussed attention on the possibility there might be a real alternative to acquiescing in the face of NCB policy. Fighting back was on the agenda. One BL member recalled that the campaign "galvanised everbody", giving a great boost to the BL, lifting its profile and credibility[13].

It is important to realise that many people who voted for Scargill didn't believe in all his policies. In many ways, right wingers wanted a strong leader as much as those on the left. The former however hoped that the NCB would be frightened by Scargill, and he would be able to win the substantial material concessions that were rumoured to abound in Yorkshire (where he had previously been area President). One man who broke the strike and is now UDM (Union of Democratic Mineworkers[14]) chairman at Murton, said:

> "I thought at the time he was the best thing that ever happened to the coalfield,... because he was prepared to stand and fight." (interview)

Right wing leaders at area level felt the ground begin to move under their feet. Some lost heart as the easy relationships of the past were replaced by an abrasive management strategy which treated them with increasing contempt.

Even in the notoriously right wing mechanics union, politics were changing at area level. In 1982, in the election to replace the long serving right wing General Secretary Tommy Bartles (killed in a London car crash), it was the most openly left wing candidate - Billy Etherington - who narrowly defeated the more moderate John Cummings, from Murton (see chapter 5). Commenting on the turnaround in the mechanics union, Etherington said:

> "I think the changes [in the early 1980's] were many people had been quite used to pit closures, but hadn't bothered too much about it because they'd been going to another pit. But I believe it began to dawn on some of them that the pits were getting rather thin on the ground."

One man he knew at Dawdon colliery was at his eighth pit!

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[13] According to at least one early BL member it was perhaps _too_ successful, because some people became involved for opportunistic reasons.

[14] The UDM was formed as a breakaway union from the NUM after the 1984/5 strike - see chapter seven.

"Also of course, our members [saw] that there had been
no apprentices taken on (or very few) over the last 5
or 6 years. And I think that perhaps made them realise
that it wasn't just somebody elses pit that was always
closing. They began to realise that it was going to be
their's! More so when you've got pits like Blackhall
and Horden - pits that had quite good reserves not so
long ago - when they went down I think it began to make
a lot of people think very hard." (interview)

In the miners union, the growing strength of the BL began to overwhelm the
established right wing leadership. Several important lodges were "captured"
by the left - notably Wearmouth and Easington. By organising for
elections, the BL were able to wrest control of the Executive Committee
from the agents during 1983. From then on, the BL was effectively setting
the pace at area level in the miners' union.

In Durham therefore, two previously right wing unions were moving left as
the NCB's aggressive new strategy combined with the onset of pit closures
and the destabilising effects of the AIS brought home to miners that their
futures were becoming very insecure. Yet the changes were in many ways
contradictory. The mechanics elected a left wing general secretary, but
continued to vote heavily against striking in support of jobs. Some of the
most threatened pits (like Sacriston) showed no sign of political change,
whereas some secure pits (like Wearmouth and Easington) went left. Clearly
a similar regional culture could generate strikingly different responses
within the workforce. The following chapters on Murton explore the
particular factors responsible for political development at the local
level.

4.5 CONLUSION

This chapter has sought to apply the theoretical arguments established in the first three chapters. In particular, I have linked the political and economic destabilisation of post war British society discussed in chapter two, with the dynamics of trade union relations with the state and capital, discussed in chapter three. The recent history of the coal industry illustrates the argument advanced in chapter three that the incorporation of trade unions within an established network of state guaranteed relations (an indulgency pattern on a national scale), is continually vulnerable to economic destabilisation within the system as a whole. This destabilisation creates room for the exercise of human agency, discussed in chapter one.

Although the central concern of this thesis is the processes of political struggle and change at the local level, it is impossible to make sense of developments in a particular place, and in a particular industry, without situating both the industry and the place in their historical context. In other words, the focus has shifted from a discussion of class struggle in general, through an analysis of the principle working class organisations of struggle, to the recent history of struggle in the coal industry.

In the 1970's the coal industry was initially insulated from the assault on working class wages and conditions, provoked by the economic crisis. A temporary energy crisis placed the domestic coal industry in a a privileged position, and the 1974 Plan For Coal recognised this reality. However, PFC also gave the state and the NCB time to plan a strategy to weaken the power of the NUM. At the same time, PFC endorsed the NUM's economistic commitment to the defense and improvement of conditions through sectional pressure within the state. Whilst the corporatist agreement between the NCB, the NUM and the government kept the miners out of the period of intensified class struggle during the 1970's, the incentive scheme was imposed to break the union's wages based unity. Incentives were linked to the introduction of new underground technology which increased the rate of work, and led to job losses.

When the Conservatives came to power in 1979 they were committed to a strategy of reasserting capitalist control over labour, ending the post war incorporation of the unions within the state apparatus, and re-establishing the market as a de-politicised mechanism for economic decision making. In

this context, the NUM's defence of the prevailing situation was also a radical challenge to the power of the state to carry through its agenda - more so because of the miners "special status" as the leaders of the labour movement, and their role in supposedly bringing down the Heath government. Although the miners appeared to win a significant victory in 1981, when the government was forced into a humiliating retreat over pit closures, subsequent attempts to mobilise the membership failed to deliver ballot votes for strike action, despite the election of Arthur Scargill as national NUM President.

In Durham the collapse of the coal industry in the 1960's, took place within the context of a deep rooted labourist consensus, in which alternative jobs were promised within the framework of regional policy. The NUM was a principle bulwark of this regional settlement, and as such refused to countenance any challenge to the pit closure programme. However, following a period of relative stability in the mid 1970's, the reappearance of an accelerating programme of further pit closures began to destabilise relations between management and labour, and between miners and their union. Opposition to the accomodative industrial relations of the past began to harden under the pressure of aggressive management and job losses. Left wing activists in both miners and mechanics sections of the union built upon these destabilising pressures. By the eve of the strike they had effectively won control of the miners' union, and established a significant shift in the traditionally more right wing mechanics' union.

In the following chapter, the focus moves to Murton. The national and area changes which we have discussed conceal remarkable variations in local activity. So far I have said almost nothing about the processes of political change. For example, I have assumed a mechanistic link between the deteriating situation in the industry, and the rise of the left. However, the rise of the left was a very uneven phenomena. Neither do these variations relate directly to the perceived prospects for particular pits or communities. In the following chapters I weave together the various elements in the account so far: the role of conscious agents, the constraints of history and the strategies of the state and the employer.

TABLE 4.1: UK DEEP MINED OUTPUT, PRODUCTIVITY, COLLIERIES AND MANPOWER
SINCE 1947

Year	OUTPUT (000 tonnes)	OMS (Tonnes (per man shift)	NUMBER OF COLLIERIES	MANPOWER (000's)
1947	187.5	1.09	958	703.9
1950	205.6	1.23	901	690.8
1955	211.3	1.25	850	698.7
1960	186.8	1.42	698	602.1
1965/6	177.0	1.83	483	455.7
1970/1	135.5	2.24	292	287.2
1975/6	114.5	2.28	241	247.1
1976/7	108.5	2.21	238	242.0
1977/8	106.3	2.19	231	240.5
1978/9	105.5	2.24	223	234.9
1979/80	109.3	2.31	219	232.5
1980/1	110.3	2.32	211	229.8
1981/2	108.9	2.40	200	218.5
1982/3	104.9	2.44	191	207.6
1983/4	90.1	2.43	170	191.5
1984/5	27.6	2.08	169	175.4
1985/6	88.4	2.72	133	154.6
1986/7	88.0	3.29	110	125.4
1987/8	82.4	3.62	94	104.4

Sources: NCB/BC Annual Reports and Accounts

TABLE 4.2: DURHAM DEEP MINED OUTPUT, PRODUCTIVITY, COLLIERIES AND MANPOWER, 1947 TO 1970

YEAR	OUTPUT (million tonnes)	OMS (tonnes/ man shift)	COLLIERIES	MANPOWER (000's)
1947	24.1	0.89	127	108.3
1950	26.3	0.99	-	104.8
1955	25.4	1.01	-	101.5
1960	22.8	1.12	109	87.2
1965/6	19.1	1.42	67	62.0
1970/1	12.7	1.74	34	33.9

Sources: NCB Reports and accounts

TABLE 4.3: CEGB FUEL BURN; Measured in tonnes coal equivalent (tce).

Year	74/5	75/6	76/7	77/8	78/9	79/80	80/1	81/2	82/3	83/4	84/5	85/6	86/7
Coal	64.5	67.1	70.3	69.9	75.1	80.4	79.5	76.8	75.3	77.2	40.5	79.0	77.0
Oil	23.2	16.7	13.9	16.0	17.3	12.3	8.1	7.8	5.3	4.8	39.9	5.1	6.8
Gas	3.6	3.8	2.0	2.1	0.5	0.8	-	-	-	-	0.8	0.3	-
Nuclear	9.5	8.7	10.7	11.8	10.7	10.9	9.8	10.1	12.5	13.5	16.0	16.4	16.2
Total	101	96	97	100	104	104	97	95	93	95	97	101	100

TABLE 4.4: CEGB FUEL BURN; Percentages of different fuels.

Year	74/5	75/6	76/7	77/8	78/9	79/80	80/1	81/2	82/3	83/4	84/5	85/6	86/7
Coal	63.9	69.9	72.5	69.9	72.2	77.3	82.0	80.8	81.0	81.3	41.8	78.2	77.0
Oil	23.0	17.4	14.3	16.0	16.6	11.8	8.4	8.2	5.7	5.1	41.1	5.0	6.8
Gas	3.6	4.0	2.1	2.1	0.5	0.8	-	-	-	-	0.8	0.3	-
Nuclear	9.4	9.1	11.0	11.8	10.3	10.5	10.1	10.6	13.4	14.2	16.5	16.2	16.2

Sources: CEGB Statistical Yearbooks 1978/9, 81/2 & 86/7.

TABLE 4.5. NCB DISPOSALS & STOCKS; million tonnes per annum.

Year	74/5	75/6	76/7	77/8	78/9	79/80	80/1	81/2	82/3	83/4
Power stations	72.5	75.8	78.9	78.9	83.3	89.1	87.7	85.3	80.8	84.0
Coke ovens/gasworks	20.5	18.5	19.6	16.3	14.6	14.4	11.3	11.2	10.0	10.6
Domestic	14.5	11.4	10.6	10.8	10.1	10.3	8.5	8.6	8.0	7.8
Other inland	19.6	16.5	15.5	15.5	14.4	14.6	12.7	11.9	11.6	11.3
Total inland	127	122	125	122	123	128	120	117	110	114
Exports	2.1	1.4	1.4	1.8	2.1	2.5	4.7	9.4	7.1	6.9
Total sales	129	123	126	124	125	131	125	126	117	121
Imports	4.0	4.8	2.4	2.7	2.1	5.1	7.3	4.2	3.4	5.1
Stocks NCB	5.6	11.0	9.6	10.3	14.1	12.0	20.9	24.9	24.9	21.7
" customer	16.1	18.9	18.5	19.5	14.7	15.8	17.5	18.6	28.3	24.5
" total	21.6	29.9	28.1	29.8	28.8	27.7	38.4	43.5	53.3	46.2

TABLE 4.6: NCB SALES; Percentages to different sectors.

Year	74/5	75/6	76/7	77/8	78/9	79/80	80/1	81/2	82/3	83/4
Power stations	56.2	61.4	62.4	63.7	66.6	68.3	70.3	67.5	69.0	69.5
Coke ovens/gasworks	15.9	15.0	15.5	13.2	11.5	11.0	9.1	8.9	8.5	8.8
Domestic	11.2	9.2	8.4	8.7	8.1	7.9	6.8	6.8	6.8	6.5
Other inland	15.2	13.4	12.3	12.5	11.5	11.2	10.2	9.4	9.9	9.3
Total inland	98.4	98.9	98.9	98.5	98.3	98.1	96.2	92.6	93.9	94.3
Exports	1.6	1.1	1.1	1.6	1.7	1.9	3.8	7.4	6.1	5.7

SOURCE: NCB Report and Accounts, 1983/4.

TABLE 4.7: UK OPENCAST AND DEEP MINED OUTPUT SINCE 1947

YEAR	OPENCAST OUTPUT (million tonnes)	DEEP MINED O/P (million tonnes)
1947	10.4	187.5
1950	12.4	205.6
1955	11.6	211.3
1960	7.7	186.8
1965/6	6.9	177.0
1970/1	8.1	135.5
1975/6	10.4	114.5
1976/7	11.4	108.5
1977/8	13.6	106.3
1978/9	13.5	105.5
1979/80	13.0	109.3
1980/1	15.3	110.3
1981/2	14.3	108.9
1982/3	14.7	104.9
1983/4	13.8	90.1
1984/5	13.6	27.6
1985/6	14.1	88.4
1986/7	13.3	88.0
1987/8	15.1	82.4

Source: NCB Reports and Accounts, 1987/8

TABLE 4.8: CHANGE IN NCB MANPOWER AND PITS 1973-84.

Year.	73/4	74/5	75/6	76/7	77/8	78/9	79/80	80/1	81/2	82/3	83/4
No of pits.	259	246	241	238	231	223	219	211	200	191	170
No of closures.	33	13	5	3	7	8	4	8	11	9	21
Manpower(000's).	252	246	247	242	241	235	233	230	219	208	191
Manpower change.	-21	-6	+1	-5	-1	-6	-2	-3	-11	-11	-17

Source: NCB Reports and accounts, 1983/4.

TABLE 4.9: NORTH EAST COALFIELD[1] DEEP MINED OUTPUT, PRODUCTIVITY, COLLIERIES, AND MANPOWER, 1975/6 TO 1988

YEAR	OUTPUT (million tonnes)	OMS (tonnes/man shift)	COLLIERIES	MANPOWER (000's)
1975/6	16.2	1.93		37.7
1976/7	16.0	1.82		36.6
1977/8	14.9	1.83		35.4
1978/9	12.8	1.87		34.9
1979/80	14.0	2.07	27	33.4
1980/1	14.2	2.07	24	32.0
1981/2	13.4	2.03	22	29.0
1982/3	12.5	2.09	18	26.4
1983/4	11.0	2.23	16	22.9
1984/5	0.4	0.47	15	21.9
1985/6	9.6	2.23	10	17.9
1986/7	10.2	2.98	8	14.4
1987/8	10.3	3.51	7	11.8

[1] The North East coalfield comprises Durham and Northumberland. A full time series of data is not available for Durham for this period.

Source: NCB/BC Annual Reports and Accounts

TABLE 4.10: NUM STRIKE BALLOTS 1982-4.

AREA.	Approx Membership	Percentage for strike action.			
		Jan 82	Nov 82	March 83	March 84
COSA	16000	14	10	15	-
Cokemen	4500	32	22	39	-
Cumberland	650	52	36	42	22
Derbyshire	10500	50	40	38	50
Durham	13000	46	31	39	-
Kent	2000	54	69	68	-
Power group	?	17	15	19	-
Leicester	2500	22	13	18	-
Midlands	12200	27	23	21	27
Northumberland	5000	37	32	35	52
North Wales	1000	18	24	23	36
Nottinghamshire	32000	30	21	19	26
North West	7500	40	44	39	41
Scotland	11500	63	69	50	-
South Derbyshire	3000	16	13	12	16
South Wales	21000	54	59	68	-
Yorkshire	56000	66	56	54	-
Scottish Enginemen	?	54	53	49	-
Durham Mechanics	?	32	22	32	-
Durham Enginemen	?	21	11	16	-
N'land Mechanics	?	32	26	32	-
NATIONAL AVERAGE		45	39	39	

?: Figure unknown
-: No ballot held

Source: Callinicos and Simons, 1985, ; and Hudson, 1986, 17

TABLE 4.11: DURHAM DEEP MINED OUTPUT 1880 TO 1947

DATE	OUTPUT (Mt)
1880	28.1
1885	27.7
1900	34.8
1905	37.4
1910	39.4
1913	41.5
1920	30.8
1925	31.5
1930	35.9
1935	30.3
1947	24.3

Source: Garside, 1971, 18 & 63

CHAPTER FIVE: MURTON BEFORE THE STRIKE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins my analysis of the changing politics in the Murton miners' and mechanics' branches, by considering the period from 1978 to 1984. This account is related to the historical analysis of the coal industry provided in chapter four. It shows how the destabilisation of the post war settlement - and the particular settlement in the coal industry - affected one colliery in Durham. It also shows how changing management strategy provided the conditions for a decisive shift in union branch politics, as the disturbance of a long standing indulgency pattern provided the room for activists to challenge existing union politics.

My central focus is on the operation of political processes at the local level. In other words, attention is concentrated on the shifting political consciousness of the workforce, and the factors which created and shaped the direction of change. At this scale of analysis, it is appropriate to distinguish between objective and subjective factors which affect the development of consciousness. Whatever the difficulties of separating objective and subjective factors at the level of capitalism in general, the distinction has obvious analytical advantages when applied to small scale studies such as this. However complicated the interaction of working class action and capitalist strategies is at the national scale, in Murton there is a clear distinction between factors which bring objective changes (pit closures, a new manager, changes in the workforce), and factors which are subjective in that they represent individuals and groups attempts to influence developments - usually by encouraging certain interpretations and actions in response to objective changes.

Throughout the following three chapters, the miners' and mechanics' branches of the NUM at Murton are considered separately. This distinction is not merely pedantic pandering to local chauvinism. It reflects important differences in their political development. These differences are crucial because they derive largely from subjective forces, and comparison of the

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[1] See appendix one for details of the methodological approach adopted in the following three chapters.

two branches therefore allows the isolation of factors such as the importance of leadership. It should be noted however, that in many respects the Murton miners and mechanics were more similar than perhaps emerges from this analysis. If comparisons had been made between Murton and other NUM branches in Durham, then similarities between the Murton miners and mechanics would have swamped the differences. Emphasising the differences between the two Murton branches is a consequence of the scale of analysis, and is not meant to suggest that intractable conflicts characterised relations between the two sections of the workforce.

Essentially the main issue that emerges when studying the period from 1974-1984 in Murton is the clear leftward shift in both the miners' and mechanics' branches. These changes occurred despite the presence of right wing leaders in both branches. However, the character and extent of changes in the two branches were significantly different. To what can these developments be attributed? Why was the pace and character of change different between the two branches? What was the actual content of the political change in each branch? And how did these developments relate to the events and processes discussed in earlier chapters?

In this chapter these questions are answered by looking at four objective factors which destabilised the previous political orientation of the two branches. These were the incentive scheme; the arrival of miners travelling from other pits which were closed down; the changing age composition of the workforce; and the impact of pit closures. Integrated into the account is an analysis of the role of leadership in directing the effect which these objective changes had on consciousness. This constitutes the subjective factor – the role of agency. My analysis shows that conscious agents exerted a crucial influence over the pace and character of political change in both branches. But I begin the chapter with a brief historical review of Murton's history and politics up until 1978, to provide a context for the subsequent discussion of political change between 1978 and 1984.

5.1: THE MURTON BRANCHES BEFORE 1978

Up until the mid 1970's, Murton remained an island. Largely detached from political manoeuvrings at area and national levels, it was a quiet place where union business appeared to carry on much as it had done since nationalisation. Yet this apparent continuity was deceptive, because forces were building up which heralded major destabilisation and change in union politics. In the following section I make some brief comments on Murton's history, as a prelude to discussing the development of union politics.

5.1.i MURTON THE VILLAGE

Like so many villages in County Durham, Murton was just a tiny rural hamlet until the coming of coal. In 1801 just 75 people clustered around the little hill top known then as Murton Moor, or Murton in the Whines. Up until the 1830's the villages East of the Permian Escarpment were untouched by the development of pit villages which characterised the rest of the County, where the coalfield was exposed. Then came the discovery of coal deep beneath the Permian escarpment, and East Durham was suddenly opened up[2].

The sinking of the first shaft at Murton was begun on February 18th 1838. amd the third shaft took until April 15th 1843 to comple, although the first caol was drawn in 1842. It was financed by the landowner Colonel Thomas Richmund Gale Braddyll. At the time the sinking was reputed to be "unparalleled in the way of hazard, detemination and expense" (Abbott, 1964/5, 40); and "the costliest and most hazardous sinking on record" (ibid, 37). The main problem encountered during the sinking was the inundation of the shaft through sand feeder. At one time, the pumping engines were drawing 9300 gallons a minute. Thirty four boilers were required to provide the power for twenty seven pumping columns (NCB, 1983).

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[2] Helen Abbott in her marvellous two (unpublished) volumes on the history of Murton captures the spirit and conditions of Murton's early years, and this account leans heavily on her work (Abbott, 1964/5; 1985).

Hippo and buffalo hide buckets were worn out every two or three hours (Abbott, 1964/5)[3].

The fearsome cost of this venture (£250000 in 1843 prices) led to an unhappy reward for Colonel Braddyll's entrepeneurial spirit - he was bankrupted in 1846!

Following the shaft sinking, Murton grew rapidly. By 1841 the population was 521, by 1851 it was 1387, by 1901 it was 6514, and by 1930 it had swollen to 10000. The initial manpower for the sinking came from Cornwall. Immigration was concentrated from just a few Cornish villages, with thirty families coming from Colstock alone. In 1847 the first seventeen families arrived from Lord Londonderry's estates in Ireland. The labour was "freed" by the simple expedient of expelling them from the land, so that they could go and work in the mines.

For many years the community was divided along religious lines. Abbott's history tends to gloss over these divisions. For example, she writes;

> "A kindly liefelong bond exists between these Cornish
> and Irish families of different religious persuasion,
> but of mutual hard working honesty and Christian
> brotherliness." (Abbott, 1985, 2)

A man whose family had lived in Murton for six generations told a very different tale. The community was split along religious grounds, with the Cornish people living in a part of Murton called Cornwall.

> "Murton is personified by the fact that it is
> geographically peculiar. [You had] Cornwall itself.
> Cornish tin miners. Cornish tin miners dominated
> Cornwall, so they're nearly all Chapel people. Wesleyan
> Chapel... You had what I would classify the top end of
> Cornwall - that was the North Stretch - that was where
> the Catholic community came over in the 1840's and
> 1950's, and settled there. And they inter-bred, and two
> or three streets in there were totally Catholic! The
> priest could go from one door, and never miss a door
> going down the street!
>
> "But there was a divide Jonathan, there was a divide.
> We called in the "Wide Street". The boundary of
> Cornwall was the Wide Street. There was Protestants
> over that side, and there was a wide street, and the

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[3]To put this operation into perspective, it is worth comparing it with the Horden-Blackhall mine - the wettest in Europe prior to its closure in 1985 - which was pumping 7500 gallons a minute.

netties [toilets] was down the middle! And they were all Protestants or Chapel people down there, and all Catholics in the three long streets. Funny."

"But was there any antagonism between the two communities?"

"Yes. Of course there was! I think they lived side by side, but not close, for almost 60 year. And I think the first... record of a Catholic man marrying a non Catholic was... about 1902, 1903. Sixty years they were apart. Culturally apart as well. In dialect they were apart. So you had the Irish brogue. In fact, when I was about 12 or 13 years old my Grandfather could still speak the Gaelic as plain as could be! And there were about 50 or 60 old Irish men or old Irish women at that time in their 80's and 90's who could speak [Gaelic]... They met each other in the street and spoke Gaelic. They passed each other underground and spoke Gaelic. That antagonised people."

Today religious dvisions are much less significant. However, the Irish Catholic tradition is still strong in the village, and it is not uncommon to hear rousing Irish folk songs being sung in pubs and homes in Murton.

Although this account would tend to suggest strong divisions within the community, from the outside its cohesiveness is far more apparent than its divisions. Although this thesis is about change, it is important to understand the strong threads of continuity which weave back into the past of a pit village like Murton. Even in the 1970's, Murton continued to display many of the characteristics of the archetypal pit village. Its social cohesiveness, relative isolation, domination by coal mining, and committment to Labour(ism), differed remarkably little from the pattern so vividly established in the classic account of the Yorkshire pit village of "Ashton", written in the early 1950's (Dennis et al, 1969).

An important point to make about Murton is its relative physical isolation (map 2). The road through Murton is a very minor one, and is not a routeway. The village has distinct boundaries, and is 2 miles from the nearest settlement. It has therefore been able to maintain a high degree of social solidarity and community identity. The survival of the colliery means that the pit continues to dominate the life of the village, and anchor the community to the social traditions and relationships that have evolved historically.

Four quotes help to catch the flavour of Murton. A mechanic who came to Murton from the cosmopolitan Wearmouth pit said:

> "It was very much a community pit, probably the last of
> the real pit villages... It was a village that had done
> all the things the old villages did. The community was
> actually built around the pit, and they saw their role
> - and some of it was probably 'left wing' in that sense
> - as <u>providing</u> the community; you know, welfare
> schemes, and they were carried through in Murton I
> believe longer than most. (interview)

A respected member of the colliery management, said this about living in

Murton:

> "There's a kind of freemasonry attached to it. And they
> guard it very jealously!.. I can remember,.. if you
> came from outside the village, you were hated! There
> was nothing like it. Easington Lane were Easington
> Lane. They were a world apart. They may as well have
> been in Europe, quite honestly!.. The rivalry was
> intense. I mean, quite apart from the sporting rivalry,
> there was the rivalry you had as gangs... It's still
> maintained now." (interview)

Rivalry between Durham pit villages has always been strong. The sense of

identity and relatively self contained nature of each community inevitably

bred a (generally benign) competitiveness between villages, especially

nearby communities. This traditional form of mining community had important

implications for politics within the the two mining unions at Murton. It

forms the background to the inward looking, conservative, unpoliticized

lodges that are described in section A 3.2 below.

The view from outside Murton is somewhat different however, as this comment

from a member of Murton's management who came from nearby Eppleton in 1970,

shows.

> "When I went to Murton there was just a sort of blank.
> Not accepted. Nothing... They didn't accept me. They
> never did... Murton to me is a place where there's a
> road through, and... in effect they've just cut off...
> [the two ends of the road] and just intermarried and
> lived there." (interview)

And a man who lived in Trimdon Grange but transferred to Murton from East

Hetton in 1983 said:

> "Murton, it seemed a bloody queer place you know. It
> used to appear to me as if they were in a time warp -
> they hadn't progressed like. They had a queer outlook
> on life. Always talking about getting drunk, and going
> out with other men's wives and things like that. It
> seems there's more to life to me like." (interview)

Although there were important regional and local variations, the typical form of union politics, and management union relations in this period is summarised by Dennis et al (1969; 84-116) in there account of the Yorkshire pit of "Ashton" in the early 1950's. Piece work ensured a continuous interest in the union because all piece workers were constantly in conflict with management over their pay (ibid; 86-7 and 106-12). This also consolidated the importance of faceworkers in the union, and this dominance is still far from over today.

In Murton a similar pattern emerges, but with important local variations. For example, a continual problem at Murton concerned the endemic use of "advance notes" by management - a relic from pre-nationalisation days. Workers in each district were paid not by the manager directly but by a "foreshift overman". Often the foreshift overman was given an inadequate sum to cover the wages that had actually been earned by the men that week - say £200 instead of £250. So he would give an advance note to those workers he couldn't pay fully, which they could claim back in cash in following weeks. However, the men sometimes got tired of chasing advance notes, reasoning that they were "only coppers"[4]. Dissension was inevitable, but at least the constant problems kept men attending meetings.

However, the union at Murton at this time appeared to be apathetic, its leadership lacking in ability and strenth. The committee was dominated by a small clique of Labour Party members. Indeed, so strong was the domination of the Labour Party that up until 1965, union meetings dealt first with Party business, and only second with union affairs![5] One retired miner and committee member put it like this:

> "The people that ran the union were people who were
> mainly in the Labour Party. There was just a certain
> clique of them. You got the odd ones who came out of
> the ranks sort of style, and went in, but they didn't

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[4] Advance notes made a comeback in 1978 with the introduction the incentive scheme.

[5] So much so, that it was quite possible the meeting had still not moved on to union business by the time the tub loading shift left for work at around 9.30pm!

> seem to last very long 'cos they weren't in the Labour
> Party... Anybody with ambitions at all was in the
> Labour Party." (interview)

Behind their continual re-election lay whisperings of ballot rigging. Suspicions were never proved, but the whispers could have contributed to a general feeling of disilluion with the union. What was the point of trying to challenge those in power if the result was a certainty? To become an official, all you had to do was stay on the committee, "keep your nose clean", make sure your Labour Party subscription was up to date, and stand. This description makes clear that the resulting calibre of leadership was poor. For example, two consecutive delegates had serious stammers. They had to read out long reports from Area Councils, but no one had the heart to vote them off. You "just had to sit there and squirm".

The role of the Area in controlling dissident opinion, and the discreet spheres of influence of Area and lodge were clearly illustrated in an incident that took place in the early 1960's. The fillers at Murton threatened to strike in a protest over wages. The trigger came from Murton men who had emigrated to the Doncaster and Nottinghamshire coalfields. They returned during their holidays with pay notes as conclusive proof they were earning up to £7 a week more than Murton men, for the same job.

Sam Watson came out to adress a meeting of the dissident Murton men. Watson's advice was that they should hand 14 days notice in, and when they'd all lost their jobs, they should get the men who started the strike to find them jobs!! When a miner had the temerity to challenge Watson from the floor, suggesting that this wasn't the way things happened, Watson told him that it was certainly the way things would happen this time.

As an old miner bitterly recalled, "he frightened the life out of the men". They were completely demoralised by what Watson said, and "just went back to work and forgot about it". The formally correct procedure for men to protest about the fillers price list was to call a coalfield delegate conference. "But see, things didn't seem to get that far." At Area level, Redhills controlled the union, setting the agenda and dealing autocratically with challenges from the rank and file. Pits were kept isolated, and left to carry on condusting their own internal affairs, whilst that Area dealt with coalfield issues.

5.1.iii MURTON LIVES ON

While the industry was decimated in the 1960's, the union at national and area level accepted pit closures and repressed any attempt to fight them. At Murton, the closures seemed distant, almost irrelevant. Murton had been saved by the sinking of the Hawthorn shaft, which was opened in 1960. This transformed Murton from a "Gutless Giant" (as the pit was then known), into a thriving modern colliery.

A contemporary report captures the extent of the change.

> "Vast changes in the past 3 years have transformed Murton colliery pithead from a grey wilderness of demolition to so drastic a scene of resurrection that the old colliery is hardly now recognisable. Old systems and methods have been made obsolete, the modern is now successfully consolidated and the fact is proclaimed in a revolutionary scheme that marks the end of an era. Not far away... stands the cause of the transformation, the Hawthorn Combined Mine." (Helen Abbott - Murtonian - Sunderland Echo, Oct 24th 1966, p4.)

The Hawthorn shaft and coking plant seemed to guarantee the future of the pit.

Not until 1967 did the first travellers arrive to bring first hand accounts of the wholesale closures in the West of the county. And even then there were only a handful of men from Bowburn. In those days 90% of the workforce of 2000+ lived in Murton, and most of the other 10% were men who'd married out of the village. Often their children would return to Murton. Everyone knew everyone else.

John Cummings described the distinctive relationships which were spawned in this era of the "village colliery".

> "What you've got to understand is that Murton is a very peculiar sort of colliery in as much as it's a family pit. Son followed father. Father followed Grandfather. Overmen would have their fathers being overmen, and their grandfathers would have been overmen." (interview)

Murton's management was stable. From 1936 to 1983 there were just 5 managers.

> "So you had stability with management. You had stability with unions... We had no travellers coming in. We were an island. And it was therefore rather an incestuous sort of relationship which existed at the time." (interview)

One part of this traditional pattern of relationships - typical of most pits - was the strong tendency for mechanics to work large amounts of overtime. This predilection was exaggerated by the tradition in the miners' union of frowning on overtime work (see Krieger, 1983). John Cummings again:

> "Mechanics were always happy so long as they were working 10, 12 shifts a week. And really that hasn't changed very much... You were conditioned to work seven days a week as a matter of course... The only problems we used to have when I took over as secretary at the colliery - indeed for years before that - was when management used to cut back on overtime. That was one issue that would certainly unite the lodge, and cause it to become quite rabid actually!" (interview)

Other mechanics confirmed that from their first days at the pit, management put then under strong pressure to work overtime.

5.1.iv CONCLUSIONS

Although this thesis is concerned with the period from 1978 to 1988, it is impossible to understand the development of political changes over this period without reference to the history and characteristics of Murton, both as a community, and a union. This section has therefore introduced Murton as a place and a community. Essentially, it shows a village dominated by the labourist consensus of the post war period. The NUM dominated local politics, but the politics associated with it were largely uncontested. At pit level, management and union were socialised into a particular indulgency pattern, which included in the mechanics' union a high level of habitual overtime.

5.2.i UNION POLITICS BEFORE POWER LOADING

Interviews with men who remember the immediate post war era suggest that the Murton miners' lodge was dominated by a small clique of Labour Party members (see appendix three for more details). It was a "top-down" lodge, controlled from above by the committee. Some idea of the prevailing philosophy comes from the attitudes of John Toft, Chairman of the miners' lodge from 1958 to 1979. He regarded his job as being to control and limit rank and file militancy. He was deeply committed to the industry's conciliation machinery.

> "My role in anything was always to try and contain disputes. You know, contain them in the area where they were, rather than spread them." (interview)

However, the conciliation machinery effectively worked to management's advantage. It was designed to stop men resorting to their principle weapon - the strike. It attempted to "legalise" management's authority, by replacing the arbitrary power of individual managers with apparently impartial bureaucratic rules. Because the machinery enshrined certain assumptions about "the right to manage", and other management prerogatives, it was very difficult for the union to win cases under it. Workers could only win if they challenged the basic rights of management, and in practice this depended on the power they could exercise through threatening - or implementing - strike action. By substituting negotiation for action, the union lost the initiative in pursuing grievances.

The piece rate wages structure (see chapter four and appendix two) and the nature of the conciliation procedure combined to create a distinctive separation between the DMA (Durham Miners Association[6]) lodges and the Area. Lodges dealt with innumerable grievances generated by piece work wages, and with other problems reported by workers, and in general the exhaustive procedures provided for by the machinery meant that these issues never left the colliery. The Area union on the other hand dealt with the Area Board over a variety of more strategic issues, including welfare benefits, day wage rates, safety issues, and so on. By and large, these separate spheres operated without much mutual interaction. Occasionally, a grievance which entered the consultative machinery at pit level was unresolved, and under these circumstances it was referred to an area meeting of union agents and NCB officials. Also, policies were proposed by the lodges for discussion at area council meetings, but the union bureaucracy was able to keep a tight control over this process.

In Murton the miners' lodge committee accepted this implicit division of labour[7]. It therefore fulfilled the kind of industrial relations function

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[6]The Durham Miners Association is the name still usually applied to the miners' union in Durham. In NUM terms, the DMA constituted the Durham Area of the NUM. In contrast the Durham Colliery Mechanics Association (DCMA) was part of the NUM's "Group number one", also comprising the Durham Enginemen, Northumberland Mechanics and enginemen. Although in NUM terms the unions were part of the same group, the DCMA remained an independent union, as did the DMA.

[7]Not all lodges did. Traditions of militancy stretched back into

for management which nationalisation had envisaged, concerning itself principally with managing disputes thrown up by the labour process. In this sense it was not self-consciously political. Nevertheless, in the sense that the Labour Party retained a complete ideological hegemony over the lodge, the leadership exercised a powerful political function in buttressing a particular view of nationalisation, and trade union function[8].

At this time the mechanics' branch, although politically to the right of the miners at area level, sported a nominally Communist secretary in Murton. However, despite his political affiliation, his policies seem to have differed very little from his Labour comrades in the miners' lodge. John Toft, the miners' Chairman, spoke affectionately of him:

> "He was the most inoffensive Communist you could ever see. But a man of very high standards. He used to tell me he'd tell any new man coming into the pit; 'I want no trouble here mind'." (interview)

At an official level, relations between miners and mechanics were good at Murton. They were helped by a strong local Mining Federation Board (popularly known as "The Fed"), on which members of the mining unions (miners, mechanics, enginemen, COSA[9] and NACODS) met regularly to discuss community issues.

Nevertheless, there was always a level of historical antagonism between the two sections of the workforce, reflecting their different places in the production process. Because they were craftsmen, mechanics tended to see themselves as a cut above "the men". In their turn, miners frequently referred to mechanics as lazy, and elitist. Habitual overtime working by craftsmen (a tradition powerfully fostered by management practices) was a further source of friction with some miners. In the days before power

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(Footnote Continued)
the last century (Douglass, 1972), and were continued by lodges like Ryhope in the 1960's and Easington in the 1970's.

[8] This domination had a long history. Before the Labour Party came into existence, the Mining Federation Board controlled the allocation of seats on the Parish and District Council. When the Labour Party was born in Murton, it was - as elsewhere in the coalfield - effectively a child of the union.

[9] Colliery officials and staffs association - the NUM's clerical section.

loading the differences were accentuated because the two sections were relatively separate, with the majority of mechanics deployed in surface workshops.

5.2.ii THE EFFECT OF MECHANISATION AND THE NPLA

a) On the Mechanics

The increasing mechanisation of coal mining during the 1950's and '60's, culminating in the wholesale adoption of the Anderton Shearer Loader (ASL), led to a revolutionary change in the role of the mechanic. From being an elite surface craftsmen, the typical mechanic became an underground repair, maintenance and installation worker. Now he was in near continuous contact with the miners. However he still retained a distinctive identity. Mechanics occupied a distinctive place in the production process, installing and maintaining mechanical and electrical machinery (fitters and electricians respectively). Craft elitism therefore persisted among some mechanics, especially those still working on the surface. Hence there was still room for antagonism between the two sections.

The reason for changes in the mechanics' role are obvious. As underground machinery developed, increasing in complexity and quantity, so too did the requirement for skilled personnel to maintain it. The ratio of mechanics to miners leapt, rising by the early 1970's from one in ten to one in three at many pits. But the change in the mechanics role was also an uneven development, reflecting the uneven spatial and temporal introduction of mechanisation in the Durham coalfield. Some pits in the West of the county, which enjoyed a legendary reputation for under-mechanisation and underinvestment, retained surface deployment of craftsmen into the 1980's (for example Bearpark). However, most of the big pits in the East of Durham were dominated by powerloading by the mid 1960's.

The new role for mechanics brought changes in union politics. In the 1960's, the Murton mechanics' lodge leadership was still dominated by the elite group of surface craftsmen whose roots lay in the traditional mechanics' role. Sammy Emery had been secretary since the war, a blacksmith and a man "steeped in the traditions of the DCMA". The introduction of new jobs, and new technology brought new problems and new conflicts. The old officials were out of touch with this new environment.

For example one of the main problems at Murton concerned the fact that under power loading rates, mechanics only qualified for the new enhanced rate of pay if they worked on a coaling shift. Shearer faces at the time only coaled one shift out of three. To get round this, men on a non coaling shift would take a "slip shear" - ie take a single shear in order to align the shearer on the face. There were constant arguments as to whether or not shifts with a slip shear attracted the power loading rate. The surface dominated committee couldn't adapt to the changes. These new battles were beyond them. One mechanic joked that Sammy Emery didn't even know what a slip shear was! (It took until the arrival of a new manager in 1970 for management to concede what had apparently been standard practice at other collieries, and pay mechanics power loading rates for all except "prep" [preparation] shifts.)

In 1968, Sammy Emery (secretary) and Billy Young (treasurer) retired, to be replaced by John Cummings and Herbert Wood respectively. So ended the surface workers stranglehold on the branch. However it wasn't until the mid '70's that a self styled "coup" led to the complete dominance of underground men on the committee. The divisions between underground workers and the right wing surface workers were sharp. Coining a colourful election slogan ("If you want your committee to be sound, vote underground; if you don't give a wank, vote for bank!"), left wingers stood a complete slate of underground men against the surface candidates. Numerical dominance meant that once the slate had been agreed, underground victory was assured.

Mechanisation therefore increased involvement in the mechanics branch, and had an important transforming effect on branch politics. This was because whilst the NPLA all but ended local disputes over pay for miners, mechanisation created a series of demarcation and grading disputes (like that over slip shears) for mechanics, which were new arena's for struggle.

b) On the miners

Whilst mechanisation itself transformed branch politics for the mechanics, the miners' lodge was affected more by the introduction of a new wages structure which had its roots in mechanisation. The National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA), introduced in 1966 fell on the lodge like a suffocating

blanket. It formally abolished piece rates in the mining industry[10]. The lodges principle function as the mens' representative in dealing with wages and allowances disputes was lost. All the key issues affecting the workforce were now dealt with at an Area or national level. This led to stagnation in the Murton lodge, and a decline in the calibre of lodge leadership. Attendances at lodge meetings collapsed. One man who was on the committee through this period - Sam - commented:

> "So you got somebody that was on the way to the library or summatt, and he saw somebody going in to the Miners Hall. So he went to see if there was something on. Lo and behold, he comes out and he was on the committee!" (interview)

Chairman of the lodge from 1958 until 1980 was John Toft. In 1962 Joe Clark replaced Jacky Stevens as Murton's secretary, and he also stayed until 1980.

> "Now Joe was the best of a bad bunch. People didn't realise how good Joe was until he retired." (interview)

Together, the two of them dominated Murton miners lodge for twenty years. However, Sam summed up the rest of the committee like this.

> "They weren't articulate. There was an appalling lack of intelligence overall on the committee. In fact, anybody that could string five or six words together, they were brilliant! Councillor Toft had years and years of this where he just carried on. His word was law, sort of thing." (interview)

Huw Beynon - a Durham University academic with years of accumulated experience in the Durham coalfield - suggested that the Murton lodge was run more like a social club than a union. With this kind of committee, it was not surprising that Clark and Toft, who stayed so long, came to dominate the lodge so completely.

The miners' lodge leadership at Murton was characterised therefore by a high degree of stability, political conservatism, and introspection. Adoption of the NPLA caused a collapse in involvement and interest in the lodge, leaving a small group of mainly Labour Party politicians to run it, using an acquired fund of "custom and practice". In a way, industrial relations ran themselves, through the long established procedures of the

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[10] However it is clear from evidence in Krieger (1983) and my own interviews that many under mechanised pits in the west of the County retained piece rates into the 1980's.

conciliation scheme backed up by traditional work arrangements at the colliery. Conflict still existed, and the uniquely oppressive nature of work at the point of production ensured that there was never any danger of class antagonism disappearing down the pit. But conflict was highly localised and isolated, with the union's adherence to the conciliation procedures ensuring that managements prerogatives were never fundamentally challenged. Union officials, having unconsciously internalised the spirit of the PWS, worked to defend conditions at the pit, relying on the union at a higher level to look after their strategic interests, and never questioning the wage relation which underpinned the whole settlement.

For management there was little incentive to change these day to day relationships so long as production targets were met, and the pit kept functioning. These then were the "cosy relationships" which Ian MacGregor found so invidious when he arrived at the NCB in 1983. From the NCB's point of view, cooperative industrial relations provided a beneficial framework for production within existing technological and production constraints, because the union cooperated in maintaining production and modernising the industry. In other words, the union (at all levels) accepted important areas of joint interest with management. From the state's point of view, these relationships were functional because they encapsulated the incorporation of the peak representatives of labour, and ensured that the union never challenged the rights of the state or capital to manage the industry and the economy.

5.2.iii PIT CLOSURES IN THE 1960'S

In 1954 Murton was a big, old colliery - nick-named the "Gutless Giant" - which could have been doomed by the collapse in markets of the 1960's and the NCB strategy to concentrate production in the Central coalfield. Instead, the NCB committed massive investment to the pit, sinking new shafts at Hawthorn, modernising the underground transport system, building a large new coke works, and redeveloping the entire pit as the "Hawthorn Combine". Nearby Elemore, Eppleton and South Hetton pits were integrated into the complex (although South Hetton retained independent coal drawing facilities), creating one of the first major "combined mines" in Durham. The Hawthorn shaft and coking plant seemed to guarantee the future of the pit (see appendix three).

At Murton therefore, the decimation of the West Durham coalfield seemed distant. Not until 1967 did the first travellers arrive to bring first hand accounts of the wholesale closures in the West of the county. And even then there were only a handful of men from Bowburn. In those days 90% of the workforce of 2000+ lived in Murton, and most of the other 10% were men who'd married out of the village. Often their children would return to Murton. Everyone knew everyone else. This miner is therefore articulating a collective experience when he says:

> "When I first started at Murton colliery [in the early
> 1960s] I knew nearly every man I saw there... I was
> related to a lot of them. A lot of them knew me family.
> So it was like everybody knew each other. When I
> returned to Murton [from Hawthorn] two years ago, on a
> Sunday night, starting tub loading[11] at 11 o'clock
> [pm], there were two men out of the full shift that I
> knew. All   the   others   were   strangers   from
> different
> collieries, different areas." (interview)

During the 1960's and 70's however, travellers seem to have been integrated reasonably well into the colliery. Favouritism undoubtedly existed, particularly at lower levels of management (deputies and overmen). Because they knew work teams from Murton, socialised with them, and had worked with them for many years, such behaviour was almost inevitable. However, John Toft admitted that the miners' lodge did insist that recruitment to the pit should be from people living in Murton, and from the families of those who came from Murton. And evidence from Blackhall men who transferred to the pit in the 1980's suggests that the union remained heavily biased towards Murton in its outlook (see section 5.4.ii).

5.2.iv THE 1972 AND 1974 STRIKES

Murton was still essentially a "family pit" when the 1972 strike erupted. Travellers constituted only a tiny fraction of the workforce. The strike was marked by exceptional community solidarity, and a well-organised, united picketing effort. Many young mechanics and miners became involved in picketing. Craft elitism was worn away, as young men from miners' and

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[11]There are three main shifts of 7 1/4 hours at most Durham collieries. "First shift" starts at about 5.40; "nightshift starts at about 12.30; and tubloading at about 23.00.

mechanics' lodges less imbued with the traditions of the past, worked together on the picketing operation. Traditional sectional consciousness was augmented by the development of a strong corporate consciousness as the working class came under attack in the early 1970's (see chapters two and three).

The power of traditional community solidarity was graphically illustrated by the treatment meted out to the members of the supervisors union NACODS who attempted to work during the dispute. Feelings ran high, and despite the fact that NACODS were not technically involved in the strike, many miners resented them crossing their picket lines. Women joined miners on the picket line, and gave the deputies a very rough ride. It was

> "old style picketing. People that went in walked the gauntlet. No police there, nowt. You know, shin kicking, all kinds. But there was never nee bother, as such." (interview)

They were treated like pariahs in the community, and it affected many of them very badly. Some never fully recovered from the psychological trauma. (Memories of this experience had a profound demonstration effect on many miners contemplating returning to work in 1984/5.)

The 1974 strike was a much quieter affair. However, some of the developments of the 1972 strike were consolidated. In particular, the transformation of the mechanics' branch under John Cummings leadership continued. Many of the younger mechanics started to become involved in the union. Group identity was fostered by a series of highly successful social events organised by John, involving mechanics and their wives. Because they were a relatively small branch (less than 300, compared to the miners' 1200+), this group identity was relatively easy to create and sustain.

After the 1974 strike however, in common with the union in general, an aura of complacency settled over both miners' and mechanics' branches at Murton. As the pit car park rapidly expanded, miners began to plan regular overseas holidays for the first time, and labour relations appeared to drift back into the routine of the decade before. However, as chapter four showed, the calm was deceptive. Changes at a global level were beginning to exert pressure on the NCB and the state, and a new offensive against the NUM began to take shape.

5.3: DESTABILISATION ONE: THE AREA INCENTIVE SCHEME

The insularity and complacency characterising both branches of the NUM in Murton could not last. The pressures described in chapter four translated into four specific destabilising influences on management union-relations which developed from 1978 onwards at Murton. They were; the incentive scheme, travellers, the changing age structure of the workforce, and pit closures. Although causally related factors, they were to an extent experienced separately, and can therefore be analysed separately. The following sections deal with each in turn, showing what their place specific impact was, what effect they had in Murton, and how this had an impact on politics and class consciousness, both at a local and national level.

Chapter four showed that the incentive scheme was designed to have particular political effects, and that its introduction was surrounded by bitter controversy. But what effects did it have at pit level, in the short and long term? What impact did it have on union politics, and on management-union relations? And how did these developments tie in to area and national events?

5.3.i HOW THE INCENTIVE SCHEME WORKS

Under the incentive scheme, each face and development is set a standard task. If the men on the face achieve this task they receive a standard bonus. If they achieve more, then they earn an increasing bonus, calculated on a sliding scale. There are two variations in payment systems for face workers. In the first system (called "pooling") each face team earns the same bonus, calculated by averaging the bonuses earned by all of them. (Development workers bonuses have never been pooled.) This was the system which almost every pit in Durham started on in 1978. In the second system (called "face by face") each face team earns the bonus for its face. Bonuses are not averaged between the different face teams. At Murton, the miners voted to pool bonuses, despite advice from the platform at a union meeting that they'd be better off if they went face to face. ("Pooling" was considered to be more collectivist than "face by face", and perhaps the vote in favour of it reflected community collectivism.)

Non face workers earn a percentage of the colliery average bonus. The colliery average is calculated by averaging the bonus achieved on all faces and developments. What percentage of the colliery average a miner earns (100%, 65%, 50%, 40%) is dependant on his grade, which in turn relates to his place in the production process. (Female canteen workers are paid at the lowest surface bonus.) Mechanics also earn a percentage of the colliery average, depending on where they they work.

Apart from divisions between areas and pits (see chapter four), at pit level the incentive scheme became a constant source of conflict. Manning levels, difficult tasks, and any other factors which prevent men earning higher bonuses all created conflict. For example, under the terms of the agreement, if a face team disputed the task set for a face, then they worked "in suspense" for six weeks. During this period they received only a reduced fallback bonus, and the pit average was therefore reduced. If at the end of the six week period management agreed that they they had shown that the target was unreasonably high, then the task was lowered, and the bonus recalculated for the suspense period from the new task. The faceworkers were then paid the backpay accruing from this new bonus. However, the colliery average for the period was _not_ recalculated, and workers on colliery average related bonuses received no back pay. Clearly this situation had the potential to heighten divisions between faceworkers and colliery average workers.

At Murton, divisions between miners and mechanics opened up because of the negotiating arrangements introduced with the incentive scheme. Under the provisions of the scheme, the mechanics had no representation on pit level negotiations about the scheme. This caused some friction between the two lodges for several years, as the mechanics' minute book shows. Although only the miners' lodge were allowed to negotiate incentive deals, the results of these deliberations affected mechanics' wages, as they earned proportions of the colliery average bonus. Some leaders of the mechanics' branch also believed that they were could have negotiated more effectively than the miners' branch.

Under normal conditions, a new task was based on the standards established with similar manning levels, similar machinery in the same seam. If serious disputes arose, then the union could call in an NCB method study team, who would carry out measurements and tests before coming to a decision. Apart

from method study, and working "in suspense" however, there was little official scope for negotiation over tasks, since management could not give more than a 5% concession on a task to the union. But at some pits in the coalfield, branch leaders were able to win significant informal concessions. For example, when it came to calculating the colliery average, they could ask the manager to effectively "pretend" that only twenty five instead of the real twenty seven men had worked on a particular face. Fewer men achieving a given task increased the bonus, so as long as the manager agreed to this little deception, then the bonus and the colliery average could be increased (and the two men taken out of the calculation were also paid the new bonus). At Murton though, the incentive scheme was always played completely by the book. There were no special deals.

Furthermore, the branch decided on whether or not to accept tasks by balloting the face teams concerned. This enhanced the divisive effect of the scheme, by giving faceworkers the only say in an issue which affected the whole workforce. In doing so it perpetuated the traditional dominance of faceworkers in the NUM. (An alternative method of deciding tasks would have been for the branch committee to make a recommendation to the entire membership at a branch meeting - thus collectivising the decision, and also offering the members a clear lead.)

5.3.ii DISPUTES OVER THE INCENTIVE SCHEME AT MURTON

From 1978 onwards, the incentive scheme caused constant problems at the pit. From time to time discontent erupted into collective action. However, the very nature of the incentive scheme was to split workers off from each other, and thereby discourage collective action. But since fundamental conflicts of interest still existed, men still took action. Often this was at the level of individuals, or small work groups, who fought for their own improvement. In this way the incentive scheme isolated conflict, because conflicts were generated at a small scale, and therefore the obvious level at which to resolve them was at this group level. It split workers from each other because it limited the basis for a united interest in any issue.

Chapter three described four levels of consciousness which could be identified in working class groups (hegemonic, corporate, sectional and "factory"). In the case of miners, "pit" consciousness substitutes easily for "factory" consciousness. However, the effects of the incentive scheme

suggest a fifth level of consciousness - "group" consciousness. This applies to miners who identify with their work group - for example, faceworkers. Within mining there is a long tradition of this type of consciousness, often associated with the traditional dominance of faceworkers (although see Daunton (1981) for strong regional variations in the extent of this elitism). However, in the same way that identification of corporate consciousness does not exclude simultaneous adoption of hegemonic consciousness, the existence of group consciousness does not rule out the attainment of "higher" levels of consciousness. Group consciousness is particularly significant in the coal industry because, in the absence of a strong counter ideology, it is easy for group consciousness to become the prime level at which workers identify themselves. Intentionally or not, it seems clear that the incentive scheme accentuates group consciousness at the expense of "factory" (pit) and corporate consciousness.

In times of profitability enough flexibility may exist for lower management to negotiate informal agreements settling grievances with work groups. However, at Murton the inflexible operation of the AIS led to a high level of dissatisfaction with the operation of the bonus scheme. But it is also clear that the response to this situation accentuated some of the divisive effects of group consciousness. This is demonstrated by the pattern of disputes in the period 1978-84 (for further details on disputes during this period, see appendix four).

On May 17th 1978, powerloaders on E51 refused to descend into the pit in a protest at the depressed level of bonus payments. The rest of the miners' lodge walked out in sympathy. They went back to work the next day after a union Special Meeting which passed a committee recommendation that they work under protest, activating the conciliation machinery. This dispute set the scene for the next two years. Failure to resolve disputes through the agreed procedures meant a build up of frustration and anger as a series of issues built up. For example, on December 11th 1978 it was reported to the miners' lodge that a deputation would include the subject of E80's bonus. On June 14th 1980 a letter was received by the lodge from the manager concerning a "restriction of effort" on E52, the problem apparently a manning dispute.

Finally matters came to a head on September 2nd 1980. Faceworkers on E80 walked out, and the rest of the pit followed. It quickly emerged that the

dispute was a focus for all the simmering discontent at the pit, and at least four issues were involved. The spark came from the practice of "teeing out" men from a face to a lesser paid job[12]. Complaints about "teeing out" had surfaced regularly over the past year. The strike lasted until the weekend, although it seems that it did not achieve many of its objectives (see appendix four).

Significantly, this dispute was both initiated and ended by facemen. Whilst the miners' minutes record a unanimous decision to return to work, interviews confirmed that only faceworkers were involved in this vote. Defending this procedure, the traditionalist lodge treasurer argued that this was a faceman's dispute, and if everyone had a vote then the pit could have stayed on strike even though all the faceworkers were happy to end the strike. A leading left wing activist – Frank Duffy – argued that this was a disingenuous position, because the face workers' bonus affects all workers at the pit, who earn a percentage of the colliery average bonus. Therefore, faceworkers' bonus rates were the concern of every worker.

In fact, the faceworkers vote owed more to the historical and continuing dominance of faceworkers within the NUM than to any intrinsic merits of the procedure. Divisions between the relatively highly paid, high status face jobs, and other underground ("backbye") and surface workers were exacerbated by the incentive scheme. Under the scheme, face workers became the wage leaders at each pit. Their results determined the wages of non task based workers. Action by face workers therefore had the potential to affect earnings throughout the colliery. When combined with their ability to regulate production, it can be seen that power loaders were relatively powerful within the pit. However, the incentive scheme encouraged the deployment of this power for group purposes, and frequently this strained relationships with other workers. For example, if power loaders led a pit walk out over a bonus issue, then colliery average workers lost their bonus for a week. Furthermore, they might have little opportunity to make up their low wages with overtime. Face workers on the other hand only lost

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[12]"Teeing out" refers to the practice of moving a faceworker on 100% bonus onto a lower paid job if that worker finishes their work before the end of the shift. See appendix four for details about this strike.

their bonus for the day(s) of the action, and their relatively high earnings could easily be topped up with extra overtime.

The failure of the 1980 "teeing out" strike was apparent within weeks, as complaints about the bonus continued to preoccupy lodge meetings. Finally, at a special meeting on 25th October 1981, the committee - forced into action by the depth of discontent at the pit - recommended a work to rule in protest at the low bonus (see appendix four for more details). But the manager refused to negotiate unless the restriction was ended, and five days later the committee got cold feet and recommended calling off the work to rule. They were defeated 85-65 at a branch meeting. On November 8th, after minor concessions from the manager the committee voted 10-6 to again recommend a return to normal working. At a special meeting however, the recommendation was rejected, this time overwhelmingly. On 15th November the committee again voted (13-7) to recommend a return to normal working. But the full meeting rejected this advice once more, and by 62 to 55 decided to continue the work to rule. Four days later however, after intervention from the area union (in the shape of a letter from the President, Harold Mitchell), the men decided unanimously to return to work.

This action was highly significant for a number of reasons. The committee was forced into action because of the mens' mounting dissatisfaction with the bonus. The branch leadership quickly lost its nerve and tried to call the action off. But the members decided that backing down would get them nowhere, and voted to continue the work to rule. Most significantly however, the decisive force behind the dispute were the recently arrived travellers from Blackhall colliery (see section 5.5 below). A new political force had entered the Murton branch. At Blackhall, a strong, well organised branch had won significant informal concessions from management over the operation of the incentive scheme, and the men who transferred to Murton after Blackhall's closure were determined to stiffen what they saw as an unacceptably weak union organisation, and win better conditions. As section 5.5.ii shows, Blackhall transferees applied a crucial political pressure to the Murton branch. In effect they challenged the official leadership, providing an "alternative leadership" within the pit.

At about the same time as the work to rule, another attempt was made to improve wages, by changing the incentive scheme from a "pooling" to a "face by face" system. Although discussions began in the lodge at the start of

1981, it wasn't until August 8th that a ballot was called. The decision was to follow almost all the pits in the county, and go face to face. Blackhall miners again played a prominent role. They were convinced that more money would be earned going face to face, and campaigned strongly for the change. This demonstrates the strong "pit militancy" of the Blackhall men. They worked hard to increase their earnings, challenging the level of bonuses, and attempting to force the lodge into more aggressive bargaining with management. Underground at Murton they regularly confronted management, challenging long established customs and management prerogatives, providing an important demonstration effect for young Murton miners in the process.

Their determined and self conscious intervention in the work to rule, going face to face, and later the election of John Dixon as lodge secretary (see section 5.6.iii), confirmed the Blackhall mens' conscious decision to stick together. As well as a highly developed pit consciousness however, many of the Blackhall men were also politically left wing. Their branch secretary had been a leading member of the Durham Broad Left (see section 4.3), and he had campaigned hard for progressive policies within his branch. The Blackhall men therefore constituted a highly significant educating element at Murton, both by their aggressive pit militancy, and their championing of left wing policies.

Disputes over bonuses, and the aggressive reaction of Blackhall travellers to the Murton branch, raise important questions about the character and quality of leadership in the Murton miners' branch. What was branch leadership like at this time? Was there a leadership crisis in the Murton branch? Why was the leadership apparently unable to establish itself in the early 1980's, after so many years of stability? How did the lodge leadership react to the changing environment?

5.3 LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

All the disputes regarding the incentive scheme were spontaneous actions. One way of interpreting this is as the persistent failure of the lodge leadership to settle the memberships' grievances. Compared to other collieries, Murton miners' lodge was thought to be weak and ineffective. Management was on top. Men transferring in from other pits noted that Murton had worse deals on bonus, and a more oppressive management than they'd been used to. The mechanics on the other hand were known to be relatively well organised, but right wing. How then, and to what extent did the two branches change?

5.3.i THE MINERS' LODGE

In 1980 the leadership of the miners' lodge entered a period of instability. For 20 years the committee had been dominated by John Toft and Joe Clark (see table 1). The men who followed failed to impose their authority on the lodge[12]. During a period of increasing turbulence and change, the officials and their committee were unable to develop strategies which protected or advanced the memberships interests. This was particularly so because of the continuous change in membership, and because of the developing management strategy, which was intent on rewriting traditional management - union relations (see chapter four). Cosy relationships no longer worked for management.

Politically the lodge leadership was "moderate" and "right wing", but what does this mean? After all, the committee men were Labour supporters, differing only in their degree of support for the party. Outside Murton, they might be considered collectivist and socialist. To answer this question, and to provide fuller definitions of other terms like "militant" and "left wing" it is necessary to return to the categories and theories of chapter three. For as was made clear there, labels are of little use unless their content is explicitly stated. In this chapter, two key distinctions are adopted, between "moderate" and "militant" on the one hand, and "right

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[12] Both miners' and mechanics' branches elect their committees and officials in annual ballots of their members.

wing" and "left wing" on the other. What then do these labels imply, and why have they been chosen?

Taking the latter question first, these two dichotomous pairings reflect categories frequently used by miners and mechanics in Murton, and as such they are anchored in the experiences of those under study. Nevertheless, their usage in Murton is neither universal, nor systematic. It also needs to be born in mind that all four categories constitute "ideal types", whereas reality defies such simple polarisation. Inevitably, people occupy positions on a continuum between these extremes, and also - most importantly - their position along these lines is rarely fixed. Despite these reservations, generalisations are possible. Starting then with the first dichotomous pairing therefore, what is it that distinguishes a "moderate" from a "militant"?

Essentially the division hinges on the readiness to resort to action in pursuit of a claim. A militant believes in the power of, and the need for, direct action. Moderates err towards negotiation and compromise, preferring to put their faith in the power of reasonable argument between rational people. Significantly therefore, there is no intrinsic political content to militancy (although it invariably has political effects, both for management and the union). It is a two edged sword, whose exact character and impact depend on its articulation to a conscious strategy. Leadership often plays a crucial role in channelling militancy, helping determine, for example, whether it is wielded for group, sectional or hegemonic aims.

Political distinctions are best drawn between right and left wings. For the left, as Thatcherism gained a hold, the task was increasingly to challenge the capitalist organisation of the industry. They recognised the need to identify and join with other sections of the working class, and to fight against the government. They possessed a strong commitment to trade union principles, in particular a fundamental belief in solidarity at all levels of the movement. For some, this extended further, towards belief in the establishment of a socialist order in Britain. Corporate consciousness was therefore strong, with some elements of hegemonic consciousness apparent in some individuals.

Right wingers on the other hand, sought a continuation of the status quo. They saw the problems facing the industry as a Thatcherite aberration, and

sought to defend the coal industry - and in particular Murton - from the incursion of such deviant policies. Their politics were therefore sectional, dominated by the need to preserve the miners position of relative privilege. In trade union terms, they deployed collective power for sectional or group aims.

This typology is clearly restricted to specific historical and social conditions. It is also couched in terms which stand outside the discourse of most of the people it refers to. As well as differences in terminology, this reflects the hesitant, partial and fitful way in which class consciousness develops. Rarely is the process as smooth and clear as the categories of language continually try and confer upon it. In particular, it is crucial to realise that many - if not most - miners fitted into these categories only by inference. In other words, for most of the time, they barely fitted themselves into any groups. Their politics - beyond a basic commitment to solidarity and welfare Labourism - were not explicit or coherent. Only left wing activists had a relatively clear, conscious political strategy.

Having unpacked the categories of political consciousness applying in Murton, and recognised their limitations, the role of leadership falls more naturally into focus. Whilst it is to be expected that leaders would posses a sharper awareness of their political orientation, and their political aims, this can by no means be taken for granted. Hence the actual practices and beliefs of different leaders, and leadership groups, require specific examination.

In Murton the miners' branch committee was "right wing". In the early 1980's they tended to be politically unaware, in as much as broader political and strategic issues did not figure in their conception of their role as lodge officials. They were immersed in the day to day running of the lodge, representing the men in the pit consultative machinery. Wider strategic issues about the running of the industry were not often addressed by the committee. In this sense they were not conscious political agents. They were right wing in the sense that they rejected political campaigning, had no conception of challenging the way the industry was run, and generally supported the status quo.

Another significant aspect of the lodge leadership was a marked lack of confidence. Strong and united leadership might have been able to resolve the problems with the incentive scheme, but as a noted left winger - Frank Duffy - commented, this was lacking on the Murton committee.

> "They've never felt confident enough to address the majority of the men on any major problem. They've always been afraid of the reactionary section of the workforce who in a lot of cases were more articulate than the leaders... I would say [the reactionaries] were the majority, and they were certainly the loudest shouters at the meetings." (interview)

Hence the leaderships political inclinations found an important echo in the attitudes of a significant section of the workforce. Because the leadership was not strongly politically motivated, and lacked confidence, a belligerent (and occasionally militant) right wing group exercised considerable influence on lodge policy.

As a consequence of weak leadership, problems were rarely resolved satisfactorily through the conciliation machinery. Branch officials lacked the power to persuade management to back down, and they lacked the confidence to use any implicit or explicit threats of action to force a management retreat. Because of the lack of conscious political commitment by committee members, there was little active campaigning within the lodge. Consequently, there was little union resistance to the aggressive new management strategy which was beginning to penetrate even to far flung corners of the British coalfield like Murton. Nevertheless, this was not a stable situation.

A weak and apathetic leadership might have been able to stumble quietly on in the days of cosy management-union relations. But those days were under threat. By the 1980's, the grip of the right wing group was being challenged, as miners transferred in from closed collieries, and (mainly) younger elements within the workforce were radicalised. Years of complacency and inactivity hastened the collapse of the right, for this was no machine dominated branch. Sections 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 take up these developments, showing how the political complexion of the lodge began to change under the pressure of objective circumstances and an active left wing opposition to the weak lodge leadership.

5.3.ii THE MECHANICS BRANCH.

In their overall political complexion, the miners' and mechanics' branches entered the 1980's with a very similar profile. The mechanics' branch officials were on the right of the Labour spectrum, and committed to the conciliation process. They were moderate too, opposed to spontaneous outbursts of rank and file action. Unlike the miners' leadership however, the mechanics' officials (and in particular the secretary John Cummings) had a clear and consistent idea behind the direction they steered the branch in. But the branch itself contained a number of people who rejected this leadership.

For example, one militant mechanic described in detail an incident which captures the attitude and effects of a right wing branch leadership, and the way the conciliation procedures work for management rather than for the men in dispute (see appendix four - section A4.3.iv - for further details). He walked off the job after being ordered to walk to a district for which he was not rostered. Other mechanics joined him, and together they rode to the surface. There they were confronted not just by an angry manager, but also by an angry branch secretary, who accused them of blatantly flouting procedures by not reporting the incident, and then working "under protest". But as the mechanic said:

> "the next week there was a shift rota fixed up for that district... and it got sorted out. Positive action. Positive action gets results every time." (interview)

It was action which brought concessions from management. Putting complaints into procedure rarely brought satisfaction, and often an individual could not be bothered to pursue the matter through the tortuous conciliation procedure.

The working relationship between the mechanics' branch secretary - John Cummings (now the local MP) - and the personnel manager at Murton reflected the way in which the branch was socialised into the pits indulgency pattern. A senior member of Murton's management commented:

> "I mean Cummings used to openly admit to me... he didn't have a clue. He was more of a politician. He's where he should be [ie in the House of Commons]. And he used to come into my office and say; 'Well, can you tell us about such and such, and why does this and why does that happen. What's the thinking behind this.' And I used to tell him... John used to come into my office times without number. Mainly in the late afternoon when

he was coming back from Easington. And have a good
chat. If he'd had a lodge meeting with uproarious
effect the night before he'd call in. 'Aye', he'd say,
'We had the gloves off with Temple [his principle left
wing protagonist] again last night'. (interview)

Behind the "right wing", "moderate" approach of leaders like John Cummings
lay an implicit internalisation of the PWS, in which the union fought
within the agreed procedures for the defence of its members immediate
economic interests. This philosophy came under threat as it became
increasingly clear that the NCB was embarked on a confrontational course
with the union.

Although the political similarities between miners' and mechanics' branches
outweighed their differences, there were some significant points of
contrast. One of the most significant was the calibre of lodge officials in
the lodges. A member of Murton's management summed it up when he said; "the
difference was Cummings".

John Cummings, the secretary of the mechanics' branch from 1968 to 1987
(see table 2) was a strong and able lodge secretary. He dominated his lodge
in a way which, after 1980, no-one in the miners' lodge did. As an
experienced and ambitious politician (he was leader of Easington District
Council from 1981 - 1986) he brought both political experience and a new
dimension of political awareness to the branch. He encouraged mechanics to
go on educational courses. He helped set up a night school class which ran
for several years in Murton. Huw Beynon at Durham University played a key
role in running these courses, which introduced mechanics to the
approaching crisis in the industry. The courses educated a core of
activists, broadening their awareness of the problems in the industry, and
raising questions about strategies to defend the miners' interests. Unlike
many of the miners' officials, John Cummings was confident, and aware of
his ability to lead the lodge, and aware of the limits to that leadership.

One further difference between the miners' and mechanics' lodges concerned
the character of opposition to the leadership. In the mechanics there was a
strong left wing opposition to the moderate, right wing leadership. This
was centred around Dave Temple, a WRP (Workers Revolutionary Party)
activist, and a tireless fighter in the struggle to raise workers
consciousness. He constantly pushed against the cautious, conciliatory
instincts of John Cummings and the majority of the mechanics' committee,

encouraging militant action which would strip away what he saw as the veneer of cooperation and compromise between management and union. Temple and other left wingers built on changing material conditions, and their campaigns began to turn the branch decisively to the left in the late 1970's.

a) The C Seam loco road dispute.

After years of struggling to get a positive response within the branch during the somnambulist years following Plan For Coal, the first major success for the left was the battle over the C seam loco road at the end of 1978. It concerned the 9.00am shift - considered the only sociable shift at the pit - which was having to walk inbye[13] from the E seam up to the higher C seam workings. The old road from the shaft at the C seam level was deemed by management to be out of compliance with the Mines and Quarries Act. However, the walk from E to C was four miles, up the 1:18 loco[14] road, and it was a safety nightmare.

At a branch meeting on December 5th, Dave Temple attempted to persuade the branch to take immediate firm action, by refusing to use the roadway. John Cummings however proposed - successfully - that the matter should be referred again for consultation. This resolution was a classic attempt to draw the sting from a militant proposal, by putting the matter back in to the procedures. However, further negotiations only produced from the manager the tough response that if they didn't like walking in on the E to C road, he would knock the 9.00am shift off, and put the men in the normal three shifts, where they would be able to travel inbye in a man set. He was clearly banking on the mens desire to keep the 9.00am shift, which would make them back down.

At a crucial special meeting called to discuss this response at the beginning of February 1979, left and right confronted each other over

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[13]Going "inbye" means travelling into the pit, and travelling "outbye" refers to journeys out of the colliery.

[14]A loco road has a railway track running along it, for underground transport of men and materials.

whether or not to call the managers bluff. John Cummings argued that there was a danger of a strike situation developing, and this should be avoided as it would cause unnecessary hardship, and be counterproductive. The left argued in response that they should refuse to use the road out of principle. For once, John's leadership was not enough, and the branch policy was changed. The manager caved in immediately, and agreed to do the work necessary to reopen the old C seam roadway. As the left had argued, he needed the 9.00 am shift, to cover between coaling shifts.

It was the probably the first time the left had beaten the secretary John Cummings on any major issue. From now on John's dominance of the lodge was not so certain. It was no longer a dominance based entirely on his own political instincts. In order to sustain his dominance, he had to modify his political stance to take account of a growing left wing opposition which was able to build on increasing dissatisfaction within the pit, caused by powerful destabilising influences.

b) The nurses day of action

This development of leadership and rank and file advanced further in 1982 when the TUC organised a campaign in defence of the NHS. A "Day of Action" was called for September 22nd. The NUM's NEC issued a call for a strike on this day, but without a national ballot it was a non binding request. Throughout the country the response was patchy. Every pit in South Wales took action, and many in Yorkshire. In Durham, the sporadic pattern of action was taken by many activists as a good indicator of the level of political development at the various branches. Those that ignored the strike call were politically right wing, whilst those that responded had a strong left.

In Murton, the miners' lodge decided to leave the decision up to the individuals conscience. In the mechanics' lodge, the left - lacking confidence in their ability to win a ballot - wanted to leave it to the individual as well. But they planned to ensure a strike by putting a picket line on, hoping that no one would cross it. However the right argued for a ballot, saying that they could win support for action if they balloted. Secretly however, many apparently hoped that the ballot would scupper action. Nevertheless, the right just won the vote, and a ballot was called.

The left then threw themselves into the campaign to win support for action. A public meeting was organised by the branch, addressed by a representative of the health service unions. And against the odds, they won the ballot. Although it was still a non binding vote almost all miners and mechanics went on strike. (One of the only mechanics to go in was the leader of the faction who had argued for a ballot in the first place!)

This ballot result was highly significant. According to Dave, it marked the point where John Cummings realised the potential power of campaigning in the lodge. He remembers John saying to him after the campaign, "We've got to become a campaigning branch". The strike also marked a significant break with the post 1974 complacency which had engulfed the union - it began the process of breaking out of the cocoon which the union had sheltered in. By now John Cummings thoughts were turning to the election for general secretary of the Mechanics Association. His candidacy required a high profile, to get him known throughout the coalfield. To achieve this, he needed his branch behind him. And with the powerful left in his branch, leading them required taking up increasingly left wing positions. In part therefore, John's way of dealing with a left he instinctively knew he could not defeat in a head on clash, was to take on left wing positions.

It is important to realise that this was not necessarily a calculating or even conscious process. It wasn't crude opportunism which pushed John Cummings left. His wider political involvement had convinced him that the union was facing a major crisis. As the crisis began to deepen he actively sought to encourage wider awareness of the situation in the industry.

The memberships' consciousness was changing gradually in response to the changing material environment, and the activities of conscious agents (predominantly on the left) who were attempting to increase political awareness of these changes by interpreting them in specific ways. Right wing arguments were increasingly squeezed out, as the political environment became more confrontational. Pushed by his memberships increasing militancy, of which he was originally suspicious, Cummings began to move with them. The mechanics became known as a campaigning lodge, developing a strong left wing profile. In 1983 for example, completely against the trend in the county and nationally, the Murton mechanics achieved a majority for strike action in the ballot over Lewis Merthyr (there are no branch figures available, but see chapter four for the national result).

As pit closures began to increase in Durham from the late 1970's onwards, they began to have quite specific - and dramatic - objective effects on the composition of workforces at the remaining collieries. In particular, the age and residential composition of the workforce at Murton was transformed in a very visible and very rapid process of change. It is clear therefore that some changes in the political profile of the Murton branches were simply due to changes in personnel. However, it is also true that new workers at the pit participated in collective movements in consciousness, with their own politics - and that of the Murton men they came into contact with - interacting to bring changes in both.

