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The Shopfloor Experience of Regional Policy:
Work and Industrial Relations at the Bathgate Motor Plant,
c.1961-1986



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Abstract

This thesis explores the experience of work and industrial relations at the British Motor Corporation's commercial vehicle assembly plant at Bathgate in West Lothian, from its establishment in 1961 until its closure in 1986. The plant opened in Scotland as a result of a government regional development policy which sought to create jobs and ameliorate the rundown of heavy industry in areas of high unemployment. The thesis considers the role of such policy in shaping industrial development since 1945, and, using the oral history testimony of former Bathgate workers to examine the impact of economic and social change on Scotland's industrial population, contributes to the regional policy literature by extending the analysis beyond questions about its efficacy and considering the experiences of the workers and communities directly affected by such initiatives.

What emerges from this study of regional policy from the perspective of the shopfloor is the extent to which the plant's establishment on a greenfield site, in an area of high unemployment, very much on the periphery of the UK motor industry and with little tradition of mass assembly production processes, shaped the subsequent evolution of its working conditions, industrial relations, and worker attitudes, as well as its position within the Bathgate community. The Bathgate experience therefore illuminates a number of key debates in the wider historiography of Britain and Scotland since 1945, not only in relation to regional policy itself, but also with regard to the motor industry, its industrial relations, and the development, in the post-war context of relatively high wages and the increasing stability of work, of a more typically 'affluent' working class.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part One explores some of the issues surrounding the plant's establishment in West Lothian, particularly the regional policy aspects, and the plant's position within and relationship to both the wider BMC – later British Leyland – organisation and the British motor industry more generally. Part Two draws extensively on the influential 'affluent worker' thesis, as well as the literature around the industrial relations of motor manufacturing, in developing and exploring questions related to the way in which work was experienced at Bathgate, and the extent to which the attitudes and behaviour of its workforce came to reflect

those which typified the motor worker elsewhere. Throughout, the thesis engages with and adds nuance to debates over the role of shopfloor organisation and strike activity in damaging the performance of British motor manufacturing, and, by drawing on the oral testimony of former Bathgate workers themselves, offers a fresh perspective on the post-war experience of regional policy both in a particular, under-researched regional policy plant, and in Scotland and Britain more broadly.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Lists of tables, charts, and illustrations | iii |
| List of abbreviations | iv |
| Acknowledgements | vi |
| Author's declaration | vii |
| | |
| Introduction | 1 |
| | |
| Part One – Establishing Bathgate | |
| Chapter One..... | 23 |
| West Lothian – a ‘County on the ‘Move’? | |
| Chapter Two | 70 |
| Bathgate’s position in a changing motor industry | |
| | |
| Part Two – Working at Bathgate | |
| Chapter Three | 118 |
| Experiences of work | |
| Chapter Four..... | 152 |
| Union representation and shopfloor organisation | |
| Chapter Five | 191 |
| The affluent motor worker in Scotland | |
| | |
| Conclusion..... | 234 |
| | |
| Bibliography..... | 246 |

Tables, charts, and illustrations

Tables

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1:1 – percentage of total economically active population seeking work in West Lothian, Scotland and Great Britain, 1961-1981 | 38 |
| 1:2 – indicators of regional divisions of production by function, c.1981 | 63 |
| 3:1 – classification of workers at BMC Bathgate, 1966 | 126 |
| 4:1 – shop steward representation at BMC Bathgate, 1966 | 157 |
| 5:1 – annual labour cost differentials by plant, decentralised versus traditional areas | 223 |
| 5:2 – wage rates at factories of BLMC and some of its subsidiaries, August 1970..... | 226 |
| 5:3 – average weekly earnings of male semi-skilled workers in engineering and metal manufacturing industries, in Scotland and the West Midlands, 1970-1978..... | 231 |

Charts

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1:1 – reasons given by 92 overspill families for moving from Glasgow to West Lothian | 50 |
| 2:1 – causes of production shortfall across BL Bus and Truck, 1974..... | 83 |
| 2:2 – number of unofficial stoppages and their causes at BMC Bathgate, 1961-1966 | 86 |
| 5:1 – rates of unemployment in Scotland, the West Midlands and the UK, 1959-1979..... | 211 |
| 5:2 – average weekly earnings of male manual workers in manufacturing industries in Scotland and the West Midlands, as percentage of the UK average, 1967-1976..... | 230 |

Illustrations

| | |
|--|-----|
| Cover page – men building trucks on the production line at BMC Bathgate, 1968. | |
| 1:1 – Main Street, Blackburn, mid-1960s | 47 |
| 1:2 – new maisonettes on the Murrayfield Estate, Blackburn, early 1960s | 48 |
| 1:3 – Craigshill, Livingston, under construction, c.1966 | 60 |
| 2:1 – aerial view of Bathgate factory, c.1982..... | 92 |
| Conclusion – Leyland Bathgate for sale following its closure, 1986..... | 234 |

Abbreviations

AEU – Amalgamated Engineering Union

AUEW – Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers

BL – British Leyland

BLMC – British Leyland Motor Corporation

BLTUC – British Leyland Trade Union Committee

BMC – British Motor Corporation

BMCJSSC – British Motor Corporation Joint Shop Stewards' Committee

BMH – British Motor Holdings

CKD – Complete Knock-Down

CP – Communist Party

DA – Development Area

DATA – Draughtsman and Allied Technicians' Association

EEC – European Economic Community

ETU – Electrical Trades' Union

FT – Financial Times

GCAL – Glasgow Caledonian University

GMB – General Municipal Boilermakers' Union

GMWU – General and Municipal Workers' Union

IDC – Industrial Development Certificate

IRC – Industrial Reorganisation Corporation

JSSC – Joint Shop Stewards' Committee

KD – Knock-Down

LNT – London New Towns

LVL – Leyland Vehicles Limited

MACE – Media Archive for Central England

MDW – Measured Day Work

MIHT – Motor Industry Heritage Trust

MIJLC – Motor Industry Joint Labour Council

MNE – Multinational Enterprise

MoL – Ministry of Labour

MRC – Modern Records Centre

NA – National Archives

NAS – National Archives of Scotland

NEDC – National Economic Development Council

NUM – National Union of Mineworkers

NUVB – National Union of Vehicle Builders

PTU – Plumbing Trades’ Union

SBI – Scottish Board for Industry

SCDI – Scottish Council for Development and Industry

SEEA – Scottish Engineering Employers’ Association

STUC – Scottish Trades’ Union Congress

TASS – Technical Administrative and Supervisory Union

TCC – Telegraph Condenser Company

TGWU – Transport and General Workers’ Union

TUC – Trades’ Union Congress

WEA – Workers’ Educational Association

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Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Introduction

In his survey of Scotland's twentieth century, John Foster writes that 'the two words 'Ravenscraig' and 'Linwood' are etched in Scottish industrial history'.¹ The Colvilles steel strip mill, opened at Ravenscraig, near Motherwell, in 1959, and Linwood's Rootes car plant, which followed in 1963, have been central elements in the historiography of Scotland's industrial and economic development since 1945, representing the attempted 'reindustrialisation' of Scotland, and in many accounts, symbolic of its failure. Missing from Foster's analysis, however, and marginalised in many others, is the truck and tractor plant established by the British Motor Corporation (BMC) at Bathgate, in West Lothian, in 1961. This preceded Linwood and was in fact the first motor plant to be built in what were, from 1960, termed the Development Districts, as a result of regional policy. This initiative, under Harold Macmillan's Conservative government, sought to create jobs in unemployment 'black spots' while easing inflationary pressures in the 'congested' Midlands and South-East of England.² Foster argues that the developments at Ravenscraig, Linwood, and Bathgate faced opposition from 'traditionalist' sections of Scotland's business elite with interests in the heavy industries, but other economic actors, including the Scottish Trades' Union Congress (STUC) and the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI), viewed them as essential to the diversification and modernisation of the Scottish industrial base.³ This was due in part to the success of motor manufacturing in driving the growth and prosperity seen in the West Midlands especially since 1945, and the expectation that the availability of steel from Ravenscraig would induce substantial secondary development in ancillary industries, encouraging the growth of a sustainable and similarly prosperous Scottish motor industry, providing thousands of jobs, and helping to close the productivity and employment 'gap' between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

The focus on the motor industry as key to Scotland's economic development was, however, highly problematic. The motor industry is, after all, frequently cited in the historiography as a symbol of British industrial decline, and the idea that its industrial relations were marked by the

¹ J. Foster, 'The Twentieth Century', in R.A. Houston and W. Knox, *The New Penguin History of Scotland* (London: Penguin, 1991) p.468.

² G. O'Hara, 'A Journey Without Maps: The Regional Policies of the 1964-70 British Labour Government', *Regional Studies*, 39:9, 2005, p.1184.

³ Foster, 'The Twentieth Century', pp.468-470; J. Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010) pp.18-21.

militancy and self-interest of its shop stewards in particular has become a familiar trope in media portrayals of Britain during the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ There are problems with this characterisation, but the industry was plainly grappling with periodic market, design, and supply chain difficulties, of which its labour troubles were, perhaps, symptomatic, and which narrowed the potential benefits of the regional policy intervention in Scotland. In addition, much of the literature surrounding the regional policy project, both from the perspective of its role in Scotland's economic development, and in terms of its impact on the performance of the UK motor industry, has highlighted the difficulties associated with introducing semi-skilled mass assembly production processes to an area with little tradition of light engineering. Christopher Harvie, for example, is among those who have suggested that Linwood's poor industrial relations record stemmed from the problems of adapting a previously highly skilled workforce to assembly line work, while Peter Dunnett, in his study of *The Decline of the British Motor Industry* implies that the 'fractious' Scottish labour force was inherently unsuited to motor industry working practices.⁵ However, the monotony, loss of skill, and loss of autonomy associated with motor assembly work has also been closely linked to the image of the motor worker as the archetypal 'economic man' or 'affluent worker', to use the terminology of John Goldthorpe *et al.*'s influential 1969 study of workers at Vauxhall and a number of other employers in the town of Luton.⁶ The conflict between the assumption in the literature that Scottish labour could not, or would not, adapt to the motor industry assembly line, and the Goldthorpe analysis, in which workers overlooked the intrinsic benefits of skilled work in order to pursue the greater financial rewards associated with assembly work in the new industries, suggests that motor industry work was experienced in a highly distinct manner in Scotland's regional policy plants.

Bathgate's absence from much of the historiography of the post-war Scottish economy also signals the peculiar position of commercial vehicle manufacture in the motor industry literature: definitions of 'motor industry' vary, but much of the literature tends to focus on car production,

⁴ See, for example, T. Claydon, 'Images of Disorder: Car Workers' Militancy and the Representation of Industrial Relations in Britain, 1950-79', in D. Thoms, L. Holden, and T. Claydon (eds), *The Motor Car and Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

⁵ C. Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Scotland since 1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981) p.151; P. Dunnett, *The Decline of the British Motor Industry: The Effects of Government Policy, 1945-1979* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p.181.

⁶ H. Turner, G. Clack and G. Roberts, *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry: A Study of Industrial Unrest and an International Comparison* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967) p.331.

and offers little detailed analysis of other sectors of the industry and its supply chain.⁷ This thesis addresses this gap in the literature, and examines the experience of the BMC – later British Leyland (BL) – and its workforce at Bathgate, as it illuminates and offers new ways of thinking about three inter-related areas of economic and social development that are central to understanding Scotland and Britain’s post-1945 history: industrial change and the role of regional policy; the motor industry and its industrial relations; and the development, in the context of post-war full employment, of a more typically ‘affluent’ working class.

Full employment, economic growth, and regional policy

Clive Lee discusses regional policy and the growth of state intervention in the economy in terms of the post-war consensus and UK government commitments to full employment, and emphasises the extent to which the developments at Ravenscraig, Linwood, and Bathgate, apparently driven by the short-term need to create jobs and alleviate unemployment in depressed areas, have attracted criticism.⁸ George Peden argues in this vein that the focus on providing jobs proved damaging to the overall Scottish economy in the long-term, as it directed regional policy to ‘development areas that were defined by high rates of unemployment’, and gave very little consideration to either existing industry or the development of the Scottish economy as a whole.⁹ By contrast, Jim Tomlinson concludes that, from the 1950s, when full employment was reached in many parts of England at least, job creation was replaced by the preservation or creation of economic growth as the main objective of government.¹⁰ Tomlinson argues that a growing awareness of Britain’s declining importance as a global power was accompanied by an increased focus on domestic economic improvement rather than the strategic implications of economic policy. This could initially be achieved through the promotion of full employment, but greater

⁷ In some analyses, ‘motor industry’ is taken to refer to car manufacturing only, with some studies of industrial relations in particular excluding explicitly commercial vehicle manufacturing on the grounds that it was generally more specialised and less automated than car production. In other cases, the scope of the study is unclear. Bathgate was, however, designed predominantly to produce small trucks, and used mass assembly processes which were not common in older commercial vehicle plants, and more representative of car manufacturing.

⁸ C. H. Lee, ‘Unbalanced Growth: Prosperity and Deprivation’, in T. M. Devine, C. H. Lee, and G. C. Peden (eds), *The Transformation of Scotland: The Economy Since 1700* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) pp.220-221.

⁹ Peden, ‘The Managed Economy’, in Devine et al, *The Transformation of Scotland*, p.246.

¹⁰ J. Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), p.79.

economic growth would be necessary to increase consumption and secure the ‘doubling of living standards in twenty-five years’ promised, in a 1954 speech, by the Conservative Chancellor, R.A. Butler.¹¹ For Tomlinson, 1960 marked the year in which growth, previously more a ‘happy aspiration’ than a policy priority, emerged as a central issue, shifting the parameters of policy debate and encouraging greater state intervention in the economy.¹² This resulted in part from a ‘statistical revolution’, which allowed countries to compare their relative economic performance, but was also informed by the need to ensure that high levels of employment could be maintained and living standards could continue to rise even with full employment achieved.¹³ As Tomlinson writes, ‘growth could deliver more of everything’, and was therefore popular with politicians and academics on both the Left and the Right.

It was under the Conservative government of Harold Macmillan that the new rhetoric of ‘planning’ emerged, which was to dominate policy throughout the 1960s and 1970s, recognising the shift required in macro-economic policy if continued expansion was to be realised.¹⁴ Foster writes that regional policy was at the heart of this new focus on planned growth, and both he and Tomlinson highlight the importance of the creation in 1961 of the National Economic Development Council (NEDC), set up to establish targets for growth and to analyse any possible impediments and, as Tomlinson writes, perhaps most important as a symbol of what he calls this ‘great reappraisal’ in British economic policy.¹⁵ While Tomlinson describes the impact of the NEDC as mainly symbolic, it is central to Foster’s analysis of the development of regional policy and its effects on Scottish industry. For Foster, regional policy was driven not by the need to create jobs and prosperity in the depressed Development Districts, but by concerns over the potentially damaging effects on growth of the concentration of industry in the Midlands and South-East of England. Certainly in the West Midlands, where motor manufacturing and its supply chain supported a strong regional economy, unemployment scarcely rose above one per cent throughout the 1950s, and concerns were, by the end of that decade, emerging over both its limited capacity for further growth, and the potentially inflationary consequences of overheating. In order to secure continued growth, therefore, it would be necessary to disperse new industrial

¹¹ Ibid, pp.3, 10.

¹² J. Tomlinson, *Government and the Enterprise since 1900: The Changing Problem of Efficiency* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) pp.246-247.

¹³ Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline*, p.13; Tomlinson, *Government and the Enterprise*, p.247.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.248; Foster, ‘The Twentieth Century’, p.468.

¹⁵ Tomlinson, *Government and the Enterprise*, p.248; Foster, ‘The Twentieth Century’, p.468.

development away from the congested areas, and into those with higher levels of unemployment such as Scotland, Northern Ireland, Tyneside, and South Wales, where surplus labour could be used to both release these pressures in the south, and reduce operating costs for manufacturing firms.¹⁶ Indeed, the NEDC published a series of reports which highlighted the ‘growth potential’ of reserves of unemployed labour in both depressed regions and ‘declining industries’, and the report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Scottish Economy, known as the Toothill Report and published in 1961, similarly recommended that Scotland’s heavy industries be rundown in order to create such a pool of labour which could be used to attract investment in the ‘new’ consumer goods industries.¹⁷

Toothill is significant as it marks a shift in regional policy thinking in Scotland which reflected the wider pervasiveness of growth as a key economic objective, and the concern that Scotland’s relatively high rate of unemployment – which at 3.1 per cent was low by historic standards but still twice the rate in England – demonstrated that the Scottish economy was lagging behind the rest of the UK.¹⁸ The report described unemployment as a symptom of low growth which could be reversed through the renewal and modernisation of the industrial base, and considered heavy industry an obstacle, characterised by poor industrial relations, weak management, and outdated methods.¹⁹ Both Foster and Jim Phillips have highlighted the divisions which emerged between the ‘modernisers’, represented by Toothill, who stressed the importance of cultivating younger forms of manufacturing, and those ‘traditionalists’, with interests in Scotland’s older, heavy industrial sectors.²⁰ In these terms, Foster presents the establishment of Ravenscraig in 1958 as a victory for the modernisers, although it is important to note that both Ravenscraig, conceived in the early 1950s, and Bathgate, under discussion in 1959, opened before Toothill reported and were unaffected by its recommendations.²¹ Toothill was in fact critical of the ‘defensive thinking’ which lay behind these previous regional policy initiatives that had sought to create jobs in unemployment black spots, and in particular the 1960 Local Employment Act.²² This

¹⁶ Foster, ‘The Twentieth Century’, p.468.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.468; Committee of Inquiry appointed by the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) under the Chairmanship of J. N. Toothill, *Report on the Scottish Economy* (Edinburgh, 1961) pp.19-20.

¹⁸ J. Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, p.20; Toothill, *Scottish Economy*, pp.17-19.

¹⁹ Foster, ‘The Twentieth Century’, p.470.

²⁰ Ibid, pp.468-471; Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, pp.19-20.

²¹ D. Stewart, ‘Fighting for Survival: The 1980s Campaign to Save Ravenscraig Steelworks’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 25:1, 2005, p.40.

²² Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, p.21; Toothill, *Scottish Economy*, p.154.

introduced the designation of Development Districts, smaller than the previous Development Areas, on the basis of unemployment rates of over 4.5 per cent, and, in Peter Scott's analysis, transformed regional policy 'entirely into one of short-term unemployment alleviation'.²³ For Scott, Toothill represented a catalyst which refocused regional policy on longer-term economic growth rather than the short-term imperative to create jobs which had informed Conservative policy in the late 1950s, and had led to the dispersal of motor manufacturing to Scotland, Merseyside, and South Wales. In this analysis, the earlier decision to direct motor industry expansion out of the Midlands was political, designed to show the government's commitment to reducing regional unemployment and justifiable on social policy grounds, which had the effect of incurring increased costs and reducing the efficiency of British motor manufacturing.²⁴

This is largely in line with Gavin McCrone's 1969 study of regional policy, in which he writes that 1960 marked a 'natural dividing line' in the way in which the 'regional problem' was approached. Anticipating Tomlinson's conclusion that it was in 1960 that growth supplanted full employment as the UK government's central economic policy priority, McCrone argued that regional planning was increasingly treated as a problem of growth, and was afforded greater precedence than it had been in the years immediately following the war, when the commitment to 'high and stable' employment levels had first been articulated as a government objective in the 1944 White Paper on *Employment Policy*.²⁵ However, while this white paper accepted that 'the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment' was a primary aim and responsibility of government, it also acknowledged that, in the cases of some depressed industrial areas, there was no real hope of economic revival and so the resettlement of some workers in more favourable locations would be necessary.²⁶ McCrone argues that this made better economic sense than the targeting of unemployment black spots which emerged during the following decade, and in this context the 1960 Act is regarded as something of an anomaly, which continued the 'preoccupation with the social aspects' of the regional problem seen during the 1950s, rather

²³ P. Scott, 'The Worst of Both Worlds: British Regional Policy, 1951-64', *Business History*, 38:4, 1996, p.56.

²⁴ Ibid, pp.54-55; P. Scott, 'Regional Development and Policy', in R. Floud and P. Johnson (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Volume III: Structural Change and Growth, 1939-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp.351-352.

²⁵ G. McCrone, *Regional Policy in Britain* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969) p.120.

²⁶ Ibid, pp.106-107; *Employment Policy* (London: HMSO, 1944), pp.3, 13-14.

than reflecting the greater emphasis on economic factors which was to mark the 1960s approach.²⁷

The Bathgate and Ravenscraig developments perhaps bridged these two approaches. The BMC, during a period of increasing difficulty in the heavy industries, was steered to West Lothian by the Board of Trade primarily because of the area's high level of unemployment, but its development was not discussed solely in terms of job creation. While Scott describes Tothill as a 'catalyst' which changed the focus of regional policy in Scotland in particular, David Stewart characterises it instead as the encapsulation of a consensus which had emerged in Scotland during the 1950s, shaped by the potential of Ravenscraig to attract light industries as well as supporting existing Scottish heavy engineering firms.²⁸ Irene Maver, in her analysis of the economic development of the Glasgow conurbation, has similarly discussed attempts during the 1950s to 'create a distinctive regional identity, based on the potential of steel and motor vehicles'.²⁹ In this context, Bathgate, Ravenscraig, and, later, Linwood – described by Maver as 'Scotland's Detroit' – were seen as providing a basis, or anchor, which would attract further motor industry investment and breed ancillary manufacturing, enabling the economic redevelopment of Central Scotland more widely. There is, perhaps, some tension between Tomlinson's assertion that economic growth replaced full employment as the key concern of government during the 1950s, and Scott's characterisation of pre-Tothill regional policy as informed above all by the need to create jobs in unemployment black spots, but, as this suggests, these positions are not necessarily incompatible. The BMC's establishment at Bathgate was primarily a response to that area's high unemployment, but it was shaped by both the need to secure continued growth in the full-employment Midlands, and an early awareness of the potential role of motor manufacturing in driving the growth and modernisation of the Scottish economy. Furthermore, in Tomlinson's analysis, the imperative placed on growth had emerged from the need to ensure continued improvements in living standards even in areas of full employment: conditions which had yet to be achieved in Central Scotland.

²⁷ Ibid, pp.120-121.

²⁸ Stewart, 'Fighting for Survival', pp.43-44.

²⁹ I. Maver, *Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) p.213.

The motor industry and its industrial relations

The establishment of the motor plants at Bathgate and Linwood was seen as essential to the modernisation of Scottish industry, and yet motor manufacturing and its industrial relations during the 1960s and 1970s have been central tenets of both contemporary discussions of the alleged failure of British industry, and the historiography of Britain's economic decline since 1945. The experience of the BMC and its workforce at Bathgate highlights many of the complexities of the industry, and especially its commercial vehicle sector, which exhibited in exaggerated form some of the key features of the industry as a whole. This is particularly true of its deep-rooted supply chain weaknesses, which were exacerbated by the length of the supply line from component makers in the Midlands to assembly in Scotland, and had considerable influence on the way in which work, pay, and industrial relations developed at the plant. Workers in the motor industry, and especially those living and working in the tight labour markets of the Midlands and South East, were noted for their relative affluence, and indeed it was the success of the industry in providing jobs and driving the growth experienced in the West Midlands especially which both contributed to inflationary concerns there, and demonstrated the importance of attracting motor manufacturers to Scotland. Paradoxically, however, the affluent motor worker, representative of the drive for growth and the increase in personal consumption, came to be associated with the poor industrial relations and low productivity central especially to analyses which highlighted the role of restrictive trade union practices in damaging the competitiveness of British industry.³⁰ Motor manufacturing was, after 1945, the UK's third most strike-prone industrial sector, accounting for five per cent of all stoppages and 13 per cent of working days lost, and the industry became a symbol of the country's allegedly poor industrial relations.³¹ This was especially the case at BL, from 1975 a state-owned 'national champion' which, Tim Claydon writes, 'had for some time been seen as exemplifying in acute form wider problems in British industrial relations'.³² Derek 'Red Robbo' Robinson, Communist convenor of shop stewards at the company's Austin car plant at Longbridge in Birmingham, developed a 'formidable reputation' in the press, and the public reaction to his sacking in 1979 is seen by

³⁰ Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline*, pp.55-56. Theo Nichols provides a critique of such analyses in *The British Worker Question: A New Look at Workers and Productivity in Manufacturing* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) pp.39-52.

³¹ J. Murden, 'Demands for Pay Parity and Fair Wages in the British Motor Industry in the 1960s and 1970s', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 20, 2005, p.1.

³² Claydon, 'Images of Disorder', p.229.

Claydon as an illustration of ‘how central a position in political and economic discourse industrial relations had come to occupy by the late 1970s’.³³ Claydon links this to what he terms a ‘meta-narrative of disorder’, which he argues dominated public perceptions of industrial relations and, in so doing, contributed significantly to a ‘sense of crisis in British political and economic life’.³⁴ Steve Jefferys, in a study of shopfloor organisation at Longbridge, describes the long-term development of a particularly confrontational style of labour relations at the plant, which began with the rigidly anti-union stance of Herbert Austin in the first decades of the twentieth century, and the belief that ‘the Austin couldn’t be organised’, and culminated in the sacking of Robinson in 1979. For Jefferys, a key factor in the creation of problems at the plant was ‘chronic management failure’ during the 1960s, when sectional and unofficial disputes were increasing, but management made no attempts to assess this situation or construct a different framework of labour relations, allowing informal shopfloor organisation to grow in strength.³⁵

It was this feature of industrial relations in the motor industry which caused much of the contemporary press and political concern, and which has since remained central to historical debate. Among the most notable contemporary studies is Turner, Clack, and Roberts’ *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry*, which, published in 1967, had considerable influence on the work of the Donovan Commission, or Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers’ Associations. The report of this commission, established in response to concerns over the impact of unofficial strike action in British manufacturing, drew on Turner *et al.*’s characterisation of the ‘parallel unionism’ which had developed in British car plants, and was marked by the strength, independence, and relative moderation of motor industry shop stewards.³⁶ Turner *et al.* rejected explicitly the ‘agitator’ theory of strike causation, according to which strike activity in the British motor industry was propagated by supposedly militant shop stewards, but considered the emergence of this informal system of industrial relations within the industry – alongside its instability of both earnings and employment, and the importance attributed to ‘fair wages’ – in their discussion of its relative strike-proneness.³⁷ In more recent literature, however, there has

³³ Ibid, p.229.

³⁴ Ibid, p.230.

³⁵ S. Jefferys, ‘The Changing Face of Conflict: Shopfloor Organization at Longbridge, 1939-1980’, in M. Terry and P. K. Edwards, *Shopfloor Politics and Job Controls: The Post-War Engineering Industry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) p.73.

³⁶ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry*, p.329.

³⁷ Ibid, pp.339-344.

been a stronger emphasis on the disruptive nature of labour organisation in the industry. Jonathan Zeitlin, for instance, has argued that ‘structural features of British trade unionism and collective bargaining have played an important role in the progressive decline of the British economy’.³⁸ Zeitlin’s argument is that the ‘peculiarity of the English’ which led to this decline was ‘not the prevalence of shop steward organisation, job control, and restrictive practices...but rather their diffusion throughout the industrial structure, including technically advanced mass production and process industries’.³⁹ This is an idea which has subsequently been criticised by Dave Lyddon who takes a more ‘bottom up’ approach to trade union organisation. While Zeitlin argues that trade unionism trickled down to semi- and unskilled workers from craftsmen keen to preserve their own status, Lyddon emphasises the nature of official trade unionism as ‘the institutional expression of what has been called “the spontaneous association of workers on the shop floor”’, and the willingness of trade unions, notably the Amalgamated Engineering Union, to support the constitutional office of shop steward, albeit arguably as a means of ‘decapitating’ the leadership of the shop steward movement itself.⁴⁰ Lyddon, unlike Zeitlin, does not see organised labour as an important factor in Britain’s post-war economic difficulties, and argues that far from being the ‘British disease’ as it is sometimes referred to, ‘attempts by workers to exercise control over work is a structural feature of all capitalist societies, not the result of a prior tradition of craft control.’⁴¹

While there is a debate about the character of motor industry trade unionism and its role in Britain’s allegedly poor post-war economic performance, there is less disagreement about the position of the motor industry itself, and indeed much of the historiography of motor manufacturing since 1945 is marked by a sense of near-permanent crisis and disorder. Books such as Jonathan Wood’s *Wheels of Misfortune: The Rise and Fall of the British Motor Industry*, Roy Church’s *The Rise and Decline of the British Motor Industry*, Peter Dunnett’s *The Decline of the British Motor Industry*, and Timothy Whisler’s *The British Motor Industry, 1945-1994: A Case Study in Industrial Decline* offer various perspectives on what is an accepted position: that, during the 1960s and 1970s in particular, the British motor industry experienced ‘one of the most

³⁸ J. Zeitlin, ‘The Emergence of Shop Steward Organization and Job Control in the British Car Industry: A Review Essay’, *History Workshop Journal*, 10:1, 1980, p.119.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.120.

⁴⁰ Zeitlin, pp.128-129; D. Lyddon, ‘Workplace Organization in the British Car Industry: A Critique of Jonathan Zeitlin’, *History Workshop Journal*, 15:1, 1983, p.132.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.137.

spectacular industrial declines', as its share of the world market in cars fell by half, and BL in particular came to represent 'a byword for industrial anarchy'.⁴² However, most of these accounts have included the industry's industrial relations alongside their analyses of numerous other factors in its decline. Whisler, for example, has emphasised the 'rigidity and insularity' which existed on the part of both labour and management, as well as weaknesses in product engineering and design, while Wood and Church are among those who have similarly criticised the weak, short-sighted management of British car firms and their subsequent inability to adapt to changing market conditions.⁴³ Studies of BL in particular have highlighted that company's creation as the culmination of a series of takeovers and mergers across the industry, which left it with an extremely complex corporate structure and an inefficient and unwieldy range of products.⁴⁴ This is the focus of recent work by Jon Murden, who examines the problems caused by the lack of pay parity across the industry and its increasingly complex firms. In Murden's analysis, the labour difficulties caused by this issue were exacerbated by the dispersal of motor manufacturing to the Development Districts, where car makers could take advantage of depressed local labour market conditions and pay considerably lower wages than pertained in the Midlands.⁴⁵

Branch plant syndrome: the historiography of regional policy in Scotland

Other analyses have suggested that the dispersal of motor manufacturing to the Development Districts exacerbated the industry's structural peculiarities by introducing further complexity to the supply chain and contributing to the problem of over-capacity.⁴⁶ Indeed, supply chain difficulties resulting from the relative isolation of Bathgate and Linwood have emerged as a

⁴² T. Whisler, *The British Motor Industry, 1945-94: A Case Study in Industrial Decline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp.1-2; J. Foreman-Peck, S. Bowden, and A. McKinlay, *The British Motor Industry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) p.165.

⁴³ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, pp.401-403; R. Church, *The Rise and Decline of the British Motor Industry* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994) pp.115-124; J. Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune: The Rise and Fall of the British Motor Industry* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1988) pp.245-250.

⁴⁴ P. Willman, and G. Winch, *Innovation and Management Control: Labour Relations at BL Cars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p.4; Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.92.

⁴⁵ Murden, 'Demands for Pay Parity', pp.1-27.

⁴⁶ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.84, 88.

central tenet of the historiography of regional policy in Scotland. This is frequently characterised by a ‘branch plant’ narrative stressing the extent to which the post-war Scottish economy became reliant on factories established by English or foreign-owned firms as a result of government incentives, and offering only low status assembly work.⁴⁷ Indeed, the idea of a branch plant economy is central to much of the literature relating to regional policy and inward investment in Britain more generally, and the Scottish experience can be seen as part of a much broader trend which developed as Britain, and its peripheral regions in particular, came increasingly to depend on plants established by multinationals (MNEs). As Peter Scott has shown, multinational investment in the ‘new’ industries did assist in the restructuring of the British economy towards higher growth sectors, but branch plants established in peripheral regions especially lacked ‘embeddedness’ in the local economy and were thus acutely vulnerable to closure.⁴⁸ As Scott’s analysis suggests, branch plants have often brought benefits in terms of employment, but this has generally not been reflected in more ‘dynamic, developmental impacts’, as headquarters and research and development (R&D) functions have largely remained outside the assisted areas.⁴⁹ In the Scottish context, the branch plant economy and the growth of the consumer goods industries more generally has been linked to the deskilling of the workforce, with William Knox, for example, describing the plants established by American electronics firms in particular as ‘little better than low level assembly production units’.⁵⁰ Recent work by Pavlos Dimitratos, Ioanna Liouka, Duncan Ross, and Stephen Young, however, has re-examined the impact of MNE investment in Scotland, and distinguishes between the MNE branch plant, or ‘production subsidiary’, the ‘developmental subsidiary’, and the ‘entrepreneurial subsidiary’, the latter exemplified by the IBM electronics factory established at Greenock in 1951. While the first of these is characterised by low levels of autonomy and reliance on imported supplies, the entrepreneurial subsidiary has made a far more dynamic contribution to the Scottish economy, developing greater autonomy in terms of entrepreneurship and R&D, and becoming far more

⁴⁷ See, for example, E. Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle: Scotland since 1880* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) p.257; Peden, ‘The Managed Economy’, p.246.

⁴⁸ P. Scott, ‘From a Solution to a Problem? Overseas Multinationals in Britain during Economic Decline and Renaissance’, in R. Coopey and P. Lyth, *Business in Britain*, pp.127-128; P. Dimitratos, I. Liouka, D. Ross, and S. Young, ‘The Multinational Enterprise and Subsidiary Evolution: Scotland since 1945’, *Business History*, 51:3, May 2009, pp.401-425.

⁴⁹ Scott, ‘From a Solution to a Problem?’, p.238.

⁵⁰ W. Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture, and Society in Scotland, 1800-Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p.256.

embedded than branch plant analyses allow.⁵¹ The IBM example highlights the possibility of dynamic growth, functioning initially as an assembly-based branch plant, but taking on new responsibilities as it expanded during the 1970s and survived into the twenty-first century. This is distinct from Bathgate where developments were informed not so much by the physical positioning of the plant in Scotland and its remoteness from suppliers and markets, but by features of the motor industry more generally, exaggerated but not created by the plant's geographical distance from the Midlands.

While Bathgate has been of marginal importance to most accounts of regional policy in Scotland, the car factory at Linwood has attracted more attention. It is arguable that this is in part due to its reputation for poor industrial relations, and certainly much of the literature relates to the difficulties associated with establishing an assembly plant in an area with a strong craft tradition which, in Peter Dunnett's words, introduced 'an unsuitable fractious labour force' into the motor industry.⁵² Implicit in such analyses are the linked assumptions that Scotland's predominant industrial culture was fundamentally different to that of the Midlands and South of England, that the Scottish workforce was unsuited to motor industry production, and, that Scotland's motor plants were therefore doomed inevitably to fail. As Jim Phillips has shown, this rests on tenuous thinking about the nature of Linwood workers' previous employment,⁵³ and other recent accounts have suggested some limits to this interpretation of regional policy in Scotland. Clive Lee, for example, describes Linwood as 'typically expensive and relatively short-lived', but shows that, during the period in which the government remained committed to creating jobs in areas of relatively high unemployment, around 39,000 new jobs were created and Scottish GDP made significant progress in catching up with the rest of the UK.⁵⁴ Richard Finlay has similarly addressed the paradox represented by Scotland's increasing prosperity, with growing consumption, and improving standards of living during a period 'normally characterised by economic failure', while Phillips has suggested that, when social as well as economic criteria are considered, the extent of Linwood's 'failure' has been exaggerated. Linwood was open for

⁵¹ Dimitratos *et al*, 'The multinational enterprise', pp.409-414.

⁵² Dunnett, *The Decline of the British Motor Industry*, p.181; Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.151; W. Knox, 'Class, Work and Trade Unionism in Scotland', in A. Dickson, and J. H. Treble (eds), *People and Society in Scotland, Vol. III, 1914-1990* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1994) p. 128; S. Young and N. Hood, 'The Linwood Experience: Chrysler and Peugeot-Citroen in Scotland', in S. Maxwell (ed.), *Scotland, Multinationals, and the Third World* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1982) p.125; Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.60.

⁵³ Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, p.32.

⁵⁴ Lee, 'Unbalanced Growth', p.221.

roughly two decades, and in that time provided work for thousands of people, which went some way to ameliorating the difficulties associated with the longer-term rundown of Scotland's old industrial sectors of coal mining and shipbuilding.⁵⁵

Scotland's affluent workers?

Alison Gilmour's work on Linwood has examined its industrial relations and demonstrated the strength of its shopfloor organisation, and Niall MacKenzie has explored the efficacy of government initiatives in the Highlands, but the historiography more generally contains very little analysis of the broader economic and social dimensions of regional policy in Scotland.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the branch plant narrative has, perhaps, obscured the impact that plants such as Bathgate had on the lives of their workers and the wider communities they affected, not only in terms of the jobs they provided, but also in stimulating the creation of additional housing, improved transport infrastructure, and new leisure, retail, and educational facilities. Certainly in the Bathgate example the plant brought considerable change to the local community, as many of those it employed were 'incoming workers' who moved to West Lothian under an overspill agreement with Glasgow Corporation and were attracted by the promise of new housing as much as by work at the BMC plant. This has significant implications for the understanding of the way in which work was experienced on the shopfloor, as there are clear parallels between the Bathgate experience and the *Affluent Worker* studies, afforded 'orthodoxy' or 'foundation status' by academics and political commentators alike.⁵⁷ The findings of these studies, carried out in 1962 by John Goldthorpe and colleagues and based on interviews with workers in four factories – including a Vauxhall car plant – in the prosperous and expanding town of Luton, were perhaps most notable for their rejection of the notion of working-class 'embourgeoisement': the idea, central to contemporary studies such as Ferdinand Zweig's *The Worker in an Affluent Society*,

⁵⁵ R. Finlay, *Modern Scotland, 1914-2000* (London: Profile, 2004) pp.237-238; Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, p.14.

⁵⁶ A. Gilmour, 'The Trouble with Linwood: Compliance and Coercion in the Car Plant, 1963-1981', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 27, 2007, pp.75-93; N. MacKenzie, 'Chucking Buns Across the Fence? Government Planning and Regeneration Projects in the Scottish Highland Economy, 1945-82', PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2007.

⁵⁷ M. Grieco, 'The Shaping of a Work Force: A Critique of the Affluent Worker Study', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 1:1, 1981, p.62; M. Savage, 'Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study', *Sociology*, 39:5, 2005, p.931.

that the stability and rising incomes associated with the post-war period of full employment had created ‘a new type of bourgeois worker’, whose interest in consumption, leisure, and family life was indicative of a ‘move towards new middle-class values and middle-class existence’.⁵⁸ For Zweig, this was particularly the case for factory workers in the ‘progressive’ new industries, where continued growth and expansion meant that pay was above average and employment relatively secure, allowing the worker to aspire to higher wages and continued improvements in living standards.

The affluent workers of Luton’s new industries similarly sought higher standards of domestic living for themselves and their families, and the importance of pursuing increased personal consumption was reflected in their instrumental approach to both work and trade union activity. In the Goldthorpe studies, however, class consciousness remained central, and the aspirations of Luton’s affluent workers ‘defined by the social realities of their position as manual wage workers’.⁵⁹ Indeed, Goldthorpe *et al.* suggest that the embourgeoisement thesis reflected a middle-class bias amongst its proponents, which ‘prevented them from even conceiving of the possibility that working-class aspirations might be focused on something other than their own cultural and social standards’.⁶⁰ In their analysis, social class is a structural, rather than a cultural, concept, which retains its relevance even in the context of rising wages and increasing prosperity: ‘increases in earnings, improvements in working conditions, more enlightened and liberal employment policies do not in themselves alter the class situation of the industrial worker... He remains a man who gains his livelihood through placing his labour at the disposal of an employer in return for wages.’⁶¹ Mike Savage, however, has argued recently that the conception of class used by Goldthorpe and his colleagues was flawed, and that their focus on money models of society did not recognise the nuances in the relationship between the three key concepts of money, power, and status.⁶² For Savage, what emerges from the studies is that the key to understanding the affluent worker’s view of class is the idea of ‘ordinariness’, and what it means to be an ordinary individual, or ‘average worker’, as opposed to a member of an ‘upper

⁵⁸ F. Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society: Family Life and Industry* (London: Heinemann, 1961) pp. ix, 206-207.

⁵⁹ J. H. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer and J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) p.122.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.116.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.157.

⁶² Savage, ‘Working-Class Identities in the 1960s’, pp.934-936.

class' marked by its wealth and power, as well as its class status.⁶³ 'Ordinary individuals', in this context, are defined chiefly in terms of 'having to make their own living': a feature which both distinguished 'ordinary factory blokes, factory workers, the council house sort of tenant' from the elite upper class, and underlined the individualism associated with the 'action frame of reference' attributed by Goldthorpe *et al.* to the instrumentalist affluent worker.⁶⁴ Indeed, Savage notes that for many of Goldthorpe's respondents there was little differentiation between working and middle class, as in each case the 'ordinary individual' still had to make their own way in life. In this re-analysis of the Goldthorpe study, individualist and class identities do not compete; rather, social class represents 'the stage on which the individual necessarily acts', and collective action can therefore be interpreted as a means by which 'ordinary factory workers' can seek to gain individual improvements.⁶⁵

Margaret Grieco's critique of the *Affluent Worker* studies centres on Goldthorpe *et al.*'s interpretation of the link between this instrumentalism and migration. Grieco argues that Goldthorpe *et al.* based their claim that Luton's affluent workers traded job satisfaction for increased income on the flawed assumption that, in a period of national full employment, these conditions informed the decisions of all workers, and that those who chose to take up unpleasant work must therefore be doing so in order to pursue higher earnings and other extrinsic rewards.⁶⁶ Furthermore, in taking worker migration as evidence in itself of instrumentality, Goldthorpe *et al.* overlooked both the role of 'economic coercion', and the regional nature of employment opportunity.⁶⁷ This has significant implications, as Vauxhall had in fact recruited many of its Luton workers from peripheral areas of high unemployment, notably the fishing areas of the East coast where labour was traditionally non-unionised, and so many had little knowledge of motor industry work and were conditioned in their choice of work by a lack of information.⁶⁸ Furthermore, even where workers had no personal experience of unemployment, those from areas of relatively high rates of unemployment had been exposed to and shaped by 'an atmosphere of employment insecurity'.⁶⁹ In this context, then, the decision to migrate to Luton in

⁶³ Ibid, p.935.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp.938, 943.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.938.

⁶⁶ Grieco, 'The Shaping of a Work Force', pp.64-65.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.65.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.69. See also H. Beynon, *Working for Ford* (London: Allen Lane, 1973) p.89.

⁶⁹ Grieco, 'The Shaping of a Work Force', p.65.

order to take up work at Vauxhall cannot be seen solely in terms of instrumentalism, particularly as Vauxhall recruited actively in areas of high unemployment. In her more recent re-examination of Luton's affluent workers, Fiona Devine has similarly found that, of those who migrated to the town for work, the majority did so not in an instrumentalist search for highly-paid work, but in search of work and affordable housing *per se*.⁷⁰ Indeed, many had been forced to move because of unemployment or poor housing conditions in their regions or countries of origin. This reflects the experiences of many of Bathgate's incoming workers who chose to move out of Glasgow because of a lack of employment opportunities, and the slum conditions which existed in many inner-city areas. Bathgate offered new and spacious housing, as well as relatively clean and safe factory work, but there are limits to the idea that Scotland's motor workers came to represent Scotland's affluent workers. The difficulties associated with branch plant manufacturing, as well as the weak position of the BL organisation by the late 1970s, undermined the plant and destabilised its workforce, while its position as a regional policy plant established under duress in an area of high unemployment had considerable implications for the terms on which labour was engaged. These issues, which have emerged from the oral history testimonies of former Bathgate workers, illuminate the ways in which regional policy was experienced on the shopfloor, and will be developed and explored in the following chapters.

Methods and structure

Paul Thompson has written that oral history enabled labour historians to study not only those trades or plants which, by their exceptionality, attracted contemporary press and government attention, but also, for the first time, 'the normal experience of work and its impact on the family and the community'.⁷¹ Much of the oral history testimony used here was collected as part of Workers' Educational Association (WEA) project entitled 'Bathgate Once More', which sought in 2011 to commemorate the plant and record the experiences of its workers on the fiftieth

⁷⁰ F. Devine, *Affluent Workers Revisited: Privatism and the Working Class* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) pp.42-43, 53-54.

⁷¹ P. Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past: Oral History', in R. Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*, second edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), p.29.

anniversary of its establishment, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of its closure.⁷² I had originally envisaged conducting my own interviews with around ten to fifteen former Bathgate workers but, as it became clear that it would be confusing and potentially counter-productive to have two oral history projects running concurrently in the town on a similar theme, I decided instead to work alongside the WEA, whose staff were very accommodating in allowing me to participate in a number of their own interviews, and providing me with recordings of others. I contributed in turn essays on the economic and political history of the factory to the project's main published outcome.⁷³ The interviewees were volunteers who responded to an advert in the local newspaper and attended a number of open days held in a Bathgate community centre. These publicised the WEA's work, with displays of photographs and archival material relating to the plant. A disproportionate number of those who volunteered to be interviewed for the project were skilled workers and former shop stewards, which raises issues of representativeness, particularly in the context of a plant which is significant in part because of the potential difficulties associated with introducing assembly line work to an area with little tradition of light engineering. This is perhaps due to the WEA's own profile, as well as the prominent involvement in the 'Bathgate Once More' project of Jim Swan, former convenor of shop stewards at the factory and currently a well-known councillor in the area. The relative shortage of testimony from assembly workers and workers with little interest in the trade union movement within the plant does not, however, represent an insurmountable problem, and is in itself indicative of the different ways in which work could be experienced. For example, the apparent lack of interest shown by assembly line workers could be taken as symptomatic of a broader indifference to or disengagement from their work at the plant, while the conversely enthusiastic response of more skilled workers to the project reflects their more positive experience of motor industry work.

Indeed, the response to the Bathgate Once More project was far greater than the WEA had expected. It was initially anticipated that the organisation would interview around fifteen former workers during the first few months of 2011. In the event, around sixty interviews were eventually conducted over the course of a year. This has provided a great resource and generated more material than a single researcher could achieve over the course of a PhD, and outweighs a

⁷² The title of the project is a reference to the lyrics of The Proclaimers' 1987 song *Letter from America*, which contains the refrain 'Bathgate no more, Linwood no more'.

⁷³ E. Bryan (ed.), *Bathgate Once More: The story of the BMC/Leyland truck and tractor plant, 1961-86* (Edinburgh: Workers' Educational Association, 2012)

number of slight disadvantages, especially where substantial business, government, and trade union archive materials were utilised alongside the testimony. The interviews were conducted by a number of trained volunteers and WEA staff, each of whom used the same schedule of detailed questions. This has been very valuable for the purposes of the Bathgate Once More project, as it has meant that, irrespective of the interviewer, the testimonies collected have been broadly comparable, and have covered all of the areas which the project has aimed to address. In order to avoid any potential problems caused by this strict adherence to a relatively narrow interview schedule, I planned to carry out a number of follow-up interviews which would allow me to explore in more detail those issues most pertinent to my own research and not necessarily addressed directly in the original interview. However, these follow-up interviews proved problematic in their own terms. Owing to their awareness of the nature of my research, those volunteers willing to be interviewed for the second time in a relatively short period represented a small and self-selecting sample, with a particular interest in the industrial relations of the plant. Furthermore, I found that their previous, and notably recent, experience of interview by the WEA impacted upon the interviews themselves as, although I was keen to keep these interviews as unstructured as possible, the conversation frequently returned to topics and themes which had been covered in detail during the first interview. I therefore decided to concentrate the bulk of my research effort on archival material, which has been used alongside the testimony collected by the WEA and in my own follow-up interviews.

Much of the available archive material relates to the plant's establishment, and to the 'teething problems' which it experienced during its first five years especially. This is particularly the case with regards to Scottish Development Department papers relating to the motor industry in Scotland, Ministry of Labour reports on the company's industrial relations in its regional policy plants and, most notably, the evidence presented to a Motor Industry Joint Labour Council inquiry into the plant's industrial relations conducted in 1966, held as part of the Jack Scamp collection at the University of Warwick's Modern Records Centre (MRC). Newspaper reports, primarily from *The Times* and *The Financial Times*, provide analysis of the plant's establishment and closure, as well as a number of 'flashpoint' incidents which attracted media attention, while television news reports held at the Media Archive for Central England (MACE – then at the University of Leicester; now at the University of Lincoln) give some insight into the way in which the BMC and, later, BL, were perceived in their Midlands heartland. The annual reports of

the General Council of the STUC, and the papers of West Lothian Trades' Council, both held at Glasgow Caledonian University, provide some institutional continuity, while the company's corporate records, at the Motor Industry Heritage Trust (MIHT), contain valuable insight into the plant's position within the organisation. The minutes of the company-wide British Motor Corporation Joint Shop Stewards' Committee (BMCJSSC), also held at the MRC, give some indication about industrial relations throughout the company and the impact of regional policy on workers in the Midlands.

The thesis is structured in two parts. The first considers the broader context surrounding the establishment of BMC Bathgate, in terms of both Scotland's post-1945 economic and social development and the role of regional policy in shaping its experience of industrial change, and in relation to the motor industry more widely. The second part examines the ways in which work and industrial relations were experienced on the shopfloor, and draws extensively on the WEA oral history testimonies. In the absence of any shop steward or trade union material from Bathgate itself, these provide a valuable resource which illuminates the variety of ways in which the presence of the plant and the opportunities which it afforded to its workforce shaped life in West Lothian between 1961 and 1986. It will be seen that the motor plant at Bathgate raised living standards in the area by providing new housing as well as training and opportunities in relatively clean and safe industrial jobs for two generations of workers, including women, who gained access to well-paid engineering work, as well as office positions. There were problems, however. While some of the difficulties experienced at the plant – such as strikes, stoppages, and disruptions to the supply chain – reflected the structural weaknesses inherent in the British motor industry more generally, they were connected to and exacerbated by both cultural and physical distance. The plant remained reliant on supplies of components sourced overwhelmingly from the Midlands, leaving it vulnerable to supply problems and suggesting low levels of 'spillover', or embeddedness in the local economy. Furthermore, high levels of labour turnover, during the plant's first five years especially, indicate considerable labour dissatisfaction and low morale amongst a workforce unused to motor industry working practices. It is not, however, the purpose of this thesis to assess the success, or otherwise, of Bathgate as a regional policy intervention, or to consider alternative potential development policies. Rather, its contribution is in providing a detailed discussion of the development of Bathgate, its role in the local economy, and the experience of work on its shopfloor. By drawing on the testimonies of former Bathgate workers

themselves, what emerges is a sense of the wider implications of a particular regional policy plant, which contributes to a number of important debates in the history of Scotland and Britain since 1945 and offers a new perspective on the role of regional policy in shaping post-war economic and social development.

Part One

Establishing Bathgate

Chapter One

West Lothian – a ‘County on the Move’?

In 1966, West Lothian County Council sponsored the production of a promotional film entitled *County on the Move*. Central to this film’s depiction of West Lothian as a modern, forward-looking industrial county was the presence of the BMC’s truck and tractor assembly plant at Bathgate, which had been established five years previously as a result of government regional policy which sought to alleviate the unemployment caused by the rundown of heavy industry in Britain’s ‘peripheral’ regions. The film presents the BMC factory, along with the construction of the new town of Livingston and the improvement of the county’s transport infrastructure, as a symbol of what can be termed its ‘reindustrialisation’, highlighting the contrast between the motor plant’s relatively high-tech machinery and clean working environment, and the more physical work processes shown in footage of coal and shale miners working underground, and fireclay workers attending to large furnaces. However, while acknowledging the immediate unfamiliarity of motor industry work to much of the West Lothian workforce and emphasising the new skills and technical education that the introduction of motor manufacturing would therefore necessitate, the film portrays the advent of the ‘new’ industries not as a complete break with the county’s heavy industrial past, but rather as a new stage in its longer-term economic development. Recognising the continuity represented by agriculture, which still accounted for three quarters of the county’s land use, and drawing on the area’s mining tradition and the very visible impact that its spoil heaps had had on the local landscape, the voiceover claims that the motor industry would ‘call on the same resolution, the same spirit’ among West Lothian’s workers that had ‘made their grandfathers move mountains with shovels’ during its previous industrial experiences.¹

Moreover, the film acknowledges that this change in West Lothian’s industrial direction was deliberate; a conscious decision by the government to reshape Scotland’s economy and rebuild

¹ Scottish Screen Archive (SSA), Scottish Educational Films Agency, *County on the Move*, IFA (Scotland), directed by Laurence Henson, 1966.

its urban environment that was both a response to the decline of its heavy industries, and a reflection of the perceived contemporary importance of emulating the economic growth experienced in the Midlands and South-East of England especially and driven by the expansion of new industry and the service sector. The motor industry in particular was seen as key to the success of those areas in terms of creating growth and supporting full employment, and indeed its dispersal under the regional policy of Harold Macmillan's Conservative government was informed as much by fears over the potentially detrimental impact on future growth that could be caused by over-concentration and inflationary pressures in the Midlands and South-East, as by concern with the levels of unemployment in the designated Development Areas. The historiography of Scotland's economic development since 1945 has, however, frequently presented both BMC Bathgate and the Rootes car factory established concurrently at Linwood near Glasgow, as a symbol of the failure of regional policy and attempts to reindustrialise Scotland after 1945. The literature relating to regional policy more broadly tends to emphasise the extent to which factories such as Bathgate and Linwood were branch plants, operating remotely from their suppliers, markets, and company headquarters, offering only low-skilled assembly work, and doing little to encourage the growth of ancillary industries. Peter Scott has argued that such branch plants were of only marginal importance to their parent firms and were therefore acutely vulnerable to closure while, in the Scottish context, Ewen Cameron is among those who have highlighted the 'footloose' attitude of investor firms attracted to Scotland primarily by the availability of relatively cheap labour and often subsidised industrial premises.²

This chapter moves the analysis of regional policy in Scotland away from questions about its efficacy to consider its broader economic and social dimensions, by using archival sources as well as the oral history testimony of the Bathgate plant's former workers to explore its impact on life and work in West Lothian. Taking into account the cyclical nature of industrialisation and the structural shifts taking place in the wider Scottish economy, and recognising the impact of inward investment and capital mobility, the chapter will situate the development of the factory and the experiences of its workforce within the wider framework of Scotland's longer-term deindustrialisation, and demonstrate that the history of the BMC at Bathgate is better understood, not as one of ill-conceived policy and inevitable failure, but as part of an attempt to manage the

² Scott, 'Regional Development and Policy', p.366; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.257.

longer process of industrial change. It will begin with a discussion of the campaign against the plant's closure, highlighting the cultural centrality of industrial employment, the perceived importance of the BMC in particular to life in and around Bathgate, and the impact of closure and subsequent unemployment on the plant's workers. The second section returns to Bathgate's establishment a quarter of a century earlier, discussing the extent to which regional development policy represented a response to an earlier phase of deindustrialisation, and indicating the continuous nature of economic development. This analysis is continued in the final section, which describes the shift in the focus of regional policy which occurred in the early 1960s and, emphasising the perceived importance of economic growth as a solution to Scotland's high levels of unemployment, considers the extent to which the development from the mid-1960s of Livingston new town as the industrial, retail, and service centre of West Lothian represented a further stage in the county's economic and social development.

