Introduction to “Damaged by Democracy: The National Union of Mineworkers and the 1984–85 Strike”

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Published online: 26 April 2011
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The 1984–85 strike of the National Union of Mineworkers' (NUM) was a pivotal event in the history of twentieth-century British industrial relations with the union suffering a decisive defeat in this work stoppage which garnered worldwide attention. At the time of the strike, the NUM was perceived to be one of the strongest unions in Great Britain after the NUM's 1974 strike brought down the Conservative government of Edward Heath. The union's loss in the 1984–85 work stoppage, however, marked the NUM's virtual destruction. Additionally, the crushing of the union enabled Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party to consolidate political and ideological control of the nation while removing any obstacles from the government's implementation of its free market program.

In this “Perspectives” Section article, David Wray, Senior Lecturer in the Division of Social Sciences at the University of Northumbria (United Kingdom) and Dr. David Allsop, Principal Lecturer in Human Resource Management at the Centre for Research in Employment Studies, University of Hertfordshire (United Kingdom), have penned an interesting, insightful and well-written essay on the 1984–85 miners' strike. Both authors bring an insider's perspective to this landmark labor dispute. Having left school at the age of 16, Mr. Wray began work in coalmining as an apprentice electrician. After having spent 24 years in the mining industry, being employed at various collieries in the Durham Coalfield, he lost his position following the conclusion of the 1984–85 strike. Similarly, Dr. Allsop possesses an industrial background having also spent some 13 years working in the British coal mining industry.

In this piece, the authors examine the tensions within the NUM that divided the union during the 1984–85 strike over the closing of various mines. In order to understand the dispute over the union's failure to conduct a national ballot to certify the yearlong work stoppage, the article provides a historical treatment of the development of this federally structured labor organization before the authors discuss how prior conflicts resulted in the union's structure leading to the creation of local as opposed to national solidarities.

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If any of the journal's readers would like to respond to essays published in the "Perspectives" Section or would like to write on any topics in the field of employee relations, please do not hesitate to contact me with your proposal. I welcome both practitioner-based and scholarly-based articles written from any one of a variety of theoretical perspectives. I hope that you enjoy this article and find it most illuminating.

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