

**THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE MINERS', THE UNION OF DEMOCRATIC
MINEWORKERS AND THE 1984-85 MINERS STRIKE: SCABS OR
SCAPEGOATS?**



by

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The Nottinghamshire Miners, the UDM and the 1984-85 Miners Strike: Scabs or Scapegoats?

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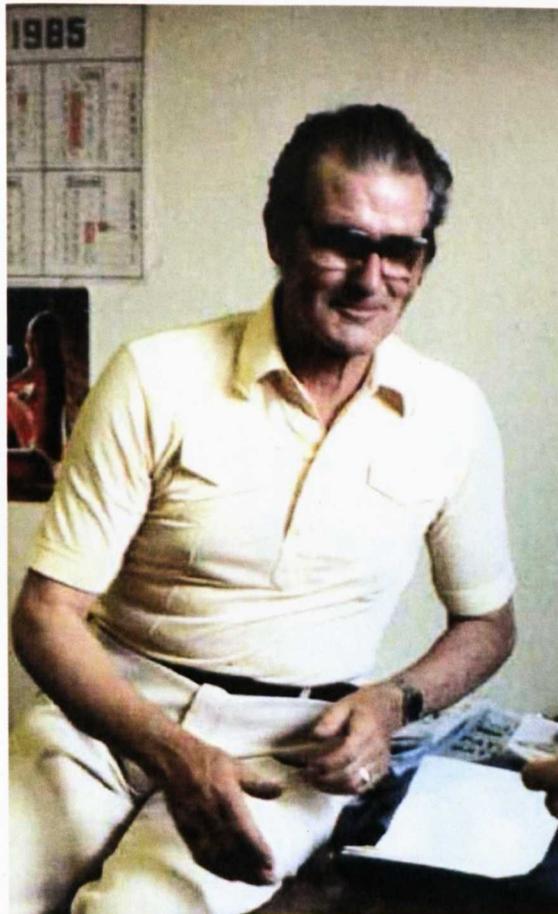
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Acknowledgements

To the memory of Matt Carey (1930–2003), former Annesley Colliery NUM Branch Official and Committee Member and Ashfield District Councillor, my union mentor and inspiration for this study of the Nottinghamshire miners.



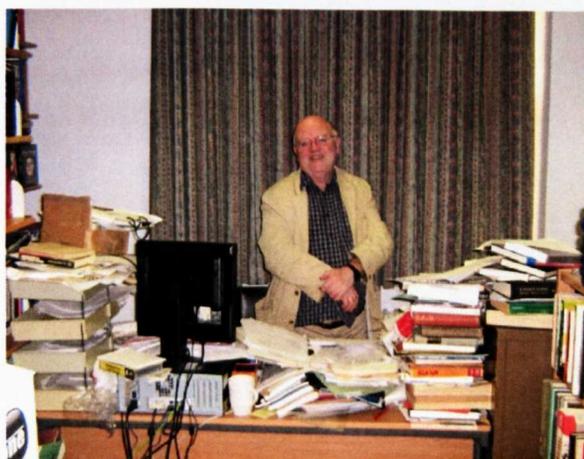
Matt Carey – Annesley NUM Office 1985.

Photo: D. A. Amos.

Acknowledgements.

This study of the Nottinghamshire Miners and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike came about as a need to do a deep and fully researched academic study of a key moment in British labour history. The various accounts of the strike which have been attempted before this have been subjective and usually biased to one side of the dispute or the other. There was also a need to record aspects of the dispute whilst relatively accurate memories still exist and invaluable primary evidence can be accessed and understood. It is hoped that this study will act as a foundation for future academic studies on the controversial subject of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike.

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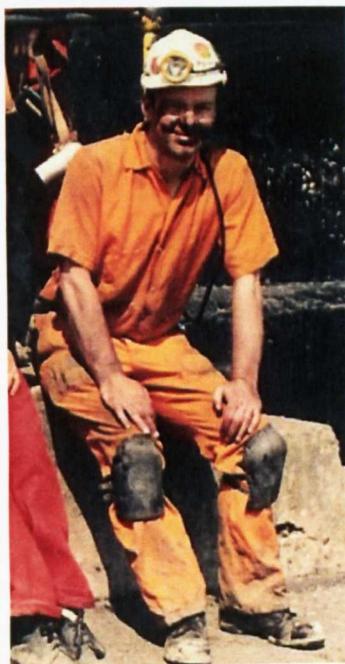


Annesley NUM Branch Committee with new Branch Banner – January 1984.

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David Amos

February 2012.



The Author: Annesley Colliery – March 1986 and January 2000.

List of Abbreviations

ACM	Area Council Meeting
AEC	Area Executive Committee
AIS	Area Incentive Scheme
AMM	Amalgamated Miners' Association
ASLEF	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
BCC	British Coal Corporation
BOCM	Conference of Branch Officials and Committee Members (NUM)
CISWO	Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation
COSA	Colliery Officials and Staff Association
CPP	Coal Preparation Plant
CTAWA	Colliery Trades and Allied Workers Association
EAC	Extraordinary Annual Conference
EBW	Elsewhere below Ground
ECRP	Extended Colliery Review Procedure
FIDO	Face Information Digested Online
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
LMA	Leicestershire Miners' Association
MAGBI	Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland (1841 – 1848)
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain (1889 – 1944)
MINOS	Mine Operating System
MNU	Miners' National Union
MPS	Mineworkers Pension Scheme
NAC	National Appeal Committee (NUM Disciplinary Rule 51)
NACODS	National Association of Colliery Overmen and Deputies

NaWMC	National Working Miners Committee
NWMC	Nottinghamshire Working Miners Committee
NCB	National Coal Board
NDC	National Disciplinary Committee (NUM – Disciplinary Rule 51)
NEC	National Executive Committee
NMA	Nottinghamshire Miners' Association (1881 – 1937)
NMFU	Nottinghamshire Miners' Federated Union (1937 – 1944)
NMIU	Nottingham Miners' Industrial Union (Spencer Union - 1926 - 1937)
NPLA	National Power Loading Agreement
NMRFSC	Nottinghamshire Miners' Rank and File Strike Committee
NRT	National Reference Tribunal
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
OMS	Overall Tons per Manshift
QC	Queens Counsel
RMPS	Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme
SAEC	Special Area Executive Committee
SDC	Special Delegates Conference
TUC	Trade Unions Congress
UDM	Union of Democratic Mineworkers
UMS	United Mineworkers of Scotland (1929 – 1935)
VERS	Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme

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Introduction

Particularly important were the Nottinghamshire miners. Some of them struck but most of them worked through the strike. They had political traditions that separated them from miners elsewhere in the country and their jobs seemed safer than those of their colleagues elsewhere.¹

When mention is made of the 1984-85 miners' strike rarely are comments made without reference to the controversial role played by the Nottinghamshire miners. Typically, comments usually centre on the issues surrounding the Nottinghamshire miners' role in the 'breaking of the strike', this topic often being entwined with the issue over the formation of a breakaway union, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM). As Adeney and Lloyd commented, because of the events of Spencerism in 1926 and its apparent similarity to the events of 1984/85, it was in the Nottinghamshire coalfield that 'the core of strike-breaking, its inspiration and its moral justification, was to be found'.² Despite significant numbers of miners working in several other coalfields during the 1984-85 strike, the centre of attention was typically centred on the Nottinghamshire coalfield.³ As Morgan and Coates commented, it was the Nottinghamshire coalfield that was politically and strategically the most important one to the outcome of the strike:

¹ Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s*, (Sydney, 2010), p. 164.

² Martin Adeney and John Lloyd, *The Miners' Strike 1984-85: Loss without Limit* (London 1986), p. 258.

³ Significant numbers of miners worked in the NUM Areas of Leicestershire, South Derbyshire, the Midlands, North Wales, Lancashire, and the NUM clerical section, the Colliery Officials and Staff Association (COSA).

Introduction

The key problem in the analysis of what went wrong involved an answer to the question of why was Nottingham different. It was there that the strike was lost, in both psychological and material terms; it was there that the National Union was divided and the strike finally broken.⁴

Over a quarter of a century since the end of the strike, the controversial role played by the Nottinghamshire miners still causes fervent debate. On one side the pro-strike argument suggested that the role of the working Nottinghamshire miners was one of treachery. It was the role played by the 'scabs' that ultimately lost the strike, and was thus responsible for the post-strike demise of the British deep mining coal industry. Various explanations have been put forward in trying to explain the Nottinghamshire miners' attitudes and actions in 1984-85. These characteristically included the Nottinghamshire miners' 'apartness' from other British miners, their insulated, more modern pits with easy geology and the phantom of 1926 and Spencerism that existed in the county. Following the formation of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM) in 1985 even more emphasis has been placed on the 'ghost of Spencerism' that supposedly existed in the Nottinghamshire coalfield:⁵

Nottinghamshire miners were accused of acting as they did for many reasons, not least because of what was referred to as their birthright. 'Spencerism' was widely invoked as a

⁴ W. J. Morgan and K. Coates, *The Nottinghamshire coalfield and the British Miners' Strike 1984-85* (Nottingham, 1989), p. 2.

⁵ Spencerism is the popular term given to the Nottingham Miners Industrial Union (NMIU) formed during the latter part of the 1926 lockout following the expulsion of Nottinghamshire Miners' leader George Alfred Spencer from the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB). It lasted from 1926 to 1937.

parallel for the situation in the Nottinghamshire coalfield and for the creation of the UDM. ⁶

Likewise, Richards referred to the apparent shadow of 'Spencerism' which permeated the Nottinghamshire coalfield and its miners:

Miners elsewhere inevitably viewed Nottinghamshire's refusal to strike in 1984-85 as being rooted in the area's role as a bastion of "scab unionism" after the 1926 strike and during the 1930's. ⁷

Strangely, the splits and left-wing breakaways in the Scottish coalfield in the 1920s seem to get less exposure than that of the Spencer Union, excluding the work of Campbell and McArthur. ⁸ Chapter 6: Part 2 looks at this subject in more detail. Laurence Turner suggested the reason for this state of affairs was because there was a greater sense of betrayal with the Spencer breakaway, possibly because of the spectre of 'non-political unionism'. ⁹

Lerner set the scene for academic debate on breakaway unions. ¹⁰ Her study was in two parts. Firstly, she looked at the David versus Goliath situation, the small trade-unions versus large trade-unions scenario. The second part looked at various case studies, scrutinising internal union problems that led to breakaway trade unions being formed. She then looked at their subsequent relationship with the parent union. Lerner looked at splits in the telecommunications and clothing trade unions in the period c1905 to 1920. This

⁶ Linda Bardill, 'Changing perceptions of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield', *The Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, Vol. 22 (2), Spring 2003, pp. 47 – 63, here p. 47.

⁷ Andrew J. Richards, *Miners on Strike: Class Solidarity and Division in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), p. 44.

⁸ Alan Campbell, *The Scottish Miners 1874 – 1939: Trade Unions and Politics Vol. 2*, (Aldershot, 2000); Ian MacDougall, (ed.), *Militant Miners: Recollections of John McArthur* (Edinburgh, 1981).

⁹ Laurence Turner, Spencerism: Industrial and Ideological conflict in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield, a presentation to the *Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Labour History Society*, Skegby, 18 September 2010.

¹⁰ Shirley Lerner, *Breakaway Unions and the Small Trade Union* (London, 1961).

case study follows a similar approach to Lerner, principally looking at the problems of trade union democracy, oligarchy and internal dissension in the NUM in the 1984-85 strike.

Both during and since the strike, a preoccupation with the alleged continuity between the events of 1984-85 and 1926 seems to have dominated the chronicles for some commentators, especially on the left.¹¹ Hester Barron believed that 1926 was distinctly used to summon images of a valiant past:

Miners' Union leaders and miners frequently invoke the memory of the 1926 dispute in order to reinforce the image of a heroic past.¹²

Some similarities did exist between the two periods. Gilbert identified some of these traits as being:

The hardships of a long strike, the outstanding strength of the strike in South Wales, the treatment of blacklegs and the miners' eventual defeat all had antecedents in 1926.¹³

Because of these traits and the spectre of breakaway unionism occurring again in the aftermath of the 1984-85 strike, 1926 has often been used as a point of departure for trying to explain the events in Nottinghamshire in 1984-85. Colin

¹¹ See Alex Callinicos and Mike Simons, 'The lessons of 1926', in *The Great Strike: The Miners' Strike of 1984-85 and its lessons* (London, 1985), pp. 221-229; David Bell, 'Introduction' in *Memories of the Nottinghamshire coalfields* (Newbury, 2008), pp. 9-14; 'Scabs and Scabs' in *Thurcroft: A Village and the Miners Strike, an oral history* (Nottingham, 1986), pp. 244-246; NUM, *A Century of Struggle: Britain's Miners in Pictures 1889 - 1989* (Sheffield, 1989), pp. 123-124; Jim Coulter, S. Miller, and M. Walker, 'A History of Division', *The Iron Fist, A State of Siege Vol. II: A report to the Yorkshire Area, NUM* (London, June 1984), pp. 20-24.

¹² Hester Barron, 'Durham's Big Meeting', *History Today*, Vol. 55 (07), July 2005, p. 40.

¹³ David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in two British coalfields 1850 - 1926* (Oxford, 1992), p. 1.

Griffin, however, writing during the strike in September 1984, stated that whilst comparisons between the 1984-85 dispute and 1926 were plausible, there was a danger that prejudiced views were 'clouding the situation' for both analysts and participants alike:

This preoccupation with 1926 is understandable but there is the danger that it is a subjective interpretation of 1926 that is unwittingly influencing the thinking of both commentators and participants alike. ¹⁴

Griffin suggested the real lesson from 1926 was not necessarily about Nottingham being a 'weak link' in the national chain of miners' solidarity but that '1926 led to breakaway trade unionism and bitter inter-union rivalry which for over a decade effectively weakened the bargaining position of the miners at all levels'. ¹⁵ Colin Griffin was well placed to comment on the situation as his father, the late Dr A. R. Griffin, was the prominent authority on the history of the Nottinghamshire miners, especially on the spectre of Spencerism. ¹⁶ Colin Griffin believed that the majority of Nottinghamshire miners were not, and never had been the 'jellybabies of Spencerite mythology'. ¹⁷ There were distinct differences between the 1926 and 1984-85 disputes. Gilbert identified some of the variances:

¹⁴ Colin P. Griffin, *Nottinghamshire Miners between the Wars: The Spencer Union revisited*, (Nottingham, 1984), Introduction.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See Alan R. Griffin, *The Miners of Nottinghamshire 1914-1944* (London, 1962), Chapter 9 'The 1926 Lockout' pp. 162 – 202 and Chapter 10 'The Spencer Union', pp. 203 – 220; Alan R. Griffin, *Mining in the East Midlands 1550 – 1947* (London, 1971), Part 3 'Spencerism', pp. 302 – 318; Colin P. Griffin, (ed.), *The Nottingham Miners Industrial Union (Spencer Union): Rufford Branch Minutes 1926-36 & Notts District Minutes 1926-27* (Nottingham, 1990), pp. 13-27; Alan R. Griffin and Colin P. Griffin, 'The Non-Political Trade Union Movement' in Asa Briggs and J. Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History 1918-1939*, (Beckenham, 1977), pp. 133 – 162.

¹⁷ Colin P. Griffin, *The Spencer Union Revisited*, Introduction.

Introduction

In 1984 the vast majority of Nottinghamshire miners never came out on strike unlike 1926 and there were changes in the tactics in both picketing and policing.¹⁸

Significant numbers of Nottinghamshire miners did not come out on strike in 1984, arguing that it was both 'unconstitutional and undemocratic' from the outset. Various events had occurred in the ensuing years since 1926 that had the effect of diminishing the effects of Spencerism. The collapse of the Butty system, the nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947, significant post-war migration of miners into the Nottinghamshire coalfield from Eastern Europe, Scotland, the North-East and Derbyshire, the standardisation of Face-workers' wages under the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) in 1966 and the subsequent affirmative role played by the Nottinghamshire miners in the national strikes of 1972 and 1974, were all key factors that played a part in rejecting the notions of Spencerism. As Barry Johnson, industrial and labour history academic and author, stated:

There were traits that linked 1926 and 1984, but the events of the NPLA in 1966, and the role played by the Nottinghamshire miners in the national strikes of 1972 and 1974, dispel these links as myths.¹⁹

Thus a case can be made that too much emphasis has been placed on the notion of Spencerism in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in 1984. It was as if the spectre of Spencerism resurfaced with the strike itself.²⁰ Do we need to look nearer to the events of 1984 than those of 1926 to get a clearer understanding of what happened in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in 1984-85?

¹⁸ Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Interview with Barry Johnson and Hilary Cave, Chesterfield, 8 March 2008.

²⁰ The author was a NUM Branch Committee member at Annesley Colliery in the year preceding the 1984-85 strike and cannot remember the issue of Spencerism being debated or mentioned at all until the strike broke in March 1984.

Is the answer to the role played by the Nottinghamshire miners in 1984-85 more likely to be found in the events during the twenty years that preceded the 1984-85 strike rather than those of 1926? Stanley suggested that one of the reasons for the failure of the 1984-85 strike was the failure to educate new entrants into the coal industry following the 1974 strike.²¹ This would only account for a limited portion of the workforce and would not account for older miners who defied the strike. However, it is probably the reaction of older miners who had witnessed the events in the coal industry from the mid 1960s onwards which was a more instrumental factor in determining the course of the 1984-85 strike than that of new recruits.

The introduction of NPLA in 1966 saw real wages drop for many Nottinghamshire faceworkers, one of its effects bringing apathy and decreasing production in the deep mining coal industry. Additionally, because of the severe rationalisation that took place in the deep coal mining industry during the Labour administration of 1964-70 (an average of a pit a week closed during the life of the Labour Government), what Taylor described as a 'betrayal thesis' took root in some sections of the NUM.²² Under the Labour administration of 1974 - 79 wage restraint again became an issue under the terms of the Social Contract. The 'betrayal thesis' showed itself in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the 1977 Ashfield by-election when a Conservative MP was elected for the first and only time. Such was the astonishment with the election of Tim Smith that it was described as being like 'Arabs electing a Jew'.²³ Even in the left-wing dominated Kent Area in the 1970's there was deep suspicion and bitter memories from the massive pit closure programme under Labour between 1964 and 1970. Pitt suggested the passive attitude to closures in this period was because the NUM leaders did not want to 'rock the boat' for their Labour mates.

²¹ Keith Stanley, *Nottinghamshire miners do strike* (Mansfield, 2009), p. 37.

²² Andrew Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969 - 1995* (Aldershot, 2005), p. 10.

²³ BBC TV, *Panorama*, 27 June 1977.

²⁴ By the early 1980s, and with the introduction of enhanced redundancy terms, many miners who had experienced the wage restraints and rationalisation of the 1960s and 1970s were now over 50 and in many cases were agitating for voluntary redundancy. Under the threat of 70,000 job losses, Peter Heathfield (NUM General Secretary) reported to the 1983 NUM Annual Conference that there were 53,000 miners nationwide in the over 50's category, around a quarter of NUM membership.²⁵ Even though the NUM was broadcasting their fears for the coal industry under the Thatcher administration many of these over 50s miners knew there would probably be no respite even under a Labour administration; history had shown that. Acceptable redundancy terms were now in place to get them out of the 'grime and dust' of an industry that was seemingly always in a state of turmoil and chaos.

One of the main aims of this study is to give a clear and coherent view of the main events, and to examine the role played by the Nottinghamshire miners in the strike of 1984-85. It will also critically analyse some of the more negative and inexact accounts of their role which have painted them as the anti-heroes in the 1984-85 strike. ²⁶ Basically this thesis will try and make a case that the majority of Nottinghamshire miners acted in line with their established 'custom and practice'. Fundamentally, the first half of the study (Chapters 1 to 3) is a narrative of the main events in the Nottinghamshire coalfield from c1979 to 1985. The need for this narrative is in response to there being few if any academic studies which have been done on the subject. Also in some cases the actual events that took place have become 'blurred in the mists of time'. Some

²⁴ Malcolm Pitt, *The World on our Backs: The Kent Miners' and the 1972 Miners' Strike* (London, 1979), p. 96.

²⁵ National Union of Mineworkers, *Report to 1983 Annual Conference*, p. 498.

²⁶ See Alex Callinicos and Mike Simons, *The Great Strike*, Chapter 3, The Tragedy of Nottinghamshire pp. 47 – p81; David Bell, *Memories of the Nottinghamshire Coalfield*, Chapter 10 – Strike and Division pp. 108, p117; Angela Franks, *Nottinghamshire Miners' Tales* (Keyworth, 2001), Part 8, The 1984-85 strike, pp. 67 - 76; Jim Coulter, S. Miller and M. Walker, 'The "Jewel in the Crown", Union splitting in Nottinghamshire' *The Iron Fist: A State of Siege*, , pp. 17 – 24; Jonathon Symcox (ed.), *The 1984-85 Miners' Strike in Nottinghamshire, If Spirit alone won Battles', The Diary of John Lowe* (Barnsley, 2011).

of the text in Symcox's account inferred that the UDM existed during the strike, whereas in fact the UDM break came following the end of the strike.²⁷ Likewise, the *Eastwood and Kimberley Advertiser* made a similar mistake in its twenty-fifth anniversary coverage of the strike, suggesting the UDM was formed on 11 December 1984; it actually came into being almost a year later.²⁸ Stephenson looked at whether the issue of the UDM was a case of democratic unionism or union busting.²⁹ Richards spent six months in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in 1990 and his findings provided some interesting evidence.³⁰ However, a significant proportion of these findings were made through oral evidence gathered more than six years after the event. Butcher and Seymour and Stanley have provided subjective accounts from the working and striking sides accordingly.³¹ Very recently Symcox's edition of John Lowe's diary has added another subjective and at times glaringly inaccurate account of the strike in Nottinghamshire.³² Additionally Franks and Bell have, in certain respects, added limited and unbalanced accounts.³³ The second half of this study (Chapters 4 to 6) is a critical analysis of some of the theories that have been put forward as to why there was an unreceptive reaction to the 1984-85 strike in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. These theories are based around the controversy surrounding the 'ballot issue' and the subsequent decision to run the strike on an area by area basis. They are critically analysed and reasons put forward as to why they may be unsustainable in their views.

²⁷ Symcox (ed.), *The Diary of John Lowe*, p. 9, p. 14 and p. 146.

²⁸ 'Events leading up to the strike', *Eastwood and Kimberley Advertiser*, 27 March 2009, p. 6.

²⁹ R.C. Stephenson, *The UDM and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike, Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting?* (BA Dissertation, University of Bradford, November 1986).

³⁰ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, pp. 175 – 204.

³¹ Chris Butcher and Malcolm Seymour, *The Link up of Friendship* (Nottingham, 1991) and Keith Stanley, *Nottinghamshire Miners do strike* (Mansfield, 2009).

³² Symcox (ed.), *The Diary of John Lowe*. The diary starts on 15 April 1984 and misses the crucial early events in the first five weeks of the strike which caused the initial split in the NUM membership in the Nottinghamshire coalfield from which the NUM never recovered.

³³ Franks, *Nottinghamshire Mining Memories*, pp. and Bell, *Memories of the Nottinghamshire Coalfield*, pp.

In Chapter 1 the main events which affected the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the five year period that preceded the start of the strike (c1979 – March 1984) are appraised. Two local fights against pit closures, at Teversal and New Hucknall, ended in failure. It also looks at aspects of internal politics within the Nottingham Area NUM in relation to events happening on the national stage. The final pieces of the jigsaw were put in place which saw the left secure the leadership of the NUM at national level by early 1984. In the Nottinghamshire Area NUM some experience was lost at Area level between 1977 and 1984 with the retirement of moderate stalwarts, Albert Martin, Len Clarke and George Cheshire. The sudden tragic death of Joe Whelan (Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary) in 1982 robbed the left-wing of the vital experience it needed to deal with the Nottinghamshire problem in 1984-85.³⁴ Finally, some proceedings around the subject of industrial unrest are considered. Ironically, some pre-strike events in the Nottinghamshire coalfield had similar tendencies to those which sparked the strike in the Yorkshire coalfield. Threatened pit closures (at the Annesley-Bentinck-Newstead complex), actual pit closures (at Moorgreen and Pye Hill), problems in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area with transport and tipping connected with the overtime ban, plus the effects of job rationalisation following the introduction of enhanced redundancy terms in 1981, all combined to produce a climate of great turbulence. Indeed, when the National Coal Board (NCB) announced the cuts to the industry for 1984-85 (the issue which sparked the strike) it could be argued that the rationalisation in the NCB South Nottinghamshire was more severe than that in the NCB South Yorkshire Area where the strike started.³⁵

³⁴ Comments made by Barry Johnson, Interview with Barry Johnson and Hilary Cave, 8 March 2008, Chesterfield.

³⁵ Both Areas had cuts of 0.5 million tons but the manpower losses in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area were greater than those in the NCB South Yorkshire Area. This was to take account of the two pit closures that were taking place at the time through the closures of Moorgreen and the Pye Hill Complex.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide a crucial narrative of the main events that affected the Nottingham Area NUM and its members from the start of the strike through to the formation of the UDM. Chapter 2 covers the main events from the start of the strike in March 1984 through to December 1984. The key events centred on the controversy surrounding the non-holding of a national ballot under NUM Rule 43 and the subsequent decision to use the Rule 41 'domino strategy' as a strike tactic. These two factors ensured that the NUM was fractured from the start of the strike. Basically the Rule 41 Area by Area strategy was a different attempt at trying to mobilise strike action over the issue of pit closures. It failed in that it found the weak links in the NUM armoury of differing area cultures and behaviours plus the federal structure of the union. It was in this period that the initial splits within the union, i.e. between the rank and file membership and some pro-strike Branch and Area Officials, began to appear. Pro-strike and anti 'no-ballot strike' demonstrations were held and legal moves were initiated that eventually led to the strike being declared unofficial in the Nottingham Area of the NUM. At national level a 'war of attrition' had commenced within the NUM, firstly initiated by the 'no-ballot issue' and the subsequent domino strategy, then added to in August 1984 by the introduction of the Rule 51 'Star Chamber' Disciplinary Rule. The effects of introducing Rule 51 was far reaching, being the main cause of the constitutional crisis that engulfed the NUM during 1985.

Chapter 3 is an interpretation of the main events in 1985. The strike ended after 51 weeks in early March 1985 but it was the start of subsequent events from March 1984, which Alan Griffin described as "having the inevitability of a Greek Tragedy", which were now in full motion and seemingly unstoppable.³⁶ In January 1985 the Nottingham Area NUM had been threatened with expulsion from the national union but the Special Conference to expel them never took place. However, it was the events surrounding the complete revision of the NUM Rules and Constitution which dominated proceedings following the end of

³⁶ Alan R. Griffin, *County under Siege* (Ashbourne, 1985), p. 6.

the strike. Fundamentally, the new set-up would see a more nationally controlled NUM effectively ending the 'federal' set up of the NUM which had been in place since its inauguration in 1944. Prior to the 1985 Rules Revision Conference there was still a distant hope that the NUM could emerge from the ashes of the strike united. The hostile treatment that the Nottingham Area NUM delegation received, and their subsequent walk-out, put pay to any hopes of reconciliation. The Nottingham Area NUM broke from the national union on 6 July 1985 following a ballot of Nottinghamshire NUM members held in May 1985. During the autumn of 1985 moves were made which resulted in the formation of the UDM, the union receiving certification on 6 December 1985.

The second part of the study (Chapter 4 to 6) is an in-depth critique of the main controversial aspects of the strike, namely the controversy surrounding the failure to hold a national ballot and the heavy picketing associated with the Rule 41 'Area by Area' strike strategy. The critique is focused on the Nottinghamshire coalfield and why there was an adverse reaction to the conduct of the strike there. Chapter 4 evaluates three main theories which have been put forward as to why a national ballot in 1984 was deemed to be unwarranted. Firstly, the safe pits theory suggested it was unfair for miners in coalfields unaffected by the effects of rationalisation to vote on miners' jobs in coalfields that were threatened. Secondly, the events linking the controversial introduction of Area Incentive Schemes (AISs) in 1977-78 are analysed. One theory suggests that the AISs were responsible for dividing the NUM because of pay differentials in different areas. It advocated that miners in some areas were on big bonuses and this was a factor for them not wanting to strike. This was not necessarily the case because of the option of negotiating on norms and contracts at pit level, and not all Nottinghamshire miners were on big incentive bonuses.³⁷ The incentive ballot also caused an internal rumpus in the NUM over the topic of

³⁷ Workers on the coalface which the author worked on at the time the strike broke (H1's – Annesley Colliery – Deep Hard Seam) were often on fall-back bonus rates because of poor geological conditions. To a man they were against the conduct of the strike from the start and in the absence of a national ballot continued to work throughout the duration of the strike.

trade union democracy. Thirdly, the circumstances surrounding the introduction of enhanced redundancy terms in the early 1980s are debated in order to assess how this could have impacted on a national ballot.

Linking in with issues explored in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 explores the weaknesses of the Rule 41 'domino theory' strategy and looks at explanations as to why it failed in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. What was the problem with a strategy relying on solidarity and the use of 'persuasive picketing'? The rise of the left in the NUM can be seen to date from the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970. As Taylor said this would have profound effects for the coal industry, the NUM and British politics as a whole.³⁸ However, there were similar traits in the Nottinghamshire miners' reaction to the 'unofficial strike action' in 1969, 1970, and 1981 to that of 1984-85. One of the main problems in the 1984-85 strike was that the NUM was not truly a national union, but technically a loose combination of independent trade unions within a federal structure. Arthur Scargill had used this justification in the autumn of 1983 when attempts were made to split the NUM up into two sectors (a central block and a peripheral block) in order to keep two seats on the Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Council.³⁹ As Taylor said, the 1944 NUM Rule book had been set up with the different area traditions and cultures in mind:

Differing regional industrial traditions and political cultures were expressed in the structure and ethos of the 1944 Rulebook which had been consciously designed to reflect, contain and manage diversity. This was fundamental to the NUM's politics. Solidarity was not automatic.⁴⁰

A key issue as to why the 1984-85 strike evolved as it did was the role played by the moderates on the NUM National Executive Committee (NEC). Their

³⁸ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 1.

³⁹ NUM, *1983 Annual Conference Report*, pp. 562 – 564.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 3.

involvement was significant to the subsequent development of the strike. The NEC was the body that ran NUM policy between Annual Conferences. The moderate influence on the NEC had been in decline since the retirement of Joe Gormley in 1982. Nevertheless, why did a majority of moderate NEC members go along with an 'area-by-area' strike strategy in 1984 when they knew a majority of their members would probably be against such a course of strike action? ⁴¹ The ensuing no-strike ballot results in several moderate NUM Areas during March 1984 confirmed this view (see Chapter 2 - Appendix 3). John Lloyd described the domino strategy, and subsequent conduct of the strike through Special Delegate Conferences (SDC's), as being a process of 'delegated democracy'. ⁴² As Lloyd stated, the problem for the NUM was that there was a number of countervailing pressures on this process, the main one being a national ballot of all members under NUM Rule 43. What was the more accurate indicator for a mandate; a decision taken at Branch or Special Meetings or one obtained from a ballot vote of members? This was the crux of the matter for the NUM that led to there being 'differing perceptions of democracy' in the union following special meetings in some Areas that overturned no-strike Area ballot results. Arkell and Rising suggested that the NUM had a right to ask the NEC to convene a SDC and thus ask 'mandated delegates' what course of action the strike should take. ⁴³ The problem was, as Ottey stated, what happens in the absence of a ballot vote if a delegation votes for strike action when three-quarters of its members voted to work? ⁴⁴ Hence the confusion over what constituted a genuine mandate.

⁴¹ The NUM NEC voted 21 – 3 to authorise the strike in Scotland and Yorkshire under NUM Rule 41 on 8 March 1984.

⁴² John Lloyd, *Understanding the Miners' Strike* (London, 1985), p. 20.

⁴³ P. Arkell and R. Rising, *Unfinished Business: The Miners' Strike for jobs 1984-85* (London, 2009), p. 17.

⁴⁴ Roy Ottey, *The Strike: an Insider's view* (London, 1985), p. 124.

The 1984-85 strike was not Arthur Scargill's strike. Jack Collins, militant leader of the Kent NUM, stated that the initiative for the strike did not come from national level but from Branch and Lodge level:

The fight came from the bottom, not the leadership (...)
the only tactic we needed was to let the men develop the
strike. ⁴⁵

Claims were made that certain NEC members had been 'leaned on' which could explain the reason for their pro-strike views at national level, often in conflict with their own members' views at area level. NUM NEC members were paid by the national union and their terms and conditions of service (and retirement) were determined by the NUM General Finance Committee. In 1984 the left had a hold on this committee. This was advocated as a reason for there being no moderate backlash against the Rule 41 picketing policy. ⁴⁶ Chapter 6 looks briefly at some of the traditions and behaviours in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Did the working Nottinghamshire miners of 1984-85 strictly fit the bill as 'scabs' or 'blacklegs'? Because there were significant doubts over the democratic nature of the strike can a case be put that the Nottinghamshire miners were acting within their established union traditions? The issues of Spencerism are also scrutinized in this section and some proposals made as to why they may have not been relevant to the 1984-85 strike.

Previously un-accessed primary evidence is crucial to the findings of this thesis. Such evidence includes extracts from the Nottingham Area NUM Minutes, and accounts of the dispute from the local press based around the Sutton-in-Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Various circulars, letters and correspondence from the NUM (at national, Nottinghamshire area and branch levels), documents from other organisations connected with strike, and oral

⁴⁵ Mike Simons, *Striking Back: Photos of the Great Miners' Strike* (London, 2004), p. 14.

⁴⁶ 'Can you remember' *The Working Miners' Newsletter*, Issue 1, 20 August 1984.

evidence from some key players are also used. This previously un-accessed evidence is used to try and give a more sensitive and reflective picture of the events in the Nottinghamshire coalfield during 1984-85. It will also be used to dispel some of the abiding myths that have been created both during and since the dispute, about the role of Nottinghamshire miners, supposedly modern pits with easy geology and thus large incentives, plus the issue of having a history of non-solidarity.

It is the role of the Nottinghamshire miners (NUM members), and their relationship with the union at branch, area and national levels, which are the key in trying to understand what happened in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in 1984-85. Some 'distant views' often place too much emphasis on other, less significant factors. The Silver Birch and the NMWC played a role in the dispute but it was always secondary to what was happening in union circles and probably not as prominent as some commentators suggest.⁴⁷ As Alan Griffin commented, some accounts of the situation in Nottinghamshire misunderstood it after being influenced by a biased minority with prejudiced, illusory views:

I have read accounts of the situation in Nottinghamshire written by well-meaning outsiders, who appear to have studied the area with as little sympathy and understanding as most Western anthropologists brought to the study of native cultures, and who allowed themselves to be over influenced by a small minority of

⁴⁷ Symcox (ed.), *The Diary of John Lowe*, p. 146. It was suggested that the UDM was formed out of the National Working Miners Committee. The Nottinghamshire Area (NUM) disassociated from both the Nottinghamshire and National Working Miners Committees at the December 1984 Area Council meeting. They disassociated on the grounds that the Union worked through the Nottinghamshire constitution, from Branch to Area, and not through Working Miners Committees. The formation of the UDM occurred as a result of the constitutional crisis which engulfed the NUM from January 1985. It officially became a bona-fide trade union on 6th December 1985.

local people whose un-representative views dovetailed with their own prejudices and preconceptions.⁴⁸

Given that the author of this study was involvement on one side of the dispute, it has been a central concern to try and main a balanced view of the issues. What the thesis has attempted to do is to provide a detailed and thoroughly-documented account of the main events of the strike as they affected the Nottinghamshire coalfield. At the same time, it does provide a critique of some of the mainly left-wing theories which have portrayed the Nottinghamshire miner's as the chief culprits in the failure of the strike. It bases this critique on an analysis of the widest range of evidence available. There were on occasions problems in obtaining some of the evidence because of the controversial legacy of the strike. Cases of people not speaking to each other still occur over twenty-seven years since the start of the strike. Moreover, the stance of the Nottinghamshire NUM devout strike loyalists, who continue refusing to appear on the same stage as UDM members (or past UDM members in the author's case), meant that certain oral evidence could not be obtained. This meant that the 2009 twenty-fifth anniversary radio programme broadcast by Radio Salistune as part of the Selstonia Living Heritage Project (2008 – 2011) and Stanley's 2009 account were particularly crucial sources for the present account.

As a scholarly appraisal of the role of the Nottinghamshire miners in the 1984-85 strike, this study seeks to contribute to broader understandings of the strike as a whole. Shortly after the end of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike, the socialist historian Raphael Samuel suggested that the meaning of the strike would be determined 'not by the terms of settlement (...) or even by the events of the last year but by the way in which it is assimilated in popular memory, by (...) retrospective understanding both in the pit villages themselves and the country

⁴⁸ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 6.

at large'.⁴⁹ Samuel also suggested that many different histories of the miners' strike had yet to be written and these would all be radically different, sometimes even within a single family.⁵⁰ As a new regional study, this thesis aims to provide one such strand of interpretation and to complement other regional studies of the dispute by Colin Griffin, David Howell, Jonathon and Ruth Winterton, Keith Gildart and Hywel Francis.⁵¹ As the study covers the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the period c.1980 – 1985 it is hoped that it complements the work of the late Alan Griffin, so adding towards a complete history of the Nottinghamshire Miners from 1881 onwards.⁵²

⁴⁹ Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield, and Guy Boanus, *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-85* (London, 1986), Preface, ix.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Preface, xvii

⁵¹ Colin P. Griffin, *The Leicestershire Miners Vol. III 1945 – 1988* (Leicester, 1989); David Howell, *The Politics of the NUM: A Lancashire View* (Manchester, 1989); J. and R. Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict: The Yorkshire Miners and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike* (Manchester, 1989); Keith Gildart, *North Wales Miners: A Fragile Unity 1945 -1996 (Studies in Welsh History)*, (Cardiff, 2001); Hywel Francis, *History on our side: Wales and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike*, (Ferryside, 2009).

⁵² See Alan R. Griffin, *The Miners of Nottinghamshire Vol. 1, 1881 – 1914* (Nottingham, 1955) and *The Miners of Nottinghamshire Vol. 2, 1914 – 1944* (London, 1962).

Chapter 1 - Teversal to Turmoil

1. Introduction to Chapter 1

Whilst it is probably true to say that the peripheral coalfields of South Wales and Scotland were in the front line for most closures in the early 1980s, it does not follow that pits and jobs in Nottinghamshire were safe. South Wales had been especially hard hit since the demise of the steel industry following the 1980 strike; its main markets were for the steel industry in South Wales. For the financial year 1984-85 it was budgeted to lose £70.7 million, the heaviest financial loss of any coalfield in Britain. Scotland was also experiencing serious problems; a number of collieries had closed in the early 1980s and there had been a number of conflicts between the Scottish NUM and the NCB Scottish Director over under handed tactics he had supposedly employed in that coalfield to close down collieries. For the financial year 1984-85 the Scottish Area was budgeted to lose £55.1 million. In total the combined South Wales and Scottish Areas were budgeted for 1984-85 to produce 12 million tons of coal at a loss of £125.8 million. ¹ In contrast the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area was the 'jewel in the crown' of the British coalfield. Its 12 million tons of deep mined coal was budgeted to produce a profit of £44.4 million. ² However, not all Nottinghamshire collieries were in the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area. It was a very different story in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area. There the collieries were much older being based on the edge of the older 'exposed coalfield' that ran up the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire border. A large proportion of its older workforce had experienced the mass of closures in the 1960s during the 'Robens Era', especially in the nearby Derbyshire coalfield.

¹ NCB South Nottinghamshire Area, *Deep Mined Budgets - 1984-85* (Eastwood Hall, 1984). D. Amos collection.

² Ibid.

In the early 1980s two Ashfield based collieries, Teversal and New Hucknall, had closed following lengthy and exhausting campaigns fought by the local NUM Branches to try and extend their working lives. Both closures went to appeal at National level. Keith Pruden cited the Teversal closure as a factor that made Nottinghamshire miners unwilling to strike in 1984-85:

We asked the NUM National Executive to help keep it (Teversal) open, and they said no. They wouldn't support us, and Teversal shut (...) when they started shutting Yorkshire pits, Mr Scargill came to the Nottinghamshire Miners and said "You've got to support us". And we said (...) "You didn't support us when Teversal was shutting so why should we support you". That was where it stemmed from.³

Teversal and New Hucknall had hardly closed when it was announced that two more Ashfield based collieries had been identified for closure. Both Pye Hill and Moorgreen Collieries were coming near the end of their economic lives and were approaching 'seam exhaustion'. The closure of both collieries was eventually agreed at NUM Branch level; a deciding factor in agreeing to close earlier was to allow the under 50s to get jobs at other Nottinghamshire collieries.⁴ Underground mergers had closed the Coal Preparation Plants (CPP's) at Annesley, Newstead and Babbington in the early 1980s with associated job losses for surface workers. Just prior to the outbreak of the 1984 strike the local NUM Branches had to agree to 550 job losses at the Annesley-Bentinck-Newstead Complex in order to try and get it into profitability.

Job losses and manpower rundowns were nothing new to the Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. From 1960 until the eve of the 1984 strike the

³ Keith Pruden, cited in Bell, *Memories of the Nottinghamshire Coalfield*, p. 111.

⁴ Interview with David Wain, Selston, 16 February 2009.

number of operating collieries fell from seventeen to nine. (see Fig 1) NUM membership for the Ashfield region for the same period dropped from 19,196 to 9,830; this represents a forty-nine per cent drop in membership. These figures do not suggest a coalfield that was unthreatened; indeed by the NUM's own admission in March 1984, no pit was safe from the McGregor axe.⁵

⁵ NUM, 'Why no pit is safe', *The Miner* (Sheffield, March 1984). D. Amos collection.

Table 1. Trends in NUM membership in the Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield 1960 to end February 1984.

NUM Branch		Year					
		1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1984
Collieries							
1	Annesley	800	828	833	854	902	960
2	Bentinck	1511	1634	2024	1860	1910	1514
3 *	Bestwood (c1967)	2136	1847				
4 *	Brookhill (c1969)	959	871	428			
5 *	Hucknall No.1 (c1960)	750					
6	Hucknall No.2	857	1112	1046	981	1045	965
7 *	Kirkby (c1968)	1608	1542				
8 *	Langton (c1968)	853	910				
9	Linby	1099	1020	1320	1095	1054	927
10#	Moorgreen	2040	1559	1345	1244	1009	733
11*	New Hucknall (c1982)	547	613	610	616	530	
12	Newstead	1197	1115	1179	1284	1276	760
13#	Pye Hill/Selston (Pye Hill No.1 & No.2 from 1970)	816	712	733	951	968	633
14*	Selston (merged as Pye Hill Complex 1970)	652	680	203			
15	Silverhill	1157	1176	1126	947	1180	1049
16	Sutton	520	683	830	800	746	700
17*	Teversal (c1980)	900	981	881	776		
Transport & Workshops							
	Bestwood Industrial			380	312	359	307
	Bestwood Workshops	204	350	382	349	375	393
	Moorgreen Workshops	440	440	529	606	634	508
	South Normanton Transport	150	149	217	288	179	381
	Totals	19196	18222	14066	12963	12167	9830
*	Denotes Colliery closed and date.						
#	Denotes Colliery due to close.						

Source: Nottingham Area (NUM) Area Minutes 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1984.

Figures 1960 to 1980 are NUM Branch returns ending December in each year

Figure for 1984 are for NUM Branch returns for 4 weeks ending 28 February 1984 (pre-strike)

After its merger Brookhill was worked from Bentinck and became Bentinck No.4 Branch for a while

2. The Teversal Colliery Closure: 1980

The dust had hardly settled from the 1974 national strike and the subsequent birth of the Plan for Coal when questions were being asked about the future of a Nottinghamshire colliery. Early in 1976 the Teversal Branch of the Nottingham Area NUM asked the Union's mining engineers to make a report on the quality and quantity of coal in the Clowne seam and the feasibility of mining it from Teversal. ⁶ Following the report, the Nottingham Area (NUM) agreed to approach the NCB to drive two new 350 yard drifts to gain access to 2.5 million tons of coal in the Clowne Seam. This would extend the life of the colliery beyond the expected closure date of 1981. Following the meeting on Teversal's future with the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area a report was made to the Nottingham Area NUM Area Executive Committee (AEC) on 10 May 1976. ⁷ It was reported that the local NCB had decided to put the development of the Clowne seam on hold for a number of reasons. Firstly, current reserves at Teversal were expected to last until 1981 and by this time the workforce would be reduced by natural wastage from 700 to 400. The remaining men could transfer to the nearby Silverhill and Sutton Collieries. Secondly, there was concern over the possibility of bad mining conditions, with water and a soft floor, in the Clowne Seam. This would invalidate the cost of £4.5 million needed to develop the Clowne seam and offset the revenue expected from the two million tons of coal reserves expected. Finally, it was reported that currently no decision could be made regarding mining the Clowne seam and any decision reached locally would have to be endorsed by the NCB nationally. The Nottingham Area NUM asked that a decision on the development of the Clowne seam be made by 31 October 1976 at the latest. However, everything was back at square one in November when the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area turned down the development of the Clowne seam as being against the best interests

⁶ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1976, p. 6. D. Amos collection.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

of the mining industry and the men in the North Nottinghamshire Area.⁸ The Nottingham Area NUM AEC rejected the NCB's decision on the grounds that similar low seam workings were being successfully worked at Cresswell Colliery on the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire borders. A Delegation from the Nottingham Area NUM had visited Cresswell to see the low seams being worked. Little appears to have happened regarding the future of Teversal until the issue flared up again in May 1977.

At the Nottingham Area NUM Area Council Meeting (ACM) on 23 May 1977 concern was again expressed by the Teversal Branch about recent NCB reports concerning the future of Teversal.⁹ The ACM agreed that an appeal against the local NCB's decision should be dealt with at national level as a matter of urgency. More significantly, in August 1977 a letter was sent from the Nottingham Area NUM to the National NUM concerning the 'lack of support for the Nottingham Area' from National level over the Teversal closure.¹⁰ The problem appeared to be overcome when the National NUM said it would produce the necessary documentation following the 1977 August Bank Holiday.¹¹ The Nottingham Area NUM case for Teversal was put to the NCB at National level in London on 20 December 1977. However the NCB's reply in early 1978 was unfavourable. In replying to the NUM's submission to mine the Clowne seam the NCB said:

Under all circumstances the Board (NCB) feels that it would be quite wrong to subject men to work under such conditions and consider that such a high risk venture could not be justified.¹²

⁸ Ibid., p. 307.

⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1977, p. 145.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 248.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 277.

¹² Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1978, p. 38.

The Nottingham Area NUM dismissed the NCB's claims and reaffirmed their support to develop and mine the Clowne seam. Also it was agreed to make moves to get the National NUM representatives to see Tony Benn, Secretary of State for Energy, to try and get the NCB's decision reversed. The NUM National level agreed to support the Nottingham Area in trying to get a meeting arranged with Tony Benn. A specially convened Nottingham Area NUM AEC Meeting was called on 3 April 1978 to consider the contents of a letter from Tony Benn to Lawrence Daly (NUM General Secretary).¹³ In the letter Tony Benn deferred making a decision saying that whilst he was willing to meet representatives from the NUM it was the NCB who had the statutory responsibility for the coal industry and that included decisions on which collieries should be worked and which closed. Ironically Tony Benn's stance on colliery closures would take a different turn in 1984 under the Thatcher administration.

In reply to Tony Benn's letter the specially convened AEC meeting decided to pursue a meeting with Mr Benn at the earliest date, inform all other Nottingham Area NUM branches to operate an embargo on receiving transfers from Teversal and call a meeting of all Nottingham Area NUM Branch Officials and Committee (BOCM) members with a recommendation to take industrial action in opposition to the Teversal closure.¹⁴ At the meeting of BOCM on 8 April 1978 the Vice President of the Nottingham Area NUM said the issue was not just about Teversal but was:

a fight to maintain other pits in the Area which still have reserves of coal but which the NCB would want to close as part of their current programme for the concentration of output at selected units.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., pp. 97-98.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

The meeting of Nottingham Area NUM BOCM on 8 April 1978 put forward a motion to lobby the NEC of the National NUM at its meeting on 13 April 1978 and voted to support the AEC's recommendation for strike action in opposition to the Teversal closure.¹⁶ Arrangements for the Nottingham Area NUM Delegation to attend the Lobby were made at the AEC Meeting on 10 April 1978. The lobby, along with a meeting with Tony Benn, was arranged for the 27/28 April 1978 in London. Joe Gormley (NUM National President) presented the NUM's case for Teversal to the Energy Secretary. In reply Tony Benn said that if the NCB had not won the Union's approval then they had not won their case. He said he would endeavour to arrange a meeting between Derek Ezra (NCB Chairman) and Joe Gormley.¹⁷ The meeting with the NCB the following day again saw the National President, supported by other members, forcefully put the case for keeping Teversal open to the NCB. The aftermath of these meetings was that the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area approached the Nottingham Area NUM in May 1978 with a proposal to set up a technical working party with the aim of 'sorting out opinions from facts' and to 'reduce the area of judgement as to what is optimistic and what is pessimistic' in the mining of the Clowne Seam.¹⁸ The Nottingham Area NUM AEC accepted the report and suggested it be acted on as a matter of urgency. By September 1978 the NCB's 'delaying tactics' over Teversal were noted and again the Nottingham Area NUM AEC passed a motion to press the NCB over a 'final decision' on Teversal by 31 October 1978. This was exactly two years after a similar motion had asked for a final decision on Teversal in 1976. Two years of meeting and negotiations appear to have solved nothing.

By early 1979 the Nottingham Area NUM again received correspondence from NCB North Nottinghamshire Area stating the development of the Clowne Seam at Teversal could not be justified and hence Teversal Colliery would close by

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

1981.¹⁹ The NEC of the National NUM had considered the issue at its meeting the previous week and had sanctioned an Area Ballot for the purpose of 'ascertaining the feelings of the membership' with regard to taking industrial action over the Teversal closure. The Nottingham Area NUM AEC reaffirmed their decision from 3 April 1978 in proposing industrial action in opposition to the NCB closure plans for Teversal Colliery. A meeting of Nottingham Area NUM BOCM reaffirmed the AEC decision at a meeting on 14 February 1979. The Nottingham Area NUM ACM endorsed the decision to ballot the Nottingham Area NUM membership by a vote of 31 Branches to 2.²⁰ The Area Ballot was arranged for 14 March 1979. In the weeks leading up to the ballot all Nottingham Area NUM Branches were visited by delegations from Teversal, with the aim of securing support for industrial action (Fig 2). Implications from one of these visits, to Ollerton Colliery, were resurrected in 1986. A former Teversal NUM Branch Official accused one of the chief 1984 strike supporters in Nottinghamshire of hypocrisy and double standards over pit closures by his apparent failure to support Teversal in 1979.²¹ The Area Ballot took place on 14 March 1979 and resulted in 6,387 (28%) voting to support industrial action in support of Teversal and 16,778 (72%) voting against industrial action.

In July 1979 a letter was sent from the Teversal Branch of the NUM to the Nottingham Area NUM HQ expressing the branch's feelings regarding the NCB's actions in reversing their decision over the Deep Duffryn Colliery closure in South Wales.²² The NCB had targeted Deep Duffryn for closure because the economic workable reserves were reaching exhaustion. Unlike Teversal, the colliery had made heavy financial losses during the previous six years. This was

¹⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1979, p. 39.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²¹ Gerry Todd, (former Teversal NUM Branch Official), *Mansfield Chad*, 9 October 1986. (It was suggested in the letter that the then Ollerton Delegate, Jimmy Hood (now a Member of Parliament), was more interested in his campaign for the vacant position of Area NUM Official than supporting the Teversal campaign).

²² Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1979, p. 241.

Fig 1. Nottingham Area NUM Campaign Literature – Teversal Colliery closure: March 1979

NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS — NOTTINGHAM AREA

**WHY NOTTINGHAMSHIRE MINERS SHOULD
VOTE 'YES' FOR STRIKE ACTION
IN SUPPORT OF TEVERSAL COLLIERY
IN THE FORTHCOMING BALLOT**

TEVERSAL COLLIERY — PIT CLOSURES

The Coal Board have decided to close Teversal Colliery on Economic Grounds. This Colliery has made a profit of half a million pounds except on two occasions since 1947.

The Coal Board accept that there are over two million tons of coal in the Clowne Seam that can be worked.

The Coal Board refuse to spend money to drift into the Seam. They say the money is needed elsewhere and so also is the manpower. That's in spite of past promises to work the Seam.

The Coal Board are not being asked for charity or a hand out, just to invest some of our past profits in the Pit.

**IF THE COAL BOARD CAN CLOSE A PROFITABLE PIT LIKE TEVERSAL
WITH ADEQUATE RESERVES OF COAL—THEN GOD HELP HALF THE
PITS IN THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COALFIELD**

PROTECT YOUR PIT — — — DEFEND YOUR JOB

The decision is yours. We ask you to give a resounding Yes Vote against the Coal Board decision and in support of your own Pit and Area. Is your Pit classified as uneconomic? It could be your turn next!

VOTE YES

E. Mellors, Printer, Hucknall, Nottingham

Source: Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Labour History Society collection.

the main basis of the Teversal complaint. The Deep Duffryn NUM Branch, like Teversal, had organised opposition to the closure, both within the local community around Mountain Ash and more widespread through parts of the South Wales Coalfield. Like Teversal, this was the backdrop to taking the closure through the official Review Procedure. Emlyn Williams, South Wales NUM President, made an emotional plea to save Deep Duffryn at the 1979 NUM Annual Conference. However, prior to any constitutional steps being taken by the South Wales NUM, Deep Duffryn was reprieved from closure in the week following the NUM Annual Conference. The reprieve was for a six week period and was on the grounds of successfully developing a coal face and getting the colliery towards profitability. Similar tactics were used when Cefn Coyd, the last working deep mine in the Dulais Valley, closed in 1968.²³ Cefn Coyd was given a three month stay of execution in 1968 pending getting the colliery into viability. The Cefn Coyd Branch put all emphasis on trying to get the colliery into viability by implementing policies of economic rationalisation. This included working with the management at the colliery to apply a redundancy programme for older miners to eliminate 'natural wastage'.²⁴ However, all efforts came to nothing as Cefn Coyd eventually closed later in the same year. Deep Duffryn closed after the six week trial period. The development of the new coalface ran into dangerous geological conditions and all concerned, the South Wales NUM, the Deep Duffryn NUM Lodge, and the South Wales NCB agreed that the colliery had to close.

Prior to the problems encountered at Deep Duffryn, a Special Executive Committee Meeting (SEC) of the Nottingham Area NUM was held at the Area HQ on 2 August 1979.²⁵ At the meeting, which was attended by the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area Director, a case was put to try and reprieve Teversal from

²³ For an account of the closure of Cefn Coyd Colliery see John Sewel, *Colliery Closures & Social Change* (Cardiff 1975), pp. 11-28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁵ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1979, pp. 267 – 270.

closure. Emphasis was put on the drastic changes that were now taking place in the world's energy situation and the likelihood of coal being at a premium in the near future. Additionally the Nottingham Area NUM Delegation asked why a colliery like Teversal, in one of the most profitable areas in the country, was being closed when Deep Duffryn had significant financial losses over the past five years and was being rerieved.²⁶ The Teversal NUM Branch believed they were being treated shabbily by the NCB after years of profitability and were the victims of their own moderation.²⁷ In conclusion the Nottingham Area NUM asked that the NCB should defer the closure of Teversal and, in view of the current situation in the industry, look into the feasibility of extending the life of the colliery. In reply the local NCB were unwilling to reopen the Teversal case. They cited various factors including that time had run out for Teversal, the decision to close the colliery had been taken at NCB National level and there was a fundamental difference between the development at Teversal and what was going on at Deep Duffryn.²⁸ Importantly it was pointed out that transfers from Teversal to nearby Silverhill Colliery had commenced, and that there was the option of Teversal's reserves being transferred there. The option of re-allocating reserves to a nearby colliery was a ploy used by the NCB on many occasions. More controversially the local NCB Area Director, whilst agreeing there was an increase in demand for coal, stated it need not necessarily be British mined coal, as it was cheaper to buy foreign coal.²⁹ This statement caused much upset in Nottingham Area NUM circles and was replied to in no uncertain terms. However, the final insult did not end there, as the Nottingham Area NUM approached the National NUM for assistance in seeking to see David Howell, the incoming Conservative Secretary of State for Energy, about reopening the Teversal case. The National NUM replied that following the Nottingham Area NUM Ballot, the NUM's NEC had no option but to accept the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 269.

²⁹ Ibid.

NCB's decision on the Teversal closure and that they therefore were unwilling to reopen the matter. ³⁰

The closure of Teversal Colliery was accepted at a Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 19 September 1979. It was agreed that everything possible regarding support to keep Teversal open had been done, and there was now no alternative but to accept the NCB's plans to close the colliery. ³¹ Teversal finished production on 25 July 1980 after 111 years. ³² It was the first colliery closure in the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area since its formation in 1967; it was also the first closure anywhere in Nottinghamshire since the ill-fated Kirkby 'Summit' Super Pit project was aborted in 1968. The majority of the Teversal workforce, 458, took short-term transfers to other local collieries at Silverhill, Sutton and Sherwood. ³³ Just one man took a long term transfer. Forty men (over 55's) took redundancy, with 21 taking Voluntary Early Retirement (VERS). Stanley suggested that the 'betrayal' over the Teversal closure became part of Nottingham mining trade union history and laid the foundations for the divisions in 1984-85. ³⁴ However, the betrayal cannot be solely laid at the door of Nottinghamshire miners as the NUM failed to raise a critical consciousness over the issue of pit closures at any time, in any coalfield, especially during the mass closure programme of the 1960's. Even following the two national strikes of 1972 and 1974, in a period of supposed renaissance for the deep mining coal industry, problems remained in getting united support against pit closures. This included the North Derbyshire coalfield in 1976 over the Langwith closure, in the traditional left-wing areas of the South Wales Coalfield in 1979 and 1983, and in the Scottish coalfield in the 1982-83 period. Stanley's betrayal thesis cannot be

³⁰ Ibid., p. 270.

³¹ Ibid., p. 303.

³² NCB North Nottinghamshire Area, *Teversal Colliery 1862 – 1980* (Edwinstowe, 1980), p. 1.

³³ Nottingham Area NUM, *An appraisal of the British Coalmining Industry and an examination of the possible consequences following pit closures in the NUM Nottinghamshire Area*, (Mansfield, 1983), Table XXII

³⁴ Stanley, *Nottinghamshire Miners do strike*, p. 41. Stanley's account suggests that the Nottinghamshire miners betrayal in 1984 had its roots in the 1979 Ballot over the Teversal closure when they failed to show support in the fight to keep Teversal open.

solely nailed to the door of the Nottinghamshire miners. Many different factors came into play on the closure of a colliery in any coalfield. As Taylor stated 'no national coalition had ever been built around pit closures, historically their effect was to fragment not unite'.³⁵ Few area coalitions against pit closures had been built up either.

3. The New Hucknall Colliery Closure - 1982

Whilst the Teversal closure debacle had been on-going, uncertainty was being expressed about another Nottinghamshire colliery based in Ashfield. New Hucknall Colliery was situated some three miles to the south of Teversal, near the mining community of Huthwaite. Unlike Teversal the colliery was placed in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area. By 1980 the colliery had been in production for over a hundred years. Concern over the future of New Hucknall was first expressed at a Nottingham Area NUM AEC Meeting on 11 August 1980. At that meeting it was reported that the Area's NUM mining engineers had been monitoring the coal reserves for some two years and the NCB's forecast was that the colliery would close in 1981.³⁶ The report stated there was 'cause for optimism' in that, based on present output, there were a further two and a half years of coal reserves beyond the NCB's forecast. It was also noted that the difference between the NCB's forecast and the Nottingham Area NUM Report was based primarily on economic considerations and not geological or total exhaustion of reserves.³⁷ It was agreed that informal talks between the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area and the Nottingham Area NUM go ahead regarding the future of New Hucknall Colliery. The meeting took place on 28 August 1980, followed by a Colliery Review Meeting on 8 September 1980. It was also agreed that a joint report be made by the NUM and NCB Mining Engineers on future coal reserves at New Hucknall and a formal meeting on the future of New

³⁵ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 186.

³⁶ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1980, p. 277.

³⁷ Ibid.

Hucknall was offered to the Nottingham Area NUM by the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area Director.³⁸

A NUM Special Executive Meeting on 24 September 1980 considered the various options regarding remaining coal reserves at New Hucknall. At the meeting it was noted that the 'interpretation of seam exhaustion' in relation to the National NUM's policy on colliery closures was of utmost importance.³⁹ The National NUM had a policy to oppose all colliery closures unless on the grounds of total exhaustion of economic reserves. A Nottingham Area NUM Special Area Executive Meeting (SAEC) considered the New Hucknall position on 13 October. Mr A Davies, Area Director for NCB South Nottinghamshire, attended the meeting in addition to the full New Hucknall NUM Branch Committee. At the meeting the Area Director reported that in 1976 he had obtained approval from the NCB at national level to develop the Yard seam at New Hucknall.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the development of the Yard seam proved abortive due to excessive amounts of water which found its way into the mine's workings. This was due to past complex inter action from past workings at closed collieries to the west of New Hucknall in the Derbyshire coalfield. The only available reserves left for New Hucknall to develop were under the high subsidence risk areas of Sutton-in-Ashfield and Huthwaite. Subsidence costs in Ashfield were becoming a major problem in the Ashfield coalfield by the early 1980s. More importantly, in answer to a question from the Nottingham Area NUM, the NCB stated that the current workforce at New Hucknall could be absorbed at other collieries in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.⁴¹

The New Hucknall situation was again discussed at a Nottingham Area NUM AEC Meeting on 10 November 1980. It was agreed that the New Hucknall issue be referred to National level, this being on the grounds that the NCB's refusal to

³⁸ Ibid., p. 298.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 326.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 332.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 333.

mine the three remnants of coal in the Yard seam should be opposed in that 'a state of seam exhaustion had not been reached'. As with most contested colliery closures, it was a case of a difference of opinion as to whether a colliery had come to its 'useful economic end'. At Teversal and New Hucknall there was no issue of 'long life pits', in both cases it was an issue of trying to extend the life of the colliery for a short period of time. Both were situated near the old workings on the exposed coalfield that ran up the Nottinghamshire / Derbyshire border. This region had a history of extensive coal mining for several centuries.

Early in 1981 the NCB at national level announced they could see no justification for keeping New Hucknall Colliery open. The issue would therefore be referred for discussion to national level, pending an appeal. However, other events in the coal industry overtook the New Hucknall issue. In early February 1981, at a nationally based meeting between the NCB and the mining unions, it was announced that in order to move the coal industry towards profitability, between twenty and fifty collieries nationwide would have to be closed, with the associated loss of jobs (see Chapter 5: Part 4) In the aftermath of the 1981 coal crisis it was revealed that none of the proposed closures would affect the North Nottinghamshire Area. However, the South Nottinghamshire Area Director announced that the proposed closure of New Hucknall would still go ahead, along with the merger of Babbington Colliery with Hucknall Colliery.⁴²

On 18 March at the Nottingham Area NUM AEC Meeting it was reported that two Colliery Review Meetings had been held on the future of New Hucknall. The NCB had put forward revised plans for the colliery following the Government's decision to grant further financial assistance to the coal industry. The plan would mean the colliery reverting to one operating coalface only, followed by a period of no production at all. New Hucknall would therefore revert to being a development- only colliery for a period of time. This would mean the temporary

⁴² Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1981, p. 50.

transfer of New Hucknall miners whilst the new reserves were developed. The Nottingham Area NUM AEC Meeting accepted the report as the development would extend the life of the colliery. In the meantime a National Appeal meeting over the future of New Hucknall was set at the NCB National HQ for 29 June 1981. Prior to the appeal industrial relations between the New Hucknall NUM Branch and the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area took a turn for the worse. The New Hucknall Branch had implemented a ban on consultation following the Area Director's attitude towards the New Hucknall development. A move to extend this ban to the whole of the Nottingham Area of the NUM was defeated by a vote of 27 Branches to 5.⁴³ Despite the Branch ban it was agreed that the four Area Officials should seek an early meeting with Mr Griffiths, the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area Director, to try and sort things out.⁴⁴ However, Mr Griffiths refused to meet the four Nottingham Area NUM Officials whilst the consultation ban remained in place.⁴⁵ It was proposed that a letter be sent to the Area Director to try and get him to reconsider so as to try and avoid an escalation of the situation. This can be considered a serious breach in industrial relations involving a union branch which epitomised the moderate stance of the Nottinghamshire NUM.⁴⁶

Following the National Appeal a letter was sent from the NCB at National level to the National NUM General Secretary regarding the future of New Hucknall Colliery.⁴⁷ In this letter it was outlined that the last two operating coalfaces in the Deep Soft Seam, S7's and S9's, would work the colliery out to seam exhaustion by August 1982. Regarding the development in the Yard Seam, the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 191.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 219.

⁴⁶ A ban on consultation was a rare occurrence in labour relations in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. New Hucknall was considered a 'family pit' and good, sometimes informal industrial relations, between the NCB and the union branch were considered the norm. New Hucknall was also the ancestral home of George Spencer, the controversial Notts Miners Leader in the 1920's & 30's. Spencer advocated the use of conciliation and arbitration to solve industrial conflicts. This moderate trait was the normal state of play at the New Hucknall Branch of the NUM.

⁴⁷ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1981, p. 271-272.

NCB agreed that the development into Y2's should continue in an attempt to prove the geological conditions in that area. Until this development was completed the NCB would not make a final decision on New Hucknall Colliery.⁴⁸ In the meantime there would be a rundown in manpower at the colliery because of the reduction in the number of faces and production shifts. In reply the Nottingham Area NUM were disturbed that there was no mention of potential development into the Blackshale, Piper and Tupton seams as proposed by the Union's mining engineers.⁴⁹

Rundown of the manpower at New Hucknall continued into the latter part of 1981. This was by means of transfers to other Nottinghamshire Collieries and 'natural wastage' through redundancies for older mineworkers. At the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 23 September 1981 it was reported that a further meeting concerning New Hucknall's future had been held in London on 16 September 1981.⁵⁰ Prior to this meeting taking place it was reported there had been an unexpected breakthrough of water in Y2's development heading. The Nottingham Area's NUM Mining Engineers, on investigation, concluded that the mine water was likely to affect any future workings in the Yard and Blackshale seams. In view of the situation it was agreed that New Hucknall Colliery should close when the current workings on S9's finish around August 1982. A specially convened Branch Meeting of the New Hucknall NUM accepted the closure decision. In reply, the NCB gave an undertaking to provide jobs for all New Hucknall men who required a transfer to other Nottinghamshire collieries.

The closure of the colliery was brought forward because of deteriorating geological conditions early in 1982. Actual production finished on Friday 5 February 1982 and the colliery closed after 106 years of life.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 272.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 258

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 288.

4. Rationalisation in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield (1980-1984)

In addition to the closures of Teversal and New Hucknall in the early 1980s, there were other risks to the Nottinghamshire coalfield. At the 1983 NUM Annual Conference, Peter Heathfield (North Derbyshire NUM General Secretary) suggested that the problems faced by the Midlands coalfields paled into insignificance compared to those faced by the peripheral coalfields of South Wales, Scotland and Durham.⁵¹ The inference was that areas like Nottinghamshire were immune from rationalisation. It provoked a fervent response from Ray Chadburn, Nottingham Area NUM President:

(...) we cannot sit back and say what is happening in the rest of the coalfield is not affecting Nottinghamshire. Because in Nottinghamshire they are cutting back on capacity, they are cutting back on machine shifts and they are cutting back on jobs.⁵²

In 1983 the Nottingham Area NUM Education and Research Department identified five Nottinghamshire collieries that had short spans of life.⁵³ In the introduction to the booklet about this situation, Henry Richardson, Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary, stated that there was no guarantee that the Nottingham Area would remain immune to pit closures.⁵⁴ He stated that the:

(...) cutting out of dead wood and rationalisation could threaten collieries then regarded as long life, thus making them vulnerable virtually overnight to the threat of closure.⁵⁵

⁵¹ 1983 NUM Annual Conference Report, p. 498.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 498-499.

⁵³ Nottingham Area NUM, *An examination of the possible consequences following pit closures in the NUM Nottingham Area*, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Of the five short-life collieries cited in the booklet, three were in the Ashfield region - Annesley, the Pye Hill Complex and Sutton, whilst the other two, Moorgreen and Babbington, were based just outside Ashfield. Of those collieries, Babbington was the worst financial loss-maker in the whole Nottinghamshire Coalfield; in the financial year 1981-82 the colliery recorded losses of some £20.6 million, more than the rest of the Nottinghamshire coalfield put together. At the time Babbington was the oldest working colliery in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Sunk in 1842 by Thomas North, it had the distinction of having the oldest union branch in Nottinghamshire. The Nottinghamshire miners' historian, Dr Alan Griffin, was an active member there as a young man in the late 1930s. In 1983 it was expected that as a single autonomous unit Babbington had a life of some eight to nine years. Threats to the colliery were made early in 1981 when an argument occurred over the tipping of pit waste.⁵⁶ However, in 1981 the NCB made proposals to link up Babbington with Hucknall Colliery to form a Hucknall-Babbington Complex. Plans were put forward to link the two collieries underground, with all coal to surface at Hucknall No.2 Colliery. This meant that all coal transport and coal preparation would finish at Babbington with a subsequent loss of jobs. Plans were also hatched for the Babbington workforce to access the reserves via the Hucknall shafts. This would give additional 'machine available time' as the Babbington reserves were geographically nearer to the Hucknall shafts.⁵⁷ In total around £30 million was spent linking up the two collieries and upgrading coal preparation facilities at Hucknall. The two collieries officially became a Complex in 1985 when all the link work had been completed. It was predicted

⁵⁶ 'Babbington Colliery: an uncertain future', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 24 January 1981, p. 4.

