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Mary Patricia McIntyre

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of Durham, June 1992

## **THE RESPONSE TO THE 1984-85 MINERS' STRIKE IN COUNTY DURHAM : WOMEN, THE LABOUR PARTY AND COMMUNITY.**

### **ABSTRACT**

This thematic account of responses from women in mining families, from the Labour Party and from communities, in Durham County, to the 1984-85 miners' strike, firmly separates mythology about the strike, generated both inside and outside the coalfield, from what actually happened. Reasons for both the generation and the persistence of that mythology are sought.

The extent of hardship suffered when miners' families faced punishing regulations and discretionary practices of the statutory bodies to which they turned for help, is indicated.

An historical exploration is made of the world of working-class, coalfield women, since 1906. Similarities and differences are remarked among women who, at different times, built organisations and became politically active in an excessively proletarian and male-dominated area.

Central to this thesis is an examination of the contradiction at the heart of the Labour Party. Its socialist objective is embodied in the 1918 Constitution but successive, revisionist leaderships have preferred class collaboration. The argument made here is that revisionists progressively depoliticise the Party and the working class. As a result, Party members in Durham, disabled by pragmatism and well-entrenched conservatism, could make only a weak and patchy response to the strike.

Widespread working-class conservatism ensured that appeals for help, even in pit villages, were not made on the basis of political solidarity. Support group women appealed successfully to safer, conservative notions of "community". In ex-pit areas, however, that appeal was irrelevant because miners were in a minority and, in any case, coal was seen as a dying industry.

The year-long strike was a remarkable occurrence, sustained in Durham mainly by family assistance, County Council donations and, contrary to popular belief, the efforts of very small numbers of activists who took on disproportionate amounts of work for hardship relief.

# **THE RESPONSE TO THE 1984-85 MINERS' STRIKE IN DURHAM COUNTY : WOMEN, THE LABOUR PARTY AND COMMUNITY**

Mary Patricia McIntyre

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

University of Durham  
Department of Sociology and Social Policy

1992

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## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT

AES	Alternative Economic Strategy
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIRTHS	Be Involved - Retain Thorpe Hospital Services
BSC	British Steel Corporation
CEGB	Central Electricity Generating Board
CISWO	Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
COSA	Colliery Officers and Staffs Association
CPSA	Civil and Public Servants Association
DASG	Durham Area Support Groups
DCWC	Durham Community (Workers) Co-operative
DDC	Derwentside District Council
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
DMA	Durham Miners' Association
DMFA	Durham Miners' Family Aid
DWAC	Durham Women's Advisory Council (Labour Party)
GMBATU	General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union
ILP	(1893-1974) Independent Labour Party
ILP	(from 1974) Independent Labour Publications
LCC	Labour Co-ordinating Committee
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
MP	Member of Parliament
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NACODS	National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers
NCB	National Coal Board
NECS	North Eastern Co-operative Society
NEEB	North Eastern Electricity Board
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
PAD	Peace Action Durham
QC	Queen's Council
RAOB	Royal Ancient Order of Buffaloes
SB	Supplementary Benefits
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SEAM	Save Easington Area Mines campaign
STC	Spennymoor Trades Council
TUC	Trades Union Congress
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VD	Venereal Disease
WAPC	Women Against Pit Closures
WLL	Women's Labour League
WRVS	Women's Royal Voluntary Service
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

### NOTE

Square brackets [ \_\_\_\_ ] are used throughout the text to indicate and acknowledge quotations or references to material from taped interviews. The initials within the brackets indicate the speaker. A key to taped interviews is provided on pages 260 - 263.

# PREFACE

Thompson made observations which are germane to what I am arguing in this thesis'. His firm belief was that, hitherto, history has reflected the standpoint of those in authority and needed to be democratised. He pointed out that the use of oral evidence about people's lives and events in which they were involved or which affected them enables

... witnesses ... (to) be called from the underclass, the underprivileged and the defeated.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, their perceptions of their own experiences are just as valid and should be accorded just as much credibility as accounts emanating from other sources. Indeed, to reinforce his stance, Thompson cited a 'classic' case, the insurrection in the Spanish village of Casa Viejas in 1933, as an instance where those who produced mythological accounts of what had happened turned out to be,

... not the direct participants, but the reporters, even the historians.<sup>2</sup>

Grassroots perceptions, then, of the 1984-85 miners' strike are at least as valid as those of reporters and commentators of one kind or another who may have had some or little or no involvement in the struggle. Having said that, an interpretive framework demands evidence from a variety of sources. So, in addition to the 'strategic sampling',<sup>3</sup> which provides a great deal of information, documentation on the strike in Durham as well as my own participant-observation is utilised.

Though the oral historical interpretive method I use involves giving credibility to accounts of participants, and though I rely heavily on what they told me, I am cognisant of the fact that some mythology about the strike was generated in Durham and needed to be explored. Consequently I explain why it occurred and what its function and role were in the context of the strike. It is important to note the distinction I make between those in coalfield support groups, for whom such mythology had a function during the strike (principally to maximise external material support for the continuation of the struggle) and those, like Bea Campbell, Hain and McCrindle and influential figures on the Left, who constructed a more wide-ranging and comprehensive mythology on paper (confusing it with reality) and incorporated it, uncritically, into their analyses, either because they did not understand what was happening or because they *wanted* to believe that momentous social and political changes were afoot. In the latter case, the mythology coincided with their own political ideologies.

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1. Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past : Oral History (1988) p.6.

2. P. Thompson, op. cit. pp.147-148.

3. See P. Thompson, op. cit. p.130 who argues (after Blumer) that it is better to interview a few individuals with a great deal of knowledge than a thousand who might have been involved in the action "that is being formed but who are not knowledgeable about that formation." In this thesis the 'sample' (as I explain in the Introduction) involved in depth interviewing of 60 knowledgeable people.

There are many drawbacks in relying heavily on ethnographic data. In a study of this size and with its particular foci, there has been neither time nor opportunity to gather, sift and evaluate quantitative data in relation to data gathered from in-depth interviews. Nor has there been space for the inclusion of other kinds of relevant material. However, I make use of structural accounts, particularly in relation to the Labour Party, to contextualise data from interviews where necessary. For instance, in accounting for the response to the strike in Durham County I employ a structural analysis, linking the politics, practice and ideological impact of the Labour Party nationally with the politics, practice and ideological impact of the Party at local level. In doing so I am aware that references to the Labour Party's role in the strike in published analyses (at the time of writing) have been largely tangential, usually confined to assessments of the quality of Labour leadership and unquestioning acceptance that the rank and file of the Labour Party acted very differently from that leadership. However, my focus on the process of depoliticisation by the Labour Party over a long period, not only of its own membership but of the working class, adds another, and in my view, crucial dimension to analysis of the strike. In effect I offer an alternative class analysis which, I believe, has more general implications for the study of social movements.

To date, there have been interesting and useful contributions to the analysis of the strike from, among others, Gibbon,<sup>1</sup> Saville,<sup>2</sup> Sweet,<sup>3</sup> Beynon,<sup>4</sup> J. and R. Winterton,<sup>5</sup> Samuel,<sup>6</sup> Waddington et al.,<sup>7</sup> and Warwick and Littlejohn.<sup>8</sup>

Gibbon argued that the strike was,

centrally a dispute about managerial authority (related strongly to) the tradition of 'pit politics' (as opposed to 'mineworkers' politics)<sup>9</sup> in British mining.<sup>10</sup>

- 
1. Peter Gibbon, "Analysing the British Miners' Strike of 1984-5" in Economy and Society May 1988 pp.139-194.
  2. John Saville, "An Open Conspiracy: Conservative Politics and the Miners' Strike 1984-5" in Socialist Register 1985/6 pp.295-329.
  3. Colin Sweet, "Why Coal is Under Attack: Nuclear Powers in the Energy Establishment" in H. Beynon (ed) Digging Deeper (1985) pp. 201-216.
  4. Huw Beynon, Digging Deeper (1985) pp.1-25.
  5. J. Winterton, "Computerised Coal: New Technology in the Mines" in H. Beynon (ed.) Digging Deeper (1985) pp.231-243. Also J & R Winterton, Coal, Crisis and Conflict: the 1984-85 Miners' Strike in Yorkshire (1989).
  6. Raphael Samuel, The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5 (1986).
  7. David Waddington, Maggie Wykes and Chas. Critcher, Split at the Seams?: Community, Continuity and Change after the 1984-5 Coal Dispute (1991).
  8. Dennis Warwick and Gary Littlejohn, Coal, Capital and Culture: A Sociological Analysis of Mining Communities in West Yorkshire (1992).
  9. Pit worker politics rested "upon a combative tradition of militancy, work-group self regulation, local bargaining and organisation and an ideological refusal of (local) managerial legitimacy." P. Gibbon op. cit. (1988) p.189. Mineworkers politics rested upon its "religion of compromise and practices of fixing and wheeler-dealing, . . . located mainly at NUM Area level and above . . ." Ibid.
  10. P. Gibbon, (1988) op. cit. p.139.

He appeared to believe that, in order to prove his thesis, it was necessary to demonstrate that in 1984 the miners' strike action was offensive rather than defensive, at least in the period from March to August. He argued that, by 1984, government, Coal Board and the NUM, especially Arthur Scargill, were part of

a kind of anti-corporatist consensus . . . . In this sense, it is not particularly helpful to identify the strike with a reactive or restorationist stance on the part of the NUM in the face of a bourgeois offensive.<sup>1</sup>

In support of his 'pro-active' argument, he cited a round-table discussion in Marxism Today<sup>2</sup> which

exuded optimism and even a degree of triumphalism.<sup>3</sup>

Gibbon's use of that article was somewhat tendentious. It would have been remarkable if, at that stage of their industrial action, NUM representatives had not 'talked up' the strike, dwelling on what could be pointed to as positive developments.<sup>4</sup> But, Gibbon failed to mention that they also discussed problems they faced.<sup>5</sup> Crucially, both in relation to Gibbon's 'restorationist' and 'triumphalist' arguments, when the participants were asked how they saw the strike ending, none opted for a scenario where the Government caved in. Bolton and Baker believed the Board must withdraw the pit closure plan and the former talked of discussions (presumably with the NCB) about wages, a four-day week and retirement at 55. Taylor was cautious in his answer,

We certainly should not get in a position where we start sharing out the spoils until we have got some . . .

but advocated an expanding coal industry, which seemed to be in line with Scargill's views on a re-commitment to the Plan for Coal - a corporatist concept.<sup>6</sup> All believed that *if* that happened it would be a political defeat for the Government. However, as Taylor pointed out,

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1. P. Gibbon, op. cit. (1988) p.144.

2. "Strike to the Finish", a discussion involving Jack Taylor, President of the Yorkshire Area of the NUM, George Bolton, Vice President of the Scottish Area of the NUM and Alan Baker, Secretary of the Oakdale Lodge, South Wales Area of the NUM, chaired by John Lloyd, Industrial and Labour Editor of the Financial Times. Marxism Today September 1984 pp.9-15.

3. P. Gibbon, op. cit. (1988) p.145.

4. See my remarks on hyperbole in Chapter 2.

5. Principally these were that lack of a ballot was hindering the NUM in the "battle of ideas" among the mass of British people; that mistakes had been made in the approach to Nottinghamshire miners; that some miners had been conditioned into accepting pit closures and that greater efforts were needed to get the NUM message across "on a very wide scale." Jack Taylor's comment, in explanation of those problems, that, ". . . you can't choose the time and therefore you can't prepare, you're always taking industrial action on unprepared ground," underlined that in his view the miners' action was defensive from the start. See Marxism Today, September 1984 p.12.

6. It must be noted here that Scargill's anti-corporatism is not as straightforward an issue as Gibbon believes. It is true that the miners' leader has always rejected involvement in schemes for industrial democracy, perceiving that as collaborationist. In his view, miners' job control was all the industrial democracy they needed. Neither has he advanced syndicalist schemes to put miners in control of the industry. But in 1984, in the middle of the strike, it was Scargill himself who successfully moved Composite Resolution 64 at Labour Party Conference. This included a declaration that, ". . . the manifesto of the next Labour Government will reaffirm wholehearted commitment to the Plan for Coal."



I tend to get (my answer) wrapped up in what I *hope* happens. Hopes very rarely get fulfilled for workers. *I'm a great believer that we should not start counting our chickens.*<sup>1 2</sup>

Gibbon appears not to have noticed the conditional nature of replies to the last question. Overall and significantly, he failed to detect what Samuel termed 'the public language of the strike'<sup>3</sup>

'Pit worker politics' and 'mine worker politics' existed in an uneasy and often oppositional relationship, according to Gibbon. In his view, NUM strategy and tactics in the strike are best understood as the transposition of typical pit politics strategy and tactics to a national arena.<sup>4</sup>

Without doubt the miners' response to pit closures in 1984 represented a significant departure from previous NUM practice. And Gibbon was right to point out that NUM leadership had become politicised in a Left direction. But while a challenge to managerial prerogative was *implicit* in the miners' response, in so far as that was understood by management as their *unlimited right* to close pits and put miners on the dole, I prefer Beynon's view that the miners' strike was

the first major strike of any duration to be fought over the question of employment.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast with Gibbon, he argued strongly that miners in 1984 believed they had their backs to the wall.<sup>6</sup> The NUM had been prepared to take industrial action in 1981 when coal stocks were low, winter was coming on and the NCB's policy of pit closures was writ large. But, 1984 was not a propitious time for miners to strike.<sup>7</sup> At that time, as far as the NUM was concerned,

The strategy being followed was a defensive strategy and the strike when it came was a defensive strike.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Gibbon, Beynon was sure that the Tory Government had prepared carefully for a confrontation with the miners,<sup>9</sup> though he added that

it is most unlikely that they anticipated or prepared for a strike that would last a year and demand such intensive and costly counter measures. They had planned to defeat the NUM quickly. They didn't succeed.<sup>10</sup>

---

1. My emphases.

2. *Marxism Today* September 1984 p.15.

3. R. Samuel, op. cit. p.31.

4. P. Gibbon, op. cit (1988) p.190.

5. H. Beynon, op. cit. p.1.

6. H. Beynon, op. cit. p.11.

7. Saville noted that the Conservative Energy Secretary, speaking on Channel 4 News on 11 December 1984, accepted that the Government's retreat in 1981 from a confrontation with the miners was "entirely" a matter of tactics: "Neither the Government nor I think society as a whole was in a position to get locked into a coal strike . . . In those days stocks weren't so high. I don't think the country was prepared, and the whole NUM and the trade union movement tended to be united on one side." J Saville, op. cit. p.304.

8. H. Beynon, op. cit. p.15.

9. H. Beynon, op. cit. p.13.

10. H. Beynon, op. cit. p.17.

Gibbon rejected Winterton's emphasis on the role of technology linked with the long term aim of the NCB to break the job control of the workers at the pit face.<sup>1</sup> Since Winterton's 1985 article was specifically concerned with 'computerised coal' he was right to draw attention to those issues. But I agree with Gibbon that the main objective of the NCB was to reduce the cost of extracting coal. He also argued persuasively that pit closures were an easier option for the NCB than the introduction of flexible working. However, as I have indicated, the evidence he produced to support his thesis, in relation to the 'offensive' of the miners, was unsatisfactory.

Waddington et al. concentrated their comparative research, on the aftermath of the miners' industrial action, in three communities in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. They set out to explore systematically the social consequences of the dispute. In particular they wanted to find out how the strike affected images of community; what impact there had been on work, gender relations and social networks; how the strike and its aftermath had shaped attitudes towards the legal system, the media and politics, and how people viewed the future of their communities in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Their assumptions about the strike itself were outlined in their overview,

Politically there was a great deal at stake for the Government. At one level it was necessary to defeat the miners in order to maintain the credibility of its monetarist economic strategy based on the holding down of public sector pay rises and the closure of surplus capacity. There was also an element of revenge.<sup>3</sup>

In making that assessment they were signalling their agreement with some of the arguments made by Beynon, Samuel, Saville and Winterton. They noted that "there were indications" that the Government had prepared for a confrontation and that Ministers

appeared to have followed the advice of the 1978 Ridley Report.<sup>4</sup>

The appointment of Ian MacGregor to the chairmanship of the Coal Board was considered by them as another sure sign of the Government's intention to confront the miners. While they did not argue a conspiracy theory, they indicated that the Government was well-prepared for a strike and that Mrs. Thatcher believed that a miners' strike was certain.<sup>5</sup>

Warwick and Littlejohn set out to replicate "to some extent" the classic study of coal communities in the 1950s, by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, Coal is Our Life. In their work (incorporating a critique of Bulmer's (1975) ideal-typical mining community, based on that book), Warwick and Littlejohn focussed primarily on the continuity and significance of

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1. P. Gibbon, op. cit. pp.146-7.

2. D. Waddington et al., op. cit. p.2.

3. D. Waddington et al., op. cit. p.7.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

traditional social networks, resources which they defined as "local cultural capital" which could be drawn on in times of social change.<sup>1</sup> They were also concerned with (among other issues)

the role of the state, social classes, the force of social movements,  
particularly the labour movement . . .<sup>2</sup>

Within a framework which took into consideration economic, political and local cultural factors, they located the 1984-85 miners' strike.

In relation to the different explanations of the strike from the Wintertons, and Gibbon and Bromley,<sup>3</sup> Warwick and Littlejohn were more inclined to the latter's views,

The explanation for the strike and its aftermath put forward by the Wintertons relies on evidence of consciously motivated capitalists using all the resources at their disposal, including technology, planning devices, propaganda, police and military force, to defeat the working class. That of Gibbon and Bromley seems to rely more on evidence of a mixture of political and organisational innovation and opportunism within the context of a capitalist culture with all its unevennesses, divisions and local variations.<sup>4</sup>

Though I am drawn to elements in both explanations, I believe that the strike is best understood in relation to the economic, political and ideological context in which it took place. There had been a massive and comprehensive attack on the Labour Movement by a radical right-wing Government from 1980.<sup>5</sup> Monetarism (arguably introduced by the 1974-79 Labour Government) was wholeheartedly embraced by the new Conservative administration. So was the free market. There was an onslaught on public expenditure nationally and locally and a great deal of anti-union legislation was put on the Statute Book. There was no comprehensive response from the Labour Movement.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the Conservative Right had been allowed to set an agenda within which 'value for money', 'efficiency' and 'cost effectiveness' became part of the vocabularies of all major political parties.<sup>7</sup>

Curbing the 'power' of the unions was one of the Government's primary aims. And persuading the public that it was a good and reasonable aim met with some success. Government argued that wages must be held down or workers would "price themselves out of jobs." They knew that wage control would be much easier if unions were further restricted by law. Where workers

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1. D. Warwick and G. Littlejohn, op. cit. Preface.

2. Ibid.

3. P. Gibbon & S Bromley, "From an Institution to a Business? : Changes in the British Coal Industry, 1985-9" in Economy and Society February 1990.

4. D. Warwick and G. Littlejohn, op. cit. p.204.

5. See Chapter 4.

6. Some unions had already indicated their acceptance of what they called "the new realism". And, while the Labour leadership were opposed to Mrs. Thatcher's vision of untrammelled "free enterprise", there was no challenge to the concept of the market.

7. In reality those phrases were used by Government to justify both swingeing cuts in public expenditure and rising unemployment.

resisted reductions in their real wages or a deterioration of their working conditions, managers tended to adopt a tougher stance than hitherto. Very high unemployment began to mute protest. All of this fitted well with the Government's overall aim of making Britain attractive for foreign investment. Within that context, the Government took the decision to 'rationalise' the coal industry.

Once the Government had decided to go down that road, they knew there were only two possible responses from the miners. Either they would acquiesce, allow a massive pit closure plan to be implemented, and accept the decline of their union, or they would put up some kind of fight and be beaten in the end by the formidable array of forces at Government's disposal. Either way, the power of the union would be seriously weakened. Either way, the Government would win. Given a militant NUM leadership, confrontation was a very strong possibility. If that happened, preparations were well in hand to deal with any industrial action. In the context of the general attack on trade unionism, a defeat for the miners' union, considered to be the vanguard of the Labour movement, would immeasurably strengthen the Government's position. And the partial or total demise of the NUM would cause them no regrets.

Every Government has advisors who work out "possible responses", options for action available to deal with varying sets of circumstances. The Ridley Report of 1978 set out such options in the event of a coal strike. Preparations based on that Report were well under way by 1984 and, as Saville has argued, many of its recommendations had been transposed into legislation by then.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Mrs. Thatcher's antipathy towards the NUM was well known,<sup>2</sup> and the 1972 and 1974 strikes were etched indelibly on the consciousness of many people on the Right.<sup>3</sup>

I do not argue a 'conspiracy' theory. Such a theory can be rejected on grounds of over-determinism, for no-one could be absolutely sure that a strike would take place. However, Gibbon himself argued that, by 1984, miners' leaders, because of their own politicisation, had rejected 'mineworkers politics' in favour of 'pitworkers politics'. Government was as aware of that politicisation as Gibbon was and had a good idea of the most *likely* response from the miners. If the Wintertons overestimated the consciousness of capitalists, Gibbon's emphasis on fortuity and opportunism, underestimated it. To say that is not to deny a role in the strike for those factors. But it is to argue that I remain unconvinced by Gibbon's implication that there

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1. J. Saville, op. cit. p.296.

2. See D. Warwick and G. Littlejohn, op. cit. p. 203.

3. See H. Beynon and P. McMylor, "Decisive Power : The New Tory State Against the Miners" in H. Beynon (ed) op. cit. p.32. They quoted Brendan Seville, special advisor to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1972 on the impact of that year's miners' strike "At the time many of those in positions of influence looked into the abyss and saw only a few days away the possibility of the country being plunged into a state of chaos not so very far removed from that which might prevail after a minor nuclear attack . . . it was fear of that abyss which had an important effect on subsequent policy."

was little or no connection between Government's highly specific contingency plans to deal with a coal strike and the strike itself.

In sum, in this thesis I employ an interpretative framework, using a variety of sources, principally grassroots perceptions, documentation and participant observation to explain what happened in the 1984-85 miners' strike.

I delineate between those who created a mythology in the course of that struggle in order to sustain themselves materially and in terms of morale, and those who elaborated a mythology which coincided with their own ideologies and incorporated it without criticism into their own analyses of the strike.

I present a structural analysis to demonstrate the linkage between the policy and practice of the Labour Party nationally and that of the Party at local level. I emphasise the class collaboration and pragmatism of the Party which has depoliticised Party members and the working class. I show how those factors help to strengthen the conservative culture and conservative hegemony. I explain how they restrict possibilities to advance the socialist project. And, in the case of the miners' strike, I conclude that they prevented the mobilisation of the whole of the Party membership in defence of an affiliated trade union and the maximisation of working class support for the miners.

In relation to the last point, I try to gauge what people in pit villages or in ex-pit areas understood by 'community', especially during the strike.

I agree with Beynon that the strike was essentially about employment, about preventing pit closures and saving jobs. In contrast with Gibbon, I believe it was defensive from start to finish and that the miners' aims were moderate, modest and even conservative;<sup>1</sup> that while not opposed to change as such, miners were opposed to change which would damage their livelihoods and prospects. There is much evidence that the Government prepared for a confrontation with the miners and, although no one could say with certainty that miners would strike, Government were aware that a militant leadership made that course of action likely if pits were closed without consultation with the union.

Specifically, within that theoretical framework, I trace and examine what I consider to be the main social and political processes which influenced responses to the strike from women, the Labour Party and communities. Though my immediate focus is on Durham County, the analysis I present has implications for debates about other social movements.

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1. In the sense of wanting their situation to stay the same.

# INTRODUCTION

## A. CHANGE OF FOCUS

In March 1984 when the Miners' Strike began<sup>1</sup> I was a postgraduate student at Durham University writing my Ph.D. thesis on *The Politics and Ideology of Labour in Durham 1918-1939*. Within weeks of the beginning of the strike it was obvious that the priority for socialists was to work in miners' support groups. Consequently, over that extraordinary year, much of my time was spent co-ordinating the distribution of food parcels to miners' families for the City of Durham CLP Support Group, which meant I had to liaise with Labour Party branch secretaries and Labour Party members, with union Lodge officials and miners' families. I also helped to organise and maintain the Miners' Families Welfare Rights Office in Durham City. I collected money on the streets and regularly attended the weekly meetings of both my own support group and the Durham Area Support Groups (DASG). I joined Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC), attended its conferences and was, for a year after the strike, one of the Durham delegates to its national committee. In 1986, on behalf of the WAPC and the NUM I visited Chile on a national women's delegation (funded by Chile Solidarity women) and was sent to meet women's groups in the southern mining area of Lota.

When I returned to my academic work, I realised that evaluation of the 1984-85 strike could shed new light on, and perhaps produce new insights about, some of the issues covered by my previous research into an earlier historical period. For, among other things, what had been witnessed and experienced by large numbers of people was the politics and practice of Labour in Durham during a unique societal crisis.

Another compelling reason for refocussing my work was that the strike had been the most amazing experience of my life and I wanted to explore issues that had arisen during its course which, it seemed to me, were being totally misrepresented or ignored.

It is almost cliché now to say that the strike was at one and the same time heartbreaking, frustrating, desperately pathetic, incredibly inspirational and full of laughter. No-one who became involved on a regular basis with the support groups and the families escaped experiencing every kind of emotion. But it was such an enormous, sprawling, often chaotic happening that a thesis of this size could not attempt to deal with more than a few of its most pertinent issues, and those mainly as experienced within the Durham coalfield.

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1. See Appendix 1 for chronology of the strike.

## B. MYTHOLOGY OR REALITY

When the strike started most of the Left in the Labour movement wanted to believe, despite a great deal of evidence to the contrary, that the whole movement could be galvanised in support of the miners. But some of those who did get involved in helping miners families to stay out on strike found that they had to struggle constantly to sustain what support there was. As Huw Beynon put it,

It became a moral and political struggle within the working class movement.<sup>1</sup>

Left activists were dismayed by Labour Party and some trade union leaders who were embarrassed by the strike because it challenged their "new realism". Those leaders focussed on what they perceived as the shortcomings of Arthur Scargill rather than on political issues raised by the strike. The Left pronounced them guilty of distancing themselves from a crucial working class struggle, but it could be argued that some of the Left were guilty of turning their backs on what was actually happening at the grass roots of the Labour movement and in the working class. Some accounts of the strike or articles commenting on the strike, written by socialists, avoided dealing with that "moral and political struggle" particularly where it might have involved facing up to the fact of widespread conservative attitudes amongst the rank and file of the Labour movement. Similarly, they shirked exploring situations where apathy or hostility was demonstrated by working class people towards those on strike.

Celebratory accounts raised more questions than they answered. Was it true, as some would have people believe, that whole communities of miners' wives had risen up spontaneously when the strike began and formed themselves into huge armies to relieve hardship? Were pit villages now full of politicised women, eager and willing to become politically active? Were those women (reportedly unschooled in party politics and uncorrupted by the "wheeling and dealing" that often passes for politics in the heartlands of Labour) representative of the real aspirations of their class and communities? Did they constitute a powerful political force that must be reckoned with? Was it the case that while Labour leadership was lukewarm towards the strike, the vast majority of the rank and file of the Labour Party gave their wholehearted support? Again, was support group activity community activity? And how supportive of the strikers were ordinary working people in the coalfields?

If I had accepted the often generalised accounts and analyses of the strike from the 'optimistic' Left, I should have had to believe that most Durham miners had become so radicalised by the strike that pre-strike relationships between men and women in the coalfield were now recognised by all concerned as anachronistic; that a great influx of politicised women was about to reinforce the efforts of activists in the Labour movement throughout the county; that the

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1. Huw Beynon, 'Introduction' in Huw Beynon (ed.) Digging Deeper (1985) p.6.

Labour Party itself had become recharged with energy since so many of its rank and file members were active and that in villages and towns throughout the coalfield the largely working class populations had overwhelmingly and unhesitatingly rallied around striking families.

My experience as a supporter of the strike in Durham belied much in the celebratory accounts. As I began to discuss the strike with other Durham activists, I was not the only one who realised that mythology generated in Durham in relation to the strike had probably contributed to the overall mythology of the dispute. Since perceptions of what happened influenced the thinking of some socialists, it was important to delineate between mythology and reality. The research problem I faced was twofold. First I needed to uncover the content and extent of that mythology. Secondly, I needed to explore the nature of the relationship between men and women generally in the coalfield; between the NUM and miners' wives during the strike; between miners' families and support groups; between support group and support group; between Labour Party activists and the rest of the Party membership; between miners' families and the Labour Party, and between support groups and the public.

This study covers the Durham coalfield but it is to be hoped that similar studies are being undertaken elsewhere.

## **C. METHODOLOGY**

### **1. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

Along the participant-observer spectrum I ought to be regarded as more a participant than an observer. My political commitment was, very clearly, my first priority at that time. But since I had kept a journal for several years, it was unsurprising that, when the tempo of my life increased dramatically, I wrote at length in that journal. I felt it was important to keep an historical record of the strike. Yet in late 1985 when I re-read what I had written I was, initially, dismayed that I had not included many comments on the national politics of the strike and had not managed to capture the grand sweep of important national events of a remarkable year. Only gradually did I realise that the sometimes pithy or angry or amused or frustrated or critical or gratified comments on the small details of everyday life in the community, in the support group and in the Labour movement, were precisely those crucial to an understanding of the dynamics of a variety of relationships in the Durham coalfield. However, my own accounts and the interpretation of events which I had experienced personally were hardly sufficient to encompass the task I had set myself. Only the accumulation of data from many more participants throughout the coalfield could lend weight to my arguments.



## 2. ORAL EVIDENCE

In an outline of my earlier research project (pre 1984) I said that I agreed with Hywel Francis<sup>1</sup> when he asserted that to ignore oral evidence was tantamount to taking a decision to write off whole areas of human experience. That opinion, I argued, fitted well with Becker's notion of a mosaic (1966) where each piece added a little to our understanding of the total picture. Becker said that when many pieces have been placed we can see, more or less clearly, the objects and the people in the picture and their relation to one another, and the different pieces contribute different things to our understanding. I also argued that, handled carefully, oral testimony could not only clarify certain documentary evidence but could also offer nuances which the investigator might never have considered. I contended that, apart from being valuable in the exercise of recovering lived experience,<sup>2</sup> oral testimony, in many instances, might be the only way of correcting misinterpretation of researchers. I continued,

The "negotiation of accounts" (Harre and Secord, 1972) including the checking and rechecking of subjective interpretation is well within the framework of both social psychology and sociology. In a male-oriented society like Durham, knowledge of the experience of working class women may depend almost entirely on oral testimony. Clearly the possibility of another qualitative dimension in exploring social change has to be considered seriously.

I went on to say that in the handling of oral testimony care had to be taken so that celebration and identification were not substituted for analysis and explanation. I ended by saying,

But analytical and methodological problems can be handled, I believe, utilising in the first instance Blumer's criteria (1939) of adequacy of data, representativeness of data and validity of interpretation of data. In the end, briefly, I decided on a system of cross checking, as far as possible, data I have uncovered . . .

When I first wrote that outline it seemed to be necessary, when embarking on sociological theses, to write elaborate justifications for the use of oral testimony. However, when I began my research into the 1984-85 miners' strike, there was little published evidence of what had happened in the Durham coalfield. In that situation, oral testimony was central to any account, for who could say better what it was like to live on a starvation income than those who were condemned to do so? Who could say better what had happened in the struggle to help mining families stay out on strike than those who were involved on a daily basis with hardship relief? Who could say better what attitudes towards the strike were prevalent in the Labour Party than those who had battled doggedly within its ranks to maximise Party support? And who could say better whether 'community' existed or whether 'solidarity' existed than those who constantly sought to encourage community or solidarity throughout the dispute?

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1. Hywel Francis, "The Secret World of the South Wales Miner: The Relevance of Oral History." (no date)

2. H.Francis op. cit.

Having said that, none of the criteria laid down earlier for dealing with methodological problems were relaxed. On the contrary, meticulous checking and cross checking of data was necessary to ensure that valid interpretations emerged. In addition, I invited those who gave me extensive interviews and who showed a real interest in what I was doing, to read drafts of my writing, point out any factual errors and make comments. It proved a very productive exercise.

### 3. DOCUMENTATION

Because I needed to take a long, historical view of the political activity of working class women in the coalfield, the main body of documentary evidence I used in my work consisted of letters and fragments of letters written by organisers of the Women's Labour League (WLL) in the North East of England in the first decade of the century, as well as available Minute books of Durham Women's Advisory Council (DWAC) from 1918 to 1967. The first organisation worked voluntarily to aid and support the early Labour Party before women were enfranchised. The second organisation was an integral section of the Labour Party and was established after the First World War.

For historical information on the Durham Labour Party I read through and utilised material from the Shotton Collection, housed in Durham County Record Office. Robert Shotton was secretary of the Durham Divisional Labour Party from 1918 till the mid 1950s. Apparently he kept every piece of paper that came across his desk including the Minutes and associated papers of the Durham Divisional Labour Party as well as fragments of material from other Divisional Labour Parties in the coalfield. Those Minutes provided official accounts of Party activity and attitudes. I tried to locate documentary evidence of other Labour movement activity, principally Minute books of the Co-operative movement in the North East. However, these had not been organised into an archive and, due to the illness of elderly custodians, that material was unavailable to me. In the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester I looked at Labour Party National Conference Minutes and Minutes of the National Executive and its sub-committees.

In terms of the strike itself I was most fortunate in having access to diaries, scrapbooks and other relevant material in the possession of interviewees. Very importantly, I was able to examine the financial records of several key support groups.<sup>1</sup> I also made use of some of the documentation and tapes from my earlier research.

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1. Easington, City of Durham CLP, North Durham CLP, Chester-le-Street, Craghead. The financial records of SEAM Relief, Durham Area (DASG), STC and Leadgate were destroyed immediately after the strike. [HW] [AS] [BG] [BC]

#### 4. CREDENTIALS

At a Labour Party branch social in Durham City in June 1984, a man who said he was an historian approached support group members for information about the strike saying he intended to write an article for New Statesman. He was asked if he would receive money for the article. He replied that the magazine would pay him only a small fee but he did not seem willing to donate it to the miners' cause. He enquired how he could meet miners and families and see what they were doing. He was invited to pack potatoes, collect food or collect money in the Market Place, in other words to become a participant-observer. That was the last Durham City Support Group saw or heard of him.

Attitudes had become so polarised in the strike that it was not surprising that the intentions of some researchers and journalists were regarded with suspicion. Strike supporters were angered and sickened by what was being said about strikers in the national mass media by those who made fleeting visits to coalfields and then produced what miners' families considered to be scurrilous journalism. Middle class reporters were so used to having easy and unlimited access to the lives of poor and distressed people that some must have been bewildered to find, on occasion, that that access could be restricted or blocked. In one instance a television producer appeared unannounced at the Miners' Welfare Rights Office in Durham City and asked to be put in touch with needy striking families. His request was refused. A member of the Labour Party in Durham City (who happened to be the producer's sister, though this was not known at the time) became so incensed by that refusal that she tried to move a censure motion in her branch against those support group workers and wanted to force them to co-operate with the producer. She insisted that the support group, as a sub-committee of the CLP had no right to refuse co-operation and said that only the General Committee could take that decision. She also argued that if the plight of needy families were broadcast, more money would come to the group from the public. On the first argument she was technically correct but since support group workers were adamant that confidentiality and privacy for the families overrode all other considerations, they resisted the pressures put on them.

As the strike wore on there were indications that at least a few people at the sharp end of the privation were becoming justifiably suspicious of "outsiders" and were less anxious to play passive roles as suppliers of information without some guarantee that those to whom it was given should not distort it. They were much more likely to speak to researchers who were prepared to demonstrate some appreciation of what they had suffered. They were also anxious to know what was going to happen to the information they were giving.

I had had no connection with the mining industry before 1984, but the fact that my role in the strike had been unambiguously in support of mining families ensured that, after the strike, most miners and miners' wives whom I approached were willing to talk to me without reservation.

When Lily Ross, a miner's wife from Burnhope, told me in late 1985 that she and others had already granted interviews to a couple of researchers from outside the coalfield, she added,

But we're going to tell you the truth.

Miners' wives I had not known personally during the strike were willing to talk to me because I was recommended by family members, friends or acquaintances as a person they could trust. Even so, on several occasions, before any taped interviews could begin, women asked probing questions about my activities during the strike. As a firm believer in the value to interviewers of reciprocity, I gave them full and truthful replies. I also reassured them that information which they did not want attributed directly to them or which they did not want disclosed publicly was safe with me. Because of that, I believe I was given unexpurgated versions of events and even if I could not use certain material, the possession of it increased the depth of background knowledge which is so valuable in the cumulative process of interviewing.

## 5. 'PROPER' INTERVIEWING

In relation to arguments about reciprocity in interviewing, I am in full agreement with Oakley who said that,

. . . the entire paradigmatic representation of 'proper' interviews in the methodological textbooks owe a great deal more to a masculine social and sociological vantage point than to a feminine one . . .<sup>1</sup>

She argued against the orthodox notion that the interviewing situation is,

. . . a one-way process in which the interviewer elicits and receives but does not give information.<sup>2</sup>

She said that there is a lack of fit between the theory and practice of interviewing and that this shows itself markedly when a feminist interviewer interviews women.<sup>3</sup> One of her main points was that both interviewers and interviewees are expected to behave in prescribed ways. Interviewers should be friendly but not too friendly. They must know what the balance should be between rapport and detachment. They should play a dominant role in the interviewer-interviewee relationship. On the other hand, interviewees should be socialised into accepting that theirs is a passive role. They should not require more than superficial information (if any) from interviewers and, according to the text books, are not to be given more than a few fudging words in reply to questions they may ask during an interview.

Oakley disagreed profoundly with that methodological approach and justified her own research methods by explaining that her project, motherhood, which involved being allowed to share with women some very intimate moments in their lives, ruled out the kind of detachment

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1. Ann Oakley, "Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms" in H. Roberts (ed) Doing Feminist Research 1981, p.38.

2. Ann Oakley, op. cit. p.30.

3. Ann Oakley, op. cit. p.31.

demanded by the textbooks. She cited Laslett and Rapoport (1975) who drew attention to the fact that repeated interviewing is not much discussed in methodological literature since the paradigm is of an interview as a "one-off" affair.<sup>1</sup> They also said that the gain, in terms of collecting more information in greater depth than would otherwise be possible, was partly made by being responsive to, rather than seeking to avoid, respondent reactions to the interview situation and experience. This sort of research, Oakley said, is deemed by them to be 'interactive'. She went on to say that,

The principle of a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee is not adhered to and "an attempt is made to generate a collaborative approach to the research which engages both the interviewer and respondent in a joint enterprise". Such an approach does not seek to minimise the personal involvement of the interviewer but as Rapoport and Rapoport (1976 p.31) put it, relies "very much on the formulation of a relationship between interviewer and interviewee as an important element in achieving the quality of information . . . required."<sup>2</sup>

Oakley believed that it was extremely difficult to keep the relationship between interviewer and interviewee neutral when the women became very interested in the aims of the research, whether and how the findings would be published and when they wanted to ask all kinds of questions, personal and impersonal, of the researcher. She cited Richardson et al (1965), Zweig (1949), Corbin (1971), and Mamak (1978) on the quality of information received when the relationship between interviewer and interviewee was interactive. She also quoted Bell and Newby (1977 pp.9-10) who noted that,

. . . accounts of doing sociological research are at least as valuable, both to students of sociology and its practitioners as the exhortations to be found in the much more common textbooks on methodology.

Oakley saw the 'proper' interview, then, as a "masculine fiction".<sup>3</sup>

Some might accuse her of special pleading in relation to women interviewing women on intimate areas of their lives, but she ended her argument by saying that,

. . . personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly her arguments have more general application and cannot be confined to women interviewing women. At the heart of what she was saying was a recognition that longitudinal in-depth research, which could produce high quality information, was likely to necessitate a reciprocity in interviewer-interviewee relationships which had not been catered for by textbook

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1. Ann Oakley, op. cit. p.44.

2. Ibid.

3. Ann Oakley op. cit. p.55.

4. Ann Oakley, op. cit. p.58.

methodology. From my own experience I would want to extend Oakley's thesis by arguing the centrality to reciprocity of a deep mutual concern shared by interviewer and interviewee about the particular area of life under investigation.

Like Oakley, I found that,

. . . interviewees very often took the initiative in defining the interviewer-interviewee relationship as something which existed beyond the limits of question-asking and answering.<sup>1</sup>

Like her I was drawn into the intimate circles of some families and even if I had wished, could not have kept up a pretence of total detachment. I, too, was offered hospitality as a matter of course at every home where I interviewed. In Durham it would have been unthinkable for my hosts and hostesses not to offer me some refreshment and unthinkable for me to have refused.

## 6. LOST INTERVIEWS

A frustrating aspect of information-gathering was when people agreed to be interviewed and then changed their minds. On one occasion that was not too much of a surprise. Even as a miner's wife was agreeing enthusiastically to help me in my project, I read the expression on the face of her husband, who was listening to our conversation, and I knew the projected interview was doomed. On other occasions I was able to persuade nervous or reluctant interviewees to co-operate and most of them told me afterwards that they had enjoyed the experience of being interviewed.

However, there were a few occasions when those who had changed their minds did not inform me before I set out on my journey to do the interview. I presume that these are vagaries affecting many researchers' fieldwork, but I mention them because in these cases I was given no explanation for refusal. Wives of two strike breakers and one woman NUM member had been contacted through intermediaries who told me they thought there was no point in my trying to rearrange interviews. One Labour Party member was hardly ever at home and proved impossible to contact though I tried on several occasions to get in touch with him. And a miner's wife who was also a Labour Party member could not explain to me why she had changed her mind and would not be persuaded to change it again. By that time, in 1989, I was beginning to appreciate why some villagers, or wives returning to habitual subordination or Labour Party members in particular branches had decided not to talk to me about the strike. Four years after the strike, some had begun to mend fences with those from whom they had become estranged. Why should they jeopardise fragile relationships? Besides, it was so much easier to live with the fiction of harmony and with the mythology of the strike than to answer probing questions and possibly open up old wounds.

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1. Ann Oakley, *op. cit.* p.45.

## **7. COMPLETED INTERVIEWS**

In spite of those setbacks, more than 60 taped interviews, involving almost equal numbers of men and women, are referred to in this thesis. Excluding support groups in Hetton and Sunderland, all my interviewees lived in the area administered by Durham County Council. I interviewed people individually and in twos, threes and larger groups. Most interviewees spoke to me for between 90 minutes and three hours, but about a dozen gave taped interviews of up to six hours. Additionally, others were willing to answer further telephone enquiries and many bore with me when I sought further (untaped) conversations with them. Some consulted each other about factual inaccuracies and contacted me to put me right. Two got together and produced a list of most useful comments and corrections.

## **D. OUTLINE OF THEMES**

I have not attempted to write a history of the strike. This is a thematic account of the actual responses made by women in pit villages, by the Labour Party and by 'communities' throughout the Durham coalfield to that strike. In Chapter 1 I give some indication of the extent of the hardship suffered when miners withdrew their labour and then faced the punishing rules, regulations and discretionary practices of the statutory bodies to which they turned for help. In Chapter 2 I explore strike mythology generated both inside and outside the coalfield, and compare it to what actually happened. In Chapter 3 I search historically to discover the role of women in the coalfield and, in particular, look at the activities and try to gauge the attitudes of those working class women who banded together for political purposes in the first three-quarters of this century. Did their activities influence those women who formed themselves into support groups in 1984? Were they the role models for women who ran kitchens, picketed pits and spoke on political platforms in the longest British miners' strike in history?

In Chapter 4 I outline reasons why the Labour Party, nationally and locally, could respond only inadequately to the demands made on it by its activist members and why it was unable to live up to the expectations of many mining families during 1984. In Chapter 5 I examine two kinds of 'community' response towards the strike, the first in existing pit villages where most people's livelihoods depend on the pit and the second in ex-pit villages and ex-pit areas where miners' families are usually in a minority.

Overall, I argue that a combination of pragmatism, class collaboration and reinforcement of working class conservatism by the Labour Party's revisionist leaderships, over many years, helped to undermine the possibility of galvanising the whole Movement in support of the strike.

# Chapter 1 - THE HARDSHIP

In 1978, the Conservative Party's policy making group, looking ahead to when a future Conservative Government would need to break the power of the trade unions in order to give free rein to liberal economic policies, outlined a strategy in the Ridley Report to accomplish that objective. The group believed that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be,

... to cut off the money supply to strikers and make the union finance them.<sup>1</sup>

In 1980, the new Conservative Government ensured that the Social Security (No.2) Bill<sup>2</sup> included such a provision.

A key factor in any evaluation of the response to the Miners' Strike from Durham communities, and from the Durham Labour Movement, has to be the nature and extent of the hardship suffered, as a result, by single miners and miners families during 1984/85. How did the new social security measures affect strikers? Were they able to feed and clothe themselves? Could they keep a roof over their heads and warm and light their homes? Did they lack necessities for a healthy existence? How much help did they actually receive from statutory agencies of the Welfare State, namely the Department of Health and Social Security and Social Services Departments of local authorities? Did all miners and miners' families suffer similar hardship or were some better off than others?

When these questions are answered it will be possible to begin to make some assessment of the adequacy or inadequacy of the responses received when miners and support groups appealed for material help to the wider community inside the coalfield and to the Durham Labour Movement whose members, in theory at least, had an interest in the successful outcome of the dispute.

## A. SINGLE MINERS

In Seaham, when the strike began, the situation was,

Appalling. That is the only word I can use to describe it. Single miners were just non-persons. [DG]

They were paid no Supplementary Benefit at all.

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1. Part of *The Economist's* summary of the Ridley Report 1978, quoted in John Saville, "An Open Conspiracy: Conservative Politics and the Miners' Strike 1984-5" in *Socialist Register 1986* p. 297.
  2. See Debate on Social Security (No.2) Bill, 15 April 1980, Hansard Vol.982.



... everywhere there is constant concern at the plight of the single miner - a non-existent, a nonentity as far as the SB<sup>1</sup> office is concerned, say their workmates.<sup>2</sup>

Single miners who lived in colliery houses and paid either a peppercorn rent or none at all, could at least keep a roof over their heads. Throughout the County, Labour District Councils allowed council house tenants to live rent and rate free for the duration of the strike.<sup>3</sup> But those with mortgages could not promise to pay even a token amount to building societies or banks and were in danger of having their homes repossessed. Some, without families to help them, became destitute. Those with relatives willing to lend a hand, considered themselves fortunate.

... an incalculable number of young single men have set themselves adrift on the community, feeding and sleeping with different relatives and friends by night, getting as much of the fifty pence an hour picket pay they can get by day.<sup>4</sup>

Of the single miners, living in villages throughout the County but working at coastal pits, few had private transport and, without money for public transport, walked miles to their workplaces to ask for food. [DI] [NS] Those who lived with relatives fared a little better but sometimes at great cost to their families. Doreen Gibson told of an 84 year old widow whose two, single miner sons, both in their forties, lived with her. One was slightly mentally handicapped. The mother had just come out of hospital and was supposed to be on a special diet. But that could not be managed since the whole family was subsisting on the old lady's pension allowance.

When I went in she hastily pushed a plate of chips under a chair. She didn't realise I'd seen it. She was trying to pretend she was still on her diet. [DG]

## B. FAMILIES

The pauperisation of single miners prompted the setting up of most miners' support groups. But a large number of families, especially those with young children, were in a desperate condition too. Prior to the strike, weekly basic wages ranged from £115 for the lowest paid surface worker to £155 for the highest paid underground miner. Under Social Security regulations, strikers could claim no benefit for themselves, only for their dependents. Their wives ought to have received £21.45p per week in benefit. The DHSS cut that allowance by £15, saying that was the sum "assumed" to have been received in strike pay from the NUM.<sup>5</sup> In fact the men received no strike pay. The net amount of state benefit available for wives was, therefore, £6.45p per week. Additionally, for each child under 11 years of age, £2.65p was allowed; for a

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1. Supplementary Benefits.

2. Drew Clode, "The pride and ... the prejudice" in Social Work Today 11 June 1984 p.13.

3. This applied to all striking miners, married and single.

4. Drew Clode, op. cit. p.13. This was limited to £2 a day for local picketing and £4 a day for picketing elsewhere in the country.

5. This was deducted under Clause 6 of the 1980 Social Security Acts.

child between 11 and 15 years, £7.20p per week; and for a child aged 16 or 17 years, £10 per week. Child benefit was £6.50 per week per child. However, if a wife worked outside the home, anything she earned over £4 was deducted from benefit received, on a pound-for-pound basis,

The same rule applies to any funds distributed by the miners (union) or any other agency, either in cash or kind.<sup>1</sup>

Before the strike, Supplementary Benefit,

. . . wasn't enough to feed anybody. There wasn't enough to sustain basic existence. Quite clearly, whatever your standpoint on the matter is, it was a fact that people weren't paid enough to live. [NC]

The assumption that the DHSS made, that £15 per week was being received from union funds, placed mining families well below subsistence level.

How do you live on an assumed income? I've never known anyone who managed it! [AH]

The reality was that, for instance, a family of three, non-waged mother, father and child aged 2 years had a total income from all sources of £15.60p per week. A family of four, non-waged mother, father and children aged 5 and 8 years had £24.75 per week. A family of non-waged mother, father and three children under 11 years lived on £33.90 per week. Out of these amounts, at the very least, families were expected to feed and clothe themselves, pay the rent<sup>2</sup> or mortgage,<sup>3</sup> as well as meet the cost of household and water rates, gas and electricity bills.

## C. SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

### 1. HELP FROM THE UNION

Initially, miners turned to their union Lodges for help in the form of hardship money or food. But Lodges did not have the resources to relieve hardship on such a vast scale. In areas with pits, some, though by no means all miners, living nearby, picketed to earn a little extra income. However, hundreds of travelling miners went nowhere near picket lines. There was obvious justification for that in the beginning, since no picket buses were organised by the Lodges to transport miners from outlying areas. But when the union did make an effort to involve the travellers, six months after the strike began, only a few took the opportunity to picket.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Drew Clode, "The pride and . . . the prejudice" (1984) p.12.

2. Some were in privately rented accommodation. Families receiving Supplementary Benefit could receive rent rebates.

3. Families receiving Supplementary Benefit could claim most of their mortgage interest from the DHSS. According to Mary Stratford, some families paid what they received to the Building Society. Others spent the money on food and thus faced even larger debts when the strike ended.

4. The vast majority of travelling miners did no picket duty during the strike. [BE] It is arguable that the main reason was demoralisation, particularly since there was hardly any communication between travellers and Lodges for the first six months of the strike.

Many Lodges insisted, at first, that if the men needed food and hardship money,<sup>1</sup> they must come to the Lodge and ask for it. And if they were really desperate, surely they could use their initiative to get to the picket lines? But, arguably, that was unrealistic when applied to those who had no money or transport to get to the coast. [MSG] However, Leadgate miners travelled in hired buses<sup>2</sup> to collect hardship money from their respective Lodges. They stopped at a supermarket on the return journey and bought food. But that was an exceptional arrangement. Until miners' support groups, servicing travelling miners, became properly established and recognised by the union as 'bona fide' organisations, a great many problems were caused when unions insisted on men appearing personally to ask for help. Eventually, some Lodges sent money to support groups via union officials or posted cheques to them.<sup>3</sup> But in the early days of the strike many families had to forage as best they could to feed themselves and keep warm.

## 2. OTHER INCOME

In all areas, those who had relatives prepared to help were grateful recipients of whatever was offered. In all areas, those who had savings confidently expected that they might have just enough to manage during the six or seven weeks they expected the strike to last.<sup>4</sup> In all areas, some miners sought any kind of cash-in-hand employment such as window cleaning, taxi driving and pub work.<sup>5</sup> And, in all areas, there were families in dire straits right from the beginning. They were people who had no savings, or who had no access to the 'black economy'.

## 3. FORAGING FOR FOOD

In some rural areas poaching rabbits, pheasants and other game was regarded as a calculated risk if families were to be fed.

People had whippets . . . and they would go with rabbit traps and ferrets. We had wonderful rabbit pie. Then of course the gentlemen farmers were very good to us. They put partridges and pheasants out for the shooting season, didn't they? By the time the shooting season came there weren't any (left) because the dogs had caught them all . . . [LR]

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1. Lodge funds plus Sheffield money i.e. money sent from the NUM headquarters on a per capita basis.
  2. The buses were paid for by Derwentside District Council. The Council gave what cash remained in the defunct local lottery fund to councillors for use in their Wards. Some of this was passed on to the local YMCA leader who hired the buses for the men. [DW] [DoW] [JC].
  3. Some support groups received money from all Lodges to which their miners belonged, some received money from a few, while few, if any, support groups received money from Sacriston Lodge.
  4. See Chapter 3.
  5. The DHSS was not informed of these jobs. Neither was the Inland Revenue.

Apparently the pheasants were so tame, (having been hand-reared to breed for the shooting season) that they were running along the ground. When the whippets set off after them, the birds,

... hadn't the sense to get up (in the air) and the dogs were catching them and killing them, instantly - just a nip on the back of the neck. [LR]

A miner who lived near Consett heard stories of sheep rustling but, since he didn't know who was doing the rustling, was unable to give substantiating details. [JP] A support group worker from Sacriston talked of poachers' lights flickering at night in fields surrounding the village, but said that that was commonplace, even when there was no strike. [AP] Lily Ross, a miner's wife, gave an account of two miners who had been digging in an illicit coal hole. As they made their way home through woods they

came upon a wounded deer. Someone must have had a shot at it. [LR]

They promptly slit its throat and hung it from a tree to 'bleed' it. Afterwards they dragged the carcass back to a woman who skinned it and shared out the venison among the families on strike in the area. Housewives had not forgotten traditional skills,

Well, it was hung up, and all you did, you had a big knife and you ripped its belly open. It was already blooded because its throat had been cut and it had been hung up overnight. So you didn't have the mess of the blood. So you just skin it, like you do a rabbit. Go like that and it just rolls off, the skin. Keep pulling it and it comes off. You've got to cut its head off, mind. And you cut up to its hocks in its legs, so you get the meat part. And then you just cut it into portions. [LR]

Another housewife kept the skin and, with instructions found in a library book, set about curing it. Yet another took the horns, but refused to take the head because,

... she couldn't stand its eyes looking at her. [LR]

#### 4. FORAGING FOR FUEL

If such foraging for food<sup>1</sup> was risky, since the lawbreakers might face fines or imprisonment, foraging for fuel could be an equally risky occupation. Any striking miner found stealing coal from a pit-heap faced immediate dismissal from his job. In Dawdon some young miners took their chances,<sup>2</sup> [NS] but sites where coal could be dug or gathered, away from the pit, were sought.<sup>3</sup> In Kelloe, as in so many other parts of the County, digging a hole in a field near a closed colliery was sufficient to reveal an accessible seam. Much of the coal was dirty and bitty. Large amounts of it had to be dug to feed a fire, since the calorific value was often low. It was, nevertheless, welcome. [PG] Chester-le-Street men also had an illicit coal-hole, but were mindful of the dangers it involved,

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1. In the 1926 General Strike, "poaching was common and forages were organised throughout the Derwent Valley." Les Turnbull, *Chopwell's Story* (circa 1979).
  2. None were caught in Dawdon.
  3. Foraging, particularly for fuel, continued throughout the strike.

It was up on Waldrige Fell. There have been pits there since Roman times. And all this was, was a hole in the bankside. Miners, people from Sacriston and around (came). It was just like being down the pit. They were sawing trees down and putting props in. Nobody did anything wrong whatsoever. It was all according to safety rules. It was amazing. There was no danger whatever going in. If any 'cowboys'<sup>1</sup> came, trying to get coal out, there was no chance. With coal being so short,<sup>2</sup> anybody would try to go up and dig it, and sell a couple of bags. [BF]

The pit was in an almost inaccessible place on a bankside. The miners queued up to get into it. It took three hours to hew enough coal to fill one bag, riddle it and get it out to the road. The last part was very difficult since there was a steep bank to negotiate. It was,

sheer hard work. It's amazing how nimble and agile these people are. There were fellows there in their fifties and sixties, but with them being miners, they're pretty strong. Each miner usually hewed enough coal to fill two bags, which were carried home on bikes and prams and, later, during hard weather, sledges. [BF]

Illicit mining was not always so well regulated. The 'bankside' at Dawdon collapsed from constant digging. [NS] [FD] In Sacriston,

Just behind the pit there's a big bank and there are seams of coal through that bank. The lads used to go in and get the coal, at the peril of their lives really, if it collapsed. It was a seam going into a woodland area. A couple got caught, but they weren't miners, they were miners' sons. [AP]

Every miner knew that wherever there were old pit workings there was coal, either 'opencast' or 'drift'. Forays into any nearby copses produced wood for pit props as well as logs for fuel,

To make the coal spin out we were burning anything. You're only supposed to burn coke on our closed fire but we were putting big chocks of wood on first, then the coal on top. Then it would smoke for a while. [EF]

Billy Frostwick declared that there was a half inch thick layer of soot on the glass door of his closed fire,

You couldn't see any part of the fire. You couldn't tell whether it was on or off. You had to feel it to make sure it was on. It was that thick with soot on the front. After the strike we got rid of the glass. [BF]

Men, women and children gathered sea coal from the beaches at Easington and Blackhall. These beaches are usually filthy, with swirling, black, gritty water which sweeps back inland, full of dumped pit waste. During the strike, because the pit was idle, no more waste was being dumped into the sea. The beaches were picked so clean by the new army of scavengers that one support group worker remembered that, in the Summer of 1984, these notorious black spots were,

Just like the South of France. [DG]

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1. Non-miners.

2. Particularly in mining areas where strikers no longer received their free coal allowance and had little money to buy coal.

Many miners and wives gathered 'duff'<sup>1</sup> from disused railway lines. [BT] [JG] [FA] Some even took up the wooden sleepers and used them for fuel too. [NS] [FD] Riddling 'duff' was laborious and what was collected did not give out a great deal of heat. All along the disused railway line from Hetton to Durham, families riddled 'duff' and carted it away. But the line ran alongside the Tyne and Wear County Council's new reclamation scheme where it was intended to make a walkway to Pitlington. Suddenly great, gaping holes appeared on the new reclamation land, so big, in fact, that they became a hazard for the families. These holes were made by huge excavators brought in by the "big boys", those who, it was alleged, were in the business of collecting and selling sea-coal. When sea coal was no longer available they, like the miners' families, appear to have decided on desperate measures to get what they wanted. Police warned the families to keep away so that they could arrest those responsible for despoiling the area. Tyne and Wear Council faced a bill of over £200,000 to make good the damage caused by the excavators. [FA]

Where there were pits, taking coal from the pit heap, inside the pit yard, seemed the obvious solution to the problem of keeping families warm. Legally speaking, The National Coal Board owned the coal and miners taking it were stealing. But since miners had hewed it in the first place, and in pre-strike days had been entitled to a supply of concessionary coal, there seemed to be a tacit understanding amongst them that the coal really was theirs.<sup>2</sup> But, mindful of the NCB's determination that miners' families should not have access to the pit heaps because of the increasing bitterness of the dispute, those who sought coal were cautious in their approaches to those guarding the heaps.

At the beginning of the strike you could go down in the pit yard, because they didn't know a lot of things were going on. Women picked up what they could - and away! [JG]

But, as the strike hardened, the National Coal Board tightened up the guarding of the pit heap. They brought in new security guards - outsiders who were not familiar with the people in the area and therefore not necessarily well disposed towards them. There were two sorts of guards, "nice", who turned a blind eye to women and children collecting coal and "nasty", who chased them, after using "fair language." [JG]

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1. Duff is very small coal and coaldust. It has often been used in coalfields as ballast to support railway lines.
  2. That 'understanding' was exemplified during the 1925 Lockout of Chopwell miners by Consett Iron Company, "The (Consett Iron) Company used the railway line from Derwenthaugh to Chopwell in order to keep the cokeovens in production. The trucks were left in sidings next to the soup kitchen whereupon the union officials knocked the pins from the bottom of the trucks and enabled the whole population to remove the coal. It disappeared like snow in front of the summer sun. This action was illegal but the union regarded it as a justified reprisal against the Company which had stopped delivery of the free coal allowance. Coal was also taken from the pit heap and from the outcrops in the neighbourhood." Les Turnbull, op. cit. (No page number)

So it was sometimes after dark that Dawdon women crept near their pitheap, watching and waiting for the interval when the guards changed shifts. As soon as the departing guard was out of sight, they swarmed over the coal, [JG] [FD] [NS]

... even the bairns' sandbuckets were filled. [JG]

It had to be riddled before it was taken home. If the "nasty" guards were on duty the whole project might be a total waste of time and the women would come away empty-handed. What put an end altogether to the gathering of coal from the pit heap at Dawdon was the presence of men who began to raid alongside the women. Joan Guy maintained they were unemployed men, not miners who,

spoilt it for the women ... because they used to sell (the coal). [JG]

and said that while some guards might turn a blind eye to women and children pleading to be allowed on to the pit heap, the sight of men joining in was too much even for the "nice" guards. Once the guards saw men taking the coal, they stopped all access.

However, Nancy Shaw and Freda Donaldson made no such distinction. Their recollection was that some young miners risked their jobs by joining the raids.

It was becoming a thriving little business.<sup>1</sup> [NS] [FD]

Some Sacriston miners took coal from the pithead baths,

Terrible stuff - it was put in three carrier bags, one inside the other for a bit of strength. I don't know if it was covered in petrol but when it was put on the fire it went "Whoosh!" [AP]

Seaham miners helped themselves to coal from their pit heap,

When your children are cold you're going to do it. [MN]

When pit-heap coal became even harder to collect, there was fuel to be had by raiding nearby copses and woods,

The dene was really in bloom, but it wasn't after the women were finished because there weren't many trees left. [JG]

Kepier Woods in Durham City also suffered the incursions of the miners bent on procuring fuel to warm their families. [DI] Lord Lambton's estate was very convenient for strikers living near Chester-le-Street. From every area where there were woods, marauding bands of strikers and families struggled with prams, pushchairs and even children's bicycles, transporting whatever they could find to burn. [AS] [DoW] [MS] Many a time the tyres dropped off makeshift vehicles.<sup>2</sup> [JG] Stumps of trees were prised up and carried off. Anything combustible could be used to make a fire, including old shoes, old gramophone records, and even, in extremis, empty

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1. Those miners who gathered coal, bagged it and sold it from door to door.

2. e.g. a bogie: usually made by fixing a wooden platform on two pairs of wheels.

tin cans, which although they did not give off much heat, at least gave the illusion of heat through a cheery glow.<sup>1</sup> [DI]

Sunderland Borough Council gave a miner permission to remove old joists from derelict property they owned. He used his chain saw to cut up the wood and delivered the fuel to other miners' families on his "wood run". Unfortunately, the local police arrested him, questioned him for hours at the police station, and wanted to charge him with trespass. [DF]<sup>2</sup>

During their increasingly expert foraging the women at Dawdon gathered 'scrap' to sell for cash to local dealers. Metal and discarded lengths of cable could bring a good price. [JG] But not all dealers were fair. Sensing they were in a buyer's market,

Some would rob us, would only give us fifty pence. [JG]

Scrap gathering was legal. Most of the rest of the foraging was not.

But when you're bloody hungry you don't think about the law. If you've got little kids you don't give a bugger which law you break. You're going to get those kids some food and you're going to find some way to keep them warm, aren't you? [LR]

Scratching a living was an unpredictable and potentially dangerous business. With thousands of families trying, simultaneously, to "live off the land", the results in terms of hunger and privation soon began to show themselves.

## D. WELFARE FOR STRIKERS

### 1. THE DHSS

In an outspoken and outraged editorial in June 1984, Social Work Today declared

. . . almost 40 years into the Welfare State, once again, pit bosses, the government by any other name, are attempting to starve the miners back to work.<sup>3</sup>

The four pages of the magazine devoted to a description of some of the hardship, and criticism of the DHSS' handling and treatment of suffering individuals and families, were written after the, then, Deputy Editor, Drew Clode, at the invitation of an activist from the Seaham Miners' Welfare Rights Group, came to Durham to see for himself what was happening.

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1. Tin cans cut down the amount of coal needed to make a fire. The cans were arranged around the inside perimeter of the grate leaving only a small space for the fuel. [DW] [DoW]
  2. David Frost maintained that the police knew the man had permission to take the wood. [DF]
  3. Drew Clode, "From the Mouths of Babes" in Social Work Today 11 June 1984 p.2.



He wrote of the desperate situation faced by families. He told of the "acute, punishing and at times, bewildering destitution." in miners' families. He cited the case of 23 year old Gail, mother of one child, six months pregnant with another and losing weight fast.<sup>1</sup> He quoted Doreen Gibson, from whom he received his invitation, who warned Durham Social Services Department,

There'll be a dead baby here if we don't hurry up.

One miner told Clode of a mother of three children who had sought help that day because she had not a scrap of food in the house with which to feed her children. Many families faced similar problems.

We met some appalling hardship. One Friday night, a young miner with three children, 2 years, 4 years and 6 years. He was trying to cook a pan of chips on a few sticks in the grate. Their gas had been cut off. They'd no electricity. And those three little faces looked at me . . . And they'd nothing. The woman said to me, "Do you know, I've slapped our youngest one today because he ate the last bit of bread in the house." She was crying. This was Friday. They didn't get any benefits till Monday. [DG]

Similar accounts of destitution came from all parts of the coalfield. Whatever income parents had, and whatever food came into the home, they tended to look after the children and go without themselves. Even so, many children were still hungry. A Dawdon miner's wife said the hungry children cried a lot. [JG]

Married, family men, desperate that their children should be fed, pretended to leave home.

In this way, their families need not be considered part of the "assessment unit" for Supplementary benefit purposes, nor can the £15 per week strike pay be deemed to have been paid.<sup>2</sup>

If miners' wives could persuade the DHSS that their husbands had genuinely "left home" they could claim and receive the "normal" supplementary benefit due to deserted wives and families. But the men and any colluding wives risked being found out by the DHSS, whose fraud squads abounded. If miners were caught defrauding the DHSS, their families would suffer an even worse fate than the one they currently faced. Their Supplementary Benefits could be stopped entirely, any money already paid to them, as a result of fraudulent claims, would have to be paid back, and there was always the risk of prosecution, fines or even imprisonment. DHSS 'snoopers' were avid in their pursuit of even the slightest infringement of the regulations. In Blyth,

Food parcels to the value of £5 had been distributed the previous week, social security got wind of it, and, because the "assessment unit" may only receive goods and kind up to a total of £4 a week, £1 was deducted from the

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1. She hadn't eaten for 5 days. [DG]

2. Drew Clode, "The pride and . . . the prejudice" p.13.

pittance each unit was paid.<sup>1</sup>

An added hardship was that the benefit claim for a striker's family had to be made at a DHSS office near his place of employment, which was not necessarily the office nearest his home. The bureaucratic rationale for this arrangement was to prevent some Supplementary Benefit offices being swamped by claims and becoming unable to cope with the large numbers of people involved. [AH] [DG] This hit travelling miners very hard. The round trip for a Consett miner working at Wearmouth, to the DHSS office in that locality, would take over two hours, provided private transport were available. Often those who owned and had used private cars before the strike, had sold them and were living on the proceeds. Those who still had their cars, found, in many instances, that they could not use them because they could not afford to tax or insure them, or buy petrol. Bus fares were prohibitive and therefore out of the question. So some miners walked miles to make their claims. In theory, claims could be made by post. But in practice, it was almost impossible because the DHSS could not be relied on to reply to letters. [DG] [LR] Hetton Advice Centre<sup>2</sup> workers knew how long it took to process claims,

We didn't even consider posting them. We were driving them through on a daily basis. [NC]

Welfare rights volunteers also alleged that some spurious judgements were made on benefits' claims and much of their time was taken up in reassessing individual cases. [DG] [AH] Any subsequent delays in payment of benefits could be devastating to families. It meant there were further problems in communication, particularly if follow-up letters were 'lost' by the DHSS.

Burnhope miners worked mainly at Wearmouth pit but they had to register their claims and deal with the Sunderland DHSS office,

We couldn't get there. We had no money. So all we were doing was sending forms into them and we were getting all this slaver back. You couldn't have this and you couldn't have that. I started off with £17.60 a week. That only lasted three months. They knocked it down to £9.07 a week. And when I wrote and asked why, I got no reply. They just wouldn't tell you why you were knocked down. So I went through the strike on £9.07 a week. It would have cost me more than £2 to get from Burnhope to Durham. [LR]

And it cost more than £2 to get from Durham to Sunderland by bus. Families with telephones might be chary of using them, bearing in mind the hefty charges. And, many families did not have telephones. There was little money for food, let alone for using public telephones. So, if benefits were delayed, families could go hungry.

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1. Ibid.

2. This was a permanent Advice Centre, staffed by salaried employees of Sunderland Borough Council.

Applications to the DHSS for special payments of benefit for people suffering exceptional hardship were repeatedly refused. Children who were ill and required prescribed diets often went without adequate help,

Frank and Vicki have a fourteen year old daughter suffering from a food allergy. They managed before the strike to cope with the special diet she needs. Now? They simply can't afford it. Result? She's vomiting up the alternative food they provide, while the folk at 'Bleak House',<sup>1</sup> . . . consider an appeal. That morning she'd been told the documents in the case had been lost for a second time.<sup>2</sup>

City of Durham Support Group supplied a special diet for a teenage coeliac girl in Bowburn, after she had been refused help by the DHSS.

A particularly harrowing incident in Seaham involved two boys aged 13 years and 15 years, both suffering from cystic fibrosis.<sup>3</sup> The younger boy, in particular, was very poorly because he wasn't getting his diet. Welfare rights workers tried every approach to the DHSS but the application for a diet was turned down. The appeal was doomed since, according to Doreen Gibson, the medical personnel treating both boys refused to supply supporting documentation to the Appeals Tribunal. Their attitude, she said, was judgemental. In their view the father was on strike through choice and if he wished he could go back to work to earn enough money to feed his children. [DG] The Cystic Fibrosis Society confirmed that children suffering the disease were in need of special diets. A private examination, provided free by another paediatrician, supported the claim. But without support from the children's own doctor and dieticians, the family could get no help,

The future, the outlook for cystic fibrosis children is not good. But the sheer cruelty of it! Because they needed the special diet! Goddam it, it was bad enough for those parents, knowing what the ultimate end for their boys would be! [DG]

The Welfare Rights group took the case as far as they could, through the statutory tribunals. They felt they could win all the arguments but that the decision would, inevitably, go against them. It did.<sup>4</sup> They strongly suspected that the DHSS had been told by Government to reject such cases. That perception of inbuilt bias in the DHSS was noted by Drew Clode,

As far as the miners were concerned,<sup>5</sup> they are convinced that the DH double S has virtually declared war on them.

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1. The local name for the Seaham DHSS office.
  2. Drew Clode, "The pride and . . . the prejudice" p.12.
  3. This case is also recorded in Chris Jones & Tony Novak, "Welfare Against the Workers" in Huw Beynon (ed.) Digging Deeper (1985) pp.94-95.
  4. "The Moderator of the Methodist Church came down to Seaham and met the family who were Methodists. He was so incensed, so utterly devastated when he went there that he asked for the privilege of supporting that family for the rest of the strike." [DG]
  5. Drew Clode, "The pride and . . . the prejudice" " p.12.

The examples of hardship and hunger cited so far may be considered dramatic and untypical. They are only a few of those reported to voluntary welfare rights workers during that year. The volume of enquiries in the Dawdon area alone was worrying. The Director and Deputy Director of Durham County Social Services Department had met miners' representatives in May 1984.

A first figure of 132 cases of severe hardship reported from the Dawdon distress centre shot up to 400 plus at the second meeting.<sup>1</sup>

In the Dawdon/Seaham area two workers from the Social Services Department were seconded to a Lodge for two mornings a week with a remit to help where they could. And the Citizen's Advice Bureau agreed to double the time made available to the area at the Social Services' expense.<sup>2</sup> Seaham Welfare Rights Group took over 200 cases to appeal at the DHSS Tribunal in Sunderland during the year. They were nearly all turned down. [DG]

Durham City Miners' Welfare Rights group were given a room by the City Council in the Town Hall to cope with enquiries for help,

We managed to get the Welfare Rights Centre opened last Friday, with a neat sign outside the door and a telephone installed, but no telephone directory until we borrowed one. As I was scrubbing out the room people wanting advice started arriving, coming in and falling over my feet. I was relieved when Ada<sup>3</sup> arrived, because an expert is needed in a place like that. Anyhow, we had a lot of miners and wives in and were able to help some of them. We managed to deal with most of the enquiries - threatened cut-offs of electricity etc., and the time went so quickly that we didn't realise we'd been open for three and a half hours instead of two.<sup>4</sup>

The 'office' opened for 4 afternoons a week. After the first rush about 5 or 6 people came to each session.

