

## Comments on Colliery Closures

### Ivor Brown, "SCMC Journal No.6"

The article on colliery closures by David Coxill in Annual Journal No.5 shows figures which do not give the conclusion claimed, ie that no political party can claim to have favoured the coal industry more than the other. The percentages given for each 10 year period do not in themselves give any indication of the above, even allowing for the fact that 8% has been omitted from the 1940s decade. There is also something wrong with the figure of 1,111 total mines since the NCB took over 1,400 mines (7 NCB mines closed in Shropshire alone in the 1940s).

Using David's figures, however, it can be calculated that 439 mines were closed under Labour administration while 672 were closed under the Conservatives. However, the Conservatives were in office for 33 years while Labour had 15 years. If this is taken into account then Labour closed an average of 29 mines per year and the Conservatives only 20.

To people in the mining industry, however, these figures are meaningless, they do not take into account mine sizes, expansion at other mines or new mines. A far better measure of any favour is average number of jobs lost per year under each administration. This can be shown from the following (dates are when changes of administration occurred) :-

<u>Years</u>	<u>Mining Jobs</u>	<u>Losses under Labour</u>	<u>Losses under Conservatives</u>
1947	728,841		
Labour			
1950	726,300	2,541	
Conservative			
1963	542,200		184,100
Labour			
1969	326,400	215,800	
Conservative			
1973	270,100		56,300
Labour			

1978	244,100	26,000	
Conservative			
1994	18,868	_____	<u>225,230</u>
Totals		<u>244,341</u>	<u>465,630</u>

Nearly twice as many jobs were lost during periods under Conservative control as under Labour but at an annual rate this becomes 16,289 per year under Labour and 14,110 per year under Conservatives. Not quite what I expected but I am prepared to accept David's conclusions.

With regard to Shropshire the position is set out below :-

<u>Years</u>	<u>Number of Mines</u>	<u>Closed under Labour</u>	<u>Closed under</u>
			<u>Conservatives</u>
1947	22 coal (5 fireclay)		
Labour		12	
1950	15		
Conservatives			9
1963	6		
Labour		3	
1969	3		
Conservatives			2
1973	1		
Labour		0	
1978	1		
Conservatives			1
1979	0		
Totals		<u>15</u>	<u>12</u>

Note - Ifton is not included in the figures but also closed under Labour in 1968.

Of the larger mines Grange (1952), Madeley (1967), Ifton (1968) and Highley (1969) all closed under Labour while Granville (1979) closed under the Conservatives. However, this does not make allowance for the "decision to close" process as this was made in some cases in the previous administration to that indicated.

In terms of persons employed, the misleading figures used by David are closely brought into focus when it is realised that employment in mining, for example, in Shropshire actually increased between 1948 and 1958 from 2,814 to 3,785. This is a 20% increase, despite the closure of well over half of the pits in the same period.

In very round figures, it would seem that about 2,500 jobs were lost under Labour and 1,000 under Conservatives.

On a related theme, the extract below is from the NCB's First Annual Report on NCB ownership.

The principal items are :

a) Collieries

There are over 1,400 which, with their stocks of products and stores, their plant and equipment - waterworks, power stations, etc - have vested in the Board. Of these, about 400 are "small mines" owned by the Board but operated by private concerns under licence from the Board.

b) Manufactured fuel and briquetting plants

The Board own 30 plants, of which 10 were not transferred under the Nationalisation Act but were bought from the Ministry of Fuel and Power.

c) Carbonisation, By-Product, and other Plants

These include 55 coke ovens which produce over two-fifths of the country's "hard coke" (ie other than gas coke); tar distillation plants; benzol recovery, sulphuric acid and pyrites recovery plants.

d) Brick works and Pipe works

The Board own 85 such works.

e) Land

Apart from the land on which the colliery buildings, sidings, etc stand, the Board own over 225,000 acres of farm land, freehold and leasehold; also sports grounds, undeveloped housing land, etc.

f) Houses

141,000 houses have passed to the Board of which 86,000 are freehold. In addition there are more than 2,000 farmhouses and agricultural cottages. Some colliery villages with their village halls, schools, etc are owned entirely by the Board.

g) Other Buildings

The Board own offices, shops, hotels, swimming baths, a cinema and a slaughter house.

h) Miscellaneous Assets

These vary from private railways, wharves and coal-selling depots to retail milk rounds, a holiday camp and a cycle track.