

**Industry and Society: A Study of the Home Front in  
Barrow-in-Furness during the First World War**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

The thesis examines the case of Barrow-in-Furness through the period of the First World War. As a town dominated by one of the UK's most important armaments firms, Vickers, Barrow experienced the full force of industrial mobilisation and government intervention. In analysing the responses to these events, the thesis provides insights into their impact on a town and population dependent on industries stimulated by war.

Barrow had special problems arising from its geographical isolation and large munitions population. Vickers, the work force and the town at large were used to negotiating their own difficulties, but these were severely tested by the impact of war. Industrial relations in a heavily unionised but strategically important town were complicated by the different positions of Vickers, unions, shop stewards, rival government agencies, and the role of women, yet ultimately all parties found ways of working together. The knock-on effects of the war on industry were extensive and far reaching. The life of the town was intimately bound up with the war industry and the changes in war requirements ultimately affected its population through housing, health and welfare and the need for utilities and transport. Addressing these difficulties posed some of the greatest problems. Political implications of wartime in a working-class town led to a split in the Labour Party and ultimately the return of a Tory in 1919.

While historians have considered how the nation met the demands of the war, a focus on the regionality of the home front highlights more precisely the impact on specific places and how the war effort was sustained in practice. The experience of the town of Barrow throughout the period of the First World War is therefore invaluable for demonstrating the complexity and inter-relatedness of how the war affected people, industry and infrastructure on the home front.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	1
State Control and the Ministry of Munitions .....	2
Labour Relations, Unions and Organisation of Labour .....	5
Politics .....	6
Women and girls .....	9
Health and Welfare .....	11
Social Impact .....	16
CHAPTER 1: BARROW-IN-FURNESS BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR - ESTABLISHING THE INDUSTRIAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS .....	27
Introduction .....	27
Industrial Structure .....	28
Workers, Employers, Unions and Industrial Relations .....	38
Wages, Payment Schemes and Overtime .....	42
Disputes and the 48 Hour Week .....	45
Politics .....	49
Housing .....	54
Health and Leisure .....	58
Conclusions .....	59
CHAPTER 2: THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR .....	62
Introduction .....	62
The outbreak and first months of the war .....	63
New Attempts to Find Labour .....	73
Gun and Shell Production .....	80
Removing Restrictive Practices .....	85
The drink problem .....	87
Housing .....	92
Conclusions .....	96

CHAPTER 3: THE MOVE TO INCREASE OUTPUT AND ITS EFFECTS .....	99
Introduction .....	99
The Ministry of War Act, Munitions Tribunals and Leaving Certificates .....	100
Drink .....	109
Accommodation .....	112
Utilities .....	118
Transport and Trade .....	125
Sunday Labour .....	133
Conclusions .....	135
CHAPTER 4: THE INCREASE IN PRODUCTION AND THE CONFLICTING NEEDS OF ARMY AND INDUSTRY.....	138
Introduction.....	138
Increase in production and the problem of dilution .....	139
Army Recruitment and Substitution .....	145
Working Hours, Shift Systems and Women’s Unions .....	150
Wages .....	155
Health and Welfare .....	159
Conclusions .....	172
CHAPTER 5: 1917 UNREST .....	174
Introduction .....	174
Unrest and the Shop Stewards .....	175
The Commission on Unrest .....	183
Overcrowding and evictions .....	194
Housing and Billeting .....	202
Conclusions .....	208
CHAPTER 6: MEN OR MUNITIONS, DEMOBILISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION, 1918-1919 .....	210
Introduction .....	210
1918 Men or Munitions .....	210
Industrial Reconstruction .....	215
Demobilisation and Adjustments .....	219
Shorter working hours .....	225
Unrest .....	227
Health .....	231

Housing and Accommodation .....	234
Politics and the General Election .....	238
Conclusions .....	242
CONCLUSIONS .....	244
Appendix A	
Barrow's War Record .....	258
Appendix B	
Toluoul Production .....	259
Appendix C	
Post First World War Map of Vickers Works and Barrow Docks .....	260
References .....	261

## Tables and Figures

### Tables

Table 1 - Leading Shipyard Construction for the Royal Navy 1899-1914 .....	29
Table 2 - Engineering, Shipbuilding and Metal Trades Industrial Disputes 1911-1914 National Figures Known to the Board of Trade .....	46
Table 3 - Barrow Estimated Population Size 1911-1914 .....	57
Table 4 - Board of Trade Results for Vickers, Barrow to 31 January 1915 .....	76
Table 5 - Quarterly Increase in Numbers in the Barrow Armament Works .....	84
Table 6 - Electricity Statistics 1912 to 1920 .....	120
Table 7 - Local Water Stock and Usage .....	124
Table 8 - Furness Railway Wartime Traffic Figures .....	126
Table 9 - Furness Railway 'Passenger' Service Reductions .....	126
Table 10 - Change in Passenger Traffic 1916-17 (first three months only).....	123
Table 11 - Barrow Places of Entertainment 1916 .....	163
Table 12 - Corporation Estimate of Wartime Overcrowding 1917 .....	196
Table 13 - Barrow Housing 1912-1917 .....	196

### Figures

Figure 1 - Local Area Map .....	20
Figure 2 - Vickers 1914 Advert .....	30
Figure 3 - Population Density against Population for 1910 .....	57

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## Abbreviations

ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
BRO	Barrow Records Office
CAB	Cabinet
CASCAT	Cumbria Archives Catalogue
CBB	Central Billeting Board
CCB	Central Control (Liquor) Board
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
EEF	Engineering Employers Federation
EJTB	Engineering Joint Trades Board
FCC	Food Control Committee
FEC	Food Economy Committee
GL	General Labourers
HMWC	Health of Munitions Workers Committee
H of C	House of Commons
H of L	House of Lords
ILP	Independent Labour Party
KORL	Kings Own Royal Lancaster
LGB	Local Government Board
LNWR	London and North Western Railway
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
MoM	Ministry of Munitions
MP	Member of Parliament
MR	Midland Railway
NAUL	National Associated Union of Labour
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
NFWW	National Federation of Women Workers
NPHS	New Park Howitzer Shop
NSA	National Shipyard Agreement
OHMoM	Official History of the Ministry of Munitions
PBS	Premium Bonus System
REC	Railway Executive Committee
SEC	Shipbuilding and Engineering Committee
SEF	Shipbuilding Employers Federation
TB	Tuberculosis
TNT	Trinitrotoluene
WLL	Women's Labour League
WMV	War Munitions Volunteers
WTUL	Women's Trade Union League
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association



## INTRODUCTION

The First World War opened up a Home Front that stretched into all parts of British life and touched almost every citizen regardless of age, gender and class. The impact of the First World War on the Home Front has been much debated and widely interpreted but there is a lack of studies of the home front amongst the literature. This study looks at one particular place, the industrial town of Barrow-in-Furness and its people. From its geographical position, its peculiar situation and abnormal growth of population resulting from war work, Barrow provides a particularly valuable case study. With relatively few comprehensive studies of how national policies and organisations operated locally, this thesis can inform debate in what it can tell us about how broader matters concerning State control of industry played out in practice and the effects it had. The work is therefore particularly valuable in countering an overemphasis on national perspectives and important in what it can tell us about how broader matters played out in practice.

The following review of the literature on the home front, sets out the key themes, issues and debates considered by historians and will also serve as wider context to the specific study of Barrow. Works of originality and importance have been produced on a diversity of specific topics, social, political and cultural, in an attempt to understand the First World War as it affected Britain's civilians. Though this body of endeavour has vastly been outweighed by military histories, it has a long lineage. Post Second World War the literature was revitalized through the injection of fresh ideas and changing interpretations occasionally overturning familiar debates. There has been a tendency towards revisiting long-established debates, especially about the consequences of wartime developments in technology and change in industrial work practices and the wartime housing crisis and drink legislation. Furthermore examination has been made of the various aspects of increased and sustained munitions production essential for the war effort. Predominantly the literature mainly considers issues at a general level on a national scale while much less exists at a local level.

The following sections take the key themes in the historiography in turn to review the main lines of debate. Each section concludes with a brief indication of the line of argument to be taken in this thesis.

## State Control and the Ministry of Munitions

First it should be said that the Government was given the task of cajoling into acquiescence a population which had become accustomed to Free Trade, private enterprise and minimal government interference. It was only when the pressures of war were brought to bear that the Government gradually abandoned its laissez faire principles in favour of direct control. The goal was to fight a war whilst simultaneously preserving the living standards of civilians so as to uphold morale on the home front and in the factories needed to supply the military front. Bourne suggests that the nature of this interference was characteristic involving a series of ad hoc responses to specific problems. These were made of necessity and not through choice, there was no overall plan and no philosophy of action.<sup>1</sup>

The main area of focus is on the production of munitions and the upheavals created by a massive expansion of demand. The first objective of the war was to complete naval ships and submarines while providing naval ordnance for the Fleet. For the Army the supply of arms and ammunition was critical to the war effort and it was failure in this area, particular the shell shortages of 1915 which played a major part in the fall of the Asquith government. From the outset the need was seen to scale up production, enhance efficiency and reduce costs, which related to issues around the direct state control of industry, and of labour relations. On the formation of the coalition government, Lloyd George moved from the Exchequer to the newly formed Ministry of Munitions. Adams provides an account of Lloyd George and the history of the Ministry of Munitions and its administrative politics.<sup>2</sup> The study complements Dewar's early work explaining the transfer of responsibilities from the War Office to the Ministry.<sup>3</sup>

The Ministry's intention was to liberate the munitions industries from military direction and restrictions of established official routine, handing over the task of guiding and coordinating these developments to prominent businessmen familiar with industrial problems.<sup>4</sup> Hinton notes the larger firms loaned over ninety directors and managers to the Ministry for the duration of the war, many remaining on their own payrolls.<sup>5</sup> The influence of these large employers he says was directed against unions by employing the state to

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<sup>1</sup> Bourne, J. M., *Britain and The Great War 1914-1918* (London, Edward Arnold, 1989)

<sup>2</sup> Adams, R. J. Q., *Arms and the Wizard: Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-1916*, (Texas, 1978)

<sup>3</sup> *Official History of the Ministry of Munitions* 12 Volumes (1918-22); Dewar, G. A. B., *The Great Munitions Feat 1914-1918*, (London, 1921)

<sup>4</sup> Beveridge, W., *Power and Influence*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953)

<sup>5</sup> Hinton, J., *The First Shop Stewards'*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1973)

strengthen employer's positions. Davidson disputes this arguing the Ministry was formed to facilitate labour due to the bottleneck in the supply of munitions workers and failure to obtain maximum output from existing labour, thus measures lacked repressive intent.<sup>6</sup> Rubin contends while both interpretations possess a degree of merit, neither succeed in fully justifying the complexity of wartime labour control.<sup>7</sup> Rubin further argues that effort was directed towards achieving a controlled and disciplined workforce and a regulated network of employers to achieve increased output. Regarding Vickers, Todd argues their management took full advantage of the Munitions Act to force the re-adjustment of the workforce to new methods. Technology, Todd says, generated long-lasting trade union and employer confrontation, and throughout the war animosity continued to characterise industrial relations.<sup>8</sup>

The image of the Ministry as a smooth functioning organisation is misleading Simmonds argues, as it lacked central coordination.<sup>9</sup> Morley elaborates, noting 'there was no time to present the theoretical case for direct State action, controlled economy was not seen and planned as a whole, but grew piecemeal as required agreeing with Bourne.'<sup>10</sup> Pope believes the introduction of progressive controls accounted for their acceptance.<sup>11</sup> The first part of Morley's statement Marwick argues needs amending saying 'as war progressed more publicists put forward a theoretical case for direct state action and by 1916 there was an informed public opinion, of which a majority were in favour of such action'.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile DeGroot maintains Lloyd George's approach was neither systematic nor coordinated, reacting to perceived emergencies with appropriate alacrity, thus complicating labour relations and manpower issues.<sup>13</sup>

To boost productivity and recruitment Lloyd George imposed a number of controls which, falling short of industrial conscription, severely restricted munitions workers' rights. Throughout the war the crucial issue facing the Ministry was labour supply, it was not integration with business but continuity with existing institutions of labour control that was important. Wolfe points out the Labour Exchange was the basis without which wartime

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<sup>6</sup> Davison, R., *The Myth of the Servile State*, Labour History Society Bulletin, No. 29 (Autumn 1974)

<sup>7</sup> Rubin, G. R., *War Law and Labour*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987)

<sup>8</sup> Todd, N., *A History of Labour in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness, 1890-1920*, unpublished PhD, Lancaster University, 1976

<sup>9</sup> Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2012)

<sup>10</sup> Morgan, E. V., *Studies in Financial Policy, 1914-25*, (London, Macmillan, 1952)

<sup>11</sup> Pope, R., *War and Society in Britain, 1899-1948*, (Harlow, Longman, 1991)

<sup>12</sup> Marwick, A., *The Deluge, British Society and the First World War*, (London, Macmillan, 1965)

<sup>13</sup> DeGroot, G. J., *British Society in the Era of the Great War*, (London, Longman, 1996)

controls would have been impossible.<sup>14</sup> Initially production was channelled through the existing armaments industry, dominated by Vickers and Armstrong Whitworth on one side and government arsenals, dockyards and naval bases on the other. Scott says that huge shell contracts created a chaotic situation which Vickers accepted on the assumption essential labour would be secured.<sup>15</sup> Complaints by some manufacturers over supervision, inspection and restrictive union practices, Simmonds argues led to the introduction of National Factories where the whole process, including labour could be brought under one management.<sup>16</sup> However National Factories were required for the massive expansion of war material.

Analysing the Ministry's wartime record Wrigley concludes it was an innovatory department, receptive to new ideas and a vital force in securing the nation's logistics supplies, of which Adams agrees.<sup>17</sup> Dewar contends the munitions feat was a lesson to peacetime industry by example of changed production methods using economised labour and resources.<sup>18</sup> What is clear, DeGroot maintains, is Lloyd George changed established labour practices to maximise output, driving industry to exhaustion causing the need for careful handling for the rest of the war.<sup>19</sup> Van Emden adds with the relaxing of Home Office rules governing factory work, long hours, shift-work and shorter mealtimes became the norm.<sup>20</sup> However, the retreat of government at the end of the war reverted much of industry to its pre-war condition, an issue central to the debate about the permanency of war induced change.

One of the central factors in this study is the nature of Barrow's industrial and geographical position that made the relationships between the local and central powers particularly important. The main parties, Vickers and Unions, the Admiralty, Ministry of Munitions and other government bodies largely concluded that it was better if there was self-regulation. Despite the role of the State, which often caused more problems than it solved, it will be argued that the town mostly sorted out its own difficulties.

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<sup>14</sup> Wolfe, H., *Labour Supply and Regulation*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923)

<sup>15</sup> Scott, J. D., *Vickers a History*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1962)

<sup>16</sup> Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*

<sup>17</sup> Wrigley, C. J., The Ministry-of-Munitions an innovatory department, in Burke, K., (ed.), *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919*, (London, 1978); Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*

<sup>18</sup> Dewar, *The Great Munitions Feat*

<sup>19</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, (New York, 1996)

<sup>20</sup> Van Emden, R., Humphries, S., *All Quiet on the Home Front: An Oral History of Life in Britain During the First World War*, (London, Headline, 2004)

## Labour Relations, Unions and Organisation of Labour

With regard to organised labour, the co-operation and identification of the trade union leadership with both employers and the State, together with their acting within narrow constitutional limits severely restricted the scope of industrial conflict. As a result, Hinton argues the official leadership failed to defend the interests of its rank and file in the face of tightening controls, becoming increasingly unrepresentative.<sup>21</sup> The rift was heightened by government policy seeking to strengthen the leadership by refusing to negotiate with unofficial local bodies. This ignored traditions of local collective bargaining and existing workshop organisation which had developed in some industries from the late nineteenth century. Hinton further argues national (and some local) leadership sought to use collective bargaining to increase their own power and authority, becoming peace agents and negotiators rather than organisers and leaders.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Cronin identifies a tendency for trade union leadership to become a caste in its own right with vested interests, increasingly distrusted and unable to control mounting unrest, stimulating the growth of an independent rank and file movement as the true representatives of labour interests under leadership of the shop stewards.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed Hyman describes the shop stewards as standing in the front line of resistance to industrial compulsion as a result of the wartime extension of national collective bargaining and rank and file independence driving the struggle for job control down to the workplace.<sup>24</sup> However rank and file militancy assumed different characteristics according to local conditions and at Barrow, Hinton argues an independent workers' committee failed to emerge during the war, and as a consequence the revolutionary left lacked real leadership remaining relatively isolated and powerless. This pattern however does not emerge in Todd's study of the development of Barrow's labour movement, who asserts they became a power of some significance during the war years.<sup>25</sup>

Interpretations of the extent and nature of change to class structure and social perceptions are diverse. McKibbin asserts middle-class perceptions of the working-classes

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<sup>21</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards*

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-79*, (London, Harper Collins, 1984)

<sup>24</sup> Hyman, R., Rank and File Movements and Workplace Organisation 1914-1939 in Wrigley, C. J., (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations 1914-1939* (Aldershot, Gregg Revivals 1993)

<sup>25</sup> Todd, *A History of labour*

were shaped by powerful and often hostile stereotypes.<sup>26</sup> Winter argues middle-class assumptions about the poor particularly that their condition was the product of weakness of character, was undermined by the visible effects of higher wartime earnings. McKibbin maintains the severity of the middle-class wartime experience simultaneously increased their hostility towards the more affluent working-classes.<sup>27</sup> This, together with Cannadine's assertion that the war undermined the hierarchic view of society and working-class respect seems to suggest considerable social antagonism was stimulated.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to longer term social change, Kirk argues whilst enduring divisions were created by wage differentials, there was a parallel tendency towards greater uniformity as a result of the commercialisation of life and leisure patterns, strong attachments to family and neighbourhood networks, together with technological change in the workplace.<sup>29</sup> Whilst McKibbin argues technical developments reduced the proportion of skilled workers to the semi-skilled, Waites contends change resulted in the emergence of new skills rather than a reduction in the number of skilled workers.<sup>30</sup> A body of opinion however argues against greater working-class homogenisation Reid claims the narrowing of pay differentials between skilled and unskilled, and the tendency towards social homogenisation have been exaggerated, a view supported by Cronin, who argues distinctions were blurred rather than reduced.<sup>31</sup> Griffiths goes further, and argues internal working-class hierarchies were becoming increasingly important and the strength of influences outside the workplace was undiminished.<sup>32</sup>

When we come to consider labour relations in Barrow, for the most part, they were maintained through self-regulation. The town was a strong union place where all men were well organized, the shop stewards' movement however failed to evolve into a permanent and effective organisation as on the Clyde and at Sheffield. According to this interpretation, Barrow's revolutionaries remained isolated and the Shop Stewards Movement never

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<sup>26</sup> McKibbin, R., *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990)

<sup>27</sup> McKibbin, R., *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000 edition)

<sup>28</sup> Cannadine, D., *Class in Britain*, (London, Penguin Books, 2000)

<sup>29</sup> Kirk, N., *Labour and Society in Britain*

<sup>30</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*; Waites, B., 'The Effect of the First World War on Class and Status in England, 1910-20', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976)

<sup>31</sup> Reid, *World War One*

<sup>32</sup> Cronin, *Labour and Society*; Griffiths, T., *The Lancashire Working Classes c. 1880-1930*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001)

achieved a position of mass leadership. However, a considerably more complex situation existed suggesting their power and influence should not be underestimated.

## Politics

The majority of historians have viewed politics from a national standpoint rather than at a local level. With its well organised labour movement militant trade union tradition and predominantly working-class population Barrow provides a valuable case for the analysis of political change. Todd's study is therefore of considerable importance regarding the rise of the Barrow labour movement and its development.<sup>33</sup> In pre-war Britain the Labour Party along with the trades' union movement truncated the growth of political socialism, and so tied Labour to the material interests of the working-class, more than to a radical and reforming ideology. In 1914, Labour was split between pro-war and anti-war supporters, but according to Pugh the former far outnumbered the latter.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the National Executive Committee voted in support of the war, although the Independent Labour Party (ILP), remained opposed.

Political matters are stressed in their relation to social trends with particular emphasis on the Labour movement. Questions of political identity and allegiance, and the Left's rise have been subjected to various interpretations. Whilst some historians describe the rise of the Labour Party as the inevitable consequences of social and economic changes, others hold the war to be a significant influential factor.<sup>35</sup> Wartime says Pugh generated material grievances, and such issues reinforced the conviction of the movement to concentrate on its influence to defend working-class conditions.<sup>36</sup> Kirk describes the labour movement and its institutions as consolidated by the War.<sup>37</sup> The War accelerated, if it did not cause the political advance of the Labour Movement. It is argued by McKibbin and Wrigley that trade union membership increased and expansion of the engineering industries at 'established places' strengthened the unions making negotiations with them imperative.<sup>38</sup> Some historians

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<sup>33</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*

<sup>34</sup> Pugh, M., *Speak for Britain, A New History of the Labour Party*, (London, Vintage, 2011)

<sup>35</sup> Butler, D., Stokes, D., *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice*, (London, Macmillan, 1969); Dangerfield, G., *The Strange Death of Liberal England 1914-1918*, (New York, Perigee Trade, 1961); Pelling, H., *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press)

<sup>36</sup> Pugh, M., *Speak for Britain, A New History of the Labour Party*, (London, Vintage, 1911)

<sup>37</sup> Kirk, N., *Labour and Society in Britain and the USA Vol. 2 – Challenge and Accommodation, 1850-1939*, (Aldershot, Scholar Press, 1994),

<sup>38</sup> McKibbin, R., *The Evolution of The Labour Party 1910-1924* (Oxford, 1974); Wrigley, C. J., *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, (Brighton, 1976)

describe the rise of the Labour Party as the inevitable consequence of social and economic changes, others hold the war to be a significant influential factor.<sup>39</sup>

Wilson argues the inadequacies of the traditional governing classes and realization of the possible contribution of working-class leaders encouraged Labour activists to approach the post-war period with optimism and enthusiasm.<sup>40</sup> While much of Labour's advance can be ascribed to an increase in candidates and a changed-electorate, Pope says the 1918 Conservative-dominated coalition victory was largely due to their intent to restore the pre-war economic and social order and divisions in the left.<sup>41</sup> There is consensus that Labour was helped by Liberal Party disorganisation following the establishment of Lloyd George's government. Although there is little evidence that war service changed attitudes towards women's political rights, their votes in some areas proved crucial to the post-war election. Labour's gains in local elections further underlined their increased strength. Although the work of local authorities during the First World War are largely overlooked they would play an important part in support of industry and the population.

Politics in Barrow were based on local interests and the outcomes were not always as would be expected, particularly at the end of the war when a political fall-out between the far left pacifists and those supporting the government in full prosecution of the war was seen. With regard to local government, although the town was initially ruled by an industrial elite with a greater interest in new industrial projects than welfare, representatives of middle-class professional, trading and business interests filtered onto the town council. Nevertheless, at the outbreak of the First World War, the prevailing attitudes remained those of the nineteenth century, although the labour movement, strong and well-organised, was steadily increasing its municipal representation. Although the split in the Barrow Labour Party caused an improbable outcome at the 1918 General Election, it will be contended that municipal politics provided the main arena for the political struggles of this period.

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<sup>39</sup> Butler, D., Stokes, D., *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice* (London, Macmillan, 1969); Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*; Pelling, H., *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965)

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, T., *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935*, (London, 1968)

<sup>41</sup> Pope, *War and Society*



## Women and girls

There is a thriving literature on women's history and the issue of the change or lack of change in gender roles. A great deal of attention has focussed on the role of women, with most writers on women's experience sceptical as to the extent of change seeing the war as leading to further debate rather than any real progress. Concerning the early part of the war the women's socialist reformers Elizabeth Hutchins and Clementina Black addressed the question of how far women's employment was of value to themselves, their families, economy and society.<sup>42</sup> More recently social and political historians saw the war as liberating for women because of their novel roles, their partial right to vote and greater assertiveness, all of which it was contended had lasting impact. Marwick takes the improver's view seeing the war as a positive force Mitchell following on Marwick puts forward a similar view while Abrams says women became independent and self-reliant because they were required, or allowed to be.<sup>43</sup> While some writers suggest management in the home had always been a female prerogative others stress the liberating effect of such responsibilities.<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Roberts adds that many women worked because of financial needs, but the majority still saw their place in the home.<sup>45</sup>

Revisionists argue the war changed nothing for women, to which Marwick notes male prejudices needed to change before women's rights and social status were recognized and improved.<sup>46</sup> Those taking this position argued the war was a victory for patriarchy, which resisted the challenge of women performing a multitude of different roles and tasks by hardening the distinction between men and women's work.<sup>47</sup> Braybon examines men's attitudes towards women war workers, presenting an overall picture of the shifts in women's employment.<sup>48</sup> She considers that women's role in the labour force could not be separated from their primary role as wives and mothers, underscoring the power of patriarchy. Elsewhere she emphasizes the positive liberating aspects of the war for women.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Hutchins, B. L., *Women in Modern Industry* (London, G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1915); Black, C., *Married Women's Work*, (London, Virago, 1983 new edition)

<sup>43</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*; Mitchell, D. J., *Women on the Warpath, The Story of the Women of the First World War*, (London, Jonathan Cape, 1966); Abrams, P. The Failure of Social Reform 1918-1920, *Past and Present*, No.24, 1963

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, T., *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War 1914-18*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989); Roberts, R., *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century*, (London, Penguin, reprinted 1990)

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, E. A. M., *Women's Work: 1840-1940*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995)

<sup>46</sup> Marwick, *Women at War*

<sup>47</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*; Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*; Roberts, *The Classic Slum*

<sup>48</sup> Braybon, G., *Women Workers in the First World War*, (London, Routledge, 1989)

<sup>49</sup> Braybon, G., Summerfield, P., *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, (London, Pandora, 1987)

Underlying this debate are common assumptions that the war was a powerful force bearing on women's roles and women's attitudes. Thom focusing on women workers in London argues the extent to which women's employment and experiences were affected by their wartime jobs was limited.<sup>50</sup> What changed about women's work during the war, she suggests, is how government organized and represented it. Thom identifies women workers in relation to men and their wartime employment as 'for the duration'. Women were 'meantime' workers Macarthur concludes pre-war they worked between school and marriage; in war they were workers for the duration.<sup>51</sup> It was thus representations of women's work rather than diversity of jobs that informed public policy and debate.

The majority of studies addressing women's work do not formally distinguish munitions workers from other female workers. Woollacott moves beyond previous debates, to look at what was of significance to women as munitions workers' viewing their lives from 'their perspective'.<sup>52</sup> Differing opinions exist regarding women's wartime gains, depending on whether a historian is optimistic or pessimistic. There is some consensus that gaining the vote was a success, not a failure, Pugh has doubts, describing the process as calculated to exclude enough women to ensure they were a minority.<sup>53</sup> Robb believes there was a deeper meaning to the war for many women; some being politicized through union membership, anger at demobilization and interaction with middle-class factory officials.<sup>54</sup> Simmonds succinctly states 'in the immediate post-war period the emancipation culture was the prerogative of a fortunate few'.<sup>55</sup>

Woollacott argues the war acted as a catalyst for change, providing awareness that would bring women's economic and social status closer to men's. Braybon disagrees saying the extent of women's war work was exaggerated, as at the end of hostilities they returned home or went back to traditional pre-war jobs. She emphasises as the munitions industries were closed down women were conspired against limiting any economic war gains.<sup>56</sup> Robbins suggests that there was an expectation amongst women that their war work was a temporary measure, and this probably suited many women who wanted to return 'to normal' as soon as

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<sup>50</sup> Thom, D., *Nice Girls and Rude Girls, Women Workers in World War 1*, (London, Tauris, 2000 edition)

<sup>51</sup> Thom, *Nice Girls*, op cit., p. 57

<sup>52</sup> Woollacott, A., *On Her Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*, (London, University of California Press, 1994)

<sup>53</sup> Pugh, M. D., *Politicians and the Women's Vote 1914-1918*, *History, Journal of the Historical Association*, Vol. 59, Issue 197, October 1974, pp. 358-374

<sup>54</sup> Robb, G., *British Culture and the First World War*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002)

<sup>55</sup> Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*

<sup>56</sup> Braybon, *Women Workers*

possible.<sup>57</sup> Alternatively, Downs contends, 'numbers' of women emerged from munitions industries ideally suited to mass production.<sup>58</sup> Thom and Braybon both agree that Edwardian social reform debates fashioned policies towards women workers, adding that categorizing women's wartime labour determined their future. Wightman consolidates this saying while new industries allowed standardisation, trades producing ships and heavy guns prevented repetitive production using semi-skilled machinists.<sup>59</sup>

An important aspect of working-class Barrow was the limited amount of waged employment open to women, and as a result, the proportion of women in the town's workforce was small and below the national average. The dearth of work for married women further reduced the earning capacity of many working-class families. The First World War however brought unprecedented opportunities for women, chiefly in the production of shells. With the arrival of thousands of predominantly single females in Barrow came the problems of management, wages, accommodation, health and welfare, and unwittingly in an attempt to introduce extended dilution, unrest. It will be argued that union strength was a key factor in the question of dilution, determining how far its expansion was allowed into other areas of engineering and the shipyard. Consequently upon the demobilisation of women, and with heavy industries remaining the chief employers, there was little change to Barrow's occupational structure and therefore women once again represented a small minority of the workforce.

## **Health and Welfare**

In response to matters affecting personal health and efficiency in the factory the Health of Munitions Workers Committee (HMWC) was established.<sup>60</sup> Government's approach however was mainly bounded by women's physical limitations, the double burden of industry and family life, and as producers of the next generation. Harrison argued that the primary objective of state intervention was to ensure social control and reproductive health; consequently married women were targeted, despite the predominance of young unmarried

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<sup>57</sup> Robbins, K., *The First World War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985)

<sup>58</sup> Downs, L. L., *Manufacturing Equality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries 1914-1939*, (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1995)

<sup>59</sup> Wightman, C., *More than Munitions: Women, Work and the Engineering Industries, 1900–1950*, (London, Longman, 1999)

<sup>60</sup> Whiteside, N., 'Industrial Welfare and Labour Relations in Britain at the Time of the First World War', *International Review of Social History* 5 (1980)

women in the workforce.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Malone characterized the legislative restriction of women's work, prompted by the press and enacted through the dangerous trade's legislation, as a policy of foetal protection which sought first and foremost to preserve women's reproductive health.<sup>62</sup> Harrison and Malone's research supports a larger historiography which argues women's health became an issue of State concern tangentially through the development of maternal and child welfare policies.<sup>63</sup>

At a time when the economic labour of young wage earners, particularly young women took on new significance the need for supervision was essential. Marwick points to juveniles in munitions factories earning from £1 to £2 per week.<sup>64</sup> For factory work undertaken by girl workers there were fears it could exert 'a damaging influence on health, mind and morals'.<sup>65</sup> Hendrick's analysis of the male youth problem suggests the concerns he identified associated with young working-class men largely applied to young working-class women.<sup>66</sup> While most studies explore the effects of war work on women there was concern about the impact of industrial work on the health of boy labourers. A boys' journal warned amidst war production demands, 'the boy was in danger of being overlooked as a future workman, citizen and father' and expressed concerns about boys' low morale and juvenile crime.<sup>67</sup>

The HMWC made far reaching recommendations on welfare supervision, its findings being encapsulated in two reports and a series of memoranda.<sup>68</sup> Records of the Factory Inspectorate, meanwhile, provide snapshots of isolated examples of welfare work and indicate how lady factory inspectors urged the amelioration of workplace conditions to promote health amongst working women. Independent-minded women however were

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<sup>61</sup> Harrison, B., *Not Only The 'Dangerous Trades': Women's Work and Health in Britain, 1880–1914*, (London, Taylor and Francis, 1996); Harrison B., 'Women and Health', in Purvis, J., (ed.), *Women's History: Britain, 1850–1945*, (London, Routledge, 2000)

<sup>62</sup> Malone, C., *Women's Bodies and Dangerous Trades in England, 1880–1914*, (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2003)

<sup>63</sup> Lewis, J., *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England 1900–1939*, (London, Croom Helm, 1980); Dwork, D., *War is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England 1898–1918* (London, Tavistock Publications, 1989)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Dyhouse, C., *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1981)

<sup>66</sup> Hendrick, H., *Images of Youth: Age, Class and the Male Youth Problem, 1880–1920*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990)

<sup>67</sup> *Boys' Welfare Journal*, 1 (1918)

<sup>68</sup> Ministry of Munitions, *Health of Munitions Workers Committee Interim Report: Industrial Efficiency and Fatigue*, 1917; Ministry of Munitions, *Health of Munitions Workers Committee Final Report*, 1918. Individual memoranda: *Welfare Supervision, Industrial Canteens; Employment of Women; Industrial Fatigue and its Causes; Investigation of Workers' Food and Suggestions as to Dietary* (Leonard E. Hill, FRS); *Juvenile Employment and Washing Facilities and Baths*. Handbook for managers and supervisors: Ministry of Munitions, *Health of the Munitions Worker: Handbook Prepared by the Health of Munitions Workers Committee* (London, 1917)

frequently resentful of welfare supervision, seen as a paternalist attempt to maintain their efficiency as units of labour in the sum of production. Welfare, observed Woollacott was an area of professional employment for middle-class women, although 'what it did for the women was another matter'.<sup>69</sup>

Important as the morale and efficiency of the labour force was, there was the long term problem of loss of life due to the war consequently the preservation of the rising generation became important. According to Marwick this had nothing to do with the desire to make good the loss of life but was a consequence of the heavy demand for labour.<sup>70</sup> To Braybon the war was a time of great potential, offering an opportunity to make industrial work enhance health generally.<sup>71</sup> Winter demonstrates an important effect of the war was the elimination of the worst aspects of urban poverty.<sup>72</sup> Paradoxically, despite a nationwide improvement in health and life expectancy Winter argues movement of rural dwellers to urban areas, long hours in industry and deteriorating housing conditions increased respiratory diseases, particularly amongst women.<sup>73</sup> Harris adds, although female health generally improved, death rates for women, mainly of working age, rose during the war.<sup>74</sup> Bryder challenges many of Winter's assumptions.<sup>75</sup> Additional to a general rise in living standards, she stresses the importance of improvements in the quality of food in raising standards of nutrition, arguing Winter's assertion that nutrition had little influence on the incidence of TB should be regarded with suspicion.

Early in the war it became clear there was a need to constrain and regulate drinking habits. The first step taken under the Defence of the Realm Act was to prohibit the carrying of alcohol in dockyards and restrict opening hours in naval and military areas, Marwick notes this regulation was purely military in purpose and soon superseded.<sup>76</sup> In civil areas, the Intoxicating Liquor (Temporary Restriction) Order was passed to maintain good order and suppress drunkenness allowing local powers to limit opening hours. Following investigations into bad time-keeping in the shipbuilding, munitions and transport areas further prohibitive

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<sup>69</sup> Woollacott, A., *On her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*, (London, University of California Press, 1994)

<sup>70</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*

<sup>71</sup> Braybon, *Women Workers*

<sup>72</sup> Winter, *The Great War*

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Harris, B., 'The Demographic Impact of the First World War: An Anthropometric Perspective', *Journal for the Society for the Historical Research of Medicine* 6 (1993)

<sup>75</sup> Bryder, L., 'The First World War: Healthy of Hungry?', *Historical Workshop Journal* (1987) 24(1)

<sup>76</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*

steps were taken through increasing prices, decreasing potency, reducing output and introducing taxation and restrictions on spirit sales.

During the war and its immediate aftermath, three works were produced about the Central Control (Liquor) Board (CCB) and the drink problem.<sup>77</sup> The Reverend Carter, a teetotaler, yet not a total prohibitionist, argued the CCB was essential because drink impaired industrial efficiency leading to loss of life abroad. Carter's appraisal of the CCB's performance calls into question his assessment, especially as members of the board co-wrote and edited his work. Nonetheless his account offers valuable factual information. Less tainted by association or participation in government agencies is Carver's work which provides a comparative piece on the subject. Carver concurred with Carter and D'Aberon the CCB Chairman that optimisation of national efficiency and prevention of waste were prime motives behind drink legislation. The social reformer Arthur Shadwell, like D'Aberon believed drink regulations were responsible for a reduction in consumption, since elements of the community particularly the working-class were incapable of exerting self-control. These contemporary accounts however were produced for a distinct political agenda relying on the restricted resources available.

The CCB has been subjected to modern historical research. Rose argued the Board provides a demonstration of how control of an important and sensitive area of social life in wartime was carried out in a positive and purposeful fashion.<sup>78</sup> While providing a valuable account on this aspect of the Board's success, the article is limited in scope. Gutze carried out an ambitious review of the progressive nature of pub reformers, underlining the reforms taken in Carlisle.<sup>79</sup> He argues that a transatlantic progressive movement emerged heavily influencing the course of alcohol reform in Britain. Jennings and Nichols also discuss the Board's work in historical reviews of the drink question.<sup>80</sup> Duncan in his monograph describes the controversies surrounding the CCB's establishment, its successes and failures and how, once hostilities ceased, it was seen as an illiberal body whose reason for being had passed. In

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<sup>77</sup> Carter, H., *The Control of the Drink Trade: A Contribution to National Efficiency*, (London, Longman, Green and Co., 1918); Carver, T. N., *Government Control of the Liquor Business in Great Britain and the United States*, (New York, 1919); Shadwell, A., *Drink in 1914-22: A Lesson in Control*, (London, Longmans Green and Co., 1923)

<sup>78</sup> Rose, M. E., *The Success of Social Reform: The CCB (Liquor Traffic) 1915-21* in Foot, M. R. D. (ed.), *War and Society*, (London, 1973)

<sup>79</sup> Gutzke, D. W., *Pubs and Progressives: Reinventing the Public House in England 1896-1960*, (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2006)

<sup>80</sup> Jennings, P., *The Local: A History of the English Pub*, (London, Tempus, 2007); Nicholls, J., *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009)

his broad study, notably on political aspects of the drink question, Greenaway argued the moral framing of Victorian temperance mutated into a dialogue on industrial efficiency once the war broke out.<sup>81</sup> Duncan adds to this observation while demonstrating 'efficiency' and morality were never totally separate concepts. Duncan's central thesis is that by promoting temperance the CCB was engaged in an unwarranted attack on working-class culture. This underplays the social diversity of the temperance movement and the strong socialist wing of temperance agitation and the repeated claims by middle-class brewers that in protecting their trade they were defending the working man in the face of reformist zeal.<sup>82</sup> There was a beneficial result as convictions for drunkenness fell and the fact the reduction was apparent amongst women as well as men suggests decline was not only a consequence of the absence of men on military service. Elizabeth Roberts notes the decrease in working-class drinking made it more socially acceptable for respectable women to drink with their husbands.<sup>83</sup> Roberts points to the cinema as an alternative to the pubs and music halls with their disreputable reputations of which women took advantage.<sup>84</sup>

Disruption not only took the form of the curtailment of employment and social liberties but the interruption of normal infrastructure development, including housing. Marwick makes the broad statement that bad and inadequate housing was a serious cancer and became worse in the First World War.<sup>85</sup> Yet this was not always the case. While acknowledging there were inadequate levels of accommodation, model towns like Barrow for example had high housing standards. Before the war there was a shortage of housing and the enormous influx of workers into munitions areas imposed further strain creating billeting shortages, overcrowding and increased rents. As the building of workers' housing became totally uneconomical the need to house munitions workers forced the Ministry of Munitions into limited house-building and the provision of hostels; alternatively government subsidies were made available to local authorities or private firms.

The war brought a slackening in the activities of Local Government Board (LGB) Inspectors, rent controls and a response in the form of rent strikes and unrest, while building

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<sup>81</sup> Greenaway, J., *Drink and British Politics since 1830: A History of the Drink Question in England*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009)

<sup>82</sup> Duncan, R., *Pubs and Patriots: The Drink Crisis in Britain during World War One*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013)

<sup>83</sup> Roberts, E. A. M., *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1984)

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*

costs and interest rates increased. The disturbances on Clydeside as described by Hinton are the best known outcome of a domestic crisis exacerbated by the war.<sup>86</sup> Swenarton however says that smaller places experienced greater pressures.<sup>87</sup> Englander also argues the introduction of rent control represented the conjunction and culmination of several pre-war struggles and the growth of tenant militancy presented an added dimension to labour unrest.<sup>88</sup> In the face of evidence that industrial unrest in some areas was linked to housing shortage, the government offered to build temporary and later permanent housing.<sup>89</sup> The State however only intervened when inadequacy of housing had a direct relation to unrest and consequently war production. Swenarton says during the war housing policy announcements were used by the government as a pawn in its complex relationship with labour.<sup>90</sup> In the wake of the Armistice, the 'homes fit for heroes' campaign was adopted as the major weapon of the state on which it was believed, the future of social order depended.<sup>91</sup> In both cases government action was determined less by housing *per se*, than by the uses to which housing could be put for wider political and ideological ends.

In Barrow formal health and welfare provision may only have reached a limited number. Much attention has been paid to women workers in the production of shells regarding health and welfare but little given to the men in the foundries, workshops and shipyards where conditions were far worse. While women's employment remained constant in the munitions shops, men's was variable. This was largely caused by a shortage of manpower, longer working periods and the loss of young fit men to the military only to be replaced by older, unfit and less efficient men. Conditions of housing and accommodation affected almost everyone. Increasing discontent caused the Government to set up a Commission of Enquiry which identified poor housing as the major cause of unrest. As a result, the Ministry of Munitions embarked on a housing programme to relieve pressure on housing stock and defuse the industrial and social crisis, but this may be regarded less as a welfare measure than a compelling necessity. The wider decline of working and living

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<sup>86</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards*

<sup>87</sup> Swenarton, M., *Building the New Jerusalem: Architecture, Housing and Politics 1900-1930*, (Bracknell, IHS BRE Press, 2008)

<sup>88</sup> Englander, D., *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain 1838-1918*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983)

<sup>89</sup> Gilbert, B. B., *British Social Policy 1914-1939*, (London, Batsford, 1970); Swenarton, M., *Homes Fit for Heroes*, (London, Heinman, 1981)

<sup>90</sup> Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes*

<sup>91</sup> Burnett, J. *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970*, (London, Methuen, 1980)



conditions caused by the increase in the production of munitions it will be argued, was not given enough attention by the responsible government departments until unrest threatened.

### **Social Impact**

The social impact of the war has received considerable attention and been subjected to much debate, the diversity of society making generalisations difficult to sustain. Whilst some assert the war changed everything it touched, its greatest impact being on the working-classes and their relationship to the rest of society, others maintain the war bolstered rather than undermined pre-war social reforms.<sup>92</sup> Marwick, saw war as a stimulus for social change, asserting it served to activate processes to transform some aspects of society, although not necessarily for the long-term and not always beneficially.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, the disruptive and destructive impact of war can stimulate rebuilding and generate new patterns of behaviour and attitudes whilst testing a nation's institutions needing to adapt to war needs. Further Marwick argues the greater the population participating in the war effort, the greater impetus for social reform and gains for under-privileged groups.

Reid supports Marwick's view, arguing legislative and political change resulted from the need for stable industrial relations, which strengthened organised labour and generated higher incomes, better living standards and improved health. Additionally, working-class institutions were reinforced by the increased strength and bargaining power of the trade unions and greater government intervention and consultation with the representative bodies of the working-class. However, he maintains the war generated less change than previously thought, much of its impact being temporary. He argues an assessment of the advances made must take account of 'the relationship between what was offered by wartime governments and what was given by way of social reform in the changed context of the post-war period', concluding if emphasis is placed on working-class bargaining power, it becomes clear how wartime advances could be reversed in a changed economic climate.<sup>94</sup> In a different vein, Hinton analyses the impact of the war in terms of class struggle, the government and employers combining to strengthen their hand against the working-class and labour

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<sup>92</sup> Cronin, *Labour and Society*, p.19; Wall, R. and Winter, J., (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe 1914-18*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988)

<sup>93</sup> Marwick, A., (ed.), *Total War And Social Change*, (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988)

<sup>94</sup> Reid, A., World War One and the Working Class in Britain, in Marwick, A., (ed), *Total War And Social Change*, (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988)

movement.<sup>95</sup> According to Hinton's interpretation, social reform (which began before the war) was a means of increased state control, wartime legislation being an extension of repressive state activity and part of a full-scale offensive on working-class culture and autonomy.

The study will examine the impact of the war on Barrow-in-Furness. Despite industrial and political upheaval it will be seen that Barrow society closed ranks and acted in unison against both the problems posed by the war, and the interventions of higher, centralised authority. Analysing the changing social and economic context of the period, will therefore interpret the impact of war in terms of the pressures placed on industry, the local authority and the wider population, giving attention to methods of working-class self-sufficiency. It will also provide the context in which ideology and social attitudes evolved, enabling analysis of their implications for political alignments and the composition of the local authorities.

The central themes of the literature review are based on what it was like to live in Britain whilst total war was being waged through examining the sequence and causation of social changes that took place, indicating their importance in the evolution of British society. The main focus concerns the impact of the war on Britain as a whole and whether its effects were shorter or longer term, matters on which there is little consensus. There is little work on how the various themes interacted, how they came together to sustain the needs of society and of how the home front actually operated. In fact the issues of transport, materials and utilities which the shipbuilding, munitions, armaments and iron and steel industries relied are generally ignored. The literature is complex, with most aspects debated to a greater or lesser degree but there is a danger that the interpretations allow of no general conclusion, and the situation nationally is such that it allows of few general statements, so a closer look at a local level could in fact well yield more concrete conclusions.

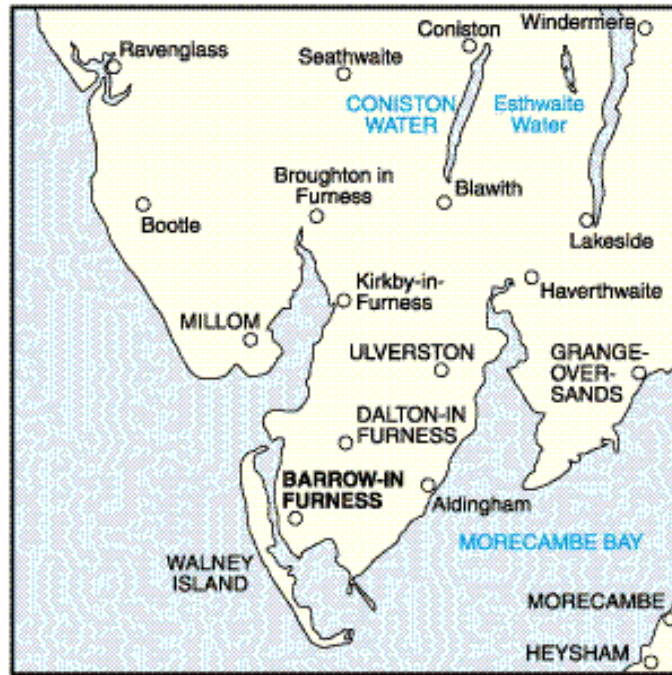
National level debates take little account of local circumstances, and a deeper analysis through regional case-studies puts existing interpretations to the test and provides a deeper and more convincing understanding of the war's impact. The literature paints an extensive picture of the Ministry of Munitions and the effects of war production and manpower which are useful in setting the framework for investigation into local conditions. Diverse and often complex relationships of key issues and contradictory opinions, particularly industrial

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<sup>95</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards*

relations, social class and attitudes, income levels, living conditions and social reform draw on inter-relationships which inevitably create considerable regional variation. The complexity of these issues therefore demonstrates the importance of analysing the inter-play of these factors to provide an understanding of changing values, attitudes, and relationships within a given community such as Barrow-in-Furness.

The town of Barrow, an important munitions centre, dominated by a single industry, experienced naval rearmament, the full force of industrial mobilisation, government intervention and reconstruction through the years 1910-19. Analysis of the responses to these processes will give insights into their impact on a town dependent on industries stimulated by war. Barrow's situation was particular and isolated at the north-west corner of the Lancashire coast. Between the town and the Irish Sea lies Walney Island a treeless barrier reef, inhabited by Vickerstown in the centre and connected to the mainland via a bridge. The town itself is centred on Vickers shipyard and engineering works but it owed its origins to the exploitation of the Furness peninsula's high quality haematite iron ore deposits in the second half of the nineteenth century. This development was assisted by the railways connecting the Furness district with Carnforth and Whitehaven. However, the transition of the local economy from the export of primary raw materials to large-scale steel manufacture transformed Barrow from a small town in 1849 to a large industrial town by 1881. The town gained the Parliamentary franchise in 1885 and County Borough status in 1889, but whilst the predominantly broad ethnic working-class population continued to expand, its level was unstable and fluctuating. Despite the construction of new docks in anticipation of continued growth, there was no immediate influx of shipping and few new industries were attracted to the town due to the inability to compete with Liverpool, the region's lack of natural resources and its geographic isolation. By the late nineteenth century the outlook seemed bleak, and although the expansion of the local shipbuilding and armaments industry halted this decline superseding the iron and steel industry as the main employer, the town remained dependent on unstable industries. Barrow was vulnerable to fluctuations in the trade cycle and therefore the town passed through periods when streets of houses were boarded up and soup kitchens established to those of most prosperous times.



**Figure 1 - Local Area Map**

By August, 1914, the town contained some 70,000 inhabitants where at the Vickers works for three years previous a steady average of 18,000 workers were employed on building Foreign and British warships and submarines. The next largest employer was the Barrow Hematite and Steel Works where some 1500 men were employed, followed by the Paper and Pulping Works. It is therefore incontestable that the numbers employed, the wages paid and the house rates paid and the houses built by Vickers were so greatly in excess of similar engagements by other firms or by the Corporation itself as to make the firm even under peacetime conditions, a dominant influence in the conditions at Barrow.

How has Barrow been treated by historians? There is some work on the town during the war which offers useful material. Three major works appertain to Vickers. Richardson provides an earlier insight into the Barrow firm, its range of products, processes, company housing and factory layout.<sup>96</sup> Trebilcock writes on the formative years of Vickers included the take over the Naval Construction and Armament Company at Barrow in 1888, although providing useful background information it concludes in 1914.<sup>97</sup> Importantly he says the dependency of the armaments industry on widely fluctuating market conditions, together with the government's non-interventionist policy which abandoned arms suppliers to their problems of over-capacity and trade slump is particularly relevant, as are the management

<sup>96</sup> Richardson, A., *Vickers, Sons and Maxim Ltd: Their Works and Manufacture*, (London, 1902)

<sup>97</sup> Trebilcock, R. C., *The Vickers Brothers: Armaments and Enterprise 1854-1914*, (London, Europa Publications, 1977)

strategies within the Vickers group. Further he described Vickers as run by a talented Board of Directors with mutually enforcing spheres of expertise not fitting any contemporary entrepreneurial model'.<sup>98</sup> Scott supports this view in his general history and asserts Vickers, aided by the versatile entrepreneurial skills of its experts, was able to meet the periodic crises of the industry with advanced technological solutions and more significantly, were able to anticipate the economic downturn and over-capacity following the Armistice.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, Vickers looked towards expansion into post-war markets unconnected with wartime products and entered the post-war period with confidence.

The most detailed work is Marshall's work on Furness essential for understanding Barrow's pre-war industries and development.<sup>100</sup> Transport was vital in the moving of men and materials and in this regard Robinson has provided articles on what he calls the wartime crisis on the Furness Railway. Andrews writes similarly on the subject pointing to the competing needs of the different government departments for train pathways.<sup>101</sup> Little has been written on the tramways and omnibuses during this period, however Cormack and Postlethwaite provide useful information on their operation.<sup>102</sup> Barrow housing has influenced local studies predominantly by Trescaheric, but while providing a useful overview they are of limited use regarding the period of this thesis.<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth Roberts' work in contrast provides good examples of working-class life and housing conditions provided through oral and documental evidence.<sup>104</sup> In addition to Roberts' published works, previously unpublished material contained in the transcripts of interviews with local residents, are particularly significant and provide unique insight into factory work and social perceptions.<sup>105</sup> Mansergh's recent publication work on Barrow-in-Furness during the First World War, appeals to a general readership but fails to provide a comprehensive picture of the town

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<sup>98</sup> Trebilcock, R. C., *The Vickers Brothers: Armaments and Enterprise 1854-1914*, (London, Europa Publications, 1977)

<sup>99</sup> Scott, J. D., *Vickers a History*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd., 1962)

<sup>100</sup> Marshall, J. D., *Furness and the Industrial Revolution: An Economic History of Furness (1711-1900) and the Town of Barrow (1757-1897)*, (Ilkley, Moxon Press, reprinted 1981)

<sup>101</sup> Cumbria Railways - Journal No. 146, Vol. 11, No. 2, May 2013; Journal No. 147, Vol. 11, No. 3, August 2013; Andrews, M., *The Furness Railway: A History*, (Barrow-in-Furness, Barrai Books, 2012)

<sup>102</sup> Cormack, I. L., *Seventy-five Years on Wheels – The History of Public Transport in Barrow-in-Furness 1885-1960*, (Cambuslang, Scottish Tramways Society Publications, 1960); Postlethwaite, H., *Transport in Barrow-in-Furness*, (Glossop, Venture Publications, 2013)

<sup>103</sup> Trescaheric, B., *Vickerstown a Marine Garden City*, (Barrow-in-Furness, 1983); *How Barrow was Built*, (Barrow-in-Furness, Hougenuai Press, 1985); *Building Barrow: From Fisher's Farm to Maggie's Farm*, (Barrow-in-Furness, 1992)

<sup>104</sup> Roberts, E.A.M., *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster 1890 to 1930*, Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, Occasional Paper No.2, 1976; *Working Class Housing in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1930* (Liverpool, 1977);

<sup>105</sup> Roberts, E. A. M., *A Woman's Place, An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1984)

during this period.<sup>106</sup> Caroline Anne Joy's dissertation examines the socio-economic context of the war with particular emphasis on health and housing, while taking into account the impact of the war and the depression in terms of the pressures placed on industry, the local authority and wider population.<sup>107</sup> This appears as a fair amount of work on Barrow during the First World War, all helpful but it still only deals with specific aspects.

The thesis draws on a range of familiar sources. The Barrow Records Office holds diverse and extensive archive material on all aspects of local authority business, industry and military records. In addition to the wealth of information contained in the published Corporation Accounts Books of the period, the statistics of the Chief Medical Officer provide details of health while the Chief Constable's Reports provide useful statistics on the subject of drink. The abundant official primary source material and published statistics are used in conjunction with local studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of developments. An examination of the local press has shown the key issues regarding the war. Examination of the national and regional press have been used extensively, the National Newspaper Archive providing a particularly useful source. This archive allows the comparing and contrasting of the reporting of the particular issues and events across the breadth of the press. Notably, Barrow is reported on by the local press in many and varied parts of the country, presumably reflecting its importance in the war effort. Newspapers provide a mass of evidence for the social history of this period, as the regional and popular press always sought to reflect popular culture and stay in touch with public opinion concerning the war, labour disputes, women's rights and work, and the human issues of the period. 'The Press', says Tosh is the most important published primary source for the historian.<sup>108</sup> Newspapers are an indicator of public reaction to the conditions on the Home Front particularly industry and were also used by the War Cabinet to gauge reactions to the war. However it is realised there are potential problems with newspaper materials including those of biased, misleading and non-reporting. The 1917 Barrow Commission on Unrest commented 'for the fact Barrow lies in an isolated position and it is inadvisable to inform the public through the Press of the evils of industrial life, we cannot believe the facts set down could so long remained actual conditions of

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<sup>106</sup> Mansergh, R., *Barrow-in-Furness in the Great War*, (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2015)

<sup>107</sup> Joy, C. A., *War and Employment in an Industrial Community: Barrow-in-Furness 1914-1926*, unpublished PhD, University of Central Lancashire, 2004

<sup>108</sup> Tosh, J., *The Pursuit of History*, (Harlow, Longman, revised third edition, 2002)

domestic life in England during the twentieth century'.<sup>109</sup> War Cabinet Papers published online for the period 1916-1919 are particularly useful in furnishing weekly labour reports which give light to understanding government reactions to threats of unrest. The *Official History of the Ministry of Munitions* is used mainly as a source of primary evidence forming the cornerstone of the study regarding the Home Front and production of munitions during the First World War. Although the Official History is predominantly based on the Ministry's work it includes the large private firms of Vickers and Armstrongs while also providing useful information regarding the production of iron and steel.

The impact of the First World War on the Home Front has therefore been much debated and widely interpreted. The thesis contends that to focus on national issues is to miss the thrust of local antagonisms, and that despite political upheaval and economic crisis, Barrow closed ranks and acted in unison against both the economic problems posed by war, and the interventions of higher centralised authority. Discussions on voluntary recruitment, family and society, women's work and cultural life test the extent to which interpretations derived from the secondary literature hold true for the case of Barrow. At the same time this thesis attempts to throw new light on areas which have not been fully accounted for in existing works. By analysing the changing social and economic context of the period, the thesis will interpret the impact of the war in terms of the pressures placed on Barrow's industry, transport, the local authority and the wider population, paying particular attention to their interlinking dependencies. The intention is therefore to take the established general and themed studies and apply them along with new elements obtained from research to provide insight into how Barrow, its industries and population were able to function and therefore contribute to the war effort. This is not a comparative work, although it could provide a foundation for other such studies.

A broadly chronological approach is taken, with each chapter dealing with a specific phase of the war but, within that, each phase highlights a distinctive set of themes. The first chapter is intended to establish the complex industrial, socio-economic and political situation which characterised the town of Barrow from 1910 until the outbreak of the First World War. It will review the administration of shipbuilding, munitions and armaments supply and provide comprehension of the character and significance of Vickers, in national military

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<sup>109</sup> Drake, B., *Women in Engineering Trades: Trades Union Series No.3*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1918)

planning and provision. The industrial structure of Barrow and its relations between employers and workers with an examination of wage schemes and their relationship to output and social standing. The political alliances will be discussed while it will be demonstrated that industrial strife was seen for the four years preceding the outbreak of war.

Chapter two discusses the outbreak of war and how the call up and uncontrolled army recruitment affected Barrow's industry, population and infrastructure. The two main themes, are the need for the Admiralty to complete warships and increase naval ordnance and the building, preparation and populating of workshops for shell and armaments production for the War Office. Emphasis is placed on the disruption caused during the period between the outbreak of war until the formation of the Ministry of Munitions. In an unrestrained, competitive and diminishing manpower market it will show how industry went about finding, retaining, protecting and accommodating labour. Having shown the response to recruiting and provision of labour it will move on to the need for industrial regulation to improve efficiency and complete munitions contracts. Discussion will focus on dilution and relaxation of trade rules and Government intervention in the interest of improving bad time-keeping. It will be argued that only through Government control and regulation with the assistance of the Trade Unions and employers could Admiralty and War Office needs be fully met.

The third chapter looks at how Barrow turned totally to war production, examines the effects and considers government methods of retaining workers and increasing efficiency following on the formation of the Ministry of Munitions. The effects and implications of Barrow turning to total war and the problems of accommodating additional workers are discussed. It will demonstrate the far reaching implications of mass production of shells and guns especially on transport, utilities, materials and the introduction of large numbers of women workers. In the process of facing the actualities of twentieth-century warfare it will be seen deep tensions emerged between traditional and modern approaches to the conflict, tensions sharply exposed by the growth of an interventionist State. In the interest of increasing industrial efficiency the Leaving Certificate which is generally seen by historians as a drastic restriction of normal liberties and a most powerful instrument is put under the microscope. Examination of the Barrow Munitions Tribunal will provide insight into its workings, analysing the needs of employers and workers, while showing it was in the Trade Unions interest to discipline miscreants. This early period it will be argued is one of unpreparedness and disruption with a huge changes of emphasis and a reduction and



rebalancing of key workers, while extended shell and guns programmes caused long hours and continuous work with little rest or leisure time.

The principal thrust of the fourth chapter is the response to the demand for increased production of armaments and the conflicting needs for manpower for both industry and the Army. The position of the Admiralty, Vickers and the engineering unions concerning further dilution and the debate around it, and the agreements reached are all addressed. In the conflict between industry and the Army for men, evidence will be provided that attestation and voluntarism under Lord Derby's scheme was opposed by Vickers. The end of voluntarism and introduction of compulsion under the Military Service Acts hardly avoided occasions of trade union grievances in view of the promises made concerning the protection of skilled men. Whilst almost all Military Tribunal records were destroyed, newspapers provide insight into their work at Barrow demonstrating skilled men's representatives' position regarding the substitution of their men. This chapter therefore shows the continuing and ever-increasing demands, and competition from the Army, leading to ever more drastic changes, notably in the resort to women workers, which in turn prompted increasing concerns about welfare. State Control of working conditions and workers surroundings on the outbreak of war were firmly established under the Factory, Public Health and Housing Acts, but the reality it will be argued was different and it will be shown the conditions in the shipyard and the iron and steel works were the opposite to those in the munitions and armaments workshops.

The fifth chapter firstly addresses the unrest of 1917 and the part played by the shop steward movement which filled the vacuum left by the taking away of the right to strike greatly removing the influence of trade unions. This is followed by examination of the Barrow Commission on Unrest which received testimony on the special problems of the town from which a subsequent report was produced. The main cause of concern was Barrow's housing which is generally held as a point of discussion by historians. However it overshadows a crucial point, that of the relationship between the Local Ministry of Munitions and Admiralty representatives with those in authority in London. The fact that bureaucratic methods did not work in Barrow, whereas common sense methods did and failure to understand these problems by Government departments and react to them rather than letting things drift it will be argued was a common cause for complaint and unrest. This poses the question should Barrow have been treated as special case. On the question of political extremism it will be argued it was not just about pacifying extreme men but preventing moderate men moving

towards extremism, in discussing this it will explain why Barrow never saw the same troubles as on the Clyde. This chapter is therefore pivotal and reflects Barrow's situation caused by the war and goes some way to explaining the causes of unrest and the attempts of government to put things right.

Finally Chapter six briefly turns to the aftermath of victory, political, economic and social problems ensuring a return of peacetime conditions was not a soft landing. The chapter looks at what gains were made and who gained them and asks if the town as a whole benefitted. It examines the changeover from war to peace products and asks how Barrow's industries, workforce and the town were affected following the withdrawal of the government with regard to the halting of naval orders and ceasing housebuilding which can be seen as betrayal of industry and people. It examines the political position following the post-war election and the return to pre-war union conditions and its effect on the shop stewards. Analysis of demobilisation and the return of men from the forces and their impact on the workforce will be examined and of whether non-war industries were revived or new industries provided. The widespread desire for a shorter working week with no lessening of wages existed, although evidence bears out that shorter hours produced more output, employers were not convinced particularly Vickers who needed to push ahead with work on new orders. The move to supply the commercial market was a new challenge for employers, employees and the unrestrained trade unions alike and its outcomes will be seen.

Thus the years between 1910 and 1919 were a period of economic, industrial and political change, and interpretations of the effects of and responses to these changes vary considerably among historians. Change caused by the war had massive implications which differed markedly in Barrow to elsewhere due to its mainly isolated position. Thus by understanding the makeup of the town, economic, social and political changes of the period, the impact of war in Barrow will be interpreted in terms of the pressures placed on industry, infrastructure, transport systems, the local authority and other key aspects of community life.

## **CHAPTER 1: BARROW-IN-FURNESS BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR – ESTABLISHING THE INDUSTRIAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will examine the complex industrial, socio-economic and political situation which characterised the shipbuilding and marine engineering town of Barrow-in-Furness from 1909 until the outbreak of the First World War. These years were driven predominantly by foreign and British naval orders which provided a large and continuous work programme from which the town and all classes of the community prospered. A thesis intended to review the administration of munitions and armaments supply during the First World War demands comprehension of the character and significance of Vickers in national military planning and provision. Explanation will be provided to establish Vickers and its products and the necessity for expansion while recognising other industries existed in the town mainly based upon iron and steel. Examination of the shipbuilding and engineering trade unions, their customs and employer relationships will demonstrate how the major industry operated.

An important and underlying issue is that of the demands made by industry on Barrow's infrastructure and utilities. It will be seen that by Barrow's geographical isolation and its industrialisation it was vulnerable to external unrest by its dependence on fuel supplies and reliance on food imports. There was no national shipbuilding and engineering strikes throughout this period however the immediate pre-war years saw the working-classes launch successive waves of mass strikes which extended rapidly across the different sectors.

Barrow's labour movement it will be seen was typically rooted in diverse political, industrial and consumer organisations; institutions that provided a firm base for popular support in the growth of the Labour and socialist parties. In a competitive market the skills needed to produce such highly technical products could only be achieved by offering good wages and through the provision of adequate decent housing. Workers housing is therefore a key theme and it will be argued that a proactive approach was made by Vickers and building syndicates while a limited effort was made by Barrow Council in its provision. The nature of Barrow's industries meant the workforce was predominantly male with a structured social hierarchy determined by workers' occupations which influenced men's earnings, health and how they and their families lived and spent their leisure time.

## Industrial Structure

The internal structure of the British engineering industry contained numerous specialist sections, amongst the largest were shipbuilding and marine engineering. Although the state had a long term history of purchasing goods from the private sector, particularly in wartime, it was the contracts placed with private shipyards during the second half of the nineteenth-century that put procurement on a substantial long-term basis. Arnold says one of the state's main aims was to create a warship building capacity in the private sector, rather than fully use it.<sup>1</sup> He continues, once firms had invested in new facilities to handle a greater volume of highly sophisticated construction they had little alternative but to compete for contracts.<sup>2</sup> It is arguable that private yards like Vickers could not rely on naval contracts as they did not guarantee sufficient work.<sup>3</sup> Armaments contracts in the years leading up to the First World War have therefore been seen as representing the 'first steps in transactions between government and large-scale private enterprise', thus bringing about important changes in the relationship between the state and the leading technologically based industrial firms.<sup>4</sup> Between 1889 and 1914, twenty-five private firms constructed Royal Navy vessels and of these the five leading yards built 63.2 per cent of the total construction (Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold, A. J., Riches Beyond the Dreams of Avarice, Commercial Returns on British Warship Construction 1889-1914, *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 54, No.2 (May, 2001), p.285

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Tuesday, 19 September 1911. the Admiralty announced it would not order more than one armoured ship from any firm in any one year

<sup>4</sup> Trebilcock, R. C., 'A special relationship: government, rearmament and the cordite firms', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, XIX (1966), p.367

<sup>5</sup> Pollard, S., Robertson, P., *The British Shipbuilding Industry, 1870-1914*, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 213-215

Constructed By	Displacement (Tons)
Vickers (Naval Construction), Barrow-in-Furness	287,994
John Brown, Clydebank	218,611
Armstrong Whitworth, Elswick	205,090
Fairfield, Glasgow	196,173
Palmers, Jarrow	139,467
Total	1,047,335

**Table 1 - Leading Shipyard Construction for the Royal Navy 1899-1914**

In 1885, Vickers set up the largest forging press ever made to enable it to manufacture heavy marine work in Sheffield, and the first armour plate for warships soon followed.<sup>6</sup> By 1888, the company stretched its tentacles north acquiring the Naval Construction and Armaments Company at Barrow.<sup>7</sup> After takeover the shipyard was re-equipped and expanded allowing orders to be secured for the largest and most sophisticated vessels in the Japanese, Brazilian, Russian, Turkish and British navies, making them the UK market leader for naval work. Although foreign vessels built to progressive designs meant they were not generally overseen by naval representatives the Admiralty had close links with these projects.<sup>8</sup> Importantly the Admiralty held option on foreign warships, allowing for war emergency purchases.<sup>9</sup> Foreign trade was thus not simply of economic benefit for Vickers but provided a reserve of wartime capacity for the Admiralty.<sup>10</sup> Where Armstrong's depended mainly on naval shipbuilding for its profits the Vickers plant at Barrow was heavily committed to submarine work, the basis of which had rested on the granting of an effective monopoly by the Admiralty which endured from 1902 until 1911.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 5 January 1885

<sup>7</sup> Johnston, I., *Beardmore Built, The Rise and Fall of a Clydeside Shipyard*, (Clydebank District Libraries and Museums, 1993), p.11,

<sup>8</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Saturday, 8 March 1913 reported Mr. Miller, Naval Designer was allowed to leave Admiralty service to supervise the construction of the Turkish Dreadnought at Barrow

<sup>9</sup> *Manchester Courier and Advertiser*, Friday, 26 December 1913, Vickers Launch Book, Turkish battleship *Reshadieh* later requisitioned and renamed *HMS Erin* launched 1913

<sup>10</sup> Gerda, R. C., *Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, 1914-19*, (Harvard, 1957), p.97



**Figure 2 - Vickers 1914 Advert**

By 1900 Vickers and Armstrong's had effectively supplanted the Royal Ordnance Works as the Admiralty's main suppliers of naval ordnance and gun mountings.<sup>11</sup> Significantly Admiralty contracts for hydraulic gun mountings kept the Vickers engineering sections busy and in some years rivalled the contribution of submarines to Barrow's profits. It was partially due to Albert Vickers big naval gun ideas that by 1914 the firm had moved into a commanding market position.<sup>12</sup> In the financial year 1913-14 out of a total of £643,000 spent on naval firepower by the Admiralty, some £302,925 went to Vickers.<sup>13</sup> By the end of 1914, to expedite the contracts for naval guns and mountings, it had become necessary to engage other huge sheds in the vicinity of the docks.<sup>14</sup> Further in the interest of working together economically and largely in expanding warship building capacity Vickers acquired a half share in William Beardmore's.<sup>15</sup> In recognition of the private yards the Admiralty announced in 1906 'the first business of the Royal Dockyards is to keep the fleet in repair and the amount of new construction allocated to them should be subordinated to this consideration'.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding, when Portsmouth dockyard constructed *HMS Dreadnought* in 1906 the

<sup>11</sup> Peebles, H., *Warship-building on the Clyde*, (Edinburgh, John Donald, 1987), p.48

<sup>12</sup> Clark, T., *A Century of Shipbuilding: Products of Barrow-in-Furness*, (Clapham, Dalesman Publishing Company Ltd., 1971), p.52, *HMS Revenge* the last battleship to be built at Barrow, ordered in 1913 was fitted with 15 in. guns

<sup>13</sup> Trebilcock, R. C., *The Vickers Brothers: Armaments and Enterprise 1854-1914*, (London, Europa Publications, 1977), p.110

<sup>14</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Thursday, 31 December 1914

<sup>15</sup> *The Observer*, Sunday, 24 December 1911, *Beardmores built HMS Benbow and Vickers HMS Emperor of India*; Beardmores also produced armoured plate

<sup>16</sup> Scott, J. D., *Vickers a History*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd., 1962), p.56

12in. guns were designed by Vickers and while the prime contractor for the machinery, the turbines were sourced from Parsons.<sup>17</sup> Importance of the private yards was further underlined when the First Lord of the Admiralty said 'the works at Barrow are a natural asset, and thank heaven we have them to supply our needs'.<sup>18</sup>

Vickers was central to Barrow and the new work brought a welcome adjustment to the earlier downtrend in warship building at the beginning of the century. Decline in product efficiency through lean markets had relegated existing machinery to idleness while poor profits had prevented renewal and modernization. The shipyard had been worked in an indifferent and expensive manner with building berth facilities inadequate for rapid production, and with inefficient power plant and tools causing breakdowns and work stoppages. The Vickers Director, Sir Trevor Dawson, recorded 'when the Vickers Board received evidence of Barrow's condition, the concern was that the yard lagged behind in equipment compared to other yards'.<sup>19</sup> Large expenditure was thereafter incurred, including amounts to rectify power supply failings and provide new machinery to ensure acceleration of warship and submarine construction. The outlay was reflected in the returns for 1909 which showed a record year at the shipyard mainly achieved through foreign orders which had needed expanded capacity for gun mountings and large steam-turbines.<sup>20</sup> By 1910 huge activity was seen at Barrow afforded by the increased naval programme which caused the Chairman to remark 'they had never at any given time had such an amount of work as at present.'<sup>21</sup>

The specialist work of building submarines had governed Barrow, but after 1911 submarines steadily lost their power to dominate Barrow's shipping returns.<sup>22</sup> This was caused by a general revival of orders after 1909 and the termination by the Admiralty of Vickers submarine building monopoly. The Admiralty concerns was over Vickers inability to complete submarines on time Vickers worry was the introduction of other yards into the field could affect output as rivals bribed their skilled men away. Attempting to improve output the

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<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, 6 April 1910, Vickers had been building internal combustion engines since the first submarines, it is also significant that the firm was asked to produce the engines for *HMS Dreadnought*, a task never before attempted on such a scale; *Daily Herald*, Wednesday, 8 July 1914, reported 160 Vickers and Armstrong's engineers were employed at Portsmouth

<sup>18</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Wednesday, 16 February 1910

<sup>19</sup> VA., Barrow Shipyard Investigation, Report of General Manager, Shipyard, 17 July 1913

<sup>20</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 2 February 1910, 60,200 tons displacement and 122,110 IHP for 7 vessels

<sup>21</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 28 March 1910

<sup>22</sup> VA Papers, V 752, submarines averaged 14.6 per cent compared to Admiralty warship contracts of 11.5 per cent and foreign naval orders of 10.8 per cent; Trebilcock, *The Vickers Brothers 1914*, p.108

submarine department was expanded, night work introduced and manpower increased to capacity. After 1913 Vickers was free to build submarines for export markets, but when the Admiralty needed more patrol submarines they found Vickers facilities mostly occupied. Submarine personnel and plant had to be kept busy, otherwise the extensive plant installed to carry out existing Admiralty work without foreign contracts would have been underemployed.<sup>23</sup> As part of the general development facilities continued to be improved and by the outbreak of war the submarine berths were in a state of efficiency.<sup>24</sup> By 1914 Vickers and Armstrong's had reached a position where they were working together to win contracts in the naval trade, with Vickers securing the lion's share. Despite cooperation Vickers dominated, their marine hardware being preferred by the world's major importers of arms. Cooperation meant many arms and shipbuilding companies were interlocked in ownership and shared directors, while the Admiralty design and procurement branches exchanged personnel with the private firm's at the most senior level.