Then it increased, and towards the end of the strike it was a slow day if we didn't have 15 people in a session. The need was great. There were a lot of applications and approaches for help with disconnections, hardship to families, help to get clothes for kids. [AH]<sup>5</sup>

In the first three weeks of the strike, 3,500 Supplementary Benefit claims were passed on from Hetton Advice Centre to Houghton-le-Spring DHSS who,

were exemplary in the way they discharged their responsibilities, as far as they could, within the law. [NC]

Then a DHSS Centre was set up in Seaham, and Hetton Advice Centre's clients had to pursue their benefits claims there.

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1. Drew Clode "The pride and . . . the prejudice" " p.14.

2. Ibid.

3. Ada Hepple and Olga Smart, members of Coxhoe Labour Party, ran the Durham City Miners' Welfare Rights Centre for the duration of the strike. In the Summer of 1984, Doreen Gibson also worked there.

4. My diary, Monday 18 June 1984. Prior to the opening of the office, problems were already being dealt with by the Welfare Rights Group.

5. Ada Hepple and Doreen Gibson also worked from home, making visits to people who asked for help.

The relationship with Seaham DHSS became very strained, because some of the officials in there became very obdurate. [NC]

Though Neil Clyde stated that, working relentlessly always got Hetton claimants anything to which they were entitled, as far as DHSS regulations would allow, it was also clear that claimants were not entitled to much. He remarked, of a single miner, newly subjected to the benefits' system,

he'd just been sent from pillar to post. And the realisation that, in 1984 in Britain, he was going to be given no money whatsoever to live on, he was going to be given no food with which to sustain life - that realisation had suddenly hit him, and he'd broken down. [NC]

In both areas where Neil Clyde worked<sup>1</sup> there was widespread destitution among miners' families. "Quite a lot" of electricity disconnections were carried out by the North Eastern Electricity Board (NEEB) in the area served by the Hetton Advice Centre. Single men were in a particularly difficult situation, since they had no money to make even small regular repayments of arrears. But even where families were offering to pay a regular sum of money to reduce their debt to NEEB,

The Electricity Board were unnecessarily obdurate in their arrangements. They just wouldn't accept anything. [NC]

Neil Clyde criticised NEEB's attitude as unbusinesslike since finance companies, to which some of his clients owed thousands of pounds, were prepared to accept as little as £1 a week repayment, on the business sense that it is better to get something than nothing. He wondered why the Electricity Board couldn't do that. He also said that two people who came to him for help could not keep up their mortgage payments and their homes were repossessed by the building societies.<sup>2</sup>[NC]

Even if all the examples of hardship brought to the attention of Welfare Rights workers were chronicled, that would say nothing of the quiet, relentless, daily hunger and suffering, borne in private by most single men and many families. For, at best, even when Support Groups were properly organised and working flat out, most could supply only a kitchen meal a day or a £4 grocery parcel a week to families, far less than was needed for a healthy diet. Also, it would not take into consideration possible long term, physical and psychological damage done to individuals by such privation.

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1. In Hetton as an Advice Centre Worker, and in Sunderland as a member of his Labour Party Ward Support Group.
  2. Doreen Gibson maintained that, "a good many mining families were actually faced with repossession. There was a lot of pressure coming from building societies and banks. Most of the building societies were fairly reasonable for the first few months but there was pressure from above because they weren't sure how long the strike was going to go on." However, Mary Stratford said that most of those she heard of who were faced with repossession sold their homes and moved to smaller ones.

Perhaps women were more acutely aware of that privation. Since every penny coming into the household was spent on necessities, luxuries like sanitary towels for menstruation seemed prohibitively expensive. One woman with teenage daughters at home suggested to a support group worker<sup>1</sup> that if ever there were any spare money, a packet of sanitary towels in the parcel, occasionally, would be greatly welcomed. Women worried, too, about their small babies. Weaning foods were costly.<sup>2</sup> Babies also needed mild bath soap, dusting powder and baby oil. Many families had no money for these items, nor for babies' nappies, washing powder, or household cleaning materials, disinfectants and all those aids to personal and household hygiene which had been taken for granted in better times. Some families, who had no other income save that which they received from the DHSS, could not afford 'proper' toilet paper,

It was back to cut-up bits of old newspaper for a lot of people. [DG]

Despite the obvious suffering the DHSS continued its practice of refusing special payments. Children with disabilities who were bed-wetters were refused money for replacement bedsheets. Children who had outgrown clothes received no help. Layettes and equipment for newborn babies were refused. [DG] [AH] [DoW]<sup>3</sup>

Special payments were also denied for children who had no shoes. [DG] [AH] It was a problem that occupied the minds of parents, children and support groups, as they cast around for funds to buy footwear. Younger children, whose feet were still growing rapidly and who needed to have new shoes fitted every three or four months, were worst affected. But older children, too, were conscious of their worn out shoes and some were especially anxious about wearing decent shoes for school.<sup>4</sup> In Summer weather, there was a spate of plastic sandals and cheap plimsolls on young feet. Many striking miners, as their good shoes wore out, took to wearing plimsolls too, and sports shoes, which, however ragged they became, sufficed in warm weather. But when it was cold or wet, layers of cardboard were stuffed into broken shoes which were often worn till the soles split from the uppers.

It has to be said that families' experiences of the DHSS did not inspire confidence that their claims were being considered impartially. The chairperson of one Appeals Tribunal was alleged to have remarked that no matter how right the miners' case was, or the family's case, judgement could not be given in favour, lest that "opened the floodgates." The alleged remark was reported to the Regional DHSS lawyer who refused to believe that it had been made so,

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1. Myself. Other women also approached me on this subject.
  2. City of Durham Miners' Support Group supplied baby milk and tinned, bottled and packeted weaning foods from the Summer of 1984 until the end of the strike. But that was exceptional in the coalfield. Elsewhere, milk tokens were supplied to mothers who collected powdered baby milk from health centres and babies over six months old were often given cow's milk. Mothers mashed up ordinary family food for babies since they could not afford special baby food. [AF]
  3. See also Coventry Miners' Wives Support Group, Mummy . . . What did you do in the strike? (1986) p.129.
  4. Told to me by mothers.

Robin Widdowson<sup>1</sup> went and got the woman, who was a university lecturer, and her written evidence that said this happened when she was a lay member of a tribunal. [DG]

But though families had a jaundiced view of the 'justice' that was being meted out to them, Seaham Miners' Welfare Rights Group persisted in challenging DHSS rulings. Group members firmly believed that, whatever the outcome, it was vital that a public record be kept of their appeals, an historical record. They had serious reservations about the neutrality of lawyers staffing the tribunals,

They were a dreadful collection. Except one, and he was one of the full-time (DHSS) lawyers, a man called Angus, [DG]

Angus, in contrast to the "rough, brutal behaviour" [DG] of his confreres, treated claimants with gentleness and courtesy. It was through Angus that the group was able to take its case on shoelessness to the national DHSS Commissioners. It was no easy matter getting past the local tribunal's 'block', as case after case was refused leave to appeal to the higher tribunal. The arguments of those appearing with the claimants were never principally about the justice or injustice of allowing children to go without shoes, but were on highly technical, legal points,

It was the only way through. Justice didn't enter into this. It was only if you could find a loophole in the regulations. And, in this instance of the shoes, it was on the question, the technicality, of 'what is a disaster?' [DG]

Some people might believe that many miners' children with no decent shoes constitutes a disaster. DHSS tribunals did not agree.<sup>2</sup> They repeatedly rejected that argument. But, on one occasion, the chairperson of a tribunal hearing a shoes claim was Angus, who gave the Group leave to appeal to the Commissioners. [DG]

A huge problem then arose for the Seaham Welfare Rights Group. The only advocate allowed at a national DHSS Tribunal, making appeals to a Commissioner, was a barrister. And claimants to DHSS tribunals do not qualify for legal aid. How then could they pay for a barrister to represent those without shoes? Child Poverty Action Group offered financial help, and Richard Drabble QC offered his services free to the claimants.

Exceptionally, three Commissioners heard the case in London.<sup>3</sup> The welfare rights workers cynically believed this was an attempt to prove impartiality, since so many previous cases, which merited serious consideration, had been quickly dismissed. This case too was dismissed. Later that day the Welfare Rights workers were being taken around the House of Commons by

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1. A barrister who gave his services free to the Seaham Welfare Rights Group.

2. A letter from R. Walters to the Nottingham Evening Post, 14 March 1988, makes it clear that DHSS practice has not changed. "I read with utter disgust about a person who was turned down by DHSS for a single payment for pair of shoes and was told to wear three pairs of socks as they were considered a suitable alternative."

3. According to Doreen Gibson, it was unusual to have more than one Commissioner.

Jack Dormand<sup>1</sup>. Suddenly they came upon the Chairman of the Commissioners before whom their case had been argued earlier that day, tete a tete with Lord Hailsham,<sup>2</sup>

It was so blatant. You could tell by their faces, when they saw us, that we were the last people they expected to see. So much for the independence of Commissioners. [DG]

While the Seaham Group battled on "for historical purposes" against a determined DHSS, the problem of new shoes was partially solved in Durham District by the initiative of Councillor Ron Morrissey and Dave Beddell, an active trade unionist, who went to the Midlands and spent money from a local charity<sup>3</sup> on hundreds of pairs of cut-price shoes. Elsewhere there was a heavy reliance on footwear from jumble sales.

There were so many cases of hardship that eventually even those most difficult to solve lost their impact within the support groups. These plodded on, facing multiple crises in surprisingly matter-of-fact ways. Occasionally, though, even hardened voluntary workers were moved to anguish and anger by particular cases. A miner whose mother was dying in a hospital nine miles from his home asked the DHSS to help with bus fares so that he could visit her every day. The DHSS refused so,

he walked. His shoes dropped off, and on the way back I gave him a pair of shoes. I could have cried with him. [AH]

That DHSS decision was modified, on appeal, after the production of his mother's death certificate.<sup>4</sup>

Ada Hepple, an ex-DHSS Officer herself, was the chief worker in the Durham City Group Welfare Rights Office. In her view Seaham DHSS was "harsh, very harsh." She believed that the DHSS' general attitude towards claimants was "political". But the Durham City Welfare Rights Group was "lucky",

If you can call it lucky, simply because we had good liaison with the Durham DHSS office. I'd worked with people, and I'd ring them up and talk to them personally if there was a problem case. [AH]

Her influence with ex-colleagues was often effective, but could not be used on every occasion on which miners and families presented themselves at the Town Hall office, with all their worries and difficulties. In at least one major crisis Ada had to turn elsewhere for help.

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1. Member of Parliament for the Easington Constituency during the strike.
  2. As Lord Chancellor he was a Cabinet Minister in the Conservative Government.
  3. Sherburn Hospital, a medieval foundation, whose charter included the relief of the poor in the County of Durham. See Chapter 5.
  4. This was a case dealt with by the Seaham DHSS.



We found out about a miner who had no insurance money. He died and his wife was having difficulty getting him buried and meeting the costs of the funeral. I had to appeal to the Bishop of Durham and Tony Blair<sup>1</sup>. The Bishop helped. He lowered the charges or wiped them out, the actual funeral charges for the churches and so on, and we got donations to get that man buried. [AH]

On at least two other occasions, members of the Durham Area Support Groups<sup>2</sup> clubbed together to bury a miner, and a miner's wife, when money was not available from the DHSS.<sup>3</sup>

Possibly the most harrowing case in the Durham coalfield, during the strike, was dealt with by Seaham DHSS. Neil Clyde said of the case,

Even Stephen King<sup>4</sup> could not construct this scenario. [NC]

A miner's wife gave birth to twins in hospital. One died immediately, while the other died after three days. If a baby dies within 24 hours of birth in a hospital, the hospital authorities will assume responsibility for the funeral. If the baby dies more than 24 hours after birth, the responsibility for its burial lies with its parents. In this case the parents had no money to bury the second child. DHSS at Seaham refused to accept responsibility. Neil Clyde, though distressed by the memory, recounted his telephone call to a DHSS officer at Seaham,

Right, can I say this story back to you, just so that we both understand what we are talking about? We've got a woman. She had twins. One died straightaway and was lying on a slab, and the hospital took care of that one. And we've got another baby, lying on a slab somewhere in the hospital that the hospital is not going to bury. The mother is lying in bed, dealing with this trauma, and dealing with the physiological aspects of the birth. The husband is running around like a headless chicken. He has no money. He is dealing with the fact that he feels, as a father, he's failed because his children have died on him and he's got no money even to bury them. And he's got no money to provide for his wife. And you are saying you're not going to pay for the funeral. Now, how do you feel about that? [NC]

It was a week and a half before Seaham DHSS agreed to pay for the funeral.

## 2. COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES

The other statutory agency, charged with responsibility for the welfare of people living in Durham County, was the Social services Department of the County Council. Voluntary welfare rights workers involved in miners' support groups paid tribute to the efforts of Joe Scott and

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1. MP for Sedgefield who took up the case with the DHSS.
  2. Every week two representatives from each of 50 support groups in the Durham coalfield met together in Durham City to co-ordinate activity. See Chapter 3.
  3. It cost more than £600 for each funeral. The Minutes of SEAM Relief meeting 5 February 1985 record that "A miner's wife aged 31 had died and it had been agreed to hold back £10 of each group's vouchers to help towards the cost of her funeral." Records of SEAM Relief Meetings, held by Heather Wood.
  4. Best-selling American author of horror stories.

Malcolm Haddick<sup>1</sup> who tried to help families in distress. But these two had a variable response from the social workers whose activities they directed.

There is a conflict of values in social work . . . On the one hand you have the individual pathology models which have influenced training and professionalism in Britain. Alongside this you've had developing a model based more on seeing problems arising from the structures of society. The miners' case was the classic example, in the history of social work, which was tending to blame the individual women for the failings of the family, rather than seeing it in economic/social terms . . . You had some very good, committed social workers. You had some who simply saw (the strike) in very political terms, in that miners had a job and why didn't they go back (to work). The fault of the poverty lay within them as individuals. [DG]<sup>2</sup>

In Doreen Gibson's overall view, some social workers' anti-strike prejudices were overlaid with hypocrisy, since the amount of help they could have given, in money terms, was extremely limited anyway.

They see it more in terms of pure casework . . . and you can't casework empty bellies. The need there, when you get down to poverty, is money. [DG]

In Durham City, local authority social workers' commitment to help the strikers seemed almost non-existent. Approaches to the local office of the Social Services Department by the Miners' Welfare Group produced friendly liaison meetings conducted by co-operative officials who provided coffee, biscuits, comfortable chairs, and assurances that they would help families in every possible way. Then, very little happened except that families complained that no one had been to see them, and their problems and worries were being ignored. More liaison meetings followed with more coffee and biscuits and more assurances. Again, the actual practice of the Social Services, on the ground, was extremely sluggish,

It seems that though we passed a case to Social Services ten days ago (another electricity cut-off threatened) they'd done nothing at all about it! They are . . . allowing their political aversion to the strike to influence dealing with obvious cases of hardship.<sup>3</sup>

What was, at that time, only guesswork on the part of members of the Miners' Welfare Rights group, regarding the motivation of some social workers, soon became a sure knowledge that there was, indeed, a political reason for that huge abyss between the help Social Services promised and the help social workers delivered. For, after two weeks of unsatisfactory liaison, a dissident social worker paid a visit to the home of a support group worker<sup>4</sup> in order to explain what was going on. According to that social worker, despite the liaison meetings, some colleagues stated clearly to each other that they had no intentions of going out of their way to help miners' families. Miners had jobs, they said. Let them get back to work.

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1. The Director and Deputy Director of Durham County Council Social Services Department during the strike.
  2. See also Chris Jones & Tony Novak, op. cit. p.96.
  3. My diary 20 June 1984.
  4. Mine.

In practice the Social Services can slow down anything it has a mind to. We never get an outright refusal of help. But, so far, we've had no satisfactory results. The plain truth of the matter is that, ideologically, many are opposed to what we are doing . . . we can't prove anything, that's the problem. What we need is a resident social worker with us in the office (in the Town Hall), during opening hours. We'll make that suggestion today.<sup>1</sup>

A social worker was seconded to the Town Hall office for a few hours a week. Malcolm Haddick, apprised of the difficulties experienced in Durham City,

intervened, and we got a better service towards the end. In fact, Malcolm got into a habit that he used to drop into the Town Hall and see if everything was all right. I think he got sick of us ringing him, so he decided to pay frequent visits to see what problems were there. And I think he did the same at Seaham. [AH]

Arguably, it was a marginally better service, since some social workers made the visits to 'cases' which they said they would. But in the November of 1984, Social Services' attitudes became almost bizarre. One support group worker was phoned by Social Services and asked if help was available for a miner and his wife who had presented themselves at the Durham City Social Services office. It transpired that this was a 'case' referred to them by the Miners' Welfare Rights Group! After a frustrating telephone argument, the support group worker wearily conceded,

Send them back to us, but I'm going to tell everybody about this ridiculous situation.<sup>2</sup>

Ada Hepple remembered,

. . . people being referred to us by Social Services, which to me seemed to be the wrong way round. They were sent back along to us. And we hadn't the wherewithal that was available, or should have been available, through Social Services. We just didn't have it. [AH]

She believed though, that if it had not been for Malcolm Haddick, the Welfare Rights Group would have been in even greater difficulties. At least he goaded social workers into a little activity,

They didn't ever refuse, they paid lip service. I never saw very much fruits come from it. [AH]

She was convinced that, whether they agreed with the strike or not, social workers had a duty to act in a professional manner, with some detachment. She was unimpressed with their performance during the crisis and thought that much more help ought to have been given.

I honestly got the feeling that (there was) a load of prejudice, that they didn't think the strike should have taken place. I don't know that they were there to sit in judgement. (But) it happened. (The strike) was a fact of life and they should have been able to accept it . . . They should have been able to set

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1. My diary 3 July 1984. The original suggestion came from Doreen Gibson.

2. This was my personal experience.

aside their personal feeling and look at it rationally. I don't think they did.  
[AH]

### 3. THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

If the performance of the DHSS was punitive, and that of some social workers less than enthusiastic, what then of the attitude of voluntary organisations, particularly those with an expressed concern for the welfare of children?

NSPCC would not help. I tried a lot of these voluntary children's charities but none would help. They saw the strike as political, and just refused, point blank, to get involved . . . they were very hostile. [DG]

An appeal to Yorkshire branch of Save the Children Fund elicited the reply that they helped only children overseas.<sup>1</sup> Other well-known charities<sup>2</sup> were approached for help and refused even to distribute funds for hardship provided by Durham County Council. Only the Salvation Army agreed to take on this task.<sup>3</sup>

### E. DEGREES OF SUFFERING

To claim that hunger and deprivation were widespread, is not to claim that every miner's family suffered in the same way. Some had savings which they eked out as long as they could. Some had regular and/or substantial help from relatives. Some took 'black economy' jobs. Many cashed in life assurance policies.

They were the first things to go, the insurance policies. Because you couldn't afford to pay them. And if you go over 13 weeks you lose the money. [AF]

Another reason for surrendering policies was that if a claimant had savings, or the equivalent, to the value of £3,000, he or she was disqualified from receiving Supplementary Benefit.

It was actually, specifically mentioned in the regulations at the time that if you had things like insurance policies, the surrender value had to be calculated and put down on the Supplementary Benefits claim form. [NC]

Those who cashed in their policies could not claim benefit until what they had in savings was depleted to less than £3,000. If they could not claim Supplementary Benefit, they could not claim other benefits, principally mortgage interest. Neil Clyde knew one man who,

didn't claim Supplementary Benefit because the surrender value of his insurance policies was too great. He hung on. He didn't want to surrender them. [NC]

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1. Letter to me.

2. According to Doreen Gibson, these included Barnados, Save the Children, Red Cross and National Children's Homes.

3. There were problems there too, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

Those who did, and who were tempted to use the money to survive, had nothing to fall back on if there was a death in the family.

Many sold off or pawned personal and household goods. At first, this involved only small items but eventually, electric washers and other large household items were sold to keep families fed. In any case, electric washers were not much use if families could not afford to buy soap powder. Many women bought household soap and washed clothes by hand as their grandmothers had done. [AF]

Families where wives or grown-up children had well paid jobs were usually better off than most and some of these were able to decline help from support groups. In a few cases, families even contributed to support group funds. Childless couples, where one partner had a paid job, usually fared better than most. But, there were households where both husband and wife worked for the NCB, were on strike, and received no income at all. Perhaps the best indicator of widespread deprivation was the proportion of miner's families who accepted help from support groups. In the City of Durham Constituency, ultimately, almost 90% of miners' families accepted food parcels. Some, who initially refused help, contacted the support group as their circumstances deteriorated. In Chester-le-Street 95% of families accepted parcels. [BF] [EF] [KM] In South Moor and Burnhope all families applied for help. [MSG] [LR] In Leadgate the figure was almost 100%. [DW] [DoW] In Craghead, over 90% sought help. [LJ] In both Seaham and Easington the figure eventually reached 90%. [MN] [HW] But in Murton, while 75% of the men came to the kitchen for a meal, none of their wives did. [PB] Figures for other areas are not available, either because exact records were not kept or support group workers could not remember.

## F. CONCLUSION

While all governments have kept up the pretence of neutrality in industrial disputes by denying strikers any income from the state, at least until the advent of Thatcherism and the Social Security Acts of 1980, strikers dependants were able to claim state benefits and even special hardship payments. Clause 6 of the 1980 Social Security Acts which,

ordered a compulsory deduction to be made from the benefit payable to strikers' dependants and which forbade the making of urgent needs payments to them and to single strikers, was the most pernicious and vindictive.<sup>1</sup>

This specifically political clause, aimed at starving strikers back to work, caused untold distress to many families. Empirical evidence from Durham County has given some indication of the kind of suffering experienced during the strike but the full extent and depth of that suffering will

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1. Chris Jones and Tony Novak, op. cit. p.92.

probably never be uncovered. During that time many people did not have enough to eat and found it extremely difficult to heat their homes and clothe their children.

The DHSS, that statutory agency which was supposed to provide a safety net to ensure that no citizen starved, was perceived as an enemy by strikers,

During the course of this dispute and more than ever before, the DHSS has taken a place alongside the militarised police forces as part of an increasingly coercive state apparatus facing striking miners and their families.<sup>1</sup>

Though some DHSS staff behaved in a humane manner towards strikers, there seem to have been many more in tune with government attitudes.

The performance of social workers in Durham County Council Social Services Department was variable. There were some individuals who were able to act professionally while others allowed their political prejudices full rein, though it is probably true that the latter were more inclined to the 'individual pathology' models of social work theory which blame the poor for their own poverty.

National charities were well aware of the deprivation in the coalfields. Every application they received from support groups in Durham spelled out the potential damage to children's health. However they declined to help in any way. They did not wish to become involved in a political situation. Despite their knowledge of what was happening, only Child Poverty Action Group was willing to indicate publicly that humanitarian help should be given to the children. Others kept an exceptionally low profile during the whole 12 months of the strike. In the light of these problems, families were forced back on their own strategies for survival until the work of the support groups became properly established.

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1. Chris Jones and Tony Novak, *op. cit.* p.87.

## Chapter 2 - MYTHOLOGY AND REALITY

In examining the Miners' Support Group phenomenon in the Durham coalfield, great care has to be taken to distinguish reality from mythology. This is not only important for historical accuracy. Political perspectives have been shaped and influenced by perceptions of what happened during 1984-1985.

It is true that, during that time, women in support groups not only accomplished amazing logistical feats in helping to feed, clothe and look after the general welfare of thousands of mining families over a whole year, but also picketed, addressed meetings and wrote songs, poetry and plays about what they had done. Some even travelled abroad as guests of foreign mineworkers and other unions. The women, possessed of a rhetoric innocent of the manipulative devices of 'organisation' men, were the most popular speakers at Labour movement meetings. Their presence at gatherings in cities far from the coalfields guaranteed, literally, buckets of money which they took back to their beleaguered towns and villages. From their own experiences they denounced the government, the DHSS<sup>1</sup> and the police as their enemies. Theirs was an inspired and vital role in one of the bitterest, certainly one of the longest and perhaps the most significant class battle this century.

But most writings on women in the strike have referred to them in too generalised a fashion. The fact that in Durham (and possibly other areas) very few miners' wives became involved at any level in collective efforts to sustain the struggle, has become obscured. There is no question that women in striking miners' households made great individual sacrifices for their own families and endured enormous stresses and strains over a long period. However, since the focus of many celebratory accounts of the strike has been collective struggle, and the political implications and possibilities of that collectivity for future Labour movement struggle, it is crucial to determine its extent as well as its nature.

### A. MOMENTOUS CLAIMS

Jean Stead talked of the spontaneity of the women's movement which was exemplified for her in the Barnsley demonstration where,

Ten thousand women turned up from all over the country, early in the strike<sup>2</sup>

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1. Department of Health and Social Security, now Department of Social Security (DSS)

2. Jean Stead, Never the Same Again - Women and the Miners' Strike (1987) p.11.

without attempting to discriminate among those for whom the demonstration may have been their only public activity, those who participated intermittently in collective action and those who organised and worked throughout the year in support groups.

Vicky Seddon remarked that,

*The women*<sup>1</sup> of the coalfields, noting the effects that such (pit) closures would have on their lives, decided to up and at 'em! They decided to get organised!<sup>2</sup>

And although she pointed out that,

. . . women who were collectively active in supporting the miners' strike have been a minority in the coalfields,<sup>3</sup>

she did not stress just how much of a minority they were in some areas. To date, with the exception of J. and R. Winterton's study of the strike in Yorkshire,<sup>4</sup> there has been little exploration of how tiny those minorities were. The Wintertons calculated that only

. . . 4.7% of Yorkshire coalfield women had an involvement of a collective kind at some time during the strike. . . . Overall, 3.7% of women were involved in manning kitchens, collecting or picketing, while three per cent were members of a women's action or support group.<sup>5</sup>

They cited a positive correlation between the activism of miners and activism in their wives or girlfriends, as well as some husbands' opposition to their wives becoming involved and some wives' obedience to their husbands. They also referred to the alleged cliquey nature of some support groups which, it was said, deterred participation.<sup>6</sup> And they quoted North Yorkshire Women Against Pit Closures,

Many people seemed frightened to get involved, quite eager to have the meal and any other service we could offer, but when we asked if they could spare an hour it was always, "well . . . ". This attitude could really have disheartened the best of us but there was always a minority of us who would not give in.<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis here on the numbers of miners' wives who participated in collective activity is no nit-picking exercise. Those who were persuaded (or who persuaded themselves) that there was involvement by vast numbers of miners' wives, which heralded a new kind of politics in a new kind of movement,

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1. My emphasis. See also Communist Party, "Support Women Against Pit Closures" in Solidarity with the Miners (1984).
  2. Vicky Seddon, introduction to V. Seddon (ed.) The Cutting Edge - Women and the Pit Strike (1986) p.11
  3. V. Seddon, op. cit. p.12.
  4. J & R Winterton Coal, Crisis and Conflict (1989).
  5. J. & R. Winterton, op. cit. p.122.
  6. *ibid.*
  7. *ibid.*



This is the emergence of a new socialism.<sup>1</sup>

often envisaged that future strategies for the Left must accommodate that movement in order to transform the Labour Party. For those directly involved in the business of advancing the socialist cause, rigorous analyses of what actually happened are of fundamental importance. Was the miners' strike midwife to a huge radical working class force? This is no idle question. The emergence of a huge radical force might augur, for example, the long-term real decline of revisionism and a revival of socialism in the Labour Party.

Arthur Scargill had no doubts. Ten days before the strike ended, he wrote,

In this struggle we've seen the emergence of a whole new dimension in British politics. . . . What the establishment have not grasped is that we've created our own resistance movement comparable to those that operated throughout World War Two.<sup>2</sup>

*Socialist Action*<sup>3</sup> had no doubts,

Even in 1926, for example, nothing on the scale and dynamic of women's involvement in the miners' strike seen today occurred. . . . The *massive*<sup>4</sup> women's action in the strike was imposed on the NUM - although, to its credit the NUM leadership immediately welcomed the *enormous*<sup>5</sup> ally of women. In short what has happened is the miners' strike is a real class struggle left in the Labour movement. One that has a base in a powerful industrial union. One that takes in the most oppressed sections of the population. One that extends from top to bottom of the Labour movement and *across all its structures*<sup>6</sup> . . . The miners' strike is the greatest turning point in working class politics since 1926.<sup>7</sup>

Others shared their euphoria. Hain and McCrindle asserted that women's support committees,

. . . have involved women on an unprecedented scale, drawing them into the politics of the struggle and not simply as back-ups for their men . . . the lives of women in mining communities have been transformed as a result.<sup>8</sup>

They forecast that if similar support activity could be organised through the Party during future struggles, there might be a prospect of building real links between the political and industrial

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1. Ann Suddick quoted in Bea Campbell, "Proletarian Patriarchs and the Real Radicals" in V. Seddon (ed.) The Cutting Edge - Women and the Pit Strike (1986) p.282.
  2. Statement made by NUM President, Arthur Scargill, to Liaison Committee for Defence of Trade Unions' demonstration held 26 Feb. 1985 and produced as an article A New Dimension in British Politics in *Socialist Action* 1 March 1985 p.3
  3. Newspaper of the Socialist League, formerly known as the International Marxist Group and member of the Fourth International. The paper's former title had been Socialist Challenge.
  4. My emphasis.
  5. My emphasis.
  6. My emphasis.
  7. James Marshall, "Scargillise the Labour Movement" in *Socialist Action* 22 Feb. 1985 p.3.
  8. Peter Hain and Jean McCrindle, "One and all - Labour's response to the Miners" in *New Socialist* No.20 October 1984 p.46.

wings of the Labour movement, "replacing the fossilised formal communications which predominate now."<sup>1</sup>

Ken Livingstone argued that mining communities had been radicalised by the most extensive political education any section of the community had had in living memory. He said that millions more people were drawn into the struggle by the network of support groups established throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

Bea Campbell was convinced that fundamental changes relating to racism and sexism had taken place,

Labourism, besieged in the cities by feminism, black consciousness and sexual politics on the one hand, and the corporate might of capital on the other has slept soundly in its bed in the outposts of supposedly pure working class socialism. The defenders of Labourist chauvinism have always been able to turn to these outposts, the cradle of the authentic working class and mobilise them against the queers, the blacks, the "middle class feminists" and the miscellany of modernisers. *Not any more.*<sup>3 4</sup>

She said that the men of the mining industry had finally been compelled to come of age and join the twentieth century<sup>5</sup> and that they

... must now deal with the personal and institutional revolution which will finally bury proletarian patriarchy : that domination of the working class by men.<sup>6</sup>

She declared that the movement of the women, and of the men's relationship to the women, historically and now, was a cultural revolution<sup>7</sup> and even postulated the theory that the very existence of that movement

... represented a break with the historical sexual division of labour which has characterised coalfield politics.<sup>8</sup>

McCrindle was similarly convinced. She wrote,

Everyone agrees that things have changed completely between men and women in mining communities.<sup>9</sup>

*New Socialist* readers agreed.

The men have learned to share their politics and trade unionism with the women, a development that is certain to survive the strike, whatever private

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1. *ibid.*

2. Ken Livingstone, "Reassembling The Left" in *Chartist* No.106 Oct/Nov.1985 p.11.

3. My emphasis

4. Bea Campbell, *op. cit.* pp.281-282.

5. Bea Campbell, *op. cit.* p.253.

6. *ibid.*

7. *ibid.*

8. Bea Campbell, *op. cit.* p.261. See also Jean Stead, *op. cit.* p.20.

9. Jean McCrindle, "Miners' wives : a lasting change" in *New Socialist* No.20 October 1984 p.4.

doubts individual men may have. The women's support groups are a new and powerful hope for the future of the labour movement.<sup>1</sup>

All these claims were momentous and far reaching but lacking in substantial evidence. For nowhere was there an indication of any awareness of the small numbers of women involved in that movement. Perhaps those who made the claims had been swayed by Betty Heathfield's remark.

What amazed me was the number of women who want to *belong*,<sup>2</sup> with its inference of large numbers of women anxious to be active, perhaps in Yorkshire? The Wintertons' statistics, quoted above, should put her statement into some kind of perspective.

It can be seen, then, that expectations of a powerful new political movement emerging from the miners' strike were held by people across a wide spectrum of the Left. And who could deny that any huge influx of women, working class, fearless, proven in struggle, uncorrupted by incorporation into male political organisations, spurning tedious, bureaucratic, manipulative practices, was just what the Labour movement needed to breathe life into some of its almost moribund and excessively patriarchal structures? The question is, where were those enormous numbers of active women? It will be contended that they were certainly not to be found in the Durham coalfield.

Yet in March 1985 a North East journalist wrote,

Britain has witnessed the emergence of a tough, committed *army*<sup>3</sup> of women hell bent on change . . . It's the working class muscle that the brown rice and lentil brigade of the largely middle class women's movement have been praying for. And it's been spawned by the traditionally chauvinistic mining communities, most of whose men have nothing but praise and respect for their women.<sup>4</sup>

That particular statement was made after interviews with a handful of Durham miners' wives who had enthusiastically embraced the Women Against Pit Closures<sup>5</sup> organisation and the new Links movement.<sup>6</sup> Their hope, at the time, was that the personal and political ground they

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1. Peter Clarney, John Field and Jean McCrindle, "The Miners : right on their side" New Socialist No.19 September 1984 p.26. (Report of a New Socialist readers' conference held at Northern College, South Yorkshire)
  2. Betty Heathfield, married to Peter Heathfield, NUM General Secretary, quoted in Bea Campbell op. cit. p.265.
  3. My emphasis.
  4. Jane Lomas, "Action Women Rise from Coal Strike Ashes" Northern Echo 5 March 1985.
  5. Two weeks into the strike Barnsley set up a group "Women Oppose Pit Closures". Sheffield women followed suit. During 1984 there was an attempt to co-ordinate regional activity. "Betty Heathfield, along with other women, organised the first national conference at Northern College. For the aims of WAPC, agreed at the Second National Conference, Sheffield, August 1985, see North Yorkshire Women Against Pit Closures, Strike 84-85 (Leeds, 1985) pp.59-60.
  6. See Appendix 3.

believed they had gained as individuals and as a group, in the course of the struggle, would stay firm beneath their feet. They sincerely believed that,

Women won't go back to being pathetic. We're an army now.<sup>1</sup>

If it was more wishful thinking than a realistic assessment of what they had actually gained and what their prospects were likely to be, such statements were not unexpected because of the strike mythology which had already been created in Durham and which is extant.

## B. SELF PRESENTATION

One factor more than any other which helped to create that mythology was the self-presentation of support groups. In order to attract material aid from supporters *outside* the coalfield, the impression was given that the vast majority of people *inside* the coalfield were working together enthusiastically to defend mining communities. This was no malicious deception of potential supporters, rather an unspoken understanding among group workers that, however dismayed, disillusioned or angry they were at any lack of response inside their community to pleas for help with day-to-day work, a facade of solidarity must be presented to the outside world. If most people who lived in the coalfield could not be persuaded to become actively involved in the struggle, at however minimal a level, and if that lack of involvement became widely known, then outside help might diminish.

Support group speakers at Labour movement meetings, where help was being sought, were unlikely to dwell on the problems of dealing with obstreperous union men,<sup>2</sup> or reveal that many miners and wives had refused to become involved with work to relieve hardship in their areas.<sup>3</sup> To have railed publicly against them might have been counter-productive, both to fundraising and even to the integrity of the strike itself. If all miners' families were not believed to be engaged in collective self-help, why should anyone else bother? It was necessary that all Durham miners be depicted not only as heroic for staying out on strike, which undoubtedly they were, but also as actively and consciously involved in a day-to-day collective struggle. It was vital, too, that most non-miners in the coalfield be portrayed as consciously supporting the preservation of mining communities. When Raphael Samuel wrote that,

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1. Ann Suddick in Jane Lomas op. cit.

2. See Chapter 3.

3. See later in this Chapter.

The public language of the strike was one of hope, encouragement and reassurance. People said what needed to be said. They refused to give voice to doubt or to admit to signs of weakening. They refused to think the unthinkable - the possibility that the strike might be lost. Words - buoyant, aggressive, strident, in one register, in another, full of moral uplift - served as a prophylactic against anxiety . . .<sup>1</sup>

he expressed exactly the tenor of that self-presentation in Durham. Activists concentrated on whatever positive aspects of the struggle could be utilised to encourage internal coherence. Equally they ignored, avoided or turned a blind eye to negative aspects which could damage the image of that struggle among supporters outside the coalfield.

That self-presentation served a second, political purpose. It was necessary to help counteract propaganda from the National Coal Board, the Government and the mass media, all of which sought throughout the year to persuade the public and indeed miners' families that the strike was crumbling.

In any political or industrial struggle, hyperbole can be expected from opposing sides. In the Miners' Strike, hyperbole from some supporters of the strike gave rise to many misconceptions, the chief of which were that unpoliticised miners' wives rose up spontaneously as soon as the strike began and initiated the setting up of most support groups; that vast numbers of women became involved in the daily work of trying to feed strikers families in each area; that miners' Lodges unhesitatingly welcomed the establishment of the groups;<sup>2</sup> that all miners' families were fighting to save their communities;<sup>3</sup> and that many women, as a result of their experiences, became completely politicised, turned their backs on previous passivity and formed themselves into an army of political activists.<sup>4</sup>

At that time, in Durham, it was not unusual to hear people describe themselves using military terms,

At a meeting at the Easington Miners' Welfare, Mick McGahey, the Vice President of the NUM, addressed an audience which contained a large number of women. He swept his arm across the front row and referred to the "housewives in the County who understand the problems." The first question was asked by one of these women. She made the situation plain : "we no longer regard ourselves as 'housewives'; we are *soldiers*"<sup>5</sup> in the struggle.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Raphael Samuel, "The Enemy Within - Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5" in R. Samuel, B. Bloomfield & G. Boanas (eds.), (1986) p.31.
  2. See Chapter 3.
  3. See Chapter 5.
  4. See Chapter 3.
  5. My emphasis.
  6. Huw Beynon, "The Miners' Strike in Easington" New Left Review 148, Nov/Dec 1984 p.109.

However, in terms of collective action, it might be argued that the battalions in Durham were seriously under strength and that most of the troops had gone AWOL<sup>1</sup> for the duration of the strike.

Yet, that self-presentation was so effective that, even within the coalfield, groups who privately perceived themselves as weak, poor and lacking community help, ( but mainly due to local pride, portrayed themselves as successful) believed that elsewhere in the County other groups did not face the same problems. A constant theme of those interviewed after the strike was that while they were struggling and were often dismayed by their neighbours' reluctance or refusal to help, other groups, elsewhere in Durham, must be better off, must be better organised, must be better supported. This gulf between day to day experience and what they believed was happening in neighbouring groups seemed to demand explanation.

Some inland groups believed that in pit villages,

... they were getting everything and we were getting nothing. [SMSG]

Some groups which provided food parcels thought those at the coast who provided kitchen meals were able to give a much better service because they had more resources. Principally, it was said, this was due to the fact that most Lodges were based at the coast and gave priority to their local groups over their travelling members. There were also rumours that 'big money' was received regularly by some coastal support groups from men working on North Sea oil rigs. It was said to be easier to appeal for such help if you were representing a 'pit village'. On the other hand, some coastal support groups felt they were disadvantaged by the concentration of miners in their villages (in Easington District mining occupied 50% of the male working population<sup>2</sup>) which made local fundraising much harder than inland where miners were widely scattered among occupationally-heterogeneous populations .

If self presentation by support groups engendered such misunderstandings within the coalfield itself, it is not surprising that supporters outside the coalfield received a very distorted picture of what was actually happening and believed that most groups inside the coalfields were enormously successful in rallying communal support. Right from the beginning of the strike many assumptions were made while there have been few critical analyses.

There was no mistaking the reality of the Barnsley demonstration and of the

... mass meeting and march in London of 15,000 women on 11th August (1984) which brought new strength to the strike.<sup>3</sup>

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1. A military term meaning absent without leave.

2. Huw Beynon (1984) op. cit. p.105.

3. Jean Stead, op. cit. p.4.

Yet that reality needed careful assessment. Could it be assumed that the fifteen thousand women demonstrators were fifteen thousand support group workers? Even Raphael Samuel, whose judgements on the strike could be more incisive than most, had assumed that the 10,000 Barnsley marchers were "women of the support groups".<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that all those who boarded the buses in Durham, paid for by the NUM Mechanics, were anxious to demonstrate their support for their husbands, fathers, brothers, sons and friends. But it was one thing to have an eventful, exciting, free day out "with the lasses" in Barnsley or London or Chesterfield,<sup>2</sup> and quite another matter to become involved in the daily work of hardship relief with all its attendant grind and stress.

## C. SUPPORT GROUPS

### 1. THE INITIATORS

It is important to note that support groups in the Durham coalfield were not homogeneous. Some were composed entirely of miners' wives, some of miners and wives, others of men and women who had some or little or no previous connection with the mining industry. Most groups were not initiated by political novices but were the result of initiatives by political or trade union activists. Groups in Murton, Seaham, Dawdon, and Horden owed their beginnings to the initiatives of Heather Wood, who contacted miners' wives throughout the Easington District and adjacent villages, urging and encouraging them to start support groups. [MN] [PB] [FA] [MS] Heather is the daughter of a miner, and granddaughter of a miner, but is married to a plumber who does not work in the mining industry. She was a member of SEAM,<sup>3</sup> a member of the Labour Party and had stood, unsuccessfully,<sup>4</sup> as a Labour County Council candidate. Pam Blanchard, organiser of the Murton Group, had encouragement and practical help from her husband, a NACODS<sup>5</sup> member and, like herself, in the Labour Party. The organiser of the Seaham Group was Margaret Nugent, an active Labour Party member, married to Albert,

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1. R. Samuel, op. cit. p.29.

2. For the WAPC International Women's Day Rally, 9 March 1985

3. Save Easington Area Mines. This was an organisation, set up a year before the start of the miners' strike, to campaign against pit closures and to alert Durham County to the economic and social effects pit closures would have on the whole area.  
SEAM Relief was the name adopted by the group when its role changed to supporting miners' families during the strike. It was an umbrella organisation to which most of the coastal support groups and some smaller inland support groups in the vicinity were affiliated.

4. Heather Wood was elected as the County Councillor for Easington in May 1985 and re-elected in May 1989

5. National Association of Colliery, Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers.

Labour Party activist, staunch member of the NUM who was, at the time, a Seaham Town Councillor.

Nancy Shaw organised the Dawdon Group. She, too, is a Labour Party member, married to a miner on Dawdon Lodge committee. He had been Secretary of Dawdon Labour Party for a number of years. Florence Anderson, a Labour Councillor on Tyne and Wear County Council, and wife of a miner, organised the Eppleton Group. After Heather Wood contacted Horden NUM,<sup>1</sup> a Lodge committee member's wife, Edie Scollert, took on the job of forming a group.

Away from the coast, the involvement of political and trade union activists in setting up the groups was equally pronounced. Great Lumley Group owed its existence to four people, Mary Stratford, a Labour Party member and ex-CPSA<sup>2</sup> activist; her husband Paul, active in the miners' union; her brother Mick Hunt, Secretary of Easington NUM Mechanics Lodge and her sister-in-law, Dorothy Hunt, also a Labour Party member.

In Leadgate, the ex-Secretary of Eden NUM Mechanics Lodge<sup>3</sup> and the ex-Secretary of Eden NUM Lodge got together to revive the defunct Lodge apparatus which facilitated the organisation of a support group. Simultaneously, Jim Crozier of Leadgate Labour Party and a few fellow members offered their services. [JC] [DW] [DoW] With the encouragement of David Hopper,<sup>4</sup> Lily Ross, a keen Labour Party activist married to an NUM activist, Ken Ross, set up the Burnhope Group. [LR] Lenny James, a Labour County Councillor, his wife Betty, Labour Party activist, Harry Feenan, also a Labour Party member and Martin Quinn, a Labour District Councillor were core members of the Craghead Group. They were also instrumental in encouraging the formation of support groups in and around the Stanley area. [LJ] [BJ] The villages of Catchgate and Annfield Plain were serviced by Labour Party members Bala and Maureen Nair. [BN]

Brian Gibson, a leading local member of the AEU<sup>5</sup> and the Labour Party,<sup>6</sup> with his wife Pauline, also a Labour Party member, together with political friends in the Labour Party who were either miners like Peter Graham, Gordon Parnaby, Ernie Foster and Billy McHale, miners' wives Marina Parnaby and Margaret McHale or activists from other trade unions, Alan

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1. She first contacted the Women's Section of the Labour Party in Horden to ask for volunteers but found none. She then contacted the Lodge and Mr. Scollert "volunteered his wife's services". [HW]
  2. Civil and Public Servants' Association
  3. David Wray. The Eden pit in Leadgate had closed in 1980.
  4. Then Secretary of Wearmouth Lodge of the NUM, elected in 1985 as General Secretary of the Durham Miners' Association of the NUM.
  5. Amalgamated Engineering Union.
  6. He resigned from the Labour Party in 1989.



Holmes,<sup>1</sup> Joan Weston<sup>2</sup> and Andrew Smith,<sup>3</sup> set up an organisation on behalf of Spennymoor Trades Council to cover 19 villages<sup>4</sup> in and around Sedgefield Constituency. [BG] [PaG]

In Durham City the initiative came from Vin McIntyre, Labour Party activist, and member of Durham I.L.P.<sup>5</sup> His resolution calling for the formation of a support group was accepted by the City of Durham Constituency Labour Party. For the duration of the strike he was secretary of the group which looked after 30 communities<sup>6</sup> throughout Durham District. Brian Freeman,<sup>7</sup> and Lynda Rutherford, members of Nevilles Cross Labour Party Branch, were both chairpersons during the year. Mike Syer, from Bowburn Labour Party Branch was the Treasurer.

The Urpeth Group was set up by the local Labour Party Branch whose Secretary was an ex-miner and whose leading workers were Maureen Potts and her husband Keith, a miner and District Councillor. [MP] Tony Parker, active in the National Union of Railwaymen and the Labour Party and his wife Maureen, also a Labour Party member, worked with Christine Smith, a Labour County Councillor and party members, Maureen Rewcastle, Anne McLoughlin and Maureen Duffy to form the Ouston Group. [TP] An NUM COSA<sup>8</sup> activist and Labour District Councillor, Billy Frostwick, his wife Elspeth, also a Labour Party member, and Labour Party friends Kath and Bob Mattheys started the Chester-le-Street Group. [KM] [EF] [BF] In Pelton, four Labour Party members, County Councillor Derek Bates, Mr. and Mrs. Harrington and Bob Kelly, drew together a few miners and their wives to set up a group. [DB] Pelton Fell Support Group was set up at the instigation of the local Labour Party secretary. [DC]

## 2. MINING VILLAGES : WOMEN'S GROUPS

To emphasise the political or trade union origins of most groups, however, is not to concur with Tony Benn's assertion that,

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1. Member of National Union of Public Employees (NUPE).
  2. Member of AEU.
  3. Member of Tobacco Workers' Union, now part of Manufacturing, Science and Finance Trade Union (MSF)
  4. Bishop Middleham, Byers Green, Cassop, Chilton, Chilton Lane, Ferryhill, Ferryhill Station, Fishburn, Kelloe, Kirk Merrington, Middlestone Moor, Quarrington Hill, Sedgefield, Spennymoor, Trimdon Colliery, Trimdon Grange, Trimdon Village, Tudhoe, Tursdale Cottages (taken over by City of Durham Group after two months), and West Cornforth.
  5. Independent Labour Publications, a registered group within the Labour Party.
  6. Bearpark, Belmont, Bowburn, Brandon, Brasside, Carrville, Coxhoe, Croxdale, Durham City, Esh Winning, Framwellgate Moor, Gilesgate Moor, Hett, Kimblesworth, Langley Moor, Littletown, Ludworth, Meadowfield, New Brancepeth, Pitington, Pity Me, Shadforth, Sherburn, Sherburn Hill, Shincliffe, Tursdale, Ushaw Moor, Waterhouses, West Rainton and Witton Gilbert.
  7. A member of Durham Branch of ILP.
  8. Colliery Officers and Staffs Association.

The *Movement*<sup>1</sup> responded by setting up support organisations, the women's support groups and so on,<sup>2</sup>

unless a comparatively small number of persistent activists can be said to constitute the Labour Movement. All evidence in Durham, so far, points to the fact that numbers of Labour Party, trade union and mining family activists were very small.<sup>3</sup> And although it is true that, especially in the colliery areas, women played leading roles in the relief of hardship, there can be no extrapolation that a plethora of willing helpers existed in those places. Of course, in almost every area where support groups were established, the involvement of miners' wives was actively sought, but there were often severe difficulties in recruiting them. An Eppleton miner's wife explained,

To start with there'd be about thirty of us but it ended up with maybe a dozen women cooking the meals and two women doing the parcels. They just didn't seem to come. We wanted more people but there wasn't the commitment there. They used to queue for parcels and queue for the meals but they wouldn't come and help. We had a few arguments with them. I said, "All we need you for is an hour. Maybe give us an hour washing up or an hour to help us put up some parcels . . ." but the commitment wasn't there.  
[JH]

About two dozen women worked in the Dawdon group for the first few weeks of the strike. But, as it became apparent that the strike might go on for a long time, the number began to dwindle until a final core of about twelve members remained,

People dropped out when they thought it was going to be longer. [NS]

Of the twelve, three were wives of men who were on the Lodge Committee but,

The Secretary of the union's wife never once came. The Chairman's wife never once came. [NS]<sup>4</sup>

The activists insisted they had put up posters asking women to come forward and spread the word around the village that help in the kitchens, where 300-400 meals were served each session, was always welcome. They were very disappointed with the response,

The vast majority of women would come for the meal but they weren't willing to do anything. When you asked them they said, "Oh, I don't want to be involved." [FD]

The refusers did not necessarily have small children or other dependants they could not leave. They were no busier than the women who took on support group work,

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1. My emphasis.

2. Tony Benn, "Keeping Our Heads Down Will Mean a Hung Parliament" in *Labour Herald* 27 September 1985 pp.8-9.

3. See also Chapter 4.

4. That might be attributable to the pressure, even in normal times, on wives of Lodge officials. This was mostly caused by Lodge members in need of help calling at the house. During the strike there was a stream of callers.  
[MS]

Three-quarters of our group had young children. They used to bring them with them to the kitchen. [NS]<sup>1</sup>

Joan Guy pointed out that some women claimed they would not work in the kitchen in case others believed they were filching food for themselves.<sup>2</sup> Joan lost friends

with working in the kitchen and my husband being a union man. They always thought we got paid while we were on strike. And also thought our cupboards and fridges were always full because I worked in the kitchen. But they didn't understand I was only getting £12 a week as well. [JG]

Nancy Shaw challenged a man said to be spreading rumours that support group women were helping themselves to kitchen food. She demanded he should come to examine her fridge and cupboards at home. He declined. Rumours abounded and were insidious. It was impossible to pin down who had said what to whom,

You could not get down to the name. There were no direct accusations. [FD]

Such rumours added stress to the already overburdened few who ran the Dawdon group.

Seaham Support Group catered for over 200 families. Again, twelve women did all the work. Regular appeals were made, unsuccessfully, for more volunteers.

When a couple of girls were off for various reasons, I got on the stage and I said, "Please, will the women help?" Many of them had no worries, no ties. But they didn't help. They didn't want to. [MN]

On average, only nine women, mostly wives of miners or ex-miners worked in the Murton kitchen. On each of the two days the kitchen was open more than 200 meals were served. Pam Blanchard did much of the fundraising herself. She raised money to keep the kitchen running by writing letters to all organisations in Murton asking for help. She called on all the shopkeepers to collect donations. She received any money the pickets could raise and she occasionally approached the miners' Lodge for help. [PB]

Even in Easington, headquarters of the SEAM Campaign, where there were almost 1,000 miners' wives, the largest number of women employed in fundraising and cooking meals was thirty. That was at Christmas when extra help was needed to cater for throngs of strikers and families who came for the festive meal. On a regular basis, only fifteen women tackled most of the chores. Heather Wood remarked that the support group had to beg for extra help at Christmas from previously uninvolved women.<sup>3</sup> The kitchen workers were, admittedly, organised into a team from the beginning, but there were many ancillary jobs needing to be done and no woman who offered help was turned away. [HW]

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1. This, at least, places a question mark over assertions that role-swapping, that is men taking on domestic roles, was widespread. See also Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community* (1986) pp.98-99.
  2. Easington kitchens suffered from similar rumours. HW
  3. Conversation with Heather Wood, 11 Dec. 1989.

### 3. NON-MINING AREAS : SELF-HELP GROUPS

Burnhope, Leadgate, South Moor and Great Lumley set up exclusively mining families' self-help organisations. It might be supposed that peer pressure would ensure that all recipients of hardship relief would take on responsibility for the success of their ventures. That could never be taken for granted.

In Burnhope,

75% of the village was against us. [LR]

Possibly because of the hostility of neighbours, the group became closely knit. Certainly the organiser, Lily Ross, was determined that all miners' families should participate in the affairs of the group, even if, at best, that meant a once-a-week attendance at a meeting,

There was none of this business of coming in, getting your parcel and bugging off home. [LR]

Those who came had to listen to reports from the secretary and treasurer on what was happening and what needed to be done. Lily, a seasoned organiser, admitted though that she did much of the fundraising outside the coalfield by writing letters to potential supporters. She also attended the Durham Area Support Groups' meeting<sup>1</sup> to claim Burnhope's share of food vouchers,<sup>2</sup> and generally acted as co-ordinator for Burnhope, taking on an enormous amount of the work herself.

Half a dozen men, out of 70 families, ran the Leadgate Group. Three women,<sup>3</sup> all miners' wives, did most of the work in the kitchen.<sup>4</sup> Great efforts were made to ensure as full an attendance as possible at the weekly meeting. Transport was hired to ferry in miners to Leadgate from surrounding villages. If asked, other miners' wives would help in the kitchens or at jumble sales but they made it clear that they wanted no responsibility for organising. [DW]  
[DOW]

There were about 200 miners in South Moor, only a couple of whom were single men. Out of nearly 200 miners' wives, nine came forward to form the support group. They tried to get other miners' wives to help,

We even went from house to house. We couldn't get any response . . . we kept asking . . . we had a meeting . . . only one person turned up. We threatened to stop the parcels (if they did not come). All of them came to the next (meeting). But they said they wouldn't go on the market stall in Stanley Front Street. We were making things to sell. (So) we told them they had to

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1. See Chapter 3.
  2. Donated by the Northern Region Trade Unions.
  3. Dorothy Wray, Mary Clarke and Angela Hall.
  4. Though David Wray and Alan Hall peeled vegetables, washed the pots and pans and "did anything which needed to be done". [DoW]

bake a cake (for sale) on the market stall. We did get some cakes. Raffle tickets! That lasted about a fortnight and then they said they didn't want any more. They didn't want to be seen selling things on the market stall. They didn't want to be seen shaking a tin. They just wanted to collect the parcel and give nothing. The biggest majority of them were like that. I think they were embarrassed. But if they'd baked a cake (and we'd given them flour etc.) we could have got 50p for it. But nobody was prepared to help in any way - to help us - well, to help themselves really. One or two did help with the meals (in the school holidays) . . . but one man said (to women on the stall), "I wouldn't let my wife stand here. Your husband ought to be ashamed of himself, letting you stand here shaking a tin." And yet he was coming for a parcel the next day! [SMSG]

South Moor Support Group women were unsure whether they would be quite so willing to repeat their hardship relief work in any future dispute. They felt that other people had been lazy and that they themselves had been used as "mugs". They said if there were a "next time" they would stop the parcels if people did not help. They would be much harder in their approach. [SMSG] But, if they had been harder during the strike, had denied food to those unwilling to help, that might have given some miners an excuse to return to work.

Great Lumley Group, which catered for 85 miners' families, encountered difficulties when they sought to bring together families living in Lumley village with those living in part of Fencehouses. From the beginning, some of the latter were not only hostile to the strike but hostile to the idea that a self-help group be set up at all. A Fencehouses woman challenged the convenors of the first meeting,

Who the hell do you think you are to set up a support group? And how do we know you're not fiddling the money? [MS]

It was pointed out to the speaker that starting off on that basis was not calculated to engender mutual trust. [MS] Later, it was discovered that the challenger, from a small, tightly knit community, was a close neighbour of a leading anti-strike activist, the North Eastern 'Silver Birch',<sup>1</sup> who bent all his efforts to engineering a return to work. He tried constantly to undermine the work of the support group. Other Fencehouses people who attended the first meetings,

. . . were hostile to the idea of a support group. They didn't support the strike. Therefore, they saw us as simply prolonging it by helping out. And they would put around all kinds of rumours. They were very much a minority. They were hostile in the extreme. But it only takes one or two. [MS]

One rumour had it that the group would make a £3 charge for each food parcel. Another implied that money was being embezzled from the funds. It was difficult for the group to quash the rumours. It was necessary to assure families, individually, that no payment was expected.

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1. The miner from Fencehouses copied the alias of the original 'Silver Birch' who was Chris Butcher, a 33 year old blacksmith employed at Bevercotes Colliery in Nottinghamshire who toured the mining areas gathering together miners prepared to break the strike.

At each group meeting the treasurer, Dorothy Hunt, gave meticulous, detailed accounts of all cash, cheques and postal orders received,

But if £25 is given to you, cash in hand, and you put it in the bank, how do you actually prove it wasn't £50? [MS]

There was a good attendance at the meetings because people had to come to get their food parcels. If they did not, their parcels were opened up and the contents shared out. But before they could collect any food they were told,

how the money stood, where the cheques were coming from, so that they couldn't say they were not informed about what was going on. [MS]

All who attended were pressed to do something to contribute to the fundraising. Those who had relatives or friends working in factories were asked to explore the possibilities of factory collections. Those who had connections with organisations such as working men's clubs were asked to approach them for help. And members were encouraged to hold jumble sales and socials.

Both in the pit areas and in more distant locations served by groups exclusively made up of miners and wives, families were not necessarily self-activating. Many needed constant stimulation from stronger, and often more politically motivated, personalities if they were to make even the most token contribution to the maintenance of their own hardship relief.

#### **4. NON MINING AREAS : MIXED GROUPS**

Other groups, serving travelling miners, were mostly made up of people who had no previous connection with the mining industry. These mixed groups were diffident about making demands on strikers or their families. How could they insist that those who accepted parcels or meals had a duty to volunteer their help? Miners' families had not asked them to show solidarity or, as was often the perception, give them charity. Non-miner group members, acutely aware that they were not on the sharp end of the struggle in terms of actual hardship, were usually much less critical than active miners, of those who seemed to do little or nothing to help themselves.

Kath Mattheys fully appreciated the reluctance of Chester-le-Street miners' families to set up a kitchen,

There was too much stigma attached to it. [KM]<sup>1</sup>

She believed their reluctance was born of embarrassment,

When there are other people about you who are working,<sup>2</sup> and their kids are not going without, you don't feel you want to shout from the rooftops, "I've got nothing. I'm going to the kitchen for me dinner. [KM]

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1. See also Tony Parker, op. cit. p.154.

2. This applied particularly inland where there might be "only one miner's family in a street." [BF]

Probably because Ada Hepple was well acquainted with most families in Coxhoe village, she felt no qualms about making criticisms of those who did little to help. Out of 37 miner's wives, only 8 joined the support group. A few others would pack food parcels,

... if we asked them each week. We had to push them ... in fact, some of the miners wouldn't even come and collect the parcels. They thought we should deliver them to the door, till we made a rule that if they didn't come they just wouldn't get. If they were fit and able, they weren't on the picket lines, they weren't doing anything else, it was their duty to come and collect.  
[AH]

Coxhoe miners and wives never actually refused to help when they were asked. But when the workers gathered to do the jobs, some, who had promised to help, just did not put in an appearance. The most that could be expected was they might sell tickets for, and support, fundraising socials. [AH] Ada's husband, Seymour, was even more scathing of those who did nothing to help themselves.

It appeared it was only the non-miners, those who weren't connected with mining at all, that were doing any work in the village and the miners just weren't interested. As long as they were getting looked after they just weren't interested in doing the graft behind it. There used to be her (Ada) and Olga (Smart) and Alec (Smart). They used to come in here some nights and they were absolutely jiggered. And all the miners had been sat at home all day in front of the telly, feet up, and these'd been out flogging away all day. [SH]

In Bowburn, out of more than 80 mining families, approximately 20 people, miners and wives, were prepared to pack food into parcels at the Community Centre and some helped to deliver them. The women among them also attended a coffee morning there every Tuesday. Though it was not a massive fund raiser, the get-together boosted morale. Those miners and wives who helped were those more keen on the strike than others and those more tuned to mutual support. Many of the rest considered the efforts of the support group as an exercise in charity. [MSy]

In the Sherburn area, mining families in Ludworth and West Rainton formed close-knit support groups.<sup>1</sup> There were 20 miners in West Rainton and nearly all, together with their wives, parents and children, helped the support group effort. [RM] Ron Morrissey attributed that to the virtual class homogeneity of those small villages. The "strong groups of wives" put on kitchen meals five days a week, and organised coffee mornings and bingo sessions. West Rainton Miners and Wives Group raised £2,544 and Ludworth Miners and Wives Group raised £1,325, all of which was paid into the central City of Durham Support Group.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, in North Durham, Ouston Group members picked their way delicately through the unpredictable mood-swings of families to whom they delivered parcels. Sometimes

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1. In Sherburn the support group consisted entirely of men, mostly single miners.

2. See Appendix 9.

they had a good reception and were invited in for a cup of tea. At other times, there was ill-concealed irritation which bordered on hostility when the quick, weekly visit was made. Tony Parker attributed this to fear of losing pensions among older miners and the fact that increasing family problems caused tensions which were almost palpable when people answered the door to those bringing food. Out of 15 families, only one miner helped the group. He believed that if non-NUM people were prepared to raise money for him he ought to do his share of the work. There were no offers of help from any miners' wives. [TP]

The wife of a miner, Maureen Potts, was the only woman involved on a daily basis in her Urpeth Labour Party Support Group. Families accepted parcels, sometimes ungraciously.

In the beginning we delivered the parcel. We would take it to the door. And some of them weren't pleased - they didn't have a kind word for you. "Oh, give us it!" and they would just walk in (to the house). That was all you got off them. I think they felt it was us to blame for the strike and yet it was us who were supplying them with a parcel. [MP]

The group called a meeting to ask for practical help. Out of 23 families, only 4 individuals turned up. Lack of money forced a reduction in the frequency of parcels. The group cancelled deliveries and insisted that parcels must be collected by the families. Nearly always it was the men who collected them. Their wives wanted nothing to do with the organisation. The men themselves were uninterested in the work of the group. When they came for the food,

... they wouldn't sit down and talk about the strike. There were very few militant around here. They just wanted to go back to work. [MP]

Maureen's husband, Keith, a union activist, refused to help his wife distribute parcels because,

... it would madden him to know that (other) miners would come there, get a parcel, and never do anything at all for the strike and for the cause. [MP]

Though Maureen acknowledged the occasional help of two other miners' wives, Ruth Barton and Audrey Hodgson, it was apparent that she did many of the jobs herself,

To be honest, I used to run all over. If there were support group meetings on in Durham, at Chester ... I was the only one who ever went. And people used to say, "Surely there's somebody else?" And I used to say, "There isn't, there's just me." [MP]

When County Councillor Derek Bates succeeded in having the Roseberry Comprehensive School opened to serve meals during the Summer holidays, there were only six or seven miners' wives available as helpers. The 90 miners living in Pelton, Pelton Fell, Urpeth, Ouston and Grange Villa were expected to bring their families for the meals and were asked to make the venture a success but,

... they just didn't get involved. They wouldn't even come for the dinners. (Even) some of the single lads wouldn't come. It was charity and they weren't going to accept charity. We thought they were eating somewhere else. But they never confided in us. [MP]



Another miner's wife, Elspeth Frostwick, who belonged to the mixed group in Chester-le-Street, voiced her criticism of those who,

... were prepared to sit at home and wait for you. [EF]

That state of affairs continued for several weeks until the numbers of miners families grew to 95. At that point, the group made it clear that families could no longer expect deliveries. One miner began to collect money on the streets with the group and a hard core of miners showed that they were willing to sort out the food parcels, carry food upstairs into the Labour Club<sup>1</sup> and help in the distribution at a weekly meeting. The miners' wives never came, possibly because they were never asked. [KM]

There were only five core members in Sacriston Women's Support Group, led by Anna Phelps, granddaughter of a miner but who was considered to be "an outsider",<sup>2</sup>

There were five women who cooked, who fed the kids, who did the food parcels, who eventually did the shopping, who raised the money. There were very few supportive women because the men didn't want the women to do it. [AP]

A few men were prepared to allow their wives to babysit for support group members because that was an acceptable woman's role and a wife would still be in the house when her husband came home. However, the babysitting service, while no liberating experience for the handful of women who did it, was invaluable since it allowed the five support group women time to set about their task of providing food for 300 miners and their families. [AP]

When City of Durham CLP Support Group began organising a parcel service, only one miner, Bob Innerd and his wife, Dorothy, volunteered their help immediately. They became part of the packing team organised by John Dent, an ex-lorry driver who is a Labour Party and ILP member. Later, they were joined by miner/councillor Colin McCormick from Bowburn.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, nine sub-groups of miners, or miners and wives, in Ludworth, West Rainton, Sherburn, Bowburn, Coxhoe, Gilesgate, Bearpark, Esh Winning and Belmont were set up, all raising money which was channelled into the central group.<sup>4</sup>

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1. The social and political meeting place for members of North Durham Constituency Labour Party. It is situated in the old railway station building at Chester-le-Street.
  2. Her father had been brought up in Craghead and now lived in Durham City. Anna had lived in the south of England. Her attitudes were different from those of Sacriston women. So was her accent which was thought to be middle class. Her clothes were casual and she was universally known as "the hippy". See also Chapter 3.
  3. See Chapter 5.
  4. See Appendix 9. Note that money raised by Bowburn and Esh Winning Miners and Wives Support Groups was included in the figures for their respective Labour Party branches.

## 5. PROBLEMS FOR NON-MINERS IN SUPPORT GROUPS

Overall, non-miners in support groups were mostly circumspect in their judgements of the passive majority. Undoubtedly, all on strike suffered some privation, some upheaval in their family lives. How could anyone not on strike appreciate the year-long loss of wages, family friction, stress, and accumulating debt that must be a source of worry for months and perhaps years ahead? Neil Clyde felt guilty that he was drawing a wage while those he tried to help were suffering destitution. [NC] Kath Mattheys empathised with those who were embarrassed to ask for help. [KM] When striking families excluded a woman from their group because her husband had gone back to work, John Ashby,<sup>1</sup> argued at first that she should still be made welcome. He backed down when he was told that Gilesgate Miners' Support Group would disintegrate if the woman were allowed to attend. [DI] And when miners insisted that those who crossed the picket line should no longer receive parcels, non-miners made doubly and trebly sure that this or that man really had returned to work before his name was crossed off the parcel list.

One case, which highlighted the sometimes invidious position of non-miner support group members, caught between the hard judgement of active miners and their own, softer judgement, occurred in the Durham City Group in August 1984. Sherburn miners said that one man who was receiving food parcels had made repeated attempts to cross the picket line at Dawdon with a police escort. They insisted his parcel be stopped. Shortly afterwards a Labour Councillor, related to the man, phoned a support group worker<sup>2</sup> to demand that the parcel be restored. He said the man had almost had a heart attack when his parcel was not delivered. And, he added, that there would be no repetition of his trying to cross the picket line. If the parcel were not restored the Councillor would stop paying his levy<sup>3</sup> to the Labour Party fund for the miners. On hearing that there would be no more attempted scabbing,

I said, in that case, I would argue with the Sherburn miners that the parcel be restored.<sup>4</sup>

It was not so easy. The Sherburn miners categorically refused to handle the parcel and threatened that if the Labour Party delivered it they would withdraw all co-operation from the support group. The man in question had voted against a strike and, although he had been assured by the Lodge Secretary that he was mistaken, was convinced he would lose his pension if he did not return to work. He had also been in touch with "Silver Birch",<sup>5</sup> the

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1. A senior officer in the Durham County Council Planning Department, a member of Gilesgate and Pelaw Branch of the Labour Party who regularly delivered parcels to miners' families during the strike.
  2. Me.
  3. This was voluntary. The suggested amount from each Labour Party member was 50 pence per week. Some gave more, some gave less and some gave nothing, at least through this mechanism.
  4. My diary, Monday 27 August 1984.
  5. The information was given to me by Derek Pickering, the man's relative.

Nottinghamshire leader of the Back-to-Work movement. Active miners could not forgive a persistent would-be 'scab'. The councillor was caught up in his family's problem and, despite the circumstances, seemed surprised and angry that his in-law had been refused a parcel. The support group tried to reconcile all parties. In the end a compromise was agreed. A parcel would be made available for the miner to collect himself. Eventually, as Sherburn miners had predicted, the man managed at last to achieve his goal by crossing the picket line at Dawdon.

No-one expected coordination of hardship relief always to run smoothly but, had there indeed been an army of women, or an army of women and men, the burden on the few, who took on the bulk of the work and tried to resolve increasingly difficult problems, would have been eased. In reality, not only were workers thin on the ground but those who were active were sometimes judged as if they were in charge of well-funded statutory agencies instead of small ad hoc organisations. For instance, when a miner's wife from New Brancepeth phoned Durham City Support Group to ask for a parcel and was told New Brancepeth had decided to organise independently,<sup>1</sup> she declared that she would insist that they join Durham so that she could receive a regular parcel. She was informed that each area was expected to raise money and was urged to join the support group. She replied bluntly that she had no intention of doing anything to help.<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, a miner who contacted Durham City Support Group for a parcel became angry when he was referred to Spennymoor Trades Council, his local support group.

I pointed out that we were all volunteers in the relief groups and his help would be welcome if he cared to give it. "Not likely," he said, "I'm not prepared to get involved in any shape or form. I didn't want to come out on strike anyway. And I think it's disgraceful that some people should be getting food parcels and others none." On further questioning him I discovered that he had received food parcels from the (Spennymoor) Trades Council.<sup>3</sup>

Often those who were passive did not appreciate that groups managed on a shoestring and mostly stumbled their way through the twelve harsh months.

## **D. NON-PARTICIPANT MINERS AND WIVES**

Those miners' families who did involve themselves wholeheartedly, either in self-help organisations or mixed support groups were inclined to regard their passive workmates and neighbours as helpless, useless or lazy, though in all areas great compassion was shown to single men and to families in particular hardship. To be able-bodied and deliberately idle caused irritation to those who felt that a better job could be made of hardship relief, if only more people

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1. See Chapter 4.

2. My diary, Tuesday 19 June 1984.

3. My diary, Thursday 28 June 1984.

were prepared to take on the work. Too, the general attitude amongst active miners' families was that whether or not people agreed with coming out on strike, and whether or not people argued that there ought to have been a union-wide ballot before strike action was taken, once the dispute had begun, all should unite in the common cause of beating back the Coal Board and the government. Maureen Potts and those who, like her, believed that miners had a duty to contribute time to picketing or helping the groups, gave hard verdicts on those who would do little to help themselves and nothing to help others.

