

Why moderate coal field blew gaping hole in strike

Ten months into the miners' strike, when the slow but inexorable collapse of support was beginning to sap the morale of even the most committed, a tough Yorkshire National Union of Mineworkers' official clenched his fists and spat out: "Don't talk about them Nottinghamshire bastards - that lot are a different breed".

His contempt was sincere and his remark, perhaps, more accurate than he might have appreciated. Many believe that the history of the Nottinghamshire pits - a coalfield of immigrant miners, one called it - ensured they were more likely to respond moderately and by the rulebook, rather than by the reflex of union solidarity.

Yard closes report centre

The National Reporting Centre, which during the miners' dispute handled the biggest movement of police in peace time, ended its year-long operation at 10am yesterday (Our Home Affairs Correspondent writes). But Kent was still having mutual aid and making its own arrangements. The centre, on the thirteenth floor of

THE WORKING MINERS

Today, for the first time in 16 months, the Nottinghamshire coalfield will be working at the weekend, pit deputies having decided to back the 27,000 miners who this week voted to end their overtime ban. CRAIG SETON takes a close look at the coalfield where miners worked on through the year-long strike.

So, when the NUM leadership failed to call a national ballot and stood by as flying pickets from Yorkshire crossed the border before the Nottinghamshire men held their own ballot, local fury triggered that

"traditionally moderate" response. It blew a gaping hole in the miners' strike.

Nottinghamshire's new NUM leaders insist that their men would have abided by a national ballot vote in favour of strike action whatever the local verdict and would have walked out to a man. Such an action would have starved the vital Trent Valley power stations of coal and, they say, would have foreshortened the strike by many months. They call in evidence the solid support of Nottinghamshire men during the strikes of 1972 and 1974.

In the event, the Nottinghamshire miners, angered by violent picketing and intimidation, voted by 73 per cent to stay at work.

As the strike took hold in other areas, the Nottinghamshire men flooded to work, protected by a police operation that almost virtually ringed the country to stop mass picketing entering from outside. The controversial police tactics saw thousands of flying pickets turned back at the boundary.

The miners' union, Labour Party members and other groups attacked it as a government-inspired plot to keep the



Minority views: Nottinghamshire miners who stayed out.

Nottinghamshire pits open at all costs. They felt their belief was confirmed when magistrates imposed strict bail conditions.

The ramifications of Nottinghamshire defiance went much further. Within the coalfield was created a working miners' committee, initially, its members insist, to arrange compensation and support for miners whose property had been damaged by the intimidatory tactics of strikers.

Its influence spread. Working miners' groups in other areas sought advice and assistance. Legal actions were begun, and

multiplied, which were to attack the legal status of the strike, of picketing and the union's financial base. Eventually, an influential national working miners' committee was formed.

"Doc" Alan Griffin who established the National Mining Museum in Nottinghamshire and who is widely regarded as the historian of the industry, firmly believes that Nottinghamshire's traditional moderation can be traced back to the second half of the last century.

The centre of the developing coalfield was Hucknall, near Nottingham, then regarded as the most prosperous area in the

British coalfields. It attracted men from the west of the area and from Leicester and Warwickshire, miners who migrated in stable family groups in the footsteps of paternal, liberal-minded coal owners.

Mr Griffin said the influences in areas such as South Yorkshire were quite different. Greenfield sites were being developed, attracting men from all over the country. There was less stability and no great understanding between the owners and their men. He said: "These traditions stamped themselves on the character of the coalfields."

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