The closure of Leyland Bathgate: a challenge to industrial permanence

In January 1982, members of the Leyland Bathgate Joint Shop Stewards' Committee and their supporters occupied the factory in response to a proposed divisional reorganisation that would see a share of Bathgate's truck production moved to Leyland in Lancashire, and its tractor plant closed down and sold off with 'significant job loss'.³ The sense of crisis at the motor plant – and the resistance tactics pursued by some of its workers – was conditioned by developments at the nearby factory of Plessey Capacitors, where, on the following day, the largely female workforce similarly went into occupation to protect their jobs and resist the closure of what they believed was an efficient, technologically advanced and, above all, profitable plant.⁴ Plessey Ltd. was at this time the fourth largest electronics company in the UK, and at its peak in 1973 had employed around 2,400 people in Bathgate. However, by 1981, its workforce across the country had fallen by 35 per cent, and the Bathgate plant employed just 330, around 75 per cent of whom were

³ Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) archive, Glasgow Caledonian University (GCAL), General Council minutes and papers, 1982, letter from N. McIntosh, AUEW – brief report on industrial situation at Bathgate.

⁴ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, pp.45-46; P. Findlay, 'Resistance, Restructuring and Gender: The Plessey Occupation', in T. Dickson and D. Judge (eds), *The Politics of Industrial Closure* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) pp.76-78.

women.⁵ Plessey had moved to Bathgate in 1965 when, largely as a result of a local campaign to attract external capital to the area, it took over the plant formerly operated by the Telegraph Condenser Company (TCC), and its history in the town, like the motor plant, is therefore closely tied to post-war efforts to boost the local economy and mitigate the effects of the decline of West Lothian's staple coal and shale oil mining industries. The TCC had opened in 1947 and, as Patricia Findlay points out in her 1987 study of the Plessey occupation, was the first major employer in the area not dependent on the exploitation of natural resources, and consequently also one of the first to offer employment opportunities for women in a town in which 'employment was almost wholly a male preserve'.⁶

Findlay argues that it was precisely the female character of the workforce at Plessey that enabled the campaign against its closure to attract widespread support and spark a wider, community-based effort to protect jobs and fight closure in the town. She highlights the importance of Plessey's women workers in building community organisations and informal neighbourhood groups, and the significance that such networks can have in industrial disputes affecting many members of the same community.⁷ The following quotation from an oral history interview with Harry Bradley, a former Leyland worker, conducted in 2011, illustrates the perceived centrality of both factories to the economic and social life of the town, and the informal links which existed between them.

I would say, oot o' B Block, which had about 2,500 workers in it, men, and women, mostly men, the biggest majority of the men, their wives worked in Plessey. The reason I'm saying that is because before Leyland came to Bathgate, the Plessey was there it was the TCC, and the young, the guys like masel who worked on foondries, building sites, different places, all winched women, or girls, who worked in Plessey, and ended up marrying them, so a lot ae us was married to girls who worked in the Plessey before Leyland came. When Leyland came, obviously, the men who worked, eh, outside Leyland all got jobs in Leyland and their wives still worked in the Plessey. So you'd a great support, because we used

⁵ Findlay, 'Resistance, Restructuring and Gender', pp.72-75.

⁶ Ibid, p.73.

⁷ Ibid, p.94. For a similar consideration of women's role in community activism, see J. Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984-1985* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) pp.132-135.

to go to the Plessey dances, we had that mebbe once a month up the canteen, and it was like walking through Leyland at times, because every second guy you met worked in Leyland.⁸

Findlay found that the testimony of former Plessey workers involved in the occupation was similarly informed by a recognition of the tight-knit nature of the community in Bathgate, as well as a related concern for the future employment prospects of its young people in particular. One former worker told her ‘we all thought the same – where are our kids going to work?’, and she cites the experience of a number of older women who were approaching retirement age and entitled to sizeable redundancy payments, but decided to forego these in order to support the occupation in the hopes of maintaining employment in the area.⁹ As one Plessey worker put it, ‘people could see the community going down and down. The British Leyland dispute was going on and everyone was worried there wasn’t going to be any work left.’¹⁰ Jim Swan, the former chair of the Joint Shop Stewards’ Committee (JSSC) at Leyland, described in 2011 the concurrent occupations at Leyland and Plessey as evidence that ‘there was something happening where people were saying our economy’s going to go down the drain if we dinnae stop this,’ and there is certainly evidence to suggest a considerable degree of support for the workers of both factories within a community facing ‘severe and growing problems’ in terms of employment.¹¹ The Plessey occupation received donations of money and provisions from local shopkeepers, families and pensioners, as well as from other local factories. This wider ‘community effort’ was discussed by the STUC and supported by the regional and district councils, the Scottish Development Agency, and the local MP, Tam Dalyell, as well as the STUC itself.¹² Indeed, it was reported in the *Financial Times (FT)* that ‘there are few political overtones to the Scottish strike. It has more of a community feel to it.’¹³

While the involvement of women workers in the campaign arguably provided the basis on which such community support could be built, it should be noted that their responses to this threat to

⁸ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

⁹ Findlay, ‘Resistance, restructuring and gender’, p.76.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.94.

¹¹ WEA, interview with Jim Swan; STUC, GCAL, papers of West Lothian Trades’ Council, Scottish Office news release – Bathgate working party report published.

¹² Findlay, ‘Resistance, Restructuring and Gender’, p.92; STUC, GCAL, General Council minutes and papers, 1982, letter from N. McIntosh, AUEW – brief report on industrial situation at Bathgate.

¹³ ‘Bathgate’s credibility problem’, *Financial Times (FT)*, 15th February 1982.

their employment, as well as the ways in which they experienced factory occupation, were undoubtedly shaped by their gender. Harry Bradley's 2011 testimony suggests an inversion of what could be described as conventional, male-centric models of class struggle, with food being prepared and sent out of occupied premises to feed men and children at home:

During their strike, ehm, ma wife who was one of I think 80 sat in who wouldnae come oot the gates, and ehm...they controlled the kitchens, and they were making soup, stovies and all this sorta thing for all the workers and the women used to take it home at night, or them that was sitting in, they used to send it home wi' other people to give to the men whose wives were sitting in.¹⁴

Findlay argues that, while it was perhaps paradoxical that women were willing to participate in a form of industrial action which made extra demands on their time, the occupation actually engendered a sense of solidarity amongst workers who became aware of their common interests and responsibilities as women, and that this in turn fostered cooperation and mutual assistance.¹⁵ Furthermore, the choice of factory occupation as a strategy in itself played a significant role in raising awareness of the problems facing the town and building support for the campaigns against closure. Ken Coates, for example, argues that the factory occupation represents a strategy which can be adopted as labour confronts new problems outside the realm of union influence: in this case factory closure and mass redundancy. In these situations, the threat of strike action loses its power, demonstrating the limitations of the collective bargaining process and the need for a new form of defensive industrial action.¹⁶ At Plessey the occupation prevented the transfer of modern and valuable machinery out of the factory, and was therefore applied as an economic sanction against a company aiming to centralise production elsewhere. Moreover, it helped to build community support for the workforce by drawing attention to the problem of redundancy and ensuring that this became a public social issue.¹⁷ Indeed, Jim Swan has described the Leyland occupation as 'a PR job and a protest. It was to try and let the people out there know

¹⁴ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

¹⁵ Findlay, 'Resistance, Restructuring and Gender', p.88.

¹⁶ K. Coates, *Work-ins, Sit-ins and Industrial Democracy* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1981) p.150.

¹⁷ Findlay, 'Resistance, Restructuring and Gender', p.83.

about what was happening at the factory... We had to get big headlines and that's why we did it that way.'¹⁸

It is difficult to assess the extent to which either of these occupations can be seen as a success, and this depends on whether they are judged in terms of the publicity they received, the solidarity they engendered, or their longer-term effectiveness in maintaining employment in West Lothian. The Leyland occupation certainly garnered a degree of press coverage, but the workers occupying the factory had to leave two weeks into the occupation when they were served with an interim interdict and eviction notice.¹⁹ Moreover, it caused some friction within the workforce, as many of the workers in the tractor plant had been willing to take their redundancy payments, and argued that the decision to fight the closure of the plant should rest with them, rather than with the JSSC.²⁰ At Plessey, the occupying workforce voted to defy an interim interdict and to remain in the factory at risk of fine or even imprisonment for contempt of court, and eventually, represented in the High Court in Edinburgh by future Scottish Government Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill, who would also represent Caterpillar workers occupying their plant at Uddingston in 1987, succeeded in having the interdict lifted in what became known as the 'Plessey judgement'.²¹ Eight weeks into the occupation, the workers voted to accept a takeover bid by a company called Arcotronics which would see the factory remain open, but with a reduced workforce of just 80. Again, this caused some divisions amongst the workers, some of whom felt they were pressurised into accepting this deal by union representatives keen to bring the occupation to a close, but the consensus amongst Findlay's interviewees was that '[the unions] had taken us to the end of the road, and there was nowhere else they could take us.'²² A similar sense of resignation is evident in the oral testimony of Leyland workers following the acceptance of the tractor plant sell-off, although this is shaped by the experience of the eventual closure of the plant four years later in 1986. Tommy Morrison, a former vice-convenor of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) in the plant, describes his involvement in a second occupation of the plant which followed the government's

¹⁸ WEA, interview with Jim Swan.

¹⁹ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.47; '1,000 ready to leave BL Bathgate', *FT*, 25th January 1982; 'Injunction ends Bathgate sit-in but all-out strike continues', *FT*, 30th January 1982.

²⁰ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.47.

²¹ Findlay, 'Resistance, Restructuring and Gender', pp.86-87.

²² *Ibid*, p.82.

announcement in May 1984 that production would cease with the loss of all remaining 1,800 jobs.²³

Once they came out with the word that it's closing, then it's closing and you cannae change their minds. So [the campaign against closure] was a paper exercise for me... Sure I was there on the picket lines with the next yin, but I was there, I was half-hearted, and I was, I wasnae there as a union man, I was there as a worker there, ken, on the picket line and that. But by then the fight had left me because I knew we'd lost, I knew we'd lost, and that was it.²⁴

Alan Marr decided to leave the factory in 1983 to seek work elsewhere, after witnessing the sell-off of the tractor plant and the continued run-down of the remaining truck production.

Numerous times they had said they were going to close the plant, but that particular time they started stripping stuff out and taking it away, and I just said, there's gonna be another three thousand guys looking for work the same time as me, I'm off... I think it was a, a quite open knowledge that the place was gonna be shutting. And eh, there was an announcement made, but I can't remember the details about it, but I do remember watching them taking away the tractor plant, to Marshall's, I do remember that quite vividly. And that was when it started to hit me that I wasnae gonna be there forever, and I had to deal with that. The only way I knew was to get out and look for something else before everybody else was gonnae look for the same job as me.²⁵

While this testimony does reflect the claim made in the *FT* that the workforce had been 'half expecting' the closure of the plant for at least two years, there is also a sense of surprise or shock that the factory could close, and a realisation that Leyland Bathgate was not a permanent fixture in the industrial landscape of West Lothian and could not be expected to provide employment indefinitely.²⁶ This is implicit in the testimony of a number of other workers who apparently thought that such a large factory, employing so many people, would surely survive to support

²³ 'They're not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate', *FT*, 23rd May 1984.

²⁴ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

²⁵ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

²⁶ 'They're not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate', *FT*, 25th May 1984.

future generations in the town. Joyce Brogan worked in the planning office, and her father was made redundant by the final closure.

There was lots of rumours before it actually closed, and eh, I think it was just like a total shock and disbelief that that could happen after, like, I think in the heyday it employed about five to six thousand people for the area, so it was a bit of a bombshell when it actually did happen. And it put a bit of doom and gloom, I think, over the whole area.²⁷

Similar sentiments were expressed by Jim Bilsborough. 'I just could not believe that they would shut that plant. I kept saying to myself, and I wisnae alone, how can they shut a place like this? It was a total shock.'²⁸ Furthermore, a number of workers expressed their disappointment that, not only was their own clean, safe and reasonably well-paid employment being lost, but that their families would not be able to follow them into the factory. Tam Brandon, for example, had hoped that the plant would provide employment for his children.

I don't mind telling you I cried because I was looking forward to my family getting work there. The Leyland had a tremendous input in the social life of people. You've got to understand how many thousands of people worked in there... I got that word and I came home and I sat and I held my wife's hand and I said 'we're finished'.²⁹

Seven members of Tommy Morrison's immediate family worked at the plant, and so the impact of the closure on his life was particularly acute.

Oh, it was disaster. Oh it was a disaster. I mean it's like, I mean it's like a death. Everybody is enjoying their self and everything laid on, and, and you were socialising and you had a job to go to on a Monday, nae fear of no getting a wage coming in every week, and everything was hunky-dory, as the name says, as the

²⁷ WEA, interview with Joyce Brogan.

²⁸ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.49.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.49.

word says. And, eh, all of a sudden, crash. But, crash. Nae work. There was nae work to go to. And this is the, this is what happens.³⁰

John Duncan had moved to Bathgate from rural Aberdeenshire to work in the tool store, a job which he describes as ‘a decent job and a decent pay, it was more than I ever anticipated.’ He was nearing retirement at the time of the closure, but his memories are nevertheless that ‘it was a great disappointment to me and I’m sure to a lot of the younger people who had sort of got used to it, you know.’³¹ This sense of opportunities lost, and of uncertainty in the future was shared by Lenny Walker, who had also moved to the area to work at the factory, and sums up the effect of the closure on much of the workforce: ‘We all didn’t know what we were gonnae do if the factory closed ‘cos it had never happened to us before.’³²

This statement encapsulates the impact that the factory had had in its twenty-five year lifetime in terms of providing relatively secure, stable and lucrative employment for a generation of men and, to a smaller extent, women in West Lothian. However, it also highlights the challenge that the closure represented to the notion of industrial permanence, discussed by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott in their work on deindustrialisation in the United States. For Cowie and Heathcott, the industrial culture of Europe and the US in the twentieth century was a temporary condition which existed in a ‘brief moment in the history of capitalism’.³³ The sense of permanence lent to industrial structures and organisations by their apparently solid foundations in fixed capital investment, the nuts and bolts of heavy machinery, and bricks-and-mortar factories, has compounded the experience of job loss and deindustrialisation by undermining a whole society, culture and way of life built on industrial employment. The reaction of the Bathgate workforce to the plant’s closure is closely in line with this analysis, in which the experience of deindustrialisation has been experienced as ‘the end of an historical epoch’, and in which the retrospective acceptance of change as a function of capital mobility, even a generation later, cannot alleviate the continued loss and pain associated with plant closure. In the Bathgate context, it is arguable that this pain was particularly sharply felt due in part to the attempted

³⁰ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

³¹ WEA, interview with John Duncan.

³² WEA, interview with Lenny Walker.

³³ J. Cowie and J. Heathcott, ‘Introduction – the Meanings of Deindustrialisation’, in J. Cowie, J. Heathcott and B. Bluestone (eds), *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialisation* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003) p.4.

reindustrialisation of the area through the establishment of the Leyland plant, and the consequent and disproportionate continued reliance on manufacturing employment across West Lothian. In 1981 a Scottish Office report found that manufacturing accounted for nearly four out of ten jobs in the Bathgate area, compared with 2.5 out of ten in Scotland as a whole, while employment in services stood at 49 per cent compared with 62 per cent for Scotland.³⁴ Moreover, 85 per cent of manufacturing employment in the area was in just four plants: Leyland, Plessey, a Levi Strauss jeans factory which employed 410 people in Whitburn, and the North British Steel foundries at Armadale and Bathgate, which employed 750 between them.³⁵ Of non-manufacturing employers in the area, the largest by some distance was the Polkemmet Colliery, which employed 1,360 and closed in 1986 following severe flood damage arising from a management decision to switch off pumping machinery during the 1984-85 miners' strike.³⁶ This reliance on a small number of large establishments, and a related absence of smaller firms and local entrepreneurs, meant that the area was particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in the fortunes of these companies, and that the closures of Plessey and later of Leyland had a great impact, particularly in an area where manufacturing continued to dominate and, as, the Scottish Office reported, the industrial culture therefore remained conditioned by its heavy industrial past.³⁷ The employment situation in the Bathgate area had been worsening even before these closures were announced, with the number of workers employed decreasing by 3,000, or 15 per cent, between 1978 and 1981. While employment was falling throughout Scotland at this time, the growth in the unemployment rate between 1981 and 1982 was 4.3 per cent in Bathgate, compared with 2.3 per cent across Scotland, indicating that even within the wider context of recession and industrial closures, the area had seen a relative as well as an absolute deterioration in its employment situation.³⁸ Contemporary newspaper reportage of the Leyland closure focused on the worsening unemployment problem, with the *FT* for example giving the unemployment rate as 19.3 per cent

³⁴ STUC, GCAL, papers of West Lothian Trades' Council, copy of Scottish Office news release – 'Bathgate working party report published', p.5.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.6.

³⁶ Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike*, pp.22, 153.

³⁷ STUC, GCAL, papers of West Lothian Trades' Council, copy of Scottish Office news release – 'Bathgate working party report published', p.6.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.4.

in May 1984, and citing the STUC's expectation that unemployment amongst males in the area could reach 50 per cent following the closure.³⁹

The impact of unemployment on workers, whose experience of both work itself and of the wider culture surrounding the Leyland plant had been shaped by the notion of industrial permanence in an area defined by and dependent on its manufacturing, was unsettling and in some cases deeply distressing. John Hastings was among those made redundant by the sell-off of the tractor plant in 1982, and his testimony reflects the feelings of workers who had no previous experience of unemployment, and gives a sense of the powerlessness which could be wrought by redundancy, particularly in a large company.

Absolutely shattered. I'd never been paid off before. That somebody had decided that no matter how good you were at your job...the tractor division was going so you were going with it.⁴⁰

Alex Moffat's description of his experience of redundancy and unemployment demonstrates Cowie and Heathcott's contention that the awareness of wider economic developments could do little to soften the impact of job loss on the individual, but also illustrates the scale of the problems caused by the closure at a time of economic difficulty in the town.

It was a disaster. At that time there was a massive recession on and there wisnae any work so I was made redundant and tried for a period of time to get any type of job... I hated being unemployed. The majority of the people that were in the factory were in an age group where they thought that was them settled for the rest of their working days. So when it closed it was a complete financial and a mental disaster for the people that worked in it.⁴¹

The difficulty of finding alternative employment, and the effect that this could have in terms of worsening the sense of powerlessness engendered by redundancy is highlighted in Harry Bradley's memories of the closure, and of attempts made by the plant's shop stewards to help in the search for work.

³⁹ 'They're not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate', *FT*, '23rd May 1984.

⁴⁰ WEA, interview with John Hastings.

⁴¹ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.49.

At that time when it was shutting in '86 there wasn't a lot of money about here. It felt sad, definitely felt sad. But Plessey had already went by that time, it was shut a few years prior to it, there was only the likes ae Menzies's [the North British Steel foundry] left here, and a couple of these new wee factories... But aye, I felt sad. I didnae drive then, so the week leading up to it shutting, the shop, well the management of the shop stewards had got these people from Bathgate and Edinburgh, I cannae mind what you call them, people likes of from the bureau [Department of Employment Job Centre] and these kind of places, and they were telling you more or less there was nothing there for you. And they got a big blackboard, I always remember this, they got a big blackboard and they drew a hill on it like a bridge, right, they marked you there with an X, with nae possibilities, nothing to dae, and over the bridge at that side, with another X, was jobs, right. So you could either try going to higher education, to get you o'er that hump, or try self-employment to get you o'er that hump, or go o'er that hump and go and look for jobs elsewhere.⁴²

The impression that there were no jobs and no opportunities in the Bathgate area in the wake of the plant's closure is reflected in the testimony of a number of other former Leyland workers, who have also drawn attention to the wider social impact that high levels of unemployment had in terms of contributing to a more general malaise in the town. The effect of the closure and the loss of well-paid employment on the economy of the town centre is described by Tommy Morrison, and reflects similar experiences seen in US cities undergoing deindustrialisation, where lost factory incomes and taxes had a damaging effect on the wider economy and urban environment.⁴³

Bathgate was quite a big thingmy as far as shopping was concerned for women and that, a lot of shoe shops, a lot ae drapers' shops. The only thing against it that mebbe should have come in was mebbe a big name like mebbe Marks and Spencer's, and mebbe a couple of big yins like that mebbe would have been ideal,

⁴² WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

⁴³ See, for example, B. Bluestone and B. Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982) pp.67-78; or Howard Gillette Jr.'s study of Camden, New Jersey, 'The Wages of Disinvestment: How Money and Politics Aided the Decline of Camden, New Jersey', in Cowie and Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins*, pp.143-147.

but, eh, you had a lot ae, you had a lot ae places and a lot ae men's places and ladies' places, and you had a lot ae shoe shops and that and grocery shops and it was really full up there wi' stores like that, but then you see what happens there is the money's no coming in in Bathgate, but also because of the outlying area, they all depended on Bathgate, OK? So, obviously, they cannae have the same money to spend, because to go fae a certain wage, and eh, go doon to what they're getting for the dole or assistance or whatever it was, insurance, whatever, they've no got the same spending power, so that has an adverse effect on Bathgate's shops, so they gradually one by one – because, because the money's no coming in, the council's thingmying it, they've got to put the rates up ae shops, because it's, if they cannae get it from the one side they've got to get it from the other. You know, they were getting a lot of money fae Leyland, fae what it was and that, whereas they lose all that so they've got to bring the money in to keep them going, to keep the place going. So they put the rates up, and by putting the rates up, basically what happens is that, eh, people cannae afford the rates. It's a snowball effect. It's a shame.⁴⁴

The *FT*, in its report on the closure plans, similarly drew attention to the impact that unemployment was having on life in the area, painting a bleak picture of a town in which large groups of men 'spend the day in the grey centre of Bathgate near the job centre and in the number of small cafes which seem to have proliferated as demand has increased for places where people can pass the time stretching a cup of coffee', and warning of the threat posed to local shops and businesses by large-scale redundancy.⁴⁵ Bathgate and its immediate environs were coming to be associated with decline and industrial difficulty; as early as 1981, the report of the Scottish Office working party looking into the economy of the town had warned of the potential impact on any future investment that might be caused by the 'low quality urban environment', and the detrimental effect on the town's image of the visibility of derelict industrial land from the nearby M8 motorway.⁴⁶ With this in mind, one of the key recommendations of the working party's report was 'the removal of the visible signs of industrial dereliction and the improvement

⁴⁴ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

⁴⁵ 'They're not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate', *FT*, 23rd May 1984.

⁴⁶ STUC, GCAL, papers of West Lothian Trades' Council, copy of Scottish Office news release – 'Bathgate working party report published', p.9.

of the physical environment...in order to project a positive image of quality and endeavour.⁴⁷ The closure of Leyland and the failure to find an alternative employer to take over the factory only exacerbated this problem. Vince Moore is among former workers who remember that the site, very close to the motorway, ‘stayed just a gap for such a long long time’. For Moore, this gap represented a physical reminder of the jobs that had been lost, and of the families who had subsequently had to move away from the area in order to find employment.⁴⁸ Indeed, it is only within the last decade that the former Leyland site has been redeveloped as the new community of Wester Inch, comprising over 2,000 private homes built around the central Leyland Road; a sign, perhaps, of both the town’s new role as a commuter dormitory for Edinburgh, and of the ‘smokestack nostalgia’ described by Cowie and Heathcott and frequently used to ‘add some place-specific color [sic] to the otherwise generic beige landscape’ of redeveloped industrial land.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the emphasis placed by Morrison, Moore, and other interviewees on the idea that the deterioration of the area resulted primarily from the closure of the plant, rather than any broader economic or political concerns, perhaps reflects the extent to which the discourse of reindustrialisation and opportunity which had surrounded its establishment had permeated the Bathgate workforce and shaped the perception of industrial permanence.

Regional Policy and Reindustrialisation: Bathgate and the establishment of the BMC plant

The job losses, high unemployment and industrial dereliction of the 1980s were not, it should be emphasised, new features of the West Lothian economy, and in fact many of the concerns that were expressed at the time of the Plessey and Leyland closures had in fact been prevalent in discussions of the area and its economic and social problems at the time of the establishment of the then BMC plant at Bathgate quarter of a century earlier. Table 1:1 uses census data to calculate the unemployment rate for West Lothian, demonstrating that it remained persistently

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.14.

⁴⁸ WEA, interview with Vince Moore.

⁴⁹ Scottish Government, *Design at the Heart of House Building*, (Edinburgh: 2008), Case Study 2: Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd. – Wester Inch, Bathgate; Cowie and Heathcott, ‘Introduction’, pp.2-3.

higher than the Scottish and British averages throughout the period in which the plant was open in Bathgate.

Table 1:1: Percentage of total economically active population seeking work in West Lothian, Scotland, and Great Britain, 1961-1981.

| Census year | West Lothian | Scotland | Great Britain |
|-------------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| 1961 | 3.5 | 3.2 | 1.6 |
| 1971 | 7.4 | 5.8 | 4.0 |
| 1981 | 12.9 | 12.3 | 9.8 |

(Source: Census, Small Area Statistics (London: HMSO, 1961-1981); Census, vol. 6, Occupation, Industry and Workplace (London: HMSO, 1961-1971); Peden, *The Managed Economy*, p.248.)

When it was announced in 1960 that the BMC would be moving to the town, unemployment in West Lothian stood at 4.8 per cent; considerably lower than the 19.3 per cent recorded in 1984, but high enough to cause alarm in the context of post-war full employment.⁵⁰ In 1966, by which time the factory had been open for five years, a survey of the area described it as ‘disfigured by the dereliction left by past industry, not merely in the form of bings but also ... in the shabby remains of deserted buildings, in the abandoned rail and canal facilities, and in the presence of many sub-standard houses.’⁵¹ Conditions in the area at this time are perhaps best captured by the views of people who moved to the area to work at the plant. Bill Raine, for example, relocated to Bathgate from Birmingham, where he had worked at the company’s Longbridge factory. His first impression of the town, possibly hardened by his experience of anti-English abuse in his first months of living there, was that ‘Bathgate was a dump, there was nothing there.’⁵² Dougie Miller was born in the mining town of Cessnock, New South Wales, to ‘very very left-wing’ parents who had chosen to emigrate because they felt that their political activism was a source of persecution and an obstacle to their employment in Scotland. However, they found that they were not able to ‘get on’ in Australia either, and chose to move back to Whitburn when they heard that the BMC would be opening up in Bathgate. ‘I remember getting out of the taxi, and I

⁵⁰National Archives of Scotland (NAS), SEP4/1660, Scottish Development Department specific industries, motor engineering, British Motor Corporation – Memorandum from Scottish Home Department to Mr J B Fleming, 12th January 1960.

⁵¹D.J. Robertson (ed.), *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan, Volume One: Economic and Social Aspects*, (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1966), chapter 2, paragraph 13.

⁵²WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

saw the grey houses, and the grey skies. I thought “what the hell am I coming to”.⁵³ For those workers who had grown up in West Lothian, such as Ian Tennant who also lived in Whitburn, childhood memories of the area were shaped by the rundown of its mining industries and consequent high rate of unemployment.

Sadly, I suppose even as a kid I was aware of the number of people hanging about Whitburn Cross and Blackburn Cross and Armadale Cross, you know, each day. I was aware there was a shortage of work, although my father wasn't a miner, you had to be aware of the mining communities you know and their involvement. So even at that early stage, even as a teenager you were aware of the economics of the area.⁵⁴

The announcement that the BMC would be moving to Bathgate was therefore seen as a great boost to the area, particularly as much of the work that was still available in the remaining heavy industries was by its nature insecure and unreliable. Harry McKay worked at the steel foundry in Armadale.

There was a lot of excitement in the build-up, there was a lot of people very very interested in it. We couldn't believe it because I remember the headlines in the paper, I believe it was the *Express* at that particular time, and the headlines, the front page was ‘It's Bathgate’, and everybody was excited about it because the foundry at that particular stage had its ups and downs as far as work was concerned, sometimes you were on a three day week, a four day week depending on the economical environment, depending on the export situation, so we all looked forward to, Bathgate was only two miles away, we knew it was going to be a huge plant, so we knew that well, if something happened to the foundry, there was an opportunity especially for a younger person.⁵⁵

The scale of the factory and its modernity were seen as particular reasons for optimism. Joyce Brogan chose a job at BMC over another offer of employment because ‘it seemed to be more opportunities, because it was a new plant that was coming to Bathgate’, and other workers have

⁵³ WEA, interview with Dougie Miller.

⁵⁴ WEA, interview with Ian Tennant.

⁵⁵ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

described their excitement during the period in which the plant was being built.⁵⁶ Ian Tennant was at school nearby at this time and remembers visiting the site to watch the construction work in progress.

In my last year at school I, I was at the Lindsay High School, the headmaster allowed the senior pupils, of which I was one, to go across to see the cutting of the sod and the building of this new BMC plant. And since I used to cycle to Whitburn from the school and to and from, I used to go up the old A8 and watch them, the machines levelling out the site etcetera. So I was well aware there was this big plant getting built.⁵⁷

Harry Bradley similarly remembers the physical changes taking place in the landscape around the town as the construction of the factory got underway.

What I mind about the Leyland when it came, when the big roundabout on the main road, there was a big gigantic concrete mixer and it used to get fillt all the time, and lorries used to come in and load it up, and the lorries went in and got fillt, put on the bottom of the tracks etcetera to concrete all the block surfaces, the floor surfaces, I can mind you that. And also, the shale mines, eh the boy fae Broxburn who had the businesses, I cannae mind anyway, I think he, rumour was that he got six pounds a ton, when they moved all the shale bings and brought it into Leyland for the bottom before they put the tar then the concrete on it.⁵⁸

This use of shale spoil in the construction of the factory highlights the extent of the changes which it wrought on the area, and was used as a symbol of the transformation and modernisation of the local economy in *County on the Move*, the promotional film made in 1966 and sponsored by West Lothian County Council and the Films of Scotland Committee, a body established by the Scottish Department for Development and Industry. The film focused on West Lothian and the structural changes taking place in the county, as spoil was used to fill the foundations for houses, schools and hospitals, and to build the roads and motorways which it was hoped would encourage the growth of new, high-tech industries. Writing about recent attempts to

⁵⁶ WEA, interview with Joyce Brogan.

⁵⁷ WEA, interview with Ian Tennant.

⁵⁸ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

commemorate the steel industry in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Kirk Savage has discussed the symbolism of the slag heap as ‘the perfect postindustrial monument...an ironic counterpoint to the official landscapes of urban rejuvenation’. One generation earlier in Scotland, it was their destruction, as survivors and reminders of a previous stage in West Lothian’s economic and industrial development, which was presented as central not only to such rejuvenation, but to the growth of a new industrial era.⁵⁹ The film casts the shale bings as representatives of old industry, old ideas, and old constraints, forming ‘a skyline of unseen effort...casting shadows where once a great family of men burrowed their lives away’, and their removal is depicted as an opportunity for the area to ‘shake off the dust of the past’ and build a future based on new skills, new technology and new industries including, most prominently, motor manufacturing.⁶⁰ It is a clear illustration, then, of the continuous nature of Bathgate’s industrial development and of the imagery associated with the redevelopment of industrial areas, that the 1981 recommendations to improve the town’s image in anticipation of the closure of the Leyland factory included not only measures to improve the appearance of derelict industrial land, but also the removal of the large Easton shale bing and the use of its spoil in new housing.⁶¹

Indeed, the construction of the plant in Bathgate can itself be seen as part of a government response to a previous wave of deindustrialisation; an attempt to reindustrialise both the West Lothian area itself and Central Scotland more broadly, and to mitigate the effects of the rundown of shipbuilding on the Clyde as well as the local staple industries of coal, shale and, to a lesser extent, steel. The negotiations between the Macmillan government and the BMC which eventually culminated in the decision to build the factory in Bathgate will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, but here it is important to place the factory’s establishment within the context of the longer term development of regional policy, and its changing priorities and outcomes. In his seminal study, *Regional Policy in Britain*, Gavin McCrone traces the origins of government attempts to control industrial structures and trade patterns in the regions to the 1930s, and the need to provide assistance to the depressed industrial areas, including Clydeside-North

⁵⁹ K. Savage, ‘Monuments of a Lost Cause: the Postindustrial Campaign to Commemorate Steel’, in Cowie and Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins*, pp.251-252.

⁶⁰ SSA, *County on the Move*.

⁶¹ STUC, GCAL, papers of West Lothian Trades’ Council, copy of Scottish Office news release – ‘Bathgate working party report published’, p.12.

Lanarkshire, which were designated Special Areas in an act of 1934.⁶² These were areas defined by their structural reliance on the ‘traditional’ and ‘heavy’ staple industries which had provided the basis for Britain’s nineteenth century prosperity – coal, iron and steel, shipbuilding and textiles – but were affected severely by the worldwide depression of the 1930s. The national rate of unemployment in shipbuilding, for example, stood at 61 per cent in 1934, while in particularly vulnerable areas such as Jarrow on Tyneside or the Rhondda mining village of Taff Well it was as high as 77 per cent and 82 per cent respectively.⁶³ The first steps towards regional policy, which comprised financial assistance and tax inducements to small companies opening up in the Special Areas and a policy of ‘industrial transference’ which sought to move labour out of the depressed areas to more prosperous regions, were a response to what was interpreted as a moment of ‘unusual emergency’ in Britain’s economic development, which was, in fact, the first stage of its deindustrialisation.⁶⁴ The structural nature of the difficulties, and therefore the longer-term necessity of regional policy, was subsequently recognised, initially in the Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population, or Barlow Report, published in 1940, with considerable influence over the development of the 1944 *Employment Policy* White Paper on and the 1945 Distribution of Industry Act. The latter both signified the recognition that increased government intervention in post-war planning would be necessary to avoid a return to mass unemployment, and, in a further reflection of the change in policy priorities brought about by the post-war consensus and shaped by the experience of the interwar years, placed greater importance on economic growth as the means by which regional disparities in unemployment and wellbeing could be avoided.⁶⁵

Jim Tomlinson has noted the difficulty of assessing the impact of economic management during the 1950s and 1960s, as the very idea of economic success in the longer post-war years has been ignored or denied in a body of literature which has generally accepted the dominant narrative of British industrial failure and decline.⁶⁶ However, the positive result of improved living standards, a key feature of the post-war ‘Golden Age’ up until 1970, was partly the consequence of the government’s attitudes towards regional development. As discussed in the Introduction,

⁶² McCrone, *Regional Policy*, pp.25-26, 91-94.

⁶³ *Ibid*, pp.91-92.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.93.

⁶⁵ Scott, ‘Regional Development’, p.345.

⁶⁶ J. Tomlinson, ‘Managing the Economy, Managing the People’, in F. Carnevali and J. Strange (eds), *20th Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007) p.242.

McCrone and Peter Scott have both suggested that, during the high employment years of the 1950s, regional policy was shaped more by its social than economic aspects, focusing primarily on providing jobs in unemployment black spots.⁶⁷ In the 1960s, however, the importance of economic factors was reasserted, and regional policy initiatives can be understood as driven by the need to secure economic growth – more evenly shared by spreading the prosperity associated with the new industries geographically – as well as a response to the rundown of the traditional and heavy industries. The implications that this increased focus on growth had for Scotland's reindustrialisation will be considered in more detail in the final section of this chapter, but here it is important to recognise the three major categories of 'regional problem' identified by McCrone. The first two of these, agricultural regions which lag behind industrialised areas, and industrial areas suffering from stagnation, were each marked by their inability to provide sufficient employment, and subsequent high levels of emigration and low incomes. The third category, 'congested regions', suffered from the very opposite set of problems; chief amongst these were the inflationary pressures caused by full employment and continued in-migration.⁶⁸ It was these pressures, identified in the Barlow Report and given renewed focus by the 1960 publication of *The South-East Study* into congestion in London and the South-East conurbation, which McCrone argues transformed the view of regional policy from 'a fad of the Celtic fringe', concerned with relieving unemployment in depressed areas, to a matter of national rather than merely peripheral importance.⁶⁹ The role played by the relatively new and growing industries of the Midlands and South of England in driving those areas' growth, prosperity and congestion was recognised. Regional policy intervention was seen as the means of dispersing investment in such industries away from these areas and into what were now termed Development Areas or, from 1960, Development Districts. Industrial Development Certificates (IDCs), introduced in 1947 as a result of Barlow's recommendations, and requiring Board of Trade planning permission for any industrial development over 5,000 square feet, were increasingly used to compel companies to invest in the Development Districts and, while it was the unemployment rate in these areas which necessitated their reindustrialisation, it was the success of the motor manufacturers in driving growth and creating congestion in the Midlands in particular which decided the manner in which they would be regenerated. In 1960, and under pressure from the

⁶⁷ Scott, 'Regional Development', pp.351-352; McCrone, *Regional Policy*, pp.106-107.

⁶⁸ McCrone, *Regional Policy*, pp.14, 38-39.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.19.

Macmillan government, a number of car-makers announced that they would be moving to new factories in Development Districts. These included Ford, refused an IDC for the expansion of its existing plant at Dagenham, along with Rootes, whose application for an IDC in Coventry had also been rebuffed, and the BMC, allowed to expand at Longbridge only on condition that it moved a significant proportion of production to the Development Districts.⁷⁰

The BMC was the first of these motor manufacturers to establish a factory in a Development District, and its experience in Bathgate was therefore being watched closely by other companies as a ‘test case’ of the government’s attitudes to and expectations of these regional policy plants.⁷¹ It was joined in Scotland in 1963 by Rootes, which moved to Linwood near Paisley, and these two developments, along with the construction of the Colville’s steel strip mill at Ravenscraig in Lanarkshire were seen as central to the modernisation and diversification of the Scottish industrial base. While ostensibly a response to the relatively high levels of unemployment in Scotland, and West Lothian in particular, the plant’s establishment can also be seen as in line with the ‘Scottish consensus’ described by David Stewart, which had developed during the 1950s around Ravenscraig and its potential to support younger forms of manufacturing.⁷² The STUC, for example, had long expressed concern about Scotland’s reliance on the heavy industrial staples, and had campaigned for investment in the new industries, and particularly in the motor industry. In a 1961 statement the STUC set out its vision of a Scottish economy reinvigorated by the creation of a well-integrated motor industry based on, but not limited to, these three major developments:

It is projects like that of the Rootes Group, to be established at Linwood, and of BMC at Bathgate that will help to change the pattern of Scottish industry. No longer can our dependence for employment rest so heavily, as it has in the past, on coal mining, shipbuilding and marine engineering. With the employment for Scots labour and the use of sheet steel from the new strip mill at Ravenscraig, the coming of the Rootes Group and BMC represent a great acquisition to industrial

⁷⁰ Scott, ‘Regional Development’, p.351; NAS, SEP4/1658, Scottish Development Department specific industries, motor engineering, general - Distribution of Industry Committee, Expansion of British Motor Corporation (Notes for the Secretary of State).

⁷¹ NAS, SEP4/1658, Scottish Development Department, Specific Industries, motor engineering, general – minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Distribution of Industry Committee, 17th December 1959.

⁷² Stewart, ‘Fighting for Survival’, p.56.

Scotland ... The break-through of Scotland into the motor car industry can, we believe, supply the dynamic which the Scottish economy has sorely needed for many years.⁷³

Films such as *County on the Move* and *The New Scotland*, produced in 1964 by Educational Films of Scotland following an economic survey of the country, emphasised the modernity of these factories and their potentially transformative effect on the landscape and economy of Scotland. *County on the Move* drew a sharp contrast not only between the shale bings and the factory they were used to build, but also between the experience of physical work in coal and shale mines, and that of more skilled and technical work in modern manufacturing. Similar imagery pervades *The New Scotland*, which focuses specifically on Linwood, Bathgate and Ravenscraig as examples both of the changes in the ways in which work was experienced in Scotland, and symbols of a much broader modernisation encompassing housing, education, leisure and transport. The sense of opportunity expressed by the Bathgate workforce, and their expectations of motor industry employment are similarly marked by both the scale of these developments in terms of both the factory itself and the BMC organisation, and the very ‘newness’ of motor manufacturing to the area. Guthrie Aitken remembers his reaction to the news that the BMC would be moving to the town, and his expectations of the opportunities it would afford.

I would be 19, 20 years of age. I went into the paper shop to buy a paper before I got the bus to my work and there were banner headlines on the newspaper and if memory serves me correctly it just said two words, ‘It’s Bathgate’. There had been speculation of course, because there were a lot of sites that were up for consideration but then it was confirmed it was Bathgate. I remember at the top of the hill going up from Blackridge to Harthill, between the football ground and the chip shop, there was a big notice board erected not long after this announcement was made and it gave you the numbers around this plant. The number of trucks they were going to be building, the number of countries they were going to be exporting to, the number of tractors they were going to build, the number of people they were going to employ. It was something we just couldn’t envisage, it

⁷³ STUC, GCAL, Sixty-fourth annual report of the STUC, 1961, p.18.

was mind boggling at that time. So it was opportunity, opportunity, opportunity, and I wanted to be part of that opportunity.⁷⁴

The scale of the factory, bigger than anything that had been in the area previously, made a huge impression on many of the workers. Alan Marr, for example, started work at the BMC as an apprentice, and was struck by its size.

I thought it was massive. I'd never been in anything like it before in my life. But I wasnae long in orientating myself and finding out... I was just quite amazed at all the different types of things that they were doing.⁷⁵

Fred McCormick was similarly impressed by the size of the factory, and described his first reaction to B Block, which contained the main truck assembly line as, 'Wow – this is some size of a place.'⁷⁶

Alongside their focus on the economic modernisation of Scotland, films such as *County on the Move* also emphasised the concurrent changes taking place in the social fabric of the country. *The New Scotland* in particular highlights the modernisation of the urban environment, depicting the slum clearance and redevelopment programmes which were getting underway in what it described as a 'frenzy of destruction'.⁷⁷ In 1959, West Lothian County Council had signed an overspill agreement with Glasgow Corporation under the Housing and Town Development (Scotland) Act, 1957.⁷⁸ Under this agreement, the County Council would build and make available three hundred new homes in the village of Blackburn, around two miles from Bathgate, for let to 'approved persons' for a period of ten years.⁷⁹ This highlights the importance, emphasised by McCrone, of considering the social as well as the economic aspects of regional policy, not least because this agreement itself formed part of a programme of policy which

⁷⁴ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.5.

⁷⁵ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

⁷⁶ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.11.

⁷⁷ SSA, Education Films of Scotland, *The New Scotland*, Thames and Clyde, 1964.

⁷⁸ West Lothian Archives and Records Centre (WLARC), Livingston, West Lothian County Council minute book, 1958-1961, Minute of agreement between the Corporation of Glasgow and the County Council of the County of West Lothian being an overspill agreement entered into under Section 9 of the Housing and Town Development (Scotland) Act, 1957.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

sought to tackle the social problems associated with Glasgow's over-population and lack of employment opportunity, and illustrated in *The New Scotland*.⁸⁰

Image 1:1 – Main Street, Blackburn, mid-1960s



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Moreover, it contributed to an increase in the population of West Lothian of over 50 per cent between 1951 and 1981 which had a considerable influence on the development of the county and of many of its decaying mining settlements over this period. Following the announcement that the BMC would be moving to Bathgate, West Lothian County Council agreed to provide further new housing for incoming workers, again mostly in Blackburn, contributing to an increase in its population from under 6,000 in 1961 to over 10,000 by 1963.⁸¹ The modernity of this housing, illustrated by the contrast between the nineteenth century streetscape of Image 1:1 and the modernist, mid-twentieth century housing of Image 1:2, had a considerable impact on the

⁸⁰ McCrone, *Regional Policy*, p.47; D. Newlands, 'The Regional Economies of Scotland', in Devine *et al.*, *The Transformation of Scotland*, p.173.

⁸¹ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 'A Policy for the Lothians', paragraph 38.

urban environment, and was to provide an important attraction for many BMC workers moving to the area from Glasgow in particular.⁸²

Image 1:2 – new maisonettes on the Murrayfield Estate, Blackburn, early 1960s



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John Moore, for example, grew up in the Gorbals area of Glasgow and was working for Albion Motors in the city when he decided to take a job at the BMC in spite of what would be a considerable drop in his wages.

I'd heard in the Albion there was recruitment taking place in the Bathgate BMC and there was houses going. At the point in time in 1964 when I applied I was staying in what they called a room and kitchen in quite a rundown part of Glasgow, Whiteinch. So anyway we had two children at that point in time and I

⁸² WLARC, West Lothian County Council minute book, 1958-1961, Minute of a meeting of the County Council of the County of West Lothian, held within the County Building, Linlithgow, on Tuesday 26th January, 1960.

was desperate to take the opportunity that was offered. I came out here in January '65 and I was with the plant until it closed.⁸³

Moore's experience was typical: of 92 overspill families living in Blackburn and Whitburn and interviewed for the 1966 *Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 54 had lived in a single room in Glasgow, and 52 had had no bathroom or toilet facilities of their own.⁸⁴ Jim Bilsborough lived in similar conditions in Glasgow and moved to Blackburn under the overspill agreement.

Blackburn was all Leyland. All these hooses were built for the Glasgow overspill. Where I stayed in Glasgow it was just a room and kitchen and I had two kids at the time. The toilet was out in the stair, on the landing. So I applied for this house in Blackburn. It was a case of saying yes right away because it was a lovely house. Three bedrooms! The kids were just coming up at the time. My third one was born there and they were all brought up in Blackburn. It was a new house, new job.⁸⁵

The development of Whitburn and Blackburn as overspill reception areas predated the 1962 designation of the nearby New Town of Livingston and had emerged from a different policy background, but in many ways can be seen as broadly in line with some of the wider social trends which characterised the growth of Scotland's New Towns.

In his study of England's *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns*, Mark Clapson warns against reducing working-class motivations for migration in the 1950s and 1960s to a simple binary of 'push' or 'pull' factors, arguing instead that push factors such as poor housing and slum clearance were intertwined with pull criteria such as the appeal of a new house and a cleaner, safer environment, and emphasises the voluntary nature of most out-migration.⁸⁶ This is also commented on in the *Lothians Regional Survey* which found little evidence in either Blackburn or Whitburn of the so-called 'New Town Blues' thought to result from the break-up of working-class communities, and central to many contemporary depictions of life in New Towns and peripheral estates, relating to a sense, described by William Knox, that 'the

⁸³ WEA, interview with John Moore.

⁸⁴ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, chapter 17, paragraph 11.

⁸⁵ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.6.

⁸⁶ M. Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) p.88.

community spirit of slum life was traded for an indoor toilet and bath.’⁸⁷ The positive atmosphere in West Lothian, it was felt, was due to Glasgow Corporation’s policy of offering overspill housing to all families on its list rather than only those in condemned housing and thus the absence of either any element of coercion in the move, or of the ‘arbitrary disruption’ of existing communities.⁸⁸

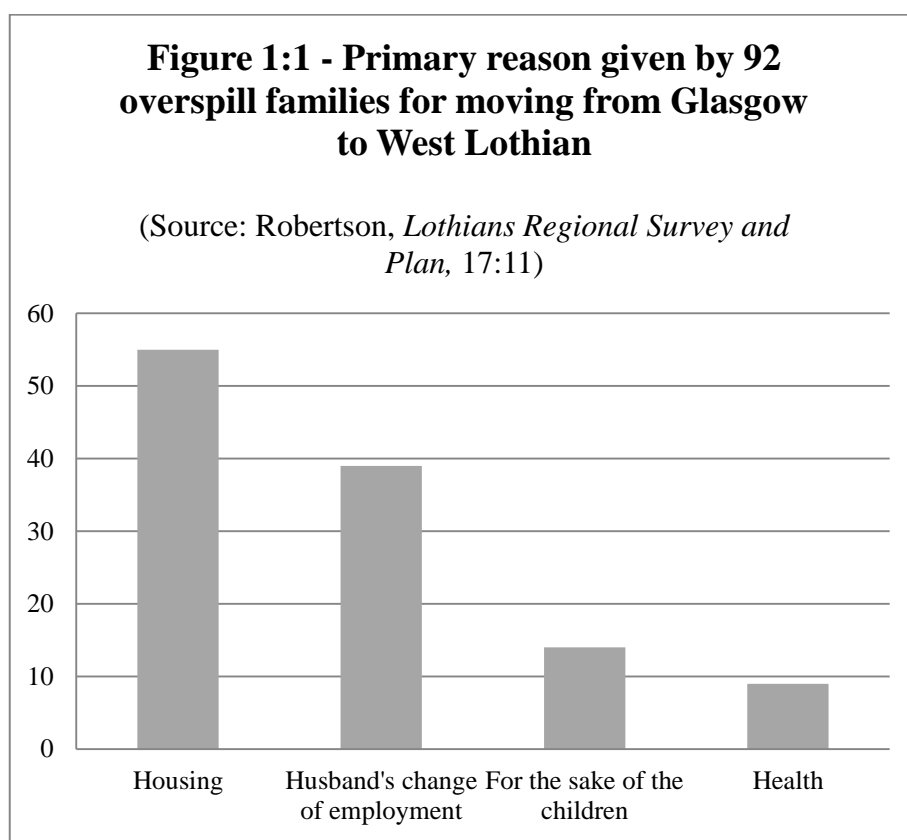


Figure 1:1 shows the primary reasons given by these families for deciding to move, but it should be noted that the *Survey* goes on to state that ‘in further discussion it usually emerged that a combination of these factors had led the family to make the move, and that in all cases the house was a powerful motive.’⁸⁹ Furthermore, there was a clear preference expressed for terraced housing and cottage-style flats which allowed a family to have ‘our own front and back door’.

⁸⁷ Knox, *Industrial Nation*, p.262.

⁸⁸ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 17:11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 17:11.

Those who had been rehoused in flats, primarily in Blackburn, were most likely to express disappointment at having been moved ‘from one tenement to another’.⁹⁰

The age profile of Blackburn and Whitburn’s overspill population was skewed by the presence of the BMC and its preference for younger workers, but the predominance of young couples and young families in their demographic structure, and the relative absence of middle-aged people and adolescents, again reflected broader trends in the development of Scotland’s New Towns and overspill estates. In his study of ‘Social and Geographical Mobility in the Scottish New Towns’, Garry McDonald writes that, in spite of the relative absence of the kind of cheap, private housing more readily available in the English suburbs, working-class migration to Scotland’s New Towns was defined by young couples and growing families seeking ‘low-density, family housing in a suburban setting’.⁹¹ For McDonald, such migration can be characterised as ‘a conscious and intended break from the past rather than an involuntary decision imposed from above’, in which the type of work available and opportunities for promotion, career advancement or higher earnings were of only secondary importance.⁹² In these terms, McDonald argues, the behaviour of those manual workers who moved to the Scottish New Towns can be seen as broadly in line with the influential *Affluent Worker* analysis, according to which manual workers were increasingly coming to see their work as a means to an extrinsic end rather than an end in itself; an idea which will be considered more fully in Chapter Five in relation to the culture of work at the BMC.