So far, a whole spectrum of explanations has been advanced to account for the passivity of the majority of miners' families. Embarrassment, opposition to coming out on strike, family problems, lack of commitment and even laziness have all been offered as reasons why so many refused or avoided involvement in the work of hardship relief. It has been claimed, too, that some miners would not allow their wives to participate. One activist believed that, occasionally, there may have been a lack of confidence in some who wanted to help but felt overwhelmed by stronger personalities already in the support group. [BJ] And, of course, account must be taken of the fact that some miners' wives were out at work themselves and may have been too overburdened to take on any more jobs. However, there were many women still at home as well as men who did not picket and therefore ubiquitous claims that "miners' families are proud" [MN] [KM] [NC] seem to sit uneasily with accounts that a majority in every area was happy to accept anything and everything in the way of food and services without, apparently, ever feeling any overwhelming urge to respond to pleas for help. This issue of pride in miners' families was constantly reiterated during interviews to explain why some hated going to feeding centres (especially those away from the coast) or why some were ungracious or even hostile when food parcels were offered. [TP] [MP] It has to be emphasised here that miners and wives in support groups also were proud, also felt embarrassment, also had family problems and also were lacking in confidence at the start of the strike. Lily Ross underlined the irritation of many of them when she enquired, scathingly, of those who believed some people were better suited than others to 'begging',

Do they think *we* were born with collecting tins growing out of the bottom of our arms? [LR]

But, when such large numbers of families did not participate in any collective work, individual or idiosyncratic explanations seem inadequate. They cannot fully account for the differences between the active and the passive. Certainly, it can be argued that, towards the end of the strike, demoralisation contributed to some inactivity. But that does not explain why, from the beginning, so few people volunteered to help in any capacity.

## E. SOURCES OF HELP

### 1. THE ROLE OF KINSHIP

Raphael Samuel's emphasis on the role that kinship played in the strike might add to our understanding of passivity among mining families,

It (relief) was improvised in the private rather than in the public sphere, and so received none of the attention given to soup kitchens and the village action committees. But in many cases, to judge by individual accounts, it was Mums and Dads and in-laws who kept a family afloat, who provided treats and presents for grandchildren and brought food to the family table and fuel to the boiler and the fire (one reason why the NCB cut down on old people's fuel allowances seems to have been because so much of it was getting back to strikers' families).<sup>1</sup>

Mary Stratford stressed that inter-generational help in the Durham coalfield was crucial to survival for many. [MS]<sup>2</sup> Some parents and grandparents felt that what they gave to their children or grandchildren represented their contribution not only to their kin but to 'the struggle'. [MS] Members of the family not employed in the mining industry were expected to help if they could. Wayne Pick, son of a striking miner from Boldon Colliery, explained that working children clubbed together to pay electricity bills and provide food. Wayne's brother also helped his in-laws. A voluntary family levy seemed to be in operation.<sup>3</sup> Those who did not help or who shunned relatives on strike were regarded as unusual if not unnatural.

Two cases cited involved 'family' who also happened to be members of the police force. Lily Ross's brother, a policeman, offered no help to the family and, in putting his job before what were perceived as his family obligations, was disowned by his sister. So devastated was she by what she saw as her brother's betrayal that she declared if she were lying dead and her family allowed her brother into the house she would come back and haunt them! [LR] A policeman's wife, sister to a miner's wife, was prevented by her husband from giving help during the strike. The miner's wife was horrified that a wedge was being driven between them. Fortunately help came from other members of the family.<sup>4</sup> Judging by accounts from Durham, backsliders (in terms of perceived family obligations) were few and, indeed, were held up as examples of most peculiar behaviour.

In more politically sophisticated echelons of society it might be considered that people who expected policemen to behave differently towards relatives on strike from the way they have behaved traditionally towards strikers in general, must be exceptionally naive. The truth is that

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1. R. Samuel, *op. cit.* p.9.

2. See also Tony Parker, *op. cit.* p.11, p.27, p.118.

3. Conversation with Wayne Pick 10 January 1990.

4. Told to me in confidence.

police who were friends, or who were members of strikers' families, were expected to be more humane or to behave differently from "the animals", [FA] those 'outsiders' who besieged Easington<sup>1</sup>, who carried out snatch arrests in Hetton [JH] [FA]<sup>2</sup>, or who knocked women to the ground when the Philadelphia Workshops were picketed.<sup>3</sup> The realisation that police who were 'family' had higher priorities than family, hurt or angered or even embittered those whose hunger and suffering could be ignored and neglected by relatives for a whole year.

Dowse and Hughes' discussion of conflicting role demands and the problems of resolving a dissonant situation of value conflict might illuminate the problem faced by police who were related to strikers. Their hypothetical example was drawn from a developing society where the values of the primary agent of socialisation, the family, were non congruent with the values embedded in the role of the bureaucrat.<sup>4</sup> Although the contexts differ and although in modern developed countries the function of the police as an organ of the state may be better understood, in pit areas in Durham the primacy of the family and family obligations was still strong enough to prompt those interviewed to underline that they considered a wrong choice between sets of obligations had been made. However, those who made the choice may have been focussing their attention on their particular identities as policemen, rather than as relatives. The job and its requirements, however painful to family, took precedence, as

Other identities are forgotten for the duration of this particular act,<sup>5</sup>  
presumably to be adopted again, in the case of police during the strike, when the crisis came to an end.

However, police were not the only people who estranged themselves from strikers' families. Some strikers expected and received more regular help from one relative than another. This usually had little to do with the comparative wealth of relatives. It seemed to depend more on whether or not the relative sympathised with the strike. Some relatives believed (as many of the general public believed) that, if a man had a job, he should go back to work and be responsible for feeding his own family. It was an opinion that might not always be expressed openly but strikers rapidly realised who was with them and who was not.

Essentially, and unsurprisingly, miners' families focused primarily on their own survival. They had to find enough to eat, fuel to warm the home and for cooking. They had to try to fend off creditors and cope with all their other problems caused by lack of money. Samuel drew

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1. See Keith Patterson & Huw Beynon, Easington August '84 (circa 1985).
  2. See Chapter 3.
  3. See Chapter 3.
  4. Robert E. Dowse & John A. Hughes, Political Sociology (1972) pp.184-185.
  5. Peter L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology (1966) p.126.

attention to the pastoral role of the NUM<sup>1</sup> and indeed it was to the union that families had turned first for material help. To be fair, the NUM, hoping for a quick victory,<sup>2</sup> had never contemplated providing the material assistance required for so many families over such a long period. [MS] [HW] [BE] Of necessity, then, people had to cast around for help from any and all quarters.

## 2. DEPENDENCE ON SUPPORT GROUPS

Roughly speaking, in terms of their dependence on support groups, Durham miners' families seemed to fall into three main categories. There was a small minority who did not accept anything from support groups during the strike. Since they had to eat something, somewhere, it was assumed that they had savings or were 'moonlighting' or, in one way or another, their families were supplying their needs. There were families receiving little or nothing through kinship ties, who had no savings and no access to the 'black economy'. For them, the support group kitchens, cafes, restaurants and food parcel operations were major lifelines. And there were families whose relatives provided some regular help on a private basis. The combination of family help and access to feeding centres or the provision of food parcels for this group enabled them to survive better than they had expected. Since most families did not broadcast exact details of help received from kin, it is impossible at this stage to establish the comparative sizes of the second and third groups. And only crude percentages<sup>3</sup> are available at present as an indication of those who strictly avoided asking for any kind of help outside the family.

It was unremarkable that those who engaged for twelve months in collective activity in kitchens, packing parcels, raising funds, embarking on money-raising speaking tours or doing other jobs ancillary to hardship relief, should become fully committed to the collective principle which they put into operation on a daily basis. It was unremarkable that the trade union and political initiators and activists in support groups who worked excessively long hours at their tasks, should regard their hardship relief schemes as central to the sustenance and prolongation of the struggle. It was also unremarkable that they sought to persuade more miners' families into active involvement with those schemes and were disappointed and sometimes bewildered by the poor response. However, if access to food provided by collective activity was only *one* of the means whereby some families sought survival, it is possible that there was a disjunction between the perceptions of at least some passive families and the perceptions of activists on the centrality of the role of support groups.

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1. R. Samuel, *op. cit.* pp.8-9.

2. See Chapter 3.

3. See Chapter 1.

On the other hand, it is also possible that the very success of the support groups in providing groceries or hot meals, contributed to the passivity of the majority. One unchallenged fact throughout the strike was that most support groups in the coalfield did provide that food on a very regular basis. Most families could rely on receiving some food from support groups every week. Also, as the strike progressed and some support groups became better organised and more sophisticated in buying, borrowing and money raising techniques, a few were able to provide more generous services. The argument here is that the regularity of provision was eventually taken for granted by the families. If somebody, somewhere, was prepared to take the lead in trying to relieve hardship and was totally committed to the work, many people seem to have been content to sit back and let them get on with it. As Michels pointed out, in a different context,

... the majority is really delighted to find persons who will take the trouble to look after its affairs.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. THE ROLE OF THE NUM

But, to assume that a passive attitude was merely or always one of laziness might be simplistic. If Raphael Samuel was correct when he commented that the miners' union is,

... conceived of not so much as a representative body but rather as an all-purpose protector, a collective insurance against disaster,<sup>2</sup>

it might also be argued that the habit of dependency on the union caused some miners to be passive. The union's pastoral role in normal times encompasses a mass of activities and demonstrates very clearly the reliance of many men on their union representatives,

A pit delegate, in Dave Douglass' description of his work, fulfils a pastoral role : 'the first person in the line to help out - it's 24 hour day'. In addition to his basic union duties, representing members at conferences and tribunals, dealing with family benefit, invalidity benefit, concessionary coal allowances, appeals to the DHSS and in industrial injury cases, there are also a mass of personal problems for which he may be the first call : 'You're a citizens' advice bureau ... you're a marriage bureau ... If the coal's not on time for the pensioners, you deal with it, if there are repairs to a pensioner's house ... If a man wants a proper letter written, or help for his children with 'O' levels ... or unemployment benefit for a son ...',<sup>3</sup>

During the strike, the NUM's pastoral role was limited, not least because considerable resources needed to be allocated for picketing. The union did what it could to help families and spared what it could for hardship payments to members but, increasingly, miners' families turned to support groups rather than to the union for help. [HW] [MS] [PB] That is not to say that there was an exact correspondence between duties of union representatives, for instance, and duties taken on by support groups. But a wide range of pastoral activities did become part of support

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1. Robert Michels Political Parties (1962) p.88.

2. R. Samuel, op. cit. p.7.

3. R. Samuel, op. cit. pp.7-8.



groups' responsibilities, especially those inland, since travelling miners had great difficulty in reaching their Lodges on the coast. Durham City Support Group provided a direct service to deal with family benefit, threatened electricity cut-offs, advice on dealing with creditors, appeals to the DHSS and tribunal work. Nearly all support groups had to cope with personal and practical problems in families. It could be argued then, that if some miners were used to leaving problems in the capable hands of their union representatives, they quickly adjusted to the fact that support groups were prepared to act as unofficial substitutes for the union (in a pastoral capacity) since union funds and resources were under so much pressure.

Another factor that may have contributed to passivity among the majority links in with Samuel's comment that,

Local (union) leaders defend their fiefs as though they were miniature empires.<sup>1</sup>

The guarding of Lodges' power could lead to the deliberate exclusion of rank and file involvement in the day to day running of the strike. Because of this the union missed opportunities to draw into activity large numbers of men with time on their hands. South Moor Support Group were convinced that, in contrast with miners in their village, miners in coastal villages knew everything that was happening in the strike and were fully involved with the Lodge. [SMSG] But that was not necessarily the case. For example, Easington NUM Lodge Committee refused to form a strike committee with ordinary miners. After pressure the Lodge agreed to form a strike committee with the Womens' Support Group. Rank and file miners approached the support group to keep up to date with what was happening. [HW] Many of the excluded miners stayed at home and focused on their own families' survival. Their wives did the same. There were enough material worries to keep them occupied. As Critcher has pointed out,

The daily experience of poverty can be thoroughly debilitating, tending to atomise and debilitate rather than produce collective action.<sup>2</sup>

And Parker quoted a miner's wife who confessed,

... it's very hard to remember just what we did do with ourselves all day, all the time. We didn't do anything very much, I know that.<sup>3</sup>

But she also recounted that she had received food parcels and her husband went regularly for his dinner to the Welfare Hall.<sup>4</sup> She was probably typical of many passive people in Durham who retreated into their own families, concentrated on their own problems and experienced the

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1. R. Samuel, op. cit. p.17.

2. Chas. Critcher, "Sociology, cultural studies and the post-war working class" in John Clarke, Chas. Critcher & Richard Johnson (eds.) Working Class Culture (1979) p.26.

3. T. Parker, op. cit. p.99.

4. *ibid.*

dispute without either becoming conscious or concerned about the importance of collective action to sustain the strike.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

The self-presentation of support groups as viable and successful often concealed the reality of very small groups of people who took on disproportionate amounts of work while a majority of others, for a variety of reasons, decided not to offer their help. That self-presentation arose firstly from pride, secondly from a desire to secure help from strike supporters outside the coalfield, and thirdly as part of a show of defiance against the NCB and the Government who wanted to portray the strike as a failure. The result of that manipulation of the truth was that support groups in the Durham coalfield gained false impressions of the success of neighbouring groups. Durham's mythology became part of the overall mythology of the strike. Empirical evidence, at least from Durham County, does not support those accounts of the strike which inferred that most striking families had joined together to help each other.

Notions, then, of an army of women (or of women and men) working collectively to relieve hardship in the Durham coalfield were a fiction. Even without data from coalfields other than Durham and Yorkshire, at the very least, a question mark needs to be placed over claims that what was happening during 1984-85 was the emergence of a huge movement of self-activating, working class women, which could become the motor for radical socialist change.

# Chapter 3 - POLITICAL WOMEN

## A. IS THERE A LEGACY?

Debunking myths about "armies of women" does not detract in any way from support group women's prodigious and self-confident activities. On the contrary, it underlines the fact that they were exceptional women in every sense. The advent of even small numbers of previously politically-inactive working class women onto a scene where a major industrial and political battle was being fought was important, particularly since they proved themselves doughty fighters in very harsh circumstances. Mary Stratford maintains that such women have been the strength of mining communities,

There have always been strong women around. [MS]

Yet locating strong, working class Durham women, historically, is difficult since documentary references to them are scant. When Graham Turner wrote of the 19th century Durham coalfield as a

rip-roaring frontier society, where men made their living doing violence to the earth . . . where men stood their friends beer by the gallon . . . (and coal and iron owners) evict (ed) men from *their*<sup>1</sup> cottages,<sup>2</sup>

he appeared to be describing an all-male society. When Garside<sup>3</sup> wrote of living conditions in the Durham coalfield between the two World Wars, he made only six references to women, each one less than a full sentence.

There are accounts of struggles by the miners' union against coalowners throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries; of their triumphs when, through the Labour Party, they captured and held on to political power in District and County Councils and of their consolidation of parliamentary seats to the point where Durham County was established as one of the so-called "heartlands" of Labour. But the struggles and triumphs, it would appear, belong exclusively to men. Historians have shown little interest in what working class women were doing when all that panoramic history was being lived.<sup>4</sup>

From a few existing letters and reports written by North East organisers of the Women's Labour League (WLL), it is possible to piece together a picture of early 20th Century political activity

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1. My emphasis.

2. Graham Turner, "The Stronghold of Labour" in Martin Bulmer (ed.), Mining and Social Change (1978) p. 123.

3. W.R. Garside, The Durham Miners 1919-1960 (1971).

4. See Richard Johnson "Culture and the historians" in Clarke, J., Critcher, C. & Johnson, R. (eds.), Working Class Culture - Studies in Labour History and Theory (1979) p. 52. See also Bea Campbell, "Proletarian Patriarchs and the Real Radicals" in Seddon, V., The Cutting Edge - Women and the Pit Strike (1986) p. 253.

aimed at recruiting working class women to the cause of Labour representation. The League was founded in 1906 with the objectives of

working for independent Labour representation in connection with the Labour Party; to obtain direct Labour representation of women in Parliament and on local bodies and to secure full rights of citizenship for all men and women.<sup>1</sup>

But the only substantial body of documentation, detailing working class women's organised political activities for Labour in Durham County, is the Minutes Books of Durham Labour Women's Advisory Council (DWAC), an umbrella organisation for all Labour Party Women's Sections.<sup>2</sup> The available records of DWAC meetings and conferences span the years from 1920 to 1967<sup>3</sup>. Women living in pit villages were targeted as potential recruits by the North East WLL from 1906 to 1918 and by DWAC after 1918.

Were the 'exceptional' women of support groups in the 1984-85 strike legatees of the politics practised by the WLL and the DWAC? Were support group women's 'prodigious, self-confident activities' the culmination of decades of intense political work in Durham County by the WLL and Women's Sections of the Labour Party organised in DWAC? Was the political development of support group women, in that year of struggle, informed by the political attitudes of the thousands of Labour Women of the past who regularly marched through Durham City on their own Gala Day, year after year from 1923? Were WLL and DWAC members 'strong women'? Can any political continuity be detected between their attitudes and practices and those of support group women?

There is no intention here of attempting to compare the women in terms of their organisation since WLL and DWAC were established as long-term political structures, while support groups were temporary collectives, set up in response to a crisis. Each organisation, too, was

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1. Averil Sanderson-Furniss, "Citizenship of Women" in Tracey, Herbert, *The Book of the Labour Party : Its History, Growth and Leaders* (1925) Vol.2 p. 248. Mary Fenton Macpherson, a linguist who translated at Labour movement conferences and wrote *Women's Corner* in *Railway Review* (organ of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants) pioneered the establishment of the WLL which was conceived as a sister organisation to the Labour Representation Committee. See Chris Collette, *For Labour and For Women* (1989) pp. 27-39 for an account of the struggle to establish the WLL; organisational and functional problems of existing Labour movement structures which militated against the involvement of women and the uneasy compromise reached between the WLL and the Labour Party. Note also that the original objective of the WLL was limited to working with the Labour Party for independent Labour representation and that the additional clause, "to obtain direct representation of women in parliament and on local bodies" was an amendment made at the first WLL Conference at Leicester in 1906, moved by Isabella Ford, member of the National Administrative Council of the ILP.
  2. Women's Sections were set up as part of the reorganisation of the Labour Party in 1918 when individual membership of the Party was established. Before that time the Party was a federation of its affiliated organisations - individual trade unions, the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party (ILP). The ILP was the only body which had been organised in local branches throughout the country and the only means by which men and women could be politically active in their own localities under Labour Party auspices. See also C.R. Attlee, *The Labour Party in Perspective* (1937) p.43.
  3. In 1979 DWAC was succeeded by Constituency based Women's organisations. Though DWAC had no place within the structures of the Labour Party after that date, it continued to meet regularly until the early 1980s. Source : Brenda Whittaker, Assistant Regional Organiser, Northern Region of the Labour Party, August 1990.

historically specific though, to a certain extent, Women's Sections built on the old WLL branches. The important fact is that, in Durham, women from WLL, DWAC and women's support groups in the 1984-85 strike (albeit at different times) lived and became politically active in an overwhelmingly proletarian and male-dominated area. Many were miners' wives or members of mining families with knowledge and experience of the particular social relations of the coalfield which shaped and dominated their lives.

## B. POLITICAL SOCIALISATION

Political socialisation is generally held to begin long before individuals reach adulthood. And the influence of the family in this process,

... remain(s) the core theoretical position of liberal science.<sup>1</sup>

Butler and Stokes quoted W.S. Gilbert - that everyone was born, "either a little Liberal or a little Conservative"<sup>2</sup> without arguing an intergenerational determinism. They recognised that the intergenerational link was complex<sup>3</sup> but concluded that children were very likely to share their parents' political preferences.<sup>4</sup> Dowse and Hughes<sup>5</sup>, Richard Rose<sup>6</sup> and P. Dunleavy<sup>7</sup> all recognised the same positive, if declining, family influence. Rose pointed out that,

Less than half the support for the Conservative and Labour Parties is, as it were, delivered by the obstetrician.<sup>8</sup>

However, there are marked indications that Labour support is strong in strong working class communities. Dowse and Hughes have said that, in terms of voting, a working class Conservative is rarer in strong working class communities than in more socially heterogeneous communities.<sup>9</sup> Rose concurs,

... individuals who live among people of a similar social class are subject to more consistent pressures to vote for their class.<sup>10</sup>

And Dunleavy, despite reservations about interpretation of data relating to 'class environment' factors, has said that,

... *the class composition of an area* continues to provide a very reasonable guide as to how that constituency's aggregate vote will split up between the

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1. P. Dunleavy "The End of Class Politics?" in A. Cochrane & J. Anderson (eds.), Politics in Transition (1989) p. 187.
  2. David Butler and David Stokes, Political Change in Britain (1971) p. 66.
  3. D. Butler & D. Stokes, op. cit., p. 67.
  4. D. Butler & D. Stokes, op. cit., p. 68.
  5. Robert E. Dowse and John A. Hughes, Political Sociology, (1972) p. 186.
  6. Richard Rose, Politics in England (1980) p. 144.
  7. P. Dunleavy, op. cit. p. 187.
  8. R. Rose, op. cit. p.145.
  9. R.E. Dowse & J.A. Hughes, op. cit. p. 199.
  10. R. Rose, op. cit. p. 163.

parties.<sup>1</sup>

But if survey evidence confirms what seems obvious in Durham - a link between the existence of massively working class communities and electoral support for Labour - it is confined to occasional voting for local or national representatives, and that says nothing about tendencies towards political activism.

In general, men are more active in politics than women. Though studies examining political interest have shown only marginal differences between boys and girls<sup>2</sup>, Butler and Stokes reported that 60% of *women*<sup>3</sup> respondents were not much interested in politics as against 33% of men.<sup>4</sup> It was not a surprising result given women's experiences of 'powerlessness' which Dowse and Hughes claim may have more influence on them than early political socialisation.<sup>5</sup> Rose points out that women have to struggle hard to have political careers.<sup>6</sup> In patriarchal societies it is axiomatic that women have great difficulty in becoming politically active. There are so few women in national politics that there are few role models for girls (let alone working class girls) who evince an interest in political issues and aspire to careers in politics at the highest level.

Yet, if participation at national level is largely denied to women, that does not necessarily preclude their becoming politically active in their own communities. And if there are role models in the shape of mothers and grandmothers who succeeded in setting up organisations and who were effective in attaining their own political objectives, women there might be disposed towards some political activism. Butler and Stokes noted a growing awareness among daughters (over the years since women became enfranchised) of a partisan attitude in their mothers.<sup>7</sup> They concluded that,

In view of the mother's importance in defining for her daughters the woman's role, this trend has evident relevance to the deepening political involvement of women as the century advanced.<sup>8</sup>

A brief exploration of how Durham Labour women of the past created political space for themselves and, more importantly, how they used that space together with an exploration of the difficulties faced by women in the 1984-85 miners' strike, when they sought to establish support

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1. P. Dunleavy, op. cit. p. 188.

2. See R.E. Dowse & J.A. Hughes, op. cit. p. 193. See also R. Rose, op. cit. p. 148.

3. My emphasis.

4. D. Butler & D. Stokes, op. cit. p. 50.

5. R.E. Dowse & J.A. Hughes, op. cit. p. 193.

6. R. Rose, op. cit. p. 151.

7. D. Butler & D. Stokes, op. cit. p. 73.

8. *ibid.*

groups, and of the political attitudes and practices they developed, should reveal whether or not there was any political continuity. And, crucially, such explorations might expose any continuity in the political attitudes and practices of Labour movement men towards women who sought to become politically active.

## C. WOMEN'S LABOUR LEAGUE (WLL)

### 1. DIFFICULTIES OF RECRUITMENT

Letters from women organisers to the National Executive of the WLL in 1908 provide evidence of how difficult it was to found branches for women in North East mining areas. Women in mining families had to adjust their lives to fit in with the unsocial hours worked by their men. They had to provide meals at the beginning and ending of shifts for male workers in their households.<sup>1</sup> Women have been an integral, if unpaid, part of the whole coalmining process.<sup>2</sup> Early WLL organisers had to struggle hard to attract such women to their meetings. It was not that women were content to be tied constantly to the home. In 1908, for instance, much to the chagrin of the WLL, North East women flocked to suffragette meetings. A WLL organiser, Mrs. Simm, recounted, somewhat enviously,

I went to one of Mrs Pankhurst's<sup>3</sup> meetings last night (wish I'd my shilling back). They charged 6d, 1/- and 2/- and got the Town Hall nearly full, and then took collections and got over £30 in spite of the awful distress in this part. How very theatrical they are! . . . And we have to be content when we get a dozen women to join our branches often (Never mind raising funds!!)<sup>4</sup>

Arguably, that 'theatricality' was one of the main attractions for the wives of workers, some of whom hardly ever left their homes for pleasure. When a Miss New attempted to set up a branch of Votes For Women, the North East WLL Organiser spoke of the teas and entertainment provided which,

. . . the women think . . . is a very nice change and something to turn out for.<sup>5</sup>

She lamented that she had not the wherewithal to emulate or compete with the suffragettes,

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1. J. Lawson, A Man's Life (1944) p. 33.

2. V.L. Allen, The Militancy of British Miners (1981) pp. 74,75,79. See also T. Austrin & H. Beynon, Masters and Servants (circa 1981) pp.31-37.

3. Mrs Pankhurst was, along with her daughter Christabel, leader of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) which became the militant wing in the struggle for votes for women. A perceptive appraisal of the Pankhursts and the WSPU is made in Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us (1978).

4. Letter from Mrs L S Simm, North East Organiser for the WLL and member of the WLL National Executive to Mrs Middleton, Secretary of the WLL 1906-11, 15 September 1908, WLL archive, document WLL/89, NRLPO. Mrs Middleton was married to James Middleton, afterwards Secretary of the Labour Party.

5. Letter from Mrs Simm to Mrs Middleton, 11 November 1908, WLL Archive document no.WLL/92 i.

I cannot afford to entice them with tea etc . . . so fear I have not much chance.<sup>1</sup>

It might also be argued that, whatever the political shortcomings of the suffragette movement, their meetings were bound to be more exciting<sup>2</sup> to women than those organised (ultimately, as it turned out in Durham) to persuade working class women to become the handmaidens of men in the fledgling Labour Party. To be fair, the early women organisers of the WLL intended that women should become well informed on many political issues. North East reports to the WLL National Executive detailed a wide range of topics covered in meetings. In 1908 alone they included *Aims of the League, Infant Mortality, Women's Suffrage, Feeding of Necessitous Schoolchildren, Married Women as Workers, Old Age Pensions and Miscellaneous Readings from Dismal England*.<sup>3</sup> And in 1911, WLL women attended lectures on, *Socialism and the Child, Evolution of Man, William Morris, Baby Clinics, Food prices, Reformation, Suffrage, The Workers' Educational Association, and The Minimum Wage*.<sup>4</sup> But, it will be argued later, the objective of working for more Labour representation seemed, in Durham County at least, to displace, almost entirely, the second stated WLL objective of working towards women's representation and their full participation in parliament and on local councils, particularly after they were merged into the general organisation of the Labour Party after 1918.

Throughout the whole of 1908, letters from Mrs Simm to Mrs Middleton are peppered with remarks indicating the uphill task of recruitment in comparison with that of the suffragette movement. But there were other obstacles, more deeply rooted, which presented great difficulties to WLL growth. Funds were always tight.<sup>5</sup> Recruiting town women was difficult but organising women in rural areas was even more of a problem, since their burden of housework was so heavy and their experiences were so narrow. Robert Moore, writing of early 20th century Durham, described chapels as the cultural centres in pit villages and said that,

at least they were non-drinking, non-gambling social centres and almost the only legitimate source of entertainment for women.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Ibid.
  2. "There was the advantage of committing oneself to immediate action, thereby stating one's freedom from stereotypical ideas of femininity. There was the bond of sisterhood in collective and sometimes dangerous efforts. There was excitement, a call to arms and a 'Joan of Arc' to follow," Chris Collette, op. cit. p. 14.
  3. Miss Grace Lloyd's Report from Jarrow WLL to the National Executive of the WLL, circa 1908, WLL Archive, NRLPO. There were two WLL Secretaries named Grace Lloyd, one in Jarrow and one in Gateshead.
  4. Maureen Calcott, "Labour Women in the North East of England" in *North East Labour History Bulletin* No.17 1983 p. 35, quoting Grace Lloyd's (Jarrow) report.
  5. The WLL was self-supporting until 1911, with contributions from members plus donations from Margaret Macdonald, (wife of Ramsay Macdonald, later Labour Party Leader), one of the early leaders of the WLL. The League requested a grant from the Labour Party in 1908 but received nothing. But, after working hard in two General Elections in 1910 the WLL was rewarded by a £50 grant from the Labour Party's General Fund and £50 from its Special Fund. In 1913 the sum was doubled. From 1914 a joint committee of the Labour Party and WLL was set up to decide how the Party would finance the League. C. Collette, op. cit. pp. 140, 144.
  6. Robert Moore, *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics* (1974) p.130. See also Burnhope Gala Committee, *Burnhope Miners' Diamond Jubilee Handbook* (1986) p. 14.



It must have been difficult to persuade women to come out, sometimes at night, often to walk along lonely roads in order to reach a meeting place.<sup>1</sup> Mrs Simm stressed, on several occasions, her desperation.

Where branches seem to be most needed, as say in the mining villages, where women in politics are almost an unknown quantity, there it is most difficult. We need to be able to follow up our work pretty closely, or the first enthusiasm will soon die. It is an awful task trying to rouse some of the women, it seems more awful that they should be left as they are.<sup>2</sup>

And, crucially, she complained of the attitude of men towards the new movement,

The great answer up here is "women's place is the home". Women have heard it so often that they believe it now.<sup>3</sup>

Men in politics, too, were not all easily won to the setting up of the WLL. After addressing "a large and strong" ILP Branch in Gateshead, Mrs Simm said that some of the old trade unionists were,

afraid we should spoil the homes by taking women out to meetings!!!<sup>4</sup>

In her letters and reports to the National Executive of the WLL, Mrs Simm vacillated between impatience with the ILP whenever she felt they did not support her with enthusiasm, and gratitude when ILP branches went out of their way to help her. Certainly in her September 1908 report she believed she was beginning to win over large numbers of ILP members,

I am bound to express to the EC my gratitude to the various ILPers for they have in all cases done what they could to help, and whenever one has had an opportunity of testifying to the usefulness of the WLL he has done so. A few still remain who think we are diverting the energies of socialist women. These also will, I hope, eventually be convinced by our "good works".<sup>5</sup>

She was heartened by the support of some "old socialists" from Gateshead ILP who,

... confessed to many years of work outside but had yet failed to win over their own wives ... said they believed the WLL would bring in some of the women who were prejudiced against "Socialism" but were yet in favour of Labour representation.<sup>6</sup>

Given Milliband's critique of the early I.L.P.<sup>7</sup>, it would be a mistake to overemphasise the distinction early socialists made between a movement with socialism as its objective and a movement with Labour representation as its objective. While it pointed to the fact that they recognised the political parameters and limitations of the WLL, they may have viewed the

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1. Letter from Mrs Simm to Mrs Middleton WLL Archive WLL/93 i. circa 1908 NRLPO
  2. Mrs Simm's Report to the National Executive of WLL, September 1908, WLL Archive document no.WLL/90 iv. NRLPO.
  3. Letter from Mrs Simm to Mrs Middleton, 6 June 1908. WLL Archive document no.WLL/81, NRLPO. See also J D Young, Socialism and the English Working Class (1989) p.61 & pp.65-68.
  4. Mrs Simm's Report to the National Executive of WLL 1908, WLL Archive document no.WLL/93 ii, NRLPO.
  5. Mrs Simm's Report to the National Executive of the WLL, September 1908. WLL Archive document no.WLL/90 iii, NRLPO.
  6. Ibid.
  7. Ralph Milliband, Parliamentary Socialism (1972) p. 18, p. 20.

women's separate organisation as a preliminary step to their integration into the full, mixed body of the Party.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. HELPERS AND SUPPORTERS

Whatever ambitions early WLL organisers may have had for the women they drew together, the tactics they used in the North East to persuade men that their womenfolk ought to join the movement, arguably, cast women, from the outset, as helpers and supporters rather than as initiators and leaders. On the other hand, it could be contended that the WLL, whose members could not vote or become candidates in parliamentary elections, had few alternatives to canvassing and fundraising if they were to demonstrate their "usefulness" and "good works" and persuade Labour men that the WLL was a necessary movement to further the aims of Labour representation.

It is easy to understand why the WLL pioneers preferred to organise women separately from the 'Men's Party'<sup>2</sup> if not to do so would have left them completely unpoliticised and confined to the home. It is easy to understand how working class women might settle for limited involvement rather than no involvement at all.

It is clear that Mrs. Simm and her fellow organisers believed it was extremely important that women should attend political meetings and strive to have equal opportunities with men in contributing to political life. However, attempts by the WLL to gain affiliated status to the Labour Party, on the same basis as other socialist societies, failed. And although the 1908 Labour Party Conference commended League election work and agreed that League women could send delegates to Conference, the WLL was not allowed a representative on the Party Executive and was excluded from any real power.<sup>3</sup>

By 1911 the organisation had grown and spread south from Tyneside into Durham County,

Nationally there were 110 Branches, 13 being in the North East - at Birtley, Bishop Auckland, Blyth, Crook, Gateshead, Hebburn Colliery and Hebburn Quay, Jarrow, Newcastle, Shildon North and South Shields and Sunderland.<sup>4</sup>

Sanderson-Furniss claimed that WLL members contributed invaluable service to the Party, not only in consolidating the efforts of women on immediate and practical ends but also in clarifying and presenting their point of view.<sup>5</sup> There is ample evidence from North East WLL

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1. See C. Collette, op. cit. p.131.

2. Report to WLL National Executive from Grace Lloyd, Secretary of Jarrow WLL, circa 1908 WLL Archive, NRPL0. See also Anne Phillips, *Divided Loyalties - Dilemmas of Sex and Class*, (1987) p. 127.

3. C. Collette, op. cit. pp.38-39.

4. M. Calcott, op. cit. p.35.

5. A. Sanderson-Furniss, op. cit. p.248. Averill Sanderson-Furniss was a member of WLL, a non-executive

organisers' reports about immediate and practical ends since these consisted of electioneering, fundraising for the Party, seeking election to District and Parish Councils and Boards of Guardians and, according to one organiser, arranging the social side of ILP work.<sup>1</sup> It is less easy to detect a political perspective markedly different from the eclectic and pragmatic politics of the Party itself. Presumably, "presenting their point of view" referred to drawing attention to the need for improved amenities for women and children in their communities.

At the 1907 WLL National Conference, Central London WLL proposed an addition to the constitution advocating the education of working women in the principle of socialism to endeavour to hasten the overthrow of the capitalist system of production. WLL Conference rejected Central London's resolution.<sup>2</sup>

When women over 30 years of age were enfranchised in 1918, Party leaders recognised that these new voters must be won to Labour's cause. The 1918 Constitution of the Labour Party made provision for the inclusion of women within its ranks. Women's Sections replaced WLL branches.

## **D. DURHAM WOMEN'S ADVISORY COUNCIL (DWAC)**

### **1. SELF-AWARE OR SELF-EFFACING WOMEN?**

As a result of vigorous recruiting in 1918 and 1919 by Mrs. Lillian Fenn, a paid staff member of the reorganised Labour Party, womens' sections were set up in Shildon, Houghton-le-Spring, Stockton, Chester-le-Street, Grange Villa, Birtley, Eighton Banks, Pelton Fell, Crawcrook, Dunston, Greenside, Ferryhill, Brandon Colliery, Blackhall, Crookhill, New Herrington, Ryhope, Spennymoor, Trimdon, Frosterley, Stanhope, Trimdon Colliery and Trimdon Grange.<sup>3</sup>

Margaret Gibb, one of Mrs Fenn's early recruits and a founder member of DWAC recalled, 60 years later,

Much has been achieved by Durham Women's Advisory Council - many activities appealing to the varying membership. It has brought to very many women widened horizons and friendships of great value, great knowledge, understanding and tolerance. So it has provided a really worthy contribution

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member and secretary of the Women's Housing Committee during the 1914-18 War; in 1925 she was an Oxford J.P., a member of the Housing Council at the Ministry of Health. She married Henry who was a Ruskin College tutor 1907-16 and Principal of Ruskin College 1916-25. See C. Collette, *op. cit.* Appendix 1 p.202.

1. Miss Grace LLOYD's (Jarrow) 1911 Report quoted in M. Calcott *op. cit.* p.35.
2. C. Collette, *op. cit.* p.46.
3. M. Calcott, *op. cit.* p.36.

to today's society.<sup>1</sup>

However, she could not claim that, over those 60 years, Durham women had achieved equality with men in the Labour Party in terms of political representation at local authority level. And certainly no working class woman was ever encouraged by DWAC to seek election to Parliament. Calcott considered that, when Durham Labour women decided, in 1925, to sponsor the adoption of a woman M.P. for a Durham constituency, it was an advance in their self-awareness though she stressed that, in contrast to the miners' union, no parliamentary candidate from DWAC's own ranks was considered,

In Durham the miners made strenuous efforts to obtain mining MPs in every County seat; *their wives remained more self-effacing.*<sup>2 3</sup>

Calcott's assertion that the women were both self-aware and self-effacing seems somewhat contradictory. Scrutiny of DWAC 1925 Spring Conference Minutes reveals that it was Mrs. Lillian Fenn who raised the issue of sponsoring a woman MP when she,

... spoke of the advisability of a woman candidate being adopted for one of the parliamentary divisions in the County. After discussion it was unanimously agreed to recommend the proposal to the Sections.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing in preceding Minutes suggests that grassroots members of DWAC had discussed sponsoring a woman MP. There is no evidence that Mrs. Fenn's proposal was a response to pressure from Women's Sections. That raises a suspicion that ordinary members were on the receiving end of a piece of political sharp practice by the women's national leadership, for as soon as the first resolution was agreed there was an immediate proposal that Dr. Marion Phillips<sup>5</sup>, Chief Women's Officer of the Labour Party, be recommended as a suitable candidate. The Minutes do not reveal who made that proposal but for Mrs. Fenn and the DWAC leadership to have allowed such a resolution to be put to the Conference and voted upon was a blatantly undemocratic procedure. According to their previous resolution, delegates ought to have consulted their Sections before nominating candidates. Nevertheless, the proposal was voted upon, there and then, and carried.

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1. Margaret Gibb, A Memory (1983). Mrs Gibb was recruited by Mrs Fenn during the 1918-19 campaign and became Party Organiser for the North East Region of the Labour Party 1929-56.
  2. My emphasis.
  3. M. Calcott, op. cit. p.38.
  4. DWAC Conference Minutes 14 February 1925. NRLPO.
  5. Marion Phillips was a graduate of Melbourne University, did research in economics at the L.S.E., worked for the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws as an investigator and was, until December 1911, Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League. After the death of Margaret Macdonald in 1911 she became temporary General Secretary of the WLL. Collette claimed that the real power in the WLL after 1912 resided with Marion Phillips and says that after her accession to office the WLL leadership controlled Conference more tightly and power became concentrated in London. See Collette op.cit. p.133. She became Chief Woman Officer of the Labour Party in 1918. She was elected to parliament, as M.P. for Sunderland in 1929. She died in 1932.

There is evidence that Dr. Phillips was prepared to bend the rules to become an M.P.. In the previous October, just before the 1924 General Election, she had tried to become a candidate for Barnard Castle where the incumbent Labour M.P. was at odds with his CLP. She was refused permission from the National Executive Finance Committee to put her name forward. When she challenged that decision she was left in no doubt that the committee felt she was out-of-order.<sup>1</sup>

Delegates at the DWAC Conference in May 1925,

... proceeded to consider the question of promoting the candidature of a Labour woman for a Parliamentary Division within the County. The proposal was agreed.<sup>2</sup>

A separate resolution moved by Mrs. Errington from Chester-le-Street, and seconded by Mrs. Emmie Lawther from Blaydon, proposed that

nominations for the candidate be invited from Labour women resident in the County.<sup>3</sup>

Whether the second resolution was designed to exclude Dr. Marion Phillips' nomination, or merely to extend the field of candidates, is unclear. But that rearguard action was supported by 35 women with 182 voting against. So, not all women were convinced that consideration should be confined to one well known Party Officer.

The involvement of Mrs Emmie Lawther in that action also suggests the surfacing of a political division within DWAC. For Emmie Lawther was a left-wing socialist who, in only two years since she had moved to Chopwell<sup>4</sup> had displayed her political militancy and had made her mark in Durham politics. She had been an active trade unionist in the North Staffordshire potteries from the age of 18 and, prior to the First World War, had joined the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). In 1920 she won a trade union scholarship to Ruskin College and there met her future husband, Steve Lawther, a miner from Chopwell. After Ruskin she spent almost a year in Vienna learning German and studying the Austrian workers' movement. In 1928 she visited the Soviet Union for five weeks with a women's delegation. In 1929 she attended the first International Anti-Fascist Congress in Berlin. After Hitler came to power in 1933 she fostered an 8 year old German refugee. But her international activities did not prevent her from being politically active both locally and nationally.

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1. See Minutes of Labour Party National Executive Finance Sub-committee 10 October 1924. NMLH.

2. DWAC Conference Minutes Summer Conference, 9 May 1925. NRLPO.

3. Ibid.

4. In 1923. Chopwell, a village in the Blaydon Constituency gained a reputation for its militancy in the early 1920s. In the General Strike of 1926 it became widely known as Little Moscow. Les Turnbull in Chopwell's Story (circa 1979), wrote "In general, politics were for the menfolk but there was also an awakening of political activity amongst the women of Chopwell which was inspired by Annie Brown and Emmie Lawther. Discussions were held on such matters as women's suffrage and birth control and through the personal connections of Emmie Lawther outside speakers of some standing (such as Dora Russell, the philosopher Bertrand Russell's wife) were invited to speak."

She had become a member of DWAC in 1925, representing the Blaydon Federation of Women's Councils.<sup>1</sup> In June, when the Consett Iron Company locked out the miners from Chopwell pit, she suggested that the Lodge call together all the women to explain the nature of the dispute and enlist their active support. The Lodge bitterly resented her intervention.<sup>2</sup>

It was no easy task for a woman socialist in those days, not even in Chopwell which was soon to become known as 'Little Moscow'. Before the days of road transport, mining villages were isolated and communal life was for men only : the place for women was kirk, kitchen and kinder.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently Emmie was undaunted. Chopwell women were so prominent in opposing strike breaking that the company agent at Chopwell pit wrote to the Home Secretary on 16 October about "a large contingent of women" active among the pickets.<sup>4</sup>

In 1926 she helped to administer the DWAC Women and Children's Fund during the miners' lockout.<sup>5</sup> She was a staunch supporter of the campaign for birth control during the 1920s<sup>6</sup> and campaigned with the unemployed during the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> She urged support for the Popular Front against fascism<sup>8</sup> and in the Second World War served on the Anglo-Soviet Women's Committee.<sup>9</sup> The picture that emerges of Emmie Lawther, from her husband's tribute to her and a few documentary references discovered so far, is that of a well-educated, intensely dedicated, political, working class woman who stood out from her contemporaries while sharing their privations.<sup>10</sup>

In 1925, those women in DWAC who supported the idea of nominating for parliament a Labour woman resident in Durham, might have held left-wing views like Emmie Lawther, and/or might have been antagonistic to what they saw as the carpet-bagging of Dr. Marion Phillips, and/or might have wished to encourage working class women to emulate those miners who had no hesitation in becoming parliamentary candidates. Whatever the motives of the dissenters, their concern that working class women should be nominated for parliamentary seats was not

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1. Steve Lawther, Emmie Lawther - A Tribute (1965) pp.3-7. The Shotton Archive D/Sho/115/6, DRO.
  2. "When press reports of her speech appeared she was bitterly attacked at the next Lodge meeting. The critics wanted to know if "the bloody women were now to run the trade union."" S. Lawther, op. cit. p.5. The Shotton Archive D/Sho/115/6, DRO.
  3. S. Lawther, op. cit. p.4.
  4. L. Turnbull, op. cit.
  5. S. Lawther, op. cit. p.6.
  6. Ibid.
  7. S. Lawther, op. cit. pp.7-11.
  8. DWAC Minutes, Spring Conference 4 March 1939 NRLPO.
  9. S. Lawther, op. cit. p.12.
  10. See D. Russell The Tamarisk Tree (1975) p.183 which describes a visit to Steve and Emmie Lawther in Chopwell in 1926, "Their lodging was very simple. Mrs Lawther, pregnant at that time, had to carry coals up several flights of stairs and cook on an open grate."

considered seriously at that time or subsequently by DWAC. It might be more apposite, then, to say that rather than being self-effacing, a majority of members of DWAC lacked self-confidence and may have been open to manipulation from better educated, well-known, middle-class women. And although there is much evidence that the early DWAC organisers passed on skills to enable the women to become chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers of Women's Sections, and of the DWAC itself, as well as delegates to Conferences, nowhere is there an indication that they tried to give them the self-confidence which might encourage them to seek much higher office.<sup>1</sup>

Calcott maintained that, by 1939, Labour women in North East England had gained considerable experience and some solid achievements. She believed they had enhanced and increased their political and social awareness, had gained confidence to administer their organisations, were conversant with local, national and international political issues and had consolidated support for Labour among many women. And she pointed out that, in Durham, by that time, they had established 126 Sections and had over 4,000 paid-up members. But she also quoted Mrs. Thomasina Todd of Boldon, Secretary to DWAC in 1939, that there were still only two Labour women County Councillors, twelve on Rural Councils, sixty three on Parish Councils and twelve magistrates.<sup>2</sup> In 1940 Durham women's lack of self-confidence was evident when, instead of insisting on equal consideration with Labour Party men as nominees for local government seats, they "appealed" for equality of opportunity.<sup>3</sup> And in 1946, in his address to DWAC Annual Conference, Mr. Charles Flynn,<sup>4</sup> Vice-Chairman of the Labour Party Regional Council,

... expressed surprise that so few women in Durham County had been chosen as candidates in the forthcoming County Council elections as he believed with their ability, men and women jointly should be giving of their best.<sup>5</sup>

Since then occasional references can be found in DWAC Minutes on the desirability of having more women councillors.

In 1990, half a century after Mrs. Todd's remarks, nine of the 59 Labour County Councillors in Durham were women. On the District Councils in the County, there were 40 Labour women

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1. For example, it was not until 1942 that a Speakers' Forum was established so that women could learn and practise public speaking. Eventually, inter-county contests were held. DWAC Conference Minutes 3rd October 1942 and 20th February 1943. NRLPO.
  2. M. Calcott, op. cit. p.39.
  3. DWAC Minutes Annual Conference 2 March 1940 NRLPO.
  4. Charles Richard Flynn (1883-1957), Northern Divisional Officer of the National Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers 1915-1947; Secretary of the North East Socialist Federation and the Northern Area of the ILP for many years; delegate to the T.U.C. for 20 years; involved in the regional organisation to control the conduct of the General Strike in the North East (Joint Strike Committee); Gateshead Town Councillor 1932-1952. Anthony Mason, The General Strike in the North East (1970) p.17.
  5. DWAC Annual Conference Minutes 16 February 1946. NRLPO.

and 188 Labour men.<sup>1</sup> There was only one woman Labour M.P. out of six Labour M.P.s in Durham County. These were an improvement on the 1939 figures<sup>2</sup> but there is still a long way for women to go before they reach parity with Labour men.

Election to parliament or to local Councils was not (and is not) the only means by which women could exercise power in politics. As their organisation grew, it ought to have been possible for the women to use their collective strength to influence policy. A short time after the formation of DWAC, an opportunity arose to do just that by campaigning on an issue vital to all women but particularly vital to working class women - the provision of birth control information in maternity welfare centres.

## 2. THE CAMPAIGN FOR BIRTH CONTROL ADVICE

It is difficult, 70 years later, to appreciate fully the national controversy which was caused when some women brought the taboo subject of birth control into the public domain and made demands on government and local authorities. Liddington and Norris, writing about working class women at the turn of the century, have said,

... birth control still remained an agonising and unspoken problem for most married women.<sup>3</sup>

In the years immediately following the First World War working class women were still denied knowledge of methods, however crude,<sup>4</sup> of limiting their families. Constant childbearing brought stress and ill-health. Backstreet abortion was rife<sup>5</sup> and there was a high incidence of infant and maternal mortality.<sup>6</sup>

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1. There are eight District Councils in County Durham. In Teesdale District there were 7 Labour councillors, all men. In the City of Durham District there were two Labour women councillors and 26 Labour men; in Sedgefield four women and 30 men; in Easington five women and 38 men; in Chester-le-Street four women and 21 men; in Derwentside 10 women and 33 men; in Wear Valley six women and 18 men and in Darlington nine women and 15 men.
  2. Though the figures are not strictly comparable because of major County boundary changes and the new District Council structure created by the 1972 Local Government Act.
  3. J. Liddington & J. Norris, op. cit. p.31.
  4. The commonest form of contraception at that time was abstinence. The male sheath was not widely used. Marie Stopes advocated quinine pessaries and the cervical cap. R. Hall, *Marie Stopes - A Biography* (1978) p.159.
  5. J.D. Young, op. cit. p.185.
  6. In 1923 the Medical Officer of Health for Durham reported (on maternal deaths), "Puerperal sepsis has accounted for about 25%, eclampsia 14%, haemorrhage 14%, valvular heart disease, with or without complications 11%, pneumonia and other chest conditions 13%, other conditions 23% of deaths under enquiry. The greatest mortality was in the age group 30-39 years and was greater in multipara (women who had already borne children) than in primipara (first pregnancies), 68 in the former against 22 in the latter." M O H Report 1923 PP.22-23. CC/H/3. In 1924 almost 50% of 141 maternal deaths were aged between 30 and 39 years, 25 as a result of first pregnancy. M o H Report 1924 P.33 CC/H/3. In 1926, out of 108 maternal deaths, the largest number was of women between the ages of 25 and 29, mostly primipara. M o H Report 1926 CC/H/4. DRO. See Appendix 4 for Enquiry into Maternal Mortality in Durham 1924 CC/H/13 pp.33-40, and for infant mortality rates in Durham and in England and Wales 1919-27.



The wartime coalition government had thought it appropriate to issue condoms to soldiers as an anti-VD measure. Despite this, one in five soldiers returned from the war with VD.<sup>1</sup> And, in 1919, 29% of all uterine and neo-natal deaths were caused by syphilis.<sup>2</sup> Presumably the War Office was worried that VD would reduce the fighting fitness of the army. Wives contracting VD from their returning husbands were apparently of no concern to politicians.

Dr. Marie Stopes' books, Married Love and Wise Parenthood, both published in 1918 (the latter being a concise guide to contraception),

... crashed into English society like a bombshell.<sup>3</sup>

Most politicians, churchmen and doctors opposed the dissemination of birth control information to working class women<sup>4</sup> although it was easily available to upper and middle class women. They fulminated against the birth control movement, inspired by Marie Stopes, which was organised inside and outside the Labour movement by (among others) Dora and Bertrand Russell, Freda Laski and H.G. Wells. Dora Russell discovered that the national average death rate of mothers was 4 to 5 per 1000 births,

By contrast, the death rate of miners from fatal accidents was 1.1 per 1000 miners actually engaged in mining.<sup>5</sup>

She used that statistic to good effect in her campaigning.

It might be supposed that when the campaigners sought allies throughout the country, DWAC members, knowing the effects of poverty and constant childbearing on the women in their area, would have flocked to support them. The evidence suggests that they did not. A few groups of Labour women in Durham publicly supported birth control. Emmie Lawther<sup>6</sup> campaigned on the issue but the DWAC did not campaign, lobby Durham Labour MPs or bring pressure to bear on Labour County Councillors.

Dora Russell and her comrades took their campaign to the 1924 National Labour Women's Conference and proposed an addendum to a resolution on maternity care. Dr. Marion Phillips confronted Dora Russell and demanded she withdraw the addendum, saying that sex should not be dragged into politics and that the campaigners would split the Party from top to bottom. Dora Russell thought the confrontation revealed,

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1. A J P Taylor British History 1914-1945 (1965) p.20.
  2. Figures given by Dr. Amand Routh, Consulting Obstetrician at Charing Cross Hospital, in his address to the Church Congress 1919. Quoted in R. Hall, op. cit. p.66.
  3. R. Hall, op. cit. p.135.
  4. R. Hall, op. cit. pp.162-72.
  5. D. Russell, op. cit. p.171. The figure given was for England and Wales. In Durham, maternal mortality was over 6 per 1000 births. Durham M o H Report 1924 p.33 CC/H/3, DRO.
  6. S. Lawther, op. cit. p.6.

. . . that the Labour Woman Organiser existed, not so much to support the demands of the women, as to keep them in order from the point of view of the male politicians.<sup>1</sup>

The Conference accepted the addendum by 1000 votes to 8 and the 1925 National Women's Conference confirmed the 1924 vote.

In February 1926 Ernest Thurtle, MP for Shoreditch, attempted to give more publicity to the issue by introducing a Bill under the Ten Minute rule.<sup>2</sup> It was lost, with 45 Labour Members voting against. Durham MPs against the Bill included Joseph Batey (Spennymoor), Robert Richardson (Houghton-le-Spring), Rev. Herbert Dunnico (Consett) and Jos. Ritson (Durham). Yet there is no mention in DWAC Committee or Conference Minutes of that vote. On an issue that was so vital to women, no expression of anger or even disappointment was recorded. There is no suggestion, either, that any representations were made by DWAC to those Durham MPs who opposed the Bill.

The redoubtable Emmie Lawther immediately sponsored meetings for Dora Russell and Freda Laski in the constituencies of Durham Labour MPs who had voted against the Bill.<sup>3</sup> As a result,

She met with opposition even from Labour people, including M.P.s.<sup>4</sup>

Consett Labour Women's Federation wrote to the Labour Durham County Council asking them to put pressure on the government to allow all welfare centres to give advice on birth control.<sup>5</sup> Their letter was "received" by the County Health Committee<sup>6</sup> which meant no reply would be sent and no action would be taken. The conquering Labour heroes of the 1925 County Council elections<sup>7</sup> posed no threat to prevailing societal attitudes and values concerning women. And whatever hard line they adopted against the lobbying of a few Labour women, Councillors could be certain that the majority of their Durham female 'comrades' would loyally turn out to do the donkey work in local elections.

At the 1926 annual Labour Party Conference, because of women's pressure nationally, the

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1. D. Russell, *op. cit.* p.173.

2. Local Authorities (Birth Control) Enabling Bill, House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, 9 February 1926. Ref. 191 H.C. Deb. 5S.

3. D. Russell, *op. cit.* p.183.

4. S. Lawther, *op. cit.* p.6.

5. Minutes of Durham County Health Committee 15 April 1926 P.98 CC/A15/1/5, DRO.

6. *Ibid.*

7. In 1919 Labour gained control of Durham County Council, winning 56 out of 99 seats (excluding aldermen). In 1922 Labour lost control. In 1925 Labour regained control, holding 40 seats out of the reduced total of 74, and has held power continuously since then. W.R. Garside, *op. cit.* p.325, p.330, p.335.

previous policy was reversed.<sup>1</sup> In July 1930<sup>2</sup> the Ministry of Health issued Memorandum 153/MCW stating that birth control clinics for expectant and nursing mothers could be set up, . . . on condition that contraceptive advice will be given only in cases where further pregnancy would be detrimental to health.<sup>3</sup>

Such advice was to be restricted to married women with gynaecological problems.<sup>4</sup> The Memorandum was not even considered by Durham County Health Committee till a whole year later on 2 July 1931. As late as 1932 there were resolutions from Blaydon UDC and West Rainton Labour Party Women's Section asking the County Health Committee to take immediate steps to implement Memorandum 153/MCW.<sup>5</sup>

Again, there is no mention in DWAC Committee or Conference Minutes or in County Council Health Committee Minutes of any approach by DWAC demanding immediate action. There is no word of criticism in DWAC Minutes of the sluggishness of the County Council in responding to those Labour Party Women's Sections actively promoting the birth control issue.

It must not be assumed that DWAC refrained from recording in their Minutes political criticisms of Party members. Only four years earlier, in 1928, DWAC's anger against Mr. Will Lawther and Mr. John Cape, for their support of a so-called 'subversive' organisation<sup>6</sup> rumbled on in the Minutes for six months.<sup>7</sup> The absence of any minuted criticism of Durham County Councillors and Durham Labour MPs for their part in the birth control controversy suggests, at the very least, that DWAC were unwilling to confront the men who had power.<sup>8</sup>

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1. D. Russell, op. cit. p.188.

2. By then there was a Labour Government.

3. Meeting of Durham County Health Committee, 2 July 1931 pp.308-9 CC/A15/1/6. DRO.

4. Durham County Health Committee Councillors expressed the opinion that they did not expect this facility to be well used since there were comparatively few women whose health would be damaged by further pregnancy. Ibid p.309.

In view of the very serious hazards attending pregnancy during that period, their conclusion, at the very least, was complacent. "During the year ended 31 March 1928, 266 patients were admitted to the home . . . 243 were delivered; of these 91 were primipara (first pregnancy) and 47 were emergency cases. 63 abnormal cases, including 4 incomplete abortions, necessitated the calling in of a doctor. There were 4 maternal deaths, viz :- 1 double pneumonia, 1 valvular heart disease, 1 eclampsia (sudden very high blood pressure particular to pregnancy), and 1 eclamptic coma. The last mentioned was admitted in a dying condition. 15 children were stillborn, 3 of them being macerated (dead in the womb and already breaking up), and 5 premature, the mothers suffering from ante-partum haemorrhage." Matron's Report, Durham County Maternity Hospital 12 April 1928, County Health Committee Minutes p.9. CC/A15/1/6.

(It should be noted that, until the mid 1930s, only a small number of births took place in maternity hospitals.) DRO.

5. Durham County Health Committee Minutes 30 July 1932 p.380. CC/A15/1/6. DRO.

6. Called the Miners' Wives United Front.

7. DWAC Committee Minutes 4 July 1928 to 4 December 1928. Mr Will Lawther and Mr John Cape were left-wing Labour Party activists from Chopwell.

8. Durham MPs, for instance, were usually nominees of the miners' union - the same union which allowed DWAC to use its halls for conferences and gave help with brass bands on Women's Gala Day.

### 3. LOYALTY - THE PRIORITY

If DWAC, as an organisation, failed to support its own members who campaigned for birth control provision, it gave unswerving support and loyalty to Party leadership. After 1926, TUC policy became overtly collaborationist as evidenced by the Mond-Turner talks.<sup>1</sup> In line with union attitudes, the Labour Party became quiescent and turned its back on the national hunger marches and unemployed workers' demonstrations which marked that period.<sup>2</sup> In loyal fashion, DWAC also ignored the national hunger marches and unemployed workers' demonstrations though approval was expressed by the chairperson in 1936 for the all-party, non-political Jarrow Crusade on the grounds that those marchers went to London,

... not in a vindictive spirit but in a sort of pilgrimage to draw attention to the awful conditions obtaining in Jarrow.<sup>3</sup>

DWAC followed Labour's narrow guidelines in help to Spain during the Civil War,<sup>4</sup> raising money through a scheme of buying milk tokens<sup>5</sup> and knitting garments for refugees.<sup>6</sup> These actions, while highly praiseworthy, were well within what Sir Charles Trevelyan scathingly termed Labour's policy of "sympathy accompanied by bandages and cigarettes."<sup>7</sup> Apparently

DWAC accepted the M.P., Mr. J. Lawson's, explanation on the Party's attitude to armaments and non-intervention in Spain<sup>8</sup> without questioning Labour's support of Conservative Government policy. In 1939 DWAC's condemnation of Stafford Cripps M.P. for his support of the Popular Front against fascism, on the grounds that he was consorting with "Tories and

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1. Employers led by Sir Alfred Mond, head of ICI, were set on securing the co-operation of the TUC in order to rationalise British industry to make it more competitive in overseas markets. The background to the South Wales Miners' hunger march in 1927, "... and indeed to all our struggles at the time was our opposition to Mond-Turnerism, the attempt of the trade union leadership to carry out a policy of co-operation with the employers while we were left to fight alone." Arthur Horner, Incorrigible Rebel (1960) pp.98,104. See also Allen Hutt, The Post War History of the British Working Class (1937) pp.179-189. See also Paul Addison The Road to 1945 - British Politics and the Second World War (1977) p.45. Addison claimed that there were few practical results from the collaboration but that the talks marked the acceptance by the majority of trade union leaders of the need to "collaborate with the employers in the pursuit of productivity." See also Eric Silver, Vic Feather TUC (1973) p.166.
  2. "The National Unemployed Workers' Movement was Communist-led. It need not have been. This small party, with so little hold on mass support that it was never able to elect more than two members of Parliament, and those only for a short time, filled the vacuum orthodox Labour left." Jennie Lee, My Life with Nye (1981) p.133.
  3. Mrs. Rutherford's remarks reported in Durham Advertiser 23 October 1936. DRO.
  4. "What was the British Labour Movement's reaction to this supreme test? ... A fund was opened. Yet from last July (1936) to the time of writing these lines, seven months later, there has been no sort of national campaign ... except for the fund, solidarity has remained verbal. ... and the fund itself ... has naturally not produced a tithe of the amount that could have been raised, as everybody knows, given a countrywide platform campaign." A Hutt op.cit. p.288.
  5. DWAC Annual Conference Minutes 13 November 1937 NRLPO.
  6. DWAC Minutes, Spring Conference 6 February 1937 NRLPO.
  7. Sir C. Trevelyan speaking in debate on "Fascist Rebellion in Spain". Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1936 p.173. NMLH (b). See also A. Hutt, op.cit. p.293.
  8. DWAC Minutes, Special Conference 25 September 1937 NRLPO.

Liberals"<sup>1</sup> smacked of double standards. The reality was simpler. Whatever party leadership decided was accepted by DWAC. Cripps returned to favour with DWAC when he became a member of 1945-50 Labour Government and even after his 1949 Budget in which,

Everything cut was socially useful and nearly everything socially useful was cut.<sup>2</sup>

Total loyalty to Labour also ensured support for possession of nuclear weapons. A resolution from Usworth and Washington Women's Section in 1951, "That this Conference urge upon the Government the need to ban the use of the atomic bomb entirely," met with short shrift from the majority of delegates.<sup>3</sup>

Alternative political ideas rarely surfaced in DWAC. A well established conservatism of approach reinforced continued loyalty to policy endorsed by the leadership, even when that policy was, arguably, against the objective interests of women. Year after year a succession of M.P.s, Regional Labour Party Executive Committee members, salaried Women Organisers and leading trade unionists spoke at DWAC Conferences and praised the women's loyalty to Labour above all else. What they were praising was the women's loyalty to the Party leadership. It could be suggested that the DWAC rank-and-file were unwitting victims of political manipulation. What seems nearer the truth is that the women, willingly and proudly, gave the highest priority to loyalty to the leadership and it is no exaggeration to say that that was the only continuously discernable policy in DWAC for most of its existence. DWAC functioned primarily as a support group for the Labour Party leadership.

This is not to infer a mindlessness in DWAC women. They appeared to believe, strongly and sincerely, that a united front in their women's movement in support of party leadership was essential. Anything which threatened that unity threatened the chances of returning Labour to power. Those who challenged interpretations and meanings of events conveyed to DWAC by national politicians and party bureaucrats were undermining that unity.<sup>4</sup> Against that background, Emmie Lawther's interventions were decidedly "out of step". After a lifetime of socialist activity, Emmie died in June 1965. At the DWAC Conference in September 1965, in the chairperson's tribute to Party comrades who had died over the last year, only Lord Lawson was singled out for special tribute.

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1. DWAC Minutes, Spring Conference 4 March 1939. NRLPO.

2. D.N. Pritt, The Labour Government 1945-51 (1963) p.293.

3. DWAC Minutes, Annual Conference 24 February 1951. NRPLD.

4. While DWAC's fierce loyalty to the Party led it to spurn the Popular Front, after the outbreak of the Second World War, Labour Party leadership collaborated quickly and easily with Tories in a coalition government. However, to its credit, DWAC never lost sight of its main objective - the election of a Labour government as soon as hostilities might come to an end. See DWAC Annual Conference Minutes 2nd March 1940, 8th March 1941, 14th March 1942, 19th February 1944, 24th February 1945. Also DWAC Autumn Conference Minutes 22nd November 1941, 6th November 1943, 4th November 1944. NRLPO.

Both the WLL and DWAC were exceptionally useful to the Labour Party in Durham in terms of their dedicated electoral work and support. But any notion that their efforts would eventually enhance the status or political influence of Durham Labour women within the Party has proved a chimera.

## **E. 1980s COALFIELD WOMEN**

### **1. CHANGING EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS**

It has been indicated already that, in the first half of the century, few married women in pit villages took paid employment outside the home. Even 40 years ago those who did go out to work were regarded as "oddballs". [HW]

It was never done. She was at home to look after the family. Your mam didn't (go out to) work. She stayed at home to look after the kids. [EF]

Many women, confined to the home, strove to make their role superlative in that domain. [AP] [HW] They exercised whatever power they could take for themselves in the domestic arena. Many women knew what their husbands earned because they collected the pay packets from the colliery offices when their men were at work or sleeping after a shift. Some women gave their husbands pocket money. [MS]

In our house, my dad always handed the money over to mam. Mam always took the decisions where money was concerned. [MS]

But miners' wages were not high. [MS] [NS] So, shouldering responsibility for household expenditure might appear to be more of a chore than a source of power. Nevertheless, it opened up a small area of decision making which afforded them some satisfaction especially if they gained reputations for being 'excellent managers'.

If the nature of coalmining made for a marked division of labour in miners' households, it also made for a distinctive tendency towards a sexual division of leisure. During shift time close bonds were formed amongst miners on account of the extremely hazardous nature of pit work. Lives depended on that bonding. So it was regarded by all the community as natural when that bonding, that closeness of 'marras',<sup>1</sup> spilled over into leisure hours. Indeed it became the norm for men to spend much of their leisure time together. [PG] [HW] [MS]

Each miner depended on his workmates for his safety and wellbeing in dangerous working conditions. These links naturally carried on into social life.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Close workmates in the pit. See Dave Douglass, Pit Life in County Durham (1972) pp. 8-16.

2. Burnhope Gala Committee, op. cit. p.3.

However, changes in employment patterns have modified social behaviour. During the past thirty years, there have been periods when young men in colliery villages found it difficult to get jobs in the pit. Vacancies tended to be filled by miners transferred from pits closing elsewhere in Durham. [PG] So the unusually strong bonds between men in pit villages have weakened, especially among the younger generation. [MS] Spending leisure time with a 'marra' is difficult if he lives miles away.<sup>1</sup>

A second change has been that more married women have paid employment. This has been due mainly to two factors : the availability of contraception and the availability of 'women's' jobs in the area. Contraception has made an enormous difference to women's lives. If couples delay having children, women's activities are not automatically confined to the home. Once children arrive, however, it is still generally accepted in colliery areas that a mother should stay at home with them until they are of school age. [MS] When women do go out to work it is primarily because of economic necessity but many also want to get out of the home and enjoy the company of other adults. Some have jobs like cleaning, shopwork and serving school dinners. Others are office workers, teachers and nurses. [MS] Yet others have become factory workers.

Austrin and Beynon documented the working class experience of big business in the North East between 1964 and 1979. Multinational companies were attracted by local authorities' continuous advertising of,

... "a pool of labour" - male and female - created by the rundown of the region's traditional industries. ... One of the consequences of this has been the growth of a large, low-waged sector based on female (and often part-time) labour.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. OLD AND NEW OPPRESSIONS

Women from Easington district work in factories in nearby Peterlee. Some say that their lives have been transformed by their ability to contribute a second wage to their households.

But it could be argued that taking on the combined roles of houseworker, childcarer and low-paid factory worker has severely increased women's exploitation. Some younger couples try to alleviate that situation by rearranging their roles in the family. For example, some men take on jobs in the home usually done by the women. But this can evoke disapproval from older women and men. [MS]<sup>3</sup> Such disapproval is not universal but those women accustomed to waiting on their husbands 'hand and foot' tend to look with disfavour on younger wives who,

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1. Since the miners' strike, because of reputedly punitive management in the pits which has lowered morale and, linked with this, bad feeling between those who scabbed and those who stayed out on strike, that weakening of bonds has accelerated. [PG]

2. Terry Austrin & Huw Beynon, *Global Outposts* (circa 1981) p.5.

3. See Sandra Taylor, "Grub up for the Miners" in V. Seddon (1986) p.85 for an account of the same phenomenon in the Midlands and Lancashire.

having arrived home from work, do not immediately rush around to make meals for their husbands. [HW] And, although many women do not emulate their mothers' or grandmothers' practices of rising at 3am in order to cook meals for their husbands, ("He gets himself off to work", is a common statement) there are some who are pleased to be regarded, first and foremost, as wonderful housekeepers, marvellous cooks, clever knitters and dressmakers and dutiful, caring mothers. However, if a woman thinks that the exercise of these domestic skills entitles her to regard the home as 'hers', occasionally she may be rudely reminded of how her status is perceived by others. Heather Wood remembered the Bishop of Durham visiting Easington to open homes for aged miners. A woman stepped forward to collect the key for the new house but the Bishop explained that the key was for her husband.

The house is his. She can look after it. [HW]

Even if women make decisions inside the home, they are largely excluded from discussion and decision making on serious issues such as politics or the union,

The men will sit around and talk union and politics and you are not expected to join in. [MS]

The exclusion of women from conversation is taken for granted,

. . . and once they are talking about the pit, you're closed off anyway, even if you are sitting in company. You can't understand ninety per cent of the conversation because you have never been down the pit. [MS]

The exceptions seem to be those rare women taking part in union activities in their own right or active in a political party though, even then, their activities are problematic. [HW]

Whatever women think privately, there is a public acceptance of male domination. This is underlined when anyone who raises an eyebrow at some of the rules in working men's clubs, which limit women's participation, is met with complacency by both women and men. For instance, Dawdon Club was host to Leicestershire striking miners and their wives and children after the Durham Miners' Gala in 1984. As families entered the Club the men were presented with large numbers of beer tokens to be exchanged at the bar while the doorman told women and children to go upstairs where a room was provided for them. Margaret Pinnegar went to follow her husband into the bar since she had no child with her. She was told she must go with the other women. The women were not provided with drinks tokens. During the evening Margaret's husband, Benny, brought drinks up to her. [KM]

Even where Club rules have changed to allow women to participate, actual social behaviour has not necessarily altered. For instance, in all but one club in Easington, women are allowed in the bar. However, women do not go into the bar because they would be made to feel distinctly uncomfortable. [HW] [MS]. The men do not have to explain why women are not welcome in the bar,

it's just accepted it's the men's place. [MS]



If change has been slow in coming to the coastal areas, even since the miners' strike, it cannot be assumed that, inland, the sexual revolution has triumphed. Brian Gibson relates that the excuse given for the exclusion of women from club bars in and around Ferryhill, is that men want to be on their own. But, he points out succinctly, women are present, serving behind the bar. [BG] It could be said that a woman serving pints in an all-male enclave is not intruding socially in men's affairs, and indeed is fulfilling the acceptable, female, domestic role of 'waiting on'.

In Kelloe village there are men vociferous in enforcing women's exclusion from the bar of the club,

A man's bar, they say. They should have a man's bar where you do what you want to do. I saw a woman in there one day, in the bar at Kelloe Club. It was Mrs. Shutt, Robert Shutt's mother. And Harold Wilson jumps up straight on his feet. He shouts, "Mr. Secretary, there's a woman in the bar here, mind!" She says, "I'll not be a minute, I'll not be a minute," and she sat down, telling somebody the tale. But she had to gan out. [PG]

In Chester-le-Street, the Osborne Working Men's Club, which did much to help the support group during the strike, allows women into the bar once a year. That is the night when the Leek Show occupies the club lounge where women usually sit.<sup>1</sup>

Many working men's clubs in County Durham can only be entered by women through the mediation of their men. Women can become members in some clubs if their husbands already hold club membership. They cannot be members in their own right. [JP] Despite the eulogising of relationships between miners and wives in the writings of Hain and McCrindle and of Campbell,<sup>2</sup> male domination in Durham is reasserted and reinforced in social life on a daily basis.

Women's exclusion is so much the norm that it excites little comment when television programme producers, anxious to impart some essential flavour of Durham working class village culture, seek out and film those leisure pursuits which are predominantly male. In August 1987, a BBC North documentary, 'The Allotment Show', featured a keen gardener who described, rather poetically, how he spent his whole day in the garden, talking to his plants and encouraging them to grow. Some yards away, across the grass, his out-of-focus wife stood, half turned as if curious of the camera, and excluded altogether from the interview. Her opinions were neither sought nor given, though she probably made tea for the interviewer and camera crew.

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1. Conversation with Billy and Elspeth Frostwick 6 October 1990.