Essentially therefore, the composition of the workforce changed in two important dimensions[15]. Firstly, the residential basis shifted away from Murton as the numbers of miners travelling to work at the colliery (following their own pits' closure) increased. Secondly, due to the operation of the redundancy scheme, travellers tended to be younger than the average, and they took the place of older men who left the industry (section 5.6). This section considers the former dimension of change.

In 1967 the once giant Bowburn colliery closed, and the first travellers arrived at Murton. They were absorbed quietly in to the workforce. There were vacancies available, and there were relatively few of them since they were shared around the many other pits open then. A second significant group of arrivals were from Elemore (the Elemore "Wombles") in 1974 - part of the same Hawthorn Combine as Murton. They seem to have been accepted easily by the Murton workforce, although some rumours of favouritism towards Murton men on the part of lower management and the miners' lodge committee have persisted.

The following section concentrates on the events surrounding the arrival at Murton of a significant group of travellers from Blackhall Colliery. There were at least three other major groups of transferees into Murton before

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[15]No NCB figures are available for the colliery workforce before 1984.

the strike, stemming from a major manpower rundown at Horden, and the closures of South Hetton and East Hetton (see table 5.3 for a detailed breakdown of the residential background of Murton's workforce in 1984). Focusing on Blackhall reflects the major impact this group of travellers had as conscious agents of political change. Although not necessarily numerically the most significant travelling group, they were unquestionably the most politically influential.

5.4.i HOW MURTON REACTED TO THE TRAVELLERS FROM BLACKHALL

Blackhall travellers were special from the start. They were the first big group of transferees of the 1980's, and their arrival swept an icy blast of change into the cosy world of Murton politics. The key change compared to previous transferals, was that the Blackhall influx coincided with the end of juvenile recruitment and apprenticeships at Murton.

> "You started to get the resentment - it would be 1980 -
> when they stopped setting the local lads on!.. That was
> when the resentment was really starting, when a lad
> who'd worked at the pit all his life couldn't get his
> son a job, which had happened up till then for
> generations." (interview)

It was a rude awakening, and led to a hostile reception for the travellers from many Murton men.

The current secretary of the miners' lodge admitted that Murton miners had a tendency to see the pit as "theirs", and therefore to resent travellers.

> "The crack was; 'Murton men should get this, and you'll
> get what we leave you'. And then they say; 'We're all
> Murton men'. Other men say; 'You'll never be a Murton
> man, you don't belong in Murton, so how can you class
> yourselves as Murton men?' Which is wrong, because we
> all work at the pit." (interview)

This interpretation certainly ties in with the understanding travellers had of their position. They felt that Murton men wanted to keep the pit for themselves, clinging on to the (objectively outdated) illusion that Murton was a village colliery, with all the meanings that went with it.

The closure of Blackhall was announced in July 1980. However, it was a phased closure, so that eventually, of the 1318 employed at the time of the closure, 535 accepted redundancy, 732 (55.5%) transferred, 38 stayed to maintain the pumping station, and 13 retired. Of the 535 transferees, 132 went to Murton in the very first stage of the phased rundown (see Hudson et

<u>al</u>, 1984, 11). Forty redundancies were proposed by the manager at Murton for January 1981, to make way for the Blackhall transferees.

The miners' lodge reacted strongly against the news. On September 30th 1980 it was reported that a deputation had seen management to request that Blackhall trainee power loaders (faceworkers) be put at the bottom of the Murton waiting list, and not slotted in according to age and length of service. This desire for Murton preference was forcefully restated at a full meeting on February 1st, 1981, less that two weeks before the Blackhall men were due to arrive. On the committees recommendation it was agreed:

> "That we inform Mr T Callan [General Secretary of the Durham Miners Association] to seek advice on the Blackhall men coming to Murton and get a postponement of two weeks to give the lodge time to discuss with management the following:- That spare power loaders get permanent jobs before Blackhall men. The same to apply to datal hands who would like to be upgraded to grades B-C, and that a list be drawn up for men who would like to be upgraded to grades B-C. And that surface jobs be kept open for our underground members who are sick or injured. And that we seek to have jobs for our school leavers. And that the training list be honoured."
> (Murton miners' minute book)

The language of this resolution indicates the depth of fears about future employment and conditions at the pit. (Not until March 23rd 1982 was this minute rescinded, and all transferees officially placed on equal terms. And it was the Blackhall men themselves who were instrumental in achieving this change of policy.) Meanwhile, on March 7th 1981, with a second batch of Blackhall travellers threatened, it was unanimously resolved:

> "That a letter be sent to Durham that we do not take any more Blackhall men as there has been no recruitment of juveniles at Murton." (Murton miners' minute book)

Ten days later however, the revolt ended.

> "It was agreed to inform the full meeting that we will have to take the Blackhall men as it is county policy passed on September 15th 1978." (miners' minute book)

Interestingly, a similar revolt took place at Easington at around the same time. In Murton, as at Easington, that hostility stemmed from the end of juvenile recruitment in the early 1980's. This coincided with a rapid increase in unemployment, and the visible collapse of the North East's manufacturing economy. Effectively the "indulgency patterns" of the post

war era were under attack (Gouldner, 1955; see also chapter three above). Murton miners had become used to a certain set of expectations, which together helped to regulate management-worker relations. One of the key elements of this "indulgency pattern" was the recruitment of youngsters from Murton into the pit. Rejection of this pattern precipitated considerable discontent, destabilising relations between management and men. However, Blackhall men (and to an extent other travellers as well) were used to a different "indulgency pattern", and therefore brought a different set of expectations to their new pit. Frustration built up among different groups of workers therefore, who all felt that expected norms of behaviour were being broken.

In this context, the reaction of Murton miners was perhaps understandable, if still chauvinistic. After almost 150 years, the identification of pit and community had broken down. The unwritten understanding - cultivated by paternalistic owners and the NCB - that the pit was in some way a part of the community, and therefore owed something to that community, had been shattered. The first response to this threat was a closing of ranks in an attempt to defend the community. This reflected the politics of the post war era, which promoted an ideology which accepted the right of management to manage the industry. The first reaction to the threat of job loss therefore was to see it as a local problem, with local solutions.

However, as chapter four demonstrated, changes in Murton stemmed from powerful forces a long way removed from the management block at the colliery. That this was not immediately apparent to many miners indicates the very real limits placed on the development of consciousness by the weight of historical experience and ideology. Whether or not workers came to understand the crisis facing the industry, and how they would respond to it, were matters dependant on the action of conscious agents working in their particular material context.

Significantly, travellers never became a major problem in the mechanics' branch. Although many mechanics also held views similar to the miners, the mechanics' leadership tried hard to ensure prejudice did not affect lodge policy. When three surface electricians complained to the branch that Blackhall transferees working on the surface, who were on a guaranteed power loading wage, were being put in for overtime rotas (and therefore being given the chance to earn even more than the Murton surface workers),

John Cummings defended lodge policy. He insisted that all members should be treated equally. He strongly advised against changing branch policy, because the protection of earnings benefits received by transferees (which guaranteed their power loading wage even if they were assigned to surface work), were part of national agreements won by the union. He argued that once travellers arrived, they were Murton men. A combination of relatively few travellers and decisive leadership therefore meant that the mechanics' branch had fewer problems accepting the new members in to the branch. In contrast, the miners' right wing leadership backed right wing elements in the workforce, failing to challenge knee-jerk reactions to travellers.

5.4.ii HOW BLACKHALL TRAVELLERS REACTED TO MURTON

The hostility of the Murton workforce to the arrival of the Blackhall men was matched by the negative feelings of the transferees to their new pit. Travellers from Blackhall were amongst the most disaffected of those that arrived at Murton. As the ex lodge secretary at Blackhall said, "Murton and Blackhall has gone down in folklore!" One of the most important factors behind the generation of this folklore was the difference in power relations between management and the union at Murton compared to Blackhall. At Blackhall the union held on to cavilling[16], despite several management offensives against the system. From the lodges point of view, it was an important weapon. Because appalling working conditions in the undersea districts at Blackhall coexisted with relatively better conditions in the inland district of the colliery, management was in a potentially strong position to divide and rule the workforce by operating a "blue eyed boy" system of favouritism. By maintaining control of manpower deployment, the union stopped this possibility, and ensured unity against the employer.

Throughout most of the Durham coalfield (including Murton) the introduction of the NPLA in 1966 spelt the end of the traditional cavilling system of deciding job allocations (Krieger 1983). It brought such a drastic

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[16]Put simply, cavilling is a lottery systen organised by union branches (typically four times a year) to decide workplace allocation. It is unique to the north east coalfield, and is significant because it approriates an important management perogative, namely the right to decide who shoud work where (Krieger, 1983).

reorganisation of work and payment systems, that it broke years of "custom and practice" (as it was intended to), giving rise to a new set of workplace relationships. However, Blackhall, in common with several other Durham collieries, successfully resisted management pressure to end cavilling.

The same lodge unity and strength which at Blackhall retained cavilling also helped the union win significant concessions under the incentive scheme. For example, the bonus rate for power loaders assigned to non power loading work should have been the bonus rate applicable to the new grade. But at Blackhall fallback bonus for power loaders was never less than 100%. And no underground worker was on less than 65% bonus, whereas at Murton datal workers were on 50% (as stipulated by the scheme). At Blackhall therefore the men were united behind a strong leadership, and they developed a high level of work control and "pit militancy". Also, their branch delegate was a leading left wing activist in the coalfield, and this promoted a more progressive consciousness among many Blackhall miners.

Arriving at Murton was a considerable shock to the Blackhall men. They found oppressive management, an undercurrent of hostility from the men, and a weak union. They also felt they were discriminated against both by first line management, who favoured the Murton men they had worked with for so long, and by the Murton men, who enjoyed the benefits of this collaboration. Murton men have denied that there was any animosity towards Blackhall (or other) travellers, but my interviews with travellers suggest that this rather glossed over the reality. Although many Murton miners fully accepted travellers, there were undeniably important elements of hostility and discrimination against the new arrivals. For example, at Murton a traveller could find himself dropped on to 50% bonus when he was doing the same job as a Murton man who was receiving a higher level of pay.

The miners' lodge at Murton helped perpetuate discrimination against travellers. Blackhall travellers found the union officials failed to pursue their complaints with any vigour, or were incompetent. For example, Blackhall miners discovered that travellers who arrived from Bowburn in 1967 were still unaware that if the NCB bus failed to arrive to take them to work, they could phone the pit and claim a days pay. Instead, they used to phone in and claim one of their rest days. This discrepancy arose after complaints from Blackhall travellers, and an investigation by the Blackhall

branch secretary on behalf of his ex members. Murton branch officials had been unable or unwilling to pursue the matter.

Travellers from East Hetton also revealed strong dissatisfaction with Murton. One man who lived in Trimdon Grange, damned Murton with the epithet "Stalag 17". It was a nickname that stuck. In his experience, East Hetton was a "friendly pit". Murton was different. He summed Murton up like this:

> "It would break their hearts to smile or even laugh
> down there. It was a standing joke that you had to get
> into a refuge hole to have a laugh! That's the way it
> was. It was bloody serious." (interview)

Despite their dissatisfaction, and unlike Blackhall travellers, the East Hetton men did little to try and change the situation at Murton. Their own branch had been weak, and in any case, relatively few came to Murton.

In contrast, the Blackhall mens' negative feelings had a constructive element, because they set out to change the Murton lodge. They had two main effects in Murton. In general terms they brought home the effects of a shrinking coalfield. They came from a once large pit, and their arrival coincided with and caused the end of juvenile recruitment and craft apprenticeships at the pit. But they also campaigned actively within the lodge. Their militant refusal to accept managements word, by arguing back, provided an inspirational demonstration effect to younger miners at Murton, and helped set in motion major political changes, particularly in the miners' lodge (see section 5.6).

At the same time as the residential composition of the workforce was changing, and for broadly similar reasons, the age composition of the workforce was altering. Table 5.4 and graph 12 show the age composition of Murton's workforce in 1984, alongside a comparison in table 5.5 with national figures. Redundancy and severance schemes had two main effects. Firstly they undermined opposition to pit closures by dividing the workforce. Secondly they altered the age composition of the remaining workers.

As the number of pit closures increased again in the 1980's (see chapter four), the NCB, with government and EEC help, developed a large and progressively more generous package of measures to encourage redundancy and early retirement (Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1983, 24-26). When a pit closed, redundancy payments were available for men over 50. They consisted of a lump sum, a weekly pension, and an allowance of concessionary coal. If a redundant miner was employed again, he lost the weekly sum and the coal allowance. Miners under 50 were offered severance - a complete break with the industry. They were paid a single lump sum, calculated by multiplying their previous years service by a set sum (in pounds) for each year. In 1981, and again in March 1984, the sums available under the various schemes were dramatically increased by the government, in obvious attempts to defuse opposition to pit closures.

The result of such schemes was to offer very powerful incentives for older miners to leave the industry when a pit closure or manpower rundown was announced. By this method, the NCB was able to divide opposition to closures because a part of the workforce had a strong material interest in accepting closure. This interest was emphasised by the inadequacies of the NCB's retirement and pension schemes. Despite strong union claims, miners still had to work until they were 60, at which point the terms available to them were less inviting than those on offer for early retirement and redundancy. In effect, the NCB's offers on early retirement and redundancy conceded the union's claims, but with the key qualification that they were only available in return for permanent job loss.

For an individual miner the terms were attractive. His choice was between leaving the industry with a relatively large sum of money, at an age when

he could still expect to live to enjoy his retirement; or to stay on with an ever increasing risk of accident or injury, the likelihood of declining wages and status, until finally leaving the industry with the prospect of a short retirement on a low pension. In effect, the failure of the union to achieve better retirement terms and working conditions (see chapter four) undermined attempts to fight closures. Opposing a closure could involve considerable individual material sacrifice for many older miners, and could therefore only be sustained by strong collective resistance, when there was a reasonable expectation of success. Successive ballot defeats, and vacillating leadership (see chapter four) made resistance seem like a pointless gesture.

There were two principle outcomes of this situation. The first was a major division within most workforces when a pit was either under threat of closure, or actually being closed. Many miners wanted the pit to close, so as to avail themselves of the generous payments available. On the other hand, the younger men, who benefited very little from the redundancy schemes, had a stronger interest in fighting closures, especially given the hopeless employment prospects in and around most pit villages (see Hudson et al, 1985).

The second outcome of the redundancy schemes was a continual change in the age composition of the workforce at those collieries which received transferees (see table 5.4). In order to accept the influx, each transferee had to be accompanied by a redundancy at the receiving pit (unless manpower was being increased). This meant that an older miner at the receiving pit was invariably replaced by a younger man transferring in.

The political effects of this changing age composition were quite confused, and depended on the particular circumstances at each pit. On the one hand, the younger men were more likely to be militant in defending their jobs, because they had relatively little to gain from redundancy. On the other, the fact that their pit was closed (and therefore their primary allegiance to pit and community was broken), and that other miners had failed to support them when their pit shut, meant that some felt a relatively weak loyalty to their new pit. This confused situation was compounded by the generally more militant attitude of the younger miners - a fact amply confirmed during the strike when they formed the backbone of the pickets,

and proved extremely loyal in the face of massive hardship. This militancy was due to many factors.

First, the continual decline of the industry had partially fossilised the division of labour within the pits. Upward mobility in wages and status was restricted (and is even harder now). The traditional "career path" of a miner would be to start off on datal work, and then move on to receive face training, and become a powerloader. However, with pit closures, and the transfer of young miners, there was a surplus of men at the receiving pits in the younger age groups. There wasn't room for them all to advance forward. In fact, there often wasn't enough places for powerloaders transferring in to be put on to powerloading. This restriction on earnings therefore acted as a source of tension for the younger men. By their late 20's many would be bringing up families, and they traditionally relied on being in a high earning job by this time. In the new situation, they found themselves struggling to cope.

Secondly, the operation of the AIS (Area Incentive Scheme) added to the aggravation. Although task workers (powerloaders) were the most directly affected by the operation of a bonus system (with numerous disputes over allowances, machine stoppages, standard tasks, manning etc inevitable), it also caused problems for men on colliery average related bonuses. Through various devices, management could suppress the colliery average. Furthermore, there were likely to be disputes about grading. And as already mentioned, the relatively low wages for men on colliery average bonuses were a source of wage militancy and frustration.

Thirdly, perhaps the most significant although intangible factor in the militancy of younger miners was the end of the era of hope of the 1960's. Whilst pit closures in the 60's took place in the context of optimism and general growth in the economy, by the early 1980's all traces of 1960's optimism were gone. John Pilger summed up the meaning of the "era of hope" when he wrote:

> "For working people, the 'consensus' did not have quite
> the same cosiness [as it did for the politicians], but
> it did mean that in exchange for their acceptance of
> low wages and the acquiescence of their trade union
> leaders, they were granted reasonably priced housing,
> clothing and food, as well as basic services such as
> nationalised health care and the hope of a 'new start'
> for at least one child... The hope on which the

> 'consensus' turned... was escape from the drudgery and
> greyness and imprisonment of class. It was this which
> was held out so tantalisingly to the young.., and it
> was this which, in little more than a decade, would be
> the source of so much 'disruption', when the betrayal
> implicit in the 'consensus' would be made clear."
> (Pilger, 1986, 53-54)

In Murton the old order was precariously close to breaking point. Pit closures, redundancy and permanent high unemployment formed the new context. Unease and fear seeped through the community.

In these circumstances, young miners felt little allegiance to the PWS. Whereas their fathers had seen conditions improve with nationalisation and the other post war changes, young miners were living with the failure of the new order. Older miners were torn between a lifetimes socialisation into the "era of hope", and the tangible erosion of much that it meant. They were often confused by the pace of change around them, and could make little sense of how to cope with it. Some became angry, but many more sought an easier way out of the chilly new climate. Younger miners carried less baggage from the past - for them the issues were more immediate, more cutting, and less easily ducked.

The changing age structure of the workforce therefore added to a growing instability caused by the influx of miners from distant communities. As older miners drifted away from the pit, attracted by high redundancy payments, the balance of power at the colliery began to tilt towards younger miners. And the same policies which produced this structural change also pumped up the level of discontent among these workers. More elements of the traditional "indulgency pattern" were being violated. Often more headstrong and militant anyway, younger miners found little in the old right wing ideology which gelled with their own experiences.

The minute books of both miners' and mechanics' branches show the significance of the re-emergence of pit closures in the early 1980's. As well as the impact of travellers, pit closures were discussed as an issue in themselves many times at branch meetings. On October 14th 1980 the mechanics heard a report from branch secretary and delegate John Cummings on the state of the industry, and Murton's position in it. In 1981 the miners' lodge reported dissatisfaction with the lack of leadership over the rolling strike against pit closures (see chapter four), which saw pickets from striking Sacriston arrive at the pit gates. From then on there were regular reports to branch meetings on the deteriorating state of the industry.

1983 witnessed a marked acceleration in the pace of change sweeping across the Durham coalfield. Despite the failure of three national ballots (see chapter four), Arthur Scargill's vigorous campaigning had put the issue of closures firmly on the agenda. In Durham, the coalfield was disappearing before peoples eyes. By now Murton was under blatant threat of closure. In 1983, South Hetton - part of the same Hawthorn Combine as Murton - closed in controversial and bitter circumstances, to be followed a few weeks later by the shock closure of East Hetton. But it was South Hetton's closure which focused attention on the future of the Combine, which was by then known to be performing badly.

5.6.i THE SOUTH HETTON DEBACLE

The events surrounding the closure of South Hetton (or its "merger" with Murton, as the NCB preferred to call it), showed the strategy of the NCB in the pre-strike period, and the divided but increasingly vocal opposition to that strategy within the NUM. In the late 1970's, South Hetton was run down to the point where it was a one face, one development pit, employing about 430 men. Then in 1981 a South Hetton DOSCO[17] team started work on a

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[17]A DOSCO is a large road heading machine use for tunnelling new underground roadways.

driveage through to Murton. Frank Duffy - who was working at South Hetton at the time - takes up the story.

> "You see, what happened at South Hetton was they said;
> 'Drive that link road, and there's... five faces for
> you, amounting to a further eight years lifespan'.
> South Hetton went ahead and drove the road, <u>despite</u>
> speculation that it would <u>inevitably</u> lead to the
> closure. They went ahead and drove that road. Men were
> making such fantastic bonuses on that link road
> [£40/day] that they were knocking the yards out ham
> sam. Sure enough, the minute they holed through, the
> Coal Board then said; 'Well, it would be better I think
> to take the coal out from the Murton side.'"
> (interview)

Secretary of South Hetton miners' committee at the time was John Dixon, a former right winger, but now associated with the BL. When the closure was announced, the lodge committee recommended that the men fight it. "But they were howled down. By the faceworkers really!" Manipulation of the incentive scheme had overcome doubts about the purpose of the link road, and now relatively well paid face workers were happy to see the pit closed so they could take advantage of redundancy terms. Others were seduced by the offer of £1500 transfer money, which was particularly attractive to men who would be transferring to the place where they already lived! The area leadership further undermined opposition to the closure when they told the men that union policy was that with other pits closing in the area, it was better to transfer whilst the option was still open.

Meanwhile, over at Murton, the final nails were hammered in to South Hetton's coffin. The Murton lodges were requested to support an initiative from the South Hetton branches to reallocate coal from Murton to South Hetton. This was the zone of coal which South Hetton had driven towards, and which they had been promised they would be able to work. In a resolution proposed from the platform, the Murton miners' lodge vowed not to give South Hetton a nut of coal from the disputed district. Murton mechanics' passed a similar resolution. As one Murton mechanic ruefully acknowledged several years later, South Hetton was

> "a bit of a shambles... It could honestly be said that
> Murton closed South Hetton as much as anyone else."
> (interview)

Under these circumstances, it is easier to see why the men at South Hetton voted not to fight the closure. But the story didn't end there. Some men -

including John Dixon - transferred to East Hetton, only to experience closure again within weeks. And men - often younger miners - who arrived at Murton brought the experience of NCB "dirty tricks" in the run up to closure, as well as bitterness at the way they'd been treated by their Murton colleagues. It all had an effect on the changing morale and consciousness of those miners that were left.

Some men drew lasting and powerful commitment from the South Hetton debacle. Frank Duffy - then a headstrong young militant - left South Hetton close to tears.

> "We were doing wrong, and I knew we were doing wrong. And I was determined from that day on that I was going to do something about it at Murton. I was going to get on the lodge, I was going to have me say, and I wasn't going to have any repetition of what had took place." (interview)

Frank went on to keep his word, becoming the dominant figure in the Murton miners' branch during the strike (see chapter six).

However, others left South Hetton feeling that it confirmed that the union was no longer able or willing to fight closures. Many travellers argued bitterly during the strike that no one stood by _their_ pit when it had closed. As the NCB got away with closure after closure, then it became harder and harder to mobilise against them. The union seemed to have accepted the principle, why fight for one pit and not another? Frank tried to explain why _he_ thought the men were so reluctant to fight.

> "I think it was just at the time the complacent attitude throughout the coalfield... I think it was more a situation where men didn't know how to fight, didn't have any kind of leadership who would prepare to take up a fight in any capacity other than a leaflet campaign or a few pious words. And I think that was about as much as what any kind of fight in this coalfield amounted to until the dispute." (interview)

Events at East Hetton only twelve weeks later seemed to bear this analysis out.

5.6.ii EAST HETTON CLOSES DOWN

South Hetton shut on April 4th 1983. On July 1st, only 12 1/2 weeks later, East Hetton shut. Once again, the NCB got away without a fight. As Beynon emphasises (1984c), the speed with which East Hetton shut is still a matter of anger and bitterness amongst activists there. One man recalled coming

back from first shift and going to bed at 1.45pm. At 2.00pm his wife woke him, and said "They've shut the pit!". It had just been announced on the local news. The bitterness increased when it began to look like the NCB had been planning the closure for some time. Typewritten sheets were already printed, detailing transfer arrangements, and which pit every man was going to.

The NCB claimed they had discovered one million gallons of water above the main workings in the colliery. Whether the water was there, whether management should ever have moved into the disputed area and whether or not they could have coped with the problem are all matters of dispute. Nevertheless, it is important to appreciate that there was considerable mistrust and suspicion of the NCB among men working at East Hetton. But why didn't the men fight?

Fundamentally, the reasons were the same as those at South Hetton. A series of decisions by management cast doubt on their commitment to the future of the pit. Rumours built up and morale collapsed. The union at the branch was complacent, and had never geared up to fight closure. This complacency extended to the area union, which again advised the men to take transfer or redundancy money while they had the opportunity. Under these circumstances it would almost have been surprising if the men _had_ voted to fight.

5.6.iii MURTON UNDER THREAT

The double shock of the closure of South Hetton and East Hetton within weeks of each other was matched by accelerating fears over the future of Murton. John Cummings - mechanics' branch secretary - recalled that the months before the strike were marked by a sharp change in managements attitude. He related this to changes at national level, culminating in the appointment of Ian MacGregor in September 1983. Arthur Scargill picked up on the new strategy as it began to emerge, and began a very successful propaganda campaign, concentrating on the emotive idea of a secret NCB "hit list" - based on the "high cost tail" identified in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the coal industry (1983). People started to talk about pit closures. "And the truth finally emerged."

Uncertainty at Murton was fuelled by rapid changes at the pit. Two districts were facing closure - C seam East and the seven quarter. Men were

being transferred around the pit to new districts and new jobs, sometimes on lower pay. This was combined with the integration of travellers, arriving from pits all around. The coalfield was visibly shrinking, and Murton looked like it might be next. One mechanics activist recalled the effect nearby closures had.

> "That's when men started to become _really_ aware. Seeing them get closer. Some of what people might class as safe pits, the likes of Horden... They was just like whittling away at the sides, you know, and sooner or later people _did_ realise, the knife's going to go through the middle one day." (interview)

A management hard line - heralded by the appointment of a new manager from the closed East Hetton pit - reinforced the feeling of danger and destabilisation. Mr Dunbar was widely seen as a hatchet man. Men said that he'd been sent to East Hetton to close it, and speculated that he'd been sent to Murton to do the same. The operation of the overtime ban further increased uncertainty.

The activities of the BL were important in supporting and initiating left wing campaigns in the coalfield, at a time when the area leadership was still complacently right wing. BL members were elected to lodge committees. Other lodge officials joined. When big lodges such as Easington and Wearmouth became involved, the scope of the BL's activities rapidly increased, as greater funds were made available. Exchanges with South Wales miners took place.

Educational activities were also a significant feature of BL activities. Huw Beynon at Durham University organised and ran several courses which miners' activists attended. In Murton the mechanics' lodge secretary John Cummings began organising courses in the early 1980's for his members.

> "Indeed a lot can be put down to the emergence on the scene of Huw Beynon, the 'Prince of Darkness'. Lo and behold - and it virtually happened overnight - that people started to attend educational courses, and weekend schools and seminars. Which certainly improved their awareness of problems. And it certainly enabled them to break out of this cocoon they'd surrounded themselves in - surrounded _ourselves_ in - since the 1974 strike." (interview)

In the miners' lodge, John Dixon's controversial 1983 victory in the battle for the lodge secretaryship - defeating the incumbent Eddie Brown by just 6

votes – exposed the rupturing of past relationships clearly. Dixon was the first non-Murton man to be elected secretary of the Murton branch (he had transferred from South Hetton and East Hetton, although he lived in Durham). Whilst many miners attributed this victory to the apathy of Murton men, who assumed Brown would win, there is no doubt that travellers, particularly an active and self conscious Blackhall group, campaigned vigorously to get Dixon elected. Dixon was a member of the BL, (although his earlier days had betrayed little leftward leaning). He had been lodge secretary at South Hetton, had then transferred to East Hetton where he had just been elected secretary when it too closed, and so his election at Murton represented his third elected office in one year!

However, whilst Dixon's election indicated a significant advance by the left at Murton, it did not represent a dominant left wing presence in the miners' lodge. Rop Naylor was chairman – a man who was to resign and return to work in the strike. Albert Swan was treasurer, and although a thoroughly loyal union man, he was not considered a left winger. Although the left had made inroads, and there was an active group of militant mainly younger miners, they were a long way from being the dominant presence. Objective developments (the changing age and residential composition of the workforce, pit closures, rising unemployment) had combined with subjective factors (the campaigning activities of Blackhall travellers and the BL, and militant younger miners) to create a volatile and unstable situation, in which neither left or right had secured outright control.

5.6.iv THE SEAM CAMPAIGN AND THE ADVANCE OF THE LEFT IN THE MECHANICS

By the eve of the strike the mechanics' branch at Murton was established as a campaigning left wing branch. Billy Etherington (the newly elected left wing general secretary of the Durham Mechanics) bracketed Murton with Eppleton and Easington in the pre strike days, saying:

> "They were well led branches, they led the way. Well
> organised, well educated, not prepared to let the Coal
> Board gull them. And of course two of them were under
> threat... Murton still is." [Eppleton closed in 1986.]
> (interview)

Murton mechanics were instrumental in setting up and organising the SEAM (Save Easington Area Mines) campaign, which developed in Easington District in late 1983. The original idea came out of a mechanics' committee meeting, and was the brainchild of Dave Temple.

SEAM was launched on November 29th, 1983 (Barker, 1984). The closure of Blackhall and South Hetton collieries with a combined job loss of 1849 had sent unemployment in Easington District to 18.2% - over 7000 people. A further 2000+ were on YTS (ibid). The Campaign aimed to unite the community behind a defence of the remaining collieries. Easington Chamber of Trade offered strong support. A massive propaganda effort was initiated. On February 25th 1984, Neil Kinnock, Peter Heathfield and local MP Jack Dormand spoke at a hugely successful rally in Easington. The campaign struck a chord in East Durham. Communities felt a very strong sense of being under threat.

The importance of SEAM in Murton was underscored by a mechanics' activist from the west of the coalfield. He commented:

> "[The] SEAM campaign was operating in Murton at the
> time. And they were actively mounting a campaign in
> Murton to prepare for the strike. I've got no doubt
> about that. People knew what was happening, and [that]
> it was inevitable. And quite right wing characters like
> John Cummings had understood that, and were actually
> preparing for it. And willing to fight it. And that way
> they should never be criticised." (interview)

Educational courses organised by John Cummings meant that Murton mechanics' activists were very aware, and well placed to win arguments in the pit and in the branch. The crisis facing the industry through the introduction of new technology and the collapse of markets was brought home. The old right wing leadership had either been replaced, or had adapted to the new environment by accepting left arguments. Given that the mechanics Association at a coalfield level was still right wing[18], lagging behind the miners in political development at almost every pit, this was a not inconsiderable achievement. As John Cummings said,

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[18]Despite the election of the left wing general secretary Billy Etherington in 1983 (just defeating John Cummings) the Durham mechanics continued to display a marked reluctance to back up their vote with a committment to aciton. In the 1982 and 1983 strike ballots (see table 4.10) they consistently voted less than 30% for strike action. Along with right wingers who voted for Scargill, it seems likely that they hoped that a strong general secretary would "deliver the goods" without the need for action.

> "We were known as a bolshy pit. So attitudes had
> changed. We were all suspicious. We all started to get
> worried. What the _hell_ is going on in the industry. We
> then start to [hear] about MINOS and FIDO and high
> technology." (interview)

All the old certainties seemed to be breaking down. In these circumstances,
increasingly confident left wing activists were able to build considerable
support. The committee was dominated by a strong, relatively cohesive group
of activists, forming a leadership elite commanding authority and respect
among the membership.

However, there were still strong elements of a right wing tradition in the
branch, particularly with respect to overtime, especially among surface
workers, and older members (see appendix three for comments about the
mechanics' overtime tradition). Elements of these traditions surfaced on
October 9th 1982, when the branch voted overwhelmingly at a special meeting
to _reject_ the instruction from the NUM's NEC (National Executive Committee)
to impose a national overtime ban. John Cummings played an important role,
because although as delegate he was duty bound to support the NEC
recommendation, it was clear from his speech at the meeting that he did not
support the ban. The rebels included some of the men who were to be the
backbone of the mechanics picketing effort during the strike. Habitual
overtime workers, they felt that the ban was the wrong way to put pressure
on the NCB.

However, in the weeks that followed, attitudes changed dramatically, and
the left won a decisive victory against the rebels. The miners supported
the ban, and they were joined by a core of left wing mechanics. Together
they piled pressure on the rebel mechanics, isolating them at work,
treating them almost as scabs. The pressure began to tell. Then the
manager, in a move which he must have hoped would intensify divisions in
the union, offered to double the amount of overtime available to the
mechanics. It gave the branch a reason to call another meeting to consider
the changed circumstances. On October 25th a special meeting was called

> "owing to confusion over the working of overtime at the
> weekend... The chairman was of the opinion that members
> attitudes had hardened over the past week and that
> unilateral action by people interfering with report
> sheets and other members refusing to work warranted
> further discussion." (mechanics' minute book)

Aggressive action by left wingers, piling pressure on the overtime workers,
swung the mood of the branch away from confrontation with the national

union. Recognising the changed circumstances, the committee recommended that the branch should impose a total overtime ban, and the defiance ended. (Two weeks later the ban was called off after a national ballot had accepted the NCB's offer.)

However, the mechanic's idiosyncratic interpretations of national overtime bans was again in evidence the following year. On October 11th 1983, the branch again discussed a national overtime ban, prior to a council meeting called to decide the Association's position.

> "Members were of the opinion that this action is by its
> very nature divisive and could result in the main
> issues being overshadowed. Therefore the delegate [to
> council] should oppose an overtime ban, but if a ban
> was agreed upon at the special delegate conference then
> the mechanics' delegation should support a total ban.
> Members being left in [no?] doubt as to the
> consequences." (mechanics' minute book)

In due course the council and special delegate conference voted to support the overtime ban, so Murton mechanics decided to impose a strict interpretation of a ban.

According to Dave Temple, this determination to stick to the letter of a ban was the result of an unholy and unwitting alliance of left and right in the lodge. Some left wingers wanted a total ban out of principle. But some on the right hoped that the frustrations and trouble that would be caused by a total ban would undermine the ban completely. John Cummings confirmed this latter motive when he explained that the policy was due to:

> "Sheer bloody frustration... The aim was to try to
> bring to the notice of the area officials the futility
> of an overtime ban." (interview)

These comments, and the support the previous year by some left wingers for defiance of a national overtime ban, illustrate the contradictory and uneven way in which consciousness develops among workers. It is not always at all clear what the "left wing" stance is. Further, left wing opinions over one issue can coexist with reactionary sentiments over another (and vice versa).

Nevertheless, the mechanics' strict interpretation of the ban increased friction steadily towards the end of 1983 and in the first few months of 1984. Murton's manager, Mr Dunbar, urged a flexible interpretation of the ban, which would allow miners to work five shifts. But the mechanics refused to rearrange their shifts, with the result that some miners were

only able to work three shifts a week, and many only worked four shifts. At area level, a special "Emergency Committee" had been set up to try and resolve problems caused by the ban. Several times it asked the Murton mechanics to be more flexible, but each request was turned down overwhelmingly at branch meetings. This volatile and abrasive situation ground on into 1984.

5.6.v RUN UP TO MARCH 1984

John Cummings is convinced that around this time there was a significant hardening in management attitudes, coinciding with the appointment of Ian MacGregor as Chairman of the NCB (in September 1983). Management knew that under the strict financial criteria being laid down by the government, they had to confront and break the power of the union, both nationally and locally. In Murton the screws began to turn in February 1984. The manager requested weekend working for essential maintenance at Hawthorn for February 18th and 19th. If the union rejected this, then he would lay the whole mine off on Friday 24th and Monday 27th to enable the work to be done then. The mechanics resolved not to work the weekend unless work could be found for all members. A meeting was called for the 21st, involving all lodge chairmen and secretaries for Hawthorn, Eppleton and Murton, area union and management representatives.

At this meeting the union requested that the mine produce ROM (run of mine[19]) coal on the 24th and 27th, and that all men should be employed on essential maintenance. The NCB replied that this was impossible as stocks were in danger of overheating, and there was no further space for stocking elsewhere. The union pressed for figures justifying these claims. The mechanics' minute book records the reply.

> "The Board declined, and on being pressed further
> stated that regardless of the above [ie whether or not
> there was a problem producing ROM coal] they were not
> prepared under any set of circumstances to produce ROM
> coal, this being an Area Board Policy decision."
> [emphasis added] (mechanics' minute book)

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[19]Coal in its raw state, before being processed through a washery.

This was interpreted by all unions present as a highly provocative change in Board policy. Management went ahead and laid men off.

A second similar dispute was brewing over a rope cap at Hawthorn at the start of March, when events at Cortonwood in Yorkshire intervened.

It is clear from the material examined in this chapter that political development turned on the subjective experience of objective processes and events. In the early 1980's the most significant objective processes were: the incentive scheme, the changing composition of the workforce (by residence and age), pit closures, and increasing unemployment. On their own, their political effect could not be predicted. Only by articulating objective developments with subjective factors could the trajectory of political change in a particular place like Murton be understood.

Subjective activities at this level transform the effects of common objective processes into a bewildering variety of locally specific experiences and responses. Destabilisation began with the incentive scheme, which shifted the wages issue back from national to local level. In the miners' lodge, perhaps the key political role was played by the Blackhall transferees. Not only did their arrival mark a decisive breach with the post war "indulgency pattern" at Murton colliery (signalling the end of local recruitment and craft apprenticeships), but by bringing expectations of a different indulgency pattern, they constituted a powerful political agency. The changing age composition of the workforce accelerated the Blackhall mens' impact by shifting the balance within the branch towards miners whose attachment to the PWS was significantly less than the older miners who were leaving the industry in increasing numbers.

The miners' lodge leadership was relatively weak, lacking both in strong personalities and in confidence. Before the destabilisation of the 1980's, it barely constituted a political agency at all. As changes enveloped the pit, the leadership proved unable to offer a decisive lead. At area level the challenge was taken up by the BL. At Murton, a combination of determined agitation by Blackhall travellers, and the increasing dissatisfaction of younger miners led to the election of BL member John Dixon as branch secretary. But the branch committee was still dominated by the right on the eve of the strike. In the mechanics' branch, similar objective changes provided a destabilising influence in branch politics (although travellers were a less significant factor). However, the character of the moderate leadership of the branch (in particular John Cummings) and of the left opposition (in particular Dave Temple) had a decisive influence on the way in which the branch changed. As the popular

secretary of the branch for almost twenty years, Cummings position was unassailable. However, destabilisation and the end of the era of hope provided left wing activists with powerful campaigning material. The SEAM campaign - launched by John Cummings in his capacity as Chairman of Easington District Council - heightened awareness of the issues facing the industry and the communities. As unease and fear crept into the branch, Cummings drifted in the direction the left were pushing it. Indeed, to maintain his authority, he placed himself at the head of the movement, and campaigned with commitment and authority against pit closures.

At Murton therefore, the operation of national political and economic processes had specific, identifiable, objective local effects (pit closures, transfers, redundancy, end of recruitment). The general national political and economic situation, exclusive of its particular effects in Murton, also affected consciousness. But individuals and groups stamped their own interpretation on the observed and experienced objective situation, and this constitutes the subjective side of political development. Sometimes agents self consciously sought to influence other peoples' interpretation of events, other times people worked things out alone or in groups, using their accumulated store of knowledge and ideology.

It is important however to re-emphasise that the exercise of agency in Murton was heavily constrained by the weight of past experience. Movements in consciousness reflected these constraints, placing powerful limits on the pace and direction of change. Nevertheless, these changes brought with them the possibility that the dominant ideology which had become entrenched throughout the coalfield under the PWS would be challenged, and with this came the possibility of significant mass changes in consciousness. Whilst the developments up to March 1984 clearly constituted the beginnings of a rupture with the past, it was the strike itself which blew apart the objective basis for the old ideology, offering all manner of opportunities to remold class consciousness. The effect of the strike is considered in the following chapter.

TABLE 5.1: LEADERSHIP OF MURTON MINERS LODGE 1960 – PRESENT.

YEAR	CHAIRMAN	SECRETARY
1960	J Toft	J Stevens
1961	"	"
1962	"	J Clark
1963	"	"
1964	"	"
1965	"	"
1966	"	"
1967	"	"
1968	"	"
1969	"	"
1970	"	"
1971	"	"
1972	"	"
1973	"	"
1974	"	"
1975	"	"
1976	"	"
1977	"	"
1978	"	"
1979	"	"
1980	G Elwick	M Wylde
1981	G Elwick	M Wylde
1982	M Wylde	E Brown
1983	R Naylor	J Dixon
1984	A Bell	J Dixon
1985	S Jackson	F Duffy
1986	S Jackson	F Duffy
1987	S Musgrove	A Young

Source: Murton miners' lodge minute books.

TABLE 5.2. MECHANICS BRANCH LEADERSHIP, 1960 - PRESENT.

YEAR	CHAIRMAN	SECRETARY	TREASURER
1960	B Olloman	S Emery	
1961	"	"	
1962	"	"	
1963	"	"	
1964	"	"	
1965	"	"	
1966	"	"	
1967	"	"	B Young
1968	"	J Cummings	H Wood
1969	"	"	"
1970	"	"	"
1971	"	"	"
1972	"	"	"
1973	"	"	"
1974	A Robson	"	"
1975	"	"	"
1976	"	"	"
1977	A Williamson	"	"
1978	"	"	"
1979	B Armstrong	"	"
1980	"	"	"
1981	"	"	"
1982	"	"	"
1983	"	"	"
1984	"	"	"
1985	"	"	"
1986	"	"	"
1987	M Rooney	D Temple	S Vardy
1988	D Anderson	"	"

Source: Murton Mechanics minute books.

TABLE 5.3: MURTON WORKFORCE BY RESIDENCE, 1984

Town/village [1]	Number employed [2]	% of workforce [3]
Murton	630	38.9
Seaham	121	7.5
Easington Lane	113	6.9
South Hetton	107	6.6
Hetton Le Hole	90	5.5
Blackhall	73	4.5
Peterlee	72	4.4
Trimdon	33	2.0
Wheatley Hill	30	1.9
Horden	28	1.7
Houghton Le Spr	28	1.7
Thornley	26	1.6
Haswell	25	1.5
Durham	22	1.4
Wingate	19	1.2
Trimdon Station	15	0.9
Ryphope	13	0.8
Sunderland	13	0.8
Trimdon Coll[y]	12	0.7
Trimdon Grange	12	0.7
Sherburn	12	0.7
Fencehouses	9	0.6
Easington	7	0.4
Bowburn	6	0.4
Hesledon	6	0.4
Sherburn Hill	6	0.4
Carville	5	0.3
Shotton Coll[y]	5	0.3
Dalton Le Dale	4	0.3
East Rainton	4	0.3
Ludworth	4	0.3
Shiney Row	4	0.3
Burnside	3	0.2
Ferryhill	3	0.2
Great Lumley	3	0.2
Hartlepool	3	0.2
High Hesledon	3	0.2
Pittington	3	0.2
Silksworth	3	0.2
Washington	3	0.2
Brandon	2	0.1
Dalton Heights	2	0.1
Fishburn	2	0.1
Hawthorn	2	0.1
Langley Park	2	0.1
Howden Le Wear	1	0.1
Bishop Middleham	1	0.1
Hutton Henry	1	0.1

TABLE 5.3 (Cont)

Town/village	Number employed	% of workforce
Penshaw	1	0.1
Shadforth	1	0.1
Ushaw Moor	1	0.1
Broompark	1	0.1
Shildon	1	0.1
Newbottle	1	0.1
Croxdale	1	0.1
Grasswell	1	0.1
West Rainton	1	0.1
Kelloe	1	0.1
Hart Station	1	0.1
Cold Hesledon	1	0.1
Stanley	1	0.1
Birtley	1	0.1
New Herrington	1	0.1
Easington Vill	1	0.1
Willington	1	0.1
Philadelphia	1	0.1
Chester-Le-St	1	0.1
TOTAL	1621	100.0

1. Several of these communities have been formed by amalgamating districts within one town. For example, Seaham includes people from Westlea, Eastlea, Dawdon, Deneside and Parkside.

2. These figures include all grades of employees (ie NUM, NACODS), except management.

3. Percentages are to the nearest tenth of one percent, hence the percentage total does not add up to exactly 100.

Source: Privately supplied figures

TABLE 5.4: MURTON WORKFORCE BY AGE, 1984

Age	Murton total	% of workforce
< 20	21	1.3
20-24	297	18.3
25-29	261	16.1
30-34	207	12.8
35-39	184	11.4
40-44	161	9.9
45-49	220	13.6
50-54	210	13.0
55-69	59	3.6
60+	1	0.1
Total	1621	100.0

Source: Privately supplied figures

TABLE 5.5: NCB WORKFORCE (NATIONAL) BY AGE, 1982/3

Age[1]	N^o employed	% of workforce
< 20	13592	6.6
20-25	28436	13.3
25-30	23265	10.5
30-40	42645	20.1
40-50	47870	22.8
50-55	23775	11.5
55-60	28186	13.2
60+	2941	1.6
Total	205710	100.0

1. Note that age bands are not identical to those used for table 4.

Source: NCB Annual Report and Accounts, 1982/3

MAP 2   MURTON'S LOCATION

Legend:
- ○ Main towns/Villages
- ■ Mines open 1989
- □ Mines shut since 1980
- — 'A' roads

MILES

0   1   2
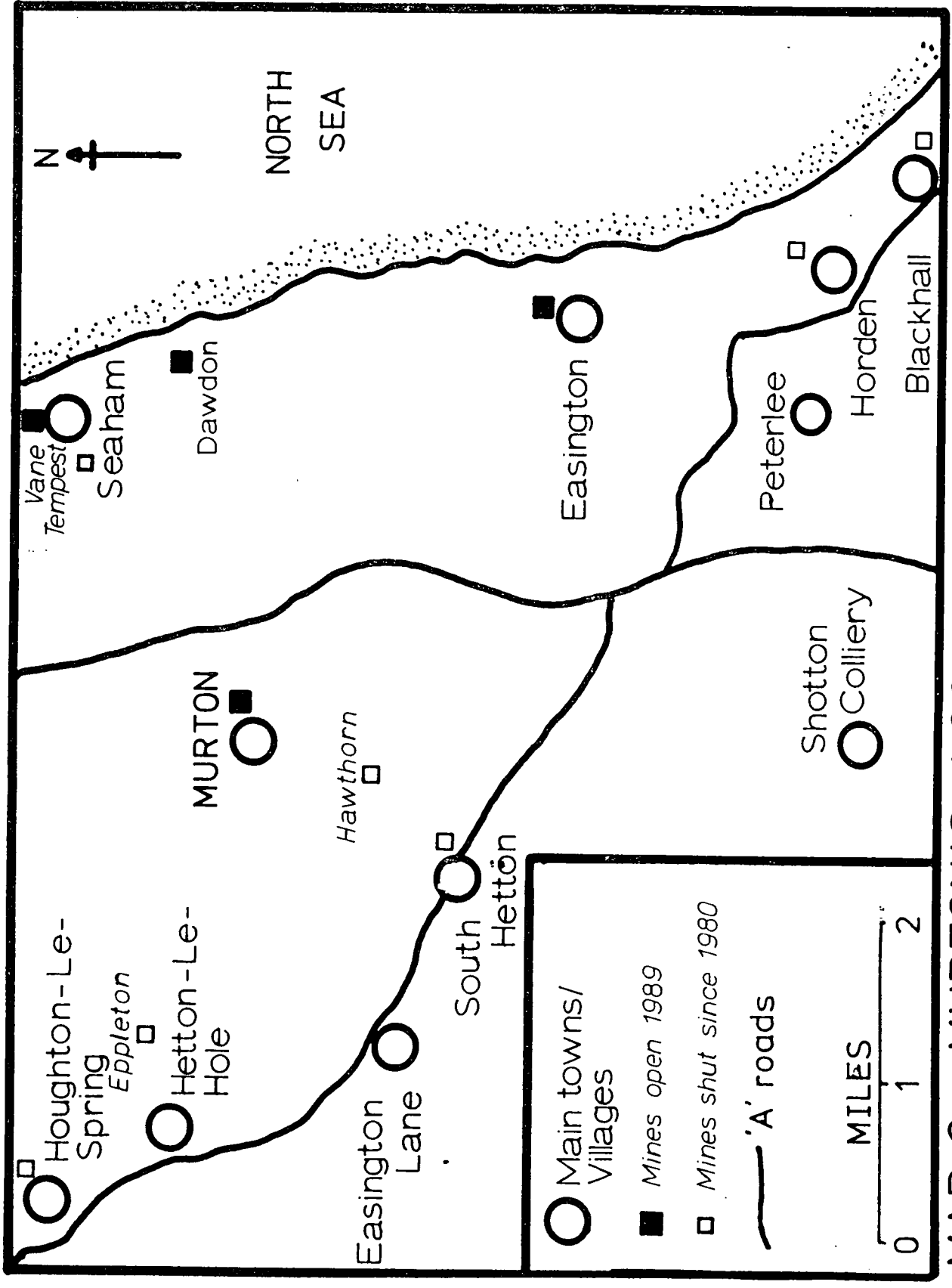
Places shown on map:
- Houghton-Le-Spring
- Eppleton
- Hetton-Le-Hole
- Easington Lane
- South Hetton
- Hawthorn
- MURTON
- Vane Tempest
- Seaham
- Dawdon
- Easington
- Peterlee
- Horden
- Blackhall
- Shotton Colliery
- NORTH SEA
- N

CHAPTER SIX: MURTON AND THE STRIKE

CHAPTER SIX: MURTON AND THE STRIKE

INTRODUCTION

The last two chapters approached the start of the 1984/5 strike from
different directions. Chapter four examined the accelerating drift towards
conflict within the coal industry nationally in the early 1980's, providing
a framework for the following three chapters. Chapter five showed how these
national events wove through the experiences of Murton colliery. It showed
how conscious agents were able to shape the direction of political change
within the place specific context established by the prevailing
destabilising pressures.

Up until March 1984, the extent and meaning of the changes at Murton were
largely unclear. It was the miners' strike of 1984/5 which turned the
developments of the previous ten years into a sharp political
transformation. As chapter three showed, strikes frequently generate sudden
shifts in union politics, (although the pressures creating them usually
build up over a longer time period). The miners' strike represented the
most elemental industrial conflict of the Thatcherite era (see chapters two
and four); a conflict over the survival of the post war settlement and the
attempt to impose a new settlement between capital and labour. With such
fundamental issues at stake, it is not surprising that Murton's
characteristic indulgency pattern was blown apart during the strike.

More than four years after the end of the 1984/5 strike, it is easy to
forget just what a monumental event it was. Talked and written about so
often, it has now become part of the everyday political landscape in
Britain. For many people it is distant history. In the mining communities
themselves however, the strike lives on, assimilated into the collective
consciousness via the oral tradition of story telling (Francis, 1985).
Underneath the bustling surface veneer of normality, there are still today
some jagged edges left over from the strike. In Murton, Rop Naylor - the
former miners' branch chairman who tried to lead a return to work - is
ostracised, a continuing victim of psychological (and occasionally
physical) intimidation. Yet for many people, the strike was the best year
of their lives.

Inevitably perhaps - given the elemental nature of the conflict - the strike conjured up almost every extreme of human emotion. As well as the astounding fortitude of the communities in sustaining the strike for a year, it also contained within it enormous contradictions and conflicts. This chapter is about the contradictions and conflicts, and how they reflected and affected the changing politics of the branches. In the first section, it shows how these contradictions out of the contradictory tendencies present in the years before the strike, and in particular the tension between younger miners and the older men. The start of the strike in Murton encapsulated these divisions, and is therefore examined in some detail. From then on the workforce split into several distinct groups, which I study in turn.

Of these groups, the most visible were the strike activists. Yet even the activists were divided, largely along age lines, with the youngest the most committed pickets, and the older ones showing more caution and restraint. These cleavages were linked to the differing experiences of different generations, and in particular their articulation to the (collapsing) PWS.

Some divisions within the unions ranks were exacerbated, if not caused, by the sheer physical demands of space. Miners working at Murton went home to villages spread out over most of County Durham. There they were isolated from the social solidarity which sustained the strike in the pit villages[1]. The implications of this physical separation are analysed, along with the activists attempts to cope with the difficulties of organisation which they posed.

In the second section I explore the small minority of "anti-strike diehards". Many were opposed to the strike from its beginning. Their actions are related to developments within the strike at a national level,

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[1]Appendix five contains a brief exploration of the role of women and women's support groups in the strike, and Murton's role in the women's mobilisation. Although this was possibly the most important long term development during the strike, I have not attempted to analyse it in depth in this thesis (see appendix one). It is too large a subject to be tacked on as one part of a chapter, and since this thesis is about processes of political change in two branches of the NUM at Murton, the changing role of women in Murton is not central to the argument.

as the state and the courts sought to undermine the legitimacy of the strike. Their opposition was based on a profound ideological hostility to the strike. Most of the anti-strike diehards were travellers. However a second group of maybe twenty or so Murton men were also hostile to the strike, and agitated against it within the community. Their hostility is related to the temptation offered by massive redundancy payments, which was bolstered by the economistic and faceworker bias of the union in the pre-strike period.

Finally, I look at the majority of strikers - people who characteristically supported the strike's cause, but who wanted an honourable compromise to end the strike. Loyalty and pride kept them out, but for some those links snapped after Christmas 1984. Mostly they supported the aims of the strike. They had no allegiance to the Thatcherite-MacGregor programme for the industry (the two were invariably seen as synonymous). Practical factors - the degree of social isolation, material hardship - were decisive in determining their breaking point.

Running through the account of the strike is the continued story of political transformation within the branches. In particular, the strike created the conditions for a left wing transformation of the miners' branch. Murton became the classic example of a union branch that swung left because of the strike.

As with chapter five, this chapter is based on detailed evidence gained predominantly by interview (see appendix 1). However, the type and quality of the data gathered was in some ways different to that available before 1984. For example, it became more difficult to maintain the distinction between miners' and mechanics' branches through the strike[2]. Also, practical difficulties in talking to the NUM's "middle ground", led to a

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[2] This was partly the result of changing research aims. When I began my interviews, I concentrated particularly on the strike, where the differences between the branches did not appear great. This concentration blinded me to the full significance of the difference between miners and mechanics, which was only fully revealed when I began to look at the period before the strike in more detail. My initial interviews concentrated on miners because I had better contacts in the miners' lodge, and was at that stage unaware that this "bias" was important (see appendix 1 for details).

strong (left and right wing) activist "bias" in interpreting the strike (appendix 1). Furthermore, the absence of a common workplace based framework of events around which to hang the narrative posed further difficulties. A huge variety of events marked the year from March 1984, many of which were highly specific to a small group, and others of which assumed far greater significance for some groups (eg travellers) than for others.

For fear of becoming trapped in this tangled web of strike experiences, this account does not provide a detailed, chronological narrative of the strike. Instead, it assumes a basic knowledge of the main events, which are generally well known (see chapter one for references), and focuses instead on significant local issues.

6.1 THE START OF THE STRIKE.

On March 1st 1984, George Hayes, the South Yorkshire Area Director, announced that Cortonwood Colliery was to close. This act - regarded as deeply provocative by the NUM - caused an immediate strike at the pit, and within days the whole of the Yorkshire coalfield was out. On March 6th, the NCB met the mining unions in London, and announced the need for a capacity reduction of four million tonnes (Mt) over that which had been achieved in 1983/4 (see table 6.1)[3]. Several collieries were to close immediately, including Cortonwood, St Johns in South Wales, Polmaise in Scotland, and Herrington in Durham.

Following this announcement, the Yorkshire action began to snowball. Although a majority of South Wales pits initially voted not to strike, they were soon picketed out (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986). Scotland and Kent joined the strike too. In Durham, there was an initial reluctance to strike. Some pits came straight out, but others (particularly the Seaham pits) attempted to work on pending a national ballot, although mass picketing soon ended the rebellion. But even those pits which supported the strike from the beginning, joined the unanimous call from the Durham pits for a national ballot. Events at Murton reflected the degree of confusion and division throughout the coalfield at the time. They also showed the way that contradictory forces developing before the strike affected the way it developed from the very start.

6.1.i MURTON MINERS DIVIDED

Both miners' and mechanics' branches at Murton called special meetings for Sunday March 11th, following the Yorkshire walkout and the appeal for national solidarity action to prevent pit closures. Events at the Miners Welfare Hall, where the miners' branch held their meeting, foreshadowed the deep divisions which persisted within the workforce throughout the strike. At the committee meeting before the special meeting, the committee voted

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[3]Because the overtime ban had reduced actual production in 1983/4 to 4 Mt below the planned figure, the NCB's planned reduction of 4Mt was actually an 8 Mt cut in planned output.

18-4 to recommend action to the men. But they were bitterly divided over the recommendation, and three of the dissenters resigned in protest.

In the packed hall, the newly elected, left leaning lodge secretary John Dixon moved the committee resolution from the platform. But he faced a hostile reception, with some miners trying to shout him down. The meeting was split, with a band of pro-strike militants congregating at the front of the hall, and anti-strike miners gathering at the back. Some of these were virulently anti-strike, and formed the core anti-strike group within Murton (discussed in section 6.3.iii). Although the lodge committee gave a lead, there was considerable uncertainty within the hall over what the true situation was. At the end of an emotive, bad tempered and confused debate, only about 25% voted (by a show of hands) for a strike.

6.1.ii THE MECHANICS TAKE THE LEAD

Although throughout the county the mechanics were more right wing and hostile to the strike than the miners, at Murton they turned the tables on the miners. Their committee were unanimous in recommending immediate strike action. They decided to hold a secret ballot following their emergency branch meeting, and count the votes immediately so that if the decision was for a strike, action could be taken at once. Left and right were united, both believing that the union now had no alternative but to take action. John Cummings, the influential and formerly right wing branch secretary, was as determined and committed as the left wing activists. From the moment that Ian MacGregor was appointed Chairman of the NCB (in Sept 1983), he had felt that a strike was inevitable. Now the time had arrived.

At the special meeting it was John Cummings who was the decisive influence. Because his reputation was moderate and right wing, his complete support for the strike carried formidable authority. One activist recalled the meeting like this.

> "Cummings spoke well as usual. I think he swayed the meeting you know. He can do that..., he's a bloody good speaker. There was a hard core of us who wanted a strike I think. John swayed it. There was a lot of discussion. It was a bloody good meeting as I remember." (interview)

The last minute in the mechanics' book until the end of the strike records the following:

> "The ballot was then conducted and counted, the result
> being 130 FOR, 80 against. It was therefore decided
> that the mechanics were on strike." (mechanics' minute
> book)

The SEAM campaign, educational courses, and national campaigning all contributed to the feeling that a battle was inevitable. A decisive, united lead from a stable and respected committee, combined with a free and open discussion persuaded the "middle ground" that there was no alternative but to support Cortonwood, and make a stand against pit closures. And the manner of this decision conferred legitimacy on the strike in the branch, imposing strong disciplinary pressures on the dissident minority.

6.1.iii ALL OUT

Although the two branches reached contradictory decisions, there was little doubt that the mechanics' strike would be respected by the miners. On Monday March 12th, the mechanics mounted a picket on the colliery gates, and the miners were effectively on strike from that day forth. Very few even turned up for work, and no-one tried to go through the line. Having secured their own pit, mechanic activists headed out to join appeals for solidarity at units still working. They were joined by eager young miners - organised by Frank Duffy and Alan Young - keen to be involved despite their branch's reluctance to join the strike.

At the end of the first week, the miners' branch met again. They were now faced with a fait accompli. John Dixon argued again for strike action, but he argued now on pragmatic grounds - since the mechanics were on strike there was no possibility of the miners working. The minute book reported tersely on the decision of that March 18th special meeting:

> "Out of the delegates report the following was agreed:
> That we take strike action pending a national ballot."
> (miners' minute book)

There was only one dissenter.

In effect - as many mechanics and miners told me - the miners were "shamed out" by the mechanics. It was an unprecedented turn of events. Throughout the county it was the miners who led the strike, as the mechanics voted by

a large majority to reject the strike[4]. This was despite significant political shifts within the mechanics in the years running up to the strike. For example, in 1983 Billy Etherington - the most left wing candidate - defeated John Cummings (among others) for the post of general secretary of the Durham mechanics (chapters four and five above). Electing a left wing agent reflected clear disillusion with the politics of compromise and acquiescence, but it did not signal a decisive break with the mechanics' traditions of moderation and passivity.

By contrast, the miners' branches all voted (eventually) to join the strike "pending a national ballot". Loyalty was probably the decisive factor, but the vote also reflected the relatively greater militancy of the miners compared to the mechanics. At Murton the tables were turned, and the mechanics showed themselves to be more militant and left wing than the miners. In a sense it was the culmination of developments in the pre-strike years (see chapter five). In 1984, despite residuals of divisive craft traditions, the mechanics were better organised by a strong leadership, which was well prepared for the coming conflict (although right wing elements were by no means absent). In contrast the miners - despite advances by the left, and a powerful militant element of young miners - lacked united leadership, and had not campaigned effectively on the issue of pit closures. The miners traditional right wing leadership was being eroded, but the left had yet to supply a clear, dominant alternative. In short, the miners' branch was split.

6.1.iv THE BALLOT THAT NEVER WAS[5]

Divisions in Murton were of course merely an echo of divisions throughout the NUM over the question of pit closures, and how to fight them. Chapter four showed how the sequence of events in the early 1980's - culminating in the third ballot rejection of strike action in March 1983 - began to

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[4]On March 12th the other Durham mechanics' branches voted to reject the strike call. Only Murton, Easington and Eppleton voted in favour of action.

[5]The wider issues behind the start of the strike at national level - and the development of the no-ballot tactic - are discussed in detail in appendix six.

persuade many activists throughout the country that a ballot was inappropriate over the question of pit closures (see also Adeney and Lloyd, 1986; 82-3).

> "In March only 15% of COSA and 19% of Nottingham members voted 'Yes'. In Leicester the percentage was 18%; in South Derbyshire 12%. Notts and the Midlands, so many people argued, would <u>never</u> support threatened miners in South Wales, Scotland and the North East. The March ballot vote was seen to condemn them almost out of hand - 'only 20% 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, 1985a; 11)

When Cortonwood began the strike in 1984, young militants quickly emerged as its driving force. And one thing they were absolutely certain of - there was no way that miners in safe jobs elsewhere in the country were going to "constitutionalise" them out of action. As they saw it, they were on strike for a basic trade union principle, and support from other areas was their <u>right</u>.

With rank and file activists taking the lead, the emergence on the right of calls for a national ballot were seen by the activists as treachery.

> "The ballot issue in the minds of the militants, had become a symbol of betrayal for those in favour, and virility among those who opposed. As Ken Capstick, the Labour voting NUM delegate from Stillingfleet, in the Selby complex, later summed it up: 'The trouble was the national ballot had been made into an issue in itself. It was like giving in. You've got to remember that we had lads, masses of them, who were picketing every day, total commitment, never seen such commitment from people... They looked at it that Margaret Thatcher wanted a ballot, Ian MacGregor wanted a ballot, the media wanted a ballot, and they weren't going to have one.'" (Wilsher <u>et al.</u>, 1985, 79)

Many Murton activists felt the same. Defeating the ballot call became the first big battle of the strike. Coach loads of Murton miners and mechanics headed down the A1 to lobby the meetings discussing the ballot issue. These mass lobbies were a key expression of the way in which rank and file activists had taken control of the strike. Dave Temple (the leading left winger on the mechanics' committee) analysed the situation in this way.

> "What you've got to consider is that at the time the miners' strike began, it started off as a spontaneous movement. It <u>wasn't</u> led from the top... That spontaneous movement influenced the leadership. The demand for no ballot came from the bottom and it was

> based on the fact that they hadn't won a ballot on the
> question of pit closures on three occasions. And they
> didn't want to be forced not to take action themselves
> because of the inability or unwillingness to fight of
> other sections." (interview)

Photos taken as Scargill announced from a balcony at the NUM's Sheffield HQ

that there was to be no ballot show a tumultuous sea of ecstatic faces,

arms upraised in triumphant acclaim. A defiant chorus of:

> "Shove the ballot,
> Shove the ballot,
> Shove the ballot up your hole,"

rang out to the assembled media.

The evidence suggests that for most activists the details of the arguments

were unimportant - the important thing was the need to stand and fight the

government. Men in safe jobs were not going to "vote them out of a job".

With one section of the workforce taking action in defence of union policy,

it was the duty of areas like Durham to join the fight. As one Murton

mechanic commented about the general strategy at the time:

> "You know, let's face it, we told lies. We told them:
> Righto, we'd agree with wanting a national ballot, when
> the time's right. But we want you out on strike before
> we have that ballot." (interview)

But as a miners' activist said, the qualification about the ballot "was pie

in the sky. Everyone knew there was going to be no ballot." (interview)

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the vast majority of miners and

mechanics in Murton and in Durham wanted a ballot. An Area Conference

passed the following resolution on March 21st (subsequently confirmed by

County Lodge Vote completed on April 6th by 96-0):

> "The decision of the Area Coalfield Conference held on
> Wednesday 21st March, unanimously decided to request an
> emergency meeting of the NEC forthwith and an
> individual ballot vote by implementation of NUM rule 43
> without delay."

Historically, a long tradition of balloting had developed in the NUM, and

therefore it was inevitable that whatever the philosophical arguments, the

majority of the rank and file would demand a ballot. Even among some miners

who picketed - almost exclusively the older ones - there were strong doubts

about the lack of a ballot. One man said:

> "Well, everyone should have a vote, shouldn't they?..
> Like I say, I didn't get a vote, but I would have voted
> for action, to fight for jobs. But when I never got a

> vote, it's like getting your arm cut off and having
> nothing to say about it! It was just stupid."
> (interview)

In this sense, it was argued that regardless of what might be seen as
desirable in terms of having a union membership which could be called out
on strike by the leadership, the traditions of the NUM did not favour this
level of executive power. As another man saw it, the tradition of balloting
meant the call for a ballot "was a legitimate demand from the rank and
file".

These competing attitudes to the ballot were indicative of fundamental
divisions within the workforce. However, the absence of a ballot did not in
itself determine any particular course of the strike. Many people who would
have preferred a ballot were highly active during the strike. (Indeed, one
of the three men who resigned from the Murton miners' committee over the
decision to recommend a strike went on to picket throughout the dispute.)
Rather the lack of a ballot should be seen as providing the state with a
powerful lever against the union, enhancing the possibilities for driving
wedges between different groups of strikers (see section 6.3.ii).

For analytical purposes, the workforce at Murton can be split into three
groups. First, there were the pro-strike activists (usually referred to
simply as "activists"). Most (although not all) were against a ballot. They
were the core supporters of the strike, and were involved in its
prosecution either through picketing or support activities. Secondly, there
was a very small minority of anti-strike diehards; people who were
implacably hostile to the strike from the beginning. But most strikers
fitted into a middle category - more or less sympathetic to the aims of the
strike, unhappy about the way it had been called, and hoping that a
compromise would be reached that could get them back to work with honour.

Things were not as static as this classification suggests - for example,
some people shifted between groups. Nevertheless, it provides a useful
framework for analysing political developments within the Murton workforce,
given the enormous variety of effects that the strike had on different
people. However, a full assessment of these effects depends on carrying the
analysis through into the post strike period - a task carried out in
chapter seven. In the meantime, each of the major groups of workers
involved in the strike is analysed in turn.

From the moment of the Yorkshire walkout, it was clear that in many crucial respects it was activists in the pits who were leading the strike[6]. Equally, it was clear that even in coalfields where support for the strike was never in doubt, these activists constituted only a minority of the workforce. In Durham and Murton my research indicates that no more than 10% were regular pickets - the same percentage as Winterton and Winterton found in Yorkshire (1989). Yet despite their minority status, they led the strike, setting a pace which union leaders were forced to follow in order to put themselves back at the head of the movement.

In terms of the central questions this thesis addresses, the strike created massive political upheavals in the politics of the union branches, particularly in the miners' lodge. This section therefore examines the Murton activists. Who were they? What effect did the strike have on them? How did they relate to the non-active majority? What effect did they have on branch politics? Before answering these questions, the seperation of the activists into two groups (with inevitable overlapping membership) must be acknowledged.

Pickets formed the strike's powerhouse - its driving energy. But within the picketing group there was an important difference between the majority of younger miners - who tore into picketing with uninhibited enthusiasm - and a smaller group of older pickets, who were more cautious and traditional in their approach. The divisions between them hinted at important ideological differences, related principally to the differing experiences of the PWS encountered in chapter five. Secondly, there were activists who chose not to picket (or who did less picketing), but who became involved in support activities of various kinds. Often they were spread around various outlying communities, and therefore exist as a group only conceptually. But both pickets and support workers had specific political effects, which are examined below.

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[6] Following Winterton and Winterton (1989), my definition of activism is based on actions rather than office holding or attendance at branch meetings (see also Fosh, 1981). This definition is necessary because not all branch officials were active in prosecuting the strike.

6.2.i WHO WERE THE PICKETS?

Activists can broadly be split into two categories. First, there were the pickets, and secondly those engaged in support group activities, with an overlap between the two. According to the miners' lodge treasurer, who filled in the daily picketing returns reclaiming expenses from Redhill[7], the miners' lodge mobilised about 200 pickets, out of a total membership of around 1200, but only 100-150 of these were regular pickets. (Towards the end of the strike many older miners picketed Murton purely for the money). For the mechanics, with a membership of less than 300, the total number to have picketed was around 80, with half that number classed as regular pickets. In other words, both Murton branches achieved fairly typical levels of mobilisation compared to Durham and other coalfields.

The overwhelming majority of pickets from both branches were younger men - mostly under under 30. However, as Winterton and Winterton found in their study of strike activism in Yorkshire (1989), the people who organised the strike - the picket "generals", branch secretaries, etc - were much less easy to classify. Many were in their 40's and 50's. The same was true in Durham. In Murton, the mechanics' branch organisation was dominated by experienced political activists - John Cummings, Alan Napier, Dave Temple, Mickey Rooney, Geordie Maitland. Many were in their late 30's. By contrast however, the miners' picket organisation was run by young men - dominated by Frank Duffy and Alan Young. This reflected the lack of enthusiasm for the strike among the miners' lodge committee. Without the passionate involvement of these committed young men, it is very doubtful that the Murton miners' branch would have sustained such a high level of commitment to the strike. Youthful picket organisation in the miners' lodge also reflected the explosion of militancy among young miners, almost all of whom had never been involved in the union before.

Given that in 1984 only 39% of the workforce came from Murton (see chapter five), it seems that Murton residents were proportionately more involved in the picketing than travellers. There were obvious practical difficulties

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[7]Redhill is the headquaters of the Durham Miners. As far as I am aware, these lists were destroyed for fear that they could be used as evidence in court proceedings against pickets.

for travellers in joining the Murton pickets, given the distance from their homes to the picketing centre in Murton. Assessing the residential composition of picketing forces is however complicated by the frequency with which pickets in distant communities operated separately from the Murton branches, organising themselves within group linked to other branches (for example Easington).

It is important to realise that from the outset the pickets did not constitute a homogenous group with a coherent ideology and a united purpose. A basic division existed between those (mainly older) men who regarded picketing as a _duty_ (the minority), and those (mainly, although not exclusively younger) men who flung themselves into picketing as the main object of the strike (the majority). Hartley _et al._ (1983) noted similar divisions within pickets in South Yorkshire during the 1980 steel strike. These differences had important implications for the conduct of the strike in Murton. They derived from the differing environments into which miners of different ages had been socialised.

6.2.ii PICKETS YOUNG AND OLD

One of the key developments apparent in the early days of the strike was the involvement and commitment of young miners and mechanics in the strike. They flung themselves into the fray with astonishing energy and enthusiasm. Many had never been to a union meeting before the strike, and they found it difficult to articulate what propelled them into such wholehearted commitment to the strike.

One young miner - "Mick" - tried to explain how he found himself down on the picket line the day after the split vote in Murton. Until then, he had taken no interest in union affairs. He couldn't give a clear answer.

> "Just quite a few of me mates, we decided to go out. It
> was a laugh like at first. Get a fire going. Lads was
> bringing rabbits and that. Just having a drink on the
> picket line. Nobody was going in. And then we started
> getting trips away." (interview)

Most had not been involved politically before. And to begin with, even though they were on the picket lines, they could not clearly articulate what the strike was about. To Mick,

> "it was just saving the pits. That was all. I knew this
> [pit] could be on the knock anytime." (interview)

Mick, and the other young pickets, identified completely with Arthur Scargill, who symbolised their militant stand against the government.

Many of the young miners formed a self conscious elite of flying pickets. They went everywhere, picketing pits in Durham first, and moving on after early successes to the opencast sites throughout the county. Then they began to target coalfields with pits that had never joined the strike, heading over to Lancashire, and down to Staffordshire. They were organised by Frank Duffy, who, although holding no official position on the miners' branch committee, acted as the unofficial leader and spokesman for the pickets. Through the BL he integrated the Murton pickets into the Area picketing organisation.

But other, mainly older, pickets quickly settled down into a picketing routine, stabilising into cohesive groups, and picketing the same target week after week using a regular shift system. Similar stabilisation was reported by Hartley et al. (1983) with regard to the 1980 steel strike (see also chapter three), and was associated with a particular ideology of picketing. Hartley et al. found that most pickets saw picketing in terms of a duty to the union. This in turn reflected varying "boundaries of legitimacy", defined in terms of attitudes to violence and legality. They wanted to remain legal and non violent. However, there were a significant number who were less worried about these boundaries, and were prepared to engage in more aggressive picketing, regarding the issues of legality and violence in instrumental terms - in other words, transgressing these boundaries depended on the effects of doing so. And "finally, there existed among a small section of strikers a distinct readiness to use force." (ibid, 66)

Such divisions were also characteristic of Murton pickets. Within the Murton miners' branch there were often sharp divisions between the older miners from stable picket groups, and the young, aggressive flying pickets. These divisions remained throughout the dispute, and followed similar boundaries to those found by Hartley et al. Picket meetings - especially in the miners' lodge - sometimes witnessed angry exchanges between the (dominant) young pickets, and the older men. Attention often focused on the "boundary of legitimacy", with older men resisting the "violence" of the younger pickets. Understanding these divisions compels examination of the experiences which gave rise to them.

a) Picketing divisions 1: Older pickets

Older pickets - and many other older miners - reacted to the strike very differently to the young pickets. Their class consciousness was already shaped and moulded by their experiences before 1984. Their interpretations were rooted in their experience of the Post War Settlement, and its final corporatist manifestation during the 1970's - the "Derek and Joe show". Historically, miners - perhaps more than any group of workers - came to believe that it was through the state that their interests could be advanced (Beynon, 1985b). Hence their complacency after the signing of "Plan For Coal" (see chapter four). Rather than seeing the strike as a fundamental clash between competing (and ultimately irreconcilable) forces, many miners were socialised into a perspective which saw the strike as a legitimate attempt to wrest certain limited defensive concessions from the government.

Hence the older miners could be described as "traditionalists", in the manner of Gouldner's analysis (1955; see also chapter three). They sought a restoration of the status quo, a return to the old "corporatist consensus". They supported the broad aims of the strike _precisely because_ they were couched in these ostensibly limited terms. They were able to support it because they could not understand the ferocity of the states' response. Samuel's term "radical conservatism" captures this tension well (1986, 22-29). It was a defence of what had been built up, and therefore a gesture of loyalty to past generations who had struggled to build a better future, not a challenge to the power of the state. This was particularly true of the small group of older pickets at Murton, who were mainly ex-branch officials, and their friends. They had a deep loyalty to the NUM, and a strong commitment to the defence of conditions which had been won in the past.