It is clear, however, that the arrival of so many young incoming workers and their families, and the employment available to both them and commuters from nearby towns, had a considerable impact on life and work in and around Bathgate. John Hastings lived in Whitburn, and enjoyed his work at the BMC precisely because of the opportunity it gave him to mix with people from other areas. ‘For the first time ever I was working with people outside Armadale, Bathgate – people from all sorts of places, Shotts, Salsburgh, even a few from Edinburgh.’⁹³ Similar thoughts are expressed by Vince Moore, who grew up in the village of Armadale and started at the plant as an apprentice in 1979.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 17:12.

⁹¹ G. McDonald, ‘Social and Geographical Mobility in the Scottish New Towns’, *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 91:1, 1975, p.47.

⁹² Ibid, pp.47-48.

⁹³ WEA, interview with John Hastings.

That was the first time that I met guys, people, from Whitburn, Pumpherston, Livingston, Broxburn, and all, the whole kinda, whole kinda range of folk from all over really, and that was really quite interesting.⁹⁴

This demonstrates the degree to which the plant was able to attract workers from across the West Lothian area, and is also, perhaps, an indication of the previous isolation of West Lothian's scattered mining settlements and the extent to which the presence of the BMC contributed to their modernisation; something which is also reflected in Joyce Brogan's memories of the wider changes to the area brought about by the construction of the plant and the arrival of its incoming workers.

I can remember it was a boom time for the Bathgate area with a lot of incomers coming from Glasgow to settle in Blackburn because they built a community in Blackburn for incoming BMC workers.⁹⁵

The idea of Bathgate as a 'boom town' is one which emerges from the testimony of a number of the plant's former workers, and especially those who had grown up locally and witnessed the longer-term development of the town and its surrounding villages. Ian Tennant, for example, grew up in Whitburn and his description of the impact of the plant on the area reflects his memories of the conditions in the town prior to its establishment.

It has a fantastic place in the history of this area. If we look at the social thing in the late '50s, mid to late '50s, this area was depressed, and I mean really depressed. The number of guys who were out. It was a political decision taken by the Tories in the '50s, they obviously realised you had to get people working...and it was social engineering. Thatcher did it in the wrong way but this was done in the right way. It proved that one, you can take people with very little skill and make them useful in a productive sense, and give them a sense of belonging, a sense of pride, because there was a lot of pride in Bathgate. There were a lot of mistakes made...but it was a good part of social engineering by the politicians, one of the better parts I think for Scotland... But looking back and reading the history

⁹⁴ WEA, interview with Vince Moore.

⁹⁵ WEA, interview with Joyce Brogan.

of the time, ehm, it put this county, it put a lot of money into this county every week. You know, I was there in Bathgate when there was six thousand employed, that was six thousand probably the majority of people would be on fourteen or fifteen pounds a week, that's a lot of income into this area, ehm, it provided Bathgate to, brought Blackburn to grow, not in the best possible way but it really gave Blackburn, Blackburn was a kinda run down village, it provided Whitburn with the opportunity to expand. Bathgate did exceedingly well out of it during the '60s and '70s.⁹⁶

In other cases, the memories of these workers are marked by a clear nostalgia shaped by the area's current perceived problems. Alan Marr's testimony overlooks the high unemployment and rundown of the mining industries which had led to the establishment of the factory in the town, and instead suggests a sharp contrast between the 'bustling' Bathgate he remembers growing up in during the 1950s and 1960s, and the Bathgate of today.

Bathgate was quite a bustling place, there was - the shops were so different to what they are just now. Ehm, there was a bit of everything there. Ehm, there was lots of work as well, because we had the Plessey was there, the pits were still open, we had, the foundries were still there, the shovel works was still there, the brick works at Armadale were still there, so there was loads of work for everybody.⁹⁷

Andy Hunter draws a more explicit parallel between the prosperity brought to the area by the factory, and the difficulties wrought by its closure.

I think obviously British Leyland changed, or the BMC changed West Lothian for the good, I think West Lothian was a much more thriving and prosperous area. I mean, everything seemed to be doing well, I mean if you look round about Armadale, Bathgate now it's basically they're ghost towns, and when British Leyland was going and that, at its peak, every Main Street seemed to be, seemed

⁹⁶ WEA, interview with Ian Tennant.

⁹⁷ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

to be flourishing. And ehm, I think, just sad sad days when British Leyland went.⁹⁸

While this suggests the degree to which the closure of the plant has been perceived to have affected life in the town, the idea that Bathgate was ‘thriving and prosperous’ while it was open indicates that not only did the factory alleviate unemployment, it did so by providing work which was considered well-paid and well-regarded. Wages at the factory were amongst the highest in the area, and working conditions significantly better than anything that had been experienced in a coal or shale mine, or iron foundry. The work culture and working conditions of the plant will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Three and Four, but here it should be noted that, as well as aiding the improvement of the area’s housing stock and urban environment, the establishment of the BMC plant clearly modernised the labour force of the county by providing new skills as well as new expectations of work.

The economic and social impact of Livingston New Town

The Bathgate initiative was of clear importance to West Lothian’s economic and social development but it was arguably compromised, albeit unintentionally, by the designation in 1962 of Livingston, around five miles away, as Scotland’s fourth New Town, with a target population of 185,000 by 1986.⁹⁹ New Towns had emerged as an important tool in urban development, rather than economic or regional policy, and had grown initially as a response to slum clearance and the need to rehouse urban populations and repair war damage.¹⁰⁰ In Scotland, the Clyde Valley Regional Plan, published in 1946, highlighted Glasgow’s poor housing conditions and led to the designation of New Towns at East Kilbride (in 1947), Glenrothes (1948), Cumbernauld (1956), Livingston and Irvine (1966), which were to be self-contained communities providing employment as well as housing for their inhabitants.¹⁰¹ It was envisaged that these towns would accommodate as many as 300,000 people displaced by Glasgow’s redevelopment in

⁹⁸ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

⁹⁹ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, p.xii.

¹⁰⁰ McCrone, *Regional Policy*, p.111.

¹⁰¹ J.N. Randall, ‘New Towns and New Industries’, in R. Saville (ed.), *The Economic Development of Modern Scotland, 1950-1980* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1985) p.246.

environments which would use novel architecture and public sculpture to assert their modernity, and demonstrate what Catriona M. Macdonald has described as their ‘self conscious desire to break with the past’.¹⁰² Peter Scott has written, however, that during the 1950s the policy of New Town development in the UK as a whole cut against regional development policy, and New Towns themselves took precedence over the Development Areas. Scott has differentiated between two different government approaches to location of industry policy before 1960. In this analysis, the development of New Towns, and particularly the London New Towns (LNTs) was a growth-oriented strategy which sought primarily to decentralise London’s population and industry and alleviate its congestion, while Development Area policy remained focused on short-term job creation in unemployment blackspots.¹⁰³ Indeed, focusing on Scotland alone obscures the fact that the majority of New Towns were in the South-East of England, which diverted government attention and economic resources from the northern regions, where growth was slower, and perpetuated the concentration of population and industry near London. Eight new satellite towns were built around London, requiring industrial development to support their populations, and over the decade to 1961 these towns increased their employment by 100,000, while regional policy created only 73,435 new jobs in the designated Development Districts.¹⁰⁴ By the mid-1960s, however, the success as centres for industrial growth of some New Towns in the Development Districts, including East Kilbride as well as Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe in the North-East of England, had highlighted their potential role as ‘an important weapon of regional policy’ and, McCrone writes, their proposed size and siting consequently came to be considered with this in mind.¹⁰⁵

The development of Livingston New Town, and the ‘Greater Livingston Area’, reflects both this change in the role of the New Town, and a shift in the focus of regional development policy, particularly in Scotland. Published in 1966, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan* was undertaken with the aim of providing the local councils and Livingston Development Corporation with a comprehensive regional scheme of development, and was influenced directly by the report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Scottish Economy, known as the Toothill

¹⁰² Ibid, p.246; C. M. Macdonald, *Whaur Extremes Meet: Scotland’s Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2010) pp.88-89.

¹⁰³ P. Scott, ‘Dispersion versus Decentralization: British Location of Industry Policies and Regional Development, 1945-1960’, *Economy and Society*, 26:4, 1997, p.579.

¹⁰⁴ Scott, ‘Regional Development’, p.351.

¹⁰⁵ McCrone, *Regional Policy*, p.111.

Report and published in 1961 and, to a lesser extent, the Macmillan government's 1963 White Paper, *Central Scotland*. While the establishment of BMC Bathgate was shaped by an emergent consensus which emphasised the potential role of motor industry development in modernising the Scottish economy and promoting a sustainable model of growth, these two documents reasserted the increasing importance of growth as a policy priority, and contributed to a change in the way that regional development was approached in Scotland. Toothill contended that unemployment was a symptom of low growth that could best be reversed through the development of newer industries; a view characterised in the *Lothians Regional Survey* as 'an observable trend of thought towards the view that what the Scottish economy needs is growth areas rather than rescue areas.'¹⁰⁶ Investment would therefore no longer be directed to those areas of highest unemployment, but rather to 'growth zones' defined by their 'specially advantageous communications, urban renewal and public services', and emphasis would be placed on the development of the 'new' science-based and consumer durable industries rather than the rescue of the older industrial sectors.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Toothill recommended the incremental rundown of the heavy industries as an element in Scotland's modernisation, in part because it would create a pool of surplus labour, cheaper than obtainable in the 'congested' English districts, that could attract investors from the new industries. While it remained the main objective of Livingston New Town to provide housing and employment for the Glasgow overspill population, it was stated in the *Regional Survey* that:

The emerging philosophy of growth areas suggests that instead of these people simply being thought to be pushed out of Glasgow by shortage of housing accommodation, we are now to regard them as a strategic population available to develop growth areas.¹⁰⁸

During the negotiations which had taken the BMC to Bathgate, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry had argued that Scotland would be in a strong position to attract further motor industry development due to its relatively high levels of unemployment and therefore its potential for sustained growth in the longer term, while it had been tacitly acknowledged by both the Scottish Development Department and, perhaps surprisingly, by a

¹⁰⁶ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 'A Policy for the Lothians', paragraph 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.76; Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, p.20.

¹⁰⁸ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 'A Policy for the Lothians', paragraph 9.

group of Scottish Labour MPs lobbying the President of the Board of Trade that labour availability and consequent lower production costs were among ‘the attractions that the unemployment areas [could] offer’.¹⁰⁹ However, the centrality to the *Lothians Regional Survey* of the idea that Glasgow’s unemployed represented an ‘underutilized resource’ highlights the extent to which regional policy priorities had shifted. While the potential usefulness of a reserve of unemployed labour was acknowledged in 1960, not least in terms of its potential to defuse inflationary pressures in more congested regions, the principal aim of regional policy had been to alleviate unemployment and mitigate its effects on the economies of the Development Areas. By 1966, on the other hand, it was accepted that West Lothian’s depressed jobs market could be used as an asset with which to attract investment and drive growth, because development in this area – unlike Glasgow – would not be hindered by the residue of traditional or heavy industry: there was the physical space for new growth as well as the labour to facilitate it. This perhaps supports Jim Phillips’s suggestion that, in seeking to improve living standards for all social classes by emphasising rapid economic growth over greater wealth redistribution, post-Toothill regional policy was ‘shaped to suit the interests of industrial employers rather than meet the ends of social justice’.¹¹⁰

It also highlights the discrepancy between the development of Scotland’s New Towns, and that of the LNTs. In Scott’s analysis of pre-1960 location of industry policy, the relatively low-skill and low-wage Development Areas were considered suitable only for labour-intensive branch plant production, while more high-tech industrial development would continue to cluster around London.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the LNTs were designed to attract skilled labour, and ‘provide prospective employers with a virtually hand-picked labour force’.¹¹² This is in sharp contrast to the post-Toothill focus in Scotland on the availability of cheap labour, and its potential to attract investment to New Towns such as Livingston. Moreover, the reality of regional policy and the way in which it shaped Scotland’s economic development could be very different from the rhetoric of documents like Toothill and the *Lothians Regional Plan*, which advocated careful, integrated development based on growth points and sustainable improvement. In practice, the

¹⁰⁹ NAS, SEP4/1658, Scottish Council submission, 25th January 1960; SEP4/1660, notes for the Secretary Of State, undated; SEP4/1658, note of meeting of President of Board of Trade with Scottish Labour Group, 16th December 1959; SEP4/1660, notes for the Secretary Of State, undated.

¹¹⁰ Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, p.21.

¹¹¹ Scott, ‘Dispersion versus Decentralization’, pp.583, 595.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p.592-593.

implementation of these ideas was complicated by the democratic imperative to provide people with the jobs, incomes and housing that were needed in the short term, and could lead to contradictory outcomes. Certainly, the idea that capital would be better served in the growth area of Livingston, and the extent to which investment was subsequently directed into the New Town, had significant consequences for West Lothian's older and apparently 'less fortunate' industrial settlements, and led to the unintended 'crowding out' of towns such as Bathgate. The *Regional Survey* describes the town as 'the most important settlement in the Survey Area', with a population in 1966 of 14,000, and an important function as a centre for shopping, education, and as a transport hub.¹¹³ However, it recommended that shopping facilities in the town 'should not be extended' and that Livingston should instead be developed as both the main retail and service centre for the county. Jim McCulloch worked at the BMC from 1961 until 1968, travelling to work from his home in Fauldhouse, and his description of the change in Bathgate's town centre both reflects the sense of Bathgate as a BMC-inspired 'boom town', and highlights the impact that the growth of Livingston is perceived to have had, even in spite of the continued presence throughout the 1960s of both the BMC and Plessey in the town.

Bathgate was the same, it went through a boom time when the factory, when the BMC factory was there, and TCC, Telegraph Condenser Company, they were there, it was mainly female labour in there, and again it was quite busy for a while until Livingston came on, and the council I think focused more on Livingston to do all the things that they wanted, because they've built this big McArthur Glen, the big shopping centre, I'm sure you've been, you'll have seen it, that's – They had a place at the Five Sisters, Freeport, but the council never ever endorsed it very much, so that's lying derelict now. Everything was targeted into Almondvale, McArthur Glen, the retail parks. So Bathgate became a wee bit of a ghost town again.¹¹⁴

Robert and Christine McAndrew moved to Bathgate from Grangemouth, but left the area when Andrew decided to leave his job at the plant in 1970. They have similar memories of the apparent decline in Bathgate's fortunes, and of the role of Livingston in that decline.

¹¹³ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 2:12.

¹¹⁴ Jim McCulloch, interview with the author, 2nd February 2012.

Christine: Well, Bathgate was like where we are now, ehm, when we were younger everybody went to Falkirk on a Saturday. Well, up there everybody went into Bathgate, into the shops in Bathgate, that was the main shopping area, but once they got Livingston, I mean, well, occasionally we'd go up or if we'd been down at Edinburgh we'd drive back down through it and it was really really depressed, wasn't it? I mean, it isnae maybe quite so bad now, but I mean maybe you're talking about fifteen years ago, maybe twenty years ago, and we came in and thought thank goodness we don't live here, because it was really, really depressing.

Robert: It was depressing to see what had happened.

Christine: It just seemed to have gone really downhill, but I suppose that would be because everybody was going to Livingston, you know, they were all going to the New Town to shop, and – and businesses in Bathgate were running down.¹¹⁵

This description seems to refer to the period following the closures of both Leyland and Plessey, when high unemployment would have had its own impact on Bathgate's shops and businesses. It is notable, however, that it is the growth of Livingston, rather than Bathgate's own economic problems, which is perceived to have been most damaging, and this reflects the extent to which the emphasis on the New Town as the focus of West Lothian's economic and social development affected life in the area more broadly. It was recommended in the *Regional Survey*, for example, that the population of Bathgate should not be allowed to grow much beyond 18,000, and the build-up of Livingston would also impose limits on the development of Whitburn and Blackburn as reception areas for Glasgow's overspill population. At the time of the survey Whitburn had a population of 9,000 which it was recommended should not rise beyond 10,000, while Blackburn, which had grown from under 6,000 in 1961 to nearly 10,000 by 1963, was given a maximum target population of 15,000 by 1985.¹¹⁶

In spite of the apparently contradictory impact that the implementation of post-Toothill regional policy had on West Lothian's older industrial settlements, however, it is important to recognise

¹¹⁵ Robert and Christine McAndrew, interview with the author, 5th April 2011.

¹¹⁶ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 'A Policy for the Lothians', paragraphs 37-43.

the improvements that this policy brought to the citizens of West Lothian more widely in terms of both living standards and access to and experiences of work. There was, for example, a qualitative difference between the way in which it was envisaged that Livingston would develop as a New Town and growth zone, and the earlier expansion of Blackburn in particular as a reception area for the BMC's incoming workforce.

Image 1:3 – Craigshill, Livingston, under construction, c.1966



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The *Regional Survey* repeatedly emphasised the need to ‘rehabilitate’ West Lothian’s built environment and to provide high quality private housing for rent and for owner-occupation as well as local authority housing, as it was considered vital that the New Town ‘should be as attractive to the executive type as to the manual worker’.¹¹⁷ This reflects the role that it was envisaged the New Towns would have in the spread of owner-occupation in Scotland, where it was generally considered there was ‘less social stigma attached to living in a subsidized council house’ and rates of home ownership were markedly lower than in England, and indeed Scott

¹¹⁷ Macdonald, *Whaur Extremes Meet*, p.88; Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 15:32.

stresses the extent to which New Town development grew out of Macmillan government's commitment to housebuilding and the 'populist agenda of fostering a "property-owning democracy"'.¹¹⁸ In addition, it underlines the extent to which Livingston's development was shaped by the importance placed by post-Toothill regional policy on economic growth, and the expansion of white-collar employment and the service sector. The recommendations of the *Regional Survey* are underpinned by an assumption that society would continue to become wealthier, and that this increase in affluence would necessitate the construction of what it describes as middle-income housing as well as improved social and educational facilities. In this respect, Livingston's proximity to Edinburgh, and its potential to develop as both a service centre for the city and as a commuter town for 'managerial employees' priced out of the capital but perhaps reluctant to move too far from its cultural amenities, was seen as key.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, the *Regional Survey* identified the potential role of Bathgate and other, older industrial settlements in the wider redevelopment of the Livingston area.

In the Lothians Area the evident circumstance that Livingston will be the centre of growth does not invalidate the part which Bathgate or Whitburn, for example, can play in the development of the Area as a whole.¹²⁰

In the case of Bathgate in particular, there was a recognition that the presence of the BMC could help to establish the town as an industrial centre as well as a labour market for the expansion of Livingston, and it advised that the town's industrial development should not be restricted.¹²¹ The survey was in fact notable for its remarkably pragmatic approach to the wider growth area's economic development; while foreseeing an eventual concentration in the growing areas of electronics and chemicals, which would also benefit from Livingston's ease of access to the affluent consumer goods markets in Edinburgh, its recommendations were based on the principle that 'no industry which is prepared to develop in the area is undesirable'. The survey recognised that primary industries in the area were in decline and that manufacturing employment was unlikely to expand greatly in future, and accepted that development would necessarily be limited, at least initially, to those firms willing to move into the area. While these firms were more likely

¹¹⁸ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, p.190; Scott, 'Dispersion versus Decentralization', p.587.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 'A Policy for the Lothians', paragraph 48.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 'A Policy for the Lothians', paragraph 23.

¹²¹ Ibid, 'A Policy for the Lothians', paragraph 37.

to be from the growing 'new' industries, it was also stated that 'some may be at the growing end of declining industries and should be equally welcome'.¹²² The first industrial concern to be established in Livingston was the Cameron Iron Works, which went into construction in 1963 and would produce forgings for the aircraft and nuclear power industries. As an iron works more typical of the traditional heavy industries which had prevailed in West Lothian previously rather than the new light engineering and consumer durables industries, its establishment apparently reflected the pragmatism which marked the *Regional Survey's* approach. However, the survey was keen to emphasise that the works represented a wholly new industrial acquisition which was the first of its kind in the UK and would not draw on any pre-existing industrial concentration or expertise, and thus 'should not be regarded as part of the existing structure, but rather as the first step towards the proposed new development of the Area'.¹²³ Moreover, as a branch plant of an American firm, employing a wholly male workforce of 2,000, only ten per cent of whom would be skilled, the works was symbolic of a number of trends which have come to characterise Scotland's post-1945 economic development, and the industrial growth of its New Towns in particular.¹²⁴

Table 1:2 reproduces data from Peter Scott's study of 'Regional Development and Policy' in Britain since 1945, and shows that, by 1981, 65.9 per cent of Scotland's manufacturing workforce was employed in plants situated over a hundred miles from their Head Office. With the exception of Wales, where the figure was 68.1 per cent, this was by some distance the highest rate in the country, with the lowest rates to be found in the South-East of England and the East Midlands, where the figures stood at 12.7 per cent and 17.1 per cent respectively. Perhaps most telling is the data in the second column, which indicates the extent to which the Scottish economy had become subject to external control by very large, distant, corporations. As Scott notes, there is a close relationship between the distance of a plant from its Head Office and the likelihood of its being used for assembly and 'other routine functions' only; a function of what is described in the literature as the 'regional dualism' that resulted from the contradictions inherent in a regional policy which, in spite of the influence of Toothill in Scotland during the 1960s, was

¹²² Ibid, 5:65.

¹²³ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 5:39.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

for much of the period overwhelmingly driven by immediate problems and employment creation rather than longer-term regional development.

Table 1:2 – indicators of regional divisions of production by function, c.1981

| Region | % of manufacturing workforce in plants over 100 miles from Head Office | % of workers in previous column in firms employing over 10,000 workers |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| South-east | 12.7 | 8.2 |
| South-west | 45.2 | 42.3 |
| East Anglia | 33.2 | 6.7 |
| North-west | 55.5 | 48.4 |
| West Midlands | 26.7 | 25.4 |
| East Midlands | 17.1 | 12.8 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 31 | 23.4 |
| Scotland | 65.9 | 50.4 |
| North-west | 53.7 | 27.4 |
| Wales | 68.1 | 55 |

(Source: R. Harris, 'Market Structure and Market Control in the Regional Economies of Great Britain', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 35:4, 1988, p.337.)

In Scott's analysis, regional policy failed to shift the 'centre of gravity' to the 'peripheral' regions of Britain, which became dependent on labour intensive branch plants while white-collar, research and development work remained concentrated in the 'core' of the South-East and, in the motor industry context, the West Midlands.¹²⁵ Furthermore, this was in part a result of the regional division of labour which emerged from the conflict between Development Area policy and the growth of the LNTs especially.¹²⁶ The idea that post-1945 Scotland came to operate as a 'branch plant economy' dependent on such plants for employment has become a prominent theme in its historiography, and is linked closely to wider debates surrounding the change in its industrial structure, summarised by Knox as the move 'from ships to chips', and the role of external capital in driving this change.¹²⁷ If, in the late 1950s and early 1960s the focus of regional policy had been on encouraging English motor manufacturers to move production to

¹²⁵ Scott, 'Regional Development', p.365.

¹²⁶ Scott, 'Dispersion versus Decentralization', p.580.

¹²⁷ Knox, *Industrial Nation*, p.254.

Scotland, the growing awareness of the difficulties associated with jittery and intermittent car sales contributed to the emergence of US-owned electrical and engineering firms, what Ewen Cameron has called the next ‘panacea’ for the revival of the Scottish economy.¹²⁸ Companies such as IBM and Ferranti, attracted by government incentives including the availability of IDCs as well as grants for building and for plant and machinery, had established factories in Scotland during the 1940s and 1950s, and between 1950 and 1968 manufacturing employment dependent on US firms rose fourfold.¹²⁹ During the post-Second World War period, Scotland received a greater volume of inward investment from overseas firms than any other part of the UK, and, after Canada, was the second most popular location for US foreign investment.¹³⁰ 75 per cent of foreign-owned manufacturing output was in electronics, and J.N. Randall has shown how far external investment in the new industries shaped the economic development of the New Towns in particular: in the periods from 1963 to 1968, and from 1973 to 1978, for example, the New Towns attracted over a third of all jobs created by ‘incomer units’ opening in Scotland and, by 1978, 39 per cent of all manufacturing employment in the New Towns was in mechanical, instrument and electrical engineering, compared with 26 per cent in Scotland as a whole.¹³¹

This had important implications for Scottish workers, and the terms on which their labour was engaged. Knox and Cameron are amongst those who have emphasised the loss of traditional craft skills associated with the growth of the new industries as US-owned branch plants concentrated on semi-skilled assembly work.¹³² In this respect, the Cameron Iron Works can be seen as typical, although its employment of a wholly male labour force was more in line with the older industries than the new, as electronics in particular was notable for the number of women productive workers it employed. Furthermore, the new industries also engendered new skills amongst both male and female workers, and the creation of technical skill in maintenance and engineering in particular has contributed to what could be termed the modernisation of the Scottish industrial base. The idea that the loss of craft skill contributed to the destabilisation of industrial employment in Scotland is, however, central to the branch plant economy thesis, and is closely linked to the use of the country’s unemployed labour reserve as a tool with which to

¹²⁸ Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.255.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.256; McCrone, *Regional Policy*, pp.133-135; Macdonald, *Whaur Extremes Meet*, p.71.

¹³⁰ Knox, *Industrial Nation*, p.252; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.256.

¹³¹ Randall, ‘New Towns and New Industries’, pp.262-265.

¹³² Knox, *Industrial Nation*, p.273; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.257.

attract external investment. This will be considered in greater detail and in relation to the work available at BMC Bathgate in Part Two, but here it is important to highlight the broader significance of capital mobility in shaping Scotland's economic development since 1945. Recent research by Pavos Dimitratos, Ioanna Liouka, Duncan Ross and Stephen Young has highlighted the extent to which cost cutting has been the key motivating factor for multinational firms moving to Scotland since the 1960s, and has described an ensuing lack of 'embeddedness' in the local economy.¹³³ For George Peden, this resulted from the failings of a regional policy which was 'guided almost solely by immediate employment creation, without consideration of what linkages there might have been with the local economy', and which apparently gave little serious thought to the availability of supply networks locally.¹³⁴ There was in fact some awareness of these problems in the *Lothians Regional Survey*, which was clearly influenced in this regard by the importance placed by both Toothill and the 1963 *Central Scotland White Paper* on improving Scotland's transport infrastructure in order to both attract further industrial investment and to ease any potential pressures associated with the cost of transporting goods to and from Scottish branch plants. The *Regional Survey's* analysis of the BMC's experience at Bathgate, for example, drew attention to the difficulties that the company had had in sourcing supplies of components from within Scotland, as well as the problems caused by its subsequent continued reliance on transporting supplies by road from the Midlands.¹³⁵

It is arguable that the growth of Livingston contributed to the BMC's difficulties in this regard, as the focus from the mid-1960s on electrical engineering as the privileged goal of inward investment-gearred regional policy drew attention and resources away from motor engineering and inhibited the development of component industries which, it had been hoped, would cluster around Linwood, Bathgate, and Ravenscraig. The problems associated with attracting ancillary industries will be considered in the context of the motor industry's longer-term development in Chapter Two, but here it is important to recognise the extent to which the perceived centrality of motor manufacturing to the Scottish economy had, even by the late-1960s, begun to wane. The STUC had been closely involved in attempts to persuade either Ford or Vauxhall to build their mooted regional policy plants in Scotland as it was hoped that the presence of a third major

¹³³ Dimitratos *et al.*, 'The Multinational Enterprise', pp.401-425.

¹³⁴ Peden, 'The Managed Economy', p.246.

¹³⁵ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 5:29-5:31.

motor manufacturer would provide enough incentive for component makers to expand or relocate, but the eventual decision of both firms to move instead to Merseyside led some within the organisation to accept as early as 1968 that ‘Scotland was now unlikely to have an industry complete in itself in this field.’¹³⁶ The short-term instability of work resulting from both Bathgate and Linwood’s continued reliance on components sourced from the south was compounded by concerns over its longer-term insecurity, as the absence of ancillary industries contributed to fears that, as long as the motor industry remained unassimilated into the wider Scottish economy, it ‘could be lifted out of Scotland lock, stock and barrel’.¹³⁷ Furthermore, the main benefit of Merseyside for companies such as Ford and Vauxhall was the relative ease of transport to the Midlands; a further indication of the perceived problems of Scotland as an industrial location, and their impact on its industrial development. The *Regional Survey* was keen to emphasise that ‘Scotland is not the Arctic Circle’ and repeatedly stated the need for a ‘first-class, modern network of communications’ to aid the growth of Livingston, while the depiction of West Lothian as a *County on the Move* was shaped by its position as a ‘pivot’ at ‘the very centre of Scotland’, and illustrated with shots of the Forth bridges and the rapidly expanding motorway network.¹³⁸

The evidence suggests, however, that in spite of improved transport and communication links, Scottish manufacturing remained heavily reliant on what have been described in the literature as ‘cathedrals in the desert’; that is to say, large, modern factories operating remotely from their markets, supply networks, and company headquarters, and offering overwhelmingly semi-skilled work.¹³⁹ Moreover, in spite of the *Regional Survey*’s insistence that ‘a desert can be made to blossom like the rose if an expensive enough supply of water and fertilizers is provided’, the extent to which Scotland’s unemployed were used to attract investment has had the effect of engendering the ‘footloose’ attitude described by Cameron amongst companies for whom, with nothing to keep them in the country but relatively cheap labour, it has often been all too easy to close their Scottish factories in order to move production to countries where labour might be

¹³⁶ STUC archive, GCAL, Seventy-First Annual Report of the STUC, 1968, p.14.

¹³⁷ STUC archive, GCAL, Eightieth Annual Report of the STUC, 1977, p.597.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 5:62; SSA, *County on the Move*.

¹³⁹ G. Kerevan, cited in Foster, ‘The Twentieth Century’, p.455.

cheaper still.¹⁴⁰ Thus, while external investment undoubtedly shaped the modernisation of Scotland's industrial structure, enabling the growth of the new industries and creating clean, safe jobs in New Towns like Livingston especially, the mobility of capital has also led to a second wave of deindustrialisation as investor companies, attracted initially by relatively low wages and the availability of subsidised industrial premises, have moved out of Scotland and into what Cameron terms the 'new periphery' in Eastern Europe in particular.¹⁴¹ In 2001, for example, it was announced that the Japanese electronics firm Motorola would be closing its factory at Bathgate with the loss of 3,000 jobs. Former BMC worker Joyce Brogan's description of the impact that this had on her family echoes both her own memories of her father being made redundant from the plant in the 1980s, and the perceived need for employment in the town which had led to its establishment in 1961.

These kindae things have been happening though, because it's the same kindae situation has been happening with Motorola, where my husband worked who loved his work, and who got government grants to set up the plant and beautiful building, great working conditions, great company to work for, and then all of a sudden they decided to stop production there and move it elsewhere abroad where it was cheaper, they moved it to Germany. And that put thousands on the dole, thousands out of work again. So that was another big blow for the Bathgate area when that happened, and gradually it's just all sortae gone over to computerised stuff now, but still in the area I don't feel there's enough jobs and opportunities for young people.¹⁴²

While Brogan's testimony implies a degree of continuity in terms of redundancy and unemployment, her family's experience also encapsulates neatly a sense of generational change which provides a clear demonstration of the cyclical nature of West Lothian's industrial development. In this context, the establishment of the BMC at Bathgate represents a short-term response to industrial change which, by providing jobs and creating new skills, mitigated the

¹⁴⁰ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 'A Policy for the Lothians', paragraph 22; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, pp.257-258.

¹⁴¹ Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.258.

¹⁴² WEA, interview with Joyce Brogan.

impact on the county's industrial workforce of the painful, longer-term process of deindustrialisation.

Conclusion

The closure of Leyland Bathgate in 1986 inarguably had a devastating effect on the factory's workforce as well as on the wider economy of the town and its surrounding villages. This chapter has demonstrated that this was not, as it has sometimes been presented, necessarily the inevitable outcome of an ill-conceived regional policy, and provides a corrective to declinist analyses of post-1945 failure and disaster. There were transparent flaws in a policy geared to providing as many jobs as possible in the short-term and in the way in which it was implemented, but in spite of contradictory outcomes – such as the 'crowding out' of older settlements such as Bathgate, and the extent to which the focus on electrical engineering in the New Towns diverted attention away from motor engineering – the attempt to create a viable Scottish motor manufacturing industry around Bathgate and Linwood cannot be characterised solely in terms of failure. Chapter Two will consider Bathgate's development in the context of the wider motor industry, but here it is important to both emphasise the longer-term context of industrial change in West Lothian and Scotland more broadly, and to recognise the extent to which the branch plant analysis has obscured the impact that such plants could have on the lives of those workers and communities directly affected. What emerges here, and has often been overlooked, is that the living standards, life expectations, and experiences of West Lothian citizens were undeniably enriched by the existence of the plant at Bathgate. Established as a response to high levels of unemployment, the BMC provided clean, safe and relatively well-paid work which mitigated the impact of the rundown of West Lothian's predominant coal and shale mining industries, and contributed to the modernisation of both the area's industrial labour force and its urban environment. Bearing in mind the shift in regional policy priorities which occurred not long after its establishment and the change in industrial structure which accompanied the development of Livingston New Town, the role of the BMC and British Leyland at Bathgate can be seen as providing a necessary short-term response to the decline of West Lothian's heavy industry and an attempt to manage its experience of deindustrialisation. This was a longer-term

process which, in the words of the local MP, Tam Dalyell, at the time of its final closure in 1986, went ‘beyond Bathgate, beyond Scotland’.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ ‘They’re not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate’, *FT*, 25th May 1984.

Chapter Two

Bathgate's position in a changing motor industry

BMC Bathgate was the first of a number of motor plants that were established in the Development Districts during the 1960s as successive governments sought to create jobs and encourage growth outside of the increasingly congested Midlands and South-East of England. The Rootes plant at Linwood was designed to function alongside Bathgate and the steel strip mill at Ravenscraig in driving motor industry development in Scotland, while the BMC opened further new factories at Llanelli in South Wales and Kirkby on Merseyside, where major assembly plants were also built by Ford at Halewood, Vauxhall at Ellesmere Port, and Standard Triumph at Speke. Gavin McCrone has noted the exceptionally high levels of government financial assistance given to the motor industry developments in Scotland and on Merseyside as they were judged to be 'projects of unusual political and economic importance', not only in terms of creating jobs in potentially sensitive areas but also in providing a sustainable model of development based around a growing and prosperous industry which it was hoped would induce substantial secondary development.¹ In the Midlands, motor manufacturing and the supply chain it supported in engineering and small metal manufacture had driven a period of remarkable economic growth and job stability, with the unemployment rate in the West Midlands region scarcely rising above one per cent throughout the 1950s and the area accounting for 40 per cent of all UK exports, and it was the replication of this example which it was hoped the dispersion of the industry would encourage elsewhere.²

It is important to stress the success of the motor industry in the Midlands during the 1950s and the effect that this had in shaping government thinking on regional development policy, as much of the historiography both of the motor industry itself and of its role in the post-war British economy more generally can be characterised as 'declinist', often focusing on the industrial relations difficulties which attracted widespread media attention and dominated press coverage

¹ McCrone, *Regional Policy*, pp.132, 216.

² K. Spencer, A. Taylor, B. Smith, J. Mawson, N. Flynn, and R. Batley, *Crisis in the Industrial Heartland: A Study of the West Midlands* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) pp. 12, 52.

of the industry during the 1970s in particular.³ This is especially the case with BL, the ‘national champion’ created through the merger of the BMC’s successor British Motor Holdings (BMH) and the Leyland Motor Company, which became central to what Tim Claydon has described as a ‘meta-narrative of disorder’ in contemporary newspaper reportage and has remained something of a byword for relative industrial decline and a popular symbol of the ‘British disease’ of supposed low productivity, weak management, shopfloor militancy and poor quality products.⁴ More nuanced studies of the British motor industry and of BL’s prominent position within it have highlighted the importance of considering the longer-term development of motor manufacturing in Britain and recognising the consequent structural and organisational changes which took place in the 1960s and 1970s especially as manufacturers sought to rationalise their own production and simplify what were often complex supply lines. Paul Wilman and Graham Winch, for example, are among those who have emphasised the extent to which the problems experienced at BL during the 1970s can be understood as the outcome of the extremely complex structure of that company, caused by its development through a process of company acquisition rather than natural growth. This perhaps epitomised the long-term growth of the industry in Britain, where both vertical and horizontal integration remained markedly low.⁵

Other analyses have suggested that that the advent of the regional policy plants in Scotland and on Merseyside caused difficulties for the companies involved by fragmenting the motor industry, creating over-capacity, and in some cases causing unrest amongst and between both new and existing workforces.⁶ This unrest will be examined in detail in later chapters, but here it is important to note the perception among manufacturers – and reflected in some strands of the historical literature – that government intervention in industrial location had a negative impact on the performance of British motor manufacturing, particularly during a period when the rationalisation of the motor industry and its supply chain were seen as essential in maintaining international competitiveness.⁷ It is arguable, therefore, that the aims of a regional policy driven more by social than economic concerns were perceived, not least by motor manufacturers

³ See, for example, A. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum, 2008) pp.190-191.

⁴ T. Claydon, ‘Images of Disorder’, p.230.

⁵ Willman and Winch, *Innovation and Management Control*, p.4.

⁶ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.84, 88; Murden, ‘Demands for Fair Wages’, p.5; C. Law, ‘The Geography of Industrial Rationalisation: the British Motor Car Assembly Industry, 1972-1982’, *Geography*, vol. 70, no.1, January 1985, p.6.

⁷ Dunnett, *The Decline of the British Motor Industry*, p.78.

themselves, to be in direct conflict with attempts to improve the industry's performance.⁸ The position of the Bathgate plant must be considered in this context, although it will be remembered that policy was also derived from concerns that the Midlands and South were over-congested, with damaging inflationary pressures the consequence. This chapter will explain the historical development and concentration of the motor industry within the West Midlands, highlighting the strategic implications of this for the regional policy branch plants, before examining the specific experience of the BMC and later the eventually nationalised BL at Bathgate during a period in which both that organisation and the wider British industry experienced profound changes to their structure, as well as a marked increase in foreign competition particularly following the UK's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973.

The industry and its structure in the Midlands

In 1974 and following a difficult period which had seen the share enjoyed by British Leyland Motor Corporation (BLMC) of the British car market fall from 40.6 per cent at its inception in 1968 to 30.9 per cent, the Labour government of Harold Wilson appointed a committee under industrial adviser Sir Don Ryder to formulate a long-term rescue strategy for the company.⁹ *British Leyland: The Next Decade*, known informally as the Ryder Report, was published in part in 1975 and recommended substantial investment to improve outdated plant and machinery which, along with poor industrial relations, incompetent management, and low sales, it blamed for the organisation's problems.¹⁰ Similar reports were published in response to Ryder by the Trade and Industry Sub-Committee and the government think tank, the Central Policy Review Staff. These three studies of the BLMC each found different causes and potential remedies for its problems, but agreed that the company had been in real difficulty since its creation through the merger of BMH and the Leyland Motor Company in 1968, and that this was in part due to the scale of restructuring that this large and unwieldy organisation required.¹¹ The BLMC was the world's second largest motor manufacturer outside of the United States, and it had been hoped

⁸ Scott, 'The Worst of Both Worlds', p.54.

⁹ Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, pp.198-99; Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.112.

¹⁰ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.112; Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.87-88. The Ryder Report could not be published in full as parts of it were considered libellous.

¹¹ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.112; Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.88.

by the Wilson government of 1966-1970, whose Industrial Reorganisation Corporation (IRC) encouraged the merger, that the consolidation of British car manufacturing into one large company would create economies of scale and improve the fragmented structure of the industry by encouraging further rationalisation of production.¹² However, as Timothy Whisler has argued, there was little real attempt made by BLMC management to overhaul existing institutional structures as the new organisation's constituent firms were simply 'lumped together' rather than more closely and systematically integrated, and so by 1974 the company still had 48 factories, including 23 major manufacturing plants, and what one member of its management team described as 'a multiplicity of everything'.¹³

Vertical as well as horizontal integration in the British motor industry had also remained low by international standards and, in spite of a broader trend towards the concentration of capital underway across the industry and its supply chain from the late 1950s onwards, Ryder found that the BLMC's continued reliance on 'bought-out' components sourced from independent suppliers was costing the firm at least £4.6 million each year throughout the early 1970s.¹⁴ In-house component manufacture therefore became a stated aim of the Ryder Report, in the hope that this would increase efficiency and remove the value added by independent component makers to externally made goods, which amounted to around 60 per cent of the average motor manufacturer's costs.¹⁵ The role and importance of independent component manufacture was largely an outcome of the longer-term development of the motor industry in Britain and its early concentration in the West Midlands, where industry had long been characterised by a system of 'unequal interdependence': towns that had grown up around the Black Country's scattered deposits of coal and ironstone supplied raw materials and often highly specialised metal goods to manufacturers and engineering firms in Birmingham and Coventry.¹⁶ This encouraged the development of a much larger and more diverse components sector than existed elsewhere in Europe, where the production of cars had developed earlier and motor manufacturers had traditionally made many of their own parts as the metal manufacturing skills and businesses

¹² Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.84-86.

¹³ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.92; Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.88.

¹⁴ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, pp. 34, 236.

¹⁵ Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, p.199; Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.240.

¹⁶ Spencer *et al.*, *Crisis in the Industrial Heartland*, pp.3-5.

simply did not exist to supply them.¹⁷ British motor manufacturers were therefore able to rely on competition between suppliers as a means of cost control and could also allow component manufacturers to bear the brunt of design and development costs, creating a strong disincentive to closer integration.¹⁸ While this produced enormous complexity in the supply chain and led to a situation in which the BMC was spending £320 million on components from as many as 4,000 different outside suppliers by 1963, it also drove a prosperous regional economy in the West Midlands which ‘led the nation into the boom’ of the post-war years and, as discussed in Chapter One, shaped the way in which regional policy would be used to both ease congestion in the Midlands and reindustrialise the Development Areas.¹⁹

However, this historical concentration of the motor industry and its unusually complex supply network in the Midlands and, to a lesser extent, the South-East of England, also had significant strategic implications for those motor manufacturers encouraged by the government to move to the Development Areas, and Scotland and Merseyside in particular. The BMC, as the first of these, expressed serious reservations about the potential impact that a move to Scotland would have and, in its negotiations with the Board of Trade over its expansion plans, showed great reluctance to move any significant portion of its production away from the Midlands.²⁰ Moreover, the Board of Trade’s position in these negotiations highlights the difficulties caused by the conflict between a government regional policy driven by short-term local employment needs and what was at the time of negotiations in 1959 a private company extremely unwilling to move away from an area in which it benefitted from easy access to both its biggest markets and an established supply network. Chapter One reflected on the extent to which regional policy in Britain until the early 1960s remained focused on alleviating unemployment ‘black spots’ rather than taking a more active approach encouraging sustainable, longer-term industrial development around designated ‘growth points’. Peter Scott argues that the decision to disperse the motor industry was essentially political and, for the government and Board of Trade, justifiable largely

¹⁷ Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, pp.7-8; D. Thoms and T. Donnelly, *The Motor Car Industry in Coventry since the 1890s* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) p.14.

¹⁸ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.234; Spencer *et al.*, *Crisis in the Industrial Heartland*, p.12.

¹⁹ Spencer *et al.*, *Crisis in the Industrial Heartland*, p.52; Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, pp.109-110.

²⁰ NAS, SEP4/1658, Scottish Development Department, specific industries, motor engineering – Cabinet Distribution of Industry Committee, minutes of a meeting held 17th December 1959.

on social policy grounds alone.²¹ In this sense Bathgate could be seen as a ‘pre-Toothill’ development, geared to the reduction of unemployment in Central Scotland, although the fact of its motor industry character in a sense looked forward to the ‘growth point’ emphasis on ‘new industry’ assembly goods manufacturing. The President of the Board of Trade, Reginald Maudling, admitted that moving production away from the motor industry’s manufacturing centre would incur additional production costs for the companies involved.²² This was chief among the concerns of the BMC, whose eventual decision to choose Bathgate over a number of other sites in Scotland was influenced by its transport links to the ports of both the Clyde and the Forth, as it was hoped that the ease of export, especially from Grangemouth to European markets, could help to off-set the increase in the cost of transporting components from, and finished vehicles to, suppliers and markets in the Midlands and South of England.²³ Furthermore, it was intimated at a meeting between representatives of the STUC and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in May 1960 that, in order to mitigate the effects of an estimated cost of transporting castings and other parts from the Midlands to Bathgate of 32 shillings per ton, the BMC would be willing, where possible, to buy components for those vehicles to be built at Bathgate from local Scottish firms.²⁴

However, in a further indication of the short-termism of pre-Toothill regional policy, the government was criticised for its failure to ‘back up’ the motor industry in Scotland by encouraging either motor component makers to move production to Scotland, or existing Scottish engineering firms to move into the manufacture of component parts.²⁵ Stephen Young and Alan Reeves have pointed out that central purchasing departments in large companies such as the BMC often over-looked the needs of their branch operations, and have highlighted the obstacles which prevented successful government intervention in ancillary development.²⁶ It was the assumption of the Board of Trade that the dispersal of motor assembly to Scotland and Merseyside, as well as the construction of the steel strip mill at Ravenscraig, would be enough in

²¹ Scott, ‘The Worst of Both Worlds’, pp.45-46, 49, 54-55.

²² Ibid, p.54.

²³ NAS, SEP4/1658, The Scottish Council (Development and Industry), submission to the Secretary of State for Scotland on the motor car industry in Scotland, 25th January 1960.

²⁴ STUC, GCAL, Sixty-Fourth Annual Report of the STUC, 1961, p.17.

²⁵ NAS, SEP4/1661, Scottish Development Department, specific industries – Motor Engineering, British Motor Corporation - notes in preparation for Secretary of State’s visit to BMC factory, 17th April 1963.

²⁶ S. Young and A. Reeves, ‘The Engineering and Metals Sector’, in N. Hood and S. Young, (eds), *Industry, Policy and the Scottish Economy* (Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p.140.

itself to encourage the growth of ancillary industries, although doubts were expressed about the efficacy of this approach from an early stage.²⁷ The STUC, for example, argued that ‘the manufacturers of components for motor vehicles and motor cars [would not] set up their plants in Scotland unless they were obliged to do so’, and called repeatedly for greater government intervention in directing industry to Scotland.²⁸ There was in fact a considerable financial assistance available for local firms to move into component supply, but take-up was slow and piecemeal. Young and Reeves argue that this was in part due to the administration of such aid being outside of Scotland, and therefore discouraging to Scottish businesses.²⁹ Existing component suppliers in the Midlands, meanwhile, had little incentive to move production to Scotland. Tam Dalyell, Labour MP for West Lothian between 1962 and 1983 and then for Linlithgow until 2005, describes in his memoirs various meetings which he held with component makers during a visit to Birmingham in the summer following his election. The response he received from these companies is typified by the reaction of one small firm, the manager of which explained that he had no reason to open a new factory in Scotland as the existing plant could already produce enough steering wheels in just three weeks to supply both the BMC at Bathgate and Rootes at Linwood for an entire year.³⁰ Dalyell goes on to recount a conversation he had later in this trip with George Harriman, managing director of the BMC, and Alec Issigonis, then the company’s technical director, during which Harriman reportedly warned him that ‘the Bathgate move will end in tears’, before going on to state that ‘we never wanted to go to Scotland in the first place – we were pressurised and encouraged by the Cabinet to do so.’³¹ Similar sentiments were expressed in the press at the time of the factory’s opening, with the *Scotsman* reporting in March 1961 that Keith Sinnott, managing director of BMC (Scotland), had told a meeting of the British Institute of Management that ‘we didn’t want to come to Bathgate’.³²

This reluctance to move was reflected in the company’s own unwillingness, in spite of its stated intention to source supplies locally where possible, to engage with Scottish engineering companies or to encourage them to produce components for the Bathgate plant. In July 1960, the

²⁷ STUC archive, GCAL, Sixty-Sixth Annual Report of the STUC, 1963, pp.5-6.

²⁸ Ibid, p.4; Sixty- Third Annual Report of the STUC, 1960, p.31.

²⁹ Young and Reeves, ‘The Engineering and Metals Sector’, p.168.

³⁰ T. Dalyell, *The Importance of Being Awkward* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011), Kindle edition, location 3,904.

³¹ Ibid, loc. 3,908.

³² ‘BMC did not want to come north – Government pressure’, *The Scotsman*, 17th March 1961.

Scotsman reported that more than 300 Scottish industrialists had attended a meeting with the Scottish Board for Industry (SBI) to find out about the supply requirements of the new factory.³³ However, while the chairman of the SBI claimed to be ‘delighted at the response’ to the meeting, the manufacturers themselves found that, in the absence of any officials from the BMC itself, many of their key questions about the plant’s requirements went unanswered as the SBI did not have sufficient information about the timescales involved or the likelihood of repeat orders for firms considering laying out plant for BMC supplies.³⁴ This lack of guaranteed repeat orders highlights an important difference in the manufacturing cultures of Scotland and the Midlands. The company complained that Scottish firms were too risk averse, demanding prolonged runs of production which were not practicable in the motor industry and which the BMC had never had in place with its suppliers in England, where the company could exploit competition between suppliers in order to keep costs down.³⁵ Established Midlands firms could supply components at far lower prices – an average of £0.096 per part – than their counterparts in Scotland, where the corresponding figure was £0.246.³⁶ The BMC also bemoaned the reluctance of Scottish engineering firms to manufacture the kind of small, simple components required by the factory and made by ‘literally hundreds’ of small firms operating from ‘backyard factories with simple equipment’ in the Midlands.³⁷ Bill Raine worked at Bathgate from the plant’s establishment until 1982, initially as a superintendent and then in managing and maintaining tool and material costs. He describes his experience of sourcing, or attempting to source, components in the Bathgate area.

We went round Bathgate and different places trying to get people to make different things for us, and it was just hopeless. We were getting, say, a piece of metal like that from Birmingham delivered for thruppence or four pence. They were asking for two and six, or two and three shillings, the local people. You just couldn’t even think about giving them the jobs, so you had to rely on the people down there. We had tanks made down at Pumpherston somewhere, petrol tanks and things like that, but the little things, no way. Costs were terrible. They wanted

³³ ‘300 industrialists flock to BMC supply meeting - £35m “shopping” list issued’, *The Scotsman*, 9th July 1960.

³⁴ Ibid; NAS, SEP4/1660, Scottish Board for Industry, summary of questions and answers at meeting on 8th July 1960 re. requirements from outside sources for BMC, Bathgate

³⁵ NAS, SEP4/1661, Scottish Office report of visit to BMC Bathgate, 1st April 1963.

³⁶ Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.151.

³⁷ NAS, SEP4/1661, Scottish Office report of visit to BMC Bathgate, 1st April 1963.

pounds to drill a hole in a piece of metal and things like that ... Just ridiculous, we were getting things supplied, delivered from Birmingham for four pence and five pence, he wanted two pound and things like this. Stupid.³⁸

As early as 1961, the *Glasgow Herald* had predicted these problems, stressing in a progress report on the BMC at Bathgate that there was little point in Scottish industrialists trying to compete with established specialist suppliers in the Midlands, and that the movement of existing Scottish industries into the supply of components such as castings and forgings would therefore be slow.³⁹ The newspaper also reported that ‘those optimists who expected an anxious rush of firms to get into the Lowland belt while good sites could still be chosen have been disappointed’ due to the BMC’s policy of buying from the most economical market, and its determination that it was ‘not their [sic] brief to bring other industries to Scotland’.⁴⁰

This again highlights the conflict which existed between government and company policy, and also demonstrates both the historical embeddedness of motor manufacturing and its supply network in the Midlands and the difficulty of replicating its success in an area with a markedly different industrial culture, particularly in the absence of any political commitment to further intervention in the direction of industry. Bathgate’s subsequent position as a ‘cathedral in the desert’, isolated from its markets and suppliers, caused the BMC significant difficulties in accessing supplies and maintaining production, and led to labour difficulties which will be central to the analysis of Chapter Five. However, here it should be recognised that, even within the closely integrated Midland industry, motor assembly plants could experience major problems in their supply lines, and that these problems increased during the later 1960s and 1970s especially as the concentration of capital which had been underway throughout the motor industry since the Second World War, perhaps epitomised by the creation of the BLMC through a complex series of mergers and takeovers, became a feature of its component sector also. The complexity of the motor industry supply chain and the consequent vulnerability of motor assembly plants were famously brought to public awareness by a prolonged strike by 22 machine setters at Girling Brakes, a Birmingham-based subsidiary of Joseph Lucas, which led to the lay-off of over 5,000 workers across the industry in 1968. This shaped some of the details of the

³⁸ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

³⁹ ‘BMC, New Focal Point in the Lothians – progress report on Bathgate’, *Glasgow Herald*, 13th September 1961.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Labour government's industrial relations White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, which proposed unprecedented powers of state intervention,⁴¹ and represented the first serious challenge to the consensus underlying collective bargaining as 'the best method of regulating questions of pay and conditions of employment'. While the proposals in the White Paper were not enacted, countered by fierce opposition from both the Trades' Union Congress (TUC) and sections of rank and file trade unionists, the episode contributed to emerging political debates over the nation's industrial position and the perceived threat posed by supposedly militant trade unions, as well as highlighting the susceptibility of the wider motor industry to disruptions in its supply chain.⁴²

Disruptions resulting from strike action had, during the 1950s and early 1960s, been relatively rare, as industrial relations in the motor component sector were notably peaceful. Indeed, Turner, Clack and Roberts omitted component makers from their 1967 study of labour relations in the motor industry as they found unrest to be concentrated in assembly firms, and that 'outside the car firms...the motor industry's incidence of industrial unrest is not particularly remarkable'.⁴³ Furthermore, it should be emphasised that supply shortages did not always result from strike action, and could occur due to scheduling problems, transportation difficulties, or machine breakdown in what were, in many cases, ageing component factories. Strike action in component firms did, however, increase markedly from the later 1960s and, while the scale and significance of the Girling dispute were perhaps atypical, instances of smaller-scale unrest could also leave car-makers facing unexpected and potentially damaging consequences. A prime example of this came in June 1969, when Jaguar was forced to supply its luxury XJ6 saloon cars to customers in an unfinished state, as a month-long strike at Wolverhampton Die-Castings left the company without supplies of radiator grilles.⁴⁴ Such problems became more frequent during the 1970s especially, as the position of independent component manufacturers and the security of component workers were increasingly threatened both by external economic forces and related structural changes within the motor industry and its component sector. In 1968, when BLMC's establishment marked the culmination of motor industry mergers which had been ongoing since the Second World War, *The Times* predicted a similar future for component manufacturing,

⁴¹ B. Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964-1976* (London: Papermac 1990) p.254.

