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A SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE CAUSES OF BRITISH
INTER-INDUSTRIAL STRIKE-PATTERNS 1950-1969

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July 1977

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A B S T R A C T

This thesis examines inter-industrial strike-patterns over a twenty-year period to approach an understanding of striking as a form of social action.

The influential concept of the 'industrial society' is first critically examined with the conclusion that it contains several inadequacies, substantive and theoretical, both in its implications for theories of industrial relations and as an analytical label for the wider societal context.

The employment relationship in capitalist society is examined together with types of industrial action, both individual and collective, and a model constructed which sees strikes as dependent on two variables: the occasion for dispute, based on the employment relationship, and the ability to take action, based on the existence of a trade union.

Trade unions are then examined and their limitations and potential discussed. The meaning of strike-action to the striker is considered and a congruence suggested between the strike as a type of action and working-class orientations to work.

After a discussion of methods of measuring the strike-rate a strike-militancy index is devised and, using this index for the period, six major strike-militant industries are identified: mining, vehicles, docks, shipbuilding, printing, and iron and steel.

Each of these industries is then analysed in detail and various theories of 'industrial strike-proneness' held up to critical examination.

The conclusion is that in any industry the occasions for dispute may be augmented by conflict-maximising factors such as frequent changes in the effort bargain, and that the ability to strike may be augmented by impact-maximising factors such as economic vulnerability. Where both sets of factors cluster in an industry, plus a third, the preparedness to take action, there is a high probability that the industry will display a high strike-propensity.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This thesis will be concerned with examining a particular social phenomenon - strikes, and a particular form of social action - striking. It will collect most of its evidence from a particular society, that of Great Britain, and from a particular historical period in the development of that society; roughly the period of the twenty or so years since the second world war, the period of full-employment, the new affluence, the 'mixed economy'. In so doing it will also examine the explanations of this particular type of social action which were in currency during the same period.

There have been, over this period, various attempts at both explaining strike action and also analysing, categorising and pigeon-holing such explanations - how many are 'functionalist', how many 'Marxist', and so on. (1) This study will inevitably be another addition to these attempts, yet hopefully one which will avoid some of the failings of earlier explanations. The first of these, as we shall see, is that the explanation of an individual act of striking all too often proves incapable of explaining quantitative fluctuations in that action (such as enable us to refer to some industries as 'strike-prone') without being forced to introduce extraneous variables such as 'a breakdown in communications'.

The second major failing, and one which may lie behind the above, is to treat the specific milieu in which the strikes take place, the industrial milieu, as containing all the sufficient causes of strike action. One often gets the impression that what erstwhile strikers do outside the factory, what relationships they enter into, what subcultures they belong to, are seen by some observers as interesting but irrelevant side issues to the 'real' world of industrial relations.

Given the popular pre-occupation with strikes, this dichotomous approach is hard to explain. Just as their academic forebears had relentlessly studied Trobriand Islanders, the new generation of sociologists in the early post-war years began lovingly to chronicle the rituals and cultural habits of the working class; they noted (rather enviously) the strength and apparent historical durability of their communities, how their families were structured, how they held coronation parties, weddings, funerals, indeed every aspect of social life except one - what they did at work, that crucial area which socially defines the working-class as the working class. It is not that work patterns went unstudied, far from it, simply that they were in the main treated as a separate entity by a growing band of academic specialists, the industrial sociologists and industrial relations experts. These concentrated their attentions on the workplace, the plant, which often came to resemble a systems-capsule, hermetically isolated from the rest of society.

This situation was not without its early critics. In 1959, Allen was calling for a "Sociology of labour" which would take into account that "what men and women do in industry cannot be separated from their collective behaviour outside industry, in Trade Unions, in politics, in social institutions like Co-operative Societies".⁽²⁾ The work of Lockwood and Goldthorpe was the beginning of the attempt to break down this compartmentalism but the academic subject-machine has had twenty years or more to build up industrial sociology and industrial relations into fairly formidable bastions of system and theory.

It seems a simple and self-evident equation that strikers are workers. No-one who is not employed by someone else can withdraw his labour in an attempt to change the conditions of his employment; if the self-employed man or craftsman withdraws his labour we call the result leisure. Before strikers can become strikers they are sellers of hand and brain power and we can suppose that by far the largest proportion of them can be regarded objectively as members of the working-class of their society. Without saying anything more about the precise nature of that society we can see that the position in society of this collectivity, the working class, and how it relates to other collectivities will form a structural parameter for every aspect of the social life of its members, whether at work, rest or play.

We can however say more about the likely nature of that society. We have, in the above paragraph, made several statements of historical specificity which point to the probability that strikes are uniquely a feature of a society in which a section of the population finds its means of living only by selling its labour-power to others. Even the term "selling" can only be used in a historically specific context which is inclusive of social phenomena such as a market and a cash nexus. We are in fact talking about societies such as our own. We can go on to hypothesise that societies in which the production relationships involve a high attachment to bonds of mutual obligation, frequently on a person-to-person-basis (i.e. feudal societies), will rarely witness anything which can be called a strike, as a withdrawal of labour will not alter the obligation. We can further expect that societies organised on collectivist lines in which production is legitimated in terms of the good of the collectivity can expect to see few strikes; where these occur it is perhaps an indication of the extent to which the structure fails to match the legitimising ideology.

If strikes really are uniquely a feature of societies like twentieth century Britain, can we really hope to understand the nature of strike action without attempting an understanding of the societal context in which that action takes place? In other words, what sort of society is it?

The fact that society can be problematic for us, its members is, of course, fundamental to the existence of sociology as a discipline; the question "what sort of society?" was first asked by Marx and Weber, and the question and its several answers is still being debated. As we shall see in the first chapter, the conclusions we come to as to the nature of contemporary society will inevitably structure our explanation of social action within that society. Conversely, we can also say that an understanding of strike action and the role that strikes play within the society will add to our knowledge and understanding of that particular societal type.

To start by examining explanations of society and the extent to which these are linked to explanations of specific (industrial) forms of action will inevitably uncover several fundamental theoretical problems, the first being the problem of conflict or, conversely, the problem of order.

Strikes are, of course, about conflict - a strike is a manifest demonstration of a conflict of interest. The question is, is that conflict inherent or transient? - if the former, then it is order that is problematical: if a conflict is inherent then why don't people strike all the time? Cohen ⁽³⁾ usefully gives some explanations for order: -

- 1) men are coerced

- 2) it is in men's interests to form a contract or social arrangement,
- 3) there is a value consensus which leads to the acceptance of common goals;
- 4) inertia - social order provides the conditions for its own perpetuation (i.e. an equilibrium model).

With the probable exception of the last, these are quite useful factors in building up a model which would explain why, if conflict is inherent in the work situation, the prevailing condition is apparently one of order. Thus the employment situation consists of a power relationship - if men do not work in the manner specified by their employers they risk not being paid. No pay means no livelihood. It is therefore in the interests of each party to form a contractual relationship. Party A, the employer, agrees to pay money to B, the employee, in return for which B plays his part in the productive process and produces, among other things, a surplus of value - profit - in the interest of the employer. At any one time, therefore, there is a further basis of order in that both parties share a value consensus on the necessity for keeping the wheels turning. The fact that this is not an equilibrium model is shown by the fact that the consensus and indeed the whole basis of order may break down when the terms of the contract alter (e.g. a speed-up) bringing us back to our original concern - a situation of conflict.

In this simple model, the most important single factor in the industrial situation would seem to be coercion which in turn governs both the terms of the contract and the permanence or otherwise of the value consensus. As Rex says, "the most basic conflicts will be conflicts over access to the means of life"⁽⁴⁾. We are not talking of any two hypothetical actors A and B, alter and ego, we are talking of a world in which A's livelihood is dependent solely on selling his labour power and B's livelihood stems from his ownership of the means of transforming that labour power into commodities of value. The model itself however, raises further questions.

If conflict is inherent and order maintained only through a structured coercion, why then, once the conflict manifests itself and a strike occurs, doesn't the situation change?

The most common explanations of this situation are based on the alternative model that sees order as the social norm and conflict as problematical. In the basic form of this model, conflict is due to extraneous factors, e.g. "poor communications, inadequate man management or subversive activity"⁽⁵⁾. In this view, there is no inherent conflict, therefore no substantial pressure for change. Eliminate the variable and you eliminate the conflict. In the more sophisticated versions, it is recognised that conflict cannot be so easily dispensed with and so it is made a function of the preservation of order. Thus Coser's view is that certain issues cannot be agreed upon in advance but that when they occur, the

question of how they are settled will depend upon the balance of power prevailing at the time. In other words, conflict is expected and built in to the equilibrium model; in Dehrendorf's phrase conflict is institutionalised and wherever possible takes place in an ordered context. Industrial conflict in such an ordered context takes the form of bargaining rather than strikes or other forms of collective action. The drawback to this model is that in the real world strikes do occur and instead of being regarded as a permitted and expected form of power-bargaining are very often fiercely resisted by employers, occasionally by fairly unorthodox means. Also the model does not explain change and while, as we saw above, most strikes do not lead to any fundamental change, some strikes do possess the potential for such change, the strikes in Paris in May 1968 being a case in point.

Thus, if we compare the alternative models to the situation existing in contemporary industrial society we can see that both conflict and order are problematical under certain circumstances. Any theory or series of hypotheses regarding strike action must give regard to why men strike, why men do not strike all the time, and why most strikes do not result in fundamental change and why some strikes can. The situation prevailing for most of the time seems to come close to that suggested by Rex; namely a "truce situation" in which the individual must both co-operate with the other side and be prepared to take action against him.

In this compromise situation there are created a value system and social institutions which are the products of neither of the conflict groups but belong to the truce situation itself (6). In other words, the institutionalisation of conflict is based on compromise; this statement reduces neither the inherent nature of conflict in the industrial situation nor the degree to which the social institutions through which the conflicting groups act (e.g. trade unions) can serve to maintain the status quo.

The mention above of conflict groups, the fact that in talking of strikes we are talking of a phenomenon of collective action is fundamental to the next theoretical problem raised in this thesis, namely the relationship between the structural determinants of action and the meaning of that action to the actors.

The meaning of strikes to a striker is likely to be quite different from the meaning of strikes to others such as employers, the general public, other workers laid off by the action, and so on. To fully understand strikes, therefore, we need to understand the meaning to the actor, the striker. This would at first seem to favour an "action frame of reference". However, in strike action, as we said before, we are not dealing with alter and ego, two individuals who interact, but with the action of collectivities, groups, and it seems a weakness in interactionist approaches that it is very difficult to move from "me" to "us", from an understanding of the meaning of individual action to the understanding

of the meaning to an individual of the actions of a collectivity of which he is a part - the two situations are by no means necessarily identical. We need to know the extent to which the meaning of the action can only be found in the meaning which the acting collectivity had to the individual. In other words, we are concerned with the consciousness attached to collectivities and the things that both strengthen it and fragment it.

This brings us to the second weakness of the interactionist approach which is its avoidance of structures. When Durkheim spoke of the collective consciousness he was referring to those pressures on individuals to act in a certain way that were built into the social structure. This concern really hinges around the problem of causality; understanding what it's like does not automatically tell us why it is. We need to take structural determinants into account. Thus while structures alone do not determine action (it also requires a necessary shift in consciousness) it does not follow that a 'strike-prone' industry is strike-prone necessarily because it is one with more 'strike-consciousness' among its work-force. Workers there may well have an increased awareness of the potential of strike action yet this may come from its increased use. We can see in this case that there is an inextricable link between the two, structure and meaning, the action becoming the mediating ground, a synthesis of the two. That action in turn may change the structural determinants of future actions.

Is it possible that the meaning which the act has to the actor could influence the methodology of the study of that act? Hyman quite correctly says 'strike' is only really a handy label which we use to classify social actions which appear similar but which may have very different meanings to the participants on different occasions (7), and that therefore to try to come to some explanation of 'strikes' in general is a very chancy business. This is undoubtedly correct, but in saying this are we really saying very much? The regular actions associated with any social role, e.g. father, consumer, bureaucrat, can have a different meaning for the actor and a different impact on others in successively different circumstances. This does not prevent us making general sociological statements about the usual nature of the social institutions of the family or bureaucracy. If the recorded instances of a particular social action (e.g. strike statistics) show a regularity and a pattern, we are entitled to treat the action as an objective category despite the fact that its subjective meaning to the participants may vary. Also, of course, in the real world when people speak of strikes as a 'problem' (or an 'answer') they are not differentiating between types of strikes; striking is seen and perhaps experienced as a phenomenon in its own right.

For the point of view which sees strikes as a problem, it is the very regularity of the action which is problematic - it seems to defy all attempts at 'man-management' and improvements in communications. For our purposes, however, the regularities and patterns in strike action are non-problematic but rather indicative of structural determinants to that action. What becomes problematic is the nature of the regularities, i.e. the question is not "why do strikes keep happening?" but rather why do certain industries figure in strike data consistently highly over time and to what elements of structure do these patterns act as pointers?

~~The method chosen to examine this question is of~~ necessity based on the study of secondary sources. Current trends in social science have somehow made this a little less academically respectable than the collection by the researcher of primary data; this latter approach however would not have enabled one to adequately cover the subject in the light of the theoretical considerations given above.

For example, if one had chosen to examine the attitudes to strikes and the strike-actions of mine-workers in County Durham over a period of three years one could have come up with valuable conclusions, possibly (but not necessarily) similar to those reached here,.

Such a study would be limited, however, in three crucial ways; firstly it would be true only of mine-workers; secondly true only of mine-workers in a particular area; and thirdly true only of Durham miners over three years in the late 1960's. Therefore, I have chosen to look at the strike patterns in British society as a whole before concentrating on those industries where striking is a particularly regular action, and secondly have also chosen to collect evidence from a twenty-year period in contemporary British history in the hope that periodic fluctuations in both consciousness and activity would be evened out. In so doing, I have made use of much valuable evidence gained from more detailed local studies, such as the one hypothesised above.

The period chosen is not entirely random however. It is one which is characterised firstly by an absence of direct legislative control over strike action, (although not over other crucial areas affecting strike action, such as incomes policies, wage freezes and so on). The wartime Order 1305 which made arbitration compulsory was repealed in 1951 and the Industrial Relations Act became law in 1972. In between lies a period which can be seen as a sort of 'golden age' of 'free collective bargaining'. Also, towards the end of the period, in the late 1960's, there was an increase in strikes for political purposes (many of them over the pending Industrial Relations legislation); these are by no means outside the scope of this study, but they are not recorded as strikes by the Department of Employment and thus their importance is a little harder to gauge.

The period was also one of considerable growth in the development of the social sciences and therefore, conveniently, a period of increased interest in, and data-gathering about various aspects of our society, not least the industrial arena.

On the basis of the above, it is admitted, indeed stressed, that the conclusions reached will be limited ones. Limited by the use of secondary sources and limited in time to the 1950's and 60's. The potential historical relativity of theoretical models and sociological explanations is the final theoretical consideration to be born in mind. Knowles' classic study of strikes (8) made very little mention of the economic and political context from which his data were drawn. Knowing now as we do the shattering effects on the trade union movement of the economic upheavals of the 20's and 30's, who can now say that Knowles' conclusions are valid for all time?

Notes

- 1) For two of the more useful examinations of explanatory theories see Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) Industrial Disputes - Essays in the sociology of industrial relations London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Chap. 1, and Hyman R. (1972) Strikes London: Fontana/Collins, pp 56 - 65
- 2) Allen V.L. (1959) "The need for a sociology of labour" British Journal of Sociology X (3)
- 3) Cohen P.S. (1968) Modern Social Theory London: Heinemann, pp 21 - 31
- 4) Rex J. (1961) Key problems of sociological theory London: Routledge & Kegan Paul p. 123
- 5) Economic League (undated) A unique service to industry p.3
- 6) Rex J. (1961) op. cit. p.128
- 7) Hyman R. (1972) op. cit. p.19
- 8) Knowles K.G.J.C. (1952) Strikes - a study in industrial conflict Oxford: Blackwell

CHAPTER I

INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The fault of many theories of 'strike-proneness' is that they are seldom rooted in any theoretical model of strike action in general and are thus unable to explain the shift along the continuum from low to high levels of strike action. Models of strike action or industrial relations are themselves often limited by not making explicit the societal context within which industrial relations are seen as occurring. As has been indicated, such societal models are bound to pose the theoretical problems of conflict and order; different analyses of society will place a different emphasis on each, and thus inevitably produce different views of the nature of industrial conflict.

I therefore propose here to start at the top, and first examine the nature of a society which displays strike action on a regular, patterned basis. In so doing, it will be argued that one of the major societal models in wide acceptance in the post-war period, and the equally dominant industrial relations theories associated with it have, by regarding conflict as a problem, imposed severe limitations on their analytical usefulness.

THE CONCEPT OF THE INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

The industrialisation of Western Europe which began in the late 18th Century had, as we now know, a revolutionary impact on practically all branches of intellectual thought; the emphasis, whether in science, philosophy or political history, was focussed on the attempt to see an underlying pattern and form behind the rapid and apparently autonomous changes and to relate this to an understanding of what was, and was to be, the new society. The attempts of the historical philosophers to pin down the essence of change concentrated on the fluid metaphysical idea of 'the process', and employed concepts such as the 'march of industrialism', 'the emergence of democracy' and the 'upsurge of the industrial masses'.

It was perhaps the failure of metaphysics to explain reality that led to the decisive break away marked by the work of the early sociologists. Industrialism was for the moment de-reified; technology was no longer seen as a 'force' sui generis. Instead, Marx, Weber, Toennies and Sombart saw technology as being only one part of a new and complex social system, interacting in a very complex way with new ideologies and new social institutions. The sense of historical awareness that marked these early classics was soon lost, however, as, for various reasons, the study of the social concomitants of industrial modes of production moved away from the 'macro' or 'Big-Range' theories towards the study of the 'every-day' resulting, in the 20's and 30's in the spate of studies of the 'work-group' and 'human relations' and the eventual growth of the sociology of industry.

Since the War, however, there has been a strong revival of the Big Range approach to industrialism, prompted partly by realisation of the limitations of a micro approach but mainly perhaps, as we shall see, by certain decisive changes in the material and political environment within which sociological work was being carried out. This revival has largely been through the proclamation (and celebration) of the Industrial Society.

Over a comparatively short space of time in the late 1950's and early 60's ⁽¹⁾ writers in Europe and America produced a series of influential works which both expressed and legitimised the new ideology of the Industrial Society. All the authors were basically agreed that the reforms and economic changes experienced by the Western economies had transformed these societies into a social form somehow fundamentally different from that of the pre-war era. Pre-war society, characterised by depression, unemployment and strikes, could, it was retrospectively admitted, be termed capitalist. Post-war society was very different and could be termed 'post-capitalist' or 'industrial'.

The main proponents of the thesis were, in Europe, Aron and Dahrendorf, and in America, Bell, Lipset and Kerr and his colleagues, although similar trends had earlier been suggested by the British Labour politician Crosland ⁽²⁾ and even earlier by Burnham ⁽³⁾.

The attempt to extract from these works the main features of the new societal type produces a fairly extensive list, but the main ones would seem to be as follows: large-scale industry is the characteristic form of production, production is the dominant concern of society, the application of science to production, the separation of the enterprise from the family, rational calculation in the productive process (all Aron (4)), the breakdown of ideological syntheses (Aron (5)), class conflict is institutionalised, contained and replaced by the conflict of interest groups (Dahrendorf (6)), the decline of overt protest, a greater role of managers public and private, increased role of State and bureaucracy (Kerr et al. (7)), decline in support for 'the old ideologies', the formation of a political consensus among the intelligentsia (Bell (8)), power passes to the 'technostructure' (Galbraith (9))

It can be seen that this list, which is by no means exhaustive, contains items which vary from the metaphysical to the mundane and many of the models of industrial society seem to lean towards prescription rather than description. (10) We can, however, isolate three main elements of the model which are held in common by most of the authors quoted. These are:

- 1) the end of ideology and ideologically-based conflict
- 2) convergence of 'Western' and 'Eastern' industrial societies
- 3) rule by the technocracy.

It is in retrospect easy to see why this model became a popular and eagerly-accepted tool of self-analysis in the late 1950's and early 60's, coming as it did at the end of a period which had witnessed the partial unfreezing of the Cold War (in Europe at any rate) under the Khrushchev era and, with the gradual resumption of trade links between the two halves of Europe, a greater willingness to look for similarities as well as differences between the two blocs.⁽¹¹⁾ As the investment of the post-war reconstruction began to pay dividends and the Western economies (most of them enjoying Conservative governments) were given a boost by the Korean War, the period had experienced a long-awaited boom and, at the same time, the growth of the ethos of technology, 'the New Europe' and what Mills dubbed the 'Great American Celebration'. All this contributed not only to the concept of the industrial society but also the affluent industrial society in which governments regulated economies, welfare state schemes smoothly iced over the less attractive parts of the national cake, money made the workers happy and, above all, as a logical corollary to all this, there was no dissent.

A decade later, we can look at the rise of the Black movement in America, the phenomenon of May 1968 in France, political strikes on a vast scale in Italy and, in 1974, in Britain the call by military gentlemen for the formation of a civilian militia for use in combatting national strikes; the concept of the end of ideology seems now to be, if not a dead duck, at least a severely lame one.

However, it should be realised that the end of ideology is not just wishful thinking but is an essential component of the industrial society model. For the model is fairly explicitly a counter-model to the Marxist analysis of capitalist society. The end of ideology is in reality a euphemism for the end of class-conflict and we can no longer have class-conflict because we no longer have classes as such, because we no longer have capitalism as such. We have Dahrendorf's post-capitalism in which the old classes representing capital and labour are replaced by a plurality of interest-groups who operate in relatively autonomous fields of social action:

"the dominant and subjected classes of industry are no longer the same as the political classes". (12)

In the Marxian model, class conflict provides us with the key to the internal dynamics of capitalism; the existence of two social classes whose interests are fundamentally opposed yet who are indispensable to each other, forms the basis of the contradictory internal pressures which produce social change within this societal type and lead eventually to its demise. Take away this dynamic by announcing the end of socio-economic classes in this Marxian sense and one is left with a somewhat static social model.

The difficulties of applying the model are further compounded by the fact that there exist two (at least) fairly fundamentally different types of industrial society -

the Eastern, state-planned, publicly owned (and tacitly communist) economies, and the Western, free-enterprise, privately-owned (and tacitly capitalist) economies.

To overcome both the question of social dynamics and the existence of such inter-societal differences which cannot readily be dismissed as 'local variables', the industrial society theorists made the theory of convergence an integral part of the model, i.e. east and west are becoming more and more like each other. In the words of Duverger, one of the earlier proponents of convergence,

"the Soviet Union will never turn capitalist, the U.S.A. and Western Europe will never turn communist, but both sides seem to be moving towards socialism through a two-fold progression of liberalism in the east and socialisation in the west." (13)

As taken up and refined by the later writers there seem to be two main variants of this sub-concept. The first, put forward by Galbraith, Aron, and Kerr claims that all industrial societies face pressures which are located in the technological basis of industrial production itself, and which will eventually lead to the creation of similar social conditions whatever the formal ideological label. Thus, put simply, it is thought that capitalist societies have now recognised the need for state regulation of the economy and for various socialisation and 'welfare' measures, while on the other hand the communist countries have to (or certainly will have to) rely on the mechanism of the market so that the allocation of resources under planning can work efficiently.

In Galbraith's slightly more sophisticated version (14) the market is rejected and power and autonomy in planning is seen as passing to the large corporations and enterprises.

The other main variant, associated with Dahrendorf is, as we have seen, a sort of bastardised Marxism which claims that the capitalism/socialism distinction was once historically correct but that we have now moved in the West from capitalism to a higher evolutionary 'stage'.

Criticism of the industrial society model and its sub-concepts of the end of ideology and societal convergence can be made on three fronts, substantive, predictive and theoretical.

a) The substantive evidence

In assessing the validity of a concept like the industrial society, we can first ask what social institutions and developments do the model's authors refer to in support of their hypothesis, are their observations in this respect accurate and if so, do the phenomena have the structural significance they claim?

One can identify four main features which can be said to have modified the working of post-war Western economies, and which supporters of the thesis claim constitute the basis of fundamental structural change:

- i) the manipulation of the economy by Keynesian methods
- ii) the increase in both state welfare schemes and fiscal redistributory measures
- iii) public ownership of sectors of the economy
- iv) the division of ownership from the control of private corporations.

These features were quoted by the authors already mentioned as being ways in which the new industrial society differed from pre-war capitalism; in addition it was pointed out that there had been a decline in the strike-rate in most of these economies since the mid-1950's, and also that most of these societies seemed to be undergoing long periods of government by conservative political parties. This, it was alleged, showed that the new society was producing new patterns of social behaviour, i.e. the decline in support for radical politics and the "withering away of the strike"⁽¹⁵⁾ both indicated that features already mentioned (redistribution, etc.) had been so successful in eradicating some of the nastier phenomena of capitalism that such ideologically-based counter-measures as striking were no longer necessary. We shall return to this theme in the next section.

- i) Keynesian economics evolved to deal with the problems of the pre-war period (severe economic slump and a concomitant level of unemployment) only achieved orthodoxy and use by governments after the war. At first glance, the policies appeared to have been successful in that the

average rate of unemployment was far lower than in the pre-war period (cf. 2m unemployed in 1935 and 250 thousand in 1955). "And yet", a contemporary writer comments thirty years after the commitment to Keynesianism,

"in Britain during recent years, the number of people recorded as being jobless has sometimes hovered around the million mark. In the United States, under the administration of Mr. Nixon (an avowed Keynesian!!), the number of people out of work has often been closer to three million what has gone wrong with Keynesianism?" (16)

What has gone wrong is that there has been a change in the structural determinants of economic problems. The upward trend in unemployment since the mid-60's has not been due to a shortfall in demand as it was in the 30's; indeed the expansion of the public sector to the position where it contributes between 30-35% of the national GNP and employs roughly a quarter of the labour force has itself been a significant factor in maintaining the level of demand. This is especially true of the increasingly large proportion of state expenditure devoted to armaments in the post-war period (17). Unemployment in the 60's and 70's seems more due to the run-down of traditional industries in traditional areas, and the growing international consolidation and monopolisation of capital. Unemployment today is also coupled with high rates of inflation (the so-called 'stagflation'), a situation which the Keynesian model is not geared to tackle.

Finally, on a more theoretical level, one could add that it seems a little odd for the industrial society proponents to so readily accept that an economic model formulated to redress some of the imperfections of capitalism should be the ideal weapon for managing the economic affairs of post-capitalism.

ii) The second assumption, since refuted by several major studies, was that there had been a large, significant and permanent redistribution of income which had been achieved by the combined results of trade union pressure and taxation and welfare schemes. We now know that the slight egalitarian trend in income distribution in most capitalist countries after the war was almost certainly a temporary phenomenon, probably caused by the higher post-war levels of employment. Union activity seems to have had very little effect on factor incomes, i.e. the ratio between profits and employment incomes. In 1938, the ratio of gross profits to all employment incomes was 1:4.5, in 1962 1:4.8 and in 1965 1:4.2. The share of wages in the national income is not very different in the post-war period from the position between the wars, or even at the start of the century (18). Even in 1956, Strachey commented that "Capitalism, it has turned out, is a Red Queen's sort of country from the wage-earner's point of view. They have to run very fast for a long time to keep in the same place relative to the other classes".

Studies such as Townsend and Abel Smith's (19) indicate that the poorest sectors of society may actually have become poorer, even using the official definitions of poverty, the National Assistance scale. Despite popular belief about the progressive effects of taxation, state and local authority revenue from regressive taxes (expenditure taxes, rates, National Insurance contributions) is about 50% greater than that from progressive taxes, (20) with the result that taxation as a proportion of income is virtually constant at all income levels and may even be a little higher at the lowest end of the scale. (21)

There is also evidence that even the receipt of welfare benefits may be skewed towards the better-off. For example, the largest proportion of national insurance funds is spent on retirement pensions. Reviewing the working of the welfare system in the mid-60's Professor Titmuss concludes:

"In the field of financial provision for old age we have learnt that the State now makes a larger contribution on average to the pensions of the rich than it does to the pensions of the poor.. This has come about as a consequence of the combined action of the principle of universality, of tax allowances, subsidised pension schemes sponsored by employers, deductable life assurance and other factors." (22)

Blackburn concludes his useful summary of the evidence by suggesting that under the British welfare system, "redistribution within social classes is more significant than redistribution between them." (23)

iii) Although nationalisation of key sectors of the economy was by no means a specifically post-war phenomenon (pre-war Conservative governments had established the C.E.B., B.B.C. and B.O.A.C.) there is no doubt that most observers regard it as such, inevitably associating the post-war nationalisation programme with the Attlee Government and therefore also with some limited onset of socialism. In retrospect we can see more clearly what the precise structural role of the public sector has been over the period. It is interesting that even Aron, writing in 1955, perceived that -

"Curiously enough, it (nationalisation) will be called a structural reform, probably because it does not in fact change the social structure. But it is still a cherished illusion, and almost inevitably the wage earner imagines that the essential point is the change in ownership, even if there is no change in the organisation of work". (24)

When we come to look at the strike-record of some of these industries in Britain we shall see that the wage-earners in question were not slow to realise this distinction. However, for the present it is necessary to look not at the public sector (now about 1/5 of all British industry) in isolation but to look at its relationship with the other 4/5, the private sector. That relationship seems primarily to be one of support and subsidy. The sectors that have been nationalised have been those on the decline and/or those which it was vital to re-organise in order that the British economy have a viable infrastructure (e.g. crucial materials -

steel; energy, - coal, electricity, gas; transport -
airways, rail, road haulage). This infrastructural
role is further evidenced by the pricing policy of the
public corporations; for example, in 1967, industry bought
electricity at 1.48 (old) pence per unit, the domestic
user paid 1.95d, industry bought gas at 1/4d. per therm,
domestic users paid 2/1½d. (25) The Post Office offered
rebates to posters of bulk mail (i.e. large firms) which
by the late 60's had been estimated to be equivalent to
a subsidy of £18m per year. (26) As well as this
indirect re-allocation of public funds we should also
consider the considerable sums paid from the public ex-
chequer in the form of direct grants and subsidies to
private firms; paradoxically these subsidies have often
not been available to public corporations. Had the NCB
been eligible for the 'regional employment premium' for
example, it would have added about £40m to its revenue
over the period 1967-70. (27)

A further indication that the 'mixed economy' is
not a dichotomous entity with two autonomous sectors,
public and private, is instanced by the fact that in 1963
of the 180 members of boards of publicly owned companies,
93 were at the same time the directors of private com-
panies, sharing between them 467 directorships. (28)

Widening our horizons again for a moment it is noticable that the nation which is either the most powerful capitalist society on earth, or the most advanced industrial society, depending on one's veiwpoint, namely the U.S.A. has, apart from some New Deal schemes, such as the TVA, resisted any suggestion of nationalisation even of basic infrastructural areas.

iv) These issues however constitute relative ephemera compared to the subject which for twenty years has occupied the position of the Great Debate in this area of the social sciences, i.e. the question of ownership and control. The groundwork for this element in the industrial society hypothesis can be seen in the work of Berle and Means, and Burnham writing in the 30's and 40's (29). They were among the first to conclude that the increasing role of the joint stock company and the consequent diffusion of ownership through the issue of share cpaital was contributing to a structural change in the economic substructure; firstly the ownership and control of enterprises were now separate, and secondly that this separation had caused a 'managerial revolution' under which the new controllers, the non-owning managers and directors, were motivated by criteria very different from those of the old style owner-capitalist. Corporations, it was said, would increasingly be run with a greater sense of social responsibility and with growth as a goal, rather than simple maximisation of returns.

Both Aron and Dahrendorf have made this development the keystone of their models of industrial/post-capitalist society and, interestingly enough, have legitimised its position there by heavily quoting Marx (even to the extent, in Dahrendorf's case, of attempting to intuit what Marx would have said in the unfinished section of Capital). Thus Aron:

"In a phrase which I like to quote, Marx observed, 'Joint stock companies and the diffusion of the capital of large undertakings among thousands of shareholders already constitute a destruction of private property.' If the diffusion of ownership of great businesses among thousands, tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of shareholders amounts to the elimination of private property, then a large American corporation is no longer private property. In this sense economic growth results in the destruction of private property and brings about a kind of socialisation of ownership."

(30)

It is easy to get bogged down in discussions about what Marx really meant by the above phrase and other, apparently Delphic utterances such as "This" (the joint stock company) "is the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within capitalism itself."⁽³¹⁾ For our purposes it is first necessary to ask a) has there been a diffusion of ownership and separation from control and b) if so, does it matter?

Post-war British society has not been characterised by a diffusion of wealth; several studies such as those by Revell and the 'Economist'⁽³²⁾ have estimated that 84% of wealth is owned by the top 7% of taxpayers and the top 2% own 55% of the total.

Within this figure for wealth in general, the ownership of productive wealth, i.e. share ownership is far more concentrated than other forms of property. The 1966 Stock Exchange survey showed that the vast majority (about 95%) of the adult population owned no shares at all (33); within the 4 - 5% that do own the shares, the top 1% of the population owned 81% of privately owned shares. (34) The implications of this are spelled out by Frankel:

"It means that property and the power that goes with it are largely concentrated in the hands of the top one percent of the adult population, 400,000 persons. We may regard this number (which excludes dependents) as roughly the size of the British capitalist class." (35)

The fact that ownership has not been widely diffused throughout the population does not, by itself, negate the possibility of its separation from the control of enterprise; what Marx termed "the labour of superintendence". The conclusions from the debate over the extent to which top executives and managers are themselves shareholders would seem to be i) that only in a few corporations do directors hold any substantial percentage of the total issue of ordinary shares, but that ii) because of diffusion of ownership through the share-buying population, a diminishing share of the total issue is needed to exercise effective influence on policy, and iii) the total shareholding of directors in general makes them larger owners than any other identifiable occupational group in society. (36)

This latter point is important. In contesting the managerial thesis on its own ground, Nichols in his very thorough review of the evidence, is quite right to concentrate on directors' holdings within their own firm. However, the fault of the managerialists lies in the very fact that they move from the particular to the general; statements about particular corporations lead them to make statements about society. It is the latter we are interested in, and such statements inevitably involve structural concepts such as class, power, ownership, which transcend the boundaries of the individual corporation and therefore cannot be verified solely from evidence taken from within those boundaries. We need to look at the position of controllers within the social structure. As Nichols himself points out:

"A defining characteristic of both propertied and non-propertied directors is that their status, their prestige, their security, and not least their wealth are all directly dependent upon the continued existence of the large private enterprise corporation." (37)

and he concludes that, historically,

"it seems wiser to consider the separation of ownership and control as a part of the progressive division of labour within capitalist society." (38)

Or, to put it another way,

"The capitalist mode of production itself has brought matters to such a point that the labour of superintendence, entirely separated from the ownership of capital, walks the streets. It is therefore no longer necessary for the capitalist to perform the labour of superintendence himself." (39)

Lastly we can say that it is questionable whether any individual capitalist or indeed capitalists as a group can be said to have "control" of their corporation or of the economy; Blackburn points out that Marx's entrepreneur was certainly not seen in this way - "capitalism subjects every individual capitalist to the immanent laws of capitalist production as external coercive laws." (40)

The most succinct conclusion to this section must be made by Marcuse. In a footnote in "One-Dimensional Man" he rather wearily asks,

"Is it still necessary to denounce the ideology of the 'managerial revolution'? Capitalist production proceeds through the investment of private capital for the private extraction and appropriation of surplus value, and capital is a social instrument for the domination of man by man. The essential features of this process are in no way altered by the spread of stock holdings, the separation of ownership from management, etc." (41)

b) The Predictive content

Most models contain either a predictive element, or an element which enables us to make predictions; thus even an equilibrium model enables us to predict that things will stay much the same.

With the advantage of hindsight we can afford to ask, "have X's predictions come true?", indeed we indulged a little in this luxury in the immediately preceding section. To make predictions however, the model must contain some social dynamic, some explanation for either social change or the return to a steady state.

Both the predictions and the dynamic within the industrial society model revolve around the concept of convergence, which, as we have already mentioned is almost entirely preoccupied with the capitalism/state-socialism dichotomy. There are three main flaws to the idea of convergence; the first is to assume that what appear to be the same social phenomena (e.g. the existence of stratification systems) are of the same social genus, the second is to assume that these phenomena will become increasingly more evident and typical of the societies concerned, the third is to treat industrial societies in general as an autonomous section of mankind.

To take stratification as an example, both Goldthorpe and Lane in their different comparative analyses of Soviet and Western stratification systems conclude that Communist stratification, while it undoubtedly exists, is not of the same generic type as that found in Capitalist societies. In the West the crucial unit of stratification is the social class defined in terms of property ownership; here "economic and specifically market forces act as the crucial stratifying agency." (42)

In state-socialist society "the limited individual private inheritance of wealth has eliminated ownership classes as known in capitalist societies, but it has put a premium on achievement as a mode by which inequality has been maintained and thus has given rise to institutional control over wealth enabling some men to have rights over property which others are denied." (43)

Secondly, the predictions of greater socialisation of the West and greater reliance on the market mechanism in the East seem to have been made in an economic vacuum. The prevailing economic situation in the East since the war has been one of a high maintained rate of growth and a state of over-full employment; it is the system of centralised allocation of resources which has been both responsible for this situation itself and also responsible for avoiding the spiralling inflation that the situation would bring in an uncontrolled economy. The various phenomena noted by Western observers can be seen as by-products of this economic situation - the shortages and misallocations, the creation of a 'black-market' or two-tier distribution system similar to that existing in western economies in war-time when similar conditions prevail. In this situation however, to return to a market mechanism would be economic suicide for the Soviet bloc.

Conversely in the West the deflation of the post-war boom has been followed by a variety of economic crises, some features of which have already been mentioned.

In this atmosphere any expansion of the Welfare State seems most unlikely and many of the welfare services at present in existence are showing signs of starvation of resources. The nature of post-war nationalisation of sectors of industry has also been mentioned; it seems unlikely that the nationalisation programme of the 1974 Labour Government will alter this role very much; indeed the very nature of the current crisis may serve to enhance it.

The third factor which highlights the essential unreality of predictions of convergence is the omission of relations between the industrial societies and the Third World. These relations are especially important with respect to capitalist societies, indeed we can only fully analyse the internal workings of any given capitalist society by incorporating an understanding of the historical and current international nature of capitalism as a mode of economic organisation. The functioning of the capitalist industrial society is decisively influenced by its interaction with an underdeveloped environment: the existence of the latter is fundamental to the existence of the former in its present form. If the countries of, let us say, Latin America decided to break out of their satellite status, the economy of the metropolitan nation (in this case, as in most others, the United States) would either have to support the cost of containing that break away or suffer the extra costs of rises in the price of raw materials, a decline in the value of overseas investment incomes and loss of markets. (44) If not only Latin

America but the rest of the Third World were to succeed in this, the consequences for at least half the industrial world would be fairly revolutionary, irrespective of whatever gradual convergent trends may or may not be taking place .

c) The theoretical content

Even if the evidence made the idea of convergence a likely possibility the social dynamic involved seems theoretically inadequate; according to Galbraith, industrial societies, whatever their formal ideological label, are subject to "the imperatives of technology", Kerr prefers "the logic of industrialisation". In other words, it is industrial technology that is seen as a force sui generis. These concepts have an almost metaphysical content reminiscent of the 19th century ideas on the subject referred to at the beginning of this chapter. We shall look at the question of the reification of industrialisation but first it is worth pointing out that an acceptance of the "imperatives of technology" effectively negates the idea of progress or change. In the literature we have a situation where underdeveloped societies 'develop' and eventually become industrial societies, whereas industrial societies themselves just undergo 'growth' and a gentle convergence to a millennial equilibrium. Once this happy state is reached, what then? The only possibility is that they will develop into some as yet unknown evolutionary state. The 'logic of industrialism', the only dynamic suggested, would thus appear to be self-eliminating.

In reality industrial society theory does not come up with any answer to the problem because it does not pose the problem in the first place; it is a strange hybrid of a philosophy of history grafted to an equilibrium model. It thus becomes a celebration of the present. Progress can only be defined in terms of some utopia, some ideal, and these have all been dropped; we have already reached the final stage -

"Democracy ... is the good society itself in operation" (Lipset (45))

This idea is not new -

"... vulgar democracy ... sees the millenium in the democratic republic and has no suspicion that it is precisely in this last form of state of bourgeois society that the class struggle has to be fought out to a conclusion." (Marx (46))

The whole industrial society model has been well summarised by Rousseas and Ferganis as:

"the Marxian dialectic brought to a halt in the final synthesis of the modern, non-ideological, democratic welfare state shimmering in the radiance of a non-committed scientism." (47)

The main theoretical weakness of the model is that nowhere is there an examination of the relationship between technology and society. We have seen that the relationship is assumed rather than proven and that the assumption is one of technological determinism; industrial technology, the process of industrialism and industrial society itself become implicitly reified.

This approach seems entirely non-sociological (indeed one could say that its acceptance heralds not the end of ideology, but rather the end of sociology).

The question is crucial however in that it is obvious that there are differences between societies using industrial modes of production and non-industrial societies, which are not entirely due to the fact that on average the former enjoy a per capita GNP ten times that of the latter. Just as obvious are the differences between industrial societies themselves.

Dickson in his analysis of 'the ideology of industrialism' ⁽⁴⁸⁾ points out that industrial society — writers reconcile the two situations by asserting that industrialism has its own internal logic (leading to convergence) and at the same time industrial technology is neutral and can be used for good or ill; this idea of neutrality becomes itself an ideology in that political issues can be presented as technical problems which can only be solved by 'experts'. (We shall examine this element in the next section.)

Dickson himself convincingly argues that there is a two-way reinforcing relationship between the social relations of production and the means of production. We find new technologies because we are looking for them; each machine that we use objectifies a particular mode of social action, e.g. a car can be seen as the objectification of private motor travel.

In other words, our social actions and the way they are structured through our social relations will be reflected in the structure of our technology, the means of production. At the same time, however, changes in the mode of production have an obvious effect on social relations. As Marx observes in the well-known passage in the 'Poverty of Philosophy' -

"In acquiring new forces of production, men change their mode of production, their way of earning their living; they change all their social relations. The hand mill will give you a society with the feudal lord, the steam mill a society with the industrial capitalist." (49)

This is frequently taken to imply that Marx was a technological determinist. In fact the same passage goes on to say that it is the men who possess this material power of production who establish social relations with others to conform to that power. In other words, it is not the technology which makes it necessary for the capitalist to accumulate but the need for accumulation which leads to the development of technology (the steam mill): this then makes possible the social relations necessary for that accumulation. The technology of the industrial factory, for example assembly-line techniques, reflect the social relations of that factory and of the wider society, and reinforce those relations.

"Hierarchical regimentation ... appears to be a necessity that flows from production technology; but in truth it is built into production technology insofar as the latter is itself a reflection of the social division of labour." (Gorz (50))

As Dickson points out industrialism developed within a capitalist framework and industrial technology was developed to incorporate capitalist social relations. Many nominally socialist countries appropriated this technology, undoubtedly viewing it as politically neutral (as demonstrated in Lenin's phrase concerning the achievement of communism via the integration of socialism and electricity). They have since been obliged to introduce forms of social organisation which are essentially of a capitalist nature in order to make effective use of this technology.

Enter the Experts

The denial of this relationship between the social relations of production and the means of production has centred around the idea that technology is politically neutral. Running parallel with this is the idea that as 'modern society' becomes 'more complex' decisions about how societies' resources can be used (i.e. political decisions) are less and less capable of being understood, let alone practised, by the layman and that decision making passes more and more to experts of various kinds - technicians, advisors, scientists, academics. These come to advise the decision-making bodies (governments, firms) on the basis of criteria that are held to be technical, scientific and objective. The advocacy of the end of ideology should perhaps be seen as following from these assumptions.

That this role of the experts - Chomsky's 'technical intelligentsia', or 'new mandarins' - has increased cannot be disputed. Most of the industrial society writers greeted the development with enthusiasm; indeed it was the third characteristic of the industrial society that we noted at the beginning of the chapter. However, if we maintain the impossibility of 'value-free' behavioural sciences and accept Dickson's assertion that developments in technology cannot be regarded as neutral or divorced from societal developments, then we must regard statements to the contrary by behavioural scientists as ideological and agree with Chomsky that:

"In an age of science and technology it is inevitable that their prestige will be employed as an ideological instrument ... that political elites will use the terminology of the social and behavioural sciences to protect their actions from critical analysis - the non-specialist does not, after all, presume to tell physicists and engineers how to build an atomic reactor." (51)

Regrettably there is no better example of this than the use made of the concept of the industrial society itself. This is really the point of this somewhat long analysis of a concept which first saw light of day in the fifties and has been criticised many times and from many quarters since that period. Rather than resurrecting an outmoded concept for the pleasure of 'unmasking', the object has been to demonstrate the theoretical and conceptual basis of a societal model that is still in political use.

And, as we shall see in the final part of this chapter, one of the most important areas of its use is in the field of industrial relations, which brings us a little closer to the study of strikes.

The point is that the industrial society model may have been rejected by academics but has been accepted and used by politicians. Thus, the late President Kennedy -

"The fact of the matter is that most of the problems ... are technical problems, are administrative problems. They ... do not lend themselves to the great sort of 'passionate' movements which have stirred this country so often in the past. Now they deal with questions which are beyond the comprehension of most men."(52)

As we have seen in the foregoing discussion, the industrial society model is an equilibrium consensus rather than a dynamic conflict model. The political implication of acceptance of this model is that conflict (e.g. industrial conflict) is not the normal state of affairs, can, in some circumstances, be regarded as deviant and is, in any case, a problem. In the 'new industrial state' -

"there is a high measure of certainty that problems have solutions before there is knowledge of how they are to be solved."(53)

Therefore, to solve the problems we call in the experts; to solve the problems of industrial relations, we call upon those writers and academics who are expert in that field.

MODELS OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The main implications of the industrial society model for the study of industrial relations are:

(a) the industrial society is a pluralist society in which power groups in the industrial sphere of social action have no necessary relationship to power groups in say, the political sphere. Industrial conflict is therefore unrelated to class conflict which is rapidly becoming historically obsolete anyway.

(b) this isolation of industrial conflict is an institutionalised isolation. The organisations representing capital and labour now balance each other in a situation of countervailing power and create an institutionalised framework for the conduct of their mutual affairs -

"Instead of a battlefield the scene of group conflict has become a kind of market in which relatively autonomous forces contend by certain rules of the game, by virtue of which nobody is the permanent winner or loser." (54)

(c) A feature of this institutional structure is that a certain level of conflict is seen as not only legitimate but necessary (i.e. functional) in reducing frustration and maintaining the system -

"The tension between capital and labour is recognised as a principle of the structure of the labour market . . . (and) is converted into a legitimate tension between power factors which balance each other." (55)

This conflict is, however, regulated and controlled within mutually acceptable limits. Where conflict exceeds these bounds of legitimacy both its causes and effects become problematic.

If we accepted the post-capitalist thesis these are the features we would take with us in the move from the general to the specific; from looking at society to looking at industrial relations; they would form the cornerstones of our model of industrial behaviour. Similarly, if we came across theories of industrial relations which, although they rarely made reference to the wider society, contained most of these assumptions we could fairly safely assume that their authors' weltanschauungen would not be too dissimilar from those of Dahrendorf or Kerr.

Of the British writers on industrial relations since the war, probably the most influential have been those of the Oxford school led and personified by Allan Flanders and Hugh Clegg. The central feature of Allan Flanders' work is the British industrial relations system and the fundamental and defining phenomenon of that system is the institution of collective bargaining.

For Flanders, industrial relations as an area of study must be seen as a system of rules, from legislation to custom and practice, relating to employment:

"The study of industrial relations may therefore be described as a study of the institutions of job regulation" (56)

The origin of most of these rules lies today in the institution of collective bargaining, a more appropriate term for which, he suggests, might be 'joint regulation'. (57)

Collective bargaining is both a process and an institution. The process of collective bargaining between management and unions arises out of a dispute and proceeds via a procedure to an agreement. As such it is seen as a preferable alternative to settling disputes through a 'trial of strength' such as a strike or lockout; however, it is not just an alternative in the form of a choice of action which the participants can make at any particular moment in time, but is seen by Flanders as a replacement of one form of social action by another. Thus, writing in the 1950's he could claim:

"The growth of the voluntary system has, without doubt, contributed greatly towards diminishing the number of working days lost on account of disputes" (58)

Collective bargaining as an institution is very nearly the finest of all possible worlds. Flanders quotes with approval an interesting passage by Dubin (given here in full):

"Collective bargaining is the great social invention that has institutionalised industrial conflict. In much the same way that the electoral process and majority rule have institutionalised political conflict in a democracy, collective bargaining has created a stable means for resolving industrial conflict" (59)

Clegg, after reviewing international attempts at co-determination, workers councils and joint consultation, concludes with satisfaction:

"There is no effective alternative to collective bargaining as a means of protecting the interests and rights of workers in industry" (60)

One senses here a satisfaction with the present very reminiscent of Lipsett's observations on the political scene.