⁵⁷ NCB South Nottinghamshire Area, *Report on Babbington Colliery* (Eastwood Hall, October 1982), p. 1. D. Amos collection. Machine available time is the actual time for cutting coal per shift minus travel time and various other associated tasks.

that the combined collieries would have a life of around twenty years.⁵⁸ In the event the Complex closed after only eighteen months in October 1986, being the first Nottinghamshire closure following the 1984-85 strike.

Moorgreen Colliery, near Eastwood, was the last colliery in the former NCB East Midlands No.5 Area. The colliery, sunk in 1865, formally belonged to the Barber Walker Company. It was renamed as Minton Colliery in *Sons and Lovers* by the Eastwood writer, DH Lawrence. By the early 1980s the colliery had been identified as having a limited life due to exhaustion of viable reserves. Life expectancy in 1983 was expected to be around three years.⁵⁹ The Waterloo seam became exhausted in 1976 and from that time all production came from the Blackshale seam. Late in 1982 reports of both Babbington and Moorgreen as being on a NUM hit list were described as 'hysterical talk' by Roy Lynk, Nottingham NUM Area Official.⁶⁰ Commenting on the limited life expectancy of the two collieries he stated that the NUM had known since 1979 that the two collieries, plus the Pye Hill Complex, had been earmarked for closure within a decade.⁶¹ Closure of the Colliery was accepted by the Moorgreen NUM Branch in 1983 and a gradual rundown of manpower commenced from that time. Miners aged under 50 transferred to other Nottinghamshire collieries, whilst over 50s were offered voluntary redundancy under the new enhanced terms introduced in 1982. Following the loss of K97's face in September 1983 the closure of Moorgreen Colliery was brought forward and it finished production in July 1985.

Not far from Moorgreen, the Pye Hill Complex was a combination of the former Selston Colliery, at Underwood, and Pye Hill Colliery near Jacksdale. It was the

⁵⁸ In the 1983-84 period many former miners from the closing Pye Hill Complex and Moorgreen Colliery transferred to Hucknall with promises of some twenty years of life. They were there for around eighteen months to two years maximum.

⁵⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes, 1983, p. 215.

⁶⁰ 'Hit list talk is hysterical says Union Man', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 3 December 1982, p. 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

last deep-mining in the Parish of Selston. For production purposes the two collieries had been linked up in the late 1960s, with all the preparation and transport facilities for coal being at Pye Hill No.2 at Jacksdale. Selston Colliery was renamed Pye Hill No.1 Colliery. Both collieries retained separate NUM Branches, being part of the Nottingham Area of the NUM. In 1983 it was expected that the Complex would have a maximum of four years life.⁶² Plans to try and extend the life of the Pye Hill Complex were dashed in 1983, when a planned mix of opencast coal from the proposed nearby Smotherfly site with Pye Hill's deep mined coal was aborted.⁶³ Henry Richardson, whilst stressing disappointment with the closure, stated that the men at both Moorgreen and Pye Hill (1,900 in total) were 'lucky in that the coal industry could absorb them at the present time'.⁶⁴ However, he stressed that his real worry was that this type of guarantee could not be made in the future if further closures occurred. As at Moorgreen plans were made for a gradual rundown of the Pye Hill Complex up to closure. Miners aged under 50 transferred to other Nottinghamshire collieries, with the over 50s being offered voluntary redundancy. Receiving collieries offered over 50s voluntary redundancy to make way for the Pye Hill and Moorgreen men. The Pye Hill Complex mined its last coal on 9 August 1985.

It was expected that Sutton Colliery, also in the Ashfield region, would close around 1990. The colliery, sunk in 1873, had limited economic reserves. The main restriction on reserves at Sutton was that only two seams in one area could be worked, following the loss of other potential reserves because of high subsidence costs. As mentioned earlier (p. 32) subsidence was becoming a major issue in parts of the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the early 1980s. In 1983 the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area announced that 'half of the 3,500

⁶² Nottingham Area NUM Minutes, 1983, p. 2.

⁶³ 'Pit loses fight for life', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 12 Aug 1983, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

subsidence claims it had last year came from the Ashfield region'.⁶⁵ Rumours abounded of there being a 'claims bandwagon'. The issue for several Ashfield collieries was that the abandonment of coal reserves under potential high cost subsidence areas could considerably shorten the life span of some collieries. The Mansfield NUM Branch was aware of this when they submitted an appeal to the Nottingham Area NUM ACM to 'try and get an agreement with the appropriate bodies, to offset the costs of surface damage from collieries whose mining activity had caused that damage'.⁶⁶ Mansfield Colliery, known locally as Crown Farm, had large amounts of its workings under high cost subsidence areas to the north-east of the Nottinghamshire town of Mansfield. In early 1984 Ian McGregor (NCB Chairman 1983–1986) commented on the subsidence problem affecting Mansfield:

(...) if Mansfield's rate of claims were to be matched in other mining districts, the industry would have to extract far less coal, profitable pits would go into the red and the whole country's available reserves would be reduced.⁶⁷

Subsidence costs and future reserves under high subsidence areas would be major factors when Mansfield Colliery closed in 1988 and Sherwood closed in 1992. The subsidence problem was, as economist Andrew Glynn indicated, that claims were set against the NCB's operating costs. If these claims were to be met by the Areas actually causing the subsidence damage then the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area could incur charges in the region of £148 million.⁶⁸ The issue of high subsidence costs affecting the life of collieries was brought home in February 1984 when Bentinck Colliery had to abandon large reserves of coal under the towns of Ravenshead and Kirkby-in-Ashfield. Subsidence levels in the

⁶⁵ 'Crumbling Ashfield', *Notts Free Press*, 7 October 1983, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1982, p. 394.

⁶⁷ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners' Strike*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ A. Glynn, cited in *Ibid* p. 4.

two areas stood at £4 per ton and it was stressed that this would have to be brought down to around £1 per ton to try and help the Annesley-Bentinck-Newstead Complex achieve improved profitability.⁶⁹ This decision considerably shortened the working life of Bentinck Colliery.

Peter Heathfield (NUM National General Secretary) claimed that Nottinghamshire's miners were immune from the effects of rationalisation. This statement can be seen to be incorrect. Parts of the Nottinghamshire coalfield, especially in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area, were suffering from the effects of rationalisation and were looking at uncertain futures as the evidence in this chapter shows. Yet in the 1984-85 post-strike aftermath he defended the decision to reject a national ballot in the 1984-85 strike because of Nottinghamshire's supposed immunity from the effects of pit closures:

I am an advocate of ballots on major issues, with one qualification, the issue of the ballot affects everyone participating in the ballot, for example wages (...) but on the question of colliery closures, the issues were affecting a minority (...) So people working at long life pits, especially Notts, don't see themselves as affected, leading to a tendency to vote against strike action.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ NCB South Nottinghamshire Area, *Informal minutes re Future of Annesley-Bentinck-Newstead Complex*, (Bestwood, 17 February 1984). D. Amos collection.

⁷⁰ Peter Heathfield (NUM General Secretary), cited in Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 183. Also see Chapter 4 of this thesis: Chapter 4: Part 1 - The Ballot Issue and the 'Safe Pits' theory.

5. The Nottingham Miners and the NUM (1979 - 1983).

In addition to the issue of pit closures, the NUM at national level was much concerned with the succession to Joe Gormley, the outgoing moderate NUM President. The election took place on 8 December 1981 with Arthur Scargill winning and taking office in Spring 1982. Scargill gained over 70% of the vote in the election in what is often described as a landslide victory.

A lot of emphasis was placed on the margin of Scargill's election: never before had a NUM President been elected by such a large majority. At the 1982 NUM Annual Conference, Scargill deemed his election to be a vote for change and for more militant tactics. However, did Scargill win by a landslide or was it the NUM moderates who lost miserably? Joe Gormley was a hard act to follow and there was no natural moderate successor to him. Tommy Bartles had been the moderate choice but he was killed in a car crash. Scargill benefited hugely from the divisions amongst his enemies. As Routledge stated, the right could not even agree on a single candidate.⁷¹ Three moderate candidates stood in the election for NUM President in 1981. They were Trevor Bell, Bernard Doherty and Ray Chadburn, Nottingham Area NUM President. Trevor Bell was a NEC and NUM Official for the clerical side of the NUM, the Colliery Officials and Staff Association (COSA). Bell was always an unlikely candidate to secure the NUM Presidency, firstly because he was not a miner and secondly, because he had been likened to Sir Sidney Ford. Ford was NUM National President from 1960 to 1971 and in many circles was identified with the passivity which saw the mass rundown of the coal industry in the 1960s. As Joe Gormley commented:

As the election approached, the moderates woke up
to the fact that the lads were unlikely to repeat the

⁷¹ Paul Routledge, *Scargill: The Unauthorised biography* (London, 1994), p. 107.

experiment of electing a representative from COSA,
as Sid Ford had been.⁷²

Lancashire Area Official Bernard Doherty was put into the election simply because the moderate Lancashire NUM, and its Area Secretary Sid Vincent, did not want to nominate Arthur Scargill. Doherty was virtually unknown at Branch level outside his native Lancashire and therefore could not be expected to gain many votes. As Routledge noted 'Doherty was nominated simply to avoid having to back that Yorkshireman'.⁷³ This leaves the position of Ray Chadburn who was likened to the proverbial 'dithering bride to be' who did not know whether to get married or not. Described by Routledge as an amicable, middle of the road man, he initially decided to stand for the position of National President.⁷⁴ He then changed his mind and stood down, only to change it again at the last minute. In the end Chadburn did not even get nominated by his own Nottingham Area, having to rely on the small Cumberland Area to nominate him. His actions hardly portrayed him as a man who was hoping to lead the 'storm troopers' of the British trade union movement. Most Nottinghamshire miners voted for Scargill simply on the grounds he fitted the main criteria; he was well known, was a good orator and he was a 'pit man'. The mediocrity of the moderate opposition to Scargill ensured he was elected with a landslide. Scargill was elected with 138,803 votes or 70.3% in an 80% turn out of 248,000 NUM Members.⁷⁵ The three moderates totalled 58,496 votes.

Despite the landslide victory, concern about Scargill's leadership surfaced in the autumn of 1983 when the Annesley NUM Branch put forward a vote of no confidence in him. This was for disparaging comments he had supposedly made against the Solidarity Trade Union in Poland and the shooting down of a

⁷² Joe Gormley, *Battered Cherub* (London, 1982), p. 207.

⁷³ Routledge, *Scargill*, p. 107.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Korean airliner by the Soviet Union in 1983. Scargill faced his accusers by addressing a Special Branch Meeting at Annesley Miners Welfare in December 1983. He managed to successfully talk round most of the Annesley meeting. However this was done with a certain amount of showmanship as the author recalls. Questions were taken three at a time and 'political type speeches' given.⁷⁶ The meeting overturned the vote of no confidence into a vote of confidence. Commenting on the turn around, Steve Williamson, Annesley NUM Branch Secretary, said "It was complete reversal of opinion".⁷⁷ At the meeting Scargill claimed that half of the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area collieries would close in the next ten years, a view later confirmed by the NCB in South Nottinghamshire.⁷⁸

Annesley was not the only Nottingham Area NUM Branch to show concern about Scargill's leadership. A 1983 Harworth NUM Branch appeal to the Nottingham Area NUM ACM stated "it was time the National President did the job he was elected to do and negotiated better wages, improved pensions and terms of employment".⁷⁹ The appeal added that recent media statements made by the NUM National President were "making the NUM lose all credibility, both home and abroad". The appeal was ruled out of order on the grounds the matter was being dealt with by the NUM NEC.

Whilst the NUM at national level in 1979 – 1983 saw the prominence of the left gaining some momentum, in Nottinghamshire things stayed much the same in terms of politics at Area level. Three Area Ballots in 1979, 1982 and 1983 respectively saw a left wing Official and two moderates elected. All three newly elected Area Officials would play a prominent role in the 1984-85 strike, but for different reasons. In March 1979 Roy Lynk, Branch Secretary at Sutton Colliery,

⁷⁶ The author was in attendance at this meeting as an elected NUM Committee member at Annesley NUM Branch, Nottingham Area NUM.

⁷⁷ 'Scargill's Annesley Visit', *The Chad (Kirkby Edition)*, 30 December 1983, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes, 1983, p. 379.

was elected as Area Agent in place of the departing Len Clarke. A long time moderate, Roy Lynk had been a union branch official at Sutton NUM for a considerable time. Roy Lynk very much fitted into a similar moderate role to that of the departing Len Clarke. Lynk, in many ways, epitomized the Nottingham Area's moderate, traditionalist stance. However, amongst the established left at Area level the election of Roy Lynk caused some concern. As the count progressed at the NUM Area Offices on 26 April 1979, Joe Whelan, left-wing Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary commented to Area President Len Clarke "It looks as if the village idiot's going to win"⁸⁰ Lynk suggested that there was 'bad blood' between himself and Joe Whelan prior to him getting elected because of differences in 'pit politics'. Roy Lynk would come to prominence in the 1984-85 strike when, following Ray Chadburn and Henry Richardson's decision not to back the Nottinghamshire working mandate, he became the Nottingham Area's leader, in his words, 'by default'.⁸¹

In September 1982 Joe Whelan, Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary, died suddenly. A life long member of the Communist Party, he was elected as an NUM Area Agent in 1965, and he was initially a NUM Branch Official at Linby Colliery. He had been Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary since 1977. Whelan had been instrumental in moving the Nottingham Area of the NUM beyond the legacy of Spencerism during the 1960s and 1970s.⁸² Barry Johnson believed that the loss of Whelan was influential to the outcome of the 1984-85 strike:

⁸⁰ Interview with Roy Lynk (Retired Nottingham Area NUM and later UDM National and Area Official), Sutton-in-Ashfield, 28 December 2005, p. 3.

⁸¹ 'Miners' Strike, I finished up leader by default', *The Chad* (Mansfield, 17 March 2004), p. 4.

⁸² Notts NUM Ex and Retired Miners' Association, *Tribute to Joe Whelan*, <http://www.nottinghamshireexminer.com>, retrieved 8 January 2009.

Joe had a mining background under the guidance of such union stalwarts such as Les Ellis and Bernard Savage. He acquired some of their skills in addition to developing his own skills. Joe was an excellent orator but his main strength was in interpreting difficult situations, which he could decipher into simple, understood terms. The role he played in the implementation of the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) in 1966 was an example of this.⁸³

In the ensuing Area Ballot to succeed Whelan, Henry Richardson, Cresswell NUM Branch Delegate, was elected as a Nottingham Area NUM Official. Through him the left were still represented in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Much controversy surrounded his stance in Nottinghamshire during the 1984-85 dispute when, from early April 1984 he told the Nottinghamshire NUM members to "get up off their knees and stop scabbing".⁸⁴ A major split occurred between Richardson and the majority of the rank and file who, in the absence of a national ballot, continued to adhere to the Area's working mandate. The strains between the two disparate sides grew until Richardson's dismissal in the edgy atmosphere following the threats to expel the Nottingham Area from the NUM in the early part of 1985.

The final key figure to be elected in this period was David Prendergast, NUM Branch Secretary at Babbington Colliery, who was elected an Area Official in 1983. He replaced the retiring George Cheshire. Again, like Roy Lynk and Henry Richardson, Prendergast's stance during the 1984-85 strike would be controversial. He was dismissed for gross misconduct, along with Roy Lynk, at

⁸³ Interview with Barry Johnson, 3 September 2011, Derby.

⁸⁴ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 191.

the 1985 NUM Annual Conference.⁸⁵ Prendergast can be regarded as a moderate, although perhaps not of the same hue as Roy Lynk. By the autumn of 1983 the Nottingham NUM Area Officials comprised:

Ray Chadburn	NUM Area Chairman & NEC Member
Henry Richardson	NUM Area General Secretary & NEC Member
Roy Lynk	NUM Area Financial Secretary
David Prendergast	NUM Area Agent

The Nottingham Area of the NUM had lost considerable experience at Area level in the seven years prior to the 1984-85 strike. The stalwarts from the national strikes of 1972 and 1974 had all departed. Firstly, Albert Martin retired in 1977, Len Clarke followed him in 1979, Joe Whelan died in 1982 and, finally, George Cheshire retired in 1983. A similar situation occurred at the national level of the NUM, Mick McGahey being the exception. The two senior officials, Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield, took office in 1982 and 1984 respectively and the NUM lost considerable experience with its back up staff following the move from London to Sheffield in 1983. Inexperience in significant sections of the NUM would be a factor in the 1984-85 strike debacle because of the diverse backgrounds in the union.

Whilst the Nottingham Area NUM Area Council, made up by the elected Delegates from the 31 Nottingham NUM Branches, remained in moderate control, the Area Executive (AE), which dealt with Area Business between Area Council meetings, swung to the left in the early 1980s. The AE was made up of ten delegates, elected annually and made up of five members from the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area and five from the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area. For the union year 1983-84 the Area Executive was made up as follows:

⁸⁵ Lynk and Prendergast were dismissed at the 1985 NUM Annual Conference for gross misconduct and for refusing to carry out the 'lawful instructions' of the NUM at National level.

North Nottinghamshire Area AEC members

J Byard (Bevercotes NUM Branch)
M. B. Howarth (Blidworth NUM Branch)
B. Smith (Welbeck NUM Branch)
G. Todd (Mansfield NUM Branch)
M. Walker (Rufford NUM Branch)

South Nottinghamshire Area AEC members

S. Abbott (Calverton NUM Branch)
R. T. Baxter (Linby NUM Branch)
N. Chamberlain (Moorgreen NUM Branch)
L. Hardwick (Pye Hill No.2 NUM Branch)
G. Skinner (Gedling NUM Branch)

When the strike broke in March 1984, only one of the Nottingham Area NUM AE members, Jeff Byard, remained at work. The others, along with other striking Nottingham Area NUM Branch Delegates, would be replaced en bloc by working miners in the Branch Elections of May and June 1984. Morgan and Coates suggested that only 4 NUM representatives out of a total of 310 remained in the hands of strikers following these elections ⁸⁶

George Bolton, Scottish NUM NEC member, suggested the tragedy of the strike happening when it did was that the left had started to emerge in the Nottingham Area of the NUM.⁸⁷ But as Adeney and Lloyd stated Nottinghamshire's leftism was activist deep only. ⁸⁸ The left did not have the time or will to change traditions in Nottinghamshire and their belief that militancy could be forced on the Nottinghamshire miners' ended up splitting the NUM.

⁸⁶ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottingham Coalfield and the British 1984-85 Miners' Strike*, p. 19.

⁸⁷ Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, p. 261.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

6. Prelude to the Turmoil – The Nottinghamshire coalfield (October 1983 – February 1984).

The NUM held three national ballots for strike action in a fifteen month period between January 1982 and March 1983. The issue of pit closures was included in the two ballots of October 1982 and March 1983. The membership of the NUM nationally turned down industrial action in all three ballots (see Appendix 1). There was some confusion over the wording of the October 1982 Ballot which linked together wages and pit closures. Some leading figures in the NCB suggested the linking of pay and closures was a 'transparent manoeuvre to provoke a strike for political reasons'.⁸⁹ Despite the problems, the ballot turned down strike action by 61 per cent to 39 per cent. Some in the NUM blamed the linking of the pay and closures for the ballot failure. As Taylor stated, there were no such illusions in the ballot of March 1983, over the Lewis Merthyr closure, when NUM members turned down industrial action by the same margin of 61 per cent to 39 per cent.⁹⁰

During 1983 the NCB had continued to close collieries and shed manpower under the chairmanship of Norman Siddall. In the twelve months to March 1984 twenty three collieries closed with the loss of 21,000 jobs. Siddall adopted a judicious approach to closures and manpower cuts, similar to what happened through the mass closure programme in the Robens era during the 1960s. Prior to his appointment as NCB Chairman in 1982, Siddall predicted that the forthcoming battle would be about trying to save deep coalmining in the peripheral coalfields:

Because we have been so richly blessed by nature, we don't have to go on scratching about in places where (...) no amount of skill and effort by management and men can succeed. Whilst we have vast resources to go for, it cannot be right that about twelve per cent of our

⁸⁹ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 174.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

output should lose £250 million as it did last year (1981).⁹¹

Siddall's stay as NCB Chairman was short, at just eighteen months, and he suffered ill health for the majority of his period in office. However, his replacement by Ian McGregor in September 1983 would set the scene for the coming battle. A known anti-trade unionist, and no-nonsense type management advocate, he acquired the nickname 'Mac the Knife'. This followed his exploits as Chairman of British Steel in the early 1980s when the workforce was slashed from 150,000 to 85,000 in less than three years. Shortly into his period as NCB Chairman he controversially summarised his own views on obtaining loyalty from management and employees: "The quick way is to chop heads off, otherwise it takes longer".⁹² With McGregor in place as NCB Chairman, Peter Walker as Secretary of State for Energy following the re-election of the Thatcher Government for a second term in June 1983, and Scargill plus McGahey as NUM Senior National Officials, the scene was set for the crisis to come. There was one more key event to put the last of the key players of the 1984-85 strike in place.

Peter Heathfield was elected as NUM General Secretary in January 1984 following a National Ballot of NUM Members. He replaced the retiring Lawrence Daly who had been NUM General Secretary since 1968. Heathfield had been General Secretary of the small Derbyshire Area NUM. Significantly, he represented the left on the union. His eventual election would ensure that the three senior posts at NUM National level were all filled by the left. In the future there would be no moderating influence at NUM National level. Heathfield's main rival in the January 1984 election was John Walsh, a moderate from the North Yorkshire coalfield. Walsh, the NUM's North Yorkshire Areas Agent, was a critic of the militants in NUM. Ted Mackay, from the small moderate North Wales coalfield, made up the field for the position of NUM General Secretary. When the results were

⁹¹ David Powell, *The Power Game: The Struggle for Coal* (London, 1993), p. 218.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 220.

announced Heathfield scraped home by 3,516 votes. This was following the redistribution of the 13,547 votes received for Ted Mackay under the transferable vote system. The turnout was sixty-eight per cent in an electorate of 221,344. Final voting figures in the second ballot were Heathfield 74,186 (51.2%) to Walsh's 70,571 (48.8%). As Powell commented; "the narrowness of the victory graphically illustrated the extent of the differences that divided the NUM".⁹³ The narrowness of Heathfield's victory was put forward as one of the reasons why the NUM NEC rejected calls for a national ballot in the 1984-85 strike. It was an indicator of the divisions within the NUM rank and file membership.

Prior to this in early October 1983 the NCB offered the NUM a pay rise of 5.2%. Tied in with the pay offer was the issue of eliminating 'uneconomic pits'. The NUM insisted the NCB had linked the issues of increased wages and eliminating 'uneconomic pits'. A NUM Special Delegates Conference (SDC) on 21 October 1983 decided to implement a full overtime ban from 31 October 1983. A resolution on the current situation in the Industry was unanimously carried at the Special Delegates Conference. (see Appendix 2) This was to be a first step in the campaign against the NCB's attack on jobs and living standards.⁹⁴ In Nottinghamshire Special NUM Branch Meetings were held to discuss the forthcoming Overtime Ban. This was prior to the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 20 October 1983 and subsequent NUM National SDC the next day. At the Nottingham Area NUM ACM the Overtime Ban was passed by the narrowest of margins, 16 Branches to 15.⁹⁵ (see Appendix 3). There was a feeling that a ban on overtime could seriously jeopardise the industry in some parts of Nottinghamshire coalfield. Steve Williamson, Annesley NUM Branch Secretary, summed up the situation in the Ashfield region:

⁹³ Ibid., p. 221

⁹⁴ NUM, *NUM Area Circular No. AS273/83* (Sheffield, 1983). D. Amos collection.

⁹⁵ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1983, p. 365

It (the Overtime Ban) will do more harm than good. Pits are on the borderline now and if we stick to a strict overtime ban, it could jeopardise pits. It's alright being militant and not doing safety work, but in effect, we'll be closing the pits ourselves.⁹⁶

In the Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield a whole swathe of problems surrounding the Overtime Ban would occur during the ensuing months. These ranged from emergency safety cover, to transport problems and geological and pumping problems in the collieries. However, the overtime ban caused major problems for the service sectors of the industry, that is for Time and Wages Departments, Transport Departments and Plant Operators. They had to man sections of the industry that ensured collieries could get production over five days from the Monday dayshift through to the Friday nightshift. These issues were not unique to Nottinghamshire but applied to the whole British coalfield. During the strike stories circulated about there being different interpretations of the overtime ban in parts of the Yorkshire coalfield. Reports were received of nearly full car parks and coal being produced for supposed 'concessionary purposes'.⁹⁷ Serious problems were experienced all over the British coalfield by the introduction of the overtime ban. At Silverdale Colliery, in the NCB Western Area, forty-winding-enginemen were reported to be defying the ban and there was talk of a breakaway winders' union being formed in the Stoke-on-Trent area.⁹⁸

The South Normanton NUM Transport Branch received 'special dispensation' from the overtime ban because of the problems with low staffing and having to work outside normal hours. The Nottinghamshire NUM Emergency Committee gave

⁹⁶ 'Overtime Ban: Fear over Jobs', *Notts Free Press*, 28 October 1983, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Story told by Pete Wood to the Author on several occasions since the dispute. Pete worked at the NCB Payroll HQ in Doncaster but had relatives that worked in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. He lived in the Doncaster region at the time of the strike. Concessionary fuel was for retired miners and their widows.

⁹⁸ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 182.

them dispensation at its meeting on 29 October 1983.⁹⁹ South Normanton's work included having to transport around 3,000 miners daily from the former colliery villages on the Derbyshire borders to collieries including Calverton, Gedling and Cotgrave to the east of Nottingham. Other vital work included the transportation of wages documentation between the NCB Computer Centre and individual NCB units in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. However, it was a tendered contract for taking 'run-of-mine' coal from Babbington Colliery to Hucknall Colliery that almost brought the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area to a standstill in early November 1983.¹⁰⁰ Work was on-going to merge Babbington and Hucknall Collieries with all output being surfaced at Hucknall. This meant that coal preparation facilities would be eliminated at the Babbington end. The Babbington CPP had been taken out of use and all 'run-of-mine' coal was being transported to Hucknall for preparation. This involved the movement of 30,000 tons of 'run-of-mine' coal weekly between the two collieries. The NCB contract, tendered for against outside competition, was won on the basis of an 11 hour shift. Failure to move the run-of-mine coal from Babbington could jeopardise the future of the Hucknall - Babbington Complex.

The special dispensation for this work was reinforced at the Nottingham Area NUM Emergency Committee Meeting on 3 November 1983. Within a week the Emergency Committee had to deal with a dispute by the NUM Bestwood Plant Branch. The Dirt Disposal men at the Bestwood Branch had gone on strike from the day shift of 8 November 1983, in protest at the special dispensation that had been granted to South Normanton alone.¹⁰¹ Because of tipping facilities being brought to a standstill the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area contacted the Nottingham Area NUM stating that the whole Area would be brought to a standstill within 48 hours. In the best interests of all South Nottinghamshire NUM

⁹⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1983, pp. 400-401

¹⁰⁰ Run of mine coal is unwashed and unprepared coal. It is the state of coal prior to going through a Coal Preparation Plant and Washery.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

members, the Emergency Committee was forced to withdraw the special dispensation for the South Normanton NUM Branch forthwith. This caused immense problems with transport arrangements, especially at Calverton Colliery, where serious problems were experienced getting the Friday night shift home early on Saturday mornings. The only way around some of the problems was the use of outside contractors to transport the miners' in order to try and preserve five shifts per week for most of the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area Collieries.

As 1983 drew to a close large parts of the British Coalfield were experiencing industrial relations problems. The Scottish Area (NUM) was in dispute over the proposed closure of Killoch, Cardowan and Monktonhall collieries. This followed the controversial Kinneil Colliery closure earlier in 1983 when Scottish miners went through picket lines for the first time ever.¹⁰² Following the failed Lewis Merthyr campaign earlier in 1983, the NUM South Wales Area continued to experience problems with the closure of Penrikyber Colliery and the transfer of its reserves to Deep Navigation Colliery. The South Wales Coalfield had been especially hard hit in the early 1980s since the decline in the market for coking coal to the steel industry. The Lancashire Area NUM had to deal with its first closure for a decade at Cronton Colliery. Problems were being experienced in the North-East with the proposed closure of Herrington Colliery and in Kent with replacement development at Snowden Colliery. In nearby NCB North Derbyshire Area, Pleasley Colliery was merged with Shirebrook with significant associated manpower losses. In September 1983 significant job losses were announced in the Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield when the High Main seam finished at Newstead Colliery and K97's coalface at Moorgreen Colliery closed sooner than expected.¹⁰³ At Newstead the High Main Seam closed because of extended travelling times and difficult geology. It was expected that around 200 jobs would be lost at Newstead,

¹⁰² Emlyn Williams, Area President, South Wales Area (NUM) addressing the 1983 Nottingham Area (NUM) Annual Conference said this incident must have shaken every miner in Britain, Nottingham Area NUM Conference Report, 8 February 1983, Morning Session, p. 22.

¹⁰³ 'Pit Shock as 200 jobs go', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 2 September 1983, p. 1.

with an associated loss in output of around 200,000 tons of coal. By January 1984 the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area continued to contract with the run down of Moorgreen and Pye Hill Collieries. This meant that redundancies were available for miners aged over 50s at other collieries in the area.

Problems were experienced with the overtime ban at Hucknall Colliery over a capping/rope change in one of the shafts. The NCB South Nottinghamshire Area had indicated that when a capping or rope change was due to take place and underground men were sent home, then in future all surface personnel not involved in the capping or rope change would also be sent home.¹⁰⁴ At the meeting of the Nottingham NUM Emergency Committee on 18 January 1984 the Committee endorsed the actions of the Hucknall Agent, Roy Lynk, in criticising the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area management for this action, especially bearing in mind the efforts which had recently been made 'to improve morale at the pit'.

¹⁰⁵ In February 1984 serious questions started to be asked about the future of the Annesley-Bentinck-Newstead Complex. The Complex was planned as a merger of the three collieries, with a workforce of around 3,400 and production of 2 million tons of coal annually. All coal was to surface at Bentinck CPP, Annesley's CPP had closed in 1981 and Newstead's CPP in 1983. From the autumn of 1983 Newstead's run-of-mine coal was being taken by road to the Bentinck CPP. The underground connection from Newstead was eventually completed in the autumn of 1984. It was envisaged by the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area that there was some twenty years of reserves to the eastern side of the shafts at Annesley and Newstead. From 1990 it was expected that Bentinck would be a surface only mine with Drift and CPP Facilities for coal from Annesley and Newstead. In February 1984 Bentinck's workforce totalled 1,600.

In early February 1984 the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area Board had been called to NCB HQ in London to account for losses of £6.8 million at Bentinck and

¹⁰⁴ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

£9.4 million at Newstead in nine-months of the 1983-84 financial year . A strong case was put forward to keep the two collieries open and secure the majority of the jobs in the Annesley-Bentinck-Newstead Complex.¹⁰⁶ As a result of the arguments put forward the NCB at National level agreed to give the Complex eighteen months to break even or become profitable. To do this large reserves of coal reserves in high subsidence areas under Ravenshead and Kirkby would have to be abandoned. More significantly the Nottingham Area NUM had to agree to a shedding of manpower of 550. This would reduce the manpower at the Complex from 3,390 to 2,840. All men over 55 within the Complex would be asked to take voluntary redundancy with a probability of bringing the age down to 50. The NCB South Nottinghamshire Area's annual production budget for 1984-85 had recently been cut from 7.7 million tons to 7.2 million tons. (See Appendix 4) The half million tons cut was the same as the NCB South Yorkshire Area, the same cuts which started the strike at Cortonwood Colliery but with additional job losses in South Nottinghamshire to take account of the two ongoing pit closures at Moorgreen and the Pye Hill Complex.

As Taylor commented, despite the predicament in Britain's deep coalmining industry between October 1982 and February 1984, the miners opted to play a passive role, their behaviour reflecting an acute awareness of their vulnerability.¹⁰⁷ This would all change following the meeting of the Coal Industry National Consultative Committee (CINC) on 6 March 1984 and the subsequent meeting of the NUM NEC on 8 March 1984 to discuss the CINC meeting. The coal industry and the NUM were about to be plunged into their greatest ever crisis. The Nottinghamshire coalfield and its miners would be right at the centre of that crisis.

¹⁰⁶ NCB South Nottinghamshire Area, 17 February 1984.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 182.

Chapter 2: Ballots, Blacklegs and Bedlam

1. Introduction

This Chapter is an account of the main events in the 1984-85 strike as it affected the Nottinghamshire coalfield from early March 1984 through to the constitutional crisis that engulfed the NUM in autumn of 1984. It will aim to give an accurate and concise portrayal of the strike in the Nottinghamshire coalfield using previously un-accessed primary evidence. In the ensuing years since the strike some basic facts have become mixed up in the mists of time, the classic one being that the Nottinghamshire working miners and all the other striking miners were in different trade unions.¹ This chapter looks at the unconstitutional nature of the strike in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, which was a legacy from the 'federal structure' of the NUM, each area having its own distinct cultures and traditions. Taylor suggested that the Nottinghamshire view of events in March 1984 was to see them as a 'fundamental challenge to a deeply entrenched industrial and political tradition'.² He cited a breakdown of the post-1944 federal consensus as the main reason for the crisis in the NUM in 1984:

Rule 41, the promulgation of Rule 51 (Disciplinary Rule) and the emphasis on absolute Conference sovereignty was a breach of the post 1944 relationship between Areas and national level, between left and right and between competing sovereignties of Conference and the individual (NUM) member.³

¹ W. Ivory, 'War of Words', *Radio Times*, 26 February 2004, p. 39. The article was for the forthcoming BBC play, 'Faith', on the 20th anniversary of the strike. The accompanying image from 1 May 1984 was described as police lining up between strikers and supporters of the breakaway Union of Democratic Miners. The UDM was not formed until the autumn of 1985 following the strike. Also see Symcox (ed.), *The Diary of John Lowe*, p. 9, p. 14 and p. 146 for similar accounts to Ivory.

² Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 191.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

The roots of the constitutional crisis can be traced back to the start of the strike and were centred on the area by area 'domino strategy' employed under national NUM Rule 41. The strike strategy under Rule 41 opened up the crevices in the NUM's armoury, the main debating point being the lack of a national ballot. In previous calls for strike action a national ballot of all NUM members was held using national NUM Rule 43. The 'domino strategy' employed by the NUM in March 1984 was based on respecting the 'sanctity of the picket line'. It was the use of these tactics which split the NUM from the outset as the policy relied on the use of coercion to achieve solidarity. Many accounts of the use of force and intimidation were reported as flying pickets, mainly from Yorkshire, tried to bring the Nottinghamshire coalfield to a standstill. Roy Lynk, former Nottinghamshire miners' leader, argued that the strike was 'possibly the right thing to do, but the wrong way to do it'.⁴ He cited timing and tactics as crucial factors as to why the strike was lost:

I had been against pit closures as much as anyone and went on strike in 1972 and 1974, but you can't have a rule book and then ignore it because someone shouted in your ear (...) sending pickets was a self defeating exercise. The more they picketed the more people would keep going. No one wanted to back down from what they were doing.

5

The timing was indeed crucial, as the Yorkshire flying pickets defied a Nottingham Area NUM request not to enter the Nottinghamshire coalfield prior to the Area ballot taking place on 15 -16 March 1984. This ensured that, when the Area ballot came round at the end of the first week of the strike, that many Nottinghamshire miners voted against the action of Yorkshire flying pickets

⁴ Roy Lynk, 'I finished up leader by default', *The Chad*, Mansfield, 17 March 2004, p. 6.

⁵ Ibid.

instead of focusing on the real issue of saving jobs and fighting pit closures. (Chapter 5 deals with the Rule 41 Domino Strategy in more depth).

The initial split in the NUM in the Nottinghamshire coalfield happened during the first few days of the strike in early March 1984 and it proved impossible to recover from. The fissures that opened up then eventually led to a split in the union in 1985. As 1984 progressed the national NUM had to deal with various legal actions taken against them over the legality of the strike. The legal action taken by members of the Nottingham Area NUM challenged the legitimacy of the strike following the NUM SDC on 19 April 1984.⁶ In fact it went right to the heart of the democratic debate in trade unions. What is the fairest way of obtaining a mandate; through meetings and a Conference of Delegates or by a ballot of the union membership? John Lloyd referred to the 1984-85 strike strategy as a system of 'delegated democracy'.⁷ The result of the various legal actions eventually resulted in the funds of the NUM being sequestered in the autumn of 1984.

Additionally, there was the controversy over the introduction of NUM Disciplinary Rule 51 in the summer of 1984. The Nottingham Area NUM refused to adopt Rule 51 into its Area rules, a decision which led to its threatened expulsion from the NUM in January 1985. The question needs asking, did the NUM need to introduce a lengthy disciplinary rule during a period when it was torn apart by internal strife? By December 1984 the NUM was facing its greatest 'constitutional crisis' since its formation in 1944 and the Nottinghamshire miners were at the centre of the dispute. The crisis in the NUM was destined to deepen during 1985 when an amendment to rule was planned by the national union that would establish a single trade union to embrace all workers in the coalmining industry. This was encompassed in the philosophy One Union, One Industry. (Chapter 3 covers that part of strike and its aftermath).

⁶ The legal action was taken under the name of Pye Hill No. 1 NUM Branch in May 1984.

⁷ Lloyd, *Understanding the Miners' Strike*, p. 20.

2. **Sowing the Seeds of Destruction: The Nottinghamshire Coalfield - March 1984**

It seems that the allegations being made of hooliganism by pickets must be fact. If we allow this to happen, there'll be no union left ⁸

This quotation could quite easily come from the Nottinghamshire coalfield at the start of the 1984-85 strike. It was in fact made by Joe Gormley, NUM National President (1970-1982), and dates from the unofficial NUM strike of 1970. NUM Flying Pickets had 'lobbied' the NUM NEC prior to a meeting at the NUM Headquarters at Euston Road in London on 12 November 1970. Militant left-wing NUM members from various coalfields were on unofficial strike action over the wages issue and the pickets were attempting to target moderate NEC members to support strike action. A national ballot vote had shown in favour of industrial strike action by 55% but the NUM rules at the time required a two-thirds majority to declare a national strike official. Following the national ballot vote the NUM NEC instructed the NUM members on unofficial strike to return to work; constitutionally a national strike could not be made official through the NUM rules. Later national NUM Rule 43 was amended to require 55% in favour to declare national strike action legal; 55% in favour of strike action was still needed to authorise a national strike at the commencement of the 1984-85 dispute.

Back in 1970, according to Gormley, Sid Schofield, NUM Vice President, was roughed up, Albert Martin, NEC Member for Nottinghamshire was kicked and Gormley himself was hit. Gormley accused the Scottish NUM of arranging the picket; Mick McGahey and Bill McLean denied the allegations. However Gormley replied to McGahey and McLean that if they wanted to bring pickets down they

⁸ Gormley, *Battered Cherub*, p. 76.

should control them or there would be an 'almighty row in this union'!⁹ Such was the fragile nature of unity in the NUM. The almighty row Gormley threatened eventually blew up in 1984, and the Nottinghamshire coalfield would be at the centre of the controversy.¹⁰ History virtually repeated itself when the two Nottingham Area NUM NEC members were attacked following an NEC meeting on 8 March 1984. However, in 1984 different tactics would be employed by the NUM NEC to those used in 1970. It was the actions of the NUM NEC on 8 March 1984 that would be instrumental in a bitter year's strike occurring and a split in the NUM which would eventually result in the Nottinghamshire miners leaving the NUM and setting up a 'breakaway union' in the autumn of 1985. (see Chapter 5: Part 6)

The start of the strike in the 1984-85 dispute can be said to stem from 8 March 1984. On that date the NUM NEC convened a meeting to discuss the situation in the coal industry following the NCB's announcement at the Coal Industry National Consultative (CINC) meeting on 6 March that twenty collieries nationwide were to close in the next year, with the loss of 20,000 jobs. At the CINC, individual collieries were not identified for closure; it would be left for the individual NCB Area Directors to implement the cuts. The situation in the Scottish coalfield had been deteriorating for some time and industrial relations between the Scottish NCB Director, Albert Wheeler, and the Scottish NUM were strained. In the Yorkshire coalfield the dispute came to a head over the announcement of the closure of Cortonwood Colliery, near Elsecar. The NUM NEC issued a lengthy resolution condemning the NCB's action (Appendix 5) and at the same time made the industrial strike action in the NUM Yorkshire and Scottish Areas official under NUM national Rule 41. Rule 41 allowed for Area disputes to be authorised; for national strike action a ballot of NUM members was required under Rule 43. (Appendix 6)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ From its formation in 1944 the NUM was a federal based trade union made up of a number of Area and Trade organisations, each a legally formed trade association in its own right.

Strike action in Yorkshire and Scotland commenced from the end of the Friday night shift on 10 March 1984. In addition the NUM NEC declared that any similar industrial action in any other NUM Area would be deemed official under National Rule 41; how this was to be achieved was unclear at the time. Normally, a national ballot of all NUM members under national rule 43 would take place prior to any proposed national strike action. However, at the NUM NEC meeting on 8 March, Ray Chadburn and Henry Richardson, the two Nottingham Area NUM NEC members, obtained approval for an individual area strike ballot of the Nottingham Area NUM membership. This was in line with long established 'custom and practice' on major issues such as wage rises or strike action affecting Nottingham Area NUM members. The NUM strike strategy was based on getting each NUM Area out on strike, and then a national strike in all but name would exist. However the domino theory would have to rely on the use of coercion: 'picketing out' collieries and units in NUM areas that did not follow the solidarity action. The whole theory was based on the sanctity of the picket line. It was here that the seeds of destruction for the NUM were sown; different NUM Areas had different ideas of how solidarity should be achieved and also had different ideas what constituted official and unofficial strike action. The NUM as a truly national union was a myth; it was a Federation of different Areas and Trade Groups with a loose binding constitution.

Following the NUM NEC meeting on 8 March the Nottingham Area NUM AEC met on 10 March 1984 to consider the NUM national resolution and to arrange details for the Nottinghamshire NUM Area strike ballot. The area ballot would take place over a twenty-four hour period from 6pm on Thursday 15 March to 6 pm on Friday 16 March 1984.¹¹ The count was planned for Saturday 17 March 1984 at the Nottinghamshire NUM Headquarters at Berry Hill, Mansfield; with the result of the ballot being announced to a Special Conference of Nottingham

¹¹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 79.

Area NUM BOCM on Sunday 18 March 1984. One stipulation put into the ballot arrangements was that all other NUM Areas were advised not to send pickets into the Nottinghamshire coalfield prior to the Area ballot taking place.¹² Many Nottinghamshire miners saw the presence of flying pickets in breach of this instruction as being a major factor which split the NUM from the start of the strike and kept the Nottinghamshire coalfield working throughout its duration. Colin Bottomore, NUM Branch Secretary at Bentinck Colliery, saw a hardening of attitudes against the Yorkshire pickets from the onset:

The attitude hardened against the striking miners because of the violent picketing that had taken place, from the very first day they entered into Nottinghamshire.¹³

Following the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 10 March 1984, a Conference of BOCM met for an update from the national meeting with the NCB on 6 March and the NUM NEC meeting on 8 March. At the meeting a resolution was passed reaffirming the total confidence of the meeting in the two Nottingham Area NUM NEC members and that adverts should be placed in the Scottish and Yorkshire NUM newspapers condemning the serious harassment of them at the NEC Meeting held on 8 March. Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn faced a hostile reception outside the meeting and had several missiles thrown at them. Sections of the crowd had harassed them believing they were automatically opposed to the strike on the assumption that by being pro-national ballot they were anti-strike. It was a similar situation to the moderate representatives who got abused during the 1970 unofficial strike (see page 62). The Nottingham Area NUM resolution read:

This Conference reaffirms its total confidence in the two Nottingham Area NEC members and that space be

¹² Ibid.

¹³ R. Samuel, B. Bloomfield, and G. Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 72.

obtained in the *Scottish Miner* and *Yorkshire Miner* in order to express the Nottingham Area's contempt at the treatment inflicted on the two Nottingham Area NEC members outside the NUM National Headquarters in Sheffield on Thursday, 8 March, 1984. ¹⁴

The NUM NEC meeting authorised strike action in accordance with NUM national Rule 41 by a vote of 21 to 3. It was at this meeting that Henry Richardson prophesied that labelling the Nottinghamshire miners as scabs would not help the situation:

Calling us scabs will not help us. I have already been called that outside. If Notts are scabs before we start, Notts will become scabs. You will make our jobs (as NUM Area representatives) impossible. ¹⁵

Back at the meeting of BOCM, NCB Budgets were outlined for the coming financial year which nationally would be reduced by four-million tons and manpower by 20,000 (see Appendix 4). Locally the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area would have a reduction of 500,000 tons and manpower loss of around 1,700. At the meeting it was also agreed that because of the anti-trade union legislation of the time that the four Nottingham Area NUM Trustees should be protected by the union in the event of sequestration of their personal assets, arising out of decisions that they may have to take in the interests of the Nottingham Area of the NUM. ¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁵ Henry Richardson (Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary) cited in Ottey, *The Strike*, p. 63.

¹⁶ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 81.

It was at the Nottingham Area NUM AEC on the Monday morning of 12 March that the first reports were received of picketing at a Nottinghamshire colliery.¹⁷ Yorkshire Pickets, wearing official NUM picketing badges, were reported as picketing Harworth Colliery in the north of the county. This was in defiance of the Nottingham Area NUM directive for all NUM Areas not to send pickets into the area prior to the Nottinghamshire Area ballot. The NUM Yorkshire Area Secretary was contacted immediately and he assured the Nottingham NUM Area that no instructions had been given from the Yorkshire Area to picket any Nottinghamshire colliery. The Yorkshire NUM did however request that a deputation of two to three men from their area visit each Nottinghamshire colliery to explain their position. This was agreed on the grounds that all Yorkshire pickets should be withdrawn from the Nottinghamshire coalfield until the Area ballot had taken place at the end of the week.¹⁸ Other stipulations were put in place for the Yorkshire delegation to carry official letters of recognition and to liaise with Nottinghamshire NUM Branch Secretaries to arrange for the delegation to address the Nottingham Area NUM rank and file members. Nevertheless, all the arrangements were to no avail as one hour after the end of the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting it was reported that the NUM Yorkshire Area Council had made a decision to lift all restrictions on picketing by their members. The battle lines were now drawn that would soon turn the picket lines in Nottinghamshire into scenes of direct conflict between miner and miner.

Locally working miners and NUM flying pickets had clashed outside Sutton Colliery on Wednesday morning, 14 March 1984.¹⁹ It was reported that Yorkshire flying pickets had mounted a blockade to try and stop the Tuesday nightshift going in; only around twenty men at the colliery worked through the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁹ 'Ugly scenes at Sutton Colliery: Yorkshire pitmen mount blockade', *The Chad: Kirkby News*, 15 March 1984, p. 1.

Tuesday nightshift. By Wednesday morning only six North Nottinghamshire collieries and eight South Nottinghamshire collieries were reported as producing some coal. Three flying pickets were arrested outside Hucknall Colliery and were charged with public order offences. However, most picket lines were reported as being peaceful due to the massive police operation which had been put in place more or less from the time the picketing started. The Nottingham Area NUM Officials reiterated their plea for pickets to keep out of the area until the Area ballot had taken place; they warned that the pickets' actions would only bring a "No" vote in the forthcoming area strike ballot.²⁰ Henry Richardson, Nottingham Area NUM Official, was pessimistic about the forthcoming area strike ballot result:

The way we are going we may well get defeated because of the action of the Yorkshire pickets. They have destroyed all the work we have done in the last twelve months to try and win our membership over. Give the men a chance because there is a strong indication they may support us. This sort of picketing is alienating men and becoming counter-productive, that is the tragedy.²¹

In a joint press statement dated 13 March 1984, the four Nottingham NUM Area Officials condemned the picketing in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield.²² (Appendix 7) The statement said that the Yorkshire pickets were in the Nottinghamshire coalfield unofficially and that it was not picketing but mass blockading that was taking place. However, the main point of the press statement suggested that no trade union could sustain a strike under these circumstances; it stated that the way things were developing it would be at the price of destroying the NUM

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 'The NCB Hit Back', *Mansfield Chad*, 15 March 1984, p. 3.

²² Nottingham Area NUM, *Joint Press Statement: re Picketing Concerns*, 13 March 1984. D. Amos collection.

itself. It also called on the NUM National Officials to get a grasp of the situation before someone was seriously injured.

In the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area various NUM branch spokesmen passionately opposed the way the strike was developing. A NUM spokesman at Moorgreen Colliery, near Eastwood, said the men at the colliery were 'violently opposed to the picketing' which, he added, was against the NUM rule book.²³ He added:

What is happening on the picket lines is absolutely disgraceful; they will split the union into fragments.²⁴

Babbington Colliery was one of the Nottinghamshire collieries the hardest hit by picketing because of its close proximity to Junction 26 of the M1 motorway. Commenting on the picketing tactics in the first week of the strike, a Babbington NUM spokesman said:

The men just don't know where they stand, they resent the picketing and want to be left alone to make up their own minds on how to vote in Friday's Area strike Ballot (...) this picketing is likely to put the men against a strike.

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It was reported that there was some doubt about the validity of some of the pickets. Some were reported as being armed with rubber hose pipes and were wearing black balaclavas as disguises.²⁶ They were described as not being miners but mercenary bully boys from outside the coal-mining industry. At Bentinck Colliery, a picket from Kiverton Park Colliery stated they had not had much success there but were confident that "we'll stop them by the weekend".

²³ 'Pickets swoop: Let us vote say angry miners', *Eastwood and Kimberley Advertiser*, 16 March 1984, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ 'Battlefield', *Notts Free Press*, 16 March 1984, p. 1.

²⁷ Sutton Colliery was reported as being at a standstill (at the time the *Chad* went to press) and that the flying pickets had guaranteed not to swell their ranks if the Sutton miners stayed away from work. At Annesley it was reported that the miners were due to have a mass meeting at dawn and were expected to ram their way, en-masse, through the picket line. The NCB admitted to being as confused as everyone by the determination and mobility of the flying pickets. Along with the Nottingham NUM Area Officials, the local NCB feared there would be worse to come in the run up to Friday's area strike ballot. Comments were made about the lamentable lack of support from other NUM Areas for Nottinghamshire miners when they had fought pit closures in the past:

Where were they when the Teversal men marched to save their jobs; Where were they when New Hucknall joined the list of pits to go; Where were they when the Kirkby (Summit) Colliery shockwaves reverberated around the area (...) pit closures are nothing new to Ashfield miners, they had fought tooth and nail to save them but at the end of the day had to accept them for a variety of reasons. ²⁸

It was added that the appeal for pickets to keep out of the Nottinghamshire coalfield until the Area ballot result was known had been blatantly ignored and had driven another splinter into the 'disjointed platform of this national campaign'. ²⁹ By then the prophecy of 'picket lines becoming battlefields over the next few days' was already fact at many Nottinghamshire collieries. ³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

The notion of the flying pickets using intimidation and threats has been challenged. Keith Stanley, a coalface chargeman at Newstead Colliery in 1984, suggested intimidation was not an issue:

I was going to work on the pit bus, on days, and it stopped at the pit gates. There was a peaceful picket from Yorkshire stood at the gates. We went over and listened to what they had to say. I went over to the canteen, and all of my face team came out that day and they stopped out. All this about we'd been bullied into it is a load of nonsense because we were asked quite clearly if we'd support. And we gave the support straight away.

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Bob Collier, also a striking miner at Newstead, suggested there was no violence on the picket line at Newstead but there was intimidation from working miners 'sticking two fingers up at the strikers and waving twenty-pound notes at them'.

³² However, Trevor Taylor, a working miner at Newstead, put a different slant on the early days of picketing at Newstead:

I was coming off the Afternoon shift when we were told there were pickets at the pit gates. I got bathed and went home; there were just a few pickets at the gate and at that time there were no problems. However the next day when we arrived at the pit there was a mass of people at the pit gates (...) I had been told not to go to the pit in my car, myself and a friend walked from his house to the pit. We had a job getting into the pit (...) the police ringed around

³¹ Bell, *Memories of the Nottinghamshire Coalfield*, p. 113.

³² 'Miners' Strike still divides the community 25 years on', *Ashfield Chad*, 4 March 2009, p. 4. The waving of the £20 notes was the inspiration for the song 'The Judas Bus' by Jez Lowe as part of the 2009 BBC Radio Ballad, *The Ballad of the Miners' Strike*. The Radio Ballad was broadcast in September 2009 on BBC Radio 2.

twenty of us and bundled us through the mass of pickets (...) Around forty of us went in to work, we did not go down the pit that day, and they found us work on the pit-top. As I remember the picket was a mixture from both Newstead and Yorkshire, probably about 50-50. The Yorkshire pickets were the ones doing the spouting, I think the (pro-strike) Newstead NUM Branch Secretary had been on the phone and asked them to come to the pit.³³

At Bentinck Colliery one of the most serious incidents of picket intimidation was a major factor in keeping the vast majority of the colliery's 1,600 miners at work. The incident happened during the early part of the strike and involved a disabled former miner who worked on the surface in the colliery offices. The flying pickets stopped the disabled miner in his specially adapted car; a confrontation took place which ended up with the disabled vehicle being toppled over, with the disabled miner inside. Neil Greatrex, Bentinck NUM Branch President at the time, recalled the incident:

I got a message to say that around 300 pickets were at the pit so I went down to meet them. They told me they were there as a peaceful picket and were intending to stop Bentinck NUM members as they got off the pit buses to ask for support. I told them there was no problem with that, in fact at the time I was of the opinion a strike should take place against pit closures. I told them I would probably ask the lads to support the strike as well. However I reminded the Yorkshire pickets that both Colin Bottomore (Bentinck NUM Branch Secretary) and me as strike supporters had been nearly crucified at a recent

³³ Interview with John Trevor Taylor, 6 August 2008, Sutton-in-Ashfield.

mass meeting of Bentinck NUM members. The open air meeting was adamant they were not going to be told what to do and would only come out on strike following a national ballot (...) The incident with the disabled miner's vehicle happened at a short distance from us. When I challenged the pickets about the picketing being peaceful, the picket leader said "You know the score". A confrontation then took place just as the pit buses arrived (...) the men said they would listen only to me as their elected union representative. They got to know about the incident with the disabled miner and they vowed that they were determined to work more than ever now.³⁴

Chris Butcher, a Bevercotes Colliery Blacksmith, became known as the working miner, the 'Silver Birch', during the early part of the strike. He described a confrontational incident that took place outside Bevercotes Colliery during the first few days of the strike. The incident resulted in a winding-engineman's car being damaged. Apparently he had done a deal with the pickets to enter the colliery premises to wind up the men that were still in the pit from the shift before. Describing the incident Butcher said:

They (the pickets) agreed to let Norman in, to bring up those who were already down there, but not to wind any more down. We agreed to return home, immediately the men were up (the pit). Norman (...) drove through the pickets. As we watched, horrified, they kicked and dented it, as they did other cars who tried to pass them (...) It was not their opinions we disagreed with, so much as the

³⁴ Interview with Neil Greatrex (Nottingham Section and National UDM Official), Mansfield, 20 March 2008. Martin Severn, a Safety Officer at Bentinck Colliery, also recalled this incident in an interview in 2002.

methods they were using to try and force those opinions on us.³⁵

Various defamatory messages were sent to Nottingham NUM Working Branch Officials during the first few weeks (see Fig 3). Ray Chadburn, Nottingham Area NUM President, had referred to attacks made on the Nottinghamshire miners at the 1983 NUM Annual Conference. He suggested that labelling Notts miners with derogatory terms would not help the campaign against pit closures:

I deplore those people who call Nottinghamshire blacklegs. I deplore the attitudes when they call us scabs. You have to look at the Nottinghamshire coalfield, because 50 per-cent of the workforce in Nottinghamshire are transferees from every section of the British coalfield (...) we talk about unity, I support that. In 1978 Nottinghamshire was isolated with a pit closure. We went to the NEC for them to support us over Teversal. They isolated us.³⁶

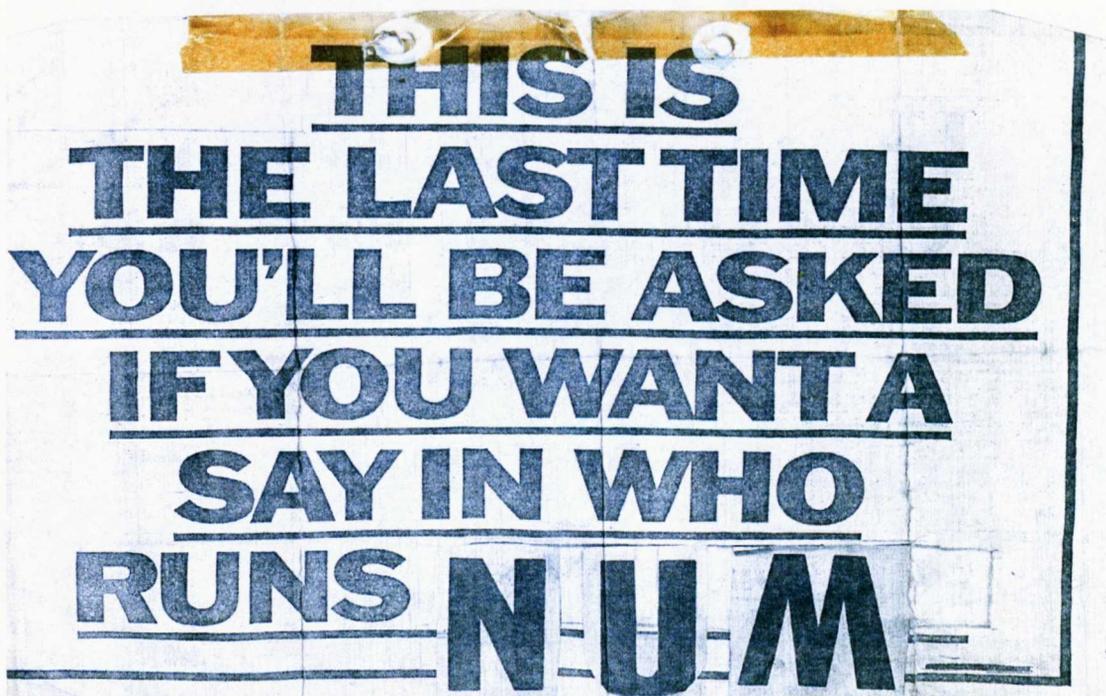
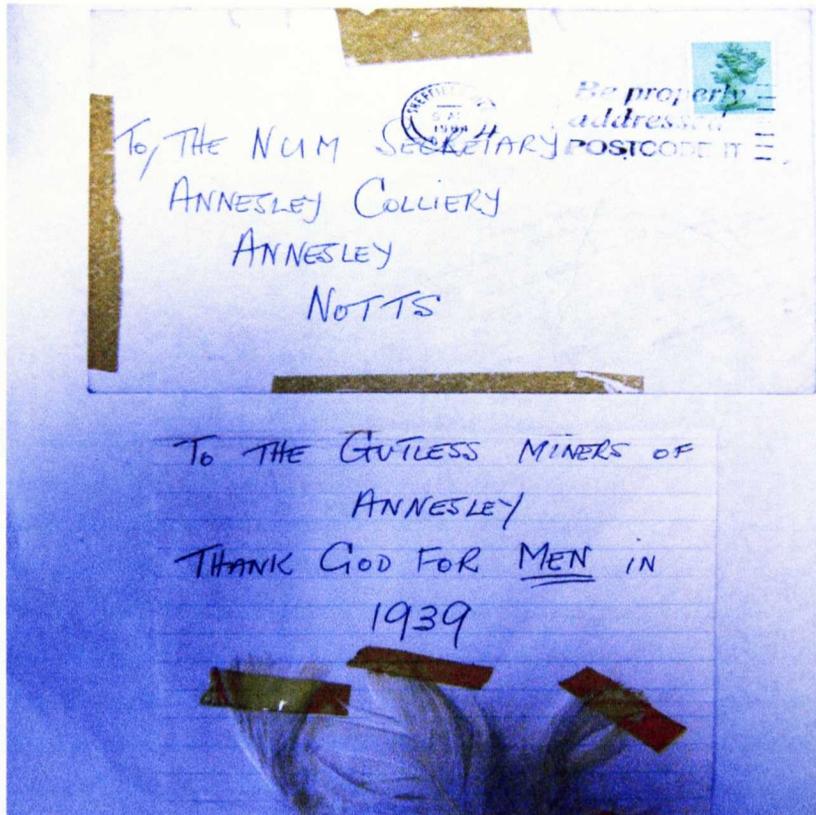
In March and April 1984 all the anti-Nottinghamshire propaganda helped to strengthen the resolve of the Nottinghamshire working miners against a strike which they considered was both unofficial and being run by intimidation and bully boys.

The issue of the early picketing is crucial to an understanding of what eventually happened in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Some evidence suggests that some of the Yorkshire pickets went into action in advance and before the official union machinery had a chance to kick in. Dave Douglass, Hatfield Main NUM Branch Official and Yorkshire NUM Executive member, said it was always the aim to get

³⁵ Butcher and Seymour, *The Link up of Friendship*, pp. 2-3.

³⁶ NUM 1983 Annual Conference Report, p. 499.

Fig 2. Anti-Nottinghamshire propaganda sent to the Annesley Branch NUM from April 1984.



their own area out before going to any other coalfield; “but Armthorpe being like it was, and everyone was on hooks, Armthorpe just said “Come on, we’re going, so half the pickets went with them”³⁷ A twenty-one year old Armthorpe Faceworker described the first couple of days of picketing in the Nottinghamshire coalfield:

We went to Harworth first and Jack Taylor (Yorkshire NUM General Secretary) got on the phone and told us to come out because Nottingham were having a vote. He said leave it to the vote and see what happens. We said no chance, if we’re out, they’re out. It’s their jobs and all that sort of thing. So we went picketing.³⁸

Another Doncaster miner described the events of picketing on the first Monday night:

We had what you call a piss-call meeting (...) a few lads (...) phone calls were made and we decided to go out on the Monday before the Executive meeting on the Tuesday to make them think, to make them know how the lads felt (...) We honestly believe we swung the Executive (AEC) to our way of thinking.³⁹

This might have been the case to try and make the Yorkshire NUM AEC react to their way of thinking but it produced a counterproductive reaction in most parts of the Nottinghamshire coalfield; an anti-strike reaction grew in opposition to the type of picketing taking place. The situation in the Nottinghamshire coalfield took a turn for the worst with the death of David Jones, a Yorkshire flying picket, on the Wednesday evening 14 March 1984. Following David

³⁷ R. Samuel, B. Bloomfield, and G. Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 70.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Jones' death, following a melee outside Ollerton Colliery, the Nottingham Area NUM AEC had an emergency meeting the morning after and a decision was made to call all Nottinghamshire NUM members out on strike from 6pm on the 15 March until the result of the Area Ballot was known.⁴⁰ The Area Ballot was due to take place the day after on 16 March with the result on 17 March. The decision was made in the interests of safety to try and allow the Nottingham and Yorkshire NUM Area Officials to meet to try and 'tone down the situation'.⁴¹ In response to the Nottingham Area NUM decision, the Yorkshire NUM agreed to withdraw their pickets and allow the Nottinghamshire ballot to go ahead unhindered. However, the damage had already been done, the pickets' presence in the first few days was instrumental in determining the result of the Nottinghamshire Area strike ballot, as Henry Richardson had predicted. Most NUM Branches in the Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield came out for the duration of the area ballot; however the majority of men at Bentinck Colliery continued to work. Neil Greatrex, then a Bentinck NUM Branch Official, recalled the situation:

Because of what had happened with all the intimidation and picketing at Bentinck we defied the Area decision to bring the men out for the duration of the Area Ballot (...) we were of the opinion that we had fought and battled our way in for four shifts, we were going to do it for five.

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⁴⁰ This meeting took place in the early hours of 15 March at the Nottingham Area NUM HQ. Roy Lynk suggested that Arthur Scargill was seething and demanded that the Nottinghamshire miners had a moral obligation to come out on strike now that someone had been killed. Roy Lynk dissented suggesting the Yorkshire NUM pickets should not have been in the Nottinghamshire Area in the first place as they had been asked to keep out until the Nottingham NUM Area Ballot had taken place. (Interview with Roy Lynk, 28 December 2005)

⁴¹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 88.

⁴² Interview with Neil Greatrex (UDM Nottingham Section and National Official) , Mansfield, 20 March 2008.

The result of the area ballot was announced at a Conference of Nottingham Area NUM BOCM at the Area HQ on Sunday 18 March 1984. To little surprise the vote recorded 20,188 (73.5%) being against strike action with 7,285 (26.5%) voting in favour of striking (Appendix 8). Not one Nottinghamshire NUM Branch had a majority for strike action, the nearest vote being at Blidworth with 399 (46%) being in favour of strike action with 461 (54%) being against strike action. In light of the area ballot result the Nottingham Area NUM Conference of BOCM on 18 March 1984 unanimously agreed that:

1. In line with the ballot decision of the Nottinghamshire membership, there would be an immediate return to work. However the overtime ban would continue.
2. Areas were asked not to picket outside their own Area.
3. A request is made for an immediate reconvening of the NUM NEC, with view to supporting the call for a national ballot.⁴³

Despite the area ballot result some men stayed out on strike whilst the majority of Nottinghamshire NUM members obeyed the decision of the area ballot and remained at work. Picketing from outside intensified during the second week of the dispute, as did the police presence. This resulted in what Alan Griffin described as the 'ludicrous situation that men, loyally obeying the Nottinghamshire NUM Area's decision to work, were being assailed as scabs'.⁴⁴ The ballot result put the pro-strike Nottingham Area NUM AEC, the two Nottingham NEC members and some pro-strike NUM Branch representatives into a quandary; the membership they represented had overwhelmingly voted against strike action until a national ballot of all NUM members voted in favour of such a strike. Did they follow the working mandate from the rank and file or their own consciences?

⁴³ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, pp. 89-90.

⁴⁴ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 7.

3. Widening the divide: The Nottinghamshire coalfield, April 1984.

One of the peculiarities of the Nottingham Area of the NUM in the early 1980s was that despite it being classified as a moderate area, the left-wing had a dominant position on the AEC (see Chapter 1 – Part 5). After the no-strike area ballot result was announced on 18 March 1984 they found themselves in a 'catch 22' situation. Following the Nottingham Area NUM Conference of BOCM on 18 March, the Nottingham Area NUM AEC met the following day and endorsed all the decisions made by the Conference.⁴⁵ However, they also condemned the police operation in Nottinghamshire for its over-reaction. Because of the rapidly changing situation in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, it was decided that members of the AEC should man the Area Offices on a round-the-clock basis. This would in time pose a problem for the two moderate NUM Area Officials, Roy Lynk and David Prendergast. For around three months they had to 'run the gauntlet' at times as the left-wing and its pro-strike supporters had a near free run in the Area Offices.⁴⁶ Roy Lynk remembers this period as being one of continual harassment from left-wing supporters milling about the Area Offices.⁴⁷ All this would change with the results from the Nottinghamshire NUM branch elections in June when the majority of pro-strike Nottinghamshire Branch Officials and Committee members were voted out of office and were replaced by working miners more sympathetic to the views of Lynk and Prendergast and the working Nottinghamshire miners'.

At the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 21 March 1984 the AEC again found them in a delicate situation. The AEC agreed on the following advice being sent out to all Nottinghamshire Area NUM branches:⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 90.

⁴⁶ Interview with Roy Lynk, 28 December 2005, Sutton-in-Ashfield.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 92.

- We respect the fundamental right of members not to cross picket lines, but ask any member who wishes to recognise a picket line to return home immediately after he has observed it.
- We must respect the mandate of the Nottinghamshire Area Ballot decision which gives the fundamental right of a member to go to work, if he wishes.

A similar instruction was given out in the Lancashire NUM Area on 22 March 1984. The Ashton and Haydock Craftsmen Delegate identified a major failing in a resolution of this kind:

The resolution (...) had one fatal flaw (...) if you advised people to work normal but not cross picket lines it meant effectively you were on strike without a national ballot (...) therefore the only way you could get a national ballot was by continuing to work normal. ⁴⁹

Initially, the AEC meeting on 21 March was lobbied by members of the Bolsover NUM Branch, historically a Nottinghamshire Area Branch since the times of Spencerism, but a NCB North Derbyshire Area colliery. With the colliery being in another NCB Area it had been subject to mass picketing following the NUM North Derbyshire Areas decision to ignore their own area ballot result and call out all their members on strike. ⁵⁰ A representation from the Bolsover Branch requested that the Nottingham Area NUM AEC close the colliery in the interests of safety. However, the AEC advised that the Bolsover Branch should call a Special Branch meeting for the purpose of ascertaining the views of the

⁴⁹ Howell, *The Politics of the NUM*, p. 116.