⁴² S. Kessler and F. Bayliss, *Contemporary British Industrial Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1992) pp.15-17.

⁴³ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.29.

⁴⁴ 'Jaguar to sell 'unfinished' cars', *The Times*, 6th June 1969.

drawing parallels between the state of the contemporary supply industry and its ‘multitude of interlocking suppliers of bits to the motor industry’, and the conditions which had prevailed in the motor industry itself a decade earlier.⁴⁵ Moves towards vertical integration accelerated following the recommendations of the Ryder report, but had been in progress across the industry for some time, as car-makers sought to rationalise their supply lines and remove the potential for disruption either by taking a share of component manufacture in-house, or by buying component makers outright. Timothy Whisler describes a gradual breakdown in relations between assemblers and component producers during the 1950s and early 1960s, as relationships previously characterised by good communication and close cooperation over production planning were strained by demands for increasing numbers of unique parts, irregular ordering, and higher tooling costs.⁴⁶ The experience of the engine and gearbox manufacturer Henry Meadows perhaps typifies such developments. The company’s neighbour in the Fallings Park area of Wolverhampton was Guy Motors, the only remaining motor assembly plant in the city and an important customer.⁴⁷ In 1961, Guy was taken over by Jaguar in order to allow that company to circumvent the rules which, under regional policy, required an Industrial Development Certificate to be granted for any large industrial expansion, and allow it to develop beyond its Coventry plant whilst remaining within the Midlands.⁴⁸ Four years later, Jaguar also took over Meadows and, although the company claimed that contracts with other motor manufacturers would stand, it planned that Meadows concentrate production on a new engine project for Jaguar itself.⁴⁹

This was typical of a longer-term move towards ‘lean production’ which emerged in tandem with increasing concentration of capital, and prioritised flexibility and variety over large volume mass production.⁵⁰ In practice this meant a significant change in working practices, as the increasing emphasis on the production of highly specialised components on short runs led to frequent instances of ‘waiting time’, which damaged the potential earnings of workers paid by the piece and therefore caused considerable unrest. Union representatives of the Meadows workforce

⁴⁵ ‘20,000 bits and pieces’, *Motoring Supplement, The Times*, 16th October 1968.

⁴⁶ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.234

⁴⁷ ‘Meadows’, on *Wolverhampton Local History*, accessed 23/7/12:

<http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/Museum/Engineering/Meadows/HenryMeadows.htm>

⁴⁸ Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, p.144; ‘Jaguar Cars Buy Henry Meadows’, *The Times*, 1st January 1965.

⁴⁹ ‘Jaguar Cars Buy Henry Meadows’, *The Times*, 1st January 1965.

⁵⁰ Foreman-Peck *et al*, *The British Motor Industry*, pp.241-242.

stressed that such problems dated ‘from the time when Henry Meadows became an odd-job shop’, producing small, specialised parts for Jaguar rather than its own engines and gearboxes, and drew attention to the difficult relationship between the Meadows workforce and its new parent company.⁵¹ Within ten months of its takeover by Jaguar in 1966, three disputes reached local conference level, and one Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) representative said of the new company structure, ‘I do not know which parent [Jaguar] is; I suppose actually it is a step-father.’⁵² This sense that component workers, and particularly those employed in the comparatively small metal manufacturing firms of Wolverhampton and the Black Country, were the ill-treated step-children of the car assembly firms of Birmingham and Coventry is one which emerges in dispute reports from a number of companies, often seemingly exacerbated by the takeover of component firms by motor manufacturers themselves. Certainly, much of the discord at Meadows resulted from an initial lack of uniformity across the Jaguar organisation in terms of pay, and the failure of the parent company to take into account the different working practices of a component factory when subsequently attempting to introduce the piece rate structure used in its Coventry car plant. Similarly, workers at the Coseley factory of Pressed Steel, the car body manufacturer which became part of the BMC in 1965, went into dispute with their employers the following year due to the company’s insistence that earnings at Coseley should be comparable with those paid in what one director rather disparagingly termed Pressed Steel’s ‘backstreet competitors’ in neighbouring Black Country towns, rather than in the BMC’s more prosperous assembly plants in Birmingham and Coventry.⁵³

⁵¹ Modern Records Centre (MRC), University of Warwick, MSS.101/M/3/9/105, National Society of Metal Manufacturers’ (NSMM) papers. Proceedings in local conference between West Midlands Engineering Employers’ Association (WMEEA) on behalf of Henry Meadows Limited and Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) and NSMM, Tuesday 22nd March 1966.

⁵² MRC, MSS/101/M/3/9/104, NSMM papers. Proceedings in local conference between WMEEA on behalf of Henry Meadows Limited and AEU, NSMM, Monday 7th February 1966.

⁵³ MRC, MSS.101/M/3/9/64, NSMM papers. Proceedings in local conference between WMEEA on behalf of Fisher and Ludlow Limited, and Transport and General Workers’ Union (TGWU), AEU and NSMM, Monday 10th January 1966.

Regional policy, the supply chain, and troubles in West Lothian and the West Midlands

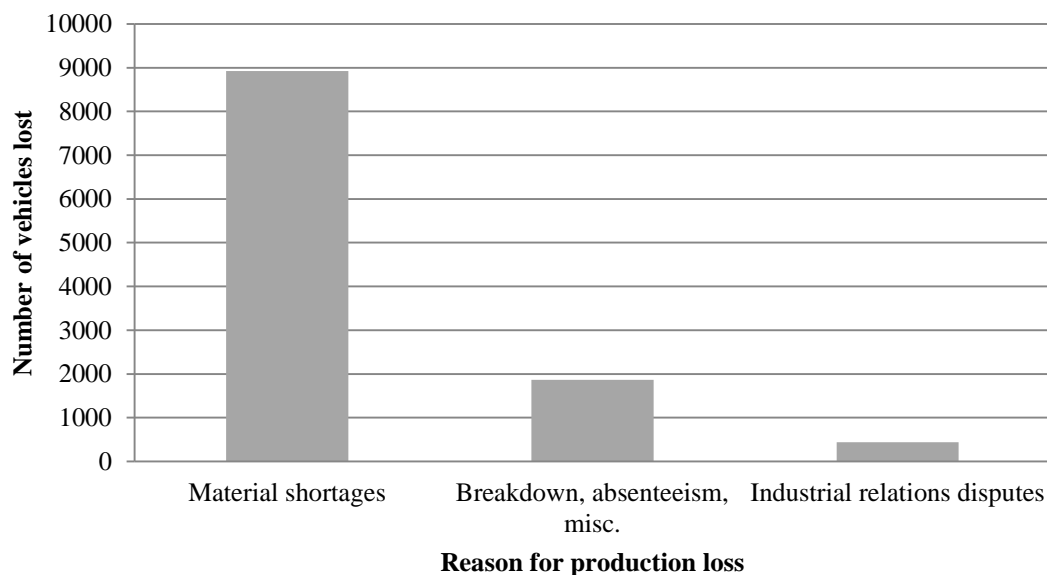
It is arguable, then, that in seeking to rationalise their supply lines and minimise the likelihood of supply shortages, motor manufacturers actually exacerbated the situation by introducing new working practices and complicating company structures, contributing to a rise in shopfloor unrest in component factories and therefore increasing the potential for disruption. This places the troubles of Bathgate, or indeed Linwood, in a different light. The literature on these Scottish motor plants tends to dwell on their particular supply chain and labour problems but these in fact were more general features of the motor industry at large. On the specific case of Bathgate the difficulties resembled those of the broader commercial vehicle sector. Trucks and buses were complex vehicles produced in smaller volumes than cars, and therefore reliant on a ‘multitude of parts’ made on comparatively short runs.⁵⁴ Figure 2:1 uses data from a manufacturing review of British Leyland Truck and Bus Division undertaken in 1974 as part of Ryder’s investigations into the problems facing the BLMC. It illustrates the extent of the production losses across the organisation caused by failures in the supply line, as 8,921 vehicles, or 79 per cent of a total shortfall of 11,288 vehicles, were lost as a result of material shortages in the twelve months preceding May 1974 alone. This review illustrates clearly that problems in motor production were not primarily the result of strike action and, although it was felt that profitability was being undermined by what were described as ‘fundamental labour problems’ at a number of the division’s factories, the focus of the company’s concern was instead on the effects of material shortages, compounded by weak management.⁵⁵ The review identified what it called the ‘top ten delinquent suppliers’ causing production problems and, although Bathgate was in fact recognised as one of the division’s more ‘well-managed plants’, its supply of engines from Morris Engines in Coventry was highlighted as a cause for particular concern.

⁵⁴ British Motor Industry Heritage Trust (BMIHT), Gaydon, 80/152/1/75-BLT-1, British Leyland (Truck and Bus Division) Corporate Records, Truck and Bus Division Review – May 1974.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Figure 2:1 - Causes of production shortfall across British Leyland Truck and Bus Division for the year to May, 1974

(Source: Motor Industry Heritage Trust, 80/152/1/75-BLT-1, British Leyland (Truck and Bus Division) Corporate Records, Truck and Bus)



In the year to May 1974 alone, 378 units had been lost at Bathgate due to problems in accessing engines, while the factory also suffered from frequent shortages of frames. These were supplied by Rubery Owen, one of the largest suppliers of components to the motor industry but another of those causing disquiet, responsible for the loss of 189 vehicles across the Truck and Bus division in the period under review.⁵⁶ It is notable that Rubery Owen was one of the few component makers to open a factory in Scotland. This was established, with significant government funding, in the new town of Cumbernauld in 1961 and heralded in the *FT* as the first of ‘a number’ which would open north of the border as component firms moved or expanded to supply both Bathgate and, later, Rootes at Linwood.⁵⁷ In spite of its proximity to Bathgate, however, the company could not guarantee a reliable supply of components to the factory.⁵⁸ As Jim McCulloch, who worked as a driver at Bathgate from 1961 until 1968, remembers, ‘it just took a lorry to break

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ‘Scottish Venture of Rubery Owen’, *FT*, 27th October 1960

⁵⁸ MRC, MSS.338/ROD, Rubery Owen (Scotland) Ltd, directors’ minute book.

down on the way in and the chassis didn't arrive, and the work all came to a standstill, and the men were laid off.'⁵⁹ Moreover, the distinct Rubery Owen (Scotland) business did not trade until 1966 and then ran at a considerable loss every year until its closure just five years later in 1971, and so by the 1974 review the company had reverted to supplying Bathgate with frames from its main factory at Darlaston in the Black Country.⁶⁰

It is clear, then, that material shortages were a structural feature of the motor industry supply chain resulting from the long-term development of a system which, by allowing motor manufacturers to rely on competition between suppliers as a means of keeping costs down, could benefit car-makers as well as causing supply problems. Such problems were endemic throughout the British motor industry, but were exemplified by the experience of the BMC and BL at Bathgate as the difficulties associated with transporting parts, described by Jim McCulloch, were magnified by the distance from the industry's core in the Midlands to its new West Lothian periphery. The following is from a 1964 Ministry of Labour report into what it termed the 'problems associated with the setting up of new factories in Scotland, South Wales and Merseyside', and highlights the transportation difficulties which affected all regional policy plants, but seemed to represent a particular challenge to production at Bathgate.

Supply problems have arisen at Bathgate because of the distance of the factory from Midland and London suppliers. In spite of heavy stocks being held the 300/400 mile pipeline has been proved a difficult problem to overcome especially in Winter, when it has become common for 40/50 vehicles to be held up daily in transit. When the production facilities of suppliers are heavily strained (such as is the case at the present time) the distance from the production centres is a particularly severe handicap.⁶¹

The failure of the government to 'back up' its regional policy plants, or of the company to engage with local engineering firms, meant that the factory remained reliant on supplies sourced from over 400 English firms, compared with just 30 based in Scotland.⁶² In these terms, the

⁵⁹ Jim McCulloch, interview with the author, 2nd February 2012.

⁶⁰ MRC, MSS.338/ROD, Rubery Owen (Scotland) Ltd, directors' minute book.

⁶¹ National Archives (NA), Kew. LAB10/2661, Ministry of Labour, Motor Industry, British Motor Corporation Ltd., 1964.

⁶² Ibid.

position of the Bathgate plant can be seen as broadly in line with the branch plant analysis introduced in Chapter One; that is, the tendency for Scotland in the second half of the twentieth century to function as a 'branch plant economy', reliant increasingly for employment on assembly plants operating remotely from their markets, suppliers and company headquarters, and often providing only low-skilled and insecure employment for their workers. This is, as discussed in Chapter One, an idea which is well established in the historical literature and closely related to the way in which successive governments used regional policy in their efforts to overhaul the economies of Development Areas defined by their high levels of unemployment. The extent to which Bathgate's position as a branch plant shaped its work culture and industrial relations will be developed in detail in Part Two, but here it is important to highlight the severity of the labour problems caused ostensibly by supply shortages and exacerbated by the uncertainty of employment in branch plants. In this context, George Peden's criticism of a regional policy 'guided almost solely by immediate employment creation, without consideration of what linkages there might have been with the local economy' bears repeating, as the evidence suggests that, in moving motor assembly to Scotland, little serious thought was given to the availability of supply networks locally.⁶³ Bathgate's consequent reliance on a high proportion of imported supplies therefore exacerbated the impact of the material shortages which were a common feature of work throughout the British motor industry, and, in contributing significantly to the instability of work within the factory, led to tension and unrest on the shopfloor.

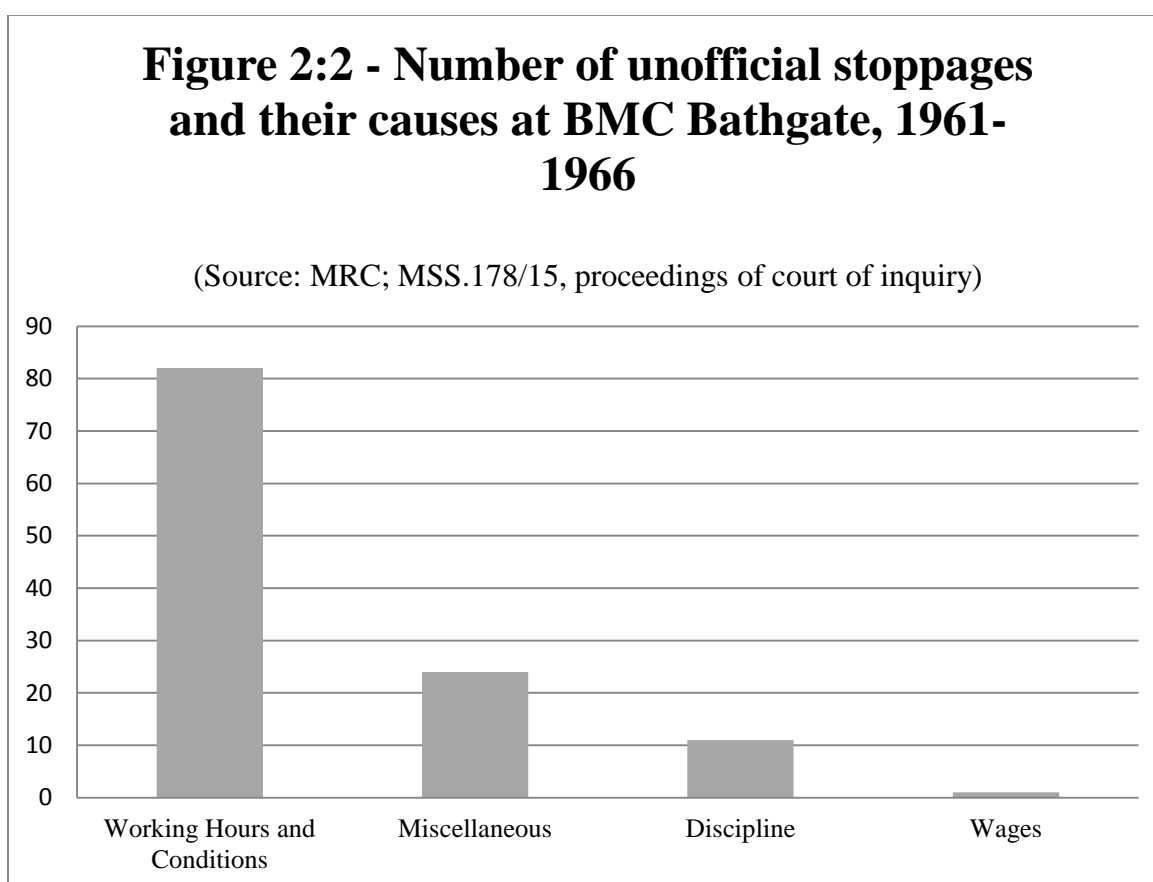
In 1966, and at the request of a National Union of Vehicle Builders (NUVB) shop steward, an inquiry was set up at Bathgate under the auspices of the renowned industrial conciliator Sir Jack Scamp. This inquiry's terms of reference were specifically 'the causes and extent of lay-offs' and, although the company felt that output per worker, which stood at around 60 per cent of the Midlands level, was far too low largely as a result of the attitude of the workforce and the incidence of unofficial strike action, the problem of maintaining supplies emerged as a significant area of concern during initial investigations and dominated discussions during the court of inquiry itself.⁶⁴ A Ministry of Labour official visited the factory in 1965 to collect evidence, and came to the following conclusion about the production situation at the plant:

⁶³ Peden, 'The Managed Economy', p.246.

⁶⁴ MRC, MSS.178/15, Ministry of Labour Industrial Relations Department circular, 16th December 1965.

Production difficulties are to my mind linked closely with industrial relations problems at the factory. Lack of supplies of component parts has meant temporary suspensions on a number of occasions. These suspensions are one of the main irritations and causes of industrial troubles.⁶⁵

This is certainly borne out by the figures for the causes of internal unofficial strikes given at the inquiry. Figure 2:2 shows that between the plant's opening in 1961 and the inquiry in 1966 there was only one strike related to pay, and this was just a half-day protest stoppage by workers unhappy at the length of time taken for their pay claim to go through procedure.



Meanwhile, the vast majority of stoppages were due to 'working hours and conditions' which, it became clear during the course of the inquiry, usually meant lay-offs and short-time working. However, while the question of short-time working was central to the Scamp inquiry, its significance was contested as certain members of the largely English management team disputed

⁶⁵ MRC, MSS.178/15, report of visit by A.S. Kerr, 7th September 1965.

the exceptionality of the situation at Bathgate. Referring to the problems of short-time caused by difficulties in accessing supplies, one representative from the company stated:

There is nothing unique in the question of supplies that you have raised today that we do not have in the Midlands. I don't feel that you are losing any more time or much more time than the Company is in the Midlands.⁶⁶

Indeed, an article in a 1967 edition of the Ministry of Labour's magazine claimed that in the Midlands car industry, 'some short-time working is usually present somewhere, like frost in May.'⁶⁷

It should not be inferred, however, that the issue of short-time in the Midlands was seen as unproblematic, and there is in fact evidence to suggest that the impact of regional policy on Midland workforces, as well as concern that Midland workers would be undercut by cheaper labour in the development areas, exacerbated a problem prevalent even in the supposedly affluent car factories of Birmingham and Coventry. At the time of the creation of the regional policy plants, frustration over short-time working related to wider concerns at the level of work in the BMC's factories and throughout the motor industry more generally, was prevalent across the organisation. Indeed, the idea that the growth of the motor industry in the Midlands was unbridled and potentially damaging to the wider economy of that region as well as the position of the UK as a whole is perhaps tempered by the reaction of the BMC's Midland workforce to the news that the company would be moving commercial vehicle production to Scotland. At a meeting of the BMC Joint Shop Stewards' Committee (BMCJSSC), shop stewards from the Austin plant at Longbridge expressed concern at the opening of the company's new plant, referred to revealingly as 'Bathurst'. It was perceived that this would inevitably entail the transfer of work away from the Midlands, and the decision to move production to Bathgate had come at a time of some difficulty within the company and the wider motor industry.⁶⁸ In March 1961 the BMCJSSC, a company-wide organisation with representatives from each BMC plant, discussed the fact of widespread short-time working throughout the company, with SU

⁶⁶ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

⁶⁷ NA, LAB 12/1544, Ministry of Labour, Unemployment Benefit, Emergency Benefit Procedure, Short Time Working at BMC Factories, 1966.

⁶⁸ MRC, MSS/228/2, BMC Joint Shop Stewards' Committee, 1958-1969, Minutes of BMC Joint Shop Stewards Committee Meeting (BMCJSSC) held at AEU Hall, Chiswick High Road, on Saturday, 3rd June, 1961

Carburettor in Birmingham, where 400 people had just two and a half days' work and orders had been completed three months in advance, amongst the worst hit.⁶⁹ There was also considerable discontent amongst workers in the company's foundry division, as it was claimed that the Coventry and Wellingborough foundries had been on short-time for as long as three years. At the same meeting, concern was expressed by Austin shop stewards over the transfer of all commercial vehicle work from Longbridge to Bathgate. Thirty-two workers were to be affected by this at the outset and would be found alternative work, but it was claimed that there was 'a far greater problem still to be faced in the press shop and eventually in the rest of the factory'.⁷⁰ By December of that year, a recruitment freeze was in place and it had been confirmed that 800 of the 1,200 Austin workers employed there on a commercial engine programme would be losing their jobs as a result of this work going to Scotland. There were also concerns in the Tractor and Transmissions division and at Nuffield Metal Products, while the Morris Commercial plant, already on a three and four day week, was losing 'a large part' of its commercial and tractor production to Bathgate, with no sign of any other work coming in to replace it. The Morris Commercial delegate to the December 1961 committee meeting stated that:

The main worry of all workers at the above factories was that up to the present no positive action had been taken by the Union or Management to prove to [the workers and stewards] that new contracts would keep them fully employed, and it seemed highly improbable to the workers that the work would be moved from Birmingham for any other reason than to get it done cheaper in Scotland.⁷¹

The delegate from Tractor and Transmissions claimed that at least 300 workers engaged on tractor production there had lost all their work, and that 'the feeling in the factory was very high, and it was not the intention of the workers to take this without a fight'. He went on to state that he 'would like to see the BMC Shop Stewards fight for a policy of no work to move until all workers at BMC were fully employed'.⁷²

This perhaps reflects wider fears for the future of the industry, as well as suspicions over the company's motivations in moving work away from the relatively affluent and supposedly

⁶⁹ MRC, MSS.228/2, Minutes of BMCJSSC meeting held at Coventry on Saturday 11th March, 1961.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

congested Midlands to what were termed the ‘unemployment areas’. As a delegate from Morris Cars stated:

It was generally believed that the Bathgate factory would not affect Morris Cars but...this was just an illusion. If it were cheaper to do the job in Scotland, then it would be done in Scotland.⁷³

The degree of disquiet and the strength of ill-feeling caused by the loss of work to the BMC’s new plants and subsequent concerns that the company’s Midlands workforce could be undercut or replaced altogether by cheaper labour at Bathgate or indeed other regional policy plants was further emphasized by the discovery, reported to the joint shop stewards in June 1962, of anti-Scottish slogans written on components being sent to Bathgate from the Midlands.⁷⁴ Dougie Miller, a former Bathgate shop steward, has similarly recalled receiving parts with the words ‘Scots coolies’ scrawled on them, suggesting the extent of the hostility engendered in the Midlands workforce by this new threat to their job security during a period in which Britain slipped from its position as the second largest car producer in the world behind the United States. By 1982 it was near the bottom of that ‘league’, producing less than France, Spain, Germany, Italy and Japan, when car imports were 58 per cent of the market, where they had been only 8 per cent in 1968.⁷⁵

The extent to which the West Midlands regional economy relied upon motor manufacturing for employment was highlighted in a 1968 report in the *Times*, which expressed nascent concern at the continued dominance of small metal manufacture, and the importance of the major car manufacturers as customers. This investigation focused on the Black Country, where 50 per cent of the workforce, compared to the national figure of 38 per cent, was at this time employed in manufacturing, and where the *Times* found that ‘the supply of component parts to the motor manufacturers dominates the whole life of the region’.⁷⁶ Three years later, in July 1971, the same newspaper published a report on the economic situation in the area which claimed that in the

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ MRC, MSS.228/2, Minutes of BMCJSSC held at the Centre Ballroom, Holyhead Road, Coventry, on Saturday 17th February 1962.

⁷⁵ Foreman-Peck *et al*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.53; Law, ‘The Geography of Industrial Rationalisation’, p.5; A. Amin and I. Smith, ‘Decline and Restructuring in the UK Motor Vehicle Components Industry’, *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 37:3, 1990, p.217.

⁷⁶ ‘Metal is still dominant’, *The Times*, 28th November 1968.

previous 12 months, 282 manufacturing firms across the region had made 26,112 workers redundant, and that ‘men from Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton who once proudly claimed “Only the daft and the bone idle cannot get a job here” are themselves standing in dole queues.’⁷⁷ Unemployment across the region grew from an average of below one per cent in the 1950s and early 1960s, peaking in 1983 by which time a slump of ‘unrivalled magnitude’ during the later 1970s had led to over 40 per cent of the economically active adult population registering as unemployed, and the overall level of unemployment standing at 17 per cent.⁷⁸ This drastic change in labour market conditions in one generation in the Midlands had consequences in terms of exacerbating the supply situation. The anxieties were revealed by the greater activism of shop stewards, such as those at the Wolverhampton-based firm John Thompson Motor Pressings, involved in just one incident of strike action during the whole of the 1950s and 1960s, who responded to increased employment insecurity by organising and taking part in a series of regional and national protest stoppages, as well as sending delegates to lobby MPs at Westminster over ‘the serious situation of unemployment in the West Midlands’.⁷⁹ A detailed discussion of the complex range of issues facing British motor manufacturers and their workers during the 1960s and 1970s is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is essential here to recognise the scale of the change in the industry’s fortunes during this period and the significant implications which this carried for the regional policy plants as well as the economy of the Midlands. Ken Spencer’s description of the West Midlands as ‘an industrial wasteland’, written in 1986, echoes similar portrayals of West Lothian a quarter of a century earlier, highlighting both the cyclical nature of industrial development and demonstrating the vulnerability of the peripheral branch plants established in the hopes of mirroring the earlier successes of what was by the mid-1970s itself an industry, and a region, in decline.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ ‘Life has been good to us here...but’, *The Times*, 29th July 1971.

⁷⁸ WEA, interview with Dougie Miller; Spencer *et al.*, *Crisis in the Industrial Heartland*, pp.1, 52.

⁷⁹ Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies (WALS), D/50/23/14, Minutes of the Motor Pressings Shop Stewards Committee, commencing 1976.

⁸⁰ Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.89.

Production at Bathgate

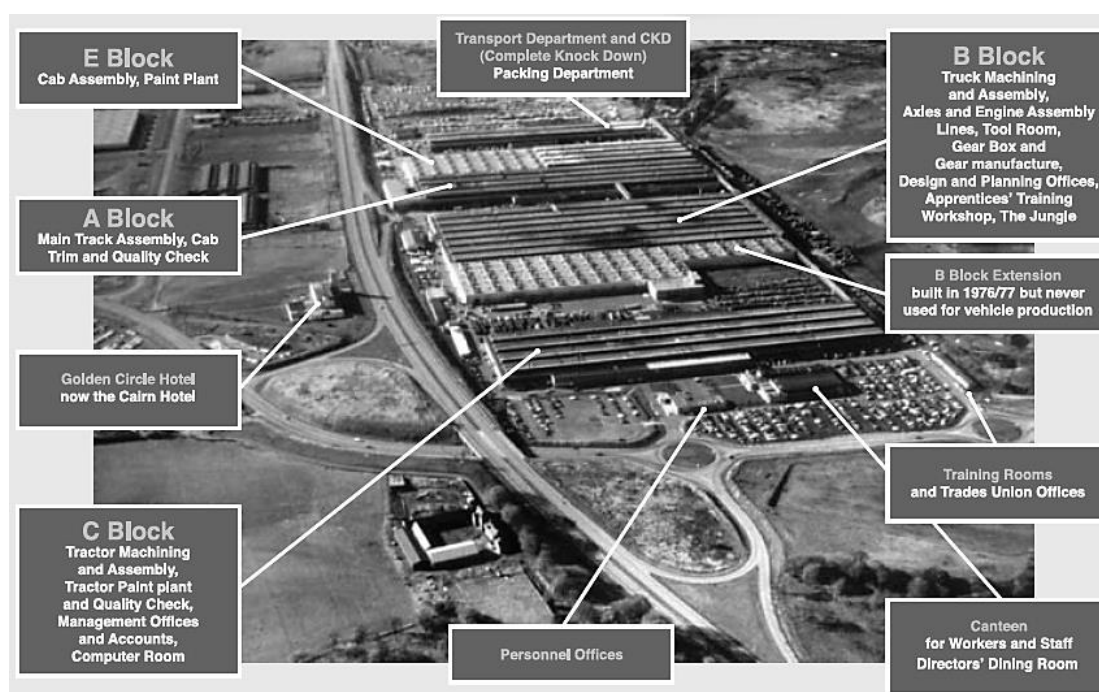
Bill Raine worked as a foreman at Longbridge before moving to Bathgate in 1962, and describes the feeling in Birmingham at the time of the move:

It was a relief really because in those days the trucks were a, they were a, you know a sore, they didn't pay and they didn't employ many people, but the Mini coming in, it took off like a bomb, and they employed thousands of people on making this Mini. So the fact that they lost the truck, which was a political move by the way – there was a lot of stories about the government, I think it was Macmillan at the time, he was gooin' to help the poor Scots and the poor people in Liverpool and the poor people in the North East of England, send them work up, typical politics.

Raine's account of the 'stories' circulating about government policy, and his disparaging reference to the 'poor people' in the Development Areas, reflects the concerns expressed by the BMC shop stewards about the company's motivations in moving production to Scotland. However, his description of the loss of truck production to Scotland as a 'relief' is at odds with the responses at the time by shopfloor workers, already examined here. These encompassed growing unease over the changing labour market conditions in the West Midlands which were undermining job security and fostering anxiety over the short-time working which was a long-established, structural feature of motor industry employment. Moreover, the contention that truck manufacture was unprofitable and undesirable is indicative of the company's attitude to its move to Bathgate, and underlines the company's reluctance in moving any of its production to the development areas. Initially, the BMC had proposed building only a small tractor plant in Scotland, employing around 1,200 people, while creating around 9,000 new jobs elsewhere, including at Longbridge. However, these plans were rejected by the Board of Trade following the recommendation of the Distribution of Industry Committee, which was concerned that if they were to be accepted they would set a precedent allowing motor manufacturers to expand in their present areas, provided that they made only 'relatively small gestures' in the designated

development areas.⁸¹ The BMC retained reservations about the distance between Scotland and its supply networks in the Midlands and about the suitability of the Clyde for vehicle exports, and it was only when encouraged by ‘a juicy carrot in the form of a substantial financial bonus’ that the company amended its proposals and instead agreed to forego its expansion at Longbridge and move all of its production of tractors and heavy commercial vehicles to a new factory in Scotland.⁸²

Image 2:1 – aerial view of Bathgate factory, c.1982



(Source: Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.12.)

The commercial and agricultural vehicle sectors of the motor industry remain under-researched in comparison to the volume car sector, perhaps reflecting the perceived contemporary undesirability of truck and tractor manufacturing. The evidence available suggests that the Bathgate factory, which built tractors, trucks, and diesel engines and is shown in Image 2:1, thought to date from 1982, was not insulated against the difficulties facing its car-making counterparts during the 1970s especially. But these difficulties were far from relentless. In the

⁸¹ NAS, Edinburgh, SEP4-1658, Scottish Development Department, Specific Industries – Motorengineering – General, Distribution of Industry Committee, Expansion of British Motor Corporation (Notes for the Secretary of State).

⁸² *Ibid.*

mid-1970s, for instance, there was an apparent boom in production, which resulted in the 1977 construction of the B Block extension. This was built as part of BL's plans to expand output at both Bathgate and its Albion Motors works in Glasgow, and came ostensibly as the culmination of a successful period of production at the plant.⁸³ In May 1972, an Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) delegate reported to West Lothian Trades' Council that the factory was 'booming,' and the next year shop stewards were involved in negotiating a move to three shift working in order to keep up with demand for engines.⁸⁴ Harry McKay worked in the pre-pack section, which consisted of the knock-down (KD) and complete knock-down (CKD) departments which prepared vehicles for export. He describes his perception of the factory's position within the wider BLMC organisation during the mid-1970s.

I think 1975, '76 would be the best years of production in Bathgate. Bathgate were then perhaps, ehm, doing lots of benefit for Birmingham then, because Birmingham wasn't doing too well in those days. And I think we kept them alive and afloat for a long time, I'm quite sure we did.⁸⁵

Certainly, truck and tractor production were less reliant on the mass market and therefore less vulnerable to fluctuations in demand than car production. Roy Church has shown that between 1967 and 1972, the BLMC's Austin-Morris volume cars division contributed 17 per cent of the company's profits, while trucks and buses accounted for 34 per cent. This marked a significant change as in the early part of the 1960s volume car production had created more than three times as much profit as either trucks and buses or specialist cars.⁸⁶ However, it is possible that these figures reflect the weakness of the ageing Austin-Morris range of cars and the impact of import penetration as much as the success of the commercial vehicle sector. By 1968 the company's top-selling models, the Mini and the Morris 1100, were nine and six years old respectively, and even new models such as the Austin Allegro and the Morris Marina were considered out-dated in comparison to their Ford and Vauxhall competitors.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the BLMC, even following attempted rationalisation, continued to produce a wide and under-efficient range of 24 different

⁸³ STUC archive, GCAL, Eightieth Annual Report of the STUC, 1977, p.594.

⁸⁴ STUC archive, GCAL, Acc 4683 (112), box 1 - West Lothian Trades' Council papers, miscellaneous minutes and correspondence, January 1972-January 1976.

⁸⁵ WEA, interview with Harry McKay.

⁸⁶ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.94.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.92; Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, pp.180-181; Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.131.

models of car, in low volumes, and therefore often in plants with excess capacity. Church claims that this was a result of the company's reluctance to concentrate production in fewer factories with a smaller overall workforce, particularly at a time of difficult labour relations. Foreman-Peck, Bowden and McKinlay have argued that this eventuality was an outcome of the post-Second World War premium placed on maintaining full employment. This had led to the establishment of the company's regional policy plants, and, even by the time of the Ryder Report in 1974, made the prospect of closing outdated or unprofitable plants unappealing.⁸⁸

Furthermore, even as the Bathgate expansion was announced, *The Times* was reporting that demand for trucks had fallen by 21 per cent in 1974 in the wake of the previous year's oil crisis, and that sales were down 16 per cent in the first half of 1976 compared with the same period in 1975.⁸⁹ However the newspaper saw as necessary the £10 million being invested by Leyland Truck and Bus in Scotland, with the aim of increasing output of diesel engines at Bathgate by 30 per cent and of axles at Albion by 60 per cent, as BL's truck factories had been 'starved of capital investment' for as much as eight years while the company gave priority to its car division.⁹⁰ In 1972, the same newspaper had reported on the introduction of the new Leyland Buffalo range of heavy trucks, which was to be built on a new assembly line in Lancashire. Bathgate's truck production would concentrate on what were termed 'biscuit tin trucks', or smaller trucks produced using mass production, assembly line methods, which the *Times* argued were best placed to sell in the Common Market as none of the major European manufacturers produced an equivalent model on an equivalent scale. This report, however, claimed that 'it is a matter of growing concern [to British Leyland] that the backbone of this effort is Bathgate', described as a 'consistent loser', and a 'doubtful quantity', whose future 'must remain in doubt'.⁹¹ The *Times* – reinforcing stereotypes – attributed this to labour relations troubles which it claimed had 'plagued' the plant ever since it opened. These issues are explored in Chapters Four and Five, where it will be seen that even some former Bathgate workers supported the pejorative characterisation that production at the plant was continually disrupted by labour difficulties. Yet there is considerable counter-veiling evidence to show that the problems facing the plant and threatening its future were more complex than this analysis suggests, and included

⁸⁸ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.95; Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.131.

⁸⁹ 'Leyland to Expand in Scotland', *The Times*, 21st April 1976.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ 'Will the pastures be richer for the Leyland Buffalo range?', *The Times*, 11th February 1972.

the quality of the factory's output as much as the attitude of its workforce. Alan Marr started as an engineering apprentice in the plant in 1969, and admits that it acquired a reputation for poor quality products precisely because of what he terms a lack of discipline on the shopfloor.

It would be unfair to say that people were particularly lazy, but I think what you got, the system wasnae regimented enough for me, if you look at it that way. I mean there were people who would do lots of work for about four hours a day and nothing for the rest of the day, and I don't know if that affected quality as well. I think some of the quality was poor, from their product, and that probably told in the end. I think the JCB company used to buy power units from us, and I think there was a big row about the stuff not being so good, and [JCB] brought a digger in one day and buried one of the power units in front of all the managers and everything, dug a big hole and dumped it and then put the dirt back on top of it. So I think that's probably lack of regimentation and discipline which, because it was so big I think it was quite hard to keep that.⁹²

It is arguable, however, that this perceived lack of discipline was itself a result, rather than a cause, of poor quality products, and a reflection of consequent low worker morale. Other strands of oral history evidence certainly demonstrate that Bathgate's workers were aware of some of the problems with their output. Robert McAndrew, for example, worked as a maintenance engineer at the plant from 1961 until 1971, and describes fundamental failures in the design of the Morris FJ. This was a 'biscuit tin truck' introduced in 1964 with a tilting cab designed to improve access to the engine, making servicing quicker and easier, and which it was hoped would be able to compete with the market-leading Ford and Bedford light trucks.⁹³

They brought in a new truck, and it was a tilting cab, and eh, Leyland had produced, this was before the amalgamation, and Leyland had, and I think Ford had eh, beaten the BMC to it, and eh, to accommodate the tilting cab they had to turn the engine sideways and, eh – it didnae really work, the engine didnae work. A good one, a good one probably got down to Carlisle, a bad one didnae get past eh, what do you call it, Whitburn. The engines were seizing up, exploding and eh,

⁹² WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

⁹³ British Pathe, *The Truck in Front*, 1966, accessed via <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-truck-in-front>.

the initials on the truck were FJ – and in workshop language, the second word is junk [laughter].⁹⁴

The FJ engine does seem to have garnered a degree of notoriety amongst former workers. As a planning engineer, Ian Tennant had responsibility for solving, or attempting to solve, the kind of problems described by McAndrew, and he highlights the introduction of the FJ as one of his most memorable times at the plant.

The introduction of the FJ, the tilting cab FJ, with the engine lying at, I think it was about a 45 degree angle the engine lay at, because the designers didn't think they could get it under the floor sitting vertical. As it turned out they could, later on, somebody did it, and that was, and the FG [an earlier model] had been on the go for a couple of years. It was, the FJ was a, it was badly, it was hurriedly put into production, and there was a lot of bad design parts in it, but we had, it took a while to get out, and the engine was kinda suspect at the start, but again by the end of the engine's life the engine really became a very very good engine.⁹⁵

It should be noted, however, that the problem of the exploding FJ engine was eventually resolved not at Bathgate, but at Albion, and that Robert McAndrew's assessment of the resulting device highlights a new set of limitations.

The Albion engine wasnae a race machine, it was a plodder, but it would have plodded on to time immemorial, you know. There was no killing an Albion engine, but it wasnae hot stuff, as far as performance was concerned.⁹⁶

Bill Raine's testimony is marked by anti-trade union rhetoric and strong criticism of the factory's shop stewards, who he believed were disruptive and partly responsible for low levels of productivity at the plant. However, even he highlights the weaknesses of the outdated models produced at Bathgate as one of the key problems facing the factory.

The attitude of these people [the shop stewards] marching about saying this and that, and to be quite honest they were turning rubbish out. It wasn't their fault.

⁹⁴ Robert and Christine McAndrew, interview with the author, 5th April 2011.

⁹⁵ WEA, interview with Ian Tennant.

⁹⁶ Robert and Christine McAndrew, interview with the author, 5th April 2011.

They were doing the job properly, but they were years and years out of date with the model. They couldn't sell them.⁹⁷

Raine is referring here to the trucks built at the plant, and goes on to describe certain problems with their design.

Abroad, nobody wanted to know. They were rubbish. The designs – the one truck we were making when I left [in 1982], we'd been making in 1938 in Birmingham. They brought a new truck out, a new cab. When I looked at it, I thought, whoever's designed and thought this out must be stupid. On the big front panel there was a great big lettering, Leyland. Each letter had got three holes drilled in the front panel for the pins to hold it. I said that's the most stupid thing you can think of, because that will rot in no time, and you've got a rusty front panel on a truck, doesn't matter what you do, you'll never cover them holes up. And it must have cost a fortune to put those punch-holes in that front panel. So they took it out, and they put a plastic Leyland thing on the front.⁹⁸

The importance of selling products abroad is alluded to here, and at the time of the Bathgate expansion in 1977, it was reported that 'most' of the vehicles produced at the plant were exported.⁹⁹ Certainly, at the time of the *Lothians Regional Survey and Plan* in 1966, 45 per cent of trucks and 80 per cent of tractors went for export, while around 20 per cent of all output for the home market was sold in Scotland.¹⁰⁰ Traditionally, the company's biggest overseas markets were in Commonwealth countries and South Africa, although the Middle East and EEC countries became increasingly important during the 1970s.¹⁰¹ Bathgate's products were mostly shipped overseas in knocked-down form, explained here by former CKD worker Harry McKay.

Well, semi-KD and CKD was mostly for tractors at that particular stage. What you would get was a built up tractor which was just a preparation, you got a built up tractor, it'd only be a part preparation, for example do you take the steering wheel off, do you take the linkages off, get underneath the bonnet, and at that

⁹⁷ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ 'Leyland boosts truck output in Scotland', *The Times*, 25th May 1977.

¹⁰⁰ Robertson, *Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, 5:32.

¹⁰¹ 'Lure of foreign market', *The Times*, 19th March 1968.

stage you would put a piece of wax cloth paper over the bonnet, tense it with the steel strapping, and stencil the front of it where it was going. Semi-KD was you would take a tractor and you would take all the axles off it, put it into a packing case with all the, you know once the front axles the rear axles were taken off, the linkage at the back, and it'd be completely in a packing case. CKD was, the tractor was never built, it was just given to you in bits and pieces.¹⁰²

The CKD system was peculiar to British overseas motor manufacturing, and relied upon agreements with independent local companies rather than the creation of wholly or majority-owned overseas subsidiaries.¹⁰³ CKD kits containing all the necessary components for a vehicle would be packed in British factories and sent to these overseas agents for re-assembly. This required minimal investment and allowed British firms to gain access to Commonwealth and European markets, but could lead to problems for parent companies who had very limited control over their overseas manufacturing partners, and in some cases found that they lacked manufacturing experience and expertise.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the requirements of export markets could present new design and engineering challenges to those at Bathgate. Bruce Davies, a mechanical engineer who moved to the plant after graduating from Manchester University in 1969, describes technical modifications which he was required to make to the Nuffield tractors produced at the plant so that they could be sold in South Africa.

They started selling tractors to South Africa, and it was hot, and they have what is called a Limited Ambient Temperature, and LAT it quickly becomes called, so if you're in this country the ambient temperature, what is it today, three, four, and then you have a number which you add on to it to make it to ninety degrees. So if you have an LAT of 42 it means you can run up to sixty degrees outside before the tractor boils, OK, and so you just had these numbers – so in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France, Germany, it's never gonna be an issue for the tractors overheating. Soon as you go to the African continent, suddenly you don't

¹⁰² WEA, interview with Harry McKay.

¹⁰³ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.274.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, pp.274, 278.

have this gap, you don't have this thermal capacity and, initially we did some tests to work out what the tractor went like, and we then did what turned out to be two very simple things – one we made the fan fit better within the radiator fan ... we discovered if we just got the fan to fit better, inside the radiator on the tractor, we immediately got an extra five or ten degrees bonus. We then found we could run the fan faster but that didn't make as much difference as we thought, so we then just looked at where the air came from. We just discovered the way they attached the side panels on the tractor really got all the air off, so we just changed the way they welded them on and that got us another, and that was enough. So it was one of these things that really didn't make much difference to the tractor at all, but just by tidying up little details in it, it got very analytical but it solved the problem.¹⁰⁵

Davies enjoyed his work largely because of the problem-solving it entailed, but it should be noted that many of the difficulties which he and his fellow design engineers encountered were themselves a result of poor management or, it would seem, a certain intransigence during the transfer of work and machinery from Birmingham.

It turns out the work, it was very interesting, very exciting in some ways because tractor research at that time were transferring all their know – I'm not high enough up the tree there to know what was going on, but I knew there was this organisation called Tractor Research that was reluctant to give Bathgate engineering much information, we had a full set of drawings for the tractor but we didn't have the engineering test reports that explained why the particular hydraulic system worked in the way it did, why the cooling system was like it was, why the gearbox was as like it was, although I subsequently discovered that the ten speed gearbox was an extract from a tank, they'd just put it into a tractor after the war and it hadn't really changed.¹⁰⁶

The lack of information available to the Bathgate engineers, and their difficulty in communicating with colleagues elsewhere in the organisation, reflects further potential problems associated with branch plants such as Bathgate operating remotely from company headquarters,

¹⁰⁵ WEA, interview with Bruce Davies.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

and also highlights the related tendency for such plants to provide predominantly low-skilled, assembly line work. The extent to which this was true of Bathgate will be examined further in Chapter Three, but here it should be noted that, although much of the work available at the plant was on the main truck and tractor assembly lines, it has also been claimed the factory had the largest concentration of machine tools in Europe, and it employed a considerable number of semi-skilled and, to a smaller extent, skilled workers in its machining and engineering areas.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, and as Bruce Davies's testimony attests, the plant's production and design engineers were able to exercise considerable autonomy in making modifications and improvements to the design and engineering of the trucks and tractors which the factory produced.

Davies worked exclusively on the tractors made at Bathgate, which were sold initially under the Nuffield name and then, from 1969, as Leyland Tractors. These were widely regarded as good products, and indeed the 1982 sell-off of the tractor plant to Marshall Tractors was taken by many Bathgate workers as a sign that the 'writing was on the wall' for the rest of the factory as well. Andy Hunter, for example, was a member of the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee, and describes his decision to take voluntary redundancy in 1980.

I left during one of the sortae, first redundancies, when we had met Michael Edwardes, Pat Lowry in the executive canteen, and Mr Edwardes was sitting swinging his legs and stopped Pat Lowry speaking and basically told us that the tractors were going, and I'm sitting thinking well, this is the start of the end, if the tractors go because I mean the tractors were very very successful, my brother-in-law was a farmer and his brother-in-law was a farmer as well, and eh Andrew Jack bought Leylands and my brother-in-law bought Davey Browns, and I can always remember my brother-in-law saying to me that basically a Leyland could pull the front end off a Davey Brown, and a Davey Brown was the name in tractors, but Leyland had got up to a spec that were beating Davey Browns and

¹⁰⁷ Dalzell, *The Importance of Being Awkward*, loc. 3,871; MRC, MSS.178/15, dossier of information submitted to inquiry.

obviously to be up there and selling the best tractor basically in the world as far as I'm concerned, and they were hiving that off, didnae sound good to me.¹⁰⁸

However, in spite of the Leyland tractors' reputation for good quality, and a perception amongst the factory's workforce that the tractor plant was its most profitable department, there is evidence to suggest that problems with their design and build quality had been growing for some time. Bill Raine, for example, recalls seeing a letter from an important customer threatening to stop buying tractors from Bathgate; something which he took as a sign of the severity of the problems facing the plant by the mid-1970s.

I picked up this letter and it was from the big chief importer of tractors in New Zealand, the big franchise holder. If you send me any more rubbish, to this country, three months from now you won't sell one more because I'm going to close everything down. And if you send any more idiots from your factory to me, and they don't know the back or the front of a tractor, that'll compound it. And this is my last warning. And I thought, I don't believe this...I didn't know much about or care much about tractors then, but when I saw that I thought well, then you've got the trucks as well, then you've got these guys marching about saying they run the factory ...¹⁰⁹

Bruce Davies left the factory in 1975 after becoming disillusioned with a new tractor model which the company was developing, and which he 'didn't think ... was gonna work'.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, he had long been frustrated by what he perceived as misjudged management decisions and, in a sign of the limitations of the autonomy enjoyed by the Bathgate engineers, a lack of flexibility in both commercial and technical decision-making. He describes, for example, what he believes to have been a loss of potentially lucrative orders due to the management's refusal to consider changing their financial model in order to accommodate engineering adjustments required for an export model.

The main thing that I still regret is a few things that I thought of, management decisions were wrong, you know. One of them was, the whole of the financial

¹⁰⁸ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

¹⁰⁹ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

¹¹⁰ WEA, interview with Bruce Davies.

model of the plant came from making five thousand cars a week, thousands and thousands and thousands of cars. So if you got an order for a small number of tractors, and by small, some people wouldn't think of it as small, some people would think of, a hundred tractors for somewhere, they wouldn't ever do a machine, a tool room job to make a hundred parts. So for example, we had an inquiry for I think it was high clearance tractors to go to, I think it was South Africa, we'll stick to South Africa, wherever it was it was somewhere like that, and we had to raise the tractor up six inches to do it, so the obvious thing was to just get longer kingpins at the front, larger diameter wheels at the rear, make sure everything cleared and that was it. But to do that you had to machine the front axle of the tractor differently, and machine the kingpins that do the steering wheel, that allows the wheel to pivot, and I think it was some track rod ends, but not much, the main thing was the kingpins had to be different to lift the tractor up because at the back all you did was put some big wheels on and put a chunk out of the mudguard. And they came back and they said it would cost a quarter of a million pounds to do this, and I said that can't be right. So I went to a local engineering firm and I asked them how much it would cost them to make a hundred, or two hundred of them because we'd probably want a few spares, a hundred to maybe up to four, two hundred, and he came back with a price, put that into the tractor and you're making a nice – and they said no no, you can't do it like that, I said what do you mean, and he said well if we're going to make that we're going to have to get an automatic machine in that'll only do that, because we need to make five thousand a week. So all their costing was all on the basis that you only made five thousand, or five hundred even a week, and they couldn't, they had no financial mechanism that says we won't make them, I'll just get a local engineering firm to make four hundred of these, to make two hundred tractors to go away.¹¹¹

He goes on to describe earlier failings in the development of the Mini Tractor, introduced in 1965 and poorly received.

¹¹¹ WEA, interview with Bruce Davies.

The mini tractor should have become the grand slam tractor of today. It was a delightful tractor to drive, you could hurtle around anywhere in it, and they refused to do two basic things initially, and one was change the clutch on it from a single clutch to a double clutch, because if you stopped everything stopped. All tractors at that time, 1966, you put the clutch down you only stopped the tractor, you didn't stop the spreader, you didn't stop anything else, it didn't have a live hydraulic pump. And there were various little things like that that could have made it a world beater. And the other thing that started at that time was going towards four wheel drive. And the powers that be decided there was no market for a small four wheel drive tractor. Every golf course in Scotland's got three of them now haven't they.¹¹²

These problems highlight both the impact of management decisions on the development of the products built at Bathgate, and, arguably, the extent to which the capacity of Bathgate's engineers to improve and innovate was constrained by the plant's position on the periphery of what was a very large organisation with its headquarters over 300 miles away in Birmingham.

Management change and corporate restructuring

These issues are also, however, signs of the weaknesses of senior BL management which are central to a number of analyses of the motor industry in Britain, including Jonathan Wood's *Wheels of Misfortune*, which is particularly critical of Lord Stokes, chairman and managing director of the company from 1968 until 1977, who confessed to being 'a bit doubtful about budgets', and once admitted to his finance director John Barber, 'I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, let alone next year.'¹¹³ Stokes had worked his way up through the company, joining as an apprentice at the age of 18 and becoming a celebrated salesman, but his elevation to chairman and managing director in spite of his own admitted lack of marketing, engineering, or managerial expertise, typified a management culture marked by its inexperience, and its 'unfashionable' unwillingness to employ graduates from either an arts or engineering

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, p.194.

background.¹¹⁴ Barber, who, as a former finance director of Ford was the only member of the BL board with any experience of direct involvement in the management of a major car producer, describes his initial impressions of working at Longbridge.