The nature of collective bargaining as a regulative institution is seen by Flanders and Clegg to derive from the nature of contemporary society, which is explicitly pluralistic in which "every important interest is organised and represented" and the most noticeable and "probably the most powerful" pressure groups are the trade unions. (61) Because a pluralistic society obviously has a multiplicity of separate normative systems, this results, in Flanders' words, in "some degree of constant disorder", i.e. the possibility of manifest and latent conflicts. Collective bargaining has evolved historically as the principal method of creating "viable and adaptive normative systems to keep manifest conflict in employment relations within socially tolerable bounds." (62)

An interesting view of just how this is done is provided by Clegg:

"All the claims of the pressure groups cannot be met. But so much of what they seek can be given them, together with such good reasons for refusing the rest as to make them think they are being treated fairly and that their bargaining is giving them as much as they could reasonably expect." (63)

There are several theoretical objections to this model. The first arises from the confusion in the literature between the use of the words 'conflict' and 'conflicts'. In most cases when the writers speak of 'a conflict' it is in the sense of 'a dispute' and, following Dubin, "every industrial conflict is resolved" (64), hopefully via collective bargaining. I.e., 'conflicts' are arguments on ever-shifting ad-hoc bases which can be settled and the system brought back to equilibrium. 'Resolved' is of course a useful word - if, after a prolonged strike a firm goes bankrupt or the whole labour force is dismissed both of these events are resolutions of sorts and, of course, industrial relations in the country as a whole will probably go on as before. (There is a further query here: in talking of the 'system' are we speaking on a societal level, an industry level, or the level of an individual firm?)

However, we have already seen that Flanders and others refer to a certain level of functional conflict or 'constant disorder' in pluralist society. It remains unclear whether industrial conflict is an extension of these societal conflicts or whether perhaps the interests of the industrial system as a whole can conflict with other systems within the pluralist entity. As we have already seen it is because industrial relations is seen as a system that the cause of 'conflict' within it is problematical. Flanders, in best systems theory style, occasionally refers to "inputs of conflict" (65), presumably from outside. Eldridge, as a sociologist, is a little more theoretically subtle; he reminds us that both conflict and co-operation can be problematical but, in support of his advocacy of the industrial relations system as an analytical model, says that "grievances and tensions" arise from "inconsistencies in the system". (66) The 'locus and distribution of power in wider society' will influence how industrial relations are conducted, for example via government restrictions, but should not, it seems, be looked to for any causal clues.

We can see that this treatment of conflict is very unsatisfactory. If conflict as such is not naturally found within the industrial relations system, then we can agree with Hyman that -

"If it is part of the definition of an industrial relations system that it contains built in tendencies towards equilibrium, and that radical conflict is excluded from the actors' ideologies, then it cannot be assumed that industrial relations in the real world constitute a system at all." (67)

The 'rules of the game' model in which it is admitted that there is bound to be conflict (or conflicts) but that this will be kept within 'socially tolerable' levels by the commonly-agreed rules which actually compose the industrial relations system is, as Fox has pointed out, not a conflict model at all, but a consensus model, harmony simply being reached at a higher level:

"The normal pluralist stress on the moral obligation ~~to observe agreements therefore implies a belief~~ that power is not so unevenly matched as to introduce the extenuating concept of duress." (Fox) (68)

As such, it is open to the criticism made by Wolff against pluralist systems as a whole and which seems especially appropriate to industrial relations. Pluralists essentially confuse the concepts of interest-conflict and power conflict, i.e., in the real world, the 'rules' reflect the structured realities of power and are not necessarily geared to letting every conceivable interest have an equal say:

"It is as though an umpire were to come upon a baseball game in progress between big boys and little boys, in which the big boys cheated, broke the rules, claimed hits that were outs and made the little boys accept the injustice by brute force. If the

"umpire undertakes to 'regulate' the game by simply enforcing the 'rules' actually being practised, he does not thereby make the game a fair one. Indeed he may actually make matters worse, because if the little boys get up their courage, band together, and decide to fight it out, the umpire will accuse them of breaking the rules and throw his weight against them!"

(69)

Yet the pluralist model of the industrial relations system has been very influential in the post-war period. As Fox has shown (70), it gained in support over the previously popular 'unitary' view; the latter has its roots in the Human Relations school of the 30's and posits a first-order consensus on the basis that 'both sides of industry' have an inherent common interest in keeping the wheels turning. As we shall see, acceptance of one model rather than the other has radically different consequences for government policy. The conflicting pressures on policy from academic and political adherents of both models really came to a head in the mid 60's when the level of industrial conflict began to make Ross and Hartman's earlier conclusions look a little improbable and rose, in fact, over the 'socially tolerable' level.

In 1965, Flanders put aside some of the euphoria concerning collective bargaining and began to ask of industrial relations "What is wrong with the system?", sensing a danger that "new values current in society" would undermine the "shared understanding" on which the system's coherence and stability were based. (71)

By 1967 he was convinced that this was happening and was suggesting a "prescription for change" consisting of a combination of regulation and compromise: both unions and employers should learn to observe a developing system of rules which were not directly of their own making. (72)

By 1969 the insidious trend was still continuing - there had been a "proliferation of unrelated normative systems" leading to a "progressive breakdown of social regulation". There were even "new issues and problems for which no regulation yet exists". (73) The rules were breaking down, an anomic situation of Durkheimian proportions was emerging, the solution was the "reconstruction of normative order", first and foremost in the enterprise. The vehicles for salvation were to be productivity agreements and job-evaluation.

By now, the demands on Government to "do something about strikes" were coming thick and fast. A year earlier, Flanders had seen many of his recommendations bear fruit in the form of the Donovan Commission Report which, in tone, seemed to be a fairly wholehearted acceptance of Flanders' analysis. Donovan saw the cause of the level of unofficial strikes in the current methods of collective bargaining and the absence of quick and efficient disputes procedures. In other words, as Fox has pointed out, (74) the assumption in Donovan was one of underlying consensus which simply needed the 'right' tension-managing institutional forms in which to emerge.

To Flanders' mind, unless a solution could be found based on the normative framework of the production and distribution of wealth, the country would be forced,

"into responses which would be tantamount to a decision that Britain could no longer support its present extreme degree of pluralism and that a measure of authoritarian state regulation must take over." (75)

Unhappily for Flanders and Donovan, this is precisely what did happen. The boom of the mid-60's was rapidly losing steam and capitalism could no more deliver the goods of a new normative order based on the production and distribution of wealth than it could maintain its own declining profit margins. (76) The much vaunted productivity deals and job-evaluation turned out, as we shall see, to be vehicles not for normative stability but for redundancy.

It was in this climate that industrial relations witnessed the return to prominence of the 'unitary' approach, to use Fox's useful term. He has pointed out (77) that since the unitarists see a common interest between 'both sides' it follows that unions and union activity are seen as superfluous - either as historical relics, the outcome of sectional greed, failure to comprehend elementary economics or the national interest, or, latently, vehicles for those aiming to subvert the social order. The implications for policy again centre around the necessity for regulation, only in this instance it is simply the unions and their actions which must be controlled; the overall common interest can only be truly served if unions' narrow sectional interests can be

excluded from the discussions. For the unitarists this priority gains in importance in a worsening economic climate.

In 1968, in the introduction to the revised edition of a collection of essays on industrial relations (78), Professor Roberts, doyen of the LSE industrial relations camp, commented sharply that the impact of strikes could "jeopardise the ability of a country to pay its way" and that the country must question whether the right to strike should not be more closely regulated. He advocated several regulatory features then novel to British industrial relations (though not elsewhere), including making collective agreements legally binding contracts, the abolition of the closed shop, and the official recognition of certain unions in each industry as 'sole bargaining agents'. The advantages would be that "the structure of collective bargaining would be greatly simplified, inter-union conflict would be eliminated and unions would be better placed to accept responsibility for the conduct of affairs in the plant or local establishment."

There would be dangers for the unions but they would be saved from "the even greater danger" of national leadership losing control over local leadership. In other words, the most effective means of controlling the unacceptable actions of union members was to get the union hierarchy to do the job itself. Two years later, Roberts was to see all his recommendations, plus a few others, made law in the Conservative Government's Industrial Relations Act.

As well as having implications for policy the models obviously have implications for further analysis. Both unitary and pluralist treatments of industrial consensus are fully consistent with the industrial society theory, Flanders' pluralist approach being a fairly direct extension of Dahrendorf's societal model. It follows that the inadequacies of the Dahrendorfian macro-analysis will be compounded and probably magnified in the micro-models dealing with the industrial sector.

We are concerned here with only one major form of industrial action - the strike. We have seen that there is an inevitable tendency for many industrial relations writers to treat industrial conflict as autonomous and separate from the rest of society, to see strikes as occurring only when there is an absence of control or a breakdown of normative order, i.e. as being in some way deviant; above all there is the somewhat un-academic tendency to treat strikes as a problem.

Yet we cannot easily dismiss a large, influential and impressive body of writing as having no foundation in truth at all. Many of the observations which the authors expand into general laws are obviously correct. Union hierarchies today are generally conservative in approach and willing to compromise, most grievances are not solved by strike action; on the other hand union hierarchies are always subject to the pressure of the rank and file membership; strikes are a frequent, regular and structured social phenomenon which cannot be dismissed as residual or deviant.

As I stated earlier what we need is an approach which can give useful insights into consensus, conflict and compromise and which recognises that all three ideological models are normal, in specific circumstances.

INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT AND CAPITALIST SOCIETY

Because of the reservations expressed in this chapter, I chose to use a theoretical framework which posits that strikes, as usually defined, are historically characteristic only of capitalist economic systems. (79) Such societies have a structured internal conflict which, because it is based on the ownership and distribution of productive wealth is bound to manifest itself in both industrial and non-industrial contexts. We should not, therefore, in examining strikes as one manifestation of conflict, confine our attentions entirely to the industrial sphere. In order to assess the causes of differentials in strike-propensity we need first to examine the objective and subjective meanings of strike action in general both in the context in which it occurs, i.e. the employment situation, and also in the social collectivities outside that context to which the strikers in other roles also belong; collectivities such as community and social class.

Notes

- 1) The following are the original dates of publication of some of the more influential works in this genre. (U.K. publication dates are given in the references that follow this note.)
1956 C.A.R. Crosland The future of Socialism
1957 N. Djilas The New Class
1957 R. Dahrendorf Class and class conflict in industrial society
1958 J.K. Galbraith The affluent society
1960 S.M. Lipset Political Man
1960 C. Kerr, J.T. Dunlop, F. Harbison, C.A. Myers Industrialism and industrial man
1960 D. Bell The end of ideology - on the exhaustion of political ideas in the fifties
1961 R. Aron Eighteen lectures on industrial society (based on lectures given at the Sorbonne 1955-56)
- 2) Crosland C.A.R. (1956) The future of Socialism London: Cape
- 3) Burnham J. (1945) The managerial revolution Harmondsworth : Penguin
- 4) Aron R. (1967 a) 18 lectures on industrial society London : Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- 5) Aron R. (1967 b) The industrial society New York : Praeger
- 6) Dahrendorf R. (1959) Class and class conflict in industrial society Stanford : Stanford University Press
- 7) Kerr C., Dunlop J.T., Harbison F., and Myers C.A. (1973) Industrialism and industrial man Harmondsworth : Penguin
- 8) Bell D. (1960) The end of ideology Glencoe : Free Press
- 9) Galbraith J.K. (1969) The new industrial state Harmondsworth : Penguin
- 10) For example, "Equality is a value which characterises all industrial societies, capitalist or otherwise" (Dahrendorf (1959) op. cit. p. 68)

- 11) It is interesting in this context to note that De Gaulle's vision of a United Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals was first expressed by Aron in identical terms: see the Preface to Aron R. (1967 a) op. cit. p. 13
- 12) Dahrendorf R. (1959) op. cit. p. 271
- 13) Quoted in Aron R..(1967 b) op. cit.
- 14) Galbraith J.K. (1969) op. cit.
- 15) The assertion made by Ross and Hartman; see Ross A.M. and Hartman P.T. (1960) Changing patterns of industrial conflict. New York : Wiley & Son.
- 16) Donaldson P. (1973) Economics of the real world Harmondsworth : Penguin p. 60
- 17) In 1962, well before the Vietnam War, a United Nations study concluded that arms spending corresponded to roughly half the world's gross capital formation. Of this total, 85% was made by seven countries - Britain, Canada, China, France, West Germany, Russia and the United States. For a detailed exposition of the thesis of the 'permanent arms economy' see Kidron M (1970) Western Capitalism since the war. Harmondsworth ; Penguin
- 18) Blackburn R. (1967) "The unequal society" in Blackburn R. and Cockburn A. eds. (1967) The incompatibles. Harmondsworth : Penguin
- 19) Abel-Smith B. and Townsend P. (1965) The poor and the poorest London : Bell
- 20) Kincaid J.C. (1973) Poverty and equality in Britain Harmondsworth : Penguin p. 108
- 21) Nicholson R.J. (1973) "The distribution of personal income in the U.K." in Urry J. and Wakeford J. eds. (1973) Power in Britain London : Heinemann
- 22) Titmuss R. (1965) "Goals of today's Welfare State" in New Left Review (1965) Towards Socialism London : Fontana
- 23) Blackburn R. (1967) op. cit. p.29
- 24) Aron R. (1967 a) op. cit. p. 197
- 25) Frankel H. (1970) Capitalist society and modern sociology London : Lawrence and Wishart p. 133
- 26) Foot P. (1971) Postal workers and the Tory offensive London : 'Socialist Worker'.
- 27) Hughes J. and Moore R. eds. (1972) A special case ? - social justice and the miners Harmondsworth : Penguin p. 48.

- 28) Blackburn R. (1965) "The new capitalism" in N.L.R. (1965) op. cit.
- 29) Berle A.A. and Means G.C. (1932) The modern corporation and private property New York : and Burnham J. (1945) op. cit.
- 30) Aron R. (1967 a) op. cit. p. 182
- 31) Marx K. "Capital III" passage, given in Bottomore T. and Rubel M. eds. (1963) Karl Marx - selected writings Harmondsworth : Penguin p. 163

For interpretations of "what Marx really meant" see Frankel H. (1970) op. cit. pp. 91 - 97; Blackburn R. (1965) op. cit. p. 117; and Nichols T. (1969) Ownership, control and ideology London: Allen & Unwin, pp. 64 - 65.

- 32) See Frankel H. (1970) op. cit. p. 77 and 'The Economist' (1973) "The distribution and taxation of wealth" in Urry J. and Wakeford J. (1973) op. cit. pp. 56 - 60.
- 33) quoted in Nichols T. (1969) op. cit. p. 78
- 34) Lydall H.F. and Tipping D.G. (1961) "The distribution of personal wealth in Britain" Bulletin of Oxford Institute of Statistics 23 (i)
- 35) Frankel H. (1970) op. cit. p. 94
- 36) For discussions of the evidence see Westergaard J. (1965) "The withering away of class - a contemporary myth" in N.L.R. (1965) op. cit. Frankel H. (1970) op. cit. pp. 93 - 5; and Nichols T. (1969) op. cit. Chapter VI.
- 37) Nichols T. (1969) op. cit. p. 142
- 38) ibid. p. 141
- 39) Marx K. "Capital III" passage given in Bottomore T. and Rubel M. (1963) op. cit. p. 161 (my emphases)
- 40) Blackburn R. (1965) op. cit. p. 117
- 41) Marcuse H. (1968) One-dimensional man London : Sphere p. 41 ff.
- 42) Goldthorpe J.H. (1964) "Social stratification in industrial society" in Halmos P. ed. (1964) The development of industrial societies (Sociological Review Monograph 8) Keele : University of Keele.

- 43) Lane D. (1971) The end of inequality ? - stratification under state socialism Harmondsworth : Penguin p. 136
- 44) Since first writing this section, two world events seem to have lent support to my assertion. The first was the military coup in Chile in September 1973 which overthrew the government of the elected Marxist President Salvador Allende and caused an estimated 20,000 deaths including Allende's own. It is now known that both the American Central Intelligence Agency and large American private corporations such as International Telephone and Telegraph had for many years spent considerable sums of money to prevent Allende's election and, when this failed, to internally weaken the economy. The American Secretary of State, Kissinger, announced to the White House Security Committee in June 1970 that in the Chilean context, "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist because of the irresponsibility of its people". (Sunday Times' September 22nd 1974).

The second was the immediate economic reverberations that have run through the industrial nations as a result of a moderate increase in the world price of oil. The demonstration of the extent of bargaining power thus gained by the OPEC nations will not be lost on other primary producers.

- 45) Lipset S.M. (1963) Political man London : Mercury p.403
- 46) Marx K. (1968) "Critique of the Gotha Programme" in Marx, Engels - selected works London : Lawrence & Wishart p. 332
- 47) Rousseas S.W. and Farganis J. (1965) "American politics and the end of ideology" in Horowitz I.L. ed. (1965) The new sociology New York : Oxford University Press
- 48) Dickson D. (1974) Alternative technology and the politics of technical change London : Fontana
- 49) Marx K. (1963) "The poverty of philosophy" passage given in Bottomore T. and Rubel M. (1963) op. cit. p. 108
- 50) quoted in Dickson D. (1974) op. cit. p. 87
- 51) Chomsky N. (1969) American power and the new mandarins Harmondsworth : Penguin p. 252
- 52) quoted in Rousseas S.W. and Farganis J. (1965) op. cit. p. 284
- 53) Galbraith J.K. (1969) op. cit. p. 29

- 54) Dahrendorf R. (1959) op. cit. p. 67
- 55) Theodore Geiger quoted in ibid.
- 56) Flanders A. (1965) "Industrial relations - what is wrong with the system?" reprinted in Flanders A. (1970) Management and unions London : Faber p. 86
- 57) Flanders A. (1968) "Collective bargaining : a theoretical analysis" reprinted in Flanders A. (1970) op. cit. p. 222
- 58) Flanders A. (1954) "Collective bargaining" in Flanders A. and Clegg H.A. eds. (1954) The system of industrial relations in Britain Oxford : Blackwell
- 59) Dubin R. (1969) "Constructive aspects of conflict" in Flanders A. ed. (1969) Collective bargaining Harmondsworth : Penguin
- 60) Clegg H.A. (1960) A new approach to industrial democracy Oxford : Blackwell p. 113
- 61) ibid.
- 62) Flanders A. and Fox A. (1969) "Collective bargaining : from Donovan to Durkheim" in Flanders A. (1970) op. cit. p. 252
- 63) Clegg H.A. (1960) op. cit. p. 20
- 64) Dubin R. (1969) op. cit. p. 54
- 65) Flanders A. and Fox A. (1969) op. cit. p. 259
- 66) Eldridge J.E.T. Industrial disputes London : Routledge pp. 22 - 3
- 67) Hyman R. (1972) Strikes London : Fontana p. 68
- 68) Fox A. (1973) "Industrial relations: a social critique of pluralist ideology" in Child J. ed. (1973) Man and organisations London : Allen and Unwin
- 69) Wolff R.P. (1969) "Beyond tolerance" in Wolff R.P., et. al. (1969) A critique of pure tolerance London : Cape
- 70) Fox A. (1973) op. cit.
- 71) Flanders A. (1965) op. cit.
- 72) Flanders A. (1967) "Collective bargaining: a prescription for change" reprinted in Flanders A. (1970) op. cit. p. 211.
- 73) Flanders A. & Fox. A. (1969) op. cit. p. 256
- 74) Fox A. (1973) op. cit.

- 75) Flanders A. & Fox A. (1969) op. cit. p. 268
- 76) see a detailed analysis of this in Glyn A. & Sutcliffe B. (1972) British capitalism, workers, and the profits squeeze. Harmondsworth : London
- 77) Fox A. (1973) op. cit.
- 78) Roberts B.C. (ed.) (1968) Industrial Relations: contemporary problems & perspectives. London : Methuen.
- 79) Strikes have, of course, occurred in Eastern-bloc societies (a recent example being the events in Poland in 1975 - 6). Apart from raising theoretical questions regarding the nature of these societies (e.g. should we term them "state-capitalist"), it must be born in mind that wage-bargaining there is not possible at factory level and thus such stoppages have usually been linked to wider political protest, over for example high food prices.

CHAPTER 2

INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT

"WORK IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD"

"Frankly, I hate work. Of course I could also say with equal truth that I love work; that it is a supremely interesting activity; that it is often fascinating; that I wish I didn't have to do it; that I wish I had a job at which I could earn a decent wage. That makes six subjective statements about work and all of them are true for me."

(Unemployed miner) (1)

A strike is, by definition, a withdrawal from working, a cessation of labour; therefore of necessity its causes must lie within the situation it negates - usually referred to as "the work situation". This term, however, is not sufficiently accurate; as Parker (2) has pointed out and as is evidenced in the consciously contradictory statements given above by the man on the dole, we tend to use the terms 'work', 'labour' and 'employment' as synonyms and this 'everyday' usage can disguise important distinguishing characteristics which, when isolated can make sense of the above contradictions. It is useful to examine the terms separately, as concepts.

Work

Much has been written concerning 'the nature of work' -

"People who speak grandiosely of the 'meaning of work' should spend a year or two in a factory ... Work, at factory level, has no inherent value."

(Factory worker) (3)

However, work in the sense of the performance of a given task or set of tasks is, like any other human function such as eating or making love, in itself value-neutral - it depends on the social context in which the activity takes place as to whether it is regarded as good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Thus, two men can perform identical tasks in different contexts and attribute to them very different meanings. Coates ⁽⁴⁾ gives the good example of two men engaged in gardening - one the 'happy fanatic' in his back garden, the other an employee of a commercial nursery; one cannot spend enough time on the task, the other prefers to read the paper when no-one is looking.

It is clear that there are specific satisfactions to be obtained from the performance of tasks, as is evidenced by the fact that men and women choose to spend their leisure (i.e. non-employed) time in gardening, repairing cars, building bookshelves, cooking or dressmaking, all of which in another place and time can provide intense dis-satisfactions to their performers.

Labour or labour-power

We saw in the previous chapter that the majority of the population own no productive wealth; in a market economy, for these people to obtain a flow of income with

which to purchase food, clothing, housing, entertainment - in other words, to exist, they have to sell to others their sole 'possession' - their labour power. This seems, on the face of it, a fairly tangible concept but, on reflection, labour-power becomes probably the most non-finite concept of the three. This has been stated with great clarity by Blackburn. (5)

"What the employer buys is the worker's ability to work rather than that work itself. By selling his labour-power, the worker is effectively making it over to the employer for a stipulated period during which its organisation and application will not be his own responsibility."

The labour-contract is thus only finite at the worker's end - he gets a fixed rate for the job whereas the employer receives "an impalpable potentiality whose ultimate development is for him to determine". The consequences of this are even more curious:

"To say that the worker sells his labour is to imply that it is his to sell. But the worker's labour is such a strange piece of property that it only exists after it has been sold. He cannot realistically just 'keep' his labour, for it has no definite existence."

(Blackburn (6))

Employment

As can be seen above, it is the concept of employment which effectively defines the terms 'work' and 'labour';

thus a woman who spends her whole day looking after her house and children is not usually referred to as 'working' or using her labour-power because she is not being paid for it - she only becomes a 'working wife' if she goes out and 'gets a job'.

Employment is a relational concept - it draws our attention to the fact that labour-power is employed in the specific context of a social and economic relationship between its buyers and sellers. The two distinctive features of this relationship are its monetary basis and the fact that it is an authority relationship. A look at these two components will show that conflicts of interest are inherent to the institution of employment.

Remuneration

As we have seen, the majority of people become employed in order to exist, or, as graphically put by the director of a small firm -

"Hunger of course! That's the only reason a bloke went out with a club and hit a rabbit and put it in a pot. He's got to eat." (7)

Thus, to employees, wages are a means of subsistence for themselves and their families and thus, ideally, to be maximised. For their employers, however, wages are a cost of production and thus ideally to be minimised. In reality because of the discrepancies in bargaining power between the two parties, few groups of workers are in any

position to take wage maximisation as a goal but will be forced to devote their attentions to achieving relative improvements or simply maintaining existing levels both compared to what other groups are earning and also compared to what is being asked of them in terms of effort.

Similarly, because of the growth of trade unionism and the constant threat of overt conflict, few employers are in a position to minimise wage costs. Thus the structural parameters of wage conflict are in reality narrower than in theory but it can be seen that the basic conflict of interest will still latently exist in every employment situation..

The compromise figure, the bargain-price of labour-power thus reached, forms the hinge around which the relationship between employer and employee turns. As the basis for a social relationship this cash nexus has two main characteristics: it is fundamentally unstable and it is totally impersonal.

As well as the constant threat of temporary rupture in the relationship caused by an overt manifestation of the inherent conflict of interest (e.g. a strike) the cash nexus implies the equally ever-present long-term threat of redundancy. Labour-power is treated as a thing which is bought and sold on the market like any other raw material - it is sold (an inaccurate term, as, although there is a buying price, there is no selling price - if not wanted it is given away) if the price is too high or if demand falls.

As a shipyard manager told the P.E.P. researchers -

"As work gets slack and we don't need men, they're paid up and, as work comes again, we take them on. It's as simple as that." (8)

Because, in the way it is purchased, labour-power is treated as a commodity, this inevitably leads to the providers of that power being similarly treated.

"I think a lot of places don't want people to be people. I think they want you to be the machines they're working with. They just want to dehumanise you. Just like when you walk in in the morning you put the switch on and here you are: 'I am a robot. This is what I do. Good morning. How are you? May I help you?' I hate having to deal with people like that."

(Bank Teller) (9)

One of the most important strands making up the historical critique of industrial capitalism is the attack by novelists and artists as well as social scientists, on the alienating and dehumanising effects of the system. The workforce is fitted to the demands of the productive capital rather than the other way about; in the industrial enterprise man is an adjunct to the machine. Consequently, writes Gouldner,

"he comes to organise his self and personality in conformity with the operating standards of utility... All that man is that is not useful will somehow be excluded or at least not be allowed to intrude, and he thereby becomes alienated or estranged from a large sector of his own interests, needs and capacities." (10)

Authority

A direct consequence of workers only selling their labour potential is that they then have to be organised, instructed and supervised as to what to do, and where and how to do it. Therefore, one of the features intrinsically associated with the phenomenon of alienation is the worker's lack of control over his job-situation. The power element in the employment relationship is present at two levels. One is the long-term power supremacy of the employer, already mentioned, based on his ability to hire and fire. The other is the day to day detailed system of control over what is to be made, how it is to be made, how many are to be made and how long is to be spent making it. Despite his possessing, in many cases, a detailed knowledge of the job, very few of these decisions will be made by the worker.

"I take the bus to work. That was my big decision. I had to go to work and do what everyone told me to, but I could decide whether to take the bus or the el. To me that was a big choice. These are the only kinds of decision you make and they become very important to you."

(11)

(Receptionist)

The resentment at this situation is clearly apparent in the personal accounts of jobs in the collections of Fraser and Terkel and the consequences for industrial conflict were spelled out in 1920 by Goodrich ⁽¹²⁾, namely that a good deal of union activity and overt conflict is directed, not so much towards pecuniary ends as towards

extending the 'frontier of control' which Goodrich saw as covering four main areas of industrial activity - wages, the object of the work, authority and workmanship. In the early 60's Turner noted that in 20 years of full employment since 1940, the proportion of strikes over 'wage-questions other than demands for increases' and (particularly) about 'working arrangements, rules and discipline' had risen from $\frac{1}{3}$ of all stoppages to $\frac{3}{4}$. (13)

We can go further and say that all manifestations of industrial conflict, including 'passive' forms such as absenteeism, contain within them the issue of control; even if a strike is nominally about wages, in the very action of withdrawing their labour, the strikers are challenging the structure of control by those in authority in the organisation. In the words of an American union official at General Motors -

"Their idea is not to run the plant. I don't think they'd know what to do with it. They don't want to tell the company what to do, but simply have something to say about what they do. They just want to be treated with dignity. That's not asking a hell of a lot." (14)

The firm as an organisation

As well as the two components of the actual employment relationship, remuneration and authority, becoming employed also entails a third characteristic which is that the worker becomes a member of an organisation, the firm, containing

within it many further relational structures into which he is placed. His relationships with the other members of the organisation, i.e. other employees, can be dependent on the work process (e.g. in work groups and, in many cases, the structure of union membership) or can be independent of the work process while being peculiar to the organisation - works clubs, joking groups and so on.

Some of these relationships will be harmonious and provide some of the relative satisfactions to be gained from employment. Others will be conducive to conflict such as the traditional dichotomy in most firms between 'works' and 'staff' and the respective ways in which they are treated.

Tedium and traction

We have seen that the essential characteristics of employment produce a qualitative change in the nature of work - from being an extension of man's personality, the task can become meaningless and anonymous, a feeling well expressed by Terkel's vocal steelworker:

"I would like to see a building, say the Empire State; I would like to see on one side of it a foot-wide strip from top to bottom with the name of every brick-layer, the name of every electrician, all the names. So when a guy walked by he could take his son and say 'See that's me over there on the forty-fifth floor. I put the steel beam in.' Picasso can point to a painting. What can I point to?" (15)

Its coercive nature leads the factory worker to claim that he sells not labour, but "time, dreary time" -

"Monday morning starts with a sigh, and the rest of the working week is spent longing for Friday night. Everybody seems to be wishing his life away. And away it goes - sold to the man in the bowler hat." (16)

For the factory-worker and others like him, as Marx noted in 'Wage-Labour and Capital', 'life' begins only when 'work' ceases:

"Does he consider this twelve hours' weaving, spinning, turning, building, shovelling, stone breaking as a manifestation of his life, as life? On the contrary, life begins for him where this activity ceases, at table, in the public house, in bed. The twelve hours labour, on the other hand, has no meaning for him as weaving, spinning, drilling etc., but as earnings, which bring him to the table, to the public house, into bed. If the silk worm were to spin in order to continue its existence as a caterpillar, it would be a complete wage-worker." (17)

There are however two non-work situations. One is leisure which, as consumption, may be seen as the obverse side of the coin to production. The other is unemployment. While there are many statements to support the contention that leisure time is 'life' or 'real' time and that work is 'sold' time, what of unemployment? This is not work, yet it is even less satisfying than being employed. To quote again the unemployed miner whose words began this chapter, commenting on his typical day:

"Hectic isn't it? Lovely life if you happen to be a turnip. But I am not a turnip mate. I am a thoughtful, sensitive, widely-read man, with cultivated tastes in music and the various arts of disputation.

"Am I filled with bitterness? Yes indeed! Do I tend to be anarchistic in outlook? Unquestionably! Why am I like this? ... The short answer is of course because I am such a bloody pointless waste of a good citizen." (18)

Such a statement as this would seem to indicate that there are certain satisfactions from being employed over and above the monetary advantage (which is not mentioned). This too is the impression we get from Terkel's supermarket checker who can say, after chronicling the occupational hazards of tired legs, varicose veins and customer rudeness,

" I look forward to coming to work. It's a great feeling. I enjoy it something terrible." (19)

In an important study of the possibility of satisfactions deriving from actual industrial work, i.e. the tasks, Professor Baldamus concludes that relative satisfactions are possible precisely because industrial work is not only tedious (monotonous, repetitive) but is expected to be so by workers. Compared to this expectation of monotony as the price of a wage, any relative satisfactions are welcome; such satisfactions as the actual rhythm of the process which may allow the day-dreaming which has been reported so often by workers as being essential to get through the day. These satisfactions Baldamus terms 'tractions' (as opposed to dis-traction'). (20)

But what of the satisfactions from employment? Why is it that despite the conflict-ridden, dehumanising nature of employment, people still offer themselves up to be employed? There are possibly two ideological components which make employment, even under these conditions preferable to unemployment. One is that in a society where the face value of a man's labour is decided via the market, there is likely to be a strong feeling that if you cannot sell your labour then it is valueless. Baldamus, following Weber, suggests that another could be the strength of the work-ethic in capitalist society. (24) For the working-class this is likely to manifest itself rather differently than it would for the entrepreneur or executive - rather in the form of work as a necessary evil rather than as a moral good, but nevertheless the concept of duty will contribute to most working-class school leavers heading for the factory gates rather than becoming drop-outs (the latter phenomenon signifying a rejection of the employment ethic).

The ideology will obviously support the system of employment but is unlikely to determine it or guarantee its continued existence. That of course hinges around the fact that employment is the means of existence and that people have to work.

Thus we can conclude that employment under certain circumstances, can offer relative satisfactions arising from social interaction in the work-place, or, more rarely, from the nature of the task.

These, however, are not the predominant characteristics of employment; rather we must agree with Baldamus' statement that -

"Industrial unrest is the most important, most characteristic feature of industrial organisation." (22)

Employment will, by its very nature contain inherent conflicts of interest between employer and employed over the relationship between effort and remuneration, over the frontier of control, and perhaps even over something as fundamental as 'human dignity'. We therefore need to know just how and in what circumstances those conflicts will manifest themselves in social action.

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT

For most of the time the conflicts of interest between employer and employed will remain latent - the workplace functions as an organisation by virtue of a compromise or 'truce' situation (to use Rex's term) which represents the best that either party can get for the time being.

For the worker (excluding for the moment questions of control) this will represent what Baldamus terms a negative disparity between wages and effort due to the employer's superior bargaining position and a practical adherence to the values of the wider society which grant the employer the right to make a profit; thus Dennis et al. remark of the Yorkshire miners:

"They see it as natural that the employer wishes to make a profit out of their work; they accept in the main that this is a sign of 'getting on' in the world. But their aim also is to make money and for this reason their relationship with the employer is one of struggle for the division of the spoil." (23)

Thus the battle is not over the making of profit per se, but rather over how much. The day to day 'truce' will be based on an effort - wage disparity (equivalent to profit or surplus value) which is regarded for the time being as 'normal' or within accepted limits.

Disputes can therefore arise (i.e. conflict become manifest) when the ratio between effort and wages changes so as to push the disparity over this 'normal' limit.

This can occur via:

- a) a decrease in wages, either in money terms (cutting out opportunities for overtime, Sunday working, etc.) or in real terms (through inflation).
- b) An increase in the effort required (re-timing of jobs, changes in track-speeds).
- c) A revision of the level regarded as normal.

The last case is more accurately an upward revision of the value attributed to a given quantity of effort and is important because it is likely to be overlooked by those approaches to industrial relations which see the 'enterprise' as an autonomous entity. It has in fact been the cause of a great many disputes in Britain in the post-war period.

A good example is the case of the motor industry where a combination of a two-tier bargaining system and increasing concentration of control in the industry has strengthened periodic demands for 'parity' with workers doing similar jobs both in other car firms and in other parts of the country. A similar but slightly different case which supports the view of profit mentioned on the previous page concerns the Vauxhall workers at Luton in 1966 who struck because their effort was leading to a greater per capita profit than that for car workers in other companies. (24)

When the wage/effort disparity exceeds the 'normal' level or is revalued there are two main courses of action for the worker, assuming the usual channels of representation and grievance procedure have been tried and have failed to produce a result:

- a) decrease the effort - via leaving, periodically going sick or absent, deliberately slowing down production, refusing to perform 'extra' tasks (i.e. working to rule), sabotaging production.
- b) attempting to increase the wage, via wage claims, supported by threatened or actual strike action, going-slow, working to rule or (increasingly) factory occupation.

As can be seen, the same tactics can be used either to decrease effort or support a wage-claim; the tactic chosen will obviously depend on its likelihood of success.

For example, if there is little possibility of a quick concession by the employer, a go-slow or work to rule may be a better tactic than a strike, having the advantage that the workers continue to be paid while output is restricted. (25)

A further distinction, however, between types of conflict is whether the action is taken individually or collectively. We can generalise and say that an individual worker acting on his own is unlikely to dent the management's wage policy and is therefore likely to concentrate on decreasing his individual effort. Wage bargaining (by which of course, we include the overt or covert use of threats) is in the vast majority of circumstances likely to be a collective action. Therefore, following Scott et al. (26), it is useful to distinguish between unorganised and organised conflict, although bearing in mind, as Scott points out, that the distinction cannot fail to be in some sense arbitrary - even absenteeism can be organised on an informal basis (perhaps even including some sort of rota system). (27)

Unorganised conflict

The quickest way out of what may seem to be a work situation of under-remunerated effort is to leave the firm. Baldamus (28) reviewing studies of labour turnover concludes that it seems to be related to subjective assessments of effort related partly to differences in skill and type of work rather than the objective social controls set up by the labour market in the form of wages and wage differentials;

generally speaking, the lower the skill and the more repetitive the type of work, the higher the degree of labour turnover. The exact amount, of course, is likely to depend on the availability of alternative job opportunities. The extent to which this is the case was minimised by Rice, Hill and Trist, who, in their work on the Glacier Project (29), claimed that, other things being equal, there is an essential regularity in turnover patterns which remains characteristic of a particular firm despite wide fluctuations in the external opportunities for mobility (in the case mentioned, consisting of war mobilisation, reservation and de-reservation of occupations). Behrend, however, was critical of these conclusions for over-emphasising factors specific to the organisation; she found that a reduction in the level of employment leads to a significant reduction in the overall rates of turnover (and absence) in all firms, irrespective of the personnel policies pursued by individual enterprises. (30)

Absenteeism is a "stayer's phenomenon", the resort of those who decide not to leave, providing "a means of temporary withdrawal from the stress of continuing in, as distinct from breaking, a work relationship" (31). It is now realised that included in the phenomenon of voluntary absence is the phenomenon of 'accident-proneness'. This is not to negate or write off the still extremely high injury rates from genuine industrial accidents, but rather refers to the minor accidents which the work of Hill and Trist (32); Baldamus (33)

and others has shown are not 'truly accidental' but rather motivational. An example of what we could call 'accident manipulation' in a car-plant was given to Beynon by one of the Halewood stewards:

"I was working on one side of the car and the boot-lid dropped. It just grazed the head of the fella working opposite me. I can see it now. He stopped working, had a look round to see if anyone was watching - I was pretending not to look at him - and then he held his head. He'd had enough, like. You could see him thinking 'I'm getting out of this for a bit'. He staggered and I could see him looking around. You know what it was like in there, paint everywhere. He wasn't going to fall in the paint ... so he staggered about ten yards and fell down with a moan on some pallets. It was bloody funny. One of the lads saw him there and stopped the line."

(34)

~~To define what is absence and what is genuine sickness~~ is, of course, virtually impossible and this obviously complicates the problem of measurement. The work mentioned, however, does suggest that high accident rates tend to be associated with high rates of absence.

The evidence about fluctuations in absence and accident is a little inconclusive. What does seem clear is that fluctuations in both rates do not stem from fatigue as one might suppose, but from choice - if the former were the case one would expect the rate to rise steadily from Monday to its highest point at the end of the week; Baldamus suggests (35) however that exactly the reverse may be true.

What we are interested in here, as with strikes, is the differential rate - why some industries have more absence than others. Mining, for example, is one of the least monotonous of occupations (monotony being one suggested explanation) yet has a high industrial absence rate. (However, as it is also one of the few industries to keep detailed absence figures, true comparisons are difficult.) Dennis et al. in their discussion of miners' leisure, suggested that the miner in the 1950's had a subjective idea of his standard of living which had been fixed at a low real level by the experience of the Depression, and was thus apt to regard much of his wage as 'free-income' - he felt

~~"free to spend it in clubs and pubs and betting, and to decide to refrain from earning it at all - to absent himself from work."~~ (36)

A clue to the cause of differential absence rates between industries may lie in the evidence regarding differential absence rates within industries. The work of Roy (37), Lupton (38) and Baldamus (39) indicates that workers regularly divide jobs into 'good' (or 'gravy') jobs and 'bad' jobs (or 'stinkers'), the criterion being the chance of (i.e. the degree of effort involved in) earning a given wage. Baldamus suggests that the types of job regarded as bad or tightly-rated have the higher absence rates. This seems to re-affirm our original suggestion concerning the wage-effort ratio and similar support

is given by the fact that the rates for all types of unorganised conflict mentioned, turnover, absence and accident, all tend to be highest among unskilled rather than skilled workers, i.e. typically those where the effort content of work is high and the wage relatively low. Thus we can initially conclude that a contributory factor in explaining rates of unorganised industrial conflict will be the terms of the wage-effort ratio: rates will be higher when there are frequent changes in the terms of the effort-bargain or when the terms are fixed at what the workers perceive to be a more than usually disadvantageous level.

In addition, rates of unorganised conflict tend to increase with an increase in employment and economic activity, suggesting that another factor may well be variations in the workers ability to take action: the more the labour market approaches full-employment, the more the worker is able to disregard one of the fundamental coercive aspects of the employment situation and, in Dennis' words, "exercise free choice in the use of his time without endangering his security".

Organised conflict

Because there are very few figures for organised go-slow or work-to-rule actions we shall restrict our attentions in this section to the most obvious form of organised collective action, the strike. If both organised and unorganised action is a response to wage/effort disparity should they be

regarded as alternative or complimentary forms of action; i.e. should we expect a high strike rate to be associated with a high or low rate of absenteeism?

The evidence is extremely ambiguous. Knowles claimed for the coal industry, as did Turner for vehicles, that the two forms of action are alternatives - that when strike losses were high, losses from absence tended to be low. (40) Baldamus on the contrary found a strong positive correlation in a group of Midlands' industries between the monthly rates for both strikes and absence, the two tending to fluctuate together. (41) Note, however, that both these examples are comparisons over time and not between industries.

Within the coal industry, however, Scott found that while unorganised conflict was strong among low status workers, organised conflict grew with a rise in occupational status. (42) This is an important clue as it coincides with the factor which has up until now been missing, though implicit in the above discussion, namely the role of the union. Dennis suggests that, although mining is a highly unionised industry as a whole, the appeal and strength (i.e. cohesion) of the union is strongest among face and contract (i.e. high status) workers and weaker among other grades such as surface workers, because the daily and weekly livelihood of the former group depends on having the union behind them in the frequent spot-bargaining which is a feature of their work-situation. (43)

We thus encounter again the two variables seen in the previous section, namely a high frequency of change in the effort-bargain (such as is brought about by the ever-changing working conditions of mining face workers) and the ability to take action, in this case collective action.

To quote the senior authority on strikes:

"Unrest finds expression in strikes only if workers have some social cohesion and tradition of common action." (Knowles) (44)

Group cohesion can of course occur in many forms but in the industrial context it is the institution of the trade union which provides just such qualities as Knowles describes and through its existence provides workers with the necessary, if not always the sufficient, ability to take collective action. Put simply, strikes and the ability to strike are partly a function of unionisation: strikes by non-unionised workers can occur but are extremely rare. This of course, by no means implies that the union actively supports every strike directly, but what is important is that strikes inevitably take place within a union framework: 'unofficial' strikes are defined as such in relation to the Union's sanction.

Occasion for dispute and the ability to act

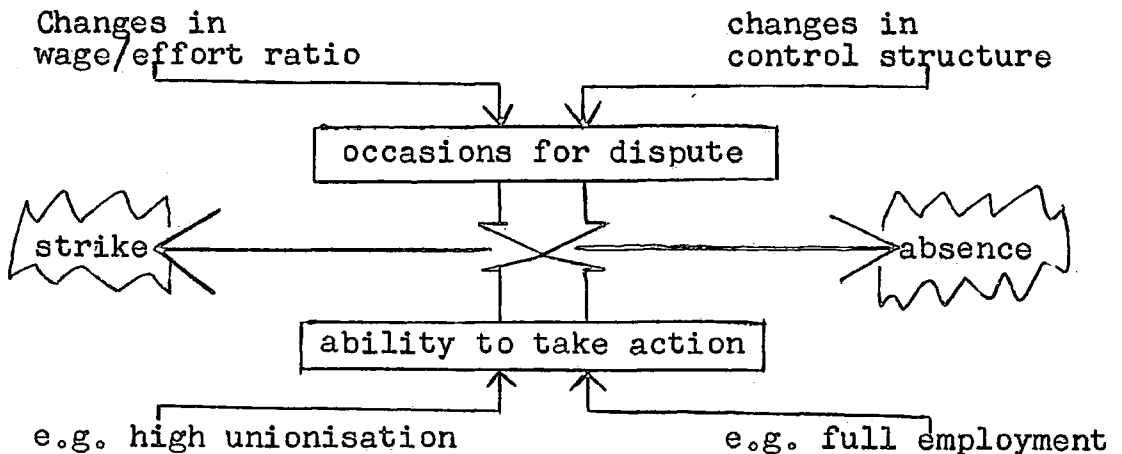
From the preliminary examination in the fore-going two sections, two variables suggest themselves as being likely

to affect the rate of industrial conflict. These are:

(a) changes in the wage-effort ratio (or structure of control.) We can call these opportunities for dispute.

(b) differences in the ability to take action when presented with these opportunities. These invariably depend on minimising the individual worker's vulnerability to the competition of the labour market. Thus, a lessening of unemployment raises the market strength of all employees. Similarly "strength through unity" has been the historical *raison d'être* of the trade union.

Our tentative model, so far, for the explanation of the rate of industrial conflict, organised and unorganised, can be summarised diagrammatically thus:



In the light of this model we must disagree with Baldamus in his claim that the differences between official strikes, unofficial strikes, labour turnover, absenteeism, quota restriction and slowdowns is that they represent points on a scale of potentially-increasing awareness of wage-disparity.⁽⁴⁵⁾ This assumes that the opportunities for each type of action are equal. His statement that "the slowdown is the strongest possible expression of industrial strife because it is a highly deliberate withdrawal of effort" is a similar over-extension of his model. As we have seen, all forms of action are likely to be 'highly deliberate' and the highest expression of strife is presumably the one that stands the greatest chance of success - it may not be a course of action that is possible for the workers however.

If unionisation is high the workers are more likely to take collective organised action in response to a dispute-opportunity than to continue in personal and unorganised withdrawals of effort. The latter course of action is, conversely, more likely to be taken by non-unionised or weakly-unionised groups of workers. Since all forms of conflict are affected by the ability to take action, we can hypothesise that a highly-unionised industry in a period of full-employment could have both a high strike rate and a high absence rate, although those striking and those going absent need not be the same. In relation to this point, however, it must be remembered that strikes are periodic

phenomena, interruptions of the work process, while absence and related phenomena can be regarded as semi-continuous processes which can continue during the inter-strike periods and be resorted to by erstwhile strikers. This may explain some of the ambiguity of the data referred to in the sections above.

It needs to be said here that, in concentrating on direct forms of action as responses to disputes, we are not denying that 'institutionalisation of conflict' has to a considerable extent taken place. As succinctly put by Ingham:

"The development of procedural norms for the regulation of conflict between employers and workers will reduce the incidence of strike activity for the simple reason that the withdrawal of labour (or an employer's lock-out) no longer constitutes the primary means for settling a dispute." (46)

This, however, is not our problem; this is that, given the establishment of such institutions has not brought about the 'withering away' of the strike, i.e. that strikes still occur in significant numbers, why is it that some industries will have a greater propensity to strike than others? The orthodox answer is that the institutions in those industries have failed and need revising.

The argument made here, however, is that, no matter how sophisticated the industrial relations procedures, they cannot alter the nature of industrial employment which is, as we have seen, essentially an authority relationship whose

prime characteristic is conflict of interest. This being so, 'institutionalised' negotiations will be as much dependent on relative bargaining-strengths as will be the ability to strike. Therefore, we can suggest two reasons why the procedures in some industries appear to be so regularly by-passed and ignored altogether.

The first stems from a qualitative difference in the nature of the two actions: strikes are by nature immediate in effect, negotiations are by nature protracted. Now the ability to bargain, on which both negotiation and direct action will be based can, very often, as we shall see, be a relatively transient thing. It may be based, for example, on the increased bargaining power of a particular group of workers at that point in the process of production. To maximise the advantages of this enhanced ability to bargain, action must be immediate. Negotiation (while production continues) may result in the moment passing and thus the weakening of the basis even for continued negotiation.

The second probable reason is that, again no matter how crude or sophisticated the industrial relations structures, in the event of a dispute they can either deliver the goods in terms of a re-evaluation of the wage-effort ratio or control structure, or they cannot. Through past experience the workers are likely to realise fairly swiftly when the system cannot deliver and it is obviously these occasions that we are interested in here.

We thus perhaps need to expand our model to include the employer's 'ability (or rather preparedness) to pay'. Over time this could be influenced by economic fluctuations, and between industries is likely to be influenced by the economic prospects for that industry, whether it is growing or in decline.

There is no simple correlation between these economic fluctuations and the propensity to strike: the relationship appears to be complex. Thus in periods of boom in the car industry there has been a tendency for the number of strikes to rise as the workers know that the management needs the production and would thus give in to demands fairly quickly. ⁽⁴⁷⁾ In an industry in long term economic difficulties, however, such as shipbuilding, there might also be a high incidence of strike action but in this case because management was not prepared to concede to demands put through the disputes machinery simply because it felt it could not afford to do so. Thus, if an employer could be said to be 'over-prepared' to pay because of short-term pressure on him to get production out, this could raise the workers' ability to take action; conversely, if the employer was 'under-prepared' to pay because of long-term pressures on costs, this would increase the opportunities for dispute.

There is, therefore, a middle section on the continuum where for most of the time, the employees' demands are matched

by the employer's preparedness to pay and the grievances are settled without direct action.

We have thus far established that industrial conflict is an inherent part of the employment situation and have looked at some of the basic pre-requisites to that conflict manifesting itself in strike action. Before we pursue the enquiry to ask why some industries have a greater strike propensity than others, we need to examine more closely the nature of the organisation that provides the structural context for strike action and then examine the nature of strike action itself.

