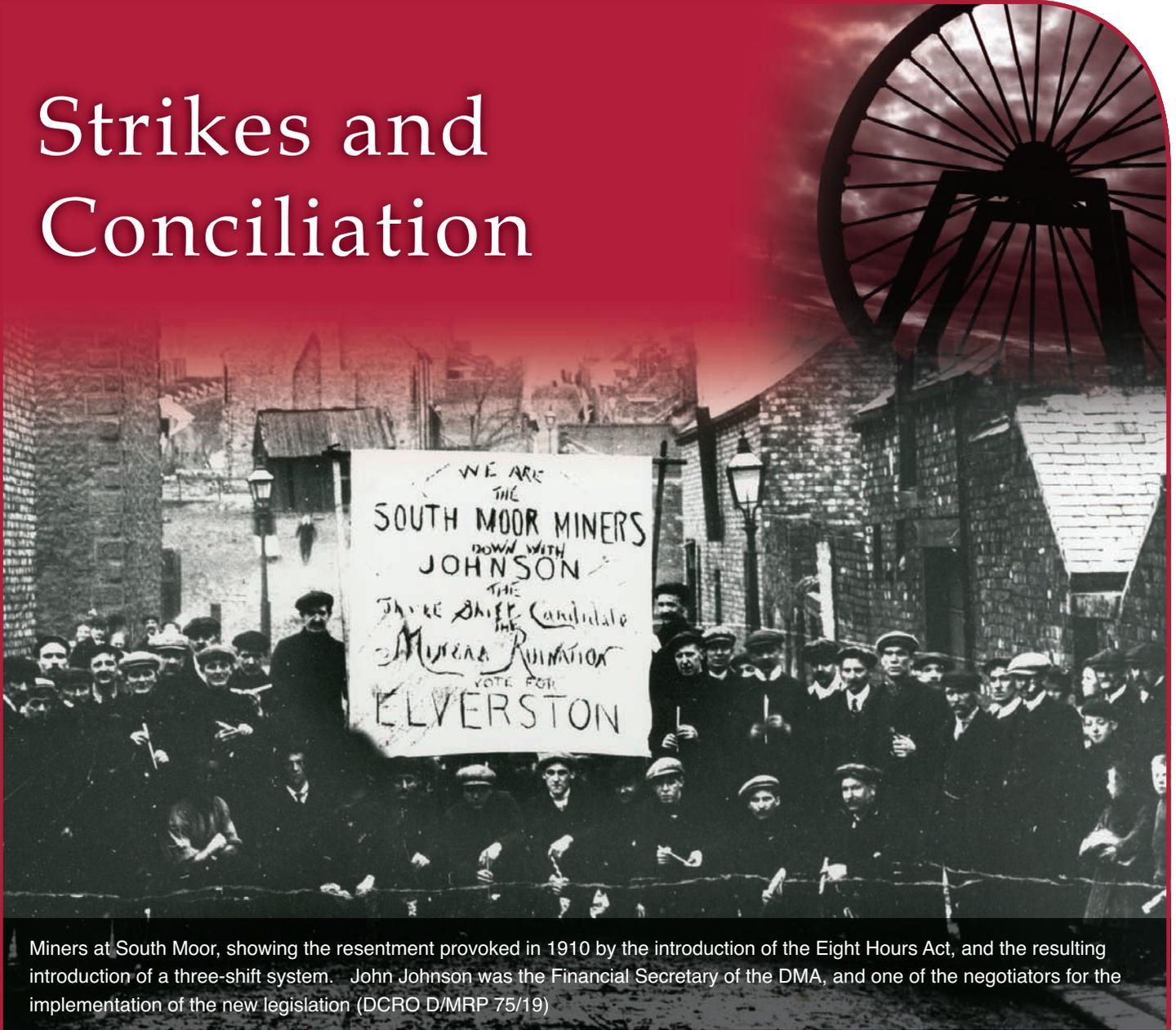


Strikes and Conciliation



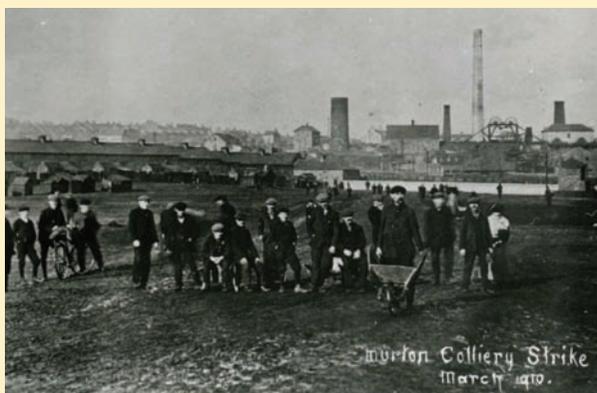
Miners at South Moor, showing the resentment provoked in 1910 by the introduction of the Eight Hours Act, and the resulting introduction of a three-shift system. John Johnson was the Financial Secretary of the DMA, and one of the negotiators for the implementation of the new legislation (DCRO D/MPR 75/19)