It was a terrible make-do-and-mend company. The intellectual calibre was very low. But they were good at getting out of difficulties. If they had a major problem in production, they could get out of it, but they weren't any good at planning on how not to get into it.¹¹⁵

The design and engineering problems described by Bill Raine and Bruce Davies were certainly not unique to Bathgate, although it is notable that Stokes described the plant as 'a disaster because every truck they made broke down.'¹¹⁶ It is, however, generally accepted in the historiography of the British motor industry that BL, even more so than its competitors, suffered from a reputation for poor products both at home and abroad. In 1976, for example, a *Midlands News* television report into 'Foreign Cars' asked members of the public their opinion of British-built cars. 'What's wrong with British cars? What isn't wrong with them! I told you about that Rover – the exhaust fell off, the handle fell off!'¹¹⁷ Timothy Whisler has found numerous examples in the contemporary motoring press of similar problems, including an 'ordinary housewife' who became so 'nervous and neurotic' following a series of breakdowns that she abandoned her new BL car outside the factory gates, a Triumph Spitfire which, in its first year alone, required two engines, a gearbox, two door locks, and a fire brigade to extinguish its burning engine, and an Austin 1300 which dispensed water rather than air through its heater, and the windows of which fell out upon opening.¹¹⁸ Such sensationalist reporting was, as Whisler makes clear, targeted disproportionately at the 'national champion' of BL, which in fact produced cars to a build-quality roughly equivalent to the standards of its British competitors. Most contemporary accounts of the industry's problems attributed defects in the quality of British vehicles to human error on the assembly line, often linked to fractious industrial relations. One man, asked by *Midlands News* to explain his preference for foreign cars, explained that

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.246.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.246.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.172.

¹¹⁷ Media Archive for Central England (MACE), University of Lincoln, 'Foreign Cars', *Midlands News*, 4th May 1976.

¹¹⁸ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, pp.328-9.

British cars were more likely to be faulty because workers leaving their workstations and assembly lines to go on strike lost track of their work and consequently ‘left bits off’.¹¹⁹ Whisler admits that assembly errors were a ‘chronic problem’, but argues they were part of a far more complex set of interrelated difficulties which included weaknesses in the design process, low corporate standards, ageing machinery, and superficial quality control and inspection systems.¹²⁰ The haphazard nature of quality control across the industry was demonstrated by a dispute which occurred at the body maker Pressed Steel in 1970 when, in order to allow a number of its marques to expand into the American market, BLMC management insisted on tighter inspection as part of a move to introduce safety and quality control checks more stringent than the ‘clout’ with a hammer and chisel which had previously been the test of the strength and durability of welding work. For the workforce at Pressed Steel, this was a sign that ‘an American life is of infinitely more value than a British life, so we should do all we can to ensure that the vehicles sent to America are much safer than those which are supplied to the mugs over here.’¹²¹

This difference between British build-quality and the requirements demanded by the US government of any vehicle imported into that country highlights the problems facing Britain’s motor manufacturers in the 1970s particularly, as the standards which had been concealed by the protected home market were exposed by increasing import penetration, and the subsequent need to expand new and existing export markets.¹²² Import tariffs were reduced from 1963 onwards, falling to 8.3 per cent by the time of Britain’s entry into the EEC in 1973, and virtually disappearing by 1977.¹²³ Church has identified 1971 as a key year for British car makers, as the availability of easy credit combined with low purchase tax produced an increase in car sales of 43 per cent; a demand which could not be met by domestic production alone, and which therefore provided a catalyst for what was to be a permanent shift in favour of foreign cars.¹²⁴ This change in Britain’s position as a car producer was compounded by the effects of the global recession which resulted from the oil crisis of 1973, and contributed to the severity of the problems experienced by the BLMC, leading to its request for state aid which was to prompt the

¹¹⁹ MACE, ‘Foreign Cars’, *Midlands News*, 29th July 1975.

¹²⁰ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, pp.329-330.

¹²¹ MRC, MSS.101/M/3/9/121, NSMM papers. Proceedings in local conference between WMEEA on behalf of Pressed Steel Fisher Limited, Castle Bromwich, and AUEW, NUVB, GMWU, NSMM and Birmingham and Midland Sheet Metal Workers’ Society, Thursday 29th January 1970.

¹²² Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.329; Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.96-98.

¹²³ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.95.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p.96.

government's appointment of Don Ryder to investigate the company's difficulties. The main implications of the Ryder Report for Leyland and its workers at Bathgate arose from its two key recommendations: that output should be expanded, and that there should be no redundancies.¹²⁵ This both explains the 'boom' seen at Bathgate in the late 1970s, and reflects the reluctance on the part of Lord Stokes, described in an internal appraisal as 'a soft-hearted man who finds it difficult to fire people', to make any redundancies, particularly as he felt that as the 'national champion' the company had a social responsibility to defend jobs as far as possible.¹²⁶ Indeed, Stokes is on record as saying, 'I don't like firing people. I hate it. I didn't agree to the merger of the British motor industry to get rid of people. I thought we were going to create jobs.'¹²⁷ Ryder's resistance to redundancies was also, however, in line with the Labour party's policy of employment preservation, and a source of criticism from both the House of Commons Trade and Industry Subcommittee and John Barber, who as finance director of the firm was perhaps less sympathetic to its social responsibilities. Barber argued that Ryder 'knew what the Government and particularly Tony Benn wanted ... a big nationalised volume car company ... and that's what he gave them on paper.'¹²⁸ Whisler has found no evidence of the conspiracy implied by Barber between Benn, then Secretary of State for Industry, and the BL trade union committee, but writes that Benn influenced the manner of the company's rescue, rejecting any radical restructuring and attempting to forge a compromise which had the effect of reinforcing the company's existing 'institutional and evolutionary path'.¹²⁹

The subsequent appointment in October 1977 of Michael Edwardes as chairman and managing director of the nationalised British Leyland has been portrayed erroneously by a number of former Bathgate workers as part of the Thatcher government's attack on nationalised industry. Andy Hunter, for example, describes Edwardes as 'Maggie Thatcher's puppet, so he was carrying out the Conservative party role for the management of British Leyland.'¹³⁰ This is no doubt a result of conflating the impact of Edwardes with that of his deputy, Ian McGregor, who was appointed by Thatcher to chair first British Steel and then the National Coal Board, although Edwardes did have an important role in the eventual closure of Bathgate. His appointment, by

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.100.

¹²⁶ Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, p.174; Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.111.

¹²⁷ Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, p.174.

¹²⁸ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.119.

¹²⁹ Ibid, pp.119-121.

¹³⁰ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

Labour Prime Minister Jim Callaghan, did, however, mark the beginning of a pronounced shift in the way in which the company was run, which would have significant implications for the Bathgate plant and its workers, and arouse suspicion particularly amongst its shop stewards. Edwardes, described by Church as ‘a self-styled apostle of free enterprise’, felt that the objectives of the Ryder Plan were ‘unachievable’, and argued that the only way to save the company was ‘to restructure, de-man, modernise, and drive through the product plan’ with minimal government intervention.¹³¹ At Bathgate, however, the B Block extension was underway as part of a major programme of investment which sought to modernise the plant and its equipment, and, in Edwardes’ words, ‘the workforce still seemed to be suffering from a euphoric post-Ryder sense of security.’¹³² This is certainly reflected in the experience of Tommy Morrison, a TGWU shop steward who was one of two spokesmen from the Bathgate JSSC who would attend regular meetings of the British Leyland Trade Union Committee, usually held in Birmingham, Coventry, or at Leyland in Lancashire. He recalls one such meeting which he attended around this time, and his description of this meeting and the way in which his news from Birmingham was received at Bathgate is worth including at length. Although Morrison does not give a date for this meeting, it can be inferred from his reference to the B Block extension and from the nature of the news imparted that it was after Edwardes’ appointment, but prior to his first visit to the plant in the spring of 1978.

I went down to a meeting in Birmingham and there was the top people all there from the management side, and that particular day I was just there myself, and when I went down to Birmingham on the train and that, all these top people who were there who I’d never seen before, and what they were there for, they were gonnae gie a break down of how British Leyland was working, Truck and Bus, and the changes that was gonnae be made. Now when I went down to that meeting I never knew anything was gonnae take place, and I’m sure the people in Bathgate never knew that, and I’m sure the people in Albion didnae know that, but the guys down south seemed to have an idea. Anyway I was sitting and taking notes, and they gave a breakdown of Guy Motors there closing, and Leyland Lancs and this

¹³¹Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.101; M. Edwardes, *Back from the Brink: An Apocalyptic Experience* (London: Collins, 1981) pp.39, 42.

¹³²Edwardes, *Back from the Brink*, p.76.

and that, different things and different places down there. I wasnae interested in that as such, and then they come to Bathgate, and Scotland, he says, and two places Albion and Bathgate, he says. Now, Bathgate is what's, and I'll never forget it, it's a possibility it'd be suicide to try and close Bathgate in a one-r. [Unclear] Closing it. He says, it could be achieved in a three to four year period. Full stop. Full stop, and he went on to the next plant. But because that was interesting to me as Bathgate I took note of that. Long story short, I come back from Birmingham and I was really sick because of what I'd heard. I come back, and I'll give you the reasons for it, I come back tae, and here, lo and behold, I didnae know there was a mass meeting getting held ... So I went over to the meeting, and as I walked in I heard somebody fae A Block say there's Tommy Morrison back the now, he'll mebbe tell you something important. And it caught me cold, know what I mean. And Swanny [JSSC convenor Jim Swan] was on the thing at the time talking, and he had said ehm, have you anything to report? I says to him no, I think I've got to report to youse first before I go to the body of the hall, and he looked at me, and no he says, we'll gie you back in to give a report later on, he says, he wants to see the Joint Shop Stewards first, and I just sat doon. So anyway they called a Joint Shop Stewards' meeting because you usually do after a big meeting, and I went over and at that time we were talking about building a new G Block, the new G Block was getting built at Bathgate, this was prior to me going down there, the G Block was getting started and they'd already started it, they'd already started the throes of a new B Block extension, and they'd already started, once they'd finished that they were going to start making inroads so they could build an engine line, so to build deep in the founds and build a thingmy. So that was already working on it before I came back. Years before, a year before you understand? So when I come back and I says I've bad news for you boys, and they look and say what you on about, and I says I think Bathgate's gonnae close. Of course I won't use the swearly words [unclear]. Anyway, long story short, he says well I've heard everything noo, and he says you representing us, he says, and you come back with a story like that. And my name was like muck, really muck in the eyes of the Joint Shop Stewards, I was the laughing

stock of the place because it fed back into the shop flayers, that Bathgate was closing, and this was a year before it happened, do you see where I'm coming from, so it looked bad on ma part. I think I was the most hated person, for being a goody goody guy. I said look, can I say something to you – do you think I would come back and tell a lie about something that I'd heard with my own two ears, and noted it down?¹³³

The degree of shopfloor hostility which greeted Morrison's news was reflected in the reaction of the plant's General Manager.

“Who the effing hell do you think you are, causing problems in a plant that I know for a fact it's here to stay and we're building a G Block and we're building this and we're building that?” I said I'm sorry, I know you're the top person here, I'm sorry, I can only tell what was stated.¹³⁴

This is a clear demonstration of the confidence in the plant's future which the investment programme had engendered in workforce and management alike; a confidence which, in Edwardes' analysis, contributed to a prolonged, unofficial strike in 1978 by 1,800 machinists at the plant who felt that their pay should increase in line with the greater skill required to operate the new, computerised machinery introduced under the modernisation programme, and a related increase in productivity.¹³⁵ Management responded by threatening to cut future investment at Bathgate and an agreement was eventually reached, but there is a sense in the oral history testimony of former shop stewards, including Morrison, that such strike activity confirmed Edwardes in his belief that Bathgate, a plant he describes as 'regularly under review', should close. In early 1978, Edwardes had visited the plant to meet its management and senior shop stewards. Tommy Morrison attended the meeting.

So then we had a man coming down started looking at the plant, a Mr Edwardes ... He come doon and had a meeting with the Joint Shop Stewards, and he had a couple of sidekicks with him, and he went on, he was quite this and that about the

¹³³ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Edwardes, *Back from the Brink*, pp.75-77; 'Bathgate strikes a sour note', *FT*, 25th September 1978, and 'Bathgate: A dispute in danger of being forgotten', *FT*, 30th August 1978.

way Bathgate had been operating, all doing this and all doing that. Next thing phone goes, personnel manager, and that's him saying heat treatment had walked out in B Block. Oh god, I says, oh no, he says this is typical of Bathgate, couldnae depend on you. He really lambasted us as union men, and a lot of time we were tied, us hands were tied, and that was the turning point. That's when I put two and two together.¹³⁶

Bill Raine's responsibilities did not include negotiating with the shop stewards, but his testimony similarly presents Edwardes' visit to the plant and his experience of its industrial relations as a decisive moment. It should be noted, however, that the attempted physical attack on Edwardes which he describes does not feature in the testimony of any other former worker or, indeed, in Edwardes' memoirs, and is perhaps a reflection of the strength of Raine's own robust anti-trade union views.

So Michael Edwardes came up one day, they were on strike, and I saw them trying to drag him out of his car by his neck. These people were standing at the gate and tried to get him – and one bloke says something and I said look pal, you've made the biggest mistake of your lives. When that guy gets back to the Midlands the first thing he'll do is start people looking somewhere for a site for this factory, and you'll all be out of work. And I wasn't very far short.¹³⁷

Contemporary press coverage of the 1978 machinists' strike also emphasised the extent to which 'a dramatic worsening in labour relations' undermined the position of the plant, particularly at a time when Leyland Vehicles, as the Truck and Bus Division had been renamed, was experiencing a fall in its share of the UK commercial vehicle market.¹³⁸ The plant's industrial relations and the nature of its shop stewards' movement will be central to Chapters Four and Five, but here it should be noted that, in spite of this assessment, it was generally accepted even in the press that Bathgate's shop stewards under the leadership of convenor Jim Swan were notably moderate. At the time of the 1982 campaign against closure, for example, the *Financial Times* wrote that 'although they are a determined strike force, the Bathgate workers have a

¹³⁶ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

¹³⁷ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

¹³⁸ 'Bathgate: A dispute in danger of being forgotten', *FT*, 30th August 1978.

record for moderation’, while Swan’s response to the end of the 1978 strike – telling his workforce to ‘prove that we can perform to capacity levels and that we can be stable’ – does little to support Edwardes’ contention that at Bathgate, as elsewhere in BL, ‘the militants were firmly in charge’.¹³⁹

Church is among those who have highlighted Edwardes’ confrontational approach to the trade unions, and the extent to which this was shaped by his determination to end the overmanning which Ryder had uncovered but done little to reduce, and the need to close inefficient plants or those operating with excess capacity that this would seemingly inevitably entail.¹⁴⁰ This had particular implications for the regional policy plants, highlighting the conflict that existed between the economic and social aims of a policy which created over 50,000 new jobs and helped to promote prosperity and improve living standards in the Development Areas, but, in doing so, had arguably increased costs and contributed to the industry’s over-capacity.¹⁴¹ Edwardes’ approach to the regional policy plants demonstrates the extent to which he eschewed any consideration of a social purpose for the motor industry, and for the ‘national champion’ of BL, focusing instead on the strategic pursuit of economic goals. By accessing and reinforcing declinist tropes which focused on the poor performance of British motor manufacturing as a result of the inefficiency and misbehaviour of its workers, Edwardes was able to ease away from the social responsibilities which had concerned Stokes and Ryder, and focus instead on the economic priorities of shutting plants and firing workers in order to achieve greater profitability. In May 1978, BL’s regional policy plant at Speke on Merseyside became the first to be closed under Edwardes’ leadership. Characterised at the time as a response to the strength of the plant’s trade union movement and its rejection, following a four month strike, of management attempts to increase productivity, this closure can more accurately be seen as a result of poor sales of the Triumph TR7 produced at the plant, and resulting low capacity utilisation.¹⁴² Edwardes describes Speke as ‘one of those misguided efforts by successive governments to impose their will on the motor industry’ which had, like its counterpart at Bathgate, been under periodic review and, by nature of its location and the costs associated with transporting components from Birmingham

¹³⁹ Edwardes, *Back from the Brink*, p.78.

¹⁴⁰ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.103-104.

¹⁴¹ Dunnett, *The Decline of the British Motor Industry*, p.81.

¹⁴² Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.146; Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, p.220.

and Coventry, was considered ‘a prime candidate for closure’.¹⁴³ Furthermore, the decision to close Speke and move production of the TR7 to the main Triumph plant at Canley in Coventry reflected Edwardes’ plan for the wider corporate restructuring of BL, which had already seen the firm split into five divisions – Austin Morris, Jaguar Rover Triumph, BL Components, Leyland Vehicles, and SP Industries – in the hope of increasing loyalty amongst workers by tapping into traditional marque and factory identities, and which would lead to the decentralisation of production.¹⁴⁴ This was to have serious implications for Bathgate, particularly as Leyland Vehicles was continuing to experience problems and, in Edwardes’ words, ‘overmanning was still rife’.¹⁴⁵ In the first half of 1981, for example, it lost £47 million, and the domestic market for trucks had fallen from 80,000 in 1979, to just 40,000.¹⁴⁶ Management responded to this by announcing a survival plan which would see production concentrated in fewer factories, with the loss of 4,000 jobs. As part of these plans, production of the light ‘biscuit-tin’ trucks built at Bathgate would move to Leyland in Lancashire, while Bathgate itself would concentrate on what was described in the *FT* as a ‘geriatric’ range of truck engines, and the large, heavy trucks previously built at Guy Motors in Wolverhampton, which was to close.¹⁴⁷

These trucks, the Landtrain and Landmaster, were produced in much smaller numbers than the lighter weight models, and were mainly for the export market, contributing to fears amongst Bathgate’s shop stewards that not only would production be scaled down, but the plant would be reduced to manufacturing trucks in knock-down form only.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, these plans also included the sell-off of the ostensibly successful tractor plant with 1,360 redundancies. Andy Hunter was a member of the JSSC and remembers hearing the news that the tractor plant would close.

To be honest with you, my thinking was oh Michael Edwardes is in Scotland, so he’s obviously, I mean we were the only Scots, us and Albion, and I thought he was just basically up to Bathgate to pop in and tell us how well we were doing or whatever it may be, the tractor sales were up through the roof and things were

¹⁴³ Edwardes, *Back from the Brink*, pp.69-70.

¹⁴⁴ Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, pp.139-140; Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, p.218.

¹⁴⁵ Edwardes, *Back from the Brink*, p.54.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.159.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Bathgate’s credibility problem’, *FT*, 15th February 1982.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

going well. I know on the truck side of it it could have been a lot better at that point in time, we were still plodding away though and I thought he was maybe up to give us a wee pat on the back for the tractor working as well as it was. And ehm, it was just a total bombshell when we sat down, I mean I can remember it as if it's just now, I was sitting, sort ae head management were in the front row, trade unions were in the second row and Michael Edwardes was just sitting across there, and it was just a total bombshell to us all, we couldnae believe it and we knew, I mean everybody just turned and looked at one another, we knew that that was the, the writing was on the wall if they were getting rid of a tractor that was so good, in the industry, the farming industry it was proving itself so good, and to take that away basically was a disaster. An absolute disaster.¹⁴⁹

This triggered the first campaign against closure, discussed in Chapter One, which sought to stop the tractor plant sell-off. It is notable, however, that Jim Swan, who led the campaign and attracted considerable media attention at the time, has stated in his oral history testimony that the sell-off provided something of a distraction, and that if the shop stewards had instead given their attention to blocking the move of the light trucks to Leyland, then the plant may have been in a better position.

They were gonnae move the trucks that we were building, oor range of medium light trucks, down to Leyland, and Guy Motors, big heavy trucks, were coming to Bathgate, eh, and the big Guy Motors trucks were being sell't to Nigeria, which was the only market place they had, and we, the only thing I think we might have done, is when we had the management on the ropes, when we were occupying the factory, and they said is there anything we could dae, and we played the naw, you've got to give the tractor back, but we thought, I think we all thought they were negotiating with us at that point, because the idea was tae, tae look at the tractor, and I know the tractor guys wanted their redundancy and we were losing that bit of the fight, but if we'd saved the range of trucks it would have gave us a better fighting chance. And it might have been right at that time to trade, keeping the trucks for stopping the strike on the tractors, eh, but we'll never know if that

¹⁴⁹ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

would have been the right thing or no. We were disciplined and we stood our ground on principle at that time.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, and as Andy Hunter's testimony suggests, it was recognised at the time of the tractor sell-off that the company's commitment to Bathgate and therefore the long-term future of the plant, was in doubt. The *FT* reported that 'British Leyland's assurances about the future of its Scottish operations are treated with scepticism', and there are suggestions in the oral history of the extent to which the relationship between workforce and management had been damaged by the way the plant had been treated under Edwardes. Harry McKay, for example, has stated that Edwardes 'was wearing these type of glasses when he came to Bathgate, he only saw the bad things', but perhaps most telling is Tommy Morrison's description of the response he received from his colleagues and fellow shop stewards when it emerged that the plant would close, and that he had therefore given an accurate report from the meeting he had attended in Birmingham shortly after Edwardes' appointment.

Later on when the members said to me 'why did you think they were going to close it Tommy when you found out they were spending hundreds, no just thousands, hundreds of thousands pounds building a new B Block extension, building a new track already, building big machinery for this new G Block. Big crans was going in in CKD, spent all that money in the eighteen month prior to it shutting. He says, how did you still think that, or why would they dae that? Well, can I say something to you. If one of the most successful plants in British Leyland Truck and Bus was Bathgate, it was proved, it's in the figures money-wise, how could they doon there, Edwardes and his crowd and his cronies, how could they turn round and say we're gonnae close Bathgate? The first thing people look at, well I would, they want to see what the profit is here. But if you make a place top heavy, and you put hundreds of thousands of pounds into stuff, machinery and that, it's never gonnae be used, it's still going against the plant. And I says, they say wait a minute they've made four million pound here but wait a minute there's a million and a half going to come off for this, and the wage and that, oh, I can see where you're coming from.' [Interviewer – so you think it was as deliberate as

¹⁵⁰ WEA, interview with Jim Swan.

that, putting that investment in?] I could put ma life on it, I know how businesses work. I'm no naive or stupid when it comes to that.¹⁵¹

While there is little evidence to support these allegations, they do suggest that the way in which the closure of the plant was handled demonstrated to its workers the company's longer-term lack of commitment to its branch plant operation at Bathgate, and the extent to which the BMC's initial reluctance to move to the Development Districts was reflected in BL's apparent determination to close what was one of its most modern facilities. Taken with the earlier closure of Triumph's factory at Speke, this indicates the vulnerability of the regional policy plants particularly in the context of the economic challenges and structural changes experienced in the wider British motor industry during the 1970s especially.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the position of the BMC and BL at Bathgate in the context of the profound changes which took place in the structure of British motor manufacturing and its supply chain during the 1960s and 1970s in particular, and has examined the complexity of the problems facing a plant set up as a result of a regional policy which was shaped more by its social than economic concerns. The company's reluctance to move to the Development Districts, and the difficulties associated with sourcing supplies of parts from within Scotland, resulted from the longer-term growth and concentration of the industry and its component making sector in the Midlands, and contributed to the production difficulties seen at the plant. It is important to note, however, that supply chain problems were not unique to the regional policy branch plants, and that in this respect Bathgate experienced in exaggerated form the difficulties of the industry more broadly, accentuated by the shorter runs associated with truck production, and the geographical distance between the plant and its suppliers. Moreover, the evidence suggests that strikes, go-slows and other forms of worker protest had little bearing on the performance of Bathgate, and that this was affected more by weaknesses in the design and engineering of its products. This was a further reflection of the challenges facing British motor manufacturers, particularly as imports increased markedly during the 1970s. The plant's supply chain difficulties and design

¹⁵¹ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

problems were, however, deemphasised by Michael Edwardes, who, as Chairman of BL, moved away from the concern with the social purpose of motor manufacturing which had been stressed by his predecessor Lord Stokes, and instead reasserted the fundamental privileging of economic priorities, with serious implications for the company's regional policy plants. In this context, it was easier politically for Edwardes to cite labour difficulties as the key factor in the diminution of BL's operations at Bathgate and the plant's eventual closure, drawing on and reinforcing the dominant declinist narrative of poor production and labour culpability. However, the causes of the strike action which did take place at Bathgate, as well as the design problems experienced at the plant, illuminate in a variety of ways the character of branch plant production, and will be explored further in Part Two.

Part Two

Working at Bathgate

Chapter Three

Experiences of work

In 1969, a delegate to the STUC drew attention to the difference between the location of industry and ‘the location of the policy-makers in industry’ and, in describing the tendency for plants established as a result of regional policy to be run from company headquarters hundreds of miles further south, identified what would later become known in the historiography as ‘branch plant syndrome’. According to this delegate, Scotland would soon find itself in a situation in which its main exports were ‘whisky, footballers and brains’, as young people were pushed out of the country due to a lack of opportunity, and forced to move to the south, and London especially, in order to find skilled work.¹ The STUC had frequently stressed the point that Scotland’s economic development was ‘not simply a question of more work and more jobs, but a question of the right kind of work, the right kind of economic development’,² and had hoped that the growth of a cohesive Scottish motor industry around Bathgate, Linwood and the steelworks at Ravenscraig would provide stable employment in modern industries which would help to diversify the Scottish industrial base. The perceived centrality of the motor industry to contemporary ideas about the growth of affluence, and its expected role in driving economic growth in Scotland, was underlined in a 1960 submission by the SCDI to the Secretary of State for Scotland. This stressed that the establishment of motor car manufacturing in Scotland must remain a primary objective if Scotland was to ‘have a foothold in the future prosperity of the UK’.³ As discussed in Chapter Two, however, ancillary industries proved reluctant to follow the BMC and Rootes to Scotland and, in spite of attempts to persuade either Ford or Vauxhall to build their mooted regional policy plants in Scotland, the eventual decision of both firms to move instead to Merseyside led to a recognition within the STUC that, by the late 1960s, Scotland was ‘unlikely to have an industry complete in itself in this field’.⁴

¹ STUC, GCAL, Seventy-Fourth Annual Report of the STUC, 1969, p.279.

² Ibid, p.267.

³ NAS, Edinburgh, SEP4-1658, Scottish Development Department, Specific Industries – Motorengineering – General, The Scottish Council (Development And Industry), submission to the Secretary of State for Scotland on the motor car industry In Scotland, 25th January 1960.

⁴ STUC archive, GCAL; Seventy-First Annual Report of the STUC, 1968, p.14.

Moreover, it is arguable that the premium placed by both the STUC and the SCDI on motor industry development had been predicated on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of motor industry employment, which although relatively well-paid, was monotonous and consequently potentially problematic.⁵ These dilemmas were explored in John Goldthorpe's influential *Affluent Worker* studies, which demonstrated the extent to which the experiences and attitudes of such workers represented the impact of deskilling on industrial workforces as much as the modernisation and increasing prosperity of manufacturing industry. Goldthorpe and his colleagues analysed the industrial, social, and political attitudes and behaviour of workers at Vauxhall Motors and two other major employers in the prosperous and expanding town of Luton and found that, in order to achieve the improved material conditions which had previously been taken as a sign of working class 'embourgeoisement', Luton's affluent workers were moving away from work of a solidaristic orientation, containing intrinsic benefits such as a degree of autonomy and opportunity, in favour of positions with an instrumental orientation, providing greater extrinsic rewards in terms of better pay and improved job security. In other words, they were coming to see work as a 'means to an extrinsic end', rather than an integral part of their own lifestyle and identity.⁶ Subsequent studies of motor industry industrial relations, such as Huw Beynon's *Working for Ford*, similarly describe the monotony associated with the overwhelmingly semi-skilled nature of motor assembly work and the extent to which relatively high wages were seen as a 'pay off' for this loss of autonomy. Furthermore, the contested nature of assembly production, and the ways in which workers responded to the boredom of the assembly line by searching for autonomy and creativity and by seeking to control their own time and effort in order to challenge the discipline of the line, became central to declinist analyses of motor industry production which linked the industrial relations of British car firms to their wider difficulties, and drew on contemporary press coverage of the role of supposedly militant shop stewards in propagating unofficial strike action.⁷

This has significant implications for the understanding of the branch plant economy, and indicates the paradoxical position of the affluent motor worker in Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the subsequent historical literature. The development of motor manufacturing, as

⁵ Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, p.28.

⁶ J. H. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer and J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) p.174.

⁷ Murden, 'Demands for Fair Wages', p.8.

the largest of the new industries, was seen as crucial to future national prosperity, and yet the automated and overwhelmingly semi-skilled nature of the work provided by a Scottish motor industry which remained limited to the branch plants established at Bathgate and Linwood contributed to the contemporary concerns of the STUC and has since been taken as an indication of Scottish industrial decline. William Knox and Ewen Cameron are among those who have drawn a link between the advent of the branch plant and the deskilling of the Scottish workforce, with Knox characterising the new factories as ‘little better than low level assembly production units’.⁸ These analyses generally include the developments at Bathgate and Linwood as part of a broader narrative covering the rise of inward investment particularly from the US electronics firms which established factories in Scotland during the 1950s and 1960s, but it is important to consider the extent to which the ‘branch plant syndrome’ apparently affecting Scotland’s motor plants was in fact a reflection of the nature of motor industry work, rather than a result of their position within larger corporate structures in which design and investment decisions were reached at distant headquarters. This chapter will therefore begin with an examination of the type of work available at Bathgate, and the extent to which this was in line with industry-wide trends in terms of skill, training, and health and safety, before moving on to consider how far the behaviour of the Bathgate workforce reflected that of workers elsewhere in the motor industry.

‘The right kind of work’? Skill, training, and apprenticeships

In their seminal study of *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry*, Turner, Clack, and Roberts dismiss the ‘green labour’ theory of strike causation in car firms, according to which strike-proneness is attributed to ‘an exceptional influx of workers without experience of industrial work routines or of proper union procedures.’⁹ They find no evidence of either any connection between the growth of motor industry employment and its incidence of strike action, or of higher levels of strike-propensity amongst those supposedly ‘green’, or inexperienced, workforces employed by the motor industry plants established in Scotland and on Merseyside. Indeed, they suggest that the very opposite could be true, and that it may have been the previous industrial and trade union experience of these workers which lay behind some of the particular difficulties

⁸ Knox, *Industrial Nation*, p.256; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.256.

⁹ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.329.

associated with the opening of new plants.¹⁰ Implicit in this analysis is the idea that the work processes and industrial culture of motor manufacturing required different skills and approaches than work in the traditional heavy industries; an idea which was central to contemporary discussions of some of the problems facing production at Bathgate in its first few years especially. In 1964, for example, a Ministry of Labour (MoL) report on the BMC's 'labour problems in the development districts' commented on what it described as 'disappointing' production efficiency at the plant, which it estimated to be around 70 per cent of the Midland level, and which it perceived to be a product of the West Lothian area's coal and shale mining tradition.¹¹ The report stated that:

The vast majority of those recruited had no experience of modern mass production factory conditions. Many difficulties have arisen because of lack of familiarity with the normal customs of factory life, and there has been reluctance to accept disciplinary codes considered normal in e.g. Midlands.¹²

Similar ideas marked the description of the BMC's progress at Bathgate in the 1966 *Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, which described the local labour force as 'untrained in the particular techniques of the motor industry', and commented on the perceived difficulties associated with the mining background of many of the plant's workers.

The company has pursued a policy of seeking its labour force mainly and in the first instance from the local Labour Exchanges, thus a not inconsiderable proportion of its employees are redundant coal-miners, traditionally one of the least adaptable sections of the labour force.¹³

The pervasiveness of these ideas and the extent to which they have shaped retrospective perceptions of the Bathgate plant, are indicated in the following passage from the recent memoirs of local Labour MP Tam Dalyell, who suggests that Bathgate's efficiency problems were a product of a fundamental difference in the industrial cultures of Scotland and the Midlands.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp.174-176.

¹¹ NA, LAB 10/2261 – Ministry of Labour, Motor Industry, British Motor Corporation Ltd., Labour problems in Development Districts, 1964.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, chapter 5, paragraph 27.

The Scots had a deserved international reputation as engineers but high-speed repetitive work on assembly lines was in the blood of those brought up in Coventry and Birmingham but it was not in the blood of the ex-coalminers and ex-shale miners in their late thirties, forties or fifties. Through no fault of their own, many Scots tended to be less productive than their English counterparts.¹⁴

It is certainly arguable that the cultural inheritance of coal and shale mining – industries in which the worker was able to retain significantly more control over the work process than was the case in motor manufacturing – influenced the behaviour of the Bathgate workforce and necessitated additional training effort in order to encourage greater output. The evidence suggests, however, that the training provided by the company at Bathgate was limited and, in this context, the low level of production efficiency experienced at the plant, rather than a sign of inherent cultural difference, can be seen instead as a symptom of a workforce expected to learn new skills and adapt to new working practices ‘on-the-job’ in a factory which, in its early years, was still being built around them.

The 1964 MoL report accused BMC management of ‘impatience’ with its new labour force, and trade union delegates to the 1966 inquiry into production at the plant, carried out by the Motor Industry Joint Labour Council (MIJLC) under the industrial conciliator Sir Jack Scamp and referred to hereafter as the Scamp inquiry, were similarly critical of the company’s treatment of what was termed the ‘green labour’ it employed at Bathgate.¹⁵ The 1964 report, which stated that the amount of training required at the plant was ‘far greater than is customary in the Midland factories’, condemned what it described as the ‘hand-to-mouth variety’ of what little was provided by management slow to recognise and respond to the unfamiliarity of the labour force with motor industry work.¹⁶ The company had arranged for a number of supervisory workers from the Midlands to move temporarily to Bathgate in order to oversee initial training, with some moving permanently, but the extent to which workers were able to benefit from this expertise seems to have varied across the plant. Malcolm Black describes his, very positive, experience.

¹⁴ Dalyell, *The Importance of Being Awkward*, Kindle edition, loc. 3,935.

¹⁵ MRC, MSS.178/15, Papers of Sir Jack Scamp, BMC [British Motor Corporation] (Scotland) Limited, Bathgate: cause and extent of lay-offs (inquiry held in April 1966), transcript of proceedings of court of inquiry.

¹⁶ NA, LAB 10/2261 – Ministry of Labour, Motor Industry, British Motor Corporation Ltd., Labour problems in Development Districts, 1964.

There was men up from Longbridge. They showed you what to do... That was my training. Arthur was his name. He was a proper gentleman... We got on great. Of course, he'd been 30 odd years at the job. He knew the machines backwards.¹⁷

Other workers, such as Harry McKay, who worked in the pre-pack section and had previously been an apprentice moulder in an iron foundry, have reported far more basic levels of training. McKay remembers receiving 'none whatsoever. You just had to hit it running. Hit it running.'¹⁸ As this implies, the factory's production demands required that its new workers develop the skills necessary for motor industry work extremely quickly; something which is reflected in the testimony of Tommy Morrison, another former foundry worker whose only training for his new role in the cab trim section at the BMC was very much on-the-job.

You picked it up yourself. [The foreman] come along with all these blueprints and all these papers and that, and he would say right, ehm, I'm putting on the big screens, you know, and I mean it just took me hours to even put this rubber round about, cos it was just springing off, and I mean, I mean really it was terrible to start with, you said how am I gonnae manage this. And then he came along with a big glass to put in to it, and then you've got to work it to put the glass in, and then you've got to put stuff in round about to seal it, and then you've got to come along and then put something like this round about it again. And it was really, it was really – and then, see before we were finished, we were just flinging them in. It was just too easy. It was surprising just how much, and it was very very good, and I'll never forget the amount of people who started in the trimming, and other places – I'm not just talking about cab trimming at the time – how they adapted to that, and how you could put that, how you could put these things together, you know. You knew all the quick ways to do it but at the self same time you had inspectors there to make sure that it was done right, it wasnae just shoddy work. It had to be done correct, right so.¹⁹

¹⁷ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.27.

¹⁸ WEA, interview with Harry and Cecilia McKay.

¹⁹ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

While time restrictions and production pressures meant that assembly workers such as McKay and Morrison had to learn new skills as they worked, the training available even to workers in some of the plant's more skilled sections could be limited by the factory's piecemeal, and apparently somewhat ad hoc, development. John Cooper, for example, had previously been an apprentice baker, and in 1962 became one of the first production workers to be taken on at the plant. The training he received, as one of the first four workers in the engine assembly section, was restricted by the facilities available at that time.

There were no engine assembly, there were only holes in the ground. And all we did for the first five or six weeks was, ehm, six cylinder or a four cylinder engine, stripped it down, built it back up again, stripped it down, built it back up - every day we did the same thing, stripping it down til you could, you knew every part of that engine, fae the shells on the crankshaft to the tappits or whatever, you knew every, on both of them.²⁰

While this approach allowed Cooper and his colleagues the time necessary to develop their knowledge of the engines they would be building, it is perhaps indicative of the extent to which workers' first experiences of the plant were shaped by the physical 'newness' of the factory building, as well as an apparent lack of understanding on the part of company management of the corresponding newness of motor industry work and working practices to the majority of its Bathgate workforce.

This essentially declinist narrative of untrained, demoralised and therefore unproductive labour does, however, require qualification. There is, for example, some resentment among former workers, including Tommy Morrison, of the idea that the plant was inefficient and its workforce poorly trained.

Dinnae blame the workers of Bathgate. They were good workers. They adapted well to factory work. You get the "Aw they did nothin' up there". We couldnae have produced what we produced if naebody was workin'. So that's a fallacy that.

²⁰ WEA, interview with John Cooper.

There were some jobs better than others, some jobs cleaner than others, but overall the people that was there, whatever they got paid, they worked for that.²¹

John Weir, who started work at the plant as an engineering apprentice, similarly refutes these negative insinuations about the plant's productivity.

We made some good stuff here. We made some very good stuff. But with a big place like that you always had your knockers, there were always people that run us down and gave us a hard time, but we did a good job basically as far as I can see.²²

Furthermore, 'on-the-job' training was common throughout the motor industry, and it should be emphasised that such training was generally regarded as perfectly adequate for the overwhelmingly semi-skilled work involved. In his 1973 study *Working for Ford*, Huw Beynon cites Henry Ford himself, who estimated in 1925 that 43 per cent of his workers required only one day's training, and quotes a conversation with a worker at Ford's regional policy plant at Halewood on Merseyside where the attitude to training seems remarkably similar to that experienced at Bathgate.

'Oh, they've got a *great* training programme here. A great training programme. I can't remember how long it is...two days I think. I'm not sure though. I didn't get any training at all when I came here, but I think they get two days now.'

What does this training involve? Do men still go straight on to the line?

'Oh yes, they go straight on the line alright. You know the sort of thing 'this is Fred, he'll show you what to do.' 'Hello' says Fred 'you stick this in here and that in there - I'm not paid for this y'know'. You either do it or you don't.'²³

Beynon goes on to write that 'the automobile industry is the domain of the new 'semi-skilled' worker. Less than one worker in a hundred in a car plant can call himself skilled in any real sense.'²⁴ Table 3:1 gives the skills classifications of the 5,009 workers employed at BMC

²¹ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

²² WEA, interview with John Weir.

²³ H. Beynon, *Working for Ford* (London: Allen Lane, 1973) p.116.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.116.

Bathgate at the time of the 1966 Scamp inquiry, and demonstrates the extent to which its workforce was dominated by semi-skilled labour.

Table 3:1 – Classification of workers at BMC Bathgate, 1966

| Skill Classification | Number of workers |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Staff | 902 |
| Skilled | 688 |
| Semi-skilled | 2832 |
| Unskilled | 360 |
| Youths and females | 188 |
| Apprentices | |
| Craft | 17 |
| Technical | 6 |
| Commercial | 16 |
| Total | 5009 |

(Source: MRC, MSS.178/15, dossier of information submitted to inquiry.)

It is clear from this information that a majority of the workforce, approximately 57 per cent, was classed as semi-skilled, and it is likely that this included most, if not all, of the assembly workers employed on the plant's truck, tractor, and cab production lines. Beynon's 1/100 skilled worker proportion appears in this light an exaggeration, although the extent and definition of skilled labour at Bathgate is ambiguous. Heavy trucks were traditionally built in smaller numbers and to more bespoke specifications than cars, although it should be noted that Bathgate's production was geared towards lighter trucks and that the plant was consequently designed as one of the first truck plants which would utilise mass assembly processes. Furthermore, and in light of the emphasis placed by branch plant analyses on the link between branch plant employment and the deskilling of industrial workforces, it is important to note that the technological changes which resulted from the rundown of Scotland's heavy industries and their replacement by the new

forms of manufacturing could create new skills as well as removing the need for more traditional, craft-based skills. William Knox is among those who have described the loss of skill often associated with branch plant work, but he also recognises that ‘the impact of technological change can be contradictory and does not necessarily presume an irresistible move in the direction of a deskilled proletariat.’²⁵ Certainly in the case of Bathgate, there is evidence that a significant number of workers were able to benefit from the opportunities afforded to them by work in a large, modern plant run by a nationally important employer. The company was, for example, keen to stress how few of its managerial and supervisory staff were brought up to Bathgate from its factories in England. A progress report published in the *Glasgow Herald* in 1962 claimed that only the ‘merest percentage’ of the 2,300 workers then employed at the plant had moved up from the Midlands, while around 40 local men had already been promoted from the shopfloor into ‘positions of responsibility’.²⁶ Moreover, the plant’s apprenticeship programme, which began in 1964 and was run in conjunction with the new Bathgate College, seems to have had a significant impact in terms of bringing new skills to the area and providing new opportunities for its young people.

This programme provided craft, technical, and commercial apprenticeships for male school leavers, and, reflecting the gendered division of labour within the factory, trained female school leavers in clerical and secretarial skills. There is no record of the number of women employed at the plant, but at the time of the Scamp inquiry, 188 of a total workforce of 5,009 fell into the category of ‘youths and females’.²⁷ Andy Hunter remembers working with a woman known as ‘Wee Totes’, whose job was to clean out the trucks once they left the line and prepare them for delivery, but claims that there were no women working on the assembly lines themselves.²⁸ It is likely that Wee Totes was one of only a handful of female production workers employed in a small number of apparently gender specific areas. Harry McKay’s first job was ‘to look after the girls in the pre-pack section’ and to stop any unauthorised men from speaking to them, but it seems likely that the majority of women employed in the plant worked in clerical roles in its various offices, some of which were located outside the factory itself.²⁹ Christine McAndrew

²⁵ Knox, ‘Class, Work and Trade Unionism in Scotland’, pp.119-120.

²⁶ ‘A Year Of Progress By BMC – Lesson for Scotland at the Bathgate Plant’, *Glasgow Herald*, 5th October 1962.

²⁷ MRC, MSS.178/15, dossier of information submitted to inquiry.

²⁸ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

²⁹ WEA, interview with Harry and Cecilia McKay.

moved to Bathgate in 1961 when her husband Robert got a job in the plant as a millwright in the maintenance department, and started working there herself shortly afterwards. She describes the short time she spent in the buying office, and her reason for leaving.

I got a job with the BMC in the buying department, and I was there for about a year and a half, ehm – not actually working in the factory ‘cos our office was in, eh, sort of prefabricated buildings outside the factory gates, and ehm, worked there for about a year and a half I think I worked there didn’t I? And then family came along, and in those days you had to leave your job, and you didnae get it back [laughter]. So, changed days.³⁰

Joyce Brogan started work at the age of 15 and had various jobs in the drawing and planning offices. The clerical and secretarial apprenticeship programme had not got underway when she first started work at the plant in 1967, but her description of the training she received subsequently demonstrates the extent to which the position of the plant’s women workers was at that time entrenched in the apprenticeship scheme.

When I arrived the first day, ehm, I was sent up to the print room and I wasn’t expecting that was gonnae be where I was gonnae be working. But it turned out I spent a year working in the print room, which involved printing drawings for the factory floor and, ehm, filing all the different, you know like draughtsman’s drawings and things, so I spent a year doing that ‘til I was 16. And then when I was 16 I got moved to the planning office which it was all a part of the same planning office, like the jig and tool, the print room, the estimating department, they were all under the same heading. So, I moved to the office when I was 16 as an office junior and then when I was 17 they opened up a training centre and we went twice a week and we were taught typing and shorthand, and we had a teacher called Mrs Bowman, that was for the girls and the apprentices had Mr Duncan, he was the training officer, and there was another man but I just can’t recall his name at the moment. And the boys all went to the apprentice training centre and the

³⁰ Robert and Christine McAndrew, interview with the author, 5th April 2011.

girls went to the typing and shorthand class, and that's where we were taught typing, touch typing and shorthand, and we all sat our exams.³¹

The craft and technical apprenticeship programme had begun slightly earlier, in 1964, and, like the training offered to some of the plant's first workers, suffered initially from a lack of suitable facilities. John Weir was among the first cohort of engineering apprentices, and describes the compound created for them in B Block.

As I say the factory wasnae really ready for us at the time, because it was very basic inside this big compound. We had a couple ae old production machines right, Ward 7DS capstan lines right, which really were production machines, and they were actually still doing production in our compound while we were serving time. Eventually they got the work rerouted, but to start with they were still making bits inside oor compound.³²

The company was working closely with the new Bathgate College to design and run the apprenticeships.

Again that wasn't really ready for us by the time we started. Because the apprenticeships started and the college was just opening. It wasn't really, 'cos there were, I mean there were wires hanging out ae sockets and there were earthen floors hadnae been laid wi' concrete and things, and machines hadnae been delivered.³³

While this does perhaps raise questions about the preparedness of the BMC and its attitude to its Bathgate branch plant, it also suggests the impact of the plant in terms of bringing new skills to the area and creating new training and employment opportunities for its young people. Weir is keen to emphasise the role played by the company in developing the college, donating equipment, tools, and even a Triumph Herald for the craft apprentices to learn on, and is also very complimentary about the apprentice instructor at the plant; an engineer with a background in shipbuilding, and 'letters after his name that you widnae believe'.³⁴ The size of the plant and the

³¹ WEA, interview with Joyce Brogan.

³² WEA, interview with John Weir.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

range of engineering trades it employed meant that apprentices were able to gain experience of a variety of different skills. Alan Marr joined the company as an apprentice at the age of 16. His first impressions of the plant were marked by its size and ‘all the different types of things they were doing’, and he remembers thinking ‘this will be a good grounding for me. If I can learn good skills here I’ll no have a problem later on in life.’³⁵ Graham Bennie similarly describes the plant as ‘one of the best places to get an apprenticeship’, as he was trained in all aspects of engineering work on equipment that was ‘second to none’.³⁶

Vince Moore started as a craft apprentice in 1979. He spent much of his time in a series of temporary cabins as the apprentice compound was still under construction in B Block, presumably by this time as part of a redevelopment or modernisation programme, but he too feels that he received an ‘excellent’ apprenticeship from instructors who were ‘so passionate about what they did’.³⁷ Furthermore, Moore remembers his intake of apprentices including, for the first time, a number of female technical apprentices. Among them was Elaine Harvey, the daughter of the convenor of the JSSC, Jim Swan, who describes the reaction of one of the apprentice trainers to the first intake of female apprentices.

My daughter followed me into the plant and so did my oldest son. My daughter was one of the first [female] engineering apprentices in British Leyland, in BMC, as far as we know, and her and her friend started at the same time. And eh, it was funny because one of the trainers said to me, eh, no long after she’d started, that he didn’t think that was a place for a woman to work, and I said well I disagree with you I think it’s time we recognised that if women could work in factories during the war then they can work in factories now, and I always remember him coming back to me after the first year and saying I’m gonnae apologise to you, she’s one of the best apprentices we’ve got, her and her colleague are very very good at what they do, and they’re very good at learning as well. And that was it,

³⁵ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

³⁶ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.32.

³⁷ WEA, interview with Vince Moore.

she went through most of her apprenticeship there at the BMC, and it was a good apprenticeship she got.³⁸

Moore describes the shopfloor response to the female apprentices, and similarly suggests that their presence in the plant contributed to the beginning of a change in attitudes towards the company's female workers by the late 1970s.

I think they could, I certainly, you know they were just kindae learning like the rest of us, and I think there was a notion, they got some kindae, but you know, some kindae looks when they were walking to, we used to have to pick up our overalls, you know they would clean them and you had to walk through the factory to this cleaning area to pick them up, and undoubtedly they got some kindae looks, no doubt some noises from the staff. But I think we got quite protective of them, there was that notion of, we were, you know, together, and pretty soon it was fine, I thought it was quite interesting actually you know, it prevented me being part of that whole thing and I think it was, it was certainly kindae, the whole kinda equalities thing, it was an early introduction to it, quite healthy I think in the long term.³⁹

Furthermore, it is notable that Elaine Harvey's own testimony is marked by her emphasis on the quality of her training rather than of her treatment by her colleagues.

The apprenticeship at Leyland was absolutely second to none, in my opinion. Having spoken to people who have completed apprenticeships with other companies, I don't think I've come across anyone tell me of a more comprehensive and thorough training programme than the one we experienced in our factory. When the plant closed, the Company made every effort to ensure that we could complete our apprenticeships. They found placements for us with various companies in and around central Scotland. I left Leyland in May 1985, 3 months short of the requirement for a 4 year apprenticeship, and so was fortunate

³⁸ WEA, interview with Jim Swan.

³⁹ WEA, interview with Vince Moore.

to be offered a position with Terex Equipment Ltd. in Newhouse, and was able to complete my qualification as a jig and tool design engineer.⁴⁰

This also highlights the extent to which the plant, in spite of the semi-skilled nature of much of the assembly work it provided and the historiographical link between this aspect of ‘branch plant syndrome’ and the deskilling of the Scottish industrial workforce, was able to contribute to the longer-term development of engineering skills in the Bathgate area which would continue to benefit local workers even following its eventual closure in 1986. Moreover, while Harvey’s experience reflects wider changes in the role of women in the workplace, the quality of the apprenticeship she received and the apparent improvement in the apprenticeship programme since its slightly ramshackle beginnings in 1964 demonstrate the importance of BMC and then BL as an employer, and provide a further qualification of the branch plant analysis. The role of the company in terms of providing wider opportunities for Bathgate’s workers, and its shop stewards in particular, will be considered further in Chapter Four, but here it should be noted that as a state-controlled company often characterised as the ‘national champion’, it is likely that the British Leyland of the later 1970s had both a greater sense of its obligations to its workers and apprentices, and a greater appreciation of the potential benefits of effective recruitment and training, than the BMC had had as a private company.

‘It wasn’t o’er the top dangerous’: health and safety at work⁴¹

The evidence suggests, then, that the type of work carried out at Bathgate, the skills it required, and the training it necessitated, were largely in line with broader industry-wide trends, rather than a reflection of the factory’s status as a distant and under-resourced branch plant. Furthermore, and in spite of the limited ‘on the job’ training available to most of the factory’s workforce, there are indications of the extent to which the plant’s presence in West Lothian contributed to the development of new skills and the creation of new opportunities for the county’s young people in particular. In terms of health and safety, too, the oral history testimony of the plant’s former workers highlights the relative modernity of the plant, of the working

⁴⁰ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.31.

⁴¹ WEA, interview with John Hastings.

practices it employed, and of the working conditions which consequently prevailed. Lenny Walker, for example, grew up in Gartcosh in Lanarkshire and moved to Bathgate in 1964 to work as a semi-skilled driller in the gears section of the BMC. For him, lay-offs and short time working resulting from shortages of components represented ‘the only problem’ with this job, which was better paid than his previous position with the US-owned Burroughs Machines in Cumbernauld, and he felt that ‘compared with other places the working conditions were pretty good.’⁴² This is a view shared and expressed by many former Bathgate workers, including John Weir who describes the modern facilities available to the workforce.

The facilities were very very good you know, we had a terrific canteen, eh, for the workers’ lunchtime, and there were cigarette machines and coffee machines throughout the factory, and there were lovely toilets all there and eh, the facilities were good you know. I don’t think they could complain, it was a new factory and it had all the latest mod cons at that time.⁴³

Harry Bradley moved to the BMC in 1972, and similarly describes the working conditions at the factory as ‘a hundred per cent better’ than those he had been used to in his previous job at Menzies’s steel foundry.⁴⁴ Bradley’s comparison between the conditions at the BMC and those he had formerly experienced as an apprentice steel moulder is telling, and reflects a recurring theme in depictions of working conditions and especially health and safety in the plant; an area in which it seems clear that the factory was perceived to be a significant improvement on what had been common in the area previously.

Some important details in this connection are outlined by Alex Moffat, who contrasts the working environment and the safety equipment provided by the company with the conditions he had experienced while working at a brickworks in Armadale.

It was really good. Completely different from the brickworks and places like that. Unless you worked in a brickwork people don’t realise how it was. You were working under tremendous heat, you weren’t allowed to strip to the waist. You had to wear a blue vest but the heat in the kiln was horrific. You went into the

⁴² WEA, interview with Lenny Walker.

⁴³ WEA, interview with John Weir.