ON TRADE UNIONS

The anarchist theorist Errico Malatesta, writing in 1907, saw Trade Unions as having two roles: the first, a negative role of defending workers' interests under capitalism; the second, a positive role of acting as the nuclei of the future society. This, in itself, was more or less a re-statement of the central belief of syndicalist movements of the time. Malatesta, however, was something of a pessimist compared to his colleagues for he went on to claim that the first role, which is after all from the worker's point of view the most important in the short run, inevitably comes to dominate and overshadow the second role and in so doing paves the way for reformism and the continued existence of capitalism. (48)

Here we have a very succinct early statement (although by no means the earliest) of one of the central pre-occupations of theoretical writing on trade unionism - the contradiction between what unions actually do (and how they do it) and what they are perceived as being potentially capable of doing. To attempt some understanding of how the interaction between potential and actuality affects the actions of both trade unions and members of trade unions (an important distinction) we need first to examine unions in the light of our knowledge of the employment situation in industrial capitalist societies.

The classic formulation used by the Webbs and most union rule-books since their day is that trade unions are institutions established to maintain and improve the standard of living and working conditions of their members; namely the sellers of labour power, those who enter the institution of employment and combine to act collectively in order to reduce the power discrepancy in the employment relationship. Theoretically, it is this decision to act collectively which is the fundamental point - as Allen rightly says:

"It is the act of taking collective action, not the organisational forms which are used (e.g. union apparatus, shop-steward committees, ad-hoc bodies) that is central to a study of trade unionism." (49)

While this is true it is nevertheless also true that it is the existence of trade unions which today must be regarded as the necessary framework within which this action takes

place; once the era of union-recognition and organisation is over, it is rare to find collective industrial action taken by those who are not card-holders of some union or professional organisation. In the case of an unofficial strike the fact that the strikers are all union members defines their role within an institutional context, thereby giving a degree of permanence to feelings of cohesion that would otherwise tend to be transitory and ad hoc.

The potential challenge to the status quo which lies within every trade union action has already been hinted at: every challenge to the wage/effort ratio is an embryonic challenge to the distribution of society's resources between capital and labour; every contestation of the structure of control raises the possibility of a shift in the locus of decision-making from the 'rulers' to the 'ruled' (50). As Hyman points out in a comprehensive review of the theoretical material (51), reaction to such potential as a means of changing the social order has been divided between, on the one hand, the optimists such as the syndicalists like Mann, and De Leon, and the American Industrial Workers of the World who said "every strike is a small revolution and a dress rehearsal for the big one", and on the other the pessimists such as Lenin and Gramsci ("Trade Unionism is only revolutionary because of the grammatical possibility of combining the two expressions.")

Looking at the role of trade unions in our own society, sixty years after the last major revolutionary threat in Europe we can say that up to now the pessimists would appear to have been the more correct analysts. A look at some suggestions as to why this has been the case throws considerable light on the nature of unions.

Hyman, following Michels' classic work on oligarchy, suggests that unions, like any other organisation are subject to the process of 'goal displacement' (52); that is procedures devised for the efficient attainment of the organisation's original goals become sanctified as ends in themselves. In the case of the British trade union movement, reliance on a national system of collective bargaining which, at its time of consolidation during the Depression presented several advantages over the then weak position of workplace bargaining, has now become an end in itself rather than a means to an end - other forms of action are seen as regrettable deviations from this, despite the fact that such a system was unable to respond to the new bargaining situation posed by post-war full-employment.

This development also forms part of another reason for the non-revolutionary nature of unions; that is the gradual process of their incorporation into the structure of society. This has been well put by Allen:

"A trade union official can now be drawn into all levels of public and private industrial management because of his knowledge and understanding of unions.... A close association with unions is not a disqualification for entry into hitherto exclusive social circles. A formal entry is made possible by the offers of government honours to union leaders. A trade union knight or peer or recipient of a lesser award is not a figure of curiosity...

"The non-legalistic integration of unions into society had proceeded in all capitalist countries but has probably gone further and deeper in Britain than elsewhere. In Britain the trade union movement is publicly acclaimed as an estate of the realm ... and (they) are seen as institutions which perform politically necessary and industrially useful functions." (53)

So integrated have they become that they are now made to appear as the final arbiters of the success of any Government wages (and even fiscal) policy and in so doing perform a useful double function for the Government of the day. They can be relied upon (especially if it is a Labour Government) for their co-operation in managing and implementing the current wages and incomes policy and yet, because they have such an ambivalent role in the mind of the public, they can be safely blamed for any failure of economic policies. This latter vulnerability has constantly served to reinforce the unions' wish (held for almost as long as their own existence) to appear "responsible" in the eyes of the public and the government, which goal in turn facilitates their further incorporation into the apparatus of administrative control.

This is not to say that such activities as national collective bargaining or industrial joint regulation on the part of the union hierarchy are totally non-productive

for their members - obviously they cannot be or no union leader would stay as such for very long. What it does mean is that the actions of the rank and file very often come up against control rather than support from the union hierarchy. Hyman comments -

"It is, no doubt, by now a sociological commonplace that what was subjective creativity for one generation stands as objective facticity for those that follow. Thus the organisation established by workers in one historical period in opposition to the controlling structures of capitalism may come to constitute an element in a new framework of control over workers in a later period." (54)

(This is not however, as he rightly continues, to bring history to a stop by denying the possibility of further creative change.)

The reasons which both Lenin and Gramsci put forward for rejecting the idea that unions on their own would be agents of social change were rather more sophisticated, hingeing around the question of consciousness, (to be more fully examined in the next section).

In his critique of "Economism" - the belief that by supporting straight 'bread and butter' demands by the unions one was in any way advancing the onset of the revolution - Lenin argued that, without a relationship with a revolutionary party, the unions were incapable of creating a revolutionary class-consciousness:

"The history of all countries shows that the working-class exclusively by its own efforts is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation." (55)

The relationship between different trade union movements and political parties does indeed demonstrate different levels of consciousness or models of society. Under Gompers as head of the AFL the American labour movement consistently rejected not only socialism (so much so that the Wall Street Journal declared in 1902 "unionism is the strongest bulwark in the body politic against the encroachment of socialism"); but also any movement towards an independent party representing labour; accepting instead the philosophy of 'business unionism' which saw the labour/capital relationship as a partnership. The British trade union movement, in common with that of some other Western European countries, has been associated with a social democratic party whose stated aims are to work via reform to some measure of appropriation of the means of production. This decision appears to be based on a deferred dichotomy/conflict model in which dislike of capitalism is apparent but the prospects of changing it seem remote. Therefore for the unions (back to Malatesta) the bread and butter issues come to the fore - given the prospect of incessant conflict it becomes important to increase your bargaining power both industrially and by supporting a parliamentary party who will try to secure reforms which in effect change some of the structural parameters within

which bargaining takes place. This, it should be remembered is the original basis for the unions' support of the British Labour Party - aspirations of socialism have been grafted onto the Party at various times, but it originally represented a single social grouping seen in terms of its commodity role: labour. This view of the Labour Party as the "political arm" of the labour movement has meant that historically the British trade unions have shunned political action and maintained a fairly rigid artificial distinction between politics and industrial bargaining. Political action has been seen as a weapon to support industrial bargaining rather than supplant it - whenever the unions can get their objectives from the employers they will not press the Labour Party for legislation. On the rare occasions when the unions have been faced with the prospect of exercising a direct political role (for example the 1926 General Strike) they have retreated with some haste.

It is the analysis of Gramsci which in many ways is the most interesting and perhaps the most useful of the Marxian approaches to trade unionism.

"Trade unionism is evidently nothing but a reflection of capitalist society, not a potential means of transcending capitalist society.... Unionism unites workers according to the tools of their trade or the nature of their product, that is, according to the contours imposed upon them by the capitalist system." (56)

In other words, unions can arise only out of capitalist

employment relations and therefore should be seen as institutions which are part of capitalist society and whose characteristics will mirror those of that society. These arguments have been expanded in an interesting article by Anderson (57). Unions, says Anderson, are dialectically both an opposition to capitalism, in the way that they resist the unequal distribution of income by their wage demands, and at the same time a component of capitalism in that by their existence they freeze, as it were, the fact of the existence of capital and labour which defines the society - they do not challenge the existence of such societal divisions but merely express it. Their maximum weapon - the strike - consists of simple absence (rather than the creation of alternative structures) and such a weapon does not lend itself to political action.

One of the main limitations to union action, according to both Gramsci and Lenin lies in the realm of class consciousness. Because unions extend beyond the immediate workplace and usually belong to a wider movement defined in terms of its members' sale of labour power, membership of a union and participation in collective action can, as we shall see in the following section, lead to an expanded awareness of social class. This class consciousness however, based as it is on the unions, can only be of a limited kind: what Gramsci calls 'corporate' consciousness, which is really only an awareness of difference of interest, of 'us' and 'them'

To conclude this necessarily short overview of a vast subject we can perhaps say that British unions in the post-war period must on one level be seen as institutions which are an integral part of contemporary capitalist society. They have been increasingly integrated into the administrative apparatus of both the society as a whole and its industrial organisations and, as part of that apparatus, are consequently sensitive to the values of the dominant ideology which have become focussed on the goal of responsible collective bargaining.

On another level, however, they base their very existence on what we have seen is a conflict situation and their reactions and the reactions of their members to this situation are inevitable challenges to the maintenance of the social system and as massive collectivities of workers they can extend feelings of solidarity and cohesion to wider parameters than those of the workplace. However, because unions are not based on a class but on a commodity-group, such challenges and feelings will be specific and transient and will be presented in ways which take their characteristics from the nature of the employment situation and the nature of the wider society. For example, concentration of union membership into larger and increasingly bureaucratic units parallels the concentration of capital; 'protecting the interests of members' becomes of necessity competing with other unions, playing the market to the detriment of the weakly-organised sections of the labour-force. Inter-union competition reflects the anarchy of the market; in the words of Gramsci -

"Workers become traders in their sole property" (58)

Equally importantly it must be seen that given these characteristics unions on their own will be 'responders' and not 'initiators' of action: to initiate a change in the status quo requires the holding of an alternative vision and trade union or corporate consciousness does not extend to this. Therefore, it is likely that collective action taken by union members will be a response to a changing situation, as suggested in the previous sections.

We have now looked at the components of the structural context of strike action - what we could perhaps call the causal environment, of which the institution of employment is the necessary component and the institution of the union the sufficient component.

To fully understand strike action however we now should examine the subjective meaning which both the context and the action have for the actor: how does the striker see (a) the job and the wider society, and (b) the strike?

THE SUBJECTIVE MEANING OF STRIKE ACTION

"It is possible in the field of social action to observe certain empirical uniformities. Certain types, that is, of action which correspond to a typically appropriate subjective meaning attributable to the same actors are found to be widespread, being frequently repeated by the same individual or performed by many different ones. Sociological investigation is concerned with these typical modes of action." (Weber)

(59)

It is clear that strike patterns are a good example of the "empirical uniformities" Weber mentions; what then can we say about the subjective meaning to the actor which is appropriate to this form of social action?

The regular patterns displayed by strike action imply that strikes are likely to have both a shared meaning for the many actors who take such a collective action, and also a permanence of meaning if the action is repeated: what is learned the first time the actor is initiated into the action will structure his view of subsequent repeat actions. Such a structure of meaning, the counterpart to structured patterns of action, we usually term 'culture'; can we then talk of a 'strike=culture', a meaning=structure which will apply irrespective of the characteristics of a particular industry or firm to the ideal-typical striker approaching and experiencing the ideal-typical strike?

The structure of pre-existing meaning

The strike is a form of collective action historically and uniquely evolved by sellers of labour-power, in other words, the working-class. (The question whether white-collar workers are being 'proletarianised' through union membership and consequent participation in strike action is an obvious complicating factor but can be incorporated in this model.) (60)
Therefore any body of meaning which is attached to strike action is likely to be a part of or at least related to a wider working-class culture or weltanschauung.

The literature on working-class culture can be divided into three main areas of concern corresponding to the three major components of any culture:

- a) the relational:; that is how the member sees other groups and the wider society; whether his mental model of that society is dichotomous, trichotomous, hierarchial and so on.
- b) the ideational: - the dominant values of the culture; individualism; collectivism, etc.
- c) a less easily identifiable concept which we may call perceptual: the relationship between members' perceptions and experiences and the structure of cultural forms such as language.

We shall therefore examine each of these below in relation to the questions of how working-class consciousness manifests itself in the work-place, how in turn the industrial experience affects the working class world-view and lastly whether there are any components in the resulting synthesis which are congruent with taking strike action.

The relationship between, and the relative importance of, the workplace and the world outside work as forming-grounds for consciousness becomes problematic when we realise that both contexts can present distinct limitations on the universalising of cultural concepts. Before subjective perceptions and values are translated into action they will first be

mediated through the institutional context in which that action will occur. In the case of the strike this context is composed of the employment relationship and the institution of the union and we have seen already that the latter can hold certain limitations as a vehicle for consciousness.

Similarly, when we turn to the world outside the factory gates we encounter the distinct possibility that the holding of a distinctive world-view by a non-dominant (politically and economically) group in society such as the industrial working-class will come into conflict with and pressure from the components of the dominant ideology of that society. In the event of such a clash we would expect the latter to in some way affect the nature of the former or at least to set limits to its range of perception.

That such a dominant ideology exists in our own society seems fairly clear. Indeed the fact that 'working-class culture' could be uncovered and all its fascinating idiosyncrasies revealed by post-war sociologists indicates the degree to which it did (and does) not correspond to the prevailing dominant culture (thereby becoming worthy of investigation). The dominant culture is however, conversely, seldom the object of scrutiny as it is continuously presented as non-problematical 'common-sense', the expected state of things; it is this very non-problematical feature which marks it as the dominant culture. It speaks to us through the politician, the newspaper editorial and the television current-affairs programme. At the same time it claims to

embrace the 'vast majority of right-thinking people in this country', the 'silent majority', or even simply 'public opinion' in general. In its treatment of strikes it is consistent and unanimous: they are wrong, deviant, totally regrettable and, at times, sinister. As Michael Frayn once remarked in a humorous article on 'The Perfect Strike':

"Public opinion, so far as I can tell, unquestioningly concedes the right of men in a free society to withdraw their labour. It just draws the line at strikes."

More seriously, Anderson, following Gramsci, calls such a dominant ideology the hegemonic ideology in a society - one which imposes its own ends and its own vision on society as a whole. (61) Anderson identifies the components of hegemony in Britain as the fact that society is presented as a hierarchy of orders and ranks distinguished by a "multiplicity of trivial but ceremonial insignia - accent, vocabulary, diet, dress, recreation, etc." which corresponds to neither social class nor objective life-chances - it comes between consciousness and the relations of production and is in turn buttressed by values of 'tradition' and 'empiricism' (hostility to ideas) and veneration of a certain style of 'leadership'.

Acceptance of the concept of hegemony means that in any one time we are likely to find aspects of the hegemonic culture present in sub-cultures in society, whose presence there may confuse observers into thinking that there is no uniform sub-culture or that it is changing to be more like the hegemonic culture. Accepting Anderson's analysis for

the lack of a more substantial one we could suggest that such aspects of hegemony, present in different periods and in different degrees, in working-class culture could include a hierarchical view of society and a respect for tradition (which is channelled into the establishment of, and respect for, 'working-class' traditions.)

If this is true, it can put much of the post-war debate on working-class attitudes into perspective. Much of this debate centres round the important work of Lockwood and Goldthorpe who, in successfully rejecting the theory of working-class 'embourgeoisement' go on to suggest that there is nevertheless a shift in attitudes away from the values associated with the solidaristic collectivism of the 'traditional' working-class and that the 'new' workers were identified by 'instrumental' attitudes to work, union and politics. (62) The concepts of 'traditional proletarianism' will be examined more fully when we look at strike-prone industries and the role of communities but in the meantime we can agree with Westergaard that there is in effect no essential difference between the supposed new values of 'instrumentalism' and those of the cash-nexus which, as we have seen, is the basis of industrial employment; far from being a new phenomenon it may be more accurate to see it as an ever-present one which has been uncovered by the erosion of 'traditional' elements which have overlain it. (63) Whatever the label, however, it seems likely that the apparent contradictions noted in workers' views of society may arise from the clash between internalised aspects of the hegemonic culture and the holding of a distinct sub-culture. What then is the basis of the latter?

Given the ideological pressures 'from above' there obviously must be some factor at work continually to create and reinforce a counter-view which still makes it legitimate to talk of working-class culture. Much of the attention was previously focussed on the 'traditional' community as the basis for working-class values and consciousness, the implication being that with the disappearance of such communities, the consciousness would change; however, as Westergaard points out in the same article, the idea that something as localised and inward-looking as a community can be causally responsible for something as societal in compass as class-consciousness is clearly implausible.

The evidence increasingly suggests that (as we would expect) it is the worker's work and employment situation which is the most significant factor in structuring his world-view.

Early work on this was done by Popitz and his colleagues in Germany. Popitz sees the definite, concrete nature of the manual worker's job as leading to the clear subjective differentiation between himself and the white-collar worker which has been evidenced by so many studies. The Manual worker

"is accustomed to performing his work in a way which is at all times visible, controllable and, as it were 'public'. Here (in the office) it is no longer public, the power of control is no longer apparent.... He will sometimes ask himself, in vain, what so many people can be doing all day behind their desks. Bitter experiences with bureaucratic procedure can intensify these impressions."

.... it seems questionable to him whether white-collar workers actually work - they are engaged on abstract procedures with no visible output. "This opportunity for differentiation on the basis of his work can be made without any particular advantage or disadvantage being attached to it" continues Popitz - it can only be said to be an element in general consciousness when the idea of productivity is added to it i.e. 'they' live off the produce of 'us'. Then the worker is likely to define his own personal social position on this basis: that he is a member of that group which 'works' i.e. does physical, productive (direct value-creating); primary work which is seen as "constituting a fundamental presupposition for the existence of others, of society". This was put in more everyday terms by one of Beynon's Halewood workers:

"It's always us. We make the fucking cars, we chase around here all day like fucking morons and as soon as anything goes wrong, it's us who get the shit. They'll be alright up there in the office, They'll get their wages." (65)

Equally important to the concept of doing productive work is the awareness of the conflicts of interest implicit in the employment situation. These two components make up what Beynon has called "factory class consciousness" - a limited awareness of class and class relationships based on their direct manifestation in conflict between "bosses" and "workers" within the factory. Such a consciousness finds its most developed form in demands for syndicalism, in its least developed form "it is revealed in sporadic bloody-mindedness and 'malingering' - the 'fuck 'em' attitude that most managers are familiar with and find distasteful." (66)

This factory consciousness will be mediated through the institution of the union which, as an institution based on collectiveness rather than individuality, will act to emphasise and give permanence to the values of collective action, 'solidarity', and the idea that 'united we stand, divided we fall'. We must remember also however that the structure of the unions and the workplace will tend to put day-to-day limits on the groups these values extend to.

Popitz claims that this work and employment situation will cause the workers' basic structure of belief to be dichotomous, but not necessarily such a hostile dichotomy as evinced by the Halewood men -

"... This dichotomy can be seen as changeable, unchangeable, bridgeable or to be mediated by means of 'partnership'."

(Popitz)

(67)

The Pilkington workers for example, five weeks into their 1970 strike, still saw the firm in terms of "everyone working together as a team". (68)

This consciousness however is based on and in many cases limited to the workplace. Much of the confusion in the literature stems from attempts to assess the workers' perceptions of the whole of society. We have already seen that the institution which has the potential of expanding the worker's perceptions of relations in his place of employment to a perception of relations in all situations of

employment is the trade union and the wider trade union movement; we have also seen however that the unions take many of their characteristics from the wider society and that consequently the extent to which they fulfill this potential will be limited. We have also seen that the hegemonic ideology will consistently present the picture of a hierarchical social structure which is likely to be accepted unless there is a clear alternative.

Thus the view of society of a particular section of the working class will be, to a large extent, a product of the employment and trade union structure and the extent to which this provides alternatives to the hegemonic view. The importance of the employment situation in thus structuring perceptions of society is given support by the work of Brown and his colleagues in the North-East shipbuilding industry. Here a highly differentiated occupational structure was mirrored by a differentiated union structure characterised by the presence of several strong craft unions - it is suggested that there could be a strong relation between this structure and the fact that very few of the sample held dichotomous models of society, most in fact holding models which differentiated between categories of manual worker. (69)

It could perhaps be asked whether we should expect to find a single cohesive world-view expressed by the working-class? According to Anderson, the hegemonic ideology in a

society is in a state of cultural supremacy because it alone presents a picture of the social totality, which it imposes on society as a whole. Working-class consciousness mediated through its institutions of the trade unions can, at its most developed, only be a corporate ideology - an awareness of separate identity, of 'Us-ness'. In Anderson's words, "a corporate class seeks to defend and improve its own position within a social order accepted as given" (70). This corporate awareness expresses itself in a series of feelings rather than clearly worked-out models -

The "... feeling that the world outside is strange and often unhelpful, that it has most of the counters stacked on its side."

That "... 'Them' is the world of the bosses, whether these bosses are private individuals, or, as is increasingly the case today, public officials."

That "... 'They' are the 'people at the top', the 'higher ups', the people who give you your dole, call you up, ... fine you, ... 'get yer in the end', 'aren't really to be trusted'; 'talk posh', are all twisters really," and so on.

"The question of how we face 'them' (whoever 'they' may be) is, at last, the question of how we stand in relation to anything not visibly and intimately part of our local universe. The working-class splitting the world into 'us' and 'them' is on this side a symptom of this difficulty in meeting abstract or general questions."

(Hoggart)

(71)

This brings us to the final component of working-class culture, that which at the beginning of this section we called the perceptual. In addition to Hoggart, many observers

(Jackson and Marsden (72), Wilmot and Young (73)) have commented on the predominance of the personal, the concrete and the immediate in working-class cultural themes, as reflected in patterns of language with its directness of speech and argument by anecdote (Bernstein (74)) and what Jackson calls 'the episodic nature of working-class life' with its 'trail of minute happenings' -

"It's as if the horizons of life are firm and immutable and interest can only come from a series of lively kicks within the too-settled structure: vitality within fatalism."

(Jackson)

(75)

The assertion that the working-class experience tends to emphasise the immediate, the local and the concrete rather than the relational and the abstract is still somewhat speculative; debate over the interpretations of Bernstein's work, for example, still continues. Trudgill and other linguists make the point that users of restricted linguistic codes are capable of dealing with abstract ideas, in other words, such codes cannot be said to be inferior in the way that they equip the user to deal with his social environment (76) The important point however, is the context in which the code is used and the relative importance given to abstract relational concepts within that culture: Hoggart and Jackson (both working-class emigrés) both suggest that the role of abstract cognition is much less important than in middle class culture.

At this point, before we suggest how a worker with such a world-view is likely to view the possibility of a strike, let us for the sake of comparison have a look at the other side of the industrial relations equation; at the culture of the manager.

The Managers

It is significant that compared to the many studies and ensuing controversy over workers' attitudes to work and society we know relatively little about similar attitudes on the part of managers. In a review of the few studies on the middle class, Lockwood and Goldthorpe (77) suggest that, amongst other things, middle class culture will embody a hierarchical view of the social order, but will also regard it as being 'open' and responsive to individual achievement. The expectation is that social and economic advance will occur but also that the individual has a duty to aim for it. Orientation is towards the future and there is a willingness to sacrifice in the present in return for future gain. The overall ethic is one of individualism in which each is judged on the basis of his personal achievement.

In an article on managerial ideology (78) Fox rightly distinguishes between managerial theories such as 'Taylorism' and 'human relations' and the way managers themselves actually see the situation. Over time, elements in the theories become assimilated into managerial attitudes and folklore via a process of selection, modification and the discarding

of unpalatable elements. The parts that are retained fit in with existing cultural values. Fox instances the influence of the public school tradition at whose root

"lies a profound belief in the personal qualities of leadership and a disinclination to acknowledge the reality of class and authority-divisions in society."

This, in turn, leads to a disposition to accept the model of the organisation as a unitary structure and to "adorn this picture with all the sporting and military analogies with which so much managerial writing is burdened".

Thus, there will be emphasis on concepts of 'the team' and 'team spirit', 'working together', 'partnership'. Fox quotes the then chairman of the CBI as saying

"one of the dangers ... of the machinery ... for collective bargaining, negotiation and conciliation" is that "it may exaggerate the concept of the two sides of industry."

This ideology serves three purposes, a method of self-assurance, an instrument of persuasion, and a legitimisation of authority. However, Fox admits that there may well be occasions where the ideology has become a public relations gloss on a hard-headed acceptance of the reality of the situation.

Approaches to conflict

Now let us suppose a case of imminent industrial conflict -

say a wage claim that has met with initial management refusal. On the one hand we have:

The Workers (which term for the purposes of this analysis shall exclude white-collar workers). Used to thinking in immediate terms, used to taking concrete observable action with a visible end product, dichotomous view of society or at least their employment situation; distrust of 'paper work' strengthened by experiences at the hands of other bureaucracies, members of an institution placing strong emphasis on, and with a probable history of, collective action.

On the other hand we have:

The Management. Probably mostly middle class by training and upbringing, used to thinking in the long term by the nature of their job, at home with abstract reasoning and 'paper work', hierarchical view of society; view the workplace as a 'team' with common interests.

Of the two major forms of action which present themselves we have:

The Strike. Immediate collective action by people all in the same position, control of the situation visibly in the hands of the majority or their representatives.

Negotiation and Arbitration. Protracted, spatially removed from the majority of those affected, control of the situation in the hands of the few, proceedings hidden 'behind closed doors', aim to find an agreement 'in the common interest'.

We are suggesting here that there is a congruency between the two main social-class world-views as expressed in the workplace, and the mode of action which is chosen. This means that under certain circumstances which make the action possible, the strike may well be regarded by the workers as an obvious and natural course of action rather than the last resort.

As the lads at Halewood told Beynon:

"We just said no and if they pushed it we went home." (79)

The meaning of the strike as action

"The only man who desires a strike for fun is the man who wants to go to hell for a pastime."

(W. Payne, busmens' leader) (80)

"It was fantastic that afternoon. We could have done anything. We could have stopped the world. We didn't give a monkey's for the rain, the bobbies, Pilkingtons, the union. It was bloody great!"

(Pilkingtons' striker) (81)

Here on the face of it are two contradictory statements about what it feels like to be on strike. Yet there is an important difference between the two which makes both of them true. In the first statement, the subject is singular - "the man", in the second it is plural - "we".

For the individual, strikes can be a grim affair - strike-pay (if granted) or social security (if eligible) are seldom enough to meet a family's need for any protracted period and a drawn-out strike such as the 1970 Pilkington strike can lead to the sale of household possessions to make ends meet.

For the body of strikers, however, the group taking the collective action, the strike may have a completely different social meaning. There is considerable evidence to show that the act of striking can have a very euphoric psychological effect of the type described in the second of the two quotes above. Patterson and Willet found that whereas argument between men over the necessity of striking had been very intense and aggressive, once the decision to strike had been made, "talk became very light-hearted" with joking playing an important role in conversation-patterns (82). Hiller (83) in the classic study of the strike gives many historical instances of musical processions, concert parties and the like held by striking men and their families and goes on to add;

".. mass strikes invite retreat into the incalculable - the surge and emotion of a sympathetic group. For the moment, the individual in resigning himself to collective sentiments escapes the responsibility of choice in conduct .. By participating in the general enthusiasm workers also temporarily escape from the worry and toil of ordinary existence."

To describe this emotional effect is not to explain it, nor is it correct to attribute to it causal values as Patterson does so that "strikes are fundamentally a response to some psychological need of the strikers" (84) - i.e. an 'escape valve' to 'let off steam'.

Durkheim claimed that a society finds consciousness of itself only through action, which is the end product of association. This statement is surely true for social groups also: collective action does lead to a consciousness of the group as a group. Just as the regular performance of religious rituals by Andaman islanders in times of crisis leads to an awareness of the Andaman community as a community, so it may be argued (although the analogy is obviously crude as the two types of action are so different) that the regular exercise of the strike weapon by workers can lead to a consciousness of themselves as workers. There will be emphasis on the necessity of certain tried modes of action if the group is to survive the crisis, leading to a moral pressure within the group that is external and constraining to any of its individual members.

In the case of the strike, such group-protective action takes the form of picketing and other forms of pressure to reduce the incidence of blacklegging and strengthen the

value of 'solidarity' = the suspension of individual concerns in preference for the concerns of the group. A good example of group versus individual pressure is the regularly controversial fact that individual ballots of strikers frequently produce different results than votes held at mass meetings; in the 1970 Pilkington strike when the strikers were persuaded to take part in a ballot under the supervision of local clergymen 6,246 took part of whom only 2,938 voted to stay on strike. Yet at previous mass meetings the strike committee had been getting a regular vote of anything up to 5,000. (85) A mass meeting can be seen as a natural extension of the collective nature of the strike, whereas an individual ballot isolates the member of the striking group and asks him to make a personal decision in which his individual worries, his wife's worries about the housekeeping and pressure from the Press can all outweigh his former sense of 'solidarity'.

What then is the nature of the social group here. Can we really regard 'strikers' as a social group? - their composition may vary from strike to strike and may be entirely different even in the same firm between one strike and the next,

The basic feature in the perception of industrial groups would seem to be the 'locality-bond' which usually acts as the basis of shop-floor organisation.

"The 'shop talk' and common experiences produce a feeling of identity between fellow employees which is lacking outside this range of association."

Patterson and Willet describe the Scots miners:

"In each yard each group considers itself primarily as 'X-section strippers', then 'strippers', then 'Backford miners' - loyalties will be more easily excited by the demands of sectional workmates than by strippers of other sections, than by the demands of other occupational groups, or by the colliery as a whole." (87)

Now obviously whole occupational groups do come out on strike, and whole factories and whole industries; Britain has even witnessed a general strike. So what is the basis for this extension of collective action beyond the everyday boundaries of the workplace? In the strike looked at by Patterson and Willet other sections of strippers joined the original 'B-section' because the latter's action was caused by a general situation facing all strippers. We can say that as a rule the more separate elements and occupational groups that are drawn into any one strike reflects an increasing awareness of similarity of situation. The logic of this ends at a general strike where all strikers are defined by the one thing they have in common - the sale of their labour power.

Thus any strike has the potential to expand the consciousness of the striker, albeit for the most part on a narrow and restricted scale. There is for the striking worker a realisation of belonging to a larger group with which he has a common interest and a realisation that this group by collective action has a power of its own to achieve its own ends. This is further reinforced by the knowledge that men in similar or different circumstances have fought

for similar things and taken similar action: the current action can thus be glimpsed as part of a process which transcends the actor and the present.

"Past causes of disputes are frequently forgotten, but the fact that a dispute has taken place is always remembered."

(Dennis et al.)

(88)

'We' becomes not just the paint-shop or assembly-line but the whole plant, or the whole industry - everybody who seems to be in 'our' situation; if they are not out already attempts may be made via solidarity appeals to bring them out also. 'They' becomes not just the management but, as the conduct of the 1969 Ford strike and the 1970 Pilkington strikes demonstrate, often the Government, the press, the police and perhaps even the union officialdom, all of whom appear to conspire to condemn and frustrate 'our' action:

"We knew we had Fords to beat and that was going to be hard enough. But then we've our officials on the NJNC and Barbara Castle and the whole bleeding Labour government. We knew this was going to be a tough one alright." (89)

The aims of the strike may rapidly expand to include the rectification of old grievances and demands for changes, as can be seen from accounts of the 1970 Pilkington glass workers strike:

"The delegation told Plumb: 'We're out for half a crown an hour!'

'You're what? Now look, I came down here on the understanding that this was a dispute over wrong payment.'

'Well, that may be how it started but it's half a crown an hour now !'" (90)

"The shop stewards addressed the meeting and recommended that we go back to work. One of them said: 'You're a bunch of cowboys. Who's going to give you 2/6d? You're asking for the sky.' So a bloke pipes up from the crowd: 'Well, let's ask for the sky then, let's ask for £25 a week' And that's how we all eventually came to be out on strike for £25 a week." (91)

Therefore while the majority of strikes are fairly routine and do not radically change the strikers' views (although they may reinforce them), under certain circumstances (such as over-reaction on the part of management) the collective action of the strike can lead to a considerable (but often temporary) expansion in consciousness. The fact that the strike makes such an expansion possible within a very short space of time should, as Blackburn points out, act as a warning against coming to too hard and fast conclusions about the 'worker's image of society'. In 1966 the car-workers at Vauxhalls, Luton, who only a year before had been found by Goldthorpe to have 'instrumental' attitudes to their work and 77% of whom enjoyed "a co-operative attitude management", struck, stopped the traffic outside the plant, sang the Red Flag, and tried to storm the company offices with the apparent intent of committing an assault on that same management. (92)

Notes

- 1) in Fraser R. (ed.) (1968) Work - 20 personal accounts Harmondsworth; Penguin p.273
- 2) Parker S.R. (1971) The future of work and leisure London: Paladin pp. 18 - 19
- 3) in Fraser R. (1968) op. cit. p. 12
- 4) Coates K. (1967) "Wage Slaves" in Blackburn R. and Cockburn A. (1967) The Incompatibles - Trade Union militancy and the consensus Harmondsworth: Penguin pp. 56 - 92
- 5) Blackburn R. (1967) "The Unequal Society" in Blackburn R. and Cockburn A. (1967) op. cit. pp. 15 - 55
- 6) ibid.
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- 8) ibid. p. 76
- 9) in Terkel S. (1975) Working London: Wildwood Ho. pp. 232 - 3
- 10) Gouldner A. (1969) "The Unemployed Self" in Fraser R. (ed.) (1969) Work Vol. 2 Harmondsworth: Penguin p. 349
- 11) in Terkel S. (1975) op. cit. p.61
- 12) Goodrich C.L. (1975) The Frontier of Control - a study of British workshop politics London: Pluto
- 13) Turner H.A. (1963) The Trend of strikes Leeds: University p. 18
- 14) in Terkel S. (1975) op. cit. p.178
- 15) ibid. p. 16
- 16) in Fraser R. (1968) op. cit. p.12
- 17) Marx K. (1968) "Wage-Labour and Capital" in Selected Works London: Lawrence and Wishart
- 18) in Fraser R. (1968) op. cit. p. 274 - 5
- 19) in Terkel S. (1975) op. cit. p. 244
- 20) Baldamus W. (1961) Efficiency and Effort London: Tavistock/SSP Chap. 6.
- 21) see ibid. Chap. 8.
- 22) ibid. p. 114

- 23) Dennis N., Henriques F., and Slaughter C. (1956) Coal is our Life London: Tavistock/SSP p. 32
- 24) see the analysis of this dispute in Blackburn R. (1967) op. cit. pp. 48 - 51
- 25) In an American study in a steel plant the authors concluded that the slowdown was far more likely to occur in a unionised shop "in which the union has developed habits of group response along with leadership skills and a sense of power". This may be because the technology of the steel plant makes individual slowdowns more difficult. See Hammett R.S., Seidman J., and London J., (1957), "The Slowdown as a union tactic" J. Pol. Ec. LXV (1957) pp. 126 - 134
- 26) Scott W.H., Mumford E., McGivering K. and Kirkby J. (1963) Coal and Conflict Liverpool ; Liverpool University Press Chap. 2
- 27) see the example in Beynon H. (1973) Working for Fords Harmondsworth: London p.148
- 28) Baldamus W. (1951) "Type of work and motivation" BJS (1951) Vol. 2
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APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 2
O N T H E P I C K E T L I N E

Some notes taken at a visit to the strike of ASTMS members at Courtaulds, Spennymoor, Co. Durham in May 1971.

Background to the strike

The factory was relatively new, having been open about two years. When opened, relations were "so good, we all said one thing, what's the catch?". The personnel officer, Jack Stevens, was liked very much - "You couldn't call it a factory". At the time of the strike the feeling was that Stevens had been "booted out" for not being tough enough with employees. Attempts by the men to have a 'whip round' for a presentation on Stevens' departure were thwarted by management who informed them that there was to be no presentation -

"So we had to meet him and his wife 'underground' - like, in a pub."

Stevens was replaced by a woman personnel officer, Mrs . Potts, who rapidly became heartily disliked - "She's wrecked that factory".

At the end of 1970 ASTMS had started organising supervisory workers. In April of the following year, the group secretary of the union was sacked by Courtaulds and ASTMS declared an official strike. Management replied by declaring

158 supervisory workers (including the entire quality control staff) 'redundant'. Subsequently some women workers were laid off, bringing the total to 173.

The strikers felt the redundancies to be a myth as they knew of individual strikers who had been contacted by management with offers of reinstatement on an hourly basis, and also blacklegs who were working on the same terms. The feeling was that it was obvious that the management were using the high unemployment rate in Co. Durham as a weapon.

The shop-floor workers were members of the Dyers and Bleachers Union and refused to come out in support of the supervisory workers. One D and B steward who told his men not to touch certain work connected with the strike was reputedly given a rocket by a D and B official. The latter stated throughout that he was concerned with "protecting the interests of his members".

The fact that many of the Dyers and Bleachers were Yorkshire men and that Mrs. Potts also came from Yorkshire caused a strong feeling of resentment and contempt on the part of many of the strikers for all natives of that county, the most general statement being that "they (Yorkshiremen) didn't know what solidarity was" and "they reckon that if the boss told 'em to come to work in clogs they would". A sign erected by the pickets on the road away from the factory gates prominently pointed the way to Yorkshire. (x)

The beginnings of the strike were very militant with an extremely high level of solidarity. Many of the strikers had been in the union for a very short time indeed (in some cases a week !). This high degree of 'novelty-value' seems to have led to an above-average faith in the union, and inexperience as to the sort of action they should be taking. It was only on the advice of members of other unions for example that they came to realise the need for contacting Courtaulds' other factories and sources of supply. In this respect, a story was recounted that in the early days of the strike a 'guerilla-squad' was formed which journeyed to Courtaulds' Bradford factory one night and, feeding doped meat to the dogs and cutting through the wire, attempted to 'fix' some of the machinery. If true, this demonstrates how eagerly in the early days of the strike, the strikers seized on new ideas and 'rules of the game' of which they had no previous experience. Later groups of strikers were sent to Grimsby to try to persuade the workers there not to handle the raw fibre.

In the third week of the strike a meeting was held for strikers' wives in Spennymoor to explain the facts of the strike. Although only fifteen turned up the fact that the meeting was held made an impression.

The visit to the picket was made in the fifth week of the strike when much of the early gloss and euphoria had worn off.

On the picket

24th_May_1971 Cold, windy, slight drizzle. Posters and signs visible on the approach road to the factory (one of several on a large flat industrial estate). Posters inform of strike and urge no deliveries; unfortunately, due to the weather, many now very bedraggled and tatty.

On arrival, a small picket (about 8) is found sheltering behind the gate-house of Black and Decker's entrance. Courtaulds' gate about 300 yards up the road, forming a dead-end for traffic - all traffic passing the B and D gate must be going to Courtaulds. Pickets had given up stopping the lorries of the regular carriers as useless.

The week before many T and G drivers had refused to deliver, but the main carrier company (Watts and Williams) had laid off some of their drivers. As the T and G was not in official dispute with Courtaulds, the others were forced to call off their supporting action. Many of the men seemed dejected by this (fairly obvious) counter - "if they had kept on till the weekend, the company would have been bugged". A few realised that they had failed to anticipate the actions of the employers.

The main talking point today was that 14 strikers had gone back and picked up their cards (i.e. accepted the management's redundancies). This was clearly preying on most of their minds this morning as it continually cropped up in conversation.

"Did you know Geordie Evans picked up his cards?
You must know him, little feller with a beard, did
you know him John?"

"Oh aye, I think I know him. Picked up his cards did
he?". etc..

A man who until that day had been on the picket line with them had apparently surprised them all by returning to the factory that morning to get his cards and then driving straight past without stopping to discuss the matter with the picket.

More men began steadily to arrive for a factory-gate meeting and the mood brightened considerably. High joking element in conversation. One man on arrival called out, laughing: "Hey, them blacklegs had better be outa there afore we get back in, mind!" - greeted with laughter which however died very suddenly.

The union officials arrived and stood on some concrete bollards giving a short pep-talk, explaining why they had not been on the picket as much as they would have liked. Details of higher level negotiations - Clive Jenkins was supposed to be seeing Jack Jones to put pressure on the T and G for official action. Ian Mikardo (ASTMS president) and Mark Hughes (the Durham M.P.) it was revealed, were likely to have informal talks with Courtaulds' management. The general impression however was that if these events were happening at all it was all happening very far away from Spennymoor: the questions put by the men were far more concrete - "Are AEF men changing wheels?" (i.e. doing ASTMS work), and

if so what was to be done about it. How could they pressurise the Dyers and Bleachers? Why had the 'Northern Echo' been allowed to report that the strike was breaking? The ASTMS official answered, reminded them of the need for solidarity, hoped that no-one else was thinking of going back (" I don't know how those people can live with their conscience"), climbed down. Details of revised rota shift system announced: the night shift picket was being dropped as a waste of time. Men began to drift away.

A strange lorry approached and, after some hesitation on the part of the men was stopped at the last minute and eventually persuaded to turn around. Spirits greatly raised by this.

25th May 1971 Fairly sunny day. Game of football going on in front of the B and D gate. Men seem much cheerier - no mention of any more going back. No lorries appear to have been stopped but directors' cars have been seen going in. The rumour is that there is to be a conference because some of the customers are beginning to complain about the bad quality of the yarn coming out of the factory. (As much of the output is warehoused after leaving the factory, there had been a time-lag before the impact of the strike was felt directly by the customers). It was felt that this was the best bit of news for some time and the first indication that the absence of quality control was beginning to bite.

Last night was the first night they had dispensed with the night picket and management had taken advantage of this to take down all the strike notices lining the entrance route; luckily some replacements were already being made because of the tatty state of the originals. Proposal agreed to take them home at the end of the day-shift picket.

Postscript

A Department of Employment enquiry into the strike published its report on 29th September that year. The strike was still continuing, in its fifth month, although numbers had been cut by half. The report concluded that the company would not have issued redundancy notices had the supervisors not come out in support of their dismissed fellow union-member, and recommended that the company should consider compensating those members of ASTMS made redundant through the strike. This was believed to be the first time in the history of British industrial relations that a Government had recommended that strikers receive compensation. The recommendation, however, was not binding on either company or union. ('Guardian' 30th September 1971)

* This projection of conflict onto members of 'out-groups' is directly comparable with Gouldner's gypsum miners who disliked their new plant manager (among other reasons) "because he was a southerner" and therefore "used to slavedriving". See Gouldner A. (1954) Wildcat Strike New York : Harper p. 74.

CHAPTER 3

INDUSTRIAL STRIKE PATTERNS

THE MEASUREMENT OF THE PROPENSITY TO STRIKE

Following the distinction made by Kitsuse and Cicourel (1) we may say that we have examined the probable structural causes of the strike as a unit of behaviour and have hypothesised as to the variables likely to affect variations in the rate of strike behaviour. These hypotheses must now be both tested and developed by a comparative analysis of variations in the rate of striking between identifiably different groups of workers. This is invariably done within a society by comparing one industry with another. The reasons for this may be several: for a start, certain industries like mining have obvious unique characteristics which make them "special cases" to a certain extent, easily distinguishable from other employment situations. Secondly, strikes are problematic to management (and, if the industry concerned is a key component of the national economy, to the government) so that a high propensity to strike in, say motor manufacture, leads to the search for explanatory factors specific to that industry. Thirdly, and possibly connected with the second point, the most readily available source of data, Government statistics, are released within an industrial classification.

This task of comparative measurement raises two sets of problem, one sociological, the other statistical. Firstly, can it be said that the strike is a measurable unit, a homogenous type of social action? Eldridge bluntly says it is not;

"One cannot sensibly speak of a strike as though it were a single category of social action. There are varieties of strikes and indeed, the very same social conditions which give rise to certain kinds of strikes may also lead to the diminution of other kinds of strikes. Clearly, the student of industrial relations has to distinguish effectively between different kinds of strikes if he is in subsequent analysis to compare like with like." (2)

I hope that the previous chapter has shown why such a proposition is unacceptable. To say that certain variables are specific only to certain forms of a particular social action does not mean that one cannot speak of that action as a social phenomenon in itself outside of those specific situations. To return to the 'classics', Durkheim showed that the causes and forms of suicide displayed considerable variation - indeed one could almost paraphrase Eldridge and say that 'the social conditions which gave rise to certain kinds of suicide, also lead to the diminution of other kinds'. This did not prevent Durkheim from treating suicide as a phenomenon in itself and formulating theory incorporating the specific variations.

Like suicides, strikes can be said to display on the one hand considerable variations both in the form they take (.e.g. small 'token' strikes, large 'trials of strength' and so on) and in their specific or immediate causes, and yet on the other hand they also display patterned regularities in their rate of occurrence and in their distribution between different groups of actors. Some of these patterned regularities have been well set out by Silver (3):

1) While particularistic factors are responsible for differences between industries in their incidence of strikes, relative changes in those levels occur across the industrial spectrum suggesting they are subject to common influences.

2) The national rate of strike action has been shown to have a clear (if complex) relationship with major macro-economic indicators such as the unemployment rate, the level of real wages, and the ratio of profits to wages.

To these, we may add a third, the subject of this study, namely,

3) Over a given time-period, certain industries will regularly have a high incidence of strike activity and other industries will equally regularly have a low incidence.

The second set of difficulties, given that strikes as a phenomenon are thus eligible to be measured, is how they are measured and what those measurements can be said to represent. As Hyman and Ingham ⁽⁴⁾ among others have pointed out, because strike figures are one of the few indices of industrial conflict which are regularly made available in quantitative form, they tend to be given an over-inflated importance based on the assumption that they carry a direct relationship to the amount of industrial conflict. While there is obviously likely to be some connection, we saw in the previous chapter that work stoppages are only one mani-

festation of industrial conflict - the absence of stoppages will not necessarily imply the absence of conflict.

In any case in this thesis we are not looking at the strike as an index of industrial conflict but in its own right as a type of social action. For this reason we are more interested in the difficulties created by the fact that strike statistics are a less than perfect measure of strikes.

All those investigating overall strike-patterns must necessarily rely for the source of their data on the records of the Department of Employment (formerly the Ministry of Labour) as published in the monthly 'Gazette'. These essentially consist of a breakdown, via the Standard Industrial Classification, of what have come to be accepted as the three main indices of strikes: the number of strikes (referred to usually by writers as the index of 'frequency'), the number of workers involved ('size') and the number of working-days lost. Various authors, such as Ross and Hartman (5) have combined these indices in a variety of ways to produce additional indices of specific aspects of strike action but before this is attempted, the weaknesses and disadvantages of each index on its own should be examined.

The number of strikes: At first glance it might seem that the first thing to look at in measuring the strike-propensity of an industry is the number of times workers in

that industry go on strike. Immediately, however, we are faced with the problems of definition referred to above: what is a strike, are similar types of action invariably seen as strikes?

The official definition in the U.K., i.e. that which qualifies it for inclusion in the DEP's monthly figures is that a strike must involve at least ten workers and last at least one day, unless it leads to a loss of 100 working days or more. As Hyman (6) and Ingham (7) have both pointed out and as the Ministry of Labour itself admitted (8), as employers are not obliged to report stoppages it seems very probable that a significant number of small strikes large enough to fall within the DEP definition never get reported. Ingham, quoting evidence from Kuhn's work in America, suggests that small walkouts, 'downers' and so on which in certain industries may be frequent, yet short-lived, never get defined as strikes. As far as supervisors are concerned they rate the level of 'nuisance' rather than 'problem' and, as one of Kuhn's foremen said, "as long as I get production, I'll take the nuisance." (9)

Ingham himself rightly concludes that "the social processes of defining and reporting strikes are themselves data which require explanation". (10)

A further limit to the official definition is that the DEP only records those strikes directly concerned with remuneration and conditions of work, that is, it expressly does not recognise 'political' strikes. Thus, the massive demonstrations against the Industrial Relations Act were not reflected in the figures for the years concerned even though, as in 1971, there were more than twice as many workers involved in stoppages against the impending act than in the whole year's industrial disputes. Thus while the exclusion of such strikes will not affect the figures for the number of strikes in any significant way it can be seen that the figures for both workers involved and days lost will be greatly affected at such periods; it can further be argued that the dividing line between 'economic' and 'political' is in the case above an extremely nebulous one.

Inconsistencies can also occur in the way that the figures are collected. The DEP obtains its information from its Industrial Relations Officers, Employment Exchange Managers, certain nationalised industries and statutory authorities, the press and, for larger disputes, from the workers' and employers' organisations concerned. This multiplicity of sources can also affect whether a strike is reported as a single affair or a number of strikes. Turner ⁽¹¹⁾ cites the example of decasualisation in the docks and the subsequent restructuring of the industry which meant that the Ministry of Labour now got its figures from individual employers rather than the local Dock Labour Boards. Between 1967 and

1968 the number of strikes in the docks rose from 97 to 179 yet the number of days lost actually fell. Turner concludes that the rise was an illusion caused by multiple reporting of disputes affecting several employers yet over a single issue.

For these reasons we must agree with the author of one of the most recent statistical analyses of strike figures when he concludes:

"In short, strike statistics are incomplete, and therefore represent a 'sample' of the entire 'population' of strikes which actually occur. It is difficult to know how representative this sample is, nor do we know how complete it is in its coverage." (12)

As we shall see this shortcoming will affect all the indices in various ways but for our purposes the figure for the number of strikes would seem the most affected of the three.

We must finally ask whether the figure for the number of strikes has any usefulness in measuring the propensity of workers in any one industry to take strike action and must conclude that its usefulness is extremely limited. A strike of a dozen tea-ladies gets equal weighting with a strike of 1200 Fords workers. A large prolonged strike may be more indicative of the strike-strength of the industry's unions than several small, short stoppages.