However, as chapter four showed, even the limited defensive demands of the strike posed a fundamental challenge to the state. Although many older strikers therefore supported the strike, they were disturbed to the extent that it seemed to involve a more far-reaching "political" challenge. The state played heavily on this uncertainty, presenting the strike as an attack on "democratic" government. Media coverage emphasised this aspect, concentrating on violence and the lack of a ballot, to try and deligitimise

the strike by highlighting its consensus-breaking aspects. Picket line violence became a key issue for many of the older miners.

In the mechanics' branch, these picketing divisions did not exist. Because their committee was united behind the strike, and because of the general shift to the left of young and old committee members before the strike, the smaller mechanics' branch did not divide along age lines. Indeed, the pickets were led by the experienced political figures in the lodge - for example, Dave Temple, Geordie Maitland, Tommy Parry and Mickey Rooney (mostly in their middle or later 30's). Their committee was wholeheartedly committed to the strike, so young pickets (of whom there were much fewer than in the miners' lodge) were integrated easily with the experienced political figures in the branch, who formed the core of the mechanics' picketing force. At area level, the mechanics' leadership (Billy Etherington) also supported the strike, so the Murton mechanics had a strong official base for their picketing operation.

However, the miners' lodge remained deeply divided over the strike for its entire duration. Frank Duffy - the unofficial leader of the pickets - was only a committee member during the dispute, and the committee still included men whose commitment to the strike was distinctly tepid. The resignation of three committee members at the start of the strike effectively handed a precarious majority to the left on the committee. But divisions on the committee were reflected in lodge meetings, which were often stormy. Verbal confrontations between older miners who were hostile to the strike and the young pickets were a feature of most branch meetings.

b) Picketing divisions 2: The young pickets

For young pickets, the government's assault on the strike's legitimacy was irrelevant. Because they travelled to the biggest trouble spots, avoiding stable picket situations, they witnessed and engaged in the most fierce clashes with the police. In these situations, a very strong sense of outrage quickly developed. For them it was the state, not the miners, who were engineering decisive breaks with consensus politics. For them, the issue was not the ballot, or alleged picket line violence, but the actions of the police. Their assaults, blatant fabrication of charges and evidence, provocation and attempts to humiliate miners (for example taunting them by waving ten pound notes at pickets) broke down consensus notions of

policing, and stimulated retaliatory violence (see Coulter et al., 1984; Miller et al. [eds], 1985 for details of police tactics). Whether it was at the private opencast site at Tow Law, in Sheffield at the Trades and Labour Club, or Orgreave on June 18th, Murton pickets felt they were attacked without provocation (see appendix seven for detailed accounts of these incidents). Inevitably, they responded with violence of their own. They saw it as class war.

Even for the young pickets though, the aim of the strike was principally defensive; preservation of jobs, protection of communities, and so on. But unlike the older men, they felt - from their experiences on the picket line as much as anything - that the time for pushing their interests through the state apparatus was gone. They felt that to "win" they had to decisively beat the government, and the forces of the state which the government was deploying against them. Their aims were defensive, but they understood that in the political context of Thatcherism, such "limited" demands were extremely radical.

Despite defeats, arrests and victimisation, active pickets experienced the strike as a phenomenal liberation. Now they were participants in history, not its passive objects[8]. In the caldron of new experiences that the strike generated, their consciousness was moulded and remolded. In this process, miners and mechanics differed little, since there was considerable interaction and cooperation between their picketing operations. Experiences were discussed repeatedly, shaping a collective memory of events. Within this process, some individuals played a greater role than others. Politically educated activists provided leadership, using their experience and knowledge to interpret events.

Dave Temple, from the mechanics' branch, brought the perspective of revolutionary "Trotskyism" to bear, and won significant support and respect among the pickets. He was able to recruit some new members to the Workers Revolutionary Party. But the subsequent splintering of the WRP towards the end of the strike dissipated this impact considerably. The miners' BL also

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[8]See Armstrong and Nichols (1976) and Scargill (1975) for comparable observations about the 1972 Saltley picket.

acted as a key educational forum, and within it Frank Duffy was particularly important for Murton miners. At a national scale, Arthur Scargill personified the pickets militant left wing challenge to the state, and he was revered with uncritical admiration by the young activists.

Both miners' and mechanics' leaders tried to maintain discipline among their pickets. A strong group pride and camaraderie built up among the young flying pickets, welding them together into a cohesive group, resistant to outside criticism. In the miners' lodge their leader was Frank Duffy.

> "Frankie wouldn't let us just get in amongst it. He'd say: 'Right, all together. We're going straight down the front. Murton lads in the front.' It was always like that... We always had to be at the front. Frankie make us. Well, he didn't make us, but he encouraged us. He always lifted people." (interview)

As a member of the Broad Left (which effectively ran the strike in Durham[9]), Frank's leadership of the Murton pickets was crucial, because it integrated them into the effective leadership of the strike. He believed in the need for discipline, and his leadership undoubtedly helped control and direct the aggression of the pickets. Also, his forceful, dynamic personality continually raised their enthusiasm. He received strong support from other miners, whose political consciousness and commitment developed rapidly during the strike.

c) Picketing divisions 3: the Murton riot

One incident which summed up the divisions between old and young pickets occurred towards the end of August 1984, when the NCB were making strenuous efforts to break the strike in previously solid areas like Durham. A fierce battle developed at Easington, where Paul Wilkinson had indicated his desire to break the strike (Beynon, 1984b). After several days in which mass pickets prevented his return by sheer force of numbers, the police

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[9] By 1984 the Broad Left had won control of the DMA executive, and the two agents - Tom Callan and Harold Mitchell - were effectively its prisoners. The strike was therefore run by the BL, which was so central to the conduct of the strike in Durham that mechanics' activists began to attend in increasing numbers. Towards the end of the strike, the mechanics set up their own left organisation.

finally sneaked him into work via a back entrance, breaking a guarantee given by the manager that anyone who went back would go through the front gates (Beynon, 1985a).

> "It was a dirty trick taking him through the back entrance. 'Cos they would never have got him through the front entrance at the time. Everybody's blood was boiling that night." (interview)

That day the pickets in Easington rioted in frustration and fury at the police occupation. Disturbances continued through the night in many other pit villages, with Murton seeing some of the worst troubles.

It began in good humour, with a lot of laughing. As some people came out of the pub that night, they started sitting in the road. More people joined the ones sitting. Then the police arrived, "trying to be clever", and it erupted into violence. About a hundred people became involved in a pitched battle with the police. All the anger and coiled up tension of the day was unleashed. The police were chased out of the village down to Cold Hesledon. Reinforcements arrived, but the pickets charged again. People pulled cars out, turned them over and set them alight, making barricades. A pub was burnt down. Finally more police arrived, "and it was just a mad scamper" to get away.

Next day a young picket - "Mick" - was arrested, with several others. There was trouble in the next miners' picket meeting. Rop Naylor - the branch chairman - argued that the riot had been a disgrace, and that the keys to the cells of the arrested men should be thrown away. He was applauded by some men for that. There were strenuous arguments on the committee about whether or not to use the union's solicitors to defend the imprisoned men, with Rop Naylor suggesting he'd resign if the lodge lifted a finger to help them. Frank Duffy arranged with Billy Etherington (General Secretary of the Durham Mechanics) to use the mechanics' solicitors. However, Rop tried to undermine this action, only to be faced with a committee vote of censure, moved by Frank. It was a humiliating rebuff for the lodge chairman, whose authority was badly damaged. Six or eight weeks later, he resigned as Chairman.

d) Picketing divisions 4: The boundaries of legitimate action

The Murton riot showed how deeply many of the older pickets were opposed to picket line violence. They picketed locally, and avoided some of the most

violent confrontations. They didn't believe in retribution, even if there was violence conducted against the pickets. Mick argued that

> "the uniforms frightened a lot of people. You hit a copper you know for a fact you've got a hell of a chance of going down... I think that's what frightened a lot of people." (interview)

After a few arrests on the picket line, people invariably began to back off. A mechanics' activist confirmed the point, reflecting on the moment in August 1984 at a Wearmouth colliery picket when the pickets broke through the police lines.

> "Arthur says it wasn't a failure of picketing during the strike, it was a failure to picket. But he's wrong, 'cos the lads were frightened! The power of the state was too great. The lads were too intimidated. They'd have a go, and they'd do really stupid things, but in the main, the mast majority of the people who were picketing were intimidated to come to close quarters with the police... We as a group were frightened of the police, and it dawned on us then, and its true, we were." (interview)

Even for the young pickets therefore, there were distinct limits to how far they would go.

Only a tiny minority - including Mick - lacked these inhibitions. He and many of the "young 'uns" - a group of 15-20 from the same year group at school - wanted to hit back. Commenting on the Orgreave picket on June 18th 1984, he said:

> "There was a _lot_ of coppers. There was a lot of us! But the difference is, they're allowed to hit us and get away with it." (interview)

He quoted as an example the policeman seen on television beating a picket at Orgreave, who wasn't even cautioned, and recalled what happened to a Welsh miner he was at Orgreave with.

> "He was whacked. I'm not kidding you, it opened like a fish, the back of his head. It just split wide open! He had this union jack cap on, and it was just red! Blood was pissing out of his head! We got him next to the bus and we were trying to bandage him. There was more than one, there was loads like that. They were just cracking about the skulls. I said we should be able to do the same to them without being charged! There's no way they'd have got away with that." (interview)

He invoked self defence - the right to fight back (for more details about Orgreave and other picketing experiences, see appendix seven).

e) Picketing divisions 5: Conclusions

Even within the relatively small picketing group at Murton, there were therefore important divisions. Older miners, heavily influenced by their socialisation into the PWS, picketed because they were loyal to the union, and they wanted to defend their jobs and communities. Younger miners, socialised into a much more confrontational social and political environment, saw a need to challenge and defeat the forces of the state to win their defence of jobs and communities. For them, the strike had a profound, politicising effect.

6.2.iii DISCIPLINING THE RANKS

When the first miners began crossing picket lines in Murton (see section 6.3), they were met by a disbelieving and explosive mass picket. From then on, the strike breakers felt the full weight of the pickets hostility. Every kind of pressure was brought to bear, from informal acts such as verbal gestures, through formal disciplining by the union, and beyond to the shadowy world of direct physical intimidation (Hiller, 1969, 103-113). However, the unprecedented role of the police isolated returnees from social pressures. Hence other measures were designed, to try and enforce discipline.

Both the miners' and mechanics in Durham set up disciplinary committees, following the NUM rule changes in August 1984 (which provided for area disciplinary committees - see Goodman, 1985). They reflected frustration, as the strike dragged on without any new offensives. Anger was directed at the unions own members who - as end products of the state back to work strategy - were identifiable and accessible enemies. This testimony - from a Murton man who sat on the miners' disciplinary committee - captures the mood of the time.

> "Well my feelings in respect of the scabs was to expel
> the bastards... At the time I was very bitter. Like I
> say, active every day of the strike, 100% in favour of
> the strike, and I was 100% in favour of expulsions. In
> the bitter climate of the strike that was the attitude
> of all the activists I think." (interview)

It was clear too that the miners' disciplinary committee was not a model of impartial judgement.

"Well, I'll tell you something now. There was nowt
decided. If you were a scab you were expelled. If
you... [came] in front of the disciplinary committee
you were expelled. It was as simple as that. And I
voted for that. Obviously, it's easy to look back now
in retrospect, and I'm the first to admit that I done
wrong. But at the time you're an activist, you've been
arrested two or three times on picket lines trying to
stop scabs entering, the boys you surround yourself
with are all activists screaming for their blood as
scabs, and at the time you cannot really start talking
about being compassionate or lenient with them fella's.
That was the situation. I voted every time to expel
them. Every time." (interview)

Other tactics were used to try and enforce discipline within the union.
When the first men broke the strike at Murton, late in 1984, a small
subgroup of the pickets - about 10-15 - formed the "Murton Hit Squad",
which attacked scabs in Murton. They met informally but regularly to plan
their actions. Usually these involved breaking windows and other attacks on
property. Attacks were also coordinated with the Easington Hit Squad; if
Easington had a scab in the Murton area then they would ask Murton to do
the job for them, and the Murton Squad would make reciprocal requests. Many
of the most militant pickets condemned these attacks - including the picket
leader, Frank Duffy - but there was no doubting their effectiveness, on one
level at least. As section 6.3.ii.c shows, fear of this small minority
helped persuade many men not to go back.

Violence of this type reflected the sheer anger and frustration of the
strikers as hopes of victory faded throughout the winter. The state
strategy meant normal picketing was now ineffective and illegal. The
massive propaganda onslaught against the strike meant that sooner or later
those who had never wanted to be on strike would attempt to break it. To
some, it seemed the only way left to try and maintain the dispute was
through terror. It was not a tactic likely to bring victory, only prolong
defeat. However, any criticism of terror tactics must understand that they
were provoked by a state strategy which used the law to destroy the union's
ability to discipline its membership, and rendered most attempts to
prosecute the strike more effectively impossible[10].

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[10]In the USA, where the law regulates strikes even more tightly
(Footnote Continued)

6.2.iv SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

As the strike progressed beyond the first few weeks, and it became increasingly obvious that it would be a prolonged stoppage, so people turned to the everyday problems of how to support thousands of strikers with almost no means of support. Government changes to social security benefits deprived strikers of the first £16 of benefit because of an arbitrary and unjustified assumption that they received strike pay (Jones and Novak, 1985). Many single miners therefore had no income at all, and all strikers suffered extreme hardship. These problems were intensified for strikers living in villages far from the pit, where there were few other people on strike, and social isolation added to material deprivation. At least in Murton (and other villages still with a pit), hardships were shared, and there was a common bond of solidarity.

As well as the womens' support groups (discussed in appendix 5), there were many other activities undertaken to sustain the strikers. They ranged from union sponsored activities like collections, to informal support work between neighbours - for example helping with redecoration. As the strike progressed, the scale of support activities multiplied, and became more organised. Within Murton and the other villages around Easington, the SEAM campaign played a crucial role, as it was transformed from a campaigning weapon into a support organisation (Barker, 1984; see also chapter five). In outlying villages it was often harder to build and sustain support groups.

a) Support groups in Murton

Within Murton, some people likened the atmosphere to wartime - everyone pulling together, a great sense of community. This view was shared by a prominent member of Murton's management who lived in the village. He thought it a shame that people breaking the strike broke the community atmosphere. Local newspapers reinforced the image by carrying stories portraying Murton as a community united by the strike (Sunday Sun,

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(Footnote Continued)
than Britain, strike discipline is sometimes enforced by shootings (Cleaver, 1975; Green, 1978. See also chapter 8 for a broader discussion of levels of legitimacy in strikes.)

20-5-84). But the reality was more complex, for just as the workforce was divided from the first day over whether or not to strike, so the community was characterised by significant divisions.

The bitterest opponents of the strike were those men who'd taken redundancy before the strike. Older miners hostile to the strike gravitated towards distinct social groups (concentrated for example in the British Legion club), and sniped continually against the activists (see section 6.3). In general, local shops - realising their dependency on the miners - offered strong support, giving free food and so on. The only shopkeeper who initially refused to give anything had his windows pushed in. In the early days, management at the pit offered some support to the strikers. Old wood was freed from the colliery stockyards for chopping and distribution to old people.

Among the activists however there is no doubt that the sense of community was tremendous. At times they give the impression of forming an almost hermetically sealed unit. This group identity was part of their strength - what kept them together. One picket summed up his memories of the strike:

> "Some marvellous moments you know. There's nee doubt
> about it. Marvellous feelings! I was brought to tears
> on many occasions. Filled up and that. Particularly
> around Christmas time. It was amazing the type of
> support we got Jonathan you know. We could never ever
> have believed it." (interview)

Whilst the secret world of the activist was a source of tremendous strength, it also had limitations. One obvious problem was the social distance between active pickets and the majority of non active members. The degree of mutual exclusivity was astonishing. One mechanic - asked what effect he thought the police presence (when the first scabs went back in Murton) had on the community generally - didn't feel able to comment.

> "I didn't really mix with anyone else [other than the
> activists]. I couldn't really tell you what the general
> feeling was." (interview)

This distance between activists and non activists signalled deep chasms in understanding, which are examined in section 6.3. It also had crucial implications for the isolation of many strikers from the kind of social networks which were so decisive in sustaining the strike.

In a sense, Murton - in common with the handful of other villages still with their own pit - was special. Although only 39% of Murton's miners came

from the village, the community was still dominated by the pit. Paradoxically perhaps, in some ways the strike temporarily reversed the trend before the strike towards the breaking down of the pit-community identity. Travellers were no longer around, and each community became something of an island. In Murton, with the pit still dominant, kinship and friendship ties brought a socialisation of the strike experience. Intrigue and factionalism were also common, but strong social networks added to the intensity of the strike.

b) Travellers and support work

Outside Murton however, the sense of community was more fractured. In many villages the pits had closed in the 1950's or 60's, and their economic bases were now more diverse. Miners were a minority. Furthermore, different miners from one village worked at many different collieries, and so lacked a communal sense of solidarity.

> "That's the one thing that everybody overlooked - that
> part of the campaign was the defence of communities,
> yet in these ex-coal mining areas the community base
> has gone in that sense. It's lost." (interview)

There were practical difficulties for people wanting to become involved in the strike. Without money, travel to the strike centre was difficult. Cosmopolitan working populations meant that many workers in the outlying villages were not on strike, leading to a feeling of isolation, and strong social pressures to earn money[11].

Both miners' and mechanics' branches tried to overcome the isolation of the travellers. Dave Temple remembered making strenuous efforts to maintain solidarity in the mechanics' branch.

> "I always in mass meetings avoided any pronouncements
> about our chances of winning. I always stressed that
> the consequences of not fighting were greater than of
> fighting and losing. I would always say they are

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[11]These difficulties call to mind the "Kerr-Siegel" hypothesis, which suggests that certain occupational groups have a higher propensity to strike because they live in "isolated mass" communities, which are insulated from outside social pressures (Kerr and Siegel, 1959). Winterton and Winterton found that in Yorkshire, the hypothesis - if applied at the inter-community rather than inter-industry level - was particularly relevant in explaining patterns of strike breaking and activism in the area (1989).

leaving us no choice but to fight. We understand how hard it is, we appreciate that many of you did not agree with our decision to strike, but are showing loyalty to the union. We had to express this concern in deeds, and the relief work we engaged in was testimony to our concern. No member who contacted us lived too far away to be visited, and involved in picketing. On a morning I would get up and drive seven miles in the opposite direction to Murton to pick up men for picketing. After fourteen miles I was passing my house to drive another seven miles to Murton." (personal communication)

Frank Duffy in the miners' branch made similar efforts, but the miners' bigger branch posed formidable logistical obstacles, and some travellers complained that they had to make their own picketing arrangements. Some joined groups of pickets organised by other branches - for example Easington. Also, the efforts of left wingers were hindered by a lodge committee which was still influenced by men who were lukewarm in their commitment to the strike. For example, Frank Duffy tried to persuade the lodge committee to take some of their meetings out into the West of the coalfield, but he was ruled out of order by the secretary, John Dixon. It is in the context of the inability of the union to reach all its members, that the gradual drift back to work towards the end of the strike must be located.

Because miners in outlying communities came from many different pits, any support organisation clearly had to be geographically rather than branch based. As such, the area unions had to take the dominant role. However, evidence suggests that activists in outlying areas did not receive all the support they needed. The Ferryhill support group - supplying 700 people in around 16 villages with food parcels - appealed for help towards Christmas. Its organiser - Brian - explained:

"We were getting indications I would say around about late October, November that things weren't right with the people. They were becoming desperate! We made appeals. We explained... And what was happening, all the tv programmes, all the newspapers, were talking about the meals a day over on the coast at the soup kitchens,.. and that they were getting fed three meals a day. Yet these people we were providing for were only getting the parcel every other week, and they were becoming bloody infuriated with it you know. So then we decided to make an appeal to the unions to give more support to travel to work miners. Quite sadly, it fell on deaf ears." (interview)

Brian had an interview with the DMA executive at Redhills. He suggested that all funding should go into a central kitty, which would then be shared equally between coastal pit villages and outlying communities. The response was negative. "[I] informed them that there would be a crack, and it would be from these areas."

The plan would have involved coastal pit villages giving up some of the money they gathered for redistribution inland. Their resource base was much stronger - more people willing to collect, more sympathetic people to donate, more organisational resources to send collectors further afield. The traditional pit - village identity ensured that most of what was collected was spent in and on the village, and there were very strong pressures to keep it this way.

As well as lacking material support, travellers were psychologically isolated from the strike. An activist from Kelloe emphasised the importance of overcoming isolation in the outlying villages.

> "I went on my knees to get the union reps to come out to these villages. I <u>knew</u> where the strike would break. We knew it would break in these outlying villages because they weren't getting the information fed to them the same way as they were in the pit villages themselves. I mean, everything that you organised here was a struggle. You battled for everything. Well on the coast - Easington - you could go and get your dinner. There was no such thing here. You got your food parcel once every two weeks - about five quids worth of groceries...
>
> Then the <u>meetings</u> were there, where people could go. And they had the information. Where here, it was just a few of us, battling to try and give the men information. And they were listening to <u>that</u> [the tv], and believed that more than they believed us. And I begged and begged Billy Stobbs and Davy Hopper and Alan Cummings (leading BL activists): get out in these villages 'cos its going to break from there. And <u>sure</u> enough, it broke from here. (It broke from Ferryhill more than anywhere like.) But we knew." (interview)

In the autumn and winter, the union (mainly via the BL) and support groups organised a series of meetings in the villages, to try and keep the strikers in touch with the union view of the strike. This was vital because the media onslaught against the strike was so overwhelming that anyone out of touch with the union case was very susceptible to NCB return to work propaganda (Douglass, 1985; Schwarz and Fountain, 1985; Jones <u>et al.</u>,

1985). Dave Hopper and Billy Stobbs (both members of the miners' BL), Billy Etherington (General Secretary of the Durham Mechanics) and Huw Beynon (from Durham University), were among those who came out to address meetings. Leaflets were put in with the food parcels. In the run up to Christmas, the campaign seemed to work. The return was stemmed. But "after Christmas it just broke completely". That dam burst was a crushing blow to those involved in the strike. (Section 6.4 examines this dam burst in the terms of the people who were involved in it.)

Ties of kinship and community had already been weakened in outlying villages. Hardship was exacerbated by the relative weakness of these support networks. Part of the strikes meaning - the defence of communities - spoke only diffusely to strikers scattered across the commuter villages of Durham. They were separated from the full intensity of the strike experience. And because most had seen at least one of their old pits close, they felt confused by the union's apparently arbitrary stand over Cortonwood.

Part of the reason why the dam burst after Christmas was because a tiny minority of miners had already broken the strike. In doing so they lowered the threshold of resistance for others who were thinking of giving up. In the following section therefore I examine the motivation and role of the "anti-strike diehards"; men who never wanted to be on strike, and some of whom became the first men back at Murton colliery.

Despite the media's lionisation of strike breakers, relatively little has been written analysing who the strike breakers were, why they went back to work, and what they now feel about their decision (see Parker, 1986, for a significant exception). Indeed, the literature on strike breaking in general is notable mainly for its absence. Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide a detailed statistical analysis of strike breakers at Murton (broken down by age, residence, type of work, when they returned, etc), but my interviews yielded considerable qualitative information concerning their characteristics, motivations and ideology.

As noted earlier, a basic division existed between strikers who opposed the dispute from the beginning, and those who supported its general aims, but harboured a variety of doubts about it. This section is concerned to analyse the role and beliefs of the small minority of anti-strike diehards. Despite the media's characterisation of all strike breakers as ideological Thatcherites, it is impossible to classify the workforce purely on whether or not they went back to work. This is particularly so with respect to the committed anti-strike miners, some of whom never broke the strike! A distinction can be drawn between the very first men back (a small minority of this minority group), and the larger group of anti-strikers, some (but not all of whom) went back. In general, the former were travellers from outside Murton, and the latter were older miners from Murton.

The actions and beliefs of both subgroups cannot be understood without reference to national events during the strike, because it was this level to which they appealed for justification of their actions. Talking to some of the first men back it was striking just how fully they identified with the anti-strike ideology of the government. National events were also important at a practical level, in providing the immediate stimulus for people returning to work.

6.3.i THE CONTEXT

At a national level, negotiations to end the strike continued fitfully until July 18th, when they broke off and were not resumed again until September (Goodman, 1985). In North Derbyshire, Area Director Ken Moses reacted to the stalemate by pioneering a meticulously planned and

aggressively executed back to work movement. It became the blue print for every area encouraging a drift back to work. (Wilsher et al., 1985; 200-203). At the same time, Ken Foulstone and Bob Taylor were beginning the legal moves which would eventually lead the courts to pronounce the whole strike unofficial. Other court actions were already underway to declare the strike unofficial in Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, and North Wales (De Friend and Rubin, 1985; 324). Ian MacGregor understood the significance of these court actions.

> "[T]he cumulative effect of the court actions was to give a tremendous boost to the back-to-work movement. Every time a case was won it gave a few more uncertain strikers pause for thought: maybe working was not disloyal, maybe Scargill was not right, maybe it was not letting your colleagues down." (MacGregor, 1986; 228)

Their action bore fruit in October, when the courts announced that the Yorkshire strike was unofficial, and instructed the NUM to desist from attempting to persuade miners not to cross picket lines. When Scargill continued to proclaim the strike official, he and the union were declared to be in contempt of court, and on October 10th, were fined £1000 and £200000 respectively. When the latter fine went unpaid (the former was paid anonymously), the unions funds were sequestrated, and a receiver appointed (on October 25th).

Although painfully slow, the back to work movement gathered pace during the summer. Even in North Derbyshire, only 800 had gone back out of a total workforce of 10500 by the start of September. In Durham, the first moves were made at Easington and Wearmouth, in the week beginning August 20th (Beynon, 1984b). After the failure of the first attempt to lay on buses in July, this second attempt yielded a revolt by 16 COSA (office workers) members at Wearmouth (led by their secretary Ken Seed), and the lone defiance of Paul Wilkinson at Easington (see section 6.2). Picketing was intense, but the first men were in. Wilkinson began court action against the union shortly after.

Throughout September the rebels numbers barely increased. Single strike breakers were reported to be back at work at a few other installations (Fishburn coke works and Ashington in Northumberland for example). But negotiations were restarted at a national level, increasing the hope that the strike might reach an agreed conclusion. These hopes were dramatically

boosted by the threat of action by NACODS, when the deputies voted on September 29th by 82.5% to strike over pit closures and loss of pay for refusing to cross picket lines.

However, on October 25th the NACODS strike threat was finally called off following an agreement to set up an Independent Review Body as a final (non-binding) appeals stage to the colliery closure procedure. And on October 31st, talks between the union and NCB ended with no sign of a resumption. At this time there were still only 23 men back at work in Durham, and 21 of these were at Wearmouth (Newcastle Journal). But now the NCB stepped up pressure on the union by threatening to switch off electricity at mines - including Murton - where the NUM had picketed out deputies (effectively threatening closure, as mines would flood without electricity to supply the pumps). And in a further move, they offered anyone returning to work by November 19th a £580 Christmas bonus, payable on December 21st.

In the first week of November, these moves prompted the biggest return to work nationally since the dispute started (2236 by NCB figures). In North Derbyshire, over 1000 went back. In Yorkshire, Cortonwood witnessed the first break in its ranks. In Durham, the strike began to crack too. By the end of that week (November 10th), there were two men back at the Hawthorn Combine (which included Murton), one at Eppleton, one at Seaham, five at Tursdale workshops, five at Vane Tempest and two at Easington (Newcastle Journal, 9/11/84; 8). That still left Sacriston, Horden, Westoe, Herrington and Dawdon completely strikebound. On November 5th, Monty Stubbs became the first man to break the strike at Murton (travelling in from Easington Lane). His return was met with mass pickets, and dozens of arrests.

6.3.ii THE FIRST MEN BACK AT MURTON[12]

The first men to break the strike at Murton constituted a tiny minority who were bitterly opposed to the strike from the first day. They were nearly all older miners. In a "normal" dispute, the weight of communal union

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[12]A more detailed account of my interviews with two of the first men back at Murton is contained in appendix 8.

solidarity would have precluded strike breaking as an option, even for those most hostile to the strike. However, with the unprecedented length and nature of the dispute, and the massive government and media attempt to delegitimise it, potential returnees were able to appeal to a national arena for legitimacy, bypassing traditional local values.

Within any large workforce, a wide variety of political views coexist, and during any strike this will include a percentage who do not identify with the action (Hiller, 1969, 100; Lane and Roberts, 1971, 100). In any strike, controlling the dissident minority becomes increasingly difficult as time drags on. Murton was no exception, and there were known "right wingers" who activists were aware constituted weak links in their solidarity. Often they were big overtime workers, which meant that they were dependant on management for maintaining their earnings. They supported the 1972 and '74 strikes, but were characteristically opposed to almost any other strike situation.

Essentially therefore, the first men back espoused a primitive individualism, rejecting all forms of collective discipline (see appendix 8 for more details about the ideology of the first men back). They came out on strike reluctantly, and went back to work as soon as their safety could be guaranteed, and the strike had been sufficiently delegitimised to justify such a momentous move. Their opposition to the strike crystallised around certain key issues; namely the ballot, union "corruption", and violence. But these issues can in a sense be regarded merely as "triggers", which were used to legitimate action based on a much deeper ideological hostility to the strike.

During the research for this thesis I could not establish strong enough contacts with "anti-strike diehards" to investigate the individual basis for their ideological hostility to the strike (see appendix one for the practical difficulties involved). But in the interviews I did do, some important points emerged. Most significant of all was the degree to which "Thatcherite" notions about the excessive power of the unions, and the dangers of collectivism were embedded in their ideology. They seized upon the government's and the media's anti-strike rhetoric, and reproduced it

passionately[13]. This was very different to other older miners who felt unhappy about being out on strike for so long (some of whom eventually went back to work), but who nevertheless retained a deep underlying hostility to Thatcherism. Anti-strike diehards accepted most of the government's arguments, both with regard to the immediate strike issues, and the broader thrust of its trade union strategy.

a) The ballot

Unsurprisingly, the ballot was offered as a key legitimating factor by the first men back. If there had been a ballot they would have voted against a strike, but would have stayed out had the vote gone against them.

> "I said then, and I say now, and I'll still repeat: if they'd had a proper ballot I would have voted against a strike... If it had voted for the strike, I would then have stuck by the vote. I'd have stopped on strike. Even though I wasn't happy, I'd have stopped. It wasn't money that forced me back to work. I went back to work because I didn't _want_ to stop on strike." (interview)

Another said "I'd still be out today", if the ballot had been for a strike.

The "missing" ballot removed the legitimacy of the strike for these people. However, interviews revealed such a deep hostility to the concept of striking, that it must be regarded as questionable whether a ballot would have prevented them from breaking the strike. National action through the courts - although rarely mentioned explicitly - seemed to have played a significant role here. Getting the strike declared unofficial in every area gave legal backing and credibility to the view - difficult to sustain in Murton despite some latent hostility to the strike - that the strike wasn't legitimate. Breaking it therefore became justifiable.

Because of the strong traditions of class solidarity crystallised within the NUM, deviant views would normally have remained marginal. Nevertheless, the existence of these views - present in any large union organisation - thrust a lever into the state's hands, which commanded increasing power the longer the strike went on. Manipulating this lever allowed the government

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[13]See appendix eight for a more detailed account of my interviews with the anti-strike diehards, and for a tentative attempt to explain these attitudes in terms of the "ideology of sacrifice".

to pursue twin objectives; the immediate destabilisation of the strike's power bases, and the long term destabilisation of non-instrumental modes of collective action. This relates to Offe and Wiesenthal's point - raised in chapter three - about the continual difficulty for trade unions of maintaining a "dialogical" definition of interests. The state was engaged in a systematic attempt to redefine trade unionism along narrowly conceived, instrumental (or "monological") lines (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980).

b) Corruption in the lodge.

A strong theme running through accounts from anti strike activists was alleged corruption in the miners' branch. Allegations were specific. One returnee claimed that he had been down on the miners' lodge picketing list since the start of the strike, when he had never picketed. Somebody was signing for his picketing money, and pocketing it. (A similar accusation was made about Eppleton miners lodge.)

A second allegation was that union support was available only if you were an active picket. Numerous examples were quoted. For example, Christmas gifts from foreign trade unionists were one of the biggest boosts for the strike. The French in particular were extremely generous, donating 27000 toys to the Durham coalfield, apparently with an average price of £10 (Newcastle Journal, 15-12-84; 5). (Another six lorries went to Northumberland and Scotland.) But anti strike activists complained that all the best presents - BMX bikes, computers, etc - were taken by the pickets before anyone else got a look in. They were left with footballs, sweets, and shoes. In similar vein, it was alleged that activists living in Murton got preferential treatment with other benefits. For example, lodge committee members kept food parcels back. Unless you knew the right people you didn't get to know about the support that was available.

It is difficult to validate or deny these accusations. What is certain however (and probably more relevant) is that feelings run very strongly among the anti-strike activists that those who weren't involved in the strike lost out considerably compared to those who were involved.

<u>c) The pit "bully boys".</u>

One of the most controversial issues during the strike was the extent to which violence - or the threat of violence - was responsible for keeping people out on strike. Anti-strike activists have no doubts. It was the "bully boys" (as they dubbed them), who stopped more people going back. One man made quite specific allegations against a group of pickets who he claimed were responsible for putting people's windows in. He was one of the first half dozen back, and like most "superscabs" (a subjectively defined group regarded as especially treacherous by the pickets), had his windows put in.

Pickets readily admit that their was a lot of "ventilation" during the strike. Miners committee members stood up at meetings and condemned the practice. Frank Duffy, the unofficial picket leader, was particularly insistent on this point, arguing that it was wrong to attack a strike breaker through his family. But as section 6.2 shows, his appeals fell on deaf ears. A Murton "hit squad" was formed, with the self-appointed role of enforcing strike discipline via window smashing and other intimidation.

However, violence was not all one way. With the tape recorder off, one of the first men back at Murton described with satisfaction how some of the returnees set up a "vigilante group" which retaliated against attacks on returnees homes by putting out a picket's windows every time one of their windows went in. They also travelled through to Durham to smash the windows of the miners' lodge secretary (John Dixon), on December 20th 1984 (Journal, 21-12-84; 5).

Getting the first man in was also crucial in increasing the opportunity for strike breaking. This perceptive comment from a (non Murton) mechanics activist shows what was at stake.

> "There is no such thing as being able to halt a return to work once it starts. From the first man to return in North Derbyshire... it was inevitable that if the strike went on long enough <u>all</u> the men would be back in North Derbyshire. 'Cos every man that goes back undermines the resolve of the others that stay out... If they can get a man back, it weakens the <u>second</u> weakest man in the branch, who wouldn't want to be the first, you know? If you can keep that first man out, you can keep them all out. But every one who who goes in makes it easier for those that go in after him."

Returnees may have looked at it from a slightly different perspective, but the sense was the same. They didn't want to be the first back. One man had talked about going back during the summer, but as he said, "nobody's stupid - no brave - enough to stick their necks out like that!" But once someone was safely through the gates, others felt able to follow.

One of the first men back at Murton told how he was "looking in the papers" to see if there was anyone back. When he saw there was, he phoned up the colliery. "As soon as they could get me through that picket line, I went back to work!" So why hadn't he gone back earlier?

> "Because you couldn't get in. Anybody who tried to walk
> in would have been killed!" (interview)

Another man who went back even earlier agreed that although he'd considered returning over the summer it simply seemed impossible. The first men in proved it wasn't.

6.3.iii WITHIN BUT AGAINST THE STRIKE: MURTON'S RELUCTANT STRIKERS

The anti-strike mavericks discussed so far were a minority of the strike breakers. They were spread throughout the county. There was however a relatively distinct group of about twenty in Murton (and no doubt in other villages with large populations of strikers) who agitated against the strike almost from the start. They were overwhelmingly - if not exclusively - older miners (in their 50's). They drank in the Legion (just as the activists concentrated in the Colliery Inn). They continually sniped at the strike, criticising the activists. All the complaints voiced by the anti-strike diehards were echoed by these men, but they had a greater reluctance to act. They lived within a community dominated by traditions of loyalty to the union. Memories of what happened to deputies who worked during the 1972 strike lingered in the background (see chapter four). Unlike travellers, Murton men faced a lifetime of intense social isolation if they "scabbed".

The significant and vocal right wing tradition within the branch, which had been so influential before the strike, was still present, almost exclusively among older miners. The Legion Club drinkers were the same men that activists identified as the voluble right wing element which the former weak lodge leadership had never been able to dominate (see section

5.4.i). They were bitterly opposed to the strike. But scabbing was another matter. One mechanic's activist reflected on:

> "the amazing emotional pull of the National Union of Mineworkers. Especially for people who'd worked in the pit all their lives. So long as there was a chance of winning, it didn't even enter their heads to go back. Not even the most venal ones!" (interview)

Only towards the end did a small number take this enormous step. It seems likely that more than anything they hoped that the strike would end so that they could go back with what they saw as dignity - even if the union had lost.

No-one from Murton dared to break the picket lines until Rop Naylor - the former Chairman of the Murton miners' lodge committee (he resigned suddenly in the Autumn of the strike) - went back two months before the end of the strike. Rop was a special case. Earlier in the strike, he had been an active picket, even to the extent of travelling away with the mainly younger pickets. But in the Autumn when he resigned, his commitment to the strike was called into serious doubt. He was identified with the Legion club drinkers. In the weeks before he went back, it was known that he had been trying to persuade other people to go back. But very few men wanted anything to do with it. In the end he persuaded three other men to go back with him in February. They were the first men from Murton to go back to the pit. (One of them came straight back out on strike, and stayed out to the end.)

The consensus among activists in Murton is that Rop thought he was going to take the village back with him. Certainly he was encouraged in this view by a senior member of Murton's management.

> "Rop on occasions came down to the control room, and we'd be sat chatting. And I was of the opinion that Rop was <u>the</u> figurehead... You know, he used to say to me: 'I'm sick of this bloody strike'. And I used to say: 'Well look, all it'll take Rop is a fella like you - to see you coming in - and they'll all walk in with you'. 'Ee,' he says, 'they'll not'. And mind, he was right. It was <u>he</u> who told me that it was the young militants who were standing up in the lodge meetings and shouting. The Duffy's and that kind of people. I was totally surprised. I thought Rop Naylor had a good grip on everybody, but he obviously didn't." (interview)

Even over the following weeks, few followed Rop back to work from within Murton[14]. Many wanted to, but family ties or friendships with activists, or a myriad of other personal bonds kept them out.

A major factor undermining support for the strike among older miners was the availability of redundancy money - up to £30000 for miners with 30 years service. The strike effectively cut off an option that many older miners would have been taking had it not been for the stoppage. It _imposed_ a collective resistance to job loss against the immediate material interests of many miners.

For most people in Murton, loyalty and fear of the social consequences of "scabbing" enforced discipline, but the grumblings had a strong material base. And many of those who _did_ break the strike thought that by doing so they could virtually guarantee themselves redundancy. This perceptive analysis comes not from a picket, but from a very senior member of Murton's management.

> "All these guys are not whiter than white. A lot of
> these fellas came back to work only because they
> thought they would be promised redundancy... There were
> some dubious characters come back to work. They weren't
> all doing it for the sake of the nation! There was some
> _very_ very dubious characters. That's not to say they
> were all like that. But most men - a lot of men - came
> back to work because they thought they would get
> redundancy out of it." (interview)

Another senior member of Murton's management recounted how he advised miners who contacted him during the strike that in his opinion the best way of getting redundancy would be to go back to work (although he emphasised that he never made any promises).

There was a strong sense in which the NUM's economistic traditions - the focus on the use of collective muscle for material interests - came home to roost during the strike. Certainly in Murton, the legacy of a weak committee unable or unwilling to fight against a vociferous right wing, combined with faceworkers elitism was a profoundly deep rooted tradition of

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[14]Rop paid (and still pays) a heavy price for his return. By all accounts he is a shadow of the man he once was. Treated like a leper by the vast majority of people in Murton, he has physically wasted away.

individual materialism. When it became clear that collective muscle was unlikely to win a quick victory, then the temptation of £30000 became almost irresistible.

So far I have looked at the strike activists and the anti-strike diehards. Divisions within them have been examined, and age has emerged as a key variable in determining miners' approach to the strike. However, it was also suggested that place of residence had a strong impact on support for the strike. The longer the strike went on, the more significant this variable became. Because the strike was about a defence of community and therefore ultimately about a defence of collectivism, the isolation of strikers in outlying villages tore the very heart out of the dispute. Many travellers were not only physically remote from villages like Murton, they were also <u>socially</u> isolated. Despite the truly heroic efforts of women and men in the support groups, in many cases it was impossible to integrate travellers into supportive social networks.

In this section I consider the strike's "middle ground". In particular I focus on the strikers who went back at the end of the dispute. The majority of these returnees (and there were about 350 in all at Murton) came from outlying areas. I argue that they differed from many miners in Murton who did <u>not</u> go back mainly in lacking a dense network of community relations which - through support and the threat of censure - sustained the strike[15].

6.4.i CONTEXT

At the end of November 1984, the back to work drift tailed off, both in Durham and nationally. Strike activists thought they'd stemmed the flow following the hemorrhage of strike breakers in the wake of the NACODS deal. They thought that if they could hold people out over Christmas then they could hold them out indefinitely. Christmas itself was for most strikers a joyous celebration of all the best things in the strike. Gifts from supporters and fellow trade unionists helped overcome financial hardship (Saunders, 1989). Pit communities like Murton revelled in a carnival, party

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[15]The significance of this point is proved by the example of travellers from Blackhall. Chapter five showed that this group of travellers formed a relatively cohesive unit, and during the strike they maintained - along with Blackhall men who worked at other collieries - much of the community atmosphere and support that characterised villages which still had a pit. Only a tiny number went back to work.

atmosphere, born of a common solidarity and pride. Even in the travellers'
villages, unbelievable efforts were made by support groups to ensure that
everyone had something to celebrate, and the means to celebrate with.

But then, as an activist from the Ferryhill support group sadly noted:

> "After Christmas it just broke completely... I think it
> were the heartbreak of Christmas that done it you know.
> They hadn't been able to give the children what they
> wanted. Plus the propaganda..." (interview)

That propaganda began before the New Year, with a huge offensive
emphasising that a possible £2118 could be earned by miners' tax free
between the start of January and the end of the financial year on March
31st. Incentives combined with the bleak anticlimax of New Year to crush
striker's morale.

Nevertheless, the first few days of 1985 were encouraging for the union.
The number of "new faces" at North Eastern pits barely crept into double
figures on the 3rd and 4th of January. But it was a false dawn. On Monday
January 7th, the NCB claimed that 363 men broke the strike in Durham and
Northumberland. On the Monday after, a further 147 went back. On Monday
21st, another 260 broke the strike in Durham alone. In the last two weeks
of January, North East miners led the national return to work. But Murton -
along with Easington, Horden, Sacriston and Westoe - remained
overwhelmingly behind the strike (see table 6.2 and graphs 13a and 13b).

Two or three weeks into 1985, all hope of a successful end to the strike
for the NUM had faded. It was clear that "General Winter" was not going to
come to the rescue. In a humiliating climbdown at the end of January,
Arthur Scargill admitted that there would be no power cuts. It was in this
context therefore that the actions of people contemplating returning to
work early in the New Year must be placed.

6.4.ii STARVED BACK TO WORK?

Making generalisations about large groups of workers is never easy. To the
people concerned, diversity often appears to swamp similarity. Threading a
way through this complex social world involves sacrifices in detail for the
sake of theoretical clarity. In this case, the task is to differentiate
within the large group of miners and mechanics in the "middle ground".
Several key questions emerge. Why did some people go back, when others did

not? Were there fundamental differences in ideology between those who stayed out and those who did not, or did minor differences in personal situations explain patterns of strike breaking? Undoubtedly there were differences between those who went back, and those who didn't. The real question though, is whether these differences were more significant than the differences between many people who did not go back!

Whilst Rop Naylor went back to work hoping to collapse the strike in Murton, others had less ambitious motives. Many people agreed that there was a distinction (in practice a continual gradation), between a number of people who wanted an excuse to go back (see section 6.3.iii), and another group of men who had simply reached the end of their endurance - their loyalty had been stretched to breaking point. Crudely speaking, people in the first group went back before people in the latter group.

The question of redundancy is a crucial one, and demonstrates once again the divisive impact of the redundancy scheme in splitting the union's ranks (see also chapter five). Section 6.3.iii has already shown how many miners went back looking for redundancy. There is no doubt that many, many older miners went back to work in the hope and expectation that they could get redundancy. They saw it as a way of clearing their debts, and escaping from the bitter legacy of the strike. But as the strike dragged on, more and more men just felt their resolve collapse. A combination of factors overwhelmed their loyalty, and their fear of the picket line. Often it was something apparently trivial that provided the final trigger (see appendix nine for more detailed comments based on my interviews with miners in the "middle ground").

For others, their activities during the strike created a situation where they were effectively forced back. The strike didn't only spawn a culture of collective solidarity. Some strikers turned entrepreneur, selling coal stolen from pit heaps, or running poaching businesses. Others pinched coal just to keep their own fires burning. But if the NCB caught men pinching coal, or performing other offences, they were threatened with dismissal if they didn't return to work. One anti-strike diehard remembered one of the pickets coming back to work for this reason, shaking with tears in the knowledge that his comrades would never speak to him again.

In the last weeks, as the government drove hard for total victory, and union leaders still refused to buckle, the rank and file finally made the decision for them. As each desperate initiative failed - involving the TUC, appealing to the church, resurrecting the NACODS deal - more and more miners decided that unless they took the lead then the strike would never end. Travellers were most susceptible. As the union organised last ditch meetings in the communities to try and rally support, it was clear that the strike would crumble. A striker described one such meeting:

> "I went to this meeting, and we were trying to talk our opinion over. What we thought about the strike. And we couldn't get a word in... All these young lads was just standing at the front - what we called 'bully boys' - just shouting back at us. 'Get your bloody selves home.' You know, other language...
> "All the men were saying: 'Whey, it's time we were back to bloody work!' 'Just keep hanging on' - that's all [the union] ever said! They didn't give you any light or anything! They just said: 'keep hanging on lads. We're fighting for you.' We could hear what was going on - there was nothing going on... There's men walked out of that meeting and went back to work!" (interview)

Going through the picket line was a terrible experience though.

> "It was a hard decision that. One of the worst decisions - I'd not say the worst - but one of the hardest decisions I've ever made in my life. You couldn't realise how I felt when I went back. It was terrible. Oh God, I felt sick! I could have spewed up! When we got in, and the others were talking and that, I couldn't talk. I just felt <u>sick</u>. Completely drained." (interview)

These words came from a man who supported fighting against pit closures, and who had voted for Scargill in 1982. Although he was no militant left winger, he wanted to support the union, and fight for jobs. By the end though, his loyalty crumbled as the strike lost all sense for him. Fighting on in a small village with just a few other strikers, no contact with the union, confused and increasingly desperate, he finally succumbed to the massive social pressure, and went through the picket line.

By contrast, a mechanic who held similar views about the strike - although he opposed Arthur Scargill - nevertheless stayed on strike. He lived in Murton and had sat on the branch committee, and his loyalty ran too deep to go through a picket line, as his wife - who opposed the strike - bitterly recalled.

> "You might not have been a Scargillite, but how many
> times did you defend him during the strike? How many
> times would you not have anything said against him in
> here? Or was that just the union? Was it because he was
> leader of the union and you didn't want anything bad
> said about the union?" (interview)

In asking the question, she answered it. Her husband didn't like being on strike, he didn't agree with the way it was called, but he couldn't contemplate breaking his loyalty.

Ideologically however little separated this mechanic from the Trimdon man who <u>did</u> go back - but his personal situation was different. He lived in a community which was still almost completely on strike; he came from a small branch which had a smaller percentage of men back than the miners, and his past involvement in the branch strengthened traditional bonds of loyalty to the union. These factors overcame his wife's passionate hostility to the strike, and his own antipathy to its conduct. It is apparent therefore that whilst returning to work was, from a practical point of view a devastating departure from traditional norms, signalling an immense emotional separation from those that stayed out, it sprang from a similar ideological background to the mechanic discussed above, who didn't go back.

Returnees never failed to tell me that there were <u>hundreds</u> of men queuing up to go back when the strike was called off. It was a point confirmed by management, and acknowledged by strike activists. Another week and hundreds more miners and mechanics would have been marked as scabs. By the end of the strike, local picket lines had lost some of their mystical potency in the face of routine and repetitive media coverage of strike breaking. A climate had been created which lowered the psychological resistance to "scabbing" among strikers rapidly becoming desperate. In these conditions it was personal circumstances more than fundamental ideological cleavages which marked the decision to return.

Summoning up all his compassion two years after the strike, one activist produced this memorable verdict on the pressures that forced some men - especially travellers - back to work. It is a testament which graphically captures the plight of men in the outlying villages.

> "Some of them were <u>desperate</u> when they returned to
> work. Some men who definitely I'd <u>never</u> call a scab.
> They gave far more to the strike than I ever gave.
> Their wives and kids left them. They sold everything
> out of the house. They were on the verge of nervous

breakdowns. Them men weren't scabs. They went back to work out of desperation.

"They gave more than I gave. My wife never left me - my wife supported me. I never had to sell owt from the house... And I had the support of me family... I wasn't faced with the mental problems or for that matter financial problems that some men were subjected to. I picketed every day of the strike, got £2 every day for picketing, which I gave to my wife. That helped out a bit...

"But some of them boys in outlying areas who didn't have the benefit of being part of a large body of active pickets - which cheered you up at times when you were down - you know, it must have been terrible for them. To wake every morning, switch the television on - no more progress, strike still on, no end to it. MacGregor saying he's not going to compromise, Scargill saying he's not going to compromise. Financial problems mounting. Wives nagging. Kids without shoes. And as you say, isolated. Nobody to talk to, other than among themselves. Holding their own sort of little meetings in their own community..." (interview)

Looking back, it wasn't so surprising that some of them buckled.

By the beginning of March 1985, the trickle back to work had finally become a flood. In Durham, Eppleton - part of the same Hawthorn Combine as Murton, and one of the most vigorous picketing pits - collapsed in less than a week (table 6.2, graph 13a). Morale plummeted. A hard core of miners and mechanics pickets wanted desperately to fight on, "forever" if necessary. But now the numbers sweeping past their own impotent picket line were multiplying. On March 3rd, a bitter national special delegate conference voted narrowly to return to work without a settlement. After almost exactly one year, it was all over.

At Murton, about 350 had broken the strike - 25% of the workforce. But almost half went back in the last week, as the strike fell apart. Only a few dozen of the returnees came from within Murton. Elsewhere in the Area, only Easington, Sacriston and Horden were more solid. Westoe showed a similar "strike profile", whilst pits like Herrington, Seaham and Wearmouth had well over half their workforces back at work. Murton was kept relatively solid because the branch leaderships' committed and vigorous support for the strike raised the threshold at which strikers loyalty caved in. Social networks of support were underdeveloped in outlying villages, consequently the threshold for travellers was often lower.

6.5: CONCLUSION

In 1984 the NUM faced a state onslaught because the state was leading an ambitious strategy to refashion capital-labour relations in Britain. A particular postwar institutionalisation of the balance of class forces - symbolised in many respects by the NCB and the NUM - was being taken apart. (The reasons for this have been examined in chapters two and four.) In this chapter the course of the 1984/5 strike at Murton colliery has been investigated. This period saw rapid political change in both branches of the NUM at Murton. It was during the strike that Murton's reputation changed so dramatically, as the old right wing lost control to the young activists who were galvanised into action by the dispute. The post war indulgency pattern wasn't just disturbed, it was destroyed. In this context, the way was open for massive changes in the political understandings of miners and mechanics at Murton.

Although only about 25% of Murton's workforce broke the strike, it is clear that the dispute reflected and generated important political divisions within the miners' and mechanics' branches. These divisions grew out of the situation before the strike, where the postwar pattern of management-labour relations had been destabilised, leading to leftward drifts in both branches. The start of the strike in Murton closely reflected the differing political complexions of the two lodges, with the mechanics' leadership decisively urging support for the strike, whilst the miners voted at a stormy meeting to work on. Nevertheless, the mechanics picket line was never challenged by the miners, and a week after the start of the strike all bar one of the miners voted at a meeting to join the strike. Following the start of the strike, the left achieved a shaky majoirty on the miners' committee, but the branch remained divided.

Quickly the strikers separated into a minority of committed activists, a tiny number of anti-strike diehards, and the majority occupying the middle ground. Looking first at the activists, I showed how - particularly in the miners' lodge - the strike called forth a remarkable surge in enthusiasm and commitment from young miners. I related this uninhibited involvement to younger miners remoteness from the consensus politics of the post war era. In contrast, a small number of older pickets were involved precisely because of their deep desire to defend the post war "indulgency pattern", both in its local and national manifestations.

Looking at anti-strike diehards, I identified two distinct groups. The first was made up of isolated travellers. I noted how thoroughly they had absorbed the rhetoric of the government's antiunion propaganda. I also explored the specific justifications they offered for their actions, and related them to the government's assault on the strike's legitimacy, and in particular the issues of the "missing" ballot, union corruption and picket violence. For these men, going back to work hinged on opportunity, not hardship. The threat of communal sanction held them out until the strike had been sufficiently delegitimised at national level to bypass the community level.

A second group of anti-strike diehards were based in Murton, although many did not break it. Within a community atmosphere the threat of sanctions held them back. But they agitated against the strike almost from the start. Redundancy became an increasingly significant factor in undermining collective support for the campaign against job loss, because it encouraged a financially rewarding individual option. Many strikers were tempted by the belief that going back to work would place them at the head of the queue for redundancy. Such instrumental approach to action was related to the economistic approach of the NUM, and the failure of the branch leadership over many years to impose norms of collective solidarity and sacrifice in a union dominated by faceworkers.

The temptation of redundancy applied also for many strikers in the middle ground. Unlike the anti-strike diehards, most of these people supported the basic aims of the strike. The ones I interviewed expressed a deep antipathy for the Thatcher-MacGregor attack on jobs and the union. If they broke the strike, it was due in large measure to desperation. Whether their loyalty was stretched beyond breaking point depended on a complex web of social and personal factors. Broadly speaking, the lack of community support in travelling areas, and the failure of the union to bridge the gap to the villages, undermined the support networks which sustained people on strike in Murton. This was a crucial failure by the union, because so much of the strike was about the defence of a particular collectivist notion of community and class. Many travellers did not connect with this strand of the strike.

In the following chapter, the implications of the strike for political development within the miners' and mechanics' branches are carried through into the post strike period.

TABLE 6.1: NCB FORECAST DEEP MINED REVENUE OUTPUT, MARCH 1984.

AREA	1983/4 [1]	1984/5 [2]	DIFFERENCE
Scottish	5.9	5.15	- 0.75
North East	11.9	10.5	- 1.4
North Yorkshire	9.1	9.3	+ 0.2
Doncaster	6.3	6.3	-
Barnsley	8.0	8.2	+ 0.2
South Yorkshire	7.6	7.1	- 0.5
North Derbyshire	7.5	7.5	-
North Nottingham	12.0	12.0	-
South Nottingham	7.7	7.2	- 0.5
South Midlands	7.4	7.1	- 0.3
Western	10.7	10.3	- 0.4
South Wales	7.3	6.75	- 0.55
Great Britain	101.4	97.4	- 4.0

1 Estimated production for 52 weeks, adjusted for overtime ban losses (million tonnes).
2 Budgeted production for 1984/5 (million tonnes).

Source: Report to NUM's NEC meeting, 9-3-84.

TABLE 6.2: NCB BACK TO WORK FIGURES.

(231)

NCB UNIT.	TOTAL (1)	TOTAL NUMBER OF RETURNEES							
		1984	1985 ------->						
		21-11	15-1	22-1	29-1	5-2	13-2	19-2	26-2
DAWDON	1742	14	119	157	183	240	285	306	425
EASINGTON	2173	28	42	52	57	61	61	65	100
EPPLETON	865	11	42	82	109	180	226	254	404
HAWTHORN	296	6	20	20	36	47	61	59	107
MURTON	1503	17	74	78	91	110	131	120	250
HERRINGTON	642	27	286	338	357	386	411	420	469
HORDEN/BLACKHALL	1134	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	9
PHILADELPHIA	470	112	N/A	318	363	382	406	404	411
SACRISTON	201	0	0	1	1	7	7	10	15
SEAHAM/VT	1339	98	308	261	388	448	531	567	730
TURSDALE	430	188	264	265	257	276	284	233	276
WEARMOUTH	2062	200	526	664	716	748	1075	1133	1361
WESTOE	2088	39	115	153	180	211	228	236	283

SOURCE: Newcastle Journal for dates quoted.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MURTON SINCE THE STRIKE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter five showed how the "cosy relationships" of union-management relations were destabilised as the state inspired management strategy altered the age and residential composition of the workforce, and placed Murton's future in jeopardy. In the miners' branch, the left was becoming an increasingly influential force, but there were sharp divisions between this ascendant force and right wing traditionalists. In the mechanics' branch, left wing pressure swung the committee left, and turned it into an effective campaigning unit. Chapter six showed that during the strike, the activist pickets became the dominant force in both branches through their total commitment to the dispute. Former right wing elements complained bitterly about the strike, but few dared cross picket lines. In outlying communities, the battle for the "middle ground" ended with the majority still holding solid, but on the brink of giving up, and there was no doubt the union had suffered a devastating defeat.

In this chapter, the period since the strike is analysed. With the defeat of the strike, the post war settlement at both national level, and particularly in the coal industry, was - to all intents and purposes - finally laid to rest. The government was intent on imposing a new settlement in the coal industry, compatible with their general aims of shaking out supposed labour market rigidities, and increasing the flexibility of labour. In the previous two chapters, the left wing shift in Murton's branch politics was located within a context of destabilisation which in many senses favoured left wing activists. In this chapter, the exercise of agency is located within a far less favourable context.

Despite this context, and within a shrinking coalfield, Murton has consolidated its reputation as the most left wing pit in the North East. In the only NUM area to change decisively from right to left since the strike, Murton provides archetypal examples of this change at a branch level. In both branches the strike accelerated and brought out into the open the leftward shift which had begun in the early 1980's. The miners elected an overwhelmingly left wing committee, dominated by the young strike leaders. The mechanics' committee was led increasingly by Dave Temple and the left, and they built on links established during the strike to create a very

close working relationship between the two branches. Politically they moved left together.

With the union beaten nationally, this was a uniquely hostile environment for the left to flourish in. Destroying left wing trade unionism was after all one of the government's central aims during the strike. So why did the union go left so decisively? What were the decisive local factors, and how did they interact with events at a national level?

With the strike broken, management pushed hard to re-establish the right to manage, and enact their strategy for modernising the industry. This fitted into the government's aim of restoring de-politicised market criteria at the centre of the industry's operation. The first part of this chapter (section 7.1) examines the detail of NCB/BC strategy, concentrating on the drive to subordinate labour under a new management regime. In the second part of the chapter (section 7.2), Murton is located within this strategy. The survival of the pit depended fundamentally on its ability to meet financial targets, so in the immediate post strike period the possibilities for survival looked bleak.

Nevertheless, the union set about rebuilding its strength. Branch politics were radically affected by the decision of almost all the old right wing elements to take redundancy. This left young miners numerically dominant. Just as importantly, it removed the only possible focus for an alternative approach to that offered by the left. The effects of post strike changes in personnel are discussed in section 7.3. Despite these conditions, the left was heavily constrained by management's dominance. In section 7.4, the abrasive post-strike industrial relations situation at Murton is explored, via analysis of the main bouts of strike action to hit the colliery since the end of the 1984/5 dispute. This analysis shows that to some extent management strategy rebounded because it provided conditions where strikes were almost inevitable.

Finally, having identified branch leadership as the key variable affecting the direction of political change at the local level, I examine this hypothesis by analysing the major ballots involving the Murton branch since the strike. This analysis confirms that the ability of committed and united branch leaderships to wage effective campaigns in the pit is crucial in affecting rank and file politics where they matter most - in action.

Chapter four analysed the changing pressures on the NCB in the period before 1984. Essentially, changes in international production, transport and communications technology had seriously eroded what was previously a virtual natural monopoly for the NCB within the British market for coal. Furthermore, government policies had contributed to a dramatic contraction in the market for coal in two respects: first, by inducing a massive recession in 1980/81, and secondly, by vigorously encouraging adoption of non coal burning energy options, including nuclear power. Increasing exposure to price competition (due to government policies) compelled the NCB to develop and adopt new technologies which provoked job loss via two processes: higher productivity in low cost pits leading to displacement of capacity in high cost areas, and rationalisation of jobs within low cost pits.

Following the strike, which represented the NUM's attempt to block the introduction of the NCB strategy, management and the state began to pursue their aims with renewed vigour. Having achieved a decisive victory over the NUM, the government pushed hard to establish the market as the basic criteria of economic decision making within the industry. In October 1985 this determination yielded the "New Strategy for Coal", which was based on eliminating subsidies and producing coal at so-called market prices (NCB, 1985; MMC, 1988). New contracts between the NCB and its major customer, the Central Electricity Generating Board (known as "Joint Understandings"), reflected the heightened commercial spirit, with annual increases in the "tranches" of coal sold at prices reflecting the putative price of coal in a supposedly "free" international market (CEGB, 1986: NCB & CEGB, 1986; see McCloskey, 1986 for criticism of the concept of a free market in world traded coal). The survival of collieries was therefore linked more and more to their ability to produce at "market" prices, with "cost per Gigajoule" adopted as the key operating criteria. Under this new financial regime, and with the eventual aim of privatisation looming on the horizon, the NCB drove on with their aggressive strategy to promote overall profitability.

This strategy had two elements. The first was a technical strategy which aimed - through a major investment programme - to progressively modernise all production units, equipping them with heavy duty face machinery, improved underground transport systems, etc. Secondly, this technical

strategy was matched with a drive towards new working practices designed to operate this new machinery as intensively as possible (see for the most famous statement, Wheeler, 1986). These in turn were predicated on a further radical restructuring of labour relations, and in particular the reassertion of management's "right to manage" (Taylor, 1988).

7.1.i BRITISH COAL'S[1] STRATEGY: TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Looking first at BC's technical strategy, a number of points are relevant. First, and almost inevitably, investment has been concentrated in low cost pits with large reserves. In the North East, which continues to suffer relative investment starvation (see Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1988, 33-34), pits such as Murton have still not been equipped with many of the MINOS subsystems which were almost standard in parts of Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire five years ago. Second, the technical strategy was indivisible from the overall strategy for the industry. For example, pit closures combined with the concentration of production from heavy duty faces to increase productivity, lower unit costs, and maintain production with a drastically reduced workforce (see tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3; and graphs 1, 2 and 3).

BC's way of linking these points was to relate investment to actual and projected production costs when considering investment at a colliery. Hence "cost per gigajoule (GJ)" became the token by which a colliery was judged. Cost guidelines were introduced in an attempt to force production costs into line with anticipated price competition from overseas imports. These were summarised by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission as follows (1988, 17):

> "a) collieries unable to produce consistently below operating costs of £1.65/GJ to be closed as soon as possible;
> b) incremental or additional output from existing collieries must have operating costs no greater than £1.00/GJ - to prevent investment in marginal output at higher cost than short-term marginal revenues; and

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[1] Although the National Coal Board (NCB) was not renamed British Coal (BC) until 1987, for the sake of continuity I use British Coal for the rest of this chapter.

> c) major project expenditure would be undertaken only
> at collieries with operating costs below £1.50/GJ -
> after taking account of costs and benefits of new
> investment."

In the North East in the post strike era, more pits fitted into the first category than the last two.

Following the "New Strategy for Coal" in 1985, BC's financial framework was further tightened with an agreement between Sir Robert Haslam (who replaced Ian MacGregor as BC Chairman in September 1986) and the Secretary of State for Energy. This agreement imposed further stringent financial objectives, including an instruction to generate increasing surplus on the revenue account in order to make investment self-financing after 1988/9. It also explicitly reiterated that production should be concentrated at low cost units to maximise profitability (ibid, 17-18). Within this framework the so-called "Wheeler Plan" was adopted as the means to achieve stringent financial objectives (Wheeler, 1986).

Essentially therefore, BC's technical strategy was an attempt to come to terms with the financial constraints imposed as a result of government policy. However, most - if not all - of the strategies aspects were predicated upon a drastic refashioning of labour relations at all levels within the industry, and a reassertion of the right to manage. The NUM's defeat had to be translated into day to day control over the workforce.

7.1.ii BRITISH COAL'S STRATEGY: SOCIAL ASPECTS

After the strike, management sought to reassert its authority, by dissolving the 40 year old structure of industrial relations in the industry (the 1946 Conciliation Scheme). Consultation with the workforce via one centrally organised union was effectively abandoned. The hallowed "right to manage" demanded that changes be imposed rather than negotiated, and market criteria became the sole arbiter of what should or should not be done. Pit closures - the immediate management prerogative which precipitated the strike - were bulldozed through, provoking only feeble union resistance (see table 4.2 and graph 2). Tens of thousands of miners took voluntary redundancy, disillusioned with the industry, and desperate to pay off the debts accumulated during a year long stoppage (see table 4.1 and graph 1). Pits which had been at the forefront of the strike, like Cortonwood in Yorkshire, and St Johns in South Wales, voted in despair to

accept closure without appealing to the independent review body set up by the deal which ended the NACODS threat of strike action in September 1984 (see chapter 6).

At the national level, BC used the creation of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM)[2] as a pretext to pull out of many 40 year old consultation and conciliation agreements with the union. Most dramatically, this involved unilaterally withdrawing from the entire Conciliation Scheme in June 1986 (NUM Annual Report, 1986, 36). This new style was evident at all levels of management, with area Boards and pit managers pursuing similarly aggressive tactics (Winterton, 1988). After 1987, BC used the UDM to further useful effect, by negotiating pay rises with the breakaway union, and then using these deals as pacesetters for the NUM, and by offering membership deals to the UDM where the NUM has refused to accept flexible working practices (Taylor, 1988).

In order to extract the maximum cost benefits from its capital intensive investment strategy, BC began to push forcefully for new, flexible working practices to be introduced (Haslam, 1988). In the North East for example, major investment in the Wearmouth and Westoe complexes was tied to the acceptance of 9 hour shifts (see report in Newcastle Journal, May 27th 1987). With more than two hours of a seven and a quarter hour shift sometimes spent on travelling to and from the coal face, 9 hour shifts would increase machine utilisation. But they also threatened safety, as fatigue increased towards the end of the shifts. In the central coalfield, enhanced machine utilisation would be achieved via a move to six day

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[2]The UDM was formed in November 1985, following the decision of an NUM Special Delegate Conference in July 1985 to introduce a new rule book which was widely interpreted as enhancing the centralised power of the union's NEC (National Executive Committee), and particularly the President's personal power. The new union was formed after ballots conducted by several unions, with the former Notts Area of the NUM by far the most significant. The other three who joined were South Derbyshire (by a 51% majority), the Clerical and Surveyors group, and the Durham based Colliery Workers and Allied Trades Association (CWATA) - the latter formed mainly from Durham mechanics expelled for strike breaking during the dispute. Membership of the UDM has always been a fiercely controversial question - at its peak in 1985 it may have topped 30000 (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986 274), but the true figure was almost certainly much lower. Today there are fewer than 16000 members, with all but a tiny rump concentrated in Nottinghamshire (Taylor, 1988).

working. As well as reflecting technical considerations, the proposals were also powerfully linked to a continuing strategy to disorganise resistance within the workforce.

Although Robert Haslam projected a less abrasive image than his predecessor, BC's industrial relations policy diligently pursued the objectives established during Ian MacGregor's reign. Divisions within the workforce were consciously manipulated, enabling management to cripple resistance to its policies. In the aftermath of an epic struggle, which ended in bitter defeat, the NUM's left wing - dominant since the early 1980s - began to splinter. South Wales and Scotland - traditionally two of the most left wing areas, increasingly opposed Arthur Scargill and the old left wing leadership. BC encouraged these divisions by continually attempting to undermine the central authority of the union.

For example, the offer to invest £90 million in a small new mine at Margam in South Wales ("creating" about 900 jobs) was calculated to drive a wedge between the increasingly restless South Wales area leadership, and the national officials. South Wales' leaders chose to support the conditions offered by BC as part of the Margam deal - notably six day working at the new mine - in defiance of national union policy. An Area Coalfield Conference voted to support the move, but was overturned by the 1987 national conference, which rejected flexible working, and called for a national ballot on the issue. No ballot was held, and in 1989 the UDM agreed negotiating rights with BC for Margam (Financial Times, 13th June, 1989).

BC continued to seek to undermine the union by a concentrated drive to bypass national agreements and replace them with a proliferation of locally agreed and often informal "agreements" (Financial Times, July 1st 1988; July 14th 1988). In doing so, they sought to fragment opposition by offering differential rewards to different groups of workers at the same pit, and workers at different pits. Given the highly limited resources available to the national union[3], national collective action to achieve

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[3]As well as the heavy burden of defeat, the strike crippled the NUM financially. Receivership was only lifted in the summer of 1986,
<div align="right">(Footnote Continued)</div>

collective rewards was out of the question. The results were quickly felt. Some miners at high productivity, long life collieries were able to win significant wage increases. However, this was often limited to faceworkers, and wages differentials within collieries increased.

Despite the obvious fact that these developments invariably benefited BC more than miners (for example, productivity bonuses never increased at remotely the same rate as productivity), many higher paid workers calculated that their only chance of enhanced earnings lay in bypassing the union, at national, area or branch level. BC encouraged this view with its uncompromising refusal to engage in any centralised bargaining. There was an unambiguous drive to replace collective bargaining at every level of the industry with direct negotiations with workers at the point of production (see Winterton, 1988 for evidence from Yorkshire). As a result, the basis for any form of collective action narrowed drastically. Only work group militancy increased, as powerful groups of faceworkers (for example at Selby) fought for their own narrowly sectional interests.

As for more ambitious union activity, the dramatic collapse in employment following the strike, combined with the heavy burden of defeat, both conspired to strictly limit the room for manoeuvre. The left wing leaders who had formed a dominant alliance before the strike quickly split. Arthur Scargill made a virtue out of his continuing uncompromising opposition to BC and the government. With his few allies - which included the newly elected left wing leadership of the Durham miners, and part of the Yorkshire leadership - he sought to isolate the UDM, and to preach the need for militant action to defend jobs and conditions. Still with the backing of conference decisions, this left wing group fought to maintain the central authority of the union in the face of BC's attempts to fragment bargaining structures.

(Footnote Continued)
allowing the union's three new trustees (including John Cummings, the mechanics' branch secretary at Murton, and Parliamentary candidate for Easington) to take control of its vastly depleted resources. Redundancies caused a collapse in membership, exacerbating the financial crisis, which is still acute now, in 1989.

But many members of the pre-strike left - concentrated in South Wales and Scotland - argued with increasing boldness that compromises were needed (Howells, 1987). In particular, they wanted to negotiate with BC over flexible working practices, especially Margam (Dutfield, 1987), and to accept the presence of the UDM in national negotiations (Financial Times, May 7th 1987). In doing so, they began to form loose alliances with the old right wing. When the NUM tried to organise an overtime ban in protest against BC's authoritarian new disciplinary code in late 1987, both groups fought hard to undermine the effectiveness of the ban (section 7.6.iv). When Arthur Scargill fought for re-election as President of the NUM at the beginning of 1988, one right wing candidate stood against him, with the tacit support of formerly left leaders in Wales and Scotland (section 7.6.v).

Although splits were usually identified at the area level, these generalisations concealed important dissenting groups within areas. For example, at rank and file level, the South Wales area still mustered considerable support for the policies represented by Arthur Scargill, and when he stood for re-election voted for him by 61.2% to 38.8% (Taylor, 1988, 232). Similarly, even though control of the Durham area shifted to the left, there were still significant pockets of opposition to this left wing stance. Typically, these pockets were found where local branch leadership adopted a position in opposition to the area leadership, for example at Easington, where the branch leadership had close contacts with South Wales.

BC succeeded therefore in driving important wedges into the NUM leadership. But despite all the advantages they inherited in 1985, they were unable to totally break union resistance. The UDM stagnated, and then shrank even within its Nottingham boundaries. The NUM organised overtime bans. Flexible working was still an objective and not reality, as the union retained just enough coherence to frustrate attempts to bypass national policy. Strikes continued to plague the industry, particularly in the volatile Yorkshire area (see Winterton, 1988 on Yorkshire walkouts). Within the union, moderate "new realists" were far from achieving the dominance they sought.

The interplay of everyday events and the battle to win miners to particular interpretations and action was clearly visible in Murton in the post strike era. Theoretically, the key questions revolve around the way in which

conscious agents were able to operate in a hostile environment, where it was no longer tenable to defend many of the arrangements characterising the post war indulgency pattern. How did left wing activists maintain control in the post-strike era? How did the workforce respond to left wing arguments in their new situation? In the following sections, political developments in the miners' and mechanics' branches are related to the developments described above. First however, Murton is located within the changed politics and geography of the Durham coalfield.

With cost parameters now declared as the only criteria for judging a pits future, the remaining pits in the Durham coalfield came under heavy pressure. Five closed in two years, and the workforce was virtually halved. For two years Murton appeared under imminent threat of closure (and now in 1989 the future again seems uncertain). This situation had two political effects. First, it led to rock bottom morale at work and in the union; but secondly it fatally undermined the chances of any alternative to the left leadership developing in the Murton branches. The manner in which BC closed pits in Durham was a major factor in maintaining hostility towards the employer, and provided the left with powerful arguments to support their continued opposition to management.

7.2.i DURHAM CLOSES DOWN

Immediately the strike ended, several Durham pits were placed under threat of closure. Sacriston, the last of the West Durham collieries was one of the first to go. It had been living on borrowed time since the 1950's[4]. Although the colliery had delivered rock solid support for the strike, there was no campaign against the closure. The men had stayed out because of an unyielding loyalty to the union, and they knew that if they lost the strike then there would be no chance for a colliery like theirs'. Herrington, although attracting the tag of "Durham's Cortonwood" early in the strike (because it was one of the five named pits at the March 1984 meeting which helped precipitate the strike), comprehensively broke the strike. It accepted closure in 1985 with hardly a whimper of protest (see map 1).

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[4] Paradoxically, Sacriston stayed open because for years it suffered investment starvation, which meant that production costs were very low. The coal produced was a high quality coking coal which attracted a relatively high price and therefore enhanced the colliery's revenue. On this basis, the colliery carried on in a virtual time warp from the pre-war years. When it finally shut in December 1985, the men were still working 18 inch seams, using "windy picks" to hammer the coal down, shovelling it across their bodies onto conveyor belts, and using pit ponies for underground transport (see Kreiger, 1983).