2. See previous Chapter.

In the same film, a pigeon fancier told how his pigeons were his whole life and occupied so much of his time that wife-and-children (inevitably bracketed together) had to accept the fact that holidays were out of the question. No one asked wife-and-children what they thought about that.

It could be objected here that the media are obsessed with stereotypes, while individuals and communities are much more complex and subtle. And, even in the North East of England, people cannot be isolated from the process of social change. Yet, while it is important to uncover those complexities and subtleties, it is arguable that there is still enough substance in media clichés of active men and passive women for many women to recognise at least partial portrayals of their own situations.

## **F. WOMEN AND THE UNION 1984-85**

### **1. WOMEN'S WORK AND CLASS STRUGGLE**

The necessarily heavy concentration of women's efforts on the feeding and general welfare of families during the 1984-85 strike was viewed by many men (and some women) as merely a logical extension of their duties as housewives. It was perceived only as relief of hardship. It was not considered as "class struggle". But since class struggle is often defined very narrowly (its terrain limited to the industrial front) it is not surprising that the meanings of whole other areas of activity, within the working class itself and within the institutions which the working class has built over decades, lack serious attention and interpretation. Notions of class struggle have always been imbued with particularly male connotations and preclude, for the most part, examination of women's activities. The words 'class struggle' tend to conjure up pictures of rugged male workers defiantly picketing; strikers pushing and shoving to get near those who would cross the picket lines, and confrontation between strikers and baton-swinging riot police. The business of sustaining strikers and families, by trying to feed and clothe them, has been treated as laudable but mundane. During the 1984-85 miners' strike, women's challenges to DHSS rulings, or to Electricity Boards' threats to cut off supplies to their homes have been regarded as highly commendable but not central to the struggle. When women made demands on and within labour movement structures they were often seen as making nuisances of themselves. The praise heaped, ultimately, on support group women by the National Union of Mineworkers was regarded by many miners as praise for extended housework. That is why the congratulatory miners' lamps, awarded by Sherburn miners, were engraved with the words, "They fed their men."

Since the end of the strike the work of support group women, both in and out of the kitchens, has been acknowledged throughout the labour movement as crucial to the continuation of the

year-long dispute. But there has been less emphasis on the struggles women had before they could start that work.

## 2. UNHELPFUL MEN

When Jean Stead wrote,

... the women, *encouraged by the miners*,<sup>1</sup> ... started to form support groups ...<sup>2</sup>

she made a sweeping statement. For in Durham union men were not necessarily supportive when some women declared their intention of organising hardship relief. Some thought the women had no right to interfere in union business. [JG] Bea Campbell, writing of women's experiences in a number of coalfields, explained the situation succinctly,

First of all the women had to fend off many men's opposition : they had to fight the men in order to support them.<sup>3</sup>

Some union men's attitudes were reminiscent of those encountered by Mrs. Simm in Labour movement men when she first attempted to set up WLL branches. In 1908 achieving a Labour government was seen as men's struggle against other men. In a context where women had no vote in parliamentary elections and women's suffrage was unlikely to be conceded for many years, that might make some sense, although arguably short-sighted, sexist and selfish. In the miners' strike, in view of the widespread hardship, union men's initial opposition, obstructive attitudes or indifference to establishing support groups, might be considered short-sighted, sexist and irrational. It can only be understood in the light of their belief that the strike would be over quickly,

You'd be amazed at how many people thought it would last about six weeks.  
[BF]

A support group woman in Easington was assured by a local NUM official that it would be over "in a couple of weeks." [HW] An ex-miner from Leadgate agreed that was the common perception in the union.

When we went out on strike, I don't think the Lodges expected the strike to last ... they thought it would be over quickly. [DW]

National leadership considered the strike might last a little longer but their message was still reassuring. Kelloe men learned from the Durham delegate to the National Committee that the leadership expected the strike to last no longer than three months. [PG] Was that because the union over-estimated its own strength?

At that time they honestly believed, I think, that they were still the strong union they had been in the past. ... I think they thought BOOMF! We're big. We'll get in there and make the kill, and we'll have won! They

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1. My emphasis.

2. Jean Stead, Never the Same Again - Women and the Miners' Strike (1987) p.31.

3. B. Campbell, op. cit. p.252.

definitely thought it would be a repeat of 1974. [HW]<sup>1</sup>

That expectation by local and national leaders of a comparatively short strike with a successful conclusion could go some way towards explaining the initial lack of enthusiasm among many Lodge committee men for the involvement of women in the struggle. Lodges resisted any encroachment by support groups on what committee men perceived as legitimately, and strictly, the business of their union.

In Easington the women sought the blessing of the union and its co-operation in setting up their group. They explained that they did not want to duplicate the work of the Lodge. At first they had to sit outside the Lodge meeting room and relay their demands through the chairman. He went back into the meeting, the men debated and discussed the issue and then the chairman returned to inform the women of the committee's decision. On the next occasion the women were called in.

You can just visualise it. A long committee room. The table runs down from the door. Pictures of Manny Shinwell and all the trade union leaders all around the walls. The Secretary sits at the head of the table and he says, "Come in, flower." I stood on the threshold . . . and said, sarcastically, "Are you sure, now? Have you voted on it? Is it a majority decision? Because once we come across this threshold we are not going back!" He laughed . . . but didn't realise that I was right. [HW]

Lodge committee men might argue that the strike was NUM business; that they were the democratically elected representatives of their workmates; that they were following a democratic procedure whereby issues had to be discussed, considered and a vote taken; that their procedures had served them well over many years, in other disputes, and were no fit subject for women's mockery. Each Lodge considered only its decisions and its activities central to the strike in its area. Lodges were not impressed by the importuning of motley groups of women thrown together temporarily and whose organisations in no respect could be considered as seriously as their own. Some of the men thought at the time that the women were 'a joke'. [HW]

Once co-operation from Easington NUM Lodge was promised, the women set out to encourage the establishment of other groups, in adjacent colliery areas, under the umbrella of SEAM Relief. Women who had never spoken at meetings in their lives went as emissaries to other Lodges to seek their co-operation. The respect due to Lodges seemed to be of paramount concern in villages with working pits. Apart from the practicality of not having Lodge and group covering the same tasks, none of the women wanted to risk "stepping on union men's toes." [HW] Union assent legitimated the existence of the groups, but also, it could be argued, reinforced the dominant position of men who gave that assent and underlined the subordinate

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1. See also Tony Parker, Red Hill, A Mining Community (1986) p.175.

position of women who felt that they could not proceed without it. Another crucial consideration was that, in most cases, women were asking the union for the use of miners' welfare halls as kitchens.

Those who were pioneering the setting up of support groups were keen to spread the message and explain what could be accomplished. A woman from Easington went to Eppleton Lodge but came back in tears. She reported that she had been sworn at by some of the men and accused of wanting to "rip-off" their wives.

We heard from the women of Eppleton that the men were holding a secret meeting. They didn't want the women there because they (the men) wanted to run the support group. But they wanted the women to go and do the work . . . the men had to have control over the money, over what it was spent on. So we went and barged into the secret meeting . . . Eppleton miners ended up by being one of the best lots as far as looking to the women was concerned. But at the beginning it was awful. [HW]<sup>1</sup>

Part of the reason for the women's boldness was anger at the obstacles being put in the way of very practical schemes. Part also was because many women believed (even if it was rarely said aloud) that men were not such efficient organisers as women. The women's attitude was that men should keep to their union work and their discussions of wages and conditions. Women, super-organisers in the kitchen, should be allowed to get on with what they knew best. At that stage, the non-cooperative attitude of some union men was perceived as more than "bloody-mindedness". It was actually insulting to home-management experts. Men had often sung the praises of "our lass" as a wonderful domestic worker, and superb homemaker, cook, seamstress, comforter and mother. The questioning of women's rights to organise the kitchens, then, caused not only frustration but some cynicism about past praise for their domestic achievements. [HW]

Women's experiences with the Lodges in Easington and Eppleton were similar to those in other areas. Some sharp struggles took place before women could get on with their work. Anne Suddick, co-ordinator of the Durham Area Support Groups<sup>2</sup> went with a bus load of Northumberland and Durham women to a rally in Bamsley in May 1984. During the journey she was bombarded with stories of union intransigence and the consequent frustration of the women. Nearly all the groups in areas with working pits were having the same problems.

South Shields were having terrible problems with the union in Westoe. The union wouldn't recognise them or what they were doing. They had lip service from the union while they were doing their best to relieve hardship. The union was sometimes being downright destructive. [AS]

Another woman recalled,

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1. See also J. Stead, *op. cit.* pp.115-116.

2. See later in this Chapter.

At first the union wouldn't help out in any way. The union . . . were just helping with the pickets. [JG]

The Lodge committees' reluctant acceptance of the role of the support groups, in the colliery areas, should not be seen primarily as a result of women wearing down union men's opposition (though they tried) or even of women triumphing over male chauvinism<sup>1</sup> (which according to many accounts would be a gross exaggeration). The more realistic assessment is that gradually the union came to accept that the strike would be protracted. State institutions like the DHSS were being used by government to try to force the miners back to work.<sup>2</sup> Hardship was intensified because strikers were excluded from state benefits. The union needed every bit of material help to sustain strikers and families if the strike was to remain solid. Some women argue that they had been trying to persuade the Lodges of that fact all along. Right from the start, political women recognised the centrality of relieving hardship. Working collectively would keep up morale. If people were not fed, men would be forced back to work and nothing would be achieved.<sup>3</sup>

Here was something positive that could be done to keep people together . . . we thought the basic need of keeping people fed would prolong the strike, would keep them sustained. [FA]

### 3. THE SACRISTON EXPERIENCE

In general, union men eventually stood back and allowed the women to organise hardship relief. But not in Sacriston. Union men there were not only adamant that they should control every aspect of the strike, but held tenaciously to that position throughout the year.

Sacriston Lodge is a very cliquey Lodge. It was very hard to get the support of the men. They really didn't want the women to be involved. They wanted the women to be there when they got home, to have their dinners made. [AP]

Support group women organised raffles and asked local shops for prizes. They tried to run sponsored events. They held jumble sales and coffee mornings to raise funds. However, they had no control over any of the finances.

We had a special hardship fund . . . separate from the Lodge fund. They (the men) had control over both funds, total control. We would raise money, then we'd have to virtually beg for it if we needed to spend it out. We used to have to go to a meeting, put our case, and it had to be so well thought out. When we started the school kitchens I had to make a menu for a week, price it, show them how we could work it, prove it to them completely, and then

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1. See J. Stead, op. cit. pp.119-121 and p.126.
  2. See Chris Jones & Tony Novak, "Welfare Against the Workers : Benefits as a Political Weapon" in H Beynon (ed) *Digging Deeper* (1985) p.87.
  3. Ron Morrissey, facilitator of the Sherburn area groups, took issue with the DMA at that time and said they did not understand how crucial support groups were going to be. He said he told union leaders they did not appreciate that "a meal in the belly and paying for the telly is more important than confronting the police and getting your head bashed in." [RM]

they had a meeting about it afterwards when we weren't there. Then gave us the go-ahead. [AP]

The discos the women organised served two purposes. They raised money and they kept young people off the streets. The only time the women received any support from the men was when they needed two 'bouncers' to deal with drunken youths who tried to push their way in.

Because of the attitude towards women for generations . . . you'd say "Get out" and they'd be very rude to you. (But) if a man said "Get out" they did. [AP]

The men would argue about who should do the job. [AP] This was not a display of eagerness, rather a display of distaste if "a short straw" were drawn. It is noteworthy that the women "blackmailed" the men into acting as bouncers by their insistence that the money-making discos would end if men were not available. [AP]

Early in the strike Sacriston men decided to do the shopping for food to go in the parcels. What they bought was not necessarily nutritious but, in making alternative suggestions, the women had to be very diplomatic since the men were easily offended. After several weeks the men decided to allow the women to do the shopping.

Opening a second-hand shop was exclusively the women's idea. It was not only planned as a money raising project. The women wanted a venue where miners' wives could talk over their problems and perhaps become more involved in the support group. But before they could make that idea a reality, once again the Lodge's permission had to be obtained. Significantly, the group argued for the shop exclusively on the grounds of its potential profitability.

We did get a shop but we had to do masses of groundwork. We had to prove to the Lodge that we could make a profit. [AP]

They sold clothing, shoes, wellington boots, roofing felt, carpets and many other items. The shop had no heating and the women had to be very frugal with the electricity. They agreed to log the sales they made to enable a close check to be kept on all financial transactions. But despite the men's eagle eyes, and their consistent efforts to exert a strict authority over the women's activities, money was siphoned off from shop sales and the amounts kept secret,

We held on to money. The men didn't know about it, but we had that money. If we needed some it was there. The Lodge was really stingy but if anyone was upset with big problems there was a bit of money there for them. [AP]

It could be said that Sacriston Women's Support Group, in its relationship with the Lodge, was characterised by its public acquiescence and private, or oblique subversion.

The women were forced to struggle every inch of the way to carve out small autonomous areas. At the same time, whenever other support groups criticised Sacriston Lodge.<sup>1</sup> Sacriston women

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1. Usually because it was extremely difficult for groups to wring donations out of Sacriston Lodge on behalf of Sacriston miners to whom they were giving food parcels or who ate in their kitchens.

publicly defended the union men. That was partly from genuine loyalty but it was also because they feared that failure to defend the Lodge would become known in the village and their participation in the Area Group might be curtailed by the men.

They have power over women in villages like this, in that they are the breadwinners. Perhaps about half of the younger women went out to work and perhaps some of the older ones whose kids were at school. But really the woman's place is in the home. And that's the way it was. [AP]

"Taking women out of the home," was a fear prevalent among some men in more villages than Sacriston, though there it was much more overt. The result, according to Anna Phelps, was a very small support group which had many problems pursuing the objectives it set itself. Union men seemed to have difficulty with the very concept of support groups,

They just couldn't cope with people actually making decisions without sitting in the committee meeting for four hours to discuss it . . . couldn't cope with how free and easy the whole thing was . . . They had to deal with women, for the first time, on an equal footing . . . They couldn't change the habits of a lifetime overnight . . . The younger NUM members were much better, had wives or girlfriends who had opinions. They were willing to listen and support. The older Lodge officials weren't. [MS]

That tension between support groups and Lodges meant that, in Durham, they did not work together though they did find a *modus vivendi*, operating separate spheres of influence. Yet there was always a feeling that, if the women were not vigilant, what little control they had might be wrested from them by union men. [MS] However, it has to be said that good working relationships were established between some rank and file miners and support groups. 'Banned' pickets<sup>1</sup> in particular showed their appreciation of the women's efforts by taking on tasks in the kitchens, fetching and carrying, or helping to raise funds so that the strike could continue. [MN]<sup>2</sup>

## **G. DURHAM AREA SUPPORT GROUPS MEETING**

### **1. ITS PURPOSE**

The setting up of the Durham Area Support Groups' (DASG) meeting, in May 1984, was a most important development which brought together men and women from all over the coalfield on a regular basis,<sup>3</sup> in an attempt to co-ordinate activities, including demonstrations, protests against

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1. Miners convicted for strike-related offences who had been bound over to keep the peace and banned from picketing.
  2. See also T. Parker, *op. cit.* p.27.
  3. DASG met once a week in Durham City. Strictly speaking there should have been two delegates from each of roughly 50 groups but sometimes more came from one group than another. However, only delegates could vote when issues had to be resolved by ballot, which was rarely. There were always about 100 people present.



the Electricity Board and women's picketing. It was organised by Anne Suddick, secretary to the General Secretary of Durham Mechanics (NUM). It became an opportunity for broadening understanding of both the politics of the strike and other political issues. Overt abuse of state powers by government, particularly in the use of police forces, was discussed. The limitations on citizens' rights to move freely around the country pointed up the belief, previously held only by some political activists, that democracy was expendable if the government decided it should be. The political bias of magistrates and judges was discussed. Speakers outlined the case for maintaining a large coal industry. They spelt out what they believed to be the political nature of the strike and collusion between government and Coal Board in their efforts to "break the NUM". They argued that the Government's economic strategy needed a weakened trade union movement. They said that the Government and the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) were intent on enhancing the role of nuclear power. They talked of imports of coal from Poland and South Africa. They gave facts about the activities of multinational companies. The speakers drew on the daily experiences of mining families and, as a result, those who attended began to be conversant with facts and arguments previously considered the province of "middle class intellectuals".

In the beginning, a material attraction for the delegates was that attendance ensured a share of food and/or money donations which came mainly from supporting trade unions.<sup>1</sup> Though this practice continued throughout the strike, the meetings were increasingly considered to be important in themselves and evolved into purposive occasions for co-operation between groups, exchange of information and, it has to be said, welcome social gatherings. There was an air of expectation, even of excitement, as people crowded into each meeting. The hardship might be terrible but comradeship and determination to continue the struggle gave meaning to the phrase "the best of times and the worst of times". Those who attended looked around and saw people like themselves facing the same problems; people who were anxious to voice those problems and seek help or advice from the larger group. [AP] In those gatherings women became enthusiastic about discussing ways in which they could express themselves more publicly through picketing, demonstrations and protests against the actions of the DHSS and Electricity Board. The activities of some women were no longer confined to kitchens and parcels.

## 2. SOME PROBLEMS

As it was a delegate meeting, not all members of support groups attended. Indeed, not all groups were represented and, because many support groups did not regularly rotate delegates, so the political impact of debate and discussion was limited to those who attended. A matter of some concern, too, was that Easington SEAM Relief stopped attending the meeting after only a

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1. Easington continued to receive their food vouchers (which came via DASG) even after they stopped attending the meetings.

short period because they believed that the immediate aim was to centralise funds in Durham for sharing out among all the groups. Since the coastal kitchens were already established and managing well with the aid of donations from inside and outside the coalfield, they were opposed to any change, especially one which might also manoeuvre them into subordination to the NUM. At first, Easington SEAM Relief had been officially represented by Heather Wood (Easington) and Pam Blanchard (Murton). Though the official SEAM delegates were withdrawn, representatives from constituent groups at Seaham, Dawdon and Murton continued to attend some of the meetings. Easington was conspicuously absent.

DASG meetings were largely unstructured. The co-ordinator, Anne Suddick, acted as chairperson and David Wray, a Sacriston miner, was treasurer. There was an open agenda and no set procedures. Few formal votes were taken. Consensus was actively sought. That would appear to represent the antithesis of a hierarchical, Labour movement organisation. Yet there were underlying tensions centred on the fact that the co-ordinator was the person who held most of the information on what was happening in the coalfield and what was going to happen. Some delegates, while paying the highest tribute to Anne Suddick's remarkable and unstinting efforts during that year, believed that she found it difficult to delegate tasks and felt it was her responsibility to attend to every detail. This was highlighted on the few occasions when illness forced her to ask someone to lead the weekly meeting or organise a deputation. That person was, allegedly, not given enough or relevant information to do the job,

... nobody had the information but Anne. We got the vouchers, but we ... just sat there like pillocks. I'd say, "The vouchers are here. I'm sorry, there's not a meeting. Anne can't make it and she's got the info.." But there were people coming from all over the County for that meeting." [MS]

People poorly briefed on deputations found themselves "in a real stew". [MS]

Miners' wives seem to have been more aware of these tensions than were other activists. To many of the latter the DASG gathering was refreshingly free of tedium and conflict. They did not appreciate, at the time, that a number of miners' wives wanted a structure that combined informality, participation and democratic accountability with full access to information as a right rather than, as they perceived, information given at the discretion of one person. [MP] [MS] They did not make this clear to the other delegates. All they actually proposed was the formation of a committee to help the co-ordinator. This the rest of the delegates readily agreed but DASG continued to work in much the same way as it had before. The frustrations of dissenting miners' wives were contained but never resolved by DASG. The fact that the dissident DASG women did not clarify their aims until after the strike betrayed, perhaps, a lack of confidence akin to that encountered in the activities of DWAC women, and probably there was a lack of sensitivity and understanding on the part of more experienced political activists present at the Area meetings.



It might be claimed that, though DASG was dissimilar in many respects from formal organisations such as trade union or political party branches, its co-ordinator had at her disposal some of the "assets" listed by Michels when he said that leaders possessed many resources which gave them unsurmountable advantages (in terms of power) over members who try to change policies.<sup>1</sup> She certainly had superior (and fuller) knowledge in that she possessed information directly denied to others. She could use the resources of the organisation to travel from place to place presenting her views to individual groups. She was more skilled than non-professionals in knowing what was necessary for organisation. In short, her own occupational skills placed her in a situation of power denied to others in the organisation.

At the same time, it has to be stressed that she had not worked her way upwards through a bureaucracy in order to take over the position of co-ordinator. She happened to be available and, crucially, was willing to take on responsibility (without knowing exactly what that would entail) when the union for which she worked was faced with a crisis and Billy Etherington, the person for whom she worked, was anxious to place resources at the disposal of the support groups.

It is a widespread belief among support group workers that, had it not been for Billy Etherington, DASG might not have come into existence. [AS] [MS] [JD] [VM] [KM] [DC] But even if it had, it would have encountered enormous difficulties in surviving without the backup given by the Durham Mechanics. And, without the exceptionally hard work, enthusiasm and steadfastness of Anne Suddick, DASG could not have functioned as well as it did. As more responsibilities were heaped on her, for example supplying buses for trips to demonstrations, to Greenham Common, for visits to other coalfields; supplying speakers for DASG meetings, and generally taking care of the myriad organisational details that were essential, but easily forgotten by others, so she became more entrenched in her position. For most of the time she appeared to revel in it. [AP] [MS]

Anne "held sway" over the meeting and was, at times, inspiring, [MS] [AP] but she continued to occupy her position by common assent. And while it is fair to comment that she possessed charismatic qualities, this by no means implies the charismatic leadership attitudes outlined by Weber.<sup>2</sup> For, although her qualities marked her out as a leader in time of crisis and distress, she never "demanded obedience" but regularly sought and encouraged consensus. Strikers' families faced extreme hardship. Anne was a willing workhorse on their behalf, often to the point of exhaustion. Whether or not she resisted delegating or sharing responsibility, the reality was that none of the dissident women was in a position to spend time sharing the whole burden. The operations base and communications centre for the support groups was the NUM Mechanics

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1. Robert Michels, Political Parties (1962) p.16.

2. H.H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, From Max Weber (1970) pp.245-248.

office in Durham City where Anne Suddick worked. All the dissident wives lived in other areas. Whatever small changes in organisation might have been possible, that reality of location could not be altered.

### 3. GRIEVANCES

One function of the DASG meeting was that of 'safety valve'. Groups with grievances against each other had an opportunity to air them before they became destructive of Area activity, but all grievances were not resolved. The most significant dispute concerned Murton Support Group and Spennymoor Trades Council (STC).

An early suggestion from STC that relief should be organised on a coalfield basis had been rejected.<sup>1</sup> But if cash collections were not to be centralised and food distributed equitably around the coalfield, then guidelines had to be agreed on how groups should operate in relation to each other. Geographical demarcations were made. Each support group undertook to look after miners and miners' families living in its area regardless of where the men worked, and some groups worked together for collection and distribution purposes. While individual support groups were free to collect money wherever they could outside the coalfield, no group should attempt to collect on another group's territory inside the coalfield. The agreement was fine in theory but caused problems in practice. For example, Fishburn cokeworks got its coal from the Murton area during the strike. Hawthorn Lodge<sup>2</sup> decided to levy the cokeworkers £1 a week each and use the money to relieve hardship in Murton. But the cokeworks was in STC's area and STC was supplying parcels to all miners who lived in and around Fishburn, including those who worked in the Murton pits. STC asked SEAM Relief to stop Murton Support Group's "poaching". SEAM Relief replied that, though Murton Support Group was affiliated to its organisation, it had no jurisdiction over the group's actions. Murton Support Group pointed out that it was not actually collecting the money - that was the decision and responsibility of Hawthorn Lodge. STC insisted there was a principle involved and that Murton Support Group should not accept the money. The women declined to do this. It is debatable whether a protest from the women would have changed the Lodge's decision. The Lodge considered the issue union business and nothing to do with the support groups. Lodges seemed unable to appreciate that co-operation and goodwill amongst the groups needed to be maintained to avoid chaos. STC's perception, however, was that the women were hiding behind that Lodge decision. [BG] [PaG] Money was always difficult to obtain and, in that instance, STC claimed that the Lodge's and the Murton Support Group's parochialism came to the fore.<sup>3</sup> In another case concerning an

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1. Brian Gibson moved this resolution.

2. Situated in the Murton area. Hawthorn miners ate in Murton kitchen.

3. Murton kitchens received the Fishburn money for 6 weeks. Then Horden miners picketed the cokeworks and collected the money. [PB]

STC complaint that a Lodge was poaching in its area and again using the money for relief of hardship on the coast, Brian Gibson says he was told by the Lodge Secretary ,

In this game, Brian, you look after your own. [BG]

In that instance, after much protest, STC accepted a 50/50 split of the money collected by that Lodge in the STC area.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. PICKETING WOMEN

As the strike wore on, some DASG women<sup>2</sup> took decisions to act more publicly and picket alongside the men. Their presence was not always welcome. Many miners found it very difficult at first to accept that women should picket. The wife of one union man dodged in at the back of the crowd, adding her voice to those who protested at the bussing-in of strike-breakers, so long as her husband could not see her. [JG] She and others explained that the men felt protective towards their wives and did not want them to get hurt if scuffles started with the police. After a time, their small presence became commonplace at pit gates. Yet when DASG women vigorously picketed the Philadelphia Workshops,

The Lodge officials didn't like it one little bit. We were dead enthusiastic, and by that time they (the men) were at the stage where they were just shouting. We weren't. We were going in there to stop these women going into the offices. We put up a bloody good fight. I can remember the Lodge Secretary saying, "Look, this isn't on, you're just getting yourselves into trouble." I just couldn't understand (the men's) attitude because I was dying to be involved. . . . They were horrified. . . . At one point we were debating going in and trying to take over the offices. And they (the men) were absolutely mortified at that prospect. [MS]

Why did the women want to picket? Most women who took part, including Sacriston Support Group, maintain that their first concern was to show solidarity with their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers. [AS] [MS] [FA] [AP] [LR] They felt they needed to demonstrate that the struggle was as much theirs as the men's. But it is at least arguable that men's traditional devaluation of housework<sup>3</sup> goaded women into confrontational activities. For some women reasoned that if picketing was considered central to struggle then that was what they ought to do. The picket line was where miners and the enemy, in the shape of scabs and the police, faced each other, and where 'the class struggle' was at its height. Women pickets also experienced a feeling of strength in that collective action, not often encountered in collecting money on the streets or cooking cabbages in kitchens. [AS] [AP] A further justification for their intervention at Philadelphia was that women office staff were crossing the picket lines. Women strike-breakers

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1. Since Easington NUM had specifically approached STC and requested them to take on responsibility for miners' families in its area, STC members were aggrieved when Easington breached the agreement that had been made. [BG]
  2. Some Seaham women who were not involved in the support group in their village picketed their local pit. [MN] Women from Easington and Dawdon Support Groups also picketed. [HW] [JG]
  3. See Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (1974) pp.1-9.

ought to be approached and spoken to by women pickets. They were convinced, too, that they would have persuaded the strike breakers to change their minds had it not been for the violent intervention of the police. [LR] [FA] [AS]<sup>1</sup>

It could be said that women who picketed regularly with men at the pitheads ( as opposed to picketing women strike-breakers or joining demonstrations or going in deputation to the Electricity Board) were accepting both the devaluation of hardship relief work and the male definition of class struggle. On the other hand, it could be argued that those who were content to be involved in kitchen work alone were reinforcing male definitions of legitimate female activities. Only one woman declared a real antipathy to kitchen work on the grounds that women involved were acting out the stereotypical roles of cook and servant,

I was always a bit unsure about the kitchens. Didn't like the kitchens. It was always, to me, a servant's job. Particularly when I went to Eppleton after we'd been picketing and they (the men) sat there, wanting to be waited on hand-and-foot by those women. The women would fetch the sandwiches around. The women would fetch their tea. Now I used to think to myself, "Oh, no!" I felt it was saying that was the woman's place. We never worked in a kitchen. [MS]

It can be seen, then, that reflections on what was or what was not legitimate or appropriate activity for women were very complex.

Mention must be made that there were also women members of the NUM on strike. Mostly these were the workers in pit canteens. Pauline Messer was one of them but when she picketed her pit at Sacriston she was informed by the Lodge Committee that she was not entitled to picket money. [AP] Pauline was one of the five core members of Sacriston Support Group.

## 5. WOMEN'S AUTONOMY

The women rejected suggestions that, by picketing, they were interfering in the men's sphere. They said they had no desire to steer the men's activities in any particular direction. [AP] [MS] But there were occasions when men interfered in the women's sphere. It has been noted above that union men eventually stood back and allowed women to get on with their work. In fact, the experience of most women (and most groups) was that very little was seen of Lodge officials since they concentrated almost entirely on organising picketing. Some support groups fortunate enough to have links with Lodges through kinship or membership seemed to be more quickly recognised as 'bona fide' and, after their initial problems, began to receive fairly regular amounts of money to help with food for the kitchens or parcels. Other support groups,

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1. On the August picket at Philadelphia, support group women were thrown to the ground and injured, and one miner's wife was arrested and held at Houghton Police Station. [LR] [AS] [FA] [MS] [FS]

particularly most of those away from the coast, saw less of union men.<sup>1</sup> But, five months after the strike began, all the groups in the Durham Area were summoned to the NUM Area headquarters at Redhills in Durham for a meeting with the Area full time officials.

The meeting began with some solemnity, the President, General Secretary and Treasurer of the DMA moving down the aisles between the rows of support group workers to take their places at the top table.

It was obvious that the DMA officials had had their orders from the National Executive of the NUM to "get involved with the support groups". They were ham-fisted about it and the groups were on the defensive, some of them believing, perhaps, that the DMA was about to swallow them up. A woman<sup>2</sup> asked, "After 21 weeks of strike, why does the union want to get involved *now*?" No real answer. In fact, the meeting was a bit of a dog's breakfast! It turned . . . (into) . . . a session about why certain Lodges are being unhelpful about hardship payments - Sacriston Lodge in particular.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the objectives of that meeting, they came to nothing. It was the only time a meeting took place between NUM Area officials and support group representatives. But the incident itself confirmed Easington women's belief that, if they had not been assertive, the men would have moved in on the groups to impose their bureaucratic control. [HW]<sup>4</sup>

Another incident led not only to confrontation between Kitty Callan, wife of the then DMA General Secretary, and Heather Wood, co-ordinator of the Easington Support Group but to a greater or lesser degree touched every woman activist. In an *Observer* article, Christopher Hitchens wrote,

Who knows what instinct was at work when the wives of striking coalminers decided to bypass what they thought to be a callous Government and petition the Queen directly?<sup>5</sup>

Hitchens was wrong to assume that the petition was initiated by rank-and-file miners' wives. It originated in the NUM headquarters. Mary Stratford believed it had been distributed by Anne Scargill and Betty Heathfield on behalf of the Women Against Pit Closures. [MS]<sup>6</sup> Heather Wood maintained it came from Arthur Scargill himself. Mary saw it as,

. . . a total and utter waste of time - even more so because in August (when the petition was due to be presented after the planned national demonstration) she was in bloody Balmoral and I just couldn't see the point in prancing over to Buckingham Palace. . . . She (the Queen) had no interest

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1. Though Alan Cummings, Secretary of Easington NUM Lodge, visited Bowburn on a fairly regular basis. [MSy] David Hopper from Monkwearmouth Lodge kept in touch with miners in Burnhope. [LR] But some groups had no communication with the Lodges for almost the whole of the strike.
  2. Heather Wood
  3. My diary, 3rd August 1984.
  4. Tommy Callan, General Secretary of DMA during the strike, denies this was ever their intention. [TC]
  5. Christopher Hitchens, "Time to End Tribal Worship of the Crown" *The Observer*, 7 January 1990 p.14.
  6. See Jean McCrindle, "Miners' Wives : a lasting change" in *New Socialist*, October 1984 p.4.

whatsoever in mining communities or miners. She'd shown that. [MS]<sup>1</sup>

The petition was distributed at a DASG meeting. No one voiced objection to it at the time but Mary Stratford was not the only delegate who "accidentally lost it". [MS] If embarrassment, irritation and an angry, gut reaction that the petition was stupid, proved stronger among some delegates than their democratic tendencies, at least on that occasion, they could point to the fact that no democratic debate had taken place before the petition was circulated.

Though most women thought that the petition was a WAPC initiative, there is indirect evidence to indicate that Heather Wood's belief may have had some substance, since Kitty Callan interpreted any refusal to sign the petition as an act of personal disloyalty to Arthur Scargill. [KC] Easington women refused to sign when they discovered that Mr. Scargill had not signed it himself. Mrs. Callan was convinced that Mrs. Wood's personal opposition to the petition had influenced the rest of the Easington group. [KC] [HW] Mrs. Wood countered that Easington women had minds of their own,

We discussed it and it was unanimous. If Arthur Scargill wouldn't sign the bloody petition to go to the Queen, why the hell should we? [HW]

In Heather Wood's eyes the petition was an example of Arthur Scargill's male chauvinism. Easington women were insulted by the idea of a 'women's petition' which pleaded with the Queen to intervene in the strike for the sake of the children.<sup>2</sup> Disaffection was not confined to Easington. Half of Murton Women's Support Group signed the petition (brought into their communal kitchen by Hawthorn Lodge men) without reading it. When they realised what they had signed they wanted to erase their names. Pam Blanchard expressed their distaste,

We said we wouldn't sign because we didn't see any reason . . . we weren't going begging. We weren't going to let Maggie Thatcher have us look as if we were begging from (the Queen). [PB]

The men refused to allow them to retract their accidental assent.

There could be no meeting of minds between those who saw support of the petition in terms of absolute loyalty to Arthur Scargill and the union, and those who felt it was a demeaning, begging letter. There was a serious rift over the issue between Kitty Callan and Heather Wood. [KC] [HW] The petition was presented but there was no intervention from the Royal Household on behalf of suffering families. Few support group women - even those who had signed - supposed there would be.

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1. See Tariq Ali, Street Fighting Years (1987) pp.254-255 for the monarch's reported reaction to the 1974 miners' strike. See Raphael Samuel, "Doing Dirt on the Miners" in New Socialist October 1986 p.14 for her remarks on the 1984 strike.

2. See Appendix 5.



The royal petition reinforced Easington Support Group's opinion that the closer DASG was pulled towards the Women Against Pit Closures organisation, the more the NUM would influence support group activities, seek to exert authority over women and destroy their hard-won autonomy. They also believed that, rather than moving towards formally structured organisation, women's objectives would be better served by nurturing spontaneous links inside and outside the coalfield. [HW]

Easington's absence from DASG was missed. Mary Stratford believed that, whatever Easington's rationale for its absence, it "robbed" outlying areas of contact with pit villages and of information and experience. She blamed Easington's parochialism.

Easington itself is that kind of place - insular, the centre of the world as far as anyone who lives there is concerned. [MS]<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, it could be argued that, after August 1984, there was no good reason why Easington Support Group should not have attended DASG meetings. From that time there were no more attempts by DMA to "get involved with the support groups". And, if all SEAM affiliates had regularly attended DASG meetings, they would have constituted such a powerful force that they could easily have prevented any threatened "takeover". Mary Stratford may have been correct in saying that DASG was "robbed" by Easington Group's absence. But it might also be the case that Easington Group denied itself a valuable experience by not becoming involved with support group workers from all over the county and by not engaging in political discussion and debate at DASG weekly meetings. Margaret Nugent who attended from Seaham,

. . . loved those meetings because they meant comradeship with other areas.  
[MN]

But even without Easington Support Group, DASG meetings functioned very successfully in terms of co-ordination, generally fostering understanding and goodwill between groups and ironing out logistical problems. As a safety valve mechanism, they were only moderately successful, though no major or debilitating rift resulted from disagreements. Very importantly, the meetings brought people together on a regular basis to discuss the political implications of the strike. Directly and indirectly they provided forms of political education. Through their daily experiences support group women became conscious of the limits which male chauvinism, union conservatism and parochialism imposed on their efforts, particularly in the early stages of the strike. Once their autonomy was established, however, most groups were prepared to question arbitrary decisions by Lodges. Through their attendance at DASG meetings some women became aware that they needed to struggle against their own parochialism within the structures they had built for themselves. In the case of STC and Murton Support Group, they failed. But occasionally they succeeded.

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1. Mary Stratford was brought up in Easington.

## 6. THE IMPORTANCE OF DASG

Despite the problems and occasional disagreements, there was a great deal of solidarity and friendship amongst the groups. There were many examples of close comradeship and mutual help. Real sacrifices were made, too, in giving material help to the more hardpressed Nottingham coalfield. But it is unlikely that any support group acted entirely altruistically throughout the strike. Groups sought out their own sources of help and came to private arrangements with generous supporters at home and abroad. In the Durham coalfield such arrangements were rarely broadcast among the groups and rarely shared. Only after the strike would people reveal in detail what these sources were and the extent of their contribution.

If relief had been organised on a coalfield basis it is possible that there might have been fewer problems, particularly for poorer, more isolated groups. Genuinely collective action might have evolved. But that would have presupposed a level of political awareness and a tradition of politically sophisticated activity that did not exist. Alternatively, had there been coalfield organisation, it is arguable that its direction would have been in the hands of union bureaucracy. That might have curtailed severely the freedom of action of others (particularly women) who decided to help and hence could have limited what social and political development did take place. Another consideration is that, if political activists had not been directly and daily involved in autonomous groups and acutely aware of the hardship, even their contributions might have been confined to occasional collections within labour movement organisations.

DASG meetings were innovatory, energising occasions where men and women met on equal terms to discuss politics and future activities. There was an amazing array of newspapers on sale from political groups as well as free supplies of The Miner and Durham Striker, the official national and local NUM broadsheets. Probably because DASG was autonomous, not dependent on any one section of the Labour movement, there was no ban on reading matter. There were no attempts to proscribe the sale of 'unofficial' publications. Allowing "a thousand flowers" to bloom increased interest in political issues. Everything was grist to the mill of some women (and some men) who suddenly realised how many other issues were connected with their situation in the coalfield. Their new understanding intensified their commitment to the struggle.

## H. AN EDUCATION IN ITSELF

Massey and Wainwright have said,

Through the strike and the support movement many people new to political involvement have become experienced, effective speakers, expert organisers and confident socialists.<sup>1</sup>

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1. D. Massey & H. Wainwright, "Beyond the Coalfields" in Huw Beynon (ed.), Digging Deeper (1985) p.166.

## 1. EFFECTIVE SPEAKERS?

How far does that judgement apply to Durham support groups? First of all it must be stressed that miners' wives have always been articulate within their own environments. [MS] Before the strike they had never been called on to give press or TV interviews or to address crowds of people. During the strike, only a minority, within the minority organising relief, ever had opportunities to address meetings. Women from the parent group at Easington SEAM were plunged into speaking when they visited Lodges to persuade union men of the value of support groups. [HW] A handful of women went to London and other cities and spoke at meetings to raise money for their groups. Those who accompanied children on trips abroad, sponsored by overseas trade unions, were forced into becoming spokespersons for their parties. [JH] [FS] Some learned how to cope with interviewers from television, radio and the press. [AS] [LR] But their numbers were small. Behind each woman speaker produced in Durham was a hinterland of women who did not have the opportunity even to travel to Durham for the Area meeting, let alone to travel further afield.

## 2. EXPERT ORGANISERS?

Men and women involved on a daily basis in support groups became expert organisers. [FA] [JH] [AH] [MN] [HW] [NS] [PB] [PaG] [LR] Miners' wives had cooked for their families but had never faced such large-scale catering as the strike-kitchens demanded. Although only Sacriston Group had to calculate and demonstrate to the men exactly how much food was needed before they received permission to set up their kitchen, all groups had to husband their resources since food was precious and there could be no experiments and no waste. Activists involved in food parcel distribution learned how to handle logistical problems swiftly or the operations would have ended in shambles. [JD] Crucially, all support group members had to be able to work as part of a team; had to become sensitised to others' strengths and weaknesses; had to learn how to approach and cope with union men and others in positions of authority and had to learn how to agitate for their objectives when bureaucracy blocked the way to solutions of difficulties. Physical stamina was a necessity, particularly for those collecting on the streets in bad weather and for those lifting heavy pans or sacks of vegetables and weighty boxes of tinned food in the kitchens and in the parcel centres. Mental stamina was a necessity for all who shouldered responsibility for the continued existence of the groups, over a long period and when no resolution to the strike was in sight. All learned that there was far more to successful organisation than they had imagined but, more importantly, that they were capable of developing the necessary skills to do the work. They became amazingly proficient and many surprised themselves with their new-found assertiveness and ingenuity. [LR] [JH] [DoW] But, contrary to some accounts, they were not miracle workers.

Howells<sup>1</sup> Jones and Novak<sup>2</sup>, and Massey and Wainwright<sup>3</sup> referred to the emergence, during the strike, of an "Alternative Welfare State" or system, born of necessity and reflecting the closeness of mining communities. But that term has to be approached with great care. McCrindle and Hain believed that miners' wives had found a way around government-imposed deprivation,

Women have organised a network of survival mechanisms which have brilliantly sidestepped the DHSS's attempts to punish the families of strikers - and the lives of women in mining communities have become transformed as a result.<sup>4</sup>

If there were coalfields where the DHSS failed in its attempts to punish miners' families, Durham could not be counted among them. The alternative welfare provision in Durham, in terms of food, amounted at most to one meal on several days a week and/or a £4 grocery parcel a week, not enough to cater adequately for one person, let alone a family. But even that provision could only be sustained while activists inside and outside the coalfield were prepared to give money, while support group workers were able and willing to collect money on the streets and while rank and file miners and some women were willing to travel to cities and towns in Britain and overseas seeking help. It is debatable how much longer those efforts could have been maintained. By the end of the strike money was harder to get. Support group workers and supporters in general, however politically and emotionally committed, were becoming exhausted because the enormous burden of work lay on too few shoulders.

However, one lesson that might be drawn from the provision of that welfare is that the approach of the providers was more humane, more sensitive and more conscious of need than any system produced so far by statutory bodies. It demonstrated that welfare could be delivered without stigma and without the pettiness and harshness often encountered by 'claimants' when they have to resort to bureaucracies for help. Then again, for socialists involved in the struggle, provision represented solidarity rather than 'welfare'.

### 3. CONFIDENT SOCIALISTS?

It is difficult to determine whether or not the activities of Durham support groups represented confident socialism at work. The miner's wife who talked about prolonging the strike had been a political activist for many years. From the start, she had clear and positively expressed ideas about the implications of the dispute and recognised the class nature of the struggle. While some other political activists saw the strike in similar terms, most miners' wives in support groups, at least initially, thought mostly in terms of keeping their own families fed for the

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1. Kim Howells, "Stopping Out - The Birth of a new kind of Politics" in Huw Beynon (ed.), Digging Deeper (1985) p.145.
  2. C. Jones & T. Novak, op. cit. p.97.
  3. D. Massey & H. Wainwright, op.cit. p.166.
  4. Peter Hain & Jean McCrindle, "One And All : Labour's response to the miners" New Socialist, October 1984 p.46.

duration of the dispute. Organising kitchens and food parcels collectively was recognised as a cheaper and more efficient method of managing than struggling along in individual family units.

Many women dreaded the prospect of a strike. Lorna Ruddle from Easington had constantly expressed her growing dissatisfaction with the overtime ban that preceded the dispute. She was devastated at the thought of an all-out strike. [LoR]<sup>1</sup> Beatrice Taylor of Kelloe recounted her panic that she had so little money saved. She wondered how her family would survive a strike. [BT] Young miners with young families usually had more to worry about than those who were older with grown-up children. [KM] A few women welcomed the dispute, some even thinking it was long overdue. [FS] [MS] [MN] Some viewed its onset with trepidation but quickly resigned themselves to its inevitability.

Political activists believed the strike had been engineered by the NCB and the Government. It was happening when the union was at its weakest, coal stocks were high and the Government had made preparations for a political as well as an industrial battle. But that crucial, political dimension was not immediately apparent to many women in support groups. For a long time Easington women positively refused to listen to political assessments of their situation. [HW] It was only as the strike wore on, and some of them experienced at first hand the repressive actions of the state that they began to ask questions. They wanted to know why they were being treated as outcasts in society rather than as citizens-with-rights they had supposed themselves to be. Juliana Herron of Eppleton also started to think politically when she visited the House of Commons and heard MPs castigating the miners,

And I saw them sitting there, criticising our men. I mean, they were just attacking them. And I thought this can't be right . . . it's no good sitting at home complaining. Get out and do something about it. [JH]

Others did not recognise themselves, their families or their neighbours in descriptions of the struggle purveyed by the mass media. There was a contradiction, an explicit denial in media presentations of what coalfield women knew to be a reality.

That contradiction was particularly marked by the absence of any rigorous media comment on police violence. Fortunately, strike supporters set about keeping written and photographic accounts of the experiences of strikers' families. For example, Patterson and Beynon, in words and pictures, chronicled the siege of Easington,

For three days . . . police road blocks sealed the village off in the morning. Even the dinner van for the kitchens was turned away. Nothing was allowed in. . . . For three days police marched through the village. Gwent police, police from Northampton. Strangers. One women spoke for many when she said : "I never thought I'd see scenes like this in Britain. I never thought I'd see what I've seen on the streets of Easington. We're occupied. We've been

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1. Lorna Ruddle's diary 1984. In contrast, others indicated that only craftsmen (Durham Mechanics) worked much overtime and the ban had had little effect on ordinary NUM members. [NS] [FD]

occupied by the police."<sup>1</sup>

Florence Anderson believed the police behaved like animals on the night of 'Black Friday' when they lay in wait outside Hetton Swimming Baths for people to emerge from a charity social, and from public houses. She said police stopped and questioned men who were peacefully making their way home. If the men admitted they were miners, they were immediately arrested. Police laid all manner of charges against them. She added that when cases came to court police lied in the witness box and told conflicting stories. It made no difference to the verdicts. Most men were convicted. [FA] [JH] Those whose cases were delayed until after the strike were usually acquitted,

But by then it didn't matter to the government, because they'd won. [FA]

There were no photographers present to make an historical record of what happened in Hetton. But Hetton people came to realise that what went on was "part of the system". [FA]

What shocked those who experienced police activity in pit areas was the media assumption that strike violence was one-sided. Or, if police were actually seen to be violent, that was deemed self-defence. And yet the stories of police provocation - the waving of £10 notes at pickets who were going home to cold houses and little food; the baiting of children by asking them if they knew their fathers were bastards [FA]; the crude language and obscene remarks directed towards women by police [AS] [FA] and the physical violence done to women on picket lines [AS] [FA] [LR] [AP] all somehow escaped the notice of the media. Those experiences stimulated some women to question long-held assumptions about how society works. A few in Durham began their search for political knowledge and active involvement in political life. But, for others, that process was slower. And for some it has still not happened.

If, in the beginning, Easington women did not want to discuss politics, Leadgate Miners' Support Group resisted to the end any "political interference". When it was suggested that Bill Etherington, leader of the Durham NUM Mechanics, should be invited to speak they vehemently rejected the idea. An ex-Clydeside shipbuilding worker, an early supporter of the Leadgate group,

... got chased. He used to stand up at the meetings and make his political statements. And he was screamed down. (They said) this strike is not political ... They didn't see (police harassment) as political. They just saw that as bastard policemen going round hitting people on the head. Everybody followed Billy (Nattrass). He used to call himself a militant moderate. And to Billy it was a test of endurance, something we had to see through, just like the Blitz. He wasn't going to go back to work. Nobody was going to go back to work as far as Billy was concerned. (His attitude was) we're gonna beat the bastards. We will endure ... it wasn't a political thing. It was a test of endurance. [DW]

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1. Keith Patterson & Huw Beynon, Easington August '84 (circa 1985).

It might be objected here that not much more could be expected from the Leadgate group since most of them were 'economistic', rank-and-file, male trade unionists. However, the speech given by David Hopper, Secretary of Wearmouth Lodge, to miners in South Moor in the Autumn of 1984, incensed not only the men but support group women as well. He had come to rally the miners, to urge them to endure and he asked for "their blood", while they only wanted to know what the union was doing to end the strike and let them get back to work. The women as well as the men had little interest in political speeches. They wanted their sufferings brought to an end. They were angry that the Lodges had made no efforts to communicate with the miners for over six months. This first meeting with a Lodge official, attended by all the miners, infuriated them because it was "political". [MSG] Families felt angry towards the Government and Coal Board because of the hardship they inflicted. But that anger was not necessarily indicative of a growing political awareness. The same anger could be turned against Lodge officials who brought a message that both men and women did not want to hear. However it has to be recorded that David Hopper's intervention resulted in South Moor miners staying out on strike instead of going back to work as they had planned. [TC]

Evaluating the extent to which women became politicised is fraught with complications. Massey and Wainwright's claim did not go so far as Tony Benn's statement that the whole basis of the Labour movement had been refounded.<sup>1</sup> But both statements, together with the view expressed by Clarney, Field and McCrindle that,

The women's support groups are a new and powerful hope for the future of the Labour movement,<sup>2</sup>

fitted well with notions on the Left that the strike had brought forth a formidable socialist force composed largely of support group women.

It was stated earlier that, in Durham, only a small minority of women became collectively active. Apart from initiators and co-ordinators of groups, only a handful of the rest could be termed 'political activists' in any sense before the strike. Two Labour Party women worked with Murton group in the kitchen but left in the Summer of 1984 because they "could not get on with the younger women." [PB] Another Labour Party member, Myrtle Macpherson, organised Easington's catering squad in the miners' kitchen. [HW] Remaining members of Murton and Easington groups and all in Dawdon, Hetton, Burnhope, Great Lumley, Coxhoe and Seaham were not Labour Party members, or even from Labour Party families. [HW] [PB] [NS] [FA] [LR] [MS] [AH] Their willingness to become involved in hardship relief then, during the strike, was not due to intergenerational party political influence. However, what did and does link generations of mining families in Durham is experience and/or knowledge of past industrial

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1. Tony Benn, "Keeping Our Heads Down Will Mean a Hung Parliament" Labour Herald 27 September 1985 p.9.

2. Peter Clarney, John Field and Jean McCrindle, "The Miners - right on their side" New Socialist September 1984 p.26.

battles. There had been many defeats but each victory, particularly the long sought-after nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947, and the outcome of the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes, reinforced a pride in the NUM and enhanced its image as the vanguard union of the working class. [HW] [MS] [MN] [FA] [PB]

It has also been argued that women who became active in hardship relief did so, initially, to help feed their families and only through the process of the strike began to characterise that struggle as political as well as industrial. They began to appreciate their own importance within that struggle. In making a critique of debates around theories about working class consciousness, Marshall has argued,

that the underdevelopment of the concept of social action has . . . given the debate its ahistorical taint. There has been little sense of progress, of reflective social action engaging social structures in ways that might change their awareness and evaluation of their social world. . . . Consciousness is generated in and changed by social action. Consciousness is, in fact, an integral component of social action rather than a distant something that somehow causes or is caused by it. Experience has shown that it is the relationships between attitudes and actions that are important.<sup>1</sup>

In that connection, all women interviewed claimed that the more active they became, the more their ideas and attitudes altered.

Those who were previously politically active emphasised that their understandings of structural linkages in society had deepened and widened as a result of the strike and some stated their intention of becoming more politically active. [AS] [AP] [MN] [HW] [MS] [LR] Some political novices outlined their pre-strike non-involvement and their pre-strike beliefs about how society worked. They contrasted those with new understandings which active involvement had generated. [JH] [FS] [DoW] [FD] [LoR] None of the latter claimed to be "confident socialists". Certainly none claimed all the elements of the mature class consciousness catalogued by Mann : class identity, that is perceiving oneself as working class; class opposition, that is perceiving capitalism and the capitalist class as the enemy; class totality, that is analysing one's own situation and one's society in class terms; and having a conception of an alternative society.<sup>2</sup> Since all four elements are rarely found together anyway,<sup>3</sup> it would indeed have been surprising if any of the women had claimed to possess them all. Contrary to claims from the optimistic Left, most Durham support group women who said they had been politicised recognised that they had only begun their political apprenticeships. They were eager to seek ways and means to advance their understandings and to act on them. [JH] [FS] [DoW] They readily discussed their changed attitudes on a range of issues. Two years after the strike ended, all women interviewed

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1. G. Marshall, "Some remarks on the study of working class consciousness" in D. Rose (ed) Social Stratification and Economic Change (1988) p.120.

2. M. Mann quoted in G. Marshall, op. cit. p.102.

3. *ibid.*



had retained antagonistic views towards the Conservative Government. All but two were antagonistic towards the police and the law.<sup>1</sup> All believed the mass media told lies. All distrusted newspapers and were very sceptical about the impartiality of television broadcasting though, paradoxically, most asserted that they watched more TV news programmes than they had before the strike.

There is a problem, though, in merely aggregating attitudes of individuals since that cannot produce an adequate map of "class consciousness" among the women. Apart from being an over-simplification of the term it says nothing of any relationship between attitudes and practice. And if

... powerful class parties are an essential condition for the transformation of latent feelings of class identity into class conscious activities on behalf of class, rather than sectional interests,<sup>2</sup>

newly politicised miners' wives had no obvious political home. For the fact is that, in Britain, there is no powerful working class party intent on helping to "constitute social identities in class rather than other terms."<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, there is another problem in enumerating those who, for instance, became Labour Party members, as if that act would necessarily lead to a widening of their political interests and a high level of political commitment. Dowse and Hughes have pointed out that in mass-member political parties,

role expectations are non-demanding and the member can make anything he likes of it : he can be active or passive, he can attend branch meetings or not, read the 'literature' or listen to the radio, and so on . . .<sup>4</sup>

However, support group women who joined the Labour Party sincerely believed that making such a commitment indicated their intentions to continue political activity. [FA] [JH] [HW] But less than thirty women throughout the area covered here joined the Labour Party as a result of their experiences during the strike. In Easington itself 8 out of 13 women joined but after five years only two remained as members. [HW] In Murton 1 out of 8 women joined, but in Dawdon there were no recruits. [PB] [NS] In Seaham, 15 people, women and pickets, came to a few meetings but left because of the "backstabbing". [MN] Further inland, in Hetton, 4 out of 14 women joined; two remained as members, one of whom is now a District councillor.<sup>5</sup> No women joined from Leadgate, Great Lumley and Burnhope self-help groups. [DW] [MS] [LR]

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1. The two were Pauline Gibson, who worked with STC and who had a relative in the police force, and one woman from the South Moor Support Group.
  2. G. Marshall, H. Newby, D. Rose and C. Vogler, "Making and unmaking class consciousness" in G. Marshall and others (eds.) *Social Class in Modern Britain* (1988) p.193.
  3. Ibid. See Chapter 4.
  4. R.E. Dowse & J.A. Hughes, op. cit. p.213. See also Jean Blondel, *Voters, Parties and Leaders* (1974) p.92. See also Chapter 4.
  5. Juliana Heron.

Mixed groups produced few recruits. Urpeth group produced one recruit who lasted six months but there were no members recruited in Chester-le-Street or Ouston. [MP] [EF] [TP] In Craghead, 8 miners' wives joined and five are still members. [BJ] One miner's wife joined in Durham City but lapsed after a few years. In Coxhoe, none of the 8 miners' wives joined but a couple of people did join in Bowburn. [AH] [MSy] There were no recruits in the area covered by STC. [BG]

Pam Blanchard explained that Murton women had never expressed intentions of becoming Labour Party members; that they had been disappointed by Labour Party leadership during the strike and that, in any case, they were not interested in politics and "just wanted to be at home with their families."<sup>1</sup> Lily Ross said that Burnhope women had never been and were not now 'political' in any sense. They had resisted the destruction of their husbands' and sons' livelihoods by becoming involved in Burnhope self-help group, and that was the full extent of their interest.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Florence Anderson observed that while the views of most Eppleton Support Group women had altered radically and while a few women joined the Labour Party, others were "not necessarily politicised towards the Labour Party." [FA] Her inference was that the Labour Party was not radical enough for them. That was a view echoed by Fran Stephenson of Ferryhill Station [FS] and Dorothy Wray of Leadgate [DoW], both of whom declined to become Labour Party members since they said no one had put forward any good reasons why they should. But none of them had joined any other political organisation either. Indeed, there was a very low level of any kind of political involvement by former support group women in the Durham area. Only around a dozen women became involved either in or on behalf of the Justice for Mineworkers Campaign which aimed to support sacked miners who were not reinstated when the strike ended. Only seven women joined a campaign to actively oppose the extension of opencast mining in the county. Two groups of women, half a dozen in each, became members of the Women Against Pit Closures organisation. But as there was some overlapping of personnel in all these activities, the total number of women involved was less than the aggregate of these numbers. By 1990 only the Justice campaign and the anti-opencast campaign retained any active women supporters. Though two Durham women still attended the National Committee of WAPC,<sup>3</sup> the small branch in Durham had been disbanded. Each group of former WAPC women now meets socially from time to time.

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1. Conversation with Pam Blanchard 11 August 1990. It has already been stated that Pam Blanchard claimed to be the person who took most of the initiatives in Murton. She related, for instance, that when shopkeepers had to be approached for food or cash donations, women who accompanied her to the shops stood outside and left her to go in alone to solicit help. [PB]
  2. Conversation with Lily Ross 11 August 1990. It was clear to all who came in contact with Lily Ross that she was the driving force in Burnhope, taking on almost all responsibility for contacting people outside the village for help. [VM] [AS] [KC]
  3. Joan Guy and Brenda Hopper.

Among former support group women who were members of the Labour Party before the strike there is only marginal evidence of greater political involvement since it ended. However, three women became District councillors, two in Derwentside and one in Hetton. Heather Wood became the County councillor for Easington in 1985 and three women in North Durham Constituency joined Independent Labour Publications (ILP) and helped to form an ILP branch in Chester-le Street. Two remain as members.

Easington women made great efforts to sustain the enthusiasm and creativity engendered by the strike. By the end of 1984, Easington SEAM had broadened its activities and campaigned until June 1985 for the retention of a local maternity hospital which was threatened with closure. Support group women with a few Labour Party men campaigned for about eight months against the Poll Tax<sup>1</sup> but probably the most interesting and enjoyable activity for the Easington Support Group was the play they performed all over the North East about their experiences in the strike. They went on to perform it in London and then in Germany.

There is no doubt that, on account of their strike experiences, Easington Support Group women became passionately anti-Thatcher. What might place a question mark over the extent of their politicisation was their decision, at the end of the strike, to donate only £400 to sacked miners while sharing out £2,220 remaining in their miners' relief fund, (some of which had been donated to SEAM Relief by political supporters outside the coalfield, specifically for hardship relief in mining families) among non-political organisations in their village.<sup>2</sup>

Durham City WAPC women found time to write their own play about the danger of opencast mining in the County and performed it in a variety of local venues.

But pressing on with political activities proved difficult and some women, whose interest in political ideas had been awakened, faced a number of problems when deciding what they might do next. Marshall made the relevant observation that,

Between statements of cognition or evaluation and patterns of social conduct lies a complexity of conditions that makes the relationship between beliefs and action indeterminate and, in each case, a matter for empirical investigation. Actors may be constrained by such things as lack of material resources, the requirements of some normative order or by subjection to the

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1. The anti-Poll Tax Campaign in the County was established in July 1987 by Durham and Chester-le-Street branches of the ILP.
  2. The recipients were : Easington Colliery Infants School £150; Easington Colliery Junior School £150; Glenhill School £50; Easington Comprehensive School £300; Easington C.of E. School £50; Easington Nursery School £50; St Mary's Church £100; Church of the Ascension £100; Easington Catholic Church £100; Easington Colliery Methodist Church £100; Salvation Army £10-0; Easington Baptist Church £100; Easington Village Methodist Church £100; Easington Playschool £50; Easington Youth Club £200; Easington Church Youth Club £50; St. John's Ambulance Brigade £50; Essyn House £50; Lee House Community Centre £50; Donnini House £50; Poplar House £50; Easington Jazz Band £50; Thorpe Hospital BIRTHS Campaign £75; Age Concern £100. Easington Support Group financial records, held by Heather Wood. See also Chapter 5.

power of others.<sup>1</sup>

There were serious constraints on some Durham women who wanted to be active. Many were preoccupied with accumulated debts. Bus fares for meetings in venues several miles from their homes were expensive. Transport was not always available. In Fran Stephenson's case, the axing of a bus from a timetable meant that the only bus she could get to the Durham WAPC meeting arrived an hour before the meeting started and there was no bus back. Other women felt guilty about their 'neglected' children, or their husbands or their homes. Support group work had been the priority for a whole year. Now some husbands wanted to be their priority, wanted them back in the home, wanted everything 'back to normal'. [MSG]

Very few women managed to alter their lives radically. Two exceptions were Anne Suddick who left her NUM secretarial job and Dorothy Wray who left her job as a shop assistant. Both embarked on higher education degree courses.<sup>2</sup> However, the vast majority of support group women have not yet recreated, outside the strike, any kind of political space in which they can become active. But, if they could not and cannot be regarded as "confident socialists", it is still too early to predict their future political development.

## I. COMPARING THE GENERATIONS

In contrast to DWAC, the WLL and the Women's Support Groups were frustrated by the male domination they encountered in the coalfield and, in different ways, attempted to overcome it. If Mrs. Simm's attitudes typified those of Durham WLL members, they did not confront Labour men in order to achieve their aims. Mrs. Simm may have vented her sarcasm against male chauvinists through letters to the WLL National Executive but, publicly, she appears to have employed persuasion with "women haters".<sup>3</sup> She circumvented problems by seeking allies, both male and female, and by adopting the tactic of "proving" to Labour men, by WLL members' "usefulness" and "good works", that the establishment of women's organisation would be to their advantage.

In 1984, when women approached Lodges for permission to set up support groups, they were acknowledging their subordinate status. Apart from the need to secure the use of miners' halls as kitchens, they were fearful of trespassing on the men's territory. They were also anxious to be recognised as 'bona fide' organisations, that is official support groups set up with Lodge

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1. G. Marshall, *op. cit.* p.120.

2. A number of miners, too, went to Durham University. Among them were Arthur Oxley, a sacked miner, David Wray, the ex-Durham Mechanic and Treasurer of DASG and George Lisgo of the Belmont Miners Group in Durham City. All three have now graduated.

3. Letter from Mrs. Simm to Mrs. Middleton 29 July 1908 WLL Archive Document No.WLL/86. NRLPO.

approval. In concrete terms, this meant the right to receive any material help available from the union itself and the right to fundraise on behalf of the area, outside the coalfield. Where the response from the men was lukewarm or obstructive, women were prepared to agitate till they got what they wanted. Once they more fully appreciated the importance of hardship relief, their confidence increased and, if guarding their autonomy meant, on occasion, challenging union men, they were prepared to do that. Those who attended the Area Support Group meetings (DASG) and/or who had opportunities to meet people from other cities, other coalfields or other countries, tended to grow more quickly in confidence and militancy. Though Sacriston Support Group's approach was reminiscent of WLL's, even they were prepared to defy the men either covertly, by syphoning off funds for their own purposes, or overtly by picketing.

DWAC did not face opposition to its establishment. On the contrary, by 1918 the Labour Party had recognised the importance of securing the allegiance of newly enfranchised women and duly made provision in its Constitution to accommodate the new voters. It also realised the potential value of having at its disposal a growing army of female election workers organised in Women's Sections. In Durham, Labour men, many of whom were supported by the Durham Miners' Association as candidates in parliamentary and local elections, were happy to accept help from enthusiastic DWAC members. Allowing miners' halls to be available for women's conferences was a small gesture of thanks to DWAC for unstinting electoral work, total loyalty, dedication and uncritical acceptance of men's monopoly of political office. DWAC may have made *requests* to men or *pleaded* with men but they were never prepared, it seems, to *challenge* men in power, on any issue. They did not actively seek equality of participation at all levels of Party life within the County. And although their collectivity was potentially a source of strength, it could be argued that, in reality, their separate organisation became the source of their weakness.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Simm defined "women's work" as electioneering and saw the role of the WLL as auxiliary to the "Men's Party". It could be argued that few other choices were open to unfranchised, working class, political women in the first two decades of the 20th century. DWAC could be said to have institutionalised the subordinate role of Labour Party women in the County by confining regular "women's work" overwhelmingly to electioneering on behalf of men. The vast majority of support group women initially perceived their hardship relief work as the most appropriate contribution women could make towards the survival of their own and other miners' families. Most were not offended, at first, by men's perception that what they engaged in was extended housework. The involvement of some women in picketing might be seen as their acceptance of male definitions of class struggle. On the other hand, involvement in picketing could have been a rejection of men's right to define the parameters of "women's work".

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1. Especially if women attended only Women's Section meetings, the real political business of the Labour Party was left to be conducted by men.

The formal political education in the WLL and DWAC was issue-based. There is insufficient evidence regarding Durham WLL political practice to indicate its character, though nationally the WLL seems to have been anxious to "keep in step" with the pragmatic policies and practices of the early Labour Party. DWAC produced no definable political perspective of its own and accepted, uncritically, the views of Party leadership, apparently having placed loyalty to leadership above all other considerations. For support groups, experience of the miners' strike was considered an education in itself. And at DASG level there was an attempt to provide deeper political analyses which linked political issues arising from the struggle with other issues, national and international.

Available documentary evidence relating to Durham WLL work during periods of industrial unrest is too sparse for comparison with miners' support group work. But activities of DWAC as an organisation, during the 1926 lockout, have been recorded and seem to have been confined to local administration of the nationally organised fund for mothers and children,<sup>1</sup> though some members may have been involved as individuals in the communal kitchens set up at that time. Predictably, Emmie Lawther was active during the General Strike and the miners' lockout which followed. Her husband, Steve Lawther, was sent to prison for three months, having been charged with offences under the Emergency Powers Act. Emmie continued the active resistance and organised solidarity action with Chopwell women,

. . . the womenfolk under the direction of Emmie Lawther picketed (Metcalf's grocery) shop in strength for 24 hours each day. After a few weeks Metcalf's shop was closed down and never reopened.<sup>2</sup>

While her husband was in gaol, Emmie was summoned to court to answer charges brought by the Blaydon Conservative Association for allegedly interfering with a public meeting. Despite a vigorous defence, she was convicted and bound over to keep the peace for twelve months in the sum of £50.<sup>3</sup> During the lockout,

She had no fewer than 26 committees under her care in the Blaydon Parliamentary Division. Some of these were in places that had no bus services and it was a very difficult task to get round them all. She had to collect the claims for these committees and take them to Durham every Monday. Mrs. Lawther was responsible during that period for the distribution of thousands of pounds to pregnant and nursing mothers in the Area.<sup>4</sup>

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1. See Durham Divisional Labour Party Annual Report 1927. D/Sho/94, DRO. See also Minutes of Labour Party NEC Organisation Committee Report on Women's Work, April 19th - June 12th 1926 p.2. Labour Party Archive. NMLH.
  2. L. Turnbull, op. cit.
  3. S. Lawther, op. cit. p.6.
  4. Ibid.

This last was a markedly more decorous, if arduous, activity, carried out in company with other DWAC committee women. Such DWAC work during the lockout was highly praised.<sup>1</sup> Unlike those of the 1984 support group women who raided pit heaps for coal, who accepted poachers' "ill-gotten gains" with equanimity, and who physically resisted police on picket lines, DWAC's activities remained entirely within the bounds of propriety. As far as can be ascertained, DWAC did not, as an organisation, encourage women onto picket lines or engage in any activity that could be termed illegal.

In contrast, DASG rejoiced in every circumvention of government, Coal Board and police oppression. Further, the weekly meeting was the occasion for passing on information to help families in that circumvention. DASG also endorsed and planned picketing forays. That is not to claim that every delegate joined in or that every woman activist was completely at ease defying bureaucracy and authority. Only a minority of women was involved in picketing, and among those women Anne Suddick detected 'plastic pickets'<sup>2</sup> [AS] But however respectable some women perceived themselves prior to the strike, most were forced to scavenge for fuel, an activity which could involve illegality. And no one seems to have hesitated to take 'black economy' jobs wherever they could or accept regular cash gifts (or gifts in kind) which, if not reported, breached DHSS benefit regulations. But, in the final analysis, as Lily Ross pointed out, when people have children to feed and keep warm, they do not care which laws they break.

The 'strong women' in WLL were those early organisers who battled to recruit and induct working class women into an organisation of their own. It might also be argued that those who kept the DWAC together and protected it from 'disunity' were also strong in terms of their objectives. If they did not vanquish the strong left-wing socialist women (and Emmie Lawther may have been only one example) and almost completely write them out of history, they made clear in their conferences whose ideas and opinions they valued and whose they did not. DASG celebrated all its strong women and sought throughout the strike to encourage greater militancy.

There was no evidence of any intergenerational partisan link between Labour women of the past and support group women.<sup>3</sup> There was, however, a strong intergenerational link in terms of knowledge and experience of past industrial struggles.

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1. Durham Divisional Labour Party Annual Report 1927, Shotton Archive, DRO. See also "Miners' Relief" in the Report of the Labour Party Executive Committee to the 1926 Annual Conference of the Labour Party (pp.177-178) for congratulations to the National Women's Committee which, under the direction of Dr. Marion Phillips, had organised the National Relief Fund for miners' wives and children during the lockout. Labour Party Archives, NMLH.

2. Those not anxious to take a forward part and who generally hung around at the back of the picketing squad.

3. That is, women in all-women support groups or women in miners and wives groups. Also, it should be noted that Labour Party Women's Sections in County Durham were not involved with support groups during the strike, nor is there any record of any independent action by them in support of miners and their families. Of course, like some other Labour Party members, individual women gave occasional help.

A minority of Durham women in the 1984-85 strike became politicised, in the sense that they began a search for connections between their concrete experiences and social structures with the intention of involving themselves in future activity which might produce change in society. It is unclear, at this time, whether those who joined the Labour Party and quickly ceased any activity within it, were constrained wholly by domestic circumstances or partly by that and the particular, political environment within the Labour Party itself.



## **Chapter 4 - LABOUR IN CRISIS**

### **A. AN OUTLINE**

The response to the miners' strike from the Labour Party in Durham County cannot be fully understood without reference to the policy and practice of the Party nationally. In this connection it will be argued that class collaboration, pragmatism and the primacy of electoralism have been the hallmarks of Labour from the Party's foundation. It will be said that revisionists have managed to redefine socialism to make it equal social reform and have always marginalised those who regard socialism as the antithesis of capitalism. It will be emphasised that the theoretical weakness of the Left has contributed to the success of the revisionists whose politics and practice have led to the progressive depoliticisation of the working class. Since the Labour Party sets out to attract all-comers into membership, regardless of their political persuasion, without providing any systematic political education for them, the reproduction of a largely revisionist or even apolitical majority in the Party is ensured. That majority is intent on electoral success above all else and tends to regard any industrial conflict as potentially threatening to Labour's objectives.

Next, the particular nature of Durham Labour politics and practice will be examined briefly. Reference will be made to the context within which that politics and practice developed. It will be argued that the domination of the local state by Labour for over 60 years has tended to strengthen conservative attitudes inside the Party. It will also be argued that in the 1984-85 coal crisis, many Labour Party members in Durham County accepted the Conservative Government's characterisation of the strike, that is they believed that if Coal Board experts declared pits to be 'uneconomic' then they must be, regardless of any contrary evidence from the miners' union; that redundancy and unemployment were facts of life which should be accepted by miners as other workers had accepted them, without struggle; that a strike against pit closures was irrational and that it would not have taken place but for the destructive aims of Arthur Scargill. Some also believed that helping strikers would prolong a dispute that would do great damage to Labour's electoral prospects.