The same maverick spirit that had promoted submarines encouraged naval airships, leading to the selection of Vickers as the main contractor.<sup>25</sup> Vickers perceiving what was improbable today might be essential tomorrow, offered to pay for the erection of an airship shed at Barrow in exchange for the building monopoly, but the Admiralty turned down the monopoly clause. Although the Barrow built HMA No.1 suffered catastrophic failure the airship provided valuable training and experimental data.<sup>26</sup> The question now was not whether the Admiralty were willing to take up experimental work with a new invention, but whether they could afford to neglect a weapon of uncertain value which might prove a determining factor in war. The Admiralty responded in September 1912, when the naval airship section, which had earlier been disbanded was reconstituted. In 1913 Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty and a supporter of the 'enormous bladder', approved the construction of two rigid and six non-rigid airships.<sup>27</sup> The rigids and three non-rigids of the Parseval type, for which Vickers had obtained a licence were contracted to Barrow.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Difficulties in Building additional Submarines, Memorandum by Commodore (S) on 'Vickers request to build for other nations', CPO1202, February 1914, Keyes Mss 4/1; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday, 20 March 1914

<sup>24</sup> BDB 16/L/1483, Submarine Department, Devonshire Dock, 16 December 1912; VA Submarine File Keyes to Dawson, 20 August 1913; 31 August 1913; VA Submarine File, Graham Greene to Vickers, 9 October 1913

<sup>25</sup> Captain's Bacon and Murray Sueter encouraged by Admiral Fisher

<sup>26</sup> Mowthorpe, C., *Battlebags: British Airships of the First World War*, (Bridgend, Sutton, 1998), p.4

<sup>27</sup> H of C Deb 30 April 1913 vol. 52 cc1158-9, Airships Under Construction

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. xxvii; *The Burnley News*, Saturday 9 Aug 1913, reported the building of the airship factory on the west shore of Walney Island for Parseval airships; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Thursday, 25 September 1913 reported a contingent of 200 men had been brought over from Germany to work in the airship factory



None of these airships however were completed until 1917, greater than the time taken to construct a super-dreadnought.<sup>29</sup>

While Vickers was fully committed to foreign and Admiralty orders, which included the production of naval shells, it had past experience with the War Office. After the turn of the century the War Office ordered significant numbers of field guns from Vickers, the guns being manufactured at Sheffield and the carriages at Barrow.<sup>30</sup> The Boer War also led to the War Office improving its garrison guns, bringing work for the Garrison Gun Mounting Department at Barrow.<sup>31</sup>

Despite large increases in spending on expansion and improvements to turn around earlier problems, Vickers shares were in favour on the eve of the war *The Economist* reported the Company's shares were oversubscribed and shareholders were expecting good returns.<sup>32</sup> The single concern was whether enough profits could be earned to write off the plant provided in excess of future needs. Effectively control was in the hands of the employers as the proportion of shares held by workers was so small they could only exercise slight influence on the Company. Shortly after the war it was realised by Vickers that giving employees the opportunity to become shareholders would more than anything else have prevented strikes and promoted increased efficiency.<sup>33</sup> Kirkaldy however notes that pre-war many employees believed that shares were a device to obtain extra production at small cost.<sup>34</sup> There was also the objection that profit sharing tended to weaken Trade Unionism and labour solidarity. Without their Unions workers felt that they were at a disadvantage when dealing with employers.

The effects of the abundance of work and wages was reflected in the increased prosperity of all classes in the community Barrow's fortunes were therefore linked to Vickers development. The firm's high success suggests in the period before the war industrial management was well able to run complex and giant operations, while Vickers superior local management with the backing of capital expenditure provided improvements. Growth was

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<sup>29</sup> Trebilcock, *The Vickers Brothers*, p.112

<sup>30</sup> Richardson, A., *Vickers, Sons and Maxim Limited, Their Works and Manufacturers*, (London, 1902), pp.69, 77; *Edinburgh Evening News*, Monday, 28 January 1901, an order for 336 field-guns for the War Office, two years' work, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Friday, 30 December 1904, orders for 40-50 batteries of field and horse artillery guns were given to Vickers

<sup>31</sup> *Portsmouth Evening News*, Monday, 25 June 1900

<sup>32</sup> *The Economist*, Saturday, 24 April 1915, Issue 3739, p.804

<sup>33</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, Friday, 17 January 1919

<sup>34</sup> Kirkaldy, A. W. (ed.), *British Labour: Replacement and Conciliation 1914-1921: being the Result of Conferences and Investigations by Committees of Section F of the British Association*, (London: Pitman, 1921), p.38

not solely dependent on Vickers management but on the widening and deepening of the docks and harbour passageways by the port authority, the Furness Railway Company. This allowed building, launching and fitting out of the latest and largest battleships and was only made possible by Vickers association with and financial assistance to the port authority.<sup>35</sup> Regrettably no dry dock was built for dreadnoughts, which would have benefited the nation and Vickers as dreadnoughts had to dock at Liverpool, on the Clyde and Belfast. This meant that Barrow's dreadnoughts could be launched, while hull repairs and refits were not possible. Importantly the docks received shipbuilding items such as steel plates from Cardiff and large forgings from Vickers Sheffield works via the Manchester docks.<sup>36</sup>

The commercial docks as well as being used by passenger ferries and pleasure steamers were employed for imports, mainly foreign ore for the iron and steel works and timber for the pulp and paper works. Though coke and coal came by rail, petroleum for which storage was provided at the dockside for onward distribution arrived by sea.<sup>37</sup> General merchandise trade was landed at Barrow by the short routes from Liverpool and Belfast providing a varied supply of livestock and foodstuff.<sup>38</sup> Though the Corporation had no financial interest in the docks it had an important interest in maintaining and keeping abreast of Barrow's staple industry. This could be arrived at through housing, health and education with the likelihood that further harbour and dock extensions might call for the other various interests in the town.<sup>39</sup>

It was important that the shipyard and town should be protected. For many years Barrow had been in an undefended position, in 1871 Reed saw its port as providing defence for the shipping lanes to Liverpool rather than the shipyard.<sup>40</sup> Previously there had been a Naval Reserve station with two small guns but it was not until 1910 that the naval and military authorities took practical steps to protect the naval construction works by building Fort Walney.<sup>41</sup> To provide further protection an aerial coastal defence station was proposed in 1913 but cancelled and only in 1914 was an emergency battery constructed at the south end

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<sup>35</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Friday, 3 November 1911

<sup>36</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 6 August 1910

<sup>37</sup> An advert for the Furness Railway, Barrow Docks noted there was storage for 34,520 tons of petroleum at the dockside

<sup>38</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Thursday, 2 July 1914, included were Irish cattle, swine and horses

<sup>39</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Friday, 3 November 1911

<sup>40</sup> Reed, E. J., *Our Naval Coastal Defences*, (London, John Murray, 1871), pp. 10-11

<sup>41</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Wednesday, 16 February 1910, it was proposed to raise two companies of Garrison Artillery the men supplied from Vickers gun shops and the testing range at Eskmeals, while Vickers would provide the six inch guns

of Walney near the harbour entrance.<sup>42</sup> Fragilities were nonetheless demonstrated when the alleged presence of German spies and fear of dock water loss prompted armed sailors to be posted at the dock gates.<sup>43</sup> The classified nature of Vickers work meant internal security was vital, the management must have felt assured when a correspondent visiting Barrow in February 1911 reported that he was surprised how little was known in the town about what was going on.<sup>44</sup> However, the complexities of a private firm with a national role were shown when Krupp Von Bulow and two representatives visited Vickers in June 1914.<sup>45</sup> The Admiralty advised secrecy, particularly revealing large projectiles or gun manufacturing, but the party was escorted through the gun and engine shops, shown the latest super-dreadnoughts and taken to the Walney airship shed.

The fortunes of Vickers impacted on the labour force, and hence Barrow's population. As a result of extensive foreign and naval orders and the increased size and complexity of warships many highly skilled men and labourers were needed in a large and varied number of departments.<sup>46</sup> Obtaining artisans was difficult, though generally blamed on lack of housing, the *Barrow News* took the view that workers were simply not available as competition for men on Admiralty work was fierce.<sup>47</sup> Predicting shipyard labour was problematic, causing employers to shed or stand-down and later re-employ squads even during high output years. As a consequence of labour demand it was difficult to maintain discipline, rather than dismiss men for breaching rules, the involvement required in recruiting meant cases were overlooked.

The 1911 census for Barrow enumerated 5,935 men employed in general engineering and 4,297 employed in ship construction, comprising 44 per cent of the 23,225 men employed out of a population of 63,770.<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Roberts say the Census does not mention Vickers, but it can be assumed those enumerated under general engineering worked for the company.<sup>49</sup> Workers had arriving from Scotland, Tyneside and Belfast, leading to the town

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<sup>42</sup> The emergency battery was built at Hilpsford Point, close to the harbour entrance

<sup>43</sup> *Manchester Courier and General Advertiser*, Saturday, 9 September 1911, the sailors were drawn from *HMS Hermione* depot ship for the naval airship which departed December 1911

<sup>44</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Wednesday, 1 February 1911

<sup>45</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Wednesday, 17 June 1914

<sup>46</sup> The Barrow site would eventually extend to 270 acres, the floor area of workshops increasing to 2.4 million square feet

<sup>47</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 11 January 1913

<sup>48</sup> Census of England and Wales 1911, County of Lancaster; Roberts, E. A. M., *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940*, (Oxford, Blackwell, paperback edition 1995) p.214

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

being described as a Tower of Babel for dialect.<sup>50</sup> By 1911 Bainbridge notes Barrow was the English County Borough with the greatest proportion of Scotch born inhabitants followed by Newcastle-upon-Tyne.<sup>51</sup> By May 1914 an additional thousand skilled mechanics were needed at the shipyard and eight hundred to a thousand at the airship works.<sup>52</sup> When a mammoth floating dock was to be built the *Birmingham Daily Post* reported 'manufacturing will be at Barrow but the dock will be erected in France consequent to labour scarcity'.<sup>53</sup> By September 1914 expansion led to approximately 19,000 men being employed by Vickers out of an estimated population of 75,369.<sup>54</sup> By comparison, according to the 1911 Census, 1,485 men were employed at the Barrow Haematite and Steel Works, the second highest employer. However, on reopening of the plate mills in April 1912 for the production of shipbuilding materials, more men were needed with the opportunity of full-time employment.<sup>55</sup>

The 1909 Labour Exchange Act transformed recruiting, yet trade unionists looked on exchanges with distrust as they were not entirely or mainly officered by the trade union class.<sup>56</sup> This coupled with the fact that trade unions had excellent recruiting machinery rendered their support of the exchanges doubtful. Any attempts to cheapen labour or employ non-unionists at Vickers largely led to unrest and the loss of valuable skilled men.<sup>57</sup> Little opportunity existed for outside labour until local men were employed, yet men hoping to obtain work headed for Barrow.<sup>58</sup> Traditionally men were recruited at the factory gate and in the works by foremen but in February 1910 the Barrow Labour Exchange opened. While information is sparse the Barrow exchange figures for April 1910 showed out of 227 vacancies, 221 were filled with 338 applications remaining on the register.<sup>59</sup>

Although there was abundant work for men in 1914, the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) reported practically the only occupation for Barrow women outside of domestic work was laundry work and consequently the wages were poor and the

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<sup>50</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 28 July 1915, it was also reported and later refuted that French girls were on their way to work on munitions

<sup>51</sup> Bainbridge, T. H., *Barrow-in-Furness: A Population Survey*, Economic Geography, Vol.15, No.4 (October 1939), p.380

<sup>52</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday, 5 May 1914

<sup>53</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, Saturday, 23 May 1914

<sup>54</sup> Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Account Books 1913-19

<sup>55</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 25 April 1912, *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1912 reported over 2,000 men were working at the iron and steel works

<sup>56</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Tuesday, 1 February 1910

<sup>57</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Saturday, 29 July 1911, when seven non-unionist were employed by Vickers the shipwrights stopped work. Three joined the society, but as the union was not consulted about the remainder strike action was threatened, three took their discharge and one remained in defiance causing 350 men to strike

<sup>58</sup> Naval contract awards appeared in local newspapers throughout the UK

<sup>59</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 18 May 1910

hours long<sup>60</sup> Full time working however had been reinstated at the Flax and Jute Works after a slump in trade, the 1911 census enumerating 474 females, while the Paper and Pulp Works provided further women's work.<sup>61</sup> A deficiency in the amount of female occupations compared with the size and character of the population existed. In 1911, Barrow's population was balanced with 33,374 males and 30,396 females of which was 23,225 males and 20,688 females made up the working population. Of these only 5,295 (23.6 per cent) females were in waged employment of which 1,982 (10.4 per cent) were married.<sup>62</sup> Most females were therefore in the home or education. The average Barrow girl was of reasonable intelligence and many were daughters of artisans who refused domestic or farm service.<sup>63</sup> Many stayed at school until they were fourteen while others continued their education at night classes. Barrow's inaccessibility prevented new large female enterprises, however small businesses for women were established for example James Tunley and Co were making wholesale and export umbrellas.<sup>64</sup>

Male rates of pay and earning capacity in Barrow were far and above similar conditions obtained in the Lancashire and Yorkshire textile areas.<sup>65</sup> In the mills, the fact that wives and daughters of mechanics could secure employment was often used by employers as a reason for not increasing men's wages. Women's pre-war employment was only accepted in the airship shed because the work was within their physical capability and not introduced in unfair competition with men's rates.<sup>66</sup> When in April 1915 a woman disguised as a man was found working in Vickers timber yard, she explained she needed the money to support her relatives and, as a woman access to good well-paying jobs were blocked.<sup>67</sup>

Vickers can be seen as central to national re-armament and to Barrow's economy, it was the major employer and therefore dominant in the town it could not however operate successfully without the cooperation of the shipbuilding and engineering trade unions and good industrial relations.

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<sup>60</sup> Hunt, C., *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.76

<sup>61</sup> Census of England and Wales, County of Lancaster, 1911; *Barrow News*, Saturday 22 February 1913

<sup>62</sup> Census of England and Wales, County of Lancaster, 1911

<sup>63</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Tuesday, 30 November 1915, when shell production started girls were said to be from families of all classes in Barrow and the neighbourhood, numbers of them much superior to any previously engaged in manufacturing work; girls were also employed in Vickers offices throughout the works

<sup>64</sup> *Manchester Courier and General Advertiser*, Monday, 22 June 1914

<sup>65</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 6 January 1912

<sup>66</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 November 1913, a photograph shows girls at work joining long strips of material in the airship shed

<sup>67</sup> *The Times*, Friday, 23 April 1915; *Dundee People's Journal*, Saturday, 1 May, this was Mrs. Ogle who later worked in the shell shop, she worked for three days before being discovered and found the hour long and the work arduous

## Workers, Employers, Unions and Industrial Relations

Shipbuilding and engineering were closely connected, many trade unions being engaged in both. The main sectors consisted of shipyard workers, engineers and labourers. The Boilermakers Society was the main union organising the largest section of skilled workers in shipbuilding while the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) dominated engineering resulting in a strong union of skilled workers separate from, and seldom acting in concert with the unskilled.<sup>68</sup> Good industrial relations were advantageous to employer and worker alike and it was essential that arrangements existed to ensure disputes were dealt with as they arose. When disputes could not be dealt with locally they were raised to national level through the employer's, shipbuilding and engineering federations.<sup>69</sup>

The central engineering skills of fitting, turning etc. accounted for over half the skilled workers in British industry of which 28.5 per cent were marine engineers.<sup>70</sup> A further 49 per cent were boilermakers, shipwrights etc., trades largely confined to shipbuilders.<sup>71</sup> Shipbuilding and engineering were closely connected, the same problems occurring in all branches of the metal-industries such that fusion seemed essential. Although shipbuilders and engineers unions formed protective federations there was no amalgamated metalworkers' union and few signs of the need for closer unity.<sup>72</sup> Syndicalists aspired to one great combination, but craft society members met such ideas with ridicule or hostility the large unions were too strong to be broken and fusion into a single organisation was inconceivable.<sup>73</sup> Combination, craft unions realised could strike at the heart of the working-class caste system undermining their social condition and weaken their bargaining power.

By mid-1894 the skilled engineers were well organised at Barrow resulting in an atmosphere expressed in struggles over dilution advocated by increasing technology.<sup>74</sup> Vickers were restricted in the use they could make of labour, this restriction taking the form of a rigid limitation of the number and type of operations semi-skilled or unskilled men could perform. New machines, seen by employers as methods of economic production presented

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<sup>68</sup> Mortimer, J. E., *History of the Boilermakers Society*, Volume 2: 1906-1939, (London, George, Allen and Unwin 1982); Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1946); Reid, A. J., *The Tide of Democracy: Shipyard Workers and Social Relations in Britain, 1870-1950*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010)

<sup>69</sup> *The Scotsman*, Saturday, 9 March 1912, Mr. J. H. Boodle (Barrow) was president of the Employers Federation

<sup>70</sup> Census of Mechanics, October 1915, in *Beverage Collection on Munitions*, Vol.3 p.142

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Reid, A. J., *The Tide of Democracy: Shipyard Workers and Social Relations in Britain, 1870-1950*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010), p.53

<sup>73</sup> Cole, *The World of Labour*, p.228

<sup>74</sup> Marshall, J. D., *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, (Whitehaven, Michael Moon, 1981) op. cit., p. 400

opportunities for lower wage rates, important for lowering costs when tendering for contracts. However, the ASE claimed only skilled tradesmen could be employed on new machinery at standard rates, and semi-skilled machine operators serve at least a four-year apprenticeship. When Vickers tried introducing new screw-drilling machines operated by unskilled labour, opposition was such that they conceded to the skilled men in the interest of harmony.<sup>75</sup> Craftsmen were likely to be sons of craftsmen, labourer's children could become craftsmen but in practice it was difficult as the majority of families could not afford apprenticeship costs.<sup>76</sup> Pressing pre-war work however meant that many Vickers apprentices were prevented from attending regularly at the Barrow Technical School, training therefore was mainly on the job.<sup>77</sup> The engineers neglected repetition work, devoting their time to more specialised operations with the result that they were unrivalled as builders of ships and bridges, meaning that when war came they had neither the labour nor the plant to deal with vast quantities of simple turning. Accordingly, the right to do most of the engineering work was the monopoly of a limited class of fully skilled men.

Barrow shipyard labourers shared in the stimulus provided for general unions by the so called 'New Unionism' of the late 1880's and by 1897 approximately 30 per cent of their numbers were unionised.<sup>78</sup> In 1899 the National Associated Union of Labour (NAUL) and the National Union of Gas Workers and General Labourers became affiliated to the Barrow Trades and Labour Council.<sup>79</sup> The *Lancashire Evening Post* reported in 1909 that the NAUL Secretary had set about organising the most unorganised and unfortunate section of the Barrow people, 'the labourers'.<sup>80</sup> By 1913 some 3,000 organised labourers were employed at the shipyard, but with their low skills and wages they were at the mercy of the artisans. The NAUL pursued recognition by employers and provided viable member welfare benefits, while strike pay allowed opportunity for limited action.

Barrow women's trade union organisation can be traced to the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) organiser Ada Nield Chew who formed a General Workers women's branch at the Jute Works in 1907, which transferred to the National Federation of Women Workers

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<sup>75</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday 15 February 1913; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday 24 February 1913

<sup>76</sup> Roberts, E. A. M., *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster*, p.12

<sup>77</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 28 October 1910, students numbered 569 in 1910 of which 200 belonged to engineering

<sup>78</sup> Todd, N., *Trade Unions and the Engineering Dispute at Barrow-in-Furness 1897-98*, p.35

<sup>79</sup> Barrow's first socialist parliamentary candidate, was an official of the NUGW & GLU

<sup>80</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 13 February 1919

(NFWW) the following year.<sup>81</sup> This was a reversal of the Federation's policy of ensuring that women wherever possible were organised with the men and suggests that the General Workers were not prepared to continue to provide sources to organise women. At approximately the same time the Women's Industrial Branch of the Gas Workers and General Labourers Union joined the Barrow Trade and Labour Council, combining the forces of female labour in the town.<sup>82</sup> The NFWW appears to have lapsed, possibly caused by the slump in trade at the Jute Works, however in 1913 Mrs. Mills working with the Women's Labour League (WLL) re-established a new branch in Barrow.<sup>83</sup>

As early as 1897 shop stewards were elected in the Vickers works. However, the shop steward had no official right to negotiate with the foreman or management should a grievance arise in the shop.<sup>84</sup> He was not officially recognized by management and the district and national Trade Union officials could not constitutionally delegate to him any part of their function of collective bargaining.<sup>85</sup> The shop steward's functions prior to 1914 were limited to contribution card checks, collecting union dues and keeping vigilance over work practices. Suppression of shop floor democracy thus allowed craft unions to take a centralised role, the skilled forming strong occupational organisations exercising significant unilateral control over labour supply, definition of job territories, standards of wages and working conditions while providing welfare benefits to bind the membership.<sup>86</sup> At Barrow, the trade union movement predominantly represented Vickers workers meaning their officials concentrated on their own problems.

Under a National Shipyard Agreement (NSA) the objective was to provide a means whereby questions between employers and unions might be discussed without work stoppages. While the boilermakers had dissociated themselves, a new amended Agreement was signed by both the shipyard trade unions and the Shipbuilding Employers Federation (SEF) in 1913 operational for three years.<sup>87</sup> The separate national agreement signed by the

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<sup>81</sup> Hunt, C., *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.28,

<sup>82</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 24 May 1907

<sup>83</sup> The Women's Labour League (WLL) was specifically concerned with recruiting women in the home, whereas the WTUL recruited in the factory

<sup>84</sup> Hinton. J., *The First Shop Stewards'*, (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973), p.186; Cole, G. D. H., *Workshop Organisation*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923), p.9

<sup>85</sup> Weekes, B. *The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 1880-1914*, (Warwick PhD, 1970), pp. 9-11; Cole, G. D. H., *The Payment of Wage: a study in payment by results under the wage-system*, Trade Union Series No.5, (Westminster, 1918), pp. 137-140

<sup>86</sup> Clegg, H. A., Fox, A., and Thompson, A. F., *A History of British Trade Unions since 1899, Volume 1, 1890-1910*, (Oxford, 1964), pp. 4-14

<sup>87</sup> *Dundee Courier*, Wednesday 19 February 1913, amendments made were to hasten negotiations when disputes occurred, definite times being fixed within which they must be dealt with



engineering unions, including the ASE, terminated in March 1914.<sup>88</sup> There were other engineering union signatories to a new settlement, but the ASE by not consulting with them left the industry in difficulty.<sup>89</sup> The difficulty was overcome when a provisional treaty was agreed by the ASE with the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) to prevent stoppages.<sup>90</sup> That it would take months for complete agreement, meant negotiations were ongoing when the war broke out.<sup>91</sup> Arrangements by mutual agreement were thus more acceptable to employers and unions alike and liable to be kept.<sup>92</sup> Characterization of pre-war industrial relationships was voluntarist, meaning a preference for non-legally enforceable collective agreements and autonomous settlement of terms by the parties themselves, rather than the intervention of third parties or the State.<sup>93</sup>

By means of national employer federations negotiating power was strengthened, and whilst collective bargaining benefited the trade unions, it necessitated recognition of the employers' as managers.<sup>94</sup> While yard owners had the power which came from winning contracts, their lack of control over labour meant they were dependent on a significant level of voluntary cooperation in everyday production. Management preferred to leave work organisation to the practical experience and intuitive skill of the different trades' foremen, although there was growing insistence that foremen should not be society members.<sup>95</sup> While performing vital administrative tasks and acting as the employer's representative in hiring and firing labour, foremen could be pulled into collusion with the squads they were supervising and in demarcation disputes normally sided with their own trades. For benefit purposes they remained in their own unions, encouraged closed-shops and accelerated work by offering generous allowances. Emphasis of managerial initiatives in the shipyard thus led to a system of payment by results through piecework and the Premium Bonus System (PBS) which would stimulate and increase the productive capacity of industry.

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<sup>88</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Wednesday, 4 March 1914, other key signatories were the Steam Engine Makers and the United Machine Workers Association, and the Tool Makers Societies

<sup>89</sup> Steam Engine Makers Society and United Machine Workers Association, Brass-founders and Finishers, Amalgamated Toolmakers etc., the ASE like the Boilermakers made their separate agreements

<sup>90</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Friday, 9 January 1914

<sup>91</sup> *Birmingham Daily Mail*, Wednesday, 17 June 1914

<sup>92</sup> Kirkaldy, *British Labour: Replacement and Conciliation 1914-1921*, p.33

<sup>93</sup> Rubin, G.R., *War, Law and Labour: The Munitions Acts, State Regulation and the Unions 1915-1921*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), p.7

<sup>94</sup> Mclvor, A. J., *Organised Capital: Employers Organisations and Industrial Relations in Northern England, 1880-1939*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 6-17

<sup>95</sup> *The Engineering Times*, March, 1907 declared 'a man cannot serve two masters'

## Wages, Payment Schemes and Overtime

Wage rates conformed generally to the state of trade, a rise in a boom, a reduction in a slump, the last pre-war year of depressed trade being seen at Barrow in 1908.<sup>96</sup> It was widely understood that wages would be restored as trade increased. At Barrow while working hours remained the same in pre-war years, wages rose gradually, increases being made to attract and retain workmen and meet the high cost of living and rents.<sup>97</sup>

The nature of shipyard products meant many tasks were organised as contracts handed to largely self-regulating work groups, predominantly pieceworkers. While piecework prices for the job were set locally general advances were set nationally. It was largely accepted that wage changes due to 'general industry conditions' in the shipbuilding industry and not 'local circumstances' would apply to all trades in the federated shipyards concurrently and equally, bringing each district in line with the 'agreed' standard rates on piecework and time wages.<sup>98</sup> The general award could however vary dependent on the general condition of industry and in its determination all trades negotiated with employers.

In the case of the engineers, in an attempt to escape wage fluctuations long-term wage agreements were made. Agreement existed between the EEF and the engineering unions that wage disputes would be dealt with locally and appealed nationally should this be necessary. At Vickers, a five-year wage agreement between the ASE and employers terminated on 31 March, 1914 affecting 2,580 engineers.<sup>99</sup> While the ASE requested a 6s per week increase bringing certain trades up to 40s per week, an agreement was reached of an immediate increase of 2s per week with a further 1s in October 1914.<sup>100</sup> Included in the agreement was a proviso that no decrease in wages would be made if a reduction of hours were introduced in the future.<sup>101</sup> In turn other Barrow engineers benefited from Vickers improved wages, the general increase of 3s per week granted in the district being the highest alongside London, Southall, Sheffield and Erith.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday 14 March 1908, *Dundee Courier*, Monday, 12 October 1908 reported the steel works closed down affecting railway and docks employment, the Flax and Jute workers were put on short time and Vickers saw a shortage of orders; *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1909, unemployment returns indicated 1,840 men or 3.2 per cent of the population were unemployed, Barrow was exceptional and of thirteen Lancashire distress committees and three labour registries had the highest population percentage unemployed

<sup>97</sup> Jeffery's, *The Story of the Engineers*, p.131, engineers were worse off in 1913 than twenty years earlier

<sup>98</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 26 December 1912

<sup>99</sup> *Daily Herald*, Saturday 16 January 1915

<sup>100</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Tuesday, 13 February 1914

<sup>101</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Wednesday, 11 February 1914

<sup>102</sup> *Daily Herald*, Saturday, 16 January 1915; Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers*, p.131, quotes the majority of district rates were 36s and 37s by 1913-14

Considering the unskilled, a minimum wage of 20s per week was granted to shipyard labourers in 1911 by Vickers at a time when wages were already higher than those in similar yards.<sup>103</sup> For all labourers on 23s or less a general rise of 1s a week from November 1912, followed by 1s per week in June 1913 was granted attached to a two year agreement. On acceptance of this agreement the NAUL demanded a general increase of 3s for men on more than 23s as this was the rate at other yards. Vickers refused and 120 men came out followed by a further 1,400 NAUL members who struck in sympathy.<sup>104</sup> Work resumed when the NAUL accepted a 2s per week advance linked to a two year agreement.<sup>105</sup> Similar wage increases were made with other sections of labourers in March 1913.<sup>106</sup> In the Steelworks labourer's wages were affected by fluctuating prices in the industry, while certain trades were tied to a sliding scale agreement.

The system of piece-rates riddled with workgroup customs and special allowances was not efficient, what employers needed was a scheme of stimulating and increasing the productive capacity of industry.<sup>107</sup> The Premium Bonus System (PBS) offered an answer as it allowed an additional payment for every unit of time saved on the job, but made payments smaller as more time was saved ensuring double-time could never be attained.<sup>108</sup> There were limitations as it was difficult timing jobs accurately except on standardised machine-work such as routine turning in the engineering and joiners shops.<sup>109</sup> Additionally as soon as a significant amount of time was saved on a job it was retimed.<sup>110</sup> The PBS was not introduced into the Vickers shipyard during the war, nor was it introduced into any shipyards. On the Vickers engineering side the system was introduced by the Committee on Production, stating that the rules of the trade societies which hindered output should be suspended.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Saturday, 5 August 1911

<sup>104</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday, 10 January 1913

<sup>105</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 23 January 1913

<sup>106</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Monday, 3 March 1913, there were approximately 3,000 labourers in the shipyard

<sup>107</sup> Reid, *The Tide of Democracy*, p.40

<sup>108</sup> Thomson, W.R., *The Rowan The Premium Bonus System of Payment by Results*, (Glasgow, McCorquodale, second edition 1919)

<sup>109</sup> *The Scotsman*, Saturday 9 March 1912, at the Edinburgh Shipbuilding Conference discussion took place about Vickers introducing the system into the joiners department; alleged abuse of rate cutting at Barrow would lead to a serious strike during 1917

<sup>110</sup> BDB 16/L/24, undated memorandum on discipline in the Vickers Yard, Barrow, noted once setting and accepting times were overcome, workers were able to obtain higher earnings at a time of rising living costs

<sup>111</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 19 January 1919, reported the system had been in use some two years on the engineering side at Vickers

While the ASE were the only society to have agreement with employers on the system, they were conscious of the profit motive and contended at times of urgent work men were speeded-up leaving them with a diminishing return.<sup>112</sup> The ASE concluded the PBS enabled the employer to retain from the worker, or part of it, that which would have been his under a piecework system. For the most part trade union opposition remained and resisted the system's application, but united action for its abolition proved impossible and while the ASE gave notice that agreement would be suspended.<sup>113</sup>

Given the independence of work groups, difficulty of supervision, and the problem of developing effective payment by results, it was hardly surprising that workers retained a high level of independence in deciding how hard and long they worked. Technical workers and outfitters on time-rates had an incentive to work slowly and spin out the length of their contracts. Metalworkers on piece-rates held down output to demonstrate existing rates were inadequate, while workers who anticipated being offered overtime at higher rates postponed work until evenings or weekend.<sup>114</sup> Complaint at Barrow was that men could earn such good wages on piecework that absenteeism was a considerable nuisance. Part of the problem lay where men had a definite standard of living and regulated their wages accordingly. If further rises outside agreements were made enabling men to earn more in less time, increased absenteeism, further delays and penalties could be expected.

High pressure was seen in naval work. With limitations on building time and imposition of penalties for late delivery, contractors had little option but add to their estimates an amount for overtime or safeguard themselves against penalties. Dependent on the state of contract completion and men's craft, normal wages could be significantly boosted by overtime, shift work, Sunday and holiday work and work until completion.<sup>115</sup> Rapid work and overtime in some Vickers departments became so excessive that protests were made to the management.<sup>116</sup> When NAUL members threatened an overtime ban, Vickers agreed to restrict overtime to 30 hours per month in the naval works. If Vickers needed labourers they agreed to ask the union to supply the demand, if not enough men were available then the union would agree to an overtime extension. On the engineering side, the major societies

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<sup>112</sup> *Hartlepool Mail*, Monday, 7 November 1910

<sup>113</sup> Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers*, p.155

<sup>114</sup> Reid, *The Tide of Democracy*, p.41

<sup>115</sup> Men working holidays were paid time-and-one-half for ordinary hours and double-time thereafter, Sunday, Good Friday and Christmas were paid double-time. Trials money could also boost workers' wages significantly

<sup>116</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 17 March 1913

were not affected by overtime decisions as they were tied to a national agreement obliging them to work as and when required. From 1911 growing unrest and a need for shorter working hours were seen.

### **Disputes and the 48 Hour Week**

When trade was good, neither employers nor workers wanted unrest. In a time of prosperity Vickers could not afford extended stoppages having contracts to complete, while workers on good wages realised prolonged strikes brought distress.<sup>117</sup> The single extended stoppage during the immediate pre-war period was caused by the 1910 lock-out of the boilermakers in the federated yards in response to frequent breaches in violation of the National Agreement by members on the Tyne and Clyde.<sup>118</sup> At Barrow it was hoped that the management would withdraw notices at the last minute, but the men were disappointed. Some 4,000 Vickers workers were affected of which 200 received no pay, others received 10s strike pay for the first fortnight and 3s thereafter.<sup>119</sup> Distress was seen largely amongst labourers and their wives and families for whom funds were raised through public appeal, while school attendance officers reported necessitous cases to the Ladies' Free Dinners' Committee.<sup>120</sup> After fourteen weeks the lock-out notices were withdrawn, the cost of the dispute in lost production, workers' wages and union funds being enormous. Todd says, regarding the engineers, the national engineer's lock-out of 1897-98 was a factor which kept them free from national disruption throughout the pre-war period.<sup>121</sup>

While there were no great upheavals in 1913, such as experienced in the 1911 national rail strike and 1912 coal strike, industrial disputes numbered more than ever (Table 2).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 5 June 1913

<sup>118</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Friday, 2 September 1910, the decision was the outcome of disputes at Henderson's Shipyard on the Clyde and Armstrong, Whitworth's on the Tyne

<sup>119</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Wednesday, 24 September 1910;

<sup>120</sup> *The Scotsman*, Monday, 7 November 1910; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Wednesday 23 November 1910

<sup>121</sup> Todd, N., *Trade Unions and the Engineering Dispute at Barrow-in-Furness, 1897-98*, p.47

<sup>122</sup> *Official History of the Ministry of Munitions: Vol. IV The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-6* - Chapter 1, The Regulation of Labour, p.11

Year	Disputes	Workmen Affected	Working Days Lost
1911, Average 4 Quarters	64	23,446	330,479
1912, Average 4 Quarters	58	20,221	342,332
1913, Average 4 Quarters	98	33,172	746,924
1914 January to March	66	13,603	424,200
1914 April to June	91	23,061	307,500
1914 July to September	47	11,978	581,900

**Table 2 - Engineering, Shipbuilding and Metal Trades Industrial Disputes 1911-1914  
National Figures Known to the Board of Trade**

Arrangements existed for dealing with disputes as they arose. Permanent Conciliation or Arbitration Boards existed to which all disputes were automatically referred, while the rules of Trade Union and Employers' Associations allowed for the summoning of joint conferences as required. Conciliation was preferred to arbitration, but the system being voluntary workers retained the right to enforce their demands by striking whilst employers held the power of the lock-out. Although the 1913 unrest was widespread and stoppages numerous, the Conciliation Boards and Joint Committees demonstrated their value by the small proportion of cases referred to them which ended in stoppages.<sup>123</sup> Sir Trevor Dawson, in 1913 spoke of the mutually satisfactory interests of Vickers masters and men. When difficulty arose he said men approached the management or directors and their case was immediately investigated to enable production to be maintained without long term difficulty.<sup>124</sup>

'Demarcation again' was the phrase often used as disputes held back work. It was essential that arbitration machinery was established and in July 1912 the shipyard and engineering trades agreed to a National Demarcation Board, the Boilermakers Society making their own arrangements with the employers.<sup>125</sup> As shipbuilders and engineers work was closely connected disputes chiefly occurred between them. Shortage of certain trades at Vickers and the urgent need to complete contracts often caused men to be transferred to

<sup>123</sup> Kirkaldy, *British Labour: Replacement and Conciliation 1914-1921: Methods Adopted to Diminish Industrial Unrest*, p.33, in 1913 Conciliation and Joint Committees dealt with 4,070 cases of dispute were dealt with, 2,238 cases were settled and 291 case were settled by umpires and in only 31 instances did work stop

<sup>124</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday 28 November 1913

<sup>125</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Saturday 13 July 1912; *Motherwell Times*, Friday, 26 July 1912, the engineers voted 18,096 to 3905 for the agreement, the boilermakers rejected the agreement by 2,309, to 1,720 votes

work that was not theirs, therefore demarcation disputes became common.<sup>126</sup> On 10 July 1913, a strike called by the Boilermaker's Society caused 5,000 men to be out including many labourers.<sup>127</sup> It was unusual in that it was a demarcation dispute amongst themselves, thus Vickers refused to discuss the matter with their delegation. It was also hinted that a national lock-out would be sought if the men did not resume at an early date. The labourer's suffered financial loss through no fault of their own and when the Boilermakers Society members returned the labourers demanded compensation and on failure refused to work preventing the skilled men doing so. The labourers returned, but by their action indicated they were worthy of consideration.

Self-regulating groups could be cause for disruption, particularly riveting squads, as if one member was absent this caused the squad to be broken preventing others working. On the other hand when efforts were made to accelerate ship-plating plater's labourers walked out complaining their numbers were being reduced such that work became excessive, the strike was quickly settled when sufficient men to carry out the work was agreed.<sup>128</sup> In general it can be said that the various Vickers disputes were dealt with quickly and without difficulty through the workers and employers organisations.

Unrest was not restricted to Vickers, in March 1913 with the backing of local unions 350 Barrow gas workers struck over wages leaving two days' gas supply. Local industries dependent on gas for production were affected while street lights remained unlit and domestic users were asked to curtail gas cooking.<sup>129</sup> Using municipal clerks, draughtsmen and others, which included an ill-fated attempt to import labour, the Corporation maintained a limited gas supply.<sup>130</sup> Inconvenience would have been greater had not the Electricity Department maintained supply, the workers resisting union efforts to bring them out.<sup>131</sup> Whilst the council used wage comparisons with other towns for refusing increases, workers pointed out that Barrow house rents were amongst the highest in the country while the cost

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<sup>126</sup> BDB 16/L/264 Discipline; *North West Daily Mail*, Friday 15 August 1914, squads of riveters, caulkers, angle-iron smiths, strikers, hand or pneumatic drillers, shipwrights, electrical wireman were only a number of the trade classes where men are needed

<sup>127</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 12 July 1913, the dispute affected 500-600 labourers

<sup>128</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday, 11 April and Monday, 14 April 1913

<sup>129</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 15 March 1913; *The Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1913

<sup>130</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 22 March 1913; *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, Wednesday, 19 March 1913, 12,000 customers were required to be supplied with light

<sup>131</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Thursday, 20 March 1913, Walney where many Vickers workers lived was supplied by electricity and not gas

of living was greater than most towns.<sup>132</sup> The strike continued for three weeks, the men returning on the Corporation's terms, which did not include a wage increase.<sup>133</sup>

Under the control of the Northern Paper Makers Association the Barrow Pulp and Paper works was threatened by the lockout of Glossop workers, but a partial settlement saw the Glossop men return.<sup>134</sup> Unrest was also seen at the steelworks, while with accommodation in great demand houses planned for completion by late 1913 were delayed by a nineteen-week builders' strike and lock-out.<sup>135</sup> Thankfully 1914 was quiescent following the unrest of previous years, wages were mainly tied to agreements, disputes settled quickly, and the lessons from prolonged strikes were learnt.

By its isolation and reliance on outside supplies Barrow was particularly vulnerable to external disputes. The towns heavy industries meant they required coal and coke as did the gas and electricity works, any breakdown in supplies therefore could cause serious disruption. The August 1911 railway strike prevented Durham coke arriving at the Barrow iron and steel works, though most of the plant shut down the plate mills maintained production.<sup>136</sup> A limited rail service meant food and milk took priority over passengers, while general non-perishable goods declined pushing up prices. Though the Furness Railway offered bonuses of 50 per cent to men who remained at work, the Company's dock labourers came out over wage advances.<sup>137</sup> The 1911 Liverpool dock strike further demonstrated Barrow's susceptibility when the steamer service from the port carrying provisions and foodstuffs to Barrow was suspended.<sup>138</sup>

While the threatened 1909 miners' industrial action caused anxiety at Barrow the 1912 strike found some industries and the gas and electricity works better prepared with stockpiles of fuel. Vickers with Government contracts to complete held four to six weeks fuel supply which not only allowed them to maintain operation but provide workmen with

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<sup>132</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday 29 March 1913, Amongst the towns compared were Wigan where it cost 2s 6d per week to rent a house and Leicester where it cost 4s for a five-roomed house; at Barrow it cost from 6s to 6s 6d to rent the smallest house

<sup>133</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Council Minutes, October 1912 to November 1913, Barrow Records Office

<sup>134</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Monday 14 April and Tuesday 15 April 1913

<sup>135</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday 13 September 1913, the strike was caused by the employment of non-union plumbers by Barrow builders; *The Barrow News*, Saturday 11 October 1913, by October 1913, forty-nine houses were erected and seventeen were one-storey high, fifty houses would have been occupied had the deadlock not occurred

<sup>136</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Saturday, 19 August 1911

<sup>137</sup> *Shields Daily Gazette*, Friday 25 August, 1911

<sup>138</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 August 1911



household coal.<sup>139</sup> Although the Furness Railway held large coal stocks, decreased rail services affected some 1,500 workmen needing to travel to Barrow daily. The Barrow Hematite and Steel Company however, being a heavy fuel consumer, gave notice that workers contracts would cease fourteen days from commencement of the strike and subsequent employment would be temporary.<sup>140</sup> In all some 4,000 men were laid off in the town causing the Necessitous Meals Bill to be introduced.<sup>141</sup>

Regarding the shorter working week, before 1914 most men were working not less than 54 hours finishing Saturday lunchtime. In their demand for a 48-hour week the boilermakers sought to stop overtime completely, but this was unachievable without the cooperation of other trades unions. Not all societies had identical views as the lessening of hours meant a decrease in wages for time-workers while hardly affecting the boilermakers on piecework. Other unions refused their demands which caused the boilermakers to change their policy to one of fixing local bye-laws to reduce overtime to its narrowest.<sup>142</sup> Though the boilermakers were prepared to support a call for action for a 48-hour week, their claim was set aside when war was declared. An approach was also made by ASE for the shorter week, but delays in negotiations occurred and before agreement could be made war broke out and discussions were suspended releasing Vickers from their obligation of reducing the working week.<sup>143</sup>

Barrow was of such distinctly working-class character that it would have be criminal for the Labour Party not to contest its Parliamentary seat.

## **Politics**

Politically the shipbuilding, engineering and iron and steel interests were of great significance to the town. It was seen that economic emancipation and social reform could be made through pressure exerted by the trade unions, and the growing influence of the political labour movement. Although the engineers were successful in returning their own Labour candidate to Parliament most of the energies of Barrow's activists were put into the fight to

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<sup>139</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16 March 1912, Vickers held a 250,000 ton coal supply, the iron and steel works shut down for eight weeks and the strike shut the company's Barnsley colliery

<sup>140</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1912

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 8 November 1913, Barrow boilermakers came out over overtime at this time

<sup>143</sup> Brownlie, J. T., *The Engineers Case for an Eight Hour Day*, 1914, Brownlie said workers found modern production wearing on the nerves, while deadening the intellect thus requiring more leisure for recreation and development of higher faculties

win the parliamentary seat and success was not repeated in the council elections where Labour failed to make significant gains. Returning a Labour MP was thus important in defending Barrow and its industry.

Barrow's labour movement was rooted in diverse political, industrial and consumer organisations, which, by the late nineteenth century, included strong trade unions, Cooperative and Fabian societies, the Trades Council and the Independent Labour Party (ILP). These institutions provided a firm base for popular support, and were influential in the growth of the Labour and Socialist Parties.<sup>144</sup> Barrow Trades Council was at the head of the Barrow trade union movement and the collective experiences of its members changed it from an organisation concerned solely with the protection of 'craft basis' and union business to that of workers alive to the changing political currents of the time. In addition to focussing on Parliamentary politics, the ILP channelled its energies into organising the unemployed and unskilled. These strong links with the general unions conflicted with the strong craft union presence on the Trades Council and generated considerable antagonism between these bodies. By the early twentieth century an integrated labour movement had developed from the piecemeal collection of disparate working-class organisations and relaxing tensions within the Trades Council, together with greater co-operation with the ILP contributed to the development of independent labour representation in Barrow.<sup>145</sup>

Through a new political trade unionism hope was seen for workers. Due to the inadequacy of strikes and the growing power of employers' federations, political action was seen by some ASE members and leaders as the only effective weapon possessed by the workers.<sup>146</sup> Union funds it was realised would be better spent sending members to Parliament than on strikes and lockouts. Following inauguration in 1904 of the Labour Representation Committee the first political levies were taken.<sup>147</sup> The ASE provided member's money to contest the two industrial constituencies of Glasgow Blackfriars (George Barnes) and Barrow-in-Furness (Charles Duncan).<sup>148</sup> 'The Barrow 'trade unionists and societies' were 'united' in returning a trades unionist to Parliament' said David Graham of the

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<sup>144</sup> Roberts, *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster 1890 to 1930*, p.10, the first socialist parliamentary candidate Peter Curran contested the 1895 general election for the Barrow ILP

<sup>145</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*, p.128, Barrow's Co-operative Society was not connected with the LRC and remained unaffiliated

<sup>146</sup> *ASE Monthly Journal*, June 1908

<sup>147</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*, pp. 144, 186

<sup>148</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 28 November 1910, when Duncan was readopted as candidate for Barrow by the ILP the delegates numbered 131 from 34 branches of 27 trade unions representing 8,000 organised workers

Boilermakers Society.<sup>149</sup> While women were prevented from voting their systematic canvassing for Labour candidates demonstrated they were serious for representation.<sup>150</sup> Moreover Labour was in favour of women's franchise and in support of Labour candidates and to propagate Labour principles *The Barrow Pioneer* was founded in 1905 and a column provided for the Barrow WLL.<sup>151</sup>

Following the resignation of the Barrow Liberal candidate the Liberal Party were unresolved whether to run a Parliamentary candidate at the 1906 election.<sup>152</sup> Finding Charles Duncan opposed to the introduction of Protection and sound on education and temperance, Liberal electors decided to support him.<sup>153</sup> Duncan therefore beat the Tory Sir Charles Cayzer on what was effectively a Liberal platform.<sup>154</sup> Not only were there socialists but Liberals and Conservatives in trade unionism who objected to paying the Labour Party levy and following the 1909 Osborne Judgement preventing use of union funds for political action, a voluntary fund was set up by the ASE.<sup>155</sup> The engineers' continued financing of Barnes and Duncan ensured they both were returned to Parliament in 1910.<sup>156</sup> Writing to the *Manchester Guardian* a Barrow resident said 'locally we have a representative of labour sitting for Barrow but not a 'Member for Barrow' in the time-honoured sense which is deplorable'.<sup>157</sup>

Duncan saw his Parliamentary job in obtaining benefits in which the town would share, even if it meant going against Labour policy.<sup>158</sup> On the occasion when Duncan spoke out against the restrictions of armaments, the Labour member R. H. Rose said: 'I have no complaint against Duncan, but why pass solemn resolutions on the detestation of war while retaining in office a man openly in support of perpetuating these evils?'<sup>159</sup> Duncan as the ASE

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<sup>149</sup> *Lancashire Daily Post*, Friday, 25 March 1904, the Barrow Labour Party represented all the affiliated trades, Trescatheric. Barrow-in-Furness Labour Party, p.1, Sponsorship was attained by J. J. Stephenson of the ASE Executive and Charles Duncan nominated to represent Barrow

<sup>150</sup> *The Barrow Pioneer*, Issue No.6, January 1906

<sup>151</sup> Shields Daily News, Friday, 15 February 1918, Councillor Egerton Wake became the representative of the WWL on the Executive of the National Administration Council of the National Labour Party

<sup>152</sup> Aberdeen Journal, Wednesday, 9 March 1904, the Liberal Party Association disapproved of his views and Mr. Conybeare the Barrow Liberal candidate retired

<sup>153</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 30 December 1905, Nottingham Evening Post, Tuesday, 17 October 1910, Duncan was an abstainer and supporter of the Temperance Movement

<sup>154</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 17 January 1906, Duncan won the Barrow seat from the Tory Sir Charles Cayzer who had represented the borough through three Parliaments

<sup>155</sup> *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, Saturday, 24 August 1912

<sup>156</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Tuesday, 18 January 1910, the strength of the vote had increased with over 1,000 names being added to the electoral register since 1906 of which Labour claimed 60 per cent

<sup>157</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Thursday, 10 November 1910

<sup>158</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Adviser*, Wednesday, 1 February 1911, *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star*, Friday, 26 January 1912, by refusing to condemn naval re-armament he had done his best to ensure Barrow got its fair share of orders

<sup>159</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1914

elective defended the workers.<sup>160</sup> On the occasion of the 1910 boilermakers' lockout, he had warned ASE members 'if the employers succeeded in taking the boilermakers down, you will be next'.<sup>161</sup> But when distress took hold Duncan introduced a Parliamentary notice to ask the Admiralty to bear pressure on employers to persuade them to become amenable to the suggestion that lockout notices should be withdrawn, his request however placed onus on contract delays rather than the boilermakers coming to agreement.<sup>162</sup> In reality political representation to bring about significant change was limited typically the 1908 slump at Barrow found the unemployed in the same desperate position they had been without Parliamentary Labour representation.

By August 1912 there was great strain on the ASE's 'voluntary' political fund causing the Management Committee to address the members on its continued neglect. Not only did the ASE have heavy liabilities in connection with Barnes and Duncan, contributions to Labour Party funds were several years overdue.<sup>163</sup> Following the 1913 Trade Union Act, passed to remedy the Osborne Judgement, the temper of many union members regarding Labour Party support had changed.<sup>164</sup> Labour's record was not considered creditable and 'political sham fighters' and 'nothing but liberals' were terms oft quoted.<sup>165</sup> One worker suggested what Barnes and Duncan had done in the House since 1906 could be inscribed on one side of a threepenny piece.<sup>166</sup> In April 1914 a retrograde vote for the levying of ASE members of 1s per year to provide funds for political action came as a serious set-back to the trade union and labour movement.<sup>167</sup> It was impossible to impose levies, and political action became dependent once again on voluntary funds which were already heavily in debt. There was thus no money available to pay the upcoming election expenses of Barnes and Duncan. The union activists realising parliamentary representation was limited made plans to put up Socialist candidates against leading Labour members at the 1914 general election.<sup>168</sup> Although there

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<sup>160</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*, p.147 interestingly records there is a hint in Tom Mann's Memoirs that he and Duncan, another ASE member formed the Workers' Union, in 1898, to overcome craft/labourer divisions by recruiting non-union engineering workers

<sup>161</sup> *Hartlepool Mail*, Tuesday, 13 September 1910; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Monday, 19 September 1910

<sup>162</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 16 November 1910

<sup>163</sup> *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, Saturday, 24 August 1912

<sup>164</sup> Mortimer, *History of the Boilermakers*, p.56, This restored the legitimacy of union political funding, but required unions to ballot their members and allow individual members to opt-out of contributing to the levy

<sup>165</sup> Jefferys, J. B., *The Story of the Engineers, 1800-1945*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1946), p.162

<sup>166</sup> *ASE Monthly Journal and Report*, October 1913, letter

<sup>167</sup> *Daily Herald*, Monday, 13 April 1913

<sup>168</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, Tuesday, 17 December 1912

was little chance of capturing these seats, the hope was to discard the current Labour leaders including Duncan, but before the campaign could be carried out the war intervened.

In the Barrow municipal elections Labour made slow progress as there was difficulty getting out their own vote. Alexandra McConnell, a Belfast immigrant and shipyard worker became the party's first official councillor in November 1905, followed by Arthur Peters a year later. These early candidates were made aware of the limitations of a supposedly free and open democratic system. The shipyard and steelwork owners actively opposed the circulation of Labour nomination papers within their works whilst promoting other candidates. Peters stressed to Labour supporters the secrecy of the ballot, 'even if the foremen were outside the polling booth.' Further, the party was accused of 'bad taste' when putting up a candidate against Councillor Miller who was supported by Vickers, while the *Barrow Herald* was moved to rhyme 'it is strange that labourers choose, as champions of their cause, men who were never known to use anything save their jaws.'<sup>169</sup>

Although Barrow was initially ruled by an industrial elite with a greater interest in new industrial projects than welfare, representatives of middle-class professional, trading and business interests gradually filtered onto Barrow Council.<sup>170</sup> A substantial number of early Labour candidates were thus middle-class socialists like Charles Ellison who ran his own mineral-water business.<sup>171</sup> Others were Labour activists like Egerton P. Wake who called for the establishment of the principle of the right to work or the provision of maintenance before armaments reductions.<sup>172</sup> Ethnic and religious divisions also played an important part in local politics and a significant section of the Unionist vote comprised Northern Irish working-class Protestant migrants who in 1908 swung the vote in the Hindpool ward where Labour lost to a churchman and Conservative.<sup>173</sup>

It was argued repeatedly that Labour was introducing politics into the Council Chamber, previously the preserve of unbiased freethinking Independents. Most of these Independents however appeared on the election committees for Conservative Parliamentary candidates. The Barrow Property Owners Association lobby group who claimed to be non-

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<sup>169</sup> Op. Cit., Trescaheric, B., *Barrow-in-Furness Labour Party (1914-1969): A Brief Introduction to the Microfilm Edition of the Barrow-in-Furness Labour Party Records* (Microform Academic Publishers, 1998), p.2

<sup>170</sup> Marshall, J. D.; Walton, J. K., *The Lake Counties from 1830 to the mid-20th Century* (Manchester, 1981), p.129

<sup>171</sup> Trescaheric, B., *Barrow-in-Furness Labour Party (1914-1969)*, p.1

<sup>172</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Wednesday, 1 February 1911

<sup>173</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 25 April 1908; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 17 January 1912, the ward returned to labour in 1912

political, held that at all costs the Labour Party representatives must be opposed.<sup>174</sup> By 1914 Labour had a solid body of eight Councillors yet were still a minority. It would have been expected Labour would have continued their advance and gradually won control of the Council, but the war intervened. Not only was there underrepresentation of the working-classes on the Council but on the bench as of 18 justices only one was representative of the workers.<sup>175</sup>

Employers realised to guarantee profits they had to attract and retain labour absence of adequate housing they realised was an obstacle to their ambitions. It was also firmly understood that healthy and contented workers were liable to stay rather than leave and therefore the conditions of Barrow's housing was important in this matter.

## Housing

Barrow housing was mostly provided by private enterprise with variable quality, while Vickers had taken the lead in building its own housing stock. Initially significant numbers of tenements and houses had been built by Barrow's industrialists to accommodate a wide range of workers.<sup>176</sup> Hindpool, built to house iron and steel workers was consistently identified as the poorest area, its dwellings described as sub-standard, badly designed and poorly maintained. Company tenements were unpopular and generated prejudices as a result of their forbidding appearance. For shipbuilding workers Reid says housing was provided on a small scale by firms able to move to bigger sites away from congested areas, however Vickers did not hold this option.<sup>177</sup> A scarcity of workers due to the inadequacy of housing accommodation in Barrow led the firm to build the large Vickerstown estate on Walney Island.<sup>178</sup> Residential status reflected the labour hierarchies of the shipyard. Grander houses were reserved for managers and villas for draughtsmen, while workers obtained suitable

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<sup>174</sup> Trescaheric, *Barrow-in-Furness Labour Party*, p.2, *Belfast Weekly*, Thursday, 10 July 1913 reported the holding of the meeting of the Loyal Orange Institution of England Grand Lodge at Barrow Town Hall of which the Mayor was a member

<sup>175</sup> BDSO 7-1: *Barrow Labour Party and Trades Council Minutes from 1914* – Meeting of 14 January 1915

<sup>176</sup> Pollard, S., *Town planning in the nineteenth century; the beginning of modern Barrow-in-Furness*, *T. L. C Antiquity Society LXIII* (1952-53), p.110, by 1873-4 the Furness Railway Company had 194 houses, the Haematite and Steel Company 696, the Barrow Iron Shipbuilding Company 437 and the Jute and Flax Company 116

<sup>177</sup> Reid, *The Tide of Democracy*, p.43

<sup>178</sup> Blackburn Standard, *Saturday*, 28 July 1900

accommodation for low rent.<sup>179</sup> The estate had its own shops, churches and schools while attractions were provided for workers' leisure hours.<sup>180</sup>

The 1909 Barrow Medical Officer of Health's Report stated 'the housing of the working-classes has no significance in the town, there has never been any difficulty, except on rare and temporary occasions for the workers to find homes for their families'. But from here on Barrow would pass through a period of unprecedented and continuous industrial activity, the renewed wave of migration being such that the Corporation was faced with the difficulty of providing accommodation. Even after finding work men had left because they could not find decent accommodation, whilst money was sent away by men who could not bring their wives and families to Barrow through lack of suitable houses.<sup>181</sup> Realisation was that private builders could not by their own efforts provide sufficient houses. They were physically unable to build enough during boom years and because their concern was profit they did not build in years of depression when no one was prepared to buy or rent. Accordingly private enterprise built to meet the needs of the better classes and the artisan classes when profitable. Beyond the provision of bare essentials, municipal concerns were limited and reflected Council intentions of keeping rates low and leaving housing in private hands.<sup>182</sup>

While craftsmen were anxious to maintain wage differentials Elizabeth Roberts says there was no distinction in housing as craftsmen and labourers lived next to each other and paid identical 'rents'.<sup>183</sup> However, it is highly probable that poorer families moved frequently, dependent upon changes in family incomes and circumstances. With a scarcity of houses, rents were naturally high and many had realised it was more economical to buy their own properties. Roberts's enquiries found four working-class families who had bought their own houses encouraged by the Barrow Trades Council who in 1904 pointed out that if a buyer could raise £10 deposit, he could pay off his mortgage at 12s a month rather than pay 20s a month rent.<sup>184</sup> These properties were likely to have been of the smaller type. Skilled craftsman and tradesman on high wages wanted new and better housing not inadequate

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<sup>179</sup> Roberts, E. A. M., *Working Class Housing in Barrow and Lancaster 1880-1930*, Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Yorkshire, Vol.127, Liverpool 1978, p.112, Vickers found it cheaper to take electricity across Walney Channel than gas so Vickerstown not only had electric light but electric ovens

<sup>180</sup> Richardson, *Vickers, Sons and Maxim*, p.194

<sup>181</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 5 May 1914

<sup>182</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*, p.21

<sup>183</sup> Roberts, *Working Class Standards of Living*, p.318

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

small two and three bedroom properties.<sup>185</sup> Such men therefore bought their own houses through building societies, private advances and Barrow Corporation under their powers of lending.<sup>186</sup> While appreciation of lending under the 1899 Small Dwellings Acquisition Act was expressed by the Barrow Property Owners' Association, but Barrow's socialists saw workers being crushed at the expense of the house-owning class as most labourers could not afford the down payments. The overall position exhibited a high proportion of house-owners, for instance it was reported in 1915 that in one street with less than one hundred houses there were seventy-two separate house-owners.<sup>187</sup>

Adoption of a municipal housing scheme to house workers at reasonable rents continued to be demanded by trade unions and the Health Committee supported by Labour representatives on the Council, but with no success.<sup>188</sup> With a lack of commitment by Barrow Council to build working-class dwellings, 250 workers houses were provided by private syndicate in January 1913.<sup>189</sup> Vickers took further steps to erect 151 utilitarian cottages at North Vickerstown.<sup>190</sup> By the time these were underway a further 253 workers cottages were ordered to be erected at the same site paid for by a Government Loan.<sup>191</sup>

With broad roads and wide back streets the town in normal times had a low density occupation per square mile compared with other towns and cities.<sup>192</sup> This condition is demonstrated by Ashmore Baker's graph for 1910 (Fig.3).<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 November 1912, reported Vickers looked forward to seven years good trade and were anxious that private builders would erect 500 houses

<sup>186</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Council Minutes November 1912 to October 1913 and November 1913 to October 1914, *Barrow News*, Saturday, 8 and 25 January 1913 the Cooperative Society refused to take up the scheme as it was too big applications were continued to be made for purchase loans from the LGB before a final request in October 1914; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 29 July 1915 reported loans through the small dwellings act were being used to buy the new Vickerstown workers cottages

<sup>187</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Friday 25 June 1915

<sup>188</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 11 February 1913

<sup>189</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, Housing Sub-committee, 20 January 1913 - Provision of Housing for the Working Classes, the major trade unions the Typographic Association and National Blast Furnace-men all submitted letters; Trescaheric, Vickers established the Walney Housing Company to use loans to finance workers' housing, the majority of houses remained for rent but some were offered for sale

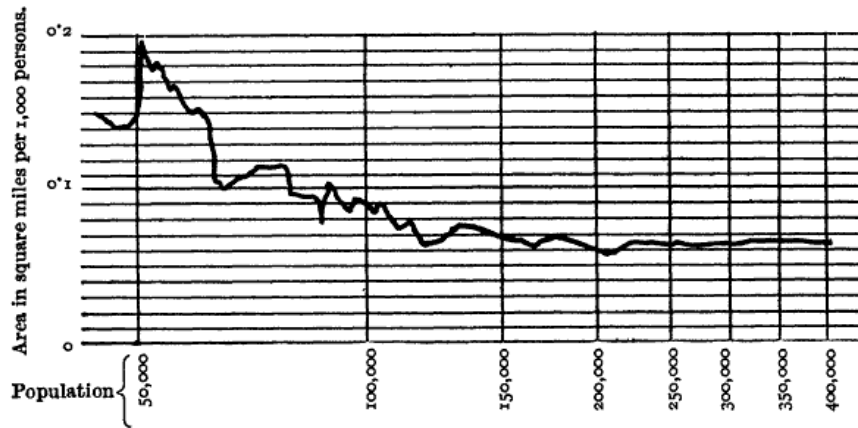
<sup>190</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Council Minutes, Housing Sub-committee, 17 January 1913 - Provision of Housing for the Working Classes

<sup>191</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V, *Wages and Welfare*, Appendix I, Permanent Houses

<sup>192</sup> Bainbridge, Barrow-in-Furness, p.282, although Barrow was one of the largest towns in the country, the density of population was much lower than those of the larger cities,

<sup>193</sup> Ashmore Baker, C., Population and Costs in Relation to City Management, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. 74, No.1 (Dec., 1910), p.78, approximately 1,000 population to 0.2 sq. miles





The hump commencing at the 50,000 population mark is chiefly due to the high ratio of area to population in the case of Barrow-in-Furness. (From *Rates*, 1910.)

**Figure 3 - Population-density Against Population for 1910**

The 1911 census indicated overcrowding was not acute and compared with the other sixteen Lancashire county boroughs and cities Barrow ranked seventh.<sup>194</sup> By 1912 the steady increase in population and the inability to provide adequate housing led to serious overcrowding in Barrow.<sup>195</sup> At this juncture overcrowding increased, 62 cases being dealt with by the courts in 1913.<sup>196</sup> By sub-letting rooms, a source of additional income and economic necessity for some low-income families' people were crammed in, many 'two-up and two-down' houses accommodating a family in each room.<sup>197</sup>

1910	1911	1912	1913	1914
57,500	63,770	65,257	68,523	75,368

**Table 3 - Barrow Estimated Population Size 1911-1914**

From Table 3 the upshot of continued and unprecedented work expansion at Vickers between 1910 and 1914 was a 31 per cent increase in population.<sup>198</sup> When added to an accommodation shortage and a lack of will to build houses based upon previous experiences of boom and bust the outcome was overcrowding and high rents.

<sup>194</sup> Census of England and Wales, County of Lancaster, 1911 provides percentages of total population living more than two to a room

<sup>195</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 5 March 1912, reported as many as five families were living in one cottage

<sup>196</sup> Chief Medical Officer's Report, 1913, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Account Books 1913-19, Cumbria Records Office

<sup>197</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Friday 25 June 1915; Barrow-in-Furness Council Minutes November 1912 to October 1913, three registered common lodging houses one with a 127 bed capacity provided some relief

<sup>198</sup> Census of England and Wales, County of Lancaster, 1911; 1912 Barrow Borough Treasures Report, *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday, 2 February 1915; population 31 December 1913, 31 December 1914, (Historical Records/R/346. 2/4)

## Health and Leisure

Others have looked at the issue of health in Barrow during the years immediately preceding the First World War and therefore there is no requirement to go further into depth on the issue.<sup>199</sup> Nonetheless it is worth noting that Vickers took an interest in their workers' health. Previous to the 1911 National Insurance Act the firm ran a sick and accident medical relief fund, the employees contributing 2d per week receiving free medical benefit and sick pay of 10s per week up to 16 weeks.<sup>200</sup> The balance of the money collected by Vickers went mainly to the upkeep of the local North Lonsdale Hospital. When the Insurance Act came into force the company implied they would cease collecting contributions. As no provision was made in the Act for hospitals a ballot was taken by the workmen to decide to continue support; the outcome was that a majority were in favour. In the works itself Vickers had first aid posts and an ambulance service allowing the seriously injured to be taken to the hospital.<sup>201</sup> Barrow Council also ran a hospital scheme from 26 July 1912, when as a condition of employment all Corporation workers contributed to the North Lonsdale Hospital through the Borough Treasurer 1d a week or if unmarried or under twenty-one a 1/2d per week.<sup>202</sup>

Before the war most men worked long hours, people arose early to start work and consequently bedtime was early too. Many lived close to the works cutting down travelling time allowing for mid-day meals.<sup>203</sup> Most were too tired take part in leisure activities outside the home except at weekends. In general the home was not a place for leisure as many houses were small and overcrowded. Leisure activities for the working-classes were limited by money so it was usual to seek free or cheap entertainment. Pre-war launches were popular, especially when attended by royalty while the airship at Cavendish Dock drew large crowds, as did warship departures.<sup>204</sup> Walking was enjoyed by all while the tramcar afforded the benefits of cheap travel taking people to the Walney beaches or Furness Abbey. Elizabeth Roberts says few went on holiday before the First World War day trips nonetheless were

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<sup>199</sup> Roberts, E. A. M., *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster 1890 to 1930*, Roberts, *Working Class Housing in Barrow and Lancaster 1880-1930*; Working Class Standards of Living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914; Joy, C. A., *War and Unemployment in and Industrial Community: Barrow-in-Furness 1914-1926*, Uclan PhD Thesis, August 2004

<sup>200</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Friday, 7 June 1912, Trade Union membership ensured some sick pay but not free medical treatment.

<sup>201</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Wednesday 27 November 1912

<sup>202</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, Saturday, 28 June 1913

<sup>203</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1911, only one hour was allowed for lunch, an eyewitness described men leaving Vickers and storming tram cars, saying if there were seats for thirty, seventy would get on

<sup>204</sup> *The Scotsman*, Thursday 7 August 1913, reported 20,000 spectators witnessed the departure of the Japanese battle-cruiser from Ramsden Dock

popular, steamers crossing to the Isle-of-Man and Fleetwood for Blackpool while trains took many people to the Lake District.<sup>205</sup> Great pleasure was gained from pubs by men and therefore heavy drinking was a serious social problem in Barrow.<sup>206</sup> Spectator sports were popular and many played sport in their local neighbourhood, others went fishing, some were poachers, kept racing pigeons and hens, or owned allotments.

Young unmarried working adults suffered least from financial restrictions enjoying more sophisticated activities including dancing. Some pastimes were legal, the game of crown and anchor was played at sports meetings, in ante rooms at whist drives, in workshops and generally where youths about.<sup>207</sup> Music was popular, like the printed word it was easily satisfied. Pianos were owned by better off workers and the sound of gramophones while providing free entertainment paid homage to possession.<sup>208</sup> Concert and theatre were both popular cinema however became a chief source of enjoyment with the working-classes, particularly their children. The limitations of time and money however dictated and fragmented the degree in which the social hierarchy pursued their leisure.

## Conclusions

Barrow's fortunes were largely tied up with Vickers and the big ship policy of the day. Vickers succeeded in their efforts to win a place among the elite shipbuilders and naval and foreign contracts guaranteeing continuation of work and full employment. The condition of extended and full work broke the trend of boom and bust and it has been seen that the size and technological changes of warships required expansion and the need for additional skilled men. Vast technological changes in warships not only required design skills but craft skills, and increased technological changes in the workshops. Long standing trade rules and work ethics however frustrated Vickers innovative methods of production and technical management. The fact dilution was not a possibility meant skilled men could only be recruited and retained through paying high wages and providing them with houses. Trade unionism strength in Barrow also meant that good men were lost who refused to join a trade union.

