Pierre-François GOUIFFES

MARGARET

THATCHER

& THE MINERS

1972-1985

Thirteen years that changed Britain
This e-book is the English translation of “Margaret Thatcher face aux mineurs”, Privat, France (2007)
Comments on the French edition

Lord Brittan (Home Secretary 1983-5, former Vice-President of the European Commission)

“The fairness and accuracy of the book are impressive both in the narrative and the analysis. I am not aware of anything comparable to what Pierre-François Gouiffès has produced.”

Dr Kim Howells MP (now Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, spokesman for the NUM South Wales area in 1983-5)

“Mr. Gouiffès’ book describes key events, such as the ‘winter of discontent’ and the industrial disputes of the eighties which had a major impact on the Labour party.”

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FOREWORD
At midnight on Sunday January 9th 1972, the 280,000 miners of the 289 British coal pits launched their first national strike action since the great strike of 1926, almost half a century earlier.

The decision to strike broke the three-month deadlock in pay negotiations between the State-owned National Coal Board (the NCB) and the National Union of Mineworkers (the NUM). The NCB could not offer anything better than a 7.9% increase, in line with the 8% public sector wage ceiling set by the Government of Prime Minister Edward Heath. This offer was unacceptable to the NUM, which continued to claim a £9 weekly pay increase on an average wage of £25 per week. The negotiations broke down under the threat of a national strike. Since November, an overtime ban had reduced the NCB coal output by 15%. In December a majority of miners voted for national strike action over pay.

On the eve of the first strike day, Derek Ezra, the NCB chairman, broke off negotiations. He then explained to journalists that the strike would cost the NCB £12 million per week, cutting its financial resources and making it even less able and more unlikely to meet the miners’ wage claims. The unreasonable NUM claim would require £120 million, an amount far beyond the NCB’s resources without dramatic increases in the price of coal. However, the NCB’s communication also hinted at a quick and positive conclusion to the conflict.

Yet the miners seemed determined to win their fight. A Welsh miner explained to the BBC: “We’re going into this now, not thinking it’s going to be over in a week or a fortnight. We’re intending to win this battle, however long it may take”. Lawrence Daly, General Secretary of the NUM, forecast that coal stocks would
drop very quickly and force NCB management to call in the only real negotiator, the Prime Minister and his Government. Meanwhile, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) planned to coordinate various initiatives in support of the miners with regard to the NUM picket lines. The transport unions were expected to be especially supportive.

The public doubted, however, that the miners would succeed in their fight. They had accepted, without any real opposition, a major restructuring and slimming down of their industry in the sixties because of cheap and abundant oil. The 58.8% December majority for strike action was only slightly higher than the required NUM constitutional majority of 55%, which raised questions as to whether the strike had solid support. The London correspondent of the French newspaper *Le Monde* explained that the strike could not have begun under worse conditions for the miners, who seemed doomed to defeat.

However the miners’ strike conformed to the difficult British industrial context of the time which was marked by increasing unrest. As early as June 1970, only one month after taking office, the Heath Government had to face a dockers’ strike and could not avoid the declaration of a state of emergency. Then the municipal workers went on strike. In December 1970, the work to rule movement by electrical workers led to a second state of emergency and required electricity rationing and limited power cuts, for the first time since 1947. In 1971 the TUC and its affiliates fiercely opposed the Industrial Relations Bill, with a national one-day protest strike respected by two million workers, and disruption of newspaper printing. This was followed by a strike at the Ford Motor Company and a strike of postal workers.

The first day of the miners’ national strike seemed like business as usual in industrial Britain of the early seventies. It was however the starting point of a critical sequence of British contemporary history, a sequence that
would end thirteen years later under the Premiership of Margaret Thatcher, then Cabinet member as Secretary for Education.

_A coherent historical cycle_

This book, written by a French observer with a great affection for Britain and a keen interest in the United Kingdom, aims to describe the full frontal confrontation between Her Majesty’s Government and the NUM, then the most powerful and feared trade union. It commenced on January 9th, 1972, thirty five years ago. The following thirteen years of confrontation were marked by three national strikes (1972, 1974 and 1984-5). The cycle ended conclusively in March 1985.

This fascinating and turbulent sequence of events started with a Conservative Government under Edward Heath, first surrendering unconditionally to the NUM, then losing a general election and being politically destroyed after two short but extremely efficient miners’ strikes. Then a second Conservative Government, this time under Margaret Thatcher, successfully faced the longest (one year!) and toughest industrial confrontation to take place in the Western world in the twentieth century. This confrontation also resulted in irreparable damage to the NUM, the British trade union movement and the once mighty British coal industry.

There is already a plethora of British literature about this sequence of events (especially the long 1984-5 strike), but most books on this subject tend to be both polemical and one-sided. However, to the surprise of this author, there are very few studies of the miners’ strikes of the seventies and no comprehensive review of the 1972-1985 period.

It is clear that the strikes form an integrated sequence: the 1972 and 1974 strikes created key myths and legends, and the subsequent 1984-5
conflict relied to a large extent on those myths. On the one hand, the Thatcher government wanted to exorcise the disasters of the seventies: the lessons from the past had been carefully learnt, and determination was shown both in the careful preparation and the operational management of the confrontation. On the other hand, the NUM leadership wanted to renew their victories of the seventies but largely overestimated their ability to do so; they also made significant strategic mistakes in pursuit of their cause, which turned out to be fatal.

The book represents a synthesis of this extraordinary 1972-1985 period. It is based on existing literature, particularly in the United Kingdom. The book also includes original research and interviews with some of the key players of all sides during the period, in addition to an extensive review of contemporary material, eye-witness accounts and subsequent analyses of the strike.

_A major conflict refracted through warlike terminology_

The title of a recent British book on the 1984-5 is "Civil War without Guns". This choice of title fully reflects the verbal violence of the three miners' strikes, marked by an abundant use of military terminology. In particular, the two key leaders used warlike language to describe what was seen as a military confrontation, or, even worse, as a civil war. Indeed Arthur Scargill compared the Conservative Government to the Nazi leadership in his NUM presidential speech in July 1983, while Mrs Thatcher would later characterise the NUM as _the enemy within_ and gave the chapter on the strike in her autobiography the title of _Mr Scargill's insurrection_.

Physical violence was fortunately not as extreme as this extraordinary verbal aggression. However the NUM successfully besieged most
power stations in 1972, leading to a catastrophic electricity situation and bringing the country “to the edge of darkness”. The enduring image of 1984-5 will remain the violent clashes between the NUM pickets and the police and between pickets and working miners.

It was indeed a war even if there was no fatal aftermath. The conflicts were to determine who had the upper hand over the British social and political model. As Margaret Thatcher stated, “The fall of Ted Heath’s Government after a general election precipitated by the 1973-4 miners’ strike lent substance to the myth that the NUM had the power to make or break British Governments, or at the very least the power to veto any policy threatening their interests by preventing coal getting to the power stations”. This rule over Britain also included a strong ideological confrontation – a Tory programme versus a Labour programme, or more precisely versus a programme of the radical Left. This confrontation would reach its climax in the eighties when the NUM leadership wanted to strike a major blow against ‘Thatcherism’.

The global war included a variety of fronts; not only that between the NCB and the Government against the NUM, but London and Southeast England versus Northern England, Wales and Scotland, the moderate Left versus the radical Left, and fierce and intimate confrontations within the mining communities during the 1984-5 strike.

Both parties deployed quasi-military resources during these conflicts. The “flying pickets”, fully coordinated militant NUM shock troops, managed to defeat the police and the State in the seventies. Confronted by such a threat and challenge to its authority, the Government and the State took up the gauntlet, reinforced and improved the weapons at their disposal, in particular the police and intelligence resources. This would lead some key commentators to criticize the State as a banana republic police State.
Both the government and the NUM waged three different battles during the miners’ strikes: the battle to safeguard or cut the electricity supply, the battle to maintain or challenge law and order, and the media war to win the hearts and minds of the nation. The conflict could have been a work of fiction: outsized characters (Edward Heath, Harold Wilson, James Callaghan, Margaret Thatcher, Joe Gormley and Arthur Scargill) engaged in a seemingly endless conflict with unexpected twists and turns of good fortune and misfortune. The confrontation was also viewed as the battle of good versus evil. Ultimately, there were decisive moments when luck, planning and persistence came together to determine who should claim the victor’s crown….

As in any war, certain generals were victors, and these included Margaret Thatcher as well as the pragmatic and moderate Joe Gormley, president of the NUM during the 70’s. Damage, however, to the vanquished was permanent; the political fall of Edward Heath just one year after his second defeat and the marginalisation of the former militant hero Arthur Scargill after the crushing defeat of 1984-5 are examples. Other leaders stuck to their positions under very difficult circumstances, including the 1983-1992 Labour leader Neil Kinnock.

* A period of rapid political and social change in British history

Until now, it has been too early to assess the impact of the miner’s strikes, but time has now come for an objective assessment of these events. It is becoming clear that they were a watershed in British history: the period can be considered as a turning point in both political and social history of the United Kingdom. Most political commentators and historians now agree that there is indisputably a *before* and an *after* these events in the United Kingdom. Whether one approves of or deplores the consequent changes which occurred
in this period, the course of Britain’s political and industrial history was changed for ever. Account must be taken of this key sequence of events for a proper understanding of today’s United Kingdom.

Simple comparison of situations in the UK before 1972 and after 1985 shows a nation which was transformed through adversity. To some extent the miners’ strikes provide a stylized picture of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1970s strikes exemplify the near-despair and depression situation of British political leaders at the time: of governments and a country which had accepted an inevitable “orderly management of decline” compared to its European neighbours and world competitors. But by the end of the 1985 strike, the Thatcher legacy was largely established: a commitment to an open economy, the declining influence of unions and strike action, the privatisation of the public sector and a belief that the UK was no longer committed to unavoidable decline. Post Second World War British history can therefore be split into three successive periods: the Attlee years (1945-1972) the Thatcher orthodoxies (1985- ) and the intervening thirteen years of turbulence described in this book.

This book also draws out the consequences for current political and economic policy, and for the handling of major political change. It looks not only backwards at history: it also looks forwards. It describes the policy implications of the strike and how governments can or should prepare for such major changes in future.

* A detailed study aiming to take all perspectives into account *

The chronological sequence between the years 1972 to 1985 is the main time-frame for this book. A detailed chronology is provided as an appendix. The book describes the ‘*modus operandi*’ of both sides: the definition
of goals, the preparation, the assessment of opposing forces, the changes from the initial plans, and the incisive implementation and communication strategies to win public support. Particular stress is laid on the respective places of the ‘real’ and ‘symbolic’ fields: the miners’ strikes are heavy with political and industrial symbolism, given the central place of the miners in both British working class history and British political, and constitutional history.

Most records of this period are partisan in their approach. It has become clear from extensive discussions with British witnesses that this period will continue to be highly topical and highly emotive in the UK. This book is neither an ode to Thatcherism nor a hagiography of heroic trade union times. Many feel that it is impossible for a British author to be unbiased about the period given the still sensitive wounds that exist: perhaps only a foreign writer can try to provide a detached and objective view of this key period in British history, which is indeed what this book attempts.
PROLOGUE: THE RISE AND FALL

OF ‘KING COAL’
Coal as the central element of the first industrial revolution

Various inventions, most of them emerging from Great Britain during the 18th and early 19th centuries, made the transition possible from traditional small-scale patterns of use to the systematic exploitation of coal, a fossil fuel formed from plants in swamp ecosystems during geological times.

Early in the 18th century, Abraham Darby I from Coalbrookdale (Shropshire) developed a blast furnace using coke instead of charcoal to produce iron. In 1769 James Watt developed a steam engine making it possible to pump water out of mines, thus solving the major issue for underground mining. He then, in 1782, developed his famous double-action steam engine. In 1804, the American inventor Oliver Evans and the English mining engineer Richard Trevithick simultaneously invented the high-pressure steam locomotive; the first intercity railway line opened between Liverpool and Manchester in 1830.

Those technical developments made coal virtually unique as the source of heat and energy until the end of the 19th century, between the timber era and the age of oil and electricity. Industrial applications were numerous: coal gas provided urban lighting, industrial steam boilers provided the power necessary to operate factories, steam locomotives provided urban and rural transportation, coal provided domestic heating. In 1900, coal accounted for 90% of the world's primary energy.
Britain benefited not only from domestic inventions but also from the availability of abundant coal. By 1800 Britain had also largely exhausted its timber resources because of demographic pressure and shipbuilding requirements. Britain, a green country known for meadows and forests, turned black: London and other big cities were soon besieged by fog consisting of mixed water vapour and coal dust.

Coal thus contributed decisively to the industrial revolution of which the United Kingdom was the cradle, and played a key role in the development of the country and the establishment of its comparative economic advantage. A powerful industry expanded the 19th century until by the early 20th century it was truly vast: the British production of coal jumped from 2.5 million tons (1700) to 10 million tons (1800), 73 million tons (1850) and 230 million tons at the beginning of the 20th century.

Coal was the “black gold” of the industry, the energy source on which the economy of the 19th century was based; according to the Victorian economist William Stanley Jevons, “Coal in truth stands not beside but entirely above all other commodities. It is the material energy of the country—the universal aid—the factor in everything we do. With coal almost any feat is possible or easy; without it we are thrown back into the laborious poverty of early times”. The mines and the iron and steel industry were the nerves of industry. The British mining industry also represented one of the most profitable sectors for British exports: 10% of French coal requirements in 1850 was imported from the United Kingdom. The French sociologist and historian André Siegfried was able to assert that: “in 1900, Great Britain, the block of coal, rules the world”.
Miners, icons of the working class

The prosperity of the coal industry resulted in huge manpower growth, with 216,000 miners in the mid-19th-century and nearly 800,000 in 1900. Coal would indeed remain consistently the most labour intensive industry of the energy sector and therefore the most socially sensitive one.

This helped to create a specific miners’ culture, which stemmed above all from the very nature of coal work: it was physically exhausting labour, a struggle between man and nature; the insulation of the miner from the outside world also generated specific patterns of group behaviour.

The threat of death was ever-present: instantaneous death from firedamp explosion, drowning from flooding in the mine or the slow death caused by lung disease. Any novelised account of coal work must include its fatal accidents which created de facto group solidarity. Furthermore, mine work showed significant similarities with military activity since it too simultaneously required strict discipline and autonomy. Solidarity was necessarily very strong between men whose fate was closely linked, from the coal face to the comprehensive logistical system necessary to coal extraction and miners’ safety.

Mine work and its dangers were restricted to men. The mining communities thus divided men from women, who daily awaited the return of their husbands or their sons from going the mine, while incarnating the centre of family life. Around this particular family structure lay the relative isolation of mining communities focused on the coal pit and largely cut off from the outside world.

The pit was hated for its harshness and its cruelty - most parents hoped that their sons would be able to escape it - but also worshipped: its
closure meant economic and social disaster since all social life revolved round it: grandfathers, fathers, brothers, sons worked, were working or would work in the mine. This situation gave powerful structure to the “miners’ culture” where myth and reality blended easily together.

The Western popular culture of the late 19th century and first half of the 20th century fully reflects this peculiarity of mining communities, with novels such as Emile Zola’s *Germinal* published in France in 1885 or *How Green Was My Valley*, by Richard Llewellyn, in 1939. This immense literary success became an instant Hollywood classic with the John Ford adaptation in 1941 which won both Best Film and Best Director Oscar awards that year.

The very nature of coal turned the miners into exceptional trade unionists, both disciplined and adaptable. But the miners played an even more important role in Britain in the structuring of the labour movement, via union action and political influence, than in any other Western country. Their influence on the trade union movement stemmed from their numbers in the working class and from the strength of their union organization: every miner was unionised and took part in recurrent industrial action.

As early as 1831 the miners were successful in leading a nationwide strike. The Miner’s Association of Great Britain and Ireland was created in 1842 with 70,000 members. In 1844 the Association launched a very tough strike which was very strong in Northern England and Scotland, but which ended without result after four months of action. In 1889, union initiatives led to the foundation of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), a federal structure gathering together the many unions marked by strong local identities and autonomy. Union action was critical in achieving social progress: the legal prohibition of underground work for women and boys under 10 (1842), the 8 hour working day (1908), the minimum wage (1912).
Union activity among the miners established the strikes at the peak of legendary moments in the struggle against the coal pit owners: there was no good fiction about miners without a strike, without industrial turmoil involving the police or the army, along with the other essential passage of a fatal underground accident in the mine. Indeed, the last involvement of the British Army in industrial conflict took place following a riot of striking miners in the Yorkshire village of Featherstone in 1893, with two dead casualties. Following this incident, public order and law enforcement was entrusted to the police force: Winston Churchill, then Home Secretary, earned lasting dislike in Wales after he sent the London Metropolitan police to control the Welsh miners' riots in Tonypandy in 1910. Gradually, however, violence was reduced in industrial conflicts: stone-throwing and rifle shots were progressively replaced by “push and shove” between miners and police officers.

1913: coal reaches its peak

1913 saw the apogee of British coal production, reaching a peak of 292 million tons which included 60 million tons for export markets. Coal was extracted by 1,400 independent producers working 2,000 pits. This is a British national record, since the output in other countries, particularly the United States and Germany, caught up with or even exceeded the British result. The British world market share fell from 55% in 1850 to 28% in 1913. Yet oil did little to reduce the pre-eminence of coal.

In 1913, Britain had 1.1 million miners, i.e. one British worker in 16. Their determination and organizational efficiency was admired by Lenin, who considered them the best organized workers in the world. The future Bolshevik leader was particularly impressed by the 1912 miners’ strike. Six weeks of strike action by the miners, the incarnation of the proletariat army,
bent the will of British coal owners and Government and achieved the introduction of a minimum wage.

The miners’ particular style of unionisation led the miners to be regarded as the élite of the working class movement, developing a sense of solidarity, or even perhaps of superiority - at least of differentiation from other elements of the trade union movement. The miners’ weight in the union movement was immense at this time: one British trade unionist out of five was a miner (800,000 miners out of four million trade union members). Never again would coal trade unionism manpower be so important in the British trade union movement. In addition, 1914 saw for the first time the constitution of the formidable “triple alliance” made up of miners, railwaymen and steel workers. Given the importance of coal, the steel and the railroads in the early 20th century, this natural alliance had the power to block all economic life and social.

The seventy years after 1913 were to demonstrate a deepening gap between the economic and social weight of British coal, in constant decline, and its political and symbolic weight, which remained very substantial until the 1984-5 miners’ strike.

THE PAINFUL AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR ONE

The British coal industry: from prosperity to deep trouble

The First World War, with its disastrously weakening consequences for all the great European powers, including “top dog” Britain, marked the brutal ending of a golden age. Britain suffered 950,000 fatal casualties, fewer than France and Germany, and was considerably weakened
and impoverished. Until 1929, 25% of total public expenditure went to cover US war debt repayments.

The pre-war economic balance was crushed, particularly with the decision in 1925 to take sterling back to parity with the pre-war gold exchange standard. This decision, harshly criticized by John Maynard Keynes, was intended to stop the progressive loss of London financial hegemony to the benefit of the United States and New York. The enduring overvaluation of sterling would bring about a lasting competitive loss for the British manufacturing sector.

Industrial relations were meanwhile increasingly strained because of more combative and more powerful trade unions. Strikes multiplied from 1919 until the 1926 general strike, with an explosion of working days lost because of strike: 35 million working days lost in 1919, 27 million in 1920, 86 million in 1921, and another 20 million in 1922. The country also faced mass unemployment. The total of jobless people in 1921 was 17%, and was still 10.4% even before the 1929 economic recession.

The wartime sufferings of the working class, the conjunction of insolent wealth for the few and deep poverty for the many, all created conditions for a political and social upheaval. The Conservative party governed the country for most of this time, but the Labour Party was the real dynamic political force, with social differences considered increasingly less acceptable. Abroad, the Russian Bolshevik revolution, during which King George V’s first cousin, Tsar Nicolas II, was slaughtered with all his family in Yekaterinburg, provoked a political radicalization between the extreme left and right wings, seeking either to speed up or, on the contrary, to crush any revolutionary move. The Communist party of Great Britain (CPGB) was created in 1920 under Lenin’s attentive eyes; its members immediately came under police surveillance.
More than any other sectors, British coal sector felt the effects of this economic and social crisis. The First World War had definitively broken the economic and social equilibrium of the past, in particular because the State was strongly involved in coalmining because of the war economy. Peace did nothing to restore former prosperity: British coalmining faced two brutal major blows: the end of coal's pre-eminence in energy and a major loss of economic competitiveness compared to other large coal producing countries. British coal exports were the first to be hit by this degradation.

Germany, mainly the Ruhr, now produced more coal than the United Kingdom and was a fierce competitor. Coal extraction was more concentrated and increasingly more modern: only 380 German companies against 300 large companies and 1,000 small ones in the United Kingdom. In 1929, only 28% of British coal was cut mechanically, against 91% in Germany, 78% in the United States and 72% in France. The strong sterling economic policy reduced even further the faltering competitiveness of the British coal sector.

Times of temporary recovery (the reconstruction boom of 1920-21, the French military occupation of the Ruhr in 1923) could not affect the hard times of an industry which was highly prosperous only ten years earlier. The British coal industry, now under permanent Government scrutiny, became the focus of permanent interaction between economic, social and political factors, a feature which was to last for seventy years, until the early 1990s.

*The 1926 general strike and its consequences*

The deterioration of the economic situation in the coal industry was particularly unfortunate in respect of the redoubtable miners' trade union organization: according to the Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin,
“there are three institutions you couldn’t possibly fight: the Vatican, the Treasury and the miners’ union”.

Miners and pit owners embarked on arm-wrestling in the early first 1920s, as soon as Government returned colliery management to the private sector following peace. To restore their margins, the owners wanted to lower wages and increase working hours, from the daily seven hours granted to the miners in 1919. This of course was unacceptable to the MFGB. A first general strike took place in 1921, during which the railwaymen and the steelmakers refused to go on solidarity strike on April 15th, 1921, Black Friday.

On July 31st, 1925, Red Friday, the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin agreed to grant a public subsidy for nine months, enabling some claims to be accommodated temporarily. At the same time he gave the Samuel commission time to report on wages and prospects in the mining sector.

By May 1926 no agreement was in view between owners and miners, who were galvanized by the MFGB general secretary Arthur J. Cook, a sympathizing Communist and author of the slogan “not a penny off the pay, not a minute off the day”. The trade union confederation, the TUC, then decided to launch a general strike in solidarity with the miners’ claims.

The right of the Conservative party and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill perceived political and insurrectional motives behind this strike. Launched on 3 April 1926, the general strike was clumsily managed and ended after nine days in total failure and unconditional capitulation by the trade unions. The strike did nothing to bring miners and owners closer together; internal dissensions within the trade union movement and the determination of Baldwin’s Conservative government led the TUC to recommend the end of the movement without any concession from the government. 160 million working days were lost in this episode, the only general strike in British history to date.
As Anne Perkins explains in her book *A Very British Strike*, an enormous gap was appearing between the hopes or fears of some - the beginning of an insurrectional movement aiming to overturn generally accepted ways and establishments - and the moderate behaviour of the vast majority of political leaders and trade-union members, all deeply attached to great political stability within the nation.

The fruitless conclusion of the General Strike did not interrupt the miners’ strike, which lasted for six months. During this time a separatist miner trade union emerged in Nottinghamshire with George Spencer as leader, which decided to resume work ahead of the other miners. The strike also ended in total failure: the miners had to accept lower wages and longer working hours. Coal production dropped from 247 to 128 million tons in one year.

After the strike

The Conservative government passed the Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act 1927 in response to the strike. It restricted the actions of trade unions, forbidding sympathy strikes, mass picketing and forbidding civil service unions from joining the TUC.

The strike of 1926 also initiated a first phase of reorganization in the coal sector, a direction taken after the decision in favour of the subsidy in 1925 and then of firmness in 1926. But this policy was no more successful than any others in achieving a real solution to the loss of competitiveness in British industry. Productivity increased by only 10% between 1913 and 1936, against 81% in the Ruhr, 50% in Belgium and 23% in France. The end of the 1930s saw, in addition to falling demand at home, the disappearance of export markets: production fell to approximately 200 million tons and exports fell to
one-third of 1913 levels. Miner manpower began to melt away, dropping from 1.1 million miners in the 1920s to 700,000 in 1940.

The political and social consequences of the General Strike of 1926 were also immense. It lay at the origin of the lasting feelings of guilt which the British trade union movement was to maintain in respect of the miners: the extraordinary surge of generosity of the workers in seeking to succeed in a claim without any benefit for themselves only partially balanced by the inadequacies of the TUC leadership, entrusted by the miners' trade union (MFGB) to negotiate with the government. Thousands of miners, convinced that they had been betrayed by the Labour Party as well as by the TUC, joined the Communist party, which went on to retain a major influence in the MFGB and then its successor the NUM, particularly in Wales and Scotland. The 1926 strike also provided powerful inspiration for certain activities at the time of the strikes of the 1970s and 1980: the charismatic and fiery speaker Arthur J. Cook in particular would be a source of inspiration for Arthur Scargill, the main actor on the miners' side in the conflict of 1984-1985.

The fiasco of 1926 was also a major episode in the history of the British Left, since it dealt a very severe blow to the political line of revolutionary trade unionism: the failure was largely attributed to the limitations of the strategy of direct action and worker control. Henceforward trade unionists and their political vehicle, the Labour party, would prefer a tactic of realism and reform successfully incarnated by Clement Attlee, who became leader of the Labour Party in 1935: after growing electoral successes in 1930s and participation in the government of national unity of Winston Churchill during the Second World War.

The Second World War also restored a centralized war economy organization with the creation of a ministry for Energy and Electricity in charge of a new rationalization of the coal industry. The path was clear for the
nationalization of coal mining, which had become a major claim of the trade union movement and the Labour party.

**THE SEARCH FOR CONSENSUS AFTER 1945**

*Clement Attlee and his social and egalitarian revolution*

In July 1945 the British chose to entrust the leadership of the country to the Labour party under Clement Attlee and for the first time in its history, the Labour party had an absolute majority in the Commons. The painful memory of the aftermath of the First World War, marked by the conjunction of massive unemployment and financial disparity between rich and poor seen as far too great, led the majority of the British to regard Labour as the most capable political instrument to direct the country after the return to peace. In the short run, the Conservative party was associated with unhappy memories of the inter-war period. Until the Thatcher era, the Tory leaders were to retain a certain feeling of guilt and of responsibility in relation to this time.

As Prime Minister, Clement Attlee implemented a radical reform program: nationalizations (Bank of England, coal, electricity, gas, railroads, iron and steel industry), economic policy of Keynesian inspiration aiming at full employment, higher taxation on high incomes and major inheritances, the introduction of a social welfare system designed to protect the British “from the cradle to the grave”. The 1927 Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act was also repealed.

It was in fact a revolution without warfare. “Within a limited number of years, he [Attlee] carried out all the great nationalizations, gave private wealth an almost
MRS. THATCHER & THE MINERS

mortg blow with tax reforms, and transformed the land of free trade, capitalist trusts, and endemic unemployment and slums, into the Statist citadel of labour regulation at well as the paragon country for reducing class distinction”, as a 1957 French book reported. This consensus would be lastingly accepted by the whole of the political community, and in particular the Conservative party, which returned to power in 1951 and remained there until 1964.

Nationalization of coal mining and the creation of the NUM

The coal sector was thus included in the vast programme of nationalizations under the Attlee government, and was taken over to constitute a government enterprise, the NCB (National Coal Board). New Year's Day 1947 saw the transfer of ownership to the NCB of 1,400 mine shafts, 225,000 acres of grounds, 85 brick factories, 55 coke ovens and 140,000 associated buildings and establishments (stores, hotels, dairies, swimming pools, etc.).

But the State was taking control of a sick industry, and the first years of the NCB were marked by many closures or amalgamations of small mines. The first years of public ownership did not bring any improvements in the fundamental economic problems of British coal: colliery productivity stagnated between 1940 and 1954, both because of low investment in the sector and because the trade union organizations resisted change. British production was therefore less and less competitive vis-à-vis coal available on the international markets.

The coal industry became accustomed to very substantial grants of public money to ensure its operations, and gradually moved away from the constraints of balanced management. The United Kingdom made no exception for its coal industry, in a tendency common to Germany, Belgium and France
which consisted of massive injections of public money. Continental coal industries were even less productive than those in Great Britain.

The MFGB had been unified since 1937, with the rehabilitation of the breakaway trade union under Spencer. At a reorganization conference in 1944 it became the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The newly formed union remained a federal structure consisting of 19 regional unions or professional areas, of which 14 were geographical and 5 were administrative bodies. The rate of unionization among the miners remained exceptionally high: 84% of them were members of the NUM in 1948, and in 1968 the figure would be 96%.

Among regional or professional unions the NUM was listed separately and remained clearly autonomous: separate finances, specific permanent officials and separate constitutions. Local cultures were very strong, and the leaders were always defined by their regional origin: Joe Gormley (Lancashire), Lawrence Daly and Mick McGahey (Scotland), Arthur Scargill (Yorkshire), Arthur Horner and Will Paynter (South Wales), Peter Heathfield (Derbyshire). The principal regional unions were Yorkshire (29% of the miners in 1984), Nottinghamshire (15%), the North-East (12%), South Wales (11%), Scotland and the Midlands (7% each).

The 1944 constitution emerged from a compromise between the various sensitivities of the NUM and largely took account of the painful experiment of 1926. This was particularly true of the arrangements relating to a nation-wide strike, the calling of which, constitutionally, required the organization of a poll and a two-thirds majority vote: taking memories of the 1926 ill-fated strike into consideration, a large majority was considered necessary to adopt such a serious decision.

The internal political life of the NUM was marked by the permanent debate between a moderate right wing and a militant left wing. The
trade-union line followed the majority line within the Labour party with discipline, which it shared many leaders, the best example being Joe Gormley. One of its great victories was the nationalization of coal mining and the creation of the NCB in 1947. This represented a traditional trade unionism, accepting compromise based on claims over category distinctions. With a strong anticommunist stance, it fundamentally rejected the use of strikes as an instrument of political change. The regional unions of Nottinghamshire, Lancashire and the Midlands belonged to the right wing, as did Yorkshire until the end of the 1960s.

The left wing of the NUM, much more assertive, was closely linked to the Communist party since its creation in 1920 and especially the strike of 1926. The miners’ trade union was the focus of by far the greatest influence of Communists or ex-Communists, particularly in Scotland and Wales: Communists or former Communists were always present among the leading authorities of the NUM, such as the Welsh general secretaries Arthur Horner (1946-1958) and Will Paynter (1959-1969). These leaders were hung to the respect of trade union discipline and therefore of a right wing leadership. Arthur Scargill would later explain that he had suffered victimisation from the right wing in Yorkshire during his early years of militancy.

The demographic importance of the NUM endured and maintained the political weight of the miners within the Labour party. More than half of the votes in Congress in the 1950s depended on three right-wing trade unions, including the NUM.

Dark days for coal

From 90% of primary energy in 1900, coal dropped to 60% in 1950 and 50% in 1960. The growth of production had already dropped by half
in the first half of the 20th century compared to the 19th century. After a temporary boom related to reconstruction in the 1950s, world coal production stagnated, with an annual increase of only 0.9% from 1960 to 1973.

The blessed times of coal as the black gold of industry were long past. Several great traditional outlets of coal disappeared (gas for domestic use, energy in the factories, individual heating, steam locomotives) and alarming competitors appeared: hydrocarbons, then nuclear energy for the production of electricity. In short, mining industry was rendered more or less obsolete by technological advances and the increasing use of other energy sources.

The share of coal in global primary energy dropped by half in thirteen years, from 50% to 24% between 1960 and 1973. The highly competitive price of oil was the principal threat, as Joe Gormley said: “The problem was very simple. Oil. Cheap oil. Lots of cheap oil. Oil giving industry cheaper energy than we could afford to supply. Not surprisingly, industry started converting to oil, and doing so with the government’s blessing.” Both Prime Minister Harold Wilson and the Energy Secretary were convinced of the superiority of nuclear energy and fuel. But, unlike France, the United Kingdom would never make the deliberate choice in favour of nuclear power: it would have to wait until 1990 for nuclear energy to exceed the threshold of 20% of total British electricity produced, whereas by then it had already reached more than 80% in France.

British production, stabilized since the 1930s at over 200 million tons, started to fall again from 1957 and dropped by a third in fifteen years (132 million tons in 1973). The investments of the NCB modernizing mechanization also contributed to the extent of the reorganizations: in a single decade, the NCB reduced its manpower by 600,000 to 230,000, in other words by nearly two-thirds, and closed 487 mine shafts.

The very significant reduction in manpower was carried out by the former Labour Member of Parliament Alfred Robens, who became president
of the NCB in 1960. The strong economic situation of the economy and employment in the decade 1950-1960 made it possible to absorb such a fall, which was also helped by a favourable population pyramid accompanied by an economic policy of revitalization and regional development.

Moreover, the leadership of the NUM had no wish to call into question the economic viability of the NCB as a national company. The trade union thus observed the enormous contraction of its industry: "When my term of office started, there were 583,000 people on the colliery books; when it ended, only 283,000… Without the undertaking and cooperation of the unions and the men themselves, this task could never have been accomplished 17."

Two outlets become strategic for coal: electrical production, which consumed two-thirds of the extracted coal, and the iron and steel industry. Electricity is "coal on wire", in the words of Joe Gormley. In 1970, 80% of the British production of electricity would depend on coal.

**TENSIONS ESCALATE FROM THE 1960s**

The spectrum of decline in Britain

Clement Attlee's legacy was respected by his Conservative (Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home) and Labour (Harold Wilson) successors, but was however safeguarded in an environment of increasing doubts over the international and economic status of the United Kingdom. More than ten years after the return of peace, British leaders could note with bitterness the final disappearance of Britain’s long-established standing as 'top dog' in the Western world, not least when Margaret
Thatcher at the age of 34 became the elected Member of Parliament for Finchley in the northern suburbs of London.

In the 1960s the German press introduced “the English disease”, (die englische Krankheit), and many now termed Britain “the sick man of Europe”. This term, applied during the 19th century to the Ottoman Empire, a British client, was now applied humiliatingly to the United Kingdom. The writings of François Bédarida in 1976 on the United Kingdom reflected the friendly condescension aroused by the end of the British exception: “Is it necessary to despair? And to declare ‘endgame’ by declaring as irremediable the decline of a nation whose glory would henceforward belong only to the past? [...] They are indeed now not different from the common fate, levelled out at a sound European average [...]. England has definitively ceased to shine proudly at the forefront of all nations. But it is up to the English people to go on being a great nation”18.

In 1914, the Union Jack flew over 19 of the 135 million square kilometres of the world's dry land. Almost all this power had disappeared by the beginning of the 1960s. It was time to mourn for the empire and its long uncontested status as great power and world leader. The same questions emerged at the same time in France, as expressed so picturesquely by Général de Gaulle: “It is completely natural that nostalgia be felt about the Empire as it used to be, just as one can romantically regret the passing of the soft light of oil lamps, the splendour of the navy, the charm of carriages. But there it is! Politics are worth nothing without realities”19.

The British decolonization certainly avoided the French dramas in Indo-China and especially in Algeria, at least in the field of internal policy, but the alarm bells were was no less painful. The miscalculations of the Franco-British military operation in Suez in 1956 rang the knell of the last illusions of power and were the start of a cruel national awakening: from now on the United Kingdom was no more than just another medium-size power - a kind
of new Netherlands - placed under the guardian wing of its American big brother.

Great Britain, cradle of the Industrial Revolution and in a completely dominant economic position around 1860, now underwent the rapid loss of its economic dominance in the developed world. Economic advances in other countries gradually overtook the English lead. From the leading world rank in per capita production in 1850, the United Kingdom was overtaken by the United States about 1880, Sweden between the two world wars, France and Western Germany in the 1960s, finally by Japan and Italy in the 1970s.

The erosion of the British economic situation indeed continued and even accelerated in the 1960s, at the moment when the three large continental countries of Western Europe - Germany, France and Italy – enjoyed a rapid economic expansion which ensured prosperity and substantial improvement in the general standard of living.

GDP annual growth rate 1960-1973 (source: OECD)

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<th>USA</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>West Germany</th>
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<th>United Kingdom</th>
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<tr>
<td>1960-1968</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968-1973</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
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In 1961 Britain's gross national product accounted for 26% of the GNP of Europe of the Nine\(^2\), but only 19% in 1973 and 16% in 1975: in fourteen years, British wealth diminished by almost 40% in relative terms. In the same way, per capita GNP was twice the average of Europe of the Six\(^2\) in 1950: by 1974 it represented no more that 63%, a reduction of two thirds in relative terms. The British performance was in particular very poor compared
to that of France, which between 1960 and 1973 enjoyed an average annual growth of 5.4% in its gross industrial product and was observed at the time with envy by the British.

The share of British manufactured goods in world trade followed the same trend: 43% in 1880, 28.8% in 1929, 14% in 1964 and 9.3% in 1979. The undisguised retreat on the industrial front, however, was partially balanced by the development, dating from the late 19th century, of a powerful financial industry in City, without any pre-1914 equivalent. In the 1960s, slackness in the industrial sector had no effect on the prosperity of the City, which was particularly striking between 1957 and 1979 thanks to the European currency market.

Since the post-war period, the intellectual framework of reference for economic matters was Keynesian. Post-1960 economic policies emphasised the response through demand adjustment in the business cycle, to the detriment of structural reforms, summarized under the reference to the 'stop-go' handling of budgetary and tax instruments in periods of both peaks and hollows in the economic situation.

Another constant of economic policy lay in the use of the incomes policy to fight inflation, namely the structuring of advances in the pay-scales negotiated with trade union organizations, including periods of wage-freeze. This policy, initiated in 1948, was to be implemented systematically by all the governments from the beginning of 1960 until 1979.

The industrial economy, with broad sectors nationalized, underwent increasing problems of competitiveness, and the British 'nanny state' frequently intervened to prevent the collapse of whole industrial sectors, through nationalization or by providing public subsidies.
The Labour party, which returned to power in 1964 on the basis of a modernization programme focused on social policy (the suppression of capital punishment, the legalization of homosexuality, abortion and divorce), made no significant change in the economic policy framework. Harold Wilson was a pragmatist, preferring a technocratic and moderate approach. He was proud of his own ignorance of Marxist theories and explained that modern Britain problems could not be resolved by the theories of someone lying dead in Highgate Cemetery. On the other hand he was deeply impressed by the success of the French model of forward planning, and set up a national plan aimed at reaching an annual economic growth rate of 4%, a goal which would never be achieved.

The radicalisation of part of the British left wing

The technocratic mandate of Harold Wilson, without real ideological content, brought criticism from the Left within the Labour party. The main reproaches of this Left of the Left related to the absence of a strong condemnation of the American intervention in Vietnam, wage-freezes within the incomes policy framework and British attempts to join the European Economic Community.

A comparable pattern of development took shape within the trade union organizations which, essentially, followed a legalistic line in relation to the Labour Party since the strike of 1926 and even more since 1945. This line would gradually be called into question during the 1960s as the various Lefts formed alliances, in particular the left of the Labour party with the Communist party. This last, with the exceptional industrial organizer Bert Ramelson as its leader, expanded its influence by facilitating the election of trade union leaders who enjoyed his support, whether or not they were Communist. This made
possible the arrival of the “terrible twins”, Jack Jones as General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers’ Union (TGWU) and Hugh Scanlon as President of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), and their millions of members at the end of the 1960s. This trade unionism was not notably interested in the search for compromise, being more autonomous and much more aggressive. A minority of the extreme Left also appeared among the leading authorities of the TUC.

The evolution towards activism was particularly notable for the British miners, and was explained by several factors. The first relates to restructuring within the NCB. The fact that they were carried through without major social clashes was not without setting up future resentment: in the single year of 1968, 55 mining sites were closed and 55,000 jobs were eliminated.

Another factor of the shift evolution of the NUM towards the Left was the installation in 1966 of a system of national settlement of miners’ wage-rates, the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA), instead of local salary negotiations. This was the result of a technocratic and productivity-related project, dating back twenty years, which was designed to give the management greater capacity in the organization of work, hitherto the origin of most conflicts. The reform would completely miss its goal and was to contribute massively to the creation of a national claim by the NUM on pay questions.

“Curiously, the NPLA was a three time loser: first, because (...) national productivity immediately declined; second, because (...) the politics of productivity at the coal face shattered the national design of the agreement; and third, because industrial conflict which had previously been decentralized and uncoordinated now erupted in national confrontations with strong class overtones.”

The Yorkshire area of the NUM, the largest in terms of manpower, also evolved towards the Left. According to the Communist organizer Bert Ramelson, “it was Yorkshire which made the NUM a right wing and
reactionary trade union. To change the central national management of the NUM, it was first necessary to change Yorkshire”. For this purpose its delegate since 1953 had been Frank Watters, at a time when all in all the county had one hundred Communist militants. Frank Watters ‘discovered’ Arthur Scargill and helped to tip the NUM leadership in the Yorkshire area to the left: “There can never be any doubt that it was the Communist party that mainly made the challenge to the right-wing machine in Yorkshire and nationally.” Activism on the left tried to be better organized in order to defy the NUM rightwing leadership and began to achieve some important successes: the first was the election in 1968 of Lawrence Daly as General Secretary, beating the moderate Joe Gormley.

The turning point for the NUM came in October 1969, “the October revolution”, when young militant miners, including the 31-year-old Arthur Scargill, launched a wild-cat strike which expanded beyond Yorkshire and spread nationally until it involved more than 130,000 miners and 140 collieries. For the first time, the semi-paramilitary tactics of flying pickets came into use: cars or minibuses transported hundreds of motivated and disciplined militant strikers to pits where strike pickets were needed, and some incidents of violent confrontation were seen with employees unfavourable to strike action. These were the first steps towards the large-scale actions of 1972.

The strike ended after two weeks, at the request of the NUM national leadership, because the action had achieved total NCB acceptance of the wage demands and a massive vote from the militants in favour of a return to work. The militant spirit was greatly strengthened by this experiment: for the miners, still marked by the terrible failure of 1926, the strike became once more an effective instrument in making claims. In 1975 Arthur Scargill would be able to declare: “69 was responsible for producing all the victories that were to come.”
The hardening of the Left emerged at the point when strikes and the trade union movement was becoming a major long-term political concern. In 1959, Peter Sellers starred in the enormously popular film *I'm all right Jack*, as an unbending trade union shop steward contemplating a small portrait of Lenin on his mantelpiece at home, and doing his best to limit output and encourage militancy at work. The 1960s saw an emerging awareness that the trade unions had too much power; this would remain the case until the mid-1980s.

The social history of the cradle nation of the Industrial Revolution was indeed one of great conflict throughout the 20th century. The end of the First World War witnessed a proliferation of strikes, reaching its peak with the general strike of 1926. The situation became somewhat calmer after 1945, but the post-war governments found themselves facing increasingly obstructive strikes. In 1948 Clement Attlee had to face a nationwide dockers’ strike, during which he declared that “this strike is not a strike against capitalists and employers. It is a strike against the ordinary common people who have difficulties enough to manage on their shilling’s worth of meat and the other rationed commodities.”

From 1964 onwards, strikes become a difficult question for all governments, whatever their political affiliation. In 1966 Harold Wilson declared during the strike of members of the National Union of Seamen (NUS) that it was “a strike against the State, against the community” and angrily denounced NUS leaders in Parliament as “a tight-knit set of politically-motivated men” pursuing the aims of Moscow rather than the wishes of their members.

The strike came to be used systematically as an instrument of pressure in collective bargaining, from the end of 1950 until the beginning of 1980. The particular problem was that of unofficial strikes (described as...
unofficial or wildcat), namely strikes which were not subject to a trade union vote, as envisaged in the majority of trade union constitutions. The British legal context at the time was extremely protective towards trade unions and strike organizers, whether or not they were official: the Trade Disputes Act of 1906, the founding text, defined the reasons for industrial disputes in an extraordinarily general way and gave the trade unions total civil and criminal legal immunity against damage and the factual consequences of a strike. It was the golden rule, according to which actions “in the continuance of an industrial dispute” were not subject to civil or criminal trade union responsibility. Such immunity privileges were unparalleled in the United Kingdom, even for the Crown.

Additionally the British began to develop an ambivalent attitude towards the trade unions. On the one hand, increasing numbers joined trade unions: the total membership of 10 million was exceeded in the 1960s, reaching the record total of 13 million at the end of the 1970s. On the other hand, the question of excessive union powers was clearly raised: in 1964 62.4% of the British considered that the trade unions had too much power, rising to 73.1% in 1970.

The framework for trade union power became a front-line political concern for Harold Wilson; all his successors in Downing Street until Margaret Thatcher would have to live with this problem, with varying results.

The Wilson government was thus the first to enter the arena. A royal commission, under the direction of Lord Donovan, was charged in 1965 to study the operation of the trade unions and employers' associations. The report submitted in June 1968 recommended a major rationalization of collective bargaining and the legal obligation to record collective agreements for companies and sectors of a certain size.
Following the Donovan commission; Employment Secretary Barbara Castle published in January 1969 the White Paper *In Place of Strife*. Its proposals were designed to reinforce the Employment Department’s arbitration powers during a dispute, the capacity to impose a twenty-eight day conciliation period and to call a secret ballot vote in the event of a threat of official strike. Trade union organizations and their members were required to respect the prerogatives of the Employment Secretary under penalty of sanctions.

The report, which was endorsed by Prime Minister Harold Wilson, was nothing less than revolutionary: a Labour government was indeed proposing to restrict militants and the trade union organizations without which the party in power would not exist. *In Place of Strife* provoked a very serious crisis between the Government and the trade unions, which were totally antagonistic. Opposition to the project mobilized the entire left wing of the trade union movement, which was growing strongly. For this purpose Bert Ramelson created a liaison committee for the defence of the trade unions. Neither Barbara Castle nor Harold Wilson had anticipated the extent of the opposition.

Confrontation was no less strong even inside the Labour party. The crisis, on a scale unknown since the formation in 1931 of Ramsay MacDonald's National government, shook the party and set Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Employment Secretary Barbara. Castle on one side and the Home Secretary James Callaghan, who was opposed to any legislative interference in the operation of the trade unions or to sanctions relating to them, on the other.

After six months of incidents of varying disorder, the proposals relating to the powers of strike regulation were abandoned. Harold Wilson regretfully brought the crisis to an end by obtaining the TUC's solemn
undertaking to oppose wildcat strikes, although it was clear that the TUC had neither will nor means of enforcing such a promise. Conservative James Prior considered that his party then made a major tactical error in failing to support Barbara Castle’s proposals: “We should have realized that the prize of a united approach would have done wonders for the country and still left the Labour party seething with discontent.” The Labour Party was thus able to avoid the worst outcome.

The trade union organizations were opposed to any reform, paving the way to Margaret Thatcher’s resolute actions ten years later. James Callaghan, who had contributed earlier in his career to the creation of a unified tax trade union, would always prefer the principle of internal self-regulation of the trade unions, but this would never come to pass. As he regretted in his memoirs, “The unions were blameworthy for failing, despite Barbara Castle’s warning, to make their own programme of reforms effective. In 1969, they still had the opportunity to demonstrate that autonomous self-governing institutions could respond to adverse public opinion and reform themselves. They failed to do so and this, coupled with the excesses of some activists in the 1970s, led inexorably to the Parliamentary legislation and the intervention by the courts in their affairs, a development I had always resisted.”

The unexpected Conservative victory of June 1970

Within Edward Heath's shadow cabinet the Conservatives naturally had their own ideas on union powers. The approach they adopted appeared in the document _A Fair Deal at Work_, written mostly by Conservative lawyers, although they had shown no support for the Labour government over the passage in _In Place of Strife_. It should be noted however that this work was not the subject of detailed consultation with the trade union or employers' organizations.
Even without completely assuming the stance in public, the Conservative party wished to rebalance the power balance between employers and employees. Conservative leaders considered that the proposed legal approach would have no chance of winning the support of the trade union organizations, but would not generate their head-on opposition. Yet this assumption was never tested or justified, since virtually no-one in the party leadership, apart from Robert Carr, had real knowledge of the union world.

Harold Wilson seized a temporary improvement in public opinion towards the Labour Government to dissolve the House of Commons and to call General Elections for June 1970. Most commentators anticipated a renewed Labour majority.

Although the Conservative party had been seen as the losers a few months before the election, it none the less won by a significant margin (46.4% of the votes cast against 43.1% for the outgoing Labour party), which ensured it a comfortable parliamentary majority (330 seats against 287 for the Labour Party) and gave real authority to Edward Heath. He had been able to lead his party to victory despite difficult political circumstances. Margaret Thatcher entered the Cabinet as Education Secretary.

The defeat was a cruel shock for the Labour party, who for a long time had been leading in public opinion surveys. It is clear that the bitter confrontation on the left over reform of trade union law weighed heavily on the final result of the poll, and Harold Wilson was to some extent the first Prime Minister to lose power over the union question. He was not to be the last.

It was the Conservatives' moment, won on the basis of the extremely detailed manifesto *A Better Tomorrow*, which took account of national economic difficulties and openly moved away from the 1945 consensus. The manifesto wanted to turn its back on economic theories accepted since 1945
by restricting trade union powers, reducing State intervention, lowering taxes and public expenditure, increasing competition to stimulate growth and targeting welfare expenditure. Nothing remained but to implement this ambitious and detailed program.
CRYSTALLIZATION OF CONFLICT

Implementing the 1970 liberal Conservative programme

Edward Heath was thus elected in 1970 with a programme which for the first time broke with the post-war consensus: “In the different, more confident atmosphere of 1970, the way was clear in Mr. Heath’s mind for a reforming Conservative Government. This Government should resolve to do in the 1970s what Peel had tried to do in the 1840s and Pitt in the 1780s. Those great Prime Ministers had shown that the aim of Conservative reform was not to enlarge the power of the state. It was to sweep away what was antiquated and inefficient in our public institutions, and create a new framework within which the individual could take his own responsibilities and create his own prosperity,” as Douglas Hurd, Heath’s political adviser, indicates. In particular the Conservative programme broke with the incomes policy: “We absolutely reject any compulsory wage policy”, even though the State retained a directing role in setting wages because of the importance of the public sector.

Early measures confirmed this liberal line: the first budget announced reduced taxes and less public expenditure. The government committed itself not to help unprofitable state owned enterprises, or private ones in difficulty, as it had been undertaken since the end of the war. This last point quickly accepted exceptions, with the February 1971 decision to nationalize Rolls Royce, the aircraft engine manufacturer which was then in considerable trouble.

The trade unions question was another major political priority. The Queen’s Speech at the opening of the parliamentary session on July 2nd,
1970, set the drafting and rapid promulgation of a national industrial relations Act at the forefront of the government's main priorities.

Parliament would legislate on trade unions and strikes for the first time since 1927. The Heath government, extremely conscious of its comfortable parliamentary majority, despised trade union opposition even though they had caused the very serious 1969 crisis within the Labour party.

The text instituted administrative oversight of trade union organizations via their legal registration. It laid down immunities for union representatives and reinforced sanctions against any individual responsible for a wildcat strike, with the creation of a specific jurisdiction (National Industrial Relations Court, NIRC) with the power to impose criminal sanctions. It opened the possibility for the State and the government to take part in collective bargaining via State approval of all collective agreements, rather as in France; it enabled the state to intervene directly in important conflicts by imposing a sixty-day period of conciliation without strike (the cooling off period) or by calling a ballot on a proposal to terminate the conflict.

The new law (the Industrial Relations Act 1971) was deeply innovative in terms of British legal traditions, establishing partial nationalization of industrial relations through the quasi-mandatory registration of trade unions and the State capacity to become involved in the resolution of industrial disputes.

Confronting with the trade union organizations

The bill was very coolly received by trade union organizations. Geoffrey Howe, one of the creators of its text, considers that it was immediately opposed by the “terrible twins” of the trade union movement Jack Jones (TGWU) and Hugh Scanlon (AUEW), who “were determined to exert again
the political muscle that had humbled Wilson and Barbara Castle, to inflict a similar defeat on Heath and Carr.39*

Opposition to the law became the great business of the TUC. This took the form of communication campaigns, days of mobilization (gathering 1.75 million employees on March 2nd 1971), the obligation imposed on affiliated trade unions to have themselves removed from public registers under penalty of exclusion from the TUC only a month after the law was promulgated in the summer of 1971. Union lawyers indeed found that this was the solution to remove any practical effect from a text that had become a focal point for grievances.

Worse, the life of the Heath government was permanently poisoned by multiple strikes. The very first meeting of the new government, on June 23rd, 1970, was held under the threat of a dockers’ strike; it began the following month and was to require a first state of emergency.

Edward Heath was the involuntary witness of a relentless deterioration in industrial relations. Working days lost through strikes multiplied by nine between 1967 (2.8 million days lost) and 1972 (24 million). On average, more than 10 million working days were lost during his years in government, a level unknown since the end of the First World War. Four times more working days were lost because of strikes than in France or other continental Europe countries.

The disputes were continuous and multiple: dockers, electricity workers, printers, car industry. This is when the solid myth of the Communist seizure of the unions was born, and through them the seizure of British political and social life: “The notion that during the 1970s, powerful trade unions pulled the government’s strings and that the Communist Party’s industrial organizer Bert Ramelson pulled the unions’ strings is of course a well-worn myth.”40*
The attractiveness and external image of the United Kingdom were deeply affected. When he lunched with Edward Heath on March 15th, 1971, Henry Ford II, whose European factories were mainly British, warned the Prime Minister that Ford would not invest in the United Kingdom any more if matters continued in their current state. Industrial disputes became the worst symptom of the “English disease” and also deeply upset back-bench Conservative Members of Parliament, who noted with bitterness the impotence of the government.

During the three years and half of his mandate, Edward Heath would have to declare a state of emergency no less than five times to mitigate the consequences of the strikes on the daily life of the British: two miners’ strikes, two dockers’ strikes, one electricians’ strike. But the fact of having to deal with the unpleasantness suffered by the population was not the only reason which led to governmental implication in the disputes.

The size of the public sector led the government to play the part of State owner in relation to significant pay demands. Douglas Hurd painfully
recalls out the position of ministers in managing public sector pay rises: “In our experience, the negotiating habits of the different nationalized industries were much the same. They worked out roughly how much they could offer their employees within the Government’s current pay policy. They then offered this amount at one go to the union. If enquiries were made at this early stage by Ministers, they would explain that this was a subtle tactic. They were dazzling the union with their generosity; they were making an offer that could not be refused. The offer was of course promptly refused. Accustomed to negotiation, the union denounced the first offer as an insult, and began to talk of industrial action. At this stage Ministers would be alerted. But already they were faced with the choice between a poor settlement and a terrible one. Increasingly, but too late, they were drawn into playing their hand, a job for which they had few qualifications.”

Genesis of the miner’s dispute

Conflict between the government and the miners was thus born in an overheated social environment. The political balance inside the NUM had continued to move to the left since the late 1960s. The impact of the movement in 1969 was still clearly visible at the time of the NUM Congress of 1970, which changed the trade union constitution by lowering to 55% (instead of two thirds) the majority necessary to start a national strike. In addition the national executive committee aligned itself with claims from the left, consisting of very significant pay rises which lay at the origin of a new wildcat strike movement.