⁵⁰ The area ballot result in the NUM North Derbyshire Area returned a result of 49.9% in favour of strike action with 50.1% being against strike action. The North Derbyshire was considered a 'barometer area' for what could happen nationally. The North Derbyshire NUM AEC voted 12-2 to overturn the Area Ballot vote at the end of March 1984.

membership. The deputation was asked to be mindful of the Area Ballot result from 18 March; at Bolsover, 341 were in favour of strike action with 479 being against. At the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 26 March it was reported that 95% of the Bolsover NUM membership were not crossing the picket lines at the colliery.⁵¹ The Bolsover NUM Branch were seeking permission from the Nottingham Area NUM ACM to make the strike official under Rule 41 of the national NUM rules. This was turned down by thirty votes to one, the one branch in favour being Bolsover itself. This was on the grounds of the Bolsover branch not having had the special meeting to ascertain the views of the membership to close the colliery.

The Bolsover NUM Branch then held its special meeting at which 299 votes were cast in favour of an official stoppage with 205 against. The Bolsover Branch again asked the Nottingham Area NUM AC to make the stoppage at the colliery official under national rule 41. Following further consideration of the Bolsover request the ACM turned down the Bolsover request by 27 branches to 4.⁵² This was the nearest that any Nottinghamshire Area NUM Branch ever got to making the dispute official through the union machinery at Area level. It also hit the 'Achilles heel' of the democratic process within the NUM itself. What was the true mandate at Bolsover, the branch ballot vote taken during the area ballot on 18 March or the Special meeting held at the Bolsover branch some two weeks later? Could a 'Special Meeting' overturn a ballot result within such a short space of time? 820 Bolsover NUM members voted in the Area Ballot; 504 voted at the special branch meeting. What happened to the votes of the 316 people who voted at Bolsover in the Area Ballot but not at the special meeting?

Several NUM areas had area ballots (Appendix 1) at the start of the strike period, all of which turned down industrial strike action only for the ballot

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 104-105.

decision to be overturned shortly afterwards by 'special meetings'. Traditionally the NUM always had large percentage turnouts for pit-head ballots; on major issues these were usually in excess of 80%. In the Yorkshire NUM Area the mandate to strike in March 1984 was derived from a 1981 Area ballot vote taken prior to Arthur Scargill leaving office to take up the position of National President. The ballot vote recorded a majority of 86% in favour of taking strike action if a Yorkshire colliery were to be threatened with closure. However, the Yorkshire vote was not a vote over an actual pit closure but was a 'vote in principle'. In the March 1983 national ballot over colliery closures the Yorkshire NUM Area's majority for industrial action was 27,597 (54%) to 23,841 (46%). Twenty-eight Yorkshire pits voted against strike action, five of them returned No votes over 80% with most of the other twenty-three returning No votes around the 60% mark.⁵³ This infers that either the mood for industrial action in Yorkshire had diminished over two years (1981-1983), or that the Yorkshire Area NUM members were not so keen to save a South Wales Colliery as one in their own area. There was some food for thought that when the strike commenced in March 1984 it was because of a Yorkshire colliery being directly affected, that it was demanded that all NUM members should come out on strike immediately. Steve Williamson, former Annesley NUM Branch Secretary (1983-85), suggested that because the left had control of the three senior NUM positions, headed by a Yorkshire President, that there was a feeling among the left in the NUM that the strike would follow automatically.⁵⁴ In the Lancashire coalfield the Parsonage NUM Branch Delegate reflected on manpower cuts at Parsonage over recent years which had been agreed with the NCB at local level. The Parsonage manpower had been reduced from 1,300 to 300 by consent. Commenting on the strike tactics the Delegate added:

⁵³ 'NEC denied strike power in ballot', *The Nottinghamshire Miner No.1*, February 1985, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Interview with Steve Williamson (Former NUM Branch Secretary, Annesley Colliery), 8 March 2009, Selston.

It seemed ludicrous that this whole thing should blow up over a rundown in Yorkshire when we had encountered similar rundowns without any thoughts of a strike for a number of years. ⁵⁵

An old Nottingham NUM Branch Official told the author in 1983 that the way things were developing in the NUM, the Nottingham NUM Area banner displayed in the main meeting hall at the Berry Hill HQ would have to be changed to read 'The Yorkshire National Union of Mineworkers' ⁵⁶

It was at the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 3 April 1984 that the first constitutional signs of a split between the pro-strike members of the AEC and some NUM Branch Officials and the rank and file occurred. The AEC had considered correspondence from the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), the rail union, that they were recommending sympathetic industrial action to support the NUM in their dispute with the NCB. The Nottingham Area NUM AEC recommended by eight votes to five that the following resolution be put to a meeting of Nottingham Area NUM BOCM due to be held on 5 April 1984:

In view of the fact that other trade unions throughout Great Britain are instructing their members not to cross picket lines in support of the miners' fight for jobs, this Area must search its trade union principles regarding its policy on picket lines. We therefore, recommend that Nottinghamshire NUM branches set up their own picket lines and the AEC instruct our members not to cross those

⁵⁵ Howell, *The Politics of the NUM*, p. 121.

⁵⁶ Comment told to the author by an older Nottinghamshire NUM Branch Official at a meeting of NUM Branch representatives at the Nottinghamshire NUM HQ in 1983.

picket lines. We reiterate our support for a National ballot vote.⁵⁷

Henry Richardson saw the 5 April meeting as a test as to whether trade unionism was alive or dead in Nottinghamshire.⁵⁸ The dilemma faced by Nottinghamshire NUM Branch elected representatives was that if they decided to agree to put on their own picket lines, they would have played the card the left-wing in the NUM had been hoping for all along - a strike without a national ballot. At the Conference of BOCM on 5 April 1984 the resolution was turned down by 186 votes to 72.⁵⁹ The Conference reiterated the AEC decision from 21 March to respect the fundamental right of members not to cross picket lines and also the Nottinghamshire Area ballot mandate which gave members a fundamental right to go to work. The Nottingham Area NUM ACM confirmed all the Conference decisions the following day.

The first indications of a significant strained relationship between some working Nottinghamshire NUM Branch elected members and the two Notts NEC members started to surface at this time. At the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 13 April 1984 the two NEC members, Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn, reported from a meeting of the NUM NEC the previous day. At the meeting they had supported Nottinghamshire's mandate for a national ballot under Rule 43 but this had been turned down. Instead the NUM NEC meeting decided to convene a Special Delegates Conference (SDC) at the NUM HQ in Sheffield on 19 April 1984.⁶⁰ A national rally against pit closures was arranged to coincide with the SDC.⁶¹ The NUM SDC would also consider an amendment to Rule 43 to provide a simple majority (50% +1) in any individual ballot vote instead of the 55% required at the present time. It was following the NUM NEC

⁵⁷ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes, 1984, p. 121.

⁵⁸ 'It's D Day at the pits', *Notts Free Press*, 6 April 1984, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes, 1984, p. 122.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-129.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

meeting on 12 April that Henry Richardson was reported as labelling the Nottinghamshire miners who chose to cross picket lines as 'scabs'. Richardson and Chadburn defended their position as reiterating the national viewpoint, which in their view they were allowed to do. Commenting on his outburst against his own Notts membership Henry Richardson stated:

I might have gone too far in view of the fact that there had been a ballot vote to work but we are all in it together now (...) our mandate is still to seek a national ballot (...) I have never broken any mandate. I can only vote the way I am told by the membership (...) but as a member of the NEC I still have a right to vote reflecting the views of the majority of the coalfields.⁶²

However, working NUM Branch officials saw the situation differently. Steve Williamson, NUM Branch Secretary at Annesley Colliery, said:

I always understood that the union (NUM) worked from the bottom up. The members decide, in the case of Nottinghamshire by an individual ballot on major issues, and this mandates the Branch representatives. The Branch Delegate is then mandated to carry out the branch's wishes at meetings of the AC which is the governing body for the area. The AC thus decides the mandate vote for the NEC members. In the case of Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn, they were voted in by the Nottinghamshire membership to represent the Nottinghamshire interests, not to make statements about policy in other areas. The Nottinghamshire Area of the

⁶² 'We won't quit', *Notts Free Press*, 20 April 1984, p. 1.

NUM decided that it was working until a national ballot under Rule 43 said otherwise. This was Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn's mandate.⁶³

The NUM had reached a significant point where conflicting views would clash; one view coming from the rank and file from the bottom up and the other from the NEC working its way down. What followed was described by Alan Griffin as "a piece of sleight of hand worthy of a conjuror".⁶⁴ The NUM SDC on 19 April turned down the call for a national ballot and instead adopted a Kent NUM Area resolution 'calling on' all miners to join the 80% already on strike. At the same SDC Rule 43 was amended from a 55% majority for a strike to a simple majority. The Nottingham Area NUM Delegation voted against both proposals. It was at the SDC that Bernard Donaghy, from the Lancashire NUM, made a passionate plea for a national ballot. He reminded the anti-ballot Delegates of the fragile unity that existed in the NUM:

If you think at the back of your mind that a ballot vote will lose and you are urging you men to come out on strike, I think you are cheating on your membership (...) for the first time since 1926 we have had confrontations between miner and miner.⁶⁵

According to Griffin the SDC had no authority to call a national strike, only the NUM NEC could do that following a national ballot.⁶⁶ That is why the resolution used the term 'call on' inferring a request rather than an instruction. However, this did not stop the Nottingham Area NUM NEC members from contacting branches telling them the strike was now official.⁶⁷ Nottinghamshire Area NUM

⁶³ Interview with Steve Williamson, Selston, 8 March 2009.

⁶⁴ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Howell, *The Politics Of the NUM*, p. 125.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 150.

Branches were to be circulated with the information and hold Special Branch Meetings following the Easter break to explain the situation to the rank and file NUM members. The Special Branch Meetings were held and initially the first week following Easter saw an increase in picketing at most Nottinghamshire pits. At Annesley it saw some miners who had been previously working since early March join the strike. Some of these miners were part of the deputation that had visited the rally outside the NUM headquarters whilst the SDC took place; none of the elected Annesley NUM representatives attended the Sheffield rally. The number of Annesley miners joining the strike increased following the SDC of 19 April. Annesley NUM branch figures for the week-ending 27 April 1984 saw 97 miners on strike at the colliery; this represented around 10% of the workforce.⁶⁸ By the week ending 16 June this was down to 50 on strike (approx 5% of the workforce); these would remain the hard core of strikers at Annesley that would see the strike through to the bitter end in early March 1985.

However, the problem of the NUM in Nottinghamshire being hopelessly split remained. On one side the NUM working representatives and working miners saw the way the strike was developing as being unofficial and unconstitutional. On the other side Nottinghamshire strikers saw the SDC as overruling all Area decisions and the strike now being official. The SDC did not solve the problems in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. The Area Ballot mandate combined with the now entrenched position of most Nottingham Area NUM branches that were working saw them more determined than ever that only a national ballot, showing a majority for a strike, could persuade them to stop work. The National NUM needed to lean more on the elected Nottinghamshire NUM branch representatives who were still working in an attempt to get them to join the strike. This happened at a Conference of BOCM on the 25 April 1984.

⁶⁸ Annesley NUM Branch documentation, 1984. D. Amos collection.

All Nottingham Area NUM elected branch representatives were called up to the Area HQ on the afternoon of 25 April 1984. The meeting was convened following the SDC on 19 April to report on the SDC and the subsequent Kent Area resolution. However, this time it was not only the Nottingham Area NUM Officials that would be addressing the meeting as usually happened, but the NUM National President and National Secretary. The Area President addressed the meeting and reiterated that the adopted conference decision was now the official policy of the NUM as all SDC and Annual Conference decisions supersede all Area decisions.⁶⁹ Keith Staley, Bentinck NUM Committee member and an ex Derbyshire 'mining gypsy' made a passionate verbal attack on Peter Heathfield, on the virtues of democracy.⁷⁰ The National President reaffirmed that the strike was now official and called upon all other miners to join the 80% already on strike. This was to ensure maximum unity and solidarity throughout the NUM. It was the National President's claim that the strike was now official in Nottinghamshire, which would provoke one Nottingham Area NUM Branch to initiate the legal action against the national union which eventually proved the strike in Nottinghamshire unofficial. The author was present at this meeting and clearly remembers Colin Clarke, NUM Branch Delegate at Pye Hill No.1 Colliery, holding up the rule book to Arthur Scargill and telling him that he would pursue legal advice to get the strike in Nottinghamshire proved unofficial if need be.⁷¹

Following the meeting one delegate, when commenting on the accusation of Spencerism⁷² by the National President, said:

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 158.

⁷⁰ A 'Mining Gypsy' referred to a miner who had worked at several collieries in a short space of time during the mass closures in the 1960's. Usually they came from coalfields which suffered significant closures i.e. The West Durham coalfield, Scotland, South Wales and Derbyshire being among these.

⁷¹ The author was an elected NUM Branch Committee member at Annesley in the Nottingham Area NUM during the 1983-84 period.

⁷² Spencerism refers to the Nottingham Miners Industrial Union (NMIU) that formed in the autumn of the 1926 dispute following George Spencer's expulsion from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB). The NMIU lasted from 1926 until 1937, when following the Harworth dispute, a merger took place between the NMIU and the Notts Miners' Association (NMA) to form the Notts Miners Federated Union (1937-1944).

We are not going to live in the shadows of our forefathers. We cannot and will not live in the past. I want a vote on pit closures, not on who governs the country. Intimidation will not win the day, what they are trying to do to the Notts miners is give them the order of the boot.

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The delegate added that a strike without a ballot was illegal under the NUM rules and that the NUM NEC may be challenged through the courts. Henry Richardson however was adamant the strike in the Nottinghamshire coalfield was now official. Talking to TV crews following the 25 April meeting, he said:

This strike is now official. We need solidarity of action and all miners should respond. ⁷⁴

A collision course between the two Nottingham NUM NEC members and the working miners and their representatives now seemed unavoidable. It would be in 1985, in the aftermath of the strike, that the drama would be enacted. However the fallout from the events during April 1984 was not to end there; legal action against the NUM and an added complication of the Nottinghamshire Working Miners Committee (NWMC) would grow out of the inter-union dispute. Prior to this the pro-strike members of the Nottingham Area NUM AEC made preparations for what they now perceived as an official strike in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. The following resolution was agreed to be circulated to branches:

At the Special Conference held at Berry Hill on Wednesday, 25 April 1984, the National President confirmed that the strike is official, as determined by the

⁷³ 'Scargill attends meeting of Branch Officials', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 27 April 1984, p. 3.

⁷⁴ 'Now NUM faces pit rebellion', *Notts Free Press*, 27 April 1984, p. 1.

governing body of the NUM, which is the Special National Delegate Conference. The Nottingham AEC instructs all BOCM to abide by the National Special Conference decision of 19 April, not to cross picket lines, and further instructs Branch Officials and Committee members not to canvass against that Special Conference decision. It is incumbent upon all Branch Officials to give all facilities to members who are on picket lines, for example, Official Picket cards, liaison with the police and all facilities necessary when picketing is taking place.⁷⁵

The above resolution was circulated to all Nottinghamshire NUM Branches in a letter dated 25 April 1984. Nevertheless, in most cases it failed to impress working Nottinghamshire NUM members and their elected representatives. Amongst reports of some area and branch officials ignoring the SDC resolution and the AEC decision to make the strike official, the NEC released a statement. It warned that any local or area official that ignored the SDC resolution and who urged miners to cross picket lines could face disciplinary action.⁷⁶ What followed next was a mass protest by Nottinghamshire NUM working miners and their elected representatives against what many saw as a flouting of the democratic process in the NUM.

4. A Working Rally, Legal Action and added complications: The Nottinghamshire Working Miners Committee.

On Tuesday 1 May 1984 Nottinghamshire NUM working miners staged a mass demonstration outside the Nottingham NUM Area HQ at Mansfield. The aim of the demonstration was to lobby the Nottingham NUM Area Officials and AEC. Estimates have been made of around 7,000 to 8,000 working miners forming

⁷⁵ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 160.

⁷⁶ Nottingham Area NUM, *Circular to Branches: Situation in the Industry*, 10 May 1984. D. Amos collection.

the demonstration on Berry Hill Park with around 1,000 striking miners occupying the NUM Area Offices.⁷⁷ Over a thousand police kept the two sides apart in an attempt to prevent an all-out battle. Placards carried by the working miners depicted what they saw as an undemocratic strike; one read 'No Ballot, No Strike': 'Scargill's mob rule out', another read 'Scargillism is Communism'. More controversially some of the working miners erected two sets of nooses on scaffolds, supposedly for Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn, the two Nottingham NUM NEC members, who they now saw as no longer representing their views. On the balcony the striking miners paraded various NUM Branch Banners and pro-strike placards. Various area officials from both the striking and working sides struggled to make themselves heard on PA systems placed on the upstairs balcony of the Area HQ, facing the hordes of working miners on Berry Hill Park. The two sides baited each other with chants and cat-calling. Ray Chadburn, almost going hoarse, prophesied that there would only be three pits left in the county. His speech was virtually drowned out by cries of 'resign' from the working miners. Roy Lynk reiterated that the only way the Nottinghamshire NUM members could be brought out was by a national ballot vote in favour of strike action. Emotions overran and several articles were thrown resulting in a number of miners on both sides receiving injuries.

The rally was mainly organised by working Nottinghamshire NUM Branch Officials from the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area. These were elected NUM representatives who were becoming increasingly fervent in their opposition to Chadburn and Richardson and to the pro strike members of the Nottingham Area (NUM) AEC. The rally was a direct response to what Griffin described as 'the spurious strike decision of 20 April'.⁷⁸ Some commentators see the working

⁷⁷ Various other estimations have been made for the size of the crowd: see P. Wilsher, D. Macintyre and M. Jones, *Strike: A Battle of Ideologies, Thatcher, Scargill and the Miners: A Sunday Times Insight Book* (Sevenoaks 1985); p. 110; J. and R. Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 73; A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 48.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

miners' May Day rally as the start of a movement to establish right-wing control in the Nottinghamshire Area of the NUM:

The problems with Nottinghamshire were not resolved by the SDC. As Chadburn and Richardson fell into line with the NEC, Lynk and Prendergast began to establish right-wing control in Nottinghamshire. The right-wing backlash in the Notts Area became evident on 1 May 1984 when about 7,000 working Notts miners clashed with half as many strikers from several areas at the Berry Hill Offices in Mansfield. Lynk, formally unauthorised to speak, snatched the microphone and encouraged the mob haranguing Richardson and Scargill.⁷⁹

The Wintertons' version of events is incorrect in that Arthur Scargill was not at the event that day. Roy Lynk was unauthorised to speak to the media; it was Nottingham Area policy that only the two senior Area Officials could do that. Because of Richardson and Chadburn's pro-strike stance this situation gave little chance for working miners to air their protests through the union channels during the early part of the strike. Neil Greatrex, Bentinck NUM Branch President, evolved as the 'unofficial spokesman' to the media for the working miners' cause. He would later be elected as a Nottingham NUM Area Official in May 1985 following the dismissal of Henry Richardson. Following the Nottinghamshire Branch Elections of June 1984, which resulted in almost every striking representative being voted out of office, the 'gagging rule' was one of the first things to be lifted.

The 1 May 'right to work' rally by the Nottinghamshire miners has always been a bone of contention for the left for two reasons. Firstly, the 1 May is the

⁷⁹ J. and R. Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 73.

designated day for International Labour Solidarity. Secondly, they (the left) argue that the rally was deliberately fostered by the NCB; the claims are that the NCB allowed rest-days for the event and laid on transport which together contributed the equivalent of £1.5 million. Brian Walker, former NUM Branch Secretary at Newstead, described the rally as 'the worst day of infamy ever':

Labour Day, of all days, was used to demonstrate the sheer wickedness of the 'right to work' mob (...) They mounted a demonstration during a special rest day and were transported to the NUM Offices by buses paid for and organised by the NCB against their own union (...) such were the times and there was much more to come, but the shame of that day will stay in my mind as a day of the worst infamy.⁸⁰

In an article commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the strike Brian Walker suggested that the right to work rally did much to change the minds of the Conservative Government, and until that point they were thinking of meeting the NUM's demands on the pit closure issue.⁸¹ No supporting evidence is given to confirm this view. Additionally Brian Walker suggested he was attending an area meeting which was 'besieged by a huge crowd of Nottinghamshire miners supporting a return to work'.⁸² This statement is incorrect in two instances. Firstly it was not a return to work. The vast majority of Nottinghamshire miners had been at work since the result of the area ballot on 18 March. Indeed, some had not lost a shift at all since the picketing started on 10 March. Secondly, the area meeting held on 1 May was a Nottingham Area (NUM) AEC meeting which was made up of Branch Delegates, not Branch Secretaries. The area minutes stated that the meeting Brian Walker attended

⁸⁰ NUM Nottingham Area, *Official 20th anniversary Programme* (Mansfield, 2004), p. 12.

⁸¹ 'The day the strike tide turned', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 11 March 2009, p. 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*

was an Area Political Committee Meeting (APCM) which was held the following day on 2 May 1984.⁸³ Later an amendment to the minutes stated that Brian Walker was not officially at any meeting, either on the 1 or 2 May 1984.⁸⁴ One can only assume he was at Berry Hill organising the pro-strike protests. Stanley suggested that the disappointing part of the 'right to work' rally was it included some NUM Branch Officials and Committee members opposing the instructions from Area.⁸⁵ Incidentally, the NUM membership at Newstead, which Brian Walker represented and Stanley was part of, had voted 71 per cent not to strike in the Nottingham Area Ballot of 15 - 16 March. There is no mention of this in Stanley's account of the early days of the strike at Newstead.⁸⁶

In contrast to the left-wing view of infamy, some working miners saw the rally as a message to the 'left wing rabble-rousers' that the Nottinghamshire working mandate would be adhered to until a national ballot under National rule 43 said otherwise. Chris Butcher, along with some other working miners, was based at a pit where some of the elected NUM branch representatives had abandoned the area's no-strike mandate and were following the AEC's pro-strike stance. For him the rally gave some hope to the confusing situation in the Nottinghamshire coalfield:

For the first time, we had encountered a situation where the working miners were in the majority. It was also heartening to see men who had voted to work were not going to be intimidated by left-wing rabble-rousers.⁸⁷

Chris Butcher, otherwise known as the 'Silver Birch', would later reach national prominence. Those striking in Nottinghamshire soon christened him 'Dutch Elm'.

⁸³ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 165.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁸⁵ Stanley, *Nottingham miners do strike*, p. 71.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-56.

⁸⁷ Butcher and Seymore, *The Link up of Friendship*, p. 10.

At the rally Chris Butcher met Kenny Duckworth, NUM Branch Secretary at Babbington Colliery, who told him a union man's job is to represent the majority, not his own feelings. He gave him one of his slips of paper and told them there was to be a meeting of working miners the following week.⁸⁸ This meeting would give added weight to the anti-strike movement in Nottinghamshire in the name of the Notts Working Miners Committee (NWMC). Later a more national working miners' movement would evolve, the National Working Miners Committee (NaWMC). Both organisations would be instrumental in bringing legal actions through individuals which would put a legal stranglehold on the NUM during the autumn of 1984. Initially the 'right to work' rally gave Colin Clarke, Pye Hill No.1 NUM Branch Delegate, the initiative to pursue legal action to prove that the strike in Nottinghamshire was unofficial.

Following the Nottinghamshire working miners' rally, Colin Clarke, with the aid of the Pye Hill No.1 NUM Branch, started the moves towards getting the strike in Nottinghamshire proved unofficial. When he initially declared his intention to follow this route, Henry Richardson is reported as telling him 'You try and be a martyr then'.⁸⁹ Clarke was to meet this challenge. Initially a whip round produced £200 with which Clarke, armed with the Area and National NUM rule books, went to see his family solicitors in Ripley, Derbyshire. There he met a young solicitor, David Negus, who quickly came to a decision that in his opinion the strike in Nottinghamshire could not be declared official under the rules of the NUM. This was the good news for Clarke and his supporters. However, he then hit them with a bombshell in recommending that they should get a proper supporting opinion from leading counsel; this meant that if it went before a judge, legal fees would be in excess of £10,000. The events of the right to work rally then played their part in the networking process amongst South Nottinghamshire Area working NUM Branches. A pit-head collection was arranged for 18 May 1984 at various Nottinghamshire NUM Branches in an

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

⁸⁹ Wilsher, Macintyre and Jones, *Strike*, p. 110.

attempt to raise enough money for the legal action that was being sought. Working Nottinghamshire NUM miners were asked to donate £1 per man as a 'reasonable price to pay for democracy'. The legal action would be sought on the following points:

1. A declaration that no official strike exists in the Nottinghamshire Area.
2. That accordingly any instruction regarding part 1 given by any national, area or branch official of the union is void and must be withdrawn.
3. Furthermore, the NUM Branch Committee are instructed to lend the name of this branch as additional plaintiffs to any action as Pye Hill No.1 Branch may, upon proper legal advice, henceforth institute. ⁹⁰

In total over £9,000 was raised at the pit-head collections, with another £1,500 being donated from individuals. The costs to employ the Barrister, M Burton QC, plus a junior barrister, came to just over £6,000. Additional expenses for Colin Clarke's party came to almost £1,400. (Appendix 9) A preliminary court hearing was made on Friday 25 May 1984. Colin Clarke and Howard Shooter, both from Pye Hill No.1 Branch, plus John Liptrott, NUM Branch Secretary at Sherwood Colliery, brought the legal action and named the senior two NUM National Officials in their writ. Clarke and his supporters were reported as being confident of success with the court case and their next move was to press for the resignation of the two Nottingham Area NUM NEC members, Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn. ⁹¹ A spokesman from Pye Hill said:

We would keep protesting for their resignations in a democratic way because they do not represent the men's wishes and it would then be up to their consciences. The

⁹⁰ Nottingham Area NUM Annesley Branch, 1984. D. Amos collection.

⁹¹ 'Pye Hill men call for resignations', *Notts Free Press*, 25 May 1984, p. 3.

only way to get us out is to hold a national ballot and if the majority decision is to strike, all 778 men (at Pye Hill) would be out.⁹²

Despite Pye Hill's imminent closure the next year, only 14 out of 778 miners at the pit were on strike and the transfer plans (to other collieries) were running smoothly.

The outcome of the hearing on 25 May was a victory for Clarke, Shooter, Liptrott and the working miners. Michael Burton, QC for the working miners, told Justice Mervyn Davis that they were seeking a declaration that Nottinghamshire working miners were entitled to continue working without being in breach of the NUM rules unless and until there was a valid and official strike of the NUM for which it was necessary under National Rule 43 to hold a national ballot.⁹³ Commenting on the ruling he stated:

For the plaintiffs the position is quite simple. There is no national strike relevant to the NUM nor is there any valid area strike in Nottinghamshire. The plaintiffs have a strong argument that there is no national strike or area strike (in Nottinghamshire) and there are no valid instructions not to cross picket lines. That makes the threats of disciplinary action more unlawful⁹⁴

Although the legal ruling made the road clearer for the working miners in Nottinghamshire it did not solve the problem within the NUM. Different interpretations of what was official and what was unofficial remained within the union. Colin Clarke appears to infer this when he commented on the legal ruling:

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ 'It's wait and see after court victory', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 1 June 1984, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

We are as interested as everyone else to see what the union's reaction to this court ruling will be (...) we are going to wait and see. How people interpret the ruling is up to them.⁹⁵

In the meantime the main core of the Nottinghamshire strikers stayed out on strike. As far as they were concerned the decision of the SDC from 19 April had become official union policy as Annual Conference or SDC decisions superseded area decisions. Working miners' elected representatives questioned the validity of the mandate of some of the Delegates who attended the SDC. Several areas had overturned area ballot results by 'special meetings'. The Yorkshire Area of the NUM was acting on a three year old ballot result. Additionally they argued that drafting in 10,000 strike activists to lobby outside the Conference Hall was designed to 'un-nerve moderate delegates'. The legal ruling again brought back the ghosts of 1977 when legal ruling was sought following the reintroduction of piece work in the name of Area Incentive Schemes. One judge had ruled that a ballot was the essence of democracy whilst another said the result of a ballot was not binding on the NUM NEC. (See Chapter 4: Part 2)

In addition to the legal ruling, the other factor that emerged from the right to work rally was the evolution of the Notts Working Miners Committee (NWMC). According to Chris Butcher the inaugural meeting was held on 10 May 1984 at the Victoria Hotel in Stanton Hill near Sutton-in-Ashfield.⁹⁶ Henry Richardson suggested that the Working Miners Committee was set up in October 1983 with a brief to ensure that the Nottinghamshire coalfield would remain in production in the event of a national strike.⁹⁷ No supporting evidence is added to say how this was done. Representatives of working miners from almost every

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Butcher and Seymore, *The Link up of Friendship*, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Stephenson, *Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting*, p. 65.

Nottinghamshire colliery attended the 10 May meeting and a 'Committee for the Welfare of mineworkers' was formed. This was to be called the Notts Working Miners Committee and was made up of the following people; ⁹⁸

Mick Smith – Bevercotes	Chairman
Ken Duckworth – Babbington	Vice Chairman
John Blessington – Bevercotes	Secretary
Graham Tavener – Gedling	Treasurer
Chris Butcher – Bevercotes	Committee
Geoff Porter – Bevercotes	Committee
Steve Williamson – Annesley	Committee

A letter sent out to local Labour Party Constituencies following the meeting stated that the Committee had been formed because the 'so called Nottinghamshire leaders' no longer reflected the views of the majority in the Nottinghamshire Area. ⁹⁹ It went on to say that the forum had been set up to help finance working miners whose properties i.e. cars, homes and boundaries, were being damaged. The reason the NWMC was set up was to do three things:

1. To form a link-up of all twenty-five Nottinghamshire Collieries to try and stop rumours spreading throughout the coalfield.
2. To assist miners who are still working for the sake of democracy and may be being intimidated.
3. To do all in its power to re-affirm democracy within the NUM and not to break or replace it.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 11

⁹⁹ D. Amos, collection of memorabilia from the 1984-85 strike in Nottinghamshire.

Replies from nearly all Labour Party Constituencies to the NWMC were indifferent and in some cases hostile.¹⁰⁰ At the first meeting of the NWMC Colin Clarke stated that he was still £5,000 short of the amount needed to go to court. This is where the idea for the pit-head collection came from. Point three of the above aims was perceived by the striking fraternity in Nottinghamshire as being a breakaway from the NUM. Chris Butcher emphatically denied this:

I must emphasise, contrary to what my enemies have said, that the NWMC was never intended as a breakaway or a rival union.¹⁰¹

The striking Nottinghamshire NUM miners formed an organisation called "The Notts Miners Rank and File Strike Committee (NMRFSC)". The main aim of this organisation was to bring the entire Nottinghamshire coalfield to a standstill and consolidate unity in the NUM.¹⁰² A meeting of 500 rank and file pro-strike Nottinghamshire NUM members representing seventeen Nottinghamshire collieries met on 16 April 1984 and decided to adopt a policy 'to organise and lift the fight at the very point of attack' i.e. inside the Nottinghamshire coalfield.¹⁰³ The NMRFSC claimed that 10,000 Nottinghamshire miners, around one-third of the NUM membership, were on strike at this time. It is more likely that the number of miners voluntarily on strike in Nottinghamshire only reached this figure for a short period following the SDC on 19 April. 7,285 (27.5%) voted to strike in the area ballot, out of a total of 27,473, and, as Alan Griffin stated, a good number of men voting to strike obeyed the ballot result and went to work.

The first moves of the Nottinghamshire Working Miners' Committee (NWMC) to involve collieries out of the county came when a delegation from Agecroft Colliery in Lancashire attended a meeting of the NWMC on 15 May 1984. A

¹⁰⁰ Butcher and Seymore, *The Link up of Friendship*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 13.

¹⁰² Copy of letter from Paul Whetton (Secretary of NMRFSC) to pro-strike Notts NUM Activists: 17 April 1984. D. Amos collection.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*.

majority of Agecroft's NUM membership were defying the NUM Lancashire's Areas in calling the strike official, even though an area ballot result had initially turned down strike action by 3,765 (59.2%) to 2,596 (40.8%).¹⁰⁴ Eventually the National Working Miners' Committee (NaWMC) would evolve under the guidance of Colin Clarke and John Liptrott. This followed a split with Chris Butcher following the Nottinghamshire NUM Branch elections in June 1984 when working miners more or less made a clean sweep in gaining NUM BOCM positions throughout the Nottingham Area of the NUM. Following the elections the pro-strike AEC was ousted from office being replaced by a new AEC more sympathetic to the working miners' cause. The effect of the Nottingham Area NUM Branch elections in June 1984 is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2: Part 5.

It was the NaWMC which was reported as having various right-wing Thatcherite advisors within its ranks, such as Tim Bell and David Hart. Bell was a Director of Saatchi and Saatchi; they designed the infamous 'Labour's not working' advertisement for the Conservatives in the run-up to the 1979 General Election. He was also a confidant of Mrs Thatcher and was working as a public relations assistant to the NCB Chairman, Ian McGregor, during the dispute. Hart was a 'special advisor' to Mrs Thatcher, and the one time Secretary of the NaWMC, Bob Copping, suggested it was Hart who was actually running the show.¹⁰⁵ Copping eventually resigned from the NaWMC because he thought it was 'turning into an anti-union organisation with a Conservative orientation'.¹⁰⁶ Colin Bottomore, Branch Secretary at Bentinck Colliery, also saw it this way. He saw no point in maintaining a separate faction following the removal of the strike supporters from prominent positions following the Nottingham Area NUM branch elections in June 1984. Bottomore suggested that the working miners' committees were continuing their separate faction because it was their aim to

¹⁰⁴ Howell, *The Politics of the NUM*, p. 111.

¹⁰⁵ Stephenson, *Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

“defeat the strike (...) and bring the union to its knees. That is not my aim”.¹⁰⁷ It was a move from the Bentinck NUM Branch that would detach the NWMC and the NaWMC from the official union channels of the Nottingham Area of the NUM. At the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 26 November 1984 a Bentinck appeal was put out to all Nottinghamshire Branches to disassociate both the NWMC and the NaWMC from the official Nottingham NUM constitution. The appeal read as follows:

We, the Bentinck NUM Branch, appeal to council to publicly disassociate the Nottingham miners from the Nottingham and National Working Miners’ Committees. We feel that the Nottingham NUM should make it known that this union works through the Nottingham constitution, from Branch to Area, and has no relationship with the Nottingham or National working committees.¹⁰⁸

The appeal was passed by 23 branches to 8 at the December 1984 Nottingham Area NUM ACM. It was also at this meeting that the Nottingham Area deleted Rule 30 from its Area rule book. Rule 30 gave the national rules precedence over the area rules in case of a disagreement. This was seen as being an integral move in the Nottingham Area breaking ranks with the National union. (see Chapter 2: Part 7) Both Morgan and Coates and Stephenson fail to mention the important factor of the Nottingham Area of the NUM disassociating from the two working miners’ committees. It is important evidence that suggests that the Nottinghamshire miners, like Bob Copping, were not happy with what in effect had become anti trade-union, Tory infiltrated organisations. It also confirms that the Nottinghamshire miners were keen to see that their disagreement with the national union was one about the unconstitutional nature of the strike.

¹⁰⁷ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners’ Strike*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰⁸ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 373.

The left always contend that the NCB and various Conservative backed supporters funded the working miners' committees. Stephenson suggests one fifth of the NaWMC was funded by business and Tory enterprises, with the other four-fifths being publicly donated.¹⁰⁹ Bob Copping suggested David Hart was introduced to him as 'the money man', that he was running the NaWMC and was handing over sums of money up to £300 in cash as floats.¹¹⁰ David Wain, NCB Safety Officer at Pye Hill Colliery, told of various strangely addressed envelopes which started to arrive at Pye Hill Colliery during May 1984. Some were simply addressed 'to the miner aiming to defeat Scargill, Pye Hill Colliery, Nottinghamshire.'¹¹¹ On opening such letters the colliery clerk found cash donations of various amounts which were surmised to be for the legal action to prove the strike in Nottinghamshire unofficial. The donations were forwarded on to Colin Clarke. It was reported that the NCB Chairman, Ian McGregor had used his good offices to put the working miners' representatives in touch with small town solicitors and business men eager to give financial backing.¹¹² Colin Clarke strongly denied there was any involvement by Ian McGregor or financial assistance from business men.¹¹³ His reply emphasised five main points. Firstly, there had been no contact, direct or indirect, between the working miners' committees and Ian McGregor, who had not masterminded any of the legal actions. Secondly, Colin Clarke's own family lawyers from Ripley had conducted the case. Thirdly, all funds of the working miners' committees had been raised by donations from ordinary members of the public. David Wain backs this point up with his evidence of donations arriving at Pye Hill Colliery. Additionally, a balance sheet survives from the legal action pursued by Colin Clarke which lists the source of the donations (see Appendix 9). Fourthly, the court actions had been solely motivated by the desire to return the union to the

¹⁰⁹ Stephenson, *Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting*, p. 63.

¹¹⁰ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield & British Miners' Strike*, p. 20.

¹¹¹ Interview with David Wain, Selston, 16 February 2009.

¹¹² Cited in Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield & the British Miners Strike*, p. 24.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

democratic control of its membership. Fifthly, and finally Colin Clarke stated he could not comprehend why 'government sources' should tell such tales. At a NUM trade union school at Stoke Rochford in January 1985 the author and several other students asked Colin Clarke how much money was actually involved with the working miners' committees. Students were politely reminded that they (the Nottingham Area NUM) had disassociated themselves from the issue and it was no business of theirs (the students). Colin Clarke left the coal mining industry on redundancy terms in the autumn of 1985 following the closure of the Pye Hill Complex. He died at Eastwood, Nottinghamshire in 2004.

5. All change: the June 1984 Nottinghamshire NUM Branch elections.

At the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 14 May 1984 it was reported that the NUM NEC had made a decision to instruct all Areas to postpone all branch elections in areas where industrial action was being taken until the situation in the industry returned to normal.¹¹⁴ The subsequent legal opinion obtained by the national NUM suggested that the action to postpone the 1984 branch elections was perfectly legitimate. However, at the Nottingham Area NUM AEC on 4 June 1984 it was reported that further information had subsequently been received from the national NUM indicating that branch elections should proceed as usual.¹¹⁵ This was following consultation by a leading Counsel. The Wintertons implied that Sir Robert Mergarry instructed the Nottingham Area of the NUM to go ahead with branch elections following threatened legal proceedings to get them reinstated.¹¹⁶ The decision to go ahead with the Nottingham Area NUM Branch elections would be significant as the pro-strike NUM elected branch representatives were replaced with working branch representatives almost to a man. The political effects of this at Area level would

¹¹⁴ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 166.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹¹⁶ J. and R. Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 71.

be to transform a pro-strike body into an anti-strike one. Branch elections took place each year and could be held between 15 May and 29 June in line with Nottingham Area Rule No. 13 (b).¹¹⁷

Morgan and Coates described the election result as leading to 'practically all traces of support for the strike in Nottinghamshire being virtually obliterated'.¹¹⁸ Working miners were returned to all four NUM Branch Officials positions at Annesley, Bentinck, Silverhill and Sutton collieries. At Newstead, traditionally one of the more militant NUM Branches in Nottinghamshire, three out of the four NUM Branch Officials positions went to working miners. Barry Rodgers replaced striking miner Jack Beet as NUM Branch Delegate. Ted Walker, NUM Branch President and a striking miner, kept his position. According to Trevor Taylor this was a deliberate ploy to allow some experience to remain at branch level.¹¹⁹ Bryn Long replaced Keith Johnson as NUM Branch Secretary; former long standing NUM Secretary Brian Walker was reported as accepting voluntary redundancy and had left the coal industry in June.¹²⁰ Oddly, Stanley's account of the elections suggested Brian Walker's position as NUM Branch Secretary was up for challenge.¹²¹ It was common knowledge around Newstead that Brian Walker had accepted voluntary redundancy and had left the industry. Stanley became one of the very few strikers to get elected as a NUM Branch Committee member.¹²² As was common among the striking miners, many of the newly elected branch representatives had been politicised by the events of the strike in Nottinghamshire.¹²³ Many openly admitted to not being involved in union affairs at their pits prior to the strike; a body of Nottinghamshire NUM elected

¹¹⁷ Nottingham Area NUM, *Rules and Standing Orders*, 1983, p. 19. D. Amos collection.

¹¹⁸ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners' Strike*, p. 19.

¹¹⁹ Interview with John Trevor Taylor, 6 August 2008, Sutton-in-Ashfield.

¹²⁰ 'Moderates win seats', *Notts Free Press*, 6 July 1984, p. 5.

¹²¹ Stanley, *Nottingham Miners do Strike*, p. 80.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

NUM Branch Officials and Committee members now contained many inexperienced representatives within its ranks, as Stanley suggested.¹²⁴

The immediate effects of the branch elections in Nottinghamshire was at branch level where it was now estimated that only 4 out of 310 places on branch committees were taken by striking miners.¹²⁵ Two out of these four places were at Newstead. At Annesley the entire NUM Committee was returned en bloc, all NUM representatives being returned with an increased majority from the 1983 elections. In some cases the branch elections saw the place for NUM Branch Officials being a straight fight between a working miner and a striking miner; this was the case at Annesley. (Fig. 4) The ploy was not to split the working miners' moderate vote. In some cases reports were made on information sheets available for rank and file members which showed who the strikers' representatives were and who the working ones were. The 31 man Nottingham Area NUM AC, which originally had 12 of its representatives on strike, was now made up of 28 working miners and 3 strikers. The Nottingham Area NUM AEC was transformed from a pro-strike body into an anti-strike body more or less over night. The new AEC members were voted in at the first meeting of newly elected delegates which was always in July of each year in line with Area Rule 22.¹²⁶ The political balance at Area level was now in favour of Roy Lynk and David Prendergast, while the two NUM NEC members, Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn, were becoming increasingly isolated from the bulk of the Nottingham Area NUM membership and their newly elected representatives. As Griffin commented, 'tension between the (new) AEC and their two NEC members was now unavoidable'.¹²⁷ Commenting on the change of representation from striking to working miners, Ray Chadburn suggested that

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners Strike*, p. 19

¹²⁶ Nottingham Area NUM, *Rules and Standing Orders*, 1983, pp. 28 – 29.

¹²⁷ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 8.

Fig. 3: NUM Branch Election results at Annesley – June 1984.

656 VAPERS 6 SPOILT.

**NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS
NOTTINGHAM AREA
ANNESLEY BRANCH**

Ballot for Officials & Committee 1984-85

PRESIDENT Vote for ONE only		COMMITTEE Vote for FOUR only	
Edward Naylor Development Worker	527	David Amos (Punk) Electrician	474 E
Leonard David Simpson (Simpe) Face Worker	96	Martin Carey (Matt) Dinter	437 E
SECRETARY Vote for ONE only		David George Roe Electrician Reg II	62
		Graham Dexter (Bombhead) FGS Worker	129
Ernest William Elkington U/G Fitter	66	Peter Robert Fields (Cat) U/G Fitter	86
Steve Williamson U/G Fitter	572	Ian Small (Bone) U/G Fitter	68
DELEGATE Vote for ONE only		Peter Horst Falkenbach F/G Ripper	21
		Brian Else K80s Face Worker	55
Terry Allen Electrician	103	Patrick Orton Ropeman	339 E
John Bonsar U/G Fitter	520	Kevin Mitchell Belt Maintenance	19
TREASURER Vote for ONE only		Derek Charles Meakin Winder	27
		John Glover Face Worker	123
Graham Bowmar (Tut) Blacksmith	547	Roubin Towle Face Worker	72
Robbie Parr U/G Electrician	81	Derek Gazzard Loco Driver	42.
COMMITTEE—YOUTH MEMBER Andrew Naylor (Andy) Face Worker (unopposed)		Anthony K. Needham (Tony) Safety Dept.	26
		Gordon Eyre (Bonny) Lamproom Ex Ripper	42
		Robert Lindsay (Bob) Face Worker	274 E
		John Henry Stafford (Stiff) Header	70
		Denis Mason Development Worker	50
		Terry Law Face Worker	62

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E. Mellors, Printer, Hucknall, Nottingham

(Signatures of Ballot Supervisors)

Source: D. Amos collection. (Signatures are the Ballot Supervisors)

'the new Nottingham Area NUM AEC now contained Liberals, Social Democrats and even some Tories'.¹²⁸ Remarking on the possibility of a split within the NUM, Chadburn added, "I think at the end of the day they now realise the implications of trying to form a breakaway trade union".¹²⁹ Events from July onwards would determine otherwise. The anti-Nottinghamshire sentiments expressed by Terry Thomas (South Wales NUM) at the 1984 NUM Extraordinary Annual Conference and the introduction of NUM (Disciplinary) Rule 51 aggravated an already delicate situation.¹³⁰

6. Entering a minefield: the introduction of disciplinary Rule 51 and its effects

The planned 1984 NUM Annual Conference due to take place at Tenby did not go ahead. The extraordinary circumstances in the industry caused by the strike made a normal Conference impossible to hold. Instead, it was proposed that a NUM Extraordinary Annual Conference (EAC) would take place at the Firth Hall, Sheffield University. The EAC took place over 11 and 12 July 1984. It was at this conference that the South Wales NUM Delegation walked out because they objected to being in the same room as 'scabs' from Leicestershire and South Derbyshire.¹³¹ A large proportion of the conference delegates left the hall when the NUM South Derbyshire President, Ken Toon, tried to address the conference. (see Chapter 6: Part 2) The vast majority of the small South Derbyshire NUM Area had been at work since the start of the strike.

Back at Area level the newly elected NUM Branch Delegates had been due to meet for a Special Council Meeting (SCM) to record branch decisions for the Annual Conference and thus mandate which way the Nottingham NUM Delegation should vote at the EAC. On the agenda of the EAC the NUM NEC

¹²⁸ Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, p. 265.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ NUM, *Extraordinary Annual Conference Report 1984*, p. 403 and pp. 410 – 426.

¹³¹ The Nottingham NUM Delegation was still represented by mainly pro-strike NUM representatives elected for the 1983-84 term of office in line with NUM Policy.

had put forward an amendment for the introduction of a new disciplinary rule. This would become NUM National Rule 51, later to be dubbed 'the Star Chamber rule'. Eventually Rule 51 would fill one-fifth of the NUM national rule book. For the working Nottinghamshire miners the main point of objection to the new disciplinary rule was it would be used to discipline working miners in 1984 for adhering to their working mandate. Rule 51 was titled 'Disqualification of members, Branches, Areas and removal of Officers'. The main point of contention of Rule 51 was Section (d) Part (vii) which stated:

The National Disciplinary Committee shall have the power to consider a complaint that a member has done any act (which includes any omission) which may be detrimental to the interests of the union and which is not specifically provided for in this rule.¹³²

In defence of the introduction of Rule 51 the national NUM suggested that it was not intended to be used to discipline working miners in the current strike but had been in preparation before the 1984-85 strike began. Rule 51 was designed to bring the NUM's disciplinary rules up to date with present requirements and in line with natural justice:¹³³

It (Rule 51) was not designed or introduced to deal with the current strike action, nor has it been used at any time since its adoption in August 1984, by the National Union.

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In February 1985 the Nottingham Area of the NUM came up with evidence that Rule 51 had been used to expel working miners in other NUM areas. The AEC had received a copy of a letter from a working Sunderland miner giving

¹³² NUM, *Decisions of the Extraordinary Annual Conference*, p. 2.

¹³³ NUM, *No return to Spencerism*, leaflet January 1985. D. Amos collection.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

evidence of his expulsion from the Durham Mechanics under the new disciplinary rule.¹³⁵ The article suggested that several hundred miners had been expelled in other areas using Rule 51. One of the consequences of the expulsions in Durham was the formation of a breakaway union. The Colliery Trades and Allied Workers Association (CTAWA) eventually became one of the constituent unions of the UDM when it was formed in the autumn of 1985. Commenting on the potential introduction of the new disciplinary rule, Bentinck NUM Branch Delegate, Dave Morrell, told Ashfield based miners not to lose any sleep over it:

I don't see where we in Notts have done anything wrong. We had an area vote and 73.5% voted to continue working pending a national ballot (...) but at no time have we been instructed to come out (on strike).¹³⁶

The Nottingham Area NUM SCM due for 9 July never took place because of a sit in at the Area HQ by pro-strike miners. It was reported that around one hundred striking miners were in the building with around three hundred other strikers outside.¹³⁷ There was widespread belief that the successful protest was aimed at preventing the newly elected anti-strike Nottingham NUM Delegates from voting on the new disciplinary rule at the EAC. Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn refuted allegations that they had anything to do with the protest.¹³⁸ The protest turned violent the next day when there was a clash between the protestors and riot police. Alan Griffin saw some irony in 'Official Picket' posters being put in place outside the entrance to the Nottingham Area (NUM) HQ to try and prevent democratically elected NUM delegates from deciding on union business, and being called scabs in the process.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ 'Kicked out', *The Nottinghamshire Miner No.1*, February 1985, p. 1. D. Amos collection.

¹³⁶ 'Aborted Council Meeting', *Notts Free Press*, 13 July 1984, p. 3.

¹³⁷ 'Berry Hill Sit In', *Notts Free Press*, 13 July 1984, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 229.

¹³⁹ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 47.

Although they were not mandated, the Nottingham NUM delegation to the NUM EAC, represented by the pro-strike 1983-84 delegates, took cognisance of the feelings in the Nottinghamshire coalfield and voted against the introduction of disciplinary Rule 51.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it was accepted at the EAC by 166 votes to 62. Explanations into the long delay in the formulation of the disciplinary rules referred to a court action when a Nottingham Area NUM member had taken the union to court. This was the case of Bill Richards, a Blidworth NUM member, who took the Nottingham Area NUM to court in the mid 1970s over alleged ballot irregularities in the NUM at Blidworth.¹⁴¹ The Nottingham Area NUM denied that it had ever proposed the introduction of Rule 51. Len Clarke, former Nottingham Area NUM President, suggested that “no proposal ever came from the Nottingham Area”.¹⁴² Another factor in the delay of Rule 51 was that the QC drawing up the rules had been appointed as Chairman of the National Reference Tribunal (NRT) and a successor had to be sought to replace him.

Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn stated that although Rule 51 had been accepted nationally there would be no witch hunt in the county.¹⁴³ Prior to the EAC, seventeen Nottinghamshire NUM Branch Officials had sought a High Court ruling in an attempt to stop the EAC going ahead. This eventually resulted in the decision of the EAC being made 'null and void' because the Nottingham Area (NUM) delegation had not been properly mandated. In answer to this the NUM NEC called another SDC for 10 August, again with the introduction of Rule 51 on the agenda. The voting from the Nottinghamshire NUM Branches on the introduction of Rule 51 was eventually conducted at the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 23 July 1984. 27 branches voted against its introduction with just 3

¹⁴⁰ The newly elected Nottingham Area NUM Delegates were not mandated because of the SCM on 9 July which never took place because of the blockade of the Nottingham Area NUM HQ by pro-strike supporters.

¹⁴¹ See Bill Richards, *Blidworth Pit and the NUM* (Blidworth, 1994), pp. 31-71.

¹⁴² Nottingham Area NUM Circular, 'What kind of men do they think you are? Rule 51: Now the Truth', January 1985. D. Amos collection.

¹⁴³ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 230.

branches, Bolsover, Clipstone and Welbeck, being in favour.¹⁴⁴ At the same meeting the Nottingham Area had been asked to provide nominations for the new seven man disciplinary committee, the so called 'Star Chamber'. It was decided to seek legal advice, bearing in mind the Nottingham Area could be held in contempt of court following Sir Robert Megarry's (High Court Judge) ruling that the introduction of Rule 51 was illegal. This ruling was from the original EAC, held on 11 -12 July 1984, when the Nottingham Area NUM Delegation had not been properly mandated because of the sit-in at the Area HQ. It was also decided to obtain legal advice as to whether the Nottingham NUM delegation should attend the re-arranged SDC on 10 August.¹⁴⁵ If the advice was not to attend, the two Nottingham NUM NEC members should vote against introduction of Rule 51; if the ruling was in favour a bus would take the Nottingham NUM delegation (made up of the newly elected NUM Delegates 1984-85) and would leave the NUM Area Offices at 9.30am on 10 August.

At the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 9 August it was decided by 27 votes to 3 that the Nottingham NUM delegation should not attend the SDC on 10 August.¹⁴⁶ Unknown at the time, this was to be the last time a Nottingham NUM Delegation attended a NUM national meeting until the fateful 1985 NUM Annual Conference in July 1985. At the ACM it was also decided not to send any nominations for the National Disciplinary Committee (NDC) or the National Appeals Committee (NAC). The national NUM had also requested that all NUM Areas amend their own area rules to accommodate the new Rule 51. The Nottingham Area NUM again sought legal advice on this issue before proceeding. The outcome of this was a reporting conference arranged to be made up of the four Nottingham NUM Area Officials, all Nottinghamshire NUM Branch Officials, Igor Judge QC, Peter Keenan, Barrister and the union's legal advisors, Hopkins Solicitors. Proposals from this meeting would be instrumental

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 259.

in leading to a 'constitutional split' between the Nottingham Area NUM and the national NUM in December 1984.

The special reporting conference was held on 25 September 1984. Igor Judge QC told the Nottinghamshire NUM representatives that he was not prepared to become involved in the politics of the situation; he was there to clarify any points contained in his advice. It was for the Nottingham Area of the NUM to decide on which course of action they should take. Copies of the legal advice had been circulated to Nottinghamshire NUM Branch Officials prior to the meeting. In his advice Egor Judge described the eight page Rule 51 as being 'the most draconian rule ever introduced by a British trade union to discipline its own members'.¹⁴⁷ In conclusion Igor Judge said whatever decision the Nottingham Area reached on Rule 51 they should at the same time 'take full cognisance of and be prepared to accept the consequences of that decision'¹⁴⁸ The inference from this statement was that the Nottingham Area could be expelled from the national NUM or indeed could be seen as constitutionally breaking away from the federal structure of the NUM.

At a meeting on 8 October 1984 the Nottingham Area NUM AEC decided to not accept the new disciplinary Rule 51 after considering the legal advice from Egor Judge QC. Whilst rejecting Rule 51 the AEC wished to state categorically that:

It was not their intension to instigate moves which would lead to a breakaway of the Nottingham Area from the NUM.¹⁴⁹

The AEC also agreed to recommend appropriate rule changes to the Nottingham Area Rules to protect the Nottingham Area from the new disciplinary rule. Amendments were done each December when the Nottingham Area NUM ACM

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Roy Lynk, 28 December 2005, Sutton-in-Ashfield.

¹⁴⁸ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 322.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 323.

voted on any proposed rule alterations. As the strike entered December 1984 the NUM was about to be plunged into its greatest ever crisis.

7. Self Defence or Gerrymandering: The Nottingham Area NUM December 1984 Rule Changes.

At the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 17 October 1984 the committee considered draft proposals for the amendment of the Nottingham Area rules for the forthcoming December ACM. The proposals were drafted with the help of the Nottingham NUM Area's legal advisors, Hopkins and Sons Solicitors. In preparing the rule amendments the Nottingham Area and its legal advisors had sought to preserve the local autonomy of the Area Union whilst maintaining its status as a constituent member of the national union.¹⁵⁰ The AEC agreed a proposal that the various rule amendments should be submitted to the November Nottingham Area NUM ACM in accordance with Area Rule 24. This would allow all Nottinghamshire NUM branches to vote on the various amendments which would then be finalised at the December NUM ACM. The first sign of any threats from legal advice came at the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 6 December 1984. The AEC considered correspondence from the national NUM regarding the illegality of the proposed Nottingham Area rule changes. The national NUM contended that a number of the rule amendments would be in conflict with the national and model rules of the NUM. The rule amendment causing the most concern was the deletion of Rule 30 from the Nottingham Area NUM Area rule book. Rule 30 concerned the relationship of the Nottingham Area rules to that of the national rules. It stated:

In all matters in which the rules of this union and those of the national union are in conflict, the rules of the national union shall apply. In all cases of doubt or dispute the

¹⁵⁰ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 326.

matter shall be decided by the NEC of the national union and such decision shall be subject to the right of appeal set out in rule 30 of the rules of the national union's. ¹⁵¹

With the national union now considering legal proceedings to try and stop the Nottingham Area rule amendments, the Nottingham Area NUM AEC agreed that authority be given to Hopkins and Sons to represent the Nottingham Area if this was to happen. The dispute over the rule amendments had the effect of bringing the simmering relationship between the Nottingham Area NUM working representatives and Henry Richardson, the pro-strike Nottingham NUM Area General Secretary, to a head. At the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 19 December 1984 it was noted that at a recent meeting of the NUM NEC Henry Richardson had voted in support of a proposal to take his own Area to court over the proposed rule amendments. ¹⁵² The meeting agreed by 12 votes to 2 that Henry Richardson should resign his position as Nottingham NUM Area General Secretary. In reply Henry Richardson refused to resign on the grounds that previous NEC decisions gave any NEC member the right to support national policy when it was in conflict with his own area. The outcome from this situation would eventually see Henry Richardson suspended from office in January 1985, with his dismissal being later in the year.

The proposed Nottingham Area rule amendments were considered at the December 1984 Nottingham Area NUM ACM. NUM Branch delegates had been mandated at December branch meetings throughout the Nottinghamshire coalfield. This followed a campaign to get 'rank and file' members to attend the meeting to enable the rule amendments to go through. (Fig. 5) Generally, attendance at Nottinghamshire NUM Branch monthly meetings had increased since the start of the strike but there was still the concern among the moderates in the Nottinghamshire NUM that the general 'rank and file' colliery worker was

¹⁵¹ Nottingham Area NUM, *Nottingham Area (NUM) Rules and Standing Orders*, 1983, p. 41.

¹⁵² Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 404.

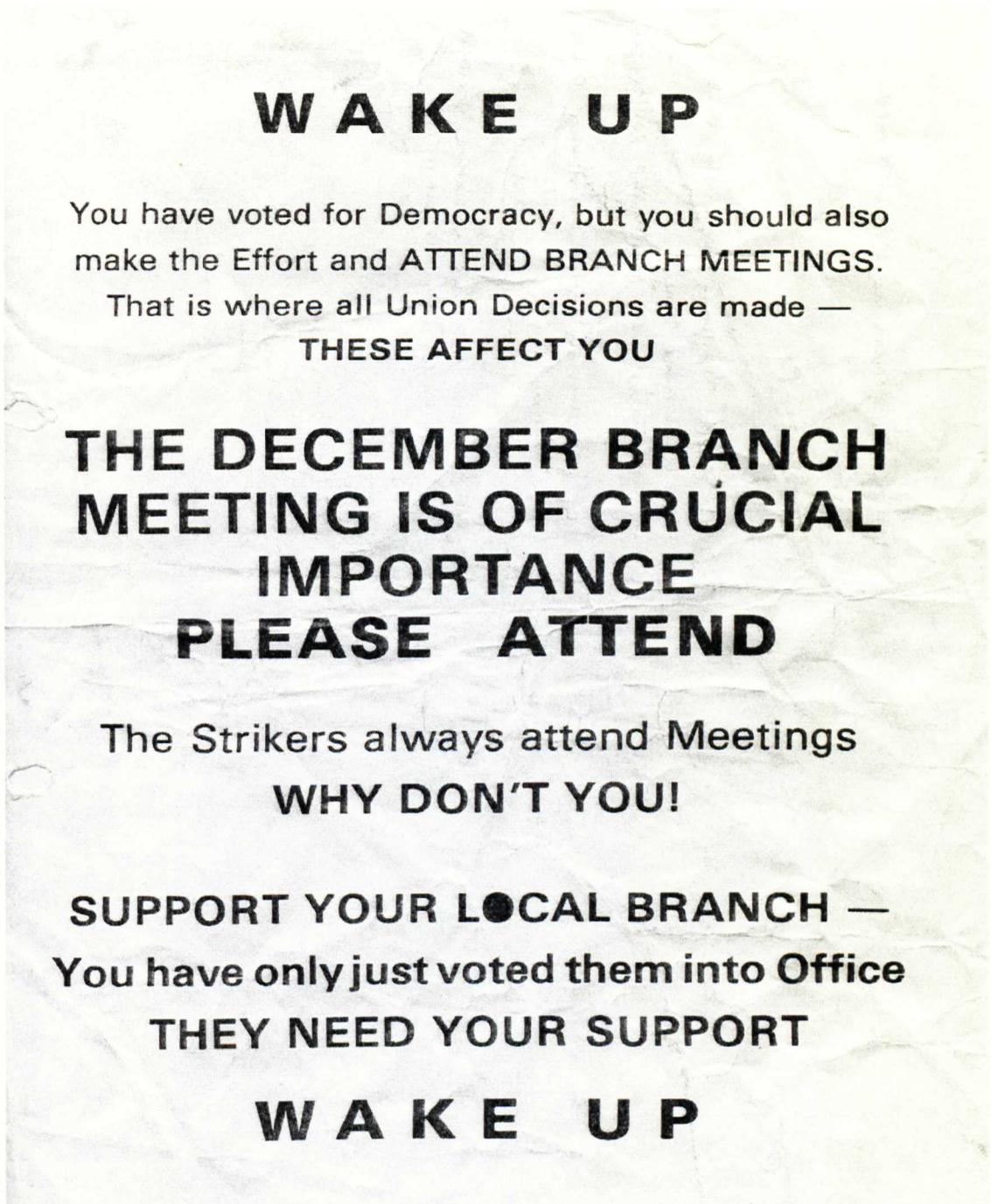
unenthusiastic about attending branch meetings, thus allowing an unrepresentative left-wing to take control of some branches. Prior to voting taking place on the Area rule amendments, the Nottingham Area (NUM) General Secretary read out a communication which had arrived from the national NUM that morning. The statement said that at a court hearing the previous day Mr Justice Warner had told the national NUM that 'they had an argument which should go to full trial.'¹⁵³ He also made it clear that if the Nottingham Area NUM amended their rules, they would have effectively disaffiliated themselves from the national NUM. The national union was then in a position to be able to suspend or expel the Nottingham Area from membership of the national union. The voting went ahead and Nottingham Area Rule 30 was deleted by a vote of 29 branches to 2. A card vote confirmed the deletion of Rule 30 by 540 to 28.¹⁵⁴

As the strike entered 1985 there was a distinct possibility of a split in the NUM in the same county where a split had occurred some forty eight years previously. Potential repercussions from the introduction of Disciplinary Rule 51 and the subsequent Nottingham Area rule amendments laid the foundations for the actual split in 1985. The NUM in Nottinghamshire had been 'physically split' from the first days of the strike, now it had become a 'constitutional split'. Had the Nottingham Area jumped or were they pushed? The Nottingham Area argued it was a defence pact and they had acted to protect their members from the new disciplinary Rule 51 and any subsequent purge that might happen. The national NUM was adamant that the Nottingham Area were in breach of the NUM rules and constitution as a number of the Area rule amendments were in conflict with the National and Model Rules of the NUM. On the eve of 1985, with the strike in its tenth month, the NUM had plunged ever deeper into its gravest ever crisis. The county in which it was born could possibly see its disintegration in its present form.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 409.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 410.

Fig. 4. Nottingham Area NUM Propaganda to attend the Rule amendment meeting in December 1984.



Source: D. Amos collection.

Despite this desperate situation the NUM reached the end of the strike as a 'united union' of sorts but the 'straw which broke the camel's back' was waiting just around the corner. It was the twin factors of the disciplining of Roy Lynk and David Prendergast, the two Nottingham Area NUM 'working miners' Officials, and the complete revision of the NUM Rules and Constitution which initiated the actual split in the NUM in 1985. Essentially it was the complete NUM rules revision which was the actual cause of the split, although it was the lack of a national ballot and the subsequent 'domino theory' strike strategy which were responsible for initiating the initial split in the NUM ranks at the start of the strike in early March 1984. Such was the intense hostility and deep rooted hatred caused by the strike that acts of vengeance were always likely to be the outcome following the end of the failed strike. In the post-strike period the working Nottinghamshire miners' and their elected representatives would be the key target for retribution in the NUM. They responded with a deepening of the 'defence ethos' which they had adopted since the early stages of the strike in March 1984. A ballot vote of the Nottinghamshire membership in May 1985 gave a mandate to leave the NUM in the event of the new Rules and Constitution being adopted. The 1985 NUM Annual Conference would be the final one of its kind, the Nottinghamshire miners break with the NUM occurring on 6 July 1985. Five months to the day from this saw the official recognition of the UDM on 6 December 1985 and from that time onwards miners' in the Nottinghamshire coalfield would be represented by two trade unions, as was the case from 1926 to 1937.

Chapter 3: UDI to UDM

1. Introduction

The events of 1985 were dominated by a constitutional crisis in the NUM, in Colin Griffin's words, the NUM being 'more divided and polarised than at any time in its forty-year history'.¹ The year commenced with the threatened expulsion of the Nottingham Area from the NUM and ended with the formation of the UDM in December 1985. The prominent issue throughout 1985 was dominated by the possibility of a 'Nottinghamshire breakaway' from the national NUM. The NUM started the 'Keep Notts National' campaign when it was proposed to expel the Nottingham Area from the national union in February 1985. The SDC to expel the Nottinghamshire rebels never took place. However, the campaign was given fresh initiative following the Nottingham Area's decision to disassociate from the national union following the 1985 NUM Annual Conference and Rules Revision Conference. As the Revolutionary Communist Party pointed out, the pleas to remain loyal to the national union in 1985 were entangled with the events that started in March 1984 when the flying pickets first entered the Nottinghamshire coalfield:

The only reason any miner would support the national union is if he could be persuaded to support the strike, that is what caused the division in the first place.²

As the year progressed, a war of attrition emerged between the Nottingham Area NUM and the national NUM. The Nottingham Area made constant reference to the events which initially caused the split in the NUM in March 1984. The national union made constant reference to any breakaway union

¹ C. P. Griffin, *The Leicestershire Miners Vol. 3*, p. 269.

² 'The Notts Scapegoats', *Revolutionary Communist Party Paper*, January 1985. D. Amos collection.

being in the lap of the NCB, the Tory Government and big business. Anti-Nottinghamshire literature constantly referred to any breakaway being a 'return to Spencerism'. The year ended with the official recognition for the UDM by the Certification Officer on 6 December 1985 following an amalgamation ballot of the former Nottingham Area NUM, the South Derbyshire Area NUM, and the Colliery Trade and Allied Workers Association (CTAWA) based in the north-east coalfield, in October 1985. Later a clerical section, the Colliery Staff and Supervisory Section (CSSS) was formed.

The amalgamation ballot to form the UDM needed a simple majority to carry the amalgamation through; one to amend the rules would require a two-thirds majority. The national union saw this move as a ploy by the Nottingham Area to form the breakaway more easily. However, when national Rule 43 (the rule for national strike action) was amended at the NUM SDC on 19 April 1984 the national union argued for an amendment from 55% needed for strike action to a simple majority (50%+1). The Nottingham Area NUM argued against a simple majority, suggesting 55% gave a more substantial mandate. In the autumn of 1985 the roles were reversed. Relations had become so strained during the 1984-85 strike that reprisals following the strike were more or less inevitable. Crick, writing in February 1985, suggested a climate of hatred and vengeance would continue from the strike, creating a climate which might see a breakaway union become reality:

Relations during the strike have become so bitter that afterwards there are bound to be attempts at reprisals. It is not difficult to see how Spencerism could return to the mining industry.³

³ Michael Crick, *Scargill and the Miners* (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 126.

Although the threatened expulsion of the Nottingham Area and the end of the strike caused their own internal problems in the NUM, it was the events surrounding the 1985 NUM Annual Conference which finally fractured the fragile unity which cemented the union together. Two crucial events brought the strained relationship between the Nottingham Area NUM and the national union to a head. The national NUM dismissed the two Nottingham NUM Area Officials, Roy Lynk and David Prendergast, for supporting the working Nottinghamshire NUM members during the strike. Both were subsequently employed by the Nottingham Area union following the break from the national union. The period prior to and following the 1985 NUM Annual Conference saw the dismissals of Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn, the two Nottingham Area NUM NEC representatives. Both were subsequently employed by the national union. All of the dismissals were not conducted amicably and as Colin Griffin stated, 'a more pragmatic leadership, could perhaps, have held the union together until the spirit of recrimination and vengeance had time to dissipate'.⁴ This mood was not forthcoming, Richardson and Chadburn arguing that they were right to support the NEC line on mandates, with Lynk and Prendergast equally arguing they were in the right in carrying out the 73% Nottingham Area (NUM) working mandate in the absence of a national ballot.

The second issue stems from the events of the 1985 NUM Annual and Rules Revision Conference. The new rules and constitution, introduced in July 1985, broke the federal base of the NUM which had existed since its formation in 1944. Many Areas jealously guarded their assets, and as Professor Chris Wrigley stated some Area Officials of the NUM acted in a similar fashion to the Ancient Briton chiefs that existed in Britain prior to the Roman invasion, each one guarding their little empire.⁵ The Nottingham Area had an additional asset to guard, a county pension fund. The Nottinghamshire Miners Pensions Scheme

⁴ C. P. Griffin, *The Leicestershire Miners Vol. 3*, p. 269.

⁵ Author in discussion with Prof. Chris Wrigley, University of Nottingham, 21 November 2009.

(NMPS) came into being in 1939 and was founded by George Spencer, the vilified Nottinghamshire miners' leader who led the 1926 breakaway union. In 2008 the fund had assets worth £148 million. For some the image of the NUM as the 'vanguard of the union movement', an all-powerful united force, was a myth. Keith Staley, Bentinck Colliery NUM Committee member and former Derbyshire miner, always thought of the NUM as a federation:

What was said repeatedly in the 1950s and 1960s, when Derbyshire miners were being transferred to Notts, was that the NUM never was, and never had been, a 'National Union of Mineworkers', only a letter-heading (...) all these years we have been a federation of unions. ⁶

Andrew Richards identified three main factors which explained the Nottingham Area's actions during the 1984-85 strike:

The failure to hold a national ballot, the consequent attempts to spread the strike through picketing (the domino effect), and the subsequent efforts to make dissident areas more accountable to the national union. ⁷

It was around the 'more accountability' issue that the events of 1985 were enacted. The 1985 post-strike constitutional crisis in the NUM cannot be divorced from the events of the 1984-85 strike. The worst case scenario in March 1984 was that the split in the union could lead to a 'breakaway union'. The events of 1985 saw the worst case scenario become a reality and the UDM was born.

