Strikes and Conciliation

Lock-out, April – July 1921
After the mines returned to private ownership in March 1921, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain pressed for a national standard wage. The owners' offer of local bargaining was refused and a lock-out began. The National Union of Railwaymen and Transport Workers initially supported the Federation but withdrew their support when the union rejected negotiations. The miners continued their action. Eventually both sides agreed on a National Wages Agreement with a national wages board, district boards and a short-term government subsidy of £10 million.

Strike, February – March 1974
The oil crisis in 1973 coincided with another attempt to increase wages. In breach of the government's wages policy, the NUM wanted weekly wages of £45 (power-loaders), £40 (other underground men) and £35 (surface workers). An overtime ban in the coal industry eventually resulted in a three-day week in December 1973 to conserve power. The miners' strike which followed led the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, to call a General Election on 28 February 1974. After the formation of Harold Wilson's Labour government the NUM accepted a settlement of £45, £36, and £32 respectively.

Strike, March 1984 – March 1985
This was not a pay dispute but was provoked by NCB plans for pit closures and cuts in production to match the reduced demand for coal. Collieries, steel works and power stations were all picketed and police reserves were brought in from non-mining areas. The strike ended after a year as increasing numbers of miners returned to work. Within ten years Durham's deep mining industry was no more. Vane Tempest, Easington and Westoe collieries all closed in 1993. Wearmouth, the final deep mine in the Durham coalfield closed in December 1993 and was demolished in 1994.

Byres Green and Binchester inhabitants digging for coal in the railway cutting south of Byres Green station, during the 1921 lock-out (DCRO D/X 779/157/14)

Miners at Birtley with bread baked in a communal oven built in the brickyard during the 1926 strike (DCRO D/MRP 137/1)

Fact Sheet distributed by the National Union of Mineworkers in 1984 (DCRO D/X 779/157/14)

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