The number of workers involved: Distortions can again arise from the method of reporting. As Hyman points out:

"Comparison of press reports of a dispute will often show how estimates of numbers vary. If a stoppage affects only part of an establishment, the strikers may wish to exaggerate the extent of their support, while management may understate the impact of the dispute." (13)

The DEP differentiates in its figures between those 'directly' involved in the dispute and those 'indirectly' involved in the same plant, i.e. laid off due to a dispute in some other section of the plant. Silver estimates that in recent years (i.e. the late 60's) this latter figure has constituted a quarter of all workers involved in disputes. (14) The general feeling among writers however is that these categories are very difficult to define and the figures in each can be little more than estimates - the degree of involvement of a particular group of workers may vary during the course of any one strike. The figures do not include workers laid off at other establishments as a result of a strike elsewhere.

As Knowles pointed out (15) because some workers in strike-prone industries are likely to strike more than once in a year, the annual figure for 'numbers involved' really represents the number of separate 'strike actions' taken by each worker in the industry; Silver however calculates that in the late 60's the proportion of the total figure for workers involved attributable to individual strikers was 93% and rising, an indication that 'multiple strikers' were becoming less important. This figure is an average for all industrial groups however. (16)

From the point of view of inter-industrial comparisons the bald figure of workers involved is not very useful in itself as, other things being equal, a large industry with a large workforce will have more workers involved in its disputes than a small industry. For the figures to be at all useful therefore, they are usually weighted in relation to the numbers employed.

Working-days lost, or to use Turner's less managerial term 'striker-days' (17) The same inaccuracies in assessing the number of strikers involved will necessarily also be present in this index, calculated as it is from the number of strikers multiplied by the duration of the strike. In addition, Hyman suggests that there may also be occasional difficulties in assessing duration as in the instance of a delay in resuming production after a return to work is agreed. (18) Also of course the numbers of workers involved often varies during the course of a strike so that any figure for days lost is likely to be an average.

Despite these factors, however, most writers (with the possible exception of McCarthy and Galambos and Evans (19)) now seem agreed that the index of days lost is the most useful for comparative analysis. It gets over the problem of the fact that strikes in some industries will be large and in others will be small as, to quote Knowles' example one strike of 600 men for one day, one strike of 100 men for six days and six strikes of 100 men for one day will all equal 600 striker-days. Thus to return to one of our original

problems, while the structure and conditions of each industry may well affect the form in which strike action takes place, we have in this index something which approaches a measurement of the propensity to strike in each industry, provided that it is weighted to account for the size of the workforce. The index is also likely to be little affected by the exclusion of small disputes mentioned in the section on the number of strikes.

STRIKE MILITANCY

The strike-militancy index. For the reasons given above it has been decided that the most useful data in assessing the propensity of workers in individual industries to use strike action, are the DEP's figures for working days lost suitably weighted for the size of the workforce. This weighting is usually done by calculating the number of days per 10,000 employees.

It is proposed however to adapt a more sophisticated measure originally used by Knowles for making regional comparisons (20). This is the ratio of the percentage (of the national aggregate) of working days lost (Knowles himself used % of strikers) in any one industry to the percentage of the industrial population in that industry. We thus arrive at:

$$\frac{\% \text{ of annual working days lost}}{\% \text{ of total industrial employees}}$$

as an index of industrial strike-propensity for each industry.

This has the added advantage that the use of the percentage of the employed workforce enables us to allow for fluctuations in national employment levels over time and for the fact that such fluctuations are likely to be disproportionately distributed over different industries with consequent effects on their bargaining strength.

By 'industry' of course we mean the categories used in the DEP's Standard Industrial Classification where the defining characteristic is the commodity produced rather than the tool operated or the job performed: thus a maintenance engineer in a textile mill is a textile worker not an engineer, and an N.C.B. typist is employed in mining. There is little official agreement on the question of the definition of industrial boundaries; TUC representation on the General Council is on the basis of 18 industrial groups, the CBI uses 53, and the S.I.C. used by the Ministry of Labour until 1959 uses 23 major categories subdivided into 48 categories in all. After this date the strike figures no longer used the major categories, all 48 categories being given equal importance.

Because of the necessity of combining the strike figures with employment figures where a slightly more condensed version of the S.I.C. is used, the tables below will use a similarly condensed version of 21 categories.

Before we examine the inter-industrial strike-militancy record for the twenty-year period 1950-69, let us remind ourselves what the militancy index means. If, for convenience we call the % of aggregate working-days lost W , the % of aggregate employed population E , and the resulting strike-militancy index M , then

$$\frac{W}{E} = M$$

If every worker in the country were presented in each year with an equal number of bargaining situations and responded equally in terms of strike action (i.e. if every worker struck for n days a year) then,

$$W = E$$

$$M = 1$$

Above this point, where the proportion of the national aggregate of working days lost in an industry is greater than the proportion of the national workforce employed in the industry ($W > E$, therefore $M > 1$) we can speak of strike-militant industries. Below this point, where the proportion of days lost is less than the proportion of employees, ($W < E$, therefore $M < 1$), we can speak of non-militant industries.

Table 1 shows M-rating for the industrial categories in the modified SIC for the period in question, together with the mean M. Taking this last column and ranking it gives us Table 2 below:

Table 2
Strike-militancy ranking 1950 - 69

<u>industry</u>	<u>M</u>	
mining	4.9	
vehicles	4.3	
transport	2.5	
eng. & shipbuilding	2.3	
printing	2.2	
metal, iron & steel	2.1	
construction	0.9	M = 1
misc. mntg.	0.8	
misc. metal	0.6	
gas, elec. & water	0.4	
timber & furniture	0.4	
bricks & cement	0.4	
chemicals	0.3	
textiles	0.2	
food & drink	0.2	
clothing	0.1	
agriculture & fish.	0.1	
distribution	0.1	
insurance & banking	0.0	
public admin.	0.0	
entertainment, etc.	0.0	

Therefore on the above basis of measurement, it is clear that in the twenty-year period since the war, the most strike-militant (or strike-prone) industries in the United Kingdom have been mining, vehicles, transport, engineering and shipbuilding, printing, and iron and steel.

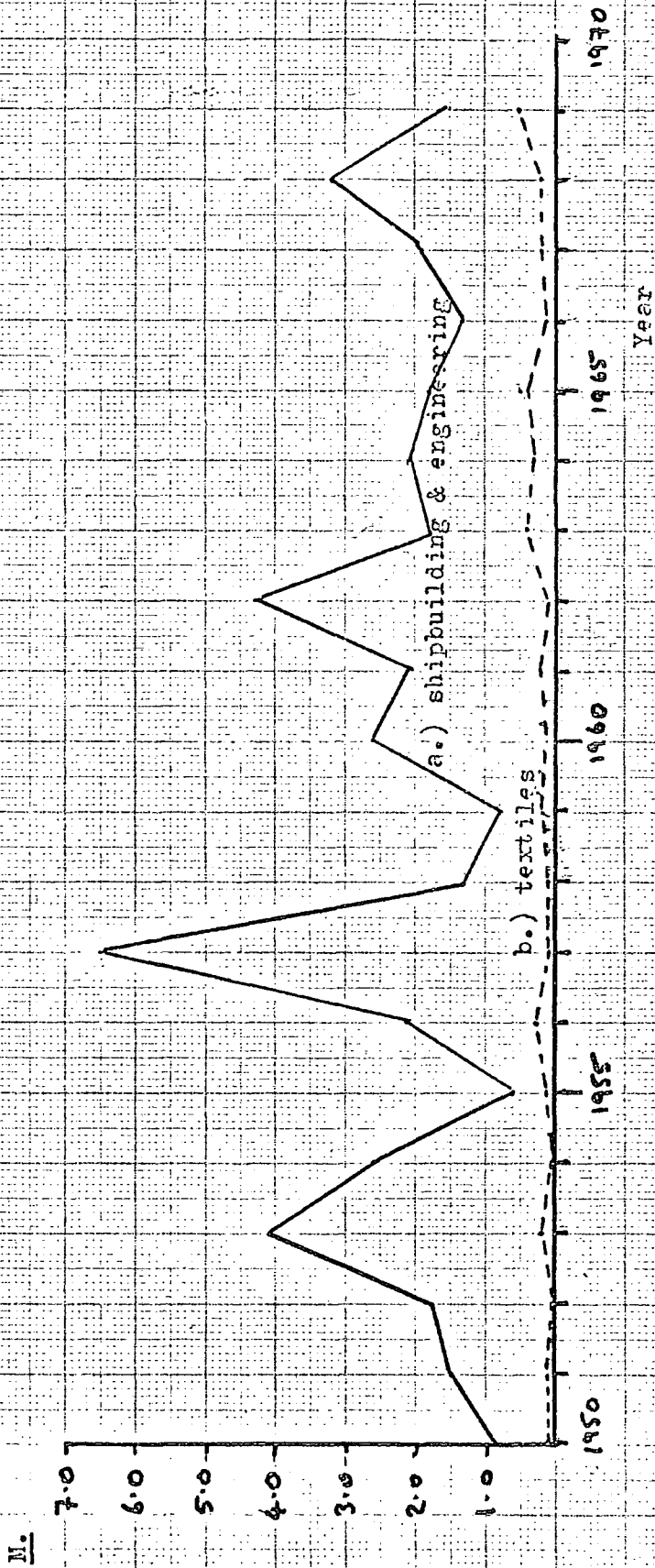
Looking at Tables 1 and 2, several things are immediately apparent. One is the very clear gap that exists between militant and non-militant industries, a gap which is itself greater than the range displayed by all the non-militant industries.

Secondly the militant industries show a much more pronounced fluctuation in their M score than non-militant industries. An example of this is given in Figure 1 which compares the trends in strike militancy of two randomly selected industrial groupings characteristic of each category, militant and non-militant. The militant industry, engineering and shipbuilding, has a range between its highest and lowest M-scores of 5.9; the range of the non-militant group is only 0.5. Obviously it is not statistically necessary to have such a range to get a mean M greater than 1, therefore the pattern must be indicative of some characteristic of the nature of strike action in militant industries.

Some of these fluctuations could have a purely statistical cause - because the figures are based on the percentage of all striker-days, if mining figures decline in a year of engineering stoppages the figures for the latter will be correspondingly amplified. It seems unlikely that this is the total explanation however. Strike-militant industries would seem to be characterised by high levels of strike activity alternating with periods of relative inactivity, the non-militant industries seem to display a fairly constant (if low) level of activity.

To attempt an understanding of these differences and to see how far the industries support the hypothesis expressed in the previous chapter, we shall examine the militant industries, their major characteristics and some of the reasons that have been suggested for their high strike record.

Figure 1.: Relative fluctuations in M.-score for two industries 1950-69



Notes

- 1) Kitsuse J.I. & Cicourel A.V. (1963) "A note on the use of official statistics" Social Problems II (1963) pp. 131 - 139
- 2) Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) Industrial Disputes London: Routledge Keegan Paul p.3
- 3) Silver M. (1973) "Recent British strike trends - a factual analysis" B.J.I.R. Vol. II (1)
- 4) see Hyman R. (1972) Strikes London: Fontana pp. 25 -26, & Ingham G.K. (1974) Strikes & Industrial conflict London : Macmillan p.25
- 5) Ross A.N. & Hartman P.T. (1960) Changing patterns of industrial conflict New York : Wiley & Son.
- 6) Hyman R. (1972) op. cit. p.17
- 7) Ingham G.K. (1974) op. cit. p. 26 - 27
- 8) quoted in Goodman J.F.B. (1967) "Strikes in the U.K. - recent statistics & trends" Int. Lab. Rev. Vol. 95 May 1967 pp. 465 - 481
- 9) quoted in Ingham G.K. (1974) op. cit. p. 27
- 10) ibid. p. 28
- 11) Turner H.A. (1969) Is Britain really strike-prone? Cambridge : Univ. p.9
- 12) Silver M. (1973) op. cit.
- 13) Hyman R. (1972) op. cit. p. 18
- 14) Silver M. (1973) op. cit.
- 15) Knowles K.G.J.C. (1952) Strikes Blackwell : Oxford p. 162
- 16) Silver M. (1973) op. cit.
- 17) Turner H.A. (1969) op. cit. p.10
- 18) Hyman R. (1972) op. cit. pp. 18 - 19
- 19) for arguments against the use of days-lost as an index see McCarthy W.E.J. (1970) "The nature of Britain's strike problems" BJIR Vol. VIII No. 2 pp. 224 - 236 and Galambos P. & Evans E.W. (1966) "Work stoppages in the U.K. 1951 - 1964 - a quantitative study" Bulletin of Oxford Univ. Inst. Stats. Vol. 28 No. 1. pp. 33 - 38. See also the comment by Knowles in the same issue.
- 20) Knowles K.G.J.C. (1952) op. cit. p. 203

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 3

Table 3 Aggregate number of striker-days in the U.K. 1950-69 (in thousands)

(Source: D.E.P. "Gazette")

	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
ag. & fisheries	43	1	4	0	0	37	0	5	1	0	1	78	0	0	1	2	7	1	3	62
mining	431	351	662	394	468	1112	503	514	450	371	494	740	308	326	309	413	119	108	57	1041
food & drink	26	19	9	7	3	2	1	4	19	10	119	12	6	9	9	51	8	31	53	141
chemicals	6	1	7	1	6	15	5	0	0	73	52	24	12	19	5	12	13	45	42	54
iron & steel	52	29	31	100	46	24	242	437	35	70	49	297	376	106	350	212	109	191	419	570
eng. & shipbldg.	103	210	272	772	569	189	401	5044	410	419	781	646	2784	326	490	576	343	625	1653	1230
vehicles	132	266	468	589	99	439	362	868	161	464	595	485	1159	368	464	912	391	543	1101	1844
other metal gds.	7	9	20	64	27	17	13	244	4	9	25	37	239	35	32	63	29	62	190	95
textiles	4	8	2	19	3	15	28	37	10	55	16	17	30	24	27	47	10	26	33	120
clothing & ftwr.	4	8	3	9	9	8	1	7	10	2	8	5	6	2	7	6	1	6	7	19
bricks & cement	2	4	4	6	4	48	2	30	2	5	46	10	18	7	14	49	10	10	100	35
furn. & timber	16	9	23	10	9	17	5	6	10	5	19	11	12	29	9	5	19	9	26	33
paper & printing	205	2	40	0	19	73	371	1	4	3509	2	9	10	5	11	13	18	13	25	81
other mfgs.	3	7	16	16	30	7	17	34	5	4	35	75	100	21	32	56	27	41	103	90
construction	64	83	157	101	233	71	78	84	151	138	110	285	222	356	125	135	145	201	233	278
gas, elec. & wtr.	42	62	11	1	3	0	8	1	5	5	21	3	3	2	12	14	2	9	7	18
transport	188	601	32	69	919	1687	34	998	2116	95	635	231	432	72	312	306	1069	823	559	787
distributive	40	10	23	23	4	8	6	91	67	4	5	13	29	25	28	22	8	7	9	18
insnce. & banking	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	1	3	19	59	10	1	135
entertmt. & sport	13	2	6	1	0	4	1	3	2	20	5	15	35	3	20	5	3	3	27	16
public admin.	8	12	2	2	4	6	5	4	0	11	3	3	5	3	5	8	10	1	43	179
ANNUAL TOTAL	1389	1694	1792	2184	2457	3781	2083	8412	3462	5269	3021	3049	5798	1759	2276	2926	2400	2785	4691	6846

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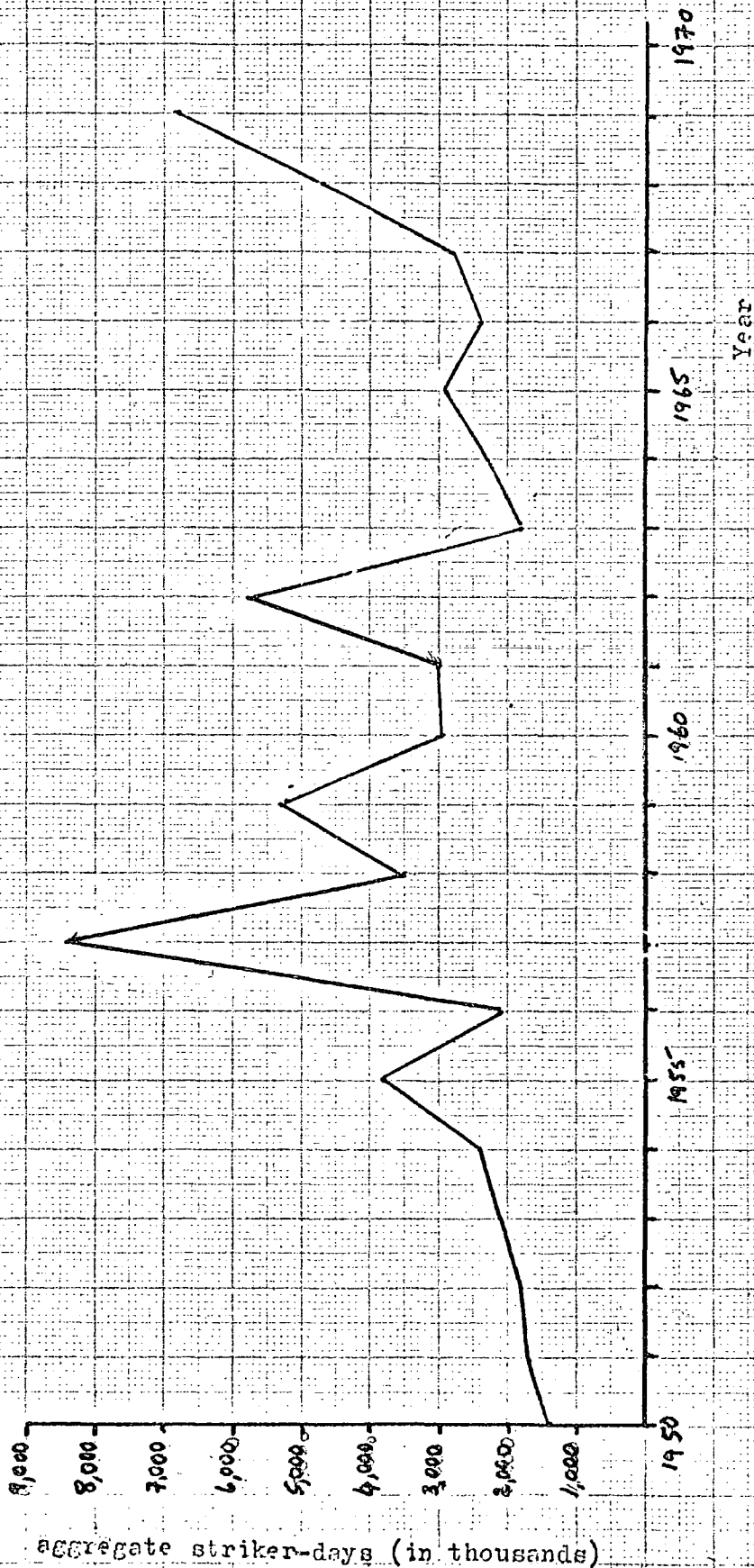
Table 1. Aggregate numbers in employment in the U.K., 1950-69 (in thousands)

Source 'Annual Abstract of Statistics'

	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
ag. & fisheries	1262	1234	1204	1178	1164	1154	1120	1110	1090	1079	1062	1021	580	566	540	497	478	443	423	401
mining	856	860	879	881	871	866	862	872	856	830	764	735	715	686	661	629	580	555	489	444
food & drink	841	863	885	893	911	926	939	944	954	844	849	860	842	833	813	839	841	832	836	846
chemicals	473	486	488	490	503	520	530	535	538	522	533	534	518	514	511	518	528	518	500	520
iron & steel	542	547	560	550	553	572	581	580	562	576	619	631	596	591	622	632	619	591	580	583
eng. & shpbls.	1839	1893	1963	1954	2014	2121	2158	2178	2177	2244	2356	2429	2429	2372	2429	2506	2551	2556	2507	2541
vehicles	1030	1062	1118	1142	1195	1249	1262	1244	1253	879	927	905	884	874	879	870	861	824	811	830
other metal gds.	653	670	651	638	654	682	686	681	675	520	557	571	551	549	571	591	596	599	599	577
textiles	1167	1193	1042	1118	1143	1100	1075	1072	995	979	974	967	913	891	897	880	870	809	754	814
clothing & ftwr.	735	718	689	726	723	711	716	713	676	590	609	611	587	568	565	558	552	524	518	552
bricks & cement	333	342	340	340	345	351	351	340	329	331	343	350	351	341	355	358	352	353	355	354
furn. & timber	324	332	312	319	324	327	316	316	309	306	315	313	289	285	294	301	296	306	336	313
paper & printing	525	535	523	522	546	567	579	589	591	583	613	627	627	627	629	639	648	640	642	652
other mfg.	254	276	251	260	278	290	289	291	288	286	306	311	306	309	323	335	342	337	354	357
construction	1458	1484	1471	1472	1491	1523	1578	1556	1528	1565	1607	1660	1552	1582	1659	1700	1745	1591	1554	1471
gas, elec. & wtr.	360	369	379	378	379	384	383	386	382	381	377	386	394	404	410	419	421	422	421	435
transport	1812	1786	1790	1761	1744	1742	1758	1751	1733	1700	1691	1713	1741	1711	1665	1655	1629	1629	1610	1571
distributive	2630	2659	2675	2722	2802	2873	2932	3007	3000	3278	3355	3384	2921	2965	2997	3033	3035	2857	2832	2771
ins. & banking	2076	2115	2163	2193	2258	2316	2380	2452	2508	2683	2748	2846	2777	2874	2996	3108	3222	3339	3426	3523
intermt. & sport	1964	1924	1895	1887	1891	1881	1868	1841	1827	2281	2291	2309	2088	2103	2199	2226	2246	2153	2138	2211
public admin.	1395	1383	1369	1352	1359	1322	1334	1331	1334	1275	1277	1301	1326	1374	1321	1338	1383	1427	1440	1421
ANNUAL TOTAL	22529	22761	22647	22771	23118	23477	23697	23789	23607	23731	24173	24464	22976	23091	23386	23622	23785	23905	23127	23385

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Figure 2: Trend of annual aggregate striker-days 1950-69 (Source: D.E.P. 'Gazette')



aggregate striker-days (in thousands)

CHAPTER 4

THE STRIKE - MILITANT INDUSTRIES

In this chapter we shall examine in as much detail as possible the major characteristics of the six industries whose mean strike-militancy index over the period has been greater than 1.

Of the suggested explanations for 'strike-proneness', arguably the most influential have concentrated on the areas of, respectively, the community, the workers' ideologies and orientations to work, the technical structure of the work situation, and the payment and bargaining systems in the industry. As these four areas provide a convenient analytical breakdown for most industries we shall examine the explanations under these headings for each of the six industries in turn, which will hopefully make easier the process of inter-industry comparison. However, as these by no means comprise a comprehensive list of possible explanatory factors, other variables will be examined in the general overview of each industry.

MINING

"In the old chap's day the miner lived in the mine like an animal; like a coal-extracting machine, and being underground, his eyes and ears were closed to events outside.... But now the miner was waking up under the ground, germinating in the earth like a good seed, and one fine morning you would see him springing up like corn in the fields: yes, men would spring up, an army of men to bring justice back into the world."

(Zola - "Germinal")

"More than anyone else, perhaps, the miner can stand as the type of the manual worker, not only because his work is so exaggeratedly awful, but also because it is so vitally necessary and yet so remote from our experience, so invisible, as it were, that we are capable of forgetting it as we forget the blood in our veins."

(Orwell - "The Road to Wigan Pier")

Since the beginnings of industrialisation, it has been mining, of all the manual occupations that has consistently attracted the attention of writers, journalists, politicians and social scientists. Apart from the fascination of the job itself - the awful mystery of burrowing underground to earn a living - there has been as much fascination with the collective action of miners above ground. The militancy of mining communities has been a consistent thread in the complex ragbag of memories, stories, songs and sentiment that for two hundred years has constituted the closest thing Britain has to a folk-tradition. Early events such as the various horrific pit-disasters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were set down in folk-song itself, but even today there are sufficient memories of recent historic events and conflicts, from the strikes of the '20's culminating in 1926, to the national strike of 1974 which caused the fall of the Heath administration, to make the miners prominent actors in most people's conception of the continuing drama of British industrial conflict.

The fortunes of the British coal industry and its workers since the war must be understood within the framework of the three main processes to which it has been subject, namely nationalisation, mechanisation and closure.

To the majority of miners at the time, Vesting Day was a long-awaited landmark:

"1 January 1947 - the realisation of the dream of every progressive-thinking miner in the country... We stood on the colliery surface that cold morning, watching the raising of the NCB banner, declaring new ownership. Standing alongside the colliery manager on a small platform, Will Thomas addressed the crowd: 'Comrades, pioneers of the socialist and trade union movement fought for nationalisation, they fought in the knowledge that it would be the first step in the direction of socialism.'" (1)

The euphoria was soon to pass, however, in many cases as soon as it was seen that the colliery manager was the same unbeloved individual as held the post under private ownership. In terms of the daily experience and the problems faced by the ordinary miner, nationalisation appears to have made little immediate difference. Slaughter suggests:

"In the eyes of the men, the fundamental issue - fighting for fair play against a management that prefers to pay as little as possible - is the same as ever." (2)

The main difference was displayed in the relations between unions and management, an emphasis on the co-operation of these parties being written into the nationalisation agreement.

The NCB has of course, the monopoly of the coal production in Britain and the NUM is the most complete industrial union in the country; both however display a high degree of regionalism. In the case of production, this is based on the fact that different regions produce different sorts of coal (which were

also sold in different markets) and in the case of the mine-workers on a history of regional autonomy of action - different regions presented different working conditions and problems, which were traditionally reflected in regional differentials in rates of pay and bonuses. Nationalisation eliminated many of these and the process has been taken much further by the National Power Loading Agreement of 1966.

Mining has traditionally been a labour-intensive industry and the situation did not radically change, as the following table shows, until mechanisation became extensive in the early 60's.

Table 5

Mining wages & salaries as a % of total costs (3)

1919	75.3%
1924 - 5	74.3%
1957	63.7%

The declining demand for coal cut the total manpower from over 1 million at the turn of the century to about 700,000 men, working 950 collieries at the time of nationalisation. Mechanisation compounded this trend to a rapid decline to a figure of 287,000 miners working 290 pits in 1971. (4) This is shown quite clearly in Figure 3.

For most of the period, the labour-force has also tended to be "bottom-heavy". For the early '60's Scott estimated that the proportion of non-manual employees to the total was

only 5% in mining, compared to 18% for British industry as a whole. (5) Three-quarters of the total workforce were underground (40% at the coalface and 35% elsewhere underground). (6) The total effect of this situation was a wide span of control at colliery and area level. One effect of mechanisation under the terms of the PLA would seem to be a trend towards evening out this aspect of the labour structure, as indicated in the following table:

Table 6

Manpower in NCB North Derbyshire Area (7)

	<u>No. of underground officials (excluding managers & under managers)</u>	<u>No. of underground workers</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
June 1967	1,766	21,257	1:12
July 1968	1,500	14,141	1: 9.5

Despite the severe contractions in the industry over the period, both in terms of the numbers employed and the pits being worked, the output of coal is still more than half that reached in the years of maximum output and the industry remains the largest in the country and the third largest world coal industry after the USA and USSR. The NUM is the largest industrial union in Britain and its sponsored M.P.'s still constitute the most numerous industrial group in Westminster.

Strikes in the industry

The expectations of some, that post-nationalisation strikes were only a residue of the previous system of ownership

Figure 3: Employment in mining 1950-69 (Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics)

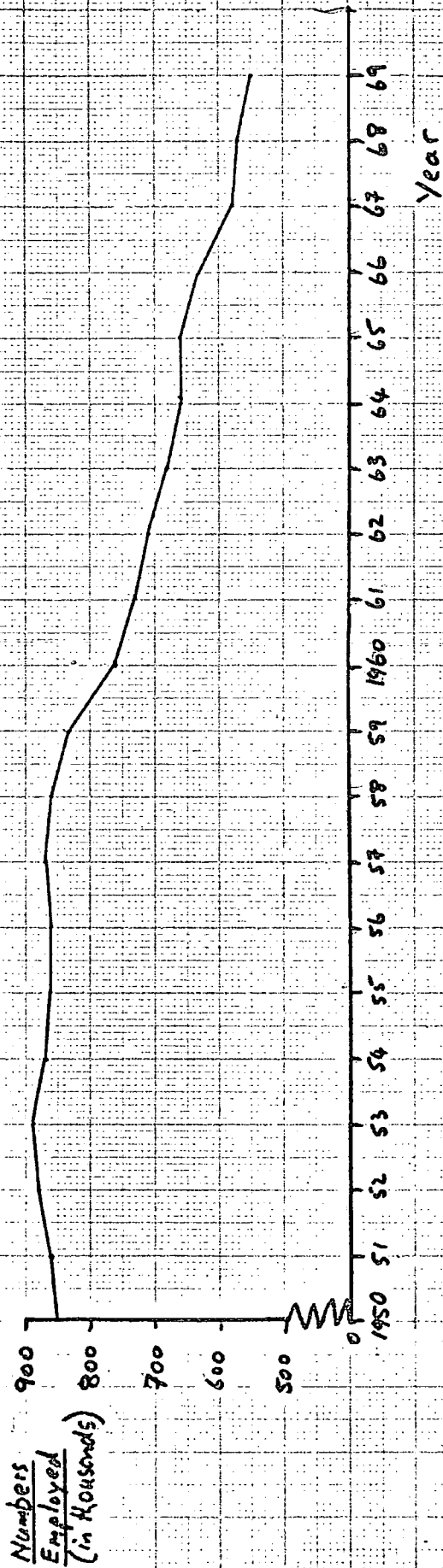
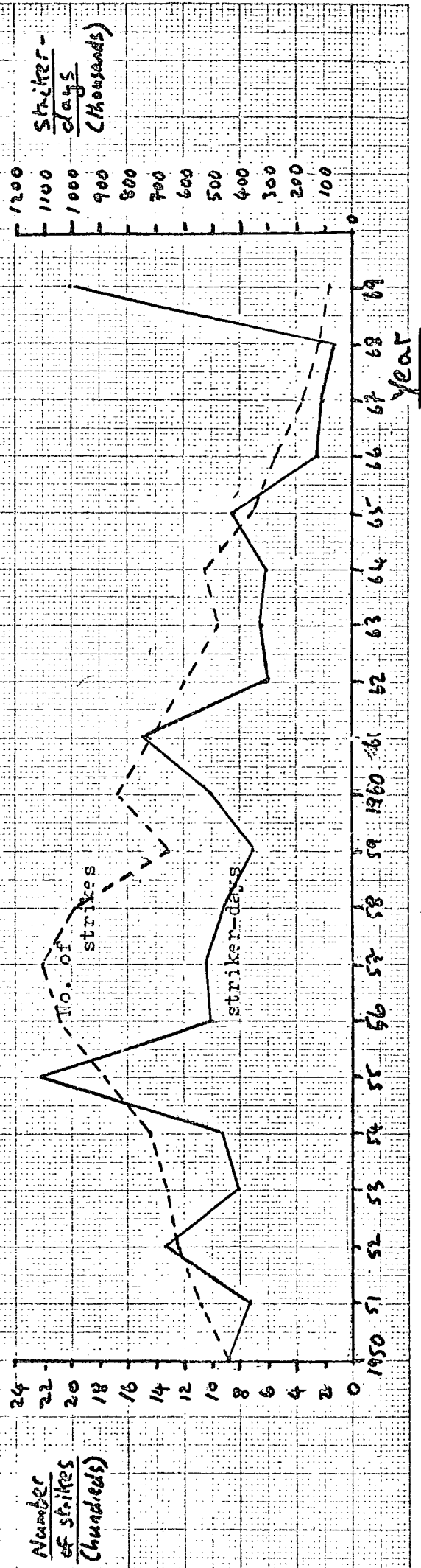


Figure 4: Strikes in mining 1950-69 (Source: D.E.P. 'Gazette')



and would soon wither away, were soon shattered. The initial upward trend of strike action can be clearly seen in Figure 4, the number of strikes in mining rose dramatically from 57% of the total in 1949 to 75% in 1953 (8). The graph also suggests that for most of the period in question the figure for striker-days was made up through a large number of small strikes; this pattern starts to change in the late 60's following the Power Loading Agreement and the change is most marked in the figures for 1969 featuring a large national strike (which was of course to be followed by the national official strikes of the early 1970's). A comparison of Figures 3 and 4 seems to indicate quite a strong relationship between a downward trend in strike action from the mid-50's and a decline in employment over the same period.

A pit is really a number of separate producing units, consisting of different districts and faces within each district. Thus a strike by a particular group does not physically stop the pit as a whole but only a local section of the pit, although

"The number that walk out in sympathy is almost invariably greater than the number of those directly involved." (9)

Thus there is much less chance of an enforced lay-off than there is in a factory where each geographical unit tends to be interrelated as part of the overall productive process. With this in mind, the 'strike-proneness' of miners seems all the more acute: despite the above 'sympathy' element, the strike-figures for mining are more likely to represent actual strikers.

An important factor which we will return to later is that all these strikes were unofficial; until February 1972 there had not been an official national coal strike since 1926, and not a single strike of any description made official since 1939.

Some explanations of strike-proneness

1) The Community

The most well-known explanation in this category (and indeed the most well-known explanation of industrial strike-proneness in general) is that first advanced by Kerr and Siègel (10) and supported by several writers including Knowles. (11) Kerr and Siègel in their original article, although arguing for multi-causality, conclude their study of strike-prone industries in eleven countries by saying that

"The most general explanation of the inter-industry propensity to strike is the nature of the industrial environment and in particular its tendency to direct workers into isolated masses; or to integrate them into the general community."

The workforce of the major strike-prone industries in a given society will form just such 'isolated masses, almost a race apart', living in their own separate communities where there are few neutrals to mediate the conflicts and dilute the mass, so that all members have the same grievances. It is hard to get out - jobs are specialised and skills relatively untransferable and thus 'protest is less likely to take the form of moving to another industry and more the character of a mass walkout'.

Therefore in looking at the strike-prone sectors we should find that the work-force forms homogenous one-industry communities who see themselves as being socially as well as geographically distinct from other groups. In such a case we should also find that leisure pursuits take their nature from the work situation and those clubs and organisations which form the basis of the social and community fabric are industry-based. There is also likely to be a tradition of sons following fathers into the trade so that the occupation comes to affect wider family structures.

Here is a description of Dawdon, one of the most up-to-date long-life pits in the North-East:

"Nearly every man in Dawdon is or was or will be a miner - the exceptions being shopkeepers, a policeman or two, those who work for the Coal Board in other capacities, the doctor, the vicar and the farmers. The pit is difficult to avoid unless you are prepared to leave Seaham."

or as one inhabitant put it:

"Ye couldn't get away from it, there was neewhere else to gan. Seaham is a big stinking black hole, that's all it is, there's nee daylight in it." (12)

As Dennis and his team pointed out in their study of 'Ashton' (13), the basic geological facts of coalmining have created smaller more autonomous communities than have other aspects of Britain's industrial growth. In such communities, just as the landscape is from every angle dominated by the pit-heap and the winding-gear, so are many diverse areas of

social life dominated and subtly influenced by the common work experience.

The labour-force in mining is still largely self-recruiting. Most men working in the pits today come from 'mining families'; the more 'isolated' the community, the more inevitable it is that son will follow father down the pit, even though both father and son do not wish it. With, in most cases a shortage of female employment opportunities (although this is changing) many families today are still as dependent on the pit as they were in the days when the women went down it.

The industry therefore does seem to dominate the mining community; even in leisure time the events of work compete only with sport as the dominant conversation topic in pub or club (14). So how does this dominance interact with the pattern of mining strikes? The evidence seems to indicate that any large-scale action such as the strike affecting several fields in 1969 will be preceded by much discussion outside work, in pub and club, and heated debate concerning the lessons of 1926 or other historical conflicts. (15)

Once the decision to strike is taken however, all members of the mining community are expected to abide by it whether they were initially in favour or not: the blackleg miner is a social outcast in every respect, not just in the place of work as in other industries but excluded from the whole social life of the community. It may be, therefore, that the single-industry community can help to determine the size and duration of certain types of strikes through a strengthening of those factors relating to the general phenomenon of 'solidarity':

In other words, solidarity, rather than originating in the community, is an important characteristic of the social relations of mining itself. As will be seen below, the social and economic importance of the work-group in a physical situation where the actions of his mates can perhaps endanger a miner's livelihood and perhaps his life, produce a work-culture with a very high emphasis on group loyalty and the importance of standing by your 'marrers'. The nature of the miners' community will both reinforce and universalise this but not 'cause' it.

If this is so it may explain why the militancy of the mining workforce appears to have declined at a slower rate than that of the contraction of the industry itself and the concomitant steady erosion of the nature of the old mining communities. The 'Ashtons' and even the Dawdons are becoming less true to the ideal-type presented above. Where the local pits close, even if the workforce remains in mining its members may now travel to several different pits in the surrounding area (10-mile journeys to work being not uncommon), and where such alternative work in mining is not available the occupational structure of the community is likely to become more varied.

The implications for militancy of these changes may prove to be the opposite of what one might expect. Wellisz, in his study of the North-West area, claimed that in the Wigan area

where there were many family pits, where most of the miners knew each other and came mainly from the old mining towns and villages, labour relations were, in general, fairly peaceful. In Manchester, however, where there were many different industries and considerable mobility between mining and non-mining jobs, there was the worst strike record of the whole region (0.75% of the total average tonnage being lost through strikes in Manchester, and only 0.10% in Wigan). Wellisz concludes in respect of the Manchester miners:

"There appears to be a good deal of class solidarity and very little solidarity with the individual pit." (18)

What he means by this remains unspecified, although the implications will be examined in a further section, but we could perhaps say that in the conditions faced by the coal industry in the 25 years since nationalisation, theses regarding the impact of community on militancy need to be severely qualified.

2) Ideologies and orientations

The first major hypotheses under this heading, that of Lockwood and Goldthorpe's 'traditional worker', stems directly from the same emphasis on the community described above, Lockwood, outlining the characteristics of the ideal-typical 'traditional worker' (19) quotes Kerr and Siegel with approval: the sort of one-class, one-occupation community already described is likely to have a "high moral density" which, together with its isolation, is likely to make it

essentially inward-looking. As further outlined by Lockwood and Goldthorpe, (20) the 'traditional' consciousness thus engendered is a dichotomous 'us' and 'them' model.

It can be seen that this is much more sophisticated than the basic Kerr and Siegel thesis and would appear to overcome the immediate objections to the latter by attempting to determine the causal link between community and levels of industrial conflict. The implications of 'solidaristic collectivism' are that the community will not merely help to influence the course of certain types of strikes as described in the previous section but will produce a weltanschauung which the miners take to the pit with them and which can influence the amount of conflict.

At work, the traditional worker will have a 'solidaristic orientation' to the job, in which the group activity of the work has a greater experiential meaning than its economic content. He will be negatively orientated to the organisation and see his work group as a source of power against the employer. Collective action by the group will be based on the loyalty to the local class-community rather than the improvement or maintenance of the economic position of the group concerned.

Now in Lockwood and Goldthorpe's work there is no explicit correlation between solidary collectivism and strike-proneness, but there are a number of pointers. Firstly, the miners, renowned as we have seen for their

history of strike action, are given as the archetypal example of traditional proletarians. This could be coincidence were it not for the fact that the authors, in testing for the next stage of ideological development - instrumentalism - found it in a workforce specifically chosen for its hitherto peaceful labour relations record and where, as they claimed, workers had a co-operative attitude towards management. The implication is that in the move from solidarism to instrumentalism there is the probability of the withering away of strikes. (21)

Thus to recap, the solidarism of the isolated community produces a dichotomous conflict model of society which is transformed at the workplace into a negative orientation to the organisation. This, when reinforced by solidaristic values gives rise to a high level of conflictual collective action, i.e. strikes.

The weak link in the chain when it is applied to the coal industry is the 'negative-orientation' to the organisation. In a previous chapter we have already suggested that all workers are likely to have negative orientations towards their workplace at some level of consciousness, so presumably we are looking here for something above average in its intensity. Scott and his colleagues however, in their study Coal and Conflict decisively concluded that in spite of the high strike rate, there was no evidence of any pronounced hostility to management on the part of any of the workgroups they studied, even what they termed the lower morale groups. (22) This is

much the same conclusion that Lockwood and Goldthorpe reached with respect to the Luton workers.

Wellisz's comments on the high level of sympathy action by pit work-groups not immediately concerned with the dispute seems to lend some support to the solidarism hypothesis but his findings on the patterns of strike action, mentioned at the end of the previous section seem in their turn to contradict the idea of community solidarism.⁽²³⁾ Perhaps relevant here is Westergaard's argument that 'solidaristic collectivism' implying some notion of 'class-loyalty' is likely to develop rather than diminish once the parochial boundaries of local communities have been both physically and ideologically transcended.⁽²⁴⁾

While on the subject of orientations we can briefly look at Kerr and Siegel's second thesis, also propounded by early post-war writers such as Zweig⁽²⁵⁾, which is that certain orientations, if not engendered by the community, are engendered by the type of work done. More specifically, physically tough jobs such as mining will attract "tough, combative types" who will be inclined to strike. Say Kerr and Siegel:

"The bull of the woods and the mousy bank clerk are different types of people and can be expected to act differently."⁽²⁶⁾

Similar themes on this stereotype are to be found in journalistic accounts of pit strikes. Apart from the fact that many 'tough' jobs such as deep-sea fishing are not particularly strike-militant while industries such as printing

are, this idea seems to be based on the dubious psychological hypothesis that physical characteristics such as muscularity are the main conditioning variables with regard to the development of attitudes and behaviour. In addition, of course, the father-son tradition of mining communities and the latter's isolated nature means that the labour force is relatively immobile and is seldom "attracted" to a particular job because of its rugged characteristics - a somewhat unreal view of job opportunities in a pit village.

3) Technology

Before we can assess the likely merits of technological explanations of the coal industry's strike record, we must first examine the main features of the organisation of coal-getting. The first point to make is that, unlike most other industries, production takes place in ever-changing work conditions in an unpredictable environment:

"The complex of factors affecting work at the coal-face is of the kind that would confront a factory if productive machinery had to be moved and reset everyday". (27)

British mining systems since the war have been changing from a partly mechanised version of the longwall system to a greater emphasis on total mechanisation. It is, however, the longwall system that has been most widely used over the period and has been the most investigated.

All mining systems can be broken down into facework, haulage, repair and maintenance, and surface work. The labour

force tends to be employed on these processes in a rough age-cycle, so that young entrants to the industry are likely to start by screening the coal at the surface, progress below ground to haulage before being given a chance at facework. Once a miner becomes too old to continue facework he returns through the cycle in reverse fashion, probably ending up back on the surface. This cycle of course excludes skilled surface jobs such as winding-men and the more specialised electrical jobs, but is an indication of the sheer physical nature of mining and a reminder that the jobs cycle is also an earnings cycle, with facework representing the earnings pinnacle.

The production area is, of course, at the coal-face and again, whatever mining system, all face-work is essentially cyclical: a fixed sequence of operations to be repeated for each web of coal cut. The main difference between the major mining systems used in Britain is that under the old Room (or Stall) and Pillar method the individual collier performed each operation in a cycle himself, under longwall each operation is performed by a different group of workers in succeeding shifts, and under full mechanisation it becomes possible to perform the operations continuously.

The longwall method of coal-getting must be the most frequently described set of work-operations in industrial literature, getting its full share of observers from Orwell onwards. Only a brief summary will be given here, more detailed accounts are available elsewhere. (28)

Basically, there are six stages, spread over three shifts:

drilling)	
cutting)	<u>shift one: preparation</u>
firing)	
filling-off)	<u>shift two: coaling or loading</u>
ripping)	
panning)	<u>shift three: moving up</u>

The most likely sequence of events in an average pit is that during the first shift the coal face will be undercut by a team of men using a machine-cutter; then the face will be drilled to permit the firing of explosive charges to bring the coal to the floor; in the second shift the largest work group, the fillers, break up the loosened coal with picks and shovel it onto conveyor belts which lead to the tubs; in the third shift the rippers move each 'gate' or roadway up to the face workings and then similarly extend the machinery of the conveyor belts.

The sequence has been described at such length here because it is claimed that this method of organisation definitely plays an important part in creating conflict situations in the industry. The main proponents of this thesis, Trist and his colleagues of the Tavistock School, alleged that:

"The type of work organisation conventionally associated with partially-mechanised longwall working contains socio-psychological features which lead to a number of substandard results." (29)

- among them a low rate of productivity, poor labour relations, a low level of job-satisfaction, and a high level of absence, both voluntary and due to sickness and accidents.

Their basic argument is that under this system the cyclical nature of facework assumes a central importance: the work of groups on one shift cannot begin unless the work on the preceding shift has been completed satisfactorily - where this has not taken place, there is the obvious possibility of inter-group friction. Thus, while technically the job of mining coal is a coherent single entity, it is experienced, socially, as three (or more) separate autonomous jobs:

"The principle difficulty of operating such a system stems from the need to integrate the miscellaneous collection of segregated task groups into an overall organisation for the performance of a cycle which, technologically is an interdependent whole." (30)

Co-ordination therefore has to be supplied externally by management, rather than being inherent in the organisation of work-tasks, and here is another source of friction.

Some of the evidence seems to bear out these assertions. In the first place, it is definitely the face-workers who are responsible for the greatest number of strikes in the industry. Baldwin (31) found that colliers and fillers alone were responsible for about 70% of all disputes, and Scott and his colleagues found that cutters, fillers and rippers, who together comprise 26% of the labour force accounted for 58% of those disputes handled by the negotiating machinery

and these groups were also the most prone to strike action. (32)

Secondly, the work-group, as already mentioned, is an important social entity. Each shift consists of an internally homogenous group with each member doing the same job; each man's actions are group-related, both in terms of personal safety and economically - if an individual filler fails to complete his 'stint', the payment of the whole group may be affected and if he does this too often, he may be asked to leave the group. Thus it is hardly surprising that Scott found that 80% of all disputes at a particular pit were concerned with groups and only 20% with individuals. (33)

Evidence more specifically related to the longwall system is offered by Wellisz who claims that in Burnley, where at this time both longwall and Room and Pillar were being used under roughly the same conditions, the loss from longwall pits was about 0.93% of total tonnage while that from Room and Pillar pits was about 0.18% (34). (This may simply reflect the greater productivity potential of the longwall system however; 'tonnage lost' is not a particularly good measure of industrial action.)

The longwall system replaced the autonomy of the old collier, with the job of co-ordinating activity underground given to the deputy (underground equivalent of foreman). If one shift fails to complete the work, then the deputy can direct the next shift to do so. The Reid report in 1945 advised that:

"The workman must be ready, if his normal work is not available to turn his hand to such other useful work (within the limits of responsibility) as his employer may ask him to take on." (35)

But, says Goldthorpe (36), the worker is not always ready to do this, and both Goldthorpe and Wellisz report that many strikes are due to what are considered arbitrary commands, and that this form of resentment lies behind other strikes which may be described as wage strikes. This comment in turn perhaps misses the point that such additional work requested of a particular work-group was likely to adversely affect its collective earnings and thus it could well be the case that 'wages' formed the basis of resentment. (see section immediately following)

To what extent, therefore, is the idea of a bad socio-technical 'fit' in mining a useful one for explaining the industry's strike record? Firstly Trist and his colleagues give no indication how mining compares for badness of 'fit' with other industries: external regulation by management via the payment system is to some extent characteristic of all industries with any degree of division of labour. Secondly, while Trist makes a socio-technical comparison between the two main systems of coal-getting, curiously he makes no historical comparison of the strike records associated with each. Knowles' figures for the pre-war period,⁽³⁷⁾ when mining was just as frequently top of the strike league-table, refer to the pillar-and-stall era when, according to Trist, there should have been fairly harmonious industrial relations because of the good 'fit' between the technology and the social organisation.

4) Payment and bargaining systems

An examination of the payment systems that existed before the Power Loading Agreement (i.e. for most of the period under examination) may illuminate some of the above points, for the other main difference between face and other workers was that the former were on piecework. The faceworkers piecework contracts (pit price-lists) were negotiated at each individual pit by the pit manager and the local NUM branch officials. Many other underground workers, however, and all surface workers were on a fixed day-wage, negotiated nationally. Nearly all observers are agreed that the consequences of this distinction for strike activity have been fairly direct.

Being on piecework in a working situation where conditions vary tremendously and are totally unpredictable means that one's earnings are similarly unpredictable. This rapidly leads to a situation where, in the words of Dennis and his team, "every strike is a wages strike". Whether the immediate cause is a sudden deterioration in conditions, difficulties caused by mechanical breakdowns, or holdups due to a previous shift, in all these cases it is the effect on the pay-note that is really at stake.

Thus we can say that for most of the period, faceworkers were constantly presented with bargaining (i.e. potential conflict) situations. Why then did so many of these become translated into strikes? Scott suggests that it is because they were also in a strong bargaining position due to their

importance as production workers, their scarcity value, plus the fact that as we have seen, their actions were usually those of a concerted group.

The bargaining power of faceworkers was able to push up wage rates at pit level, often obscuring the fact that surface workers who lacked both the bargaining position and the means of local negotiation, for the most part usually lagged behind. This raises the question of the role played by the NUM. It can be seen from the above that the skill of local union officials in negotiating price-lists could be a crucially important factor. However, as one writer has pointed out:

"Local union power was used in the past to benefit the highly paid contract and coalface pieceworker and this prevented the development of strong central bargaining pressure to improve the position of the outbye and surface workers."
(38)

Indeed, judging from the union's record over most of the period, it is debatable just how effective the NUM would have been at pit-level were it not for strong coal-face pressure. Co-operation between the union and the NCB was written into the nationalisation terms and for most of the period it soft-pedalled on pit-closures (while successfully getting agreement on high redundancy payments) and the pay of day-wage men, and (in 1969 and 1970) failed to sanction at national level what must be some of the biggest unofficial strikes in any industry.