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<sup>205</sup> Roberts, *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster*, p.54

<sup>206</sup> Roberts, *Working Class Standards of Living*, p.319, offers the proposition that when employment is scarce drunkenness tends to diminish while during years of high employment and wages increase rises

<sup>207</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 13 June 1916

<sup>208</sup> Roberts, R., *The Classic Slum*, p.153

The spread of external disputes in federated yards was always a threat, whilst local unrest was generally caused by wage demands and demarcation disputes, often between the Boilermakers Society and the ASE. Profitable times were seen and neither employers nor employees wanted prolonged stoppages. Good earnings were being made, skills or lack of them dictating wages and social standing. While a shop-stewards organisation existed it had little influence before the war. Though women stayed mainly in the home, because there was little female industrial employment, those who found work in the factories formed early unions and became politically active through membership of the Trades and Labour Committee. By the outbreak of war a federation of women workers was formed in the town.

Besides shipbuilding and marine engineering, iron and steel production formed a large part of Barrow's industry, while the docks received materials required for manufacturing and much of the districts provisions including foodstuff. The rail system was important for the transporting of iron ore and pig iron, coal and coke and the movement of workers. Barrow's isolation meant it was dependent on its port and rail system it was not a great exporter as its major products steamed away from the port. The transport links, were therefore tenuous and vulnerable to external influences.

At the outbreak of the First World War although the Labour Party movement was strong, well-organised and supported by the unions they were under-represented on the town council. Refusing to be swayed by union pressure the council maintained its independence. The very fact that little or nothing was gained from strikes was reason enough to provide a political Trade Unionism however political action for solving economic problems were slow or ineffective.

Health was dictated by a multitude of things including accidents, working conditions, the ability to pay for health care and living conditions. Leisure was circumstantial upon time and money whilst welfare was provided by Vickers in the interest of paternalism with the aim of attracting men away from undesirable activities. Housing was a real problem to recruiting as the stock was never increased in sufficient numbers to meet pre-war needs. In their defence Barrow Council did encourage artisan housing by private syndicate but there were never enough. Meanwhile trade unions and the Labour Party were aware of the need for working-class housing but it was left to Vickers to provide limited numbers. By the outbreak of war there was therefore a housing and an overcrowding problem.

On the eve of war Vickers and the iron and steel works were shut down for the summer holidays. The men were immediately recalled to their work and from then onwards the war dictated how industry would be run and thereafter the conditions in the town.

## CHAPTER 2: THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

### Introduction

This chapter looks at the period from the outbreak of war to the advent of the Ministry of Munitions. Due to mobilisation of the reserves and territorials and the competition between the armed forces and Vickers for manpower without state intervention, many skilled men were lost from the company. The problems of Vickers were further exacerbated by the immediate need to complete essential Admiralty work and by huge War Office contracts for shells. Following the initial disruption informal attempts to protect key workers were made by Vickers, these protective measures were consolidated by the Admiralty and to a smaller extent by a hesitant War Office. Although the railways came under the control of the Rail Executive Committee (REC) on the outbreak of war men were lost to the Army. The turmoil caused by the call up was not only restricted to Vickers but to the town's iron and steel industries and Barrow Corporation yet no immediate protection was afforded to their workers, the effects of which will be discussed. New attempts to find labour mainly in the shipyard and engineering workshops by various means including the recruiting of Belgians and Canadians will also be examined.

The labour movement was pledged to the war effort and it was resolved that an immediate effort would be made to terminate all existing trade disputes and whenever difficulties arose during the war period, a serious attempt should be made by all concerned to reach an amicable settlement before resorting to a strike or lockout. The worsening labour situation led to the Shell Conference at which the Board of Trade proposed, in addition to the no strike agreement, that trade union rules and practices restricting output should be temporarily suspended for the duration of the war to allow for dilution. The outcome was the Shells and Fuses Agreement encompassed in the Treasury Agreements which were followed by the formation of the Ministry of Munitions and the introduction of the Munitions Act. The issue of improved war production based around work efficiency mainly centred mainly on the question of drink as the cause of bad timekeeping, however lack of serious attention was given to the question of workers housing and accommodation. Chapter 1 therefore deals with the attempts to confront the manpower crisis, the

need to prevent disputes and suspend restrictive practices, whilst improving workshop efficiency to meet war contracts.

### **The outbreak and first months of the war**

On 4 August amongst dramatic scenes in London and across the country, Britain declared war with Germany a declaration that saw Britain swamped with a patriotic swell of emotion. Two days previous the British navy had been mobilized and 242 Barrow naval reservists left by train to Devonport, while it was reported 900 troops had arrived to help in the defence of Barrow, its docks and works.<sup>1</sup> On 5 August Barrow docks were put under military orders and the shipyard guarded, whilst 766 men, many of them Vickers workers reported for duty.<sup>2</sup> The local territorial unit the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Kings Own Royal Lancashire (KORL) Battalion was called back to Barrow from training on 3 August in preparation to mobilize. As part of their duties men were sent to guard the Kent and Leven viaducts carrying the Furness Railway line into Barrow, however the territorials were quickly relieved by the 4th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers on 8 August.<sup>3</sup> Expecting to move to Ireland an advance party of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion KORL was sent to Liverpool on 8 August, but their orders were withdrawn the same day. On the 11 August the battalion marched to Ulverston and four days later departed for Slough. Meanwhile plans were put in place for the unlikely threat of air attack and the police commissioner proscribed the town for both friendly and enemy aliens. However when Belgian labour was required by Vickers the part dealing with friendly aliens was set aside.<sup>4</sup>

The crisis in Ulster had loomed large in the public consciousness for most of the summer of 1914 and by late August the Barrow battalion of the Irish National Volunteers were drilling at Little Park on the outskirts of town.<sup>5</sup> Nearly 90 members returned to the British Army while the battalion's services were offered to Kitchener for the defence of Ireland. Not only were there Ulstermen but Irish independence

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<sup>1</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, Monday, 3 August 1914, men of the reserve were also sent to Barrow to man naval ships as they were completed

<sup>2</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 10 July 1915, Barrow Docks were under military order and drink was prohibited from being taken on the premises and aboard ships

<sup>3</sup> Hutton, J., *Kitchener's Men: The Kings Own Royal Lancaster's on the Western Front 1915-1918*, (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2008), p.4; Mansergh, R., *Barrow-in-Furness in the Great War*, (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2015), p.36

<sup>4</sup> H of C Deb 15 March 1915 vol.70 cc1822-45

<sup>5</sup> *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, Saturday, 22 August 1914

supporters.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Leahy, a riveter and trade unionist working on submarines stated 'all our actions and work in support of the movement had to be well guarded for Barrow remembered the assassination of one of its founding fathers, Lord Cavendish'.<sup>7</sup> Once war was declared those of Southern Irish origin or recently arrived at Barrow on gun and submarine work were particularly careful in everyday life. Those who could get home before restrictions came into force did so while staying in touch with Barrow families who remained active.

On the outbreak of war Vickers and the Barrow Hematite and Steel works were shut for the annual holidays, although numbers of men had remained at work on Admiralty rush jobs.<sup>8</sup> Vickers' focus was on expediting existing Admiralty contracts to increase the strength of the Fleet, while recommencement of production in the naval shell and gun shops where work would become continuous to cope with orders became an immediate priority.<sup>9</sup> At midnight on 4 August 1914, Vickers issued a patriotic statement to the Press Association for distribution in newspapers, requesting that in the national interest all their workmen and staff now on holiday return to work immediately.<sup>10</sup> Although the North Sea was closed on 8 August and the Admiralty requisition British vessels in home waters, shipping continued in the Irish Sea allowing Belfast workers to return to Vickers shipyard and Irish cattle to be landed at Barrow.<sup>11</sup> The first Admiralty requisitions were of the *City of Belfast* and *Duchess of Devonshire*, the Midland Railways Belfast-Barrow boats taken on 30 October 1914. They were used to transport refugees and German prisoners to the Isle-of-Man and were not returned to Barrow after the war, causing the Barrow-Belfast to be discontinued.<sup>12</sup> For the Furness Railway, their daily sailings

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<sup>6</sup> Bureau of Military History 1913-21, Document No. W.S. 660, Statement by Witness Thomas Leahy, p.2

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.2, Leahy said they had about 200 men and women in Barrow all keen and kept in touch with events in Ireland and Dublin

<sup>8</sup> *North West Daily Mail*, Wednesday, 5 August 1914, this would be the last seasonal holiday for two years; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 6 August 1914, the battleship *Reshadieh* was fitting out, work had been pushed forward some time ago in view of Turkey's urgent requirements, while there were three Brazilian river monitors ready to leave, these vessels were taken over by the Admiralty

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, Wednesday, 5 August 1914

<sup>10</sup> *Evening Despatch*, Wednesday, 5 August 1914

<sup>11</sup> *Belfast News Letter*, Friday, 19 August 1914, the direct service between Belfast and Barrow, after a temporary suspension, was advertised as being run as usual; Andrews, *The Furness Railway*, p.212, the route was not revived after the war

<sup>12</sup> Andrews, *The Furness Railway*, p.212



continued between Fleetwood and Barrow for tours of the Lakes until they were withdrawn on 30 September 1914.<sup>13</sup>

Government's haste to war caused a rush to the colours of all classes of workpeople including young engineer's adding further disruption to the Vickers workforce.<sup>14</sup> Amongst them were large numbers of apprentices and in replacing them the School Medical Officer said virtually all the boys of the lower sixth decided their patriotic business was with Vickers.<sup>15</sup> Although Army call up threatened a grave situation throughout the first month of the War it was hampered from the outset by a lack of recruiting staff at Barrow. With no protection for industrial workers Vickers became aware of the need to safeguard key men and by 8 August workers liable to call up were required to supply their names, addresses and employment particulars so that the Government could determine whether they might best serve the national interest by continuing their employment or joining the colours.<sup>16</sup>

Vickers directors decided to pay to wives, families and other dependents of 'employees called up' an allowance similar to that paid by Government by way of separation allowance.<sup>17</sup> Hutton confirms this saying Vickers agreed to keep open the jobs of those who 'volunteered' and match any allowances paid by the Government to their families left behind.<sup>18</sup> Arguably these patriotic gestures might have encouraged men to enlist rather than keep them in place and as the recruitment drive in Furness gathered pace Vickers began to experience a problematic loss of key workers. The company were eventually forced to modify their offer of an allowance to every man who 'joined the colours' and from early September this was restricted to those who were members of the Territorials and other reserve units.<sup>19</sup> Hutton also notes that the iron and steel works owners by

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.218, the *Lady Moyra* and *Lady Evelyn* were laid up due to lack of crew until they were requisitioned by the Admiralty; holidays however by rail, coach and steam launch to the Lake District and Furness Peninsular continued to be advertised during the spring and summer of 1915

<sup>14</sup> Hutton, *Kitchener's Men*, p.4

<sup>15</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 5 September 1914; Barrow School Medical Report for 1915

<sup>16</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday 8 August 1914

<sup>17</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, Tuesday, 25 August 1914

<sup>18</sup> Hutton, *Kitchener's Men*, p.4

<sup>19</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Enquiry into Unrest, No.2 Division North-West Area, Supplement Report for Barrow-in-Furness

mid-September had withdrawn their offer of allowances, as the company were finding it difficult to maintain production with so many men 'enlisting'.

Following complaints by armament employers that their work was being disorganised by the loss of pivotal men, Vickers offered the emergency solution of issuing private wartime service badges.<sup>20</sup> In response to the firm's request for use of a recognized badge for their men, replies were received from the Master-General of the Ordnance and Kitchener.<sup>21</sup> The latter sent a letter saying that it was fully recognised that in supplying munitions men were doing their duty as equally as those doing service in the field. 'Industry and commerce,' wrote Arthur Greenwood, 'were not primarily intended as a field for exploitation and profit, but were essential national services in as true a sense as the Army and Navy.'<sup>22</sup> In the early months of the war attention was thus turned towards impressing on employees the importance of Government work, while assuring men their duty was equal to those of the armed services. Such assurance took the form of messages, memorandums and personal speeches followed in May 1915 by a visit by the King to Barrow and Vickers.<sup>23</sup> The feeling locally however was men were aware of the responsibility of their position and it was their patriotic duty to do all that they could.

The Admiralty was keen to press for a 'comprehensive' protection system of the labour essential to its work. On 27 October 1914 the First Lord made enquiries of Admiralty contracts and how their operations were being hampered by the withdrawal of workmen. An Admiralty design badge was ordered and endorsed by the Cabinet on 26 December; by late January 1915 they were being distributed amongst workmen of military age employed at the Barrow shipyard.<sup>24</sup> Additionally both the Admiralty and War Office drew up lists of contractors including Vickers whose employees should not be accepted for military service without written consent of a responsible member of the firm.<sup>25</sup> This had an immediate and

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<sup>20</sup> Simmonds, A. G. V., *Britain and World War One*, (London, Routledge, 2012), p.84

<sup>21</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. II The Treasury Agreement, Chapter I The Supply of Armament Labour, p.4

<sup>22</sup> Hutchins, *Women in Modern Industry*, p.259 - During the First World War Greenwood published *The Reorganisation of Industry* (1916) and worked closely with Christopher Addison and Arthur Henderson in the Ministry of Reconstruction

<sup>23</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Friday, 21 May 1915

<sup>24</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Monday 25 January 1915

<sup>25</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 24 February 1915

considerable effect as the Barrow Recruiting Office reported average numbers enlisted had fallen to five or six a day.<sup>26</sup> Sibley concludes that growing industries in the first year of the war sent significantly fewer men to the army than shrinking industries, and statistical and anecdotal evidence support each other on this point.<sup>27</sup> Mansergh also notes that Barrow sent a small proportion of men to war compared to similar sized towns.<sup>28</sup> As the majority of eligible men were now engaged in turning out armaments and building or fitting-out warships and submarines, the Barrow shipyard became known as 'the Funk Hole' by the local population.<sup>29</sup>

In their quest to complete warships for active service Vickers attempted to bring men to Barrow. Appeals for workers were made for skilled men through the press in the major engineering centres of the North West and Midlands. The Barrow Labour Exchange was open from 6 a.m. until midnight while 24-hour access for telegraph and telephone communication was provided.<sup>30</sup> One Barrow newspaper noted 'there had been considerable exodus through one cause or another lately but so vigorous and urgent has been the campaign for fresh workers conducted by Vickers that the influx is of a parallel if not greater proportion, and yet demand remains unsatisfied.'<sup>31</sup>

The slacking of pressure in merchant shipbuilding set free large numbers of men to accelerate Admiralty work in private yards and Royal Dockyards.<sup>32</sup> However, Naval Dockyards having entered the manpower market and by offering special terms disadvantaged the private yards. The Board of Trade and the Admiralty had a previous agreement that labour exchanges would obtain additional skilled labour for war mobilisation or emergency. The difficulty arose in the terms of employment

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<sup>26</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday 23 January 1915

<sup>27</sup> Sibley, D., *British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2004), pp 82-103

<sup>28</sup> Mansergh, R., *Barrow-in-Furness*, p.27, Barrow sent 3,313 men to war

<sup>29</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Thursday 10 September 1914, at Barrow up to Wednesday morning recruits numbered 865; *Barrow News*, Saturday, 27 March 1915, after the prevention of recruiting of Vickers men some 1,000 enlistments had been accrued from other employment;

<sup>30</sup> *North West Daily Mail*, Friday 15 August 1914; OHMoM, Vol. I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. II The Treasury Agreement, Chapter I Supply of Armament Labour, p.23, over 30,000 men were transferred by the Exchanges principally to the dockyards and shipyards in the first fortnight of the war

<sup>31</sup> *North West Daily Mail*, Friday 15 August 1914; *The Liverpool Echo*, Saturday, 26 December 1914

<sup>32</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday 31 August 1914, building of the merchant marine at this time was not of national concern; *Belfast Weekly News*, 13 August 1914 reported the Labour Exchange at Frederick Street had sent numbers of men to Barrow; *Sunderland Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Monday, 28 September 1914, workers were sent from the North-east including a large number of drillers to Barrow; *Hull Daily Mail*, Wednesday 20 January 1915, many Hull men were employed in the Barrow shipyard, the chief industry being identical to that of Messrs. Earle's

approved at the Dockyards which included a subsistence allowance.<sup>33</sup> In the case of Admiralty work the emergency did not cease with mobilisation and dockyard terms were not withdrawn. Though it had been intended that subsistence be only paid for a short time it continued indefinitely.<sup>34</sup> This gave rise to a claim for Admiralty terms in private yards and become a principal point of contention between employers and trade unions. Employers opposed a subsistence allowance, arguing it would have an unsettling effect on other workers who received no allowance and would provoke wage demands. Conversely the Unions' argued travelling and subsistence allowance was the established custom when men were employed away for a guaranteed period.<sup>35</sup> The outcome was that men transferred from private shipbuilding yards to those engaged on Admiralty work were moved by the Labour Exchanges with no special terms, except as a rule rail fares were paid by the employers. Altogether, in the first fortnight of the war, over 30,000 men were transferred by the Exchanges to urgent war work, principally in the dockyards and shipyards.<sup>36</sup>

Although engineers, shipyard and iron and steel workers had contributed to the National Prince of Wales Relief Fund to help servicemen's families and those out of work due to dislocation of trade, little unemployment was seen at Barrow.<sup>37</sup> DeGroot points out that the rush of recruits was dominated by the sort who had always volunteered for the army, the young, unskilled, unemployed and desperate but this is a generalisation.<sup>38</sup> The unusual activity at Barrow attracted unemployed men particularly from the Lancashire cotton industry.<sup>39</sup> But where men were placed they were often found to be inefficient and lacked shipyard experience prompting the local MP to say 'old grannies would have done just as well'.<sup>40</sup> Not only were

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<sup>33</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. II The Treasury Agreement, Chapter I Supply of Armament Labour, p.23

<sup>34</sup> The Admiralty claimed after damage to vessels in conflict emergency repairs to maintain the strength of the Fleet, however the private yards also carried out emergency repair work to naval vessels

<sup>35</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. II The Treasury Agreement, Chapter II Trade Union Restrictions, p.33

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Supply of Armament Labour, p.23

<sup>37</sup> Winter, J. M., *The Great War and the British People*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2003), p.242, *Sheffield Independent*, Saturday, 29 August 1914

<sup>38</sup> DeGroot, G. L., *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the First World War*, (London, Longman, 1996)

<sup>39</sup> *The Burnley News*, Saturday, 24 October 1914

<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, Tuesday, 11 May 1915

inefficient men being employed, but men who would normally never have been engaged on account of their bad timekeeping.

By the end of August 1914 Barrow's iron and steel trades were reported as being brisker than at any other time in their history, yet in the pig iron industry uncertainty existed as north-west coast manufactures realised foreign ore supplies could be cut off at any time.<sup>41</sup> At the steelworks notices were posted warning workers that all contracts would expire fourteen days hence and subsequent to that date employment would be temporary. A later bulletin notified workers that the earlier notice was precautionary over doubt whether the Furness Railway and other companies could sustain coke supplies and transport manufactured items. The recruitment of some 250 men for the armed forces and men leaving for higher wages at Vickers was particularly damaging causing a heavy reduction in output as furnaces and plant were occasionally shut down.<sup>42</sup>

In their demand for recruiting the War Office failed to see the importance of the iron and steel companies to produce material for munitions manufacture. The list of trades exempted from recruiting excluded blast furnace-men, workers in puddling furnaces, or iron and steel rolling mills, steel manufacture and smelting or iron-founding. When the Government needed all the iron possible, output was prevented until additional furnaces could be put into blast and men were found to work them. The Barrow works were left to replace men as best possible, but this was problematic as there was already shortages of skilled men and dilution was not an option.<sup>43</sup> Attempting to recruit men, the iron and steel works management posted notices at the factory gates, while a hostel for 40 single men was set up to provide accommodation.<sup>44</sup>

More blast furnaces required additional iron ore and miners were ordered to return from munitions work at Vickers, the War Office also instructed recruiting officers not to take iron ore miners and undertook to return men who had joined

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<sup>41</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post*, Monday, 3 August 1914

<sup>42</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday 26 March 1916; *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Monday 29 March 1915, reported the steel mills were shut down through lack of labour

<sup>43</sup> *Rochdale Observer*, Wednesday, 9 December 1914, Vickers were advertising for fitters, turners, slotters, planers, millers, coppersmiths and millwrights in competition with other companies, Vickers offered constant work and good wages, plus a bonus to suitable men

<sup>44</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Friday 26 March 1915

the army. With labour shortages steel workers asked for a 6s per week increase to be submitted to arbitration.<sup>45</sup> The response was the granting of a war bonus of 6d per shift where men's wages did not exceed 50s per week and for boys 3d per shift representing an advance of 3s weekly to the men and 1s 6d to boys.<sup>46</sup> Furnace-men's wages however were tied to a sliding scale and when pig-iron prices rose in April 1915 they obtained the substantial advance of 22¾ per cent.<sup>47</sup> As a result of negotiations between the Barrow Hematite Company and their locally owned iron ore mine managers the men's wages were increased and if needed miners or slate quarrymen, including men from North Wales would be found work in the area.<sup>48</sup> It was not until June 1915 that the Ministry of Munitions turned its attention to the industry when a committee of steelmakers was appointed.

In common with many other railway companies the Furness Railway found itself squeezed between the call up and enlistment of men at a time when the demands of its workforce were unprecedented.<sup>49</sup> Though Government control of the railways took place on the outbreak of war this did not prevent the Company losing men to military service and Vickers.<sup>50</sup> Some 515 men left for the services throughout the war, equal to 18 per cent of the workforce on 4 August 1914.<sup>51</sup> To offset the drain of essential personnel, Belgians were employed at the engineering works and females as clerks, ticket collectors and carriage upholsterers.<sup>52</sup>

Government control however added to the Company's problems throughout the war. Although the railway companies continued managing their own systems as previously, they were subject to an increasing number of Railway Executive Committee (REC) orders. During 1915 alone 527 instructions and circular letters were received which involved considerable amounts of labour in the general

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<sup>45</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Monday 22 March 1915

<sup>46</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Wednesday 10 March 1915

<sup>47</sup> *Birmingham Daily Mail*, Monday 5 April 1915

<sup>48</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, Thursday, 25 May 1915

<sup>49</sup> Robinson, *Cumbria Railways Vol.11, No.2*, May 2013, The Wartime Crisis on the Furness Railway. p.50

<sup>50</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 20 February 1915; Robinson, P., *Cumbria Railways Vol. 11, No.3*, The Wartime Crisis on the Furness Railway, May 2013, Appendix 'A', p.94;

<sup>51</sup> Robinson, *Cumbria Railways Vol. 11, No.2*, May 2013, p.50; *Liverpool Echo*, Monday, 6 December 1915, under the Munitions of War Act railway workers required leaving certificates, at the Barrow Munitions Tribunal two Furness Railway requesting certificate were turned down

<sup>52</sup> Barrow Records Office, List of girls working for the Furness Railway 1916-18

manager's offices at Barrow and other departments concerned.<sup>53</sup> The vastly increased levels of rail traffic into and out of the shipyard and engineering works caused problems of management, while at the railway owned docks time was lost in unloading causing unshipped goods piled at the wharves until railway wagons were available.<sup>54</sup> These difficulties were particularly notable in the case of iron ore cargoes which needed experienced labour to unload them.

Kitchener had not only appealed to the public for men for the army but to local authorities to supply labour for munitions.<sup>55</sup> In his appeal the need to protect Corporation workers of recruitment age required to provide essential utilities and services was ignored. The war as well as having an impact on Barrow Corporation as a major employer caused a knock-on effect by reducing local authority activities. As the war progressed its impact through the removal of staff and workers become evident as labour was economised in various departments causing the elderly to be retained for such work as street cleaning.<sup>56</sup> Arthur Race the borough engineer and surveyor indicated the effects of providing men for Vickers.<sup>57</sup> Regarding refuse collection, he said in normal times ash pits were emptied once a week in summer but owing to the increased population and staff reduction, collection was every three weeks.<sup>58</sup> Householders were asked to burn refuse as far as practicable to reduce scavenging, while the refuse destructor plant was kept going as the alternative was to tip refuse on the fields requiring additional transport and labour whilst providing a health hazard.<sup>59</sup> By February 1916 Sunday labour was sanctioned

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<sup>53</sup> Third General Meeting of the Furness Railway Company, Thursday, 17 February 1916; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 24 February 1917 reported 877 circulars had been received by the general managers department from the REC involving instructions to staff and numerous enquiries

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Thursday, 29 April 1915, Kitchener asked for men to augment the supply of fitters, millwrights, machine hands, and skilled or unskilled labour, it was suggested in replacing men active and strong women and old men might be used

<sup>56</sup> Barrow Records Office, Borough Engineer and Surveyor Letter dated 29 April 1915, maintenance of sewerage gang could be cut from 14 to 8, public park from 15 to 8 men, normally 60 men were employed on the repair of streets and footpaths now reduced to 39 elderly men, 30 men was considered the minimum; *Newcastle Journal*, Wednesday, 12 May 1915 when Barrow elementary schools closed due to an influenza epidemic, two male teachers enlisted, two went into the shell shops, while the rest entered the Corporations understaffed departments; *Western Press*, Wednesday, 23 June 1915, a Methodist minister was working full time in Vickers gun shop but was continuing his ministerial duties Sundays

<sup>57</sup> Barrow Records Office, Borough Engineer and Surveyor Letter dated 29 April 1915

<sup>58</sup> Joy, *War and Unemployment*, p.82, she says that this posed a real health threat but fails to say what actions were taken

<sup>59</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 3 July 1915 Complaints were made by property owners when the rates were increased, it was reported the municipal debt was £1.25 million on which ever increasing interest was paid

to overcome the refuse difficulty it was also decided the collection of trade refuse be discontinued, but this was strongly opposed by some tradesmen councillors. The LGB was also requested to insist on the inclusion of workmen amongst the reserved occupations to enable the local authority to maintain a sanitary service at a reasonable standard of safety and efficiency. The Electrical Department meanwhile complained that the number of changes in staff had been exceptionally large, adding considerably to the difficulties of carrying out work in the department. Although the extraordinary demands were met with a willing and loyal response from permanent staff members, it was said many temporary men did not show the same willingness to do their share in carrying out the work of the country.<sup>60</sup>

War service meant not only labour for munitions production but the erection of workmen's dwellings and munitions buildings, further Lloyd George also asked for economies to release resources for the war.<sup>61</sup> Local authorities were instructed to sanction expenditure only for the war, public health or other urgent purposes. As a consequence capital expenditure by Barrow Corporation was restricted to essential services and projects, resulting in a number of private building schemes being halted and public works suspended including construction of new police and magistrates' courts and two schools accommodating 1,000 children.<sup>62</sup>

By the outbreak of war the Barrow Labour Party was deeply divided into far left 'pacifists' and those supporting the government in its full prosecution. The Industrial Committee of the local Trades Party saw the working-classes being best served by the Labour Party devoting its time and attention to the needs of the working-classes rather than acting as agents of a capitalist government.<sup>63</sup> Charles Duncan the local MP, chose to support the government addressing working people as a member of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee.<sup>64</sup> In an attempt to recruit

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<sup>60</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book 1914-15 - Electrical Engineers Report for Year Ending 31 March 1915

<sup>61</sup> National Federation of Building Trade Employers Minutes, 9 June 1915, Vickers munitions plant at Barrow was reported as one of the most aggressive labour poachers; Dearle, N.B., *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War for Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-1919*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1929), p.9

<sup>62</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 23 December 1916, evidence suggests that two new schools did open as the newspaper said tenders had been accepted for furnishing of the new Ocean Road and Victoria Schools; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 11 December 1915, the cost of schools for the previous year came to £176,737; the Corporation spent £170,750 on the gas works, £158,480 on the electricity works and the waterworks had cost £433,482

<sup>63</sup> BDSO 7-1 Minutes of the Barrow Labour Party and Trades Council Minutes, Thursday, 11 February 1915

<sup>64</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Saturday 3 October 1914



experienced NCO's Duncan became a signatory to an appeal to trade unionist ex-NCO's to re-enlist and train fellow trade unionists and others who had responded to the call.<sup>65</sup> These were exactly the experienced men industry need to keep, men qualified to undertake duties of shop floor superintendence and whose removal meant additional work and fatigue for those left behind.<sup>66</sup> The *Burnley News* reported that men who had visited Barrow said there was no supervision and work was not getting done.<sup>67</sup>

Mobilization and recruitment thinned the ranks of workers creating a shortage of skilled men and those qualified to undertake duties of superintendence and management.<sup>68</sup> Additionally facilitating delivery of Admiralty contracts created conditions where it was impossible to obtain all the skilled and semi-skilled labour needed. Employers and the Board of Trade believed from the outset that the supply of skilled men would not match demand and in an attempt to resolve the problem employers emphasised the necessity to suspend trade union restrictions and demarcation rules. Trade unions on the other hand believed labour could be provided by other means without sacrificing their practices.

### **New Attempts to Find Labour**

Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty, suggested it would be far more fruitful concentrating the labour force on Government work, as opposed to merchant ship work. He suggested that the same principle successfully applied to the railways should be extended to shipbuilding.<sup>69</sup> The trade union leaders believed such a transference from merchant work would fulfil the deficiency for shipbuilding; and since merchant shipbuilding was the key to many minor industries, a similar

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<sup>65</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday 17 September 1914

<sup>66</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday 10 April 1915, If foremen overslept they could come in at 6.30 a.m. or 6.45 a.m. where a worker lost a quarter after 6.15 a.m., many foreman a source of irritation to workers; BDSO 85/1/4 Barrow Working Men's Club and Institute Minutes, the Mayor sent a notice regarding the recruiting of NCO's for the new army which was posted in the club, he was a keen supporter of Army recruiting throughout the war

<sup>67</sup> *The Burnley News*, Saturday 1 May 1915

<sup>68</sup> Board of Trade Report on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom, July 1915, Part I, p.3, by October 1914 the engineering trade group generally had lost 12.2 per cent of the male pre-war workers, by February 1915 this proportion rose to 16.4 per cent.

<sup>69</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. II The Treasury Agreement, Chapter II Supply of Armament Labour, p.62

transference could be made to where the War Office needed labour. Although contemplated by the government in February 1915 the idea was dropped.

Fresh labour was now to be supplied from unemployed engineering workmen through the labour exchanges. On 4 January 1915 the exchanges became recruiting centres for armament firms, and managers were instructed to bring armaments vacancies to the notice of suitable men signing on or drawing benefit.<sup>70</sup> The problem was that unemployed men were the least skilled and efficient, whereas Vickers needed highly skilled men. Trade union strength meant dilution was not an option and union members were preferred by employers in the interest of harmony.<sup>71</sup> Indeed the skilled trade unions engaged their own men, the South Wales Steel Smelters Society for example provided unemployed skilled labour for Vickers at Barrow.<sup>72</sup> A further difficulty was men were scattered around the country in small numbers and it was unlikely the majority with wives and families would move to Barrow with its housing problems. It became evident the demand could not be met from the reserve of unemployed and it would be necessary to compel men engaged in ordinary engineering.

Diversion of labour from ordinary engineering to government work was hardly productive. Many engineering companies preferred armament work to be spread rather than diverting their skilled men to earn high profits for Armstrong's and Vickers.<sup>73</sup> This did not deter the large armament firms from using enticement. The shortage of skilled men led to attempts on all sides to attract labour by advertising, using canvassing agents or by offers of higher wages. Typically the Halifax Association of Engineering Employers complained that Vickers and Armstrong's were using representatives to entice their men.<sup>74</sup> In attempting to prevent enticement the Defence of the Realm Act was used but proving inducement made

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<sup>70</sup> C. O. Circular 1700 (4/1/15)

<sup>71</sup> CAB 24/55/100 Labour Position in Muniton Industries, 26 June 1918, so strong and successful was the pressure applied by the unions that of the 35,000 workers employed at Vickers during the war only 60 or 70 were non-unionists

<sup>72</sup> *Western Mail*, Thursday, 15 April 1915, these were men recruited amongst unemployed tin-workers sent in batches to be employed on munitions at £3 per week

<sup>73</sup> OHMoM, Vol.1 *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. III The Armaments Output Committee, Ch. I Beginnings of Local Organisations, p.4

<sup>74</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. III The Armaments Output Committee, Ch.5 Central Organisation, p.95; *The Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 16 December 1914, Vickers advertising for coppersmiths offered 41s for 53 hours; a bonus of 25 per cent to 33 per cent of wages and permanency there were no offers of rail fares, subsistence allowance or housing

the measure ineffective.<sup>75</sup> Another solution to the manpower shortage was the recruiting of Belgian refugees.

Sir Trevor Dawson making a big effort on behalf of Vickers to get hold of Belgian labour had been frustrated in obtaining skilled men through Holland.<sup>76</sup> As the labour exchanges were able to give priority to suitable British labour, Admiralty and War Office contractors were to obtain Belgian labour through them. Lists of vacancies were made by the armament firms and labour applications compared against a live register of Belgians not of military age or exempt from service. To dispel anxieties about migrant refugee workers being exploited or used to drive down wages, employment conditions were to be as good as those offered to British labour, which was not to be displaced. Once employed, newspapers reported Belgians were working well alongside British workmen, but this was not the case as initially Belgian engineers were not welcomed by the Barrow ASE and seen as a menace due to their ignorance of trade unionism.<sup>77</sup> They were perceived as displacing workers, and while ASE members were sent to fight, Belgium men of serviceable age were in fact taking their places.<sup>78</sup> Language was a major problem and only when interpreters were found was it possible to ascertain the feelings amongst them and discover their qualifications and wage rates. It was discovered many had been shop stewards and members of Belgium's largest trade union and were therefore anxious to join the ASE which made them acceptable.<sup>79</sup> Results achieved for Vickers by the 'Board of Trade' campaign for supplying labour, whether unemployed or diverted from private work are provided in Table 4.<sup>80</sup> However the demand continued and a fortnight later the labour requirements of the Royal

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<sup>75</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. III The Armaments Output Committee, Ch.5 Central Organisation, p.94

<sup>76</sup> OHMoM, Vol.1 *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt. I Munitions Supply, Ch. V Need for Reinforcement, p.124; *Leaming Spa Courier*, Friday, 12 February 1915, by this date it was reported 900 Belgians were being employed in Barrow

<sup>77</sup> BDSO 57/1/7 Barrow ASE Minute Book, 30 December 1914 to 8 June 1916, 23 December 1914

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 2 June 1915, when turners and machine men missed a quarter, it became the practice of Vickers to place Belgians at their machines and not reinstate the men

In August 1916 Belgians of military age (18-41) were called up, but many at Barrow will have been in protected trades

<sup>79</sup> BDSO 57/1/7 Barrow ASE Minute Book, 30 December 1914 to 8 June 1916, 31 March 1915

<sup>80</sup> OHMoM, Vol.I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-1915*, Pt. II The Treasury Agreement, Ch.1 The Supply of Armament Labour, p.27; it is noticeable from the table that the total of 1,966 additional workers compares closely to the demand by unions and working-class councillors for a further 2,000 houses to meet the requirements at this time

Factories and the four main armaments firms including Vickers amounted to 9,108.<sup>81</sup>

<b>Belgians Started Work</b>	<b>British Unemployed</b>	<b>British Released by Employers</b>	<b>British Reported as Starting Work</b>	<b>Total</b>
601	913	273	179	1,966

**Table 4 – Board of Trade Results for Vickers, Barrow to 31 January 1915**

In early February 1915 it was reported that ‘originally a small party of Belgians were employed at Vickers and the experiment having proved satisfactory further workers were requested and now 900 were employed by the firm.’<sup>82</sup>

In Canada there were thousands of unemployed men of which a considerable proportion were ex-employees of Woolwich Arsenal, Government Dockyards and armament firms, men willing to come to England to form an industrial reserve.<sup>83</sup> Suitable men could be found but neither Woolwich, the Government Dockyards nor the private firms notably Vickers and Armstrongs favoured the proposal.<sup>84</sup> The grounds of opposition were that the introduction of such labour would be liable to cause trouble with their employees; the difficulty of securing suitable men, since the best were likely to go to the United States; and a preference for placing munitions orders in Canada rather than withdrawing labour. Vickers changed their minds, conceivably because their Montreal yard was not fully employed having built ten H Class submarines which were close to completion.<sup>85</sup> On 10 May 1915, Vickers Barrow management wrote to the head office in London saying they had already made arrangements with the ASE to send through their Canadian agents

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> *The Times*, Monday, 8 February 1915; *Leamington Spa Courier*, Friday, 12 February 1915; Cumbria Archives Catalogue (CASCAT), Belgian Refugees in West Cumbria, though Belgians lived in Barrow, in January 1915 Millom was to receive between 300 and 500 Belgian men for work at the Barrow Shipyard, numbers being supplemented as wives and families arrived; London IWM Library, Women’s Work Collection, BEL pamphlets/4, p.114, a report by the Comité Officiel Belge states there were 5,797 Belgians working at Vickers, Barrow in 1917, this is a massive overstatement; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 27 April 1917, the monthly meeting of the Barrow Insurance Company stated there were 876 Belgian workmen contributors

<sup>83</sup> H of C Deb, 28 July 1915 vol. 73 cc2395-457

<sup>84</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I, Pt. II, Ch. IV The Treasury Agreement, p.89, the ASE had many Commonwealth members of which large number were in Canada; J. Brownlie ASE Executive stated ‘we number between 170,000 and 180,000 members of those between 150,000 and 160,000 are located in the United Kingdom’

<sup>85</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, Saturday, 16 January 1915, the submarines were to be built in secret but in January the Canadian Militia Department authorised a statement admitting the construction of British submarines; Perkins, J. D., *The Canadian Built British H-boats*, 1999, on-line article

considerable numbers of workmen.<sup>86</sup> Additionally Canadians above enlistment age were recruited by the Board of Trade and allocated to Barrow some of which the ASE found were not Society members.<sup>87</sup>

The terms of engagement were unclear. A guarantee of six months' work was given for which men had to remain at their work post, however return fares were to be paid by the employer to those who remained as long as they were needed for Government work.<sup>88</sup> While a leaving certificate was not required on completion of contract to return to Canada, Vickers needing all available men were apt to refuse certificates to men wanting to work elsewhere letting them take their appeals to the Munitions Tribunal.<sup>89</sup> When a number of Canadians were refused certificates things were brought to a head.<sup>90</sup> On appeal it was held they were entitled on expiry of the contracted six months to obtain certificates unless the employer had reasonable grounds for withholding them and the Munitions Tribunal should have considered this. The workmen were therefore entitled to a re-hearing if they wanted one. On completing their contracts they had to apply for a passport, the declaration form having to be signed by either a magistrate, doctor or religious minister who knew the applicant. This was altered in February 1916 when the Foreign Office declared that the form could be signed by a Vickers manager or other responsible official.<sup>91</sup>

The Canadians' view of Vickers is revealing, one worker complained 'we do not know where to get material, cannot borrow tools which should be supplied and

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<sup>86</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I, Pt. II, Ch. I, p.20

<sup>87</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday 7 September 1915, at Barrow Munitions Tribunal a Canadian complained that he was unduly influenced to come to Barrow, Vickers representative pointed out that he was recruited by the Board of Trade and allocated to Vickers works, which was Government controlled; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 14 February 1916, as British citizens residing in Canada those of enlistment age could be attested under Lord Derby's scheme; OHMoM Vol. I Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15, Pt. II, Ch.1 Supply of Armament Labour, p.20; some 250 Canadians are acknowledged to have arrived in Barrow, *The Journal of St. Thomas*, Saturday 25 June 1915, reported a consignment of 16 and another of over 100 men had already arrived at Barrow and a third of 52 were crossing

<sup>88</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I, Ch. I, p.21

<sup>89</sup> *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, Tuesday, 15 February 1916, at the Barrow Tribunal, Thomas Morris a Canadian asked to leave on account of his health, his six month agreement having expired. Vickers said the agreement was six months or longer, if required. They wanting all available men, application for release was refused

<sup>90</sup> *Losh & Woodward v Vickers Ltd*, 1916 E.A.R., Vol.1, p.76, *Lancashire Evening Post*, 6 May 1916, at the end of their six months contract a number of Canadians wished to leave Vickers where the Board of Trade had placed them and find work elsewhere. Applying for leaving certificates the local tribunal refused as they had no jurisdiction

<sup>91</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 6 May 1916

without exaggeration the firm was a hundred years behind the times.<sup>92</sup> Canadian engineers were unlikely to volunteer to work in Britain when such reports reached back across the Atlantic, in truth numbers were limited by armaments contracts being placed in Canada. The fact that Canadians were allowed to return home from Barrow or to seek munitions work elsewhere in Britain does not allow for reliable statistics. Problems of distance, transport and testing of applicants meant skilled men from other Commonwealth countries were initially declined. Australians whose passages, subsistence allowance and unemployment pay were later arranged with the Australian Government arrived at Barrow in their low hundreds in 1916.<sup>93</sup> A common factor regarding many Belgian and Commonwealth workers seems to be that they were doing work which they were unaccustomed too indicating that Vickers were filling jobs as best as they could.

At the start of 1915 the principle of releasing men from the colours needed for indispensable industrial work was accepted by the War Office. Getting back men from the army proved difficult as many had left the country while others claimed they were engineers when they were not.<sup>94</sup> To assist the War Office a Government circular was sent to engineering firms to supply names of men who had enlisted along with their units. Once the names became available steps were taken to return them however men were released not discharged and if required Kitchener could recall them to utilise their military training.<sup>95</sup> In the spring of 1915 over 300 men from the Kings Own Royal Lancaster Regiment returned to the Barrow shipyard disrupting the regiments war service preparations. In response a new recruitment drive focused on parts of Lancashire not affected by the needs of the defence industries for key workers.<sup>96</sup>

Waites says the immense transfer of workers from one occupation to another and one district to another, accustomed individuals to wages they would have never commanded in their original occupations giving them new conceptions

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<sup>92</sup> *The Journal of St Thomas*, Saturday 16 August 1915, letter from Harry Manning writing from Ulverston

<sup>93</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 11 January 1919 reported the body of 250 Australians were departing

<sup>94</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 15 May 1915, no less than 2,000 local representatives were in different units of HM Forces

<sup>95</sup> OHMoM, Vol. IV The Supply and Control of Labour, Pt. I Labour Supply, Ch. II, Release from The Colours, p.17

<sup>96</sup> Hutton, *Kitchener's Men*, p.11

of their economic value.<sup>97</sup> Better conditions of work occasionally offered by different firms merely resulted in the circulation of men from yard-to-yard and consequent disorganisation of work occasioned by constant change of each firm's employees. In three Vickers works, the number of men leaving their employment during April and May 1915 amounted to nearly 50 per cent recruited in the same period.<sup>98</sup>

Generally, wage increases were secured where labour need was greatest and backed by organisation. With employers desperate to attract and complete contracts a widespread chaotic bidding-up of wage rates took place resulting in a free-for-all to the detriment of the supply departments. Allegations were made that the reasons Vickers could not obtain sufficient men, and why they were continually losing them was because they did not pay them highly and they had 'a bad name' amongst the workers. When Sydney Smith a government officer visited Barrow he found the allegations were false and overall the opinion was that Vickers was an extremely good shop.<sup>99</sup>

With wages stationary, the sharp rise in the cost of living had led to workers demanding increases. In February 1915, the industrial truce was broken when unprecedented wage advances were secured by workers whose labour was critical for war purposes. At Vickers the ASE demanded 6s on their current wages while the steam engine makers patriotically refused to endorse the demand having vowed not to strike throughout the war.<sup>100</sup> By a large majority the engineers accepted the offer of 3s per week affecting some 6,000 out of approximately 10,000 engineers. Turners now received 43s, fitters, coppersmiths and blacksmiths 42s, machinists 39s and capstan hands 36s.<sup>101</sup> This was shortly followed as over 12,000 labourers accepted a 4s a week increase on time-rates and 10 per cent on piece-rates, having demanded 5s and 15 per cent respectively, the terms were to remain undisturbed for twelve-months.<sup>102</sup> Importantly the conditions provided for the trade unions concerned to cooperate with Vickers in remedying the excessive time-losing by

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<sup>97</sup> Waites, B., *A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918*, (Leamington Spa, Berg Publishers Ltd., 1987), p.133

<sup>98</sup> Armaments Output Committee Printed Minutes, pp. 5, 10

<sup>99</sup> Shadwell, A, *Drink in 1914-22: A Lesson in Control*, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1923), p.190

<sup>100</sup> *Daily Record*, Thursday, 25 February 1915

<sup>101</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, Thursday, 4 March 1915

<sup>102</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Monday, 10 March 1915

workmen.<sup>103</sup> In general the cost of labour was higher than would be expected, recognised rates as incentives were added to prevent men leaving.<sup>104</sup> The question was whether a form of control or motive not purely financial in character could be effectively substituted. The answer would be sensible labour control by the Government introduced under the Munitions of War Act.

Whilst most Vickers men were busy on Admiralty and marine engineering work, large factory extensions were being built to meet the huge new contracts for artillery and shell production.

### **Gun and Shell Production**

In the five years previous to the war the bulk of army supplies had come from the Royal Ordnance Factories, but the factories could not greatly expand their output and the immense increase had to be got from armaments firms, mainly Armstrongs, Vickers, the Coventry Ordnance Works and Beardmores. The private manufacturers were looked upon as 'maids of all work' on whom demands for guns and shells could be made, thus the planning for total war placed the new burdens squarely on their shoulders.<sup>105</sup>

Vickers had limited experience as suppliers to the War Office but suddenly the company was overwhelmed with demands. By the end of October 1914 the Company had agreed to undertake a total of 1,010 18 pounder guns and do their best to produce 1,000 before 1 July 1915.<sup>106</sup> The firm however would not quote rates of delivery in excess of the 640 guns they had promised at a conference on 13 October. As the firm was keeping fairly up-to-date with deliveries a continuation order for 450 18-pounder guns was sent to Vickers in January 1915.<sup>107</sup> Barrow

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<sup>103</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Monday, 15 March 1915, it was proposed to provide a printed notice in the works signed by representatives of the societies, calling on the men to be regular in attendance at work

<sup>104</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*, pp. 169-70, says wage levels continued to rise at Barrow and by the end of the war the Engineering Joint Trades Committee asserted that the basic wage in the shell shop had increased from the 1914 level of 28s to 56s 6d, together with an extra 2 to 3 shillings for skilled men

<sup>105</sup> The scheme for the first National Shell Factory at Leeds was not accepted by the Government until 13 May 1915

<sup>106</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Pt I Munitions Supply 1914-15, Ch. IV Supply Policy and Organisation, p.94, on receiving the Government's promise that the capital required for extension would be found, and that they would be fully compensated for any consequential loss Vickers and the other contractor undertook to extend their output by every practicable means

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p.95



shared in these orders manufacturing both guns and carriages which were proved at the Vickers Eskmeals firing range.<sup>108</sup> Visiting the Barrow Works in 1915, James M.

Tuohy the London Correspondent of the *New York World* said:

I saw numbers of 18-pounder guns in all stages, beautiful finished weapons, whose breach mechanism is such a marvellous combination of strength, simplicity, and effectiveness. The breaches demand the skill of expert fitters, and it is surprising how rapidly and regularly they are completed. I am not permitted to give any definite indication of a week's output, but I saw rows and rows of them mounted on their carriages awaiting transport to their destination having passed every test of the workshop and the firing ground.<sup>109</sup>

With a shortage of heavy guns, Vickers were asked to enter the market and on 4 September 1914 were given a contract for sixteen 9.2in howitzers raised to thirty-two on 13 October. A further contract for eight 12in. howitzers was accepted and the first one proved in January 1915, it was further agreed that damaged 9.2in and 12.2in siege gun carriages would be repaired at Barrow.<sup>110</sup> Touhy quoted 'the heavy howitzer is impressive and there are special sheds devoted to this weapon and their numbers and extent are being increased. The increases in the gun programme required a corresponding expansion in shell supplies. In the first instance orders were placed to the amount the private armament firms thought capable of producing. By the end of 1914 the private firms had taken on the lion's share of the work and orders were distributed as follows:

• Ordnance factories	812,000
• Armament firms	6,210,000
• American firms	1,280,000
• Canadian Shell Committee	1,700,000
• Indian Government	<u>52,000</u>
	10,054,000 <sup>111</sup>

It followed any forecast of future supply of these vast orders rested on promises of deliveries from the Ordnance Factories and private contractors. At the Shell Conference of 21 December 1914 it came to light that the grave shortage of engineering labour threatened all the great firms offering a substantial increase in

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<sup>108</sup> OHMoM, Vol. IX, *Review of Munitions Supply*, Pt II Design and Inspection, Ch. III Inspection 1914-16, p.22

<sup>109</sup> *The Liverpool Daily Post*, Tuesday, 30 November 1915

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> OHMoM Vol. I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Munitions Supply 1914-15, Chapter V, The Need for Reinforcement of the Supply Organisation, p.113; Scott, *Vickers a History*, p.101

production. Vickers at Barrow could not take on additional contracts without the supply of 814 skilled mechanics besides large numbers of unskilled men and women, while finding labour by themselves would be difficult.<sup>112</sup> Hampered by the problems of obtaining labour and materials whilst competing for production equipment, it is understandable why armaments firms found it difficult to meet shell contracts.<sup>113</sup>

Following on the Ministry designs being accepted large shell workshops were built as extensions to the existing Vickers works by Sir William Arroll and supervised by the Office of Works. Although Government property, Vickers provided managers to run the workshops as Ministry agents and it followed that shell production required both expert supervision and Government inspection. Large numbers of special single-purpose and largely automatic machines, or adaptation of existing machines for repetitive shell production operations were installed. Shortage of labour was particularly seen in men essential for setting up and equipping workshops, men in the tool departments, this led Vickers to engage Canadians as millwrights, work they had never previously done.<sup>114</sup>

To allow 'wide recruitment' of additional labour for the 'operation' of machines the Employers' Federation in December 1914 asked that trade restrictions should be removed to allow the manufacture of shells and fuses by employing women and semi-skilled men.<sup>115</sup> On 4 February 1915 the Committee on Production was appointed to report on means of making labour fully available for government work.<sup>116</sup> One recommendation was to increase the output of shells and fuses by extending female labour.<sup>117</sup> Shell and fuses production carried out by machine was ideal for piecework and the Committee on Production recommended that to increase output for the duration of the war piecework prices should not be reduced, thus encouraging work to be continued knowing rates were guaranteed.<sup>118</sup> After

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<sup>112</sup> OHMoM Vol. I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Munitions Supply 1914-15, Pt. II The Treasury Agreement, Chapter I, Supply of Armament Labour, p.2

<sup>113</sup> Dearle, *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War* p.40. only 16 per cent were reported as being on time during May

<sup>114</sup> *The Journal of St Thomas*, Saturday 16 August 1915, letter from Harry Manning writing home from Ulverston

<sup>115</sup> Jefferys, *The History of the Engineers*, p.175

<sup>116</sup> Dearle, *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War* p.25 the Committee comprised Sir George Askwith (Board of Trade), Admiral Sir Francis Hopwood (Admiralty), Sir George Gibb (War Office), most of the Governments incentives for improving output in industry pre Munitions of War Act were driven by the Committee on Productions reports

<sup>117</sup> *Newcastle Journal*, Saturday, 27 February 1915

<sup>118</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Saturday, 27 February 1915

several discussions with the employers and the Government, the 'Shells and Fuses Agreement was signed by the ASE Executive on 4 March 1915.'<sup>119</sup> This allowed the employment of unskilled labour and women on skilled men's work during the war, excluding gauge and tool making and setting of machines.<sup>120</sup>

In April 1915, *The Times* reported new and large workshops fitted with modern shell-making machinery were complete at Barrow. Initially men, women and boys were recruited locally as munitions buildings and preparations were completed.<sup>121</sup> The problem with boys though was that they were difficult to manage and needed constant supervision. At the Vickers shell shop sufficient women were recruited to allow three eight-hour shifts, seven days a week for the standard wage of 15s for 45 hours this amount could be increased according to individual capacity.<sup>122</sup> For many the recruitment of women in Barrow was welcomed, particularly those with parents to support.<sup>123</sup> However, for Barrow's commercial industries it meant the loss of many of their workers as they left to manufacture munitions at Vickers.<sup>124</sup> Local farmers complained of the difficulty of replacing men called up, as many young women who could be employed in agriculture were attracted to munitions work by high wages.<sup>125</sup> Such was the lure of the munitions shops that it was reported that domestic servants, shop girls and the like were at a premium in Barrow. Women were also brought from Lancashire where work had fallen off in the cotton trade and ancillary industries; disciplined to work and accustomed to machinery they were rapidly assimilated to produce the vast

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<sup>119</sup> Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, p.86; The Dilution of Skilled Labour - *The Economic Journal* Vol. 26, No. 101 (March 1916), p.30; Barrow News, Saturday 30 January 1915; Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers*, p.175; Adams, R. J. Q., *Arms and the Wizard, Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-1916*, (Texas A&M University Press, 1978), p.80; Cole, G.D.H, *Trade Unions and Munitions*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923), p.26

<sup>120</sup> Dearle, *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War* p.31

<sup>121</sup> Barrow Record Office, List of Local Female Workers at Vickers, records the first girls started work in the Ordnance Department Shell Shop on 16 February 1915; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 13 August 1917 on Baden-Powell's visit to Barrow to inspect the Barrow and District Scouts he remarked that many of them were working on munitions

<sup>122</sup> Thom, D., *Nice Girls and Rude Girls, Women Workers in World War 1*, (London, Tauris, 2000 edition), p.60, a minimum wage of 20s and equal pay for women would not be introduced until October 1915 under the Munitions of War Act.

<sup>123</sup> Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p.122, a retired postman and his wife moved to Barrow before the war to be near their daughter who worked for an umbrella maker which failed leaving the parents desperate, the war allowed the daughter to earn good wages to support them

<sup>124</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Thursday 13 May 1915, this included men and women from the pulp works, which closed half its factory

<sup>125</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 6 March 1916 referring to the Ulverston Rural Area Military Tribunal

numbers of shells needed.<sup>126</sup> By the end of May 1915 Barrow was estimated to be producing 50,000 shells per week and in June it was reported that the 600 women shell makers were to be immediately augmented by a further 1,000.<sup>127</sup>

The problems of obtaining skilled men for munitions factories were to some extent overcome in June 1915 when a scheme for War Munitions Volunteers (WMVs) was announced. A list was opened for the enrolment of skilled volunteer workers who were not working on government contracts. Signing up for six months they were to be paid the district rate, rail fares to be paid as required and where necessary a subsistence allowance granted. Vickers were only prepared to employ WMVs without subsistence alongside other workmen who had left their homes for war work previous to the scheme being launched. Nonetheless WMV's were employed at Barrow as on 20 June 1916 the Chairman of the Munitions Tribunal asked whether volunteers were signing on again after completing their first term of service. Although the Vickers representative admitted the majority did and a few hundred were employed, he said housing difficulties were encountered.<sup>128</sup> Table 5, compiled from weekly returns of increases in the numbers employed in private works, demonstrates the growth at Vickers helped by additional armament workers.<sup>129</sup>

Total No. Employed		Increase in 13 weeks	
3 April 1915	3 July 1915	No.	Per Cent
3,650	6,243	2,593	72

**Table 5 – Quarterly Increase in Numbers in the Barrow Armament Works**

Protection was needed for male munitions workers against the Army recruiters. The War Office had only gone as far as instituting a list of firms whose men were not to be accepted for enlistment without written consent of the firm. When signs of breakdown in the munitions programme accumulated the War Office

<sup>126</sup> *Aberdeen Evening Express*, Tuesday 1 June 1915

<sup>127</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Saturday 26 June 1915, *Liverpool Daily Post*, Tuesday, 30 November 1915 said that the heavier shells were handled throughout by men and women and girls dealt with the lighter shells

<sup>128</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 21 June 1916, one volunteer refused to sign on because he could not get proper lodgings and lived fifty minutes' walk from work; OHMoM Vol. IV The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-16, Appendix IV, Employment of WMVs in Certain Establishments, p.150 records 120 WMVs as being employed at Vickers, Barrow for July 1916

<sup>129</sup> OHMoM, I and R Department, *Weekly Report*, II (15/7/15), Appendix A

followed the Admiralty and started issuing badges. During March 1915 technical workers employed by the Royal Ordnance Factories and recognised armament firms were issued with badges. Despite the system being continually refined and extended, the war service badge was only a temporary expedient and never a complete solution to resolving labour shortages. The system did not solve the labour problem, but it served a purpose for Vickers and prepared the way for a systematic method of exemption when conscription became inevitable.

The placing of Admiralty and War Office contracts with the major private firms meant their problems of production were inherited, whereas government arsenals and dockyards worked practically trouble free. Restrictive rules were reduced to a minimum, irregular attendance did not exist, there were no drink problems and strikes and lock-outs were virtually unknown. Arguably by assimilating private shipyards and armament works to Government establishments these evils might be remedied and war production increased.

### **Removing Restrictive Practices**

The first steps were taken shortly after the commencement of war when a number of private firms entered into negotiations with the unions in the hope of abandoning restrictive practices to which a vague 'industrial truce' was offered on behalf of labour.<sup>130</sup> With the need to increase war production early attempts to introduce unskilled workers were made but the first case of dilution led to serious threats of trouble at Vickers works at Crayford where engineers objected to setting up work on machines to be operated by females.<sup>131</sup> This was overcome by an agreement between the engineering employers and the ASE in November 1914. Cole said this was the first agreement of its kind during the war but in the same month the ASE approved to women operating automatic machinery at the Naval Shell Shop at Elswick.<sup>132</sup> Simmonds further states that Vickers' attempts to extend the Crayford Agreement to its other works floundered in the face of grass-roots opposition, nonetheless females were introduced on naval shell finishing at Barrow

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<sup>130</sup> Dearle, *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War* pp.5-15

<sup>131</sup> Braybon, G., *Women Workers in the First World War*, (London, Routledge,1981), p.51

<sup>132</sup> The Dilution of Skilled Labour - *The Economic Journal* Vol. 26, No. 101 (March 1916), p.30; *Barrow News*, Saturday 30 January 1915

in late January 1915.<sup>133</sup> The steps seen at Crayford, Elswick and Barrow did not provide the great advances in productivity needed for the mass production of shells and while the Shells and Fuses Agreement had been a welcome sign it was limited in scope causing Lloyd George to become involved.

With the need to increase munitions and equipment production Lloyd George called representatives of the principal trade unions to a conference at the Treasury held from 17-19 March 1915.<sup>134</sup> Government had the powers under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) to assume control over works which were turning out munitions, but could not exercise it without cooperation of employers and workmen. By taking over this meant assuming control of the large private works already producing munitions. Above all was the imposition of a limitation on profits, as long as workmen knew the state was benefitting from their efforts and the profits were not going to any particular individual or class they would hopefully put more effort into the war.<sup>135</sup> Securing control over the principal private armament and shipbuilding firms to the limitations of profits would not be realised until the 'controlled establishment' clauses were introduced into the first Munitions of War Act.<sup>136</sup> A controlled establishment meant the state became a statutory partner in the industry, owners ceased to freely conduct their business, and the state shared in the profits. Limiting the profits of Admiralty and War Office private contractors, including Vickers, was thus a major part of the government agreement in the settlement of labour. In return there would be a relaxation of restrictive practices during the war and continuance of work pending the settlement of disputes by arbitration as recommended by the Commission on Production.

The first Treasury Agreement was signed by the chief trade unions representatives on 19 March 1915, but not fully accepted by the shipbuilding unions, whilst the miners withdrew and the ASE demanded further safeguards.<sup>137</sup> On 25 March, the Government called the Second Treasury Conference at which the

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<sup>133</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday 30 January 1915

<sup>134</sup> Commonly known as the First Treasury Conference

<sup>135</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Thursday, 29 April 1915, for the year ending 1914 Vickers profits after deducting depreciation and paying Debenture interest reached the record figure of £1,019,034, or £217,149 more than Armstrong's

<sup>136</sup> Fyfe, T. A., *Employers and Workmen Under the Munitions Act*, (London, William Hodge, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1918), p.56

<sup>137</sup> OHMoM Vol. I, *Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15*, Part II The Treasury Agreement, Chapter II The Relaxation of Trade Union Restrictions, p.89

ASE claimed that as far as ammunition production was concerned they had assisted the Government by signing the Shells and Fuses Agreement. Should a similar need arise in 'any other branch of the industry' the ASE was willing to meet the government, but asking for semi-skilled and female labour to be introduced into 'all engineering branches' was something they were not prepared to do. In fact this was what Lloyd George wanted, that when the need did arise to increase the munitions output, semi-skilled and female labour 'for the moment' should be introduced.

The ASE accepted the First Treasury Agreement in return for Government undertaking to secure limitation of profits of firms where trade union practices were to be relaxed. This bound workmen's representatives to recommend the proposals, which did not specifically mention dilution.<sup>138</sup> *The Times* reported the feeling amongst workers at Barrow regarding the proposals were favourable and further emphasised that the town was a strong union place where all men were well organized.<sup>139</sup> The initial document signed at the first Treasury Conference bound the workmen's representatives to recommend the proposals to their members but until a favourable ballot was taken no Union was committed. Though the ASE recommended their members accept the Treasury Agreement, it was not confirmed by ballot of the whole Society until 16 June 1915.<sup>140</sup> On realisation the Agreement was no more than a dead letter, and voluntary agreement was proving insufficient, negotiations between the Government and Unions were reopened and the terms of the treaty embodied into the Munitions of War Act 1915.<sup>141</sup>

DeGroot notes as industrial output increased bad time-keeping came under the microscope, production being said to be hindered by high wages and drink.<sup>142</sup>

### **The drink problem**

The First World War helped reposition drink as an aspect of national efficiency rather than temperance, though politicians were not averse to drawing on

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<sup>138</sup> ASE Monthly Journal and Report, April 1915, p.67

<sup>139</sup> OHMoM, Vol. IV, The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-16, Ch.1, *The Problem of Labour Supply*, p.1; *The Times*, Monday, 29 March 1915,

<sup>140</sup> ASE Monthly Journal and Report, May 1915, p.5

<sup>141</sup> DeGroot, G. L., *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the First World War*, (London, Longman, 1996) p.74

<sup>142</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Saturday, 25 February, 1915

an older rhetoric to whip up support for his plans to create a more sober and productive workforce. Locally, the Chief Constable in his annual report stated during 1914 the increase in persons proceeded against for drunkenness in Barrow had increased by 40 per cent.<sup>143</sup> During the summer there had been decreases, but after the war broke out proceedings had increased. This was largely expected as the population had expanded and trade was brisker, one foreman pointed out that drinking in Barrow had always been bad but was now worse than ever.

Drink agitation started on 18 November 1914 when the government announced it was raising the duty on a standard barrel of beer. As the highest tax was placed on the highest gravity beer it was anticipated that brewers might lower the gravity while making it too expensive for heavy drinkers. Insofar as the tax induced the drinking of lighter liquors it would make for efficiency. Although the influx of Scotsmen at Barrow increased spirit sales, workers were neither spirit nor wine drinkers, and with wages high men were drinking a combination of beers priced at 5d a pint, whereas previously they could only afford beer at 3d a pint. The increase in the price of beer therefore made little difference, as one report said: 'publicans in Barrow collect the new taxes with all the scrupulousness and boldness of a trustee for the nation.'<sup>144</sup>

Drinking was deeply seated in the earnings and habits of men and any irregular timekeeping consequent upon it naturally affected others.<sup>145</sup> Early opening coincided with the start of work, while allowing men to drink coming off the nightshift it allowed men going on shift to break shipyard rules to obtain drink and turn up late. Responding to bad time-keeping Vickers told men to carry on working until their mates turned up, to which the engineers objected, saying that men should be relieved as soon as possible.<sup>146</sup> Vickers could not afford to hold up work and evidence indicates that previous to Munitions Tribunals workers who broke regulations were subjected to fines enforced by the firm's police.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday 6 February 1915

<sup>144</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Thursday, 6 May 1915

<sup>145</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Saturday, 27 February 1915

<sup>146</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday 10 April 1915, shift-workers were informed if the dayshift man did not turn up at 6 a.m. the nightshift worked until 8 a.m. and if the nightshift man did not turn up at 5 p.m. the dayshift man worked until 8.20 p.m.

<sup>147</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Saturday, 21 October 1911



Further incentives were required and on 5 March 1915, the Barrow licensing magistrates in pursuance of the Intoxicating Liquor (Temporary Restriction) Act, 1914 reduced the licensing hours. It was agreed that weekday hours should be from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and between 12.30 and 2.30 pm and 6.30 p.m. and 9 p.m. on Sundays.<sup>148</sup> Though the shorter hours removed the early drinking, arousing comment amongst shipyard workers, men now drank more in less time.<sup>149</sup> On 24 March a military order prohibited the sale and supply of intoxicants throughout the Barrow Garrison area before 10.30 a.m. on a weekday.<sup>150</sup> The justice's now revoked their first order and made another to correspond with the hours of the military.<sup>151</sup> For women the sale of drink had be prohibited before 11.30 a.m. from 20 November 1914. Opening hours were not uniform throughout the district and the problem of accommodation meant workmen living outside Barrow drank as usual. Managers also complained there were no restrictions six miles away at Dalton and many of the nightshift took the train and started drinking there shortly after 6 a.m.

Emphasis changed as the Government prepared the ground for further drink legislation after investigation into bad timekeeping in shipyards.<sup>152</sup> The investigation emanated from large labour employers including Vickers who had approached the government for special powers to deal with drink.<sup>153</sup> Reports to the naval authorities in the shipbuilding areas indicated partial measures would be useless and total prohibition was the only remedy outside martial law. At Barrow there was agreement that the amount of work being carried out was less than reasonably expected and a study of 135 fitters in the submarine engine shop proved this. Published in a white paper it showed that during a single week in March 1915, less work was carried out in a normal 53-hour week than in peacetime, some of the lost time 'it was believed' was down to drink.<sup>154</sup> Labour representatives however

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<sup>148</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 6 February 1915; *Liverpool Echo*, Friday 5 March 1915,

<sup>149</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Friday 5 March 1915

<sup>150</sup> Shadwell, A, *Drink in 1914-22*, p.190, opening hours were therefore 10.30 a.m. to 10 p.m. weekdays and 12.30 to 2 p.m. and 6.30 to 9 p.m. Sundays; BDSO 85/1/4 Barrow Working Men's Club and Institute Minutes, in late August men in uniform belonging to the territorials and members of HM Navy were admitted as honorary members by the various Barrow Clubs

<sup>151</sup> Barrow Chief Constables Report 1915 - Licensing and Drink

<sup>152</sup> Shadwell, A, *Drink in 1914-22: A Lesson in Control*, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1923), p.51

<sup>153</sup> *Western Daily Express*, Tuesday, 30 March 1915, among the deputation was John Barr representing Vickers, Barrow

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

were not consulted before publishing the white paper and no indication given as to whether production was retarded.<sup>155</sup> *The Times* referring to Barrow stated: 'that at no town in the country had such bad time been made by men who preferred to spend their time in public- houses.'<sup>156</sup> For the activist section of the Barrow working-classes such reports caused resentment and were regarded as an unjustified slight, as the conclusions were broad-based and often unconvincing.<sup>157</sup>

Individual reports of drinking in the town were provided by Sydney Smith, a government officer on the committee on bad timekeeping who paid five visits to Barrow. He reported there was plenty of drinking but the impression was men could stand a fair amount without getting drunk. Smith noted that public-houses were well patronised during the daytime and there was always numbers of men in working clothes in the vicinity showing signs of having a skin full. However, during one week there was little evidence of drunkenness in the streets and only a few cases brought before the courts. The decrease in drinking was due to double wages on Good Friday and one-and-a-half wages on Saturday morning being offered to men who had worked regularly all week, a distinct incentive to remain sober.

Drinking habits Smith believed were prevalent among riveters and platers and the less skilled. Such men, although their remuneration was equal to that of professional men had not increased much above the social position of the man earning 30s a week, noted another commentator. Having not been educated to spend their wages wisely money was wasted as apart from alcohol they had few interests and little else to spend their wages on.'<sup>158</sup> In reviewing 1915 the Mayor remarked that the prosperity of the town was phenomenal but he would like to have seen a greater exercise in thrift by those earning record amounts.<sup>159</sup> It appears there was an easiness with cash, and many had more money than they knew how to sensibly spend.

One writer in the *Manchester Guardian* said he had not met any serious minded trade unionist who does not admit there is far more drinking by Barrow's

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<sup>155</sup> *The Times*, Tuesday, 11 May 1915

<sup>156</sup> *The Times*, Wednesday, 31 March 1915

<sup>157</sup> Shadwell, A., *Drink in 1914-1922*, p.158

<sup>158</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Monday 3 May 1915

<sup>159</sup> *The Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 4 January 1916

workers than can be justified, even by the lingering idea that beer is a necessary aid to healthy perspiration in hot and hard labour.<sup>160</sup> Smith doubted if there was anything like the amount of fatigue among the workers which was considered in some areas to be prevalent, though he admitted workers at the large shell-forging presses and heating furnaces were the exception as were the shipyard riveters and platers. Much of the manual work he said was not fatiguing as men stood watching machines. The ASE president begged to differ saying workers found modern production mentally wearing encouraging the use of intoxicating stimulants.<sup>161</sup>

DeGroot says that a later government report directly linked poor production at Barrow's factories with workplace intoxication, Scotsmen who had moved to the area were being blamed, 'a cheap shot' he suspects.<sup>162</sup> The generally feeling however was that those responsible for excessive drunkenness and lost time were imported hands, the bulk of Barrow workers being said to be of high calibre.<sup>163</sup> Smith reported that the police records gave some support to this view as a striking proportion of strangers were arrested for drunkenness.<sup>164</sup> Even though Smith admitted the majority of men kept good time he failed to bring out clearly the problem was amongst a small number of the workforce which reflected badly on the production of the majority of sober workers. In fact it was the sober, steady four-fifths of the workmen led by the trade union leaders who applied moral pressure on the slackers.