The moderate and pragmatic Joe Gormley was elected president in July 1971, the crowning moment of a double career within the NUM and the Labour party. The fairly clear-cut defeat of the Communist Mick McGahey did not mean the retreat of the left within the NUM, but was due rather to the unwritten rules regulating the balance of power within the NUM leadership.
From now on, national mobilization was thought possible. For the assertive left wing of the NUM, these were the first results of a patient and applied effort to organize a nation-wide strike, which had been never attempted since the terrible disillusionment of 1926. All the work-related changes since the 1960s made it possible to reach this situation: increasing exasperation succeeding the passivity of the NUM rightwing leadership in relation to the 1960s coal industry restructuring, the national centralization of pay negotiations, the relative success of wildcat strike movements in the late 1960s. But this evolution occurred without challenging the trade-union unity, which was now represented by President Joe Gormley and Secretary General Lawrence Daly acting together.

The chosen battlefield was that of pay. The NUM made its calculations and considered that it had a solid case with the accumulated arrears in miners' wages purchasing power: according to NUM data, the cash wages of the miners increased by 164% from 1951 to 1971 compared with 218% in industry as a whole. Miners' wages, 10% higher than the average manual worker's pay in 1960 were now 3% lower than the average.

The annual NUM convention in 1971 demanded a complete correction of the slippage, that is to say increases of 16% to 47% depending on skills, with an average of 27%. The wage discussions with the new chairman of the NCB, Derek Ezra, began in July. They quickly became a dialogue of the deaf, since the NCB wished to respect the national instruction given on pay rises in state enterprises (8%) and initially offered only 7%.

Joe Gormley and Lawrence Daly wanted to see the NUM taking a unified line. This point was reached when in mid-October the NUM executive achieved a unanimous vote - a very rare event in the history of the NUM - on strategy relating to the NCB and the government. Joe Gormley reported these remarks in his memories - written in 1982, before the 1984-5 strike: “In the light
of the interference by the government, in the light of the impossibility to negotiate, we’ve got to be completely united. If you go into a battle divided, you’ve lost. And if you go into a battle, you’ve got to go under the assumption that you’re going to win. You can’t go into a battle thinking that you might win. The topic of wages ensured very strong cohesion between the pragmatic objectives of Joe Gormley and other moderates, and more politically driven objectives of the NUM left.

On October 21st, the NUM leadership held a Special Conference at Congress House, the TUC headquarters. Lawrence Daly summed up his speech: “We have all to remember that the entire trade union movement has its eyes on the miners today. We are in the vanguard, because a whole number of other unions, large and small, are awaiting the outcome of the miners’ struggle and the miners’ settlement, because they know that if we cannot break through Conservative wages policy, they may be left to be isolated and beaten down as the postal workers were earlier this year.”

Joe Gormley paid special attention to the energy and power trade unions and concluded an alliance with them built around a common claim for an integrated and balanced energy policy. He understood that this agreement could constitute the most powerful tool ever deployed by the miners, a modern equivalent of the early 20th century “triple alliance” between miners, railwaymen and steelworkers.

The intensification in the power struggle between the NUM and the NCB continued as the executive committee of the NUM decided in November 1971 on an overtime ban. This decision made it possible to show the determination of the NUM towards the NCB and the government while immediately reducing coal output by 15%.

The two months of the overtime ban reduced the coal stocks required for electricity production. Stocks available in the power stations represented eleven weeks of production at the beginning of November 1971 when the overtime ban began, and were reduced by a quarter during the two
months which preceded the launching of the nation-wide strike. No more than eight weeks' supply for electricity production was in stock when the general strike began at the beginning of January.

An additional stage in the escalation was reached when, in accordance with its constitution, the NUM called a ballot on the NCB wage offer, with the launch of a nation-wide strike in the event of the offer being rejected. 247,392 miners (86%) took part in this ballot in late November, the outcome of which was considered far from obvious. The results were announced on 2\textsuperscript{nd} December: rejection of the wage settlement won 58.8\% of the votes, a small margin over the statutory majority of 55\%. The strike would not have been possible if the two-thirds majority prior to the reform of 1970 had been maintained.

But for the first time since 1926 the core membership had declared its solid backing for the principle of a nation-wide strike. The executive committee of the NUM fixed the launching of the nation-wide strike for January 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1972, in support of the pay demands. The wage discussions between the NCB and the NUM continued until January 5\textsuperscript{th}, but without coming to any concrete result. At the beginning of January, therefore, the active phase of the strike began.

It led to 280,000 miners stopping work and the closing of all the 289 British collieries. At the beginning of the strike, the miners' chances of success seemed quite slight, as explained by \textit{Le Monde}'s London correspondent in an article, dated 11 January 11, 1972, entitled “The miners' strike puts trade union solidarity under strain”.

“The national coal strike - the first since 1926 - could not begin under worse conditions for the miners. Coal stocks have reached an historic peak level ready to meet exceptional circumstances [...]. The key coal users, in particular the electrical and steel industries, can easily bear eight weeks of strike. It is difficult to understand why, after
hesitation and a decision taken by a tight 58.8% majority (below 55%, a national strike could not have been called), the NUM is engaging in a battle with little chance of success.”

The power of the NUM, which from now on represented on less than 3% of the total of trade unionists, was largely discredited. The miners were no longer the terrible warriors of the proletariat who had impressed Lenin at the beginning of the century. In the 1950s and 1960s the NUM had endorsed without protest the massive reorganizations of the coal industry, and had neither been able to preserve the miners’ rank in the wages hierarchy nor organized a nation-wide strike for nearly half a century.

The government paid little further attention to the movement. It did not, for example, ask for the period of conciliation without strike which the new law allowed for industrial relations. Further, the principal nation-wide strike of 1971, that of Post Office employees, had ended without success for their trade union. Firmness thus seemed to be the governmental strategy best adapted to the situation.

THE 1972 BLITZKRIEG STRIKE

Effectiveness of NUM militant action and inter-union solidarity

The national nature of the strike, solid in both moderate and very militant areas, eliminated the need for pickets at mining sites and made it possible to mobilize the militants for other objectives. The most militant unions of the NUM and its regions (Yorkshire, South Wales, and Scotland) immediately implemented the flying pickets system, which had been tested at the time of the wildcat strikes of 1969, to stop all coal movements as fast as possible. The militants of the NUM, trained, paid46 and with precise mission
orders, were transported by minibus or cars to key points in order to block targeted sites, to prevent the movement of coal or other strategic products such as fuel for power stations. From the beginning of the strike the national management of the NUM coordinated units across the country to maximize the strike effect.

Arthur Scargill presented his vision of the 1972 events in his 1975 interview for the New Left Review, entitled *The new trade unionism*: “*We took the view that we were in a class war. We were not playing cricket on the village green, like they did in ’26. We were out to defeat Heath and Heath’s policies because we were fighting a government. Anyone who thinks otherwise was living in cloud-cuckoo land. We had to declare war on them and the only way you could declare war was to attack the vulnerable points. They were the points of energy: the power stations, the coke depots, the coal depots, the points of supply.*”

In less than a week, all movement of coal was stopped. Almost all the coal-fired power stations were blocked, with strike pickets of between 40 and 80 militants. The unbroken monitoring by NUM observers at all power stations, 24 hours a day, was complete by February 1st. There was at least one member of the NUM to constitute the picket line, which was generally well respected by other trade unionists. The extent and the effectiveness of the blockade controlled by the NUM strike pickets took the electricity operator (Central Electricity Generating Board, CEGB) completely by surprise.

The support of the trade union movement had been secured even before the launching of the strike. The NUM required neither financial support nor direct intervention from the TUC in the conflict, but merely asked for respect for the NUM pickets from affiliated trade unions. The TUC immediately passed a recommendation to this end. Joe Gormley moreover negotiated strategic support for the key sector trade unions: TGWU, NUR and
ASLEF for transport (dockers, truck drivers, railwaymen) and the electrical sector unions.

The government unprepared

During the launching of the strike, the government counted on being able to stand firm for at least eight weeks, but it was badly mistaken. Moreover, at the same time the Prime Minister had to deal with the calamitous Bloody Sunday crisis of January 30th, 1972 (thirteen people were killed by British Army bullets in Northern Ireland) and spent much energy and time on his own great business, Great Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community. The impact of the strike was much faster than the government had anticipated: the situation in the electrical industry deteriorated extremely quickly and in fact the battle was already virtually lost by the government three weeks after the conflict began.

The effective blockade of the coal-fired power stations was a total surprise. The result was the near-total interruption of deliveries of coal and other materials necessary for normal electricity production, such as fuel for lighting the power stations. As of January 19th, CEGB operators warned the Ministry for Industry that the longer rationing of electricity consumption was delayed, the more severe the rationing would be. The CEGB recommended restrictions as soon as possible. The government declared a State of Emergency on February 9th, one month to the day after the strike launch. It made it possible to organize the electricity rationing, in particular the introduction of the three-day week in industry and retail. The first cuts took place the next day, February 10th, for industrial users, when coal stocks available for electricity production already represented no more than seventeen days' consumption.
By February 14th, 800,000 people were on lay-off pay. The Minister for Industry, John Davies, informed the House of Commons that the CEGB had stocks for only two weeks at the current rate of consumption. After these two weeks, CEGB capacity would be no more than 20-5% of the normal load: quite simply there would be no more electricity for almost everyone, professionals or private individuals.

On Wednesday, February 16th (less than six weeks after the beginning of the conflict), it was the turn of the general public to suffer power cuts between 7am and midnight, by a rolling six or nine hours programme. The files for the same date show 1.2 million on lay-off pay. This situation remains permanently engraved in the memory of British people now aged over forty or over and more: several hours every day without electricity, with open fire heating for the lucky ones, and lighting by candle...

*Le Monde* of 18 February 1972 had an article headed “the brave subjects of King Coal”, describing the daily life of the ordinary British during the strike: “For commuters, the vast majority of the London workers, problems begin early in the morning. You have to get up in the dark and sometimes in the cold. It is then difficult to prepare a decent breakfast on a spirit lamp. Then you have to jump on to fewer and overcrowded trains. Those who choose to take their car face considerable delays due to exceptional congestion created by the lack of traffic signals and a record number of cars.

“Eventually arriving at their place of work, some will walk up the stairs to their office to avoid being trapped in blocked elevators. Authorities now give notice of power cuts by a siren signal. Work is more difficult: electric typewriters are unusable, calculating machines function only on manual mode, coats are kept on to avoid the cold while tea warms slowly on a spirit stove. Evening brings suburban train overcrowding again, before a walk in the dark: public lighting is off.”

The government also had to face an unprecedented situation regarding law and order. The massive use of flying pickets surprised and
disorientated the police, who faced difficult and ambiguous situations and decisions, as their directives and rules of engagement were not very clear. In addition, strike pickets were not covered by legislation, in particular the fact of organizing strike pickets at a location other than their own place of work (secondary picketing). The police forces, which had no units specialized in the maintenance of law and order were moreover badly prepared, under-equipped and at critical times available in fewer numbers than the trade-union activists. On occasions, to calm situations the police chiefs decided to close industrial sites to avoid disturbances of law and order\textsuperscript{48}. The police force did not succeed in interrupting the complete blockade of the power stations.

The NUM official position was to condemn all violence, with the aim of avoiding negative consequences on public opinion. Lawrence Daly sent a written memo to all areas under the heading “Peaceful Picketing”\textsuperscript{49}. These clear instructions generally resulted in outbreaks of traditional push and shove between police officers and pickets, but this did not prevent many incidents of intimidation and violence. Scuffles burst out around the power stations. However, on February 3\textsuperscript{rd}, the miner Fred Matthews met his death, crushed by a truck on a picket at the entrance to a power station.

The marked impotence of the police force was strongly symbolized on February 10\textsuperscript{th} by the total blocking of the Saltley coke depot near Birmingham. 15,000 demonstrators (members of the NUM regional unions in Yorkshire and South Wales, together with trade unionists of the TGWU and AUEW on sympathy strike) took part in the blockade. The 917 police officers present, swamped by greater numbers, exhausted, were overwhelmed. After several days of confrontation, the police chiefs decided to bring the stale-mate to an end and not to reopen Saltley in order to restore law and order and ensure the dispersal of the crowd. 30 people were wounded, including 16 police officers, and 76 people were arrested, including 61 miners.
The action was directed by a still unknown militant from the NUM Yorkshire area, Arthur Scargill, who immediately became a high-power media star. The battle of Saltley immediately acquired a special place in the Scargill epic, “a moment when the workers took the initiative and had a decisive influence on the course of the conflict”.

The event had a resounding media impact and appeared to be a major turning point in the 1972 strike. It indeed symbolized the deficiencies of a government and a State caught unawares. But the situation was especially untenable for the government because of the lack of coal stocks for electricity production and its inability to win any support from public opinion.

Communication strategies and the public attitude

The NUM was able to present solid claims on public opinion: low wages, democratic backing for the strike through the internal ballot, the support of the entire trade union movement. The focus on pay demands made it possible to evade criticism of political motivations for the strike. As for the occasionally violent confrontations between police officers and the militants of the NUM, they made contribution to the impression of general chaos which could be charged to a government unable to control the situation, and were not viewed as incidents for which the miners were solely responsible.

The position of the government was much less comfortable. Its inability to protect the general public from the direct consequences of the strike - multiple and generalized electricity cuts which literally put the country in the dark - and the laying-off of 1.5 million workers imposed a major share of responsibility on the government for in the vexations which the ordinary citizens had to face.
Strike-related damage did not stop the public tendency to favour the miners, who profited from a fairly positive image among the general public who acknowledged the difficulties and dangers associated with their trade. The public also recognised that miners' wages were poor: even the conservative newspaper *Daily Express* carried a front page headline at this time: “Give them the money”.

As to the attribution of responsibility for the dispute, a Gallup Poll of February 1974 gave an irrefutable answer. The British public sympathized almost three times as much with the miners (57%) as with the NCB (19%). Public opinion was mainly solidly behind the miners, even though the British disapproved, by 59%, of NUM methods. The Times summarized the situation thus: “In a war – which is what the miner’s dispute became - the active support of the community is critical. The government did not succeed in obtaining it, and that’s is why it lost; it must now reflect on whether it explained its case sufficiently, and then carry on the battle so that it could claim victory.”

*The end of the strike*

The government eventually and suddenly woke up to its desperate situation at the beginning of February. Douglas Hurd has explained that at this point the weeks of the 1972 miners’ dispute were the worst of all his experience as Edward Heath’s Political Secretary. The situation in the electrical sector had no visible way out. The police force had been overwhelmed. The National Industrial Relations Act, on which the greatest hopes were built, had brought no solution. The public opinion was unfavourable to the government, which in addition received no demonstration of support from the employers' associations. Douglas Hurd noted laconically in his diary on February 11th that “The Government now wandering vainly over the
battlefield looking for someone to surrender to – and being massacred all the time\textsuperscript{51}. The situation seemed unreal to him: the impression was that the government was suffering a terrible defeat without all its members being fully aware of it\textsuperscript{52}.

The miners were masters of the situation. The government had to accept almost unconditional surrender and compromise from a state of absolute weakness. On February 11\textsuperscript{th}, shortly after the closing of Saltley, the Employment Secretary, Robert Carr, set up an independent emergency commission on miners' wages with Lord Wilberforce in the chair\textsuperscript{53}. On the 17\textsuperscript{th}, the Minister of Industry, John Davies, announced on television that the nation's economy would come to a complete stop if the strike continued for a further ten days.

Working in record time, the Commission reported its conclusions on February 18\textsuperscript{th}, which were virtually a summary of the miners' claims. These conclusions were immediately accepted by the government: by this time only 2 million tons of coal remained available in the power stations, that is to say enough for nine days' consumption.

In a strong position, the NUM executive committee refused the conclusions and asked for even greater pay rises. The NUM added an additional list of non-wage claims, "a list as long as your arm", in the words of Joe Gormley as quoted by Margaret Thatcher\textsuperscript{54}. It was only after the personal intervention of the Prime Minister that, at one o'clock in the morning on the 19\textsuperscript{th}, the NUM accepted an agreement adding fifteen non-wage concessions to the wage package. Only the agreement by the NUM to end the strike on February 19\textsuperscript{th} and the withdrawal of the strike pickets made it possible to lift the siege of the power stations.

The euphoria was sky-high in the mining communities. On February 20\textsuperscript{th}, the miners carried Lawrence Daly in triumph through the streets of Mansfield, in Nottinghamshire. The strike pickets which had been blocking
the power stations were raised. The NUM had garnered more results in seven weeks than during all its industrial action in the past fifty years: the miners became the best paid industrial employees in the United Kingdom. The unhealed wound of 1926 was healed. On February 25th the miners voted the end of the strike in a festive atmosphere. On February 27th they were able to return victorious to the mines after an extraordinarily effective and inexpensive lightning strike. This short and joyful strike contrasted with the terrible war of attrition which would mark the strike of 1984-5.

According to testimony from the top executives of the electric operator CEGB, Frank Ledger and Howard Sallis, at the end of February 1972 the United Kingdom was literally on the edge of darkness: “on 18 February, the date on which the Wilberforce Report became available, the (coal stocks) figures had dropped calamitously to 2,080,000 tons, the equivalent of only nine average winter days’ supply. If the NUM had rejected the Coal Board’s offer a few days later, they would have had no difficulty in persuading their members to continue the strike. If those in power in the Union had been bent on bringing the government down and causing the imminent collapse of the country’s electricity supplies this probably would have been achieved.” Indeed, stocks in the power stations were almost nil when work started again on February 27th. Return to a normal electricity situation would take over a month.

Consequences of the strike

The British government and State apparatus emerged wounded from this short and brutal crisis. “After this exceptional social crisis, there is an obvious malaise in political circles and some detect a major crisis affecting the British institutions. Is it acceptable that the will of the nation, expressed by the elections, can be battered by the miners’ lobby? Can one govern the country without and against the trade unions? These are the questions discussed in Westminster”, said Le Monde of 20-21 February 1972.
But Pandora’s box was now open. The NUM showed the way for other British trade-union organizations, who would now call further multiple strikes or threats of strike action to obtain significant wage improvements. Indeed, the miners’ strike accounted for only 45% of the 24 million working days lost for 1972.

The martyrdom of the National Industrial Relations Act continued. When the government wished to intervene in April 1972 in the wage conflict opposing British Rail to the railway workers' unions, it sought and obtained from the NIRC, the recently created jurisdiction which specialized in industrial relations, a summary procedure for one 14-day strike-free period of conciliation (cooling off period), followed by an injunction to organize a poll of paid staff on British Rail’s wage proposal. The vote revealed a massive majority of three to one among railwaymen in favour of resumption of the conflict, which destroyed the credibility of a judicial instrument for conciliation in industrial disputes.

Worse, in March 1972 the NIRC came to a conclusion about illegitimate practices by the TGWU union at the time of a dockers’ dispute and condemned the union to a fine, a judgement against which it immediately appealed. The Court of Appeal did not uphold the NIRC decision and, on the contrary, ruled that the TGWU was not responsible for the actions of its officials, even if they implemented unlawful practices. Geoffrey Howe considered that this decision torpedoed the text, since the NIRC in similar cases could no longer challenge the local immunity of trade union organisations and had no option but to impose sanctions on individual trade unionists, immediately creating for them the keenly desired status of martyrs in the cause of the trade union movement.

The most striking example is the affair of the five union representatives from Pentonville, the famous ‘Pentonville Five’, five dockers
who were imprisoned in July 1972 and become instant heroes of the union struggle. Their arrest set social relations ablaze again, started a dockers' strike and once again locked up the Heath government in an intolerable political and social dead end, leading to the fourth state of emergency since it came to power.

The TUC gave notice of an official general strike to obtain the release of the five dockers. The situation seemed insoluble between extreme social tensions and the constitutional crisis caused by the failure to implement a legal decision. A general conflagration was narrowly avoided, since a magistrate sought and obtained the release of the five dockers, based on old legal prerogatives opportunely pulled out of the hat.

All this demonstrated clearly that the National Industrial Relations act was much more effective in reinforcing trade union solidarity than in equipping the State and the government with the means of calming down industrial and union unrest. One of the major components of the 1970 Conservative programme, on which much hope was based, had turned into an absolute nightmare.

According to Margaret Thatcher, the Government lost its confidence in the chosen political line early in 1972. “January and February 1972 saw three events which together tried the Government's resolve and found it wanting – the miners' strike, the financial problems of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders and the unemployment total reaching one million.” Those three events were indeed combined: blighted hopes in some state enterprises, the rapid increase in unemployment and the shattering defeat at the hands of the NUM. At the end of 1971, the question of the rescue of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders shipyards posed the same dilemma as the Rolls-Royce affair. On January 20th, 1972, unemployment passed the symbolic threshold of one million workers in search of a job. The additional drastic disappointment of February 1972 over the miners completed the
deterioration of the situation by dismantling the policy of free wage determination and the search for progressive moderation in public-sector pay increases.

The Prime Minister then decided to carry out the famous U-turn in his economic policy. To the despair of part of its majority, it almost entirely abandoned the liberal part of a political programme which dated back only to June 1970. Edward Heath from now on was convinced that the only way of solving all British contradictions was to increase growth strongly and quickly at around 5%, that is to say at a level comparable with that of the most successful economies of continental Europe.

Economic policy now became exceptionally expansionist: the draft budget of March 1972 thus envisaged increased expenditure and lower taxes. The money supply increased by 25% from the end of 1972 to the end of 1973, in an economy in which all the fundamental trends were inflationary. The government also adopted an industrial policy designed to protect companies in difficulty.

The struggle against inflation, which remained an important concern, was organized from now on within the framework of a price and wages control which was even more detailed and interventionist that that instituted by Harold Wilson as Labour Prime minister from 1964 to 1970. Four precise stages of revaluation were planned when the incomes policy was presented in October 1972. Edward Heath would commit himself wholeheartedly to repeated meetings with the trade union organizations, with whom he attempted to rebuild the bonds of a constructive relationship - a process which was not without raising doubts among some of the Conservative parliamentary group.
1974: AN ARM-WRESTLING CONTEST LEADING TO STRIKE AND
GENERAL ELECTION

The initial will to avoid conflict

The first two stages of the incomes policy proceeded without a hitch in October 1972 and April 1973. During the summer the government prepared the third stage, planned for the autumn. Edward Heath wished to do it without unnecessarily upsetting the unions, and in particular the NUM. On July 16th, a secret meeting took place between Edward Heath and Joe Gormley in the Downing Street gardens 59. Joe Gormley wanted the miners to be the subject of specific treatment and, constructively, proposed extra money for “unsocial working hours”, hours between shift work time and rest time 60. Joe Gormley’s generally conciliatory and pragmatic approach convinced the Prime Minister that some limited improvements in the incomes policy would be sufficient to satisfy the miners.

Early in October the government announced the third stage of the policy for a wages structure, that is, a maximum annual increase in wages of 7% as from November 1st. The plan envisaged flexibility, and in particular the possibility of additional payment for other elements of working hours (unsocial hours), representing Joe Gormley’s suggestion of the summer. The following week, Edward Heath addressed the Conservative Party Congress 61 emphatically on the nature of his relations with the trade-union organizations, which he now met “in a calm atmosphere to discuss future policy and no longer in the heat of a crisis” 62.

The majority of the trade union leaders were indeed aware that the ground was not ready for a head-on opposition to an incomes policy whose first two phases were successful. The risk was thus limited to the general union
front, and the Prime Minister considered that the possibility of remunerating unsocial hours would make it possible to reach agreement with the miners.

Joe Gormley indicated in his memoirs that he was disappointed at the time by the Prime Minister's announcement. The idea of unsocial hours, which was suggested by the Prime Minister, was not limited to the miners alone but was now extended to all employees. To retain his executive committee, he considered that something unique was needed specifically for the miners. Indeed, he had to face the core of the NUM's executive committee on the rise of power on the left. His Communist adversary of 1971, Mick McGahey, was elected vice-president in 1973, and the activist left was completely reinvigorated since the triumph of 1972. Gormley saw it as his duty to try to avoid a strike, because he was instinctively opposed to the use of the strike weapon to refine policies and saw it only as a category of instrument for use in the last resort.

The Prime Minister and the president of the NUM were both very cautious over any fresh confrontation. However, despite sincere efforts in the search for a compromise between the two central figures, events and fate were to open an inescapable route towards a renewed industrial fight.

*The impact of the 1973 oil crisis*

The war of Yom Kippur, the fourth Arab-Israeli war, began at the beginning of October, exactly two days before the announcement of the third stage of the incomes policy by the government. Events were precipitated: on October 17th the Arab countries of OPEC decided on an embargo of oil deliveries to countries which supported Israel, mainly the United States and Western Europe. It was the beginning of the first oil crisis, marked by the quadrupling of the price per barrel over the last quarter of 1973.
It was a colossal shock for the developed countries, but the short-term political consequences were overwhelming for the British Prime Minister. The oil crisis would create a major reduction in growth and even a recession, which would ruin the expansionist goal of the British economic policy after the U-turn. The marked rise in oil prices would bring inflation back strongly and would render all theories on the incomes policy obsolete. It thus became far more difficult to gain acceptance from the union leaders and their backing for moderate wage rises, which would in fact be translated into reduced purchasing power.

Moreover, the short-term major impact concerned the NUM. The increase in oil prices galvanized the miners because the economic importance of coal was sharply adjusted, erasing the long decades of diminishing demand for coal in favour of abundant and cheap oil. The miners were more determined than ever to benefit from the circumstances favourable to energy to continue further up the hierarchy of the highest-paid workers. It was already not clear that they would accept the framework of the incomes policy, this now became impossible. In these circumstances, the meeting between Edward Heath and the NUM executive committee on October 23rd ended without result.

The situation posed a frightening dilemma for the government. To give in was to reduce further an authority to govern which was already heavily damaged, a situation unacceptable for the Conservative parliamentary group after the 1972 humiliation. But not to adapt was to give the impression of failing to understand the entirely new economic context.

In every relevant choice of action, troubles returned, as noted by Douglas Hurd: “During November 1973, the earth began to move again under the Government’s feet. Our oil supplies were going to be cut by the producers. There was an immense confusion of information and much hectic diplomacy, so no one could yet tell how
harshly we would actually have to cut our consumption. At the same time the Government was being drawn into a struggle with the miners on incomes policy. The Conservative Party, its Leader, its Ministers, its backbenchers and its supporters in the country had already been beaten on this very ground in 1972. We had most of us dreaded, beyond anything else, a further engagement with the miners. Yet we were being manoeuvred once again towards the same fatal field, still littered with relics of the last defeat.63.”

The struggle begins

On November 8th, the executive committee of the NUM voted for rejection of the wage offer and an overtime strike starting on November 12th, against the judgment of President Joe Gormley, who would have preferred to consult the miners by vote. The NUM again took up the step-by-step strategy of 1971-1972. The government reacted immediately by declaring a state of emergency. The aim was to increase endurance compared to 1971-1972, where the government had waited three months after the beginning of the overtime strike before declaring the state of emergency.

In Le Monde of 15 November 1973 the front page stated that: “a decisive confrontation is beginning between Mr. Heath and the unions” “The state of emergency is “the governmental response to the sheiks of coal and electricity [...]. The government seems willing to dramatize the conflict, at a moment when union action is already strongly disapproved by public opinion. Some even suspect the Heath government of preparing snap elections in which the slogan would be ‘national wellbeing against union blackmail’”.

By the end of 1973 the CEGB electricity operator was in an unprecedented position. The oil crisis was increasing oil prices and causing a shortage of diesel fuel, about 20% of the normal supply. The miners’ overtime strike caused a one-third drop in the coal supply, more especially as a move by the railway workers’ union disrupted coal deliveries. Lastly, a strike of some
electricity workers affected power stations and the electricity distribution network.

Coal stocks diminished quickly and, as of December 12th, the CEGB indicated to the government that with the current pattern of consumption coal stocks would reach the critical level of 6 million tons late in January or the beginning of February, against 19 million tons in mid-November when the government issued the state of emergency. On December 13th, the government declared a three-day week in industry\textsuperscript{64} for the third time in from January 1st. Severe restrictions in electricity consumption (light and heating) were immediately instituted for shops and offices.

Beginning the next day, December 14\textsuperscript{th}, the cuts affected a million homes. Less than two years after 1972 the British found themselves confronted once more by deep disturbances in their daily life: it was necessary to read the newspapers to be aware of the timing of power cuts. The nights were dark, it was often necessary to keep coats on and to use candles for lighting at home. Television channels ceased transmission at 10.30 pm and the Energy Secretary Patrick Jenkin advised people to brush their teeth in the dark.

\textit{Attempts at conciliation}

The overtime strike and state of emergency did not interrupt negotiations between the NCB and the NUM. At the same time, ways and means for a solution through conciliation were fully tested by the government and Joe Gormley.

Edward Heath, who personally involved himself untiringly in the management of the struggle, promised a favourable report from the wages commission. But the NUM was in no frame of mind to favour conciliation: Joe Gormley was firmly defeated on November 21\textsuperscript{st} in the executive committee of
the NUM (18 votes to 5), in a vote on his resolution to seek a national poll on the new proposal from the NCB.

This did not prevent him from seeking other solutions. The president of the NUM, for example, considered specific remuneration for miners' idle periods (waiting, getting ready and showering), but was unwise enough to mention it confidentially to Harold Wilson, Leader of the Labour Party\textsuperscript{65}. The former Prime Minister revealed this suggestion during a Question Time session in the House of Commons in a way which made it politically impossible for Edward Heath to pursue the proposal: “Harold Wilson had raised the idea in the House of Commons as if it were his very own. I went mad. It was bad enough to have the Tories playing politics with an industrial dispute, but to have our own Party doing the same thing to us was beyond belief. I think that was the most frustrating moment of my life\textsuperscript{66}.”

A new meeting was set up on November 28\textsuperscript{th} with Downing Street between Edward Heath and the NUM executive committee. It came to nothing except to reveal the political motivation of certain NUM leaders, when Mick McGahey declared: “Of course, I want to change the government, but I want to do it by democratic means and through the ballot box...”

December brought no advance, with the month marked by increasing restrictions on electricity consumption. The TUC then tried to pursue mediation. On January 9\textsuperscript{th} 1974 the leaders of the TUC proposed a deal with the government so that the unions would not use concessions made to the miners to strengthen wage demands from other sectors. This proposal, which did not justify acceptance of the government's incomes policy, was renewed on several occasions by the TUC up to January 21\textsuperscript{st}. Union leaders were struck by the appearance of extreme physical and psychological fatigue of the Prime Minister, who felt besieged from all sides.
Edward Heath and the government finally refused this offer, on the grounds of the material incapacity of the TUC to carry the other trade-union organizations with it and therefore to make commitments on their behalf. Margaret Thatcher indicated as early as 1976 that this offer should undoubtedly have been accepted, because it would have allowed the government to take matters in hand again politically, either by obtaining a major concession from the union world, or by justifying a hard line against the trade unions if they had appeared unable of meeting their commitments: “The incident taught me neither to accept nor to reject any offer until the consequences had been fully weighed.”

A speed contest between the government and the NUM

The situation appeared completely blocked in mid-January 1974. As for electricity, the very early restrictions had made it possible to save fuel and to maintain coal stocks at a bearable level if the conflict remained limited to the overtime strike. On the other hand, the situation would become much more difficult again in the case of an all-out strike. In spite of the three-day week, the general public continued to support the miners (52%) twice as much as the NCB (24%)68, even though once again majority of those polled disapproved of NUM methods.

Matters were now moving fast within the NUM. Joe Gormley in particular was tired of fighting his executive committee when none the solutions which he had sought to initiate could calm the dispute. On January 23rd, the executive committee decided, with the agreement of the president, to ask the miners to make a decision by vote on a nation-wide strike. The mobilization of the miners was much easier than in 1972, precisely because the success of 1972 had created a victorious precedent. The result of the vote,
announced on February 4th, was historic: 81% of the militants, against 58.8% in 1972, voted for a nation-wide strike. The executive committee ratified this decision and set the launch of the move for February 10th, 1974.

On the government side, certain leaders and parliamentary advisers had been thinking since December of the possibility of escaping the crisis through dissolution of the House of Commons and a call to the electorate. This strategy was seen with all the more interest when a Times/ITN survey showed a five-point lead for the Conservatives over the Labour party for the first time since December 1970. Nigel Lawson, working in the research department of the Conservative party, was directed to write a Conservative manifesto for a possible electoral campaign.

The complete blocking of the situation reinforced the partisans of dissolution. Douglas Hurd reached this conclusion after Christmas 1973 and, with other close connections of the Prime Minister, began trying to persuade the very reluctant Edward Heath. Nigel Lawson however, was facing a speed contest about democracy between the government and the NUM leaders: it was indeed known that at the end of December that the NUM leadership was planning to organize a vote in favour of a national strike.

Douglas Hurd still remains convinced today that a General Election called for February 7th, and therefore with a result at the latest on January 13th, could have been won by the Tories. In this case the election would have taken place before the launching of the national strike, a strike symbolizing the failure, at least in part, of government action.

It needed much more time to convince the Prime Minister, who was both extremely tired and very unwilling to accept that the call to the nation through a General Election was the only option still open to the government. Those four lost weeks would prove to be fatal: “The missed opportunity of calling the election for early in February lost vital momentum and sacrificed much of the emotive
value of a crisis appeal. This public hesitancy left the Party puzzled and confused. It was only at the beginning of February, after the result of the miners' vote on the nation-wide strike, that Edward Heath finally made his decision. On February 7th, eighteen months before the legal deadline for the election, he requested the Queen to dissolve the House of Commons and to initiate the election, intended for February 28th. The plan remained unsettled until the last moment, since on this same date, February 7th, the Employment Secretary Willie Whitelaw submitted the miners' wage demands to the pay commission for analysis.

The clash of timing between the strike and the legislative campaign

Right up to the end, Joe Gormley tried to avoid politicization of the conflict, but could not succeed. After discussion with the Prime Minister, he agreed to defer launching the strike until shortly after the election campaign, but was beaten on this point by his executive committee. The strike was launched on February 10th although the election was already called for February 28th. Mobilization was very easy, almost a “picnic”, given the success of the 1972 strike and the clear-cut nature of the miners' vote.

As in 1972 the miners had the support of the union world. The TUC invited all its affiliated trade unions to respect NUM pickets, which particularly concerned the railwaymen and the transport workers. Alliance with the key unions remained as solid as ever and Eric Hammond, of the electricians' union, would recall in 1984 that: "In fact the studies provided by my trade union put an end to the myth hawked by the Heath government about the level of coal stocks and which thus helped to initiate the drop in their public support."

The strike was in any event calmed from the outset by the fact that it occurred while waiting for the result of the General Election. Flying pickets
played a minor role compared to 1972. The NUM leadership required strikers to avoid completely any form of intimidation or violence, which would have proved a godsend for the campaigning Conservative party. "The miners were clever enough to play everything quietly. They instituted a Code of Practice on picketing, which restricted pickets at any site to six, and whether at the mines, power stations or docks they were as quiet and well-behaved as mice."

The power stations thus did not suffer a repeat of the brutal siege of 1972. But the strike was equally effective since the strike pickets, although undoubtedly less aggressive, were scrupulously respected by members of other trade unions. The electricity situation, from being fairly stable at the beginning of January, deteriorated further. The CEGB experts and the Ministry of Trade saw no way out of the crisis, apart from going even further in measures of restriction, such as imposing a 2.5 or 2 working day week in trade and industry.

The electoral campaign took place after two months of varying disturbances for private individuals (power cuts, short-time working) and companies (the 3-day week). The Heath government had the appearance of being on the defence at least as much as the NUM or the trade union movement in general. But members of the Labour party carried no conviction either, in particular because of their division between the radical left, which supported the miners' strike noisily, and the moderate minority centre wing.

The main theme of the Prime Minister's electoral campaign was governmental authority, with the question: "Who governs Britain?" For the Conservative leaders, the true choice did not lie between Conservatives and members of the Labour Party, but rather between Conservatives on one side and, on the other, the NUM and radical trade unionism, to which Edward Heath attached particular responsibility in the British difficulties as well the severe crisis related to the strike as the insidious crisis affecting the country.
For the Labour leader James Callaghan, the Conservative slogan was wrong: “Heath’s slogan ‘Who governs Britain?’ was misplaced. The answer was surely obvious - it must be the elected government and no one else. Asking this question did not fully satisfy the electorate. Instead, people continued to ask what a new election would settle when the Government already had a working majority and still had eighteen months of its term to complete.” Indeed, the Labour leader Harold Wilson skilfully shifted the general trend of themes in the election as far as possible from the ground chosen by the Conservatives: the high cost of living, increased unemployment, the supposed misdeeds of the Common Market, greater capacity of members of the Labour Party to manage disputes with the trade unions.

The Conservatives therefore failed to concentrate the campaign on topics of their choosing. Moreover, they suffered several disappointments in the middle of the campaign. The hardest blow fell on February 21st, one week before the poll, when the commission on wages (Pay Relations Board), activated on the 7th by the Employment Secretary Willie Whitelaw, published its provisional report. Its conclusions could imply that certain elements of miners’ income were wrongly regarded as pay and that a higher wage offer could have been offered to the miners in strict respect of Phase 3 of the incomes policy. This information implied that a wage settlement between the NUM and the NCB could have taken place. The Labour leader Harold Wilson tactically added pressure based on this new information: “Harold Wilson claimed that an arithmetical error had thrust the country needlessly into a national pit strike, the resultant industrial disruption and what he termed a ‘farcical general election’.”

Two days before the vote it was the turn of Campbell Adamson, chairman of the CBI, the employers’ main organization, to demand the withdrawal of the law on industrial relations. Right until the end, this text had been a martyrdom for Edward Heath.
The surveys noted a hardening of voting intentions in favour of Labour party candidates in the three weeks of a very short campaign. The extremely tight results shown by the surveys at the end of February made any prediction of the final poll inconclusive.

The election result and the end of the dispute

The election held on February 28th, 1974 gave no clear majority, with Conservative and Labour candidates running neck and neck in both votes and seats. The only indisputable winners were the Liberal party and regional or independent parties. Members of the Labour Party lost 5.8% of the votes cast compared to 1970, but had a greater number of Members of Parliament in the Commons, with 301 MPs against 287 in 1970. However it fell short by 17 of an absolute majority. The disappointment was much greater for the Conservative party; although it had a few hundreds of thousands of votes more than the members of the Labour Party but it had suffered the worst defeat administered to a political party in the polls since 1945. The British appeared more divided than ever and no longer seemed to want to entrust either of the two great parties unreservedly with the responsibility of leading the country out of the serious difficulties with which it was confronted.

Le Monde of 2 March 1974 explained that: “Mr. Heath lost his bet, as he wanted a clear and massive majority to face the economic crisis.” If the British did not entirely solve the question of knowing who was in control, between the government and the trade unions, they said that in any case it was not Edward Heath. Douglas Hurd concluded that Edward Heath was politically broken “by the brutal exercise of trade union power”. His attempt to establish a coalition with the Liberals failed. On March 4th he resigned and left Downing Street to Harold Wilson, who had to govern the country with a hung Parliament. For
the French newspaper *L’Aurore* of 6 March 1974, “*England, initially considered the model parliamentary democracy, now looks like a rudderless boat*”.

The new Labour government agreed to readopt the conclusions of the Pay Commission, whose results published during the electoral campaign had created so much uproar. Michael Foot, the new Employment Secretary, offered to meet the miners with very generous proposals: substantial pay rises, overtime pay, the strengthening of other additional advantages.

The agreement was concluded on March 6th. On March 11th, two years after the triumph of 1972, the miners returned a second time to the mines after a clear victory and a new short strike (three months for the overtime strike and a month for the all-out strike). There was no real showdown: this time, it was more the election than the strike pickets which determined success, and to some extent the strike was lost by the Heath government rather than won by the miners.

**THE LEGACY OF THE STRIKES OF THE 1970S**

*The miners’ union transformed*

The victory of 1972, renewed in 1974 with its electoral drama, changed the image of the NUM in overall perceptions. It was no longer the passive trade union of a declining sector, but a powerful union capable of winning major concessions for its members and of bringing down a government. The myth of invincibility was established. At both political and symbolic levels the miners regained their pre-1914 stature, despite their much reduced economic and demographic scale. The increases in price of oil price
gave hope that coal would constitute the principal fuel for power stations for a long time to come.

Events strongly reinforced the left of the trade union together with confidence in its capacity for action and the strong authority it had gained over the whole of the union world. The NUM would continue its evolution towards the left of the trade union movement. The French Communist newspaper *L’Humanité* of March 6th was pleased with the appearance of anti-capitalist trends. The miners showed during the strikes of 1972-1974 that they were the elite of the trade union movement and that they could deploy immense strength in the event of confrontation. From now on the NUM would to some extent constitute an avant-garde of workers whose support was often requested by other trade unions to advance their own claims.

In addition, the miners' trade union became a major media attraction. All its annual conventions would henceforward receive broad media coverage. Its leaders became important media characters, in particular Arthur Scargill. The events of Saltley in 1972 initiated the legend of a man equipped with an indisputable charisma and natural powers of communication. He indeed had a perfect command of two modes of expression which often require opposite qualities: the speech before a vast assembly and the televised interview.

The period of 1972-1974, which was exceptionally favourable for the NUM, was partly the result of exceptional contingencies: quadrupling of the oil price in 1973 by OPEC, poor anticipation of the crisis by the government in 1972. This sequence gave the miners a possibly exaggerated confidence for the future vis-à-vis government and the State, which would quickly learn the lessons of the events. As so often in the History, large successes can promote an excessive confidence leading to heavy disappointments or even future catastrophes.
Lessons for the Conservatives

During this period Margaret Thatcher held only a modest if any position in the management of the trade union crises. Her ministerial sector - education - was not directly concerned. Douglas Hurd does not remember any circumstance where her opinion was requested by the Prime Minister. But she was, like all the members of the government, a privileged witness of the evolutions.

The lessons of defeat would thus not be forgotten by Margaret Thatcher: “Looking back (...), it is extraordinary how little attention we gave to ‘endurance’ - the period of time we could keep the power stations and the economy running with limited or no coal supplies – and how easily Cabinet was fobbed off by assurances that coal stocks were high, without considering whether those stocks were in the right location to be usable, i.e. actually at the power stations (...). The possibility of effective mass picketing, which would prevent oil and coal getting to power stations, was simply not on the agenda.”

All the efforts of the Conservatives, even before their return to power, would aim to avoid finding themselves in such a calamitous situation ever again. They wished to draw the correct lessons from History including its concrete operational and political consequences: “We naively assumed that our opponents would play by the same rules as we did. In particular, we imagined that there would not be either mass opposition to laws passed by a democratically elected government or mass infringement of the criminal law (...). We did not recognize that we were involved in a struggle with unscrupulous people whose principal objectives lay not in industrial relations but in politics.” Margaret Thatcher, Cabinet member of the Heath government, would not forget the total failure of her predecessor in relation to the miners, and at the time of the strikes of the 1980s would prove her determination not to revive the humiliation of Edward Heath: “for me, what happened at Saltley took on no less importance than it did for the Left. I understood as they did, that the struggle to
bring back trade unions properly within the rule of law would be decided not in the debating chamber of the House of Commons, nor even on the hustings, but in and around the pits and factories where intimidation had been allowed to prevail."

Lessons for the State

In the end the 1972 strike had a major impact on the evaluation of civil risks by the State apparatus. The consequences were very important in the three fields of electricity generation, law and order and intelligence.

The public electrical operator CEGB began to integrate crisis management in its priorities as from 1972, and the catastrophic moment where the country came very close to an almost total breakdown in the electricity supply. Anticipation of the crisis was already clearly better in 1973-1974. At the time of the 1984-5 strike, the electricity operating Board would be able to implement all the know-how acquired in the 1970s.

As regards law and order, Saltley was a snub for the Heath government, but also for the police, constitutionally independent from political authority. The lesson would not be forgotten. Shortly after the 1972 strike the Heath government decided on the creation of two structures, the Civil Contingencies Unit, supervised by the Home Secretary and required to prepare and anticipate situations of threats to law and order, and the police National Reporting Centre (NRC). The NRC was a non-permanent structure of national coordination of the regional police forces, capable of being activated when necessary. Further, the police began to adapt their methods of intervention.

A final consequence of the increasing trade union agitation of the 1970s was a reorientation of the activity of the United Kingdom intelligence MI5 services and the Special Branch of the police. Following the miners’ 1972
strike, Edward Heath required it to reinforce the effort on ‘the threat within’, in particular the subversion of ‘the left and extreme left’.

The short time-interval and the very special nature of the 1974 strike did not make it possible to activate these various means; they would on the other hand be completely operational later ten years, after the ten year interval of the inter strike period.
1974-1984: THE LABOUR INTERLUDE AND MARGARET THATCHER'S EARLY PERFORMANCE
The Labour Interlude

The fall of Edward Heath and the ascent of Margaret Thatcher to the Tory leadership

The absence of any Commons majority after the February 1974 General Election provided Prime Minister Harold Wilson with the incentive to call another election as soon as possible. On September 20th, the shortest Parliament of the century was dissolved. The polls predicted a Labour victory, in line with the public opinion will to give the government of the day a chance. Their forecast was confirmed and the Labour party won the October 1974 election with a comfortable lead over the Conservatives, with 39.2% of the votes against 35.8%. Labour now had a fragile but nonetheless genuine parliamentary majority.

This new electoral reverse was the last stroke for Edward Heath, who had suffered three defeats at the polls out of the four elections in which he led the Conservative party. Even before the October election an influential member of the shadow cabinet, Keith Joseph, began to voice open criticism of the interventionist approach and support for the corporate consensus since the post-war period, although he did not exonerate the Conservative government of 1970-1974 from this critical assessment. He travelled the road to Damascus and was to declare in 1975: “It was only in April 1974 that I was converted to Conservatism (I had thought I was a Conservative but I now see that I was not really one at all.82) At the time of a speech at Upminster on June 22nd, 1974, he criticized the Keynesian beliefs at the heart of economic policy and “one after the other he led all the sacred cows to the abattoir”, according to Margaret Thatcher83, asking for a full ideological reversal.
The right wing of the party wanted Keith Joseph to replace Edward Heath as leader of the party. He seemed a genuinely credible alternative at the time, but on October 19th 1974 he made a speech at Edgbaston which was perceived as an attack against poor households with children. He decided to withdraw his candidature. Margaret Thatcher then offered herself, following the same political line, and Keith Joseph lined up behind her banner.

Keith Joseph's withdrawal indeed offered a major opportunity to a woman in politics who was still little known and whose ministerial experience was limited. She also benefited from the support of Members of Parliament such as Edward du Cann and Airey Neave, not notably on the right, but exasperated by Edward Heath. Yet Margaret Thatcher was not an obvious winner: On January 22nd, 1975, the Labour politician Barbara Castle wrote in her diary of her guess in favour of Heath, “despite the fact that Margaret Thatcher is now giving Heath a hard run for his money”. The French newspaper Le Monde dated February 1st 1975 in fact also offered a somewhat superficial presentation: “Mrs Thatcher’s Achilles heel is to appear too much of a Conservative lady, wearing flowered hats, the traditional pearl necklace and always defending the upper middle-class philosophy whose supreme ambition is to acquire a suburban house, while their children attend a public school.”

To general surprise, she beat Edward Heath very clearly at the first round: 130 MPs voted for her against 119 for the former Prime Minister. Edward Heath, who had obstinately refused to organize his succession, was forced to resign as leader of the Conservative party almost exactly a year after the launching of the second miners’ strike. Barbara Castle, who observed Margaret Thatcher's media style on February 5th, wrote in her diary: “What interests me now is how blooming she looks – she has never been prettier (...) she is beset by
enemies and has to watch every gesture and word. But she says through it all looking her best. I understand why. She is in love: in love with power, success — and with herself.""

It was indeed too late for that the supporters of Edward Heath to organize a response and a robust alternative to Margaret Thatcher. On February 11th, she easily defeated at the second round William Whitelaw, the candidate supported by Edward Heath, by 146 votes to 79, and became leader of the Conservative party. The comments of Barbara Castle alternate between female solidarity (“I have had a growing conviction that this would happen: she is so clearly the best among them and she will, in my view, have an enormous advantage in being a woman too.”) and premonitory remarks on the coming difficulties for the Labour Party (“I can’t help feeling a thrill, even though I believe that her election will make things much more difficult for us.”).

Le Monde on 13 February 1975 was also premonitory. On page 4 it set the scene, side by side, of Margaret Thatcher and Arthur Scargill. The extent of the victory of the leader of the Conservative party, “the only man of the shadow cabinet”, gave her, according to the daily newspaper, an undeniable political authority. On the same page, Le Monde continued its special series on “the strange British crisis” and reports an interview with the young NUM Yorkshire area president. Arthur Scargill “considers that Mr Wilson’s present policy is not socialist but shamefully social democrat. He is committed to the advent of a true British socialism and firmly believes that it is possible to build a Marxist economy without falling into totalitarianism.” He considered that there is “no economic crisis but a crisis of capitalism, the price of which is paid by the workers”, and that “his views do not differ much from those of the majority of his trade unionists”. The two characters were to find themselves face to face nine years later for a decisive confrontation.
The Labour Party in power

Barely confirmed in his functions as Prime Minister, Harold Wilson was confronted with an extremely difficult economic situation: inflation in excess of 15%, fast-rising unemployment, the trade deficit bursting ahead, the Stock Exchange was in freefall, the very expansionist budget policy resulting in an abysmal deficit of 8.9% of the GDP for 1974-1975. The question of the coherence and sustainability of the British economic policy was openly put. An April 1975 Wall Street Journal article, headed “Good bye Great Britain”, advised investors to sell their sterling holdings. The pound crumbled compared to the dollar during the first quarter of 1976.

The United Kingdom was forced to have recourse to a first loan from the International Monetary Fund for nearly £1 billion. This move to international supervision symbolized decline and the loss of economic sovereignty and was rightly experienced as a humiliation, like the final straw on the camel's back, before the turn-round which James Callaghan was to try. In 1976, Harold Wilson indeed resigned and gave way to the very experienced James Callaghan, the only Prime Minister in British history to have occupied the three key offices beforehand (Home Secretary, Chancellor, Foreign Secretary).

James Callaghan went on to become the incarnation of an administrative British socialism and the turning point in rigour. He successfully defended this line at the Labour party Congress on September 28th, 1976: “We thought that one could come out of a recession while spending more and achieving better employment levels through tax cuts and increased public expenditure. I declare to you, in all sincerity, that we cannot resort any more to this solution which, if ever it were possible, always resulted, every time it was applied, in the injection of a further amount of inflation in the economy followed by a new worsening in the employment picture.”
He thus amended the dominant Labour orthodoxy, according to which continued increase in public expenditure can always protect full employment. On September 15th, 1976, the British government officially sought additional assistance from the IMF for a new loan enabling the country to face the currency crisis. In November London hosted an IMF mission, which attached strong reductions in public expenditure to the loan. Even before the arrival of Margaret Thatcher, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey thus introduced monetarist elements into the control of economic policy. Overall James Callaghan restored a difficult situation in 1977 and 1978.

The “social contract”, a pact of confidence between the Labour Party and the trade union organizations, was signed in 1974. The incomes policy was applied thereafter with less strife. The years 1975-1978 were also a quiet time for strikes compared to the peaks known by the Heath government. This was not without cost, since Harold Wilson and Employment Secretary Michael Foot accepted significant extensions of trade union judicial immunities between 1974 and 1976. These were largely to the benefit of industrial organisations which were able to act in companies outside the original dispute. The Labour government did not agree however on accepting certain claims of the trade unions which want to be seen entrusting prerogatives on the public highway in the event of strike…

Trade union power was at its peak: the government was tied to union goodwill within the framework of the incomes policy, still a central point of the economic policy. This goodwill was bought at the price of new kinds of advantage. It was the golden age of “beer and sandwiches” meetings in Downing Street for union leaders who were now the referees of the British economy. The second half of the 1970s was also the apogee of union membership: 13 million British belonged to a union at the end of the 1970s, that is to say 50%
of the workforce on average, with record levels of 97% in state enterprises and 89% of council staff. At the same time, trade unions power continued to be resented in public opinion, since four British people out of five considered that trade unions had too much power. This unpopularity was a sword of Damocles hanging over the mighty unions.

Certain industrial disputes were violent. The Grunwick dispute, the strike at a photographic laboratory which lasted for two full years, was marked by violent confrontations. The confrontations of June and July 1977, between 700 union activists (including militants of the NUM brought in by Arthur Scargill) and as many police officers, took place under the eye of national television cameras. The confrontation of June 22nd, 1977, however, had nothing to do with what had occurred at Saltley in 1972: the police force was neither overwhelmed by numbers nor hampered by unclear rules of engagement. The pickets did not stop strike breakers, and 53 of the 2,000 trade unionists present on the picket lines were arrested. The speech of the judge Lord Denning in the ensuing lawsuit showed the increasing embarrassment of the regal structures of the State: “Our laws are being disregarded right and left. The mobs are out. The police are being subjected to violence. I take no part in the rights and wrongs of these disputes but I do know intimidation and violence are contrary to the laws of the land.” Certain specialized units of the police force acquired a specific know-how regarding the maintenance of law and order, even gaining a certain reputation for aggression.

With regard to the NUM, in 1974 the Labour government worked out a “plan for coal” for the NCB. In the long term this plan envisaged a return to production levels of 200 million tons (up by 50% compared to the 1973 production of 132 million tons), a substantial investment plan and the opening of new sites. The plan was optimistic, but also corresponded to the hope of a lasting improvement in the competitiveness of coal compared to other sources
of energy. The first oil crisis indeed marked an interruption in the marginalisation of coal in the 1950s and 1960s.

However the recurring problems of NCB competitiveness were not solved. The company was ranked last of five European coal mining enterprises in a Financial Times 1973 investigation into the competitors of the principal British state enterprises. Continental Europe coal professionals considered that English mines were underproductive, that considerably more staff were needed to produce the same amount of coal than on the continent because of restrictive work practices which, for example, prohibited electricians from doing mechanics' work and vice versa.

The NCB felt partly under the pressure of international markets in its two essential outlets, the iron and steel industry and electricity. British Steel indicated: “There is no longer any commercial advantage to be gained (...) by maximising the quantity of local, high-volatile coals used; additionally the quality of the coal has deteriorated.” The NCB remained however largely insulated from market constraints because of the scale of public grants.

For the NCB, the second half of the 1970s was marked by the “Derek & Joe Show”, in reference to the de facto co-management between the president of the NCB, Derek Ezra, and that of the NUM, Joe Gormley. The latter would regularly obtain the best pay rises among manual workers. With great skill, he used the threat of industrial movement fomented by the left of the NUM to maximize the result of pay negotiations. He concluded his negotiations in general by asking for various “goodies”: better early retirement conditions, free working clothes, additional payment for showering time, etc.

The miners’ wages remained a highly sensitive political question. Harold Wilson travelled to the NUM Scarborough conference in July 1975 and made what many witnesses considered the best speech of his political life to curb NUM wage claims and rescue the voluntary incomes policy from the
ruins. Harold Wilson saved the day, since through a ballot the miners accepted a moderate wage increase. He was to say in his memories that this was the most carefully prepared speech of his career.

The political life of the NUM was however marked by the progressive insulation of Joe Gormley from the rise of the left. This arose from political weakening within the moderate wing of the NUM, in decline and unable to organize itself effectively. To some extent Joe Gormley maintained an apolitical line and respected the social contract between the unions and the Labour government. The rising man was Arthur Scargill, whose ambitions were clearly set on becoming president. Joe Gormley also supported the plans of Arthur Scargill while remaining as president as long as possible and using statutory modifications to impede the claims of his old rival Mick McGahey, the only credible alternative to Arthur Scargill but who reached the presidential age limit in 1981.