The possible implications of these larger strikes will be discussed in the concluding chapter, but it is necessary here to add a brief note on the 1966 Power Loading Agreement, which may have been a major contributor to the change in pattern of mining strikes.

The NPLA marked a move away from piecework to a system whereby members of teams are paid a fixed wage per shift based on average earnings in the area before the Agreement. By 1971, when the third National Daywage Structure was adopted, most power loading teams were on the same rates.

The reason for the agreement was, as the name implies, mainly the fact that the introduction of mechanised loader-cutters and other equipment had destroyed the necessity for the longwall cycle. Secondly, as explicitly stated by the NCB, there was the intention that the Agreement would diminish stoppages and more effectively control wages. (39) The third aim was to increase productivity and, as such, the NPLA must be seen in the context of the wave of productivity bargains made in the late 1960's.

The main effect on strike-levels seems to have been to continue the downward trend in strike-militancy at pit-level for the remaining years of the 1960's. However, at the same time as reducing bargaining opportunities at pit level, mechanisation plus the day-wage system brought new grievance issues, nowhere more graphically set out than in the miners' evidence to the Wilberforce Commission following the national

strike of 1972⁽⁴⁰⁾. These issues included increased dust hazards from mechanisation, an awareness of the value to the NCB of dramatic increases in productivity, and a falling behind of miners' earnings compared to those in other industries due to the few opportunities for overtime or other means of adding to basic wage rates. It can be seen that these issues, far from affecting only a single shift or even a single pit, affect the industry as a whole.

Thus we would expect that the decline of bargaining opportunities at pit-level, together with the increase in importance of supra-pit issues would lead to a switch in the pattern of mining strikes from small local actions to larger (but fewer) national or semi-national actions; judging by the evidence of the early 1970's this is what happened.

Conclusions

As can be seen, the suggestions as to why mining has been such a strike-militant industry are extremely varied and complex. What can be salvaged from them?

Firstly, we can perhaps say that the requirements of the work situation create and foster a tradition of collective action and collective responsibility which both sustains the work group and permeates the wider social community.

This concept of collective responsibility has become institutionalised in the form of 100% membership of the NUM - this provides the institutional framework within which smaller

collective actions can be taken even if it does not itself instigate such actions.

The occasion for such action arose over much of the period from the constant presentation of dispute situations due to the ever-changing nature of working conditions and the long-term decline in employment in the industry and the consequent effect of these on the pay of key sectors of the workforce. Thus the occasion for action is not 'solidary collectivism' for its own sake but represents the use of available opportunities to maintain certain economic standards.

VEHICLES

"If the car industry has a public image, it is one of perpetual strikes on seemingly trivial issues." (41)

If the miners epitomise to many the old-style traditional working-class, with a history of conflict stretching back two hundred years, the car-makers, who look like displacing miners as the most militant sector of the workforce, seem to epitomise the very opposite. A new industry, barely fifty years old, (and whose basic characteristics were established by a man who regarded history as bunk) with few traditions, and where the motivation of men and management alike seems based entirely on money. The contrast of the fabled affluence of car-workers with their consistent strike record, has at times reduced the lower professional strata almost to incoherence: "Look at how much they are earning and still they are not satisfied!" being probably the most frequently heard comment in newspaper

leader columns and similar sounding-boards from the early '60's onward.

The two basic features of the British motor industry in the post-war phase of its development have been its continued vulnerability to fluctuations in economic fortunes at home and abroad, and the ever-increasing trend towards greater concentration of capital.

While mass car-ownership was a pre-war phenomenon in the U.S.A., it did not come to Britain or Europe until after the war, and then not immediately. The rapid post-war rise in British car production (1958 saw a million vehicles come off the lines for the first time) was originally geared almost exclusively to exports. Britain had few competitors until the mid-1950's and the rush to expand production to take advantage of this led to a lowering of production standards (creating a reputation internationally that was to prove embarrassing later) and a low priority being given to good industrial relations. The emergence of foreign competition however, led British manufacturers to depend more heavily on developing the domestic market, at the same time adopting the American idea of regular restyling and a constant launch of new models to stimulate demand. The necessity for this really originates from the nature of car ownership. As the authors of the most exhaustive study of the industry have pointed out, demand for cars is not demand for new cars, but a demand for vehicle ownership. Most people become vehicle owners via purchase of second-hand cars; the market for new cars is therefore largely a replacement market, i.e. something which can be easily deferred according to fluctuations in the cost

of living, government policy, the terms of trade, and other determinants of consumer fortunes at home and abroad. (42) For this reason, industrial and commercial 'fleet' purchases have become increasingly important in the demand for new cars; such purchases are also subject to the same fluctuations however. In addition to the car-industry catching cold whenever the economy sneezes, because of the continued importance of its exports, a healthy car industry is seen as vital to a healthy economy. In a comparatively short period of time, the industry has become a key component of the British economic structure; so much so that the early 1970's saw several occasions of Government intervention to prevent ailing car firms from going under.

Parallel with this development has been the ever increasing concentration of capital; as shown in Table 7:

Table 7

Major motor-car manufacturers in the U.K.

	<u>No. of firms and major mergers</u>
1922	75
1929	15
1930's	"The Big 6": (Morris, Austin, Ford, Vauxhall, Rootes, Standard)
1952	"The Big 5": (BMC, Ford, Vauxhall; Rootes, Standard)
1961	Leyland (commercial vehicles) acquire Standard-Triumph
1967	Leyland acquire Rover BMC acquire Jaguar
1968	Leyland acquire BMC to form BLMC

Thus by the end of the period, the British car industry was concentrated in the hands of four firms, three of whom

were themselves American-controlled (Vauxhall - General Motors; Rootes - Chrysler; and Ford), British Leyland remaining as the only firm whose capital was based in the U.K. For as well as the domestic concentration detailed above, there has also been considerable international concentration. Most car firms today are multi-national in scope (British Leyland controlled the Italian firm of Innocenti for a period and has overseas subsidiaries in Spain, South Africa and elsewhere (43).)

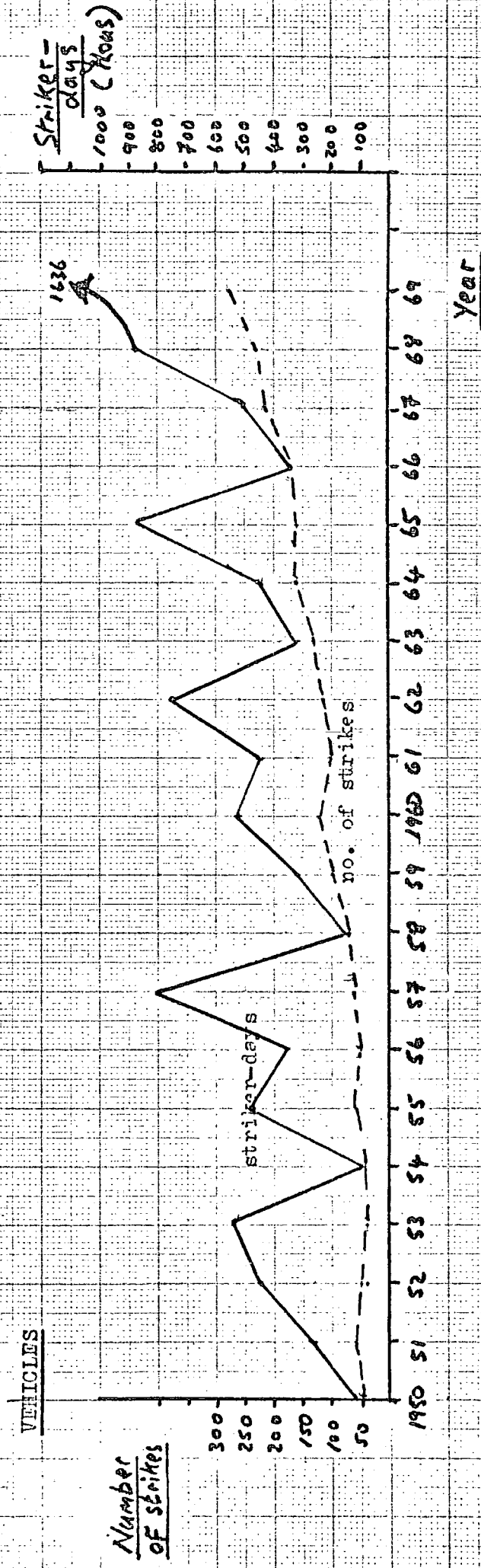
These structural changes have produced considerable upheaval in the industry during the period in question, which in turn has been exacerbated by the economic fluctuations and stop-go policies already referred to. The vulnerability of car production is further compounded by the nature of that production itself which is not so much production as the assembly of the products of a great many other firms. Despite early lateral expansion such as the Ford take-over of Briggs Motor Bodies in the 1950's the car manufacturers depend heavily on a large number of component makers; in 1964 BMC had no less than 4,000 different suppliers. This is partly due to the fact that cars are fairly complicated pieces of machinery, but also due to the complex model-range indulged in by post-war British manufacturers. Whatever the cause, car production in any one plant is kept going only by the constant influx day and night of components. Stocks are kept to a minimum; G. Turner quotes Fords as using only a 4-hour supply of tyres when in full production. (44)

Car assembly itself has become synonymous in most people's minds with flow-line production: the process broken down into its component parts, each performed in sequence by a separate group of workers along the assembly line. This process of interdependence has been taken even further by the car companies in the form of geographical specialisation. Thus, within the Ford company the Swansea plant produces rear axles for all Ford U.K. models, Halewood produces all car gearboxes, and so on. (45)

It can be seen from the above brief outline of the industry that the single overriding characteristic of car production is its extreme vulnerability. Production can be affected by economic recession, changes in Government policy, a change in the value of the pound, foreign competition, a switch to a new model (that may be produced in another plant) changes due to mergers or, more immediately, by a shortage or holdup in any one of several components supplied either from another plant within the Company, or external suppliers, or a holdup at any stage in production within the plant itself.

Strikes in the industry

The pattern of strike action in the industry over the period is shown in Figure 5. It can be seen that the number of strikes is far fewer than in mining (the latter being measured in hundreds) but displays a steadily rising trend over the period. The figures for days lost, in turn, display a much more regular and pronounced fluctuation than do the comparable figures for mining. These figures are based on



(Source: D.E.P. 'Cemette')

Fig. 5 Strikes in vehicles 1950-69

the SIC and therefore include not only cars, but heavy road vehicles, motor cycles and most component and accessory manufacturers.

Turner and his colleagues, using their own figures, manage to isolate cars from these figures and show that, until the mid-50's, cars were not particularly strike-prone, most of the motor industry's strikes occurring in the components and commercial vehicles sectors. Since then, industrial unrest in those sectors remained fairly constant, but cars experienced a considerable expansion in strike activity. (46) The loose definitions of these categories, however, can be demonstrated by the case of Briggs Motor Bodies, which had a fairly high strike record in the early '50's. Before 1953, this would have been listed under component manufacturers; it was then taken over by Fords and became part of the Ford Dagenham plant and would presumably have then figured under the statistics for Ford.

Perhaps more so than in other industries strikes in the motor industry form only a part of the picture of industrial conflict - almost the visible third of the iceberg. In addition to labour turnover and absence; daily life in the car plant is likely to include a great many small disruptions, such as lunch-time meetings which extend into working-time, "downers", or mid-shift stoppages with an exeunt to the works yard until the grievance has been sorted out, and mid-shift walkouts in which men go home for the rest of the day but return the next morning. A (somewhat extreme) example can be taken from Beynon's Fords study:

".... the weather was beautiful, hot and sunny. The lads kept coming in late from their dinner breaks. 'If they can play football they can work. They're just a lazy bunch of bastards.' It got hotter and hotter, it was too hot to work.... They weren't going to work - take the roof off. Senior plant management went into the Paint Shop to check the complaint. One of them was streaming with sweat. 'What did the lads want?' They wanted iced lime juice. This unfortunately couldn't be supplied but would orange be alright? Yes, orange would do fine. They drank it and went home." (47)

All such stoppages are too small to be reported in the official statistics but are, conclude Turner and his team,

"a normal feature of the day-to-day conduct of industrial relations at most of the car plants, deliberately undertaken for aggressive or defensive reasons, to express protests, back up claims, achieve action, demonstrate the genuineness of a grievance and so on. (48)

The same study also concludes that to talk of 'days lost' or 'production lost' from such downers or most small strikes is a misnomer; as what actually happens most of the time is that production is delayed, only to be made up in the period following the stoppage. This is because they are likely to affect one section only and units in transit between sections form a buffer stock to be drawn on by the next section until production is resumed. There is thus a threshold of flexibility to be reached before a stoppage significantly affects production; when it does, however, its effects are likely to be disproportionate to its size because of the technological interdependence already described.

The regular fluctuations in strike activity for the industry as a whole have already been illustrated, and Turner and his

team found a strong correlation between these fluctuations and the cycle of economic activity. (49) During a time of boom, after a small lag, the number of strikes follows the production figures upwards, whereas in a recession, the number of striker-days rises, even though the number of strikes is less.

Both of these trends may be seen as reflecting the car workers' awareness of the state of the market as a basis for collective action.

As one of the Halewood stewards put it:

"All you've got to do is watch the car park. You watch the car park and you'll get a pretty good idea of what will be going on inside this plant. When the park starts filling up they start to push a bit. Little things like, but you haven't got to be a genius to work out what's happening. Whenever we have a strike here we have it when it suits Fords. Never when it suits us." (50)

This is overstating the case; he could also have said that when the park is empty the stewards know that claims and grievances will be speedily dealt with in order to keep the line going and get the production out, hence a large number of smaller strikes. The quotation is however a good pointer to the reasons for the higher number of striker days lost in slack periods. Turner, in the chapter already cited, suggests that many workers who have experience of slumps and realise that they are usually short-lived are more ready to join strike action at such a time, as the alternative may well be lay-off or redundancy. On the employers side, he neither wants to pay fall-back pay nor pay workers to produce cars he

cannot sell, and thus may tacitly welcome the strike as an opportunity to suspend production. Thus claims Turner the strike becomes almost a form of work-sharing. As the quotation indicated, management may even actively provoke conflict situations by instituting short-time, changing rates and speeds and so on; (51) and Turner's view of the mutual advantages of strike action must be qualified by the realisation that a strike called in one section may lead, under such economic conditions, to lay-offs affecting the majority of the rest of the plant.

The immediate causes of strike action have altered over the period. The low strike record of the car firms in the early-1950's must be seen in the context of the low level of unionisation in the industry. In 1936, G.D.H. Cole had described the industry as the most weakly organised section of British Trade Unionism; (52) and the early 1950's were marked by recognition disputes as the industry became unionised (often, as in the case of Fords and Morris, in the face of stiff opposition). Following recognition, there was a brief spate of disputes following from the decision of some managements to curb the power of stewards and eradicate 'militants'. Since then the vast majority of disputes have been over wages and control issues (as we said in Chapter 2, the distinction between these two is, for the most part, academic) i.e. the 'effort bargain', who does what and for how much. Other major issues in the later part of the period have been over parity and redundancies.

Some explanations of strike-proneness

1) The Community

While car-production is undoubtedly geographically concentrated in certain areas (e.g. the Midlands, Merseyside) and some towns (Luton, Dagenham, Oxford) can be regarded, not just as 'car towns', but as 'company-towns', there is little evidence that car-workers are members of homogenous, isolated communities as required by the Kerr and Siegel thesis; (to be fair, it must be added that at the time they were collecting their data, the car industry was only just beginning to emerge as a strike-prone sector and thus did not feature in their figures. This is the danger of trying to universalise an a-historical explanatory theory).

To begin with the case of the car towns. In Luton, for example, Vauxhall is the biggest employer but by no means the only one, and the catchment area for car firms appears to be quite large - journeys to work of up to twenty miles being not uncommon. In this respect there is reason to believe that car-workers will be among the most geographically-mobile due to their above-average earnings and the car-purchasing facilities available to them. Thus, outside work, car workers are likely to live next to and mix socially with workers from a wide range of occupations.

A variant to the isolated solidaristic community is the belief that certain areas, such as Merseyside, are 'more militant' than other areas and have a tradition of collective action that permeates the community. Thus Matthews quotes an unnamed Halewood steward:

"It's traditional on Merseyside that when we talk about solidarity, we mean every man - and his wife and children. By strike we mean strike. If we're going to fight an employer, we fight him on every front there is. When the pickets are out, nobody passes nothing passes. Not even the post." (53)

The difficulties with this view are the same as we encountered in mining: the 'solidarity in struggle' approach is not helpful in understanding the most common form of strike - the short 'downer'. A more fruitful approach is instanced by Beynon describing the contacts Halewood stewards had with stewards in other firms, both through their own previous experience in those firms or through outside work friendships. Through such contacts, the steward could learn from the experiences of others and apply them to his own work situation. (54) This still does not explain why cars should have a higher strike record than these other industries. As Beynon rightly says:

"There are some docile labour forces on Merseyside. Not all the factories there are in ferment and only a small proportion of them have developed a strong shop-steward organisation. The fact that the PTA workers at Halewood were scousers mattered.. The fact that they worked in an assembly plant of the Ford Motor Company mattered more."

(55)

This is born out by the fact that Fords, when setting up the Halewood plant, and fearing just such an influx of workers with militant experience, deliberately established a policy of recruiting 'green labour' - young workers, those with family commitments, some from as far away as Wigan and Runcorn. Such a policy (which could not be maintained for very long anyway) did not prevent the workforce adopting militant attitudes towards their employer.

Turning to the question of 'social' isolation, there is no evidence that car workers see themselves, or are seen by others, as in any way separate from other workers. There is no extra contact between car-workers per se in leisure time.

"Many of them do not consider themselves to be 'car workers' They see themselves as workers who happen to be working in a car plant. They've done other jobs in the past and expect to do others in the future. They don't want to grow old on the line. They work in the car plant because of the money." (56)

2) Ideologies and orientations

It is ironical that the most important work done on car workers' orientation to work and society should have been specifically based on a firm with a low level of industrial conflict. In Lockwood and Goldthorpe's Luton study, the high wages of the car firm were supposed to have attracted to Vauxhall's a labour force divorced from old traditional working-class values (including that awarding importance to collective action) and characterised by its instrumental

attitude towards work. Now we know that Vauxhall was chosen by the authors specifically for their low conflict record (57) but while this may be understandable in terms of refuting ideas of embourgeoisement (58) it was an atypical choice within the car industry as a whole. At this time, Vauxhall was also bottom of the pay league (59) so that more affluent car workers could have been found elsewhere. They would however have given equally instrumental answers to questions of why they worked on a car assembly line. Thus compare:

"What is it that keeps me here? Money and again money -
nothing else !" (60)

with

"You just endure it for the money - that's what we're
paid for, to endure the boredom of it." (61)

The evidence indicates that much of the industry's workforce is originally attracted to car assembly as one of the few high-wage industries with open access, and that they are prepared to put up with high track speeds, noise, fumes and monotony (see next section) in return for the higher than average economic reward. If this constitutes 'instrumentalism', it follows that anything which frustrates or reduces that economic reward immediately upsets the effort bargain, threatens established standards of living and makes the conditions of work less bearable. In other words, the workers relation to his work is solely through the fragile point of the wage packet and is not mediated through any commitment or identification with the product.

While on the subject of ideologies, we should briefly examine the role of militants of varying ideological persuasions who have become the folk devils of industrial conflict. Turner and his colleagues concluded that there was no relation at all between levels of conflict and the presence of Communist Party members as shop stewards; they compared the record of Ford at Dagenham where the C.P. was strongly established with that of Jaguar, who had an equivalent strike record despite the absence of any communists, and where the leading militant was a member of the Conservative Party.⁽⁶²⁾ Statements like those of G. Turner that the Communists in the AEU are controlled "not from Party headquarters in King Street in London but from the Prague offices of the World Federation of Trade Unions" and that orders from the WFTU can unleash a wave of disputes in the industry, while being good journalistic stuff, are based on an unrealistic view of how disputes arise in any industry. Even Turner is eventually forced to admit that the "Communists simply applied their weight to a door that was already open"⁽⁶³⁾. The fact is, that all such explanations of strikes in terms of the machinations of militants make the mistake of seeing stewards as leaders and the rest of the workers as capable of being led. As Beynon more realistically points out, both stewards and workers are suspicious of political action for its own sake., i.e. if it does not fit in with the pattern of shop floor guerilla warfare. Politics in this sense can become an encumbrance. Thus:

"I don't give a shit what names they call me. It doesn't matter if they call me 'a Communist' or 'a Trotskyist' or whatever. It's just that it gets in the way of the job. Y'know the lads get enough pro-poganda as it is without having it thrown at them that their convenor is a communist getting orders from Moscow or something. It doesn't matter to me personally, it just makes the job of the stewards in the plant that much harder." (64)

3. Technology

Car production is really assembly within assembly. As has been stated, many components, especially electrical parts, are bought in from suppliers like Lucas or AC-Delco already assembled. Within the car plant itself engines, bodies, gearboxes and rear-axles are all separate sub-assemblies (and as we have mentioned these too increasingly may originate from other plants).

The basic organisation of car assembly is that in the Body Shop the body shells are pressed out and welded. They then progress to the Paint Shop where they are washed, degreased, primed, rubbed down, painted and oven-dried. They then move onto the first station in the Trim and Assembly line for the addition of hard components and soft trim. They then meet the second major line which carries the engine and transmission units, and the combined body and power section proceeds down the line for addition of further components such as wheels, for testing and then driving off and storing in the car park.

There is obviously a marked contrast here with the organisation of mining. Instead of a fixed sequence of

operations taking place in an ever-shifting location, for car workers the operation sequence is spatial rather than temporal. For the individual worker, it is the same operation in the same spot repeated for the whole shift, and then the shift after that, and after that, and knowing that when he is off shift the same operations will be being done by someone else: - "The line never stops", "forty gearboxes an hour, three hundred and twenty a shift". (65)

The range of jobs is wide, the most numerous being the assembler who fits, finishes and trims the various components, drilling, screwing, bolting, welding and clipping them to each other and to the body shell.

Much work has been written on the effects of assembly-line work both in Britain and in America (66), the general consensus being that it is monotonous, physically tiring and frustrating. Thus, for example, Goldthorpe found at Luton that assemblers "appeared to derive little intrinsic satisfaction from their jobs and experienced various forms of deprivation" - monotony (69%), physical tiredness (48%) and having to work at too fast a pace (30%); 87% wanted to get off the track. (67).

Clack however, from a factory 'somewhere in the Midlands', reported after a year's participant observation that work on the track is not boring -

"Assembly line work in car factories is comprehensible and meaningful and not at all without variety." (68)

More boring jobs could he suggests be found in textile spinning and machine minding. While no-one has claimed that track work is the most boring job in Britain, a line-worker at Fords describes his work thus:

"No-one wants to work on a production line. Bench workers or sub-assembly workers are often threatened that they will be 'put on the line' if they don 't improve their output and finish their quota earlier ... Repetition work ... causes peculiar afflictions. Workers using portable weld-guns grow a lump on their thumb knuckles, corns on one foot, an ache in one leg or round one side of their ribs, not to mention tennis elbow." (69)

Other Ford workers variously report, "It's the most boring job in the world", "A robot could do it. The line here is made for morons"; and "I still have nightmares about it. I couldn't go back on that line. Not for anything." (70)

Presumably that which is "not without variety" for a participant academic for a year somewhat loses its zest after two or three. Clack himself sheds a glimmer of light when, in asserting that workers had favourable attitudes towards the line, he remarks that "complaints came when they (the lines) stopped and the workers were on lower waiting time the level of earnings seemed the major concern." (71) As the Halewood man said; "I just close my eyes and stick it out. I think about the kids and the next (mortgage) premium being paid".

In the end, the debate about monotony seems to matter very little, for Turner and his colleagues found that an analysis of the occupations of those directly involved in disputes showed that there was no disproportionate concentration of line-workers, (72) but indeed some occupational groups who figured prominently, such as internal truck drivers, had relatively varied work experiences.

The size of car firms is greater than average for the rest of industry. Yet despite the increase in size over the period and the increased degree of technical integration, there has been little tendency for motor strikes to involve more people. The average number involved in pre-war strikes was 1,200; in 1946--48 it was 1,250; in 1961 - 3 it was 1,250; in 1965 - 6 it was 1,072 and in 1967 - 8 it was 875. There is also little correlation between size of firm and strike activity - for most of the 1960's Jaguar regularly had more strikes than Vauxhall with only a quarter the size of workforce.

It seems therefore that the degree to which technical integration has increased the ability of workers to take strike action may have been exaggerated. What may have been overlooked, however, is the extent to which such integration and the ever-increasing concentration of capital have led to increases in the occasions for dispute by making the question of control of production a constant priority for both workers and employers. Because of the enormous cost of the capital tied up in vehicle production it is imperative that the line

never stops. To ensure that smooth production continues, the management of car firms have, since the early days, placed high priority on retaining what they regard as control functions exclusive to management and aiming for a disciplined workforce. From the workers standpoint, for their own physical and economic wellbeing, it is equally imperative that they attempt to minimise insecurity of earnings by gaining control over line-speeds, piece-work rates and other essential components of their employment situation. As Beynon clearly demonstrates, the 'frontier of control' in a car plant is pushed back and forwards by both sides depending on the prevailing economic climate in the external market.⁽⁷³⁾ What is important for our purpose is the means by which such control is achieved and exercised.

The skilled man exercising a craft or trade can control output by a myriad of changes to the quality or appearance of the product. The assembly-line workers have no such freedom; as Beynon points out: "They either do the job or they don't"⁽⁷⁴⁾. Thus the technology of mass production can affect the likelihood of strike action by removing the main expressions of conflict, except the decision to stop making the product.

4) Payment and bargaining systems

At the beginning of the period there was a very rapid increase in unionisation in the car firms so that by 1965 all were 100% organised with the exception of Ford (99%)

and Vauxhall (85%). Because of the evolution of the motor industry from its varied origins in engineering, metal manufacture, coach building and so on, the number of unions in the industry remains very large. In 1969 there were 22 unions within Ford and more within British Leyland, (not all of them within the same plant it must be added), a situation which has led to many comparisons with the United States and the monolithic position held by the U.A.W. The two most important unions in the industry are the T.G.W.U. and the A.E.U., followed by G.M.W.U. and the N.U.V.B. (since merged into the T. & G.) the E.P.T.U. and a host of craft and white collar unions.

The fact of so many unions within the average firm has not itself been a direct cause of disputes, although it may have hindered the creation of coherent union policies within the industry. Because of the interchangeability of jobs and workers, the major unions have never attempted to demarcate their own empires with any degree of rigidity. The other main reason for the lack of internecine strife is the presence, characteristic of the engineering industry generally, of "parallel" shop-stewards organisation and shop-floor bargaining. The stewards have become responsible for all day to day bargaining, often representing in their section members of several different unions. Turner and his colleagues concluded: "What union a man is a member of becomes largely irrelevant as long as he is a subscriber." (75)

The long emphasis on shop-floor bargaining has influenced the main systems of payment. Under the engineering wage system the two most common methods of payment are, in theory, either a fixed time-rate varying according to skill-level, or piecework consisting of a basic rate and some sort of bonus. In practice in the car industry innumerable combinations of the two have been constructed as a result of continuous shop-floor pressure. (Turner found that many stewards would admit to not fully understanding the complexities of the system themselves.) Until the mid 60's however the most common system in car firms was some form of piecework or payment by results (PBR) which ironically had been introduced after the war against union pressure, but which the unions found could be turned to advantage. The basic rates would be established between the firm and the relevant Joint Negotiating Committee representing the unions involved. This rate rapidly became a minimum basis for earnings which would be jacked up by local shop-floor pressure.

The disadvantage of this system for the unions was that it magnified the impact of any recession or even minor disturbances in output, making insecurity and fluctuations in earnings one of the major complaints of workers.

This situation has been changing since the mid 60's however, due mainly to the declining fortunes of the industry. A decline in the number of new domestic registrations, plus a highly competitive overseas market has forced the manufacturers to look for ways of increasing productivity. One result has been redundancies, the other a switch to the method of payment known as Measured Day Work (MDW) in an attempt to reduce

shop floor pressure on wage costs.

MDW has been used by Ford and Vauxhall for most of the period and is defined as a "fixed hourly rate payment system, based upon quantified performance standards".⁽⁷⁶⁾ MDW should, once fully implemented, reduce both fluctuations in earnings and the occasions for shop-floor bargaining and, according to Turner, this should reduce the occasions for dispute. In fact, since its introduction into Chrysler and BLMC there has been a spectacular increase in striker-days lost. There have been several reasons for this, but basically the issues have been those of grading, mutuality and parity. MDW is invariably based on some form of job-evaluation involving the reduction of hundreds of different jobs to a handful of graded payment-bands. The amount of "guestimation" in this procedure has invariably led to some sort of grading dispute where it has been introduced, or even the flat refusal of the unions to participate (viz. the 1968 Rootes dispute at Linwood)⁽⁷⁷⁾.

The loss of control by the shop-floor in giving up PBR swiftly led to increased demands for 'mutuality', i.e. the joint setting of measured time rates and line speeds by representatives of both management and workers, demands often initially rejected by management for obvious reasons.

Lastly, the switch to MDW in the Chrysler and BLMC plants in the Midlands made comparisons possible for the first time between their rates (based on what they had achieved under

PBR) and rates paid in companies like Ford which had proved much more static. This led to the demands for parity behind the Ford strikes of 1969 and 1971, and similar demands from Chrysler and BLMC plants in other parts of the country.

The switch to MDW has not reduced insecurity of earnings because it has coincided with a long-term recession in the industry which has caused periodic lay-offs and short-time working.

Conclusions

Car production is a high-wage industry with open access, but where working conditions are monotonous and often physically tiring. There is evidence that it may attract workers who are looking for high earnings and are prepared to put up with the conditions to get them; they have no desire to make cars as such and so, following Lockwood and Goldthorpe we may call them instrumental in their approach. A threat to their livelihood is constantly experienced in the regular insecurity and fluctuation in earnings, either through hold-ups, lay-offs or changes in the effort-bargain. The last named can be minimised by striving to control the organisation of production at shop floor level. On the part of the employers the high capital-intensive nature of the industry makes continuous utilisation of capital a necessity, and thus equally necessary to control the organisation of production. Thus conflicts over both the frontier of control and its concomitant effects on the effort-bargain will be frequent.

One of the few ways open to the assembly worker to influence production is simply to stop making cars. Thus, the occasions for dispute have a high probability of being translated into strike action. This is made possible by a 100% level of unionisation expressed in practical terms in strong shop-floor organisation.

DOCKS

A note on the transport industries

The overall SIC classification of 'transport' comprises railways, road passenger transport, road freight haulage, docks, harbours and waterborne transport (including merchant seamen), and other forms such as air transport. It can be seen that the types of labour and working conditions are quite varied and it thus becomes necessary to see which, if any, of these groups is responsible for the 'strike-proneness' of the transport sector as a whole. The following tables can be taken as a rough guide only due to the inadequacy of the figures available. Table 8 shows the mean annual striker-days over the period and is complicated by the fact that merchant seamen were included in with docks and harbours until 1959.

TABLE 8

Mean annual striker-days (in thousands) 1950 - 69
for all transport industries

<u>Railways</u>	<u>Buses</u>	<u>Road Freight</u>	<u>Docks</u> [*]	<u>Sea</u> ^φ	<u>Other</u>
65	175	35	259	98	25

* includes seamen until 1959

φ ten year period only

Since 1959, the figures for industrial disputes have included a breakdown in terms of striker days per 1,000 employees. As we have already mentioned, this sort of weighting is more suitable for comparative purposes, and the median score for the resulting eleven year period is shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9

Median range of striker-days per 1,000 employees
in all transport industries 1959 - 69

<u>Railways</u>	<u>Buses</u>	<u>Road Freight</u>	<u>Docks</u>	<u>Sea</u>	<u>Other</u>
20-50	100-250	50-100	1000-1500	0-10	20-50

It will be noted that until now the arithmetic mean has been used as a measure of central tendency. The usual objection to this is that a few high scores may 'distort' the picture; however a high score of striker days may be indicative of a powerful bargaining position that, once demonstrated, may not need exercising through strike action in the period immediately following, and so it would, for our purposes, be distorting to ignore its importance.

Because of the method of presentation of the official figures, however, it has not proved possible to use the mean for Table 9. The median gives a much flatter appearance to inter-industry differentials, reducing the influence, for example of the 1967 and 1969 dock strikes, and, most obviously, the 1966 seamans strike.

Despite this, it can clearly be seen that the sector most responsible for the overall record for transport is the docks, whether measured purely in terms of aggregate striker-days, or when these are weighted to take account of employment.

The Docks

The basic characteristic of all dock work has been, until very recently its unpredictability. Ships at the mercy of tide and weather seldom arrive at regularly spaced intervals, and, once arrived, present a multitude of different designs and capacities which, when added to the variety of cargo, present an almost infinite number of unloading and loading times. This, plus fluctuations in trade, has meant that, for most of its history, it has not been possible to organise dock work in terms of a regular flow of inputs and outputs, and the demands for dock labour by employers have consequently been highly volatile, fluctuating literally from day to day. Dock employers have always been faced with the problem of only employing enough men for the job in hand and yet ensuring that there is enough labour 'on tap' to cope with peak periods.

Historically, this problem was met by the system of casual labour: the crudest system of industrial work-relations, whereby the employee was hired daily for a specific job and discharged once that job was over. The iniquitous system of totally casual labour changed very little, in principle, up to the second world war from the scene described by Mayhew at the call stand in the London docks:

"Then begins the scuffling and scrambling forth of countless hands high in the air to catch the eye of him whose voice may give them work. As the foreman calls from a book of names, some men jump upon the backs of others so as to lift themselves high above the rest and attract the notice of him who hires them. All are shouting, some cry aloud his surname, some his Christian name, others call out their own name to remind him that they are there Indeed it is a sight to sadden the most callous to see thousands of men struggling for only one day's hire." (78)

The degrading business of individual workers competing with each other daily at the call stand (or 'pen') led to enmity, violence, graft and favouritism, as well as little hope of employment for the old or infirm worker.. Mayhew was writing in the days of sail; with the coming of steam, the pressure grew more intense as ship-owners aimed for the ever-faster turn-around: a ship not at sea was wasted capital. Hiring before and after the war became a more orderly affair, men chosen by nods, signs and touch, but the principle was still the same.

The first significant change in this system came in 1947 with the creation of the National Dock Labour Board, in turn largely a creation of the wartime need for a regular permanent dock labour force. The aims of the National Dock Labour Scheme were to ensure greater regularity of employment, an adequate supply of labour to facilitate the rapid turn-round of ships, and the speedy transit of goods through the ports. The overall control for the supply of dock labour was taken by the National Dock Labour Board, comprising an equal number of representatives of both employers and unions, and each port or group of ports had its own local Dock Labour Board, similarly constituted.

All dock workers and port employees had to be registered with the NDLB, no dock work could be undertaken by any party not on the register, and the DLB's undertook to supply employers with labour from the register. There thus arose in effect a distinction between the contractual employer (DLB) and the operating employer (the dock and wharf companies): all dockers were employees of the Board until the moment they were hired by a company.

The main achievement of the Scheme was the establishment of guaranteed fall-back pay for registered workers not hired on a particular day. This was originally intended to be 84% of basic rates and the system was widely hailed as the 'end of casualisation'. In practice, the rate of fall-back pay soon failed to keep up with wages drift in the docks and so periodic failure to get hired continued to cause pronounced fluctuations in earnings: to maintain a steady income still depended on daily fortunes at the stand.

The NDLB was a significant step in one respect in that it represented a change in the official recognition of the nature of dock work. In the words of one post-war writer:

"It has come to be realised that the services which they perform ;..... includes not only the handling of cargo but also their constant availability in sufficient number to undertake any work that may arise, whether in fact it arises or not, and their willingness to work intermittently at a varying pace for varying periods of time."

(79)

One of the major effects however was that it made the structure of dock employment even more complicated. The docks themselves were owned by a plethora of bodies: some by Trust Boards (London and Liverpool), Bristol was owned by the municipality, Manchester was a public limited company, and others were run by the British Transport Docks Board. Ownership of the ports was unconnected with the employment of dock labour except in the cases of the PLA, Manchester, and later, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, most of the employment being in the hands of subsidiary companies of shipping groups, or independent wharf companies like Scruttons. According to Wilson, in 1960, there were still 1,500 registered employers providing work for a labour force of 70,000 men. Some employers were huge like the PLA with an average daily requirement of 4,000 men or Scruttons (3,000), others were miniscule being little more than labour-only sub-contractors:

"Of the 400 employers in London alone, the smallest in fact has a single operation a year, requiring six men and, reputedly, operating from a caravan and a telephone kiosk." (80)

At national level, at least four separate organisations, plus their local branches, could take a hand in influencing conditions of employment- the NDLB, the NJIC, the National Association of Port Employers and, often, the Government. It is small wonder that one of the commonest complaints in immediately post-Scheme years was that dock workers did not know "who was gaffer": 50% of the Liverpool University study's sample said that they worked for the Manchester Ship Canal Company, 35% said the Dock Labour Board, and 12% did not know. (81)

The presence of the union on the DLB must have been the last straw which caused Knowles' informant to exclaim -

"We go to see the boss, and we find our trade union leader. We go to see our own trade union official and we find the Government. We don't know here we are."(82)

Full decasualisation, as recommended by the Rochdale Report in 1962, did not come until the implementation in 1967 of the proposals contained in the Devlin Report. Summarised, the Devlin Report of 1965 recommended that dockworkers should eventually give up many of their working practices regarding manning scales, allocation of jobs and so on, in return for permanent employment. Two years later, in September 1967, all dockworkers became employed directly by the individual companies, received a guaranteed weekly wage, and were given a no-redundancy pledge. It is difficult to assess the effects of Devlin as the circumstances of its implementation are complex. One can certainly say that it was not simply the end of the casual system; it contained many elements of a national productivity deal, e.g. emphasis on labour flexibility, and it came at a time of profound technological change for dock work.

Containerisation was threatening the future of traditional dock work and many of the employing companies were moving to container depots outside the registered area and aiming to severely reduce the dock workforce. Thus disputes following Devlin are inevitably bound up with issues of redundancy.

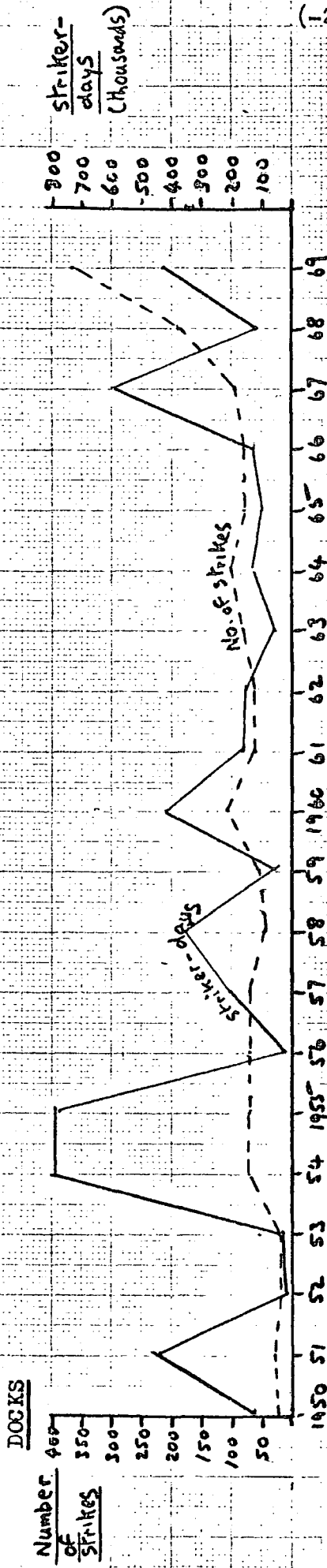


Fig. 6 Strikes in docks industry 1950-69

Source: Ministry of Labour 'Gazette'

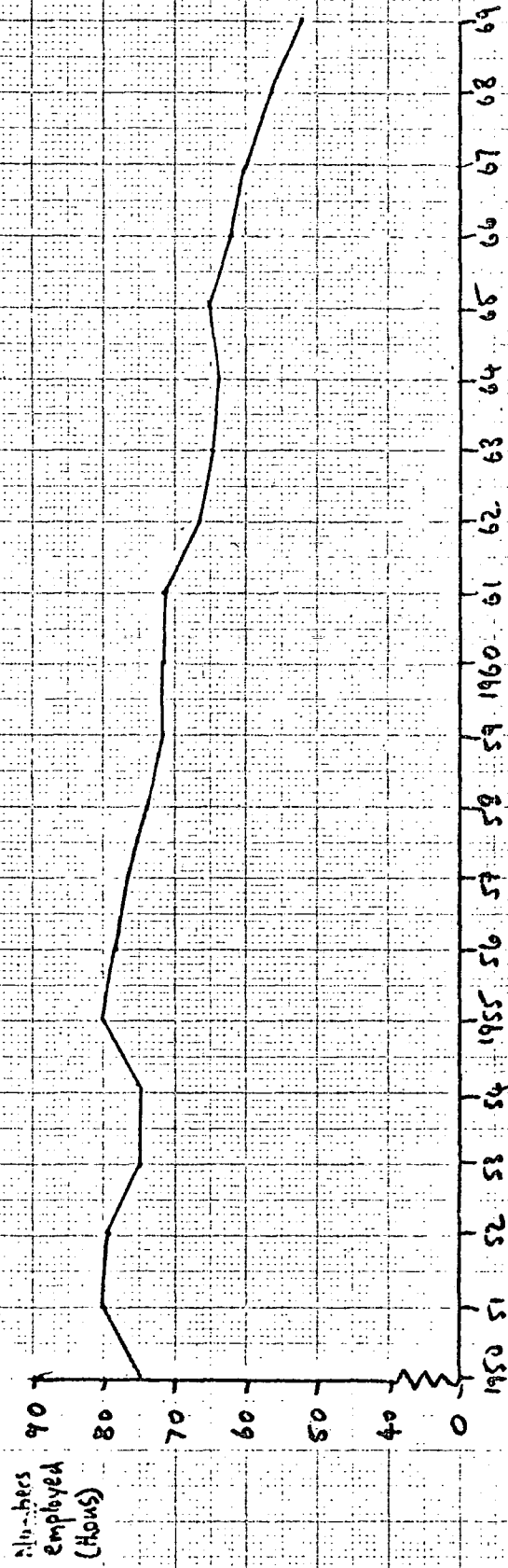


Fig. 7 Dock employment 1950-69

Source: Wilson D.F. (1972) Dockers London: Fontana Appendix 1, p.308.

Strikes in the industry

"Dock strikes rank second only to coal strikes in economic importance since dockers largely regulate the pulse of external trade on the steadiness of which the country's health, in terms of competitiveness and living standards, so much depends."⁽⁸³⁾

The pattern of dock strikes for the period is shown in Figure 6. It can be seen that the overall trend as measured in striker-days does not have the regularity of that displayed by car strikes; periods of extreme militancy alternate with fairly long periods of relative calm. The figures for the number of dock strikes do not really mean very much. In the previous chapter we mentioned Turner's comment on the reporting of strikes before and after decasualisation; and the same point is amplified by Wilson.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Multi-reporting of large strikes is such that the 1970 national dock strike was recorded as more than fifty stoppages.

In addition, there is a long tradition of 'political' strikes in the docks and these are rarely recorded in the figures, from the 'Jolly George' strike in 1919 when dockers refused to load arms to Poland for use against the Bolsheviks, to the stoppages against the industrial relations bills, and including, in 1968, a short stoppage in support of Enoch Powell.

Before the war, dockland's strike record was little worse than that of other industries. As can be seen from Figure 6 it was the years immediately after the setting up of the Scheme that gave the docks the reputation of being strike-prone

and bred a spate of studies, reports, enquiries and journalistic outbursts.

Devlin himself concluded of this period -

"It is impossible to believe that the causes for legitimate dissatisfaction with working conditions were any greater in the post-war period than in the pre-war. The enormous increase in man days lost can best be explained by the fact that men have felt freer to follow their own inclinations to strike, officially or unofficially if they want to." (85)

In other words, the greater security offered by the system of fall-back pay meant that dockers were no longer prevented from striking through fear of being cut out of future work by the foreman. This is a doubtful explanation for two reasons. One is, as we have seen, the Scheme did not really usher in a new age in the industry - the individual still relied for steady earnings on his contacts and reputation at the stand - the extent to which he could 'get a good corner'. Secondly, even if this were true one might expect it to be reflected, given the nature of the organisation of dock work (see below) in a large number of small strikes. In fact, as Wilson points out, and even allowing for the fact that many small downers and stoppages go unreported, the bulk of striker days in a peak year were likely to be made up from one or two single disputes. Wilson suggests that the major strikes in the post-war period can be interpreted as displaying "institutional instability" with neither side recognising each others limits within the new structure of the Scheme, similar upheavals occurring with the changeovers in the Devlin programme. (86)

Further reasons may be indicated when we look at the trend of employment in the industry over the twenty years. As shown in Figure 7, the trend is clearly one of steady contraction. In other words, in addition to the short-term day-to-day insecurity of the stand dock work has been carried out in the climate of long term insecurity and contraction of the labour force.

The other main feature of dock strikes is, that like mines and cars, they are almost totally unofficial. After the war and the unions' integration into the structure of the NDLB, the Transport and General, by far the biggest union in the industry, seems under Deakin to have taken the official line that, as decasualisation was an accomplished fact, there was no longer cause for official dispute. This policy was not quite so baldly stated under later General Secretaries but by then the schism between T. & G. card holders and the officials had become part of the structure of industrial relations in the docks. For this reason, and in view of the union's role on the NDLB, some strikes do not give the appearance of being direct clashes with the employer but rather with the union.

Some explanations of strike-proneness

1) The Community

"This old-fashioned receptiveness to soap-box orators has deep sociological (sic) causes: the dockers' communities have been left in the age of the cloth cap and muffler which so many of them still wear." (87)

It can be seen that here we have a somewhat garbled version of the "traditional proletarian community leading to solidary collectivism" thesis. Like mining towns and villages, dock communities have always given the appearance of geographical and social isolation even from other working-class areas. The economic importance, under the casual system, for every dock worker to live as near to the dockyard gates and the call-stand as possible, plus the geographical position of most docks in relation to the main metropolitan areas, served to create an occupational homogeneity on the one hand and cut the dock communities off from other communities on the other. The prime example of this can be seen in the Isle of Dogs in London which, containing the East India and Milwall Dock and little else, is cut off from the rest of the East End by water. The Liverpool study in the early 50's found that even in Manchester, which is a good deal less 'traditional' than other areas, in having a good deal of mobility of labour between docking and manufacturing, 40% of the sample lived less than a mile from the dockyard gates and another 20% lived 1 - 2 miles away. (88)

There is considerable evidence also of social isolation, that dockers see themselves as different, and this is based on their belief that others accord them low social status. This is likely to reflect a cultural lag from the days of the casual system, when -

"the insecure and unattractive work was historically the last resort of the 'failure in every branch of life, professional, commercial and industrial' (Smith & Nash)." (89)

As Wilson points out there does appear to be a stigma attached to dockwork, often reflected in jokes and protests over dockers supposed high earnings, the implication being that the job isn't worth as much as it's paid and that they have risen 'above their station'. A subjective occupational grading made in 1950 placed the docker twenty-ninth out of thirty groupings, superior only to the road sweeper.⁽⁹⁰⁾ It seems likely that dockers have retaliated through a form of "defensive elitism", setting themselves apart from others.

In Manchester, Woodward and her colleagues found that the group living close to the docks formed a very cohesive social group which, through providing most of the informal leaders both in the docks and the community and regular attenders at union and mass meetings, had an importance out of all proportion to its size and which could not simply be attributed to the fact that it was easier for members to attend meetings.⁽⁹¹⁾ The group however included few union officials, most of whom were recruited from outside or moved away after their appointment.

As with mining communities, these patterns are matched by a strong connection between the community and the conduct of industrial conflicts, and one which is arguably stronger in this industry than anywhere else. The threat to the success of industrial action posed by the existence of a large labour reserve traditionally meant that a successful strike necessarily entailed the participation in terms of solidarity of the whole

dock community, including those men not currently in work. Thus, large or prolonged strikes will again have a social significance in the community. Woodward, for example, found in Manchester that in time of strike the whole family felt involved and that the family of a strike leader would be given high status with his wife and children often assuming leading roles in their own spheres. (92) The families of blacklegs (or "tarrys" - tarrylegs) were accorded universal abuse, which was not just limited to the period of the strike. Dash recalls in his autobiography the time when he was showing an old docker to his seat at a dockers' benefit dinner.

"Suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks. 'I ain't sitting next to him', he stopped pointing to an already occupied seat. Naively I asked, 'Why; does he owe you money?'. 'Why?' he replied scathingly, 'The dirty bastard was a 1912-er' - which meant that the other old fellow had scabbed in the great strike of 1912. And this was now 1960!" (93)

A further area of interaction between community and work lies in the method of recruitment and the strong father-son tradition that still exists. As Wilson points out, the practice has been marked in several casual trades where experience and 'knowing the ropes' is more important than trained skills in making a job pay. (94) In the docks, the tradition had its origins at the call-stand and the necessity of establishing links which would minimise the element of chance. A father would "speak for" his son, introduce him to a gang and teach him the tricks of the trade. As an informant told Young and Wilmott in the Bethnal Green study:

" 'They kicked their sons arses until they did lay the ropes right. The son was the father's mate. He carried the son while he was still learning and the sons later on carried the fathers when they were old.' " (95)

Sometimes gangs were organised round family groups, the eldest being the ganger in charge.