As new workers poured into the town the effect was to bump up the already high population density, cramming them into a limited housing stock. Duncan also made the fundamental point that provision of proper housing was essential if public-houses were to be less frequented.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Thursday 6 May 1915

<sup>161</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Thursday 18 June 1914

<sup>162</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, p.237, the government report is unreferenced

<sup>163</sup> *Western Daily Press*, Tuesday 4 May 1915

<sup>164</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Thursday 6 May 1915, considering brisker trade in the town and the larger population the increase in drunkenness was not much of a surprise

<sup>165</sup> Carter, H., *The Control of the Drink Trade: A Contribution to National Efficiency 1915-1917*, (London, Longman, Green and Co., 1918), pp. 72-73

## Housing

For the previous three or four years Barrow had been faced with a housing problem and as thousands additional workers were brought into the town to increase munitions output the problem became more acute. Early attempts to overcome the problem was by patriotic appeal to the Barrow people to afford all the accommodation they could and to send their names and addresses to Vickers with particulars.<sup>166</sup> While the difficulty was said to have been overcome by residents offering accommodation the local labour exchange informed Vickers further labour would be refused unless accommodation was found prompting the company to form a housing department.<sup>167</sup> By this method Vickers found it easier to find tenants as the company had facilities for deducting rents. In an attempt to assist the Ulverston Trades Association it pointed out that the town could accommodate several hundred the response was favourable and by June 1915, 650 Ulverston boarders were working at Barrow.<sup>168</sup> Amongst these were colonial workers, one worker stating 'boarding cost 16s 6d a week and rail fares 2s 6d'.<sup>169</sup>

Since the start of the pre-war boom workmen's trains had been run into Barrow. Firstly from Dalton, Lindal and Ulverston then from Askam and following the outbreak of war a workman's train was run from Millom to the Shipyard Junction on Barrow Island a distance of sixteen miles.<sup>170</sup> Eleven workmen's trains were run per day and on top of these dedicated services workmen's carriages were attached to ordinary passenger trains. From Dalton alone some 1,200 men were taken to Barrow every day and as many as 640 men mainly Belgians were travelling from Millom to Vickers.<sup>171</sup> Previously there were some 200 empty houses at Millom but since the arrival of the Belgian men with their wives and families no houses were available for rent.<sup>172</sup> Unheated workers trains however caused some Belgians

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<sup>166</sup> *North West Daily Mail*, Wednesday, 5 August 1914

<sup>167</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, Friday, 21 August 1914

<sup>168</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 13 February 1915 *The Journal of St Thomas*, Saturday 16 August 1915, letter from Fred Moore to his mother

<sup>169</sup> *The Journal of St Thomas*, Saturday 25 June 1915, letter from Ronald Mitton to his mother – Canadians were prevented from bringing their wives and families; CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, No.2 Division – North-West Area, Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness District

<sup>170</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Friday, 25 June 1915

<sup>171</sup> Cumbria Archives Catalogue (CASCAT), Belgian Refugees in West Cumbria

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

workers to move from Millom to Barrow.<sup>173</sup> By mid-1915 workmen's trains were extended to Cark, Kent's Bank and Grange-over-Sands where other Belgians lived. Engineers earning £5 and £6 a week occupied rooms at Grange usually taken by summer visitors therefore providing landladies with winter incomes.<sup>174</sup> On account of the Barrow housing problem not only were thousands of pounds being sent away to wives and families by workers, the special trains conveying men from Vickers night and day to the surrounding district were boosting their economies.

Houses in Barrow were built for selling not letting purposes as trade fluctuations made letting risky even just before the war an increase in population of 5,000 had been met by the erection of just 644 houses.<sup>175</sup> As war commenced and things became uncertain, private builders were unwilling to build, the cost of materials having risen while banks stopped lending. Additionally, enforcement of rent control after 1915 eliminated any economic incentive for speculative builders to provide housing for the working-classes. Some contractors lost men to the services whilst the onset of winter and fall off in housebuilding caused labourers to take jobs in the shipyard erecting munition and armaments workshops.<sup>176</sup> Mclvor notes there was wage drift in the North West as building firms responded to the request for labour in places like Barrow where large munitions plants were building.<sup>177</sup> However, labourers working on a Vickers factory extension complained they were not getting a war bonus like other men, and as they were unable to make 30s per week, and the cost of living being so high, they asked the Barrow Munitions Tribunal for certificates to move elsewhere.<sup>178</sup>

For many newcomers to Barrow, their total worth being what they stood up in the problem of accommodation was acute and the growing feeling was towards a municipal scheme. When Barrow Council was asked how many of the houses being

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<sup>173</sup> Andrews, *The Furness Railway*, p.218, winter 1914 led to demands for heating in workmen's carriages and 11 were fitted with heat in December 1914, the process of adding heaters to carriages continued throughout the war

<sup>174</sup> *The Times*, Monday, 8 February 1915, reported 250 men were living at Cark, Kents Bank and Grange

<sup>175</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday, 2 February 1915; The population on 31 December 1913, was 68,523 and on 31 December 1914, 75,368 (Historical Records/R/346. 2/4)

<sup>176</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday 20 September 1914

<sup>177</sup> Mclvor, A. J., *Organised Capital, Employer's Associations and Industrial Relations in Northern England 1880-1939*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.161, the Vickers plant was reported by the National Federation of Building Trade Employers as one of the most aggressive labour poachers

<sup>178</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 1 December 1915

built or newly constructed would be let for 6s to 6s 6d per week, the average pre-war cost of a workman's house, the answer was that under a municipal scheme it could not build a small house under a minimum rent for that amount.<sup>179</sup> The most a man could expect for 5s was three rooms on the top floor of a tenement a house cost 8s and more if there was a lodger as this gave some landlords opportunity to raise already high rents.<sup>180</sup> Property ownership being high in Barrow, useful incomes could be made from lodgers by landlords living in a couple of rooms and renting out the rest to lower paid workers. In this way the Rent Restrictions Act, which pegged the rates at 1914 levels was overcome landlords however were prevented from selling the tenants home without recourse to the courts.<sup>181</sup> When a mother and daughter responded to the mayor's appeal to undertake the inconvenience of taking in lodgers the landlord raised the rent by 2s. 6d. a week.<sup>182</sup> This hardly encouraged others and the search for affordable accommodation meant people would keep on piling themselves up unless restrained.

There were no bye-laws to the effect that no room or rooms of a furnished or unfurnished house could be sub-let, and without registration the municipality was powerless to ascertain accurately the pressures on housing accommodation. Registration would have provided a municipal barometer to indicate dangerous overcrowding but instead Barrow became a sponge soaking up an invisible influx. Overcrowding had led to amazing statements regarding conditions.<sup>183</sup> One woman said she lived with her husband and six children in a single room. An example was given of a family living in a single room where a coffin sat at one end of the table while a meal was eaten at the other. In another house there were fourteen lodgers where beds were occupied night and day, while a near relative of an important council member was said had been turned into the street with an ill wife.

Although the Local Government Board gave authority for the preparation of a corporation town planning scheme, resistance to municipal housing by landlords

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<sup>179</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 6 March 1915

<sup>180</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 27 March 1915, conditions were such that advertisers were prepared to pay £2 and £3 key money to gain possession

<sup>181</sup> Englander, D., *Landlord and Tenant 1838-1918*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983), p.234

<sup>182</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday 2 February 1915

<sup>183</sup> H of C Deb 15 March 1915 vol.70 cc1822-45

was formidable and Barrow Council shelved the question until after the war on the grounds these were abnormal times and when the war ended there might be no need for a housing scheme.<sup>184</sup> Proviso was made that after the war Vickers be asked if necessary to assist the Corporation with a view to erecting permanent buildings, while a recommendation was made that Corporation bye-laws should not be enforced in providing 'temporary' housing for men employed in manufacturing munitions. Once the Ministry of Munitions was formed housing munitions workers was seen as their responsibility and arguably the Corporation should have insisted proper provision was made. Ministry responsibility was hardly less because munitions workers were employed by a private firm if the Ministry denied responsibility and held housing requirements were the province of the Corporation, it should have ensured they fulfilled their obligation. In all events munitions was state work, therefore it was the business of the Ministry of Munitions to ensure it was carried out efficiently, it would not however be the Ministry that determined workers' accommodation, but the Treasury.

The extent to which the permanent building of housing for munitions workers could be realised was limited by control over Treasury expenditure. It was only under extreme pressure that the Treasury consented to erect permanent houses at Woolwich.<sup>185</sup> By the middle of 1915 as the extraordinary cost of building became apparent, the Treasury regretted its decision. A letter to the new Ministry of Munitions in June 1915 laid down Treasury rules on housing; schemes would be permitted where shown to be necessary for war production and to be temporary unless this was impossible.<sup>186</sup> Not all the benefits were on the side of temporary structures. The cost of building constituted part of the provision of housing, the substantial cost of site development had to be borne whether permanent or temporary buildings were erected. It was arguable that temporary buildings were more expensive than permanent buildings because of their shorter life. The limited amount of housebuilding in Barrow meant the bulk of the industrial labour force had to find lodgings in the private market however other ideas were under

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<sup>184</sup> *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, Monday, 7 September 1914

<sup>185</sup> Swenerton, M., *Homes fit for Heroes*, (London, Heinmann, 1981), pp.49-51

<sup>186</sup> PRO T132 (Treasury to Ministry of Munitions, 15 June 1915)

consideration to relieve domestic congestion. When drafting the Defence of the Realm (Amendment) No.2 Act in February 1915, it was proposed to take powers to compulsory billet workmen in centres such as Barrow and Newcastle.<sup>187</sup> The Board of Trade recommended a more moderate provision giving powers to take possession of empty properties, following these recommendations the Treasury instructed that accommodation at Barrow was to be provided by men and women's temporary hostels and the seconding of buildings as will be seen in the next chapter.<sup>188</sup>

### **Conclusions**

The outbreak of war brought no unemployment to Barrow. On the contrary the town benefited from the rush of Admiralty work and the new contracts the War Office brought. However the call to the colours and the lack of manpower control caused a loss of key men, particularly foremen, which affected workshop organisation. Movement was seen towards total war as Barrow's population became involved with war work in support of munitions production. This had the effect of disrupting council services and caused the migration of workers from other industries into higher paid work at Vickers. From the start it was urged on the Barrow male population that their duty was at home rather than in the armed forces.

Success of industry concerned with the continuance of the war could only be achieved by replacing, retaining and expanding the skilled workforce. Initially the labour exchanges found men from the merchant ship yards to complete Admiralty work, whilst amongst the unemployed inferior unskilled men were recruited. Vickers took steps to replace lost labour and protect their workers. Protection was taken a step further when the Admiralty provided official badges for its workers, this scheme was thereafter taken up by the War Office and the Ministry of Munitions. Output depended on increasing or economising the supply of labour but the uncontrolled labour market led to competition between firms for men and

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<sup>187</sup> OHMoM, Vol. I, Industrial Mobilisation 1914-15, Pt. II The Treasury Agreement, Ch. III Control of Industry, p.60

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.



inducements had to be found to attract and retain men largely based on remuneration and a guarantee of service. The quest to find and transfer new skilled men failed mainly due to disagreement between employers and unions over allowances and incentives. When the Board of Trade tried to find skilled men from the unemployed and commercial work they fared only slightly better. Recruiting of Belgians was initially successful, while the bringing over of Canadians and the return of skilled men from the colours went some way to easing the manpower problems.

Employers and government alike realised that production could only be increased through the relaxation of trade union practices and rules. The massive numbers of shells required not only skilled men but semi and unskilled men and women. After failed talks between employers and unions the Government's Production Committee brokered the Shells and Fuses Agreement allowing dilution of work in shells shops. If the armaments industry was to become efficient, the continuance of work pending the settlement of disputes and relaxation of restrictive practices was essential. The Treasury Agreement signed by government and trade union representatives confirmed labour's promise to abandon strike action for the duration of the war. The unions, including the ASE, whose members were principally affected, further agreed to suspend 'restrictive practices' in skilled trades by agreeing to the use of unskilled or semi-skilled labour including women in 'some branches' of engineering under their supervision.

High wages generated by overtime and bonuses determined the hours many men worked and allowed some to spend their wages on beer without worry of government restriction and taxes. Drink was increasingly seen as a cause of bad time-keeping which the government intended to stamp out starting with early legislation which had little effect. The decisions of Barrow Town Council not to build corporation housing and of the Treasury not to provide funding for housebuilding determined the living conditions under an expanding population throughout the war. The health of shipyard workers was affected by working long hours in bad weather and cramped conditions. Any weakness in health was aggravated by overcrowding and indifferent cooking in such lodgings as were obtainable, whilst men's tempers were increased by the petty annoyances of fellow lodgers.

Although there was increasing government involvement, the armament industry during this period was not working efficiently and lacked organisation. In addition to the measures taken for supplying skilled labour for munitions work, powers were needed to prevent the disorganisation of the munitions factories by the capricious movement of labour and to increase the efficiency of workmen by tightening discipline in the shipyard and workshops.

## CHAPTER 3: THE MOVE TO INCREASE OUTPUT AND ITS EFFECTS

### Introduction

This chapter concentrates largely on the period from the summer of 1915 until the summer of 1916, although dates are extended where necessary to provide further understanding. Vickers being integral to the war effort the Ministry turned to them and the other major armaments companies for the production of shells and guns needed for an expanding army. The aim is to show how Vickers whilst already under Admiralty control came increasingly under the influence of the Ministry of Munitions and the War Office, which exacerbated an already difficult situation. A short explanation will be provided regarding the introduction of the Ministry of Munitions Act and its application to controlled establishments. With the intention of regulating the migration of men to better paid work, providing discipline in the workplace and improving timekeeping in controlled establishments, local munitions tribunals were introduced. These will be examined to provide insight into how they operated and cooperated with industry. It will be argued that Barrow was a special case and did not fit into the general pattern of tribunals as advocated by general historians. In creating further restrictions to prevent time losing and improve industrial efficiency the Central Control (Liquor) Board (CCB) was formed and its effects on Barrow and its environs will be seen.

The implications of extended munitions production were far reaching in an already overcrowded town. Housing will be revisited to examine how increased numbers of workers, many of them females, arriving in Barrow were accommodated. The housing position now became more acute and the provision of hostels and hotels as temporary accommodation was seen as a limited answer to the problem. The chapter will demonstrate the effect the massive increase in munitions production had on utilities and how this impacted on the population. It will also examine how the Government in an effort to save rail miles changed Barrow's coal and coke supplies and what the implications were of this. The change in trade at the docks to the import of war materials and the results on rail transport will be examined while the transport system for moving workers will be discussed. Due to the needs to complete contracts and due to a shortage of manpower limited

Sunday work was introduced, but this could only ever be a temporary measure as industry was driven by the needs of the needs front and the requirements of the navy.

### **The Ministry of War Act, Munitions Tribunals and Leaving Certificates**

Apart from the Defence of the Realm Act no particular legislation had been enacted on the outbreak of hostilities it was quickly realised however that an overwhelming supply of war munitions was essential in the successful promotion of the war. To attain this output the organisation of industry would need to be run on a new basis. Difficulties were many and varied and legislation was required to provide the requisite powers for the direction and distribution of munitions work so that the best results could be obtained from the available resources. Following the Shell Scandal, and the fall of the Liberal Government a coalition was formed and the Ministry of Munitions created under the leadership of Lloyd George. The new cabinet minister was charged with 'examining and organising the sources of supply and labour available for the production of all types of munitions of war'.<sup>189</sup> Marriot says government policy was such that:

No private interest was to be permitted to obstruct the service, or imperil the safety of the State. Trade Union regulations must be suspended; employers' profits must be limited, skilled men must fight, if not in the trenches, in the factories; manpower must be economize by the dilution of labour and the employment of women; private factories must pass under the control of the State, and new national factories set up.<sup>190</sup>

The new Ministry of Munitions Act enshrined both the Shells and Fuses and Treasury Agreements while introducing the leaving certificate. Powers exercised under the Ministry of Munitions were extensive and drastic steps were taken to control the conditions under which private firms were carried on. Simmonds says that on paper at least, the balance of power within industrial Britain now tilted decisively towards the government.<sup>191</sup> Control argues Marwick was in the sense of a constant watchfulness over discipline, timekeeping, and the achievement of a

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<sup>189</sup> Mortimer, J. E., *History of the Boilermakers' Society, Vol. 2: 1906-1939*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1982), p.84

<sup>190</sup> Marriott, J. A.R., *Modern England: Vol. III, 1885-1945*, (London, Methuen, 4th ed. 1948), p. 376

<sup>191</sup> Simmonds, A. G. V., *Britain and World War One*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2012), p.87

reasonable level of output.<sup>192</sup> Hinton interpreted the Act as while being a reciprocal agreement between employers and unions, it was in reality a direct attack on organised labour which succeeded in reducing its protection and strength.<sup>193</sup> Wrigley provides a more measured view, describing government intervention in the deadlock between employers and unions over the suspension of craft union core practices as a necessity and a means of finding a compromise while providing the unions with some safeguards in the face of extreme employer demands.<sup>194</sup> According to Todd industrial relations at Barrow were particularly volatile and described as being brought to an all-time low in the war years as Vickers exploited the Munitions Act to the full.<sup>195</sup> One Vickers Director later remarked that: 'relations between employers and employed were complex, but if the questions of Government were intelligently and sympathetically approached from all sides' solutions could be found'.<sup>196</sup>

The most important sections of the Act related to controlled establishments which included Vickers, controlled implying with regard to the employer as the limitation of profits, control of wage changes, and in regard to the workman the suspension under statutory safeguard of rules and practices restricting production or employment in regards to efficiency.<sup>197</sup> Importantly the strike and lock out was forbidden by the Act. Within the controlled establishments the total effect before amendment of the Act in 1916 was to arm employers, managers, and foremen with arbitrary powers which generally affected workers in a negative manner. These powers were extended through the Munitions Tribunals, which not only retained workmen but helped maintain discipline in the interest of production.

The most unpopular section of the Munitions Act provided an effective means of tying munitions workers to their employment by the institution of leaving

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<sup>192</sup> Marwick, A., *The Deluge*, (London, Macmillan, 1963), p.60

<sup>193</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards'*, pp. 31-35

<sup>194</sup> Wrigley, C., *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement: Peace and War*, (New York, Harvester Press 1976)

<sup>195</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*, 174

<sup>196</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday 25 August 1917, Barr succeeded Councillor Miller as commerce director and secretary who retired through ill health. Vickers therefore in Miller had a board member serving on Barrow Council

<sup>197</sup> *The News*, Saturday, 24 July 1915, Control of profits were limited and excess profits went to the Exchequer, the sacrifices made by workmen were therefore made to the nation as a whole and not to the benefit of individuals

certificates. This was a drastic restriction of normal liberties and the most powerful instrument of industrial efficiency which the war produced which in practice gave rise to discontent. The leaving certificate virtually extinguished the market for free labour, the only commodity a worker had to sell, whereas there was open competition for everything he had to buy. Not only was freedom of movement to be circumscribed dramatically but also discipline and control over men who were slack or disobedient to reasonable orders were to be dealt with. Hinton sees the trinity of wage deflation, labour immobility and factory discipline embraced in the leaving certificate and Munitions Tribunal as introduced by the Act.<sup>198</sup> In the absence of direct wage regulation imposing uniformity of rates and earnings, employers were vulnerable to the enhanced market power possessed by skilled labour. The first task Rubin says was to control wages by stopping employees moving elsewhere for better wages.<sup>199</sup> While applications for leaving certificates to allow men to improve their earnings were requested at the Barrow Tribunal the Chairman could not deal with actual workers' wages.<sup>200</sup>

Responsibility nonetheless was placed on those in authority to which the system applied to ensure that the least possible hardship occurred to the workpeople whose freedom had been restricted. However, the paramount consideration in each case was whether the national interest could be best served by a workman remaining where he was or moving him to a new sphere of work. Although the Barrow Munitions Tribunal reports provide indication of cases and outcomes before the Chairman they but do not indicate numbers of certificates issued by Vickers without recourse to the tribunal. Whilst the majority of cases dealt with Vickers workers, a number were from other firms and companies in the town carrying out war work.<sup>201</sup>

Workers had come to Barrow on promises of high wages and continuous work and a major complaint was they were prevented from bringing their wives and

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<sup>198</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards'*, pp. 35-36

<sup>199</sup> Rubin, G. R., *War Law and Labour: The Munitions Acts, State Regulation, and the Unions 1915-1921*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), p.205

<sup>200</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Wednesday, 7 September 1915, when a Vickers engineer complained after finishing his apprenticeship that he was paid 14s under the standard rate and wished to go elsewhere he was told the tribunal did not deal with wages

<sup>201</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 29 July 1915, ironically builders arriving from Blackpool camped alongside the new houses they were erecting

children to Barrow through a shortage of suitable houses in the town.<sup>202</sup> In late 1916 an advertisement appeared in a local newspaper of a house to let noting it was 'a very rare thing nowadays'. This brought between 300 and 400 applications, others meanwhile in searching for a house were offering as much as £5 for a key.<sup>203</sup> The cost of keeping two places of residence became too much for some, leaving them with little alternative but to request leaving certificates.<sup>204</sup> The problem was not one of wanting to move for higher wages, as men's earnings were high in Barrow. It was also not necessarily that a man wanted to return to his family, as national work elsewhere with suitable housing was just as acceptable.<sup>205</sup> Also those wanting to move away with their wives and children from the conditions of Barrow, were forbidden to do so without leave of the tribunal. Fundamental objections existed challenging the scheme's lack of reciprocity, the most obvious was that while a worker could not leave his employment without a certificate the employer could dismiss him. Once a worker entered a scheduled industry he had to prove his services could be of greater advantage to the national interest elsewhere before a certificate was granted. If the employer whose yard a man had left unreasonably withheld a certificate it was up to the tribunal to decide whether it was unreasonable or not. The onus was on the man to convince the tribunal that the employer was unreasonable. Even if he was successful the employer was not liable to a penalty.

Leaving without a certificate meant disqualification from a man's trade for six weeks before a new job could be taken up, something few could afford. Amongst penniless Irish labourers brought over by Vickers, three returned home without certificates. One man unable to find proper living accommodation in Barrow wrote to the tribunal saying he had a wife and six children and wished to have his certificate as he could not afford to remain idle in Ireland.<sup>206</sup> The tribunal could do little but

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<sup>202</sup> Suitable did not just relate to a property but to the distance from work and the convenience of transport

<sup>203</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 31 December 1916

<sup>204</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 26 January 1916

<sup>205</sup> Suitable housing did not necessarily mean comfortable but could mean proximity to work with good transport services; there are also constant remarks to men earning high wages at the Barrow Munitions Tribunal; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 4 January 1916, the Mayor made the point that the prosperity of the town was phenomenal, but he would like to have seen a greater exercise of thrift by those who were earning record wages and money

<sup>206</sup> *Barrow Evening News*, Saturday, 14 March 1915

refuse, as granting a certificate to those who left and departed Barrow would set a precedent causing an exodus. Employers were liable to a penalty of up to £50 if they employed anyone who during the previous six weeks had been working in a scheduled industry without seeing a certificate signed by the previous employer. This rule left discharged men and employers in limbo. When Armstrong's, Openshaw works discharged 121 skilled workers, Vickers at Barrow were prevented from employing one man in their shell department until issued with a certificate.<sup>207</sup>

Vickers was in a bad position, being geographically isolated and having brought workers to Barrow they could ill afford to lose them. All workers were needed and the local tribunal Chairman rarely assisted in granting certificates through appeal. This meant the tribunal was more accommodating to the employer, while many cases were adjourned to discuss what could be done to obviate workers' problems. Munitions production was first and foremost and the position was such that if the employer needed to retain a man and taking that man away delayed work, then the objective of the Munitions Act was defeated.<sup>208</sup>

Numbers of requests for certificates were caused by changes in work practices leading to lower wages which affected men's standards of living giving cause to dissatisfaction. Labourers came to Barrow under agreement whereby Vickers could place them in sections of the works where employment was not suitable or as well paid. This was an economic way of using labour to meet contracts and when questioned by one certificate applicant he was informed that it was not his place to say how work was run.<sup>209</sup> Labourers on work squads were particularly vulnerable as when jobs finished they were taken off piecework at higher rates and put on lower rate timework.<sup>210</sup> Foremen stated they were only placed on timework until piecework became available again, but men could not afford delays in an expensive town.<sup>211</sup> Men were apt to walk out refusing to work for lower wages or

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<sup>207</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Adviser*, Saturday, 4 September 1915; *Daily Herald*, Saturday, 4 September 1915, the men were members of the Steel Smelters Society and Armstrong's used them as a reserve of labour and they were tied down at Openshaw for six weeks until certificates were issued

<sup>208</sup> *The News*, Saturday 11 September 1915

<sup>209</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, Wednesday, 17 November 1915

<sup>210</sup> For the employers this could be of advantage as men needed to work their hours and overtime to maintain living wages

<sup>211</sup> *North West Evening Mail*, Tuesday, 4 January 1916; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 18 January 1916 typical was a plater's helper who was guaranteed work at 53s per week but was 'passed out of the works' because the only work was timework at 26s per week which he refused to do



were passed out by their departmental managers, even when employment was available in other departments. Managers subverted the system hanging on to men to prevent them being shorthanded when work unexpectedly came in experience showed that once men changed departments they were unlikely to be changed back. When cases were brought before the tribunal the chairman could do little other than state if workers agreed to alternative work and Vickers kept them in another department for an unreasonable time, then the case should be brought back.

In cases of discipline the general approach of the Barrow Munitions Tribunal was to draw men's attention to the provisions of the Munitions Act, administer warnings, followed by action and fines. With labour scarce in Barrow men were unlikely to be dismissed unless the case was overwhelming. Trade union representatives admitted men voluntarily came into shipyards habitually absenting themselves and making bad time when they knew work was urgent. In less pressurised departments men were not arriving on time, therefore failing to assist the war effort. In ordinary circumstances, if men kept bad time the employer had the remedy of dismissing them, but under war conditions extreme labour shortage made this difficult. Significantly working in a protected industry safeguarded men. When young Vickers men passed A1 fit appeared before the Tribunal for time losing the Chairman suggested releasing them to the Army, but it was pointed out they were exempted from the Military Service Acts.<sup>212</sup> Though men were unsatisfactory, Vickers' standpoint was that bad men were better than none and rather than threatening men with the Army to improve timekeeping, as happened elsewhere, this method was rejected.<sup>213</sup> Some men saw timekeeping no worse than before the war and if taken before the Munitions Tribunal failed to understand why they were there, as long as they were paid for their time they saw no reason to change their ways. Furthermore the Commission of Unrest pointed out that not all bad timekeepers were brought before the courts.<sup>214</sup> Nonetheless it was in the union's

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<sup>212</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 18 July 1917

<sup>213</sup> Rubin, G. R., *War Law and Labour: The Munitions Acts, State Regulation, and the Unions 1915-1921*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), p.221, The ASE jealous of preserving its member favourable status, said it was becoming common for employers to threaten men and apprentices with the Army as a spur to prevent slacking

<sup>214</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 12 July 1917

interest to improve timekeeping. Bad timekeepers were thus called before their District Committees, their excuses heard and warned and advised to mend their ways in their own and the country's interest and of course the union's.

Numbers of cases appearing before the tribunal were due to lost time through illness and symptoms caused by the nature and conditions of work. Long hours under heavy conditions naturally led to strain and irregularities leading to lost quarters and sometimes days which were often wrongfully diagnosed as the result of slackness. Constant work brought on physical strain and in many cases men remained off to recover men not at their peak could not be expected to work to the best of their abilities.<sup>215</sup> Duncan pointed out the allegations for time losing against a section of men were at a time when the climatic conditions in the shipyard were at their worst and consequently there was much illness.<sup>216</sup> Apart from the incidence of normal ailments and disease the average standard of health was lowered by the influx of workers of poor physique.<sup>217</sup>

Most men had family and financial commitments and were liable to hide serious ailments and continue working until forced to take time off.<sup>218</sup> Typically a tank tester working amongst water and complaining of soreness and rheumatics pleaded guilty at the Munitions Tribunal to missing days.<sup>219</sup> In such conditions men earned high wages at the expense of their health and occasional requests were made for certificates to transfer to departments where work was less arduous. For example a rivet holder-up suffering from rheumatism and other ailments from working in confined spaces requested to be transferred from the submarine department to the gun shop.<sup>220</sup> While earning £5 a week including overtime, he considered his health more important, but transfer was made difficult by the lack of such skills and the need to complete contracts. Although offered a job in the gun shop the submarine department could not afford to release him and when offered

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<sup>215</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Monday, 3 May 1915, Sunday work with double pay was not seen as a success. It was considered that stopping it would improve time-keeping during the rest of the week

<sup>216</sup> *The Times*, Tuesday, 11 May 1915; Shadwell, *Drink in 1914-1922*, p.197, Sydney Smith conversely said lost time through sickness had not been as profound in Barrow during the winter of 1914-15 and was assured sickness had been below normal

<sup>217</sup> OHMoM, Vol. IV, The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-1916, Ch.1 The Regulation of Labour, Pt. II The Problem of Labour Supply, p.32

<sup>218</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 12 February 1916

<sup>219</sup> *Lancashire Evening News*, Wednesday, 1 August

<sup>220</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 12 February 1916

a labouring job he refused as the pay was too low. Vickers proposed to see if he could be transferred.

Vickers complained if men provided foremen with medical certificates they would not be taken before the tribunal, but men who held certificates were often too ill to hand them in. Hard pushed doctors were not always sympathetic and even when men were not fully fit they were told to return to work, whereas workers hesitated to trouble doctors unless there was a serious problem.<sup>221</sup> The panacea for minor ailments was to take a day off, men finding their own cures. One worker told the Munitions Tribunal his influenza had been cured by drinking a half bottle of rum followed by a hot bath and twenty-hours in bed.<sup>222</sup> Doctors informed one licensed victualler that death occurred from influenza simply because people were not able to obtain the necessary spirits.<sup>223</sup> Such cures were known to prove fatal, a foreman with a cold on returning to his lodgings added a bottle of whisky to a basin of tea, consumed it, and the next morning was found expired.<sup>224</sup>

Efforts to standardise medical certificates were not successful. When large numbers were printed in 1917 for use in controlled establishments it was found busy munitions panel doctors whilst prepared to give written statements, often refused to do so unless allowed to charge more than the normal working-class fees. This was overcome when the munitions tribunals were directed to obtain medical referees where doubtful cases could be sent. Alternatively they could ask for attendance of the defendant's doctor, provided they were registered, many having failed to change doctors on arrival in Barrow.<sup>225</sup> Shortage of labour rendered the penalties of dismissal, suspension and exclusion for periods of the working day and irregularity of attendance by skilled and fit men as almost useless.<sup>226</sup> Time arranged

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<sup>221</sup> Pope, *War and Society*, p.62, by January 1918 there was one doctor to 376 soldiers, where there was one GP to 3,004 civilians

<sup>222</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, Wednesday, 31 January 1917, one Barrow steelworker called before the tribunal for absenting himself from work, said he had been off with bronchitis and previously with sciatica. The underlying problem was he needed to work as he was a widower with three children and ultimately was hiding a rupture that he had not been to the doctor with

<sup>223</sup> Lancashire Evening Post, Thursday, 13 February 1919, the doctors had quoted 'the finest thing in the world without a doubt, for influenza was spirits.'

<sup>224</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Monday, 6 December 1915

<sup>225</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VII Timekeeping, p.144, Referees charged a small fee of 7s 6d and defendants doctors £1 1s

<sup>226</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 3 July 1915, Vickers tried persuasion by encouraging participation in their War Bond Scheme they offered a monthly bonus to workers subscriptions on condition they were diligent, efficient and good timekeepers

in attending the court by foremen, witnesses and offenders along with the bitterness caused by conviction often made it pointless using them. At Barrow previous cases of bad timekeeping dealt with leniently proved ineffective. In attempting to stamp out systematic bad timekeeping, a large number of men were brought before the tribunal, not only to discourage those appearing but as a deterrent to others.<sup>227</sup> Barrow's cases were widely published in the local and provincial newspapers, reporting delinquents alongside those requesting leaving certificates for genuine reasons. However, reports of hearings meant to act as a deterrent to self-respecting workmen, rarely affected the bad cases. Though excuses were offered, including looking for accommodation and sickness, a range of fines were imposed generally payable in instalments to prevent suffering to lower paid workers and their wives and families. Fining some offenders was of no deterrent as they could easily make up losses. Typically the scale of fines when paid by instalments, variable within the £3 limit, were insufficient penalty to workmen earning £5 to £10 a week.<sup>228</sup>

The provisions of the Act can be said to be draconian and workers could be hard-treated by it, especially those wanting to move away for family reasons. On the other hand there was nothing that could be done about the significant numbers of poorer workers, so this was a double blow, as the deserving were penalised while the undeserving were protected, a situation which has not been properly considered in the secondary literature. Following grievances on the Clyde an Amendment Bill was raised and the leaving certificate standardised to prevent the addition of comments by employers, any man was to be given a certificate immediately or within three days if suspended. Tribunals were now empowered to issue certificates to men not receiving their rate or fully employed and to compensate workers not receiving the district rate. Individuals were to be compensated for periods of unemployment caused by unreasonable refusal of a certificate and a court of appeal set up to hear complaints.<sup>229</sup> Although this did not abolish the leaving certificate it ensured a fairer system.

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<sup>227</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 10 November 1915 during this month some 150 Vickers employers were called before the Munitions Tribunal, 90 being summoned for systematic bad timekeeping

<sup>228</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI Hours of Labour 1916-19, p.143

<sup>229</sup> OHMoM Vol. IV, The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-16, Pt. II, Labour Regulation and the Munitions of War (Amendment) Act 1916, pp.64-83

While limited drink restrictions had been introduced by the Barrow justices and the military, the Government now saw it as a hindrance to munitions production and in the interest of industrial efficiency introduced further restrictions and regulations.

## Drink

In early spring 1915 a considerable body of evidence regarding lost time in the northern shipyards had been collected leading the public to believe that the chief reason for the delay in production was drink.<sup>230</sup> Opinions and figures made a great impression on the country, presented as they were by Lloyd George when he introduced his Bill for the control of liquor traffic.<sup>231</sup> The figures showed a serious loss of time but no attempt was made to determine how far the loss was due to unavoidable causes. Charles Duncan while not opposing the Bill, said Labour could not stay silent in view of the aspersions made against those they represented which were one-sided and unjust.<sup>232</sup> Nonetheless the Bill was passed and state control authorized establishing the Central Control Board (CCB) to deal with drink to improve national efficiency.<sup>233</sup> Although drink control was introduced to rid excessive drinking among a section of workers as an obstacle to output it would also bring about changes in habits.<sup>234</sup>

Barrow workmen were fully aware they would come under the new CCB Orders and on 22 July 1915 notice of the new restrictions were given.<sup>235</sup> Initially the area was defined as within a circumference of a circle having a radius of ten miles from Barrow Town Hall.<sup>236</sup> An interval was allowed between the issue of the new Order and enforcement to provide notice of impending changes, promote general

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<sup>230</sup> *Report and Statistics of Bad Time kept in Shipbuilding, Munitions and Transport Areas* (1 May, 1915); *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 3 July 1915, a report of eight cases for drunkenness at the Barrow Police Courts provides evidence that most Barrow workers were beyond reproach: five were non-residents mainly new arrivals, one was not known, one a soldier, one a sailor and two tramps

<sup>231</sup> H of C Parliamentary Debates (1915), LXXI. 864 -896

<sup>232</sup> *The Times*, Tuesday, 11 May 1915

<sup>233</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Adviser*, Tuesday, 11 May 1915, in introducing the Bill, the Barrow MP said that Labour had no opposition to it but the party considered that many of the statements made in the white paper about workman and drink were unfair and unjust

<sup>234</sup> Duncan, R., *Pubs and Patriots: The Drink Crisis in Britain during World War One*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.94

<sup>235</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Saturday, 24 July 1915

<sup>236</sup> *The Times*, Wednesday, 7 July 1915

interest in its terms, and allow the local press to provide publicity. The CCB complained that the object of the Order was defeated by migration during prohibited hours from the restricted to the non-restricted neighbourhood. This loophole was closed by an amended Order when a new boundary a considerable distance from the scheduled area was created.<sup>237</sup> In November 1915, Barrow was finally incorporated into the Western Border Area removing it from Lancashire influence altogether.<sup>238</sup>

On 1 August 1915 the CCB gave notice that the hours for the sale of intoxicating liquors on weekdays would be further reduced to between noon and 2.30 p.m. and 6 and 9 p.m. whilst Sunday hours would remain unchanged.<sup>239</sup> Even so, Barrow's Chief Constable pointed out that some men were drinking more in the shorter hours while spirits were ordered by men who previously happy with a glass of beer.<sup>240</sup> If the new restrictive hours concentrated or changed consumptive energy the authorities' impeded progress further. No treating was allowed, meaning the method of every man for himself multiplied the waiters and barmen's workload slowing business and lessening takings. One Barrow visitor believed the new restrictions constituted a Machiavellian manoeuvre to drive barmen and waiters into the army, asylum or the grave thereby bringing about a drink deadlock.<sup>241</sup> Customers could not club together to buy beer, nor the price of a pint be lent, at least not openly, a man could not pay for his wife's refreshment but gave her money before entering to buy her own while credit was banned. Additionally the limited number of licensed houses in proportion to Barrow's increased population caused such congestion, especially at weekends, that it was difficult for licensees to conduct business.

Publicans were pretty unanimous in their belief that Barrow would be all the better for the change, even if they were out of pocket. Many had no intention of being submerged under a wave of enforced temperance, if men could not drink, there was the opportunity and prospect of a revolution in public house enterprise in

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<sup>237</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Saturday, 25 September 1915

<sup>238</sup> Barrow Records Office – Defence of the Realm Act, Order of the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) for the Western Border Area, 22 November 1915

<sup>239</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Friday, 23 July 1915

<sup>240</sup> Barrow Chief Constables Report 1915 - Licensing and Drink

<sup>241</sup> Reported in the *Derry Journal*, Wednesday, 11 August 1915

the selling of food. Treating restrictions conveniently provided the opportunity of allowing a person to pay for intoxicants consumed at a meal as long as a friend was invited.<sup>242</sup> The ordinary time for opening a public house had been 6 a.m. but now Barrow's publicans were permitted to throw open their portals at 5.30 a.m. for the sale of food and non-intoxicating drink. Many who had never sold a sandwich and to whom a request for tea without spirituous reinforcement would have been an insult now kept stocks of edibles.<sup>243</sup> Clubs also made adjustments, the Barrow Working Men's Club and Institute for example following closing of the bar at 10 p.m. sold temperance drinks and solid refreshment until the club closed at 11 p.m.<sup>244</sup>

There had been no real test of the new drink restrictions as influences towards efficiency in workshops, as shortly after they were introduced Barrow had five days holiday when many journeyed elsewhere in search of renovation and repair.<sup>245</sup> By September 1915 it was reported further improvements had been seen in timekeeping at the principal works and men who turned up often suffering from the effects of drink appeared in better condition.<sup>246</sup> The effect of the provisions also became noticeable as convictions for drunkenness in Barrow during the last five months of 1915 declining by over 30 per cent compared with the previous five months.<sup>247</sup> While there was less evidence of public drunkenness the Barrow Chief Constable said that the problem had moved indoors.<sup>248</sup> The CCB foresaw this and from August 1915 alcohol for home consumption in restricted areas could only be ordered in the promulgated opening hours and only during the week, Saturday and Sunday being barred while salesmen kept a written record of the purchaser and the amount purchased. On 22 September 1915 a further order prohibited the 'long pull', the over-measuring of beer to draw trade into the house, while additional restrictions were imposed on the sale of beer and spirits for off premises consumption.

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<sup>242</sup> *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, Monday 20 September 1915

<sup>243</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Friday, 5 March 1915, The Home Office at this time had approved new drinking hours as from 9 am until 10 pm weekdays while Sundays were unaltered

<sup>244</sup> BDSO 85/1/4 Barrow Working Men's Club and Institute Minutes, 29 March 1915

<sup>245</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, Saturday, 31 July 1915

<sup>246</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Saturday, 4 September 1915

<sup>247</sup> Barrow Chief Constables Report 1915 - Licensing and Drink

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* 'more drink was now being consumed indoors' were the words sited in the report

Many Scotch mechanics and labourers were employed in Barrow who had moved south to the call for munitions workers. Leaving their wives and families behind they were apt to sweeten their solitude in the usual way, only more so. The usual way was to drink a small whiskey then dilute it with a pint of beer and as he could do this indefinitely drastic action was called for. The solution was to allow certain spirits to be diluted, Barrow Council having to take and analyse monthly samples, the results of which were sent to the CCB.<sup>249</sup> On 28 March 1916, Barrow Council received a further communication from the LGB enclosing an amending order permitting further dilution of spirits.<sup>250</sup> In making consumption less rapid and transport more difficult, spirits sold in bottles of less than a quart were banned. While drink regulations largely contributed to better timekeeping in Barrow, improvements were also brought about by the actions of the Local Munitions Tribunal and the curtailing of Sunday labour causing men to work weekday overtime.<sup>251</sup>

Better work however could have been got out of the men if they were on three shifts of eight hours, but this was impossible without a large number of extra men and a great increase in accommodation.

### **Accommodation**

Vickers in trying to hold on to key men, attempted to find accommodation by placing them on a register and by October 1915 houses were being supplied for their employees at the rate of approximately fourteen per week, often outside Barrow.<sup>252</sup> In November, with the continuing need for accommodation the Barrow Chamber of Trade appealed on behalf of Vickers to 'all classes' of householders to find room for lodgers or paying guests. Those who had not previously done so were asked to reconsider. However, when the Central Billeting Board carried out its investigation in 1917 it found that the better off civil dignitaries and the like who

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<sup>249</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, 3 January 1916, Dilution of Spirits

<sup>250</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, 22 March 1916, Dilution of Spirits

<sup>251</sup> The Police Constables Annual Report for 1915 said with the restricting of hours of intoxicating liquor to 5.5 hours a day there had been a decrease in drunkenness and men were keeping better time in the munitions works

<sup>252</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 13 October 1915



spoke loudest for patriotic self-sacrifice, were those least willing to lodge munitions workers.<sup>253</sup>

Hutton says wartime developments were largely concerned with permanent housing for workers and their families rather than temporary accommodation while Sydney Smith suggested that increased accommodation could be provided by vessels in Barrow docks.<sup>254</sup> In practice permanent housing was only sanctioned where it was certain it would be required to meet the needs of the normal population after the war.<sup>255</sup> The Ministry's primary interest in housing was to secure and increase output, welfare and social aspects were a means to an end and workers accommodation it seems subordinated to the needs of the moment. When housing was needed for the Woolwich Chief Inspectors staff on arrival with their families arrangements were made with Vickers to build 90 houses close to the works.<sup>256</sup> The firm received a grant to be written down from profits on each house, in return these better type houses were left at the disposal of the Ministry.<sup>257</sup> On the other hand, suitable accommodation was never provided by the Ministry of Munitions for their women and girl workers on arrival at Barrow.<sup>258</sup>

As shell production increased Vickers opened a bureau to further deal with the accommodation question. A form of billeting system was introduced for workers, Alice Wycherley arriving from Manchester said she was met at the railway station and taken to lodgings where she was provided with a room in a private house.<sup>259</sup> She paid 14s a week rent and board while only earning 20s 9d, so there was little left for extravagance. Meals were depressing, although the landlady meant well, and when things turned bad with her roommate she moved, but this

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<sup>253</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, No.2 Division North-West Area, Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness District

<sup>254</sup> Hutton, J.E., *Welfare and Housing: A Practical Record of Wartime Management*, (London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1918) pp. 41-42; Shadwell, A., *Drink in 1914-1922: A Lesson in Control*, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1923), p.190

<sup>255</sup> Treasury letter, 15 June 1915 (CRV/Gen 360 and LR/112/140)

<sup>256</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday 8 March 1919

<sup>257</sup> OHMoM Vol. V, Wages and Welfare, Ch. VI, Special Aspects of the Housing Problem – Barrow, p.45, Barrow Records Office Agreement to the erection of 90 houses at Vickerstown 19 May 1916

<sup>258</sup> BDSO 7-1 Minutes of the Barrow Labour Party and Trades Council Minutes, 12 October 1916, the Committee called upon the Ministry of Munitions to provide suitable conditions before any more females were brought into the town; Lancashire Evening Post, Friday 11 April 1919, the Admiralty accommodated their staff at a large hotel close to the Naval Construction Works the hotel was returned to the owners in 1919

<sup>259</sup> *The Woman's Point of View*, Chapter XII, p.149, whilst providing moral and physical welfare for women workers, the Woman's Welfare Supervisor supplied them with 'home care and comforts'

meant sharing a bed with another girl as few had their own room.<sup>260</sup> By going on alternative shifts she could earn 32s 6d but this she found more tiring and even though able to afford better accommodation there was little chance of finding anywhere else.

With the sudden pouring of people into Barrow in search of work, efforts were made particularly by Vickers to build houses, but it was soon realised the additional houses obtained were inadequate to keep pace with the population. A limited number of hostels were thus provided for single men and women, although Hutton and the regional newspapers maintain they were provided for married couples, no such evidence has been found regarding Barrow.<sup>261</sup> What is generally reported by historians is limited to women's hostels, and concerning Barrow, Joy says statistics are unavailable.<sup>262</sup> Nevertheless, hostels were established in various configurations for different classes of workers under assorted management. Hostels emanated in two phases, firstly to accommodate men needed for expanding war work and secondly for imported female munitions workers.<sup>263</sup>

To accommodate Belgians awaiting lodgings Vickers took over Whinsfield House converting it to a hostel for which they sent a bill for £550 to a local Belgian charity for refugees to recoup their outlay, the mayor pointed out that the fund was not for increasing Vickers' dividends.<sup>264</sup> Further accommodation for Belgians was provided at Lund Hall, Ulverston.<sup>265</sup> In 1915 two hostels were erected, one close to Vickers' works accommodating 250 single men on a cubicle system.<sup>266</sup> The model Trades Hostel as it was known was of brick and made fireproof throughout. Cubicles were of corrugated steel while the ground floor was taken up by a communal dining-

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<sup>260</sup> Trescaheric, B., *Voices from the Past – Contemporary Accounts of Barrow History*, (1994, Lord Roberts Street, Barrow-in-Furness), p.55

<sup>261</sup> Hutton, *Welfare and Housing*, pp. 32-34; *Dundee Evening Telegraph and The Evening Telegraph and Post*, Wednesday, 20 September 1916

<sup>262</sup> Joy, C.A., *War and Unemployment in an Industrial Community: Barrow 1914-26*, Partial Fulfilment of History PhD., Uclan 2004, pp.60,73

<sup>263</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V Provision for the Housing of Munitions Workers, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems - Barrow, p.46, the enormous influx of workers into Barrow can be gauged by the fact that of some 35,000 Vickers employees in June 1917, 6,596 men and 2,647 women were imported

<sup>264</sup> Cumbria Archives, Belgians in Cumbria During World War 1, twenty-four refugees arrived at Lund Hall, Ulverston on 31 September 1914 mainly artisans from Louvain

<sup>265</sup> H of C Deb, vol.70 cc1822-45, 15 March 1915

<sup>266</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V Provision for the Housing of Munitions Workers, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems - Barrow, p.45, states accommodation for 300 to 400 men

room, kitchens, laundry, toilets and bathrooms.<sup>267</sup> Its clientele could be quarrelsome; one lodger being ejected for splitting open a man's head with a bottle.<sup>268</sup> Advertising for a warder the hostel was described as a first-class weekly lodging house, whilst the job description was likened to that of a club doorman.<sup>269</sup> The hostel accommodated all trades and tended to be full a building worker from Burnley complaining that he had slept three nights in the tram sheds before he could find lodgings there.<sup>270</sup> The second timber constructed hostel accommodated 100 men affording the comforts expected by navvies, including cooking and other facilities.<sup>271</sup> For those preferring a private house Vickers altered and furnished the Bankfield Hotel on Walney to accommodate 80 men. Renamed the Bankfield Boarding House it proved popular with colonial workers.<sup>272</sup> Additionally the Salvation Army provided a hostel in town for 50 single male workers who paid 6s per week for lodgings and obtained food at fixed charges.<sup>273</sup> Further accommodation was provided by three common lodging houses.<sup>274</sup>

Shell production increased as workshops were completed, production machinery installed and workers, predominantly women and girls trained.<sup>275</sup> Vickers held the names of many women residing in the Barrow and Dalton district, but as production increased women arrived from all parts of the country needing accommodation.<sup>276</sup> Some arrived with nothing more than what they stood up in and

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<sup>267</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V Provision for the Housing of Munitions Workers, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems - Barrow, p.45, the hostel was erected by Vickers and cost £7,000, it was operated by a company in which Vickers held controlling interest

<sup>268</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 22 May 1918

<sup>269</sup> *Daily Record*, Saturday, 2 February 1918, must be big, strong, sober and experienced and willing worker; good wages and fare paid – state age, height weight and testimonials

<sup>270</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, Wednesday, 17 November 1915

<sup>271</sup> Possibly Natal Road, Walney Island

<sup>272</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V Provision for the Housing of Munitions Workers, Ch. III (Appendix 1) - a house was also adapted by the Ministry to accommodate 38 men for use by various firms

<sup>273</sup> Barrow Record Office, Letter to the Town Clerk from the Salvation Army, 17 August 1915; Letter from Salvation Army to Barrow Council, 6 April 1916 regarding accommodation for 50 war munitions workers; Joy, *War and Unemployment*, p.60, says the Salvation Army had opened a hostel for 250 which is probably incorrect

<sup>274</sup> Hutton, *Welfare and Housing*: pp. 41-42; Barrow Council Minutes, Health Committee, 15 December 1915,

<sup>275</sup> *North West Evening Mail*, Wednesday, 29 January 1919, all the general figure quoted for female workers at Barrow on war work is 6,000, the newspaper quotes 4,977

<sup>276</sup> H of C Deb 19 May 1915 vol.71 cc2349-50W The First Lord of the Admiralty was asked why French girls were being employed at Barrow, there is however no evidence of this; OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. II Welfare: The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. V Hours of Labour 1914-16, p.89, by October 1915 2,500 women munitions workers were working at Barrow; *Barrow News*, Saturday 21 October 1916 one young Irish woman arriving in Barrow to make munitions brought her 16 month baby with her

headed towards the Barrow Hostel for Women and Girls.<sup>277</sup> This pioneering hostel, effectively a clearing house, was self-supporting and any profits used to pay the mortgage on the building. Run by a committee of ladies it brought into existence a group concerned with women workers, which resulted in a widespread movement throughout the borough. The hostel also welcomed homeless and destitute girls and those arriving by late train with nowhere to go such people were provided with food and lodgings until suitable places could be procured.<sup>278</sup> There was 31 beds, but on busy nights women slept in armchairs and on couches, no alcohol was allowed, lights out was at 10.30 p.m., and by 9 a.m. the premises had to be vacated.<sup>279</sup> Whilst strict, the dormitories were described as nicely furnished and the establishment said to have a comfortable atmosphere.

This work was further enlarged when the Dane Ghyll Hostel for twenty-eight women munitions workers opened under YMCA management. The building, lent by Lady Cavendish, was situated in its own grounds and said to offer every comfort. Separate cubicles were provided and terms comprised residence and board including breakfast, packed lunch and supper costing from 16s to 17s 6d per week.<sup>280</sup> For Vickers' manageresses and forewomen Ramsden Hall in the town was converted to a hostel, providing comfortable quarters at 18s per week.<sup>281</sup> On Walney, Vickers erected a temporary hostel without cubicles for 104 women. It was described as well-furnished and equipped with recreation, reading and writing rooms adjoining the main building.<sup>282</sup> Initially the hostel was used as temporary accommodation for women brought over from the Isle of Man for training in balloon and airship fabric work.<sup>283</sup> The Manx Hostel as it became known at the time was rent free and run by

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<sup>277</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 10 July 1915, situated at 17 Church Street in the six months ending 30 June 1915 some 2,380 beds were occupied, *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 4 October 1915 advertised for a matron for the Women and Girls Hostel; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 14 March 1919, stated 6,000 beds were occupied during 1918-19

<sup>278</sup> Basically it became a clearing hostel throughout the war

<sup>279</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 14 October 1916

<sup>280</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday, 1 September 1916; *Evening Telegraph and Post*, Friday, 20 September 1916, the Dane Ghyll Hostel in providing cubicles was superior to dormitories

<sup>281</sup> Barrow Records Office, 2 January 1917, Tenancy agreement to use Ramsden Hall as Women's Hostel; *North West Daily Mail*, Saturday, 28 December 1918

<sup>282</sup> Hutton, J.E., *Welfare and Housing*, pp. 41-42, total cost excluding land was £3,600; *North West Daily Mail*, Friday, 28 December 1918

<sup>283</sup> Barrow Records Office, Letter by the Town Clerk

the ladies who paid for the coal and electricity, while the cost of food and occupant care was 10s each per week.<sup>284</sup>

Though conditions varied in hostels, conflicting opinions regarding their popularity existed. Woollacott noted men like women preferred lodgings, while the *Jarrow News* stated men at Barrow were pouring into hostels as they provided comfortable and clean accommodation in preference to the undesirable crowded lodgings.<sup>285</sup> In Barrow many women were said to be of poor class and disliking the restrictions of hostels they preferred crowding into private lodgings.<sup>286</sup> The *Barrow News* also reported there were dreadful stories of girls who had maddened their landladies with their unclean habits.<sup>287</sup> Not only were landladies maddened but women workers. Alice Wycherley changed lodgings because her roommate had been freely using her hairbrush on hair described as dirty or worse.<sup>288</sup>

Hostels barely touched the accommodation problem and in November 1916, Vickers wrote to the Ministry stating the housing congestion was now at breaking point. Lord Harrowby was asked to investigate conditions at Barrow and his report of December 1916 substantiated Vickers' concerns recommending 1,000 houses and a number of hutments should be built immediately, while more buildings should be converted to hostels.<sup>289</sup> Vickers had done all it could and having spent £623,330 on housing refused to spend further capital on what was a war emergency largely occasioned by the needs of the new Ministry's Howitzer Shop.<sup>290</sup> Although a scheme for corporation housing brought forward by the Labour wing in the spring of 1915 was defeated, agitation was renewed the following year.<sup>291</sup> It was now certain any future schemes would have to be initiated by the Ministry.

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<sup>284</sup> *Mona's Herald*, Wednesday, 4 June 1919, having found there was insufficient space at Barrow to cope with airship work and a need for labour Vickers transferred their Air Fabric Department to Douglas. The Palace Ballroom, Douglas was used by Vickers to build airships as it was one of the few buildings large enough to allow this

<sup>285</sup> Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p.57; Memorandum on Housing Scheme at Barrow, Lancashire, 1917 Oct. 12; Nov 7; Nov 26; PRO, MUN 5/96/346.2/4; *Jarrow Express*, Friday, 2 August 1918

<sup>286</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V Provision for the Housing of Munitions Workers, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems - Barrow, p.46

<sup>287</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 21 October 1916

<sup>288</sup> Trescaheric, *Voices from the Past*, p.55

<sup>289</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Special Housing Problems - Barrow, p.46

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> *Barrow Guardian*, Saturday, 9 December 1916

Problems of accommodation did not just concern Vickers workers. When the Barrow Steelworks plate mill shut down in March 1915 through lack of labour a hostel for 40 men was opened in the quest to accommodate and retain additional workers. As the iron and steel industry took on importance and production increased, notices were posted at the works requesting lodgings for skilled workmen in the steel and engineering trades. In December 1915 ejection orders were applied for against tenants not engaged on government work living in their company housing. The accommodation was needed for key workers who would otherwise leave Barrow.

With the huge requirements for industry energy and the needs of the vastly increased population, Barrow Corporation gas, electricity and water works with limited staff and workers came under enormous pressure.

### **Utilities**

As the major firms, smaller foundries and metal works in the borough became heavily engaged in Ministry work, gas demand increased enormously.<sup>292</sup> Vickers, the major consumer caused consumption in November 1915 to rise almost to the total capacity of the gasworks.<sup>293</sup> It had become clear by 1910 that a new gasworks was needed, but a site was not purchased from the Furness Railway Company until 1913 and the new works eventually opened in 1917. Finding key staff for the new works proved problematic as the appointed manager lacked experience and both he and the assistant manager were liable to military call up.<sup>294</sup> While there were several successful applicants for a works foreman, they could not leave their employment and the Ministry of Munitions had to be contacted for the release of an experienced man.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, 3 April 1916, Gas price increased to 3d per 1,000 cu. ft., Vickers was paying the same price as householders and asked for a reduction but this was refused. The company had to pay the Council £925 per quarter until either the gas stoves were reconnected or the new gas plant came on line

<sup>293</sup> Barrow Records Office, Letter from Vickers to the Town Council regarding gas charges, Vickers consumption rose by 136 per cent between April 1915 and October 1916; *The Manchester Guardian*, Monday, 8 November 1915

<sup>294</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, Gas and Water Committee 14 March 1917, Mr. Gabbatt was appointed Manager on a salary of £140 per year, with free house, coal and gas

<sup>295</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 9 April 1917

The Barrow gas position became so acute that steps were taken to curtail domestic gas supplies including shop and street lighting.<sup>296</sup> Not only was there a need to conserve gas for industry but to conform to the Home Secretary's lighting restrictions. However with restraints less stringent on the West Coast, Barrow was only affected in the unlikely threat of an air attack.<sup>297</sup> Public safety became of concern in the winter of 1917 causing the Chief Constable to ask the Council to increase street lighting. Permission was granted and the restrictions lifted to allow the street lights to remain lit until 11 p.m.<sup>298</sup>

Many Barrow houses were fitted with gas ovens, the numbers having increased as new houses were built to accommodate the growing population.<sup>299</sup> To reduce consumption notice was given that all gas ovens where coal ranges were fixed in houses were to be cut off. For some the loss of gas ovens had a detrimental effect as coal fires were too small to prepare and serve meals for families accommodating lodgers.<sup>300</sup> There were also health issues as one resident pleaded for her gas oven to remain connected to cook light invalid food.<sup>301</sup> In response to such complaints numbers of ovens were reconnected, ensuring adequate means of cooking for munitions workers were available and to meet cases of illness.<sup>302</sup> As the new gasworks came on line, one councillor suggested that many would happily connect the pipes themselves and he hoped they would risk prosecution.<sup>303</sup> The shortage of plumbers meant reconnection was slow and Vickers had to assist until urgent work called their men back, by July 1917 practically all the gas ovens were re-connected.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> The illuminating and calorific value of the gas had already been reduced by the extraction of Toluol

<sup>297</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 28 February 1917

<sup>298</sup> Barrow Council Minutes November 1916 to October 1917 - Watch Committee 12 September 1917

<sup>299</sup> *The News*, Saturday, 27 November 1917, some 10,000 gas ovens were fitted in Barrow; Vickerstown was all electric

<sup>300</sup> Barrow Records Office, 23 November 1915; Barrow Records Office, Letter dated 1 December 1915 from 15 Dundee Street, Barrow, the resident said the problem had been remedied by giving boarders notice to quit

<sup>301</sup> Barrow Records Office, 23 November 1915, letter from Bertha Mathews pleaded for her gas stove to remain connected

<sup>302</sup> Trescaheric, B., *Voices from the Past – Contemporary Accounts of Barrow History*, (1994, Lord Roberts Street, Barrow-in-Furness), Extracts from the Gas and Managers Report for 1915, p.50, in November 8,646 cookers were disconnected of which 1,572 were reconnected

<sup>303</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 28 February 1917

<sup>304</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, Gas and Water Committee, 6 June 1917, at this date there were still 3,271 stoves to reconnect of which Vickers was bearing the cost

The electricity works were also at maximum output supplying Vickers with motive power. The firm's heightened electrical use led to an agreement in late 1914 with Barrow Corporation to supply five million units per year for three years necessitating additional electrical plant until the firm commissioned their own.<sup>305</sup> Introduction of Vickers' new plant reduced the Corporation output, but the loss was made up by new consumer demands.<sup>306</sup> Table 6 indicates the units supplied by the Corporation and shows Vickers consumption rising considerably, and more than doubling in 1917-18.<sup>307</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Bucleuch Street (units sold) Millions</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Vickers Consumption Millions</b>
1912-13	1.7	1912	17.5
1913-14	2.1	1913	17.25
1914-15	3.6	1914	18.5
1915-16	13.8	1915	25.5
1916-17	13.4	1916	34
1917-18	10.2	1917	38.5
1918-19	8.3	1918	36.6
1919-20	6.6	1919	14.0

**Table 6 - Electricity Statistics 1912 to 1920**

When the Corporation requested an extension of the electrical plant in 1917 the Ministry electricity controller agreed only to expenditure on another boiler and converter to supply direct current to the shipyard.<sup>308</sup> This rigid control had become necessary to cut down plant requirements to an absolute minimum and economise the use of power through coal shortages.<sup>309</sup> The Controller was eventually

<sup>305</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday, 24 October 1914, stated Vickers used 1,000,000 units less

<sup>306</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 5 June 1917, of the units sold 1,129,360 were for lighting and domestic use, 11,448,800 for power and heating, 730 for public lighting and 689,370 for tramway supply

<sup>307</sup> Reports of the Barrow-in-Furness Power Committee, P.3

<sup>308</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 9 April 1917

<sup>309</sup> OHMoM, Volume VIII Control of Industrial Capacity and Equipment, Pt. III, Engineering Supplies, Electrical Power Supply, p.102



convinced of the need for a new generator and certification was provided in early 1918 to allow its use the following winter.<sup>310</sup>

Barrow gas and electricity works depended on a continuous supply of good quality coal.<sup>311</sup> Failing to obtain suitable supplies at the old gasworks the Hindpool district suffered from a lack of pressure causing Barrow Council to issue a notice apologising for the gas shortage.<sup>312</sup> Problems of coal supply did not exist until 1917 when the Coal Transport Reorganisation Scheme assigned definite producing areas to particular consuming districts to save coal haulage miles.<sup>313</sup> Barrow traditionally received high quality coal from the Barnsley and Wigan districts but was reallocated to the West Cumberland area. This meant coal now arrived from Durham and Northumberland. Instead of shorter journeys they were lengthened incurring higher carriage costs of which the west-coast iron smelters mainly using Durham coke were already experiencing.<sup>314</sup> Additional costs were therefore incurred for less efficient coal affecting Barrow's industries and population.<sup>315</sup> Great strain was put on the railway line between Whitehaven and Barrow as the coal and ore traffic vied for rail pathways.<sup>316</sup>

In view of the increased prices a pure coal gas supply could not meet demand and carburetted oil gas was introduced. Ministry oil was obtained but the supply fell short of demand and the plant throughput was reduced affecting daily gas output.<sup>317</sup> Even when the new gasworks came into operation household gas cookers remained disconnected until the gas pressure could be built up.<sup>318</sup> Following repeated applications a licence was obtained to obtain sufficient coal from Yorkshire for the new gasworks the quantity from Yorkshire however was never more than

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<sup>310</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 15 February 1918

<sup>311</sup> Barrow Accounts Book 1916-1917, deliveries of coal had been fairly good but the quality had deteriorated considerably, the collieries not being able to screen and pick their coal so thoroughly owing to labour shortages

<sup>312</sup> Barrow Council Committee Meeting Minutes, 15 October 1915, Barrow Records Office

<sup>313</sup> Dearle, *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War*, p.148

<sup>314</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 31 July 1917, the cost of carriage to the gasworks alone was estimated as £7,000 per year more; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 8 September 1917 the Coal Controller eventually offered to cut carriage costs depending on colliery location

<sup>315</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 8 September 1917

<sup>316</sup> The coal traffic was due to War Office decision while the iron ore was the concern of the Ministry of Munitions

<sup>317</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 2 October 1917, a delivery of 150,000 gallons was authorised; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 5 February 1918, reported that to 31 March 1918 the quantity quoted would increase from 68,950 gallons to 88,950 gallons

<sup>318</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, Tuesday, 27 July 1915, noted the existing gas works would not be able to cope with next winters demands; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 28 February 1917

half met. The new gasworks justified itself, however better results would have been obtained had the deliveries of Yorkshire coal been fully maintained the variation to Durham coal causing output to be reduced.<sup>319</sup> Supply of coal for the electricity works came from the North-East while the steelworks were allowed to carry on receiving supplies from its own colliery at Barnsley.<sup>320</sup> There was also concern that the change of supply would affect household coal costs and the working-classes. Although the Coal Controller had cancelled the normal coal supplies to the Barrow district on 31 July 1917, the decision was modified to allow deliveries of household coal until further notice.<sup>321</sup> The fear of Barrow household supply falling short of ordinary demand caused the formation of a local retail coal price committee with authorisation to stockpile as much coal as they considered necessary up to 2,000 tons for distribution to the poor and sick at cost price during the winter months. The tonnage of emergency coal for distributing to the poor was roughly 1,000 tons to 100,000 inhabitants enabling Barrow to stockpile 637 tons.<sup>322</sup> This figure was calculated on the 1911 census of 63,700 inhabitants which by December 1917 was 85,048. Barrow Council therefore authorised the stockpiling of additional household coal.

Ironically in an area renowned for rainfall on the edge of the Lake District a water shortage threatened industry during the war years. The town's great population, industrial consumption and serious drought linked to Barrow's low reservoir capacity all endangered the water supply. In October 1915 water consumption had reached 42,000,000 gallons per week of which industry was taking 20,000,000 gallons (Vickers 12,000,000 gallons) the remainder being for domestic purposes, an abnormal drain on the local reservoirs.<sup>323</sup> The Corporation issued precautionary notices warning there was only seven days' supply, and the situation would become critical if rain did not fall copiously during the next week.<sup>324</sup> No domestic water could be drawn from the High Furness reservoirs and Barrow

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<sup>319</sup> Barrow Accounts Book 1917-1918

<sup>320</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday 19 July 1917

<sup>321</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 31 July 1917 the instruction was not expected until 8 September for Barrow; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 4 August 1917

<sup>322</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 2 October 1917

<sup>323</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 5 October 1915, Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book 1915-16, Vickers water consumption was 66.1 per cent in excess of 1914-15

<sup>324</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, Monday, 11 October 1915

became reliant on the Duddon Valley Water Works.<sup>325</sup> When the works opened in 1910 Barrow Corporation asked for powers to take up to five million gallons a day, this was strenuously fought by mining and iron smelting companies, local authorities, and riparian owners which resulted in an allowance of two million gallons a day.<sup>326</sup>

Restrictions were enforced in the summer of 1916 on washing windows, watering gardens, allotments and bowling greens, swilling flagstones and paths and the use of hosepipes whilst no street watering was allowed to damp down dust preventing disease. The situation was exacerbated by severe frosts in the winter of 1916-17, when a large number of mains services burst with consequent waste of water accounting to some degree for the heavy consumption.<sup>327</sup> Restrictions thus remained in operation as the drought continued in the summer of 1917 when the average rainfall fell to 4.23 inches below average, the lowest on record for the ten year period. Water had to be found somewhere and was pumped direct to the mains from the disused Yarlside ore mines. Though said to be fit for human consumption, the water was described as decidedly off, unclean looking, not nice to drink or wash in and bad for ladies' complexions.<sup>328</sup> It smelled, contained too much lime and sulphate of soda and organic impurities and forced many to drink beer.<sup>329</sup> Despite winter rains the reservoirs were short of their full capacity by 168,000,000 gallons and the storage in January 1916 was 123,000,000 million gallons less than at the corresponding period in 1915.<sup>330</sup> Stocks of reservoir water and usage for the week ending 5 May 1917 and corresponding periods of 1915 and 1916 are shown in Table 7.<sup>331</sup> The table indicates the stock in 1917 was lower than in 1915 and consumption was 600,000 gallons more per day, even after making economies but a healthy balance seems to have been maintained.

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<sup>325</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Monday, 8 November 1915

<sup>326</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 30 October 1916

<sup>327</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book 1916-1917, the situation was not helped by a shortage of plumbers

<sup>328</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday 5 October 1915

<sup>329</sup> *The News*, Saturday, 20 November 1915

<sup>330</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 4 January 1916

<sup>331</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 11 May 1917

<b>Date</b>	<b>Water Stock (gallons)</b>	<b>Daily Consumption (gallons)</b>
8 May 1915	484,000,000	5,526,000
6 May 1916	504,000,000	5,953,000
5 May 1917	427,000,000	6,190,000

**Table 7 - Local Water Stock and Usage**

With water being drawn from the reservoirs and without the possibility of gathering and storing more water, the demands of Barrow's increased population and enormous amounts used by Vickers and other works left Barrow Corporation to seek more water from the Duddon through Parliament powers.<sup>332</sup> The Water Bill was quickly passed but the concern was that if the drought continued there would be no water coming down the river.<sup>333</sup> Basically due to the needs of war production the population suffered, not only in Barrow but the surrounding district where towns were forced to make water savings.

As war production intensified and continuous work became the norm use of electricity, gas and water increased in consequence of which supplies were only maintained by Corporation employees working overtime. Utility departments were not establishments where munitions were being made so did not come under the 1915 Munitions of War Act. However supplies became of such vital importance that in September 1915 badge certificates were issued to essential Barrow Council workers.<sup>334</sup> Under the Ministry of Munitions (Amendment) Act 1916 the provision of light, heat, water and power for tramways for carrying on munitions work all became certified war work.<sup>335</sup>

Throughout the war the railways were the quickest way of moving people and goods around and most places had access to a railway station. With a huge workforce spread over a wide area, getting the workers to and from Vickers however was a problem. While the Shipyard Railway Station was only a short walk from the

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> *Lancashire Daily Mail*, 9 May 1917, *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday 31 July 1917, one labour councillor contended there would still be 3 million gallons coming down the Duddon

<sup>334</sup> Barrow Records Office, Letter by the Borough Electricity Engineer: War Badges, Notice to Workmen; Barrow Council Minutes, General Purpose Committee, 11 June 1915; The Electricity Works was supplied with coal from the New Silkstone and Haigh Moor Colliery

<sup>335</sup> Barrow Records Office, Letter to Barrow Council from the Ministry of Munitions dated 12 October 1915

works and trams ran past the main gates there was no public transport covering outlying districts due to the lack of an omnibus service. Additionally much of Barrow's foodstuffs were now carried on the railways following the discontinuing of the Liverpool and Belfast routes, leaving the docks largely to be used for the import of war materials.

### **Transport and Trade**

After a serious decline in the business of the iron and steel industries in the first half of 1914, on which the Furness Railway largely depended, a reversal of fortunes was seen on the outbreak of war. Work had mainly continued on improving the permanent way and the strengthening of the Kent and Leven viaducts to enable heavier loads to be conveyed and the speed restrictions to be lifted.<sup>336</sup> However, virtually all capital expenditure now needed approval of the Railway Executive and after 1915 in many cases the Ministry of Munitions.

Along with the expansion of the Vickers works was the need for additional siding accommodation to handle munitions and related traffic.<sup>337</sup> Improvements were made and in 1915 the shipyard dispatched and received almost double the traffic it handled in 1914. Siding accommodation was also provided for the storage of coaches for an additional workmen's train, the Vickers workforce having risen with many living outside Barrow encouraged by cheap railway tickets.<sup>338</sup> Special arrangements were made for females travelling from Dalton and Ulverston engaged in the Vickers shell shop and for workers living at Rampside and Roa Island along the Piel branch.<sup>339</sup> As the war proceeded further new traffic was generated by the Vickers New Park Howitzer Shop (NPHS) and later by its extension where the

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<sup>336</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Monday, 14 February 1916, reconstruction of the Levens Bridge was completed in 1915 at a cost of £27,482

<sup>337</sup> Robinson, *Cumbria Railways Vol. 11, No.2, The Wartime Crisis on the Furness Railway*, August 2013, p.44; Barrow Council Minutes, Highways and Lighting, 8 November 1915, an additional siding was built at Bridge Road under the Defence of the Realm (Consolidation) Act

<sup>338</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 20 February 1915 reported that the number of weekly workmen's tickets was 2,900; Furness Railway Handbill, Tuesday, 1 October 1918 stated tickets were issued at a reduced rate and available in workmen's carriages; Dearle, N.B., *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War for Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-1919*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1929), p.33 notes on 29 March 1915 English cheap bookings were cancelled excluding those for relatives visiting men in camps

<sup>339</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 10 July 1915; *The News*, Saturday, 4 August 1915

numbers of guns and workers greatly increased.<sup>340</sup> Yet another matter was the extended platforms for longer workmen's trains at Dalton and an extra platform at Barrow Shipyard Station where associated new crossovers and signalling works were needed.<sup>341</sup> As more passengers were carried to the shipyard and armaments works, train services were altered to suit the working hours.