Despite these setbacks, the union fought a grim struggle against the closure of the once massive Horden mine. The full story is told in graphic detail in the report commissioned by the NUM to fight the closure (Beynon et al, 1985)[5]. Despite the NCB's attempts to avoid taking the closure to the final independent appeal stage of the Modified Colliery Review Procedure, their hand was forced as volunteers for redundancy and transfer dried up while the union campaign to save the pit gathered momentum. BC were forced to announce Horden's closure. It was then referred to the Independent Review Body (IRB) - set up as part of the settlement which persuaded NACODS to call of their national strike threat in 1984 (Feickert, 1986, 4-9). Despite comprehensive evidence that BC had sabotaged the pit with a series of critical decisions in the early 1980's (see Beynon et al, 1985, 13-26, 32-34, 77-83) - presumably in response to the loss of the key coking coal market - the IRB found (after hearing the case on January 14th-16th, 1986) that whatever the historical background, Horden was no longer a viable colliery. It closed in 1986.

North of the Tyne, in Northumberland, an equally bitter battle was fought against closure at Bates Colliery. A week after the Horden IRB hearing, the final appeal was heard. But to general astonishment, the unions won it. However, despite the verdict of the IRB that the pit should be given a three year trial period to prove itself, BC acted with calculated ruthlessness and announced a few weeks later that the pit would close anyway. The message was clear. Any attempt to fight closure was doomed. Even if the case was won, the pit would close. The credibility of the IRB was fatally weakened. NACODS (who had cancelled their own strike in 1984 in the belief that IRB decisions would be honoured) were humiliated.

Meanwhile, the Hawthorn Combine (Murton, Eppleton and Hawthorn) was undergoing further reorganisation (following the closure of South Hetton before the strike - see chapter five). In September 1985, BC forced the amalgamation of the Hawthorn and Murton branches of the NUM (miners and

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[5]Almost as soon as the strike ended, BC began maneuvering to close the colliery. In an attempt to bypass agreed procedures, BC designated Horden (along with Bates in Northumberland) a "manpower reservoir". Any man wishing to transfer to a "long life" pit, or to take redundancy would be allowed to do so. If so many men chose to that the pit became unviable, it would close.

mechanics), by closing the Hawthorn surface facilities and announcing that henceforward the combined workforce could be represented only by the Murton unions. Although the Hawthorn branches protested, opposition was halfhearted, and the men succumbed to the temptation of £1500 transfer money. So the Hawthorn men were bussed from Murton back to their old jobs at Hawthorn, and at the end of the shift they came riding back to the Murton baths.

7.2.ii THE END OF EPPLETON

Even before the closure of the Hawthorn surface operation, in August 1985 BC had announced plans to reorganise the Hawthorn Combine into a single unit, sending all men and materials down the Murton shafts, and raising all coal at Hawthorn. Eppleton surface was to close, with the loss of some 403 jobs (Diamond, 1986, 14). By now, rumours were rife that the whole combine was facing imminent closure. Certainly its financial performance ("the heaviest and most persistent loss maker in the North East Area") placed it in the front line of pits facing closure (see tables 7.1, 7.14 and 7.15; and appendix 10).

The proposals for Eppleton were hardly new. They had first been mooted in discussions between the union and management in 1982. It appeared that in the pre-strike era BC didn't feel able to push ahead with the plans because of the expected strong opposition from the unions. This was confirmed by the notorious BC planning document leaked during the strike. It said:

> "Area manpower is projected to reduce from the present level of just over 22000 to around 16500 by 1987/8, providing for the closure of Bates, Brenkley [both in Northumberland], Horden and Sacriston and also rundown at Hawthorn. By 1995/6 it is planned that the total number of men will have fallen to around 10000 to serve the six remaining collieries. Area anticipate major industrial relations problems related to closure and rundown at the large collieries, particularly Hawthorn." (quoted in Diamond, 1986, 12-13; emphasis added)

After the strike, with union resistance to pit closures broken, BC pushed ahead with its plans for the Eppleton part of the Combine.

During the last weeks of the strike, Eppleton's once energetic support for the strike collapsed. The miners' branch leadership lost heart, and the demoralised workforce poured back to work. Eppleton's workforce was beaten

and apathetic. At Murton however, the newly elected miners' lodge secretary, Frank Duffy, was determined to ensure that the South Hetton debacle would never happen again. South Hetton's closure had been sanctioned by the Murton branches, who voted not to cede any of their coal to South Hetton (see chapter 5). Having secured the branch committees support, Frank called a special meeting of the miners' lodge, to try and stiffen the weakened Eppleton lodge's resistance. He proposed a motion that the lodge should strike if Eppleton men transferred without fighting to the IRB. The transferees would be met by a picket line. The meeting voted unanimously to support the lead from the platform[6].

Eppleton miners - under pressure from Murton - took their case all the way to the IRB. BC argued that without closure the whole combine would have to close. In the absence of a mining plan from the unions promoting the viability of Eppleton as a seperate unit, the IRB concluded that Eppleton should close to protect the future of the pit as a whole (Diamond, 1986). With the closure of Eppleton came the adoption by BC of the mining plan they offered to the IRB for Murton. This envisaged lifting OMS (output per manshift) from 1.76 tonnes to 3.4 tonnes, and raising output to 6000 tonnes a day. Manpower would be reduced from 2253 to about 1800 (ibid).

7.2.iii MORALE AT MURTON

At the time the overwhelming feeling throughout Murton and the union generally was that the proposed production targets were hopelessly unrealistic, and it was only a matter of time before Murton was closed. The secret document quoted earlier was offered as confirmation, because under it Murton was scheduled to close before 1995/6. Rumours of imminent closure abounded as the pit struggled to recover pre-strike production levels (see table 7.14). At the same time, enormous changes rocked the colliery. Miners poured into the pit from Hawthorn, Horden, Eppleton and other pits that were closing; hundreds of others left in successive waves of redundancy. Underground, the explosive combination of young militants and "scabs"

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[6]Frank also used this opportunity to carry through the idea he'd had during the strike of taking branch meetings into the villages. Although only a few people attended these meetings, it opened up an important line of communication between travellers and the branch leadership.

quickly gave Murton a fearsome reputation for intimidation (matched in the North East only by Westoe colliery, according to management sources). Management was reorganised more than once, but every permutation seemed only to heighten anxiety about the future, and to fuel Murton's reputation for oppressive management.

This then was the climate which union activists faced as they struggled to retrieve the union's credibility in the aftermath of the humiliating defeat of March 1985. It wasn't just the union's credibility which was at stake, but the future of effective collective organisation and action themselves. What direction the union took depended on whether activists were able to win the battle with miners who were neither committed strike activists, or determined strike breakers. In this respect, there were two contradictory pressures created by BC's hard line. On the one hand, morale plummeted. Bitter divisions between strike breakers and activists created a climate of recrimination and fear at the pit. Managements reassertion of control destroyed the atmosphere underground, and intensified the rate of work. Miners found it difficult to display the servility expected of them under the new regime. The union was clearly powerless to halt the unilateral imposition by management of wholesale changes in working conditions.

But whilst the union's impotence might have fuelled attempts to develop a more accommodative stance in the branches, resentment and distrust at management's tactics rendered any such attempt futile. There was simply no material basis for trying to develop closer relationships with management when they were so clearly intent on unambiguously reasserting control at the point of production. The effect of these two pressures was that although confidence and interest in the union were low, management reaped only sullen resentment as a reward for their "victory" during the strike.

But management strategy offers only the beginning of an explanation for the development of politics in the miners' and mechanics' branches after the strike. Perhaps the decisive factor in allowing the left to consolidate its dominance of both branches were the enormous upheavals in manpower at Murton following closures elsewhere in the coalfield. The effects of these changes are examined in the following chapter.

When the Murton branches met pit management at the start of March 1985 to discuss arrangements for the return to work, they were left in no doubt that management intended to pursue a tough, anti-union strategy. One moderate miners' branch leader suggested they put the strike behind them, so they could work together to restore production. The manager wasn't interested. Instead, he briskly withdrew almost all the union's concessions (for example, a guaranteed day shift for branch secretaries, and the practice of allowing branch officials to ride early to deal with problems), and imposed an unpopular new shift rota without consultation. Furthermore, out of 150 miners sacked in Durham for strike related "offences", 28 came from Murton[7]. At the same time, the Area Board withdrew from the arbitration procedure dealing with dismissals, thereby avoiding scrutiny of its decisions by an independent arbiter. Henceforth the union was told to take appeals to non-binding industrial relations tribunals.

In this oppressive environment, branch officials set about trying to win back credibility, both with management and with many of their own members. At the same time however, they had to cope with enormous changes in membership, as hundreds of men took redundancy, and hundreds more transferred in from pits closing elsewhere in the area (for example, Horden). What effect did these manpower changes have on the politics of the two branches?

7.3.i CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP

In the miners' branch, the post strike changes included the resignation of the left wing branch secretary John Dixon. Shortly afterwards he took redundancy, and was not seen in Murton again. He was succeeded by the acknowledged leader of the Murton pickets, Frank Duffy. At the same time, many others from the Murton "old guard" were replaced on the committee by much younger men, who had been active during the strike. For example, the right wing branch delegate resigned and took redundancy. Alan Young - who

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[7] Nine mechanics were also sacked in Durham, but none came from Murton. Of the 28 miners sacked from Murton, all but two have now been reinstated.

had played such a crucial role in the strike organisation - was elected in his place. In 1986 Murton became only the second NUM branch in the country (after Philadelphia workshops, also in Durham) to elect a woman onto a branch committee. Pat Curry - a canteen worker at Murton - became a leading figure in national campaigns to win equal pay and equal rights at work to her male colleagues.

Murton miners' lodge became almost the archetypal example of a branch that was politically transformed by the strike. Yet as chapter five showed, the old order had already suffered considerable destabilisation before the strike. Now, as older, conservative miners fled the new regime underground, more left wing, militant miners assumed a dominant numerical presence at the pit. However, despite the declining significance of Murton men at the pit (see tables 7.3 and 7.5), the committee was still dominated by miners from the village, with only one or two travellers elected each year.

In the mechanics' branch committee on the other hand, there were fewer post-strike changes in personnel. However, Dave Temple emerged with his reputation strengthened, through his total commitment to the strike. When John Cummings was selected as Labour candidate for Easington - the safest of safe Labour seats - Dave began to slip into his long-time adversaries position, elected first as assistant secretary, and finally replacing Cummings when he was elected MP in 1987. As court cases enveloped the NUM, Cummings was nominated as one of the union's trustees, replacing the three national officials who were removed by a court judgement. With his other jobs taking him out of Murton more and more of the time, the mechanics' leadership gradually fell into the hands of the left.

The mechanics' relatively stable leadership can be attributed to their comparative unity during the strike. With the old right wing united behind the strike on the committee, there was no focus for discontent to concentrate on. The miners' branch on the other hand had been characterised by a dual leadership, with a left wing group assuming dominance during the strike, whilst facing considerable hostility and resentment from significant sections of the workforce and the committee.

Just as the miners began to build a new committee, BC demonstrated their new style of macho management by sacking Frank Duffy, just after he had been elected branch secretary, in May 1985. Management claimed that his

dismissal related purely to a breach of the Mines and Quarries Act, and was unrelated to his strike activities. In the immediate post strike climate however, there was no doubt in most people's eyes that Frank had been set up by management. A senior member of Murton's management said two years later that following the incident that led to the sacking, the manager had received instructions from BC Area HQ at Team Valley. Although losing an industrial tribunal appeal for unfair dismissal, Frank stayed as branch secretary for another one and a half years, before being elected branch delegate (a position he holds today) - a remarkable testimony to the respect he was held in at the pit. Alan Young became Assistant Secretary, and took over the effective leadership of the lodge at the pit.

At the same time however, a small branch of the UDM was formed at Murton. Although concentrated in Nottinghamshire, the UDM had a few outposts in Durham, with the main concentration at Tursdale workshops and Wearmouth colliery. Murton's branch numbered 47 just over a year after the strike, and it was led by a transferee from Eppleton. However, in a pit where comparatively few had gone back to work, where divisions were so sharp, and where management offered not a hint of compromise, the UDM was effectively squeezed out[8]. It could offer no alternative leadership to the NUM.

7.3.ii DEMORALISATION AND ISOLATION

In the aftermath of the most bitter and divisive industrial dispute in Britain since 1926, it was not surprising that morale among the workforce collapsed. Every miner I interviewed commented on the poisonous atmosphere underground following the end of the dispute. It was undoubtedly a significant factor encouraging redundancy, both among activists and returnees.

BC promised returnees that they would suffer no loss of earnings (because, for example, strikers refused to work with them), and if they suffered

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[8]Under BC's "majority/minority" concept, only the majority union at a pit could negotiate with management. Although this isolated NUM members in Nottinghamshire, it also constituted a formidable barrier to the UDM's expansion outside its Nottingham heartland. At Murton, management generally had little time for the UDM.

intimidation then the perpetrators would face the sack. But nothing BC said could stop some NUM militants waging a grim and sometimes dirty war against the people who they felt had betrayed their struggle. Conducted in the secret underground world of the pit, with a hard and unrelenting hatred, activists struggled to impose the discipline they had been unable to sustain during the strike. According to management sources, Murton shared with Westoe the worst reputation for intimidation of any pit in the North East, and some of the young picketing militants were proud of it.

Not all men who stayed on strike adopted such a hostile attitude to returnees. One Murton mechanic said:

> "All I can say to that Jonathan is that they made their
> own minds up, or circumstances made them up. I still
> speak to the majority. In fact, I still talk to
> practically everybody." (interview)

Certainly the first men back were of the opinion that if it wasn't for a tiny minority of "militants" who intimidated the passive majority, then most non-strike breakers would treat them normally. Interestingly however, there was a hierarchy even among the returnees, with the earliest men back being treated as "scabs" even by men who later returned to work (Winterton and Winterton [1989] report a similar phenomena in Yorkshire).

Looked at from the point of view of the returnees, there is no doubt that many were deeply affected by the way they were treated after the strike. A combination of pressure in the community (social isolation, bannings from pubs and clubs, "ventilation"), and pressure at work (social isolation and occasional physical harassment) convinced many who broke the strike that they didn't wish to cross a picket line again. One man who broke the strike at Eppleton, became a member of the UDM, and then transferred to Murton, commented:

> "I know this much, I'll never do it again... I wish I
> hadn't. I've lost a lot of 'friends'... I'm never going
> through another picket line... I think the majority [of
> those that broke the strike] are of the same frame of
> mind now... In fact, all the lads I've spoken to will
> not go through a picket line again. Never again!"
> (interview)

This judgement is born out by the reaction to the strikes that hit Murton after 1985 (see sections 7.5 and 7.6), which were virtually solid. Crossing picket lines in 1984/5 was only possible because of the ability to appeal to a national stage where the strike's legitimacy was under assault - and even then it required an enormous "psyche up" for most strike breakers.

However, it is also true that activists found the post-strike atmosphere demoralising. With management so blatantly dominant and the union on the retreat, political involvement lacked the glamour and excitement of the pre-strike years (and the strike itself). Many activists - especially the older ones - did the same. John Dixon - the Murton miners' branch secretary has already been mentioned. But there were others too. The camaraderie - so important in the pits in making the work, if not enjoyable then bearable (and safe) - collapsed in the bitter aftermath of the strike. "The pits aren't what they were."

For some activists, especially older men, it was too great a disillusionment to add to the unbearable demoralisation of losing the strike. One miners' activist - his conscience racked with guilt - tried to explain his decision to take redundancy.

> "To be honest with you, the carrot they dangle for somebody like me - and the rest of the workforce over 50 - the carrot they dangle takes some refusing. It takes some refusing... To a working man it's a lot of money... I wasn't happy to take my money you know. I felt I shouldn't. I did feel I shouldn't, on principle. So I suppose I sold my principles. I suppose I did. But the things that were going on around, there wasn't any solidarity to help us out. If there'd been some solidarity in the pit I probably wouldn't have took it. I probably would have stuck it out and gone to 55. But I mean we were really beaten, and beaten into the bottom. I think we were forced to take it." (interview)

Given this verdict - and it was by no means uncommon in the months after the strike - the tenacity of those who stayed behind to continue fighting BC appears even more remarkable.

Disillusion and despondency (as well as debt) were therefore rife among activists and returnees alike, creating a profound desire to be out of the industry among a broad swathe of the workforce. The widespread resort to it fundamentally changed the nature of the workforce at collieries like Murton.

7.3.iii REDUNDANCY

Following the NUM's return to work without a negotiated settlement in March 1985, BC embarked on a massive manpower rundown. Large redundancy payments provided an intoxicating incentive for miners who had wracked up enormous debts during the 12 month dispute. And whilst redundancy pay-offs

constituted an important "pull" factor, the "push" came from the repressive atmosphere in the mine.

Details of the first post strike redundancy at Murton are contained in tables 7.2 and 7.3[9]. They show that 56% of over 50's at the colliery left within three months of the strike's conclusion. 80% of all the redundancies involved men over 50. And as some men took redundancy, others transferred in, shifting the residential base of Murton's workforce yet further away from the village.

a) Analysing redundancy in 1984 and 1988

Since demand for redundancy consistently ran ahead of supply, management allocated it according to age and work category. In other words, the manager received a breakdown from Area HQ that he needed to lose - for example - 30 powerloaders, 10 electricians, etc. Redundancy would then be offered to the oldest men in each category, and so on down the list until enough had accepted. Because of shortages in some areas (eg blacksmiths), some relatively old miners were denied redundancy whilst younger men doing other jobs left. Decisions on how many men were to go were based on Area's knowledge of how many people were transferring from collieries which were closing or being rundown. However, transferees rarely replaced redundancies one to one. For example, with the Eppleton closure, Murton's manpower was built up, but every successive redundancy led to incremental falls in overall manpower, as management endeavoured to achieve productivity increases (see table 7.14).

Table 7.3 shows that with respect to residence, redundancies were spread fairly evenly throughout the various communities supplying Murton's labour (compare the "percentage of all leavers" column in table 7.3 with the "percentage of the workforce" column in table 5.3). For example, redundancies from Murton itself were almost exactly proportional to their

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[9]These tables were constructed using computer readouts of Murton's workforce in 1984, 1985, and 1988. Data for 1985 was restricted to the names of miners, whereas the other two years had date of birth, address, work grade and union code. Unfortunately, this data was not available for any other periods (see appendix 1 for problems of data collection).

relative weight in the workforce. However, those communities which were represented only by a very few workers, had differing levels of redundancy. At some, everyone working at Murton left; at others, none did. This reflected the paramount influence of age and work category in the availability of redundancy, so that the residential breakdown of redundancies was essentially a by-product of these two factors, combined with the desire to take redundancy.

There were at least four major batches of redundancies at Murton in the 18 months following the strike. At the same time, a steady trickle of men left outside these main groups. However, the data for April 1988 show that the pattern of redundancies was very different to that in the immediate post-strike environment (graph 14). Changes were particularly evident in the age structure of those leaving. Table 7.4 shows that the pattern was much more evenly spread than in 1985, with only just over 20% of all those opting for redundancy in the over 50 category (see also graph 14). Partly however, this reflected the rapid decline in those left at the colliery who were over 50. Although they represented only 20% of all those taking redundancy, over 40% of the remaining over 50's left in April 1988. This left just 70 people at the colliery over 50, compared to 270 in 1984 (see graph 12).

The figures for 1988 also showed a significant spattering of redundancies in all other age groups except the very youngest (20-24). Particularly noticeable were the 10% of 30-34 year olds and 25-29 year olds opting to leave. Although this to some extent reflected the increasing opportunity for redundancy in these age groups (as the number of volunteers in older age groups dried up), it also seemed to reflect the widespread recognition that Murton's days were numbered, the future of the industry in the North East was bleak, and that it might therefore be better to try and make a new start whilst still relatively young.

Analysis of redundancy by residence sheds further light on the changing composition of Murton's workforce (see table 7.5). Many of those taking redundancy lived a long way from Murton. This suggested that older miners, living a long way from Murton were the most likely to want redundancy. Conversely, only seven miners aged 25-29 living in Murton took redundancy. The 1988 figures also showed that the Eppleton transferees had a major impact on the residential composition of the workforce. Eppleton's core

workforce had been drawn from Hetton-le-Hole, Houghton-le-Spring and Easington Lane (see map 2). In 1984, before Eppleton's closure, only 14% of Murton's workforce travelled from these communities (229). In 1988 it was 33% (592) - more than the 27% (481) living and working at Murton! Murton's workforce was now more spatially fragmented than ever. Only just over a quarter of the workforce came from Murton, and the travellers were dispersed even further afield than in 1984.

b) Murton's new workforce

The net effect of these enormous upheavals in manpower was to alter the workforce even more dramatically than in the pre-strike years. In essence, Murton became dominated by workers who travelled in to work each day (see table 7.5). Well over half were less than 40 years old (see table 7.4 and graph 12). And it was the younger miners who provided the militant cutting edge at the colliery. Most had been heavily involved in the strike. They were rebellious. (Many older miners castigated them for "laziness".) Unlike their fathers, they had either not been socialised into an era of consensus, and an ideology of social and economic planning for the common good, or they had consciously rejected it. Like many young men reared in the masculine, macho environment of the pit village, they were aggressive, and in a time of trenchant social divisions, this aggressiveness could potentially be displayed in social and political rebellion.

Frank Duffy summarised the kind of pressures young miners were under when he responded to the accusation that young miners were "lazy".

> "Well I would say young miners are no different to any other young lad, whether he's unemployed or whether he works at the pit, or whether he works in any other industry. I would think the present system, or the present government... certainly doesn't convince me I have to work any harder for the benefit of the country. The way the mining industy's being run, there's certainly no encouragement for a young miner to get stripped off and get stuck in as hard as he can, I'll tell you now. 'Cos men's being robbed blind on bonus, their jobs are constantly under threat, they face disciplinary action for the slightest misdemeanour, and it's certainly not a climate which ideally suits young boys.
>
> Particularly young boys who've been brought up in this community, who are traditionally highly strung anyway. Militant just by nature, just the way they've been brought up. Certainly my generation, the young boys I

knock around with, wouldn't kowtow to anybody... Lads
who I know who went to prison wouldn't knuckle under in
prison. They spent a lot of time in solitary
confinement... Rebellious just by nature. That's
something I'm proud of... I dinna' think they're lazy.
I think if there's an incentive and a little bit of
goodwill from both sides, then I think they're capable
of doing the job they're asked. I wouldn't say they'd
do any extra. They'll do what's asked of them, and I
don't think anybody can ask for more than that."
(interview)

Young men dominated the workforce. Only a tiny minority were committed
activists. But most of the rest shared a belligerent antagonism to "the
bosses". The strike, and management's hard line after it, did little to
persuade them to adopt a cooperative attitude to management. As Frank said,
they were "rebellious just by nature".

Significantly, the numerical dominance of younger miners was accompanied by
the redundancy of most of the old right wing. The miners who had exercised
such a strong influence on the branch before the early 1980's, dominating
the weak committee with their face militancy and right wing attitudes, and
who had been so hostile to the strike, were now out of branch politics.
This removed the main focus of opposition to the left leaders of the
branch. But this did not automatically imply that the left would be able to
achieve control of either branch. With disillusion so strong, apathy and
individualism might have taken over. In the following section I explore the
extent to which the union was able to organise frustration and anger in the
militant workforce into the application of collective pressure against
management.

Whatever the long term political gains of the strike (for example in terms of a politicised core of younger workers), most strikers went back in March 1985 with the sickening weight of defeat lying like bile in their stomachs. For those union activists who didn't buckle under the pressure and take redundancy, the task of rebuilding the union into a credible organisation capable of standing up to the employer was daunting. At a national level, the NUM was unable to resist BC's remorseless drive to a capital intensive, high productivity, central coalfield dominated strategy (section 7.1). But at local level, tight union organisation offered the opportunity to win back significant areas of control.

In Murton, both miners' and mechanics' branch leaderships set about rebuilding the union as a credible force. In doing so they were constantly aware of the changes swirling around them - the dramatic labour turnover, the fortunes of the pit, the national union's situation - and in formulating their strategies they fought to stay within the realistic parameters imposed by these developments. On some occasions, events ran away from them, reflecting the prodigious difficulties facing a union treated with contempt by management. Rebuilding the workforces confidence in their capacity to take collective action was an essential part of the union's battle, because without it, individual solutions (high levels of overtime working, redundancy) would continue to come before collective struggle. This section examines the close relationship between the developing strategy of branch, area and national leadership, and the pressures which caused the rank and file to move in different directions at different times.

7.4.i FIRST STRIKE ACTION

Shortly after the end of the strike, there was a lightning two day strike at Murton, prompted by the sacking of two miners at Eppleton[10]. It was led by the mechanics, and in particular by Dave Temple, who saw it as a vital

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[10] I had not begun my research when this strike took place, and by the time I did begin my studies it had been superceded by other events, so I have little information on the dispute.

confidence building measure. It was an attempt to show the men that the union still functioned, that they could still strike together, and that striking was still possible. The miners supported the strike[11]. Given the contempt with which management was treating the union at this time, the strike certainly forced them to take account of the potential strength still contained within the union. But with management rampant, in practice the strike was little more than a tokenistic statement of defiance, although several weeks later one of the two sacked men was reinstated.

7.4.ii THE UNION STRIKES BACK

Management continued to pursue a tough strategy throughout the year following the strike. Murton's survival confounded almost every observer, although its financial performance continued to be disastrous (see table 7.14). Clearly management were under massive pressure to improve results, and the outcome was aggressive, and at times arrogant management behaviour. However, this strategy produced a backlash. Low bonuses, oppressive management, and an uncertain future combined to increase frustration and anger among the workforce.

By the summer of 1986, tension and resentment in the Durham coalfield was reaching a peak. For the first time since the end of the strike, activists were able to contemplate campaigning for a programme of industrial action. However, at area level the miners' and mechanics' unions were unable to coordinate their plans. Since the strike the miners' Broad Left had taken control of the DMA, but very soon after the BL began to disintegrate[12]. Relationships between the Area leaders of the miners' and mechanics' unions also deteriorated. Therefore two separate programmes of action emerged from the two unions. However, the issues affecting them were the same.

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[11]John Cummings, the secretary of the branch was furious at what he saw as pointless and unnecessary action.

[12]The reasons are too complex to engage here. Essentially the BL split as some members perceived the elected agents as "selling out" the ideals which had informed the movement since its inception in the late 1970's. In late 1988 the BL was reunited (although as a depleted force), with the two agents joining the activists with whom they had been at loggerheads for three years.

Undoubtedly the most immediate grievance was British Coal's threat to withdraw the 1985 pay award unless the NUM agreed that members should pay pension contributions for the period they were on strike in 1984/5 (Taylor, 1988, 224-225). It was this issue above all others which provided the energy for industrial action. It was felt to be such blatant victimisation that it was almost bound to unite miners and mechanics who had stayed loyal to the union in 1984/5. But it also came on top of widespread anger at BC's victimisation of sacked miners. One case in particular - that of Geoff Hartnell, a sacked mechanic from Tursdale workshops - caused widespread offence. After BC withdrew from the 40 year old conciliation procedure for dealing with dismissal - telling men to use industrial tribunals instead - Hartnell took his case to an industrial tribunal, where he won an order for reinstatement and backpay for the period of his dismissal. But unlike the final stage of binding arbitration which characterised the old appeals procedure, industrial tribunal rulings are non-binding. BC ignored the instruction to reinstate Hartnell.

Of less significance to the rank and file, but of great importance to the union leadership was the issue of BC's abandonment - at a national and area level - of conciliation procedures. Finally, BC chose this time to announce the closure (or "merger" with Vane Tempest, as they preferred to call it) of Seaham Colliery. Together, all four issues summed up BC's attempt to redefine management-union relations. The "right to manage" was being asserted with a vengeance.

Despite the defeat of the strike, the membership reacted angrily to the management hard line. Bitterness suddenly focused around BC's hard line decision to penalise strikers by withdrawing their pay rise. By planning industrial action, activists aimed to channel the anger and frustration into meaningful action, and raise the level of struggle by transforming individual action into collective, purposive action.

Within the mechanics' union, the decision was taken by BL activists (including the area leadership) to ballot the membership on a programme of rolling one day strikes throughout the coalfield. The four issues mentioned above were listed on the ballot paper, along with a recommendation to take action. One day strikes were seen as more effective in achieving public recognition, and also more likely to achieve support from the membership

than an overtime ban, which was the alternative form of action on the agenda (given the mechanics' legendary propensity for overtime).

However, the miners decided that they were more likely to get support for an overtime ban than for strikes, because the massive wage differentials among their membership meant that strikes were deeply divisive, affecting low paid workers far more than the high earning face workers. In essence therefore, both unions balloted their members on the easiest options.

However, for both sections, the ballots were a considerable success. In the mechanics' vote, Murton consolidated its reputation as the most progressive branch by turning in an 82% majority for action. Westoe was second, but the once left wing Easington branch only scraped a 55% majority, the same as right wing Vane Tempest. Overall the mechanics voted 68% for action (see table 7.7). The miners' ballot for an overtime ban - called over the pay and pit closures issue - provided a 61% majority for action. Again Murton was top in the area, with 79% voting in favour (NUM sources; see also section 7.6.iii).

In order to cause maximum disruption, the mechanics planned to make a snap announcement for each of their one day strikes. On Friday 19th November the DCMA executive met and decided (to no-one's surprise) that Murton was to be the first of the one day strikes, on Monday 22nd[13]. The strike was solid. Only two of the forty seven UDM members, and perhaps eight men in all crossed the picket lines. But even more significantly, 60% of the deputies refused to cross the line. The union had stamped its authority on the pit with a vengeance.

On that day, the atmosphere among the activists was euphoric. There was a tremendous sense of pride. After months of being treated with contempt,

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[13]The delay in informing the miners' lodge of the action came dangerously close to undermining the strike. To make sure that travellers knew about the Monday strike, Dave Temple drove around pubs and clubs on the Sunday night spreading the word that there would be a strike the following day. Without this, many miners could have arrived for work at 5.30am, to find that another section of the workforce had stopped the pit. This would have seriously undermined the credibility of the union. Thanks to this action, only a handful of men made the wasted journey.

they could hold their heads up. Management had to take them seriously again. For example, I was on the picket line at lunchtime when a deputy came over and asked respectfully: "I've just been in to see The Boss, and he's hoping you'll let some men in on the pre-shift at 5.00pm to do safety work for tomorrow." A tangible murmur of satisfaction ran through the pickets. The manager was asking them for a favour. For the activists, this reassertion of their collective strength and solidarity was a massive morale booster.

Following the action at Murton, the strikes rolled on into the winter, a different unit coming out every week. Although not all pits had the same united response as at Murton, there was overwhelming support for the action throughout the coalfield.

This success was due to several factors. On the one hand, the objective situation provided the preconditions for success. After 18 months of harsh discipline, and vindictive management, the refusal to award the pay increase to strikers created massive anger among the workforce, whilst simultaneously providing a clear objective to fight for. Also significant was the changed composition of the workforce. Transfers and redundancies had transformed the age composition of the workforce, so that it was now predominantly young. Older, more cautious and conservative men had left, to be replaced with younger miners who tended to be more militant.

On the other hand, without the "subjective factor" - the intervention of self conscious, purposive individuals - the anger and militancy of the workforce would have remained random and undirected. Success was built upon the shrewd and careful choice of action which the membership could unite around, and the thorough campaigning of activists in the pits to win the membership around to the idea of taking action.

There were several postcripts to the one day strike at Murton. The manager was clearly rattled by the action. Immediately following the strike he announced that bonuses were being stopped for a week for all men not working at the point of production. The belt men responded to this attempt to divide the workforce with a go slow. Around the pit the slogan "NO BONUS, NO BELTS!" was chalked up on girders. If the manager wasn't going to pay them, he wasn't going to get any coal. Conveyor belt repairs dragged on. Faces stood. Production plummeted. Once the manager had used his weapon

- manipulating the bonus scheme to slash wages for non-powerloaders - the men had nothing to lose by curtailing production.

Nevertheless there was a backlash effect when men discovered the loss of bonus. One moderate miners' branch official predicted that many men would not support a one day strike again. Many miners resented the loss of earnings. There was considerable confusion over the clause in the incentive scheme which allowed the manager to stop bonuses for backbye men. The clause allowed this move in situations where the men were restricting effort. Many miners hadn't expected the one day strike to attract this penalty. It appeared that the clause was designed to deal with the type of go-slows which its implementation in this case actually provoked!

Rattled by the strikes success, particularly the support it received from NACODS, the manager responded with a bitter letter to the workforce. In it he claimed that the only interpretation he could put on the strike was that the men wanted to close the pit. Only BACM, he fumed, had any commitment to the pit, and were prepared to work long hours for it. Hollow laughs from the activists greeted this allegation - overtime at the pit among miners and mechanics was running at record levels (see table 7.14). He was clearly under pressure, squeezed from above and below. To Team Valley it must have looked as if he was in danger of losing control of the pit. Production had collapsed in the wake of his decision to cut bonuses from non face workers. Financial results were appalling, and the men's actions were jeopardising a recovery. His own reputation - if not his career - might well have been under threat. The miners' overtime ban started the week after the one day strike, supported by a mechanics' ban on mid week overtime. The situation was deteriorating.

However, the impetus created by the one day strikes and overtime ban soon petered out. The mechanics decided to call off the rolling programme of one day strikes after one "round", apparently fearful of stretching the success too far. The miners' overtime ban was also abandoned after several rather ineffectual months of operation. Lack of support at a national level (due to the bitter divisions between the Scargill left and the reformists in Scotland and Wales) meant that the action was leading nowhere. At Murton, the action had coincided with a peak of rank and file resentment and frustration. However, few of the issues were resolved, leaving the way clear for further outbursts of protest action. The NUM eventually won the

pay increase, but only on condition that in future pension contributions lost during strikes would have to be made up after the action. Geoff Hartnell stayed sacked, Seaham pit closed, and the conciliation issue remained unresolved. More significantly perhaps, the day to day balance of power still lay heavily in management's favour. This was felt most strongly in relation to the bonus system.

Shortly after the 1986 one day strike, Murton's performance began to show signs of a dramatic recovery. Despite months of doom laden predictions from activists (centring on repeated allegations that the coal clearance system was unable to handle anything approaching the break-even production level of 6000 tonnes a day), by November 1986 the "unachievable" figure was being exceeded. For the next six months - largely due to one big hitting face (E75) - Murton was profitable, and some of the previous 18 months losses were clawed back. This run undoubtedly saved Murton from closure (see table 7.14). Further redundancies trimmed the operating costs of the mine, and all available manpower was thrown into coal getting.

However, instead of the recovery generating smoother industrial relations (via enhanced bonus payments), in May 1987 anger and frustration again erupted in strike action. Many miners, especially powerloaders, felt that the increased output from the colliery was not being reflected in their pay packets. Because of the nature of the incentive scheme, grievances were not evenly distributed throughout the workforce. Some face teams were aggravated by long-standing disputes going back over many months, and it was one such dispute that finally sparked a spontaneous walkout by powerloaders on the nightshift on Wednesday May 20th. The particular grievance concerned the alleged non-payment of backpay from a six week "suspense" period (see chapter five for a discussion of the workings of the incentive scheme). The issue had been outstanding for months, and the union had failed to resolve it in negotiations with management. According to some branch committee men, the dispute had been brewing for weeks, and management had been warned that without a solution a strike was inevitable. Finally the men lost patience, and walked out. Their spontaneous action partly demonstrated the limited strength and authority of the branch committee to resolve bonus grievances with management.

Although backpay provided the immediate provocation for the walkout, it was clear that as well as this "immediate trigger", there were a set of "underlying causes" (Gouldner, 1955). These were concerned with authoritarian management, and the general operation of the incentive scheme. The two were related, since the former constrained the possibilities for flexible negotiation over the latter. The union was simply not strong enough to force management into making the concessions

the men wanted. Particular members of management attracted considerable hostility for their aggressive posturing, and one such man - "Fillharder" - played a key role in the dispute. The walkout occurred just as Murton's previous manager - "Dimblunder" - had left the colliery to move to a management job in Northumberland, and Fillharder had taken over the acting managers role.

Frank Duffy - at this stage still the miners' branch secretary - met the strikers at the pit canteen, and urged them to return to work, pending a union special meeting at the weekend. But the seething anger of past weeks could not be so easily dissipated, and the union recommendation was unanimously rejected. The branch committee had lost control, and the night shift walked out. However, by the time the tub-loading shift arrived for work, the lodge committee thought they'd resolved the backpay question which lay at the heart of the dispute, and the next two shifts worked normally. But when the night shift colliery average men arrived back the next day to find that management had docked their bonus for a week, then "all hell broke loose".

Chaos ruled in the canteen and outside it as colliery average workers fought to persuade powerloaders to support further strike action. The divisiveness of the incentive scheme was clearly visible, as power loaders were only docked bonus for the day they struck. Colliery average workers however now felt that they had little to lose by taking further action, as they had already lost their bonus for the week. Again the lodge leadership recommended that the men work normally, pending a special meeting. There was pandemonium as the shift tried to reach a decision. Successive votes were taken, with colliery average men rejecting the outcome and insisting on recounts until on the third count they achieved a 73-72 vote majority. They had decided they were not going down the pit, come what may. So on the strength of one vote, the pit went out on "indefinite strike", pending a special meeting on Friday May 22nd. The next two shifts were picketed out without difficulty, and the mechanics followed the standing orders of their branch, and supported the miners' action.

Prior to the special meetings called by both branches, the two committees met and agreed a united plan of action to try and regain control of the situation. Relationships between the two branches had never been so strong, and at both special meetings the recommendation to "suspend" the action,

with the possibility of an overtime ban in the future was overwhelmingly endorsed. Fillharder, the acting manager and a man thoroughly disliked at the pit, was rocked by the dispute. He was left carrying responsibility for a strike caused by his predecessor, but which he had been warned about several times. Union activists argued plausibly that the strike ended his slender chances of becoming the new manager, and shortly after being passed over for the post, he took redundancy.

It was a classic wildcat strike. A host of grievances had built up over a long period of time; a relatively trivial event triggered a walkout by a group of faceworkers whose action became a catalyst in releasing the anger and frustration of other miners, particularly concerning the operation of the incentive scheme. The miners' lodge committee was caught unprepared by the action, even though they'd known for some time that discontent was rising. Lodge leaders could see that the action would lead nowhere, and tried to persuade men back to work to allow an orderly resolution to the dispute, but the anger was too great. When the second dispute erupted, many miners were so furious at being "cheated" of their bonus that nothing would persuade them to go back to work.

The miners' lodge committee were worried about the potential divisiveness of the strike, as men arrived from outlying communities to find a picket line, and realised they'd made a wasted journey. Furthermore, the initial faceworkers walkout heightened divisions between well paid faceworkers (powerloaders) and low paid backbye and surface workers. Powerloaders lost only one shifts bonus, and could easily recoup their relatively high wages through overtime, whereas other workers lost a weeks bonus from a smaller wage packet, and had fewer opportunities to make good the difference in overtime.

Nevertheless, the unity of the miners' and mechanics' committees faced with a potentially highly damaging dispute was significant. Politically, the two committees were converging, working together on all the main issues affecting both sections of the workforce. This provided a powerful platform from which to organise the membership, and win their support for collective resistance to BC. This was not the end of the story however, because as sections 7.2 and 7.3 made clear, BC's dominance placed formidable constraints on what could be achieved. But within this context, the Murton branches made considerable headway. In the following section, this

political progress is examined with regard to the ballot results returned within the Durham Area since the strike.

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7.6 LEADERSHIP AND BALLOTS

I have already commented on the difficulties facing the union after the strike. The burden fell particularly heavily on activists at pit level, who faced day in and day out the consequences of defeat, both in terms of managements' aggressive new style, and in terms of a demoralised membership. At Murton, the influence of three factors was crucial in helping rebuild the union into a credible force. First, the workforce changed dramatically, with older miners quitting in droves, leaving a younger, more militant workforce who did not relate to the old consensus politics of the NUM (section 7.3). Secondly, BC's continuing onslaught on the union and on working conditions was not conducive to the development of conciliatory instincts among the workforce (sections 7.2, 7.4, 7.5). And thirdly, there were present in both branches some exceptionally committed activists who fought with inspirational tenacity to raise the consciousness of the workforce.

If events in other branches in Durham following the strike are compared with Murton, then the key variable at Murton emerges as the quality of leadership provided by activists in the two branch committees. In different degrees other collieries experienced similar changes in personnel, and in management style over the period. However, both Murton branches stand out for their left wing profile since 1985. One way of analysing this political profile is via an analysis of voting patterns by the various branches in the post strike period. Ballots provide "snapshots" of political consciousness. In the way of snapshots, they are rather simple and imperfect. They conceal much hidden complexity. Nevertheless, outlines are easily picked out, and detail can be filled in from other aspects of my research.

7.6.i VOTING IN DURHAM SINCE MARCH 1985

Branch breakdowns of voting results since the end of the 1984/5 strike provide a useful method of analysing political developments at Murton, especially in relation to other branches in the area. Unfortunately, whilst the branch voting record is relatively complete for the mechanics'

branches, the miners' records are more difficult to track down[14]. Tables 7.6 to 7.13 summarise the voting results for colliery branches of the NUM in Durham as they were available[15].

In the case of the mechanics, they confirm the point that Murton remains the most left wing and militant pit in the area. And although not all the figures are available, results for the miners' branch show that in every ballot for action since the strike, Murton has produced the strongest support. Only Westoe colliery - in both miners' and mechanics' sections - comes close to Murton's record. But these results need closer examination in order to unpack the specific factors generating such apparently uniform trends. What emerges is the absolutely central role of branch leadership in determining the voting results within branches.

7.6.ii THE BALLOT OVER THE 50P LEVY (MECHANICS BRANCHES[16]), APRIL 1985

Called immediately after the strike, the ballot on a 50p levy to raise money for sacked miners caused considerable controversy in pit communities (Beynon, 1985b). Despite long traditions of mutual help and solidarity, the desperate divisions engendered by the strike persuaded many people that sacked miners had basically got what they deserved. Media and state propaganda depicted militants as mindless thugs, and the attacks by a small minority of pickets on strike breakers lent credibility to this distorted view. In general, the more conservative mining communities were most likely to turn their backs on the sacked men. Horden was the classic example, because despite having the fewest returnees, the mechanics' branch produced the biggest anti-levy vote in the area! Nearby Easington on the other hand,

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[14]Ultimately, all voting records are sent to NUM headquarters in Sheffield. However, the NUM refused to release these records. Tables 7.6 - 7.14 were constructed using data gathered in Durham from local NUM personnel.

[15]I have chosen to ignore Durham area elections for agents and delegates. The peculiarities of local political factors would make analysis enormously complicated. Such locally specific factors often outweigh the political affiliation of these complicated elections.

[16]Figures are not available for the miners' branches.

which was one of the most politicised branches, had the biggest majority in support of the levy (along with Westoe).

Murton fell between the two, just winning a majority for the levy. This reflected contradictory political forces in the branch. Murton was still in many respects a traditional village, and the older mechanics who held out during the strike did not necessarily agree with the tactics used in its prosecution. Their loyalty was to the union, not to maverick elements within it. On the other hand, the highly politicised activists who wholeheartedly supported the strike won considerable support for the levy from militants in the branch. But the balance of forces changed rapidly after this vote with the redundancy of many older mechanics.

7.6.iii THE OCTOBER 1986 BALLOTS IN MINERS' AND MECHANICS' BRANCHES

Section 7.4.ii showed that both miners' and mechanics' branches in Murton topped the poll in the call for action over the failure to backdate the 1985 pay award in September 1986 (table 7.7). Both examples showed what could be done when united branch committees launched determined campaigns to try and win the memberships support for a definite programme of action. They focused the anger of the rank and file generated by the employer's actions, giving it a disciplined and coordinated expression. In doing so, they took a major step towards restoring the unions' credibility and strength at the pit.

With the management forced to take the union seriously, the union also became a more credible force with its own members. And at area level, union officials noted an immediate softening in BC's attitude to the union. They were forced to recognise the union as a force again. Nevertheless, none of the proximate causes of the strikes and overtime ban were withdrawn as a result of the action. The victory lay in the reassertion of collective solidarity rather than the defeat of BC.

Murton achieved the best results because both miners' and mechanics' committees committed themselves to all out campaigns. In contrast for example, the formerly left led Easington branches began to betray clear signs of their leaders realignment with the Welsh and Scottish "new realists" (section 7.1). Easington's majority for action was reduced in the mechanics' branch to a wobbly 52%-48%.

As part of their attempts to weaken the ability of the union to resist their production strategy and reassert the "right to manage", BC devised a new disciplinary code of conduct in 1987. Although claiming that their code was based on the model ACAS code, most miners immediately understood at a gut level what it was all about. BC were attempting to provide formal mechanisms for disciplining and controlling union activists.

Despite the public pretence, BC's code was not based on the ACAS model. For example, the ACAS code stipulates (para 10) that an employee has the right to be accompanied by a person of their choice to any disciplinary meeting. The BC code (para 15) inserted the crucial qualification that this representative must be acceptable to BC. The BC code was imposed unilaterally on NUM members, without consultation of discussion. The ACAS code (para 5) makes it clear that they should be the subject of negotiation, and should be acceptable to both sides. Billy Etherington, the general secretary of the Durham Mechanics summed it up like this:

> "It is a travesty to suggest that this particular document is influenced by the ACAS code of practice. In fact, about the only thing that it does comply with is that ACAS recommends that there be some form of disciplinary procedure." (letter to branch secretaries, 9-6-87)

The most controversial aspects of the code concerned BC's attempts to dramatically extend its scope for sacking employees. In particular, the code allowed BC to sack someone for committing an offence unrelated to work (clauses 10.viii, 10.ix, 11 and 42.iii), and to sack men when they had been charged "with a criminal offence connected with a BC's property or interests", even when they were subsequently found not guilty of this offence (clause 42.i). The ban immediately stimulated industrial action, concentrated in the still volatile Yorkshire coalfield. When BC suspended five miners at Frickley colliery for allegedly leaving work early, a strike erupted which spread to 14 pits in South Yorkshire, laying 13000 miners idle. The strikers only agreed to return to work when the national executive committee agreed to sanction a national ballot on an overtime ban (Winterton, 1988).

In Durham, 70% of miners and mechanics voted to support the call (the mechanics' vote was predictably lower than the miners, due to their historical predilection for overtime). In the mechanics' branches, only Westoe provided a fractionally higher vote for action than Murton (see table 7.8). Interestingly, Easington mechanics' vote slumped to the point where they recorded the lowest vote for action among the working collieries (51.8%). Amongst the miners' lodges, Murton produced comfortably the largest majority for action (87.8% against Westoe's 83.4% - see table 7.9).

However, within the union nationally, opinions were sharply polarised over the ban. Opposition to Arthur Scargill and his leadership crystallised around the appropriateness of overtime bans and other forms of industrial action as methods of dealing with BC. Leaders in South Wales, Scotland, and the traditionally moderate areas in the Midlands sought to use the ban as an opportunity to discredit Scargill's leadership. Even in areas like Durham which recorded strong support for the ban, its practical effectiveness was quickly undermined. Because it was limited to a mid-week ban, it had a very limited effect on production, especially in Durham which had no tradition of coaling between shifts anyway. What little effect it might have had could easily be eroded if the union cooperated with management, for example by ensuring that the maximum amount of essential safety work was scheduled for overtime. Under these conditions, support for the ban began to dissolve in a swamp of cynicism and recrimination. Rank and file miners could see little point in making personal sacrifices for no obvious effect, when elsewhere thousands of people were rendering the ban ineffective.

Although the ban lingered on into 1988, Murton was among many pits consistently breaking production records throughout its operation. With Scargill's opponents working hard to ensure that the mid-week ban was not intensified into something more effective, a ballot was finally called in March 1988 on whether or not to continue with the ban. Unsurprisingly, the membership voted to call it off. Within Durham, Murton was the only mechanics' branch to vote (narrowly) to preserve the ban (table 7.12). The miners too voted for a continuation, but overall the area accepted the futility of continuing with such an ineffective policy.

The whole affair provided a classic example of how to gradually draw the sting out of intense rank and file anger. The informal alliance between

right wing leaders and leaders in South Wales and Scotland regarded it as imperative to scupper militant action because they saw it as counterproductive at a time when they were pursuing a conciliatory line with BC. Recognising the extent of rank and file feeling against the code, they needed to take some action. But by limiting it to an ineffective overtime ban, they manoeuvred to ensure that their policies of compromise would not be jeopardised.

At Murton and many pits around the country the disciplinary code provoked profound anger among rank and file miners. It was a national issue, which could only be dealt with at a national level. Local campaigning could translate rank and file anger into massive votes for action - as happened at Murton. But the limits to the action were set within the union nationally, where powerful figures were fighting to move away from what they perceived as the politics of industrial confrontation. It was in an effort to break the apparent deadlock at national level that Arthur Scargill resigned as national President to seek re-election, hoping a decisive mandate would give authority to left wing policies at a national level.

7.6.v ARTHUR SCARGILL'S RE-ELECTION, JANUARY 1988

Arthur Scargill's surprise decision to stand for re-election as national President fell between the two votes over the disciplinary code overtime ban. The timing was shrewd. None of Scargill's "left" opponents felt confident enough to risk their careers by standing against him. Instead, John Walsh, a right wing area agent from North Yorkshire, became Scargill's only opponent. Nevertheless, the election turned into a battle over the future direction of the union. A Walsh election leaflet castigated "six wasted years under Scargill's leadership, characterised the President as a "modern day King Canute", and argued that unity was the key to winning back the unions' strength. Emphasising the call for unity was widely regarded as code for negotiating with the UDM to reunite the unions. Similarly, Walsh's plea for "progress through negotiation" was understood to imply concessions on flexible working.

The campaign was very different from Scargill's triumphal march to victory in 1982. With the union nationally unable to negotiate wage increases, an increasingly unpopular overtime ban dragging on, and no progress apparent

in almost every sphere of union activity, it was perhaps not surprising that Walsh was able to win some support for his intentionally ambiguous notions of change.

At Murton, the miners' and mechanics' committees campaigned together. They issued a joint leaflet to their members, replying to Walsh's election agenda, and comparing the candidates point by point.

> "...One candidate is for negotiating a six-day week and
> nine hour shifts - the other candidate, in line with
> conference policy is opposed to flexible working...
> One candidate wants to make peace with the scab union
> leaders in Nottinghamshire - the other refuses to meet
> with the breakaway leaders and continues to pursue the
> union policy of recruiting all miners back into the
> NUM.
> One candidate is supported by the Tories, the UDM,
> British Coal and the Tory Press - the other candidate
> has by his single-minded defence of miners earned the
> hatred of all these anti-working class institutions..."

Nationally, Scargill only just scraped a victory. Yet in Durham a clear majority of miners still cast their votes against Walsh's "new realism" (see tables 7.10 and 7.11). It was a triumph for hard campaigning. Murton miners 70% majority reflected both the political alignment of the lodge committee, and the predominantly young, belligerent workforce. The arguments against new realism were won. Miners accepted their branch leaders view that, however arduous the task, the fight to re-establish an effective, militant union was preferable to negotiating away hard won conditions - which is how they saw new realism.

Much less militant at area level, the Durham mechanics voted for Walsh. But at Murton, 64% supported Scargill. A vote against the area trend like this reflected just how left wing the Murton mechanics had become. The vote also reflected the cohesiveness of the branch, and the overall tradition of militancy and leftism by now well established at the pit. Also, in common with the miners, the mechanics' branch committee had earned the respect of the members through their day to day work on members' behalf. They had won the middle ground. The point was confirmed in the ballot one year later over pay negotiations.

If ever a ballot captured the decisive trends in the NUM's shifting political alignments, then it was the attempt to call a national overtime ban over BC's pay offer in December 1988. Nationally, the vote went against imposing the ban, by a tiny majority (29386-28650; Financial Times, 19-12-88). The campaign marked the most decisive break yet between the Scargill left, and the "new realist" leaders of South Wales, Scotland and elsewhere. Although the ballot had been called by a national Special Delegate Conference of the union, the South Wales and Scottish Area leaderships took the unprecedented step of issuing a call to their members to vote against the ban (Dutfield, 1987). This calculated step deepened splits within the union over strategy.

But in Durham - where the ballot was fought for the first time under the leadership of the new North East Area[17] - a 60% majority was recorded. And Murton went over 73%. It was an astonishing result. And also a very difficult one to achieve. Following the previous disastrous overtime ban against the disciplinary code, confidence in the efficacy of this measure was at an all time low. Divisions in the national leadership contributed to general demoralisation. Newspaper and television reports highlighted the dangers of taking action. And in Murton, the campaign started with even loyal activists expressing hostility to the idea.

Yet hard campaigning turned the men around. The central argument was that without action now, the union was finished as an effective national organisation. Essentially, the overtime ban was an attempt to force BC to enter national negotiations with the union leadership[18]. On the campaign

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[17] The Area was formed in July 1988 by the amalgamation of five north eastern sections of the NUM; the Durham Miners, Durham Mechanics, Durham Enginemen, Northumberland Miners and Northumberland Mechanics. Although the area leaderships amalgamated, seperate branches continued to exist at pit level.

[18] Since BC unilaterally terminated the coal industries conciliation machinery in 1986, they have refused to negotiate with the NUM until the latter agree to accept the so-called "majority/minority" concept. Under this concept, the NUM would only be able to represent men where it had majority union membership at a unit. But this would mean deserting NUM
(Footnote Continued)

trail, Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield - backed up in Durham by the Area agents and the BL - evoked the images of history and tradition, portraying the ballot as a desperate attempt to save the union built up by their forefathers. In Murton they spoke to a half empty hall. Grand rhetoric barely lifted the cloak of gloom enveloping the meeting. Despite this, demoralised activists trudged back to the pit, and won the arguments with their workmates. Once again, determined, united campaigning won through.

In contrast at Easington, the branch leadership was aligned with the Scottish and Welsh areas. An unofficial scare campaign played on the memberships fears of further job losses by suggesting that the overtime ban would cause further pit closures. Only 35% supported the ban. And as one left winger caustically remarked, that 35% would have supported another all-out, indefinite strike! In five years Easington had slid from being perhaps the best organised, most militant and left wing pit to being seen as the most right ring, and a standard bearer for the "new realism" (see chapter eight).

7.6.vii CONCLUSIONS ON BALLOT RESULTS

The ballot results convey two consistent messages. The first is that determined, united campaigning by a leadership which had built up respect over a period of years could win support - albeit reluctantly sometimes - for action which was often unpopular. Secondly, the national political situation placed tight constraints on what activists at one pit could achieve. While Murton resisted a shift to more accommodative industrial relations, in the face of a divided union and a labour movement sailing decisively towards a new accommodation with capital, this militant stance could not break the paralysis afflicting the NUM.

Murton's ballot results do not of course tell the whole story. High votes for action coincided with disinterest and apathy in union affairs. It was easier to mobilise people for a ballot vote than it was in day to day

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(Footnote Continued)
loyalists at pits where they were in a minority, which the union refused to do. The policy remained, despite attempts to change it led by the Scottish and Welsh Area leaderships.

affairs. This point was emphasised by the strong tendency for miners to vote one way and act another. Support for overtime bans coincided with record levels of overtime (table 7.14). Miners were prepared to support an overtime ban if everyone was in on it. But they weren't prepared to stop working overtime on their own, because that would be a financial sacrifice for no purpose.

In other words, the contradiction between voting behaviour and individual action can only really be explained by reference to events at a national level. The success of activists campaigning in the pit literally depended on national politics - the national outcome of ballots.

7.7 CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS TO LEADERSHIP?

In the post-strike period, branch leadership was clearly the decisive factor affecting the political actions of NUM members at Murton. But leadership must be seen as a product as well as a cause of consciousness. Leadership in the miners' and mechanics' branches reflected the changing composition of the workforce, and the oppressive weight of pressures generated by BC and the government's strategy towards the industry. Furthermore, strategies chosen by the committees also reflected the realities of the situation in the industry. Only a limited range of options presented themselves - activists struggled within a narrow set of parameters.

Perhaps the severest limitation on local union activity lay at the national level. Here more than anywhere BC held on to the crushing superiority it established at the end of the strike. The union's Sheffield base was arguably its least effective arm. Inter-area conflicts, a major financial crisis and BC's unrelenting hostility all but paralysed the central union organisation. All the more remarkable therefore that areas like Durham, and pits like Murton were able to reassert some elements of solidarity and control.

It was an uphill battle though, characterised by massive efforts for limited rewards. Often defeatism swamped the activists upon whom so much responsibility fell. Many who had enthusiastically supported the union before the strike, drifted away after it. Management intimidation undoubtedly deterred potential activists from greater involvement. With so little reward, enormous reservoirs of self-belief and commitment were tapped by the few who kept going.

Political change in both the mechanics' and miners' branches was less dramatic during this period than before and during the strike. Essentially, it was a period in which the left consolidated the somewhat tenuous hold it had gained on the branches during the dispute. Faced with a management onslaught which was the logical extension of the Thatcherite drive to restructure trade unionism, workers could either buckle down and seek a new accommodation with management, or they could resist. Because the management strategy was predicated on breaking collective organisation, making an accommodation was only possible at an individual or work group level. The

union's fight was a fight to maintain collective representation and organisation.

Massive changes in the workforce could have weakened the left's emerging hold on branch politics by providing an influx of hostile new blood, as in the early 1980's. In fact, the opposite happened. Older miners who had formed the core opposition to the left in the early 1980's took redundancy, and the new travellers were dominated by young men generally antagonistic to management. BC management's hard line, designed to assert the "right to manage", helped prevent the emergence of any opposition to the left. It also created the conditions for a programme of industrial action in Durham over pay in 1986, because rank and file resentment was successfully channelled into collective action. However, with management so dominant, the union could not always resolve grievances, resulting in build ups of anger and frustration. At Murton, this exploded into wildcat strike action in May 1987. In day to day confrontations with management, the union often struggled to maintain its relevance to the workforce. Gradually though, significant areas of control were won back, earning the respect of the membership.

Two hard working committees were also able to mobilise support for left wing policies among their membership through determined campaigning. Ballots gave the chance to organise, and the Murton branches led the "league table" on ballot results for every one organised since the strike. This remarkable performance reflected the abilities of the two committees, and showed how miners and mechanics could be persuaded to support unpopular policies such as overtime bans. Nevertheless, the success over ballots needs to be set against continuing high levels of apathy and disinterest in the union, and in the tendency for men in their day to day activities to undermine the collectivism which they are prepared to vote for.

What everything in this chapter indicates is that within a particular context, determined campaigning could win significant advances in political consciousness. Agency was decisive in maintaining a left consciousness despite formidable obstacles. Union politics did not simply follow the economic and political situation, but remained arenas for hard struggle. Ultimately, despite strong pressures in this direction, union incorporation was guaranteed neither by the PWS, nor the post miners' strike drive to create a "new realism". Resistance to the Thatcherite project continued.

The type of unionism which would eventually emerge to begin constructing a new "indulgency pattern" was still indeterminate.

But what is the wider significance of these lessons? Has anything <u>really</u> changed at Murton over the last ten years? Contradictions continue to bedevil politics at the branch level. These contradictions can only be fully explained by relating developments at Murton back into their wider political context, and reviewing the historical background which generated them. Chapter eight does this by drawing together the main conclusions to have emerged from the last ten years of political developments within the NUM at Murton. Given the centrality of the Thatcherite programme to what has happened at Murton, chapter eight also engages the debate on the lessons of Thatcherism for the trade union movement - a debate activists at Murton have fully participated in.

	1980/81 Loss £000	1981/82 Loss £000	1982/83 Loss £000	1983/84 Loss £000
Murton	902	2590	294	961
Eppleton	4275	7057	5859	5920
The Combine	5177	9647	6153	6882

Source: Diamond, 1986

TABLE 7.2: FIRST POST STRIKE REDUNDANCY AT MURTON BY AGE

Year of birth	Age in 1984	Total number employed 1984	Number leaving by 22/6/85	% of all leavers	% of age group leaving
1925-29	55-59	58	24	12.7	41.4
1930-34	50-55	210	126	66.7	60.0
1935-39	45-49	220	12	6.3	5.5
1940-44	40-44	161	6	3.2	3.7
1945-49	35-39	184	2	1.1	1.1
1950-54	30-34	207	6	3.2	2.9
1955-59	25-29	261	9	4.8	3.4
1960-64	20-24	296	4	2.1	1.4
1965-69	15-19	20	0	0.0	0.0
Totals		1617	189	100	

Source: Personal sources

TABLE 7.3 FIRST POST STRIKE REDUNDANCY AT MURTON BY RESIDENCE

Village	Number before strike	Number taking redundancy	% of all leavers	% of village leaving
Murton	630	73	37.8	11.6
South Hetton	107	14	7.3	13.1
Easington Lane	113	13	6.7	11.5
Hetton le Hole	90	10	5.2	11.1
Peterlee	72	9	4.7	12.5
Wheatley Hill	30	6	3.1	20.0
Gilesgate	13	6	3.1	46.2
Blackhall	73	6	3.1	8.2
Thornley	26	5	2.6	19.2
Haswell	25	4	2.1	16.0
Deneside	32	4	2.1	12.5
Ryhope	13	4	2.1	30.8
Durham	9	4	2.1	44.4
Trimdon Colly	12	3	1.6	25.0
Houghton Le Sp	26	3	1.6	11.5
Sherburn	12	3	1.6	25.0
Wingate	17	2	1.0	11.8
Horden	28	2	1.0	7.1
Dawdon	7	2	1.0	28.6
Eastlea	7	2	1.0	28.6
Parkside	9	2	1.0	22.2
Shiney Row	4	1	0.5	25.0
New Herrington	1	1	0.5	100.0
Trimdon	33	1	0.5	3.0
Hendon	3	1	0.5	33.3
Seaham	45	1	0.5	2.2
Carrville	5	1	0.5	20.0
Westlea	27	1	0.5	3.7
Shotton Colly	5	1	0.5	20.0
Great Lumley	3	1	0.5	33.3
Easington	7	1	0.5	14.3
Sunderland	3	1	0.5	33.3
Millfield	2	1	0.5	50.0
TOTALS	1617	193	100.0	

Source: Personal sources

TABLE 7.4: 1988 REDUNDANCY BY AGE

(282)

Year of birth	Age in 1988	Total employed start 1988	Number leaving by April 1988	% of all leavers	% of age group leavin
1924-28	60-64	3	2	0.1	66
1929-33	55-59	1	0	-	-
1934-38	50-54	118	49	21.2	42
1939-43	45-49	241	50	21.6	21
1944-48	40-44	272	28	12.1	10
1949-53	35-39	314	26	11.3	8
1954-58	30-34	311	31	13.4	10
1959-63	25-29	468	42	18.2	9
1964-68	20-24	88	3	1.3	3
Totals		1816	231	100	

Source: Personal sources

TABLE 7.5: 1988 REDUNDANCY BY RESIDENCE

Village	Number at start '88	Number taking redundancy	% of all leavers	% of village leaving
Murton	481	48	20.8	10.0
Hetton Le Hole	296	39	16.9	13.2
Easington Lane	176	16	6.9	9.1
Houghton Le Sp	120	13	5.6	10.8
South Hetton	106	9	3.9	8.5
Wheatley Hill	35	9	3.9	25.7
Seaham	71	7	3.0	9.9
Trimdon	21	6	2.6	28.6
Blackhall	47	5	2.2	10.6
Sunderland	21	5	2.2	23.8
Peterlee	51	5	2.2	9.8
Fencehouses	25	4	1.7	16.0
Ludworth	7	4	1.7	57.1
Brandon	18	4	1.7	22.2
Westlea	22	3	1.3	13.6
Trimdon Station	6	3	1.3	50.0
Meadowfield	6	3	1.3	50.0
Easington	3	3	1.3	37.5
Gilesgate	9	3	1.3	33.3
Thornley	27	3	1.3	11.1
Newbottle	6	3	1.3	50.0
Haswell	15	2	0.9	14.2
Willington	3	2	0.9	66.7
Sherburn	8	2	0.9	25.0
Carville	4	2	0.9	50.0
Hesledon	3	2	0.9	66.7
East Rainton	12	2	0.9	16.7
Silksworth	3	2	0.9	66.7
Stanley	3	2	0.9	66.7
Low Willington	1	1	0.4	100.0
Shotton Colly	11	1	0.4	9.1
Hebburn	1	1	0.4	100.0
Ushaw Moor	4	1	0.4	25.0
Hartlepool	3	1	0.4	33.3
Sacriston	1	1	0.4	100.0
High Hesledon	2	1	0.4	50.0
Horden	20	1	0.4	5.0
Belmont	7	1	0.4	14.3
New Brancepeth	6	1	0.4	16.7
Dawdon	10	1	0.4	10.0
Chester Le St	5	1	0.4	20.0
Dalton Le Dale	4	1	0.4	25.0
Albany	1	1	0.4	100.0
Trimdon Coll[y]	9	1	0.4	11.1
West Rainton	3	1	0.4	33.3
Kelloe	5	1	0.4	20.0
Usworth	1	1	0.4	100.0
Shiney Row	4	1	0.4	25.0
Washington	7	1	0.4	14.3
Quarrington H	1	1	0.4	100.0

Source: Personal sources

TABLE 7.6: DURHAM MECHANICS BALLOT ON 50P LEVY, APRIL 1985

BRANCH(1)	For(2)	Against	TOTAL	% For	% Against
Dawdon	152	153	306	49.8	50.2
Easington	312	127	439	71.1	28.9
Eppleton	68	83	151	45.0	55.0
Hawthorn	27	42	69	39.1	60.9
Herrington	39	175	214	18.2	81.8
Horden	50	252	302	16.5	83.5
MURTON	80	69	149	53.7	46.3
Sacriston	15	25	40	37.5	62.5
Seaham	40	44	84	47.6	52.4
Vane Tempest	42	102	144	29.2	70.8
Wearmouth	123	118	241	51.0	49.0
Westoe	253	103	356	71.1	29.9
TOTAL(3)	1447	1925	3376		

(1) Includes all working branches at mines at the time of the ballot (excluding workshops), but excludes branches from recently closed collieries (eg Blackhall).
(2) Excludes spoilt papers
(3) Includes votes cast at workshops and closed collieries, which were excluded from this table.

Source: Durham Mechanics

TABLE 7.7: DURHAM MECHANICS BALLOT ON ONE DAY STRIKES, SEPT 1986

BRANCH	% YES	% NO
Easington	52	48
MURTON (1)	82	18
Newbottle	59	41
Tursdale	87	13
Vane Tempest(2)	52	48
Wearmouth	71	29
Westoe	82	18

(1) Amalgamated with Hawthorn and Eppleton

(2) Amalgamated with Seaham

Source: Durham Mechanics

TABLE 7.8: DURHAM MECHANICS BALLOT ON OVERTIME BAN, BC CODE OF CONDUCT, AUG 1987

BRANCH	YES	NO	TOTAL	% YES	% NO
Dawdon	137	87	224	61.2	38.8
Easington	172	160	332	51.8	48.2
MURTON	186	41	229	81.2	18.8
Vane Tempest	87	79	166	52.4	47.6
Wearmouth	148	56	204	72.5	27.5
Westoe	273	59	332	82.2	17.8
TOTAL	1229	573	1802		

Source: Durham Mechanics

TABLE 7.9: DURHAM MINERS BALLOT ON OVERTIME BAN, BC CODE OF CONDUCT, AUG 1987

BRANCH	% FOR	% AGAINST
Dawdon	71.1	28.9
Easington	75.8	24.2
MURTON	87.8	12.2
Vane Tempest	66.2	33.8
Wearmouth	71.9	28.1
Westoe	83.4	16.6

Source: Durham Miner, Oct 1987

TABLE 7.10: DURHAM MECHANICS VOTING FOR NATIONAL PRESIDENT, JAN 1988

BRANCH	SCARGILL	WALSH	% SCARGILL	% WALSH
Dawdon	123	151	44.9	55.1
Easington	124	232	34.8	65.2
MURTON	175	98	64.1	35.9
Vane Tempest	57	135	29.7	70.3
Wearmouth	106	136	43.8	56.2
Westoe	185	170	52.1	47.9
TOTAL	876	1129		

Source: Durham Mechanics

TABLE 7.11: DURHAM MINERS VOTING IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, JAN 1988

BRANCH	% SCARGILL	% WALSH
Dawdon	55	45
Easington	61	39
MURTON	70	30
Vane Tempest	55	45
Wearmouth	59	41
Westoe	66	34

Source: Durham NUM

TABLE 7.12: DURHAM MECHANICS BALLOT TO CONTINUE OVERTIME BAN, MARCH 1988

BRANCH	YES	NO	TOTAL	% YES	% NO
Dawdon	80	165	245	32.7	67.3
Easington	80	259	339	23.6	76.4
MURTON	109	98	208	52.4	47.6
Newbottle	49	122	171	28.7	71.3
Tursdale	65	66	131	49.6	50.4
Vane Tempest	53	129	182	29.1	70.9
Wearmouth	84	139	223	37.7	62.3
Westoe	144	190	334	43.1	56.9
TOTAL	664	1168	1832		

Source: Durham Mechanics

TABLE 7.13: DURHAM MINERS AND MECHANICS OVERTIME BALLOT, PAY, DEC 1988

BRANCH	FOR	AGAINST	% FOR	% AGAINST
Dawdon	516	643	44.4	35.6
Easington	453	836	35.0	65.0
MURTON	789	283	73.6	26.4
Vane Tempest	472	329	58.7	41.3
Wearmouth	837	438	65.4	34.6
Westoe	710	446	61.1	38.9

Source: Durham NUM

TABLE 7.14 BRITISH COAL TREND STATEMENT FOR MURTON COLLIERY

YEAR	SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL (1)	DAILY (2)	OVER TIME %	MAN POWER (3)	O.M.S. (4)	OP.COST /TONNE £	PROFIT /LOSS (5)	OP.COST PER GJ £
1984/5	-	-	-	1629	-	-	-	-
1985/6	655	2764	8.6	1493	2.01	62.76	-13833	2.39
1986/7	1231	5285	11.6	1796	2.94	44.92	-5469	1.72
1987/8	1298	5618	12.1	1522	3.47	39.35	-2014	1.55
1988/9	1350	5819	14.7	1460	3.91	36.21	4535	1.43

TABLE 7.15: BRITISH COAL TREND STATEMENT FOR NORTH EAST AREA

YEAR	SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL (1)	DAILY (2)	OVER TIME %	MAN POWER (3)	O.M.S. (4)	OP.COST /TONNE £	PROFIT /LOSS (5)	OP.COST PER GJ £
1984/5	308	-	-	21914	-	636.71	-	-
1985/6	9495	38649	10.5	17910	2.23	49.83	-63383	1.95
1986/7	10219	43184	12.5	14444	3.00	40.91	-9275	1.58
1987/8	10229	43457	14.0	12168	3.51	38.27	9028	1.48
1988/9	10323	43637	17.4	11071	3.81	36.80	28508	1.42

(1) Yearly output in thousand tonnes
(2) Average daily output in tonnes
(3) Manpower at year end
(4) Overall Output per Man Shift in tonnes
(5) Bottom line profit/loss in £000

Source: Personal sources

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I draw together the main conclusions to have emerged from my analysis of the processes of political change in the miners' and mechanics' branches in Murton between 1978 and 1988. To do this it is necessary to draw out the linkages between the theoretical and historical material in the first four chapters, and political developments in Murton as they are discussed in chapters five, six and seven. These linkages are vital because one of the principle aims of this thesis is to explore the limits to conscious action within particular places. Those limits are set by the burden of a particular historical development, and by material changes affecting a place over time.

Hence in the Murton unions, the relevant constraints were provided by the historical experience of the post war settlement, and especially the way in which it came to be experienced in coalfield regions like Durham. Constraints were also created by the way in which the state's strategy to restructure capital-labour relations in Britain, and re-establish the rule of the market came to have specific material effects on miners' lives in Murton. However, the burdens of history and material changes carried with them some strongly contradictory elements, and these opened up spaces for conscious agents to try and work out strategies to confront the changes affecting their lives.

Analysing the leftward shift at Murton within this framework strongly suggests that left wing activists were able to exercise a significant influence over the way miners came to understand the changes within the industry, and within society. Destabilisation was assured by the strategies of the state and the NCB, but the understandings people came to about these changes, and the actions they took in response to them, were guided socially, by active campaigning. This reinforces a central point, namely that workers experience themselves as a class first and foremost through their organisation in trade unions. Trade union leadership therefore both reflects and creates shifts in workers' understandings of their lives. Local union organisations are often more sensitive to these periodic upheavals in consciousness, and also therefore more influential in affecting them, than the national organisation.

Ultimately however, the stimulus for political change came from outside Murton, and so too did the most significant constraints on its pace and direction. This conclusion therefore spends time summarising the main points to have emerged from the earlier historical and theoretical chapters. It simply is not possible to understand and explain events in Murton, or appreciate their significance, without locating them within this wider frame of reference. It is essential to know where contradictions deriving from the place specific impact of these wider changes opened up space for the development of differing interpretations and responses among agents in Murton.

Having established the framework, I then show how, over a ten year period, conscious agency played such a decisive role in shaping the pace and direction of political change in the two branches of the NUM in Murton. Whether it was travellers from Blackhall colliery, the old right wing in the miners branch, or left wing activists - each one stamped their mark on political events at the pit. They were "conscious" agents because they possessed definite plans. They aimed to achieve something.

Throughout this thesis, one of the principle limits placed on the development of trade union strategies at the local level has been the strategies and actions of the wider trade union movement. Chapter seven showed in particular the way that developments within the labour movement had placed quite severe limits on the achievements of activists at Murton. The growth of a "new realist" movement split both the NUM and the wider labour movement. Ironically, new realism gained enormous strength out of a general assessment that the defeat of the miners' strike showed the need for a new kind of politics. Yet new realism remains a fiercely contested ideology. Both Murton NUM branches have bitterly opposed it. But at a national level, it was clearly the dominant strand within the labour movement.

8.1 SUMMARISING MY CONCLUSIONS

In this section I summarise the main conclusions to have emerged from the preceding seven chapters. I do so in order to offer a concise response to the research questions which were introduced in the preface. These questions were to do with the nature of the political changes observed in the two branches of the NUM between 1978 and 1988; the relationship of these changes to the broader political and economic environment; and the extent to which conscious agents were able to shape a strategy within the constraints imposed by history and wider political-economic developments.

8.1.i THEORETICAL POINTS

Chapter one justified the focus on local political activity in two ways. First, a review of literature on the 1984/5 strike showed that the absence of research on the local dynamics of the strike, and how these local dynamics grew out of spatially specific histories, seriously hinders an understanding of the most important industrial dispute since the war. Typically, analysis of the strike was based on a national scale, resulting in rather crude and stereotypical generalisations. When attempts were made to reorientate research towards the spatial specificity of the strikes development, they tended to remain at a regional level. Important though an understanding of regional political processes is, the region cannot be fully interpreted without reference to the local scale, for it is at the local scale that the (often contradictory) elements of regional identity are constructed. Only in a very few regions was a regional identity characterised by anything other than profoundly contradictory elements of political development. In other words, the task is to understand how at a local level, particular political strategies emerge in preference to others.