⁶ 'The Myth of the NUM', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 19 July 1985, p. 4.

⁷ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 194.

2. Expelling the Nottinghamshire Rebels? The Nottinghamshire Coalfield: January and February 1985

The start of 1985 saw the NUM in what Roy Ottey described as being in 'another deep constitutional crisis'.⁸ The Nottinghamshire miners were at the centre of that controversy. The initial constitutional crisis Ottey referred to was caused by the way the strike had commenced under Rule 41 and the 'domino strategy'. Now a constitutional split in the national union had occurred and for some, history was about to repeat itself with the situation being likened to the Spencer Union split from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) in 1926. Following the decision of the Nottingham Area NUM to delete Rule 30 from its Area rule book two differing opinions developed. The national NUM insisted that the Nottingham Area had refused to adopt the Model Rules for Areas (including the Disciplinary Rule 51) and thus were in breach of the Union's Rules and Constitution. The NUM Model Rules stated that in an area of conflict between Area and National rules, the National Rules shall apply. With the Nottingham Area deleting this rule it had effectively broken away from the national union. The Nottingham Area argued that they had acted in self-defence to protect their members from being disciplined under the new Disciplinary Rule 51. They argued that there never was or had been a national strike, only a series of Area strikes, and therefore only a national ballot of all NUM members could have overturned the Nottinghamshire Area ballot working mandate from 15 – 16 March 1984.

The NEC of the NUM met on 10 January 1985 to consider the situation in Nottinghamshire. The national union had taken legal action in December 1984 to seek an injunction to stop the Nottingham Area NUM from proceeding with the Area rule amendments. Although the Judge refused to grant the injunction he had pointed out that provision existed within the NUM rules for dealing with

⁸ Ottey, *The Strike: an insider's view*, p. 143.

an Area that refused to adopt the Model rules of the Union. This was National Rule 40, titled 'Exclusion or Suspension of an Area or Branch'. Rule 40 (part b) stated:

If an Area or a Branch in an Area shall: refuse to adopt the model rules resolved upon by Conference as being applicable to such subordinate division (Area or Branch) (...) such Division (i) may be excluded from the Union by a resolution of Conference and upon such resolution being passed all the members of such division shall automatically cease to be members of the union.⁹

The NUM NEC meeting of 10 January 1985 decided that they would continue to pursue the legal action against the Nottingham Area rule amendments of December 1984 but were of the opinion that the current situation was that the Nottingham Area NUM, its Area Council (AC), Area Executive Committee (AEC), and NUM Officials, by their actions taken at the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 20 December 1984, had refused to adopt the Model Rules for Areas, and therefore were in breach of the NUM Rules and Constitution. The NEC agreed that the following resolution be recommended to a NUM Special Conference (SDC):

That the NUM Nottinghamshire Area is excluded from the Union with effect from 1 February 1985 in accordance with the provisions of Rule 40 of the Union and that the NEC be only permitted to rescind this decision on receipt of completely satisfactory undertakings prior to its implementation.¹⁰

⁹ National Union of Mineworkers, *NUM Rules, Model Rules and Standing Orders*, 1978, pp. 20-21. D. Amos collection.

¹⁰ National Union of Mineworkers, *Circular: Nottingham Area of the NUM*, dated 10 January 1985, Sheffield. D. Amos collection.

The SDC to expel the Nottingham Area was planned to take place on 30 January 1985. Commenting on the possible expulsion of the Nottinghamshire miners from the NUM, Roy Lynk, Nottingham NUM Area Official, stated:

It is not our wish to be expelled from the (National) union (...) what does seem odd to us in that we in Nottinghamshire appear to have been sentenced to death, and then told that the trial will be in two weeks. Nottinghamshire have never sought a split from the National Union, it is the National Union that wants a split from us and it is my own personal opinion that the real issue behind the strike never was pit closures. It was engineered purely for political reasons.¹¹

Counteracting Roy Lynk's views, Henry Richardson, pro-strike Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary, suggested it was the Nottingham Area's working miners' representatives who wanted to split from the NUM:

Make no mistake, they want to breakaway. Already they are producing literature and leaflets urging people to stay with the Area and not the National union. They say they only changed the rules because of the new Disciplinary Rule (...) but that rule change was never put there to expel Notts members en masse (...) the change of the Notts Area rules was a back door way of breaking away.¹²

What Henry Richardson did not state was that the national union was also producing leaflets at the same time urging miners to stay loyal to the national

¹¹ 'Seconds out for Scargill v Lynk', *Notts Free Press*, 18 January 1985, p. 1.

¹² 'Witch Hunt in Notts', *Labour Weekly*, 18 January 1985, p. 1.

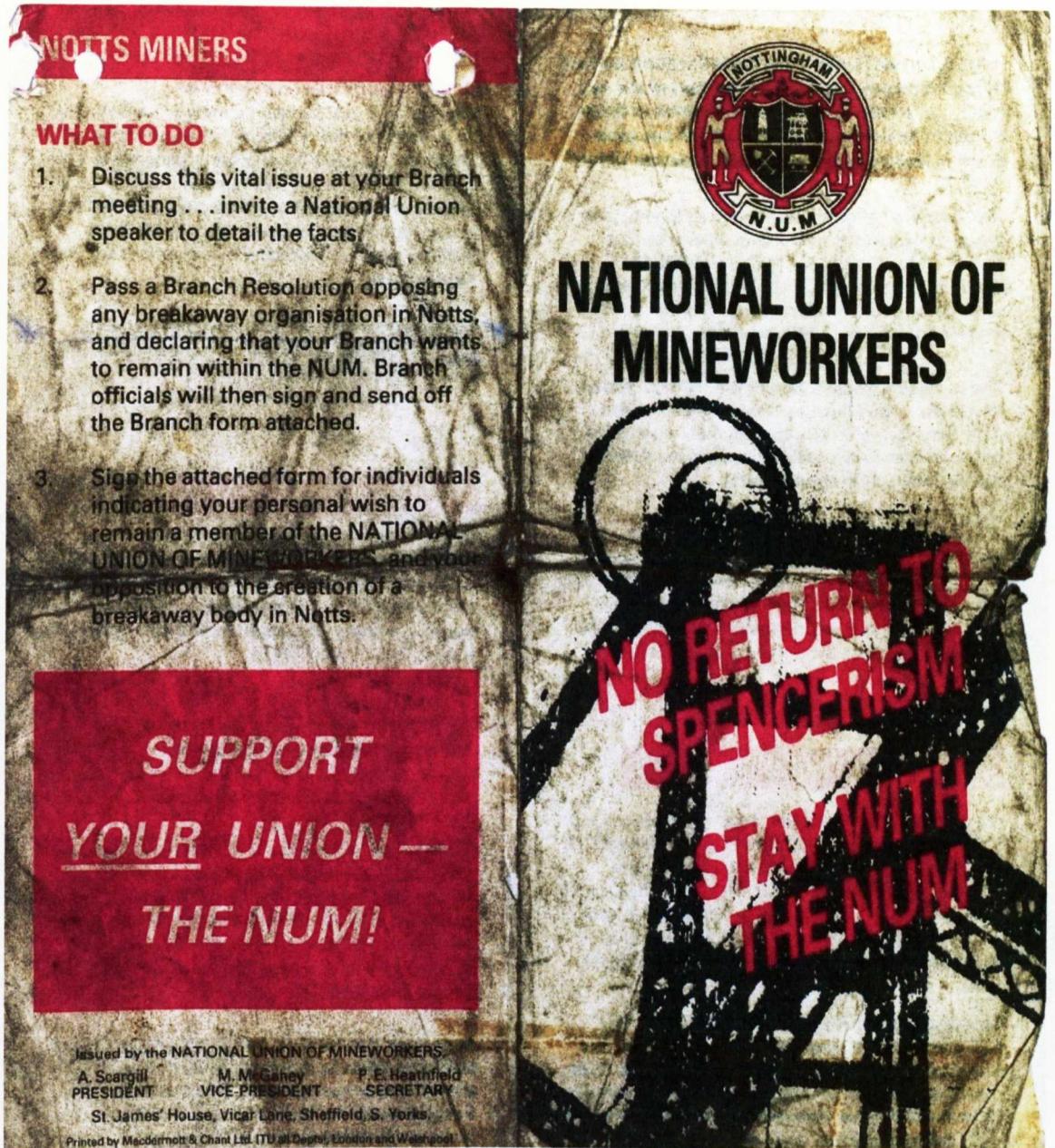
NUM. It was one of these leaflets, along with a letter suggesting that Nottinghamshire NUM individual Branches could apply en bloc to be admitted to the new Nottingham Division of the NUM (in the event of the Nottingham Area's expulsion at the SDC on 30 January) that would bring the simmering relationship between Richardson and the working Nottingham Area NUM representatives to a head. Initially, Henry Richardson was suspended from duty and was eventually dismissed from his position as a Nottingham Area Official later in 1985. This followed a lengthy and chaotic series of events, involving various legal actions, which were not concluded until the decision of a High Court Hearing on 2 April 1985.

At the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 28 January 1985 the contents of a leaflet that was circulating the Nottinghamshire coalfield was discussed. It was reported that the leaflet was being distributed by Henry Richardson and his agents. The leaflet was entitled 'No return to Spencerism: Stay with the NUM' (Fig. 6) The nature of the complaint was that the leaflet, in the names of the NUM National Officials, was canvassing for membership of the NUM at a time when the Nottingham Area was still a constituent association of the national union. It also contained Henry Richardson's home address to which completed forms should be sent; all correspondence was normally sent to the NUM Area Offices. Leading Counsel Opinion had been sought on the contents of the leaflet and the advice expressed the view that the leaflet was a libellous document.¹³ It was proposed that legal action against the contents of the document would be taken in the names of Roy Lynk, Nottingham Area NUM Acting Secretary and David Prendergast, Nottingham Area NUM Official. Henry Richardson suggested he had not been aware of the contents of the leaflet and he undertook to notify national level that some items in the leaflet could be libellous.¹⁴

¹³ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes, 1985, p. 23.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Fig. 5: No return to Spencerism leaflet: January 1985.



Source: Annesley NUM Branch correspondence 1985, part of D. Amos collection.

The contents of the leaflet suggested Spencerism had returned to the Nottinghamshire coalfield:

The Nottingham (Area) Council's decision to delete the National Union's Model Rules from the Area rule book effectively creates a breakaway organisation. The spectre of Spencerism has reared its ugly head in a direct throw-back to those dark days over half a century ago when trade unionism in the Notts coalfield was hijacked by management and the mine-owners.¹⁵

Ironically the same leaflet suggested the NUM would ensure that the 'local pension rights' of all our members would not be affected by the breakaway, despite the fact it was George Spencer who created the Notts Miners Pension Scheme (NMPS) in 1939.¹⁶ NMPS ensures that Nottinghamshire miners get an additional pension to that of the nationwide Mineworkers Pension Scheme (MPS). The nationwide pension scheme commenced for industrial workers in the industry initially in 1961, later becoming an earnings related pension scheme in April 1975.

The author was directly involved in the exposure of the Spencerism leaflet at a Nottingham Area NUM trade union school at Stoke Rochford Hall in January 1985. The leaflets were left by Roger Windsor, Chief Executive of the NUM, following a lecture at the school. Roger Windsor was the centre of media attention when he was exposed as the NUM's representative who met Colonel Gaddafi of Libya in October 1984 in an attempt to raise funds for the strike. Britain had broken off diplomatic relations with Libya after Yvonne Fletcher, a WPC, was reportedly killed by gunfire from the Libyan People's Bureau in London in April 1984. Following Windsor's aborted lecture at the trade union school, the author picked up one of the leaflets and brought it to the attention

¹⁵ NUM, *Leaflet: No return to Spencerism: Stay with the NUM*, Sheffield, January 1985.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

of the school's liaison Officers, Colin Clarke and John Allsop.¹⁷ Both men were working representatives on the Nottingham Area NUM AEC and Colin Clarke was a leading light in the NaWMC (see Chapter 2: Part 4). Copies of the 'Spencerism leaflet' were forwarded to the Nottingham Area NUM Offices. A letter was then sent to all Nottinghamshire NUM Branches, enclosing a copy of the leaflet.¹⁸ It was suggested that the decision to expel the Nottingham Area had already been made, and the SDC on 30 January 1985 was merely being held to ratify the decision.

The working Nottingham Area NUM Area Officials issued their own leaflet and refuted in a leaflet of their own some of the allegations made in the NUM's Spencerism leaflet. The suggestion that the Nottingham Area had proposed the Disciplinary Rule was challenged. The Nottingham leaflet suggested that the Spencerism leaflet was a 'clumsy attempt at a confidence trick' by inviting Nottingham Area members to remain in the NUM:

What a nerve! You are the NUM. One thing is for certain, we don't think that they even begin to understand you. Can they seriously believe that you will desert your democratically elected Officials to join those who attacked your homes, assaulted your mates and called you scab? What kind of men do they think you are?¹⁹

In response to this 'Notts breakaway' the pro-strike NUM loyalists in the Nottinghamshire coalfield started a campaign called 'Keep Notts National'. Its committee was made up largely of striking ex NUM Nottinghamshire Branch

¹⁷ The Lecture was aborted following advice from Nottingham Area NUM HQ following the finding of the Spencerism leaflet. However, the two NUM Liaison Officers put the matter to a vote of the all the students before the terminating of the lecture.

¹⁸ Letter from Roy Lynk (Acting Area Secretary Nottingham (NUM) to all Nottinghamshire NUM Branches, 23 January 1985. D. Amos collection.

¹⁹ Nottingham Area (NUM), '*What kind of men do they think you are? Rule 51: Now the Truth*', January 1985. D. Amos collection.

Officials, some whom had been ousted in the June 1984 branch elections. Various allegations were made about supporters of the 'Keep Notts National' campaign being victimised by the NCB for distributing Keep Notts National literature. It was also suggested that pressure was being exerted to prevent working miners from hearing the case for the national union. Nonetheless, after ten months of the strike, the two opposing sides were as entrenched as ever and there was little chance of any reconciliation.

The 30 January 1985 arrived and the threatened SDC to expel the Nottingham Area of the NUM was postponed. A newsletter from the 'Keep Notts National' campaign stated that the SDC had 'only been deferred'.²⁰ The initiative changed to the issue of trying to get a settled agreement on the strike. In the week leading up to the SDC, moves were made to try and get the NUM and the NCB back to the negotiating table to resume negotiations to end the strike. The TUC were heavily involved in setting up these negotiations which were planned for the week commencing 28 January 1985. In view of the developments the NUM NEC had agreed that the SDC be postponed. No other date was ever set for the expulsion SDC. Griffin believed the reason that the expulsion Conference never went ahead was because feedback from the county indicated that a considerable majority of Nottinghamshire mineworkers would remain loyal to the Area Union and the NUM would be left with a 'small band of loyalists'.²¹ Griffin suggested that instead a policy was made that the 'Scargill faction' in the county should work within the Area to try and gain control over a period of years.²² Eric Eaton, former Newstead striker, confirmed this had been the strategy, although he did admit to it failing.²³ Another theory is that the events that eventually resulted in the 'return to work with no agreement' overtook events.

²⁰ 'Keep Notts National', *Newsletter No.1*, 15 February 1985. D. Amos collection.

²¹ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 10.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Selstonia Living Heritage Project, 'The Miners' Strike 25 years on', *Radio Salistone*, Broadcast on 1 April 2009.

3. At the Edge of the Precipice: The Nottinghamshire coalfield: March to May 1985.

The strike ended following an NUM SDC held at Congress House, London on 3 March 1985. Controversially it ended with no agreement on the pit closure issue between the NCB and the NUM. During February 1985 the TUC had intervened to try and get an agreed settlement for the dispute but all efforts were to no avail and failed. Following the breakdown of talks, the Northumberland Area of the NUM put in a request to the national NUM for a SDC to consider a return to work without a settlement. The SDC was held on Sunday 3 March 1985 to consider a return to work without agreement. Eventually a South Wales NUM resolution to end the strike without agreement was adopted by the delegates by a vote of 98 to 91. No Nottinghamshire NUM delegates attended the SDC, the Nottingham Area NUM AC having sought legal advice as whether to attend the SDC on 3 March 1985. This legal advice questioned the legitimacy of all national conferences held since 10 August. This was on the basis that NUM Branch elections, due in May and June 1984, had been suspended by the national union and therefore the majority of Delegates had not been elected by the membership, as required under the NUM Rules and Constitution.²⁴ The Nottingham Area NUM AC accepted the legal advice and voted by 24 Branches to 7 not to participate in the return to work SDC on 3 March 1985.²⁵

In the Nottinghamshire coalfield the return to work by the strikers was mainly a low key affair.²⁶ In other coalfields miners followed NUM Branch Banners and Brass bands back into the pit yards. 1,200 cases of intimidation had been reported to the police in Nottinghamshire during the dispute.²⁷ These included

²⁴ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁶ See Stanley, *Nottingham Miners do strike*, pp. 108-111; Symcox (ed.), *The Diary of John Lowe*, pp. 171-172; Richards, *Miners on Strike*, pp. 157-172.

²⁷ 'The Price of Peace', *Notts Free Press*, 8 March 1985, p. 8.

criminal damage and acts of violence, in 960 cases working miners had been the victims. In the Ashfield region NCB figures suggested just over 2% of the workmen were still on strike at five of the region's collieries as at 1 March 1985.

²⁸ Figures for five Ashfield collieries were broken down as follows:

Table 2 : Ashfield working and striking miners, 1 March 1985.

	Working	Striking
Bentinck	1,186	16
Annesley	897	45
Newstead	753	49
Sutton	703	16
Silverhill	1,093	20
Totals	4,632	146

Only a handful of strikers saw the dispute to the end at the collieries due to close, Moorgreen Colliery and Pye Hill Complex. Final dates for the finish of production had been agreed at a Colliery Review Meeting in February 1985; both collieries were scheduled to finish production in late July and early August 1985 respectively. The phasing out of the two collieries had begun in 1983 and by February 1985 Moorgreen's manpower had reduced from 1,050 to 410 with Pye Hill's manpower falling from 1,070 to 500. ²⁹ Around 140 miners would remain at each colliery for salvage work.

Attitudes towards the ending of strike were mixed in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Bentinck striking miner Paul Beasley suggested the strike had not been a defeat:

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 'Pits to close', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 22 February 1985, p. 3.

It has not been a defeat. We're right behind the national leadership. I had made up my mind that whatever the Conference decision on Sunday I would support them (...) but I would have preferred to carry on.³⁰

Working Bentinck NUM Branch Official Neil Greatrex suggested even though the strike had ended it would not mean an end to the troubles in the coal industry:

I think most working miners are pleased to see this strike eventually come to an end. Unfortunately it does not mean an end to the troubles. There will no doubt be some people looking for scapegoats to blame for the failure of the strike and there will be lots of shouts for Nottinghamshire to be expelled from the NUM. This is the worst thing that could happen.³¹

Neil Greatrex's prediction of the troubles ahead would become a grim reality as 1985 progressed. In the meantime the ending of the strike threw up some other pressing issues that had to be dealt with in the Nottingham Area of the NUM. The first of these issues was the lifting of the overtime ban which had been in place since 31 October 1983. Nottingham Area NUM members had adhered to the ban since that time because it was deemed to have been implemented constitutionally. Despite this there had been rumblings to lift the overtime ban since the autumn of 1984. A Calverton appeal to the Nottingham NUM AC on 26 November 1984 asked for a fresh mandate on the ban as twelve months had passed since the membership gave that mandate.³² Prior to this, various communications had been received at national NUM level that certain

³⁰ 'The Price of Peace', *Notts Free Press*, 8 March 1985, p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 374.

Nottinghamshire NUM Branches had planned to breach the national overtime ban. Henry Richardson dismissed these claims stating that the Nottingham Area (NUM) AEC had upheld the national overtime ban whenever it had been questioned, only giving dispensation for overtime working in the interests of safety.³³ Nottinghamshire NUM Branches considered the position of the overtime ban during February 1985 and the decision to lift the ban was made at the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 25 February 1985. Branches voted by 20 to 11 to lift the ban, this decision being endorsed by a 'card vote' of 360 votes to 206.³⁴ A substantive motion to lift the ban as from the day of the ACM was carried by 21 Branches to 10. Evidence from the surface overtime book at Moorgreen Colliery suggests that overtime working recommenced on the weekend of 9 - 10 March 1985 following the end of the strike. (Fig. 7 p. 136) Nationally the overtime ban was lifted following the decision of a NUM SDC in Sheffield on 2 April 1985.³⁵

A second issue which came about with the ending of the strike was the plight of NUM members that had been dismissed during the strike. Part of the resolution which ended the strike on 3 March 1985 was aimed at getting the dismissed miners their jobs back. The resolution called on the NUM NEC to negotiate with the NCB on a national basis for an amnesty for those men dismissed during the dispute.³⁶ Nationally over 600 NUM striking members were dismissed by the NCB. At the May 1985 Nottingham Area NUM ACM it was reported that the Nottingham Area was representing six cases of unfair dismissal in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area and fifteen cases in the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area.³⁷ In conjunction with the 3 March 1985 resolution to reinstate dismissed NUM members, a resolution was passed to set up a Hardship and Victimisation

³³ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 358.

³⁴ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 55.

³⁵ NUM, *NUM Annual Report 1985*, p. 34.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁷ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 194.

Trust Fund, in order for the national NUM to fulfil its obligations to the dismissed miners under National Rule 42.³⁸ The NUM NEC considered this resolution at a meeting on 7 March 1985 and it was decided that a special levy of 50p per week should be paid by all members of the NUM to the Miners' Solidarity Fund.³⁹ A national ballot would be held to ratify the NEC decision. The Nottingham Area NUM AEC considered the case of the 50p levy for sacked miners, along with the subsequent ballot planned to implement the levy, at a Special Area Executive meeting on 18 March 1985. After considering the matter the AEC unanimously agreed that the Nottingham Area's legal advice that all conferences since 10 August 1984 were illegal should be adhered to. Thus the Nottingham Area NUM did not participate in the national-ballot, or the 50p levy for sacked miners.⁴⁰ Similar decisions were made in the South Derbyshire and Leicestershire Areas of the NUM, both who had a majority of NUM members who worked through the 1984-85 strike. In the event the national ballot turned down implementing the 50p levy for dismissed miners. Following this, the national NUM embarked on a campaign for NUM members to voluntarily donate to the Miners' Solidarity Fund.

The other main issue concerned the wage claim which had been outstanding since October 1983. The last wage increase for miners dated from the autumn of 1982, by the end of the strike it was almost two and half years since NUM members had received any wage rise. At a Nottingham Area NUM Special AEC meeting on 7 March 1985 the apparent lack of any negotiations on wages and terms of conditions at national NUM level was considered.⁴¹ With the strike now ended and the Nottinghamshire coalfield almost back to normal working, it was agreed that Nottingham NUM Area Officials, Roy Lynk and David Prendergast, should meet the NCB Area Board and have informal discussions regarding the outstanding wage claim. An appeal on the wages issue from the Pye Hill No.2

³⁸ NUM, *Report of Special Delegates Conference*, 3 March 1985, p. 105.

³⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Branch, was referred to all Nottinghamshire NUM Branches for a decision at the ACM on 25 March 1985. The appeal was worded as follows:

We, the Pye Hill No.2 Branch, appeal to Council that due to the fact that since November 1982 the national union has failed to negotiate any wage settlement with the Board, therefore, we ask that Council make a direct approach on behalf of the membership of the Nottingham Area.⁴²

The Pye Hill appeal was turned down by the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 22 April 1985 by 19 votes to 12.⁴³ Eventually a 10.65% pay offer over two years was accepted by the national NUM in April 1985. Ironically, following the major upheavals of the dispute, the NUM accepted the same wage increase that was on offer prior to the dispute, dating back to October 1983. Commenting on the wage settlement, Roy Lynk suggested it could be construed as a drop in pay:

The offer is worth less now. We have negotiated a drop in pay. It is a pity they did not accept the 5.2% offer when it was first offered in 1983. Hundreds of men who have left the industry have lost out⁴⁴

Furthermore, Roy Lynk stated that the Nottingham Area NUM would not be seeking any bonus payment for those who had worked through the strike. Commenting on the extra pay allegations that had been made he stated:

We did not work through for the satisfaction of the Government or the NCB. We were working and fighting for a principle and we would be insulted if

⁴² Ibid., p. 117.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 148.

⁴⁴ 'Pit Pay, no victory says NUM leader', *Notts Free Press*, 19 April 1985, p. 4.

someone asked us to accept more payment for working through the dispute.⁴⁵

At the end of the strike a 'moderate pact' of the AECs from the Nottinghamshire Area NUM, the South Derbyshire Area NUM and the Leicestershire Area NUM, met on 14 March 1985 to discuss issues arising from the dispute. The main points were:

1. That the dispute since 1984 had not been of a 'national character'.
2. The actions of the national union since March 1984 have divided the union. A national ballot under Rule 43 would have alleviated the problem of the miners being divided.
3. Despite the end of the strike the outstanding problems within the coal-industry have not been solved.
4. That the NEC be contacted with an aim of lifting the overtime ban. Failing a satisfactory response from the national union the joint areas will use their own autonomy and allow their membership to work overtime.
5. If any attack is made, from whatever source, on any of the three areas, it will be collectively opposed.
6. The joint areas make it explicitly clear that their aims and objectives at all times are committed to the NUM and reiterate they are totally opposed to the NCB policy of pit-closures and rundown of manpower.
7. The three joint areas should make it clear, that by their attitudes, they are not in the hand of the NCB or the Government. The joint areas were

⁴⁵ Ibid.

keen to help resolve the current problems facing the industry at the same time uniting all sides of industry in a democratic manner.

How an attack on the moderates might occur was not entirely clear at the time. Nevertheless, by the time the Nottingham Area NUM AC met at a SCM on 10 April 1985 things became a little clearer. Correspondence from national NUM level had been received giving details of a Special Rules Revision Conference that would take place following the 1985 NUM Annual Conference. The entire rules of the NUM were to be changed and the federal constitution of the union abolished.

4. New Rules for Democracy?

In January 1985 when the National NUM SDC was proposed, to consider expelling the Nottingham Area from the NUM, Section 8 of the NUM document gave details of an amendment to rule which aimed to 'establish a single national organisation to embrace all workers within the British coalmining industry'.⁴⁶ In considering the Nottingham Area's refusal to adopt the disciplinary Rule 51 into its Area Rules, the NUM SDC of 10 January 1985 resolved that:

In order to avoid a similar situation arising again, the national office is required, in consultation with the union's legal advisors, to prepare an amendment to rule that will give effect to the intentions of the inaugural Conference of the NUM in 1944 and establish a single national organisation to embrace all workers within the British Coalmining Industry.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Initially the Nottingham Area NUM AC decided to call a Conference of Branch Officials and Committee Members (BOCM) in order that the “fullest possible discussion and understanding of the proposed rules revision could take place”.⁴⁸ It was further agreed that a meeting of the moderate pact of the Nottingham Area NUM, the South Derbyshire Area NUM, the Leicestershire Area NUM and COSA, the clerical section of the NUM, should take place to discuss the implications from the rules and constitution change. The Nottingham Area NUM Conference of BOCM took place at the Nottingham Area HQ on 18 April 1985. The Conference had been convened to offer as much legal advice and information as possible regarding the proposed new NUM National Rules and Constitution.⁴⁹ In attendance were Mr Igor Judge QC, Mr Peter Keenan (Barrister) and Paul Todd from the Nottingham Area NUM’s solicitors, Hopkins and Sons to give legal advice. Igor Judge dealt with the main points in the proposed changes which were listed as being Membership, Areas, Discipline, Dissolution, Control, Model Rules and Strike Action. However, in his opening remarks Mr Judge stressed that the rules revision represented fundamental changes in the relationship between the national union and the areas, which if carried out, would have a great effect on the autonomy and control of area unions.⁵⁰ This would result in greater control being placed in the hands of the national union; in his opinion the federal structure of the NUM would be finished. Mr Judge also stressed the importance of ensuring that the Nottingham Area NUM membership were made fully aware of the implications of the proposed rules revision and their effect on the future of the Nottingham Area if they were passed at the Special Rules Revision Conference in July. In his summing up Igor Judge placed an emphasis on several key points of the proposed rules revision if they were implemented. He stated that the new rules

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 133.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 140.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

would be detrimental to the Nottinghamshire Area in a number of ways.⁵¹ In his opinion they would:

- Greatly increase the power of the national NUM against the Area unions.
- Confer disciplinary power of the widest kind upon the National Disciplinary Committee (NDC)
- Enable the NUM NEC to call a strike, which could be declared official, without a ballot and without the likelihood of court interference of the type recently seen
- Enable the general funds of the Area unions to be used by the national NUM.
- Enable the current President of the NUM to exercise the increased powers conferred upon him without the need for re-election under the new (trade-union) legislation.

In conclusion, he stated that it was the two main issues of control by the members, along with the autonomy and independence of the constituent unions, which remained as the most important aspects of the proposed NUM rules revision. Mr Judge also suggested that as the recent dispute loomed large in the minds of all members of the union their reaction to it could affect their stance regarding the proposed rule changes. Commenting on the new rule proposals, Peter Heathfield (NUM General Secretary), stated they were designed to:

⁵¹ The Proposed Changes in the rules of the NUM, Legal Advice, Hopkins & Sons Solicitors, April 1985. D. Amos collection.

Strengthen democracy in what we proudly claim is one of the most democratic trade unions in the world.⁵²

For many working Nottinghamshire miners, the Heathfield statement had a hollow ring about it following the events of the last twelve months. For them it was a case of strengthening an oligarchy. A 'breakaway union' in the Nottinghamshire coalfield now seemed more likely than ever with the proposed rules revision debacle now taking centre stage. A Conference of Nottingham Area NUM BOCM decided that a ballot vote of the Nottinghamshire NUM membership would be necessary in order to ascertain what action the Nottingham Area should take; in the event of the new rules coming in.⁵³ The decision was endorsed by the AEC. The ballot was arranged to take place for the week commencing Monday 13 May 1985, with a recommendation that the membership vote against the proposed national rule changes. The two opposing camps now commenced their respective campaigns in the run up to the ballot. Commenting on the forthcoming ballot Roy Lynk put the case for opposing the rule changes:

In the forthcoming ballot we are asking the Nottinghamshire membership to indicate through the ballot box that they are prepared to give the Nottingham AEC the power to resist these rule changes (...) if the rule changes are implemented (...) Mr Scargill will have complete and utter control over the lives, thoughts and deeds of every member (...) there is no such place in a democratic society for any one man to have such power.

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⁵² NUM, 'New Rules for Democracy', *The Miner: Special Edition*, May 1985, p. 1.

⁵³ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 140.

⁵⁴ 'Pit leaders in Stay Loyal plea', *Notts Free Press*, 3 May 1985, p. 1.

Speaking in support of the proposed rule changes, Peter Heathfield, NUM General Secretary, suggested that a hysterical campaign against the new rules had been whipped up by enemies of the NUM and by the media.⁵⁵ He stated that the new rules would not affect the powers of the Areas whatsoever and that AECs would have the same control over their members, to hold area ballots and control area pension funds and union funds. The aim was to bring the old rules up to date, with others being made necessary by the Thatcher Government's trade union laws and legal actions taken up during the strike.

Author David Howell suggested that even though some sectors of the NUM were receptive to breakaway initiatives, the rewriting of the NUM Rule Book gave these breakaway initiatives more credibility.⁵⁶ In his opinion certain proposals in the rule changes contained 'elements that were bound to reawaken the passions and divisions from the strike'.⁵⁷ Not least of these was the issue of industrial action, Rule 26c, under the title of Industrial Action, which recalled the controversial strategy which had underpinned the 1984-85 strike from the outset:

The NEC shall have the power to call industrial action by any group of members whether in one, or part of one, or more than one area and such action will be declared to be official.⁵⁸

For critics of the proposed new rules the spectre of a strike without a ballot was here once again. In its defence the national NUM stated that Rule 26c needed introducing because of the legal action taken against it during the strike and subsequent sequestration of its funds. Trade union lawyers had advised the NUM that had Rule 26c been in the existing rule book then it would have been

⁵⁵ NUM, 'New Rules for Democracy', *The Miner*, May 1985, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Howell, *The Politics of the NUM*, p. 181.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ NUM, *Preliminary Agenda of the Special Rules Conference 1985*, p. 18.

protected and its funds would not have been sequestered. Winding up the national union's defence, the NUM National President placed an emphasis on the rules being democratically proposed by the democratically elected bodies within the NUM. He suggested that NUM votes, whether by branch or ballot, always showed a high turnout.

However, trade union democracy depended on how one viewed it. NUM pit head ballots historically had high participation rates but attendances at branch meetings were a different case. In some cases a militant minority could overtake the running of a NUM Branch as most rank and file members were unenthusiastic about regularly attending branch meetings. Hallsworth found this to be the case in the Yorkshire NUM Area in the early 1980s during the Laurence Scott Electronics dispute.⁵⁹ Fryer suggested 'remoteness from home and place of work, timing of the meetings, arcane procedure and archaic language' as reasons for poor attendances at union branch meetings.⁶⁰ Fryer also identified the problems that were caused by the mass pit closures of the 1960s which had caused the 'bussing in' of large sections of colliery workforces at the remaining collieries:

Even the mining industry where branch and lodge organisation might have been closely integrated with the pit and the village, the extension of bussing miners to work from areas where pits had closed meant they (Branch meetings) fell increasingly to an activist minority.⁶¹

By the early 1980s in many coalfields, miners were travelling to work from regions where the pits had shut in the Robens Era of the 1960s. The NCB South

⁵⁹ D. Hallsworth, 'When strikes were strikes', www.spiked-online.com, 2002, retrieved 20 September 2011.

⁶⁰ B. Fryer, 'Trade Unionism in Crisis', in Huw Beynon (ed.), *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike* (London, 1985), p. 75.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Nottinghamshire Area was an example of this, with many miners travelling daily from areas of the Derbyshire coalfield around Heanor, Ripley and Alfreton, which had lost their pits in the 1964-70 era. This was also common in other areas. Down and Warrington's study of the Somerset coalfield looked at this mobility of labour at a time when the Somerset coalfield had contracted to its last two working collieries in the late 1960s:

There are several instances of ranks of new houses being erected to house workmen of a new mine, the village around Kilmersdon Colliery being an example. For the older pits, however, the men seem to have integrated into existing communities without obvious rows of miners' cottages. These men would often own homes and, when their local pit closed, be reluctant to move. Instead they would be content to travel further to work (...) even today there are men who travel ten miles from Pensford to Kilmersdon for work.⁶²

It was a fine balancing act when decisions made by an activist few at a union meeting could affect thousands of union members. There was also the issue of everyone not being able to attend union meetings; a small section of workforce always had to be available for weekend work for repair and maintenance. Their work was vital in keeping the collieries operating from Monday to Friday.

In the meantime another major issue was thrown into the arena during the run up to the rules revision conference. Nottingham NUM Area Officials Roy Lynk and David Prendergast were summoned to appear before the NUM hierarchy to answer allegations concerning their conduct during the strike. They were

⁶² C.G. Downs and A.J. Warrington, *The History of the Somerset Coalfield* (Newton Abbott, 1969), p. 38.

charged with committing acts of gross misconduct relative to their contracts of employment with the national union and disobeying the lawful instructions of the NUM NEC. Lynk and Prendergast were summoned to appear before the NUM NEC on 9 May 1985 with the final decision and appeal going to the 1985 NUM Annual Conference in July. The Nottingham Area NUM AEC considered the allegations against Roy Lynk and David Prendergast at a SEC Meeting on 29 April 1985. After considering the evidence the Nottingham Area NUM gave out a statement in defence of their area leadership:

We will not stand for our leadership to be treated in this way. All they are guilty of is obeying the democratic wishes of the Nottinghamshire NUM membership. We shall be asking the membership to support our stance. (...) These trumped up charges are an attempt to silence our leadership, if that fails, to sack them (...) We stand for democracy. Arthur Scargill had better understand that we will not allow the decisions of our ballot box to be swept aside.⁶³

The disciplining of Lynk and Prendergast was likened to appearing at a kangaroo court. It was reported that threatening letters signed by the NUM General Secretary, Peter Heathfield, had been pushed through the letter boxes of the two Nottingham Area NUM Officials during the night.⁶⁴ At the NUM NEC meeting on 9 May it was recommended that Lynk and Prendergast be dismissed by the NUM for gross misconduct. Commenting on his potential dismissal from the NUM Lynk stated:

⁶³ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 174-175.

⁶⁴ 'Future at Stake', *The Nottinghamshire Miner No.3: Part 2*, May 1985, p. 1. D. Amos collection.

There will be no appeal (...) I have carried out my commitment to the Nottinghamshire miners (...) and there is no way I am going to grovel to anyone. This is justice gone crazy, but we intend to continue to fight within the national union rather than go it alone (...) I will continue to serve and do my job as a Nottinghamshire miners' leader. Their mandate is the only authority I will accept.

65

Following the proposed dismissals of Lynk and Prendergast the Nottingham Area NUM AEC met to discuss the situation on 16 May 1985. At the meeting it was proposed that in the event of the termination of their contracts, contracts of employment should be offered to them with the Nottingham Area Union. The new contracts were to be on similar terms to the ones that currently existed with the National NUM.

In the meantime the Area ballot on the proposed NUM rule change went ahead on 14 May 1985. On the ballot paper the following question was put:

Do you support your Nottingham AEC in opposing the new national rule changes, even if this means being expelled from the NUM, or leaving the NUM?

At a SEC meeting of the Nottingham Area NUM AEC on 16 May 1985 the result of the area ballot was announced:

Those voting yes	15,157 (73% of those voting)
Those voting no	5,631 (27% of those voting) ⁶⁶

⁶⁵ 'I won't grovel: sacked NUM Chief', *Notts Free Press*, 17 May 1985, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 181.

The Nottingham Area now had an official mandate to oppose the new NUM rules. Commenting on the May 1985 area ballot result George Liddle, Nottingham Area NUM Vice-President stated:

The Area Executive has tapped right into the grassroots feelings of the membership. We were confident they would support us in the ballot and they responded magnificently. ⁶⁷

Likewise, Roy Lynk, commenting on the ballot result and on his potential forthcoming dismissal, said:

The (Nottinghamshire) membership has shown overwhelmingly that they will not be dictated to by an unrepresentative clique in Sheffield who wants to impose sinister rule changes on them. Nor are they prepared to put up with these people trying to get rid of the Nottinghamshire leadership. ⁶⁸

Another Area Ballot took place during May 1985 to replace Henry Richardson, the dismissed Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary. Thirteen candidates put up for the position of Nottingham Area Official and the eventual winner was Neil Greatrex from the Bentinck NUM Branch. Neil Greatrex had acted as the unofficial voice of the working Nottinghamshire miners in the March to July 1984 period, frequently criticising both Arthur Scargill and the way the strike was being conducted. Within days of Greatrex being elected as a Nottingham Area NUM Official it was reported that a disciplinary call would be arriving for his dismissal. As with Lynk and Prendergast this move had been pre-empted and

⁶⁷ 'Thanks a Million', *The Nottinghamshire Miner No.3: Part 3*, June 1985, p. 1.

D. Amos collection.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

plans were made for the newly elected Area Official to have his terms and conditions of employment underwritten by the Nottingham Area Union. Greatrex later suggested that he never was paid by the NUM at any time because Arthur Scargill would not accept his election as a Nottingham Area Official.⁶⁹

Ironically, prior to the strike Neil Greatrex had been one of Arthur Scargill's biggest supporters in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Things changed with the 1984-85 strike when Neil Greatrex eventually made a decision to move from pro-strike to anti-strike. (see Chapter 2: Part 2, p. 75-76) Commenting on his one-time support for the NUM President he said:

The men at the pit said you will rue the day that you supported Scargill. In defence of Scargill I said there is a NEC to keep him in check (...) however, all of the NEC was threatened in 1984 because their terms of conditions were with the national union. When the strike started they stood the chance of losing their houses, cars and pensions (...) Roy Ottey [Power Group NEC member and a JP] said he would not have nothing to do with an illegal strike and it cost him his £30,000 pension. ⁷⁰

Roy Ottey resigned from the NUM NEC in November 1984 following the NUM acting in contempt of the law in respect of the sequestration of its funds. Neil Greatrex took office as a Nottingham Area NUM Official in June 1985 following the Area ballot on 22 May 1985. He retired as UDM Nottingham Section President in 2008.

⁶⁹ Interview with Neil Greatrex, Mansfield, 20 March 2008.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

5. “As we left the silence was deafening”: The Nottingham Area NUM and the 1985 NUM Annual Conference.

At the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 24 June 1985 Ray Chadburn, the NUM Area President, gave his annual report. A significant part of his comments emphasised events from the strike; other comments suggested a rocky road ahead for the coal industry. Despite the internal divisions that had plagued the Nottingham NUM since the start of the strike he called for reconciliation on the eve of the 1985 NUM Annual Conference:

(...) The Union cannot be totally exonerated for their handling of the dispute, because of the highly emotive issues that were at stake, mistakes were made, and as a consequence the union became bitterly divided. It is essential therefore, that we stop looking over our shoulders and look to the future and create a climate of reconciliation whereby we can all go forward together and bring about a united national union (...) unless we have a united national union, many of our aspirations will fall by the wayside.⁷¹

Despite all the bitterness and divisions caused by the strike both working and striking NUM representatives hoped for some sort of reconciliation following the end of the strike. Newly elected Nottingham Area Official, Neil Greatrex also used conciliatory language:

Much remains to be done to heal the mistrust and bitterness in this coalfield. I see it as part of my task to help achieve true unity and comradeship again.⁷²

⁷¹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 247.

⁷² 'Neil will work for true unity', *The Nottinghamshire Miner No. 4*, June 1985, p. 2. D. Amos collection.

On the eve of the Conference NUM National President Arthur Scargill made a plea for unity. He said "We want every member and every area to stay solid and remain in the NUM. This is the only way we can combat the NCB's pit closure programme and improve wages and conditions".⁷³ A *Morning Star* article reported that all signs seemed to point to a majority of Delegates being in a conciliatory mood in an effort to re-unite the areas of the NUM and its membership. The mood of the Conference, the dismissal of Roy Lynk and David Prendergast and the Rules Revision later in the week would shatter these illusions and lead to a split in the the union.

Despite his conciliatory tones on the eve of the Conference, when addressing the Conference the National President castigated those whom he considered had let the union down during the strike. In his opinion these included the TUC, the Electricians and Power unions, the Labour Party and the ISTC steel union. However the severest criticism was laid at the door of the Nottinghamshire miners who, in his opinion, had not followed the 'democratic decision under Rule 41' and had not respected picket lines. This, he said, had provided a life line to the Tory Government.⁷⁴ Despite not getting a seconder, to condemn the NUM NEC for its work over the previous twelve months, other resolutions from the Nottingham Area NUM achieved some success, with sickness leave and National Concessionary Fuel Agreements being composited with other resolutions and one of unsociable hours pay being carried. However, it was when Resolution 2 on Victimisation was debated that all the bitterness and anger stored up from the strike exploded. Resolution 2 had been submitted by the left-wing Kent Area NUM on the issue of reinstatement for NUM members dismissed during the course of the strike:

⁷³ 'Scargill calls for unity as NUM Delegates gather', *Morning Star*, 1 July 1985, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 289.

Conference agrees that if, as a result of the 1984-85 strike, any victimised member not in jail at the time who has not been reinstated by the NCB by the last day of September 1985, then a Special Conference will be held during the first half of October 1985 in order to decide upon what action will be taken to bring about their reinstatement.⁷⁵

The issue at stake was the fate of 622 NUM members who had been dismissed during the strike. The Kent Area went to the rostrum demanding national industrial action on the issue and it was when the Nottingham Area Delegation voted against the motion that all the bitterness exploded. The Kent Resolution was carried with only Nottingham Area Delegates voting against. Following the Conference John Allsop, one of the Notts Area Delegates and NUM Branch Delegate at Sutton Colliery said:

We were in Sheffield, representing thousands of men who had been subjected to unprecedented violence and intimidation (...) the hatred shown reminded us what Scargillism meant. Not once during the strike did he condemn the thugs who had attacked our members.⁷⁶

Hilary Cave, National NUM Education Officer, suggested some members of the Nottingham Delegation were equally hostile towards the striking miners' fraternity at Conference, singling out Neil Greatrex for particular attention.⁷⁷ The hostility on both sides was perhaps understandable as former allies Neil Greatrex and Arthur Scargill were now bitter enemies.

⁷⁵ NUM, *Decisions of the 1985 Annual Conference*, Sheffield, p. 4.

⁷⁶ 'Hatred: don't ever forget', *The Nottinghamshire Miner No.5*, July 1985, p. 1. D. Amos collection.

⁷⁷ Interview with Hilary Cave and Barry Johnson, Chesterfield, 8 March 2008.

Day three of the Conference saw the Nottingham Area NUM appeal under Rule 30, with regard to accepting the Area's nominations to the Parliamentary A Group. This was for the nomination of Don Concannon and Frank Haynes, the two NUM sponsored Nottinghamshire Labour MPs. The issue became embroiled in the dispute over the Nottingham Areas refusal to accept the NUM Model rules following the deletion of Rule 30 from its Area Rule Book in December 1984. Conference voted against accepting the two Nottinghamshire Labour nominations by 91 votes to 23; it was stated that the NUM NEC could not sanction any Parliamentary candidates they had no control over. Day three also saw the Barnsley Area Women's Support Group invited into Conference to make a £9,500 donation to the Victimised Miners Appeal. They were given a standing ovation by the rest of the Delegates with a call to the Nottingham Delegation to 'stand up you scabby bastards'.⁷⁸

Despite the animosity, and at times intense bitterness and hostility, of the 1985 Annual Conference the Nottingham NUM Delegation were still there after three difficult days. However, it would be the Rules Revision on Day 4 which would be the 'straw which broke the camel's back'. For the Nottingham Delegation the bone of contention was the way the rules revision was conducted. George Rees from South Wales NUM chaired the Conference Arrangements Committee. As he was going through the logistics of the amendments, it was stated that the South Derbyshire Area NUM amendment would be dealt with first. The South Derbyshire Amendment challenged the NUM NEC amendment by opposing the new rules en-bloc, leaving the old NUM rules in place. The NUM NEC proposal on the Rules revision was worded: 'Delete all existing rules, model rules for areas and standing orders and insert the revised rules, model rules and standing orders'.⁷⁹ The new NUM rules were then to be renumbered into 32 new rules as against 51 in the old rule book. When George Rees was questioned about

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 292.

⁷⁹ NUM, *Preliminary Agenda of the Special Rules Conference*, Sheffield, 1985, p. 5.

the other amendments he replied that there could not be any amendments until you have got rules; as the South Derbyshire amendment was addressing the NEC recommendation and that had to go first. If the South Derbyshire amendment fell, then the NEC recommendation would stand on its own, and would delete all existing rules and adopt the new model rules en bloc.⁸⁰ At past NUM Conferences amendments to the rules were taken individually, debated and then voted on. In 1985 the new rules were voted in en bloc, with amendments and debate following. Neil Greatrex, one of the Nottingham Area delegates to Conference, suggested the voting on the rules en bloc was a flagrant abuse of custom and practice:

Normally someone moves the resolution or change of rule, you then go through each individual rule amendment, debate them and then vote on them. Scargill got to the rostrum and said something like "That's the new rule book, we're not spending time going through them, I want you to adopt them in their entirety". I stood up and accused him of being a cheat⁸¹

When voting eventually took place the South Derbyshire amendment fell on a card vote by 54 to 170. The NEC recommendation to vote the new rules in en bloc was carried by 174 votes to 58. The Nottingham delegation knew it was more or less inevitable that they would have to leave the Conference because of their ballot mandate to oppose the new rules. However, Roy Lynk asked for a ten minute recess for the Nottingham Delegation to consider their position. During the recess the Nottingham Delegation reached a decision that they had no option but to leave the Conference. Recalling the situation Roy Lynk

⁸⁰ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 292.

⁸¹ Interview with Neil Greatrex, Mansfield, 20 March 2008.

suggested that a 'democracy trap' had been set with the voting taking place first and the debate afterwards:

We walked out of the Conference because if we had stayed we were agreeing to the new rules. I got up (...) and said there was no way we could stay and go through supposed democracy in this fashion. In effect a trap had been set in pushing the rules through in this way. The aim was to get people into voting first and speaking against afterwards. Scargill could then claim you had taken part in the vote.⁸²

The situation Lynk described was confirmed by Jim Downen, former Clipstone NUM Branch Delegate and striker, who suggested that because they had participated in the initial vote, the Nottingham Area NUM had accepted the new rules:

By virtue of taking part in the debate on the new rules, even though they (the Nottingham Area) voted against them, they have accepted the new rule book.⁸³

On day four of the NUM Conference it went into Private Session to discuss the NEC recommendation to dismiss Roy Lynk and David Prendergast from their employment with the NUM. The recommendations were to dismiss Lynk for gross misconduct and to reprimand Prendergast. Both had to appear on the rostrum to defend the allegations made against them. Lynk recalled defending his position at the 1985 NUM Annual Conference:

⁸² Interview with Roy Lynk, Sutton-in-Ashfield, 28 December 2005.

⁸³ *Morning Star*, 9 July 1985, p. 9.

(...) I had to go before the NUM NEC on a disciplinary hearing. There were thousands of people outside the meeting and it was terrifying (...) At the Conference I had to make a speech as to why I should not be dismissed. I told the Conference that the Nottingham Area had voted 73% to continue working until a National Ballot under Rule 43 of the NUM rules. I informed them under no circumstances would I betray the Nottinghamshire miners and challenged them that given the same situation which one of them would go against a 73% mandate. Anyway they voted to sack me.⁸⁴

The voting was 75 to 18 in Lynk's case for him to be dismissed, and 81 to 13 to dismiss David Prendergast. Both were dismissed on the grounds of gross misconduct and insubordination. (see Appendix 10)

Could the split have been avoided at the 1985 NUM Conference? It was the first Conference a Nottinghamshire Delegation had attended since the aborted July 1984 SDC which introduced the controversial Disciplinary Rule 51. At that time the Nottingham Delegation were made up of elected Delegates from the union year 1983-84, as under the union rules. A majority of these were pro-strike Branch Officials who had recently been deposed at the recent June 1984 Branch Elections. However, the Delegation to the 1985 NUM Conference was made up of working miners, delegates who had replaced the pro-strike Nottinghamshire NUM Branch Officials in the elections of May - June 1984. It was thought therefore that they would receive a hostile reception. Keith Gildart suggested the uncompromising position of the NUM NEC meant any possible reconciliation between the national NUM and the Nottingham Area was unlikely but the rules revision conference made it impossible:

⁸⁴ Interview with Roy Lynk, Sutton-in-Ashfield, 28 December 2005.

There was a complete intransigence of the officials in their articulation of a policy for preventing a split. The rules revision conference of 1985 was crucial in that it codified the aversion of the union to the situation in Notts and lacked any sense of conciliation.⁸⁵

Alan Griffin, in his assessment of the situation, cited not just the rules issue but the hostility shown towards the Nottingham NUM delegation by striking delegates and the bellicose Presidential address by Arthur Scargill as being factors for making the split inevitable:

The national rule changes of July 1985 created a totally new situation. The Nottingham Delegation went to that Conference with a mandate, obtained in a ballot with a 73% majority, to vote against, and to refuse to operate, the proposed new rules (...) their hostile reception at Conference killed any such hopes [of reconciliation], and the belligerent address by a President, in which he castigated those who had opposed the strike.⁸⁶

The argument then centred on whether the Nottingham Area had jumped or had been pushed. The atmosphere at the Conference had at times been hostile, interspersed with cries of scab when a working miner went to the rostrum, or in Roy Lynk's case being greeted with hissing. However, as the Nottingham Delegation walked out of the Conference on 4th July 1985 it must have been obvious to everyone there that the NUM in its present form was about to come to an end after just over forty years. The Nottingham Area NUM report on the 1985 NUM Annual Conference concluded with the following words:

⁸⁵ Gildart, *North Wales Miners: A Fragile Unity*, p. 193.

⁸⁶ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 10.

For all the sneers and jeers we had had all week, when we left the silence was deafening.⁸⁷

Events proceeded rapidly following the Nottingham Area walkout. On Saturday 6 July 1985 a Conference of Nottingham Area BOCM met at the Area HQ to discuss the situation. Members of the Delegation to the National Conference gave individual reports on the proceedings on the main events. These included the dismissals of Lynk and Prendergast, the Parliamentary A List debacle and the National Rules Revision. After receiving the reports the meeting congratulated the Delegation on its behaviour at the NUM Conference, especially bearing in mind the 'intense hatred, verbal harassment and intimidation that had been levelled against them by Delegates from other Areas'.⁸⁸ The meeting then agreed by 228 votes to 20 to recommend to the Nottingham Area Council (AC) the following resolution:

This Conference confirms the mandate given by the membership in Nottinghamshire, and disassociates the Notts Area from the national union with immediate effect.

⁸⁹

As one of the 20 who voted against breaking away from the national union, Stanley suggested he was subject to intimidation at the meeting following the vote to break from the national union.⁹⁰ The Nottingham AC met immediately following the Conference of BOCM to consider the recommendation and unanimously agreed to accept it. Following sixteen turbulent months the Nottinghamshire miners had left the NUM after just over forty years. Ironically, the NUM had been formed in Nottingham at a Special Conference in 1944; the same county now saw its demise in its present form.

⁸⁷ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes, 1985, p. 293.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Stanley, *Nottingham Miners do Strike*, p. 116.

6. Towards the UDM: The Nottinghamshire coalfield : July to December 1985

Following the split with the national NUM the Nottingham Area union issued details to all Nottinghamshire miners stating that their employment with the NCB and membership benefits with the union were unchanged. (Fig. 8) In the immediate aftermath of the split the Nottingham Area union was faced with two main issues; firstly, a legal challenge was made against the break from the national union and, secondly, the precarious position of Ray Chadburn, the Nottingham Area President.

News of the breakaway caused little surprise in the Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Pat Orton, Branch President at Annesley, commented that 'most of our members had felt the sooner we got away the better'. Likewise Bentinck Branch Secretary, Colin Bottomore, stated that 'nobody at Bentinck had reacted strongly against the news'.⁹¹ However, Bob Durrant, Sutton Branch Secretary, reacted more cautiously to the split in the union but thought the Nottingham Area had little choice in leaving the NUM following the events of the 1985 NUM annual conference:

Many of our lads don't like the idea of coming out of the national union, some have been in it for forty years, but we've little choice. The rule changes gave Scargill more dictatorial powers and on top of that were the Lynk and Prendergast sackings; other Officials feel it might happen to them.⁹²

⁹¹ 'Diary of a Breakaway', *Notts Free Press*, 12 July 1985, p. 1.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Fig. 7. Correspondence relative to the Nottingham Area leaving the NUM – July 1985.

TO ALL NOTTINGHAM AREA MEMBERS

**NOW THE NOTTINGHAM AREA
HAS LEFT THE NATIONAL UNION
THIS IS YOUR POSITION—**

YOU REMAIN A FULL FINANCIAL MEMBER

OF THE NOTTINGHAM AREA	—	—	UNCHANGED
N.C.B. PENSION ENTITLEMENT	—	—	UNCHANGED
NOTTS. AREA PENSION ENTITLEMENT	—	—	UNCHANGED
FUEL ENTITLEMENT	—	—	UNCHANGED
COMMON LAW CLAIMS	—	—	UNCHANGED
D.H.S.S. REPRESENTATION	—	—	UNCHANGED
BENEVOLENT CLAIMS	—	—	UNCHANGED
UNION CONTRIBUTIONS	—	—	UNCHANGED

YOU ARE STILL AN EMPLOYEE OF THE NATIONAL COAL BOARD

NEW WAGE CLAIMS TO BE PURSUED

**THE NOTTINGHAM AREA IS
ABLE TO FUNCTION FINANCIALLY
ADMINISTRATIVELY AND DEMOCRATICALLY**

Your Position - Unchanged

FROM THE NOTTINGHAM AREA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Source: D. Amos collection.

A legal challenge was made against the Nottingham 'breakaway' in the names of Henry Richardson, Ray Chadburn and twenty-nine other Notts ex strikers still loyal to the national union. Their argument was that the Nottingham Area was still tied to the national NUM and was linked by 17 clauses within the Nottingham Area rules. The rules made it clear that the Nottingham Area was still a constituent association of the NUM through issues such as the Area's financial contributions, representation on the NUM NEC and even the union's title. What the NUM was asking was that the Nottingham Area should be restrained from doing anything until they had held a ballot on the rule changes: a ballot which would require a two-thirds majority to authorise the area rule amendments. The Judge, Mr Justice Stuart-Smith, ruled that the Nottingham Area should ballot its members on 'the break from the national union' and that for the time being the name of the Nottingham union could not be changed. (The Nottingham Area had initially proposed that the union change its name to the Nottingham Union of Mineworkers as an interim measure.) He also accepted an undertaking from the Nottingham Union that they would follow the correct legal procedure on the changes needed in their own rule book arising from the union split, however; no time limit was set.

It emerged that a ballot would probably be held in September 1985 following the summer holiday period. In a further High Court hearing on 7 August the Judge, Mr Justice Tudor Price, likened the Nottingham Area's break from the NUM to that of a marriage break up. He stated:

Of course, for a union to secede from a federation requires changes of rule in due course. As in the case of a partner leaving a marriage, there are all kinds of loose ends to be tied up before the break is completed.⁹³

⁹³ *Transcript of the High Court Hearing Richardson & Others v Lynk & Others*, 7 Aug 1985, p. 15. D. Amos collection.

In the original hearing on 10 July 1985 Justice Stuart Smith had declined to grant this part of the injunction on the Nottingham Area Officials. The undertaking was not to amend the Nottingham Area rules except in accordance with its own rule 24 or in accordance with the provisions of the 1964 Trade Unions Amalgamation Act. Under the 1964 Act a ballot for amalgamation with other unions required a simple majority as against a two-thirds majority needed for the rule changes. Rumours started emerging that an amalgamation ballot would probably be the preferred option for the Nottingham Area. Following the end of the strike informal arrangements had been made by the 'working pact' of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, South Derbyshire and the Colliery Trade and Allied Workers Association. The NUM saw this as a political manoeuvre by the Nottingham Area to avoid the two-third majority required under a rules amendment ballot. Commenting on the forthcoming ballot the national NUM suggested that an amalgamation ballot would run contrary to the custom and practice of the NUM:

Whilst such a ballot may be held to be legal before a court, it would violate the letter and the spirit of the Nottingham Area rules and NUM national rules. The national union have made it clear no matter what type of ballot is held, all Nottinghamshire miners will remain full members of the NUM.⁹⁴

The great irony here was that in the eyes of many Nottinghamshire NUM members it had been a flouting of the spirit of the NUM rules that had caused the whole catalogue of events in the first place. Taylor referred to this as a 'circumvention of the rules'.⁹⁵ The author touched on this in a letter to *The Chad* newspaper in July 1985 following the split:

⁹⁴ 'No vote on rules?', *The Notts Collier*, August 1985, p. 2. D. Amos collection.

⁹⁵ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p

The roots of the present actions were sown back in March 1984 when certain elements decided to try and get Nottinghamshire out by using force (...) (...) The people who brought this intimidation and violence are now the same people who now want your support. Why have they suddenly turned about face from calling us blind to wanting us with them? ⁹⁶

Despite the forthcoming ballot, the Nottingham Area union leaders still maintained that the ballot would make no difference to the decision to split from the national NUM. They maintained that the 73% ballot vote taken in May 1985 gave a mandate for them not to accept the new NUM rule book; all they had done was leave the national framework of a federation. However, the true significance of the forthcoming ballot would be whether a new moderate federation of miners would emerge in Britain's coalmining industry. This was not so much a return to Spencerism, as the national NUM were constantly arguing, but probably more akin to the situation prior to the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1889. Between 1869 and 1874 two separate mining organisations existed, the Miners' National Union (MNU) formed in 1863, and the Amalgamated Association of Miners (AAM) formed in 1869. The AAM was a more militant organisation than the MNU, being based on a more centralised, national structure; it was founded by Thomas Halliday. In contrast the MNU was a national union but based on a federal structure with more power being based in the separate districts. The MNU, like the Nottinghamshire miners, believed in the use of arbitration and conciliation to solve disputes. In contrast the AAM had few arbitration and conciliation procedures within its set up. The AAM collapsed as a result of a long dispute in the South Wales coalfield and was taken over by the MNU in 1874. Ironically,

⁹⁶ David Amos, Letter: Writing on the Wall, *Mansfield Chad*, July 1985, p. 6. D. Amos collection.

the AAM was supported by the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire miners during the dispute and donations were sent to the South Wales miners during the eighteen month lockout. The end of the following decade, in 1889, saw the birth of the MFGB, the forerunner to the NUM.

In the aftermath of the Nottingham miners 1985 split, the precarious position of Ray Chadburn came to a head following the decision to secede from the national union. Chadburn, like Richardson, had followed the NEC line through most of the dispute, through to the time that the Nottingham Area seceded from the national union. A complaint had been made against him in April 1985 in relation to his non observance of the Nottingham Area's working mandate during the strike.⁹⁷ The AEC upheld the complaint and severely reprimanded him for his lack of commitment to the Nottingham Area during the past year. He was asked to prepare a statement confirming his future commitment to the Nottingham Area union. The ambiguous statement was made as part of his presidential report at the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 24 June 1985:

(...) Unless we have a united national union, many of our aspirations will fall by the wayside. Therefore, as President, I commit myself to the Nottingham Area of the NUM, to do everything that is reasonable to bring about the fulfilment of the [unions] objectives, but it will be impossible to realise them without your support and commitment of each and every one of you.⁹⁸

Unfortunately, any chance for a climate of reconciliation was lost following the events of the 1985 NUM National Conference. It was in these circumstances that Chadburn's position as a Nottingham Area Official was determined.

⁹⁷ Complaint by P. Jones and R. Naylor against Ray Chadburn, Nottingham Area NUM AEC, 17 April 1985, Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985 ,p. 138.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 247-248.

Ray Chadburn was not present on 6 July 1985 at the meeting of BOCM and subsequent ACM, on 6 July 1985, the meetings which decided to break from the national union. However, he chaired the meeting of the Nottingham AEC at its first meeting following the break, on 8 July 1985. At that meeting he explained he had been appointed President of the Nottingham Area of the NUM and was not prepared to be President of a breakaway organisation. Prior to leaving the meeting he stated that he would carry out his duties as an Area Official until legal opinion said he must do otherwise.⁹⁹ Following Chadburn's departure the Nottingham Area sought legal advice on his position now that the Area had seceded from the national union. The legal advice suggested that Mr Chadburn was well aware of the federal structure of the NUM and that the Nottingham Area union was an independent trade union with its own independent existence.¹⁰⁰ By his words and actions at the start of the AEC meeting it was suggested that he had in effect resigned his position as President and repudiated his contract of employment. Therefore, the Nottingham AEC was entitled to exclude him from the Area Offices pending an appeal. A series of events followed where Chadburn was locked out from the Nottingham Area HQ and publicly clashed with Roy Lynk, scenes which were acted out in front of the TV cameras. Lynk told Chadburn that he had either resigned or dismissed himself by his words and actions at the AEC meeting on 8 July. Chadburn did not accept this and stated that he had not resigned or been removed and therefore was still President of the Nottingham Area NUM. He commented, "If I finish up on the dole or eating grass, I am not prepared to lead a breakaway union".¹⁰¹ The national union took Chadburn's case for reinstatement to the High Court Hearings as part of the legal challenge to the 'breakaway'. A Nottingham Area SAEC meeting on 29 July 1985 considered a complaint against Ray Chadburn from Sid Walker of Clipstone NUM Branch. The meeting was adjourned until 12 August 1985 at

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 257.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ 'Nottinghamshire NUM sacks Chadburn as Area President', *Financial Times*, 10 July 1985.

Chadburn's request. In the meantime, Judge Tudor Price at the High Court Hearing on 5-7 August 1985 did not reappoint Chadburn to his position as a Nottingham Area Official. After giving a brief history of Chadburn's actions during the strike and its aftermath, Judge Tudor Price questioned the appropriateness of reinstating him as Nottingham Area Official:

I think it is wholly inappropriate to seek to force on a body of men as one of their officials someone whom they have lost confidence.¹⁰²

Both Walker and Chadburn attended the complaint hearing at the Nottingham AEC meeting on 12 August 1985. Walker, along with a witness, put his case against Chadburn and he replied to the allegations. Some of the various allegations had been cited by Judge Tudor Price in his summing up on 7 August. These included abstaining from the threatened expulsion of the Nottingham Area from the NUM in January 1985 and voting in April 1985 for acceptance of the new NUM rules, including the Disciplinary Rule 51, knowing a majority of Nottinghamshire miners would be against them.¹⁰³ The AEC found the complaint against Chadburn proven and that his dismissal was justified in that he had been 'guilty of gross misconduct in his performance of duties as President, Agent and Nottingham Area Official'.¹⁰⁴ The AEC also reiterated the decision that Chadburn had 'resigned from his position as Nottingham Area President, Agent and Area Official or repudiated his obligations in respect thereof on 8 July 1985'.¹⁰⁵ Following his dismissal Chadburn still maintained that the Nottingham Area could not dismiss him from his post. From his new office at the NUM's national HQ at Sheffield he said:

¹⁰² Transcription of Proceedings, High Court Hearing, 7 August 1985, p. 13. D. Amos collection.

¹⁰³ Notes from High Court Hearing 7 August 1985, Richardson & Others v Lynk & Others, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 302.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 304.

As far as I am concerned I am still the President of the Nottingham Area of the NUM (...) I am no part of their organisation, I am employed by the Nottingham Area of the NUM. I cannot resign from their organisation because I don't belong to it. They cannot dismiss me from the NUM. ¹⁰⁶

Amidst accusations of using an 'inquiry agent' and bullying tactics to inform Chadburn of his dismissal, Roy Lynk stated:

We were honour bound to tell Mr Chadburn what the result of the meeting was in writing. We were also honour bound to tell the press in a democratic society what the result was. We wanted to make sure that Mr Chadburn did not learn of the decision by reading it in the press first. We gave him the opportunity on the day of the meeting to stay while we reached a decision and tell him there and then. We had to give him the letter; we knew where he was so we were not hunting him. ¹⁰⁷

One of the first issues to be dealt with by the newly formed Nottinghamshire Area of the NCB was to establish an agreement on joint negotiating machinery between themselves and the newly split Nottingham Area Union. ¹⁰⁸ Under the 1946 Coal Industry Nationalisation Act, Section 46, the NCB was required to negotiate a conciliation scheme with organisations that represented 'substantial numbers of persons employed in the coal-industry'. At the Nottingham union's

¹⁰⁶ 'My anger and my anguish: Chadburn,' *The Chad*, 22 August 1985, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ The NCB Nottinghamshire Area was formed out of the old NCB South Nottinghamshire Area and NCB North Nottinghamshire Area. In 1986 the NCB's title was changed to the British Coal Corporation.

AEC meeting on 8 July it had been agreed that the union should approach NCB Senior Management with regard to setting up recognition and negotiating machinery.¹⁰⁹ In their reply to the Nottingham Area union the NCB suggested that the setting up of joint machinery for matters specified in Section 46 (1) of the 1946 Coal Industry Nationalisation Act was needed as a matter of some urgency.¹¹⁰ The same letter also stated that the terms and conditions of Nottingham miners were not adversely affected by their recent decision to secede from the national union.

Following the split in the NUM the NCB set up separate collective bargaining schemes, firstly with the Nottingham Area Union and later with the Union of Democratic Mineworkers after it came into existence on 6 December 1985. The NUM objected to the move and referred the matter to the National Reference Tribunal (NRT). The NUM's case was that they were the union specified in the 1946 Act to represent industrial workers in the coal industry. On 12 November 1985 the NRT ruled that although the NUM was indeed the union specified in the Act, it was not legally enforceable. The soon to be in existence UDM rendered the agreement and scheme obsolete. At the High Court Hearing in June 1986 Mr Justice Scott ruled that the Conciliation agreement was not legally enforceable and that British Coal had a duty under the 1946 Act to recognise both the NUM and the UDM. In February 1986 British Coal contacted the relevant mining unions with details of the proposed new conciliation scheme. This was titled 'Consultation on New Conciliation and Consultative Machinery for Mineworkers'. The existing agreements were due to be terminated on 31 May 1986. The new agreement, encompassing the UDM, would be based on a majority / minority scheme and would cover mineworkers / workplaces at which the respective union held a majority. As Taylor stated this situation put the

¹⁰⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1985, p. 258.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Bert Wheeler (NCB Nottinghamshire Director) to Roy Lynk, 8 July 1985. D. Amos collection.

NUM into a quandary; the new agreement required the NUM to recognise the UDM's lawful right in the coal industry:

British Coal's majority/minority consultative proposals required the NUM to recognise the UDM's legitimate presence in the industry, participate alongside the UDM in negotiations with British Coal and effectively abandon its members in UDM areas.