The most important internal development related to the implementation in certain mining areas of mechanisms for additional productivity-related pay. The Labour government favoured this flexible device as being useful in avoiding crises such as those of 1972 and 1974. Joe Gormley also favoured this system, but the left wing of the NUM strongly opposed it: the system could produce a new pay differential in favour of miners at the most productive pits, thus calling into question the national pay uniformity as agreed in 1966 under the National Power Loading Agreement.

The NUM Conference – the “Parliament” of the union's assembled regional delegates – and then the miners themselves, consulted by vote, opposed the scheme, but Joe Gormley overcame this by authorizing agreements reached by the various regional unions. This episode created two significant precedents for the future 1984-5 strike: decisions of national level
were called into question by the regional unions; worse, the regional unions decided to seek arbitration on their disagreements in the courts.

*Thatcher as leader of the opposition*

Margaret Thatcher's years in opposition were far from easy. After the surprise triumph of her election as leader of Party and with relatively little experience, she had to deal with Harold Wilson and especially with James Callaghan, “*a formidable political adversary*”, according to her own description. Callaghan was a brilliant politician, persuasive, full of common sense and gifted in communication, according to Douglas Hurd. In the eyes of British opinion, James Callaghan appeared much more credible than the Conservative leader, and his prospects for re-election were very high until the autumn of 1978. It must be remembered that an electoral defeat would probably mean Margaret Thatcher’s ousting from the Conservative leadership.

Her position within the Conservative party was indeed by no means straightforward. She retained the majority of the members of the shadow cabinet inherited from Edward Heath, of which the majority voted against her at the time of the 1975 election and whose support had not been won, apart from her unfortunate opponent in the second round, Willie Whitelaw. She had to preserve the unity of the Party and its electoral prospects. On 13 February 1975, *Le Monde* explained the Conservative dilemmas: “*The slogans which provoke enthusiasm in Tory circles are not necessarily those which will win the next general election for the Conservative party.*”
Margaret Thatcher remained particularly careful in her public statements over the trade union question, by far the most sensible topic. The Party base was hostile to union power abuses, but hesitated between confrontation and co-operation with the unions. James Prior, Employment Secretary in the shadow cabinet, was also close linked to Edward Heath and in favour of a line of compromise. But this did not prevent the right wing of the party from preparing much more aggressive scenarios on the economic and social level. James Prior felt personally attacked when the “hawk” Norman Tebbit made a speech in 1977 in which he argued that “there were people to be found in the Conservative party, as well as among Liberals and Labour, with the morals of Laval and Pétain, because they adhered to the ‘doctrine of appeasement’.”

On the economic front, Margaret Thatcher was opposed to any de facto political acceptance of the “orderly management of decline”, and on the
contrary saw it as an absolute priority to make every attempt to stop any such decline. With Keith Joseph, the right wing of the Party had its hand on the economic programme for the next election. Three reports were particularly important: *The Right Approach to the Economy*, under the direction of Geoffrey Howe, the report of the nationalized industries policy group under the direction of Nicholas Ridley, and the project on the trade unions, *Stepping Stones*, by John Hoskyns and Norman Strauss.

Geoffrey Howe, Keith Joseph and Nigel Lawson were the three principal contributors to the official document *The Right Approach to the Economy* of 1977. The report rejected Keynesian remedies and made monetary policy one of the essential instruments of economic policy. The trade union question was not dealt with in this report, but their direct influence on future economic policy was in any event intended to be reduced, because the choice had been made to encourage free wage settlements and abandon the incomes policy.

Keith Joseph also required Nicholas Ridley MP to write a report on the nationalized industries and to provide a confidential appendix describing the best way to manage a new confrontation with the unions, in particular the NUM. The three-page appendix, entitled *Countering the Political Threat*, was a synthesis of the practical measures to be taken. In 1972, “I had been a junior minister in the Department of Trade and Industry (...) dealing with, among other things, the coal industry. So I knew a little about the subject and I had been close to the events which led to the Wilberforce forced capitulation. I therefore found it quite easy to draw up a list of the precautions that should be taken.”

Two “casus belli” likely to trigger head-on opposition were identified: an unreasonable pay demand and site closures combined with dismissals. The case of the key state enterprises was studied, with special attention to coal, along with the docks and road transport.
"The most likely area is coal. Here we should seek to operate with the maximum quantity of stocks possible, particularly at the power stations. We should perhaps make such contingent plans as we can to import coal at short notice. We might be able to arrange for certain haulage companies to recruit a core of non-union lorry drivers in advance to help us move coal where necessary. We should also install, dual coal/oil firing in all power stations, where practicable as quickly as possible (...)."

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

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

"It also seems a wise precaution to try and get some haulage companies to recruit some good non-union drivers who will be prepared to cross picket lines, with police protection. They could always be used in the crunch situation which usually determines the result of any such contest."

"These five policies seem all that is available and if integrated and used wisely they provide a pretty strong defence – particularly when there is no Incomes Policy against which to strike. They should enable us to hold the fort until the long term strategy of fragmentation can begin to work."

This was an exact summary of the measures which would be taken by the Conservatives in power after 1979 and especially after 1981. During and after the 1984-5 strike the report would acquire a mythical status, but in the
short run it was something of a source of embarrassment for Margaret Thatcher. Broad extracts were leaked, and were published in the May 27th 1978 edition of The Economist, under the title “Appomattox or civil war”. This revelation created an onslaught even in the Conservative press, which did not consider the plan as a way to avoid a new Saltley, but a plan for aggression against miners who were merely claiming better wages. Nicholas Ridley felt obliged to see Margaret Thatcher to apologize, because of the commotion provoked by the leak. “Never apologize, never explain”, she said. “In my view, she always knew, even as far back as 1978, that she would face a pitched battle mounted by Arthur Scargill. She knew it would be ostensibly an industrial dispute, but in reality it would be a political assault designed to overthrow her Government. She never doubted that these were Arthur Scargill’s ambitions.”

On their side, the experts John Hoskyns and Norman Strauss produced the confidential project Stepping Stones designed to identify an electoral and communication strategy to counter the unions. To explain the British problems, John Hoskyns drew up a graph of the nation’s problems. Each problem reinforced the others and contributed to the vicious circle of decline: union power reinforced unemployment, which pushed the government to print more money and increase the public deficit. The resulting inflation would reinforce union claims, encouraging them to ask for employees to be protected from it. Wage control was then set up to control inflation. But that worsened the situation still further since the trade unions have the power to disregard such wage control. The conclusion was that the problem was systemic and that it was therefore necessary all to change everything to have any hope of obtaining any improvement.

This conceptual diagram placed the responsibility for the nation’s difficulties on the shoulders of the British trade unions, as explained in the first paragraph of the report: “The task of the next Tory government — national recovery —
will be of a different order from that facing any other post-war government. Recovery requires a sea-change in Britain’s political economy. (...) There is one major obstacle – the negative role of the trade unions. Unless a satisfying and creative (union) role can be developed, national recovery will be virtually impossible. Implementing this policy was not without huge political difficulties, given the union weight in the electorate. The Stepping Stones project and report thus proposed a pre-electoral and electoral strategy concerning the trade unions, making it possible to facilitate the later implementation of a government programme: “Anti-union hysteria gets us nowhere, but the unions do pose a true dilemma. [...] the Tories can either challenge the trade union status quo, and risk losing the elections in the subsequent rumpus; or they can promise to govern on the unions’ terms, and probably win the election on safer issues, knowing that they are then certain to fail the country in office. Any move to break out of this trap has, so far, been successfully blocked by unions’ shouting ‘Blackmail’.

Moving beyond this dilemma implied defying the unions in a way which would improve electoral prospects for the Conservatives: the Conservative electoral victory should be built on the total rejection of socialism and union power rather than by seeking a simple vote against the Labour party. It was thus necessary to assimilate British socialism with the abuse of union powers (“the sick society”), and to propose instead the much better Conservative offer, built on the values of unity, effort, work, honesty and faith in the future (“the healthy society”).

It was necessary to persuade the country that the risk of confrontation was no more than bluff by the union organizations and to carry out a denigration campaign of all the advantages of the trade union leaders, to stress the gulf separating the leaders and union activists from ordinary members, and that the trade union leaders were the only holders of real power; and that the nation must look directly to ordinary members rather than the unions’ official structures. Another lever was to use the rising public discontent
with trade unionism “Skilfully handled, however, the rising tide of public feeling could transform the unions from Labour's secret weapon into its major electoral liability, and the fear of union/Tory conflict could be laid to rest.”

The project, considered somewhat explosive, was left on the shelf, but the ‘winter of discontent’ reinforced deeply its relevance and gave it great influence on the Conservative manifesto in 1979.

The ‘winter of discontent’ and the election of May 1979

The ‘winter of discontent’ explosion

By mid 1978, James Callaghan had at least partly recovered from an apparently desperate economic situation. The surveys were hesitating between Labour and the Conservatives if an election were called by the Prime Minister in the autumn, which was the general forecast.

It was at that time that the Conservative party selected the young advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi. Tim Bell took on the management of the Conservative party account and proposed a very aggressive communication strategy relating to the Labour party. The poster campaign of August 1978, showing a long line of jobless people in front of an employment office, accompanied by the slogan “Labour Isn’t Working” which tackled the Labour party head-on, broke the rule which recommended avoiding any mention of the adversary in a political communication. The poster was shown on only twenty sites in the United Kingdom, but generated a major controversy within the Labour party which was given further publicity on all the TV news reports. Many British people still remember today the significant impact of this poster campaign.

To general surprise, James Callaghan announced on September 7th that there would be no General Election in the autumn. He calculated that the
rigorous measures that he was recommending would still be accepted and that Britain, and in particular the trade unions, would not endanger his policy, for fear of helping the Conservatives to win power. Nobody will ever know who would have won this election, but on the other hand it is certain that the events which would follow - the ‘winter of discontent’ - would transform the electoral prospects and even more the political program of Margaret Thatcher.

James Callaghan indeed decided to continue the incomes policy for another year and from July 21st the maximum pay rise was set at 5%. But in September the TUC and in October even the Labour Party rose up against this year of extra effort: inflation envisaged at 7.5% would entail a loss of purchasing power.

The flashover began with the multiplication of industrial disputes. It all began on September 22nd with a strike at the Ford factories, made official by the TGWU on October 5th. Ford U.K., having hesitated over a long period because of possible governmental sanctions within the incomes policy framework, finally decided to grant increases of 17%, well beyond the governmental ceiling of 5%. This offer was accepted by the employees on November 22nd.

But this was only the beginning of the ‘winter of discontent’, a phrase drawn from the first Act of Shakespeare’s Richard III. The conclusion of this first dispute began with a domino-effect trigger, a strike by public service staff. The four main public sector unions called a strike by their 1.5 million members in support of the 35 hour week and very substantial pay rises to catch up with the private sector. Strikers from schools, the ambulance service, hospital staff, street cleaners and seamen demonstrated en masse in the streets of London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast, as well as in the north east of England.
The General Secretary of the GMWU, David Basnett, said that those taking part were the people who "literally care for us from the cradle to the grave." Schools were closed. Rubbish was not collected, and rats proliferated. In the hospitals, only the emergency services functioned, and patients - even those with cancer - were turned away by strike pickets. The dead lay unburied in Liverpool, an enduring image in public opinion. Street dealing in drugs was almost unhindered because of reduced police surveillance. Military ambulances were used to mitigate the serious deficiencies in the hospital system.

James Callaghan was caught unprepared by the situation. When he returned on January 10th from the summit meeting of industrialized nations organized by Valery Giscard d'Estaing in Guadeloupe, he carelessly gave a quick reply to journalists without having grasped the scale of the situation and was caught out apparently minimizing the crisis. The next day's *Sun* carried the front page headline, "Crisis, what crisis?", expressing well the gap between the Prime Minister and the people. For the first time, Margaret Thatcher beat him in surveys on his credibility.

*Le Monde* printed a chronicle of these events. On January 19th, it noted that the British economy was paralyzed: "The truck-drivers ceased work, and paralysis overtook the whole economy [...]. This confrontation is likely today to turn to showdown. The crisis resembles more and more that which, in 1974, ensnared Mr. Heath and the striking miners. The experiment is all the more bitter for Mr. Callaghan who had long been regarded as one of the defenders of British trade unionism. Do not his enemies reproach him for having at one time torpedoed the efforts of Mr. Wilson to limit the capacities of the trade unions?" The core unions appeared to have lost control of their base: "The trade union leaders seem overwhelmed by their militants [...]. A minority of outside elements in the unions, in particular students of Trotskyite tendencies, bear responsibility for the abuses."
John Hoskyns, one of Margaret Thatcher’s key advisers in opposition and in office, reports in his memoirs the vision from Bernard Donoughue, the head of James Callaghan’s Policy Unit, of Downing Street under siege: “In the second week of January, mobile pickets were blocking the ports and there was a serious shortage of food and medical supplies - ministers considered sending tanks into the ICI medical headquarters to retrieve drugs and essential equipment. The strike of water workers had deprived many places in north-west England of fresh water since the New Year. The sewage workers were threatening to join the water workers. The lorry drivers had turned down a 15 per cent offer and were demanding more over 20 percent. The railwaymen had called a national strike because they wanted a 10 per cent bonus on top of their 20 per cent wage demand. The nightly television pictures of violence and the brutal face of trade unionism were doing terrible damage to the government and to the trade union movement itself.”

This strike acquired mythical qualities and entered popular political culture. It witnessed the combination, on a very broad scale, of substantial pay demands and consumers being treated as hostages. Supplies of food and fuel were threatened by the strike of heavy goods vehicle drivers. An article in L. Monde of January 20th, under the title “And yet one saw others of them…”, described the daily life of wage-earners and British consumers: “For people who once suffered under the Blitz [...] the strike is only a minor evil, to which one adapts. It belongs to the normal order of the things, even if it is suffered with increasing impatience.”

“One of the drivers described the adventures of his last trip, strewn with obstacles. However he had a pass, laboriously obtained from the strike committee acting in liaison with the local authorities. But to the union bureaucracy was added that of the administration to complicate and delay deliveries. A first stop to show the strike picket - a group of strapping men well muffled up in heavy jackets or warming themselves at a brazier - the stamped and restamped pass and, of course, the certificate of union membership. Later, on the road, a private car waiting at the roadside started to pass the truck and beckoned to him
to stop. This time, it was the ‘flying’ picket exerting its control. [...] ‘Great Britain on its knees’, ‘Threats of famine’: these headlines in the popular press, once again relaying highly alarmist declarations from the food industry, do not seem to have caused any panic [...] The atmosphere remains calm and relaxed. One cannot say as much of the millions of railway passengers, these commuters who, every day, leave their suburbs to go to work. For them, the trial is severe [...]. There are others to be seen, say the commuters. But it is more specifically in the suburbs that heavy resentment is accumulated, directed against the government, British Railways, the railwaymen. Such resentment can explode into violence with the slightest incident, as has been seen in the past.”

The crisis came to an end on February 14th with an agreement under which the government was committed to limit inflation and not to put a ceiling on a priori revalorizations of wages in the public sector. It took some time however for the national agreement to bring about the end of sectorial movements and in particular to see the signature, on February 21st, of a wage settlement with the municipal staff unions. This was the most significant strike movement since the General Strike of 1926. With 29 million working days lost, James Callaghan, possibly the best friend of trade unionism, beat Edward Heath’s 1972 sad strike record.

Public opinion and perception of the trade unions

The consequences of the ‘winter of discontent’ for British daily life and economic activity were important, but the political impact was even stronger. For some years the majority of the British people considered that the unions held too much power, but 81% now felt this109. In addition, the late 1970s saw contradictions developing within the unions. Membership increased strongly and reached a historical peak in 1979, but members judged their organizations with increasing severity: 69.4% of union members considered that the unions were excessively powerful, following the example of the British as a whole.
The multiple strikes became intolerable to the general public. As from 1966, the Gallup survey institute included strikes among the main difficulties which the country must regulate, and this indicator rose very high very often in the 1970s. The record was reached during the ‘winter of discontent’: in January 1979, 53% of the British considered that strikes were the country's main issue. Moreover, in February 1979, Gallup revealed that 61% of the British were in favour of a law making wildcat strikes unlawful.

In the end, the middle classes, including many trade union members, grew weary of muddle-headed and continual trade union agitation. This change of attitude emerged initially over questions as to the legitimacy of unions which escaped the democratic poll and were directed by trade-union “barons” increasingly felt as irresponsible and out of control, men such as Joe Gormley of the NUM, Jack Jones of the road transport union TGWU or Derek Robinson (“Red Robbo”) of British Leyland. The other widely shared feeling was that the trade unions no longer hesitated to obstruct life for citizens and ordinary consumers in order to pressurize their employer or the State and to obtain satisfaction for their claims, in particular wages. In 1979 no more than 20% of the British saw trade unions as good for the country, whereas fifteen years earlier their support stood at 58%.

**Political consequences**

For ten years now, finding ways to restrain excesses in union power had raised difficult questions of political power for both the Labour and the Conservatives. The political consequences of going on strike were substantial once again, but this time to the detriment of the Labour party.

Labour had often stressed the political advantages derived from their supposed good relations with the unions, for whom the Labour party was the political expression. It was therefore confident of being able to guarantee a
certain level of social peace as a result of its close relationship with the union world: the 1974 “social contract” signed between the trade union organisations and the Labour government was the best way to achieve a more benevolent neutrality for the British population and a certain level of discipline in trade union initiatives.

These traditional arguments of members of the Labour Party were valueless in the face of the union leaders’ inability to genuinely control their base. On the contrary, such relations with the unions, seen as completely irresponsible by public opinion, became an irredeemable political handicap. In addition there was an increasing disconnection between trade union membership and the Labour vote, which dropped from 65% to just 50%, showing that union members saw themselves less and less as Labour voters.

The ‘winter of discontent’ was a correspondingly outstanding opportunity for Margaret Thatcher. The difficulties of managing the crisis undermined the credibility of James Callaghan, no matter how strong he had been hitherto. The electorate, undecided in surveys until the end of 1978, now irrevocably favoured the Conservatives. Their electoral victory, doubtful up to this point, became probable. According to a February 1979 Gallup Poll, from now on the British had much more confidence in the Conservatives that the Labour party to settle problems of industrial disputes.

Even greater importance concerned the power of the Conservative party to assume a strict programme for framing union power without harming their electoral prospects. By the force of the example, the ‘winter of discontent’ validated the electoral strategy of the Stepping Stones report and authorized Margaret Thatcher to give up her last prejudices in choosing an unambiguous platform concerning abuses of union powers.

The Conservative political manifesto indeed stated its position clearly in relation to unions: “A powerful and responsible trade union movement must
play an important part in the British rebirth. We must work with the trade unions and seek their co-operation. But it is the government that has the responsibility to represent the people. On the other hand, the unions - as with other groups or organizations - represent only part of the population and for a part of life only. It is for the government to act for all, in any time, in the search for the national interest.” The programme was thus designed to set strict limits for types of action that the unions could undertake. Targets were the closed shop (obligatory trade union membership for workers at a particular company), the rules on strike pickets and the introduction of the secret vote for strikes.

The election takes place

On March 28, 1979, James Callaghan was forced to ask the Queen to call a General Election following a vote of ‘no confidence' passed against his government by a majority, a first since 1924.

The Conservatives, who offered a less precise programme but one that in many ways resembled that of 1970, were now clear favourite in opinion polls, even though the gap narrowed at the end of the campaign. On April 3rd, the Conservatives won the election with a clear majority.

Le Monde of May 5th, 1979, showed the victorious leader of the victorious party as “a political warrior”: “Margaret Thatcher also believes herself invested with the mission of driving the enemy, i.e. socialism, out of the kingdom [...]. She believes what she says, she says what she thinks, this is alarming, noted a politician of her friends [...]. She carefully selected the journalists chosen to interview her, deliberately excluding those whom she knew to be hostile. Not that she was afraid - but, on the contrary, from fear of frightening the electorate by tearing them apart, like Kipling’s female bear, ‘more deadly than the male’ to which she would one day have compared herself.”
The Queen asked Margaret Thatcher to form the new government. On April 5th, on the steps of Number 10, the new Prime Minister quoted some words of St. Francis of Assisi before taking office:

“Where there is discord, may we bring harmony.
Where there is error, may we bring truth.
Where there is doubt, may we bring faith.
And where there is despair, may we bring hope.

And to all the British people – bowsover they voted – may I say this: now the election is over, may we get together and strive to serve and strengthen the country of which we’re so proud to be a part. (…) There is now work to be done.”

The Margaret Thatcher victory undoubtedly put an end to the 1970s, which, rightly, have the reputation of being the blackest period in British history since the 1930s, except of course for periods of war. The May 1979 general election “brought to an end a decade of decline, confusion and economic failure which had taken the country to the brink of collapse. It also closed a distinctive chapter of post-war British history - which had included the Attlee government’s social reforms, the independence of India, the brief life of ‘one nation’ Conservatism and our accession to the EEC – as the national leadership passed to a new generation, with new ideas and values.”

The apparently unstoppable deterioration in the British economic and industrial situation was reported with certain condescension in France and in the world. On January 24th 1979, Le Monde printed a leading article under the heading “What has happened to the British?": “What is much more serious, for Great Britain and with her for Europe, is the new erosion of power and wellbeing which it will be necessary for the nation to undergo. Whoever says massive rises in wages in effect says increase
in production costs, higher prices, reduced commercial competitiveness and in the final analysis monetary erosion. [...] We never stop hearing about England as ‘a country in the course of underdevelopment’. What happened to this proud nation? [...] The threat which hangs over the United Kingdom today is less serious than that which its subjects knew so well how to face in 1940. As then, they are not the only ones concerned with its outcome.”

Nothing was working at the economic level. The first oil crisis fell on the United Kingdom when it was already in great difficulty. Contrary to France, there was no visible switch from thirty glorious years “30 glorieuses” to the “crisis”, but a move straight into an acute stage of a deep and underlying crisis. The economic assessment for the years 1974-1979 was very poor: annual growth did not exceed 1.5% (half the rate for 1968-1973), inflation was on average 15% per annum (double the rate for 1968-1973) and the number of unemployed was running steady at over a million. The country was completely out of line as regards per capita GDP in the developed world.

The economic situation of the country was taking on an apparently unstoppable downward trajectory, Argentinean style, and became a subject of jokes for the economists of continental Europe. Sir Nicholas Henderson, the British diplomat ambassador in France, explained that in 1976 “the French press were full of the ‘collapse’ of the pound sterling; the ‘wipe-out’ of the UK and of the ‘tumbling down’ of our economy. For days, I have found listening to the news on the French radio and hearing the French commentaries upon our ‘decline’ unbearably humiliating.” When his Bonn colleague asked the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to intercede with the IMF on behalf of the United Kingdom, the Chancellor gave him “a lecture on how we had messed up our economy”, who likened Britain to East Germany. The bottom was perhaps reached when the cradle of the industrial revolution was put under supervision by the IMF, following the example any nation in Africa or South America. For some, the United Kingdom was heading towards under development.
Beyond the economic performance, it was the pervasive pessimism which chilled the spirit in the United Kingdom. Douglas Hurd considers in addition that this despair constituted the acutest demonstration of the “English disease”. The January 1974 French TV broadcast “24 heures à la une”, entitled “England, a partner in difficulty”, presenting a long litany of pessimistic interviews from British people of all social classes.

Behaviour among the elites was particularly striking. Cynicism and the return to the private sphere were the rule. What struck Gilles Carrez, as a trainee in a British local government agency in the 1970s, was the behaviour of professional staff capable of gossiping and complaining endlessly about the British decline while continuing to enjoy a pleasant life, even while contributing personally to the disconnection: long golf parties reduced working hours. The same decadent atmosphere can be witnessed in Ronald McIntosh’s book: endless discussions on British stoppages and the abyss awaiting Britain, within the National Economic Development Council “Neddy” or in the Civil Service, did not stop him enjoying pleasant nautical evenings at the Royal Thames Yacht Club.

The rhetoric of the British economic decline, which emerged from the end of 1960 in a still-favourable international context, settled in lastingly at the heart of the political debate at the beginning of 1970 and gradually came to radicalize partisan points of view.

Under these conditions, political management was quietly despairing. Government activity consisted for many commentators in “rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic”. The apparently total impotence of politicians and government officials in relation to a weakened and ungovernable country led certain British people to doubt the virtues of the parliamentary democratic system. It was particularly visible in the proliferation of political alternance from the 1960s, manifest signs of dissatisfaction but also

This general deterioration coincided with the golden age of the unions. The union organizations pressed heavily on economic policy, in particular from 1972 to 1979. This was the time of the beer and sandwiches meetings in Downing Street between the Prime Minister of the day and the major union leaders, often seen as far more powerful than the Prime Minister.

The tensions were increased by the major attraction exerted by the application of the incomes policy since the 1960s. “Under the postwar consensus, the maintenance of economic stability - full employment combined with stable prices – depended crucially on the restraint of organised labour; and this required governments, whether of left or right, to enter into bargaining relationships with the trade unions. Whether governments sought to moderate wage claims through ‘incomes policies’ – either statutory or voluntary – or through other methods, they needed the consent both of union leaders and of the rank-and-file membership if economic management were to be successful." For the system to work, constructive trade unions were needed, thinking almost in terms of community property and the general interest. In particular, union members must be convinced that distribution in the form of wages could only represented wealth created by productivity gains and no more, in order for the incomes policy to function in the long term. It was possible: the Scandinavian countries were able to make comparable economic policies function positively, managed jointly by public authorities and the trade unions.

But the way in which British trade unionism had evolved since the 1960s made it impossible to observe these conditions. The trade unions were unable, either in their structures or in their ideologies, to constitute the reliable partners required by Edward Heath and James Callaghan. Contradictions became intolerable, between a pacified trade unionism jointly managing economic and social policies with the government and a militant trade
unionism of opposition and class struggle. 1979 brought the proof that the trade union leaders were unable to control their base and hence in the medium term to maintain co-operation with the government.

The union organizations thus found themselves in the role of principal defendant of the mediocrity in the British economic performance. At the same time they were accused of organizing underproduction in the old sectors (choosing wages rather than investment, restrictive practices), in asserting wage claims that were completely disconnected from developing productivity, finally in maintaining a very high level of industrial unrest, which made the United Kingdom the uncontested world champion of strikes.

Some were also aware that efforts to control wages via an authoritative and permanent policy of wages structures could, in a democratic society and market economy, cause a serious confrontation between the government and powerful trade unions such as those of the miners or the electricity sector. In any case, the association of trade unions with the economic policy became politically destructive. Confrontations in 1973-4 and 1978-9 brought the proof that neither a Conservative nor a Labour government could make a long-term success of an incomes policy. In particular, the will to stick to the objectives of the incomes policy led to confrontations with the union organizations.

But in general these relationships ended badly for the political authority. What was certain at the time when Margaret Thatcher came to power was that her three predecessors had suffered electoral failure either because of the particularly serious consequences of strike movements (Edward Heath, James Callaghan), or because they had sought to reform the legal framework of union activity and the right to strike (Harold Wilson). The British mandate to reform trade union activity would thus have to be extremely cautious.
THE EARLY YEARS OF MARGARET THATCHER

Margaret Thatcher’s economic policy and their political and social consequences

Economic policy

The primary goal of the Thatcher government was to break the spiral of the inescapable British economic decline, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer Geoffrey Howe indicated when he presented his first budget: “France and Germany’s combined share of world trade of manufactured goods, which in 1954 was almost the same as Britain’s alone, is now more than three times as large as ours. The French people now produce one and a half times as much as we do. The Germans produce twice as much, and they are moving further ahead all the time [...] In the last few years the hard facts of our relative decline have become increasingly plain, and the threat of absolute decline has gradually become very real.”

The post war sacred cow, the fight against unemployment, became a lesser objective since the fight against inflation became the priority. The monetary instruments of foreign exchange rates and interest rates were in the forefront of this monetarist approach, but in pragmatic reality the control of inflation would put pressure on every element in the range of macroeconomic tools. The incomes policy vanished in favour of decentralization and freedom of wage settlements.

Direct state interventionism was rejected in favour of a programme of massive privatizations launched in 1981: “Public Sector trade unions have been extraordinarily successful in gaining advantages for themselves in the pay hierarchy by exploiting their monopoly collective bargaining position… Privatization… makes it possible to link pay to success and to provide appropriate rewards.” The privatizations
coupled to a massive programme for the sale of social housing make it possible to build a nation of small owners.

Like all the developed countries, the United Kingdom suffered the effects of the second oil crisis – directly, with the increased cost of oil (much mitigated by oil from the North Sea) and also, particularly, the indirect effect of the diminishing demand from the other oil importing industrialized countries. From the end 1979 Britain suffered a recession of renewed severity, worse than in 1920-1922 or the early 1930s. The gross national product dropped by 6% between the fourth quarter of 1979 and the fourth quarter of 1980. In two years, industrial production fell by of 14.5% in constant monetary terms.

The recession was disastrous for the manufacturing sector, which lost 1.7 million jobs, a quarter of the 1979 workforce. Although it cannot be certain that the recession was caused deliberately, the consequences concerning the behaviour of industrial sector employees were obvious: “Unemployment related to the reorganization of traditional industries such as coal provides a solution by reducing the negotiating power of the trade unions, making possible the acceptance of new industrial practices and allowing the development of employment in new economic sectors.”

Was this a back-to-front industrial policy designed to accept the depression of whole sectors of the economy in order to allow the development of a strong service economy, and in particular in financial services? In any case, the falling trend in industrial employment undergone by the whole of the developed world was strongly concentrated in the early 1980s in the United Kingdom, perhaps because it was held back for a long time by a British industrial 'nanny state' in the 1960s and 1970s. All this led at the beginning of the 1980s to brutal losses of industrial employment, while the service sector presumed to provide alternative employment emerged slowly. In geographical terms, the recession had a major impact in the north and the west of the
United Kingdom, while London and the south-east of England was relatively secure.

Unemployment rates grew explosively during the recession, rising from 1.3 million out of work at the end of 1979 to 2.1 million at the end of 1980. The United Kingdom was to come very near to three million unemployed in 1982-1983, and the unemployment rate went from 4% to 10% of the active population. Total employment dropped by 1.6 million people from 1979 to the General Election in 1983 (from 25.4 million British people in employment to 23.7 million despite the beginnings of recovery).

The Thatcher government was however fortunate in being the first to profit fully from oil revenues. The share of the oil sector in national economic activity grew from 1.2% to 3.9% of GDP between 1978 and 1982, a crucial contribution to reducing the sharp decline in non-oil production in the early 1980s. Oil also made it possible to strongly improve the balance of
payments and to balance the budget, since the British state took approximately three quarters of the income\textsuperscript{119}.

On the economic plan, the recession contributed largely to the victory against inflation. Wage moderation and the appreciation of the pound sterling contained inflation undoubtedly more effectively than monetarist control of money supply. These actions closely resembled the French policies for competitive reduction of inflation selected by François Mitterrand from the 1983 “régueur” turning-point until the early 1990s.

\textit{Political consequences}

The economic recession was not without political consequences: the government was confronted with an unprecedented fall in production, a doubling of the unemployment rate and a very strong increase in public expenditure because of recession. In March 1981, the Mori survey institute indicated that 16\% of the British were satisfied with the Thatcher government and 74\% dissatisfied.

Margaret Thatcher stood firm, even though, at the very centre of her party and of her government, she suffered virulent attacks from the left wing and allies of Edward Heath. She made a statement which became famous, at the 1980 Conservative party Congress, “\textit{To those waiting with bated breath for that favourite media catchphrase, the ‘U-turn’, I have only one thing to say: ‘You turn if you want to. The lady’s not for turning’},” in direct reference to the 1972 Edward Heath’s complete reversal of economic policy\textsuperscript{120}. Margaret Thatcher also gained a new nickname at this time, TINA, for “\textit{There Is No Alternative}”.

The tensions were no less extreme. The results in approval rating and voting intentions were low: after her election Margaret Thatcher suffered a descent into Hell in the surveys with a low point in August 1981 (25\% of those questioned satisfied, 65\% of those questioned unsatisfied); at the end of 1981,
voting intentions in favour of the Conservatives were barely above 20%, against more than 50% for an alliance between the Liberal party and the Social Democrat Party. But Margaret Thatcher and her Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, held firm, including in the crucial episodes, as at the time of the vote of the 1981 budget.

Trade union relations

Margaret Thatcher’s arrival initiated a period of retreat for the trade-union organizations. They were no longer associated with the economic policy, as in the 1970s (no more beer and sandwiches meetings at Downing Street). The economic options selected - the abandonment of a Keynesian-inspired economic policy, the reduction of financial support for heavily unionised state enterprises – together with the economic recession also strongly reduced their influence.

Union opposition was apparently determined, but in the end somewhat vain, on the whole representing frustration. April 14th 1980 day of action against the government's policies met with only relative success. It was the reign of a dialogue of the deaf, as recalled by the president of the TUC at the time of the trade union Congress of 1981: “The government does not want to hear reason. Its only way of arguing consists in parroting worn-out sentences taken from the books of Milton Friedman. Talking to this government is much like trying to begin a conversation with the speaking clock. In fact it is worse, because with the exception of Margaret [Thatcher] and Geoffrey [Howe] who seem to have everything wrong, the speaking clock at least gives you the right time”.

In addition, the trade union movement suffered important reverses at the time of the strike movements. The steelworkers’ strike in 1980 was a failure, as was the move of the printers’ union (National Graphical Association) in 1982. Further, it had to look on, powerless, during the
establishment of a legal arsenal which heavily restricted its capacity for action, and made heavy financial sanctions possible under the Employment Act 1982.

*The 1981 crisis and the arrival of Arthur Scargill as head of the NUM*

*The government's unfortunate initiative*

In its first two years the Thatcher government did not concentrate on the mining sector. None the less, the economic policy was supposed to keep public grants under control in state enterprises. This had important implications for the NCB management, accustomed for many years to receive comfortable subsidies.

The NCB suffered the terrible economic recession, which was particularly brutal for manufacturing industries. Coal extraction dropped by 15% between 1979 (130 million tons) and 1982 (111 million tons). From 1981 to 1983, coal under consumption involved the accumulation of massive stocks (approximately 60 million tons or six months' production) stocked at the mines or at the power stations, stocks which would be strategic at the time of the dispute to come.

The government tried to treat the coal sector with the same rigour as the economy as a whole. The Coal Industry Act 1980 envisaged a return to financial equilibrium (except for public grants) for 1983-1984. Ambitious financial indicators were preferred over physical indicators of production, as the NCB had a long term vocation to privatization. Internal loans for loss making pits were prohibited. It was while trying to implement those orientations that the NCB management proposed an important programme of pits closure to the Energy Secretary David Howell, who seemed to have accepted this package under Treasury pressure: “A hundred miners fewer allow us to make a million pounds' worth of economies.” Indeed since 1974, forty pits had already
closed without industrial problems and with at least the implicit agreement of the NUM.

But the closure figures now envisaged were greater. At a meeting with the executive committee of the NUM on February 10th 1981, the chairman of the NCB, Derek Ezra, announced the immediate closing of fifty pits in five years. According to Joe Gormley, “It was probably the most stupid statement he ever made. The fact was that he was only talking about a two-year closure programme of about twenty-three pits, eighteen of which had already been discussed, and a few already agreed. And, over a five-year period, it probably would have been about fifty pits in the normal course of events. But, by blatantly setting a picture like that as target, he gave the ‘militants’ the perfect platform they needed. ‘Fifty pits’ became the issue, along with the projected loss of 30,000 jobs. It wasn’t just the militants either. The whole Executive, myself included, was angry and bitter.”

Joe Gormley immediately threatened a national strike ballot. One national executive committee member said: “Mrs. Thatcher has been out to get the miners since 1972 and 1974. If she throws down the gauntlet, I can assure her of one thing: we will pick it up.” Before the famous meeting of February 10th, Arthur Scargill had organized a vote of his Yorkshire members in January, and 86% of the 66,000 members backed the recourse to a strike if any mine-shaft were closed for other reasons than the exhaustion of the coal seams, and the call for help from the other regional unions in this case. The NUM Yorkshire area president indicated to journalists that “the strike could supply the conditions for a forthcoming election and thus make it possible to get rid of this Conservative government once and for all”. Wildcat strikes spread everywhere, including in the mining areas with moderate unionists, such as Nottinghamshire. The Times published a large leading front page article under the title “Miners against conservatives: the supreme test which awaits Mrs Thatcher”.

The Prime Minister very quickly realized the limits of the government's power to face a tough strike. Its capacity for resistance was quite simply inadequate, in particular because of the limited level of coal stocks at the power stations: government data indicated that the maximum endurance in the event of a miners’ strike was thirteen or fourteen weeks. Moreover, public opinion was perhaps not yet ready for a major confrontation. The combat, if it were unavoidable, was to be avoided for the moment to escape the political disasters that Edward Heath had undergone a few years earlier. Margaret Thatcher decided to withdraw. Since a conflict without any reasonable chance of success must be avoided at all costs, it was now essential to limit the already serious political damage as far as possible.

This battle was therefore very soon seen as lost. With a speed which surprised actors and commentators of both sides, the withdrawal of the mine closure plan was ratified by a tripartite meeting - government-NUM-NCB - on February 18th, 1981, almost a week after the announcement of the plan for restructuring. The restrictions weighing on the fiscal contributions to the NCB were lifted, taking the state contribution for 1981-1982 to 1.5 billion pounds (5.6 billion euros at 2007 prices). The protocol for closing the dispute included the abandonment of the programme of mine closures, the reduction of imports (only 750,000 tons per annum for the electricity operator CEGB) and wage concessions.

It was to be the last great victory of the NUM. The retreat of 1981 was at the same time the third major success of the NUM with Joe Gormley at its head against a Conservative government and new backing for Margaret Thatcher, and even a U-turn (small U-turn) over her programme and her convictions on a very important subject and policy. The turn-round was felt by the Conservative commentators and MPs as a humiliation in the face of the
despised power of the trade unions: Margaret Thatcher had in the end done no better than her predecessors, whether Conservative or Labour.

Margaret Thatcher tried to hide her retreat while exploiting the distinction between the state enterprise, the NUM and the government, but was left deeply marked by the episode. She noted in particular that the leadership team of the NCB was still held captive by its contradiction between a managerial approach (taking into account of economic reality over the restructuring proposal) and its historical intimacy with the trade union organizations, leading to a de facto complicity: the president of the NCB, Derek Ezra, had thirty four years of seniority in the company in 1981 and had already chaired it during the strikes of the 1970s. The leaders of the NCB and the Energy Secretary, David Howell, who had led her into a dead end, lost her confidence. David Howell, heavily marked by the fact of not having initially managed to resist the Treasury, moved from the Ministry for Energy to that of Transport at the time of the first important government shuffle in September 1981.

Arthur Scargill becomes president of the NUM

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the advent of Arthur Scargill, appreciated by his militants with as little restraint as he was hated by his adversaries. After making his total opposition to any site closure his battle-cry in his campaign for the presidency, Arthur Scargill won the election in December 1981, with the unprecedented total score of 70% of the votes. Scargill's triumph was strengthened by the inability of the moderate right wing of the NUM to organize itself: it had no fewer than three candidates in the election. He also knew how to exploit the distress of the miners over the general feeling of the risk of an imminent catastrophe for British coal and the need for a fighting leader against such a risk.
With the election of Arthur Scargill, the NUM completed its political move towards the left. It became the union to the left of the entire union world. Arthur Scargill saw his personal victory as the validation of his double conviction: always to obtain higher category wage advantages for the miners, but also to implement a revolutionary political programme which implied a major defeat for the Conservative government.

Joe Gormley announced that with the arrival of Arthur Scargill as president of the NUM, nothing would remain as before: during his presidency, he had certainly had to compromise with a stronger and more turbulent left, but he had made claims on wages and working conditions the central focus in negotiations. In addition he had always fought against the political orchestration of union action. Arthur Scargill brought change: the media and other observers saw here the harbinger of a radicalisation towards the left and militancy. A book published in 1983 also expresses this in a premonitory manner: “With Scargill installed as NUM president and the possibility that a resurgent Triple Alliance may be prepared for a new 1926 in hopes of a different outcome, it will take far more than an alteration of the inner rationale of administrative bureaucracies to ensure that events of 1972 and 1974 do not become merely the first acts of a deepening drama.”

The change of leadership had immediate effects. One of Scargill’s first presidential decisions was to move the NUM headquarters from London to Sheffield, in its militant stronghold of Yorkshire. In particular, the strike lost its status as the last resort and became more of a simple tool for everyday use. In fourteen months, he asked for three votes to launch a nation-wide strike, even though he suffered as many failures. The call for a wages strike in January 1982 received only 45% of votes in favour. A few days before the poll, Joe Gormley published a statement in the Daily Express against the strike. The calls of October 1982 (on wages and pit closures) and of March 1983 (pit closures) won less than 40% of votes in favour of the move to strike. Kim Howells
indicates that the NUM South Wales area was aware since 1981, even since 1979, that it would be extremely difficult to mobilize the miners of Nottinghamshire, and even in certain zones of Yorkshire, for a strike\textsuperscript{127}.

The government prepares for the conflict

These events convinced Margaret Thatcher even more of the certainty of the confrontation to come. Nigel Lawson felt the same as Energy Secretary: “I became convinced that the problems of the coal industry could not be resolved without the decisive defeat of the militant arm of the NUM, even if that meant facing up to a strike, for which we would need to be properly prepared\textsuperscript{128}.” Geoffrey Howe considered for his part that it was impossible to constitute a successful, profitable coal industry independent of government subsidies, without settling the trade-union monopoly issue definitively.

But the humiliating retreat of 1981 taught that, from then until the next battle, it was necessary to combine rigorous preparation and extreme caution: “We would have to rely on a judicious mixture of flexibility and bluff until the Government was in a position to face down the challenge posed to the economy, and indeed potentially to the rule of law, by the combined force of monopoly and union power in the coal industry\textsuperscript{129}.” The preparatory work began. It was entrusted within the government to a sub-group in charge of crisis management in three principal fields: energy policy, the police force and law and order, and trade union legislation.

The 1977 Ridley had magisterially summarized the comprehensive preparation plan to be implemented. Whatever the discretion of the implementation, it was however unlikely to pass entirely unnoticed by an attentive NUM leadership.
Changes among the key men

It was first necessary to change the key men for the preparation. At the political level, Margaret Thatcher took advantage of the cabinet reshuffle of September 1981 to promote two strategic supporters. Nigel Lawson was named for the crucial post of Energy Secretary to replace the unfortunate David Howell. He had a double mission: to avoid a strike at all costs while preparing for future confrontation. Margaret Thatcher in addition replaced the moderate (‘wet’, according to Thatcher terminology) James Prior with Norman Tebbit at the Ministry for Employment to take a much firmer line over the very sensitive dossier on the right to strike and trade union rights.

It was also necessary to change the chairman of the two key state enterprises, the CEGB and the NCB. For the CEGB, Nigel Lawson picked Walter Marshall, an enthusiastic promoter of nuclear power130: “I needed someone able to keep the power stations running in the event of a coal strike and, meanwhile, to cooperate to the full with the Government in the preparations to withstand a strike.”

It is also necessary to replace the chairman of the NCB, Derek Ezra. After thirty-five years of good and faithful services in the service of the NCB and ten years of tenure punctuated by three lost crises and two national strikes, the unhappy chairman of the Joe Gormley years was replaced by Norman Siddall, long the 'number two' of the NCB. Norman Siddall chose a more managerial stance and insisted on cost controls while avoiding direct confrontation with the NUM. One key decision by Nigel Lawson and Norman Siddall concerned the exploitation of a new coal seam in the Vale of Belvoir countryside (Leicestershire), a decision which would do much to persuade some miners to trust the NCB more than the NUM133. Siddall's performance was recognised by both Margaret Thatcher and Nigel Lawson, but his poor health would not enable him to continue his functions.
Energy policy and security of electricity production

The power stations constituted the heart of the battles of 1972 and 1974, marked by sometimes dramatic shortages of electricity. It was therefore necessary to maximize the electricity system’s capacity to endure a long miners’ strike. The Energy Department and the CEGB established a risk contingency plan and planned the logistics to maintain production and distribution of electricity in a crisis situation, in coordination with the NCB and British Rail.

One of the essential issues consisted of keeping far greater stocks of coal available within the power stations. The NCB was in a state of overproduction with considerable stocks held at the mines (43 million tons in December 1981). It was imperative to move these stocks to the power stations – which became all the more necessary since one of the government’s concessions to meet the crisis of February 1981 consisted of almost ending CEGB coal purchases from abroad.

A detailed plan for the increase in stocks was requested from the CEGB before the end of 1981. The plan continued until the power stations were virtually full, allowing the doubling of stocks in the power stations between the crisis of February 1981 (15 million tons) and the beginning of the NUM overtime strike (30 million tons) at the end of October 1983. The level of coal stocks in the power stations formed part of the indicators prepared each week for the Prime Minister.

All the ancillary products necessary for electricity production were also stored in large quantities: diesel fuel necessary for the start and the stability of coal combustion, carbon dioxide for cooling the boilers, oxygen, hydrogen and chlorine. Whenever possible, industrial gases were moreover manufactured within the actual premises of the power stations.
It was both ironic and paradoxical that the situation of surplus production by the NCB, at the origin of the 1981 site closure plan and the ensuing crisis, made it possible between 1981 and 1983 to establish significant stocks in the power stations, an essential pre-condition for winning a war of attrition against the miners at the time of the next strike. It also seemed difficult for these preparations to be made without attracting the attention of the NUM.

Another way to reduce the dependence on coal consisted in enabling the use of fuel other than coal in certain power stations. Many sites thus changed to dual mode, oil/coal. Nigel Lawson also had to hold back Margaret Thatcher, for budgetary reasons, when she wished at one time to turn all power stations over to dual oil/coal operation.

For supplying the power stations, plans were set up to use road deliveries rather than the railways because of the major risk of interruption of rail-bound movements through the close links between the NUM and the NUR (the National Union of Railwaymen). The preparations were detailed to the point of identifying helicopter landing sites inside the power stations to bring in the chemical components necessary for the proper performance of the power stations, and to envisage the training of helicopter pilots in transporting heavy loads.

The CEGB staffs were reluctant to be used, potentially, by the government in a combat with the miners beyond the mere mission of ensuring the supply of electricity. According to Frank Ledger and Howard Sallis, it was in the end the proliferation of provocative declarations by the leaders of the NUM.

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NUM and Arthur Scargill's attempts to launch a strike at all costs which would remove the scruples of the CEGB leaders and employees. The mission of “keeping the lights on” was simple and clearly identified by the agents of the CEGB, except for certain areas where the bonds between the miners and the employees of the electricity sector were strong; such as South Yorkshire.

Preparations were also undertaken to avoid stoppages in the iron and steel industry, the next most strategic outlet of the British collieries after electricity production. In mid-1983, the government was considered capable of lasting for six months in the face of an all-out miners’ strike.

**Law and order**

The events of Saltley had constituted a true shock for the government, but also for the police forces and legal authorities in charge of the maintenance of law and order. The police forces however continued to be trained for severe and multiple industrial disputes, as at the time of the Grunwick dispute in 1977, which it had faced with much greater effectiveness than at the time of the 1972 strike.

One of the first decisions of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister was to check that both the police and the armed forces were properly paid, in particular to fight what she saw as a crisis of morale, especially in the police service\(^\text{132}\). During her mandate as Prime Minister, police numbers (127,000) and civil auxiliaries in the police forces (46,500) would also increase by almost 15%. Police pay doubled in real terms between 1979 and 1994, soon enabling young police officers to earn more than teachers or junior doctors\(^\text{133}\). During the 1979 General Election, the Police Federation was the first trade union to campaign for the Tory party\(^\text{134}\).

The government however had to deal with the particularities of the British police force. According to Lord Brittan and Lord Hurd\(^\text{135}\), Home
Secretary from 1983 to 1985 and from 1985 to 1989 respectively, the police force felt a deep cultural weakness at being liable to be seen as tools of the employers or the government. The police forces were jealous of their independence from the political authorities, and the role of strike breaker which this authority would attempt to entrust to the police was a sensitive issue. The police forces would not however be able to avoid increasing involvement in the 1960s and 1970s.

Several initiatives aimed to avoid the renewal of Saltley-style situations. Police training now included issues of civil order disruption as well as contemporary industrial relations. By early 1984, 10% of the 140,000 British police officers had been trained on civil disorder issues and how to use specialised equipment. Police equipment was indeed adapted, with the general issue of individual anti-riot equipment (helmet, protection shield, truncheon), within the county police forces. The existence of a handbook of tactical operations for the maintenance of law and order (methods of using truncheons by mounted police) would be revealed later, at the time of the lawsuit in July 1985 over the incidents at Orgreave.

Police experience relating to law and order was also reinforced considerably since the beginning of the 1970s through the events in Northern Ireland and urban violence at the beginning of 1980, in particular in Brixton.

The strength of territorial coordination of police forces was increased. The national centre for the coordination of police forces (NRC), created in 1972, was activated in 1981 for the Brixton riots and in 1982 for the visit of the Pope; it was then fully able to fulfil its purpose: national planning of resources, organization of mutual support between the various regional police forces through the availability of means and national supervision of law and order. Finally, the government supervised with great attention the nomination of new Chief Constables for police forces in significant mining areas.


**Supervision of the trade unions by the intelligence services**

The increasing union agitation of the 1970s (the dockers' strike of 1970, miners’ strikes in 1972 and 1974) led to the reorientation of follow-up activities by MI5. According to the BBC, MI5 stressed “homeland subversion”, in particular the subversion of “the left and extreme left”, on the initiative of the Prime Minister Edward Heath after the 1972 miners’ strike which led to considerable reinforcement of the means and manpower of division F, “anti subversion”.

MI5 and police Special Branch seemed then to have considerably developed their network of advisers in the trade unions: “literally hundreds of trade union officials and activists were signed up in the 1970s as informers – or ‘sources’, as they are known in MI5”

In the BBC documentary “True Spie” in 2002, a former officer in the Special Branch, ('Alan') indicated that twenty three union leaders regularly provided information to the intelligence services. According to 'Alan', the hardening on the left of many trade unions merited greater attention from the intelligence services, which sought or placed advisers at good levels within the trade-union organizations.

Among the advisers, 'Alan' quoted Joe Gormley, president of the NUM between 1971 and 1981. Gormley, representative of the right or moderate membership of his union, wanted to thwart the rise to power of the militant left wing represented by Arthur Scargill and Mick McGahey: “He loved his country, he was a patriot and was particularly anxious over the growth of the Militant Tendency in his own trade union.” Questioned on these facts, Arthur Scargill was not surprised besides: “throughout its history the NUM has had senior leaders linked to both the Special Branch and with the State.”
Transformation of the right to strike and industrial relations

The reform of strike and union legislation was part of the 1979 Conservative programme. Here was a subject on which Margaret Thatcher had a clear mandate from the electorate, but the difficulties encountered in this field by Edward Heath in the 1970s make her cautious. The political line chosen was one of gradual and step by step action, implemented by Jim Prior, Employment Secretary from 1979 to 1981, very much in favour of caution in this field, and then Norman Tebbit, Employment Secretary from 1981 to 1983, much closer to Margaret Thatcher on the ideological level.

The legislative programme was based on the lesson of the disastrous Industrial Relations Act 1971. The law could only create provisions of which the use lay with the discretion of the employers, without any obligation to implement them. This solution minimized the resistance of companies to the new texts, since they were not forced to change their practices as regards labour relations, and in particular made it impossible for martyrs to emerge from union causes likely to mobilize the support of the union world. Norman Tebbit expressed this approach plainly: “If necessary I will surround every prison in this country with police - and if needs be the army. I am willing to seal them off with barbed-wire barricades. Under no circumstances will I allow any trade union activist – however hard he tries – to get into prison under my legislation.”

The Employment Act 1980, prepared by James Prior, was the trial attempt at this incremental approach. The law limited picketing to activities carried out by an employee on his place of work or in the immediate vicinity of his work place. It thus provided strict rules over secondary picketing: it became illegal for strikers to gather in the neighbourhood of a site whose employees were not on strike, or to obstruct the activity of non striking employees, in particular the employees of suppliers or the customers of the company on strike. The law was aimed unambiguously at the actions of flying pickets, shock
troops of union disputes in the 1970s. From now on, it was no longer legally possible for them to block factories, ports or public buildings during strikes.

Norman Tebbit went further with the Employment Act 1982. In a structurally limiting way the law enumerated the reasons for legality of a strike: only strikes which related exclusively or primarily to a disagreement between employees and employers remained legal. Strikes in sympathy with other wage-earners became illegal, and the employer saw his powers recognized to lay off employees who had taken part in an illegal strike. The law put an end to the legal immunity of unions as moral entities if damage was caused in pursuance of an illegal activity. That answered well the problems identified by Geoffrey Howe in the texts of the 1970s: it was now possible to attack the unions through their finances, up to a ceiling of £250,000 in damages, equal to approximately 900,000 euros in 2007.

The 1984 law on the unions (Trade Union Act) imposed the requirement for a majority vote by employees with secret ballot before any strike could be launched. The vote and associated procedural obligations were essential to guarantee the legality of the strike and thus the immunity of the unions and their delegates. This law would be only partially implemented at the time of the miners’ 1984-5 strike.

The three laws were reasonably well accepted by public opinion, which had a corrosive memory of the ‘winter of discontent’ and its abuses. Through three laws, the landscape of the right to strike and of union immunity was revolutionized so that the risks identified at the time of the great strikes of 1970s could be avoided: “Conservative industrial relations legislation was both pragmatic – a response to changing conditions and opportunities - and ideological: it was ideological in its content, direction and coherence but pragmatic in its timing and the manner in which it sought to achieve its aims.”

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Adapting the welfare benefits

Even the Welfare State was adapted. In the 1970s, legislation enabled the families of striking miners in need to profit from welfare benefits by about £7 per week. The issue had not been forgotten by Nicholas Ridley in his 1977 confidential report. The report indeed recommended that cash payments to the miners should be stopped, and so make the strikers' financial burden fall directly on the unions. The rules for granting benefits were therefore adjusted. Strikers could no longer make a profit for themselves out of welfare benefits, but only their wives and children.

The field of confrontation

Beyond the preparatory work, the early 1980s saw a clarification of the field of the coming confrontation, where the stated reasons for the dispute barely concealed the two opposing determinations to purge a political bone of contention.

The industrial field

Arthur Scargill made the absolute rejection of any mine closures the core of his campaign for the presidency in 1981. In 1982 he declared to a parliamentary select committee that in this respect there should be no ceiling to the financial loss acceptable at any mine location. The concept of uneconomic pits simply did not exist. A pit failure to make a profit was due only to inadequate investment, and the only acceptable reason for closing a site was the total exhaustion of its coal seams.

A new cause must be found too mobilize the miners, since the central claim of the 1970s, pay rises, had lost its urgency after more than ten years of comfortable wage increases. But the president of the NUM capitalized
ferociously on a cause of high anxiety and with a strong emotional charge. The fight against pit closures was to prove extremely effective in mobilizing the miners, who as has been shown, saw themselves as belonging to very specific communities, separate from the outside world. For most of these communities, the closing of the pit meant the loss of the community itself. This fight was not related to material considerations, but to the actual existence of the community. Arthur Scargill knew how to play on this string to perfection: the battle for the lifestyle of the miners, their specific culture, was more important than cold economic and administrative rationality.