Interestingly, the failure to disaggregate the region is not peculiar to studies of NUM politics. Within social science, the recent emphasis on integrating "place" into social, economic and political analyses has yielded a comparable reluctance to disaggregate the region. Where locality studies <u>have</u> burrowed beneath this level, they have still tended to clutch at the security of "official" data (company reports, government statistics), rather than explore the complex social worlds which underpin bureaucratic data. This is a strange lapse given that one of the key

pretensions of locality studies is the desire to integrate place as an active element in the organisation and reorganisation of capitalist society.

Place in this context can only be understood socially, as the ensemble of social practices and lived history which define life in different localities. Some of the only work to attempt to integrate this notion of place into an analysis of capitalist restructuring has looked at campaigns against works closures in the steel industry. In chapter two I compared these generally unsuccessful campaigns with the successful work-in at the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders yard on Clydeside in Scotland in 1971.

Research on anti-steel closure campaigns - especially that which developed around Consett in 1979/80 - emphasised that an unintended consequence of basing a campaign around the profitability of a plant was the reinforcing of the wage relation as the basis of capitalist society. It also effectively isolated workers in one plant from those elsewhere because with a perceived need for capacity reductions, the implication of saving one works was the closure of another (Sadler, 1985). Nevertheless, workers chose to fight on grounds of profitability because they perceived this to be the "only feasible solution" when faced with catastrophic works closure (Hudson and Sadler, 1986). This argument raised the important question; why did workers perceive profitability to be the only feasible basis for mobilisation?

The answer lay in the desire to maximise support within the community with a "lowest common denominator" appeal. Yet this is only half the story. Why for example was the lowest common denominator so low? And why were other options involving generalising the campaign within the region and/or the industry not considered? Clearly part of the answer lay in the history of trade unionism within the steel industry, and its particular manifestation at Consett. Another contributing factor was the attitude of the steel unions' national leadership. Yet understanding exactly why the campaign developed as it did would only be possible by reconstructing the way in which these factors came together with the people organising the campaign at the time. We know a lot about the effects of the Consett campaign (and others like it), but much less about the dynamics of their development.

In comparison, Foster and Woolfson (1986) used their privileged access to archival material to reconstruct in graphic detail the way in which the campaign to save the UCS shipyard developed. They focused on the abilities of a wily and committed shop steward leadership which was able to use its experience to mobilise support across Scotland and the rest of the UK. However, it is also clear that the UCS work-in was helped by a political and economic climate which allowed it to become a symbol for the defence of the post war commitment to state intervention in maintaining employment. This commitment was in turn part of the complex network of social regulations guaranteed by the state which became known as the post war settlement (PWS). Foster and Woolfson's study demonstrated the need to integrate a macro-scale account of the changing political economy of Britain with the role of conscious agents in particular localities. In Murton, the PWS provided the macro-scale context.

The PWS is central to the arguments developed in this thesis. Miners stood at the pinnacle of the PWS - the nationalisation of the coal industry symbolised the belief in state intervention to plan production for the common good. But nationalisation as it was enacted contained powerful contradictions. For capital it allowed socialisation of the costs of producing a basic raw material. And by incorporating the NUM into the running of the industry, it limited workers struggles (with a few exceptions) to isolated conflicts at the point of production. However, incorporation of the union did not eradicate conflict between miners and the NCB. Throughout the 1950's and 60's dissent was minimised by a combination of the union's determination to enforce cooperative industrial relations, and the state commitment to coalfield regions, which legitimated pit closures in the peripheral coalfields. But although dissent never became organised into collective action, discontent at job losses and declining wages simmered beneath the surface tranquility.

At the same time, this institutionalisation of the union within a general social context of state intervention to maintain employment and raise living standards, socialised miners into the belief that their interests could be met through the state. In other words, it politicised the process of economic decision making. This unforseen consequence of the PWS had profound implications for the way in which the struggle against pit closures developed in the 1980's and particularly for the way in which the strike was understood by different age groups in the NUM.

The NUM's role in the PWS grew out of the structural role of trade unions in capitalist society. Because unions organise workers along the contours imposed by the capitalist system, they face overwhelming pressures towards incorporation within the system. Their very existence implies acceptance of capital and of the wage relation. Once they have won their battle for recognition, then their day to day operation increasingly involves negotiations to improve and defend their members interests. In order to avoid relying on the unstable tension of power generated by depending on the memberships "willingness to act", the union leadership seeks "external guarantees" of its power within the state. This leads to bureaucratisation as reliance on "external guarantees" increase the separation of the bureaucracy from the membership.

A further consequence of organising along the contours of the capitalist system is that trade unions concentrate on the economic struggle to defend and improve workers conditions. This structural tendency towards economism confines trade union activity to the pursuit of improvements within capitalism, leaving unchallenged the wage relation which generates changes in working conditions. This separation was incorporated into the PWS, where unions like the NUM continued to represent their members economic interests within the social democratic framework, whilst limiting their political work to campaigning for the election of a Labour government. Again though, this had the effect of politicising economic decision making, and reinforcing the belief that miners' interests could legitimately be pursued through the state, by the exercise of economic power.

Ultimately however, the post war incorporation of labour was an unstable phenomenon. Although it created indulgency patterns at both national and local levels, their continued existence was predicated upon a particular set of economic conditions, which began to fall apart in the 1970's. As Rosa Luxemburg argued, economic crises force capitalists to attack workers conditions (routinised into characteristic indulgency patterns), which in turn threatens to collapse the distinction between political and economic aspects of workers struggles. In the 1970's and '80's, as the indulgency patterns of the PWS came under attack, new terrain was opened up for struggle between capital and labour.

The PWS had depended for its success on the ability of capital to deliver rising living standards. When this condition began to crumble in the late

1960's with the onset of recession, the PWS plunged into crisis. For capital, the crisis was experienced as a crisis of control, because as various attempts were made to impose new conditions on workers, the labour movement resisted. From the late 1960's, the state faced mounting opposition as the economic crisis blew the lid off the discontent which had been contained by the incorporation of the peak representatives of the labour movement. Trade union leaders reflected the explosion in militancy, and the state found that under these conditions the incorporation of union leaders backfired, because the radicalised unions were in a strong position to defend their interests.

Just as the miners symbolised the era of post war planning, so their two strikes in the early 1970's symbolised the crisis of the PWS. Rising unemployment and falling real wages pushed the rank and file into a militant stance, which their leaders were forced to reflect. The success of both the strikes had contradictory effects however. First, it pushed the state into even greater crisis, because it problematised to a hitherto unprecedented degree the extent of its authority. Secondly, it confirmed to miners that their interests could be advanced through sectional, economic struggle (backed up with the judicious intervention of other workers at key moments), bringing pressure to bear on the state. And thirdly, this point was confirmed and expanded by the signing under a Labour government of the 1974 Plan for Coal (PFC).

Plan for Coal, and the Social Contract represented the final attempt to rework the PWS. For the miners, PFC and the oil price rises seemed at last to guarantee them a stable future. An aura of complacency settled over the union in the mid 1970's, as pit car parks expanded and miners began taking overseas holidays. Whilst other workers engaged in bitter battles with the Labour government as austerity measures began to bite, the miners were effectively removed from the battlefield. Yet the NUM's privileged position depended on a continuing commitment by government to corporate planning and state subsidy, and the acceptance of union power in the decision making process for the industry. The Conservative government elected in 1979, was instead committed to a fundamental redefinition of the role of trade unions, and the ultimate removal of the state from economic intervention.

Even, during the period of the Labour government, two major developments began to destabilise the apparently secure union position. Imposition of

the Area Incentive Scheme (AIS) in 1978 was calculated to weaken the unity which the negotiation of a national wages structure in 1966 had achieved. And under PFC the commitment of resources to investment in mining technology stimulated destabilisation by threatening job loss through increased production at low cost units (thereby defining production at high cost pits "uneconomic"), and through the shaking out of labour at low cost units.

8.1.ii MURTON AND THEORY

In Murton, the first effects of these destabilising factors were felt through the operation of the AIS. This began to disturb the "indulgency pattern" of the past decade, by throwing wages disputes back from national to pit level. The change coincided with the retirement in the miners' branch of officials who had held their positions since the early 1960's. There followed a period of leadership instability, as successive branch secretaries and chairman were unable to achieve the confidence of the membership. This leadership instability was accelerated by three further destabilising factors in branch politics, namely; the changing age composition of the workforce; the changing residential composition of the workforce, and the increase in pit closures. Crucially, these destabilising influences affected different sections of the workforce (mechanics/miners, young/old, travellers/non travellers) in different ways. These cleavages had fundamental implications for the way in which branch politics developed at Murton.

Following the destabilising impact of the AIS, the influx of travellers further disturbed the established indulgency pattern at the colliery which had grown up during the years of the PWS. In 1980/81 the arrival of over 100 travellers from Blackhall colliery signalled the end of juvenile recruitment and craft apprenticeships at the pit. Furthermore, the Blackhall men brought with them memories of their own indulgency pattern, which they found constantly violated at their new pit. Blackhall travellers therefore began the first conscious, planned attempts to change the miners' branch politics. They intervened to force a work to rule in an attempt to improve bonus terms. They were instrumental in changing the terms of the bonus agreement from a "pooling" system to a "face by face" agreement. And underground at the pit, their militant challenge to management prerogatives

had a profound demonstration effect on young Murton miners, who began to learn how to resist management tactics.

In the early 1980's the government proceded cautiously against the NUM. Subsidies were gradually cut back, but there was no open assault on the PFC. When the NCB did attempt a direct assault on PFC, a rolling strike forced the government to concede extra cash and effectively confirm the NUM's special status. Nevertheless, the gradual approach had important political effects in Murton. As pit closures increased, the government made available extra cash to fund redundancy payments. This was aimed at disorganising a collective response to closures, because it gave older miners (who benefited most under the terms of the redundancy scheme) a strong financial interest in accepting closure. Whilst this effect was achieved, redundancy schemes also altered the age composition of the workforce at remaining collieries, with important implications for the dominance of the union's old right wing. As pits closed, older miners took redundancy, and younger ones transferred to other pits.

Age was therefore a crucial cleavage in the workforce at Murton, made more important by the operation of the redundancy scheme. Up until the 1980's both Murton branches had been dominated by men socialised into the PWS. This socialisation involved a commitment to a framework of industrial relations which the NCB and the state were rapidly rendering obsolete. "Cosy relationships" between management and union were under attack. Industrial relations no longer ran themselves on the basis of a shared reliance on "custom and practice". Interviews with older miners repeatedly revealed a bewilderment at the NCB's aggressive new posture in the period before the strike. For older miners it seemed like an aberration, and they could rarely conceive of any way of dealing with it other than arguing for a return to the "old days". Younger miners on the other hand were frustrated by the fossilisation of the NCB "career structure", and frightened by the increasing prospect of unemployment. They felt that the Board was messing them around. The obvious ineffectiveness of the union at all levels in the face of the management offensive weakened their attachment to the formal and informal arrangements of the post war era.

Pit closures, the incentive scheme, and the arrival of travellers all exposed the leadership of the miners' branch to considerable pressure. These pressures were also felt in the mechanics' branch. This small craft

organisation was characterised by a tradition of right wing politics, and craft elitism at an area level. At Murton however, the branch had a reputation for being well organised and well led by its secretary - John Cummings - who was also a major figure in the local Labour Party. Because he was politically involved in a much wider context than officials in the miners' branch, Cummings grew to appreciate the full extent and scale of the changes facing the industry before many people in the miners' branch. Despite his own socialisation into the politics of the PWS, he began to realise that the old era was under threat. Furthermore, active left wing campaigning within the branch, building on the destabilising factors described above, began to push the branch left. In order to retain control, Cummings moved with the tide of opinion. Also, he organised classes at Durham University for branch activists. His leadership of Easington District Council meant that Murton was fully integrated into the Save Easington Area Mines (SEAM) campaign, which raised awareness of the threat of pit closures. Murton mechanics became a forceful, campaigning, left wing branch.

In the miners' branch, the left began to make inroads, but did not achieve dominance. At an area level, the growth of the Broad Left (BL) organisation enhanced the leftward drift as the politics of the PWS began to come apart nationally. In the Murton branch however, the BL was relatively weak. Blackhall travellers - the principle agents of change in the early 1980's - were motivated primarily by pit issues (bonus, management authoritarianism). This pit consciousness - similar to the factory consciousness described by Beynon (1984; see chapter three) - challenged the established leadership, but did not constitute an attempt to shift the branch into a wider political transformation. Younger miners were angry and frustrated, but these feelings were not articulated to a conscious programme of change. The BL began to make significant inroads in 1983, noteably with the election of John Dixon as the first non-Murton secretary of the union. But the branch was still influenced by a group of voluble older, right wing miners, who for years had exerted pressure on the committee at branch meetings.

The separation between economic struggle (carried out by trade unions) and political struggle (carried out by political parties) which was endorsed by the arrangements surrounding nationalisation, had the effect of encouraging a limited, pit based consciousness among miners. Conflict at the point of

production was channeled into local struggle with management. Many miners seemed unable or unwilling to see the political context within which their struggles occurred. The concentration on pit based struggle was enhanced by the incentive scheme, which also had the effect of increasing the historical tendency for faceworkers (powerloaders) to fight for their group interests separately from the rest of the workforce. The vote to end the 1980 "teeing out" dispute (restricted to faceworkers only) confirmed that this group elitism had a powerful hold in the Murton miners' branch. This kind of politics was reflected in the group of older, right wing miners who tended to dominate the rather weak miners' committee.

Sectional and group consciousness of this kind also grew out of the economism which unions insertion into the capitalist system tends to generate. The separation of economics and political aspects of struggle, and union's focus on the "economic guerrilla war" imparts a strong tendency for unions to pursue their own short term material interests without much regard for their wider political implications.

Paradoxically therefore, many of the old right at Murton supported Arthur Scargill during his 1981 election campaign. They hoped that by electing a strong President the NCB would be intimidated into conceding improvements in pay and conditions. In other words, they thought he would prove a more effective leader in the "economic guerrilla war". On the other hand, younger miners supported him because he offered a coherent focus for their rising discontent. It was this convergence of interests which explained Scargill's landslide victory. The right supported Scargill precisely because they thought he would be able to achieve their aims without the need for action, which partly explains why votes for Scargill were never translated into votes for strikes against pit closures.

Meanwhile the state was driving on with its strategy to re-establish the rule of the market in economic decision making, and effect a decisive shift in power from labour to capital. However, the nationalised coal industry remained a bastion of the old corporatist consensus. The union was still integrated into the NCB's decision making process at national level, and at pit level complicated procedures and negotiations accompanied almost every management initiative. Massive subsidies balanced the NCB's accounts every year. As the government attempted to remove the basis for this settlement by gradually imposing market criteria on the Board, the resulting pit

closures meant that the union's resistance would have to be overcome. This could happen either if the union was unable to mobilise support in defence of jobs, or if the union's mobilisation was defeated in open battle. With the closure of Cortonwood and the Yorkshire walkout, open conflict began.

Immediately however the divisions which had characterised the unions' ranks before the strike were apparent. Nationally, the differential impact of the NCB's strategy combined with long traditions of moderation helped lay the foundations for Nottinghamshires resistance to the strike call. But regional generalisations obscured complicated political developments at the local level. Certainly, although Murton ended up as one of the most solid pits in Durham, the workforce in the numerically dominant miners' branch initially voted to reject the strike call. This vote crystallised pre-strike divisions into a rigid pattern. Younger miners saw the strike as a chance to finally express their anger at the NCB and the government, and they voted eagerly to strike. The younger miners therefore were beginning to consciously challenge the acceptable limits of trade unionism as they had been enshrined in the PWS. They saw the traditional indulgency pattern as irrelevant to their present crisis.

For the older miners however, a national strike against pit closures was a threatening event. Instinctively they felt that it crossed the boundary of legitimate trade union activity. This was not an economistic strike for more pay, but ultimately an attempt to change government policy. Whilst that may have been acceptable with regard to pay - a legitimate sphere of union interest - it was problematic with regard to a strategic question such as the size of the industry. Acceptance by the union of pit closures in the 1960's seemed to clearly concede this point. Among older miners therefore the strike provoked contradictory feelings. This in turn derived from its contradictory elements.

On one level the strike was an attempt to defend the status quo. It was about preserving pits, jobs and communities. Yet on the other it was a radical challenge to the state. Because the state was intent on a radical restructuring of capital-labour relations in Britain, and because the NUM's defence of the traditional stood in the way of this programme, the strike was a highly political challenge to the authority of the state. As chapter three's discussion of the significance of strikes showed, it is frequently the state itself whose actions widen the significance of an originally

limited demand. But it was only the young pickets who were truly radicalised in a way which Rosa Luxemburg's theory of the "mass strike" might suggest (chapter three). The state's onslaught on a defensive strike turned it into a potent struggle over the organisation of an industry, and the preservation of hard won gains in conditions. Yet the experience of the PWS left contradictions deeply embedded in many sections of the workforce, preventing the full radicalisation which might have been expected given the extent of state mobilisation against the strike. To the extent that the state was able to portray the strike as an attack on democratic government, it was able to exploit the contradictions in many miners ideology. Older miners were happiest with the defensive elements of the strike. Most did not picket, because this aggressive side of the dispute they saw as hovering dangerously close to the boundary of legitimate union activity.

Yet the other side of this contradiction was that because miners were used under the PWS to pursuing their interests through the state, they regarded it as legitimate to attempt to force the state to change its policy. What they did not like was the way in which the strike seemed to challenge the very basis of society - by for example the violence on the picket line, or the refusal to have a ballot. For most miners therefore, the strike created massive tensions. They stubbornly and openly supported the limited, defensive aims of the strike, and could not understand why they should be seen as so subversive. But the state's ability to turn the strike into a contest over fundamental issues such as democracy and violence alienated them from the way in which the strike was pursued.

One small group of older miners at Murton did picket. They were the ex branch officials - men with a powerful loyalty to the NUM. Their misgivings about the conduct of the strike were outweighed by what they felt as their simple duty to defend the union. It was this defensive aspect which they identified with most strongly. They were often appalled at the violence inflicted by the state, but they were equally condemnatory of the "excesses" of the young pickets.

For younger miners on the other hand, without the weight of historical socialisation into the PWS, or the complications of high redundancy pay to weaken their resolve, the strike provided an outlet for all the compressed frustration and anger that had built up in the early 1980's. They leapt into the strike, becoming the most active pickets. They took effective

control of the Murton miners' committee at the start of the strike. They experienced the strike as a powerfully radicalising experience. But they were separated both from the anti-strike diehards and the decisive middle ground by massive differences in understanding.

In practical terms, the strike was finally defeated when the middle ground began to take the lead in returning to work. Strike breakers came mainly from the outlying villages, because the isolation was greatest away from the strike centres in pit villages. This weakness of the strike was a crucial one, because it undermined one of the strikes central claims - that of defending the community. What it showed was that the community as conceived by this slogan was barely relevant to thousands of miners. The ties of pit, community and class were already weakened by the effect of past pit closures. Strikers started going back when hopelessness finally overcame loyalty to the union. Going back did not signify the final expression of long repressed support for the NCB and government policy, but a pragmatic recognition that the strike stood no chance of achieving its aims. They were defeated, but not converted to Thatcherism. This gave left wing activists some purchase when they tried to rebuild the union after the strike. But the wider significance of the drift back to work was to legitimate the state's arguments that militant trade unionism was futile and counter-productive in the new era.

The exceptions to this pattern were the minority of anti-strike diehards, who opposed the strike from the start. They had internalised the government's arguments about the strikes illegitimacy. But it was only a minority who rejected collectivism in such a strong way. Most of those who went back were not ideologically hostile to the strike. Their negative feelings about it were in the context of the tensions and contradictions described above.

Despite the divisions, following the strike, the left consolidated its dominance in both miners' and mechanics' branches. Ballot results throughout the post-strike period confirmed that Murton activists were able repeatedly to mobilise support for left wing policies. My analysis in chapter seven showed that branch leadership was the decisive factor in explaining Murton's consistent showing at the "top" of ballots for action. This was due to a mixture of hard campaigning, BC's strategy, and the redundancy of much of the right wing opposition. There were however

contradictory elements in these factors. BC's strategy reinforced the strength of the union in some ways, but undermined it in many others. Similarly, active campaigning by the branch was affected by the divisions within the union at national level. These contradictory elements are significant, because they contribute to an understanding of the relative importance of "the local" in the political development of the Murton branches.

Hundreds of miners took redundancy after the return to work. They included most of Murton's old right wing. Although some left wing activists also left, redundancy effectively ensured the dominance of strike activists in both branches because it removed their main opponents. The young miners who had formed the backbone of the picketing operation were still not a majority of the workforce, but they were certainly the dominant political force. They achieved this because there was simply no organised opposition. They maintained this position partly because hard line management tactics - reasserting the "right to manage" - provided no purchase for any alternative leadership. Yet whilst the management hard line consolidated the left in power, it also rendered the union impotent across a broad swathe of activity. Union activists had to fight hard to achieve relevance in the lives of workers at the pit. That they gradually began to claw back some areas of control reflected little more than sheer determination and hard work.

Yet even with creeping successes, the union's power was heavily circumscribed. Many of the limits lay outside the direct control of branch activists. BC's strategy to reassert the right to manage, and impose strict financial criteria on colliery operations, was effectively unchallengeable once the strike had been defeated. Management's hard line at local level could only be challenged realistically by collective action at area and/or national levels. But here local activists faced a second (related) problem - the divisions within the NUM.

The defeat of the strike had profound implications for the NUM and for the labour movement. For the union, it created strong pressures for a change in direction. Formerly left wing NUM leaders in Scotland and South Wales began to support a softer line with management. They argued that there was no point in maintaining confrontational postures against management in the light of the new balance of power in the industry. The first priority was

to talk to management, which was impossible while the union maintained its intransigent refusal to recognise the UDM. Compromises were needed in order for the union to achieve a stronger bargaining position. The left on the other hand argued that BC would not negotiate concessions to the union unless placed under pressure to do so. Accordingly, they tried to win support for national action - an overtime ban - to try and force BC to the negotiating table. Murton stood solidly behind the left wing position[1]. Nationally however, the left was defeated.

The split in the union was a fundamental one. It crystallised a struggle over the future direction of trade unionism which was being fought out in unions across the country. It was all the more intense within the NUM because the union's defeat in 1984/5 was used by many as definitive proof that the "old style" trade unionism was finished. Murton miners and mechanics still stood on the left, searching for a way forward which built on the new realities without compromising on what were regarded as basic principles, but the way forward was very unclear.

8.1.iii SUMMARY

In short, this thesis has demonstrated that at a local level, agency exerted a decisive influence over the process of political change in two branches of the Murton NUM. However, activists could only work within the constraints deriving from the place specific experience and interpretations permeating the consciousness of miners and mechanics working at Murton. At a time of massive instability, where the contradictions of trade unions role in capitalist society were (partially) exposed, and a long established indulgency pattern was under threat, then the room existed for conscious agents to shape a new understanding of society. The 1984/5 strike was a massive rupture with the past, and threatened to tear down the separation between economic and political aspects of workers struggles. Certainly the younger activists to whom the PWS bore little relevance began to grope

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[1] However the weakness of the union at local level was illustrated by the tendency for miners' day to day actions to contradict their ballot support for national policies. For example, many men who supported a national overtime ban continued to work large amounts of overtime. They could see no point in engaging in individual acts of sacrifice without collective support.

towards a completely different conception of legitimate trade union activity than that which had prevailed since the last war.

Yet at the same time it clearly was not possible to throw out all the political baggage of the past, and political changes at Murton therefore reflected the background from which they emerged - not least in the divisions and confusions which characterised the post strike period. Contradictions continued to underly the political life of both branches, just as they had in the pre-strike era when the old right wing leaders found their ideological positions were no longer tenable. Miners knew they could not return to the "cosy relationships" of the PWS, but on the other hand it was not at all clear where this left the union. The left could hold the line at Murton against what was perceived as the abject surrender preached by new realists, but a general state of confusion existed over the most appropriate response to the crisis the NUM (and indeed many other unions) found themselves in.

This confusion is not unique to Murton. It is part of an intense debate raging in the labour movement over the most appropriate direction to take in the light of the changes wrought by Thatcherism. This in turn relates to the whole question of trade union's role in capitalist society. One of the principle consequences following from trade unions tendency to organise along the contours of capitalist development (which I identified in chapter three), was the tendency towards economism and sectionalism. These tendencies were entrenched in the PWS, which did however allow some room for union's political involvement because of the high degree of state involvement in economic decision making, both indirectly through macro economic planning and directly through state control of important sectors of the economy.

Under Thatcherism, the state has been distanced - at least formally - from intervention in economic decision making. This policy has been matched with an aggressive drive to redefine the role of trade unions along strictly economistic lines, and to interpret the legitimate pursuit of members economic interests in short term, utilitarian terms. In other words, it is an attempt to impose "monological" criteria for decision making and action in trade unions, so that unions judge their interests purely within the capitalist economic system, and never challenge basic managerial perogatives.

Within the labour movement, the success of Thatcherism in defeating all attempts to defend the old settlement between capital, labour and the state has prompted new ideas for dealing with the changed political and economic situation. The dominant strand of thinking has been termed "new realism". New realists seek a new accomodation with capital and the state, which accepts some of the major changes Thatcherism has imposed on the labour movement. In the coal industry, new realism has been encapsulated by attempts to change NUM policy to accept greater labour flexibility. BC have tried hard to increase flexibility in order to increase machine utilisation, thereby boosting productivity. Opponents have argued that increasing productivity at low cost units in an essentially static market can only lead to job loss at relatively high cost units. New realists argue that the changes are inevitable, and that the union should negotiate for the best possible deal.

More broadly, new realists have argued that confrontational class politics are no longer appropriate for the trade unions, and that negotiations and compromise should replace aggressive posturing. This can be seen as an attempt to carve out a new role for unions, based on the premise that the decade of confrontation which followed economic destabilisation in the 1970's, is now effectively over. I examine these arguments in appendix three, arguing that whilst Thatcherism has certainly fundamentally altered the balance of power between capital and organised labour, this does not justify the abandonment of "traditional" trade union values to the extent that new realists suggest. In particular, using the defeat of the miners' strike to herald the death of class politics seriously misreads the situation. The principles the miners' strike was fought on - defence of jobs, trade unions and communities - are still fundamental to any effective working class politics. Workers experience themselves as a class first and foremost through their organisation in trade unions. New realist rejections of class politics undermines the very basis of working class consciousness.

The battle over "new realism" is not yet over. This thesis has demonstrated that many of the simplistic assumptions made to justify a new politics for the working class are at the very least premature, and at the worst dangerous.

8.3 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this thesis I have moved from the level of restructuring within the international energy circuit down to the nationally specific resolution of the contradictions posed by both changes in energy supply and demand, and the emergence of a heightened level of class conflict in Britain in the late 1970's and 1980's. From this national context I have shown how the state and NCB strategy had spatially variable effects, and how this provoked different responses and strategies in different places. Crucially, I have argued that a decisive (although limited) sphere exists for the exercise of human agency in localities as people struggle to resolve the contradictions posed by the place-specific impact of ultimately global restructuring processes.

Following on from this, it is important that locality is reassessed to include more than simply a dissection of the economic/gender relations working through a particular place. Rather, if locality is to be understood as having a causal impact on broader social relations, then it is vital to study the processes of political involvement and transformation at the scale at which most people experience them. My study of the processes of political change in the Murton branches of the NUM has shown the conditions under which a shift from right wing to left wing union politics took place. It has interpreted this shift within the national politics of the NUM and the political economy of Britain within which the union was operating over the period from 1978 to 1988.

This analysis does not permit general conclusions to be drawn about the importance of local activism in political change. What it _does_ do is show that under particular historical conditions, local activism played a decisive role in influencing the pace and extent of political change in two branches of the NUM at Murton. At the same time, factors external to Murton placed powerful constraints on that political development. I have shown - for one case study - how agency at the local level was able to exploit the room available for political action within national constraints to engineer a fundamental break with the politics of the post war settlement.

Finally, the wider point that needs to be emphasised is that class relations provide the fundamental driving force behind locality specific developments. Class power underpins almost every facet of work and life -

and not just in Murton. Acknowledged or not, class is still the controlling principle in society. Not until strategies are devised and implemented with the aim of overthrowing that class power will men and women - to paraphrase Marx - be free to make history in circumstances of their own choosing.

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GRAPHS

GRAPH 1: UK DEEP MINED EMPLOYMENT
1947-1987
THOUSANDS

800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0

1945   1950   1955   1960   1965   1970   1975   1980   1985   1990

YEAR
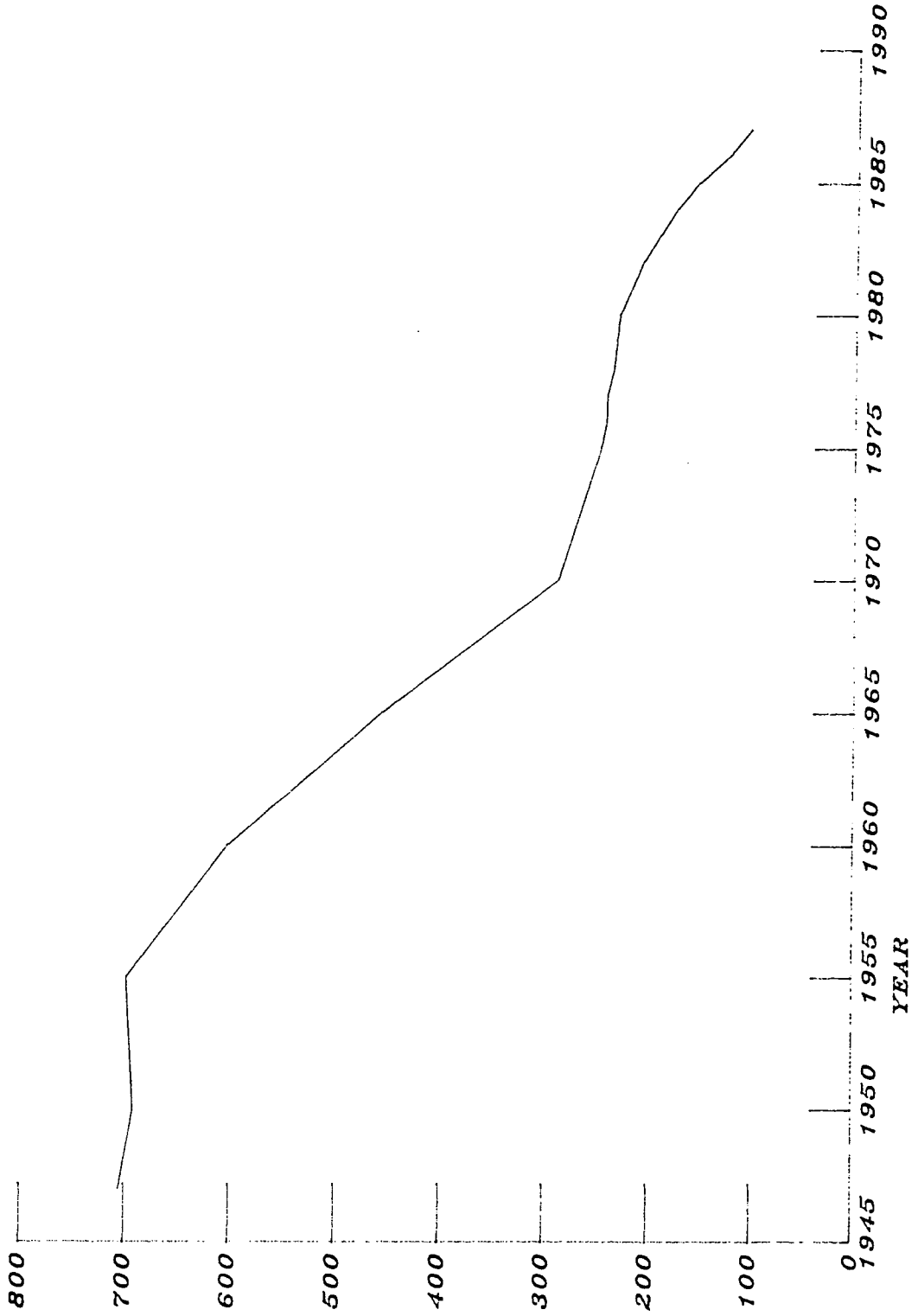
GRAPH 2: NUMBER OF NCB/BC COLLIERIES IN UK
1947–1987
NUMBER OF COLLIERIES

YEAR
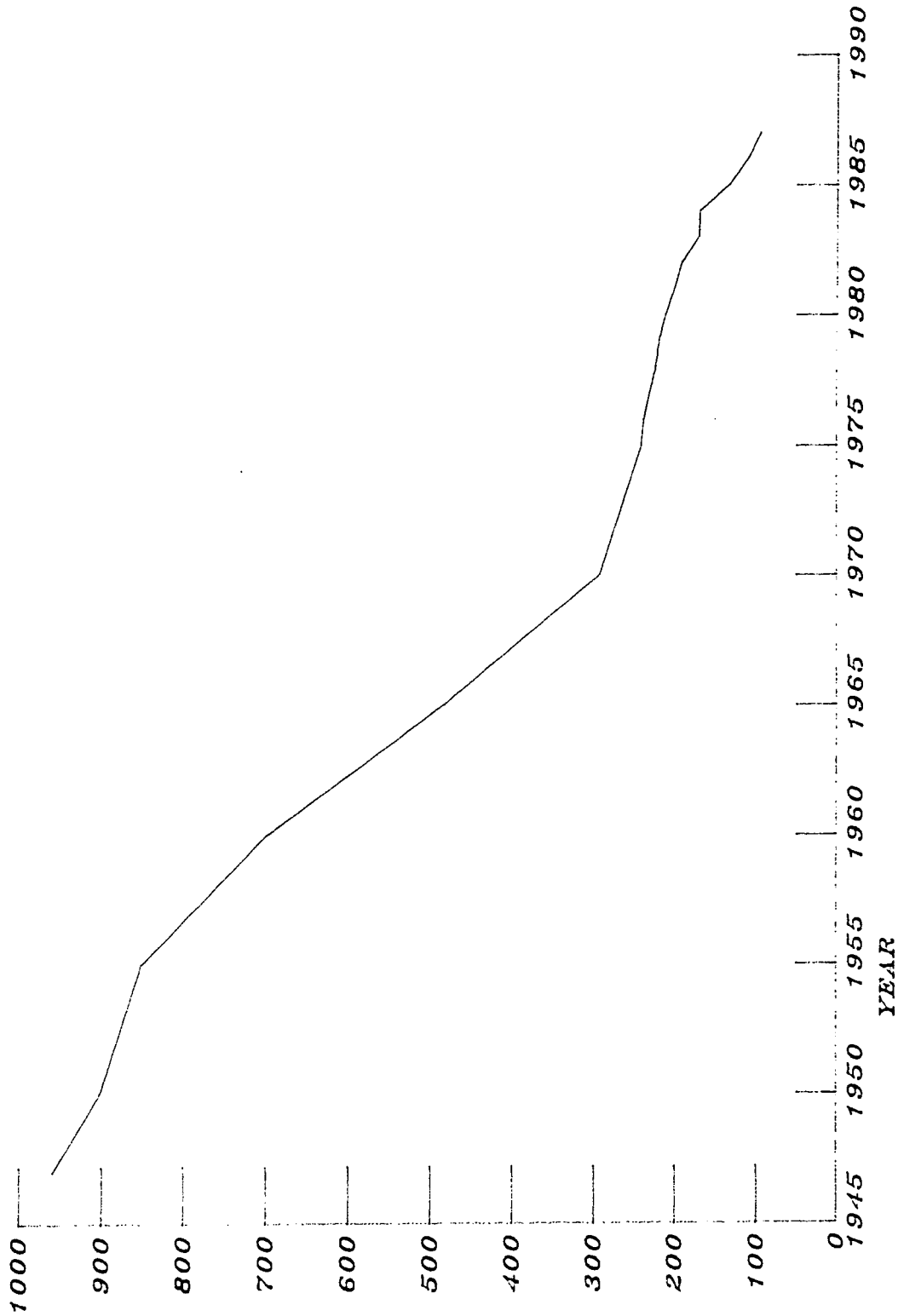
GRAPH 3: UK DEEP MINED OUTPUT
1947-1987
MILLION TONNES

YEAR
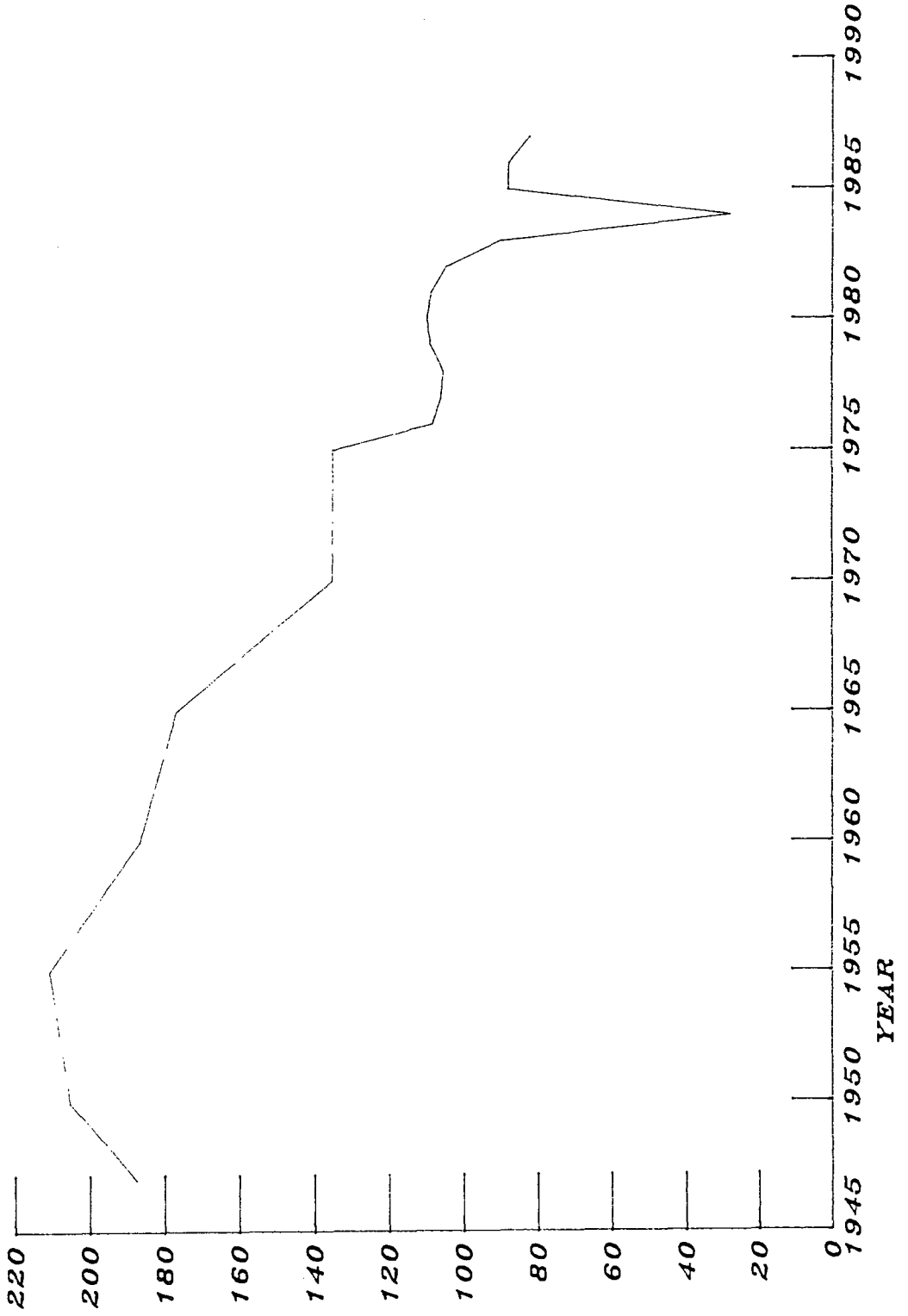
GRAPH 4: UK DEEP MINED PRODUCTIVITY CHANGE
1947–1987
OUTPUT PER MANSHIFT (TONNES)

YEAR
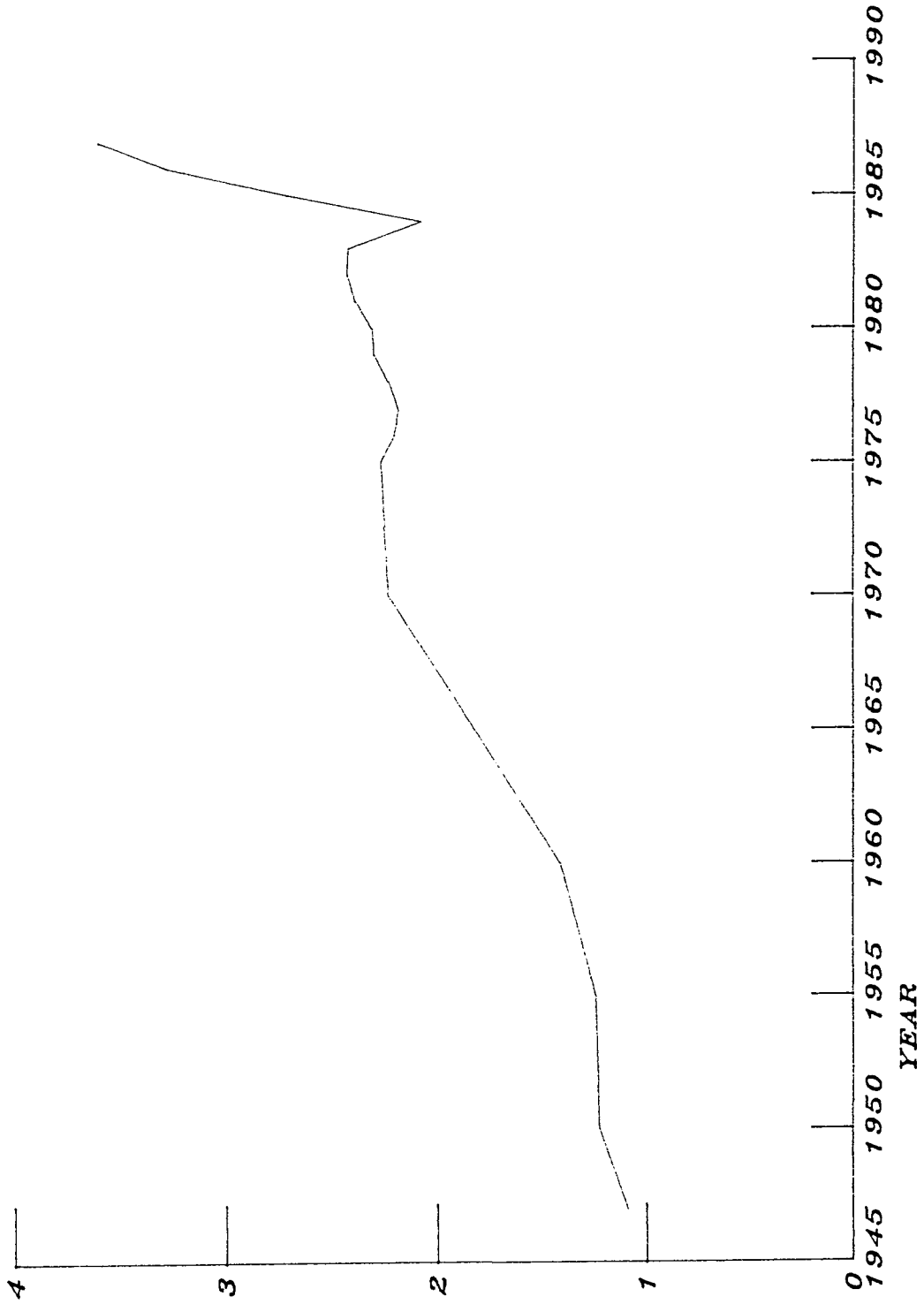
GRAPH 5: DURHAM COALFIELD EMPLOYMENT
1947–1970
THOUSANDS

110 —

100 —

90 —

80 —

70 —

60 —

50 —

40 —

30 —

20 —

10 —

0 —
1945   1950   1955   1960   1965   1970

YEAR
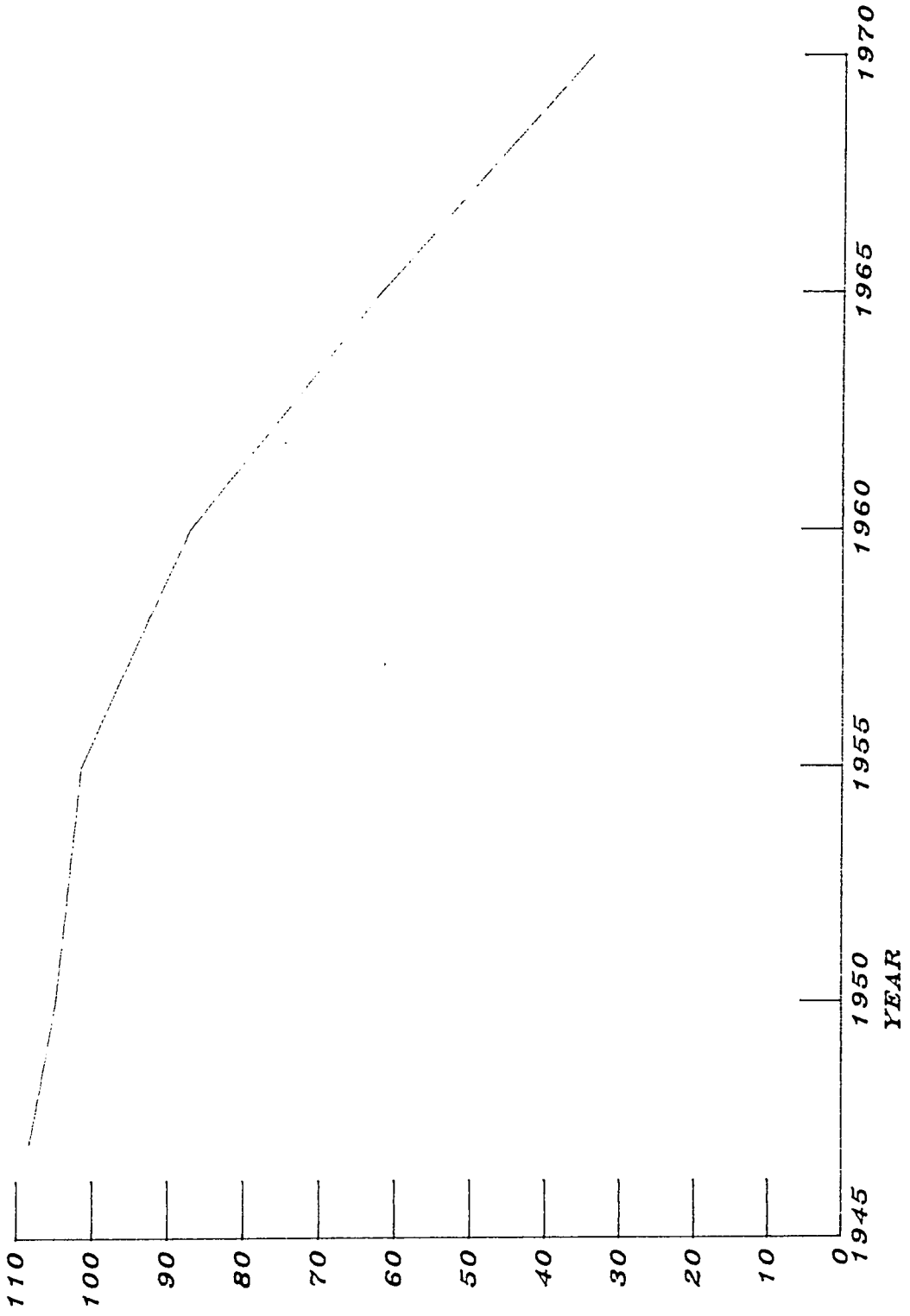
GRAPH 6: NUMBER OF NCB COLLIERIES IN DURHAM
1947-1970
NUMBER OF COLLIERIES
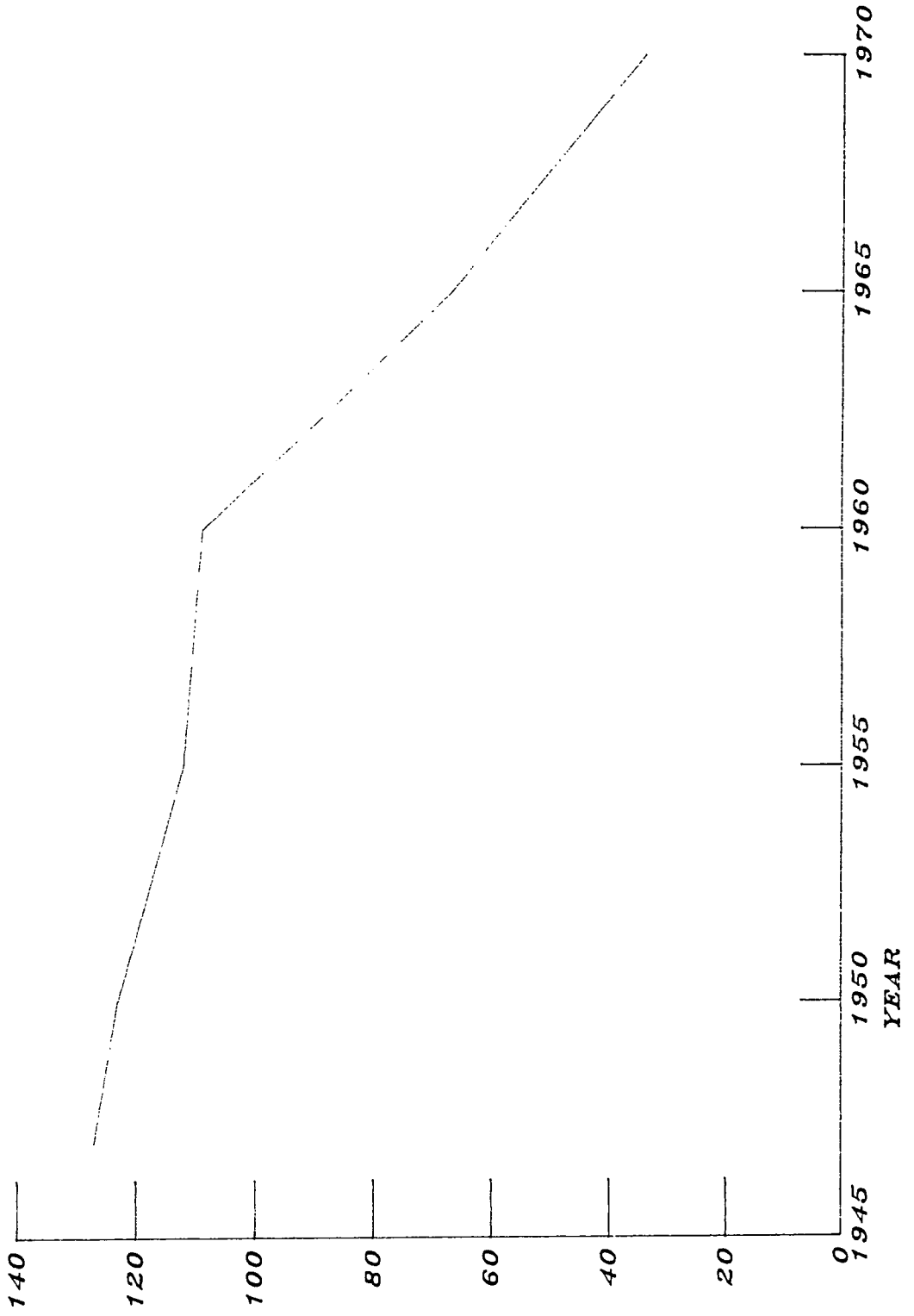
GRAPH 7: DURHAM DEEP MINED OUTPUT
1947-1970
MILLION TONNES

YEAR
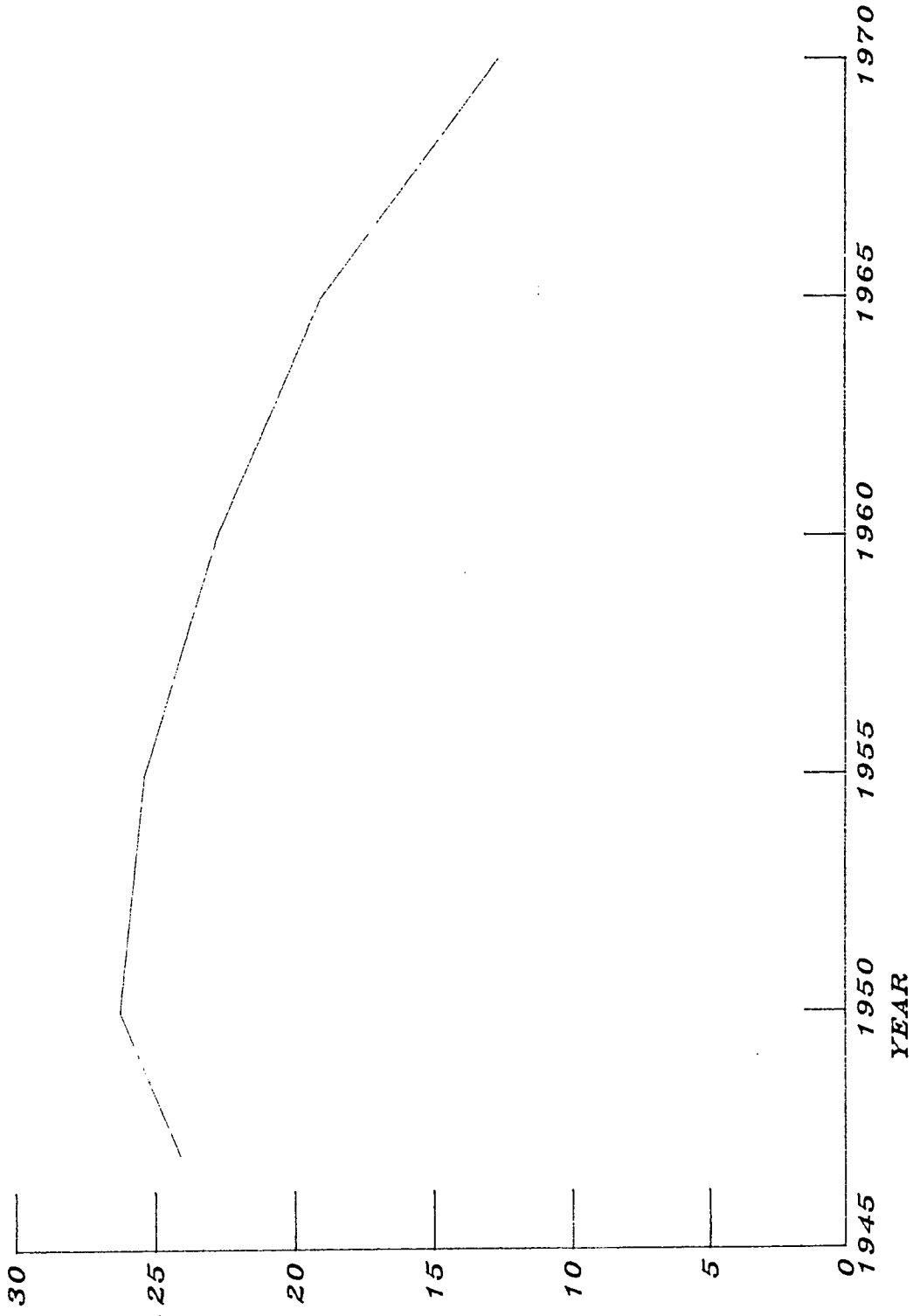
GRAPH 8: DURHAM DEEP MINED PRODUCTIVITY CHANGE
1947–1970
OUTPUT PER MANSHIFT (TONNES)

YEAR

1945   1950   1955   1960   1965   1970

0
1
2
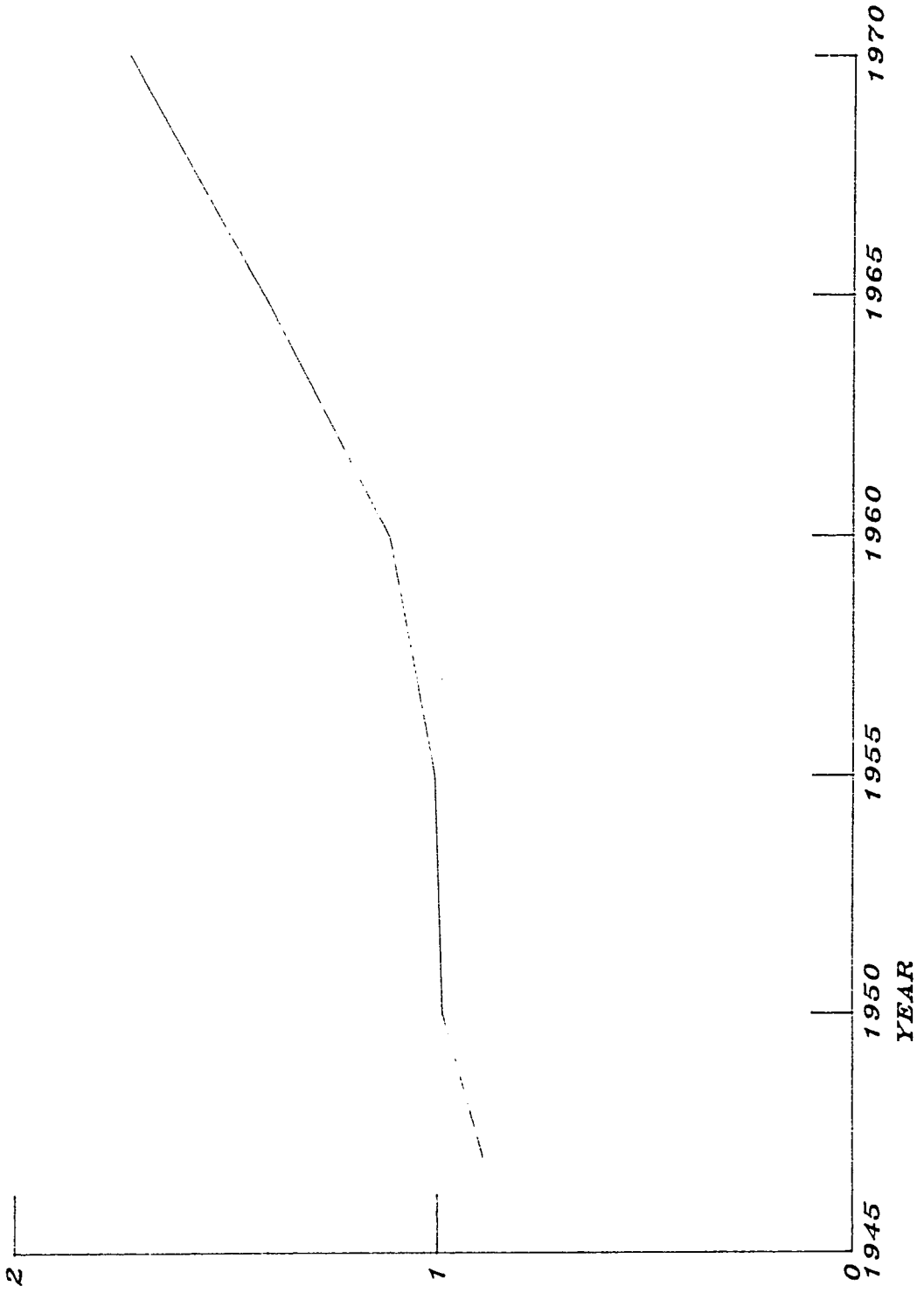
GRAPH 9: NORTH EAST DEEP MINED EMPLOYMENT
1975–1987
THOUSANDS

40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0

1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987

YEAR
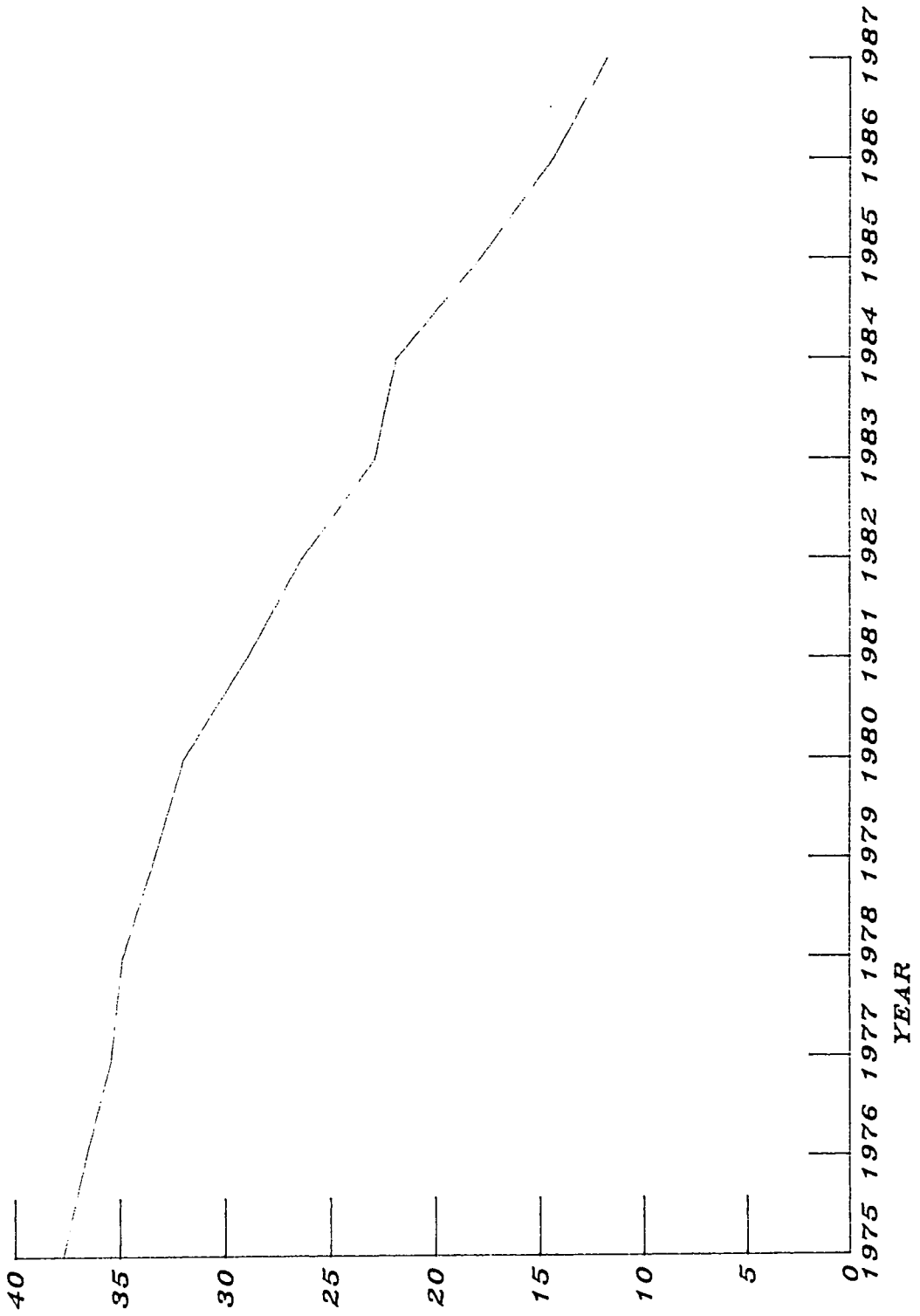
GRAPH 10: NORTH EAST DEEP MINED OUTPUT
1975-1987
MILLION TONNES

YEAR
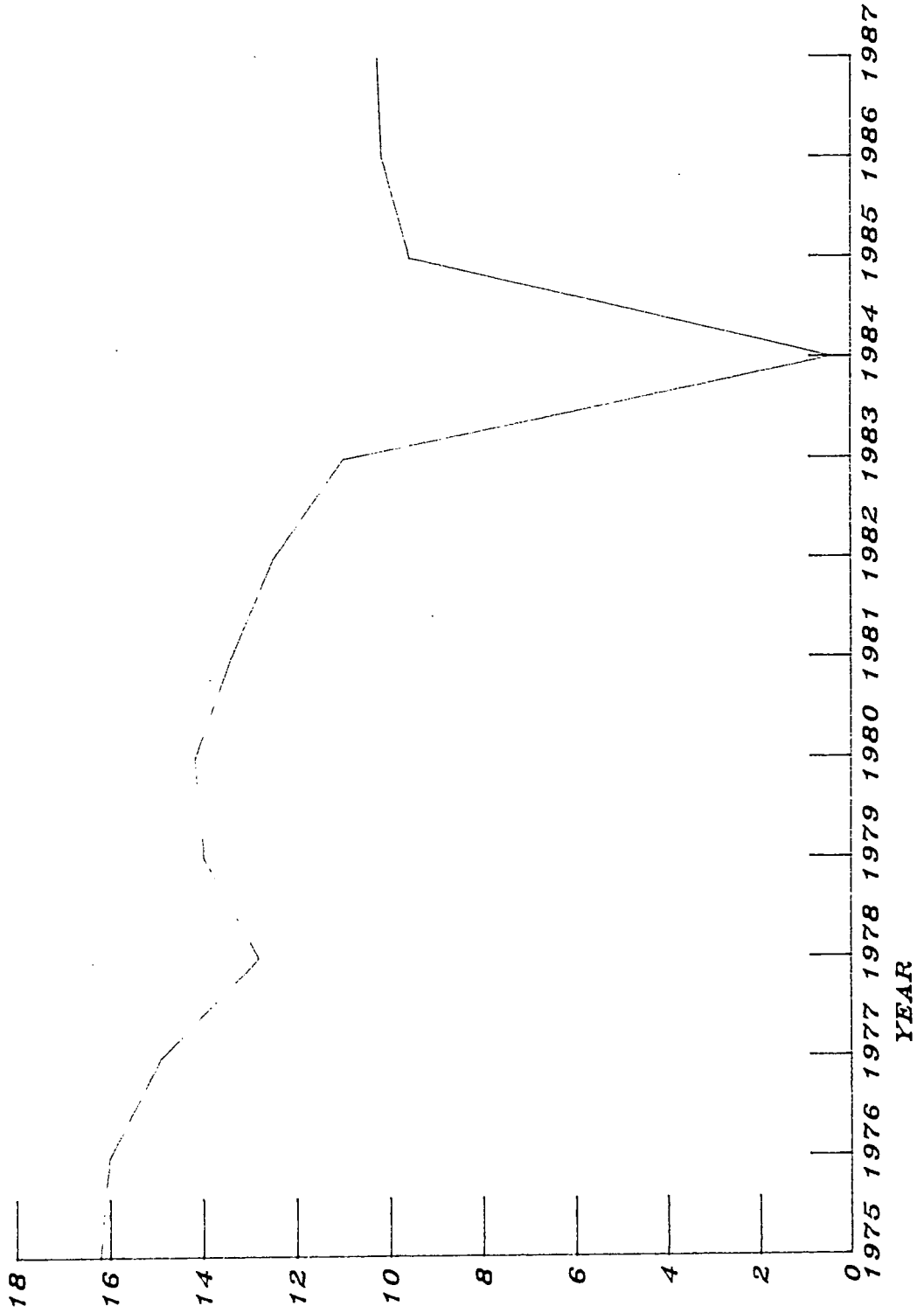
GRAPH 11: NE DEEP MINED PRODUCTIVITY CHANGE
1975-1987
OUTPUT PER MANSHIFT (TONNES)

YEAR
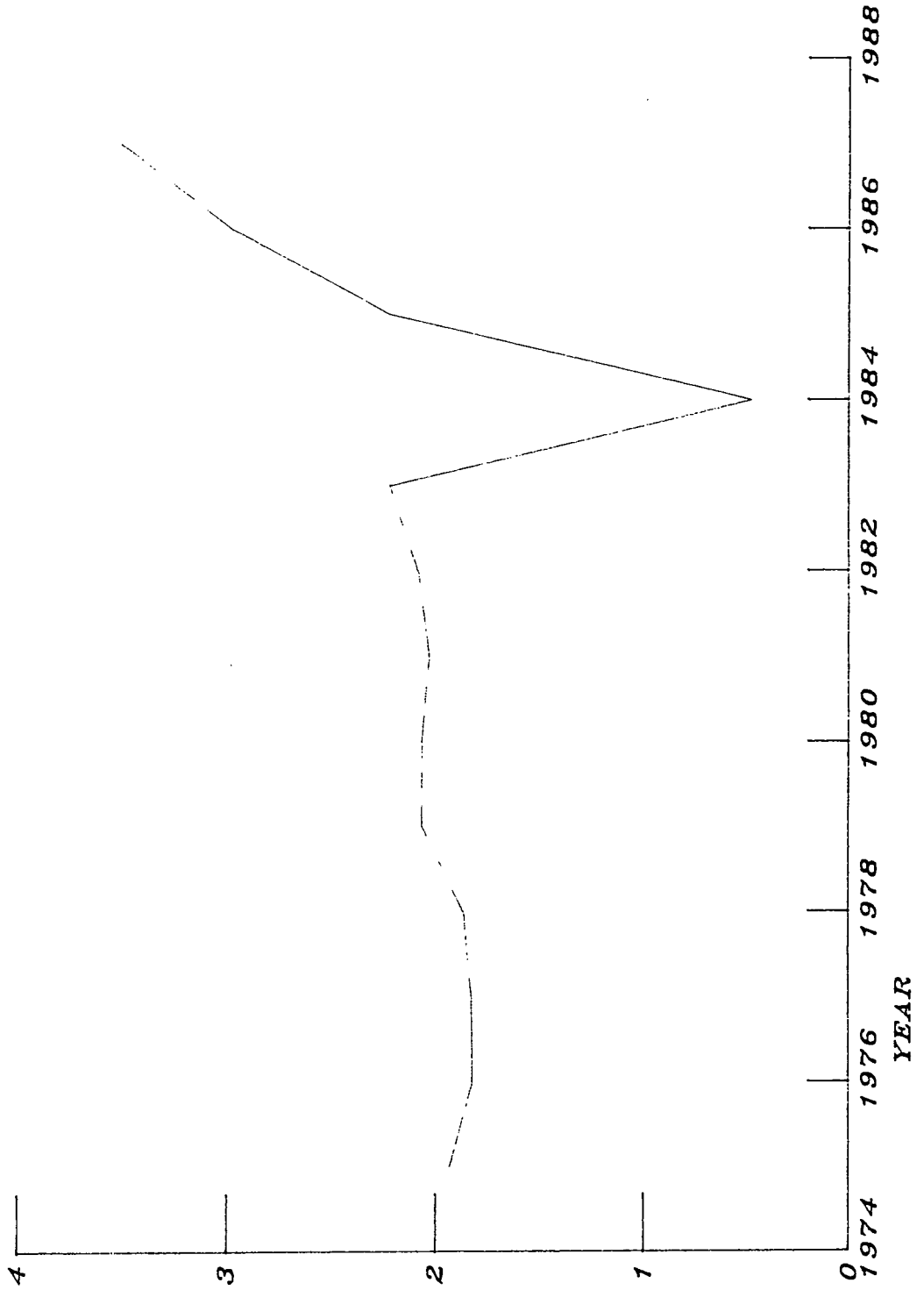
GRAPH 12: MURTON WORKFORCE BY AGE
1984 AND 1988
% OF WORKERS

MURTON 84
MURTON 88

AGE GROUPS (LESS THAN 20, 20-25... 60-65)
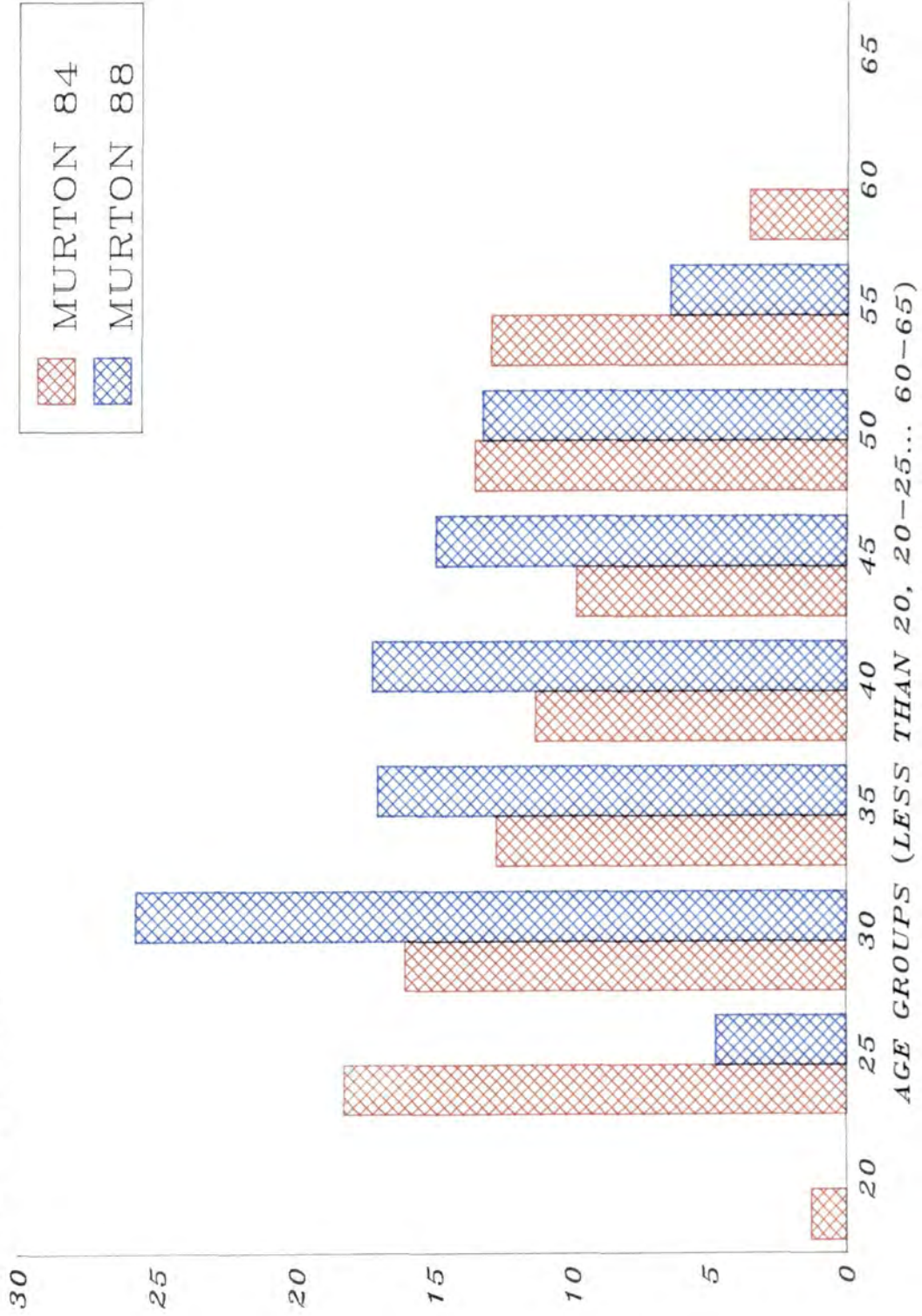
GRAPH 13A: STRIKE BREAKERS IN DURHAM 1984-5
NOTE: WEEKS 36-43 ARE EXTRAPOLATED!!
PERCENTAGE OF WORKFORCE RETURNING TO WORK