<b>Number of Workmen</b>						
1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
744,000	1,000,000	2,377,000	3,167,000	3,061,000	3,160,000	1,995,000

**Table 8 - Furness Railway Wartime Traffic Figures<sup>342</sup>**

In December 1916 the REC asked all railway companies for proposals for significant reductions in services to convey the increase in materials, men and supplies to the front.<sup>343</sup> From 1 January 1917 the Furness Railway produced a revised timetable including extensive passenger cuts and the closure of one station (Table 9).<sup>344</sup> Passenger luggage allowance was drastically cut, seat reservations discontinued and passenger fares increased by 50 per cent (excluding workmen's, season traders' and zone tickets) while all travel advertising ceased.<sup>345</sup>

<b>Trains per day</b>	<b>September 1914</b>	<b>January 1916</b>	<b>January 1917</b>	<b>October 1918</b>
Departures from Carnforth	12	13	9	8
Coniston branch	4	4	3	3
Kendal branch	5	5	2	2
Lakeside branch	7	7	3	3
Piel branch	5	6	4	3

**Table 9 – Furness Railway 'Passenger' Service Reductions**

<sup>340</sup> Barrow Records Office, List of Factories Built or Enlarged Since 1914, date of Howitzer Shop plan 21 July 1915; date of Howitzer Shop Extension plan 22 September 1916

<sup>341</sup> Furness Railway Directors Minutes, 10 June 1915; *The News*, Saturday, 2 October 1915, an industrial army of 1100 workers were travelling from Dalton each day

<sup>342</sup> Robinson, P., *Cumbria Railways Vol. 11, No.3*, The Wartime Crisis on the Furness Railway, August 2013, p.95

<sup>343</sup> Furness Railway Directors Meeting 9 Mar 1917

<sup>344</sup> Robinson, P., *Cumbria Railways Vol. 11, No.2*, The Wartime Crisis on the Furness Railway, May 2013, p.146

<sup>345</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 24 February 1917, the immediate result was that during January 1917 the company conveyed 49,818 passengers fewer than in the corresponding month of 1916; Dearle, N.B., *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War for Great Britain and Ireland 1914-1919*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1929), p.116, fare increases, luggage limitations, and travelling restrictions were general throughout the country

Previous to the changes trains were run during the short July 1915 holiday to Newcastle, Scotland and other districts at ordinary fares.<sup>346</sup> Also in what seemed a gesture of goodwill in the summer of 1916, long distance tickets were issued to allow short term visits to see relatives on munitions work at places like Barrow.<sup>347</sup> Part of the changes included the withholding of railway vouchers usually issued for holidays. This led to further workers grievances in August 1917.<sup>348</sup> The changes had the desired effect however as ordinary passenger numbers fell drastically while workmen's numbers remained consistent (Table 10).<sup>349</sup>

	1916	1917	Percentage Change
Passenger (ordinary)	558,385	379,378	-32
Passengers (workmen)	769,765	771,522	-
Tonnage	1,141,261	1,226,387	+7
Passenger train miles (ordinary)	131,724	96,548	-27
Passenger train miles (workmen)	32,829	26,226	-20
Goods train miles	166,541	189,935	+14

**Table 10 - Change in Passenger Traffic 1916-17 (first three months only)**

The effects of alterations and reductions was to make the housing situation more acute, and in consequence of the withdrawal of trains to and from Ulverston, business people relocated to Barrow to arrive at work on time.<sup>350</sup> For armaments workers resident at Greenodd the curtailments on the Lakeside branch meant a ten mile round trip either on foot or bicycle to catch the workers trains at Ulverston. In September 1917, the Billeting Board attempting to relive Barrow's overcrowding proposed investigating Dalton and Ulverston where accommodation was available.<sup>351</sup> This proved difficult as workmen did not want to live at a distance especially as there was a deficiency of railway accommodation. Although an

<sup>346</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Friday, 30 July 1915, there is no mention of railway vouchers

<sup>347</sup> *The Burnley News*, Wednesday, 16 July 1916

<sup>348</sup> CAB 24/21/94, Report of the Ministry of Labour Week Ending 1 August 1917

<sup>349</sup> Robinson, *Cumbria Railways Vol. 11, No.3*, The Wartime Crisis, p.89, no explanation is provided why the number of workmen passengers increased slightly in 1917 but the rail mileage fell substantially

<sup>350</sup> CAB 24/23/59, July 1917, Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, No.2 Division – North-West Area, Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness District

<sup>351</sup> CAB 24/27/30, 26 September 1917 Inadequacy of Housing Accommodation at Barrow

experimental cheap and adequate train service was tried in December 1917 to encourage workers to live at Coniston it provided little relief being too distant.<sup>352</sup>

The Furness Railway also owned the docks where wartime trade was largely confined to imports of iron ore from Spain and Algeria while oil imports became important business. Unloading was achieved by hydraulic cranes supplied with water from the docks and therefore maintaining dock levels and security was vital. War put a stoppage to large imports of pulpwood timber which led to the closure of the Barrow Pulp and Paper Works allowing transfer of the remainder of the labour force mainly to Vickers.<sup>353</sup> General merchandise trade by steamer between Barrow, Liverpool and Belfast ceased, preventing a varied supply of produce arriving by the shortest route.<sup>354</sup> The distribution of foodstuffs was now supplied to Furness and West Cumberland by the railway which was not as efficient as by sea. The removal of coastal shipping indeed disturbed the established order, effecting a complete reversal of circumstances under which active competition had been carried on between railway and coastal shipping services, the lack of competition allowing the REC goods managers to consider and approve emergency rail rates on the outbreak of war.<sup>355</sup>

Diverting sea traffic to rail added a huge load to the railway system. This could have been massively increased if the Furness Railway chairman's proposal in early 1915 of discussing with the Liverpool dock authorities the possibility of diverting traffic from congested Liverpool to Yorkshire by the Furness docks and Midland Railway had gone ahead.<sup>356</sup> The goods and mineral traffic conveyed over the railway during 1916 was exceptionally heavy, and difficulties were experienced both in regard to engine power and wagons, particularly the latter. Pre-war plans had concentrated on the demands of mobilisation for a short war, but the war of attrition led to a massive increase in manufacturing facilities overwhelming the wagon supply. As early as February 1915 the Furness Railway suffered from the

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<sup>352</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Monday, 17 December 1917

<sup>353</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Friday, 23 July 1915, the firm had tried holding onto its workers and a dispute arose when a numbers of girls gave notice to apply for work on munitions, the girls were told they could not leave without clearance cards although they had already left their employment

<sup>354</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 30 August 1919

<sup>355</sup> Furness Railway Directors Meeting, 14 June 1917

<sup>356</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 20 February



hold-up of wagons awaiting discharge owing to congestion caused due to the rush of Government traffic. At the commencement of 1916 serious congestion existed at Vickers causing the Inland Transport Branch which was employed in the supervision of conveyancing by rail to relieve the situation causing the average daily discharge to be increased thus releasing large numbers of wagons.<sup>357</sup>

As orders increased for war munitions the Barrow and Workington steelworks absorbed the entire output of ordinary iron for smelting causing local ore supplies to be supplemented by foreign ores. At Barrow docks, increased cargoes of iron ore caused problems of storage, transport and manpower. During October 1915 the Furness Railway received complaints of wagon shortages from the local iron and steel companies which was impeding the importation of raw material.<sup>358</sup> In particular the limitations of Maryport harbour in dealing with larger iron ore vessels meant supplies came through Barrow.<sup>359</sup> Also when the unloading of iron ore for the Carnforth Iron Works was prevented by the silting up of Heysham harbour the ore ships were diverted to Barrow adding to the rail transport problem.<sup>360</sup> This traffic engaged a large number of wagons while tying them up in consequence of the longer haulage, the common usage of wagons amongst railway companies only coming into operation in 1917.<sup>361</sup> The Furness Railway also hired numbers of wagons, and with assistance from the LNWR and MR Companies the large volume of traffic was worked satisfactory.<sup>362</sup>

To prevent congestion of ships in the docks and improve the unloading of iron ore cargoes, which needed experienced dockside labour, agents who were usually shipping firms were appointed in the ore ports to accelerate the rate of discharge and lessen demurrage charges. These special agents reported to the Overseas Transport Department on the conditions of port labour or any other matters relating to the discharge of cargo. In the late summer of 1916 a Port Labour

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<sup>357</sup> OHMoM Vol. VII, The Control of Materials, Pt. V Transport, Storage and Salvage, Ch. I, Overseas Transport, p.27, the Inland Transport Branch was also responsible for conveyance on the roads and canals

<sup>358</sup> Andrews, *The Furness Railway*, p.217, with the intention of relighting more furnaces in 1916 the Furness Railway Goods Manager recommended hiring 200 open wagons with bottom doors and installing temporary hopping to make the wagons suitable for carrying ore

<sup>359</sup> Andrews, *The Furness Railway*, p.216, during the first five months of 1917 199,008 tons of iron ore passed through Barrow Docks of which 46,706 tons was for Workington

<sup>360</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Thursday, 20 January 1916

<sup>361</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 24 February 1917

<sup>362</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 16 February 1917

Committee consisting of representatives of the Admiralty, the War Office, the Port Authority, and one member of organised labour was instigated at Barrow.<sup>363</sup> Coincidentally port occupations were declared work of national importance enabling the Board of Trade to grant certificates of exemption from military service.

In early 1917 a transport workers battalion arrived at Barrow which also formed part of the Barrow Garrison quartered at Cavendish Park Military Camp.<sup>364</sup> The battalion was only called upon to assist dockside labour in maintaining the flow of traffic through the port or handling foreign ore supplies at the iron and steel works.<sup>365</sup> The organisation of dockside labour was also enhanced by the introduction of large mechanical grabs as labour saving devices. While seeing improvements they were not always satisfactory. With four ships with iron ore for Workington awaiting unloading in Barrow Docks, it was said: 'even if they were worked day and night as London proposed, it would require 600 wagons to carry 6,000 tons per day, namely twenty trains a day'.<sup>366</sup> Notwithstanding, the effect of improvements during 1917 was the saving of 1,000 days in shipping time, equivalent to 30 additional voyages between Barrow and Spain. Indeed the average import of iron ore per month at Barrow nearly doubled from 27,000 tons in 1913 to 52,000 tons in 1918.<sup>367</sup>

The privately owned Barrow tramways on which workers relied was both irregular and unprepared for the additional traffic.<sup>368</sup> The tramways' manager stated there were few towns where conditions made it so difficult to secure regularity of service as the lines passed over two lifting bridges and on route there

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<sup>363</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 22 August 1916, the Barrow Committee representatives were Lt. George Wescott, Mr. T Jackson and Mr. S. Lowry (organised labour), Mr. A. Aslett (Furness Railway);

<sup>364</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 25 August, 1916, a local government committee was formed at Barrow of Lt. G. Westcott, Mr. T Jackson, and Mr. A. Aslett (FR), battalions were chiefly composed of men formerly employed as dockers and were used to supplement not supplant civilian labour when there was a shortage involving delay to shipping - the 15th (Transport Workers) Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment was based at Barrow; H of C Debate 05 August 1919 vol.119 cc177-8 – Transport Workers Battalions

<sup>365</sup> CAB 24/21 Port and Transit Executive Committee – Transport Workers Battalions;

<sup>366</sup> This is worthy of further research as the number of ships in Barrow docks could have been caused by the introduction of the convoy system causing the difficulties of discharge to be increased as the ships arrived in fleets instead of singly, the interval between arrivals however was extended

<sup>367</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 6 December 1918, Barrow held records for discharging ships during the war - in September 1917 3,150 tons were unloaded in 21.5 hours, during October 1917 the output from all iron ore steamers was 1,888 tons a day

<sup>368</sup> Postlethwaite, H., *Transport in Barrow-in-Furness*, (Glossop, Venture Publications, 2013), p.9

were seven level-crossings.<sup>369</sup> Partly due to the infrequent and bad tramway service, lodgings in the town any distance from the works were unpopular. In June 1910 four large 96-seater double-decker tramcars were provided to help cope with the increasing numbers of shipyard workers during rush hours.<sup>370</sup> Notwithstanding, shipyard shift-changes were described as chaotic as men clambered up the outside standing and sitting everywhere, it being impossible to collect half the fares or for women to find a place.<sup>371</sup> Though the war placed restrictions on expansion, 1915 saw the doubling and extending of the track along the main road into town and a shuttle service dropping off workers at the town hall near Vickers' works. However these additions had been consequent on getting and retaining drivers and conductors including women.<sup>372</sup> Such was the shortage that weekend labour from the shipyard were employed as conductors and drivers.<sup>373</sup> Complaints continued and in November 1915 the ASE Secretary wrote to the Council drawing attention to the inadequacy of the tramway service particularly at the early morning and lunchtime peak hours.<sup>374</sup> By early February 1916 Barrow Council had allotted £400 per annum to the British Electric Traction Company in the understanding immediate improvements were made.<sup>375</sup> The introduction in May 1917 of two tramcar trailer-cars to meet the exceptional heavy munitions traffic especially at peak times proved to be of great value.<sup>376</sup> The problems of local transport were caused by the hugely increased population trying to board a little improved pre-war system, further compromised by workers shift patterns. Increased electricity costs for the trams' prime mover was handed on to the users, while disruptions to the system meant

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<sup>369</sup> Cormack, I. L., *Seventy-five Years on Wheels – The History of Public Transport in Barrow-in-Furness 1885-1960*, (Cambuslang, Scottish Tramways Society Publications, 1960), p.24

<sup>370</sup> Ibid. p.22, they were also used to carry passengers too and from the pier for the excursion steamers before the war terminated the services

<sup>371</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems, 'Barrow', pp.47-48

<sup>372</sup> Barrow Record Office, Letter from Barrow Labour Exchange, 1 April 1915 saying the Labour Exchange would provide substitutes where men or women were required: road men, tramway men, council clerks, meter inspectors etc.; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 16 October 1917 reported on an accident in July involving a Miss Griffiths the driver of an electric tramcar

<sup>373</sup> Cormack, *Seventy-five Years on Wheels*, p.23; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday 5 April 1917, on the previous Sunday a fatal accident occurred, Mrs. Hutchinson was the appointed driver but as she was suffering from cramp when the accident happened, Harold Veale who was appointed to such work, was driving it. Veale (18) was an apprentice fitter employed on the tramcars at weekends

<sup>374</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, Highways and Lighting, 15 November 1915

<sup>375</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 8 February 1916

<sup>376</sup> Cormack, I. L., *Seventy-five Years on Wheels – The History of Public Transport in Barrow-in-Furness 1885-1960*, (Cambuslang, Scottish Tramways Society Publications, 1960), pp. 24-25, the trailers were built to order

workers walked, a cause of frustration and a contributing factor to late arrival at work.<sup>377</sup>

The Inland Transport Department for which all transport came within its purview established certain principles.<sup>378</sup> To avoid labour wastage, material and vehicles, no individual or company was allowed to institute a new motor-omnibus service unless necessary for munitions workers or other government war service.<sup>379</sup> At Barrow omnibus numbers were low and under supervision regarding running times, speed, routes, numbers of passengers and vehicles on the road.<sup>380</sup> Penalties were such that their operation was seriously limited nevertheless in 1915 a service started between Barrow Town Hall and Dalton with extensions to Ulverston.<sup>381</sup> Their small numbers however were decreased when an omnibus was destroyed by fire in January 1916.<sup>382</sup>

The strain of long factory hours was often aggravated by living, or rather sleeping in overcrowded and noisy lodgings and for some extended hours of travel to and from work. Most Vickers' men were working an eleven-hour dayshift and thirteen-hour nightshift while some men, chiefly shell-makers, were working two or three hour's overtime on top of normal hours.<sup>383</sup> Workers were not adverse to the call for more effort as members of one union put in on average 87 to 90 hours a week, 80 per cent above the ordinary working week.<sup>384</sup> In one emergency men worked continuously from early Friday morning until Saturday teatime.<sup>385</sup> Men

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<sup>377</sup> BDSO 7-1 Minutes of the Barrow Labour Party and Trades Council Minutes from 1914, on 8 May 1918 the Trades Council complained to the Ministry of Munitions asking them to take steps so that no loss of labour would arise through the inability of the men to get to work by failure of the Barrow Tramway System

<sup>378</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V Provision for the Housing of Munitions Workers, Ch. V The Transport of Munitions Workers, p.41

<sup>379</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 2 March 1916, the advisability of running a motor from the Town Hall to the Shipyard Gate was put forward by the ASE Committee to the Directors of Vickers

<sup>380</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, Highways and Lighting, 14 January 1916; Cormack, I. L., *Seventy-five Years on Wheels – The History of Public Transport in Barrow-in-Furness 1885-1960*, (Cambuslang, Scottish Tramways Society Publications, 1960), p.36, only three licences were issued so the service would have been limited

<sup>381</sup> Barrow Council Minutes, Highways and Lighting, 10 January 1916;

<sup>382</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 15 January 1916, a motor omnibus belonging to Barrow Tramway Co. was destroyed by fire near Furness Abbey last night. The bus was the last from Ulverston to Barrow and there were only four passengers, it is supposed a passenger discarded a match igniting gases which had collected in the bottom of the compartment, there was a sudden outburst of flame and fire spread to the petrol supply

<sup>383</sup> Shadwell, *Drink in 1914-1922*, p.189; *Evening Telegraph*, Monday 31 May 1915, by May some relief was provided when Vickers workers were given the last Sunday of each month off, Sunday cricket was allowed at Vickerstown to allow war workers to obtain quiet recreation in the open air

<sup>384</sup> *The Times*, Saturday, 20 March 1915; Roberts, E. A. M., *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster*, p.13 one respondent kept a diary and recorded in one week in 1915 he worked 110 hours

<sup>385</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 27 March 1915

were also meant to work through holidays. No cessation of work was seen at Easter 1915 and though Whit Bank Monday was allowed it was not general as men worked to deliver contracts.<sup>386</sup> Some relief it was realised could be found through relaxing Sunday labour.

### **Sunday Labour**

Vickers was in the unusual position of working for two masters, the Admiralty and the Ministry of Munitions, which placed them in a difficult position regarding Sunday labour. The Admiralty had taken action in April 1915 when the home dockyards and contractors were ordered to discontinue Sunday labour on shipbuilding and engineering work except in emergency, since 'recent experience had shown that over a long period more work would be done without Sunday work than with it.'<sup>387</sup> In July 1915 the Admiralty further informed the contractors that 'systematic' Sunday labour was to be discontinued on hull work, though urgent fleet repairs and items employing small numbers of men was permitted.<sup>388</sup> Discontinuing of Sunday labour by the Admiralty caused Vickers to complain of dissatisfaction amongst its workforce regarding the loss of earnings and the difficulties of enforcing the rule. This caused the Admiralty to write to the Ministry of Munitions in October 1915 explaining their desire to put a complete stop to Sunday work and drawing attention to difficulties caused by its constant use by the Ministry of Munitions and War Office for munitions production. The Ministry was likewise asked to take definite restrictive action on behalf of controlled establishments as isolated employers could not take an independent line.

Having started Sunday work on grounds of necessity, Vickers found it difficult to discontinue, partly through exigencies of completing contracts and partly because of anticipated or actual difficulties over wages. Skilled workmen after all had left their families and come to Barrow attracted by high earnings with increased overtime rates which covered the cost of keeping two homes. Stoppage of Sunday work with double-time might despite the leaving certificate cause men to go

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<sup>386</sup> *The Times*, Friday, 21 May 1915

<sup>387</sup> OHMoM Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI The Control of Hours of Labour, 1916-1919, p.95

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

elsewhere leading to decreased output.<sup>389</sup> Others were not able to support families, as one man complained that through cessation of Sunday work he was unable to support his parents on 35s per week.<sup>390</sup>

Numbers of employers were against working on Sundays on administrative, economic, religious and social grounds. Supervision was difficult to arrange and imposed a severe strain on foremen, deputies not being easy to find, while double pay for Sunday work made it expensive often leading to bad time-keeping and slackness. Trade union officials warned that men were getting fed up, nervous and irritable, the report on Sunday labour confirmed this adding boredom was a cause of defective output.<sup>391</sup> It was therefore strongly urged by the HMWC that Sunday work should be confined to cases of emergencies and necessity.

Suggestions were made to work all day Sunday and play Saturday as the men or at least the great majority of them were not church or chapel goers and could amuse themselves in a way Sabbatarian prejudices prevented on Sundays. In the same way it was represented on behalf of women munitions workers that a Saturday holiday gave opportunities for shopping. When the Government eventually gave notice that Sunday work was to be avoided where possible, many Vickers men stayed away Saturday afternoons to get fresh air and in some departments as many as 90 per cent absented themselves. This retarded important munitions work causing disorganisation and interference with weekend work, the issue also had to be dealt with by the Munitions Tribunal.<sup>392</sup> Nonetheless the day of rest was Sunday and by May 1915 Barrow munitions workers were given the last Sunday of each month off for rest and recreation.<sup>393</sup>

As pointed out Sunday work should be confined to cases of emergencies and necessity. When efforts were concentrated on the 1916 offensive and its support, the pressing need for output was grounds enough for limiting and cancelling

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<sup>389</sup> Committee on Employment, 1658/13; CE 439/13

<sup>390</sup> *Sheffield, Telegraph*, Tuesday 16 November 1915,

<sup>391</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Thursday, 6 December 1915; Vernon, H.M., *Industrial Fatigue and Efficiency*, (London, George Routledge and Sons, 1921), pp. 115-116 Vernon said Sunday labour was industrially uneconomical, not only because of the physical strain involved but by the monotony of continuous work unrelieved by any relaxation

<sup>392</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, Wednesday, 6 October 1915; *The News*, Saturday, 9 October 1915

<sup>393</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, Monday, 31 May 1915, *The Liverpool Daily Post*, Tuesday, 30 November 1915 also reported munitions girls were getting off one Sunday in three

holidays and reintroducing Sunday labour. On the one side the HMWC urged the necessity of diminishing Sunday labour while the manufacturers and Ministry Supply Departments wanted increased output insisting on the importance of utilising as many 'machine hours' as possible. Where labour on munitions work could not be stopped firms were asked to drop one Sunday shift or employ weekend relief labourers, such relief shifts were provided for a short time at Barrow at the end of 1916.<sup>394</sup>

Where the intention to stop Sunday work was explained to workpeople labour trouble was reported only in isolated cases.<sup>395</sup> In some cases increased weekday overtime, on which the trade unions had withdrawn all restrictions partly met the Sunday stoppage, while in others the loss of Sunday work was a general excuse for wage demands.<sup>396</sup> Sunday labour thus raised a number of issues, the demand for production by the employer, the desire for wages for workers to maintain their living standards, against the need for rest and Sabbatarian concerns. Certainly the long hours being worked without breaks contributed to the unrest which was to come.

## Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the changes which came about due to further expansion of the war industry in Barrow and the need for control in the interest of increasing efficiency and therefore output as provided through the Ministry of Munitions Act. Arguably as employers the Act assisted Vickers who were struggling to complete contracts through a lack of skilled manpower caused by the loss of key men. The leaving certificate although generally said to be a major cause of complaint helped in securing Vickers men. The Munitions Tribunal was an important negotiating tool and it has been seen that the Chairman was unlikely to release men as long as Vickers needed them whilst at the same time demonstrated common sense in its operation. It is realised that the Tribunal cases were mainly related to

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<sup>394</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III Welfare: The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. V Hours of Labour 1914-16, p.109

<sup>395</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III Welfare: The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. V Hours of Labour 1914-16, p.102

<sup>396</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 10 November 1915

the shipyard and iron and steelworkers and not to the shell shop workers' where the methods of production were mainly repetitive and the conditions more conducive to health and wellbeing.

The published White Paper regarding the loss of hours to bad timekeeping in the northern shipyards including Vickers, coupled with reports on drink, although largely unfounded, was reason enough to form the CCB. The drink restrictions did improve timekeeping but there were other contributing factors including the work of the Munitions Tribunal and unrestricted overtime. The major problem was the shortage of manpower. More work however could have been completed if Vickers men were able to work a three-shift system. This was never a possibility as there was inadequate housing and accommodation for the additional men. What is evident is that while Vickers provided houses for its workers there would never be enough. However the Ministry of Munitions while providing good quality housing for its inspectors and examiners failed to supply proper accommodation for its men and women munitions workers. Accommodation for single females was mainly provided by suitable lodgings or through the use of hostels founded and run mainly by voluntary effort. It was only when the Labour Exchange threatened to prevent further women coming to Barrow that the Ministry took action.

The huge demand of industry for utilities meant the public had to go without some of the necessities and comforts of life while the Government rescheduling of coal transportation added to Barrow's woes. The railways saw massive expansion in both freight and passenger transport and the removal and rescheduling of trains services was further cause for Barrow's problems. Barrow tramways were basically a failure, not having the capacity for transporting the increased numbers of workers, whilst little extension or improvement was made to the system. The transport system was not assisted by the government limitations placed on the use of omnibuses. In the docks the conditions of war prevented normal sea trade, largely transferring effort to the import and unloading of iron ore for war production.

Long hours of work without breaks and the conditions of work had a wearing effect upon the workforce. Although Sunday labour was introduced to complete contracts, its removal made little difference as was quickly re-instated when the need arose for additional war munitions. Vickers problems can be related to the



lack of workers' housing preventing enough workers forming an adequate shift system, which would have gone a long way to preventing the wearing down of the workforce. However, it is doubtful if enough houses could have been built and whether Barrow's infrastructure could have coped. Taken back a step further, it might be argued that the firm had been forced to take on more work than it could cope with. What is clear is that many of the problems of Barrow were government instigated which were left to the towns industries and citizens to resolve.

In the next chapter it will be seen how improvements in welfare and health were introduced at national level in the interest of increased munitions production, which unfortunately were not seen in the shipyard.

## **CHAPTER 4: INCREASE IN PRODUCTION AND THE CONFLICTING NEEDS OF ARMY AND INDUSTRY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is mainly concerned with the competing demand for the increased production of armaments and the calls of the Army for manpower covering the period 1916 and 1917. It will show that the continuing and ever-increasing demands led to ever more drastic changes, firstly in the resorting to further skill dilution required for the expansion of gun production. In the interest of increased production and completion of contracts, further dilution was attempted by Vickers following on the successful introduction on the Clyde and Tyne, but in endeavouring to introduce dilution without supervision the outcome was one of unrest bringing the shop stewards into conflict with the state and its eventual grudging acceptance in certain departments. The limited dilution achieved at Barrow was therefore only a partial victory for the state and employers as future dilution in the shipyard would be in conciliation with the trade unions rather than introduced under the Ministry of War Acts. In providing the huge gun and shell increases great demands were made for iron ore for the production of pig iron and thereafter steel demands necessitated high pressure work against time against a background of labour shortage at the Barrow Iron and Steel works. Demands were also made on the railways as further men, material and munition were needed at the front.

Barrow was not only competing with other industries but with the Army for the manhood of the country at a time of increasing production. The response of Vickers and the engineering unions it will be seen was one of reluctance and obstruction in allowing skilled men to be attested and conscripted. Likewise the process of substitution was closely monitored in the selection of such men. With the end of voluntarism and the introduction of compulsion the likely outcome was trade union grievances in view of the promises made concerning the protection of skilled men.

Both dilution and substitution brought more women into Barrow raising issues of hours, wages, health and welfare. The large numbers of women available for munitions work allowed them a shorter working day unlike the men. The problems thus turned to those of different shift patterns which Vickers and the Ministry of

Munitions were at odds over and women's accommodation. The introduction of women munition workers brought a strengthening of women's unions and the question of wages which was inhibiting their recruiting and affecting their subsistence. Following the introduction of women the Ministry looked to the control of their wages and welfare. A widespread system of intervention into conditions of labour in the interests of efficiency was also taken by the Ministry bringing in measures aimed at increasing the output and the internal and external wellbeing of labour under abnormal conditions, particularly for females.

### **Increase in production and the problem of dilution**

Construction of vessels was seriously delayed by labour shortages due to men joining the Army and being taken up by the Ministry. The Admiralty could therefore not afford further interference.<sup>1</sup> The Admiralty was only able to concentrate labour on urgently required vessels and in 1916 Vickers employed all available men on K-class submarines. Men were transferred such as brass-fitters from the field carriage department who were allowed to carry out submarine brass-work as long as a record of change of practice and assurance they would be returned was received by their union.<sup>2</sup> The transferring of men while assisting the employer could create problems. Moving one shell-shop worker to the submarine department caused a loss of wages and on requesting a leaving certificate from his new department he was told to continue working as he was needed there.<sup>3</sup>

The competing demands of Admiralty, Ministry and Army were exacerbated in a place like Barrow and complicated by the role of unions. The Admiralty informed the Ministry they would encourage dilution provided efficiency was maintained, the rate of output remain undiminished and any skilled labour released utilised to increase productivity at Vickers. In view of the first two conditions the Admiralty argued it must be the authority to govern what measures of dilution should be introduced where output was destined directly or indirectly to their work, which effectively excluded

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<sup>1</sup> Report of Conference between the Admiralty and the Ministry of Munitions 1 June 1916, MW 105290/7

<sup>2</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 10 August, 1916, fitters were urgently required for six K-class submarines, the ASE argued the problem was not lack of fitters but lack of management

<sup>3</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 1 March 1916

Vickers from the Labour Department Dilution Section.<sup>4</sup> In mixed firms where the Admiralty and the Ministry of Munitions had interests there was thus a demarcation of responsibility where dilution was concerned.

In early 1915 the trade union leaders had agreed to the principle of dilution under the Shells and Fuses Agreement, however discontent reigned at Barrow. While there were men in favour of dilution they were unlikely to air their views publicly. When the secretary of a Barrow branch of the United Machine Workers Association, fearing a strike, wrote three anonymous newspaper articles pleading for loyalty to the dilution agreement they failed to have the desired effect.<sup>5</sup> The man's opinions ended in a widely publicised slander case and his standing down as union secretary.

Large numbers of guns, extra howitzers and ammunition were required, while fighting increased the need for repairs causing damaged guns and carriages to be returned to Barrow.<sup>6</sup> During early 1916 heavy howitzers were badly needed and Vickers were asked to increase production.<sup>7</sup> The firm was also responsible for three-fifths of 9.2in gun orders and unless they could cope it was possible that this work could be sent elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> A number of these guns were held in stock for a foreign power, while an order for three more was received, but delivery was delayed for the howitzer work.<sup>9</sup> Needing to complete this urgent work Vickers proposed taking men from the Airship Department where materials were light and processes repetitive, ideal for women and unskilled men.<sup>10</sup> Attempting to introducing dilution under the Ministry of Munitions Act, the firm asked the engineering trades to cooperate to which they replied they would not negotiate unless skilled operatives retained control of the

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<sup>4</sup> OHMoM Vol. IV *The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-16*, Pt. IV The Process of Dilution, Ch. V Dilution, p.96, It was agreed on 18 October 1916, that inspection and dilution in shipyards and shops engaged on marine engine work should be conducted solely by Admiralty officials

<sup>5</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Wednesday, 27 February 1918, William Oldfield the secretary of the UMWA was ordered to pay £35 to Joseph Tyson, ASE chairman who was said to have slandered him at a dilution meeting in 1916

<sup>6</sup> OHMoM Volume X *The Supply of Munitions*, Pt. I Guns, Ch. V Manufacture and Repair, p.73

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.72, September 1914 Vickers told to proceed with 16 9.2in Howitzers, a further 16 were ordered in October, in May 1915 Vickers asked for further orders to keep their capacity employed and a third order for 16 howitzers was given, July 1915 Vickers was realised as manufacturer, the first order for 120 howitzers was followed by a continuation order

<sup>8</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 15/16 June 1916, in the Old Howitzer Shop 6in. Howitzers made in other places came for final overhaul and finishing after final tests

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73

<sup>10</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 20 July 1916

work. Although a local Labour Advisory Board was available to assist dilution, the engineers ignored the Board preferring their own Joint Trade Dilution Committee.<sup>11</sup>

When Vickers introduced forewomen to airship work several local union branches opposed the changes and warned if further changes were introduced without agreement an independent inquiry or arbitration would be demanded.<sup>12</sup> Vickers also intended introducing females to lathes in the NPHS. In response the shop stewards said that they would consider further dilution until all available manpower was utilised. Moreover members would refuse to teach dilutees.<sup>13</sup> Vickers were adamant and started females on the NPHS machines and after a reasonable time intended applying dilution throughout the works.<sup>14</sup> The engineers threatened hostility and refused to cooperate as they felt dilution was unnecessary and therefore requested an immediate enquiry.<sup>15</sup> It was also resolved that if further dilution took place there would be a strike and a proposal was made that engineering representatives meet with Lynden Macassey, Chairman of the Government Commission for Dilution of Labour to discuss the situation.<sup>16</sup>

Claiming that further dilution was being introduced to skilled work in the Admiralty Shop without union consent the engineers and allied tradesmen led by the shop stewards struck without notice and demanded that all females on the NPHS machines were removed before starting negotiations.<sup>17</sup> The strike for some, however, was seen as unpatriotic:

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<sup>11</sup> OHMoM, Vol. IV *The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-1916*, Part I Labour Supply, Ch. IV Munitions Labour Supply Committee, p.81; *Aberdeen Journal*, Monday, 20 March 1916

<sup>12</sup> BDSO 57/1/7, 16 March 1916

<sup>13</sup> BDSO 57/1/7, 29 March 1916, evidence was placed before Vickers of slackness in departments and in some cases walking about cards being issued including the Airship Department BDSO 57/1/7, 2 April 1916, at a Joint Trades mass meeting the decision was taken on behalf of the organised workers to refuse to work the dilution scheme until all available male labour was employed to capacity and progress men and fixers were back on the tools, the same resolution was reiterated at a mass meeting on 13 April 1916

<sup>14</sup> BDSO 57/1/7, 26 May 1916; Vickers must have seen their opportunity as in normal times partly through preference and partly for fear of upsetting male workers and disrupting production through industrial action, they were reluctant to employ women

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 28 June 1916, Macassey would only see the unions with whom agreements were made but in the interest of peace he saw the shop stewards committee

<sup>17</sup> *Evening Despatch*, Monday, 3 July 1916; *Lichfield Mercury*, Friday, 7 July 1916, 5,500-6,000 engineers came out over alleged dilution, turners in the Admiralty Shop were pressed to do work in the NHS and did not know who was going to operate the lathes they had left, when a deputation tried to find out they were refused access to the manager

‘what shall be said of men like those at Barrow who are ready to stop work for a week rather than allow skilled work to be done by unskilled persons. The report of the proceedings at Barrow may be read alongside the record of heroism by our troops and will be read with disgust and with gratification that the authorities put their foot down declaring the strike organisers would be dealt with under DORA’.<sup>18</sup>

Macassey on arrival at Barrow made clear the Government’s intention to introduce dilution as on the Clyde and Tyne.<sup>19</sup> Although the ASE executive advised the men to return they refused. However the strike was cut short under threat of proceedings being taken against the instigators and those taking part. While the strike was illegal, no sanctions were applied to discourage such action and the men returned under the conditions they had left. Following prolonged discussions and certain guarantees, dilution was grudgingly accepted in certain departments starting with the airship shed. The *Women’s Worker* proudly pointing out that ‘girls were climbing 50ft ladders acting as holders up for riveters’.<sup>20</sup>

When the Government Commission for Dilution was dissolved by the Ministry of Munitions, Macassey noted ‘they did not like an outside authority achieving what it had previously failed to do’.<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding, the same results were not achieved at Barrow as on the Clyde and Tyne where several thousand women were employed under dilution.<sup>22</sup> The failure was down to Vickers in attempting to introduce dilution under the Munitions Act. In the end an agreement was made that would suit all parties and prevent further unrest which meant that dilution would only be introduced in certain departments with the consent of the engineers and their supervision.

In October 1916 Macassey met with the local representatives of the Admiralty and Ministry of Munitions regarding the organisation of labour in Barrow’s

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<sup>18</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 3 July 1916

<sup>19</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8

<sup>20</sup> *Women’s Worker*, October 1916; Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 10 July 1916, dilution was proposed in the Airship Shed, Admiralty Shop, Shell Repairs Department and Ordnance Gallery; *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday, 27 June 1916 reported women had traditionally been doing cutting out, gumming and stitching work in the airship shed

<sup>21</sup> Macassey, L., *Labour Policy False and True: A Study in Economic History and Industrial Economics*, (London, Thornton Butterworth, 1922), p.268

<sup>22</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 2 September 1916

‘shipbuilding industry’.<sup>23</sup> To increase production the Government now aimed at using all Barrow shipyard trade resources before introducing any innovations, while the Government departments concerned were anxious to conclude agreements in preference to introducing dilution under the Munitions Acts. The intention was to adopt every type of tool wherever calculated to improve production, and introduce semi-skilled male labour and women into shipyard trades when imperative. Maurice Kirby notes opportunities to employ women in shipyards were limited and it is significant most female recruits were directed to the engineering shops engaged in repetitive production of light simple components.<sup>24</sup>

Coincidental with the October 1916 Barrow shipbuilding meeting it was reported that with labour forthcoming Barrow would commence building many merchant craft.<sup>25</sup> The provincial press including the *Liverpool Echo* reported ‘land had been purchased from the Furness Railway with a frontage of 1,500 feet allowing slipways for up to fifteen standard design vessels’, this however proved to be speculative and the scheme never went ahead.<sup>26</sup> The *Echo* further reported that women and girls were being taught engineering work with trade union consent to assist in producing engines for merchant steamers. Engines however were built predominantly for submarines and reports confirm that women were employed on machines in the Submarine Engine Department.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore women and girls were labouring in the Vickers shipbuilding fitting shops.

On 11 January 1917, Macassey was appointed controller of shipbuilding Labour and four days later the powers of the Ministry of Munitions over shipbuilding and marine engineering establishments were transferred to the Admiralty. Macassey returned to Barrow in March 1917, but on this occasion to address workmen’s representatives on the importance of accelerating production.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, Thursday, 12 October 1916, Admiral C. W. Barlow the local Admiralty representative and Mr. J. E. Baker representing the Ministry of Munitions

<sup>24</sup> Constantine, S., Kirby, M.W., Rose, M.B., (eds.), *The First World War in British History: Industry, Agriculture and Trade Unions*, (London, Edward Arnold, 1995), p.57

<sup>25</sup> *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, Thursday, 12 October 1916,

<sup>26</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Thursday, 19 October 1916, Vickers Launch Books, only two standard cargo ships were built by Vickers, *War Master* launched May 1918 and *War Ruler* completed in May 1919

<sup>27</sup> *North West Daily Mail*, Saturday, 7 December 1918, possibly diluted females in the Admiralty Shop previously mentioned; OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III Welfare: The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI Hours of Labour 1916-19, p.117; *Evening Telegraph*, Friday, 29 August 1919

<sup>28</sup> *The Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 16 March 1917

In the prevailing conditions activity was now at its greatest throughout the Cumberland and North Lancashire iron and steel industries.

### **Steel Production and Iron Ore**

In servicing the war activity the iron and steel industry faced problems of manpower shortage and long hours in maintaining production. With furnaces in full production it was difficult to include iron and steel makers in holiday arrangements as rest periods could only be taken when furnaces were shut down. The Government needed all the pig iron possible but output could only increase when additional furnaces were put into blast and men found to work them. At Barrow the steelworks were now wholly concerned with making steel for munitions of war while commercial work receiving little attention.<sup>29</sup> There was adequate production of the grades of ore required for furnaces on special iron, but a shortage of ordinary iron ore for ordinary furnaces. The Barrow and Workington works were absorbing the entire output of ordinary iron ore for smelting which caused local stocks to be supplemented by foreign supplies.<sup>30</sup> Efforts were therefore made to enlarge the output of iron by increasing the production of hematite ore from native pits.<sup>31</sup>

To increase output mine owners were guaranteed profits while iron ore masters agreed to change from a two to a three-shift system provided the Ministry of Munitions supplied the necessary labour.<sup>32</sup> An increase in wages for iron ore miners was granted attracting a steady migration of men from non-ferrous to iron ore mining.<sup>33</sup> Additionally the Ministry advised using men from the slate mines while others were ordered to return from munitions work at Barrow.<sup>34</sup> Due to many men having joined the army from the ore mines the War Office undertook to return men if

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<sup>29</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, Saturday, 10 March, 1917, insufficient labour was seen all round and women workers were being employed at Barrow Steelworks; Barrow Records Office, BDB 9A 6/11 Letter to Ministry of Labour Barrow, 3 May 1917, Employment of Women in Steelworks – lists operations women were carrying out in different steelworks

<sup>30</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 28 July 1917, the greater part of low phosphorous iron was going to Midland and Scotch users while the bulk of ordinary iron was absorbed by Barrow and Workington steelworks; Barrow Records Office BDB21 7/1/87

<sup>31</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday 27 December 1916, to secure ore supplies the North Lonsdale Company set about searching for deposits in Cumberland and the Lindal Moor district of Furness

<sup>32</sup> OHMoM, Vol. VII *The Control of Materials*, Pt. II Iron and Steel, Ch. II, Iron Ore and Pig Iron, p.37

<sup>33</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday 22 April 1916

<sup>34</sup> OHMoM, Vol. VII *The Control of Materials*, Pt. II Iron and Steel, Ch. II, Iron Ore and Pig Iron, p.37, in December 1917 hundreds of Scottish miners were started at Hodbarrow but this was not a success as many drifted back to Scotland



their names were provided, while instructions were made to recruiting officers not to take miners.<sup>35</sup> Though the ore output from the North Lancashire and Cumberland mines decline during the War, the decline was retarded to some extent by the increase in the numbers of miners and therefore economised foreign ore tonnage arriving at Barrow. At the Barrow Hematite and Steel works stoppages occurred occasionally causing men to be transferred to other departments often on labouring jobs at half wages leading to requesting leaving certificates.<sup>36</sup>

The conflicting requirements of industry and the Army continued. Neither the Ministry nor the Admiralty could carry out their programmes without retaining large numbers of men of military age and fitness while the Army had to maintain the number of divisions at strength and provide for expansion of the war through further recruitment.

### **Army Recruitment and Substitution**

In the spring of 1915 it was realised voluntary enlistments could not be sustained and the upper age limit was raised in an effort to maintain numbers. In July 1915 the National Registration Act was introduced as a Government stocktaking exercise to organize resources for munitions production. Apart from this general objective the War Office was anxious to know how many men were available for military service in view of their ages, occupations and where they lived. Grave objections to compulsion existed but voluntary recruiting was providing only 20,000 of the 30,000 men required by Kitchener per week.<sup>37</sup> If the National Register showed men were available after supplying the country's services, objections to compulsion, it was argued, should not prevent Kitchener taking the men he wanted. However voluntarism was given a last chance under Lord Derby's Scheme. Under this scheme men between the ages of 18 and 41 were encouraged to attest a willingness to

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. in October 1915 when discussing increasing output from the large Hodbarrow mines by altering working methods, it was found the manager and many miners had joined the Army and as many as possible were released; Barrow Records Office BDB 21/6/10/2 list 386 men between the ages of 18 and 36 returned from the Army to Hodbarrow in October 1916

<sup>36</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 26 January 1917, a rail-straightener was put on half pay as a labourer when alterations were made in his department, seeking increased pay he asked for a leaving certificate which was granted and he transferred to Vickers; plant broke down, modernisation occurred and furnaces were shut down due to iron ore shortages

<sup>37</sup> OHMoM, Vol. IV The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-16, Pt. III The Limitations of Recruiting, Ch. II The Derby Scheme p.32

volunteer on the understanding that the younger men would be taken first and all single men taken before married men. Those wishing to join the colours immediately would be allowed to, the remainder would be attested and divided into groups to be called up when required starting with the unmarried men.

There was resistance to the scheme at Barrow when Vickers took the position that even un-starred men could not be spared and told workers to ignore the appeal. Most Barrow men waited until the last minute when there was a rush to meet the extended closure deadline.<sup>38</sup> Of 19,000 men eligible for service at Barrow 3,182 were unattested, and of 15,818 attested (starred and un-starred), 8,001 were single and 7,817 married.<sup>39</sup> The Mayor as a supporter of the war pointed out in his New Year Speech that all eligible council employees had attested and the results at Barrow were satisfactory.<sup>40</sup> Following the reopening on 10 January, 1916 attestation was light, the total at Barrow being approximately 50 in one week.<sup>41</sup> In a final appeal for men to attest before the Military Service Bill became operative the mayor said: 'to his mind our line of duty is so clear that I cannot understand the mental condition of anyone who holds back.'<sup>42</sup> All male single British subjects who since August 1915 had either become resident or employed in Great Britain were now subject to the provisions of the Bill. When two Canadians having completed their contracts at Vickers asked the magistrate to sign their passport declaration form, he refused, as they had attested and they were told to go before the Military Service Tribunal.

The Military Service Bill introduced on 16 January 1916 was a tacit acceptance by the government that the voluntary Derby Scheme had failed to generate sufficient new recruits.<sup>43</sup> The Act now imposed conscription on single men aged 18 to 41 but men employed in essential work were not to be taken, the local Military Service

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<sup>38</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 13 December 1915, The last day of attesting was 11 December 1915 but was extended by another day to meet the rush, for shipyard men a separate office was opened where in one day 600 men attested

<sup>39</sup> *Lancashire Daily Post*, Monday 17 January 1916

<sup>40</sup> *Lancashire Daily Post*, Tuesday, 4 January 1916, *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday 22 January 1916

<sup>41</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 17 January 1916

<sup>42</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 22 January 1916

<sup>43</sup> CAB 37/140/1; Report of Conference between the Admiralty and the Ministry of Munitions 1 June 1916, MW 105290/7, Nationwide approximately only 24 per cent of the male population were prepared to go when called on

Appeals Tribunal deciding which workers were essential.<sup>44</sup> While part of the wider initiative of maintaining and replenishing the army Tribunals existed to accommodate local concerns.<sup>45</sup> The Barrow Military Appeals Tribunal met initially to deal with applications from the first four Derby Groups of which approximately 2,000 were attested men, the vast majority being in starred or reserved occupations.<sup>46</sup>

The tribunals continued on a statutory basis and the first under the Military Service Act was held at Barrow on the 22 February 1916 when the Mayor presided.<sup>47</sup> Appeals were made by employers for their men, many were tradesmen urging that their men were indispensable as they were looking after munitions worker's needs. Generally, temporary or conditional exemption was given dependent on men's situations at work or home reasons provided varied with applications made on moral, medical, family and economic grounds.<sup>48</sup> For those unhappy with the decision of the local tribunal, appeals could be made to the Lancashire County Appeals Tribunal.<sup>49</sup> Where previously slackers and shirkers were conspicuous by their absence now they were seen everywhere, one fitter pointing out that men came from Manchester to Barrow to avoid joining the army.<sup>50</sup> When Barrow men were given exemptions many neighbours did not understand why and were apt to write anonymously to the tribunal.<sup>51</sup> With the need for more soldiers the government turned its attention to industry and the protected men.

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<sup>44</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 17 January 1916; OHMoM, Vol. IV The Supply and Control of Labour 1915-16, Pt. III The Limitations of Recruiting, Ch. II The Derby Scheme p.31, it was not intended to supersede existing instructions which limited recruiting persons engaged in public utility services

<sup>45</sup> McDermott, J., *British Military Tribunals, 1916-18*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011), p.1, says Military Tribunals were unloved during the war and un-mourned following their demise, Government's instructions to councils in England and Wales he says were to destroy all records relating to them

<sup>46</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 10 January 1916, these were single men aged 19 to 23 (groups 2 to 5), Groups 2 to 5 were called up in the last two weeks of January 1916, and Groups 6 to 13 in February. The last single groups other than 18 year-olds were called up in March. This last batch were called up in parallel to the first men to be summoned under conscription under the Military Service Act. Attestation under the Derby Scheme ceased on 1 March 1916

<sup>47</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, Wednesday, 23 February 1916

<sup>48</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 22 November 1916, the War Office appointed a special recruiting medical board to deal with appeals where there was discrepancy between private practitioner and the medical board

<sup>49</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 6 March 1916, the appeal tribunal for Lancashire under the Military Service Act was divided into the four quarter session of the county

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, E.A.M., *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster*, p.49; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 25 May 1916, Five married men employed by a Blackburn engineering firm applied for leaving certificates. They wanted to go into ordnance works to manufacture munitions and one thought he could make £4 a week at Barrow. It was unusual for men to leave their wives to earn more money, and was generally the other way about. A representative of the firm said the problem was they could not give them war badges

<sup>51</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 5 July 1917

In late November 1916 the Ministry of Munitions agreed to withdraw protection from all semi and unskilled men in government establishments and controlled and badged firms. Only men under 31 would be called up and substitutes obtained where necessary. In January 1917 the War Cabinet decided 50,000 men engaged in munitions works should be made available for general service by the end of the month.<sup>52</sup> Lists of men classified in employer's registers as semi or unskilled were forwarded to recruiting officers before medical examinations were carried out to determine those fit for general service. Delays were seen, the main cause being the pace of medical examination a matter clearly illustrated at Barrow where 12,000 men were to be examined. A medical board established in early 1917 examined 1,700 men in three weeks, a rate at which examination would conclude in May.<sup>53</sup> The Barrow ASE interviewed the Medical Board and Recruiting Officer regarding the position of their members in possession of exemptions cards and the unnecessary trouble they were being put to.<sup>54</sup> The Recruiting Officer stated that it was from the point of view of organisation that men were being called for examination, but the officer was told this could best be served by members presenting their trade cards. There was thus no necessity for men being medically examined seeing they were exempt from military service and the shop stewards were told to warn members of the matter. Clearly there were problems of getting men out of Vickers, as the Military Representative said: 'we cannot get the young ones, let alone the old ones'.<sup>55</sup> Changes were made and medical examination was made possible by new local Ministry and recruiting offices and by taking away the right of refusing medical examination which now included starred men.

Substitutes were required to replace young semi and unskilled men passed fit for the army. These were to be obtained from army reserve munitions workers and men exempted from military service by the military service tribunals or recruiting officers, provided they undertook work of national importance.<sup>56</sup> On 10 March 1917 it was reported at Barrow that several hundred substitutes would commence

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<sup>52</sup> CAB 24/6/33 War Cabinet, Munitions Output and Recruiting, Memorandum by Lord Derby

<sup>53</sup> CAB 24/6/9 Munitions Output and Recruiting, Memorandum by Dr. Addison, 12 February 1917

<sup>54</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 1 March 1917

<sup>55</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 10 March 1917

<sup>56</sup> OHMoM, Vol. VI *Manpower and Dilution*, Pt. I Release of Munitions Workers for Military Service, 1916-1917, Ch. IV De-badging and Substitution, p.68

immediately.<sup>57</sup> Release of semi-skilled men however required care and sufficient time to allow for training. No question other than whether the physique of the substitute was adequate for the work was considered and only one substitute was offered for acceptance. The scheme was therefore unlikely to produce men of the qualities required in many branches of munitions and shipyard work. Additionally, the Admiralty would only allow substitution on the understanding that their representative would decide how far substitution was necessary and who could be released.

Men rejected as unfit for service were often put on work of national importance with little knowledge of that work, tribunals generally being unqualified to decide the technical points at issue.<sup>58</sup> In this respect Marwick described 'substitution' as an attempt to release the able-bodied by the employment of the less able-bodied.<sup>59</sup> At the Barrow Military Tribunal the tradesmen were more guarded. The NAUL Secretary sitting on the Munitions Tribunal pointed out that substitutes were being sent into the shipyard displacing experienced men of low medical category. However this was disputed by the Military Representative who said substitution was only proceeding in the shell shops and clerical areas.<sup>60</sup> The fact that the Barrow Military Tribunal would not say where men were specifically being placed led to refusal by the Secretary to agree to substitution. While the District Commissioner under the National Service scheme was powerless to deal with the shipyard, he pointed out that gamekeepers, cloth-makers and others were displacing valuable Barrow workmen.<sup>61</sup>

Rather than accommodating community needs the wider initiative of maintaining and replenishing the Army took further toll of Barrow's services. Reserved occupations came under threat, at one tribunal the gasworks manager appeared in five appeals, while exemptions were requested for fourteen men in the

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<sup>57</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 10 March 1917

<sup>58</sup> Throughout the Barrow ASE Minutes there are many cases of men's credentials being checked, the union was highly conscious of its status

<sup>59</sup> Marwell, *The Deluge*, p.79

<sup>60</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 5 July 1917, unfortunately the article does not say whether or not substitution was carried out by women

<sup>61</sup> OHMoM, Vol. VI *Manpower and Dilution*, Pt. I Release of Munitions Workers for Military Service, 1916-1917, Ch. IV De-badging and Substitution, p.68

highway department, eleven being agreed to.<sup>62</sup> Corporation appeals for five men in the health department resulted in two being adjourned, one exempted until later, one to be 'substituted' and one to be called up later.<sup>63</sup> While females filled many jobs in the town the Barrow Cooperative advertising for male assistants and boot repairers asked for men of non-military age.<sup>64</sup>

This all came at a price, namely the magnitude of work in investigating whether men were protected, investigating complaints, arranging inspections and medical examinations and finding substitutes. However, nothing less could secure for the supply departments the labour for their work and satisfy the critical attitude which the War Office and country adopted towards some million men exempted from military service. The needs of the Army were not just for manpower but munitions and the production of shells. At Barrow thousands of women had been brought into the town to work on munitions, the problem was not one of a shortage of workers as seen on the manual side but the operating of shift systems.

### **Working Hours, Shift Systems and Women's Unions**

Before the outbreak of war, work in engineering shops was normally carried on under a single-shift system with the provision of overtime and night work when required. The campaign for increased output required a double-shift system, normally of twelve hours each and by the end of 1914 the nightshift at Vickers was said to be almost as large as the dayshift.<sup>65</sup> Preventing a three-shift operating at Vickers was a shortage of skilled workmen, and the difficulty of housing extra numbers of workmen in an already overcrowded town. The urgent demand for output made it difficult to arrange the change-over of shifts so as to ensure a complete Sunday rest. Whenever continuous Sunday labour could not be stopped by shutting down for 24 hours, weekend relief labour was provided and this occurred at Vickers, Barrow for a short period at the end of 1916.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 6 December 1917

<sup>63</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 13 December 1917

<sup>64</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 2 February 1917

<sup>65</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Thursday, 31 December 1914

<sup>66</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III Welfare: The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. IV The Control of Hours of Labour, 1916-19, p.112

With the introduction of women into munitions work efforts were made and encouraged by the Ministry to adopt a three eight-hour shift system.<sup>67</sup> The surplus of women ready to work on munitions made it possible to provide three shifts at Vickers but congestion of lodging and railway accommodation was restricting their importation.<sup>68</sup> The Health of Munitions Committee recommended where the supply of women was governed by the difficulties of housing and transit every effort should be made to overcome these before a two-shift system was adopted.<sup>69</sup> A temporary order was thus issued prohibiting importation of more women into Barrow until proper accommodation was provided. In response a local Advisory Committee on 'Women's War Employment' under the authority of the Board of Trade was formed due to the pressing necessity for further lodging accommodation. The Barrow Labour Party stated that accommodation had hardly been increased and conditions were deplorable, especially considering the moral welfare of women workers and favoured sending a deputation to the Ministry asking for a subsidy to meet the increased housing demand. The Council decided against a deputation, the Mayor stating the Health Committee, Vickers and Ministry of Munitions were dealing with the question. A solution was found through the positive reaction of householders to the Mayor's appeal for accommodation for women munition workers and by the provision of women's accommodation in public buildings.<sup>70</sup> Three buildings were thus taken over by the Ministry of Munitions and adapted and managed by Vickers to provide accommodation for 160 women.<sup>71</sup>

As far as male workers were concerned a shortage of workmen and the difficulties of supervision, as well as the problems of housing and transit to a large

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<sup>67</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III Welfare: The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI Hours of Labour, 1916-19, p.125, the Health of Munitions Workers Committee favouring the three shift system recommended every effort should be made to overcome housing and transit the difficulties

<sup>68</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. II Welfare: The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. V Hours of Labour 1914-16, p.89, stated at Vickers, Barrow in October 1915, 2,500 girls were working an eight-hour shift for a seven day week, with one Sunday off in four, while the men did a twelve-hour shift on the same basis

<sup>69</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, Saturday, 12 February 1916, at Vickers the removal would release one shift of women which would allow them to return home easing up the accommodation position

<sup>70</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 2 September 1916, two of the three buildings taken over by the Ministry of Munitions and managed by Vickers were the Victoria Hall and Cambridge Hall Mechanics Institute the third was possibly on Barrow Island

<sup>71</sup> BPR 4/M/18 Use of Victoria Hall for Munitions Workers; BPR 4/M/23/4 Plan of Victoria Hall – Proposed Accommodation, on the ground floor 85 women lived in dormitories with kitchen, bathroom, recreation room, washhouse and drying room, on the first floor was the superintendents quarters, sick bay, washbasins, separate bathroom and WC

extent, excluded eight-hour shifts from practical consideration. Firstly there was inconvenience caused to foremen and tool-setters, since there was insufficient skilled labour available for separate supervision of three shifts. Indeed this had caused women munitions workers who as 'labourers' or as 'skilled' tool-setters and turners to work with men on two shifts.<sup>72</sup> It was therefore on account of their fellow workmen that the Ministry was compelled to ask the Home Office to sanction thirteen-hour nightshifts for women at Barrow.<sup>73</sup> Long hours were thus one of the penalties 'some' women paid for invading men's work.<sup>74</sup> Secondly the difficulty of working two different systems simultaneously meant even if women workers wished for a short working day, men were anxious to work and earn for a full twelve-hour shift. It was also difficult synchronising the coming and going of two different sets of workers and either the shift patterns had to be serviced by the railways or changed to suit the railways. Vickers thereafter submitted a timetable to the Ministry illustrating the extreme inconvenience of the scheme of work in force at Barrow, with men and women on different shifts.<sup>75</sup>

The threat of introducing twelve-hour shifts by Vickers prompted one woman to write to the *Woman Worker* complaining that two long shifts would be injurious to the majority of girls and not increase output.<sup>76</sup> The girls, she said, would be too tired to put the same energy into their work and did not think the Ministry of Munitions could be justified in sanctioning such a scheme.<sup>77</sup> It was reasoned most women attracted into munitions work were unaccustomed to factory life. For example one Barrow shell worker asked to be released due to poor health. She had stuck it as long as she could, but needed to go back to her profession as a confectioner for a rest.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI The Control of Hours of Labour, 1916-1919, p.122

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p.123, the 13 hour nightshift ensured an extra hour's pay at higher rate for night work to compensate for its drawbacks

<sup>74</sup> Trescaheric, B., *Voices from the Past*, p.55, Alice Wycherley a shell gauger that her nightshift last from 5pm until 7.30 am the next morning, this fits in with a two-shift system

<sup>75</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. III *Welfare: The Control of Working Conditions*, Ch. VI Hours of Labour, 1916-19, p.125

<sup>76</sup> *Women Worker*, July 1916, Letters

<sup>77</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI The Control of Hours of Labour, 1916-1919, p.124, while finding the strain of a twelve-hour shift exhausting women worked readily and effectively through an eight-hour period

<sup>78</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 23 September 1916



Conversely some women workers opposed the eight-hour system because a twelve-hour system would give them increased wages in an expensive town.

Previously Vickers had attempted to make economies by using one girl to operate two machines, this proved both unpopular and unproductive whilst causing physical strain. Machines were operated under protest leading to a number of women being dismissed for not adopting the scheme. For one fifteen year old girl dismissal had a devastating effect as her mother's husband and a son were ill and the family dependent on her income.<sup>79</sup> Capacity diminished. Women capable of producing 32 shells on one machine per shift produced less operating two machines, and this effected earnings, as they were expected to produce twice the number of shells for the same bonus.<sup>80</sup> Further, on the occasion of Vickers adapting machinery at Barrow for a new class of work it became necessary to partially close a department for a short period, causing women to be stood down.<sup>81</sup> As a result, the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) Secretary reported to the ASE that 600 to 700 females had been discharged.<sup>82</sup> Vickers admitted they had asked for official permission to change from a two to a three-shift system, but stated their action in regard to closing the department was not due to this proposal. The Ministry in turn warned Vickers not to make arrangements on the assumption permission asked for would be granted.<sup>83</sup>

There was also a social aspect as different shift patterns had the effect of upsetting home life, for where families were lodging shift workers meal and bed times spread themselves over night and day.<sup>84</sup> Housework expected before and after an eight-hour shift was neglected and in some cases mothers' were so fully occupied on munitions that children's cleanliness suffered.<sup>85</sup> Further there was the inconvenience of the hours of coming off duty, especially for those on nightshift while complaints were made by landladies and hostel managers over the variable hours at which the three-shift workers left and returned.

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<sup>79</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 12 July 1916

<sup>80</sup> Barrow District ASE Minutes, 30 December 1914 - 8 June 1916, BDSO 57/1/7, 27 January 1916

<sup>81</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 18 April 1916

<sup>82</sup> Barrow District ASE Minutes, 30 December 1914 - 8 June 1916, BDSO 57/1/7, 18 April 1916

<sup>83</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI The Control of Hours of Labour, 1916-1919, p.124

<sup>84</sup> Vernon, H.M., *Industrial Fatigue and Efficiency*, (London, Routledge, 1921), p.87; *Barrow News*, 8 May 1915, one woman with lodgers wrote she started at 4.30 a.m. and went to bed any time after 11 p.m.

<sup>85</sup> Barrow School Medical Officers Report for 1915, where munitions workers were taken in the assistance of young girls became necessary for looking after younger children and running errands etc.

The practical and domestic difficulties were illustrated not just at Barrow but notably at Erith, and the Huddersfield and Leeds National Shell Factories.<sup>86</sup> In 1916, Vickers and the two national factories requested and obtaining reluctant government consent to change from a three-shift to a two-shift system.<sup>87</sup> Such changes were only sanctioned after full inquiry by the Home Office, and on the acquiescence of the majority of employees in the extension of their working day. To what level a two-shift system for women was introduced at Barrow is difficult to ascertain, however the Women's Welfare Officer pointed out that the organisation of cloakrooms were determined by whether a two or three-shift system was worked.<sup>88</sup>

By the autumn of 1916 the Barrow branch of the NFWW boasted some 2,000 members the number being boosted by women coming from the textile industries where organisation existed.<sup>89</sup> Whilst the ASE could provide little in monetary terms when Federation funds ran low, it gave cordial approval and support to the Federation's organisation of munitions workers and WTUL. As Cole notes, the relationship worked better in some places than others and a considerable amount of concern remained within the ASE that Federation members had the potential to damage their long-term workplace position.<sup>90</sup> At Barrow support was provided to the Federation, but the temporary nature of the relationship was never far from some engineers thoughts. Typically there was criticism of a local agreement between Vickers and the Federation which had been concluded without local representatives. One ASE member stated it was prudent to know whenever the women's union were in conference with employers, not because he supported the women's position, but because it was vital to protect men's long term interests.<sup>91</sup> At the Barrow Commission on Unrest the local ASE secretary said: 'he had no fear regarding restoration of pre-war conditions as female labour was not a paying proposition in the business of engineering'.<sup>92</sup> He did not think women generally would oust engineers and believed

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<sup>86</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI The Control of Hours of Labour, 1916-1919, p.126

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> *The Woman's Point of View*, Chapter XII, p.149; Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p.67, state with uncertainty that Vickers at Erith and a national factory at Huddersfield were allowed to change to twelve-hour shifts while Vickers at Barrow was about to do the same

<sup>89</sup> NFWW Annual Report 1915, *Woman Worker* October 1916

<sup>90</sup> Cole, G. D. H., *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923)

<sup>91</sup> Barrow District ASE Minutes, 30 December 1914 – 8 June 1916, BDSO 57/1/7, 23, February, 1917

<sup>92</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 12 July 1917

they would be more prudent than to attempt it nonetheless concerns were voiced when women dilutees were retained in Barrow's factories whilst men were seeking employment.<sup>93</sup> The changes in which it was necessary to adjust wages however affected women more than men.

## **Wages**

The Ministry of Munitions was mainly responsible for the industrial employment of women and thus control of their wages. The problem of women's wages were very different from those of men munitions workers. The latter had trade organisations and in shipbuilding and engineering the principles of collective bargaining and standard rates of pay were firmly established. Some women had taken up wage earning for the first time, being moved by patriotic impulse, while many more had deserted domestic service for greater freedom and wages offered by munitions work. Although good wages could be made there were exaggerations on this score. Women munitions workers were receiving a living wage not rolling in wealth. As Alice Wycherley remarked 'whilst Vickers was a medieval vision of hell far worse was the continual shortage of money'.<sup>94</sup> Until rates were scheduled, women doing jobs not previously carried out by men were paid at rates agreed between employers and unions in the districts. When debating the fixed rate for women and girls working on shells at Barrow the ASE admitted there had been no district rate pre-war. Rather pay varied according to progress made and ability shown.<sup>95</sup>

Where women were to perform skilled work it was particularly important they should get the full wage rates as this was the basis of security in regard to the engineers' position after the war. In October 1915 the Ministry issued a circular stating women employed at 'men's work' should be paid 20s for a normal working week and those doing 'skilled men's work' or piecework should receive the men's rate. Although the Minister's keynote was equal pay for equal work the 20s a week was below that of the unskilled labourer in practically all engineering districts.<sup>96</sup> Initially the circular was issued as a 'recommendation' to controlled establishments, therefore

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<sup>93</sup> Barrow District ASE Minutes, 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1 8, 16 August 1917

<sup>94</sup> Trescaheric, *Voices from the Past* p.55

<sup>95</sup> Barrow District ASE Minutes, 30 December 1914 – 8 June 1916, BDSO 57/1/7, 3 September 1915

<sup>96</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, Thursday, 4 January 1917

not obligatory. The ASE had also caused the Ministry to issue the circular to controlled establishments as a Statutory Order in February 1916, while promising cooperation with the Ministry's dilution policy.<sup>97</sup>

With the introduction of dilution came the questions of female hours and wages. A lot of women however introduced on men's work did not displace or replace men, but started on new machines in new shops.<sup>98</sup> The Barrow ASE Meeting Minutes for 28 June 1916 noted that delegates from the Women Workers Union attended and stated 'they were out on grievances regarding changes of girl's hours and pay and asked for ASE support', but the engineers flatly refused.<sup>99</sup> A Special Arbitration Tribunal was held in July with the girl's represented by the NFWW.<sup>100</sup> They contested they were engaged in men's work for which their male counterparts received 26s a week, but were only paid 18-20s. The NFWW protested against this system of deduction as it encouraged employers to put young girls on heavy work on grounds of economy.<sup>101</sup> The Tribunal accepted Vickers who argued that women's wages were in line with the Ministry circular and the war gave rise to the need for economy in the cost of producing munitions.<sup>102</sup> From the employer's standpoint it was hard to refute paying low wages as young girls cost more in wasted material and supervision than their elders.<sup>103</sup> Stories of underpaid women persisted.

In August 1916 women moved from Darlington to Barrow on the understanding they would be guaranteed 20s a week and receive at least 28s when on machines.<sup>104</sup> On arrival they found as Vickers was working 45 hours they were entitled to 16s 11d, and the 28s was paid to women whose work was determined by

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<sup>97</sup> Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 113

<sup>98</sup> Barrow District ASE Minutes, Barrow Archives, BDSO 57/1/8, 20 June 1916, girls on machines in the New Howitzer Shop were rated at 20s while some machine men transferred from other departments were 2s below the rates which should be paid on the NHS machines

<sup>99</sup> *Daily Herald*, Saturday 15 July, 1916, reported the strike was over dilution

<sup>100</sup> OHMOM Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. II The Control of Women's Wages, Ch. III Men's Work in 1916, p.22; BDSO 57/1/8 Barrow District ASE Minutes, Barrow Archives

<sup>101</sup> Barrow District ASE Minutes, Barrow Archives, BDSO 57/1/8, 20 June 1916, reported also that girls in the New Howitzer Shop were rated on machines at 20s; girls under 18 employed on men's work at this time was small, being engaged on such as rough shell turning, eventually awards covering the whole of Vickers women employees were dealt with by Special Tribunal; Barrow District ASE Minutes, Barrow Archives, BDSO 57/1/8, 23 July 1916, in the Shell Repair and Admiralty Shops objections were raised to the heavy structure of the work for females, Vickers said work would be simplified and changes made to the lathes to make work easy

<sup>102</sup> LAB 2/420/IC912/1916 – Chief Industrial Commissioner's Department: Munitions Industries: Arbitration Awards. Vickers Ltd., Barrow-in-Furness v National Federation of Women Workers (W.W. Mackenzie)

<sup>103</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 23 July 1916

<sup>104</sup> *Daily Herald*, Saturday, 26 August 1916

the rate fixers.<sup>105</sup> The flat rate of 20s a week was based on the usual working hours of the district for men in engineering establishments, which was 53 hours. Women were thus entitled to 45/53 of 20s (16s 11d).<sup>106</sup> Although Vickers found and paid for their accommodation, neither hours nor pay could be changed to meet Barrow's high living costs and the women returned home. The Ministry were left with no choice but to maintain its ruling that payment in such cases must be made at a proportional fraction of 20s. In late December 1916, however an amending order provided for a weekly flat rate of 20s for 48 hours or less, ranging to 23s for 54 hours to women munition workers.<sup>107</sup>

Cathy Hunt notes that decent lodgings in Barrow could not be found for less than 15s or 16s per week and for women's hostels during 1916 the charge was 14s while at the manageresses and forewomen's hostel 18s per week.<sup>108</sup> The living tariff for munitions workers indicates single men were paying 18s 6d per week for board and lodging in hostels, 4s 6d more than women, reflecting pay differences. These prices to an extent had a levelling affect, as in one local village persons taking boarders reduced their charges from 27s per head per week to 18s 6d in order to compete with Vickers' tariff. The assumption therefore that women munitions workers were prosperous has little foundation in reality and for single women only by working longer or harder under a task related scheme were they able to survive. Even after government intervention women still struggled on the wages provided. For families it was possible to keep pace, even outpace inflation, but it involved trade-offs. Either men worked extensive hours which was to the advantage of the employer or women entered the workforce. Meanwhile the men's wages system had been subjected to unprecedented strains particularly the cost of living.

In July 1916 a 3s advance on time-rates was granted to unskilled and semi-skilled men in the engineering trade in the Barrow district by the Committee on

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<sup>105</sup> Five eight hour shifts and five hours Saturday; the women were brought under a task work system against which the unions had always fought

<sup>106</sup> OHMoM, Vol V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. II The Control of Women's Wages, Ch. III Men's Work in 1916, p.19

<sup>107</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, Friday, 22 December 1916, this was for women employed on the work of men other than skilled men, after 48 hours there was an increase of 6d per hour up to 53 hours; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday 24 January 1916, reported female shell workers at Barrow had had their wages, standard for 45 hours increased from 15s to 23s 9d adding to the confusion of women workers' wages

<sup>108</sup> Hunt, C., *The National Federation*, p.82; OHMoM, Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. V Provision for the Housing of Munition Workers, Ch. II Housing Administration, p.14, at Barrow economic rents worked out at 15s, 16s and 17s per house, while pre-war accommodation ranged from 5s to 6s 6d

Production, but an advance of piece-rates was refused. This advance was regarded as war wages, and recognised due to the abnormal conditions prevailing.<sup>109</sup> The paradoxical effect of improved wages on increased efficiency and output however tended to be a greater loss of time among pieceworkers than the less wealthy time-workers. Employers' concern was that increased advances to pieceworkers would lead to more irregularity and lost time.