But this thematic approach had its reverse side: proposals to close specific sites were capable of strengthening divisions between the miners. On the one hand the miners whose pits were designated for closure, involving in the more or less long run the end of the very specific cultural community which had developed around the mine, but there were also those who worked in the most profitable mines and for whom the risk of closure and the end of the community was much more theoretical. This division between the miners in the various pits was reinforced by the reformed wage structure and the no-claims bonus endorsed by Joe Gormley in 1977 and established in certain NUM regional unions. What was the interest of a well-paid miner, whose site was viable and thus held very little threat to employment, in joining a global movement relating to other sites? In addition, the practice of the NUM even in the glorious 1970s was to accept mine closures, without the fate of the miners concerned causing any mobilization at all by the NUM.

For the NCB, the burning question lay in the economic requirement of viability imposed on all state enterprises. Only the crisis of 1981 enabled it to escape the rigour imposed on all other state undertakings. The closing of uneconomic pits – pits that were economically unviable - was a
medium-term requirement, and management must gradually recover its freedom to manage.

The battlefield was tightly circumscribed. The irreconcilable positions on the uneconomic pits set the terms of the conflict and the dialogue of the deaf which would characterize relations between the NCB and the NUM throughout the strike to come.

The political field

But the “right of management to manage” or the “great fight to save the mines, employment and the mining communities?” was used as a smoke screen for a far more political confrontation. The stakes were very high on both sides: it was a question of consolidating the Thatcherite paradigm or of cutting it down. The struggle would overthrow either the neo-liberal Conservative icon or that of the radical left, the miners’ trade union.

For Arthur Scargill, the claims dependent in the future of coal were never far removed from revolutionary political considerations. He also developed them at length in his interviews, as in the New Left Review in 1975 or Marxism Today after Margaret Thatcher backed down in 1981. In April 1981, he continued in this vein while declaring to an audience of 10,000 assembled trade unionists in Bradford: “Direct action by working people is the only language this Government will listen to. They are not prepared to listen to logical argument. We must show that we are no longer ready to sit back and accept decisions in Westminster which destroy the right to work. We need to get the whole economic policy on this Government changed and get rid of this Government. This campaign will not be won in the House of Commons. It will be won on the streets of Britain.”

This was the heart of the political subject. For her part, Margaret Thatcher had to prove that it was indeed her elected government and not the NUM which governed the country and determined its political direction. One
day it would be necessary to settle the conflict between the holders of parliamentary legitimacy (Conservatives, but also most members of the Labour party) and the promoters of direct action at production sites, ready, brutally if necessary, to act against the political power when its orientation was considered to be unacceptable. This led more or less to the question raised by Edward Heath in the 1974 General Election, that is, to establish whether it was the government or the NUM which governed Great Britain, or, more exactly, as had been the case since 1972, whether the government could only put into effect policies that were compatible with the interests and the orientation of the NUM.

Margaret Thatcher located the major elements of the hard left at the beginning of the 1980s in three British institutions: the Labour party and its relationships with the trade union movement via the TUC, local government, finally the NUM, the very incarnation of British economic decline, a monopolistic union in an industry subsidized well beyond the rules of economics: “history intertwined with myth seemed to have made coal mining in Britain a special case: it had become an industry where reason simply did not apply”, “By the 1970s the coal mining industry had come to symbolize everything that was wrong with Britain”. 

The Conservative party's orientation was in any event full of major potential conflicts with the NUM. All state enterprises were designated for privatization, not excluding the energy sector. The choice of budgetary rigour prohibited the continuing granting of significant sums to the public sector, while at the same time the NCB was accustomed since the post-war period to receiving the lion's share of subsidies to the state enterprises. Lastly, the economic recession at the beginning of the 1980s, partially related to Margaret Thatcher's monetarist policy, had hit industry hard, cut back certain channels and, finally, endangered the least productive mine shafts.
Geoffrey Howe, one of the key ministers of all the Thatcher years and already a minister in 1974, explained: “We had to be ready to face the risk of a new miners’ strike but in no way were we motivated by a desire of revenge [...]. We knew that British industry could not have the foundations for prosperity and pacific industrial relations if we were permanently exposed to such a [...] risk. We therefore put ourselves in the best position not to lose in a confrontation again if it were to take place.” The moment of truth approached. John Hoskyns, key adviser to Margaret Thatcher, was convinced from the beginning that “coal would provide the ultimate test of the Government’s will and authority”.

The inescapable nature of the confrontation

Since his arrival as president, Arthur Scargill had clearly demonstrated his determination to go for confrontation and sought only a pretext to go into action.

From the government’s point of view, the approach was not to trigger confrontation, but to accept the risk fully and to face it if necessary. The government made thorough preparations for a potential struggle. There was no question of reviving the terrible sequence of events suffered by Edward Heath in 1972 and 1974, which contributed decisively to his disappearance from the political scene. Margaret Thatcher was in any event convinced for a very long time of the inevitable character of the conflict. Rightly or wrongly, in 1983 the government felt ready to accept the confrontation with the NUM which it had refused two years earlier. The time for confrontation seemed to have come for a government which no longer feared the power struggle.

It is thus difficult and even a little pointless to allocate particular responsibility to either side for the outbreak of the 1984-5 strike. The two sides were following two lines which could lead only to collision and an unavoidable confrontation. When the conflict caught fire in March 1984, the beginning of
hostilities would be felt almost as a relief by certain Conservative Members of Parliament, such as Gillian Shephard, a future minister under John Major.
THE 1984-5 STRIKE PART ONE:
FROM EXPLOSION TO WAR
OF ATTRITION
FIRST STEPS IN THE CONFLICT

The political context and the unions

In mid-1983 the government and the NUM found themselves in a political context transformed by the prospect of the General Election. The 1982 British military victory in the Falklands helped to raise Margaret Thatcher’s approval rating and gave her an undeniable political authority; defeat, on the other hand would inevitably have condemned her to resignation, following the example of Anthony Eden after the Suez fiasco in 1956. Other elements also helped to pave the way for a major electoral success for the Conservatives, as they held an advance of between ten and twenty points over the Labour party in all the surveys carried out at the first half of 1983.

The undeniable economic recovery was a key factor in the Conservatives’ political improvement since 1982: tied to the electoral cycle, the monetary policy was relaxed. The confused state of the British left wing was also helpful to Margaret Thatcher: the creation of the Social Democrat party and its alliance with the Liberal party offered a new centre-left which provided a home for disappointed Labour members. In any event, division on the left was a crippling factor in a single-vote electoral system in which the candidate at the top of the poll gains the seat, ‘first past the post’.

The British had little trust in Michael Foot, the Labour leader since November 1980, to direct the country. Even when Margaret Thatcher’s popularity was low, the Prime Minister had always held a significant lead over him. The Labour programme of 1983, “radical and naïve” according to the Prime Minister, envisaged unilateral nuclear disarmament for the United Kingdom,
the return of nationalizations and centralized economic planning, increased public expenditure and exit from the European Economic Community for protectionist reasons. It was described at the time as “the longest suicide letter in British history” by the Labour MP Gerald Kaufman, who did no more than corroborate his attitude in assessing other features: “a triumph of political orientations over presentation and communication”, “a compilation of unripe and badly digested ideas”, “an illiterate programme impossible to implement”.

All this offered Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives a historic success in June 1983: thirteen million British people voted Conservative – 4.5 million more than for the Labour party. They won an absolute majority in the Commons, with 397 seats against 209 for Labour MPs.

This was as a consequence an electoral disaster for the Labour party. The party polled no less than three million votes fewer than in 1979 and emerged with the lowest result since 1918. Nationally, it won very little more (fewer than 700,000 votes) than the Liberals/Social Democrat Alliance party, which also received more votes than the Labour party in around half the constituencies. Margaret Thatcher's political opponents, at least temporarily, were severely weakened.

The Conservative programme for 1983 clarified the government's objectives for the coal sector: “In the next Parliament, the general interest of the country requires that the enormous British coal industry, on which we depend for most of our electricity, returns to economic viability.”

The trade union movement was also obliged to take note of the new political situation. The TUC could only observe the failure of the policy of opposition and quarantine chosen since 1979. The 115th TUC Congress chose the line of “new realism” designed to link up again with the government and employers. It held its distance in respect of the political implementation of union action: “The threats aimed at destroying elected governments are not only infantile,
but they constitute a frightening boomerang, alienating us from the support of our members while threatening the only type of society able to guarantee our liberties.” This accommodating line suited the unions of the electricity sector and the iron and steel industry.

Such was not the case of the NUM, and in particular of its president, Arthur Scargill. On the contrary, he saw direct worker action as the last and only rampart against Margaret Thatcher’s shameful policies. The verbal aggression of his remarks at the time of the NUM Congress on July 4th 1983, less than a month after the General Election, was truly extraordinary on this subject.

It is useful to recall broad passages of this speech: “We have two choices. We can give in, as many German people did in the 1930s, and allow the worst to happen - we can watch social destruction and repression on a truly horrific scale, and wait for the inevitable holocaust. Or we can fight back.

A fight-back against this Government's policies will inevitably take place outside rather than inside Parliament. When I talk about “extra-Parliamentary action”, there is a great outcry in the press, and from leading Tories, about my refusal to accept the democratic will of the people.

I am not prepared to accept policies proposed by a Government elected by a minority of the British electorate. I am not prepared to accept quietly the destruction of the coal-mining industry, nor am I willing to see our social services utterly decimated.

This totally undemocratic Government can now easily push through whatever laws it chooses. Faced with the possible Parliamentary destruction of all that is good and compassionate in our society, extra-Parliamentary action will be the only course open to the working class and the Labour movement.”

The challenge launched by Arthur Scargill and the NUM indeed went well beyond defence, even radical, of the sectional interests of the miners.
This political combat must if necessary be freed from respect of the law. Ian McGregor, soon to become chairman of the NCB, saw this Scargill speech as a genuine NUM declaration of war on the Government\textsuperscript{148}.

\textit{Final preparations before the conflagration}

Even before the General Election, the Energy Secretary Nigel Lawson announced the nomination of Ian McGregor as chairman of the NCB with effect from September 1983. The 72-year-old manager was recruited with a decisive criterion: not to be afraid of the Arthur Scargill bogeyman. His career had mainly been in the United States, in heavy industry and mining\textsuperscript{149}, and his last post consisted in managing the iron and steel company British Steel Corporation (BSC), where he successfully concluded the reorganization of important reductions in manpower numbers. Ian McGregor and the government emerged undamaged from a thirteen-week steel strike in 1980.

His selection was a controversial political topic: the shadow energy secretary John Smith - a future leader of the Labour party – spoke of a completely stupid nomination. The choice indeed constituted a break with the usual profile of leaders of the NCB since nationalization. Ian McGregor had not made his career in the NCB or British state enterprises and \textit{a priori} came under less suspicion from Margaret Thatcher and Nigel Lawson of complicity with the trade unions.

Margaret Thatcher undertook important changes in her government after the General Election. Nigel Lawson was promoted to be Chancellor of the Exchequer and Peter Walker was selected to replace him. He was however a long-term political adversary of the Prime Minister, one of Edward Heath's faithful followers\textsuperscript{150}, holding a moderate line within the Conservative party. It was precisely this moderate aspect, his political know-
how and his great powers of communication related to a wide network of media contacts which guided the choice of the Prime Minister. Peter Walker was there to give a positive presentation to public opinion of the government's position in the looming crisis. At the time of coming to power, indeed, Margaret Thatcher indicated to Peter Walker that Arthur Scargill would doubtless launch a strike against the NCB and the government, as he had already made three such attempts since attaining the presidency of the NUM in 1981.

Ian McGregor arrived in September with the mandate to return the NCB to economic balance by restructuring capacity as needed, as he had done in the iron and steel industry. In one of his first statements he indicated that the NCB was producing too much coal at too great a cost. His introductory address echoed the report of June 1983 by the Mergers and Monopolies Commission which concluded that 75% of mines were loss making. He proposed to close 10% of them.

At the time the NCB reference framework remained the 1974 “Plan for Coal”. Ian McGregor dubbed it an “Alice in Wonderland document”, because its projections of energy demands were based on circumstances dating from before the oil crises and were thus too optimistic. He also noted that strong increases in investment had done nothing to increase the company's productivity.

Public finance for the NCB was considerable, even though it was far from representing a unique situation across the European landscape of coal mining. For 1983-1984, the total deficit rose to £875 million for a total turnover of £4.7 billion. The public subsidy of £1.1 billion (£2.8 billion in 2008 figures) accounted for 40% of the total subsidies to State enterprises.

Ian McGregor believed sincerely in the possibility of making the British mining sector viable, but only after one essential reorganization. On
November 3rd, 1983 he presented a modified version of the “plan for coal”. The principle of closing non profitable pits, proposed and then withdrawn in 1981, was unambiguously restated. In Arthur Scargill's view, it was a catastrophic initiative. The new orientations for the NCB – significant restructuring and layoffs - were exactly the kind of decision which the Ridley report had identified since 1977 as likely to ignite a crisis. The collision with Scargill’s stance seemed inevitable. But Peter Walker wished to make the restructuring plan acceptable for at least one miner in two, so that it was impossible for the NUM leadership to reach the 55% majority required to launch a nation-wide strike, the majority required under the provisions of article 43 of the union constitution.

On the other hand Peter Walker had absolutely no illusions as to his ability to come to any agreement with Scargill, considering the intractable and ideologist character of the president of the NUM: “My first action was to examine Mr. Scargill’s background. I looked at all the press cuttings available over several decades, obtained copies of the speeches he had made to Labour Party conferences and elsewhere, and pamphlets and leaflets to which he had contributed. I probably did the most thorough read-in anyone had done on the NUM president. And I quickly realized that I was dealing with a person with a close and friendly connection with the Marxists. Communist Party literature which had not had wide circulation brought this out with crystal clarity. Perhaps the most significant was the leaflet he produced with an American Marxist, Peggy Khan, in which they presented the case against worker participation in industry. He acknowledged that if it succeeded the workers would become happy participants in a capitalist system and difficult to detach from it. The whole objective of Marxist philosophy is to overthrow and destroy capitalism154.”

He persuaded Margaret Thatcher to devote substantial financial means for the industrial and social support of the restructuring plan and decreased manpower. The balance of the plan proposed – substantial
reorganization, important site closures, but accompanied by significant social and industrial measures - should isolate Arthur Scargill from the NUM base.

Within the NUM, the arrival of Ian McGregor destroyed any hope of compromise with the moderates and personified the hardening of the government's stance. The road towards a trial of strength seemed unavoidable, because of the irreconcilable incompatibilities between the strictly managerial style of the NCB and Arthur Scargill's opposition to any site closure; he also wanted to cross swords. Scargill was not discouraged by his failure in the three polls to call a strike between January 1982 and March 1983. He was not the only one to think that confrontation was the only solution: for the militant wing in the South Wales regional union, “the perception of 2,600 job losses in one year in 1983 burned like acid in our brains” says Kim Howells. Wildcat strikes broke out from September, in particular in Scotland.

During wage discussions during October 1983 between the NUM and the NCB, the NCB associated pay claims reviews with the acceptance in principle of the closure of certain pits. On the other hand, on October 21st the NUM conference voted for an overtime strike, starting from October 31st, in protest against site closures and to reject the NCB pay proposal (an increase of 5.2%). As in 1972 and 1974, this decision gave warning of a far greater struggle.

Ian McGregor indicated in his memoirs that as from December he knew that the strike would begin in March 1984. At a turning point in a conversation in December, Mick McGahey indicated to the executive vice president of the NCB, James Cowan, a Scots like himself: “If I were you, Jimmy, for your sake and for the stake of Harriet (James Cowan’s wife), I would get out now, because it’s going to be very unpleasant. The die is cast – it’s too late. The strike will take place. It will start in March with the Yorkshire area led by Jack Taylor – and Henry Richardson will look after Nottingham and make sure they join in.”
The NUM leadership actually identified a solution enabling it to free itself from the union's statutory rules relating to a nation-wide strike. Moreover, a week before the beginning of the strike, Arthur Scargill was to declare on the BBC that a poll was unnecessary to launch the strike. In site closures he had a topic of industrial action particularly apt to arouse anxiety and to mobilize, but knew that the poll essential to launch a nation-wide strike had little chance of being conclusive. How could he get round this contradiction?

The solution then consisted of combining multiple local strikes with action by effective militant strikers to block production and coal consumption completely in the territory. This domino strategy relied on the most militant fraction of the miners - approximately 10% of them - particularly members in Yorkshire, South Wales, Durham and Scotland. This activist base must occupy the terrain and gain very swift success before any question of the vote had been put. This solution, which would probably never have been adopted by a man such as Joe Gormley, who was deeply attached to democratic respect for the NUM constitution and unity, was either a brilliant statutory innovation or a kind of coup set up by the NUM leadership.

There was thus in the launch of the strike as much premeditation by the NUM as by the Thatcher government. Ian McGregor was immediately convinced of this: “My impression from events in those first days was that Scargill and his cronies had been preparing for a strike for about a year. They were formidable organized and clearly had a coherent ‘battle plan’ long before it started. From day one, they were out in large numbers, moving with well-coordinated instructions and in constant communication with their area headquarters. They didn’t look to me like people who had suddenly found themselves out on strike and were looking around and wondering what to do. They knew exactly what to do and where to go. Their tactics in the field were laid down by local command centres, using CB radios, and buses to organize troop movements.”
A final indicator corroborated the premeditated nature of the strike anticipated by the NUM. Being aware of possible seizure of union funds allowed by the Employment Act 1982, the NUM transferred £8.5 million pounds to a bank in the Isle of Man on March 9th, 1984. At a meeting at the national headquarter in Sheffield the treasurers of the regional unions found themselves advised to act in the same way.

The overtime strike was confirmed by a unanimous decision of the executive committee of the NUM on January 12th, 1984. Doubts however appeared as to the solidity of the movement. The campaign for the election of a general secretary of the NUM, to replace the ailing Lawrence Daly, ended on January 24th in a victory for Peter Heathfield, the candidate supported by the left of the union. But the poor majority by which he was elected (51.2%) seemed to reveal the absence of unanimity in support of the president’s strategy. Unlike the strikes of the 1970s, the executive team which would lead the strike consisted only of representatives from the left of the NUM with the president Arthur Scargill, the general secretary Peter Heathfield and the vice-president Mick McGahey.

The overtime strike was however worrying enough for the electricity operator, the CEGB, which saw its stocks melting away by 22% in four months. Its calculations indicated that by the end of October 1984 stocks would be reduced to 14 million tons if the overtime strike were maintained for a year, that is to say a level making it possible to sustain only twelve weeks of an all-out miners’ strike.

But no one fell out of line. Ian McGregor indicated to the press on January 10th that the overtime strike did not have any influence on his decisions. The next day he presented a programme for reorganization designed to take NCB capacity to 100 million tons whereas the NUM counter-claimed to take production to 200 million tons. The announced objective, compared
with the production of 138 million tons achieved in 1983, made site closures unavoidable.

**THE FLASHPOINT**

_The strike is launched_

On March 1st, the NCB Yorkshire local manager announced to the leaders of the Yorkshire NUM the closure in April of the sites at Cortonwood, which had been active for 111 years, and at Bulcliffe. Much has been written on the choice of these initial sites, which could appear as a provocation in the middle of King Arthur's Yorkshire. It seemed that this was in fact more of a local decision, made within the framework of the national directions for the reduction of capacity announced by Ian McGregor on January 11th.

The sites affected by the closures went on strike on March 5th. The following day, March 6th, 1984, the NCB restated its intention to stand back from the “plan for the coal” of 1974 and reaffirmed the need to reduce capacity. The NCB announced a reduction in output of 4 million tons, the closure of 20 pits out of the 170 in existence and the elimination of 20,000 jobs, approximately 10% of NCB manpower. The sites concerned were mainly located in Northern England and in Wales, including three symbolic pits: Cortonwood in Yorkshire, already announced earlier, Snowdon in Kent and Polmaise in Scotland, at the heart of the most militant NUM areas. On March 8th the Department of Energy and the NCB presented the social measures to accompany the restructuring plan, decided on the initiative of Peter Walker: no instant dismissal, early retirement at the age of 50, mobility allowance in the event of a change of work place, increased pay, and an annual £800 million investment plan for the coal sector.
The initiative of the NCB and the government stumbled over the detailed plan prepared by the NUM. In a brilliant succession of tactical operations, Arthur Scargill and the militant wing of the NUM succeeded in launching a national strike by all militants without any national ballot as required under article 43 of the NUM constitution. The executive committee of the NUM voted on March 8th by 21 votes to 3 for official NUM support for the miners of Yorkshire and Scotland engaged in a strike “for the defence of pits and jobs” over the weekend from March 9th to 12th, in accordance with the rules in article 41 of the constitution.

This article 41 indeed stated that strikes decided by the regional unions could be launched only with the approval of the National Executive Committee. The latter thus endorsed the decision of the NUM Yorkshire area to go on strike, but the decision was based on a regional vote of January 1981 (more than two years earlier) which validated a regional strike in the event of site closures. The national vote envisaged by article 43 fell through the gap.

Arthur Scargill thus had launched the equivalent of a nation-wide strike by the combination of regional strikes, to the surprise and disappointment of Peter Walker. Admittedly, major decisions of trade union life, such as the profit-sharing agreements late in the 1970s, were taken without national polls, even in opposition to such votes; but the nation-wide strikes of 1972 and 1974 had both been subject to a national poll. Breaking away from the requirement for a vote on the most serious decision of trade-union life, the launch of a nation-wide strike, thus constituted a major precedent at the legal and political level.

Trevor Bell, representing senior staff and supervisors on the executive committee and unsuccessful challenger of Arthur Scargill in the 1981 election for the presidency, set down a motion for the application of article 43, but the motion was not even submitted to the vote. Arthur Scargill hoped to
be able to count on support from the Welsh miners, but they were divided between their attachment to the principle of a poll and their traditional respect for the decisions of the national management, in which they never failed throughout their history.

On the following day, March 9th, the leading authorities of NUM area unions for Durham and Scotland gave their support for the strike, without a vote, as did the Yorkshire NUM area on the basis of its decision of January 1981. The Nottinghamshire NUM area resisted this strategy and required a vote at all its pit sites. The strike thus began officially on Monday, March 12th, 1984.

Launching the strike was however far from straightforward, even in traditional militant areas such as South Wales. At first, the great majority of Welsh miners were opposed to the move, but the action of the militant left of the NUM made it possible to reverse the situation completely. “At the beginning, there was no majority in favour of the strike. We established pickets to debate with each team as it left the mine. We persuaded them by saying that if the miners of South Wales did not come out in strike themselves, miners from other areas would come and close the pits, which would create a dreadful and shameful spectacle for the NUM,” as Kim Howells points out. He also recognized that only this initiative, which was undemocratic and in clear contradiction to the NUM constitution, made it possible to bring all the Welsh pits out on strike, on March 15th. They would remain on strike until the end.

The domino strategy of the NUM leadership was then implemented. The first pits stopped when the strike was called. It was then necessary to achieve, by conviction and if necessary by intimidation, the closing of the remaining sites. Flying pickets were not mobilized, as in 1972, against power stations or coal depots, but against mining sites not yet on strike. All in
The NUM offensive struck like lightning: 81 sites out of 165 were stopped on March 12th, the date of the official beginning of the strike, only four days after the meeting of the Executive Committee. The flying pickets moved into Nottinghamshire and all the sites not on strike to prevent access to the pits. On March 13, 130 pits were closed. 48 hours later, only 11 pits were operating normally. The NUM was managing to cut off the strategic zone of Nottinghamshire and to succeed in bringing coal production to a complete halt.

Police intervention and security in Nottinghamshire

The government's first line of defence, “the Walker line”, based on a plan drawn up to stop the NUM leadership obtaining a 55% majority in favour of the strike, had collapsed: Arthur Scargill had managed to organize a national quasi-strike without a poll. From March 12th - 15th, situations multiplied where
police officers were unable to resist the numbers and prevent the closing of sites. The nightmare of 1972 was appearing again for the government.

This situation provoked Margaret Thatcher to Homeric rage, in the face of police failures over what she saw as an unacceptable challenge to the rule of law. The rules of engagement for the police forces were therefore redefined and clarified by the Home Secretary Leon Brittan. The law authorized the right to strike and the right to organize pickets in a peaceful way. On the other hand, it prohibited the use of intimidation, obstruction or violence to prevent anyone from getting to their place of work. Violence among the strike pickets must also be fought and repressed. Leon Brittan thus specified on March 14th to the House of Commons: “The position is simple in the field of the application of the law. Any attempt to obstruct or intimidate those who want to go to work is a violation of the criminal law. The mere presence of substantial strike pickets constitutes intimidation. The police force has a duty to prevent any attempt of obstruction or intimidation.”

It was absolutely essential for the “Brittan line” to hold. The decision was made to apply strict controls over access by the NUM militants to areas that were not on strike, and in particular in Nottinghamshire, the strategic objective for both sides in the first days of the struggle. The National Reporting Centre (NRC) in Scotland Yard was activated, which enabled the regional police forces to be coordinated nationally.

The system of mutual support from the NRC made it possible to supplement the 2,200 members of Nottinghamshire’s own police force very quickly from external resources: within a few hours 1,000 additional police officers were placed at the disposal of the Chief Constable Charles MacLachlan, with a further 3,000 men redeployed as from at the end of March.

Nottinghamshire was completely protected. The accumulation of resources, including aircraft and helicopters, enabled anti-riot units to organize
road blocks at the county boundaries. A check-point was set up on March 18th at the Dartford Tunnel. The police requested all vehicles suspected of transporting strike pickets to turn back under threat of arrest, which did not fail to cause criticisms concerning breaches of public liberty during and after the conflict. “According to figures issued by the Nottinghamshire police themselves, 165,508 ‘presumed pickets’ were dissuaded from entering the county in the first crucial 27 weeks of the strike.”\textsuperscript{162}\textsuperscript{3}

The police force thus played a crucial role in preventing the NUM from bringing coal production to a complete halt. But it was the conjunction of this entirely unprecedented police operation and the determination of some miners to oppose the NUM leadership which destroyed its initial ‘domino strategy’.

\textit{Divisions among the miners and one-third resistance to national direction}

Margaret Thatcher, like Ian McGregor, also recognized the major importance of the working miners’ contribution to the final defeat of the NUM: “It is a testament to the Nottingham men that, apart from a few days at the beginning, nearly 25,000 of them braved the mobs and worked on right through the strike. But, as we shall see later, this did not prevent them from feeling isolated, alone and very unsure of themselves as the pressure on the mounted.”\textsuperscript{63}

In 1984 Nottinghamshire was the second largest NUM area, led only by Yorkshire, and accounted for 15\% of NCB manpower. Its miners worked in one of the areas least threatened by site closures and had fair wages, including the production bonuses introduced at the end of the 1970s. The decision taken by Nigel Lawson to develop a new site in Leicestershire, the Vale of Belvoir, also contributed to reinforce co-operative behaviour between the miners and the NCB regional management.
Historically, the miners of the Midlands were always more moderate than, for example, the Welsh and Scottish miners. In addition, during the General Strike in 1926, they split away and, under Spencer's direction, created a trade union distinct from the MFGB. The NUM constitution of 1944 made it possible to find an institutional balance and to finalize the rehabilitation outlined in 1937. The miners of Nottinghamshire then behaved in an exemplary way at the time of the strikes in the 1970s.

But they found it inconceivable to be associated with a strike without their opinion being sought. At the meeting of the NUM Executive Committee on March 8th, the general secretary of the Nottinghamshire NUM area, Henry Richardson, whatever his loyalty to Arthur Scargill, declared in premonitory fashion: “Calling us scabs will not help. I have been called that outside. If Nottinghamshire are scabs before we start, Nottinghamshire will become scabs.”

The decision not to resort to a vote thus immediately became a source of division between the miners, and more specifically between the coalfield areas. Moderate coalfields, Nottinghamshire first of all, demanded a vote. The lack of concern or inability to convince the miners of the Midlands and Nottinghamshire to join the strike movement thus constituted an important fault in the NUM strategy. Moreover, the vice-president of the NUM, Mick McGahey, would recognize this after the strike: “I am not sure we handled this it all correctly. The mass intrusion of pickets into Nottinghamshire, not just Yorkshire: I accept some responsibility for that. I think that if as an executive we had approached Nottinghamshire without pickets, it might have been different. I refuse to accept (...) that 24 or 30,000 miners, their wives and families and communities are scabs and blacklegs (...). We did alienate them during the strike.”

Worse, of the thousands of flying pickets, coming in particular from Yorkshire, the mining sites close to Nottinghamshire invaded the county even before the local miners had come to a decision. They were not long in
reacting. Violence followed: it was the period of the dreadful spectacle where groups of miners threw stones at each other. On March 15th, David Jones, a 24-year-old striking miner, died on a strike picket in Ollerton in Nottinghamshire. The later investigation would prove that he died of blows to the throat, probably at the time of a dispute between miners.

The use of intimidation and violence created a gap that nothing from now on would be able to bridge, between the NUM leadership supported by a majority of miners and the minority of working miners. Solidarity among the miners came into play, but in this case in opposition to the intrusion into their region by NUM militants from other areas, which was understood as an invasion. The strike pickets around the sites, violent and organized by 'outsiders', transformed the perception of the police presence, which was felt as protective by the local people. The external aggression generated a common feeling of identity and pride, a kind of counter-society compared to the majority of the NUM, which in the long run would resurface in the creation of a dissenting trade union.

The determination of the miners to oppose the NUM leadership was evident: nine regional unions, representing a total of 70,000 miners, organized polls in spite of the continuing intimidation, in particular in the Yorkshire NUM area, which required the miners to go on strike ahead of local polls if they wanted to avoid external militant presence on their territory.

But intimidation did not work. The polls were held around March 17th against the opinion of the NUM Executive Committee. Better still, eight regional unions out of nine voted against the strike, and the only site favourable to the strike recorded a small majority of 2%. Out of some 70,000 miners who took part in the vote (one-third of the national number of miners), over 50,000 decided to continue work. Henry Richardson explained again in front of journalists: “If we don’t hold a ballot we are never going to get out of this mess.”
The division among the miners, a new phenomenon compared to the strikes of the 1970s, was however confirmed. This fracture would mark the strike until its end. On March 19th, the Nottinghamshire miners indicated that they would continue to work: 42 pits in the Midlands continued in production under strong police protection. On April 5th, Ray Chadburn, president of the Nottinghamshire NUM, repeated: “we have brother against brother, father against son. We have got to get together because we are doing irreparable damage for the future.”

These major local disappointments for the NUM leadership encouraged moderate trade union officials to call again for a national poll. The Executive Committee of the NUM met on April 12th, in a setting further heated by the presence of many NUM militants around the head office of Sheffield. On this occasion it is probable that a motion recommending a vote ahead of a nationwide strike would receive a majority of votes in the Executive Committee if it were put to a vote. But Arthur Scargill, who was opposed to it, used a procedural process: he vetoed the resolution, arguing that a similar motion i.e. that of Trevor Bell, had already been discussed during the meeting of March 8th. Then he left Mick McGahey to chair the meeting and the coalition of members in favour of a poll crumbled because many members of the Executive Committee refused to blame national management.

Arthur Scargill and Mick McGahey again gained a brilliant tactical victory in the face of an awkward and disorganized right. A nation-wide strike could be launched without a poll, on the basis of principle: protection for the jobs of some members could not be prevented by the vote of miners whose employment was not threatened. Mick McGahey also made fun of the media, saying that it was “infected with the disease of ballotitis”.

It was however a Pyrrhic victory. The NUM would be reproached with the lack of a poll throughout the entire strike and would lose much support from the moderate left, most of the trade union movement and the
Labour leadership. With a national poll favourable to the strike, it is probable that the eight regional unions resistant to the strike would have conformed to the majority rule. Arthur Scargill, moreover, brutally dissociated himself from the philosophy of action of his predecessor Joe Gormley: “As a law which is not supported by the majority of the population is a bad law, I believe that it is the same for a national strike which does not have majority support. I believe indeed that such a strike is likely to fail.” For Kim Howells, “Mick McGahen certainly pronounced the most absurd declaration of the entire strike, when he said that ‘we shall not be constitutionalized out of the defence of our jobs’: it was the very NUM constitution which be proposed to override!”

It will never be known if a poll could have gained the 55% majority defined in article 43 of the constitution. Some consider that a success was possible. “The ironic thing is that had the NUM held a national ballot in the first few months of the strike, the Left would certainly have won it. Several opinion polls, and experience in the coalfields, would suggest as much. Five separate opinion polls carried out between early March and early July showed that a 55 per cent vote could easily have been achieved.” On March 9th a Mori survey showed that 62% of the miners were in favour of the strike. On March 31st an NOP survey indicated that the strike was supported by 51% of the miners, slightly less than the necessary majority under the NUM constitution, and rejected by 34%. On April 14th, a Mori survey still gave a majority of 68% in favour of the strike among the miners.

But others consider that a ballot would have been lost, from the Communist organizer Frank Watters (“There were too many divisions within the trade union [...] a ballot would not have succeeded”) to Ian McGregor (“I shared Scargill’s scepticism over the proliferating public opinion polls at the time – all of which showed majorities of more than 60 percent of miners in favour of striking. It was one thing for a total stranger to approach a miner in a street, in his village, or even knock on his door in a row of miners’ houses and ask him, in effect, whether or not he was a good union man. Quite
another to ask him, after due consideration of all the factors involved, in total secrecy to put a mark on a piece of paper which would commit him and his family to ever-increasing hardship for weeks, if not months ahead.\(^{170}\).

A statutory majority in favour of the strike could thus possibly have been assembled. That would have led however to a management of the strike very different from the Arthur Scargill's authoritative management style and pushed it towards the conclusion of a compromise. That was all the more probable since, if support for the strike was solid among the miners, their confidence in the power of the NUM to bring down the government and the NCB was a good deal less.

Throughout the strike, Arthur Scargill would also use the NUM conference more than the executive committee to gain endorsement of important decisions. Representation at the conference corresponded to the miners' membership and made it possible to get close to a majority with the delegates from the three most militant regional unions (Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland). The conference facilitated the hardening of the movement and made it possible to muzzle the Executive Committee. The disputed decisions of the Executive Committee of April 12\(^{th}\) were thus endorsed by a conference on April 19\(^{th}\), which met again in Sheffield with strong militant presence.

6.2.4 The failure of this phase of the strike

Five to seven weeks had been enough for the miners in 1972 and 1974 to gain a decisive victory over the Heath government. After a similar period, the conflict presented a very different situation in 1984: the Thatcher government and the NCB had held out against the first shock.

The miners, so solid in 1974, were still mainly behind their charismatic president, but an irremediable rupture were consummated with the emergence of a minority of miners, all the more determined to oppose Arthur
Scargill because there had been no national vote on the strike and because they were subjected to measures of intimidation from their colleagues. The strike was not national and never would be.

The action of the big battalions of flying pickets, decisive in the 1970s, lost some of its effectiveness in the face of law and order enforcement, coordinated at national level and implemented by many police forces, well trained and with solid morale. The flying pickets had already suffered major reverses, in strong contrast to the triumphant operations in 1972.

Indeed, the combination of determined protection by the police against picket action and the legal and political force of local polls opposed to the strike prevented the complete interruption of coal production. To the contrary: the best equipped and most productive sites functioned normally and thereby increased the powers of resistance of the government, the NCB and the electricity operator, the CEGB, which were organized to hold out for at least six months. A third of the miners would work from the first to the last day of the strike: the Nottinghamshire pits continued to feed the strategic chain of power stations in the Trent valley and in Warwickshire and Leicestershire.

The desired rapid victory did not happen. The prospect of a long war of attrition was now acknowledged. The final winner was not yet designated, but the victorious camp would certainly be the one that could hold out longest. Taking note of the failure of this first phase, the NUM changed its strategy at the beginning of April by making steel factories and power stations and sites the priority target for its strike pickets.

The power to launch a general strike without a poll was certainly the result of an innovative tactical operation by the NUM leadership and their great mastery in the management of union structures, but this was not without risk. For those opposed to the strike, it was very easy to recall that the real level
of support for the strike among the miners was unknown and that only the
miners opposed to the strike had given their decision through a poll.

This upset public opinion and the miners’ natural supporters. The
movement could not benefit from unstinting support from the Labour party,
whose leader Neil Kinnock decided in favour of a national poll. The legal
consequences were not much happier: interpretations of certain judges on the
definition for an official or unofficial strike were capable of having very
unwelcome consequences for the legal immunity from which the NUM and his
leaders benefited.

In this respect the NUM probably made a major gift to the
government, and one may even wonder whether the will to free itself from the
poll on the “Walker line” did not have in return a terrible boomerang effect on
the NUM. This was in any event the conclusion of the Mirror journalist
Geoffrey Goodman in the book which he devoted to the strike, The Miners’
Strike. The absence of NUM unity was also disconcerting. It deprived the strike
of the indisputable moral authority that had supported the two strikes of the
1970s. How was it possible to seek the support of the world-wide trade union
movement when an important section of the miners was opposed to the strike?

Powerful images of the strike were printed on the mind. The
violence of certain NUM militants damaged the miners’ image, traditionally
very positive in the public eye, perhaps beyond recovery. The NCB and the
government could already articulate their public communication on the fight
against militant violence and protection of the right to work for the
working miners.

The strike was launched remarkably late compared to 1972 and
1974. The NUM would have to lead its movement in a period of falling
electricity consumption. But this somewhat inappropriate choice of launch date
for the strike was much less important than the question of the votes and
perceptions of the miners: the dispute had now settled in to be long and much more difficult than in the 1970s.

THE STRIKE SETTLES IN FOR THE DURATION

The NUM could only mourn its lost victory. The mining communities also organized themselves to face a new conflict, one which promised to be long-drawn-out: settlement was reached in less than two months in the 1970s, and even the great mining struggle of 1926 lasted 'only' six months, from April to the autumn. The conflict this time would last a year, an exceptional length of time in view of the numbers involved.

Activity of the NUM and the strike pickets

The situation of the NUM from now on was this: the strike was ‘solid’ for two thirds of the miners, but an indomitable third continued to work. In a war which at this stage was still offensive, the NUM leadership looked for new targets. Those selected corresponded to the two central outlets for coal: iron and steel power stations and plants.

The very limited picketing activity around power stations was a blessed surprise for the CEGB, whose leaders had painful memories of the extraordinary effectiveness of the siege in 1972. Even if pickets could initially have only a limited impact, because of preparation and the stocks laid up in the power stations, the CEGB leaders were surprised to find their power stations functioning in relative peace. The NUM strategy appeared incomprehensible to the CEGB: pickets organised in a random way, power stations abandoned from the month of May - to the benefit of the iron and steel sites – followed by intervention by some pickets.
In the next phase, with “the invasion of Nottinghamshire”, the national coordination of strike picketing action was weak. In contrast to the strikes of the 1970s, there was no national centre of coordination of the pickets, but only the use of the control room of a supportive trade union, the National Union of Seamen (NUS), then of a specific room but which for a long time had no telex:\footnote{171} “The evidence was that there was no nationally co-ordinated picketing strategy and that the NUM’s organisation of picketing, both nationally and in most areas, was poor.”\footnote{172}

The direction and coordination of the pickets were indeed largely left to the regional unions, which was the major consequence of the absence of a national poll. For this reason, the quality of picketing action depended instead on the regions. The coordination of South Wales NUM pickets proved effective; South Wales was the only union to organize systematic picketing of power stations, although it never reached sufficient mass to put pressure on the electric system.

This South Wales NUM area was to have the most exemplary behaviour in maintaining an exceptional level of support for the strike (98% Welsh strikers on February 14th, 1985) and by organizing large-scale strike pickets over a long period (4,000 pickets out of a total of 21,500 miners). The other solid regional unions were Yorkshire and Kent and, to a lesser extent, Scotland. During this period, Arthur Scargill lived surrounded almost exclusively by people who completely and unconditionally admired him, without real internal opposition. Tongues would not be unleashed until near the end of the conflict.

The main activity for many striking miners consisted of joining the strike pickets. For the moderates, these were the pickets at production sites where the strikers usually worked. For the 20,000 more militant union members of the flying pickets, they were the geographical targets of sites of
coal consumption, mainly the power stations and iron and steel plants starting from the end of May.

95% of the time spent on the picket lines consisted of tedious waiting, both for the militants of the NUM and the police officers opposite. The only lively moments came with shift-changes and vehicle movements. This generally brought the traditional ‘push and shove’ with the police force to block access to the site.

The militants had to grow accustomed to an imposing police presence around the sites as well as in miners' home communities, and to the fact that some of their comrades were in prison. Compared to 1972, the pickets were impotent and the traditional methods of ‘push and shove’ were completely defeated by new police methods and equipment, as recognised by a disillusioned delegate of the NUM: “Today, you’ve no chance. There’s a lot more of them, and if you look like you’re going to break through, the tough guys are called in, them with shields and bloody truncheons. Well your unarmed picket can’t compete with that sort of thing. I don’t condone it, but I can understand why some of the lads start throwing things.”

Violent situations (relating to police officers, truck-drivers wanting to pass through, ‘scabs’) were thus the expression of frustration and severe aggravation caused by impotence, resulting in various objects - bolts, stones, etc. - being thrown at the police.

Payments to picketing miners were the main expenditure for the NUM and its regional unions, in addition to legal costs. The local NUM delegates paid picketing strikers a few pounds a day (£1-£3) for eight to ten hours on the picket line. As in 1972, the NUM gave no grants to help the ordinary strikers. The amounts depended on the financial situation of the regional unions: payment of £1 per day and fuel expenses for the Yorkshire NUM area, £3 per day in South Wales until the legal seizure of the union's funds at the end of July, nothing in Scotland. This expenditure was a heavy
financial burden for the NUM. Before the seizure of its funds, the South Wales NUM area spent £1.3 million in this way, that is to say £80,000 to £100,000 per week for its 4,000 strike pickets.

The general rule that Arthur Scargill wished to see being applied by other trade unionists was that “when workers are on strike, trade unionists do not cross the strike picket line”. Absolute compliance with such a rule would have given the NUM pickets enormous leverage. But the rule was mere fantasy, since it was not respected by the strategic trade unions at the power stations or the iron and steel sector, or by the truck drivers, who were mostly not unionised.

Demonstrations of support and massive operations of fund collection were however illustrated by spectacular gifts from the various funds supporting the miners (£1 million from the union of municipal employees, £100,000 from the oil tycoon Paul Getty II). These cash donations were accompanied by multiple gifts in kind, food in particular, and offers of support, such as taking miners' children for the holiday periods.

The pattern of life for striking miners and their communities

Although there is an abundant body of material testifying to the lives of the miners and their communities during the 1984-5 strike, it is of course extremely difficult to recall in detail the lives of almost 200,000 miners (two-thirds strikers and one-third working miners), their families, neighbours and communities.

The feelings which emerge from this, often recalled with emotion and even pride by people whose lives until now had tended towards monotony, showed the relevance on this point of Arthur Scargill's analysis: the dispute was experienced by the striking miners and their communities as a fight for dignity, well summarized in the movement's slogan, “coal not dole”, the
response to external aggression which threatened the survival of the 
communal culture.

Only the power of the slogan, and the cohesion of communities 
generally largely closed to the outside world, explain the strikers' capacity for 
resistance, who would hold out for long months without wages or social 
security benefits in a very difficult material situation for themselves and their 
close relations.

This situation was somewhat paradoxical. David Feickert explains 
thus that “many miners’ were out of work because of the economic recession in the early 
1980s, while many of their fathers wanted to leave the industry. The great majority of the 
mothers did not want their sons to go down the mine, but in fact there was no other 
employment available. In the end, everyone was engaged in a completely new way not for 
genuinely desired objectives, but to maintain the unity of their homes and communities.”

The miners’ material life

The average miner in 1984 was 39 years old and earned £8,000 per 
annum (£20,000 in 2008 figures). He had a car and often a mortgage. A 
household in which the husband was a miner thus had an income of £850 per 
month, taking social security benefits into account. Expressed in 2008 figures, 
these sums represent £1,700 per month in wages, plus £400 of social security 
benefits, that is to say £2,100 per household.

This budget was demolished by the strike. It became necessary to 
live on £30 per week, an amount divided by seven. In the Sheffield Star of April 
25th 1984 the miner Stuart Asher of Derbyshire explained how he adapted to 
this situation. As a father of three children, including a baby, he had a food 
budget of 70 pence per person per day (£1.75 in 2008 figures); taking into 
account the social security benefits received by his family, his total income was
£33.47 per week (£84 in 2008 figures). Tea, breakfast cereals and special baby food were replaced by soup and potatoes, sometimes with meat. There was no more coal for heating when winter came.

The major material problem was the payment of household bills (gas, electricity, telephone) and loan repayments. In certain cases, miners lost their houses. The majority found themselves with debts to pay after the strike (£1,300 on average, or £3,200 in 2008).

These material difficulties were particularly critical for single men, who were completely without resources: social security cash benefits were paid only for the women and children. They also caused arguments in couples. During the long months of the conflict, the economic and financial situation of the miners and their families (in general, the women did not go out to work) deteriorated and pushed some men to return to work. How to hold out, for example, when there was a large loan and no wages coming in? Women and children sometimes urged the husbands to give up the strike, facing the miners with a conflict between trade union solidarity and the situation of their immediate family.

The distress was however alleviated through support from the local communities: families, retired and pensioned miners, collections of food and funds, free meals given to school children and to workers at the strike centre, local organisations, local government agencies which gave the striking miners material and political support. An alternative Welfare State emerged spontaneously. The old tradition of mutual aid and support thus made it possible for the strike to last a year, in spite of the habits, temptations and constraints of the consumer society.

At each site on strike, the miners' daily life was organized around the strike centre where all the strike supporters gathered: NUM delegates, strikers, miners' supporters, and in particular women. It was a question of
providing a focus and planned purpose in the strikers' life, to keep out of trouble, through various activities such as the search for money and participation in demonstrations of support for the strike: festivals and village fairs, fund-raising operations, more or less close to home, for the militants and especially the most active militants.

In a male-dominated society – after 1842, by law only men could go down the mine - the strike gave women a moment of emancipation. Miners' wives and groups of women indeed became of considerable importance in animating the movement. They operated at the heart of strike activity, deploying their ingenuity to collect funds (frequently for very small sums) or to make the life of the miners and their close families as pleasant as possible at these difficult times (sending parcels, organizing summer camps abroad for miners' children).

The role of the women was also promoted in the media by the NUM to show the unity in the communities behind the strike. A massive support movement spread through the country, in particular in mining towns with the association “Women Against Pit Closures”.

Continued division among the miners

During most of the strike, a certain unity of behaviour among the miners was observed within both striking and non-striking communities: great collective discipline meant that defections were rare; only the arrival of winter and the absence of any hope would affect behaviour and make the return to work more acceptable in the strikers' community nine months after the dispute was launched. Only half of the miners would have already 'cracked' at the beginning of March 1985, when the NUM called for the strike to stop. This
exceptional solidarity could not however mask the depth of divisions between miners.

Certain incidents reflected the very distinct character of opinion on the dispute within communities. Splits between strikers and strike-breakers divided not only communities, but also colleagues, old friends or neighbours, or even emerged within families in communities which traditionally lived in relative self-sufficiency but which were suddenly experiencing a very visible police presence.

In two poignant scenes, the film *Billy Elliot* illustrates these divisions and splits: the dispute with the supermarket between two friends, one on strike, the other a working miner; then the miner father and son weeping in each other's arms when the father decides to return to work to earn enough to pay for his second son's dance lessons.

These were the worst conflicts, a kind of civil war in the pit villages. The miners' wives hurled abuse in front of the cameras. As soon as they had an opportunity, striking miners attacked strike-breakers – generally verbally.

Neil Greatrex, one of the leaders in charge of the working miners in Nottinghamshire, then president of the separatist UDM (Union of Democratic Mineworkers), has explained that his father did not speak to him again until his death because he did not yield to directives from the president of the NUM, Arthur Scargill, and had not spoken to him since then except through his brothers. In the areas dominated by the NUM, its militants exerted very strong pressure on 'scabs' - the insulting name given to strike-breakers. As much as the economic effects of a very long strike on an industry, it was this damaging climate which would largely contribute to the destruction of the communities. In her memoir Margaret Thatcher wonders about the very
concept of a mining community in view of what occurred in areas which decided not to join the movement.

NUM inability to renew the successes of the 1970s

May and June marked a second phase in the NUM offensive war, which continued to be pressed by the most militant strikers, approximately one-sixth of the 120,000 striking miners, in other words 20,000 people. The NUM strategy to stop coal extraction was a failure. The blockade of the power stations, debated at one time, was only briefly considered a priority: in any event, pickets would have only a weak impact there, taking into account the coal stocks prepared well beforehand in order to resist a siege.

The priority target as from May became the iron and steel industry. The NUM decided to block its deliveries of coke and iron ore supplies with the help of the dockers and the railwaymen. Particular efforts were made at the Orgreave coke factory, which supplied Scunthorpe iron and steel plant. The factory at Orgreave also had the advantage of being located in the middle of Yorkshire and was thus easily accessible for the many pickets from this regional union. For several weeks the NUM militants would try to block the departure of any coke from the factory.

It was not clear whether iron and steel were Arthur Scargill's chief objectives. His main point of reference was the blockade of the Saltley coke depot in February 1972, a masterly operation which brought him immediate national fame. Based on the Saltley example, the idea was to cause a massive political confrontation going well beyond simple embarrassment for the iron and steel sector. By mobilizing the maximum number of NUM militants to oppose the massive anti-riot police force manpower linked together around the site, this became a matter of starting a crisis of law and order: in this situation,
the government could exceed the limits acceptable to public opinion, for example by bringing in the army; it could also be defeated by the determination of the pickets and be forced to go to the country by calling a General Election, as Edward Heath had done it in 1974.

Against this, the Thatcher government and the police force had nothing whatever in common with their counterparts in 1972. Their level of preparation and determination was considerably reinforced, as also seen in the success of the security operations in Nottinghamshire in March-April. The police force, with precise information on the objectives of the NUM militants and drawing on considerable means, from now on succeeded completely in blocking this type of action. For the government and the NCB, the stakes were indeed also very high. Keeping the site open was used only as a final decorative touch in the search for a symbolic demonstration that the law must be respected. After the events, David Hart, adviser to both Margaret Thatcher and Ian McGregor, even went so far as to claim that Orgreave was the government's deliberately and rationally chosen location for the government to trap the NUM and its president.

Out of this conjunction of aims emerged the 'battle of Orgreave', which ran from May 23rd to June 18th 1984. This was to become the greatest symbolic battle of the strike that was a struggle to the end for the most active militants of the NUM. Overall, 32,500 pickets took part in the various strike pickets over three weeks, with daily peaks of 10,000 strike pickets. The first violent clash took place on May 29th, marked by confrontations around the coke factory between police officers and strike pickets. Arthur Scargill himself was arrested there for obstruction.

But the principal battle took place on June 18th: access to the site was protected by several thousands of police officers, between 3,000 and 8,000 according to sources, including mounted police and dog units. 5,000 to 6,000
strike pickets tried to block the arrival and then the departure of trucks delivering coke, but without any success despite throwing projectiles of all kinds (stones, bricks, rails, etc) at the anti-riot uniformed policemen. Scuffles followed, and in the evening the police declared that it was a miracle that nobody was killed. The use of mounted police who charged at certain times gave the day an air of medieval combat.

This was one of the strike’s toughest and most debated episodes. It came under the gaze of the television cameras and thus of the whole of Britain. Tony Clement, Assistant Chief Constable and in charge of operations, testified: “When the miners came over the hill, they did not find untrained police holding dustbin lids (…). They were confronted with a well-trained, well-equipped and confident force.” Speaking in Banbury, Margaret Thatcher said: “I must tell you that what we have got is an attempt to substitute mob rule for the rule of law, and it must not succeed. There are those who are using violence and intimidation to impose their will on others who do not want it (…) the rule of law must prevail over the rule of the mob.” In opposition, the civil rights organization Liberty presented the events in a very different way: “Orgreave, where 8,000 riot police staged medieval-style mounted charges of unprecedented ferocity: ‘There was a riot. But it was a police riot.’” The Queen explains that she has not been as shocked since the violent urban riots in 1981.

The day was far from resembling a ‘day at the beach’ or the ‘picnic’ of Saltley. The factory was not closed and the trucks could pass. 100 NUM militants were arrested and the NUM president Arthur Scargill, went to hospital, wounded and claiming that he had been hit by an anti-riot shield. The saturation of the strike pickets by police officers had made it impossible to replicate the successes of the past.

The effect was doubly devastating for the NUM, because it was the total overturning of the triumph at Saltley twelve years earlier. On the one hand, police protection proved the impotence of the flying pickets and enabled
the trucks to enter and to leave without hindering the factory - the time when the flying pickets constituted the ultimate weapon was over. On the other hand, cameras captured scenes of violence between miners and police officers which would be used effectively by the government in its management of public opinion.

It was another reverse for the NUM. Its morale received a blow and the offensive phase of the action of NUM pickets came to an end on June 18th. The only weapon left to the NUM leadership from now on lay in the psychological and material endurance of the mining communities.

Negotiations between the NUM and the NCB

All relations broke off between the NUM and the NCB when the conflict was launched at the beginning of March. In mid-April, more than a month after the dispute began, Ian McGregor declared to the press that a meeting with Arthur Scargill would be a total waste of time at this stage of the conflict. At this time the NUM was also seeking a showdown and saw no interest in negotiating.

From April, the prospect of a long-drawn-out conflict - a major change compared to the strikes of the 1970s – led both sides to reconsider the situation: the strategy of confrontation continued, but it could be supplemented by attempts at dialogue. The negotiations were also needed in terms of external communication with the general public: it was at the same time a question of not offering any opening for any criticism of refusing dialogue and of making a success of any chance of a good media operation. This was the case with the first Scargill-McGregor meeting, on 23rd April 1984: the meeting lasted only 60 minutes but enabled Arthur Scargill to call the meeting a “total fiasco” in front of journalists.
In general terms, meetings between the NCB and the NUM often represented more of a dialogue of the deaf than a genuine search for a genuine compromise. They were simply an opportunity for all and sundry to take a media posture. As Ian McGregor explained, “My other problem with Scargill, when it came to negotiations, was getting him safely through all the tribal dances his position as a revolutionary Marxist leader required, and to the table”. The results of the negotiations were the occasion of as many official statements of victory as of denial in the press.

Faced with the intensity and length of the dispute, the control of negotiations also became a requirement of internal communication: it was necessary to be able to say to their troops (the striking miners for the NUM, the working miners and executives for the NCB) that they were genuinely searching for a way out of the conflict and to restore hope to its partisans. Margaret Thatcher was conscious of the need for negotiations, but also that these represented a double danger: reinforcement of the strikers’ mobilization and, worse still, the risk of an incomplete compromise.

A second round of negotiation was held between May 31st and June 13th between Sheffield, Edinburgh and Rotherham, at one moment when the president of the NUM was navigating his way between the negotiation table and the pickets at the ‘battle of Orgreave’. The thinking of the NUM seemed to have moved towards good sense, which led Ian McGregor to declare on June 8th that “I would say that a degree of realism is entering the discussion”. According to the president of the NCB and his assistant, James Cowan, it was the only moment of the strike where they felt a gap between Arthur Scargill and Mick McGahey. “I think the Communist party is ready to settle”, said James Cowan. But the president of the NUM was not so inclined, and Ian McGregor concluded at the conclusion of this round of negotiations that the strike would last until the following winter.
The negotiations concentrated on the concept which generated the conflict, that of uneconomic pits, the non profitable pits that the NCB wanted to be able to close in its own way, whereas the NUM denied any demand for mine profitability. The NCB wanted to preserve its prerogatives of business management, while the NUM wanted to make the management bend in their favour, hence the intransigent positions of the two sides on this central theme of closures, in spite of multiple editorial formulas. It was however during the third cycle of negotiation (from July 5th to July 18th in London and Edinburgh) that the positions of the NUM and the NCB came closest. The NCB put on the table a draft agreement accepting a complete review of procedures, mentioning that the mine shafts could only be closed if they could not be ‘beneficially developed’. The discussion would turn on this ambiguous expression, with its advantages and disadvantages. After some prevarication, this compromise was rejected by the leaders of the NUM, to the great relief of Margaret Thatcher.