Legend:
- Dawdon
- Easington
- Eppleton
- Hawthorn
- Murton
- Herrington

WEEK OF STRIKE (35 IS 21-11-84)
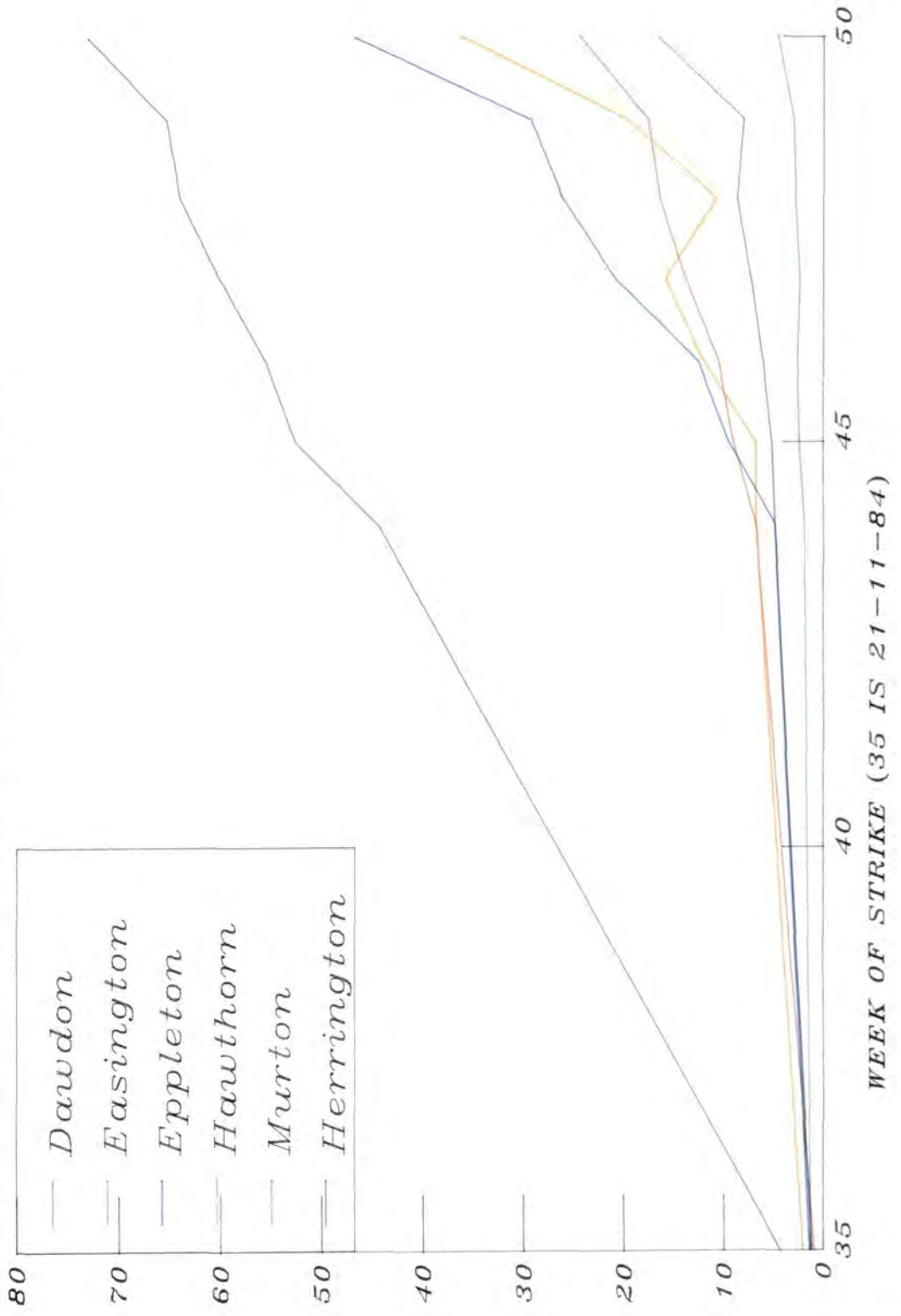
GRAPH 13B: STRIKE BREAKERS IN DURHAM 1984-5
NOTE: WEEKS 36-43 ARE EXTRAPOLATED!!
PERCENTAGE OF WORKFORCE BREAKING THE STRIKE

Murton
Horden-B/h
Sacriston
Seaham-V/T
Wearmouth
Westoe

WEEK OF STRIKE (35 IS 21-11-84)
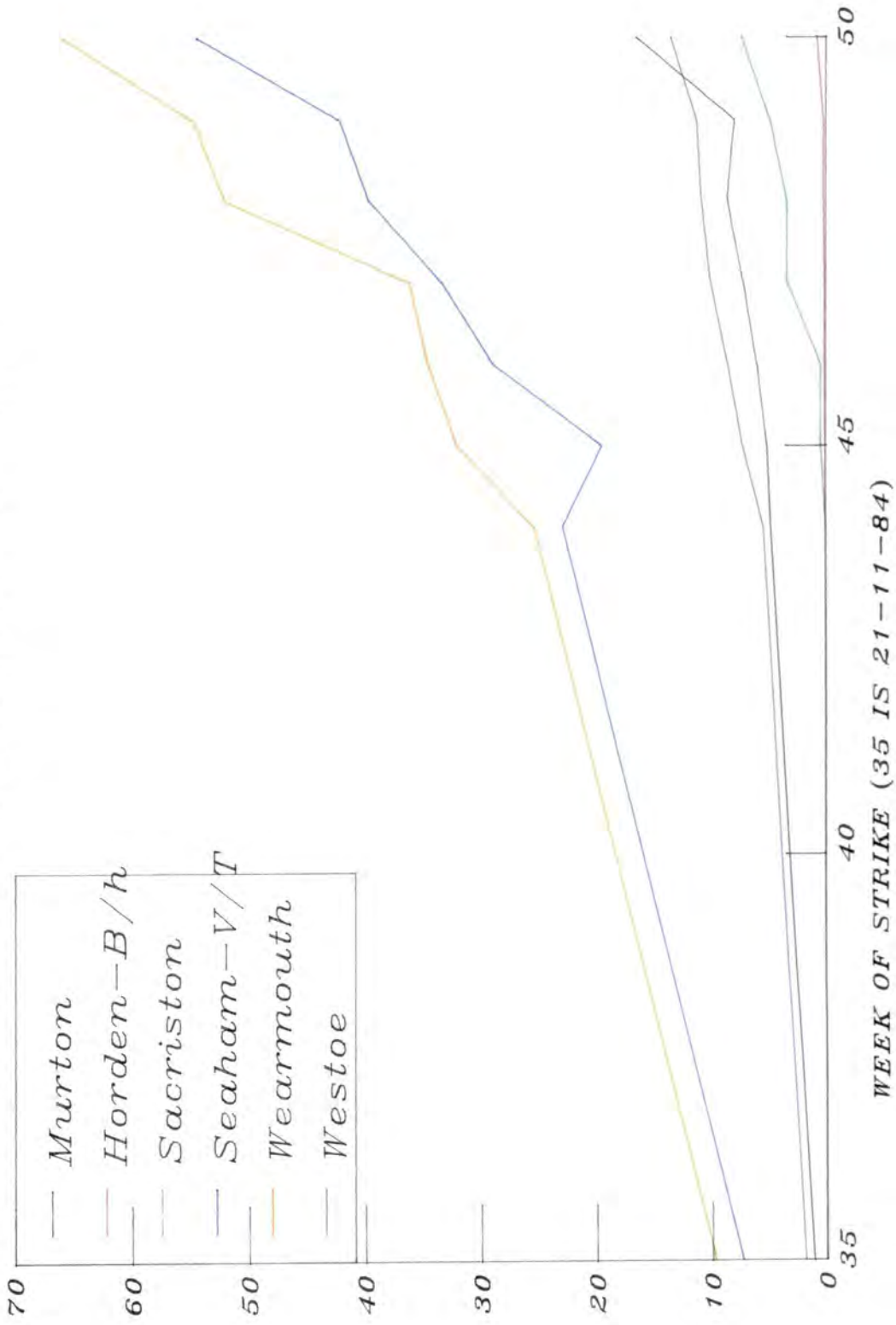
GRAPH 14: MURTON WORKFORCE REDUNDANCIES BY AGE
1985 AND 1988
% OF REDUNDANCIES IN EACH AGE GROUP

% RED 85
% RED 88

AGE GROUP (LESS THAN 20, 20-25... 55-60)
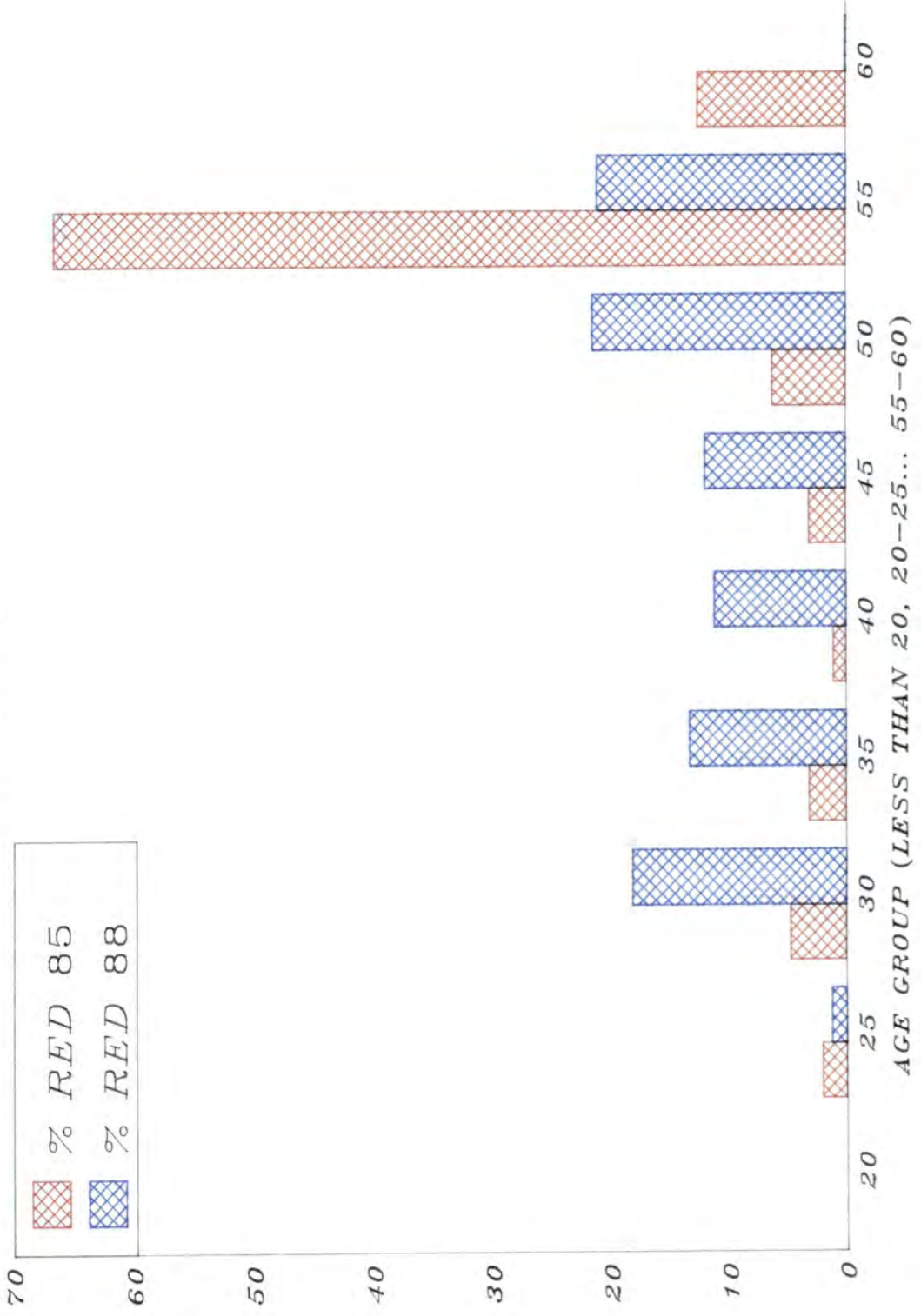
APPENDIX ONE: METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

A 1.1 PREFACE

Research in the social sciences is not easy. Two close friends of mine who have done PhD's in genetic engineering never tire of poking fun at the imprecision, the subjectivity and the shallowness they perceive in what they disbelievingly refer to as social _science_. Notwithstanding my standard riposte concerning the uncertain status of certainty in natural sciences, it is certainly true that some of what passes for research in the social sciences is not difficult to criticise. In particular, the tendency to make spurious claims about the applicability and certainty of research conclusions opens up the field for armchair critics. But part of the problem concerns the simple fact that the social world is enormously complex, and simply not amenable to the kind of rigorous laboratory investigation which characterises "hard" science (Sayer, 1985).

A second problem however lies with social scientists (and marxists) tendency to skate over the process by which they have reached their conclusions. Cloaking highly controversial research methods in a cover of scientific techniques and terminology represents either misplaced confidence in the applicability of scientific method, or lack of confidence in alternative methods of data collection. Instead, we should be clear and open about our research techniques. Where ambiguity exists, it should be admitted. If personal factors have intruded on the conduct of the research, why not say so? Only by concealing the process of data collection do "personal" factors invalidate conclusions. We have nothing to lose by emphasising the difficulty of what we are trying to do!

In many ways it seems odd to be relegating a discussion of methodology to an appendix of this thesis. With the current emphasis on PhD's as an exercise in research training (Renouf, 1989), it might have been better to integrate methodology into the main body of this thesis. Nevertheless, I chose not too, for two reasons. First, I decided that the prime aim of my thesis was to construct a thorough and coherent narrative explaining political developments within the Murton branches of the NUM. Second, within an 80000 word limit, decisions had to be taken about thesis content. Prioritising narrative consistency and fluency required considerable attention to detail, which inevitably ate up space. It also suggested that

discussion of methodology might unduly distract attention from the unfurling account. For these reasons, methodology is considered here in a seperate appendix.

It is by now a truism that the aims and methods of PhD research evolve continually throughout the three (or more) years of study. (One lecturer recently suggested to me that you only really become aware of what your PhD is about a year after it is finished!) This process of development was evident from the beginning of this PhD, exaggerated by my stubborn (and somewhat ill-advised) refusal to define too tightly the central questions of the research. Naively, I expected both questions and answers to "emerge" from my interviews, and reflection on them. Unsurprisingly, there are times when this weakness shows through, particularly in the uneven and inconsistent nature of the evidence I collected. In my defence, at least some ambivalence related to the difficulties of knowing exactly what "data" was likely to be available to answer any specific question fully. In this situation, it was dangerous to become too addicted to any single line of inquiry. These - and other - problems need to be discussed so that my research can be judged in the light of decisions I made about data collection.

Having made these prefatory comments, this appendix considers methodology via a four part structure. First, the choice of the Durham coalfield, and within it Murton, is explained. Secondly, the strategy and techniques applied to the practical task of carrying out research "in the field" are discussed, and criticised. Thirdly, I make some brief comments about the way I chose to present my research material. Finally, some implications of my research strategy for the relationship between theory and evidence are broached.

In chapter one I explained that the focus of my thesis was local processes of political change. Because when I began my research the miners' had just engaged in the most dramatic industrial struggle of the post war years in Britain, an NUM case study offered the opportunity to integrate an understanding of the assault on the Post War Settlement from the late 1970's with an analysis of political change at the local level. I wanted to study class action, and to unpack the processes which created it, and the factors important in controlling its content and direction. Within the coal industry however, there were still a number of options available. Comparisons between pits in different areas, between pits in the same area, a combination of both, or even an international comparison between British and European pit(s) were all possibilities.

Comparitive research has a number of well known advantages. In terms of the questions posed in this research topic, it offered the chance to compare the validity of differing explanations of political change. Carefully chosen case studies could have suggested how different processes created similar outcomes, or perhaps how apparently similar processes created different outcomes! The effects of differing regional (or national) histories could be investigated. At the very least, comparisons force allowances to be made for the unique characteristics of one particular place. In time however, all these temptations were rejected in favour of an intensive case study of one colliery - Murton. Why?

On one level, I didn't have to make a choice. Not only did I find Murton to be an exceptionally rewarding (and convivial) place to study when I began my data collection, it also proved to be an exceedingly complex case study. Gradually I began to realise that in order to glimpse the social processes behind the everyday explanations of political change in the union branches, I would have to commit more than just a few months to the task. It became increasingly clear that the quality of information I required was not available to breathless researchers who "dropped in" to a union office pit, flourishing a long shopping list of questions.

Furthermore, I began to wonder to what extent it would be possible _for me_ to make meaningful comparisons between different places. Given the demands of research in Murton, would it be possible to develop such a thorough

understanding of another place in the time available? As I drifted further and further into an intensive study, I realised that a comparison was not essential to this type of research. Murton's uniqueness was exactly the point. A comparison would offer only another unique conjunctural example of the relationship between objective changes and subjective agency. It would be undeniably useful, in that it would generate important signals on the relative importance of different subjective and objective elements, but it would not change the conclusions emerging from analysis of Murton. Given the practical difficulties, I decided comparative work was a luxury I could not afford.

But why did I settle on the Durham coalfield, and within it Murton? Answering this question requires reference to the central issues this thesis set out to address. Although many different types of political change could have formed the basis for investigation, I wanted to study the change from "right wing" to "left wing" (and within this, to unpack exactly what the changes meant in practice). At a coalfield level, Durham remains the only area to have shifted decisively leftwards since the miners' strike. Both leadership and rank and file have been transformed, with ballot votes confirming Durham's movement to the left. In comparison, areas such as Scotland and South Wales have shifted dramatically to the "right", whilst Yorkshire has retained its left wing profile[1].

One further significant advantage in studying the Durham coalfield was the split union structure which characterised the area from the 1870's. Whereas miners in almost all other areas of the NUM are represented by just one constituent union (eg the South Wales or Yorkshire Areas), in Durham the mining workforce was[2] split between three constiturent Assiciations. The two largest of these - the Durham Miners (representing most non craft workers) and the Durham Mechanics (represent craftsmen) - offered a unique

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[1] These bald regional generalisations obviously conceal the subtelties of political change in each area. Despite this, Durham does emerge clearly as the only coalfield to move decisively left, whatever the disputes about the true content and variation of politics in other coalfields.

[2] "Was" is used here advisably, since 1988 witnessed the amalgamation of the three Assocaitations, along with the three comparable organisations in Northumberland, into a single North East Area of the NUM.

opportunity to study differing political developments within two branches at the same workplace[3].

Within Durham, political changes within miners and mechanics have been spatially uneven. Easington has moved rightwards. Wearmouth - although known as a left pit - has pursued an uneven path, the real nature of its political development remaining elusive, and complicated by a significant UDM presence. The Seaham pits (Dawdon and Seaham-Vane Tempest) have in the main remained stubbornly "moderate". Since I wanted to follow my research into the post strike period, that left just two collieries, Westoe and Murton[4]. Both have idiosyncratic reputations within the coalfield. Indefinable qualities such as "bloody-mindedness" are often mentioned with respect to both. Of the two however, Murton represented a better example of the processes I wanted to study, because it summed up the stereotypical change I wanted to examine.

Despite the emergence of a young, radical group of miners at coalfield level in the pre-strike years (Lloyd, 1985), Murton remained a formidable fortress for the old style Durham NUM politics. Known throughout the coalfield as the most right wing pit in the county, Murton ended the 1970's with branch leaders whose terms of office were measured not in years, but in decades! But such apparent stability was deceptive. Bu the end of the 1984/5 strike, Murton had been transformed into one of the most militant and progressive pits in the county - a reputation since consolidated. This then was the stereotypical description of Murton I was confronted with when I began my research. As chapter 5 shows, it glosses over the uneven

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[3]For the purposes of this thesis the small Enginemen's Association (consisting of the winding enginemen at each colliery) is ignored. It is perhaps not being too unkind to suggest that its contribution to union politics in this period was relatively minor.

[4]At the time when I chose Murton, its continued existence was in jeopardy. However, if it were to be threatened with closure, I knew that I would have the opportunity to study at first hand the political struggle that this would inevitably precipitate. Of the other collieries still open in 1985, Horden was about to close, as was Eppleton. Herrington and Sacriston had already agreed to closure. Seaham was a noteably moderate pit (merged with Vane Tempest in 1987). Although I could also have studied an NCB workshop (eg Tursdale or Philadelphia), these were manned entirely by mechanics, and I wanted a more "mainstream" case study.

development of the Murton branches in the pre-strike years, and the extent to which change was already destabilising traditional relationships. Nevertheless, since I wanted to investigate just this type of stereotype, Murton emerged as the best case study in the Durham coalfield - a once right wing pit that was now unmistakeably transformed.

A 1.3 CHOICE OF RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Again, the choice of research techniques reflected both the requirements of the research topic, and also practical limitations imposed by working within Murton in the immediate post-strike era. My definition of the research topic determined that my main data source would be people associated with Murton Colliery, (official data on the development of class consciousness being rather thin on the ground!) Given this situation, the two problems were clearly who to try and seek information from, and how best to extract it. Before discussing the resolution of these problems however, a few words are necessary on other sources of information.

A 1.3.i DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

I am acutely aware that the arguments in this thesis are not bolstered by much "objective" data. Perhaps I could have spent more time trawling through pit and area consultative committee minutes, fishing out a staple diet of "official" figures on manpower, output and productivity, coupled with "official" pronouncements on the state of Murton colliery. I chose not to because I took the view that it was more important to explore subjective experience than capture all the nuances of objective reality. For me, it was more important to know that "Murton was under threat", or that "productivity had lept in the last 12 months", than it was to track down the official data sources that spelt out the statistical parameters of these statements.

Despite this reluctance to spend too much time chasing "official" data, I recognised the strengthening effect of certain types of documentary evidence. Perhaps the most important of these were the miners and mechanics branch minute books. They offered the most complete historical record of activities in both branches. However, they also suffered from some serious drawbacks. The mechanics minute books are comprehensive, and stretch back to the pre-war era. After John Cummings election as secretary in 1968 they became extraordinarily copious, reflecting - as one mechanic put it - that John was self-consciously "writing for history". But their very length precluded the possibility of reading them all. Instead, I relied on interviews to bring out the key developments within the branch, and turned to the minute books for details of these events.

Unfortunately, the miners minute books constituted a far less complete record. They are available only for the period since 1980 - the earlier volumes having disappeared. Furthermore, a crucial volume dealing with 1983-84 is also missing. I have therefore relied more heavily on interviews to construct my account of events in the miners branch than was necessary for the mechanics.

Gaining access to minute books, like most data collection for this research, was not something which I could simply assume would happen. Relationships of trust had to be built up. To this extent - and it is a point which deserves its repetition later in this appendix - there is a very real sense in which subjective factors, like the friendships the researcher makes, can exercise a decisive influence over the type of evidence available to him/her. As will become clearer later, I was particularly fortunate to strike up highly rewarding relationships, which were also of great benefit to my research.

Subjective factors also led to the acquisition of some of my most important data - that concerning the age and residence of Murton's workforce. The NCB wrote to tell me that this information was not available. I was able to gain access to it only because of the generosity of certain people (who of course have to remain anonymous) connected with Murton colliery. No amount of research planning could have guaranteed such good fortune.

In other areas however, I was not so fortunate. In particular, I would have liked to establish the voting results, broken down by branch, for all the national ballots held in the Durham area since 1978. Unfortunately, only the mechanics union kept this data, and then only since the strike. Otherwise, the data was held only by the NUM's national office, and in the absence of connections there, my request (via the Durham Area General Secretary, Dave Hopper) to see the data was met with a polite refusal.

These examples show the importance of the subjective, human element in data collection for research of this type. The implications, and potential weaknesses they introduce into the research, are discussed later. But whilst subjective factors are important in gaining access to the data described above, when it comes to collecting primary evidence, they permeate the very quality of the data itself. Given that my main source of primary data was people connected with Murton, two key problems emerge,

namely; how to gather information, and who to gather it from. Each is discussed in turn.

A 1.3.ii QUESTIONNAIRES VERSUS INTERVIEWS

Essentially, there are two methods of collecting detailed information from people - questionnaires and interviews. These methods are related to two different research strategies; extensive and intensive respectively (see the discussion in Massey and Meegan, 1985). This research is based on the latter. I rejected questionnaires (and therefore extensive research) for two main reasons. In the first place, I did not believe that they could yield the quality of information I required. In the second, it was clear that I did not have the basic information necessary to undertake a meaningful questionnaire survey.

With regard to the quality of information, there are a number of points to make. First, questionnaires are basically inflexible. They are designed to elicit the same type of information from a large number of people. As such they depend on a common frame of reference among the respondents. However, since one of my main aims could be interpreted as an attempt to understand differences between the frames of reference of the respondents, questionnaires appeared inappropriate. Put more simply, how do you design a questionnaire to apply equally to a 55 year old miner who has worked all his life at Murton colliery, and a 25 year old who transferred from Boldon colliery a few months before the 1984/5 strike? How many questions that were relevant to an active picket during the strike would also be meaningful to a man who broke the strike before Christmas 1984?

One possible response would be to design several different questionnaires. However, this raises the second practical difficulty with survey research, namely the paucity of an adequate data base upon which to base a sample. As became clear above, access to a comprehensive workforce list was only achieved by good fortune, and only then towards the end of my period of data collection. There was simply no practical basis for undertaking a questionnaire survey, even of the most rudimentary type. Targetting different questionnaires at different groups was therefore out of the question.

Choosing interviews was not however based primarily on the difficulties of undertaking questionnaire research. Rather, it reflected a positive - although wary - belief in the need to gather information through sensitive, in-depth questioning. The fundamental problem with questionnaires is the type of information they yield. Crudely, they are designed to extract answers to "what?" questions, rather than the "why?" questions which were the preoccupation of my research. Even flexible questionnaires tend to close down options for answering, which is a particular problem in answering "why" questions. Even many "what" and "how" questions require more subtle and sensitive exploration than questionnaires can provide. My research depended on the ability to probe with open ended questions. Interaction is the key to teasing out the understandings and beliefs hidden behind the cloak of everyday generalisations.

A 1.3.iii ONE-OFF INTERVIEWS

How then did I approach my interviews? Basically, they can be divided into two categories, although with an inevitable gradation between them. First, there were "one-off" interviews, and secondly "repeated" interviews. "One-off" interviews occurred with the majority of interviewees. Typically with this type of interview, I arrived at someone's home, having usually made contact by phone, and interviewed them for between one and three hours. Since I knew that I would probably not return, I used basic questionnaire type questions as a framework for the interview (an example is included in table A 5.1). However, I tried to remain sensitive to the particular preoccupations of each respondent. For example, if an interviewee was clearly hung-up on the "incompetence" of the branch leadership, then I pursued the issue further.

Nevertheless, a balance had to be struck between alertness to the interviewees interests, and the need to explore issues behind his/her everyday formulations. Just as important as the issues which the interviewee clearly had strong opinions over were the ones which s/he had not considered very deeply. For example, the fact that an active picket during the strike could say almost nothing about the atmosphere within Murton during the police "occupation", was as significant as his own detailed observations on the same event. Needless to say, the choice of issues which were probed despite the interviewees lack of response to them clearly reflected decisions I made about what the significant issues were.

Such decisions were based on theoretical considerations, which were modified during the course of the research.

Flexibility was a key concept in my interviewing. One of the advantages interviews offer over questionnaires is the possibility of adapting questions over the research period. This was necessary because interviews revealed information not only about what people thought, but about what the important events were that affected what they thought. Beginning interviewing inevitably short on the details of local history, I was reliant on general questioning to draw out historical detail. Obviously this meant that, in general, later interviews contributed greater rewards than the early ones. But I tried to minimise this effect by interviewing "key informants" at the start, in order to isolate the principle events on which to base later questions. (The basis on which I chose "key informants" is discussed later.)

Paradoxically perhaps, this problem of incomplete knowledge was particularly acute with respect to the post strike period. Put simply, many of the events discussed occurred after I had conducted some of my interviews! This leads on to an important point, namely that the research strategies used for each of chapters 5, 6 and 7 were significantly different. In chapter 5, I used interviews with key informants to direct me towards my main documentary source, the minute books of the miners and mechanics branches. I also used other interviews to probe further behind the issues I identified.

For chapter 6 - on the strike - there was almost no documentary evidence available. Fear of providing the police with incriminating material prompted the destruction of the limited documentation that was kept. So I relied heavily on interviews to reconstruct events, feelings and attitudes from as wide a variety of viewpoints as possible.

Chapter 7 - on the post-strike period - was far more susceptible to participant observation. I was conducting my research when many of the key events - like the 1987 bonus strike - happened. By the same token however, many one-off interviews occurred before these events took place. In practice therefore, I tried to use recent important events as a way of exploring the wider attitudes of an interviewee. In this way I gathered information in two different dimensions. Strangely perhaps, I found that

interviewees recollections of recent events - other than the most immediate past - was often hazier than their more distant memories. This reflects the tendency for distant events to become part of a collective memory, reinforced by "oral history" (Francis, 1985). More recent events - other than those actually happening - have not yet been so codified, and they tended to be swamped by the urgency of the present.

A 1.3.iv REPEATED INTERVIEWS

When I first crossed the level crossing which marks Murton's Westward boundary, I felt almost as if I was entering a foreign land. Even the language was different! Finding my feet, and making any sense of this strange and complicated new world presented massive practical difficulties. So, like any explorer, I relied on guides. There were so many new things to make sense of, I needed people who could help me abstract what was significant for my research from the riot of new impressions confronting me every time I encountered Murton. Developing "key informants" was however not a process open to rational choices. In the end, it was a very personal thing.

There were two people who I ended up relying on in this respect. Without them, this research could not have happened. But there were also other people who repeatedly gave of their time, allowing me to discuss my research over and over again, in their homes, in pubs, or after meetings. These "repeated" interviews helped me interpret information collected from many other sources. They also prodded me along the road to some sort of understanding of the changes I was grappling with. But how did these interviews work?

Repeated interviews offer two significant advantages over one-off interviews. First, they allow extended coverage of events and attitudes. As new questions bubble up from the process of data collection, the interviewer can return to add more detail to an emerging picture. Similarly, as new events occur, attitudes can be covered across time, and changes of opinion recorded. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, repeated interviews allow much more intensive investigation. As a relationship develops between interviewer and interviewee, so it becomes possible to drop below the level of everyday, routinised responses, and explore interactively the complexity underlying daily commonplaces.

One example sums up the point. Early on when I interviewed Frank Duffy, he suggested that the leadership of the Murton miners' branch before the 1984/5 strike had been too scared to address branch meetings on controversial issues. Armed with this provocative assessment, I began to focus on the leadership of the branch. Questioning travellers, trawling through minute books, and comparing the miners with the mechanics branch, all yielded a web of (sometimes contradictory) information, on this question. Returning to Frank, I was able to re-examine his assertion, refining the point, and drawing out wider implications (see chapter five).

A 1.4 THE CHOICE OF INTERVIEWEES

Everything I have said so far has emphasised the importance of <u>who</u> I spoke to for the outcome of this research. Justifying my choice of "informants" therefore becomes crucial. This is especially so because there is no doubt that this was an activist based research project. Three questions assume paramount significance. Who did I speak to? How did I choose them? On what basis were so many people excluded from the process of data collection?

A 1.4.i WHO WERE THE INTERVIEWEES?

In order to guarantee anonymity to the respondents to whom it was promised, certain small details have had to be changed in the classification which follows. Classification is in any case a complicated issue. It interacts with theoretical decisions about the appropriate factors on which to divide up the workforce. In practice, two fundamental principles guided my interviewing strategy: first, a desire to speak to as many different people as possible (different in political terms, that is), and secondly, a recognition of the importance of returning repeatedly to key informants.

In total I formally interviewed just 47 people, although I conducted at least 60 interviews. In pubs and clubs I spoke to many more people, some very regularly. Below my interviews are broken down according to four different dimensions: miners/mechanics/management; strike breakers/non strike breakers; Murton/travellers-to-Murton/no direct connection with Murton; activist/non activist. Because the interviewees are chosen from such a wide range of inter-locking factors, the only way to fully describe the coverage of my interviews would be to describe each interviewee in detail (eg a miner from Blackhall who transferred to Murton in 1980, supported the strike but was a non-activist, and took redundancy in 1985). However, I am unwilling to this since it would risk prejudicing anonymity which I guaranteed to many interviewees. Below are 4 tables listing the number of interviewees in a series of categories.

Miners who work/have worked at Murton: 20

Miners working elsewhere: 5

Mechanics who work/have worked at Murton: 5

Mechanics working elsewere: 4

Management: 3

Strike breakers working at Murton: 3

Other strike breakers: 3[5]

Non strike breakers: 23

Miners from Murton village: 10

Mechanics from Murton village: 4

Miners travelling to Murton: 8

Mechanics travelling to Murton: 1

Miners/mechanics with no Murton connection: 7

Left wing activists[6]:   15

Right wing activists: 5

This final classification - based so heavily on subjective judgement, and the theoretical categories adopted in chapter 5 - also brings into focus another classificatory problem, namely the predilection of some interviewees to change their politics over the ten year period of this research. These developments are discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The

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[5]Two of these three transferred from Eppleton to Murton after the strike.

[6]Dividing interviewees along active/non-active lines is almost impossible. In categorising my interviews along these dimensions, I have defined "activist" relatively loosely, to refer to anyone who has become consciously involved in union politics, with such involvement extending beyond short term involvement in the strike. Strike involvement is excluded as a defining characteristic because there is a sense in which the strike made activists of everybody. I want to define activism as a longer term political involvement.

tables above should therefore be regarded as guides only, and not as rigid classifications.

A 1.4.ii CHOOSING THE INTERVIEWEES

Conducting my research in the immediate aftermath of the most bitter, divisive and passionate industrial dispute since 1926 posed unique problems for gaining access to interviewees. These difficulties closed down many options, and virtually dictated that my initial encounters would be with the activists who controlled both miners and mechanics branches. My first contacts came from Huw Beynon, then at Durham University's Sociology Department, who suggested I contact John Cummings, Dave Temple, and Frank Duffy. Because these three men were activists, it was inevitable that I would begin my research with the activist network.

After preliminary interviews with my three initial contacts, I proceeded by asking them to suggest other people I could interview. In the tense and complicated post-strike environment, their suggestions were perhaps not as ambitious as they might have been before the strike. The elemental conflict of the dispute hacked out unbridgeable chasms between some people. Core activists still tended to relate strongly to their own activist group, and I began to realise that it would be extremely difficult to break out of these dense interlocking networks.

There were however considerable advantages in concentrating on activists. By their very nature, activists were more likely to have considered the questions my research addressed. They had made a self-conscious effort to get to grips with historical issues; and they were used to dealing with abstract questions and generalisations. Political motivation stimulates an active memory of past events. In contrast, non-activists were not able to reflect over past events in the same way. For example, asking a non-activist what he thought of the 1980 "teeing out" dispute may raise no more than a flicker of recognition. It was not something that would have been consigned to memory, because it was not seen as important. In all probability, it would have been lumped together with other minor disputes as an "aggravation". Even if it was remembered, the non-activist would not have related it to a political history - s/he would not see it as part of a process of political development.

This is not to say however that the politics of the non-activist are unimportant. Rather, it is to acknowledge that when it comes to finding out about historical events, and attempting to place them in a coherent framework, it is more useful to talk to politically aware people who have considered the issues themselves. When it comes to exploring the politics of non-activists, a more indirect approach is necessary. Because political orientation is not a primary part of their identity, then their political philosophy has to be partly inferred. Many people are unwilling to call themselves "political", but this cannot hide the real political choices which everybody in modern society is compelled to make - miners no less than anybody else. I used a range of questions to try and get behind an individual's stated "neutrality". For example, what were their attitudes to Joe Gormley and Arthur Scargill? Because these individuals acted as polarised repositories of particular ideologies, questions like these could tease out ideological positions which were not amenable to direct questioning.

However, a fundamental problem of access remained for non-activist miners. As my interviews with activists of various hues continued, I realised with mounting astonishment, that many activists simply did not know people outside their group well enough to be able to put me in touch with anyone. In the absence of a list of people employed at the colliery - past or present - this was a serious blow. However, activists from outlying villages proved to belong to more permeable social networks than the polarised, entrenched, and often mutually exclusive, groups within Murton. I was therefore able to break into my first non-activist circles in villages like Trimdon.

Even once this had been achieved however, problems remained. Some of the most interesting non-activists were clearly those who had gone back to work. But people who had been hostile to the strike were usually extremely reticent about talking to anyone about their experiences. Many more who did not break the strike had since left the industry, and wanted to bury the whole experience out of sight, as deeply as they could. Unlike the activists, whenever I hesitantly asked a non-activist to suggest another contact, the reaction was invariably one of such uncertainty and trepidation, that I immediately withdrew the request.

Only right at the end of my research did a list of the workforce at Murton, complete with addresses, come into my possession. By this time, I judged it too late to embark on another massive round of interviews. Before then, I had access to a list of the 1984 workforce, but without addresses. I made two attempts to use this as a base for my interviews. For the first, I chose ten names at random and looked them up in the telephone directory. I sent out 10 trial letters with s.a.e.'s enclosed, asking if it would be possible to interview them. I received two replies, one from a gentleman who had never had anything to do with Murton colliery, and another from a miner who I subsequently interviewed.

However, experiences with my second attempt to use the list dissuaded me from attempting to follow up the letter approach. Because of the poor response to my letters, I decided to telephone people at random from the list. The third of these calls solicited such an angry and emotional tirade from the recipient that I decided (after one or two more rejections) to abandon the tactic. During this brief call, the unknown miner became more and more worked up as he recalled his connections with Murton, repeating over an over again that he'd <u>hated</u> the place. He mentioned having to see a doctor since he retired from the colliery, and then began to get very angry. He accused me of seriously disturbing his return to health, before suddenly hanging up. Perhaps I over-reacted to this jagged torrent of emotion, but I decided then (and still feel now) that I had no right to burst into people's lives without warning, possibly tearing open old wounds and destabilising someone's life. The whole experience was a salutary reminder that the strike was not just a convenient tool for studying class struggle, but also (and primarily) a colossal conflict, with very real human casualties on all sides. Treading a path through the bloody aftermath of battle required greater wariness and sensitivity than I sometimes showed.

From then on, I abandoned attempts to interview people without some sort of initial introduction. My caution was rewarded however by a development so bizarre that I almost allowed it to slip away from me. It was during the 1987 bonus strike (see chapter seven), at about 5.30am, that the breakthrough occurred. I had gone to the picket line at the colliery gates to see how the strike was proceeding, but the last thing I, or the thirty or so NUM loyalists huddled in the chill morning wind expected, was for the UDM (Union of Democratic Mineworkers) to put in an appearance. Four or five

arrived in a car, and nervously took up positions across on the other side of the gate from the pickets, who regarded them with repressed loathing. There was no contact between the two groups. Shivering with a friend from the mechanic's branch, I agonised over what to do. I feared that if I crossed over to the other gate, then I would be forever damned by the pickets. I also felt considerable loyalty to the people I was with. Finally my mind was made up by the mechanic next to me, who told me to stop dithering and take the opportunity - not least because he wanted to know what the "scabs" were thinking!

Maybe because of their isolation, the UDM men were glad to talk to me, notwithstanding my earlier attachment to the pickets 15 metres away. In the end, this totally unpredicted meeting yielded interviews with two key right wing activists, and two other men who broke the strike. My only other contact with a right wing activist came from a letter I wrote to a miner who had been mentioned in interviews with left wing activists. These examples show just how important luck is in defining the practical parameters of intensive research into a subject as emotionally charged as the miners' politics in the post-strike era. There is however at least some sense in the old adage that you make your own luck, because to an extent these contacts were the result of persistently pursuing certain objectives. No doubt if I had been able to spend more time in Murton itself, further contacts would have opened up.

Whilst broadening the scope of my interviews posed consistent problems, and involved many difficult decisions, intensifying the depth of my interviews with "key informants" proved one of the easiest (and most rewarding) aspects of my research. There is a very real sense in which my "choice" of "key informants" was no choice at all. It is impossible to plan for the type of relationships which develop with "key informants". (Indeed, the term itself is for me simply a cumbersome academic gloss for the everyday term "friend".) Whether or not relationships develop, and who they develop with, is essentially not a process amenable to planning. In my research, I was exceptionally fortunate to meet several people whose patience at my endless, often painfully naive, questioning frequently defied the bounds of human tolerance.

My two principle "key informants" were Dave Temple and Frank Duffy; the former a left wing mechanic, the latter a left wing miner. In addition, my

regular Sunday lunchtime visits to the "Inn of Seventh Happiness" produced hours of discussion with several more mechanics, at least some of which was actually related to my research! One very serious objection emerges however from this pattern of intensive contacts. My two key informants are also identified in chapters five, six and seven as two of the key agents of political change in their respective branches. Even the most sympathetic reader is likely to blanch at such a "coincidence". Is this "coincidence" acceptable?

Naturally, I was hardly unaware that I was relying heavily on two of the most prominent figures in Murton politics over the past ten years. I made strenuous efforts therefore to seek out secondary confirmation of their role and analyses. This was not because I doubted their (or anyones elses) word, but simply because I knew that people in different places see things in different ways. Not a few of my interviews outside Murton were inspired by attempts to establish the authenticity (or eccentricity) of views generated by interviews in Murton (not just with key informants).

Using a familiar marxist metaphor, my interviews in Murton were like looking at reality through a series of windows. The view, although varying through each, was still recognisably of the same landscape. Each different view introduced new objects, and at the same time offered different perspectives on more familiar scenes. Just occassionally it was necessary to step outside the house and look back at the whole edifice, to ensure that the structure of the building, and the shape of the glass in the most frequently used windows, were not introducing unwitting distortions to the unfolding image.

What all this is saying is that I made the best efforts I could to counter any possible "bias" created by relying on these particular key informants. Once this had been taken into account, then the information I was able to gain from their enormous knowledge and experience was incalculable. Naturally the same problems arose with other "repeated interviews", but part of the process of repeated interviews was to check various accounts against each other, again to try and assess why someone. should have one account, and another person see the same event differently.

It must by now be clear that my interview coverage was far from exhaustive. Not only was there no attempt at sampling, but I have readily admitted to an activist bias. Who then were the main groups I did not interview, and why were they excluded? Essentially the gaps are (as ever) the result of two interlocking sets of factors, one practical, the other theoretical. Below, I use these factors to examine and explain each of the main gaps in my evidence.

Although I interviewed three people connected with the management of Murton colliery, I have not attempted to offer "management's side of the story" in this thesis. This was a difficult decision, and one I was guilty of largely allowing to make itself. Although the manager of Murton from 1983 until 1987 refused to be interviewed, I could no doubt have made greater efforts to establish contacts on the management side. A reluctance to pursue this option eventually left me without enough material, or time to gather material. There were, of course, formidable practical difficulties in attempting to pursue contacts with management - not least the highly polarised and antagonistic relations between union and management at the pit. In the dense, sometimes claustrophobic, Murton world, it was impossible to keep two lines of research seperate. Management would inevitably discover my close relationship with the NUM. In this situation I felt unable to adopt the chameleon personality necessary to enter two such physically close and yet socially hostile worlds.

It would unquestionably have been advantageous to establish management's view of the events surrounding my research. But only a very few members of management had a long enough historical perspective to cover the ten years research period (I interviewed two of them), and for the reasons above, I lacked the enthusiasm to try and overcome the enormous practical difficulties of exhaustive research in this area.

Also missing from my account is the supervisory union, NACODS (National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers). Basically, this ommission was simply a reflection of the questions my research sought to address. Since I was concerned with the changing politics of the NUM in Murton, NACODS assumed only peripheral importance. Once again, there is no doubt that my perspective would have been broadened had I at least spoken

to one or two representatives from NACODS. However, my one serious attempt to achieve this contact with a NACODS representative was not reciprocated, and I let the issue lie.

Without doubt the most serious ommission from my interviews is the women of the mining communities. This can only be defended in terms of the research focus of this thesis, which is to examine the political development of two branches of the NUM. Nevertheless, it is clear that miners' attitudes towards women constitutes a crucial dimension of their politics. Wherever possible I tried to address these questions, by observing interviewees attitudes in speech and practice. However, although I interviewed several women activists from Murton and elsewhere, I was unable to embark on a programme of interviewing women as I did men. The task was beyond me, both in terms of time, but also in terms of my personal capacities. I realised quite early on that I was not equipped theoretically or practically to devise and carry through a meaningful programme of interview questions with women.

Instead, I have tried (in appendix five) to provide a sense of the general way in which sexual politics are inserted into the general political practices prevalent in Murton (and other similar mining communities). With a shortage of my own research material, I have not attempted to recount the specifics of these relationships in Murton. Instead my aim has simply been to show that there is another dimension to the political struggle in Murton, and to suggest the ways in which this second dimension has important implications for the overall question of the struggle against oppression in mining communities. Discovering the particular relationships between the two dimensions of struggle, and in particular, according women's struggle for liberation the equality it deserves, is something I was unable to achieve. It may be that only a woman (or women) can pursue the story of women's struggle against male oppression with the honesty, openness, and thoroughness necessary.

Within the range of miners and mechanics interviewed, certain groups were either completely missing, or seriously under-represented. Within the mechanics, I missed out travellers, which perhaps partially accounts for my favourable interpretation of travellers integration into the mechanics' branch, compared to the miners. In general, I was unable to achieve such a wide coverage across the political spectrum in the mechanics branch as I

was in the miners. This reflected difficulties of access rather than choice.

Putting so much time and emphasis into Murton leaves me exposed to charges of insularity, and mistaking the particular for the general. To counter these charges, I took several opportunities to interview people not directly connected with Murton, but whose activities had, for various reasons, brought them into contact with the place. There is no doubt that these interviews served to put Murton's uniqueness into perspective. But it is also true that there are some obvious ommissions concerning my interviews with "non-Murtonians". In particular, I made no attempt to contact the leadership - past or present - of the DMA (Durham Miners Association). In retrospect, I think this was a mistake. At the time, I felt that I would learn little more than was already common knowledge from press and other reports. Faced with difficult decisions about how to allocate my time, I chose to concentrate on developing links with Murton. But missing the DMA agents off my list of "non-Murton" interviews was basically an arbitrary and unjustified decision.

Other people were not interviewed for more straightforward reasons. Eventually my relationship with the core activist groups at Murton were strong enough to have permitted me to interview many, many more than I finally chose to. My reticence was due to a desire to avoid an account that was too activist centred. I felt after a while that I could go on adding to (right and left) activist accounts forever, with inumerable variations in interpretation being thrown up by each interview. Instead I chose to stick at a certain point, and trust that I had captured most of the competing accounts of events.

On the other hand, some people simply refused to speak to me. In many cases - as examples above make clear - this was understandable.

Of the "key agents" in Murton during the period of my study, there are two noticeable absentees. One is the former miners' branch secretary - John Dixon - who took redundancy after the strike, and was never seen again in Murton. He did not respond to a letter I wrote. The second absentee was the miners' former branch chairman - Rop Naylor - who resigned during the strike, and then became one of the first four men from Murton to go back to work. I deliberately did not try and contact him. Faced with a village

still deeply split, and with Rop an isolated and despised character, I decided that trying to interview him could damage my credibility more than the risk was worth.

It could be argued that I "took sides" with the activists, and that in doing so I allowed my research to be deflected from some of its potentially most probing courses. I freely admit that my sympathies lay with the left wing activists, but it is also true - as is made clear above - that developing relationships is intrinsic to any intensive research strategy. Just like any other relationships, relationships in Murton commanded adaptations and loyalties, as well as delivering rewards. Within the scope of a one person research project, there were real limitations to what could be achieved (Renouf, 1989). Ultimately, these limitations were personal limitations. All I can do faced with such shortcomings, is explain how they came to influence my research findings.

A 1.4.iv USING THE MATERIAL

In chapters five, six and seven, I present the primary research material I collected through 1986 and 1987. In truth however, only a fraction of the material I gathered surfaces in these chapters. Inevitably, the selection process was a difficult one, which also had important implications for the eventual research conclusions. When I finished my interviewing in late 1987, I had collected such an enormous stack of interview notes that before I could begin compiling them into a thesis, I felt I needed to assess exactly what it was I now knew.

Accordingly, I set about writing three reports - one each on Murton before, during and after the strike - which incorporated all the relevant research data I had. They were immense - put together they were about the same length as this entire thesis. Writing them was a cathartic as well as academic exercise. They contained elements of polemic, analysis and straight recording. Pouring out my knowledge and thoughts about Murton in this way began the long process of ordering and theorising what I had discovered. Gradually, the torrent of material began to settle into distinct patterns. Chapters five, six and seven eventually emerged from this process.

When writing, I decided my primary aim was to create a coherent narrative, illustrating and explaining the developments which I felt had emerged from my data collection. To this end, I used material - including quotes - selectively, in order to build up arguments. This does not mean I ignored contradictory evidence. On the contrary, I was always painfully aware of such contradictions. Given that I could not reproduce my most important data sources (interview tapes), the reader has to take on trust that I have tried scrupulously to maintain my intellectual integrity when presenting my evidence. I accept however, that in all probability I have unwittingly missed important points, and made false interpretations. I can see no way around this in so solitary a piece of work as a PhD.

Only one other ameliorative measure was available. I could have attempted to distribute drafts of my reports among "key informants" in Murton. But even if people had been willing to read and respond to such massive reports, I was extremely reluctant to release them, for several reasons. First, they were raw and unrefined. Some statements might have provoked strong emotions. Secondly, in order to "set things straight" in my own mind, I used real names throughout. Breaches of confidentiality would have abounded if these reports had enjoyed general circulation. Thirdly, whilst spraying reports around Murton would undoubtedly have stimulated further material, this could have delayed the writing process by many months.

A 1.4.v PRESENTATIONAL NOTES

Using tape recorded interviews in a written thesis is not easy. Where quotes appear, they are the actual words used by the interviewee, except for slight changes made to tidy up sentences (for example, "you know" - a characteristic phrase in the spoken word - is usually dropped). I have also translated vernacular Geordie into "straight" English, to improve readability. I have used conventional square brackets to enclose my own words of explanation, and three dots to mark a break in the text. In some cases I have changed names and made small alterations to biographical details to preserve anonymity. Although space limitations precluded using more than a small fraction of my interview material in the main body of the thesis, I have placed considerably more interview material in the appendices. The appendices should therefore be read as supplements to the chapters they are referenced for.

Various practical difficulties intruded on the process of actually writing the thesis. In particular, the need to find a career and earn some money after six years on student grants, followed by six months on income support, led me to take a seven month job in television before finishing writing up. I completed this thesis during a three month break from my job. In practice this meant that my cut-off point for research and for considering new published material was the end of 1988. Increasingly PhD's are going to be completed under this kind of intense pressure as research students struggle to make ends meet financially, and are consequently compelled to jump at opportunities in the labour market.

A 1.5 METHODOLOGY AND THEORY

I have provided this fairly exhaustive account of the process of data collection because I recognise that my research findings could be seen by some people as a simple consequence of a flawed research strategy. I have shown that this is not the case. Instead, I have demonstrated the crucial interaction between theory and methodology. My research questions were defined by the theoretical constructs I brought to the thesis. (Nowhere is this more clear than in the choice of Murton itself as the single case study.) At the same time however, theory was modified as I reflected on the outcomes of data collection, and discussed them with people in Murton and elsewhere.

Also, my theoretical approach directed me towards an intensive research methodology (see discussion in Massey and Meegan, 1985), which at the same time had implications for the further development of my theoretical position. Defining the central question of my research as the processes determining political change in two union branches pushed me towards flexible, intensive research methods which would allow sensitive investigation of a wide range of sometimes nebulous factors which impinged on the political process. This approach then provided the raw material upon which I subsequently based my interpretation of what happened at Murton over the period of study. Had I used questionairres then this would have reflected (for example) a theoretical framework which was predicated upon fairly mechanistic link between different factors and political change. At the same time, the results would have missed the continual interaction between events, and the actions and understandings of different agents, thereby tending to reinforce the orginal theoretical assumptions.

My purpose in the first four chapters of this thesis was to set up the theoretical space in which to locate my analysis of Murton. Since the exact object of my study - in terms of the questions I sought to address - changed throughout my three years of research, so did the nature of my theoretical excursions. Establishing the relationships between theory and evidence is often the hardest task in research, as the analysis moves from abstract generalisations to the confusion of the particular. I found the same difficulties as I attempted to track from movements in the international economy, through national historical resolutions of class struggle, down to the level of one small mining settlement in County Durham.

More importantly, I wanted to move in the other direction too. Now this is difficult, because Murton is clearly only one part of the cumulative pressures exerted by miners - and by the working class in general - on the British state, which in turn is only one of many nation states affecting the trajectory of capitalist development globally. By the time the level of international capitalism is reached, the specific influence of Murton is - to put it mildly - rather diffuse. Therefore, only by situating Murton within these broader struggles can any relationship between levels be sustained. Murton has no special significance in the miners' struggle, but isolating the way in which it changed can say important things about the extent to which conscious agents are able to influence the direction of class struggle in a particular place. At the same time, limits imposed by historical conditions can be explored in practice. Understanding - and ultimately changing - the course of capitalist development depends on making conscious and purposive the actions of workers engaged in struggle.

Table A 1.1: SAMPLE OF BASIC QUESTIONS FOR "ONE-OFF" INTERVIEWS[7]

```
Personal details

Where born?  When?
Family background:
 - Parental occupation
 - Family home
```

```
Work history

Where and when started work?
Work other than coalmining?
   (reasons for returning to the pits?)
What sort of work done at the pit?
Other collieries worked at?
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Working at Murton (prior to the strike)

Attitudes to work - a "pitman"?
What were working conditions like?
How tough was management?
   (overmen, undermanagers, manager)
Involvement in disputes?
   (strikes, restrictions, overtime bans)
   (over what?)
```

```
The union at Murton

Involvement in the union?
Did you attend union meetings?
What was the union leadership like?
   (effectiveness in dealing with management)
Was there a cavilling system?
How did you react to 1966 introduction of NPLA?
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1972 and 1974 strikes

Did you support the 1972 strike?
Did you go picketing?
   (What were the police like?)
What did you think of the NUM leadership?
(Same questions for 1974)
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[7]This table constitutes a kind of composite of core questions. It does not list all the questions I asked in an interviewe. Similarly, the way the questions were framed differed according to the interviewee.

The incentive scheme

Did you vote for the incentive scheme?
Do you think it has been a good thing?
What do you think about the way it was introduced?
Did it lead to more disputes?

Experience/impact of travellers/transferees

What effect did the transferees have?
  eg Kelloe
     Blackhall   EXPAND
     South Hetton
(Why did you decide to transfer?
   - rather than take redundancy?
   - reaction to Murton?
   - would you make the same decision again?)

Immediate background to the strike

Questions about:
   - Scargill's election
   - High unemployment
   - impact of Thatcherism
   - appointment of MacGregor
   - three ballots
   - Scottish and South Wales protests
      (Kinneil and Lewis Merthyr)
   - 1983 overtime ban
   - changing atmosphere at the pit?

Start of the strike

Reaction to Cortonwood?
What should the union have done?
Ballot?
Which way would you have voted?
Attendance at Murton meetings?
Why did you join the strike?
How long did you think it would be?

The strike

What did you do during the strike?
(If picketing, then a series of questions about experiences)
What effects did talks and breakdowns have?
What was stopping a settlement?
What should the government have done?
How did you cope financially?
Where did you get support from?
  (family, friends, community, union)
Who did you spend your time with during the strike?
What were their attitudes to the strike?
What did you think of media coverage?
Did you consider going back to work?
(If yes, then a series of questions about this. If no, why not?)