⁴⁴ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

kilns in the morning with a navy blue vest and when you came out at night it was pure white just with the salt and sweat out your body. All you had was a wee billy can sitting outside the kiln with salt water because you had to drink plenty salt water for the heat. So the Leyland was a completely different situation. You were reasonably well attired, your footwear was fine, you werenae working in the heat, it was all air conditioned. And, I suppose for the people in the pits it was a completely different situation as well, not having to go down mines.⁴⁵

As Moffat indicates, conditions in the BMC also represented an apparent improvement on those which had been experienced by West Lothian's coal and shale miners. The local MP Tam Dalyell describes in his memoirs the degree to which his ambivalence to the rundown of the local shale industry was shaped by his own formative experience of the conditions underground.

Although in retrospect it was against the economic interest of Britain that the shale oil industry should be forced to close down, I confess I was not angry. As a teenager, I had been taken down the Whitequarries Pit and had to crawl through a long passage, which the miners were obliged to negotiate every working day. By its nature, shale is a very jagged mineral and serious cuts to the skin and knees could be debilitating in the long term – industrial injury was common.⁴⁶

Dalyell's account in particular highlights the visibility of the hazards associated with manual work in the heavy industries. In their work on asbestosis and miners' lung, Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston have identified the tension between the prevention of easily observable accidents and injuries, and concerns over 'invisible' occupational diseases, which has marked debates over health and safety issues and is consequently reflected in the historiography. General histories of coal mining, for example, have tended to include discussions of the obvious dangers of mining work, but very little reference to the impact of dust inhalation; to some extent a result of the relatively recent acknowledgment of the dangers of coal dust.⁴⁷ However, it has been acknowledged even by the Health and Safety Executive, established by the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act, that too much emphasis has been placed on workers' safety at the expense

⁴⁵ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.33.

⁴⁶ Dayell, *The Importance of Being Awkward*, loc. 3881.

⁴⁷ A. McIvor and R. Johnston, *Miners' Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) pp.23-24.

of workers' health, and McIvor and Johnston note that the number of deaths caused by traumatic injury at work fell between 1945 and 1980, while rates of industrial disease remained stable.⁴⁸ This is important when contemplating the health and safety dimensions of a modern motor industry plant such as Bathgate, particularly as perceptions of motor industry work as clean and safe were conditioned by workers' previous experiences of the more obvious dangers of brickworks, mines, and foundries, and the apparent absence of any comparable, visible risks. That is not to say, however, that working with high-speed machinery and heavy vehicles did not carry some risk of injury. John Hastings worked as a 'slip man' on the tractor assembly line, which meant that he would 'slip in' and take over from any worker who needed to leave the line in order to go to the toilet or have a cup of tea, for example. He had followed his father, who died young from silicosis, into Menzies's steel works, before moving to the BMC in 1973, and his impression of his new job was that 'coming fae a foundry I widnae say it was dangerous'.⁴⁹ However, although he describes the tractor line as 'not o'er the top dangerous', he goes on to mention a number of incidents which occurred on the line when tractors had not been fixed securely and subsequently fell off when they reached the end of the line. Similarly, Lenny Walker remembers his fellow gear grinders having accidents with the machinery they were using, the effects of which were often compounded by the management's reluctance to let them wear protective gloves, which it was felt would restrict their dexterity.⁵⁰

Many of the issues which did exist at the plant were not, however, as visible as the more immediate risks presented by foundry or mining work, and in some cases did not become apparent for some time. Alan Marr began as a mechanical apprentice at the plant before working as a maintenance engineer, and describes his impression of the working conditions he experienced.

The working conditions were, on the whole, very good. You werenae asked to do anything that was dangerous, although you mebbe crossed the line a couple of times. They could have had better facilities for noise I think, because I do suffer from tinnitus and I believe that's where I got it. There was a bit of dust, carbon

⁴⁸ A. McIvor and R. Johnston, *Lethal Work: A History of the Asbestos Tragedy in Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000) pp.57, 59.

⁴⁹ WEA, interview with John Hastings.

⁵⁰ WEA, interview with Lenny Walker.

and stuff like that, from cast iron and that was never deemed a problem, but you must have breathed tons of that stuff over your life.⁵¹

A number of former workers have similarly described developing tinnitus and other hearing problems which they believe to have resulted from their time working at the plant. John Moore's job as an inspector in the truck and tractor detail section involved listening to engines to detect 'noisy gears' or any other potential problems; a job which could not be done effectively while wearing ear defenders.⁵² Ear defenders, safety goggles, and gloves were all available, but, as both Moore and Lenny Walker's experiences demonstrate, they were not always practical, and the fact that in some cases they had to be requested specifically by individual workers meant that they were perhaps underutilised.⁵³ Furthermore, during the plant's initial build up, the lack of training facilities was, as John Cooper remembers, reflected in a lack of such equipment.

Well as far as I was concerned, at the start they had, with the test beds, they didnae have right ear muffs, things like that, but it was all new so we didnae, you didnae expect people to have these things. 'Cos I don't know, when they were introduced to the working environment, I suppose it was the same everywhere. But as far as the working conditions were concerned, the toilets, facilities for washing, everything was first class. 'Cos everything was new, it was spic new.⁵⁴

John Moore states that health and safety at the plant was 'as good as could be expected at that point in time', similarly reflecting both the challenges of developing a new factory site and the limited contemporary understandings of such issues. It should be emphasised, however, that working conditions varied widely across the plant and that workers' experiences of safety issues depended very much on the type of work in which they were engaged.⁵⁵

The most serious concerns were in the heat treatment section, where components were heated in ovens in order to harden them up. As a welder in the maintenance department and a senior shop steward in what was then the Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Blacksmiths, Shipbuilders

⁵¹ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

⁵² WEA, interview with John Moore.

⁵³ Ibid; WEA interview with Jim Swan.

⁵⁴ WEA, interview with John Cooper.

⁵⁵ WEA, interview with John Moore.

and Structural Workers, Kenny Paton had considerable experience of work in various departments across the factory. He describes the work he carried out in the heat treatment plant.

There were certain areas in the plant where we had, as maintenance welders we had probably one of the worst roles we had to go into an environment that was very unhealthy. We had, basically the heat treatment plant had these, chrome, aluminium, stainless steel type pipes that heated up to heat the various engine components to get them to certain temperatures so as they would be hard, you know it was heat treatment so as they would become hard. And within these ovens as they were called, and the only way I can describe these ovens is if you've seen a cremation and when the body goes in to be cremated, that's basically the same sort of size of it, the same sort of location that we used to put components. Well there was times when these stainless steel pipes had to be renewed or had, the welds in them had broke, so therefore we were actually put on a trolley, on a roller, and we used to have to lie flat, we had to lie and go in there and weld these chrome aluminium pipes that were really, and it was really, it was still like an oven when you were in there and the heat that was there, and then when you were welding them you were generating the heat.⁵⁶

In health and safety terms, however, it was not the heat itself that posed the greatest risk to the maintenance workers, but rather the safety measures taken to protect them, as Paton goes on to explain:

One of the major issues that I found in the plant was that eh, when we were doing this at the time in the early, well mid '70s to late '70s, it was custom and practice that whenever you were going round to these furnaces and wherever we were getting sent to within the plant to do anything, you used to get one of the fire department to make sure, because we were using burning equipment and welding equipment, you always had a fireman with you. And they brought with them an asbestos blanket, for you to either lie on, so you werenae touching the bottom of it, or they would hold it over you, in case something went on fire, and that was

⁵⁶ WEA, interview with Kenny Paton.

one of the major things that I felt when I was in the plant that I was instrumental in helping to stop them use asbestos in this sort of environment.⁵⁷

Asbestos was also common in the engine test area, and as a shop steward Paton was involved in a wider campaign against its use across the factory. However, in spite of seeking expert advice from an Edinburgh University scientist, their campaign encountered opposition from both the management, who were unable to take any action without the guidance of the Leyland group's own analysts, and from within the shop stewards movement itself. Paton describes the views expressed by some shop stewards ahead of a meeting arranged with management to discuss the problem.

One of the things that I always remember, there was 13 convenors there fae the various unions within the plant, and one of the things I found was very difficult was, prior to the management coming in to discuss this, there was convenors turning round and saying you're talking a load of, I've worked with that for thirty forty years, never done me any harm, you know, I'm a pipe fitter, I've lagged pipes with asbestos and all the problems, and I'm fine. And little did they understand that one particle can come back thirty forty years later and can kill you. And you know, I'm looking back here and it's thirty odd years ago that I used it, and you're almost – it's the sword of Damocles, you never know when one of these particles, you never know what's gonnae happen to you.⁵⁸

Paton's experience reflects a broader struggle over the use of asbestos, the dangers of which were discovered by a Factory Inspector as early as 1898, and over the recognition of asbestos-related disease.⁵⁹ The word 'asbestosis' first appeared in British medical literature in 1927, and by the 1940s it was known within the medical community, if not by the wider public, that exposure to the substance could cause lung cancer even in the absence of scarring on the lungs.⁶⁰ In spite of this, its use in industry continued to grow, and its prevalence in shipbuilding in particular contributed to Clydebank – home to an asbestos cement company as well as John Brown's

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ WEA, interview with Kenny Paton.

⁵⁹ McIvor and Johnston, *Lethal Work*, p.112.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.113. McIvor and Johnston note that the asbestos industry ensured that the research showing that lung cancer could be caused by exposure to asbestos was not published.

shipyard and the Singer sewing machine works – having one of the highest rates of asbestos-related disease in Western Europe by the 1980s.⁶¹ A detailed discussion of attempts to limit or regulate the use of asbestos is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it should be noted that the historiography of what McIvor and Johnston call ‘the asbestos tragedy’ condemns both the industry and the government for their inaction on the issue, as well as the trade unions for their failure to protect workers from the threat posed by asbestos.⁶² McIvor and Johnston write that the emergence of pressure groups such as Clydeside Action on Asbestos was in part a response to the failure of the STUC which, even by the 1970s, was showing little interest in the issue. This, they argue, can be seen as a result of a high acceptance of risk among Scottish workers, particularly with regards to occupational health and illness rather than more visible safety concerns. Certainly, Kenny Paton’s testimony, and the attitudes he encountered among his fellow shop stewards, indicates the pervasiveness of the ‘machismo’ work culture which McIvor and Johnston argue had shaped the industrial workforces of Clydeside, socialising workers into accepting risk in their work and creating an environment in which to raise concerns over health and safety issues would be taken as a sign of weakness and ‘an affront to their masculinity’.⁶³

McIvor and Johnston discuss the asbestos disaster in the context of a longer British and Scottish tradition ‘in which workers’ health consistently ran a poor second to workers’ output.’⁶⁴ While asbestos provided the worst example of an occupational health disaster, invisible issues such as fatigue, exhaustion, and ‘overstrain’ resulting from long working hours and the intensification of work also demonstrated the extent to which the health of workers was shaped by the demands of capital. Harry McKay’s oral history testimony suggests a lack of understanding of such issues at Bathgate, as well as their potential to result in death or serious illness.⁶⁵ When McKay was promoted into senior management in production control he found he was having to work for up to 80 or 90 hours a week, and he had to be on call in case of any problems which might arise during the night shift. His immediate boss was taken ill, apparently as a result of such pressures, and McKay describes the treatment of one of his workers who was suffering from similar problems.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.120.

⁶² Ibid, pp.214-15, 219.

⁶³ Ibid, pp.220-222; McIvor and Johnston, *Miners’ Lung*, pp.263-264.

⁶⁴ McIvor and Johnston, *Lethal Work*, p.62.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.36.

You know how people, they say that today is a stressful world, well there were people under stress in those days and there were people went off ill. They called it more nerves in those days, almost like a nervous breakdown, unfortunately most of those people were either demoted, sacked, or moved, because of that, and replaced. No-one gave any indication of empathy, sympathy, or help, or retraining for people like that, which I thought was absolutely awful. I had one particular foreman that went down that route, and I told the trade union six months prior to that I wanted to demote him and change his job, but no deduction in salary, and the trade union wouldn't allow me. That man died of a major heart attack six months later. I saw something that no-one else saw, I thought I was handling it the correct way I was protecting him, protecting him in remuneration and protecting him in stress, and that's still living with me yet, about that poor – and he was a nice guy, a lovely guy, and I remember at the funeral looking at the trade union of ASTMS (Association of Scientific, Technical, and Managerial Staffs), looking at the faces across the cemetery where they were burying the poor guy, and I got eye contact from them and I almost called out to them, looks what's happening here today, if you'd only listened to me. That's the sadder side of the factory, the sadder side.⁶⁶

There are, however, some indications that by the late 1970s, the company's attitude to health and safety was markedly more advanced than that of other employers in the area, and that understanding of even the less conspicuous health and safety risks posed by work at the plant was beginning to spread amongst the workforce. Kenny Paton had previously worked for a local haulage contractor, and his memories of his first day at the plant in 1975 show that, in spite of the continued use of asbestos in the heat treatment section, BL's approach to health and safety was relatively progressive.

Well the first day you go in on a day's induction course when they tell you all about the plant and what they were doing, and health and safety aspects. And even then, it was quite, quite a large, I mean there was about six hours of telling you all the various aspects of health and safety, which was excellent because a lot of the

⁶⁶ WEA, interview with Harry and Cecilia McKay.

companies I'd worked with previously health and safety wasn't an issue, it was – you were employed, but British Leyland, they had a structure and a set up there that they actually told you the problems and what you had to make sure you done, safety shoes and various areas and various things like that.⁶⁷

This reflects both the impact of the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act, introduced by Harold Wilson's Labour government, and the role of BL as a large firm, state-owned and controlled from 1975, with developed health and safety practices. Using evidence primarily from the nationalised coal industry, McIvor and Johnston have found that standards of occupational health and safety have tended to be higher in state-owned companies than in private enterprise, but it is important also to recognise the importance of union representation at Bathgate and across BL as a factor in the increased recognition of even invisible health concerns.⁶⁸ The shop stewards at Bathgate were, for example, involved closely in negotiations with the company over the introduction of a health and safety policy following the 1974 Act; an indication, perhaps, of the limits to McIvor and Johnston's 'machismo' thesis in the new industries. As convenor of the AEU at the plant, Jim Swan purchased a hundred copies of a manual entitled *Health and Safety at Work* which were distributed among shop stewards in the hopes of 'demystifying' health and safety issues and raising awareness of the dangers of asbestos and of the damage that could be done to workers' hearing by noise levels in areas such as engine testing.⁶⁹ Swan was also involved in negotiating a progressive policy on alcohol, the consumption of which in nearby pubs and hotels during lunch breaks was a recognised problem described by Swan as 'the scourge of the factory'. Under the policy he promoted, which was unpopular with some workers who believed it to be 'too soft' on those struggling with alcoholism, those returning to the factory drunk as a result of drinking at lunch time would be sacked immediately, but anyone missing work or injuring themselves as a result of a known drink problem would instead be offered counselling.⁷⁰ Laterally, in 1978, the company implemented its first health and safety policy, and the unions were able to appoint their first safety representatives. These representatives were offered training by the TUC and had

⁶⁷ WEA, interview with Kenny Paton.

⁶⁸ R. Johnston and A. McIvor, 'Marginalising the Body at Work? Employers' Occupational Health Strategies and Occupational Medicine in Scotland, c. 1930-1974', *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 21:1, pp.130-132.

⁶⁹ WEA, interview with Jim Swan.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

considerable influence on the shopfloor. In Jim Swan's words, 'the management were even more scared of the safety reps than they were of the shop stewards.'⁷¹

Responses to motor industry work

While many of the oral testimonies of the plant's former workers are marked by depictions of its cleanliness and modernity, it is notable that, in an area with no history of mass assembly production, this could be negated to some degree by the tightly regulated nature of the work itself. This was especially the case for those working on the main truck and tractor assembly lines. Andy Hunter, for example, worked on the truck line in A Block, and his testimony implies that the way in which his work was controlled by the speed of the track was the only downside to the working conditions he experienced.

A Block on the whole I would say was quite a clean block. Ehm, obviously you were, the conditions were that you were, you were managed by a moving track, eh, which several places in the plant were. But other than the moving track, the A Block was a great place to work, conditions were really good I would say.⁷²

Harry McKay worked in CKD before moving into production planning, and his description of the excellent facilities provided in the factory is similarly tempered by his experience of long working hours and tight discipline.

The conditions were excellent. The factory was clean, the factory was tidy, the toilets were very very modern, washing facilities very very modern, you didn't get that in foundries I can assure you. And eh, clocking in, clocking out, was entirely different. The only thing was you never got a break between half past seven and half past twelve, you never got a break. You could eat something and drink something, but move at the same time. That was the only thing I found unusual, 'til you got a properly agreed break, you know, and lots of people used to sit down and they were disciplined for sitting down in the early days, you weren't allowed

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

to sit and have a cuppa tea during working hours, you had to wait for your proper break, and that was only one a day from half past twelve ‘til quarter past one.⁷³

It is notable in this context that former assembly line workers account for a disproportionately small number of those involved in the WEA *Bathgate Once More* project, which has provided much of the oral history testimony used in this dissertation. The over-representation of skilled workers and former apprentices among those who volunteered to be interviewed by the WEA, as well as those who contributed to the project in other ways such as providing personal memorabilia and photographs, signifies the extent to which they engaged with and were invested in their work. Conversely, the relative absence of semi-skilled assembly workers from the project suggests a degree of alienation engendered by the monotony of assembly line work, or at the very least a lack of job satisfaction. Beynon gives the following description of assembly work at Ford Dagenham.

If you stand on the catwalk at the end of the plant you can look down over the whole assembly floor. Few people do, for to stand there and look at the endless, perpetual, tedium of it all is to be threatened by the overwhelming insanity of it. The sheer audacious madness of a system based upon men like those wishing their lives away.⁷⁴

He found in his interviews with these men that many used ‘mental blackouts’ as a ‘solution’ to this tedium, and were keen to move away from the assembly line and into more skilled, or at least more autonomous, work whenever possible.⁷⁵ One man told him ‘I’d prefer to be on sub-assembly really. You can make your own time there.’ Another described his relief at being able to move into a different job away from the track.

It’s a relief when you get off the moving line. It’s such a tremendous relief. I can’t put it into words. When you’re on the line it’s on top of you all the time. You may feel ill, not one hundred per cent but that line will be one hundred per cent. Being on sub-assembly is like getting off the roundabout. Y’know...day in day

⁷³ WEA, interview with Harry and Cecilia McKay.

⁷⁴ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p.109.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.117.

out...never stopping. I still have nightmares about it. I couldn't go back on that line. Not for anything.⁷⁶

Goldthorpe and his colleagues found similar attitudes to the assembly line among the affluent workers of Luton. Of the 299 workers interviewed for the *Affluent Worker* studies, 56 were classed as highly skilled, 23 as 'relatively skilled', and 86 as semi-skilled. Job satisfaction was found to be highest amongst those who retained a degree of autonomy and variation within their work. As one relatively skilled worker said, 'you have to use your mind more and it [the job] is more responsible. You feel as if you *are* somebody.'⁷⁷ Moreover, when asked if they would rather be doing any other job on the shopfloor, the semi-skilled assembly line workers overwhelmingly desired to be taken off the track altogether, and given a supervisory or maintenance role, as 'there's more to it', 'you get the variety in jobs', and 'it's a better grade of job'. In Marxist terms, these roles were attractive because they allowed the worker a greater capacity for creative labour.⁷⁸ Such ideas are reflected in the testimony of a number of former Bathgate workers, although they are qualified by the relative variety, even of assembly line work, in a factory producing commercial vehicles in comparatively small volumes, rather than cars. Andy Hunter, for example, worked at a car dealership and then as a maintenance welder in a brickworks before moving in 1972 to what was by then the BLMC, and describes a typical day on the truck line in A Block.

The truck you finished on the day before was sitting waiting on you the next morning, so you'd just go and get the parts from the bin or the trolley that was supplying your parts that you were fitting on the line, go and pick them up, pick your wee toolbox up, and I done some work externally on the cab and I done some work internally on the cab. Now you would work away, move from let's say it was a Terrier at that point in time I was working on, you might come off and it'd be an FG you'd be going on to, so obviously you had different parts to pick up to go on to the FG, and then you could mebbe go on to a Boxer, different types of trucks. You never, it was very very rarely unless there was a big big order for

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.118.

⁷⁷ Goldthorpe *et al.*, *Industrial Attitudes*, p.13.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp.15-16.

mebbe Terriers or Boxers or that kindae thing, they usually just staggered them so you werenae, it wasn't totally repetitive work that you were doing.⁷⁹

Although Hunter enjoyed assembly work and considered A Block 'a great place to work', he nevertheless looked forward to moving off the track and into a more skilled trade.

I enjoyed my time on the big track, eh, at its peak we were building 74 trucks a day, nine point something an hour kind of thing, and I really liked it but obviously I wanted, my main ambition was to get on to my trade when I went into the plant.⁸⁰

Harry Bradley was a semi-skilled machinist in the flywheel production department before moving to a new job in stores, which he 'absolutely loved'. Although he did not work on a moving track, his description of the pressures associated with production work, and his resulting eagerness to move into another area, also echo the experience of the Ford workers recorded by Beynon.

When you're, when you're on the machines you've got a tally tae do, and this, if you're on the day shift you've got to work 528 minutes on the 8-hour shift to gie you the 110 per cent, but if you're night shift it's 660 minutes. In the stores you've nothing like that, so the pressure's off you right away. So you've nothing like, you've no got to, when you get into your work at night go 'oh what have I got on my wee machine', get your tally done.⁸¹

At the end of each shift, Bradley would fill in a worksheet declaring the number of parts he had machined that day and the number of minutes he had worked for, which would then be checked by both his foreman and 'the office staff'. He goes on to describe the pressure which he felt to ensure he completed exactly the right amount of work during each shift.

I think me myself, I think you tend to put pressure on yourself. I'm not saying pressure's the right word, but you know you've got to do these minutes eh, and you always wanted to make sure you'd done exactly what you had tae do because

⁷⁹ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

the old saying was, if you do a few minutes extra you don't get paid for it but the Leyland gets the benefit, you know that sort of thing.⁸²

This indicates both what Beynon has described as a lack of 'moral involvement' in the firm, and the extent to which semi-skilled assembly workers responded to the monotony of their work by seeking to exercise a degree of control over the time and effort they expended.⁸³ In their study of 'life on the line' at Peugeot's plant at Sochaux in France, Jean-Pierre Durand and Nicolas Hatzfeld have found that monotony would only set in once assembly workers had 'mastered' their work on the line, and that this would be reflected in two particular work behaviours: attempts, like Bradley's, to economise on the effort required of the worker; and to find 'self-affirmation' in the work itself.⁸⁴

In Durand and Hatzfeld's analysis, this was enabled by the very 'vacuity' of monotonous assembly work which encouraged what they describe as a 'freeing of the mind', and allowed workers to occupy themselves by talking to their neighbours and 'having a laugh'.

'You shout,' says one worker of 43 years of age, 'you talk to pass the time. I can't be on the line without talking. I joke with the lad and when... You have to be careful when you're making jokes, it can be misunderstood, but it's quite a laugh here, just the same.'⁸⁵

In this context, conversation and 'having a laugh' becomes one more element of the work itself, 'just like the repetitiveness and fatigue, filling the interstices of time on the line, a reconstructed pleasure in company.'⁸⁶ This is certainly reflected in the testimony of John Hastings, one of very few former Bathgate workers interviewed by the WEA who had worked on an assembly track for the duration of his time at the plant. It is worth noting, however, that as a 'slip man', who temporarily relieved workers on the tractor line, his work involved more variety than that of most assembly workers.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p.118.

⁸⁴ J. Durand and N. Hatzfeld, translated by D. Roberts, *Living Labour: Life on the Line at Peugeot France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p.46.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.53.

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp.53-54.

We had many a good laugh. And it's because the job's monotonous, you've got tae. To say you do it without thinking's not true, it becomes natural for you to do it, so you sortae could chat while you were doing it.⁸⁷

Harry Bradley has similarly described his happiest memories of his time at the plant as 'the companionship with a lot of the guys that I worked with, the camaraderie, aye the laughs we used to have.'⁸⁸ The evidence suggests, however, that the way in which camaraderie and 'having a laugh' was experienced could vary, and was shaped by factors such as the character of an individual worker, or their gender. Joyce Brogan, for example, worked in offices within the main factory building, and remembers enjoying the 'social part' of work within the plant. When asked about her happiest memories of her time at the BMC, she gave the following response.

Everybody was so friendly, and – I think the sortae social part of it as well was good, we had a good social thing, and I always remember when I was young, and this is just, I don't know if this will go down well, obviously because we were young, ehm, they had the stationery department right, and to get to the stationery department you had to go down the stairs and you had to go on to the factory floor right, and walk by, and that day it was the day of the mini-skirts and everything, right, and so the men, on the production line used to have boards with numbers on it, so each time a girl went by they used to haud up a number out ae ten [laughter] and they used to roar. They were the kinda things, the laughing things you used to have.⁸⁹

Bradley's description of the working environment in the fly wheel machining section similarly highlights what he perceived to be the friendly atmosphere in the plant, but also suggests the limits to this friendliness, and the extent to which some workers may have had a very different experience.

I felt I liked the spirit of the workers round about me, you werenae – you werenae tied to the one wee bit all the time, you were moving and you were doing different things, which other - eh some machines you were fast at, others you werenae so

⁸⁷ WEA, interview with John Hastings.

⁸⁸ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

⁸⁹ WEA, interview with Joyce Brogan.

fast, so obviously you wanted to do the ones you were a wee bit quicker at because you got finished that wee bit early. But no I liked the, I liked the section spirit of all the other men, there were some guys you didnae get on with obviously, you cannae get on with everybody, you always had the fly guys, but eh I think Leyland on the whole it let you stand up for yourself, not to be a sorta lone individual because a lone individual was sorta just, they just made a fool of them sort of thing you know. But no I found it fine. I was an outgoing guy anyway, I liked to talk all the time so I got along with most of the guys.⁹⁰

It is likely that such ‘lone individuals’, and those who did not enjoy their work, are underrepresented in the WEA project. Durand and Hatzfeld have drawn attention to some of the problems which could result for such people in an industry in which assembly workers were generally organised in ‘teams’ or ‘gangs’ who would ‘shuffle operations about between themselves’ for convenience.⁹¹ Andy Hunter’s experience of working with his workmates on the truck line in Bathgate’s A Block was ‘like bees, working about the nest kindae thing’, but for Durand and Hatzfeld, it must be recognised that the monotony of assembly line work, and the camaraderie and conversation which it enabled, were only a feature of work for those with sufficient skill and experience to complete their work without difficulty. Those who struggled could experience a different range of emotions; frustration with themselves, as well as anger with the line, their supervisors, and their apparently more successful workmates.⁹²

Durand and Hatzfeld argue, however, that an acceptance of the work process and any satisfaction consequently found in assembly work could only result from what they term a ‘downgrading of one’s own aspirations’, and is therefore an indication of the alienation engendered by the assembly line amongst workers who must suppress a part of their own character in order to find their work acceptable.⁹³ Turner, Clack and Roberts, in *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry*, describe the track as ‘the symbol of car plants’, and the idea of the mechanised assembly track imposing discipline and dictating the working patterns of an alienated workforce is central to many analyses of work and industrial relations in the motor industry. Turner *et al.* write that

⁹⁰ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

⁹¹ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.40.

⁹² WEA, interview with Andy Hunter; Durand and Hatzfeld, *Life on the Line*, p.46.

⁹³ Durand and Hatzfeld, *Life on the Line*, pp.51-52.

‘moving tracks enforce their own supervision’, while Durand and Hatzfeld emphasise that the speed and repetitiveness of assembly line work could lead to both ‘physical fear’ of injury or fatigue, and ‘moral fear’: the worker might not be able to keep up with the speed of the line, or make mistakes which would cause defects and lead to the whole work team being penalised. This moral fear exerts pressure on the whole line, acting as a tool to ensure that each worker maintains vigilance in order to avoid mistakes, and creating tension particularly for those having any difficulty with their work.⁹⁴ Moreover, the track is often characterised in the literature as a focus for tensions between workers and their employers, and a key consideration here is the extent to which ‘having a laugh’ at work on the line not only reflected boredom and alienation, but also represented a challenge to its control of the work process. The Ford workers interviewed by Beynon describe a variety of approaches which were taken in order to test the discipline imposed by the track, and to create space for autonomy and creativity. This could take the form of sabotage or rebellion, in terms of simply refusing to work at the speed dictated by the track.⁹⁵ In other cases, however, it could revolve around what Beynon terms ‘horseplay’.

Ford class you more as machines than men. They’re on top of you all the time. They expect you to work every minute of the day. The atmosphere you get in here is so completely false. Everyone is downcast and fed up. You can’t even talk about football. You end up doing stupid things. Childish things – playing tricks on one another.⁹⁶

Beynon goes on to describe the example of ‘bombs’ made of adhesive and used to cause explosions in rubbish containers at Ford Halewood.⁹⁷ It should be noted that there is no evidence in the oral history testimony of former Bathgate workers of any incidence of sabotage, although it is possible that this is either a result of the self-selecting nature of the WEA sample and the consequent disproportionate under-representation of assembly line workers, or of an unwillingness to discuss what could be perceived as a sensitive subject.⁹⁸ The lunchtime drinking described by Jim Swan, which were also a serious problem at Linwood, could, however, be seen as a response to the discipline of motor industry work, and there are indications of the ways in

⁹⁴ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.40; Durand and Hatzfeld, *Life on the Line*, pp.46-47.

⁹⁵ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p.137.

⁹⁶ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p.118.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁹⁸ Portelli, ‘What makes oral history different?’, in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, p.38.

which workers would organise themselves and their work in order to challenge the line and demonstrate their autonomy.⁹⁹ A number of former workers have mentioned, for example, that it was well-known that men on the night shift would arrange a schedule to allow them each in turn to get some sleep, and that some would watch pornographic films while they worked; a practice which, according to former AEU convenor Chris Bett, was eventually stopped by management on the grounds that the workers were ‘stealing’ the company’s electricity to power their video player.¹⁰⁰ This arguably reflects what has been termed the ‘remasculinization of the shop floor’ seen in the US motor industry, where the loss of the ‘respectable’ masculine culture associated with the craft tradition, and the elimination of brawn and strength from unskilled work, led to the emergence of new identities which shaped the behaviour of shop floor workers. In this context, the ‘boylike playfulness’ of drinking and ‘having a laugh’ represents a reconstruction of traditional masculinity in response to the automation of ‘unmanly’ production work and the increasing presence of women in the workplace, which could take on explicitly sexual connotations.¹⁰¹ This could be in the form of sexual boasting or ‘shared sexual activities’ or, as Joyce Brogan’s experience at Bathgate demonstrates, the harassment of female workers. As Stephen Meyer writes, ‘the remasculinization of the shop floor often resulted in the general degradation and dehumanization of all women.’¹⁰² Furthermore, assembly line production processes have been associated with industrial relations problems, and the idea that short strikes in particular represented a response to the discipline of the line is central to number of studies of motor industry work.¹⁰³ The extent to which the evidence from Bathgate supports this analysis will be considered in Chapter Four.

⁹⁹ Gilmour, ‘The Trouble with Linwood’, pp.78-79.

¹⁰⁰ WEA, interviews with Ian Tennant and Chris Bett.

¹⁰¹ S. Meyer, ‘Masculine Culture on the Automotive Shop Floor, 1930-1960’, in R. Horowitz (ed), *Boys and their Toys? Masculinity, Class, and Technology in America*, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.13-15.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p.18.

¹⁰³ See, for example, D. Lyddon, ‘The car industry, 1945-79: shop stewards and workplace unionism’, in C. Wrigley, (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1939-1979: Industrial Relations in a Declining Economy*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1996)

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the type of work offered by the BMC and British Leyland at Bathgate, while largely semi-skilled, was typical of work across the motor industry. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that, as a commercial vehicle plant, work at Bathgate was less automated and less monotonous than in car plants equipped for standardised mass production. The responses of former Bathgate workers to their experiences of motor industry work again largely reflect industry-wide trends, although it is important to note the underrepresentation of assembly line workers in the WEA's sample. While bearing in mind both the limited nature of the training offered to such workers and the possible implications of their absence from the WEA project, it is nevertheless clear that the plant provided good opportunities for some of its workers, and particularly those school-leavers taken on as apprentices. The development of the apprenticeship programme, and the improvement in the health and safety of the work environment, suggest both the importance of BL as a large and eventually nationalised company, and the extent to which the culture of work which prevailed at the plant evolved over its lifetime. The remaining chapters will consider how far this was reflected in its industrial relations, an area which attracted considerable attention in its first five years especially, and in which the validity of the branch plant analysis seems most apparent. As will be shown in Chapter Four, Bathgate was again in line with broader trends in terms of union organisation and the nature of much of its strike action, and only in its strike causation and high rate of labour turnover does its experience seem exceptional. This will be explored further in Chapter Five, which will consider the extent to which the development of a typically 'affluent' motor industry workforce at Bathgate was undermined by local labour market conditions, and the factory's position as a branch plant established in Scotland with considerable reluctance on the part of the BMC.

Chapter Four

Union Representation and Shopfloor Organisation

The industrial relations of motor manufacturing have been central to many declinist accounts of Britain's economic and industrial development since the Second World War, reflecting contemporary concerns with the industry's performance and the potentially damaging effects of strike action in a highly integrated and nationally important export sector. In his recent history of Britain in the 1970s, for example, Dominic Sandbrook writes that 'the death of British car-making was one of the great industrial tragedies of the century', and describes labour relations at BL in particular as 'ludicrously bad', while studies of the industry itself such as Timothy Whisler's *The British Motor Industry, 1945-94: A Case Study in Industrial Decline* have characterised its industrial relations as 'particularly debilitating' by international standards.¹ The company, and the industry more widely, did see a marked deterioration in its industrial relations over this period: between 1945 and 1979, motor manufacturing became the UK's third most strike-prone sector, accounting for five per cent of stoppages and 13 per cent of working days lost across British industry and losing up to ten times as many working days to strike action as its German counterpart.² Moreover, the unofficial nature of much of this strike action attracted particular concern as it was perceived to represent a serious threat to the stability of a system of industrial relations built on voluntarist collective bargaining.³ While Britain's strike record during the 1960s was unremarkable in comparison to other major industrial countries, fewer than a hundred of the 2,000 or so strikes which took place across industry between 1964 and 1966 had official trade union sanction.⁴ The concentration of unofficial stoppages in motor manufacturing, and the industry's increasing importance to the wider British economy, attracted considerable media interest, which frequently focused on the alleged role of supposedly 'militant' shop

¹ D. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: the battle for Britain, 1974-1979* (London: Allen Lane, 2012) pp.262-263; Whisler, *The British Motor Industry*, p.211.

² Murden, 'Demands for Fair Wages', p.1; Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.65-66; D. Aldcroft and M. Oliver, *Trade Unions and the Economy, 1870-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) p.101.

³ W. Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism, 1700-1998* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) p.218; H. Gospel and G. Palmer, *British Industrial Relations* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp.15-17.

⁴ Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p.217.

stewards in propagating unofficial strike action.⁵ As Tim Claydon writes in his study of media representations of motor industry workers, ‘if industrial relations were one of the defining images of British society, the motor industry was the lens through which this image was projected and, arguably, distorted.’⁶

The link between industrial unrest and the industry’s poor productivity is, however, unclear. Major contemporary studies by Turner, Clack, and Roberts in 1967 and Durcan, McCarthy, and Redman in 1983 suggested that strike activity and working days lost peaked when demand fell, as management allowed stoppages to drag on in order to avoid redundancies, while the work of Jones and Prais found that the direct effect of strikes in terms of lost production was marginal.⁷ It is likely that the industry’s relatively high incidence of strike activity did damage the industry’s performance in other ways, for example by absorbing management time and deflecting attention from other problems, and figures which show that BL lost 250,000 vehicles to 700 disputes in 1977 alone indicate the extent to which the situation at BL in particular deteriorated during the latter part of the 1970s.⁸ As discussed in Chapter Two, however, the historiography of the motor industry itself, while recognising the challenges posed by what Prais describes as ‘continuous disruption’, has also emphasised both the importance of considering other factors in the industry’s 1970s ‘malaise’, including, but by no means limited to, the problems arising from its structure and longer-term development, and the extent to which the nature of motor industry work influenced the character of its industrial relations.⁹ Such considerations are particularly important in the context of regional policy, as the industry’s concentration in the West Midlands and its continued reliance on a large network of independent component suppliers had significant ramifications for workers in its branch plants. Analyses of the impact of regional policy in Scotland have, for example, stressed the poor industrial relations which ‘dogged’ Linwood and, to a lesser extent, Bathgate, with some writers including Christopher Harvie and Ewen Cameron suggesting that this was a problem which arose from, or was at least closely linked to, the

⁵ Claydon, ‘Images of Disorder’, p.233.

⁶ Ibid, p.229.

⁷ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.68-69; Aldcroft and Oliver, *Trade Unions and the Economy*, p.99.

⁸ Ibid, p.101.

⁹ D. Marsden, T. Morris, P. Willman, and S. Wood, *The Car Industry: Labour Relations and Industrial Adjustment*, (London: Tavistock, 1985), p.1; Willman and Winch, *Innovation and Management Control*, p.4.

weaknesses of regional policy and the plants' location in areas with little tradition of light engineering, and no pre-existing supply network.¹⁰

Chapter Three has suggested some limits to this branch plant analysis. The work carried out at Bathgate and the skills required of its workforce were largely in line with motor industry-wide trends, and there is evidence to suggest that the plant's industrial relations were similarly unexceptional. This chapter therefore begins with a discussion of some of the structural features of industrial relations in the British motor industry, and an examination of how far Bathgate conformed to general trends in terms of union representation and its incidence of strike action. Highlighting the extent to which the importance of the motor industry shop steward grew out of the multi-unionism characteristic of British motor plants, it will then go on to discuss the nature of Bathgate's Joint Shop Stewards' Committee and its role in fostering a sense of the factory as a 'community', helping to embed it in the social as well as the economic life of West Lothian. The chapter will conclude by considering the changing industrial climate of the late 1970s and the impact of BL's restructuring on its industrial relations, introducing the idea of the shop stewards as community as well as workplace activists, and highlighting the limits to the power of organised labour in the context of industrial closure and widespread unemployment. The peculiarities of Bathgate's industrial relations, and the extent to which the plant's position as a branch plant can be said to have exacerbated the tensions implicit in assembly production, are considered separately, in the analysis of the Scottish 'Affluent Worker' that follows in Chapter Five.

Structural features of industrial relations

Christopher Harvie writes that in 1970, Bathgate and Linwood were both operating at 'barely 50 per cent capacity', and is among those who have suggested that the production problems experienced at Linwood in particular resulted primarily from 'bad industrial relations' which can be understood in terms of the difficulties associated with 'adapting a hitherto skilled workforce to the numbing discipline of the assembly line.'¹¹ This returns to the idea, introduced in Chapter

¹⁰ Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.151; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.277.

¹¹ Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.151.

Three, of a traditional Scottish industrial culture fundamentally different to that of the Midlands and South-East of England and unsuited to motor industry production, and rests on the assumption, highlighted by Jim Phillips, that the workers employed in Scotland's motor plants had previously experienced more skilled or varied work in the docks, shipbuilding, and engineering.¹² Yet Scottish exceptionalism may have been exaggerated. Turner, Clack, and Roberts have drawn attention to the tendency for car firms across Britain – not only in Scotland – to employ adult labour from a variety of other, possibly more skilled and certainly less automated occupations, and so it is likely that most motor assembly plants employed workers with no previous experience of 'the limitations of mass assembly work,' and that Linwood and Bathgate were unexceptional in this respect.¹³ Furthermore, it is important to reemphasise Turner *et al.*'s rejection of 'green labour' as a factor in strike-propensity in the regional policy plants especially, and to note their description of strike action at the 'new car plants' in the Development Areas as 'small but fairly frequent', and broadly in line with industry-wide norms in terms of their causation.¹⁴ Indeed, it is arguable that much of the unofficial strike action which occurred throughout the motor industry, and attracted government concern and employer condemnation during the 1960s and 1970s, can be interpreted as a further response by workers to the discipline of the assembly line. Jack Scamp was among contemporary commentators who suggested that the monotony of track assembly work was partly responsible for the high level of disruption in the motor industry as 'short strikes broke the tedium of the day', while Dave Lyddon contends that the frequent and often very short nature of strike action demonstrates the limits to either managerial or shop steward control over individual assembly line workers who realised the power that they had to stop production by withholding their labour even for a very short time.¹⁵ Lyddon emphasises just how short many unofficial strikes were. Exactly 100 of the 297 stoppages which took place at Morris Motors in 1965, for example, lasted for 30 minutes or less, while 20 per cent of 104 strikes recorded at Rover Solihull in the same year could be accounted for by lunchtime meetings running over.¹⁶

¹² Phillips, *The Industrial Politics*, p.32.

¹³ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.331.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.68.

¹⁵ Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p.215; D. Lyddon, 'The Car Industry', p.203.

¹⁶ Lyddon, 'The Car Industry', p.203.

Evidence from the oral history testimony suggests that much of the strike activity seen at Bathgate fitted into this template. Jim McCulloch worked at the plant from 1961 until 1968, when he left to take up a job at the Ravenscraig steelworks because ‘every week there was a stoppage of some kind,’ either due to lay-off or strike action.¹⁷ He describes the difference he noticed between industrial relations at Bathgate and at Ravenscraig.

But at Ravenscraig, as I say that was a different – There were strong unions in there too but there weren’t so many strikes. There weren’t these spasmodic strikes. When they were striking at Ravenscraig they would strike for days on end, whereas in the BMC you would strike for a day, you would strike for half a day.¹⁸

Indeed, the testimony of many former Bathgate workers and their memories of industrial relations at the plant are shaped not by large disputes, such as a nine week strike over the issue of pay parity which took place in 1972 and is discussed here in Chapter Five, but by apparently minor antagonisms between unions and what Andy Hunter describes as the ‘silly wee strikes here and there’ which could result.¹⁹ John Hastings, for example, has no memory of the parity strike in spite of starting at the factory in 1971, but does comment on the ‘stories’ he was told about sectional disputes which had apparently been a particular problem in the plant’s early years.

Some of the stories, well, the stupidest one that I ever got told, was – a person was sent to B Block, because obviously - in the early days they had problems keeping everything going ‘cos of the distance, the supplies up fae England, so from time to time they didnae have such and such, so they couldnae, they couldnae run the build. So they used to get sent to different bits, and there was a guy sittin’ havin’ a cup ae tea one day, and somebody came by, he says what are you doin’? He says I’m having a tea, he says aye but you’re having a piece o’ bread wi’ it, he says that’s right, he says but you’re no’ entitled to that, you’re entitled to a biscuit – and yet in C Block if you sat doon you could have – how true that is I don’t know, but I got told that that is the standard that was right across the whole, it was like

¹⁷Jim McCulloch, interview with the author, 2nd February 2012.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

the A Block, B Block, and C Block, and it was like three different interpretations of what everybody was entitled to.²⁰

This reflects the tone of much contemporary newspaper reportage of industrial relations in the motor industry which frequently focused on the apparent trivialities underlying unofficial strike action. Indeed it is possible that Hastings' story originated from a report in *The Scotsman* in June 1962 describing a 'tea-break strike' at Bathgate which lasted for one hour and involved just 80 workers.²¹

Negative press coverage and 'stories' have apparently had some impact in terms of shaping the memories of some former Bathgate workers with regards to the plant's industrial relations, reflecting the idea seen in the oral history literature that interviewees draw on public discourses in constructing their personal narratives.²² In 1972, for example, *The Times* reported on the introduction of a new range of trucks, and claimed that 'it is a matter of growing concern [to British Leyland] that the backbone of this effort is Bathgate.' As mentioned in Chapter Two, this report described the factory as a 'consistent loser', and a 'doubtful quantity', whose future 'must remain in doubt' due to labour relations troubles which it claimed had 'plagued' the plant ever since it opened.²³ Similar views have been expressed by some of the plant's former workers, including Bill Raine, who had worked in the gears section at Longbridge prior to moving to Bathgate where he became a superintendent in the machine shop. His testimony is marked by anti-trade union rhetoric and strong criticism of the factory's shop stewards, who he believed were disruptive and responsible for low levels of productivity at the plant. He describes a strike which he was involved in as a superintendent on the cab assembly line in E Block.

It was the most stupid thing I've ever met. When you're welding steel sheets there's slightly oil on them to stop them going rusty, it creates smoke. I've seen more smoke in the pub in Bathgate, but they complained. So I found a firm that had got an extractor, you put it on the gun and it took the smoke up to the roof, and I managed to get one, and everybody was pleased to death with it... But I

²⁰ WEA, interview with John Hastings.

²¹ 'Tea-break strike at BMC factory,' *The Scotsman*, 2nd June 1962.

²² P. Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1, 2004, pp.65-68.

²³ 'Will the pastures be richer for the Leyland Buffalo range?', *The Times*, 11th February 1972.

couldn't get any more for the time being because of their programme, and they asked for more, and I said as soon as I get them you'll have 'em. They wouldn't wait, they just walked off out. Now I think they were out for a week. And when they came back, I'd managed to get some by then – a week after they came back I'm walking round and there's this one lad who'd got it lying on the floor, he'd took it off. I said why isn't that on the machine being used, I don't like it he said. So I says you took the factory out for a week for something I've put in for you, and you've just thrown it out like that. So I brought the main shop stewards in, and I said that's the attitude of your people. There's nothing you can do about it is there, they've lost a week's wages.²⁴

It should be noted, however, that in spite of his claim that 'they had a hundred-odd strikes in that factory', and in spite of working in the plant for over twenty years, this was the only instance of industrial action in which Raine was involved personally. Chris Bett was a senior shop steward in the AEU, and describes his frustration at much of the press coverage of what was often small-scale strike action which he saw as resulting primarily from the fast-paced and highly integrated nature of work in the motor industry.

One of the things I object to, and I object to it yet, and I've run into it one or two times wi' people, one of the key problems was because of the very nature of the industry, it's volatile, and when you're talking about the peak of the place, between five and six thousand workers there, and it's volatile in the sense that companies are pushing for production, changes taking place, and all sorts of issues arise, and you get a situation where guys say I'm standing back, you know. And you learn how to deal with a lot of these kinds of problems, and you could get people on strike, short strikes, that kindae thing, always headline news in the papers and that.²⁵

Moreover, Bett's reference to the sheer scale of the factory and the number of workers it employed is important, and highlights the structural foundations of many of the characteristics of industrial relations in the motor industry, and the extent to which the system of industrial

²⁴ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

²⁵ WEA, interview with Chris Bett.

relations which prevailed in British motor plants reflected the industry's longer-term development in Britain as well as the nature of the work itself.

Lyddon argues that the changing patterns of ownership in the British motor industry during the 1950s and 1960s especially complicated the existing 'British system' of industrial relations based on piecework bargaining, particularly as factories themselves became ever larger as a consequence.²⁶ The proportion of the motor industry workforce employed in factories of over 5,000 workers grew from 27.5 per cent in 1951 to 51.3 per cent by 1972 and, as Lyddon writes, 'the greater range of activities carried on in the big factories increased the consequent scope for fragmented bargaining.'²⁷ The variety of work carried out in these large plants was reflected in the range of trade unions representing their workers; the majority of the motor industry's semi-skilled workers were members of the TGWU, AEU, or National Union of Vehicle Builders (NUVB, which merged with the TGWU in 1972), but several skilled unions and staff associations were also present in most factories.²⁸ This 'multi-unionism' had been a feature of the industry since the 1930s, when skilled craftsmen began to be replaced with machinery which could be operated by semi-skilled workers ineligible for membership of the craft unions and discouraged from joining the AEU or NUVB by those unions' resentment of their 'dilution' of the skilled workforce.²⁹ Multi-unionism placed great importance on shop steward organisation within the individual plant as stewards found themselves, rather than full time union officials, charged with handling many of the concerns affecting the everyday running of their plant such as discipline, the pace of work, introduction of new machinery and distribution of overtime; issues which were rarely covered by national agreements.³⁰ Turner, Clack, and Roberts write that 'even were a significant part of the efforts of the unions' full-time officials not wasted in the duplication and other inefficiencies attending multiple unionism, there would be too few of them for the responsibilities thrust upon them', and so for many workers it was the shop stewards' organisation rather than the 'union proper' that represented the 'real union'.³¹ This system, termed 'parallel unionism' by Turner *et al.*, emerged as a key finding of the Donovan

²⁶ Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, pp.30-31.

²⁷ Lyddon, 'The Car Industry', p.188.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.188.

²⁹ Turner *et al*, *Labour Relations*, pp.192-193.

³⁰ *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations*, June 1968, (London: HMSO, 1968), paragraph 101; Turner *et al*, *Labour Relations*, p.343.

³¹ *Ibid*, pp.222, 341.

Commission, or Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, which was set up by the Wilson government in 1965 in response to concerns about the level of unofficial strike action across industry and the perceived need for greater legal regulation of the trade unions.³² Donovan reported in 1968, emphasising the importance of the informal customs and practices which existed in many workplaces and contributed to high levels of unofficial and unconstitutional strike action, and was notable for its description of motor industry shop stewards as 'generally more of a lubricant than an irritant'.³³ This was a sharp contrast with the depictions of militant 'wreckers' or 'extremists' which featured prominently in newspaper reports of an industry apparently 'not far from anarchy'.³⁴

The character of the Bathgate shop stewards' movement and its relationship with the wider workforce will be considered in the latter sections of this chapter, but here it is important to note the extent to which the plant conformed to industry-wide trends in terms of multi-unionism, and of the nature of some of the strike action which resulted. John Cooper was a member of the AEU at the plant, before joining the Association of Scientific, Technical, and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS) when he was promoted to the role of foreman in engine rectification. He was not active in either union, and describes what he perceived to be the problem of multi-unionism in the plant.

At Bathgate, B Block which was mainly machine shop, and ehm, the engine lines, were nearly all AEU members, but B Block, which was, sorry A Block, which was the truck assembly, was nearly all Transport and General Workers. So you had various – and then you had maintenance staff, you had the electricians' union, you had different unions. I think this was the biggest bugbear in the plant, there were too many unions in it.³⁵

At the time of the Scamp inquiry, workers at Bathgate were represented by ten different trade unions; the majority, in line with industry wide trends, by the AEU, TGWU and NUVB, with some skilled workers in craft unions such as the Electrical Trades' Union (ETU) and Plumbing

³² T. Claydon, 'Images of Disorder', p.235.

³³ Turner *et al*, *Labour Relations*, p.222; Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p.217; *Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations*, paragraph 110.

³⁴ Claydon, 'Images of Disorder', p.189.

³⁵ WEA, interview with John Cooper.

Trades' Union (PTU). Table 4:1 shows their relative size within the plant, by the number of shop stewards representing each.

Table 4:1 – Shop steward representation at BMC Bathgate, 1966

| Trade Union | No. of shop stewards |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Amalgamated Engineering Union | 70 |
| National Union of Vehicle Builders | 33 |
| Transport and General Workers' Union | 25 |
| Clerical and Supervisory Staff | 11 |
| Draughtsmen | 6 |
| Electrical Trades' Union | 5 |
| Plumbing Trades' Union | 2 |
| Boilermakers | 1 |
| Woodworkers | 1 |
| Sheet Metal Workers and Coppersmiths | 1 |

(Source: MRC, MSS.178/15, dossier of information submitted to inquiry.)

Andy Hunter's experience of moving from the truck assembly line into a more skilled job as a panel beater highlights the kind of difficulties that could arise from this multi-unionism, particularly in a plant in which the majority of labour was semi-skilled and therefore highly mobile.

I started on the big track on A Block. I'd be on the big track for about maybe 6 months. Then the EA van was transferred from Willenhall to Bathgate so a vacancy arose for a panel beater and [the] Block Manager at that point in time knew that I was a panel beater. He says 'Andy, do you fancy going on to panel beating on the EA vans?' which I did do... I went to the Tool Stores, got my tools wi' a line off o' [the Block Manager], and started repairing dents in vans but I hadnae transferred my union. I was still in the NUVB. So I'm knocking away at an EA van and the Convenor of the Sheet Metal Workers' Union at that point in time came and tapped me on the shoulder. He says 'haw, what dae ye think you're

daein'. Of course I say, 'well, I'm sortin' the van.' He said, 'that's a Sheet Metal Worker's job.' He was very nice about it. He says 'put your tools doon, you'll need to sign a form and join the Sheet Metal Workers' Union', which I did do and then that was me free to carry on repairing vehicles... There were a lot of demarcation lines within the plant.³⁶

These demarcation lines could prove restrictive, and represented the only downside to a job which Bruce Davies, a graduate engineer at the plant and a member of the Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians' Association (DATA), otherwise enjoyed very much.

The most irritating thing at the time was there were very very strict demarcation rules, and at five o'clock when the drawing office closed you had to stop, literally in the middle of whatever you were doing, if you, I just tried to finish off a document sort of five past five, and somebody would be in telling you come on, we either all work for an hour or we all stop. And I thought at the time that it wasn't a good idea, and I think historically it wasn't a good idea, because we could have done a lot of little extra things which wouldn't have – anyway. So notwithstanding that minor irritation I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Furthermore, demarcation could lead to sectional disputes between unions, and especially between the craft unions and those representing semi-skilled workers. Alan Marr was a member of the AEU and, although never a shop steward and not particularly active in the union, remembers being involved in disputes with the ETU.