### **B. THE LABOUR PARTY IN PERSPECTIVE**

#### **1. SOCIALIST CRITIQUES**

The 1984-85 Miners' strike took place at a time of marked crisis for working class politics. The massive, coherent and comprehensive attack on the Labour movement since 1980 from a determinedly radical, right-wing Conservative Government had not drawn any massive,

coherent and comprehensive response.<sup>1</sup> Labour was unable to protect itself, arguably, because of debilitation by decades of the pragmatism which led R.H. Tawney, in another era, to comment,

The gravest weakness of British Labour is its lack of a creed . . . it does not achieve what it could because it does not know what it wants . . . Being without clear convictions as to its own meaning and purpose, it is deprived of the dynamic that only convictions can supply.<sup>2</sup>

In 1932, Tawney was advocating a process of socialist renewal in the Labour Party, and castigated both leadership and led for Labour's confusion and lack of direction. Reflecting on two Labour Governments notable for their "flight from principles"<sup>3</sup> he argued that, despite Clause Four of its 1918 Constitution,<sup>4</sup> the Labour Party was not socialist and needed to admit that fact if it were ever to become socialist. To attain its stated objectives it needed to agree collectively on the kind of society it wished to establish; the nature of the resistance to be overcome in establishing it and the techniques, methods and machinery required for its establishment.<sup>5</sup>

Since Tawney's time, other socialists have submitted other trenchant critiques of the Party's politics.<sup>6</sup> At least three factors militated against such critiques finding much purchase with Labour Party leaderships. These were the politics of those leaderships; the overwhelming focus of the Party on parliament and on electoral activity generally and, linked with that, the Party's insistence on the existence of a "national interest" over and above working class interests in society.

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1. It was because of that passivity that the Left sought to encourage a fightback. See John Richardson, "We Cannot Wait for a Labour Government, We Must Fight Back Now" (Report on Institute for Workers' Control Conference) in Labour Leader, February 1981; M. Meacher et al, There is an Alternative - Policies for prosperity in the eighties (circa 1981); Scofield P., et al, Youth Training - The Tories' Poisoned Apple (April 1983); Labour Research Department, Privatisation - Who Loses, Who Profits (May 1983); John Gunnell (Leader of West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council) "Tory Vandals and How to Fight Back" in Labour Leader, November 1983; Pat McIntyre, "Where now for Youth Training?" in Labour Leader November 1983; John Denham, How the Labour Party and the Left Can Win (1984); Eric Preston, The Local Counter Attack (1984 : first published 1980); Campaign Group of Labour MPs, Tory Government Policy - A Threat to Democracy (circa 1985).
  2. RH Tawney, "The Choice before the Labour Party" in The Attack and Other Papers Spokesman, Nottingham 1981 p.55.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Clause 4 of the 1918 Constitution, drawn up by Sidney Webb and Arthur Henderson, said that the object of the Party is "to secure for the workers by hand and by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service." In 1929 it was amended to read "the means of production, distribution and exchange."
  5. R.H. Tawney, op. cit. p.58.
  6. e.g. D.N. Pritt, The Labour Government 1945-51 (1963); R. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism (1972); L. Panitch, "The Impasse of Social democratic Politics" in L. Panitch, Working Class Politics in Crisis (1986) pp.1-52; E. Preston, Labour in Crisis (1983 - first published 1982). Preston's work on behalf of the ILP is specifically aimed at the grassroots of the movement.

## 2. THE POLITICS OF LABOUR LEADERSHIPS

From its inception, the Party has been a coalition between groups of *socialists* who want to work towards the establishment of a socialist society, that is, at the very least, a society marked by the absence of economic exploitation, and *social reformers* who accept the permanence of the capitalist system and seek to ameliorate, through reforms, the worst aspects of capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Throughout its history there have been struggles between socialists and social reformers about which political direction the Party should take. Early on, Labour leaders adopted a class collaborationist approach<sup>2</sup> from which they rarely veered. Panitch has said that the question of how the Party was to achieve the socialist objective embodied in its 1918 Constitution, while retaining its long-standing commitment to class co-operation, has never been answered.<sup>3</sup> But social reforming leaderships could hardly be expected to embrace critiques that required them to develop strategies to confront and challenge the power of capital.

Socialists have always clung to the fact that public ownership, which they believe is the key to the transformation of society, is still one of the central tenets of the Party's Constitution, even while they recognise that successive leaderships have lacked any real commitment to it. In 1945, the Labour Party Manifesto "Let us face the Future" insisted that the Labour Party was, "... a Socialist Party and Proud of it."<sup>4</sup> However, the 'radical' governments of 1945-51 were reluctant nationalisers.<sup>5</sup> And, as Saville has pointed out, even if the whole programme of public ownership had been carried out,

... some 80% of industry would remain in private hands, and there were no plans for altering in any way the highly uneven distribution of capital ownership.<sup>6</sup>

After 1951, Gaitskell's attempts to override Clause 4 of the Constitution were successfully resisted by the Left.<sup>7</sup> But when Anthony Crosland M.P. published The Future of Socialism<sup>8</sup> in 1956, that book,

... became a Bible for the so-called revisionists who wished to revise Party attitudes towards public ownership. It argued that capitalism had been

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1. It has to be stressed that socialists are also in favour of social reforms but wish to go much further.
  2. R. Miliband, op. cit. p.19, p.20, p.28. See also F. Williams, op. cit. p.168.
  3. L. Panitch, op. cit. p.5.
  4. John Saville, The Labour Movement in Britain (1988) p.85. He pointed out that "The (1945) programme was not a socialist one, although it was usually described as such, ... but (it) represented a marked advance on previous statements by Labour."
  5. D. Kavanagh and P. Morris, Consensus Politics from Attlee to Thatcher Blackwell, Oxford 1989 p.13. See also R. Miliband Parliamentary Socialism Merlin Press, London 1972 p.277. See also D.N. Pritt The Labour Government 1945-1951 Lawrence & Wishart, London 1963 pp.37-45.
  6. John Saville, op. cit. p.85.
  7. Hugh Gaitskell 1906 - 1963, Leader of the Labour Party 1955 - 1963. However, Miliband said that, for all practical purposes, Labour's revisionist leaders had had their way. R. Miliband op. cit. p.351.
  8. C.A.R. Crosland, The Future of Socialism Cape, London 1956.

reformed and was now serving the nation well. Governments had various instruments such as the budget, investment and controls on the location of industry to influence the large corporations. Keynesian demand management could even out the cycles of boom and slump and deliver full employment. Public ownership, therefore, was no longer so important.<sup>1</sup>

The implications of the revisionists' case were far reaching. Private enterprise and the market economy were not simply to be tolerated by Labour but should be defended and encouraged.<sup>2</sup> Preston has pointed out that, while it was legitimate to argue that case inside the Party, it could not be argued that it had anything to do with traditional socialism. The only way the right-wing of the Party could hope to create the illusion that it had,

... is by totally *revising* the theory to fit the practice. Socialism is redefined to equal social reform.<sup>3</sup>

That sleight of hand enabled revisionists to have their way, while still utilising the rhetoric of socialism. It enabled them to portray as *unreasonable* demands from the Left for any real socialist advance. Public ownership, as envisaged by early socialists and enshrined in Clause 4 of the Constitution, was in practice jettisoned by leadership.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. LABOUR AND THE CONSERVATIVE CULTURE

#### (a) The dominance of social reform

Once genuine measures to advance the socialist project have been rejected, (since that is considered to be "unrealistic",<sup>5</sup>) the only alternative is to seek ways of managing capitalism better than political parties overtly dedicated to its triumph.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the causes of unemployment, poverty and massive inequalities in income and power can never be attributed by revisionists to the workings, and indeed the requirements of the capitalist economic system.<sup>7</sup> Labour leaders' principal argument over many years has been that the Tories have managed the

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1. D. Kavanagh and P. Morris, Consensus Politics from Attlee to Thatcher Blackwell, Oxford, 1989 p.27.
  2. E. Preston, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Labour Party (1987) p.11.
  3. Ibid.
  4. See C. Leys op. cit. p.59 who argued, crucially, that the record of performance of the nationalised industries, within the constraints imposed upon them by the Labour legislation of 1946-9, and the subsequent policies of Conservative Governments, provided no basis for the development of popular support. He went on to say that down to 1979 the Labour Party never subsequently returned in practice to the view that the common ownership of the means of production was a valid objective in its own right. See also B. Lapping The Labour Government 1964-70 (1970) p.20. He argued that, "The old issue of nationalisation was all but dead by 1964." See also John McGhie, "Kinnock Ditches Nationalisation", The Observer 1st September 1991.
  5. L. Panitch, op. cit. p.4.
  6. Tawney's comment in 1932 that the Party had, "... appealed to (the electorate) on the ground not that a Labour Government would be different from other governments, but that it would be a worthy successor to all British governments that had ever been," highlighted that trend. He remarked, somewhat sarcastically, that it would not be surprising if the electorate concluded that, "since capitalism was the order of the day, it had better continue to be administered by capitalists." R.H. Tawney op. cit. p.58.
  7. See J. Westergaard & H. Resler Class in a Capitalist Society (1975).

economy badly - the implication being that Labour could and should continue to manage the same, capitalist economy better<sup>1</sup> instead of working for radical change.

Michels has argued that most people do not have a lively interest in political affairs.<sup>2</sup> No major political party in this society has encouraged active political participation by the public in matters which affect their daily lives. Hyman has remarked that the conception of democracy which prevails in contemporary political discussion rejects active popular control as a defining characteristic,

Instead, the mass of the population is assigned a passive role : its democratic rights consist solely in the occasional opportunity to elect Parliamentary representatives who are then autonomous until the next election.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, those who elect governments do hope for improvements in their lives. Generally speaking, working people ask very little,

. . . what most people seem to want is a reasonable standard of living, security and freedom from the threat of unemployment - or rather from the threat of any serious downturn in their income as a result of unemployment, old age or whatever. They want the provision of facilities for the welfare and development of themselves and their families. They want freedom from oppression, from molestation and violence both as individuals and as a community, and, for that matter, as a nation. They want entertainment and the pleasurable things in life.<sup>4</sup>

There is a gap between what large numbers of working people reasonably desire and what is available to them on a sustained basis. Consequently, they seek explanations. If those produced by avowedly capitalist political parties are based on the dominant, conservative ideas, attitudes and beliefs which underpin and which are reproduced and constantly reinforced by capitalist states and, at the same time, there is an absence of strongly expressed *alternative* explanations from the Labour Party, or indeed credible strategies which address their reasonable demands, working people can become unreasonable, can look for scapegoats, can adopt racist and generally reactionary attitudes.<sup>5</sup> Such attitudes are compounded when Labour Governments lay most of the blame for economic ills on "greedy workers".<sup>6</sup> As Preston has argued, trade unionists themselves can develop antipathy towards workers in other unions,<sup>7</sup> can produce a

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1. See Barry Winter, The Politics of the Alternative Economic Strategy (1981) p.1.

2. R. Michels, Political Parties (1962) p.85.

3. R. Hyman, Industrial Relations, a Marxist Introduction Macmillan, London 1975 p.123.

4. E. Preston, op. cit. (1983) p.3.

5. E. Preston, op. cit. (1983) p.4.

6. See Paul Foot, The Politics of Harold Wilson (1968), Chapter 6. See also E. Preston, Labour's Lost Leader (1985) p.3. See also R. Miliband, op. cit. pp.366-7. See also P. Rowlands, Trade Unions and Socialism (1981) p.11. He pointed out that the use of law against trade unions derived from a belief subscribed to by Tory and Labour Governments in the 1960's that it was trade union action, particularly at 'unofficial' level, that was a root cause of Britain's economic decline and inability to compete with the major trading partners.

7. For an early example of a Labour M.P. "playing off" one set of workers against another, see speech of J. Ritson M.P. for Durham Division, reported in Durham Advertiser, 13th June 1924 DRO.

working class anti-trade unionism<sup>1</sup> However, it would be a mistake to characterise Labour leaderships' attitudes as merely reactive to an already well-entrenched and well-served conservative culture. It is reasonable to contend that, having eschewed the socialist road, consistent presentation and reinforcement of conservative explanations of what is wrong in society is their only option; that Labour leaderships' attitudes actually bolster capitalist hegemony.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, experience of social reform,

Keynesian state intervention; rate and taxation levels which have been costly to the working class without making substantial inroads into real wealth; capitalist state control and Morrisonian and inefficient nationalisation; centralised, bureaucratic, remote and inadequate welfare services, all of which are rightly or wrongly associated with the Labour Party *and consequently with socialism*,<sup>3</sup> have, in the context of Britain, arguably done more harm than good to the socialist cause.<sup>4</sup>

But if social reform has been consistently mistaken for socialism, Left socialism has been linked in the public perception (however unfairly), with the 'socialism' of the USSR and East European states.<sup>5</sup> Squeezed between the negative effects of social reform in practice and justifiable public hostility towards the undemocratic 'socialism' of Communist states, it is unremarkable that there is little support for socialists or socialism among working people.

From time to time activists on the Left have asserted themselves to campaign for a renewal and revitalisation of democratic socialism inside the Party.<sup>6</sup> After the 1979 electoral defeat, for instance, they mustered enough votes in Labour Party Conference to make changes in the Constitution which established mandatory reselection of M.P.s and rank and file involvement in the election of the Party leader.<sup>7</sup> But after the 1983 electoral defeat the Right began to reassert itself, to reclaim and extend its influence inside the Party.<sup>8</sup>

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1. E. Preston, op. cit. (1983) p.4.

2. See Audrey Wise, Towards a Mass Party (1980) p.10 for an indictment of labour's policies 1976-79 which undermined a fightback against the new Tory Government.

3. My emphasis.

4. E. Preston, op. cit. (1983) p.5.

5. Owing not a little to the Cold War and the definition of anything to the Left of social reform as 'communist'.

6. This was particularly the case during the 1970's. See L. Minkin, The Labour Party Conference (1980) pp.335-9. See also K. Coates and T. Topham, The New Unionism (1974) pp.192-202. See also S. Holland, The Socialist Challenge (1975).

7. The main objective was to make M.P.s more accountable to their Constituency Parties (which have been commonly regarded as being to the Left of the leadership). See Colin Leys, op. cit. (1983) p.192. It can be argued that Leys overestimated the immediate potential of mandatory reselection. See also E. Preston One Member, One Vote (August 1987) p.5.

8. See C. Leys op. cit. p.328.

## (b) Reproducing social reform

The internal functioning of the Party itself favours the reproduction of a 'moderate', 'conciliatory', largely passive, social reforming or even apolitical majority. Using Macridis' typology, the Labour Party can be formally characterised as an 'open' Party,<sup>1</sup> since it demands nothing from recruits in terms of political credentials or political apprenticeship. It has already been argued that, in mass political parties, membership roles are non-demanding. In 1924 Citrine mockingly described the role of Party members.

Let us have a look at the sacrifice entailed by the call of the applicant to join the Labour Party. What is he required to do? He is asked to pay a contribution of a very small amount and occasionally is asked to attend a political meeting. The supreme sacrifice that he is to undertake is an occasional saunter down to the polling booth and putting a cross on a ballot paper. If he is extremely energetic he can find scope for his activities canvassing or delivering circulars during the election.<sup>2</sup>

In the modern Labour Party, the same situation prevails,

Indeed there was never a golden age of participation when large majorities of members of the party were active.<sup>3</sup>

In Labour's 'open' party, members may be *invited* to political meetings but there is no pressure on them whatsoever to *attend*, even if they are delegates from branches to other Party fora. It is not considered necessary - and little provision is made - for members to gain knowledge of the Party's policies in any systematic fashion, let alone to develop deeper understandings of, say, the economy and the state. 'Open' parties do not require members to participate in political discourse. Consequently, they produce politically-uneducated members, many of whom firmly believe that any measures enacted by any Labour administration, local or national, are by definition socialist. Some of these kinds of members may be organised and/or manipulated by one section of the Party or another for attendance at particular branch or Constituency meetings.<sup>4</sup> One revisionist has argued publicly that membership's role should be directed to supporting "the parliamentary vanguard" and servicing it.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Roy C. Macridis, *Political Parties* (1967) p.21. This characterisation must be tempered by the fact that there have been, throughout its history, periodic purges of Left-wing individuals and Left-wing groups.
  2. Walter Citrine, "Sidney Webb and the Trade Union Congress" in *Notes from My Diary* 29 December 1924 p.11 (BLSPPS Citrine Box 1/1). Citrine was General Secretary of the TUC 1926-1948.
  3. J. O'Brien, E. Preston and B. Winter, *Who Rules - Annual Conference versus the Labour Party* ILP (1980) p.7.
  4. See E. Preston, *op. cit.* (August 1987) pp.11-12. See also E. Preston *Taking the Party to the Cleaners* (1989) p.12. where he argued the ILP case against the manipulative 'democracy' of the Party and its possible extension by Constitutional changes proposed from the Right. He argued in favour of genuine participatory democracy dependent on a minimum Branch attendance qualification, and the formation of a Constitution which was not rigged in favour of any section of the Party.
  5. Austin Mitchell, "Rebuilding the Coalition" in *Labour's next moves forward* Fabian Society Tract No. 521, London 1987 p.25.

#### 4. THE WEAKNESS OF THE LEFT

It is arguable that social reformers and their supporters (in an organisation whose 'openness' they demonstrably wish to extend<sup>1</sup>) are chiefly responsible for the process of its depoliticisation and that of the working class. But the question must be asked whether the continuing crises in Labour movement politics can be attributed in any way to those who consider themselves to be on the Left of the Labour Party. Preston's categories of *right reformists* and *left reformists* are extremely useful in helping to clarify the, often, confused and shifting political positions, beliefs and attitudes to be found inside the Party. He argues that *reformism* of both right and left, as opposed to social reform, is of the traditional socialist movement. However, right reformism, which originally embraced the Fabian belief of incremental, gradual socialism (though arguably flawed by its assumption of the unwavering will of Labour administrations to advance the socialist cause) has,

... degenerated into the key mechanism through which the working class has been incorporated into and confirmed in a subordinate position within capitalism ... it becomes difficult to distinguish the right wing reformist from the social reformer ... Indeed, the degeneration in post war years has been so extensive that, in effect, there is no right wing reformist influence within the Labour Party today. The reformers, the right wing revisionists, have overwhelmed it.<sup>2</sup>

Preston has argued that Left reformists divide roughly between the soft-Left and the hard-Left. After Labour's electoral defeat in 1983, part of the soft-Left had begun to abandon the socialist project altogether. Another part supported the Labour leadership with the hope that, when it eventually came to power, it would shift to the left. Yet another part, *third roaders*, were more realistic about the rightward direction in which the Party was being led and sought to marry a parliamentary approach with extra-parliamentary politics in order to nudge the Party in a more socialist direction. In reality, the extra-parliamentary politics were subordinated to the parliamentary politics.<sup>3</sup>

Hard-Left reformists, particularly those centred around the small core of the Campaign Group of Labour M.P.s,<sup>4</sup> strove to hold their ground as the Party shifted to the right. But they were (and still are) hampered by their own organisational conservatism, especially their support of the trade union block vote,<sup>5</sup> and by their over-optimistic view of the immediate potential for socialism among the working class. Hard-Left reformists attribute Labour's failures entirely to

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1. E. Preston, op. cit (1989) pp.13-14.

2. E. Preston, op. cit. (July 1987) pp.13-14.

3. E. Preston, op. cit. (July 1987) pp.14-17.

4. The Campaign Group, though organised in parliament, did not promote much organisation in the Constituencies. The parliamentary group itself, though helping to spearhead constitutional changes in the Party which demanded accountability of M.P.s to Constituency Parties, was, in a very real sense, self-selecting as a Left leadership and accountable for its policies, practices and initiatives to noone.

5. Also supported by the Soft Left, notably the L.C.C.. See P. Rowlands, op. cit. pp.23-24.



the dominance of its Right-wing leadership which they see as unrepresentative of Party membership. The Hard-Left's romantic view of workers and trade unionists has been heavily influenced by Trotskyist perspectives which propagate the notion that,

... given a different leadership, the working class could be won to socialism overnight. The Marxist, Regis Debray, said of this perspective that it is "a metaphysic paved with good intentions. It is based on the belief in the natural goodness of the workers which is always perverted by evil bureaucrats but never destroyed . . . (there is) a proletarian essence which cannot be altered by circumstances. For workers to become aware of themselves it is only necessary that they be given the word; that objectives be set for them which they see without seeing and which they know without knowing. Result : socialism becomes a reality, all at once, without delay, neat and tidy."<sup>1</sup>

Those who challenge or refute that "metaphysic", who argue that the working class, including trade unionists, are thoroughly steeped in the conservative culture and that that fact has to be faced before coherent socialist strategies can be developed, are often regarded as traitors to the whole socialist project,

It is almost as if the left believe that the clear acknowledgement of working class conservatism challenges the very notion of class politics, or otherwise denies the necessity for or the hope of eventual mass support for socialism, which of course it does not.<sup>2</sup>

It could also be said that to argue the existence of the conservative culture is not to argue that it is total or impenetrable.

But even after the loss of the 1983 General Election,

... Labour's worst performance for 50 years . . . many on the Left were inclined to 'explain' the disaster in terms of media bias and divisions within the Labour leadership. For these people there was no need to rethink socialist theory and policy - the policies were on hand waiting merely for a forthright leadership which would expound them clearly.<sup>3</sup>

The main problem for the reformist Left in the Party is that it has no rooted tradition of analysis and development of theory or political perspectives.<sup>4</sup> Bereft of any coherent socialist perspectives *which take into account the existing conservative culture* and, consequently, unable to formulate realistic ways of counteracting conservative attitudes, beliefs and values in the working class, Left reformists are easily marginalised by the dominant social reformers. The latter *do* recognise the conservative culture, pander to it<sup>5</sup> and therefore further reinforce it,

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1. E. Preston, op. cit. (July 1987) p.16.

2. E. Preston, op.cit. (1983) p.6.

3. John Callaghan, The Far Left in British Politics (1987) p.210.

4. See R.H. Tawney, op. cit. p.58, p.59. There is little evidence that his remarks on that particular lacuna has been seriously addressed by the majority Left in the Labour Party since that time.

5. Barry Winter, "Renewal" in Labour Leader, October 1984.

presenting themselves as realists and guardians of a 'common sense' approach to politics.<sup>1</sup> It can be argued then that the reformist Left's romantic view of the working class has attenuated that Left's hold on political reality and has retarded its ability to advance the socialist project.

## 5. SOCIALIST CHANGE

Miliband has argued that

... the Labour Party will not be transformed into a Party seriously concerned with socialist change ... Its leaders ... will see to it that the Labour Party remains in practice what it has always been - a Party of modest social reform in a capitalist system within whose confines it is ever more firmly and by now, irrevocably rooted.<sup>2</sup>

Miliband's thesis is not only that the Party will not concern itself with socialist change, but cannot do so. Preston, on the other hand, arguing the ILP case,<sup>3</sup> believes that possibilities for socialist change *may* still exist, and therefore the socialist project in the Party ought not to be abandoned.<sup>4</sup>

Leys challenged Miliband's thesis, arguing a quite different case that,

The history of the Labour Party ... is the history of (its) gradual radicalisation ... This process has not been smooth or linear (but) ... over the long run (the Party) has been propelled away from its liberal-labourist starting point, towards the point where its commitments are less and less compatible with capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

Those 'commitments' were policies put forward by the majority Left in the early 1980s and adopted by Party conferences.<sup>6</sup> But Leys went on to say that opinion poll evidence showed that trade union members did not yet approve of all that their leaders had supported at union conferences and Labour Party conferences of 1980 and 1981; that popular support for Labour's programme had not been mobilised, and that, in any case,

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1. E. Preston, *op. cit.* (1983) p.8. See also C. Leys, *op. cit.* pp.182-183.

2. R. Miliband, *op. cit.* p.376.

3. The ILP, a pressure group within the reformist/revolutionary/marxian tradition advocates a parliamentary road to socialism but one which is inextricably linked with the building of an extra-parliamentary socialist movement. It firmly believes in the existence of the conservative culture and the problems caused by working class conservatism and thus it rejects a metaphysical faith in the immediate potential for socialism in the working class. In its view, socialist advance can only be secured by a long struggle to build a strong socialist base in the Party. A renewed socialist Party can then become an effective bridge to the working class, and the wider society. Without that bridge socialist ideas are unlikely to take root within the working class. In terms of Party organisation, and in contrast with the rest of the Left, it opposes the trade union block vote and the existence of affiliated groups and sections. It argues for one member one vote in a participatory, democratic Labour Party.

4. E. Preston, *op. cit.* (July 1987) p.22.

5. C. Leys, *op. cit.* p.186.

6. Particularly Left versions of the Alternative Economic Strategy. *Ibid.*

... it could readily be predicted that in the medium run the leadership would moderate the programme adopted by Conference.<sup>1</sup>

However, he argued that the leadership problem and the mobilisation problem were both being more openly confronted at the end of 1981 than ever before.<sup>2</sup>

Leys' arguments about the gradual radicalisation of the Party were not supported by hard evidence and he was over-optimistic about the possibilities for immediate Left advance. Signally, he failed to outline or to point to any comprehensive strategy developed by the majority Left by which measurable advance could be achieved.<sup>3</sup>

It is possible to accept many of Miliband's arguments regarding the power and influence of social reform in the Labour Party without necessarily agreeing with his conclusion that the Party can never seriously concern itself with socialist change. Similarly, it is possible to accept the validity of Leys' conclusion that the socialist potential of the Party is not irredeemably exhausted<sup>4</sup> without accepting either his thesis of the Party's gradual radicalisation or the (often tenuous) arguments with which he sought to refute Miliband.

Set against that debate, Winter declared that much of the Labour movement was a shell and that most of the purported Left advances in the early 1980s were paper victories.<sup>5</sup> Exaggerated claims had been made about the Broad Left's Alternative Economic Strategy but,

To substitute the AES for a political strategy, as some do, and to wish away the present circumstances *not least the current weakness of the Left itself*<sup>6</sup> in no way assists the socialist argument. What must be remembered about even these Left strategies is that they would leave the bulk of the economy in private hands.<sup>7</sup>

Winter also made it clear that while the democratic reforms fought for by the Left were an advance, they were not a short cut to the transformation of the Party. Constituency Labour Parties' ability to select and deselect M.P.s<sup>8</sup> could not be regarded as a substitute for the construction of a socialist base in the movement.

... in seeking to transform the Labour Party so that it might become a vehicle for socialism, we are forced to recognise the enormity of the task. A necessary condition is a qualitative transformation of the Labour Left which will spearhead the changes. That job lies largely ahead of us, not behind ...

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. See C. Leys, op. cit. pp.190-193.

4. Ibid.

5. B. Winter, op. cit. p.3.

6. My emphasis.

7. B. Winter, op. cit. p.2.

8. The ephemeral nature of that democratic reform became clear as it was progressively eroded in the period 1988-92.

it amounts to much more than occasional rallies for Left-inclined individuals and entails a concerted and coherent ideological assault to displace the Right.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. PARLIAMENTARY FOCUS AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Since it is widely accepted in the Labour Party that what is wrong in society can be remedied solely by the election of Labour Governments, the focus on parliament and elections generally is the overwhelming preoccupation. However, leadership emphasises the notion that, despite Labour's origins, its links with the trade unions and its claim to represent "ordinary people", the Party does not represent one class. Labour must be seen to represent a national interest over and above that of class. For Saville, commenting on that stance as it revealed itself during the first Labour government, it

. . . meant, of course, that working class concerns would not be given preference.<sup>2</sup>

Here it must be noted that Hindess rejected the assumption that people have concerns or 'interests' as a consequence of their position as members of a group or class in relation to members of other groups or classes.<sup>3</sup> While Panitch said that class identity, class consciousness, class politics

. . . is by no means an automatic and inevitable outcome of economic locations in productive relations alone.<sup>4</sup>

he recognised that,

. . . the salience of the relations of production provides great *potential*<sup>5</sup> by virtue of their central place in the constitution of social arrangements in general as well as their inherently exploitative and hence contradictory and conflictual character, for struggles about and around the formation of class subjects; and that in turn the possibility of realising a socialist project cannot conceivably do without working class identity, consciousness and politics forming its mass base and organisational core.<sup>6</sup>

But, since Hindess' aim was to prove that class analysis served no useful purpose, he chose not to stress or explore that potential among those who occupy exploited and subordinate positions in society. His own preoccupation also led him to ridicule Miliband's efforts to discover why people fail to pursue what would be, reasonably, in their interest, namely the end of that

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1. B. Winter, op. cit. p.3.

2. J. Saville, The Labour Movement in Britain Faber, London 1988 p.51. See also L. Panitch, "Ideology and Integration : The Case of the British Labour Party" in L. Panitch op. cit. pp.56-77.

3. B. Hindess, Politics and Class Analysis (1987) p.117.

4. L. Panitch, op. cit. p.16.

5. My emphasis.

6. L. Panitch, op. cit. p.16.

exploitation and subordination.<sup>1</sup>

In relation to the potential of the working class to become involved in struggle, only those who will not acknowledge the strength of the conservative culture and working class conservatism could take umbrage at Hindess' insistence that to be *effective*, that is, to form reasons for action, interests must be recognised by 'actors' as *their* interests. But, having reinforced the argument that the working class has not been won to socialism, Hindess showed no further interest in *how* 'actors' might be encouraged to recognise the nature and consequences of their exploitation and subordination in a class-based society and how they might attempt, collectively, to change their lives in a radical way. But that is not surprising since his own strategy for social change was based on the formation of an anti-Thatcher alliance of some Conservatives, Liberals and the SDP as well as the Labour Right and Centre.<sup>2</sup> In keeping with that perspective, he was at pains to refute Hain's statement that Labour's task is not to manage capitalism better but rather to transform it in a socialist direction.<sup>3</sup>

Hindess would have none of that,

It is impossible to imagine that many Labour voters share that view, and it is just as well for its electoral prospects that they do not. In the eyes of many of its supporters and affiliated unions Labour's task is not to overthrow capitalist society but precisely to manage it better. . . The successful management of the British economy is an important and worthwhile political objective for the Labour Party . . . If Labour could manage that it would be a considerable achievement, one that should not be decried for not *yet*<sup>4</sup> ushering in socialism . . .<sup>5</sup>

However, he did not explain how managing capitalism "successfully" could *eventually* usher in socialism. By that lacuna, Hindess demonstrated that he was not concerned with problems of socialist politicisation. He did not appear to be interested in how people come to believe what they believe. He did not explore the conservative culture and working class conservatism in the context of formulating combative strategies. And he had nothing to say about how values, attitudes and beliefs in society might be influenced in socialist directions.

Returning to Saville's comment, and taking into consideration Preston's elementary criteria for a reasonable existence, the question must be asked : is there necessarily a contradiction between

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1. For Hindess, pursuing explanations for *absences* of action is a nonsensical occupation (see B. Hindess, op. cit. pp.122-123). But explanations for absences of action can be very important. For instance, it is valid to ask why the loading doors on a Channel ferry were *not* checked before that vessel sailed to its doom. The answers to this question might reveal individual carelessness, stupidity or inefficiency but might also reveal systematic understaffing and/or a tacit policy of elevating the profit motive over concern for safety, revelations which could have widespread implications for other transport industries as well as for shipping.
  2. B. Hindess Parliamentary Democracy and Socialist Politics (1983) p.116.
  3. See B. Hindess op. cit. (1983) p.156.
  4. My emphasis.
  5. B. Hindess, op. cit. (1983) p.156.

the Labour Party advocating measures to change the lot of the working class in a significant way and, at the same time, representing "the national interest"? In this connection, Panitch has pointed out that,

Labour's predominant ideological orientation was consistently one of presenting itself as a national Party, *not in a Gramscian sense of formulating and leading a hegemonic class project*<sup>1</sup> but in the conventional idealist sense of defining a 'national interest' above classes. . . . This is not to say that the Party did not represent and even formulate working class demands, but it did so in a manner that *a priori* conceived these demands as inherently partial and sectional. Labour certainly lived off, electorally and organisationally speaking, the existing consciousness of the class *but far from carrying it to a hegemonic plane*,<sup>2</sup> it attached itself to it through reinforcing and, in many cases, inducing those values of moderation, responsibility and class harmony that encapsulate class identity within a subordinate framework.<sup>3</sup>

When the Labour leadership argues a 'national interest' then, it could be said to be effectively arguing permanent subordination for the working class, albeit a subordination made as comfortable as possible as and when capital's circumstances permit reforms to be conceded.<sup>4</sup> Within that context, extra-parliamentary activity, particularly to further political or trade union demands, has always induced nervousness in Labour leaderships.<sup>5</sup> It has been perceived as potentially damaging to the Party's image and electoral prospects.

This is particularly true in relation to strikes.

Strikes in our society are maligned.<sup>6</sup>

They are generally regarded as aberrations, deviations from the 'norm' of harmony, pathological conditions of the body politic which need urgent treatment - in fact, as 'social problems'. Against that, Cohen has cautioned that,

. . . whenever we see terms such as deviance and social problem, we must ask, "Says who?"<sup>7</sup>

Certainly the occurrence of strikes is perceived as a problem by employers since it is,

. . . a persistent practical contradiction of the ideology of harmony of interests which assigns legitimacy to managerial power.<sup>8</sup>

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1. My emphasis.

2. My emphasis.

3. L. Panitch, *op. cit.* p.15.

4. Capital conceded such reforms in the post-war settlement of 1945. See D. Kavanagh and P. Morris, *op. cit.* p.20. See also P. Addison, *The Road to 1945* (1975) p.273.

5. Leys has argued that the 1926 miners' strike reinforced Labour leaders' fears of the consequences of extra-parliamentary action. C. Leys, *op. cit.* p.181. See also P. Rowlands, *op. cit.* p.4. See also R. Samuel, "Doing Dirt on the Miners" in *New Socialist* October 1986 p.16.

6. V.L. Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners* (1981) p.9.

7. S. Cohen, (ed) *Images of Deviance* (1971) p.17.

8. R. Hyman, *Strikes* (1977) p.161.

Governments too regard strikes as 'problems'. Their economic policies are tied into the success of capitalism. Powerful business lobbies consistently subject them to pressures,

Such pressures inevitably shape governments' attitudes towards strikes. Insofar as strikes are a challenge to managerial interests, they must represent a threat to 'the' economy.<sup>1</sup>

In 1984, for Labour leaders,

The electoral disaster nine months earlier had left much debris of reputation, of hopes, of assumptions. There could be no easy road back to office . . . Among the leadership some were too ready to see industrial confrontation as a handicap to electoral revival . . . Given their perspective, the issues raised by a lengthy coal dispute were hardly welcome.<sup>2</sup>

It can be argued, therefore, that the Labour Party leadership was in a difficult position when it encountered demands from the coalfields for unreserved support to that section of the working class which found itself in conflict with the National Coal Board and the Conservative Government.

But, realistically, what were the prospects that the Labour Party could be galvanised in support of the miners? Labour Governments in the 1960s had caused great upheavals among mining families by closing many pits,<sup>3</sup> while arguing a 'national interest' and reordering energy policy towards a greater reliance on oil and nuclear energy.<sup>4</sup> What arguments could Labour make in 1984 against a Conservative Government which also argued that what it was doing<sup>5</sup> was in the 'national interest', and which was intent on moving towards greater reliance on nuclear energy? Wedded as it was to the continuance of the nuclear industry, Labour was in a weak position to contest the expansion of nuclear power on ecological or any other grounds. And, the Government's contention that cheaper overseas coal could be bought in 'the free market' to top up any shortfall in indigenous production was unlikely to be challenged by a Labour leadership which had never challenged the logic of 'the market' and which had never publicly explained and condemned the role of cheap labour in the working of international capital.

Those in the Party who worked in the mining industry or who agreed with the miners' stance might be expected to probe more deeply into the economics of energy policy and be prepared both to advocate the miners' case and mobilise forces in its support. But how much could be expected from a grass-roots largely unused to political education, political discourse or extra-parliamentary political campaigning? In fact, those who firmly believed that nothing

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1. R. Hyman, op. cit (1977) p.163.

2. D. Howell, "Where's Ramsay McKinnock?" in H. Beynon (ed.) *Digging Deeper* Verso, London 1985 p.184.

3. See Chapter 5.

4. See R. Hudson & D. Sadler, "Coal and Dole : Employment Policies in the Coalfields" in H. Beynon (ed.) (1985) p.223.

5. The Government insisted that pit closures were entirely the business of the National Coal Board but no one doubted Government support for that policy.

could be done to change Government policies, between one election and the next, save for persuasive speeches in parliament, might regard activists as mavericks who were capable of inflicting irrevocable damage on the Party.

## C. DURHAM - A HEARTLAND OF LABOUR

If there were potential obstacles in the way of national support from the Labour Party for striking miners and their families, did the same problems exist at local level? What were the prospects that the strike would be an occasion where concern among Labour Party membership in the coalfield would override concern, shared by many with Labour leadership, that the Party should always be perceived as playing a socially unifying role in society?

### 1. THE LEGACY OF PATERNALISM

Austrin and Beynon have argued that,

In Durham, the institutions of the labour movement were produced within the context of a culturally overloaded, paternalistic society, dominated by coalowner and church. The result has been a County where (in daily life, through social relationships, political parties, ceremonies and the like . . .) the past weighs heavily on the present.<sup>1</sup>

Paternalistic influence in mining communities, from the nineteenth century onwards, ensured the provision of company houses, their heating, gardens, sometimes the establishment of free medical attention and education and even the provision of facilities, including money, for colliery bands, agricultural shows and other village pursuits,

To the extent that this provision was accompanied by the encouragement of other practices amongst the pitmen (allotments, pigeon fancying and so on) it can also be seen as fitting into a complex system of regulation and control. Within this system, the miners and their families obtained certain advantages; but these were entirely dependent upon acceptance of the defined rights and duties of the coalowners' society . . .<sup>2</sup>

That acceptance was hardly a matter of free choice for men who needed to work to support their families in a county dominated by the mining industry. They were further restricted in the

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1. T. Austrin and H. Beynon Masters and Servants Durham University Department of Sociology Working Paper (circa 1981) p.5.

2. T. Austrin and H. Beynon op. cit. p.38. However, as they pointed out, existence in most colliery villages during the 19th century was no idyll and indeed was marked by squalor. (pp.29-30) In 1925 Councillor Peter Lee, Chairman of the Labour Group in the County Council said, "What had the captains of industry done in this County? They had housed great numbers of people in the worst possible conditions in the mining villages and had refused to put proper sanitary arrangements in force. The result was that the county of Durham was one of the most overcrowded counties in England. There was a great amount of sickness and disease, entirely brought about by the insanitary conditions in which people had to live." Durham Chronicle 14 February 1925 DRO.



pre-union period by the fact that they were 'bound' to their masters. The end of the Bond<sup>1</sup> came after the foundation of the Durham Miners Association (DMA) in 1869 and its recognition by the coalowners in 1871.

Its recognition marked an important adaptation of the paternalistic order. This was made clear in 1872 as collective bargaining finally replaced the bond as the basis of the labour contract. But it was more than this. 'The Bond' was predicated upon a society in which an established order and hierarchy was seen to reflect 'worth' and 'standing'. To a real extent the miners - the most populous group within the coalfield - were not bona fide members of this society. Symbolically the union - the miners' own institution - can be seen as an assertion of place : its recognition by the employers was more a general social recognition of the miner within Durham society.<sup>2</sup>

The formation of the union and its recognition did not mean the immediate end of the paternalistic order,

. . . paternalism as a societal form survived the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Its effects were to be seen in both the form and content of the Labour movement in the county.<sup>3</sup>

The early union leadership was Liberal, sought conciliation with coal owners and consistently surrendered to their demands, even when that meant a substantial reduction in their members' living standards.<sup>4</sup> And, although Gregory characterised the Durham of 1910 as a hotbed of socialist agitation,<sup>5</sup>

Liberalism was by no means dead. Wilson,<sup>6</sup> already a member of parliament when the MFGB<sup>7</sup> agreed to affiliate with the Labour Party in 1910, refused to sign the Labour whip and was never regarded as a Labour M.P.. The by-elections in Houghton-le-Spring and North West Durham during 1913-1914, at which Labour candidates sponsored by Durham Miners' Association were defeated in areas where miners represented a significant proportion of the electorate, testified to the strength of Liberal support still within the coalfield.<sup>8</sup>

The union was accepted by Durham 'society' only so long as its leadership was moderate and conciliatory. When miners sought to defend their meagre living standards against assaults from coal owners intent on depressing wages, established Durham society became very vocal.

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1. See T. Austrin and H. Beynon, op. cit. pp.48-67 for an explanation of the Bond.

2. T. Austrin and H. Beynon op. cit. p.68.

3. T. Austrin and H. Beynon, op. cit. p.70.

4. D. Douglass, Pit Life in County Durham (1972) p.48.

5. R. Gregory, The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914 (1968) p.67.

6. John Wilson was a leader of the Durham Miners' Association, first as an Agent from 1882, then as General Secretary from 1896 to 1915. Also Liberal M.P. for Houghton-le-Spring 1885-86 and for Mid Durham 1890-1915.

7. Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

8. W.R. Garside, The Durham Miners 1919-1960 Allen & Unwin, London 1971 pp.320-321.

Periods of industrial strife were marked by hostility towards those who pressed the miners' case.<sup>1</sup> At the same time appeals were made for conciliation and industrial peace - but on the coal owners terms.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. LABOUR IN POWER

In a letter to the *Durham Advertiser*, complaining of Mr. Robert Smillie's remarks at the 1924 Durham Miners' Gala,<sup>3</sup> a correspondent wrote,

Many of the good old miners' representatives have, alas! gone to their rest, representatives who were so highly respected by the owners and miners; such men were never termed agitators, who Mr. Smillie so highly praises, because they were never afraid to speak their minds out to the men when they had no case, which is so essential towards industrial peace at the present time.<sup>4</sup>

That lament for the 'good old days' of the 'good old miners representatives' was a recognition that social change had taken place in the coalfield. *Organisationally*, there had been a definite break with Liberalism as the DMA belatedly threw its weight behind the Labour Party.<sup>5</sup> *Politically*, even if Liberal ideas were very slow to evaporate, miners experienced their first local Labour administration in County Hall during the 1921 lockout when,

The Labour controlled County Council in Durham took full advantage of the power given in the 1906 Provision of Meals Act to organise feeding centres for school children.<sup>6</sup>

By the early 1920s, then, Durham miners realised that if they, through the Labour Party, controlled the county's political institutions, those institutions could be utilised to support miners involved in industrial action. It is clear that, during the whole of 1925, Labour prepared for the coming battle with the coal owners. [GT] It was crucial that the 1925 County Council elections returned Labour to power if the same service to the community they had experienced in 1921 was to be available when industrial conflict occurred. Conservatives were well aware of

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1. See editorial *Durham Advertiser*, 20th March 1925 DRO; reported speeches of Mr. McKeag, Liberal candidate for Durham *Durham Advertiser*, 5th and 26th June 1925 DRO; reported sermon by Canon Cruickshank in Durham Cathedral, *Durham Advertiser*, 14th May 1926 DRO; reported sermon by Bishop of Durham *Durham Advertiser*, 14th May 1926 DRO; reported Whit Sunday sermon by Dr. Welldon, Dean of Durham *Durham Advertiser*, 28th May 1926 DRO.
  2. See speech by Lord Londonderry to the Conservative League Rally, *Durham Advertiser*, 9th January 1925 DRO; "Weekly Westminster Report" in *Durham Advertiser*, 20th January 1925 DRO; Dean of Durham's address at the Gala Cathedral service 1924 in *Durham Advertiser* 25th July 1924 DRO; Colonel Ritson's speech at the opening of Burnhope Miners' Welfare Hall *Durham Advertiser*, 20th March 1925 DRO.
  3. Left wing Labour M.P. for Morpeth. He praised the agitator and said he did not know where the workers would have been without him. *Durham Advertiser*, 25th July 1924 DRO.
  4. Letter from A. Dury Mitton, *Durham Advertiser*, 1st August 1924 DRO.
  5. Though the Miners' Federation of Great Britain given its allegiance to Labour by 1910, the DMA did not actively support the Labour Party until 1918. See M. Calcott "Parliamentary Elections in Durham Between the Wars: The Making of a Labour Stronghold" in North East Labour History Bulletin No.8 October 1974 p.16.
  6. Quoted in Garside, op. cit. p.145 from J. Lawson *Peter Lee* London, 1936 p.233.

what was at stake. A local Conservative leader attributed the 1925 election defeat of the Moderates (sic) to

... the foolish fear entertained by many people that candidates who were not connected with the Labour Party would necessarily try to assist the coal owners by starving the people into submission in the event of trouble occurring in the mining industry.<sup>1</sup>

The history of the 1926 strike in Durham will not be set down here. What can be stated is that the Labour County Council took responsibility for preventing miners' families being starved into submission. [GT] Durham County Education Authority,

... provided 309 feeding centres for children and provided 19,387,504 meals at a total cost of £283,731 between 1st May and 26th December 1926.<sup>2</sup>

Permissive legislation was generously interpreted, and caused financial problems for the County Council over a long period.<sup>3</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the strike, and in the 1930s, national agitation and protest against unemployment and poverty was organised largely by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM). [ES] In 1930 the NUWM marched against the Labour Government's lack of policy on unemployment and its continuation of some of the previous Conservative Governments' harsh treatment of the unemployed. That action earned the NUWM the enmity of the Labour leadership and Labour loyalists.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Paynter wrote that,

Until the 1936 Hunger March, the leadership of both the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party was hostile to the unemployed struggles, and encouraged local organisations to adopt a similar attitude.<sup>5</sup>

In 1936, the DMA went so far as to publicly dissociate itself from the Northern contingent of the National Hunger March.<sup>6</sup>

Labour was prepared to protest locally against the harshness of Conservative Governments. In 1932 a Special Conference of the Durham Divisional Labour Party recorded its backing and thanks for the Labour County Council for refusing to administer the Means Test.<sup>7</sup> There is evidence, too, that petitions against the Means Test were organised by Local Labour Parties, and

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1. Durham Chronicle 7th March 1925 DRO.

2. W.R. Garside, op. cit, p.271 quoting 204 HC Deb 5s p.583-4.

3. See County Council Health Committee Minutes 28 October 1926 para.29 and for 20 October 1927 para.38. CC/A15/1/5 DRO.

4. See Peter Kingsford, The Hunger Marchers in Britain 1920-1940 (1982) pp.113-116.

5. Bill Paynter "Foreword" to Peter Kingsford op. cit. p.10.

6. Durham Advertiser 23rd October 1936. DRO.

7. Durham Divisional Labour Party Minutes 29 October 1932. D/Sho 93(ii) DRO.

a house-to-house canvass was carried out in Durham Division.<sup>1</sup> In 1934 Houghton-le-Spring Divisional Labour Party Annual Report recorded that the Party had been involved in all agitations against reaction and repression, including the Means Test and the Unemployment Bill.<sup>2</sup> As well as that, the miners' union had joined with Sunderland Divisional Labour Party in a local demonstration against the Means Test and UAB regulations.<sup>3</sup>

Labour leaderships have never supported the idea of national mobilisation by the poor and unemployed against their harsh treatment by governments. Since such mobilisation had already been used against a Labour administration in 1930, clearly that was a weapon that could be used again if a future Labour Government failed to improve living standards. More importantly, the Party must be seen as 'fit to govern'. Arguably, support for extra-parliamentary activity might be interpreted by Labour's enemies as an indication that the Party had become disenchanted with the parliamentary process. That must be avoided.

Because the politics and practice of Labour in Durham, as that of the Party nationally, was totally focussed on future electoral victory, arguably, large-scale extra-parliamentary activity was seen as detracting from that objective. That caution and inactivity was challenged inside the Party, but only occasionally and by very few. At a conference of the Labour Party's Distressed Areas Commission<sup>4</sup> in 1936, a councillor from Jarrow denounced the two previous Labour Governments for "doing nothing" for his town and said the Party was not doing its job. He threatened that the unemployed of the area would organise enough pressure on Government to upset the "sacred constitution", which constitution he denounced as "rotten".<sup>5</sup> Councillor S. Lawther of Blaydon accused MPs of not doing even their parliamentary jobs properly and questioned the whole rationale of Labour's approach, saying,

. . . deputations from the County of Durham had time and again placed the facts before Parliament, but as long as the capitalist system prevailed so long would they have distressed areas. It mattered nothing how much the Labour Party held Commissions unless they were prepared to carry the political struggle into the House of Commons. . . .Shinwell,<sup>6</sup> Lawson,<sup>7</sup> Whiteley,<sup>8</sup> Dalton<sup>9</sup> and the whole of the county M.P.s knew all there was to know of Durham's position.<sup>10</sup>

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1. Durham Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee Minutes 25 March 1933. D/Sho 93(ii). DRO.
  2. Houghton-le-Spring Divisional Labour Party Annual Report 1934. D/Sho 99. DRO.
  3. *ibid.*
  4. The Distressed Areas Commission was a Labour Party national initiative to detail exactly the problems in areas of high unemployment
  5. Durham Advertiser 18th December 1936. DRO.
  6. Emmanuel Shinwell, then M.P. for Seaham.
  7. Jack Lawson, then M.P. for Chester-le-Street.
  8. William Whiteley, then M.P. for Blaydon.
  9. Hugh Dalton, then M.P. for Bishop Auckland.
  10. Durham Advertiser 18th December 1936. DRO.

Those protests were easily outflanked by Emmanuel Shinwell, M.P. for Seaham and a County Commissioner. His priorities were clear.

If they claimed to be not merely a party of propagandists and agitators but a party of constructive people who hoped some day to be the Government of the country, then they must prove it by indicating the exact requirements of the county and the line of approach to the solution of the problem.<sup>1</sup>

The report of the rest of the conference indicates that Labour delegates preferred Shinwell's stance.

### 3. LABOUR'S CONSERVATIVE IMAGE

In 1967, Graham Turner remarked on the "surprisingly conservative image" of Durham County Council,<sup>2</sup> and

... the development of a class of city and town bosses, some of whom pursue and exercise power with a frankness which would cause considerable shock in other parts of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Should he have been so surprised? Michels drew attention to the phenomenon of adulation of powerful, individual political leaders in social democratic parties.<sup>4</sup> The tendency to venerate leadership, whatever its practice, was evident in the early years of the Labour Party in Durham. For instance, the election of the first Labour Government prompted the Durham Divisional Labour Party to request,

J. Ritson M.P. to convey to the Prime Minister the following resolution : The Executive of the Divisional Labour Party expresses its confidence in the Cabinet, its devotion to Ramsay Macdonald and *its readiness to follow wherever he leads.*<sup>5 6</sup>

If it is objected that such unquestioning loyalty to leadership was understandable in the light of those times, that such elation marked the culmination of years of unstinting work to gain power for Labour, it has to be said that there is no recorded criticism of subsequent Labour leaders or administrations in available Labour Party Divisional Minutes or Annual Reports from Constituencies throughout the County. Loyalty to Party leadership was expected and freely given by most of the members. Then again, it has to be noted that ordinary delegates met only once a year as members of the Durham Divisional Labour Party while the Executive Committee met six times a year. Almost all decisions in that Division, then, were effectively taken by a

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1. Ibid.

2. G. Turner, "The Stronghold of Labour" in M. Bulmer (ed.) Mining and Social Change (1978) p.127.

3. G. Turner, in M. Bulmer op. cit. p.122. Only a few years later a Durham boss cited by Turner, Alderman Andrew Cunningham, Chairman of Durham County Council, was gaoled for financial corruption after the "Poulson affair". See E. Milne, No Shining Armour (1976). Cunningham was readmitted to membership of the Party (North Durham CLP) in 1990.

4. R. Michels op. cit. p.88 p.97.

5. My emphasis.

6. Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting of Durham Divisional Labour Party, 16 February 1924 D/SO/94 DRO.

minority. It says much about that minority and indeed about the excluded majority that, for instance, it was not until 1947 that a resolution was passed deciding to

seek to devise ways and means to enable rank and file members to express their views on the National Conference Agenda.<sup>1</sup>

Over a long period, the domination of Labour in the County has been overwhelming. Labour holds the vast majority of parliamentary seats.<sup>2</sup> Labour has held power continuously on the County Council since 1925. Paradoxically that political domination would seem to have reinforced conservatism inside the Party. There are two main reasons for this. First, lack of serious challenge from political opponents obviates any urgency to develop coherent political perspectives, to initiate political debate, to promote political education or to emphasise the values of participation and accountability in political life.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, there is no doubt that anyone seeking public office, *whatever his political views*, has a far better chance if he joins the Labour Party. Given an 'open' Party, such a recruit can transport his pre-membership ideological baggage, whatever its content, directly into the heart of decision making.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. THE DECLINE OF COALMINING

One more important factor must be considered when evaluating Labour's response to the strike. The decline of the mining industry in Durham<sup>5</sup> has also meant the decline of NUM power in the Party throughout the County<sup>6</sup> and an increase in the power of other unions, notably the Transport and General Workers Union and the General and Municipal Workers Union.<sup>7</sup> In coastal areas where there are working pits, miners still predominate in the organisation. [HW] [NS] [MN]<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere, more heterogeneous populations have produced local parties where, although some members are ex-pitmen or would describe themselves as 'from mining families', the direct political influence of the union has diminished significantly.

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1. Durham Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee Minutes 10 May 1947. D/Sho 93(ii) DRO.
  2. See M. Calcott, *op. cit.*. In 1984 Labour held 6 of the 7 parliamentary seats in County Durham.
  3. Even Margaret Gibb, Labour Party Northern Region Women's Officer 1930-1957, implied by the following comment that there was danger for Labour when opposition was too weak: "The best can always be got out of the ruling Party by a good, alive, alert minority. Durham County Council for too long knew no effective opposition and, in taking *all* Aldermanic seats, as it did in 1939, . . . aggravated the position by strengthening numerically the very strong and unnecessarily weakening the already too weak . . . How worthwhile is a really good minority group." Margaret Gibb, "The Labour Party in the North East between the Wars" in *NELH Bulletin* No.8 October 1974 p.13.
  4. See E. Preston, *op. cit.* (August 1987) p.9.
  5. See Chapter 5.
  6. See T. Austrin & H. Beynon, *Global Outposts* (circa 1981) p.16.
  7. For instance in North Durham Constituency in 1984 the combined votes of the TGWU and GMBATU delegates were usually decisive. [DC]
  8. See also Sandra Taylor, "Grub Up for the Miners" in V. Seddon (ed.) *The Cutting Edge - Women and the Pit Strike* (1986) p.86.

Against the whole of that background, in 1984, pleas were made to the Labour Party throughout Durham County to support the miners in their struggle.

## **D. LABOUR IN ACTION IN THE MINERS' STRIKE**

### **1. INFLUENCES ON MEMBERS**

The evidence I have collected suggests that the main factors which inhibited support inside the Party for the miners, were acceptance of the Conservative view of the strike and, linked in with that, acceptance of Labour leadership's view that industrial confrontation was a threat to future electoral prospects. What surprised activists was that any Labour Party members in Durham who opposed the strike should assign culpability for the crisis, not to those whose intention was to close pits, but to those who were striving to keep them open. However, Neil Kinnock's judgement on Arthur Scargill, that he was

... destroying the coal industry single-handed. He's the labour movement's nearest equivalent to a First World War general,<sup>1</sup>

was well known throughout the movement, hardly differed from views expressed constantly by both the Government and NCB<sup>2</sup> and greatly weakened support for the strike among Party members. While the National Executive Committee encouraged support for the miners, and particularly urged members to pay a voluntary levy, parliamentary leaders failed to provide a "strong alternative explanation" of the crisis, and did not seek to counteract Tory propaganda.

Most of my interviewees referred to leadership attitudes, and told how those attitudes "filtered down", affecting the membership. They also referred to the absence of a pre-strike national ballot and to picket line violence. Sometimes, by way of further explanation, they described the nature of their local Labour Parties and the kinds of people attracted into membership.

#### **(a) Parliamentary leaders**

It is difficult to assess how far the hostile relationship between Kinnock and Scargill influenced the Labour Party leader's unsupportive attitude.<sup>3</sup> In any case, many activists believed that Kinnock's main aim was to distance Labour from the coalfield struggle in order to present the Party as dedicated to national unity, and 'fit to govern'.

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1. Private remark by Neil Kinnock, quoted in Robert Harris, The Making of Neil Kinnock, (London 1984) p.164, cited in D. Howells, *op. cit.* p.189.

2. In fact, throughout the strike, the Government was allowed to conduct what little debate on the crisis did take place publicly, largely on its own terms and focussing more on the personality of the NUM leader than on the serious political issues raised by the strike.

3. Neil Kinnock did not openly oppose the strike but his remarks in parliament seemed designed to distance him from it.

Political judgements on the priorities of the Labour leadership at that time varied depending on whether people supported or opposed the strike and on their political perspectives. Most Durham Labour Party members who supported the strike were, at the very least, disappointed with national leadership, though Mike Syer did not feel the anger some felt about leadership's stance and was,

. . . conscious of the political problems of a Party which aims to represent Nottingham at the same time as Durham. [MSy]

Linda Rutherford, chairperson of the City of Durham Support Group, believed Kinnock "was in a hell of a position." Not only was he attempting to balance his principles with his ambitions but he was inexperienced and,

Margaret Thatcher had him on the ropes for the entire time in parliament. [LiR]

County Councillor Derek Bates thought that Labour's stance nationally was very disheartening. M.P.s were ensnared by the fact that the strike was opposed by the media and that Establishment publicity portrayed miners as a mob,

. . . what Labour was frightened of was the law-and-order situation. M.P.s didn't want to be seen associating with . . . disorder. We were badly let down. The leaders of the parliamentary team and the M.P.s didn't really face the issue as a political issue (or) see the role of the Establishment within that. [DB]

In his view the consensus-seeking approach did not work for the leadership. M.P.s hoped that the consequences of the strike would be limited but they didn't really understand what the consequences would be,

. . . like the miners being first in line ( so that Government could) defeat the rest of the trade union areas. [DB]

Doreen Gibson believed that leadership understood only too well what they were doing and what the consequences would be,

I think they saw this as maybe damaging their political interests. I think it was their own self-interest here. It was more paramount than the interests of the miners. [DG]

Tony Parker's views were similar. He drew attention to the fact that Neil Kinnock first went down to a picket line

"about ten months or so after the strike started. . . . I think they understood exactly what it was about. I don't think they wanted to be seen on the picket line because . . . obviously the press would be there and the rest of the media. [TP]

In Hetton Miners' Welfare Hall, the centre of activity for the local support group,

Neil Kinnock in particular became rather like a bogeyman . . . because every word he uttered, or what he didn't utter, was a subject of conversation. Though people were not members of the Labour Party, they looked to the Labour Party to defend them and to fight on their behalf at parliamentary level. . . . They felt let down by it. Miners had everything in the book thrown at them. There was a blank cheque written out to defeat them. We



saw lads who were beaten on the picket line. We saw the invasion of the community by animals in uniform. And yet you had this namby-pamby attitude coming from the leadership. [FA]

In Seaham, before the strike, a rally had been held at which Neil Kinnock was the main speaker. Margaret Nugent had voted for him in the 1983 leadership election. She remembered his speech very clearly, and drew attention to the inconsistencies of his attitude.

Kinnock said, "Fight for your jobs! Come out on the street and fight for your jobs!" My hair was standing up at the back of my neck. I thought he was great. He was fantastic. The strike comes and what does he think about? About getting into Number 10. Not about socialism or who was right. [MN]

In Brian Gibson's opinion, Labour leaders' attitudes worked their way down to ordinary members who began to believe that, if the leadership wasn't totally behind the strike, there must be doubt about its validity. Labour leaders sat on the fence and,

... watched working lads and lasses go into greater despair. [BG]

#### **(b) Absence of a pre-strike ballot**

Howell stated that,

... Labour parliamentarians largely accepted the orthodoxy that such an individual (national) ballot counted as the ultimate in democratic procedures. Accordingly they not only marginalised other participatory forms of decision-making but also failed to focus on a fundamental problem of democratic theory. Whilst it may be argued that a national ballot would be appropriate on an issue that affected all participants equally - a national wage demand for example - it is less obviously appropriate for dealing with so divisive an issue as pit closures.<sup>1</sup>

There is some validity in the argument that no one should be able to decide, by ballot, that pits in another area should close. Yet that does not alter the argument that those who do not wish to strike should be allowed the opportunity to say so in a ballot. Additionally, it is extremely difficult to argue that "other forms of decision making" (for example, delegatory democracy) are superior to one-person-one-vote. Howell was right to point to a "fundamental problem of democratic theory", but neither he nor anyone else has presented a satisfactory solution to it so far.<sup>2</sup>

The Left did not raise the issue of the ballot at all, though in retrospect some believe they ought to have done so,

... they (the NUM) probably would have won a ballot after five or six weeks of the strike. Whether that would have been any different in Nottingham - it's a hypothetical point - but it might have split Nottingham in a way that was much more favourable to the strike. I do think you can say, in

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1. David Howell, op. cit. p.183.

2. Though H. Beynon in *Digging Deeper* (1985) pp. 6-13 presented a comprehensive examination of this issue, he too offered no solution. See also R. Hyman "Reflections on the Mining Strike" in *Socialist Register* 1986.

retrospect, that failure to hold a ballot and win a ballot was quite important in the ideology of the strike. [DC]

Absence of a ballot allowed some non-supporters to claim a moral superiority and it weakened the activists' case in the first two months. Jim Crozier was,

... annoyed with Scargill for not doing it properly ... I supported the strike out of the loyalty I have for my class. But ... we were on a loser. [JC]

However, as any prospect of a national ballot receded, as privation pressed harder on miners' families and as burdens grew heavier on support groups, many people felt that the issue had become irrelevant and agreed with Jim Crozier that,

Regardless of what's happened about not getting the vote, we're talking about families now. [JC]

### **(c) Picket line violence**

Another issue which appeared to cede the high moral ground to opponents of the strike was violence on the picket lines. When Howell argued against Kinnock's claim that violence is no part of British trade unionism he pointed out that the Labour leader was wrong on historical grounds,

Blanket claims about the British labour movement's pacific qualities are not only Pharisaical; they misrepresent the past; they misleadingly isolate certain responses as abnormal and they present an idealised portrait of the liberality of the British State.<sup>1</sup>

There was certainly a question mark over that "liberality" in the Durham coalfield where interviewees claimed that most of the violence and intimidation was being perpetrated against strikers, pickets and, sometimes, bystanders. [HW] [BC] [BF] [MM] [BT] [JaH] [LR] [DC] [AS] [AP] [FA] When police activities expanded to include preventing citizens going about their lawful business, strikers looked towards the Labour Party to speak on their behalf and challenge the Government's curtailment of their civil liberties [JH] [FA] but,

With one early exception, Labour's front bench made no attempt to make the question of civil liberties a matter of major political controversy.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Bea Campbell's comments on the issue of picket line violence are worth noting. She pointed out that the Labour movement, or at least its male trade union section, had not learned from the women's movement guerrilla blockades of Greenham Common nor from the non-violent direct action of the peace movement. Chaotic macho violence, she argued, is not the same as illegal direct action, nor is it so effective in popularising causes.<sup>3</sup>

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1. David Howell, op. cit. p.192.

2. David Howell, op. cit. p.193.

3. Bea Campbell, "Politics Old and New" in New Statesman 8 March 1985 p.25.

## 2. LOCAL M.P.s

Despite Labour leadership's attitude, four local M.P.s showed solidarity with the strikers : Bob Clay (Sunderland North), Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington), Tony Blair (Sedgefield) and Jack Dormand (Easington). The first two, at the time, were on the hard-Left of the Party and were vociferous in their support. Bob Clay was a member of the Campaign Group of M.P.s and had a strong base in his Constituency. As M.E.P. for County Durham and Blaydon at the time of the steelworkers' campaign in 1980-81, Roland Boyes had been in favour of direct action against the closure of the Consett steelworks and, with a group of militant workers, tried to block Westminster Bridge during the morning rush hour.<sup>1</sup> He was also an exceptional campaigner in the cause of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Though such activities made him popular with the Left, apparently they had proved no handicap to his gaining parliamentary nomination for the Houghton and Washington seat.<sup>2</sup> He was elected M.P. in 1983. During the strike he was a frequent visitor to picket lines and,

... backed us all the way. [JH] [FA] [DG]

Miners formed only a small proportion of the electorate in Sedgefield, an ex-mining area where Tony Blair was also a new M.P., elected in 1983. He was considered to be on the soft-Left of the Party and during the strike he helped mining families by taking up a number of their complaints with the DHSS. [DG] [AH] Jack Dormand was regarded as a man of the centre ground. With over 50% of the male workers in his Constituency involved in the mining industry and a CLP dominated by the miners' union, [HW] it would have been surprising if he had turned his back on them. According to activists, he cared deeply about miners' families and was always available to help them. [MN] [HW] [DG] He also appeared on picket lines at Hawthorn and Murton. [PB]

There were only 800 mining families in the whole of the City of Durham Constituency. The M.P. for the City of Durham warned the CLP General Committee, even before the strike started, against making collections for the SEAM Campaign, on the spurious grounds that to do so risked the sequestration of the Party's funds. Both David Connolly<sup>3</sup> and County Councillor Ron Morrissey argued against his stance and the latter insisted he would take a collection for SEAM at the end of the meeting.<sup>4</sup> [RM] [DC] During the strike the M.P. made a donation but

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1. He asked me to come with the group but I was unable to do so. The blocking of the bridge proved unsuccessful but group members interrupted the business of the House of Commons. Two were arrested and spent the rest of the day in the House of Commons cells. This incident was related to me by Roland Boyes and John Dent on their return from London.
  2. In conversations with me, he spoke of his CLP's political conservatism.
  3. Then a member of City of Durham CLP.
  4. I then moved a resolution to that effect and it was overwhelmingly supported by the delegates. A letter was sent to the NUM, asking if we were "breaking the Industrial Relations Act", as the M.P had informed us. See Appendix 6 for NUM's reply.

otherwise took no part in the support activities. What he said or did had little or no effect on the work of the support group.

In North Durham the M.P. was known for his right-wing views and was not seen as a wholehearted supporter of the strike. [BF] [EF] [MS] [BN] But miners were a small proportion of the electorate and had few delegates to the CLP Management Committee. The M.P.'s power base lay with the GMBATU whose research officer he had been and which had many affiliated branches in North Durham CLP.<sup>1</sup> Credit was given to Giles Radice for his participation in a money-raising sponsored walk [BF] [KM] [MS] [DC] [EF] and for donations to some support groups. [LJ] [BF] [MS] But his speech at a CLP meeting in Autumn 1984 encouraging miners to go back to work [BF] [EF] [MP] [BN] aroused resentment, not least among Party members who were striking miners. [BF] [KM]

The coal industry had once flourished in North West Durham but, in 1984, travelling miners there numbered hundreds rather than thousands. The then M.P., Ernest Armstrong, a well known Methodist preacher, seems to have been under little pressure from his CLP to offer aid to striking families. Bob Colson remarked that, as far as the miners' support group was concerned, the M.P. was "non-existent". [BC] In Bishop Auckland Constituency there were less than 30 travelling miners. The M.P., Derek Foster, gave donations to the support group which serviced them, but was not otherwise involved. [RD]

Stephen Hughes was elected in 1984 as the M.E.P. for County Durham and Blaydon. His support for the miners' strike was overt and unequivocal. He visited many support groups and regularly contributed money to them. He was frequently seen on rallies, paid fines for some miners who were convicted of strike-related offences and,

... was always vociferous in his verbal support. [BN]

Billy Frostwick recalled that when Stephen Hughes was interviewed on television he wore his 'COAL NOT DOLE' sticker. [BF] That moral support was as important to support group workers and strikers as any money they received. [EF] [BF] [KM]

### **3. LABOUR COUNCILLORS AND PARTY BRANCHES**

#### **(a) North Durham Constituency**

##### **(i) Labour Party Branches**

In Durham County, Labour District Councillors are usually the most conspicuous local leaders, usually have most regular contact with Party members and are often very influential. Some

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1. When asked about the disproportionate number of trade union delegates to North Durham CLP, Len James said, "This goes back . . . to the selection of Giles Radice as the MP, when (County Councillor Andrew) Cunningham went around forming branches all over the constituency in order that it could be a G & M selection." [LJ]

totally dominate Labour Party branch meetings, particularly if they are also branch officers. [BJ]  
[BG] Betty James considered that many councillor/delegates to North Durham CLP meetings were,

... only interested in keeping themselves as councillors, so much so that you get small branches who tell people the Labour Party is full. How can you get young people joining? Councillors are frightened they'll lose their positions. And if you get these people coming (to the CLP General Committee meetings) who are only concerned about themselves and local politics, in the main, then I don't see how you can get them worrying about the miners strike ... because they are not committed. [BJ]

Anna Phelps had problems with Sacriston councillors. One of them was so opposed to the strike he "would not even buy a raffle ticket." [AP]<sup>1</sup> She decided to apply to join Sacriston Labour Party and told one councillor that the Party needed new blood, needed young people, needed radical change. He "hummed and hawed" and was "very very wary." [AP] She and a friend in the miners' support group were told that women did not come to branch meetings but that they could join the Labour Party Women's Section. Anna refused to be relegated to the Women's Section and demanded full membership,

... the Women's Section sit around with their knitting. They don't do anything positive. I'm not saying that happens throughout the Labour Party but in Sacriston it's like that. The men took the decisions. [AP]

She and her friend filled in application forms to join the Party and handed them to a councillor. Nothing happened. The women were never invited to a meeting. No one asked them for subscriptions. Eventually they decided on a back-door approach. They asked Keith Potts, District councillor for Urpeth, to put forward their names directly to North Durham CLP General Committee. The Sacriston councillor, "was furious we had gone over his head." [AP] Labour Party rules at that time stated that members must be accepted by the local branch before names were put forward for endorsement to the CLP.<sup>2</sup> Both women's efforts to join the Labour Party in Sacriston failed. Sacriston Labour Party Branch took no part in support group activities, [AP] but may have made donations to the Lodge.

Betty and Len James believed that some Chester-le-Street District councillors deliberately kept the Party small. They cited one branch which was so "tightly held" by two councillors that other members dared not speak. While they emphasised that if it were not for some councillors the Party would not exist in certain areas, they told of a branch chairperson/councillor who was the only one to speak in a meeting organised so that a North Durham CLP officer could question people on their activities,

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1. Billy Frostwick maintained that only Councillor Pounder (an ex-miner) supported the strikers while the two other District councillors from Sacriston were very opposed. [BF]
  2. Potential members can now apply to join the Labour Party by contacting its national office. This rule change was made after many complaints from around the country that applications to local branches were ignored.

X was in the Chair. Well, he answered every question . . . there were 20 people there but X answered everybody's questions. [LJ]

In Chester-le-Street North Ward Branch, many of the least politicised members had been drawn into the Party by District councillors who perhaps had done them some small service. Generally, and perhaps unsurprisingly, if councillors' preoccupations were as Betty James described them, those recruited were people who took little interest in national or international issues but liked to know, for instance,

. . . what was happening in the town's shopping centre or where new bus stops would be sited. They would have been traditional Labour voters, but won't necessarily have thought we wanted to change society or anything like that. . . . It's hardly surprising that when we did get into the strike and were expecting support we didn't get it. Because people didn't join the Party for that. [KM]

When Kath Mattheys and her friend, Jean Mann, tried to collect money from North Durham CLP members they quickly became demoralised,

. . . we came across people who were very antagonistic, people who were really anti-strike and anti-Scargill. The chairperson of one Branch chased us really. Chased us, yes! "Don't you dare come back here! Don't you dare, for the miners!" he said. And he was pretty nasty. [KM]

Though the women insisted that donations were for the relief of hardship, they failed to persuade many Party members who were adamant that to give donations of any kind was tantamount to supporting the leader of the NUM, whom they detested. Time and again the women were told, "I'm not giving to Arthur Scargill". [KM] While Kath Mattheys had often been critical of Labour Party leadership and bureaucracy, she had always considered that the rank-and-file were different, were good working class people who would recognise where their loyalties lay during a major dispute, especially if it involved overt intervention by a right-wing Conservative Government.