The tracking-down of the negotiators by packs of journalists would gradually become a great classic feature of the conflict. This was the case in the fourth cycle of negotiation from September 7th to 14th between Edinburgh, Selby, Doncaster and London. This cycle yielded nothing whatever, but Ian McGregor was filmed at this point with his head under a plastic bag to avoid the journalists. Other more or less unexpected characters would try, in general without the slightest success, to act as intermediaries between the NCB and the NUM. One of these was Robert Maxwell, owner of the newspaper of the moderate left newspaper The Daily Mirror, which sought conciliation in September in vain.
Mobilizing the State

The serious preparation for a major dispute, undertaken since the beginning of the 1980s, allowed the government and the state to mobilize rapidly. All their power was put to use during the conflict.

Narrow supervision by the Prime Minister and the government

The strike was followed with meticulous care by Margaret Thatcher. From the launching of the movement, an ad hoc committee was established, consisting of half of the government, the MISC 101, meeting between once and three times per week. In addition to Margaret Thatcher, it included the Deputy Prime Minister Willie Whitelaw, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson, the Energy Secretary Peter Walker, the Home Secretary Leon Brittan, the Lord Chancellor Michael Havers and the Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine.

Margaret Thatcher, who was to meet Ian McGregor six times during the dispute, rang Leon Brittan whenever necessary on questions of law and order and Peter Walker on energy subjects. The latter also brought himself up to date every morning with all the directors of the Ministry of Energy.

Reality did not correspond entirely to the public situation initially posited by the government, namely of keeping its distance over an industrial disagreement between the NCB and some of its employees. The political nature of the strike did not escape the Prime Minister, who would devote a whole chapter to the description of “Mr. Scargill’s insurrection” in her memoirs.
The NCB during the strike

Ian McGregor had known almost nothing but confrontation since his arrival in September 1983: four months of overtime ban, immediately followed by the strike. Hobart House, the seat of the NCB, operated in tune to the rhythm of the strike.

In addition to two major exercises - to negotiate with the NUM and to ensure NCB communication - Ian McGregor and his teams had to incarnate “the right of management to manage” in all fields of the company's life.

Convincing miners to resume work was an essential concern for the NCB management, which was playing the incentive-discouragement game. A national press publicity campaign was launched on April 25th, followed on June 21st by an individual letter to each miner from Ian McGregor. Beginning on July 4th, the NCB launched a new campaign in the newspapers countering the remarks of the NUM leaders and insisting on the danger that the strike was burdening the company in spite of its good economic outlook. Until October 1984 these actions had very little effect. The NCB also waved a stick: 500 miners would be laid off for misdeeds during the strike, in particular for violence to strike pickets. As well as the media strategy, the NCB targeted the two newspapers of the Murdoch group widely read by the miners, the Sun and the News of the World, whereas access to the third widely-read newspaper (the Daily Mirror) was more delicate because of its Labour attitudes.

The NCB also had to carry on producing coal. This production was ensured by the 42 pits of the Midlands and Nottinghamshire, although 119 sites were stopped during most of the strike. Coal extraction would be reduced by a little over half compared to 1983. The restructuring plan at the origin of the strike in March was implemented; on August 15th the NCB decided to close two of the three coal faces at the symbolic site of Castlehill in Scotland, thus
taking the total of site closures to 12 since the beginning of the strike, that is, 15 pits.

But life at Hobart House was far from being a sinecure during the strike. Relations were tense between Ian McGregor, the man from outside, and the senior executives already in place there, accustomed to years of actual shared administration with the NUM and extremely wary over excessively close links with the government. This was particularly the case of the director of human resources, Ned Smith, and of the director of public relations, Geoffrey Kirk. The two men were also basically favourable to a negotiated solution and the least possible political approach to the strike. All this ended in public scandal when Geoffrey Kirk, despite being a professional well recognized by journalists, was dismissed in October by Ian McGregor. On November 6th, he resigned and affirmed to the press the existence of links between the NCB and the Conservative party.

The relations between Ian McGregor and his guiding minister Peter Walker could only get worse, and both men would use their memoirs to settle accounts. Ian McGregor was influenced much more by two men from outside who were close to Margaret Thatcher. The first was the communicator Tim Bell, whose arrival meant the triumph of the political approach and shocked Geoffrey Kirk (to Ian McGregor “you can’t use him, he works for the Tories”), but who would take over communications with the NUM and would orchestrate the media campaign to encourage the miners to return to work.

The second, David Hart, was Ian McGregor's departmental information officer in the 'Economic War'. He was a businessman of Baltic origin, occasional chronicler in The Times and close to Margaret Thatcher. He saw the strike as a crusade for democracy and against a Marxist tyranny which must absolutely be won, come what may. So David Hart would permanently
defend to the president of the NCB a hard line aimed at achieving the total defeat of Arthur Scargill and at opposing the reconciliatory and moderate approach better suited to the frame of mind of Peter Walker or the technostructure of the NCB.

His creativity was limitless. For Ian McGregor he invented both the "Gulliver strategy", aiming at tying down the body of the NUM through increased resumption of work and endless legal procedures and, at the same time, the "ant strategy", aiming at dividing the close links between the three segments of the body of the NUM: Scargill (the head), the executive committee (the thorax) and the whole of the miners (the body). On October 19th the *Mirror* journalist Geoffrey Goodman revealed to the general public the complicity between Margaret Thatcher's David Hart, the committee of the working miners and Ian McGregor.

The two only people who managed to maintain a link between the president of the NCB and the executives were the executive vice president James Cowan and Michael Eaton, promoted on October 20th as spokesperson of the NCB to make up for Ian McGregor's nullity in the media, which was finally recognized by all.

*Police force*

During the dispute the police played an absolutely crucial role, since they led the NUM leadership and pickets to suffer two major reverses: the maintenance of coal extraction in Nottinghamshire and the Midlands, and their defeat in the 'battle of Orgreave.'

The massive police presence took pride of place in the iconography of the 1984 conflict. The front page of most works dealing with the strike (and all works critical of the government's action) showed large
numbers of policemen combing through the mining villages or opposing the strike pickets – peacefully, by the simple fact of their presence, or violently. This feature was reinforced by the fact that the NUM and Arthur Scargill made “the police state” the main theme in their communication battle to win the heart of public opinion. Didier Huck, a French mining engineer on a training course with the NCB at the time, retains the memory of columns of coal trucks surrounded by vans and coaches of policemen. The scuffles between police officers and pickets, the medieval stylization of the ‘battle of Orgreave’, came to be the enduring representation at the heart of imagery of the dispute.

**Governmental surveillance**

The government had to organize its actions by taking into account the decentralized nature of British police organization. The resulting approach consisted of facing police forces with their responsibilities for the maintenance of law and order while at the same time promising them unfailing moral and financial support. Throughout the conflict, the position of the government would give priority to absolute respect of the universal individual right to work, and this whatever the consequences in terms of regards law and order. The support of political authority for the police forces was also total: Margaret Thatcher and her Home Secretary Leon Brittan would never fail to emphasise the “splendid” action of the police force during the conflict.

The Home Secretary had traditionally no power of injunction over the senior officers, the Chief Constables, who held great autonomy in their respective territories. Putting operations into action for the maintenance of law and order around the strike was thus, according to Leon Brittan, left with the local managers. Lord Brittan states however that the policy issues were so important for the government that if the British traditional system based on the police forces’ strong local autonomy had appeared ineffective, the government would undoubtedly have changed this organization.
On the other hand the Home Secretary was able to receive detailed information on the development of the situation. Leon Brittan received a full daily report, the core of the information, which he passed to the Prime Minister at the three weekly Cabinet committee meetings devoted to the strike held throughout the year of the dispute.

Organization of the police force

From the first days of the dispute, the National Reporting Centres, NRC, was activated to enable coordination in providing forces between the various administrative units. Over the first ten weeks of conflict, 8,000 police officers were posted to the mine fields expected to pose the most important problems, with 220,000 individual mission orders in the first ten weeks of the conflict, the most critical in terms of the maintenance of law and order.

The NRC allowed very substantial deployment of manpower away from urban police forces in favour of the mine fields at risk. Indeed it organized exchange of resources between the 43 police areas, managed through a special wall-chart continuously kept up to date and detailed by district: debtor or credit situation in manpower, risk assessment especially for the mining areas (peaceful, hostile area or violent), news of the day and cumulative information on damage, casualties and arrests.

National coordination was a great success, in particular in relation to the weakness of the NUM strike picket coordination mentioned above. To avoid risks of fraternization, the areas most at risk were fed by massive police resources from outside the area in question or close to them. Two police officers had an important role: David Hall, director of the NRC at the beginning of the strike, and Charles McLachlan, who combined the functions of Chief Constable of the critical Nottinghamshire region, president of ACPO
(the association of Chief Constables) and Director of the NRC, succeeding David Hall at the end of 1984.

The Home Secretary Leon Brittan was never far away, even though the government used the autonomy of the police forces to conceal his initiatives. The quality of organization of the police forces would clearly be a matter for satisfaction for the Thatcher government.

All actions of the police forces were aimed at neutralizing the strike pickets through three main tasks, corresponding to the three phases of the strike: to guarantee access to the mines for working miners, to protect delivery of coal and energy-generating products and to guarantee public safety and the protection of the families in miners' housing where the clashes between strikers and 'scabs' were exacerbated.

This general mission was adapted to the three great phases of the conflict: the security of Nottinghamshire and the areas mainly not on strike, the management of the 'battle of Orgreave', finally the security of the miners who wanted to return to work. The lawsuits after the strike would show that during the dispute the police had made use of an anti-riot handbook in which aggressive practices, prone to judicial questioning as regards legality, were specified.

Local situations ranged between total hostility and passivity, and even support for the police in the non-striking areas. David Adams, a police officer, recalled for the BBC that during the dispute the Welsh miners kept to a very moderate pattern of behaviour linked to strike solidarity and miners' discipline. The police paid attention to their image with suitably adapted communications. In Orgreave the assistant Chief Constable, Tony Clement, conducted a periodic review of the situation with the press.
Importance of the means used

The means put into effect were considerable: 20,000 policemen were mobilized in operations of security in the coal fields, that is to say the entire number (and even beyond) of policemen with anti-riot training; this represented more than 10% of the total staff of British police forces. The basic police unit for managing the means of the NRC was the Police Support Unit (PSU). More than 600 PSUs would be made available to the management of the dispute - 14,000 police officers posted in addition to local manpower in the principal areas concerned in the dispute (Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, South Wales, and Scotland).

The excess costs of the operations were the subject of recurrent dispute between the two equal sources of funding for the police force, the state and the local authorities. Generally, the state, via the Treasury, put its hand in its pocket to finance specific expenditure related to the police operation, in particular the payment of innumerable overtime hours resulting in very long working days of up to sixteen hours per day.

Indeed, while the striking miners suffered increasing deterioration in their material conditions, the police paid out very substantial wage supplements which led to complaints from police women, on May 6th 1984, about not taking part in the operations on the picket lines and thus losing the opportunity to receive overtime payments.

The intelligence services of the police forces (Special Branch) were largely put to work, subject to attacks such as the intervention of M15. On April 9th, 1984, the Chief Constable of North Wales, David Owen, acknowledged in this respect that the civil police were infiltrating strike pickets "with the aim of identifying the people who were committing offences". The neutralization of the effectiveness of the pickets operated through good anticipation of their movements, and the militants of the NUM could in general only observe the
quality of information and capacity of the police forces to anticipate their initiatives.

*Daily life for police officers during the strike*

Massive and long-term displacements of forces implied logistics which were initially impromptu: old Royal Air Force bases and old army camps lodged the police officers who were moved. Their living conditions, very limited at the beginning of the conflict, gradually improved.

On the BBC, Bill King remembered his daily life as a commander of PSU units during the strike: departure by bus on Sunday, return home on Friday, living in hangars during the week, occasionally spending the night in sleeping bags on the ground, the alarm clock ringing at 1 am to reach the mining sites before dawn and the arrival of the NUM militants, returning to the hangar around the middle of the afternoon.

The days appeared interminable and tedious, with alternation of long periods of waiting, transport or peaceful discussions with the militants on the pickets and short periods of confrontation or violent moments of set-to with NUM militants (‘push and shove’). The police officers were divided between pride in taking part in a police operation of very high professional level and awareness of the sufferings endured by the miners and their families, deprived of all resources, their awareness all the sharper because many police officers came from modest backgrounds.

*Assessment of law and order*

Leon Brittan considers that the police operations were carried out very effectively. He could not remember any situations during which the police forces were unable to fulfil materially the missions that he had entrusted to them. This effectiveness as regards organization is all the more remarkable
because the operation mobilized very substantial means for an exceptionally long period of time.

The quantified assessment matched the great scale of the operation. Over the whole of the conflict, the NUM was to record more than 11,000 arrests of militants, 7,000 wounded and 200 imprisoned. Legal records confirmed that 11,291 people were stopped during the strike, including 8,392 convicted. The convictions were related mainly to attacks on law and order, insulting the police or blocking roads.

*Sliding towards a police state?*

The miners’ strike restored to favour the traditional debate on the place and role of the police force in a democratic society. The police were supposed to hold the legal monopoly of violence; they were also supposed to intervene impartially in conflicts in civil society, while thwarting any threats to the State. But since most demonstrations and oppositions are directed against the State, an unavoidable ambiguity exists between a police force protecting the national interest and a police force protecting the interests in favour of the current holders of power.

Arthur Scargill and the NUM would argue, during and after the dispute, over whether the United Kingdom was sliding towards a police style comparable to the dictatorships of Latin America of the day: after being stopped after the confrontations of Orgreave, Arthur Scargill, for example, stated that “*what you now have in South Yorkshire is an actual police state tantamount what you are used to seeing in Chile or Bolivia.*” Certain works of opposition to Margaret Thatcher went so far as to describe as ‘torture’ the blows suffered in the heat of the action.

This thesis was the logical consequence of the intensity with which the police force implemented their actions to neutralize the strike pickets:
security of the territory and not strikers (on March 20th, 1984 the director of the NRC, David Hall, declared: “Our operations are in no way paramilitary”), the sometimes brutal opposition to the NUM attempts to block coal movements, vigilant protection of the return to work of a very small number of strike breakers, the use of methods considered as brutal (interrogation of miners on their political choices, seizure of photographs and unofficial prints, recourse to ‘agents provocateurs’ and infiltration operations). On March 29th, a Labour Member of Parliament revealed that 19 militants of the NUM from Yorkshire were questioned by the police force on their political choices and their views on Arthur Scargill.

Another criticism related to the creation of a national police force, although constitutional requirements specify that the police force is organized at county level. On December 9th, the National Council for Civil Liberty formally requested an investigation into the dispute.

The strike undoubtedly led to a transformation of the rules of engagement and behaviour of the police force compared to former practices and on the traditions established during the first half of the 20th century in the field of industrial disputes: the image of the conciliatory police officer, stopping cars at the entrance to occupied factories in order to dissuade motorists from breaking through the barriers, was replaced during the conflict by that of anti-riot units awkwardly bundled up in protective clothing, wearing helmets with visors, armed with protective shields, hammering on their shields with their truncheons, facing the strike pickets.

Although the argument of a police state or the paramilitarisation of the police force had all the greater repercussions because the NUM set it up as a major argument in their communications, hindsight offers an measured report: during the dispute there was no notable overwhelming, not even a
weakness, by the police force, no drama comparable with what happened in Ulster on 1972 ‘Bloody Sunday’.

The police were clearly not implicated in either of the deaths that occurred on the picket lines, those of David Jones and Joe Green, and the only homicide was the work of desperate NUM militants. The government thus supervised an operation that was politically vital for it with a sufficient level of control. In any case, criticism of violence by a police state was not accepted by public opinion. A Mori survey on violence during the strike allocated responsibility for violence at 71% for the NUM, 43% for the miners, 19% for the government and only 8% for the police force.

Intelligence services

In addition to the police Special Branch, it was proved that British counter-espionage services (MI5) and the electronic listening services (GCHQ) were heavily implicated in the management of the dispute, in particular by undertaking operations to infiltrate or listen to the NUM and among the miners, strikers and non strikers alike. Direct comparison between official statements from MI5 and those of opponents to the Thatcher government makes it possible to approach reality.

The NUM supporters' version

According to the detractors of the government, at the time of the miners’ strike MI5 and the Special Branch implemented a very broad operation of ‘fighting subversion’. The Labour Member of Parliament Tam Dalyell, who often thereafter challenged the Conservative governments on these operations, considered that “MI5 wanted to ingratiate themselves with the PM – who looked a permanent fixture – by breaking the NUM.”
The journalist Seumas Milne considered that “the phone-tapping operation in 1984-5 was the most ambitious ever mounted” in the United Kingdom. All the leaders of the NUM and their close relations were put on listening-in rosters, on both their professional lines and their private lines, 24 hours a day. Their usual meeting places (hotels, restaurants) are also listened to.

Arthur Scargill was entitled to preferential treatment: “as far as the Thatcherite faction in the Cabinet and their supporters in the security services were concerned, the NUM under Scargill’s stewardship was the most serious domestic threat to state security in modern times”, as the Conservative camp was quick to recognize. On television in 1993, Arthur Scargill complained that he had been subject to police surveillance for over twenty years, and Bernard Ingham, Margaret Thatcher’s press secretary, agreed without hesitation. “Far from challenging the NUM leader’s account, Ingham ridiculed any suggestion that there would be anything sinister or untoward about such operations. Scargill had, he declared, just restored his faith in the security services ‘because since 1972, to my certain knowledge, he’s been trying to overthrow the elected government of this country and he’s no doubt still at it. It is therefore very important for the security services to keep him under close surveillance.”

The MI5 leadership version

MI5 did not deny its involvement. In her memoirs published in 2001, Stella Rimington - Director-General of MI5 1992-6 and agent in charge of the trade union supervision activities before and during the 1984-5 strike - explained that certain union leaders had indeed been under surveillance. After her nomination, before the strike, to the counter-subversion branch (F Branch), she indeed investigated the activities of the NUM leadership.

Stella Rimington justifies the MI5 involvement by the fact that the triumvirate which directed the strike (Arthur Scargill as NUM President, Mick McGahey as vice-President and Peter Heathfield as Secretary General) had
publicly declared that they were using the strike to try to bring down the elected government of Mrs Thatcher and that the strike was supported by the Communist Party, an organization permanently seen as subversive.

On the other hand, Stella Rimington rejects the existence of specific governmental directives and the political use of MI5 to break the miners’ strike and destroy the NUM. She indicates that intelligence reports issued to Whitehall were “most carefully scrutinised to ensure that they referred only to matters properly within our remit. Nevertheless, they were treated as most particularly sensitive documents, which were supposed to be returned for destruction after they had been read.” If phone-tapping was undertaken (a practice neither confirmed nor denied by Stella Rimington), this was duly authorized by the Home Secretary, Leon Brittan at the time.

The current website of MI5/Security Service posts an argument that is unsurprisingly in agreement with that of their former Director General. “It has often been alleged that, in the past, we systematically investigated trade unions and various pressure groups, such as the National Union of Mineworkers and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.”

“We have never investigated people simply because they were members or office-holders of trade unions or campaigning organizations. But subversive groups have in the past sought to infiltrate and manipulate such organizations as a way of exerting political influence.”

“To meet our responsibility for protecting national security, we therefore investigated individual members of bona fide organizations when there were grounds to believe that their actions were ‘intended to overthrow or undermine parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means’. We investigated the activities of the subversive groups, but not the organizations they sought to penetrate. Any past investigations were carried out within the laws and processes agreed by Parliament at the time.”
Stella Rimington also explains that the MI5 activities focused on control of the “subversive” NUM leaders, but did not include any intelligence work regarding the activities of picket lines and miners’ wives’ support groups. She consequently denied allegations according to which MI5 would have been involved in supervising and forecasting NUM pickets’ activities and targets. She however recognized the critical importance of such information for the police in charge of the law-and-order aspects of the strikes, therefore to some extent asking readers, journalists and historians to address those allegations to the Special Branch of the police.

A mole inside the NUM leadership?

It is also more or less believed that the intelligence services had an adviser, a “mole”, among the leading authorities of the NUM. The discovery of the existence and the identity of this mole (code name ‘Silver Fox’) constituted a whole different saga. The BBC programme “True Spies” in November 2002 revealed the existence of a mole in the entourage close to Arthur Scargill. Former Special Branch officers indicated that Silver Fox provided the United Kingdom very important information: “The information in question made it possible to beat the strikers, there is no doubt on this point.”

On July 22, 1993, five Labour MPs (including Tam Dalyell and the former Home Secretary Merlyn Rees) tabled a parliamentary motion to this effect, accusing Stella Rimington, then Director-General of MI5, of having sent an agent into the NUM in order to destabilize the union, and even reveal the identity of this mole: “That this House, noting recent publicity about Stella Rimington, Director General of the Security Service, recalls her central role in operations against the miners during and after the coal strike of 1984-85, in particular, her deployment of agents provocateurs within the National Union of Mineworkers, including Roger Windsor, Chief Executive Officer of the NUM 1983 to 1989, an agent of MI5 under Mrs. Rimington, sent in to the NUM to destabilise and sabotage the Union at its most critical juncture; notes
that in 1984 he made contact with Libyan Officials through Altaf Abasi and staged a televised meeting with Colonel Gaddafi, causing immense damage to the striking miners.”

In May 2005, the declassification of new official documents still suggested the presence within the leading authorities of the NUM of a mole or an infiltrated agent. Margaret Thatcher’s main communications adviser, Tim Bell, who was very close to the Prime Minister and at the time charged with improving NCB communications, had an adviser within the TUC, as confirmed in a note from Ian McGregor dated October 24th 1984\(^2\)\(^0\), now declassified.

At a critical moment, when the pit supervisors (NACODS) were likely to come out on strike, it seems that Tim Bell had a contact within the TUC and thus was informed of pressures from the NUM on the NACODS union. This example showed that the government and the NCB could see internal memos from the NUM leadership with only a few days' delay.

Roger Windsor was thus shown by the Labour motion of 1993 to have been the infiltrated mole. This information was challenged by Stella Rimington ambiguously in 2001\(^2\)\(^0\): “It would be correct to say that Roger Windsor has never been an agent in any of the meanings which you can give this word and that the United Kingdom does not manage agents», while indicating that «this does not mean to say that the police force or Special Branch could not have done this type of thing».

Roger Windsor was largely suspected of being the key adviser and also to have been implicated in a media attempt to destabilize Arthur Scargill in 1990, Scargill having supposedly used Soviet and Libyan funds during the 1984-5 strike for his personal ends. He was however cleared of this charge in the courts.
Battling over electricity

The government's inability to ensure normal electricity supplies explained largely the disappointments of the Heath government over the miners in the 1970s. The situation was very different in 1984, because the electricity operator had learned the lessons of the experience and had an extremely detailed contingency plan.

The impact of the overtime strike starting on October 31st, 1983

The period of the overtime strike by the NUM launched on October 1st was a delicate moment for the CEGB, for two reasons. It was initially impossible to know in advance the impact of such a strike on CEGB coal supplies. In addition, the embargo was an intermediate situation between the situation of normal provisioning and the open conflict constituted by a strike. It was under these conditions very difficult for the CEGB to decide whether it was necessary to resort to importing coal and whether the use of oil should be increased: such decisions could seem provocative with regard to the NUM as well as for the unions in the sector.

Coal stocks available inside the power stations dropped by a quarter in four months, but they were in fact much larger than the very inaccurate evaluation declared by the NUM. An internal report by the NUM in March 1983 indeed assessed stocks at 12.3 million tons, that is to say half of the effective stock of 23 million tonnes\(^{203}\); this undervaluation could lead to a mistaken judgement that CEGB stocks would be exhausted in ten weeks. Kim Howells remembers a declaration of Arthur Scargill according to which CEGB had had very tall heaps of coal built by bulldozers in the power stations to give the impression that stocks were greater than was really the case. These approximations combined with 'back-of-an-envelope' calculations\(^{204}\) led the
president of the NUM to multiple inaccurate statements on coal stocks: “Either Arthur Scargill had estimates of stocks that were low and inaccurate, or he lied deliberately to the miners about these estimates,” explains Kim Howells.

*Establishing the plan to hold out*

The launching of the strike was almost a relief for the CEGB, which could then benefit fully from its immense preparatory work. It had, for example, prepared extensive computer models, specifying profiles of consumption under various conditions of provisioning and normal weather to maximize endurance in the event of stocks running out.

In normal weather, electricity production triggered production units in ascending order of marginal costs (thus using the most expensive units only to satisfy peak demand). The hierarchy was as follows: initially nuclear plants, then coal stations, finally oil-fed units, the most expensive, for peaks and emergencies.

The strike led the CEGB to reorganize production according to the level of risk of interruption: to achieve maximum electricity production at nuclear-fired and oil-fired power stations to meet 50% of the demand, then to benefit from the well-supplied coal stations in the Trent valley and the Midlands. In this setting, only 20% of full capacity still depended on areas at risk, in particular on ‘have not’ power stations located within coal fields where the employees agreed to use only the coal already in stock before the conflict.

As of March 23rd, the president of the CEGB Walter Marshall decided to make use of oil fuel to conserve coal stocks. Oil-powered stations, seldom used, came into full-time operation. Nuclear plants produced at full output between periods of maintenance, but production was based to the maximum on oil. During the strike, oil accounted for 50% of the 81.2 million tons of fossil energy consumed to produce electricity.
Coal supplies to the coal-fired power stations were regulated according to the union situation. Some strikers continued to work, enabling the production of 24 million tons, but the traditional alliance between the NUM and NUR resulted in a massive reduction in coal deliveries still undertaken by rail.

Coal movement was then very largely shifted from the railways towards road deliveries, under police protection if necessary. 800,000 truck loads were organized, causing a real ‘gold rush’ for truck-drivers, the majority of who were not unionised. 17 million tons of coal would be delivered by road, against 12 million tons by train. Coal transport was secured, but also that of oil: small transport firms and all the small ports were mobilized to move the oil.

The NUM action and the absence of union solidarity

One of the main reasons that enabled the NUM to block the electricity system and bring down the Heath government in the 1970s was its capacity to organize the effective blockades at power stations and to ensure union support in critical economic sectors. Nothing like it happened in 1984, to the astonishment and satisfaction of the CEGB, which was never really obstructed by the NUM pickets. 28 million tons of coal would be delivered to the power stations during the strike.

Production in the vital pits in Nottinghamshire and other non-striking areas, combined with the lack of solidarity among the road carriers and police protection for all coal movements, made it possible to supply the belt of power stations in the Trent Valley and correspondingly reinforced the ‘endurance’ of the government.

The trade union context had also turned out extremely unfavourably, both in the transport sector and in that of electricity production. In transport, the NUM benefited from the powerful support of the
railwaymen’s trade union, the NUR, which made it possible to reduce rail deliveries of coal considerably. But this advantage did not work, since the CEGB and the NCB strongly supported the use of coal deliveries by road. The massive use of non-unionised drivers thus rendered inoperative the support which the transport union for transport, the TGWU, gave to the NUM.

A particularly delicate point related to the two great electrical sector trade unions: EEPTU (electricians) and EPEA (engineers). The CEGB leaders had to manage a significant situation with great tact: “The Board knew that all the talents in the world would not prevent failure if its initiatives were understood as support for the Government’s fight against the miners. The fathers, sons and brothers of many power station employees were striking miners and any provocation could have brought them out on strike too.”

Social relations within the CEGB must therefore be managed very carefully during the conflict. In this context, transport of coal by the army would have been felt as a provocation likely to justify a strike by the electricians. In addition, the electricians at certain sensitive power stations – the ‘have-nots’ – had, as has been shown, refused to use coal delivered to the power stations after the beginning of the strike.

But the total context was very unpromising for the NUM: there was no confidence between the leaders of the NUM and those of the two key electricians’ trade unions, the general secretaries Eric Hammond for EEPTU and John Lyons for EPEA. After the leak of governmental memos intending to promote this form of energy in order to weaken the miners, Arthur Scargill had spoken with brutal directness against the development of nuclear power. This harsh judgment had displeased the moderate leaders of the electricity sector, who refused to follow Scargill in his political objectives. Eric Hammond in particular declared that his union was completely opposed to non-observance of the law and the politicization of strikes aimed at overturning an
elected government. The only struggle which it was ready to support was that of safeguarding the coal industry within the framework of a settlement negotiated with the government.

The absence of a vote from the miners on the strike and the recourse to violence constituted another considerable problem. The electricians could not understand why the very principle of closing mine sites caused radical opposition from the NUM while at the same time the electricity sector had for ten years undergone site closures, not organized in a concerted way between CEGB and the trade unions.

Eric Hammond however tried to be constructive. He made an astonishing offer to the general secretary of the NUM, Peter Heathfield, in April 1984. “My trade union is completely opposed to the non-observance of the law and the political use of the strikes to reverse elected governments in a democratic way. The addition of a political rhetoric to the strike is a major hurdle for any support on our part. To be clear, is it possible that the NUM publicly repudiates the political objectives of the strike and indicates that its sole objective is to ensure the future of mining industry by a negotiated and honourable compromise, that the NUM then organizes a poll in favour of the strike? If such were the case, I would use all my capacity and my influence to bring a maximum assistance to the NUM, and my idea is in this case to recommend at my executive committee the organization of a poll so that the coal-fired power stations stop working in support of the miners. To be completely frank, without the gestures of the NUM that I have indicated, such a recommendation would not have any meaning and I would not follow it.” This offer remained without continuation, and the power stations continued to function normally.

All this tore up the agreements concluded ten years earlier by Joe Gormley with the electric sector. On March 22nd, 1984, the electricity unions asked their members to cross the NUM strike picket-lines. On September 3rd, the vote by ten votes to one in the TUC council in favour of full and
unconditional support for the NUM did not prevent the key electricity federations from opposing any practical implementation of this support. The electricians also voted by 84%, on October 19\textsuperscript{th}, against any support for the miners.

\textit{The Legal system}

The use of the legal system, and even more precisely of the various legislative texts setting out the right to strike within strict conditions, did not constitute the first line of defence for the government, which had not forgotten since 1970 that it had to be used with caution.

\textit{Reserves available for direct governmental use in the anti-union arsenal}

To general surprise, the government and the NCB decided not to implement directly the legal arsenal instituted since 1980 to frame the right to strike. It seems that they had learned the lessons of the 1970s: the legal weapon had considerable limits and could even become completely counter-productive in managing an acute crisis. Extreme prudence was essential. Although on March 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1984, the NCB obtained a civil High Court summary procedure to prohibit the Yorkshire miners from setting up strike pickets in other mining areas, it at once decided not to apply it.

However, these laws were dissuasive since they could be called on by interested parties. On April 10\textsuperscript{th}, two coke conveyers brought a legal action against the South Wales NUM and their secondary pickets operating round the Port Talbot iron and steel plant. On April 17\textsuperscript{th}, a High Court judge pronounced under a summary procedure that this action was illegal, and directed the South Wales NUM to stop blocking trucks from entering or leaving the factory. As the South Wales NUM did not obey this legal decision, it was condemned on July 30\textsuperscript{th} to pay a £50,000 fine, and as it refused to pay, its funds were
sequestrated, under the sanctions envisaged by the Tebbit law (Employment Act 1982). Another High Court decision court indicated on April 25th that a strike launched without a vote was an unfair operation and prohibited the NUM from encouraging miners to respect the strike pickets.

*Accent on the criminal law*

The legal attack in the first months of the strike concentrated on the criminal law because of the immense deployments of police. The official statistics for England and Wales showed 8,460 arrests between March 14th and November 27th, 1984. 92% of those stopped were miners, and nearly a third of the arrests were concentrated in Nottinghamshire alone. The other key areas of arrest were South Yorkshire and Derbyshire, whose miners mainly took part in the strike. The charges overwhelmingly related to civil disorder (41%), obstructing the police (17%), blocking highways (7%) or criminal damage to property (9%).

Criminal justice had to cope with a massive increase in cases, in what would be described as ‘supermarket justice’. Of a sample of 3,488 people in England and Wales, approximately half of the accused were condemned to a fine, 21% were made the object of a payment order and 25% of safety measures to preserve law and order (measurements of distance or prohibition of mining areas other than their own). 200 miners were condemned to custodial sentences, that is to say nearly 2% of the sample.

*Financial means of the State*

Margaret Thatcher and her government spared no expenditure in a conflict where victory was vital, because the strike was analyzed mainly in political terms. The government indicated on June 4th, 1984 that the State would underwrite all financial losses of the NCB relating to the strike. In a
statement to the House of Commons on July 31st, Nigel Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer, evaluated the expenditure already laid out because of the strike at between £300 and £350 million. He explained that the strike was a worthwhile investment “even in narrow financial terms”209. He would reiterate this position in his memoirs, indicating that “it was essential for the government to spend all that was necessary to beat Arthur Scargill”.

Leon Brittan confirmed the somewhat ancillary nature of the financial question in a struggle of political nature: he received a total ‘carte blanche’ from Nigel Lawson to pay for all police deployments210. As in a war, it was also necessary to pay without counting the cost in order to import oil and coal, to use the energy infrastructures without taking account of the expense, or to pay as much overtime as necessary to police officers: to be able at this time to meet the normal electricity demand for private individuals and business and to guarantee that law enforcement was not a matter of cost.
THE 1984-5 STRIKE PART TWO:
DISAPPOINTMENTS, REVERSALS
OF FORTUNE AND THE TWILIGHT
OF THE NUM
THE BATTLE FOR PUBLIC OPINION

Importance of the media

For a full year the miners’ strike was the central subject of British news. Every evening on television, the general public was brought up to date on the advances and retreats on both sides. The way in which the situation was presented to the public every day was a strategic issue for all parties committed to the conflict.

Television, the prime source of information for 90% of the British population, continued to show the strike, day after day, and contributed substantially to the creation of perceptions amongst the public. The essential programmes were the evening news on the BBC (audiences of between 6 to 8 million people) and the news output in the second part of evening such as ITV Channel Four News and BBC Newsnight.

The strategic radio programme was Today, every morning on BBC Radio 4. Its audience of 1.2 million people was made up of opinion leaders, including the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. This programme had a significant impact on the headlines in the morning television news output.

The written press also influenced the editorial line of the television journalists, but unlike television news it varied according to the geographical location of significant strike events and the public expression of witnesses and key actors in the movement. The tabloid press gave its opinions, particularly Murdoch’s The Sun, which had supported the Conservatives since 1979. The most popular newspapers read by the miners were The Sun and the Daily Mirror, together with the News of the World. The readers of the major 'establishment'
newspapers such as The Times, The Sunday Times or The Financial Times, lived mainly in southern England, far from the minefields in the north.

**Key personalities in communications**

**Ian McGregor, NCB chairman**

Among government and NCB personalities, Ian McGregor received the greatest amount of media exposure. For a long time he was in the front line; this corresponded to the initial communications strategy which tended to present the dispute as one of opposition between the NCB and the NUM, with the government standing well back. His pronouncements punctuated the first months of the strike: “We live in difficult times and they could become still more difficult” (April 4th, 1984), “Meeting Arthur Scargill does not constitute a relevant use of my time” (April 16th). He went so far as to propose setting up a strike ballot with the company’s own resources (June 14th).

Consensus was quickly reached on the mediocrity of his media performance. Ian McGregor had neither the experience nor a particular liking for the journalists, whom he found irritating, indiscreet and inclined to put poor questions, although those whom he had to face were specialized and very experienced. He came across badly on television, where he appeared at the same time old and particularly incomprehensible to the public. In this exercise he appeared wholly incapable of matching the weight of Arthur Scargill who, although coming across as something of a caricature, was young, alert and dynamic.

McGregor therefore soon came in for a grilling in the media. According to Raymond Seitz, attaché in the US Embassy and future American Ambassador, “Ian McGregor (…) represented management with all the political and social sympathy of a bar-room bouncer… I recall wincing whenever he appeared on
television.” On September 9th, television showed him disguised under a plastic bag to escape the journalists; what was supposed to be funny would endure as an outstanding image of the struggle. The Anglican Bishop of Durham spoke of him on September 21st as an “elderly imported American” and asked for his departure. His media presence crumbled continuously: according to a Mori survey carried out in June 1984, 49% of the British considered that he was managing the crisis badly. The figure rose to 62% in December.

His media performance was increasingly alarming for Margaret Thatcher and Peter Walker. He seemed to have only poor understanding of the political dimension of the dispute and its media consequences: the importance of a rapid settlement of the conflict to avoid any reversal of public opinion, the media need for a positive attitude of negotiation, and also the obligation not to give Arthur Scargill a political and media victory through the detailed terms of a possible agreement to bring the conflict to an end.

The question of his replacement seems to have been raised unequivocally the strike, and the fact that his departure would be regarded as a victory for Arthur Scargill and the NUM was apparently his final safety-net. The solution came with the arrival of Tim Bell, communications aide in Margaret Thatcher’s victorious electoral campaigns in 1979 and 1983. Bell’s task was to improve a communication style which was causing increasing anxiety for the government. He was who chose Michael Eaton as spokesperson for the NCB to balance the failures of Ian McGregor, dubbed “a total public relations disaster” by Bernard Ingham, Margaret Thatcher’s press secretary.

Arthur Scargill, president of the NUM

Since 1972, the significant media impact of Arthur Scargill had helped a lot to accelerate his career and his rise to the NUM presidency. As a
consequence, he was the major media character on the side of the striking miners. This pre-eminence was reinforced by the strategy of the government and the NCB to personalize the conflict around him: Arthur Scargill must be the ‘villain’, responsible for violence and all other excesses of the striking miners.

Scargill's media appearances were thus in great demand from journalists, with whom he developed a paranoid relationship - by selecting a few trusted supporters with care, he felt that he was giving a fair representation of the strike. Scargill was the main, if not the only, point of focus in all NUM communication, an approach supported by strict control of media intervention. Apart from Scargill, all journalists were authorized to speak to only one person, Nell Myers, the newly appointed press officer at the NUM Sheffield headquarters. Press conferences were filmed by the NUM, and often took place in the presence of somewhat intimidating militants who provided applause on request. Rumours existed of a black list of journalists with whom it was forbidden to communicate.

But the magic of Saltley had vanished: the British crushed it even more comprehensively than they did Ian McGregor, since the level of opinion considering that he had managed the strike in June badly ran at 59%, a figure that would rise to 82% in December.

The centralization and relative modesty of the NUM PR means created communications congestion for the journalists. Its switchboard was saturated. The print-run for the NUM newspaper *The Miner* went from 200,000 to 400,000 copies then dropped back to 200,000 at the end of August. Rebuttal of police statements relating to incidents of violence or answers relating to NCB figures concerning returns to work were not really organized. As in other fields of the strike management, certain local situations were better, in particular for the South Wales NUM, where media management was managed.
by Kim Howells, in charge both of organizing the action of strike pickets and of press relations.

*Peter Walker, Energy Secretary*

Peter Walker's qualities and experience concerning communication - to the point of being described as a ‘journalist’ by his ministerial colleagues – were determining factors in Margaret Thatcher's decision to appoint him Energy Secretary. Peter Walker indeed cultivated a calm appearance and sympathetic style, while the long list of his many friends in editorial circles at the large newspapers and in his address book impressed the media. His media performance would be remarkable and would be duly acknowledged in her memoirs by Margaret Thatcher, who was generally sparing with her compliments.

During the strike, Peter Walker would make use of this exceptional network: “*So I phoned several editors almost every day, and talked to journalists like Paul Potts of the Express and Georges Jones of the Daily Telegraph. Editor of the quality of Sir David English were passionate to see that the nation recognized the reality of this dispute and my regular conversations throughout the dispute with key editors such as to Sir David meant that, in the main, we were successful in bringing to the British public the truth about what was going on*” 215. This led to astonished and admiring comments: “*It was marvellous. Here was a man who could just pick up the phone and ring a friend in the cause. Of course, it wasn’t so good for the journalist; he would find his editor had got a bee in his bonnet.*” 216

Peter Walker gave great priority to the Sunday press, which in his view gave the guiding line for the week to come; he wrote many leading articles in the *News of the World* of the Murdoch group, which had the advantage of being widely read by the miners. In addition, he chose to address himself in the
drafting more to 'political' journalists than to 'industrial' journalists concerned with industrial relations, who were considered to be too close to the miners.

He started to be quoted publicly only from July 1984. His style of communication would be to present the government case in a moderate way, to reassure the public on the fact that there would be no power cuts, by giving accurate information on the level of coal stocks, and by monitoring and countering the media performance of the two other stars of the crisis, i.e. to respond instantly to Arthur Scargill’s public statements and, perhaps even more, to mitigate the media damage caused by Ian McGregor.

**The media exposure of Margaret Thatcher**

Margaret Thatcher was also heavily exposed during the strike, later recalling her two major concerns throughout the conflict: respect for the law and the right to work. The House of Commons, where she faced the Labour leader Neil Kinnock, was the principal theatre for her communication, which was also shown fully on television and in the press.

It was also in the Commons that the Prime Minister was to make the most memorable statement and catchphrase of the entire strike during a discussion with the Conservative parliamentary group on July 19th: “*We had to fight the external enemy in the Falklands. We must also be aware of the enemy within, which is at the same time much more difficult to fight and much more dangerous for freedom.*”

She thus dared a direct comparison with military confrontation with Argentina in the Falklands, without making it clear who she was identifying. Did the miners as a whole constitute the enemy within, therefore a subset of the British nation? In October, in an interview in *The Sunday Mirror*, she would specify that “*the enemy within concerns people who use violence and intimidation to force people to do what they are not able to persuade them to do*”, and thus that it was aimed at the NUM leadership. But the expression “*the enemy within*”
flourished: it was stamped on the t-shirts of NUM supporters and would later be used as the title of a number of works reporting the strike.

Communication strategies

The government approach

The government consistently left the NCB in the front line during the first part of the conflict and maintained the illusion that the conflict was limited to a state enterprise and its trade union. The government also consistently pointed out that this was above all a hostile industrial dispute between the NCB and a section of its employees. For the government, it was a question of remaining behind the NCB and of letting the dispute as remote as possible from the great mass of the population. The government would in particular NEVER enter into direct relations with the NUM.

From the summer onwards, however, the media mistakes by the NCB and the peak of violence of May-June 1984 led the government to question to some extent its strategy of keeping its distance from the NCB. In this respect, the government had two immense advantages in its communications.

The first has been described at length: this concerned the absence of a miner's ballot on the strike, an absence which was all the more criticized in that the large areas which remained active did so after having organized local votes for their miners. Throughout the conflict the argument of the non-democratic character of the strike was raised repeatedly by the strike-breakers and the government.

The second was the violence of some militants: flying pickets in Nottinghamshire, the events at Orgreave, violence against any return to work in the areas that were mainly on strike. The media presentation of this violence,
in particular at the Orgreave sites in May and June 1984, helped to marginalize the NUM in public opinion.

The miners’ violence was also used to justify the authority of the State, and in particular the scale of police deployments. The police force was doing “splendid work” and in particular ensured the “right to work” of the working miners; this offered positive justification for the considerable police deployments, introduced in the autumn to protect access to work for miners who for a long time were very few in number. In addition, the government consistently explained the line defended from the outset, namely the possibility of closing ‘uneconomic pits’.

The aggressive use of the media was also aimed at increasing divisions within the NUM: it was the strike and not the NCB management which was destroying the industry, and politicization of the strike should be avoided. An NCB press release of August 17th, 1984, indicated that the strike could lead to far more redundancies than the initially programmed 20,000.

Finally, Arthur Scargill, the NUM’s main media performer, was an important point of focus for government communications: “This false prophet and his band of untamed red guards and coalfield sans-culottes should be treated as outlaw” Several scoops would help to support this thesis, with the objective of generating maximum damage in a very patriotic public opinion: assistance requested - and received - by the NUM from miners in the USSR (£1 million), assistance received by the NUM from foreign Communist parties or the foreign trade unions close to the Communist parties, such as the French CGT.

*The NUM approach*

As in the strikes of 1926 and the 1970s, the NUM could depend on the sympathy with the miners and their communities that was long-established in a large part of the population. Fund-raising, demonstrations, the
activities of women's groups, were used to mobilize against the destructive policy of Margaret Thatcher and her ‘minority Government’.

Moreover, the NUM communications made use of terminology and confrontation borrowed from the military world. At the beginning of the conflict, Arthur Scargill would multiply forecasts on the level of coal stocks and the next power cuts. Unfortunately, taking into account his poor knowledge of genuine stock levels and of his incapacity to stop the power stations effectively, these forecasts were generally contradicted by the CEGB and Peter Walker (who would end up calling Arthur Scargill a ‘liar’ at the end of 1984), but especially by the facts. ‘General winter’ would never come. The topic of the ‘second front’, the launching of another major strike, was also frequently raised. But in all there would be only two short strikes by the dockers during the struggle.

Another major axis of NUM communications was based on the theme of ‘the police State’ responsible for violence. In addition, after Orgreave, Arthur Scargill associated the United Kingdom more closely with the dictatorships of Latin America, without ever clearly condemning acts of violence by miners themselves, although they were the subject of constant governmental criticism and negative public opinion. Arthur Scargill thus indicated to the TUC Congress on September 3rd, 1984: “There was violence. But isn’t it also an act of violence to threaten to destroy the labour of a man and his son?”

Finally, the NUM leadership was not at all satisfied with the way in which the strike was reported by the media. Quite soon, Scargill was inciting his militants at public meetings by attacking the journalists, as seen in his speech of June 1984 at the time of the demonstration in London's Jubilee Gardens. “I would like to extend cordial greetings here to all members of a union, if only the vermin journalists present here would not try to take a photograph of me with my arm raised and to write something insulting [cheers]. From the beginning of this conflict, day
after day, television, the radio and the press have systematically favoured the NCB and the government even when they were caught red-handed in duplicity or a lie. This band of piranhas will continue to support Mrs Thatcher.” Of this episode, Kelvin McKenzie, associate editor of The Sun, had in fact tried on May 15th, 1984 to publish a photograph of Arthur Scargill greeting his partisans in a way that was capable of being interpreted as a Nazi salute, with the subtitle “Mine Führer”. The printers refused to print this image and replaced it with a white page. The photograph was however taken up by the Express and Arthur Scargill obtained a right of reply in this newspaper.

It is not surprising that in these conditions the journalists, often welcome by comments such as “here comes the lie machine”, were treated roughly, and even subjected to violence. Further, all this was in addition to the expression of immense frustration among some NUM militants who were growing conscious of the coming failure and were in search of traitors of any kind (the police force, working miners, journalists, the Labour party, the TUC…) to hold up to public shame.

The media impact on public perceptions

The television impact was huge and for twelve months the public received its daily ration of news on this Shakespearian conflict. “In any event, the spoken word had far less impact on opinion and perception than visual material, and television was engaged in a constant search for fresh images. Images broadcast in the morning were by lunchtime too familiar to the audience and new ones were needed for the afternoon and evening news bulletins.”

Violence was by far the principal media image of the strike. Reports on violence (from which the journalists did not escape) had a major impact on the public perception. From the first days of strike, violence on the picket lines appeared in the media, the prelude to the crescendo which would
culminate with the battle of Orgreave and the death of the taxi driver David Wilkie at the end of November 1984.

The written press had much less influence on public perceptions. Overall, moreover, it tended to be somewhat negative to the miners' point of view. Arthur Scargill and the NUM were subjected to ceaseless attacks in the tabloid press, *The Sun* in particular. The more 'establishment' newspapers like *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* were also very critical. The newspapers of the left, in particular *The Daily Mirror*, with a broad readership, supported the miners' cause while strongly distancing themselves from the personality and methods of Arthur Scargill; this was fairly representative of the embarrassment felt by many members of the Labour party. Only *The Morning Star*, close to the Communist party of Great Britain, supported the NUM and its president for a long time without question. But in its turn it shifted towards criticism of Arthur Scargill towards the end of the strike.

The NUM and Arthur Scargill dominated media air-time. According to British Research Links (BRU219), Scargill occupied 14% of air-time against 5% for Ian McGregor. Unfortunately for him, his interventions were consistently accompanied by critical comments presenting him as marginal and failing to respect the usual conventions of cultural life in the United Kingdom.

To the public, however, information appeared balanced: the British Research Unit found that 53% of its national sample regarded television news bulletins as impartial, although Labour voters were four to five times more likely than Conservatives to see television news as biased against the miners220. In the end the strategy of the NUM which consisted in tackling the impartiality of the media head-on led nowhere.

The press and the media constituted a central battle ground, where the NUM mostly lost ground: “the continued failure of the NUM leaders to swing
public opinion, including that of their own members, decisively to their side, in spite of self-inflicted wounds of the Coal Board, was a key factor in their defeat. The media had only a weak influence on public opinion, primarily because of the long-established concept which held that the unions were too powerful, in particular since the 1979 'winter of discontent'.

A body of public opinion mainly opposed to the conflict

This perception of opinion was a complete reversal of the situation during the strikes of the 1970s, and this tendency would only be reinforced. Public support for the NCB reached 40% in July, and from November represented more than half of the nation.

Are your sympathies mainly with the employers or mainly with the miners in the dispute which has arisen in the coal industry? (Gallup poll)

Although it was recognised that pit closures meant the death of communities, the tradition of massive support for the miners - because of the
demands of their work – was defeated by the undemocratic character of the strike which was launched without a vote, and also by the NUM orchestration of their militants' violence.

10 to 12 million adults favoured the cause of the miners. The scale of funds collected (at least £5 million, perhaps £10 million) symbolized the importance of this support, offered by a population which felt guilt at the lamentable fate facing the miners. There would be several large demonstrations in London.

But this support by an important minority, which for a long time represented a third of the population, was wasted by the methods of the NUM, which rapidly generated massive rejection. Throughout the conflict, between 80% and 90% of the British disapproved of them, against slightly more than 50% in the 1970s. Responsibility for violence, the main image of the strike on television, was allocated fully to the NUM and the miners, and not to the police. Nearly three quarters of the British (71%) did not think that the police force was using excessive violence, including 45% of Labour sympathizers and 98% of Conservatives.

After the strike the vice-president of the NUM, Mick McGahey, would also recognize this undeniable fact: “Anyone who makes an analysis of the miners' strike can't avoid the issue of violence. I'll argue that the Ridley plan, the mass use of police, the use of scab lorries and so on, contributed to the violence, the exasperation of it all. But I find it difficult to argue that there was no violence on our side, and that violence did not help us. It was played up to the maximum. Many people would say 'the miners have a case but we can't have this business of harassment, the vilification of people; it's against the best traditions of British people.' So we didn't have the mass support we had had in 1972 and 1974.”

This reversal of trend also corresponded to a radical change of perception in the face of the 'to the bitter end' attitude of the NUM. “By being
treated as a special case under the Heath government of 1970-1974, the miners had struck a tacit bargain with the remainder of society: they got a better deal than most men who depend on muscle and nerve, but they got it for producing coal [...]. The NUM had forfeited national trust in its ability to deliver coal regularly. For all the sentiment and reverence (...) which surrounds the miners’ place in society, fundamentally the expectation that coal miners dig coal, which produces power.225

In addition, the strike was taking place at a time when a true economic boom was developing in southern England, thus completely out of phase with the events. Moreover, the many employees who had suffered economically in connection with the terrible recession of the early 1980s lost much of their traditional solidarity with the miners.

In the end, the strike felt very distant for most people. The public did not suffer inconvenience in their daily life, and its opinion on the strike was not sought as in 1974 when Edward Heath called an election. The situation was completely reversed in comparison with the strikes of 1972 and 1974: as long as the lights worked, the dispute appeared remote. The British, whose daily lives were not affected by electricity rationing or a three-day working week, thus observed the spectacle of the strike with a certain detachment; meanwhile, every day on their TV screens they followed the great national industrial soap-opera serial, which was what the fight between the NUM and the Conservative government had become.

**THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND THE POLITICAL LEFT**

Within the union world it is necessary to distinguish between miners who refused to strike, other unions and the TUC.
As explained above, the ‘battle of Nottinghamshire’ and on other sites which wanted to work left indelible traces of division between the two-thirds of miners who were faithful to the NUM national leadership strike strategy and the other communities (Nottinghamshire, the Midlands, South Derbyshire and Leicestershire) which decided not to join the strike and very early backed this option through local votes. An unbridgeable gulf was created between these two groups.

After the decisions of the NUM executive committee and conference on April 12th and 19th, Ray Chadburn and Henry Richardson decided to remain on the side of the national leadership and incite the Nottinghamshire miners to join the strike. In response, a committee of working miners was established, covering the twenty-five pits and to “support the working miners in the defence of democracy”. Control over this NUM area was at stake.

On June 11th, the working miners won the area elections. This made it possible to replace all NUM officials with miners in favour of the continuation of work. On July 2nd, they took control of the regional executive committee. On the 6th, the NUM area decided to secede from the NUM after forty-one years of membership. These developments were obviously undertaken against the NUM president and national executive, against whom several successful legal actions were brought. The secession came to light at the time of the annual NUM convention on August 10th, without delegations from Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and South Derbyshire. None of the NUM’s disciplinary initiatives could change this.

Finally, on December 11th, the dissenting miners voted to adopt a new constitution which provided autonomy from the NUM. The Union of
Democratic Mineworkers (UDM) was born and in the long term would encompass one-third of the miners, under the direction of Roy Lynk and Neil Greatrex.

A national organization of working miners, the National Working Miners' Committee, was also created at the beginning of June. The purpose of a secret meeting organized on the initiative of ‘Silver Birch’ - the code name of the non-striking miner Chris Butcher - was to develop units of working miners at all the mining sites, to give them moral and material support within the framework of the campaign to return to work orchestrated by the NCB. A national committee, with a constitution and elected leaders, met on September 11th. The committee, largely supervised by David Hart, was used in the legal strategy developed against the NUM.

The solidarity of other trade union organizations

One of the main reasons for the successes of the 1970s was the great solidarity of unions in related sectors (power stations, dockers, road and rail transport), based largely on solid emotional support for the miners from all union members. Nothing like this happened in 1984-1985: the fall in solidarity was obvious. Several factors explain this deep transformation.

First of all, the legal framework became much more restrictive with the prohibition of secondary picketing (the Employment Act 1980), the strict definition of a legal strike (the Employment Act 1982) and the requirement for a poll in order to start strikes (the Trade Union Act 1984). Most trade union organizations were both basically legalistic and wary of the legal sanctions which the courts could impose on anyone infringing these laws, in particular fines or even the sequestration of union funds.
In addition, the principal claim of the NUM - the total rejection of any site closures - went down badly with other unions, many of which had undergone restructuring and site closures at the time of the economic recession in the early 1980s. This was particularly true for the electricians and steelworkers, many of whose factories had closed. Solidarity would moreover be particularly difficult for economically fragile sectors. The mere fact that some of the miners continued to work and produce coal reinforced the hesitations, as the vice-president of the NUM was to recognize it after the strike: “other union leaders who wanted to help us had to face the question from their members: why should we sacrifice our jobs when 20 per cent of the miners are producing coal?”