The NUM never accepted the principle of the majority / minority principle, to do so would mean abandoning the Nottinghamshire strike loyalists. A NUM SDC in early 1987 made the decision that the NUM would not appear on any stage where the UDM was present. This situation still prevailed at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the commencement of the strike in March 2009 when a Nottingham NUM loyalist stated he would not appear in an article in a Sunday newspaper with the author because of NUM policy of not appearing on the same platform as the UDM.¹¹¹ NUM policy regarding the majority /minority negotiating machinery and its attitude towards the Nottinghamshire breakaway could be described as unequivocal:

In its attempts to weaken the NUM and support the breakaway, the Coal Board, or British Coal, unilaterally scrapped the conciliation and consultation agreements which had formed the bedrock of the industry since nationalisation in 1947. British Coal has continued to give every encouragement to the breakaway in Notts, and has conducted a war of attrition against the NUM.¹¹²

¹¹¹ 'Reunited...at last: The striker and the scab – The Miners' Strike 25 years on', *Independent on Sunday*, 8 March 2009, pp. 30-31.

¹¹² NUM, *A Century of Struggle*, p. 123.

Griffin, writing prior to the ballot which formed the UDM, suggested that the NUM, the union that most Nottinghamshire miners were associated with, probably no longer existed:

However unpopular though its President now is, many are still reluctant to opt out of the national union. Most of them have no recollection of separate area unions (...) the idea of one powerful national union to protect them in a local environment still has its appeal. This is understandable, but the question they must ask themselves is whether the NUM they grew up with still exists. ¹¹³

In the meantime, following the split from the NUM, the Nottingham Area met up with representatives from South Derbyshire NUM, and CTAWA with view to forming a closer association. At the July 1985 meeting the principle of a new Federation was agreed between the Durham based CTAWA and the Nottingham Area. It was surmised that the forthcoming ballot in the autumn would be a vote to amalgamate and not a straight rule change poll. ¹¹⁴ The forthcoming ballot was termed a 'Federation Ballot'. It was also suggested that the issue of who represented the Nottinghamshire miners had entered another crucial stage:

Now as the fighting over whom represents the county's pitmen rages, pitmen must wait until after the summer holidays to find out what happens next. ¹¹⁵

A Harris Poll at the time suggested 50% of Notts miners would support a breakaway, with 46% being against. More significantly 71% of miners surveyed

¹¹³ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ 'What happens next ballot in the autumn?', *The Chad*, 18 July 1985, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

in the same poll suggested Arthur Scargill was the main obstacle to reunification.

The first official meeting to discuss the setting up of a new Miners' Federation was held at the Nottingham Area HQ on 23 August 1985.¹¹⁶ At the SECM the Area Executives from the Nottingham Area, the South Derbyshire NUM and CTAWA met to give consideration to the initial draft copy of the proposed rules of the Amalgam to be known as the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM). Legal advisers were present with each AEC in addition to the Branch Officials from Daw Mill Colliery, who were there as observers. Daw Mill Colliery had a branch ballot to secede from the NUM in the autumn of 1985. At the meeting the rules were agreed upon, subject to further consideration and revision by the rank and file membership in each area. Recommendations were also agreed for the three senior UDM National Officials: President: Ken Toon (South Derbyshire), Vice-President: George Hunter (CTAWA) and Secretary: Roy Lynk (Nottinghamshire). A Conference of Branch Secretaries and the Nottingham Area Legal Advisors followed on 3 September 1985 to give an up to date report on the proposed UDM rules and amalgamation.¹¹⁷ At this meeting it was reported that the Instrument of Amalgamation would require the approval of the Certification Officer before the ballot could take place. It was also agreed that a final draft of the UDM rules would be circulated to members as soon as possible for perusal prior to the 'federation ballot'. At a Nottingham Area SEC meeting the following day a Campaign Committee was set up with the aim of getting support for the forming of the UDM in the forthcoming ballot. Strategy and tactics were also discussed and an allocation of the various NCB collieries and units was made.

In the run up to the ballot the two groups set out their stalls and launched their campaigns. The NUM maintained their slogan 'Keep Notts National' and

¹¹⁶ Nottingham Union Area Minutes 1985, p. 329.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

arranged for a series of open meetings to discuss the forthcoming ballot to form the UDM. The main gist of the NUM 's argument was that the emergence of a breakaway union would weaken the bargaining power of all miners and that a breakaway would not be recognised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the Labour Party, the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) and other regional, national and international organisations. There was constant reference in NUM literature of a return to 'Spencerism'. Commenting on the forthcoming ballot NUM General Secretary, Peter Heathfield, stated that the main reason why the ballot was taking place was that the NUM was the main stumbling block to future plans for a slim lined, profitable coal-industry:

The ballot is taking place for one reason above all others, to divide the NUM so that pits can be closed at will, leaving a few highly profitable pits for privatisation (...) tens of thousands of pounds have been made available to finance grotesque giant posters, expensive Fleet Street journalists (...) all designed to confuse and split the NUM.

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The Nottingham Area summoned artist John Kent, a political cartoonist, to design a number of posters backing the Area campaign. The huge posters appeared at 124 sites throughout the county. Anti-UDM Literature started appearing in some publications at the same time. (Fig. 9)

In the run-up to the ballot claims were made by the NUM that a form of censorship was taking place in the Nottinghamshire coalfield with the Nottingham Area union being accused of not making miners' welfare clubs available for meetings. The NCB were also accused of threatening disciplinary action against NUM members who distributed 'Keep Notts National' literature.

¹¹⁸ 'No to Suicide', *The NUM Miners (Notts Special Edition)*, October 1985, p.1.
D. Amos collection.

According to the NUM, a case at Ollerton Colliery brought the issue to a head and with a threat of industrial action hanging over the colliery, the NCB backed down and allowed literature from all sides to be distributed.¹¹⁹ Despite the claims of censorship, details of public meetings, special editions of the NUM newspaper, *The Miner*, and various other 'Keep Notts National' pamphlets were ready available in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield.¹²⁰ (Fig. 10) In contrast to the NUM Campaign, the UDM Campaign claimed that a 'yes vote' in the forthcoming ballot meant a choice for Britain's miners for a 'vibrant, new alternative, a free and democratic union genuinely controlled by the grassroots'.¹²¹ Commenting on the setting up of the UDM and claiming that the new union could become the new NUM, Roy Lynk, Nottingham Area General Secretary said:

We shall return the power to where it belongs, the ordinary members, and the new rule book will be, if anything, even more democratic than the (old) NUM rule book before Scargill hijacked the NUM from its membership.¹²²

Despite rhetoric from both sides, and claims and counterclaims about whether the UDM or the NUM could best represent Britain's miners, the recent issue of the strike still dominated much thinking. Nottingham Area Official, David Prendergast, touched on this when commenting on the UDM campaign, amidst claims that instructions had gone out from the NUM HQ for its members to stop calling Nottinghamshire miners scabs and now to refer to them as colleagues:

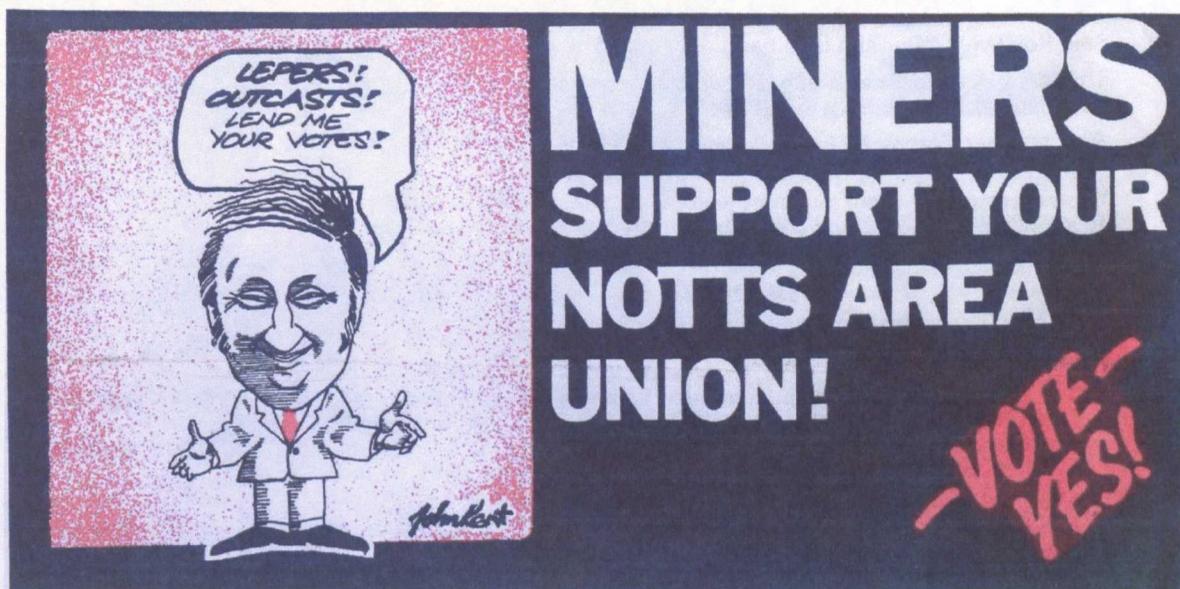
¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²⁰ The author still has most of the anti-breakaway propaganda from 1985.

¹²¹ 'Yes means Freedom', *The Nottinghamshire Miners No.6*, Sept 1985, p. 1.

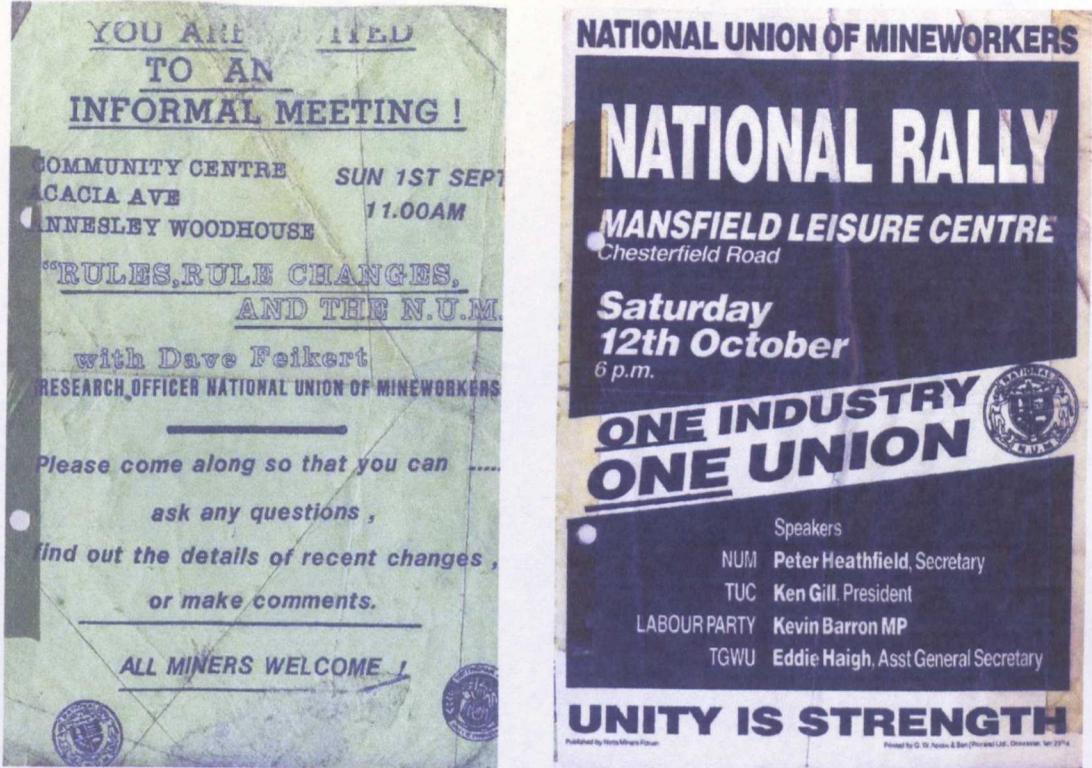
¹²² *Ibid.*

Fig. 8. Pro and anti UDM Propaganda in the Nottinghamshire coalfield: September 1985.



Source: D. Amos collection.

Fig. 9. 'Keep Notts National' Propaganda: The Nottinghamshire Coalfield - September 1985.



<h2 style="text-align: center;">Keep Notts National CAMPAIGN MEETINGS</h2> <p>Wednesday September 25: 7.00pm, Eastlands Junior School, Meden Vale: A Scargill, R Chadburn</p> <p>Thursday September 26: 7.00pm, Turners Hall, Mansfield Woodhouse: W Etherington, R MacSporrán, R Chadburn</p> <p>Sunday October 6: 6.00pm, Joseph Whittacker School, Rainworth: A Scargill</p> <p>Saturday, October 12: 6.00pm, Mansfield Leisure Centre: Peter Heathfield + Labour Party & TU leaders.</p>	<p>WHO SUPPORTS A BREAKAWAY?</p> <p>The 'breakaway' is supported by the Coal Board, the Tory Government, big business and the media.</p> <p>This fact alone should convince all miners to stay in one National Union of Mineworkers.</p>
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Source: D. Amos collection.

The theme of our campaign is 'remember the true face of Scargillism', and scabs, lepers and outcasts are what he has been calling us until now. Our members aren't stupid. They can never forget the assaults and the intimidation. Now at the eleventh hour, Scargill has realised a fundamental fact of life, you can't degrade a man one day and ask him to join you the next. ¹²³

The NUM campaign tried to portray an image of unity by giving much airtime to working miners who claimed they were stopping with the NUM. ¹²⁴ However, the emotions that had split the union from the start of the strike were still instrumental factors in the run up to the ballot. Apart from a few exceptions, the situation was static, working miners generally indicated support for the Nottingham Area and the UDM campaign, and former Nottinghamshire strikers kept loyalty with the national union. The leading officials from each side wrote to all Nottinghamshire miners in the run up to the ballot, such was the important nature of the vote. For the Nottinghamshire former NUM members, Roy Lynk played on the loyalty issue and emphasised that he had followed the Nottinghamshire miners' instructions throughout the dispute. A fact sheet accompanied the letter suggesting the decision that was about to affect the Nottinghamshire miners was not of their making and that working miners had fought for a principle for twelve months and should not 'sell themselves short now'.

We are about to make the biggest decision of our working lives. A decision we never wanted to make, but a decision that was forced on us. Remember for twelve months you fought for a principle, don't sell yourself short now. This

¹²³ 'Our Poster has got' em rattled!', *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²⁴ 'Notts Family reunites to back union', *The Notts Collier*, Sept 1985, p. 2, 'The Mood Changes', *The Miner*, Notts Special Issue, October 1985, p. 2-3.

ballot has to be won, if it is only to bring people to their senses and show that men have a right to decide their own future, by the only means they have, through the ballot box.¹²⁵

A letter to the Nottinghamshire rank and file from the national NUM emphasised the issue of union solidarity and that any breakaway was supported by anti NUM organisations, but it also made an anti-democracy attack on the Nottingham Area union:

The idea of seeking a simple majority in a ballot to amalgamate with another Area of the Union and a handful of anti-NUM miners is merely a device to create a breakaway organisation of miners and avoid the normal two-thirds majority required to change the rules.¹²⁶

This provoked a passionate attack from Keith Staley, a former migrant miner from the Derbyshire coalfield, and former NUM committee member at Bentinck Colliery, who replied with a public letter to Scargill and Heathfield:

Today you had the gall to write to my son employed at Annesley Colliery. Having gone to great lengths to explain to my son about democracy (...) the word that chokes me every time I hear you (...) and why, I was there at Berry Hill (Nottingham NUM HQ) (...) I was on the front row, you both refused to give us a ballot. I could have cried, having been a member of the union since 1946, being a mining gypsy of the 1950s and 1960s, eventually moving

¹²⁵ Nottingham Area Miners' Union, *Fact Sheet*, October 1985. D. Amos collection.

¹²⁶ NUM, *Letter from National NUM Officials to all Nottinghamshire miners*, October 1985. D. Amos collection.

to the Nottinghamshire coalfield (...) I am proud to have been a Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire miner, proud that my son has the gumption to say "No Arthur, get lost". Let this defeat of our beloved union go with you to your grave (...) Given the vote you stole from the Nottinghamshire coalfield the outcome I'm certain would have been very different. The only shame I feel, is the fact that I, Keith Leslie Staley, helped to put the pair of you in office.¹²⁷

Keith Staley had made a passionate verbal attack on Peter Heathfield at the Nottingham Area NUM BOCM meeting at the Nottingham Area NUM HQ on 25 April 1984, when as a working member of the Bentinck NUM Branch Committee, he attacked the decision not to have a national ballot for the 1984-85 strike.

Prominent NUM Officials such as Henry Richardson, Ray Chadburn, Bill Ethrington, Peter Heathfield and Arthur Scargill were all actively involved in the campaign to try and keep the Nottinghamshire miners in the NUM. Yet, all five had made unhelpful comments about the Nottinghamshire miners, either during or since the end of the strike.¹²⁸ Griffin suggested that the NUM leadership would have been better advised to let others run their campaign:

Mr Scargill has been addressing meetings throughout the (Nottinghamshire) coalfield appealing to members to vote against the breakaway. Now, it would appear, he accepts that Nottinghamshire and South Derbyshire had a perfect right not to strike in 1984, and yesterday's scabs, outcasts and lepers have become valued colleagues (...) In truth,

¹²⁷ 'Retired miner's letter to Scargill and Heathfield', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 11 October 1985, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 285.

the NUM would have been well advised to leave others to run the campaign.¹²⁹

At a Nottingham Area SCM held on 28 September 1985, it was reported that formal approval of the Instrument of Amalgamation would be given by the Certification Officer within the next few days.¹³⁰ After receiving a report from Roy Lynk, Nottingham Area General Secretary, and Paul Todd from Hopkins and Sons Solicitors, the meeting unanimously agreed that the Nottingham Area NUM, the South Derbyshire Area NUM and the Colliery Trades and Allied Workers Association (CTAWA) should amalgamate to form the Union of Democratic Mineworkers with effect from the date of registration of the Instrument of Amalgamation.¹³¹ Arrangements were then made to hold a ballot vote of members of the union, in accordance with the provisions of the Trade Union (Amalgamation etc.) Act of 1964 upon the question:

Do you approve the Instrument of Amalgamation of the National Union of Mineworkers (Nottingham Area) with the National Union of Mineworkers (South Derbyshire Area) and the Colliery Trades and Allied Workers Association to form the Union of Democratic Mineworkers?¹³²

Details of the Council Resolution from 28 September 1985, along with the ballot question and details of ballot opening hours were sent out in a notice to members all concerned.¹³³ In addition, it was agreed that copies of the Instrument of Amalgamation be sent out to all members not less than seven days prior to the ballot taking place. It was also arranged for sufficient copies of the UDM rules to be sent to all Nottinghamshire union branches. The ballot

¹²⁹ A. R. Griffin, *County under Siege*, p. 10.

¹³⁰ Nottingham Area Union Minutes 1985, p. 349.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Nottingham Area Union, *Notice to Members*, October 1985. D. Amos collection.

was arranged to take place over a twenty-four hour period from 5pm on 17 October 1985 to 5pm on 18 October 1985.

A Conference of Nottingham Area BOCM was held on 7 October 1985 to discuss the proposed rules for the UDM and to finalise ballot details on the proposed amalgamation. Peter Keenan, Barrister, was in attendance in addition to Paul Todd, as the Nottingham Area's legal advisor. Mr Keenan explained to the Conference that the basic aims when preparing the new rules were firstly, to preserve the best of the old system and improve on it where necessary and secondly, to preserve the local independence of Areas whilst introducing a new umbrella structure over Areas.¹³⁴

Mr Keenan explained that in preparing the new (UDM) rules, they (the legal advisors) had sought to:

- Embody as far as practically possible the democratic control of the Union by members through the ballot box.
- Preserve the legal autonomy of Areas which will be called Sections.
- Preserve the basic principle that the only gateway to membership of the Union is to be the member of a Section.
- Preserve the Union as a Union of Mineworkers and Ancillary Workers.¹³⁵

The basis of the UDM Rules and Constitution very much fitted in with the previous arrangements that existed with the NUM from its inception in 1944 till the rule changes in 1985.

¹³⁴ Nottingham Area Union Minutes 1985, p. 355.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

The results of the ballot were announced at a Nottingham AEC Meeting on 23 October 1985. 17, 750 (72%) voted in favour of forming the UDM with 6, 792 (28%) being against the proposal in a 90 per-cent turnout. (Appendix 11) The Nottingham Union AC unanimously confirmed the result of the ballot at its meeting on 28 October 1985 and agreed that this should become the policy of the Area. The victory was not as convincing as some of the Nottingham Area AE had hoped, however Roy Lynk suggested that the UDM would be the new NUM in the county:

We are the new NUM in Nottinghamshire, and anyone who stays with the NUM will not be represented in Nottinghamshire in any way, shape or form. I expect a large proportion of the people who voted national to go along with the ballot result. ¹³⁶

Counteracting what Roy Lynk had said, Mick McGinty, leader of the 'Keep Notts National' campaign suggested that 7,000 Nottinghamshire miners had pledged to continue their loyalty to the National NUM. He stated that as far as they were concerned 'there would be two unions in most of the Area's pits'. ¹³⁷ However, the NCB declared that the UDM would be the only recognised union in the county and said that if the 7,000 miners who supported the national NUM wanted recognition from the Coal Board they would have to be part of the new union. Following the ballot it was six weeks before the former Nottingham Area of the NUM became the Nottingham Section of the UDM. £4 Million of NUM assets would then be transferred to the UDM and a new name would appear over the door at the former Nottingham Area NUM HQ. The UDM came into official existence on 6 December 1985 following clearance from the Certification Officer. It soon started a nationwide campaign for membership. (Fig. 11)

¹³⁶ 'We will be the New NUM', *Mansfield & Sutton Observer*, 24 October 1985, p. 1.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

In the euphoria of the ballot result some optimistic claims were made that the UDM could become the majority union for Britain's coal mining industry. Amidst claims that the UDM were being inundated with requests for membership, David Prendergast stated:

I am confident that before long we will prevail as the majority union in the mining industry. When we have more than 50% of miners joining us we will expect full negotiating rights for the miners in the country.¹³⁸

Subsequent events in the Leicestershire, Lancashire and North Wales coalfield were to shatter any illusions that the UDM would challenge the NUM in size. All three areas, all of which had significant sections of working miners through the strike, turned down joining the UDM in the two months following its formation. Perhaps Leicestershire's decision was the most surprising of all. There, Jack Jones' influence persuaded the majority of the Leicestershire miners to remain in the NUM.¹³⁹ In the Leicestershire Area ballot on 25 January 1986 the four collieries voted by 885 to 490 to remain in the NUM.¹⁴⁰

Apart from disparate sections of membership around Britain's coalfields, the UDM never really broke out of its Nottinghamshire heartland. Even the South Derbyshire vote was a near-thing recording a majority of only twenty-six in the UDM formation ballot. Unsurprisingly CTAWA members voted by a majority of 90% to form the UDM; a large proportion of CTAWA's members had been expelled from the Durham Mechanics section of the NUM for working during the strike.

¹³⁸ 'United they stand', *Notts Free Press*, 25 October 1985, p. 1.

¹³⁹ See C. P. Griffin, *The Leicestershire Miners Vol. 3*, pp. 274 -279.

¹⁴⁰ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 289.

Fig. 10. UDM Recruiting Propaganda: December 1985.

UNION OF DEMOCRATIC MINeworkERS

**THE WORLD'S
FASTEST GROWING UNION—
WE ARE ON OUR WAY**

JOIN THE UDM AND—

- Your NCB Pension will be protected
- Your Fuel Entitlement will be protected
- Common Law Claims will be pursued by experts (in 1984 £2,000,000 damages were won for the Notts. Miners)

THE UDM WILL ALSO PROVIDE—

- A Legal Advice Service
- An Education Department which provides regular Schools for Members
- A Research Department
- A Social Insurance Department to assist in pursuing DHSS Claims
- Fully qualified Mining Engineers and Electrical/Mechanical Engineer

THE UDM RULE BOOK IS DESIGNED—

- To protect its Members and ensure their democratic rights
- To ensure the right of all Members to vote on all major issues

THE UDM FIGHTS FOR DEMOCRACY AND IS COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLE THAT "THE POWER IS IN THE HANDS OF THE MEMBERS"

JOIN THE UDM NOW

Whilst a trade union civil war had been enacted by the two disparate sides from the 1984-85 strike, Geoffrey Goodman drew definite links between the 'domino strategy' employed by the NUM at the start of the strike and the breakup of the NUM in 1985. Commenting in the immediate aftermath of the ballot to form the UDM he stated:

The break-up of the NUM is by far the worst sequel to the twelve-month strike (...) In this revolt by the Nottinghamshire and (South) Derbyshire miners there is an uncanny parallel with the events of 1926. The big difference between then and now is that this time Nottinghamshire miners (mainly) refused to join the strike from the beginning. It was that decision which became the principal issue in defeating Scargill and the NUM. ¹⁴¹

In its 'Random Shots' section the Notts Free Press newspaper suggested that the UDM was not a 'fly on the wall' trade union, adding that, in hindsight, if the NUM National President and his supporters ever regretted the counter-productive strategy of sending flying pickets into Nottinghamshire at the start of the strike:

They (UDM) have proved they are not 'putty in the hand' trade unionists, wilting under pressure. They said they would do it and they have. In moments of tranquil retrospect we wonder if Mr Scargill ever regrets the bully boy louts coming to our pits. ¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Geoffrey Goodman, 'Deeper into the Pit', *Daily Mirror*, 21 October 1985, p. 6.

¹⁴² 'Random Shots', *Notts Free Press*, 25 October 1985, p. 6. A 'Fly on the Wall' trade union infers a short lived existence merely spontaneously reacting to a situation.

As we enter the second decade of the twenty first century, with only five large deep mines left in production in Britain (at November 2011), perhaps we should reflect on the words of Morgan and Coates. During the post union-split, without showing bias, they stated:

Splits are relatively easy to initiate, but may prove difficult to overcome. What is clear beyond doubt is that the future in its own way, will continue to be complex and difficult as the heroic battle in the mid 1980's.¹⁴³

The union split proved impossible to overcome despite the common factor of the coal industry's rapid post-strike demise affecting everyone. The UDM saw its 25th anniversary on 6 December 2010. Their main membership now (November 2011) is at the last working Nottinghamshire colliery, Thoresby, and at the last Warwickshire colliery at Daw Mill. Membership, in terms of working miners, is probably no more than 750; at its peak the UDM claimed around 45,000 members throughout Britain. Likewise the NUM's membership for 'active miners' in 2011 probably stands at a no more than 1,750, being based mainly at the three remaining Yorkshire collieries of Kellingley, Maltby and Hatfield.

Was it possible to stem the decline of the deep-mining coal-industry in Britain at any time? That is open to debate. However, it should be remembered that the deep coal mining industry in Britain has been in decline since the time of World War One. There were two significant periods of decline, the Robens Era (1960-70) and the aftermath of the 1984-85 strike (1985-1994). Collieries have closed in significant numbers throughout the history of the coal industry, the main difference being that now we are approaching the 'end of a chapter of British industrial history' as the closure of Britain's last large deep colliery is probably not too far in the future. The 1984-85 NUM strike was a 'last stand' valiant

¹⁴³ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners' Strike*, p. 25.

attempt at trying to stop the decline in the industry. It failed because there were many factors against it, the most tragic one being that in its attempt to stem the decline the NUM ended up destroying itself.

Chapter 4: What a load of ballots! – The Nottinghamshire Miners and the Ballot Issue in the 1984-85 Miners' Strike

1. Introduction

A Ballot would have been won for the strike (...) what it would have done is guarantee unity right across the mining labour force. ¹

To hide behind a ballot is an act of cowardice. I tell you this now, decide what you like about a ballot but this coalfield [South Wales] will be on strike and stay on strike. ²

The most controversial issue surrounding the 1984-85 miners' strike centred on the running of the dispute without a national ballot of all NUM members; instead a domino policy under NUM Rule 41 was attempted with an emphasis on trade-union solidarity (see Chapter 5). Since that time arguments have raged as to the rights and wrongs of the 1984-85 strike strategy. Traditionally the NUM was perhaps the most democratic trade union in Britain with pit-head ballots regularly recording turn outs in the region of 80% - 90% on a wide range of issues. These included the election of NUM National, Area and Branch representatives, pay issues, and in 1982 and 1983 on the issue of pit closures. In 1984 it was the NUM Rule 41 domino strategy which caused controversy from the outset and split the NUM members into two sections: one which wanted the strike conducted under what they saw as the established constitutional methods (working

¹ D. Summers, 'Neil Kinnock attacks Arthur Scargill for 'suicidal vanity' over miners' strike' www.guardian.co.uk/politics 12 March 2009.

² Arthur Scargill, 'We could surrender, or stand and fight', www.guardian.co.uk/politics, 7 March 2009.

miners) and a second group willing to strike under an act of unity to try and stop the continued run down of the deep mining industry in Britain (striking miners).

Unlike the 1926 Lockout, the majority of Nottinghamshire miners never came out on strike in 1984-85, claiming that the lack of a national ballot and the strategy under Rule 41 made the strike in the Nottinghamshire coalfield both unconstitutional and unofficial. Although the split in the NUM occurred after the end of the strike in 1985, as Stephenson maintained, it was impossible to understand the evolution of the UDM without recourse to the strike itself.³ Therefore, it is necessary to examine the main issues of the strike which caused the initial split in the NUM membership and eventually led to the formation of the Nottinghamshire based Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM). This chapter looks at some of the arguments made at the time and the theories that have been put forward since as to why a national ballot was not held, and aims to investigate why these arguments against holding a national ballot failed so miserably in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. In Chapter 5 the weakness of the Rule 41 'domino strategy' will be debated, making some historical comparisons with how the Nottinghamshire miners had reacted to unofficial strike action in the past.

In 1984 why did the strike take off without recourse to a national ballot? Previously a national ballot preceded any proposed strike-action, as it did in the two national strikes of 1972 and 1974. The main reason was probably the failure to get a majority in the three national ballots held in the two years leading up to the 1984-85 strike. NUM National ballots held in January 1982, October 1982, and March 1983 all turned down proposed strike action. The ballots of October 1982 and March 1983 included the issue of voting on pit closures. In some circles the October 1982 'no strike' vote was attributed to the linking of wages and pit closures on the same ballot paper. But as the NUM reported in 1983 'such an interpretation was proved false in

³ Stephenson, Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting? BA Dissertation, p. 24.

March 1983'.⁴ The March 1983 national ballot over the Ty-Mawr-Lewis Merthyr closure produced the same 61% - 39% no strike majority as the October 1982 national ballot had. Some interesting trends occur when looking at the strike figures between the ballots of January 1982 and March 1983. (Appendix 1) Only two NUM areas, the traditional left-wing South Wales and Kent, showed an increase in support for strike action over the period. Ironically, in the Yorkshire and Scotland NUM Areas, the two Areas which acted as catalysts for the 1984-85 strike, support for strike action had dropped: in Yorkshire from 66% to 54% and in Scotland from 63% to 50%. More interestingly when the figures for the Area strike ballots taken in March 1984 are studied, only one NUM Area, Northumberland, showed a slight majority in favour of strike action, but all the others showed an increase in support for strike action since the national ballot in March 1983. In the Nottingham Area NUM support increased from 19% in March 1983 to 26% in March 1984. This was in spite of intensive picketing in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the week leading up to the Area ballot on 15 and 16 March 1984.

The problem for the NUM was trying to get a consensus in favour of striking on the contentious issue of pit closures. The mass closures in the 1960s saw a passive attitude towards pit closures which resulted in the halving of the coal industry from almost 700 collieries to just under 300 by 1970. As Allen stated the problem with pit closures was:

Those with jobs were not keen to jeopardise them whilst those who had experienced closures in the past resented being called out on strike for pits which had not supported them when their pits had closed.⁵

Even during the supposed resurgence of the coal industry in the 1970s, following the two national strike victories of 1972 and 1974, the problems associated with protests over pit closures were prominent. In 1976 when

⁴ NUM, *1983 NUM Annual Conference report*, p. 248.

⁵ Vic Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners* (Shipley, 1981), p. 302.

Langwith Colliery in Derbyshire was proposed for closure, the NUM had to call off a national overtime ban against the proposed closure after only four days because of strong opposition to it. A national ballot showed 61% favoured lifting the ban.⁶ In the Derbyshire Area NUM itself there was a majority opposed to taking industrial action to save Langwith. Only the traditional left-wing NUM areas of South Wales, Kent and Scotland plus the left-moving Yorkshire Area voted against lifting the overtime ban. A mirror image of this result happened in the national ballots against pit closures in October 1982 and in March 1983. Similar patterns to the Langwith closure followed with the Teversal closure in Nottinghamshire in 1979 (see Chapter 1 pp. 23 - 32). Also in 1979 the South Wales NUM took no constitutional steps to test the feeling of the NUM membership when Deep Duffryn colliery was proposed for closure. As Allen stated 'they realised that the divisive elements generated by pit closures would predominate in South Wales as it had done in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire'.⁷ In the event the closure of Deep Duffryn was agreed at local level when dangerous conditions were experienced trying to develop a new coalface. (see Chapter 1 pp. 27 -30). As Taylor mentioned the situation was no different in the Scottish coalfield in the two years preceding the 1984-85 strike; here Scottish miners crossed picket lines for the first time in living memory.⁸

Hilary Cave, former NUM Education Officer, cited three main reasons as to why no individual national ballot vote was taken on strike action in the 1984-85 strike.⁹ Firstly, there was a fear that a ballot would not be won because miners not affected by pit closure would vote against such industrial action. This is sometimes referred to as the 'safe pits' theory. Secondly, it was claimed that some sections of NUM members were already out on strike, and a no strike ballot result would have the effect of undermining them and 'pulling them back from the brink'. This was linked with the way the strike evolved under the 'domino theory'. Thirdly, it was

⁶ Nottingham Area NUM minutes 1976, p. 95.

⁷ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 304.

⁸ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 176.

⁹ Interview with Barry Johnson and Hilary Cave, 8 March 2008, Chesterfield.

claimed that the strike was a principled strike about the issues of saving jobs and not simply about pay or conditions of employment. Another factor involving the ballot issue that came into play was the controversy over the introduction of Area Incentive Bonus Schemes in 1977-78. In November 1977 a majority of miners nationwide voted against the introduction of an incentive bonus scheme; despite this Area based incentive schemes came into operation in all coalfields shortly afterwards. How did this occur and what were the implications for democracy in the NUM?

The remainder of this chapter will critically analyse the three theories which have been put forward as to why no national ballot vote was taken. Firstly, the 'safe pits' theory is looked at, secondly, the part played by the controversy surrounding the introduction of Area Incentive Bonus Schemes in 1977-78 is reviewed and finally, the effects of the introduction of enhanced redundancy payments in the early 1980s on the decision not to have a ballot is studied.

2. The Ballot and the Safe Pits theory

Those on the left of the NUM claimed a national strike ballot of all NUM members was unfair because some Areas were unaffected by pit closures and manpower rundowns and NUM members in those regions would vote against any such strike action. Thus miners, especially in the central coalfields, in supposedly safe regions, would be unwilling to act in solidarity to save their comrades in the peripheral coalfields of Scotland, South Wales, the North-East and Kent. This is sometimes known as the 'safe pits theory'. Basically, the theory is that at a safe pit there would be favourable geological conditions, which lead to higher profits, and thus higher incentive bonus payments, and therefore there would be less inclination for the miners there to strike. Searle-Barnes suggested the hypothesis was that better conditions

made for bigger tasks, higher profits and higher wages. This in turn fostered better labour relations, co-operative effort and willingness to innovate.¹⁰

The 'safe pits' theory has found advocates ever since the strike, including some prominent historians. Clarke described the NUM's initial approach to the 1984-85 strike as being flawed and betraying some lack of confidence in its members:

This proved most damaging since the Nottinghamshire miners, least at risk and least militant, went on working.¹¹

Likewise, Fraser made reference to the double factor of the Nottinghamshire coalfield being a 'safe haven' from pit closures and also a historical weak link in the national chain of miners' solidarity since 1926;

There (Nottinghamshire) many pits were new and efficient and therefore not threatened with closure; loyalty to the national union had always been weaker since the bitter divisions of 1926.¹²

Lowe suggested that the initial response to the strike was positive except in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The reaction to the strike in many parts of the Nottinghamshire and some parts of the Derbyshire coalfield was apathetic from the outset.¹³ Lowe also added that the Nottinghamshire coalfield was at least risk from pit closures but that the strike strategy of running without recourse to a national ballot was a fatal error:

There was an excellent response from the miners except in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, where they

¹⁰ R. G. Searle-Barnes, *Pay and Productivity Bargaining: A study of the effect of national wage agreements in the Nottinghamshire coalfield* (Manchester, 1969), p. 19.

¹¹ Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900 – 1990* (London, 1996), p. 378.

¹² W. H. Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism: 1700 – 1998* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 241.

¹³ The Area Ballot results in March 1984 showed 27% in favour of striking in the Nottingham Area NUM and 49.5% in North Derbyshire NUM: see Appendix 1, trends in NUM ballots per Area 1982-1984.

were least at risk (...) Scargill made the fatal mistake of failing to hold a national ballot on whether to strike.

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Even Ian MacGregor (NCB Chairman 1983-1986) made reference to the supposed security of the Nottinghamshire coalfield:

Most non strikers, particularly those in Notts, wanted nothing to do with Scargill's blatantly political ends, and on the other side of the same coin was they neither felt particularly threatened in their jobs. ¹⁵

Coulter's view is more typical than that of the historians quoted. Some stereotypical views of the Nottinghamshire miners have found sympathy with the left in the post-strike aftermath. Coulter suggested that the Nottinghamshire coalfield was continually in profit, did not suffer from bad geological conditions and historically had not suffered through the mass pit closures of the late 1950s and 1960s. ¹⁶ Similarly, Morgan and Coates made reference to the supposed favourable working conditions and high pay in the coalfield together with the view that the Nottinghamshire coalfield was unaffected by pit closures in the run up to the strike:

Traditionally the Nottinghamshire miner has always been the highest paid in the British coalfields, benefiting from relatively fortunate conditions that prevailed in the area. He has rarely felt himself to be under threat as the county provided a sheltered area of coalfield employment. ¹⁷

¹⁴ Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History (3^d edition)* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 575.

¹⁵ Ian MacGregor, *The Enemy Within: The Story of the Miners' Strike 1984-85* (London, 1986), p. 196.

¹⁶ Coulter, Miller and Walker, *The Iron Fist: State of Siege*, p. 70.

¹⁷ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miner's Strike*, p. 5.

The safe pits theory of 1984 was mentioned in a letter sent from the Kent Area NUM to the Nottingham Area NUM during the early days of the strike. In the letter to Henry Richardson, Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary, dated 24 March 1984, Jack Collins, Kent Area NUM Secretary, whilst cancelling his proposed attendance to the 1984 Nottinghamshire NUM Miners' Gala due to be held later that year, said:

You by advocating a ballot, are assuming that your members have some kind of authority over the future of my two sons and their families together with the future of others in this coalfield. Such an assumption is dangerous claptrap and a betrayal of other workers who are demanding the right to work (...) Voting another's job away has nothing to do with democracy but is the ethics of the rat cage.¹⁸

The inference from this statement suggests that the Nottinghamshire coalfield was safe compared to the plight of the Kent coalfield. Whilst the plight in Kent was generally much worse than in Nottinghamshire (in terms of geological conditions and financial losses) it did not mean that an automatic assumption could be made that the Nottinghamshire coalfield was safe from the effects of manpower rundown and pit closures. It was not. Pits in the Nottinghamshire coalfield were under threat and indeed two, Moorgreen and the Pye Hill Complex, were being run-down towards closure at the time the 1984-85 strike began.

The safe pits / favourable conditions view of the Nottinghamshire coalfield was not new to the 1984 strike and post-strike period; Searle-Barnes suggested it already existed in the pre nationalisation period.¹⁹ Nevertheless, he advocated that geological conditions at many Nottinghamshire collieries were little different to geological conditions in some other coalfields,

¹⁸ NUM Kent Area, letter from Jack Collins (Kent Area NUM Secretary) to Henry Richardson, (Nottingham Area NUM Secretary) , 24 March 1984. D. Amos collection.

¹⁹ Searle-Barnes, *Pay and Productivity*, p. 19.

citing South Yorkshire as an example. Yet, Nottinghamshire collieries had a longer history of greater productivity, higher wages and better labour relations.²⁰ He suggested that the Nottinghamshire tradition of industrial relations played a role here:

Some part of the credit for this must go to the Nottinghamshire coal-owners and to the union leadership in Nottinghamshire. Their legacy to the coalfield was recognition, on the one hand, that high wages can produce higher profits and, on the other, that strike action creates more problems than it solves.²¹

John Stafford, in his poem 'Fellow Men', made reference to the supposed favourable geological conditions in the Nottinghamshire coalfield that the Durham miners were expecting when they migrated south in the mid to late 1960s. The reality, as the poem states, was different:

So from Durham, down to the Midlands,
To mine coal as soft as chalk,
Why, you only have to get to the coalface
It's just like a picnics walk.

Like the old folk forty-niners,
And with an old hessian bag,
Fill it up with fivers,
Why it's just like making jam.

Of course this was all a dream,
Hard work was what they met,
Like the steel they were made of,
Days were hard with hurt and sweat.²²

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² John Henry Stafford, *Pastimes Forgot – a glance back* (Kirkby-in Ashfield, 2009), p. 55.

John Stafford added personal evidence of this scenario from his working days spent with various migrant Durham miners who settled at Annesley Colliery in the late 1960s. Prior to them transferring, they expected working conditions and the pits themselves to be much improved and more modern than where they had come from.²³ In some cases, such as at Annesley, the reality was markedly different. Low seam mining, sometimes combined with mining methods antiquated for the time, was not uncommon in some parts of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Keith Staley, a migrant Derbyshire miner who worked at Ripley, Denby Hall and Ormonde before settling in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the 1970's made reference to this:

In Derbyshire we'd gone from handfilling right through mechanisation, but as we got to Moorgreen, we had to go back to handfilling (...) we went into the Low Main seam and it was very low. In Nottinghamshire you were expecting seams to be six and seven feet thick, but in the Low Main it was really very low.²⁴

At the start of the 1984-85 strike many collieries in the Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield were working in low seams, i.e. seams under four-feet in thickness. Annesley had coalfaces in the Deep Hard and Tupton (Low Main) seams, both in far from perfect geological conditions. Newstead was also working the Tupton seam, also in far-from-perfect conditions.²⁵ Other low seam mining was taking place at Sutton, Silverhill, Linby and in the Waterloo seam at Bentinck. The thick Blackshale seam (six to seven feet) was being worked at Hucknall, Pye Hill, Moorgreen, Bentinck and Annesley (one face). As the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) report from 1983 stated, coal seams were not homogeneous. They varied from location

²³ John Stafford in discussion with the author in the summer of 2009 about working with former Durham miners Luke Dobinson and Jim Stephenson when they first transferred to Annesley in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the late 1960s.

²⁴ Bell, *Memories of the Nottinghamshire Coalfield*, p. 105.

²⁵ For poor geological conditions in the Tupton seam at Newstead Colliery see Stanley, *Nottingham Miners do strike*, pp. 44 – 45.

to location in seam thickness, and suffered poor geological conditions such as faults and inclusion of foreign matter.²⁶ Issues of geological interaction, increased manshift time getting to the face, and a requirement for a greater proportion of back up manpower at older pits to maintain the coal and conveyance systems, were not uncommon factors in all coalfields, including Nottinghamshire. It was at many of these Nottinghamshire pits, working low seams, that the majority of NUM members opposed the way the 1984-85 strike was conducted. Therefore, in many cases, the theory of all Nottinghamshire miners working in thick seams, in favourable geological conditions, can be dispelled and therefore would not have been a factor for those miners voting against strike action in a ballot over pit closures.

If it is accepted that parts of the Nottinghamshire coalfield did not conform to being 'safe pits', what of the claims of it being a modern, profitable coalfield, and that being a major reason why a national ballot was not held and why the Nottinghamshire miners failed to join the 1984-85 strike? The issue of comparing supposed 'safe pits' with older collieries became an issue because of the nature of working the coal reserves at the older collieries. This is because productivity, and hence profitability at older collieries generally, but not necessarily, declines as the main seams for which the pit was sunk in the first place become exhausted, leaving more distant, poorer quality, more difficult to mine reserves.²⁷

Firstly, considering the issue of the Nottinghamshire coalfield being modern, it can be seen that some parts of the description fitted whilst other parts did not. The newest pits in the Nottinghamshire coalfield were the 1950s and 1960s NCB sinkings to the east of the coalfield at Calverton, Cotgrave and Bevercotes respectively. In contrast, the oldest pit was at Babbington (sunk 1840-42), with other older collieries dating from the 1860s and 1870s, notably in the Leen Valley and around Sutton-in-Ashfield. Parts of the coalfield, especially in the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area, could be seen to

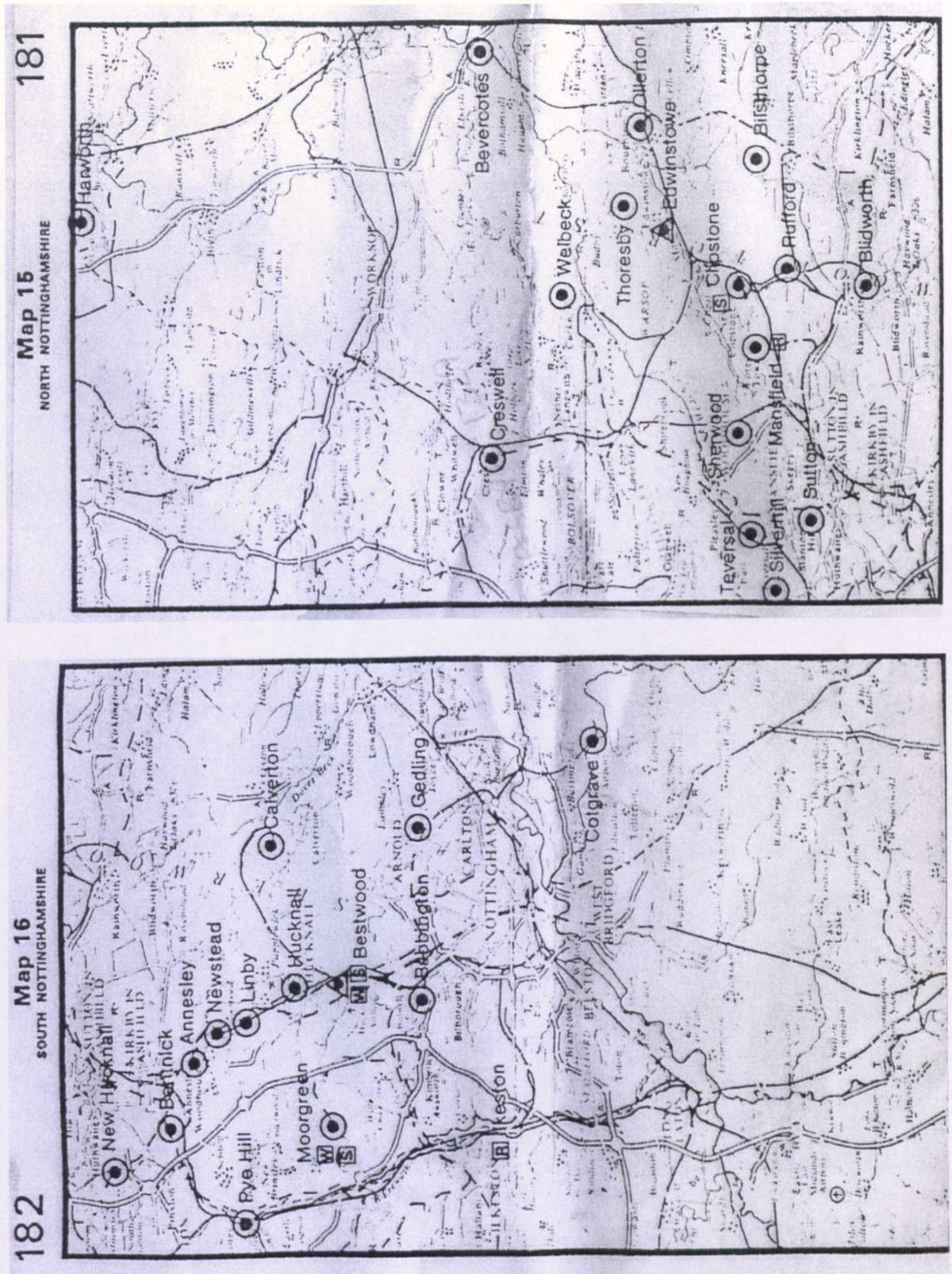
²⁶ Monopolies and Mergers Commission Report, *A report on the efficiency and costs in the development, production and supply of coal by the NCB Vol.2*, June 1983, p. 69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

fit a modern, profitable coalfield description, for example at Thoresby, Ollerton and Welbeck, but inconsistencies existed and old unprofitable pits mining low seams could be found in other parts of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Looking at the sinking dates of Nottinghamshire pits it can be seen that the pits in the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area were much newer than pits in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area. (Appendix 12) The majority of sinkings in the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area took place between 1904 and 1928 whilst in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area sinkings took place generally between the 1860s and 1900. Apart from three longer life pits to the east of the South Nottinghamshire Area at Calverton, Gedling and Cotgrave, the other eight pits had an average age of 114 years at the start of the 1984-85 strike. These, therefore, cannot be classified as new collieries, and yet it was at these collieries that the majority of NUM members opposed the strike and, it could be argued, that the seeds of the UDM were sown.

In the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area the twelve collieries that made up the Dukeries coalfield (with the exception of the NCB sinking of Bevercotes Colliery) had an average age of just over 68 years at the start of the 1984-85 strike. If we compare the pattern of sinking dates with that of the NCB South Yorkshire and Doncaster Areas it can be seen that the NCB South Yorkshire Area had a similar range of sinking dates to the South Nottinghamshire Area, with the sinking dates for pits in the NCB Doncaster Area being similar to those in the NCB North Nottinghamshire. (Appendix 12) The thirteen youngest collieries in the NCB South Yorkshire Area had an average age of 91 years at the start of the strike with the ten collieries in the NCB Doncaster Area having an average age of 76 years. Yet the Doncaster region was one of the more militant Areas that supported the strike whilst in the North Nottinghamshire Area the strike was opposed by the vast majority of miners. As the areas formed part of the Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire coalfield, it is not surprising that many of the pits in the four NCB Areas mined the same or similar seams. The Top Hard seam in Nottinghamshire becomes the Barnsley Bed in the Yorkshire coalfield, likewise the Blackshale

Fig 11: Map showing position of collieries in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area (Map 16) and the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area (Map 15) c 1980.



Source: D. Amos collection.

seam becomes the Silkstone seam. In many respects the collieries in the NCB South Yorkshire Area were younger than those in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area and yet more miners struck in the NCB South Yorkshire Area than in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area. Likewise, the average age of collieries in the pro-strike NCB Doncaster region, were similar to those in the anti-strike NCB North Nottinghamshire Area. Overall there seems to be little concrete evidence in claims that there was no ballot in 1984 because the Nottinghamshire miners were working in a more modern coalfield.

There is evidence for some of the claims that the Nottinghamshire coalfield was profitable. The main collieries in what constitutes the Dukeries coalfield in the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area were continually in profit from 1976-77 to 1981-82. (Appendix 13) Some of these profitable collieries such as Thoresby, Welbeck and Ollerton were classified as the 'jewels in the NCB crown'. However, at the other end of the scale the results at Bilsthorpe, Rufford, Blidworth and Sutton mainly showed losses in the same period. In the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area only three of the eleven collieries in the region continually showed a surplus between 1976-77 and 1981-82, and by the early 1980s one of these, Pye Hill Colliery, had been identified for closure because of exhaustion of economic viable reserves. (Appendix 13) Increasing losses were experienced at Annesley, Bentinck, Linby, Newstead and Babbington by the early 1980s, and by that date around half of the Nottinghamshire coalfield (as a whole) was loss making. Far from it being a wholly profitable coalfield some of the losses at Nottinghamshire collieries were comparable to the lower loss makers in the NCB Scottish Area and the NCB Doncaster Area. (Appendix 14) Similarities can be seen when comparing working against striking pits across the whole British coalfield (Appendix 15). Again there is no correlation between the pro-strike heavy loss-making collieries such as Bettshanger in Kent with the anti-strike heavy loss making collieries such as the Snibston and Whitwick complex in

Leicestershire, where the vast majority worked through the strike.²⁸ Peculiarities occur within NCB Areas themselves when comparing working and striking pits. In the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area miners opposed the strike at the profitable Thoresby Colliery and also at the loss making Sutton Colliery. In the NCB Doncaster Area militant stances on the strike were taken by miners at the loss-making Hatfield Main and also at the generally profit-making Rossington Colliery.

Agreement for closure had been made at local level in all coalfields prior to the 1984-85 strike and this fitted in with the tradition of dealing with pit closures right through the nationalisation period. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission identified this in its 1983 report:

8.23 The NCB regards effective local consultation and the availability of attractive redundancy and transfer compensation as key elements in gaining the acceptance at local level of its policies for dealing with uneconomic capacity, not only closures but also measures to improve performance at continuing collieries.²⁹

This method of pit closures using 'salami tactics' had become custom and practice in many coalfields by 1984. Out of the 58 pit closures in the decade prior to the 1984-85 strike, 43 were by agreement with the Area NUM at local level. Of the remaining fifteen collieries which went to appeal, five were closed following the appeal, eight continued in production but were subsequently closed by local agreement and at the remaining two collieries it was agreed to work the remaining reserves from other units.³⁰ In effect 53 of the 58 colliery closures under the 1974 Plan for Coal were by agreement, mainly at local level.

²⁸ In the Leicestershire Area (NUM) only 30 miners out of a membership of c2,500 struck in 1984-85. They were known as the 'Dirty Thirty'.

²⁹ MMC report, 1983, p. 174.

³⁰ Ibid.

At a Nottingham Area NUM Branch Secretaries Conference on 29 November 1982 the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area Director gave a portrayal of limited classified coal reserves of 122 million tonnes, compared to 465 million tonnes in the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area, declining manpower, and only three long life pits at Calverton, Cotgrave and Gedling.³¹ At the same meeting it was suggested that the life of Babbington Colliery would be extended into the 1990s through the merger with Hucknall Colliery. Between 1981 and 1983 coal preparation plant jobs (CPP) had been lost because of underground mergers at Annesley, Newstead and Babbington and there were fears for the future of the Annesley, Newstead, Bentinck Complex following a crisis meeting in February 1984 about its future (see Chapter 1: Part 1) Automation underground had also been responsible for a number of job losses such as those of conveyor attendants (button men). Taken together all these factors, and the financial evidence, do not suggest a region that was unaffected by the issue of pit closures, job losses and a climate of contraction.

Both during and since the strike the left have referred to the safe pits theory to defend their no ballot position. In addition to the evidence considered above the NUM's 'safe pits' theory was flawed by its own admission. The NUM NEC resolution passed on 8 March 1984, which started the Area by Area strike strategy, stated that 'No area is safe, none will escape the McGregor plan' (see Appendix 5) In March 1984 the NUM Newspaper, *The Miner*, listed seventy-four collieries which the NUM leadership suggested were under threat of closure. This was an updated list from the 'Scargill Seventy Pit Closures List' c1982. The article, titled 'Why No Pit is Safe', listed a number of collieries under threat in each Area.³² It is interesting that when the list is examined and some local knowledge is applied, then the proposed closure list only confirmed what was common knowledge in most areas: that some pits had closed and others were due to close anyway, by local agreement. (Appendix 16) For example in Nottinghamshire the three collieries that had already been

³¹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1982, p. 366.

³² NUM, 'Why no pit is safe', *The Miner*, March 1984.

agreed for closure, namely Pye Hill, Moorgreen and Sutton, were on the NUM hit list. The remaining Nottinghamshire colliery on the list was Babbington, which was the worst loss maker in the whole Nottinghamshire Coalfield in the early 1980s. Most colliery mergers are in effect closures in everything but name. Mergers and abandonment of old workings had been happening in the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire coalfields for as long as people could remember. Despite the NUM claiming 'the facts are obvious to a blind man' about proposed colliery closures, nothing would save Pye Hill, Moorgreen and Sutton Collieries from closure. The hit list was not so much a list confirming the NUM's closure predictions but a list of inevitable closures and the biggest loss makers. Forty two out of the seventy four collieries on the list were either already closed or had been agreed for closure at local level.

Despite this, twenty-five years on from the strike, the same 'safe pits' theory is still being used to defend the decision not to have a National Ballot. Arthur Scargill, former NUM National President, reiterated that the decision not to have a national ballot was due to the 'safe pits' theory:

A question that has been raised time and time again over the past 25 years is why the union did not hold a national strike ballot? The real reason that NUM Areas such as Nottinghamshire, South Derbyshire and Leicestershire wanted a national ballot was that they wanted the strike called off believing their pits were safe.³³

Stanley contended that the Nottinghamshire coalfield was not affected by closures at the start of the strike, and this influenced its miners' decision not to strike:

³³ Arthur Scargill, 'We could surrender, or stand and fight', *The Guardian*, 7 March 2009, www.guardian.co.uk/politics

I don't know whether it was selfishness because none of the pits in Nottinghamshire Area were under threat. You only have to look what coalfields we have left to show maybe they were wrong in their decision.³⁴

As previously mentioned the Annesley, Bentinck, Newstead Complex where Stanley worked was under serious threat at the start of the 1984-85 strike. Had the Nottingham Area NUM and local NUM Branch Officials not agreed to the cutbacks in February 1984, including 550 job losses for miners aged over 50s, it was a distinct possibility that the whole Complex could have been closed and over 3,000 jobs lost in 1984.

Pro-strike supporters believed that the Nottinghamshire miners had no intention of joining any strike in 1984 because it was a safe and prosperous coalfield. The evidence put forward shows this view to be a myth; Nottinghamshire was affected by cutbacks, technological advances in the coal industry, colliery mergers and closures through 'exhaustion of economic reserves'. No coalfield was immune from the laws of economics or the exhaustion of economic workable reserves. In 1984 the NUM attempted to stop closure by local agreement in its tracks. In closure terms the deep coal mining industry was a former shadow of what it had been at nationalisation. 83% of the NCB's deep mines had closed since vesting day in 1947. Indeed in the period 1955 – 1970, just over 550 pits had closed nationally. At the end of December 1955, 850 collieries, employing 695,000 men, were in production.³⁵ By the end of December 1970 this figure had fallen dramatically to 293 collieries, employing 283,000 men. Many of these closed under the Labour Government of 1964-1970. At the start of the strike these figures had fallen even further: 174 collieries were in production employing 192,000 men in March 1984. During the mass closures of the 1960s right through to the early 1980s the NUM had failed to get a rallying point against

³⁴ 'Miners Strike still divides the community 25 years on', *Ashfield Chad*, 4 March 2009, p. 4.

³⁵ Robert Bradley, *Snippets of the past on the coalmining Industry* (Ollerton, 1993, unpublished typescript).

pit closures. With the rise of the left to prominent positions in the NUM during the early 1980s it was always likely that there would be a standoff against the continued demise of the deep coal mining industry in Britain. When it came it would eventually prove fatal, not only for the industry, but for the NUM itself.

3. Incentives, Ballots and Democracy

In defence of its no ballot strategy in 1984 the left-wing of the NUM often point to the anomalies surrounding the introduction of Area Incentive bonuses following the 1977 ballot vote not to introduce a national incentive bonus scheme. Along with pit closures, piecework was a major shift in policy and was one of the most divisive issues the NUM had to deal with. For the left a return to piecework would fragment the national solidarity which had grown since the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) was introduced in 1966. As Taylor stated there was a historical aspect to the introduction of NPLA which had divided the miners in the past:

The NPLA was the culmination of the historic struggle to eradicate the cut-throat competition of piecework and it expressed a powerful sense of social justice amongst the workforce. Supporters of incentives schemes were (...) portrayed as selfish and parochial, wishing to return to the days of 'blood on the coal'.³⁶

In their defence, supporters of incentive schemes (NUM moderates) point to the fact that significant shifts in policy had always divided the NUM. As Taylor pointed out, the moderates pointed to the evidence that the NPLA had been introduced by a small majority vote in 1966, and the 1972 strike was authorised by a majority vote of only 58% of NUM members.³⁷ However, once the decision had been made the NUM became united on whatever the issue was.

³⁶ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 122.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

However, the national solidarity that the left claimed was not what it seemed. In some NUM Areas there was unrest about the lack of a productivity scheme. NUM Areas that pushed for this were the traditional moderate Areas of Lancashire, South Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. It should be remembered that at the same time the Yorkshire Area of the NUM was rapidly moving to the left with the election of Arthur Scargill as Area President in 1973. He was passionately opposed to any form of productivity bonus and indeed took legal advice on the issue prior to the NUM SDC which discussed the subject in September 1974.³⁸ He later led the Yorkshire delegation out of the meeting.

The Wilberforce enquiry recommended the implementation of a productivity scheme following the 1972 national strike. Whilst it is not in the scope of this study to do a full account of wage uniformity and productivity schemes in the British coalmining industry, the outcome of the negotiations that started in 1972 culminated in two NUM National Ballots turning down the introduction of a National Productivity Scheme, firstly in 1974 and again in 1977. It was the 1977 ballot on which the principal debate concerning democracy was centred when the strike broke out in March 1984. At the 1977 NUM Annual Conference moves to try and introduce a National Incentive Bonus scheme were opposed by a majority of delegates. It was, however, a narrow decision and the motion was carried by only three votes. Resolution 24 from the South Derbyshire NUM proposed that a meaningful incentive scheme be implemented from 1 August 1977 but it was turned down by 137,000 votes (50.5%) to 134,000 (49.5%). The NUM was hopelessly split on the issue. The South Derbyshire resolution, however, put in a clause that in the event of an incentive scheme being turned down, different NUM Areas should be allowed to negotiate local self-financing schemes.

Despite the 1977 Annual Conference decision the NUM NEC decided to put the issue to a national ballot of all NUM members. Pressure had been brought on the NEC by some NUM Areas for the introduction of an incentive

³⁸ For an account of this Conference see Gormley, *Battered Cherub*, p. 149.

scheme since the stagnation of miners' wages under the NPLA from the late 1960s, and the Social Contract of the Labour Government (1974-79). Miners' real wages had fallen by 2 per cent in 1974-75, by 4 per-cent in 1975-76 and then by 5 per-cent in 1976-77.³⁹ In 1975 miners' earnings were 125 per cent of those in manufacturing; by 1977 it was down to 108 per cent.⁴⁰ At the same time productivity had fallen under the NPLA during the 1970s from 2.44 Overall Tons per manshift (OMS) in 1970-71 to 2.18 tons OMS in 1977.⁴¹ Rumours were circulating the Nottinghamshire coalfield that 'special payments' were being made in other coalfields in order to keep up production targets. The 1978 NUM Annual Conference Report described these additional payments as being 'additions to the day wage system by means of localised incentives supported by other variations to national agreements'.⁴² There was serious concern within the NUM about declining production in the coal industry and that the NUM could be held to account for not playing its part in the tripartite agreement under the 1974 Plan for Coal.⁴³

This was during the general climate of unrest and limited wage rises under the then Labour Government's Phase 3 of the Social Contract. Inflation was running at record levels and the Labour Government had to secure a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the previous year to prop up the ailing British economy. Accordingly, the Labour Government had to adopt a monetarist economic policy over two years prior to the election of the first Thatcher Government in 1979. Despite Labour being in power and the Plan for Coal being in place, the issue for the NUM was how to pacify the miners' pay issue without breaking the Government's incomes pay policy. Regarding the forthcoming incentive bonus ballot the Kent Area NUM went to court arguing that the NUM NEC was not acting lawfully within the rules and constitution on the union and was in defiance of an Annual Conference decision. However, the judge declared that the NEC's decision was lawful

³⁹ Callinicos and Simons, *The Great Strike*, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴² NUM, *Report to the 1978 Annual Conference*, p. 317.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 316.

and the Kent Area of the NUM had costs awarded against them. The Judge stated that a ballot of all members was by far the fairest and most democratic process:

What the NEC is proposing to do is to hold a secret ballot of all members. This is the very essence of the democratic process, a far more satisfactory and democratic process than leaving it to the delegates of a Conference. ⁴⁴

When the ballot result was announced, much to the surprise of many people, a majority of NUM members nationally voted against the introduction of a National Incentive Bonus scheme. The scheme was rejected by 110,634 votes (55.5%) to 87,901 (44.2%) In the Nottingham Area NUM a majority voted for the introduction of an Area Incentive Bonus Scheme (AIS), but the majority was not as substantial as one would expect. 14,744 (59.5%) voted in favour of the introduction of a bonus scheme with 10,042 (40.5%) being against. ⁴⁵ Thirty three branches voted in favour with only six being against.

In response to the national 'no vote', the NUM NEC then ruled that any Area that wished to negotiate for the introduction of Self Financing Area Incentive Schemes could do so under Rule 36 of the NUM National Rules. They got round the 1977 'no-ballot' result on the grounds that the ballot had rejected a 'national scheme' and this did not stop individual NUM Areas from negotiating Area based schemes. This part of the South Derbyshire Resolution was approved in the NUM NEC section of the report on incentive schemes, apparently without comment or debate. ⁴⁶ The South Derbyshire Area NUM was the first to negotiate a local based scheme, quickly followed by the Leicester and Nottingham Areas of the NUM. The South Wales Area NUM was the last area to negotiate an incentive scheme in January 1978. Following the NUM NEC decision to allow Area incentive schemes the Yorkshire, South

⁴⁴ John McIlroy, *Trade Unions in Britain today* (Manchester, 1988), p. 128.

⁴⁵ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1977, p. 369.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 129.

Wales and Kent Areas then went to court arguing that the NEC were in breach of the rules, the constitution of the union and the previous court ruling. The courts however upheld the NEC's actions. When summing up Justice Watkins said:

The result of the ballot, nationally conducted, is not binding on the NEC in using its powers between conferences. It has no great force or significance.⁴⁷

In the democratic process, which was the correct decision, the judge who stated the ballot was the essence of democracy or the judge that ruled that the ballot was of no great force or significance on the NEC using its powers between conferences? As John McIlroy pointed out, the issue of trade union democracy was a complex one; but was the incentive bonus introduced as a result of a democratic decision?:

Was it a result of an Executive which had already made up its mind and imposed its will on the membership? Were the judges who thought a national ballot was the essence of democracy right? Or was the judge who believed it was 'of no great significance' on firmer ground? Was it right for the Executive to go against the decision of a more representative gathering of delegates, the Conference and a national referendum of members as exemplified by the ballot?

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When the no-ballot issue cropped up at the start of the 1984-85 strike, the left-wing of the NUM was quick to point to the ballot anomalies of the 1977 incentive debacle to defend its no ballot position:

It is interesting to note that (...) the sanctity of the ballot box was not shown in 1978. Then a ballot

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ McIlroy, *Trade Unions in Britain Today*, p. 129.

supported the earlier delegate conference decision to reject pit productivity schemes (...) despite the vote rejecting productivity, discussion on area schemes began in 1978 with South Derbyshire leading the way. There was no uproar in the press on that occasion.⁴⁹

The issue of 'foul play' over the introduction of Area Incentive Schemes has remained as an instrument in defending the 'no ballot' issue in the 1984-85 strike ever since. Twenty years after the strike Dave Douglass suggested that the 1977 incentive ballot debacle was the major influence in the aversion to a ballot in 1984:

The antipathy to a ballot had more than one source. Perhaps the greatest related to an earlier period when the NCB, with the approval of Mr Gormley (...) had tried to introduce a productivity scheme. The Conference, fearful that such a scheme would bring back financial divisions between areas and break national pay bargaining, would not agree.⁵⁰

The Area Incentive Schemes have been put forward as a major cause of disunity among NUM miners and thus a main factor in causing a 'no vote' in any NUM national strike ballot. Like Douglass previously, Wilsher was of the opinion that the introduction of area incentive schemes fractured unity in the NUM:

In January 1978, as area vote followed area vote, the men indicated, pretty unequivocally, that for them the choice was money first and unity a poor, rather

⁴⁹ Labour Research Department, *The Miners' Case* (London, October 1984), p. 11.

⁵⁰ D. J. Douglass, *Strike, not the End of the Story* (Overton, 2005), p. 32.

theoretical, second. It was to prove a critical decision when 1984 came round.⁵¹

Likewise Milne backed the theory of incentive bonus payments being a factor for causing division within the NUM 'rank and file' members, along with the myth of the 'safe pits' theory:

The division between what appeared at the time to be pits and coalfields guaranteed a long term future, notably Nottinghamshire (...) and the rest had been deliberately nurtured by the Coal Boards' reintroduction of incentive payments favouring miners at high productivity pits.⁵²

The inference from this way of thinking is that high productivity pits with favourable geological conditions automatically command high incentive bonus payments whilst low productivity and bad geological conditions automatically command low incentive bonus payments. The Nottinghamshire coalfield is often described as being a monolithic coalfield, with good geological conditions and an assumption that these conditions were linked automatically to high incentive bonus payments at all of its collieries. Thus, because the Nottinghamshire miners had been bought off by high incentive bonuses, they would be unwilling to back strike action in a national ballot. However, as the Revolutionary Communist Party pointed out, this does not explain why Barnsley miners, who also got high bonuses, were among the most militant supporters of the strike.⁵³ Also, as previously mentioned in part 1 of Chapter 4, there were distinct differences in geological conditions within the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

⁵¹ Wilsher, Macintyre and Jones, *Strike*, p. 21.