With the establishment of the Scheme and the setting up of the Register this practice became virtually institutionalised to control entry into the industry. The DLB would notify the union of vacancies on the Register and the union would call upon dock branches to submit nominations; by custom the branches would only nominate sons, unless there were not enough to fill the vacancies. In the case of the Stevedores of the 'Blue' union a virtual 100% 'son-only' recruitment policy is practised. Thus Woodward found in her sample that 75% of dockworkers were the sons of dockers and a further 10% had entered docking after marrying a dock worker's daughter. (96)

In 1950 the NDLB calculated that out of 6,425 men recruited in 1947 - 9, 3,369 were the sons of dock workers. (97)

Young and Wilmott go on to demonstrate how the 'speaking for' system which ensured both entry to the Register and regular employment once on it, had permeated the whole Bethnal Green community from getting a job to getting a council house. It was also very strong in other major industries in the community such as market portering (where an alternative method of entry was literally fighting your way in) and in the print. (98)

It would seem from their account that the father-son practice is not limited to the docks, indeed they suspect it may apply to a substantial proportion of the economy of East London. Historically one may see it as having a common economic origin, as an attempt to secure some measure of economic security in the shifting amorphous labour market of nineteenth and early twentieth century London where employment in many trades was casual, mobility between trades was strong and fluctuated with fluctuations in the economy so that many workers were forced to hold two jobs (Ben Tillet, the dockers' leader was also a boot maker and founder of the Boot and Shoe Operatives) and there was almost always a pool of 'reserve' labour. In this, therefore, it contrasts with the father-son tradition in mining - here we have a tradition based on the lack of alternative employment in a one-industry pit-village. In the docks we have an economic practice designed to create some sort of economic security.

However, the pattern of dockland communities has changed over the past twenty years. Dockland areas were some of the worst affected by bomb damage and subsequent rebuilding and rehousing have contributed to the dispersal of the communities. In addition, the introduction of first fall-back pay and subsequently of permanent employment has made it less economically necessary to live near the dock gates. The changing pattern of traffic and the move to down-river ports has meant longer journeys to work as has the post-Devlin practice of transferability within a particular dock system. These changes do not seem to have led to a decline in the docks' strike record.

2) Ideologies and orientations

The docker is, with the miner, the other main candidate for the concept of the 'traditional worker' and several explanations of militancy based on these supposed traditional attitudes and character traits have been put forward. Woodward herself almost suggests a 'dock-personality' model:

"The satisfaction they get from a public display of solidarity may indeed be due to the fact that such action helps them to get rid of the feelings of guilt aroused by selfish struggles on the call-stand.

"They make deliberate efforts to perpetuate traditional habits of thought and behaviour..... One of the dockland traditions which they try to perpetuate is that of conflict between employers and dockworkers..... This may be explained as an example of the operation of the psychological mechanism of projection, which provides a convenient means of discharging the hostility between fellow-workers on an object remote from the contacts of daily life." (99)

H.A. Turner in the superbly-titled article "The Docker and the Sociologist". (100) comments that as a general explanation of the intensity of dock conflicts, this "has a ring of claptrap" about it, and one is inclined to agree with him. Now it is true that the solidarity expressed in dock strikes does appear to contradict the inherently selfish and individually competitive behaviour on the call-stand. Most dockers seem to have been well aware of this and of the degrading nature of the latter (101), but it was also obvious that the situation in the short run was really outside their control - the stand was part of the conditions of employment which one had to accept in order to work in the docks: it seems unlikely that dockworkers have a drive for collective atonement for a social evil which is patently not their fault.

If the situation has any bearing on the matter at all, it is far more likely that dockers would try via the 'effort-bargain' to gain some sort of economic compensation for the indignities and insecurity suffered in the pen.

Similarly, the widespread view that dockworkers are "clinging to the ideology of a bygone era" (Woodward again) has usually been voiced after every significant change in the docks. Now it has been shown that in real terms, the DLB Scheme did not significantly change the structure of dock work and nobody was sooner aware of this than the docker - to him all that had changed was the name of the gaffer. If basic conditions of work had not changed (even to the point of continued failure by the employers to provide washing and similar facilities (102)) and were comparing increasingly badly with conditions in the rest of industry, there was obviously little incentive to 'update' the ideology.

In addition, it seems doubtful if dockworkers had to 'try' to perpetuate a dichotomous conflict model of their workplace. Woodward herself found that the employers' attitudes towards the workforce were not exactly tailored for harmonious industrial relations, as they saw them as lazy, incapable of thinking for themselves, interested only in their wage packets and being easily-led. (103)

One could perhaps generalize and say that the overall conditions of dock employment generate a high level of mutual suspicion, all too often reinforced by perceived practices. Dockers are likely to be suspicious of employers, of union, of preferential treatment of 'blue-eyed boys' and so on, they are thus less likely to accept the words and actions of union officials at face value, and perhaps come to hold the view that the only way to be certain of the outcome of any dispute is to control the situation themselves.

3) Technology

Monotony and boredom are definitely not a problem in the docks, and the degree of underemployment fostered by the call-stand in slack periods made voluntary absenteeism virtually non-existent (among other things, it could mean the break-up of a gang and thus the offender would be liable to face sanctions from other gang-members as well as the employer). The work remains physically dangerous: the London Portworkers Liaison Committee (the main unofficial organisation in the London Docks before the introduction of shop-stewards) quoted figures of 1 man in every 1,500 killed on the job, 1 in 8 seriously injured, and every man attending the medical centre at least four times a year. (104) Fatal accidents occur five times as often as in manufacturing and two thirds of all accidents are due to conditions associated with dock work, such as falling, striking against objects or being hit by objects. (105) Other dangers to health involve continuous

lifting, or handling noxious cargoes. Twenty-four percent of Woodward's Manchester sample were absent through illness for at least two weeks in the year and 13 percent were absent for more than eight weeks. (106)

The work is organised on a gang basis under a foreman or hatch-boss. The size of the gang will vary according to the job and can be from six to ten men. The actual manning scales for each job are laid down in the rule book which, though few workers possess a copy, most are intimately acquainted with and a refusal to start work is almost immediate if only seven men are allocated to an eight-man job. Some of the gang will be permanent men who will follow the foreman around from job to job, others will be selected for the gang via the call-stand (pre-Devlin) for the specific job in hand. Until the implementation of Devlin, when all dockworkers became permanent, there was a great deal of suspicion of permanent men who it was felt could prove to be employers' men in the event of a dispute.

A large number of dockworkers chose to follow a particular employer as casuals but on a regular basis. They would usually be hired as complete gangs (often based on family, religious or other social ties) and were given semi-official preference. These were probably the best paid of the casual workers and were the 'kings of the river', 'flying 18's', 'top-six' gangs who relied on their reputation as fast workers who could be picked for difficult jobs.

The relationship between the foreman and the rest of the gang was entirely voluntary - neither need stick it out beyond the job in hand if they did not get on. This especially applied to the non-regular gang members, the 'floaters' or 'pool men', many of whom rejected regular gang membership on the grounds that it restricted their freedom of choice to go where the big-money jobs were. The last main group were the 'drifters' - men who, having no advantages of influence or physical strength, were the most insecure as they were the last to be taken on at the stand and their wages were correspondingly low.

It can be seen that neither the regular men nor the floaters were likely to be well-disposed towards permanency - the former already had a high measure of security and the latter saw permanency as threatening his freedom of action. Some disputes in the early '60's against a reduction in the proportion of casuals actually persuaded some employers to close their books to 'perms' until the jump to full decasualisation following Devlin. (107)

Freedom of choice was the one aspect of the call-stand system that the dockworkers did not want to lose: under the casual system, foremen had a choice of what men they took on and most dockworkers had a choice of what work they would go after (even if they did not get it) - overtime or non-overtime work, dirty but big-money jobs or straightforward jobs at a lesser rate and so on. The combination of this and the constant

insecurity inherent in the casual system led to the evolution of certain protective practices designed to combine the two conditions, freedom of choice and job security. The basic practice was the so called continuity rule under which, once a worker had been allocated to a job, then that job was his no matter how long it took and the employer could not terminate his employment or switch the man to another job half-way through. (It was this principle that was most threatened by the employers' post-Devlin demands for job flexibility.) A variant of this was division of work into 'overtime' ships and 'non-overtime' ships so that if a worker chose not to work overtime he did not expect the work to suddenly be re-allocated as overtime work half-way through the job. Attempts by employers to ignore the work practices have invariably led to stoppages as much to prevent the erosion of the principle as to ensure the correct rates.

The only job-specialisation on the NDLB registers was into crane-drivers, coal trimmers and checkers or tally-clerks; the rest (89% in the Manchester sample) were lumped together as dock labourers, the assumption being that all dock workers were equally capable of any job notwithstanding the great age range in the dock labour force and the immense variety of cargoes and conditions to be tackled. In actual practice, however, the foremen and regular gang members come to specialise in say, ship versus shed work, loading or unloading, or in a particular type of cargo. Also most of the jobs have their place in a recognised status hierarchy - sweeping the sheds, for example, is low status work usually given to

old or injured men. Thus the structure and organisation of dock work was reflected in the unofficial structure of the workforce rather than the formal structure and there is evidence that the two sometimes clashed. The NDLB did not recognise either the status hierarchy of dock jobs nor the existence of regular gangs (if a foreman was ill or absent a gang would be broken up and unable to re-form for weeks with consequent loss of earnings) : in this way there was no attempt by the official structure to fit jobs to those best suited to do them.

The above comments all refer to the organisation of the workforce rather than to any technology as such as, for most of the docks' history the technology of dock work consisted, with the exception of the crane, of manual labour in its most basic form. However, in the period under discussion, there have been some of the most fundamental changes to affect the docks, mainly in the field of containerisation and bulk-handling.

Containers are basically big boxes that still have to be loaded and unloaded ('stuffed and stripped') but not necessarily at the dockside. They can be loaded by the exporting firm in one country and unloaded by the importing firm in the other country, having passed through two sets of docks in the meantime. Such methods were immediately seen by the dockers as a large-scale redundancy threat as only a handful men are required to unload a container from a ship and onto a lorry; the most labour-intensive part of dock-work, that of packing and unpacking, looked like being taken right out of the port.

Containers also necessitated the rebuilding of docks around the new technology. Old style docks were built round the requirements of traditional dockwork, with the distance from ship to shed governed by how far a man could carry goods on his back or push them by truck. Containers, however, need far more space and sheds are dispensable, since the box itself protects the goods. The new ports need heavy lifting gear, rail and road terminals, and might also contain a depot for stuffing and stripping part-loads but increasingly this is being done inland.

The dockworkers fears seem well justified: the 1967 McKinsey survey estimated that with full containerisation and other cargo-handling techniques the dock labour force could be reduced by 90% in the ensuing ten years (108). It is estimated that half the 108 general cargo berths in the Pool of London - the big users of traditional dock labour - will be closed by the late-70's (109). They are being replaced by container ports situated outside the areas of traditional dockland - at Tilbury and further down the estuary, at Felixstowe for the growing east coast trade. A Tilbury multi-user berth can now turn round 14 ships a week employing only 26 dockers and, since Devlin, such ports are increasingly using non-Scheme, non-registered labour. Thus the dock strikes of the last quarter of the period under discussion must be viewed against the long-term threat of redundancy (see again Figure 7).

4) Payment and bargaining systems

It is fairly impossible to compare average earnings in docking with those in other industries. Knowles and Romanis⁽¹¹⁰⁾ calculated that wages and attendance money, plus guaranteed make-up, roughly corresponded with average earnings in other industries but point out that the average per man on the (pre-Devlin) payroll includes people wholly without work, consistently high earners, consistently low earners, and a middle group whose earnings fluctuate considerably from week to week.

The docks as a whole have been noted for an extremely complicated piecework system (although northern docks such as Liverpool have tended to be based more on time rates) which acts to provide a good deal of potential occasions for dispute. Piecework is really an incentive for individual effort and yet dockwork is organised around the collectivity of the gang: members of regular gangs are likely to know each others capabilities and, as we have seen, older men will be carried by younger men and the gangs earnings averaged out. Where gang members are unknown to each other (now more likely since the post-Devlin introduction of transferability) there may be less willingness to tolerate slow working on the part of an individual member.

Secondly, because the speed of loading and discharging cargoes will depend on the facilities of the port, the unions have always insisted on local autonomy, with the result that,

apart from coal trimmers, there exist no national rates for particular cargoes, nor any co-ordination of piecework scales in different ports. The determining factor in earnings is the specific cargo handled, not the amount of effort or time expended. Each cargo has its particular rate, making it extremely difficult for any one person to commit all the rates to memory, which, plus the fact that the cargoes come stowed in a variety of ways in a variety of differently constructed ships, means that arguments over rates are extremely frequent. The progress of this sort of 'hatch bargaining' is well described by Dash:

"On arrival at the place of work aboard ship and quay the ship's gangs remove the hatches of the hold, take a good look at the cargo and note how it has been stowed; they then make the necessary division of labour and commence work. After an hour or two they sum up what the yield will be on a piecework momentum in conjunction with the rate for the commodity they are handling. If the manner in which the cargo has been stowed creates obstacles to a piecework output, they will stop the job, sum up what a day's output would yield over and above the time rate, the agreed minimum hourly rate, and if the yield is too small they will call the ship's foreman and tell him that the job warrants extra men, plus money to make it pay on a piecework basis." (111)

As Wilson points out it is at this point that the gang is in a very powerful bargaining position because they know that no other gang will take the work on in their place, and they probably will also know whether the ship-owner is pressing for a fast turn-around. A compromise may eventually be reached after negotiations between the gang as a bargaining unit and the labour superintendent and employers' area committee.

Failure to agree on the spot to a suitable rate is likely to result in a walk-out, which will be joined by all the gangs remotely connected with the job.. Some examples of the sort of problems faced by dockworkers for which a suitable rate must somehow be arrived at are given in the 1951 Leggett Report:

a consignment of drums of formaldehyde, some of which had leaked during the voyage, filling the hold with fumes and causing discomfort to men whilst working;

work on a consignment of cotton-seed cake in bags, awkwardly stowed, in which flies and insects had bred;

work on a consignment of 250 tons of spelter, above which was stowed 100 tons of peanut butter. Heat from the ship's propeller had caused the butter to run onto the spelter, making discharge difficult. (112)

A further point to make about such hatch-bargaining is that, in the absence of any national rates, the solution can only be fixed locally. Dockworkers can thus make the most of the particular circumstances without at once coming up against the broader issues of industry-wide negotiations. In addition, the very fact of daily hiring of gangs meant daily payment and thus daily occasion for dispute over rates.

What is most remarkable about this daily hatch bargaining is that again it is conducted via the unofficial structure of the gang as a bargaining unit. A union official will be

called in to ratify the later stages of negotiations but is really only an intermediary between the gang and the employers' area committee. Any resulting industrial action will also be unofficial.

Again we see here the combination of an extremely high level of unofficial action with 100% trade unionism - you cannot become a dockworker without first becoming a trade union member. The breakdown in terms of members of the dockworkers unions is as follows:

Table 10 Union membership of dockworkers in 1965 (113)

<u>union</u>	<u>dockworkers</u>
Transport & General	56,000
N. Ass. of Stevedores & Dockers (Blue Union)	7,500
Watermen & Lightermen	4,000
Scottish T. & G.	2,000
General & Municipal W.U.	1,200

It can be seen that the overwhelming majority of dockworkers are in the T.G.W.U. In spite of this, dockers only represent 6% of the T. & G's. total membership, frequently leading to complaints that the union leaders have not got the interests of dockers at heart but are more interested in other groups. The root of these accusations must lie in the change in the union's policy after the setting up of the Scheme. All the major pre-war strikes, including those of political origin like the 'Jolly George', were official. With the representation of

the union on the NDLB however, the Transport and General's post-war policy was for many years based on the argument that dockers had the best machinery in the country for dealing speedily with disputes. (Disputes over national agreements go straight to the National Conciliation Committee, those over local rules to the local Port Negotiating Committee). In the unions' view, earnings were high, wages were semi-guaranteed and they saw no reason to sponsor official stoppages. Not surprisingly, this standpoint created a degree of alienation between the rank and file dockworkers and the union executive. In the Manchester study for example, criticism of the union came second only to criticism of wages.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ Even Devlin concluded his remarks on the T.G.W.U.:

"Has the policy of the Transport and General inclined too far towards the employers? Has it been less militant than the ordinary rank and file worker would wish it to be? The record suggests that it has." (115)

There have been two main results of this situation. One concerns the position of the NASDU (Blue union) who in the early 1950's attempted to expand its membership at the invitation of disaffected T. & G. members in the northern ports. Since the 1955 TUC ruling, however, the Stevedores have had their negotiating rights restricted to London. Here, however, they have been in the vanguard of most of the large strikes. There may be several reasons for this; the leadership has traditionally been on the left of the trade union movement, but in fact officials have very little power vested in them, being almost elected spokesmen of the members rather than

union officials in the traditional sense. In addition, they have been always anxious to preserve their independence from the T. & G. Stevedores usually earn more than dockers mainly because they are traditionally employed in high-rate jobs and areas. The area of demarcation differs - in the Royal Group some ships are 'Stevedores' Ships' and some 'Dockers' Ships', in other docks it may be ship work versus shore work. In any case it is rarely total, it being common for stevedores and dockers to work in the same gangs.

The much-publicised inter-union disputes of the early part of the period existed mainly at official level rather than being reflected in any long-term animosity between rank and file members who, in fact, will invariably come out in sympathy with each others' strike. To give an example, in 1962 when the T. & G. attempted to impose a one-union closed shop in northern ports with the employers' backing, T. & G. members in the docks operated a policy of non-cooperation with their own leadership by refusing to show their union cards at check points as requested by the union, or to accept employment where stevedores were being discriminated against, so that after ten days the management withdrew their support.

The other main result of the lack of involvement by the union official structure at dock level was the rise to importance of the Port Liaison Committees, the semi-permanent unofficial bodies set up by rank and file members of both unions as the organising force behind the major post-war disputes, acting as forerunners to the present shop-stewards committees,

preventing grievances being forgotten and providing continuity in the handling of disputes. The fact that, being a rank and file organisation, a committee representative was nearly always on hand when a grievance arose, compared unfavourably with the remote bureaucratic nature of the T. & G., as did the practice of holding open air meetings at the dock gates in the lunch hour with the T. & G. branch meetings at awkward hours in the evenings. It was these liaison committees rather than the unions proper that became the frequent target of media campaigns in the 1960's, not least because of the preponderance of Communist Party members, including Dash of course, and other left wingers among the leading personnel. On the subject of militants, Wilson⁽¹¹⁶⁾ concludes that "the number of politically committed dockers is few" and even if their influence exceeds their numbers, it must be through their readiness to take up the never-ending supply of grievances that arise through normal daily dock working that leads to the same individuals being re-elected time and again to posts on the committees; as Wilson adds "at a time when branch life was moribund, many rank and file activists gave valuable time and energy to making unionism work at the grass roots". Also, the banning from office of Communist Party members by the T. & G. left only unofficial structures open to them. Despite their militant demands, however, the liaison committees were never in the position of negotiating with the employers; this function remained firmly in the hands of the union officials.

Following the recommendations in the Devlin Report, the T & G and the other dock unions instituted a system of shop-steward organisation in the docks from 1967 onward. There rapidly arose shop-steward committees, some of them indistinguishable from the old liaison committees.

Conclusions

Again we find a combination of factors which could have an effect on dockers' militancy.

Historically, the insecurity of the casual system made solidarity an economic necessity both within the work group and within the community. That the work group is the more important of the two is demonstrated by the fact that the dispersal of many of the older dockland communities has had little effect on the industry's strike record. The casual system also created an atmosphere of perpetual uncertainty and suspicion, the only antidote to which appeared to be to act collectively to control the situation as much as possible.

The organisation of management and workers facilitated a dichotomous conflict view of the docks. The two are spatially and socially separate entities. Not only is movement between them virtually unknown but also unthinkable (compared to say engineering where movement from the floor to junior management has been a feature). In addition, dockers are awarded a relatively low social status by non-dockers, and dock employers (even among employers) a fairly high one. Feelings of hostility

and distrust across this gap appear to be mutual.

The industry is characterised on all levels by a contrast between the official and the unofficial employment and bargaining structures. The practices of job allocation, day to day bargaining at the hatch, and rank and file organisations for guiding the progress of industrial actions, coexist with the unions' position on the NDLB and the fact of 100% trade union membership.

Perhaps the underlying theme beneath this brief study of the industry is the dockers perpetual lack of security. There are two aspects to this, one being fluctuations in pay. The uncertainties of the casual system meant that, even with the NDLB fall back pay the dockers luck at the stand meant the difference between a fat and a thin wallet, not only in terms of getting hired or not, but in terms of the type of job allocated. The enormous variety of work in turn created a very complicated piecework system which constantly threw up occasions for dispute, many of them at the hatch where the gang's bargaining power was greatest. Decasualisation, plus containerisation seem likely to all but abolish these in time but are unlikely to immediately reduce dock militancy as both these developments have led to a dramatic increase in long-term insecurity through the threatened running down of the traditional dock labour force.

The combination of the technological changes affecting the industry with the changes in the conditions of employment

may, as in mining, be leading to changes in the pattern of dock disputes. 1970 saw the first official national docks' strike since 1926.

As a postscript, to get an idea of the relative importance of dock strikes, a 'Financial Times' analysis in June 1969 of delays in the loading of 3,000 tons of cargo to one ship showed that the operation took a week and a total of 185 hours were lost. Of these, only 20 were due to unofficial stoppages, the rest being due to rain, congestion and administrative holdups. (117)

SHIPBUILDING

A note on the engineering industries

As with the previous section, the use of official sources can produce some difficulties of measurement. The major SIC category in use until 1959 was "engineering, shipbuilding and electrical goods" which was subdivided into shipbuilding and ship-repairing, engineering and machinery, and electrical engineering. To determine whether any one of these industries (which again differ considerably in their working conditions) is responsible for the high strike-militancy of the category as a whole it is proposed to follow the same procedure as advocated for the docks industry.

A comparison of the average number of striker-days per year over the period is given in Table 11:

Table 11.

Mean annual striker-days (in thousands)
for engineering and shipbuilding 1950 - 69

(Source: DEP 'Gazette')

<u>shipbuilding & ship-repair</u>	<u>Mechanical engineering</u>	<u>Electrical engineering</u>
338	391	185

It would seem on the face of it that shipbuilding and engineering are almost equally as strike-prone; if, however, the figures are balanced against the size of workforce so as to indicate the relative strike-militancy of employees in the respective industries (for ten years only) we get:

Table 12

Median range of striker-days per 1,000 employees
in engineering and shipbuilding 1959-69

<u>Shipbuilding & ship-repair</u>	<u>Mechanical engineering</u>	<u>Electrical engineering</u>
1000-1500	100-250	100-250

(Source: DEP 'Gazette' 1960-70)

It can be seen that while none of the sectors is particularly non-militant, it is shipbuilding that emerges as leader in the strike-militancy stakes (with the same median score as the docks over the same period).

This finding is consistent with the calculations of other authors regarding the period before 1959: thus the Geddes Report gave an annual average figure for days lost (per 1,000 employees) of 1,862 for the period 1949-58 (compared with 263 for engineering and vehicles combined) (118) and for the shorter period 1950 - 56 Parkinson gives an annual average of 970 days (compared to 84 for engineering alone). (119)

Shipbuilding

The shipbuilding industry is essentially a labour-intensive construction or assembly industry. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the cost of a finished ship represents the cost of bought-in materials, and the majority of costs incurred within the yard itself represent labour charges.

Apart from the initial planning stages, the work of building a ship is traditionally separated into two main parts, the actual shipbuilding stage, employing the 'blacksquad' trades of steelworkers - shipwrights, platers, drillers, welders and so on, and the consecutive stage of fitting-out employing plumbers, painters, electricians and similar trades. The important point about these occupations is that they are nearly all represented by a specific group of workers each with its own craft tradition and organisation. Two thirds of all manual workers in the industry are skilled craftsmen and the industry is further defined as a craft industry by the fact that, in the majority of cases, each ship still represents a unique end-product, the construction of which presents a different set of tasks and problems from those presented by the

one before. Thus, despite a move towards standardisation and specialisation in recent years, it is still possible for a single yard to build a ferry, followed by an oil tanker, followed by a container ship. As can be seen in Table 13, the economic state of the industry since the war has not been very healthy, with little or no growth:

Table 13

Annual U.K. output of completed merchant ships
at selected 5-year intervals

(Source: Eldridge (1968) (120))

	<u>1,000 gross tons</u>
1948	1,213
1953	1,250
1958	1,464
1963	1,096

This stagnation of output has been coupled with a steady decline in the workforce, which is demonstrated in Table 14, below and in Figure 9.

Table 14

Employment in shipbuilding, shiprepairing
and marine engineering 1950 -1968 (121)

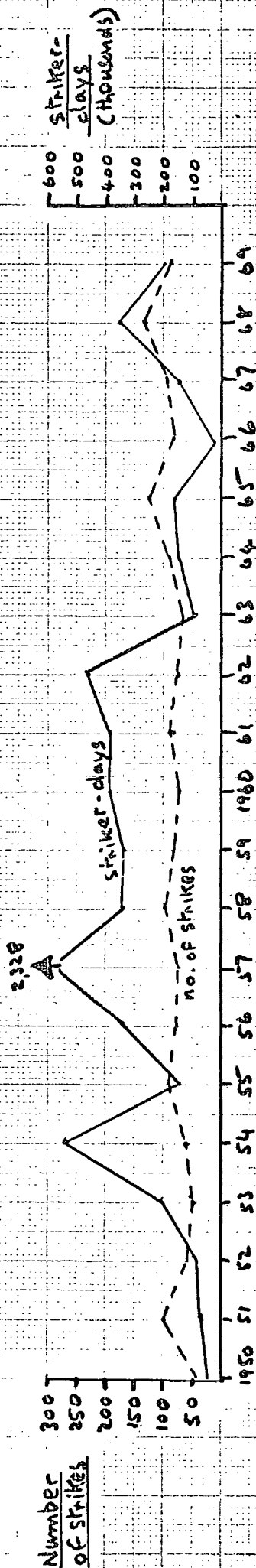
	<u>numbers employed</u> (in thousands)
1950	262
1955	275
1959	267
1960	253
1961	243
1962	235
1963	211
1964	203
1965	205
1966	200
1967	196
1968	188

It can be seen that there has been a drop in the workforce of some eighty thousand employees over the latter ten-year period (Geddes quotes a similar 30% decline for the period 1958-65), giving shipbuilding every right to the label of declining industry.

In addition the industry remains heavily concentrated in certain geographical areas, the most important of which are still the Clyde and the North-East, followed by Merseyside; Barrow-in Furness, Southampton and Belfast. In these areas, shipbuilding has for long been and still is one of the major sources of employment, accounting for an average of 6% of the total employment in any one of these areas (and ranging from 2.4% in the upper Clyde to 15% in Barrow).⁽¹²²⁾ Thus the employment problems of a declining industry are experienced even more keenly by the working population of these areas.

The stagnant record of the British industry led the Government to set up the Geddes Committee, as a result of whose report in 1966 there have been moves towards standardisation of ship design, specialisation in individual yard production and a general rationalisation via the mergers of several independent yards into larger consortia. Such moves were

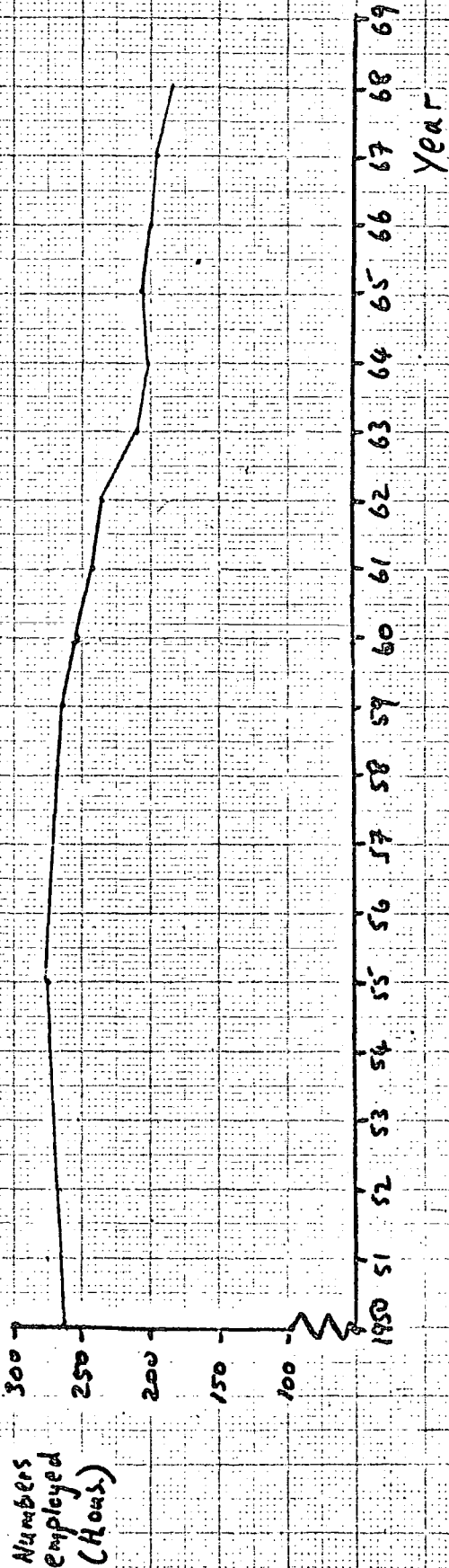
SHIPBUILDING & SHIP-REPAIR



Source: Ministry of Labour 'Gazette'

Fig. 8. Strikes in shipbuilding & ship-repair

1950-59



(Source: as for Table 14.)

Fig. 9. Employment in shipbuilding & ship-repair

1950-69

seen as necessary, given the fact that the market situation of any one shipbuilding firm is based on international rather than domestic competition. At the time of writing the proposals for nationalisation of the industry would seem to indicate that the post-Geddes structural changes were insufficient to enable the industry to withstand the international economic recession. (123)

Strikes in the industry

The trend of strike patterns in shipbuilding over the period is shown in Figure 8. The main pattern seems from the evidence to be a few largish disputes occurring at fairly regular intervals but interspersed with a great many small, short strikes, the latter being the 'typical' shipbuilding strike. Cameron's study of the North-East yards in the post-war period (1946-61) for example, showed that they participated in three national stoppages in 1954, 1957 (all workers) and 1960 (apprentices only) but that the typical strike remained the small stoppage. (124) This is reinforced by Eldridge's figures for the same area over roughly the same period which show that, of non-demarcation disputes (83% of all recorded strikes in the area) nearly 69% were settled within three days and 61% involved less than 100 men. Demarcation disputes tended to be slightly bigger and take slightly longer to settle. (125)

Demarcation disputes are historically associated with craft-based industries faced with a declining or fluctuating

demand for labour and, as such, have long been noted in shipbuilding. As Eldridge shows, however, whether they take the form of horizontal demarcation (craft versus craft) or vertical demarcation (craft versus unskilled labour) their proportion of the total number of strikes is fairly small. This is demonstrated in Table 15 below, which further suggests that their incidence is declining.

Table 15

Reasons given for striking in shipbuilding (126)

	<u>1949-60</u> (N.E. only)	<u>1960-64</u> (all regions)	<u>1965-70</u> (all regions)
wages	45%	>50%	64%
demarcation	15%	<10%	10%
other	40%	40%	26%
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

Whatever the reasons given for striking, it appears that shipbuilding unions are more than usually prepared to give support, even if retrospectively, to their members, resulting in a high level of official stoppages. According to Geddes, official strikes resulted in 54% of working days lost in shipbuilding compared with 6% in the docks, 2% in mining and 51% in engineering and vehicles. (127)

The post-Geddes changes in the industry may be affecting strike patterns in ways similar to those we have noted in other industries. The formation of consortia resulted in nearly all workers in a given region having only one or two employers to deal with - Swan Hunter on the Tyne and U.C.S. in

the Clyde being two of the more important examples, Also the terms of many productivity agreements reached in the late 60's frequently ruled out many of the local bargaining practices used by specific workgroups, which made it all the more important for their unions to secure gains from wider-based negotiations. The result of these changes could again be a move to a generally wider-based industrial action. As Brown and his colleagues point out in respect of North-East yards, seven months after the Swan Hunter productivity agreement had been signed in 1968, June 1969 saw the spectacle of all 3,000 members of the Boilermakers Society on the Tyne stopping work for a week over a bonus payment, and in the February of the following year, representatives of all the unskilled labour on the river met for the first time as one body to demand a wage increase, both actions being in direct contrast to the former pattern of fragmented local stoppages and demands. (128) Since 1969 there have been a number of further large-scale strikes on both Tyne and Wear.

Some explanations of strike-proneness

1) The Community

As has been said, shipbuilding accounts for an average of 6% of direct employment in the main areas of the industry's location and the actual concentration of employment within these areas is considerably denser than this. The catchment area for each yard remains extremely local, producing "Shipbuilding" towns like Wallsend, Jarrow and Clydebanks. In their study of Wallsend, Brown and his colleagues found that over 35% of the occupied male population were in shipbuilding

and ship-repair, (129) and over a third of Robertson's sample of Clyde shipyard workers lived immediately adjacent to the yard (130).

The Wallsend study (131) provides a detailed picture of a shipyard town, in which, despite post-war decline in the industry, shipbuilding retains what Brown calls 'cultural dominance'. Shipbuilding was named as the dominant industry by nearly all the inhabitants of Wallsend sampled and the town was found to contain a great many close and overlapping networks of kin, neighbours, friends and workmates within which shipbuilding workers formed an occupational community. Many of the different trades in the yard ran outings, social functions, benefit clubs and so on, and the overall impression was that work was an important topic of leisure-time conversation. Kinship networks again seem important in recruitment patterns to the industry - as many as a third of apprentices had fathers in the industry and only 8% had neither relatives nor friends already in the industry. There was little mobility in or out of the community, with the result that the majority of the adult population had shared the pre-war experiences of poverty and massive unemployment. As Brown remarks:

"If, as has been suggested, shared deprivations are a potent factor in the growth of a working-class community with the values of mutual aid and neighbourliness, then one would expect this to be typical of Wallsend." (132)

Six out of ten inhabitants of Wallsend saw the community as being of one class and over 60% of the sample saw themselves,

friends, neighbours and 'most people' to be working-class.

Thus, like mining and the docks, shipbuilding seems ideally suited to support the Kerr and Siegel thesis. It is however subject to the reservations that have already been expressed and, moreover, as Brown and his colleagues demonstrate (and as will be examined below) the homogeneous nature of the community is rarely matched by the nature of the employment situation which tends to be fragmented, localised and craft-centred..

In addition, the shipbuilding communities have been subject to the same pressures of change as have the docks, resulting in a trend towards longer travelling distances between home and work. This means that the community and the workforce are no longer synonymous: by no means all the shipyard workers living in Wallsend worked in the Wallsend yard, and only 38% of the workforce in the Wallsend yard actually lived in Wallsend (Cousins and Brown (1970)).

2) Ideologies and orientations

If shipbuilding workers display a greater readiness to take strike action over grievances than do workers in other industries and if

"when strikes do happen in shipbuilding, everybody involved stops work and there is no need for pickets" (133)

are these reflections of an underlying solidary collectivism?

Brown and his team suggest not. They found little hostility toward the firm (only 3% saw it as a bad firm to work for) although less than 40% felt that management had favourable attitudes towards the men and two-thirds felt that the firm could afford to pay more in wages. Only 5% expressed the general view that strikes achieved anything. (134) The greatest divergence from the 'traditional proletarian' pattern however, is that, far from being what Kerr and Siegel call 'mass grievances' -

"the same grievances at the same time, at the same place and against the same people.' (135)

shipyard grievances are likely to affect specifically one craft or work-group and may frequently be implicitly or explicitly in conflict with the interests of other trades in the yard.

Similar divergence occurs in their societal models - shipyard workers seem to display a somewhat complex variety, with only a third of Brown's sample having a two-class model of society (and not all of these being a conflict model) (136) the majority of the remainder seeing society as some sort of hierarchy with themselves in the bottom group and a sizeable minority seeing it as a hierarchy in which other groups were below them.

There thus seems to be an implicit contradiction between social models which shipyard workers may hold firstly as citizens of Wallsend ("All one class") and secondly in the yard ("society as a hierarchy") - different definitions are

used in different situations. This is similar to the conclusions reached by Mann who says that the working class is more likely to support values at odds with the prevailing consensus view of society -

"if these values relate either to concrete everyday life or to vague populist concepts" (e.g. 'working people') "than if they relate to an abstract political philosophy. Working class individuals also exhibit less internal consistency in their values than middle-class people." (137)

It is therefore perhaps the case that, as citizens of Wallsend, the men see the town in homogeneous class terms, because that is how it is, and how they experience it in terms of 'concrete everyday life'. Their other main source of concrete everyday experience, however, is in the workplace where, instead of homogeneity they experience considerable diversity of situation in the highly specific and gradated occupational structure.

A similar discrepancy between the concrete and the general is displayed in attitudes to strikes. As already quoted, only 5% of the Swan Hunter sample agreed with the general principle that strikes achieved anything, yet more than half of those with actual experience of being on strike approved of that particular strike. (138)

For consciousness to become action it must be mediated through the institutional context of the actor. The context of the shipyard consists of a very complex work situation with a multiplicity of grades and divisions and, as will be seen, a correspondingly complex trade union structure. Because of the immediacy of the situation and its importance to the

worker in the earning of his living, this context is powerful enough to fragment on a day to day basis any consciousness of similarity with other shipyard workers which the individual may possess and to which the community might play a supporting role.

Thus it is conceivable that the view of the yard held by a majority of workers coincides with and provides grounds for acceptance of the dominant consensus view of society, namely society as a status-hierarchy.

It is arguable, however, that because of the essentially economic basis of the experience of the yard, perceptions based on that experience can swiftly be transcended. All shipyard workers experience the employer as employer and this makes possible, as we saw in coalmining, industrial action on a variety of levels: all boilermakers on a particular shift; all boilermakers, all skilled workers, all yard workers, all shipbuilding workers, depending on the common elements in the situation. Thus in 1972 when the prospect of mass redundancy threatened all workers in the Upper Clyde yards, the response was a form of occupation of the yards by all workers, skilled and unskilled. (139)

In this latter situation, there are factors making for homogeneity which, while always present, now emerge as concretely relevant. One of these is the continuing consciousness of the industry's history remarked on by several observers. Although the pre-war depression can only have been experienced by a

minority of those comprising the industry's workforce over the last decade, knowledge of the period is handed on and perpetuated in the yard, despite the intervening wartime period of relative prosperity. As a shipyard manager told Parkinson:

"When I started my apprenticeship I hadn't even heard of the Depression. But after the first week at work I knew all about it, about the dole years, making the meals out of bones and all the rest of it." (140)

3) Technology

As has already been stated, shipbuilding is essentially the construction and assembly of a unique end product. Every ship presents its own problems and the names of past ships built in the yard are still remembered and referred to in argument and general discussion among yard workers⁽¹⁴¹⁾. The end product is visible to the workers at virtually every stage of its construction and the various stages themselves are recognised and often marked with ritual; the most obvious example being the launching which, although there is usually no official halt to work in the yard, is usually attended by not only most of the men, but also their wives and relations.⁽¹⁴²⁾

Following the planning of the ship, the construction work can be divided into 'shop' and 'ship' work. After the selection of the steel from stock and its initial preparation, it goes to the prefabrication sheds where it is cut, shaped and welded into sub-assembly units. These are then transferred to the building berth where they are erected, faired, and welded together to form the hull. This completed, the hull is then

launched and towed to the fitting-out berth where machinery, furnishings and fittings are installed.

It can be seen that many of the divisions among the work-force mentioned in previous sections follow from this production sequence. There is firstly the main division between 'blacksquad' trades (i.e. metal-workers) and fitting-out trades, and secondly, within the former, between 'shop' men and 'ship' men. It is this last group which regards itself as doing shipbuilding proper. An additional distinction between these three groups is that their work is performed in geographically separate parts of the yard. Thirdly there is the division between skilled craftsmen who have been apprenticed into their trade, and unskilled workers including the 'mates' or 'helpers' of the former. Lastly, there may be perceived divisions within the actual blacksquad trades based on unofficial skill hierarchies within a particular trade where, for example, some plating jobs are regarded as more skilled than others.

This structural division of labour becomes an important factor in bargaining because of the nature of the demand for the specific skills, which in shipbuilding tends to be sequential - the finishing point for one trade being very often the starting point for another. Because, as has already been noted, shipbuilding still consists of individual unit construction with planning geared to the ship in hand, the labour demand for the next ship can rarely be predicted. This uncertainty is even more marked in the fitting-out trades,

in that a liner and a tanker, while requiring essentially similar skills in hull-fabrication, are very different in terms of their fitting-out requirements.

There has, therefore, always been a strong casual element in the supply of unskilled labour, even in time of relative prosperity (and including in the past, use of the call-stand similar to that for dock labour).. For skilled labour the vulnerability to such fluctuations is more marked as, when laid off on completion of a ship, they cannot easily look for work outside the industry as shipyard skills tend to be non-transferable to other industries. We therefore find several features of the labour force and its practices which are similar to those examined in the docks, both originating in the management of uncertainty.

There are similarities in labour market strategy. Some 'floaters' or 'cowboys' choose to move round the yards following the work or money, others aim at becoming regular men (or 'royals') in the yard where they are known by building up contacts and a reputation for good working. These men are the last to be laid off by the yard and frequently do not seek alternative work, it being understood that they will be invited by the yard to return on the resumption of work. (143)

Because an early completion of a ship can lead to early dismissal, 'going-slow' can be an important method of job-protection. As one worker put it to Stokes:

"There's six months work on this ship and we'll be able to stretch it out to possibly nine months, so you don't need to worry about the sack for a good while." (144)

Many of these practices are not just the result of shop-floor militancy however, but are frequently directed by the foreman, who while usually having risen 'from the ranks', is technically on the staff. The foreman is still the traditional recruiter of labour (cf. the docks) with whom personal contacts are still held to be an important factor in getting and holding jobs. (145) Because of his position, the foreman is able to regulate the supply of labour and may even have a rota for men having time off. (146)

The main area of job-protection, however, is in the practice of demarcation. As we have already seen, there are two main types of demarcation - firstly the 'horizontal' separation of work-tasks (e.g. fitter, plater, plumber, electrician) which are usually upheld fairly strictly, and secondly the 'vertical' distinction between skilled and unskilled (e.g. the craftsman and his 'helper') which Cousins (147) found were, in practice, regularly ignored by the men, being used when necessary rather than as permanent restrictions - this would seem to point to their essential protective rather than 'restrictive' origin.

One of the main areas where insistence on demarcation has been seen as necessary concerns technological change in the

shipyards. The deep hostility noted by all observers of the industry between shipwrights and platers is generally held to stem from the change from wooden to steel hulls which threatened the shipwrights (formerly woodworkers) jobs.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ Since then other changes in construction techniques have been perceived as threats by different crafts. One of the more important of these was the switch from plate-by-plate construction to prefabrication of welded hulls, which greatly exacerbated the platers/shipwrights distinction and also led to a decline in the demand for riveters and an ensuing insistence on strict demarcation between riveters' and welders' work. Such practices are obviously clear attempts to prevent the crafts which are on the 'up' as it were from taking more work from those crafts on the 'down' than is seen as inevitable.

Demarcation boundaries are vague and vary from yard to yard, so that the practice cannot be seen entirely as a product of multi-unionism - shipwrights and platers for example are now members of the same union (the Boilermakers).

The other main protective practices are the frequent use of overtime restrictions (such as 'all or none' rules - where overtime is offered to all members of a craft group or no-one at all) and, of course, restrictions on entry to the trade via apprenticeship. One result of apprenticeship systems, whatever the industry, is that the skilled man once out of his time, tends to have his occupation fixed for the remainder of his working life if he is to remain in skilled work. This is particularly true of shipbuilding because the skills are so

industry-specific.

We have already seen why shipbuilding can be regarded as a craft technology; Brown and his colleagues go further and, using Stinchcombe's term; point out that the industry is characterised by craft administration (149). Instead of a formal organisational structure of decision-making, many of the detailed decisions about how the job should be done are made by the shipyard worker himself who does not have his job specified in detail by the management. Even basic management functions are delegated to lower staff levels - thus, as we have seen, it is the foreman who commonly makes decisions over hiring and firing.

Most groups have considerable autonomy and control over their jobs (and this autonomy is both maintained by and itself facilitates job-protective practices). The craft group is thus both an economically motivated interest-group and also a moral community in that it makes its own rules and values. The social cohesion of the group is both induced by socialisation (apprentices were found to have less hostile attitudes to management than others (150)) and also the fact that the achievement of the craft group's goals depends on the mutual activity of all group members. Such goals include both security of employment and maintenance of earnings, and the achievement of these goals will necessitate industrial action both against management, and in competition with other groups. The willingness and ability to take such action will vary from

group to group and Brown suggests that the most powerful groups in the yard will be those with a central role in the productive process who could quickly bring the yard to a standstill, those who are the most numerous, and those groups with a strong commitment to the industry (e.g. because of the non-transferability of their skills)⁽¹⁵¹⁾. As proof of this hypothesis Brown and his team found that the production welders, who satisfied all three criteria, plus possessing an absence of internal differentiation, were the highest paid group in the yard.⁽¹⁵²⁾

This implies that workers are able to perceive their market situation very clearly and act upon it. As further evidence, Cameron found that different craft groups would time their claims to coincide with that point in production when their skills were most highly in demand and the local level of unemployment was low. The expectation was that under these conditions management would readily agree to the claim; if agreement was not forthcoming the men would come out.⁽¹⁵³⁾

This sequential timing of sectional demands on the part of individual craft groups is a further indication of what Brown and his team term their 'diversity' of interest and outlook, and it can be seen from the above brief account that the technology of shipbuilding is the basis for much of this diversity. It does however also contain factors contributing to a homogeneity of interest at a basic level. One is, as has already been mentioned, that all shipyard workers

experience the employer as such. They also commonly experience working conditions in the industry which are in the main dangerous, dirty and noisy and exposed to the weather. Brown and his team found that the majority of shipyard workers regard shipbuilding as a dangerous industry, a view based largely on their own experience of accidents, and that questions of safety and physical working conditions provided the most common platform for a united approach to management by the yard shopstewards' committee. (154) The other unifying factor is that the end product is unique and continuously visible and participation in its construction is done in a way that is meaningful and understood. This degree of job-satisfaction and the possibility of identification with the product, plus the specificity of the skills, makes the shipyard worker see himself as a shipyard worker, and he may come to identify his fortunes with those of the yard or the industry.

4) Payment and bargaining systems

Payment systems in the shipyard are notoriously complicated. (155) The traditional divisions between metal-workers who were theoretically on piece rates and the finishing trades who were on time-rates has been constantly modified so that, frequently, blacksquad trades could be on semi-time rates, some fitting-out trades are on PBR, and others are getting bonuses based on a 'contract' where part of the construction work is sub-contracted to a squad-leader of a specific trade at a price fixed between him and the management, any surplus

after completion being distributed as a bonus among squad members. For non-craftsmen, overtime has to be worked fairly consistently to bring wages up to a comparable level, and for all groups of workers there are special allowances won by their trade groups for particular working conditions - confined spaces, fumes, using special materials, weather and so on. It can be seen that the particular conditions worked can often change from ship to ship often necessitating on the spot bargaining over such rates.

It can be seen that there is very little common ground for negotiating on wage issues in general. In addition to inter-trade differentials, Cameron also suggests that inter-yard differentials have been a frequent cause of dispute due to the close proximity of different yards in the main shipbuilding regions and the frequency of labour mobility between them. (156) (The emergence of the post-Geddes consortia may well have reduced this factor however.) Although the shipbuilding unions are affiliated to the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, the C.S.E.U. (or 'Confed.')

can only negotiate on questions of pay and conditions that are common to the industry as a whole and has no power to negotiate on matters concerning single crafts. Wage rates for individual crafts are negotiated nationally by the union, but typically these are no more than minima, actual take-home earnings being largely dependent on what can be won in that particular yard through local negotiations (although some fitting-out trades may be subject to agreements made at district level). Even

the yard shop stewards' committees, representing all trades, only discuss questions of safety and conditions, the question of pay being regarded as the business of the individual unions. Therefore, as Brown concludes:

"collective action by all shipbuilding workers through the national negotiating machinery to raise basic rates was therefore only one way and a rather remote and lengthy way, of improving pay." (157)

As has already been mentioned, the shipyards are characterised by a high degree of multi-unionism, which has tended to reinforce the above situation. For most of the post-war period there have been about eleven unions in the industry, nine of which have been craft, and two general unions. Recent amalgamations, notably between the Boilermakers and Blacksmiths in 1961, later joined by the Shipwrights in 1963 to form the present Amalgamated Society (virtually one union for all black-squad trades) have reduced this number and, together with the concentration and amalgamation among the employers, have introduced the beginnings of a more broadly-based negotiating framework. The position in the mid-1960's is given in Table 16, which follows:

Table 16

Unionisation in shipbuilding 1965 - 6 (158)

<u>Union</u>	<u>% of workforce in shipbuilding</u>
Am. Soc. of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths & Structural Workers.	33.0%
N.U. G.&M.W.	15.0%
A.E.U.	9.6%
T.G.W.U.	7.3%
Am. Soc. of Woodworkers	7.1%
Am. Soc. of Painters & Decorators	6.3%
E.T.U.	4.6%
P.T.U.	3.6%
N.U. of Sheetmetal Workers	2.8%
	<hr/>
	89.3%

In the early 1970's there were mergers between the Electricians and Plumbers, and between the Woodworkers and Painters; these were purely formal amalgamations however, in the main completely unrelated to the structure of shipbuilding work or bargaining. In addition to the above unions, there are, of course, also the non-manual and technical unions.