In late 1916 the skilled engineers met Vickers over pay due to demands made on men in food costs and clothing, items maintaining men in efficiency. The ASE believed Vickers were in a position to pay more as their work was high class and organised to ensure good results. Vickers agreed men needed to be fed, but surmised they were receiving enough, as if they needed to earn more they were not taking the opportunity.<sup>110</sup> Proof was evidenced by lost time and Vickers would not provide more wages for fear of further restricting output, the engineers pointed out men were getting increased wages because of overtime which benefited the firm as it increased output. Vickers indicated the statistics showed poor timekeeping representing a loss of 10 per cent of effective strength, and the increased cost of living was more than covered by wages.<sup>111</sup> Further Vickers wanted the ASE to agree to calculating overtime after 53 hours rather on a daily basis, they felt compelled to ask for cooperation as timekeeping showed little improvement.<sup>112</sup> In 1917 the practice of periodical hearings and national awards including the provision to meet the cost of living was adopted this drew sharp criticism from employers thereafter, with complaints of overly favourable awards to the unions and lack of consultation with employers.<sup>113</sup>

While wages rose considerably, inflation and high rents counter-balanced such improvements. Although the relationship between wages, rents and prices is difficult to analyse, Todd asserts that evidence from the Commission of Enquiry, the Labour Party and Trades Council, and the Barrow press suggests 'that many families did experience real hardship during the war'.<sup>114</sup> This reflects Bryder's warning on the need

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<sup>109</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, Saturday, 26 July 1916

<sup>110</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 5 October 1916, pre-war engineers were earning from 44s to 50s per week and in September 1916 averaged 75s per week

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 5 October 1916

<sup>113</sup> Mclvor, *Organised Capital, Employers' Associations and Industrial Relations in Northern England 1880-1939*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.154

<sup>114</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*, p. 171

to differentiate between the incomes of workers in different sectors, and the difficulties experienced by servicemen's families trying to survive on army pay remittances.<sup>115</sup>

As the questions of industrial fatigue, hours of labour, and matters affecting the health and therefore efficiency of workers arose in munition factories and workshops the HMWC was established. The terms 'health and welfare' however were not originally destined for the shipyard or male munitions workers, often working under greater stress, but whose trade unions provided in theory the power to take care of their own working conditions.

### **Health and Welfare**

Conditions had changed drastically at Barrow as skilled and unskilled workers flocked in from all parts of the country. Housing accommodation was difficult to find, transport became more congested and employment of increasing numbers of women workers affected further transformation, while urgent work necessitated putting in long hours. Previously night work for women had been abolished and for boys was rare, now it was common. Hours had been reduced in many workshops now increased hours were being worked while overtime and Sunday labour became for a time universal. Yet concurrent with these backward steps were ideas of providing workshop amenities in the improvement of industrial and social conditions. If the worker was subservient to the machine it was believed advancement of workers themselves could add to their efficiency creating greater output.<sup>116</sup> Keen interest was thus shown into the report of the HMWC appointed to consider and advise on the question of industrial fatigue, hours of labour and matters affecting the personal health and efficiency of predominantly women workers in 'munitions workshops'.

The Committee realised questions of canteen provision, individual employee welfare, housing and transit as seen in Barrow were the chief influences affecting industrial efficiency in munitions works.<sup>117</sup> These appeared more important than the

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<sup>115</sup> Bryder, L., *The First World War: Healthy or Hungry?*, *Historical Workshop Journal* (1987), 24(1), p.144; Roberts, E., *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster*, p.23 families of soldiers at war suffered considerable hardship because the army allowance was frequently less than their fathers' pre-war wage in a time of rising prices

<sup>116</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, Saturday, 17 August 1918

<sup>117</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. III Welfare the Control of Working Conditions, Ch. I Welfare Policy, p.2

immediate or technical environment in which work was carried on while problems of materials shortage, building labour and transport all stood in the way of new 'welfare' accommodation or housing.

With the intention of providing for women workers and young person's comfort, efficiency and health to a higher standard than that of the Factory Acts a Ministry Welfare Section was introduced. This section extended the policy of the HMWC to controlled establishments by moral persuasion and supply of special facilities and information. While improvements were made for female munitions workers, shipyard conditions were said to be bad, lavatories, cooking arrangements, hot water and litter were all complaints at Vickers. Typically men protested about bay doors being left open in winter and smoke and black-lead getting into their lungs, while others complained of damp conditions inside submarine tanks. The Barrow Munitions Tribunal reports are full of complaints of men being off through bad working conditions, at one tribunal a Vickers officer said: 'men were asking to go into the shell shop for the better conditions there'.<sup>118</sup>

Where females were employed the HMWC was unanimous that a suitable system of welfare supervision should be administered by an appointed officer.<sup>119</sup> The officer was to be of good standing and education, having experience and sympathy, while tactful and sensible in her dealings with others.<sup>120</sup> Dorothee Pullinger, a 21-year old engineer could hardly be expected to meet all these conditions, but as Simmonds says 'in a flick of the wrist' she was appointed lady superintendent at Vickers' works at Barrow.<sup>121</sup> As women's supervisor she believed the aim of her job was the morale and physical welfare of her young female workers, supplying them with 'home care and comforts' as part of a 'big family'.<sup>122</sup> Pullinger in fact was the internal Welfare Officer as a Miss Phillips is mentioned as the 'Outside Welfare Officer of the Ministry

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<sup>118</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 12 February 1916

<sup>119</sup> *Newcastle Journal*, Wednesday 12 January 1916

<sup>120</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, Saturday 8 January 1916; Hunt, *The National Federation*, p.89, the Welfare Supervisors tended to be middle class and it was the opinion of many women workers that they did not necessarily understand the needs and habits of the girls they were appointed to safeguard

<sup>121</sup> *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, Saturday, 7 August 1915, she was educated at Loughborough and by 1910 she followed in her father's footsteps and started work as a draughtswoman at the Paisley works of Arrol-Johnston, a car manufacturer where her father served as manager; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, p.147

<sup>122</sup> Woollacott, A, 'Maternalism, Professionalism, and Industrial Welfare Supervisors in World War I Britain', op. cit., pp. 29-56



of Munitions'.<sup>123</sup> The *Official History* also notes that by June 1918 the work of the external and internal welfare officers at Barrow was amalgamated.<sup>124</sup> Conflict existed, particularly between trade union officials and welfare officers appointed by employers. Union activists were sceptical of the motives of welfare officers employed to 'look after' the interests of women workers, fearful that they might direct women away from trade unions and persuade them to accept the paternalism of the employer. But in truth through the provision of leisure activities and entertainment there was less need for women to seek union activities.

The character and tone of work however depended largely on the thirty forewomen who referred to Pullinger in matters of discipline, slack work or bad timekeeping, providing relief to Vickers management and the local Munitions Tribunal.<sup>125</sup> Indeed little evidence has been found of female workers appearing on disciplinary matters before the Tribunal.<sup>126</sup> In contrast criminal cases are more often found in the civil court reports.

The huge increase of women at Barrow meant drastic changes in workshop arrangements. *The Times* noted that at Vickers there were ten mess rooms where workers can eat in comfort and cooks provide meals, whilst rest rooms with qualified nurses attend to women taken ill.<sup>127</sup> Pullinger provides insight into methods used in maintaining efficiency.<sup>128</sup> When arranging cloakrooms the most efficient method was a check system more costly was a cloakroom for each shift. Importantly exits were provided with easy access to shop floor and road. Shifts were run in military fashion, the signal for one to cease work and another to start, securing continual production. Toilet cleanliness was of concern. Therefore choice of materials and attendant were important, although some disapproved time recording prevented idling while allowing

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<sup>123</sup> Barrow Council Minutes Barrow Council Minutes November 1916 to October 1917 - Watch Committee 18 May 1917 Miss Phillips called attention for the need for women police patrols for the protection of young girls and women, in July two policewomen were appointed

<sup>124</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III Welfare the Control of Working Conditions, Ch. 1, Welfare Policy, p.14

<sup>125</sup> Proud, E.D., *Welfare Work: Employers Experiments for Improving Working Conditions in Factories*, (London, G Bell and Sons, 1916), p.12; a list of Women Workers indicates Miss Pullinger had an office staff and a clerk

<sup>126</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 1 July 1916, at the Barrow Munitions Tribunal a girl asked for a certificate to go into farm service which was granted, while others showed interest in the outcome; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 29 March 1919, when Nellie Sears (19) appeared before the Barrow Magistrates the Chief Constable explained that she came to Barrow and worked at the shipyard and the steelworks, and lost both jobs through bad timekeeping

<sup>127</sup> *The Times*, Tuesday, 19 September 1916; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 24 January 1916 reported Vickers had decided to have a rest room and qualified nurse for those females who become indisposed at work

<sup>128</sup> *The Woman's Point of View*, Chapter XII, p.149

access to others. Half-an-hour was allowed for meals on an eight-hour shift while a further rest period of seven minutes was granted.<sup>129</sup> Women were differentiated in the workshops head forewomen wore white overalls and caps, forewomen were distinguished by khaki, whilst workers wore blue with blue or red caps. On starting work the practice was for girls to receive two pairs of overalls, each girl signing a receipt showing the cost, which was deducted in instalments and refunded on returning the overalls on leaving. Overalls were exchanged at the stores once a week, which was of advantage, especially to workers in lodgings where no washing facilities existed or where labour shortages at laundries meant they could not be relied on.

Social conditions in factories varied considerably but to improve morale and increase the contentment of female workers the provision of healthy recreation was deemed essential. Recreation and education was not simply to provide a healthy outlet for munitions girls but also to counter the monotony entailed by unskilled, mechanized tasks in the workplace. In an essay on *'The Young Factory Girl'* Emily Matthias explained how the 'immorality' of the factory girl could be explained by her being 'drugged by the monotony and long hours of physical labour, and the need for strong and sharp stimulus'.<sup>130</sup> It was considered the average girl in lodgings was at a loss how to spend her spare time, and if not guided was liable to drift into loose company. Girls away from the restraints of home needed to learn where to draw the line in their newly found independence. Joining sports clubs, institutes with sewing classes, music and refreshments were thus encouraged.<sup>131</sup> Age and family roles often affected the time they could spend enjoying themselves away from work. Leisure time was shaped by the length of their shifts, whether they were working day or night and whether a push was on at the front demanding increased production.

The report on Sunday labour highlighted men and women in munitions factories were suffering from the monotony of long hours and boredom a cause of defective output. Authorities realised workers' minds needed to be clear and amused if the strain of long hours was to be borne. The cinema, like public-houses, provided

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<sup>129</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday, 27 June 1916

<sup>130</sup> Matthias, E., The young factory girl, in Findlay, J.J., *The Young Wage Earner* (London, 1918), p.87 Cited in Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p.107

<sup>131</sup> *The Times*, Tuesday, 19 September, 1916 stated 2,000 girls had joined the Munitions Works Girls Club; *Leeds Mercury*, 22 February 1918, the Barrow YMCA Ladies Football Team would like a fixture with any ladies team at Leeds or Bradford for Easter

a resort for the large numbers in lodgings who found houses congested.<sup>132</sup> A development in Barrow was the establishment of cinema shows for munitions workers.<sup>133</sup> Vickers workers had had their own cinema for some time and this trend was expected to be followed in or near the big London shell factories. At the peak of munitions production in October 1916, Barrow had a considerable array of entertainment including a large number of establishments showing pictures as indicated in Table 11.<sup>134</sup>

<b>Establishment</b>	<b>Entertainment</b>	<b>Periodicity</b>
His Majesty's Theatre	Cinema, music, singing and dancing	Nightly
Coliseum	Cinema	Matinees, Daily, Twice Nightly
Royal Theatre and Opera House	Stage Plays	Nightly
Gaiety Theatre and Picturedrome	Cinema	Matinees, Daily, Twice Nightly
Palace Theatre	Cinema, music, singing and dancing	Twice nightly
Electric Theatre	Cinema	Twice nightly
Walney Theatre	Cinema	Twice nightly
Tivoli	Music, singing and dancing	Twice nightly
Kings Hall	Cinema, music, singing	Saturdays nights during winter months
Town Hall	Music, singing and dancing <sup>135</sup>	Concerts and occasional entertainment

**Table 11 - Barrow Places of Entertainment 1916**

<sup>132</sup> *The Liverpool Echo*, Monday, 13 December 1915, Reported Barrow Magistrates had granted a licence to allow cinemas to open from 1400 until 2200 to allow men in congested lodgings some resort on Christmas Day

<sup>133</sup> *The Manchester Guardian* Thursday, 6 December 1915

<sup>134</sup> Barrow Records Office, List of Entertainment Establishments – Public meetings were also held at the Palace Theatre which could seat 2,500

<sup>135</sup> Roberts, E., *Working Class Barrow*, p.61, a respondent said that throughout the war her brother ran dances at the Town Hall on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday afternoon and Saturday evening

The cinema's appeal as escapist entertainment and its importance in broadening working-class culture were immense. Cinema was also a useful propaganda tool showing war films, including censored battle scenes.<sup>136</sup> For the working-class in Barrow, Elizabeth Roberts said the War gave many munitions workers' wages far in excess of what they had previously earned encouraging large attendances at the theatre.<sup>137</sup> The working-class however were interested in the cinema even before the war it did not have the poor reputation of the public house and music hall. Parents regarded the cinema as an innocent and cheap form of entertainment and children forbidden from the theatre were allowed to the 'pictures'. The cheapness of this form of amusement created a new audience and the picture house became emphatically the poor man's theatre.<sup>138</sup> The HMWC however regarded the cinema as the cause of lost time for juvenile workers.<sup>139</sup> On the importance of adequate sleep and recreation from the physical wellbeing of boys and girls, the committee said the temptations of the cinema and street amusement kept them up late. In December 1916 a regulation gave the Government power to close places of public entertainment if prejudicial to the production of war material.<sup>140</sup> Regulations were also in place to prohibit race meetings, fairs and coursing, whippet races or similar sports where they were likely to interfere with the production or transport of munitions by workers absenting themselves.<sup>141</sup> A deputation of women also pointed to the need for women police patrols to protect women and young girls and two officers were appointed to supplement the Barrow police force which had lost many men to the Army.<sup>142</sup> Fraternising was discouraged and young men and women who stood talking on Barrow's streets particularly on a Sunday evening were likely to find themselves before the petty sessions charged with obstructing the pavement.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Woollacott, *On her Their Lives Depend*, p.141

<sup>137</sup> Roberts, E.A.M., *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster*, p.54

<sup>138</sup> Roberts, E.A.M., *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-class Women 1890-1940*, (Oxford, Blackwell, paperback edition 1985), p. 123

<sup>139</sup> *Newcastle Journal*, Tuesday, 10 October 1916

<sup>140</sup> Ministry of Munitions Act, Regulation 10c, (22 December 1916), stipulated licenced or unlicensed premises or places for public singing, dancing, music, or other public entertainment

<sup>141</sup> Ministry of Munitions Act, Regulations 9B (8 June 1916), 9D (18 August 1916), 9BB (24 January 1917)

<sup>142</sup> Index of Barrow Borough Staff and Workers Serving with the Armed Forces, Barrow Records Office, a total of 25 police officers served during the war

<sup>143</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday 11 December 1917, Chief Inspector Hinds explained there was a good deal of trouble on Sunday evenings by the obstructing of the Dalton Road footpaths and cases were brought as a warning to others

What some of the munitions girls wanted was a clubroom as they had become tired of the picture palaces and nothing of this nature was supplied at the 'small number' of Barrow women's and girls' hostels.<sup>144</sup> This led to the good and wealthy fostering a scheme for a girl workers club hut assisted by the YWCA. Land was provided by the Furness Railway while Lord Derby and Vickers subscribed towards the cost of the building which was rapidly erected to accommodate some 500 women and girls.<sup>145</sup> When opened in March 1916 it was officially named the Queen Alexandra's Club for Women's Munitions Workers. Donations equipped the hut and rules and regulations were made to suit local conditions, while a committee worked and looked after the club charging a weekly membership fee to ensure self-sufficiency.<sup>146</sup> The club with rest and reading rooms provided tea and amusement and a place for munitions girls coming from distance to await trains at the nearby station.<sup>147</sup> Although the foundation of the YWCA was religious it was not thrust down member's throats. The movement stood simply for the principles of Christianity. The YWCA was there to provide good wholesome influences and recreation and help females strive for the higher ideal of girl and womanhood. In this way they were not only working for the present but providing strength for the future.

In January 1917 Barrow Council received a letter from the travelling secretary of the Munitions Workers Welfare Committee stating the YWCA had been asked by the Ministry of Munitions to erect a second munitions workers club hut.<sup>148</sup> The conditions in Barrow highlighted by the Unrest Commission caused the *Manchester Guardian* to report on the issue:

'The matter was serious' as it concerned women from Manchester and surrounding districts working at Barrow. These girls had left their homes and the institutes of home life to live among strangers under conditions which were not conducive to health or decency.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 19 February 1916

<sup>145</sup> *Newcastle Journal*, Saturday, 18 March 1916

<sup>146</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 8 March 1916

<sup>147</sup> BDSO 85/1/4 Barrow Working Men's Club and Institution Minutes, 29 November 1916 resolved to give £2 2s to the YMCA hut

<sup>148</sup> *The News*, Saturday, 27 January 1917

<sup>149</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Friday, 31 August 1917, the article in fact was using the case of Manchester women in Barrow to raise more funds for huts in other parts of the country

This caught the attention of the committee providing huts, hostels and canteens for women wartime workers under the auspices of the Women's Day Committee of the YWCA. In May 1917 public collections were made in Manchester and the money utilised for a Barrow women munitions workers club.<sup>150</sup> Land was found close to Vickers Works to enable a hut similar to the Queen Alexandra's Club to be built for a further 500 females.<sup>151</sup> The opening of the 'Manchester Club' as it became known took place in September 1917.<sup>152</sup>

A number of welfare provisions were provided for men and boys. Previous to December 1915 the Salvation Army had established a canteen in Barrow, but the introduction of industrial canteens were a by-product of the drink campaign.<sup>153</sup> The Ministry of Munitions allowed capital expenditure incurred by the owners of controlled establishments with CCB approval to be written off against current profits. Thus owners could introduce canteens at small cost to themselves.<sup>154</sup> Hutton notes there were sixteen canteens at Barrow accommodating 4,471 persons.<sup>155</sup> For use as a men's munition workers social club, the YMCA agreed to the lease of 'The Stadium', a large wooden building which mysteriously burnt down.<sup>156</sup> The oddly named Mangle Club, possibly derived from Triangle, the symbol of the YMCA, was used by munitions workers soldiers and sailors. Dinners, teas, concerts and lectures and various forms of recreation in addition to writing and reading facilities allowed incomers to relax.<sup>157</sup>

Erection of new houses within Vickerstown prompted new responsibilities for the owners. Recognizing the need to provide places of entertainment and leisure Vickers erected an alcohol free cinema and variety theatre and a new institute with reading and card rooms, billiard tables etc., while land was appropriated for kitchen

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<sup>150</sup> Barrow Council Committee Minutes, 23 March 1917, Barrow Records Office, indicates a new Munitions Workers Canteen (Club?) for the Munitions Workers Welfare Committee was to be built at Farm Street

<sup>151</sup> Barrow Records Office, 5 September 1917, agreement with the YWCA as to the use of land situated in Farm Street, Barrow Island

<sup>152</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Saturday, 8 September 1917; Barrow Records Office, 5 September 1917, *Agreement to the use of land situated in Farm Street*, this document provides a plan of the land for use as a club hut and an unknown hostel

<sup>153</sup> *The Scotsman*, Monday, 6 December 1915 reported that In addition to canteens in the London area, Birmingham and Barrow, new buildings are in the course of erection elsewhere

<sup>154</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, Tuesday, 23 November 1915

<sup>155</sup> Hutton, J.E., *Welfare and Housing, A Practical Record of Wartime Management*, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), p.75,

<sup>156</sup> *Liverpool Daily Mail*, Tuesday, 25 May 1915

<sup>157</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday 16 January 1919, following the war the club was enlarged to meet the needs of boys and youths by providing recreation and billiard rooms and a gymnasium

garden allotments.<sup>158</sup> Two model hotels selling food and non-alcoholic drink were operated by the Walney Public House Trust Company, the profits being used for setting up counter attractions to public-houses.<sup>159</sup> There were however dissenters, the vicar of Walney for one saying there was a feeling in view of the acuteness of housing shortage unnecessary buildings had been erected including a golf house and institute financed by Vickers, while a schools were left unfinished.<sup>160</sup> Barrow's clubs and institutes also boasted leisure provisions. The Barrow Working Men's Club and Institute for example, had a large library, reading, writing and billiard rooms and even a rifle range.<sup>161</sup>

Welfare extended to infant care Joy tends to dwell on the statistics, causes and remedies for infant mortality in Barrow rather than the general decreasing birth rate.<sup>162</sup> As more men were slaughtered it was realised new human lives, which could grow up to replace lost adult lives were valuable national assets.<sup>163</sup> Barbara Harrison argued the primary objective of state intervention was not just to ensure social control but reproductive health.<sup>164</sup> Increased concern for infant welfare was expressed in a number of publicity campaigns, arousing interest in the nation's babies creating a cyclic process, the most extraordinary of which was National Baby Week held in July 1917.<sup>165</sup> Barrow's week comprised exhibitions, demonstrations, addresses and entertainments to arouse interest in the need for reduced infant mortality.<sup>166</sup> Opened by the Mayoress the Medical Officer of Health provided daily support while Miss

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<sup>158</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest, No.2 Division North-West Area, Supplementary Report for Barrow-in-Furness

<sup>159</sup> *The Times*, Tuesday, 19 September 1916; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 5 February 1916 the second of these establishments, the George Hotel was built in six months during 1916, as well as providing a refreshment room with teas, Vickers hedging their bets requested an alcohol licence which was turned down by the magistrates

<sup>160</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 12 July 1917; *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Adviser*, Monday, 10 January 1916, two schools were eventually completed although no new ones were started

<sup>161</sup> BD/SO 85/1/4 Minutes of the Barrow Working Men's Club and Institute, the rifle range was used by the territorials as well as the members

<sup>162</sup> Joy, C. A., *War and Unemployment in an Industrial Community: Barrow-in-Furness 1914-1926*, PhD Thesis, Uclan 2004; *Co-operative News*, 2 February 1916 – A Working Woman, took the view: the state wants babies but it is only the most ignorant among the working-classes who burden themselves with large families, the wages of the bulk of workers are not large enough to admit the proper rearing of a large family, why doesn't the state look after those which are born and die every year for lack of nourishment and warmth?

<sup>163</sup> Baker, S. J., *Fighting for Life*, (Huntingdon NY, Robert E Krieger Publishing Co., 1980), p.165

<sup>164</sup> Harrison, B., *Women and Health*, in Purvis, J., (ed.), *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945* (London, Routledge, 1995), pp.157-92

<sup>165</sup> Dwork, D., *War is Good for Babies and Young Children*, (London, Tavistock Publications, 1987), p.211

<sup>166</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 9 July 1917

Phillips was one of the speakers.<sup>167</sup> School girls were addressed and the work of the local Voluntary Infant Welfare Committee brought further awareness to mothers.

Although evidence exists of a child welfare centre, provisions for maternity cases at Barrow were inadequate and in many homes impossible to deal with decently. Women were reported to be giving birth in one room which was home not only to the entire family but lodgers. Elizabeth Roberts says 'midwives, some who continued to be untrained and unqualified long after the 1902 Midwives Act were sent for.' Even after a 1916 Act demanding more rigorous qualification standards of midwives, including six months' training, attendance to a minimum of twenty births and a written examination, problems existed. One Barrow respondent speaking of her 1917 and 1918 confinements said:

The nurse came and she was not fully qualified. The doctors told her what to do and what not to do but she couldn't read a thermometer, but she brought babies into the world. There were hundreds of women in Barrow who's had to go to the gynaecologist through her.<sup>168</sup>

It was common for landladies to insist that an expectant mother leave the house until the baby was born, and as Barrow did not have a maternity hospital this meant mothers had to choose between going to the Workhouse and or to distant friends.<sup>169</sup> In June 1917 Barrow Council passed a proposal urging the government to establish a maternity home free from Poor Law or charity to provide accommodation for expectant wives of munitions workers.<sup>170</sup> In July it was reported the Welfare Department was arranging to take over a YWCA hostel to use as a Barrow maternity hospital.<sup>171</sup> The October council minutes furthermore state that the Ministry had made temporary arrangements for two beds for maternity cases at Miss Williams Nursing Home and two beds were set aside at the Nurses Hostel.<sup>172</sup> The council suggested a public announcement should be made by the Hospital Authorities that the four beds were available for maternity purposes. These provisions however were

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<sup>167</sup> OHMoM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III Welfare the Control of Working Conditions, Ch. I Welfare Policy, p.14

<sup>168</sup> Roberts, E., *Working Class Barrow* p.40

<sup>169</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 20 August 1917; Barrow Council Committee Minutes, 21 March 1917 acknowledged a grant from the LGB paid to the Barrow Infant and Child Maternity Centre

<sup>170</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 5 June 1917; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 1 December 1919 a maternity home was again proposed at Barrow

<sup>171</sup> Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p.77

<sup>172</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Minutes of Council and Committees, November 1916 – 12 October 1917



wholly inadequate.<sup>173</sup> For children, there was a dramatic change in the health of those at elementary school as the School Medical Officer's report for 1915 demonstrates:

'No serious cases of malnutrition were observed and the great number of cases of slight malnutrition were due to improper feeding rather than insufficiency. Improvement can be accounted for by lack of unemployment, and higher wages earned by the working-classes in the Borough. There is no doubt that higher wages are benefiting the children as regards their general physical condition.'<sup>174</sup>

Visible health gains continued throughout the war. In 1916 'no cases of malnutrition due to insufficiency of food were noted' and by 1917 'the children were well clothed, well-fed and presented a generally healthy appearance.'

In June 1917 the Corporation were asked by the local Insurance Committee to investigate the housing and sanitary conditions in the Hindpool and Ramsden wards. Despite not pre-dating the rest of the borough and being only fifty years old, there was a higher than average incidence of tuberculosis, but manpower shortages prevented inspection.<sup>175</sup> In regard of tuberculosis provisions, Barrow Corporation from September 1915 had leased a number of beds at a sanatorium five miles distant administered by Lancashire County Council. Additionally two dispensaries were opened in Barrow, whilst the Devonshire Road pavilion was used as an isolation hospital for acute and advanced cases and by spring 1918 action was taken for the compulsory removal of cases that could not be isolated at home.<sup>176</sup> However, there were no local facilities for children, and though they could be treated at dispensaries success was often undermined by home conditions whilst premature return of patients to their old environment could result in a relapse. Environmental factors were given consideration and from October 1916 the local Insurance Committee had pressed for the establishment of farm colonies to provide after-care facilities, but small headway was made.

In autumn 1917 the spiritual welfare of munitions workers became of concern. At Woolwich it was said to be a campaign and at Barrow a challenge. In both cases it

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<sup>173</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Minutes of Council and Committees, Medical Report, June, July, August 1917

<sup>174</sup> School Medical Officer's report, 1915, Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book 1915-16

<sup>175</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 3 July 1917

<sup>176</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 4 January 1916, Barrow Council took premises in Harrison Street as a dispensary on seven years lease, Barrow Council Committee Minutes, 20 June 1917, Barrow Records Office reported a TB dispensary was to be opened at 64 School Street

was intended to reach those who through war-weariness and unaccustomed surroundings were in danger of slacking their religious duties. The chief missionary at Barrow noted 'there was something wrong if eighty out of every hundred persons were found outside sanctuaries on Sundays.'<sup>177</sup> Not only should material service be rendered but spiritual, and with the motto 'You Need God and God Needs You' the religious establishment descended on Barrow. Various methods were employed to drive the motto home: for example open-air preaching by the howitzer shop, near the airship shed, in the steelworks, the bye-streets, at the central court of the Scotch-Buildings housing iron and steelworkers and within the heart of Barrow at Cavendish Square. Every night in the Old Town Hall, save Saturday, an evangelistic service was conducted whilst the seven parishes were visited. Results were difficult to estimate, but those understanding the inner mind of the shipyard and workshops said more good had been done than was realised. In reality the mission was an experiment as there was a need to discover new and effective means of evangelistic work and seen in this light the Barrow challenge was worthy of repeating elsewhere. The depth of understanding of Barrow's general condition however is questionable. Following the Unrest Report the Archdeacon of Barrow said: 'though he was not prepared to deny bad conditions existed, they were not within his knowledge and unconfirmed by his clergy'.<sup>178</sup>

Lack of holidays contributed to overstrain at Barrow. From the outbreak of the war with the exception of a day now and again such as Christmas Day and Bank Holidays there was no cessation of activity at Vickers. In July 1915 a five day holiday was granted and thousands of people, nine tenths sporting War Service badges, went home in search of renovation and repair.<sup>179</sup> This provided respite in the home for some women allowing them a break from looking after lodgers.<sup>180</sup> For those holidaying locally, Walney Island, Furness Abbey and the seashore villages were well patronised as no train excursions were running and the passenger boats were either

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<sup>177</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 20 September 1917

<sup>178</sup> OHMoM Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. V The Provisions of Canteens in Munitions Factories, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems, Barrow, p.48, the archdeacon was based in Carlisle

<sup>179</sup> OHMoM Vol. V *Wages and Welfare*, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI The Control of Hours of Labour, 1916-1919, p.139, During summer 1915 the MoM issued letters to the small number of controlled firms urging them that not more than a week should be taken

<sup>180</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday 21 July 1917, traders had been under pressure mainly because of their young assistants joining the army, newspaper advertisement generally called for assistants not of recruiting age for shop work

laid-up or requisitioned by the navy. By late 1915 holidays were to be the minimum necessary for workers' health, controlled establishments being urged to take no more than three or four days at Christmas and New Year.

Though workers' sacrifices were expressed as patriotic, holidays remained government concessions at times of national stress and workers were expected to make up output loss to justify such concessions. In 1916 at the insistence of the Ministry of Munitions, holidays were both curtailed and postponed following a heavy drop in munitions output caused by the Easter break.<sup>181</sup> Accordingly the trade unions, agreed to postpone Whit-Monday and cancel the annual summer holiday. Only when pressure for output lessened was relief given to the workers and staff of controlled establishments. This required considerable negotiation, and at Vickers holidays were approved for late September 1916. Nonetheless essential work and maintenance needed carrying out, additional payments being in accordance with holiday arrangements. For the remainder of the war public holidays returned to a level of normality and Christmas 1918 was extended until 6 January, the longest for some time.<sup>182</sup> What is not generally realised is that shopkeepers and business remained open even when munitions factories were on holiday.<sup>183</sup> In August 1917 the *Barrow News* reported 'next week the members of the Barrow Chamber of Trade will close their premises for four days and the butchers will close until Friday morning'. This was appreciated by most traders who had been under considerable strain for some time.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Tuesday 30 May 1916, agreement was arrived at between Vickers and the men at Barrow to continue work with a view to keeping up the output of munitions of war, it was usual to have Whit-Monday holiday

<sup>182</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 21 December 1918, the March 1917 twelve day strike and the addition of the Easter weekend gave relief to some 6,000 engineers and their tradesmen allowing many to return to home outside of Barrow

<sup>183</sup> *Fife Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian*, Saturday, 21 August 1915 noted that regarding the Shop Assistant's Union, the district minimum wage movement had been successful with a considerable portion of the shopkeepers in Barrow, where over a £1,000 per year had been added to the wages of the members, besides advances for quite a number of non-members

<sup>184</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 6 August 1917, although railway restrictions remained in force for ordinary passengers, Morecambe received an enormous number of visitors on the Saturday, many from Barrow. Lakeland had not been so well patronised since the war broke out, munitions workers arrived from all parts of England, coaches on the mountain pass routes were crowded and it was difficult to hire boats

## Conclusions

Government agencies such as the Admiralty were suspicious of dilution and needed to maintain efficiency in the shipyard and the quality of their products. However when increased production of large howitzers was needed dilution was attempted on the engineering side of Vickers works but was only partially successful. Although the engineers accepted dilution on their terms outside the munitions shops, any attempts to introduce dilution in the shipyard would be in agreement with all the parties involved and only as a final solution.

Recruitment drives for the Army were often resisted. In the conflict for manpower for industry and the forces, the Recruiting Authorities were supported by the public who saw shirkers everywhere. At Barrow with a shortage of skilled manpower both Vickers and the unions objected to the taking of further men and were both obstructive and guarded against their removal. The Derby scheme having failed to obtain the numbers need for the Army, conscription under the Military Service Act led to the introduction of Military Tribunals. These allowed local men to appeal against the call up on a number of grounds, while protecting the essential workers needed for the war effort. In the need to provide further army recruits protection was withdrawn from semi and unskilled workers for which substitutes were required. The provision of substitutes was not a satisfactory system, against which the employers and unions were guarded, as they were likely to provide inferior workers with no knowledge of shipyard and engineering who needed training and supervision.

Ultimately, dilution brought more single women into the workforce, but they were difficult to accommodate. The imbalance between male and female workers at Vickers and the question of accommodation caused Vickers to pursue a two-shift system for women as it was not possible to set up a three-shift system for men. Although Vickers were given permission to introduce a two-shift system for women it only appears to been adopted in certain areas of engineering where women worked alongside men. Women had formed unions and had variable support in workplace negotiations, but they often struggled to survive on what they earned. This brought about statutory regulation of women's work which fixed rates for those employed on men's rates. The step was also taken of laying down standard rates for the payment

of women in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, traditionally performed by women in the munitions trades. For men's wages the problems of piece-rates remained, as little improvement in timekeeping and efficiency would be seen if further increases were granted.

The advent of women, brought about major changes in welfare, although these were not generally seen in the shipyard. While there was concern for the wellbeing of women, leisure time was inverse to work time which was dependent on the requirements of the Admiralty and the War Office. Even though welfare existed this did not prevent men and women working long hours and relinquishing their holidays when the need arose. For many the combination of long hours and poor housing lacking privacy and filled with street sounds meant that sleep was impeded, especially for nightshift workers. Such conditions could only lead to a tired workforce eventually becoming an exhausted one.

## CHAPTER 5: 1917 UNREST

### Introduction

Russia and France were not the only members of the Entente to experience a domestic crisis in the spring and summer of 1917. Britain underwent its own crisis, which culminated in a series of strikes in the engineering industry that called into question the willingness of organized labour to continue to accept the leadership of Britain's traditional governing classes. A government which had come to power pledged to win the war now had the task of acting as a barrier to a British revolution. This chapter addresses the unrest of 1917 as it affected Barrow and the part played by the shop stewards movement which had filled the vacuum left by taking away the right to strike which greatly removed the influence of the trade unions.

According to Simmonds, strikes provide clear evidence that in negotiating settlements with trade unions the Minister of Munitions failed to acknowledge the groundswell of rank-and-file opinion as voiced by the shop stewards.<sup>1</sup> Marwick adds, the shop stewards developed from minor trade union officials into major spokesmen of rank-and-file discontent, deriving their strength from the fact they served with and were elected by men from the shop floor.<sup>2</sup> Hinton believes that the official leadership failed to defend the interests of its rank-and-file in the face of tightening controls, therefore becoming increasingly unrepresentative'.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty for the Ministry of Munitions was negotiating with the army of shop stewards in place of the central body of trade unions, particularly in the engineering shops. As the leadership was unable to function properly, the shop stewards furnished a valuable outlet for working-class action. At Barrow although the majority of workers were moderate in their outlook and the revolutionary element generally contained, the concern was that the unaddressed problems of the town and the national non-recognition of the shop stewards by the engineering unions could drive the moderate men into the arms of the revolutionary element.

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<sup>1</sup> Simmonds, A. G. V., *Britain and World War 1*, (London, Routledge, 2012), p.114

<sup>2</sup> Marwick, A., *The Deluge, British Society and the First World War*, (London, Macmillan, 1965), p.76

<sup>3</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards'*, p.52,

The general proposition as to industrial unrest were the same in Barrow as reported elsewhere by the Commission of Enquiry but the town had its own special problems for which special attention was needed. It was geographically isolated, it had a very large influx of new population coming into the town to work at Vickers, and the needs of its citizens were gravely neglected. Gregory says the Commission for Industrial Unrest identified two strands of discontent, the local and specific, and the general, noting Barrow had such specific problems that it warranted its own report.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will therefore look at these issues and see what was or was not done to alleviate them.

### **Unrest and the Shop Stewards**

Since the war began the shop stewards had organised themselves into bodies representing the men of several unions instead of being the agents for their unions in the shop. At Barrow a number of factors operated to push the workers into building up their workshop organisation independent of the official trade union movement. In late 1916 the Sheffield Workers' Committee had produced the strike over the conscription of Leonard Hargreaves a Vickers skilled man.<sup>5</sup> When Hargreaves was not returned the local men struck, followed by Barrow the only centre to come out under the shop stewards leadership.<sup>6</sup> The Barrow strike however ended shortly after it started as Hargreaves was quickly returned due to the unrest in Sheffield.

During February 1917 a similar case occurred at Barrow and the men recalling the resolutions passed at the time of the Sheffield strike threatened to place the case in the hands of the shop stewards unless the man was released from the army within seven days.<sup>7</sup> On the sixth day he was returned. Such acts carried the Barrow workers beyond the confines of official action and by the spring of 1917 the formation of a 20-30 men Shop Stewards Executive representing all Vickers unions put them beyond the

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<sup>4</sup> Gregory, A., *The Last Great War, British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008)

<sup>5</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards'*, p.186

<sup>6</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt.1 Release of Mmunition Workers for Military Service 1916-17, Ch. II The Trade Card Agreement, p.37; Murphy, J. T., *Preparing for Power*, (London, Jonathan Cape, 1934), p.131

<sup>7</sup> Solidarity, March 1917

collective control of the skilled unions who alone were represented on the Engineering Joint Trades Board.<sup>8</sup>

The crisis came over the Premium Bonus System. In late March 1917 a twelve-day strike occurred at Barrow over what was alleged to be the systematic cutting of the premium bonus time allowance and rate-fixing.<sup>9</sup> As the Joint Trades Board was unwilling to take illegal action members of the Shop Committee protesting against the delay in settlement organised a strike.<sup>10</sup> Though the Sheffield Workers' Committee called for a sympathetic strike, they failed as the PBS was unknown to their workers.<sup>11</sup> Meantime a settlement was offered by the Minister of Labour with retrospective payment, while the ASE and Employers Federation tried to bring about a settlement.<sup>12</sup>

Encouraging women workers to join a union Mary Macarthur (WTUL Secretary) pointed out that trade unions did not cause strikes but reduced their number by removing the grievances which caused them.<sup>13</sup> However in trying to remove the rate-fixing grievance numbers of women were put out of work causing hardship.<sup>14</sup> As the women were employed by Vickers, the Ministry refused to entertain the matter, even though they had arrived at Barrow from as far as Ireland at their invitation.<sup>15</sup> Further, Vickers would not provide relief as the strike was caused by the men. The women were left in limbo and the local Ministry of Munitions welfare officer was told to consult with the local authorities to see if voluntary effort could mitigate their circumstances.<sup>16</sup> On the women's behalf speakers of the patriotic Suffragette Women's Social and Political Union visited Barrow.<sup>17</sup> Attempting to get the men to return they distributed leaflets and pamphlets and re-prints of letters giving accounts of the ravages in France and Belgium, while stating the unrest was entirely worked by Germans.<sup>18</sup> This made no difference and the men voted overwhelmingly to continue

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<sup>8</sup> Hinton, *First Shop Stewards'*, p.187; CAB 24/14/97 The Growth of the Shop Stewards Movement, 31 May 1917

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, Monday, 2 April 1917, the strike effected 5850 employees

<sup>10</sup> Hinton, *First Shop Stewards'*, p.187, since October 1916 Vickers had allegedly been systematically cutting time allowances

<sup>11</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards'*, p.207

<sup>12</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 27 March 1917

<sup>13</sup> Marlow, J., (ed.), *Women and the Great War*, (London, Virago Press, 1998), p.174

<sup>14</sup> *Dundee Courier*, Saturday, 24 March 1917, the strike was over alleged cutting of the Premium Bonus time allowance and affected the naval shell making department where a number of women worked

<sup>15</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 4 April 1917

<sup>16</sup> *Western Daily Express*, Wednesday, 4 April 1917; H of C Deb 3 April 1917, Vol. 92, cc1110-2110

<sup>17</sup> The WSPU faded from public attention and was dissolved, with Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst founding the Women's Party in November 1917

<sup>18</sup> *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, Saturday 14 April 1917



the strike until agreement was reached on the rate-cutting.<sup>19</sup> While recognising the risk of an extension of the strike the government took the position that there would be no bargaining and no discussions until they returned.<sup>20</sup> Under the threat of strong authoritative measures the men returned on the conditions they had left and a Vickers' agreement that they would confer with the engineering union rather than negotiate with the Government.<sup>21</sup>

Although work was carried on by Vickers apprentices assisted by the labourers, the strike seriously affected output. Delayed howitzers, gun carriages and recuperators and a fall in naval shell output were seen, the interruption in 9.2in howitzers and 18 pounder recuperators being particularly serious.<sup>22</sup> Considerable delay was caused to the propelling machinery and mechanical hull fitting of light-cruisers, also to submarines under construction and rigid airships, whilst ship repair work was delayed.<sup>23</sup> Addison as Minister of Munitions made good propaganda from the delays informing the press that the June 1917 offensive depended on the strike being over.<sup>24</sup> *The Times* amongst other newspapers condemned the Barrow strike as revolutionary and unpatriotic.<sup>25</sup> The *Daily Herald* however took the view that the blame should be put on the employers, who despite the Munitions Acts had been rate-cutting.<sup>26</sup> The full facts were never reported and the rate-cutting always assumed. Therefore those responsible for providing the conditions which produced the strike were never censured.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, Thursday 29 March 1917, For resumption 218, Against 2,838

<sup>20</sup> *Western Daily Express*, Tuesday 3 April 1917; CAB 23/2/28, 2 April 1917, The Barrow Strike, a proclamation was made that if the men did not return within 24 hours the shop stewards who brought the men out would be arrested under DORA for impeding the production of war material

<sup>21</sup> *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, Saturday, 7 April 1917; *Hamilton Advertiser*, Saturday, 7 April 1917 a ballot for and against a conference with Vickers and a resumption of work was taken resulting in a majority of 373 in favour of a conference

<sup>22</sup> H of C Deb 03 April 1917 vol. 92 cc1110-2110; H of C Deb 20 March 1917 vol. 92 cc37-8; CAB 24/10/18, 11 April 1917, The Barrow Strike; OHMoM Vol VI *Manpower and Dilution*, Part I, Ch. III Dilution on Private Work, p.63, actual number were 2 12in., 5 9in., and 8 8in. howitzers, 12 18pdr carriages and 20 to 30 18pdr recuperators – 'Recuperator' was the British name for the mechanism which returned the gun barrel to its firing position after recoil

<sup>23</sup> CAB 24/11/23 Strikes: Their Effects on the Construction and Repairs of HM Ships, the launch of Submarine L1 was put back indefinitely

<sup>24</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, Tuesday, 15 March 1917

<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, Tuesday, 3 April 1917

<sup>26</sup> *Daily Herald*, Saturday, 31 March 1917

<sup>27</sup> Although the newspapers assumed there had been rate cutting it was serious enough for the workers to want the chief rate setter to be dismissed

In the subsequent settlement a successful scheme without interfering with production or control met some of the rate-fixing difficulties.<sup>28</sup> The terms arrived at included recognition of a Premium Bonus Basis time-rate and referring disputes to an appeal section, failing agreement the matter was submitted to the directors for decision.<sup>29</sup> This principle was applied elsewhere and approved by unions and employers while a new clause was introduced to the Ministry of War Act Bill.<sup>30</sup> The strike Hinton notes, represented the high point of shop steward power in Barrow.<sup>31</sup> However, while Barrow's tradition of rank-and-file independence was reinforced, at no point did agreement recognize the shop stewards, or allow access to higher management even by the committee specially elected to deal with the grievance.<sup>32</sup>

On 3 April 1917 the trade card scheme was abolished on the grounds that insufficient numbers of men were volunteering for the army. It was replaced by the Schedule of Protected Occupations, making exemptions the prerogative of the National Service Department narrowing the grounds for the exemption of skilled workers. The extension of conscription increased the shortage of skilled labour and on 29 April 1917 a Bill was introduced to spread dilution to private work. This broke the Treasury Agreement whereby skilled workers had agreed only to dilution on war work protected by legislative safeguards and ministerial promises. The disastrous dispute which followed was therefore in protest over the attempt to introduce dilution to private work, with the trade card as a secondary motive.<sup>33</sup> On 3 May, before the Dilution Bill was passed, a Rochdale firm began introducing dilutees into private work.<sup>34</sup> Though the Manchester district came out in support, extension of the

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<sup>28</sup> *Aberdeen Evening Express*, Friday, 27 April 1917

<sup>29</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post*, Friday, 27 April 1917, the terms were agreed to by 2,940 votes to 517

<sup>30</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Part I, The Control of Men's Wages, Ch. V Payment by Results, p.165, the Clause provided for the tightening of the machinery to prevent rate cutting

<sup>31</sup> Hinton, J., *The First Shop Stewards'*, p.200, as from 5 May the strike became operative against the trade card scheme as well

<sup>32</sup> ASE, Monthly Journal and Report, May 1917; Cole, G. D. H., *The Payment of Wage: a study in payment by results under the wage-system*, Trade Union Series No.5, (Westminster, 1918), pp. 137-40

<sup>33</sup> OHMoM Vol VI *Manpower and Dilution*, Part I, Ch. V Engineers Strike 1917, pp. 92-120, the trade card scheme, introduced after the November 1916 Sheffield strike, later replaced by the Schedule of Protected Occupations exempted craft union members from military service enraging other unions particularly those representing semi and unskilled workers and was responsible for preventing the Ministry from providing its quota for the Army – the engineers strike extended across the engineering sector involving 200,000 workers in 48 towns and cities causing 1,500,000 working days to be lost

<sup>34</sup> Horner, D., Mansfield, N., (eds.) *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) p.144, David Swift in his article says the strikes were responses to the irresistible pressure on living standards, the originating strike in Rochdale in fact was over the introduction of dilution to commercial work

strike swayed in the balance and while the ASE leaders explained the safeguards and spoke against the strike policy, the rank-and-file differed.<sup>35</sup>

As the engineers strike expanded efforts were made to bring the Barrow men out, but through indecision and small ballots they remained in work.<sup>36</sup> The strike call was never popular and numbers of workmen demonstrated their patriotism by signing forms against any cessation of work. Feeling was such that whole departments signified their unwillingness to accept the ballot recommendation of a stoppage.<sup>37</sup> The strike was on the verge of collapse when the ringleaders were arrested and would have ended had not the trade union's sympathy been largely with these men. This demonstrated that relationships between the shop stewards and the trade union leaders were not totally hostile.<sup>38</sup> The moderates who had hitherto succeeded in maintaining a precarious equilibrium at Barrow were swept aside and 6,000 men downed tools, only returning after the charges against the arrested men were withdrawn.<sup>39</sup> The Barrow shop stewards remained a threat to the Joint Board and in June led opposition to the Permanent Committees set up in the dilution agreement, but despite government fears no strike action resulted.<sup>40</sup> The July ballot in the ASE districts on whether dilution into private work should be introduced was heavily defeated, Addison resigned and Churchill succeeded him withdrawing the dilution clause from the Munitions Act Amendment Bill.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Barrow ASE Minute Book 13 June 1916 to 11 September 1917, BDSO 57/1/8, 29 April 1917, the Barrow ASE opposed anything in the way of compromise on the question of dilution in commercial engineering

<sup>36</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, Tuesday, 15 May 1917, the ballots were not a reflection of the true feeling as less than 2,000 engineers were affected less than a sixth of their number

<sup>37</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday 16 May 1917, patriotism was possibly further encouraged by the forthcoming visit of the King and Queen to Barrow on 17 May

<sup>38</sup> OHMoM Vol VI Manpower and Dilution, Part I, Ch. V Engineers Strike 1917, p.112 a ballot at Barrow on 12 May 1,128 voted for and 714 against striking, on 20 May 1,783 voted for and 218 against striking, three days later the result was reversed 1,808 against 1,164 for, the number voting as elsewhere was a small proportion of the men concerned; CAB 24/14/32 Report from the Ministry of Labour, Week Ending 22 May 1917, the Barrow strike was effected as a result of the arrest of the ringleaders followed by a meeting addressed by delegates from Sheffield and Manchester

<sup>39</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Friday, 18 May 1917, reported 43 howitzers and 30 carriages were delayed; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 22 May 1917, importantly labourers were allowed to work, otherwise would not receive out-of-work pay, previously when the joint engineering trades were out and labourers unemployed through no fault of their own they received some out of work money, it can be assumed this was the result of union funds being depleted following the March strike

<sup>40</sup> *ASE Monthly Journal and Report*, June 1917

<sup>41</sup> OHMoM Vol VI Manpower and Dilution, Part I, Ch. V Engineers Strike 1917, p.120, there was a majority of 37,906 against dilution

Following the Commission on Unrest in July 1917 the Barrow shop stewards turned to the conditions in the town to press their views of industrial and social reconstruction. After the 1917 summer holidays the position at Barrow was outwardly normal but restlessness started to increase, chiefly over the unsatisfactory 3s engineers award and the treatment of the Clyde deportees. Attempting to organise a general ASE strike for re-employment of the deportees, Arthur McManus claimed to have the support of the Barrow and Sheffield shop stewards provided the Clyde took the first step.<sup>42</sup> In September 1917 the chief subjects of resolutions at Barrow were the Billeting Act, income tax assessment and the support of the United Machine Workers to resist the further combing out of men for the military.<sup>43</sup>

The problem of housing remained and a decision by the Ministry of Munitions to construct houses was announced to defuse the unrest.<sup>44</sup> During October trouble between foremen and forewomen was resolved in favour of the former for which the shop stewards claimed responsibility, having offered to support the foremen in going as far as threatening a work stoppage.<sup>45</sup> The employment by Vickers of 40 non-union men attracted the shop stewards' attention in November with the threat of downing tools if they were not dismissed.<sup>46</sup> So strong and successful was the pressure applied by the unions during the war that of the 35,000 Vickers workers only 60 or 70 were non-unionists.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile 170 Furness Railway workshop craftsmen who were members of various trade societies came out over district pay rates and conditions, meaning those prevailing in the local munitions works.<sup>48</sup> Hoping Vickers men would come out in support, the men struck as engineers not railwaymen. With the backing of the shop stewards and the moral support of the shipyard trade unions, the government's fear was that the longer the strike continued the more likely the Vickers men were to join

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<sup>42</sup> CAB 24/21/94 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 1 August 1917

<sup>43</sup> CAB 24/27/39 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 26 September 1917

<sup>44</sup> Pepper, S., Swenarton, M., 'Home front: garden suburbs for munitions workers', *Architectural Review* (June 1978), pp. 163, 366, described the Ministry of Munitions housing programme as 'introduced to defuse the crisis as a matter of necessity rather than a welfare measure'

<sup>45</sup> CAB 24/27/39, Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 26 September 1917

<sup>46</sup> CAB/24/31/42 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 7 November 1917

<sup>47</sup> CAB 24/55/100 Labour Position in Munition Industries, 26 June 1918

<sup>48</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 31 December 1917

them.<sup>49</sup> The dispute was resolved locally and the craftsmen returned after ten days without Vickers coming out.

Barrows rank-and-file movement says Hinton was limited to a 'rebel element, composed of zealous and intelligent men'.<sup>50</sup> Failing to capture the Shop Steward Executive he says, they formed a Barrow Workers Committee which unlike on the Clyde and at Sheffield failed to seize a position of mass leadership. However the unrest commission report provides another view:

'men, some young and thoughtless, others young and thoughtful, and all infected by a spirit of revolt attempt to remedy their grievances and bring about better conditions by calling attention to their wrongs by methods of stoppages and strikes which interfere with munitions output.'<sup>51</sup>

Revolutionary views were not held by the mainly loyal and law-abiding Barrow community, while many of the extreme men were said to state their views with moderation.<sup>52</sup> The low turn outs often seen at ballots were usually representative of the younger element, while the majority of men had not sufficient active interest in strikes to vote for continuance. Hinton further points out that failure of workshop organisation to acquire negotiating rights at Vickers meant no 'unofficial' shop stewards organisation could rival the authority of the Joint Board unless the workers were on strike. In the absence of competition between local employers, craft unionism at Barrow had developed in an exceptional form, the one-to-one relationship between Vickers and the Board preventing full development of direct workshop democracy which had explosive results elsewhere. The capacity of the union to contain wartime militancy was therefore related to the overwhelming predominance of the dominant Vickers Company. Overall the Barrow atmosphere was patriotic while trade relations were generally harmonious. An investigation into shipbuilding during 1917 disclosed that trouble had been frequent on the Clyde and Tyne, occasionally serious on the Mersey and in Belfast, while rare at Barrow, Southampton, Hull and Dundee.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> CAB/24/35/52 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 12 December 1917

<sup>50</sup> Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards*, p.189

<sup>51</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest, No.2 Division North-West Area, Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness

<sup>52</sup> Vickers workers are often quoted as 'the steady majority'

<sup>53</sup> CAB 24/67/83 Report from the Minister of Labour for the Week Ending 13 March 1918

Simmonds maintains strikes provide clear evidence that in negotiating settlements with trade unions the Minister of Munitions failed to acknowledge the groundswell of rank-and-file opinion as voiced by the shop stewards.<sup>54</sup> The shops stewards' movement generally revolted against industrial conditions and a system of industrial control that required remedy. Agitation viewed as a whole was of a movement towards a more human standard of life and broader outlook for the working-classes. In essence the shop stewards movement was industrial and social and if workers could be convinced that the government was seeking remedies for the existing evils and finding solutions to future problems, then the need for repression and likelihood of revolution would disappear.<sup>55</sup>

Without government action moderate men were likely to turn to causes they had no real belief in, but it was realised that with legitimate recognition of the shop stewards' movement the workman would have a voice regarding his employment.<sup>56</sup> This could be achieved by works committees which would fit into the labour machine without dislocating the existing mechanism. Although it was not expected unrest could be allayed by these committees, grounds existed for thinking they would do much towards mitigating it. The Ministry of Labour believed that while the functions and constitution of works committees varied, they were the direct representatives of the shop floor workers and approved by the Trade Unions concerned.<sup>57</sup> They could also produce good results, for not only did the workers feel their troubles would be properly put forward by their representatives, but in electing them they would generally choose responsible men. In reference to this the Commission on Unrest drew attention to the agreement between Vickers and representatives of the Barrow Engineers Joint Committee for the procedure observed over the adjustment of the Premium Bonus Basis times.<sup>58</sup>

In late November 1917, a strike occurred at a Coventry firm over the recognition of shop stewards. The Engineering Employers Federation refused to meet

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<sup>54</sup> Simmonds, A. G. V., *Britain and World War 1*, (London, Routledge, 2012), p.114

<sup>55</sup> CAB 24/14/97 The Growth of the Shop Steward Movement, 31 May 1917

<sup>56</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. I The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. II Relations with Labour, p.32

<sup>57</sup> CAB 24/14/97 The Growth of the Shop Stewards Movement, 31 May 1917 notes at Vickers (Barrow) a Workshop Committee approved by the Trade Unions had been set up to represent workers

<sup>58</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest

the local shop stewards contending the problem was a national one which could only be dealt with at the forthcoming conference of employers and trade union officials.<sup>59</sup> The conference was of huge importance, as it affected the position and powers of the employers and the trade unions of engineering workshops throughout the country. Although they were aware of the shop stewards' encroachments, the engineering trade unions had generally avoided facing the question of their recognition as they were largely the root cause of industrial unrest. But as demonstrated, without recognition a strike could break out wherever the engineering shop stewards were powerful.<sup>60</sup> Although the ASE was not party to the final agreement it was signed by the employers and remaining engineering trade unions.<sup>61</sup> While agreement provided for the appointment of workers' shop floor representatives as part of a 'limited' trade union organisation they were subject to selection and control by the remaining unions. In view of the unrest and to address existing grievances and prevent the existence of others a Commission on Unrest was formed in the summer of 1917.

### **The Commission on Unrest**

On 12 June, 1917 the Prime Minister appointed 24 Commissioners to enquire into and report on industrial unrest and make recommendations to the Government. Conditions were such that the Commissioners of the North-West Area submitted a separate report for Barrow after taking evidence in July.<sup>62</sup> In an extraordinary censure of bureaucratic procrastination and ineptitude position at Barrow was described as 'a crying scandal', constituting a terrible indictment against rulers and governors. The Commission commented 'for the fact Barrow lies in an isolated position and it is inadvisable to inform the public through the Press of the evils of industrial life, we cannot believe the facts set down could so long have remained actual conditions of domestic life in England during the twentieth century'.<sup>63</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*

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<sup>59</sup> CAB/24/34/86, Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 5 December 1917, sympathetic strikes seemed certain in the Midlands while George Peet of the Manchester shop stewards issued a circular to Sheffield and Barrow among other centres calling on support for Coventry, Peet was Secretary of the Shop Stewards National Amalgamation Committee of which Parkinson and Sharpe of Barrow were key members

<sup>60</sup> CAB 24/35/52 The Labour Situation (The Shop Stewards Movement), notably Barrow, Manchester, Sheffield and the Clyde

<sup>61</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Monday 24 December 1917

<sup>62</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 11 July 1917

<sup>63</sup> Drake, B., *Women in Engineering Trades: Trades Union Series No.3*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1918), p.76

reported: 'in attracting such attention it meant the question of Barrow had become a national question to be answered by the Government.'<sup>64</sup>

The Commissioner pointed out that central government regulation did not work at Barrow and should be suspended; alternatively common-sense methods when dealing with unrest did. Although local officials were inspired to do their best in the circumstances, and likewise in London, evidence showed they were hampered by London officials ignorant of Barrow's conditions and possibilities. Fault thus lay with the centralisation of those with the power to put things right, yet they had largely ignored the conditions at Barrow.<sup>65</sup> The local Ministry of Munitions and Admiralty Representatives however were praised by the Commission for the work carried out in maintaining industrial wellbeing through their own initiatives.

The operation of the Military Service and Munitions of War Acts were cause for complaint. Skilled workers were called for but many were with the colours and the feeling was that the War Office should be approached with a view to discharging them.<sup>66</sup> The feeling was that those who had come into industry since the war began should be called up before those who were in when war was declared. It was alleged where men had returned to the engine shops they had been unfairly treated and too many pledges had been broken. It had become necessary after the start of the war to convince workpeople, as endorsed by Kitchener, that they were doing National Service by remaining in the workshops. This was remembered and dwelt on by men who regarded such messages as promises for all time, even if conditions had changed.

Much unrest the Commissioners said was caused by the leaving certificate which had brought about suffering amongst men who could not improve their position but had assisted employers. While the leaving certificates demise came about in October 1917 the outcome was they were replaced by new restrictive rules and regulations that mainly relieved the Munitions Tribunals of a large part of their work.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Friday, 31 August 1917

<sup>65</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest, No.2 Division North-West Area, Supplementary Report for Barrow-in-Furness

<sup>66</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 12 July 1917

<sup>67</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. I Munitions of War Act, 1917, p.13, sudden dislocation was provided against by making a week's notice on each side compulsory, and prohibiting movement of labour from munitions to private work without the Minister's consent; an arrangement was made by which any man of military age unemployed for more than fourteen days was liable to be called up unless proving reasonable cause for unemployment; H of C Deb 26 November 1917 vol. 99 c1624, there was a tendency for some men to use their freedom as a lever for securing higher wages, while numbers of



Complaints were made to the Barrow Commission by skilled day time-workers that their wages were much below those of piece-workers.<sup>68</sup> Abolition of the leaving certificate made it necessary to readjust skilled time-workers' wages, otherwise they would have moved to more highly paid though in many cases less skilled repetition piece-work with the consequence of disorganising munitions work. In preventing the movement of skilled time-workers a 12½ per cent advance was awarded, but it was foreseen the settlement would lead to requests from semi-skilled and unskilled time-workers. The drawing up of an order, extended the bonus to these workers in both the engineering and shipbuilding trades.<sup>69</sup> Piece-workers now found they no longer had an advantage over time-workers regarding earnings and so a 7½ per cent award was announced.<sup>70</sup> The piecemeal manner in which the awards were granted increased unrest, which only ceased when the awards were extended to the limits of their application. It is arguable that the Schedule of Protected Occupations would have afforded safeguard against the migration of skilled time-workers to semi-skilled work, even if the 12½ per cent award had not been granted. What is clear, is that Churchill's Orders proved expensive as the preliminary estimate of increased wages was £14,500,000.<sup>71</sup>

It was realised men and women were tired, long hours of strain in the factory, lack of holidays, overcrowded housing and lodgings deprived of comfort, unpalatable food obtained by waiting in queues, limited amusement and recreation, bereavement and return of the wounded all produced a nervous irritability. Long hours had been worked for some time and in many cases carried out by older or less fit men, while more difficult work than had previously carried out was undertaken by women and

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firms were offering inducements to workmen to leave their employment, the MoM had the power to embargo employment of additional labour by any firm attempting to upset the labour position by poaching

<sup>68</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. II Relations with Labour, pp. 27-31; H of C Deb 26 November 1917 vol. 99 c1624, stated considerable movement had taken place in certain skilled occupations, more especially tool room men

<sup>69</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest, No.2 Division North-West Area, Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness

<sup>70</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. II Relations with Labour, p.29

<sup>71</sup> H of C Deb 28 November 1917 vol. 99 cc2011-5

girls.<sup>72</sup> Although a general limitation of working hours was under consideration during the summer and autumn 1917, no large scale action taken until 1918.<sup>73</sup>

The unrest commission noted that the isolated position of Barrow made the question of food prices a very acute one. Concerning the food supply, the engineers engaged in the production of munitions were in the commissions view worthy of similar sympathy in the matter as given to the Army in the field. The recommendation was that Barrow should have a Civil Administrator with the full power to deal with the question of the food supply. While Barrow did not suffer acute distress, the importance of economising on food led to a tentative experiment being carried out in the Hindpool district.<sup>74</sup> The experiment met the demand of a considerable number of people in supplying porridge breakfasts at cost price, significantly reducing the consumption of bread, the staple diet of most working-class families.<sup>75</sup> The scheme was observed by the Food Economy Committee (FEC) and while throughout the summer months there was reduced demand for porridge, the provision of soup etc. was seen as a large scale possibility later.<sup>76</sup> By August 1917 the result of food shortages at Barrow became such that landladies declined to board further lodgers and after charging per head those already in lodgings for the share in the use of a bed left them to feed themselves.<sup>77</sup> With the Billeting Board seeking lodgings for workers, the food question along with rail transport restrictions hardly made their task any easier. Things were no better in January 1918 when workers experienced difficulty in obtaining sufficient food to carry out their work, while landladies were on the point of giving notice to their lodgers.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. III The Control of Working Conditions, Ch. VI The Control of Hours of Labour, 1916-1919, p.117, 6,000 men and a few women were working Sundays in February 1917. The previous November some 11,000 men from the engineering works and 1,381 women were working 12 hours weekly overtime continually for many months. Previous to the March strike Barrow engineers were working on average 13½ hours above the normal 53 hours in the shipyard and engineering department, men in the two branches numbering 3,600 and 12,000 respectively

<sup>73</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Relations with Labour 1917, p.26

<sup>74</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 14 July 1917, possibly started by the Labour Party

<sup>75</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 23 June 1917, the principle that State funds should be used to supply bread at a price low enough for the poor to buy bread was accepted by the Food Controller

<sup>76</sup> School Medical Officer's Report, 1912, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow, the School Medical Officer saw old fashioned oat-meal porridge as a bone and muscle former in children

<sup>77</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 29 August 1917

<sup>78</sup> CAB 24/40/42 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 23 January 1918

The industrial unrest committee pointed to a deep-rooted suspicion of profiteering as a primary cause of discontent at Barrow. Giving evidence, Councillor Ellison stated 'the food question had been badly handled by the Government and people had not been protected from unscrupulous profiteers'.<sup>79</sup> Fish arriving by the harbour or rail was being cornered and sold by individuals at high prices and instead of vegetables being brought to market from the neighbouring area and sold at reasonable prices they were being privately exploited and sold at unreasonable prices.<sup>80</sup> It was recommended by the commission that the Food Controller should stop food exploitation in Barrow immediately, as owing to Barrow's peculiar position it should be just as easy for him to control the supplies as it was for the profiteers.

A Barrow union representative pointed out that food prices were rising so high that if the engineers made a united stand and forced a reduction, not only would they benefit themselves by the equivalent of a wage advance, but benefit the public including soldiers' dependents.<sup>81</sup> Hinton notes that the Barrow Workers Committee when discussing whether their delegates at the national shop stewards conference should support strike action over wages, urged and agreed food prices should be attacked and the wage question left alone.<sup>82</sup> Worries over industrial unrest became such that the Government introduced a price subsidy for bread in September 1917 and fixed the wholesale price of meat.<sup>83</sup>

Frustrated with waiting for a ministry scheme, Barrow Council established a Food Control Committee (FCC) in September 1917.<sup>84</sup> The final composition of the committee consisted of eight members of the Corporation (one from each ward), one representative each of the Chamber of Trade, Cooperative Society, Trades and Labour Council, and General Federation of Women Workers, the Mayor as Chairman, and a

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<sup>79</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 11 July 1917

<sup>80</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest, No.2 Division North-West Area, Supplementary Report for Barrow-in-Furness

<sup>81</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, Monday, 3 September 1917; CAB 24/29/81 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 24 October 1917

<sup>82</sup> CAB 24/31/42 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week ending 7 November 1917; Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards'*, p.237

<sup>83</sup> Bowley, A. L., *Prices and Wages in the United Kingdom 1914-1920*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1921), p.52

<sup>84</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 20 September 1917, initially the FCC consisted of four members of the Council, four ladies nominated by the Council, one representative of the Barrow Chamber of Trade, Barrow Cooperative Society, Barrow Trades and Labour Council, and General Federation of Women Workers, a District Executive Officer was added later

District Executive Officer or food controller for the district.<sup>85</sup> Their job was to supervise the registration of consumers, distribute local foodstuffs, set retail food prices and institute municipal food services.<sup>86</sup> The weekly food allowances however, were not to exceed the maximum limits laid down by the Government Food Controller. Importantly the FCC had the power to try and fine cases of profiteering coming before them. The Committee were in fact an extension of the local authority, for example when the FCC asked the Council to consider the use of communal kitchens, they deemed them unnecessary.<sup>87</sup> Instead of the country being covered by *ad hoc* municipal schemes, in December 1917, the Food Controller chose to use the local authority apparatus to implement the Food Control Committees (Local) Distribution Order.<sup>88</sup>

The responsibility for advising the FCC on milk retail prices was the Barrow Milk Dealers Protection Society, but wholesale prices until the Milk Order was introduced were fixed by the farmer, increasing as production and distribution costs rose.<sup>89</sup> Wholesale milk prices became of such concern that the Barrow trade unions wrote to the Food Controller complaining that increases were causing discontent and adding to their problems.<sup>90</sup> Economic use of milk was not ideal either and it was not realised that 90 gallons had been used for ice-cream making.<sup>91</sup> In early December 1917 a further rise in the price caused a deputation to visit London to meet representatives of the Food Ministry and discuss Barrow's milk. The visit was hardly successful as the representatives were told the measures taken to ensure continuity of the milk supply was wise and the ice-cream matter would be addressed to ensure sugar and milk were used more efficiently.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 5 January 1918, Barrow had three district food controllers in a very short period

<sup>86</sup> Barrow Minutes of Council and Committees November 1916 to October 1917, General Purpose Committee 24 August 1917

<sup>87</sup> Barrow Minutes of Council and Committees October 1917 to November 1918, General Purpose Committee 30 November 1917, provision of food via a central municipal kitchen would have eliminated waste in preparation, reduced coal consumption and saved labour

<sup>88</sup> Simmonds, Britain and *World War One*, p.214

<sup>89</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 3 July 1917

<sup>90</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday 27 September 1918; *Daily Herald*, Saturday, 2 February 1918, Mrs Mills, Barrow NFWW pointed out at the Labour Conference 'what is the use of the FCC saying a milkman can sell milk at a certain price if he is unable to buy it at that price', *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 18 August 1918 even under the Milk Order farmers were selling their milk to retailers above the Government price, 18 cases appearing before the Barrow FCC

<sup>91</sup> Barrow National Services Tribunal, Wednesday, 12 December 1917

<sup>92</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 15 December 1917

One of the causes of the rise was transit costs, some 7,000 gallons being brought into Barrow weekly by rail from the Cumberland, North Lonsdale and Lancaster districts.<sup>93</sup> However the supply could be variable, when 2,000 people were left short in September 1917 it was blamed on farming system changes and the summer drought preventing grass growing for dairy cattle.<sup>94</sup> Distribution however was prioritised so that less milk went to people without families to provide more for those with children.<sup>95</sup> The distribution system was not helped by the call-up of Barrow dairymen. When sixteen dairymen appeared before the Military Tribunal asking for exemptions, the verdict was that the distribution system should be improved to allow them to be released for the army.<sup>96</sup>

Before the Milk Order came into force farmers arranged with milk retailers to obtain high prices so there was less need to make butter. To alleviate the shortages Barrow dealers travelled to Kendal and bought wholesale butter and other produce causing unrest amongst working-class women. Kendal FCC responded by increasing the retail price to encourage farmers to bring their butter to the weekly-market instead of disposing it to dealers from Barrow and elsewhere.<sup>97</sup> Shortages at Barrow continued causing queues for butter and margarine. About 1 ton of margarine over the amount received in normal times was arriving at Barrow but there was still a shortage of 2,000lb per week.<sup>98</sup> The problem was largely surmounted by controlling distribution to retailers and by the amounts that could be purchased as set by the FCC.<sup>99</sup> Though the Barrow shop stewards threatened a one-day strike in protest against queues and inadequate supplies their views were put before the FCC and sympathetically met with, the stewards opting to support any action taken by the Committee.<sup>100</sup> In November 1917 the publication of the new authorised scale for

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<sup>93</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 3 December 1917

<sup>94</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 5 September 1917,

<sup>95</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 13 December 1917

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday 8 December 1917

<sup>98</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 22 December 1917; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 5 January 1918 it took 9 tons of margarine or butter to supply Barrow each week

<sup>99</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 11 October 1917, Barrow Cooperative Society was allowed to sell half a pound (8oz.) of butter but not a pound (16oz.) unless £1 was spent on other goods; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 5 January 1918, reported that the queues were less after the FCC had distributed a large amount of margarine to certain dealers on the condition they sold it so that no person received more than 4oz a week

<sup>100</sup> CAB 24/32/39 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 14 November 1917 and 19 December 1917

voluntary rationing was welcomed at Woolwich and Barrow.<sup>101</sup> The Ministry of Labour Report noted that the extremist shop stewards had responded at once to the calls made upon them by the Food Controller.<sup>102</sup> This was a positive step however there were still concerns over the food question. In looking to unite the workers to produce a strike and demonstrate their power Arthur McManus travelled to Barrow in December 1917. In a speech given to the Barrow workers he exhorted them not to raise deputations on the food matter to the Government, but wait until they could act together nationally to force the issue.<sup>103</sup> However, timely recognition of the shop stewards as a part of the trade union machinery had satisfied the reasonable element preventing them being drawn to the extremists leaders.