```
After the strike

What was the atmosphere like at the pit?
Did you consider redundancy?
What were your attitudes to the union?
Questions about recent events at the pit
  (1986 day of action, 1987 bonus strike, etc)
Attitudes now?
```

APPENDIX TWO: THE COAL INDUSTRY 1947-1974

This appendix expands on the post-war history of the coal industry up until 1974. It explains in more detail how nationalisation served the interests of capital (for example in smoothing pit closures), but how at the same time, the consensus arrangements of the 1940's, '50's and '60's contained their own contradictions for the NUM and the state. An incorporated union could not deliver industrial peace at the point of production, which was one stimulus behind the development of a national wages structure. The National Power Loading Agreement aimed (among other things) to remove wage bargaining from the pit to the more accomodative level of national negotiations. But this had the effect of channeling militancy away from the face and into political campaigning in the union.

A 2.1 NATIONALISATION AND THE POST WAR CONSENSUS

By the end of the war, the clamour for nationalisation of the coal industry had reached irresistible proportions. But nationalisation was on the way to assuming the status of a consensus policy even before the war. In 1938 coal royalties were effectively nationalised by a Conservative government, which forced through compulsory amalgamation powers for a new Coal Commission in the same Bill (Eldon Barry, 1965). At issue was the inefficiency of the industry.

> "[T]he Bill... had the backing of the Government and
> The Times, both acting on behalf of what may be called
> the fourth vested interest - the body of industrialists
> in general, who regarded the inefficiency of the
> coalmining industry as a drag on the whole economy."
> (Eldon Barry, 1965, 356)

By the end of the war, nationalisation was seen by British capital as the only solution to the seemingly intractable inefficiency of the coal industry. The wartime Reid Report had clinically and relentlessly documented the inefficiency and wasteage predominating in the industry (Heinemann, 1944). For capital therefore, drastic reorganisation of the coal industry was essential. Nationalisation became the only solution to these problems because the wartime effort had consolidated a firm consensus around the slogan "Never again!".

> "'Never again!' meant, above all, no return to mass
> unemployment, distressed areas, malnutrition, and the

> other ills of capitalist anarchy. In 1945 no political
> party dared to suggest dismantling of state controls
> such as happened in 1919." (Eldon Barry, 1965, 370)

For the working class, the post war era heralded the enactment of a long cherished dream. On January 1st 1947 - Vesting Day - private ownership of the coal mines ended.

Yet it quickly became clear that nationalisation represented considerably less than the miners' long cherished dream. Despite repeated exhortations from their union leaders, miners realised that fundamentally things hadn't changed. The work was still the same, and the same bosses enforced the same discipline (see Dennis et al, 1969). For the state the problem was how to deal with a potentially militant and very powerful workforce. The state aimed to blunt that militancy and power by incorporating the (newly formed) NUM leadership in a corporatist consensus. NUM leaders urged discipline and effort on their members in order to make nationalisation work, but the new regime was working for capital, not the miners.

Throughout the 1940's and 50's, at a time when the shortage of coal and high market prices would have enabled the NCB to make a comfortable profit, pay off its debts and finance its own investment (eg the 1950 Plan For Coal), the NCB was forced by the government to keep the price of coal well below the market value (Allen, 1981, 104). During this period demand for coal consistently outstripped supply (Hall, 1981). As well as refusing to allow the NCB to exploit its market position, the government instructed the NCB to buy expensive imports and sell them at UK prices, forcing the NCB to bear the loss (NCB Annual Report, 1965/6 in Allen, 1981, 104). At the same time as fuel shortages persisted at home, the NCB was also required to continue to export coal, to help shore up Britain's balance of payments situation. This was consistent with the concept of nationalisation which emerged from the limited programme of takeovers initiated by the 1945 Labour government. The implications - accepted by Conservative and Labour governments, and significant sections of the trade unions - were that nationalisation was aimed at supporting the competitiveness of the economy as a whole (Hudson, 1986, 13).

Furthermore, opposition from the only major opponent of nationalisation - the coal owners - was reduced to tokenism when the compensation terms became known. In the end a staggering £394 million total compensation was

paid (Ashworth, 1986, 28) - at a time when miners were paid around £300 a year! To meet the bill the NCB were compelled to borrow the money necessary to pay back the owners (from the government), and the interest payment on this loan helped turn an operating profit into an overall loss in 5 of the first 10 years following nationalisation (NCB annual reports).

As well as these financial restrictions, after 1950 the NCB embarked on an ambitious investment programme to modernise the industry. Interest charges therefore further increased as the NCB tried to reconstruct the hopelessly backward industry bequeathed by the private owners with further borrowing from the government. In 1950, after two years of maximising output from existing resources to meet endemic fuel shortages, the NCB began to plan its long term strategy. A "Plan For Coal" was published in 1950, envisaging £486 million of investment (at 1950 prices), in order to begin reducing production costs (RPRU, 1979, 15-19). Inflation pushed the costs higher than anticipated, and by the first revision of the Plan ("Investing in Coal") in 1956, estimated capital costs were £1000 million. These were reduced in 1959 to £825 million (NCB, 1959, 15).

Throughout the period 1947-57 the formal labour relations of the industry remained placid. The NUM was dominated by an authoritarian right wing leadership which stamped on dissent, and maintained a rigid loyalty to the concept of nationalisation long after disillusionment had settled over the membership. The state aimed for incorporation, and succeeded with the leaders of the NUM. But as chapter three showed, this strategy risked dislocating the leadership from the rank and file to such an extent that the membership rebelled. This is what eventually happened in the coal industry.

Despite official labour relations tranquility, unofficial disputes dominated the industry throughout the 1950's and 60's. In 1956, 78.4% of all strikes in Great Britain occurred in coal mining (Allen, 1981, 90). This spectacular militancy was concentrated almost exclusively at the point of production. Most disputes were over wages and conditions, and were highly localised, sometimes only involving a small section of the workforce within one pit. Only rarely did disputes flare up into major strikes (see Slaughter, 1958 for an example). When they did, the official union leadership offered only unwavering opposition to the strikers. Confronted with such hostility, most strikes quickly petered out. Yet the biggest were

in effect strikes by the rank and file against their own leadership - they were attempts by the membership to force the leadership to take their grievances seriously (ibid).

A 2.2 WAGES, MILITANCY AND CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY

Rank and file militancy therefore continued despite official union hostility[1]. At the root of this militancy lay two common factors. First, no matter what the technology, mining remained an appallingly dangerous and oppressive job (see Pitt, 1979; Douglass, 1972 and Krieger, 1983 for some historical descriptions). To combat both aspects, miners devised complicated work rules and effort norms (Krieger, 1983), enforced by strong peer group pressure, and internalised within a powerful ideology reproduced through "tradition". This involved trespassing on managements sacred "right to manage", and ensured that a continual battle for control was waged underground. Acting as combatants for management were deputies and overmen - first line supervision. The nature of coal mining conferred significant advantages on miners in their struggle to maintain control of their working environment (see Douglass, 1972). Such advantages were boosted by technological factors - miners were a classic example of the pattern Marx identified whereby skilled workers are able to defend considerable autonomy, and build up resistance to management control.

Secondly, the coal industry was dominated by piece rates. Piece rates were closely related to the (backward) technology of coal getting. Without them, managers feared that workers would simply not apply themselves to such arduous work. They offered several advantages to management. In particular, piece rates obstructed the development of anything more than a narrow sectional consciousness. They were divisive, often pitting workers in the same pit against each other. Piece rates also functioned as a powerful disciplining tool, ensuring work effort without direct supervision - an

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[1]It should be noted that levels of militancy varied markedly between regions, with Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland traditionally recording the highest levels of strike activity. In contrast, the Midlands, North East and North West were relatively peaceful (McCormick, 1979, 158-159).

especially significant characteristic in the dark and secret world of underground mining where supervisors could not see most of what went on.

But piece rates had several disadvantages for management. Under piecework, each group of workers bargained seperately over a host of allowances and extras (see Dennis et al, 1969 and Slaughter, 1958). This encouraged militancy at the coal face, as wages were directly affected by such action. In turn, this left the NCB wages bill susceptible to "wages drift" (or "drive"), as well organised groups of workers were able to extract material concessions from managements which wanted to avoid breaks in production.

By the 1960's, wages "drive" had been identified as a major problem for British capital (see Donovan, 1968, Hyman, 1975). The state was seeking ways to curb the problem. And technological development intervened to further increase pressure on the NCB to rationalise its wages system. By the early 1960's, Plan For Coal investment had dramatically increased the amount of power loaded coal (from 3.8% in 1950 to 85.7% in 1966/7 - Kelly, 1969, 137). The Anderton Shearer Loader (ASL) was revolutionising underground mining, leading to prodigious leaps in productivity (Kelly, 1969). Increasingly production was "machine led", and the NCB felt that a wages system based on "payment by results" was inappropriate when the major factor controlling production was relatively independant of individual effort (Ashworth, 1986, 292-293; Krieger, 1983; Rutledge 1977).

Ending piece rates had been an objective of the NUM for years, but it wasn't until the NCB started showing an interest that progress was made. The unions aim was to unify workers across the country and ensure that whatever the conditions, men doing the same job would get the same pay. The National Power Loading Agreement (signed in 1966) appeared to achieve just this. Accomodative national union leadership enabled the NCB to strictly control annual wage negotiations, and local disputes withered to a tiny fraction of pre NPLA days.

Technological changes therefore led to a revolution in the process of coal mining, and this revolution stiulated a complete reorganisaiton of the wages structure. Investment in new and reconstructed mines began producing results just at the time when demand was falling due to competition from imported oil in the electricity generating market. Other factors also contributed to declining markets; the 1956 Clean Air Act reduced domestic

consumption, railway useage fell sharply as cheaper diesel locomotives replaced steam, oil replaced coal in the chemical industry. Pits began to close at an unprecedented rate (see tables 4.1 and 4.2). In the peripheral coalfields like Durham, Scotland, Northumbria and South Wales, contraction was particularly acute.

A 2.3 PIT CLOSURES

Patterns of closure were not however purely a reflection of unfavourable geological "facts". Instead, they represented the effects of conscious technological decisions taken by the NCB. In the 1950's the NCB decided on a strategy of maximising output from the most geologically favourable locations to create a modern, efficient, low unit cost industry (Tomaney, 1988). Technological investment reflected these criteria, as no serious effort was made to develop and apply machinery that would have improved working conditions in thin seam conditions. Effectively therefore the NCB strategy heaped further economic advantages on the most geologically favoured collieries and areas (RPRU, 1979). Throughout the 1960's this led to a concentration of closures in the oldest coal mining districts of the country. Many miners trekked in to the still buoyant "Central" coalfields of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, forming a new generation of "industrial gypsies". Countless millions of tonnes of coal were sterilised in the "peripheral" coalfields.

Although there were sporadic, isolated attempts to oppose closures the union leadership took firm action to crush rank and file opposition (Allen, 1981, 68-69). Instead union leaders placed their faith in the election of a Labour government. In opposition, Labour promised to restore the flagging fortunes of the industry. But when Harold Wilson took power in 1964, his government continued Conservative policy towards the industry (Taylor, 1984, 54). Essentially this involved a laissez faire approach, where coal could only survive if it became cost competitive with other fuels. Labour's manifesto committment to aim for an annual output of 200 Mt was unceromoniously abandoned, to be replaced with the 1965 National Plan figure of 170/180 Mt (Taylor, 1984, 54). And the real agenda seemed to be the total demolition of the domestic coal industry in favour of oil and nuclear power (Sweet, 1985). In the years 1965/6-68/9, 200 pits closed down - about one a week for four years! (Hall, 1981).

The NCB's financial situation was precarious, mainly because of the interest burden, and also due to government price restrictions in the 1950's which prevented the NCB from building up financial reserves to help it through difficult times (NCB, 1966; quoted in Allen, 1981, 104). In 1965 the government agreed to a massive financial reconstruction for the NCB. At this time the NCB still owed £339.1 million of the original £394 million load it needed to pay off the old coal owners (Ashworth, 1986, 276)! A variety of other factors combined to create a massive debt burden, which in turn fuelled escalating interest payments (see Ashworth, 1986, 274-279). The government wrote off £415 million of the total debt, which reduced interest payments by £21.5 million. Other measures further eased the financial situation, and the government also offered state subsidies on redundancy payments (Ashworth, 1986, 278-279). But the financial package was dependant on pit closures continuin.

As demand for coal continued to decline, and wages slipped below the relatively high levels of the 1950's, morale in the industry - particularly the peripheral coalfields - collapsed. Once it became clear that the union hierarchy was acquiescing to the closure programme, resistance to closures proved impossible to sustain (Allen, 1981, 68-69). Men left the industry in thousands, convinced that it was racing to complete extinction (Hall, 1982). Cleaner, better paid jobs beckoned as the government attempted to counter the worst effects of pit closures with regional aid.

However, although industrial relations in the industry appeared tranquil, the enormous changes of the preceding 10 years had created the foundations for the growth of "mass militancy" (Rutledge, 1977), as miners had fallen behind the wages achieved by plant bargaining in the manufacturing sector (Winterton, 1985a). By the late 1960's, the NCB was forced to make thousands of miners redundant (rather than relocating them) as possibilities for relocation dried up (Allen, 1981, 136-137) Unemployment outside the coal industry was rising, so leaving the industry for alternative employment became difficult.

> "Those who were dissatisfied with their conditions of
> work lost the option of leaving the industry easily and
> had to stay and tolerate them or to struggle
> collectively to improve them." (Allen, 1971, 137)

A 2.4 NATIONAL STRIKE ACTION

A collaborative NUM leadership had accepted derisory wage increases, and miners had fallen well down the pay league (Allen, 1981, 100-101). In Yorkshire, a militant workforce was beginning to rebel against the authoritarian right wing area leadership (Allen, 1981, 137-140). The national wages structure (which had its roots in the shift to power loading) was a major factor, since it forced miners to direct their militancy away from local management towards the national arena (Rutledge, 1977; Krieger, 1983). Increases in wages could no longer be won by sectional action at the point of production. The NPLA also united miners to a hitherto unprecedented degree, since it equalised wages across the country. Wages grievances were now inherently national issues, affecting all workers similarly. And since the NPLA's method of equalising wages was to hold down wage increases in well paid areas to enable miners in lower paid areas to catch up, normally "moderate" areas such as Nottingham were also infected by the new militancy, as they saw their standards of living declining rapidly (Ashworth, 1986, 305).

This new militancy was both expressed and advanced with the successful campaign to elect Lawrence Daly as Will Paynter's replacement as General Secretary of the NUM in 1968. Anger in the coalfields boiled over for the first time in 1969, over the unlikely issue of surface workers hours. A chaotic, unplanned strike over surface workers hours and wages spread from Yorkshire to Scotland, South Wales, Derbyshire, Nottingham, Kent and the Midlands, involving 130000 miners from 140 pits (Allen, 1981, 152-159). Although unsuccessful in strictly material terms, it marked the beginning of a new phase in the NUM's history. The rank and file were fighting back.

Yorkshire again proved the powerhouse in 1970, when a second unofficial strike threatened to envelop the industry (Ashworth, 1986, 302-303). For four weeks sporadic and bitter action spread and then receded in reaction to a 55% rejection of the NCB's pay claim (66.6% was required for a strike mandate). But by now one further ingredient had changed. The Labour Party had been replaced in government by a virulently anti-trade union Conservative administration. Right wing leaders no longer felt constrained not to strike out of loyalty to "their" government. In 1971 the NUM annual conference changed the union rules so only a 55% majority was required in ballots over strike action. Later that year the NCB's response to the unions pay claim provoked an overtime ban, followed by a ballot, which achieved a 58.8% majority for strike action. On January 9th 1972 the miners

began their first national and official strike since 1926. Seven weeks later they returned to work triumphant after one of the most significant working class victories of the century (see Pitt, 1979 for a graphic account of the strike).

In 1974 the miners struck again. United as never before, they struck to regain the wages status they felt their job demanded. Caught in an economic crisis, the Heath government appeared to panic, and lost the general election which it called (in the hope of capitalising on anti-union sentiment - see Crouch, 1982, 83). At the same time, the left wing made noteable advances within the union, particularly in the previously right wing Yorkshire area (Taylor, 1984). However, the success of the left wing explosion contained contradictions, carrying with it the risk that the left would prove susceptible to the same structural pressures towards incorporation which engulfed the union's right wing.

In the events leading up to the 1972 strike there are important points of contact with arguments established in chapter three. During the 1950's and 60's, the union leadership pursued collaborative policies, similar to those discussed by Offe and Wiesenthal (1980). They were driven to secure "external guarantees" as a method of resolving the contradiction between the need to have a membership which it could mobilise, and one which it could at the same time control. The state encouraged this process by proving accomadative to providing their external guarantees. Also however, some of the contradictions of this strategy are revealed, as the leadership struggled throughout the 1960's to pursue policies which maintained credibility with their membership. Their demobilised membership still experienced exploitation, and although many reacted by pursuing individual solutions - for example, leaving the industry or transferring - those that were left were forced to develop collective strategies to cope.

Furthermore, as the NCB attempted to cope with historic problems of wages drive (and constant local strike disruption) promoted by an archaic wages system of byzantine complexity, they unknowingly sowed the seeds for a united union (Krieger, 1983). Technological changes suggested solutions to sectional wages militancy, but contained unforeseen contradictions. And in a more diffuse manner, technological change contributed to the breakdown of NUM/NCB consensus by stimulating massive pit closures. This in turn helped create a growing swell of bitterness and resentment, which finally found

expression in wages militancy. These changing material circumstances called forth a new brand of leadership in the union - the left won significant advances, especially in Yorkshire. In other words, union bureaucracies proved themselves susceptible to pressure from the rank and file. But the way that the rank and file rebelled against the policies of compromise was structured by historical circumstances - it was a rebellion embedded with its own historically derived contradictions. This was seen particularly in the different ways that the 1972 and 1974 strikes developed.

The 1972 strike was significant for the extent to which grass roots mobilisation dominated proceedings. In areas like Yorkshire the strike was effectively run by informal grass roots committees, centred on the "Panel" system (Taylor, 1984, 176-179). This reflected the "unfinished revolution" then underway. The NPLA redirected faceworkers militancy away from sectional disputes at the point of production to putting fierce pressure on the union's national leadership (Rutledge, 1977, 421). This pressure led to the forceful wage demands pushed through NUM conferences in the early 70's, and also sustained a militant determination to prosecute strike action in their support. Vigorous and uninhibited picketing, combined with an uncompromising attitude to safety cover in many areas, demonstrated the extent to which rank and file anger and determination had built up.

With such pressure from below, national and area leaders were compelled to organise the strike effectively. They realised that success depended on blacking alternative fuels, and set about organising the picketing of power stations and other major coal users. Given this support from their leadership, the rank and file quickly evolved their own picketing organisation, exceeding all expectations in their committment and resourcefulness. Where right wing leaders still held office, they found their authority bypassed as pickets took unofficial control of the strike. Yorkshire was the engine house of the strike, and of the changes then going on. Although nominally still controlled by the right, the explosion of militancy made a left wing takeover inevitable.

By 1974, this takeover had occurred. Arthur Scargill had been elected President of the Yorkshire Area in 1973, following his earlier election as Compensation Agent, and as an NEC member (in 1972). Owen Briscoe was elected General Secretary, and Peter Tait an NEC member, completing a drastic reversal of political leadership in the previously right dominated

area. The example of Yorkshire is worth quoting, because there are certain noteable similarities with what happened in Durham over 10 years later. Here too, a deeply entrenched right wing leadership came under increasing pressure as rank and file anger built up. Unofficial left wing organisation succeeded in pushing the right wing into action, and after the strike, succeeded in replacing them with their own nominees.

Changed leadership was one of the factors that created a markedly different climate around the 1974 strike. This time the union leadership attempted to demobilise the membership as much as possible, trying hard not to embarrass the Labour Party in the throes of a general election campaign.

> "It was clear that on this occassion they wanted to avoid the spontaneity of 1972, the relative autonomy of local strike committees and the confrontations. This time they wanted to control the strike from the national centre so that they could determine tactics and regulate its sdope. They planned from the outset to contain the strike and, in so far as it was possible, to give it a respectable image." (Allen, 1981, 140)

Victory in 1974 was less dependant on the actions of rank and file miners, and more related to higher level political maneuverings. In the short term, these were successful, as a highly politically motivated government lost an election over a strike which its actions had provoked, and which it had then attempted to politicise.

A 2.5 CONCLUSION

Up until 1974 the coal industry was firmly established at the centre of the PWS. The union leadership looked to the state to secure its interests, and the membership were encouraged to believe that its interests could be met within the state. Even the 1972 and 1974 strikes did not seriously challenge this view, because they resulted in substantial victories for the union, and led to the PFC which further consolidated the belief that miners interests lay in securing "deals" thought the state, rather than challenging the wage relation itself. This corporatist legacy had strong implications for the way in which the miners later fought to defend their jobs.

APPENDIX 3 WHAT FUTURE FOR CLASS POLITICS?

In 1983, writers on the left were struggling to come to terms with two successive NUM ballot rejections for strike action over pit closures. If the shock troops of the labour movement couldn't be mobilised in defence of jobs, then who could?

> "To imagine that people will sacifice their livelihoods on the un-evidenced assurances of their leadership is to misread the relationship between leaders and troops and to misunderstand the rationality of working-class action... The miners were offered three reasons for voting for a strike [in 1983]: in memory of those who had built the union; for their families; and 'as men', who have a duty to stand up and fight. Glowing sentiments. And yet, in their backward trajectory, their familial and masculinist assumptions, those words fall on my ears as archaic. The cause is correct. The langauage is a dying one." (Hall, 1983, quoted in Miliband, 1985, 23)

Writing at the same time, Dave Temple - a pit activist at Murton - offered a different interpretation.

> "The miners have lost a battle, but in no way have they lost the war... The major struggle is only in its beginning. The important lessons from the ballot have nothing to do with whether miners will fight or not. Whatever the moods of this or that group of individuals, they have no alternative...
> "Miners and other workers are going to have to struggle because British capitalism intends to cut its costs of labour to the bone and break the working class organisations. It has steadily prepared the army, the police and its other state organisations for this and it is setting its legal framework in the Police Bill and anti-union laws." (Temple, 1983; 56)

These two quotes sum up a fierce debate which was already raging on the left between "new realists"[1] and those who - from a variety of perspectives - rejected the new philosophy. Because of their symbolic association as archetypes of both the post war settlement and proletarian class consciousness, NUM politics attracted attention beyond their material

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[1] I use the term here to describe a broad swathe of opinion from Neil Kinnock through to the Communist Party - people who share a belief in the need to reorientate Socialism away from its traditional class base to a shifting assemblage of non class based alliances. See the rest of this chapter for further discussion.

significance. Anyone proclaiming the end of an era or the beginning of a new one searched for some seminal change in NUM fortunes to offer definitive proof of the most fundamental changes. It is in this context that Stuart Hall's comments above should be located.

For Hall, old class politics were dying. Not only were they dying, but there was no hope of resurrection. Defeatism prevailed. Then - out of the blue - came the 1984/5 strike. As Dave Temple and other activists in the pits had predicted, the miners had no choice in the end but to fight. But how did the new realists see the most epic struggle in Britain since 1926? For the most part they were strangely silent[2]. The strike seemed to an embarrassment to them. It contradicted their clean cut theories about the decline of class politics. So heads stayed down. When they finally started bobbing above the parapet again - a decent interval after the end of hostilities - it was to begin the arduous task of appropriating the strike to their own ideology.

In fact, it turned out to be not so difficult. After all, the miners were defeated. To the new realists, the miners were a sad reminder that in Thatcher's Britain, mass working class strike action was doomed to inevitable failure. If a miners' strike couldn't beat the government, then it proved that no strike could. With the working class fragmented and divided, no longer tied to notions of collective solidarity, the old ways of mobilising would have to be replaced. Locally based campaigns organised on non-class lines moved to the forefront. In the workplace, new realists urged accomodation and flexibility on workers. Positive aspects of capitalist initiatives - like "flexible specialisation" - should be supported.

"New realism" is a difficult philosophy to tie down. Because it has become almost a pejorative term, many people are unwilling to be identified with

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[2]Apart from those whose leadership roles in the NUM compelled them to take up militant positions in an attempt to put themselves back at the head of the rank and file explosion which generated the strike. The general silene was typified by Marxism Today - the theoretical journal of the Communist Party, and a leading organ of new realist thought - which managed just one round table discussion on the strike during its 12 month duration.

it (Neil Kinnock is a noteable exception). In union terms, new realism is associated with the business unionism of the EEPTU and the AEU (Bassett, 1986). But many other unions are now engaging in substantial reassessments of strategy, which involve elements of "new realism". Within the NUM the issues have polarised around attempts by Communist Party leaders in the South Wales and Scottish areas to accept greater flexibility in the union's approach to management (chapter seven).

Intellectually, new realism has its roots in the Communist Party's attempts to analyse the success of Thatcherism in the late '70's and early '80's[3] (see in particular Hall and Jacques, 1983). They saw Thatcherism as a novel political phenomena which had been able to generate a new "common sense" around particular ideological issues. As such, it needed to be tackled on the same ideological plane. This theme has been coupled with an economic debate which has heralded the end of Fordism, and the transition to a "post-fordist" era[4]. This supposedly epochal change further signalled the end of "old-fashioned" class struggle, because some aspects of post-fordism brought benefits to workers and were therefore worth embracing.

Perhaps the most definitive and radical statement of the "new realism" is provided by the Communist Party's (CP) "Manifesto for New Times" (CPGB, 1989). Despite the numerical insignificance of the CP, the document is important as the distillation of a determined attempt over the last 10 years by those on the left who have sought to reorientate the labour movement away from its old class base. It is also important because the CP retains a political influence out of proportion to its size.

The CP's argument rests on the need to create a broad popular alliance to defeat Thatcherism. This alliance should mobilise people via a multiplicity of shifting agendas and movements. These movements should in turn reflect the renewal of radical thought in the late 1980's, moving with the grain of the "new times", rather than searching for the illusory security of the

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[3]Although the business unionism of Hammond, Jordan et al was rooted more in opportunistic pragmatism than intellectual inquiry.

[4]See for example; Aglietta, 1979; Leborgne and Liepitz, 1988; Schoenberger, 1988; Scott, 1988. For a critique see Tomaney, 1988; Clarke, 1988.

old. The peace movement, the green movement, gay rights and women's struggles have all mobilised people in new ways, across class divisions. Allied with a transformed Labour Party and modernised trade union movement, these are the forces which can transform society (CPGB, 1989).

But nowhere does the manifesto tackle the decisive questions of state power and capitalist ownership. The questions which have loomed so large not only during the miners' strike but in a series of diputes during the Thatcher years - for example, Wapping, the seamen at Dover, the docks - are left not only unanswered, but even unasked. Time and again the document paints a bold and attractive vision of the future, without ever suggesting how capitalist corporations and state opposition are to be overcome. There is a lot of talk about what should be, but not how to get there. As a consequence it is a gloriously utopian vision of how things might be, if...

In the document's only statement on the means of achieving their proposed economic transformation, three ways of overcoming opposition are outlined. First by building the "broadest possible popular consensus around the need for those changes" (26). Secondly by using the "initiative and conviction of people", particularly in the labour movement. Thirdly, economic change will be accompanied by progressive democratisation of other areas of society, like the state and the media, "which will help to diserse power though society and break up existing undemocratic concentrations of power" (26). But all of these suggestions presuppose that the really difficult battles have already been won - employers are on the defensive and state power has been shackled. Every goal the CP suggests, every policy they advocate is painted with a yawning hole in the centre of the analysis - what to do if change is resisted.

Nobody on the left can seriously argue against the proposition that Socialist politics needs to take more seriously emerging social movements such as the Greens, feminism and anti-racism. Few would dispute that what we aim for is a society which "widens and deepens the the quality of life" (2); which invests in "skills, science and technology and the social environment, through mutual support for child rearing, education, and health" (2); and which encourages creativity "through greater involvement of people in taking the decisions which affect them" (3). What is so disturbing about the CP's argument is the illusions it peddles about the availibility of these aims.

To take just one example, particularly relevant to this thesis. Arguing that trade union bargaining is one of six areas where the means exist to achieve their goals, the Manifesto goes on to argue that:

> "A major agenda for the unions should be to press for production to be oriented more around the needs of women and domestic work, through child-care facilities, more flexible working time, career breaks with guaranteed jobs at the end, women's training and career advice." (26)

Amen to that! Furthermore, with pressure from employers to reorganise production to make the best use of new technology,

> "the unions must meet the employers' agenda with pressure to reduce and reorganise working time to suit workers' needs. Unions could for instance, press for long-term deals to include employment security clauses in exchange for more flexible working practices."
> (26-27)

But what if employers refuse to accede to these ostensibly reasonable requests? They are after all not new ideas. When the NUM tried to negotiate a new technology agreement with the NCB along just such lines in the late 1970's, management refused even to discuss the NUM's proposition. Similarly the port employers are busy tearing up the dockworkers "employment security clauses" with some gusto even as I write. For the CP, in the same way that the miners' strike was a "heroic" relic of a byegone age (ibid, 11), any industrial struggle to defend hard won rights is an embarrassment because it focusses attention on the hole at the centre of their analysis - power!

Undoubtedly Thatcherism has been successful in reshaping the experience of class in Britain today. Class divisions are more antagonistic than for a generation, but workers consciousness of themselves as a class is weak. Changes within capitalist organisation, combined with the active strategies of the state (chapter 2) have fundamentally decomposed the working class in Britain, opening up strong divisions between different types of workers, and weakening the base for solidarity even among traditional manufacturing employees. The miners' strike was an attempt to defend a particular notion of class, and its defeat effectively brought the curtain down on that kind of institutionalised class politics. But whilst that means the end of a particular state guaranteed class consensus, it by no means signifies the end of the struggle to defend and advance workers rights. And that struggle involves many elements which were to the forefront in the miners' strike -

for example, the defence of hard won conditions, the need for a collective identity, and for mobilisation to embrace the whole community.

New realists response to these changes is to argue that class no longer provides the fundamental cleavage in society, and that the working class is therefore no longer the major agent of social change in advanced capitalist societies (see for example Cohen, 1982 and Gorz, 1982 and for opposing views Miliband, 1988 and Wood, 1986). Furthermore, they tend to be hostile to strikes and other forms of industrial action. Yet their attempts to identify other agents of social change are unconvincing - shifting alliances between a plurality of pressure groups does not sound like a strategy calculated to put the frighteners on the Conservative Party (never mind international capitalists). They are defeatist strategies because in the end they are not designed to attack capitalism - only to make it work better for the underprivileged. Quite apart from the implied abandonment of workers elsewhere in the world who are excluded from this purely national settlement, the strategy says nothing about why capital and/or the state should feel minded to make such far reaching concessions.

Rejecting class struggle effectively disarms workers. When the CP promote constructive negotiations over industrial confrontation they talk as if the two were mutually exclusive. By all means let us have the most constructive negotiating possible. But let us also do everything in our power to ensure that if those negotiations fail, then the power exists to defend and advance working class interests. Strong working class organisation is necessary for any type of negotiation - as the post strike experience at Murton colliery demonstrates on a micro-scale. Achieving this means building solidarity within the working class, because in the end it is only the working class who have the power to challenge the power of capital and the state. By fighting shy of this struggle, the CP embrace the powerfully corrosive capitalist seperation of workers from "the public", when workers make up the majority of the public. In doing this they legitimate a basic strand of capitalist ideology which serves to make their other arguments over the sectionalism of trade union action self-fulfilling. If workers are seperate from the public, then the way is open for a division of interests between workers and the public, which no amount of attempts to rejoin via joint campaigns of workers and consumers (CPGB, 1989, 27) can overcome (see also Murray, 1988 for an explicit statement about this seperation).

Failure to tackle the central question of power in a capitalist society has fundamental implications for the actual practice of the CP strategy. It means that - faced with an intransigent employer or unresponsive state - workers in struggle are effectively urged to give up. Instead of tackling the hard, hard tasks of re-establishing working class unity, working towards international working class solidarity, and building a strategy to rest economic and political power from the ruling class, new realists are peddling illusions about the possibility of winning fundamental social change within capitalism[5]. By failing to come up with a strategy for dealing with rejection of their demands, the CP says to workers, "change your demands". The only other hope it offers workers is the election of a Labour government. But so committed are they to this objective, that they are unable to resist the Labour Party's collapse into a Thatcherite party with a mild social conscience, because to do so might jeopardise Kinnock's election chances. Truly the politics of despair!

And where the Manifesto - along with Labour and some trade union leaders - talk about seizing the opportunity provided by new developments within industry, they make another serious error. In their haste to move with the tide of the "new times", they take an extraordinarily optimistic view of transformations in the field of production. In particular, the idea that "post-fordism" is destined to bring major improvements in working conditions must be challenged. Not only is the evidence for post-fordism very cloudy (Tomaney, 1989), but focussing on "flexible team working within much smaller, more skilled workforces" (CPGB, 7) obscures British capitalisms principle "modernising" strategy - increasing the rate of exploitation of workers (Tomaney, 1989). On its own, urging workers to seek trade-offs over flexible working also adds to divisions within the working class because even in the few cases where reskilling occurs, it usually does so at the expense of other workers who become marginalised (sub-contracted and part-time employees). Trade-offs may be available for a core of elite workers, but the task for socialists is to build solidarity between powerful core workers and relatively powerless, marginalised employees.

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[5]In this respect, new realism is strikingly similar to the social democratic ideas which informed the post war settlement.

Where does the new realist road lead? Perhaps the most interesting comparison is with the USA. In a thought provoking article comparing the USA air traffic controllers strike in 1981 with the British miners' strike in 1984, Ghilarducci (1986) argues that British labour law is moving decisively towards the American model (see also the response from Northrup [1988], and Ghilarducci's reply [1988]). Since the 1935 passage of the National Labour Relations Act (NLRA), US law has been intimately involved in trade union affairs. Unlike in Britain, where union rights since 1906 were defined in terms of specific immunities, in the USA the NLRA together with powerful subsequent ammendments, have positively specified the scope of legitimate union activity.

The 1947 Taft-Hartley Ammendment was particularly effective in this respect. It banned unions from "striking, boycotting, or taking any concerted action against an employer with whom the union has no contract" (Ghilarducci, 1986, 118). Workers engaging in any secondary action could be sacked. In Britain, the 1980 Employment Act also proscribed secondary action, but aimed penalties against the union rather than the individual. Under US legislation, to secure negotiating rights a workforce must petition the National Labour Relations Board, who may then approve representation.

> "The American law has created a situation where,
> regardless of workers' desires for self organisation,
> the boundaries of collective action are established by
> the employer's size and organisational structure. This
> characteristic represents the difference between the
> liberty and the positive right to organise and strike."
> (ibid, 119)

As with recent British legislation, the law defines the scope of legitimate union activity before workers.

Justification for this lies in the seperation of unions from the public - a seperation enshrined in the Taft-Hartley Act.

> "The Act's preamble declares that its purpose is to
> promote the full flow of commerce and to protect the
> rights of the public in connection with labour
> disputes. American unions were further seperated from
> their members even though workers are the largest
> portion of the 'public'; once the public was identified
> as an entity seperate from workers, unions became
> another bureacracy conflicting with one's life as a
> member of the 'public'." (ibid, 118)

Similar patterns have been followed by the British state, and implicitly endorsed by new realist advocates. Legislation has made secondary action illegal; forced unions to meet stringent balloting conditions before calling legal strikes; banned "political" strikes; and intruded on the internal workings of union affairs. Just as "the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin Acts made class conscious unions illegal" (ibid, 119) in the USA, so the same could be said of Conservative anti-union legislation in Britain.

American legislation effectively increases the tendency towards bureaucratisation within unions, which in turn enhances the seperation of members from their unions[6]. Gramsci's point - noted in chapter three - that unions organise workers according to the "contours of the capitalist system" has become entrenched in law. As a consequence, sectionalism has become institutionalised. And it is here that new realism comes back into focus. In urging accomodation to the "new times", new realists - wittingly or unwittingly - lend added credibility to the drift towards sectionalism and division within the workforce. They don't only comment on it, they encourage it.

Overcoming barriers to class solidarity requires a long term strategy to overturn Conservative legislation and build links between workers across industries and between countries. Accepting both the legislation and the principles underpinning it offers no chance of reversing the balance of power between capital and labour. In the USA - where the trade union movement accepted the legal regulation of their affairs - unions have become largely irrelevant, with only one in six workers unionised. Furthermore, even where there are unions they are often remote from their members and restricted to limited sectional bargaining roles. One response to this - typified by American miners - is an astonishingly high level of wildcatting. Throughout the 1970's an unofficial wildcat movement fought

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[6]For example, throughout the 1970's American miners fought a series of battles against their union - the United Mineworkers (UMW). In the early 1970's rank and file miners formed the "Miners for Democracy" (MFD) movement to replace a corrupt and autocratic union leadership. Wildcat strikes accelerated, and in 1978 a national strike led to miners repeatedly rejecting the leaderships attempts to gain acceptance for compromises on managements terms (see Cleaver, 1975 and Green 1978).

the coal owners over wages, safety and the social wage. Local activism replaced central organisation (Cleaver, 1975; Green, 1978).

The wildcat movement opened up new territory for mobilisation, particularly in the way it was able to broaden its demands out to include community issues. As one coal company official said "They're striking over anything. They'll stike if they don't like the local sheriff. How can normal labour-management relations deal with that?" (Quoted in Cleaver, 1975, 125). It is conceivable that we might see similar developments in Britain, where traditionally militant workers like miners react to the legal restraints by taking unofficial action, defying court orders and so on. Indeed, unofficial action is likely to become far more widespread as union officials build legal restraints into their mode of operation, leaving workers frustrated, their demands unsatisfied.

Already there are some signs that this is the case. On the London Underground, NUR members organised a series of highly successful unofficial one day strikes throughout April and May 1989, finally compelling their union to ballot for official strike action. London bus crews have also taken unofficial action. In the North Sea, oil rig workers have organised strike action, surmounting formidable organisational barriers in the process. In all cases, the impetous for action has come from below - from rank and file activists - rather than cautious union leaders.

Undoubtedly there are powerful arguments which suggest that the left in Britain needs new directions. The CP and other new realists are right to identify new agendas and new movements which offer elements of a new mobilising vision for the left. Old fashioned trade union values are unpopular, and this needs to be tackled head on. Trade union membership is falling, and stands today at less than 40% of the employed labour force (Bassett, 1989). The working class itself is being transformed as work shifts from male dominated manufacturing to more individualised service jobs, frequently part time, feminised and low paid. Within the declining manufacturing sector, the nature of work is changing (although not as positively as new realism suggests). Combined with developments in consumer lifestyles and deliberate state strategies, most of these changes have indeed weakened the basis for collective solidarity within the working class.

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But the new realist's response to these changes is the politics of dreamers cloaked in despair. Their theories are not new, any more than the predicament which the working class finds itself in is new. In the 1920's and 30's the trade union movement was demoralised following the defeat of the miners, and the same policies of "realism" and cooperation were urged on workers as are offered up again today as "new" realism (Scargill, 1988). There is nothing wrong with being realistic. But whilst realism should guide tactics and temper short term ambition, it should do nothing to moderate the ultimate goal.

Being realistic means starting with a frank assessment of strengths and weaknesses, and then building strategy around the strengths. For example, new realists have correctly identified one area of strength - the increase in mobilisation of people in locally based campaigns over a variety of issues. However, celebrating this resistance is not enough. Great dangers are contained within it, as Urry and others have pointed out (Urry, 1981, and chapter one). Campaigns to defend or promote one place can quickly become campaigns against another. The competition to "win" the Nissan investment in the UK is a good example (Garrahan, 1986). Similarly, Ford was able to play on competition within the international place market during 1987 and '88 before deciding to locate its new electrical plant in Spain rather than Dundee (Foster and Woolfson, 1989).

Whilst right wing new realists in the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) argued openly for the unions to accept Ford's conditions for the Dundee plant (a single union deal outside Ford's UK negotiating framework), or else "lose" the plant to a foreign country, "left" new realists agonised over the difficult decisions posed by the case (see Leadbeater, 1988). In reality, Ford's decision was only marginally affected by the union deal it could (or could not) get at Dundee (Foster and Woolfson, 1989). And few union leaders seem to have applied themselves to the task of winning international cooperation between unions to undermine the basis for Ford's divisive strategy. In the case of Caterpillar's decision to close its Scottish plant at Uddington, the AEU's business unionism was exposed as powerless to prevent a multinational carrying out its restructuring plans despite the union's cooperation with the introduction of Japanese production methods to improve productivity (ibid).

What both these examples point to is the need to mobilise at the local level, but build a national and international strategy. Business unionism does not work. It does not even keep existing jobs, never mind create new ones. Furthermore, it corrodes workers solidarity by entrenching divisions within the labour movement created by dual labour markets. Instead of jumping through hoops to compete for the attention of international capitalists, unions need to build international links to "bargain up" conditions in multinational corporations. It is here that the real scope exists for political mobilisation at the local level.

Yet it cannot stop there - with a kind of rejuvenated syndicalism. Although this thesis has concentrated throughout on the politics of trade unions, this is not meant to imply that unions are the principle agents of social change for the working class. Rather, workers solidarity should be seen as the essential foundation from which hegemonic strategies can be built. New realists are wrong to argue against traditional class struggle for three reasons. First, workers do not engage in this kind of struggle out of choice. They do so when they have no alternative. Secondly, new realists are attacking not only the bureaucratic unionism characteristic of the PWS, but also the principles on which any effective trade unionism is built. In doing so, they are throwing the bucket out with the water. Thirdly, these basic union principles are essential if workers are to have any realistic defence against capitalists intent on exploiting labour.

In summary therefore, because workers experience themselves as a class, defence of union rights is fundamental to working class politics. Thatcherism is an attempt to redefine the role of unions, effectively outlawing class conscious trade unions, and reconstituting them as voluntary pressure groups. This strategy is a response to the PWS incorporation of the unions which although it constituted a powerful disciplining force on the working class, failed to immunise the state and capital from upsurges in worker militancy. Ultimately Thatcherism aims to redefine the experience of class through the combined effect of reorganising work, attacking collective action, and de-politicising economic decision making through the withdrawal of the state from direct economic intervention.

New realism effectively concedes that Thatcherism has "won" because it rejects the challenge of recreating working class unity. This thesis has

shown that local activism can be very powerful in resisting the creation of a new consensus. However, if local activism in a broader sense is to form the basis for a rejuvenated politics of opposition to Thatcherism, then it must be allied to a strategy which avoids the weaknesses of the old post war settlement. In particular, it must seek to reunite the economic aspect of trade union struggle with the struggle for political transformation in society.

Local struggle can form an important element in a more responsive and more effective political mobilisation, but to realise its full potential, it must work in harmony with a national and ultimately international strategy for change. Organisation within the Murton branches of the NUM over the period 1978-88 confirms the significance of local organisation and local activists in influencing political consciousness and action. The defeat of the strike may mark the effective end of the post-war, state guaranteed institutionalisation of a particular capital-labour settlement. But it should not mark the end of attempts to establish national and international working class organisations which can begin to challenge the power of capital.

APPENDIX FOUR: LABOUR UNREST 1978-1984

APPENDIX 4: LABOUR UNREST 1978-1984

In this appendix I offer more detail relating to the industrial relations problems encountered at Murton between 1978 and the start of the 1984/5 strike. As chapter five makes clear, this was a period of destabilisation in management-union relations, as the incentive scheme, travellers, and pit closures all began to chip away at the post war "indulgency pattern". It was the incentive scheme around which open conflict was situated, and this appendix looks in detail at the various disputes which it threw up. (It should be read in conjunction with chapter five, to which it acts as a supplement.)

A 4.1 THE FIRST STRIKE

On May 17th 1978, powerloaders on E51 refused to descend into the pit in a protest at the depressed level of bonus payments. They were immediately supported by the rest of the miners lodge. The mechanics however were unhappy at the strike call, and their minute book records the lodges dissatisfaction with their lack of involvement in bonus negotiations.

> "The secretary had received the assurance that if the
> mechanics remained at their posts, then full bonus
> would be paid. No information was forthcoming from the
> miners secretary, and as the mechanics had no part to
> play in bonus negotiations, the secretary saw no reason
> why the mechanics should lose money over an issue they
> knew nothing about." (mechanics minute book)

Breakdowns in communication between miners and mechanics were a feature of this period. The miners went back to work the next day after a Special Meeting at which the committee recommendation that they work under protest was passed, activating the conciliation machinery.

The spikey response to the miners strike from the mechanics leadership came only a week after a meeting of the Federation Board, at which the mechanics had expressed their continuing concern over their exclusion from bonus negotiations. The mechanics minute book reported on that meeting in the following terms.

> "The branch at this meeting stated that there were many
> aspects of the agreement which were causing the
> mechanics concern, and a suggestion of the forming of a
> liason committee was made. The miners were of the
> opinion that the agreement was their responsibility,
> however they would at future Federation Board meetings
> give a report on any progress which had been made...

The targets and standard tasks at the various locations were being looked at and renegotiated frequently, and the agreement for C seam was the subject of an APM [Adjourned Pit Meeting]. The agreement for the C seam DOSCO had not been signed. The mechanics stated that they were prepared to assist the miners in their claims, and suggested that the mining Federation Board meet management, this would have the effect of a combined effort. The miners replied that only they were empowered to negotiate. The mechanics then suggested that if at any time in the future they wished for our assistance, then we would be only too pleased to advise and attend any meeting which could be arranged."

For the next 2 years the operation of the incentive scheme caused constant minor aggravations and disputes. Failure to resolve disputes through the agreed procedures meant a build up of frustration and anger as a series of issues built up in mens' minds. For example, on December 1st it was reported to the miners lodge that a deputation would include the subject of E80's bonus. On June 14th 1980 a letter was received by the lodge from the manager concerning a "restriction of effort" on E52. The problem was a manning dispute.

A 4.2 THE 1980 WALKOUT.

Finally matters came to a head on September 2nd 1980. Men on E80 walked out, and the rest of the pit followed. The walkout was apparently actively encouraged by two of the lodge officials, who persuaded different districts to come out by telling each district that all the others were already out!

It quickly emerged that the dispute was a focus for all the simmering discontent at the pit. At least four issues were involved. The spark seems to have been the practice of "teeing out" men from a face to a lesser paid job[1]. Complaints about "teeing out" had surfaced regularly over the past year. For example, on November 20th 1979 it was agreed to see the manager with respect to "'teeing out' of face men when doing incidental work, 100% [bonus] being the object in mind." On the 19th of August teeing out was

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[1] Teeing out is the practice of removing a man from face work to another type of work if there is no more work for him on the face.

again on the agenda for a deputation. Despite complaints therefore, the lodge had failed to resolve the problem through the conciliation machinery.

Another spark was provided by an undermanager who called one face team "lazy bastards", and threatened to replace two powerloaders with men about to be transferred in from Blackhall. But the energy behind the dispute came from the consistent failure to earn high bonusses. Arguments over tasks being set too high had continued since the inception of the scheme. The failure of decisive leadership using united action to force management into changes meant that task renegotiation rarely yielded satisfactory results.

The mechanics minute book identified the four demands which emerged from the miners special meeting called after the walkout.

> "i) Men not to be transferred or 'teed out'.
> ii) Mr Nelson to be transferred away from the colliery.
> iii) E80 task to be renegotiated.
> iv) All tasks at the mine to be re-examined."

The miners minute book is less informative. It reports that the issues behind the walkout were Mr Nelson's comments and men being teed out. But it is clear from later minutes that these were just the sparks that lit a very inflammable situation in which bonus disputes provided the combustible material. The minute book records a unanimous vote to withdraw safety cover, remove Mr Nelson and stop teeing out. This was backed by an indefinite strike.

In fact the strike lasted until the weekend, when the committee voted 11-3 to return to work on the following Monday. This was backed unanimously by the special meeting. They went back to work pending a special deputation with management. The following weekend it was reported that this deputation had discussed eleven matters, which had been raised at the earlier special meeting. Nine of these concerned the incentive scheme, and they all fitted into the four categories reported to the mechanics lodge. Neither minute book records the outcome of this deputation.

The mechanics reacted to this dispute much as they had done to the 1978 strike. When the miners walked out, John Cummings and the Chairman Bobby Armstrong went to the pit and recommended that the mechanics continue working. "This was based on the fact that mechanics, not being party to any negotiations arising out of the incentive bonus agreement, were not in dispute with the board." Again there was a breakdown in communication with

the miners. "At no time did the miners officials indicate the scope of the problem, or seek the support of the mechanics."

Following their special meeting, the miners asked the mechanics for support and withdrew safety cover. Initially the manager had provided safety work for mechanics, but when he tried to get them undergound with under BACM supervision, they refused. At their own special meeting the mechanics therefore decided to support the miners. The mechanics again suggested setting up a lison committee, which the miners finally agreed to. It was to be activated by any dispute at the pit.

A 4.3 THE 1981 WORK TO RULE

Problems with the bonus continued after the September 1980 dispute. In March 1981 E53 refused to sign their agreement, and went to method study. They accepted the method study 24-21, but by June they were negotiating another task. They rejected an offer, but a few weeks later an agreement was accepted. Three weeks later the committee was discussing the question of five weeks backpay on E53. And in August E81 and F20 both elected to go to method study.

At a special meeting on 25th October the committee recommended a work to rule in protest at the low bonus at the pit. Five days later the committee recommendation to call off the work to rule was defeated 85-65. On November 8th it was reported that management had agreed to reduce the tasks on E63, E80 and F20. If men still couldn't earn a decent bonus, then tasks could be renegotiated. The committee voted 10-6 to recommend return to normal working. At the special meeting however, this recommendation was overwhelmingly rejected.

On 15th November a committee meeting heard that E63 had voted 34-8 against accepting a reduction from 26 to 25 shears a week, whilst F20 had voted 28-11 for accepting a reduction from 19 to 18.75 shears a week. The committee therefore voted 13-7 to recommend a return to normal working. But the full meeting again rejected this advice, and by 62 to 55 decided to continue the work to rule. Four days later however, after intervention from the area union (in the shape of a letter from the President, Harold Mitchell), the men decided unanimously to return to work.

This seems to have been a classic case of action against the union as much as against the employer. The men acted in protest at the low bonus, but when the leadership wanted to back down they determined to continue fighting. They knew that backing down would get them nowhere. They finally ended the action after their stand had brought the problem to the attention of the area union. A crucial role was played in this dispute by the travellers from Blackhall. They were the decisive force behind the action, and their dissatisfaction with the leadership of the Murton lodge was both demonstrated and enhanced by the committees conduct of the work to rule.

The liason committee created after the 1980 dispute was not activated until two weeks into the work to rule. There was criticism of the secretary within the miners lodge for failing to convene the emergency committee, showing a concern on the part of some rank and file miners about the lack of cooperation with the mechanics. The secretary explained that he had been struggling with family illness and had therefore forgotten to contact the mechanics.

The mechanics minute book reported on the liason committee meeting in the following manner.

> "Details were presented in respect of F20, E81 and E63 and also why the incentive agreements had not been signed. On more than one occassion the advice of the [miners] committee had been rejected. The lodge had since imposed a work to rule and output had declined to such a degree that both the area union, the Area Board and indeed the national Board were expressing grave concern. Informal talks had been held, but as yet no solutions had been agreed."

Throughout the restriction management apparently refused to negotiate unless the men resumed normal working. In the end NCB Area management and the NUM's Area agents were called out to Murton to sort it out.

Unsurprisingly arguments over the incentive scheme continued to surface regularly at lodge meetings. On May 11th 1982 E81 went to method study, and on September 21st the men on the same face asked for a reduction in the task.

A 4.4 PIT MILITANCY IN THE MECHANICS

One further dispute is worth quoting, as an example of the way that union bureaucracies sometimes act as useful adjuncts to management's personnel function. It concerns a small dispute in the late 1970's over manpower deployment among a small group of mechanics. A mechanic at the centre of the dispute takes up the story.

> "'Under protest' is just noted unless you take it up later... I've known on two occasions a whole shift of mechanics walk out the pit, and getting wronged off the union for doing it...

> I'll give you an instance right. Happened in my shift once. There's about five fitters and seven electricians. Now the Yard seam, E to C, was just starting up... We were coming in from our own district. There was nobody in particular to do it [go to the new seam], and it had become very regular, very convenient [for management] to just take a man out of North.

> I'm not talking about just walking from here to the terrace you know, I'm talking about humping a gear bag to Dalton Le Dale... And they were just gradually getting away with it...

> [I] kept fetching it up with the union. 'Whey, we can't do anything about it. We've got to wait till the boss decides that he wants a team of men there.'

> It comes to my shift once, and he [the deputy] says 'Go out there [to the new Yard seam]'. I says 'I'm not going out there, I'm fed up with this...' He says 'You've got to'. I says 'I haven't got to do owt'... The deputy engineer gets on. He says '- are you going out there?' He says 'Looka; if you don't go out there, as from now your time's stopped'. I says 'Well, I'm not going out there'. He says 'Well, your times stopped, you're not getting paid from now'. I says 'Fair enough'.

> So I gets on the tannoy system, and I tell the lads. And the next thing I know is they've all come out. They're all sitting at the sub station. I says [to management] 'I'm coming out the pit and there's some lads coming out with us.' 'You can't do that'. I says 'Well, <u>watch us</u>!' We came out the pit...

> And who should we meet at bank... but John Cummings, Tom Parry and a few others. The deputy manager and everything. 'You can't just do this you know. We explained to them the situation. The deputy manager went out, and John Cummings was sitting, and all of us were sitting. He says 'You think you're clever, coming out like that?' 'How's that man?' He says 'You know what the procedure is. You do things under protest and we get things done'.

But the next week there was a shift rota fixed up for
that district... and it got sorted out. Positive
action. Positive action gets results every time."
(interview)

Because the conciliation procedure provided a means for management to
control disputes, if the union bureacracy supported the procedure, it
effectively collaborated in that control. This was certainly the case when
union officials shared a distaste for industrial action, believing that
disputes should be sorted out by formal or informal negotiation between
management and union. Safe in the knowledge that the union was not going to
do anything so rash as to call a strike, management could stall or block
until the union gave up or accepted a compromise.

A 4.5 CONCLUSIONS

This appendix has expanded on some of the disputes during the period
between 1978 and 1984. The miners' branch was characterised by weak
leadership which led to the men trying to take the initiative on a number
of occasions. In the mechanics' branch, relatively strong leadership
sometimes failed to control militant members. Yet both branches were
clearly socialised into an indulgency pattern, which was now coming under
threat as management groped there way towards the implementation of a new
strategy for the pit.

APPENDIX FIVE: WOMEN AND THE STRIKE

APPENDIX 5: WOMEN AND THE STRIKE[1]

This thesis asks questions about the changing politics of the two main NUM branches at Murton. But the definition of politics has been a traditional one - a definition which says that union politics is what the union does and tries to do. However, NUM politics extend well beyond the sphere of production relations at the pit. Indirectly (and often directly), the actions and attitudes of miners have far reaching impacts on the lives of non-mining members of the community, and in particular on women. Therefore it is impossible to truly consider the politics of the union without considering the importance of the union in defining women's role. To do this, it is necessary to assess what this role is, and how it has developed. Only when this has been done is it possible to consider the phenomenal impact of the strike in challenging traditional female roles, and how miners reacted to these challenges.

A 5.1 HISTORICAL DOMINATION

Allen (1981, 74-84)) argues plausibly that the characteristic form of women's oppression in mining communities derive in large measure from the structural requirements created by the historical development of coal mining[2]. Specifically, women became responsible for the social reproduction of the male labour force within the family. Patriarchy and capitalism reinforced each other, as the employer benefited from free social reproduction, and the male worker enjoyed a home situation geared towards meeting his emotional and physical needs. Beatrix Campbell put it like this:

> "His woman's labour was for him. It was a personal control over the labour and time of women. For the employers, that stake in personal power also provided, at no cost, the work that made miner's work possible."
> (Campbell, 1984, 107: emphasis in original)

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[1] Appendix one explains the research focus of this thesis, and why I have not concentrated more fully on the role of women.

[2] This is not to say that the social relatons of coal mining created women's oppression in mining communities; only that their particular form derives from these relations. The origins of the overarching domination by men of women is a debate I cannot enter here.

Nevertheless, within the community structure, women played a vital but largely hidden role. Recent work has emphasised that within mining communities women have carved out their own histories, by fighting their own political battles, as well as taking an active part in male campaigns (John, 1984). However, historical studies have also explored the crushingly rigid sex roles typical of mining communities. Murton was no different in this respect from hundreds of other cases, some of which have been documented (Dennis et al., 1969). In all cases, public life was overwhelmingly male.

> "For the men, the communities are built around them. They have a women at home labouring and caring for them. The pit itself often dominates a village with its size, noise and sheer physical presence and the towns are filled with miners' clubs and meeting places which dominate leisure activities. Everything revolves round, and is turned towards them." (Miller, 1985, 357)

The social fabric of the village was organised for men. Pubs and clubs catered for their leisure activities. Women stayed at home. An unyielding ideology confirmed women's role in life as being within the home. Within politics, women were similarly excluded.

Male social activity was also separate from women's. Furthermore, this separation was reinforced by all the trappings of a "secret society" (Dennis et al., 1969). Women were excluded from the meeting places (pub and club). Special rules applied within these meetings, particularly relating to language. Swearing, an endemic feature of pub conversation, was forbidden in any mixed group. Men did not discuss their lives with their wives. So much so that Dennis et al. concluded that husbands and wives in Ashton typically lived separate and secret lives.

Perhaps most significantly of all in a capitalist society, women were economically imprisoned in the home. Even with the spread of female employment to mining areas, women's opportunities to exploit their wage earning potential were limited, both in number and quality. Sometimes women's earnings simply allowed miners to pocket a higher proportion of their own wages. Dennis et al. recorded the social pressure which channelled women towards their housekeeping role, poignantly describing the way in which originality and ambition were squeezed out as the demands for conformity mounted (ibid). Significantly however, the vast majority of women internalised the ideology of their menfolk, and celebrated command of their own empire with pride. Previous strikes (in 1972 and 1974 for

example) did little to challenge these rigid role definitions. Miners solidarity remained as much a solidarity of sex as a solidarity of class (Miller, 1985, 358).

A 5.2 WOMEN AND THE MINERS STRIKE: AN OVERVIEW

It is in this context that the spectacular development of womens' support groups (WSG's) during the 1984/5 strike needs to be placed. In the same way that the strike leapt out of the blue (in defiance of repeated attempts to write off the miners' capacity to fight), so nobody expected women to become the dynamic new force which ended up sustaining the strike, adding a new dimension to working class struggle. They began to organise early - within weeks of the start. In East Durham the SEAM campaign had introduced a novel development before the strike by allowing women to organise a separate section. This meant that Easington District produced some of the first support groups in the country.

In Murton it began about five weeks into the strike, when volunteers went to the Welfare Hall to peel potatoes which had been collected by the mechanics' branch. Within days they had more volunteers than they needed. Most worked as full time housewives, although two had part time jobs. About 15 women settled into the regular pattern of preparing one cooked meal a day. Women from Murton joined the picket lines too, although they did not travel to other areas. Their experiences were as powerfully radicalising as those reported by women throughout the country (see Stead, 1987; Parker, 1986, 171-172 and Beaton, 1985). In particular, a concentrated loathing for the police developed in response to their experiences of psychological and physical abuse.

Male activists in Murton celebrated the involvement and commitment of the women. They understood and acknowledged that without them, the strike could not have continued for a year. On the day the strike ended, it was the women who carried the lodge banner proudly up the Terrace, leading the remaining strikers on their emotional march back to work (Stead, 1987, 156). Yet there was also ambivalence from the men about the women's role. Many echoed responses from around the country, that picket lines were no place for women. Miners recounted with pride the way in which Murton women had resisted feminists from Greenwich who tried to encourage a rebellion against sex-stereotyping in the home. It seemed that women's activity was

fully appreciated so long as it was restricted to _supporting_ men - so long as it didn't challenge the essential division of labour which sustained mens lives.

Beatrix Campbell perceptively analysed some of the contradictory themes to emerge from womens' involvement in the strike. For her, the strike was crucial in beginning to break down the male monopoly of the community, and all its social and political institutions.

> "It was [the womens's] intervention which exposed the political vacuum in the community. They exposed its _absence_ by creating its _presence_. The very existence of the women's movement, its insistence on the right to participate, represented more than something specific about this strike - it represented a break with the historic sexual division of labour which has characterised coalfield politics. (Campbell, 1986, 261; emphasis in original)

Even though - as at Murton - much of the womens' involvement consisted of doing the same work they normally did in the home, their support kitchens posed fundamental challenges to male domination in the villages. "The Women Against Pit Closures movement collectivised the work of women, and in so doing, constituted the women as a _social_ force, a force the NUM had to reckon with" (_ibid_, 275; emphasis in original).

Campbell acknowledges strong tensions between miners' activists and women. But only only very briefly does she address the tension between women who were involved in the strike, and those who were either not involved, or positively against it. A women from Hetton (whose husband broke the strike), provided eloquent testimony to the bitterness of these divisions when she spoke about the women involved in the Hetton support group (which many Murton miners attended).

> "I know a few of them, and I wouldn't say hello to one of them. They've had nothing in their lives and when this [strike] came on, a little power went to their heads. And they think they're little gods... They involve themselves in anything, but where they are, there's trouble... Both them and their husbands, they liked trouble. They were the lowest of the low really... I mean, I don't think I'm any better than anyone else, but they sort of pulled themselves down more. They didn't try." (interview)

These comments reflect a break with the ideology of community solidarity which dominated pit villages. But as Campbell points out, community solidarity rarely extended to women anyway - so if women were more

reactionary than their husbands, men reaped the rewards for excluding women from the political processes which created militancy (Campbell, 1986, 261).

The majority of women - like the majority of men - were not involved in the strike. At Murton, most simply supported their husbands. Some however exercised direct pressure to try and force their husbands back. Given the characteristic separation of responsibilities within miners homes, such pressure was to be expected. Women traditionally carried sole responsibility for managing household finances and child rearing, and were excluded from the political processes creating and sustaining militancy, so their interest lay in ensuring that sufficient resources existed to discharge their side of the marriage bargain. When they were unable to carry on, they reacted by seeking a return to normality. Without involvement in the strike, they might well see it as senseless. Out of loyalty, some might trust their husbands, but others could be less supportive, and more forthright in demanding that a husband meet his side of the marriage bargain.

One further aspect of womens' involvement in the dispute concerns the role of the minority of women NUM members (mainly canteen workers). These workers are the only remaining women in the industry, following the final "purging" of "pit brow lasses" in the 1950's, following an agreement between the NUM and NCB (Cambell, 1986; John, 1984)[3]. At Murton, canteen workers remained solidly on strike throughout the dispute. And a forceful Murton woman - Pat Curry (working at the linked Hawthorn canteen) - had begun to challenge the entrenched male orientation of the branch by initiating an "equal value" claim for canteen workers pay. Women had been written out of many of the NCB-NUM agreements in the 1950's, but now Pat and others like her began to fight back. Womens' importance to the strike meant that she could not be ignored. Her involvement took on even greater significance after the strike (see also chapter 7).

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[3]Before then, the feminisation of women in Victorian times spawned a successful campaign to remove women from underground work.

Following the strike, there was an inevitable decline in women's activism,
as the immediate mobilising issue disappeared. At a national level, the
organisation "Women Against Pit Closures" attracted considerable criticism
for bureaucratising the movement, and for its dynastic overtones (Betty
Heathfield and Ann Scargill both played prominent roles). Not surprisingly,
most of the local women's support groups broke up after the strike. The
local groups which survived tended to be those that diversified away from
fighting pit closures to embrace related issues, like the anti-nuclear
movement, or (particularly in Durham) fighting the expansion of open cast
coal mining. Other groups carried on on a largely social basis, with
occasional forays into political activity (basically the case at Murton).
What then were the lasting implications of the WSG's? What impact did they
have on women's consciousness, and how have men reacted in the longer term
to their appearance?

In Murton one of the first and most significant developments prompted by
the WSG's was the confidence it gave women activists like Pat Curry,
working within the NUM, to pursue canteen workers fight for equality. So
long the poor relations of the industry, canteen workers had been excluded
from many of the agreements available to miners. Curry became a leading
activist within the miners' branch, and one year after the strike became
only the second woman in the country to be elected onto an NUM branch
committee[4]. She fought tirelessly in support of the canteen workers "equal
value" pay claim[5], which is still outstanding at the courts.

Within the union her election and her campaigning have attracted some
hostility, even from the branch committee itself, with conservative members
lamenting the challenge to the old order. But she has had influential
support too, both within the branch and at a national level. When Arthur
Scargill addressed a packed meeting of miners in Durham in 1986, Curry rose

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[4] The first was also in the North East, at the Philadelphia
workshops.

[5] The claim centres around the women's assertion that they do work
of equal value to male surface workers who get paid more. Women should
therefore get the same rate of pay as the men.

to question the union's committment to the equal value claim, and received a ringing pledge of support from the national president, to the visible annoyance of some senior NUM figures! Despite the refusal of the NUM conference to incorporate the WSG's as honourary members of the NUM, women's issues were not being allowed to die within the union. The equal value claim still awaits a hearing.

In Murton the WSG has continued to function since the strike as a more informal network of contacts and friendships. The women who were most involved experienced a lasting politicisation. But they constituted only a minority of women within the villages, and their overall impact seems to have been limited in scope. Perhaps the real gains are less tangible, and only to be fully appreciated in the longer term as women begin to use the confidence the strike gave them to gradually assert themselves more.

Without experience of the pre-strike situation it is difficult to assess how much male attitudes have been changed by the strike. Certainly however, Murton is still a community dominated by men, and by male values. Even activists appear remarkably untouched by basic "feminist" ideas - and when the possibility of women working underground was mooted in a government bill published in November 1988, it was almost universally condemned "on principle". Some younger miners are apparently more disposed to undertake household chores, but for the majority, a woman's place is still seen as essentially in the home. Certainly there has been no fundamental change in male attitudes to women.

Any visitor to Murton cannot help but be struck by the extent to which men dominate the social space of the community. Pubs and clubs are overwhelmingly populated by men. In conversation, women invariably defer to men. When pressed to justify the obvious social segregation of the sexes, men argue that women have as much - if not more - power than men, but that this power is located in the home, where women rule unchallenged. Furthermore, they claim that this is the way their wives prefer it. Certainly many wives have internalised the ideology of their own containment within the home, no doubt rationalising that their best chance in life lies in creating space within the system. However, it is also true that women - especially younger women - seem to be less ready to accept male domination. When this rebelliousness meets a defender of male domination, then the result can be wife battering and abuse.

Women's involvement in the 1984/5 strike was the most unexpected and exciting aspect of the dispute. Although - as with male activists - only a minority of the women were organised, their centrality to the maintenance of the strike ensured that the impact of their involvement rippled throughout the community. Nevertheless, it is also important to realise that some women were very hostile to the support groups. And my own research has also indicated that many miners' activists still hold deeply patriarchal attitudes to women in general. There is a need for more research on these contradictory elements of women's involvement in the miners' strike, and its subsequent impact.

APPENDIX SIX: THE BALLOT AND THE START OF THE STRIKE

APPENDIX 6: THE BALLOT AND THE START OF THE STRIKE

In the first months of the strike, the issue of a national ballot dominated discussion of the strike. The rejection of a ballot continued to serve as an ideological sledgehammer for the government, the media and the NCB throughout the dispute. So what were the arguments either way, how did miners in Murton react to them, and how did these reactions relate to historical developments outlined in earlier chapters and appendices?

A 6.1 THE LEFT AND THE BALLOT

As Beynon makes clear, in what is still the best discussion of the ballot issue (Beynon, 1985a, 6-13), by 1984 strong pressures had built up to resist another ballot over pit closures. In order to understand how these pressures became dominant, it is important to understand how the strike started and developed within the first turbulent days.

Two days after the NCB's March 6th announcement on capacity reductions, the NUM's NEC voted 21-3 to sanction any area strike action taken under national rule 41 (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986, 85), effectively endorsing a no ballot tactic for a strike. On March 27th the remnants of the NUM right wing held a very public "secret" meeting at the Brant Inn, near Leicester, to discuss how they might force a national ballot. The meeting backfired badly, undermining the credibility of the right, who appeared to be trying to stop the action, not strengthen it (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986; 88: Wilsher et al., 1985, 73-4).

At the NEC meeting on April 12th, a majority of NEC members were mandated to vote for a ballot. But Arthur Scargill ruled the motion proposing a ballot out of order on the grounds that the matter had been voted on at a previous meeting (March 8th), and the Special Delegate Conference to be held on April 19th would discuss the ballot question, and whether or not to lower the percentage required in a ballot to endorse strike action (from 55% to 50%). The right challenged this ruling, but NEC members were freed of their mandate on this issue, and voted 13-8 with the President (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986, 89: Wilsher et al., 1985, 79-80: Lloyd, 1985, 24).

Although the April 19th Special Delegate conference voted to reduce the majority required for strike action, it also resoundingly endorsed the decision not to ballot. What then caused this decision?

Chapter four showed how and why by March 1984 the no ballot option had gained a strong currency among left wing activists. In the first few days of the strike, an incredible momentum built up among the young activists who provided its energy, that this was the time to fight. As soon as the strike began, the media, the government and the NCB started to push for a ballot. And they were joined by known right wingers in the union. To the activists who felt that this was their last chance to resist the onslaught of market forces in the industry, it was clear that the ballot had little to do with a general desire to enhance democratic decision making, and everything to do with stopping the strike.

This view gains currency when the development of the strike in the first few weeks is examined. Even establishment commentators such as Wilsher et al. (1985) and Adeney and Lloyd (1986) record how the union's leadership lost control of the strike in the first few days. The Yorkshire area tried desperately to stop the pickets going in to Nottinghamshire, but they went anyway.

> "An emergency meeting of the Yorkshire area executive had already resolved the day before [March 7th] that 'picketing must be restricted to collieries in the Yorkshire area, with numbers of pickets restricted to no more than 6'. But it was the inability of the Yorkshire leaders to control their members and stick to the agreement which many miners leaders now claim cost them any chance of a united action and was a fatal blow to their chances of success... Jack Taylor's words appealing to members to continue the 'dignified and responsible approach' of restricting picketing to their own coal field fell on deaf ears... The Yorkshire executive met to review the situation and backed the fait accompli." (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986, 95, 96, 97: emphasis added).

The pickets set a furious pace, and normally more cautious leaders were pressured into adopting militant postures. With rank and file activists in the lead, the emergence on the right of calls for a national ballot were seen by the activists as treachery. The view that it was the young activists who didn't want a ballot was reinforced by "Mick", a young Murton picket. He said:

"The young 'uns didn't want it. It was more the young 'uns who didn't want it. Young 'uns just wanted to get on with it. The older ones - a lot of the older ones mind were the same as us - some of the older ones, some middle aged, said we shoud have gone for it then like [five or six weeks into the strike]. And looking back on it, maybe we should have. At the time it was just the young 'uns that pushed it. In my opinion." (interview)

A 6.1.i The Special Delegate Conference.

At the NEC meeting on April 12th, and the Special Delegate conference a week later, the extent of activist control over the dispute was clear. Wilsher et al. described the lobby of these two crucial meetings in terms akin to a lynching mob (Wilsher et al, 1985, 77, 82: see also MacGregor, 1986, 182). In doing so they missed the chance to understand the development of the strike, in favour of easy sloganising. The mass lobbies were a key expression of the way in which rank and file activists had taken control of the strike. If the union was to act on its policy of fighting closures, it could not defy the wishes of the activists who were leading the fight.

At the Special Delegate Conference on April 19th, the arguments for and against a ballot were put. Those arguing for a ballot insisted that it was a basic democratic right. Furthermore they argued that they were just as determined as the anti ballot faction to fight closures, but that in order to be effective this fight needed a national ballot which alone had the authority necessary to pull out the miners still working.

Consider this contribution from Roy Lynk.

"The Notts Area is committed to fight pit closures like anybody else, and every leader in Notts, every branch official in Notts, have campaigned for over a year to fight the closures."

This from David Prendergast.

"This ballot is to unite our people in our fight, because we in Notts, the leadership are opposed to pit closures. We are opposed to the loss of jobs."

And this from Ken Toon.

"I want to say this, that what we should be doing is to be uniting ourselves. We can only unite ourselves by using the national rule 43 and ballot the membership, and if we ballot the membership, I have no doubt as the

Rule has been changed we will get the required majority for strike action." (All quotes from: Report of Reconvened Special Conference, 19-4-84, published by NUM.)

All three men later led the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers.

The left had several arguments to deploy in response. The gut reaction, which was probably decisive in shaping peoples views, was expressed directly by Jack Taylor.

> "I will tell you what worries me about ballots, and I do not want to be offensive to anybody because we have got enough problems. I will tell you what is up. We don't really trust you. We don't really trust you. That is the reason (applause). You come up every year with 16%, you come up with 32%. That is the problem we have got. We want to be united, but we are not right sure that you do. We are not right sure whether you want to go back to work. You want to go back to work and you will leave the dirty work to Owen Briscoe, Ken Homer and me, when we go down to Cortonwood that Sunday morning and say, 'I am sorry lads. I am sorry. There are 800 jobs have gone down the road'." (ibid: emphasis added.)

As evidence, the left looked no further than the debate earlier at the same conference over whether or not to reduce the majority required in a ballot for strike action from 55% to 50%. The same people who argued for democracy, and for a ballot to achieve a successful strike, also argued against lowering the majority for action to 50%. It seemed clear that far from trying to strengthen action by having a ballot, they were acting to undermine action by doing all that they could to make sure it would be as difficult as possible to achieve a ballot majority for strike action.

This feeling was strengthened by the past record of the pro ballot faction. The left bitterly recalled the introduction of the incentive scheme in 1978, despite a national ballot rejecting it (chapter four). The areas and individuals now arguing for the sanctity of a ballot had been the leaders in defying the incentive scheme ballot. They were seen by the left as speaking with forked tongues. A Durham activist explained this view.

> "The sort of people who were shouting for a ballot, I was instintively against them, you know? Possibly we made a mistake, I don't know. But if we did make a mistake, I know the road to hell is paved with good intentions! We made a mistake for the right reasons. When you see Sid Vincent [a known right winger] wants a ballot..." (interview)

There were principled reasons too for opposing a ballot. The most commonly cited was that it was not right for men with secure futures in long life areas and pits to be able to stop other men fighting to save their own jobs.

> "Peter Heathfield has argued passionately and with great conviction that 'it cannot be right for one man to vote another man out of a job'; that a ballot on wages is a ballot which everyone enters on an equal basis and everyone is affected by equally; on jobs it is a different matter, especially when the jobs are at risk in some areas and not others." (Beynon, 1985a, 13)

John Lloyd expanded this complex argument in his 1985 pamphlet.

> "The line that no national ballot was taken because of different interests by different areas in job preservation was dismissed by the Government, the Board and much of the press as a phoney argument. It was not... In essence, the NUM leadership's argument was the old one of the tyranny of the majority over the minority with a special interest, one to which there is no in principle answer [sic]." (Lloyd, 1985, 23: emphasis added)

But, as Howell points out (1987, 397) this argument disappeared from the later book authored by Lloyd with Martin Adeney. Howell argues that accepting Lloyds earlier analysis, would have compelled Adeney and Lloyd to "move from conspiracy theory and ulterior political motives to an awareness of the diverse pressures on the NUM." Instead, their interest is to construct an orthodoxy of political conspiracy (ibid).

In fact, as Howell and Beynon (1985a) imply, the left leadership of the NUM was propelled into the no ballot strategy by a complex set of interacting processes. The explosion of rank and file militancy - concentrated in Yorkshire but significant in places like Durham also - made it almost impossible for left leaders to argue for a ballot. It would have meant defying the wishes of the activists who had given the strike its energy. Given that most leaders in the NUM were either elected on openly left wing platforms, or came from places where the left held control, defying them would have destroyed their own credibility. (Hence for example the remarkable shift in Tom Callan's position evident in his speech at the delegate conference.) To an extent many leaders were prisoners of their own rhetoric once the membership had called their militant bluff, and taken

action in support of words. In order for these left leaders to put themselves back at the head of a strike movement which had rocketed out of their control, they had to adopt the militant rhetoric of the young pickets who were making the running.

Furthermore, the activists view had been formed by the experience of the last few years. It looked like it was impossible to win a ballot majority for action in support of the threatened minority. But the union policy was to oppose closures, and if workers were prepared to take action in support of that policy then they should not be stopped by a self interested majority. Indeed, they had a <u>right</u> to demand support in line with union policy. Such a view was strengthened when activists saw that the people who shouted loudest for a ballot were the ones whose track record showed disdain for democracy, and a reluctance to fight for anything.

The Special Delegate Conference voted 69-54 for the Kent motion which endorsed the NEC decision to sanction action under rule 41. A national ballot was never again discussed formally by the NUM. But the implications of the union's decision were never allowed to die. The following section considers the way the ballot issue was understood in Durham, and then in Murton.

A 6.2 THE BALLOT AND DURHAM.

A 6.2.i Durham in the national picture.

In the first week of the strike, Scotland, South Wales and Durham joined Yorkshire on strike. Traditionally militant South Wales miners initially voted by 18 branches to 13 not to join the strike. Undoubtedly this related to the lack of support in Yorkshire when South Wales struck to save Lewis Merthyr. But pickets from the minority 13 pits quickly persuaded the reluctant branches - without any struggle - to join the strike (Adeney and Lloyd, 1986, 96). In Scotland too there was initial opposition to a strike, concentrated at Bilston Glen. But pickets soon overcame resistance here too. For the first few days of the strike men at the traditionally moderate Durham pits in Seaham worked on. Picketing quickly built up, and Dawdon - the last rebel pit - finally bowed to the inevitable a few days into the strike.

It was clear from the fateful March 6th meeting between the NCB and the unions that Durham would be particularly seriously affected by the planned capacity reductions. Out of a total 4.0 Mt (million tonnes) planned reduction, the North East would contribute 1.4 Mt, or over a third (see table 6.1). At a meeting on March 9th between all North East mining unions and the NCB, the Director - David Archibald - sought to play down the significance of the planned reductions.

In his report of this meeting, written for the branches, Billy Etherington (General Secretary of the Durham Mechanics), there were indications that the NCB were trying to stave off action, or undermine it, by portraying the reductions in the best possible light. Archibald

> "stated that at this juncture that the 1.4 Mt were inaccurate. He stated that the action that had been taken during the present financial year 83/84 had set things well on the way to getting down to the budgetted figure without too much hardship. He states that the NCB insists on operating properly and informing people of what's going on and he stated categorically that there are no present plans for any new pit closures."
> (emphasis added)