As one would expect from the closed-shop practices already referred to, and the tight control held by the craft unions over recruitment, most of the major craft unions claim 100% membership in the larger yards. The Wallsend sample showed virtually 100% unionisation but discovered that the level of formal participation was not very high: only 11% always attended branch meetings, 51% did 'sometimes' and 38% 'never'. (159)

As Brown and his colleagues point out this is a level similar to that found in the Liverpool University study of Manchester dockworkers, and slightly higher than Lockwood and Goldthorpe's Luton car-workers. However, attendance by shipyard workers at steward-called workplace meetings was nearly 100%. This lack of enthusiasm for the official union structure contrasts with the continued readiness of the shipyard union hierarchy to back the actions (however autonomous) of members, a policy nowhere more clearly set out than in the resounding statement of Ted Hill, former Boilermakers' General Secretary:

"If a strike is on a question of wages, we have got to support it. Sometimes it has got to be unofficial, but if it is for the purpose for which unions were formed, I can always find a way to justify it." (160)

Conclusion

It seems that again the existence of a homogeneous, 'traditional' proletarian community has little bearing on the pattern or frequency of strike action in the industry and, more importantly, does not result in shipyard workers holding dichotomous power-models of society or 'solidaristic' values. The experience of the yard with its hierarchy of skills, status, and prestige seems a more important determinant of social orientation for most of the time.

The differentiation between separate craft-groups and the sequential nature of the productive process results in marked differences in bargaining power, both between different groups and also over time. This is clearly perceived by

workers and used as a basis for action. Such action is therefore likely to be specific to a particular craft group - the practice of 'craft administration' and the considerable autonomy of action on the part of craft groups within the yard's administrative structure, having its counterpart in autonomous industrial action by craft groups within the union structure (in the knowledge that the union will almost inevitably support them.)

This explains the nature of shipyard action: to analyse why such action is so frequent we need to summarise the factors affecting the occasions for dispute and the ability to take strike action.

The perceived historical economic insecurity of the industry, the post-war technological changes within a situation of overall declining demand for both ships and men, plus the regular fluctuations in craft job-security arising from the nature of the productive process, have all led to the widespread use of job practices in the management of uncertainty and job-maintenance. The overall insecurity may also have fostered attitudes of 'getting what you can while you've got the chance'; negotiations and agreements couched in the long-term may seem slightly irrelevant to the immediate needs of shipyard workers - in the long-term they may no longer be in the yard. There thus may be a priority given to immediacy of action. (161)

Frequently-changing working conditions allied to a complicated payment system (as in mining and docking) provides a constant source of occasions for dispute, and 100% trade unionism, reinforced by closed-shop practices and control over recruitment provides an institutional framework for effective collective action.

PRINTING

Perhaps even more than shipbuilding, printing is still very largely a craft industry in terms of both its technology and the organisation of its workforce. The Industrial Revolution made very little impact on printing techniques and it could justifiably be said that, even fifty years ago, the actual process of printing remained little altered from that established by Caxton and Gutenberg. As will be seen it is only now that the industry is faced with radical technological change, despite which the characteristics and culture of a craft industry remain dominant features.

This is indicated firstly by the actual physical structure of the industry which tends to be widely geographically dispersed in what are, by manufacturing standards, fairly small units: a factory of over 200 employees is large for the industry, one of over 1,000 is enormous. This is even more the case in the 'general print' section of the industry. In

1965, 78% of all firms who were members of the Federation of Master Printers (the employers association for general printing) employed under 50 production employees and a 'firm' can include more than one establishment. (162)

'General print' which covers the printing of everything from books to packaging material (including printing directly on metal for canning) is one of the two main groups comprising the British printing industry, the other being the newspaper and periodicals groups (within which the production of the national daily papers forms a very distinct sub-group).

Workers in both groups tend to be fairly well-paid. In 1966 the average hourly earnings in newspapers and periodicals were about 46% higher than the average for all manufacturing industries and the earnings in general print were about 14% higher than manufacturing. (163)

The main threat to the printing unions since the war has been an enhanced recurrence of a characteristic of the industry since its early days: a shortage of jobs. (164) After a brief period of labour-scarcity immediately after the war, the long term threat of redundancy returned with a vengeance due to a combination of mergers among printing firms similar to those in the rest of industry, plus the impact of the most far-reaching technological changes to affect the industry so far, the main feature of such innovations being that they were highly labour-reducing.

This double threat of redundancy and the undermining of traditional systems of job-grading and allocation and payment systems posed by the changes in production methods has forced the unions on to the defensive. As Child has pointed out⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ print-workers have, literally over the centuries, built up job-protecting practices which today, while often appearing outmoded, are still extremely effective in maintaining job-levels in the industry, often however at the expense of inter-union co-operation.

The production of daily newspapers occupies a distinct place within the industry as a whole for several reasons. Firstly, while in general print, printing is a service industry to the producer of the end product so that, for example, a book publisher or packaging manufacturer can distribute the printing to one of many printing firms, the production of a newspaper or periodical is printing and is done at the point of production, i.e. at the newspaper offices. If there is a stoppage at the 'Daily Express' there is no likelihood of the Express being printed by another firm. Secondly, unlike for example the United States, Britain has a national newspaper system with very little regional coverage on a daily basis, so that a stoppage of daily newspapers effectively cuts out the whole of non-broadcast national communications media. The reliance by newspapers on revenue from advertising⁽¹⁶⁶⁾, plus the battle for circulation, makes such stoppages potentially damaging for the future economic health of the paper.

Strikes in the Industry

The pattern of strikes in printing is unique in that, at first glance, it does not appear to be a strike-militant industry at all. For most years the figure for both the number of strikes and the number of striker-days are so small that it is not really possible or worthwhile to represent the trend in graph-form for comparison with other industries. Suffice it to say that over the period, there have only been six years when printing has had more than 20 thousand striker-days per annum - 1950, 1955 (newspaper maintenance electricians) 1956 (the four-day national dailies stoppage, 370,000 striker days) 1959 (the general print strike, 3,217,000 striker days) 1968 and 1969.

When strikes do occur in the industry, therefore, they tend to be either so prolonged or widespread that they have had the effect of bringing printing into the table of strike-militant industries on the average for weighted striker days over the post-war period.

Because of this, it will be argued that printing strikes can be taken as indicative of a very high level of workshop militancy and organisation, which rarely manifests itself in an actual strike because it is so strong it rarely needs to. Employers have been forced to capitulate to a large extent to day to day demands (see the evidence below on high rates of pay and the maintenance of inter-union machine-manning procedures and manning scales) because the consequences of a

strike taking place are usually fairly severe due to the high degree of solidarity. This facet of militancy is likely only to be noticable over time and is thus one which the concept of 'strike-proneness' with its emphasis on high annual strike figures often ignores. None of the strikes in the non-militant industries (e.g. textiles, food and tobacco) display anything like the severity of the 1959 print strike when the militancy-index, M, for the year reached 26.7, the highest reached by any industry in the whole period.

A further characteristic is that printing strikes are invariably official. Unofficial action is comparatively rare, some unions even imposing sanctions against such action.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

Explanations of strike-militancy

1) The Community

As has been mentioned, printing is a fairly geographically-dispersed industry. Only the national dailies show any evidence of real concentration, being centred mainly on London and Manchester, although there are a few towns and cities like Leeds and Watford which contain several firms engaged in general print work.

In London, the main newspaper offices are localised in and around Fleet Street and it is fairly easy for printworkers to meet socially in pubs and eating-places.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ Residentially however there is little evidence of any occupational concentration or any sense of the "printing community".

There has been, however, a long tradition of sons following fathers into the trade, which the Economist Intelligence Unit in a survey of the industry carried out for the Newspapers Proprietors Association claimed led to a lack of knowledge about conditions in other industries and a certain amount of hostility to outsiders.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ This tradition may be weaker in recent years due to fears for the future of the industry.

2) Ideologies and orientations

In spite of being very definitely "affluent workers", the attitudes of printworkers are characterised by 'traditional' elements which are mainly reflected in and, in turn, supported by the organisation of the Chapel, which will be described below. Sykes⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ states that it is the belief in being in a situation of conflict with employers that is an element in structuring the moral obligations of the chapel, and that it is a feature of printing that this belief manifests itself in chapel cohesion rather than unofficial action.

The Economist survey already quoted, concluded that management-labour relations in newspapers were "reasonably good at top and bottom levels ... they are probably less satisfactory at middle-management level."⁽¹⁷¹⁾ This is perhaps amplified by Doyle's account of his relationship with the local manager:

"Sometimes I felt sympathy for the local manager ... I believed him when he said he came here for his pay on a Friday, because a number of overseers have been displaced since the IPC took over. All the same, his job was to run the firm at a profit for IPC, so we agreed under the circumstances that we had to be suspicious of each other." (172)

Cannon claims that the dominant values held by composers were that:

"A good compositor is a strong trade unionist, belongs to the working class, and supports the Labour Party."

and that these values were more likely to be found in the older chapels that maintained traditional chapel practices and customs. (173)

Compared to these attitudes on the part of skilled workers, however, we have Doyle's disparaging remarks on the social and political attitudes of his fellow SOGAT (i.e. unskilled) members:

"The work in all but a few cases has a brutalising effect. Many are racialists, anti-semitic and intolerant of minority opinion..... I don't have to wonder how in past elections so many workers have voted Conservative they are either incapable or unwilling to see any alternative to their present way of life." (174)

Such beliefs are of course not necessarily incompatible with 'traditional' working class world-views. They do not however suggest a homogeneous class-based ideology which would form the subjective basis for collective industrial action.

3) Technology

Printing was chosen by Blauner (175) as the archetype of a craft industry. The end product is always different and it is possible for an individual printworker to look at the first paragraph of a newspaper or book and know that he and he alone set the type, compared to which the Ford worker never knows whether he has had a hand in any particular Ford car. It is difficult to see any direct connection however between this sort of typology and levels of industrial conflict. Following Blauner it could be suggested that the greater degree of control over production and the possibility of identification with the end product in a craft industry should produce less alienation and (perhaps) less overt conflict. On the other hand we have seen in shipbuilding how just these same conditions can produce a greater preparedness to take collective action. It is perhaps more useful to look at the economic context within which a particular technology is operated.

Printing has traditionally consisted of two processes invented in 1476 and which have remained basically unchanged over the succeeding four centuries. Firstly there is composition the arrangement of type to conform to the written copy - which is done by compositors. This can either be monotype, separate letters arranged and then dispersed after use, or (since the 1890's) linotype, where the compositor works a keyboard which produces a casting of a solid 'slug' or line of type which can be re-melted after use.

The second process is that of presswork - applying ink to the surface and pressing it against the paper and it is here that there has been the greatest amount of technological change. There are now three types of presswork. Firstly, there is the letterpress or traditional method where the actual type has ink spread on it and is then pressed directly onto the paper. Secondly there is lithograph printing which uses a plate, the non-printing parts of which are kept free from ink using the wax-and-water principle, and thirdly there are various types of photographic printing.

All three methods can be done on a rotary process, using rollers, although the first two can also be done via the more traditional flat-bed process. In recent years, there has been increasing use of the offset principle in which the actual image does not contact the paper directly but is relayed by intermediate rollers. Machines of whatever process can either be fed on a single sheet basis or from a continuous reel or 'web' of paper. In practice, various combinations of these different processes have been introduced for specific printing tasks, as in webb-offset, offset-litho, photo-litho and so on. This has had the effect of blurring the older distinctions between design and composition, and between litho and other types of presswork.

Whatever its internal modifications, however, the overall technology of printing has had a distinct influence on the social organisation of work. Because printing firms and work-

shops tend to be small, the division of labour between the composing room, the machine room, the plate-makers and so on means that the work-groups in each of these locales usually consists of face-to-face groups, and it is this which has been the historical basis of the Chapel. Such groups can often become fairly fixed in their membership; for example, a large job performed fairly regularly, such as a periodical, will often have several men working together permanently, known as a 'companionship' or a 'ship', which Cannon suggests promotes an extra sense of group-feeling. (176)

In the printing of daily newspapers, the necessity for continuous running in the machine-rooms and the fact that the papers are printed nearly every day of the year produces a frequent complaint from print workers of working unsocial hours and there is some evidence that they expect adequate monetary compensation for this. (177) Continuous runs, where 'natural breaks' are not possible, plus the high manning-ratios maintained by the unions, produces the practice of the 'blow' whereby men stay away from work for specified periods according to a rota. An indication of the high manning scales maintained in the industry is given by the fact that production is possible with a '100% blow' - one man away for every man working. (178)

As with many other craft industries, the various unions in printing have established for their members the exclusive right to perform specific types of work so that, for example, in the composing room the unions insist that composing machines

can only be run by someone who has served a hand-composing apprenticeship (179) (here again apprenticeship fairly obviously functions as a means of controlling entry to the craft rather than as practical training), and in the newspaper foundry members of SOGAT (unskilled union) are excluded entirely, skilled men even performing tasks such as sweeping up. (180)

The major area affected by demarcation problems has been the machine room and the problems here have mainly been caused by technological change. The normal practice is that where craft and non-craft workers work on the same machine, the craft machine-minders do all the quality control, and the non-craft machine-assistants all the mechanical work including starting and stopping the press. The introduction of new processes such as webb-offset led to several disputes which were not strictly speaking demarcation disputes as again they centred round manning scales and the threat of redundancies posed by the new processes. Webb-offset was a combination of at least two existing processes each of which had a different manning scale in terms of the number of skilled and unskilled men required on each machine. The skilled unions, ASLP and the NGA, took the position that previous arrangements for sheet-fed litho should apply, while the unskilled members of SOGAT said that webb-offset litho was a new form of printing and previous arrangements were irrelevant. In their investigation into the resulting disputes, the 1967 Court of Inquiry concluded that there was no evidence that either the unions, or especially the employers had made any attempt to analyse objectively the precise requirements of the new machines in terms of the skills

needed to operate them and the relevance of existing skills. (181

Such disputes must be seen against the background of the threat of redundancy caused not only by the new processes but also by the series of mergers and amalgamations taking place on the newspapers and periodicals side of the industry. The webb-offset dispute referred to is a case in point. One of the major firms involved, the International Publishing Corporation had just closed its central London subsidiary of Odhams Press, creating severe redundancies and had transferred some of its workers to a new webb-offset plant at Southwark, where the dispute took place. What is significant about a dispute such as this was that, although it resulted in a stoppage it was not directed against management as such (who, as the Court of Inquiry showed, played very little part in the outcome of the dispute) but was essentially between the two main affected unions. As one writer somewhat cynically put it, it was a dispute over "who should get the sack first". (182)

Despite (or rather because of) such disputes the print unions have on the whole been very successful in resisting redundancies and maintaining very high manning levels. The Economist Intelligence Unit calculated a potential saving to the newspaper proprietors of nearly £5m per annum if potential reductions in staffing could be carried out, (183) and found that if extra work was being performed, the newspapers would frequently engage casual labour on a nightly basis rather than increase the workload of the existing labour force and thus threaten manning agreements. (184)

The situation is described from the inside by Doyle:

"I and 150 other warehouse workers put in a full week and yet many of us are lucky if we work more than two days a week....

"Demoralising as it is, our position is only maintained by our union strength They know of course that if they arbitrarily tried to dismiss our members they would be threatened with a close-down of the 'Mirror', 'Sun' or other sections of IPC. While we remain strong they have to negotiate As things are today then, and as ridiculous as it may seem, I support the policy of maintaining staffs at their pre-automation level. I know I am fighting a losing battle. But in the jungle one has to defend oneself as best one can." (185)

The dilemma for the unions looks like increasing as technological change moves out of the machine room into other areas. Recent introductions include the increased use of photo-composition and computerised typesetting which apparently have an out-put equivalent to the rate of 200 linotype operators. (186)

The unions seem caught in a vicious circle. They are collectively so strong that they can successfully prevent dismissals, and yet because they are fragmented along craft lines, the overall surplus of labour will frequently lead to inter-union disputes in which they have to expend their strength on each other to keep the available jobs in their own union (and thus maintain their bargaining strength).

4) Payment and bargaining systems

"Every printing house is by Custom of Time out of Mind; called a Chappel; and all the Workmen that belong to it are members of the Chappel, and the Oldest Freeman is Father of the Chappel And the Judges of the Controversies relating to the Chappel or any of its members, was plurality of Votes in the Chappel. It being asserted as a Maxim that the Chappel cannot Err."

Joseph Moxon "Mechanick Exercises" (1683) (187)

The basis of printing unionism and the distinctive feature of it is the Chapel. As can be seen from the quote from Moxon the Chapel is extremely old in origin, easily pre-dating the union. In the 19th, an expanding awareness of common interests led the Chapels to band together into local societies, eventually fusing into unions within which the chapel became the workshop unit. The chapel now had a responsibility to a wider organisation as well as (but not instead of) its members, but still remained an autonomous self-regulating occupational community.

It is thus necessary to distinguish between the chapel as an official workshop unit within the overall union structure where behaviour is governed by the rules of the union, and the chapel as a self-regulating workshop association whose behaviour is governed by custom and democratically-established norms of behaviour.

Many of the traditional terms and customs serve to reinforce the internal cohesion of the chapel and many have not changed for centuries, being perpetuated on the craft side through apprenticeship which, in addition to the functions already described, serves to socialise the new entrant into the culture of the craft (188). Members pay chapel subscriptions as well as union subscriptions and the chapel may have its own outings, sick funds and so on, as well as rituals associated with someone leaving, an apprentice 'coming out of his time' and similar important occasions. (189)

Sykes (190) points out that the two fundamental rules of the chapel are that all members of the chapel are to be considered equal, and that all **decisions** of the chapel must be abided by. These are incorporated into an overall moral obligation to do what the chapel feels to be the 'right' thing. As a printworker told Sykes:

"Sometimes you could do better on your own and you lose by keeping the Chapel rules, but if you didn't you would bust up the Chapel and that would lose you ten times as much in the long run." (191)

The close physical proximity of the workgroup allows for a variety of inter-personal sanctions against those breaking chapel norms, the most extreme sanction being complete ostracism. These sanctions cannot be ordered by any external agency such as a union official - they are applied when the chapel feels they ought to be. In reality they are seldom used as the norms have been established by general agreement anyway. The chapel is essentially democratic - the Father of the Chapel can make no decisions but only participate in the making of collective decisions and while the extent of his powers will vary from chapel to chapel, he acts more as the spokesman for the group than as its leader - many chapels in fact having a rotating F.o.C.

The Chapel therefore with its average membership of 12-15 members (a chapel of over 40 is very large)⁽¹⁹²⁾ and its strong internal codes and practices, is the workshop basis of the printing unions and many of the characteristics and policies

of the latter can only be understood in the context of their chapel origins.

Unionisation in the industry is high: Sykes estimates 90% union membership and the Cameron Court of Inquiry estimated 80% for the industry, excluding newspapers. (193) Over the period under examination, the number of printing unions has been dramatically reduced via amalgamation from at least eleven after the war, to four major unions by 1969. These were the main craft union, the National Graphical Association, with 85,500 members, the main non-craft union (which however contains several craft sections), the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades with about 234,500, and the two lithographic unions (both craft) the Amalgamated Society of Lithograph Printers (12,000) and the Society of Lithographic Artists, Designers, Engravers and Process Workers (15,000). Since 1969, the ASLP has merged with the NGA but a major section within SOGAT, the National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants (NATSOPA) decided to break away once more. In addition to these specifically printing unions, there are two maintenance unions, the AUEW and the EEPTU

The printing unions, together with others such as the National Union of Journalists and the Paperworkers Union are members of the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, whose total affiliated membership in 1965 was 384,000 (194). The PKTF has its own procedures for dealing with demarcation disputes which specifies no stoppage of work (as we have seen

this is not always adhered to.) During the DC Thompson union recognition strike in 1952 the PKTF actually acted as a united body, co-ordinating action against the firm but such potential strength is rarely realised. In re-negotiating an agreement with the newspaper proprietors following the four week national dailies stoppage in 1955, the responses from the unions concerned showed complete autonomy despite their joint action - some rejected the offer, others called for arbitration, some were for acceptance, others came to no decision. (195)

In any one printing works, each union may well have several chapels which unite for collective bargaining through the union organisation. Union behaviour reflects chapel principles in that there is a very small proportion of unofficial action, and the unions maintain specific sanctions over the actions of wayward members, the ultimate sanction being expulsion from the union which is virtually synonymous with the termination of a job in printing.

Chapel principles are even more explicitly expressed in attitudes to payment. The principle of equality of treatment among chapel members is extended to several levels of the payment system. The unions and chapels have always insisted on the principle that differences in pay should reflect only occupational differences (i.e. the job being done) rather than personal differences (how well an individual performed the job) and Sykes remarks that the most general feeling throughout the industry is that workers must not allow themselves to compete against each other (196).

As he was told by one F.o.C.

"There is nothing worse than one man making more money than another." (197)

This has led to a consistent opposition to personal incentive or merit schemes, the deliberate concealment or refusal to divulge individual speeds of work, an opposition to all forms of piecework or their operation on a pool basis whereby payment is made to the group and shared out by them on the basis of man-hours worked to conceal from management the output of individual members, and limits on overtime whereby all men must have had the opportunity to do a limited amount before any member of the chapel is allowed to exceed it. (198)

The craft unions traditionally tried to insist on the principle of 'craft parity' under which all craftsmen, whether composers, machinemen, lithographers or bookbinders should have the same basic rate in the same town (199). A bone of contention for some years, being threatened and re-established at various times, it was more or less solved by union amalgamation which made possible a craft wage structure for the industry. A similar process helped fix the majority of non-craft rates, the problem since being the relationship between the two, a cause of several disputes in the early '50's.

Even where basic rates are fixed there is however little uniformity in actual earnings between firms, especially in newspaper production. The differences are due to negotiated

house rates, overtime and various extras and the E.I.U. concluded that these were determined more by the militancy of the unions than the nature of the job. To be more precise it is the Chapel rather than the union which is the most important in determining final take-home pay. Sisson (200) cites the components of pay for Fleet Street photoprinters in which agreements between the unions and the NPA account for 49.6% of earnings, the remainder (a further fourteen components in all) being negotiated between management and the Chapels.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this section, it was suggested that, while the printing industry did not display a high strike frequency, the strike-militancy index seemed to indicate a high level of bargaining power which rarely needed to manifest itself in strike action. The evidence appears to confirm this, in that the printing unions have been highly successful in maintaining a level of earnings well above the industrial average, and also an extremely high level of employment in the industry in the face of the continued threat of major redundancy brought about both by technological change and concentrations in the structure of ownership. That this has been achieved in spite of internal divisions seems clearly to be due to the strong traditions and practices of workshop organisation as epitomised in the chapel.

The technical processes of printing perhaps contribute to the efficacy of workshop action, firstly by splitting the work-

force into primary-sized groups and secondly by the economic interdependence of the various processes so that a stoppage by compositors can stop the works whether or not they are joined by machine-men.

An area that remains problematic is the apparant acquiescence of the employers to the demands made possible by this strong organisation. One answer may lie in the vulnerability to the loss of daily revenue of the major daily newspapers and the vulnerability to competition in the general print sector in an industry characterised by a large number of geographically dispersed small firms.

IRON AND STEEL

Together with coal, the making of iron and steel was the essential process behind Britain's industrialisation and since then, despite fluctuating fortunes, the industry has been regarded as a basic component of the economic infrastructure.

The first things that strike an observer in a steel plant are its vast size and the apparent absence of personnel, for the industrial unit in the industry tends to be large and, like other process industries, highly capital-intensive.

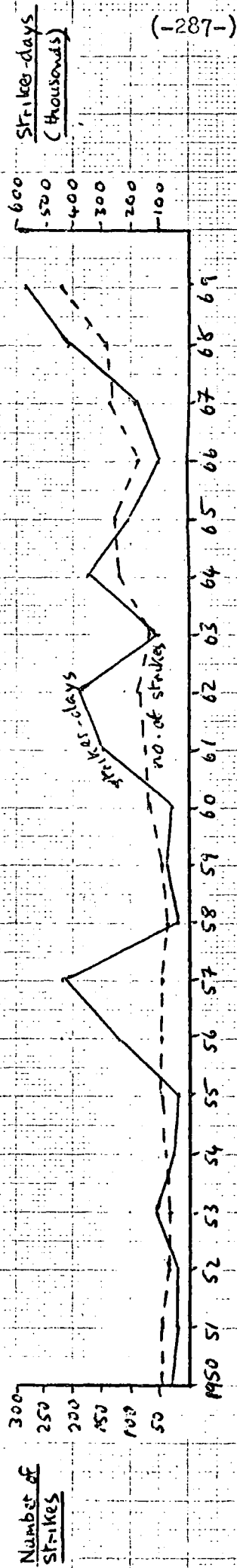
In 1951, 68% of the total number employed in the industry were concentrated in establishments of over 1,000 (201), and yet, in the mid-sixties, the wage and salary bill represented only 20% of total costs. (202)

As one would expect, the demand for iron and steel is a derived demand and thus extremely vulnerable to general economic fluctuations with a consequent effect on employment in the industry. The large steel companies were hit so badly by the pre-war depression that, from 1921-31 they paid no dividends at all on share capital and from the 1930's onward the main steel union, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, had so little confidence in the ability of private enterprise to safeguard the jobs of its members that it began calling for public ownership quite independently of the debate over nationalisation then occurring in the Labour Party. (203) Nationalisation eventually came in 1951 and some rationalisation of plant had started to occur prior to this so that, for example, in the Scottish plant studied by Sykes (204), nationalisation made very little difference to the management structure, the former managers and owners continuing to run the plant until it was denationalised in 1953.

An immediate post-war shortage of metal sheet led to a rapid increase in employment in the industry which, however, when recession hit steel in 1957-63, resulted in a situation of surplus capacity and overmanning. These problems were

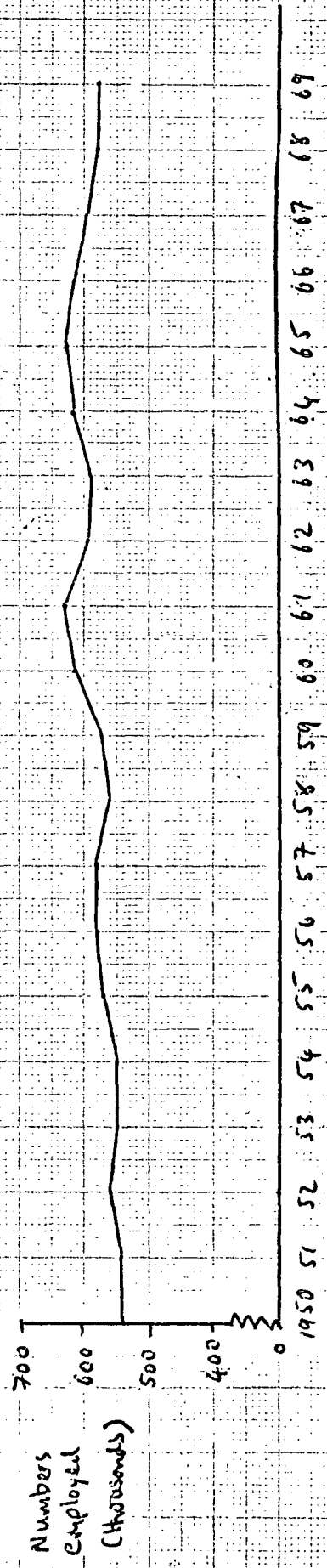
made worse by the fact that some steel firms had started to replace the older 'open-hearth' furnace with the new Basic Oxygen (BOS) furnaces for steel making which were even more capital-intensive than former methods. The steel managements reacted to the continuing situation of declining profits by attempting a more economic use of the labour force through 'pruning' and increased job-flexibility via productivity deals. Thus from the mid-sixties, steel workers and especially process workers (those actually engaged on the production of iron and steel) have been faced with the increasing possibility of redundancy. Figure 11 shows the overall trend of employment in metal as a whole but unfortunately does not indicate the extent to which iron and steel process workers have been affected by technological change. Firstly it includes semi-manufactures such as tubes, but more importantly it does not indicate the changing employment structure of the steel plant. The new steel-making processes with their greater automation and technical complexity, while reducing manpower required on the process side, tend to need an increase in the craft and maintenance workers (electricians, engineers and so on) who service and repair them. Similarly, the increased size of the newer steel plants, together with the re-nationalisation in 1967 has led to a consequent increase in administration. Thus, the proportion of craft, maintenance and white-collar workers in the industry has steadily increased at the expense of the actual steel process workers.⁽²⁰⁵⁾ This is not entirely a recent phenomenon - as early as 1953, the Liverpool University study of Summers' plant at Shotton found that the proportion of skilled craftsmen had risen from 7% in 1925 to

IRON & STEEL



Source: Ministry of Labour 'Gazette'

Fig.10 Strikes in iron & steel 1950-69



Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics.

Fig.11 Employment in iron & steel 1950-69

11% of the workforce in 1953. (206)

In 1967, the industry was nationalised for the second time, bringing together 14 major steel companies into the British Steel Corporation, responsible for nearly 90% of UK crude steel production. The tenth of steel tonnage left in private hands consists of highly specialised steels and semi-manufacture based largely in Sheffield and is responsible for a third of the annual cash sales.

By re-organising on product-lines, the BSC has increased the rate of rationalisation and hence the threat of redundancy. The White Paper issued in 1973 (207) estimated a reduction of about 50,000 in BSC employees over a ten-year period. One of the major implications of re-organisation is the gradual closure of small older plants such as Shotton and Consett, situated inland originally to be near the supplies of coal and ore, and the construction of very large new complexes such as Llanwern, Scunthorpe and South Teeside, situated near the coast for the import of higher grade ores from Sweden and elsewhere. (208)

Strikes in the industry

At first glance, descriptions of the militancy record of the industry seem rather inconsistent. Both the Liverpool study of the North Wales plant in 1953 (209) and Eldridge's study of the North East (210) stress the reputation of the industry for industrial peace, whereas Owen Smith's account of

the Steel Company of Wales claims that South Wales has gained a reputation in the industry for industrial militancy. (211) This may be partly due to regional differences, but it seems more likely that the reason for the disparity is the timing of the different studies, the first two being conducted in 1953 and the period up to 1963 respectively, whereas the last study was written in 1969-70. As is clearly shown in Figure 10, militancy in steel is a phenomenon peculiar to the latter half of the period. Referring back to Table 1 in Chapter 3, showing the M scores for the period, we can see that from 1950-60 there were only four years when M was greater than 1, whereas from 1961-69 M never fell below 1 and only once dropped below $M = 2$.

As indicated in the brief outline of the industry above, the watershed in militancy coincides with the period of 'cost-consciousness' in the industry which increased the rate of redundancies and decreased the scale of wage-awards.

In his analysis of industrial relations in the North-East area in the period 1949-61, Edridge found that, of the few strikes that did occur, most of them lasted less than three days and three-quarters were over in a week, and only 14% of strikes involved more than 300 men. Over 50% of the strikes and all those lasting over a week were over wage questions. All the strikes began in response to situations in individual firms, all started as unofficial before negotiating procedures were exhausted, and most of them (and all the larger

strikes) were the result of action by craft and maintenance workers.⁽²¹²⁾ Thus, in this initial period, we have a familiar pattern of wage militancy on the part of craft unions expressed through fairly small, fairly short, unofficial strikes.

Was this pattern maintained in the ensuing 'militant' period? Unfortunately, there is no study for this latter period of such comparable detail as Eldridge's, but Smith writing in 1971 comments that BISA/ISTC has not had an official strike since 1926 and remains proud of its discipline and small number of unofficial strikes.⁽²¹³⁾ Some hitherto non-militant groups have, however, become involved in strike activity, mainly as a result of the internal changes within the industry. In 1968, the question of who should organise the growing number of white-collar staff caused these workers to strike with an ensuing period of inter-union dispute, and in 1969 the protracted strike by Blastfurnacemen (to be repeated in 1971 and 1975) ended their comparatively peaceful record. The main industrial action therefore still seems to have been on the part of the craftsmen.

Explanations of strike-militancy

1) The Community

There is no doubt that one can talk of steel communities. In some cases, for example Consett, the town is literally physically isolated from other industrial centres, while in

others the sheer size of the plant (e.g. Port Talbot) or the interrelated nature of different plants (e.g. Sheffield) ensure that they effectively dominate the occupational structure of the community. A historical feature of the labour force is that, as different areas of the industry have expanded, they have attracted in migrant labour from other parts of the country, sometimes from steel areas that are running down. The Liverpool study found that the original workers at the Shotton plant were recruited from all over the country and especially Wolverhampton and the Midlands. (214) Once established, however, kinship patterns within the community become very important for the workforce: the Liverpool study found that, in 1954, an average employee in the plant had 2.6 relatives in the firm, a number which rose to 4.1 if relatives who had worked there at some time were included. This especially applied to process and junior staff workers, craft workers tending to be more mobile when measured by the place of origin of themselves and their parents. The family influence on recruitment patterns seemed fairly large - a quarter of the sample admitted to being 'spoken for' by a relative or friend, especially the former, and it was felt by the research team that the real figure was probably larger. (215)

The question again arises as to what is the precise relation between such communities and industrial action. Smith quotes the work of Thomason in Port Talbot who describes how workers were attracted into the town by high pay immediately after the war. These early affluent workers, far from acting

according to the instrumental Luton blueprint and becoming home-centred, pooled their affluence to set up working men's clubs which, once wives had been admitted, served to reinforce the relationship between work and community. (216) As Smith comments -

"Any workgroup considering industrial action could therefore rely on the most valuable allies a man could have - his wife and his workmates." (217)

He suggests that, in spite of inter-union rivalry at work the sense of having a common adversary proved to be an underlying factor among the workers, for during major strikes in Port Talbot, by whatever group of workers, strikes were invariably supported by the rest of the community.

One must treat this sort of suggestion with some reserve. As will be seen, there are fairly marked inter-union differences in the steel plant and we have already seen in the case of shipbuilding how such diversity of interest can override those feelings of solidarity which are based on *gemeinschaft* alone.

These reservations would seem to be supported by Esland and Thompson's recent account of Scunthorpe where they claim that a combination of sustained immigration into the town from the rest of the country (and outside) plus the fragmented nature of the labour force, meant that Scunthorpe remained a fragmented community with little 'solidarity' in the traditional sense. This was despite the fact that iron and steel making completely dominated the life of the town and that

'work' was a major topic of leisure-time conversation in pubs and elsewhere. (218)

In addition we must remember that the steel industry, as we have seen from Eldridge's study, is not characterised by long drawn-out encounters and thus the value of the supportive role in the community again seems doubtful.

2) Ideologies and orientations

The paradoxical fact about the steel industry is that despite its (albeit recent) militancy record, the largest union in the industry, BISAFTA/ISTC has traditionally been opposed to strike action and severe on any of its members who indulge in unofficial action. The aim has historically been one of 'amicable negotiation' rather than conflict, a feeling expressed by L. Evans, former General Secretary of the ISTC, writing in 1951:

"We believe in the peaceful settlement of differences.;... We never believed there was anything attractive about a strike, it being at best an ugly and painful necessity."
(219)

What evidence there is of the attitudes of rank and file steelworkers to such things as strike action and nationalisation does not provide an overwhelmingly militant picture. Although Syke's sample of manual employees were all in favour of striking as a general course of action, the sample (somewhat oddly) did not contain any ISTC members, being mostly craft workers and members of the T. and G. (210) Scott and his team enquired of the Shotton sample whether they were ready to take strike

action over the impending introduction of new machines and processes. The result at first seems to contradict the earlier impression that it is the craft workers who are the militant sections in the industry for although the majority of workers of all categories were against strike action, more process workers were for a strike than were craft workers (40% and 29%). It must be remembered, however, that the new machines would hit the process workers hardest because of the increase in capital intensity mentioned. In a follow-up study by Olive Banks it was found in response to the same question that the proportions for and against by process workers had remained the same, but the proportion of craft workers against striking had fallen from 65% to 49%, those for correspondingly rising from 29% to 35%. (221)

There are similar differences in attitudes to nationalisation shown by the findings of Sykes and Scott. All Sykes' sample of craft and maintenance workers were in favour of nationalisation, whereas Scott found that 43% of process workers would have preferred to work for private firms rather than a nationalised concern, only 27% opting for public ownership. (222)

A major corollary to these non-militant attitudes on the part of process workers would seem to be the prevalence of a "family ideology" in the steel plant. While there is an obvious connection with the high level of kin relationships in the plant, Scott and his team found that a perception of the plant in family terms was very common, although the ex-

pression of this view varied from "we're all one big happy family" to "it's not what you know, it's who you know that counts". (223) It would seem likely that the isolation of the steel plant and steel community, the attitudes of the main steel union to minimising conflict, plus the historical use of sliding-scale payments which linked steel wages to the level of steel prices (224) have created an attitude of shared fortunes and misfortunes. This has been disturbed firstly by the harsh realities of redundancy but perhaps mainly by the growth in numbers of those groups of workers who are not specific to the industry but whose skills are theoretically transferable, namely the craft and white-collar workers.

It is the attitude of white collar workers that have perhaps undergone the most change. In Sykes' original study he found that the white-collar workers in the Scottish steelworks almost universally held anti-union and anti-nationalisation attitudes. However, on a follow-up visit he discovered a significant change in attitudes towards unionisation, coinciding with the introduction of middle-management trainee schemes which effectively blocked upward promotion by lower grade white-collar workers. (225)

The increase in white-collar unionisation in the late 60's led to disputes in the industry between ISTC and clerical unions such as CAWU and ASTMS as to who should represent clerical workers. ISTC has always regarded itself as the steel industry union and would be quite happy to accommodate

Blastfurnacemen, craft workers and clerical workers if these groups were willing to re-classify themselves as grades of steelworker. It was also losing its dominant position through changes in the structure of the labour force and so was anxious to recruit the clerical workers into its ranks. Bowen and Shaw investigating the attitudes of white-collar workers at Consett Iron Works shortly after the 1968 dispute (226) found that all the clerical workers were then members of ISTC but 50% wanted separate representation by an appropriate white collar union. Investigation to see whether these white-collar 'non-affiliates' were middle-class aspirants found, if anything, that they were the opposite - while there were no significant differences in terms of age, sex and class, the non-affiliates were more likely to identify with manual wage-workers. They concluded that these were white-collar 'militants' who had decided that effective representation of their interests was impossible within the essentially non-militant framework of the ISTC.

It is sometimes suggested that one possible reason for the difference between the passivity of the steel process workers and the greater militance of other groups such as the blastfurnacemen lies in historical religious differences, the leaders of the early unions making up the ISTC being often staunch methodists and imbuing the unions with the spirit of responsibility, while the blastfurnacemen are descended in many cases from Irish immigrants. (227) These suggestions hold very little water for at least three immediate reasons:

- a) the miners' lodges of Durham and South Wales were no less influenced by Methodism, but with no apparent diminution in their readiness to take industrial action;
 - b) the historical influence of Catholicism on union militancy, for example in the United States, has conversely usually been that of an effective bromide (228);
- and
- c) the blastfurnacemen did not become significantly militant until the late 60's.

3) The technology

The technology of steel making is succinctly broken down in the 1975 ACAS report:

"An integrated iron and steel mills, incorporating strip mills will comprise seven main production departments in the following sequence: coke ovens, ore preparation and sinter plant, blastfurnaces, steel-melting shops, primary (slabbing) mills, hot rolling mills and cold rolling mills. Each of these departments is serviced by its own maintenance craftsmen, while some craftsmen may perform duties in more than one part of the plant." (229)

To make iron, a 'burden' of iron-ore, limestone and coke is fed into a blastfurnace, a blast of hot air is blown through the mixture and the molten pig-iron run off from the bottom. The iron is now converted into steel in another furnace or converter which reduces the proportion of other minerals such as carbon, silicon, manganese and phosphorous either by an air-blast (the Bessemer process), in an open hearth, or by the more recent oxygen-blast (BOS) and electric-arc processes.

The steel is then cast into ingots and almost immediately rolled into the shapes and sizes required.

The industry contains virtually every kind of abnormal working condition. To stand next to a steel converter in a steelworks in the middle of winter is to experience wintry cold on one side of the body and intense heat on the other (230), and the works as a whole contains conditions of dust, dirt, height, confined space, gases, dangerous machinery, and the hazard of molten metal. In jobs where these are compounded, such as blastfurnacemen, the premature mortality rate is high. (231) The nature of the steel making process means that steel workers work to a cycle of intensive but intermittant effort with a lot of the time being spent waiting for the steel to reach the right mix. Because of the skills and knowledge traditionally required to ensure how and when this happened, job-satisfaction among steelworkers, in spite of the conditions, was traditionally fairly high and other types of production based on continuous processes were regarded by them as monotonous (232). Something of the attitude can be seen in this account of his work by an ex-steelman:

"There (was) still the great satisfaction of seeing one's charge surging from the furnace to the ladle. Then the melters felt like sea-captains who had brought their ships safely to port after a long stormy voyage. It was the long voyage before each charge became steel that allowed me and my kind to exercise our skills and so to feel at home with our jobs." (233)

This high level of job-satisfaction would obviously re-

inforce the feelings of identification with the industry mentioned in the previous section and perhaps explain the lack of militancy on the part of the steelworkers union. It certainly served to increase the perceived differences between steelmen and the other main groups of workers in the plant, the maintenance and ancillary workers:

"(Although) we are friendly disposed (and consider) craftsmen a necessary evil, we nevertheless represent the people who produce."

(ISTC member) (234)

However, changes in technology involving increases in instrumentation and automation have reduced the element of chance and the necessity for process workers to exercise their physical strength or skilled judgement. Increased demand for more specialised steels turns quality control over to the analytical chemist rather than the ordinary steelman. There is some evidence that this has had an effect on the work orientations of steel process workers. Firstly, the steel crew under the old open-hearth system represented a pronounced status hierarchy: the steel man worked his way up through a rigidly enforced 'dead-man's shoes' system of seniority until he reached the top position of First Hand (now called Senior Vesselman). Now the skills and responsibility formerly exercised by the First Hand have been taken over by a new level of management, Vessel Controller, with a consequent loss of both status and job satisfaction. In the words of a Senior Vesselman:

"When we were on the old furnaces the decisions were ours. Managers wouldn't come up to us and say - she wants a ladle of steel - or if they did we'd tell them where to go. We made the decisions and we made the steel. Now we just assist the computer." (235)

The same man also adds, "now the only redeeming factor about the job is the wages".

Since the status hierarchy of the old system was, as Scott and his team found, an important factor in committing the steel worker to a working life in the steel plant, it may also be that the erosion of status at the top may negatively affect this commitment and the identification with the works instanced earlier, and reinforce the 'instrumental' attitudes instanced above.

3) Payment and bargaining structures

The wage-structure for the industry for most of the period has been very complex, characterised by a high level of piecework and a variety of extra payments to cover extra hours worked, special working conditions (fumes, heat and so on) so that the wages of a craftsman could be made up of over nine separate components. In 1966 the British Iron and Steel Federation (the main pre-nationalisation employers' organisation) distinguished five major components in the majority of earnings - a base rate, a sliding scale addition, a cost of living payment, a tonnage or incentive bonus, plus shiftwork, overtime and weekend bonuses. Following nationalisation and the 1968 productivity bargain between the BSC and the unions (the

industry 'Green Book') this has been simplified to three main elements - a basic time-rate, incentive or bonus payments and premiums for shift-work and overtime. (236)

It follows from this and the periodic fluctuations in the national demand for steel that earnings in the industry can be fairly unstable. The problem is further compounded by multi-unionism, pay negotiations being conducted between the firm and individual unions, although the unions combine on the TUC Steel Committee to negotiate on common conditions of employment such as holidays with pay, pensions and sick pay arrangements and so on. At the end of the period, the composition of the TUC Steel Committee membership in the BSC was as follows:

Table 17 TUC Steel Committee - Union membership in BSC (237)

Iron & Steel Trades Confederation	67,000
National Union of Blastfurnacemen	13,500
Transport & General Workers Union	10,500
General & Municipal Workers Union	4,000
National Craftsmen's Co-ordinating Committee	27,000

Unionisation in the industry is organised vertically rather than horizontally, that is to say, workers at different stages of production rather than workers of different grades will belong to different unions. The initial making of iron is largely done by members of the National Union of Blastfurnacemen (except in Scotland where workers are members of the ISTC) one of the smallest unions in the country with an average membership over most of the period of about 18,000.

The largest union in the industry is the main union for steel process workers, having about 100,000 members, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. The ISTC was set up during World War I through an amalgamation of those unions involved in the production of steel and steel sheet. At the same time another union, the British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association was set up by the same unions to deal with administrative matters; thus has arisen a situation confusing to outsiders, where ISTC and BISAKTA are not really separate unions but respectively negotiating and administrative organisations with essentially the same membership. The ISTC has plant-based branches which either cover one job spread over the plant (such as cranedrivers) or jobs located in specific locations such as the melting shop. As with NUB lodges, individual branches are autonomous bargaining units and can negotiate directly with management over manning, rates, rules and conditions.

Craftsmen believe that the ISTC is given special treatment by employers as, without any display of militancy, it has managed to maintain the wages of its higher paid members, Many of its members however, are comparatively low paid. Smith (238) argues that, because ISTC members skills are industry-specific and non-transferable this explains their non-militancy as they feel they have a vested interest in the prosperity of the industry. The same argument was advanced regarding shipbuilding workers, however, and it was shown that this did not necessarily result in industrial passivity.

The attitude of ISTC to clerical unions has already been mentioned and contrasts strangely with its attitude to redundancies. In spite of the report of the 1968 Pearson Inquiry which recommended that CAWU should be recognised if it could show over 50% membership of clerical workers in any one plant, ISTC refused to operate the new BOS plant at Port Talbot in 1969 unless there was an agreement that middle-management staff would be in ISTC. The union made no mention or protest however about the fact that the new plant would lead to a loss of 1,100 jobs of ISTC members elsewhere. Indeed, in his evidence to the Donovan Commission, Sir Harry Douglas, ISTC General Secretary, was adamant that his union never fought redundancies and that new machines and processes were always in operation the day they were installed. (239)

Although some general steel workers are organised by the Transport and General, the third major group in the industry are the craft maintenance and service workers belonging to a variety of craft unions - engineers, plumbers, boilermakers, foundryworkers and so on, whose demands and actions are usually linked through the Craft Co-ordinating Committee. As has been already mentioned, such groups are less orientated to the 'family' atmosphere of the steel works, both their origins and reference points lying outside the industry. They are able to make continuous comparisons with earnings of fellow craftsmen in engineering, shipbuilding, construction and so on, and make use of the complex payment system to push up local rates. The evidence seems to indicate that up to the early 60's, the steel managements were happy to go along with craftsmen's demands in order

to get production out, but that with the steel recession came a hardening of attitude and the idea that it was time to take a stand both on pay and manning-scales. As Smith comments, "the craftsmen happened to be the group of workers concerned."

In the previous sections on other industries, white-collar employees have usually not been mentioned, not because they do not strike, but because there is usually a lack of evidence on their behaviour and attitudes, and secondly because their job situation is not usually unique to that industry. There is evidence, however, that white-collar workers in steel do have a special place, indicative of one more division among the workforce. Just as the process workers and craft workers are mutually suspicious of each other, it seems that manual workers in general have little regard for clerical workers. The support given to ISTC by other steel unions in its resistance to the Clerical and Administrative Workers Union (240) is perhaps explained by the comments of the Blastfurnacemen to the ACAS enquiry; they felt that manual workers in general had taken the brunt of redundancies and reductions in overtime and shift premiums, and that clerical workers had been very little affected. (241)

Conclusions

The problematic area in the steel industry is almost a question not of why there is so much strike action, but why, given the conditions prevailing, there is not more.

The answer to this question must certainly lie in the ideology and policy of the main steel union, ISTC, reinforced perhaps by the relatively high level of job-satisfaction on the part of many of its members.

One can say that the fluctuation and insecurity of earnings, the increased threat of redundancy, and the often hazardous conditions of work, create constant occasions for dispute, which have not been taken up by the ISTC. They have, however, been taken up by the craft unions who have used them to maintain earnings and manning scales in line with fellow-craftsmen elsewhere in industry, being strengthened in this by their growth as a proportion of the total workforce.

The shortage of steel in the period immediately after the war, together with the practice of sliding-scale payments created high-wage, high-employment conditions in the industry which, although they were not to last, provided points of reference in the ensuing period of managerial retrenchment. Thus the second half of the period is one of greatly increased industrial action, again mainly by craft groups, but also increasingly by other groups, such as the Blastfurnacemen.

The role of the steel community has either been to augment the 'family' ideology of the plant, or to give supportive action to groups in conflict, an apparent paradox which seems to reinforce the earlier suggestions that what goes on in the community depends to a large extent on what goes on in the workplace.