Both shop stewards and women became active in setting up food vigilance committees in the Barrow wards for the purpose of focussing working-class demands in connection with the food supply and stimulating government and municipal activity.<sup>104</sup> During early January 1918 a meeting was held at Barrow Town Hall where several shop stewards gave an address calling for fairer food distribution.<sup>105</sup> A further meeting demanded increased food supplies while calling for the necessities of life to be sent by passenger trains at goods rates due to the transport breakdown.<sup>106</sup> Resolutions were passed urging the Government to take control of farming and distribution and for Barrow to become a proscribed area from which no foodstuffs sent to the town should be allowed to other districts.

Even before the introduction of compulsory rationing, the Barrow FCC had asked retail grocers to furnish particulars regarding the issuing of ration cards for basic provisions to prevent second buying. A further meeting followed to promote the

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<sup>101</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 18 October 1917, the weekly allowance was for bread including cakes, puddings etc. 4lbs; meat including bacon, ham, sausages, game, rabbits, poultry and tinned meat 2½lbs; Sugar 12oz

<sup>102</sup> CAB 24/33/16 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 21 November 1917; H of C Deb 7 March 1917, vol. 91 c367 - Voluntary Rationing, following the start of the U-boat campaign voluntary ration was introduced by the Government in February, the response showed an increasing disposition on the part of the public to accept the voluntary rationing scale indicated in the Food Controller's appeal; *Manchester Evening News*, Saturday, 24 February 1917 for the first time no potatoes were seen at Barrow market, this was not due to a shortage but scarcity of labour in the area to unearth them

<sup>103</sup> CAB 24/36/62 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 19 December 1917, while the Clyde Workers Committee provided the model for other urban organisations, its language was syndicalist, but its practice was not, in that it sought to link the industrial struggle based on the shop stewards with wider community campaigns such as the food question

<sup>104</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 18 May 1917

<sup>105</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday, 11 January 1918

<sup>106</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 21 January 1918

ration card with the intention of approving it for issue in February.<sup>107</sup> On 30 January the War Cabinet finally approved the Order for National compulsory rationing based on a 'scale of rations' covering bread and flour, butter, margarine and lard and sugar.<sup>108</sup> The shortage of sugar and its unequal distribution was a grievance in Barrow and had caused sugar registration forms to be issued in 1917.<sup>109</sup> Bread rationing was never enforced but butter, and margarine were limited to 4ozs and lard to 2oz.<sup>110</sup>

While there was a beef scarcity in Barrow it was made up by the supply of mutton.<sup>111</sup> The Ministry Order restraining the selling meat over Christmas 1917 meant that only 40 pigs were slaughtered at the Barrow public abattoirs against 400 during the corresponding period the previous year. The Barrow Butchers Association pointed out that owners in cottages were slaughtering pigs and selling the pork to neighbours and others, and asked the FCC to ensure that the commodity was sold through the butchers shops.<sup>112</sup> The matter was referred to the Meat Sub-Committee. Meat rationing was introduced by the Government in February 1918 and allocated on the basis of monetary value rather than weight. Those employed on heavy industrial work received supplementary rations of bacon, whilst others received extra meat in relation to wholesale supplies. Children aged under six were allowed 50 per cent of the adult allocations. Food saving was also taken to the population when a week's patriotic food economy exhibition was organised by the local FEC.<sup>113</sup> Mrs. Myles Kennedy opening the Barrow exhibition condescendingly said:

'she had not come from the Government to ask them to eat less, but eat enough to do their arduous and essential work, and still play the game, avoiding excesses ensuring nothing was wasted'.

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<sup>107</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 24 January 1918

<sup>108</sup> DeGroot, G. J., *British Society in the Era of the Great War*, (London, Longman, 1996), p.87 between February and June 1917 some 85,000 tons of sugar was lost, at one stage the nations supply was reduced to four days';

<sup>109</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 29 November 1917, the number of claimants was 77,000, this figure is suspicious as in cases of large families it was found claims were vastly exaggerated

<sup>110</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Thursday, 18 October 1917, Barrow Cooperative bakers were producing approximately 100,000 2lb. loaves, a week a variable total that could be much larger; Gazeley, I., Newell, A., *The First World War and Working-Class Food Consumption in Britain*, Discussion Paper No. 5297, (University of Sussex, November, 2010), butter and margarine was rationed at 4oz., until June 1918 when the allowance increased to 5oz

<sup>111</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 19 January 1918, the local food committee endeavoured to get frozen beef released by the Government

<sup>112</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Saturday, 22 December 1917

<sup>113</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 6 February 1918

To obtain representation on the local FCC the shop stewards and food vigilance committee ran four members for the Barrow Cooperative Society Committee, of which all were returned, one heading the poll.<sup>114</sup> At the end of March 1918 the council acceded to the request of the FCC to increase its membership by including representatives of the Grocer's and Butchers Association and the shop stewards.<sup>115</sup> Thus by representation of the different societies on the various committees the matter of providing food equitably and at affordable prices was achieved for Barrow's working-classes. By the end of April 1918 the Barrow landladies were able to obtain the commodities needed for lodgers preventing them giving notice.

Allotments were also an important food source and any vacant cultivatable land in the borough was used.<sup>116</sup> When the Agricultural Board suggested land in the borough should come under the County Agricultural Executive Committee, Barrow Corporation were adamant that land issues would be dealt with by its own committee.<sup>117</sup>

Use of wheat, barley and sugar in the production of alcoholic drinks was criticised, as essentially the German submarine campaign produced both a food and drink problem. This was the start of a fraught relationship between the CCB and the Ministry of Food, which had encroached on the Board's territory. In April 1916 the Government passed the Output of Beer Restrictions Act, the first in an extensive period of reform concerning restriction of foodstuffs in drink.<sup>118</sup> Further limitations were placed on beer production and spirits by the Food Controller in January 1917, a policy regarded to cause 'hardly less unrest than total prohibition.'<sup>119</sup> The restricted amounts of beer on sale were totally inadequate to meet the requirements of the public as evidenced by 'ale sold out notices' in licensed premises. Fears grew about the sanctity of the working man's pint, the *Daily Express* prophesying 'the pint

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<sup>114</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, Monday, 28 January 1918

<sup>115</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 26 March 1918

<sup>116</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday 7 May 1918, there were 425 allotments in 1917 which had increased to 630 by May 1918 covering 170 acres, by summer 1919 there were over 1,000 allotments in the borough, when land was needed for new houses, allotment holders were moved to other suitable sites

<sup>117</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 5 September 1917, this was in the interest of increasing food production and was but it was not compulsory to come under the extended powers of the county committee

<sup>118</sup> Shadwell, A., *Drink in 1914-1922, A Lesson in Control*, (London, Longmans Green and Company, 1923), p.83

<sup>119</sup> Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots, The Drink Crisis in Britain During World War One*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.188



measure would soon disappear'.<sup>120</sup> There were complaints about the amount of beer coming into Barrow, it being the same or less than before the war. The town's public-houses were virtually closed. However the unrest committee pointed out that favoured customers were entering the back door drinking their own share and more, and where beer was available profiteering was taking place.

The difficulty in the liquor trade in Barrow was that government had shown little interest in the locality and its needs and the working-classes who needed beer were never sufficiently consulted. It was after all the Barrow licensing justices who understood the town's interests. Although control of the drink trade was intended as a contribution to national efficiency, opinion abounded that beer was necessary for work especially for blast-furnacemen, and when required men should be allowed such a luxury. Barrow being an industrial town the Unrest Commission recommended that it should have a more liberal allowance. Restrictions were regarded not as the cause for unrest but a loss of temper for many beer was not just a beverage but a national institution. One temperate Barrow man said: 'I have yet to taste my first pint, but it is a great hardship that my mates who desire it cannot get it.'<sup>121</sup> Matters were not helped by the hot 1917 summer accentuating the shortages and in July the Government allowed the brewing of a third more beer in return for brewers producing a lighter beer.<sup>122</sup> The CCB view was that the lighter beer, which was stronger than government beer, would check the increased consumption of spirits in munitions areas, a habit spreading amongst workers and women.<sup>123</sup>

The shortage dragged on into 1918 and loss of temper turned to action when men invaded a Barrow public house threatening to help themselves unless served immediately.<sup>124</sup> It was suggested a card system for men engaged on furnaces, smelting and similar work to introduce should be introduced and at the steelworks it was proposed to distribute beer through a canteen. In early June, organised labour

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<sup>120</sup> *Daily Express*, Wednesday, 10 October 1917

<sup>121</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Inquiry into Unrest No.2 Division North-West Area, Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness

<sup>122</sup> Collier, F., *A State Trading Adventure*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1925), p.134, twenty per cent of the increase was to be directly allocated to brewers who agreed to brew half their output below a gravity of 1036°, this beer was given direct to workers in munitions areas; Vernon, H. M., *The Alcohol Problem*, (London, Balliere, Tindall and Cox, 1928), p.89, to eke out the beer supply it was brewed at lower gravity, eventually the average gravity of all beer was not to exceed 1030°

<sup>123</sup> *Derby Telegraph*, Thursday 4 October 1917

<sup>124</sup> CAB 24/51/48, Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 15 May 1918

was called on to partake in the settlement of the supply of beer to workmen and others. At a conference presided over by the mayor in which the Barrow Labour Party took a prominent role it was agreed there should be uniformity in supply, hours of opening and closing and pricing. Forms were issued and an inquiry office opened with a view to getting census and ideas of requirements. It was proposed to introduce a beer rationing scheme to secure fair distribution, each workmen being issued with a registration card allowing him three pints a day.<sup>125</sup> The scheme was a failure and to obtain the ration at one public house was unpopular, so the old conditions resumed and the little beer available went to first comers.<sup>126</sup> Better timekeeping in the munitions works was seen, and the greater sobriety led the Barrow Chief Constable to conclude that it was not entirely due to CCB restrictions, but the quantities available.<sup>127</sup> There were however a few licensees who opened their premises on Saturday evenings just to alleviate overcrowding. Charles Duncan believed that if proper housing was provided there would be no need for men to visit public-houses.<sup>128</sup>

### **Overcrowding and evictions**

Vickers employers by June 1917 numbered some 35,000, nearly double the pre-war strength. Of these 6,596 men and 2,647 women had been imported and over 5,000 came by workers trains from towns and other small places within a 20 miles radius.<sup>129</sup> The provision of suitable facilities for the transport of munition workers was therefore important in the solution of the housing difficulties, the unrest commission received complaints about the deficiency of the railway system, little or no improvement being seen.<sup>130</sup> The Barrow tramways and omnibuses saw little

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<sup>125</sup> BDSO 85/1/4 Barrow Working Men's Club and Institute, at the end of June 1917 the club held a meeting on the advisability of issuing tickets restricting the supply of beer, stout, and spirits, the intention was to serve two drinks a day to all members also to those members on active service, the 1916 membership was 555

<sup>126</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Saturday, 6 July 1918, it transpired that only about 6,000 registration cards were rationed-out of 30,000

<sup>127</sup> *North West Evening Mail*, Saturday, 2 February 1918; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 8 February 1919, noted the Barrow Chief Constables report stated that convictions of drunkenness since 1914 had fallen by nearly 70 per cent

<sup>128</sup> Carter, H., *The Control of the Drink Trade: A Contribution to National Efficiency 1915-1917*, (London, Longman, Green and Co., 1918), pp. 72-73

<sup>129</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V The Provisions of Canteens in Munitions Factories, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems, Barrow, p.46; CAB 24/33/16 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending, 21 November 1917

<sup>130</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 21 January 1918, due to the transport breakdown the shop stewards called for the necessities of life to be sent by passenger trains at goods rates

improvement. In May 1917 licences were renewed and granted for twenty-six tramcars and it was recommended they be granted for six motor-buses, four to be used regularly with two standby.<sup>131</sup> Although improvements were agreed to carry out extensions and alterations to the tram depot, the owners warned fewer cars would be run owing to further staff decreases.<sup>132</sup> The trams and infrastructure were in such poor condition that some standards having to be filled with concrete. Such deterioration caused the Secretary of the Engineering Trades Council to write to Barrow Council calling their attention to the 'deplorable' condition of the tram service and asking for steps to be taken to improve matters.<sup>133</sup>

The unrest commission heard evidence from all classes on the overcrowded condition of the town's housing. Joy says council records on wartime overcrowding are sparse, but disclose they could only 'get an idea' from figures obtained from Sanitary Inspectors' random checks, with the admission that only a census would provide comprehensive figures.<sup>134</sup> Information about wartime overcrowding levels is therefore patchy, however with the council being short staffed this is understandable. One surviving but undated report from the war years recorded that there was no overcrowding in the town's tenement blocks.<sup>135</sup> A further file dated June and July 1917, no doubt stimulated by the unrest commission examined overcrowding in four Hindpool streets (Table 12).<sup>136</sup> Hindpool was identified as having high-density working-class accommodation and the poorest area of Barrow, its dwellings were described as sub-standard, badly designed and poorly maintained.

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<sup>131</sup> Barrow Council Committee Minutes, 14 May 1917, Barrow Records Office, there were 52 licenced tram drivers and 46 conductors amongst which were women

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p.25

<sup>133</sup> Barrow Council Committee Minutes, 2 September 1918

<sup>134</sup> Joy, C. A. *War and Unemployment in an Industrial Community, Barrow-in-Furness 1914-1926*, Uclan PhD Thesis p.62 little is revealed of housing conditions in the borough and demonstrates the Corporation's poor recording procedures and emphasises problems arising from local statistics; Housing Statistics 1914-1921, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/H BOX II

<sup>135</sup> Housing Statistics 1914-1921, CRO, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/H BOX II

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

Street	No. of Houses	With two or more families	With Lodgers	No. of Bedrooms
Melbourne	72	8	34	3
Adelaide	35	8	15	3
Exmouth	48	1	10	2 and 3
Howe	54	3	26	3

**Table 12 - Corporation Estimate of Wartime Overcrowding 1917**

While providing statistical details, the report fails to provide any meaningful correlation of the figures with regard to the level of overcrowding in these properties. However, the report does list some individual examples, the worst being the conditions at 49 Melbourne Street where 12 adults and seven children were living.

Year	Number of Houses and Flats	Population	Average Nos.
	31 March	31 December	Per House
1912	12,902	65,257	5.06
1913	13,259	68,523	5.17
1914	13,626	75,368	5.53
1915	13,983	79,206	5.66
1916	14,588	85,179	5.83
1917	14,791	85,048	5.75

**Table 13 - Barrow Housing 1912-1917**

Table 13 provides accommodation and population figures allowing average numbers per house to be calculated but does not provide meaningful information regarding overcrowding. Therefore we are left with the evidence of the commission which commented: 'no decent person who understands the condition of housing in Barrow could do anything but condemn them'.<sup>137</sup> Their report detailed nine persons living in one room and sixteen in one small house, while a family of a man, wife, two adolescents and two children were subletting a bedroom of 12 feet.

<sup>137</sup> CAB 24/23/59 Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest - Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness District

Whilst many contemporaries blame the tenant for housing conditions, poorly maintained houses were common, and oral evidence reveals many landlords avoided repairs and had no contact with their tenants.<sup>138</sup> House-ownership networks included some local Councillors who owned and let a string of properties, among these only Councillor Dockeray was accredited with frequent repairs, whilst doctors were listed among the worst offenders owning 'some horrible houses'.<sup>139</sup> The most commonly requested repairs were minor but even these were avoided by a majority of landlords, thus a common complaint was tenants found themselves 'paying money and getting nothing'.<sup>140</sup> In the landlords defence joiners, plumbers, plasters and painters were by the end of 1917 mainly in the military or on work of national importance.<sup>141</sup> Schools were also affected. The Operative House and Ship Painters and Decorators Secretary suggested that painting should be deferred until winter owing to the shortage of staff through men being called up.<sup>142</sup> It was doubtful whether the work could be carried out caused by the pressure of work and with half the staff. It was agreed that the greater portion of the work was external, this was cut down to a minimum and the internal work deferred until winter.

Although Hindpool was seen as the poorest area, poverty was spread across the borough with a mix of income groups in all housing areas, an unusual situation unlike Vickerstown where skilled and unskilled lived in segregated housing and paid fixed rents. Elizabeth Roberts offers further evidence of overcrowding, saying where overcrowding existed whole families were packed together in single rooms where they lived and slept for which exorbitant prices were charged.<sup>143</sup> Surprisingly Vickerstown saw overcrowding as one newspaper reported: 'in Latona Street six men lodgers slept in a room, the three beds filled the room such that they had to put their belongings

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<sup>138</sup> *Social History of Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster 1880-1930*, E. Roberts Collection, Lancaster University, respondent M1B, 77

<sup>139</sup> *Social History*, M8B, 19-20

<sup>140</sup> Barrow Minutes of Councils and Committees, November 1916 to October 1917, 4 July 1917, when 2,224 Hindpool houses were inspected, 369 defective items of plumbing were found and owners served with notices, but work was slow due to a shortage of plumbers

<sup>141</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 1 November 1917, the Munitions Tribunal Advisory Committee recommended that no further joiners be taken for the Army; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 29 November 1917, reported a shortage of plumbers, it stated that masters and men in Barrow numbered two dozen for a population of 76,000

<sup>142</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 18 July 1917

<sup>143</sup> Roberts, E., *Working Class Standards of Living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914*, *Economic History Review*, Issue 2, Vol. 30 (May, 1977), p.318

under their beds while in the adjoining room was a man, his wife and four children'.<sup>144</sup> Mobility of labour in Barrow meant there was no power to make a person stay in a room for 5s if they preferred half a bed at 2s 6d.<sup>145</sup> People heaped themselves up unless restrained by force, cellars, attics, kitchens, caravans and railway carriages were all inhabited and any family arriving in Barrow was lucky to have the use of two rooms. The Barrow Medical Officer of Health only served notices in cases of gross overcrowding, many cases were thus overlooked on account of war conditions which under normal circumstances would have been dealt with.<sup>146</sup>

The housing shortage kept rent levels high, and stimulated working-class house-ownership, largely among skilled craftsmen, some of whom became landlords in their own right, letting a string of houses.<sup>147</sup> Although the Rent Restrictions Act froze rents and banned evictions, this was not extended to lodgings and an owner was able to take possession of the property, occupy a couple of rooms and let the rest. There was a growing body of opinion that the law was operating unfairly in Barrow 'people were buying houses to obtain possession and defeating the objects for which the law was brought into effect.'<sup>148</sup> The existing state of affairs were not made easier by the rental disparities for similar classes of houses. These disparities were a source of irritation and discontent arising from the fact that legislature decreed rents up to certain specified amounts could not be increased beyond the pre-war figure. Restriction however did not apply to houses erected since the outbreak of war and so the anomaly existed of identical houses being let in the same district at different rentals.

It should be mentioned that company housing was not exempt from ejectments as the proprietors of Vickerstown houses on at least two occasions requested orders.<sup>149</sup> Also as previously mentioned the Barrow iron and steel works obtained

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<sup>144</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Wednesday, 29 August 1917; the Latona Street houses at Vickerstown are small two bedroom houses, these men would have been hot bunking and the room continuously occupied as they would have been on different shifts

<sup>145</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, Saturday, 1 September 1917

<sup>146</sup> Barrow Chief Medical Officer's Report, 1917; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 21 November 1917

<sup>147</sup> op. cit. Joy, *War and Unemployment*, p.71

<sup>148</sup> At Barrow, the buyer paid a deposit as little as £10 or £20 to the seller and the balance of the price converted to a mortgage repayable by weekly instalments of an amount considerably in excess of the previous rent

<sup>149</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 2 November 1918, in April 1916 the Magistrates granted an ejectment order after the tenant had left the house in possession of lodgers, possession of a house tenanted by a J. Macfarlane was also applied for explaining Vickers built houses for their workmen, and one was let to the defendant who was no

orders to eject non-munitions workers to regain possession of their housing. Nonetheless the vast profits to be made from letting of rooms stimulated the housing market, creating a rush to buy, and requests for eviction orders.<sup>150</sup> Although orders were served in some cases the total numbers were not high and where orders were granted arrangements were often made for the incoming tenant to take in the outgoing tenant, a policy that aided the homeless but aggravated overcrowding.<sup>151</sup>

Even with a lack of working-class justices there was unease, some Barrow magistrates being on the point of resignation. The bench felt compelled to question the moral right of the law to turn people out of their houses.<sup>152</sup> 'We acknowledge the Magistrates and County Court are called upon to deal with difficult matters', said the unrest commission, and these courts are being brought into disrepute, not so much by their decisions as by the law which shackles them in making sensible and humane decisions'.<sup>153</sup> The extent of magistrate's demoralization can be gauged from the tone of the resolution forwarded in conjunction with one of several requests for an interview with the London authorities:

The Justices gravely fear, unless some steps are taken to give them power to refuse ejectment warrants, and ameliorate the sufferings of a very large number of the working-classes, industrial unrest is likely to ensue, with a possible accompaniment of strikes and rioting; the justices therefore desire to impress on HM Government the extreme urgency of the matter.<sup>154</sup>

Despite the magistrates' humane interpretation of the law, which kept evictions to a minimum and deferred eviction orders in the County Court, property owners turned to the High Court where tenants were unable to fight due to the high cost.<sup>155</sup>

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longer employed on munitions having left Vickers in June 1917. Having sub-let the house to a soldier cook, it was now required for a Vickers workman

<sup>150</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Minutes of Council and Committees, November 1916 - October 1917, Ejectment Orders, 30 July

<sup>151</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V The Provisions of Canteens in Munitions Factories, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems, Barrow, p.49; from 1915 until the Commission on Unrest in 1917 out of 88 cases 42 orders were made *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 4 December 1915, whether the 42 evictions included non-munitions workers from the Steelworks Company housing is not known

<sup>152</sup> *Barrow Guardian*, Saturday, 25 August 1917

<sup>153</sup> Commission on Industrial Unrest 1917

<sup>154</sup> Minutes of Proceeding of a Conference etc. (PRO Mun. 5/97), op cit Englander, D. *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain 1838-1918*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983), p.244; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 17 February 1916, tenants could appeal to the High Court against ejectment orders which could be suspended until the next court when landlords were summoned to appear

<sup>155</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 1 September 1917

Although small in number it was the type of ejectments which were irksome. Intensity of feeling stemmed from Hindpool where Belgian refugees had bought houses, subsequently applying for High Court orders to evict sitting tenants.<sup>156</sup> It was evident some Belgian munitions workers intended settling in Barrow and it was reasonable they should be comfortably housed.<sup>157</sup> They could hardly be blamed for buying houses as this was the only way of obtaining tenancy indeed people not engaged on munitions work had bought houses where ejectment orders were granted.<sup>158</sup>

What was bothersome though was that Belgians were said to be turning out the very people who helped provide homes for them when they arrived at Barrow. A local magistrate told a Ministry of Munitions Commissioner 'there will be Satan's row if Belgian people are allowed to buy houses and the working-classes in Barrow are turned onto the streets.'<sup>159</sup> These were not cases of aristocracy turning out democracy, but of the working man turning out working man said the magistrate.<sup>160</sup> One Labour Councillor said: 'Hindpool was ablaze, and if the Government did not take immediate action something would happen'. That something he conjectured would be a shipyard strike, he himself was prepared to use 'physical force' and go to gaol if required.<sup>161</sup> Though the Belgians become the scapegoats for unrest by the end of the war their numbers were halved by the transfer of workers and their families to other parts of the country at different periods.<sup>162</sup>

Evictions were of concern to the Barrow Poor Law Guardians, who emphasised to the Government that widows with sons at the front and old people with munitions workers as lodgers were being forced out of their Hindpool houses with nowhere to go and would need Workhouse accommodation.<sup>163</sup> The Board protested against Government inaction, calling on them to stop further proceedings for evictions.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 22 August 1917

<sup>157</sup> No doubt workers having to keep two homes were in the same predicament

<sup>158</sup> Cumbria Archives, Belgians in Cumbria during The First World War, Belgians were earning good wages and some lived in the better town for example the Van Der Scheuren family lived at 36 Lord Street one of the best parts of Barrow. Wages from 1 August 1917 were between 43s and 55s per week inclusive of the 8s war bonus and the working week was 53 hours

<sup>159</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday 1 September 1917, the ejections causing the problems appear to have been at Byron Street, Hindpool

<sup>160</sup> Minutes of Proceedings of a Conference on the Making of Ejectment Warrants at Barrow, 7 September 1917

<sup>161</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 30 August 1917

<sup>162</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 21 December 1918, number quoted are between 400 to 500

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, the Workhouse was part of the problem, there was no more room as the military had taken part of the institution over as a hospital

<sup>164</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, Wednesday, 29 August 1917



Further demands were made by Barrow Council who called the Ministry of Munitions attention to the acute housing position requesting immediate action to prevent people being made homeless. The Barrow magistrates viewing evictions as of extreme emergency, proposed sending a deputation to Winston Churchill the Minister of Munitions to press for a change in the law to vary the days of grace from 30 to three months or until the end of the war.<sup>165</sup>

Remedy was found in DORA, empowering Churchill to declare any district where munitions work was being carried out a special area.<sup>166</sup> The week previous to Barrow being declared a special area, Churchill informed the Barrow Trades and Labour Council of his intention to invoke the new regulation as soon as possible.<sup>167</sup> The effect of this premature announcement along with the impolitic reticence of the magistrates, who since returning from London had remained silent, became evident. The silence of the magistrates on such a subject of great interest had allowed the government to take credit for stopping the evictions.<sup>168</sup> Swenerton also suggests that government housing policy announcements were used to improve its own credibility.<sup>169</sup>

By late September 1917 those evicted since the attention of the Ministry was drawn to the matter were rehoused in requisitioned unoccupied dwellings.<sup>170</sup> On 1 October, Barrow and its neighbourhood were constituted a special area, meaning henceforward no 'munitions workers' could be ejected as long as they paid their rent and observed the conditions of residency.<sup>171</sup> The Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (Amendment) Act introduced in April 1918, by providing that an owner who bought his house after 30 September 1917 could not either for his own occupation or the occupation of someone in his employment turn out a tenant made it unnecessary

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<sup>165</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday 22 August 1917; *Liverpool Echo*, Saturday, 8 September 1917 the deputation met Churchill on 7 September 1917 to discuss ejections and housing conditions in Barrow

<sup>166</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V The Provisions of Canteens in Munitions Factories, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems, Barrow, p.48

<sup>167</sup> *North Western Daily Mail*, Saturday, 22 September 1917; *Liverpool Echo*, Friday, 21 September 1917 information also came to hand that ejections were to be suspended when following the dismissal of an application the magistrate intimated the Government meant to take action in the matter

<sup>168</sup> *North Western Daily Mail*, Saturday, 29 September 1917, CAB 24/27/30 Inadequacy of Accommodation at Barrow, 26 September 1917

<sup>169</sup> Swenerton, M., *Homes Fit for Heroes* (London, Heinemann, 1981), p.72

<sup>170</sup> CAB 24/27/30 Inadequacy of Accommodation at Barrow, 26 September 1917

<sup>171</sup> *Coventry Standard*, Friday, 26 October 1917, the Order-in-Council was made on the 29 September and Barrow was the only munitions district immediately made a special area 1918

to schedule further areas.<sup>172</sup> The Act however failed in that it could not be applied retrospectively so did not apply to those cases which have already taken place. On 2 October 1917 the War Cabinet decided a scheme for 1,000 houses was to go ahead and while construction was ongoing something had to be done to alleviate Barrow's overcrowding.

### **Housing and Billeting**

At Barrow the housing situation was not created by the war, although undoubtedly aggravated by it. The provision of dwellings had by no means kept pace with industrial expansion and the shortage of housing was in 1914 a grievance of some time standing. The war intensified existing housing problems, many areas experiencing severe overcrowding, whilst living conditions deteriorated further as scarce resources and inflated prices inhibited repairs. The housing campaign initiated at Barrow was not limited to the particular problems of munitions workers, the trade's council being amongst the first to call for an extension of the regulations to embrace all workers rather than those engaged on war production. It was the continual house-building delay which aroused agitation, assisted by the Barrow Labour Party who had been advocating for years for a municipal scheme. Many councillors in fact were property owners letting out houses, and it was in their interest to vote against such a scheme. Feelings were at a high pitch, with Councillor Ellison leader of the eight strong Labour Group on the Town Council in demanding the building of houses warned 'if they did not get them by peaceful persuasion they would get them, make no mistake'.

In pursuance of supporting their claim for immediate housebuilding the Barrow Labour Party set up a bureau to compile a list of house applications.<sup>173</sup> People registered with particulars and conditions in their current accommodation in apartments, along with their rent and living difficulties to provide statistics in support of the claim for additional houses.<sup>174</sup> The enquiry closed when 1,000 housing

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<sup>172</sup> H of L Deb 14 March 1918 vol. 29 cc445-9, Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (Amendment) Bill; OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V, Ch. III Housing Schemes, p.30

<sup>173</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, Saturday, 1 September 1917 by this date 900 applications for houses had been made at the offices of the Barrow Labour Party

<sup>174</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Thursday, 23 August 1917, when the Labour Party Offices opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> for taking names of those wanting houses, the place was besieged, a large number of which were women whose husbands were at work

applications were received, the number of houses suggested the Government build in the district.<sup>175</sup> Meanwhile, the Poor Law Guardians, Women's Labour League and other Barrow public bodies by petitioning the Minister and raising the question in Parliament over whether immediate action was being taken in view of the Industrial Unrest Report eventually produced results.<sup>176</sup> On 10 September it was announced a Ministry representative was being dispatched to Barrow with orders to prepare a scheme for the construction of temporary or permanent houses with immediacy to a total of 1,000 'if necessary'.<sup>177</sup> The Medical Officer of Health pointed out 1,500 houses were needed for the permanent population and a further 1,500 if the war population was to be properly housed and it was the Ministry of Munitions responsibility to build them.<sup>178</sup>

The knowledge that the overall demand for houses was transitory, and on conclusion of hostilities Barrow's population would return to the pre-war figure, offered little inducement to private enterprise to embark on a scale of building commensurate to immediate needs. Nor in the current climate and with restrictions on borrowing were the Barrow authorities able to conduct a large housing scheme. George Barnes, Labour MP, suggested the limitation imposed on the LGB on sanctioning loans over £500 should be changed to allow loans for housing purposes in special districts like Barrow.<sup>179</sup> The LGB who had no power to buy land or build houses, turned a deaf ear to any application for money to provide houses there would eventually be no need for. As Barrow was purely a munitions centre the LGB remained unconcerned and had no intention of intervening between the Ministry of Munitions and local authority regarding housing.<sup>180</sup> While the unrest commissioners were impressed by Vickers' efforts, they stated there was no evidence that the Government

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<sup>175</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 1 September 1917

<sup>176</sup> H of C Parliamentary Debates (1917) XCVII. 1594

<sup>177</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, Saturday, 8 September 1917

<sup>178</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 29 August 1917; BRO, MOH Annual Report, Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book 1917-1918

<sup>179</sup> CAB 24/23/58, 18 August 1917, Reports of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest – Barnes had connections with Barrow having worked in the shipyard for two years, he was also General Secretary of the ASE before joining the ILP

<sup>180</sup> CAB 24/27/30 Inadequacy of Housing Accommodation at Barrow, 26 September 1917

or the municipality had taken any practical steps to deal with the housing problem and strongly recommended the War Cabinet take the matter in hand.<sup>181</sup>

The mayor denied the blame for 'a housing scandal' as called by outsiders, could be laid on the Corporation.<sup>182</sup> Putting the case before the people, he argued whilst the unrest commission heard evidence from all social groups, 'the Corporation was never formally asked to appear before the Commission'.<sup>183</sup> He claimed the findings were based largely on one-sided statements of minority groups, each pursuing their own agenda, and he was anxious to restore the balance. He denied pre-war overcrowding was sufficient to warrant a municipal building programme and believed private enterprise could have met the demand, stating the Corporation was not prepared to saddle the town with a huge building debt for wartime overcrowding which was seen as a temporary problem. He argued in addition to the wartime scarcity of manpower and materials, Vickers had commandeered the districts' brick supply. Further laying the blame elsewhere, he argued the Commission was at fault for suggesting the Corporation was negligent, the government was the guilty party and Barrow's housing scandal a fabrication.

With a single blow, the Commission undermined any claim to civic pride and municipal authority by stating unequivocally that the conditions to which the working-classes were subjected were unacceptable and unjustifiable. This caused considerable ferment and Labour Councillors seized on the issue, stating 'The Corporation was responsible for having failed to realise its duty in the provision of adequate housing for the people'.<sup>184</sup> Councillor Ellison emphasised the need for pressing the issue and finding strength through numbers and unity, arguing 'until the common people were prepared to organise politically to the same extent as they had industrially they would remain oppressed'. Significantly rather than blame the Corporation he rhetorically blamed the Barrow working-classes for allowing these people to sit on the Council.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 7 March 1916, Barrow Council had discussed providing houses for its own workmen in 1916, but due to increased building costs were prevented from going ahead without Government assistance

<sup>182</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 4 September 1917

<sup>183</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 8 September 1917

<sup>184</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 8 September 1917

<sup>185</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 15 September 1917

Despite the potency of the issue, housing reform would lose its impetus and the attempt to radicalise the working-classes was unsuccessful.

The provision of new houses which had been open to debate was decided upon. Barrow's climate was unsuitable for temporary buildings, but to save time half the houses would be single-storeyed concrete buildings of semi-permanent character designed to last 30 to 40 years.<sup>186</sup> However, it was impossible to obtain a rent which provided anything approaching a full economic return on outlay. Rents of the semi-permanent types sanctioned for Barrow in October 1917 were fixed at 9s 6d for a three bedroom bungalow and a two bedroom at 7s 6d, representing a return of 52 and 45 per cent on capital.<sup>187</sup> The Treasury protested against such low rents, but on Ministry assurance it was impossible to obtain a higher rental the scheme went ahead.<sup>188</sup>

Whilst the work of construction was ongoing something had to be done to mitigate the unsatisfactory housing conditions that prevailed. The Central Billeting Board (CBB) held a local inquiry at Barrow on behalf of the Ministry and met with conflicting testimony both on overcrowding and the amount of lodging accommodation available'.<sup>189</sup> The Billeting Board considered the real need was for houses rather than further exploitation of lodgings. Nevertheless a billeting officer was appointed and local committees set up at Barrow and Ulverston supported by local investigators.<sup>190</sup> In the course of the investigations the only opposition encountered was of mistrust on the part of workers regarding compulsion provided in

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<sup>186</sup> H of L Debate 07 November 1917 vol. 26 cc905-5, an immediate decision was taken there should be a considerable building scheme initiated at Barrow, half of permanent buildings and half of semi-permanent buildings, to get over the immediate difficulty, in effect a wartime measure

<sup>187</sup> OHMoM Wages and Welfare, Pt. V The Provisions of Canteens in Munitions Factories, Ch. II Housing and Administration, p.15; Roberts, E., *Working-Class Housing in Barrow and Lancaster 1890-1930*, Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1977, Vol. 127, p.118, Barrow inhabitants named the semi-permanent homes 'China Town' Roberts respondent said they were simply a box with a lid on built for war workers

<sup>188</sup> CAB 24/27/30, 26 September 1917, Inadequacy of Housing Accommodation at Barrow – the rents were to vary between 6s 6d to 8s 6d per week according to the class of house

<sup>189</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V The Provisions of Canteens in Munitions Factories, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems, Barrow, p.47 Vickers maintained on an out-of-date register there was suitable lodgings for 700 women

<sup>190</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 1 September 1917, Charles Duncan MP for the borough on a recent visit inquiring into billeting expressed the opinion the trouble at Barrow was absolutely a housing one; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 10 August 1917, by this date the CCB had informed the Ulverston Urban and Rural Councils and the Dalton Urban Council on the intention to billet munitions workers

the Billeting Act, which in no case was enforced.<sup>191</sup> Given the power to billet anyone engaged on work of national importance while protecting the rights of the householder, the Act did not contain provision for billeting munitions workers' families.

Cost of board and lodging had to be decided upon. The wartime cost of lodgings in Barrow ranged between 8s and 12s per week, exceeding the Billeting Board's allowance of 6s.<sup>192</sup> Fixed rates based on the market price in the district for workers of a class similar to those to be billeted were thus submitted to the CBB. Without waiting for the completion of the lodgings register steps were taken to billet munitions workers. By early October it was reported that 4,884 houses had been inspected and accommodation found for approximately 523 workers.<sup>193</sup> Final figures provided by the *Official History* are quoted as 4,611 persons (4,004 men and 607 women), but this is an overstatement, as altogether it was hoped additional accommodation from all sources might be available for 2,000 people.<sup>194</sup>

Despite serious labour scarcity, the first houses were completed before the close of 1917 and tenants started taking up occupancy in February 1918.<sup>195</sup> In November 1917 doubt was expressed as to the wisdom of completing the semi-permanent scheme as overcrowding was not as serious as first rumoured as proved when a bread ticket census indicated 4.5 against 6 persons per house.<sup>196</sup> Following an interview with Barrow Council in January 1918 the Ministry decided to complete the 202 houses started and postpone the remainder, this decision was shortly extended to the 500 permanent houses of which 250 were taken in hand. Reasons given were the shortage had probably been overstated, the need was relative as compared with other munitions districts, and the difficulties of obtaining structural labour.

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<sup>191</sup> CAB 24/27/30 Inadequacy of Accommodation at Barrow, 26 September 1917, the CCB proposed to carry out billeting by voluntary or if necessary by compulsory means; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 1 September 1917, if voluntary appeals to take in lodgers were not successful then compulsory billeting would be carried out

<sup>192</sup> Barrow Corporation Minutes of Council and Committees, November 1918 - October 1919, General Purpose Committee Minutes, 25 November 1918;

<sup>193</sup> CAB 24/27/30 Inadequacy of Accommodation at Barrow, 26 September 1917 stated 413 houses had been inspected and accommodation for 139 persons found available; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday 5 October 1917

<sup>194</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V The Provisions of Canteens in Munitions Factories, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems, Barrow, p.48; Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, says additional billets were found for 900 people

<sup>195</sup> OHMoM Vol. V Wages and Welfare, p.48

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49

There were other perspectives the late labour unrest was said to be more of the union secretaries than the men; these Secretaries who were not manual workers noted their members were taking less interest in the union as their wages increased and their spare time was absorbed in overtime. They saw opportunity in under-housing for agitation which might lead to higher wages for lodgers in which the working-class landlords would benefit.<sup>197</sup> It is possible that the Barrow working men, who as a rule owned their own houses realised a largescale housing scheme would relieve them of their lodgers. In December 1917 house owners near the new site sent a formal protest to the Ministry against the erection of government bungalows as likely to depreciate the value of their property not only for letting but selling.<sup>198</sup> The trade unions representatives, moreover, expressed strong objections to bungalow-type houses and asked for a guarantee of their demolition immediately after the war.

There was no later development of the Barrow housing question. The deficiency of labour caused a delay and a scheme suggested in June 1918 by the Corporation and Vickers for houses on Walney Island was refused by the War Priorities Committee on the grounds that labour should be concentrated on the buildings already in progress.<sup>199</sup> The local master builders maintained they could obtain the necessary labour if given the Walney contract while the company engaged on the scheme were struggling to obtain labour because they were an outside firm. By September 1918, the semi-permanent houses were completed, but progress with the permanent scheme was slow.

Barrow was spared further overcrowding as when the Government needed larger airships Walney Island was deemed inadequate and vulnerable to U-boat attack. Flookburgh fifteen miles away suited the requirements for an airship shed but lacked accommodation and it was decided to build close to the proposed site a 250 house estate.<sup>200</sup> In September 1917 the Airship shed was cancelled along with 130

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<sup>197</sup> OHMoM Wages and Welfare, Pt. V The Provisions of Canteens in Munitions Factories, Ch. VI Special Housing Problems, Barrow, p.49; Historic Record/R/346. 2/4

<sup>198</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Council Minutes, November 1917 to October 1918, General Purpose Committee, 2 January 1918, a further petition was signed by 47 inhabitants and owners of properties complaining against the erection of Government dwelling houses opposite to a number of good semi-detached villas

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50

<sup>200</sup> Flookburgh Aerodrome, Diary and Borehole Schedule, Barrow Records Office, Ref. Z1011/1/2, Vickers awarded the contract to Barrow builders Rainey who had been involved in the construction of Vickerstown and a second firm Parnell.

houses and by the end of 1917 the remainder of the 120 houses were complete.<sup>201</sup> Evidence points to the houses being occupied by Barrow workers as in August 1918 it was reported a machinist of Ravenstow, Flookborough and his motorcycle passenger were involved in a fatal accident with a pedestrian near Vickers works.<sup>202</sup> The Ravenstow estate to an extent could have relieved Barrow's housing pressure, but further research is needed.

The whole issue of Barrow housing is complex. Indication is that the housing problem was overstated and the overcrowding was most serious in the poorest area of the town. Much of the housing and accommodation problem however was of a political nature as both the unions and the Labour Party went out of their way to lay the blame at the Ministry of Munitions and Barrow Council's door. Certainly there were class overtones as the working-class landlords saw their incomes threatened by the new housing schemes and the loss of their lodgers. The new semi-permanent houses provided some relief but as the next chapter will indicate the problem of overcrowding still remained following the Armistice.

## **Conclusions**

Problems nationally and locally during the first half of 1917 highlighted the unrest in the country to the extent that Government convened Regional Commissions on Industrial Unrest. Barrow's problems were such that it warranted its own enquiry. Although the major problems of unrest were highlighted by the commission there were many other underlying problems which were not brought to light. Essentially the problems of Barrow were Government related caused by the massive expansion for the production of shells and guns additional to large workload in the shipyard. The problems of increased production were overcome by the building and extension of workshops but the human aspect and its implications were never fully investigated or understood by Government.

Because of its Barrow's isolation conditions were never publicly reported until unrest threatened the production of munitions. Barrow had special problems and the

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<sup>201</sup> CAB 24/40/48 Supply of Steel for Rigid Airship Housing Sheds under Reduced Airship Programme, 30 January 1918

<sup>202</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday 15 August 1918, Vickers had followed on the tradition of Vickerstown providing the military names of Jutland, Marne and Somme Avenues



wants of its citizens were gravely neglected and emphasised by the labour movement and the actions of the shop stewards. Although it took a special commission to highlight the problems and recommend solutions, it was regrettable that the problems took so long to come to the attention of government and to be acted upon. It can be argued that the position of the shop stewards at Barrow does not fit into the wider historiography in the sense that although they occasionally acted sympathetically with other areas they became more concerned with the economic and social aspects of Barrow's working-class people. The problems of food could have turned to national action but this was prevented at Barrow by the local authorities taking it upon themselves to deal with the questions of food prices and supply. This was assisted by the vigilance of women's representatives and the shop stewards and by ensuring that the butchers and grocers had a say in the food matter.

The Commission's report demonstrates the nature of the housing problem and tensions created by the fusion of industrial, social and transport issues. In Barrow the housing issue came to represent levels of social tension providing impetus for relief. Provision of housing therefore was seen by the Ministry as a counter-balance against social unrest to be addressed immediately.

## **CHAPTER 6: MEN OR MUNITIONS, DEMOBILISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION, 1918-1919**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the final stages of the war and the continuing problems of men versus manpower. Early 1918 unrest and radical statements however were shelved during the spring crisis, only to return in the summer. While not making an extensive analysis of the transition to peace, some general points will be made as indicators of how the onset on peace-time conditions impacted on a town geared up to war production including the political, economic and social changes caused by the return to post-war conditions.

In the transition to peace, as before the war, the dependence would be upon Vickers to supply work in the town. Foreign and imported female workers it was expected would quickly leave. Although local efforts were needed to employ demobilized female munitions workers, these would be very limited as Barrow's peace industries would not be suited to mass production. The turnover to peace products required a restructuring of Vickers expected to cause temporary disruption of the workforce. While skilled men were wanted elsewhere, they were likely to stay in the town as it would be more economical for them to take up labouring jobs rather than maintain two homes. It stood to reason that if many workmen remained at Barrow, the housing situation would not be eased or would it be helped if the Ministry withdrew from the promised building program. The pre-war demand for a shorter working week was only halted by the war and was to be resurrected, but it needed to be viewed in the light of the restructuring of Barrow's industry. Similarly, politics would be revived with renewed rivalries caused by a split in the Labour Party between those who had supported the war and those who were against it.

### **1918 - Men or Munitions**

At the opening of 1918 new Government manpower proposals were made with the intention of taking steps against what was believed to be an urgent problem. Withdrawal of Russia from the Alliance had made it possible for Germany to transfer troops from the Eastern to the Western Front, and though the entry of America would

redress the balance the problem was maintaining forces until they arrived.<sup>1</sup> At the Manpower Conference summoned on 3 January 1918, the Minister of National Service pointed out it would be impossible to maintain the forces in the field unless large numbers of men were recruited from munitions and shipyard work.<sup>2</sup> Young men were to be taken from essential industries and substituted if necessary by men of those trades who had fought and been severely wounded.<sup>3</sup>

At Barrow a letter from George Barnes, Labour politician and supporter of the war raised the question of the attitude of the ASE towards male dilutees.<sup>4</sup> The response to allowing dilutees to remain in shipbuilding, even if skilled men were withdrawn from the engine and munitions areas for military service, was that their members would resist any further encroachment until all dilutees were withdrawn. Charles Duncan, the Member for Barrow, believed that if the Government put the case for manpower plainly before young workmen he felt sure there would be no disinclination on their part to join the Army. The manpower question was a keen topic amongst Barrow workers but no unanimous opinion was expressed. Although the feeling amongst the older skilled workers was that some of the younger men who had flocked to Barrow to escape military service should be taken to the colours, however these young men pointed out that they were doing important work.<sup>5</sup> The *Official History* notes that the question of protection of pivotal men arose particularly in the case of gun equipment.<sup>6</sup> In gun shops such as at Barrow essential work was carried out by young specially trained men, while work on large calibre guns was so heavy as to make substitution by less fit men or women impossible. While workers belonging to other unions in the town showed themselves on the whole prepared to accept the new manpower scheme opposition was intense among the younger Barrow ASE members. The general attitude of the Barrow ASE was that no sacrifice would be too great to save the engineering union from destruction.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. III Men or Munitions in 1918, p.36

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, Friday, 4 January 1918

<sup>3</sup> H of C Deb 14 January 1918 vol. 101 cc58-134

<sup>4</sup> BDSO 57/1/9, Barrow ASE Minutes, 13 September 1917 to 7 December 1918, 13 January 1918

<sup>5</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 16 January 1918

<sup>6</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. III Men or Munitions in 1918, p.52

<sup>7</sup> BDSO 57/1/9, Barrow ASE Minutes, 13 September 1917 to 7 December 1918, 13 January 1918

On 20 January 1918 at the National Conference of Engineering Allied Trades Joint Committees held at Leeds, a resolution rejecting government manpower proposals as unnecessary was passed.<sup>8</sup> Encouraged by Woodrow Wilson's proposals for ending the war it was considered peace was possible, and that no further consideration should be given to supplying men for the armed services unless the belligerents failed to arrive at a settlement. While the Allied Trades were qualified to focus workshop opinion, they only had the power of recommendation to the various Trade Union Executives.<sup>9</sup> A mass meeting of engineering and shipbuilding workers held on the same day at Barrow passed a similar resolution including a decision not to accept any agreement arrived at between the trade union officials and Government, while national action should be taken to enforce demands.<sup>10</sup> The National Administrative Council of Shop Stewards and Workers Committees having considered resolutions in favour of a national strike decided that the grievances arising over the manpower proposals should be left to the union executives.<sup>11</sup> The National Administrative Council however could not prevent local shop stewards calling men out on strike and in some districts there was danger of local trouble.

Whereas the ASE Secretary notified the Barrow District Committee of the need to pin the government to their Protected Trades Schedule agreement, Geddes said the engineers were willing to let old men go to the Army and young men remain, causing soldiers' leave to be cancelled while forcing wounded men to return to the front.<sup>12</sup> On 1 February 1918 a new Schedule of Protected Occupations came into force further diminishing the craftsman's protection. The Ministry of National Service now had the right to cancel exemptions under the Schedule without consulting the unions. Importantly the main revision enabled munitions and shipyard workers under the age of 23 to be conscripted with the exception of men engaged on hull construction and ship repair.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. III Men or Munitions in 1918, p.44

<sup>9</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 21 January 1918

<sup>10</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 21 January 1918

<sup>11</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Ch. III Men or Munitions in 1918, p.44

<sup>12</sup> BDSO 57/1/9, Barrow ASE Minutes, 13 September 1917 to 7 December 1918, 24 January 1918; M.M. 130, 28 April 1917, Schedule of Protected Occupations for Men Employed on Admiralty, War Office or Munitions Work, or in Railway Shops, 126/VB/6/BR/CO/1/4 Warwick Digital Archives

<sup>13</sup> OHMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, III Men or Munitions in 1918, p.42, to at least age 23 on 1 January 1917, Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards'*, p.39

In further considering the new manpower proposals, the Barrow Joint Engineering Trades held a mass meeting to which the ASE did not attend. The resolutions though similar to those passed at Leeds were not as drastic and were more moderate than those passed by the Barrow shop stewards.<sup>14</sup> Part of the resolution was that the Barrow men wanted a people's peace, but if German Imperialism prevented this they were determined to cooperate in the prosecution of the war until their objective was met. Alternatively, failing the Government entering into immediate negotiations with the belligerent countries, they pledged themselves to act with the organised workers of Britain in resisting the manpower proposals. Although the shop stewards condemned the manpower proposals out of hand, resistance was blunted by the German Spring Offensive.<sup>15</sup> The ASE could not oppose the Government and the nation, and on the Executive appealing to the engineer's acceptance of the Bill in a slightly modified form was secured by a slender majority.<sup>16</sup> The German offensive also put aside any further action for an international peace meeting.

The more drastic Military Service Bill of 9 April 1918, introduced when the German offensive was at its height met no effective opposition and brought a further cancelling of exemptions. But when the Government attempted to extend the WMV Scheme in June, as the offensive was being turned back, it aroused a storm of protest.<sup>17</sup> Detailed proposals including provisions to force men into the Volunteers by withdrawing exemptions if they did not join were worked out.<sup>18</sup> The proposed measures were seen as an attempt to convert the scheme into a form of compulsory industrial service. At the end of June, the Trade Union Advisory Committee were informed that nothing in the nature of compulsion had been exercised and it was not anticipated that the scheme for compelling men to enrol as WMV's need be

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<sup>14</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 4 February 1918; Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers*, p.186 says the shop stewards held two meetings in Manchester on the 14 and 21 March and decided to call for a nationwide strike against the Bill

<sup>15</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday 28 March 1918, the spring offensive caused Barrow workmen employed on material necessary for the fighting forces to work through the Easter holidays

<sup>16</sup> OHoMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. III Men or Munitions in 1918, p.47; Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers*, p.186, the vote was 58,650 'for' and 46,332 'against'

<sup>17</sup> H of C Deb 9 April 1918 vol. 104 cc1351-4; Cole, G.D.H., *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923), pp. 139-140, 155-156; Marwick, A., *The Deluge*, p.209

<sup>18</sup> OHoMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. IV Labour Regulation and Unrest 1918, p.58, on refusal on enrolment a man could ultimately be called up for military service if the right age

introduced at this time.<sup>19</sup> On 1 July the Government Advisory Committee made a strategic retreat, rejecting the scheme and declining any responsibility for the consequences of introducing it.<sup>20</sup>

Although agitation over the scheme was seen at Barrow and elsewhere, it was eclipsed by the announcement of the government's embargo for controlling the distribution of skilled labour.<sup>21</sup> The Ministry of Munitions had long been aware that some firms employed an undue proportion of skilled labour and were also using them uneconomically, while munitions output was hampered elsewhere. Firms were instructed that no further labour of the types scheduled were to be engaged without licence of the Ministry. This was yet another method of industrial conscription depriving men of the advantages gained through the abolition of the leaving certificate.<sup>22</sup> The working of the embargo brought its existence and methods forcibly home as was seen in Barrow when the shop stewards denounced the compulsory return of men who had travelled to Enfield in hope of finding work, continuing agitation until the Ministry paid their travelling expenses.<sup>23</sup> While unrest had subsided during April and May in answer to urgent demands for men and munitions to counter Germany's supreme effort, with the first signs of the tide turning in France unrest reappeared.<sup>24</sup>

A strike took place in July supported by the Barrow men's officials and shop stewards in any actions taken on the embargo question at Coventry. At a conference called by the National Engineering and Allied Trades Executive to discuss the embargo it was decided work would cease unless the embargo was lifted.<sup>25</sup> The Government's announcement that men must work or fight influenced the union officials to leave the decisions to the men. The firm government attitude had the full approval of the Barrow general public, while amongst the men's officials there was doubt as Vickers

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<sup>19</sup> OHoMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. IV Labour Regulation and Unrest 1918, p.60, apparently enough volunteers had come forward and moreover American troops were coming over in large numbers and it was expected that the release of men for the Army would proceed at a considerable decreased rate

<sup>20</sup> *The Herald*, Saturday, 13 July 1918

<sup>21</sup> OHoMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. IV Labour Regulation and Unrest 1918, p.64

<sup>22</sup> CAB 24/58/69 Labour Position in Munitions Industries, 17 July 1918

<sup>23</sup> CAB 24/59/20 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 24 July 1918

<sup>24</sup> The Second Battle of the Marne of July 1918 was the first sign that the ascendancy had definitely passed to the Allies

<sup>25</sup> *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, Friday, 26 July 1918

was not affected by the embargo because there was no surplus of skilled men.<sup>26</sup> The Prime Minister took a hard line against the strikers declaring all men wilfully absent from their work on or after 29 July would be deemed to have placed themselves outside of the munitions industries.<sup>27</sup> Protection certificates would cease to have effect and they would become liable to the provisions of the Military Service Acts.

Work resumed at Coventry and Birmingham and the national conference agreed in view of work resumption not to recommend a national stoppage of work, advising members to resume or stay at work pending the report of the Committee of Inquiry which Churchill as Minister of Munitions had promised. The circumstances of the strike were investigated and the verdict was the Government's scheme was justified by circumstances while the method of introduction ought to have been more tactful.<sup>28</sup>

When the war ended the news was broadcast at Barrow by the sounding of work's buzzers causing men to leave work and crowd the streets while flags were hoisted everywhere. But even in celebration many workers were concerned about what did the future would hold.

### **Industrial Reconstruction**

The key factor in the transition to peace was the sudden removal of state action and reversion to reliance on Vickers primarily and Barrow's other industries for continuing employment. Vickers, Scott says looked towards expansion into post-war markets unconnected with wartime products and entered the post-war period with confidence.<sup>29</sup> Much was done at Barrow during 1918-19 to prepare for and undertake the building of merchant ships, and for the manufacture of land boilers and large gas engines. The future of sea and road transport was believed to be tied up in the internal combustion engine and Vickers were ideally placed to supply a range of engines.<sup>30</sup> Though a number of submarines were cancelled, delayed or sent to other yards, a number remained at Barrow for completion whilst four submarines arrived for

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<sup>26</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 29 July 1918

<sup>27</sup> OHoMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 197-18, Ch. IV Labour Regulation and Unrest 1918, p.68

<sup>28</sup> *Coventry Standard*, Friday, 27 September 1918

<sup>29</sup> Scott, *Vickers a History*, p.140

<sup>30</sup> Vickers continued to make main and auxiliary turbines

refitting before going to a foreign station.<sup>31</sup> On the warship side the light-cruiser *HMS Diomede* was launched, while work completed on a second and construction on a third cancelled.<sup>32</sup>

As the changeover to merchant construction got underway in the shipyard, the slipways were cleared of Admiralty vessels. The inevitable stoppage of work on howitzers and the slowdown of Admiralty work, including the transfer of *Diomede* to Portsmouth for completion, caused large numbers of engineers to be laid off or to receive notices.<sup>33</sup> Anticipating these events, activities were centred on two liners and three cargo steamers, while the refitting of numbers of vessels found work for many trades.<sup>34</sup> Vickers were therefore able to mainly transfer men to commercial orders and refitting work, and additionally a new floating dock approved by the Admiralty to replace the existing Furness Railway dock. As trade picked up it was expected more work would be found for underemployed departments and additional men.<sup>35</sup>

During the war the shell and gun plants had been built at Government expense and managed by Vickers, the buildings were light but worked well for the purposes intended and could find use after the war provided trade expansion demands allowed accommodation. As for the presses, lathes and boring machines there was little chance of their employment as they were virtually worn out. In turning to peace products Beyer, Peacock was prepared to supply drawings to Vickers if they undertook the manufacturing of locomotives at Barrow. Plans were prepared for production of 300 locomotives a year quoting prices to the government, but there was disappointment as Barrow's prices were found to be higher than their competitors.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 23 November 1918 reported that Cunard had placed orders for two liners which would be laid down immediately

<sup>32</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 29 December 1919, refitting and repair was being carried out on the P&O Mantua and 24 steam-tractors

<sup>33</sup> *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, Monday 8 September 1919, CAB 24/89/56 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 1 October 1919 the September unemployment register showed an increase by 520 at Barrow

<sup>34</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Saturday, 16 April 1919, joiners and cabinet makers, wages 69s 9d., 47 hours plus 12 per cent on earnings, permanent employments; *Leeds Mercury*, Monday, 7 April 1919, French Polishers required; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 19 August 1919, cabinet makers, ship-painters, shipwrights and red-leaders required, Vickers were offering permanent employment for suitable men, 47-hours per week and railway fares paid after three months service

<sup>35</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 27 August 1919, *Narragansett* was launched for the Anglo-American Oil Company while a further order was received for an oil tanker in October 1919

<sup>36</sup> Pigou, A. C., *Aspects of British Economic History*, (London, McMillan, 1947), pp. 23-24 although Vickers were encouraged by government policy which contemplated placing large orders in anticipation of demands, Lord Inverforth, Minister of Munitions felt measure of this kind would hold up the return to private enterprise and a free market



There was plenty of work for repairs and workshop space was given over to locomotive work including production of new boilers entailing the installation of new plant for the heavy flanging and rolling of boiler-shells.<sup>37</sup> Most major rail companies sent locomotives for repair and some 280 engines passed through the workshops during 1919. At the Cavendish Dock airship shed work was turned over to production of flexible pontoons for salvage work. Men were transferred to produce sewing machines, rock and ore crushing machinery for use in road making material and cement, and machines for manufacture of rubber tyres and vulcanized presses.<sup>38</sup> In under a year large changes were seen and the general impression was one of rapid accomplishment. Nevertheless there was insufficient work to absorb all men causing Vickers to introduce short time in order that work could be spread over a larger number of men, which was only made possible by the payment of unemployment benefit in agreement with the government.<sup>39</sup>

With the cessation of warship orders the tonnage passing through the docks had declined and efforts were made to counterbalance this with the revival of Irish and Liverpool shipping trade.<sup>40</sup> By the end of the war coastal trade was no longer competitive, war having disrupted services many being reduced or suspended, which together with government redirection of trade to the railways had resulted in less cargo being carried and less income. Once restoration of these services was seen and competition restored, goods and foodstuffs would arrive at Barrow much quicker than by rail benefitting both the Furness district and Cumberland.<sup>41</sup> While trains came to a halt during the National Rail Strike the Furness Railway owned and operated docks remained operational as National Union of Railworkers members maintaining the hydraulic machinery and dock gates having declined to continue handling shipping were replaced by naval ratings.<sup>42</sup>

Reconstruction had also gone ahead at the Barrow Hematite and Steel Works with the private expenditure of £500,000 since pre-war days. Once war conditions

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<sup>37</sup> Scott, J. D., *Vickers a History*, (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1962). P.137 in 1918 the Vickers Directors asked Barrow to study the use of the shell shop for the manufacture of locomotive boilers

<sup>38</sup> *The Times*, Monday, 27 October 1919

<sup>39</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 6 October 1919

<sup>40</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 30 August 1919

<sup>41</sup> Watson, N., *Around the Coast and Across the Seas: The Story of James Fisher and Sons*, (Leyburn, St. Mathews Press, 2000), p.53

<sup>42</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday 2 October 1919

ended developments were made in fuel saving and lower working costs, a new blast-furnace and hot gas stoves were constructed and blowing power augmented, a gas cleaning plant was installed and the steel foundries extended to tackle heavy castings for cargo and passenger ships.<sup>43</sup> Since the Millom and Askam Iron Company had purchased the Duke of Devonshire's shareholding in the Barrow Company it had obtained a number of assets to ensure a successful future.<sup>44</sup> The Camerton Colliery and Brickworks were acquired to safeguard a future supply of quality firebricks for furnace linings and additional funding was provided for equipment and business development.<sup>45</sup> Large numbers of shares were obtained in the Ullcoats Mining Company, a producer of high quality Cumberland iron ore, improving the position of future Barrow supplies. A number of areas in Cumberland considered likely to contain ore deposits were obtained, exploitation proceeding under the prevailing labour conditions. Additionally the Millom and Askam Iron Company were the largest shareholders in the Algerian Ben-Fellkai ore mines which had proved of huge value during the war. Investigation was also made of the company's collieries at Barnsley where there was a large tonnage of unworked gas-coal and once labour became available it was planned to increase output from the highest pre-war figure to 750,000 to 1,000,000 tons per year, a rate expected to continue for 40 to 50 years.<sup>46</sup> The Bessemer department of the Barrow Steelworks was restarted after standing idle since 1915 providing employment for an additional 150 workmen. With plenty of iron available and with improved working conditions output was expected to exceed 4,000 tons per week.<sup>47</sup> The Barrow rail mills returned to a three-shift system and the merchant mill foundry and Siemens plant were restarted.

Notwithstanding all this good news a gloomy future was predicted at the annual meeting when the chairman announced once Government control was withdrawn and subsidies removed there would be a considerable advance in the price of steel and iron. If wages and production costs remained high and there were no protective tariffs against foreign products it was predicted the steel industry could be

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<sup>43</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday, 27 December 1918

<sup>44</sup> *Newcastle Journal*, Monday, 17 July 1917

<sup>45</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 9 December 1918

<sup>46</sup> *The Birmingham Post*, Thursday 19 December 1918

<sup>47</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 15 May 1919

wiped out with few exceptions.<sup>48</sup> As war contracts came to an end the steelworks plate mills closed down. The rail strike prevented coke supplies for the blast furnaces reaching Barrow causing their damping down and the throwing out of large numbers of men.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless by the end of the year trade appeared brighter as large amount of business was foreseen for the Colonies, India and home use, while the quality of iron ore mined was improved after deteriorating under Government control for three years.

The responsibilities of the Ministry of Munitions towards labour ended with the first steps in the demobilisation of munitions workers whilst the realisation of possible national bankruptcy caused the cut down of the enormous expenditure on defence spending. Transformation of industry from war to peace conditions also involved the dislocation of industries and workshops causing large numbers of workers to change their employment, but this was not necessary the case at Barrow where it was more one of adjustment.

### **Demobilisation and Adjustments**

During the last 18 months of the war demobilisation of workers on munitions and other war work was under consideration.<sup>50</sup> In late 1917 owing to the needs of economising shipping tonnage the Government decided that the Ministry of Munitions imports could be considerably reduced. The consequent decrease in raw materials made it necessary to revise the 1918 munitions programme, particularly production and filling of shell and shell components, explosives and small arms ammunition. Other causes were the closing down of Russian contracts, and changes in character of certain classes of munitions. It was estimated between 100,000 and 120,000 workers would be dismissed of which about which 30 per cent would be men for whom the demand for labour would obviate unemployment on any large scale.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, Thursday, 1 May 1919

<sup>49</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 29 December 1919, emergency unemployment donations were introduced

<sup>50</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, Friday, 7 September 1917, at the Trades Union Congress, Mrs Mills (Barrow Women Workers) moved, and Mary McArthur seconded a motion on demobilisation of women calling on the Government Departments concerned to adopt recommendations calculated to minimise distress and involuntary employment

<sup>51</sup> OHoMoM Vol. VI Manpower and Dilution, Pt. II The Control of Industrial Manpower 1917-18, Ch. V Preparations for Demobilisation, p.77; *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, Friday, 12 April 1918, 40,000 women and 20,000 men munition workers were to be discharged by June 1918

These men could be accelerated into the colours or found suitable work in shipyards and blast furnaces, but it was for women that new work had to be found during early 1918.<sup>52</sup> Aware of labour, unemployment and hardship problems, discharges were spread over as long a period as possible and the closure of factories or dismissal of workpeople was to take place in areas where the housing problem was particularly acute, including Gretna, Woolwich and Leeds but not Barrow.<sup>53</sup> Plans were interrupted by the German Spring offensive and in response the available supplies of materials were restricted to munitions for which the offensive revealed the greatest need. The offensive created the necessity for the rapid reinforcement of reserves in guns, machine-guns, tanks, aeroplanes and certain classes of ammunition. This meant no workers were discharged from these classes of production and a fortnight after the offensive every gun and shell lost to the enemy was replaced out of reserves without depletion to a dangerous degree.

Demobilisation began at Barrow as 600 workers, mainly married women followed by a further 250 left Vickers.<sup>54</sup> By the end of January 1919, 5,177 women employed on war work at Barrow had been discharged.<sup>55</sup> This demonstrates that Barrow female munitions workers were never regarded as anything other than temporary, agreeing with both Thom and Macarthur. As Belgians' contracts terminated there was little option but to send them home, the intention was to get them out of the country as quickly as possible. Professor Tony Kushner maintains that when the war finished the British government wanted its soldiers back home and refugees out.<sup>56</sup> They were pushed out of the country, which suited the Belgium government who needed people to rebuild their country. A week after the war ended something had to be done with the Belgians, as the unemployment donation would not be payable to them and therefore relief was urgent. Once repatriation began the Government needed some authority to collect and pack up refugees to ensure they

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<sup>52</sup> *Lancashire Evening News*, Tuesday, 26 February 1918, reported 8,000 female munitions works had been dispensed in the last three weeks owing to termination of certain contracts

<sup>53</sup> *Birmingham, Daily Post*, Monday, 23 December 1918, this figure does not include shipyard workers, also at Barrow the government was starting on a new housing scheme

<sup>54</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 7 December 1918, *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 20 December 1918  
*Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 6 January 1919

<sup>55</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 13 January 1919, *North West Evening Mail*, Wednesday, 29 January 1919

<sup>56</sup> *BBC News Magazine*, 15 September 2014, How 250,000 Belgian refugees didn't leave a trace

got to their point of departure.<sup>57</sup> As there was no Refugee War Committee at Barrow, the War Distress Committee took the job on. Repatriation was dealt with by the LGB, forms completed and refugees told to remain at their address until instructions for departure arrived via the shipping controller. The considerable weight of 300lb per head was allowed to be carried, but on no account was furniture included in this allowance. Regular shipping services were quickly organised and the first refugees left Millom in January 1919, followed on 2 February by almost all the remaining refugees who travelled to Newcastle to be shipped to Antwerp.<sup>58</sup> Coincidentally the first twenty of 250 Australians left, no doubt happy to go having experienced Barrow's overcrowding and uncongenial working conditions.<sup>59</sup> These small numbers however made little difference to Barrow's overcrowding as many had lived outside the town, and as mentioned Belgian numbers were reduced by transfer of workers to other parts of the country at different periods until there was probably no more than 400 to 500 left in the area.

Employment had to be found for those out of work in the town and from January 1919 the Ministry of Labour, Barrow Corporation and the Employment Exchange liaised to establish relief work schemes, but these were small scale enterprises.<sup>60</sup> The problem existed of providing employment for some 2,500 demobilised females in the borough. The only position that could immediately be offered was domestic service for which there was no desire to take up at 10s to 15s per week during a period when they were entitled to 13 weeks unemployment donation of 25s a week (girls 12s 6d).<sup>61</sup> Most women registered as factory hands rather than their pre-war employment knowing the labour exchange could not offer them factory work and out-of-work pay therefore continued. Girls offered employment who refused were likely to have their out-of-work donations stopped, in which event they could apply to the Board of Referees comprising employers and

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<sup>57</sup> Letter to Barrow Town Hall from Tudor Owen, War Office Refugees Committee, Aldwych dated 18 November 1918

<sup>58</sup> Whitehaven Archive and Local Studies Centre, *Belgian Refugees in West Cumbria* compiled by Stuart Nicholson; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 23 December 1918

<sup>59</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 11 January 1919, no mention was made of Canadians leaving

<sup>60</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 21 December 1918, for the nine days out of work the donation was paid at 29s per week to males and 25s a week to females, those workers having families were allowed a supplementary donation for dependent children

<sup>61</sup> *North West Daily Mail*, Wednesday, 29 January 1919

employees. This board was practically idle at Barrow and there was no attempt to press girls into employment they did not seek. In late February 1919 a demonstration was held to bring to attention unemployed women in Barrow whose benefit had been extended at the lower rate of 15s (girls 10s).<sup>62</sup> Showing their frustration twelve unemployed girls were charged with using insulting words and behaviour, the Barrow magistrate remarking 'he had seen an 'extraordinary' number of young girls, formerly munitions makers' on similar charges, but worse the girls before him were drawing unemployment pay while accosting the men.<sup>63</sup> Labour leaders believed it was better for government to subsidise an industry for women in Barrow rather than provide benefits as if poorly paid work existed there was fear of some women drifting into destitution adding to the Board of Guardians problems.<sup>64</sup> Inquiries meantime were made in cotton towns to find females work, while there was suggestions of building a toy factory and the possibility of aeronautical fabric making, neither of which came to fruition.<sup>65</sup>

Barrow a heavy industrial town was not able to employ women on work requiring light repetitive tasks as those industries aimed at mass markets.<sup>66</sup> By March 1919 Barrow Council was urging the Government to provide employment for demobilised female workers. The new Parliamentary Member took this up with the Labour Advisory Committee, advising Vickers and other interested parties to hold a London conference.<sup>67</sup> Vickers however had given consideration to peace products and were pursuing the subject, but only in regard to male employment.<sup>68</sup> As far as women were concerned Vickers had not decided on any developments to provide suitable work for women which would not be conducive to difficulties arising between the

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<sup>62</sup> *The Barrow News*, Saturday, 22 February 1919

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 14 March 1919; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 4 June 1919, a dressmaker working full time for a Barrow firm with one child could not manage on 15s and applied to the Board-of-Guardians for assistance

<sup>65</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 6 January 1919

<sup>66</sup> Wightman, C., *More Than Munitions, Women, Work and the Engineering Industries 1900-1950*, (London, Longman, 1999), p.56

<sup>67</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 4 March 1919

<sup>68</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 23 November 1918, it was generally reported that Vickers had received two orders from Cunard for liners, work on which was to start immediately

trade unions and themselves.<sup>69</sup> Although Vickers were anxious to assist, as the Government was not willing to help financially to promote industries for women's employment, there was little point in holding a conference unless concrete proposals were forwarded. Whilst Vickers were not planning on recruiting females they did retain numbers, indicated by women and girls in the fitting-shop of the shipbuilding section being awarded pay rises in August 1919.<sup>70</sup> Large numbers of females were engaged in the aeronautical department where there was optimism as Vickers proposed building airships for trans-Atlantic passengers and goods.<sup>71</sup> The only way Vickers could continue building such large airships however was to complete the Flookborough airship shed, but this project was abandoned.<sup>72</sup> In September 1919 the Government announced that along with gun production the construction of Admiralty rigid airships would cease. Although the aeronautical work at Barrow included a small Japanese airship, the cessation of large airship work affected many artisans and the only rigid airship design team in the country.<sup>73</sup> Women however remained at the Walney airship shed until the completion of R80 in June 1920.