That was a time when we should have been showing some solidarity. It really opened my eyes to the sort of people we had in the Labour Party. [KM]

Out of 52 North Ward members, less than half gave donations on a regular basis. [KM]

Some Chester-le-Street Party members said they could not afford even a small tin of food or 20 pence a week. Yet others who were poor would,

. . . rake about in cupboards, just to give you something, just to show that they had solidarity. [KM]

Party members' reasons for not supporting the miners were legion. Refusers declared that the miners should not have come out on strike, or that the miners should get back to work, or that, since no one had helped their families during the 1926 strike, they did not see why they should help striking miners in 1984. Some said the NUM should have the sole responsibility of helping its members while others maintained that the miners should be helping themselves. All these responses were in addition to the, by now, familiar arguments about the lack of a national

pre-strike ballot, violence on the picket lines and a vehement aversion to "Helping Arthur Scargill". Some who opposed the strike were persuaded to give donations. However, according to Kath Mattheys, the same people took every opportunity to denigrate striking miners and the dispute itself, thus withholding the equally vital moral support, and some said nothing at all. It was clear

... there were very few of us you could honestly say were behind the miners.  
[KM]

Some money and food came from North Ward, albeit from a minority. In the very small North Lodge Branch, all six members gave generously. But, although some South Ward members were happy to donate, the response from members living in Chester Moor was such that collectors did not go back a second time. [KM] Only the Labour Club Committee went out of its way to help the support group. In 1984 the Club was run by politically active people, Jack Doyle, Elwyn Jones, Maureen Patterson, Bob Mattheys and Tom Connery, Chairman of North Durham CLP. These members spanned the political spectrum in the Party. [KM] The Labour Club premises were used for food storage, packing and as a distribution point for food parcels. Each Friday a collecting tin was passed around and some members,

... used to dig deep in their pockets for that. One man put in £10 every week ... a good left-winger, Bob Harrison. That was every week. [BF]

Ouston had no Labour District councillors. Tony Parker related that, out of 22 members in Ouston Branch, only 6 offered to help,

Obviously, some weren't very friendly towards the strike. And really, it's a painful thing ... you think you're all in this together and it turns out you're not all together. Some of you are a bit further ahead than the others. [TP]

Despite the efforts of Councillor Keith Potts, most of the members of the small Urpeth Labour Party Branch, too,

were not supportive of the strike. A lot of the older people weren't really involved. [MP]

4 out of 50 Pelton Labour Party members formed a support group with about 8 miners and miners' wives. There was no levy on Labour Party branch members since many of them were old. None of them refused to help when asked but they were not asked often. [DB] A Pelton councillor who was chairman of the council that year gave a donation from the Chairman's Fund. [MS]

In Craghead, Len and Betty James, District councillor Martin Quinn and Harry Feenan considered that the Labour Party was an electoral machine and not at all suited for the kind of work support groups set themselves.<sup>1</sup> In Len James' view, that owed much to the fact that the

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1. Though support group funds were channeled through the branch bank account. [LJ]

Party took too long to make decisions and, in a strike situation, decisions needed to be taken quickly. As well as that, they did not want the Labour Party to "run the strike". They wanted to make their services available, whenever necessary, to the mining families. [LJ] [BJ] [BN]

Catchgate's two District councillors were,

... on the opposing side. They did not believe in the strike at all . . [BN]

When the councillors were asked to speak to the management of the Fine Fare supermarket to ensure continuation of the arrangement to have collecting trolleys in the shop, they declined saying they did not want to interfere. They also refused to stand by the trolley to encourage customers to donate food. There was no enthusiasm to distribute food parcels either or to contact miners or help their families. [BN]<sup>1</sup>

Bala Nair faced a monthly ordeal of wringing money out of Catchgate Branch. He was one of only three activists out of 22 branch members.

Serious discussions were held in the branch but there was almost a majority of people who believed the miners didn't deserve (the help) they received. It was quite a battle to get the money out. It was begrudgingly given and the arguments were quite strong. [BN]

There was much antipathy towards Arthur Scargill. Branch members considered that he was not properly representing his members, that he was too political,

They couldn't see that the actual battle was political. They couldn't see that the miners were being made an example of . . . The basic idea was that the miners were being greedy because, even though they were being offered a substantial redundancy payment, they were still on strike. I don't think that people could get through to them that the fact that the miners were still on strike, despite being offered all these incentives, proved that they were looking out for jobs, keeping, safeguarding jobs, looking after the structure or the fabric of society. I don't think most working class could see that, within the Labour Party. And a lot of older people thought the miners were upsetting the Labour Party. [BN]

Added to that, some members declared both that Arthur Scargill was a 'loudmouth' who didn't know what he was doing, and that he was using the strength of the miners towards an individual, selfish, political gain. By a narrow majority each month, Catchgate Branch made a donation, amounting in the end to half of its funds. [BN] However, Bala had to,

make a specific guarantee that if money went in helping the strike (picketing) then it would not be forthcoming (in future). As a matter of fact . . . they were hoping that the male members of the (striking) families would not get any help with the food parcels. It was as bad as that, and it perturbed me quite a bit that people would feel that way. [BN]

He took up the issue with his M.P., Giles Radice, and said he was very disappointed with Labour leadership's attitude. In Bala's opinion that attitude "filtered down" in the Party and had

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1. These were the only occasions when Catchgate's councillors were asked for help. [BN]



a particularly bad effect on older members who felt they shouldn't take an active part in the strike because leadership had so obviously dissociated itself from it. [BN] The M.P.'s response, . . . was rather ambiguous. All that he would say was that the stance taken by the leadership was because of things that the average person doesn't see and, "we know better", which is the normal answer given by people who, because of their position, think they are *there* because they know better. [BN]

Although he was disappointed with Labour leaders' and his M.P.'s responses, Bala was not too unhappy about the rank and file in the Party, accepting that only a minority would ever be active. However, he believed that some people had joined Catchgate Branch for purely personal and not political reasons. It surprised him at first that a lot of younger members voted against supporting the strike *because* they were unemployed themselves, victims of the closures of the ball bearing factory at Annfield Plain as well as Consett steelworks. But he recognised that,

They were finding it hard and they couldn't understand because most of them didn't get the kind of redundancy money that the miners were going to get. I think it was a first-time experience and a frustration and an anger against that. [BN]

Immediately the first miners from the area broke the strike and returned to work, the branch refused to give any more money to the support group. In Catchgate Branch, it was an 'us-and-them' situation, [BN] but an "us-and-them" inside the working class. The Labour Party branch in nearby Annfield Plain, which had more members than Catchgate, was "pathetic". [BN]

On the other hand, in Pelton Fell a committed group of ten Labour Party members worked with a dozen miners in the village and "raised quite a lot of money". [DC] According to Derek Little, Havannah Branch in Stanley was extremely active too. £500, the whole of the branch funds was put at the miners' disposal; periodic street collections were made; food was collected in local supermarkets; food parcels were delivered to miners door-to-door and branch members took turns collecting money on the market stall in Stanley. [DL] A striking miner, Jack Pallas, joined the Labour Party branch because he was so impressed with its activities. His recollection, however, was that after he joined, in September 1984, only a few members were *very* active while,

. . . the majority wouldn't really help. They wouldn't. I asked them but they just said, "I'm busy," even though a couple of them were on the dole. [JP]

One prominent member of the branch was totally against the strike,

He said the pits must be economic and that they should be closed down if they're not economic, not a viable proposition . . . He kept very quiet in the branch meetings but as soon as he got outside and saw me standing on the street with a (collecting) can, he would come and argue with me. [JP]<sup>1</sup>

There was no Labour District councillor for Havannah.

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1. Jack Pallas added that, after the strike, the same member had begun to change his mind and was coming to believe that the miners had been right. [JP]

## **(ii) Chester-le-Street District Council**

The Labour controlled District Council in Chester-le-Street was a great disappointment to one of its members, miner/councillor Billy Frostwick,

I got a lot of stick from Labour Party councillors for being on strike. [BF]

One colleague told him he should get back to work because the miners were responsible for her son being on short time, that is, working a three-day week. Billy was "staggered" that she ignored the fact that miners were receiving no wages at all. Other colleagues, too, were less than sympathetic. At least three stormy meetings of the Labour Group culminated in Billy's walking out in anger. [BF]

As Party delegate to the District Council Labour Group, Tony Parker had an inside view of the relationship between the majority of councillors and those miner/ councillors pressing the Group for help. The majority was irked that the issue of the strike was raised at every meeting,

I thought it must have been difficult for the miners themselves to go and conduct business which might not have been so very important when you had this national dispute on. If I'd been a miner at the time and I'd been faced with the same situation I'd have felt some hostility to the councillors . . . because of their inactivity. [TP]

Billy Frostwick had been a councillor for four years and was reelected just after the beginning of the strike. He said that, out of 23 Labour councillors, only a handful - Councillors Potts, Patterson, Suddick and Pounder - raised their voices to insist that solidarity with the miners was imperative. In Billy's view, there was no excuse for the Labour Group to hold back support. No District elections were imminent and Labour had an unassailable majority. What decided their actions, he said, was political antagonism. [BF]

Under pressure, the Council allowed the support group the use of a van, once a week after Meals-on-Wheels were finished with it, so that groceries could be transported from a cash-and-carry warehouse. However, the single most contentious issue was the Council's refusal, over a long period, to pay accumulated housing benefit to single miners. In the rest of the County, single miners had received their full payments by Christmas 1984. In March 1985 Chester-le-Street councillors were still hesitating, still persisting in the (mistaken) belief that it was illegal to pay the money. The support group had to "fight tooth-and-nail" [BF] before any payments were made. They decided on a women's 'picket' of a Council meeting, [MP] [KM] [EF]

We had to put a picket on the council. They were absolutely horrified, being picketed by Labour Party people. [KM]

The 'picket'<sup>1</sup> assembled at the foot of the stairs in the Civic Centre and tried to lobby councillors as they came in. Some walked past and did not want to listen. The 'picket' then moved *en bloc* to sit in the council meeting. [EF] The CLP support group meeting of 7 March 1985 noted,

Single Miners' Housing Benefit. Lobby of District Councillors took place on Monday 4th March. Council/Labour Group to pay an interim benefit of £3 per man, meanwhile investigate legal position of £8.70p.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the strike there were still miners in that District who had not received money legally due to them. [BF] Billy Frostwick believed that the fuss about the "illegality" of paying money to single miners was just an excuse to do nothing. In his opinion, what really motivated councillors was that they believed a majority of the public did not support the miners. Consequently, they did not want to be seen to be supporting them either.

Billy Frostwick decided not to seek reelection for a third term,

I finished with the council mostly because of the strike and the attitude towards me. I think if the election had been during the strike, when I knew what they were like down there, I would not have stood again *then*. It definitely changed my attitude towards fellow councillors. [BF]

The only positive result of his experience, he said, was that on the Labour Group all pretences were shoved aside and true characters were revealed,

They either supported you or they didn't. When it came to the crunch, they didn't support us. [BF]

### (iii) North Durham CLP Support Group

In September 1984, some activists decided that if all the small village-based groups in North Durham Constituency could be pulled together into an official CLP support group, a number of political and practical problems could be solved. [MS] [KM] [DC] Party members, vocal in their opposition, might tone down their remarks lest they be construed as disloyal to a Party decision. There might be opportunities to encourage the more hesitant Party members to join in the work. Financial problems could be ironed out since an open accounting of all monies would spell out the desperate situation to the branches. That might spur them into activity. Crucially a CLP support group would be in a more advantageous position to appeal for help to CLPs outside the coalfield.

Our idea came from the success in Durham City. We were trying to fight a couple of battles here, because Giles Radice<sup>3</sup> was also coming out with the kind of thing we were getting in the branches - talking about violence on the picket line, talking about the strike in a very negative way. We thought that

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1. The word 'picket' was employed very loosely here, probably because of its common usage during the strike. In fact, interviewees used the words 'picket' and 'lobby' almost interchangeably when discussing this incident. They emphasised that no attempt was made to prevent councillors entering the chamber. [MP] [EF]
  2. North Durham CLP Support Group, Notes on Meetings 7 March 1985. Records held by Kath Mattheys.
  3. M.P. for North Durham.

if it became Constituency Party policy then a lot of leading members, such as the councillors, would have to get involved. [KM]<sup>1</sup>

However, the establishment of the CLP Support Group did not solve the problems. The group set out an elaborate and ambitious programme of activity.<sup>2</sup> Its implementation depended on mobilising many Party members. But, the setting up of the CLP Group,

... was seen as the Constituency doing its bit. But what was happening was that it was being hived off. The Constituency could take the credit for the work of the support group. In practice, it was a small minority that was doing anything. The others could say, "This is what we are doing as a Constituency," even if they themselves were doing bog-all. [DC]

Len James believed the Constituency had done all it could to support the strike and added that,

You never get more than a minority of people actually doing any work anyway - like Mary Stratford and David Connolly, Billy and Elspeth Frostwick. [LJ]

His wife insisted that it could not be said, then, that the Constituency was doing anything,

Again it's the same activists. You wouldn't say it was the Constituency Party. You always get the feeling that's typical of the Labour Party. [BJ]

County Councillor Derek Bates,

... could not remember much activity at all (at Constituency level) ... I was very disappointed in the poor take up of the strike as a political question. [DB]

The CLP Group's financial records show that only two of the Chester-le-Street town branches made contributions to the CLP Support Group fund. North Ward made three donations - a total of £80 - while Holmlands Park Branch paid regular levies from 2nd November 1984 until 23rd March 1985, also amounting to £80.<sup>3</sup>

Giving money or food in passive donation is, arguably, easier than giving time and energy as part of a fund raising team. Money was desperately needed and the CLP Group decided to approach the general public for help. However, very few people in the CLP were willing to do street collections. [MS] [EF] [BF] [DC] [KM] [MP] Those who refused said it was begging and they didn't like begging. Kath Mattheys confessed,

I hated it but I used to go, grit my teeth and rattle my can. [KM]

The collectors were the same few who took on most of the other support group jobs. Some still entertained the hope that as more Party members became aware of the intense suffering in some mining families, viable rotas could ensure a steady stream of collectors in the street and on a

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1. Mike Syer and Pat McIntyre from Durham City Support Group were invited to speak to the North Durham CLP General Committee on 15 September 1984 to put the case for a Constituency-wide organisation.
  2. See Appendix 7.
  3. Financial records of North Durham CLP Support Group, held by Billy Frostwick.

market stall. It was a forlorn hope. A few weeks after the establishment of the CLP Support Group, the secretary noted,

Lack of commitment of some Branches, especially in the Chester-le-Street district. One of the functions of the Group - to involve Party members who had not so far been involved - on this, Group failing. Same people doing all work.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of December, despite efforts to involve more people, it was clear the group could not stir inactive members. Street collections became harder. The secretary noted,

Street collection. A great deal of extra help needed, same people collecting all the time.<sup>2</sup>

In January, there were even fewer volunteers,

Street collections - Chester-le-Street. Support from Labour Party members ABYSMAL.<sup>3</sup>

Most efforts to energise Party members to collect money in public produced the same results,

The bulk of the members of Chester-le-Street branches stayed away. I was in charge of organising street collections and I sent out loads of letters<sup>4</sup> saying we are having a collection on such-and-such a date and getting bugger-all response. There were only ever one or two people who had not previously been involved who came into the group from the Labour Party and did one or two days fundraising. But we never saw them again. [DC]

## **(b) North West Durham Constituency**

### **(i) Labour Party Branches**

The central town in the Constituency is Consett and until the early 1980s it was a 'company town'.<sup>5</sup> For years prior to the strike, the Party was dominated by the trade union movement, first by the miners and then, from the 1960s,<sup>6</sup> by the steelworkers,

Trade unions could make or break. They had an automatic reservoir for membership. They were putting trade unionists up from the Company (British Steel) for the District Council or County Council. If that ever seemed to be threatened by other people from the community, the trade unions went to the branches, saw which of their members lived in that area, got them into the Labour Party and turned them out for votes. The trade union branches affiliated people to the Labour Party and paid fees en bloc. They kept control that way. [DH]

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1. North Durham CLP Support Group, Notes on Meetings 2 November 1984. Records held by Kath Mattheys.
  2. North Durham CLP Support Group, Notes on Meetings 7 December 1984. Records held by Kath Mattheys.
  3. North Durham CLP Support Group, Notes on Meetings 5 January 1985. Records held by Kath Mattheys.
  4. See Appendix 8.
  5. Virtually the only male employment in the town was at the steelworks owned by the Consett Iron Company and, after nationalisation, by British Steel Corporation. Consequently the affairs of the steelworks and its trade unions dominated the social and political life of the area.
  6. After mass closure of pits under a Labour Government.

At the time of the strike<sup>1</sup> many Labour Party branches were stagnant. [DH] South Moor<sup>2</sup> and Leadgate branches were exceptions. [JC] When Leadgate Miners' Support Group members described the local Labour Party branch as "very good" they named Jim Crozier, Terry Richardson and Mick Hughes as the moving spirits behind the help that was given. Crozier himself described his branch, at that time, as "very conservative with a small 'c'" and said that many branch members were opposed to discussion of national politics. He added that, as an organisation, the Labour Party in North West Durham did nothing. In his view many Wards were "pathetic". [JC]

## **(ii) Derwentside District Council**

In the early 1980s, Derwentside District Council was dominated by people from a limited range of occupations,

... people who had worked in BSC, either as gaffers or as trade unionists.  
Or people who worked in education - hell of a lot of teachers, hell of a lot of school board people,<sup>3</sup> not many people from other sorts of backgrounds.  
[DH]

According to Jim Crozier and David Wray, there were also many Labour councillors suspected of being freemasons.<sup>4</sup> Jim Crozier believed that most of the 'old guard' were in the Labour Party because it was the only route to public office in the area,

The Labour Party in Durham attracts people who want power and it doesn't matter whether it was the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, the SDP - you'd have those people joining it. [JC]

David Wray agreed. He did not regard such people as socialists,

If they'd lived in Wimbledon, they would have been Tory councillors. They wanted to be councillors first and foremost. And then they wanted to be Labour councillors because that's the only way you can be a councillor in Consett. [DW]

Support group workers also singled out Councillor David Hodgson as the person behind most of the help received from the Derwentside District Council. [BC] [JC] [DW] It was emphasised that, although many of the 'old guard' would swear they had helped the miners, in fact the reverse was true, [DW] [JC]

Most councillors were against, though they would say they were for us. But only Hodgson was really with us. Hodgson was forcing all the time . . . Hodgson is the Denis Skinner of the local Labour Party. Davie was like a wolf in a pack of sheep. And they hated him. [DW]

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1. Most interviewees in North West Durham Constituency and Derwentside District claimed that since the miners' strike the political scene had been radically altered with the election of new younger councillors who wanted a more participatory Party. [DW] [DH] [LJ] [JC] [BJ] [LR]
  2. South Moor was in North Durham Constituency but in Derwentside District. In 1984 South Moor had no Labour councillors, the Party having lost all seats in the 1970s because, "Let's face it, Derwentside District Council neglected South Moor." [LJ]
  3. Education welfare officers employed by the County Council.
  4. Grassroots members of the Party mistrust any who belong to secret societies, especially those which attract members believed to be unsympathetic to the Labour movement.

According to Jim Crozier, more than one councillor made it quite clear they wanted nothing to do with the strike because, they said, the steel workers hadn't had any help from the miners when they were in dispute. [JC]

Bob Colson talked about one councillor who was opposed to the strike but kept his views to himself. [BC]<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Councillor David Hodgson made his views known and,

. . . used to fight hammer and tongs for us. I've seen him walk from Delves Lane because he wasn't working at that time (and didn't have any money). He used to walk down to come to the meetings. We used to take him back in the van. [BC]

Another District councillor, Martin Quinn from Craghead, not only informed groups in Derwentside about claiming housing benefit for single miners but personally contacted the men [LJ] and spread the information through the informal DASG network. [BF]

A Liaison Committee was set up between the Council and the miners' support groups in the area. Miners Billy Nattrass and David Wray decided to ask the Council for help in kind,

When the councillors pulled themselves round they said, "Well, you can't have any." [DW]

Even the YMCA delegate to the committee was moved to declare that he would help the miners and that councillors should be doing likewise. Eventually some help was forthcoming - a Meals-on-Wheels van. As a result WRVS women "began to resign in protest" [DW], so the WRVS sign on the side of the van was covered over with a piece of paper [DW] [DoW] [DH]

At one time DDC had run a lottery. It failed but the money left in the fund was doled out to councillors from every area covered by the District Council for use among their constituents. Some of the money came to the support groups via the councillors. [DH] [DW] [BC] [LJ]<sup>2</sup> In addition, the council agreed that miners who were council tenants should not be pressed for rent and rates while the strike lasted.

Under pressure, the council was permissive but not active. Pressure had to be put on for them to give anything. [DW]

### **(c) Easington Constituency**

A year before the strike, the resolution to set up SEAM was supported by Easington CLP but,

Words are one thing. Action is another. [HW]

The gap between what Labour Party members said they supported and what they were actually prepared to do was no new phenomenon,

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1. At this point in Bob Colson's interview with me, an elderly relative interrupted twice to say, "Watch what you're saying about people," and reminded him that the councillor in question had "done a lot" for her. [BC]
  2. There are no financial records for the Leadgate Miners' Support Group. They were destroyed after the strike. [BC]

The Party has always been the same in Easington. That's how we lost the County Council seat to the Liberal.<sup>1</sup> The Party was complacent. They thought that people would always vote Labour because they were all miners. Individuals . . . gave a lot to the community . . . but we were not seen as a Party (doing things for the community). [HW]

That complacency continued even after the loss of the council seat. The Party wanted to win, wanted to beat the Liberals,

. . . we want to have all this power. We want to have every councillor a Labour councillor . . . but (those who want office) don't want to go out to *work* to be a Labour councillor. [HW]

John Wood was convinced that,

If it was the Tory Party (dominant) in County Durham, councillors would be Tories. They just want to be councillors. [JW]

It came as no surprise, during the strike, that some of them were unhelpful. [HW]

For many years, Easington Labour Party Women's Section had been a "strong, political group of women." At the time of the strike some members were "very elderly" and unable to help, though if they had been younger, "they'd have been there." Others, Heather Wood said, probably did not want to take on the hard work. Out of 25 members, only four helped the support group. [HW] When Horden Women's Section was contacted,

They said they had too much to do and hadn't time to help. [HW]

The Labour Party in Easington Constituency,

. . . wasn't involved in the strike. Afterwards, when Alan Burnip<sup>2</sup> said, "We have to thank our Women's Section for helping us through the strike", I had to bite my tongue. A couple of members did come for a day. But when you think, we were out on strike for a year. Now and again somebody would pop in (the kitchen) and peel a few potatoes. We even had a couple of men from the Party (who did that). But that was as far as they went. [HW]

#### (i) Seaham

In Seaham, there was also a difference between what some Labour Party members said and what work they were prepared to tackle,

I would like to be able to say councillors were (actively) supportive. One of them, Mary Lee, used to come down to the kitchen and help. But when Albert (Nugent) went to another councillor to ask for help, towards the end of the strike, (that councillor) said, "F... the miners. I'm sick of the miners." [MN]

Margaret Nugent was a member of Deneside Branch in Seaham No.2 Ward. In 1984 it had perhaps 30 members, though only half of that number attended branch meetings. There were

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1. In 1976.

2. A miner and Labour councillor on Easington District Council.



some NUM members, some in other trade unions and others who did not have union membership. No levy was imposed but donations were made from branch funds. The branch had no real involvement in the strike and did not organise fund raising activities to help the support group.

Albert Nugent was a Town councillor in 1984. He was away from home much of the time, picketing in other coalfields. But he was shocked when, just before the end of the strike, fellow Labour councillors withdrew the Whip from him because he had not regularly attended council meetings. Margaret Nugent told Ward members that they knew exactly where her husband had been. It was impossible for him to be in Nottingham and Seaham at the same time. Those who opposed him said he ought to have written them a letter saying where he was. Margaret insisted that they knew and they ought to have been supporting him instead of trying to expel him from the Group and attempting to have him thrown off the council. When the next selection meeting took place, Albert was deselected and Margaret was nominated to stand for council. She was reluctant until her husband urged her to accept,

. . . so that there would be one socialist voice on the council. [MN]

According to Margaret, the focus of most Party members in Seaham was parochial. Though national and international issues were discussed if they appeared on the agenda, there seemed to be little understanding or appreciation of how they impinged on people's daily lives. For instance, at a time when cheap South African coal was being imported through Seaham docks, threatening the livelihoods of thousands of miners working in deep pits, the Town council was generous in its dealings with the dock authorities. In Margaret's view, they ought to have withheld co-operation until imports of coal ceased. Whenever an anti-Apartheid rally took place in Seaham, only one or two members of her branch could be expected to appear. [MN]

At every level of the Party there had been no fight back against government cuts which were devastating people's lives. In Seaham, Town councillors were too involved with their own interests to campaign on issues that affected the long-term interests of the community. Although she allowed that councillors did some good so far as parks and cemeteries were concerned and although she applauded Seaham's twinning arrangement with a German town, she was perturbed that,

They are all lined up for the mayorship - he'll be mayor next year and he'll be mayor the next year. It's wrong because this town is too small to have a mayor . . . But if this was a Liberal held place, many of them would be Liberals; if it was Tory, many of them would be Tories. [MN]

## **(ii) Dawdon**

Out of 30 members in Dawdon Labour Party Branch, 28 were miners,

We haven't got a lot of active people . . . people aren't interested in politics.  
[NS]

Nancy Shaw's husband, Frank, an NUM member and Labour Party branch secretary made many efforts over a long time to promote activity and political education. He invited speakers,

But people didn't come to listen to them. [NS]

There was no Labour Party Women's Section in Dawdon. It had been different in the 1930s but in all the 14 years Nancy Shaw had been in the Labour Party it had proved impossible to attract women into membership. Dawdon women were "just interested in their own lives." [NS] At the Labour Party branch there was much apathy. No one wanted to be on the branch committee or to stand for Parish council. At the time of the strike, no help was forthcoming from the District Council although support group women had been told that if they asked for the use of a van, one would be provided. [NS] [FD]

### **(iii) Murton**

Though she was a Labour Party member, Pam Blanchard would not have become involved in setting up a support group in Murton had it not been for her husband, Brian, also a Labour Party member and in the Deputies union, NACODS. When Heather Woods contacted Pam to ask her to help,

I wasn't really bothered about the strike because it didn't affect us directly.  
[PB]

However, her husband strongly encouraged her involvement.

Murton Labour Party branch had 50 members. Like Seaham, it was a mixed membership. About 20 attended meetings and the branch gave donations to the support group but it was not involved otherwise. Three Labour women helped in the kitchens at the beginning of the strike but left in the summer, since they said they could not "get on" with the other workers there. Another two Labour women helped on one occasion. The rest of the women in the Party,

... hadn't time to get involved. None of them are very political and they didn't want to know. [PB]

If some members of the Party opposed the strike, Pam believed they would not dare to speak out in Murton branch. She was so busy in the kitchen and raising money that she had not reflected, during the strike, on the role played by the Labour Party but,

Thinking about it, we didn't do very well. [PB]

### **(d) Sedgefield**

Labour councillors in Sedgefield District donated their expenses to the Spennymoor Trades Council (STC) Miners' Support Group on a regular basis. The chairman of the council, Terry Ward, gave every possible help. A Meals-on-Wheels van was made available to transport food to 700 families scattered throughout a large rural area. When that van proved too small, a large transit van was substituted. The District council itself,

... could not be faulted. [BG] [PaG]

However, Brian Gibson detected "a frame of mind developed in Durham", which conveyed to individual Labour Party members the notion that, since "your local councillor *is* your Labour Party", all activity must be left to him or her and neither individual members nor the branch need do anything. In Sedgefield, local branches, when asked, gave donations at first. But as soon as collections began at the monthly CLP General Committee meetings, which yielded £45 - £55 per month, from 50 - 60 delegates, all branch donations ceased. [BG] [PaG] No branch members, other than those originally involved, volunteered their services to the support group. [PaG]

#### **(e) Hetton**

Hetton Support Group did not approach the local Labour Party to ask for their involvement since they believed the initiative should have come from the Party itself. In Florence Anderson's opinion, the miners' strike was a fundamental fight for the whole of the Labour movement, and Party members should have understood that. But,

... there was virtually no relationship with the Party. Our meetings were open to anyone who wanted to come ... but there were no representatives sent ... I'm a member myself but I do not remember any individual members who came from Hetton Labour Party. [FA]

Many Party members who were ex-miners felt the strike had nothing to do with them and therefore they wanted no part of it. That caused resentment among those on strike, particularly since CLPs up and down the country seemed anxious to give assistance. Hetton Labour Party never discussed the issues arising from the miners' strike. The one gesture of support it made was to donate the proceeds of a dance held in November 1984. [FA]

Early in the strike, Labour-held Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County Council gave one voucher worth £4 to each striking miner's family. But applications to Labour-held Hetton Town council asking for use of premises as kitchens were turned down. [FA] [JH] The support group had no alternative but to use the Miners' Welfare hall which had extremely poor cooking facilities. [FA] After Christmas one Hetton miner-councillor returned to work and subsequently became well known for proposing a toast to "the working miner",

If anything alienated strikers (from the Labour Party), that did. [FA]

Miners looked to the Labour Party to defend them but the inactivity and lack of interest in their suffering made them feel "let down". [FA]

#### **(f) City of Durham Constituency**

##### **(i) Labour Party Branches**

City of Durham District is made up of 19 rural, mostly ex-pit villages and the City itself which has a university, little industry and a much more socially mixed population. Local government district and parliamentary constituency boundaries are co-terminous. The miners' support group

was constituted as a sub-committee of the CLP. It operated autonomously save for giving monthly reports to the General Committee. All branches other than those in Sherburn and Croxdale accepted the need to support the miners. Sherburn modified its position after the intervention of Councillor Gerry Steinberg.<sup>1</sup> Since there was only minority support in Sherburn Branch for the strike, it was not surprising that only 16 of the 80 members would pay the levy,

(It was) 50 pence levy for the duration, and the thing failed, it fell flat. I rapidly saw we weren't going to make any progress with that. It was indifference or antagonism. [RM]

Even some miners who were Labour Party members were opposed to the setting up of support groups since they believed that would prolong a dispute they did not want. They said that County Councillor Ron Morrissey and those he worked with should not be doing what they were doing, that their actions were disgraceful. [RM]

Croxdale Branch remained completely hostile to the strike. Its councillor/chairperson was approached and asked to try to persuade the members that they ought to help, even if that help were to be given on humanitarian grounds alone. The underlying worry of activists was that if one branch opted out of the CLP Support Group arrangement, others might follow suit and the whole network of branch support could collapse. The councillor/chairperson did not seem to appreciate why his suggestion, that he should deliver the parcels to Croxdale miners so that Croxdale Labour Party should have the 'credit,' was regarded as somewhat bizarre. He pointed out that he had been embarrassed to hear a member of Durham Miners' Family Aid (DMFA),<sup>2</sup> who was collecting money on the street, shouting to passers-by, "Let's defeat Macgregor!" Nevertheless, he said he would do what he could to get branch members to change their minds, but added that as he was about to set off for a holiday in Canada he could not promise much.<sup>3</sup> Over the year of the strike, Croxdale miners received parcels costing about £700. Croxdale Branch made one donation of £10 to the food fund.<sup>4</sup>

New Brancepeth councillors declared that their branch would not join the Constituency Group since they could look after their own miners' families. But in six weeks they supplied only one parcel to each family. Pressure from the families who heard about the weekly parcels received in neighbouring villages pushed New Brancepeth into the Constituency Group, which was fortunate since the Branch raised very little money over the year and certainly would have been unable to supply a weekly food parcel to all striking miners in that village.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Elected in 1987 as the M.P. for the Constituency.

2. See Chapter 5.

3. My diary 19 June, 27 June, 28 June 1984..

4. See Appendix 9.

5. Parcels to New Brancepeth miners cost £2,900 while the New Brancepeth Labour Party Branch donated £111 - 50p over the year. See Appendix 9.

In Coxhoe where there were about 40 mining families,

the Labour District councillor, at that time, didn't even pay 10p subscription towards the strike, towards the miners. No, no, he had no part whatsoever. He didn't raise one penny. He didn't donate anything. He came to an odd social event, but they were few and far between. [AH]

In contrast, an SDP District councillor gave help to the support group whenever he was approached. [AH]

Out of 34 members in Coxhoe Branch, only 5 were prepared to help in any way. The branch did vote to levy its members,

. . . we agreed it but nobody ever would donate, so it just fell through. I think it was bad, and I honestly thought at the time that the Labour Party branch did not have Labour Party members. It had members but they didn't believe they were socialists. [AH]

Even the trade unionists in the branch who "shouted about helping" were never there to help or give donations, though they were asked on more than one occasion. [AH]

Ada Hepple said that many Coxhoe Branch members, at that time, had not joined the Labour Party because they were interested in politics but,

. . . to be truly honest, to get jobs, for their own self-preservation. Jobs with the council, no good telling lies, that's what it was for. [AH]

If they achieved their aims, she said, they were seen less often at branch meetings. Although she made several attempts to introduce political education in the branch,

The attitude is that they do the business, they go home or they go to the pub and that's it. [AH]

Attempting to encourage any kind of political discussion was "just a waste of time". [AH]

Although "a fair number" of Bowburn Labour Party's 40-50 members were prepared to help the miners, Mike Syer encountered "considerable difficulty" with a very vocal minority who were against the strike, against the setting up of the support group and against Arthur Scargill. [MSy] Nevertheless, Mike and those who wished to help the miners worked on with strikers families very successfully. In fact, Mike Syer made a substantial contribution to the work of City of Durham Support Group by organising the parcel distribution operation in Bowburn [JD]; organising money-raising socials in his village [MSy]; acting as Treasurer [VM] and regularly collecting money in Durham Market Place. Also, in his capacity as a Community Worker, he gave a great deal of assistance to miners' families in North Durham Constituency. [EF] [MP] [DB]

Neville's Cross Branch provided both chairpersons of the CLP support group, Brian Freeman up till January 1984 and Linda Rutherford thereafter. 25 out of 60 members regularly attended branch meetings in 1984. Of these, a very high percentage supported the strike. The few who were less enthusiastic were

... the same people who would have been much more excited by a County Council election. To a lot of people in the branch who are in the mainstream mould of Labour Party member, elections are everything and campaigning on other issues is ancillary. The more political career-oriented people are always thinking, "How will this affect Labour's chances?" I have memories of discussions happening about how unpopular the strike was, how difficult it was for Labour leaders to balance support for the strike with electoral progress. [BFR]

The branch raised £2,016.27 though there were only four mining families in its area. There were no Labour councillors for that area.

Most members who regularly attended Gilesgate and Pelaw Branch meetings, 25 out of about 100, voted to support the miners. At that time the branch was very lively, had regular political discussions and put out a regular newsletter to the people in the area. The branch supplied the ubiquitous and hardworking secretary of the CLP Support Group, Vin McIntyre, who had been instrumental in persuading the Constituency Executive and General Committees to sponsor the support group. An early start was made by a few active branch members who collected food and money outside a local supermarket. The principal branch officers, secretary Philip Malyan, treasurer John Ashby and chairperson Daisy Henderson ensured that the branch mandate to help the miners was adhered to faithfully. Philip and Lorraine Malyan were regular money collectors, John Ashby delivered parcels and Daisy Henderson helped the fundraising effort. Daisy was also notable for being the only member of the Gilesgate Branch Women's Section who supported the strike. John Ashby facilitated the setting up of a weekly meeting of the miners and wives. 27 miners lived in the area and 12 to 15 attended the Tuesday meetings. The branch covered two Wards and had four councillors. None was antipathetic to the strike but only one was active in the support effort.

Belmont Branch could be relied on for regular and generous levy contributions. [VM] Elvet Branch members, Pat and Johnson Dent and Lotte Shankland, sold ex-catalogue clothes in freezing conditions in Durham Town Hall and gave the proceeds to the food fund. They also worked hard selling jumble and helping to organise regular social events. Framwellgate Branch member, Catherine Sutcliffe, worked with Neville's Cross Branch member, Carol Reeves, and Matt Smith at the clothing centre for miners families. Framwellgate Moor Branch members, Gus and Noreen Burns, and Neil and Michaela Griffin regularly collected money on the market stall. Gus also delivered food parcels and personally donated £20 each week to the support group. Neil, a member of the Musicians Union, donated his professional services at numerous events throughout the strike. Philip and Mary Venn represented Esh Winning Branch at the CLP support group meetings while Barry Ormsby and Romy Chaffer organised a support group at Esh Winning with miners and their wives which collected money in the village. One of the biggest money raising efforts of the year was the street collection organised at the Miners' Gala in July 1984. Ed Ramsay from Gilesgate and Claire Hepworth from Newton Hall Branch each collected over £100. Vin McIntyre, Philip and Lorraine Malyan, Pat and Johnson Dent, Lotte

Shankland, Catherine Sutcliffe, Matt Smith, Gus and Noreen Burns and Michaela and Neil Griffin were also members of Durham Branch ILP and contributed to the ILP's own efforts on behalf of the strike and strikers.<sup>1</sup>

### **(ii) City of Durham District Council**

Despite the attitudes of some District councillors, the Council itself did help the support group in a variety of ways. It provided the use of a van, an office for welfare rights work, daily permits for street collections<sup>2</sup> and gift vouchers for miners' children at Christmas. It was also extremely helpful and efficient in processing housing benefit rebate claims by single miners. Most members of the CLP support group believed that the City Council's response was generous, [LR] [BFr] [VM] [JD] though County Councillor Morrissey<sup>3</sup> criticised the City Council for keeping a low profile, believing it should have publicised what it was prepared to do. He felt there was a good case to be made publicly on both class and humanitarian grounds and a vigorous campaign ought to have been mounted to explain the miners' case even if that raised the political temperature. If they had done that, he maintained, the political consequences need not have been negative since people respect views genuinely held and persuasively argued. [RM]

### **(iii) City of Durham Miners' Support Group**

Overall, the best Labour Party response in the County seems to have been made in the City of Durham Constituency.<sup>4</sup> 10 members from 5 Labour Party branches attended the inaugural meeting of the support group on 1st May 1984. Admittedly this was out of more than 800 members in 19 branches, but it was hoped that, over time, more members could be persuaded to come to its weekly meetings and get involved in its work. The highest attendance of Labour Party members and the largest representation of branches was on 9th July 1984 when 18 members from 13 branches came together. The lowest attendance was on 10th December 1984 when 6 members from 4 branches met. The highest attendance of the joint Constituency/DFMA Group was held on 28th August 1984. 13 Labour Party members from 9 branches met with 15 activists from outside the Labour Party. Over the year, the average attendance was 12 people.<sup>5</sup>

With the permission of Tom Callan, General Secretary of DMA, John Dent, a staunch Labour Party and ILP member, first started organising the parcel packing and distribution from a tiny

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1. See Appendix 9.

2. Normally any organisation is limited to two permits per year.

3. At that time he was a CLP Observer to the City Council Labour Group meetings.

4. Anne Suddick, co-ordinator of the Durham coalfield support groups had an overview of the situation. On more than one occasion she said to me that the organisation and performance of the City of Durham Support Group was the best in the County.

5. Records held by P. McIntyre.

room at Redhills, the DMA headquarters. Later, after securing a larger room, he led the small team which took delivery of the tons of potatoes, vegetables, fruit, eggs and tinned foods; eventually packed as many as 700 parcels weekly and ensured their distribution to the villages. The regular team included John, Colin McCormick, Dot and Bob Innerd, John Parkin who was a member of Bearpark Labour Party Branch and Matt Smith, a university student who showed an extraordinary dedication to the miners' cause. Others who helped for a period, or occasionally, included Ian Hannis, an unemployed engineer; Betty Gill of Brandon Labour Party Branch; Linda Rutherford and Carole Reeves, both members of Neville's Cross Branch and John Bowman from Sherburn Branch. Tony Serjeant, a Labour Party and Socialist Organiser member, dedicated some of his time to parcel packing but was most noticeable for his money collecting on the streets of Durham.

At the beginning, most Labour Party branch secretaries could be persuaded to offer their own help or help from their members to distribute food parcels to miners' families living in their areas. As groups of miners or miners' families became involved, and after the support group was loaned a van by the City Council, some of the burden was lifted from Labour Party branches. But if only a comparatively small number of Party members became involved regularly in distribution, the support group hoped that the branches would take on the task of raising the money to buy the food.

It can be seen from the financial accounts<sup>1</sup> that some branches raised a great deal of money and some did not. That was not necessarily dependent on the size of the branch or the age or financial circumstances of its members, though in a few cases those factors might be taken into consideration.

£13,989.17 was donated by Labour Party branches in the City of Durham Constituency during the strike with some most generous donations and consistent hard work from several branches. That sum was out of a cash total of £93,724.01 raised from all sources.<sup>2</sup> In the full financial accounts, £6,482.52 is attributed to the CLP, actually the proceeds of collections at a stall in the Market Place. It masks the fact that, although a few members from a few branches regularly took part, most Labour Party members did not involve themselves at all in the street collections. [LiR] Indeed, one member, when invited to share the chore of collecting money at the market stall, refused on the grounds that he had to consider his 'status' as an employee of the City Council. This was long before Conservative Government restrictions on the political activities of council employees was even suggested. His earlier willingness to deliver parcels prevented a scathing retort.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See Appendix 9.

2. See Appendix 9.

3. My experience.



There was always a problem in assembling enough street collectors from Labour Party branches though appeals were made through regular newsletters.<sup>1</sup> The situation became worse in the Autumn of 1984 and during the Winter of 1984-85. Linda Rutherford, who was responsible at that time for drawing up rotas commented,

It was difficult. The City Wards were good but out in the villages people were very unwilling. I had to rely on the same branches time after time.  
[LiR]

Plaudits for the work done by the activists were given at monthly CLP General Committee meetings, but the support group preferred 'active bodies' to the praise. [AH] [VM] Some support group members were exasperated and annoyed that so few Labour Party members were willing to give time to help and they wanted to say so in the regular bulletins which went out to all branches. In the end, the tenor of the support group reports to the CLP was encouraging rather than critical. However, on 27 October, the issue of too few workers was raised at a General Committee meeting,

Vin McIntyre, Mike Syer, Mrs Gibson and Mrs Hepple each presented their reports on the activities of the (Miners' Support) Group, since the last meeting. They spoke of the great strain that was being placed upon the small band of members who were actively involved in the Constituency and appealed for other members to assist if at all possible."<sup>2</sup>

The situation did not improve. Only the help of DMFA members and individual miners at the market stall enabled what eventually became daily collections to continue into the winter months. To state that is not to denigrate the committed efforts of a number of Labour Party members who raised money in other ways. But in some quarters there was a sluggishness which was partly hidden by the activity of those whose commitment was wholehearted.

Less than a dozen of the 800 members of City of Durham Labour Party took on a daily responsibility for support group work. No more than 50 ever took on any kind of regular responsibility. Only a small minority of the CLP could be termed activists in any sense during the miners' strike. Despite that, the support group achieved a great deal. However, its very success may have irked some in the CLP who were not particularly supportive of the strike.

We did a fantastic job and I think it was resented. It was the same few people who were exhausted by the end. Others were less willing to help. We pricked their consciences - we must have done, on and on, month after month at the G.C.. On one side they had the television version, twice a day in their living rooms, and it was very anti-miner. And there was us, once a month, doing our bit and saying, "Look, this is what it's really like." . . . People don't like having their consciences pricked. They hardened their hearts towards the miners and towards us (near) the end. [LiR]

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1. See City of Durham CLP Miners Support Group Bulletins to Branches No.2 22 May 1984, No.5 13 June 1984, No.6 19 June 1984, No.7 26 June 1984, No.8 3 July 1984, No.9 10 July 1984, No.11 23 July 1984, No.12 8 August 1984, No.14 5 September 1984. See also Support Group Report to CLP Management Committee 29 September 1984. See also Bulletin to Branches 8 January 1985. See also letter to Labour Party members circa October 1984. Records of City of Durham CLP Miners' Support Group held by Vin McIntyre.
  2. Minutes of City of Durham CLP General Committee meeting 27 October 1984.

For at least two activists, that resentment was demonstrated at the end of the strike. The speed with which the miners' welfare rights office was closed (the day after the strike ended) by the City Council when there was still work to be done, took one of them by surprise,

My biggest disappointment at the end of the strike was when the Council said no, we couldn't continue the Welfare Rights from the Town Hall. I felt the need was there and when they turned me down I got the shock of my life. They bundled us out of the Town Hall very quickly. [AH]

Another commented on the anxiety of some Party members who wanted to disband the support group officially and swiftly when some support group members would have preferred to stay organised to raise money for sacked miners. [LiR] Those who wanted to continue did not press the point since they understood very well that, by that time, their activities had become a source of irritation to a few influential members. Immediately after the end of the strike the CLP Executive Committee proposed that thereafter any political campaign of any kind in the Constituency should be in the hands of a Campaigns Committee made up of what the Secretary described as "respected members of the CLP". Hardly any of these worthies had been active in the support group and, despite Management Committee resolutions agreeing to activity, the Campaigns Committee has not organised a single campaign over the seven years of its existence.

#### **4. DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

##### **(a) Aid for strikers' families**

The Council was responsible for the health and welfare of people in all the areas discussed so far except Hetton and Sunderland. There is no question that, without the money provided by Durham County Council, miners' support groups would have found it exceptionally difficult to sustain the work they had begun.

The only organisation willing to take on the task of distributing County Council money to miners' families was the Salvation Army. Other organisations refused on the grounds that they did not want to become involved in politics. [DG] Whatever the overview of those Salvation Army leaders who generously agreed that their organisation be used as a conduit, there were many problems on the ground. The Salvation Army is accustomed to dispensing charity on the basis of proven need. Means-testing by some local officers who opposed both the strike and Arthur Scargill resulted in complaints to support groups. There was also, to say the least, irritation among activists that County Council leaders had not liaised with the groups to determine the best method of distribution.

When the first batch of money vouchers was distributed by the Salvation Army, chaos ensued. In some areas, vouchers were restricted to individuals, each of whom had to apply in person to the local officer. Since the County Council had issued the vouchers on the basis that they were available for people in need, unemployed people and others on state benefits approached the

Salvation Army asking for help. The result was that, in STC's area for instance, about 70% of mining families received no vouchers at all. [PaG] [BG] In some localities, too, the problem was compounded when strikers lived a long way from the nearest local officer and had no money for bus fares. Additionally, some officers were not very approachable. Again, in STC's area,

The Salvation Army man was unsympathetic to the miners' strike. He didn't want to distribute the vouchers. He'd been instructed to do it. [BG]

Though there were no problems with the Salvation Army in Dawdon, [NS] in Murton,

It was known that the Salvation Army was opposed to the strike. [PB]

In Leadgate,

The Salvation Army was means-testing people. It was a bit of a mess. [BC]

Contrary to practice elsewhere, when Vin McIntyre and John Ashby, on behalf of City of Durham Support Group, applied to an officer for a batch of vouchers, they did not come away empty handed,

But for the £600 in vouchers, Vin said he had to 'eat shit'. In other words he had to bite his tongue while the 'unpolitical' Captain maligned Arthur Scargill and the NUM. Still, he said he would do the same again for £600.<sup>1</sup>

After County Councillors received complaints about the shambles of voucher distribution, they were persuaded to take action to avoid similar results in the future. One County Councillor conceded that, even in his own area,

The first time was a bit of a dog's dinner. The bloody Salvation Army were a nuisance. He (the Officer) wanted to go around them all and make sure they *were* in need before he actually dispensed the money. . . . Well, we'd abolished that, "Please can I have something, sir?" We wanted the money on an "it's available, you can have it" basis. We stopped it. We got Middlesbrough (Salvation Army Regional Office) to instruct him. [LJ]

From July 1984 onwards, in very complicated circumstances, the staff of the Salvation Army Regional Office faithfully and commendably carried out the task of channelling County Council money to support groups. [VM] [PG] [PB] [HW]<sup>2</sup>

#### **(b) Opening school kitchens**

In July, the support groups asked the County Council to feed miners' children in school kitchens during the summer holidays. On 12 July,

A letter arrived today from the County Council outlining its willingness to open up certain schools, provide a cook to "supervise" and allow us the use of the equipment for the summer to feed the kids. The problems would be enormous if we took them on since we now have 600 families on the books<sup>3</sup>

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1. My diary, 18 June 1984.

2. See Appendix 9 for amount of County Council money received by City of Durham Support Group.

3. My diary 12 July 1984.

By the following weekend, the situation was becoming confused,

Yesterday I tackled Mick Terrans<sup>1</sup> as we lined up for the march.<sup>2</sup> I asked him about the County Council money. He intimated that the *Council* would open up some schools, staff the kitchens, supply the food and cook it! All this is in total contrast to the message I got from the County Council this week. . . . The trouble is that we can't quite figure out what is going on.<sup>3</sup>

On the basis of that information from Councillor Terrans, City of Durham Support Group (along with other groups) filled in applications for the use of school premises. But by 17 July,

All is total confusion. Yesterday I went to County Hall to deliver the application forms . . . . But though Mick Terrans (had) assured me that all *we* had to do was supply volunteer labour for preparing vegetables and dishing out meals, the phone call I received in the afternoon from Mr. Rowland of the School Meals Service, told a different story. He maintained that the support group had to raise half the money to pay for the food. The other half would be forthcoming from the County Council through the Salvation Army.<sup>4</sup>

Though many groups were willing to supply labour for school kitchens, none could finance these operations and continue their parcel services.

In the end, the support group decided that Terry Willoughby (Kelloe), Claire Hepworth (Newton Hall) and myself should go on a deputation this morning to get things sorted out with Mick Terrans.<sup>5</sup>

When that meeting took place, senior councillors present were adamant that the support group must find 50% of the cost of the food. Support group members said that could not be managed. Then Mick Terrans, Leader of the County Council, came into the room, said straight away that the kitchens would open and the Council would bear the full cost of the meals.<sup>6</sup> None of the councillors previously insisting on the 50% spoke against or even queried that decision.

When Brian Gibson accompanied by Ernie Foster, Gordon Parnaby and Billy McHale deposited STC's application forms at County Hall, they were told they were wanted in the Leader's Room. There they faced two senior councillors who insisted that STC must pay 50% of the cost of the food for the kitchens. Brian could not agree to that. He explained,

I knew I had the councillors over a barrel. [BG]

He had learned that miners in Trimdon (in STC's area) had already been told by Mick Terrans, their County Councillor, that school dinners would definitely commence in the following week.

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1. Leader of the County Council.

2. National Miners' March through Durham, held in place of the usual Miners' Gala, 14 July 1984..

3. My diary, 15 July 1984.

4. My diary 17 July 1984.

5. Ibid.

6. I was present at that meeting as one of the representatives of City of Durham Support Group.

But if STC was unwilling to take on the responsibility for the kitchens, that promise could not be fulfilled. [BG] Just then, Councillor Terrans entered the room and,

He blew his top and said he was very angry since he had not known that 50% was being demanded. Suddenly the 50% demand was dropped. [BG]<sup>1</sup>

County Councillor George (Mick) Terrans gave a total commitment to miners and their families,

Mick Terrans had a big influence and he used that influence. [RM]

Fellow councillors who were sympathetic to the strike or to the families, backed him all the way but insisted the credit was his. [DB] [RM] [LJ] One said,

Mick Terrans came out flat for the miners and it made things very easy. [LJ]

However, the way in which the school meals problem was settled, while most acceptable to the support group delegates who were desperate for help, revealed something of the nature of Durham Labour's political practice. The decision of one leading councillor could override what other members had been insisting on before he entered the room and, by his words, silenced them. [HW] [BG]

Heather Wood has stressed that this was not an isolated example of important decisions being made by one man or by small groups of men. [HW]<sup>2</sup> Oligarchical tendencies are pronounced in the County Council Labour Group. In County Hall the decisions of a very small minority of councillors generally prevails. [HW] According to Heather, new councillors soon learn that those who persist in asking awkward questions or who want more discussion before decisions are taken may find that they are regarded as "aggressive" or "troublemakers" and, as such, marginalised. Consequently they may be able to 'deliver' much less to their localities than those who are more circumspect in their approach, those who do not 'make waves'. The latter are more easily assimilated into what is, essentially, a system of patronage inside the Labour Group. [HW]

Apart from voting public money to alleviate distress, Labour councillors paid a levy into a special Labour Group fund to be distributed to support groups. Tubingen, the County's twin town in Germany, channelled aid through the County Council. The money and food was distributed at the County Council's discretion.

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1. This account was substantially confirmed by Gordon Parnaby, though he could not recall the exact percentage figure. Ernie Foster's recollection was not so clear though both he and Gordon remembered that the two senior councillors became very nervous when Councillor Terrans "blew his top". [Conversations with G. Parnaby and E. Foster 13 October 1991.]
  2. Gordon Parnaby gave a more recent example (1989 or 1990) of that kind of decision making. The reclamation of land around the old East Hetton pit was very unsatisfactory to Kelloe parish councillors. The reclamation that had taken place had not lowered the pit heaps so the parish councillors agitated for a meeting with the county councillors. When it took place, the latter argued that the £5 million reclamation package was all settled and the plans could not be altered. Then the Leader of the council arrived and, after listening for a while, announced unilaterally that 15 metres would be taken off the top of the heaps. [Conversation with G. Parnaby 13 October 1991.]

### **(c) Active County Councillors**

Only a few councillors became actively involved with the groups.

In North Durham, Derek Bates organised raffles as well as appeals to friends and relations. He helped with coffee mornings, the buying and selling of coal from opencast sites and the CLP support group's street collections. He also attended its meetings and the meetings of DASG. People knew he was always available. [DC] [MS] [KM] [MP] [BF] [LJ]

In Craghead, Len James, despite his "ambivalence" about the strike and about Arthur Scargill's leadership [LJ] worked ceaselessly for miners' families, raising money, packing parcels and trying to co-ordinate the work of support groups in his area. [SMSG] [JP] [BN] [BF] [KM]

In Durham City, Jim Mackintosh with his wife Rita regularly attended the Gilesgate Miners and Wives Support Group and helped in many money raising ventures. According to Philip Malyan, secretary of Gilesgate/Pelaw Labour Party Branch in 1984, their efforts were deeply appreciated by mining families.<sup>1</sup>

Ron Morrissey was facilitator for support groups in and around the Sherburn area. As Chairman of the Board of Trustees of a local religious charity, he supported DMFA applications for money for needy families. A great number of them benefited from the work he did. With his friend and fellow socialist, Dave Beddell, he sought out supplies of much needed new shoes when the welfare rights group had despaired of being able to cope with the demand. [AH] [DG] [VM] [JD] Most significantly, he was never afraid or embarrassed to speak out publicly for the miners, arguing their case on political as well as humanitarian grounds. [VM] [JD]

Only one County Councillor was noted for his continuous and open antagonism to the strike. [JP] [LJ]

You never saw Councillor X with any of the miners. He didn't want to know. [JP]

Miners' wives in Tanfield and Havannah areas were well aware of the Councillor's opposition,

All the women down there knew he didn't support the strike [LJ]

However, the councillor's son, a well-known journalist was praised for donating good quality cast-off clothing. [BJ] [LJ]

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1. Conversation with Philip Malyan, 3 September 1991.

## E. AN ASSESSMENT OF LABOUR IN ACTION

There were three outstanding and interlinked features in the response to the miners' strike from Labour Party members throughout Durham County. First, only a minority of them seemed to be aware of the political significance of the dispute. Secondly, only a minority became involved in efforts to sustain striking families. Thirdly, a large majority appeared to accept that a very low level of political activity among the membership was all that could and should be expected even during a protracted struggle between one of the Party's affiliated unions and a radical right wing Conservative Government. Strenuous efforts were made by a number of Party members to assist striking miners' families. However, just as women had to fight obstreperous Lodge officials before they were allowed to do their work, so Party activists often found they had to struggle constantly within their branches and constituencies to obtain support for the miners, even on humanitarian grounds.

In Durham CLPs, the issue of the strike was raised by members who, in the main, considered themselves socialists and by those trade unionists for whom solidarity retained some meaning. They were largely seasoned activists and some, from different CLPs, were known to each other. The strike, at least temporarily, extended and strengthened the informal network of Labour Party left activists throughout the County. They argued that if the miners' union were defeated the prospects for the rest of the trade union movement were bleak. They understood that if the Labour movement did not defend itself when under attack from Conservatives, it would be badly damaged. Some foresaw that defeat would not only mean a weakened Labour movement but a corresponding strengthening of the radical right wing forces ranged against it. Each defeat, they argued, would make subsequent attempts to protect the working class less effective. [BFR] [VM]<sup>1</sup> But that kind of perception and understanding could not be expected among members who rarely engaged in discussion on political issues or political strategy, either because little or no political education was provided in the Party and/or because they had no interest in matters beyond the parochial.

Unpoliticised, politically uneducated or apolitical Party members were more likely than others to accept uncritically the media's views on the strike. They were very likely to take their cues from the Party leadership in deciding their attitude towards the strike and thence in deciding how to respond to pleas from support groups.

It has been shown that a majority of Labour Party members in the county did not support the strike either through apathy, disinterest or hostility. In North Durham CLP there was,  
just a kind of silence. [BJ] [DC]

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1. This was an argument made by Vin McIntyre in Labour Party fora from the earliest days of the first Thatcher Government. See "Labour warn : toe line or quit", Northern Echo 13 February 1982, p.8.

The failure of the voluntary levy throughout the Labour movement in Durham was an indication of just how widespread was lack of political support for the strike. Even in the City of Durham CLP, where there were attempts to boost that levy through the production of weekly newsletters and what was virtually a league table of Branch donations, the results were disappointing. For instance, even if only half of City of Durham CLP members had paid the minimum of 50 pence a week, the support group's income over the 41 weeks it supplied food parcels would have been at least £8,000 from that source alone. £5,307 was donated<sup>1</sup> and, within that, the amounts from some branches were exceptionally poor.

As well as that, in all areas of the county where street collections were attempted, support groups had difficulty in finding enough people to do the work. Many Party members who refused to "rattle a can" perceived collections not as an attempt to engender solidarity among the public for a righteous cause but, at best, as asking for charity and, at worst, as begging. Evidence from Durham overwhelmingly suggests that solidarity was a political concept hardly understood by the unpoliticised inside the Party, let alone those outside of it. It was, of course, a concept totally rejected, in that instance, by those in the Party who opposed the strike.

It was argued earlier that commitment to even minimal activity is not and never has been a requirement of Labour Party membership. In Durham there are no Labour Party political campaigns outside of those immediately linked to elections, local or national. There is no appreciation that it is possible and even desirable to campaign politically outwith an electoral context. Campaigning against Conservative Government policies (particularly those which clearly damage the living standards of working people) outside of election periods, is an unfamiliar and often unwelcome concept particularly for those who, in Kath Mattheys words,

. . . did not join the Party for that. [KM]

It was suggested earlier that trade union affiliation to the Party creates ambiguities. Unions in the roles of paymasters or bulwarks for right-wing leadership usually find a welcome within the Party. But when they are in dispute with employers they are often regarded, at least by the right-wing and their fellow travellers, as electoral liabilities. The truth is that working class anti-trade unionism flourishes inside as well as outside the Party and has been regularly bolstered by the Right.<sup>2</sup>

One factor which, arguably, militates against the generation of solidarity with trade unions, inside the Labour Party, is the artificial divide between the political and industrial wings of the

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1. See Appendix 9.

2. It is significant, for instance, that there was no upsurge of protest in the Party when the Shadow Cabinet decided against future repeal of all Conservative anti-trade union legislation. Arguably, that indicated a nod in the direction of the Conservative notion that blame for Britain's economic failures should be laid at the door of the trade union movement and that their "powers" should be curbed by law.



movement. There has always been an unwritten rule that the political wing must never interfere in any way with what is termed "trade union business". It is a short-sighted policy. That artificial divide makes it seem as if solidarity is optional. Croxdale and Sherburn Labour Party branches in City of Durham CLP demonstrated that that was their belief when they decided that they would not raise money for hardship relief during the miners' strike.

The foregoing factors ensured that there would be problems in maximising support in the Durham Labour movement for miners and their families. They ensured that support was sought and received more often on the basis of charity than that of solidarity. Derwentside District Council, for instance, eventually decided to give help on the grounds that the poor miners and their families had been badly misled by Arthur Scargill. [DH] Even Durham County Council's generous donations were made on the basis of relieving the needy.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

As we have seen, the Labour Party's inability to defend working class people unequivocally when they are attacked arises from the deep contradiction between Labour's constitutionally declared socialist objectives and its pragmatic practice of class co-operation. That pragmatism has led to Labour leadership's emphasis on representing a "national interest" over and above any class interest. The argument that unless Labour represents a "national interest" it will not gain enough support to get into office is as common now among the membership as it is among Labour's leaders. However, Labour has never even attempted to formulate and lead a hegemonic class project, has never even considered raising working class concerns to a hegemonic plane.

Despite its best efforts, the Party's promotion of its neutral image is occasionally hampered when affiliated trade unions, representing sections of the working class, take industrial action and look to the Party for support. When that happens, there are members who feel that the union's action alienates the public and diminishes Labour's electoral chances. Those members are often people who have been drawn into the Party because its "open" nature demands little of their time or commitment but requires only that they pay their subscriptions and support Labour candidates in local and national elections. The internal functioning of the Party favours the production of a moderate, social reforming or even apolitical majority which is not encouraged to participate in the Party's political life but which, from time to time, is open to manipulation by one section of the Party or another. Activists are in a minority in the Labour Party and normally the Party's characteristic passivity would not be noteworthy. But in an extraordinary situation, in a societal crisis such as the 1984-85 miners' strike, it became glaringly obvious that the Labour Party at all levels was not geared up to cope with demands made on it by those who sought to spur the membership into concerted action.

In areas where Labour has held unchallenged power over a long period, conservatism within the Party can become entrenched. If there is no effective opposition, political wits become dulled because they are never honed and sharpened in meaningful debate. There is no impetus, either, for local leadership to develop fresh and invigorating policies when there is little prospect of their losing political control if they do nothing. One-party domination of the local state, too, has meant that those who seek public office, whatever their political views, can achieve their objectives more easily if they join the dominant party. In that way, the tendency to conservatism in Durham Labour politics has been reinforced.

At least in part because of national leadership's attitudes, significant numbers of Party members in the County did not help the miners in 1984. The decline of the mining industry and the consequent weakening of the influence of the miners' union meant that some, even including ex-miners, believed the strike had nothing to do with them. Not only did they fail to understand the political significance of the strike to the whole trade union movement, but some accepted the Conservative view that the crisis was "all down to one man."<sup>1</sup> That kind of assessment was, perhaps, easier to make in Durham where, despite the existence of formal democratic structures, members have become accustomed to decisions being made by one man or small groups of men. [BG] [HW] [VM] In 1967 Graham Turner found town and city bosses who *had* arrogated great powers to themselves. In 1984 Brian Gibson detected "a frame of mind developed in the County" whereby local leaders regarded themselves and were regarded as the only individuals in the Party who *ought* to be active, who *ought* to be the sole decision makers. [BG] [HW] There is no contention here that the resulting decisions have been, necessarily, detrimental to the interests of the people of Durham. Indeed it could be reasonably said that, in 1984, support groups greatly benefited from the fact that Councillor George (Mick) Terrans was recognised as the man whose decisions mattered at County Hall. The point being made is that such decision making is arbitrary and has no consistent democratic basis. Because of his mining background and his sense of history, Mick Terrans favoured supporting miners' families. He happened to be County Council leader at the time of the strike. If support groups had faced a leader opposed to the strike, the outcome might have been far from easy. The response from the rest of the local leadership was variable. Those who considered themselves to be on the Left supported the strike from political principle. Some who were left of centre and nervous about adopting a high profile were prepared to give help on humanitarian grounds, even if only "by stealth".

It has been demonstrated that the life of the Party at branch level cannot be described as participatory since many meetings are sparsely attended. Generally, there is lack of political debate or lack of interest where some provision for political debate has been made. [AH] [PB] [DB] [NS] [LR] There is an overwhelming focus on parochial matters, often to the exclusion of national and international concerns. [LR] [HW] [JC] [MN] Campaigning does not take place in

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1. See R. Samuel, "Doing Dirt on the Miners" in New Socialist October 1986 p.14.

the community except for short periods before elections. [HW] [NS] [MN] [VM] In some branches, tight control is exercised by some councillors who wish to keep the Party small to avoid challenges to their own positions. [BG] [BJ] [LJ] [AP] Within that context, oligarchical tendencies go virtually unchallenged. Within that context, the miners' strike could evoke only a patchy and uncoordinated response from Labour Party members.

In Durham County only a minority of the Party membership responded to the miners' appeal for support. These were largely on the Left, though there were others whose views ranged along the whole political spectrum inside the Party. Some were trade unionists who, as I said earlier, had not forgotten the meaning of solidarity. Some were those who, if they disagreed with the calling of the strike or the NUM's behaviour in the strike, nevertheless recognised that it was an unfair contest, heavily weighted against miners' families. They believed that those who took strike action ought not to be starved back to work by a Conservative Government. Still others, acknowledging that the strike would be prolonged, took a humanitarian attitude towards hardship relief. Others could not and did not respond from political choice. Most of them had not joined the Party in order to become involved in any kind of political campaigning outside of elections and/or they were opposed to the strike.

Early on, support groups recognised that they must seek help from CLPs throughout the country. Some also sought help outside Labour's ranks and even far beyond the coalfield, from sympathetic supporters overseas.

# Chapter 5 - COMMUNITY

## A. THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

According to Nisbet, community became one of the key concepts in 19th century sociology because of the reaction of both conservatives and radicals to the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution,

. . . to intellectuals of that age, radical and conservative alike, the changes were of almost millennial abruptness. Contrast between present and past seemed stark - terrifyingly or intoxicatingly, depending upon one's relation to the old order and to the forces at work on it.<sup>1</sup>

Conservatives deplored the break up of the old moral and social order, the

. . . falling away from the superior virtues of Christian-feudal society<sup>2</sup>

They feared the displacement from power of the landowning class and the rise of the liberal bourgeoisie. Conservatives and radicals alike deplored the new division of labour and the,

. . . wrenching of work from the protective contexts of guild, village and family that was the most fundamental and shocking characteristic of the new order.<sup>3</sup>

In the face of anomie and alienation among urban masses condemned to labour in appalling conditions, conservatives and radicals eulogised past community and wanted to rediscover 'the good life'.

In the sociological tradition from Comte to Weber, conceptual contrast formed by the communal and the non-communal is vivid and articulate. It was Tonnies, towards the end of the century, who gave it its lasting terminology of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, but the contrast is hardly less real in the works of other sociologists, before and after with only Marx dissenting significantly from the value implications carried by the contrast.<sup>4</sup>

Tonnies contrasted *Gemeinschaft* (community) with *Gesellschaft* (society), to the latter's disadvantage and considered the former to be warm, homely, affectionate, exhibiting unity of purpose and co-operation, all ensured by firm tradition. *Gesellschaft* - modern, urban, social life was characterised by its coldness and its impersonal and fragmented nature.<sup>5</sup>

Conservatives, in reaction against the rationalism they saw as responsible for sordid urban squalor and the disintegration of all that they valued in society, sought to laud, discover,

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1. R A Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (1967) p.22.

2. R A Nisbet, op. cit. p.26.

3. R A Nisbet, op. cit. p.24.

4. R A Nisbet, op. cit. p.48.

5. See Norbert Elias in Colin Bell & Howard Newby (eds) *Readings in the Sociology of Community* (1974) p.xi.

advocate and recreate "community" on the bases of traditional pre-capitalist values. In contrast, the only kind of community which interested Marx was the wider community of working classes across the world. In the Communist Manifesto he attacked both feudalism and capitalism and pointed out that,

The modern, bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses however this distinctive feature : it has simplified the class antagonisms . . .<sup>1</sup>

Marx had no preference for feudal values over capitalist values. For him, both were manifestations of the exploitation of oppressed classes. While other philosophers and sociologists were looking for sources of social order and attempting to discover what it was that bound people together for common purpose, what traditional values made for community, Marx was emphasising what divided society, what triggered inevitable conflict. The only bonds that interested him were those that could be forged among members of the working class to enable them to struggle to free themselves from capitalist exploitation. In his view, all other bonds, based on past tradition were cul-de-sacs.<sup>2</sup>

From a marxian, socialist perspective, then, notions of community linked in with traditional values run counter to notions of class and class struggle. And Nisbet has argued that the 'quest for community' in the modern world is part of a pervasive and fundamentally conservative ideology, running through a great deal of academic thinking.<sup>3</sup> Worsley et al refer to Dennis' contention that, historically, the deliberate fostering of local community life has been motivated by fear of class conflict and a consequent attempt to divert working class energies into controllable local channels of expression. Underlying such notions, they say, is the more fundamental assumption that "differences, conflict, and the desire for change, are essentially unrealistic and pathological phenomena."<sup>4</sup>

In 1984, particularly outside the coalfields it was widely believed that what was under attack from the Government and what was being defended by mining families was not merely jobs but a valued way of life that, once lost, could never be retrieved. There were (faint) echoes there of the much more powerful sentiments expressed in the 19th century when destruction of the social order and especially family life seemed to be threatened. In 1984, those in pit villages who were content to be considered the guardians and defenders of a particular way of life rather than of a particular class, arguably reinforced conservative attitudes. Although mining villages have been

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1. K Marx and F Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (1973) p.33.

2. See R A Nisbet, op. cit. p.69.

3. See P.Worsley et al, Introducing Sociology (1977) p.350.

4. Peter Worsley et al, op. cit. p.350 quoting N. Dennis. "The Popularity of the Neighbourhood Community Idea" in Sociological Review Vol.VI, 2, p.203.

predominantly one-class, one-industry habitations, and although Frankenberg has argued that in such places class relationships seem to be intensified,<sup>1</sup> in Durham in 1984 it was the image of *community under attack* which was stressed inside pit villages and not the image of *class under attack*. But what was meant by community?

If strike supporters in the Durham coalfield initially assumed that most people who lived either in pit villages, ex-pit villages or ex-pit areas, shared values and attitudes formed during the long-time dominance of a particular kind of industry which produced a special, close-knit way of life; that that way of life was considered worthy of preservation and that when it was threatened most people in the County would be prepared actively to defend it, or to support those who were prepared to mount a defence, then their experiences during the strike forced a reconsideration of those assumptions. It will be argued that when the call to defend 'community' was made inside the coalfield it was couched far less in terms of preserving any kind of traditional values (particularly any that were remotely related to Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft*) than in terms of preserving existing material conditions for mining families - jobs, infrastructure and amenities. It will be said that the statement that miners were fighting to save their communities had some resonance in areas where there were working pits and where most of the population, both miners and non-miners, relied on the pit's continued existence for their livelihoods, but there was no certainty that such a call would find much purchase in villages which had long been deprived of jobs or infrastructure or amenities. Further, it will be said that the way in which massive economic and social changes had taken place in the coalfield over the previous 30 years, had persuaded many people that it was a pointless exercise to attempt to halt pit closures since coal was a dying industry.

## B. CHANGES IN THE COALFIELD

### 1. EFFECTS OF PIT CLOSURES

In Global Outposts, Austrin and Beynon outlined the scale of the decline of the mining industry in Durham over the last 60 years.

In 1927, 128,283 men were employed in the mines, in 1947, 108,900 remained. The figure remained above 100,000 into the 1950s but was quickly halved by Lord Robens' "ten year stint" at the Coal Board. In 1967 there were 57,000 miners employed and by 1975 their number was halved again to 25,000. Today that number is nearer 15,000.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s that decline had accelerated in the west of the county,

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1. See Ronald Frankenberg, Communities in Britain (1966) p.122.

2. T. Austrin & H. Beynon, Global Outposts (circa 1981) p.10. The result by 1984 was that many mining families lived in ex-pit villages and ex-pit areas but were minorities in those villages and areas.

In Burnhope, we had the biggest pit in the North East. They used to come from Westoe, here. When the pit closed around 1950 . . . 95% of the village were miners. There was only the odd 5% who moved out of the village for work and that was mostly clerical. Then the buses started to run just once an hour instead of every 20 minutes. We had a bus that used to go to Chester-le-Street every day. One to Durham. One to Stanley. You could get anywhere. When the pit closed, the Durham bus only ran on a morning for any workers and once a night to bring them back. The one to Chester-le-Street completely stopped. So you were cut off. [LR]

Since most people in Burnhope relied on public transport for their mobility around the county, the depletion of that sector of the infrastructure was a serious concern.