⁵² Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War against the Miners?* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 19.

⁵³ Revolutionary Communist Party, *The Notts Scapegoats*, January 1985. D. Amos collection.

In his address to the 1983 NUM Annual Conference, Arthur Scargill suggested that the Area Bonus Incentive Agreement was the main reason why the NUM membership had turned down industrial strike action twice in the previous year:

There can be no doubt that the main reason [for turning down strike action] was the Bonus Incentive Scheme, which has indeed put man against man, pit against pit, and Area against Area (...) The Incentive Scheme has disunited us and set this union back fifty-years. ⁵⁴

Despite this claim there were flaws in the left's argument that the AISs were the main cause of disunity in the NUM in the early 1980s. When the NPLA agreement came into existence in 1966 a clause was introduced whereby the NUM were involved in setting the 'norms' for production workers on coalfaces. The NPLA had the effect of finishing the different country-wide piece-rates for coalface workers that existed prior to 1966, replacing it by a standard face rate (power-loading rate) for face workers throughout the country. Under the scheme parity was to be achieved for all face production workers throughout Britain by 31 December 1971. Real wages in some coalfields stagnated and workforce morale collapsed. As a result of this and the devastation of the deep mining coal industry during the Lord Robens era (c1960 – 1970), no more was this seen than in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, as real wages fell and thousands of migrant miners settled in the county with stories of their pits being closed in other regions for no apparent reason. Dick Martin's view on NPLA, 'that the incentive in pit work had been kicked out', echoed throughout the Nottinghamshire coalfield. ⁵⁵ In order to try and maintain some kind of incentive for production workers on NPLA, the issue of 'method study' was brought in. Method study set the norm for the task which should be achieved. Clause 4 of the NPLA schedule stated:

⁵⁴ NUM, *Report to 1983 National Conference*, p. 351.

⁵⁵ All our Working Lives (Cutting Coal), 1983, *Channel 4 Production*.

The number of men who shall comprise a power-loading team will be assessed by method study within four weeks where possible of the face starting. The union may, if they wish, have an observer present whilst method study is being taken. During this period the number of men shall be assessed by management after consultation with the union on experience of similar installations working in comparable conditions.⁵⁶

In the event of a dispute arising at pit level out of the implementation of Clause 4, the following system should operate: (This came under Clause 19 of the NPLA Schedule)

In the event of a dispute at pit level arising out of the implementation of Clause 4 of this Schedule two persons shall be appointed by the Board and two by the union at District level, all of whom must have knowledge of power loading systems in other parts of the district. They will visit the face and report their findings to a meeting of the parties at District level for decision. In the event of a dispute on any other Clause of the Agreement it shall be treated as a national question under the National Conciliation Agreement of 1947 and dealt with accordingly.⁵⁷

It should be remembered that NUM Policy at the time NPLA was introduced objected to measurement by the time clock. At the start of the 1984 strike NPLA still gave a basic set wage for face-workers, and incentive bonus could be earned, on top of the basic wage, when the face produced above the set norm. Incentive bonus schemes could be district-based, pit-based or face-

⁵⁶ NCB and NUM, *National Power Loading Agreement*, November 1966, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

based. Pit-based or district agreements were referred to as 'chuck in systems'. Pits that operated individual coalface contracts were called 'face to face agreements'. From 1978 negotiating the norm, for the face or development heading, was therefore an important aspect of determining miners' earnings at pit level. The duty for negotiating on incentive bonuses at pit level usually lay with the local NUM Branch; in the Nottinghamshire coalfield this responsibility usually lay with the NUM Branch Secretary. His duty would be to negotiate both face-norms and incentive rates with the local colliery management for each coalface or development heading. In the event of a face suffering from poor geological conditions it would be the duty of the NUM Branch Secretary to try and negotiate down the norm i.e. reduce the set norm pro-rata to take into account whatever particular problems were beyond the control of the face team. In some cases coalfaces with poor geological conditions would get a pit or area fall-back rate. Former NUM National President, Joe Gormley, dispelled the theory that area incentive schemes were bound to lead to wide discrepancies between earnings in different coalfield areas because of the issue of pit based norms:

In theory this [earning discrepancies] ought not to be the case, because norms are decided at pit level, according to the conditions of each coalface. This is a matter for negotiation between the local NUM representatives and the Colliery Manager. And the payment for achieving the norm, or percentages above and below it, is the same throughout Britain, so that theoretically everyone should be able to earn the same bonus.⁵⁸

In reality, the Area Incentive Bonus schemes did not work out this way, hence the myth of good geological conditions creating good bonuses and bad

⁵⁸ Gormley, *Battered Cherub*, p. 153.

geological conditions creating poor bonuses. However, Joe Gormley drew an important historical comparison between the then new Area Incentive schemes of the late 1970s and the old piece work systems that existed prior to the introduction of NPLA in 1966:

(...) the curious thing is that the Areas with the lowest earnings are the same Areas which had the lowest earnings under the old piece-work systems, the same areas incidentally, which supported the NPLA and opposed the Incentive Scheme. That suggests either that they are not interested in earning themselves more money, or that they just don't know how to negotiate properly for themselves.⁵⁹

Stanley dispelled the theory that bad geological conditions automatically led to poor incentive bonuses. When working on a coalface in the Tupton seam at Newstead Colliery prior to the strike, lower norms to take account of poor geological conditions were negotiated at pit level which then allowed decent incentive bonuses to be earned:

I have to say that even though we had these horrible conditions we also earned some very good money, as the norms for the coalface production negotiated by the union were very good. The incentive scheme was exploited to its fullest by the Tupton men.⁶⁰

Ironically, Stanley contradicts himself earlier in the same document by suggesting that the incentive bonus scheme was responsible for the disunity in the NUM whilst earlier claiming that the Newstead Tupton men were benefitting from the same incentive bonus scheme:

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Stanley, *Nottinghamshire Miners do strike*, p. 45.

The avarice of the Nottinghamshire miner was becoming more and more prominent as we then entered into a pit by pit bonus scheme and then shortly afterwards a face by face scheme. Even at local pit level you would have workers doing the same kind of work as others being paid differently because of the production achievements of each individual coalface or heading.⁶¹

Therefore, it can be construed that negotiations on the norm, and subsequent incentive earnings, were an important factor in determining miners' wages at pit level by the early 1980s. However, evidence exists that another important influence, involving the negotiation of pit bonus, was happening at the same time. In the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the early 1980s a new breed of NUM Branch Officials was replacing the old NUM Branch stalwarts from the 1960s and 1970s. The left-wing of the NUM was ideologically opposed to differential earnings, the goal of standard earnings for face-workers being a long sought after policy. Thus, from 1966 to 1978, the left's ideological policy of standard face rates throughout the British coalfields was achieved. This was thought to underpin the unity in the NUM during the two national strikes of 1972 and 1974. But it was also, as Jack Jones (Leicester Area NUM) stated in 1976, at a cost to districts like Leicestershire where production levels regularly topped the national OMS but no additional payments were forthcoming as wages levels stood still. Attacking the principle of NPLA and national unity it had created he said:

Call it what you may, standardisation or rationalisation, the Leicestershire miner has paid dearly for National Agreements.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁶² C. P. Griffin, *The Leicestershire Miners Vol. 3*, p. 178.

Real earnings during the periods 1966-72 and 1975 – 1978 declined in several coalfields, as the coal industry continued to contract. By the time of the introduction of the Area Incentive Scheme in 1978 it had become apparent there was a need for a fresh approach to the negotiating process.

Williamson suggested that in the run up to the 1984-85 strike a new breed of Branch Official was emerging in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. He contended that these new NUM Branch Officials, many of whom were craftsmen, were more suited to the changing pattern of industrial relations in the coal industry at that time. Williamson saw a distinct difference between the old school of Branch Officials and the new school:

The old Branch Secretaries were usually those that could shout the loudest and fight the hardest, to be fair they were never elected for their intellect and intelligence (...) then the pendulum began to swing (...) more and more craftsmen were being elected onto the union because of the incentive scheme coming in and many of them knowing they were being ripped off with bonus payments ⁶³

What Williamson was describing was an altering industrial relations climate for the union, a climate changing from the industrial muscle of the 1970s to one of industrial negotiation, mainly centred at pit level. During the NPLA era (1966 – 1978) negotiations, especially concerning the issue of wages, moved to a more national base, but with the advent of pit based incentive schemes from 1978, the emphasis on earnings moved back to pit level. It was left to the local NUM Branch Officials to negotiate a significant part of production workers earnings from this time. From the early 1980s, many of the old Nottinghamshire NUM Branch stalwarts from the 1960s and 1970s were starting to take advantage of the new enhanced redundancy terms and were

⁶³ Interview with Steve Williamson, Selston, 8 March 2009.

leaving the coal industry. In many cases the 'New Breed' of NUM Branch Secretaries were taking their place.

Concluding this section on the ballot issue, three important themes can be identified. Firstly, the controversy surrounding the introduction of Area Incentive Schemes in the 1977-78 period highlighted the 'different perceptions of democracy' which existed in the NUM. As John Lloyd rightly stated, the NUM Annual Conference was the supreme authority in the union; between conferences the NUM NEC was responsible for conducting the business and affairs of the union. However, in addition to resolutions to Conference, there were other 'countervailing pressures to the delegated democracy of conference'.⁶⁴ One of these was the requirement under NUM National Rule 43 to hold an individual ballot vote on any proposed national strike action. The two legal judgements on the incentive bonus debacle (1977-78) merely highlighted this democratic anomaly in the NUM. Secondly, the issue that once the Area Incentive Schemes had been introduced, the argument that they were a main cause of disunity in the NUM need not be the case. From 1978 onwards a significant part of miners' wages was reliant on NUM Branch Officials negotiating incentive contracts at NUM Branch level. As in the case that Stanley highlighted in the pre-strike period at Newstead, strong branch negotiations could result in face workers earning decent bonuses despite unfavourable geological conditions. Also, as Griffin stated, 'it hardly took an area incentive scheme to divide the union; division was its normal condition'.⁶⁵ There had been constant division for most of the 1970s on 'the futility or desirability of pressing for substantial wage claims and taking militant or conciliatory stances over pit closures'.⁶⁶ More importantly, the left's claim that NPLA created unity in the NUM was challenged. Griffin suggested that apart from the 1972 – 1974 period which was affected by particular economic circumstances, 'National wage agreements and uniform, national rates of pay had not brought unity, NPLA

⁶⁴ Lloyd, *Understanding the Miners' Strike*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ C. P. Griffin, *Leicestershire Miners Vol.3*, p. 181.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

had been a constant source of division'.⁶⁷ Finally, in the period pre dating the strike, there was a move in the centre of negotiations from National level to Area and pit level. No more was this seen than in negotiations at NUM Branch level which determined the level of earnings a miner could get through additional incentive bonuses.

Despite the safe pits theory and the issue of wages disparity, there was another main factor which was influential on the ballot issue and the ability to win a strike: the effect that enhanced redundancy terms had on the NUM members leaving the industry. This was especially prevalent among the over 50s. The implication was that NUM members over 50, signifying that they would take advantage of the new enhanced voluntary redundancy terms, would be unlikely to vote for industrial strike action in a national ballot vote. Part 3 on the Ballot issue appraises the link between redundancy and the failure to hold a national strike ballot in the 1984-85 strike and investigates why this affected the eventual outcome of the strike.

3. Bailing Out: Redundancy, the Ballot issue and the strike

Hilary Cave's third reason (see p. 192) why the 1984-85 strike was conducted without a national ballot lies in the issue of the strike being a principled strike about saving jobs for future generations.⁶⁸ Bob Collier, a striking miner from Newstead Colliery, made reference to a 'genuine strike', based on the issue of saving jobs:

We were totally united in 1972 and 1974 when it was about money. The 1984 strike brought out the difference between the genuine man concerned about his job and his future and the greedy people who

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Interview with Barry Johnson and Hilary Cave, Chesterfield, 8 March 2008.

knew what they were doing was wrong, but all they wanted was the money.⁶⁹

Likewise on the centenary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) in 1989 the NUM's account of the strike emphasised the 'principled issue' as being the preservation of jobs:

This strike had not been about wages, better conditions or any material gain. It had been waged on principle; the principle that miners' jobs were held by each generation of workers in trust for those who would come after them, and must not be wantonly destroyed.⁷⁰

Overall manpower had been falling in the British deep-coalmining industry since it reached its peak in 1913 of around one million workers. A combination of new technologies, economic downturns and a move to alternative fuels had combined to cause this decline. From the early 1980s one of the main obstacles obstructing the fight for jobs was the issue of enhanced redundancy. Many miners, especially the over 50s, had been leaving the coal-industry in significant numbers since the introduction of enhanced terms in 1981, available under the Government based Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme (RMPS). Benefits were increased again under the RMPS from April 1983. Redundancies in the coal-industry doubled from 8,100 in 1982-83 to 18,100 the following year.⁷¹ This issue was not unique to the coal industry. As Adeney and Lloyd maintained, enhanced redundancy packages had been brought in to deal with a period of contraction throughout British Industry, especially in the public sector, in the steel

⁶⁹ Bell, *Memories of the Nottinghamshire Coalfield*, p. 109.

⁷⁰ NUM, *A Century of Struggle*, p. 112.

⁷¹ Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, p. 25.

industry, shipyards and British Telecom.⁷² The main question surrounding the redundancy issue is what effect did it have in undermining the ability to win a strike ballot, and thus the ability to win a strike which was about saving pits and mining jobs?

Reg Guest's humorous poem (Appendix 17) summed up the general climate of both the pre-strike and post-strike periods, when constant rumours circulated the Nottinghamshire coalfield about imminent requests from the NCB for voluntary redundancies:

Ave' you eard owt is the greeting,

Heard at every shift,

Ave' you eard owt's what they cry

When you're going down the lift.⁷³

The RMPS was a Government funded scheme which replaced the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme (VERS). The VERS had gradually brought the miners' retirement age down from 65 to 60 in the late 1970s. The RMPS paid benefits over and above those paid under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act of 1978. Importantly, redundant miners over the age of 55, with a least ten years' service, received both a lump sum and a weekly benefit, the amount depending on service in the industry and average earnings in the tax year prior to redundancy.⁷⁴ The benefits under RMPS could effectively be split into two parts. Enhanced benefits for miners over 50 were based on lump sums up to £20,000 plus pension benefits, which combined with state entitlements, gave a weekly income over £100. For miners under 50 the new rates gave a payment of £1,000 for each year of service. In the industry this was usually referred to as severance pay.

How is the issue of the strike ballot and the enhanced redundancy terms connected? Finishing figures from a Nottinghamshire colliery during the

⁷² Ibid., p. 263.

⁷³ Reg Guest, 'Ave' you eard owt', *The Chad*, July 1986. D. Amos collection.

⁷⁴ NCB, *Benefits payable under the Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme*, April 1983.

period that pre dated the introduction of the enhanced redundancy terms (1978-79) and following their introduction (1983-84 & 1986-87) show some interesting trends:

Table 3. Leaving statistics for Annesley Colliery: 1978-79, 1983-84 and 1986-87.

Reason for leaving	1978-79	1983-84	1986-87
Redundancy	14 (11.0%)	124 (83.0%)	97 (75.0%)
Dismissed	14 (11.0%)	8 (05.3%)	7 (05.5%)
Transfer	13 (10.3%)	3 (02.1%)	10 (08.0%)
Voluntary	46 (36.5%)	7 (04.7%)	7 (05.5%)
Death in Service	3 (02.5%)	1 (00.6%)	0
Early Retirement (VERS)	33 (26.5%)	3 (02.1%)	0
Incapacity	1 (00.8%)	1 (00.6%)	8 (06.0%)
Emigration	1 (00.8%)	2 (01.6%)	0
Other reason	1 (00.8%)	0	0
Totals	126 (100%)	149 (100%)	129 (100%)
Average Colliery Manpower	957	981	890
Overall Tons per manshift (OMS)	2.91	3.64	4.39
Annual Colliery Tonnage	588,556	682,181	844,902

Source: Annesley Colliery Leavers Book 1972 – 1993. D. Amos collection.

Note that the percentage of leavers in the three financial years was relatively constant; between 13% and 15% of manpower left the colliery each financial year for a variety of reasons. However, the reasons for miners finishing is noticeably different in three areas over the periods studied. The most significant factor is the mass increase in miners finishing on voluntary redundancy under the enhanced RMPS terms by 1983-84. From just over 10% in 1978-79 the figure soared to 83% by 1983-84, in the year before the strike, and remained at three-quarters of the leavers in 1986-87, following the strike. Directly connected with this trend is the fact that miners finishing voluntarily or through early retirement virtually disappeared between 1978-79

and 1983-84 onwards. Retirement went down from 33 in 1978-79, to just 3 in 1983-84 and then none by 1986-87. Voluntary leavers accounted for over a third of finishers in 1978-79 (36.5%); by the 1980's this had dropped to around 5% in each of the years studied. The inference from this is that from the time of the enhanced redundancy terms being announced, most miners waited to be paid off instead of leaving the industry voluntarily. However, another significant factor when looking at the redundancy/retirement figures should be considered. The average age of miners leaving Annesley Colliery dropped considerably between 1978-79 and 1986-87. In 1978-79 the majority of miners leaving Annesley were in the 57 to 63 age group and the majority left on the VERS Scheme. By 1983-84 this figure had dropped; most miners who left then were in the 56 – 59 age group and finished on voluntary redundancy. Three years later this figure had dropped even further; in 1986-87 most of the miners who left Annesley on redundancy were in the late 40s to early 50s age group; out of the 97 miners who left in 1986-87 only one was over 55.

An important factor for the increase in miners leaving Annesley in 1983-84 on redundancy terms was to make way for displaced miners at the due to close Pye Hill and Moorgreen Collieries. At these two collieries men under 50 were given the opportunity to transfer to the more 'high priority pits' to facilitate redundancy on a one to one basis. In effect, every transferred miner from Moorgreen or Pye Hill meant the opportunity of a redundancy for an over 50s Annesley miner; the same scenario applied at other Nottinghamshire Area 'receiving pits'. The rationalisation would come under the banner of 'natural wastage'. Beynon, Hudson and Sadler described a similar situation in the Durham Coalfield in 1985 following the strike. At Horden and Bates Collieries, which had been scheduled for closure, the men were given the opportunity to transfer to the high-priority pits in the region to make redundancies available for the over 50s at the receiving pits. The main difference between the Durham and Nottinghamshire cases was that the closures in the latter had been agreed at local level prior to the strike; in Durham the closures were contested. Both the Horden and Bates closures

went to appeal through the Extended Colliery Review Procedure (ECRP) but both still closed following that appeal. In the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area an influential factor for accepting closure was that younger miners could get jobs at receiving collieries while they still existed. Some former Moorgreen miners told the story of Henry Richardson, the pro-strike Nottingham NUM Area Official, telling Moorgreen NUM members in 1983 to accept the closure of the mine whilst other jobs still remained available in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.⁷⁵ Within a year he was telling them to 'get off their knees' and fight for their jobs.

The number of miners over 50 finishing from 1981 onwards was an important factor when the NCB announced its plans to shed 20,000 jobs in early March 1984, the trigger that started the strike. This issue was the crux of the matter for the NUM. Who could deny men who had worked thirty to forty years in the pits the chance of a decent redundancy payment and to rescue of what was left of their lives from the dust of the pit? At the 1983 NUM Annual Conference in Perth, Peter Heathfield, then NUM Area Secretary for the NUM North Derbyshire Area, told the conference of the imminent threat to 70,000 jobs in the coal industry. Interestingly he claimed 53,000 of these were miners over 50:

(...) there are 53,000 miners in our industry over the age of 50. Many of them may sigh with relief (...) I know 70,000 into 53,000 does not go (...) inevitably in the course of the next few years (...) the 40 year olds of our industry, are going to feel the axe.⁷⁶

The fact that Heathfield stated that many of them 'may sigh with relief' inferred that he thought many over 50s would be willing to accept redundancy and get out of the industry as soon as they could. The figures

⁷⁵ The author in discussion with Mick Kirby and Trevor Wilson, ex Moorgreen miners, at Annesley Colliery following the 1984-85 dispute. Henry Richardson was the Nottingham Area NUM Agent for Moorgreen Colliery.

⁷⁶ NCB, 'Midland Miners need Convincing', *Coal News*, September 1983. D. Amos collection.

from Annesley for 1983-84 confirm this view. There was no shortage of volunteers to make way for younger miners affected by closure. In the event of 70,000 jobs losses being correct this would leave a deficit of 17,000 jobs. One factor Heathfield did not include in his calculation was the number of miners waiting to reach the 50 milestone and have the opportunity of getting redundancy with the lump sum and associated weekly benefits. Todd Clark, from Bentinck Colliery, described the prevailing atmosphere of this sector of workers in the immediate aftermath of the strike in 1985:

The carrot's there and any man over the age of 46 who keeps his mouth shut and his head down will hope he gets redundancy .⁷⁷

This scenario Clark described existed before the strike, during the strike and following the strike as the figures from Annesley confirm. In the Nottinghamshire coalfield it was added to by the introduction of £1,000 per year severance pay for miners under 50. This was first introduced in the Nottinghamshire coalfield following announcement of the Hucknall-Babbington closure in September 1986.

If the Annesley scenario for 1983-84 were to be projected nationwide, the 20,000 job losses the NCB required, which sparked the 1984-85 strike, could have been achieved. However, as the NUM leaders knew, this would be at the cost of pit closures. Was the attitude to redundancy from the over 50s nationwide the same as the miners in Nottinghamshire? Some evidence suggests this was so. Coulter suggested 450 men were leaving the coal industry weekly from the time of Ian MacGregor's appointment as NCB Chairman in September 1983.⁷⁸ Both Ivor Evans and Roy Walters from the South Wales Coalfield suggested miners over 50 would leave the industry on enhanced redundancy terms rather than transfer. When asked if miners in

⁷⁷ Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 82.

⁷⁸ Coulter, Miller and Walker, *The Iron Fist: State of Siege*, p. 13.

South Wales would transfer to other pits in the event of closures, Ivor Evans suggested that men over 50 would not go: 'They'll take the pittance (...) this redundancy money'.⁷⁹ In July 1983 Roy Walters of Tower Colliery suggested that redundancy payments would improve with the imminent appointment of Ian McGregor as NCB Chairman:

The redundancy payments are now good (...) I suppose when he (Ian McGregor) gets in that he will ask for higher (redundancy) payments (...) which is a way of demoralising the people over 50 (...) and they will say, well we've worked thirty years, forty years in the pit, if we go to 60 we only get £500, we can have £21,000 now or £30,000 or whatever the case may be, they're going to take it and you can't blame the men for taking it.⁸⁰

Colin Bottomore, NUM Branch Secretary at Bentinck Colliery in Nottinghamshire, also identified the issue of the £500 VERS payment as being a factor in the over 50s deciding to accept redundancy. At the Nottingham Area NUM Conference in February 1984 he very bluntly stated the reasons why he thought the men over 50 were leaving the industry:

They [the men] accept redundancy because they are knackered, because they cannot continue to do the work at that age, and because if they go to 60, they finish up with £500 [VERS].⁸¹

The redundancy problem and the destiny of the 1984-85 strike is considered to be a clash between the ideologies of the left-wing NUM union activists and the realities of the situation for miners over 50. Union ideology talked of no man having the right to sell the job of a son or grandson. The NUM National

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁸⁰ Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 64.

⁸¹ Nottingham Area NUM, *1984 Area Conference Report*, (6 and 7 February 1984), p. 62.

President's address to the 1983 NUM Annual Conference touched on this issue:

We must face the fact that our people, are, all too often, selling the job of son or grandson in exchange for a lump sum benefit (...) we must convince our members that, while they have every right to demand early retirement (...) they do not have the right to sell the jobs of their sons and grandsons.⁸²

As Adeney and Lloyd stated, the Government and the NCB had fashioned a redundancy package which appealed to the individual miner but was bound to receive the opposition of the union.⁸³ There was a clash of ideologies within the union between the collective idealism of some of the NUM leadership and activists, and the individualism expressed by some of the NUM members at branch level. There was, as Adeney and Lloyd identified, a conflict of opinion in the union on the issue of voluntary redundancy:

Its [the NUM's] definition of collective responsibilities and the need for struggle necessarily conflicted with the short term, family bonded horizons of many of its members.⁸⁴

The issue for the left-wing of the NUM was that the job reductions achieved in the 1983-84 period were the 'thin end of the wedge'. During that period, under the NCB chairmanship of first Norman Siddall, then Ian McGregor (from September 1983), expected production capacity had been reduced by four million tons, resulting in fifteen pits being closed and over 18,000 miners leaving the industry on voluntary redundancy.⁸⁵ Only 300 of those miners were under the age of 50. As Harper and Wintour pointed out, the NUM had

⁸² NUM, *1983 Annual Conference Report*, p. 352.

⁸³ Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, p. 263.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁸⁵ Keith Harper and Patrick Wintour, 'The bitter battle that ended an era', *The Guardian*, 5 March 1985, p. 16.

found it impossible to find a rallying point of resistance to these 'closures by stealth'. The Penallta NUM Branch Secretary (South Wales) commented on the limited impact of increased redundancy payments stating the issue was really about younger miners fighting for jobs. However, he did emphasise the impact of the redundancy terms on the over 50s in the coal industry:

(...) I made it clear to our General Meeting that, you know, fighting for jobs (...) was not for me or for the Chairman (of the Branch), because both of us were over 50. But I said, if the younger people are prepared to fight for their jobs (...) then I'd be prepared to vote with them. And the majority of our older men voted for strike action in the 1984-85 strike, although they had nothing to gain.⁸⁶

The inference from the Penallta example is that all the strike did was to delay the inevitable; that the flow of voluntary redundancies for the over 50s would continue despite the strike. The reality of the situation was that by the early 1980s many miners aged over 50, throughout Britain, were willing to accept voluntary redundancy and leave the coal industry. Every pit had a significant number of miners over 50 and often, as at Penallta, there was no distinction between NUM Branch Officials and NUM rank and file members volunteering for redundancy. The pro-strike NUM Branch Secretary at Newstead finished his twelve weeks' notice in June 1984 and subsequently left the coal industry as did the Branch Secretary at Allerton-Bywater in the Yorkshire coalfield in May 1984.⁸⁷

Many of the over 50s had been in the industry for thirty to forty years and had experienced the rundown of the coal industry in the Robens era of the

⁸⁶ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 106.

⁸⁷ Allerton Bywater Colliery Miners' Memorial / History / Miners Strike 1984-85, www.abcmembersmemorial.co.uk

1960s, when most of the mass closures were conducted under a Labour Government. Some, like Keith Staley had transferred from other coalfields into Nottinghamshire. More importantly, if they carried on till the age of 60 they risked not only a £500 VERS payment but worsening health after years working in the pits. A redundancy payment before this, with a weekly payment and lump sum, could get them out of the pit and enable a better retirement than the previous generation had experienced. Many stories circulated the coalfield areas of some old miners who retired in their early 60s and died before enjoying the benefits of retirement. It could be a hazardous occupation for a NUM Branch Official to openly voice his opposition to any potential redundancies at the pit. As Adeney and Lloyd stated:

Indeed, union officials found that if they expressed their opposition too forcefully they met the anger of their members.⁸⁸

The factor of more generous redundancy terms being available than had been previously, combined with a type of blackmail-style implementation by the NCB, ensured the NUM could never get round the issue of jobs going by stealth. The NCB ensured that each scheme was given a terminal date, with no assurance that a further scheme would be introduced. This helped create a climate of uncertainty among miners, especially those nearing 50 and those over 50 years of age. Despite the strike, over six and a half thousand miners still left the industry on redundancy in the financial year 1984-85, with over five-hundred leaving on leaving on VERS. In total the workforce nationally reduced by almost 12,000 in 1984-85 with the Scottish, Western and South Nottinghamshire NCB Areas suffering over half of those job losses.⁸⁹ In each of those areas the redundancies took place as a result of pit closures which were taking place prior to the outbreak of the strike.

⁸⁸ Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, p. 263.

⁸⁹ NUM, *1985 Annual Conference Report*, p. 29.

Parker cited the issue of the redundancy benefits as being one of the main factors which defeated the strike:

The redundancy terms for the mineworkers were kept as generous as necessary to ensure the men themselves would vote for closure, therefore allowing a policy of voluntary redundancy to be sustained in a way which made union opposition to closures ineffective.⁹⁰

This policy would be sustained throughout the mass run down of the industry between 1985 and 1994. A combination of more generous lump sums, the fear of withdrawal of the lump sums if the miners went to appeal, and the policy of ensuring each scheme had a terminal date with no assurance of another scheme being introduced, swept through the industry like a plague. As Williamson stated the general malaise that the strike caused throughout the industry meant that, in the post-strike era, the NCB could have closed any pit in Britain without too much resistance:

After the strike you could have closed any pit in the country, the men had had enough and were fed up with it all. They didn't want any more strikes, didn't want any more intimidation, they could have shut all the pits and the men would have been happy to get out.⁹¹

The great irony of a strike primarily aimed at saving jobs was that while all the turmoil was breaking out in March 1984 miners in the Cumberland coalfield agreed to accept the finish of production at the region's last colliery. NUM members at Haig Colliery, near Whitehaven, discussed the NCB's plans to shed 580 jobs by August 1984 and put the colliery on a

⁹⁰ M. J. Parker, *Thatcherism and the Fall of Coal* (Oxford, 2000), p. 80.

⁹¹ Interview with Steve Williamson, Selston, 8 March 2009.

development only basis, leaving 134 development workers to try and develop new coal seams.⁹² It was reported that the colliery had been plagued by geological problems and had lost £29 million in the last ten years. Despite the fear of job losses the NUM members at Haig voted by a four to one majority against striking in the area ballot the previous week. Harry Hanlon, NUM NEC member for Cumberland NUM, suggested there was a fear of the colliery workings flooding and thus it not reopening again, this would put the miner's redundancy payments at risk. Commenting on this situation Hanlon stated:

Under the old agreement, a man of 49 could have expected to pick up around £8,000 in redundancy payments. Under the new scheme, the same man can expect £33,000.⁹³

The Cumberland Area (NUM) members were not willing to gamble an unsecure future against enhanced redundancy payments that could disappear if they did not act fast. Haig Colliery, the last Cumberland pit, finally closed in 1986, the search for new seams having been unproductive. The Haig case was interesting in that it was not just another colliery closure but the end of coalmining altogether in a former industrial region.

Although not known at the time, the Haig scenario would set the scene for things to come in the British coalmining industry over the next decade. Following the end of the 1984-85 strike, colliery after colliery closed throughout Britain, the majority of miners at each closed colliery not willing to gamble enhanced redundancy payments against an uncertain future. Despite claims from some post-strike NUM activists, this scenario applied to both NUM and UDM majority pits. During the 'coal crisis' of 1992-1994, British Coal closed three out of five of its profit-making Midland's collieries on one day in February 1994. This followed the announcement of a significant drop in coal supplies to the newly privatised power generation

⁹² 'Redundancy Talks', *The Observer*, 18 March 1984, p. 17

⁹³ *Ibid.*

markets following the 'dash for gas'. Enhanced redundancy payments ensured that there was little resistance to the closures, even though the three collieries concerned, Manton, Ollerton and Annesley-Bentinck had restructured and were showing significant productivity increases by the early 1990s. At Manton only 5 miners voted to oppose the closure in the NUM Branch ballot. Majorities of four to one at Ollerton and three to one at Annesley-Bentinck voted not to contest the closures. The latter two were UDM majority pits; Manton was a NUM majority pit. Colin Stephenson, a Colliery Fitter at Annesley-Bentinck, summed up the situation as he saw it at the time:

When British Coal came with their closure proposal the pit was producing coal like it was going out of fashion. Production records had been broken and earnings were very good. However, the closure put some people into a quandary because of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the industry and whether any future redundancy payments would be as generous, or indeed would be there at all. When the closure was announced I think one-third of the workforce wanted the pit to close, another third wanted it to stop open and the remaining third were undecided. When British Coal put a time limit on accepting the enhanced redundancy terms, the undecided third joined the third wanting the pit to close, hence the 3 to 1 vote not to oppose the closure.

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At Annesley-Bentinck in 1994, as at Haig a decade previously, the majority of miners were not willing to gamble an uncertain future against enhanced redundancy terms available at the time. The strange thing at the commencement of the 1984-85 strike, ignited by the Cortonwood issue, was

⁹⁴ Interview with Colin Stephenson, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,, 11 April 2009.

that Haig and three other collieries due to close all produced no-strike votes in a dispute supposedly against pit closures! Along with Haig, Cronton in Lancashire and Moorgreen and Pye Hill in Nottinghamshire all had significant votes against strike action in the area ballots of March 1984. This again suggests that the loss of 20,000 jobs nationwide that the NCB had proposed in early March 1984 could probably have been achieved without too much bother. The issue had been dealt with at a local level, by local custom and practice. A similar amount of jobs and cuts in capacity had been achieved voluntarily in the previous financial year (1983-84). However, for the NUM leadership and many of its activists, the issue was seen as the thin end of the wedge. As Douglass stated at the pre-strike Delegates Meeting at Hatfield on 10 March 1984, the issue was about the need to fight then or there would be nowhere to go eventually. It was a reaction against the passiveness of the NUM which closed up much of the coalfield in the North-East during the reign of Lord Robens in the 1960s:

When our pits closed up yon (the North-East), we came to Yorkshire. Where is your Yorkshire going to be? There is no place left to run, our backs are to the wall.⁹⁵

At the 1983 Annual Conference Emergency Resolution 1 was passed and it asked the NEC to embark on a nationwide campaign to oppose pit closures and reductions in manpower. (Appendix 18) The resolution further instructed the NEC to 'conduct a national ballot on the question of pit closures at a time deemed to be the most appropriate'.⁹⁶ The appropriate time was the crux of the matter for the NUM as this proved impossible to pin down. For Dave Douglass and the activists at the Hatfield meeting on 10 March 1984 the time was then, for the Cortonwood miners the time was also in March 1984. However, for the Ty Mawr- Lewis Merthyr miners the

⁹⁵ Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 98.

⁹⁶ NUM, *1983 Annual Conference Report*, p. 592.

time had been a year earlier in March 1983 when their pit closed; for the Teversal miners in Nottinghamshire the time had been in March 1979. In the white-hot atmosphere of the Hatfield meeting Dave Douglass had asked the men who did not believe in fighting for jobs to get up in the meeting and say so. They did not need to, as miners throughout Britain, especially the over 50s, were quietly leaving the industry or were waiting for the appropriate time to leave quietly. With miners willing to leave the coal industry voluntarily any strike aimed at trying to stop manpower reductions in their tracks was always likely to be fruitless. The strange thing is why did supposed experienced men on the NUM NEC, knowing these facts, let the strike proceed as it did in March 1984?

5. Wot no ballot! – the consequences

How significant was the decision not to have a ballot connected with the failure of the 1984-85 strike? Neil Kinnock, the then Labour Party leader regretted his decision not to press harder for a national ballot at the time.⁹⁷ He cited three main reasons that were instrumental in isolating the NUM and assisting in the defeat of the strike. He suggested that if the NUM had had a national ballot three things would have resulted:

1. There would have been unity among all miners, in all coalfields, as there had been on previous occasions when a democratic pithead ballot had been taken; everyone accepted the majority view.
2. There would have been more active, wider support, from trade unions and trade unionists, which would have changed the whole environment of the strike.

⁹⁷ 'Miners' Strike: Kinnock launches fresh attack on Scargill', *www.guardian.co.uk/politics*, 16 March 2009.

3. The miners would have had the unalloyed respect of the great majority of the public because it would have been understood that the strike was on a strictly democratic basis and men were struggling to save the pits, not a pay dispute.⁹⁸

On Kinnock's first point, a ballot most certainly would have held the NUM together, whether it was a pro or anti strike ballot. Admittedly an anti-strike ballot would have been in a climate of continuing decline for the deep mining coal industry. On the second point, the NUM alienated large sections of wider trade union support because of its no ballot strategy. Apart from support from a few trade unions, notably the rail union ASLEF, the NUM had limited support because other trade unionists questioned the democratic validity of the strike. The NUM only went to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) for support in the autumn of 1984, and then, despite many token gestures from the rostrum, wider union support was still lacking. For the left-wing of the NUM there were ghosts from 1926, when the miners were left to fight on their own following the collapse of the General Strike. Kinnock's third point was about the need to have public sympathy with you in any industrial conflict.

Harper and Wintour also identify three key areas why the strike failed. They cited the failure of a national ballot, the failure of NUM leaders to condemn violence and contended that the battleground should have been on future investment instead of 'the futile situation of defending uneconomic pits'.⁹⁹ They suggest that the refusal to hold a national ballot threw up three key points:

1. It ran against the populist pro ballot mood the Government had created among union members.
2. It allowed around one-third of NUM members to remain at work.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Harper and Wintour, 'The bitter battle that ended an era', *The Guardian*, 5 March 1985, p. 16.

3. It was a self-inflicted wound. A ballot could probably have been won in April 1984.

In 2002 Linda Bardill came up with some thought-provoking evidence on the ballot issue and Nottinghamshire miners in the 1984-85 strike.¹⁰⁰ Her findings were obtained through a series of oral interviews conducted in 2001. Two main points came out of her findings; firstly that the Nottinghamshire miners would have joined the strike if a national ballot had been held; secondly, in the absence of the ballot, the confrontational tactics of the Yorkshire pickets remained a point of contention. On the first point, Bardill found mixed reactions among Nottinghamshire miners in respect of their attitude to strike action in 1984, but found an overall reaction that Nottinghamshire miners would have abided by the results of a national ballot.

Some were in favour of strike action but would not do so in the absence of a ballot. Some disagreed with the strike so decided to work but stated they would have taken strike action if instructed to do so by the outcome of a (pro-strike) national ballot.¹⁰¹

Bardill added that the Nottinghamshire miners' refusal to strike was 'rooted in a genuine belief that the rule book of the union was being violated'.¹⁰² Other commentators also suggested that the lack of a national ballot undermined the legitimacy of the strike. Harper and Wintour maintained that whilst NUM activist support was forthcoming, the lack of a national ballot crippled the potential political power of the strike. Reviewing the strike in March 1985 they stated:

¹⁰⁰ Bardill, 'Changing perceptions of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike', pp. 49-52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

The absence of a ballot, the centre piece of the NUM constitution, poisoned the dispute. The moral legitimacy of the strike and therefore its potential political power was crippled (...) winning the support of activists is one thing, but it does not stop there. You have to go out to the coalfields and win the approval of ordinary members.¹⁰³

Over a quarter of a century later the issue of the lack of a national ballot in the 1984-85 strike remains a major point of contention. NUM activists maintain that it was unfair to hold a ballot on the issue of pit closures for the reasons discussed in this chapter. Nottinghamshire NUM working miners maintain that the lack of a national ballot made the strike both unconstitutional and unofficial in the Nottingham Area of the NUM. This dissertation cannot attempt a full in-depth study of trade union democracy, that is a subject in its own right, but it is worth looking at the views of Allen and McIlroy. On the matter of NUM national rule 43 (the rule for national strike action) Allen stipulated the important role played by 'rank and file' members:

Special provisions are made for colliery national strikes. A national strike must be supported by a 55% majority of the members who vote in a national ballot (...) It is quite clear from this synopsis that power was intended to lie in the hands of ordinary members.¹⁰⁴

Allen's inference is that ordinary members were the men at the pit, the rank and file NUM membership. Rank-and-file NUM members were the key to the dispute. The 1984-85 strike ran in the hands of mainly young left-wing activists, constitutionally through a system of delegated democracy. Without

¹⁰³ Harper and Wintour, 'The bitter battle that ended an era', *The Guardian*, 5 March 1985, pp. 16-17.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

recourse to a vote of all rank and file NUM members it was difficult to assess whether there was a definite majority for strike action amongst all NUM members on their own accord. The various Area Ballots held during March 1984 and the outcome of the three national ballots in the two years that preceded the 1984-85 strike implied there was not a desire for strike action among the NUM membership. At the time of the NUM SDC on 19 April 1984 it was claimed that 80 per cent of NUM members were out on strike. If all of the 80 per cent were out on their own accord, then as Donovan stated, a pro-strike ballot would have removed the 'democratic fig leaf' for all working miners, not just those in Nottinghamshire. But as the Webbs stated, a tension existed between ordinary members, who would normally look to their own immediate interests, and union officials, who were able to bring wider vision, expertise and consistency into union activities. It would be disastrous if either were to completely dominate union decision making.¹⁰⁵

McIlroy suggested that the controversy over the ballot issue was one about procedural arguments which were related to the key issue of where individuals stood over the issue of job losses and what should be done about it.¹⁰⁶ He suggested the ballot was vital to the fortunes of the strike as this eventually led to the sequestration and legal tying up of the NUM's assets:

The issue of the ballot had a vital impact on the fortunes of the strike and the legal judgements eventually produced the state takeover of the NUM's assets.¹⁰⁷

Comparing the NUM's experience of trade union democracy with the area incentive bonus controversy of 1977/78 and the area-by-area strike strategy controversy which started the 1984-85 miners' strike, he suggested that

¹⁰⁵ McIlroy, *Trade Unions in Britain Today*, pp. 131-132.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

"the question of trade union democracy was a complex and not a straightforward matter (...) it was not a scholastic exercise; it goes to the roots of trade union activity".¹⁰⁸ The problem for the NUM, as with most trade unions, was trying to marry the different competing interests within the union, and trying to balance different forms of decision making at national, area and branch level. The federal set up of the NUM meant the alliance between the individual area unions and the national union was a fragile one. The 1984-85 strike and its aftermath was an effort to centralise control of the union. Like the reaction of anti-Europeans to a Brussels led EU, various groups in the NUM were willing to defend the status quo and acted accordingly against an increasingly centralised and dominant NUM at national level. A crucial issue was about managing diversity in the NUM.

McGahey stated on more than one occasion that getting constitutional strike action over pit closures was impossible because of the diverse nature of closures. Those with jobs were not keen to jeopardise them whilst those who had experienced closures in the past resented being called out on strike for pits which had not supported them when their pits closed.¹⁰⁹ Arthur Scargill maintained that the NUM's strike strategy in 1984 was correct. Commenting on the NUM's 1984 strike policy on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the strike he stated:

(...) if the coal board planned to force pit closures on an area by area basis, then we must respond, at least initially, on the same basis. The NUM rules permitted areas to take official strike action if authorised by the NEC in accordance with Rule 41. If the NEC gave Scotland and Yorkshire authorisation under this rule, it could galvanise other areas to seek similar support for action against closures.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 302.

¹¹⁰ Arthur Scargill, 'We could surrender, or stand and fight', www.guardian.co.uk/politics, 7 March 2009, p. 1.

The problem was it did not galvanise similar support but instead opened up fractures in the NUM's armoury. The origins of the 'domino strategy' lay in the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970 and to some extent 1981. The reaction of the Nottinghamshire miners to those disputes was a key factor in their adverse reaction to the 1984-85 strike. Chapter 5 investigates why the Rule 41 domino theory failed in the Nottinghamshire coalfield and draws on historical evidence from previous similar acts of industrial action, notably the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970. Whilst the 1969 and 1970 bouts of unofficial strike action were seen as a springboard for the left in the NUM, the reaction in a moderate and conservative (with a small c) coalfield like Nottinghamshire was restrained. The chaos which accompanied the 1984-85 strike was evident in the 'false starts' of 1969, 1970 and 1981. In 1981 the NCB helped create divisions in the NUM by staggering the closure announcements in the different NCB Areas, thus preventing unified action. As Allen stated there was some hesitancy about the 1981 strike in sections of the coalfields which had conservative traditions.¹¹¹ This was the case in the Nottinghamshire coalfield (see Chapter 5 – Part 4). The concern was over the constitutional legitimacy of the strike, exactly the same issue which arose from the start of the 1984-85 strike in Nottinghamshire. The strikes of 1969, 1970, 1981 and 1984-85 were all seen in Nottinghamshire as being unofficial as they had not been processed through what was considered the agreed constitutional methods in the union. Allen commented:

(Industrial) Action which is not processed through these procedures can be a threat to the union itself (...) Miners who are unwilling to engage in unofficial strike action inevitably accept a national strike decision without hesitation (...) coalfields which have conservative traditions tend to be more constitutional-minded than the rest. They are willing to strike

¹¹¹ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 313.

whole-heartedly provided it is done through what they regard as the proper procedures.¹¹²

It is for this reason that the 1984-85 strike in Nottinghamshire was doomed from the start. The Area by Area 'domino strategy' was alien to the Nottinghamshire coalfield by its nature. In Nottinghamshire the disputes in 1969, 1970, 1981 and 1984-85 all had a common link, they were all classified as being unofficial because they had not been conducted through the understood constitutional procedures of the union. For this reason alone the lack of a national ballot in 1984, as far as the Nottinghamshire coalfield was concerned, was a fatal error.

¹¹² Ibid.

Chapter 5: A game of Constitutional Acrobats: The Rule 41 'Domino Strategy' and the roots of disunity

1. Introduction: The Rule 41 Domino Strategy and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike.

Stephenson, in his dissertation on the Nottinghamshire miners, suggested that the UDM was formed as a direct result of the strike ¹ He also stated it is only by studying the strike that the evolution of the Nottinghamshire based 'breakaway union' can be understood. He placed much emphasis on the split that occurred in the NUM within the first few days of the strike as being the main factor in helping to establish the UDM:

The split in the NUM occurred within a few days of the beginning of the strike in March 1984. The UDM was born out of and because of this split. ²

In order to assess the validity of Stephenson's assessment it is necessary to analyse the evolution of the strike and its effects in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. The Rule 41 strike strategy is still a hotly contested issue. Previously the NUM NEC had resorted to well-understood constitutional procedures, now with the left in control there would be another course of action. The theory behind the 'domino strategy' was that different NUM federated Areas (mainly left wing dominated) would initiate strike action in their own Areas, then other NUM federated Areas and trade-groups would be obliged to join the 'rolling strike action' and a national strike in all but name would exist. It relied on two main factors: the effective use of flying pickets and other areas respecting the sanctity of the picket line. It was adverse aspects associated with these two factors that ensured the NUM membership was split from the onset and the strike eventually failed, leading to a post-

¹ Stephenson, 'Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting' BA Dissertation, p. 24.

² Ibid.

strike speeding up of colliery closures and the terminal decline of the British deep coalmining industry.

Prior to the 1984/85 strike Arthur Scargill had stated that it would be legitimate to run a strike under Rule 41 by calling each area out on strike and creating a de-facto national strike. This was suggested in a 1983 BBC radio interview, a week prior to the failed national ballot on the Tymawr Lewis Merthyr closure issue. Scargill stated that a strike could be run in this way and that it would be constitutional and within the rules of the NUM. Different NUM Areas or Trade Groups could use Rule 41 to call strikes in their own areas, through their own constitutional means, and it could secure a national strike by another way: 'This could amount to a national strike but called by different, though still constitutional means'.³ Harper and Wintour suggested that leaked 1983 NUM NEC minutes showed the NUM National President had also advocated such a strategy at the NEC.⁴ At that time the NUM NEC rejected the idea and instead called a national ballot. The 1983 national ballot turned down industrial strike action by 61% to 39%, with only two NUM Areas reaching the 55% majority needed for strike action.⁵

In order to understand how the domino strategy evolved in early March 1984 it is necessary to review the events leading up to the strike. The local disputes in the South Wales, Scottish and Yorkshire coalfields in the months leading up to the strike have been well documented by Samuel, Adeney and Lloyd, Richards and Taylor.⁶ In late 1983 at Brynlliw in the South Wales coalfield the local NUM branch accused the NCB of reneging on agreed investment for the pit and on agreed joint arrangements for extending the pit's life.⁷ The Scottish coalfield saw the closures of Kinneil, Cardowan and

³ Routledge, *Scargill*, p. 140.

⁴ Harper and Wintour, 'The bitter battle that ended an era', *The Guardian*, 5 March 1985, p. 17.

⁵ South Wales NUM and Kent Area NUM both recorded 68% majorities for strike action, Yorkshire Area NUM had a 54% vote for strike action, 1% short of what was needed under the rules. .

⁶ See Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 43-66; Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, pp. 70-87; Richards, *Miners on Strike*, pp. 94-100; Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, pp. 94-100.

⁷ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 95.

Polmaise in the eighteen months prior to the commencement of the 1984 strike and in January 1984 Bogside Colliery was flooded. The Polmaise NUM Branch appeared on the cover of a Special edition of the NUM's paper, *The Miner*, as the strike broke in early March 1984.⁸ In the Yorkshire coalfield there was industrial unrest at Bullcliffe Wood (over its proposed closure) and Manvers Main Complex. The Manvers dispute over lunch break or 'snap times' led to 10,000 out of 14,000 miners in the NCB South Yorkshire Area being called out on strike by February 1984. The Cortonwood closure was the issue which 'ignited the strike call' in the South Yorkshire coalfield. The fact that it was seen as an economic closure hiked up the stakes; the issue was about closing Cortonwood because its coal was too expensive. Dave Douglass, Hatfield NUM Branch Delegate, touched on this issue at the Hatfield NUM Branch meeting which authorised strike action on 10 March 1984:

Cortonwood is an attempt by the Board to establish the principle that pits will close on economic grounds. If we accept Cortonwood can close (...) because its coal's too expensive, then we can accept that any pit can close on economic grounds.⁹

The NUM had recently produced a document which showed that 115 out of the 179 pits in production could be classified as uneconomic.¹⁰ This suggests that 64 were in the situation of being supposedly 'safe pits'. This evidence dismisses the pro-striker's-claims of 'safe areas' being able to vote threatened areas out of work in a national ballot on pit closures. (see Chapter 4 – part 1)

It should be remembered that in the Nottinghamshire coalfield there were also issues around job losses and rationalisation leading up to the strike. (see

⁸ NUM, 'The Fight's on and here is why', *The Miner: Special Edition* (Sheffield, March 1984), p. 1.

⁹ Samuel, Bloomfield, and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 93.

¹⁰ Wilsher, MacIntyre, and Jones, *Strike*, p. 54.

Chapter 1: Part 4). Economic closures in the industry were nothing new, despite the claims that the Cortonwood closure was the first one on economic grounds. Many of the 300 plus closures in the 'Robens era' of the 1960s were economic closures.¹¹ The issue then was the cost of cheap oil undercutting the price of coal against a falling market for coal. Lord Robens (NCB Chairman 1960 – 1971) recalled this era when the NCB had to tour the coalfields in a whistle stop 'morale-boosting tour' in the late 1960s. When admitting to cheap oil as being a main cause for coal's decline, he recalled a meeting when an old miner asked him if he thought that 'the Arabs would be content to live in tents forever'.¹² In similar fashion to the Elsecar men transferring to Cortonwood just prior to the start of the 1984 strike, and then being told the colliery was to close imminently, Langton miners arrived at Kirkby Colliery early in 1968 to be told three weeks later that the Kirkby 'super pit' was to close. The Kirkby delegation at the Nottingham Area NUM Gala later in 1968 carried a coffin inscribed with the words 'Kirkby Colliery: murdered by NCB promises'.¹³

The period between June 1983, following the re-election of the Thatcher Government for a second term, and March 1984 saw relations between the NCB and the NUM deteriorate and enter what Richards described as being a "deepening crisis".¹⁴ Milne suggested that the NUM were left with little option but to go into battle following the Cortonwood closure decision:

Against such a background, any attempt by the union leadership to postpone action in March (1984) would have been interpreted as a sign of weakness, encouraging a further acceleration of closures, and very

¹¹ See W. Ashworth, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol.5 1946 – 1982: The Nationalised Industry* (Oxford, 1986).

¹² Alf Robens, *Ten Year Stint* (London, 1972), p. 221.

¹³ 'Miners' symbol of Summit's Murder', *Notts Free Press*, 7 June 1968, p. 1.

¹⁴ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 95.

likely to lead to a battle in still more unfavourable circumstances.¹⁵

Supporters of the strike still maintain that it was provoked by the Thatcher Government at a time of year unfavourable to the NUM, with the winter period nearly over. However, as some commentators have stated, other factors suggest the NUM were also spoiling for a fight. A Yorkshire NCB Area Manager commented on the NUM agitation in the Manvers Main dispute in Yorkshire during February 1984, 'Some of the NUM left had been running around with a lighted match looking for a blue touch-paper (...) but Manvers was pretty damp'.¹⁶ Parker suggested that the Government could not possibly have foreseen some of the events that were to unfold with miner against miner and limited trade union support for the strike. He suggested that in the event of a national coal strike, the Thatcher Government would have planned to take on the whole NUM, Nottinghamshire included:

(...) the government could not have foreseen the way in which the chaos in early March 1984 would result in the strike beginning when it did, and with a third of the industry continuing to work (...) there was no way of knowing before the event that Nottinghamshire and other moderate coalfields would continue to work throughout the strike, that any difficulties with NACODS would be so readily solved, or that support from other trade unions would be so limited.¹⁷

However, Parker did suggest that on the other hand the Government must have thought that a clash with the NUM was inevitable at some time. He listed three main factors as to why this could happen. The NUM leadership

¹⁵ Milne, *The Enemy Within*, p. 18.

¹⁶ Wilsher, MacIntyre, and Jones, *Strike*, p. 42

¹⁷ Parker, *Thatcherism and the fall of coal*, pp. 44-45.

had made impossible demands. First, that the coal industry should be greatly expanded, secondly, that coal should be produced whatever the cost, and finally, that the NUM should have the power of over veto over NCB decisions.

¹⁸ There is other evidence to suggest that the NUM was planning for a confrontation. In December 1983 Mick McGahey is stated as having warned Jimmy Cowans (NCB) about an imminent strike being planned for March 1984. McGahey advised him to quit the industry because the forthcoming turmoil in the coal industry would become unpleasant. Cowans thought, that as in the past, the NUM NEC would keep Scargill and the militants in check. However, McGahey apparently told him that plans for the strike were already afoot:

The die is cast, it's too late. The strike will take place. It will start in March with the Yorkshire area led by Jack Taylor and Henry Richardson will look after Nottingham and make sure they join in. ¹⁹

An important feature of the period before the strike was how the pro-strike supporters in the NUM thought that the strike action would spread. The domino strategy was based on the issue of solidarity, the sanctity of the picket line, combined with the use of flying pickets to ensure that Areas that did not conform were brought into line. Arthur Scargill repeatedly gave his opinion on the subject:

There is one rule, in my view, above all the rules and that is when workers are involved in action, you do not cross picket lines under any circumstances. ²⁰

The problem here was that Scargill's appeal not to cross picket lines was what McIlroy described as being 'an appeal to moral principle'. ²¹ In March

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁹ Mick McGahey (NUM National Vice- President) quoted in Routledge, *Scargill*, p. 141.

²⁰ Arthur Scargill, quoted in Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 187.

1984 the moral principle appealed to left wingers in the NUM and to younger radical miners. In some NUM Areas this strategy ran into the buffers of district union protocol and age old area traditions. McIlroy suggested an important part in the organisation of picketing was to try and find out as much as possible about other workplaces. Although the 1984 NUM pro-strike activists made much of Nottinghamshire and the links with 1926 and Spencerism, there is more recent evidence which helps explain the adverse reaction of the Nottinghamshire miners to the Rule 41 domino strategy in 1984. The 1984 strike had its roots in the unofficial industrial disputes of 1969 and 1970. Milne identified this link, not only with the 1969 and 1970 disputes, but also that of 1981:

As in 1969, 1970 and 1981, there was a domino effect as activists spread the action from area to area through mass picketing (...) the decision not to hold a national ballot would dog the NUM's efforts to win support for the strike, even though it essentially repeated the tactics of 1969-70 and 1981 on a larger scale. ²²

Therefore, if we accept Milne's theory there is a need to look at the Nottinghamshire miners' reactions to the unofficial strikes in 1969, 1970 and 1981 in an attempt to try and understand why there was such an adverse reaction to the conduct of the 1984-85 strike. Parts 2, 3 and 4 of Chapter 5 look at the reaction to unofficial industrial action in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in 1969, 1970 and 1981 respectively.

²¹ John McIlroy, *Strike: How to fight and how to win* (London, 1984), p. 171.

²² Milne, *The Enemy Within*, p. 19.

2: The Nottinghamshire Miners and the 1969 unofficial NUM Strike

In October 1969 a major dispute occurred over the unexpected issue of surface workers' hours. The dispute centred on a campaign for a reduction in the hours of work for surface workers in the coal industry. The issue of surface workers' hours gained momentum during the spring and summer of 1969 and finally erupted in the autumn of that year. As Allen stated, the timing of the dispute was important following a major contraction of the coal industry over the previous decade:

After a decade of humiliating repression what indeed was capable of creating a sense of unifying injustice amongst miners. Pit closures had not done so.²³

The Yorkshire Area acted as a catalyst for the 1969 strike. By a vote of 85 to 3 the Yorkshire Area NUM ACM approved strike action on the issue of surface workers' hours. This followed an upheaval at the meeting when the Yorkshire NUM Chairman, Sam Bullough, was ousted from the chair because he refused to accept the strike motion on the grounds that it could result in unofficial strike action. The motion for strike action was moved by Arthur Scargill, a young Branch Delegate from Woolley Colliery. By the morning of 13 October 1969 the whole of the Yorkshire Area was out on strike, except for one colliery. The remaining working colliery was forced out by Tuesday 14 October by the flying pickets. From that time flying pickets, mainly from Doncaster, had started visiting other coalfields in an attempt to spread the rolling strike action. The 1969 strike was important as it acted as a springboard for getting left-wing activists into positions of prominence in the NUM and moving sections of the NUM to the left during the 1970s and early 1980s. Most notable among these was Arthur Scargill, whose rise took him to

²³ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 153.

being NUM Yorkshire Area President in 1973 and then the NUM National President in 1982.

At the Nottingham Area NUM AEC meeting on 13 October 1969 a delegation of 50 miners from the Yorkshire Area NUM arrived at the Area NUM HQ without the prior knowledge of the Nottingham Area.²⁴ Standing orders of the AEC were suspended while the Yorkshire delegation addressed the Nottingham Area NUM AEC as to the situation in the Yorkshire coalfield. After the Yorkshire representation had finished the Nottingham Area NUM AEC agreed it should act in accordance with the Rules and Constitution of the Union at all times. It was agreed that the Nottingham Area should wait for any recommendation from the NUM NEC. They had to consider up to date reports on negotiations between the NUM and the NCB and on the Yorkshire Area's unconstitutional action.²⁵ For the week ending 24 October 1969 it was reported that five NCB North Nottinghamshire collieries out of fourteen were idle due to the effects of the Yorkshire flying pickets.²⁶ In the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area it was reported that all twelve pits were working normally. In similar fashion to the events of March 1984, Nottingham Area NUM Officials condemned the Yorkshire tactics and moves were made to get protection for workers against 'hooliganism'. Proposed joint action by the NCB and the Nottingham Area NUM discussed the possibility of getting a police presence on standby to ensure Nottinghamshire miners could get to work. Albert Martin, Nottingham Area NUM General Secretary, condemned the actions of the Yorkshire flying pickets:

From peaceful picketing it has gone to a policy of intimidation and we are not going to have that.²⁷

²⁴ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1969, p. 228.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ 'Notts miners keep it constitutional', *Notts Free Press*, 24 October 1969, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

The NUM NEC called a SDC for 30 October 1969 on the NCB offer for surface workers. The NCB offer was on two issues: firstly, a wages increase and secondly, on surface workers' hours. In the meantime a Nottingham Area NUM SCM held on 18 October 1969 discussed the issue of the forthcoming national SDC. An up to date report on negotiations was given at the meeting and NUM Delegates were advised that neither the Nottingham NUM ACM nor NUM Branches should vote on the NCB's offer until the NUM NEC had discussed them at its meeting next week. A resolution recommending that Nottinghamshire NUM Branches support the Yorkshire Area's unofficial action was defeated by 32 votes to 2.²⁸ Ironically a Linby NUM appeal to council on 27 October 1969 urging the Nottingham Area NUM ACM to compel the national union in leading the membership into militant action was carried by 19 votes to 12 at the December 1969 ACM.²⁹

The NUM SDC turned down the NCB package for surface workers by 168 votes to 165. However, the NUM NEC agreed to hold a national ballot on the issue. In an atmosphere of great controversy, the NUM NEC decided to combine the issue of wages and surface hours on the same ballot paper. This meant, as Allen stated, that the acceptance of one was dependent on acceptance of the other.³⁰ He contended that with the ballot paper only requiring one answer it was 'a devious and well known way of getting an unsatisfactory offer accepted'.³¹ This proved to be the case as the NUM membership accepted the NCB's offer by 237,462 to 41,322. (Appendix 19)

The unofficial strike of 1969 lasted from 13 to 27 October. At its peak it involved 140 collieries (out of around 300) and spread from its main base in Yorkshire to the coalfields in Scotland, South Wales, Kent, North Derbyshire, parts of the Midlands and parts of Nottinghamshire. Allen suggested that the main rationale for the 1969 strike was more about the episode of actually striking rather than hours of work:

²⁸ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1969, p. 231.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 159.

³¹ Ibid.

The unofficial strike of 1969 was more about the phenomenon of striking than about hours of work. In a sense the strike was experimental. For so many years miners had been told that strikes would boomerang and cause additional pit closures (...) nothing like that happened.³²

Allen believed that the 1969 strike gave the NUM left some actual experience of militant trade unionism. Prior to that the only thing they knew of it was in mining folklore. However, there were other aspects of the 1969 strike which provide parallels with the strike of 1984. One factor was a poor line of communication between the different areas. In some cases there were incidents of miners being called out on strike, led back and called out again. Attitudes were mixed in the Scottish coalfield; altogether around 18,000 miners out of 27,500 were on strike at one time or another. A traditional left-wing area had failed to get total unity, an issue which would crop up again in the Scottish coalfield just prior to, and during the 1984 strike. Allen stated that the 1969 strike was actually a shambles everywhere except in the Yorkshire coalfield.³³

In the Nottinghamshire coalfield, Len Clarke, Nottingham NUM Area President, was scathing about the tactics employed by the Yorkshire pickets. Commenting at the tactics employed for the 1969 unofficial strike, he could easily have been describing the early days of the 1984-85 strike in Nottinghamshire coalfield:

Last week's action of a minority of members who were determined to act unconstitutionally (...) can only be described as irresponsible, and to say the least deplorable. Unconstitutional action of this nature

³² Ibid., p. 159.

³³ Ibid., p. 156.

discredits the movement, and can only inflict hardship and distress to the many thousands of loyal and staunch members, whose desire is to abide by the constitution (...) it is regrettable that those of our members who wanted to work last week were denied that opportunity for various reasons, including intimidation. ³⁴

Clarke went on to suggest that the real cause of the strike was not just the 'twenty-minute (surface workers) snap break' but was an accumulation of other frustrations. However, in line with Nottingham Area NUM custom and practice, he supported the Nottingham Area NUM members who had continued to work during the unofficial strike and suggested those who gone on strike had been mistaken:

If it becomes necessary for strike action to achieve (...) an eight-hour day inclusive of mealtimes for surface workers, it must be done constitutionally. We, as leaders, can only advise, but we are not empowered to impose our desires on our members (...) remember if we are to achieve our objects, it is essential we be united. ³⁵

Clarke's comments had remarkable parallels with Roy Lynk's comments at the Newstead NUM Branch meeting which started the 1984-85 strike. ³⁶ 1969 Sid Ford, NUM National President, at the NUM SDC on 30 October 1969, talked of the need to run the union by established and constitutional practices. Opening the SDC to discuss the issue of the surface workers hours, Ford made a plea for calm otherwise:

³⁴ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1969, p. 238.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Stanley, *Nottingham Miners do Strike*, pp. 55-56.

You take the first steps towards chaos and disorder and the break-up of the union as you have known it.³⁷

A year later, Joe Gormley would be making similar remarks to Ford during the 1970 wages dispute as flying pickets again tore through the coalfields. Whilst the NUM left claimed militancy had won the day in 1969 a fragile unity lay just under the surface.

3: The Nottinghamshire Miners and the 1970 unofficial NUM Strike

By the autumn of 1970, and almost one year on from the surface workers' 'hours dispute', the NUM and NCB were once again in confrontation over industrial relations matters. The NUM were demanding a wage of £20 weekly for surface workers, £22 for Elsewhere below Ground (EBW) and £30 for coal face workers. The 1970 NUM Annual Conference had adopted Composite III for the above resolution; Resolution 12 from South Wales added a clause for strike action in the event of the NCB not conceding the demand. Resolution 16 put forward by the Nottinghamshire Area NUM in support of the introduction of local incentive schemes was rejected by Conference. The NCB had made an offer of £16 and £28 respectively. The newly elected Heath Government had set a limit of 12 per cent for wage demands in the public sector; the NUM's demand amounted to a wage increase of 33 per cent.³⁸ The Nottingham Area NUM AEC proposed that the NUM NEC put forward an overtime ban as a means of putting pressure on the NCB to meet their wage demands. Len Clarke, Nottingham NUM Area President commented:

We are urging miners to show solidarity in the fight for higher wages. We shall support the national union to the

³⁷ Andrew Taylor, *The Politics of Yorkshire Miners* (Beckenham, 1984), p. 193.

³⁸ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 162

best of our ability and make an effort to bring about a national strike.³⁹

The NPLA was causing great frustration in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, real wages for power loader men having stood still since its implementation in 1966. At the 1970 NUM Annual Conference Clarke stated that any proposed strike action over wages would be backed by the Nottingham Area of the NUM. However, he did state such action must have a mandate and be in line with the established union rules and constitution:

If that course (strike action) is taken in conformity with the rules of this organisation, and the majority of our members vote in favour of such strike action, you will find that we are as solidly at the back of you as we have ever been.⁴⁰

A meeting of Nottingham Area NUM BOCM on 19 September 1970 was convened to hear an up to date report on the latest stage of wage negotiations from the two Nottingham NUM NEC members. The NUM NEC noted that the NCB offer was their final one and the NCB had declared their opposition to the wages claim which was described as totally unacceptable.⁴¹ The NUM announced a national ballot of all members would take place, with a recommendation that all NUM members vote in favour of strike action. The ballot vote was scheduled to be held over the four days 13 to 16 October 1970, with each NUM branch holding the ballot over a 24-hour period within this period. The meeting of Nottingham NUM BOCM also moved two motions, the first to back the call for national strike action and the second to urge Nottinghamshire NUM members to work normally until the result of the ballot was known.⁴² The ballot result was announced on 23 October and it resulted in 143,466 (55.5%) being in favour of strike action with 115,120

³⁹ 'Miners urged to ban overtime', *Notts Free Press*, 25 September 1970, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1970, p. 216.

⁴² *Ibid.*

(44.5%) being against.⁴³ (Appendix 20) Ten out of the twenty-three NUM Areas voted for industrial action, these including the traditional left wing Areas of South Wales, Scotland and Kent. The Yorkshire region polled 36,291 (60%) for strike action with 22,307 (40%) being against.⁴⁴ In the Nottingham Area NUM ballot 12,149 (42%) of the membership were in favour of striking with 16,963 (58%) being against.⁴⁵ Despite showing a majority for strike action, the ballot result caused a constitutional crisis in the NUM. The vote in favour of strike action did not reach the two-thirds majority required to call a national strike under the unions' rules and constitution. McCormick suggested that the ballot result showed some of the contradictions that lay under the surface. Under the new show of militancy, a breakdown of the voting figures revealed the problems, tensions and conflicts that lay within the NUM:

On the one hand, the vote of manual members was in favour of strike action by more than the necessary two-thirds and it was the white collar vote of the Colliery Offices and Staff Association (COSA) members which swayed the total vote against strike action. Hence, there were comments that the union was dominated by petticoat government.⁴⁶

The vote had shown up the vast diversity that existed in the NUM membership. Under the union's rules the NUM NEC could not call for a national strike. Rule 43 was amended to 55% for strike action the following year (1971) and again to a simple majority (50% + 1) at a NUM SDC in April 1984. Following the announcement of the 1970 ballot result the NUM NEC resumed negotiations with the NUM on the wages issue. This did not stop some of the areas which had voted for industrial action from starting

⁴³ Ibid., p. 263.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ B. J. McCormick, *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry* (Basingstoke, 1979), p. 195.

unofficial strikes. The use of Rule 41 in the areas which had shown a majority for striking was advocated by the Scottish Area (NUM) but this was turned down by the NUM NEC.

Following the return to the negotiating table the NCB offered a 10 shilling (50p) rise on all levels and the NUM NEC ordered a second ballot with a recommendation to accept the amended wage offer. From 26 October 1970 various collieries, mainly in the traditional left-wing areas, began unofficial strike action against the NCB's revised offer. At its peak around 103,000 miners (out of 292,000) were on unofficial strike, mainly in the traditional left-wing Scottish and South-Wales coalfields, but also in parts of the rapidly left-leaning Yorkshire coalfield. The peak of strike activity occurred on 10 November 1970 when 116 collieries were out on strike: 42 collieries out of 72 were out in Yorkshire, 21 out of 32 in Scotland, all 50 collieries in South Wales, 4 in Durham, all 3 Kent collieries, Wolstanton in Staffordshire and Pleasley in Derbyshire.⁴⁷ The focal point for unrest in the Yorkshire Coalfield was in the Doncaster region, as it was in 1984. It was from here that flying pickets travelled to other coalfields trying to drum up support for what in effect was 'rank and file' unofficial strike-action.