We mebbe had a bit of a spat now and again with the Electricians. We tended to, we didn't quite crossover but there were certain things that we'd do every day that we shouldn't have been doing, and things that they did that they shouldnae have been doing. And if they were on strike, we'd be doing these things and they wouldnae be too happy about them, and probably the same the other way. But I think we got on alright.³⁷

³⁶ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.40.

³⁷ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

Andy Hunter also refers to the Electricians, who he claims ‘thought themselves a better person than anybody else’, and who, at one point in the late 1970s, reportedly tried to break away from the JSSC in order to establish their own negotiating rights with management.³⁸ Such problems were exacerbated by the company’s introduction of Measured Day Work (MDW) across the factory, which entailed the regrading of the workforce, and caused the following difficulties described by AEU shop steward Harry Bradley.

See I’ll let you understand, everybody was sort of on the same level to start with for wages, and the management were fed up wi’ this one strike against that one strike, different sections for different reasons for more money, so they put the suggestion to the shop stewards that they should have a grading of workers within the factory. For instance, labourers, toilet cleaners maybe number 1, eh number 2 grades would be labourers, just say labourers, number 3 was progress workers, number 4 was machine operators and suchlike, number 5 was the track, people who worked on the track, moving track because it didn’t stop, number 6 was the setters, number 7 was the tradesmen, so that was about 8 at least. But human nature being human nature, when shop stewards went in to decide this, they were all wanting the same, they were all wanting to be the higher grade. Now they couldae made it that everybody got a good grade, but no they put it all on to these different grades, I’m gonnae get paid mair than you sortae thing, which, in my view they couldae given everybody a good wage, but for whatever reason the shop stewards went for these gradings. So, it didnae work out as well as I thought it should have at that time.³⁹

Lyddon describes the grading of car workers as ‘fraught with difficulty’, particularly as car makers moved towards MDW, which meant that, for the first time, skilled non-production workers who had previously been on piecework were able to compare their wages with their hourly-paid, semi-skilled counterparts on the production lines.⁴⁰ In many cases the differential between skilled and non-skilled work was found to be minimal, and at BL this led to a month-long strike by most of the company’s toolmakers who sought bargaining rights for the newly-

³⁸ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

³⁹ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

⁴⁰ Lyddon, ‘The Car Industry’, p.200.

formed BL Toolroom Committee in 1977.⁴¹ Alan Marr was a skilled member of the AEU at Bathgate, and describes the impact of ‘across the board’ pay increases such as that resulting from the 1972 nine week strike on pay differentials at the plant.

It never did the skilled guys a lot of favours because what they used to get, they went for what they called a cross the board increase, which was everybody got ten pounds say, which meant the differential between the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled was gonnae decrease, if you see what I mean, and that was never addressed. So sometimes it seemed as though you’d be knocking your pan in for less, there wasnae that much of a point learning to be a skilled guy. So that’s, I never thought the unions did their job very well in that aspect.⁴²

Jack Scamp bemoaned the relentless ‘jacking up’ of earnings in car plants as a result of constant sectional disputes engendered by the complex pay structures that resulted from multi-unionism and the informal system of industrial relations.⁴³ Indeed, Turner, Clack, and Roberts estimate that over a quarter of all officially recorded strikes in the motor industry between 1949 and 1969 arose from disputes related directly to wages, and that this could in part be explained by anomalies in wage differentials.⁴⁴ Chris Wrigley puts the proportion of strikes during the 1960s attributable to wage disputes at 55 per cent, and, notably, the regional policy plants were generally no different in this respect.⁴⁵ Turner *et al.* write that the ‘bulk’ of strikes which took place at the new plants between 1961 and 1964 concerned wages, which draws attention to the exceptionality of the situation at Bathgate where just one of 117 unofficial stoppages between 1961 and 1966 was directly related to pay, while 82 arose from working hours and conditions. This discrepancy is central to the analysis in Chapter Five.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid, p.200.

⁴² WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

⁴³ Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p.214.

⁴⁴ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.66, 331-333.

⁴⁵ C. Wrigley, ‘Strikes in the Motor Car Manufacturing Industry’, in A. Charlesworth *et al.*, *An Atlas of Industrial Protest: 1750–1990* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p.202; Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.333.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.68; MRC; MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

‘A rational group of people that one can take problems to’: the Joint Shop Stewards’ Committee⁴⁷

Bathgate was also notable for its unusually high levels of both absenteeism and labour turnover; related issues included by Turner *et al.* in their discussion of ‘withdrawals from the work situation’ which, they argue, constitute alternative expressions of industrial discontent.⁴⁸ The 1964 MoL report, for example, found that, even in 1964 when the plant was fully operational and employing 4,579 people, levels of both lateness and absenteeism remained ‘excessive’, while it was recognised by both MoL and BMC delegates to the Scamp inquiry in 1966 that the recruitment and retention of labour remained particular problems.⁴⁹ Indeed, management representatives told the inquiry that one of the greatest challenges facing them in maintaining the smooth running of the plant was the unusually high level of labour turnover which, according to one union estimate, was as high as 16.75 per cent.⁵⁰ Some possible explanations for this anomaly will be considered in Chapter Five, but here it is important to note its implications for industrial relations at Bathgate more broadly. Turner *et al.* find no evidence of any direct connection between rates of withdrawal from the work situation and strike-propensity, and suggest instead that absenteeism and labour turnover, as dispersed and often individual expressions of discontent, are more likely to occur where collective action is suppressed or otherwise problematic. They cite the case of an unnamed car firm which, during the 1961-1962 recession dismissed workers deemed to be ‘ringleaders’ in industrial disputes, and consequently saw absenteeism increase ‘significantly’, the amount of time lost due to accidents rise by 40 per cent, and the rate of labour turnover almost double.⁵¹ The evidence from the Scamp inquiry indicates a complex relationship between labour turnover in particular and the trade union movement at Bathgate, as it was felt that industrial relations difficulties had been exacerbated by the resignation of 46 shop stewards in 1965 alone.⁵² This was perceived to have contributed to problems in forming a stable system of industrial relations within the plant, summarised by the experience of one delegate from the NUVB who claimed that, ‘in the first twelve months I

⁴⁷ These are the words of the plant’s general manager, during the proceedings of the Scamp inquiry. MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

⁴⁸ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.184.

⁴⁹ NA, LAB 10/2261 – Ministry of Labour, Motor Industry, British Motor Corporation Ltd, Labour problems in Development Districts, 1964.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.190.

⁵² MRC, MSS.178/15, dossier of information submitted to court of inquiry.

visited this area on each occasion I discovered we had a new convenor.⁵³ It can perhaps be inferred, then, that the labour turnover and absenteeism seen at Bathgate both reflected and contributed to the initial weakness of its shop stewards' movement. The idea that a high incidence of withdrawal from the work situation tended to reflect the relative difficulty of engaging in more collective forms of action does, however, require considerable qualification in light of the claim in a 1964 MoL briefing that the BMC had been 'plagued by irresponsible stoppages' at Bathgate, and that the factory had experienced 69 strikes in its first 28 months.⁵⁴

The Scamp inquiry resulted initially from concerns over the frequency of unofficial stoppages, and during an initial visit to the plant by a MoL representative in 1965, works manager H. Rudd bemoaned the 'one out, all out' attitude which reportedly prevailed at the plant and which he felt 'the Scottish worker is more prone to' than his Midland counterpart.⁵⁵ It is notable, then, that during the proceedings of the court of inquiry, both management and trade union representatives acknowledge a marked improvement in industrial relations, and that Rudd himself praised the plant's shop stewards movement for their part in that improvement.

I must say specifically and repeat, I think in the last 10, 12, 15 months the rational thinking of this group of people has been of great assistance to us as management in getting implemented common sense in this factory.⁵⁶

The inquiry was, of course, an open, public forum, and it is possible that Rudd deliberately tempered his remarks in comparison to those made in private conversation with the MoL employee. However, it is also likely that he distinguished between the rational organisation of the shop stewards and the irrationally solidaristic generality of the wider workforce. The role of the shop steward has been central to both contemporary media portrayals of industrial relations in the British motor industry since 1945 and to much of its historical literature, but it is important to reiterate the sharp contrast that exists between the depictions of militant 'wreckers' which characterised newspaper reports of the industry, and the perhaps more realistic picture described

⁵³ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

⁵⁴ NAS, SEP4/1661, Scottish Development Department, Specific Industries – Motor Engineering: British Motor Corporation, Ministry of Labour brief, 24th February 1964.

⁵⁵ MRC, MSS.178/15, report of initial visit.

⁵⁶ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

in the historiography, and often drawing on the findings of the Donovan Commission.⁵⁷ Donovan's conclusions went some way towards rehabilitating the motor industry shop steward, drawing on the work of Turner *et al.* and rejecting what they term the 'agitator theory' of strike causation, by which much of the strike action in the industry was propagated by stewards who were either political activists or 'generally inflammatory'.⁵⁸ However, as Tim Claydon has shown in his discussion of the 'Images of Disorder' which frequently dominated reportage of the industry, the figure of the militant Communist or Trotskyist shop steward remained a popular media trope throughout the 1970s which arguably drove the 'public obsession with car industry disputes'.⁵⁹ Claydon contends that the media's focus on the motor industry and on individual shop stewards such as Dick Etheridge, Communist convenor of shop stewards at Longbridge and, perhaps most notably, his successor Derek Robinson, lay behind the enduring but false belief that Britain was unusually and damagingly strike-prone, and prepared the ground for legislative attacks on the power of organised labour in the 1970s and 1980s, by which time Arthur Scargill had replaced 'Red Robbo' as the country's most prominent left-wing 'bogeyman'.⁶⁰ In January 1975, ITV's *Midlands News* programme interviewed Etheridge on the occasion of his retirement, and he claimed that it had long been the deliberate intention of the media to create an image of him as a trouble maker.

They [the media] depicted me as a trouble maker and a trouble rouser and a violent man, but this isn't the truth I don't think...I only reacted to the violence in the motor industry by the people who run it. Last year for instance there were 1,200 meetings in this office, and these were held not on the basis of causing trouble, but of resolving it.⁶¹

The idea, common in the media at the time, of Etheridge and BL chairman Donald Stokes as locked in 'constant struggle' was, he claims, 'a million miles from the truth'. Indeed, Etheridge is at pains to point out that Stokes, frequently portrayed as his 'arch enemy', in fact gave a dinner

⁵⁷ Claydon, 'Images of Disorder', p.235; *Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations*, June 1968, (London: HMSO, 1968), paragraph 110.

⁵⁸ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, pp.329-330; Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p.218.

⁵⁹ Claydon. 'Images of Disorder', p.236.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.229, 236; Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p.217.

⁶¹ MACE, 'Communist shop steward at Longbridge retires', *Midlands News*, 7th January 1975.

in his honour to mark his retirement.⁶² Claydon frames his discussion in terms of what he calls a ‘meta-narrative of disorder’ which used specific events, notably a series of disputes at Ford’s Briggs Bodies plant in Dagenham in the 1950s where the Communist Party (CP) was reported to have significant influence on the shop stewards’ movement, in order to define a more general malaise in British industrial relations which in turn set the parameters in which debates over industry, the economy, and the state could take place.⁶³ The idea of press reportage simply reflecting public opinion is, as Claydon states, too naïve an analysis, but the imagery which was used to depict figures such as Etheridge and which therefore shaped this meta-narrative does seem to have been pervasive, and there is evidence from the oral history testimony of former Bathgate workers of how far it influenced the views of workers even within the motor industry itself.

This can be seen in the ‘stories’ of the trivialities apparently underpinning unofficial strike action discussed above, but is perhaps most evident in the testimony of Bill Raine, a foreman at Longbridge before moving to Bathgate in 1962. Raine’s views of the shop stewards at Bathgate are clearly informed by television coverage of their Longbridge counterparts, and he draws a parallel between the convenor of shop stewards at Bathgate in the 1960s who, Raine claims, would ‘march around saying he was the general, he ran Bathgate’, and Derek Robinson, who he remembers encountering in a Birmingham pub not long after he was sacked for resisting the reforms introduced by Michael Edwardes in 1979. It is worth pointing out, however, that the veracity of Raine’s story is called into question by his reference to the *Daily Worker*, which had changed its name to the *Morning Star* in 1966, and by his contention that ‘there isn’t a brick standing there now’ at Longbridge, a portion of which is still in operation, assembling small volumes of MG sports cars imported from China in semi-knocked down form.⁶⁴

A man called Red Robbo had took over, he used to march about, everybody out, everybody out. And one night I was sitting watching the television and there was a big union meeting in the Town Hall in Birmingham, and this Red Robbo was the chairman, and he said “I was sitting at home reading me *Mail* last night when the

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Claydon, ‘Images of Disorder’, p.230.

⁶⁴ ‘New £5m MG design studio unveiled at Longbridge site’, BBC News, 15th June 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10317764>, accessed 13th January 2013.

phone went, and I said hello who's that, and a voice said Musgrove. Never heard of ya. I'm the new boss." He said "naoooo you can't be, I'm the boss of the Austin." I said to Joan...three months, that bloke'll be out on his neck and he'll never get another job in England. And he [Robinson] didn't. He was out. And I was down, he got a job with the *Daily Worker*, that was this Communist newspaper, for about a month, and I went down to see one of Joan's family, we went for a pint and sitting in the corner of the room on his own was Red Robbo, absolutely demoralised. Nobody was speaking to him and he never worked again. And he used to march about the Austin, he was the general, he decided what. There isn't a brick standing there now and that was the biggest factory in Europe, where we lived.⁶⁵

Whether or not this account is factually accurate, it highlights the importance of what Alessandro Portelli describes as the 'psychological truth' of oral history testimonies. Portelli contends that there are no 'false' oral sources, and that apparent factual inaccuracies in oral testimonies such as Raine's can reveal a great deal about the subject's relationship with and understanding of their own personal history.⁶⁶ Raine's story seems a clear example of Portelli's description of the value of oral testimony: 'oral sources tell us not what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.'⁶⁷ Furthermore, it demonstrates the validity of Clayton's meta-narrative as a tool for understanding contemporary debates over the economy and the role of industrial relations in its alleged decline, as Raine implies a link between Robinson and his political views, and the eventual closure and demolition of the main Longbridge works over two decades later.

Similar views of 'the general', however, are also central to John Duncan's memories of trade unionism during his time at Bathgate.

Well perhaps I shouldna say that, but the union, to my way of thinking, were too powerful, and the least thing seemed to create a problem, and there was, I don't know if they were 'reds' or no, but they seemed to sorta gather round the union

⁶⁵ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

⁶⁶ Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?', in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, pp.36-37.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.36.

man, thought he was John the Baptist or something you know. I thought he was, I thought they were too strong, and perhaps management werenae strong enough, I don't know.⁶⁸

Duncan was an ironmonger from Aberdeenshire who had moved to Bathgate to work as a buyer in the tool store, and was eventually promoted to chief store keeper and had around 35 men working for him. He was not an active union member but joined what he thinks was 'the foremen's union' because 'oh, everybody had to be a member,' and describes his memories of strike action in the plant.⁶⁹

I don't know that there were particular ones, but there were disputes where the, the various unions, not necessarily all at once, but in separate groups, had a problem and we had to join in and I just had to follow the leader, because I couldn't afford to fall out with the union, and I just had to do what the union told me more or less.⁷⁰

Duncan's testimony is valuable as he is one of the few former workers interviewed for the 'Bathgate Once More' project who was not involved, or at least interested, in trade union activity at the plant. Former shop stewards were represented disproportionately in the project, perhaps because it was arranged by the Workers' Educational Association in conjunction with labour-movement groups including the STUC and the West Lothian Trade Union Council and with the prominent participation of former convenor of shop stewards Jim Swan, now a well-known local councillor. Their greater involvement in their work and the broader life of the plant may have been an additional factor, yet the testimony of the minority of former workers involved in the project who were not stewards suggests that the role of the JSSC and the work that they did at the plant was not always clear to those they represented. Bill Raine's description of the Committee is typically unequivocal, and reflects the marked anti-trade union rhetoric which pervades his testimony.

⁶⁸ WEA, interview with John Duncan.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

There was seven or eight of them sat in a room in the training centre, doing sweet nothing but smoke and drink tea.⁷¹

This draws on the idea, described by Huw Beynon in his study of work and industrial relations at Ford, that senior stewards acting as full-time negotiators, and often doing very little work as production workers, could be perceived as out of touch with their membership, and echoes a description given by one Ford worker of Dagenham's 'armchair generals': 'They've been convenors for so long they don't know what the shop floor looks like.' Beynon emphasises the complexities of a steward-member relationship often marked by this sense of division between production workers and the shop stewards' committee, and by the committee's autonomy from the shopfloor.⁷² Alan Marr's testimony gives a similar sense of the Bathgate JSSC as a body somehow apart from the majority of the workforce.

I don't really know much about the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee, I know that it was a big sort of club that they had and they would go and discuss things and formulate plans for doing this and doing that, and when the next strike was going to be happening. But I remember coming out on strike sometimes, and you'd be away working away somewhere, and "right that's it, we're going home", and that'd be that, that was you on strike, and you didnae really know why you were going on strike.⁷³

In spite of this separation from the shopfloor, Beynon is keen to stress that Ford's shop stewards saw themselves as 'of the men': 'They weren't phonies. They were the representatives of the lads – that was the basis of their position.'⁷⁴ In her work on Linwood, Alison Gilmour has echoed Dave Lyddon's emphasis on the essential 'bottom up' nature of shop steward organisation in the motor industry, writing that the unofficial strike action seen at the plant grew out of a shopfloor organisation which 'responded to the immediate needs, grievances and day-to-day concerns of the workforce with low worker interest in branch affairs rather than a unionism driven by the objectives of a left wing labour organisation.'⁷⁵ Chapter Five will consider the Bathgate

⁷¹ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

⁷² Beynon, *Working for Ford*, pp.216, 230-231.

⁷³ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

⁷⁴ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p.217.

⁷⁵ Gilmour, 'The Trouble with Linwood', pp.75-76, 93.

workforce's relationship with and orientation to trade unionism in more detail, but there is evidence to suggest that the situation with regards to the position and perceived role of the plant's shop stewards was broadly in line with this analysis. While some Bathgate workers apparently lacked awareness of the work of their shop stewards and sometimes of the reasons behind strike action, even those who have had misgivings about the character of the JSSC have expressed some appreciation of their achievements in securing wage increases and improved working conditions for the workers they represented. John Duncan, for example, felt that the shop stewards had too much power in the plant and was suspicious of 'reds', but concedes that the JSSC did win some benefits for the wider workforce.

And really, it was, I would say it was a union orientated factory pretty much, and eh, they each had their own convenors and things like, and there was a, obviously there was a group that formed the factory trade union group as well, and eh, they did a lot of good work for the workforce, yeah.⁷⁶

Even Bill Raine, while bemoaning the 'anarchy' created across British industry by figures such as Arthur Scargill and Derek Robinson, concedes that the Bathgate shop stewards 'did get better things, they did get benefits and that' for their workers.⁷⁷

Furthermore, the testimony of former stewards themselves suggests that their work was largely in line with the Donovan analysis of shop stewards functioning as the mouthpiece of their workmates and occasionally having trouble 'thrust upon them', and echoes Dick Etheridge's claim that the shop steward's role was concerned not with causing trouble, but with resolving it.⁷⁸ Tommy Morrison describes his experience as a TGWU shop steward in the cab trim section.

What was the good thing about the shop steward was you werenae just tied to the one place all the time, you could move about a wee bit you know, and there were always people with complaints, different things. But one thing I will say, and whether you accept it or anybody else accepts it I don't know, I've always classed myself as being fair. I felt that some people who played on it would go doon the road of saying well I'm going to get the union to you, or I'm kinda threatening the

⁷⁶ WEA, interview with John Duncan.

⁷⁷ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

⁷⁸ Lyddon, 'The Car Industry', p.189.

sorta foreman or superintendent or that, I was always fair there and says excuse me a minute, on numerous occasions, you know you've not got a case here, you've not got a claim. They've not done anything wrong. I would try and explain that to them, and it did eventually quite a lot it got through to them. And they knew they werenae just going to use me for the sake of using me. Eventually the next thing, I was picked to be a vice convenor, I was vice convenor then, and I remained the vice convenor, and that was for many many years.⁷⁹

Kenny Paton started at the factory in 1975 and represented the Boilermakers on the JSSC, and also saw it as his job as a shop steward to solve any problems which emerged on the shopfloor before they could escalate or reach the level of management.

One of the most important things I learned in there as a shop steward was shop stewards werenae instrumental in saying right, we're no getting that, let's go oot on strike. There was, I would say nine oot ae ten of the times that people approached me wi' a complaint or a grievance then I would turn round and say now what is the problem, and I would try and sit and try and analyse what the problem was and say look you're no' going to do yersel' any good wanting to go out on strike, you'll need to be constructive, positive on how you're gonnae apply yourself and what you're gonnae do. And, as a shop steward and a trade unionist we prevented more trouble within the plant through members wanting tae walk oot and various things, and that's a lot ae the times, you had a lot of people who were hot heads just wanting to fly oot the plant, wanting tae just walk oot, sometimes at the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee meetings that's what it'd be, we're goin' oot on strike, we're goin' oot on strike, but you'd tae sit doon and try and analyse the situation and say that's not gonnae be positive for you or your members wi' doin' that. 'Cos what a lot ae the time, various, mebbe one union would have a grievance with the plant and them walking oot would cause, the maintenance, if the maintenance werenae workin' then the plant shut, basically...so therefore you had to sit with the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee and try and iron out any problems tae stop strikes which basically I would say, I

⁷⁹ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

think a lot of the times it was exaggerated that British Leyland were always on strike. I mean I was there I think it was 11 years and I think I was only on strike for I think it was about three weeks in total. It wasnae a matter of we go on strike every time we down tools, we'd a lot of short-time working when obviously the miners' strike and things like that that affected every industry in the country. But the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee meetings were very positive and constructive in stopping a lot of the trouble within the plant 'cos we used to try and sort it out before it went to the management level, goin' in and discussing it with management. Joint Shop Stewards' Committee used to solve the problem before it got, escalated.⁸⁰

Paton states that he became a shop steward due to his 'socialist background' which had taught him the importance of the trade union movement in representing and educating working people. However, he also remembers there being 'a lot of heated discussions and arguments – there was a lot of right wing/left wing elements in that Joint Shop Stewards', and it is important to note in the context particularly of the media emphasis on shop stewards as extremist 'wreckers' that, in a further reflection of the situation at Linwood, there is very little suggestion in any of the oral history of strike action as politically motivated.⁸¹ The only example of any such situation is in the testimony of Chris Bett, who describes a strike in response to his sacking for campaigning on behalf of the CP during a general election.

I remember, I got the sack. For, it was during the course of a general election. And eh, I got called in, and said ehm, you're getting the sack. I says what for. Says, you were handing out political literature on company premises. I says that was on the car park. Company premises. I says but, I wasnae the only one. Labour party's there, SNP's there, the shop stewards – eh, you're all commies, you see. Huh. So they were taking the opportunity. And, fortunately, as I said to you the clout I had, they, ma boys said well, the place'll no go 'til he's back. So that was that. But I

⁸⁰ WEA, interview with Kenny Paton.

⁸¹ Gilmour, 'The Trouble with Linwood', p.92.

can remember banner headlines in the Scottish national press, about reds and all this carry on. Pathetic.⁸²

This incident is not mentioned by any other former worker, suggesting that its wider significance was limited. No data appears to be available on either the number or causes of strikes at Bathgate after the 1966 Scamp inquiry, but the evidence from the oral history testimony and from BMC and BL corporate records suggests that for much of its lifecycle, and with the notable exception of the nine week parity strike, industrial relations at the plant were generally stable by motor industry standards. Throughout the 1960s, for example, board meetings of BMC Scotland and then Leyland Motors (Scotland) concentrated on the plant's continuing supply problems while variously describing its labour relations as 'reasonably healthy', 'reasonably stable', and 'generally satisfactory'.⁸³ A 1974 manufacturing review of the Leyland Bus and Truck division similarly identified Bathgate as one of its 'well managed plants' and absented it from discussions of the serious labour difficulties affecting Albion Motors in Glasgow, Scammell Trucks in Watford, and the company's factory at Leyland in Lancashire in particular.⁸⁴ It seems likely, then, that press descriptions of the plant as 'plagued' by strikes were largely a hangover from the stoppages which had occurred during its early years and had led to the Scamp inquiry, by which time the formation of a stable JSSC had already driven an improvement in its industrial relations. Moreover, those incidences of strike action described by former Bathgate workers imply that that action which did take place generally followed industry-wide trends and fitted into one of two categories: either short stoppages by small groups of workers, often without the endorsement of the shop stewards or trade union, and over apparently 'trivial' grievances; or larger-scale strikes which sought to secure wage increases and which, in the Bathgate context, were frequently framed in terms of achieving pay parity with the Midlands.

⁸² WEA, interview with Chris Bett.

⁸³ MIHT, 80/98/20/75-BMC-20, BMC Scotland Ltd./Leyland Motors Scotland corporate records, directors' minute book, 1960-1969.

⁸⁴ MIHT, 80/152/1/75-BLT-1, British Leyland (Truck and Bus Division) corporate records, Truck and Bus Division review, May 1974.

Community activists? The shop stewards' movement and the politics of industrial closure

This perhaps suggests an instrumental orientation to trade unionism at Bathgate, broadly in line with the *Affluent Worker* analysis of workers withholding their labour in order to assert their autonomy and demonstrate their power over the mechanised moving track, but viewing their membership of a union primarily as a means to an extrinsic end rather than an assertion of class identity. These are ideas which will be explored further in Chapter Five, but it should be noted that former shop stewards have emphasised the intrinsic benefits of their work, while the testimony of many former workers, including but not limited to shop stewards, emphasises the idea of the factory as a 'community', and the importance of the JSSC as community as well as labour activists. This can be seen in the committee's work on issues such as health and safety and alcohol policy, introduced in Chapter Three, as well as in its role in the social life of the factory. Andy Hunter represented the NUVB on the JSSC and describes his first experience of strike action.

Initially, my first dispute that I can remember would be in 1974, and it was for overalls basically, we were, it was the '74 wage negotiations and obviously, well the unions all put in their different points for what they were wanting that kind of thing, and ours was basically for free, what is the correct now, PPP, free overalls basically, 'cos you had to pay your own overalls, you had to launder your own overalls that kinda thing, and that was quite a big thing in the '74, I mean it might sound very very trivial in this day, but I mean I'm sure at that point in time in '74 we actually went on strike to get protective clothing.⁸⁵

As Hunter points out, this is the kind of strike action which could be characterised as 'trivial', but which was in fact very important in both improving health and safety conditions and raising real wages for the Bathgate workforce who, prior to 1974, had had to pay for their own overalls and safety shoes.⁸⁶ It is notable that in his oral history testimony, Jim Swan, who was involved in the nine week strike of 1972 and convenor of shop stewards at the time of the plant's closure, affords considerable priority to his discussion of health and safety and his role in negotiating

⁸⁵ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

⁸⁶ WEA, interview with Jim Swan.

health and safety policy with the company management following the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act. He highlights the help he received from the TUC who organised courses for Bathgate's new health and safety representatives, and indeed the role of JSSC involvement in terms of providing education and valuable experience emerges as a theme from the testimony of several former shop stewards, including Andy Hunter.

I was 24 when I went on the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee, which was quite a big thing to go from basically working in small garages to basically sitting down along with the likes of Michael Edwardes and Donald Stokes and Pat Lowry these kind of guys, it was quite a, it was quite a big jump.⁸⁷

For Chris Bett, his experience as a shop steward was an important part of his political education and led to involvement in other forms of labour activism.

I was a member of the AEU, which is now Unite, it's now called, I was a member of the AEU, and I was always a representative on the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee, that was about twelve senior shop stewards from all the various unions you know, Transport and General Workers, Plumbers, Electricians, and I was nearly always on that all through, right from near the beginning to the end, so in that sense I was involved in most things, ehm, right through the whole twenty five years, or most of it. It was a good education for me, and then it was the political thing and the outside trade union activities on the local engineering committee, that kindae thing you know. So it was, I don't know how my wife put up with it you know [laughter].⁸⁸

An important aspect of this education was the opportunity provided by the JSSC to interact with colleagues across the BMC and BL organisations. Bett attended meetings of the BMCJSSC, and later its successor the British Leyland Trade Union Committee (BLTUC), along with Tommy Morrison, who describes their involvement.

We were down in England quite a lot, as because we were one of the, well we were one of two, there was us here and Albion through in Glasgow, and to be in a

⁸⁷ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

⁸⁸ WEA, interview with Chris Bett.

combine, and eh I felt quite strong about it, and Chris Bett also in the union also felt quite strong about it, that to be involved and no to be left out of things, we should go to meetings down in England, and listen – They were a combine there, where you had representatives from different kind of factories, and they met mostly, all the time in fact they met down in England. Leyland Lancs, Birmingham, Coventry, they kinda places.⁸⁹

The shop stewards also received formal training and education in industrial relations. Robert McAndrew was vice-convenor of the AEU during the 1960s, and remembers a series of lectures given at the factory by an academic from the University of Glasgow, which would later help him in his dealings with management.

He came in, he came in on a couple of lectures. They were getting on, the company was trying to introduce Measured Day Work and job evaluation, you know, so, I learnt a lot about that as well. But eh, they used to think about that, what the hell do you know about job evaluation? And I says I've been taught by one of the finest professors in the country about job evaluation, and there was another one, a chap I can't remember his first name. He was another professor as well, you know, so – You were taught by the best, you know.⁹⁰

Kenny Paton, who represented the plant's 60 or so members of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers (GMB) on the JSSC during the 1970s attended trade union and health and safety courses organised by the STUC and designed to 'help to educate you with regards to how to run, how to be as a shop steward and be positive and constructive.'⁹¹ Paton found that 'the trade union structure helped us a lot, and helped me, gave me an education more so than some of the schooling that I had.'⁹²

This stands in sharp contrast to the attitudes amongst workers at Ford's regional policy plant at Halewood on Merseyside, where Huw Beynon found that 'no steward mentioned the educative aspects of trade unionism.' Beynon argues that this was due to the sheer amount of hard work

⁸⁹ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

⁹⁰ Robert and Christine McAndrew, interview with the author, 5th April 2011.

⁹¹ WEA, interview with Kenny Paton.

⁹² Ibid.

associated with being a motor industry shop steward, and ‘the day to day struggle with the foremen, the time study men, the superintendent, along the frontier of control.’⁹³ This analysis implies that the nature of motor industry work, the alienation which could result from the monotony of the assembly line, and the concern with work primarily as a means to an extrinsic end, shaped the development of parallel unionism and contributed to the importance of the motor industry shop steward, while simultaneously placing limits on their role in what became a ‘much blunter’ form of trade unionism than that which prevailed in the heavy industries.⁹⁴ For example, Beynon compares the Halewood shop stewards with their counterparts at a steelworks in South Wales, where he had previously found that stewards who ‘identified themselves with their work and their jobs’ also emphasised the economic, political, and technical education which they had derived from their trade union activity.⁹⁵ The evidence from Bathgate, however, suggests that assembly line work did not necessarily breed a shop stewards’ movement concerned solely with ‘looking after the interests of the men’, as the plant’s former shop stewards have highlighted the involvement of the JSSC in the broader social life of the factory, as well as the educative aspects of their trade union work. Kenny Paton is among those former workers who recall the JSSC’s participation in charity work within the plant, and in the wider community around Bathgate and Blackburn especially. He helped to organise a contribution scheme whereby every worker at the plant would donate five pence each week from their wages which would then be donated to various charities, and is particularly proud of a deal which the shop stewards made with the factory management to allow them to build trucks to be sent to charities overseas (in Paton’s testimony the trucks went to Uganda; in Elaine Harvey’s, to Cambodia).

I think it was, it was something on *Blue Peter* about how, you know, they were talking about this, East African coast, and they were starving, and the people were badly needing all the help they could get, and us as a truck producer, we sat and we asked and we negotiated with the management in there to build a couple of trucks that we could send to Uganda, and the workers in there would give an hour of their time so as they were working for nothing for that hour, and this agreement was reached and we did send these trucks to Uganda which was a, a very positive

⁹³ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p.220.

⁹⁴ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.222.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.220.

– because a lot of people forget the charitable organisation that the Joint Shop Stewards were instrumental in setting up, and it was the workers in the plant that put forward all the proposals at the various mass meetings.⁹⁶

Bathgate workers also raised money to purchase expensive equipment including foetal monitors and a coagulator for the local Bangour hospital by organising various sporting and social events. Before the construction of a purpose-built social club in Blackburn, these events centred initially around the factory canteen, at that time the largest hall in West Lothian, and helped to foster a sense of the plant as a ‘community’, which emerges from a number of oral testimonies. It is notable that Jim Swan’s ‘happiest memories’ of his time at the plant regard its social life, and in particular a lunchtime running club which he, as a keen marathon runner, helped to organise.⁹⁷ Sports clubs certainly played an important part in Bathgate’s social life, and Swan states that ‘it was said in that factory that it didnae matter what hobby you wanted to take part in, somebody would be able to start you off.’⁹⁸ This included a weightlifting club, which put spare axles and flywheels to good use during its lunchtime training sessions.⁹⁹ In their study of work at the large Peugeot factory at Sochaux in France, Jean-Pierre Durand and Nicolas Hatzfeld argue that the importance of the social life of the factory grew out of the monotony of assembly line work, writing that workers sought the ‘unity and complexity nowhere in evidence at work’ in their hobbies and social activities. They give the example of one Sochaux worker whose chairmanship of a Portuguese cultural association with 270 families as members allowed him to make use of his capacities for organisation, initiative, and public self-expression, and to demonstrate a ‘spirit of enterprise’ beyond what was required by his work.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the social events put on in the Bathgate canteen and later the social club, which included boxing and wrestling matches, variety nights, and folk music, provided a focus for the wider community, attracting some prestigious and well-known names to the town, and drawing audiences of over a thousand.¹⁰¹ The importance of the factory to the life of the area was further underlined by family events arranged by the JSSC. Tommy Morrison was instrumental in organising family days out, children’s trips

⁹⁶ Ibid; Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.38.

⁹⁷ WEA, interview with Jim Swan.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Bryan, *Bathgate Once More*, p.35.

¹⁰⁰ Durand and Hatzfeld, *Living Labor*, p.51.

¹⁰¹ Robert and Christine McAndrew, interview with the author, 5th April 2011. Robert McAndrew was social convenor of the JSSC and claims to have turned down The Who as the shop stewards were concerned that a pop concert in the canteen could lead to damage of company property.

to the seaside, and sports days, which allowed workers and their families to socialise outwith working hours, while open days held within the factory itself allowed local children to see where their parents worked, and perhaps contributed to the sense of permanence lent to the plant by its scale and modernity.

There is, perhaps, a conflict here between the idea of the shop stewards as community activists, and the extent to which the facilities available to the Bathgate workforce were provided by a typically paternalist employer seeking to control its workforce and constrain industrial militancy. Some strands of the historiography of work and labour in Scotland have stressed the role of company welfarism – providing ‘perks’ such as social and cultural space and activities, as well as tied company housing – in inducing loyalty to the firm amongst the workforce and undermining the position of the trade unions.¹⁰² There are, however, limits to this analysis, and certainly to its application in the case of Bathgate. McIvor has emphasised that only a minority of Scottish employers used welfarist strategies, even in the early years of the twentieth century, and evidence from the oral history suggests that the provision of facilities by the BMC and BL had little effect on trade union organisation at the plant.¹⁰³ Indeed, the JSSC seems to have been heavily involved in promoting social activities, some of which – such as the weightlifting club discussed above – apparently developed informally and without company sanction or involvement. Furthermore, the idea of the factory at the centre of the community, and of its shop stewards as community activists, is demonstrated most clearly through the strength of the reaction to the announcement that it would close, and the subsequent trade union campaign against its closure. Chapter One discussed the concurrent campaign against the closure of the nearby Plessey works and the idea that the threat to both factories represented a much broader challenge to the future economic prospects of the area. Kenny Paton ‘fought tooth and nail’ against the closure, and joined pickets at Plessey as well as at Polkemmet pit in nearby Whitburn. He explains the JSSC’s involvement in the campaign at Plessey.

We obviously, as trade unionists, you try to support your fellow trade union movements. We felt there was injustice being done in taking the jobs elsewhere

¹⁰² See, for example, A. McIvor, ‘Were Clydeside Employers More Autocratic?’, in W. Kenefick and A. McIvor, *Roots of Red Clydeside 1910-1914? Labour Unrest and Industrial Relations in West Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1996) pp.56-57.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.57.

and just closing that plant so therefore it was, it was only right that anybody, trade unionists or not, wanted to make sure that there was gonnae be jobs for the people, a manufacturing base within West Lothian.¹⁰⁴

There is evidence of a certain hardening of industrial relations at the plant following the appointment of Michael Edwardes as Chairman of BL in 1977, and much of the shop steward testimony relating to this period, including the following extract from Paton's testimony, is marked by anti-Edwardes and anti-Thatcher rhetoric, and draws on the idea that the policies of the Thatcher government represented a deliberate attack on state-owned industry not just in Bathgate or in Scotland, but throughout the UK.

Obviously we felt strongly about the miners' strike 'cos, it wasnae just the miners, was only involved in it, every industry in the country was getting taken on by Thatcher, because they seen that as a positive way out of manufacturing. The steel industry, shipbuilding industry, a lot ae the industries were getting closed, and they were sacking thousands of people, and the mines were getting shut as well.¹⁰⁵

In this context, Edwardes and his plans for Bathgate and BL more widely forms part of a longer narrative, mentioned in Chapter Two and reflected in the testimony of a number of former workers, which includes the 1960s Beeching cuts to the railway network and Ian MacGregor's management of the coal mining industry. It should be noted that the emphasis placed by some workers on Beeching, whose report, known officially as *The Reshaping of British Railways*, was published in 1963, is likely a result of the recent reopening of Bathgate's direct rail link to Glasgow at a cost of £300 million, and with considerable press attention.¹⁰⁶ In his study of the campaign to save Ravenscraig in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, David Stewart describes a similar tension between what he terms the 'Scottish consensus', emphasising Scotland's history as an industrial, manufacturing economy, and the 'uncaring' and 'anti-Scottish' Thatcher government. The Ravenscraig case attracted considerable media attention and was represented in the press as 'the symbolic end of a whole industrial culture', and it is certainly possible that this has had some influence on the 'collective memory' of Bathgate's

¹⁰⁴ WEA, interview with Kenny Paton.

¹⁰⁵ WEA, interview with Kenny Paton.

¹⁰⁶ 'Major rail link project approved', BBC News, 28th March 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/glasgow_and_west/6504201.stm, accessed 12th December 2012.

former workers.¹⁰⁷ Andy Hunter is among those whose testimony is shaped by this narrative, in which Edwardes himself functions, in Hunter's terms, as 'Thatcher's puppet'. Hunter goes on:

I think it was just a simple matter of fact that the Tories didnae want any nationalised industries so Michael Edwardes was basically put on board to, ehm – Donald Stokes was the chairman of British Leyland prior to Michael Edwardes, and I think mebbe Donald Stokes wasnae toeing the line as far as Maggie Thatcher was concerned and, eh, Donald Stokes was asked to move aside and let the little nippy sweetie Michael Edwardes come on board, which he did do and as we all know there's no Bathgate, there's no Leyland, there's no Longbridge, there's nowhere, and Michael Edwardes done a very very good job of sticking to the rules as far as Maggie Thatcher was concerned.¹⁰⁸

Some of the problems with this narrative – chiefly the fact that Edwardes was appointed two years before Thatcher was elected Prime Minister – have been discussed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, Edwardes' plan for the future of BL was initially well received amongst the BL workforce nationally, and indeed, it was his attempt to organise opposition to Edwardes which led to Derek Robinson's landmark dismissal from Longbridge in 1979.¹⁰⁹ Robinson and his supporters in the AEU organised a strike for his reinstatement and assumed he would receive the full support of his union, but, in fear of losing their own jobs, the Longbridge workforce voted overwhelmingly against strike action.¹¹⁰ In his study of CP influence in British industry, John McIlroy describes Robinson's dismissal and failure to win the support of his workers as a 'dark narrative of defeat [that] tells us as much about the debilitation of workplace unionism,' and coverage of the dispute on the local *Midlands News* highlighted the disharmony which it engendered, or perhaps exacerbated, amongst Longbridge workers.¹¹¹ Robinson's supporters were shown holding banners depicting him as Christ, nailed to the cross by Edwardes, while his opponents rallied around Ron Hill who had organised a previous 'We Want to Work' campaign

¹⁰⁷ Stewart, 'Fighting for Survival', p.56; L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) pp.96-98; A. Green, 'Can Memory be Collective?', in D. Ritchie (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp.99-100.

¹⁰⁸ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

¹⁰⁹ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.102.

¹¹⁰ Claydon, 'Images of Disorder', pp.227-228.

¹¹¹ J. McIlroy, "'Every Factory our Fortress'": Communist Party Workplace Branches in a Time of Militancy, 1956-79, part 2: Testimonies and Judgements', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 12, 2001, p.88.

and gave anti-Robinson speeches in the factory grounds, stating ‘I shall keep coming here – as long as they keep finding me work I shall keep coming here’, and telling his supporters, ‘You keep coming and bloody working, alright?’¹¹²

While the issue here was primarily Edwardes’ anti-unionism and his victimisation of the plant’s most prominent union representative, a CP member who he considered responsible for the loss of 62,000 cars and 113,000 engines worth £200 million during a 30 month period in which he had kept Longbridge in ‘ferment and upheaval’, it is important to note that Robinson’s sacking took place in the context of the comprehensive restructuring of BL and the consequent decline in employment security in the West Midlands, as elsewhere.¹¹³ The failure of the Longbridge workforce to back Robinson and support calls for his reinstatement cannot, therefore, be taken simply as a sign of a broader failure of trade unionism, particularly as an estimated 5,000 trade unionists marched through the centre of Birmingham to hear Robinson and his supporters speak at a rally in the Town Hall.¹¹⁴ The plans put forward by Edwardes and opposed by Robinson, who described the way in which they were presented to the Longbridge workforce as ‘emotive’ and misleading, involved the closure of plants at Speke on Merseyside and Abingdon in Oxfordshire and led to a cut in the BL workforce of some 50,000 between 1977 and 1982.¹¹⁵ Roy Church writes that this was achievable precisely because Edwardes appealed to workers directly, explaining the company’s difficulties and asking them to accept the need for job losses and more stable industrial relations.¹¹⁶ That the BL workforce voted 87 per cent in favour of the Edwardes corporate plan demonstrates the effectiveness of his brinkmanship, also highlighted by Foreman-Peck, Bowden, and McKinlay, who write that it was Edwardes’ use of the threat of closure and his bypassing of the company’s shop stewards which allowed him to restructure the company’s industrial relations and reassert ‘management’s right to manage’, indicating the limits to the power of organised labour in resisting redundancy and closure.¹¹⁷ Claydon cites a contemporary report in *The Times* which sums up the way in which the question was presented to the BL

¹¹² MACE, ‘Derek Robinson’, *Midlands News*, 20th February 1980; ‘Robinson’, *Midlands News*, 27th November 1979.

¹¹³ Edwardes, *Back from the Brink*, p.109.

¹¹⁴ MACE, ‘Robinson’, *Midlands News*, 27th November 1979.

¹¹⁵ Claydon, ‘Images of Disorder’, p.229; Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.102.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp.102-103; Wood, *Wheels of Misfortune*, pp.218-219.

¹¹⁷ Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.232.

workforce, asking of Robinson's union, 'will they opt to save one job – or 100,000?'¹¹⁸ Chris Bett's memories of addressing the Bathgate workforce about the Edwardes plan suggests that the divisions between workforce and shop stewards which this caused at Longbridge were replicated throughout the company.

The real problems came when they introduced, when they hired that Michael Edwardes. He was on the same line as Beeching with the railways and MacGregor with the pits, and I knew that's what he was there for. He developed a corporate plan, and we searched for a while to find out what this corporate plan was, and eh, he put a series of documents and asked everybody to vote, whether they accepted his version of the development of Leyland or no. And eh, he won hands doon. 71 [per cent] was the vote in favour of Michael Edwardes' plan. That was right across Leyland. So after it was, the result came oot, the national shop stewards met to discuss it. And the conclusion was, that it was a scam, the intention was to close plants, curtail the operation, that's what it was. So, delegated to go back and report back to your plant, the position of the national shop stewards to it that it should be opposed. I'll never forget it. We organised, organised a meeting in the canteen, maybe about two and a half thousand of the workforce there that morning, argued the case that we should oppose Michael Edwardes. I nearly got thrown off the platform, because, I can understand the position of the lads, anyway "get off the platform, we voted, seven to one, to support the plan. What right have you got to come and change the plan", you see. So that was the outcome of the Michael Edwardes plan.¹¹⁹

At Bathgate, this was compounded by the sell-off of the tractor plant, which was announced in January 1982, and which, in Bett's words, 'split the whole place right doon the middle'.¹²⁰ Andy Hunter describes his memories of a meeting held between the JSSC, the plant's management, Edwardes, and Pat Lowry, BL's personnel director, at which it was announced that the tractor plant would close.

¹¹⁸ Claydon, 'Images of Disorder', p.228.

¹¹⁹ WEA, interview with Chris Bett.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Pat Lowry opened the meeting and was basically speaking regarding this that the next thing as far as Bathgate was concerned, and Michael Edwardes turned to his right, Pat Lowry was sitting on his right, and didn't, didn't even say a word but he turned to his right and Pat Lowry just acknowledged that he'd turned and he just shut up. And Michael Edwardes then went on in his wee South African brogue, if I can say I don't like the man [laughter], but ehm, and I think it was a complete bombshell to everybody, I mean I don't think the plant directors knew, maybe they did, maybe they didn't, but to me it looked like a complete and utter bombshell to everybody sitting there who was representing Bathgate when he said that the tractors were being sold off to Marshall Fowler.¹²¹

The news was slightly less of a bombshell for Jim Swan, who had discovered during his morning run to the factory that the *Daily Express* was carrying a headline announcing the closure, and remembers his reaction.

I just went mental, that's absolutely disgraceful, it's shocking that you should treat people like that, and we went back in, and it was after that we decided that, rather than diving out on strike we needed to get the men's, need to get their confidence back, because they'd been having such a hammering with the Michael Edwardes period.¹²²

Initially, the JSSC asked those working in dispatch not to allow any tractors or tractor components to leave the plant, and arranged a collection to pay their wages when the plant's management declared them 'off the clock' and therefore refused to pay them.¹²³ The factory then went into occupation, and was joined the following day by the workers at Plessey. However, support for the occupation was not universal, and, according to John Moore it caused a serious split in the trade union movement within the plant, as the workers affected in the tractor plant itself felt that it was up to them to decide on their future, and not the JSSC.¹²⁴ In January 1982, the *Financial Times* reported that 'virtually the entire 850 workforce involved in tractor production had volunteered for redundancy to take advantage of enhanced severance payments

¹²¹ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

¹²² WEA, interview with Jim Swan.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ WEA, interview with John Moore.

of about £5,500'; a clear indication of the limits to JSSC influence across the factory in the context of industrial closure.¹²⁵ Harry Bradley, an AEU shop steward, describes the impact of this decision, and it is notable that the tractor block shop steward who he mentions is the same man depicted by Bill Raine as the trouble-making 'general'.

The sad thing about C Block, that was the tractor block, was they voted to take their redundancy money, but it was only, now I think I'm right in saying, it was only the people in C Block that voted for what was to happen to C Block, the rest of the factory never got involved. I think I'm right in saying this, because I can remember the leader of C Block was a guy from Armadale, he was elderly looking for me at that time, he'd be in his 50s or something. Now they were getting offered five thousand pound I believe it was at that time, for voluntary redundancy, and he says that nobody was gonna tell him that he's no taking his redundancy money. So that was, that was the first nail in the coffin, when C Block went.¹²⁶

This was not, however, the first instance of Bathgate workers voting in large numbers for redundancy, and two years previously in 1980, a delegate from West Lothian Trades' Council had reported to the STUC that an accepted redundancy of 750 had had to be halted at the voluntary stage as more than 1,200 men had applied.¹²⁷ This was taken as symptomatic of the lack of confidence in the future of the plant at Bathgate, and perhaps reflects its particularly vulnerable position as a branch plant, established relatively recently and remaining largely unassimilated into either the organisation or the wider motor industry.

It is certainly an indication of wider concerns at the dearth of alternative work in an area which, by the time the closure of what remained of the factory was announced in 1984, had a reported rate of unemployment of 19.3 per cent.¹²⁸ This emerges from the oral history testimony as an important motivating factor for those workers who chose to leave the plant before its closure. Alan Marr, for example, describes his decision to take redundancy not long after the sell-off of the tractor plant.

¹²⁵ '1,000 ready to leave BL Bathgate', *FT*, 25th January 1982.

¹²⁶ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

¹²⁷ STUC archive, GCAL, Eighty-Third Annual Report of the STUC, 1980, p.475.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*; 'They're not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate', *FT*, 23rd May 1984.

Numerous times they had said they were going to close the plant, but that particular time they started stripping stuff out and taking it away, and I just said, there's gonna be another three thousand guys looking for work the same time as me, I'm off. I just went in one day and said I want to take voluntary redundancy, and I went home, and Jean wasn't very happy about it right enough, but that's just my decision and she accepted it, and I went straight out looking for something else the next day.¹²⁹

Andy Hunter's experience was similar, and his testimony indicates both how much he had enjoyed and valued his work at the plant, and the extent to which the prospect of unemployment had to override any other concerns.

Although I loved my job, I loved where I was, I loved where I worked, absolutely loved it, eh I decided let's mebbe get out and try to get ma business up and running before somebody else decides to do it. But ehm, it was a big heart-wrench to leave to be quite honest with you, a big big heart-wrench.¹³⁰

In their study of the politics of closure, David Judge and Tony Dickson discuss the difficulties facing organised labour in resisting plant closures: 'Fighting closure' essentially means entering the ring after the bell has gone – after management has already decided upon closure.'¹³¹ In this context, they argue, capital defines the grounds on which labour can 'do battle', and its response is therefore necessarily limited to action which is essentially reactive and defensive. Attempts to formulate alternative plans and build trade union campaigns are reduced in this analysis to mere 'tokens of resistance' and, while this does seem to underplay the courage, determination, and hard work of those at both BL and Plessey who occupied their factories and, in the case of Plessey, had some success in terms of keeping it open, it indicates the extent to which the effectiveness of such labour and indeed community solidarity is constrained by 'the expansive and increasingly international orientation of capital'; an issue which goes far beyond the individual work community and cannot be confronted effectively through traditional modes of

¹²⁹ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

¹³⁰ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

¹³¹ D. Judge and T. Dickson, 'The Politics of Closure', in T. Dickson and D. Judge (eds), *The Politics of Industrial Closure* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) p.183.

collective organisation.¹³² In the context of BL, this coincided with what Claydon describes as ‘the onset of a new phase of ‘macho management’ in British industry under the recently elected Thatcher government’, embodied by Michael Edwardes and his determination to overhaul the company’s working practices and industrial relations.¹³³ The extent to which this undermined the security of BL’s workforce nationally contributed to the divisions which appeared throughout the company and which, at Bathgate, were exacerbated by the closure of the tractor plant. The pragmatic decision taken by men such as Andy Hunter and Alan Marr to leave the plant before its closure therefore demonstrates neither the weakness of Bathgate’s shop stewards’ movement nor the instrumentalism of its workers, but rather the extent to which the threat of closure and subsequent unemployment undermined the position of the motor industry’s workforce, particularly in Scotland, where a quarter of all manufacturing jobs were lost over the five years to 1984.¹³⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has built on the analysis of Chapter Three, demonstrating the extent to which industrial relations at Bathgate were shaped by the same structural features of motor industry work which had informed the development of the system of industrial relations characteristic of British motor manufacturing. The multi-unionism typical of the industry was reflected in the presence of ten separate trade unions, although the majority of workers, in line with industry-wide trends, were members of the semi-skilled TGWU, NUVB and AEU. While the nature of the WEA oral history project has meant that shop stewards have been disproportionately over-represented in the testimony used in this chapter, it seems clear from evidence given to the Scamp inquiry, and from the company’s own internal papers, that the plant’s Joint Shop Stewards’ Committee was generally regarded as rational and responsible, and concerned more with resolving strike action than with propagating it. Most of the strike action which did occur at the plant seems to have been very short, and it is only in its causation that it differs from wider motor industry trends. Furthermore, the shop stewards played an important role as community

¹³² Ibid, pp.181-182.

¹³³ Claydon, ‘Images of Disorder’, p.229.

¹³⁴ ‘They’re not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate’, *FT*, 23rd May 1984.

activists, helping to embed the factory in the social as well as economic life of West Lothian, and using the opportunities afforded by their trade union activities to improve the health and safety of the workplace, and to represent the interests of their workers at national level. While the reaction to the Edwardes plan, and to the sell-off of the tractor plant, arguably demonstrates the limitations of organised labour in confronting industrial closure, it does not necessarily signify the weakness of workplace unionism, but rather the nature of the challenge posed by the restructuring of BL and the loss of jobs that this would inevitably entail. This is particularly the case given both Bathgate's position as a branch plant and the West Lothian area's high levels of unemployment; a feature of the local economy which goes some way to explaining the peculiarities of the plant's industrial relations in terms of strike causation and its exceptionally high level of labour turnover. These are issues which will be central to the analysis of Chapter Five.