David Hodgson remembered that when he was a boy in Delves Lane,

. . . pits were never-ending, but pit villages started to die a death from the 1960s onwards. [DH]

While those who lost their jobs had,

a hell of a lot of resentment that communities were being broken up, [DH]

their dislocation was cushioned by the prospect of better jobs in the Nottingham and Yorkshire coalfields. Durham mines had always been difficult to work since they had small seams, cramped conditions and water. Modern pits in Nottingham promised better conditions and the easier winning of coal. But, for families, deciding to leave Durham was not easy. The upheaval in people's lives was immense. Old and young miners faced dilemmas of whether to move away from kith and kin or to stay in the coalfield and face uncertain futures. David Hodgson recalled his fears when, as a boy, he watched removal vans taking away the possessions of 20% to 30% of the people in his village. If elderly people who commanded respect in the community moved away he wondered what that would mean for the future. Those who remained soon discovered that loss of the local pits meant an end to the Miners' Institutes, the Welfare Grounds, the Sports Days, the colliery bands and the football teams, all facets of community life that had been considered permanent. Durham Big Meeting day "became a thing of the past". [DH] And, when David Hodgson started work himself,

I always seemed to be going into pits that were just closing. [DH]

## 2. THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL PLANNING

Arguably, what made matters worse for ex-pit communities was the County Council plan for social reorganisation,

The Durham County Council produced its own detailed plan (1951) for the social reorganisation of the county - a reorganisation aimed at producing "pools of labour" that fitted it to the needs of the new industry<sup>1</sup>

The new industry would be technologically based and was to be brought into the county by all manner of financial inducements. Factories were to be sited in New Towns like Peterlee and

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1. T. Austrin & H. Beynon, op. cit. (circa 1981) p.11.

Washington and around the existing town of Spennymoor. The run down of the pits would provide those "pools of labour". But in case people were reluctant to move out of ex-pit communities and into the New Towns, and into new estates around existing towns, the planners decided to leave nothing to chance,

In the plans, pit closures were seen to mark the end of many pit villages. On the basis of an assessment of likely "pools of labour", villages were classified from 'A' to 'D'. Those classified as 'Category D' would receive "no further investment of capital on any considerable scale . . . and when existing houses become uninhabitable, they should be replaced elsewhere."<sup>1</sup>

In the minds of planners that scheme probably appeared to be reasonable, sensible, prudent and perhaps even kind. For Lily Ross, one of those on the receiving end who had no wish to move from her village, the perspective was very different,

To cap it all, the damned council went and slapped a Category D on us. So there was no building. There was no work. [LR]

Young ex-miners then moved to Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Yorkshire.

When I think about it now, I think that at the back of the County Councillors' minds - and they were supposed to be Labour men - I think they wanted to empty Burnhope, just bulldoze it over as if it had never been here. People don't realise what Category D means. Your buses stop . . . On Saturday we have one bus every two hours to Durham (City) but the last bus is 4.15pm. . . . It comes back at 5 o'clock. People haven't got cars because unemployment is so high. So you've got to walk it, [LR]

Just before the 1984 strike, the one miner from Burnhope employed at Horden pit<sup>2</sup> had to, walk over to South Moor, about 5 miles, through the night and in the winter, to catch a bus to take him to work at the coast. [LR]

### 3. COAL - A DYING INDUSTRY?

Massive economic change in Durham, as in other coalfields, was engineered by politicians and employers and accepted by complaisant trade union leaders who believed that pit closures were needed to make the coal industry "efficient". One Ferryhill woman remembered that,

. . . in those days it was just accepted because there was plenty of jobs. You might have to travel to industrial estates but there were jobs. . . . So they (miners) weren't bothered if the pit closed because they knew they could just walk out of that pit and into a job. [PaG]

In a perceptive critique of the role of miners' leaders in the 1960s, Allen pointed out that the union's collaboration in pit closures,

. . . endorsed the view that the coal industry did not have a future, that it was an industry to vacate.<sup>3</sup>

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1. T. Austrin & H. Beynon, op. cit. (circa 1981) p.21.

2. Now closed.

3. V.L. Allen, The Militancy of British Miners, (1981) p.65.



He argued forcefully that, because miners' minds were turned away from protest, and because they were encouraged to accept the inevitability of decline, miners became depoliticised. No longer did they see their situation politically, with political causes and political solutions. In fact, he believed they were encouraged to think that there was no solution and said that,

The issue was converted into one of self-preservation, of looking after oneself and one's family. This of course was a central consideration because it lay at the core of the dominant capitalist ethic, namely individualism. But this was an instance of a collectivist organisation encouraging by its actions the antithesis of its own ethic.<sup>1</sup>

The extent and depth of that depoliticisation was painfully apparent in Durham during 1984.

By that time, governments had ceased even paying lip service to the notion of full employment. The ideologues of a right-wing government were intent on what they, employers and the mass media chose to call "modernisation", "rationalisation", "shake out", "streamlining" and "slimming down" of industry - all euphemisms for huge increases in unemployment prior to privatisation of every publicly owned industry and utility. It was pointed out in Chapter 4 that no massive response to Conservative policies could be expected from the Labour Party. And indeed there was none. In making its response, the NUM had calculated that further pit closures would mean intensification of economic and social impoverishment in the coalfields which were in regions of already high unemployment. In contrast with the 1960s, few if any alternative jobs would be on offer for displaced miners.

## **C. PIT VILLAGES IN THE STRIKE**

### **1. THE APPEAL TO COMMUNITY**

Two months into the strike, after miners' cafes had been set up in Easington and Murton, women on the SEAM Relief committee sent out a leaflet specifically addressed to all women in the area who had not yet become involved in actively supporting the strike. The leaflet read,

... What future will there be for our children when they grow up? They will be forced to leave the area in their droves to find work, leaving behind an aging population with no one to take care of them. As the population falls and job prospects dwindle, schools will close, there will be a surplus of empty houses for sale with the consequent dramatic reduction in values (as witnessed in the Consett area), there will be an upsurge of bankruptcies particularly amongst small businesses and local shopkeepers, and so the inevitable decline will continue in a sickening and depressing spiral, **UNLESS WE CAN RALLY TO SAVE THE PITS** through a really vigorous campaign uniting all sections of the community in protest. Members of our committee are not only miners and their wives but local clergy, local traders, concerned people from all walks of life. (Incidentally, local traders tell us their takings have dropped sharply since the strike started so imagine their

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1. Ibid.

chances of survival if the pits closed altogether). . . . Whilst the NUM is fighting pit closures, we feel as women we should be giving our active support in as many ways as possible to protect the long term interests and welfare of our community. SEAM needs the women of our community to strengthen the campaign and help with organisation. WE ARE NOT GOING TO STAND BY AND LET THINGS FALL DOWN AROUND OUR EARS. IF YOU FEEL THE SAME OR SIMPLY CARE AT ALL ABOUT THE FUTURE FOR YOUR CHILDREN, WE APPEAL TO YOU TO COME TO OUR NEXT MEETING.

Perhaps most importantly in relation to notions of community, was the tenor and basis of the SEAM women's appeal. Community seemed to be defined as the aggregate of individual and sectoral, material concerns. It must be assumed that SEAM women understood their audience, understood what meanings of community would move the most people into active support. It might be said that reminding people of the possibility of an old age, bereft of their children's presence and support, was an appeal to family sentiment and ties of kinship as well as to concern about a financially and materially secure future. But the principal and most prominent message in the leaflet was the threat of imminent financial loss, through bankruptcies for traders and through falling house prices.

Despite the preponderance of one class in the coastal pit villages and the left-political beliefs expressed in the Labour Party by some members of SEAM Relief, there was no attempt in that leaflet to appeal for political solidarity with the miners. On the contrary, it might be argued that there was an implicit acknowledgement that the main values to which they *could* appeal in pit communities, with some expectation of response, were conservative values redolent of the market place.

Pam Blanchard confirmed that SEAM women's approach was quite deliberate,

We said we were non-union and non-political. That was how SEAM got a lot of money because we didn't represent the unions. [PB]

Bea Campbell has argued that patriarchal politics in the coalfields produced conservative class consciousness and that it was the women's movement which challenged that conservatism,

by generating the community alliance which was one of the most remarkable features of the strike. And it was their intervention which exposed the political vacuum in the community. They exposed its *absence* by creating its *presence*.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the evidence from other coalfields, her analysis was wide of the mark when applied to Durham. For although the women's intention of feeding families could be read as 'class struggle', it appears that in order to promote or reconstitute 'community', SEAM women considered that they needed to suppress or play down overt politics in the strike and, at least publicly, to put a notional distance between their activities and union activities,

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1. Bea Campbell, "Proletarian Patriarchs and the Real Radicals" in V. Seddon (ed.) The Cutting Edge - Women and the Pit Strike (1986) p.261.

We said it was for the families. I had people who gave me money in Murton - one was a rank Tory. He wouldn't give it to the union because the union would use it for picketing. It wasn't a lot but he gave it to me when he saw me because he couldn't see the bairns starve. [PB]

## 2. THE TRADERS' RESPONSE

Couched as it was in non-controversial terms, the women's appeal to traders met with some success. In Easington, the Chamber of Trade and individuals who stood to lose directly and massively from the closing of the only heavy industry in the area, gave their support. A total of £726 was donated in cash by members of the Chamber,<sup>1</sup> though some shopkeepers donated groceries directly to the kitchen. Occasionally the fish shop supplied a fish and chip dinner for the families. And once, instead of a cash donation, a local sweet shop owner provided pies and peas. [HW] Heather Wood claimed there was a particular closeness in Easington and that help from almost all the traders was constant throughout the year. [HW]

When the strike ended, the secretary of Easington Chamber of Trade wrote to the support group,

Dear Girls, (sic)

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of our members and myself for the good work you have done over the last year. There is no doubt that not only have you catered for the needy at this time but have also been instrumental in keeping up morale and promoting community spirit. I do hope the good work you have started will continue and help bring even closer together different sections of our community.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the strike, mining families showed their appreciation by a march past the shops and applause for the shopkeepers. [HW]

In Seaham money was raised "through the kindness of local tradespeople" even before the kitchen was opened. The support group told the traders the strike was likely to last for a long time. Most of the traders gave their help. [MN]

Pam Blanchard collected money or food from most shopkeepers in Murton. Instead of giving money, the butcher supplied mince at reduced rates. The local milkman donated six pints of milk each day to the kitchen and the rest at cost price.

We kept as much custom as we could in Murton because we wanted the shopkeepers to keep going. The majority of them were good. There were just a couple who gave me a bit of hassle, said I was begging. So I didn't go back to them. [PB]

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1. Easington Support Group financial records held by Heather Wood.

2. Heather Wood Strike Scrapbook.

In Dawdon, every shop donated money or goods every week. Arthur Brown, a local milkman, supplied free milk to the kitchen and supported the women from the day the kitchen opened till the day the strike finished. [NS] [FD]

In Hetton, shopkeepers contributed to funds and, as far as possible, food was bought locally after special deals were struck with the traders. [FA] <sup>1</sup>

### 3. THE CHURCHES

The Catholic church in Easington was by far the best single contributor to support group funds in the village, donating £711 over the year. In comparison, donations from the Methodists totalled £72 while a donation of £5 was made by the anglican Church of the Ascension. The Catholic church's contribution surpassed the total contribution of the parish councils in Easington (£690) and was only £15 short of equalling the total cash contribution of the Chamber of Trade, though some shopkeepers also donated in kind. Set against the combined total donations of £1,003 from Easington clubs,<sup>2</sup> it can be seen what an important part the Catholic church played in assisting miners' families.

At the end of the strike, Easington support group distributed the cash which remained in the miners' relief fund. £100 each was given to the Catholic church, the Church of the Ascension, St. Mary's Church, Easington Colliery Methodist Church, the Salvation Army, Easington Baptist Church and Easington Village Methodist Church. Easington Church Youth Club received £50.<sup>3</sup>

In Murton the Catholic church was "very good" and donated £10 a week to support group funds. Other churches gave occasional donations. [PB]

The Reverend Peter Holland, a Church of England vicar, was "fantastic" in his response to Seaham Support Group's problems,

Peter Holland? We could never have done without him. [MN]

When the women asked permission to use the church hall as a kitchen he immediately agreed and dedicated himself to the welfare of mining families. He also took part in support group forays to London and elsewhere to collect money on the streets. The women cooked for such a

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1. On the other hand, in Sacriston, an inland pit village, only a few shops gave a few prizes for raffles but, according to Anna Phelps, a butcher and a greengrocer there were very hostile to the strike. [AP]
  2. Easington Colliery Working Men's Club, Easington British Legion (and Women's Section), British Legion Football Club, Easington Angling Club, Easington Cricket Club, Easington Colliery Leek Club, The Royal Ancient Order of Buffaloes (RAOB), Knights of the Golden Horn, Easington District Club, Liberal Club, Easington Constitutional Club, Easington Colliery Amateur Football Club, the Club Association. From Easington Women's Support Group Financial Records 1984-85, held by Heather Wood.
  3. Easington Women's Support Group Financial Records 11 June 1985, held by Heather Wood.

large number of families that they overloaded the electricity supply and everything broke down. Although Peter Holland mended everything himself, he was given £100 from the support group at the end of the strike towards the rewiring of the hall. [MN] [AN]

#### **4. OTHER SUPPORT**

Easington seems to have been better off than other pit villages in terms of donations from local organisations. In Murton the Women's Institute gave £5 and raised £50 by holding a jumble sale. But in Dawdon, apart from traders' donations and money from individuals, there seemed to be a reliance on money collected outside the area by SEAM. When Dawdon women asked retired miners and families who worked outside the mining industry to help,

Some used to give us a lot (but) some used to chase us - mostly older people who'd never had anything to do with the miners. We used to get a lot of abuse, but there were more people who would help. [JG]

### **D. FORMER MINING AREAS**

If there was a reluctance among SEAM women to appeal to their neighbours for political solidarity, on what basis could support groups in ex-pit villages and ex-pit areas appeal to the public? What kind of responses did they expect and how far did their experiences match their expectations?

#### **1. DERWENTSIDE**

Collecting donations of food in Annfield Plain supermarkets was,

... painful when you think that it had been a mining community. There were regular people who gave you an odd thing. You could almost recognise them. [BN]

The collectors were not allowed to approach shoppers for help. All they could do was stand near a trolley bearing the sign 'Help Miners' Families'. Little was collected. Bala Nair had become disillusioned with tales of the warm communities in Durham,

... you always hear about the caring Northern community, all that stuff. But people used to walk by - as a matter of fact a huge number of them, larger than I thought possible. They used to make derogatory remarks when they realised it was for the miners. (They said) "I'm not helping that lot over there," things like that. And you really couldn't reply to most of that because if you said anything, the manager of the shop was within his rights to ask you to leave and stop collecting. [BN]

In the end the collectors could count on receiving about half a dozen tins of food.

A member of the Craghead Support Group, Betty James, endorsed that view of many Derwentside people. She was convinced, at first, that the general public were worried about

miners' families and wanted to be helpful. It was only when she began to collect in Fine Fare that she,

. . . realised that people didn't want to help the miners and they certainly weren't going to put anything in the trolley. They said the miners should get themselves back to work. I realised then how much animosity there was, even in our area. [BJ]

Those who declined to help were often children of miners but they had 'bettered themselves'. [LJ] Betty James noticed that teacher friends of hers would walk a long way from the trolley so they would not have to make a donation. If they gave anything it was grudgingly.

They would put in a tin of beans, because they felt it was the least they could do. [BJ]

The manager at the Fine Fare supermarket was sympathetic to the support group. [LJ] When the shop's head office ordered the collecting to be stopped, he succeeded on one occasion in having permission reinstated. But again collectors were not allowed to approach shoppers. One miner's wife became annoyed that so many people were passing by without making a contribution. She started calling out to them, asking if everyone in the shop wanted the miners' children to starve. That shamed some people into making donations but they complained,

I come in here and I spend £50 a week. I do not want people begging in Fine Fare. [LJ]

And in another incident, a checkout assistant accosted a miner's wife and asked,

Do you enjoy standing here begging, night after night? [LJ]

The collectors' presence in Derwentside supermarkets was always precarious. Walter Wilson's offered a trolley but other shops refused permission to collect. Disco, a North Eastern Co-operative Society store, only allowed collection after "a hell of a fight". [LJ] But after the first week, Disco's head office withdrew permission so the support group contacted the public relations department and succeeded in having the decision reversed.

Although some shoppers were sympathetic, most did not understand why the miners were out on strike. They were convinced miners were getting strike pay. Whenever they could, collectors explained that there was no strike pay and said that, whatever the reasons for the strike, women and children could not be allowed to go hungry. It was a direct appeal for sympathy, not for solidarity. Often the response took the form of a long diatribe on why the miners should not be on strike and how they should get themselves back to work. The collectors decided not to argue but to point out that, it would be terrible if women and children were in need, especially at Christmas.

We tended to forget about the reason they were striking when we were out raising money with a collection box. [BJ]

Approximately £760 was raised by street collections in the area covering Craghead, South Moor, Tanfield, Havannah, Catchgate, Annfield Plain and Stanley. That sum included money from boxes placed in supermarkets and money collected on the Stanley Market stall.<sup>1</sup>

Letters written to businessmen in the area on behalf of Craghead Support Group produced "very little" but Mr. Shaw, owner of a bus company,

gave us money because he was worried about the families. He gave everybody a chicken, in Craghead, as well as quite a bit of money (to the support group) during the strike. [BJ]

There was some initial agonising over whether to accept a £100 donation from a local opencast mining business whose activities are seen as a threat to deep mining jobs. In the end, support group members were so desperate that they decided to use the money. [BJ] More locally,

The Craghead Homing Society put on a sale of squeakers (young pigeons) in the Club here and raised £600. They gave it to the women for Craghead only . . . to go and buy toys for Christmas. [LJ]

It has already been stated that, in most areas of the County, miners were in a minority. Nowhere was this more marked than in Burnhope, an ex-pit village. Out of 625 households, only 37 were those of striking miners. It came as a blow to them that most of their neighbours not only opposed the strike but had no intention of giving them any help. What really angered them was that money originally belonging to the miners' union had been accepted by village organisations only one month after the strike had started. A large part of that money came from insurances paid to Burnhope NUM Lodge thirty years before when a fire had destroyed the miners' hall. After the pit closed, the money was paid into the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO), administered jointly by the Coal Board and the NUM. During that thirty years Burnhope did not benefit from the fund, despite repeated applications for grants. [LR] In April 1984 CISWO gave £3,500 to the Burnhope Community Centre, £1,000 to the Chapel, £1,000 to the Church and £1,000 to the Burnhope Cricket Club. [LR] When David Hopper urged Lily Ross to set up a miners' support group, he advised her to write to all the village organisations for donations,

So we wrote to them all. Couldn't have anything from the church - they had no money. But they'd just got £1,000 of our money in April! The Community Centre couldn't give us any money, but they'd let us have the hall free of charge as long as the strike lasted, because they thought it wasn't going to last very long. Chapel couldn't give us anything but they had a whipround among themselves. We got three tins of pilchards, which were bad when we opened them, one pound of sugar, a half pound of margarine and a packet of currants. [LR]

Appeals to shopkeepers brought a poor response. Nothing was received from the newsagent who said he couldn't afford anything. One chicken was donated by the owner of the wool shop. Neither the owner of the grocery shop nor of the fish shop replied.

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1. Craghead Miners' Support Group Financial Records 1984-85, held by Betty and Len James.

We got a small parcel from Ellington's shop - one! [LR]

The only generous shopkeeper was an ex-Bearpark miner, Ernie Rutherford, who donated a huge box of groceries for a raffle and gave mounds of very good second-hand clothing for miners' families. Money raised by the group was deliberately not given out in vouchers.

It was no good giving £4 vouchers because they (the miners) would have to go and spend them in the bloody shops that were against us. [LR]

Instead food was bought in bulk from supermarkets in other towns.

The old Burnhope Club was in financial difficulties but offered the use of its premises free of charge. That became the place where they watched videos on the strike and listened to speakers.

The Burnhope group became tightly knit because,

. . . we weren't just isolated *outside* our village, we were isolated *inside* our village. The miners were together and 75% of the other people in the village were against us. Not all, but most of them. You got the odd 20% that would verbally tell you. The others just wouldn't speak. [LR]

Those who were outspoken told the miners to go back to work and not to come cadging money because they had jobs to go to. Arguments that the strikers were fighting to retain jobs for themselves and their sons left the opposers unimpressed. They insisted that men should accept redundancy as the government demanded and made it clear they had no sympathy with those who would not. [LR]

Leadgate Support Group received an enormous amount of help from the local Y.M.C.A. leader, Alex Forsyth. He put himself and the local organisation at the disposal of those suffering hardship. He organised transport to take miners to coastal lodges to collect food vouchers. He arranged to ferry miners into Leadgate from villages within a 10 mile radius to collect their weekly food parcels. He facilitated the cooking of meat for the kitchen. Anything he could do to alleviate the suffering, he did. His attitude was that he was at the service of the community. [DW] [DoW] Support Group members declared that they would not have managed so well had it not been for his help. [BC] [DW] [DoW]

Another good friend to the group was the owner of a local catering firm who came to their rescue by supplying cutlery, crockery and all kinds of utensils and kitchen equipment, free of charge. He also supplied a meal for the families near Christmas 1984, with "turkey and gateaux". [DW] Workers in a fabric firm in Delves Lane donated between £30 and £40 a week to the strike fund. [BC]

Four small shops in Leadgate allowed collecting tins to be placed on their premises. In contrast, the local butcher and greengrocer were extremely hostile. They called the group workers "communists" and told those who had come asking for help to leave their shops. When the owner of the Chinese takeaway shop offered to peel potatoes for the kitchen, the greengrocer urged him to change his mind. The Chinese owner not only told the man to mind his own



business but stopped peeling potatoes for the greengrocer. [DW] The Spar shop would not allow collections of food to be made on its premises. [BC]

"The arguments raged long" in the support group about collecting money on the streets. David Wray and Peter Byrne said they would do anything to ensure the success of the parcels' operation and the kitchen. But they failed to persuade a majority of their mates who felt that collecting money on the streets was begging and, as such, demeaning. Perhaps their attitudes arose from a suspicion that the ex-steel working community of Consett would have little sympathy for miners. And indeed, the man who eventually looked after the group's second-hand stall in Consett Market on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, did suffer some abuse from passing ex-steelworkers who insisted that when they were on strike nobody would help them. [DW] Nevertheless, collections on the Consett stall raised roughly £100 a week, sufficient to keep the kitchen in operation. Since there was little money in Consett after the closure of the steelworks in 1981 and the town's conversion from "a B.S.C. town to an M.S.C. town"<sup>1</sup>, £100 a week might be considered a reasonable sum but Bob Colson believed that, while a lot of people sympathised with the miners, "there was a hell of a lot against them." [BC]

In Havannah no support was expected from tradespeople,

Oh, no! I know them. I know them better now. If we had asked the response would have been nil. They certainly wouldn't have given. Not in this area. Sure of that. If they do give generously it's to the likes of charities, but they wouldn't (give) to us, mind. [JP]

Jack Pallas did not believe that such a thing as community help existed in his area. There might be close neighbours in streets<sup>2</sup> who would help each other,

But communities as a whole - I don't think much help is given, unless there was somebody - like a baby - whose eyesight could be saved. I think they'd help there. But apart from that, I don't think so. [JP]

He did not believe that was much different from village life 20 years ago, except that then there was full employment, whereas

now we've got, in some parts of Stanley, nearly 30% unemployed. That makes people bitter. It makes you think of yourself. [JP]

Despite that, a few unemployed people gave what they could but the response from most people was moderate. I wouldn't say it was poor but it wasn't good. [JP]

The Havannah Support Group, consisting of 44 miners and wives, were not asking for charity but solidarity, and Havannah Labour Party put out a leaflet arguing for solidarity with the miners. [JP] Jack Pallas was prepared to put the miners' case to anyone who approached him

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1. When the British Steel Corporation works closed down in 1981, the main source of the town's income became the Manpower Services Commission.

2. Back-to-back houses, many of which have been replaced by council house estates.

when he was collecting in the street. Many Stanley people knew miners since there were several hundred scattered around the Derwentside area. Despite that, the public,

definitely did not know what the strike was about. They just thought it was about money. They didn't realise it would be the end for the working class. The rest were going to get trodden on if we got beat. But they didn't see that, y'see. That was the tragedy of it all. [JP]

He said there was little sympathy for miners because people believed they were earning good money. Only the low paid, like nurses, could get sympathy from the public. [JP] Members of the public were hostile or indifferent,

Some of them wouldn't even look at you. People you'd know. [JP]

The best contributors were women, both old and young. The men "just weren't interested." [JP]

However, there were some supporters in the East Stanley Working Men's Club. A move was made on the club committee to waive the cover charge for entertainment, for miners' families. When that was approved with the support of two ex-miners who "must have been very working class and very socialist", three other members resigned. The club committee also supplied free bingo cards so that families could have a good night out. [JP]

## 2. NORTH DURHAM

Ouston, with a population of 2,000 in a mixture of council and private houses, gave little help to the 15 miners' families who lived there. The local support group decided on a low profile campaign because they felt that a vociferous, political campaign might alienate both Labour Party members and the general public. Rather than dwell on the political dimensions of the strike, the support group emphasised its welfare role.

... the support groups arose from a need to support the families and children in particular. And we had to play on that. And we knew full well what the implications were. I think we felt we couldn't afford to play it too high in case we put backs up against it totally. [TP]

The leaflet put out by the Ouston support group, in the village, explicitly divorced itself from the politics of the strike. It read,

The Ouston Action Group has been set up to help the families of NCB employees in Ouston who are, at the moment, caught in the middle of this dispute. We are *not* asking you to support the NUM *or* the NCB. We are, however, asking you to help relieve the suffering of the *wives* and *children*. They are the people who have suffered most, going without basic essentials. So if you can afford a small tin of beans, or anything that may be tucked in the corner of your cupboard, please donate it ...

Definite hostility was shown by members of the public, some of whom believed that the existence of the support group actually prevented the miners from going back to work. Tony Parker commented,

If you can believe that, you can believe anything. They thought that because we were raising money, running around doing things, organising, handing out parcels and trying to make life a bit easier - they thought we were preventing the fellers from going back. . . . So, in the end we set up a bit of a barrier between ourselves and some of the people who might have been interested in joining the Labour Party if it hadn't been for the strike. [TP]

The 30 miners living in Pelton were a decided minority in the ex-mining village. 2,000 houses there include two private estates. Manual and clerical workers commute, mostly to Gateshead and Newcastle. No street collections were attempted by Pelton Support Group and it took a great deal of hard work to raise £50 a week by holding raffles. In fact, most raffle money was raised by selling tickets among friends and relatives. Coffee mornings in the Community Centre were not successful,

There was a general, couldn't-care-less attitude in the broader community.  
[DB]

Money proved so hard to raise that, in the Autumn, it was decided to organise trips to the Tow Law opencast site where coal was bought and "a bob or two" put on it before it was resold. [DB]

Urpeth used to be a mining village.

These houses are full of ex-miners and there wasn't one of them willing to support. We couldn't get some of them to buy a raffle ticket. They thought Arthur Scargill was wrong. And the only reason a few (village people) helped was because the strikers lived in the village. They weren't supporting the strike. They supported because it was us that were on strike. That was at the beginning. As the strike went on there was very little help at all. [MP]

Response to appeals in the village, even on humanitarian grounds became so poor that Urpeth activists were forced to rely on what they could raise collectively with North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. [MP]

In nearby Chester-le-Street, collections were made on Fridays and Saturdays when hundreds of shoppers milled about the market place. David Connolly believed that most people in Chester-le-Street "didn't want to know" about the strike or were hostile to it. He remembered one case of a man putting money in the box, thinking he was donating to some charity. He was given a 'Coal Not Dole' sticker. He walked ten yards up the street then came and demanded his money back because he had not realised it was for the miners,

and I told him to get stuffed. [DC]

North Durham CLP Support Group made no secret of their political support for the miners when they made collections at a market stall. Billy Frostwick considered that there was a mixed response from the townspeople to pleas for help. Some trade unionists donated five pound notes or one pound coins. Unemployed people put money in the box every week when they came to collect their copies of 'The Miner'. On the other hand there were members of the public loud in their condemnation of the strike and the collectors,

At first it really got through to you . . . there were right-wing people saying, "Get back to work you lazy bastards," and things like that. [BF]

Maureen Potts confirmed that,

Some of the collectors were heckled terribly on the market. [MP]

After some rough experiences, Elspeth Frostwick became quite blasé about the abuse. She was aware that her husband worried in case she became upset by the occasional 'aggro', particularly from other stall holders. [EF] [MS]

But you learned how to handle them. Women would come up and say nasty things. It did upset me at first but you got used to it. [EF]

It seemed that very few of the townspeople understood why miners had taken strike action. Most believed the men were demanding more pay, so they felt justified in calling miners "lazy bastards" and demanding they go back to what were perceived as well paid jobs. A total of £499-86p was raised in the five street collections from the general public over two months.<sup>1</sup>

There was one abortive attempt by Elspeth Frostwick and Mary Stratford to explain miners' hardship relief to students in two Durham University colleges. At the first they had a good reception but at the second they were met with such a barrage of abuse and hostility from both lecturers and students that they found themselves having to defend the union's case instead of being allowed to concentrate on the case for hardship relief. Their defence was robust,

I was hoarse at the end of the meeting. [EF]

They expressed surprise that people they expected to be well informed had, in their opinion, very little knowledge of what the strike was about and what was happening to families in the coalfield,

They didn't know County Durham outside of that tight little college system. . . . They were supposed to be the cream. If they are, God help us! [MS]<sup>2</sup>

However, sympathetic staff and students at the university donated a total of £1,650 to the City of Durham Support Group during the strike.

Lecturers at New College Durham, the local F.E. College, approached by their colleague Brian Ebbatson,<sup>3</sup> donated £499.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. DURHAM CITY

In Durham City shopkeepers were not approached for donations to the miners' support group. Miners are a tiny minority of the very mixed population of the city and as such lacked economic

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1. See North Durham CLP Support Group Financial Records held by B. Frostwick.

2. See Appendix 9.

3. A member of North Durham CLP.

4. See North Durham CLP Support Group Financial records, held by B. Frostwick.

'clout'. Marks and Spencer's even refused to sell the support group bulk supplies of plastic carrier bags in which food could be packed. [VM] [JD] But, as well as offering a small discount on bulk purchases of food, Liptons gave a few boxes of tinned food and two large barrels of concentrated orange juice. Both Fine Fare and Hinton's were also persuaded to give a small discount on the group's purchases at their stores. Eventually the parcels' operation grew so large that the support group dealt directly with wholesalers and, ultimately, with national shippers and importers. The only two retailers with whom the group had a lasting arrangement were the North Eastern Co-operative Society (NECS) and the Durham Community (Workers) Co-operative (DCWC). NECS gift tokens, bought by the regional offices of trade unions and donated to the Durham Area Support Groups' organisation, were distributed on a weekly basis. The Durham City group used theirs to finance part of a regular large order from the local Co-operative store. DCWC supplied vegetables at cost price and arranged bulk deliveries by wholesale merchants. Dave White, a member of the co-operative, made all these arrangements and spent many hours helping miners' families and support groups.

Street collections in Durham, which became more frequent as the strike went on, raised over £11,000.<sup>1</sup> Leaflets outlining the political arguments against the Government and the NCB were distributed in the Market Place along with thousands of copies of The Miner and, later, the Durham Striker newspaper. On 2nd June,

Brian Freeman told us the police were really heavy with the Market Place collectors.<sup>2</sup>

On another occasion, a uniformed policeman approached the stall and argued vehemently with the collectors that the miners should abandon the strike.<sup>3</sup> His political acumen was such that collectors joked that he must be a member of the Special Branch in disguise. Predictably, there were townspeople who opposed the strike and some who were abusive to collectors. Two Labour Party women members were even confronted by a masked man who threw a bucket of water over them and the miners' stall.<sup>4</sup> But, generally speaking, collections proceeded unhindered for most of the year and regular donors were very generous.

Outside the City, fundraising could be difficult. Ada Hepple said that,

Coxhoe is a funny village . . . practically a Tory village. At the time of the strike it was. Lots of times, if we'd organised anything, a jumble sale for instance, a lot of Coxhoe people would by-pass you. They just wouldn't come in. [AH]

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1. See Appendix 9.

2. My diary, 2 June 1984.

3. My diary, 25 August 1984.

4. My diary, 1 September 1984.

In her view their attitudes stemmed from the fact that Coxhoe had not had a pit of its own for many decades. Additionally, the majority of Coxhoe workers had been employed for years in factories in Spennymoor. Few were trade unionists and that,

could have had an effect on them. Some have bought their council houses. They now think that they're the upper class or the middle class and that they should vote Tory. [AH]

In reality, at that time, many voted for the SDP candidate in local elections, largely on the grounds that he was a good councillor. In fact, the support group owed much to him since it was he who provided raffle prizes when asked, was instrumental in getting them the free use of the (SDP controlled) village hall for jumble sales, meetings, the distribution of parcels and the feeding of schoolchildren. But the general response of the public was very limited. People bought raffle tickets "if you pushed" and it was always a struggle to generate interest or raise funds. [AH]

Shopkeepers gave little.

Gatenby's gave us some clothes that they'd had in the sale . . . for the jumble sale. . . . The manager gave one donation of £5 and for anybody who had accounts with the shop we got an agreement that he wouldn't press for payment during the strike. [AH]

The florist gave a few tins of food for a raffle while the chemist made a small cash donation "but it was a one-off thing, not a lot." [AH]

The Coxhoe Workingmen's Club offered its premises free for social evenings. Artistes performed "for next to nothing" while the organist played "just for expenses". [AH] Ada believed these social evenings were morale boosters. The club made no cash donations and no collections were taken in the club or in any of Coxhoe's public houses.

Two people who were not in the support group were praised for their dedication and commitment. These were George Beckford, an old Communist, and his wife.

They were 80 years old. Every week or fortnight he'd come and give us his pocket money. . . . He couldn't put parcels up . . . but he used to say "if you're really beat, I'll go and carry them around for you to hand in." So I mean, their hearts were in the right place. [AH]

Ada believed that,

. . . the distance between Bowburn and Coxhoe might be a mile and a half but in the attitudes of people there's an awful lot of difference. [AH]

Since Bowburn had had a pit until 1967 she expected ex-miners there would show solidarity. However, in Mike Syer's view, those 17 years without a pit had made a lot of difference to the village. A large proportion of economically active adults had never worked in the mining industry so, "the historic community was weaker." [MSy] Bowburn people were not anxious to be identified with the strike and in fact there were many who had anti-strike attitudes. In view of that, Mike Syer was surprised by the large number of people who were prepared to buy raffle

tickets. On the other hand, he reflected that buying raffle tickets was a "safe thing to do" since no-one would criticise those who bought them. [MSy]

When County Councillor Ron Morrissey first approached the West Rainton Community Association (which was housed in the former Miners' Welfare Hall) for permission to use their premises as a kitchen and for fund-raising events, he was told by those he described as "middle class" who were in charge of it that his was a political purpose and they would not countenance it. [RM] The Community Association received its money from the County Council's Youth and Community Committee. Councillor Morrissey promised them he would speak against further funding for the association on the grounds that they were not being good stewards of the Miners' Welfare which had been built with the pennies of past members of the miners' union. He could see no better use for the hall than helping local miners' families who were in need. He was challenged to repeat his promise in public and did so. Under constant pressure, the association's committee resigned and miners came forward to take their places. Ron Morrissey insisted,

We didn't choose a confrontation. They did. [RM]

On the other hand those in charge of the village hall in Sherburn Hill were all working class and all ex-miners. They demanded payment for the use of the former Miners' Welfare and when Councillor Morrissey persisted in arguing against their demand,

I was told to get out of the Hall and never darken their doors again. [RM]

While Gordon Parnaby remarked that there was "not a lot of community spirit now in Kelloe," Marina Parnaby and Peter Graham questioned whether it had ever existed. All believed the notion of community was over-rated, though all agreed that when their families had occupied street houses on "The View" before council houses were built in Kelloe, there was closeness of a kind. Then everybody was poor and had atrocious living conditions.

Most of Kelloe lived up there - nobody had nowt up there. [PG]

It was true that, in those days, babies were delivered at home by village women but,

. . . this was nothing to do with people being kind to each other, it was a necessity. [PG]

Women attending a woman giving birth were confident that when they were in the same position, others would help them. In the 1930s, diphtheria had been rife and many people died of the disease. Neighbours gave what help they could to neighbours. However,

When things got better, you didn't need people to help you. [PG]

The meaning of community, so far as they were concerned, was rooted very firmly in necessary reciprocal arrangements during periods of adversity. Those reciprocal arrangements came to an end with the advent of better housing and the establishment of the National Health Service. [PG]

Kelloe's pit had closed just a few months before the 1984 strike. During the first week of the dispute the response to an appeal to aid the miners was "very good". [GP] However, after the first week the help stopped,

I think they thought it was just going to be that one week. [MPa]

All interviewees asserted that, apart from a handful of individuals, most people in the village, including most ex-miners, would contribute nothing to the support group most of the time.

#### **4. FERRYHILL**

Working Men's Clubs in the whole of STC's area, except Ferryhill, responded to calls for help. There had been two pits in Ferryhill and most people who lived there had had some connection with the mining industry. Ex-miners ran everything locally, including the clubs. But they would do nothing for the miners,

The (club) committee down here tried to discipline me (with) accusations that I was distributing leaflets and collecting money (for the miners). They fell back on the excuse that the club is non-political and non-religious. And while they were telling me all this, in came the Sally Army with their collecting tins, in a non-religious way and took money off members. It was hypocrisy. [BG]

The largest factory in the area was Smart and Brown with a workforce of 4,000. Though the AEU convenor was approached on many occasions and asked to organise collections on the shop floor, no donations were ever received. One AEU activist, Joan Weston, sold crisps in the factory and made £24 profit every fortnight which was handed to the support group. [BG]

#### **5. BISHOP AUCKLAND**

Collections on a market stall in Bishop Auckland netted the local support group £50 a week at first. That gradually dwindled to nearer £25, although it was £125 at Christmas. The only other notable donation from a community source amounted to £10 a week and was collected by Labour Party member, John Gilmore,<sup>1</sup> from 12 to 15 lecturer colleagues at the local technical college. [JoG]

#### **6. CHURCHES**

Approaches made to the churches in Chester-le-Street met with limited success. The Church of England Parish of St. Mary and St. Cuthbert made a donation of £100 and put aside a corner in the parish shop where donations from parishioners could be placed. Periodically, Billy

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1. Who later left the Labour Party and joined the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP).



Frostwick collected those donations. Neither the Methodist nor Roman Catholic churches responded to pleas from the group, though it is possible that individual miners' families received charity from some churches on occasion. [BF] In Urpeth, the local vicar allowed the support group free use of the church hall. In Leadgate, the local Methodist minister offered the use of the chapel as a kitchen. [DoW]

Two months after the strike began, all churches in Durham City were sent letters by Durham ILP inviting representatives to participate in Durham Miners' Family Aid, a non party political group.<sup>1</sup> Every denomination ignored the letters. Despite that, DMFA was inaugurated with members from four workers' retail co-operatives : DCWC, Maggies Farm, the Community Bookshop and Earthcare. They worked with some members of Peace Action Durham,<sup>2</sup> and individual supporters including Quakers, an anarchist and a Communist Party member. DMFA was an autonomous group and worked tirelessly to raise money, mainly through street collections. While retaining its autonomy, DMFA agreed from the outset to channel all its income (except for a weekly donation to the Langley Park Support Group<sup>3</sup>) through the City of Durham CLP Support Group which organised parcel distribution throughout the area. Members were repeatedly harassed by shopkeepers in the Milburngate Shopping Centre who resented collections being made outside their premises.

After it had become clear that the churches in Durham City were not prepared to help, the Governors of Sherburn Hospital, a medieval charitable foundation attached to the Church of England, stepped in to alleviate some of the distress and poverty throughout Durham District. Their help was timely and generous and owed much to the fact that the Master of the Hospital, the Reverend Graham Patterson, the Chairperson, Ron Morrissey and a majority of the Governors were not prepared to follow the example of most Durham churchmen. Ultimately it was Sherburn Hospital money that provided shoes for miners' children. Sherburn Hospital's substantial help was crucial to the success of the Durham City Support Group.

In Coxhoe there is a Catholic church, a Methodist church and a Church of England.

None of them ever came forward to help. We did approach them but there was nothing. In fact, the Methodist minister got on the radio at one stage and suggested that the miners should go back to work. . . . That was in the middle of the strike. [AH]

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1. The ILP's objective in inaugurating DMFA was to establish an organisation for people sympathetic to the miners who might not be prepared to work under the aegis of the Labour Party sponsored support group.
  2. Serious arguments over whether PAD should support the miners produced a split in the organisation. [RH]
  3. Langley Park is nearer to Durham City than to towns in Derwentside to which, officially, it belongs. Also residents of Langley Park were active in DMFA.

His advice did not go down well with striking miners but since they were a small minority in Coxhoe, perhaps the minister believed he was speaking on behalf of a majority of the public. In contrast with Coxhoe, Methodists in nearby Bowburn donated £100.<sup>1</sup>

Without being approached for help, the Anglican vicar in Ferryhill periodically delivered cash and boxes of food to the miners' support group. [BG] [PaG]

## E. HELP FROM OUTSIDE THE COALFIELD

### 1. APPEAL FOR POLITICAL SOLIDARITY

In order to put the 'community' response into perspective, mention must be made of some of the money, food and other goods that poured into the coalfield from organisations and individuals throughout the country and from overseas who responded to appeals for political solidarity. In contrast with the non-political SEAM appeal inside pit villages, one speech made by Heather Wood on behalf of SEAM (the gist of which was repeated on numerous occasions outside the coalfield) read in part,

*We are not however simply making meals, as important as this may be. We are very much involved in the politics of this strike. We have been on picket lines and attended rallies and demonstrations all over the country. We believe it is time for the working class to unite. We cannot allow Margaret Thatcher to do to our mining industry what she has already done to our health service, our education system and our steel industry. These things belong to the people of this country and the Government are there to protect our interest. However, this Government is only protecting the interests of the minority who in truth have the money and influence to look after themselves. . . . Now is the time for the working class to unite because together we can and we will win. The miners need your support and I appeal to you all to help these families who are in the forefront of the battle to save the whole of the working class movement.*<sup>2</sup>

### 2. THE RESPONSE

#### (a) SEAM Relief

That appeal for political solidarity spurred Labour movement activists outside the coalfield into raising a lot of money for SEAM Relief. Many thousands of pounds were received from a large variety of sources. Supporters in Greenwich, and North London Polytechnic Students were generous and frequent donors. However, exact amounts cannot be given here since the financial records of SEAM Relief were destroyed immediately after the strike [HW]

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1. See Appendix 9.

2. This speech is not dated. See also copy of speech made in Sheffield 30 June 1984. Both are contained in Heather Wood's Strike Scrapbook.

Where there were activists who were good at raising money from outside sources, their support groups received large donations. But receiving outside help depended on several factors : the number of already existing supportive contacts or possible contacts known to group members; the opportunities open to support groups to make contacts and the opportunities created by support groups themselves to tap into sources of help.

#### **(b) STC**

Spennymoor Trades Council received £100 a week from Hill's wood factory workers in Stockton-on-Tees because a leading trades unionist there was Brian Gibson's brother. [BG] A personal friendship between Ernie Foster, a travelling miner who worked at Seaham Colliery, and Bernard Regan, a London teacher, led to invitations to STC to send speakers to the capital. Ernie Foster, Billy and Margaret McHale, Marina Parnaby, Graham Williams, Andrew Smith and Peter Graham spoke on various occasions to Inner London teachers. When STC funds were very low in the Autumn of 1984, £15,000 cash was collected and donated by the teachers who also dispatched a pantechicon filled with Christmas toys to STC. [BG] [PaG] [PG] [GP] [MPa]

#### **(c) City of Durham CLP**

Two thousand letters, written in July 1984 by Matt Smith and Vin McIntyre to every Constituency Labour Party, M.P., Labour Peer, local, national and foreign trade union and foreign institute of higher education and any potential donor for which an address could be found, brought a rich reward. Jenny and Dick Shea's personal contacts in Bexley Heath Labour Party were especially generous with donations amounting to £1,190 over the year.<sup>1</sup> Mike Syer's contacts in St. Peter's Labour Party Branch, Islington, collected £668.<sup>2</sup> Additionally there were many unsolicited donations which boosted funds and spirits in City of Durham Support Group when money was short. Among these were the contributions of the workforce in William Press Ltd., Gateshead. Maurice Clemmet and his fellow trade unionists donated a total of £620.<sup>3</sup> The works' collection was given to a different support group each week. City of Durham benefited because a relative of Mr. Clemmet told him about the regular help she was getting from the support group. Ilford Pensioners gave regular donations amounting to £114.<sup>4</sup>

Donations came from as far afield as the USA, Australia, Finland and Zimbabwe. International solidarity gave an added boost to the determination of activists. That was why the efforts of G R (Bob) Thompson, then editor of the New Zealand Motor Vehicle Builders' Union journal and those of his wife Pat, were so appreciated. For 20 years they had corresponded with a member

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1. See Appendix 9.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

of the City of Durham group who told them what was happening in the coalfield.<sup>1</sup> When asked for support, they alerted their brother-in-law, Geoff Stenton, a Public Services trade unionist. He contacted the 'wharfies' (dock workers), seamen, boilermakers and other trade unionists at the Wellington Trades Hall and told them that help was needed for Durham miners. Consignments of butter and cheese arrived from New Zealand and, later, lamb vouchers were received from, among others, the crews of the SS Aratika and the SS Dunedin.<sup>2</sup> Letters written by a support group worker to Bob Thompson were published as articles on the miners' strike in the New Zealand Seamen's Union journal and helped keep up the momentum of support.

#### **(d) North Durham CLP**

Constituency Labour Parties outside the coalfield responded well to pleas from the North Durham CLP Support Group. As well as that, a doctor from Devon donated £50 a month, and on one occasion a "Cockney woman" came to the Support Group with hundreds of pounds and lots of toys. [BF] In mid-February 1985, North Durham CLP Support Group sent Billy Frostwick and David Connolly to Denmark to raise money. There they met socialists and trade unionists and received £1,887 from them.<sup>3</sup> An official appeal by the District Council to Chester-le-Street's twin town of Kamp Lintfort in Germany raised £1,114.<sup>4</sup>

#### **(e) Derwentside**

The fund run by Craghead Labour Party to assist Derwentside miners' families received a £200 donation from workers at Ford, Dagenham, £363 from City of London College and £418 from a group of friends in Bradford.

Without help from trade unionists outside the coalfield, Spennymoor Trades Council would have experienced great difficulties. At least £10,000 in cash and large numbers of food vouchers, as well as mounds of clothes, donated from outside the coalfield by a plethora of individuals and Labour movement organisations, including some overseas, enabled City of Durham Support Group to survive till the end of the strike. But perhaps the most significant amount of money donated, which underlined the lack of community feeling towards striking miners in one ex-pit area, was the £499 raised in street collections in Chester-le-Street over two months when that was compared with £1,887 raised by two North Durham CLP Support Group members in an appeal in Denmark over five days. [EF] [BF] {DC} [KM] [MP]

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1. I was the correspondent.

2. These donations were subsumed under the £20,146 referred to in the preamble to the accounts. See Appendix 9.

3. See North Durham CLP Support Group Financial Records, held by B. Frostwick.

4. Ibid.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

### **1. PIT VILLAGES**

In contrast with many ex-pit villages and ex-pit areas, working pit villages in the Durham coalfield were said to have exhibited 'community' in 1984. [HW] [MN] [PB] The appeal to 'community' from SEAM Relief was not an appeal based on traditional values and bore little relationship to the meaning Tonnie gave to the term. SEAM women were concerned about school closures and loss of population but the main thrust of their message inside their villages was to warn of the financial losses traders and houseowners would suffer if pits closed. In other words, despite the overwhelmingly one-class nature of those pit villages affiliated to SEAM, women activists framed their appeal to their neighbours with a tacit recognition of the prevalence of widespread working class conservatism among them. Not only was their campaign not built around notions of class struggle, it seems that any mention of class struggle or political struggle was deliberately avoided, the better to promote the more conservative and therefore more acceptable concept of community. Certainly, in terms of the support it engendered, that tactic served them well. Most of the population in those areas, including local traders, members of local social organisations and, sometimes, members of local churches, were prepared to help miners' families for the duration of the strike. They recognised that if the pits closed, shops would also close for there would be little money around. Helping miners to stay out on strike by donations of money and food was a straightforward, pragmatic act of reciprocity. Traders were helping to keep their own shops open over the longer term. Other residents were helping themselves to stay put, helping their organisations to remain in existence and/or helping to keep house values buoyant.

Some SEAM women regarded themselves, and were pleased to be regarded inside their villages, as promoters of community. [HW] In fact, so committed did Easington Support Group members become to promoting community that, in the end, arguably, they allocated a higher priority to it than to maximising relief for sacked miners. Their argument, that distributing most of what was left in their relief fund to village organisations indirectly helped miners' families, [HW] has to be set against a recognised political imperative, at that time, of giving as much financial help as possible to those who had been sacked by the NCB for activities during the strike.

### **2. EX-PIT AREAS**

One difference between appeals for support in pit villages and those in ex-pit areas was that since miners' families were mostly minorities in the latter, they had little to offer their neighbours in terms of reciprocity. When Easington, Murton, Dawdon or Seaham Support groups, for instance, shopped in their own villages on behalf of thousands of mining families with money raised inside and outside their areas, they were helping the internal economy,

keeping traders in business. The same could not be done by support groups looking after families of travelling miners who, though numerous, were widely scattered throughout towns and villages in the rest of the coalfield.

While people in pit villages could not fail to know what the strike was about, in many ex-pit villages large numbers of people apparently had no idea why miners had withdrawn their labour. Some believed they were asking for higher wages and, because they thought miners were already very highly paid, were ready to call them greedy and selfish. Others, socialised into thinking that redundancies were inevitable in the mining industry and that, in any case, there was little future for coal, felt justified in telling miners that they had jobs and should get back to them. They should look after their own families and not come scrounging for money. And if the NCB was insisting on redundancies, then at least the severance pay received by miners would be far higher than that received by other people who had been made redundant. Many people, too, saw the strike as "Scargill's strike" and believed that the mineworkers had been either duped or badly led or both by NUM leaders. There were also those who were unaware that £15 had been deducted from supplementary benefit paid to miners' families and that had plunged them into acute poverty. But even when people were well aware of why miners had taken strike action, acceptance of conservative views of the strike including animosity towards Arthur Scargill, ensured a great deal of hostility towards activists collecting money and food.

### **3. SOLIDARITY OR CHARITY?**

Some support groups put out political propaganda in efforts to ensure that the public did know what was going on. City of Durham Support Group, North Durham CLP Support Group and Havannah Labour Party members produced political leaflets urging solidarity with the miners. But the pressure to raise money became so great that support group workers in many areas were forced to tailor their approaches according to their audiences. Other CLPs, and trade unions in Britain and overseas were asked for help on the grounds that mining families were in the vanguard of the fight against Thatcherism. Less overtly-political organisations were approached by appealing to a sense of morality, fair play or humanitarianism. However, street collections, the most direct public appeal, sometimes degenerated into tugging peoples' emotions about starving women and children. Increasingly, in some areas, it was futile to refer to the validity of the miners' cause and to attempt to argue a political case. Collectors got to know their audiences and, to many activists, all that mattered in the end was getting the cash to sustain families and prevent them from being starved back to work. It was no surprise to the collectors that charity, both organisational and individual, is the most familiar, acceptable and established concept in the county. Having said that, even in the City of Durham, it was roughly estimated by Richard Brown, a regular street collector, that only one in every 200 shoppers contributed

anything to the miners' relief fund.<sup>1</sup>

When it came to appealing outside the coalfield for help, support groups looked for political solidarity from all sectors of the Labour movement. When speaking *outside* the coalfield, support group women did not hesitate to make hard hitting speeches about the need for class struggle. Few, if any, speeches like that were made *inside the 'communities' of existing pit villages*, at least in Durham County, but those who listened to miners' wives and political activists speaking from platforms of large city halls, the length and breadth of the country, did not know that. It is reasonable to assume that that contributed to false impressions of what was going on in the coalfield.

#### 4. HAD COMMUNITY EVER EXISTED?

When pushed to give examples of community spirit that was supposed to have existed when areas or villages still had working pits, interviewees sometimes found it hard. Jack Palass could not recall any 'golden moments' of community before the pits closed in Derwentside, but *supposed* that people living in back-to-back terraced housing would know each other better and possibly do more for each other than those who lived on modern estates in their semi-detached dwellings. Bala Nair was totally sceptical that there had ever been warm, northern communities, especially after his bad experience of appealing for support in supermarkets around Derwentside.

Peter Graham and Marina Parnaby were convinced that the whole idea of community was overrated. They declared quite bluntly that notions of people rushing to help neighbours in the past had been exaggerated. They pointed out that reciprocal arrangements whereby women tended other women in childbirth, for instance, came to an end in Kelloe village with the introduction of the National Health Service. As far as they were concerned, that reciprocity had nothing to do with any traditional values and existed only in adversity.

In the final analysis, though, if some people, like those in pit villages, *believe* they experienced something called community at the time of the miners' strike, then for them it had real meaning and value.

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1. Conversation with Professor Richard Brown, Durham University, December 1991.

## Chapter 6 - CONCLUSION

What I have written is a thematic account of the responses from women in mining families, from the Labour Party and from communities in Durham County, to the 1984-85 miners' strike. Before I could deal adequately with those themes, it was important to establish the extent of the hardship faced by strikers and their families during the dispute and, in particular, to explore their relationships with statutory bodies to which they turned for help.

My main research problem was to uncover strike mythology, generated both inside and outside the coalfield and to separate it, very firmly, from what actually happened. Next, I tried to discover whether there was any link between political women of the past who had built their own organisations within a massively proletarian and male-dominated county and the militant women of the 1984 support groups. I compared and contrasted their attitudes and achievements. Central to my concerns was an examination of the relationship between the politics and practice of the Labour leadership with the politics and practice of the Party at local level, how that affected Party members and the working class and how that was related to the amount of support received by the miners on strike in 1984-85. Finally, I explored what people living in pit villages and ex-pit areas meant when they talked about 'community' particularly in relation to the strike.

### A. THE CONSERVATIVES' 'OPEN CONSPIRACY'

Despite the existence of "end-of-class" theories, there was ample evidence of the influence of class on the miners' strike. The Ridley Report of 1978 could be seen as an overt declaration that future Radical Right policies could not succeed unless the power of the working class, through their trade unions, was broken irrevocably.<sup>1</sup> Government recognised the need to do battle with trade unions, for their power remained

... the largest single obstacle to liberal economic policies.<sup>2</sup>

As I indicated in the Preface, Gibbon's implication that there was little or no connection between Government contingency plans and the strike was very weak. By 1984, the Government were specifically prepared to face a coal strike. They were well aware that the militancy of the NUM leadership made industrial action in defence of jobs a very strong possibility. Preparations to discourage industrial action by any group of workers included

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1. See John Saville "An Open Conspiracy : Conservative Politics and the Miners' Strike 1984-5" in Socialist Register 1986 p.297.

2. John Biffin quoted in Bea Campbell, "Politics Old and New" in New Statesman 8 March 1985 p.22.



alterations in Social Security regulations to deny income to strikers so that they would be forced back to work. Those changes caused enormous hardship to families in the coalfields. The DHSS, for the most part, faithfully followed Government orders and was seen by many strikers as an enemy, part of the attack Government was making on the ability of families to feed, clothe and look after themselves for the duration of the dispute.

## **B. MYTH MAKERS**

For the NUM, the strike was a defensive act of workers against the planned obliteration of their livelihoods. The optimistic Left invested the strike with far more meaning.

The miners' outside support groups were . . . unwilling to recognise the conservative character of the strike. The miners were fighting against losing something : their supporters wanted them to win a new world.<sup>1</sup>

Some of them did not know what was happening at the grass roots, while some of those who did know chose to ignore the reality. They eulogised union/support group relationships and shied away from exploring the problems many support groups had with NUM Lodges. They contributed to and encouraged the myth that whole communities of miners' wives, spontaneously, had risen up and formed themselves into huge task forces to relieve the hardship. We have seen that there were no huge task forces in Durham. Support group activity was portrayed as community activity which, in most instances in Durham it was not. And women in support groups were depicted as completely politicised, confident socialists because of their strike experiences. I have argued that most had just begun their political apprenticeships.

Many on the Left still believe that although Labour leadership let down the miners, the vast majority of rank-and-file Labour Party members supported the strikers. Whatever the volume of support from Labour Parties outside the coalfields (and much more research is needed in that area) the weight of evidence presented in this thesis has shown that only a minority of Labour Party members in the Durham coalfield supported the strike and striking families.

Myth making inside the Durham coalfield, which arguably contributed to the overall strike mythology, involved pride and self interest, was understandable, given the hardship faced by families on strike. But the myth making of influential activists on the left, which coincided with their own optimistic political perspectives, arguably did a disservice to those involved in the struggle.

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1. R. Samuel, "Doing Dirt on the Miners" in New Socialist October 1986 p.15.

## **C. SOCIALISTS AND REVISIONISTS**

Central to all my arguments in this thesis has been the tension at the heart of the Labour Party between a minority of members (backed by the Party's Constitution) whose intention it is to create a socialist society, and the majority of members who support leaders determined to manage capitalism better than the Conservative Party. I stressed that Preston was right when he argued that revisionists have been helped considerably by the theoretical weakness of the Left over a long period. The hard-Left's prescription of presenting uncompromising socialist policies to the public has always failed to take into consideration the increasing conservatism of the electorate which Labour's pragmatism has encouraged. Mapping out long-term strategies to counter that conservatism has never been a priority of the optimistic Left.

I said that progressive depoliticisation of both Party members and the working class can be attributed mostly to the Party's revisionist leadership. Mindful of the widespread conservatism in society, that leadership panders to it and thus strengthens the dominance of capitalist ideas. At the same time, the Party leadership discourages extra-parliamentary agitation which it considers a potential danger to Labour's electoral prospects. And, indeed, because of the vacuum in left politics, that attitude has some validity. The vacuum needs to be filled by the development of strategies by the Left which simultaneously advance the socialist project and seek to combat conservative hegemony as it affects both the Party and the working class. In the absence of such strategies, effectively, over a long period, the Party has continued its move to the Right.

## **D. THE CONSERVATISM OF DURHAM LABOUR**

I made it clear in the Preface and in Chapter 4 that the politics and practice of Labour in Durham could not be fully understood without reference to the politics of Labour nationally. Next, after a brief look at the long-time dominance of Liberalism in the County prior to the Great War, I argued that Labour's monopoly of power since 1925, paradoxically, led to greater conservatism within the Party. Lack of opposition makes Labour politically sluggish. So widespread is Labour's dominance in the County that anyone, of whatever political persuasion, anxious to hold public office, has a far better chance of doing so if s/he joins the Labour Party. Because there is no systematic political education for the membership, conservatism in the Party is reinforced.

In 1984, sixty years of virtually unopposed rule at County Hall had not made for a vigorous, active, campaigning organisation. Local leadership, reflecting Labour Party membership, was not geared to robust political work on behalf of a trade union affiliate. The generosity of the Labour County Council, which made possible the continuation of the strike, did not arise out of

a tradition of strong, democratic and socialist decision making. It came through the influence of a Council Leader who *happened* to be an ex-miner and a strong supporter of miners' families.

I looked at every level of the Labour Party in Durham and examined responses to miners' pleas for help. Overall, I concluded that the Party's response was weak and patchy because of debilitation by years of pragmatism, because of political sluggishness, because of acceptance by many of its members of the Conservative Government's view of the strike and because of its fear that if it were seen to be supporting an unpopular cause, that would damage Labour's chances at the polls. Given a conservative society, political support for the strike might have had that effect. On the other hand, if there had been an enthusiastic, political campaign by the whole Party in support of the miners, some sections of the public, as Ron Morrissey suggested, might have been won to the miners' cause.

The material support given to miners' families within the area was mainly inter-generational. In addition County Council money helped enormously. But the responsibility for ensuring that every striking family received help on a very regular basis fell to support groups. These consisted of comparatively few people who doggedly persisted that citizens who were ignorant, indifferent or even hostile to their cause, should reflect on the economic damage to the whole area if the strike were lost. Some of the same people struggled inside the Labour movement's own organisations against those who were embarrassed by the strike, those who wanted to 'sit on the fence' during a monumental class struggle or those who were antagonistic towards the strikers.

## E. COMMUNITY

In comparison with the objectives of Waddington et al.<sup>1</sup> in their intensive study of three communities and those of Warwick and Littlejohn<sup>2</sup> in their long-term, in-depth study of four communities, I had a more limited aim. As I indicated in the Preface, my focus on 'community' extended as far as discovering what meanings people inside and outside pit villages attached to the term, especially in the context of the miners' strike. Though there was a difference between the meanings given to that concept by pit villagers and by others in the coalfield, it was not a difference based on 'traditional' understandings of community. Nor was the meaning rooted in the class solidarity of overwhelmingly proletarian localities. In Chapter 5 I said that, arguably, the concept of community is a conservative one, pursued by those who want to turn people's minds away from notions of class struggle. I pointed out that, by deciding not to take a political

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1. D. Waddington, M. Wykes & Chas. Crichton, Split at the Seams? : Community, Continuity and Change after the 1984-5 Coal Dispute (1991)
  2. D. Warwick and G. Littlejohn, Coal, Capital and Culture : A Sociological Analysis of Mining Communities in West Yorkshire (1992)

stance and by relying instead on an appeal for 'community' help, workers in support groups affiliated to SEAM Relief implicitly recognised the extent of working class conservatism in their villages. Their meaning of 'community' fell short even of Tonnies' definition. Shorn of romantic overtones and realistically stressing the close relationship between pit closures, bankruptcies and falling house prices, the appeal to 'community' rallied those whom support group women believed would have nothing to do with political campaigns specifically agitating against attacks on the working class.

In ex-pit areas miners were in a minority, so 'community' campaigns around the survival of the coal industry were not considered to be relevant. Interviewees there believed that notions of past 'community' were grossly exaggerated and, where it had existed, it was based on reciprocity in adversity.

## **F. COALFIELD WOMEN**

### **1. WOMEN IN THE PAST**

When I explored the role of women in the coalfield I was concerned to emphasise Allen's assertion (Chapter 3), that they have been an essential, if unpaid, part of the mining process. Despite that, their presence has hardly been acknowledged in the past by writers, researchers and historians, partly because of institutionalised sexism in society (which is particularly marked in the North East of England), but partly also because of women's acceptance of domestic subordination and near-invisibility in political arenas. Even the Durham working class women who organised themselves politically to work in the Labour Party turned out to be, essentially, support groups for Labour men. Such women helped to ensure men's virtual monopoly of political power in the County.

### **2. WOMEN IN THE STRIKE**

#### **(a) The NUM's verdict**

For twelve months, a small minority of women from mining families joined in a collective public battle to save pits and jobs. They carried more than a fair share of the burden of hardship relief and they held their organisations together through enormous difficulties. At the end of the strike, despite all the praise and rhetoric about the role of the women, the NUM voted against giving them Associate Membership of the union. Everyone knew that it would have been only a symbolic gesture of thanks, giving them no rights inside the union. It was galling, then, when Honorary Membership of the NUM was awarded to a few Labour M.P.s. The politicians were expected to support working class struggles. In the women's eyes that was what they were paid to do. The women's work had been entirely voluntary. No doubt Kim Howells was sincere when he wrote that,

South Wales women threw off all that garbage about being "behind" their men and began occupying Coal Board offices, blockading steelworks' gates and touring Europe putting the case for the defence of their communities,<sup>1</sup>

but such statements had a hollow ring when the miners finally gave their public verdict on the women's worth by their vote against Associate membership. Perhaps more than any other decision, that one proved just how temporary had been the "changes" in the coalfields, so lauded by the myth-makers.

### **(b) Radicalisation**

For some women, who considered they had become radicalised by their strike experiences, there were obstacles to their becoming politically active immediately after the strike. However, there is still no sign of any significant political activity among those women. That might be because there were two very important differences between working in a support group and working in a political organisation, particularly in the Labour Party which dominates in Durham. During the strike, women discussed problems, made decisions and carried out work without a great deal of fuss, principally because those involved knew that was necessary in the dire situation they faced. But the Labour Party does not work like that. Apart from periods of electioneering, there is no urgency in the Party's approach to activity.

Len James drew attention to the inefficiency and delays in the Party's decision making machinery, even at local level. [LJ] Some branches do not meet regularly or, when they do meet, few members attend. Often, there are not enough activists to make a branch viable. And meetings can be extremely boring, involving little of political interest. [LR] But even in arenas of the Party where political discussions do take place and political decisions are made, members can not be certain that action will follow. The prime example of that practice was the setting up of the Campaigns Committee in City of Durham CLP, after the strike. Effectively it buried every campaign referred to it by the General Committee.

A second, related difference is that members interested in political issues need incredible amounts of staying power to combat the overwhelming passivity in the Party. Sustaining hope and enthusiasm over long periods, sometimes in branches which resist any kind of political discussion or political activism, is a wearying experience, one which support group women, used to an energetic and co-operative environment, were unlikely to find congenial. However, as I said in Chapter 3, women who did join the Party believed sincerely that, by doing so, they showed their political commitment. Whatever its shortcomings, the Labour Party is still regarded by a majority of working people in Durham as the political expression of their class.

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1. Kim Howells, "Stopping Out: The Birth of a New Kind of Politics" in H. Beynon (ed) *Digging Deeper* (1985) p.139.

Those women who claimed they were totally changed in their political outlooks, who wanted to become politically active but who considered the Labour Party not radical enough for them, have yet to show themselves on the political scene. Arguably, if radicalisation has any meaning, action of some kind must be a vital component.

## G. TWO QUESTIONS

At the end of a very detailed sifting of empirical evidence gathered in the Durham coalfield, there still remained two questions. First, were there any other factors which could account for the lack of support in County Durham for striking miners? And, secondly, why has mythology about the strike been so persistent?

### 1. LACK OF SUPPORT

There were two factors which might explain why there was not more support for miners among the general public in Durham County. First, there was a belief that the coal industry was dying and, secondly, the Labour Party and the NUM failed to campaign for a viable coal industry as part of a safe (i.e. non-nuclear) energy policy.

In ex-pit areas the effects of pit closures in the 1950s and 1960s had been not only economic and social but ideological. Unquestioning acceptance of redundancies and consequent demographic changes had influenced many people into believing that the coal industry was doomed. In 1984, the threat of more closures seemed to them to proceed logically from that premiss.

... there's been such a run down of mining communities in County Durham that a lot of people thought that was the natural way. Since the '60s, coal had been branded as a dying industry, so what was prevalent was this attitude that miners were trying to save an industry that was dying, that was dead, or that wasn't worth saving . . . The Government was very clever in reinforcing that attitude. In certain parts of County Durham . . . which have experienced a rapid decline of the coal industry, it is perceived as something *of the past* rather than *of the present* or *for the future*. [DC]

Small wonder then, that many believed the strike could not be won and that supporting it could only prolong the agony. Those who were fighting to save mining jobs were regarded, at times, as so many King Canutes.

Though it was possible for the Labour Party and the NUM to have campaigned for a safe energy policy, no such effort was made. If it had been, that might have caught the imagination of the general public, an increasing number of whom were worried about the safety of nuclear power and the disposal of nuclear waste. But, as I argued earlier, the Labour Party was already committed to maintaining nuclear energy. It was also not prominent in public debates about where and how the dangerous nuclear waste might be stored. In 1984-85, the NUM said little about a safe energy policy, perhaps because it was seeking financial help from trade unions

which had large numbers of members working in the nuclear industry. So the case for a viable coal industry as an integral part of a safe energy policy, which might have mobilised a great deal of support, was never explained publicly, not even inside the coalfield.

There may have been additional factors in Durham, including the effects of individual socialisation, which influenced whether people supported or refused to support the miners. It can be seen that there is plenty of scope, around this issue, for future research.

## 2. ENCOURAGING MYTHOLOGY

The main reason for the generation and persistence of mythology about the strike was that too many people wanted to believe that there was enormous, working-class, collective activity in the coalfield, and there was just enough circumstantial evidence to make their accounts plausible. For their own ideological reasons, people with diametrically opposed beliefs fed that mythology. Some on the Left (and the ultra-Left) were anxious to believe that the strike was midwife to a huge, new, powerful, political, working class women's movement. Some believed that that new movement would strengthen the Labour movement and inspire it to fight back against the Radical Right. This fitted well with their notions of what could be achieved with uncompromising socialist leadership. Such leadership was all that was necessary to release the immense, revolutionary fervour they believed to be inherent in the working class. At the same time, the Radical Right portrayed the strike as a revolutionary act, led by a zealot whose intention was to undermine the very existence of the state. As late as 1986, Adeney and Lloyd demonstrated how far even they had accepted that view,

... the conduct of the miners' strike and the aims of the union's leadership, posed once more the choice which British Labourism hated to make ... the choice between revolutionary and revisionist socialism ... Here was the opportunity, if not to overthrow the state, then to destabilise it, to prepare the ground for an overthrow later.<sup>1</sup>

It was a pity that Adeney and Lloyd had no dialogue with Samuel before they wrote what they did and contributed, not so much to the history of a most extraordinary year but to the mythology surrounding it. For Samuel, eschewing hyperbole, characterised Scargill as,

... rather a chip off the old block, neither an English Lenin nor a Yorkshire Hitler as journalists portrayed him during the strike, but a miners' leader centrally, even narrowly, concerned with the protection of his members and determined, like some of the miners' leaders of old, whether of the right or of the left, not to be separated either emotionally or physically from them. As a would-be Lenin he has shown singularly little interest in political parties or in building a political machine ... He seems, too, quite far from what a historian would recognise as a "revolutionary syndicalist" ... being deeply attached both to the corporatist structure of the industry ... and to existing union structures.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Martin Adeney and John Lloyd, *The Miners' Strike of 1984-85 : Loss without Limit* (1986) p.6.

2. R. Samuel, op. cit. p.14.

Gibbon characterised Scargill as anti-corporatist and summarily dismissed Samuel's judgement,<sup>1</sup> but, as I indicated in the Preface, Gibbon's assessment was not without its problems. While there is no doubt that Scargill ridiculed the Coal Board on occasion, Gibbon did not specify what Scargill had *done* to translate his public opposition to corporatism into action. What alternative structures did Scargill advocate? What kind of organisation did he build to work for structural change? And, in the light of that, how can his advocacy of the Plan for Coal be explained? In the absence of answers to those questions, it must be conceded that, even if Scargill's sentiments were anti-corporatist, Samuel's view of Scargill's behaviour was nearer the mark.

Samuel was also correct in believing that miners were not fighting for change of any kind, let alone revolutionary change. They wanted their lives to remain the same. Change, in the form of closed pits and lost jobs, was the last thing they wanted. The Government was forcing that kind of change upon them. In resisting the Government, working class people - miners' families - struggled against representatives of the class which wanted to change their lives for the worse. However, the coincidence of views held by influential people on the Left as well as on the Conservative-Right, concerning the revolutionary potential of the strike, helped to create and sustain a mythology which was almost the exact opposite of the reality.

## H. THE HEGEMONY OF CONSERVATISM

Beynon said that the strike was a landmark in the political and economic development of post war Britain and that in the breadth of the issues involved and in the drama of its action it stood out as a major social and political event.<sup>2</sup> But while there was a certain grandeur about it, seen from another perspective, the strike was very limited both in its aims and in its methods.<sup>3</sup> Twelve months was a long time for a strike to last but it was too short a time in which to improve significantly the status of women. This is especially true in a County where every institution from the family to the Labour movement is excessively male-dominated. It was too short a time in which to regain political ground lost to the working class by decades of depoliticisation. It was also too short a time to guarantee lasting inroads into the parochialism and conservatism which permeate all the institutions of the working class. Depoliticisation of the class by the Movement itself, coupled with the insistent economic, political and ideological onslaught from the Government and the State, had engendered insecurity, fear, lack of confidence and apathy among many working class families. And, as shown in Chapter 5, many

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1. P. Gibbon, *op. cit.* (1988) p.167.

2. Huw Beynon, *Digging Deeper* (1985) p.1.

3. For example, Gibbon remarked on the NUM's circumspection in its relations with other unions, the Labour Party and even the Government, during the strike. See P. Gibbon, "Analysing the British Miners' Strike of 1984-5" (1988) p.149.



working class people were hostile towards miners who defied a right-wing Government in defence of their jobs.