The Barrow Calcutta Jute Company found work for more females once the firm the Army returned its men and the same position existed at the Kellner Partington Paper Pulp works where machinery had lain idle during the war.<sup>74</sup> The return to work was short lived when it was announced in October 1919 that the Calcutta Jute Works would shut down affecting 360 workers mainly women, girls and boys.<sup>75</sup> Women therefore remained disadvantaged in Barrow as no new schemes for absorbing their labour were forthcoming. By the end of the 1919 consideration by the Juvenile Employment Sub-Committee of the cases of boys and girls was requested. For girls resolutions were passed by the NFWW suggesting the immediate establishment of

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<sup>69</sup> The pledge to restore Trade Union pre-war conditions was fulfilled by the passing of the Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act, 1919 and though the Government gave indication of its desire to remove sex disqualifications it was an uphill struggle employing women against Trade Unions demands

<sup>70</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Thursday 28 August 1919, these are likely to have been labourers as the claim was made by the NAUL

<sup>71</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Thursday 10 October 1919, a company to be known as the Great Northern Aerial Syndicate was formed with the intention of inaugurating a scheme for linking up the world by means of airships

<sup>72</sup> H of C Deb, 28 July 1919, Vol.118, cc1826-7W

<sup>73</sup> *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Saturday, 6 September 1919; Mowthorpe, C. E. S, *Battlebags: British Airships of the First World War*, (Stroud, Alan Sutton Publishing, 1998), p.145, during 1920 Vickers received an order for a small Parseval, non-rigid airship for the Japanese Navy

<sup>74</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 19 January 1919

<sup>75</sup> *North West Evening Mail*, Wednesday, 29 January 1919; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 11 October 1919

classes in dress-making, domestic service, nurses' training and the provision of a municipal farm.<sup>76</sup> Dressmaking and domestic training were partially provided by the Labour Advisory Committee while it was difficult to see how nurses training could be provided, provision of a farm on the other hand was a problem of finance.

Turnover from war to peace in some Vickers workshops could not be carried out without alterations causing a temporary loss of employment for some men. In the naval construction works some 700 men mostly skilled workers were out of work at Christmas 1918, a figure that would increase or reduce dependent on the pace of reconstruction and the rate of army demobilisation. Instances occurred of men coming out of work who had had their homes in Barrow for many years and yet other men who had arrived in the war from districts where they were now wanted continued working in the town. Vickers generally paid higher wages than elsewhere and if Barrow residents were required to go and work at these places they could possibly find hardship in paying for lodgings and also sending money to their wives and families to maintain them.<sup>77</sup> The position now existed where local men could be better declining skilled employment elsewhere and remaining in Barrow working for labourer's pay and sparing additional expenses. This meant that skilled labour was retained in Barrow rather than dispersed.

It was said many more labourers could be found work than were actually employed. The Corporation Health Committee for example needed men to carry out scavenging work in the borough. Following the demobilisation of the transport battalion, 200 men were required immediately for discharging and loading shipping as any delays would lead to the charging of demurrage and increased cargo costs.<sup>78</sup> Due to the wet January weather several local iron ore mines were flooded putting 270 miners out of work.<sup>79</sup> The men were offered work discharging ore, but refused as the pay was lower than in the mines and also they were not suited to the weather at the docks.<sup>80</sup> As the water subsided some miners returned while others who had declined

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<sup>76</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 2 December 1919

<sup>77</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 21 April 1919, the engineers suggested that subsistence should be provided in lieu of stoppage of out-of-work pay for men working away to cover additional costs

<sup>78</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 14 February 1919

<sup>79</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 9 January 1919, many had been accustomed to working underground and in places that were warm

<sup>80</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Friday, 14 February 1919 advertised the rate for the job at 1s 6d per hour



dock work found employment as shipyard labourers. To overcome the docks manpower shortage, application was made for the return of men from the Army. Further work was available for 50 labourers at the Ferro-Concrete Ship Construction Company which built Admiralty experimental vessels powered by Vickers engines.<sup>81</sup> However by May 1919 it was reported that operations would soon cease at the Company's yards at Barrow.<sup>82</sup> Although the turnover from war to peace work was progressing smoothly and satisfactorily for finding employment for men, any delays in getting out work in hand could prejudice future orders. Reasonably active attempts were therefore made to manage the transition to peace. Foreigners were moved out, male workers were accommodated in other roles, and although there could be short-term problems, the situation of women was the least successful.

With the outbreak of war the drive for a shorter working week was shelved, it was now revised becoming a matter of priority.

### **Shorter working hours**

Eight days after the Armistice, agreement was reached between the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades and employers' associations over a 47-hour week, if endorsed by the members.<sup>83</sup> This agreement was hailed as 'one of the greatest triumphs of British trade unionism' as it not only meant a reduction in hours but established a standard working week.<sup>84</sup> The agreement was endorsed but opposition to the acceptance of the 47-hour week came mainly from districts where shop stewards were strongly entrenched, including Barrow.<sup>85</sup> To consider the proposed 47-hour week, a mass meeting of the engineering and shipbuilding federated trades unions was held at Barrow. This was the first time all trades including women trade's union members had been represented at a local meeting.<sup>86</sup> The proposed 47-hour week was rejected and a unanimous request made for a 35-hour

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<sup>81</sup> Vickers Launch Book, several barges and a one ocean going steamer were built for the Admiralty

<sup>82</sup> *Dundee Courier*, Tuesday, 6 May 1919

<sup>83</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 23 December 1919 the engineers ballot on a ballot on a 47-hour week without a reduction in wages showed a majority of more than two to one for acceptance: 290,547 for and 141,763 against

<sup>84</sup> *ASE Monthly Journal and Report*, December 1918 the Agreement on hours was of a national character in contrast to pre-war local agreements, similarly the 1919 Agreement on piecework was similarly national in effect

<sup>85</sup> Jefferys, J. B., *The Story of the Engineers, 1880-1945*, (Lawrence & Wishart Ltd.,1945), p.187; CAB 24/74/21 Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 29 January 1919

<sup>86</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 9 December 1918

week at the present rate. Previous reports showed that the Barrow and Coventry shop stewards wanted a 32-hour week, with a minimum weekly wage of £6 for skilled men and £5 for unskilled labour. The demands also included a time limit for acceptance failing approval the downing of tools and Revolutionary action were threatened.<sup>87</sup>

On returning to work at Barrow on 6 January 1919 a mass meeting was held where it was tentatively decided to approve a 47-hour week, while efforts would be maintained to obtain a 44-hour week. Further it was proposed to reduce the nightshift from the old hours of 57½ to 37½.<sup>88</sup> The new hours were 07.30 am until noon and 1.00 pm until 5.00 pm Monday to Friday, and 07.30 am until noon Saturday. Reaction amongst the Barrow workforce was varied, some appreciated the later start but others were against the long morning without a break. However for Barrow housewives this was a novel experience who found themselves making breakfast between 6.30 am and 7 am and preparing dinner for noon rather than 12.30 pm.

On the Clyde the Workers' Committee and other militant groups, trade union leaders of the older type, demanded cuts in working hours to protect jobs and wages and absorb returning servicemen.<sup>89</sup> A Joint Committee of shop stewards, members of the Scottish Trades Union Council and Allied Trades Council was set up to organise a national strike, which was opposed by the ASE and most other unions. A manifesto was issued to workers throughout the country calling a strike for a 40-hour week with no reduction in wages. Although the Barrow men were dissatisfied with the 47-hour week, they considered there was no use one district coming out while others stayed in.<sup>90</sup> Delegates were therefore sent to the various centres including the Clyde to see what was happening, on returning to Barrow a mass meeting of shipbuilding and engineering trades was held to hear their reports.<sup>91</sup> As opinion was diversified, a National Conference was held at Barrow on 31 January in order to arrive at a final decision and secure unanimity of action. At the National Conference between the shipbuilding and engineering trades in February it was recommended that all districts

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<sup>87</sup> CAB 24/71/25 Fortnightly Report on Revolutionary Organisation in the United Kingdom and Morale Abroad, 2 December 1918, it was said thousands of red flags were already available for Barrow and Coventry

<sup>88</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 6 January 1919

<sup>89</sup> Glasgow Digital Library, *The 40 Hours Strike*, *Liverpool Echo*, Monday, 9 December 1918

<sup>90</sup> Shields Daily News, Friday, 10 January 1919, CAB/24/74/21 Report of the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 29 January 1919

<sup>91</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 20 January 1919

adopt a 44-hour week.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, at Barrow it was agreed to obtain reduced hours by constitutional means, and a ballot on the question of a 40 or 44-hour week resulted in the majority voting for 40-hours, while electing to continue work pending settlement.<sup>93</sup> The 47-hour week continued to be worked at Vickers and by August 1919 recognition of a general 44-hour week was adjourned to allow investigation of the economic relationship of production to workhours, and the methods of manufacture in shipbuilding and engineering industries in Britain and other countries.<sup>94</sup> Meanwhile unrest continued and 1919 became a year of strikes.

## Unrest

At an important transition period in making Barrow a leading shipyard for the building of merchant and passenger ships, and repairing such ships the Vickers joiners with the support of the bricklayers ceased work. The townspeople generally regretted the strike as it meant delay in getting out work already in hand and could prejudice the chances of further orders. The strike was described as one of sympathy with the demand for the 40-hour week on the Clyde, but this was denied as on the request of the union executives the men came out to enforce the withdrawal of the Premium Bonus System.<sup>95</sup> The strikers demanded a return to time-rates holding the system was a war measure to facilitate production that should be dispensed with and its continuance tended to increase unemployment.<sup>96</sup> Vickers contended when the 47-hour week was conceded the system had to be continued, pointing out there was plenty of work particularly for joiners and more men were wanted.<sup>97</sup> After eight weeks the men returned subject to a conference between Vickers and the men's representatives and on recommendation of the officers of their trade unions with the

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<sup>92</sup> CAB/24/74 Report for the Ministry of Labour for the Week Ending 5 February 1919; *Leeds Mercury*, Tuesday, 21 January 1919 reported there was no unanimity of opinion at Barrow, but a great many men and women were urging that a 44-hour week was what was necessary at the least

<sup>93</sup> *Derry Journal*, Friday, 7 February 1919, Barrow narrowly voted for a 40-hour week

<sup>94</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 19 August 1919, cabinet makers, ship-painters, shipwrights and red-leaders were all required, Vickers were offering permanent employment for suitable men, '47-hours per week' and railway fares paid after three months service; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Friday, 29 August 1919

<sup>95</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Friday, 7 February 1919; H of C Deb, 20 February 1919, Vol.112, c1203W

<sup>96</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Friday, 31 January 1919, the PBS was only in operation for two years and applicable to the engineers

<sup>97</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 30 January 1919, the strike was a disaster for Vickers, as well as having to abandon the PBS, when the strike commenced many joiners left Barrow to take up aeronautical and builders work, of some 400 who went on strike only 200 returned to work

additional threat of withholding strike pay.<sup>98</sup> The Premium Bonus System was withdrawn as far as the joiners and bricklayer were concerned, but Vickers complained of the tremendous loss of output which resulted by replacing the system with time-work.<sup>99</sup> Two serious disputes were to follow, the national railway strike and the iron-founders and moulders strike, both of which affected Barrow's major industries.

Although the Government deployed its wartime emergency powers, soldiers being posted at the Barrow gas and electric works, the railway strike caused problems for many men getting to and from work caused by the limited railway service.<sup>100</sup> The absence of early morning trains found hundreds of Vickers nightshift workers stranded at Barrow causing men from Dalton and Ulverston to set off on foot while Vickers lorries carried men further afield.<sup>101</sup> The loss of the rail service meant the halting of coal and coke supplies and the gradually damping down of furnaces followed by closure of the steelworks. Even after the strike ended, dislocation continued due to the breakdown of rail transport, causing the iron and steel works to place blast furnacemen on day-to-day notice.<sup>102</sup> Problems of transporting pig iron to different parts of the country were experienced through shortage of railway wagons, though coke and ore arrived the trucks were found to be unsuitable for carrying pig-iron.<sup>103</sup> Compounding matters further, was that local pig-iron consumption was small due to the steelworks remaining idle, in normal times the bulk produced at Barrow being consumed in the works.

On 20 September 1919 a major strike amongst the iron-moulders and founders occurred and was not easily terminated, it continued for eight weeks adding to unemployment while further reducing the use of pig iron.<sup>104</sup> The strike caused a lack of castings delaying peace work programmes including work on the new Cunard liner and as the works became affected Vickers reluctantly gave men a weeks' notice which was particularly unfortunate for those on part time. Although several hundred

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<sup>98</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday 24 March 1919

<sup>99</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Thursday, 15 May 1919; CAB 24/83/73 Report from the Minister of Labour for the Week Ending 9 July 1919

<sup>100</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 30 September 1919

<sup>101</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 29 September 1919, reported during the morning there was a long stream of men walking from Ulverston and Dalton to Barrow shipyard to draw their pay, and that they were too late to commence work

<sup>102</sup> *Lincolnshire Echo*, Tuesday 16 December 1919

<sup>103</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 11 December 1919

<sup>104</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 24 January 1920

moulders were employed by Vickers, smaller workshops in the borough could not continue causing them to discharge workers.<sup>105</sup>

Table 14 shows the Barrow monthly unemployment figures for the majority of 1919. The figures could be reduced or increased according to the speeding up or reconstruction in some workshops, and demobilisation from the army.<sup>106</sup> However unlike other towns and cities, returning servicemen did not suffer high unemployment at Barrow. This is possibly because Vickers and the Corporation had promised servicemen their jobs back on return and compared to other areas Barrow had sent less men to the war. Notwithstanding men's unemployment figures remained steady until late September when they increased to worrying proportions consequent upon the railway and moulders strikes. It must also be noted that the returns ruled out those men working part time while receiving out of work donations. For women, large numbers were left out of work following demobilisation, although numbers were absorbed when the two major commercial industries reopened. It may also be assumed that others returned to their pre-war occupations or remained at home.

<b>1919</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
14 March	1,000	3,745	129	340	5,041
3 April	1,291	4,064	96	249	5,700
1 May	1,275	3,942	52	271	5,540
5 June	1,801	2,451	101	301	4,654
10 July	1,122	1,088	60	282	2,552
8 August	1,779	847	124	169	2,919
1 September	996	473	52	155	1,676
24 October	2,347	338	173	146	3,004
13 November	2,632	427	231	215	3,505
19 December	2,782	317	139	123	3,361

**Table 14 - Barrow 1919 Unemployment Figures**

Growing numbers of unemployed began organising, marching and petitioning both the local authority and central government, declaring unemployment was

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<sup>105</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday, 18 October 1919, the striking Barrow moulders, voted by 304 to 11 to stay out when offered terms offered by the employers

<sup>106</sup> The shorter working week would also have assisted in employing more men

government responsibility.<sup>107</sup> In November 1919 unemployed men demonstrated in front of Barrow town hall where a resolution was carried calling on the Government to inaugurate national employment schemes generally and asking for a 100 per cent increase in the unemployment donation.<sup>108</sup> The corporation supported the demands of the unemployed calling on the government to provide work or a level of maintenance for those thrown out of work through no fault of their own and warned of the distress and unrest that would result from the discontinuation of the unemployment donation.<sup>109</sup> The prime minister was asked whether the government in placing work will regard the special hardships under which towns like Barrow, engaged almost exclusively in the manufacture of war material were now suffering and would he ensure some clear priority in the allocation of such orders be made promptly to enable workers to weather the coming winter. Lloyd George said the Government had devoted attention to such industrial centres and much had been done to mitigate the evils owing to the change from war to peace conditions, and in consequence there had been little actual distress.

Dismissing concerns, the Government declared the November Barrow unemployment figure of 2,632 men was not abnormal and did not warrant special attention, particularly as 1,800 were in occupations covered by the National Insurance (Unemployment) Acts and were entitled to unemployment benefit when out of work.<sup>110</sup> In fact the Government believed there was no abnormal industrial condition, apart from the dislocation caused by the iron-moulders dispute.<sup>111</sup> But suffering there was, and in an ingenious method of increasing membership the Barrow Cooperative Society proposed putting £500 aside for distribution among its members who were in

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<sup>107</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 11 December 1919, a number of men were found work on road improvements at Barrow, they were to work in relays of three days per week at 1s 6d per hour

<sup>108</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 20 November 1919

<sup>109</sup> Letter from the Distress Sub-Committee to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour, 8 December 1919, Distress Sub-Committee Minutes Book 1905-1921, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 1/3/1; Letter from Mayor to Prime Minister, 1 December 1919, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Ministry of Labour to the Mayor, 5 December 1919, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1144 BOX 48

<sup>111</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 19 November 1919, Mrs. Mills asked the Juvenile Employment Sub-Committee for the cases of boys and girls between 14 and 15 becoming unemployed through the closing down of the Jute Mills to be considered

distress and would include strikers in the grant provided they consented to becoming co-operators.<sup>112</sup>

Problems of food supply were caused by the railway strike, the worry being Barrow's isolation from the mainline, the Ministry of Food stated supply was good and arrangements in hand for meeting shortages should the strike be prolonged.<sup>113</sup> Steps were taken to deliver milk by road, while rationing of tea, meat, butter and cheese were reintroduced.<sup>114</sup> Procuring a local supply of fresh fish was partially overcome by the arrival of fishing boats from Morecambe delivering supplies to the quay at Piel instead of the railway owned docks.<sup>115</sup> Although the railwaymen returned in October the iron-moulders remained out and needy cases were met by a Strike Distress Committee.<sup>116</sup> While there were food shortages, there was no immediate return to pre-war drinking hours nevertheless by mid-1919 weekday opening was extended until 10 pm which attributed to an increase in the number of convictions for drunkenness. The lifting of output restrictions in June followed by an increase in gravity can also be said to be contributing factors to this increase.

Meanwhile the questions of health and housing remained. Like the rest of the country Barrow felt the effects of the influenza outbreak while the Corporation acknowledged 'it was the duty of the local authority to carry through a programme of housing for the working-classes'.<sup>117</sup>

## Health

The massive simultaneous outbreak of influenza throughout the country did not come until late June 1918, the first wave reaching its crest in the second week of July.<sup>118</sup> During the first week of July a large number of workpeople were absent from work at Barrow owing to influenza, but there were no stoppages at the large establishments or loss of public services.<sup>119</sup> The position regarding school children

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<sup>112</sup> CAB 24/93/26 Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, Report No.24, 13 November 1919

<sup>113</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 30 September 1919, there were stocks of food in the borough in hand for a fortnight

<sup>114</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 29 September 1919

<sup>115</sup> Probably due to Barrow Docks being owned and operated by the Furness Railway

<sup>116</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 17 December 1919

<sup>117</sup> Health Committee Draft Minutes, 24 April 1918, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness. BA/C ill/i Vol. 19

<sup>118</sup> Marwick, A., *The Deluge, British Society and the First World War*, (London, Macmillan, 1973), p.257

<sup>119</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 6 July 1918

however was so serious that on the advice of the Barrow Medical Officer of Health, the Education Committee closed the elementary schools until the last week of August.<sup>120</sup> In the second week of July a number of deaths from influenza occurred in Barrow but the epidemic was now said to have passed its climax and was abating. A second and more serious wave hit Barrow in late October and early November when undertakers and gravediggers were overwhelmed and soldiers assisted in digging graves and making coffins. The week the war ended 41 influenza deaths were reported in the town.<sup>121</sup>

The labour situation was not helped when the final wave of influenza appeared in Barrow towards the end of February 1919 causing staff shortages for local industries.<sup>122</sup> The position was compounded by a coal shortage, firmly blamed on the Coal Controller, leaving hundreds of houses without fire and people with influenza in danger by not getting the warmth needed. Although influenza became prevalent again it was not as virulent as in 1918. Three deaths occurred in one week and there were a few serious cases under the care of the doctors, some of the latter being men returned from the Army.<sup>123</sup> In the final week of February 1919 it was reported sixteen deaths had occurred within ten days at Barrow, and many cases of illness existed at Ulverston where workers lived, however the schools remained open.<sup>124</sup> In some cases where influenza was the cause of illness it was followed by pneumonia and recorded as the cause of death masking the epidemic's true figures. Throughout the 1918-1919 epidemic, people remained resilient, giving and receiving the same advice they had followed for the preceding four years, that of simply 'carrying on'.

Under the Food Controller the 'national kitchen' programme grew out of community kitchens, predating the introduction of full rationing. The Ministry in 1917 seized on their potential for efficiency, wholesale purchasing and collective preparation, reasoning they would help cut waste.<sup>125</sup> They offered cheap food for the

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 70 per cent were absent from one school

<sup>121</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Monday, 28 October 1918 reported there were 18 fatal cases during the previous week; *Western Gazette*, Friday, 8 November 1918; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 13 November 1918

<sup>122</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 24 February 1919

<sup>123</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 20 February 1919

<sup>124</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 26 February 1919

<sup>125</sup> Barrow-in-Furness, Minutes of Committee November 1917 to October 1918, General Purpose Committee, 27 September 1918, National Kitchens, in consideration of saving coal the kitchen was designed to use both gas and electricity for power and heating



masses, were run by local workers and funded by repayable Government grants, they were not charities and did not resemble soup kitchens for societies poorest. As late as mid-1918, the Ministry of Food was talking confidently of national kitchens becoming a 'permanent national institution', and in August 1918, the government empowered county councils, as well as urban authorities, to open and run national kitchens.<sup>126</sup>

Acute distress had not been suffered in Barrow during the war and no requirements had been seen for community kitchens. However, a national kitchen was opened in the populous district of Barrow Island on 17 March 1919, although the restaurant seated 64 persons at one sitting, the chief object was to provide cooked food to be taken into people's homes.<sup>127</sup> It was calculated 800 to 1,000 meals per day would have to be sold to meet their liabilities, but if not used the kitchen would quickly shut down.<sup>128</sup> The local vicar viewed it as part of a future they had been striving for and of real social and political value, observing working women he was convinced their work was never done and they had too much to do, the national kitchen was therefore an aid that would provide better meals for many mothers and children. Although Barrow's National Food Kitchens outlasted the Armistice, the Treasury removed funding in 1919.<sup>129</sup>

In the autumn 1919 the Barrow School Medical Officer, reporting on a sample of 6,667 school children, concluded 'there was indication that numbers of children were not obtaining sufficient food due to the bad economic conditions in the homes on account of the labour troubles'.<sup>130</sup> Joy says this may account for the slight increase in deaths from contagious diseases in 1919, but at no stage does she consider the returning influenza epidemic in February.<sup>131</sup> In the Hindpool district schools a few cases of malnutrition due to insufficient food were found, but generally children were

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<sup>126</sup> *The London Gazette*, 18 August 1918, p.9470

<sup>127</sup> It is interesting to note that the local FCC were still in existence and invited to the opening

<sup>128</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 18 March 1919, Barrow's National Food was established through the efforts of the Food Control Committee

<sup>129</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 18 March 1919, the building on Farm Street was a temporary one and cost about £650, the Government found the capital for the building and equipment on the understanding it would be repaid in ten years without interest

<sup>130</sup> Medical Officer's report, 1919, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book 1918-1919

<sup>131</sup> Joy, C. A., *War and Unemployment in an Industrial Community: Barrow-in-Furness 1914-1926*, PhD Thesis, Uclan 2004, p.93

well nourished, similar conditions were found on Barrow Island.<sup>132</sup> The Barrow women's activist Mrs. Mills, pointed out that malnutrition did not show itself immediately as many mothers tried to make ends by giving a little less food and in such cases it would take time before the effects were seen. Attention was drawn to the Board of Guardians and Education Committee to consider implementing the feeding of necessitous school children.<sup>133</sup> To children requiring food the Education (Provision of Meals) Act was put into operation providing meals six days per week, distribution centres were organised and two-course dinners arranged costing approximately 5d per head.<sup>134</sup>

Although thousands had left the town to return to their homes and occupations in other parts of the country and abroad the housing shortage in Barrow remained acute.

### **Housing and Accommodation**

By the Armistice approximately eight per cent of the work on the new permanent houses was complete, and by May 1920 only 132 houses out of 250 were available for occupation.<sup>135</sup> Important and far reaching decisions regarding workers' housing were therefore needed if the town was to maintain its industrial supremacy. As the cost of building continued to rise, difficulty increased in obtaining an economic rent on 70 per cent of the cost of permanent houses as required by the Treasury.<sup>136</sup> In the case of congested places like Barrow the competition of prospective tenants made it possible to secure the higher rents, but the danger existed that a claim for higher wages would follow and any increase would not be restricted to the tenants of new houses, but spread through the whole district, or even a whole industry.

The Ministry estates were problematic from the outset as both Vickers and the Town Council refused post-war possession so ownership was vested in the Ministry.

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<sup>132</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 12 November 1919

<sup>133</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 22 October 1919

<sup>134</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 19 November 1919, between 19 November and 31 December 1919 18,858 dinners, an average of 510 daily were provided

<sup>135</sup> OHMOM, Vol. V Wages and Welfare, Pt. V Provision for the Housing of Munitions Workers, Ch. II House Administration, p.19, in 1918 Miss Octavia Hill's System of house property management was introduced to Barrow by appointing educated women to act as agents to the landlords in providing full house management

<sup>136</sup> CAB 24/58/69, 17 July 1918, Labour Position in Munition Industries - Housing

The first area of contention was the Ministry of Munitions' unilateral attempts to fix rents at the extremely high figure of 17s 6d per week for the permanent houses, which roused corporation protests at both the figure and lack of consultation.<sup>137</sup> In June 1919, Mrs. Mills said government houses at Barrow were too small, too dear at a rent of 17s 6d and hampered with unnecessary regulations.<sup>138</sup>

By virtue of being a Ministry funded scheme however, the question of rents was a matter of public policy, and whilst the Ministry insisted on the need to charge an economic rent to recoup the high building costs, the corporation was adamant that it was unreasonable to expect working men to pay such an amount.<sup>139</sup> However, following the Corporation's refusal to accept even reduced rents of between 10s and 12s per week, and with over half of the proposed houses not built, the Ministry of Munitions announced an end to its building programme.<sup>140</sup> This led to the problem of large numbers of permanent properties standing empty despite the chronic housing shortage. Following the Corporation decision not to purchase the properties the houses were placed on the market. However when the best offer failed to meet the average building cost of £1,200, the properties were withdrawn from sale in July 1919, and were still unoccupied in the autumn of 1920.

Following the loss of the state sponsored initiative, the Corporation's decision to proceed with the building of the remaining 500 houses in August 1919 quickly ran into difficulties.<sup>141</sup> The Housing Commission rejected tenders for the remainder for being too high, and despite Council attempts to stimulate the building of working-class houses and limit non-essential work, construction was hindered by labour and material shortages and the requirement to balance housing needs.<sup>142</sup> The Council was evenly divided on the housing issue, some councillors were against the entire concept while others believed building could not be justified as local industry would never again employ such a large workforce. A further view suggested building should be

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<sup>137</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 2 December 1918, the rent fixed in the first instance having regard to a moderate return on the expended capital was 22s 6d per week, at 17s 6d per week was on about 80 per cent of the cost

<sup>138</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 24 June 1919

<sup>139</sup> Pepper, S., and Swenarton, M., 'Home front: garden suburbs for munitions workers', *Architectural Review* (June 1978), p.367

<sup>140</sup> General Purpose Committee Minutes, April 1918, Barrow Corporation Minutes Book, CRO

<sup>141</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 30 August 1919

<sup>142</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Thursday, 6 November 1919 the Corporation set out to build 100 of the outstanding 500 permanent dwellings as a start

deferred until costs fell and rents were reasonable. The pro-housing lobby supported building on the grounds of the borough's poor and insanitary conditions, whilst others argued for giving people 'decent places to live and not herding them like pigs'. There was a body of opinion, both within the Corporation and from the general public, that the problem was the habits of people themselves. The engineers however believed the working-class had the right to live in accommodation that would not prejudice their own or their children's physical conditions. Despite some change of attitude, house-building in the borough fell away rapidly in the post-war period, apart from those built by the Ministry of Munitions, the few subsidised, built and completed under the 1919 Act however barely equalled the pre-war rate. Whilst the Commission into Industrial Unrest provided the catalyst for a break with the past, condemning the Corporation's passive acceptance of appalling living conditions, the Ministry succeeded in limiting house building without industrial militancy.

There was no lessening of demand in the town for accommodation. Estimates differ for the 1919 Barrow population figures, one estimate gives 73,627 a second 78,000, these figures were a drop from the 1918 population of 83,179 and roughly on a par with that for 1915 of 75,368.<sup>143</sup> Due to the slow pace of building and releasing new houses for occupation demand remained as such that in one instance £10 key money was offered on empty four-roomed house, and for the tenancy the owner had 100 applicants.<sup>144</sup> With the renewal of eviction orders there was a call from the Barrow Labour Party for the local magistrates to cease granting them and a demand that the Government immediately restore the anti-eviction laws instituted during the war, and that they remain in operation until suitable accommodation was provided for the workers.<sup>145</sup> The magistrates also refused to meet a Corporation deputation, stating that evictions involved the judicial function of the Justices, whose powers and duties were subject to legislation rather than negotiation. Nevertheless the Barrow magistrates were alive to their responsibilities and sent a deputation to London on the subject of evictions further there is evidence that evictions were only allowed where

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<sup>143</sup> Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Account Books 1913-19; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday 9 July 1919

<sup>144</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 2 December 1918, the Rent Restriction Act failed to penalise the collection of key money from prospective tenants

<sup>145</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 17 November 1919

alternative accommodation was available while others were deferred.<sup>146</sup> With the withdrawal of the Ministry of Munitions the threat of strike action against the Government over evictions was no longer viable. In June 1919 the Labour Party and Trades Council had threatened Barrow Council with grave industrial disorder unless the granting of ejection orders were stopped immediately.<sup>147</sup> Strike action did not occur and intimidation appears to have been used when two or three property owners were threatened during November that if their tenants were evicted those tenants would be taken with their chattels to pitched tents in Cavendish Square in the town centre, where there would be a public scandal.<sup>148</sup> There was no desire to prevent men who owned houses getting into those properties as long as there was provision of a municipal scheme so that tenants having to leave houses had somewhere to go. If municipal houses were built there would be no evictions, the desire therefore was to provide decent houses at reasonable rents. In fact it is arguable that under a climate of reduced prosperity and rising unemployment the demand was increasing for cheaper housing.

Accommodation and conditions under which certain families were living owing to new eviction orders being granted or threatened were substandard. The leasing of caravans became a profitable business, a landowner would pay rates for the land and lease vans, railway wagons and furniture vehicles, creating small colonies where families lived under primitive conditions.<sup>149</sup> In April 1919, twenty-eight adults and eleven children were living in railway wagons at weekly rents of 7s per wagon with one toilet between them.<sup>150</sup> Rates were not payable on mobile homes and were not affected by bye-laws. An assortment of structures were generated, some with artificial wheels and others with wheels painted on as landowners sought to profit from the homeless. Others lived in wooden huts, one councillor asked members to inspect a hut almost in the shadow of the Town Hall, let at 11s 6d per week.<sup>151</sup> One bed nearly filled it, there was a bacon box for a table and two rickety chairs, conditions

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<sup>146</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 29 July 1919

<sup>147</sup> Resolution to Barrow Corporation, 12 June 1919, Labour Party and Trades Council Industrial Committee Minutes Book, CRO, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 7/1

<sup>148</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 17 November 1919

<sup>149</sup> Housing Statistics 1914-1921, CRO, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/H BOX II, identified 79 caravans occupied as dwellings

<sup>150</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 12 April 1919

<sup>151</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 7 October 1919

he declared were vile, disgraceful and unsanitary. Not only were makeshift colonies tolerated but encouraged. In October 1919 the Housing Committee had to reconsider acquiring Army huts for temporary accommodation in which to house Barrow workers.<sup>152</sup> A Labour councillor argued that the Council would use the huts as alternative accommodation for people turned out of their houses, people who could not afford to buy houses. Further the council surveyor was against purchasing the huts, not only on the grounds of health, but because the huts were not fit to live in.<sup>153</sup> Pressure mounted from the Labour Party and Trades Council urging the Council to make every effort to ease the hardships caused by the housing shortage while the Corporation took steps to deal with the worst abuses, but efforts proved futile in the face of increasing homelessness. The immediate post-war period therefore saw continued evictions, increasing numbers of houses standing empty and the expansion of 'alternative' forms of accommodation for the homeless. As the town reverted to a changing industrial system with it came a return to traditional politics.

### **Politics and The General Election**

Joy says that although there was a marked shift towards the left among Barrow's organised working-class, this should not be overstated to the exclusion of the vast body of the apolitical and non-committed waverers.<sup>154</sup> During the war there was little evidence of socialist ideology beyond the workplace, and any evidence of anti-capitalist rhetoric was largely confined to the Labour Party and Trades Council minutes. Even there, a resolution that the Labour Party should focus on food control issues and the nationalisation of key industries rather than act as recruiting agents for the capitalists was immediately diluted to express disappointment in the government's lack of attention to essentials such as food, fuel and wages, suggesting that the Labour Party and Trades Council handled ideology with caution.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Dearle, N. B., *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War for Great Britain and Ireland 1914-1919*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1929), p.275 during July 1919, due to the housing shortage the Government made the decision to use wartime wooden huts as a temporary expedient

<sup>153</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Tuesday, 28 October 1919;

<sup>154</sup> Joy, *War and Unemployment in an Industrial Community*, p.113

<sup>155</sup> Labour Party and Trades Council Industrial Committee Minutes Book, 11 February 1915, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 7/1

The issue of the war deeply divided the Barrow Labour Party into two rival factions, the far left 'pacifists' and those supporting the Government in full prosecution of the war.<sup>156</sup> Vickers shop stewards had become more powerful than the traditional union leaders and by 1917 they numbered over a hundred, many committed anti-war socialists.<sup>157</sup> This was clearly brought to light in early 1918 when radical statements were made regarding a people's peace. Ideological conflict within the Labour ranks was inevitable and in the hierarchy of the ILP Charles Duncan was becoming increasingly isolated. When Duncan appeared at a meeting in the autumn of 1918 defending his stance on the war he claimed he spoke for the common man, although this was well received there were cries of 'kick out the Bolsheviks'. The Barrow ASE were primarily responsible for Duncan's political life but throughout the war years became displeased over his internal policies and independent attitude which determined them to be rid of him.<sup>158</sup>

While the engineers voted against his candidature and other labour candidate came forward, they found Duncan foisted on them regardless. Nominated by the local Boilermakers Society and the Barrow Workers Union of which Duncan was general secretary he was left to contest the borough on behalf of the National Labour Party.<sup>159</sup> Duncan had not been averse to coming forward under the Coalition ticket, but the decision of the National Labour Party to withdraw from the Coalition Government compelled him to revise his views. He now supported the good measures of the coalition government and opposed the bad measures, and on trade union and labour matters generally he acted with the National Labour Party.<sup>160</sup> Tensions ran high to the point where in-fighting over the choice of Parliamentary candidate eclipsed all other considerations and prevented Labour from offering an effective challenge to the Unionist Coalition candidate. In fact six days before the election a meeting of the Barrow Labour Party delegates representing all the allied trades was held to consider supporting Duncan, but an overwhelming majority refused their support.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday 18 May 1918, it was reported that Duncan who had supported the war had been turned down by the Labour organisations at Barrow, but this was never officially confirmed

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<sup>158</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 11 December 1918

<sup>159</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Tuesday, 10 December, 1918, the candidates were Councillor Ellison of Barrow and Councillor Buchanan of Glasgow City Council

<sup>160</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, Tuesday, 19 November 1918

<sup>161</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 11 December 1918

Furthermore it was agreed to take no united action in the contest, and individual party members were left to vote as they pleased.

The split in the Labour ranks provided Barton Chadwick, the Unionist Candidate with his opportunity. He appealed as a Lloyd George supporter and his strong point was that it was necessary to have a representative Government to carry through peace negotiations and handle reconstruction. Without the organisation of the Barrow Labour Party little time was left to Duncan to create his own election machinery and although disadvantaged he had the backing of many Trade Unionists, the Barrow Liberals and considerable Irish support.<sup>162</sup> The result was expected to be close with women playing a decisive part. Duncan condescendingly said that 12,737 women out of an electorate of 37,969 in Barrow were 'given the privilege' of exercising the franchise and he thought he was entitled to some credit with regards to obtaining enfranchisement.<sup>163</sup> Mrs. Pankhurst was more decisive and visiting Barrow under the auspices of the Women's Party addressed a large meeting where she appealed to the women to vote for Lloyd George.<sup>164</sup> Every man had a vote and almost every woman she said, but warned that women would not allow extreme men to put the country into bloodshed. Totally opposed to war and class supremacy she added 'there would be no Labour Government because women were against it'.<sup>165</sup>

Labour narrowly lost its Parliamentary seat, a defeat Duncan rightly attributed to Barrow Labour divisions.<sup>166</sup> Todd argues it was the extremists' intention to oust Duncan and the strength of their influence within Barrow's Labour Party is demonstrated by its refusal to support his candidature at the 1918 General Election.<sup>167</sup> In fact this was nothing new as the Barrow activists had planned to put up Socialist candidates against leading Labour members including Duncan at the 1914 general election.<sup>168</sup> In defeat Duncan commented 'it does seem to be a disgrace to a great Labour constituency like Barrow, where probably there is a better organised band of

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<sup>162</sup> Many Barrow Liberals declined to follow the advice of the local Asquithian Liberal Association and voted for Chadwick

<sup>163</sup> Saturday, 7 December 1918

<sup>164</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Wednesday, 13 December 1918

<sup>165</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Thursday, 13 February 1919 whilst it is not known what influence women had on the outcome of the 1918 election

<sup>166</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 30 December 1918, only two-thirds of the electorate voted with a number of spoiled papers and on a recount Chadwick won by 299 votes

<sup>167</sup> Todd, *A History of Labour*, p.181

<sup>168</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, Tuesday, 17 December 1912



trade unionists than any other part of the country, to overthrow the Labour representative and return a Tory ship-owner'.<sup>169</sup> Socialist influence and attitudes towards the war therefore divided Barrow's Labour Party and brought the once 'well-oiled machine of a model constituency' to division and defeat.<sup>170</sup>

The *Yorkshire Post* said the shop stewards at the 1918 election had decided to support the Tory candidate rather than stay neutral.<sup>171</sup> In this they were displaying a certain amount of shrewdness, as if Duncan was returned he would once more stand against a Unionist. In the event of the shop stewards entering the field there would be a three-cornered contest with little prospect of success therefore by supporting Chadwick they were hopefully clearing the way for a straight fight in the future. While the election was lost for Labour, the shop stewards achieved their objective of removing Duncan. The shop stewards soon found their candidate when Councillor Wake was selected by a large majority at the Conference of the Barrow Trades and Labour Party in August 1919.<sup>172</sup>

In the immediate post-war period, left-wing ideology was low key, and in '*The Northern Beacon*' the organ of the Barrow extremists, ideology and class rhetoric were minimal. For example, the Labour Party manifesto for the 1919 Board of Guardians election called for the replacement of the Poor Law with a more humane system, the transfer of the care of the needy to the relevant local authority committee and prevention rather than the amelioration of poverty.<sup>173</sup> Similarly, another article expounded the consequences of middle-class control of the council and its inevitable failure to meet the needs of all citizens, particularly regarding to the provision of adequate working-class health and education. Yet although emphasising social divisions and stressing 'the cure is with ourselves' the ideology is non-confrontational with no rhetoric of class struggle.<sup>174</sup> Instead emphasis was placed on the need for non-violent change by ballot and industrial action, but neither such articles nor the

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<sup>169</sup> *Barrow News*, Saturday, 4 January 1919

<sup>170</sup> McKibbin, R., *The Evolution of The Labour Party 1910-1924*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1975), P.8

<sup>171</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday, 11 December 1918

<sup>172</sup> *Lancashire Evening Mail*, Saturday, 30 August 1919

<sup>173</sup> *Northern Beacon*, Thursday, 27 March 1919; Mowat Papers, Barrow Records Office, BDXJ 93/2; *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday, 5 April 1919, for the 14 vacant seats there were 25 candidates, 11 of whom belonged to the Labour Party

<sup>174</sup> *Northern Beacon*, Thursday, 24 July 1919

damning indictment of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest politicised the town's working classes.

There is evidence of frustration with the populace as a whole, who were increasingly criticised in the *Beacon* for apathy, indifference and of having 'as much imagination as a grasshopper'.<sup>175</sup> Such insults would not endear the left to its readership, and despite stressing the importance of the working-class press the paper was short-lived caused by a fall-off in readership.<sup>176</sup> Nonetheless when the first municipal election was held for a vacant council seat in January 1919, just a month after the general election, it was convincingly won by Sam Lowry the NAUL adviser, increasing the number of Labour council members to nine.<sup>177</sup> When municipal elections were held in November 1919, out of the seven wards contested, Labour held their three seats and gained a fourth bringing their representation on the Council up to ten out of 32, the latter figure including eight aldermen.<sup>178</sup> This was achieved in spite of exceptional opposition by the Conservative and Liberals fighting Labour on independent lines and a new organisation the Barrow Constitutional Workers League which conducted a campaign against the mainstream Labour Party, who it was alleged had captured the trades unions.<sup>179</sup>

## Conclusions

Unrest which had grown in intensity as the strain of the war effort and the hardships and restrictions created by the exigencies of the war now made themselves more severely felt. No sooner had the claims of all classes of munitions workers to share in the 12½ and 7½ per cent awards subsided than a new bone of contention arose in the early months of 1918. The prevailing discontent manifested itself principally in the opposition to new recruiting measures and in the demand in some quarters to peace negotiations. Unrest to some extent subsided during April and May 1918 caused by the demand for men and munitions to counter Germany's supreme effort, but with the first sign of the tide turning in France it showed itself again in the

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<sup>175</sup> *Northern Beacon*, Thursday, 15 May 1919

<sup>176</sup> CAB 24/79/54 Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, Report No.3, 14 May 1919

<sup>177</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, Friday, 24 January 1919, Lowry polled 1,336 votes against Smith (Independent) 763

<sup>178</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday, 3 November 1919

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* on a vote of 15,772 out of an electorate of 23,725 the Labour vote totalled 8,164 against 7,608 for the Moderates or Independents

embargo dispute. Therefore unrest was readily shelved during a crisis, but it was quickly resurrected once the worst was over.

As the War ended Barrow's future was determined by the ability of Vickers to turn from war to peace products. The rundown of Admiralty and heavy gun orders and the changeover to merchant ship building meant less skilled labour was required. Though skilled labour was needed elsewhere, Barrow's high wages kept men in the town often on labouring jobs while female labour was generally dispersed, and for those remaining little scope was seen for earning wages previously seen in munitions. Return of demobilised men and the employers and trade unions stances further prevented female employment at Vickers.

The retention of labour and the slow house-building programme caused by the withdrawal of the government meant the problem of overcrowding remained. With virtually no unemployment in Barrow throughout the war the problem returned on its conclusion and cases of hardship were witnessed by calls for relief and people living in temporary and sub-standard accommodation. The Vickers joiners and bricklayers strike demonstrated the trade unions aversion to the payment by results system, but on the positive side working hours were reduced providing more leisure time. The major strike amongst the iron-moulders was not easily disposed of and continued for four months, badly affecting Barrow's industries. National strikes in the autumn further exacerbated the problems of unemployment and distress, causing men to claim out of work benefits and children to be provided with school emergency meals.

The issue of the war deeply divided the Barrow Labour Party. Before the war it was the avowed intention of the shop stewards to oust the local MP Charles Duncan and the need became greater after his pro-war stance. The strength of their influence within Barrow's Labour Party was demonstrated by their refusal to support his candidature and Duncan's loss at the 1918 general election. The significance of this issue was that it was uncharacteristic that a strong labour town returned a Tory MP. It also shows the radicalism or politicisation of the workforce, or at least of sufficient numbers that could divide support for the war-time MP.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research has implications not just for local home front historians but general historians. It demonstrates what local studies can add to the general studies by expanding the wider based explanations and by seeing the complex nature of a town at war. By carrying out a case study it has shown how the various elements interacted, the broad consensus of engagement in the war and the importance of local factors working together to achieve war aims. In addition to illustrating the distinctive nature of Barrow's war experiences the study provides important insights and contributes to the better understanding of the impact of war on the economy and social dynamics of a single industry town. This concluding section reviews the main themes identified through the thesis of the disruption caused by the war, especially relating to state control and the Ministry of Munitions, labour relations, unions and organisation of labour, the Labour political movement, the place and role of women, and housing, health and welfare. The main conclusions will demonstrate how the war impacted on Barrow, and how it met the challenges and came together to help sustain the war effort whilst providing an opportunity to test how far the general interpretations from the secondary literature apply to Barrow. The conclusions will also discuss the value, and limitations of the local case study as a mode of analysis of the home front.

Before the outbreak of war Barrow's fortunes were largely tied up with Vickers and the big ship policy of the day. Vickers had succeeded in their efforts to win a place among the elite shipbuilders, naval and foreign contracts guaranteeing continuation of work and full employment breaking the trend of boom and bust. Besides shipbuilding and marine engineering, iron and steel production formed a large part of the town's industry while the docks provided for materials and much of the town's provisions including food, its major products steaming away from the port. The rail system was essential for the transportation of iron ore, coal and coke, pig iron and the movement of workers and passengers. Barrow's isolation however meant that its geographical links, were both tenuous and vulnerable to external influences, but made the town more self-reliant in other ways.

The vast technological changes in warships not only required design skills but craft skills, although increased technological changes were seen in the workshops,

long standing trade rules and work ethics tended to frustrate Vickers' innovative methods of production and technical management as noted by Todd. Trade unionism was strong although friction was seen between the ASE and the Boilermakers Society, whilst the large number of individual unions and representation of some trades by more than one union fragmented the movement. While a shop-stewards organisation existed it had little influence before the war. Profitable times seen in the pre-war years meant neither employers nor employees wanted prolonged stoppages. Nonetheless Barrow was not an ideal environment as pre-war housing and overcrowding problems existed of which the war would intensify.

Following the outbreak of hostilities, the rush to the colours and unemployment becomes the focal points of historians while ignoring the fact that the completion of warships and submarines and the production of naval munitions was of first priority. DeGroot and others see the outbreak of war as bringing general unemployment, but this was not the case at Barrow.<sup>180</sup> The indiscriminate nature of volunteering led to serious trade disruption and disorganisation forcing Vickers to take steps to protect their workforce. Marwick observed: 'in a war of machines it was at least as necessary to look to the supply of machine-makers at home as to the supply of machine-users on the fields of battle'.<sup>181</sup> Initial manpower shortages were overcome by moving men from non-essential to essential work, including those from merchant ship builders where work was slack. Success concerned with the continuance of the war however could only be achieved by retaining, redistributing and expanding the skilled workforce, output being dependent on increasing or economising the supply of labour.

The Barrow male population were urged to see their duty was at home and the thesis has highlighted the disruption caused by men migrating to higher paid work at Vickers from other industries and services in the town. Abundance of work drew in unemployed workers from elsewhere but they generally lacked shipbuilding experience and were described as 'of a lower character'. While sympathy was seen for the Belgians their introduction into the engineering and railway workshops was

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<sup>180</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, Gregory, *The Last Great War*, Marwick, *The Deluge*, Pope, *War and Society*, Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*

<sup>181</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, p.56

unpopular. These initial problems of loss, redistribution, recruiting and retaining of industrial manpower were further compounded when Vickers accepted huge shell and gun contracts as recognized by Scott.<sup>182</sup>

State control and the Ministry of Munitions have been much written about, discussing manpower control and improving production efficiency to increase output especially by the use of leaving certificates and munitions tribunals. Historians disagree about the intent behind the Munitions Act, but as Rubin points out this was a response to the manpower shortage, and also an attempt to discipline labour at a time when scarcity rendered the workers powerful.<sup>183</sup> Notwithstanding if arbitration failed the Ministry had the law and the threat of force behind them. For workers, the most significant provision of the Act was the leaving certificate, generally seen as a drastic restriction of normal liberties and the most powerful instrument of industrial efficiency. The balance of power between the employer and worker was mediated by the munitions tribunals, and the conclusions based on Barrow is that it was not automatically repressive on the worker but was more sensitive and accommodating.

Study of the Barrow Munitions Tribunal has demonstrated the problems and conditions of industry and shed light on how they were addressed in the interest of retaining men. It has been established that difficulties lay mainly in the shipyard and iron and steel industries, not in the shell and gun shops. In matters of discipline fines had little effect as offenders made up deductions by high earnings or working overtime. Manpower shortages meant poor workers were retained while protected workers previous to the coming out of men for the army had little fear of dismissal. Industrial harmony was therefore essential and trade unions were apt to discipline transgressors. This was important when completing contracts, in the interests of the steady workers and when negotiating pay rises, particularly with Vickers. Thus the Ministry looked to Vickers and the unions for self-regulation to maintain order and efficiency and broadly this worked. However, it has been shown that in the interest of maintaining men under threat of conscription, both unions and Vickers were unified in defying authority.

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<sup>182</sup> Scott, *Vickers a History*, p.101

<sup>183</sup> Rubin, *War, Law and Labour*, pp. 7-39

Most historians relate women's experiences with the practices of dilution and substitution. Simmonds say the difference between the two is indistinct and the subject of some controversy.<sup>184</sup> The Shells and Fuses Agreement and the Treasury Agreement opened the way to a sharp increase in women's employment. In 'controlled' establishments, essential to the 'production of munitions', the principle of dilution was accepted. At Barrow, trade union strength was such that union members were preferred by employers in the interest of harmony and therefore further dilution beyond munitions work was going to be problematic. Dilution was contentious as DeGroot says it undermined the skill differentials upon which the workers' security was based.<sup>185</sup> However, the application of dilution to Admiralty work is largely ignored. The Admiralty held that dilution would only be encouraged provided efficiency was maintained, output remained undiminished and the skilled labour released utilised to increase Vickers' productivity. In view of the first two conditions the Admiralty maintained it had to be the governing authority to what measures of dilution should be introduced where output was destined directly or indirectly to their work, effectively this excluded Vicker's from the Labour Department Dilution Section.

Following the success of dilution into controlled Tyne and Clyde engineering and shipyard establishments, Vickers attempted to introduce further dilution on skilled men's work under the Ministry of War Act. The outcome was a strike and the reluctant acceptance of dilution in certain departments forced upon the engineers by the Chairman of the Government Commission for the Dilution of Labour. Failure to introduce dilution on a large scale led to the government meeting with local representatives of the Admiralty and Ministry of Munitions concerning the organisation of Barrow's shipbuilding industry. Importantly government preferred to conclude agreement with the shipyard trades rather than introduce dilution under the Ministry Acts. The line was taken of using all shipyard trade resources before introducing innovations, while semi-skilled male labour and women would only be introduced into shipyard trades when imperative. This demonstrated that the government supported and accepted a measure which encouraged industrial peace. The Admiralty took a similar view on substitution only agreeing to its introduction on

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<sup>184</sup> Simmonds, *Britain and World War 1*, pp. 137-8

<sup>185</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, p.111

the understanding that their representative would decide how far it was necessary and who could be released. Study of the Barrow Military Tribunals indicates why such a stance was taken not only by the Admiralty but the unions, as most male substitutes were unsuitable or unqualified for the work. Attempting to run private shipbuilding and armament firms along the lines of Royal Dockyards and government munitions factories was always bound to fail and if government had realised this and addressed the private yards problems earlier much unrest could have been avoided.

Whilst the war strengthened the local shop stewards movement, interpretations of the extent of their powers vary considerably. Hinton argues that Barrow developed in an exceptional form, the relationship between Vickers and the Engineering Joint Trades Board (EJTB) preventing full development of direct workshop democracy which had explosive results elsewhere. He maintains that when Barrow's rank-and 'rebel element' formed an independent workers' committee it was never allowed to seize a position of mass leadership as on the Clyde and at Sheffield. Todd's study of the development of Barrow's labour movement however asserts quite rightly that the shop stewards' became a power of some significance during the war years of which the government recognized.<sup>186</sup>

Revolutionary views however were not held by the mainly loyal and law-abiding Barrow community, the extremists tending to state their views with moderation. The Barrow Unrest Commissioners noted 'though extreme men made the point of being loyal to the country' there was a sense of being pushed beyond reasonable limits through lack of representation. Failure to set up shop committees with representation on Joint Works Committees dealing with detailed matters of industry were thus likely to drive well-meaning enthusiasts towards the extremists. The key elements were a lack of a way for the shop stewards to legitimately put forward their complaints, non-recognition by engineering unions and the way government had largely ignored the problems of Barrow. By setting up works committees with EJTB representation, partial recognition by the Trade Unions and government intervention to provide workers' housing these problems were largely overcome and unrest prevented. As in many industrial centres, with the collapse of

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<sup>186</sup> Todd, A History of Labour, p.178



the movement after the war the shop stewards' influence was transferred from the workplace to the wider community.

An examination of political change has provided insights into the ideological undercurrents of the period. The gains made by Barrow's Labour Party in the pre-war years testify to the organisation and backing of the engineering trade unions. Whilst crediting the shop stewards as laying the foundation for a strong socialist movement their effect on Labour politics can be seen as acting in a detrimental manner. The lack of funding caused by the withdrawal of the political levy and the realisation that Labour parliamentary representation was limited provided an opportunity for the socialists at the 1914 general election, but the war intervened. The issue of the First World War deeply divided the Barrow Labour Party into two rival factions, the far left 'pacifists' and those supporting the government in its prosecution. Indeed, the wartime growth of socialist ideology coupled with the extension of the shop stewards' influence within the party itself proved particularly divisive culminating in the loss of the parliamentary seat at the 1918 General Election. Although the Barrow Labour Party had always welcomed and supported women, enfranchisement failed to bring about the anticipated post-war gain. Whilst these divisions turned the attentions of the Labour Party inward and set the pattern for left-wing politics particularly towards the latter period of the war, it was municipal politics that provided the main arena for the political struggles of these years. Throughout the war the Labour Party was underrepresented on Barrow council and although it made gains at the 1919 Municipal Elections the party's failure to obtain control of the Corporation was out of step with the wider Labour successes of that year.<sup>187</sup>

Pre-war females in Barrow had little scope in the choice of their occupations. The war therefore brought new opportunities for females but with its own special problems. In the workshops they were continually under the scrutiny of the engineering trade unions and as Thom and Macarthur identify women were only meantime workers, there for the duration. The Barrow ASE Secretary endorsed this as he had no fear regarding restoration of pre-war conditions once the war was over as female labour would not be a paying proposition in engineering. He did not think

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<sup>187</sup> Local elections were cancelled in 1918 until the following year

women generally would oust engineers and they would be more prudent than to attempt it. Concerns were also voiced when women dilutees were retained in Barrow's factories at a time when men were looking for employment.

In addition to full employment, the war increased the earnings of many male workers, which together with the benefit of a wife's wage, brought a new affluence to many working-class families. Woollacott notes it was young, single women with no dependents who mostly experienced high wages as offering unprecedented spending choices.<sup>188</sup> However assumptions that Barrow single women munitions workers were prosperous had little foundation in reality, a first-hand account pointed out that only by working longer or harder under task related schemes were they able to survive.<sup>189</sup> Alice Wycherley provides further confirmation by stating that: 'only by working alternative shifts and longer hours could she maintain herself.'<sup>190</sup>

Following the Armistice female labour was generally dispersed and for those remaining there was little scope for earning wages as in munitions. This agrees with both Braybon and Wightman. The return of demobilised men along with employers and trade unions stances further prevented female employment at Vickers. The government in failing to find new work for unemployed Barrow women meant that they remained disadvantaged. Commercial use of wartime munitions methods were not seen and females were left with little option but to return to their pre-war trades.

The impact of war was out of all proportion to anything previously experienced by the town's fluctuating economy and the unprecedented influx of wartime munitions workers placed the infrastructure of the town under severe pressure. During the pre-war years the lack of housing was a problem to industrial recruiting as the stock never increased in sufficient numbers to meet pre-war needs. In their defence Barrow Council encouraged artisan housing by private syndicate but there were never enough and while unions and the Labour Party were aware of the need for working-class housing it was left to Vickers to provide limited numbers. Although the majority of Barrow's housing stock was no more than fifty years old at the outbreak of the War, working-class housing conditions were characteristically poor,

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<sup>188</sup> Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p.122

<sup>189</sup> *The Liverpool Daily Post*, Tuesday, 30 November 1915, James M. Tuohy the London Correspondent of the *New York World* visiting the Barrow Works

<sup>190</sup> Trescaheric, *Voices from the Past*, p.55

and high rents, sub-letting and overcrowding were endemic. However as a result of the town's modernity and its favourable comparison to the stereotyped image of what constituted a slum, the prevailing conditions were regarded as acceptable by the authorities, and together with the intention of minimising municipal expenditure to keep the rates low, provided no stimulus for reform. However, by 1917 the housing conditions in Barrow were described by the unrest commission as a 'crying scandal'. The general commission on industrial unrest also pointed out that housing conditions were not only bad in Barrow but in Scotland and Wales.<sup>191</sup> Marwick points to Glasgow's poor housing conditions and those in Wales and Monmouth stating: 'the workers were deeply discontented with their housing accommodation and with their unwholesome and unattractive environment generally.'<sup>192</sup>

Inevitably, the wartime influx of munitions workers had a profound effect on levels of overcrowding, but whilst the Rent Restrictions Act pegged rents at 1914 levels, it offered no protection for the thousands of lodgers in the town. Consequently sub-letting became extremely profitable and stimulated the eviction of sitting tenants and multiple occupation at house famine rents. The Unrest Commission demonstrated the nature of the housing problem and the social tensions created by the inaction of both Government and the Municipality. Thus whilst Abrams described housing as traditionally providing a reliable indicator of levels of deprivation, in Barrow the wartime housing issue represented levels of social tension.<sup>193</sup>

Despite the urgency of the situation, the Ministry successfully reduced the number of houses to be constructed on the grounds of the temporary nature of the demand, the anticipated post-war population fall and unjustifiable expense. The war radically changed the nature of the housing problem, supporting Marwick's assertion that participation in the war enabled the working-classes to press their demands and improve their living standards.<sup>194</sup> However, in Barrow the impetus for housing reform was particularly short-lived, and following the demise of the Ministry of Munitions, the building programme was abandoned with only half the houses built. The

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<sup>191</sup> CAB 24/23/58, 18 August 1917, Reports of the Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest

<sup>192</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, pp. 204,205, the Welsh towns and villages were ugly and over and overcrowded; houses were scarce and rents were increasing, and the surroundings are insanitary and depressing: conditions similar to Barrow

<sup>193</sup> Abrams, P., 'The failure of social reform: 1918-1920', *Past And Present*, 24, 1963, p.44

<sup>194</sup> Marwick, A., (ed.), *Total War and Social Change* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), xiv.

measures taken by the Ministry of providing a building programme, preventing evictions and easing overcrowding by billeting nonetheless represented a political response to the crisis by removing the major concerns of unrest.<sup>195</sup> While housing accommodation was difficult to find, transport became more congested, utilities were put under strain and urgent work necessitated putting in long hours.

Loss of sea trade transferred much of Barrow's food and provisions to the railways while increased supplies of foreign iron ore for pig iron production in the west coast foundries increased. Rail transport was therefore crucial not just for the moving of materials and goods but for carrying workers. Although the Furness Railway managed its own systems, they were subjected to the Railway Executive Committee orders. The Transport Order of 1916 was of particular significance, making the housing question more acute in consequence of the alterations and reductions to the train services. Barrow's tramcars were both irregular and unprepared for the additional traffic. The system lacked investment preventing any large scale improvement, which combined with staff shortages led to delays and late arrival. Travelling facilities thus remained an important cause of unrest, little or no improvement being effected throughout the war.

The role of utilities was important in the production of munitions and the living conditions of workers, war not only impacted on Barrow Corporation as a major employer, but caused a knock-on effect by reducing local authority activities. In the move towards total war Barrow's population became involved with war service work in support of munitions production as actively encouraged by Kitchener. As industrial production and the population increased so did the demand for utilities which the corporation was only able to maintain by excessive overtime of its staff and workmen. Until the new gas works became available restrictions were placed on the population whilst a prolonged drought and industrial priority in the use of water forced constraints throughout the district. Plant improvements needed government sanction, rigid control being necessary to cut down plant requirements to an absolute minimum and economise power use due to coal shortages. Barrow's heavy industries required coke and coal, as did the gas and electricity works and any breakdown in

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<sup>195</sup> Pepper, S., and Swenarton, M., 'Home front: garden suburbs for munitions workers', *Architectural Review* (1978), pp. 163, 366

supply could cause serious disruption. The change of coal supply due to the government requirement to reduce haulage miles incurred additional costs for less efficient coal affecting output for Barrow's industry and population. The problems of utilities and fuel supplies were therefore chiefly the fault of government leaving the corporation to cope as best possible, generally to the detriment of the population.

Whilst higher wages were being earned the continuous rise in the cost of living meant many had to work overtime, of advantage to industry but harmful to workers' health. Wartime consciousness of health led to incentives reinforced by legislation and an extension of municipal responsibilities in what was an atmosphere of falling manpower and worsening conditions in the town. The evidence suggests that only the most serious cases of overcrowding were dealt with, whilst an ageing council workforce occasionally assisted by Vickers, provided reduced services to meet health legislation. While there were financial incentives to improve conditions in munitions workshops where significant numbers of women were employed, small improvement was seen in the engineering workshops, shipyard and the iron and steel works.<sup>196</sup> Further, money was not widely available to the council, the general conditions in the town were therefore at variance with the health and welfare of the female munitions workers in the factories.

Van Emden notes that the relaxing of Home Office rules governing factory work, long hours, shift-work and shorter mealtimes became the norm.<sup>197</sup> Life was made worse by working continuously without breaks, determined more by the needs of the front line than the conditions recommended by the Ministry or Factory Acts. Working hours therefore increased while overtime and Sunday labour became universal and holidays became conditional. Removal of Sunday labour made little difference as it was re-introduced when the need arose. In many cases work was carried out by older or less fit men, while harder work than they were previously used to was undertaken by females. The effect of long hours under heavy conditions led to strain and irregularities leading to lost quarters and sometimes days, often wrongfully

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<sup>196</sup> Although there were women in the shipyard, engineering workshops and iron and steel works their numbers are not known and the majority of information regarding welfare is provided for shell workers in the munitions shops

<sup>197</sup> Van Emden, R., Humphries, S., *All Quiet on the Home Front: An Oral History of Life in Britain During the First World War*, (London, Headline, 2004)

diagnosed as slackness. Workers' health was affected by working in bad weather, overcrowding and indifferent cooking in such lodgings as were obtainable. For many men and women poor housing lacking privacy and quietness meant that sleep was impeded expressly for night shift workers. A major problem at Barrow was the different shifts patterns. At Vickers, synchronising shifts in the interests of efficiency was opposed by the Ministry as this would have meant women changing to a two-shift system.<sup>198</sup> Conditions would have improved in the home for married women with lodgers, while the removal of one shift of women workers would have eased the housing problem. Adversely women would work longer hours, earnings would increase but there would have been greater exhaustion and a drop in efficiency. However there is only evidence of shifts being partially synchronised.

Though drink control was introduced to rid excessive consumption among a section of workers as an obstacle to munitions output it also brought about changes in habits. Drink was a sensitive subject in a town where hot and arduous labour was the norm and the pint the reserve of working men. While steps were taken to revise the opening hours to prevent men drinking before going on shift, this did not affect nearby towns and so control was extended outwards. The German submarine campaign produced both a drink and a food problem causing beer to be diluted and output cut leading to shortages. The greater sobriety seen in 1917 was not entirely the result of the CCB restrictions, but largely to the limited quantities of intoxicants available for consumption. Lack of beer was not a cause for unrest but one of loss of temper leading the unrest commission to advise that Barrow was a special case warranting special privileges. The government showed little interest in the locality and its needs, and the working-classes who demanded liquor were never sufficiently consulted. Nonetheless, what was radical about the CCB, says Robert Duncan, was the fact that Board, with its blend of restrictive and constructive policy, managed to implement practical reform.<sup>199</sup> Notably a valuable health achievement was the fostering of the growth of restaurants and canteens as an alternative calorific source to alcohol. Drinking restrictions were also a major contribution to family welfare, as

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<sup>198</sup> Three shifts of manual workers would have added to the housing and transport problem but overcome Vickers manpower problems, with the combing out of men it is highly likely that the three-shift system would have to be discontinued

<sup>199</sup> Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots*, p.180

in numbers of working-class households expenditure on alcohol was a cause of poverty. Following the war it was realised that the welfare of the workforce needed to be studied and treated in a scientific way if future output was to be improved.

Barrow's isolation meant that the food question was important. According to Gregory, in the first two years of the war, food shortages were localized and of relatively short duration, as high prices had 'provided incentives for increased supply.'<sup>200</sup> But as the war progressed, shortages and inflationary pressure increased, and demands for state intervention became more persistent. The enquiry into industrial unrest pointed to increases in the cost of living, along with deep-rooted suspicion of profiteering, as primary causes of discontent. While local food committees were introduced, shop stewards and women became active in setting up food vigilance committees for the purpose of focussing working-class demands in connection with the food supply and stimulating government and municipal activity. By representation of the different societies on the various committees, the matter of providing food equitably and at affordable prices was therefore mostly achieved for the Barrow working-classes. Whilst compulsory rationing, did not mitigate the food difficulties it removed the sense of injustice, and to a certain extent that of inequality.

The impression of the town itself is one of depression with diminished council services, housing, utilities and a failing transport system. Although no new hospitals, schools or public buildings were started two schools were completed and a ward extension opened at the North Lonsdale Hospital.<sup>201</sup> Home conditions for many deteriorated, not only caused by overcrowding but by a shortage of materials and manpower to carry out repairs. Yet in these failing conditions there were no serious outbreaks of illness or an increase in the mortality rate, even when the influenza epidemic visited Barrow industry continued working. Joy says the health of 'the borough' improved dramatically during the war years, demonstrating the close correlation between income levels and health providing better diets yet the subject of worker's poor health caused by industrial conditions are never broached.<sup>202</sup> Most

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<sup>200</sup> Gregory, A., *The Last Great War, British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008)

<sup>201</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday, 30 September 1918, some of the money raised for the 32 bed ward came through donations from Vickers and the Iron and Steel Works

<sup>202</sup> Joy, C. A. *War and Unemployment in an Industrial Community, Barrow-in-Furness 1914-1926*, Uclan PhD Thesis, p.228

historians agree that the working classes did make material and health gains during the war. However incomes could be affected as demonstrated by Vickers as men were moved to lower paid work to complete contracts or they were laid off until new work was available.

The report of the unrest commission noted that the government failed to recognise that centralised bureaucracy did not work in Barrow while common sense methods did. Whilst sensible methods were applied by the local representatives of the Ministry of Munitions and Admiralty to industrial wellbeing the needs of Barrow's citizens were gravely neglected. Essentially the problems of Barrow were government related exacerbated by the massive expansion for the production of shells and guns. The problem of increased production was quickly overcome by the building and extension of workshops but the 'human aspect and its implications' were never fully understood by those in Whitehall. Where local efforts were made to succeed, they were often hampered by London officialdom ignorant of local conditions and possibilities. Barrow's isolated position and the fact that it was considered inadvisable to inform the general public of the conditions of industrial life meant the situation went largely unreported. Even the Report of the Unrest Commission and its damning indictment of Barrow Corporation who had done little to alleviate conditions failed to radicalise the electorate. Nevertheless the real threat of industrial unrest caused the government to take action. Indeed, the housing issue and the threat of unrest emphasised the urgent measures taken by the Ministry to maintain stability.

Barrow made a massive contribution to the war in the production of armaments, warships, submarines and airships while its iron and steel works and local mines produced vast amounts of war materials. When war ended there was a general withdrawal of government from industry and a return to the reliance mainly of Vickers with its associated problems. The rundown of Admiralty and heavy gun orders and changeover from naval to merchant shipbuilding needed less skilled labour, yet Barrow's high wages retained men in the town as it could be more economical for skilled men to take labouring jobs. Retention of labour and the slow house-building programme meant the problem of overcrowding remained. With virtually no unemployment in Barrow throughout the war the problem returned on its conclusion and cases of hardship were witnessed by calls for relief and by people living in



temporary and sub-standard accommodation. In fact the stimulus for change was restricted as the continuity of the occupational structure and established residential patterns, together with limited change within the workplace suggests.

A study of the town of Barrow leaves open the opportunities of comparative studies with similar areas or singular studies of those areas themselves. Admittedly all local case studies are going to be different in some way and it might be found that Barrow is exceptional in its geography and by the role of Vickers. Although these factors alone make Barrow a particularly important case study for the First World War they might also provide a potential drawback and the town may be found to be unique. The hypothesis however could be made that all towns producing armaments and munitions might be different but arguably they will all show a broadly consensual interaction of factors that allowed the home front to operate, and sustain the war effort.

## Appendix A

### Barrow's War Record

*The Times*, Monday, 27 October 1919

Taking into consideration the record of production for the Army and Navy during the war. Three super-dreadnoughts *HMS Erin, Emperor of India and Revenge*, five light cruisers, *HMS Penelope, Phaeton, Cassandra, Curlew and Calcutta*, three Monitors, *HMS Clyde, Humber and Tyne*, and over seventy submarines were delivered from the shipyard. Machinery and engines were provided for ten other ships, thirteen vessels were converted for use as minesweepers and sixty barges built for the War Office. The part played by the paravane or otter in the defeating of the mine at sea are well known, and 3,200 complete units were supplied from Barrow in addition to 325 bodies. Twenty-two Admiralty vessels were repaired at Barrow during the war, 15in. gun turrets were delivered for *HMS Revenge, Valiant, Barham, Ramilles* and monitors and there was much miscellaneous work. Three rigid airships, two non-rigid airships, 26 kite balloons for the British Government and four small airships for Italy were constructed. In the way of field equipments, Barrow turned out 11,740 vehicles for 18 pounder guns alone and also 30,000 tons of howitzer equipments. The output of shells was enormous, and include 6,810,000 completed projectiles ranging from a calibre of 18in down to 12 pounder and 9,813,00 partly finished shells.

## **Appendix B**

### **Toluol Production**

The little known part played by Barrow in supplying toluol for the production of Trinitrotoluene (TNT) is worthy of mention. The general method was to strip Corporation gas of its toluol and benzene content, this reduced the gas illuminating and calorific value causing street and shop lighting to dim and domestic gas cooking ovens to work less efficiently. The more efficient method was to produce toluol from Borneo petroleum which was first produced at Portishead after the removal of the Shell Distillation Plant from Rotterdam. At the end of June 1915 a second distillation plant with half the Portishead capacity was erected at Barrow. The two plants went unreported and it was only after the Armistice that their contribution to the war effort was recognised. Up to the Armistice the Portishead plant produced 18,500 tons of toluol while the Barrow plant produced 11,500 tons, a total of 30,100 tons a figure almost identical to the total output of toluol of the entire British gas industry from the outbreak of war until the Armistice. This total yielded 60,000 tons of TNT, sufficient to produce nearly 250,000 tons of high explosive.

## **Appendix C**

### **Post First World War Map of Vickers Works and Barrow Docks**

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