On 12 November 1970 the NUM NEC rejected a call for a SDC and an instruction was given for miners on unofficial strike to return to work. What was made clear at the NEC meeting was that no Area had the right to call upon its members to act contrary to the advice of the NEC.⁴⁸ This would appear to be a direct reference to the growing left presence in Yorkshire through the Panels which existed outside the official NUM Area constitution. Early in the year at the 1970 NUM Annual Conference, Arthur Scargill had proudly associated himself with 'splinter groups' which ran against what he considered was passive union policy. Ironically, when the Nottingham Area 'cried foul' at the SDC which authorised official strike action on 19 April 1984, Scargill and the left were not then impressed with the 'splinter group' action.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196

⁴⁸ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1970, p. 275.

Taylor described the 1970 unofficial strike action as 'an explosion of consciousness in which some miners ignored the ballot result, and their leaders, and struck'.⁴⁹ A similar situation would be re-enacted in March 1984 when miners ignored some areas no-strike ballot mandates and went on strike.

Back in 1970 the second ballot on the revised wage offer was held in November and it resulted in 76 per cent of NUM members accepting the revised offer. The unofficial strike finally ended on 20 November when the last of the Doncaster collieries returned to work. The fall-out from the 1970 strike centred on the nature of picketing, described by Joe Gormley (then the new elected NUM national President) as hooliganism. (see Chapter 2, pp. 62-63) Also the problems in trying to achieve unity in the NUM were again highlighted by the dispute. Both Taylor and Allen refer to the 'pattern of uncoordinated action' which was a feature of both the 1969 and 1970 unofficial strikes. Taylor described the mixed up situation that the 1970 unofficial action caused in the Yorkshire Area of the NUM:

The pickets concentrated on the North and South Yorkshire Panels who had, as yet, made no decision. The Barnsley pits were beginning to come out, and the North Yorkshire Panel expressed its support, but only Wheldale and Kellingley had struck. The South Yorkshire Panel was split; some pits were out but others, perhaps a few hundred yards away continued working. The situation was very confused, with rumour chasing rumour.⁵⁰

Considering its near solid position in the 1984 strike, it was a return to work by two Doncaster pits, Hatfield Main and Bentley, against the decision of the Doncaster Panel, which was instrumental in ending the unofficial action in the

⁴⁹ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

Yorkshire coalfield in 1970.⁵¹ Allen also made reference to the nature of uncoordinated action that the 1970 unofficial dispute caused:

The pattern of the uncoordinated action of 1969 began to emerge. For instance, as the Yorkshire pits came out on strike, six Scottish pits went back to work on the recommendation of the Scottish Area NUM AEC. Very little reliable information about the intentions of Areas seemed to pass from one to the other. In any case it took time before an Area could respond to what others were doing and by then some of them had changed their minds.⁵²

McCormick cited three main differences between the unofficial strikes of 1969 and that of 1970. Firstly he suggested there was a shift towards militancy in the NUM leadership. Lawrence Daly had refused to meet unofficial strikers in 1969. In 1970, when he addressed some unofficial strikers in Doncaster, he was given a rough ride. This treatment is thought to have shaken him up and during 1971 and 1972 he displayed increasing militancy.⁵³ The second factor cited by McCormick was that the South Wales NUM and the Scottish Area of the NUM, two of the more disciplined coalfields, voted to strike and joined the unofficial strike action initiated by the Doncaster panel of the Yorkshire Area NUM. Thirdly, the ballot figures showed increasing militancy in the moderate areas of Durham and parts of the Midlands where some joined in the unofficial action.

Taylor believed that there was a change in the miners' awareness in 1970 which finally led to a majority of NUM members voting for strike action. Many of the frustrations had been caused by the stagnation of wages following the introduction of NPLA in 1966, the Labour government's incomes policy and the recent massive rundown of the deep coalmining industry

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 200

⁵² Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 163.

⁵³ McCormick, *Industrials Relation in Coal*, p. 196.

under the Labour Government of 1964 – 1970. The unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970 challenged the passivity and dominance of the right-wing of the NUM which had dominated during the malaise of the 1960s. New left-wing leaders emerged out of the two disputes, leaders who advocated militant industrial action to defend miners' interests. Nowhere was this move to the left seen more than in the Yorkshire coalfield. As Taylor said "between 1971 and 1973 this new generation came to power (...) in doing so they profoundly affected the political orientation of the NUM as a whole".⁵⁴ Arthur Scargill was elected as the President of the Yorkshire Miners in 1973. However, in the Nottingham Area NUM moderation still dominated and union business ran very much in line within the established moderate traditions. As Taylor stated, although there were traits of the left-wing in Nottinghamshire through officials such as Joe Whelan, it remained on the right of NUM politics as epitomised by Len Clarke.⁵⁵

The 1970 strike, despite acting as a springboard for the national strikes of 1972 and 1974, also showed up the potential fragility of the NUM. In a manner similar to what happened early in the 1984 strike at the Groby Inn, moderates on the union's right met in 1970 at Snibston Miners Welfare Club in Leicestershire to consider how they should react to the developing unofficial strike-action. As in 1984 the moderates were concerned about the 'unconstitutional methods that had been employed by certain groups in the NUM'.⁵⁶ Following the moderates' meeting, accusations were made that a breakaway union was being planned, a claim strongly refuted by Len Clarke and Albert Martin, the two Nottingham NUM NEC members. In a statement to the press they suggested that the Nottingham Area NUM had demonstrated its loyalty to the national union and national decisions, even at times when this had been to the financial disadvantage of the Nottinghamshire miners. The statement emphasised the unconstitutional actions which they considered discredited the NUM:

⁵⁴ Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p. 207.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 164.

There have been certain suggestions from various quarters that the lucrative areas of the NUM are attempting to bring about the disintegration of the union. We, in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, want to make it abundantly clear that at all times we have been loyal to the national union, abiding by democratic decisions taken in accordance with the rules and constitution. We are perturbed at some of the actions in recent months, which are not in the interests of our members and tend to discredit the union.⁵⁷

John Thierry from the Clipstone NUM Branch, condemned the 1970 unconstitutional strike action, suggesting that aims should be achieved by constitutional methods and by using democratic procedures within a 'National Union of Mineworkers'.⁵⁸ He had attended the lobby of the NUM NEC outside the NUM HQ in an attempt to put his views to the pro-strike activists. He was of the opinion that they were wrong in the tactics they were adopting. Thierry's suggested that anti-strike comments were not popular with the lobbyists, but he stated they respected his views, although having differences of opinion. In addition to criticising the tactics of the 1970 unofficial strike, he was also scathing about the two Nottingham NUM NEC Officials attending the meeting of moderates in Leicestershire. He suggested their action was undemocratic and made their intentions suspect:

(...) To attend such a meeting is deplorable and highly suspect of their intentions regarding the future of the NUM, were they wanting Spencerism again?⁵⁹

⁵⁷ 'No break up of NUM planned', *Notts Free Press*, 27 November 1970, p. 1.

⁵⁸ 'Strike was wrong', *Notts Free Press*, 27 November 1970, p. 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Just over thirteen years later the accusations of 'Spencerism' would resurface to haunt the Nottinghamshire coalfield once again.

4. The Nottinghamshire Miners and the 1981 Coal Crisis

On 10 February 1981 the NCB announced plans to cut ten million tons of uneconomic capacity forthwith, in order to stay within the Government's new cash limits brought in by the 1980 Coal Mines Act. It was thought this would mean around fifty colliery closures, with the loss of 30,000 jobs over a three year period. Individual collieries were not identified and different NCB Area Directors would decide on the cuts that would be necessary within their own areas. With the threat of a national strike ballot by the NUM, plus sporadic unofficial strike action in some areas, the Government eventually backed away. This was the Thatcher Government's U-turn or a 'body swerve' as McGahey referred to it.⁶⁰ A week after the closure announcement Welsh miners began strike action in protest against the planned colliery closures. Tripartite talks were eventually held and the threat to the fifty collieries was withdrawn. The NCB agreed to stick to the Colliery Review Procedure (CRP), which had been agreed in the early 1970s as the medium for closing collieries. As Lloyd stated, 'Once again strike action, or the threat of it, had been seen to be successful'.⁶¹

Twenty five years on from the strike, Arthur Scargill supported the Rule 41 Area strategy for the 1984-85 strike and suggested that unofficial strike action in 1981 by miners, including those in Nottinghamshire, had sown the seeds for the 1984-85 strike:

The NUM's historic battle did not begin in March 1984
(...) the seeds of the dispute had been sown long
before. A pit closure programme resulted in miners,
including miners in Nottinghamshire, taking unofficial

⁶⁰ NUM, *1983 NUM Annual Conference Report*, p. 483.

⁶¹ Lloyd, *Understanding the Miners' Strike*, p. 5.

strike action (without a ballot) and forcing Thatcher into a U-turn.⁶²

In spite of Scargill's claim, what actual role did the Nottinghamshire miners take in the 1981 dispute? This section aims to try and determine if the Nottinghamshire miners actually did take part in the 1981 unofficial action, and if so to what extent. Also, was there a similar reaction to the sporadic unofficial strike action in the Nottingham Area NUM as there had been to the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970?

Firstly, the situation by 1981 had been reached partly through the failure of the 1974 Plan for Coal to deal with the issue of uneconomic capacity, one of the issues which was central to the 1984-85 dispute. The period 1979 to 1981 saw a world energy glut, especially in oil and international coal prices, which hit world markets just as market demand was flattening out. This led to a collapse in world coal prices from around \$70 per ton to \$40 per ton. Much emphasis had been placed by the NUM leaders on the part of the Plan for Coal which envisaged an annual market for coal of 150 million tons by 1985, increasing from the 113 million tons per annum when the 1974 plan was hatched. However, under the Plan for Coal it was hard to pin down a definition for taking out uneconomic capacity. Lloyd suggested the 1974 version of the Plan for Coal was not one, but a series, of documents.⁶³ The 1974 documents envisaged that 3 to 4 million tons of capacity, both exhausted and uneconomic, would be taken out of the system annually. As Lloyd noted, by mid-1982 only a quarter of this uneconomic/exhausted capacity (8.84 million tons or 58 collieries) had actually been taken out which averaged out at 1.1 million tons annually.⁶⁴ Combined with a falling market for coal and with coal production consistently outstripping demand, this meant that coal stocks gradually doubled from 27.9 million tons in 1979 to 58 million tons in 1983. As Lloyd suggested these stocks of coal were 'crucial to

⁶² Arthur Scargill, 'We could surrender or stand and fight', *www.guardian.co.uk/politics*, 7 March 2009.

⁶³ Lloyd, *Understanding the Miners' Strike*, p. 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the ultimate victory of the Government and the NCB in the 1984-85 dispute'.⁶⁵ This is the point the left of the NUM emphasised in their argument about the introduction of area incentive bonuses in 1978, i.e. that incentive bonus schemes helped to create the huge stockpiles. Nevertheless, it was not solely the incentive scheme but also a failure in the Plan for Coal which played a part in creating the huge stockpiles in the early 1980s.

The 1981 dispute followed hotly on the heels of the Nottingham Area NUM Annual Conference which had taken place at Sutton-in-Ashfield on 2 and 3 February 1981. Fighting the threat of colliery closures emerged as the main priority from the Area Conference, following reports that there were concerns about the futures of New Hucknall Colliery (over its proposed closure) and Sutton Colliery (uneconomic issue) in the Ashfield region, along with fears for four other NCB North Nottinghamshire collieries which were believed to be loss makers, namely Mansfield, Rufford, Bevercotes and Blidworth.⁶⁶ NUM Branch Delegates, fearing a return to the mass closures of the 1960s, voted 251 to 4 in favour of lobbying the NUM NEC following their meeting with the NCB on 10 February which had announced the 50 pit closures nationwide. A national strike vote on the issue was to be deferred until the outcome of the 10 February meeting was known. The emotional debate was conducted in the aftermath of the Teversal Colliery closure debacle from two years earlier (see Chapter 1: pp. 23- 32). During the debate there were claims and counterclaims that Nottingham Area NUM union officials had not opposed colliery closures strongly enough. Ray Chadburn, Nottingham Area (NUM) President, refuted these allegations pointing to evidence of that only 28% of the rank and file membership had supported Teversal in the 1979 area ballot. He also referred to poor member attendance at some branch meetings which full time Area Officials had attended in recent times. Earlier in the Conference, the Bolsover MP, Dennis Skinner, had warned of the Tory

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ 'Fears for future of four local pits', *The Chad*, 5 February 1981, p. 1.

Government's strategy to close more collieries and the necessity to ensure unity and solidarity amongst the NUM.⁶⁷

Following the 10 February meeting between the NCB and NUM, the NUM NEC discussed the matter at its meeting on 12 February. Despite rejecting the NCB's plans to cut capacity, it was decided that no immediate action should be taken but that all the facts should be ascertained from the different NUM Areas and a total picture built up. Areas were to meet in the period 13 to 18 February with the NUM NEC reconvening on 19 February. Additionally tripartite agreements were arranged to discuss the Government's commitments under the Plan for Coal, the need to control coal imports, and parity for the coal and steel industries with those of Europe. The NUM NEC agreed that if there was no satisfactory response to these representations then the union would ballot its members on the question of strike action.

In the meantime the depth of feeling on the emotive issue of colliery closures led to unofficial strikes occurring in several coalfields. Some Area discussions had brought out the names of individual collieries that were due to be scheduled for closure under the NCB's plans. As Goodman stated, the eventual figures revealed later indicated that twenty-three collieries, relating to a cut in four million tons of capacity, were to be taken out, figures remarkably similar to the ones announced in March 1984 which sparked the 1984-85 strike.⁶⁸ Because of the gravity of the situation both the NUM and NCB pushed for a meeting with the Government; eventually this was brought forward from 23 February to 18 February. David Howell, Secretary for Energy, listened to the NCB's and NUM's case, and performed the U-turn. He stated that the Government fully supported the Plan for Coal and that he would support a continuation of the amount of investment needed for it to be implemented. Since that time, various reasons for the U-turn have been given, notably that there was not enough coal in stock at power stations to deal with a lengthy miners' strike and the 'special measures' needed to deal

⁶⁷ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1981, p. 34.

⁶⁸ Geoffrey Goodman, *The Miners' Strike* (London, 1985), p. 22.

with the trade union problem not yet being in place. For example, the 'special police force' cited under the Ridley Plan had trouble dealing with the inner-city riots in the spring and summer of 1981.⁶⁹ As Taylor stated the 1980 steel strike and the 1981 dispute with the NUM had showed that it would take time and preparation to break the trade unions' power. Limited coal stocks at power stations, the memory of the 1972 and 1974 disputes still being relatively fresh, combined with the Thatcher revolution still being in its infancy meant that 'a tactical withdrawal made perfect, if embarrassing, political sense'.⁷⁰

Following the U-turn decision the NUM NEC met the following day and it was reported that the U turn was a victory for common sense. In the light of this it was decided to instruct NUM members still out on unofficial strike to return to work.⁷¹ A Nottingham Area NUM delegation, made up of two from each Nottinghamshire NUM Branch and led by Henry Richardson (then Cresswell NUM Branch Delegate), travelled to lobby the NUM NEC meeting 'to stress the grass roots feeling that the proposed colliery closures should be resisted'.⁷² In a sign of things to come in 1984, Joe Gormley, then NUM National President, had cautioned some of the Areas backing unofficial strike action by stating that a national ballot would be wanted if the NUM were to avoid damaging court action.⁷³ It was reported that 50,000 miners nationwide were still on unofficial strike on 20 February, the day after the NUM NEC meeting; the last of the unofficial strikers returned to work on 23 February 1981. The unofficial stoppage had lasted just under of two weeks.

In the Nottingham Area NUM there is little documentary evidence of any stoppages taking place. Nevertheless, a short stoppage occurred at Babbington Colliery in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area on 19 February 1981. The colliery was working normally again by 20 February following a

⁶⁹ See Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years 1979 - 1990* (New York, 1993), pp. 139-143.

⁷⁰ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 159.

⁷¹ NUM, *1981 Annual Conference Report*, p. 18.

⁷² 'Name the Pits to be axed', *The Chad*, 19 February 1981, p. 3.

⁷³ Goodman, *The Miners' Strike*, p. 22.

'temporary stoppage' as confused workers tried to ascertain from union officials whether the merger (with Hucknall Colliery) was on or off.⁷⁴ Further evidence that little or no unofficial strike action took place in the Nottinghamshire coalfield existed from G. K. Naylor of Bilsthorpe Colliery. Citing the 1980 Coal Mines Act as being the main cause of the 1981 industrial unrest (it required the coal industry to break even by 1983-84) he suggested that it was the South Wales miners along with backing from other sections of the trade union movement which made the Government see the errors of their ways. However, in the letter he indicated that the Nottingham Area NUM had been inactive during the dispute, even though Nottinghamshire collieries were not immune from the effects of the NCB's closure plans:

I would like to thank the Yorkshire and South-Wales miners who took action that provided me with security of employment. I will just finish by saying; Nottinghamshire NUM, where the hell were you when we needed you.⁷⁵

No reports of any unofficial strike action in the Nottinghamshire coalfield or any picketing from other NUM Areas appeared in the Nottingham Area (NUM) 1981 Minutes. Despite G. K. Naylor's⁷⁶ accusations of inactivity, a meeting of Nottingham Area NUM BOCM took place to discuss the situation in the industry in a specially convened meeting on 21 February 1981. Following the withdrawal of the proposed pit closures the main issue of concern to the Nottinghamshire coalfield were the proposed closure of New Hucknall Colliery and the proposed merger of Babbington Colliery with Hucknall Colliery, the issue which had caused the walk out at Babbington in February. The Nottingham Area NUM had received a non-committal reply from the Deputy Area Director (Mining) of the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area on these two issues. The Conference of BOCM agreed that Sir Derek Ezra (NCB Chairman) should be contacted immediately to try and ensure that the recent

⁷⁴ 'Huthwaite pit saved pledge', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 20 February 1981, p. 1.

⁷⁵ G. K. Naylor, 'Newark MP has got it wrong', *The Chad (Letters Page)*, 5 March 1981, p. 4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

withdrawal list included New Hucknall and the proposed Babbington/Hucknall merger was still on. The Nottingham Area NUM passed a resolution supporting proposed industrial action in the event of the Government or NCB reneging on the promises given by David Howell on 18 February 1981⁷⁷ (Appendix 21). Ironically, given events three years later, the resolution included a call for strike action by Nottingham Area NUM members, not only on the issue of the New Hucknall closure plus the Babbington/Hucknall merger, but 'to support any other collieries in the British coalfield'.⁷⁸

Despite the U turn of February 1981, collieries continued to close by a process of stealth. Discussions at local level saw 12 collieries close, the largest number of closures since 1974. Prior to the 1982 NUM Annual Conference the NUM NEC noted that other closures had been agreed at local level that would be implemented over the coming year.⁷⁹ The report suggested that if further closures were not firmly resisted then the NCB may have "achieved its original objectives in terms of reduced colliery capacity by a process of stealth".⁸⁰ The process of closures by stealth continued under the short chairmanship of Norman Siddall. In his eighteen month reign as NCB Chairman twenty-three pits closed with the loss of 21,000 mining jobs.

A second factor from the events of 1981 was influential on the future of the coal industry. In the immediate aftermath of the 1981 U-turn the Nottingham Area NUM President raised his concerns about the potential effects of the Redundant Mineworkers Payment Scheme (RMPS) introduced in April 1981. In the 1981 President's report to the Nottingham Area NUM ACM on 23 March 1981 he stated:

Whist on the face of it, it could be argued that we have been successful in protecting the interests of the industry and our members' jobs, we have to view with suspicion,

⁷⁷ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1981, p. 51.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ NUM NEC, *Report of the NEC 1982*, May 1982, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

and be alert to the consequences of, the improvements in the RMPS and the effects they could have on the industry. It could be construed as a back door method of picking individual pits off by inducing our members to accept cash at the expense of jobs and job availability.⁸¹

An important aspect of the 1984-85 strike had its roots in 1981; the decision to enhance miners' redundancy terms, especially for the over 50s. A principled strike aimed at saving jobs was counteracted by significant numbers of miners indicating that they would wish to leave the industry on the voluntary redundancy. The pre and post-strike figures from Annesley show this to be the case (see Chapter 4: Part 3).

From the available evidence it appears that there was little industrial action in the Nottinghamshire coalfield during the unofficial strike of 1981. Whilst it cannot be ruled out that some Nottingham Area NUM left-wing activists may have supported the unofficial strike action, what was clear was that the issue of any potential industrial action in the Nottinghamshire Area NUM was dealt with by established union procedures. Similarities existed between 1969, 1970 and 1981; in all cases the issues were dealt with in the Nottingham Area NUM by the established constitutional methods. It was, as Allen described, a trait of coalfields with conservative traditions.⁸²

In the aftermath of the 1981 dispute it soon became clear that the unofficial strike action plus the threat of an official strike had not solved the problem of colliery closures. The NUM had still not found unanimity on the issue of pit-closures. Closures were being pushed through at local level with the enhanced redundancy payments, combined with improved transfer payments for younger miners being used as levers to get the cuts implemented. As Allen stated there was a feeling, similar to that of the mass closures from the

⁸¹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1981, p. 106.

⁸² Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 313.

1960s, that there was little the miners could do about it, despite the rhetoric of some left wing national and area NUM Officials:

Many miners believed that they had been outwitted and they could do little about it because the mood for unified action which had characterised the (1981) strike had been dissipated. Such moods are not easily recreated.⁸³

Despite appeals for militancy to combat the continued run down of the deep coal mining industry there was a perception that following the 1981 unofficial strike the NUM's power was continuing to weaken. Three times NUM members rejected industrial strike action in national ballots between January 1982 and March 1983. Taylor suggested history would prove there would be a time when the miners would stand their ground. The time and place was not known then, for some that time would come in March 1984:

(...) history shows that there will come a point, as their leaders predict, where the miners will take a collective decision to retreat no further and to stand their ground and fight.⁸⁴

The problem, as with the Emergency Resolution 1 to the 1983 NUM Annual Conference, was that the point in time could not be tied down. The staggered nature of closures meant each colliery and NUM Area had its own time to launch its protests. Also the issue of colliery closures was a diverse issue that the NCB always seemed to be able to get round. The words of Peter Tait, cited during the colliery cull of the 1960s remained prophetic:

When a pit is earmarked for closure, then the Board has its own way of ensuring that in spite of everything we do or say, close it will.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., p. 315.

⁸⁴ Taylor, *Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p. 290.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Powell, *The Power Game*, p. 179.

5. The Rule 41 Domino Strategy and the roots of disunity

The unofficial strikes of 1969, 1970 and 1981 were 'explosions of consciousness' among sections of the NUM. What the evidence from the unofficial strikes of 1969, 1970 and 1981 shows is that there were problems getting coordinated solidarity in the NUM in the absence of a pro-strike national ballot. In March 1984 it was mainly an 'explosion of consciousness' among left-wing activists and younger miners which triggered the strike. Because the strike started with confusion over mandates and whether the industrial action was official or unofficial in different NUM Areas, bewilderment reigned, as some miners struggled to establish what they should do. On the 12 March 1984 it was reported that miners in Scotland were confused as to the situation of the strike:

Scotland's pits appear to be divided on the stoppage. There were angry clashes between fellow miners meeting at Bilston Glen, Scotland's largest pit (...) no vote was taken on whether to strike or not and the meeting was adjourned for a week.⁸⁶

It was reported that miners in both the Scottish and South Wales coalfields referred to the lack of support they had received from Yorkshire, and elsewhere, when they were battling closures in 1983.⁸⁷ The situation in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the first few days of the strike was just as confusing as in other coalfields. Amidst reports of both picketing successes and failures in the Ashfield region of the Nottinghamshire coalfield, both the Nottingham Area NUM and the local NCB admitted to being confused over the style of industrial action. During the first week of the strike it was reported that a chaotic situation prevailed:

⁸⁶ John Ardill and Peter Hetherington, 'Split vote strains coalfield strike call', *The Guardian*, 12 March 1984, p.1.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

King Coal faced anarchy in Ashfield on Wednesday with virtual civil war breaking out at pit yard gates. Meanwhile, local pits were coming to a standstill amid scenes of confusion and uncertainty (...) The NCB admitted to being as confused as everyone, such was the determination and mobility of the pickets.⁸⁸

In the Nottinghamshire coalfield the parallels with the adverse reaction to the 1984-85 strike and the unofficial strikes of 1969, 1970 and to some extent 1981, were uncanny. The main theme of protest from the working Nottinghamshire miners concerned the unconstitutional nature of the strike. Most would agree that a protest aimed at saving jobs was a good cause but would argue the way it was conducted was the real issue. A typical comment came from a working Hucknall miner. He stated that the cause of the strike was right but inferred that the strategy employed was wrong:

I would have voted for a strike but my feelings were that it wouldn't change anything but the cause was right.⁸⁹

From her research Bardill identified two main issues which led to the failure of the 1984-85 strike in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. First, she found that the overriding main reason for working was the absence of a national ballot vote. Linked with this, the other main point of contention was 'confrontational tactics' employed by the Yorkshire pickets. Many Nottinghamshire miners saw this as a violation of the union rules and constitution. A typical comment came from a working Notts miner at Ollerton Colliery:

(...) because we were being told by Yorkshiremen what to do, it was like a red rag to a bull.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ 'Battlefield', *Notts Free Press*, 16 March 1984, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Bardill, 'Changing Perceptions of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield', p. 52.

Neil Greatrex commented on the dictatorial nature of the Yorkshire pickets in the early days of the strike and suggested this clashed with the traditional philosophy of the moderate Nottinghamshire rank and file NUM members:

Order or tell a Notts miner what to do and nine times out of ten he will go out of his way to oppose you. Ask him and you will get a more favourable response.⁹¹

The Nottingham Area NUM Press statement of 13 March 1984 prophesied that the nature of picketing could be counter-productive. Francis identified two reasons why a different style evolved among the South Wales NUM from the 'head to head' picketing style adopted by Yorkshire flying pickets. He suggested that the 'intense and dynamic industrial strategy' employed during the early weeks of the strike seemed justified by:

A combination of long distant travelling to the English coalfields and the experience of past troubles resulted in a distinct South Wales style of picketing, very different from the confrontational picketing engaged in by the Yorkshire miners in particular.⁹²

For many Nottinghamshire working miners in 1984 it was the confrontational style of picketing, especially from the Doncaster region, which became the main point of contention. However, there was some sympathy with the Welsh pickets, as the author recalls, the problem was the damage had been done in the first few days of the strike.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 53.

⁹¹ Interview with Neil Greatrex, Mansfield, 20 March 2008.

⁹² Francis, *History on our sides*, p. 30.

⁹³ The author conversed with some South Wales pickets two weeks into the strike when they came to picket Annesley Colliery. Attitudes were entirely different from the aggressive, confrontational approach of the Doncaster pickets. It was suggested that had the Welsh led

Some of the evidence suggested that strike tactics based on total solidarity would be a risky venture. Apart from the national strikes of 1972 and 1974 the whole history of strikes in coalmining had an issue of non-solidarity attached to them. Outram and Church found evidence that showed many pit based strikes in which very few men were directly involved and none were indirectly involved; in many cases the majority of the workforce carried on working, 'One out all out' was a myth.⁹⁴ By late March 1984 eleven areas of the NUM had conducted Area ballots on the issue of strike action. Out of these only Northumberland showed a slight majority, 52%, for strike action. Even the South Wales NUM Area initially voted to work by 18 branches to 13 but striking NUM members picketed out the coalfield.⁹⁵ This meant, initially, there was no strike mandate in ten NUM areas, equally important, in terms of NEC representation, it showed that 12 out of the 23 NEC members had backed strike action at national level (under Rule 41) when they did not have a pro-strike ballot mandate from their own members. At the time these ten NUM areas represented around 95,000 members out of a total NUM membership of 225,000 or around 40% of the membership. Commenting on this pattern of no-strike votes Taylor suggested that 'the results indicated a marked absence of automatic solidarity on which the success of Rule 41 depended'.⁹⁶

Part of the problem for the NUM lay in the fact that the Union was federally based. It was as Allen described 'a de facto federation of semi-autonomous county unions disguised as Areas of a national union'.⁹⁷ This was the very argument Arthur Scargill used at the TUC Conference in September 1983 when trying to preserve the two NUM seats on the TUC General Council. Maintaining that each NUM Area or Group was voluntarily in the national union, Scargill stated that the NUM was:

with the picketing in the 1984-85 strike instead of the Doncaster pickets there could have been a different outcome.

⁹⁴ Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield conflict in Britain 1889 – 1966*, (Cambridge, 1998), p. 263.

⁹⁵ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 186.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁹⁷ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 283.

(...) a combination of independent trade unions, coming together in the National Union through a National structure voluntarily. We have also pointed out that each union has its own Rule Book and its own constitution, and that only certain parts of those rules directly interconnect with the Rules and constitution of the National Union. ⁹⁸

Howell also identified that the federal structure of the NUM was a problem when trying to secure total solidarity in the strike. He suggested that the different NUM Areas were 'products of complex circumstances which inhibited easy generalisations'. ⁹⁹ Likening the situation of the working Agcroft NUM Branch in Lancashire with the situation in Nottinghamshire he stated:

(...) the Agcroft confrontations, coupled with the Nottinghamshire shambles, demonstrated that the NUM's strategy was fatally flawed. The method of spreading the strike on an inherently divisive issue was itself divisive (...) any attempt at a domino strategy had to take the dominoes as they were and not as they might be in an ideal world; how they were was a consequence of the structure of the national union and contrasting Area cultures. ¹⁰⁰

From the evidence some themes can be identified that were common between the unofficial strikes of 1969, 1970 and 1981 and the start of the 1984-85 miners' strike. First, there was difficulty getting unified action because it took time for news from the different areas to filter through and influence what was happening. The initial reaction of some of the men to

⁹⁸ NUM, *1983 Annual Conference Report*, SDC 7 July 1983, p. 562.

⁹⁹ Howell, *Politics of NUM*, p. 111.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

the closure of Cortonwood, the issue that sparked the 1984-85 strike, was 'let the pit close and let's get to a better pit'.¹⁰¹ There was hesitancy about the constitutional legitimacy of the strike in sections of the coalfields which had conservative (with a small c) traditions such as the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Also as Allen identified each coalfield has differing industrial and political characteristics which become particularly marked during times of crisis.¹⁰² However, it was not as easy as labelling different coalfields as either militant or moderate; within each coalfield there are contradictory tendencies. At the start of the 1984-85 strike in the Nottingham Area (NUM), Annesley and Newstead collieries stood adjacent to each other but the reaction to the way the strike started produced completely differing contrasts from the two sets of NUM Branch Officials. The Annesley Officials followed the Nottingham Areas conventional tradition and viewed the strike as lacking constitutional legitimacy, whilst the Newstead Officials backed the strike. Newstead had a reputation for militancy which dated back to the era of Spencerism following the 1926 strike; it had one of the largest numbers of members who remained in the Nottinghamshire Miners Association (NMA) between 1926 and 1937. Initially more rank and file miners joined the strike at Newstead than at Annesley. However, at the end of first week of the strike the Nottinghamshire Area NUM ballot gave results of 80% at Annesley and 71% at Newstead against strike action. This was a classic example of the moderate check on left-wing activism at Branch level in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Summing up, why did the Rule 41 Domino strategy fail so dismally in the Nottinghamshire coalfield? In the absence of a national ballot the plan, as Stephenson suggested, was to get a rolling area-by-area strike by using flying pickets, and once the Areas were out apply Rule 41 to each Area to give the strike some legitimacy:

¹⁰¹ Samuel, Bloomfield, and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 67.

¹⁰² Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 310.

The decision not to ballot was taken in the belief that a domino effect would occur. That is striking miners would be able to picket other areas into support, and, as each area came out on strike Rule 41 would be applied to give the individual strikes official recognition.¹⁰³

Because the Rule 41 strategy relied on the picketing out of areas, some of which was conducted in a highly confrontational way, Stephenson suggested that the effect was to shift the emphasis of the strike. He suggested that the nature of picketing distorted the whole strike and instead of being seen as a noble attempt at fighting pit closures and saving jobs the centre of attention became centred on infighting within the NUM.¹⁰⁴ Trevor Bell, one of the three NUM NEC members who voted against sanctioning the Rule 41 strategy on 8 March 1984, also suggested the nature of the strike had diverted attention away from the real issues:

The publicity our union was getting was not about the case we were fighting (...) it was about the methods of our approach to those problems and the real issue was lost.¹⁰⁵

In the Nottinghamshire coalfield there was also a feeling that the presence of the Yorkshire pickets during the first week of the strike had an effect on the way that Nottingham Area NUM members voted in the Area strike ballot on 17-18 March 1984.¹⁰⁶ At the NUM NEC meeting on 8 March 1984, which authorised strike action under Rule 41 in Yorkshire and Scotland, authority was given for the Nottinghamshire Area of the NUM to ballot its members on strike action against colliery closures. When the Yorkshire pickets entered the Nottinghamshire coalfield during the first few days it was

¹⁰³ Stephenson, 'Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting', p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Roger, Ratcliffe, 'Village at War', *The Guardian*, 18 March 1984, p17.

¹⁰⁶ See Richardson comment in Chapter 2, p. 68.

pointed out by members of the Nottingham Area NUM AEC that their presence could have an effect on the forthcoming area strike ballot:

The point was made that the pickets which had arrived in force on the Tuesday in Nottingham would never be able to stop the area ballot set for the end of the week, and as a result the ballot vote would not be about pit closures, but about the presence of Yorkshiremen attempting to bar their way to work.¹⁰⁷

In effect this is what happened, members of the Nottingham Area NUM voted against the presence of the Yorkshire pickets and not on the real issue of saving jobs and fighting pit closures.

Roy Ottey, NUM NEC member for the Power Group, who prophetically forecast that the Rule 41 strategy would cause much infighting in the NUM, commented on the legitimacy of trade union democracy when strike action in the Power Group was made official by the NUM NEC. NUM lobbyists from the Power Group met the Group's Executive members (EC) on 19 June 1984 to ask for strike action in the Power Group to be made official under NUM national rule 41. The Power Group EC agreed to the request by four votes to two and the national NUM made the strike action in the Power Group official on 6 July 1984. This was in accordance with the NUM NEC decision from 8 March 1984 and the NUM SDC decision from 19 April 1984. Ottey stated he was flabbergasted that such a system could operate under the banner of trade union democracy:

I was astounded that such a decision could be made, particularly when one of the four voting in favour (of a strike) was due to pick up his redundancy pay within three to four weeks of leaving the industry, and another

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

was employed in ancillary work in the coal industry and had worked continuously throughout the strike. Even worse was the fact that 75% of the Power Group members were at work, we had not had a strike ballot, and if we did, it would be against strike action.¹⁰⁸

Although constitutionally, in the eyes of pro-strike supporters, the Rule 41 strategy was seen to be legitimate it could also be seen as being a theoretical model rather than a practical one. Although parallels can be drawn with the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970, the problem was that it had never been used before to try and mount a constitutional strike. Wilsher made reference to this:

Until the 1984 dispute Rule 41 had never, on any occasion, been used as a constitutional platform for a countrywide stoppage.¹⁰⁹

But as Harper and Wintour pointed out, the NUM President had confidence in the use of the domino strategy. As well as advocating its use prior to the Lewis Merthyr closure dispute in March 1983, he had confidence in a system which had launched his own reputation:

He (Scargill) had an enduring faith in the efficiency of flying pickets (...) his own reputation within the Yorkshire Area had been built on his own organisation of pickets into Nottinghamshire in 1969.¹¹⁰

Dave Douglass, NUM Branch Delegate at Hatfield Branch in the militant Doncaster region of the NUM, also indicated his faith in the successful use of

¹⁰⁸ Ottey, *The Strike: An insider's view*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁹ Wilsher, MacIntyre, and Jones, *Strike*, p. 53.

¹¹⁰ Harper and Wintour, 'The bitter battle that ended an era', *The Guardian*, 5 March 1985, p. 17.

the domino strategy when the strike was launched at Hatfield on 10 March 1984:

Scotland and Wales are with us from Monday. Kent and possibly Derbyshire will be joining of their own bat and the rest will be picketed out. The fight back has started lads. Let's get into it. ¹¹¹

The term 'will be picketed out' suggests a confidence in the domino strategy and a confrontational approach to picketing. The past evidence from the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970 has shown that the domino strategy had flaws. Despite this the Rule 41 strategy was nearly a success in 1984. Following the NUM NEC meeting on 8 March 1984, which authorised strike action under Rule 41 in the Yorkshire and Scottish Areas of the NUM, the twenty-eight South Wales NUM lodges met on 11 March 1984 and voted against joining the strike. However, within twenty-four hours only six south Wales pits were still operating and it was reported that ten of the pits had come out voluntarily with twelve others being picketed out. ¹¹² By the middle of the first week all the South Wales coalfield was out on strike and would remain so for the next eleven months. However, it should be noted that South Wales was one of the minority of NUM Areas which had constantly voted in favour of strike action during the failed national ballots in the 1982-1983 period. Harper and Wintour suggested that the first few days of picketing in Nottinghamshire determined the whole course of the strike. ¹¹³ It was, as Taylor stated, a challenge to the traditional constitutional methods used in the county:

From the Notts perspective the events of March 1984 were a fundamental challenge to a deeply entrenched industrial and political tradition. They (...) responded

¹¹¹ Samuel, Bloomfield, and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 99.

¹¹² Harper and Wintour, 'The Bitter Battle that ended an era', *The Guardian*, 5 March 1985, p. 17.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

with a defence of the ethos and culture expressed by the 1944 NUM Rule Book.¹¹⁴

Central to the decision to conduct the 1984-85 strike under the Rule 41 'domino strategy' were the actions of the NUM NEC. Their role in the strike was as integral to the outcome as was the presence of the masses of police to ensure the rights of the individual miner to go to work. It is to the role of the NUM NEC in determining the course of the strike that we shall now turn.

6: Abnormal Actions! – The role of the NUM National Executive Committee in the 1984-85 strike

One important factor in trying to understand the evolution of disunity in the 1984-85 strike is the role played by the NUM NEC. The 1969 and 1970 disputes ended with 'constitutional intervention' by the NEC by means of using established constitutional procedures. In the 1984-85 strike the NUM NEC tried a different strategy which would eventually split the union and lead to the subsequent formation of the UDM. Why did the traditionally more conservative right-wing members of the NUM NEC go along with the Rule 41 domino strategy? Surely the experiences from the 1969 and 1970 unofficial strikes had shown that such a strategy was seriously flawed? The domino strategy was traditionally associated with support from the left-wing of the NUM, but it was the role of the traditional right-wing members who, by their support of it, played a significant part in the way that the 1984 strike evolved. Various causes have been cited as to why this state of affairs happened.

By 1984 there had been a weakening of the right for a number of years; from the time of Joe Gormley's retirement in 1982 the right had lost much of its effectiveness within the NEC. This was apparent from the time of Scargill's election as National President when the right failed to get its act together by nominating a single successor to Gormley. Initially it was thought that

¹¹⁴ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 191.

Tommy Bartles from Durham would be a natural successor to Joe Gormley, but he died in a traffic accident. Another factor in the demise of the right on the NUM NEC was the NUM's move of HQ to Sheffield in 1983. This played a significant part as the moderate NEC members no longer had the benefit of their pre NEC meetings, as they did when the NUM NEC met in London. With most of the moderates being from the central coalfields overnight stays for Sheffield meetings were no longer an option. However, the traditional left wing areas of South Wales, Scotland and Kent still enjoyed their overnight stays and pre NEC meetings as they had done in London, and thus were able to meet and collectively discuss their strategies.

Howell suggested three reasons why the moderate right NEC members acted as they did in 1984.¹¹⁵ First, some of them who represented areas where colliery closures would occur were prepared to go along with the Rule 41 strategy or any other strategy, if it could mobilise any kind of opposition to colliery closures. Secondly, some, as initially in the case of the two Nottingham NUM NEC members, believed that eventually there would be a national ballot on the pit closure issue. Howell's third reason was a shrewder one, it legitimised both striking and working:

Some, pessimistic about opinion in their own areas, could comfort themselves with the assurance that they could protect themselves with their own Area ballots, and the results could legitimise either involvement in spreading the strike or working on.¹¹⁶

This third view was reflected in the Nottingham Area NUM AEC recommendation on 21 March 1984 which gave the fundamental right for Nottingham Area NUM members not to cross picket lines but also to respect

¹¹⁵ Howell, *Politics of the NUM*, p. 101.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

the Area mandate and go to work.¹¹⁷ Henry Richardson, Nottinghamshire NUM NEC member in 1984, maintained that as a NEC member he had the right to recognise a NEC mandate, even if it conflicted with his own area's mandate, as it did in 1984. For some in the Nottinghamshire coalfield there was a problem with this as the NUM NEC did not elect Richardson, the Nottingham Area NUM membership had in an area ballot in 1982.¹¹⁸ A custom in trade unionism in the Nottinghamshire coalfield was that elected union members were there to advise, not, as Len Clarke stated, to impose their will on the membership.¹¹⁹ In the past the NUM NEC had been a check on militant left wing members at national level, in the Nottinghamshire coalfield the membership were a check on elected left-wing union officials at both Area and Branch level.

Despite these issues affecting NUM NEC members, in 1984 another aspect came into play which affected some miners' unwillingness to fight the colliery closure problem. This issue was redundancy terms. However, for NUM NEC members this was not NCB redundancy terms but NUM redundancy terms. The Government had recently enhanced the redundancy terms for mineworkers when the 'domino strategy' was hatched.¹²⁰ The aim was clear, the improved redundancy terms were designed to get miners to drop any protests and leave the industry quietly. The enhanced redundancy terms were especially aimed at getting the over 50s to voluntarily leave the coal industry. (See Chapter 4: Part 3) Many of the traditional moderates on the NUM NEC were in the latter parts of their union careers and to oppose the 'Scargill influenced left' could put any possible retirement terms at risk. As the 1984 strike went on, in an NEC atmosphere described as being fearful, the issue of NUM redundancy terms cropped up. One anonymous NEC moderate suggested that fear and money were the two main factors which stopped the moderate right-wing members from speaking their minds during the strike:

¹¹⁷ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1984, p. 92.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Steve Williamson, Selston, 8 March 2009.

¹¹⁹ Nottingham Area NUM Minutes 1969, p. 238.

¹²⁰ New terms for the RMPS came in in April 1983.

(...) the whole set up of the union is fear. There were witch hunts on the executive itself. It was not only fear, money came into it. For many years (...) it has been the practice that when a full-time official retired, he got three years pensionable salary as a lump sum. On a General Secretary's pay that could be worth £40,000. Then they give you the union car (...) It could all be taken away from you. ¹²¹

Just as the NCB redundancy scheme influenced some older miners' decisions to leave the industry, so the same situation applied to senior NUM NEC members. The NEC member above made reference to this:

It's the finance committee which decides in the first instance, but there are only two moderates on it now, and the fear is that Arthur (Scargill) could influence its decisions. It is a hold on you (...) if you do anything which could be claimed to be detrimental to the union you think "There goes my car, there goes my lump sum". Nobody ever said it, but we all think it. ¹²²

Neil Greatrex suggested that it was this scenario that cost Roy Ottey £30,000 when he resigned from the NUM NEC in November 1984. ¹²³ Ottey was one of only three NEC members who voted against the Rule 41 strategy at the NUM NEC meeting on 8 March 1984. It was suggested that other factors were probably at work. ¹²⁴ In the Staffordshire coalfield working miners enquired why their NUM NEC members had either 'drifted into the woodwork'

¹²¹ G. Turner, 'Miners' Leaders who are afraid to speak their minds', Summer 1984, D Amos collection. (National Newspaper article – Source unknown).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Interview with Neil Greatrex, Mansfield, 20 March 2008.

¹²⁴ Can you remember?, *The Working Miners Newsletter Issue 1*, 20 August 1984, Stoke on Trent, p. 1. D. Amos collection.

or were openly plotting to force working miners out on strike, against their Area's majority wishes. It was suggested that pressure was being put on their pension entitlements and this was the real reason why they were not speaking out about the validity of the strike:

Had the Golden Tongue of Arthur struck again, one could ask, and convince so called men of principle the error of their ways, or did someone warn them that their actions could directly affect their pension entitlements? Officials' entitlements at present are one year's salary, on today's rates anything up to £30,000, a big weekly pension and usually the (union) car (...) The exact amount is awarded discretionally by the NEC to whom they have to apply personally. Draw your own conclusions.¹²⁵

Nottingham NUM Area Officials also had a union house, rent free for the rest of their lives. The evidence suggests there were significant financial penalties for an NEC member, nearing the end of their NUM career if he championed the working miners' cause. In the Nottingham Area (NUM) the initial reaction of the two NEC members was to oppose the way the strike had evolved, even though they voted in favour of authorising strike action under Rule 41 at the NUM NEC meeting on 8 March 1984.¹²⁶ However, within a month both were seen to be obeying the pro-strike line against the majority wishes of the Nottingham Area NUM members and the Area working mandate obtained from the Area Ballot of 15-16 March 1984. Were the NUM redundancy/retirement benefits an influencing force on their decisions to comply with the pro-strike national line?

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ It was the two Nottingham NUM NEC members, Ray Chadburn and Henry Richardson, that asked for the Nottingham Area ballot on pit-closures at the NUM NEC meeting on 8 March 1984. Up until early April 1984 they advocated the need for a national ballot until succumbing to left-wing pressure for no ballot.

Why was the control of the NUM NEC so influential in the evolution of the 1984-85 miners' strike? Government of the NUM (under NUM Rule 8) was by Conference; usually this would be Annual Conference but Special Delegates' Conferences (as in 1984) could apply. In between periods of conference it was the duty of the NUM NEC to administer union business, its job being to perform its duties in line with resolutions to conference. The constitution of the NUM NEC is made up of Area Officials, the numbers depending on the numerical strength of NUM membership in each area, this being under Rule 12 of the NUM National Rules. The supreme authority of conference works on a system of delegated power from the different Areas and Branches of the NUM. Delegates to national conference are elected from the different Area Councils, the Area Councils being made up of Branch Delegates, elected annually by pit head ballot. Branch Delegates, in many cases, get their mandates from NUM Branch meetings. These can be the usual monthly meeting or in the case of the Yorkshire Area NUM in 1984, special branch meetings could mandate the Branch Delegate to vote for strike action.¹²⁷ Pitt suggested that mandates in the Kent Area of the NUM were obtained at canteen and pit gate meetings.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, as happened in the Nottingham Area NUM in March 1984, Branch Delegates can also get their mandates from Area Ballots votes in addition to Branch meetings and ACM's. This is what Lloyd described as being 'countervailing pressures' which applied to the delegated democracy of conference.¹²⁹ At national level Lloyd cited two mechanisms which applied this countervailing pressure. Both involve national ballot systems, the first the national ballot vote for the NUM National President and NUM General Secretary, and the second the requirement under National Rule 43 to hold an individual ballot of all NUM members on any proposed strike action. But as Lloyd stated, the power of the Conference was less than sacrosanct, both in constitution and practice, because of the countervailing pressures and

¹²⁷ Samuel, Bloomfield, and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 92-99.

¹²⁸ Pitt, *The World on our Back: The Kent Miners*, p. 17 and p. 86.

¹²⁹ Lloyd, *Understanding the Miners' Strike*, p. 20.

loopholes in the system. Not all NUM members attended branch meetings and they could be controlled by a small clique of activists. Additionally there was a numerical bias of Delegates (usually left-wing) that attended AC's and SDC's.¹³⁰

Lloyd stated that, prior to the election of Scargill, previous NUM leaders had attempted to balance these various centres and mechanisms of NUM power i.e. Conference, Executive, Areas and Ballot votes.¹³¹ From the time of his election as NUM National President, Arthur Scargill, on several occasions, notably in his inaugural address to the NUM Conference in 1982, put on record his opinion that the conference was the 'supreme authority' of the union. This was not a controversial statement but merely a statement of intent; he was indicating the way he intended to run the NUM:

(...) he (Scargill) was making clear his intention of running the union and its policies through a forum which, because it is composed of the most active, committed and usually (leftist) members would be most likely to support his radical policies.¹³²

Williamson was of the opinion that once the left-wing were in control of the process of the delegated democracy and various other influential positions in the NUM, then the strike would naturally run its course.¹³³ George Bolton, Scottish NUM NEC member, was of a similar opinion.¹³⁴ In the Nottinghamshire coalfield in March 1984, in the absence of a national ballot, the domino strategy ran into the rocks of the great check on it, a no strike mandate from the rank and file membership in an area ballot. With no national ballot forthcoming what in effect happened was that the Rule 41 Domino theory opened up 'different perceptions of democracy' in the NUM.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Interview with Steve Williamson, Selston, 8 March 2009.

¹³⁴ Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, p. 261.

Disagreeing with the left's view that the issue was solely one of competing individual and collective rights, Lloyd saw the issue as one causing a clash of 'competing collective rights':

The point at issue was (...) one of competing collective rights; the collective right of the NEC, and the NUM SDC, to call a strike; and the collective right of Nottinghamshire and other areas to abide by their results of their ballots taken under Rule 41 to go to work. ¹³⁵

The NEC's role in the unofficial strikes of 1969 and 1970 was to adhere to trusted and used constitutional means which had the effect of checking the flow of the left-wing influenced unofficial strikes. In 1984 it was the NEC's role in letting the left run with the Rule 41 domino strategy which eventually led to the split in the NUM and the eventual formation of the UDM. The principle of the Rule 41 domino strategy was solely based on the sanctity of the picket line, a basic call to solidarity and a 'one size fits all' strategy. As Outram and Church indicated, for the main part of mining history this had not happened, the events of the 1970s were a temporary variation from this trend. In concluding this chapter it would be worth reviewing the comments of Pitt, made in the context on the amendment of NUM Rule 43 following the debacle of the October 1970 national ballot. 55% of NUM members had voted for strike action but constitutionally, even though it was a majority, it did not reach the required two-thirds majority required under union rule at the time. The outcome was the unofficial strike of 1970. Following the unofficial strike NUM Rule 43 was amended from a two-thirds majority to 55% to authorised strike action. ¹³⁶ The significance of this was that the 1972 National Miners' Strike was authorised on a 58% majority vote. Emphasising the importance of using Rule 43 to secure unity in the NUM, Pitt

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

¹³⁶ Resolution No. 7 to amend NUM Rule 43 from a two-thirds majority to 55% for strike action was carried by a card vote of 215 votes to 98 at the 1971 NUM Annual Conference in Aberdeen.

suggested an area by area strategy in 1970 would have resulted in an acrimonious internal battle in the NUM:

If the miners were forced to confront the Heath Government on an area basis, and under the stigma of unofficial action, a demoralising defeat would turn the wages offensive in on itself, and into a bitter internecine struggle within the Miners' Union.¹³⁷

Inadvertently he had forecast the outcome of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike.

¹³⁷ Pitt, *The World on our Backs- The Kent Miners*, p. 110.

Chapter 6: Digging Deeper – Habits, attitudes and actions in the Nottinghamshire coalfield

1. Strike Breaking in coalmining – a brief outline

Oh, it's in the evening after dark,
When the blackleg miner creeps to work,
With his moleskin pants and dirty shirt,
There goes the blackleg miner. ¹

The song, *Blackleg Miner*, is thought to originate from the 1844 Miners' Lockout in the North East Coalfield. The Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland (MAGBI), founded in 1841 by Martin Jude, was in dispute over the yearly bonding systems. The union was demanding fortnightly contracts. The lockout in the North East lasted twenty weeks and collapsed largely as a result of the introduction of 'blackleg labour'. The coal owners, including Lord Londonderry, imported strike breakers from Wales, Cumberland, Ireland and the lead mines. In the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire coalfield the miners were out for thirteen to fourteen weeks. Williams suggested the miners had grievances other than the bonding system, including wages, hours of work, the truck system, the butty system, methods of weighing coal and working conditions in the mines. ² The MAGBI was relatively young in Nottinghamshire, the first branches having been formed at Kimberley and Thomas North's Cinderhill Collieries (sunk 1840 – 1842). When the miners at Pinxton returned to work in August, the strike organisers were refused work. Included in this, ironically, was the Hayes Family, who had been part of the 'blackleg interlopers' who had gone to the North East to break the 1832 strike. It was the 1832 strike that broke Hepburn's union. Hepburn's union is often considered to be the first coalmining trade union that had a semblance of permanence. According to Wheeler's account the Hayes family were tricked into moving to the North East in 1832 by the coal

¹ Steeleye Span, *Hark the Village Wait* (Mooncrest Records, London, 1970).

² J. Williams, *The Derbyshire Miners: A Study in Industrial and Social History* (London, 1962), p. 91.

owners.³ Griffin suggested that the 1844 strike failed in Nottinghamshire because of the inexperience of the new union, the employers' use of the 'document' and the blacklisting of leading union activists.⁴ The document was included in the return to work terms and it denounced trade union membership.

⁵

The other big dispute of the nineteenth century was the 1893 Miners' Lockout. The dispute was over proposed wage cuts by the coal owners to compensate for a fall in coal prices since 1890. 300,000 miners were eventually locked out but the strike was not a national one. The main stronghold of the MFGB (formed in 1889) was the central Federated coalfields. Miners in the exporting regions of the North East and South Wales operated on sliding scales and were not involved in the dispute. The MFGB would have nothing to do with a sliding scale method of paying miners' wages. The 1893 strike was eventually settled in November after intervention by the Prime Minister, W. E. Gladstone and Lord Rosebery, the Foreign Secretary. Following this intervention it was agreed there should be a resumption of work on the pre-stoppage terms and conditions. A Conciliation Board was set up to look into miners' wages which lasted until 1918. One consequence of the lockout was the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) was expelled from the MFGB for refusing to join the 'national strike'. There was no mention of this in the NUM's abridged history of the MFGB which stated that 'fifteen weeks of united action forced the owners to restore wages cuts they had tried to introduce'.⁶ Along with the Northumberland miners, the DMA went back into the MFGB in 1907. The South Wales miners joined the MFGB in 1899.

So during the 1830s and 1840s a powerful tradition of ostracism and hatred of strike-breakers, blacklegs and scabs entered mining trade union culture. In coal mining history, especially for the left, the most significant legacy of strike-breaking followed from the events of 1926. As in 1984-85, the Nottinghamshire

³ M. Wheeler, *The Life of Matthew Hayes: The Colliers Spurgeon* (Pinxton, 1899).

⁴ A. R. Griffin, *Mining in the East Midlands*, p. 75

⁵ 19th Century Mine-Owners often used the document following strikes and lockouts. The idea was to get the men to sign it, thus denouncing trade union membership under the new terms of employment following the dispute.

⁶ NUM, *A Century of Struggle*, p. 8.

coalfield was at the centre of the controversy. In the latter stages of the 1926 lockout a split occurred in the MFGB, and a breakaway, moderate union, the Nottingham Miners Industrial Union (NMIU) was formed. Most union branches in the Nottinghamshire coalfield went over to the 'breakaway' NMIU, commonly known as the 'Spencer Union'. The NMIU was led by the Nottinghamshire Miners' leader, George Alfred Spencer, and controversially it did not align politically to the Labour Party but advocated 'non-political trade unionism'. The Spencer Union lasted from 1926 until 1937 when, following the Harworth dispute, it amalgamated with the Nottinghamshire Miners Association (NMA) to form the Nottinghamshire Miners Federated Union (NMFU). The NMFU lasted from 1937 until 1944 when, at a conference in the Black Boy Inn in Nottingham, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was formed. The Nottingham Area (NUM) became a constituent part of the newly formed NUM. Ironically, it was in Nottinghamshire sixty years later that the NUM found itself in its greatest crisis, the Nottinghamshire miners, as in 1926, being at the centre of the crisis.

The song 'Blackleg Miner' was revamped by the folk-rock group Steeleye Span in 1970, and became part of their repertoire in live performances during the 1970s and 1980s. During the 1984-85 miners' strike the song was used by striking miners in some coalfields to intimidate those who continued to work. The song became a political statement for supporters of the strike. A legacy from the strike still exists at some football matches when supporters of Nottingham Forest, Notts County and Mansfield Town visit former coalfield striking areas. They are greeted with spontaneous chants of 'scab, scab, scab' throughout the match:

To this day, Nottingham Forest supporters receive far more of the usual away followers' normal share of abuse when they visit Hillsborough or Bramwell Lane (homes of Sheffield Wednesday and Sheffield United respectively). Nottinghamshire's football teams have

been objects of scorn in parts of Yorkshire and North Derbyshire since the 1984-85 coal strike.⁷

2. **Fitting the Bill: The Nottinghamshire Miners and the Strike-breaking issue in 1984-85**

Samuel contended that notions of honour and shame were pivotal in the conduct of the 1984-85 strike:

To resist the blandishments of the Coal Board (over return to work incentives) was an act of self-respect; to stand up to the police was an act of physical courage, even proof of manhood. Union men (supporters of the union) were steadfast. Weaklings and cowards were scabs.⁸

How do the Notts miners who worked through the 1984-85 strike technically fit the bill as scabs? Were they the weaklings and cowards suggested by Samuel? Scab is a derogatory term that is generally used to refer to people who continue to work when trade unionists go on strike. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines a scab as being 'a person who refuses to strike or join a trade union, or who tries to break a strike by working, a blackleg'.⁹ The term 'blackleg' is an older word for scab, blackleg being defined by the OED as 'a person who fails or declines to take part in industrial action'.¹⁰ Such a worker was memorably portrayed in the 1960 British drama film, *The Angry Silence*, in which Richard Attenborough plays factory worker Tom Curtis, who refuses to take part in an unofficial strike and is ostracised by the other workers as being a scab.¹¹

During and since the 1984-85 miners' strike some references to 'scabbing' or 'blacklegging' use the example of the working Nottinghamshire miners in the

⁷ 'Football fans still bear brunt of strikers' ire', *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 27 March 2009, p.8.

⁸ Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, p. 27.

⁹ *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1992), p. 964.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹¹ *The Angry Silence* (1960), directed by Guy Green, screenwriter Bryan Forbes.

1984-85 strike. Lynn Beaton suggested that striking miners referred to Nottinghamshire as being 'scabland in 1926' during the first few weeks of the strike.¹² At Harworth Colliery during the first week of the strike Yorkshire strikers at the heavily picketed pit openly talked of 'trying to force the Notts men out, men who they openly talked of as being scabby bastards'.¹³ In the early part of the 1984-85 strike, Jack London's definition of a scab was revamped and circulated in the Nottinghamshire coalfield by South Wales NUM activists (Appendix 19). Jack London (1876 – 1916) was an American author, journalist and social activist. He was a passionate advocate of unionism, socialism and the rights of workers. The leaflet caused some concern amongst some South Wales NUM Lodge Officials because they considered its derogatory nature could be counter-productive in the efforts to get Nottingham Area NUM members to join the strike.¹⁴ In the 1996 film, 'Brassed Off', Stephen Tomkinson played the part of a former striker in the 1984-85 strike and ironically referred to himself as being a scab when he told his work colleagues that he had voted 'to take the money' in the ballot vote to save Grimley Colliery.¹⁵

McIlroy suggested a deeper definition for strike breaking and pointed out a distinct difference between scabbing and blacklegging. He suggested that workers who replace strikers were, 'threatening (their) livelihood and organisation (and) by doing so (were) 'scabbing' in the correct sense'.¹⁶ In comparison he suggested that workers who 'blacklegged' as against 'scabbing' were:

(...) breaking the democratic decision of their fellows (and), by doing so, (were) attacking their brothers and sisters and opening them up to

¹² L. Beaton, *Shifting Horizons* (London, 1985), p. 69.

¹³ Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, p. 88.

¹⁴ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 101.

¹⁵ *Brassed Off*, Channel 4 TV Corporation, 1996.

¹⁶ McIlroy, *Strike*, p. 150.

victimisation. By going in they (were) 'blacklegging' in the correct sense of the term.¹⁷

If we use McIlroy's interpretation can the Nottinghamshire miners of 1984-85 be seen to have been 'blacklegging' as against 'scabbing'? However, there is one contentious point in McIlroy's interpretation, the breaking of the 'democratic process'. It is because there was some debate over the democratic process in the 1984-85 miners' strike that the question is raised as to whether the working Nottinghamshire miners were scabs at all. Jimmy Reid, leader of the 1971 Clyde Shipyard strike, was critical of the term being applied to working miners:

A scab is someone who participates in a vote in which the majority are for taking strike action and then refuses to honour the decision. If you are denied the right to vote it is impossible to be a scab.¹⁸

Likewise Roy Ottey, NUM NEC Member for the Power Group, who resigned from the NEC in November 1984, questioned the definition of a man being called a scab who had abided by a no strike area ballot vote in the absence of a national strike ballot:

How can a man, exercising the right given to him in a ballot in his own area, be called a scab if he abides by the result and goes to work? After all, the members are the union, not the Officials and the leaders. If the result of a (national) ballot had been to strike (...) there would have been few if any, so called scabs.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 'Opinion Special', *Channel 4*, 13 January 1985. (Script of the programme in the *Nottingham Evening Post*, 15 January 1985, p. 6)

¹⁹ Ottey, *The Strike: an insider's view*, p. 123.

Joe Keenan from the British and Irish Communist Association also called into question the issue as to whether the Nottinghamshire miners were scabs:

The Nottinghamshire miners are to be congratulated for their courageous stand (...) far from indulging in a bout of latter day 'Spencerism' or seeking to revert to the Federation they are treating the NUM in a more principled manner than its President cares to (...) Whilst Scargill calls them scabs and despatches his heavies to assault and intimidate them they are keeping up the overtime ban. Some scabs! ²⁰

While some of the NUM strike activists had referred to Nottinghamshire miners as scabs from the start of the strike, the issue of 'scabbing' came to a head at the NUM Extraordinary Conference in July 1984. At the start of the Conference Terry Thomas (South Wales NUM) came to the rostrum on a point of order following the Obituary. The Conference had stood in respect of the deaths of flying pickets David Jones and Joe Green. Thomas made a passionate attack on 'scab delegates' attending the Conference, and suggested that they had been responsible for most of the reverses the NUM had suffered during the strike up to that time:

I come to this rostrum (...) to ask a question as to whether or not there are any scab delegates in this Conference. Comrades, these rats who have assisted in trying to defeat the NUM, have assisted the establishment in Britain of seeing thousands of our comrades arrested, hundreds of our comrades beaten up by police, and two of our comrades killed, and those

²⁰ Joe Keenan, *Scargill's Strike*, (Belfast, 1984), p. 6.

people have the audacity to (...) stand and pay their respects to those comrades who have been killed.²¹

The NUM South Wales Delegation then made a collective decision to leave the Conference, leaving their Area General Secretary (against his wishes) in order for the NUM South Wales conference vote to be cast. To his credit Arthur Scargill, NUM National President, ruled that every NUM Delegate had been sent to the Conference in accordance with the rules and constitution of the union. However, the serious fractures in the NUM, which had split the union from the start of the strike, came to the fore in the debate on the 'Situation in the Industry'. Jack Collins of the Kent Area NUM accused those who lined up with the scabs, i.e. Thatcher, the Police and the NCB, of being 'all that is disgraceful and disgusting in society'.²² Mick Walker, Nottingham Area NUM Delegate and striking miner, when commenting on the Nottinghamshire working miners' stance, suggested they had forgotten their class but made an important reference to the issue of getting the message over regarding pit closures:

People have forgotten their class. People take the biscuit. People believe the press (...) I tell you this, if we don't get the message over after this confrontation then we have failed, and we have failed miserably. I never thought in my lifetime we would have a situation in Nottinghamshire again where they scab on the rest of the British coalfield. I never contemplated that we could have one man cross a picket line, never mind 20,000 of them.²³

Mick Walker concluded his speech by declaring 'eternal shame on the Nottinghamshire scabs'.²⁴ This quote was resurrected during the autumn of

²¹ NUM, *1984 Extraordinary Annual Conference Report* (Sheffield, July 1984), p. 403.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 451.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 452

1985 in the campaign in the run up to the ballot which formed the UDM (Fig. 14). Incidentally at the time he was NUM Branch Delegate at Rufford Colliery and had recently been voted out of office in the June 1984 NUM Branch Elections.²⁵ The 1984 Branch elections virtually wiped out any remaining pro-strike representation in the Nottingham Area of the NUM. (see Chapter 2: pp. 105 -108) Interestingly in the Nottingham Area NUM Ballot of March 1984 the Rufford Branch, which Mick Walker represented on the Nottingham Area NUM AC, voted to work by 760 votes (64%) to 409 (34%). Back at the 1984 NUM EOC when Ken Toon, South Derbyshire Area NUM, tried to give his interpretation of scabbing, it provoked a mass walk out by pro-strike delegates. Ken Toon was one of the senior members of the NUM NEC, having attended NUM Annual Conferences for over twenty years, through the severe decline of the 1960s, including closures in his own South Derbyshire Area. He remarked:

I want to give a definition of what I think of scabbing and that is if this union had held an individual ballot vote under Rule 43 and the required percentage of that vote had been achieved (...) [if] following such a decision individual Areas or members refused to stop work, then they would be entitled to be called scabs.

Twenty-five years on from the strike the role of the Nottinghamshire miners in strike-breaking is still a hotly contested issue. Both sides of the divide still air strong views on the subject. Arthur Scargill stated he would never forgive the strike breakers who he insisted helped crucify the industry:

²⁵ NUM Delegates were still were selected as Delegates for the NUM National-Conference under Nottinghamshire Area (NUM) Rules prior to the elections for branch representatives for the subsequent union year. Branch elections were held in May and June each year and officers and committee members took office from 1 July each year. Because of the logistics involved Delegates from the previous year attended the NUM Conference in early July each year. Hence in July 1984 a mainly pro-strike Nottingham Area NUM delegation attended the NUM Conference even though they had been recently voted out of office in the NUM Branch Elections for 1984-85.

Fig. 12: Pro-UDM Propaganda in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield, September 1985.

TO ALL NOTTINGHAM AREA MEMBERS

(Confirmed by High Court Judgment on 7 August, 1985)

A statement made by MICK WALKER, a NOTTS. STRIKE LEADER speaking at the NUM Conference on 11/12 July, 1984—

**“I SAY TO THESE SCABS, SHAME ON YOU.
ETERNAL SHAME ON YOU.”**

A question needs to be asked of THESE PEOPLE NOW PLEADING FOR US to return to the National Union. They claim there was a STRIKE LEADER at every pit. If so, ask the STRIKE LEADER—

DOES HE STILL MEAN IT? ASK HIM!

ASK—THE ONES WHO SPAT ON YOU
THE ONES WHO ATTACKED YOUR HOUSES
THE ONES WHO ATTACKED YOUR CARS
THE ONES WHO INVADED YOUR OFFICES

REMEMBER

NOW THEY STATE—THEY DO NOT MEAN IT

**There is one fact we wish you to REMEMBER—
THEY DO NOT NEED YOU
THEY NEED YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS
NOT YOUR BALLOT BOX!**

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE NOTTINGHAM AREA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Those miners who went through picket lines committed the unforgivable sin and broke the 11th commandment; history will never forgive them and never forget them. Their role in this is one of treachery.²⁶

Bob Collier, a striking Nottinghamshire miner at Newstead, suggested that the Nottinghamshire working miners had been mistaken in their decision to cross picket lines:

Every one of them that crossed the picket line knows what they are (...) in my mind they were very foolish and that it is a polite way of putting it.²⁷

Neil Greatrex, a working Nottingham NUM Branch Official in 1984, later to be a senior UDM Official, in line with Jimmy Reid, Roy Ottey and Joe Keenan, questioned the constitutionality of the strike and the scab title given to the Nottinghamshire working miners:

My interpretation of a scab is someone crossing a picket line but there wasn't anything official about those picket lines set up in Nottinghamshire.²⁸

The relationship between the NUM and the UDM was never one that was on an easy footing, at activist level anyway. Part of Lerner's work on breakaway unions looked at some of the internal union problems which led to breakaway unions being formed. It also looked at the relationship between the parent union and the breakaway.²⁹ Activists in the post-strike NUM never accepted the existence of the UDM, especially following the introduction of British Coal's majority / minority concept for branch recognition and negotiating rights in

²⁶ 'Scargill Insists: I will never forgive', *Hucknall Dispatch*, 24 April 2009, p. 3.

²⁷ Bob Collier, 'Why I went on strike', *Ashfield Chad*, 4 March 2009, p. 4.

²⁸ BBC News, 'What is a scab?' <http://news.bbc.co.uk>, 4 March 2004.

²⁹ Lerner, *Breakaway Unions and the Small Trade Union*.

1987. Non-recognition and non-participation with the UDM became official NUM policy following a Special Delegates Conference (SDC) in February 1988. This rejection was, as Taylor stated, a novel development in NUM politics because the veto on the UDM entailed the rejection of the fundamental principle of both the MFGB and the NUM: one-industry, one-union.³⁰ Despite splits and breaks in the mining unions and the hostility shown towards strike-breakers and 'scab unions', mining unions in the past strove for inclusiveness to preserve solidarity and limit the ability of management to divide and rule.³¹ The NUM rejection was odd in the fact that while rejecting the UDM and everything it stood for they gladly would accept miners who broke the strike in 1984-85 to membership of the NUM.

At the 1988 SDC Arthur Scargill identified the UDM with 'Spencerism', taking the view that the MFGB had made a fatal mistake when it brought the NMIU back into the MFGB in 1937 as this had infected the body politic of this organisation for 50 years.³² However, what he did not mention was that the Leicestershire miners had stayed under the banner of the MFGB during the 1920s and 1930s. The character of the Leicestershire union was, as Waller stated, very similar to that of the Spencer Union in Nottinghamshire in that there was:

Very similar politics, a return to work in late 1926, followed by negotiation and co-operation with the employers, that were adopted by the Leicestershire Miners Association (LMA) which remained within the MFGB throughout the 1920s and 1930s.³³

There was no mention of the Leicestershire Miners infecting the body politic of the national organisation! Additionally, Scargill's 'infectious statement' was noticeable in that no mention was made of the splits and breakaways in the

³⁰ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 291.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 296

³³ R. J. Waller, 'Sweethearts & Scabs: Irregular Trade-Unions in Britain in the Twentieth Century', in P. J. Waller, *Politics and Change in Modern Britain* (Brighton, 1987), p. 221.