The NUM would receive genuine support, though mainly verbal, from unions in the transport sector (railwaymen, dockers, seamen), but on the other hand a final refusal from unions representing the two main coal-consuming sectors, electricity generation and the iron and steel industry.

Trade unions which supported the NUM

The transport union, TGWU, the railway workers' unions (ASLEF and NUR) and the seamen's union traditionally supported the miners and acted accordingly in 1984. The leaders and the permanent staff felt strongly involved, and their verbal and financial support would never fail. But the miners would have had greater need of the opening of a ‘second front’ against the government, such as the launch of second major strike coordinated with the NUM.

Very early on, the leaders of the railway workers' unions immediately and unhesitatingly expressed their official support for the strike. On March 20th, the central transport unions required the implementation of an embargo on coal movements. This official support would last throughout the
strike, until March 4th, 1985. But over the whole duration of the dispute, it would result, in no more than two one-day absences (on June 27th, 1984 and January 17th, 1985), with little consequences.

There were many isolated cases of strong support for the miners. For example, 60 railwaymen in Coalville, in Leicestershire, refused for months to transport any coal from the mining areas still in production, in spite of the obvious illegality of such initiatives. But all this would not prevent the transport by rail of 12 million tons of coal. Time brought increasing disconnection between the activist speeches of the trade union leadership and the more measured attitude of the grass-roots members.

The government itself, moreover did not remain inactive. As well as its massive recourse to road transport for coal, it ensured that the railwaymen themselves obtained satisfaction during the strike. On June 5th, the Daily Mirror ran its front page on the government’s implication in the strike, by indicating that it had accepted the pay demands from railway workers to minimize the risk of even more effective support for the miners from the railwaymen. The management of British Rail would at the same time act appeasingly, by refusing to claim sanctions against illegal support for the miners, and acting with firmness to keep the railways working properly. Any generalization of situations like Coalville must be avoided carefully as a tactful incentive for the railwaymen to fall into line.

The dockers' and transport union, TGWU, did little better. Their verbal support was also fervent. On April 20th, the TGWU threatened a nation-wide strike if dockers were laid off because of their support for the miners.

At the beginning of June, TGWU required truck-drivers not to load the coal which would normally be transported by rail. None of this did anything to stop the road haulage drivers, unintimidated by strike pickets, from supplying the NCB's strategic customers. Worse, a NUM militant Joe Green,
aged 55, died on June 15th after being crushed by a reversing truck as it forced its way through a picket line at the entrance to Ferrybridge power station in Yorkshire. The TGWU threat was put into execution with the launching of a strike on July 9th, 1984, in reprisal against the use of non-unionised labour to handle coal at a dock site, but on July 21st the TGWU had to stop under the pressure of the angry truck-drivers. The ‘second front’ crumbled, delivering a terrible psychological blow to the striking miners.

On August 23rd, the TGWU called on the striking dockers for the second time to protest against the fact that British Steel Corporation had had a load of coke unloaded by non-unionised staff from a ship at Hunterston, for the Rvescraig iron and steel plant. The second strike received even less support from the base than the first and did nothing to prevent the ports from operating normally. The call to strike was withdrawn on September 18th, 1984.

The solidarity of these trade unions would be defeated by the establishment of alternative transport by the government, CEGB and British Steel. Surface transport was protected by mobilizing a multitude of individual small entrepreneurs, as well as maritime transport making use of small and medium-sized shipping companies which used the smaller ports, which were much less organised at union levels.

*Trade unions in opposition to the NUM*

The electricians and the steelworkers unions were completely opposed to the NUM. This stance combined the personal aversion of these union leaders to Arthur Scargill and the economic and social realities of their industry. The two sectors, virtually the only outlets for the coal industry, had already faced the same restructuring plans rejected by the NUM and were not ready to sacrifice their industries. They had no wish to wage war for King Arthur.
The disunity between miners, electricians and steelmakers was the worst news for the NUM. Unions and their members, although some of them were close to the miners, would never grant the level of support which in 1972 had enabled the miners to besiege the power stations, to cut electricity and finally to bring down the government.

The absolute opposition of the electrical union to a political strike and the absence of any vote to launch the strike has already been mentioned. At the time of the NUM Congress in September 1984, Eric Hammond of EEPTU made his opposition very clear to the motion of unconditional moral and material support for the NUM by the TUC. He pointed out his proposal of May and held Arthur Scargill and the NUM responsible for disastrous inter-union division, balancing the maintenance of an energy policy exclusively founded on coal against those who preferred a balanced energy policy. “True friends are those who speak the truth and do not reinforce the folly of others.” He asserted his absolute opposition to the violence and politicisation of the strike. John Lyons, of the electrical executives' trade union EMA, summarised the step to him: “It is not the vocation of the electric sector to settle problems of other trade unionists, even for the miners.”

The trade unions in the iron and steel sector, steelworkers' union ISTC in particular, were above all concerned to protect their industry, which was barely emerging from the very difficult period of restructuring of the early 1980s. In addition, this union remembered the lack of support from the NUM at the time of the thirteen weeks' steel strike in 1980. On March 30th, Bill Sirs, ISTC president, stated that he was ready “to see the iron and steel industry sacrificed on someone else's altar”. The vote organized on April 5th elicited a massive majority in favour of the continuation of work. The recommendation of the NUM's executive committee requiring other trade unionists not to cross strike picket lines was rejected.
The NUM summer campaign to block the normal functioning of industry was very badly received. On June 27th, and the ISTC leaders declared that they would accept any coal to enable the steel-works to continue operating. There would be no second iron and steel front: on September 21st the workmen finally rejected calls to stop production.

_The conciliatory but impotent attitude of the Trades Union Congress (TUC)_

_The primarily verbal support of the TUC_

The strike had begun at the very moment when the TUC general secretary, Len Murray, had chosen a line of appeasement with the government. Although Len Murray admired Arthur Scargill’s great powers, he could not follow him in his oft-repeated ambition to bring down the Thatcher government: the strike was to remain a simple industrial dispute. In addition, his legalistic approach required him to respect the new legislative framework.

Arthur Scargill himself almost openly scorned the TUC methods based on the search for compromise. The precedent of 1926 was alive in his mind; he considered that the TUC had betrayed the miners who had then entrusted the TUC with an important role in the management of the conflict. He also recalled the 1982 dispute of the printers’ union, when the TUC had been unable to create solidarity. For the most radical militants of the NUM, seeking assistance from the TUC was almost the same as offering their throat to the knife. On March 26th, 1984, therefore, the NUM requested the TUC not to deal with the conflict, “No assistance required”, except by inviting the affiliated trade unions not to cross NUM strikers’ picket lines, a recommendation immediately rejected by the key trade unions of the electrical and iron and steel industries.
Only the major setbacks of spring and summer 1984 pushed the NUM to come closer to the TUC. Meetings took place for this purpose on July 28th and on August 10th; the NUM conference officially required financial support from the other trade unions at a rate of £200,000 per week. The first formal debate of the TUC general council on the miners’ strike took place only on August 22nd.

At the time of the TUC Congress early in September the council passed a motion of general solidarity in favour of the miners, by ten votes to one, in spite of head-on opposition from the power sector unions. The support was mainly verbal and financial, which offered the miners only slightly longer endurance in a dispute where they remained de facto isolated. In particular, this support gave no call to other trade union organizations to establish sympathy strikes, which moreover were now illegal, and thus tried to identify a negotiated way out of the crisis.

The strike showed very clearly the divisions and impotence of the unions. The extreme dramatization of this struggle paralyzed most organizations, caught between a legal arsenal that was now effective, a mainly restive public opinion, sectorial economic difficulties in the bastions of trade unionism, and finally the uncompromising radicalism of the NUM.

Attempts at mediation

Norman Willis became general secretary of the TUC, replacing Len Murray at the September Congress. He would be armed with courage in the impossible task of trying to bring the stances of the opposing sides closer together. During the Congress the NUM agreed to continue discussions with the NCB and agreed to consult the TUC. On October 30th, the president of the TUC Jack Eccles stated that the NUM should accept a compromise.
This labour did not go unhindered for the TUC. At a public meeting in Aberavon on November 13th, the general secretary Norman Willis was humiliated and scorned under the impassive gaze of Arthur Scargill when he condemned any form of violence: an enormous hangman’s noose was displayed behind him by NUM Welsh militants.

The initiatives would then continue until the end of the year, at a time when the strike was already lost for the miners: a new initiative of conciliation on November 25th, an official request for the reopening of negotiations on December 9th and, on December 14th, a meeting with the Energy Secretary Peter Walker, who confirmed the need for the NUM to accept the closing of unprofitable pits. All this led to nothing constructive.

The complicated position of the Labour party

After the rout in the General Election of June 1983, in October Neil Kinnock took over a Labour Party still demoralized by the defeat, disorganized and torn by internal divisions between right and left wings. The new leader would undergo an immediate test of fire with the NUM miners’ strike, seen by the extreme left of the party as the Praetorian Guard of the working class. In October 1983 he met Arthur Scargill and lavished the same advice to him: the strike “must be properly prepared for, and played long. Public opinion has to be brought on to the miners’ side: the Surrey housewife has to be made to feel sympathetic as well as support maintained in the coalfields.” The Welsh miner’s son that Kinnock was wanted quite simply to see the perpetuation of the principles and the tactics which had brought success in the strikes of the 1970s, strikes which he too had ardently supported as a young Member of Parliament. This advice would have little effect.
Feelings of the Labour leader

Neil Kinnock did not wish to deviate from the democratic rules in industrial disputes and accorded a crucial role to the polls. At the beginning of April, he announced his decision in favour of a miners' ballot on the strike, in opposition to the Scargill line. The fact of his over-moderate support for the principle of the vote would remain his greatest regret after the dispute. He was moreover hindered by the politicization of the conflict, which went against all traditions of British political life: “General Elections - and only General Elections - are for changing governments. British trade unionism has never in its 116 years of history preached or practised any other creed. And it never will.”

The violence of the strike pickets posed another problem for the leader. Neil Kinnock was ready to disregard both the police (and thus the Thatcher government) and the strike pickets, but not, as the NUM wished, to treat the police force as the only source of violence. For the third time, in June, in the middle of the battle of Orgreave, he declared: “An industrial conflict is absolutely not the place for the use of projectiles, battering rams or any other form of violence.” His condemnation of violence in any form was renewed at the TUC Congress in September and the Labour party conference in October, where he reproached the NUM militants equally with the police force for the recourse to violence: “I condemn the violence of those who throw stones as I condemn the violence of cavalry charges and that of the police officers equipped with truncheons.”

The justification of the strike that Neil Kinnock emphasised was the 'case for coal', i.e. the future of the coal sector and the communities which depended on it. He would continue his strong support for the miners and their communities while refusing to align himself unconditionally with the radical line of the NUM and its president. He tried to define a compromise solution for the dispute by entrusting Stan Orme, the shadow Energy secretary,
with, a mission of good offices between the NUM and the NCB - a mission which failed at the end of August like all the others.

*Tactical management and style of communication*

Neil Kinnock's convictions were clear on principles and tactics. He was entirely out of phase with Arthur Scargill's attitude, while being aware that he had no influence whatsoever on him. The two men did not get on and, throughout the year of the dispute's duration, only one meeting would see them both on the same platform. In 2004 the Labour leader recognized their mutual detestation very clearly²³⁰.

But Neil Kinnock has to face the left and extreme left of the party, in particular Tony Benn, who made the strike their war-horse. He had at all costs to avoid appearing as a traitor to the miners' cause, not to give Arthur Scargill any alibi for the failure of the strike and not to divide his party. Many months would pass before he criticized the NUM president openly. He would prefer to hold his ground by attacking the government on the causes of the strike, on their share of responsibility for violence and on the destruction of the mining communities.

*Impact on the management of the conflict*

The strike could therefore not benefit from an unfailing support from the Labour party, caught between tactical opposition to the government, support for the miners and embarrassment over the intransigent and partially antidemocratic line followed by Arthur Scargill.

The weakness of the Labour party was political balm for the Thatcher government, which constantly used parliamentary debates to highlight its contradictions. Margaret Thatcher benefited from the fact that the Labour Party could not openly and strongly condemn the NUM by declaring
that it was supporting violence and the illegal nature of the conflict. The political front was thus largely neutralized during the strike, which facilitated the political stance of the government.

Nightmares for the Communist party

The NUM leadership which managed and organized the strike included Communists or Communist sympathizers of substance. The president, Arthur Scargill, was a former Young Communist, always close to the Party. The Scottish vice-president, Mick McGahey, president of the NUM in Scotland, was perhaps the most respected member of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Throughout the strike the Communist party could thus give no more than its official and unconditional support for the NUM movement. The leaders of the party were conscious enough of the fact that the NUM and Arthur Scargill were heading for catastrophe, but they could not withhold their solidarity from them. The dilemma was particularly difficult for Mick McGahey.

In his history of the British Communist party, Andrew Beckett considered that the Party would try every possible way to change the course of affairs. At the beginning of July 1984 the vice-president of the NCB, James Cowan, thought that Mick McGahey and the party were ready for a negotiated solution, but not Arthur Scargill. In desperation, the Communist leadership decided to drag Bert Ramelson, Scargill’s Pygmalion and former national industrial organizer, out of retirement: “If Scargill would listen to anyone, it would be to Ramelson”. Ramelson assessed the situation and wrote an appreciation of the situation that he took personally to Arthur Scargill. The NUM president stopped reading it after the first few lines, threw it on the floor and accused
Bert Ramelson of betraying the working class\textsuperscript{231}. During the strike Peter Carter, the party's industrial organiser, wrote a very critical pamphlet on Arthur Scargill's leadership, but had to agree to its suppression for the sake of party unity\textsuperscript{232}.

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MRS. THATCHER & THE MINERS
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\textbf{THE ‘OCTOBER REVOLUTION’ AND THE FINAL TURNING}

At the beginning of October, the situation was completely blocked. Both sides of the dispute had embarked on a war of attrition. The NUM had only left the extraordinary weapon of the resistance of the miners, their wives and their communities, but what was their ability to endure in the face of the continuous deterioration in their material conditions? From a distance the government and the NCB appeared to be able to hold out, but the power operator CEGB had not yet passed the trial by fire of a winter without power cuts. The way out of the dispute was still in doubt: indeed, the exceptional tenacity of the miners enabled the NUM to take advantage of time and resist the state's unlimited use of its means.

However, by an extraordinary coincidence, with the unexpected intervention of the NACODS trade union, the strike was to experience what the military historian John Keegan calls a "moment of decision" in warfare, i.e. one of the few truly crucial brief moments when victory can brutally and irremediably change sides\textsuperscript{233}. For a few days or at most a few weeks, the NUM leadership, which had suffered an accumulation of disappointments – inability to stop coal production, inability to cut electricity, inability to occupy the ground victoriously against the police force - would have the opportunity if not to win, at least to obtain a compromise which could have been presented, politically and in the media, as a great success.
The opportunity would pass, and, at the end of October, the NUM was being confronted with new difficulties which would make its defeat unavoidable and resounding.

The NACODS affair

NACODS (the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers) represented the operatives in charge of safety and maintenance of the mine shafts, whose presence was obligatory in the pits under the terms of the health and safety rules. It was a trade union of 16,000 members, marginal in terms of its manpower and influence compared to the NUM, seen as moderate, and had never gone in strike in its entire history.

However, NACODS changed at the beginning of the 1980s. Technological advances regarding safety in the mines made their contribution less critical in the pit operations. The union moved to the left and its general secretary, Peter McNestry, 41 years old at the time, got along reasonably well with Arthur Scargill.

On April 11th, 1984, NACODS organized a first vote in favour of a strike against pit closures, but without gaining the two-thirds majority required by their constitution. Peter McNestry's obsession was that the pits must not deteriorate too much. He would get busy bringing the NUM and the NCB closer together and took part in the three cycles of negotiation in April, June and July.

Ian McGregor then made a tactical error. In August, as part of his strategy in favour of the return to work, the NCB issued a directive to the supervisors in the NACODS union to cross the strike pickets if they wanted to continue to be paid. Up to that point, these operatives could choose whether or not to cross the picket lines and continued to be paid whatever their
decision. In the electric atmosphere of the dispute, Ian McGregor clearly underestimated the risk of a flashpoint within NACODS. The president of the NCB had just offered to the NACODS leaders a reason to take on the NCB.

On September 12th, the leaders of NACODS decided to organize another poll on the strike. On September 28th, the militants of NACODS voted for the strike with a crushing majority of 82.5%, with one month's notice, leaving the field open to negotiation, which corresponded well to the NACODS moderate philosophy. The consequences of this strike could be considerable materially, politically and in media terms. Taking safety regulations into account, the strike of NACODS could bring about the closing of all British mines, including those which had never ceased operating since the start of the dispute (Nottinghamshire and the Midlands), and completely stop the safety work in the mines.

A wave of panic now seized the government, which, after six months of immense and determined efforts, was found to be in an extremely delicate situation with a substantial risk of defeat.

It was one of the critical moments of the strike, and all the main actors in the conflict would very readily recognize this afterwards (Margaret Thatcher, Ian McGregor, Peter Walker, Mick McGahey). Margaret Thatcher summoned Ian McGregor and ordered him to use all means possible to find an exit solution: “I’m very worried about it. You have to realize that the fate of this Government is in your hands, Mr McGregor. You have got to solve this problem.”

NACODS, little accustomed to such honours, appeared in the role of intermediary between the NCB and the NUM. The aim of its leaders was to reach agreement, and the NCB had an equally firm directive from the government to meet their requests. The discussions between the NCB and NACODS began for the third time on October 1st. In parallel, on October 6th the government agreed to entrust a mission of conciliation between the
NUM and the NCB to ACAS, the public agency for conciliation in industrial disputes. Up to that point the government had always refused to entrust any role to this Labour creation, a symbol of the shameful co-administration of the 1970s. NACODS joined these discussions on October 11th. The negotiations were stopped on October 15th and, on the following day, NACODS indicated that the first strike in its history would start in ten days' time. The NACODS leaders clearly wanted to bring pressure to reach agreement, but it seemed clear to them that this was just what neither the NUM nor the NCB wanted.

Anxiety was then at its highest pitch on the government side and the NCB. Questioned in the House of Commons, Peter Walker indicated on October 18th that the government was ready to submit to the conclusions established within the ACAS framework. Negotiations between the NCB and NACODS began again officially on October 22nd, a few days before the strike ultimatum. To the great relief of the government, they achieved an agreement on October 23rd. The NCB made several major concessions: withdrawal of the NACODS directive of August 15th at the basis of the dispute, abandonment of the programme to close the five pits which lay behind the grounds for the dispute, introduction of an independent advisory commission to analyze any proposal to close a mine. Since the beginning of the dispute, the NCB had never accepted so much limitation of its power to manage, in particular over site closures. The NACODS union, traditionally considered by the NUM as unimportant, won more than the redoubtable miners, and that without even going on strike.

NACODS indicated that it would ask its members to withdraw the call to strike. The general secretary of the TUC tried to bring pressure to bear on NACODS not to sign without the NUM. But Arthur Scargill and the NUM rejected any agreement, because it made no reference to the ‘plan for coal’ of the 1970s. Privately, Mick McGahey, of the NUM, declared: “Arthur has won but
be is not aware of it. He will end up destroying our union.” A major opportunity to get out of the dispute profitably was wasted, particularly because of Scargill's intransigent personality and his barely concealed contempt for NACODS. It would be the last chance for the NUM. On October 31st, the discussions led by ACAS were suspended without result. The NCB and the government finally emerged unscathed from the last of the most critical passages of the crisis since the shock of the first weeks and the battle of Orgreave.

The NUM catastrophes

From July, the inventive and motivated David Hart established a legal strategy designed to make use of the Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982, not through the NCB or the government, as in the 1970s, but by means of private individuals, and in particular the working miners. He used the national committee of working miners to identify individuals capable of launching legal actions against the NUM, by supporting them through law firms and financiers close to the Conservative party.

On August 7th 1984, two Yorkshire miners, Ken Foulstone and Bob Taylor, brought a legal action against Yorkshire NUM area on the grounds that no poll had been held before the strike. On September 28th, the High Court of Justice declared that the strike launched by the NUM in Derbyshire was illegal, and that launched in Yorkshire was unofficial, which stripped the union leaders of the legal immunities from which they profited in official strikes.

Arthur Scargill publicly rejected the decision: “No High Court judge can withdraw the democratic right of a trade union to organize its own business.” As has been seen, there was a premeditated intention by the NUM leadership not to respect the law. At the same time he would multiply verbal protests over the
legal decisions and would not appear at legal hearings. All this displeased the judges and did not incline them towards leniency in respect of the NUM.

On October 1st, while the Labour party Congress was in full progress, Arthur Scargill was publicly handed a legal injunction on the NUM and on himself, because of his continued description of the strike as official in spite of the legal decisions. On October 10th, following this injunction, the High Court condemned the NUM and Arthur Scargill to fines of £200,000 and £1,000 respectively for contempt of court.

Arthur Scargill's fine was paid anonymously, but the fine of the NUM was not paid. Stating this non-payment, on October 25th 1984 the High Court declared the seizure and sequestration of the NUM's funds. Official letters of international enquiry were established to recover funds transferred to accounts in Ireland and Luxembourg. In November the financial management of the NUM was handed to an official trustee.

Various sources stated later that the electronic intelligence service, GCHQ, had contributed to the identification of NUM bank accounts overseas. This information would not be contradicted by the Prime Minister John Major on June 3rd, 1991 when the Labour MP Tam Dalyell asked him in the House of Commons whether the government transmitted information to the person in charge of the sequestered funds. John Major acknowledged that support had been provided by the Government. £5 million was recovered at the end of January 1985, which in practical terms forced the NUM to use cash alone for any financial transaction. The NUM would regain control of its funds only in 1986.

Further disasters began for the NUM. On October 28th, the Sunday Times revealed links between the NUM and Libya. The scoop was illustrated by the publication of a photograph of Colonel Ghadaffi in his tent, receiving Roger Windsor, the managing director of the NUM who had come to seek
his support, in particular financial. The information shocked public opinion, because it reinforced the thesis of 'the enemy within': six months earlier, on April 27th 1984, police officer Yvonne Fletcher had been killed by a shot from the Libyan embassy in London.

The campaigns to return to work

The strike was lost strategically by November 1984, but it would continue for another four months. For the NUM, it was the hour of the final battle, a merely defensive and almost hopeless fight against the return of the miners to the mine shafts.

For the NCB, no site was officially closed, and each one could thus in theory get on with its work. On many sites, there were some miners who went to the pit and dared to break the absolute NUM taboo: to cross the picket line. The incentive campaigns for the return of the NCB became extensive starting from the end of the summer.

This phase generated a new explosion of violence between the police and strike pickets and was marked by a massive and visible police presence in the mining communities. On August 20th, no fewer than 1,000 police officers were needed to escort one miner returning to work in Yorkshire. The emphasis of the campaign that began in the autumn resulted in a recrudescence of picket-line violence, continuing until a police station in South Yorkshire was attacked with a Molotov cocktail. Police officer David Adams, son and grandson of miners and a police officer in South Wales for over twenty-five years, indicated later that it was only the campaign to return to the mine that caused violence in an area that had been fairly peaceful up to that point, because of broad support for the strike, with only some demonstrations, gatherings and peaceful strike pickets. All this changed also in August when a
single miner, Monty Morgan, decided to return to work. It then became necessary to organize transport for him, under very strong police protection: 200 police officers to make the mine entrance safe, 80 police officers to make his house safe, a NCB coach driven by a police officer after its driver's refusal and flanked by two police Land Rovers. The news stirred up strike pickets again throughout South Wales, with stones and bricks being thrown at the vehicles as they passed. The same scenario occurred both on arrival at work and on the miner's return home; after two days this miner gave up, to the relief of the police officer. As in Orgreave, the skies were full of missiles launched by NUM militants (bricks, stones, rails, sticks, metal balls etc.).

The morning arrival of the 'scabs' at the mine was indeed a ritual of confrontation between the militants present among the strike pickets and the police force in position at the pit entrance. A barrier of police officers, often from the anti-riot squad, often wearing anti-riot gear, prevented the NUM militants from blocking the road. The coaches bringing the working miners then arrived under police vehicle escort. The NUM militants insulted the working miners as they passed ("scabs, scabs, scabs!!!") and threw various objects at the coach, for which reason the panes of the bus were protected by grids (and for the same reason the driver sometimes wore a helmet).

The presence of the police force in anti-riot mode was experienced almost as a military occupation (3,000 police officers in the village of Easington). It is true that, in such circumstances, the doctrines of the government were to ensure that at all costs those who wished to return to work must be able to do so, and that this concern was more important than the possible threats to public peace. This situation is well recalled in the film *Billy Elliot*, where the police force chases the NUM militants in the housing areas and sometimes enters private houses.
From the end of the summer of 1984, the movement to return was the main fresh news item, and it is possible that the media played a significant role in the progressive demoralization of the miners. Tim Bell kept the newspapers well supplied with publicity material on incentives for the return to work (which weighed as much on the miners as on the wives and families of even those who had returned), and the only media ‘fresh idea’ consisted in counting the number of miners who resumed work. At this time, Margaret Thatcher and her communications advisers seem to have succeeded in presenting the return to work and the abandonment of the strike as the only way out.

THE END

After the first effects of the campaign of encouragement to return, the strike entered a phase of concession and collapse. Increasingly, the miners were losing heart as they waited for a miracle.

The CEGB definitively wins the battle for electricity

For the government and the CEGB, the last critical moment on the electrical aspect took place in late October - early November. Concern lay with the ‘have-nots’ power stations, i.e. those where the electrical workers wanted to use only coal available on site at the beginning of the strike. CEGB calculations revealed that a deficit of 400,000 tons at these power stations would involve possible cuts as from January 1985. It was on November 6th, 1984 that the Portsmouth power supply area approached its limit of consumption and that the risk of disconnection was highest. This risk however
was local, and in no way comparable to the situations of widespread electricity shortage in 1972 and 1974.

But from the end of 1984, the CEGB was to find new ways to optimize the use of its full complement of power stations. At no time therefore did the miners’ strike prevent the normal functioning of the electricity system or cause power cuts to the detriment of either business or private individuals.

At the end of 1984 the Energy Secretary, Peter Walker, was able to guarantee the complete absence of cuts for the whole of 1985.

The British also became gradually convinced of the situation despite contradictory declarations by Arthur Scargill and Peter Walker on the imminence or otherwise of cuts. At the beginning of November, approximately as many people believed that there would be cuts (51%) as those who did not believe this (47%), according to the Gallup institute. By mid-December, 59% of them thought that there would be no cuts.

The winter 1984-1985 was quite mild. On January 8th, 1985, the CEGB dealt without difficulty with the largest instant demand for electricity ever recorded in the United Kingdom. ‘General Winter’, often evoked by Arthur Scargill, would never come.

*Demoralization among the miners*

The strength of the movement had depended for a long time on the miners’ extraordinary endurance. For nearly a full year, two miners out of three would remain on strike, refusing to return to work in spite of material personal difficulties and increasingly fragile morale. A survey revealed that on September 29th, 1984, two-thirds of the miners continued to support the strike.
The striking miners and their families showed courage, energy, an exceptional sense of sacrifice and loyalty to their trade union. For nearly a year they lived without wages and with limited access to social security benefits. It could be said that they accepted and bore with dignity and courage the greatest hardships in the western world which from 1945 had been marked by peace and abundance. The British may have felt guilt at this situation: more than 50% of them considered throughout the strike that the miners' situation would be worse after the strike, against barely more than 10% who thought the opposite (Gallup Poll). This explains the very high level of funds raised. On November 13th, Lord Stockton (the former Conservative Prime Minister Harold McMillan) declared that: “my heart is broken by this terrible strike of the best men in the world” in his induction speech to the House of Lords. Bernard Ingham, Margaret Thatcher’s press secretary, also felt “desperately sorry for their families whose traditional loyalty had been cruelly exploited.”

Moreover, splits began to appear in November, with the development of desperate gestures. On September 14th, Paul Womersley, the 14-year-old son of a Yorkshire miner, died while digging to recover coal. Two brothers died on November 18th while trying to recover coal to earn a little money before Christmas.

Even more dramatically, on November 30th, 1984 a taxi driver, David Wilkie, was killed in South Wales while taking a non-striking miner to work when his taxi was hit by a concrete block thrown off a road bridge by two young miners. David Wilkie died at the age of 35, leaving his partner pregnant with his second child. A bloody demonstration of the growing despair of some strikers, the event was felt like an electric shock and symbolized all the violence of the movement.

“I felt a physical pain that somebody died because of action by our militants”, stated later Kim Howells. He then indicated that he had felt somewhat
panicked and had destroyed many documents of the South Wales regional union, fearing a police raid on the buildings of the NUM after this terrible incident. The two miners responsible, Dean Hancock and Russell Shankland from the town of Rhymney, were subsequently convicted of homicide and would be released in 1989 after a reduced sentence. More generally, violence diminished after this tragic event.

Christmas 1984 was organized in strike centres, with a distribution of toys collected for the miners' children, but in an atmosphere that grew daily gloomier. The spectacle of the material misery of their families now increasingly pushed miners to return to work. At the end of their resources, the miners had gone beyond the dilemma between returning to work (and thus to be seen as 'scabs') or to continue living on their wits and gifts, which the majority of them had done for a very long time.

The movement to return to the mines

The NCB incentive campaign to return to work, first initiated by Tim Bell in the summer, started to bear fruit with miners who had reached the end of their economic resources and who saw no way out of the strike.

At the beginning of November, the NCB offered a no-claims Christmas bonus and paid holidays for miners who resumed work by November 19th. 10,000 returns (out of a total of 200,000 miners) were recorded in the second fortnight of October. The objective of the NCB was to bring 50% of miners back to work, the threshold beyond which it would consider the dispute won. The campaign combined aggressive communication - publication of the figures for returning miners, which the NUM was unable to challenge, and financial advantages for those who returned to work.
An additional no-claims bonus of £1,000 was offered at the end of December (£2,500 in 2008 figures). The campaign to return then became widespread, with 10,000 more returns recorded in January. A new peak of daily coal production, 640,000 tons, was reached on January 13th, 1985. The various forms of incentive for the resumption of work offered by the NCB, the NUM leaders' inability to offer any convincing hope, the exhaustion of economic resources, accelerated the movement in February: 2,318 individual returns were listed on February 4th, 3,807 on February 25th.

*Final negotiations and union decisions*

The last attempts at negotiation also threw into doubt the determination of Arthur Scargill, as of Margaret Thatcher, to compromise. Scargill's leadership, which remained intractable - at least in appearance - wavered. Faced with the spectre of defeat, the remaining unity of the NUM façade was cracking under the effect of resounding declarations from important leaders who disassociated themselves from Arthur Scargill. The leader of the NUM energy group, Ray Ottey, for example, resigned a month before his retirement and on October 9th, 1984, declared: “I am not ready to sit down over the law. I give my full and total support for the democratic system of our country.” The attack was even, on November 29th, targeted by the leader of the North Wales NUM, Ted MacKay, who attacked Scargill head-on by declaring: “God will never forgive him for what he did to the mining communities.”

A confidential meeting between the director of industrial relations at the NCB, Ned Smith, and the general secretary of the NUM, Peter Heathfield, was held on January 21st. The two men found a compromise on the remaining sticking point of the dispute, that of the closure of pits that had not exhausted their coal seams. But this attempt was torpedoed by the *Evening
Standard headline poster “peace talks collapse”. Geoffrey Goodman of the Daily Mirror thinks that this resulted from the fact that the government insisted on reaching a personal defeat over Arthur Scargill. Margaret Thatcher, who appeared on television on January 24th, moved in this direction by stating that any written agreement must avoid any ambiguity on the power of the NCB to close pits that were not economically viable.

Moreover, dissension seemed to be appearing within the NUM leadership. Mick McGahey and Emlyn Williams, president of the South Wales NUM, wanted to deviate from Scargill's intransigent line. In addition the NUM made an informal request for help from the TUC.

At the end of January the general secretary of the TUC, Norman Willis, with a team of seven wise men, began a new mission of good offices, requesting the executive committee of the NUM not to exclude the possibility of a compromise. He shuttled between Ian McGregor and Peter Heathfield, but the process above all further reinforced the dissensions between the president of the NCB and his protective minister Peter Walker: Ian McGregor required a formal agreement from the NUM on site closures, a position that the Energy Secretary considered overstated. Relations were not much better on the opposing side, when Mick McGahey expressed his dissent with the intransigence of Arthur Scargill in front of the TUC team. Nothing positive emerged from this shuttle.

A new attempt began on February 19th with a meeting between the seven leaders of the TUC and Margaret Thatcher. It was the only moment of the strike when the Prime Minister became personally involved in the conflict. On full form and showing the TUC her mastery of all the details, she insisted that the agreement must not be ambiguous. A new meeting ensued between the TUC and the NCB, which was determined to yield none of its managerial power.
The test crumbled into multiple recriminations. The NUM considered in particular that the second compromise suggested was worse than the first. From this emerged an exchange of insults on February 21st after a special meeting between the TUC and the NUM. A union official of the NUM, the future Labour MP Dennis Murphy, declared: “If you entrust a man’s work to a child, you will always have problems.” It was also the moment when the last trade union leaders of the TUC favourable to Scargill lost patience in the face of his stubbornness.

Faced with this deadlock, the South Wales NUM leadership then considered a return to the mines, even without agreement with the NCB. This position suited Arthur Scargill well, who was also very hostile to any compromise, as stated in his declaration on February 1st: “If the NUM did not manage an agreement, its position would be much more solid than if the NUM accepted what the NCB is trying to impose on the union.” On February 26th the South Wales NUM area undertook a reassessment of the situation to organize the informal return to the pits and to save whatever it could of the union's credibility.

On February 22nd the NCB launched a final initiative to arrange for more than 50% of miners to be working and on February 27th was able to announce in a press release that the objective had been achieved. On this same day, February 27th, Arthur Scargill continued to show his usual intransigence, as shown in his interview on Radio 4: “We have already succeeded in stopping the pit-closure programme in 1984. That in itself is a victory. We have stopped the closure of five pits and shown that we can oppose the government’s policies. That is also a victory. This has been the most courageous and determined stand by trade unionists anywhere in the world, arguing for the right to work.” He asked Norman Willis to return to negotiate with the NCB, but the general secretary of the TUC, already sorely tried by the previous shuttles, refused to do it without written instructions from the NUM.
The strike was in any event collapsing. A meeting of NUM officials was held on Sunday, March 3rd at the TUC headquarters in London, Congress House. Two votes from the executive committee on the proposal of the South Wales NUM led to an evenly balanced result (11-11), but Arthur Scargill, who wanted to remain ‘pure’, refused to use his casting vote as president to settle the vote either way. During the meeting of the conference, three motions to end the dispute, proposed by the regional unions of Kent, Scotland and Yorkshire, were rejected before the motion by South Wales, proposing a return to the mines without written agreement, was accepted by 98 votes to 91.

The strike was over. Arthur Scargill announced the decision in front of Congress House. The majority of the miners present dispersed quickly while others shouted: “Traitors (...) you’ve sold us down the river, we’ve got nothing.”

The farewell to arms and return to the mines

On March 5th, the miners returned to work, walking solemnly through the streets of the mining communities behind the banner of the local NUM. “When the South Wales miners marched back to work with banners flying behind a brass band, their pride was widely shared.” It was a worthy but defeated army which received the honours of war. The miners, after a year on strike, held their heads high and were often accompanied by their wives pushing a pram or holding the hand of a young child, because the younger miners were particularly involved in the strike. They were greeted by residents of the villages as they passed through.

It was, almost to the day, eleven years since the triumphal return to the mines which followed the success of the 1973-4 strike and Edward Heath's defeat at the polls, and thirteen years since the short and merry 1972 strike.
Several hundred miners were laid off by the NCB and some scores were still in prison: there would be still six miners still in prison in March 1986.

The great strike for pits and jobs was over; with it was buried the dream, nourished over generations by the left activists of the NUM, that a *coup d'état* organized by the left of the NUM would bring permanent change in mining unionism and with it the trade union movement as a whole. “The Left had power, but they didn’t know how to use it”, concludes Emlyn Williams, the South Wales NUM president. According to the Mori institute, only one miner in seven considered that the strike ended in victory, but only one on four thought it had been a defeat.

On the government side, Peter Walker and even Margaret Thatcher kept a low profile. Only Ian McGregor took a more aggressive position when in an interview on March 10th he declared that “people had learned the cost of insurrection and insubordination”.

On its front page on March 5th, *Le Monde* proclaimed ‘the failure of the British miners’ and spoke about an ‘unconditional surrender’. “The failure is total for their trade union and their principal leader, Mr. Arthur Scargill, none of whose claims was satisfied. This resumption of work marks the victory of Mrs. Thatcher over the trade union movement. […] The victory which the London government has just won over one of the most powerful British trade unions is what Mrs. Thatcher likes: total. The resumption of work in the collieries looks very much like full surrender.” The judgment of the leader-writer would not be contradicted by time.

*The immense endurance of the miners, but no escape*

When the miners returned to work on March 5th, the strike had lasted a year. The movement, even though it led to defeat, was exceptional in its scope and its duration. The preparation orchestrated by the Thatcher
government had been calculated on a maximum period of six months in order to assess what levels of coal stocks would be required. The strikers would in fact hold on for twelve months, and many of them today are still proud of the fight for dignity.

The prize for endurance was without question won by the miners of South Wales. At the end, the Welsh miners had retained their unity virtually throughout of the dispute: 98% of strikers on the day of the call to end the strike, and eight mines without any resumption of work.

How can such a long dispute be understood? The full material support of close communities was a determining factor. The Welsh Labour MP for Aberavon, Hywel Francis, explained this endurance by a mixture of nihilism and millenarism nourishing a symbolic conflict which miners knew would certainly be the last; hence the need for a worthy and glorious defeat. Quite early in the dispute, many miners became aware that they were indeed fighting more to delay the moment of defeat than for the victory; to this can be added the ‘patriotic’ participation of a population also committed to a confrontation between Wales and London.

Opposite, in spite of the solidarity of its members and their extraordinary capacity to resist the difficulties endured during twelve months on strike, the NUM failed to repeat the successes of 1972 and 1974. It was indeed a true nightmare compared to the 1970s, since there was no success.

The NUM was unable to trigger a general strike; on the contrary, internal opposition led to the splitting of the trade union movement into two rival and enemy organizations. The strike pickets could not prevent the continuing production of coal, even if this objective was nearly achieved twice, in March because of action by the pickets and in October over the NACODS affair. The NUM was unable to endanger the continuity of the electricity supply and to pose a real threat to law and order. Finally, the public remained
largely in the position of spectator of a conflict during which it did not suffer any inconvenience in daily life.

Unfortunately for the miners, most of the fruits of the success in the 1970s were forgotten: internal division, rather than solid respect or alliance with the remainder of the trade union movement, or a skilful search for majority support in public opinion, and maximum confrontation with the state machine. Because of its very effective preparation, the government could ‘play a watching game’, whereas its lack of preparation had made this strategy impossible in the 1970s and 1972.

The economic and social impact of the strike

The strike cost 26.1 million days' work lost to the NCB and a massive fall in production: 116 million tons in 1983, 49.5 million tons in 1984, 91 million tons in 1985. Production would never again go beyond 100 million tons. On the commercial level, strategic customers were lost for ever.

Estimates of the total cost vary widely, but whatever the assessment it was significant: £2 billion according to the government, £12 billion according to the NUM. The generally accepted figure today is £6 billion, that is to say the equivalent of £15 billion in 2008 figures. The two principal items of expenditure related to covering the losses suffered by the NCB (£2.3 billion), and the additional cost of buying oil by the CEGB (£2 billion). Expenditure on oil for the power system indeed rose from £2 to £4 billion. The other expenditure related to the exceptional excess payments for police officers (overtime pay), and losses of revenue from income and social taxes related to the non-payment of miners' wages.

The macro-economic impact was not negligible. The cost to the balance of payments and public deficits is assessed at £2 billion. The 1984-5
coal output loss accounted for 1% of GNP. According to economic evaluation, Britain lost 1.2% of growth in 1984 because of the strike (with a growth rate of 2.8% against 4% had the strike not taken place); a symmetric correction took place in 1985 (a growth rate of 3.5% against a forecast of 2.3% for 1985)\textsuperscript{248}. 


EPILOGUE AND LESSONS FROM

THE STRIKES
EPILOGUE: THE DEEP CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM

Coal and energy

Ian McGregor achieved only one term as president of the National Coal Board, which had become British Coal. In 1986 his replacement, Robert Haslam, confirmed the managerial and commercial line: “We think that we must first return the company to economic balance, then its financial viability and credibility must be established. That will make privatization possible. We would like the company be privatised en bloc rather than piece-meal.”249 The 'plan for coal' was replaced by the ‘new strategy for coal’, which stressed managerial control and the satisfaction of the CEGB, the most important customer, for example by establishing indicators on the heating capacity of coal still mainly intended to produce electricity.

The two strategic customers, CEGB and British Steel, would be privatized and were now keen to curb coal prices. In the 1986 evidence provided to the House of Commons Select Committee on Energy, the CEGB compared domestic pithead prices (£43.30 a tonne) with those available on the spot market (£32.73 a tonne) and concluded that the CEGB’s coal bill could be cut by 14% if imports were increased by up to 30 million tonnes per year250. Reductions in manpower and site closures then developed rapidly: between 1985 and 1992, 140 pits were closed and 100,000 miners left the industry. The number of pits, like that of the miners had thus been divided by three since the strike.

British Coal however remained overdrawn. A 1987 study judged that “the prospects for the coal industry vary from a sharp acceleration of its rationalisation
programme, and stabilisation thereafter, to a radical and permanent reduction in its power station market, and the shrinking of the central belt of the industry”. On October 13 1992, Michael Heseltine, Environment Secretary, announced a further wave of closures with the additional suppression of 30,000 jobs and 31 sites, which would reduce the number of active sites to 19. The mining industry thus fell quickly to a much lower level than any of the players of the strike had foreseen beforehand, whether it was dependent on the irrevocable loss of customers (the Conservative theory) or on a collective punishment (the NUM theory). In 1994 no more than 15 sites remained active, against 170 when the strike began in 1984.

The initial dream cherished by Ian McGregor, that of transforming British coal mining from a labour-intense and overdrawn industry into a capital-intensive and highly productive industry, had passed. For David Feickert, “after such a disastrous conflict, there was a total loss of confidence in the capacity of mining industry to solve its problems; industry was completely abandoned by the political officials, the miners and even in the end by the coal executives who yet had believed so deeply in their work. Consequently, the executives lost their jobs like the others and the United Kingdom lost access to its single long-term energy resource. All that wove the script of a tragedy worthy of Shakespeare.”

British coal industry was no more than the shadow of its former self: output in 2005 was 20 million tonnes (one-sixth of the figure before the strike and one-tenth of the goals of the 1974 ‘plan for coal’), with 12 sites and 6,000 miners, 80% of it devoted to electricity production. Imports represented twice as much as domestic output. But the amount of coal used in electricity production fell: from 75% of energy production in 1980, without any recourse to imports, it dropped in 2005 to only one-third, mainly replaced by imported natural gas.
The quasi-disappearance of the British mining industry left the United Kingdom without national energy resources. Oil revenues were temporary and from now on Great Britain is a net importer of oil and gas. David Feickert estimates that by 2020, the United Kingdom will have to import nearly 90% of its fossil energy.\(^{255}\)

British coal mining followed a different pattern from that of the rest of the world. British production today is running at only 15% of its level in 1970, whereas worldwide production has doubled since this date (4.6 billion tonnes in 2004). The United Kingdom, which in 1850 represented 73% of the worldwide market, 32% in 1900 and still 10% in 1960, became no more than a negligible actor, representing no more than 0.5% of world output.\(^{256}\)
The prospects for coal have indeed improved over the last thirty years. Its place in primary energy has stabilized with a quarter of the total since 1973, at second rank behind oil. The world demand moved at a constant annual rate of +3% and mainly represented the continuous increase in electricity consumption (+1.9% per annum), because coal remains by far the leading fuel used by power stations. 60% of extracted volume feeds the power stations. In 2007, China was currently increasing its extraction by 100 million tonnes and bringing a new coal-fired power station into service every week.

Coal is thus well positioned for the post-oil era. Its reserves are abundant (984 billion tonnes listed in 2005, more than 150 to 200 years of consumption, against 40 to 60 years for oil) and these are geographically...
distributed in a more balanced way than hydrocarbons. It constitutes a major energy solution for China and India.

The major disadvantage of coal is environmental: coal combustion emits 35% more carbonic gas than oil, 72% more than natural gas. The use of coal contributed to a major degree in the doubling of Chinese emissions of CO₂ between 1990 and 2004. Technological solutions (‘clean coal’) are being studied to reduce the gas emission in relation to the greenhouse effect, in particular by collecting emitted CO₂. In any event, world energy construction will not manage without coal although all seems finished in the United Kingdom.

Today, Britain is indeed awakening to an energy policy that was for long limited to the exploitation of oil from the North Sea and the effective destruction of the coal industry following the terrible strike of 1984-1985.

*Industrial life*

*Miners and the NUM*

The miners were totally demoralized after the strike. A 1986 British Coal funded consultants’ report concluded that “communication and understanding between management and workers was ‘worse than we have found in any other survey’. On the specific question which related to workers’ information about management decision-making, ‘the scores were so low we thought that there must be some error in our data."

The ‘miners’ culture’ had been destroyed. The miners were now aware that there was no future left in the coal industry, and they often preferred to take the money they were offered to leave the industry, either for early retirement or to move to another sector. “In each of these state-owned companies, powerful workplace traditions existed, established in trade union agreements and
the operation of custom. These were not simply (or even) ‘restrictive practices’. Rather they were patterns of workplace behaviour which added up to being a miner, or a plater, or a fitter. The restructuring and run-down of these industries seems to have been predicated ultimately upon the operation of the power of the state to break these traditions, thereby creating a demoralized workforce — most of whom have left the industry, some remaining under the new conditions.\textsuperscript{260}

The fact that it was impossible to overcome the terrible divisions of 1984-1985 between striking and non-striking areas did not help. In spite of the will of many, it would never be possible to reunite the trade unionism of the miners torn between the NUM and UDM, whereas the MFGB and the Spencer union had come together in 1937. The report was bitter compared to the hopes born during the nationalization of the NCB: “On 1 January 1947, when the assets of the coal industry were vested with the state, Josiah Winter, the union secretary at Horden, took part in a ceremony with the representatives of the National Coal Board. A hatchet was buried at the base of the flag-pole at the top of which the new blue and white flag of the NCB was unfurled. In this simple ceremony, a critical break was symbolically registered. The NCB was to be run on ‘behalf of the people’, and in that way the coal districts were to be reordered (…). Forty years later, speaking in Durham, Peter Heathfield expressed the feeling that the hatchet had been dug up and ‘buried between my shoulder blades’.\textsuperscript{261}"

The protests of certain Conservative members of Parliament did not prevent the mine closures in 1992. For certain miners, this was the “cynical betrayal of a loyal, patriotic, and self-reliant community, ironically the virtues Conservative governments were anxious to promote”. The tragedy of the miners reached its peak when “Our heritage, indeed our very way of life, is summed up in the tragedy of the miner who achieves the near impossible every day, producing top-quality work in desperate conditions, and then describes himself as unskilled at the dole office.”\textsuperscript{262}. The film Brassed
described the twilight of the communities around a Yorkshire mine through the final and dignified statement of the brass band.

Today, the harshness of the closures is felt in various ways in the mining communities, which was forced to adapt brutally. Some were broken by the strike and still suffer high unemployment rates and levels of social violence that are much higher than in the remainder of the United Kingdom. Others reinvented themselves and took the route of prosperity which the United Kingdom has enjoyed since the early 1990s.

The conclusion of the strike thus led to the realization of Arthur Scargill’s dark prophecy, when he declared before the strike that the failure of the movement would mean not only the disappearance of mining industry but also that of its communities. The 51 weeks and the 358 days of the conflict led to total defeat for the miners. The spearhead of the labour movement since the 19th century, the miners’ trade union bit the dust. But, to return again to the expression of General Jodl, “it is not because Carthage was finally destroyed that Hannibal was a bad general.” In spite of the fatal errors of their leaders, the miners held out for a full year against the inflexible determination of the government and the power of the state, even though Margaret’s Thatcher’s preparations were actually predicated on a six-month maximum duration for the strike.

This end-of-an-era combat, simultaneously millenarist and nihilist, was historically exceptional. The behaviour of the South Wales and Kent miners, united in the strike from the first day to the last, demands particular admiration. Various works published at the time of the twentieth anniversary of the strike showed that many participants still remain proud of their struggle for dignity. The failure could not hide some positive aspects, like the opening to the outside world of areas restricted up to that time, and the emancipation of the women.
It remains no less true that communities were broken and divided at the end of the dispute. The miners' political and social importance was definitively reduced. The defeat of 1985 to some extent ended the British anomaly noted since 1914, where, in spite of the reduction of the economic significance of coal, its symbolic and political importance had remained unique. The crises of 1926, 1972, 1974 and 1984, when coal came first in the concerns of the British government because of the serious associated political risks, seem to have gone for ever.

Great Britain did not choose the path of a soft landing for its mining industry, even when reductions of capacity in the coal industry were by no means out of the ordinary for Europe. In France, in 1994 the Minister of Industry Gerard Longuet outlined a plan which led to the complete cessation of coal mining in 2005, but which was accompanied by a social framework, undertaken "with dignity" and acknowledged within the mining community. The British exception thus lay less in the disappearance of the coal-mining industry than in the political and social conditions of this extinction.

Unions

Just after the miners’ strike, the TUC 1985 conference adopted a new resolution which gave once more very favourable verbal support to the claims of the NUM (release of imprisoned miners, recovery of confiscated funds, reinstatement of miners fired for going on strike). All this was used specifically to demonstrate yet again the impotence of the unions. In any event, the 1980s marked the beginning of a long process of reducing union manpower numbers and their influence, as in all the developed countries. Union membership dropped from 29% to 19% of the electorate between 1974 and 1992. Collective bargaining also diminished: although 73% of British employees saw their wage levels determined by collective agreement in 1973, this applied to no more than 70% in 1984 and 40% in 1998. The NUM lost
72% of its manpower over the period 1979-1996 and was in competition with the UDM, the only trade union which negotiated pay rises. Arthur Scargill would always reject amalgamation with the UDM, however much this was wanted by some NUM leaders, including Mick McGahey.

In the long term the strike also clarified the place of the unions in political and social life. It was the greatest union defeat since the General Strike of 1926. Focusing on the union irresponsibility which obsessed commentators and public opinion in the 1970s faded for lack of supporters. The strike thus confirmed the distancing of the unions from power, as either managers or protesters.

The miners’ strike, described as “most courageous conflict over principles in British trade union history” by Peter Heathfield at the time of his 1992 retirement address, also marked a major turning in work-related confrontation in the United Kingdom. Six months after the miners’ strike, in January 1986, the move of production by the Murdoch group of newspapers to Wapping caused a strike by the printers’ unions, NGA and SOGAT. The course of this dispute closely resembled the miners’ strike on a smaller scale, and ended in February 1987 again with the defeat of the unions.

The annual average of days lost to strikes amounted to 657,000 over the period 1990-2005, against 12.9 million in the 1970s and 7.2 million in the 1980s. The strict and effective legal framing of the right to strike, the fall in the rate of unionization, the deterioration of industry as it was replaced by a service economy, helped, among other causes, to eliminate most incentives to go on strike. The United Kingdom returned to a level of industrial conflict comparable with that of the other developed countries.
Over the period 1966-1990 strikes were one of the main issues of the day. After March 1990 this feeling disappeared completely. The ‘English disease’ seemed to have been cured in fact as well as in thought.
The weakening of union power inherited from the Thatcher era continues. The number of union militants has fallen by half since the beginning of the 1980s. At the time of writing, the data on the strikes do not indicate any change of tendency compared to the early 1990s.

The unions, an important source of Labour party funds, are openly putting pressure on Gordon Brown to dismantle the Thatcherite legislative yoke in whole or in part. To date the Prime Minister has rejected their proposals loud and clear, for reasons that are well understood: the British have no wish at all to relive the 1970s.
Economy

Economic performance

The Thatcher years did not in the short run lead to any significant improvement in the British economic position. But in the medium term there was to some extent a reversal of the roles in Europe between the United Kingdom and the flourishing continental economies of the years 1950 to 1970 (Germany, France, Italy). Progress was especially spectacular from 1992, after the departure of Margaret Thatcher. Between 1992 and 2005, the British GDP per head increased by 39%, twice as fast as in France. As a result, the French GDP per head moved from 111% of the British GDP to 96% in 2005. The end of 1980 marked the end of a hundred years during which French growth was consistently higher than that of the United Kingdom.

The results were also clear on the unemployment front. The divergence between French and British rates also dated from 1992. The United Kingdom oscillated between 4 and 5% unemployment, while in France the level ran at around 8-9%.

The French attitude to Great Britain changed markedly after the end of 1970. Condescension towards nation in decline gave way to criticism of a very inegalitarian society. According to Michele Debonneuil, the United Kingdom, like the United States, decided to go for growth rather than the reduction of inequalities.

Change in economic structures

Thatcher’s Great Britain did in fact enjoy a genuine economic revolution during the 1980s. At the same time, there was economic destruction in some sectors and the appearance of new structures.
Jean Lemierre considers that the United Kingdom underwent a true economic and social revolution during the 1980s. The structures of the old order, those of an economy still largely inherited from the first industrial revolution and trade unions, had been overthrown. With the benefit of hindsight, it may be asked whether this was a back-to-front industrial policy which consisting in accepting the weakening or even the disappearance of whole swathes of the economy in order to foster the emergence of a strong service economy, in particular financial services.

Indeed that followed, in particular in London, was a commercial and financial economy open to the world, which regulated itself and functioned somewhat like the old guilds. Everyone came to make deals in London. From the middle of the 1980s, the prosperity of the British financial industry reached proportions unknown in modern history. London had long been the only city in Europe where salaries could reach more than £1 million per annum. Bonus payments rose from approximately 2 billion dollars in 1998 to 17 billion in 2006. The financial industry thus contributed to the establishment of a class of newly wealthy people, ‘yuppies’, or traders whose codes and ostentatious values were in truth very far from the Methodist values of which Thatcher's origins were an outstanding example.

One of the essential elements in the spread of prosperity was the durable rise in property values and consumer credit, which had until now brought profit from renewed growth to all British 40- or 50-year-olds. This diffusion of prosperity enabled the middle classes to support the economic and social developments.

**What now?**

The United Kingdom was thus particularly deeply affected by the financial crisis of 2007-2008, with Britain having to pay in the short term for
the nature of its economic specialization, in a situation where many reference markers have disappeared.

The present situation indeed overturns neo-Thatcherite conformism: the financial crisis and the economic recession thus constitute a break for the former new ‘good European pupil’, which had grown very strong in marketing and very quick to give advice to other nations in Europe and the world. The United Kingdom, openly exposed by its financial and property activities, may be one of the major victims of the growing recession. Unemployment, one of the great arguments in favour of the relevance of the English model, is expected to increase considerably.