It would seem that where an important group of workers has skills which are industry-specific, they can either make militant use of their indispensability (as in the shipyards) or can regard themselves and their economic fortunes as being dependent on the fortunes of the industry. If the increase in insecurity posed by the BSC's planned re-organisation together with the loss of job-satisfaction implied by technological change, result in ISTC members' disenchantment with their official union policy, we may see the metal manufacturing industry rise higher in the table of strike-militant industries.

Notes

- 1) Evans C. (1969) "A miners life" (in Fraser R. (ed.) (1969) Work, Vol. 2. Harmondsworth : Penguin) p.50
- 2) Slaughter C. (1958) "The strike of Yorkshire mineworkers in May 1955" British Sociological Review 46
- 3) compiled from Knowles K.G.J.C. (1952) Strikes Oxford : Blackwell p. 164 and Scott W.H., Mumford E., McGivering I.C and Kirkby J.M. (1963) Coal and Conflict Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, p.23
- 4) figures from NCB Report and Accounts 1968 - 9, quoted in Cliff T. (1970) The employers' offensive London : Pluto, p. 114 and Ferris P. (1972) The New Militants - Crisis in the Trade Unions Harmondsworth ; Penguin p.39
- 5) Scott W.H. et al. (1963) op. cit. p.26
- 6) Baldwin G.B. (1955) Beyond nationalisation - the labour problems of British coal Cambridge ; Harvard Univ. Press p.4
- 7) from Heath R.H. (1969) "The NPLA in the coal industry and some aspects of workers control", in Coates K., Topham T. and Barratt-Brown M. (eds.) (1969) Trade Union Register London : Merlin pp. 185 - 200
- 8) Baldwin G.B. (1955) op. cit. p. 74
- 9) Wellisz S. (1953) "Strikes in coal mining" British Journal of Sociology 1953
- 10) Kerr C. and Siegal A. (1954) "The inter-industry propensity to strike - an international comparison" (in Kornhauser A., Dubin R. and Ross A.M. (eds.) (1954) Industrial Conflict New York ; McGraw Hill (pp. 189 - 212)
- 11) Knowles K.G.J.C. (1954) "Strike-proneness and its determinants" American Journal of Sociology L (3) pp. 213 - 229
- 12) from Freeman C. (1970) "Community Studies and the analysis of culture": University of Durham : Unpublished seminar paper.
- 13) Dennis N., Henriques F. and Slaughter C. (1956) Coal is our life London : Tavistock p. 27
- 14) ibid. p. 144
- 15) See Freeman C. (1970) op. cit.
- 16) Dennis N. et al. (1956) op. cit. p. 64

- 17) ibid. p. 79 (my emphases)
 - 18) Wellisz S. (1953) op. cit.
 - 19) Lockwood D. (1966) "Sources of variation in working-class images of society" Sociological Review 14 (3)
 - 20) Goldthorpe J., Lockwood D., Bechofer F., and Platt J. (1968) The Affluent Worker (Vol. 1) Cambridge : University Press
 - 21) under criticism, the authors modified their position to say that car-workers strikes were consistent with instrumentalism. Thus there would seem to be 'solidaristic' and 'instrumental' types of strike. See Lockwood D. et al (1968) The Affluent Worker Vol. 1 (Appendix D. pp. 195-6)
 - 22) Scott W.H. et al. (1963) op. cit. p. 183
 - 23) Wellisz S. (1953) op. cit.
 - 24) Westergaard J. (1965) "The withering away of class : a contemporary myth" in New Left Review (1965) Towards Socialism London : Fontana pp. 77 - 113
 - 25) Zweig F. (1952) The British Worker Harmondsworth : Penguin
 - 26) Kerr C. and Siegel A. (1954) op. cit.
 - 27) Trist E., Higgins G., Murray H. and Pollock A. (1963) Organisational Choice London : Tavistock p. 20
 - 28) see Orwell G. (1937) The road to Wigan Pier. London : Gollancz, Dennis N. et al. (1956) op. cit., Baldwin G. (1955) op. cit., and Trist E. et al. (1963) op. cit.
- The description of the work given in this Chapter was also aided by my own visit below ground at the Morrison Busty pit, Annfield Plain, in West Durham.
- 29) Trist E. et al. (1963) op. cit. p.xi
 - 30) ibid. p. 60
 - 31) Baldwin G. (1955) op. cit. p.86
 - 32) Scott W.H. et al. (1963) op. cit. p. 151, p.174
 - 33) ibid. p. 125
 - 34) Wellisz S. op. cit.

- 35) "Coal mining : report of the technical advisory committee (Cmnd 6610) (1945), quoted in Goldthorpe J. (1959) "Technical organisation as a factor in supervisory-worker conflict" British Journal of Sociology
- 36) Goldthorpe J. (1959) op. cit.
- 37) Knowles K.G.J.C. (1954) op. cit. p. 162
- 38) Heath R.H. (1969) op. cit.
- 39) ibid.
- 40) Hughes J. and Moore R. (eds.) (1972) A special case - Social Justice and the miners Harmondsworth : Penguin
- 41) Turner G. (1964) The Car Makers Harmondsworth : Penguin p.79
- 42) Turner H.A., Clack G. & Roberts G. (1967) Labour Relations in the Motor Industry London: Allen & Unwin p. 107
- 43) see Counter Information Services (1973) British Leyland - the beginning of the end ? (CIS Anti-Report No: 5) London: CIS
- 44) Turner G. (1964) op. cit. p.66
- 45) See Matthews J. (1972) Ford Strike - the workers story London : Panther pp. 26 - 28
- 46) Turner H.A. et al. (1967) op. cit. p.23
- 47) Beynon H. (1973) Working for Ford Harmondsworth : Penguin p. 140
- 48) Turner H.A. et al. (1967) op. cit. p.52
- 49) ibid. Chapter 5: 'Strikes and the level of activity'
- 50) Beynon H. (1973) op. cit. p. 156
- 51) see also Matthews J. (1972) op. cit. p. 84
- 52) quoted in Beynon H. (1973) op. cit. p.45
- 53) Matthews J. (1972) op. cit.p.110
- 54) Beynon H. (1973) op. cit. p.240
- 55) ibid. p. 68
- 56) ibid. p.90
- 57) Goldthorpe J. et al. (1968) op. cit. Vol.1 Introduction
- 58) although it is interesting that G. Turner in an admittedly unscientific study obtained far more 'bourgeois' answers to his questions in Coventry than he did in Luton. See Turner G. (1964) op. cit.

- 59) see Turner H.A. et al. (1967) op. cit. pp. 138 - 144
- 60) Goldthorpe J. et al. (1968) op. cit. Vol. 1 p.28
- 61) Beynon H. (1973) op. cit. p. 118
- 62) Turner H.A. et al. (1967) op. cit. p.213
- 63) Turner G. (1964) op. cit. p.86
- 64) Beynon H. (1973) op. cit. p. 227
- 65) ibid. Introduction
- 66) see Walker C.R. & Guest C. (1952) The man on the assembly line Cambridge Mass. : Harvard and Chinoy E. (1955) Automobile workers and the American Dream New York : Doubleday
- 67) Goldthorpe J.H. (1966) "Attitudes & behaviour of car assembly workers" British Journal of Sociology Vol. 17 No. 3
- 68) Clack G. (1967) Industrial relations in a British car factory Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, also Turner H.A. et al. (1967) p. 169
- 69) "On the track at Fords" Socialist Worker 30 May 1970
- 70) see Beynon H. (1973) op. cit. Chapter 5
- 71) Clack G. (1967) op. cit.
- 72) Turner H. et al. (1967) op. cit. pp. 170 - 171
- 73) see Beynon H. (1973) op. cit. Chapter 6 - "controlling the line"
- 74) ibid. pp. 187 - 188
- 75) Turner H. et al. (1967) op. cit. p; 222
- 76) see Cliff T. (1970) The employers offensive London : Pluto pp. 50-51
- 77) see the 'Robertson' Report (1968) Cmmnd 3692 HMSO, which gives a concise statement of managerial attitudes to shop-floor bargaining:
"The company could not accept that standards established by work-study should be the subject of shop-floor bargaining."
- 78) quoted in Wilson D.F. (1972) Dockers - the impact of industrial change London : Fontana p. 22
- 79) Dawson A.A.P. (1951) "The stabilisation of dockworkers earnings" International Labour Review 63 pp. 241 - 265

- 80) Wilson D.F. (1972) op. cit. p. 34
- 81) Woodward J. et al. (1954) (Liverpool University Dept. of Social Sciences) The Dockworker Liverpool : Liverpool University Press p. 85
- 82) Knowles K.G.J.C. (1951) "The post-war dock strikes" Political Quarterly 22 pp.
- 83) ibid.
- 84) see Wilson D.F. (1972) op. cit. Appendix 7
- 85) Devlin Committee (1965) Report into Decasualisation and causes of dissension Cd 2734, Table p.4
- 86) see Wilson D.F. (1972) op. cit. pp. 294 - 5
- 87) "The Docks Nettle" The Economist May 6 (1961)
- 88) Woodward J. et al (1954) op. cit. p.42
- 89) quoted in Knowles K.G.J.C. & Romanis A. (1952) "Dockworkers Earnings" Bulletin of the Oxford Institute of Statistics 14 pp. 327 - 365
- 90) Wilson D.F. (1972) op. cit. p.53
- 91) Woodward J. et al. (1954) op. cit. p.43
- 92) ibid. pp. 48 - 9
- 93) Dash J. (1969) Good morning Brothers! London : Mayflower pp. 70 - 71
- 94) Wilson D.F. (1972) op. cit. p.50
- 95) Young M. & Wilmott P. (1957) Family & Kinship in East London Harmondsworth : Penguin p. 98
- 96) Woodward J. et al. (1954) op. cit. p.49
- 97) quoted in Young M. & Wilmott P. (1957) op. cit. p.100
- 98) see ibid. pp. 97 - 100
- 99) Woodward J. et al. (1954) op. cit. pp. 67, 80
- 100) Turner H.A. (1955) "The Docker and the Sociologist" Social Welfare 9 pp. 139 - 147
see also Hill S. (1967) The Dockers - class and tradition in London London : Heinemann. Hill makes a similar conclusion to that reached here, namely that "It is noteworthy that local communities do not appear to have any impact on orientations." p.66

- 101) for a first-hand example of some of the contradictory attitudes held by dockworkers against the call stand see Ellenger V.C. (1965) "The engine that drives the system" New Society March 25, 1965, an account by an ex-Bristol dockworker.
- 102) Devlin Committee (1965) op. cit. p. 30 onwards
- 103) Woodward J. et al. (1954) op. cit. p. 91
- 104) Dash J. (1969) op. cit. p. 127
- 105) see Wilson D.F. (1972) op. cit. p. 118
- 106) Woodward J. et al. (1954) op. cit. p. 198
- 107) Wilson D.F. (1972) op. cit. pp. 114 - 115
- 108) quoted in Cliff T. (1970) op. cit. p. 36
- 109) Topham T. (1970) "The ports Bill, joint control and rationalisation" (in Coates K., Topham T. and Barratt-Brown M. (eds.) Trade Union Register 1970 London : Merlin) pp. 153 - 161
- 110) Knowles K.G.J.C. and Romanis A. (1952) op. cit.
- 111) Dash J. (1969) op. cit. p. 101
- 112) Leggett Committee (1951) Report into unofficial stoppages in London Cmnd. 8236
- 113) Devlin Committee (1965) op. cit. p.33
- 114) Woodward J. et al. (1954) op. cit. p.127
- 115) Devlin Committee (1965) op. cit. p.46
- 116) see Wilson D.F. (1972) op. cit. p.129
- 117) quoted in Cliff T. (1970) op. cit. p. 154
- 118) Lord Geddes (chairman) (1966) Shipbuilding Inquiry Committee Report Cmnd. 2937 Table 8, p.105
- 119) Parkinson J.R. (1960) The economics of shipbuilding in the U.K. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press p.156
- 120) Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) Industrial disputes London : Routledge & Kegan Paul p. 120 Table XII
- 121) Sources for Table 14: 1950 - 55 from Cousins J.M. & Brown R.K. (1970) "Shipbuilding" J.C. Dewdney (ed.) Durham County & City with Teeside Durham : B.A.A.S. p .317
1959 - 1968 from Department of Employment (1971) British Labour Statistics - historical abstract 1886-1968 London : HMSO Table 135, p. 249
- see also Geddes (1966) op. cit. p. 97

- 122) Geddes (1966) op. cit. p.98
- 123) see also the report on the industry by the Commission on Industrial Relations (1971) CIR Report No. 22: Shipbuilding and shiprepairing London : HMSO
- 124) Cameron G.E. (1964) "Post-war strikes in the North-east shipbuilding and ship-repair industry 1946 - 61" British Journal of Industrial Relations Vol. 11 No. 1
- 125) figures calculated from Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) op. cit. Tables VIII, X and XI pp. 99, 102 - 3
- 126) Sources: Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) op. cit. p.100
Geddes (1966) op. cit. p. 106 & CIR Report No. 22 (1971) Shipbuilding & ship-repairing Cmnd.4756 London : HMSO Appendix 8 p. 181
- 127) Geddes (1966) op. cit. p. 105
- 128) Brown R.K., Brannen P., Cousins J. and Samphier M. (1972) " The contours of solidarity" B.J.I.R. Vol. X No. 1 pp. 12 - 41
- 129) Cousins J. and Brown R.K. (1972) Patterns of paradox - shipbuilding workers images of society (Durham Working Papers in Sociology No. 4) Durham : Dept. of Sociology, University of Durham p. 4
- 130) Robertson D.J. (1954) "Labour Turnover in the Clyde Shipbuilding Industry" Scottish Journal of Political Economy No. 1. pp. 9 - 32
- 131) Brown R. and Brannen P. (1970 a) "Social relations and social perspectives among shipbuilding workers" (Part 1) Sociology Vol. 4 No. 1 pp. 71 - 84
- 132) ibid.
- 133) Cousins J. and Brown R.K. (1972) op. cit. p. 27
- 134) ibid. p. 27
- 135) Kerr C. & Siegel A. (1954) op. cit.
- 136) Cousins J. & Brown R.K. (1972) op. cit. p. 22
- 137) Mann M. (1970) "The social cohesion of liberal democracy" American Sociological Review Vol.35 No. 3 pp. 423 - 439 see also Brown R.K. (1974) "Some problems emerging from research in shipbuilding" Mens en Maatschappij 1974
- 138) Cousins J. & Brown R.K. (1972) op. cit. p.27

- 139) for a detailed account of this action see Buchan A. (1972) The right to work - the story of the Upper Clyde confrontation London : Calder & Boyars
- 140) Parkinson J.R. (1960) op. cit. p. 157
- 141) Brown R.K. & Brannen (1970 b.) "Social relations and social perspectives among shipbuilding workers" (part 2) Sociology Vol. 4 no. 2 pp. 197 - 211
- 142) ibid.
- 143) Cousins J. & Brown R.K. (1972) op. cit. p.8
- 144) Stokes R.S. (1949) "A shipyard from within" Manchester School 17 (1)
- 145) Cousins J. & Brown R.K. (1972) op. cit. p. 8
- 146) see Stokes R.S. (1949) op. cit. This practice is similar to 'spelling' in the docks, and the 'blow' system in printing.
- 147) Cousins J.M. (1971) Shop stewards in shipbuilding University of Durham : unpublished seminar paper (a shorter version of this paper can be found as "The non-militant shop-steward" in New Society 3 February 1972.)
- 148) see Parkinson J.R. (1960) op. cit. p. 160
- 149) Brown R.K. & Brannen P. (1970 b) op. cit. See also Stinchcombe A.L. (1959) "Bureaucratic & craft administration of production" Ad. Sci. Qtly. No. 4 pp 168 - 187
- 150) Brown R.K. & Brannen P. (1970 a) op. cit.
- 151) Cameron (1964) op. cit., suggests that the greater militancy of blacksmiths and steelworkers is due to their greater dependence on the yard, i.e. their special skills can rarely be used outside the industry. It could also be suggested however that their bargaining-power is based on the fact that the yard depends a good deal on them - in a period of average employment, shipbuilding skills cannot readily be obtained by management from outside the industry.
- 152) Brown R.K. et al. (1972) op. cit.
- 153) Cameron G.C. (1964) op. cit.
- 154) Brown R.K. et al. (1972) op. cit.
- 155) for a detailed analysis of payment structures see Cousins J.M. & Brown R.K. (1971) "Trade union shopfloor organisation and industrial change in shipbuilding" University of Durham ; unpublished seminar paper.

- 156) Cameron G.C. (1964) op. cit.
- 157) Brown R.K. et al. (1972) op. cit.
- 158) taken from Geddes (1966) op. cit. Appendix Q, p.190
- 159) Brown R.K. & Brannen P. (1970 a) op. cit.
- 160) quoted in Cameron G.C. (1964) op. cit.
- 161) suggested by Cameron ibid.
- 162) Cameron Committee (1967) Report of the committee of inquiry into the problems caused by the introduction of web-offset machines into the printing industry Cmd.3184 p.8
- 163) calculated from figures given in ibid. p.6
- 164) for a history of the industry see Child J. (1967) Industrial relations in the British printing industry London : Allen & Unwin
- 165) see ibid. pp. 361 - 362
- 166) for the percentage of newspaper content devoted to advertising see Williams R. (1968) Communications Harmondsworth : Penguin pp. 36 - 41
- 167) see Sykes A.J.M. (1967) "The cohesion of a trade union workshop organisation" Sociology Vol. 1 No. 2
- 168) See Cannon I.E. (1967) "Ideology and occupational community - a study of compositors" Sociology Vol.1
- 169) Economist Intelligence Unit (1966) The National Newspaper Industry - a survey London : 'The Economist' p. 93
- 170) Sykes A.J.M. (1967) op. cit.
- 171) E.I.U. (1966) op. cit. p.18, see also Rhodes E. (1976) Press, papers & print - a case study Open University : O.U. Press
- 172) Doyle R. (1968) "The Print Jungle" (in Fraser R. (1968) Work - twenty personal accounts Harmondsworth : Penguin) pp. 28 - 29
- 173) Cannon I.C. (1967) op. cit.
- 174) Doyle R. (1968) op. cit. p.27
- 175) Blauner R. (1964) Alienation and Freedom Chicago : University of Chicago Press
- 176) Cannon I.C. (1967) op. cit.
- 177) E.I.U. (1966) op. cit. p. 94
- 178) ibid. p. 174

- 179) Sykes A.J.M. (1967) op. cit.
- 180) E.I.U. (1966) op. cit. p. 155
- 181) Cameron (1967) op. cit. p. 62
- 182) Cliff T. (1970) op. cit. p. 168
- 183) E.I.U. (1966) p.92 A measure of the success of the printing unions policies on redundancies is perhaps given by the frequency with which commentators refer to "too few jobs" in the industry rather than the usual "too many men".
- 184) ibid. p. 174
- 185) Doyle R. (1968) op. cit. pp. 22, 24, 26
- 186) Cameron (1967) op. cit. p. 68
- 187) quoted in Child J. (1967) op. cit. p.35
- 188) see Sykes A.J.M. (1967) op. cit.
- 189) Cannon I.C. (1967) op. cit.
- 190) for details of the working of the group norms of the Chapel see the work of Sykes in Sykes A.J.M. (1967) op. cit.; Sykes A.J.M. (1960a) "Unity and restrictive practices in the British printing industry" Sociological Review VIII; and Sykes A.J.M. (1960b) "Trade union workshop organisation in the British printing industry - the Chapel" Human Relations 13
- 191) Sykes A.J.M. (1967) op. cit.
- 192) ibid.
- 193) Sykes A.J.M. (1967) op. cit. and Cameron (1967) op. cit., p.12
- 194) Cameron (1967) op. cit. p. 10
- 195) Child J. (1967) op. cit. p. 334
- 196) Sykes A.J.M. (1967) op. cit.
- 197) Sykes A.J.M. (1960a) op. cit.
- 198) see Sykes A.J.M. (1967) op. cit.
- 199) see Child J. (1967) op. cit. p. 311
- 200) Sisson K. (1975) Industrial relations in Fleet Street Oxford:Blackwell Table 4.3, p. 43
- 201) Banks J.A. (1970) Marxist Sociology in Action London:Faber

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- 203) see Banks J.A. (1970) op. cit. pp 102 - 4
- 204) Sykes A.J.M. (1965) "Some differences in the attitudes of clerical and manual workers" Sociological Review Vol.13 pp. 297 - 310
- 205) Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. p. 37
- 206) Scott W.H., Banks J.A., Halsey A.H., & Lupton T. (1956) Technical change and industrial relations Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, p. 45
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- 208) for further details of these changes, see Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (1975) ACAS Report No.3: Court of Inquiry into a dispute between the National Union of Blastfurnacemen and the British Steel Corporation Chapter 2.
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- 210) Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) "Industrial relations in the North-East Iron and Steel Industry" (in Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) op. cit.)
- 211) Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. p. 100
- 212) Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) op. cit.
- 213) Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. p. 37
- 214) Scott W.H. et al. (1956) op. cit. pp. 46 - 8
- 215) ibid. pp 51 - 2, 54
- 216) Thomason G.F. (1963) An analysis of the effects of industrial changes upon selected communities in South Wales University of Cardiff : unpublished Ph.D. thesis (quoted in Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. pp. 96 - 7)
- 217) Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. pp. 96 - 7
In this context it has been alleged that blastfurnacemen in Port Talbot - "still point at a passing worker in the street and deride him as the son of a 1926 blackleg" (Sunday Times (June 6th 1970) "The agony of the blast-furnacemen"). In view of the importance of post-war migration into the town this seems a little unlikely.
- 218) Esland G. & Thompson D.M. (1976) "Working in Steel" in People & Work M.B.I. Open University.
- 219) quoted in Banks J.A. (1970) op. cit. pp. 89 - 90
- 220) Sykes A.J.M. (1965) op. cit.

- 221) for both these sets of figures see Banks O. (1960) Attitudes of steel workers to technical change Liverpool : Liverpool University Press p. 102
- 222) Scott W.H. et al. (1956) op. cit. pp. 182 - 3
- 223) ibid. pp. 51 - 2
- 224) see Banks J.A. (1970) op. cit. p. 20
- 225) Sykes A.J.M. (1965) op. cit.
- 226) Bowen P. & Shaw M. (1971) "Clerks and unionisation in steel" Newcastle Polytechnic : unpublished seminar paper
- 227) see Eldridge J.E.T. (1968) op. cit. pp. 161 - 2, Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. p. 38 and Sunday Times (1970) op. cit.
- 228) see Karson American Labour Unions and Politics 1900 - 18
- 229) ACAS (1975) op. cit. p. 15
- 230) as the writer can testify following a visit to Consett Iron Works, Co. Durham in 1971.
- 231) see Sunday Times (1970) op. cit.
- 232) Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. p. 98
- 233) McGeown P. (1969) "Steelman" (in Fraser R. (1969) Work Vol. 2 Harmondsworth : Penguin)
- 234) quoted in Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. p. 41
- 235) see Esland G. & Thompson D.M. (1976) op. cit.
- 236) ACAS (1975) op. cit. p. 15
- 237) from ibid. Table 1, p. 12
- 238) Smith E.O. (1971) op. cit. p. 37
- 239) quoted in Cliff T. (1970) op. cit. pp. 171 - 2
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- 241) ACAS (1975) op. cit. p. 36

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS A THEORY OF STRIKE-MILITANCY

THE MEANING OF MILITANCY

From the preceding examination of some of the suggestions as to why certain industries are 'strike-prone' it would seem that there exist certain major areas of confusion, due in many cases to writers putting forward theories of strike-proneness without first having a theory of strike action in general. The confusion centres round two main areas.

Firstly there is what we may call the "error of particularism". One of the commonest objections made in this thesis to some of the explanatory theories in existence is that they are both mono-causal in substance and yet incapable of being universalised to cover similar levels of industrial action in the same society and the same historical period.

The second major area of confusion arises over the precise mechanism of causality behind social action. Some theories, for example the traditional/instrumental thesis, imply that attitudes and values are automatically translatable into action. We saw, for example in the case of shipbuilding, that this is not necessarily the case, but that orientations and ideologies tend to be mediated through the institutional structure within which action takes place; in the case of strikes this is jointly composed of the structure of the workplace, and the structure

of union organisation. Other theories, for example the socio-technical school, would seem to imply conversely that certain structures will inevitably result in certain levels of action; this again does not necessarily apply - in the steel industry the same socio-technical system produced different responses from craftsmen than it did from steelmen.

It is necessary to clarify the position if the term strike-militancy is to have any usefulness. Allen defines militancy as referring to methods rather than aims - all trade unions, he says, have the same aims, namely to improve the living standard of their members, but

"It is not what unions are pressing for which matters so much as how they are pressing." (1)

The methods are not limited to strike action (which is why I have referred throughout to strike-militancy rather than militancy in general) but include all other forms of industrial action if they are undertaken with the requisite speed and vigour, and degree of achievement.

This corresponds with the view taken in this thesis that strike-militancy or 'strike-proneness' is merely one end of a continuum of industrial action. In asking why militant methods come to be adopted in certain industries we need to recognise that consciousness is not necessarily directly translated into action: the desire to act militantly may be thwarted by structural factors in the context of the workplace or industry

which make such action not readily possible. Conversely, structure alone does not necessarily result in action, as the example of the steelmen shows.

Social action, in this case strike action, is the result of a continuous interplay between structure and consciousness and the effects on both of these of the action itself; we saw for example in the examination of the nature of strike action and trade unions in Chapter 2, that the worker's everyday consciousness, limited as it is for most of the time to local and sectional issues, can rapidly be expanded through the actual act of striking, and perceptual horizons broadened (even if only temporarily) to include concepts of class and power.

For militant methods to be adopted they must be both desirable (or necessary) and possible. Returning therefore to the model first put forward in Chapter 2, we can say that the degree to which a body of workers acts militantly will depend firstly on there being occasions of overt dispute between themselves and the employers, secondly on the degree to which they are prepared to take collective action, and thirdly on their ability to take such action. As we said in Chapter 2, all three conditions must be present for any strike action to take place in any industry. Any factors which increase the amount or intensity of these conditions, however, will help to push the scale of the action towards the militant end of the spectrum.

It will perhaps be useful, therefore, to take the various suggested causes of 'strike-proneness', including those examined in the previous chapter, and assess their usefulness as contributory factors within this overall framework, i.e. whether they contribute to the occasion, the preparedness or the ability to take strike action.

OCCASIONS FOR DISPUTE

Examples were given in the previous chapter of that approach which points the finger at certain types of technology for consistently throwing up occasions for dispute. Even outside those specific industries examined, technology and its concomitant social systems is frequently given as a 'cause' of industrial conflict in general. Thus:

"... Each broad type of productive system calls for its own characteristic organisation structure.... This structure is not precisely determined by technology and there are limits within which a choice can be made. Nevertheless each type of system has its own characteristic temper of industrial relations so that we would know something to be exceptionally wrong if oil-refining were suddenly to throw up a succession of unofficial strikes, just as we would be surprised if cars were mass-produced without some stress and strains within the social organisation involved."

(Fox) (2)

This argument is pursued in several well-known classifications of industrial processes in terms of their technology such as those by Woodward (3) and Blauner (4). Under Woodward's classification into unit and small-batch production, large-batch and mass production, and process production, it was claimed that industrial relations were consistently "better" in unit and process industries than in large-batch and mass

industries as there was likely to be less tension and pressure, smaller working groups, and a smaller span of control, (5) In fact, as is shown in Table 18 below, if one attempts to classify the amended SIC categories for manufacturing industry used in this study according to Woodward's typology and compare this with the strike-militancy ratings, no real relationship is readily apparent. In fact, the one category which appears to have a high rating, unit and small-batch, is the very one which Woodward expected to be low.

Table 18 Strike-militancy and Joan Woodward's typology

manufacturing industry	M
<u>UNIT & SMALL-BATCH</u>	
shipbuilding & engineering	2.3
printing	2.2
construction	0.9
<u>LARGE-BATCH & MASS</u>	
food drink & tobacco	0.2
clothing & footwear	0.1
bricks & cement	0.4
vehicles	4.3
textiles	0.2
wood products	0.4
<u>PROCESS PRODUCTION</u>	
iron & steel	2.1
gas, electricity & water	0.4
chemicals	0.3

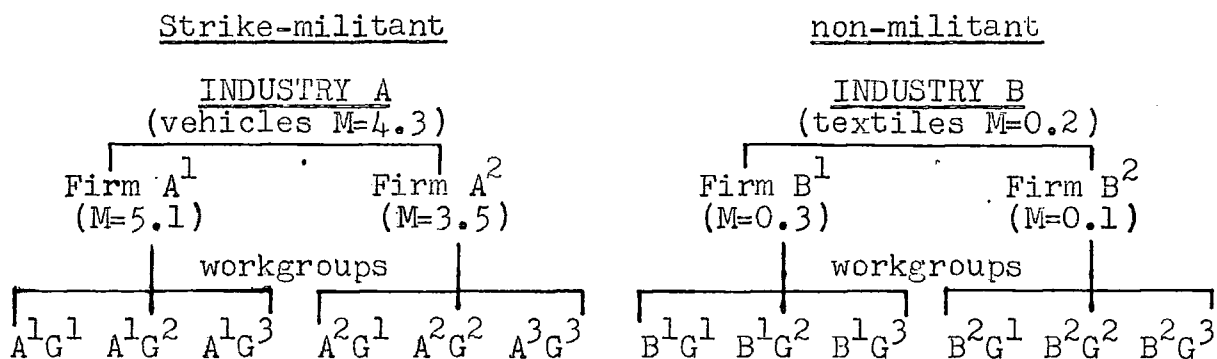
It is of course very difficult to categorise manufacturing industry in this way and even more difficult to assign a category to non-manufacturing industry such as mining. The categories are too crude and any one industry is likely to contain several types of technological organisation.

The same difficulties are encountered with Blauner's division into craft, machine-minding, assembly-line, and process industries. In our examination of strike-militant industries we found one assembly-line industry (vehicles) where Blauner suggests problems of alienation will be most acute, but also two craft industries (printing and shipbuilding) where alienation should be minimised. In addition there was one process industry (iron and steel) and two others, mining and docking, not readily classifiable.

The reservations already mentioned (and indeed admitted by both authors) that a particular industry will contain a variety of work-situations in addition to those structured by the dominant technology, is taken further by Kuhn (6) who suggests that a given technology will lead to specific groups in the plant being more prone to conflict than others in the plant. Now while this may be true, and Kuhn's analysis of how this works is extremely useful, it is also for our purposes of inter-industry comparison not very relevant.

As an example, we can see in the diagram below that the technology of vehicle manufacture may mean that in any vehicle-factory workgroup G^2 (bracketed) will strike for more striker-days than either groups G^1 or G^3 , and similarly, the technology of textiles will contribute to ensuring that in any textile-plant group G^3 will be more strike-militant than other groups. This does not tell us, however, why vehicles as an Industry should be more strike militant than textiles.

Industry, plant and workgroup



Similarly, locally unique organisation factors may mean that vehicle firm 1 will have a higher strike record than firm 2. This does not explain why both will be higher than textile firms 1 and 2. We have to compare Fords and Courtaulds rather than Ford and Vauxhall.

The approach taken by Trist and his colleagues of the Tavistock School of Human Relations attempts to overcome some of these difficulties in that they suggest that what is important is not the technology per se but the degree to which it matches the social organisation of the workplace. We have already seen in the review of the coal industry that Trist's specific criticism of the semi-mechanised longwall system was that although the cycle of tasks was a technological whole, it was performed by a miscellaneous collection of segregated task-groups who could only be integrated externally by management through the payment structure. The fact that this approach is difficult to universalise either historically or in respect of other industries has already been suggested. More importantly, we must ask again whether there is anything unusual in such external monetary integration. In 150 years of analysis of the phenomenon of alienation it has been repeatedly

pointed out that the only link between different groups of workers in the same plant is the fact that they are paid by the same management. Men rarely come together voluntarily to work in one geographical locus, and that locus itself - the factory - is built primarily to house machines not men: the latter fit themselves as best they can around given technical tasks. As has already been suggested in Chapter 2 and has been pointed out by Westergaard⁽⁷⁾ the worker remains tied to his job and the social relations that go with it primarily through the cash nexus - the size, security and potential growth of his wage packet.

Now it is extremely possible that under certain circumstances there can be overlaid on this cash-basis a form of social organisation characterised by personal social bonds which act as extra co-ordinators of task activity. Such a case would be the old "marrer" relationship in the pits where the actual physical dependence of each member of the team on the other and the personal social links between them provided an additional bond over and above managerial integration. Such an element must be seen as an addition and not an alternative however. As a confirmation one can think of other examples like the 'top-six' gangs in the docks where the task-cycle of unloading a ship is performed by the same group from start to finish, the different stages are not segregated and membership of the gang is semi-permanent and frequently based on externally-derived social bonds such as religion or kinship. In spite of this apparent 'fit' dock workers are still strike-militant.

To criticise these explanations is not to deny that technology often does have a role in providing occasions for dispute but a more useful method of analysis might be to concentrate on the extent to which specific technologies lead to periodic alterations in the effort-bargain. For example, most of the strike-militant industries were characterised by pronounced insecurity of earnings which in several cases (mining, the docks, shipbuilding) was a direct result of frequently-changing working conditions.

In the light of our earlier analysis which placed fundamental importance on the monetary basis of the employment relationship and the all-important nature of the effort-bargain, it is likely that such uncertainties will be far more instrumental in providing occasions for dispute than the presence of any given type of technology.

All employment must be uncertain to some extent, given that the initiative in hiring and firing and fixing earnings lies with the employer, hence the importance of struggles over the frontier of control. The evidence reviewed in the previous chapter, however, displayed a level of insecurity of both earnings and employment in most of the industries which certainly seemed above average. In addition to the fluctuations in pay (magnified in most cases by complicated payment systems) there were cyclical insecurities of both pay and employment as industries were affected by economic boom and recession (vehicles, docks, iron and steel) and the long-term threat of redundancy due to the running-down of those industries over the period in question (coal, docks, shipbuilding, printing, iron and steel). In addition there

is the threat to continued earning power (and indeed to life itself) posed by dangerous physical working conditions.

Insecurity of earnings due to complex payment systems was suggested as a key factor in explaining strike-militancy by Turner's team for the vehicle industry, Scott's team for coal and the Devlin Report for the Docks. The assumption in such reports seemed to be that, if the payment system were simplified the strike-proneness would drop. This has however not as yet been born out by the events of the past few years. We saw in the last chapter that most of the industries mentioned had introduced a significant productivity deal at some time in the late sixties which in all cases had the specific aim of simplifying the payment structure (by abolishing PBR in favour of MDW, simplifying the number of grades through job evaluation and so on).

Two things appear to have happened. Firstly, the amount of strike action rose fairly dramatically and, secondly there was a trend away from what had hitherto been the typical strike, short, small and unofficial, towards larger and longer strikes. As Whittingham and Towers cautiously concluded in 1971:

"strikes are on average tending to increase in duration"

and

"it is possible to detect some slackening off in the proportion of unofficial strikes"

(8)

We have already hypothesised in two instances why this should be the case. In both mining and shipbuilding the sharp drop in the ability to bargain locally following productivity agreements was followed by the largest strikes the industries had seen for decades as it now became necessary to work through the official union structure, often at national level, to achieve any significant gains. (The miners even altered the majority vote necessary for strike action from two-thirds to a half in order to facilitate large-scale action under the new bargaining conditions.)

The mechanism here seems to be that experience of the ability to maintain living standards and conditions via wage-drift and shop-floor bargaining in one period serves as a reference point for action in the following period. Also the removal of purely local ingredients in the pay structure makes comparison with rates paid to similar workers elsewhere much easier, and may thus increase demands for parity. What changes is that different payment systems provide different sets of occasions for disputes and therefore perhaps result in different types of strike. Whether this continued high level of strike action is a permanent phenomenon or whether it will subside once the memory of the heady days of shop-floor bargaining fades remains to be seen.

It may be argued in criticism of this thesis that insufficient attention has been paid throughout to the formal systems of negotiation and conciliation, that high industrial strike-levels may be due to the failure or malfunction of

that industry's formal system of grievance-handling. The engineering and related industries for example are generally regarded as having complex and often long-winded conciliation and negotiation procedures - could this be a reason for high strike-levels in shipbuilding and vehicles? There are several reasons why this seems unlikely. For example, the industry which has consistently topped the strike-militancy league; mining; had (in theory) under the Pit Conciliation Scheme; a fairly clear and straightforward system for dispute-handling, (9) as is also the case in the docks which, however, does not seem to have eliminated the necessity for strike action in either industry. The complexity or simplicity of the formal system itself seems to have made little difference to whether an industry is strike-militant or not.

The argument is based on the view, held by writers such as Flanders; that use of the formal system is an alternative to strike action: that if the system is the right one, strikes will be unnecessary. It may be more useful; as we suggested in Chapter 2; to regard them as complimentary; collective bargaining depends on the balance of power for success just as much as strike action and both have their advantages in specific contexts. Collective bargaining can bring in the power of the trade union to back up claims and grievances; strike action can use the power of the workforce at a particular optimum point of production. We saw particularly good examples of this in the last chapter in the cases of shipbuilding

and hatch-bargaining in the docks; if the disputes arising at these times were put through the procedure and given the 'carry-on working' clause written into most procedures, the optimum time for bargaining would be lost along with the chance of success. In addition of course, strike action is invariably taken where use of the formal system fails to deliver the goods; indeed it seems doubtful if one could have any meaningful bargaining if neither side possessed a fairly strong non-'peaceful' sanction to back up its case. For the employers the sanction is the basic one of control of continued employment and earnings, for the workforce it is the threat of cessation of production through strike action.

A further drawback to the view which sees procedure and strikes as opposed alternatives is that it assumes that all matters of dispute are covered by the negotiation machinery. In reality management can very often deem certain areas such as control of output to be 'non-negotiable', i.e. in their view they form part of the function of management over which employees should have no say. (10) Similarly we have seen examples of how the formal industrial relations structure can ignore and exclude shop-floor informal structures of bargaining and job-organisation. We have seen how the dock management did not formally recognise the existence of the gang as a unit nor the unofficial grading of dock work, and Beynon quotes the Ford management as not really regarding the shop stewards as representing anyone but themselves even though their presence was tolerated at the lower levels of procedure. (11) Thus

even the question of what is covered by the formal industrial relations system and what is excluded can hinge around the frontier of control.

PREPAREDNESS TO TAKE ACTION

'The traditional proletarian worker', on the basis of his social experiences in his single-class, single-industry, isolated community, is supposed to hold dichotomous views of society which find their expression in a negative attitude to management and a willingness to take collective action on the basis of this perceived dichotomy of interests. In the previous chapter we voiced several reservations about this model; the most important probably being that from the evidence it seems to be the workplace rather than the community that is the more powerful context for structuring perceptions and orientations. In shipbuilding it was the diverse structure of the yard rather than the class-basis of the community that provided the basis for the shipyard workers' world-view; in the docks it was the long-standing insecurity of dock work which fostered an air of permanent suspicion towards the dock employers; and in the vehicle industry and in printing the absence of solidaristic communities did not prevent the formation of dichotomous views of the plant.

It is this latter, plant-orientation, which is surely the most important in determining industrial action, rather

than the workers' views of society in general which are often imprecise and open to pressure from the hegemonic culture. What Beynon calls the worker's "factory class-consciousness" is based on his direct experience of employment. This factory class-consciousness need not be overtly hostile as Lockwood originally suggested, but may simply be a recognition of a conflict of interest. Taking up Westergaard's point about the parochialism of community as a restriction on both consciousness and action, we can suggest that it is precisely where the monetary nature of the work is most self-evident, as in vehicles, that a dichotomous factory-consciousness is most likely to be widely held; and it is in the traditional firm with its additional ideologies of 'one happy family' or 'all in the same team' that this view may be obscured. Examples were seen in Wellisz's study of North-West pits, and especially in the steel industry where the steel workers with their 'family' orientation to the industry were the very group to have a low strike record.

To say that this limited factory-consciousness of 'us-ness' arises out of concrete experiences implies that it can be transcended in fresh circumstances, one of which may be the experience of strike action itself. It can also be reinforced through a continued emphasis on past history and events; this was seen in the case of shipbuilding and in the emphasis on custom and tradition in printing. It also

follows that changing economic conditions in the industry, as well as possibly raising the number of occasions for dispute; can also strengthen factory class-consciousness. Mechanisation in the docks or in printing for example constantly poses the choice of priorities between jobs and capital. In this situation a dichotomous view of the workplace is likely to be strengthened.

THE ABILITY TO TAKE ACTION

The ability to take action lies in the existence of that institution which makes permanent the possibility of collective action; namely the trade union. It was frequently noted in the previous chapter that the levels of unionisation among the manual workers in the industries concerned was very high, often as high as 100%. If we take figures for union density of membership for the workforce as a whole (i.e. including clerical and managerial staff) and relate them to the M-scores we can still see that there is an obvious relationship between union strength and the ability to take action. This is shown in Table 19:

Table 19 Strike militancy and the density of
union membership

<u>industry</u>	<u>Mean M</u> <u>(1950-69)</u>	<u>union density 1960</u>
mining	4.9	89%
vehicles/eng. &shpbldg/ metals	3.2 (averaged)	54%
transport	2.5	79%
printing	2.2.	57%
construction	0.9	37%
gas, elec. & water	0.4	51%
furniture & timber	0.4	37%
chemicals	0.3	20%
textiles	0.2	48%
food drink & tobacco	0.2	11%
clothing and footwear	0.1	27%
ag., fish & forestry	0.1	47%
distribution	0.1	15%
insurance, bankg., & profnl.	0	28%
public admin.	0	72%
entertainment etc.	0	39%

In 1960 the average union density was 43.2% (Source: Hindell K. (1962)⁽¹²⁾).

Kendall's rank (r) correlation gives $r = 0.400$

Spearman's rank (p) correlation gives $p = 0.509$

Both these fall within the moderate range 0.40 - 0.70, showing a "substantial relationship".

From the evidence of the last chapter it would seem that it is union membership that is a greater determining variable on ability to take action rather than whether there are many small unions or one large one, or whether the unions are of any particular type. Indeed if we attempt

another rough classification of the strike-militant industries, this time in respect of their predominant union types, we get the following result:

Table 20 Strike-militancy and union type

mining	- industrial (N.U.M.)
docks	- general (T.G.W.U.)
shipbuilding	- craft (Boilermakers, E.P.T.U. etc.) + general (T.G.W.U.; G.M.W.U.)
vehicles	- craft-industrial (A.E.U.); craft (E.P.T.U.) + general (T.G.W.U.; G.M.W.U.)
steel	- industrial (I.S.T.C.) + craft (A.E.U., E.P.T.U. etc.)
printing	- craft (N.G.A.) + industrial (S.O.G.A.T.)

Concentration on the effects of union type and structure places far too much emphasis on the patterns of formal organisation. As we have seen from the evidence, one of the major factors in increasing the ability of union-members to take action is the existence of what are often informal organisations, namely strong levels of shop-floor organisation such as the shop-stewards in vehicles and engineering, the liaison committees in the docks, or, more formally, the printing Chapels. These all have the function of enabling workers to bargain immediately over alterations to the effort-bargain, or, by pushing at the frontier of control, attempting to secure greater management of an insecure situation.

Their task is made easier or more difficult according to the economic position of the industry or firm. The economic vulnerability of a firm may strengthen management's resolve to resist workers' demands but may weaken their ability to do so. For example it was suggested that the highly competitive nature of the printing industry gave the printing unions a

greater ability to maintain wages and manning-levels without frequent recourse to strike action.

Vulnerability may also be due to the industry's key role in the economy. Meszaros⁽¹³⁾ has succinctly pointed to factors which indicate the escalating vulnerability of contemporary industrial organisations compared to those of the nineteenth century, among which is

"The economic link-up of the various branches of industry into a highly stretched system of closely inter-dependent parts, with an ever-increasing imperative for safeguarding the continuity of production in the system as a whole."

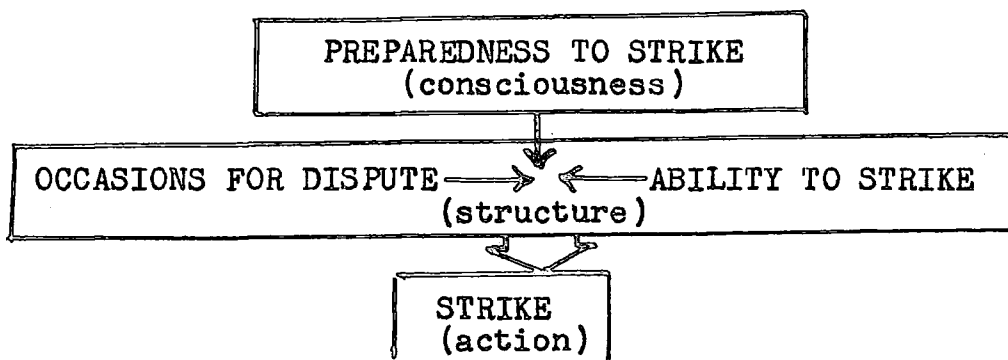
The use of the phrase "holding the nation to ransom" in the event of any major strike is itself indicative of this: as Meszaros rightly points out, nineteenth-century capitalism could not be "held to ransom" by an army of 'troublemakers' let alone by a mere handful of them.

The fact that strikes in certain industries can be amplified by the technological interdependence of the production process and thus have a domino-effect on the rest of the economy obviously increases the impact of the strike as a means of bargaining. Not every strike in such an industry is going to cripple the economy but the potential is there that it might. It is fairly difficult to quantify factors such as economic vulnerability but one can subjectively appreciate the strategic value of the transport sectors, the coal and iron and steel industries, and Turner has estimated that the strike-prone industries, while employing one quarter of the total labour force, account for a third of British export earnings.⁽¹⁴⁾

Lastly, what of the effect of the community on the ability to take collective action? Four out of the six industries are characterised by strong industrial communities and one of the remaining two has a strong father-son tradition. We have seen that the role of the community in fostering a preparedness to take action is open to doubt; but it did seem from the evidence that such communities are capable of playing a useful supportive role in the event of certain types of strike (i.e. large or long ones affecting a large proportion of the workforce). It is indeed possible that the ability to take such action would be greater with this sort of support than in a heterogeneous community where strikers were fragmented and isolated once they went home. In addition the older generations in the community provide an instant point of referral for memories and details of past disputes in the industry.

CONCLUSION

Our model of strike action can now be summarised diagrammatically as follows:



As we said earlier, this model will apply to any strike action in any industry, the institutional structure of the industry providing both occasions for dispute and the ability to take action. The basis of the former in a capitalist society is the inherent conflict of interest in the employment relationship. For most of the time this conflict is resolved in the compromise of the effort-bargain. Where the effort-bargain is continually altered or threatened, either through fluctuation in effort demanded or remuneration received, this inherent covert conflict is likely to become overt; there is in addition likely to be emphasis placed on extending or reclaiming the frontier of control in order to minimise future fluctuations. Factors which affect the effort-bargain or frontier of control in this way we may call conflict-maximising factors, and on the basis of the foregoing evidence we can summarise the more important ones as follows:

Occasions for dispute. Basis : inherent conflict in capitalist employment.

+ conflict-maximising factors: fluctuations in pay
cyclical insecurity
long-term threat to jobs
dangerous conditions
ability to compare with others

The basis of the ability to take strike action is the existence of a trade union. Any conditions which increase that union's strength and bargaining power we may call impact-maximising factors and again we can summarise these as follows:

Ability to take action. Basis : existence of a trade union.

+ impact-maximising factors: above average union membership.
technological interdependence.
economic importance of the industry.
industrial competition.
shop-floor organisation.
community support.

Lastly we may say that the preparedness to take strike action will be increased where there is an awareness of conflicting interests between the workgroup concerned and another group; this is usually the management and is reflected in a dichotomous view of the plant; but it may be another group of workers. Preparedness to strike will also be strengthened by an awareness of past conflicts.

On the basis of this model we can suggest that where there is a concentration of both conflict-maximising factors and impact-maximising factors in a specific industry then there is a likelihood that that industry will display an above-average level of strike action. Table 21 summarises the evidence from the previous chapter and displays just such clusterings for the six strike-militant industries:

Table 21 The contours of strike-militancy

	coal	cars	docks	ships	print	steel
<u>Occasions for dispute</u>						
fluctuations in pay	x	x	x	x		x
cyclical insecurity		x	x	x		x
long-term decline	x		x	x	x	x
dangerous condns.	x		x	x		x
ability to compare with others		x		x	x	x
<u>Preparedness to strike</u>						
dichotomous view of plant	x	x	x		x	
conflict view of other workgroups				x	x	x
importance of past history	x		x	x	x	
<u>Ability to strike</u>						
above-average unionisation	x	x	x	x	x	x
technological interdependence		x		x	x	x
economic importance of industry	x	x	x			x
industrial competn.		x		x	x	
shop-floor orgn		x	x	x	x	
community support	x		x	x		x

We can conclude that in the period 1950-69 these six industrial groupings had consistently high levels of strike action due to the concentration of multiple factors providing occasion, preparedness and ability for strike action.

There is nothing permanent in this situation: the next two decades may well see the place of these industries taken by others as the structure of the economy changes and the fortunes of different industries wax and wane. The purpose has not been to point conclusively at the strike-prone industries but rather to indentify those industries with a high level of strike-militancy and use the evidence they provide to hold up to scrutiny a hypothesis concerning the co-existence of conflict and compromise in industrial employment.

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