Strike, April – May 1879

The first sliding scale of wage regulation, based on the selling price of coal, was agreed in 1877. The coal owners ended the agreement in 1878 then demanded wage reductions of 20% (underground) and 12% (surface). This led to a county-wide strike organised by the DMA, after the union's offer of arbitration was rejected. The employers unilaterally reduced wages by 15% (underground) and 10% (surface), but eventual arbitration reduced these cuts to 10% and 8%.

Strike, March - June 1892 (The 'Twelve Weeks' strike)

From a peak in 1890 coal prices began to decline and the employers wanted a 10% reduction in wages. The DMA Executive Committee initially opposed a strike but the membership voted for action. The Durham miners received financial support from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, even though the area was not a member at that time. During the strike the employers increased their demands. Eventually arbitration, and the intervention of Bishop Westcott, resulted in a 10% reduction in wages and an undertaking to consider the establishment of a Conciliation Board.



Striking miners with their families at Murton, during the 1910 strike (DCRO D/CL 27/278 packet 58)

Strike, January – April 1910

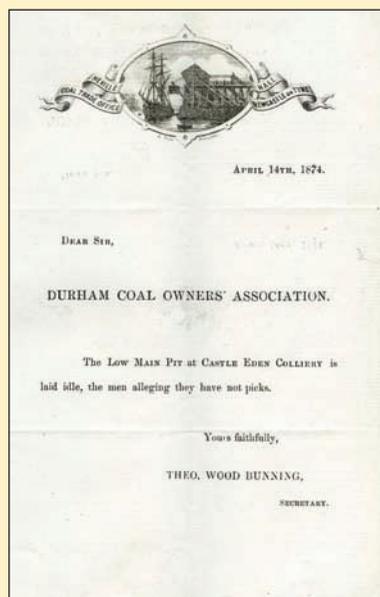
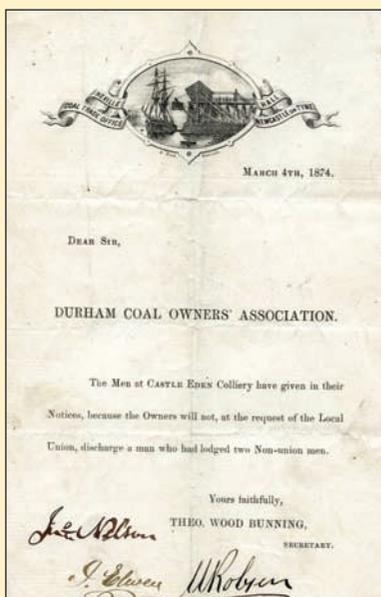
In 1908 Durham re-affiliated with the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. One of its aims was the Eight Hour Day. The Eight Hours Act, 1908, came into effect in Durham on 1 January 1910. Considerable disruption followed because the act allowed colliery owners to decide on the number of men and shifts needed. There was widespread antagonism to the DMA Executive members who had reached the agreement, culminating in a call for their resignation, but there was no coalfield-wide strike.

Strike, March –April 1912 (minimum wage strike)

The first national miners' strike was over a guaranteed minimum wage. Despite opposition by John Wilson, the DMA General Secretary, 67% of Durham miners voted in favour of the strike. The strike ended when the government brought in a Minimum Wage Bill against the wishes of the coal owners. The result was the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act, 1912, which provided for District Boards to settle minimum rates.

Strike, October – November 1920 (The 'Datum Line' strike)

The government, which still controlled the mines after the First World War, would not consider the nationalisation of coal, despite the Sankey Report recommendations of 1919. It also increased the selling price of coal, but refused to increase wages. The Prime Minister offered wage increases based on productivity increases (the 'datum line') but this was rejected by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Wage increases were eventually won when the National Union of Railwaymen threatened to shut down the railway network. Following this strike the Emergency Powers Act was passed, which gave wide-ranging powers to the government of the day. It was only used twice, during the 1921 and 1926 disputes.



Notifications from the Durham Coal Owners' Association of strikes in individual collieries (DCRO D/X 832/198 (3),(6), (11))