Doubts are also appearing on the underlying nature of the British boom noted since the mid-1990s: had British growth been healthy, dependent on a structural improvement in competitiveness or economic specialization, or had it been nurtured more or less artificially through ‘bubbles’ in the last decade? What was the role played by the combination of increased public expenditure, greater private debt and higher property prices? Was household consumption, accounting for 65% of the GDP, perhaps artificially increased or sustained in particular by householders' endless refinancing, through betting on the continued rise in house prices, for example through the availability of remortgaging?

Discoveries over the financial and economic crisis of 2008 however make it possible to refine judgement, both on the relevance of the Thatcher paradigm and on the way that her successors have used it. Faced with the extent of the 2008 crisis, Gordon Brown in any case decided to return to the good old recipes of pre-Thatcher times and to relaunch increased public expenditure and lower taxes.
Politics

Short term

The fact that the government did not emerge exhausted from a major conflict with the unions was in itself an innovation since the end of the 1960s. All three of Margaret Thatcher's predecessors in Downing Street had not only been forced to give way in a confrontation with the unions, but had lost the ensuing General Election. This time the government retained its authority and its capacity for reform intact.

There was on the other hand no political advantage in the short run. The government, misled by surveys during the strike, enjoyed no upturn at its end. “There was one disappointment for the Government at the time. During the course of the strike we had been languishing in the opinion polls, even though the public opinion was overwhelmingly anti-Scargill. That was hardly surprising; but we did expect that victory would bring a political bonus in terms of opinion ratings. It did nothing of the sort. The British people was relieved the strike was over, and promptly turned their attention to other things”, explained Nigel Lawson.

Unsurprisingly, however, the Conservatives won the General Election of June 1987 without difficulty. The Labour party would still need another ten years before regaining power. Margaret Thatcher had there won the General Election for the third time in a row, an unprecedented event in the United Kingdom for a hundred and sixty years.

Later on, the impact on the Thatcher legacy was on the other hand considerable. In Leon Brittan’s words: “In 1979, vis-à-vis a period of one crisis and a desperate plight, people were genuinely ready to accept a programme which was moreover not very different from that of Edward Heath in 1970: heavily reduced taxes, the reduction of the role of the state in the economy, the limiting of union capacity... All that, the British
were ready to accept. But there was a limit, and this limit was what the NUM would allow, especially if it had the support of the remainder of the union movement. The miners’ strike showed that in the end there was no limit. It thus constituted a decisive confirmation, a ratification of the economic and social programme already largely carried out by Margaret Thatcher. The failure of the government in the strike would have been perceived as the fact that the Thatcher legacy undoubtedly would not crumble, but could be unravelled little by little.”

The myth that a government, even strongly supported by Parliament, could not really govern if it opposed the NUM – a tenacious myth since the defeat of Edward Heath in 1974 - was exorcized. Margaret Thatcher stated publicly that winning this strike was the most important victory for any government since the end of the Second World War: “what the strike’s defeat established was that Britain could not be made ungovernable by the Fascist Left.” It was also the kind of victory that the British appreciate, i.e. those which ensure a lasting advantage.

The British left wing emerged completely transformed from the dispute. The defeat generated very heavy consequences for the British Communist party. For the first time since its creation, the CPGB lost militants after a major social movement: “The experience of the defeat resulted in the collapse of the ideology which provided the energy for action”, according to the Marxist historian Christopher Hill. The entire legacy of Bert Ramelson was overturned: the trade unions, major vectors of Party influence, were left irretrievably weakened by the Prior and Tebbit laws and the obvious failure of the NUM, the most powerful of all unions, which neutralized their capacity for political action.

The Labour party leadership would use this marginalisation of the extreme left to rebuild party unity. The absence of a ballot on the general strike and the aggression of certain NUM militants brought the Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, very close to the miners' concerns but, conscious of the political
disaster which Arthur Scargill represented, he prudently kept his distance, to avoid being tainted by his failure. Neil Kinnock was successful in winning the trial by fire that this inextricable political situation represented.

The Party Congress in 1985 was the occasion for the Labour leader to initiate the lawsuit over the strike and Arthur Scargill. The speech, prepared with the assistance of the South Wales NUM militant Kim Howells, was a true indictment of the NUM leadership. When Neil Kinnock was asked what he did for the miners during the strike, he responded: “At least I did not tell them lies, that is what I did during the strike.”

He criticized the tactics of the NUM, or rather its absence of tactics: “The fact (...) that it (the strike) was called without a ballot deprived the miners of unity and the solidarity of much of the trade union movement (...). On top of that, we were given continued, repeated promises that coal stocks were on the verge of exhaustion, and it was never true (...). The strike wore on. The violence built up because the single tactic chosen was mass picketing, and so we saw policing on a scale and with a system that has never been seen in Britain before. The court actions came, and by their attitude to the court actions the NUM leadership ensured that they would face crippling damages as a consequence. To the question ‘How did this position arise?’ someone in my constituency office said: ‘it arose because nobody really thought it out.’” Kinnock concluded his speech by stressing that the strike “has left the management of the National Coal Board with a power, a prerogative, a force that no mining management in Britain has enjoyed for a single day since 1947.” He refused to vote extreme motions of the left of the Party (request for a general amnesty), which were blessed political balm for the Conservatives.

Kinnock took advantage of this crucial congress to conduct a brutal attack against the extreme left of the Party (the 'Militant Tendency') severely discredited by the defeat of Arthur Scargill. His outstanding speech was a stage towards the reuniting of the Labour party, and Kinnock managed
to rebuild unity on the basis of agreement between the right and the centre left of the party. The congress enabled him to move forward on the unresolved contradictions within the Labour party: was it a party of reform or of revolution? Was it necessary to overturn or merely to rearrange the existing social order? The objective was also a pragmatic one - to restore the eligibility of a party whose credibility had been diluted under the leadership of Michael Foot.

Long term

It was the beginning of a long process of centralisation, punctuated by two fresh defeats at the polls. The red flag, the party emblem, was replaced by a pink one at the 1986 conference. The anticipated defeat of 1987 reinforced the orientations towards ‘new realism’, with the abandonment of some ‘sacred cows’: unilateral nuclear disarmament, punitive tax rates and nationalizations. In 1989 Tony Blair, Employment Secretary in the shadow cabinet, announced that the Party was adopting almost all of the Thatcher legacy as regards union legislation and that it no longer supported the union monopoly of recruitment within companies (‘the closed shop’).

The arrival of Tony Blair as leader of the party in 1994 further accelerated centralisation with the suppression in the TUC statutes of Clause 4\textsuperscript{274}, which since 1918 had made public ownership of the means of production a central Labour party objective. The road towards full employment would then be launched by Tony Blair, heavily influenced by Margaret Thatcher, simultaneously “his goal, his idol, his target, his example\textsuperscript{275}”. He thus capitalized on Margaret Thatcher’s achievements and the centralising work of Neil Kinnock followed by John Smith. Thatcherism, in a ‘New Labour’ diluted version (the great disputes were won before his takeover), industrial relations (the introduction of a legal minimum wage) and morals, was adopted.
Description of British political and social history after the Second World War usually separates the Attlee settlement from the Thatcher settlement after 1979. The analysis set out in this book does not call this distinction into question, but clarifies the long transition period in the thirteen turbulent years between 1972 and 1985. This turbulence was marked by a hardening of political options on both right and left, which exploded the myth of national consensus. The gulf marking political divergence, and the impossibility for all and sundry to create compromise, would reach its culminating point in the miners’ strike.

The return to moderation would be undertaken gradually on both sides, starting from the late 1980s, but in an environment completely transformed by the passage of Margaret Thatcher. The situation following the 2008 recession may incidentally open a new era.

Ideology

Thatcherism and ‘New Labour’

Thatcherism, although a somewhat vague term, allows to define Margaret Thatcher’s programme: a mixture of free markets, strictly controlled of public finances, tax cuts and privatizations, all blended with a pinch of Victorian values, nationalism and populism. These priorities dictated the policies of the British Conservatives from 1979 to 1997, before major aspects of the Thatcherite legacy were largely endorsed by Tony Blair’s New Labour between 1997 and 2007. A very large proportion of the Thatcher political balance-sheet was moreover adopted by her successors, in particular by the Labour party from 1997. The Labour party, defeated four times in a row from 1979, and convinced itself that it was crucial to move to the centre, accepting that a shift
towards the right of the centre of gravity in British political life was essential to have any chance of retaining power. Although Tony Blair's 'New Labour' and his ‘third way’ spoke out against the brutality of the Thatcherite change it adopted the essence of her legacy, while promoting a rehabilitation of public expenditure. In particular, the Labour party wished to assume the monopoly of responsibility for economic planning; an example of this came immediately after they regained power in 1997, when they promptly liberated the Bank of England from government control.

*What’s left of Thatcherism*

Margaret Thatcher's political activity, associated with that of Ronald Reagan, largely contributed to the creation of a new orthodoxy; this paradigm was all the more powerful because its appearance had been part of the discrediting of alternative socio-political models and was sanctioned by sound economic performance. Recent events indisputably place this model in difficulty.

But today this neo-Thatcherite conformism has been completely overturned. The financial crisis and the economic recession that began in 2008 in the United Kingdom constitute a profound break with the post-Thatcherite era, marked since the early 1990s by stronger economic growth and lower unemployment than in continental Europe.

The fate of Thatcherism seems to indicate that some ideological legacies do not last long; they become less relevant precisely because the problems that they attacked have been resolved or have disappeared, they can be driven off-track by the successors to the leaders who instituted them, finally they may include contradictions or excesses which undermine them in the short or the long term.
But the successor or successors of Thatcherism have yet to emerge clearly. The current situation seems marked by the disappearance of major reference points and immense confusion.

A renewed vision for the developed world however seems essential in the face of new problems which were not in Thatcher's field of vision: taking notice that states are far from having disappeared from the economic sphere, renewal of relations between State and market, new power of concerns about the biosphere, ever-increasing competition for the West from emerging countries with less and less simple objects and more and more subjects of their own destiny.

THE MINERS' STRIKES AS A CLASSICAL OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL WARFARE

Vision, preparation and tactic

The years 1972-1985 constitute a complete historical sequence of reforms desired by various governments and positive or resistant claims defended by the NUM. The threefold approach articulating vision, preparation and tactical management makes it possible to summarise this period, from both the point of view of governmental action and that of the trade union. It is initially necessary to define the three components of the triptych.

The articulation between vision, preparation and tactic

In her book *L'Espoir économique*, the economist Michele Debonneuil offers an attractive definition of the vision which must necessarily precede any useful action. The vision is simultaneously a word, a hope, a prediction and a course. It is an image of the future, the representation of the
future, everything must be constructed. The vision is essential when traditional recipes fail, when it is no longer enough to make something new out of something old, when orthodoxies are exhausted and when nothing is as it used to be. The vision imposes the need to do something quite different. It is necessarily disruptive and thus, in a certain way, revolutionary.

In particular the vision can appear to resemble divination, the soothsayer's art of discerning what is hidden, and to foretell the future: ancient Rome had its specialists who foretold the future by observing the flight of birds (*auspices*) or the entrails of a sacrificed animal (*haruspices*). The concept of 'vision' thus retains powerful spiritual or even religious connotation.

But in fact, the vision seldom appears out of the blue and is not a disembodied intellectual creation. To a certain extent, it is even the complete opposite. The vision emerges on the contrary from a long integral process combining reflection and action, a shrewd understanding of the development in progress, permanent adaptation. It is necessary to pose problems without hedging, and try to answer them. The process presupposes humility, careful listening, diagnosis, adaptability with trial and error. It integrates current developments. "This is what is happening, I can tell you this", and its presentation must elicit approval, "but of course, this is exactly what's happening, but I have never heard it explained so clearly".

Vision is a word which is at the same time clear and unambiguous, simple and instructional, combining hope with realism, and thus carrying implications for those who listen to it. Vision makes it possible to explain simply to each individual, whatever his or her cultural baggage, the new situation in which he will find his place. It offers the possibility of winning hearts and minds to the greatest possible extent and of building a consensus, of convincing the greatest number to line up behind the banner of a shared future, simultaneously full of promise and possible.
Symmetrically, it makes it possible to reduce opposition, to obtain a critical mass of free agreement on subjects, because in the end little can be done by the mere exercise of brute force. Vision can reduce an opposing front line. It moreover makes it possible for each individual to know how to be directed without precise directives, to follow the flag\(^{277}\) of shared destiny; it thus has an intrinsic power of coordination. It has a character of self-fulfilling prophecy since it makes it possible to direct behaviour in the direction of necessary change. But vision is nothing, or in any case has no chance of being embodied historically, if it is not based on sound previous preparation and tactical good management of change in the real world.

Although vision is able to determine the nature of the objectives, preparation enables the planning for implementation in the most effective way possible. History indeed teaches that if the best preparation does not make it possible to escape the risks arising from the action, the absence of preparation leads to the management only of risk, which therefore means permanently facing the risks of improvisation. The preparation must integrate the assets of the past. The process of apprenticeship is long, because it is impossible to succeed completely at first, and great failures are possible. It may be necessary to start again several times before achieving success. The process requires patience and determination. It includes the mobilization and organization of its supporters, but also detailed and precise knowledge of any threats or opponents. It normally leads to the formalization of action plans, risk analysis and scenarios for all fields of action.

But the best vision and the most rigorous preparation cannot eliminate the need to make the right choices at the time of action. There are necessarily risks in implementation, an element of the unforeseen for which it is necessary to be ready to face. These are changing circumstances, moments of decision, something of the great military general's eye and instinct.
The 1970s

The threefold approach was very appropriate in the two strikes of the 1970s, led by the left of the NUM but undertaken by leaders concerned to safeguard union unity. The slogan heard in 1984, “miners united cannot be defeated”, held true significance here. The vision was that of claims from all the miners, moderates and activists, on a programme of the left, maximum unity between the NUM and the trade union movement and the search for public support.

The topic of wages made it possible to unify the NUM between a pragmatic wing which sought corporatist advantages and the left wing of the NUM which was not without ulterior political motives. The recourse to a vote before the strike sanctified the unit of the trade union around a reasonable claim which did not disturb public opinion. The solidarity of other trade unions was actively sought, at the same time to strengthen the impact of the strike but above all as the expression of a justified claim.

The NUM's preparation was the fruit of the immense patience accepted by the activists on its left since the 1960s, and the report of moderates that their union was not receiving any of the respect which it was owed. The operational scheme was barely in place, with particular anticipation for what was expected from friendly trade unions and preliminary recourse to an overtime strike, the first stage in a confrontation in which the strike was a credible threat but used only as a last resort. The rules of engagement for strike pickets were also defined, since a national coordination of pickets was in place from the first days of the two strikes of 1972 and 1974. The relevance of the vision and the quality of the preparation, associated with the quality of tactical management by Joe Gormley and Lawrence Daly, led within record time to spectacular results and final victory.
Because the government opposing them was far from having such a relevant threefold belief in vision-preparation-tactics, the use of the law as the only way to overcome abuses by trade unions led to important mistakes. The government initially operated with firmness in 1972, but was quickly overtaken by the two brutal attacks against the electricity supply and law and order. It was taken by surprise and completely overthrown. More surprisingly, the confrontation of 1974 was accepted by the government although its level of preparation had improved only very slightly, despite of the lessons of 1972. As the tactical management of the government brought no way out of the crisis, improvisation – in the form of an early General Election - finally won the day but still led to a greater catastrophe for Edward Heath.

The 1980s

All was reversed in the 1980s. As indicated by Kim Howells, Margaret Thatcher had a vision of what the modern British company must become, or become once more. François Mitterrand also recognized this very readily: “She was an adversary, but at least she had a vision. Unpopularity did not frighten her. In the end I got along very well with her. A ‘vision’ and indifference to criticisms: This was how he recognized a statesman.” This vision is everything except an illumination and matured gradually through the disappointments of all kinds which affected Great Britain in the 1960s and especially the 1970s: it was necessary to halt the rapid decline of the United Kingdom, to stop the rot. The trade unions were at the forefront in the dock: they had every opportunity in the 1970s to show their irresponsibility, their inability to reform themselves, became unpopular and even gave a terrible political blow to their principal ally of the 1960s, James Callaghan. It was accepted that the NUM could and should profit from preferential treatment because of its growing radicalisation and the political mythology which had surrounded it since 1974. It was the ultimate test of the Thatcherite vision.
Exceptional preparation by the government and state would serve the vision. This preparation was based on the three key fields (electricity, law and order, communications) identified during the harsh lessons of the 1970s. Tactical management would finally meet the need for preparation at the time of the ultimate confrontation.

Whereas the government had very clear ideas, the vision of the NUM leaders was radically transformed, in particular after the change of president. The objectives of a political nature - to deliver a heavy blow to the government, to even help to overturn it - were much more transparent, which was a major factor of division. The topic of wage demands was exhausted precisely because of successes in the 1970s, and it was necessary to find another focus. This would be the absolute rejection of any new pit closures, a claim which presented a double danger: it was opposed to a fundamental economic evolution – one that was moreover little disputed by the NUM in the 1970s – and, worse still, it was a major source of division between miners. It did not facilitate strong support from other trade unions, whose members saw many reorganizations taking place without the NUM being mobilized. All these contradictions led to a complete breaching of the golden rules which created the success of the NUM in the 1970s.

As for the gaps in the preparation and tactical management of the NUM, they have already been broadly evoked. Worse, minds were still full of the victories of 1972 and 1974 whereas the context had changed radically. The strategic and tactical plans remained largely unchanged in the face of a government that was entirely different in its preparation and its determination. “The tragedy is that in twelve years many lessons could have been learned by the miners and that these lessons had alas not been learned or had been ignored”, in the words of Kim Howells279. In less than eighteen months, the tremendous successes of the
1970s would be transformed into dark defeat, with the opposite results for the government.

Key actors in the drama

The period was marked by a double confrontation between the Prime Minister and the president of the NUM, with different champions in the 1970s and the 1980s.

Edward Heath

Edward Heath was in the line of ‘One Nation Tories’, instinctively reluctant to accept social confrontation, and reluctant to assume the unpopular role in the class struggle. He showed little taste for confrontation. He was at the same time convinced of the economic consequences and very negative social consequences of the behaviour of the large union power-houses. A way of evading this contradiction consisted in trying, by discussion and dialogue, to build policies with the unions which he hoped would be ‘intelligent’. Perhaps it was due to Heath’s excessive belief in reason and his unwillingness to enter power struggles which would necessarily be brutal. In any case, all his close relations retained a deep respect for him and his undeniable desire to serve the public interest.

History was however cruel to Edward Heath. He and its principal Labour successor, James Callaghan, did not find the union interlocutors structurally and intellectually capable of agreeing to respect the compromises which they needed to follow economic and social policies in which the unions would play a major role. Moreover, he accumulated misfortunes and disappointments during his mandate: industrial disputes proliferated at a level unknown since 1918, the miners’ 1972 strike torpedoed his first ‘free market’ economic policy and the first oil crisis defeated his second policy, ‘statist and
interventionist’. Heath's satisfaction ratings were poor (37% confirmed as satisfied compared with 51% unsatisfied), but he would never be as unpopular as Margaret Thatcher.

It is difficult to allocate real responsibility to Edward Heath for unleashing the 1972 strike, which struck the government like a thunderbolt. The same judgment would not be applicable to the 1973-4 strike. His line was not clear: he did not take the helping hand – offered once by Joe Gormley, another time by the TUC, on a third occasion by some Conservatives, who pushed him to dissolve the House of Commons when it was advantageous. In particular, he engaged in an escalating situation with the miners without the level of preparation which would characterize Margaret Thatcher in 1984, and without the savage will to win. In addition, he seemed then extremely weary and undecided.

The assessment was grave at the end of the crisis. Heath was certainly the leader with the greatest responsibility for the political impact of the strike. Although the left of the NUM also wanted a political exit, it was Heath who crossed the Rubicon by calling a General Election to bring a solution to the strike and focussed the campaign on the question of power: ‘Who governs Britain?’ On the other hand, his failures did not mean loss for everyone in the Conservative camp. Taking part in his government constituted almost a training camp for the Conservatives who would be in control in 1984: Margaret Thatcher, but also Geoffrey Howe, Nigel Lawson, Peter Walker and Nicholas Ridley. He would also leave the leading political posts in the humiliating epilogue of his internal defeat at the hands of Margaret Thatcher in February 1975.
Joe Gormley

Joe Gormley clearly dominated Edward Heath. He had already had a long career at the heart of the NUM and the Labour party when he became chairman of the NUM, at the very moment of the rise of the militant left within the union. Although moderate, he would give permanent pledges on three great principles: trade union unity (“If you go the battle divided, you’ve lost”), internal democracy and respect for the NUM constitution at key moments. Joe Gormley was very interested in the coal economy and seems to have understood that it was necessary to manage the decline of British mining industry in the best interests of the miners because of the constraints of economic developments. He was moreover the supporter of a controlled use of union power based mainly on specific sectors: “when you have the position of leadership of a union like the National Union of Mineworkers, bearing in mind the strength which that union possesses, and the large degree of public sympathy which it enjoys, you have to be sure to use this power very, very carefully indeed.” His remarks and especially his deeds showed a fundamental opposition to the politicization of the strike and union action, and thus a major point of disagreement from the left of the NUM. His autobiography, written in 1982, before the 1984-5 strike, left no room for doubt on this subject: the option of politicisation of trade unionism represented “…disaster. We would get to the position where other people would have to step in to take control, and that would mean, in my opinion, not a left-wing government, but an ultra right-wing government, whose prime objective would be to destroy the labour and trade union movement.”

His collaboration with the general secretary, the Scottish left-wing Lawrence Daly, would produce historic results. The 1972 strike, considered as ill-conceived, was a resounding success. In 1973-1974 Joe Gormley would proceed, somewhat despite himself, to confrontation, after first pursuing multiple constructive attempts to avoid the dispute: “I am not anti-Communist as
such. I'm against the way in which the Communist Party in Britain applies its ideas, always seeking confrontation. That gets nowhere, and even the most left-wing of union leaders finds, when he reaches the top of the tree, that it's just too exhausting and unproductive to have battles going on all the time. He even managed to make Margaret Thatcher retreat in 1981. It is highly probable that Joe Gormley would have led the conflict of 1984-1985 in a completely different way from that of Arthur Scargill. The absence of ballot among the miners could only have been against his instincts and his use of power.

Moreover, he proved to be a remarkable, pragmatic and skilled negotiator, well able to play the power struggle but without ever going too far. Joe Gormley dominated the ‘Derek & Joe Show’, which he shared with the chairman of the NCB, Derek Ezra, between 1974 and 1981. Ian McGregor could also only acclaim Gormley’s skill when he took over as head of the NCB: “You have to give Joe Gormley (...) full credit for that fact that he managed to extract almost every penny out of the protection that was offered to the coal industry by the rising cost of oil, while conceding next to nothing in return. It was the measure of his domination of both government and management of the NCB that he succeeded so well.”

When he left his post at the end of 1981, his stock was outstanding. He handed over a powerful and feared trade union, equipped with a symbolic and political influence far beyond its real economic importance. The miners had moved steadily up the wage hierarchy and had become the best paid manual workers.

This did not prevent Joe Gormley from contributing to the advent of Arthur Scargill as president of the NUM, although it was not known whether it was possible to be opposed to this rise: the moderate wing of the NUM was much disorganized and no credible leader could be seen emerging when Joe Gormley left; by statutory modifications the same Joe Gormley had torpedoed any possibility for his old rival Mick McGahey to put himself
forward for the presidency. It would take less than four years under Arthur Scargill to destroy the legacy of the NUM left by Joe Gormley.

But the greatest of the battles would involve two strong personalities. Margaret Thatcher wished to bring a completely clear-cut answer to ambiguities arising from the events of 1972-1974, while Arthur Scargill wanted their final confirmation.

An extraordinary complementarity can be seen between Margaret Thatcher and Arthur Scargill. The leader of the NUM initially contributed decisively to the career of the Iron Lady: “For Margaret Thatcher, the miners were where she came in. If they hadn’t humiliated the Heath government into fighting an election which it lost, she would not now be party leader and prime minister.”

Arthur Scargill

Before giving an opinion on the role of Arthur Scargill in the conflict, it should be understood how his character was formed. Born in 1938, he was the only son of a Communist miner from Yorkshire. Peter Walker noted in 1983, when he studied Scargill’s character, that the attachment of Arthur Scargill to Marxist doctrines was the lightning conductor which offered the best way to understand him. At a very young age he belonged to the Communist youth organisation and, although he would never be a member of the Party, all his declarations were impregnated with the class struggle.

The implementation of radical Marxist objectives, only lightly marked by respect for democratic rules, implied a taste for confrontation and the absence of inhibition over violence, at least verbal. There must be revenge for the strike of 1926. This time the model of Arthur J. Cook, general secretary of the miners’ trade union in 1926, must be overtaken by Arthur Scargill as the embodiment of a triumphant Cook. No-one must get in the way: “The Transport
and General Workers Union (TGWU) has a contractual arrangement with the working class and if they didn’t honour that arrangement we’d make sure, physically, that they did. For we would have thrown their lorries and everything else in the ditch."

Scargill was marked by personal experience of difficulties, even according to him of persecution, to which he had been subjected by the ‘right wing’ of the NUM at the time of his first years of militancy in Yorkshire. He seems to have been deeply wounded by this. But in fact it was the events at Saltley in 1972 which completed the construction of his personality. Saltley would embody two essential components of ‘Scargillism’: the idea that the miners could not only defend their own interests but could shape the political destiny of the United Kingdom, and the central place of their leader as organizer and principal hero of this saga.

At Saltley Arthur Scargill showed his exceptional media talent, his great capacity to seize the best place and an innate talent for a slogan. Hywel Francis recalls that his father, Dai, Communist president of the Southern Wales NUM, considered that it was the Welsh NUM militants, not the Yorkshire men, who made the difference at Saltley. When Arthur Scargill asked him to bring his men to Saltley coke-works close to Birmingham on Saturday, February 5, 1972, Dai answered that it would be difficult on that specific day because “Wales are playing Scotland at Cardiff Arms Park”. There was a silence and Scargill replied “But Dai, the working class are playing the ruling class at Saltley.”

Arthur Scargill described with emotion and romanticism the blocking of the coke depot in his interview in the New Left Review in 1975: “Suddenly a banner appeared over the hill, and I never in all my life saw so many people following a banner. The view to the horizon was full of people descending on Saltley.”

Scargill made his main speech when the police force decided to close the depot: “Here, in Saltley, the working class showed itself at its best. These slogans on banners were embodied in reality.”
Everything came from Saltley. Scargill's trade-union career, extremely laborious up to that point, accelerated prodigiously. In 1973 he became the president of the Yorkshire NUM area, the most important since it represented one-third of British miners. Nobody before him had managed to reach such a position at such a young age. He joined the National Executive Committee during the 1974 strike. In December 1981, at the age of 43, he became president of the NUM, and would even manage to survive the 1984-5 strike, holding the presidency until 2002.

Arthur Scargill was fired by driving ambition, an immense capacity for work, a personal courage which deterred more than one adversary. One of his assets was his duality: he was at the same time a union leader of the old school, pushing undoubtedly extreme but very traditional sectorial claims, and a ‘presidential’ political leader proposing a revolutionary political project. His interlocutors judged him according to one or other of these qualities, but seldom both at the same time. Moreover he would brilliantly turn to his own benefit the concept of unity of the left that had been hammered out in the minds of the militants of the ‘left of the left’ by the Communist party and the left wing of the Labour party since the 1960s.

His charisma was undeniable. His personality was imbued with a communicative self-confidence and a certain degree of megalomania. He was able to hypnotize his audience by the force of his words and a capacity to arouse admiration, even worship. Ian McGregor recalled the “highly combustible mixture in Arthur Scargill of a theatrical performer and Marxist autocrat”288 The young Kim Howells, then a modest research assistant in the South Wales NUM area, went to interview Scargill in 1981. He made the pilgrimage to Sheffield, the Camelot of ‘King Arthur’. He returned “amused and shocked”, because he met Scargill in an office filled with portraits of himself, “including a Stalinist painting of Scargill making a heroic
speech from the back of a truck with adoring people all round him, worshipping in the classic Social Realism tradition. I thought that anyone naff enough to put a thing like that on the wall must be absolutely round the bend. I came away feeling desperately uneasy. It was also the first time I had met anyone who spoke to you in the third person. I thought only Royalty spoke did that. That came as a shock. The swing to the personality cult was not far off. During the 1984-5 strike, journalists were almost the only people whom he met who were not in total admiration before him. Comparisons with Adolf Hitler also appeared: on 2 April 1984, 6,000 working miners paraded in Berry Hill behind a banner with the slogan ‘Adolf Scargill’; on 15 April, the Sun carried the headline “Mine Führer”.

All this built a revolutionary leader who was untroubled by the scale of the search for consensus, or even the principle of reality: for Ian McGregor, “a man bent on pursuing such a romantic dream of a glorious place in history is, like many a demagogue before him, not going to let the facts get in the way.” He had only scorn for the moderate union leaders, almost all to his right and who rejected a world in which everything was either black or white, but never grey: “Scargill never played by the rules of the British trade-union game and despised the routine deal-making and bureaucratic compromises accepted as inevitable and necessary by more orthodox trade-union leaders.”

In contrast to Joe Gormley and leaders of the NUM in the post-war period, Scargill was indeed little or not at all interested in the economic of the mining industry. Consequently, he could not understand, or refused to understand, the economic mechanisms which undermined its foundations. There was, finally, a considerable contradiction between the completely unrealistic production targets which he defended and acceptance of the fact that it was impossible to have a viable mining industry without the leaders and executives capable of making the system work, and if possible with clear ideas.
According to Kim Howells: “We knew in South Wales and even in Yorkshire that certain mines were extremely efficient with excellent promise for the future, but that other pits were in a precarious state and had very poor coal reserves. Arthur Scargill thought that no mine must close. This vision was quite simply not viable in a modern economy.”

Nigel Lawson, who had dealings with him as a Minister of Industry between 1981 and 1983, rapidly felt that it was absolutely impossible to treat with him: “Scargill’s concept of the truth was strongly influenced by what he found it convenient to believe.” Joe Gormley seemed to think that the exercise of power would soften him, but was mistaken. As far as Margaret Thatcher was concerned, she was entirely convinced over a long period that he sought a confrontation at all costs. The facts would endorse her thinking: there was indeed a major difference between Arthur Scargill and his principal interlocutor, Ian McGregor, at the time of the strike: “for McGregor, for much of the strike at least, a settlement WAS there. For Scargill (not for the NUM, for SCARGILL), it would have meant as shameful bargain, a settling for a finite quantity when the demands were really infinite.” For Kim Howells, it is probable that “he believed sincerely that the miners were able to bring the Thatcher government down, and this was certainly the greatest of his illusions.

According to the same Kim Howells, he was also a populist incapable of making difficult decisions: “He said to us one day that he had always refused to take part in an absentee tribunal when he was an NUM mine delegate, because he never wanted to have the slightest responsibility for the loss of a member from the NUM. For me, that was the ultimate expression of his type of populism.” Similarly, he would always refuse to condemn miners' violence in 1984-1985. To ensure his power, Kim Howells indicated that “he was always pressing the activists, in Yorkshire and elsewhere, by short-circuiting the elected local leaders of the NUM. And thus if you criticized Arthur Scargill publicly, you appeared to be criticizing your own troops.” He thus strictly enforced the trade union tradition, that one should never criticize workers in a
dispute. The two other members of the triumvirate directing the NUM during the strike, Mick McGahey and Peter Heathfield, would never oppose Arthur Scargill, to the great disappointment of many local leaders.

Before analyzing the performance of Arthur Scargill during the 1984-5 strike, it should be admitted that he was far from bearing sole responsibility for the defeat. Kim Howells recognized this without flinching in an interview with the BBC in 2004: “We failed, we lost the strike, the trade union movement lost its battle against Margaret Thatcher, we lost an industry and thousands of jobs, and we all played our part in these events, believe me, and not only Arthur Scargill.” There was thus a collective failure of the NUM leadership, unable to provide good management for the outstanding union activists at their disposal, the “lions led by donkeys” according to an expression which was applied after the strike.

The failure of the president of the NUM were however significant. He completely disavowed the strategy of the 1970s, based on an inter-union support which was concerned for the sympathy of a public opinion naturally and emotionally favourable to the miners. He would in fact have preferred the broad generalization of wildcat strikes as in 1969. By refusing to resort to a poll before launching the strike, he very quickly discarded union unity and in particular the support of the Nottinghamshire miners, at the heart of the legacy of the 1970s: “In an altruistic gesture, the miners of Nottinghamshire, who worked in the most productive mines and took home the best wages, strictly respected the watchword of the strike and supported the remainder of the miners in the 1970s. It was a major gesture on their part and it was an element of the legacy which Arthur Scargill threw out of the windows in a criminal way”, as Kim Howells records.

When this strategy failed in relation to a determined government and a well-prepared state, he wished in April-June to revive Saltley, which fascinated and focussed his thinking, but all that led to a new failure at
Orgreave. He would moreover lose the two other key battles: the battle for electricity, carried out in an erratic and unprofessional manner, and the battle for public opinion, which was lost almost from the start because of violent incidents and the undemocratic nature of the beginning of the strike. The posture which consists of saying ‘who is not with me is against me’ was not helpful in finding support beyond the many admirers committed in advance. In a way that is not easily understood, he really did not appear to look for sympathy from the public and would thus never obtain it.

On the other hand, and to the bitter end, Arthur Scargill would make full use of an extraordinary asset, namely the honesty, loyalty and spirit of sacrifice of the mining communities, who, in resisting for a year, ‘bought’ him much time. David Lea, ex-deputy secretary general of the TUC, explained that: “He squeezed the lemon dry”. Neil Kinnock would describe him afterwards as “the nearest equivalent in the industrial world to a general of the First World War”. He did not seize the two occasions to end the strike without losing it and thus by reducing the sufferings of his troops: in July, with Ian McGregor's proposal, and in October with the NACODS affair.

His attitude at the beginning of 1985, when all was lost, was also characteristic. Until the end, he rejected the slightest compromise, and it was the South Wales NUM area which thought up the solution to return to the pits without any agreement with the NCB. For the Welsh Hywel Francis and Kim Howells, Arthur Scargill did not have the distinctive quality of a great trade union leader described by Will Paynter, the general secretary of the NUM of 1959 to 1969: “It is always easy to make men abandon a strike. The true difficulty consists in being able to convince them that it is necessary to return to work, even if all their claims were far from being satisfied.”

At least one of Scargill’s prophecies would be fulfilled, that of the total destruction of the mining industry and the loss of cultural identity in the
mining communities. As Bernard Ingham explained: “the outcome – progressive closures and redundancies which Mr Scargill had confidently forecast and done his level best to bring about – could scarcely have been worse for them.”

At the end of the strike, Arthur Scargill defended a line according to which the strike was a victory: “The greatest result is the fight itself.” The miners' action recalled the glorious defeat of the Paris Commune of 1871 or that of the Spartakists in Berlin in 1919. He won a standing ovation at the NUM Congress of 1985 for his speech which contained this line: “The contribution of our trade union to History and Humanity is in itself a triumph. Let us show that our great strike is the beginning of the combat not only to save the jobs and the pits, but to strengthen our trade union and to create the conditions for the election of a Labour government committed to implementing the values and the principles of the NUM.”

Other speeches from the left however softened after the rout. Neil Kinnock indicated that Arthur Scargill was “the impossibilist who will not give an inch on ideology, who will lead his followers to defeat rather than compromise on any of his demands. The accepted technique of labour negotiation is, in the event of winning one concession, to use it as a basis for a negotiated settlement. That is not Scargill's way: instead he will instantly and intractably move on to the next, more improbable demand... He seeks the support of others on the left as a matter of moral duty... He convinces them that the politics of the streets and the picket lines are more likely to bring victory in the class struggle than (to his mind) discredited methods of Parliamentary democracy.”

Jimmy Reid, an old friend of Arthur Scargill's Communist youth, who at the end of 1971 stimulated opposition to the Heath government over the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders affair, followed this in his destructive comment. On the Channel 4 ‘Opinions' television programme in January 1985 he declared that: “Arthur Scargill is the best thing that’s happened to Mrs. Thatcher since General Galtieri invaded the Falklands [...] The strike of the coal industry is bringing unquestionable damage to the Labour movement. It will destroy the National Union of
Mineworkers as an effective fighting force for the rest of the century. It will damage trade unionism in general and alienate millions... Only the extent of the damage is in question. It might even prove disastrous.\(^{301}\)

When Arthur Scargill assumed the presidency of the NUM, in December 1981, on a programme of opposition to site closure, the NUM had 220,000 members working in 200 sites. Ten years after the miners’ strike, the NUM had barely 20,000 members in 20 mines. There would be no more than 3,000 names registered with the NUM when Arthur Scargill left the presidency in 2002. The strike was lost perhaps more by Arthur Scargill than it was won by Margaret Thatcher, whose action must now be analyzed and assessed.

**Margaret Thatcher**

Much has been said, and continues to be said, about Margaret Thatcher, in spite of the somewhat limited literature on her in France. Today she still continues to exert a fascination for the French right-wing ‘free market’ tendency, but ‘Thatcher’ is also almost a dirty word, synonymous with ultraliberalism, for most of the left. She remains 'radioactive', for instance in France.

This present work seeks to cool the debate, on the basis of the judgment of the French political managers who had dealings with Margaret Thatcher. The British Prime Minister was never on good terms with Président Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and reserved some darts for him in her memoirs, whereas the French president's memoirs eventually made very little reference to the leader of the British government. Raymond Barre, Prime Minister at the time of her coming to power, gave a very positive judgment on her economic plan: “The worst of the scenarios which can occur in France today, it is that of Great Britain in 1976, under the members of the Labour party: to be obliged to seek credits from the IMF, with the controls that that implies. It was a humiliation for London at the time. It
would be necessary to await the arrival of Margaret Thatcher, in 1979, for England to recover."

The opinion of François Mitterrand, who was in power during nine of the eleven years of Margaret Thatcher's mandate in Downing Street, is very interesting. He offered a contrasting but positive portrait, in which exceptional determination and cynicism was combined with certain femininity. Two versions of a remark of the French president exist in this double nature: "She has the lips of Marilyn Monroe and the eyes of Caligula" or "She has the eyes of Stalin and the voice of Marilyn Monroe." 

Jacques Attali recalled in ‘Verbatim 1983-1986’ and in ‘C’était François Mitterrand’, that Margaret Thatcher was the foreign politician that he most admired, and by a wide margin. “Even if everything set him in opposition to this ultraliberal chemical engineer, a rare relationship of seduction and complicity was formed between them. From their first meeting, he was attracted by the strength of her conviction and her indefinable charm [...]. The Iron Lady, who expected to hate this ally of the Communists, this cultured person who was not interested in the economy, fell in her turn under his intellectual charm and discovered in him a faithful ally”, in particular thanks to the unstinting support of France during the Falkland War. Nor did this complicity prevent Margaret Thatcher and François Mitterrand from opposing each other, sometimes brutally. At the time of the G7 summit at the Grande Arche at La Défense in July 1989, at the time of the bicentenary of the French Revolution, the British Prime Minister made it clear, in a very undiplomatic way, that none of it was worth the Bible and Magna Carta and that the French, overall, had not invented anything really new in respect of human rights.

The judgment of her contemporaries was thus overall fairly favourable. Margaret Thatcher exceeded the simplistic image of the flag-bearer ideologue of the British neo-liberal revolution, even though this revolution
actually took place. If Margaret Thatcher was also the political woman of conviction described, but with the qualification of ‘conviction politician’, the second word should not be overlooked in favour of the first. “Mrs. Thatcher never pretended to be a thinker. She was a politician and – unlike Keith Joseph – an intensely practical and ambitious one. It is not the job of politicians to have original ideas, or even necessarily to understand them. Professional economists (...) used to sneer that she never really understood monetarism. But she did not need to. It was enough that she saw its importance; she possessed - as Joseph did not – the much more important and rare ability to simplify complex ideas and mobilise support for them.”

Working alongside her was far from being a sinecure. François Mitterrand “observed with fascination the way in which she crushed her ministers and her colleagues, in particular during a lunch [...] where she did not allow her two chief ministers, Geoffrey Howe and Nigel Lawson, to utter a single word.” According to Douglas Hurd, she had the irritating practice of consistently speaking first at ministerial meetings, thus firmly shaping the debate and leaving little space to the minister responsible for the brief. In this way she wore out many ministers and advisers during her mandate.

Margaret Thatcher was undoubtedly an intractable personality. According to John Campbell, the word which was least applicable to her form of government was ‘serenity’. She was warlike in pursuit of policy which accepted, even sometimes sought, tough confrontation, never seeking to avoid opposition. After her arrival as leader of the Conservative party, she always had to face multiple forms of opposition, and those which existed within the party were not the least dangerous.

Some have seen an association, which is less strange than it might appear, between Margaret Thatcher and Lenin. Sir Charles Powell, her Private Secretary on foreign policy from 1984 to her departure, indicates that he "always thought that there was something Leninist in the style of government of Mrs.
Thatcher: absolute determination, the conviction of being part of an avant-garde which, if it remained limited and consistent, would change the course of things\textsuperscript{310}. Of course this comparison must be seen in relation to British culture and history, in particular respect for the rule of democracy. But we see in Thatcher a powerful connection between the belief in a powerful dogma, carrying hope and almost sacred, an absolute determination to implement it whatever the opposition, and the belief that a determined and active minority can achieve change. On the basis of this assessment, we can re-examine the great phases of the Thatcher epic.

The ideological corpus contributed to an action strategy marked by a very strong pragmatism. The certainty of to her convictions was combined with particular care in preparing to take action, and with continuous adaptation to changing circumstances and opportunities, using the parliamentary timetable and other methods to achieve defined goals. In her analysis, Naomi Klein\textsuperscript{311} lays much stress on the neo-liberal ‘shock doctrine’ used in the management of each crisis by Thatcher and her colleagues to implement their way of thinking.

Indeed with Margaret Thatcher, politics was war, and the Prime Minister fully deserved the nickname of ‘the Iron Lady’ which was bestowed on her by the Soviet press from 1976. Margaret Thatcher was defined as much by her enemies who fell, one after another, as by any specific project. She showed good luck, taste and a talent for choosing her enemies well: General Galtieri, Arthur Scargill, the IRA, the European Commission. Within the framework of trade union reform, she was also wholly remarkable in that she launched her most brutal attacks on the extremists among her opponents, among whom the NUM was the absolute incarnation, rather than the Labour Party or the TUC, which however constituted the principal focus of the battle over manpower.
This craving for confrontation had its effect on her image. The struggles of Margaret Thatcher, who believed in the existence of good and evil, are often presented in a manichean way; she drew on to herself in return a very considerable level of resentment and hatred. Renaud's ferocious Miss Maggie in 1985 portrayed her as the only specimen of the female gender not to have a woman's natural kindness and compassion. She played the part of a wholly extraordinary driving force and for example retained a much more negative image than the Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, despite his aggressive defeat of the miners' strike in 1926, or Ronald Reagan, President of the United States, who conducted policies close to hers at the same time. It true that magnanimity was not her forte, even for her victims. The chapter of her memoirs devoted to the miners' 1984-5 strike, written in 1993, gave very little space to compassion for their communities despite their considerable sufferings.

Analysis of the miners' strike offers several lessons on Margaret Thatcher's exercise of power. Both her supporters and her opponents recognized that her ideas were very clear on her objectives. “She had an extremely clear vision of the type of society that she wanted to create, and this vision did not include a large and heavily subsidized mining industry. It was absolutely essential to pull back from the enormous subsidies poured into public and state enterprises”, indicates the former NUM activist Kim Howells. The lessons of History were learned through the finger tips, and above all from the events of 1972 and 1974.

The preparatory work was exhaustive, and was patiently built. With the passing of time, Kim Howells admits readily the extreme intelligence of the government. Union defences were tested in sector strikes between 1980 and 1983: steelmakers, electricians and publishing unions could all be controlled. The only open question left was the NUM, the main adversary, but in a union context which was much more unfavourable for the miners than in
the 1970s. “In 1984, the British trade union movement was already ravaged and beaten, and the government was apparently aware of the broad and growing gap between the combative rhetoric of the trade union movement and its real capacity to mobilize its members in support of a conflict in favour of a particular group of workers.”

For the preparation and management of the strike the Prime Minister formed a veritable ‘dream team’ consisting of the Ministers for Energy, Nigel Lawson then Peter Walker, the Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, the chairman of the power operator (the CEGB), Walter Marshall, and the Minister for Transport, Nicholas Ridley. The only possible error of casting concerned the chairman of the NCB, Ian McGregor, in particular because of his weak understanding of the policy issues and his mediocrity vis-à-vis the media. As Douglas Hurd noted with humour, “The problem, when you promote surprising people, is that these people might surprise you.” Ian McGregor however played a useful character-part as the tough ‘macho manager’ to symbolize the break with the past during the first phase of the dispute; Tim Bell, the faithful spin doctor, would then be sent in to play down the weaknesses and the errors of the president of the NCB.

Margaret Thatcher did not make any crippling tactical error and seems to have had the eye of a good general at key moments. The withdrawal of 1981 was the result of a poorly anticipated contradiction between the demands of the economic policy and the insufficient level of preparation for a power struggle with the NUM; but with the passing of time the decision to beat a retreat can be seen as a brilliant tactical operation aimed at testing the defences of the NUM. At the key moments, pragmatism overrode ideology, as at the time of the NACODS crisis in October 1984, where very important concessions were accepted very quickly to restore a compromised situation.

Margaret Thatcher does not seem to have had the romantic craving for confrontation which characterized Arthur Scargill. Her attitude was
rather an absolute determination to reach her strategic objectives, without any fear of a conflict if that became necessary. With regard to the miners’ strike, the strategy and profile of Arthur Scargill played a crucial role in the bitter defeat of the miners. It is fairly likely that a dispute conducted by Joe Gormley, or even by Mick McGahey, would not subsequently have ended in a rout. In addition, Margaret Thatcher seems to have adapted herself and prepared for the specific confrontation that the psychology of Arthur Scargill made inevitable.

On several occasions during the strike the government could expect only a limited victory, to even obtain only a ‘draw’ with the NUM, which would then require a later clarification. But at no time was Margaret Thatcher faced with the desperate plight or the dead ends in which Edward Heath was driven back in 1972 and 1974. The miners’ strike, like the Falklands War, undoubtedly made it possible to see the Prime Minister at her best.

Norman Tebbit thus considers that the victor’s laurel wreath was entirely hers: “Until then it had been an axiom of British politics that the miners would always win a strike and had to be bought off. Since then it has been different, and although good planning by Nigel Lawson, Peter Walker and Ian McGregor played their part the credit falls overwhelmingly to Margaret Thatcher. No other leader would have backed the legal changes which prevented the secondary action which would have made a coal strike effective and I think none would have had the courage to fight the dispute through to victory.”

In any event Margaret Thatcher constituted an astonishing political paradox, even a genuine political UFO. She beat all records at the electoral and political level. She was the first woman at the head of a Western nation, twenty six years before the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. She won the three elections which she fought as leader of the Conservative party, and had the longest mandate as Prime Minister in the 20th century (11 ½ years). She faced
three Labour party leaders, the Prime Minister James Callaghan (1979), Michael Foot (1983) and Neil Kinnock (1987), whom she successively demolished to break the period of regular political alternance initiated in 1964. The only comparable performance was that of Tony Blair, who also won three elections in a row as leader of the Labour party (1997, 2001, 2005), but who was to remain for ‘only’ 10 years in Downing Street.

These far from standard electoral results were combined with severe appreciation from the British before and during her mandate as Prime Minister. Margaret Thatcher was never popular, as shown by the mediocrity of her ratings in satisfaction surveys, whether by Mori or Gallup: on average, over the period, 32% of those questioned expressed satisfaction with their government against 59% who were dissatisfied.
Perhaps the evolution of Margaret Thatcher's popularity was based on an extraordinary control of the electoral cycle: a marked fall followed by recovery, with only three situations where more British expressed satisfaction than dissatisfaction with governmental action - during and after the Falklands War (first half of 1982), and before and immediately after the two General Elections of June 1983 and June 1987. However, these rare favourable phases did not last and were almost immediately followed by a collapse in her approval rating.

How to explain under such conditions the exceptional electoral performances of the Conservative party and Thatcher government? In spite of the level of affection for Margaret Thatcher, at the very least moderate, from 1979 to 1990 the British showed even greater reserve over the Labour leader: of the 118 monthly surveys of Ipsos Mori, the level of Thatcher's popularity, even mediocre, almost always remained higher than that of the Labour leader, with Michael Foot the most prominent, always largely outdistanced by the Iron Lady. The only Labour leader who offered a solid resistance to Margaret Thatcher was James Callaghan, before her accession to Downing Street. Once Prime Minister, she was never really threatened.
Without particularly appreciating Margaret Thatcher, the British at the time of the elections of 1983 and 1987 considered that she was much better qualified than the leader of the Labour party to run the country. The British thus scarcely approved of Margaret Thatcher, but accepted that she carried out substantial and often painful reforms. Then would come the fall: Margaret Thatcher also had the characteristic of being the only political leader to be got rid of by her own party without electoral failure, like Edward Heath, or without exceptional external circumstances, such as Neville Chamberlain or Anthony Eden.

Today, Margaret Thatcher is one of the great characters of British history, but certain resentments remain strong. At the beginning of 2007, she was the first Prime Minister to have a bronze statue set up during her lifetime in the House of Commons, next to the figures of Lloyd George, Winston
Churchill and Clement Attlee. But with Margaret Thatcher, everything is always unique: her first marble statue had been decapitated in 2002 with blows of an iron bar and a cricket bat.

On October 13, 2008 Thatcher, by now, much diminished by Alzheimer's disease, celebrated her 83rd birthday. "This woman who dominated the discussions so a long time could no longer carry on debate nor follow the thread of a friendly conversation." The twilight is long and painful for the aged lioness.
Who's Who in the British Miners' Strikes
Bell, Tim: advertising and public relations executive involved in Margaret Thatcher’s three successful general election campaigns (1979, 1983 and 1987) and having an advisory role for the chairman of the NCB during the 1984-5 strike.

Bell, Trevor: member of the NUM executive during committee the 1984-5 strike, favouring a ballot before the national strike.


Carter, Peter: industrial organizer of the Communist Party during the 1984-5 strike.


Cowan, James: deputy chairman of the NCB during the 1984-5 strike.

Daly, Lawrence: general secretary of the NUM (1969-1983)

Donovan, Lord: chairman of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations 1965–1968 leading to the 1969 In Place of Strife white paper by Barbara Castle.

Eaton, Michael: spokesman of the NCB nominated on 20 October 1984.
Ezra, Derek: chairman of the National Coal Board-NCB (1971-1982).


Goodman, Geoffrey: industrial columnist of the *Daily Mirror* during the 1984-5 strike.


Hammond, Eric: general secretary of the EEPTU (electricians’ union) during the 1984-5 strike.

Hart, David: British businessman who became adviser of the chairman of the NCB and helped organize working miners committees during the 1984-5 strike.


Heathfield, Peter: general secretary of the NUM (1983-1992)


Jones, David: 24 years old Yorkshire miner and NUM militant who died when picketing at Ollerton (Nottinghamshire) on 15 March 1984.


Lyons, John: general secretary of the EMEA (electricians’ union) during the 1984-5 strike.


Matthews, Fred: 2 miner and NUM militant who died when picketing at a power station on 3 February 1972.


Myers, Nell: personal assistant of Arthur Scargill and press officer of the NUM during the 1984-5 miners’ strike.


Ramelson, Bert: industrial organizer of the Communist Party in the 1960s and 1970s, retired during the 1984-5 miners’ strike.


Robens, Alfred: chairman of the National Coal Board-NCB (1960-1971).
Routledge, Paul: industrial columnist of the *Times* during the 1984-5 strike.


Sidall, Norman: chairman of the National Coal Board-NCB (1982-3).


Smith, Ned: NCB director for industrial relations during the 1983-4 miners’ strike.


Watters, Frank: Communist industrial organizer sent in 1959 to Yorkshire, where he ‘discovered’ Arthur Scargill.

Wilberforce, Lord: English judge who chaired the 1972 commission on miners’ wages during the 1972 miners’ strike.
Wilkie, David: Welsh taxi driver who was killed on 30 November 1985 when his taxi driving a working miner to his colliery was hit by a concrete block dropped by two working miners.

Willis, Norman: general secretary of the TUC (1984-1993)


INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN THE
BRITISH MINERS' STRIKES
ACAS: The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, a public organization for consultation and arbitration in industrial disputes.

ACPO: Association of Chief Police Officers, association of the regional leaders of the British police force.

AEU: Amalgamated Engineering Union, the mechanical engineers' union existing under this name from 1920 to 1971.

ASLEF: Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, trade union of the railwaymen.

AUEW: Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, trade union of the mechanical and electrical sector composed in 1971 from the AEU with the integration of other sectoral trade unions.

BACM: British Association of Colliery Management, trade union of mining executives.

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation.

BRU: British Research Unit, British research centre on the media and public opinion.

BSC: British Steel Corporation, iron and steel state enterprise (operating under this name from 1967 to 1999, privatized in 1988)

CBI: Confederation of British Industry, the main professional organization for British employers.

CEGB: Central Electricity Generating Board, state enterprise for electricity production and transmission (operating under this name from 1957, dissolved in 2001)

CPGB: Communist Party of Great Britain.
EEPTU: Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union, electricians' trade union.

EMA: Engineers and Managers Association, trade union of engineers and supervisors.

EPEA: Electrical Power Engineers' Association, section of the EMA for the electricity industry.

GCHQ: Government Communications Headquarters, British services for electronic intelligence.

IMF: International Monetary Fund.

ISTC: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, trade union of the iron and steel industry.

MFGB: Miners' Federation of Great Britain, trade union of the miners from 1889 to 1944, renamed the NUM in 1944.

MI5: Military Intelligence section 5, the common name of Security Service, the British counter-espionage service.

NACODS: National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, trade union of the mines safety supervisors.


NGA: National Graphical Association, the printers' trade union.

NIRC: National Industrial Relations Court instituted by the national industrial relations act-NIRA of 1971.

NPLA: National Power Loading Agreement, national agreement set up in 1966 between the NCB and the NUM aiming at increasing productivity and instituting a national wage negotiating procedure.
NRC: National Reporting Centre, national centre of coordination for the police force.

NUM: National Union of Mineworkers, trade union of the miners since 1944.

NUR: National Union of Railwaymen, trade union of the railwaymen.

NUS: National Union of Seamen, trade union of the sailors.

NWMC: National Working Miners' Committee, committee of the working miners, created at the time of the 1984-5 strike.

PSU: Police Support Unit, basic police unit in the management system under the NRC.

SOGAT: Society of Graphical and Allied Trades, printing trade union.

Special Branch: intelligence units of the British police force.

TGWU: Transport and General Workers' Union, trade union for the transport industry.

TUC: Trades Union Congress, confederation of the British trade unions.

UDM: Union of Democratic Mineworkers, trade union of the secessionists miners, created at the time of the miners’ 1984-5 strike.
CHRONOLOGY

**BEFORE 1969**

1782: Invention of the double-action steam engine by James Watt.

1804: Oliver Evans and Richard Trevithick simultaneously invent the high pressure steam engine and the locomotive.

1830: First intercity train line between Liverpool and Manchester.

1831: First nationwide miners’ strike.

1842: Foundation of the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, which had 70,000 members two years later. Legal prohibition of underground work for women and children under 10.

1844: Miners’ strike of the North-East and other areas which ends after four months without real gain for the miners.