The NCB's argument was that there had been reductions of 75000 tonnes from Bearpark, 50000 tonnes from East Hetton, 150000 tonnes at Hawthorn, 100000 tonnes at Horden, 250000 tonnes from Lynemouth, 200000 tonnes at Wearmouth and 250000 tonnes of pit coal during 1983/4, so the actual need for further reductions in 1984/5 was minimal.

Dennis Murphy from Northumberland kept on emphasizing the difference between this message and the "entirely different picture" which had been painted in London. With recent NCB actions fresh in their minds (for example over Horden - see Beynon et al., 1985), most NUM leaders didn't believe the Board's bland assurances. But in any case, as in other areas, the actions of the activists had taken over.

After pickets had brought the coalfield to a standstill, the miners' lodges adopted a unanimous position. They were on strike "pending a national ballot". An Area Conference passed the following resolution on March 21st (subsequently confirmed by County Lodge Vote completed on April 6th by 96-0):

> "The decision of the Area Coalfield Conference held on Wednesday 21st March, unanimously decided to request an

> emergency meeting of the NEC forthwith and an
> individual ballot vote by implementation of NUM rule 43
> without delay."

Nobody denies that the rank and file in Durham overwhelmingly favoured a national ballot.

A 6.2.ii The Activists and the Ballot.

At the start of the strike, almost every activist rejected the call for a ballot. This was in line with the arguments advanced above; that a ballot was an invalid procedure for deciding on action over pit closures, and that if workers were striking in line with union policy, they should be supported. The most sophisticated version of this argument was advanced by Dave Temple, using the theoretical perspective of a revolutionary socialist. He argued on principle that it is wrong to ballot on pit closures, as it is wrong to ballot on any basic human right.

> "The right to work, unlike the issue of a wage rise, is not a question of expediency but a basic democratic right. It is not negotiable and therefore not ballotable. It must be defended by executive action. (Temple, 1983, 29: emphases in original)

In a situation of continuous class struggle, he argued that union leaderships should have the power to call strikes without having to ballot first.

> "I would far rather there had been a tradition within the NUM that you elect an executive and the executive leads, and the executive has the power to call strike action without going to a ballot. Now that is a far more combative organisation than one which has to be tied down to a ballot before you take strike action. Now if I was an employer, and I was negotiating with the union and the union I was negotiating with... had the power to immediately call a strike, I would be very, very wary of that organisation." (interview)

In this system, the ultimate democratic sanction is applied by the election and true accountability of the union leadership.

Having justified the rejection of a ballot on principle, Dave argued that the combination of a vaccilating leadership lacking confidence in its ability to pull the membership out, and a committment to ballots, demonstrates the tactical fault in relying on ballots. He offered this interpretation of events in South Wales in 1983 (see chapter four).

"They had a ballot on strike action in Wales in January, and they decided they would strike - they gave a date for the strike - unless there was investment in the Welsh pits. They got a majority for doing for it. About a month later (first of all, my dates and timings will be wrong, but it went something like this) they decided to postpone the strike action. That was [Emlyn] Williams [President of the South Wales area of the NUM]. Then the colliery at Lewis Merthyr, the closure was announced.

"They took action there. Now instead of saying, instead of the leadership saying: 'Well, we've got a mandate, we've never been beaten on a ballot for strike [action], we have that mandate, we'll call people out because we've got that mandate', they said: 'No, we've got to seek another mandate'... So they went and had another ballot.

"And each time we go for a ballot the actual numbers are being reduced that are voting for strike action. Because men are saying - _obviously_ saying - are we ever going to, you know? It dissipates all the impact of the thing... All the time, time's tickin' over you know. Days are passing. Men are getting themselves psyched up to expecting the pickets to be there, and to come out on strike, and they don't arrive. Or they _do_ arrive, and say: 'We're not picketing, we're arguing for you to vote in a national ballot for strike action'. And the whole impact is lost.

I mean,.. these are basic questions of human behaviour... This is how people - when they move into action - this is how they move. They _don't_ move in a sort of fixed pattern, logically agreed, going through various questions. Men fight on their [instincts]."
(interview)

Many other activists rejected a ballot on more pragmatic grounds. Some thought they might lose it. But these pragmatic reasons were stated because of a basic premise similar to the one outlined by Dave Temple above. In a situation of class struggle, the legitimate tactics are the ones which best allow you to defend your interests. As Frank Duffy said, in a slightly different context, "the constitution's only got a small role to play" when you're fighting the class war. Workers may not like striking without a ballot, but so long as they strike anyway, the tactic is justified. If the union had not stood and fought over Cortonwood, it would have been revealed as a paper tiger.

Yet there were also some divisions in Durham over the ballot question. With a relatively weak left wing organisation concentrated on only a few pits, the miners' BL lacked the confidence to call explicitly for a no ballot strike. Instead, they softened their call for strike action by arguing for men to strike before having a ballot. Although successful in persuading miners to come out, the legacy of this tactic was felt later in the strike as bitterness about the promised ballot that never materialised continued to undermine support for the strike. In the mechanics, the weakness of left wing organisation led to a voted against strike action at area level (see chapter six), and the strike was only declared official after effectively being enforced by the miners'.

A 6.3 THE PRO-BALLOT MAJORITY

The overwhelming majority of rank and file miners and mechanics in Durham - and Murton was no exception - wanted a national ballot. So did many older and more "right wing" lodge officials. This was usually articulated as "we wanted to have our say". One Murton miner - a traveller from Blackhall who lived in Trimdon and went back to work in the last week - articulated his frustration at his lack of say in the decision. He hadn't even gone to the two meetings in Murton at the start of the strike.

"Murton pit you know voted not to go on strike."
(miner)
"The first week." (me)
"That's right."
"And then you were shamed out by the mechanics?"
"That's right. And we didn't even know nothing about it until we got to work."
"You didn't go to that first meeting where you voted..?"
"No. We didn't even know it was on! We didn't even know it was on. And then the following week, when we went back to Murton on the Monday, they said that they'd voted not to go on strike. They says, 'Oh, we're going to give it another week or so'. And then the Friday came..., they said they were having another vote. And they voted for strike action. [They'd] sent their delegate down to Scargill and them, hadn't they. I forget who it was. Well, I says, we never even got a vote."
"Did you not go through to that second meeting?"
"No. Nobody did. Because they didn't know it was on... Everybody will tell you 'round here. There wasn't even a bus provided, or nothing. It was just chaos man!"
(interview)

And indeed even Dave Temple tacitly acknowledged the _tactical_ importance of the ballot when he said: "There is no doubt that what helped keep us solid was the authority from the individual ballot we had [in the Murton mechanics]". Unlike the miners, the mechanics branch had the legitimacy of the ballot result in favour of action to sustain them through the strike. The miners had only come out "pending a national ballot", because they had been picketed out.

Yet on one issue surrounding the ballot, their is a striking degree of agreement between right and left, miners and mechanics. Most people in Murton and in Durham thought a ballot would have given a majority for action, especially if it had been held after the April 19th delegate conference reduced the required majority to 50%. This contradicts the opinion of the government, the media, and Arthur Scargill. However, it gains credibility from the only opinion polls that were ever done at the start of the strike to see how miners would vote in a ballot. On April 13th for example, a MORI poll for the Sunday Times showed 68% for the strike, 26% against, and 6% uncommitted (Wilsher _et al._, 1985, 78).

Attitudes about the result of a ballot might have been affected by such polls. But a far more likely influence was the widespread appreciation that in Durham at least, the strike had a deep groundswell of support. A Wearmmouth mechanic who supported the strike said this:

> "I couldn't understand them not having a ballot at the time of the strike... I couldn't understand why they didn't just say, well lets just have a ballot. Because even people here - and you knew what type of men they were - were talking about they would vote for a strike. I know it's different behind closed doors like, but I think they'd have walked a ballot at that particular time... Looking back in hindsight, I'm _still_ amazed, because I think they'd have won it." (interview)

A Murton mechanic who never really supported the strike agreed that the ballot would have been won after the rule change. And the man who is now Chairman of the UDM at Murton thought that if the ballot had been held in the summer, with the men out and "the sun on their backs", then there would have been a majority for a strike. Once out, people weren't talking about going back. They may not have liked being on strike, but they knew that if they were going to fight, this was the time they had to make a stand.

The question then arises to what extent the lack of a ballot influenced the course of the strike even after all the Durham miners were on strike anyway? Even six months into the strike, right wingers were approaching union men in pubs and clubs, and asking at union meetings when the ballot was going to materialise. For the first people back, the failure to ballot was the crucial reason they gave for being prepared to break the strike. But to many left wingers, once men had come out on strike, then the ballot was a dead issue, just an excuse. If they didn't agree with being on strike because there was no ballot, why did it take them nine months to go back?

A 6.4 POSTSCRIPT: A CHANGE OF HEART BY THE ACTIVISTS?

Since the strike many activists have clearly had doubts about the no-ballot strategy. Those who saw it as an opportunist move have revised their opinions on the basis that it didn't work. And even many of those who were wholeheartedly caught up in the momentum of the strike movement have had second thoughts.

One man who has gone further than most in renouncing his old views was a secretary of one of the Durham miners' lodges. He says now

> "There should definitely have been a national ballot on the issue... At the time I thought it [the no ballot strategy] was right, but when I went on that platform that Saturday morning and got our members out on strike, I wasn't happy. You know, the gut feeling was wrong." (interview)

A committed activist from the West of the coalfield agonised over the question 3 years after the event.

> "It may well be that there should have been a ballot. I don't know. I'm in two minds. I'm not sure... Personally I was outside the city hall in Sheffield [on April 19th] when they made the announcement, and there was thousands of people clapping and dancing. And I didn't feel like clapping and dancing, you know? I didn't feel like celebrating that there wasn't a ballot. 'Cos I believe we'd have won the ballot. I also believe that Nottingham wouldn't have come out. But at least they couldn't have said they hadn't had a ballot...
>
> "I shouldn't really criticize because I never said it at the time, and you sound a bit like George Bolton you know? - 'There should have been a ballot'. I was violently opposed to the ballot, 'cos that's what I was saying at the time. But I was opposed to a ballot

because they wanted a ballot for a return to work, and
for that reason I didn't want a ballot. When it came to
changing the rules at the Sheffield conference seven
weeks into the strike, I wouldn't have been broken
hearted if there'd been a ballot then. But there wasn't
one, and we made the best of it..." (interview)

Not all activists have come to this view. Dave Temple for example remains
absolutely committed to a tactical view of ballots. In other words, the
decision on whether or not to ballot is a tactical question, not a matter
of absolute moral principle. The only relevant principle is that there is
no requirment in principle to ballot before taking strike action. In the
case of the start of the 1984/5 strike, a ballot would have been a fiasco
because it would have drawn the energy out of the strike which therefore
might never have happened. Many other people have been so saturated with
what has become the right and left orthodoxy - that the lack of the ballot
was at the very least a tactical disaster - that they have almost lost
touch with the feelings and arguments that propelled them in the first few
weeks of the strike.

A 6.5 CONCLUSIONS

Most analyses of the ballot issue have ignored or played down the
historical background to the development of the "no ballot" strategy. In
particular, they have tended to discuss the ballot in a vacuum, hence
neglecting the very real pressures which built up on the NUM leadership in
the period immediately before and at the start of the 1984/5 dispute. Many
activists were determined to fight pit closures, and evolved an argument
which appealed to fundamental trade union principles in an attempt to
circumvent what was seen as an inherently divisive compulsion to ballot.
They associated calls for a ballot not with a commitment to the highest
principles of democracy, but with a shabby attempt to betray miners who
were fighting to defend union policy. On the other hand, the long tradition
of balloting in the NUM set up an inevitable tension between the activists
and the mass of the membership, which the government and the media
exploited during the strike.

APPENDIX SEVEN: PICKETING EXPERIENCES

APPENDIX 7: PICKETING EXPERIENCES

This appendix recounts some of the most important pickets that Murton miners and mechanics participated in. (It should be read as a supplement to section 6.3 of chapter six.) It is inevitably partial, reflecting the experiences of the people interviewed, who were by no means a comprehensive sample of the activists. Nevertheless, their descriptions capture much of the atmosphere of the time. Also in this appendix I review in detail state preparation to deal with picketing, and this to the evolving state strategy for dealing with organised labour (see chapter two).

A 7.1 EARLY DAYS: WINNING EVERYTHING?

As soon as the Murton mechanics decided to strike, pickets from Murton began to spread out to seek support elsewhere in the coalfield. They were joined by a small number of miners who acted despite the lodge vote to defy the strike call. One of the first stops was the notoriously conservative Tursdale workshops, near Ferryhill. A dozen men turned away hundreds of mechanics. "They were bloody unhappy about it, but they wouldn't cross our picket line." Picketing at Dawdon Colliery was the most intense of those first few days. Violence flared, but unlike in Nottinghamshire, the pickets soon imposed their will, and the police were unable to stop the men finally deciding to stop work.

In those early days, the police weren't geared up to deal with the picketing. As another mechanic said about the famous Tursdale picket (when a handful of mechanics turned back hundreds of reluctant strikers): "That was where the police sat in a van and watched in case <u>we</u> were assaulted!" A miners' activist argued that the lack of police readiness gave the lie to those who argued that the whole strike was set up from day one.

> "The state <u>wasn't</u> ready to defeat the miners. It took
> them a month to get control... The police became
> organised gradually... They certainly weren't effective
> in <u>this</u> area. We stopped everything in the West of
> Durham. Turned everything we wanted away. Turned every
> waggon away... brought everything to a standstill. Then
> all of a sudden, after a month or six weeks, the police
> came." (interview)

In those early weeks, the police operation was concentrated in Nottinghamshire. After the pickets were beaten in Notts, the police spread

out, and the tactics developed and legitimised there were deployed in places like Durham.

Following these early successes, the going got tougher. A vicious (and barely reported) little war developed around the private opencast sites near Tow Law. The first arrest of a Murton man came only a couple of weeks into the strike, at the Philadelphia workshops. It left a big impact. Later on arrests became commonplace, but this first one was greeted with outrage. The mechanics formed up behind their banner and marched to the police station in protest. One mechanic said "We demanded - because in March we _did_ demand - we demanded his release."

The arrested man gave me his account of the event, two and a half years later.

> "You got to Philly, and you saw loads and loads of policemen. You're confused. Hadn't been on TV yet about all this mass picketing, police presence and everything. See about 15 people walking up, surrounded by police. These people are going in to work! [disbelief]. They mustn't realise what's going on. That's when the adrenalin starts to flow. I felt very strongly about people like that like. Weren't thinking about the long term future, they were thinking about the short term. Cash." (interview)

He was arrested under section 5 - disorderly conduct.

He recalled:

> "Being arrested, being demoralised. Sitting in the cell there with your handcuffs on, feeling like a criminal, saying "What the hell. What have I done wrong? You know? It didn't sink in what I was doing wrong. What I was doing wrong was shouting 'Scab!'. That was wrong. Well, it _isn't_ wrong. It's part of being a trade unionist, which I had to explain in court." (interview)

Some Durham pickets also began to travel to other coalfields. Even now, many miners are reluctant to discuss these experiences, because of a fear that they could still be prosecuted under conspiracy law. Rather than trying to catalogue every picket, and the specific experience that each one brought, this appendix concentrates on two big demonstrations which have become part of the collective memory of the strike for Murton activists (and miners nationally, in the case of Orgreave).

On April 19th, the day of the lobby of the special delegate conference to decide on the ballot question, an incident occurred which was for some miners more important even than Orgreave. Wilsher et al. described it like this.

> "Outside [the meeting] the police paraded in self conciously disciplined ranks, and were almost immediately called upon to suppress a savage pub fight. For an hour they, press photographers, television crews and anyone who could be remotely identified as 'a lackey of the capitalist media' had to negotiate a hail of bricks, blows and strident verbal abuse. There were 68 arrests, and dozens of minor injuries." (1985, 82)

But the actual events of the day were different, and as one miner said: "After what happened at Sheffield, we shouldn't have been surprised by Orgreave." Below, a journalist and several mechanics give their version of two of the 68 arrests.

Gerry Marron, a Northern Echo reporter, travelled down to Sheffield with the Murton men. His report of the incident was published - under the title "Why the fury flowed after a quiet pint" - on April 21st.

> "Trouble started around 3.15 pm. I was one of the first out of the club and saw only a handful of miners standing and chatting on the grassed area outside. Then quickly several vans of police arrived. Moments later miners were being pushed around by the police. Police on the spot were saying that they had been called by the pub across the road which claimed trouble makers had run in to the Labour club to hide.
>
> "Arguments began between police and pitmen and some miners inside the club, incenced at what was happening outside, urged that the police be sorted out. But others kept the doors shut, leaving only a handful still outside. More police arrived by the minute. A convoy of seven or eight blue vans pulled up, the doors were flung open and police charged up the bank in a military fashion towards the club. They outnumbered miners about 3 to one - 400 to 500 police facing about 150 miners.
>
> "I saw senior union officials, including national executive member Billy Stobbs and Wearmouth secretary Dave Hopper, who asked why all the police were there, being pushed away. Other miners who questioned police tactics were sworn at by officers. I saw one man who didn't seem to be doing anything hit across the legs with a truncheon by an officer. I saw several miners arrested who moments earlier had been standing around

peacefully. Miners sat down in the road blocking traffic in a bid to get police to release their colleagues."

This account tallies almost exactly with those given several years later by Murton men who were there. One said:

"The police more or less surrounded the club you know. And it was exactly round about quart past, half past three, when everybody was coming out... It was mayhem outside the club. It was the first time I'd ever seen a policeman in my life with his truncheon out, swiping at people like that. It was totally uncalled for... There was all hell let loose. We sat on the road and all kinds. We blocked the traffic off." (interview)

Two Murton men were arrested - Steven Vardy (who was charged with being drunk and disorderly) and later Tommy Parry (who was charged with assaulting a police officer). Evidence submitted in defence of the two men described how the Murton men, along with other miners, had emerged from the club at about 3.15, to be confronted by a massive force of police with truncheons drawn. Some police were already attacking miners. One Murton mechanic - Stewart - became angry, and Steven tried with Tommy Wilson to calm him down. Stewart's evidence for Steven's trial explained how it all started.

"When we came out, there was a massive police presence, and scuffles were going on. I suppose I saw three or four seperate incidents in all. I was aghast to see the police wading in with truncheons at the ready for no apparent reason.

"We had by this time walked down from the club to approximately 10-15 yards from the club door. I was becoming more and more angry at the behaviour of some of the police. Tommy Wilson and Steven Vardy were both standing next to me, telling me to keep calm. Tommy had hold of me and I think it was his idea that we return back to the doorway of the club. Stephen Vardy was not even shouting at the police as I was." (statement of evidence)

Tommy Wilson confirmed this account in his evidence, and took up the story.

"Steven Vardy was doing exactly the same as me. He was being helpful and responsible, in trying to tell Stewart that he ought to keep out of trouble. I think Steven thinks he has been unlucky and we were just standing talking to him. There was lots of shouting

going on around us, but Steven Vardy was certainly not shouting at the police.

> "The next thing I knew was that Stephen was getting led away. He was not struggling, he just walked away voluntarily. I immediately followed him to the police van he was led to. I asked if I could talk to the officer who had arrested him, and I was allowed to. The door of the police van was open. I said that I was a lodge official and I saw Stephen and advised him to say nothing. I wrote down the number of the arresting officer, number 523. I then went round the side of the van knocking on the van and repeating my advice to Stephen to say nothing. He looked flabbergasted and there were tears in his eyes." (statement of evidence)

Realising that one of their members had been arrested, the mechanics decided to take their coach to the police station in Bridge Street to find out what had happened to him, and to try and see him. Shortly after arriving "about three bus loads of police arrived, and most of us were pushed out of the way" (statement of evidence, Dave Temple). Tommy Parry takes up the story of his own arrest.

> "When we were waiting I witnessed a police sergeant 2001 walk over [and] push and kick Mr Dalton Davidson who was sitting on the kerbstone of the road approaching [the] gates to [the] station yard. Mr Davidson said 'What was that for? I have asked that policeman there and he said it was OK for me to sit down.' I noted the number of this policeman down (2112). The time now was 5.14pm."

> "About five minutes after this incident I was standing talking to a policeman who was standing inside the of the gates. This policeman originated from the Newcastle area. I was standing resting against the wall. I heard a policeman say 'Unlock the gates'. This was done. A policeman said to me 'Come this way'. I walked in with them, I thought to go and see Mr Vardy. Just short of the door a policeman stepped in front of me and said 'I am arresting you for assaulting a police officer'."
> (Statement of evidence)

Numerous statements given in evidence supported the contention that at the time of the alleged assault Tommy could not possibly have been involved in any incident. The feeling was that Tommy was arrested because he had noted down the number of the police officer who had assaulted Dalton Davidson a few minutes earlier.

The significance of the Trades and Labour Club clash was that for most miners it was the first time they saw the police engaging in sustained

bouts of gratuitous violence. Tactics which had become commonplace in Nottingham (see Coulter et al., 1984, 77-104) were deployed against men from Durham and Murton for the first time. Years later the reaction was still one of shock and outrage. To see policemen laying savagely about them in an unprovoked attack on peaceful miners, and arbitrarily arresting two men who the Murton mechanics knew to be innocent, was a traumatic experience.

A 7.3 ORGREAVE, JUNE 18TH 1984.

If there was one single event which for most people summed up the miners strike, it was the mass picket at Orgreave on June 18th 1984. It was Arthur Scargill's Waterloo. It summed up the differences between the successful 1972 and '74 strikes, and 1984. For the miners, the tactics were the same. Sheer weight of numbers would overpower the forces of the state, as they had done at Saltley coke depot in 1972. But the situation in 1984 bore no meaningful comparison with those heady days of the early 1970's.

For those miners and mechanics from Murton who were there, it left an indelible mark. To understand this impact, it is necessary to go in to the story of Orgreave in some detail, because the accounts of people who were there differ so fundamentally from the version which the media has poured into the collective consciousness of the nation that for their experiences to be validated requires re-exhuming the entire story. Fortunately this is a relatively easy task, because the notoriety of Orgreave is such that it has been well documented by both sides.

A 7.3.i Setting the stage.

Although the final and most famous Orgreave picket was on June 18th, this was merely the culmination of picketing that had been going on for 4 weeks. Despite the far greater significance of the CEGB market to the NCB, the NUM decided early in the strike to concentrate picketing efforts on the steel sector. Although now only a small market, steel had the advantage that any cutback in production would have an immediate impact on other sectors of the economy, particularly engineering and cars (Wilsher et al., 1985, 84).

However, the much vaunted - and unfailingly disappointing - "Triple Alliance" of coal, steel and transport unions failed to deliver the

necessary solidarity. In particular, the ISTC made it clear that it would not support the miners, because of the risk to their own members jobs. Attempts to limit coke burn by negotiation to that required to stop the blast furnaces cracking failed (see ibid, 85-88: Adeney and Lloyd, 1986, 138: Callinicos and Simons, 1985 for differing accounts).

Sporadic and uneven picketing at Orgreave began on May 23rd and culminated on June 18th. It began when BSC reacted to the collapse in steel production at Scunthorpe and an explosion in the "Queen Mary" blast furnace, by deciding to bring in supplies of high quality coke by lorry from Orgreave. Prior to this decision, Scunthorpe had been producing under a fragile dispensation agreement, which was supposed to guarantee delivery of 17500 toones of coal from Yorkshire pits. But BSC claimed that they received nowhere near this amount, and furthermore, the quality of this coal was very poor. Iron and steel production fell to just 17% of normal by the end of April (Wilsher et al., 1985, 89-90). BSC also knew that since the start of the strike

> "Orgreave had been locked up tight, with a miners'
> picket installed permanently on a nearby railway
> bridge, ensuring that no NUR or ASLEF man would take a
> train in or out." (ibid, 91)

So the stage was set for the use of mass lorry convoys to bypass the successful railway picketing.

A 7.3.ii The Police and state strategy.

Policing at Orgreave represented the conscious strategy of the state for dealing with the miners' strike and especially the threat posed by mass pickets. As Bunyan showed, the tactics grew out of the successful picketing by the NUM in 1972.

> "Previous mass demonstrations over Vietnam and South
> Africa in the late 60's were, in the main, controlled
> by force of numbers rather than by the use of force. We
> have witnessed a return not to the police backed by the
> army and militia as in the last century, but of a
> riot-trained, para-military force drawn from the ranks
> of ordinary police officers." (Bunyan, 1985, 293)

The success in 1972 of the miners' strike (culminating in the famous Saltley picket) and the Dock strike, with the release of the "Pentonville five" after massive demonstrations, led to the setting up of the National Security Commission (NSC). Briefed "with the immediate task of drawing up

plans to defeat a prolonged strike and to combat 'flying pickets'" (ibid, 294), the review heralded fundamental changes in public order policing.

> "From this [review] stemmed: the creation of Special
> Patrol Groups in all urban centres; the arming of
> specialist police units and a general increase in guns
> training; the creation of Police Support Units,
> initially and ostensibly for Civil Defence purposes;
> the removal from the Home Office of responsibility for
> dealing with civil emergencies (disasters, strike,
> public order) and its transfer to the Civil
> Contingencies Unit in the Cabinet Office; the creation
> of the National Reporting Centre; the extension of the
> Special Branch to all forces outside London and their
> remit expanded to include a wide definition of
> 'subversives' (this only became public in December
> 1984); the formulation of strategic and tactical plans
> for the use of troops in strikes under Military Aid to
> the Civil Ministries (MACM) and for disorders, Military
> Aid to the Civil Power (MACP)." (ibid)

To this list we might add the redirection of MI5 away from its traditional obsession with the "Soviet threat" to the internal "threat" posed by "subversives" (Wright, 1987).

Instead of relying on the army to maintain public order in times of tension caused by industrial action or political protest, the state chose to create a "Third Force", drawn from the police but filling a role between the police and army. This mobile para-military force was quickly in action. In 1973 the SPG shot dead two young Pakistani's, and in 1974 they killed Kevin Gateley at an anti-National Front demonstration. At Grunwicks the SPG were repeatedly used against pickets. In 1979 Blair Peach was killed by the SPG as they went on the rampage at another anti-NF demonstration (Bunyan, 1985). David McNee, then Metropolitan Police Commissioner said:

> "If you keep off the streets of London and behave
> yourself you won't have the SPG to worry about" (quoted
> in ibid, 296)

However, the 1980 and 1981 riots – where the police lost control of the inner cities for long periods – led to a further revision of tactics (ibid, 295-297).

These new tactics were tried out at the Warrington dispute between the NGA and Eddie Shah.

> "The NGA speaker van was attacked and overturned by
> police, and squads with full riot gear, including the
> now familiar NATO helmet and face masks, repeatedly
> charged the pickets. The police were seemingly more

> interested in exacting physical punishment than in
> making arrests... For the first time in an industrial
> dispute para-military policing more akin to that used
> in Northern Ireland had been used to attack strikers."
> (ibid, 297, emphasis added)

A secret police review in 1981 by an Association of Chief Police Officers
(ACPO) working party led to the preparation of a secret manual of police
practices in 1982 (ibid, 301-2). Sections of the manual were made public at
the Orgreave riot trial. They included the revelation that PSU's (police
support units) are trained to go into a crowd, not with the intention of
arresting them, but to "incapacitate" them (Jackson and Wardle, 1986, 83).

> "The most familiar instruction concerning miners'
> pickets is that where there are 20 officers with short
> shields and batons they should 'run at the crowd in
> pairs in order to disperse and/or incapacitate'."
> (Bunyan, 1985, 302)
> "Similarly another maneuvre that is proposed is that
> all the officers at the scene should run forward to
> 'disperse the crowd and incapacitate missile throwers
> and ring leaders by striking in a controlled manner
> with batons about the arms and legs or torso so as not
> to cause serious injury'." (East et al., 1985, 312)

This of course amounts to an official instruction to assault. The concept
of incapacitating someone in a "controlled manner" so as not to cause
"serious injury" would be laughable if it were not so horrific.

It is therefore quite clear that the police arrived at Orgreave with a
strategy and tactics which had been well prepared. Repeatedly, in the media
and in the courts, the police justified their actions at Orgreave by saying
that they simply responded to the overwhelming assault by the miners. In
reality, they executed a carefully engineered strategy, using tactics
developed over 10 years and honed in earlier industrial disputes. But why
did the state choose saturation policing and the criminal law as their main
strategy for dealing with the dispute, rather than the civil law?

As McIlroy has pointed out, although pickets enjoyed certain limited
immunities from civil law between 1906 and 1980, they enjoyed virtually no
protection from the criminal law. There is no legal right to picket.

> "The only indisputably lawful pickets are those who
> attend in small numbers and who keep out of everybody's
> way. Meanwhile, the workers they have come to persuade
> to join them can sweep past in vehicles which the
> pickets have no right to stop." (Wedderburn, quoted in
> McIlroy, 1985, 102)

Any attempt to halt cars or pedestrians could attract criminal prosecution.

In 1980 and 1982 the government removed some of the most important civil immunities for strikers and their unions, concentrating on action taken against so called "secondary" employers and workers. Henceforth pickets and their unions were liable for damages if picketing any workplace other than their own. The picketing code of practice which accompanied these Acts severely restricted the actions of pickets, and it was emphasised that these guidelines should be taken into account by the criminal courts. (McIlroy, 1985, 103).

Given these developments, it is perhaps surprising that the state chose to rely on the criminal rather than the civil law to control the dispute. McIlroy explains that:

> "There was the fear - justified or not in hindsight - that such an initiative could change the bone of contention, focus the dispute on resistance to industrial relations legislation, and unite a union fragmenting over closures." (ibid, 104)

The success of saturation policing under the central control of the National Reporting Centre (NRC) (Bunyan, 1985, 298), meant that there was less need to rely on civil action, with the risk of widening the dispute (see also East et al., 1985, 307). Far better, if possible, to portray the strike as a simple "law 'n order" issue.

Precedents had already been set.

> "Previous court decisions meant that there was, in the end, no right to picket... Yet because trade unionists perceived approaching fellow workers to be both right and necessary, strikers would picket and, if frustrated, would do so in ever greater numbers. As a consequence they would be breaking the criminal law and could legitimately be answered by the growing presence and restraint of the police. The workers' reaction - defence of what they saw as their rights - would then become, in the eyes of the law and of law-abiding citizens, gratuitous and offensive violence." (McIlroy, 1985, 105)

A spiral of violence was initiated as the pickets tried to exercise what they saw as their rights, and the police acted to enforce the criminal law as interpreted over the years (ibid, 106-7).

> "The legal edifice now works to make effective picketing criminal and therefore acts as a direct agent of the employer in industrial disputes." (ibid, 106: emphasis in original)

Prior to the mass Orgreave picket, most picket and police attention had been focussed on the Nottingham coalfield. Police concentrated on preventing picketing of any type - a strategy reaching its peak in the Dartford tunnel road blocks (East et al, 1985; 308-9: McIlroy, 1985; 106). As McIlroy says, citing Orgreave in particular,

> "The evidence accumulated of mass military-style intended not to regulate picketing, nor to guarantee peaceful picketing, but clearly aimed <u>at stopping all picketing</u> is impressive." (McIlroy, 1985, 107: emphasis in original)

The police strategy made violence on the picket lines inevitable. When small, peaceful pickets were met by police obstruction, when the police blocked attempts to picket at all (Nottingham's chief constable estimated that 164508 people were prevented from entering the county in the first half of the strike - McIlroy, 1985, 106), and when larger pickets were met by snatch squad arrests, beatings and short shield unit charges, it was inevitable the pickets would respond with bricks.

On top of this, the savage war waged on the pickets and strikers in the Nottingham pit villages in the first few weeks of the strike should not be forgotten (Coulter <u>et al</u>., 1984, 81-93 and 100-104: Beaton, 1985). Such levels of police brutality, including kidnap and torture, formed an essential backdrop both to police tactics at Orgreave, and to the miners response to them.

Police tactics at Orgreave on June 18th had been clearly sign posted in the preceding mass pickets there (see Coulter <u>et al</u>, 1984, 93-100 for a thorough account of police provocation and brutality on May 29th). On these occassions the strategy I outlined above were put through there paces. On May 29th for example, a normal picket with a traditional push and shove was dramatically transformed when the police issued the instruction "Take prisoners!" (<u>ibid</u>, 96-7). After several beatings and arrests, some pickets at the back began to throw stones. The police charged the pickets on horses, wielding long batons, and were followed up by short shield units. Arrests were extremely brutal. Three charges were made, with no response from the pickets except to run away. As Coulter <u>et al</u>. say:

> "For the rest of the afternoon, from about two o'clock until four, they [the police] gave a varied demonstration of riot control tactics which were evidently well rehearsed and which had next to nothing to do with what the pickets were doing." (<u>ibid</u>, 97)

Most miners arrived at Orgreave to demonstrate their solidarity with the union. They did not come to cause a riot. However, incidents such as that at the Sheffield Trades and Labour Club on April 17th, earlier mass pickets at Orgreave (on May 29th, 31st and June 6th), and the police actions in Nottinghamshire meant that many were no longer surprised by police violence. Some undoubtedly arrived with the intention of throwing missiles at the police if, as expected, they would not be allowed to picket. But by far the majority were there simply to demonstrate a common purpose, to show their support for the national union, and to try and stop the lorries going in (although very few held out a realistic hope for this last objective).

If miners had come to Orgreave expecting and hoping to engage in a riot, or indeed any violent acts against the police, they would not have arrived in tee shirts and trainers, as they did. They would have brought protective clothing, armed themselves with implements to throw at the police, and to hit them with. In fact, it was the police who arrived in protective clothing, carrying shields, armed with clubs, dogs and horses.

Miners were not prepared for the onslaught that met them at Orgreave. Over the previous ten years in which the state was preparing its tactics, practicing new methods, deploying new equipment, the miners were going about their normal work. The union leadership failed to develop any new tactics after the success of 1972, and relied on the same methods twelve years later. Miners arrived hoping that by sheer force of numbers they might stop the lorries going in. This tactic followed the police action in banning pickets from the partially successful attempt to try to persuade the lorries from going in (Jackson and Wardle, 1986, 29-30).

This then was the background to the Orgreave picket. Comprehensive preparations by the state and the police meant that they arrived with a battle plan ready to be executed. The pickets arrived for a traditional picket and show of solidarity. As the following section shows, contrary to the media and police interpretation, the pickets never developed a collective offensive momentum (never mind strategy).

June 18th 1984 was a scorching hot summers day. Pickets began to arrive early, answering Arthur Scargill's call for a mass show of strength. Right from the start, this was a different day. After weeks and weeks of being unable to picket because of a suffocating ring of road blocks around Nottinghamshire, miners found police actually <u>directing</u> them to Orgreave. Road blocks were <u>still</u> in operation on June 18th, stopping miners from getting to Nottinghamshire (Jackson and Wardle, 1986, 32), and directing them from these road blocks to Orgreave (<u>ibid</u>; see photograph between pages 52-53). A Murton mechanic was unequivocal: "I mean, there's no doubt we were directed there you know,.. police were directing people to Orgreave. It was well planned."

The official police response to these reports is that with so many pickets involved, it was better to have them all together in one place. Suddenly the strategy of preventing picketing at all was abandoned. Many of those who were there believe they had been set up to be given a good beating.

What happened at Orgreave is described in vivid detail in Jackson and Wardle's comprehensive account (1986). Their description makes use of the police' own video of events, which provides incontrovertible proof to back the pickets account of events that day (<u>ibid</u>; see especially 78-80, and the evidence of perjury by Antony Clements, the officer in charge of policing at Orgreave contained in pages 57-85).

At about 8.10 several thousand pickets faced a wall of police at least 10 deep, for the ritual shove as the lorries went in. The scale of the police presence was frightening. One Murton picket described his impressions.

> "When we went there we thought, 'Oh, we're brave'. Take
> the pickets down to the front like, our lads, straight
> down to the front. Standing like that... the squash,
> hell you thought you were going to get killed! If you'd
> lost your feet you were frightened for you were going
> down..." (interview)

The police video shows a very occassional missile coming over at this stage. Some missiles hit pickets rather than policemen.

Then, without warning or provocation, the police lines parted and horses charged out. After lashing about, they returned to their lines. Minutes

later, the same thing happened, only this time the police line advanced up behind the mounted officers. When the horses returned to police lines they were met by cheering and clapping from the police ranks.

At 9.20 the lorries left Orgreave. Again there was a shove. Around 9.30 the police came out again. This time the short shield units - PSU's - attacked the pickets.

> "They seemed little interested in 'taking prisoners' and rather more concerned with injuring. It made no difference if pickets stood still, raised their hands or ran away; truncheons were used on arms and legs, trunks and shoulders, and particularly on heads and faces. Men lay around unconscious or semi-conscious with vicious wounds on thier bodies, more often than not with bloody gashes on the backs of their heads.
> (Jackson and Wardle, 1986, 34)

This account fits well with the tactics advised in the secret police manual quoted earlier. Pickets trying to run away faced police dogs in the woods to the left, and mounted police to the right. Directly behind was a steep railway embankment, with the only realistic means of escape a narrow bridge over the railway line.

After this second police operation there was a lull until around 11.30. Already it was scorchingly hot, and many pickets left the field in front of the police line to patch up injuries or seek refreshments in the large ASDA store in Orgreave village. When pickets returned to the field, it had been transformed into a large picnic area. A few hundred men were sitting and standing around - many shirtless - drinking and eating. In front of them though, the solid line of heavily protected policemen still stretched across the road and the field.

At around 11.30, the police began to execute what was clearly a carefully planned strategy. In a three stage movement, they advanced up the field. There was no provocation. Most of the pickets were not there. Those that were, and were unable to escape, received savage beatings, and were arrested. With nowhere to run to, many pickets were stampeded over the edge of the steep cliff down on to the main railway line.

From then on, the police went on the rampage. Belatedly, pickets began to respond. By the end of the day, some of those that were left threw whatever

they could at the police line. Up in the village, in the ASDA car park, the police continued to hand out a brutal form of summary justice.

A 7.3.v Murton pickets at Orgreave.

Fear was the dominant theme in every interview I mentioned the Orgreave picket. Invariably mention of Orgreave left the interviewee stumbling around for adjectives sufficient to sum up the depth of their horror and fear at what happened.

> "That's a time I'll never forget that. Never forget. Never ever. Scared. Really scared." (mechanic)
> "I've never seen nowt like that afore in my life, Orgreave like... 'Cos nobody ever thought they'd do what they did, you know? Couldn't believe it." (mechanic)
> "I've never been so frightened as Orgreave, when the coppers was running up the bank with the horses." (miner)
> "Horrifying, unreal... That should never happen anywhere, never mind England." (mechanic)

This is one mechanics recollection of that day.

> "It was one of those days, a beautiful summers day. It was mind. Beautiful. Lads walking around with flasks in their hand, plimsolls on, shorts on, shirtsleeves. It was a picnic day, (started off as) for most of them. They were going to give a push here and there, and get a push back. I would say 80% of the people there knew they weren't going to to get anywhere. They weren't going to stop that convoy going in. They were hoping to stop it just on sheer presence of numbers... It didn't work that way... When you see them coming out with their shields and their helmets - it's a red hot day tha' knows - then you start realising these lads mean business here.
>
> "What scared me from me own point of view... was irresponsible people at the back throwing rocks. That scared us. You not only had that trouble in front of you, but you had that trouble behind you. And the people that's doing all the throwing, probably the nearest they ever got to the picket line was 100 yards away. That scared us."

There was an ever present danger of being trampled in the crush at the front of the picket line.

> "You know for a fact that nobody's going to help when you're down on the bottom. That scared us... The police started to move forward a bit, and then the horses, them scared us. When they're coming out just wielding

sticks. They were playing polo with mens heads, that's all they were doing. <u>That</u> scared us.

> "Then they started the first charge up the hill on horseback. I mean, Geordie will probably tell you the same story. When me and him was running I was saying 'Dinna panic, that's the worst thing'. I remember sayin' it. 'Trot. Just keep moving along.' Then you hear clippety clop, and you turn round and there's a horse from here to that curtain off you. An' he's hitting people across the back of the head like, standing up in his stirrups. You feel like relieving yourself, you know? You panic. That's the first thing you do. Doesn't matter who gets in your way. Friend or foe. Your mind isn't concentrating on that. You just want to get out of the way. You want to get as many bodies inbetween as you can. <u>That</u> scares you." (interview)

Another mechanic relived his experiences two and a half years later. As the police lined up, he:

> "just saw masses of police with shields; long shields, short shields. Saw the horses up on the hilltop on the right, saw the dogs in the field, <u>knew</u> it was a terrible situation... The timing [of the police charges] was all the police timing. They would come out and they'd have the short shield men behind them - which you didn't stay long enough to see them, you buggered off."

During the lull after the 9.30 police advance, he left with another Murton mechanic to get some food and drink at the ASDA store. Then they headed back to the field in front of the police lines.

> "So we're saunterin' down the road, past Arthur Scargill. 'Alright?' [we asked]. 'Ah, I'm fuckin' sick o' this!' And he doesn't swear normally... And we walked on down... And then suddenly there was like <u>dust</u>, the first thing we saw. And lads runnin'. Well it was really quiet, there wasn't even that many [pickets] down there (or didn't appear to be)... And they ran up towards us you know. And we're still saunterin' down...

> "And then we saw it - I'll never forget it - the blue! And it was the reflection from the helmets. <u>And there was masses of them.</u>.. And there were the horses charging. Well that was [it] you know... We took off in all parts... I ran off the road, through the cornfield, 'round the bushes, onto the bridge. They <u>still</u> kept coming. Ran up the road. They stopped for a while.

In the break that followed, as the police regrouped having completed another phase, he began to try and help some of the severely injured

pickets. He went to a house to ask for help, and the elderly woman living
there re-emerged with half a cotton sheet she'd torn from a bed, to use for
bandaging. He was still in this woman's garden helping an injured man with
one or two others, when the police charged again.

> "Then the police moved again. Now I'll never know why,
> because as I say I was busy then. And the next thing I
> knew there was all these bloody horses, flying. I was
> convinced at one time they were coming into the garden
> like, they were that close. They just went _crazy_
> through there!.. They went tearing up. We saw the
> snatch squads, the short shields - hundreds of them -
> racing past us."

It was so bad, that he decided to take the injured man into the house. But
the others wanted him to stay outside to keep a look out.

> "When the door shut I was standing there on this step,
> and I was watching them, and they were crazy man. They
> really were. There was a riot that day, and it was the
> police who rioted. They went crazy."

At this point he tried to phone for an ambulance, but the ambulance service
said they couldn't get down that road. So he went out to try and find an
ambulance which he could guide down.

> "Well I wasn't too keen, I'll be honest. I went out and
> I looked up, and the police were coming back then. So I
> says, 'maybe if I wait a second or two they'll be away
> and I can get out without any bother'. And they did
> come back, on their horses. Laughing. And that's what
> got you - they were enjoying it. Laughing and joking
> and threatening. Being so bloody superior.

> "Then I got called across the road. There was a lad
> lying there, and he says, 'Can you come over and have a
> look at him?'.. Went across, and there was a lad - must
> have been 50 plus. And he had a horse print - a hoof
> print - _there_ [just under his rib cage]. He'd either
> been kicked or trodden on. Well, my first reaction, I
> thought he was dead! His face was grey. _I_ couldn't hear
> him breathing... He looked dreadful. Certainly
> unconscious."

Desperately he returned to the house to try and phone again for an
ambulance. Again he was told that they could only get as far as the
supermarket at the top of the road. So he went up the road to try and bring
an ambulance down.

> "[I] stopped a police car. Never forget that, 'cos what
> he was doing there I don't know - a normal patrol car.
> I explained: 'I'm waiting for an ambulance. Where the
> hell are they? Why can't they get down this street?'
> And he told us to 'Fuck off'."

Finally an ambulance did arrive, coming from the opposite direction, through the police lines, and he returned to the Murton mechanics coach. I asked what the feeling on the coach was.

> "Shock... Really it was panic and shock. I remember my first drink was 2 paracetamol and a pint! That's how I felt. I was bursting! Tense! And I think most of the people were. They'd felt fear they'd never felt before in their lives. They'd seen things they hadn't seen - obviously. There was an element of panic there."

Other interviews confirmed that whilst the details of these two accounts are specific, the general experiences, feelings and reactions were collective. In fact, as Dave Temple suggested:

> It's been my observation (since the strike) that individual reminiscences become 'socialised'. That is to say, they merge with that of others, and sometimes carry the stamp of a particular leaders observations at the time - ie 'There was a riot at Orgreave, it was a police riot'. (pers comm)

Nowhere is this more apparent than with Orgreave. It was such a major event, and such an overwhelming experience, that as the same mechanic quoted above said, "It's practically all we talked about for the next three months." Distorted media coverage further emphasized the subsequent obsession with Orgreave (see Douglass, 1985; Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 1985). This media coverage was so totally at odds with their own experience that talking about the day became an act of solidarity in itself.

In this account there is no attempt to put the police view of the Orgreave picket. People wishing to familiarise themselves with the police view should read the opening address by prosecuting counsel at the Orgreave trial (reproduced in full in Jackson and Wardle, 1986, 1-5), and the report from the Chief Constable for South Yorkshire (Wright, 1985). It can also be noted that 95 men (none of them policemen) were charged with riot or unlawful assembly arising out of events on June 18th (both of which carry a maximum life sentence) (Wright, 1985). Of these, the police offered no evidence against 80, and the remaining 15 were found not guilty after the police withdrew from the case 48 days into the trial (Jackson and Wardle, 1986, 122).

Appendix 7   (447)

A 7.3.vi Aftermath.

Obviously stones _were_ thrown at the police. This account does not attempt the futile task of trying to establish who threw the first offensive blow on the picket line. Instead, it shows that violence at Orgreave was caused by the conscious strategies of the state. The police had a strategy and tactics worked out before they arrived at Orgreave. This strategy had evolved over the years, and was designed not to prevent breaches of the law, but to ensure that effective picketing could not take place. It relied on a pliant media who accept official versions of events such as Orgreave. And it was based upon the institutionalised use of violence sanctioned by the state.

Miners at Orgreave were not intent on a riot. Dave Temple recalls Arthur Scargill urging the pickets down the hill towards the picket line. But even he couldn't persuade them to fight the police. As one Yorkshire picket grittily responded: "Fuck off Arthur. It's fucking murder down there."

For a brief period at the end of the day, the Murton pickets - like many people who had been there - were capable of an extreme reaction. As one Murton mechanic said:

> "The attempt at retribution, if it had worked, would
> have been worse than the police, because lads really
> did lose their cool." (interview)

Some wanted to go back the next day. But the picket was called off. Mass picketing was never again used as an offensive strategy during the strike.

A 7.4 ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT OF PICKET LINE EXPERIENCES

Although it was discussed many times, the miners at Murton never passed the threshold of embracing major planned acts of sabotage. As Beynon reports, throughout the summer of 1984 discussions among pickets in Durham focussed on how to make picketing more effective. It would have required a 'military operation', but "very few miners seemed prepared to take the risks that such a confrontation would involve" (Beynon, 1985b, 397) Blowing up power lines for example was discussed in Murton. But offensive strikes of this kind were never attempted.

One of the key reasons was that miners - unlike inner city minorities - have been integrated into the state and its processes.

> "Miners historically, to an extent far beyond any other groups in the working class, have progressed their interests throught the state... In 1984, the miners were in dispute over the Plan For Coal, made between the NUM, the NCB and the government. As a group the miners are not the dispossesed. Generally they experience none of the feelings of being outside 'politics' and beyond the state which affects the consciousness of the black communities and the urban poor. While on strike, however, the miners were treated like the black communities and the poor." (Beynon, 1985b, 400)

Politically, events at Orgreave, and indeed the general level of class conflict in the first months of the strike, provoked considerable involvement. A series of evening classes were organised in Murton by Dave Temple on behalf of the Workers Revolutionary Party. People were searching for an explanation of what they had experienced, and considerable political debate ensued. Dave recruited some miners, and one or two mechanics into the WRP. The radicalisation of the young miners was a key political development in Murton.

However, as Beynon points out (Beynon 1985b), there was a strong tension in the radicalisation of the pickets. Whilst for some "things will never be the same again", there was also a strong desire to return to "normality". The strike was a defence of the status quo - an attempt to preserve the communities and their relationship with the coal industry. Traditional relationships and attitudes are woven deeply into the fabric of the pit villages, and it is not surprising that in the aftermath of the strike villages like Murton settled down to give every appearance of carrying on as before.

APPENDIX EIGHT: PROUD TO GO BACK: THE ANTI-STRIKE
DIEHARDS

This appendix elaborates on the arguments contained in section 6.4 of the thesis, concerning the minority of anti-strike diehards. I interviewed two men in detail, and fuller reports on these interviews are contained below. They are followed by a tentative explanation of the reasons why the right wing ideology both subscribed to became so strongly rooted in their beliefs.

In the first weeks and months of the strike, the government and NCB concentrated their efforts on keeping the Nottingham coalfield working, and pressing for a national ballot. This helped to undermine the legitimacy of the strike in two ways. Firstly, it made it difficult for the union to argue that it was a truly national strike. Secondly, by playing on rank and file desire for a ballot, the government began the process of undermining the moral, and then legal foundation of the dispute.

However, in areas like Durham where the strike was completely solid, very few men even considered going back at this stage. Negotiations proceeded, if rather sporadically, at a national level, until July 19th (Wilsher <u>et al.</u>, 1985, 127-136). There was still a realistic possibility that the strike might end in a negotiated settlement. In this situation, the enormity of breaking a major all out strike was too great to be contemplated.

A 8.1 "BOB'S" STORY

One man who thought differently, even at this early stage, was Bob. Three months into the strike, he was already thinking about going back to work. In this respect he differed from other men who went back later on in the strike, most of whom didn't consider going back until the end of the summer. As the Chairman of the UDM at Murton said, it was such a glorious summer once they

> "got the sun on their backs, they just didn't want to
> go back to work. Men didn't want to go back to work.
> Till men finally decided they <u>had</u> had to go back, or
> the strike would never end." (interview)

Bob emphasised the belief that if people like himself hadn't gone back, "the strike would still be on today". Later on in the strike, this was also

to be decisive in persuading a lot of other miners to go back. But for the moment, the majority still believed that it would not be necessary to break the strike for it to end, and it was therefore not considered. Meanwhile, Bob discussed with his mates the idea that someone would have to go back, to break the deadlock. He remembered arguing: "Well, somebody's got to make a push". But for the time being, it didn't seem a realistic possibility.

Over the summer, while Bob talked with his mates about the possibility of going back, he managed to find a job for a few weeks doing demolition work. It only paid £9 a day, and the work was hard and dangerous. But at least he was able to get out for a couple of nights a week. Then, towards the end of the summer, his wife became ill and had to go into hospital. It was clear Bob couldn't cope with this situation. When his wife came back, tension in the house rose, and shortly afterwards - feeling overwhelmed by the pressure of the strike and domestic problems - he left. After two weeks staying with relatives in Murton, and considering his position, he came back to his wife, and told her he was going back to work. He was however insistent that his wife had not put pressure on him to go back.

Clearly therefore there were a number of reasons why Bob went back to work. These need to be seperated into the reasons why he broke the strike, and the reasons why he went back when he did. Looking at the former, Bob made no apology for the fact that he was against the strike from the start. Going back further, he voted against strike action in all three strike ballots in 1982 and '83. He had a powerful dislike for Arthur Scargill.

> "I mean, I was a union man. [But] from the day Arthur
> Scargill took over, the coal mines have gone right
> downhill." (interview)

Earlier still, he proclaimed his support for incentive schemes, against Scargill.

At the start of the strike, Bob confirmed his reputation as a right winger. Both right and left remember his interventions at union meetings at the start of the strike. After the first meeting (when the lodge voted not to strike), he remembered standing up at the meeting the following week, and asking "what about the ballot?". The young pro-strike activists gathered at the front of the hall heckled him vociferously, as they did anyone who tried to criticise the strike or call for a ballot.

He attended about four lodge meetings during the strike. At all of them he was met by considerable verbal abuse from the young activists - "I was booed out". Nevertheless, he claims that he was supported by the majority at those meetings. They were afraid to express their support because of intimidation from the activists. Bob insisted that intimidation wasn't only psychological. This argument was supported by other right wingers and some on the left, who concede that the threat of being "ventilated" deterred many people from going back.

However, up until the first people went back, the pressures must have been largely psychological. Although Bob said he only half realised the extent to which people would react, most people knew that breaking the strike - scabbing - would never be forgotten. They knew the kind of social isolation and victimisation that scabbing would attract. In Murton, a strong reminder was provided by the 1972 strike. Although the NUM branches supported the strike solidly, NACODS members crossed picket lines. As one mechanic remembered, that was

> "old style picketing. People that went in walked the gauntlet. No police there, nowt. You know, shin kicking, all kinds. But there was never nee _bother_ as such." (interview)

Deputies who went through the line were treated with great hostility in the village. They became pariahs, outcasts in the community. Some never fully recovered from the psychological pressures.

People like Bob, who were bitterly anti-strike, were looking all the time for an opportunity to go back. In a way, they were psyching themselves up to go throught the picket lines, and overcome the psychological pressure of becoming a "scab". Because even for men who were against the strike from the start, there was a considerable barrier to cross to go through the picket line for the first time.

Turning to look at the reasons why Bob went back when he did, probably the most important factor was opportunity. At the beginning of November, it had become _possible_ to go back to work. Nationally, the papers and tv were relentlessly emphasizing the trickle back to work that had followed the NACODS settlement, and the breakdown of negotiations between the NUM and

the NCB. In Durham, it was clear that men were breaking the total solidarity of many of the previously strikebound pits[1].

Furthermore, the breakdown of negotiations convinced potential returnees that if they didn't make a move, then the strike could drag on for many more months. There was still no end in sight. This factor was mentioned by Bob, when he was asked why he didn't go back earlier: "Because I always thought it was going to end next week... If it hadn't been for people like me, we'd still be on strike now!" So at the beginning of November, it had become clear that the strike wasn't about to end; that if the men didn't break it, it could go on indefinitely; and that it was now physically and psychologically possible to break the strike.

A 8.2 "KEN'S" STORY

When Ken went back with two of his mates in late November, they brought the number back at Murton to 27. Ken made made even more explicit the importance of the first men back, and the momentum the media built up in November. He told how he was "looking at the papers" to see if there was anyone back at Murton. After he saw a report in the paper, he phoned the personnel manager, and was told there were about six back. So he decided to go back. "As soon as they could get me through that picket line, I went back to work." He'd talked about going back before with his two mates, and another man who backed out at the last moment. But they'd decided they couldn't go back in safety. "Nobody's stupid - no brave - enough to stick their necks out like that." In July, after the first letter from the manager asking men to go back, he'd gone to the crossroads at the top of the Terrace (Woods Terrace), and looked at the picket line. It just wasn't on.

1

The headlines in the Newcastle Journal for this period show the momentum that the media attributed to a tiny number of returnees (the figures include the Northumberland coalfield). "NORTH STRIKE REVOLT GROWS", and "PICKET LINE BATTLE AS MINERS GO BACK" (8-11-84). "COUNCILLOR JOINS REBELS", and "NOW 78 ARE BACK AT WORK" (9-11-84). MORE REBELS SET FOR RETURN" (12-11-84).

Ken's opposition to the strike was based on the belief that it had been wrongly called. Without a ballot it lacked legitimacy. Before the strike he admitted he'd not got involved with the union. He criticised his apathy then.

> "I wish now I'd gone [to union meetings] and made my voice heard... Before the strike I was probably very self centred." (interview)

But being forced not to work politicised him. Like Bob, he showed a lot of the characteristics of a "right winger" before the strike. Working at bank meant he was low paid, and like many surface workers he worked masses of overtime. His years underground at Elemore convinced him that a properly administered incentive scheme was beneficial for workers and management (and not just in the coal industry either!).

His family backed up Ken's militantly individualist stance. His wife and two of his daughters worked at the same factory making natural casings for sausages from pigs intestines ("It pays a wage at the end of the week, and we don't go on strike.") His third daughter worked at a garments factory, and his son worked at Murton. I interviewed all except his son.

They all hated unions.

> "No, I don't like unions. Mind, saying that, when unions first started they were the best things that ever happened to men, and women. Because they were downtrodden. The unions got them better wages... But they just - how can I put it? - they got too clever. So what's going to happen is, if they don't calm down - this is just my opinion mind - if they don't calm down there's going to be no unions. 'Cos they're all going to be banned... They're getting above theirselves. They cannot dicatate to a boss." (wife)
> "Unions is all out for themselves." (Daughter B)

They all hated Arthur Scargill too. "He's not a man, he's a monster!" At the start of the strike, Ken's wife and daughters went to the Barbary Club in Sunderland to ask Scargill why Murton was out on strike when they wanted a ballot. They were pushed out of the road by Scargill's bodyguards, including members of Wearmouth lodge committee. They couldn't get near him. "That's how frightened he was - of five women!"

> "I didn't like his bombastic attitude right from the start... What he was going to do, and what he was not going to do... He's just the mouthpiece, he's not the union!.. It's the men - the rank and file - who are the

union. Unfortunately, the NUM, as with a lot of other unions, they don't want to be bothered. So they let themselves be led."

The family saw the strike as an issue of individual freedom.

"I believe that every man should do what he wants to do. This is supposed to be a free country. Not to be dictated. I mean, if you want a dicatatorship you go and live behind the Iron Curtain, places like that."

This reply mirrored Ken's own. There was no legal right to stop a man going to work, he argued.

On the question of pit closures, Ken showed more doubt than his family. Interviewing him alone a few weeks before interviewing him with his family, he began by saying:

"I'm what you might say financially minded... I contend that if a pit is totally uneconomic, I don't see why the taxpayer should subsidise it."

However, he conceded that there is a balance to be struck. Since a pit closure would cost the taxpayer some money, you "could probably run a pit at a small loss, and still break even [overall]."

Then he ran through some of the important closures in Durham before the strike. At South Hetton he argued that the men went back to work their old workings when they transferred to Murton so it wasn't really a closure. Blackhall he thought closed because it was too wet. He'd heard that Houghton was exhausted. In some cases, the NUM's own engineer had agreed with closures. So whilst he conceded that in principle their might be cases where closure might cost more than keeping a pit open, in practice this was a very rare occurrence.

His family were rather more inflexible than this.

"Nobody - I don't care who it is - is going to keep a pit open what's running at a loss. If they were private, they'd have closed years before."
"I mean, you couldn't have a business of your own, and run it a loss! Where's the money coming from? It's the same with pits. Same with shipyards. Same with anything. You can't let them run at a loss like that. If it was privately owned, as I say, they'd have been closed years ago... I mean, it's only common sense. How long has the mine [Murton] been open? How much can you take out of the ground?" (wife)

Mrs Thatcher would be proud of the faith this working class family had in the "invisible hand", and its omnipotent authority. Understanding why they were so committed to the system, and so hostile to those who challenge it, requires recourse to arguments which Nichols and Beynon developed in their 1977 book about workers at a major chemical works in southern England (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, 193-198).

A 8.3 THE IDEOLOGY OF SACRIFICE

In this work, Nichols and Beynon try and explain why workers who hate the mindless, repetitive, physically exhausting work they have to do, resent so strongly people being on the dole. Their explanation is that to workers "the idea of such men constitutes an immense _threat_ to the idelogy of sacrifice", (_ibid_, 196; emphasis in original) which sustains them through their unforgiving days of labour. These workers justify their backbreaking work by the belief that the sacrifice is worth it, for the life that you buy with the rewards of labour. Not that this life is anything special, but at least the sacrifice is rewarded. But, as Beynon and Nichols suggest,

> "If you pack bags at 60 tons an hour, catch them on your shoulders until they ache permanently, it perhaps isn't surprising that you object to laziness." (_ibid_)

Seeing people getting rewarded _without_ making such a sacrifice, strikes at the very heart of a workers self justification.

The "ideology of sacrifice" also lies behind those miners (and their families) who reject militancy in favour of individualist solutions. One of the most consistent themes among older miners who broke the strike - and one strongly subscribed to by Bob and Ken - is that miners today don't know what real work is. They were heavily critical of the younger miners, who want to get paid for "doing nothing". For Bob, miners getting paid the same as he was for taking it easy - for example, taking a snap break for as long as possible when he never took one at all - these miners were a threat to his world. He strongly supported an incentive scheme because it sorted out those that really worked from the lazy ones.

In struggling for individual advancement, he needed an ideology that condemned those who were left behind - those he was struggling to rise above - as deserving what they got. An ideology such as that held by the "militants"; of struggling together against a common enemy, of being all in

it together, and requiring individual sacrifice in the pursuit of common advantage - that struck at the very heart of his belief in individual advancement.

In his only real protest against the present "system", Bob expressed bitterness that it wasn't possible for a working man to get ahead on the basis of his merits. He commented cynically on the way that Lord Robens (former Chairman of the NCB) made millions, boosting his fortune with intermarriages within the coal industry. The working class man, he opined, has to work hard all his life, and yet he still gets no further forward. If he's got the brains and application, he should be able to advance. And he quoted the case of a miner at Murton who became an overman, but was unable to advance further because he hadn't had the right educational background.

Nevertheless - and perhaps surprisingly - he confessed that he didn't want to become an overman. "I couldn't have got a man the sack", he explained. He decided he wasn't ruthless enough to become a boss. Perhaps because of this, he was particularly bitter about people who were overmen. They were the lazy ones, who couldn't work themselves, and who got their positions by crawling to the bosses.

Ken's philosophy concentrated on union politics. This reflected his recent politicisation by the strike, compared to Bob who was politically involved before the strike. Since it was the strike that politicised him, it was the issues of the strike about which Ken's politics revolved. Basically, he had absorbed most of the media arguments about trade union democracy. He outlined the problem with the union as being one where leaders get in and then tell their members what to do. Unfortunately, the membership cannot be bothered to keep a check on the activists who they elect. This chimed with Ken's own experience, because he willingly criticised himself for having been one of those who hadn't cared.

As a man who was - by his own account - doing "masses of overtime" (enough to double his standard wage), it was not surprising that Ken adopted right wing interpretations of trade unions. He too was making big sacrifices. Depending on overtime for such a high proportion of his wages made him very vulnerable, and dependant on management. Being dependant on an individual solution to low wages, he became used to pursuing individual solutions. Of course none of this was inevitable. Some of the most militant pro-strike

activists in the mechanics lodge were also the most addicted to an extended working week.

Which way individuals reacted given the _potential_ for individualism inherent in dependency on overtime and/or a committment to incentive schemes depended on factors such as: tradition (the mechanics have a tradition of working overtime, so it is less likely to be a distinguishing factor between men), and personal relationships (which can establish and reinforce collective discipline). How these factors came together exerted a strong influence on an individuals ideology, and how they reacted to the strike.

A 8.4 CONCLUSION

Both Bob and Ken, the two anti-strike diehards I interviewed in depth, had strongly internalised the government's arguments about the strike's illegitimacy. Their individualism was tentatively related to the "ideology of sacrifice" thesis outlined by Nichols and Beynon.

APPENDIX NINE: DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT TO GO BACK TO WORK

This appendix contains more detailed reports on four interviews I did with miners who went back to work towards the end of the strike, or who came close to going back (see chapter six, section 6.5). Although these four cases cannot claim to be a representative sample, they do offer insights into the minds of miners who, by the end of the strike, had simply reached the end of their tether. All four interviews show the enormous psychological pressures which built up towards the end of such an exhausting struggle. None of the interviewees wanted to go back, and they had all supported the general campaign against pit closures. In order to protect anonymity, I have changed the names and some minor details in the following accounts.

A 9.1 "IAN'S" STORY.

In the New Year, many men who had previously not contemplated returning to work began to seriously consider it. One was an older miner living at Trimdon Grange - "Ian". He picketed locally during the strike, but by the end, like many men, his morale was at rock bottom. By this time the union had belatedly woken up to the fact that the travellers were most likely to break the strike, and meetings were organised in the villages to try and counter the isolation and loss of morale which they were suffering.

Ian remembered that the first meeting wasn't until three or four weeks before the end of the strike.

> "And all they could say was; 'Just give us a bit of extra time, bit of extra time'. Well, fair enough. A few of us wanted to go back to work, but I says 'bloody hell'. I just didn't fancy the bloody hassle to tell the truth... We knew the strike would come to an end."
> (interview)

In trying to articulate why he didn't go back, he gave a confused set of replies - giving a different emphasis each time the question came up.

> "To me it wasn't worth the hassle. I mean, if you went back you still had to work with them. I mean, I don't think I could live with myself."

Was it the "hassle" or the social pressure not to be a scab that held him out?

His wife, although generally supportive, began to ask towards the end when he was going to go back. He would reply 'Ah, next week'. Then he'd drag it out until Wednesday, by which time there was no point in going back that week. The power of the picket lines was crucial too. He quoted a conversation he had with a an old man in Trimdon Grange who'd said the miners should have gone back to work a long time ago.

> "So I says: 'Why, would thou go through a picket line?'
> 'Oh, I'd go through a picket line.' I says: 'Aye, thou
> go down to Easington or Murton and try the bogger! And
> see what'll happen!' I says: "There's no bloody danger
> of me going through a picket line! We're on strike, and
> that's all there is to it'!"

There was "no point" in going against the union.

> "I says: 'You're going back when the union says to, and
> that's all there is to it'."

Ian also said that it wasn't the physical hardship that made him question the strike. Financially he could just about get by.

> "It was more like the _mental_ aspect, put it that way.
> Were you doing right if you went back to work, or were
> you doing right if you stopped at home? I had a son who
> was only 15."

It was very hard to see your kid going without. Not being able to give them what you wanted. "It was hard to tell kids you didn't have any money."

Ian's account highlights the enormous strength of loyalty towards the NUM. A right wing miners committee member in Murton agreed. For many older miners, loyalty to the union kept them out. "They wouldn't cross a picket line for anybody." Yet in the end, many of them did. It is difficult to tell to what extent these men supported the strike. In one sense they did. Only Bob and Ken of those I interviewed accepted the government line that uneconomic pits should close (see appendix 8). But many of them also harked back to the 1960's, and wondered why the union was kicking up such a fuss now, when they'd let all the pits shut then. A right wing miners' official at Murton remembered that at the first tubulent meeting at the start of the strike in Murton, some men were shouting:

> "Who supported Durham area when they were closing the
> Durham area down? Did Yorkshire come and support us?"

Some people remembered the far more recent failure to support Durham when pits closed, quoting South Hetton and East Hetton as examples where the

Durham area was let down. The present UDM chairman at Murton - who used to be a big supporter of Arthur Scargill - commented

> "A lot of Durham people if you spoke the truth thought
> that Arthur Scargill betrayed us in Durham because we
> had three pits close in this area the year before the
> strike, and there wasn't that done about it."

Ian felt the injustice of 60's closures too, and linked it to a wider point about his feelings for Murton.

> "We came out on strike, but having lived through the
> 1960's - worked in the 1960's over here - when they
> were closing 'em, there wasn't a word of protest! I
> used to say: 'Why, what the hell are we on strike for?'
> I mean, we weren't bothered whether Murton closed or
> kept open or not. In fact, a lot of us used to say,
> we're stopping on strike and hope they close the bloody
> place! That was the outlook. But as I say, we stuck it.
> And when you reckon up, there wasn't that many scabs
> from around here. Not the Trimdons. Most stayed loyal."

For these older miners, whether or not they went back before the end depended on factors specific to their situation. They were all close to breaking point at the end. Whether or not they crossed the threshold before March 5th was due to a range of factors. In Murton village very few did, because the community itself was still almost solid. In Trimdon Grange too, very few had gone back. A traveller had two considerations in this respect: firstly whether or not his community was still solid, and secondly whether or not his pit was solid. For example, if he lived in Ferryhill (where most people had gone back to work) and worked at Easington (which was still almost completely solid), then he was less likely to cross the threshold than another striker living at Ferryhill and working at Tursdale workshops (where the strike had completely crumbled).

Another important factor towards the end was the availability of redundancy money. As debts mounted, massive social strains were created. Everyone is agreed that many people went back at the end for the money, fully intending to go straight out of the industry after the strike.

A 9.2 "PETER'S" STORY

An example of the pressures came from a mechanic living and working in Murton - "Peter". His wife - "Rosie" - bitterly opposed the strike. She

gave this brief but graphic summary of the strain created in the family by the strike.

> "During the strike we didn't get on. I hated him!
> Simply because he didn't have the guts to go down to
> the Welfare Hall and speak his mind." (interview)

Financial hardship increased the pressure as the strike went on. Rosie commented that "it was frightening. I wouldn't like to go through it again."

Even interviewed 18 months after the strike, the tensions were still evident in their differing accounts of the strike. It was clear that for all his misgivings about the strike, Peter would still support the union against Rosie's bitter attacks. Witness this exchange, starting with Peter.

> "For all the criticism of Scargill, he at least stuck
> to his guns. He carried through conference decisions,
> as he said he would. It just happens his views were
> different to mine."

Rosie's response.

> "You might not have been a Scargillite, but how many
> times did you defend him during the strike? How many
> times would you not have anything said against him in
> here, during the strike? Or was that just the union?
> Was it because he was leader of the union and you
> didn't want anything bad said against the union?"

Again the tremendous loyalty felt towards the union burns through these words. As his wife understood, even though Peter disagreed with the way the strike was called, and with the actions of the "hooligans" on the picket lines, he still couldn't bear to hear the union criticised in his home.

But many mens' loyalty snapped sometime in February. All hope had gone. There was no end in sight. The strike might go on for months yet. Going back seemed the only way to end it. They felt they had given everything they could. For many men who went back towards the end, it is possible to trace their decision to one small thing which convinced them that the strike couldn't end unless they went back. Many more were on the brink of coming to that same decision, but for different reasons their resistance was a little stronger.

A 9.3 "COLIN" FROM WEARMOUTH.

An interview with two mechanics from Wearmouth colliery - Kevin and Colin - drew out the unbearable pressure that eventually became too much. They were

In conversation with Jenny, some of the various conflicting stresses and pressures came out.

> "We went to a meeting up here, me and me brother spoke at that meeting. And everybody we spoke to, they wanted to go back to work. But it was just the fear of what would happen to them... Everybody was <u>scared</u> man."
> "Is it a psychological fear in that what you're afraid of is men not talking to you, or is it a fear of bricks coming through your window?" (interviewer)
> "Why, I would say bricks coming through your window. Ee, I never thought about not talking to us as a matter of fact! I didn't think about that at the time. What we were frightened of was bricks coming through the windows and things like that."
> "Apart from that - like I say - it [going through picket lines] was just something you didn't believe in doing." (Jenny)
> "Oh aye, I didn't believe in it. I <u>honestly</u> didn't believe in it." (Jerry)
> "There was no way he wanted to go back in one sense." (Jenny)
> "I didn't, no. Me brother was getting at me for weeks and weeks, wasn't he?" (Jerry)
> "Oh, he wanted to go back. His wife was getting on to him all the time. I think a lot of men who did go back, that's all they went back for, their families. And the families were suffering." (Jenny)
> "I'd rather have faced 20 Germans in a trench. The gut feeling was terrible. I'll never forget it. I'll never <u>ever</u> forget that feeling. It was just the thought that I was going through that line... There was a lot <u>did</u> get an awful gut feeling. But it's like I said, it was a decision I made, and I stood by it at the time. 'Cos it would never have finished! You could see no end to it!" (Jerry)
> "Would you have gone back if you'd known it was only going to be another week?" (interviewer)
> "Probably not. No, I don't think I would have, to be honest." (Jerry)
> "Did the fact that your brother was keen to go back, did that have something to do with it as well?" (interviewer)
> "I think it did, aye." (Jerry)
> "I think that was the main thing. John was going to go back, and there was no way he would let him go back and face that on his own. I think that's one of the reasons - to support [his brother]. (Jenny)
> "It was like." (Jerry)

After he went back he was ignored by many people who he knew. And it really hurt. Jenny articulated his distress.

> "I mean there's no getting away from it. I mean, it does hurt, when you've talked to people all your lives, and all of a sudden they won't talk to you."
> "Oh aye, it hurts."

> "I mean, I know him. I know it hurts. But there's no
> way those men would ever know. He would never ever let
> on to them. But I know it does." (Jenny)

She wishes now she'd made a greater effort to persuade him not to go back, because then he might not have had to suffer the pain he has.

Asked if he'd go through the line again, he couldn't answer. Jenny tried to explain for him, saying he went back for his family, at the point when Scargill said there would be no more talks.

> "His very words were: 'He's not going to ruin my life
> for me. I'm going back to work.' Well, his brother had
> been wanting to go back to work for a few weeks hadn't
> he? And I think it was that and all. People were
> saying, we're going back to work. Then others were
> wanting to go back. There was a few people round here
> talking about going back."
> "But they never did." (Jerry)
> "And then the same ones wouldn't go back, and then
> wouldn't talk to those who when they went back, yet
> they wanted to do it themselves! You know it's things
> like that which stick really." (Jenny)

A 9.5 CONCLUSION

For many miners, the differing balance of social pressures on individual miners was clearly the decisive factor in determining when or whether the scales finally tipped towards going back to work. There was no fundamental ideological split between the majority of miners in the "middle ground". In the end it was seemingly quite trivial things which pushed men back to work. Those that didn't go back were perhaps part of a stronger social network, offering support and encouragement to stay on strike (see chapter six).

APPENDIX TEN: BRITISH COAL TREND STATEMENTS FOR NORTH EAST PITS, 1984/5-1988/9

The following pages contain British Coal's trend statements for the North East pits since the strike, with the exception of Westoe, which I was unable to obtain.

The first table is reproduced (in more legible form) as table 7.15, and the table on Murton is reproduced as table 7.14 (chapter seven). Essentially the most significant columns are those relating to manpower, OMS, net proceeds per tonne, operating costs per tonne, operating and bottom line profit/loss, and operating cost per gigajoule. Most of these are self-explanatory.

OMS however refers to "output per manshift", and is measured for the coalface and for the mine as a whole. Net proceeds per tonne refer to the average imputed value of each tonne of coal sold by the pit. The figure varies according to coal quality and the market it is supplied to. Bottom line profit/loss includes all overheads, including for example those arising from area administration. Operating cost per gigajoule is the cost of producing coal when its calorific value is taken into account.

SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL 000 TNES	OUTPUT AVERAGE DAILY TNES	CLOSING STOCKS 000 TNE	FACE SHIFTS %	OVER- TIME %	OVERALL E.M.S. &	MANPOWER AT END	O.M.S. FACE TNES	O.M.S. OVERALL TNES	GIGAJULES PER MANSHIFT	NET PROCEED PER TNE &	TOTAL OP.COST PER TNE &	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) AMOUNT £000	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) PER TNE &	BTM LINE PROFIT/ (LOSS) £000	OPER COST PER GJ	BTM LINE COST PER GJ
300	-10273	3393	7.9	4.1	56.18	21914	5.83	0.35	57	75.96	636.71	-1734646	-562.75	-65303	1.95	1.48
9175	50642	505	17.0	10.5	56.65	17910	11.07	2.23	78	45.62	49.83	-40005	-4.21	-9275	1.58	1.49
10219	43104	654	17.9	12.5	40.68	14999	14.35	3.00	91	42.04	40.91	11626	1.14	9028	1.48	1.57
10229	43437	355	18.3	14.0	40.68	12160	17.16	3.51	91	41.15	38.27	29005	2.92	1442	1.50	1.57
10523	43437	1494	18.1	17.4	44.00	11091	18.66	3.81	99	41.36	36.80	47030	4.56	28508	1.42	
843.6	43020	1500.5	18.6	18.7	45.90	10014	20.10	4.09	107	41.19	37.00	3420	4.05	2040	1.42	1.48
828.1	41079	1606.3	19.2	20.5	46.09	10674	19.19	4.07	107	40.99	37.60	2815	3.40	1442	1.43	1.49
890.5	40745	1621.8	17.2	25.3	46.24	10473	19.68	3.89	102	42.83	39.26	3193	3.57	1489	1.50	1.57
2566.2	42119	1621.8	18.3	20.9	46.11	10473	19.68	4.01	105	41.60	38.01	9428	3.67	4971	1.45	1.52

RESULTS EXCLUDE GROSS RESTRUCTURING COSTS

BRITISH COAL CORPORATION
TREND STATEMENT

AREA 20   NORTH EAST GROUP
COLLIERY 090   DAWDON
MANAGER   J PARKINS

	SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL 000 TNES	AVERAGE DAILY TNES	CLOSING STOCKS 000 TNE	FACE SHIFTS %	OVER-TIME %	OVERALL E.M.S. &	MANPOWER AT END	O.M.S. FACE TNES	O.M.S. OVERALL TNES	GIGAJLES PER MANSHIFT	NET PROCEED PER TNE &	TOTAL OP.COST PER TNE &	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) AMOUNT £000	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) PER TNE &	BTH LINE PROFIT/(LOSS) £000	OPER COST PER GJ	BTH LINE COST PER GJ
YEAR 1984/85	649	125	656	7.1	0.9	31.52	1912	0.92	0.02	55	28.10	5636.34	-15639	5608.24	-10527	2.02	
YEAR 1985/86	1092	3566	110	12.5	10.0	30.99	1890	14.95	2.08	73	43.94	53.42	-8051	-9.49	-3974	1.69	1.34
YEAR 1986/87	1365	4608	130	16.4	13.1	36.94	1684	14.85	2.72	95	43.87	45.23	-1489	-1.36	4142	1.41	1.36
YEAR 1987/88	1365	5003	95	16.8	14.9	41.01	1587	18.28	3.64	98	41.58	36.85	6461	4.73	8165	1.33	1.28
YEAR 1988/89	1323	5701	312	20.0	17.3	43.34	1392	17.73	3.73		42.44	34.89	9989	7.55			1.38
ACTUAL MONTH																
APRIL	95.5	5024	320.9	23.5	20.0	44.83	1232	16.46	3.93	101	41.22	33.22	764	8.00	640	1.29	1.34
MAY	95.7	5050	347.9	25.1	20.0	45.23	1197	15.76	4.03	106	42.09	34.55	722	7.54	599	1.31	1.36
JUNE	104.6	5250	302.6	22.6	22.6	45.55	1157	17.67	4.08	109	42.61	32.92	1014	9.70	866	1.25	1.28
CUMULATIVE	295.0	5100	302.6	23.7	21.2	45.21	1157	16.62	4.01	106	41.99	33.54	2500	8.45	2105	1.28	1.33
JULY																	
AUGUST																	
SEPTEMBER																	
SEPT. QTR																	
CUMULATIVE																	
OCTOBER																	
NOVEMBER																	
DECEMBER																	
DECM. QTR																	
CUMULATIVE																	
JANUARY																	
FEBRUARY																	
MARCH																	
MARCH QTR																	
YEAR 1989/90																	

O. M. S.

RESULTS EXCLUDE GROSS RESTRUCTURING COSTS

BRITISH COAL CORPORATION
TREND STATEMENT

AREA 20 NORTH EAST GROUP
COLLIERY 110 EASINGTON
MANAGER K NICHTINGALE

	SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL 000 TNES	AVERAGE DAILY TNES	CLOSING STOCKS 000 TNE	FACE SHIFTS %	OVER-TIME %	OVERALL E.M.S. £	MANPOWER AT END	O.M.S. FACE TNES	O.M.S. OVERALL TNES	GIGAJLES PER MANSHIFT	NET PROCEED PER TNE £	TOTAL OP.COST PER TNE £	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) AMOUNT £000	PROFIT/(LOSS) PER TNE £	BTH LINE PROFIT/(LOSS) £000	OPER COST PER GJ	BTH LINE COST PER GJ
YEAR 1984/85	-2	-1874	392	7.6	1.9		2354	0.03	-0.04		20.43	-785.67	-20251	806.11	-5659	1.85	1.46
YEAR 1985/86	1096	4603	51	21.0	12.9	36.46	2175	10.42	2.28	63	48.48	50.99	-2745	-2.51	-623	1.57	1.40
YEAR 1986/87	1393	5900	164	21.5	14.7	40.07	1969	13.68	3.05	83	44.37	42.56	2519	1.81	-1467	1.59	1.69
YEAR 1987/88	1468	6327	65	19.8	15.6	42.09	1873	16.16	3.32	88	41.61	40.56	1547	1.05	1956	1.50	1.57
YEAR 1988/89	1525	6571	325	18.9	24.8	46.40	1682	18.12	3.51	94	43.37	40.04	5079	3.33			
ACTUAL MONTH																	
APRIL	136.5	7174	352.6	21.6	25.2	49.39	1676	18.45	4.10	112	42.75	37.96	653	4.79	415	1.39	1.46
MAY	136.8	7158	372.4	22.2	28.2	49.04	1663	18.21	4.17	110	42.78	35.14	1040	7.64	803	1.34	1.40
JUNE	132.0	6600	323.2	17.6	34.3	48.64	1668	19.25	3.46	93	43.07	43.03	5	0.03	-287	1.60	1.69
CUMULATIVE	404.5	6971	323.2	20.3	29.3	49.01	1668	18.62	3.89	104	42.86	38.67	1697	4.20	931	1.44	1.51
JULY																	
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YEAR 1989/90																	

RESULTS EXCLUDE GROSS RESTRUCTURING COSTS

BRITISH COAL CORPORATION
TREND STATEMENT

AREA 20 NORTH EAST GROUP
COLLIERY 150 ELLINGTONCOMBINE
MANAGER M.KEARNEY

	SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL 000 TNES	AVERAGE DAILY TNES	CLOSING STOCKS 000 TNE	FACE SHIFTS %	OVER-TIME %	OVERALL E.M.S. £	MANPOWER AT END	O.M.S. FACE TNES	O.M.S. OVERALL TNES	GIGAJULES PER MANSHIFT	NET PROCEED PER TNE £	TOTAL OP.COST PER TNE £	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) AMOUNT £000	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) PER TNE £	BTM LINE PROFIT/ (LOSS) £000	OPER COST PER GJ	BTM LINE COST PER GJ
YEAR 1984/85	168	3272	59	8.1	2.2		2591	12.12	3.28	92	57.49	171.38	-214269	-133.89		1.45	1.55
YEAR 1985/86	1969	8306	30	16.0	10.4	40.20	2229	14.56	3.85	102	40.48	34.05	12655	6.43	8835	1.36	
YEAR 1986/87	2027	8775	52	16.7	12.0	41.85	2277	15.61	4.20	110	39.60	33.04	13283	6.55	9172	1.24	
YEAR 1987/88	2201	9530	65	16.5	15.9	43.74	1872	25.43	4.86	116	38.05	24.88	17768	8.07	13354	1.26	1.34
YEAR 1988/89	2326	10070	233	16.1	16.5	46.28	1980	25.50	4.99	120	38.59	30.34	19205	8.26	15108		
ACTUAL MONTH																	
APRIL	192.2	10118	224.4	15.4	17.8	47.49	2080	31.59	4.93	121	38.74	32.84	1135	5.90	820	1.34	1.41
MAY	181.5	9555	227.0	13.7	18.8	47.50	2043	30.72	4.67	118	39.98	32.42	1372	7.56	1060	1.29	1.36
JUNE	232.5	9606	231.1	12.6	19.9	48.01	2029	30.69	4.73	117	38.93	31.40	1751	7.53	1361	1.27	1.34
CUMULATIVE	606.2	9770	231.1	13.2	18.9	47.70	2029	31.06	4.78	118	39.18	32.16	4258	7.02	3241	1.30	1.37
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MARCH QTR																	
YEAR 1989/90																	

RESULTS EXCLUDE GROSS RESTRUCTURING COSTS

BRITISH COAL CORPORATION
TREND STATEMENT

AREA 20 NORTH EAST GROUP
COLLIERY 190 MURTON MINE
MANAGER T. F. BURNS

	SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL 000 TNES	OUTPUT AVERAGE DAILY TNES	CLOSING STOCKS 000 TNE	FACE SHIFTS %	OVER-TIME %	OVERALL E.M.S. %	MANPOWER AT END	O.M.S. FACE TNES	O.M.S. OVERALL TNES	GIGAJLES PER MANSHIFT	NET PROCEED PER TNE £	TOTAL OP.COST PER TNE £	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) AMOUNT £000	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) PER TNE £	BTM LINE PROFIT/(LOSS) £000	OPER COST PER GJ	BTM LINE COST PER GJ
YEAR 1984/85	-35	-17309	475	8.5	0.4	54.50	1629	13.15	-0.93	53	24.48	-425.06	-15562	449.54	-13833	2.39	1.49
YEAR 1985/86	655	2764	210	15.6	8.6	37.05	1493	12.92	2.01	77	43.26	62.76	-12773	-19.50	-5569	1.72	1.61
YEAR 1986/87	1231	5265	92	21.1	11.6	38.80	1796	17.85	2.94	88	41.92	44.92	-3689	-3.00	-2014	1.55	1.50
YEAR 1987/88	1298	5618	27	17.9	12.1		1522		3.47		38.99	39.35	-477	-0.37			
YEAR 1988/89	1350	5819	209	20.6	14.7	42.53	1460	16.61	3.91	99	40.21	36.12	5520	4.09	45535	1.43	1.46
ACTUAL MONTH																	
APRIL	99.4	5251	223.0	19.8	15.9	43.49	1400	16.60	3.82	94	38.49	36.09	239	2.40	179	1.46	1.49
MAY	83.3	4506	243.3	18.6	18.2	43.92	1393	15.78	3.24	84	39.47	41.12	-137	-1.65	-195	1.59	1.61
JUNE	90.2	4510	254.3	16.7	21.7	44.15	1320	17.04	3.26	87	41.44	39.25	197	2.18	128	1.47	1.50
CUMULATIVE	272.9	4706	254.3	18.3	18.6	43.69	1320	16.47	3.44	88	39.76	38.67	298	1.09	112	1.50	1.53
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MARCH QTR																	
YEAR 1989/90																	

RESULTS EXCLUDE CROSS RESTRUCTURING COSTS

	SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL 000 TNES	OUTPUT AVERAGE DAILY TNES	CLOSING STOCKS 000 TNE	FACE SHIFTS %	OVER-TIME %	OVERALL E.M.S. 4	MANPOWER AT END	O.M.S. FACE TNES	O.M.S. OVERALL TNES	GIGAJLES PER MANSHIFT	NET PROCEED PER TNE 4	TOTAL OP.COST PER TNE 4	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) AMOUNT £000	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) PER TNE 4	BTH LINE PROFIT/(LOSS) £000	OPER COST PER GJ	BTH LINE COST PER GJ
YEAR 1984/85	34	652	282	11.4	0.5		1451	4.71	0.64		52.09	395.18	-11644	-341.10			
YEAR 1985/86	916	3047	11	16.7	7.6	36.49	1415	16.20	2.93	78	45.82	41.34	-4099	4.48	2063	1.54	
YEAR 1986/87	952	4066	79	14.6	9.7	37.78	1320	20.86	3.23	83	41.55	39.66	1632	1.72	421	1.54	
YEAR 1987/88	833	3590	26	20.5	12.9	39.70	1077	15.56	3.35	92	44.34	40.32	3342	4.01	2140	1.46	1.51
YEAR 1988/89	894	3055	129	19.1	14.1	42.88	1037	17.97	3.68	102	46.83	38.31	7613	8.51	6729	1.38	1.41
ACTUAL MONTH																	
APRIL	74.8	3934	140.3	19.3	14.9	44.28	1034	19.22	3.89	110	46.94	37.65	694	9.29	635	1.34	1.37
MAY	69.5	3658	156.1	21.3	16.6	44.63	1037	16.10	3.59	102	47.06	39.25	542	7.80	484	1.39	1.42
JUNE	65.3	3265	158.3	22.8	20.6	43.50	1029	13.17	3.09	87	46.67	46.23	28	0.44	-42	1.64	1.68
CUMULATIVE	209.6	3613	158.3	21.2	17.4	44.12	1029	15.90	3.51	99	46.89	40.86	1265	6.04	1076	1.45	1.48
JULY																	
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MARCH QTR																	
YEAR 1989/90																	

RESULTS EXCLUDE GROSS RESTRUCTURING COSTS

BRITISH COAL CORPORATION
TREND STATEMENT

AREA 20 NORTH EAST GROUP
COLLIERY 380 WEARMOUTH
MANAGER T HARRISON

	SALEABLE OUTPUT TOTAL 000 TNES	OUTPUT AVERAGE DAILY TNES	CLOSING STOCKS 000 TNE	FACE SHIFTS %	OVER-TIME %	OVERALL E.M.S. £	MANPOWER AT END	O.M.S. FACE TNES	O.M.S. OVERALL TNES	GIGAJULES PER MANSHIFT	NET PROCEED PER TNE £	TOTAL OP.COST PER TNE £	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) AMOUNT £000	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS) PER TNE £	BTH LINE PROFIT/(LOSS) £000	OPER COST PER GJ	BTH LINE COST PER GJ
YEAR 1984/85	40	722	351	8.8	1.5		2271	6.30	0.43		27.25	532.01	-20649	-504.76	-6416	1.85	
YEAR 1985/86	1049	4487	10	19.7	9.8	36.06	2439	10.64	2.16	62	50.80	52.92	-2231	-2.13	-3139	1.66	1.60
YEAR 1986/87	1212	5182	65	20.1	12.1	57.74	2136	11.59	2.39	70	49.20	48.25	1153	0.95	-253	1.68	1.75
YEAR 1987/88	1178	5077	43	21.2	14.7	59.92	1966	11.36	2.49	74	48.78	50.17	-1641	-1.39	-6153	1.81	2.18
YEAR 1988/89	1291	5564	258	19.7	15.9	43.56	1789	14.74	3.04	89	50.20	43.76	8309	6.44	4355	1.49	1.59
ACTUAL MONTH																	
APRIL	106.8	5623	242.5	18.2	17.5	45.18	1773	17.13	3.22	95	49.72	44.49	550	5.22	261	1.51	1.60
MAY	99.1	5210	247.5	19.6	19.0	45.17	1751	14.74	3.02	89	48.93	48.48	45	0.45	-253	1.64	1.75
JUNE	88.4	4418	245.7	18.1	21.5	45.43	1732	13.09	2.50	73	49.42	59.59	-898	-10.16	-1270	2.04	2.18
CUMULATIVE	294.3	5075	245.7	18.6	19.3	45.26	1732	14.95	2.91	86	49.37	50.37	-295	-1.00	-1262	1.71	1.82
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AUGUST																	
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