There is nothing new or surprising about working class conservatism and the problems it poses for social movements in many parts of the world. For example, one of the founder members of the activist organisation, the United Democratic Front, who spent years in the 1970s and 1980s organising cadres in South African townships said that working class conservatism was as rooted there as it is in Britain. Worse, police informers among township dwellers are "thick on the ground."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, speakers from the African National Congress (ANC) looking for support overseas, rarely dwell on the difficulties of organising in their own communities and winning people to their ranks. Palestinians activists, too, face many of the same kinds of problems in organising against the might of the occupying Israeli state in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>2</sup>

Even when social movements engage in intensive activity and struggle, they do not necessarily produce social change. Given the opposition they face (in some areas the tanks and guns of the state), it is surprising when they do. Further, changes which do take place sometimes have negative effects. It has to be noted too that, in most instances, change produced by social movements tends to be gradual and can be fully appreciated only retrospectively. After 60 years of struggle in South Africa by the ANC, economic apartheid is still entrenched and universal suffrage has still to be won. On the West Bank and in Gaza, two and a half years of Palestinian Intifada has petered out without any discernable achievement. And, in the aftermath of the miners' year-long struggle against pit closures, the coal industry in Britain is being dramatically reduced in size with the consequent loss of many thousands of jobs. However, it is important to understand that mass demonstrations, uprisings and strikes are only moments in larger struggles. So, the defeat of the British miners' strike, and the tailing off of the Palestinian Intifada, do not necessarily signal the end of all struggle against injustice in those countries.

In conclusion, while I understand the limitations of what I have written, I believe this thesis is a contribution to wider and ongoing debates about social movements.

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1. Conversations with Dr. Ahmed Bawa of Durban - Westville University, Natal, 1990-91.

2. Conversations with Dr. P.M. Glavanis, Durham University, 1991-2.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Chronology of the strike**

# CHRONOLOGY OF THE STRIKE

Since 1985 there has been time to reflect on the fact that, although the radical Right's plans to emasculate trade unions were well known after the leaking of the Ridley Plan<sup>1</sup> in 1978, the NUM was still able to be manoeuvred into strike action at a most unpropitious time. Huw Beynon was right when he said that,

The NUM leadership were not spoiling for a fight in 1984. . . . It was the widely leaked NCB plan for colliery closures which affected the situation decisively . . . .<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, following the announcement by the NCB of huge non-negotiable cut backs in coal production, it was learned that Cortonwood Colliery in Yorkshire faced imminent closure.

Men who had been transferred to the pit within the previous fortnight had been promised a secure spell there before it closed. The announcement of closure broke all procedures established in the industry for dealing with questions of capacity reduction and colliery performance. It was a deeply provocative act.<sup>3</sup>

The strike started on 9th March 1984. From the beginning there were enormous problems because a majority of Nottinghamshire miners could not be persuaded to support it. There were rumours that a national ballot would be held and, in April, the union rules were changed so that only a 50% vote was needed to decide national strike action. That NEC change of rule was endorsed by a special delegate conference in Sheffield. But no ballot was held. Meanwhile, throughout the coalfields, support groups were being set up. On 12th May a rally, organised by Barnsley Miners' Wives Support Group, drew 10,000 women from mining areas. They flooded through Barnsley and were addressed by Arthur Scargill. Two days later thousands of miners from all over the country marched through Mansfield in Nottinghamshire to show support for the strike. But the majority of miners in that coalfield ignored them and went to work.

By this time the strikers had begun to feel the full force of the state which was pitted against them. Striking miners travelling to picket in other coalfields were stopped by the police and made to turn back. Even miners' wives travelling to Nottingham with food for the beleaguered minority there who supported the strike were not permitted to proceed. Invariably the courts legitimised police action whether or not that ran counter to any semblance of justice. John McIlroy pointed out succinctly that,

The use of arrest as a means of intimidating pickets and removing them, at least temporarily, from the combat zone, is illustrated by the statistics. By December 1984, 8,731 arrests had been made. But about 1,000 of those arrested, about a seventh of the total, were not charged. NUM solicitors also

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1 See John Saville, "An Open Conspiracy : Conservative Politics and the Miners' Strike 1984-85" () pp.296-7

2 Huw Beynon, "Introduction" in Huw Beynon (ed.) Digging Deeper (1985) p.15.

3 Ibid.

argue that the majority of those charged should not have been; and if the cases *were* brought then they should have resulted in acquittal . . .<sup>1</sup>

But the heavy policing became heavier as the year went on. On 18 June, the whole world was able to see via television the events at Orgreave when police on horseback and in riot gear chased and batoned lightly-clad pickets. It had become obvious that the police had *carte blanche* to use any methods they wished, legal or illegal, to harass and pressurise not only pickets but also mining families in their villages.

There had already been one fatality on the picket line in March when David Jones was killed at Ollerton. In June another miner, Joe Green, was crushed to death by a lorry on the Ferrybridge picket line. And from all over the country there were reports of injuries to pickets. In the early months, the fact that the NUM had not held a national strike ballot had caused some concern among striking miners. By June, thanks to the heavy policing, most of those on strike were past caring about such niceties. Police brutality and their flagrant law breaking helped to ensure that there was no middle ground left in the strike. Certainly there were people who were not remotely interested in what was going on, but wherever there were conversations about the strike people took sides - they hated either the Government or the strikers. The knowledge that the police were using *agents provocateurs*, and the strong suspicion in every coalfield that, on the picket lines, soldiers were masquerading as police, intensified anger amongst the miners.

From the beginning of the strike, £15 had been deducted from supplementary benefit payments due to strikers' families, the Government ordaining that the union should give each family that amount in strike pay, while knowing full well that the union was in no position to do so. Millions of pounds of tax refunds due to miners were also withheld by the Inland Revenue. And wherever possible, police moved against those collecting money for families, especially in the cities, harassing or threatening them. The aim seemed to be to starve strikers back to work.

Talks between the Coal Board and the NUM proceeded fitfully but by July it had become obvious that the strike would be prolonged. Police had already occupied pit villages in Yorkshire, damaging property and intimidating families, as well as arresting people, whether or not they had broken the law. In August 3,000 police attempted to get one man through picket lines and into work at Easington Colliery in County Durham. The seige of Easington lasted three days and during that time the police sealed off the village. Ordinary householders were prevented from going about their lawful business. One of them, a frail pensioner named Jossy Smith was manhandled by policemen twice his size in full view of all his neighbours while his slightly-built wife pleaded with the heavies to stop hurting him and let him go.<sup>2</sup>

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1 John McIlroy, "Police and Pickets - The Law Against the Miners" in H. Beynon (ed.) op. cit. pp.110-111

2 Press photographs of this incident in Heather Wood's Strike Scrapbook and in Durham Stiker.

Since there were many accusations of police brutality, why was it that there was not a corresponding number of official complaints? The answer is probably that, by then, in pit villages, no-one trusted police to uphold the law themselves and certainly not to investigate themselves. Men who had been unjustly arrested also believed that complaints might be counter productive. As John McIlroy reported, few miners would use existing complaints' procedures,

When I discussed this with two arrested miners they felt that the complaints' procedure was not only toothless, to use it was to court further surveillance, intimidation and possible assault, "Those animals are completely out of control. They are a complete law unto themselves."<sup>1</sup>

In August, too, Women Against Pit Closures held a huge rally in London. It was the occasion for the handing over of the controversial petition to the Queen. On 24th August miners were (temporarily) heartened when dockers came out on strike against coal being unloaded from the coke ship *Ostia* by steel workers in Hunterston. A week later 100 South Wales miners occupied three very high cranes at Port Talbot steelworks.

In September the national dock strike was called off. At that time the Bishop of Durham called for the resignation of Ian MacGregor. Needless to say, the call was ignored. Most significantly in that month, since NACODS men had voted overwhelmingly to support the miners, it was hoped by the NUM that this would put some pressure on the Coal Board. However, the NCB offered NACODS a deal which was accepted by its leadership.

In October the NUM and the NCB agreed to meet under the auspices of ACAS. The NUM was under a great deal of pressure at that time since there was a possibility that the union's funds would be sequestrated. It was at that point too that the Coal Board offered striking miners a back-to-work bonus.

When November came the NUM, which had transferred union funds outside the country in an attempt to avoid sequestration by the British courts, faced the judgement of a Dublin court which 'froze' £2.7 million of its assets. At the end of that month a taxi driver, believed to be taking miners through picket lines, was killed by a concrete block dropped from a road bridge by angry strikers.

In December Belgian, German and French trade unions sent lorryloads of Christmas toys for miners' children in all the coalfields. Turkeys and chickens, bought abroad with money from a public appeal organised by WAPC, began arriving at Dover. Some were confiscated by the authorities but enough got through to allow each striking family a seasonal meal.

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1 J. McIlroy, op. cit. p.109

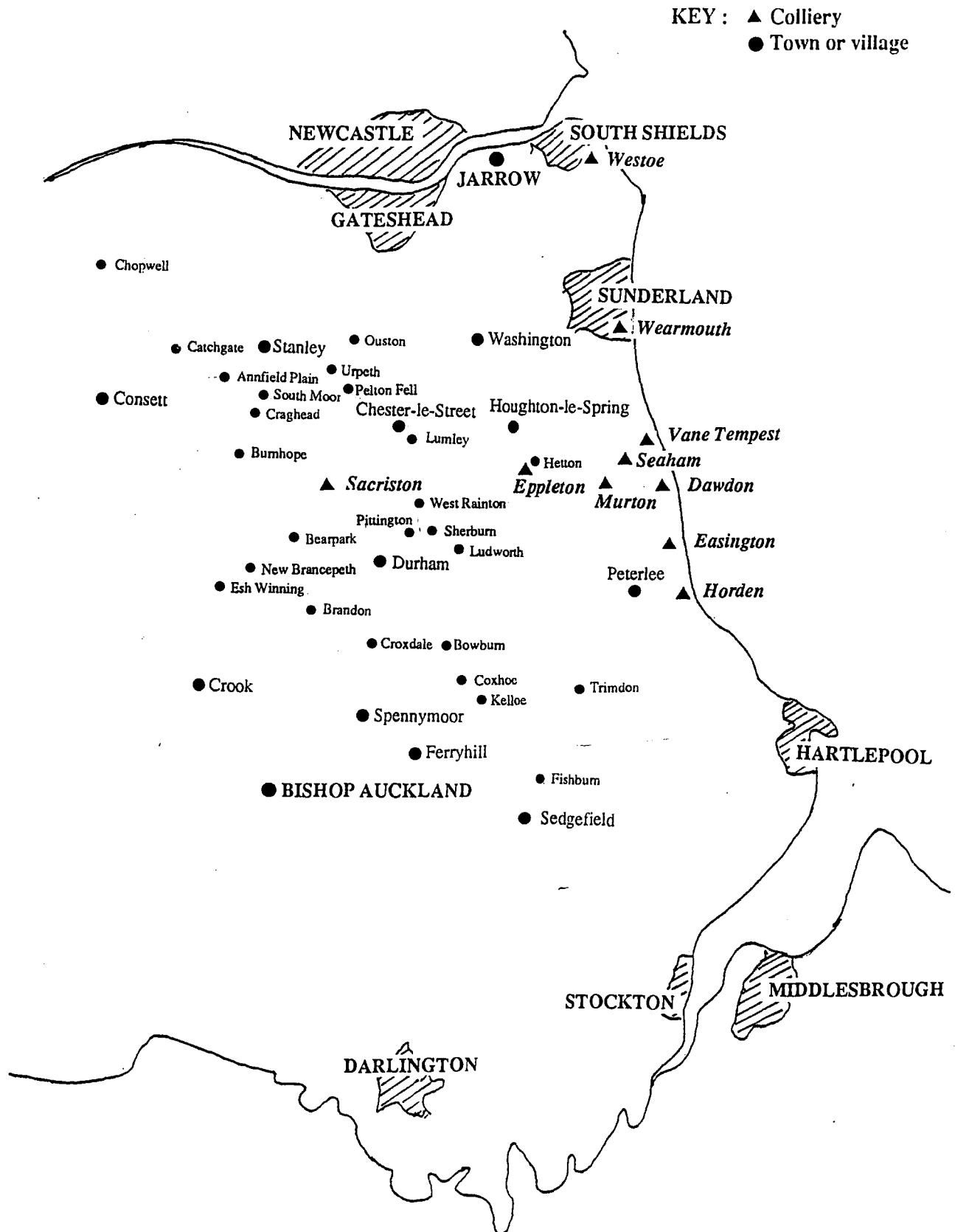
In January there was a trickle of miners back to work. The relentless use of the state against families had made them understand that no matter what they were willing to bear, the Government was prepared to use billions of pounds of taxpayers money to ensure defeat for the NUM. At last, in that month, the Government decision to deduct £15 from supplementary benefit to striking families was challenged in the High Court. Their Lordships, to no-one's surprise, upheld the Government's case. And when Welsh church leaders urged an independent enquiry into the future of the coal industry, the Energy Secretary, to no one's surprise, refused.

In February there was an appeal from the NUM and NACODS to the NCB that negotiations should be reopened. Until the New Year the strike had held together exceptionally well in all major areas except Nottinghamshire. The state's attempts to starve the miners back to work at an early stage had been completely unsuccessful. But after nearly a year of privation families were weary and because there was no prospect of a reasonable settlement, the trickle back to work was growing. There was a danger that, before too long, that trickle would become a flood. To preempt that, the NUM decided to end the strike and miners returned to work without a settlement on the anniversary of the day they had first withdrawn their labour to protest against pit closures.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Map of the Durham coalfield**

# DURHAM COALFIELD 1984 -85





## **Appendix 3**

### **Manifesto of the *LINKS* organisation**

# LINKS



## A philosophy for action

Druidge Bay proposed nuclear power station site.



After Embrace the Base, Greenham caught the public eye: thousands of women became involved in a political issue for the first time. Then the Miner's Strike took over, filling the TV screens every night. When Rainbow Warrior was bombed, suddenly everyone focussed on what Greenpeace was doing in the Pacific. Last year we all dug into our pockets for the starving Ethiopians, and Live Aid/Band Aid was the hottest flavour in town. Scenes of police violence in South Africa brought thousands onto the streets in Britain and many other countries, against Apartheid. The Chernobyl disaster gave Friends of the Earth and opposition to nuclear power a new lease of life.

What's wrong with all this? Why do we allow the media to hop from demo to demo pretending that last years' flavour is a has been left over? Why do we feel guilty for "abandoning" a previous campaign when we redirect our focus?

Because of South Africa's racist policies, Black uranium Miners in Namibia work in appalling conditions, while South Africa, who illegally occupied this country to exploit the mineral wealth, makes huge profits from selling the uranium. Its major buyer is British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

These issues are fundamentally linked. Cruise or starvation or women's struggle for their mining communities don't cease to exist the minute the media moves its spotlight. We damage ourselves by feelings of guilt and competition among struggles which we **know** to be part of the same huge iceberg of exploitation, male violence and capitalism.

Pacific Islanders have been bombed, radiated, moved from place to place, dispossessed, exploited, denied any basic rights or independence so that the US, France and Britain can use their homes for testing nuclear weapons such as Cruise and Trident before they are deployed at places like Greenham and Faslane.

Mines have been closed and mining communities destroyed so that the Government could push through its nuclear power programme to "satisfy Britain's future energy needs." Nuclear power is the socially acceptable face of the nuclear weapons industry, giving it spurious credibility. But Chernobyl's accident has also reminded us of the short term and long term dangers of radioactive poisoning and the terrifying reality of "accidental" nuclear annihilation. Millions starve in Third World countries because the arms trade ensures that resources go into weapons marketed by the multi-nationals and not food and agricultural development.

We need to be able to link our campaigning and reassert the links in the networks that each of these Campaigns has developed without feeling we are "treading on toes" of some other campaigning organisations.

**LINKS** is about doing it for ourselves: choosing our particular focus and priority and working on that with respect and support and sometimes direct involvement from those specifically concerned in other areas. It's also about setting up our own informal networks of communication and action to multiply the effect that any one group can achieve - to widen the web. It means bypassing the destructive "flavour of the month", demo-hopping mentality fostered by the media who have their own agenda and only notice our needs and struggles when it is convenient - and even then they distort, isolate and compartmentalise what we are doing. **LINKS** could become our most effective way forward. Isolated and divided campaigns lie all around us.

The early achievements and popular success of local campaigns to prevent certain areas being turned into nuclear dumps have been hindered by sweeping court injunctions taken out by NIREX to intimidate the protesters and prevent them from exercising their democratic right to resist non-violently. Companies and Government bodies such as the MOD, NIREX, the National Coal Board, Unilever and Newbury District Council, have all sought (and promptly received) immediate legal powers to stop the political activities of ordinary people protecting their lives and communities. Evictions, injunctions, bail conditions amounting to internal exile, frequent or heavy prison sentences for trespass, "conspiracy", obstruction etc have been used to bully and break pickets, Greenham women, anti-nuclear and animal rights protesters. Such court orders are backed up by increasingly paramilitary and brutal policing. Ethnic minorities, the unemployed, lesbians and gay men are often subjected to particular harassment whether they are actually demonstrating or just trying to survive with respect and dignity in a hostile, prejudiced society. Justice is not equally administered. It is just another means available to those with money and power to criminalise the lives and protests of the rest of us.



Recent Government legislation has been busy stopping up the few remaining loopholes which allowed freedom of speech, assembly, picketing etc. The erosion of trade union powers took about ten years to arrive at the crippling Trade Union Legislation we know today. The use of legal Sequestration and Receivership of trade union funds has effectively made it impossible for Trade Unions not to break the law when protecting their members. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) looks like a charter for arrested persons rights until you read the small print at the back giving a senior police officer full powers to withhold all these "privileges" on various legalised pretexts.

The Public Order Act proceeds from the premise that demonstrations and protests "disrupt normal life" and must be curtailed. Centuries of struggle by women and working people to win precious freedoms of speech, assembly and dissent, and to incorporate these rights as a fundamental and essential part of "normal democratic life" will be swept away by the Public Order Act.

Britain is not alone in these dangerous changes in civil liberties. The laws of all the Cruise and Pershing Sites (Germany, Holland, Britain, Italy and Belgium) are being brought into line to restrict civil rights so that these weapons of mass destruction can be dispersed among our homes without effective local opposition. Human and civil rights and freedoms are the first victims sacrificed to the arms race, the profit motive and nuclear development.

That is why we must make common cause with struggles for peace, freedom and independence throughout the world. We have to recognise and understand the **LINKS** that bind these issues for us. We must refuse to work in isolation any longer. The aims of the Anti-Apartheid movement are directly linked with the aims of the Peace movement, which in turn are linked with the anti-nuclear movement and groups striving to protect their communities from mass unemployment or the dangers of pollution and radiation from the transporting and dumping of poisonous waste. These issues are locally and internationally linked with the way in which society is economically and militarily dominated by multi-nationals and the interests of capital.



**Together we can break the violent stranglehold of that chain and replace it with our own **LINKS** of mutual support, co-operation, and respect.**

**LINKS** is not setting up another organisation. We are a group of people involved in all of the above mentioned campaigning who feel the need for a stronger network to respond quickly and effectively to the changing political needs and conditions of each campaign. We have so many common aims and experiences. We need to exchange resources and information and link our campaigning more effectively, enabling different groups to support each others' initiatives, taking their own actions, in their own way, under their own responsibility.

**LINKS** is a mixed group of women and men originating in women's initiative in the Miners Support Groups in Durham. **LINKS** first major action was to co-ordinate local actions outside the CEBG and Electricity show-rooms to get thousands of signatures demanding an end to the nuclear energy programme in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster. The petitions and letters were presented to the Government and Embassies by groups of women and children on June 25th. Now there are **LINKS** meetings and activities in many areas. Some of these are mixed and some are women only. **LINKS** respects and affirms the right of women to organise autonomously and take women only actions when chosen. The purpose of **LINKS** is to enhance existing campaigns rather than to undermine or mould any group into a rigid format.

**Involvement in **LINKS** is not commitment to a new bureaucracy but empowerment to take co-ordinated action. Divided we fall - United we'll win.**

**LINKS CONTACT:**  
24 The Crescent, Langley Park,  
Durham, Co. Durham.

## **Appendix 4**

**(a) Infant mortality rates in County Durham and  
England & Wales 1919-1927**

**(b) Enquiry into maternal mortality rates and into the  
incidence of puerperal infection 1924**

# INFANT MORTALITY RATES

## per 1000 births

Year	County Durham	England & Wales
1919	115	89
1920	107	80
1921	109	83
1922	99	77
1923	86	69
1924	97	75
1925	101	75
1926	84	70
1927	96	70

Source : County Durham Medical Officer of Health Reports 1919-1927  
 See DRO CC/H/2, CC/H/3, CC/H/4

## Attendances at the Welfare Centres during 1924.

NAME OF CENTRE.	Children under 5.			Expectant Mothers.		
	No. on books.	Attendances.	Consult.	No. on books.	Attendances.	Consult.
Annfield Plain .....	497	2739	2408	26	102	77
Barnard Castle .....	39	401	303	8	9	3
Birtley .....	906	3792	3216	150	445	403
Cockton Hill, Bishop Auckland	664	2528	1179	...	...	...
Town Head, Bishop Auckland	118	473	381	3	4	4
Blackhill .....	257	1106	649	15	38	32
Blaydon .....	502	2558	2289	17	55	54
<sup>a</sup> Boldon Colliery .....	182	944	281	1	1	1
Barnhope .....	93	478	255	...	...	...
Burnopfield .....	147	559	492	14	32	31
Chester-le-Street .....	142	1761	1135	10	23	22
Chopwell .....	260	1042	608	2	15	12
Consett .....	481	2649	2372	20	38	38
Coxhoe .....	221	774	732	1	15	15
Craghead .....	92	1338	576	1	17	16
Crook .....	480	1711	1008	18	26	21
Durham .....	804	3363	2522	66	140	132
<sup>a</sup> Easington .....	310	1170	827	10	33	31
<sup>a</sup> Esh Winning .....	159	469	363	10	19	14
Felling .....	534	3280	2638	25	81	77
Ferryhill .....	551	2113	1649	32	40	33
Haverton Hill .....	282	2585	931	11	78	30
Hetton-le-Hole .....	346	1243	691	7	7	6
Horden .....	346	1653	1375	11	29	28
Houghton-le-Spring .....	990	3769	2874	53	137	134
Middleton-St-George .....	62	389	173	3	5	5
<sup>a</sup> Rowlands Gill .....	87	168	133	4	7	7
Ryhope .....	372	1600	1014	2	2	1
Sacrison .....	367	1178	637	9	41	34
Seaham Harbour .....	614	2125	1706	25	53	50
Sildon .....	570	2649	2085	18	53	52
Shotley Bridge .....	183	1429	349	1	6	3
Shotton .....	271	778	663	15	38	37
Southwick .....	406	2580	565	17	21	8
Spennymoor .....	566	3034	2576	67	166	163
Trimdon .....	306	974	699	19	27	27
Washington .....	669	2650	1265	11	31	27
West Stanley .....	555	2650	2285	82	184	173
Willington .....	191	727	384	3	17	17
<sup>a</sup> Wingate .....	83	136	104	...	...	...
<sup>a</sup> Wheatley Hill .....	284	1078	912	20	29	29
Whickham .....	470	782	627	10	19	19
Wolsingham .....	127	744	242	...	...	...
Totals .....	15892	70172	48186	817	2083	1866

There were roughly 90,000 children under five in the county during 1924, a total of 15,892 made 70,172 attendances, and had 48,186 consultations. This means an average number of 4.4 attendances and 3.03 consultations per child enrolled at welfare centres.

817 expectant mothers made 2,083 attendances and had 1,066 consultations—an average of 2.5 attendances and 1.3 consultations per mother in attendance during the year.

#### ENQUIRY INTO MATERNAL MORTALITY AND INTO THE INCIDENCE OF PUERPERAL INFECTION.

In making the enquiries into the above deaths it was of the greatest help to have a talk with the practitioner concerned. Welfare medical officers made the enquiries in the areas in which they had charge of the centres, and thus got to know the doctors, who, except in a very few cases, were only too willing to give what information they could.

Information was obtained of 110, out of a total of 141, deaths; of that number only 37 received ante-natal care, which in many cases did not concern their pregnancy but their general health; 7 only attended an ante-natal clinic, while 5 were kept under observation by the midwife, and 52 received no care at all.

To supplement the above statement urines were tested in only 14 cases, which certainly leads one to stress the desirability of taking samples early in the pregnancy (9 deaths were attributed to eclampsia and 5 to nephritis).

Nearly 50% of the women were between 30 and 39, the majority of these being already mothers. 25 died as the result of their first pregnancy.

It is interesting to note that most of the presentations were normal—67 being vertex and 7 breech presentations (no information given as to 34, and 5 were abortions).

Six of the total were delivered by handywomen and 67 by doctors, only 18 by trained midwives.

Thirty-one children were born dead, while 10 died subsequent to birth, or nearly 35%.

In only 11 cases were patients given an enema; in view of the fact that one of the first lessons in the management of labour is to clear the patient's bowel, this is very serious; but up to the present it has not been a routine practice in the county.

Again, 31 deaths were due to sepsis, in one form or another, and in only 2 cases was there evidence that gloves were worn.

By far the greater number of deaths are due to sepsis of one form or another, 31, or 28%, 9 were due to eclampsia and 5 to nephritis, while 8 died from placenta prævia. One would wish that more of the patients were nursed in institutions, as so few of the houses are suitable for obstetric operations.

### CAUSES OF DEATHS.

#### PUERPERAL SEPSIS.

Septic Endometritis (following abortion).....	2
General Septicæmia .....	10
"    "    after abortion .....	2
"    "    with phlebitis .....	2
"    "    with broncho-pneumonia .....	1
"    "    with cyetitis .....	1
"    "    with septic endocarditis .....	1
"    "    with placenta prævia .....	1
"    "    with cerebral embolism .....	1
"    "    with toxic vomiting .....	1
Total.....	22

#### PERITONITIS.

General .....	2
"    with femoral hernia .....	1
"    following salpingitis .....	1
"    following abortion .....	1
"    with enteritis .....	1
Pelvic .....	1
"    following abortion .....	1
"    following salpingitis .....	1
Total.....	9

TOTAL SEPTIC CASES..... 31

ECLAMPSIA .....	9
NEPHRITIS .....	3
"    with exophthalmic goitre .....	1
"    with uræmia .....	1
PLACENTA PRÆVIA .....	8
POST-PARTUM HÆMORRHAGE .....	6
"    "    with Pul. embolism .....	2
"    "    following abortion .....	1
EMBOLISM .....	3

#### HEART DISEASES, ETC.

"    Valvular disease .....	4
"    Fatty degeneration of heart .....	1
"    Heart failure .....	3
"    "    with bronch. asthma .....	1
INFLUENZA .....	5
"    with influenzal pneumonia .....	2
"    with pleural effusion .....	1
"    with biliousness .....	1
"    with nephritis .....	1

PNEUMONIA .....	8
"    with chronic nephritis .....	1
"    with pyelitis .....	1
"    with tuberculosis .....	1
SCARLET FEVER .....	1
"    "    with broncho-pneumonia .....	1
MISCELLANEOUS CAUSES.	
Pulmonary T.B., with exhaustion .....	1
Ruptured uterus, with shock .....	2
Exhaustion from malnutrition .....	1
Shock following caesarean section .....	1
Do., with fatty infiltration .....	1
Shock (contracted pelvis) .....	1
Pernicious anæmia .....	2
Chorea gravidarum .....	1
Puerperal insanity .....	1
Cholecystitis and gall-stones .....	1
Anæmia, with cardiac failure .....	1
	—
	13
	—

## SUMMARY.

Total number of cases of Puerperal Sepsis.....	31
"    "    "    "    "    Eclampsia .....	9
"    "    "    "    "    Nephritis .....	5
"    "    "    "    "    Placenta Prævia .....	8
"    "    "    "    "    Post-partum Hæmorrhage .....	9
"    "    "    "    "    Embolism .....	3
"    "    "    "    "    Heart Disease .....	9
"    "    "    "    "    Influenza .....	10
"    "    "    "    "    Pneumonia .....	11
"    "    "    "    "    Scarlet Fever .....	2
"    "    "    "    "    Various other cases .....	13

Total number of deaths investigated... 110

TOTAL NUMBER OF MATERNAL DEATHS .....	141
From Puerperal Sepsis .....	31
"    other accidents and diseases of Pregnancy and Parturition .....	79
No information available in.....	31
	—
	141
	—

## AGES.

Under 20 .....	3
20—29 .....	35
30—39 .....	52
40—50 .....	20
	—
	110
	—

## PARITY.

Primipara .....	25
Multipara .....	76
No information .....	9
	—
	110
	—

## GENERAL HEALTH.

Good .....	50
Fair .....	13
Poor .....	37
No information .....	10
	—
	110
	—

## HOME CONDITIONS.

Good .....	52
Fair .....	24
Poor .....	24
No information .....	10
	—
	110
	—



## ANTE-NATAL CARE.

Doctor .....	37
Midwife .....	5
Ante-natal Centre .....	7
None .....	52
No information .....	9
	<hr/>
	110

## URINE.

Tested .....	14
Not tested .....	57
No information .....	39
	<hr/>
	110

## GESTATION.

Full time .....	66
Premature .....	35
Induced .....	Nil.
No information .....	9
	<hr/>
	110

## DELIVERED BY:—

Doctor .....	67
Midwife .....	18
Handywoman .....	6
Abortion .....	5
B.B.A. ....	9
No delivery .....	2
No information .....	3
	<hr/>
	110

## POSITION.

Vertex .....	67
Breech .....	7
Transverse .....	Nil.
Abortion .....	5
No information .....	34
	<hr/>
	113

## CONDITION OF CHILD.

Alive .....	58
Dead .....	31
Died since birth .....	10
No delivery .....	2
Abortions .....	5
No information .....	7
	<hr/>
	113

Enema given .....	11	Not given, or no information .....	99
Vaginal Examination ....	63	Not done .....	47
Douches .....	11	Not given .....	99
Catheter passed .....	5	Not passed .....	105
Forceps applied .....	22	Not applied .....	88
Perineum torn .....	8	Not torn .....	102
Gloves worn .....	2	Not worn .....	108

## CASES NURSED BY:—

Midwives .....	33
District Nurses .....	3
Trained Nurses in Hospitals .....	21
Handywomen .....	21
Friends .....	21
No information .....	20

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119

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CASES NURSED AT HOME .....	86
CASES NURSED IN INSTITUTIONS .....	21
NO INFORMATION .....	3

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110

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## HEALTH WEEK.

During the week commencing 7th October, 1924, "Health Week" was held throughout the administrative county, when in many districts members of the county medical and health visiting staff addressed audiences on subjects appertaining to public health. Special health talks were given by teachers by arrangement with the Director of Education in all the elementary schools in the county.

The County Health Committee convened their 9th annual conference in the Town Hall, Durham, on Thursday, the 9th October, when, at the morning session, Dr. A. F. Tredgold, the medical expert to the Royal Commission on the Feeble Minded, gave an address on "Mental Disorder from the Social Aspect" to a crowded audience. A most useful discussion took place, many questions were asked and the answers of the lecturer were of a most helpful nature.

The afternoon session was held in the Palace Theatre, Durham, when a display of health films was given to a large and appreciative audience.

## HEALTH VISITORS.

The health visitors' staff consists of a superintendent, who is directly responsible to the county medical officer, two assistant superintendents and seventy health visitors. The approved number of health visitors is 76, but owing to the dearth of properly qualified applicants the staff was below strength most of the year. In addition, part-time health visitors are utilised in certain areas, viz.:—Hartlepool and Stockton boroughs and Barnard Castle and Whickham urban districts.

The administration of the Notification of Births Act is in the hands of the County Council, except in the boroughs of Hartlepool, Jarrow and Stockton, and in the Whickham Urban District. The great majority of the registered births were notified; notified births in the area administered by the County Council numbering 21,422. Registered births were 21,512. A large proportion of the 90 births not notified occurred in the practices of medical practitioners.

Registrars supply information in respect of registered births which have not been notified, and medical practitioners and midwives who fail to notify births receive reminders of their obligations under the Notification of Births Act. Health visitors enquire into cases of unnotified births.

Of the notified births, 13,140 were reported by doctors and relatives, and 8,282 by midwives.

The health visitors paid first visits to 21,890 births. In 10.6 per cent. of the cases no doctor or certified midwife was present when the birth actually took place. During 1923 it was arranged, experimentally, that births attended by mid-

## **Appendix 5**

### ***Women Against Pit Closures'* Petition to the Queen**

WOMEN AGAINST PIT CLOSURES

Your Majesty,

We, the women of the British mining communities, appeal for your support in our struggle to defend an industry which is crucial to the future well-being of all.

Our husbands, our sons, our fathers - and indeed many of us ourselves, have now been on strike for nearly five months. Ours is a campaign to save the British coal industry, to preserve the jobs that should be passed on to our children and grandchildren, and to hold together the very lives of our communities.

We are proud of the determination and courage of our men. We support them wholeheartedly. We have, over recent years, seen the horrors of mass unemployment cripple other industries; we have witnessed the slow death of communities dependent on them, and the tragedies that fall upon families and individuals.

We also share fully with them the intimidation and intense hardship levied against us by those who oppose our fight for pits and jobs. As loyal and law-abiding citizens of this country, we never thought that the violence, the denial of civil liberties, the day-and-night harassment employed by police forces from around the nation against us would enter our lives.

But we are determined people with a strong sense of justice.

On the picket lines, in the streets of our villages, and indeed in our own homes, the police have been used to terrify us and try to silence our opposition to pit closures.

Our children go without proper nourishment; indeed, they often go hungry. We care for them and comfort them, but their distress is a sharp reminder that this dispute must be settled quickly.

We ask you, Your Majesty, to speak up on our behalf and help us to defend our families, our communities and a source of energy which can only grow in importance as oil and gas reserves diminish over the years to come.

WE THE UNDERSIGNED SUPPORT THE ABOVE STATEMENT

NAME

ADDRESS

## **Appendix 6**

### **Letter from NUM General Secretary to Pat McIntyre**

# NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS

ST. JAMES' HOUSE, VICAR LANE,  
SHEFFIELD, SOUTH YORKSHIRE S1 2EX

President A. SCARGILL

Secretary P. E. HEATHFIELD

Telephone: 0742 700388

Please quote our reference in reply:

Your Ref:

Our Ref: N.O. 22/PK/JB

Mrs. Pat McIntyre,  
42 Wearside Drive,  
The Sands,  
Durham City.

1st March 1984

Dear Mrs. McIntyre,

Thank you very much for your letter of 10th February 1984 asking about the legality of Labour Party support for the Save Easington Area Mines Campaign.

First, may I say that I hope that your constituency does support the campaign and does everything possible to help retain jobs and pits in the Durham coal industry. The local Durham campaign, as you are probably aware, is part of a national Campaign for Coal. I am sending on some of our national campaign materials, which I believe are already in use in Durham.

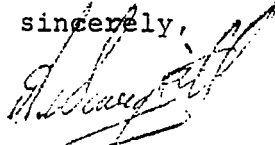
Secondly, I can assure you that the Tory Government's anti-trade union legislation is directed towards trade unions and trade unionists taking specific forms of industrial action, not towards individuals who sign petitions or make donations. Before the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts, trade unions enjoyed immunity from proceedings in civil law when acting "in furtherance of a trades dispute". That is, employers could not take out injunctions or claim damages against them if they interfered with contracts. Now, certain special forms of industrial action, such as "secondary" picketing, are no longer protected.

The NUM's position of course, is that the Employment Acts are anti-trade union law, meant to prevent trade unions from undertaking effective industrial action. They are one small part of the Government's attack on trade unions. They are meant to intimidate and punish ordinary people who wish to fight for their jobs and communities. The NUM believes the law should be ignored.

If you have further questions on points of law, I suggest you contact Bill Rees at the Law Faculty at Durham University.

Best of luck.

Yours sincerely,



## **Appendix 7**

### **North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group's Programme for Action**

# THE LABOUR PARTY

## North Durham Constituency

Member of Parliament

Giles Radice, M.P.  
House of Commons,  
LONDON, SW1A 0AA

Telephone No: DURHAM  
852087

Please reply to: E.E. Jones,  
3, Beaumaris,  
Bournmoor,  
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING,  
Tyne and Wear,  
DH4 6EB

1st October, 1984.

Dear Comrade,

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace by your faith in Him, until by the power of the Holy Spirit, you overflow with hope. Romans 15.13

It is not my practice to use Biblical quotations in letters, circulars or messages. The Bishop of Durham (Dr. David Jenkins) used this verse as the text for his sermon at his Enthronement in Durham Cathedral on Friday, 21st September, 1984.

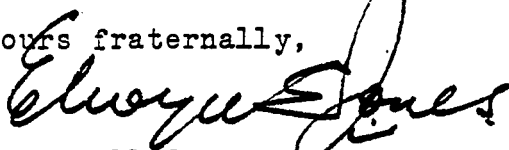
Professor Jenkins did not follow slavishly the establishment line in vilifying the miners during this bitter dispute. He did acknowledge that massive hardship is being inflicted on coalworkers and their families. He has been at the receiving end of vitriolic attacks for exposing this fact.

The miners, the Labour Party, the Trade Union Movement do not expect reasonable (certainly not accurate) reporting from Tory politicians or newspapers, and have lived with slanted opinions from television and radio channels - with a couple of honourable exceptions.

You will see from the enclosed copy of the Notes on the Meeting of the Sub-Committee to coordinate support and fund-raising activity that a start has been made in the Constituency.

There will be another Meeting this Saturday, 6th October, at 10 am in the Labour Club, Station Master's House, Station Road, Chester-le-Street. We would like to see every Branch represented - the miners have a right to expect unity from and with us. And YOU?

Yours fraternally,



To: All Secretaries,  
Branches, Trade Unions, Women's Sections,  
Affiliated Organisations,  
North Durham Constituency, The Labour Party.



THE LABOUR PARTY - NORTH DURHAM CONSTITUENCY.

Miners' Strike - Sub-Committee to coordinate support and fund raising activity.

The Labour Club  
Chester-le-Street.

Saturday,  
22nd September, 1984.

Time: 10.00 am

Branches represented:

Burnopfield  
Tom Beck

Chester Central  
Bill Frostwick

Chester/Street Labour Group  
George Staines

Chester - North  
Kathleen Mattheys

Chester - North Lodge  
Rod Oswald

Chester West  
Mary Wears

Craghead  
Len James

Dipton  
Elizabeth Greener

Edmondsley  
Bill Davison

AUEW Chester-le-Street  
A. Dunn

Lumley Miners' Self Help Group  
D. Hunt  
J. Haigh

Ouston  
Ted Mullen  
Tony Parker

Pelton  
Derek Bates  
J. Harrington

Pelton Fell  
David Marshall

ROF Branch GMBATU  
M.S. Hall

Socialist Education Association  
Brian Ebbatson

South Moor  
Betty James

Tanfield  
Celia Laverick

Urpeth  
Maureen Potts

Catchgate  
Bala Nair

CLP and Bournmoor & Lambton  
Elwyn Jones

OFFICERS

Chairman: Bill Davison      Secretary: Elwyn Jones  
Treasurer: Bill Frostwick

1. BANK ACCOUNT.

An account would be opened with the CWS plc Bank with four signatories - Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Len James. Two signatures would be required for withdrawal of funds and cheques.

2. COSTS; NEEDS

It was estimated that £2,700 at least would be needed each week to support families and single miners who were on strike. The sum was calculated on the number of families who were receiving some form of assistance from groups in Chester-le-Street and Stanley and outlying villages and communities.

### 3. FUND RAISING.

(a) Branches in the Labour Party, Trade Unions, Women's Sections and Affiliated Organisations were to be encouraged to arrange weekly collections with the proposal for contributions from

- (i) Working Members of 50p per week
- (ii) Unwaged Members of 20p per week.

Branches should under-write the total amount over, say, one month, and strive to top-up the sums from Members. The proposal should be repeated until the strike had been settled.

(b) There should be (i) collections in main centres, eg Chester-le-Street and Stanley. Branches should be encouraged to provide Members from the Labour Party and the NUM for the period 10 am to 4 pm on a two-shift basis, ie 10 am to 1 pm and 1 pm to 4 pm. At least six collectors would be needed for each shift; (ii) street and/or door-to-door collections in all areas.

(c) Fund raising activities should be organised in each Ward/Parish, eg discos, sales of work, jumble sales. (With Jumble Sales, arrangements can be made for surpluses to be collected and transferred to another village for a subsequent sale).

(d) Appeal to be made to Chester-le-Street's twin town KAMP LINTFORT (in West Germany). The Chairman of Chester-le-Street's District Council will be visiting the twin town shortly. Bill Frostwick is to arrange with Councillor Mrs. Peggy Potter for approaches to be made to the West German Authority for assistance to miners' families.

(e) The Secretary was asked to draft a letter - which would be translated into German and reproduced on a mass scale for despatch to the Socialist Party and Trade Unions in Germany

(f) Trade Union Branches which are affiliated to the Constituency to be asked for aid from their political fund.

(g) Party and Trade Union Members might consider adopting a family for, say, one day a week.

(h) Sale of Euro Socialists badges, when they were available, could raise around £200

### 4. EFFORT.

It was felt that effort and results varied from area to area. The initiatives should come from Branches.

### 5. NEXT MEETING.

THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD AT 10 am ON SATURDAY, 6th OCTOBER  
in the

LABOUR CLUB, STATION MASTER'S HOUSE,  
Station Road, CHESTER LE STREET.

### 5. REPRESENTATION.

Every Branch, Section, Trade Union and Affiliated Organisation are requested to ensure that one representative, at least, attends the Meetings of the Coordinating Sub-Committee.

NOTE: These are NOTES OF THE MEETING AND NOT MINUTES.

## **Appendix 8**

**Letters from North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group  
asking Labour Party members and trade unionists to offer  
their help**

NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

Tel : (Home) 881022  
(Work) Gateshead 770291

2 FRONT STREET,  
PELTON FELL.  
DH2 2RT

15th October 1984

To : Ward Secretaries

Dear Comrade,

I write to ask if members of your Ward Labour Party would be willing to participate in street collections for the Constituency's Miners' Families Support Group.

At present permission to collect in Chester-le-Street Front Street on Fridays and Saturdays, 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m., is being given by the District Council on a weekly basis. I propose to phone secretaries at the beginning of each week, when permission has been given, to ask for your Ward's assistance. It would therefore be a good idea if you could draw up a list of volunteers from your branch who could be called upon at a few days notice. It would also be useful if we could include miners in this activity, particularly for the Friday collections.

With other sources of funding coming to an end successful street collections are increasingly important in sustaining the Constituency's Miners' families in the current dispute. The more volunteers we have the more money we will collect!

Give me a ring if you require any further information at this stage.

Yours fraternally,



DAVID CONNOLLY  
STREET COLLECTION ORGANISER

NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

Tel : 881022 (Home) or  
Gateshead 770291 (x311)

2 Front Street  
Pelton Fell  
DH2 2RT

24th October 1984

To : Ward Secretaries

Dear Comrade,

We have been allocated two further days for street collections in Chester-le-Street. These are :

Friday 2nd November

and

Friday 9th November


It is vitally important that we maximise our income on these days.

WE NEED YOUR MEMBERS TO HELP!

We shall be collecting in Front Street 10.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. meeting initially outside the NEEB Showrooms. Please let your members know about this and encourage them to come along, even if it's only for an hour or two.

I'll ring you early next week to see what support we can expect.

Yours fraternally,



DAVID CONNOLLY  
STREET COLLECTIONS ORGANISER

NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

Tel : 881022 (home) or  
Gateshead 770291 (x311)

2 Front Steet,  
Pelton Fell,  
Chester-le-Street.  
DH2 2RT

8th November 1984

To : Ward and Union Branch Secretaries

Dear Comrade,

At the last meeting of the Constituency Support Group serious concern was expressed about the low level of participation in the group's meetings and activities by members of the Labour Party.

This low level of support means that the work of organising fund raising events e.g. raffles, dances and street collections falls on a very small number of activists. With Christmas approaching and with 600 miners' families to support in the Constituency, we urgently need to step up our fund-raising work. To do this we need your members' ACTIVE support.

To explain why and how you should become more involved the Support Group would like to send a speaker to your December Ward or Union branch meeting. Just give me a ring and I will arrange for someone to attend.

Victory in this historic dispute is not assured, it has to be worked for! I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours fraternally,



DAVID CONNOLLY  
(on behalf of the Support Group)

NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

IMPORTANT DATES

Street Collections

- Front Street, Chester-le-Street  
FRIDAY 16TH, 23RD and 30TH  
NOVEMBER 10.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m.

Meet at NEEB Show Room, opposite  
Market Place.

Tel : 881022 or 885903 for  
details

Anyone with an hour to spare is  
welcome.

Dance

- Saturday 17th November, Bullion  
Hall. Tickets £1.50. Live music  
7.30 pm.

Support Group Meetings

- Weekly, Saturdays, 10 a.m. Labour Club,  
Chester-le-Street.

NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

Tel : 881022 or  
770291 (Gateshead)

2 Front Street,  
Pelton Fell.  
DH2 2RT

29th November 1984

To : Labour Party Branches

Dear Comrade,

SPONSORED WALK

We are organising a sponsored walk from Sacriston to Herrington Pit (11 miles) on SATURDAY 22ND DECEMBER commencing at 10.00 a.m. Volunteers are required to take part. With sufficient walkers this event could be a major fund-raiser.

I need to know who is definitely taking part so return the attached form as soon as possible. I will contact the participants directly nearer the day.

Assistance is also required with refreshments en route.

STREET COLLECTIONS

Collections are arranged for FRIDAY 7TH DECEMBER and SATURDAY 15TH DECEMBER. I hope that those normally unable to collect on Fridays because of work commitments will help on the Saturday.

Yours fraternally,



DAVID CONNOLLY



NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

## STREET COLLECTIONS

FRIDAY 7TH DECEMBER

AND

SATURDAY 15TH DECEMBER

Front Street, Chester-le-Street

10.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m.

Meet NEEB Showrooms

We need your help  
BE THERE!

Tel: 881022 for details  
or  
885903

NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

## STREET COLLECTIONS

FRIDAY 7TH DECEMBER

AND

SATURDAY 15TH DECEMBER

Front Street, Chester-le-Street

10.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m.

Meet NEEB Showrooms

We need your help  
BE THERE!

Tel: 881022 for more info.  
or  
885903

NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

Tel. 881022

2, Front Street,  
Pelton Fell.  
DH2 2RT

7th January 1985

Dear Supporter,

SPONSORED WALK

To those who completed the sponsored walk on 22nd December, Congratulations! To those who gained sponsors but didn't take part, we still want your money! If necessary transfer your sponsorship to someone else who did participate.

In either case I would like to get all the money in by the end of January, preferably by cheque made payable to the support group. Send it to my address.

STREET COLLECTIONS

These will take place on Saturday 19th January and Saturday 26th January 10am - 3pm. If you can spare any time to help it would be appreciated. Meet NEEB Showroom, Front Street, Chester-le-Street 10a

You may also wish to help with the regular Friday Market Stall collections in Chester-le-Street.

Let me know if you want any further information.

Yours fraternally,



DAVID CONNOLLY

NORTH DURHAM MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

I want to help the Miners win the strike.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

.....

TELEPHONE .....

MY PARTICULAR SKILLS ARE .....

.....

I WOULD LIKE TO HELP WITH: ( PLEASE TICK )

STREET COLLECTIONS  
FRIDAY MARKET STALL  
SOCIALS  
DANCES  
RAFFLES  
SPONSORED EVENTS  
TRADE UNION LIASON  
PUBLICITY  
OTHERS

I HAVE USEFUL CONTACTS FOR FUNDRAISING IN :

TRADE UNIONS .....

LABOUR PARTY .....

U.K. ....

ABROAD .....

Support group meetings are held fortnightly on Saturday mornings  
in the Labour Club. Next one : 26th January 10.00am.

ALL WELCOME!

RETURN TO : K. MATTHEYS, 3, SPRINGFIELD GARDENS, CHESTER - LE-STREET.  
DH2 3UQ 254

## **Appendix 9**

### **City of Durham CLP Miners' Families Support Group - record of donations 1984-85**

City of Durham C.L.P. Miners' Families Support GroupRecord of Cash Donations (including branch levies) 1984/85

A total of £93,724.01 was received during the Coal Dispute and immediately after the strike. This includes £1,100 which was not shown on the weekly accounts sheets, received for miners' families covered by Kelloe and Cassop branches at Christmas 1984. It does not include a further £20,146.79 worth of food also donated, nor such things as clothes and children's toys etc.

Thanks are due to all those listed below, but also to many, many more. Far more individuals than those shown have obviously contributed, but are included under the names of this or that group, branch, union, CLP, etc.

For the purpose of cross-referencing (by auditors, etc.), those individuals and groups that are named below are listed according to the way in which they were classified at the time of receipt. I apologise if this means that some people's names are not included (because they appear under "X" Labour Party, for instance) and if any organisation would have preferred to have been listed under (e.g.) "Other Labour Party" instead of "Other", etc. No offense, of course, is intended. Rather an undying gratitude and appreciation for the solidarity shown by so many. Thanks.

Mike Syer,  
Treasurer  
11-8-85

Labour Party Branches (City of Durham)

Bearpark	£318.21	Gilesgate	1788.89
Belmont	561.08	Meadowfield	202.50
Bowburn (inc MFSG)	3135.82	Nevilles Crossgate	2016.27
Brandon	166.30	New Brancepeth	111.50
Coxhoe	147.21	Newton Hall	277.03
Croxdale	10.00	Sherburn	564.00
Elvet	1124.54	Shincliffe	629.65
Esh Winning	640.57	Ushaw Moor	300.00
Framwellgate	1011.57	Witton Gilbert	143.56
Framwellgate Moor	840.57	All Branches	13,989.27

Constituency L.P. (including Women's Council : £55; Advice Centre : £59) 6,482.52

Young Socialists & Students

LPYS	188.25	University Labour Club	575.36
Durham University M.A.	1035.32	D.S.U.	40.00
		Total	1,838.93

Independent Labour Publications 1,909.83

Other Labour Parties (i.e. not City of Durham)

Blackmore Vale L.P.	98.20	Beaconsfield L.P.	90.00
Brighton L.P.	25.10	Bexley Heath L.P.	1190.00
Broxbourne C.L.P.	10.00	Blaby C.L.P.	144.70
Canterbury C.L.P.	25.00	Chesham & Amersham CLP	25.00
Clay Hall L.P., Redbridge	50.00	Cardigan C.L.P.	10.00
Durham County Lab. Group	1,900.00	Delyn C.L.P.	50.00
Durham Euro C.L.P.	13.25	Eastleigh C.L.P.	30.00
Eccles C.L.P.	20.00	Enmore LP (Australia)	50.00
Gorton C.L.P.	225.00	Honiton L.P.	5.00
Ilford South LP	50.00	Littlebro' & Saddlew' Th CLP	21.65
N.W. Leeds C.L.P.	25.00	Northampton L.P.	10.00
Nelson I.L.P.	20.00	Poole C.L.P.	35.00
Pendle C.L.P.	100.00	Reigate C.L.P.	34.50
Skelton C.L.P.	15.00	Salisbury C.L.P.	17.40
St. Peter's LP, Islington	668.43	S.W. Norfolk C.L.P.	26.00
S.W. Cambridge C.L.P.	50.00	Swaffham & Dist. L.P.	27.00
Saltash L.P.	10.00	U.S. Socialist L.P.	43.74
Vauxhall C.L.P.	50.00	W. Derbyshire C.L.P.	47.00
Warrington C.L.P.	10.00	Woking C.L.P.	70.00
Individuals (see p.3)	1010.00	Wm. Morris Hall, Watford	100.00
Carpenders Pk & S. Oxhay		Paolo Zion	60.00
Labour Hall	50.00	Total	6,511.97

N.U.M & County Support Groups

D.M.A., D.C.M.A. & County Support Groups (including donations received via DMA/DCMA from other unions etc.)				3238.00
Easington Mechanics	300.00	Easington NUM		50.00
Horden Mechanics	50.00	Murton Mechanics		30.00
Seaham Mechanics	40.00	Seaham NUM		16.40
Tursdale Mechanics	200.00	Vane Tempest NUM		75.00
Wardley Mechanics	40.00	Total		<u>4,039.40</u>

Miners Support Groups (within the District)

Bearpark	181.79	Coxhoe		751.80
Ludworth	1325.30	Sherburn		5346.00
West Rainton	2544.77	Belmont		1450.00
Gilesgate	145.92	Total		<u>11,745.58</u>

Other Trade Unions

A.U.E.W., Cornwall	30.00	Australian Railwaymen		70.82
APEX, Northern Area Council	256.00	Association of Pattern Makers		50.00
Canadian NUPE	31.88	COHSE, Reigate		100.00
Durham Co. Assn of Trades		Fire Brigade Union		245.00
Councils	4.50	Hugh Mackay Women Workers		25.35
Inst. of Teachers, Adelaide	356.77	NALGO (Wilson)		25.00
Nalgo, S. Tyneside	15.20	New College staff		219.00
N.U.J., Durham	20.00	N.U.P.E.		50.00
N.A.T.F.H.E., S'land	35.00	NALGO, Sedgfield		100.00
Nat. Assn of Probation Officers		SOGAT		700.00
	15.00	TGWU (Northern Region)		200.00
Textile Workers Union	100.00	U.C.W.		560.00
UCATT (Irwin)	25.00	Union of Hosiery & Knitwear		
US Newspapers Guild	555.32	Workers		30.00
Univ. of London Inst. of Education	413.00	William Press TUists		620.00
Other (misc.)	50.00	Univ. of New England		13.05
Con Doyle (N.Zealand)	27.33	Total		<u>4,943.22</u>

North Eastern Cooperative Society (bonus/discount on vouchers) 3,388.00

Durham Miners Family Aid etc.

Maggie's Farm	28.00	Durham Community Coop customers		
Women's Aid	11.01			39.00
Peace Action Durham	51.06	Miners Support Badges		100.00
D.M.F.A.	4636.22	Total		<u>4,865.29</u>

Durham County Council (via Salvation Army) 13,991.82

Bowburn Hospital 12,480.30

Other - Miscellaneous

Belgian collections (G. Sutcliffe)	523.06	Bowburn Methodist Church		100.00
Bank - interest	98.53	City of Durham D. Council		5000.00
Ilford Pensioners	114.00	Foods of the Earth		2.50
Meadowfield WMC	10.00	Inst. of Educ., London Univ		
Mid-Somerset CND	50.00	(see also "other TU"		67.00
NALGO round robin	1.00	New Brancepeth WMC		20.00
Sherburn Parish Council	500.00	Stumbling Band		8.68
Polek Group, Tilbure		SPCK (discount)		20.00
Univ., NL	70.00	Ushaw Moor WMC		50.00
Zimbabwe Org. of Collective Cooperatives	10.00	W. Rainton Parish Council		100.00
		Individuals (see p.3)		793.11
		Total		<u>7,537.88</u>

# Individual Donations

The vast bulk of individual donations were of course anonymous and/or made through groups, parties and organisations listed on pages 1 and 2. The following were however individually receipted, and were included under either "Other Labour Parties" or "Other - Miscellaneous" on those pages.

## Other Labour Parties

H. Armstrong	110.00	Miss Bennett	10.00
E. Barber	5.00	EJ Booth	10.00
T. Collin	74.00	G & G Cox	10.00
Mr & Mrs Crump	30.00	WHT Davison	50.00
Lady Ewart-Biggs	25.00	GF Gibbons	20.00
Mr & Mrs Hankin	30.00	S. Hughes	110.00
M Hughes	200.00	(Other 150.00 included under CLP)	
F Kemble-Williams	40.00	Lord Hugh Jenkins	4.00
JG & DI Mann	20.00	BJ Perry	35.00
G Tully	2.00	C Vinnicombe	25.00
Miss Weeden	200.00	Total	<u>1,010.00</u>

## Other - Miscellaneous

A & P Ballance	20.00	G Bestford	15.00
N Bartle	50.00	Miss Bennett & Mrs Maggs	10.00
JG Davis	40.00	Burke Family	15.00
J Huggins	5.00	Miss Horniman	20.00
Mrs. Halliday	30.00	JG Johnson	5.00
T Lincoln	5.00	V Lincoln	20.00
GT & V Lorraine	20.00	JA McDonald	40.00
JV Martin	15.00	MR & Mrs Medcalfe	20.00
N Parkin	10.00	C Pearson	50.00
Mr. Polanski	50.00	D Robinson	145.00
I & D Rutherford	11	Mrs LM Seex	5.00
EA Shenow	25.00	Mr & Mrs Teasdale	15.00
Bob Thompson	40.00	Anon	23.00
Dr Speight	100.00	Total	<u>793.11</u>
(Other 540.00 under Gilesgate LP)			

City of Durham C.L.P. - Durham Miners' Families Support Group

Statement of Accounts at

1. Goods and Cash Account

Income

Cash received (see below)	93,724.01
Goods from LP branches	563.07
Goods from other LPs	265.00
Goods from other Lab mvt.	4,365.00
Goods from other sources	14,953.72
Total .....	<u>113,870.80</u>

Expenditure

23,299 parcels @ £3.99	91,299.54
Cash in hand & at bank	2,650.35
Goods in hand	21.50
Cash/vouchers & post-strike	7,787.00
Organiz'n expenses etc.	1,389.01
Gifts	10,287.40
Campaign	436.00
Total .....	<u>113,870.80</u>

2. Cash Account

Income

LP branch levy	5,307.61
LP branches - other	8,681.66
Other Labour Party	16,743.25
Other Labour Movement	24,046.20
Other sources	38,945.29

Expenditure

Food	76,576.93
Cash/vouchers to single miners	4,406.00
Babyfood	1,881.72
Post-strike hardship	3,381.00
Gifts (mostly Xmas)	3,003.00
Donation to Durham	
Campaign for Coal	436.00
Misc. Organiz'n expenses	92.95
Bags	159.16
Travel/transport	349.50
Postage, phone	289.08
Printing, photocopying	209.73
Newspapers	21.60
Badges, stickers, prizes, hall hire	107.40
Clothes	35.59
Rallies	124.00
Deposit Account	1,463.24
Current Account	1,058.86
Cash in Hand	0.00
C.L.P. held	128.25
Total .....	<u>93,724.01</u>

Total ..... 93,724.01

Mike Syer  
Treasurer  
11-8-85



MINERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP  
ACCOUNTS @ WEEK ENDING 20<sup>th</sup> JULY 1985  
(FIGURES IN BRACKETS SHOW TOTAL DESPATCHED OR RECEIVED)

	PARCELS DESPATCHED	CASH RECEIVED		FOOD RECEIVED	TOTAL TO DATE
		LEVY	OTHER DONATIONS		
Bearpark	( 1246 )	( 26.00 )	( 292.21 )	( 43.00 )	361.21
Belmont	( 2336 )	( 502.53 )	( 58.50 )		561.03
Bowburn	( 2748 )	( 454.18 )	( 2681.64 )	( 53.60 )	3188.82
Brandon	( 1377 )	19.00 ( 58.00 )	( 108.30 )	( 46.00 )	214.30
Coxhoe	( 1621 )	( 101.00 )	( 46.21 )	( 17.00 )	164.21
Croxdale	( 172 )	( 10.00 )	( )		10.00
Elvet	( 119 )	3.00 ( 674.36 )	( 450.18 )	( 21.00 )	1145.54
Esh Winning	( 1475 )	( 31.24 )	( 609.33 )	( 28.00 )	668.57
Framwellgate	( 179 )	( 203.85 )	( 807.72 )	( 98.45 )	1110.02
Fram. Moor	( 323 )	( 414.85 )	( 625.74 )	( 113.00 )	953.57
Gilesgate	( 944 )	( 703.18 )	( 1085.71 )	( 51.00 )	1839.89
Meadowfield	( 449 )	( 7.00 )	( 195.50 )		202.50
Nevilles X	( 148 )	( 1050.22 )	( 966.05 )	( 18.00 )	2034.27
N. Brancepeth	( 715 )	( 51.50 )	( 60.00 )		111.50
Newton Hall	( 409 )	50.00 ( 77.00 )	( 200.03 )		277.03
Sherburn	( 7286 )	16.00 ( 304.00 )	( 260.00 )	( 62.62 )	626.62
Shincliffe	( 77 )	( 540.65 )	( 89.00 )	( 10.00 )	639.65
Ushaw Moor	( 1177 )	( 5.00 )	Correction -30.00 ( 265.00 )		270.00
W. Gilbert	( 568 )	( 93.00 )	( 50.56 )		143.56
ALL BRANCHES*	( 23,338 )	88.00 ( 5307.61 )	-30.00 ( 8651.66 )	( 563.07 )	14522.34
C.L.P. INC. WOMENS COUNCIL			251.66 ( 6482.52 )	( 263.00 )	6745.52
YOUNG SOCIALISTS & STUDENTS . . .			( 1838.93 )	( 2.00 )	1840.93
I.L.P.			( 1901.83 )		1901.83
OTHER LABOUR PARTY			611.68 ( 6511.97 )		6511.97
ALL LABOUR PARTY			833.34 ( 25394.91 )	( 828.07 )	31530.59
N.U.M. & COUNTY SUPPORT GROUPS			( 4039.40 )	( 2280.00 )	6319.40
BEARPARK MINERS SUPPORT			( 181.79 )		181.79
COXHOE MINERS			( 751.80 )		751.80
LUDWORTH MINERS			( 1325.30 )		1325.30
SHERBURN MINERS			( 5346.00 )	( - 5.00 )	5341.00
WEST RANTON MINERS			( 2544.77 )		2544.77
BELMONT MINERS			( 1450.00 )		1450.00
GILESGATE MINERS			( 145.92 )		145.92
OTHER T.U.			73.05 ( 4943.22 )	( 2090.00 )	7033.22
N.E.C.S.			( 3288.00 )		3288.00
LABOUR MOVEMENT			906.39 ( 49418.11 )	( 5193.07 )	59911.79
D.M.F.A.			( 4865.29 )	( 594.50 )	5459.79
VIA S.A. (COUNTY COUNCIL)			( 13991.82 )	( 10505.42 )	24497.24
CHARITY			( 12480.30 )	( 3343.80 )	15824.10
OTHERS INC. CITY COUNCIL			120.58 ( 6537.88 )	( 510.00 )	7047.88
TOTAL			1026.97 ( 87,286.40 )	( 20146.79 )	112,740.80

\* KELLOE AND CASSOP BRANCHES OPERATE THROUGH SPENNYMOOR TRADES COUNCIL SUPPORT GROUP

## CATALOGUE (WITH KEY) TO AUDIO-TAPED INTERVIEWS

[AF]	Anne Frost	Miner's wife who worked as a cook at Sunderland Fire Station. Member of Sunderland Support Group who later joined the Labour Party. Interviewed 6 July 1989.
[AH]	Ada Hepple	Former DHSS Officer. Member of Coxhoe Labour Party Branch and Coxhoe Miners' Support Group. Organiser of City of Durham Miners' Welfare Rights Office. Interviewed 6 July 1988.
[AN]	Albert Nugent	Miner, Labour Party activist and former Seaham Town Councillor. Member of Seaham Support Group. Elected Durham County Council 1991. Interviewed 1 November 1988
[AP]	Anna Phelps	Organiser of Sacriston Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 7 July 1988.
[AS]	Anne Suddick	Secretary to General Secretary of Durham NUM Mechanics. Organiser of Durham Area Support Groups and Durham WAPC. Interviewed 3 April 1987.
[BC]	Bob Colson	Miner. Treasurer of Leadgate Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 10 January 1989.
[BE]	Billy Etherington	General Secretary, NUM Durham Mechanics Association. Later, Vice President North East Area NUM until election as M.P. for Sunderland North 1992. Interviewed 3 September 1987.
[BF]	Billy Frostwick	Member of COSA (NUM) and Labour District Councillor 1979-1987. Treasurer of Chester-le-Street Miners' Support Group and North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 15 October 1987.
[BFr]	Brian Freeman	Training Officer during strike, now solicitor. Member of Labour Party and ILP. City of Durham CLP Miners' Support Group (chair May 1984 -January 1985). Interviewed 26 January 1989.
[BG]	Brian Gibson	AEU member and, until 1989, member of Labour Party. Research worker at Newcastle Centre for the Unemployed in 1984. Organiser of Spennymoor Trades Council Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 2 September 1987.
[BJ]	Betty James	Retired teacher. Member of Craghead Labour Party. Co-organiser of Craghead Miners' Support Group and member of North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 28 February 1988.
[BN]	Bala Nair	Technical Services Engineer. Member of Catchgate Labour Party and North Durham CLP Support Group. Interviewed 3 November 1988.
[BT]	Beatrice Taylor	Miner's wife, living in Kelloe. Member of Durham WAPC. Interviewed 5 November 1985.
[DB]	Derek Bates	Former AEU member. Member of Pelton Labour Party, Pelton Miners' Support Group and North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Durham County Councillor. Interviewed 12 July 1988.

[DC]	David Connolly	Co-operative Society Member Relations Officer. Member of Pelton Fell Labour Party and ILP. Organiser of North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 13 September 1987.
[DF]	David Frost	Miner. Member of Sunderland Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 6 July 1989.
[DG]	Doreen Gibson	Polytechnic lecturer. Member of Shincliffe Labour Party. Organiser of Seaham Welfare Rights Team and co-organiser of Durham Miners' Welfare Rights Office. Interviewed 19 April 1989.
[DH]	David Hodgson	Member of Delves Lane Labour Party. Derwentside District Councillor (later also Durham County Councillor). Interviewed 17 November 1988.
[DI]	Dot Innerd	Miner's wife. Member of Gilesgate Miners' and Wives Support Group. Parcel packer with City of Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Joined Labour Party after the strike. Interviewed 8 November 1985.
[DL]	Derek Little	Member of Havannah Labour Party Branch (Stanley). Interviewed 8 November 1988.
[DoW]	Dorothy Wray	Miner's wife during strike. Member of Leadgate Miners' Support Group. Became mature student after strike. Interviewed 19 March 1987.
[DW]	David Wray	Miner until 1985. Now university lecturer. Member of Leadgate Miners' Support Group and Treasurer of Durham Area Support Groups. Interviewed 19 March 1987.
[EF]	Elsbeth Frostwick	Miner's wife. Member of North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group and Chester-le-Street Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 15 October 1987.
[ES]	Teddy Shields	Retired miner. Member Ferryhill Labour Party and lifelong socialist. Interviewed 6 May 1980 & 16 January 1981.
[FA]	Florence Anderson	Miner's wife. Tyne & Wear County Councillor. Organiser of Eppleton Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 6 November 1985.
[FD]	Freda Donaldson	Miner's wife. Member of Dawdon Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 19 July 1989.
[FS]	Fran Stephenson	Miner's wife. Member of Spennymoor Trades Council Miners' Support Group and Durham WAPC. Interviewed 4 November 1985.
[GP]	Gordon Parnaby	Miner. Member of Kelloe Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 14 September 1987.
[GT]	George (Mick) Terrans	Retired miner. Leader of Durham County Council in 1984-85. Interviewed 6 May 1980 & 24 July 1980.
[HW]	Heather Wood	Local Government worker. Member of Easington Labour Party. Organiser of Easington Miners' Support Group and Secretary of SEAM Relief. Elected Durham County Councillor in 1985. Interviewed 25 August 1987 & 8 October 1987.
[JaH]	Janice Hunter	Miner's wife living in Kelloe. Member of Durham WAPC. Interviewed 1 April 1987.
[JC]	Jim Crozier	Local Government worker. Member of Leadgate Labour Party. Interviewed 25 March 1988.

[JD]	John Dent	Former lorry driver. Member of Labour Party and ILP. Parcels Organiser for City of Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 15 June 1988.
[JG]	Joan Guy	Miner's wife. Member of Dawdon Miners' Support Group and Durham WAPC. Interviewed 18 February 1986.
[JH]	Juliana Heron	Miner's wife. Member of Eppleton Miners' Support Group. Joined Labour Party after strike and now District Councillor. Interviewed 8 October 1985.
[JoG]	John Gilmore	Lecturer. Member of Bishop Auckland Labour Party during strike, later joined Socialist Workers' Party. Member of Bishop Auckland Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 6 October 1991.
[JP]	Jack Pallas	Miner. Member of Havannah Miners' Support Group. Joined Labour Party during strike. Interviewed 14 November 1988.
[JPa]	John Parkin	Former steelworks electrician. Member of Bearpark Labour Party and City of Durham Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 6 August 1990.
[JW]	John Wood	Plumber. Husband of Organiser of Easington Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 8 October 1987.
[KC]	Kitty Callan	Wife of General Secretary, Durham Area NUM during strike. Interviewed 1 February 1988.
[KM]	Kath Mattheys	Teacher. Member of Chester-le-Street Labour Party. Secretary of North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Joined ILP after the strike. Interviewed 12 October 1987.
[LiR]	Linda Rutherford	Teacher. Member of Labour Party and City of Durham CLP Miners' Support Group (Chairperson January - March 1985) Interviewed 7 September 1987
[LJ]	Len James	Former sales executive. Member of Craghead Labour Party. Co-organiser of Craghead Miners' Support Group and member of North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Durham County Councillor. Interviewed 28 February 1988
[LoR]	Lorna Ruddie	Shopworker and miner's wife. Member of Easington Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 28 October 1987.
[LR]	Lily Ross	Miner's wife. Member of Burnhope Labour Party. Organiser of Burnhope Miners' Support Group and member of Durham WAPC. Interviewed 15 October 1985.
[MM]	Mavis Morrison	Miner's wife from Kelloe, now deceased. Member of Durham WAPC. Interviewed 1 April 1987.
[MN]	Margaret Nugent	Miner's wife. Member of Labour Party. Organiser of Seaham Miners' Support Group and member of SEAM Relief. Interviewed 1 November 1988.
[MP]	Maureen Potts	Miner's wife. Member of Labour Party. Co-organiser of Urpeth Miners' Support Group and member of North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 28 October 1985.
[MPa]	Marina Parnaby	Miner's wife. Member of Kelloe Miners' Support Group and Spennymoor Trades Council Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 14 September 1987.

[MS]	Mary Stratford	Former civil servant and CPSA activist. Miner's wife. Member of Lumley Labour Party, North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group and co-organiser of Lumley Miners' and Wives Support Group. Joined ILP after strike. Interviewed 7 September 1987 & 5 October 1987.
[MSy]	Mike Syer	Community Development Officer. Member of Bowburn Labour Party and Treasurer of City of Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Organiser of Bowburn Miners' Support Group. Elected Durham City Councillor during strike. Interviewed 26 March 1988.
[NC]	Neil Clyde	Welfare Rights Adviser. Member of Labour Party and Sunderland Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 6 July 1989.
[NS]	Nancy Shaw	Miner's wife. Member of Dawdon Labour Party. Organiser of Dawdon Miners' Support Group and member of SEAM Relief. Interviewed 19 July 1989.
[PaG]	Pauline Gibson	Shopworker. Member of Ferryhill Labour Party and Spennymoor Trades Council Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 2 September 1987.
[PB]	Pam Blanchard	Wife of NACODS member. Member of Murton Labour Party. Organiser of Murton Miners' Support Group and member of SEAM Relief. Interviewed 13 September 1989.
[PG]	Peter Graham	Miner. Member of Kelloe Labour Party, co-organiser of Kelloe Miners' Support Group and member of Spennymoor Trades Council Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 14 September 1987.
[RD]	Reg Davison	Sales representative. Member of Labour Party and Bishop Auckland Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 4 April 1991.
[RH]	Robin Humphrey	University lecturer. Member of Labour Party, Peace Action Durham and Durham Miners' Family Aid. Interviewed 9 September 1991.
[RM]	Ron Morrissey	Manager of Youth Training Organisation. Member of Sherburn Labour Party. Member of City of Durham CLP Miners' Support Group and facilitator for support groups in and around the Sherburn area. Durham County Councillor. Interviewed 11 July 1988.
[SH]	Seymour Hepple	Hospital worker, now deceased. Husband of organiser of Coxhoe Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 6 July 1988.
[SMSG]	South Moor Miners' Support Group.	8 miners' wives. Group interview 15 February 1988.
[TC]	Tom Callan	General Secretary, Durham Area NUM during strike. Interviewed 1 February 1988.
[TP]	Tony Parker	Member of NUR and Ouston Labour Party. Co-organiser of Ouston Miners' Support Group and member of North Durham CLP Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 3 August 1988.
[VM]	Vin McIntyre	Careers Adviser. Member of Labour Party and ILP. Organiser of City of Durham Miners' Support Group. Interviewed 24 March 1987 and 21 September 1988.

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