1848: Failure of the Chartist movement. The “People's spring” shaking all continental Europe does not spread in Great Britain.

1889: Foundation of the Miners 'Federation of Great Britain (MFGB).

1893: A miners’ strike in Yorkshire turns into a riot and pit destruction. The army, called in reinforcement of the police force, shoots at
crowd for the last time in an industrial dispute, with two fatal casualties in Featherstone.

1908: 8 hour working day for all miners.

1910: Home Secretary Winston Churchill sends the London metropolitan police force to control a strike of Welsh miners in the Rhondda valleys. Incidents take place in Tonypandy.

1912: Six week national miners’ strike. Introduction of a miners’ minimum wage.

1913: Historical peak of British coal production: 1.1 million miners produce 292 million tons (41 million tons in France).

1914: Creation of the triple alliance between miners, railway workers and steelmakers.

1914-1921: Mining industry is placed under state supervision following war economy restrictions.

1919: 7 hour working day for all miners. The Sankey Commission recommends the nationalization of the coal industry.

1921: General miners’ strike.

15 April 1921, “Black Friday”. Breakdown of the triple alliance.

1925: Return of the sterling to the gold standard pre-war parity.

31 July 1925: “Red Friday”. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin institutes the Samuel Commission on miners’ wages. State subsidies granted for 8 months to accommodate both miners’ unions and coal owners’ irreconcilable demands.

3-12 April 1926: the General Strike of all trade unions in support of the miners’ wage demands fails after 9 days. It is followed by a six month
national miners’ strike. Some miners return to work early under the banner of the secessionist Spence Union, especially strong in Nottinghamshire.

1927: Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act, restricting the actions of trade unions, forbidding sympathy strikes, mass picketing and forbidding civil service unions from joining the TUC.

1937: Merger between the MFGB and the Spencer Union.

1942: Creation during WW2 of a ministry for Energy and Electricity in charge of the coal industry.


1945: The MFGB becomes the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).


1 January 1947: All coal industry assets are regrouped in the state-owned National Coal Board (NCB).

1948: Disruptive dockers’ strike.

1951: Paris Treaty of and creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) including Germany, France, Italy and the three Benelux countries. Conservative party wins all General Elections until 1964.

1960: Alfred Robens becomes chairman of the NCB.


1966: Disruptive strike of the National Union of Seamen.
1968: Closing of 55 mining sites and suppression of 55,000 jobs without strong trade-union reaction. Lawrence Daly, new secretary general of the NUM.

**1969-1972**

**1969**

January: Publication of White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, on the role of the trade unions on the initiative of Barbara Castle, Employment Secretary.

October: Miners’ wildcat strike eventually involving a third of NCB workforce. First implementation of the flying pickets tactics.

**1970**

18 June: Polling day; Conservatives win (330 Conservative MPs against 287 Labour MPs). Edward Heath Prime Minister.

23 June: First Cabinet meeting, under the threat of a dockers’ strike.

15 July: Rejection of the dockers' wage offer by the TGWU. Official strike launched following the ongoing wildcat strike.

16 July: State of emergency declared by the government and creation of a wage commission chaired by Lord Pearson.

4 August: Dockers’ strike ends. End of the state of emergency.

13 October: NUM Congress. Decision to lower the majority required for a national strike ballot from two thirds to 55%.
5 November: End of a 5 weeks' strike of the council employees following a settlement very favourable to employees.

3 December: Industrial Relations Bill sent to the Commons.

7 December: Beginning of the work-to-rule strike in the electricity sector. First power cuts since 1947.

12 December: Second state of emergency issued following the work-to-rule strike of electricity sector, with rotating power cuts.

14 December: End of the electricity sector work-to-rule strike following the installation of the Wilberforce wage commission.

1971

January: TUC campaign against the Industrial Relations Bill.

20 January: Strike of postal employees.

February: Strike at the Ford U.K. factories.

1 March: Action day against Industrial Relations Bill mobilizes 1.75 million employees. No newspapers available.

July: Joe Gormley, new president of the NUM, and Derek Ezra, new president of the NCB.

6 August: Industrial Relations Act passed.

September: Annual TUC congress; instruction is given to all affiliated trade unions to deregister in opposition to the Industrial Relations Act.

1 November: Miners’ overtime ban starts.

22 November: Miners vote on NUM national strike over pay.
2 December: Ballot results announced: 86% of the miners voted, with 58.8% majority favourable to strike action. Strike action unanimously voted by the NUM executive committee.

1972

9 January: Beginning of the nation-wide miners’ strike to obtain a 47% pay rise.

11 January: 17 Shropshire schools using coal heating must close.

20 January: The number of unemployed exceeds the million for the first time for 25 years (in raw data).

30 January: “Bloody Sunday”. 13 are killed by bullets in Northern Ireland.

3 February: Miner Fred Matthews, crushed by a truck on a picket line at the entry of a power station, dies.

5 February: Businesses start to put employees on temporary lay-off because of power cuts.

9 February: The government declares a state of emergency for the third time since coming to power, with 3-day working week in industry.

10 February: The Saltley coke depot is closed because of action by the pickets of the NUM and other unions.

11 February: Employment Secretary, Robert Carr, installs a commission chaired by Lord Wilberforce to review miners’ wages.

16 February: Widespread power cuts because of miners’ strike. 1.2 million laid off because of power cuts.
18 February: The Wilberforce commission recommends significant wages rises for the miners. The NUM executive refuses recommendations.

19 February: The government agrees to the principal recommendations of the Wilberforce commission. Final agreement between the government and the NUM around 1 am, including wage settlement and additional non-pay-related concessions.

25 February: Miners vote to end strike (after 7 weeks). Miners are now the best paid manual workers in the country.

21 March: Anthony Barber, Chancellor of the Exchequer, presents an expansionist budget. U-turn of the economic policy.

29 March: First fines imposed on the trade unions by the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC).

17 April: Work-to-rule strike of the railwaymen begins.

31 April: Railwaymen's ballot required by the NIRC shows a majority of six to one in favour of the strike.

14 June: The NIRC orders the arrest of 5 TGWU dockers. TGWU immediately launches solidarity strike.

21 July: The NIRC gives custodial sentences to the 5 TGWU dockers, now nicknamed Pentonville Five, who refused to conform to legal decisions. Dockers’ nation-wide strike.

26 July: Pentonville five released following a specific court order.

3 August: Fourth state of emergency issued by the government to allow movement of goods blocked by the dockers’ strike.

16 August: Dockers’ strike ends.
4 September: The TUC to suspend any trade union registered under the *Industrial Relations Act*.

26 September: Tripartite meeting (government-trade union-employers) to launch an incomes policy to fight inflation.

16 October: Rules of the incomes policy set. Phase 1 of incomes policy announced.

6 November: 90 days freeze of prices and wages.

**1973-1974**

*1973*

1 January: The United Kingdom enters the European Economic Community (EEC).

4 January: Phase 2 of the incomes policy announced.

1 March: Nurses’ strike.

April: Phase 2 of the incomes policy implemented.

16 July: Secret meeting between Edward Heath and Joe Gormley in the Downing Street gardens.

5 September: TUC rejects in advance a third phase of the incomes policy.

7 September: Edward Heath affirms the national requirement of wage control.

6 October: Yom Kippur war, the 4th Arab-Israeli war begins. Crude oil spot price set at 3 dollars per barrel.
8 October: Phase 3 of the incomes policy White Paper published. Annual pay rises limited to 7%.

17 October: The OPEC Arab countries decide an oil embargo affecting countries which support Israel, mainly the United States and Western Europe. Barrel spot price quadruples, from $3 to $12.

23 October: Yom Kippur war cease-fire. Discussions between the NUM and Edward Heath in Downing Street.

30 October: Detailed content of the incomes policy phase 3 announced by the government, for implementation on November 1st.

8 November: The NUM executive committee rejects the NCB wage offer and launches an overtime ban, against the opinion of President Joe Gormley.

12 November: The NUM overtime ban starts.

13 November: State of emergency declared by the government (5th since 1970).

21 November: The NUM executive committee rejects Joe Gormley’s proposal of a miners’ ballot on pay.

22 November: Edward Heath declares that the government cannot and will not accept the miners’ wage demands.

28 November: Inconclusive meeting between Edward Heath and the NUM executive committee.

6 December: A Times/ITN poll gives the Conservatives a 5 points lead over Labour.

11 December: First power cuts.

12 December: State of emergency renewed.
13 December: 3-day week in industry starting from December 31st. Only 5 working days authorized between December 17th and December 31st.

22 December: The 6 OPEC Arabic countries unilaterally set the crude oil barrel spot price at $11.65.

1974

1 January: 3-day week in companies implemented.

9 January: The TUC agrees not to use miners’ wage levels as a benchmark for other sectors’ demands.

14 January: Discussion between Edward Heath and TUC to end the miners’ strike. The TUC renews its 9 January proposal.

21 January: The TUC renews in writing its proposal.

23 January: The NUM executive committee of the NUM calls a strike ballot.

4 February: 81% of miners vote for the strike (188,393 for, 44,222 against). Conciliatory talks between the government and the TUC cease.

5 February: The executive committee of the NUM calls national strike starting from February 10th.

7 February: Parliament dissolved, with General Elections within 3 weeks. The Employment Secretary, Willie Whitelaw, requests the wages commission (Pay Relativities Board) to scrutinize the compatibility of the miners’ wage claims with phase 3 of the incomes policy.

10 February: Nation-wide miners’ strike starts. The TUC invites all its affiliated trade unions to respect the NUM picket lines.
21 February: Publication of the Pay Relativities Board report on miners’ wage demands, blocking the possibility that better wage offers could have been granted within the incomes policy framework.

26 February: The CBI managing director, Campbell Adamson, asks for the withdrawal of the Industrial Relations Act 1971.

28 February: Polling day leading to a hung Parliament (301 Labour seats, 297 Conservative seats, 14 Liberal seats).

4 March: Resignation of Edward Heath. Harold Wilson, Prime Minister.

5 March: Employment Secretary Michael Foot negotiates with the NUM.

6 March: Agreement reached to end the strike.

11 March: Victorious return of the miners to work.

June: Foundation of the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), Conservative think-tank favouring radical changes on economics.

10 October: Polling day (319 Labour seats, 277 conservatives). Harold Wilson, Prime Minister.

6 December: “social contract” between the Labour government and the TUC including incomes policy.

1975-1979

1975

February: Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative party. Miners (246,000) agree on a 35% wage increase.
April: Wall Street Journal headline “Goodbye Great Britain” advising investors to sell off their sterling assets.

July: Harold Wilson’s speech at the NUM Congress to avoid a wage demands beyond incomes policy framework. A million unemployed (data corrected for seasonal variations).

1976

4 March: Sterling value falls against the dollar.
16 March: Resignation of Harold Wilson as Prime Minister.
25 March: James Callaghan wins the Labour leadership contest.
5 April: James Callaghan Prime Minister.
15 September: The government asks officially for IMF assistance to face the sterling currency crisis.

November: IMF mission in London, setting public expenditure cuts as a condition of the loan.

1977


November: Firemen strike. Miners' wage systems to include a productivity element. Conservative reports and memos: «Right approach to the economy», under the direction of Geoffrey Howe, report of the nationalized industries policy group, under the direction of Nicholas Ridley, «Stepping Stones» report on the trade unions by John Hoskyns and Norman Strauss.
1978

21 July: Incomes policy wage increase ceiling set at 5% maximum.

6 September: The TUC officially rejects the 5% ceiling.

7 September: The Prime Minister, James Callaghan, announces that there will be no autumn general election.

October: Labour Party motion rejects any wage ceiling. Various strikes (Ford, fuel transport, hospital, funeral services, municipal services…).

14 December: The government gives up sanctions proposals for companies not respecting the 5% wage increase ceiling.

1979-1982

1979

11 January: Catastrophic media coverage for the Prime Minister apparently unaware of the depth of the “winter of discontent” crisis. Sun headline “crisis, what crisis?”.


22 January: “winter of discontent” climax. 1.5 people on strike: transport, ambulance services, municipal workers.

31 January: 1,100 of the 2,300 NHS hospitals offer only emergency services.

6 February: 1,150 schools closed because of strike.
14 February: start of recovery from the “winter of discontent” following a joint government-TUC document “the economy, the Government and Trade Unions responsibilities”.

21 February: Wage settlement for the municipal workers.

29 March: Parliament dissolved, following a motion lost by the Prime Minister at the Commons.

3 April: Polling day. Conservative victory (majority of 43 seats: 339 Conservative seats against 269 Labour seats).

5 April: Margaret Thatcher Prime Minister.

November: The NUM executive rejects a 20% wage increase proposal.

5 December: Miners’ ballot rejects strike action on pay.

6 December: Employment Bill sent to Parliament.

1980

Employment Act including strict legal limitations of secondary picketing.

29 April: unsuccessful 13 weeks strike by steel workers.

14 May: The TUC day of action against government policies has moderate success.

10 November: Michael Foot defeats Denis Healey in ballot and becomes the leader of the Labour party.

25 November: More than two million unemployed.

January: 86% of the 66,000 NUM Yorkshire area members authorize area leaders to launch a strike in opposition to any pit closure.

10 February: the NCB announces a closure programme for 50 pits.

18 February: The government and the NCB withdraw the plan. Tripartite agreement (NUM-NCB-government) includes the abandonment of the programme of pit closures, the reduction of imports (750,000 tons per annum for the CEGB) and other concessions.

April: Arthur Scargill declares to an audience of 10,000 trade unionists in Bradford: “Direct workers’ action is the only language that this government understands. This government is not ready to pay attention to rational arguments.”

May: The CEGB introduces plans to enhance power generation capacity during a miners’ strike. Plans included strong increase of coal stocks in power stations.

21 February: miners ballot to accept a 9.3% wage increase.

14 September: Nomination of Nigel Lawson as Energy Secretary.

8 December: Arthur Scargill elected president of the NUM with 70% of the vote.

January: First NUM ballot requested by Arthur Scargill for pay-related strike action. 55% of the vote against the strike. Employment Act 1982 providing strict boundaries to a legal strike and lifting trade union legal immunities in case of illegal strike.

February: More than three million unemployed.
April: Invasion of the Falklands by Argentina.

June: Support by the Welsh miners for the claims of health sector workers. End of the Falklands War.

July: Nomination of Walter Marshall to the presidency of CEGB and Norman Siddall to the presidency of the NCB.

August: The CEGB increases the storage of all materials necessary for power generation.

October: Second ballot requested by Arthur Scargill for strike action on pay and pits closure: 61% of votes against strike.

November: Arthur Scargill answers the question of a parliamentary select committee about uneconomic pits: “the loss does not have a limit because I am interested more in the investment put into the mining industry.”

1983

January

11: Publication of the Green Paper *Democracy in trade unions*.

March

Third defeat of Arthur Scargill in a NUM ballot on pit closure (61% of votes against the strike).

28: Energy Secretary Nigel Lawson announces the nomination of Ian McGregor as NCB chairman.

June
Mergers and Monopolies Commission report concludes that 75% of pits are loss-making and propose a reduction of 10% in coal production capacities.

9: Polling day; historic Conservative victory (majority of 188 seats: 397 seats against 209 for the Labour Party). Appointment of Nigel Lawson as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Leon Brittan as Home Secretary and Peter Walker as Energy Secretary.

July

4: Annual NUM conference. Very aggressive speech by Arthur Scargill against the re-elected government.

September

1: Ian McGregor takes over as chairman of the National Coal Board.

14: First meeting between Arthur Scargill and Ian McGregor. Strike over planned closure of Monktonhall pit in Scotland.

115th Trades Council Union Congress chooses a “new realism” line following the failure of the “quarantine” line against the government.

October

2: Neil Kinnock, son of a Welsh miner, becomes leader of the Labour Party to replace Michael Foot.

18: Scottish miners stage a one-day strike in support of the five-week-old Monktonhall pit stoppage.
21: NUM delegate conference votes for overtime ban starting 31 October to protest against pit closures and pay offer of 5.2%.

23: Coal stocks in the power stations reach the historical peak of 30.8 million tons, with complementary stocks for all other materials required for power generation.

31: Overtime ban starts. The NCB calls for ballot on pay offer.

November

3: Ian McGregor unveils a new version of the 1974 “Plan for Coal” which Arthur Scargill describes as “catastrophic” for the industry.

December

14: the NCB meets three mining unions – BACM, NACODS and NUM – to discuss the new Plan for Coal. Scargill again warns of “disaster.”

The CEGB adapts 1981 coal imports rules for the Thames power stations.

1984

January

10: Ian McGregor dismisses the NUM overtime ban and says it would make no difference to his policy.

11: the NCB announces new policy for pits – 100 million tonnes a year output target, closure of 8 million tonnes of capacity “in near future”, higher redundancy payments.
12: NUM Executive votes to continue overtime ban – without a ballot.

24: Peter Heathfield, new NUM Secretary General, elected with 51.2% of the votes

February

5: NACODS and BACM unions ready to accept NCB pay offer.

20: Scottish miners reject all-out strike call, but agree to strike over closure threat to Polmaise colliery.

Increase in the impact of the overtime strike over CEGB coal stocks. If the overtime ban lasts until October 1984 followed by a strike, the electric supply can be assured for only 12 weeks.

March

1: NCB local representatives give NUM notice of the April closure of the Cortonwood and Bulcliffe Wood pits in Yorkshire. Jack Taylor, Yorkshire NUM president, says: “We have not been looking for a strike but the Coal Board has stopped negotiating”.

6: The NCB headquarters announces to the unions the planned closure programme of 4 million tons of capacity with estimated job losses of 20,000 men (10% of the total of mining workforce at the time). All Yorkshire miners called out over Cortonwood and Bulcliffe Wood closure threat. Scottish miners put on strike “alert”.

8: The NUM executive committee gives official support to Yorkshire and Scottish miners determined to launch a strike over the weekend of March 9-12. NUM moderates call for ballot. The government and the NCB
announce a reinforcement of the social benefits of the coal restructuring plan: £1,000 per year of service for all miners aged between 21 and 50, with early retirement schemes.

9: Durham and Kent miners’ leaders agree to support strike. The Nottinghamshire NUM area requires a pithead ballot. 109,000 of the 183,000 miners are in strike. Transfer by the NUM of £8.5 million to a bank on the Isle of Man.

12: The national strike starts. Flying pickets move into Nottinghamshire and other areas where the strike call is opposed. Only half the 184,000 miners are on strike. Coal stocks in the power stations rise to 23.9 million tons.

14: The NCB wins High Court injunction to stop Yorkshire miners picketing other areas.

15: Nottinghamshire NUM leaders call men out on strike before area ballot to try to prevent heavy picketing. David Jones, 24, dies during picket at Ollerton, Nottinghamshire. Inquest later hears he died from severe blow to the chest.

17: Massive votes by Nottinghamshire, Midlands, Northeast and Northwest miners against the strike in the area ballots. North Derbyshire is the only balloted NUM area which votes in favour of the strike. Arthur Scargill declares: “I am prepared to consider what my membership wants”. Henry Richardson, NUM Nottinghamshire area general secretary, declares: “If we don’t hold a ballot we are never going to get out of this mess.”

18: Complete mobilization of the police force to face mass pickets. Activation of the National Reporting Centre to provide national coordination of police operations. Kent police turn back miners’ cars at Dartford Tunnel.
19: Nottinghamshire miners say they will continue to work and huge police presence keeps 42 pits in Midlands producing. 4 of the 6 trade unions in the electricity sector recommend their members to continue to work normally.

20: Chief constable David Hall, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers and controller of National Reporting Centre, says: “There is nothing paramilitary about our operations”.

22: Power unions advise their members to cross NUM picket lines.

26: NUM leaders tell TUC to keep out of the dispute.

27: Picketing stepped up and some miners stage a French-lorry-drivers-style blockade of the M1 motorway in South Yorkshire. But leaders in eight areas which voted against the strike tell the members to work and call for a national ballot.

28: The power stations become the priority target for the NUM pickets. NUM calls for a complete stoppage of power generation.

29: The leaders of the rail, transport and steel unions agree to a blockade of coal. Labour MP reveals that 19 Yorkshire pickets had been questioned by police about their political beliefs and their attitude to Arthur Scargill.

30: Yorkshire miners admit a complete stoppage of coal production unlikely and first split in coal/steel alliance emerges. Bill Sirs, leader of ISTC, says: “I am not here to see the steel industry crucified on someone else’s altar.”

31: NOP poll reveals 51% of miners would vote for a strike (less than the necessary majority by the NUM constitution, but only by a small margin) and only 34% against.

April
1: Sid Vincent, Lancashire leader, says after his area votes to return to normal working, “We are in a terrible and awful mess. You would need Jesus Christ to sort it out.”

3: Energy Secretary Peter Walker begins to press for national ballot. NUR members ordered to boycott coal movement by rail.

4: Ian McGregor declares: “These are tough times we live in and I think they could get even tougher.”

5: Nottinghamshire miners vote to work normally by a very large majority (3 to 1) and reject the recommendation of the NUM executive not to cross the picket lines. Ray Chadburn, Nottinghamshire NUM president, says after his area votes at delegate conference: “We have brother against brother, father against son. We have got to get together because we are doing irreparable damage for the future.” Steelworkers also vote to work normally.

7: Demonstration of support for the miners in London.

9: Chief Constable of North Wales, David Owen reveals plainclothed police infiltrated picket lines “with a view to identifying persons responsible for an offence.”

10: Two coke hauliers begin legal action against NUM’s secondary picketing of Port Talbot steelworks.

11: Pit deputies’ union NACODS votes in favour of strike over pit closures, but not with the two-thirds majority required by their constitution.

12: Meeting of the NUM executive committee. NUM leaders propose to lower necessary majority for strike from 55% to simple majority. Arthur Scargill vetoes a NUM militants’ ballot on the strike. Executive meeting heavily picketed and Nottinghamshire leaders face wrath of striking miners.
Mick McGahey says media suffering from “ballotitis”. The Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock backs a ballot.

14: A Mori survey shows 68 to 26% margin in favour of strike.

16: Ian McGregor says meeting Arthur Scargill not “a constructive way” to spend his time.

17: High Court judge bans South Wales pickets from stopping lorries entering or leaving Port Talbot steelworks.

19: Meeting of a special conference of the NUM in a context overheated by the presence of 7,000 militants from the Yorkshire area NUM; it endorses all the decisions of the executive committee of the 12, in particular the passage to a simple majority within the framework of a strike poll.

20: Arthur Scargill says CEGB has at best nine weeks' of coal left at current burn. Massive transport by truck of coal and oil to the power stations. TGWU threaten national dock strike if dockers are sacked for supporting the miners.

23: NUM conference changes rules on strike vote (50% instead of 55%).

24: Arthur Scargill refuses to meet NCB at talks about the rescheduling of pit closures.

25: NCB launches advertising campaign in newspapers to persuade miners to go back to work.

26: Arthur Scargill offers NCB talks on the “future of coal”. CEGB implements operational changes in coal power stations to optimize endurance, with a total coal stock of 17.95 million tons in power stations.

30: The miners’ strike launched on March 12th, 1984 constitutes the longest strike period in the sector since the movement of 1926.
May

3: British Steel Corporation arranges lorry deliveries of coal to picketed steelworks.

6: Women police officers complain they are not being used on picket lines and so are losing overtime payments.

8: NUM press NUR for ban on iron-ore deliveries to BSC plants.

12: NUM guarantees coal supply to threatened Ravenscraig steel plant.

14: Arthur Scargill says CEGB will be in “desperate trouble” within a few weeks and that ultimate aim of strike is downfall of Thatcher government.

16: Anne Scargill, wife of the NUM president, is arrested for “wilful obstruction”.

23: The first meeting between Arthur Scargill and Ian McGregor since beginning of dispute lasts 60 minutes. Scargill describes the meeting as a “complete fiasco”. Nottinghamshire miners start court action against NUM for declaring strike in area official despite vote against.

25: High Court judge condemns strike without ballot as “unfair” and bans NUM from telling men not to cross picket lines. Convoy of lorries begin taking coke from Orgreave plant to Scunthorpe steelworks.

29: NCB says 15 pits at risk from geological problems caused by 12 week-old strike. First battle of Orgreave: heavy, violent picketing of the coke plant – and police use of riot gear for first time.

30: Arthur Scargill arrested at Orgreave charged with “obstruction”.

June
1: The leader of the Labour party, Neil Kinnock, declares: “There is no place in any industrial dispute in Britain for missiles, battering rams or any other implement or act of violence” First signs appear of national working miners’ grouping.

4: Government prepared to underwrite NCB’s losses.

5: The Daily Mirror exposes government intervention in strike. Leaked documents show the government bought off rail workers’ pay claim to prevent their unions giving more support to the miners.

7: A demonstration by angry miners outside the House of Commons leads to 110 arrests.

8: NCB and NUM meet again in Edinburgh. McGregor says: “I would say that there is a degree of realism entering the discussion”.

10: Organization of oil transport to the power stations by small haulier companies and independent truck drivers.

11: Pro-strike left heavily defeated in Nottinghamshire area elections.

13: NUM and NCB meet, but talks fail after 90 minutes. Arthur Scargill predicts strike will last until winter.

14: Ian McGregor suggests NCB could organize its own strike ballot.

15: Joe Green, 55, knocked down and killed on picket line outside Ferrybridge power station, Yorkshire. The transport trade union TGWU asks the truck drivers not to transport coal normally conveyed by rail.

18: “Battle of Orgreave”: violent confrontation between 3,000 police and 6,000 pickets. One hundred pickets arrested and Scargill in hospital after, he claims, he was hit by a riot shield. The police say it was a “miracle no one was
killed’. The Queen lets it be known she has not been as shocked since city riots of 1981.

19: Labour energy spokesperson Stan Orme given green light to try to get talks going.

21: Ian McGregor warns strike could drag into 1985 and in a letter to all NUM members, tells miners they will never win.

27: Steelworkers’ leaders say they will accept any coal to keep plants going, Rail workers stage 24-hour strike in London to support miners – with limited effect.

28: NUM executive committee proposes rule to discipline members for offences, including actions “detrimental to the interests of the union”.

July

2: Working miners’ leaders take control of NUM Nottinghamshire executive committee.

5-6: Secret talks resume between the NUM and the NCB. They are “hopeful” at the beginning.

9: Talks continue and both sides talk of movement. National docks strike called over the use of “scab” labour to move coal at Immingham.

10: Nottinghamshire miners win injunction against NUM proposal to change rules at a special conference. Nationwide dockers’ strike.

11: NUM conference ignores court injunction and sets up a disciplinary “star chamber” to judge the recalcitrant NUM members.

12: Ian McGregor says rebel miners will not lose their jobs if kicked out of the NUM in spite of the closed shop rule.
14: Kinnock and Scargill on same platform at Durham miners’ rally. Kinnock says: “Somewhere the spirit of submission has got to stop and it has stopped here in the mining industry”.

18: The “peace negotiations” end in stalemate with NCB still insisting that pits could close if they could not be “beneficially developed”. High Court grants Nottinghamshire miners application to have NUM special conference ruling on “star chamber” declared void.

19: During a meeting of the Conservative parliamentary group Margaret Thatcher describes the striking miners or their leaders as “the enemy within”, in direct analogy with the Argentinean enemy fought in 1982.

21: End of the dockers’ strike (“the second front”), under the pressure of angry truck-drivers, which gives a psychological blow to striking miners.

24: Secret meeting aimed at ending the strike organized by rebel pitmen lead by “Silver Birch”. Growth of working miners’ groups.

28: TUC and NUM hold tentative talks.

29: Norman Tebbit, DTI Secretary, declares that electricity bills could soar because of the strike.

30: South Wales NUM fined £50,000 for contempt for ignoring injunction to ban secondary picketing on steelworks. The refusal to pay the fine leads to the sequestration of NUM South Wales funds.

31: Chancellor Nigel Lawson says between £300 and £350 million spent on strike, “Even in narrow financial terms it represents a worthwhile investment for the good of the nation”.

CEGB is anxious over the duration of the strike and the possibility of not being able to face electricity demand at the beginning of the winter. Detailed analysis of all options increasing the endurance of power generation.
August

7: Two Yorkshire miners, Ken Foulstone and Bob Taylor, reveal their plan to take Yorkshire NUM to court over failure to hold a ballot. They are supported by funds from Tory businessmen.

10: Annual NUM conference – without delegates from Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and South Derbyshire- backs tougher disciplinary powers and rejects NCB peace plan, but agrees to appeal for £500,000 from other unions each week.

12: Start-up of closed power stations.

13: National Council for Civil Liberties launches inquiry into policing of dispute.

15: NCB closes two out of three coal-faces at the showpiece Castlehill pit in Scotland, bringing total closures to 12 pits during strike. A NCB directive requires NACODS supervisors to cross the strike pickets if they want to continue to be paid.

17: An NCB press release says strike could cost more than the 20,000 jobs originally planned.

18: Arthur Scargill declares: “The nearer we get to our biggest ally, General Winter, the weaker our opponents’ position”.

20: One thousand police escort one Yorkshire miner to work at Gascoigne Wood drift mine.

21: Ian McGregor suggests police and government should take court action against Arthur Scargill and other miners’ leaders for “criminal conspiracy” to intimidate working miners.

22: TUC General Council holds first full debate on miners’ strike.
23: Trade union TGWU calls dockers out again because BSC unloads a 'blacked' ship carrying coking coal for Ravenscraig. But second dock strike gets less support than first and men still work at key ports.

24: NCB rejects Stan Orme's peace plan and deputy chairman James Cowan says talks will only take place “when the Board obtain an understanding from the NUM that they are prepared to abandon their policy that only collieries that are exhausted should be closed”.

September

2: Daily Mirror publisher Robert Maxwell helps bring two sides together and resumption of talks promised.

3: TUC votes 10-1 to give more money to miners and for action in support, “wherever this is necessary”. Resolution opposed by key unions of electricity and power workers Eric Hammond and John Lyons. Norman Willis becomes the general secretary of the TUC to replace Len Murray.

4: Neil Kinnock attacks picket-line violence at TUC. NCB-NUM talks called off.

6: Confrontation forces between miners and police force in Kellingley.

7: Talks back on again and NUM agrees to consult TUC.

8: A striker’s son, 14-year-old Paul Womersley, dies digging for coal in Yorkshire.

9: NCB-NUM talks resume in Edinburgh then Selby, Doncaster and London, with reporters in pursuit. In Edinburgh McGregor appears with a plastic bag over his head. Transport of coal per rail and road rises to 589,000 tons per week, against 1,500,000 tons before strike.
11: Working miners set up national committee with elected officials and constitution.

12: NACODS leaders agree to hold ballot and urge strike action.

13: Striking miners refused funeral grants by Department of Health and Social Security.

14: Week-long NCB-NUM talks collapse.

18: Second dock strike called off.

19: Margaret Thatcher says she is prepared to see strike going on for more than a year.

21: Bishop of Durham calls McGregor an “elderly imported American” and calls for his replacement. Steel workers reject appeal to stop production.

26: NCB offers compromise to NACODS to prevent strike.

28: NACODS votes by 82.5% to strike, but High Court declares NUM strike in Derby unlawful and Yorkshire strike unofficial (thus without penal immunity for its leaders).

29: Poll shows miners still support strike by two to one.

October

1: NCB-NACODS talks to avert strike. Writ served on Arthur Scargill and NUM for continuing to call strike official. This writ is given to Arthur Scargill during the public session of the Labour party conference.

2: Neil Kinnock says at Labour Party conference: “I condemn the violence of stone throwers and battering ram carriers and I condemn the violence of cavalry
charges, the truncheon groups and the shield bangers”, thus putting challenging both the NUM and police force in the use of violence.

6: ACAS conciliatory body start talks with the NUM and the NCB.


8: Resumed NUM-NCB talks at ACAS consider fresh formulas.

9: Leader of NUM power group, Ray Ottey, resigns a month before retirement. He says: “I am not prepared to flout the law. I fully support our democratic system in this country”.

10: Arthur Scargill stays away from court and is fined £1,000 and the NUM £200,000 for contempt.

11: NCB-NUM talks resume at ACAS and broadened to include NACODS.

12: IRA bomb attack against the Brighton hotel where the Conservative party conference is taking place.

15: Talks collapse when ACAS chief Pat Lowry “draws stumps”.

16: NACODS announces its first-ever national strike to start on 25th October.

18: Peter Walker indicates to the House of Commons that the government is ready to accept the proposals established within the framework of ACAS.

19: Scargill’s £1,000 fine paid anonymously and NACODS men vote to support strike call. Daily Mirror reveals involvement of Thatcher adviser David Hart with working miners’ committee and Ian McGregor. Electricians in power stations vote by 84% against miners’ support action.
20: Michael Eaton appointed new NCB spokesperson.

22: ACAS holds NCB-NACODS talks.

23: NCB and NACODS agree on formula that includes independent advisory panel on pit closures and NACODS says it will call off strike.

25: Judge orders seizure of NUM funds after union fails to pay £200,000 fine. NUM and NCB meet at ACAS, but little optimism about talks.


29: The spokesperson of the NCB, Michael Eaton, is asked not to speak again during a press conference, an event which is followed by the mysterious introduction of the communications director of the NCB, Geoffrey Kirk.

29: NCB spokesman Michael Eaton silenced in the middle of a press interview, an event which is followed by the mysterious suspension of press officer Geoffrey Kirk.

30: TUC chairman Jack Eccles opens rift in TUC ranks by saying NUM should compromise. British Rail boss Bob Reid warns of job losses because of unions’ refusal to move coal.

31: Talks at ACAS finally collapse.

*November*

1: NUM announces a series of rallies to boost morale as NCB campaign to get men back in the key coalfield of North Derbyshire begins to bite.
2: NCB offers a Christmas bonus and holiday pay if men back at work by 19 November. 10,000 return to the mines in a two week period.

4: CEGB internal concerns over weak coal reserves at certain power stations, which may not be able to produce more during the winter, which would cause cuts of electricity at times of peak demand.

5: First substantial return to work and over £2 million of NUM funds frozen in a Dublin bank. NUM conference continues to back strike.

6: The NCB communications director, Geoffrey Kirk, resigns and discloses NCB-Tory connection.

9: NCB campaign to persuade more miners back to work met by increased picket-line violence, including a petrol bomb attack on a police station in South Yorkshire.

13: Norman Willis of TUC shouted down during rally in South Wales when he condemns violence and a symbolic hangman’s noose is lowered over his head. The former Conservative Prime Minister Harold McMillan, 90 years old Lord Stockton, speaks of his heartbreak at “this terrible strike of the best men in the world” in his maiden speech in the House of Lords.

18: Two brothers die picking coal to raise money for Christmas.

21: Government increases the deduction from strikers’ social security payments from £15 to £16.

25: TUC considers new initiative to end strike. TUC declines to take more positive policy of intervention.

27: Oil millionaire Paul Getty II gives £100,000 to miners’ hardship fund.

28: NUM money traced to Zurich and Luxembourg. Arthur Scargill fails to attend a meeting with TUC.
29: NUM North Wales leader Ted McKay attacks Arthur Scargill, saying: “God will never forgive him for what he has done to the mining communities”.

30: Receiver appointed by High Court to handle NUM funds. Taxi driver David White, 35, killed when concrete thrown from a bridge on to his taxi carrying working miner. Three miners charged with murder thereafter.

December

3: NUM delegate conference votes to continue defiance of courts.

4: TUC seven-man monitoring team meets NUM.

9: TUC presses government and NCB to reopen talks. The National Council for Civil Liberties makes formal demand for official inquiry into dispute. Unions fail to respond to TUC approval of sympathy strikes.

11: Miners throughout Nottinghamshire vote heavily for new constitution to make their area semi-independent. Subsequent creation of the UDM (Union of Democratic Mineworkers, union of the democratic miners), which will attract one-third of the miners.

14: Arthur Scargill is fined £250 for obstruction. The TUC monitoring team meets Energy Secretary Peter Walker, who confirms that it is necessary for NUM to accept the closure of uneconomic pits.

20: Nottinghamshire votes to reduce power of national leaders but decides not to break away from national union.

27: The North Derbyshire miners campaign to oust strike supporters from NUM National Executive.

29: Positive CEGB prospects to face the winter. A press release by the Ministry for Energy indicates that no power cuts will take place for the whole of 1985.
30: NCB says returning miners could earn £1,000. Energy Secretary Peter Walker brands Arthur Scargill a liar for predicting power cuts.

1985

January

1: City analysts Simon and Coates says strike costing £85 million a week.

3: Neil Kinnock joins picket line for first time.

5: Arthur Scargill says that the NUM will forgive working miners and forget if they join strike, «But if they continue to work they will be stained in the eyes of the movement».

7: Continuation of the return to work movement, with 1,200 individual returns in a single day.

8: Electric producer CEGB is able to face the largest electricity demand ever recorded in the United Kingdom.

10: NUM executive committee agrees to widen negotiating team and threatens to expel Nottinghamshire dissident.

13: New peak of daily production of coal at 640,000 tons.

14: Henry Richardson, Nottinghamshire NUM general secretary, is suspended by his area council.

16: Henry Richardson wins right in court to retain limited role as NUM area official.
17: NUR and ASLEF stage another 24-hour strike - this time in protest against British Rail harassment of railmen 'blacking' coal. New peak of electricity demand passed without interruption, with strong press coverage.

21: Talks about talks suddenly take place between Peter Heathfield and Ned Smith, leading to some optimism.

24: Government stamps on possible compromise.

26: Question of amnesty for 500-plus sacked miners becomes an issue.

30: Hopes for pit talks dashed. Sequestrators recover almost £5 million of NUM money after seizures in Luxembourg.

31: Many gestures on the fixing of a negotiations timetable. Norman Willis, general secretary of the TUC, addresses NUM Executive Committee to keep peace hopes alive.

**February**

1: Idea of return to work without agreement emerges as NUM-NCB seem even further apart. Arthur Scargill declares: “If the NUM did not get an agreement the position would be considerably better than what the NCB is trying to impose on the union.”

4: Return to work by 2,318 miners. The Frances colliery in Scotland closed after fire with the loss of 500 jobs. NUM at ACAS to try getting talks restarted.

7: NCB rules out talks after appeals from NUM and NACODS.

12: Norman Willis meets Ian McGregor in attempt to get talks going again.
14: Norman Willis and Ian McGregor draw up an agenda for peace. Peter Heathfield, NUM general secretary of the NUM, says two sides on “eve of breakthrough”.

15: Norman Willis shuttles between two sides, each of which tables proposals unacceptable to the other.

17: Shuttle diplomacy breaks down.

19: New settlement attempt tried by the TUC seven-man monitoring team, which meets Margaret Thatcher. Second draft agreement drawn up.

20: TUC attempts to bridge gap between two sides end in recriminations. Moderates say second draft agreement worse than first.

21: TUC gets drawn into slanging match after special NUM conference. NUM official Dennis Murphy declares: “If you send a boy on a man’s errand you have got problems”.

22: NCB plans final big push to get 50% of miners back at work.

24: Rally in London to support miners results in 101 arrests after trouble in Whitehall.

25: Strike abandoned by 3,807 miners.

26: South Wales NUM moves to end strike by calling for a reappraisal, an initiative bringing about the end of the strike later on. Durham NUM follows.

27: A NCB press release claims over 50% miners working.

28: NUM executive committee calls for a new special conference.

March
1: 95,000 miners have returned to work, according to a NCB press release.

3: A special NUM conference votes by a narrow majority (98 to 91) to end the strike and organize a return to work on 5 March without agreement with the NCB.

4: The trade union of railway employees NUR maintains its embargo on the rail transport of coal until March 4th at midnight.

5: End of the strike, which will have lasted 51 weeks and will have caused the loss of 26.1 million working days. The striking miners return to the pits in processions preceded by NUM banners. Coal stocks in the power stations rise to 11.1 million tons.

1986 ONWARDS

June 1986: The High Court restores NUM control of its funds, after written apologies from Arthur Scargill.

September 1986: Departure of Ian McGregor as chairman of the NCB.

11 June 1987: Polling day; third consecutive victory for the Conservatives in the General Election (majority of 147 seats: 376 seats for the Conservatives against 229 for Labour).

1989: Tony Blair, shadow Employment Secretary states that the Labour Party no longer supports any closed shop.

22 November 1990: Margaret Thatcher resigns. John Major Prime Minister.
9 April 1992: Polling day; fourth consecutive Conservative victory in the General Election (majority of 65 seats: 336 seats for the Conservatives against 271 for Labour). John Smith is elected new leader of the Labour Party to replace the resigning Neil Kinnock.

13 October 1992: Michael Heseltine, DTI Secretary, announces 31 additional pit closures with 30,000 job losses. 19 coal sites still open.

1994: Privatization of coal mining. 15 coal sites still open.

May 1994: Tony Blair is elected leader of the Labour Party following the death of John Smith.

October 1994: Labour Party Congress gives up clause 4 of the Party constitution on collective ownership of means of production.

1 May 1997: Polling day, Labour Party wins after 18 years of opposition (majority of 253 seats: 418 seats for Labour against 165 for the Conservatives).

2 April 1997: Tony Blair, Prime Minister.

August 2002: Departure of Arthur Scargill from the presidency of the NUM. The number of NUM militants amounts to 3,000 (against 180,000 when Arthur Scargill became President in 1981). 13 private coal pits in activity, against NCB 170 pits in 1981.

13 October 13, 2008 Thatcher, by now much diminished by Alzheimer's disease, celebrates her 83rd birthday. "This woman who dominated the discussions so a long time could no longer carry on debate nor follow the thread of a friendly conversation“ according to her daughter Carol.
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*Margaret Thatcher, the long walk to Finchley* (biopic), BBC, 2008

**Audio**

Trades Union Congress (TUC), British union history website: [http://www.unionhistory.info](http://www.unionhistory.info)


**INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN 2007**

**Government and Conservative party**

Lord Howe

Lord Brittan

Lord Hurd

Baroness Shephard

**TUC and NUM**

Dr. Kim Howells MP

David Feickert
Dr. Hywell Francis MP

Lord Lea

Journalists

Geoffrey Goodman (*Daily Mirror*)
3 This industrial process would be stabilized only in 1830.
5 Pimlott Ben and Cook Chris, Trade Unions in British Politics, the first 250 years, Harlow, Longman, 1991, p. 21.
7 Trade unions membership doubled in size, reaching 8 million in the early 1920s.
9 This famous saying was used again by Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister from 1957 to 1963.
11 Historic peak for the United Kingdom, comparable in France only to the 150 million working days lost during the May 1968 strikes.
13 The Second World war did not stop industrial action in the coal industry. A miners’ strike occurred at Betteshanger Colliery in Kent in 1941-2. Even though the other collieries in East Kent were also involved this was very different from a nationwide strike.
15 In his 12 March 2004 conference, Kim Howells explained that productivity was 245 tons of coal and per annum in 1940 and only 243 tons in 1954. Details on: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/3506098.stm
20 Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.
21 Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.
22 Karl Marx was buried in Highgate cemetery in 1883.
23 Bert Ramelson coordinated the various Communist groups that monitored key trade unions.
The TGWU (transport industry, docks) and the AEU (metal workers) were at the time the two major British trade unions in terms of membership, with respectively 1.8 million and 1.4 million members.

Bert Ramelson used this alliance strategy to maximize impact at the TUC congresses, gaining leverage from the weight of the AEU and the TGWU.


Ian Carmichael plays an employee whose efforts to work hard and ignore restrictive practices are constantly thwarted by the Sellers character. Apart from its commercial success, the movie also won several British film awards. Chris Howell, Trade Unions and the State. The Construction of Industrial Relations Institutions in Britain, 1890-2000, Princeton University Near, 2005, p. 4.


This law was voted following the 1901 Taff Vale Case decision in which unions were held liable for damages resulting from actions by its officials on the ground that workers blocked the freedom of work of others.


Registration was indeed optional, but was critical to guarantee the union representatives legal immunities for their activities.


Beckett Enemy Within..., p. 174.

Hurd, An End to Promises, p. 96.

These rules included a representation of different area unions at the national level and the right-left equilibrium between the President and the General Secretary. Mick McGahen, like the general secretary Lawrence Daly, was both Scottish and supported by the NUM left.

These nominal figures are to be considered in a context of high British inflation at the time.

Gormley, Battered Cherub, p. 88.

Ibid, p. 89.

The militants who went on the picket lines were paid £2 per day by the NUM, that is to say 26 euros at 2007 prices. No money was paid to strikers without militant activity.

This corresponds to the British power output capacity excluding coal-fired power stations.
Rules of engagement would be different ten years later during the 1984-5 strike: the key and explicit aim was then to keep all sites open and to guarantee the right to work of any miner by all means available.


Hurd D., *An End to Promises*, p. 102.

Ibid, p. 103.

Conversation with the author on 28 February 2007.

Lord Wilberforce, a High Court judge, carried out a comparable exercise during the 1970-1 electricians’ strike.


Howe G., *Conflict of Loyalty*, p. 63-64.


Data before seasonal adjustments. Seasonally adjusted statistics above one million job applicants would appear only a few years later, in the mid seventies.

This meeting was so secret that neither the Employment Secretary nor the NCB management were informed.


This was his last speech to Congress as leader of the Conservative Party.


Industrial production remained normal until mid-December because of a productivity surge and lower idle periods, but then decreased by 25%, with a severe impact on British exports.

Joe Gormley also held important responsibilities within the Labour party.


Conversation with the author on 28 February 2007.


From 1918 on, this power concerned the British Prime Minister and him alone: this was not a Cabinet decision.


Hurd D., *An End to Promises*, p. 150.


Ibid, p. 205.

Ibid, p. 218


Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, p. 254.

This speech entitled “Our human stock is threatened” is available on the Margaret Thatcher Foundation website, [http://www.margaretthatcher.org](http://www.margaretthatcher.org).


The legislative work completed under Michael Foot as Employment Secretary, who dismantled the Industrial Relations Act of 1971, restored all trade union legal immunities, authorized strike action remote from the workplace, created the public body of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) which would survive the Thatcher era, and even further reinforced unions and the prerogatives of union representatives. The principal laws were the Trade Unions and Labour Relations Act, the law creating ACAS and the Employment Protection Act. Kenneth Morgan, Michael Foot, *A Life*, London, HarperPress, 2007, p. 300-308.


This NUM rule, amended in 1978, defined 55 years (in line with early retirements) as the maximum age to stand for the position of NUM President.


Some observers argued that a deeply complacent class of mandarins, confronted by Ministers who for most of the 1970s had small or no Parliamentary majorities, had been able to get on with what Peter Hennessy has referred to as "the orderly management of decline" without politicians interfering too much in their domain.

The 28-page report is available on the Margaret Thatcher Foundation website, [http://www.margaretthatcher.org](http://www.margaretthatcher.org).


Ibid, p. 67. “First, I said, sufficient amounts of coal should be stockpiled at the power stations, not at the pits, in order for them to survive a year’s strike. Second, as many power stations as possible should be converted to dual coal/oil firing, so that the maximum possible amount of oil could be used to generate electricity in a coal famine. Special arrangements should
be used to hire haulage firms who would not be intimidated in transporting coal by road in the event of a strike, and the police should be organized on a specially mobile basis so that they could concentrate wherever the strikers decided to concentrate for the purpose of closing down coal-using plants.”

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102 Ibid, p. 67
104 Andrew Taylor, The NUM and British Politics, p. 149.
105 John Hoskyns, Just in Time…, p. 46.
107 BBC website, On This Day of 22 January 1979: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/22/newsid_2506000/2506715.stm
109 Since 1966, a majority of the public opinion considered that trade unions had too much power. This opinion was permanently shared by least 60% of the British according to Ivor Crewe, Anthony D. Fox and Neil Day, The British Electorate, 1963-1992. A compendium of data from the British Election Studies, Cambridge University Press, 1995.
112 John Hoskyns, Just in Time…, p. 35.
113 Ronald McIntosh, Challenges to Democracy, London, Politico’s, 2006, p. 223-224.
116 Geoffrey Howe, Conflict of Loyalty, p. 135.
118 Huw Beynon, Ray Hudson and David Sadler, A tale of two industries, p. 96.
120 Margaret Thatcher, The Collected Speeches, p. 116.
122 Joe Gormley, Battered Cherub, p. 176.
124 The impact of this vote appeared limited at the time. But in 1984, the NUM executive committee would leverage on this vote to launch a combination of regional strikes without a national ballot designed to have the same impact as a national strike.
125 For 1981-1982, the public subsidy amounted to £375 million for NCB operations (including £428 million to cover past losses) and £902 million for investment and output capacity increase, is a total subsidy of £1.47 billion.
126 Joel Krieger, Undermining Capitalism…, p. 278.
Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, p. 143.

Walter Marshall had also been sacked in the 1970s from his position as Chief Scientist at the Department of Energy by the Labour Energy Secretary Tony Benn, who assessed his position as too favourable towards nuclear energy. Lawson N., The View from Number 11…, p. 149,151 and 154.

Nigel Lawson, The View from Number 11…, p. 144-146.

Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, p. 32.


Discussions with the author respectively on 24 February 2007 for Lord Brittan and on 26 February 2007 for Lord Hurd.


The Brixton riots on 11 April 1981 were the most serious civil riot of the 20th century: 300 police officers and 65 civilians injured, more than 100 vehicles burned, including 56 police vehicles.


http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/true_spies/2351547.stm

Chris Howell., Trade Unions and the State…, p. 147.

Ibid, p. 147.


Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, p. 340.


Conversation with the author on 17 January 2007.


Speech of the NUM president at the annual NUM conference in the City Hall, Perth, Scotland. The full text of the speech is available on the site of the NUM: http://www.num.org.uk/?p=history&c=speeches


Ian McGregor owned both American and British passports.

Peter Walker held even higher ministerial responsibilities under Edward Heath, in particular as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1972-4). From 1979 to 1983 he was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

McGregor I., The Enemy Within, p. 122.

The public subsidy covered operational losses up to £358 million, financial costs up to £467 million and capital expenditure up to £255 million.


McGregor I., The Enemy Within, p. 147.

Ibid, p. 175.
The policy had six main points: “not a single compulsory redundancy, early retirement provisions for miners over fifty which were more generous than those offered in any other industry, offer of a job at another pit to any miner whose pit did close, younger miners who did not want to transfer would receive handsome terms for voluntary redundancy, an £800 million a year investment programme, far above that of other nationalized and privately owned industries and calculated to turn them green with envy, a pay award which would reward those who produced more coal”. The early retirement package includes £1,000 pounds per working year in the coal industry, a weekly income and coal for heating.


All important communications of the NUM leaders were probably recorded and supervised by the services of MI5 and the Special Branch of the police force.

One 1984 pound sterling is worth 3.20 euros at 2007 rates.

The new name of the National Council for Civil Liberties, an organization considered as subversive by the MI5 in the 1970s according to the declarations of Cathy Massiter during a BBC broadcast
MRS. THATCHER & THE MINERS

186 Conversation with the author on 24 February 2007.
187 Waddington R A.J., Contingency in law and order enforcement..., p. 49.
188 Testimony available on the site of the BBC dedicated to the miners' strike: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk/2004/miners_strike/default.stm
189 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/3414695.stm
190 Waddington P.A.J., Contingency in law and order enforcement..., p. 54.
194 Ibid, p. 5.
198 http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page57.html#8
200 Parliamentary day-motion 2352 of July 22nd, 1993.
201 Information was revealed to the general public in an article in The Guardian of May 16th, 2005. The memo is available on this site: http://politics.guuan.co.fMeMages/0,9069,1485176,00.htm
203 Ledger F. and Sallis H., Crisis Management..., p. 113.
204 Arthur Scargill affirmed at one moment that the coal stock in the power stations was tiny room of 20% because of decomposition or the loss of the heating capacity of coal.
205 Conversation with the author on 24 May 2007.
206 A large-scale power station requires 5 to 6 million tons of coal per annum to burn, i.e. 100 trains or 6,000 trucks per week.
207 Ledger F., We kept the home fires burning, Financial Times, April 23rd, 1994.
208 Eric Hammond mentioned this proposal during the 1984 TUC congress and made his letter to Scargill public in 1988.
210 Conversation with the author on 26 February 2007.
211 The Internet did not exist at the time. The strike took place in parallel to the introduction of two TV innovations: morning television and use of video equipment to shoot, which allowed a much faster diffusion of any filmed material.
213 Campbell J., Margaret Thatcher..., p. 364
214 Adeney Mr. and Lloyd J., The Miners' Strike., p. 246
215 Walker P., Staying Power..., p. 174
216 Adeney Mr. and Lloyd J., The Miners' Strike., p. 244.
218 Taylor A., The NUM and British Politics..., p. 212.
219 BRU also notes that 50% of the televised time presented material filmed between the miners and the police force against 31% of the material filmed from behind the police forces.

The ACAS, Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, was created in 1975 by the Wilson government with Michael Foot as Employment Secretary. It is an independent public body providing arbitration and conciliatory services to settle social conflicts, after having heard the explanations of all parties to the conflict, when employers and the trade union are unable to find a settlement by themselves.


It was the NUM highest non-elective position.


Conversation with the author on 27 February 2007.


Conversation with the author on 1 July 2007.

2005 data of the Department of Trade and Industry.
The transition to natural gas was also the reason for allowing the United Kingdom to reduce its greenhouse effect gas emissions.

Conversation with the author on 1 July 2007.

2005 data of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Coal accounts for 40.1% of world power generation, against 19.4% for natural gas, 16% each for nuclear power and hydropower, 6.9% for oil and less than 2% for renewable energies.

In 2004, Chinese emissions increased by 18% compared to 2003 (nearly 200 million tonnes of carbon, i.e. equivalent of French plus Spanish emissions), contributing to more than 50% of world emissions (+5.0%). However Chinese CO2 emissions per capita represented less than 20% of US emissions.


Ibid, p. 89.

Ibid, p. 123.


A January 1979 Gallup poll showed that 53% of the British - stuck in the middle of the "winter of discontent" - considered strikes as the country’s main problem.

OECD data. GDP per capita in 2000 prices.

Debonneuil M., L'espoir économique..., p. 22.

Conversation with the author on 12 January 2007.

Source: centre for economics and business research CEBR.

Lawson N., The View from Number 11..., p. 162.

Thatcher M., The Downing Street Years..., p. 378.


Adeney Mr. and Lloyd J., The Miners’ Strike..., p. 295-296.

The new clause 4 faced the apology for the mixed economy, by recognizing the importance of the private company and competition and by wishing that the United Kingdom combined "a thriving private sector and high quality public services".


Nigel Lawson (1992), The View from Number 11, Bantam Press, p. 64.

Attali J., C'était François Mitterrand, p. 92.


Gormley J., Battered Cherub, p. 88.

Ibid, p. 197.

Ibid, p. 197.

Ibid p. 184.


Scargill A., 1975 interview to the New Left Review.


Routledge P., *Scargill: the Unauthorized biography*, p. 109. This presentation was confirmed during the discussion with the author on May 24th, 2007.

MacGregor I., *The Enemies Within*, p. 119.


Lawson N., *The View from Number 11…*, p. 147.

Adeney Mr. and Lloyd J., *The Miners’ Strike…*, p. 5.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Conversation with the author on 11 January 2007.

Ingham B., *Kill the Messenger… Again*, p. 239.

Jones E., *Neil Kinnock*, p. 64.


The Magna Carta is a charter of 63 articles won by the English barons from King John (‘Jean sans-terre’) on June 15th, 1215 after a short civil war. This text limits the arbitrary exercise of royal power and establishes the right of habeas corpus which prohibits, inter alia, arbitrary imprisonment.


Attali J., *C’était François Mitterrand*, p. 90.


Ibid.

Ibid.


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