Scottish coalfield during the 1920s, especially that of the Communist inspired breakaway, The United Mineworkers of Scotland (UMS), formed in 1929 and accepted back into the MFGB in 1935. According to Griffin the UMS caused as much trouble to AJ Cook and the MFGB as the Spencer Union split had.³⁴ The UMS had a significant influence in the NUM following its formation in 1944. John McArthur and Abe Moffatt, both prominent leaders of the breakaway UMS, became leading figures in the NUM. Abe Moffatt was President of the Scottish Area of the NUM from its inception until 1961 whilst John McArthur became the NUM District Secretary for Fife, retiring from office in 1964. There was also Willie Allan, the first UMS Secretary, who left the Scottish coalfield and settled in Northumberland, and eventually became an Area Official of the Northumberland Area of the NUM.

Following the strike there has been a view expressed among the 1984-85 pro-strike activists that the strike-breakers were the main cause for the demise of the coal-industry in Britain. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the start of the strike Arthur Scargill suggested that had the Nottinghamshire Miners joined the 1984-85 strike there would have been a flourishing coal industry in the county in the Twenty-First century:

It is a sobering thought that if all Nottinghamshire miners had joined their brave colleagues who did come out on strike in 1984, Nottinghamshire would have a thriving coal industry today and Britain would not be dependent on imported coal.³⁵

Bob Collier's 2009 poem also makes an inference that a thriving coal industry could have existed in the event of the 1984-85 strike being won:

Shame on the working miners for not joining the fray,

³⁴ A. R. Griffin, 'Avoiding a split', *The Nottinghamshire Miner No.1*, February 1985, p. 4.

³⁵ Arthur Scargill, 'Scargill writes for the Chad', *The Ashfield Chad*, 18 March 2009, p. 4.

Because if we had stood together it could have been a different story today.³⁶

Although we are entering the world of counterfactual speculation, it could be reasoned that these views ignored the economic, technological and political rationale of the situation. The coal industry had been in decline for some time, other sources of energy having significantly cut into its markets from the late 1950s onwards. Also, coal was an extractive industry and the closure of some collieries and mergers of others had been an on-going process since mines were first sunk. Technology, in the guise of coalface mechanisation, was a chief factor, along with cheap oil, that caused the industry to halve in the 1960s with the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. Into the 1980s many mining jobs continued to be lost through computerised technological advances such as MINOS (Mine Operating System) and FIDO (Face Information Digested Online) and other rationalisations such as the elimination of coal preparation plants by merging collieries underground. The NUM listed technology as being one of the four main threats to the industry in its 1983 Education Pack (Fig. 15). Politically there was no certainty that a Labour Government would have secured a large coal industry. More collieries closed under the Labour Government of 1964-70 than in the aftermath of the 1984-85 strike. 280 collieries closed with the loss of 185,000 jobs during the 1964-70 Labour administration compared to around 150 in the post-strike period 1985-1994 under the Conservatives.³⁷ This amounted to an average of one colliery a week closing between October 1964 and June 1970, with a subsequent average loss of over 600 mining jobs per week, for the whole duration of the 1964-70 Labour Government's period of office.

³⁶ Bob Collier, 'The 25th Anniversary of the Great Miners' Strike 1984-2009', *The Nottingham NUM Ex Miner*, Issue 16, March 2010, p. 11.

³⁷ Bradley, *Snippets from the Past*.

Fig. 13. NUM Flyer: Four Serious threats to your Jobs - NUM Education Pack 1983.

NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS
(NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AREA)

FOUR SERIOUS THREATS
TO YOUR JOBS

1. GOVERNMENT POLICY
The Government intend to shed uneconomic capacity and create a few super pits, which they could sell to Private Enterprise.
WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR JOB AND YOUR PIT?

2. SUBSIDENCE
Subsidence damage has now become so critical that it now can make an economic pit lose money.
All the losses in South Nottinghamshire last year were equivalent to subsidence damage paid. North Nottinghamshire announce that next year they expect to pay between £40 million and £80 million in subsidence damage.
HOW LONG BEFORE NORTH NOTTS. BECOMES UNECONOMIC?

3. NEW TECHNOLOGY
The National Coal Board have introduced the Micro Chip and have announced that they wish to reduce the number of craftsmen **by 40,000 and de-skill the remainder.**
New Technology should benefit the workers by shorter hours and longer holidays and **not by redundancy.**
ARE YOU THE ONE THAT THE MICRO-CHIP REPLACES?

4. NUCLEAR POWER
The Sizewell B Inquiry has divulged that by the year 2000 **40%** of electricity will be generated by Nuclear Power and by the year 2020 **90%**. (This means the remaining 10% is half the production of the Selby Project).
WHAT HAPPENS TO THE COAL INDUSTRY?

IS YOUR JOB SAFE?

Source: D. Amos collection.

Despite this mass rationalisation Labour did not suffer a loss of support in its traditional Labour heartlands, even in those coalfields most severely hit by closures. But as Taylor argued, what it did do was to have most profound changes in the NUM, and subsequently for British politics overall:

Labour paid no electoral price even in those coalfields which had suffered most from pit closures but the NUM was undergoing rapid political change. This change was reflected in the new legitimacy of industrial action in the unofficial strikes of autumn 1969 which were a reaction to the events explored above [the rationalisation of the coal industry in the 1960's]. This change was to have profound consequences for British politics.³⁸

The consequences would be the 1972 and 1974 strikes, the subsequent move to the left in some quarters of the NUM and a lurch to the right in the Conservative Party, which eventually led to the election of the right-wing Thatcher Government in 1979. Griffin, writing in 1976, asked whether the resurgence in the coal industry's fortunes since 1970 was permanent or merely a temporary amelioration of long term decline.³⁹ It was to be a temporary stay of execution.

The rationalisation of the coal industry in the 1960s would have ramifications for the 1984-85 strike in two main ways. First, in the way that the 1984-85 strike evolved, essentially it was a militant backlash against the passivity in the NUM which saw the industry halved in the 1960s. Secondly, in the way that the miners who experienced this contraction reacted to the enhanced redundancy payments introduced from 1981 onwards (See Chapter 4: Part 3). Many of the miners who experienced the rationalisation of the 1960s ended up working in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Numerous miners had worked in parts of the

³⁸ Alan Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.1 1944-1968* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 250.

³⁹ Alan R. Griffin, *The British Coalmining Industry: Retrospect and Prospect* (Hartington, 1977), p. 185.

Scottish, North-East and Derbyshire coalfields which suffered the severest part of the 1960s rationalisation programme. When statements were made about the Tories' intentions to 'axe the coal-industry' they calculated that there would probably be no respite even under a Labour Government. History had shown that. By the start of the 1984 dispute the majority of these men were in their 50s and in a position to consider the enhanced redundancy terms that were available. When the Labour Government of Tony Blair was elected in 1997, although coal was a much smaller industry, again the Labour Government showed no special favours to the deep mining coal industry in Britain and the industry continued to shrink.

With the deep coalmining industry in Britain now (2012) in the final stage of its long history, it is predictable that the NUM strike loyalists will say 'We told you so'. It is often been quoted that one of the ultimate aims of the Thatcher Government was to destroy the unions, starting with the NUM.⁴⁰ However, this viewpoint fails to take account of some of unforeseen and unexpected factors which hit the coal industry during the 1980s and 1990s. Parker made reference to some of these catastrophic factors:

The outcome (for the coal industry) was the result of chance, unexpected consequences and economic trends that could not have been foreseen when Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979. Thus, the Conservative Governments were attended by good fortune, being greatly assisted by the folly of the NUM leadership (which was a decisive factor in enabling the Government to defeat the Great Strike), the professionalism of British Coal (BC) in managing decline, the unforeseen way in which electricity privatisation was followed by the 'dash for gas' and the unpredicted severity of the progressive

⁴⁰ See Callinicos and Simons, *The Great Strike*, p. 42; Milne, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War against the Miners*, pp. 6-14; plus Huw Beynon and P. McMyler, 'Decisive Power: The New Tory State against the Miners' in Beynon (ed.) *Digging Deeper*, pp. 29-45.

economic and other external pressures on the UK coal industry.⁴¹

Many of the factors cited by Parker were not manifest at the time. For example the main alternative energy fear was from the nuclear sector and not a “dash for gas” (see Fig. 15). Therefore, the argument about the 'scabs' being responsible for the demise of the coal industry is very much a case of the left verifying their own 'self-fulfilling prophecies'.

3. Digging Deeper: the strike breaking issue in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in 1984-85.

Bardill identified the lack of a national ballot as the overriding reason why the majority of the Nottinghamshire miners carried on working.⁴² Other key issues she identified as being influential on the decision to work were the confrontational picketing tactics and the role of the police. Cliff's assessment of Hem Heath and Florence collieries during the 1984-85 strike led him to believe that the materialist issues thrown up as excuses for the Nottinghamshire miners working i.e. better working conditions, higher bonuses, security of employment, did not stand up when they were scrutinised.⁴³ Hem Heath had better conditions, higher bonuses and more job security than Florence, yet greater militancy was shown by the Hem Heath strikers than at Florence. Because of this situation, Cliff believes that the real reasons for the Nottinghamshire miners' failure to respond to the strike call may be due to deeper reasons than have been suspected.⁴⁴

Despite significant migratory patterns into the Nottinghamshire coalfield, especially since the end of World War Two, and an increased militancy shown in the two national strikes of 1972 and 1974, traditions of moderation remained

⁴¹ Parker, *Thatcherism and the Fall of Coal*, p. 222.

⁴² Bardill, 'Changing Perceptions of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield', p. 49.

⁴³ Dave Cliff, 'A Tale of Two-Pits', in Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 86 – 92, here p. 87.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

strong in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Some migrant miners retained regional characteristics, and formed distinct communities in parts of the Nottinghamshire coalfield e.g. former Durham miners at Calverton and Cotgrave. However, many of the migrant miners were to be influenced over time by the moderate traditions, attitudes and practices of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. During the 1984-85 strike the issue that it was not just Nottinghamshire miners, but 'ex pats' that were working, became a bitter pill to swallow for some strikers:

At Durham we got a great response. They thought that no-one was out. Anyway they couldn't accept the fact that it is their own people who live down there who were still working (...) they tried to say to themselves its Notts miners who won't come out, but of course it was Geordies, Scots as well as Notts miners that were keeping the pits open.⁴⁵

The issue of migrant miners taking up the attitudes and practices of their adopted coalfield is worth investigating. This situation could fit in with Cliff's theory on why there were different responses to the strike call by different collieries in the 1984-85 strike. Cliff suggested that basic historical differences went a long way in explaining the divergent courses taken by Hem Heath and Florence Collieries. Although he stated there were no simple answers to explain why some collieries went on strike and other did not, in the end it was the working environment which determined whether a workforce would be either militant or moderate:

Individuals starting work in a militant, pro-union environment are quite likely to become strong supporters (...) of collectiveness, while the opposite is

⁴⁵ In 'Notts Women strike back', Claire Higney Arts Connection, an independent pamphlet, April 1985, cited in Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners Strike*, p. 6.

true of a moderate, management orientated environment.⁴⁶

Cliff's simplistic explanation needs some examining. In explaining Florence's moderation and Hem Heath's militancy he ventured into the different historical backgrounds at each colliery. He suggested Florence's moderation stemmed from the pre nationalisation days of the Cheadle pits. There, working conditions were bad, management was oppressive and there was no tradition of militancy amongst the men. Things improved considerably when the men transferred to Florence and according to Cliff the much improved conditions did not foster a need for unity. Since that time an easy going, non-militant attitude had existed at Florence which permeated the majority of new entrants and maintained the moderate traditions. This could go some way to explaining migrant miners developing moderate attitudes which influenced them when they transferred to pits in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Working conditions at some Nottinghamshire collieries were an improvement from where they had come but this was not the case universally throughout the Nottinghamshire coalfield (see Chapter 4 – Part 1).

One of the more popular explanations for the adverse reaction of the Nottinghamshire miners to the 1984-85 strike was the influence of 'Spencerism'. Some commentators, mainly on the left, have drawn parallels with the splits in the union in the Nottinghamshire coalfield of 1926 with that of 1985 and made the easy conclusion that 'Spencerism' was the cause:

After the strike, sections of the Notts miners formed a breakaway organisation, as happened in 1926. Having withdrawn from the struggle for pits and jobs, they now established with the encouragement of the Coal Board and Tory Government a body known as the Union of

⁴⁶ Cliff, 'A Tale of Two Pits' in Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanus, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 86 -92, here p. 92.

Democratic Mineworkers (UDM). The same bitterness and anger directed at the 'Spencer Union' after 1926 has been shown by miners towards the UDM. ⁴⁷

Liversuch provided another simplistic view comparing the UDM with the Spencer Union:

The breakaway of the UDM was an exact replica of what happened in the 1926 strike (...) This union was anti-strike and pro-mine owners, and why it calls itself moderate, it was always referred to as a 'scab union' by the majority of miners. The name of George Spencer was one that was reviled in NUM circles. ⁴⁸

Despite other coalfields working in the 1984-85 strike, it was the Nottinghamshire coalfield that drew most the attention. For most of the left, the reason for them acting as they did was simple; it was their birthright. But as Taylor stated 'the easiest and least satisfactory explanation for the UDM's formation is that Nottinghamshire miners had always been scabs'. ⁴⁹ He points to the symbolic absence of a national ballot in 1984 as being an overriding factor. Likewise Stephenson (1986) suggests that there has been an over-emphasis on the importance of 'Spencerism' which could be drastically misleading. ⁵⁰ He cited several factors that existed in 1984-85 but not in 1926: these included the coal-industry being nationalised, miners enjoying a higher standard of living than in 1926, the work process had altered significantly, and the role of coal in the energy economies of Britain had also changed drastically. ⁵¹ Morgan and Coates also point to changes in the work process which had dramatically altered between 1926 and 1984. They cited the influence, and

⁴⁷ NUM, *A Century of Struggle*, p. 123.

⁴⁸ Paul Liversuch cited in David Bell, *Memories of the Derbyshire Coalfield* (Newbury, 2006), p. 104.

⁴⁹ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 282.

⁵⁰ Stephenson, 'Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting', p. 8.

⁵¹ Ibid.

subsequent collapse, of the butty system as being an important factor in the demise of Spencerism. They maintained that the 'Spencer Union' was a creation of the Butties, when the 'Spencer Union' re-unified back into the MFGB in 1937 it was accompanied by the collapse of the butty system itself.⁵²

Morgan and Coates also pointed to the role played by the Nottinghamshire miners in the introduction of the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) in 1966 as being an influential factor that made Spencerism an unlikely influencing factor on the Nottinghamshire miners' actions in 1984.⁵³ The arguments for centralised wage bargaining were greatly developed in the aftermath of the First World War, and even after nationalisation local bargaining continued in the coal industry and led to frequent local disputes. At this time local strikes in coalmining, usually over piece-work payments and small and short in duration, outnumbered strikes in all other industries.⁵⁴ The NPLA put an end to this situation and from 1966 wage questions became centralised. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the miners' dissatisfactions now became more concentrated, the NPLA came at a price. Under NPLA face workers' wages were to achieve parity by 31 December 1971.⁵⁵ (Appendix 20) This meant serious cuts in real wage terms for many miners in the Midlands coalfields as other areas caught up. Dick Martin worked on a NPLA face in Nottinghamshire shortly after its introduction and told the story of a slow-down in the work process being noticeable. Expounding on the counter-productive nature of the NPLA he said:

There was a 'money's in the tin' attitude among miners on that coalface. Because everyone was paid the same you would not do six-feet (of ripping) when you got paid the

⁵² Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners' Strike*, p. 7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ NCB/NUM, *National Power Loading Agreement*, November 1966, p. 6.

same for doing four-feet. Many old colliers said that the incentive had been kicked out of pit-work.⁵⁶

Alan Scrivens, a Tail-Gate Ripper at Newstead Colliery in the mid 1960s, stated that the motivation dropped almost immediately because of the effects of NPLA:

The last wage I received on piece rates (on a ripping contract) I took home £70. On the new face we moved onto NPLA and my first take home pay under NPLA was £20 10/- (£20.50p) (...) the effects of this was that everyone slowed the pace down after this (...) setting one ring instead of three or four became the norm then.

⁵⁷

Hughes and Moore suggested that Nottinghamshire miners saw their pay decline in real terms by 15% between 1966 and 1972, compared to only 1.8% in the South Wales coalfield.⁵⁸ Accounting for the downturn in production levels at some Nottinghamshire collieries in the late 1960s, Searle-Barnes suggested that the NPLA was another case of a national agreement which was detrimental to the interests of the Nottinghamshire miners but which had been accepted in the national interest.⁵⁹ He stated that:

A number of instances were quoted in Chapter 2 of national settlements which were prejudicial to the interests of Nottinghamshire but which were accepted in the coalfield in the national interest. It seems, on the evidence of this study, that the 1966 Power Loading Agreement must be accounted in such a settlement. It may appear from the downturn in productivity that on these occasions

⁵⁶ Channel 4 Production, *All our working lives- Cutting Coal*, 1984.

⁵⁷ Interview with Alan Scrivens, Annesley Woodhouse, 20 October 2011.

⁵⁸ J. Hughes and R. Moore, *A Special Case? Social Justice and the Miners* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 29.

⁵⁹ Searle-Barnes, *Pay and Productivity Bargaining*, p. 168.

the dictates of national policy have by no means fully accepted in the coalfield.⁶⁰

The dissatisfaction with NPLA, along with a reaction to the mass rationalisation of the coal industry in the mid and late 1960s, culminated in the national strike of 1972 and the subsequent Wilberforce Enquiry. Despite their opposition to the NPLA and alleged 'Spencerite traditions', the Nottingham Area NUM accepted the new NPLA arrangements voted in at a special Conference of the NUM in April 1966, and subsequently played a significant part in the two national strikes of 1972 and 1974.

Morgan and Coates identified another aspect which differentiated the Nottinghamshire miners in 1984-85 from the spectre of Spencerism. They compared the strike organisation of a Nottinghamshire mining community in 1972 and 1984-85.⁶¹ Calverton was the most easterly and newest colliery in the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area, starting production in 1952. In 1972 the Calverton NUM Branch initiated a bulk grocery co-operative and had an active women's support group, which not only distributed the food hampers but were politically involved. In 1984 the Calverton NUM Branch would play an entirely different role, despite the NUM Branch Delegate being a pro-strike devotee and member of the Nottingham Area NUM AEC.

On the formation of the UDM Peter Heathfield, NUM National General Secretary during the strike, suggested 'Spencerism' had returned to the coalfields. Adeney and Lloyd maintained it was not 'Spencerism'. They cited substantial evidence to support their claim. Despite encouragement from the NCB, the UDM had erupted from below in opposition to the bulk of the NUM leadership, it did not rely on the management enforcing membership by refusing jobs to those who were not in the union and it was not part of a larger movement hostile to the Labour Party and the TUC.⁶² Supporting this view Waller argued: could the UDM properly be placed in a tradition of anti-socialist trade

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 169.

⁶¹ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners' Strike*, p. 9.

⁶² Adeney and Lloyd, *Loss without Limit*, p. 277.

unionism?⁶³ Research conducted by Richards found that many Nottinghamshire miners continued to situate themselves and their new union within the traditions of the Labour movement.⁶⁴ He also suggested that support for the Labour Party among non-striking Nottinghamshire miners remained relatively strong despite misgivings about the Party's role during the 1984-85 strike and its subsequent attitude towards the UDM.⁶⁵ Morgan and Coates stated that 'catch-all explanations like Spencerism had little or nothing to do with the hostile reaction of the Nottinghamshire miners to the 1984-85 strike'.⁶⁶ Stephenson stated that the arguments he presented surrounding 'Spencerism' were important to dismiss the belief, and myth, that the UDM is a return to the 1920s.⁶⁷ He suggests that the direct seeds of the conflict could be found rather closer to the event itself.⁶⁸ If Stephenson is correct it is to those closer events that we therefore should look to discover if the Nottinghamshire miners in 1984-85 have been made the main culprits for the failures of the 1984-85 strike. However, the debate remains how much has 1926 and 'Spencerism' to do with the 1984-85 miners' strike in Nottinghamshire? It is beyond the scope of this thesis to look in-depth into the links between 1926 and 1984-85 in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Nevertheless, there is scope for a future study to look into the 'Spencerism' links in more detail. In the meantime the evidence presented in this thesis suggests that the 1984-85 miners' strike evolved into an internal union dispute over procedural issues. In 1984 the majority of Nottingham NUM members reacted not just to what they saw as being an oligarchy, but an ochlocracy. The words from the Oakdale NUM Lodge in South Wales sum up the whole episode:

What people don't realise is that Notts did not do anything wrong, under rule. They went to their men, but they did not want to strike (...) which they were quite

⁶³ R. J. Waller, 'Sweethearts & Scabs: Irregular Trade-Unions in Britain in the Twentieth Century', in P. J. Waller, *Politics and Change in Modern Britain* (Brighton, 1987), p. 226.

⁶⁴ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 199.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁶⁶ Morgan and Coates, *The Nottinghamshire Coalfield and the British Miners' Strike*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Stephenson, 'Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting', p. 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

entitled to do (...) I think the biggest thing against the Notts miners coming out was the way they went about picketing (...) I have always found if you ask someone to do something it's a lot better than trying to tell them (...) I think the whole thing was handled wrongly and we ought to be big enough to admit that.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 192.

Conclusion

During the autumn of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike a letter appeared in the local press in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, from a retired local miners' union man.¹ Making reference to his union mentoring from iconic Derbyshire miners' leaders of the past, namely Bert Wynn, Harry Hicklin and Bert Parkin, he suggested there were three basic principles for successful industrial action:

- Make sure the cause is right.
- Pick the right time.
- Make sure the majority of the membership is with you.

On face value it would appear that the 1984-85 miners' strike met two out of three of the criteria. A strike against pit closures and saving jobs was surely an honourable cause. It also appeared that the majority of the miners backed the call and voluntarily came out on strike without redress to a national ballot. The time could not be helped, it was the NCB and the Thatcher Government who had provoked the strike, thus the miners starting a strike at the 'wrong time of the year' could not be helped. Nevertheless, as Parker indicated, some of the evidence suggested that the NUM were also spoiling for a fight.² On closer inspection though, the situation was not what it seemed. The issue of pit closures was a divisive issue as mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 4. The results from NUM national ballots on the issue of pit closures in 1976, October 1982 and March 1983, the problems trying to get industrial action over colliery closures in the South Wales and Scottish coalfields in the early 1980s and the results from the various Area ballots held in March 1984 suggest the NUM had still not got a consensus on the issue of colliery closures by the start of the 1984-85 strike. As Taylor indicated no national coalition had ever been built around pit closures; historically the effect was to fragment

¹ Alf Martin, 'For successful strike action', *Eastwood and Kimberley Advertiser- Letters Page*, 19 October 1984, p. 4.

² Parker, *Thatcherism and the Fall of Coal*, p. 36.

the NUM, not unite it.³ Therefore, the very subject on which the 1984-85 strike was founded was a historically contentious issue.

The issue of the 'majority being with you' became entangled in an inter-union civil war over the constitutionality of the strike. This related to the strike strategy. The 1984-85 strike was never truly a national strike: industrial action was authorised under NUM Rule 41 on an Area by Area basis. The idea was that a domino effect would take place and a rolling strike would evolve. However, the strategy relied on cohesion. Two factors were essential for its success: the sanctity of the picket line and the effective deployment of flying pickets to bring indifferent NUM areas into line. As Stephenson mentioned, this laid the foundation for the split in the NUM and the subsequent formation of the UDM in 1985.⁴ The lack of a national ballot and the subsequent confrontational picketing was seen as a serious breach of the NUM ethos. From the time the Nottinghamshire NUM members turned down industrial action, and in the absence of a national ballot, the Area's no-strike ballot result became highly contestable. As Ratcliffe reported, this ensured that the dispute in Nottinghamshire soon became one about intra-union rivalry and not one about saving jobs and pits.⁵ Taylor argued that the seeds of the split in the NUM were sown once the Rule 41 strategy was approved.⁶ He suggested that if the strategy had been adhered to a year earlier, during the Lewis Merthyr dispute, the split in the NUM would have been a year earlier.⁷

One of the arguments put forward by the pro-strike supporters was that the majority of miners had marched with their feet and there was no need for a national ballot. The pro-strike advocates suggested that a national ballot was unjust because it was unfair for miners in 'safe areas' to vote on miners' jobs in area that were not safe. The evidence presented here proves this 'safe pits' theory to be a myth. The NCB South Nottinghamshire Area was affected by rationalisation like all other areas, but the majority of miners there

³ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 186.

⁴ Stephenson, 'Democratic Breakaway or Union Busting', p. 24.

⁵ Roger Ratcliffe, 'A Village at War', *Sunday Times*, 18 March 1984, p. 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁷ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 178.

opposed the conduct of the strike. What was not widely broadcast was that when the strike broke the run down to closure of two collieries was taking place there (See Chapter 1: Part 4 pp. 38 - 43). Yet at these two collieries the majority of NUM members opposed the way the strike evolved and were scathing about the lack of a national ballot and the subsequent confrontational picketing that took place. This scenario was repeated in the Cumberland and Lancashire coalfields. Also, there was a great irony in that one of the collieries due for closure, Pye Hill, started the legal action which eventually declared the strike unofficial in the Nottinghamshire coalfield in May 1984. A seemingly ludicrous situation occurred when a colliery due to close put its name to a legal challenge to prove a strike against colliery closures illegal!

Richards and Bardill point to the alienating effects of the picketing tactics adopted by the Yorkshire flying pickets as being a main factor for the failure of the strike in Nottinghamshire. As Richards indicated, it was not so much about Nottinghamshire miners being against a strike but about them being dictated to on the matter.⁸ The Rule 41 'domino strategy' was an attempt to get a consensus on the pit closure issue. The 1960s had seen passivity in the NUM and the coal industry halved. In some respects the 1984-85 strike was a left-wing reaction to this passivity. It tried a different approach to constitutional strike action with fatal results. By its confrontational nature the nature of the strike brought out all the cracks in the federal structure of the NUM. Each NUM Area was an independent union in its own right, with its own rule book, and an amount of local autonomy within a federation of the national union. The ethos and culture of the 1944 NUM Rule Book encompassed these differing area traditions and values. That is the reason why Rule 43 on national ballots existed. As Taylor stated the issue was not a one size fits all but about managing diversity.⁹

⁸ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 181.

⁹ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol.2*, p. 3.

When the Yorkshire flying pickets entered the Nottinghamshire coalfield in the first days of the strike the evidence suggested that they came with preconceived ideas about the Nottinghamshire miners. As Taylor suggested, these ideas included 'materialistic' and 'culturist' explanations of why Nottinghamshire miners would be predisposed against striking.¹⁰ Nottingham, it was alleged, had easy coal and thus large incentive bonuses, more modern pits and thus immunity from pit closures and a history of a lack of solidarity dating back to 1926. These enduring myths about the Nottinghamshire miners were repeated by Bolsover MP, Dennis Skinner, in 2011:

Those leading the fight at national level always knew Notts would renege upon what the rest of us were doing, as they had in the old days of the General Strike of 1926 (...) The Notts coalfield, generally speaking, made a lot of money as it was newer than the others, at most pits you did not have to go out so far to reach the coal (...) The colliers there used to get wages that were a little above the odds. All this meant they thought they were the bees-knees, indispensable.¹¹

It is clear from the evidence presented in this thesis that this was not necessarily the case. Not all Nottinghamshire pits fitted the modern category, as Chapter 4 – Part 1 shows. Collieries in the NCB South Yorkshire Area and the NCB South Nottinghamshire Area were of similar age, as were collieries in the NCB Doncaster Area and the NCB North Nottinghamshire Area (see Appendix 12). The evidence shows there were inferior geological conditions in parts of the Nottinghamshire coalfield and not all collieries were working six-feet plus seams of coal. Incentive bonus payments were dependent on negotiating on 'norms' and 'contracts' at Branch level and as the author mentions not all Nottinghamshire miners were earning large incentive bonuses. Faceworkers, working in poor geological conditions, could earn

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 191.

¹¹ Cited in Symcox (ed.), *The Diary of John Lowe*, p. 7.

reasonable bonus payments as Stanley hinted was the case at Newstead.¹² Therefore the AISs were not necessarily a vehicle for division in the NUM as the left suggested. Recent history from 1966 showed that the Nottinghamshire miners had a history of solidarity; the introduction of the NPLA in 1966, the loyal support given to the national strikes of 1972 and 1974 and the keeping to the overtime ban during the 1984-85 strike were instances of this. Searle-Barnes suggested some of the abiding myths about Nottinghamshire miners were wrong because disputes and strikes were not entirely unknown in the history of the Nottinghamshire miners:

The early history of the union in Nottinghamshire was characterised by disputes and strikes on the same sort of issues as occurred in other districts, though to a lesser extent. Moreover, the Nottingham Area of the Union never failed to join other areas in concerted strikes on national issues, though the rank and file of Nottinghamshire miners had not the same tenacity of purpose.¹³

As Bernard Savage stated in 1966 at the NUM Special Conference which introduced the NPLA, the Nottinghamshire Coalfield and its miners had 'some very peculiar history'.¹⁴

Despite the preconceived ideas of those supporting the strike the evidence presented suggests that the lack of a national ballot, the nature of picketing from Yorkshire and a circumvention of the NUM rulebook were the main issues that were instrumental in the decision of the Nottinghamshire miners to

¹² Stanley, *Nottinghamshire Miners do strike*, p. 45.

¹³ Searle-Barnes, *Pay and Productivity Bargaining*, p. 19.

¹⁴ Colin P. Griffin, 'Notts have some very peculiar history': Understanding the reaction of the Nottinghamshire Miners to the 1984-85 Strike', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, No. 19, Spring 2005, pp. 63 – 99. Here p. 63.

work through the strike. As Taylor stated, the 1984-85 strike was a challenge to a deeply rooted industrial and political tradition:

From Nottinghamshire’s perspective the events of March 1984 were a fundamental challenge to a deeply entrenched industrial and political tradition. The Nottinghamshire miners responded with a defence of the ethos and culture expressed by the 1944 rulebook.¹⁵

In 1984 this tradition derived not from 1926, but from more recent unofficial disputes of 1969, 1970 and to some extent 1981. As the evidence in Chapter 5 shows, the reaction in many parts of the Nottingham Area of the NUM to the 1984-85 strike was the same as it had been to the unofficial disputes of the past; they were seen as being unconstitutional and unauthorised. Although the left see 1969 and 1970 as being victories for militant action and a springboard for the rise of the left in the NUM, other coalfields retained their conventional traits. As Allen stated, these coalfields with conservative traditions were often hesitant to strike under such circumstances because there was a problem of it being conducted through accepted and understood procedures:

Unofficial strikes suffer from the inherent defect that they lack constitutional union legitimacy. This is significant because a union derives strength from the uniform acceptance of a common set of governing procedures. Action which is not processed through these procedures can be a threat to the union itself.¹⁶

¹⁵ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol. 2*, p. 191.

¹⁶ Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p. 313.

It was a lack of uniformly accepted governing procedures which was the root cause of the split in the NUM in 1984. The roving picketing style employed by the Yorkshire NUM flying pickets may have been custom and practice to them but the practice was alien to the Nottinghamshire coalfield and the Nottinghamshire miners felt threatened by this style of picketing. The threat to the union was hatched in March 1984 and played out through a series of episodes throughout the rest of 1985. It ended with a split in the union and the subsequent formation of the UDM.

It is clear from the evidence presented and reviewed that the division in the NUM in the 1984-85 strike was not simply a matter of strikers trying to protect jobs and non-strikers taking a selfish position because their jobs were safe. Analysis of the evidence points clearly to several underlying reasons which resulted in disagreement and division in the NUM and the subsequent formation of the UDM. The lack of a national ballot made the strike unconstitutional for many NUM members in Nottinghamshire, in what had been a very constitution-compliant trade union. The use of democratic pit-head ballots on major issues that affected them was a feature of this. Additionally, the lack of a national ballot had the effect, in Richards' words, of legitimising the breaching of that most potent symbol of collective solidarity: the picket line.¹⁷

Essentially the issue was how to deal with the continuing decline of the coal industry? The effects of the enhanced redundancy terms following the 1981 unofficial strike seriously undermined the NUM's attempts to save jobs. Nevertheless, for some the situation was fast moving to one where there would be no jobs to go to for the younger miners, especially in the peripheral coalfields. Passivity in the NUM in the 1960s ended up with almost 300 pit closures and a shrinking industry but the NUM remained intact. Because of the nature of the 1984-85 strike it not only laid the foundations for the terminal decline of the coal-industry but split the NUM in the process. Market confidence was lost, morale was rock-bottom amongst the workforce and the

¹⁷ Richards, *Miners on Strike*, p. 180.

union was split. As Williamson stated, the NCB could have closed any pit in Britain in the post-strike period, such was the malaise in the industry.

The pro-strike critique of the Nottinghamshire miners and the UDM suggested it was their role in undermining the strike that was the root cause of the strike being lost and the subsequent terminal demise of the coal industry. Nevertheless, the evidence submitted suggests that the Nottinghamshire miners acted within their established traditions. Richards' findings clarified this position.¹⁸ First, they continued to support free and independent trade unionism. Secondly, they continued to situate themselves within the traditions of the labour movement. Thirdly, the style of industrial relations espoused by the UDM was very much in keeping with traditions of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Fourthly, support for the Labour Party remained strong despite serious misgivings about its role in the 1984-85 strike. In the post-strike aftermath Mick McGahey refused to criticise the Nottinghamshire miners, inferring that they were acting within their traditions, whilst putting an emphasis on re-unification:

I don't treat 20,000 Nottingham miners (...) and their communities as outcasts, untouchables, they're miners. They have got basic problems, the same as other miners (...) and that is the avenue upon which we must build the basis of unity (...) they have not breached from the labour movement, they have breached from the national leadership of the miners.¹⁹

What had altered in 1984 was the NUM at national level. Just prior to the strike all three senior positions in the union were filled by the left, and the moderate group on the NEC had more or less collapsed following the retirement of Joe Gormley in 1982. The national NUM had lost some

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 198-200.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 193.

experience in its back up staff following the move from London to Sheffield in 1983. Added to this was the loss of experience at Area level at the Nottingham Area of NUM. In the seven years preceding the strike three senior officials, Albert Martin, Len Clarke and George Cheshire retired, and in 1982 Joe Whelan suddenly died. The loss of Whelan was especially significant as it robbed the NUM of the experience it needed to deal with the Nottinghamshire problem in 1984. The testimony shown in this thesis suggests that certain moderate NUM NEC members acted out of character and it is possible that they were being coerced at national level over their retirement terms with the NUM. Many were approaching the twilight of their union careers and it would be easier to adhere to the status quo for a relatively short period of time rather than risk losing any retirement benefits.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that the Nottinghamshire miners acted within their traditions of moderate trade-unionism. Despite claims about their 'apartness' in 1984, the evidence presented demonstrates this. Their past adherence to national decisions in the 1960s and 1970s, the observance of the overtime ban throughout the 1984-85 strike and their disassociation from the Nottinghamshire and National Working Miners Committees all point to traits of strong moderate trade unionism. Because of this, the suggestion that Nottinghamshire miners are scabs is inaccurate. The evidence suggests they acted within their own understood accepted procedures and thus have been made the main scapegoats for the failure of the 1984-85 strike. The real failure in 1984 was that the left of the NUM failed to deal with the issue of managing diversity in the union. The Rule 41 domino strategy relied on a one sizes fits all policy, there was no place for diversity. As Howell stated, once the domino strategy was employed it had to take the dominos as they were and not as they might be in an ideal world.²⁰ The Nottinghamshire miners' actions were a consequence of the structure of the national union and divergent Area cultures. In conclusion, it would be worth looking at the views of Colin Griffin, who suggested a combination of local 'custom and practice'

²⁰ Howell, *The Politics of the NUM*, p. 110.

and a division in the NUM ranks caused by disagreements over inter-union procedures were the main reasons for the defeat of the strike and subsequent split in the NUM which led to the formation of the UDM:

In 1972 and 1974 (...) the self-interest of the Nottingham Area NUM coincided with that of the union as a whole and a united front was displayed. In 1984-85 it was very different. The NUM was wrecked, as the MFGB had been in 1926, by a combination of the pursuit of local self-interest and autonomy, mismanagement of strike mobilisation and bitter, uncompromising division within its ranks which proved conclusively that miners' solidarity was not natural and that they were as capable of destroying as constructing it when confronted by extreme, adverse circumstances.²¹

²¹ C. P. Griffin, 'Notts have some very peculiar history', p. 99.

Valour

Nottinghamshire Working Miners 1984

**"All that is necessary for the
triumph of evil is that good
men do nothing".**

Text of an A3 Cardboard Medallion received at Annesley Colliery NUM Office during April 1984 during the early stages of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike. The mail was postmarked from the Durham Area.

Edmund Burke (1729 – 1797)

Irish orator, Philosopher and Politician.



Appendix 1

Area Trends in NUM Ballots for strike action January 1982 – March 1984 (Area per-centages for and against strike action)

NUM Area or Group	No. of Members (approx.)	NUM National Ballot January 1982	NUM National Ballot October 1982	NUM National Ballot March 1983	NUM Area Ballots March 1984
Cumberland	650	52%	36%	42%	22%
Derbyshire Area	10,500	50%	40%	38%	50%
South Derbyshire Area	3,000	16%	13%	12%	16%
Durham	13,000	46%	31%	39%	-
Kent	2,000	54%	69%	68%	-
Leicestershire Area	2,500	20%	13%	18%	-
Midlands Area	12,200	27%	23%	21%	27%
Nottingham Area	32,000	30%	21%	19%	26%
Lancashire Area	7,500	40%	44%	39%	41%
Northumberland	5,000	37%	32%	35%	52%
Scotland	11,500	63%	69%	50%	-
Yorkshire	56,000	66%	56%	54%	-
North Wales	1,000	18%	24%	23%	36%
South Wales	21,000	54%	59%	68%	-
COSA	16,000	14%	10%	15%	-
Cokemen	4,500	32%	22%	39%	-
National Average	198,350	45%	39%	39%	

Source: Callinicos A & Simons M, (1985), p44. Reproduced from the New Statesman 23 March 1984.

Denotes NUM Area or Group in favour of industrial action

Appendix 2

NUM Memorandum: Special Delegates Conference, 21 October 1983 re Overtime Ban

Area Circular No. AS273/83

At the Special Delegates Conference held on Friday 21 October 1983, a Resolution was proposed from the floor of the Conference and unanimously accepted by Conference.

This read as follows:

"This Special Delegates Conference has discussed the very serious and rapidly deteriorating situation in the mining industry, and notes with grave concern the increasing pressure to close pits and destroy jobs. It has also discussed, and denounced, the intensified harassment of the workforce now taking place in all sections of the British Coalfield. It is clear that the NCB and the Government are determined to close at least seventy pits and wipe out 70,000 jobs over the next few years – despite the acknowledged fact that the cost to the taxpayer of this proposed closure programme would be £4,300 million over a ten-year period; more than double the cost keeping those pits open, and saving those jobs. The Conference has also received a report on the wage negotiations, and has noted the wholly unsatisfactory offer from the Board (NCB), whose proposed 5.2% increase falls short of the amount required to restore the real value of miner's wages. The Board's refusal to make any improvements on unsocial shift payments, rate protection and hours of work is regarded as a further attack on miner's living standards".

Having heard a full report on both the situation in the industry and the Board's offer on wages, the

Special Delegates Conference agrees;

Appendix 2 continued

1. Wages

To reject the Board's proposal as totally unsatisfactory, and to instruct the NEC to continue negotiations to secure an improved offer.

2. Situation in the Industry

To reaffirm the Union's opposition to all pit closures other on the grounds of exhaustion, to fight any further reduction in manpower levels, and to resist the NCB/Government plans to close 70 pits over the coming five-year period.

3. Overtime Ban

To impose a full overtime ban from 31 October 1983, as a first step in the campaign against the Board's programme of attack on jobs and the living standards.

Appendix 3

Nottingham Area (National Union of Mineworkers)

NUM Branch voting re National Overtime Ban – October 1983

NUM Branches voting in favour	NUM Branches voting against
Ashfield NUM Branches voting in favour	Ashfield NUM Branches voting against
1. Hucknall	1. Annesley
2. Linby	2. Bentinck
3. Newstead	3. Bestwood Plant & Industrial
Other Notts NUM Branches (in favour)	4. Bestwood Workshops
4. Bevercotes	5. Moorgreen
5. Bilsthorpe	6. Moorgreen Workshops
6. Blidworth	7. Pye Hill No.1
7. Calverton	8. Pye Hill No.2
8. Clipstone	9. Silverhill
9. Cotgrave	10. South Normanton Transport
10. Cresswell	11. Sutton
11. Mansfield	Other Notts NUM Branches voting against
12. Ollerton	12. Babbington
13. Rufford	13. Bolsover
14. Sherwood	14. Gedling
15. Thoresby	15. Harworth
16. Welbeck	

Voting Figures from the Nottinghamshire NUM Area Council Meeting, 20 October 1983.

The overtime ban was proposed by the National NUM who asked all Areas to give full and urgent consideration to a National Overtime Ban in order to strengthen the union's ability to resist the NCB's closure programme.

The overtime ban was discussed in Nottinghamshire at an Area Special Conference on 15 October 1983. This was followed by Nottinghamshire NUM Branches holding Special Branch Meetings over the weekend of 15/16 October 1983 in order that the views of the Nottinghamshire Branches could be reported to the Area Council Meeting on 21 October 1983.

Source: *Nottingham Area (NUM) Minute Book 1983*, pp355 - 365. D. Amos collection.

Appendix 4

NCB Deep Mined Revenue Output 1984-85 Budgets

NCB Area	1983-84 Estimated 52 weeks (adjusted overtime ban losses) (million tons)	1984-85 Budget (million tons)	Difference (million tons)
Scottish	5.9	5.15	-0.75
North East	11.9	10.5	-1.40
North Yorkshire	9.1	9.3	+0.20
Doncaster	6.3	6.3	0
Barnsley	8.0	8.2	+0.20
South Yorkshire	7.6	7.1	-0.50
North Derbyshire	7.5	7.5	0
North Nottinghamshire	12.0	12.0	0
South Nottinghamshire	7.7	7.2	-0.50
South Midlands	7.4	7.1	-0.30
Western	10.7	10.3	-0.40
South Wales	7.3	6.75	-0.55
Great Britain	101.4	97.4	-4.0

Source: NCB South Nottinghamshire Area, February 1984, Eastwood Hall (PR Dept)
D. Amos collection.

Appendix 5

National NUM Resolution : 8 March 1984

The National Executive Committee condemns the National Coal Board announcements of a further savage programme of pit and plant closures over the next twelve months.

We have witnessed twenty-three pit closures and the loss of 21,000 jobs in the past year and it is clear that this latest announcement is further evidence of the Board's intention to reduce the British Coal industry to almost half its present size.

The Coal Board's decision will result in the closure of half the pits in Scotland, South Nottinghamshire, North Derbyshire...and an even larger closure programme in the North-East and South Wales.

No Area is safe, none will escape from the McGregor Plan; Areas such as Yorkshire, North Nottinghamshire, the Midlands, as well as Cokeworks, Workshops, Transport Departments and offices of clerical staff will be affected. The latest round of Coal Board cutbacks follow the pattern deployed by Ian McGregor at both British Leyland and British Steel.

The National Coal Board has been adopting an increasingly provocative attitude, which has led to a rapidly deteriorating situation throughout the coalfields and resulted in spontaneous escalating action.

The Yorkshire and Scottish Coalfields have declared their intention to take strike action as from the end of the Friday night shift, 10th March 1984, in opposition to the Board's pit closure programme. Both Areas seek permission from the NEC to declare this action official.

In accordance with (National) Rule 41, the NEC declares the proposed strike action in Yorkshire and Scotland, and in any other Area which takes similar action, as official. The Union (NUM) will monitor the situation and take any action it feels appropriate or necessary in light of changing circumstances.

Source: Nottingham Area (NUM) Area Minutes 1984, p78/79. D. Amos collection.

Appendix 6

National Union of Mineworkers – Rules, Model Rules and Standing Orders: 1978

Rule 41: Strikes and Lockouts

In the event of a dispute arising in any Area or applying to the workers in any Branch likely or possible to lead to a stoppage of work or any other industrial action short of a strike the questions must be immediately reported by the appropriate official of the Area in question to the National Executive Committee (NEC) which shall deal with the matter forthwith, and in no case shall a cessation of work or other forms of industrial action take place by the workers without the previous sanction of the NEC, or of a Committee (whether consisting of members of the NEC or of other persons) to whom the NEC have delegated the power of giving such sanction, either generally or in a particular case and no funds of the union shall be applied in strike pay or other trade dispute benefit for the benefit of workers who shall have ceased work without the previous sanction of the NEC.

Rule 43: NATIONAL ACTION

In the event of national action being proposed by the union in pursuance of any of the objects of the union, the following provision shall apply: -

That a national strike shall only be entered upon as the result of a ballot vote of all members taken in pursuance of a resolution of Conference, and a strike shall not be declared unless 55% of those voting in the ballot vote in favour of such a strike. If a ballot vote be taken during the time a strike is in progress, a vote of 55% of those taking part in the ballot shall be necessary to continue the strike.

If a ballot vote be taken during the time a stoppage is in progress, such stoppage may not be continued unless 55% of those voting in the ballot vote in favour of continuance.

Source: *NUM – Rules, Model Rules and Standing Orders 1978*, pp21 & 22. D. Amos collection.

Appendix 7

Nottinghamshire NUM Joint Press Statement by T H Richardson (General Secretary) and R Chadburn (President), supported by R Lynk (Financial Secretary) and D Prendergast (Pensions/Benevolent Officer): 13 March 1984.

We abhor the situation that is now arising in the (Nottinghamshire) Area. The Yorkshire Pickets are in the Area unofficially, as the Yorkshire leaders have undertaken to keep them out of the Area until the Notts ballot has taken place, but even when the ballot is over, we cannot accept the type of intimidation that is taking place.

We have instructed our members not to cross picket lines, but the type of action taking place is not picketing, but merely mass blockading. The principle of picketing is that the majority attempt to persuade a minority who are ignoring that majority, but what is taking place now is entirely the opposite and will be counterproductive.

No union can sustain a strike under these circumstances. We have always believed that the miners should stand and fight the pit closure programme, but the way things are developing, it will be at the price of destroying this Union and that price is as devastating as the pit closure programme itself.

We appeal to the Yorkshire lads to withdraw and we also appeal to non-miners and miners' wives, to keep away from picket lines, as it will only exacerbate the situation.

We also appeal to the National Officials to grasp and control the situation before someone is injured, not only in this Area, but in some other Area in the Country.

Source: Nottingham Area (NUM) Press Statement, 13 March 1984. D Amos collection.

Appendix 8

Nottinghamshire Area (NUM): Strike Voting Figures, 15-16 March 1984.

The question on the ballot paper: "Do you support strike action to prevent pit closures and massive run down of jobs?"

	NUM Branch	Voting Yes	Voting No	Spoilt	Blank	Totals
1.	Annesley	161 (20%)	642 (80%)	0	0	803
2.	Babbington	159 (23%)	562 (77%)	6	0	727
3.	Bentinck	229 (16%)	1065 (82%)	6	0	1300
4.	Bestwood Industrial	11 (4%)	255 (96%)	0	0	266
5.	Bestwood Workshops	56 (16%)	310 (84%)	1	0	367
6.	Bevercotes	384 (34%)	751 (66%)	2	0	1137
7.	Bilsthorpe	238 (25%)	760 (75%)	8	0	1006
8.	Blidworth	399 (46%)	461 (54%)	2	0	862
9.	Bolsover	341 (42%)	479 (58%)	1	0	821
10.	Calverton	233 (21%)	1088 (79%)	2	0	1373
11.	Clipstone	344 (28%)	907 (72%)	0	1	1252
12.	Cotgrave	401 (29%)	1017 (71%)	1	0	1419
13.	Cresswell	395 (45%)	488 (55%)	2	0	885
14.	Gedling	261 (21%)	1001 (79%)	2	0	1264
15.	Harworth	312 (30%)	753 (70%)	0	0	1065
16.	Hucknall	208 (23%)	711 (77%)	4	0	923
17.	Linby	276 (34%)	562 (66%)	2	1	841
18.	Mansfield	221 (19%)	987 (81%)	3	0	1211
19.	Moorgreen	123 (20%)	511 (80%)	0	0	634
20.	Moorgreen Workshops	83 (19%)	364 (81%)	0	0	447
21.	Newstead	223 (29%)	551 (71%)	0	0	774
22.	Ollerton	335 (34%)	681 (66%)	3	0	1019
23.	Pye Hill No.1	121 (19%)	525 (81%)	0	0	646
24.	Pye Hill No.2	18 (14%)	123 (86%)	1	0	142
25.	Rufford	409 (34%)	760 (64%)	0	1	1170
26.	Sherwood	330 (40%)	494 (60%)	2	0	826
27.	Silverhill	248 (24%)	788 (76%)	1	0	1037
28.	South Normanton Tran	21 (11%)	333 (89%)	1	17	372
29.	Sutton	107 (20%)	455 (80%)	2	0	564
30.	Thoresby	314 (24%)	1003 (76%)	3	0	1320
31.	Welbeck	324 (29%)	801 (71%)	2	1	1128
	Totals	7285 (26.5%)	20188 (73.5%)	57	21	27551

Source: *Nottingham Area (NUM) Minutes*, p114. D. Amos collection.

Appendix 9

Balance sheet re Colin Clarke: Legal Action to prove strike action in Nottingham Area (NUM) unofficial, On behalf of the Notts Working Miners: May 1984.

Monies Received

<u>Received from pits</u>	Donation	Totals
C. Clarke – miscellaneous pits	£886.72	
Linby	£179.61	
Cresswell	£348.17	
Working Nottinghamshire Miners	£759.85	
Blidworth	£32.00	
Pye Hill No.2	£12.00	
South Normanton Transport	£138.06	
Bestwood Workshops	£126.80	
Welbeck	£217.03	
Calverton	£557.54	
Babbington	£200.00	
Silverhill	£382.59	
Hucknall	£371.00	
Pye Hill No.1	£935.36	
D Cooke – miscellaneous collieries	£455.00	
Bolsover	£257.00	
Bilsthorpe	£391.31	
Rufford	£447.35	
Sherwood	£527.25	
Harworth	£550.00	
Ollerton	£295.00	
Bestwood Landsale	£72.50	
Bestwood Industrial	£95.00	
Clipstone	£311.00	
Newstead	£322.95	
Annesley	£449.47	£9,320.56
Individual Donations	£1,573.40	
Added interest earned on deposit	£14.04	£1,587.44
Total		£10,908.00

Appendix 9 continued

Notts Working Miners Legal Action to prove strike in Nottinghamshire unofficial re Colin Clarke: Monies paid out, May 1984.

Monies Paid out	Payment	Totals
M Burton QC – Counsel fees	£3,400	
VAT @ 15%	£510.00	£3,910.00
Richard Slowe (Junior Barrister)	£2000.00	
VAT @ 15%	£300.00	£2,300.00
		£6,210.00
<u>Expenses</u>		
Hotel – London (4 members of staff & 2 clients – 2,3 or 4 nights each)	£524.60	
Train fares & Taxis	£630.29	
Meals & miscellaneous items	£157.31	
Court fees, commissioners fees etc.	78.50	£1,390.70
Total Costs		£7,600.70
Balance in Hand		£3,307.30
		<u>£10,908.00</u>

Source: Nottingham Area: Annesley NUM Branch 1984. D Amos collection.

Appendix 10

Decisions of 1985 NUM Annual Conference re Disciplinary Hearing against Roy Lynk and David Prendergast (Nottingham Area NUM): July 1985

Conference resolved:-

"That Mr Lynk and Mr Prendergast (are) in breach of (their) Contracts of Employment in respect of charges brought by the NUM National Secretary on behalf of the union".

It was further resolved that

"Conference having heard and considered the evidence in this matter, agreed;

- a) That Mr Lynk and Mr Prendergast (have) committed acts of gross misconduct in relation to (their) Contracts of Employment as Area Officials of this union.
- b) That Mr Lynk and Mr Prendergast (have) despite repeated warnings and directions, disobeyed the lawful instructions of (their) employers, the NUM.
- c) That this union no longer has confidence in Mr Lynk / Mr Prendergast to act with loyalty and fidelity in his capacity as employees and Area Officials of this union.
- d) That the employment of Mr Lynk and Mr Prendergast as Area Officials be terminated, in accordance with the terms and conditions of (their) Contracts of Employment, three months from the decision of Conference and that from the date of Conference (they are) suspended from office on full pay.
- e) That the decisions taken in the context of Mr Lynk and Mr Prendergast's Contracts of Employment only and in no way affects (their) individual rights as members of this union.

Source: Decisions of the 1985 Annual Conference, NUM, 1985, p24.

Appendix 11

UDM Amalgamation Ballot Results: Nottingham Area: 17-18 October 1985.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Branch</i>	<i>Voting Yes</i>	<i>Voting No.</i>	<i>Unissued</i>	<i>Blank</i>	<i>Spoilt</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	Annesley	612	200	75	3	0	890
2	Babbington	260	119	61	0	0	440
3	Bentinck	843	240	48	1	2	1134
4	Bestwood Industrial	198	12	25	0	0	235
5	Bestwood Workshops	259	80	20	0	0	359
6	Bevercotes	782	384	198	1	7	1372
7	Bilsthorpe	725	254	135	0	2	1116
8	Blidworth	526	262	86	0	1	875
9	Bolsover *	333	388	101	4	1	827
10	Calverton	1014	237	86	0	3	1340
11	Clipstone	832	328	141	0	1	1302
12	Cotgrave	987	354	159	0	1	1501
13	Cresswell	636	211	81	3	5	936
14	Gedling	849	346	132	1	1	1329
15	Harworth	831	135	127	0	3	1096
16	Hucknall	703	263	108	1	2	1077
17	Linby	494	292	63	0	1	850
18	Mansfield	959	251	62	0	3	1275
19	Moorgreen **	66	33	29	0	0	128
20	Moorgreen Workshop	355	84	41	1	2	483
21	Newstead	418	244	52	0	0	714
22	Ollerton	620	359	103	0	0	1082
23	Pye Hill No.1 **	67	11	71	0	0	149
24	Rufford	817	310	157	0	1	1285
25	Sherwood	466	370	68	0	1	905
26	Silverhill	660	287	109	4	1	1061
27	South Normanton Transport Depot	256	28	30	0	1	315
28	Sutton	474	95	53	0	0	622
29	Thoresby	1016	254	178	1	2	1451
30	Welbeck	689	361	94	0	1	1145
31	Notts Area HQ	3	0	4	0	0	7
	Totals	17750	6792	2697	20	42	27301

Total Valid Papers= 24,542
Total Participation = 90%

Voting Yes 72%

Voting No 28%

Source: Nottingham Area (NUM) from the Electoral Reform Society, 19 October 1985.

Appendix 12	Sinking Date	Age at start of 1984-85 strike (years)		Sinking Date	Age at start of 1984-85 strike (years)
NCB South Nottinghamshire Area			NCB South Yorkshire Area		
Babbington	1840	144	Shireoaks	1854	130
Annesley	1865	119	Kilnhurst	1858	126
Hucknall No.2	1865	119	Kiverton Park	1866	118
Moorgreen *	1865	119	Manvers Main	1868	116
Linby	1873	111	Cortonwood	1873	111
Newstead	1873	111	Wath	1873	111
Pye Hill No. 1 & No.2 *	1875	109	Treeton	1875	109
Bentinck	1893	91	Cadeby	1889	95
Gedling	1900	84	Manton	1899	85
Calverton	1950	34	Silverwood	1900	84
Cotgrave	1964	20	Dinnington	1903	81
			Maltby	1907	77
			Thurcroft	1909	75
			Barnburgh	1909	75
			Brookhouse	1929	55
NCB North Nottinghamshire Area			NCB Doncaster Area		
Sutton	1873	111	Hickleton Main	1892	92
Silverhill	1875	109	Frickley / South Elmsall	1903	81
Cresswell	1891	93	Brodsworth	1905	79
Sherwood	1902	82	Bentley	1905	79
Mansfield	1904	80	Yorkshire Main	1909	75
Rufford	1911	73	Goldthorpe / Highgate	1910/1916	74
Welbeck	1912	72	Askern	1911	73
Harworth	1920	64	Hatfield Main	1911	73
Clipstone	1920	64	Rossington Main	1912	72
Ollerton	1923	61	Markham Main	1922	62
Thoresby	1925	59			
Bilthorpe	1925	59			
Blidworth	1926	58			
Thoresby	1928	56			
Bevercotes	1958	26			

*Sinking date denotes starting date for the sinking of the shafts and not the start of coal production which in most cases could be two to five years later.

Sources: Nottinghamshire collieries sinking dates – Bradley R, *Snippets from the Past Excerpts from the pits of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire*, unpublished, Ollerton, 1998. Yorkshire collieries sinking dates, Hill A, *South Yorkshire Collieries: A History and Development*, Stroud, Tempus, 2001.

Appendix 13	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82
NCB North Nottinghamshire Area Collieries						
Thoresby	5.2	7.1	7.5	10.7	13.3	11.8
Welbeck	7.2	9.0	6.5	9.2	9.0	9.5
Ollerton	1.5	3.9	5.4	10.8	13.0	10.3
Sherwood	6.5	6.3	2.5	7.3	4.8	5.9
Silverhill	2.5	7.4	8.9	2.2	5.1	2.2
Clipstone	8.8	9.8	6.1	10.5	7.6	6.6
Cresswell	1.0	2.9	(0.6)	3.5	5.2	5.3
Mansfield	5.4	4.9	4.3	5.8	4.7	(0.4)
Harworth	3.6	(1.3)	0.5	5.5	(6.1)	3.9
Bevercotes	(0.0)	3.5	2.2	2.3	0.6	(0.5)
Bilsthorpe	(4.5)	(0.5)	(10.9)	0.7	(4.7)	3.6
Rufford	(0.4)	1.5	(0.1)	(2.1)	(4.4)	(0.9)
Blidworth	0.1	(2.6)	(1.7)	(3.5)	(4.7)	(5.1)
Sutton	(1.0)	(6.1)	(3.8)	(15.4)	(1.0)	(4.9)
NCB South Nottinghamshire Area Collieries						
Pye Hill Complex	6.7	6.3	3.3	6.4	4.1	4.7
Cotgrave	1.3	1.9	1.5	2.0	4.2	3.4
Calverton	1.9	5.4	4.4	8.6	6.4	1.5
Hucknall No.2	4.4	5.4	0.1	1.0	(6.2)	(4.0)
Annesley	0.6	1.5	0.8	(1.7)	(5.6)	(3.1)
Bentinck	0.7	1.3	0.0	(3.5)	(5.9)	(3.5)
Linby	(5.1)	(4.3)	(6.4)	(4.4)	1.6	(0.4)
Newstead	0.3	(3.5)	(3.8)	(5.8)	(3.6)	(8.9)
Moorgreen	(1.1)	(6.3)	(6.4)	(9.1)	(0.5)	(0.1)
Babbington	(3.0)	(4.2)	(4.5)	(8.1)	(11.9)	(20.6)

Source: MMC – *A report on the efficiency and costs in the development, production and supply of coal by the NCB, Vol. 2, June 1983.*

Appendix 14

NCB Area	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82
NCB Doncaster Area Collieries						
Hatfield Main	(0.5)	(0.4)	(4.5)	(1.0)	(10.4)	(16.8)
Hickleton	(5.1)	(14.4)	(8.4)	3.4	(2.8)	(12.3)
Bentley	1.6	(2.6)	(1.2)	0.2	(6.1)	(10.1)
Yorkshire Main	(2.7)	(0.6)	(7.7)	1.4	(1.3)	0.6
Markham Main	2.5	(5.9)	(21.8)	2.3	6.1	0.1
Askern	0.7	(2.2)	(6.9)	(5.5)	(6.7)	4.1
Frickley / South Elmsall	(1.1)	(0.1)	0.6	1.0	(3.7)	(4.2)
Brodsworth	0.5	3.0	1.8	(3.0)	(1.7)	(9.9)
Goldthorpe/Highgate	3.9	3.1	1.4	(5.0)	(8.8)	(9.0)
Rossington	0.7	3.4	1.9	(1.7)	6.6	8.2
NCB Scottish Area Collieries						
Cardowen	(9.7)	(13.1)	(21.6)	(21.8)	(27.0)	(38.3)
Sorn	(3.2)	(6.6)	(6.6)	(2.5)	(22.9)	(21.5)
Barony	(9.1)	(4.5)	(7.1)	(13.3)	(5.5)	(13.8)
Killoch	(4.3)	(5.1)	(6.6)	(10.8)	(10.2)	(10.7)
Seafield	(6.1)	(6.0)	(8.0)	(7.4)	(13.0)	(8.7)
Bilston Glen	(0.8)	(1.0)	(1.6)	(2.0)	(1.8)	(4.6)
Frances	(2.4)	(6.3)	(14.9)	0.0	(4.6)	(17.8)
Highhouse	(1.4)	(1.7)	(4.7)	0.3	(3.0)	(7.4)
Longannet Complex	(1.1)	0.5	(0.2)	(0.4)	(1.3)	(1.5)
Polkemmett	3.2	(8.2)	2.4	(5.0)	(6.5)	(9.0)
Comrie	2.1	1.1	(4.0)	3.5	(1.5)	(16.6)
Monktonhall	0.5	(0.3)	0.4	2.2	(3.6)	(8.2)

Source: MMC – *A report on the efficiency and costs in the development, production and supply of coal by the NCB, Vol. 2, June 1983.*

Appendix 15

**Colliery Operating Costs (Colliery comparisons pre 1984-85 strike)
Surplus / (Loss) 1977/78 to 1981/82 (£ per tonne)**

Colliery	NCB Area	NUM Area / Group	1977/78	1978/79	1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	Worked or on strike in 1984-85 dispute
Thoresby	North Notts	Nottinghamshire	7.1	7.5	10.7	13.3	11.8	Worked
Sutton	North Notts	Nottinghamshire	(6.1)	(3.8)	(15.4)	(1.0)	(4.9)	Worked
Pye Hill *	South Notts	Nottinghamshire	6.3	3.3	6.4	4.1	4.7	Worked
Babbington	South Notts	Nottinghamshire	(4.2)	(4.5)	(8.1)	(11.9)	(20.6)	Worked
Hatfield Main	Doncaster	Yorkshire	(0.4)	(4.5)	(1.0)	(10.4)	(16.8)	On strike
Rossington	Doncaster	Yorkshire	3.4	1.9	(1.7)	(6.6)	8.2	On strike
Snowdown	South Midlands	Kent	(26.7)	(29.2)	(25.7)	(51.5)	(68.6)	On Strike
Snibston **	South Midlands	Leicestershire	(8.9)	(14.6)	(26.6)	(23.9)	(19.7)	Closed 1983
Whitwick (Merged with Snibston) 1983	South Midlands	Leicestershire	0.0	(0.9)	(4.7)	(6.3)	(1.1)	Worked
Donisthorpe	South Midlands	South Derbyshire	(1.7)	(1.7)	(0.4)	(10.3)	(3.6)	Worked
Cadley Hill	South Midlands	South Derbyshire	0.3	1.9	(6.5)	(5.3)	(2.9)	Worked
Haig ***	Western	Cumberland	(14.5)	(16.7)	(13.2)	(3.0)	4.1	On development
Agecroft	Western	Lancashire	(8.9)	(1.5)	(1.7)	(4.9)	(8.8)	Worked
Bold	Western	Lancashire	(4.9)	(0.8)	(1.9)	(6.5)	(24.5)	Majority on strike

Source: MMC - A report on the efficiency and costs in the development, production and supply of coal by the NCB, Vol. 2, June 1983.

Appendix 16: NUM article: Why no pit is safe, March 1984

Area	Pit already closed *	Pit being closed **	Pit under threat ***
Scottish	Cardowan Highhouse Som Kinneil Bogside Bedlay	Polmaise	Killoch
Yorkshire	Newmarket Silkstone Park Hill Rothwell Elsecar Peckfield Lofthouse Newmillendam Orgrave	Savile Cortonwood Glasshoughton Bulcliffe Wood Cadeby (PC)	Fryston Ledston Luck Goldthorpe Highgate (M) Brookhouse Hickleton
South Wales	Blaengwrach Britannia Trmawr Brynlhw Wyndham/Western Lewis Merthyr Coegnant Morlais	Blaensserchan	Bedwas Blaenant Celynen South Mardy Penrhiwceiber
South Midlands (including Kent)	Desford Snibston (M) Newdigate		Bagworth Ellistown Measham South Leicester Whitwick Snowdown
Nottinghamshire		Pye Hill Moorgreen Sutton	Babbington
North East	Marley Hill East Hetton	Bearpark Herrington	Ashington Bates Sacriston South Hetton Lynemouth
North Derbyshire	Westthorpe Pleasley (M)		Arkwright Ireland Whitwell
Western	West Cannock No.5 Bickershaw (M) Hapton Valley Victoria	Cronton Birch Coppice (PC)	Wolstanton (PC)
Totals	33	14	28

Source: NUM, Why no pit is safe, *The Miner*, Sheffield, March 1984.

Appendix 17: Ave' you eard owt'

There's speculation at the pit,
We know it's on the cards
That soon they'll shut the faces down
And close up all the yards.

Scargill or the UDM,
Or Thatcher's flaming lot,
Just seem to talk but don't do owt',
To try and stop the rot.

It makes me mad not knowing when,
The hammers going to fall,
Not knowing when me mates and me,
Are going to hear the call.

That's it lads, you can down your tools,
You're finished now for good,
Go home, here's your dough,
We've had our share of blood.

Oh yes, it's going to come,
It's just not knowing when,
The big wheel will stop turning,
Cos the cage ain't got no men.

Ave' you eard owt' is the greeting,
Heard at every shift,
Ave' you eard owt's what they cry,
When going down the lift.

Somewhere in an office,
Written on a piece of paper,
Is the very time and date,
But they think it's a caper

To keep you hanging on,
Not knowing when your work has ended,
Not knowing that by secrecy,
You are most offended.

No more do you want to hear the cry,
When you take off your coat,
From dozens of your mates who ask,
Ave you eard owt!

Source: Guest R, Ave' you eard owt, *Mansfield Chad*, July 1986.

Appendix 18

NUM: 1983 Annual Conference – Emergency Resolution 1 Situation in the Industry

This Conference of the National Union of Mineworkers instructs the NEC and the National Officials to immediately embark upon a campaign to win the whole hearted support of the miners to not only oppose pit and works closures, but all reductions in manpower. The NEC is further instructed to conduct a National Ballot of members on the question of pit and works closures at a time deemed to be most appropriate.

Source: NUM, *1983 Annual Conference Report*, NUM, Sheffield, 1983, p482.

Appendix 19

Jack London's definition of a Scab.

After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad, and the vampire, He had some awful substance left with which He made a scab. A scab is a two-legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a waterlogged brain, and a combination backbone made of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts, he carries a tumour of rotten principles.

When a scab comes down the street, men turn their backs and angels weep in heaven, and the devil shuts the gates of hell to keep him out. No man has a right to scab as long as there is a pool of water deep enough to drown his body in, or a rope long enough to hang his carcass with. Judas Iscariot was a gentleman compared with a scab. For betraying his Master, he had character enough to hang himself. A scab hasn't.

Esau sold his birth right for a mess of pottage. Judas Iscariot sold his soul for thirty pieces of silver. Benedict Arnold sold his country for a promise of a commission in the British Army. The modern strike breaker sells his birth right, his country, his wife, his children, and his fellow men for an unfulfilled promise from his employer, trust, or corporation.

Appendix 20: National Power Loading Agreement: 6 June 1966

Supplement Agreement to the revision of the Wages Structure Agreement of 20th April 1955.

Whereas:

d) The Board and the Union consider that power loading techniques have now developed to the stage where a day wage is appropriate, provided that method study is adopted to determine maximum machine utilisation and the number of men needed on each installation on each shift.

e) The Board and the Union have agreed to introduce a uniform national rate shift for men employed on power loading faces not later than 31st December 1971.

Schedule

7) Team members will be classified as task workers and will be paid an inclusive standard shift rate as follows:

Location of colliery	Inclusive Standard Shift Rate (£ s d)	(£ p)
Scotland	75/-	£3.75
Northumberland	81/-	£4.05
Durham	75/-	£3.75
Yorkshire	82/6	£4.12.5
Lancashire	84/5	£4.22
Cumberland	75/-	£3.75
North Wales	75/-	£3.75
Nottinghamshire	86/9	£4.33
North Derbyshire	84/5	£4.22
South Derbyshire	83/1	£4.15.5
Leicestershire	79/3	£3.96
Cannock Chase	79/6	£3.98
North Staffordshire	76/11	£3.84.5
South Staffordshire & Salop	75/-	£3.75
Warwickshire	83/2	£4.16
South Wales	75/-	£3.75
Kent	89/5	£4.47

Source: NCB/NUM: *National Power Loading Agreement*, NCB/NUM Booklet, 1966, p5 – 8.

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