Chapter Five

The affluent motor worker in Scotland

Chapters Three and Four have shown that, in terms of skill, training, and industrial relations, working life at Bathgate was, for much of the plant's existence, largely in line with motor industry-wide trends. The shop stewards were generally regarded by their employer as rational and reasonable, and many of the strikes which did occur were very short. Only in terms of its strike causation and the high rate of withdrawal from the work situation recorded in its first five years does its experience seem exceptional. This is perhaps surprising, given Linwood's reputation for militancy and the emphasis placed by branch plant analyses on the poor labour relations of Scotland's motor plants resulting from the difficulties associated with adapting previously skilled workers to assembly line production.¹ It should be noted, however, that in most cases such analyses focus overwhelmingly on Linwood, while any comment on the situation at Bathgate, often referred to erroneously as a car plant, tends to be based on either contemporary newspaper reportage, or an assumption that its work culture and industrial relations mirrored those seen at its better-known near-neighbour.² Previous chapters have noted some limitations to such theses, arguing that to characterise Bathgate solely as a de-skilled branch plant, offering only low status work to a demoralised workforce, is unfair and inaccurate. Furthermore, these analyses carry the implication that the failure of Bathgate and the wider regional policy project was inevitable, and obfuscate the economic and social benefits that the plant provided for the West Lothian area. That is not to say, however, that the plant's location did not cause difficulties in terms of production and labour relations. Productivity was initially low in comparison to the Midlands, and it is in the peculiarities of Bathgate's industrial relations that the validity of the branch plant analysis seems most apparent, as its position as a 'cathedral in the desert' both exacerbated the tensions implicit in mechanised assembly work, and hindered the development of the 'affluent' workforce supposedly characteristic of the motor industry.

¹ Gilmour, 'The Trouble with Linwood', p.77.

² See, for example, Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.290, or Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.151.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the plant's location in Bathgate and its continued reliance on components sourced overwhelmingly from the Midlands led to failures in the supply chain which frequently resulted in workers being laid off or put on to short-time. Material shortage was, however, a problem endemic in the industry and so the degree of discontent caused by this issue at Bathgate and expressed in the high proportion of strikes related to 'working hours and conditions' suggests that the instability of work at the plant was exacerbated by other factors. A key consideration here is the local labour market. BMC's development at Bathgate was directed to West Lothian primarily because, at 4.8 per cent, its rate of unemployment was among the highest of the areas under consideration and expected to rise further with the anticipated closure of five local shale mines and the loss of 3,000 jobs.³ This was to have significant implications for the terms on which labour was engaged, particularly as policy makers in Scotland acknowledged that its labour availability and consequently low production costs could be used to attract investment in the new industries. In 1963, the General Council of the STUC criticised a speech given by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Noble, during a recent visit to the United States, which had informed American businessmen that labour costs in Scotland were lower than the UK average and approximately only 50 per cent of those in America. According to one delegate, 'this speech had not been selling Scotland; rather, it had amounted to a selling of the Scottish worker.'⁴ Conversely, the Scottish Engineering Employers' Association (SEEA) expressed concerns about the potential for companies investing in Scotland to drive up wages across industry. In a circular sent to the members of the SEEA in 1952, its director Sir Ernest Field wrote that investor firms 'are required to observe the wages and conditions of the district in which their works are situated', and that any 'efforts by their workers to obtain any more favourable conditions applicable elsewhere should be resisted.'⁵

Chapter Three suggested the paradoxical situation of the affluent motor worker in Scotland, as the contemporary emphasis placed on attracting motor industry development failed to take account of the monotonous and overwhelmingly semi-skilled nature of motor industry work, and both led to contemporary concerns about the 'right kind of work', and shaped subsequent

³ NAS, SEP4/1660, Scottish Development Department Specific Industries, Motor Engineering, British Motor Corporation – Memorandum from Scottish Home Department to Mr J B Fleming, 12th January 1960. The firm was also considering a site at Newhouse in North Lanarkshire, where the rate was 6.6 per cent.

⁴ Ibid, pp.263-4.

⁵ E. Wigham, *The Power to Manage: A History of the Engineering Employers' Federation* (London: Macmillan, 1973) p.302.

historical analyses which have stressed the role of branch plant employment in the deskilling of the Scottish industrial workforce. This chapter will explore a further dimension to this paradox: the perceived importance of comparatively low labour costs as a factor which could be used to attract investment into Scotland, and the SEEA's apparent determination to resist the introduction of any more favourable conditions, meant that the high wages paid by many motor industry employers, seen as the 'pay-off' for the monotony of assembly line work and the basis for the perception that the industry had driven the prosperity of the West Midlands, were not replicated at Bathgate. The conflict between a workforce expecting work in the new industries to be stable and relatively well-paid, and an employer for whom the chief attraction of the Development Areas was the availability of cheap labour, arguably explains the degree of discontent which resulted from the frequency of lay-offs and short-time, and which, in the plant's first five years, was expressed both in strike action and in its exceptionally high level of labour turnover. The chapter continues with a discussion of the extent to which industrial relations and the culture of work prevailing at the plant were shaped by its position on the periphery of the industry, and by the BMC's attitude to its enforced move to the Development Areas. The temper of industrial relations will be gauged by exploring the question of orientations to work at Bathgate. The Goldthorpe *Affluent Worker* analysis is utilised, establishing the extent to which Bathgate workers viewed their employment as an extrinsic means to an end. The prioritisation of money wages helps to clarify the nature of grievances at the plant. The final section of the chapter explores the issue of pay parity, suggesting that its importance during the 1970s represented a shift in the plant's industrial relations and the priorities of its workforce which brought it more in line with industry-wide trends in terms of strike causation.

‘Are we to understand that we are country cousins?’⁶ Supply problems, instability, and shopfloor discontent

The 1966 Inquiry of the MIJLC, or Scamp Inquiry, provides the most comprehensive record of strike activity at BMC Bathgate. The inquiry was established in response to concerns over the level of productivity

⁶ These are the words of a Plumbing Trades' Union (PTU) representative to the Scamp inquiry. MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

at the plant, where output per worker stood at 60 per cent of the Midland level, and management held concerns about the attitude of the workforce and the level of unofficial strike action. As discussed in Chapter Two, its most notable finding was that, of the 117 unofficial strikes which had taken place between the plant's establishment in 1961 and the inquiry in 1966, only one was related to pay, while 82 had arisen from concerns over working hours and conditions. This is in sharp contrast to the 55 per cent of all major strikes which took place during the 1960s attributable to wage disputes, particularly as Turner *et al.* stress that the 'bulk' of strikes in the new, regional policy plants similarly concerned wage demands.⁷ Furthermore, the majority of strikes over Bathgate's working hours and conditions related primarily to the issues of lay-offs and short-time working; problems which were a common, structural feature of motor industry work resulting from the long-term growth of motor manufacturing in Britain and its reliance on a large and independent component sector, and which the BMC's representatives at the Scamp inquiry were keen to stress were no worse at Bathgate than elsewhere in the organisation.⁸ The degree of discontent expressed by strike action, however, suggests that the way in which material shortages and the ensuing irregularity of work were experienced at Bathgate was qualitatively different. In this respect, the idea of Bathgate as an isolated branch plant seems central. For example, the oral history testimony of a number of the plant's former workers is shaped by the idea that production could be problematised by its location over three hundred miles from the industry's core in the Midlands. Jim McCulloch, a driver who was the first worker to be taken on at the plant, left his job in 1968 and claims that during his seven years at Bathgate he never received a full week's pay. He blames this on poor management, as the factory only kept one day's worth of supplies in hand.

It was a very haphazard way of working, you wasn't guaranteed any work. It only took a heavy snowfall to interrupt, if the lorries didn't get through with the supplies that day it meant you weren't working the next day, and that caused a lot of tension.⁹

As McCulloch's testimony implies, these problems were particularly acute in winter, and in 1964, BMC management estimated that as many as fifty vehicles transporting parts to the plant

⁷ Wrigley, 'Strikes in the Motor Car Manufacturing Industry', p.202; Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.68.

⁸ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

⁹ Jim McCulloch, interview with the author, 2nd February 2012.

could be held up in transit because of adverse weather conditions every day.¹⁰ John Moore, a former inspector in the truck and tractor detail section and senior AEU shop steward, recalls the ‘real, real problems’ caused by workers being laid off ‘willy-nilly’ as a result of supply shortages, which he similarly remembers being a particular problem in winter when, in the days before the construction of the M6 motorway, the northern sections of which were not completed until the early 1970s, trucks carrying components from factories in the Midlands struggled to cross the notorious Shap Summit in Cumbria.¹¹

The problem of crossing the Shap appears in the testimony of a number of former workers, including the former AEU vice-convenor Robert McAndrew, who tells the story of an incident which occurred during the famously harsh winter of 1963 when a truck carrying engine parts, one of the few to reach the factory at all, arrived four days late only to be sent back to the Midlands as the parts had begun to rust during the protracted journey.¹² It is notable that in spite of evidence suggesting that this situation improved following the recommendations of the Scamp inquiry and, perhaps more importantly, the completion of the M6, the problem of crossing the Shap is an axiom which seems to have shaped the perceptions even of those who did not have any personal experience of such problems. The evidence presented to Scamp shows that the sections of the factory worst affected by material shortage and therefore most frequently involved in strike action were the truck and tractor assembly lines, as the variety and complexity of the vehicles produced at the factory meant that they relied on supplies of highly specialised components made on comparatively short runs of production.¹³ John Hastings, however, worked on the tractor line from 1973 until 1982 and states that there were ‘no major disputes’ during his time at the plant, and yet the difficulties associated with maintaining supply lines from England are among the ‘stories’ he remembers hearing about the factory’s poor industrial relations record.¹⁴ This highlights the extent to which the issue of supply shortages, and by extension the idea of the plant as an isolated ‘cathedral in the desert’, has become a dominant narrative amongst the plant’s former workers, and demonstrates the degree to which the work culture of the plant was shaped by its position as a branch plant on the periphery of the UK motor industry

¹⁰ NA, LAB 10/2261, Ministry of Labour, The British Motor Corporation Limited, Problems associated with the setting up of new factories in Scotland, South Wales and Merseyside, 1964.

¹¹ WEA, interview with John Moore.

¹² Robert and Christine McAndrew, interview with the author, 5th April 2011.

¹³ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

¹⁴ WEA, interview with John Hastings.

and in an area in which, in the words of one management delegate to the Scamp inquiry, ‘there were not only green fields to be considered, but green labour’.¹⁵ Chapters Three and Four have, however, discussed the limited extent to which the plant’s problems resulted from the inexperienced ‘green labour’ it employed, and indeed it is worth reemphasising Turner, Clack, and Roberts’ explicit rejection of the green labour theory of strike causation in the regional policy plants especially. Nonetheless, while BMC representatives to Scamp stressed that material shortages and consequent lay-offs were a structural feature of motor industry work, experienced no more severely at Bathgate than in Birmingham or Coventry, their impact on the Bathgate workforce and the pervasiveness of the ‘cathedral in the desert’ narrative raises questions about the way in which motor manufacturing and its industrial relations were experienced in a branch plant, and the extent to which this branch plant status influenced the behaviour of its workers.

This is reflected not only in Bathgate’s unusual record of strike causation, but also in its rate of withdrawals from the work situation. Levels of both absenteeism and labour turnover were notably high, and had attracted the attention of the Ministry of Labour two years prior to the Scamp inquiry, in 1964. The rate of turnover at the time of Scamp was estimated at 16.75 per cent – conspicuously high in a sector in which labour turnover was actually lower than in British industry as a whole, and in comparison to its continental European counterpart.¹⁶ At the most basic level, the evidence suggests that this anomaly, at least in terms of absenteeism, could be attributable to the very ‘newness’ of the factory in the West Lothian landscape and the extent to which this shaped the culture of work which prevailed at the plant from the outset. Robert McAndrew worked as a millwright in the maintenance department, and his description of a certain lack of discipline, apparently exacerbated by the piecemeal way in which the plant was constructed, indicates the extent to which Bathgate’s workers struggled to adapt to motor industry work.

There wasn’t any fences round about the plant for a good two or three years and, eh, people were wandering off, you know! They would do their, they would do their amount of work that they had for the day, and if they finished early they just peeled off. You know! Because there wasn’t anything – On the night shift, well

¹⁵ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

¹⁶ Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.170.

we were starting roughly twenty minutes to eight in the morning on the day shift and, eh, the night shift, you were meeting them coming up on to the main road at Bathgate up at Kaim Park, people were going to get buses and things like that. They'd finished before they were due to finish.¹⁷

The factory initially employed both piece-work and a form of MDW by which workers were given a schedule of work which they were expected to complete each day, and it seems that many workers were not required to clock in, at least during the plant's build-up period. Bill Raine had worked at Longbridge before moving to Bathgate to be a superintendent in the B Block machine shop, although he had to work in A Block at first as the machine shop was not completed in time. He remembers his reaction to the apparently haphazard conditions he found in the newly opened factory.

We were sending the parts up from Birmingham, and the Morris were sending engines up, and we got people assembling them. We thought we had anyway, 'til we came up and found – well I came up and found, I couldn't believe it. Nobody could - they were going home when they felt like it, nobody was recording anything had been done. And I'm looking and I'm absolutely amazed, and the Managing Director comes up, I was showing a chap how to use a drilling machine, and the Managing Director comes up and he says isn't it wonderful, and I says well I think it's a [pronounced sniff] disgrace. That people are allowed to act like this. They're not interested, they're gooin' home when they feel like it, they don't have to clock out, because you stopped the piecework system that we had in the Midlands that created the [motor] empires. You had what was called Measured Day Work. These guys are just laughing at you, all of 'em. There are one or two good lads, but you'll never run this factory like this.¹⁸

This suggests, then, that much of the absenteeism reported by the Ministry of Labour in 1964 and by the Scamp inquiry in 1966 stemmed from the teething problems associated with establishing a new plant on a green field site, with a new workforce and an apparently inexperienced managerial staff. This analysis does little, however, to explain the number of workers leaving

¹⁷ Robert and Christine McAndrew, interview with the author, 5th April 2011.

¹⁸ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

their jobs at the plant; a demonstration, perhaps, of a more deep-seated discontent reflecting both the relationship between the workforce and the company, and the terms on which labour was engaged.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the motor manufacturers had significant reservations about the regional policy project, and there seems to have been some awareness among the plant's workforce of the BMC's reluctance to move to what one member of its staff described in the *Glasgow Herald* as 'the wastelands of West Lothian'.¹⁹ Jim McCulloch is among those former workers who have expressed their belief that this reluctance affected the way in which the plant was run.²⁰ His testimony returns several times to what he perceived to be poor industrial relations resulting primarily from the company's attitude to regional policy and the enforced move to its Bathgate branch plant.

And as I say, as time went on, we found, as I say, industrial relations was never very good. Because politically, the government never ever wanted, or BMC never wanted to come to Scotland, that was a known fact. And the government made them come, because of the pits that were closing, both in the coal and the shale industry in this area. A lot of bings about here, you'll have seen them, that's the shale pits and they were shutting at the same time as the coal pits. So the factory was - BMC were told to open a factory here. They never ever wanted to be here. And the industrial relations were very poor, all the time.²¹

While it should be noted that McCulloch's testimony is shaped by both his personal political views and by his knowledge of the plant's eventual closure, similar ideas have been expressed by a number of other former Bathgate workers, and the perception that the factory was established at Bathgate as a result of political or social engineering seems to have had some influence on the development of the culture of work within the plant. Alan Marr grew up locally and started an apprenticeship with the BMC after leaving school. His testimony echoes McCulloch's description of the political decision behind the plant's creation, and his contention that some of the strikes at the factory were manipulated or even created by management implies the level of

¹⁹ 'BMC, New Focal Point in the Lothians – progress report on Bathgate', *Glasgow Herald*, 13th September 1961.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Jim McCulloch, interview with the author, 2nd February 2012.

distrust between the company and its workers arguably engendered but certainly exacerbated by the BMC's known unwillingness to move to Scotland.

It was silly but, but I think some strikes were manufactured. And I always, I've always got the impression that bringing the plant up here was a social, eh, experiment and it didnae appear to be working, so they just closed it down. They thought they would have to bring some, a big industry up here, for to appease everybody and I think they did that, but then there's been nothing big like that ever since.²²

This is another idea which features frequently in the oral history testimony and which is also supported in the literature. As noted in Chapter Four, Turner *et al.* suggest that it was a deliberate strategy adopted by management to allow strikes to drag on in times of weak demand in order to avoid redundancy, and strikes during slumps consequently tended to be fewer, but larger, and for longer, than in times of boom.²³ McCulloch, who it should be noted was not an active trade unionist, describes one particular instance of a strike which he believes was coordinated by management working in collaboration with a particular shop steward and aimed at keeping the plant closed during a period in which work was slack and workers would otherwise have been laid off or put on short-time.

One of the times they had us out on strike, and they had us out for about seven weeks, never went to work for seven weeks, and what has happened was that... they kept telling us that the order book was full, and that we would bring the company to their knees if we stayed on strike. We'd bring the company to their knees, they'd be begging us to come back. Which turned out to be a load of nonsense. There was a story in the *Daily Express* that the BMC had just won an order for overseas trucks. And, uh, the strike – And [a shop steward] said at a meeting at the football park, there were three thousand, four thousand all gathered on the football park, not to believe the Tory press, the order books were full and we'd bring them to their knees. But it didn't work that way and he recommended that we go back to work, so we went back to work on the Monday morning and

²² WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

²³ Church, *The Rise and Decline*, pp.68-69; Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.332.

[the shop steward], as I said he was trade union convenor, he didn't come in, he walked into Personnel and sat down at a desk as a Personnel Officer. Having kept us out for seven weeks, he got his reward, and he only lasted about four months and then he went to pastures new.²⁴

This is a particularly colourful example, but comparable situations have been described by other former workers. John Moore, for example, alleges that there was often 'an element of manipulating by the company' in engineering strikes or walk-outs in order to avoid giving lay-off pay or, in the case of what he terms 'the big strike', which lasted for nine weeks in 1972, to keep the factory closed during a period when production might otherwise have been disrupted by power cuts and the three-day working week resulting from the miners' strike of that year.²⁵

Similar suspicions were also voiced during the Scamp inquiry. One representative of the AEU, for example, gave the following statement.

We believe, gentlemen, that many of the strikes that the management referred to which were associated with lay-offs in fact, to some degree, were a convenience to management. We believe as Trade Unions, responsible Trade Unions, when management had men laid off they deliberately in some cases created the circumstances where a walk-out became a factor in the total picture.²⁶

The degree of suspicion and mistrust which this issue apparently engendered at Bathgate is again unusual, as Turner *et al.* contend that workers and unions alike were willing to collude with management in the hopes of postponing dismissals and lay-offs, and they suggest that this represented the industry's 'substitute for formally-agreed means of dealing with recurrent labour surplus'.²⁷ This is perhaps symptomatic of a lack of communication between management and shopfloor. Indeed, it was the contention of the trade union delegation to the Scamp inquiry that the strike action that had taken place at Bathgate was as much a result of a lack of consultation over the issue of lay-offs and short-time working as it was a response to those problems

²⁴ Jim McCulloch oral history testimony, edited to remove third party information.

²⁵ John Moore interview.

²⁶ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

²⁷ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.332.

themselves.²⁸ Shop stewards complained that communication with management was limited, that they were given insufficient notice when a lay-off was to take place, and that they were not allowed the opportunity to take, or even recommend, action which might avoid the need for a lay-off altogether.²⁹ Furthermore, there was a feeling amongst the union delegates to the inquiry that the management's reluctance or even refusal to engage with the plant's shop stewards and communicate more effectively with its workers was indicative of a broader indifference which was also reflected in both the company's allegedly weak management of its supply chain difficulties, and its lack of understanding of what its representatives variously described as its 'ignorant' and 'naive' workforce.³⁰ The AEU delegate, for example, described as 'ridiculous' the first instance of a lay-off at the plant, which resulted from the company forgetting, or perhaps not realising, that Scottish statutory holidays differed from English statutory holidays and therefore not ensuring that the factory held enough supplies to keep it running over an English holiday period.³¹ Such instances contributed to a sense that the BMC's approach to the factory and its workforce was marked by a certain lack of commitment to its branch plant operation, reflected in the poor condition of the factory's aging, second-hand equipment, much of which had been transferred from factories in the Midlands. A representative of the PTU, for example, drew attention to these issues, asking 'are to understand that we are country cousins?'³² This was undoubtedly compounded by the factory's continued reliance on components sourced from the Midlands and its consequent lack of embeddedness in the West Lothian economy, as the absence of ancillary industries contributed to fears over its longer-term stability. As one delegate to the STUC put it, as long as the motor industry remained unassimilated into the wider Scottish economy, it 'could be lifted out of Scotland lock, stock and barrel'.³³

The testimony of a number of former workers suggests that the company's reluctance to engage with those it employed at Bathgate manifested itself, at least in the plant's early years, in a sharp distinction between shopfloor workers and staff. Jim McCulloch's memories of his time at the plant are defined by what he terms an 'unhappy atmosphere' which he perceives to have resulted from the company's resentment of regional policy and of its enforced move to Bathgate. For

²⁸ MRC, MSS.178/15, report of inquiry.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ STUC archive, GCAL, Eightieth Annual Report of the STUC, 1977, p.597.

McCulloch, the distinction between workforce and management was a product of this resentment and a resultant hostility towards the workforce which he feels formed the ‘underlying current’ of the plant’s industrial relations. He describes an incident which demonstrated to him the extent of this distinction.

I think one of the things I should mention, in the BMC, there was a very big distinction between staff and workers, or between white collar and blue collar. I mean staff, if you were staff you were superior to the ones with the blue collar, the overalls. They got things done for them that the men in the shop weren’t getting. I remember the Managing Director – as I said I looked after the Managing Director’s car, just valeting and driving for him now and again, and his wife, and one of the times the staff had a car club and they decided they were going to do advanced driving courses, and the Managing Director’s wife decided she was going to, and she put my name down as well, so the two of us could go on it. But it was rejected by the car club because I wasn’t on the staff. I was lowly, I was hourly paid. But they said she was more than welcome, even though she wasn’t a member. Her reply to that, “well if I’m not a member then I can’t drive, and Jimmy can’t drive either” and she didn’t take a course. But that was just the sort of attitude they had. If you were staff you were somebody, if you were white collar you were superior to the blue collar, and that prevailed all the time. I think that caused an awful lot of friction.³⁴

Bruce Davies, a graduate mechanical engineer who took up a job as a trainee design engineer in the tractor plant, takes a slightly different view. For him, the distinction between blue collar and white collar workers was equally obvious, but resulted primarily from an out-dated management approach which was also reflected in the lack of vision and poor decision making discussed in Chapter Two.

I’d been there about three months and they had a set of canteens, and the canteen I think was from, and this is a joke, was from none-paid, it started off from people who were paid by the minute, paid by the hour, paid by the week, paid by the

³⁴ Jim McCulloch, interview with the author, 2nd February 2012.

month, paid senior by the month, and management. So it was either six or seven canteens. And by this time, we started off on monthly staff, we were paid, it was just a function of how you got your pay, it put you in no position at all relative to anybody else, and if you went into the monthly staff canteen they had a sort of help yourself, whereas round the corner was the senior monthly staff canteen where you sat down and a waitress came and served you. Now I was completely unaware of all, I just thought these were canteens that you chose to go to as you felt like, so I'd been in the senior monthly staff canteen, going for months before anybody discovered I wasn't part of senior monthly staff. I never did change, but as we came to one corner after this, there was another guy who was going into corporate staff, or management, and I said it's alright, I know my place, I have to go into the other canteen now. And what astonished me is I thought we would have just laughed and carried on, well that's the way it is. I had a ten minute lecture on the industrial importance of having a layered series of canteens, and we now know from Mark Zuckerman [sic] and Facebook what a real nonsense that was, and I didn't say anything for once, I was so astonished that they would even try to justify something which I thought was patently ludicrous, or just a legacy of when Lord so-and-so came here and they gave a separate lunch or something, I didn't want to comment on it. But I remember, it was one of those moments that fixed in my mind.³⁵

It is worth noting here that, although McCulloch left the plant in 1968, Davies started work with the BMC in that year and stayed until 1975. This perhaps suggests that, while a distinction between the factory's shopfloor workforce and managerial staff remained, the perception that this resulted chiefly from the company's initial reluctance to move to Bathgate receded as the plant became better established.

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that this distinction could be exacerbated by the cultural differences which existed between the factory's workforce and its largely English management team, as well as the sometimes difficult position of the supervisors and foreman brought from the Midlands to assist in the initial development of the factory and the on-the-job training of its

³⁵ WEA, interview with Bruce Davies.

workforce. The proceedings of the Scamp inquiry include some heated exchanges between the largely English management team and trade union representatives, one of whom refers to the company as ‘Sassenachs’, whose reluctance to encourage local firms to manufacture components for the plant was, it is implied, born out of an inherent prejudice against ‘Scottish traditional employers’.³⁶ There is also a suggestion that ‘the English people have lived a sheltered life’ and that the management therefore could not be expected to understand the extent to which the attitude and behaviour of its Bathgate workforce had been shaped by the experience of unemployment. This is an idea which seems to have had some influence in shaping the industrial relations of the plant in its early years, and which will be developed more fully later in this chapter, but here it is important to consider the testimony of Bill Raine, who was among the cohort of experienced Midland motor workers sent by the company to assist in the build-up of the plant. Raine claims that he’d ‘never heard of Bathgate, no, I didn’t even know which country it was in’, and his experiences demonstrate both the minor but telling cultural differences which existed across Britain at the time, and the resentment towards the plant and its workers which was expressed by some sections of the local population. Here he remembers his bewilderment on encountering Francie and Josie, a popular Scottish comedy duo of the 1960s whose fame had apparently not reached Longbridge.

Woolworth’s opened that week, and Francie and Josie, do you remember them – well, we were walking up the precinct, well it’s the precinct now, me and Joan, and there was this crowd. Ah, I said, they’re opening Woolworth’s, and there’s this one guy in a red and one guy in a blue suit, with the sleeves rolled up and the legs – and this one says ‘Josie’, and everybody starts laughing, and he says ‘Francie’, and everybody starts laughing, and I said is something wrong with us two, everybody’s laughing their socks off and I can’t see any reason for laughing. I’d never heard of Francie and Josie [laughter].³⁷

He goes on to describe initial impressions of the town, marked by cultural differences and his experience of alleged anti-English abuse.

³⁶ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

³⁷ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

I've never, ever experienced anything like it. The anti-English, you would not believe it. People shouting across the road at you, you know, English go home. Great big signs painted on the road bridges, English go home, and things like this. It was rife in this part when we came here. When we lived in Birmingham every brewery was building big nice hotels, so if you wanted a drink, I don't drink by the way, if you wanted a drink you could take the family down on the weekend and the kids could play in the back, they got parks for them and swings, in the hotels. When we came to Scotland, you weren't allowed. I brought my mother up once on a tour and she wanted a drink, a lemonade, and I said well, the shops are closed, I'll pull up at the next pub, just nip in, there's probably an outdoor - and they threw her out. They told her to go and get lost, go back to England if she wanted anything. But she couldn't believe it, that it actually happened.³⁸

It can perhaps be inferred from the fact that Raine stayed at the plant until its closure, and then continued to live in the town, that this situation also improved as the factory became established and its workforce more settled. However, his experience reflects the extent to which the factory, by providing relatively well-paid work in clean, safe surroundings which were visibly more modern and significantly more prominent than other employers in the area, created resentment among those local people and businesses who were not employed there and did not benefit directly from its presence. A relation of Chris Bett's was Managing Director of Renton and Fisher's steel foundry in Bathgate, and his reported attitude to the BMC reflects the concerns expressed by the SEEA over its potential to push up wages in the area.

He came to me and he complained about it, that he had bother hiring engineers, skilled engineers obviously he was talking about it, he had bother hiring engineers because of the rates of pay we were talking about, so I said to him well pay the bloody rate and you'll get all the engineers that you want.³⁹

Alan Marr grew up in Bathgate, and it was his perception that '[the BMC] sucked a lot of people in, and it may have had a derogatory effect on other, ehm, industries, in the area.'⁴⁰ Jobs at the

³⁸ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

³⁹ WEA, interview with Chris Bett.

⁴⁰ WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

plant were highly sought after, and Harry Bradley, who lived in Blackridge and worked at Menzies's steel foundry in Armadale until he was able to get a job at the factory in 1972, recalls how difficult it was to find work at the plant initially as it was so over-subscribed.

When Leyland came everybody tried to get into Leyland but, they were that, I'm saying they were slow but you just couldnae get an interview, it was hard tae get an interview, it was OK if you knew somebody who knew somebody tae help you.⁴¹

Given the esteem apparently associated with work at the plant, the number of workers choosing to leave their jobs and reflected in its exceptionally high rate of labour turnover is, perhaps, surprising, and raises further questions about the way in which work was experienced on the shopfloor. This is particularly the case as the plant was also notable for its unusual record of strike causation, suggesting that the labour turnover seen at Bathgate represented a further reflection of the level of discontent that arose from the frequency of lay-offs and short-time, and was exacerbated by the lack of communication and the perceived divisions between workforce and management informed by the company's known reluctance to move to Scotland.

'People come to work for one thing only. Money.'⁴²

Foreman-Peck, Bowden, and McKinlay attribute the industry's generally low levels of labour turnover partly to the British motor worker's greater use of 'voice' than 'exit' in expressing dissatisfaction. They go on to write, however, that 'low labour turnover suggests that, given the wages, conditions were acceptable.'⁴³ This is a key point, and highlights the idea, central to the *Affluent Worker* thesis and many other characterisations of motor industry workers, that the high wages paid in the industry represented a 'pay off' for the loss of skill and autonomy associated with assembly line work. In her work on the experience of motor manufacturing employment in the United States, for example, Ruth Milkman describes auto workers as 'prisoners of prosperity', for whom the industry's monotonous assembly line work provided 'their only

⁴¹ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

⁴² WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

⁴³ Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.170.

opportunity to share in the unrivalled prosperity of the post-war boom years'. Milkman writes that car workers, in discussing their jobs, frequently likened the plant to a prison: 'once they grew accustomed to the high pay and benefits, most began counting the years until their "sentences"...would be up.'⁴⁴ As discussed in Chapter Three, Goldthorpe's affluent workers valued intrinsic benefits such as autonomy and variety in their work, and many expressed their desire to move off the line and into a more skilled supervisory or maintenance roles. Their key concern, however, was with pay. Goldthorpe writes that this was of 'extreme importance', particularly to assembly workers, a third of whom claimed that it was the pay alone that kept them in their jobs.⁴⁵ One worker characterised his reasons for working at Vauxhall as 'money and again money – nothing else!' while another claims 'it's money every time. I sell my labour to the highest bidder.'⁴⁶ This concern with work as a means to an extrinsic end is central to the *Affluent Worker* analysis, and is reflected in the testimony of Bill Raine, who describes the attitude to work at the BMC's Austin car plant at Longbridge, where he worked as a foreman before moving to Bathgate in 1962.

In them days the motor empires were built on piece work. If you didn't work you didn't get paid. Everything you did had a price, a time. If you did it you got paid, if you didn't you didn't get paid. Everything was inspected and checked, and if the inspector said it was no good you didn't get paid for it. Everybody was work mad in them particular days, they stood by their machines at eight o'clock waiting for the horn to start, and they started. It was a pressure, like. Everybody was the same, everybody went to work for one reason only – earn money, the more the better. To buy houses, to buy cars and things like that.⁴⁷

The evidence from the oral history interviews suggests that many of Bathgate's 'affluent workers' shared this orientation to work, and took up jobs at the plant precisely because it was expected that they would be well paid. John Cooper, for example, was an apprentice baker before starting his national service.

⁴⁴ R. Milkman, *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) p.27.

⁴⁵ Goldthorpe *et al.*, *Industrial Attitudes*, p.28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁴⁷ WEA, interview with Bill Raine.

After that, as I said, they started to build what do you call it, the BMC, which was terrific, because it made you, just married, put in an application for a job to earn more money. And that's the reason I moved.⁴⁸

Cooper estimates that, including overtime, he was able to earn up to three pounds a week more at the BMC than he had done as a baker. Andy Hunter's circumstances were similar when he decided to leave his job at a local clay pit in order to move to what was then British Leyland in 1972, and it is notable that he had already left a more skilled job at a garage for higher wages at the mine.

I think the wage was very fair. I obviously left my trade to go to Wallhouse Mine for more money, and I left Wallhouse Mine to go to British Leyland for money as well, as obviously I had a young family and I was just starting the way with my young family and eh, obviously money dictated how you got on in life. So when I left Wallhouse Mine, I probably just a wee bit less than doubled my money, going from Wallhouse Mine to British Leyland. It was a big big jump.⁴⁹

The factory developed a reputation for offering well-paid work, particularly for semi-skilled workers, and Guthrie Aiken remembers a newspaper report on the plant which presented the wages it paid as a notable advance in the area's economy.

"It's a thousand pound Bathgate". And that was the inspectors, that was the skilled people, were getting twenty pounds a week, and it was a thousand pounds a year, and that was a breaking point, you know. You know, it had got to that point where blue collar workers were earning more than a thousand pounds a year. Fantastic.⁵⁰

Joyce Brogan was offered two jobs on leaving school; one with the BMC, and one with a small local firm in her hometown of Armadale. She describes her reasons for taking the job with the BMC.

⁴⁸ WEA, interview with John Cooper.

⁴⁹ WEA, interview with Andy Hunter.

⁵⁰ WEA, interview with Guthrie Aiken.

I think it was because it sortae held a lot of opportunities because it was a big concern, that my dad sort of influenced me in that decision. Also, the money I was offered at the time compared to the money I was offered at the other place was higher, so I remember my dad saying to me ‘take the job that pays the most money’, and I just took that job.⁵¹

The sense that the BMC offered greater opportunities as well as higher wages is reflected in the testimony of a number of former Bathgate workers, and especially those who joined the firm either as apprentices or in more skilled occupations. Alan Marr started his apprenticeship in 1969, and his testimony echoes Brogan’s in suggesting that the company was held in higher esteem than other local employers.

The main three places I was thinking about were, eh, Renton and Fisher’s, which was a foundry, Plessey, and Leyland. They were the ones that were offering the best apprenticeships. So, I gave my dad my application for Plessey, and I hudnae heard anything for weeks and weeks and weeks, and he never said anything to me about anything, and then the one for Leyland came in and we went for the interview, he came with me, we met everybody at the time, and then ah asked him about the Plessey one and he says I didnae hand it in. He dusnae want me to work there he said. [Laughter] He must ha’ saw the writing on the wall and decided, well, that’s not the place for him.⁵²

The implication here is that by the late 1960s it was recognised that many local firms which had been important local employers were under threat, and that the plant was perceived to offer not only the highest pay and best apprenticeships, but also the safest prospect of secure, long-term employment in the West Lothian area. Chapter One considered the idea that the closure of a large, modern, and capital-intensive factory which its workers and the wider community had expected would exist to provide work for future generations in the area represented a challenge to the notion of ‘industrial permanence’, but here it is worth emphasising the extent to which the promise of stable and permanent employment attracted workers to the plant, demonstrating the limits to the idea of Bathgate’s affluent workers as motivated primarily by money.

⁵¹ WEA, interview with Joyce Brogan.

⁵² WEA, interview with Alan Marr.

Kenny Paton, for example, grew up in the Gorbals and Garthamlock areas of Glasgow before moving to Whitburn to work for a haulage contractor. He describes his decision to apply for a job in BL's maintenance department in 1975.

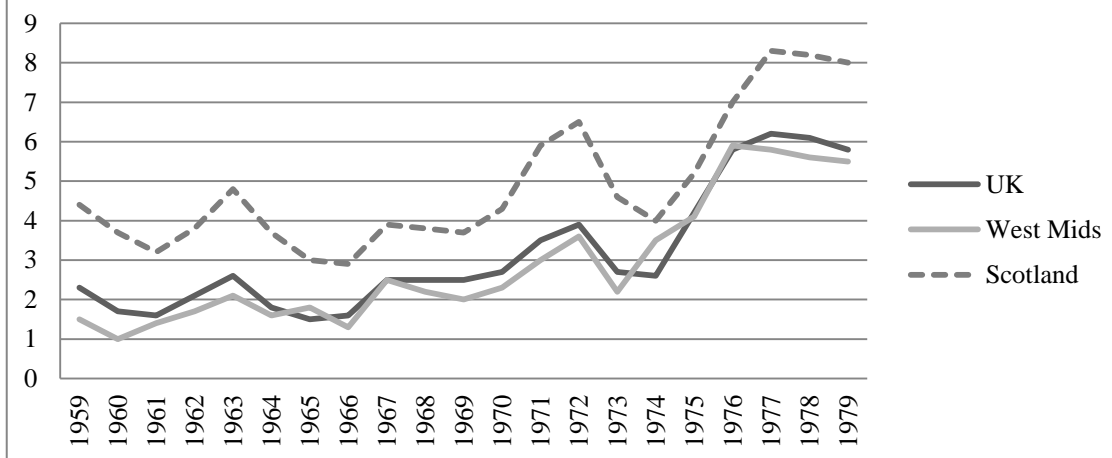
Well a lot of the people that I worked, that I socialised with in Whitburn and West Lothian, quite a few of them worked in British Leyland. And I think the hourly rate was better, and it was – it was, we believed then it was giving you continuity of employment for the rest of your life, because of the scale and the nature of the factory 'cos it was vast, I think at that time in '75 there was about 3,500 people were employed in British Leyland, I'm not sure exactly but round about that, and I think a lot of the people thought of it that look, this is a way that I'll get an income for the rest of my adult life. And that was the reason I applied for a job in there.⁵³

It is important to note that 'good security' did also emerge as a key concern of Goldthorpe's affluent workers, but that the reasons underlying its perceived importance, second only to the level of pay, were perhaps rather different in full-employment Luton than in Development District Bathgate. Goldthorpe writes that 'typically with our respondents, 'security' seemed to be thought of far more in relation to long-run income maximisation than to the minimum requirement of having a job of some kind', whereas its importance to the BMC's workers at Bathgate seems to result primarily from the experience or threat of unemployment.⁵⁴ As the data shown in Figure 5:1 shows, rates of unemployment remained consistently higher in Scotland than in more typically 'affluent' areas such as the West Midlands – included here for its pertinence to motor manufacturing – and in the UK overall throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

⁵³ WEA, interview with Kenny Paton.

Figure 5:1: Percentage rates of unemployment in the UK, West Midlands, and Scotland, 1959-1979

Source: Central Statistical Office, *Abstract of Regional Statistics* (London: HMSO, 1960-1979)



Tommy Morrison's description of finding work at the BMC after being made redundant from his job as a steel moulder at the West Lothian Foundry at Armadale underlines this point and demonstrates the centrality of 'having a job of some kind' to many of the Bathgate workforce for whom work within the plant was a necessity rather than a choice.

[The foreman] come to me on, we'll say a Wednesday, a Wednesday he come to me and he says do you know you've got to finish up this Friday, I says well that was kindae quick, but he says the reason I'm telling you, there's a BMC opening up, I says where's that about, he says at Bathgate. I says oh, he says there's a BMC opening up, and I would like you to apply to get a start. Oh I says, that'd be good then. He says now what you've to do, I'll send you to a doctor in Bathgate to get a medical, he says you won't have a problem with your medical, but he says I've got to send you there, and so I got paid to the Friday, I got my medical on the Saturday morning, I got a telegram on Sunday, to start in British, BMC on the Monday. So I never lost a shift, it was that comical. So that's how it's went.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ WEA, interview with Tommy Morrison.

The idea that the prevalence of unemployment represented a key motivating factor for Bathgate's workers was also put forward during discussions of the impact of lay-offs and short-time at the 1966 Scamp inquiry. The AEU delegate, for example, claimed that the BMC's largely English management team were insensitive to the effects of both unemployment and the insecurity of work which had often resulted from the style of management which predominated in Scotland's heavy industries, and argued that this inhibited their understanding and handling of lay-offs at the plant.

We have a heritage in Scotland. To a certain extent the English people have lived a sheltered life. We were brought up in a period of unemployment where quite frankly the Labour Exchange was something we were brought up with and it is inherent in most of the workers' minds that is instability of employment inside factories, and this is something we as the Shop Stewards Committee continually try to break down. We have to struggle to ensure we get the guaranteed 40 hour week inside the factory.⁵⁶

This reflects John Foster's characterisation of Scotland as a 'proletarian nation', which draws on the legacy of this 'authoritarian, hire and fire' style of management in arguing that, in spite of an industrial structure becoming increasingly similar to that of England, Scots in the latter half of the twentieth century nevertheless saw themselves as 'somehow more exploited, more embattled, and...more proletarian than...their English fellow citizens south of the border.'⁵⁷ In this context, it needs to be emphasised that the problems of lay-offs and short-time were not exclusive to Bathgate or even to the motor industry's regional policy plants, and that the security of work was considered important by both Goldthorpe's affluent workers and by the Ford workers studied by Beynon. Furthermore, the issues of pay and working hours were not discrete, and indeed Turner, Clack, and Roberts include instability of earnings as a result of the irregularity of motor industry employment alongside wage differentials as a key factor in their discussion of the industry's strike-proneness.⁵⁸ In Beynon's analysis, the incidence of the lay-off is another sign of the semi-skilled worker's loss of autonomy in a motor plant; in this case to the market forces which

⁵⁶ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

⁵⁷ J. Foster, 'A Proletarian Nation? Occupation and Class since 1914', in Dickson and Treble, *People and Society in Scotland*, pp.206, 209.

⁵⁸ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.331.

dictate the demand for cars.⁵⁹ However, just as Goldthorpe wrote that security was important primarily for its role in ‘income maximisation’, so Beynon found that the lay-offs experienced at Ford were resented by the company’s workers largely because they ‘had children, hire purchase debts and mortgage repayments to make’.⁶⁰ He goes on to cite Turner *et al.*, who discuss the paradox of the motor worker as the archetypal affluent worker, or ‘economic man’, in spite of his position in an industry which was marked by both instability of earnings and significant wage differentials.⁶¹

Chapter Four showed that the sectionalism which frequently resulted from such differentials was a feature of industrial relations at Bathgate, but here it is important to note the qualitatively different way in which job insecurity was experienced by the plant’s workers when compared with motor workers in England. A second AEU delegate explained to the Scamp inquiry that it was his belief that levels of labour turnover experienced at the plant were unusually high because ‘people were leaving in disgust because they regarded themselves as casual labour.’⁶² He goes on to develop this point:

I think it can be said that the established industries in Scotland in the main have never been subject to the violent fluctuations of short time working that are prevalent in the car industry. As I said earlier many years ago I had an experience when they came along at four o’clock in the afternoon to say there are 2,000 away. Even in the worst days of Scotland this has not taken place and even where we have industries today which are facing difficulties we would spread the load over a four day week for all the people which is difficult to do in a car factory but this type of thing cushioned any effect, but there is no cushioning here and as our colleagues have said this factory was encouraged by the Board of Trade and it was encouraged to come to give employment to people living in Scotland. When they talk about employment they talk about employment without casual labour and I can tell you quite definitely that many of the Scottish men have left because of that casual aspect even although at the end of the day they may have got slightly

⁵⁹ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, pp.153-156.

⁶⁰ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p.157.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.157; Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.331.

⁶² MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

more for their day's earnings than they get elsewhere for their five days but the principle is still inherent that they want full employment and this is the important thing.⁶³

This analysis perhaps underplays the structural instability of work within Scotland's heavy industries which, as Foster explains, relied on low wages, tight management control of workers, and the maintenance of a reserve of unemployed labour in order to allow Scottish industrialists to compete while investing considerably less in plant, equipment, research, and design, than those elsewhere in Britain, and which had considerable influence in shaping this aversion to apparently casual labour.⁶⁴ It does, however, highlight both the problem of expectation which existed between an employer hoping that Scottish labour would be cheaper and more pliable than its Midland counterpart and a workforce which had been led to believe that the new industries would provide work which was stable as well as relatively well-paid, as well as the 'newness' and lack of understanding in Scotland of work in the notoriously unstable motor industry. Furthermore, it underlines the extent to which some Bathgate workers, conditioned in their approach to work by what could be termed the 'culture of the labour exchange', prioritised job stability even over pay. This is reflected in the oral history testimony of a number of former workers, including Harry Bradley who described his reason for taking a job with the BMC as 'mostly the security'.⁶⁵ He goes on to describe a considerable drop in his earnings compared to his previous job at a local steel foundry, although it should be noted that the sums he gives are exaggerated, as £84 a week would be equivalent to more than £1,000 a week in today's values.

Well, I worked in Menzies's the steel foundry at the time, and I was night shift as well, and everybody was saying how much money was supposed to be good in Leyland, I think I was on about, I think it was 84 pound a week on the nightshift, which was an awful lot for working four nights, I mean that was way back in the late '60s, and I went into Leyland, I'm no sure, I think the first pay was about seventy pound or something.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid, pp.114-115.

⁶⁴ Foster, 'A Proletarian Nation?', p.209.

⁶⁵ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Chris Bett similarly took a small pay cut in order to work at the BMC, in part because he was concerned about the future of his employment on the railways.

Bearing in mind that the starting rate at that time in 1961, '62 for a semi-skilled worker was 25 pence an hour, that's what it was. Ehm, and I worked on the railway at the time, I was just married, just had the first kid, and reductions on the railway, you know with the Beeching cutbacks and everything else, my wife and I discussed it and said, well, they're asking people to apply for jobs at the BMC, do you think I should go in? Had a look at the wages and the wages were basically ten pound a week. But working on the railway, put back on the cleaning you were on three shifts, and with a wee bit shift allowance instead of ten pound a week I had ten pound ten shillings. So we sat and we talked about whether I should move or no, and anyway I decided to move and really, never looked back after that in that sense.⁶⁷

Pay was also of only secondary importance to many of those discussed in Chapter One who moved to Bathgate primarily because of the good, modern housing built for the plant's incoming workers. John Moore had previously worked at the BMC's Albion Motors truck plant in Glasgow, and was therefore one of the few at Bathgate with previous motor industry experience. Moore estimates that his wages fell by approximately 40 per cent, but states that this was acceptable because he was 'desperate for the opportunity' to move his family from a rundown room-and-kitchen flat in the Whiteinch area of Glasgow to a new house in Whitburn.⁶⁸

The significance of this housing to many of the plant's workers, and the extent to which it acted as a pull-factor in attracting people from Glasgow in particular to work at the BMC raises further questions about the position of the affluent motor worker in Scotland. Luton was chosen as the location for the *Affluent Worker* studies in part because it was not an 'old' industrial town marked by traditional industries and long-established industrial relations practices, but rather a growing town attracting geographically mobile workers seeking both high wages in the new

⁶⁷ WEA, interview with Chris Bett.

⁶⁸ WEA, interview with John Moore.

industries and improved standards of living in new, private housing.⁶⁹ This marks an important cultural difference with Bathgate, where the housing available to incoming workers was provided by the local authority, as home ownership and ‘privatism’ more broadly have been seen as key tenets in the development of a ‘new’ working-class culture based around the home and the family. This is an idea which is central to both the embourgeoisement thesis and to its revision in the *Affluent Worker* series, and which has longer roots in England, with inter-war antecedents explored by Peter Scott in his work on home ownership and consumer spending.⁷⁰ In Scott’s analysis, the rapid spread of owner-occupation during the 1930s resulted in part from a marketing strategy ‘which portrayed the suburban semi as an essential component of a new, aspirational, form of working-class respectability’, demonstrating the affordability of new housing and overturning the traditional ‘respectable’ working-class aversion to debt.⁷¹ Moreover, the emphasis placed by building society advertising on the aspirational lifestyle associated with this new, suburban model of working-class life, contributed to the emergence of what have been termed ‘consumption communities’ defined by their shared material values.⁷² The concurrent development of hire purchase schemes, meanwhile, created a mass market for consumer durables and afforded working-class consumers greater access to such goods. Indeed, by 1938, the non-agricultural working-class comprised the most important socio-economic group in terms of purchasing power, accounting for 54.18 per cent of the mass market in furniture, for example.⁷³

For Goldthorpe and his colleagues, the importance of work as a means to an extrinsic end in terms of income maximisation was driven not by a desire to challenge class status or emulate a typically middle class way of life through consumption, but rather to improve the individual family’s own standard of living within the ‘social horizons’ imposed by the class status of the manual wage labourer.⁷⁴ In this context, geographical mobility and in particular the willingness to break family and community ties, is characterised as ‘following the money’ and taken as

⁶⁹ F. Devine, *Affluent Workers Revisited: Privatism and the Working Class* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) pp.16-17.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pp.15, 19.

⁷¹ P. Scott, ‘Marketing Mass Home-Ownership and the Creation of the Modern Working-Class Consumer in Inter-War Britain’, *Business History Review*, 50:1, 2008, pp.5, 10-11.

⁷² *Ibid*, p.16.

⁷³ P. Scott, ‘Mr Drage, Mr Everyman, and the Creation of a Mass Market for Furniture in Inter-War Britain’, *Economic History Review*, 62:4, 2009, p.811.

⁷⁴ J. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer, J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) pp.121-2.

evidence of the worker's commitment to material advancement.⁷⁵ Conversely, the 1966 *Lothians Regional Survey and Plan* posited that the production problems experienced by the BMC in its first five years at Bathgate could be explained by the limited appeal to the Scottish worker of incentives aimed at increasing productivity and achieving higher earnings.

Ambition to own his own house, for example, is a powerful incentive to the English wage-earner but has at the moment little effect on the Scottish wage-earner, who has long been accustomed to expect and be satisfied with low rental, subsidized Council housing.⁷⁶

This depiction of Scottish motor workers contrasts with Bill Raine's account of their Longbridge counterparts going to work to 'earn money, the more the better. To buy houses, to buy cars and things like that.' Furthermore, it is at odds with the findings of Daniel Wight's anthropological study of an industrial Lowland village that he calls 'Cauldmoss', which demonstrates the centrality of money and consumption as reasons for working even in the absence of the 'privatism' associated with the growth of affluence among the English working class.⁷⁷ Wight describes the 'employment ethic' which he encountered particularly among the male population of Cauldmoss during the year he spent living there in the early 1980s, and which he differentiates from the more usual work ethic, which encompasses an ingrained willingness to engage in tasks, whether paid or unpaid. The employment ethic focused instead on the discipline of working life and the value of withstanding the discipline of waged labour over a long period, rather than productivity, industriousness, or the quality of work.⁷⁸ He describes, for example, the esteem afforded to men who 'worked all their days', or 'put a good shift in', and the extent to which the idea of enduring hardship in order to earn money and provide for a family shaped perceptions of both masculinity and respectability. In this analysis, work is 'arduous, monotonous and routine, offering no intrinsic satisfaction', and the employment ethic, by attributing value to manual work

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.122.

⁷⁶ Robertson, *The Lothians Regional Survey and Plan*, chapter 5, paragraph 28.

⁷⁷ D. Wight, *Workers not Wasters: Masculine Respectability, Consumption, and Employment in Central Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) p.1; Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.66.

⁷⁸ Wight, *Workers not Wasters*, p.106.

as a means of earning money to enable consumption, allows the men of Cauldmoss to make sense of their employment and reassert their masculinity.⁷⁹

If employment could never be anything more than a means to the end of providing for oneself and one's family, and if it was always going to be an unpleasant experience, then at least a virtue could be made of necessity.⁸⁰

As Wight makes clear, this suggests a degree of alienation in line with Marx's characterisation of work as 'not the satisfaction of a need, but only a means of satisfying other needs', and indeed Wight found that the importance of maximising pay in order to pay the bills, buy a car, or go out several times a week was such that 'almost any hardship or disruption was considered if the wage was right'.⁸¹

It is also important to note in this context Garry McDonald's depiction of migration to Scotland's new towns as a 'conscious and intended break from the past'. As discussed in Chapter One, the construction of housing for the BMC's incoming workers in Blackburn in particular, and the accompanying change in the village's demographics, reflected broader trends in Scottish new town development. McDonald emphasises the 'very constrained housing situation' for many working class families in Glasgow especially, where in 1970 there were 42,000 names on the Corporation housing waiting list, and highlights the degree of downward mobility seen amongst migrant manual workers for whom the lack of housing on Clydeside was the primary push factor, writing that 'men anxious to qualify for Development Corporation housing will often accept less skilled, and often less rewarding, jobs in the new towns.'⁸² This contrasts sharply with the position of the migrant middle classes, many of whom moved to the new towns primarily because of the career opportunities provided by new industry, and consequently experienced a 'substantial amount' of upward social mobility. In spite of the limited availability of private housing, then, McDonald argues that working class migration to the Scottish new towns can be seen as broadly in line with the affluent worker analysis of manual workers seeing their work as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.⁸³ There is evidence to suggest,

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.113.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.110.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.95.

⁸² McDonald, 'Social and Geographical Mobility in the Scottish New Towns', p.48.

⁸³ Ibid, p.47.

however, that the improved standard of living afforded by the new housing built by West Lothian County Council was often not enough in itself to keep incoming workers in their jobs at the BMC. One of the management representatives to the Scamp inquiry, for example, intimated that a considerable proportion of the plant's high level of labour turnover was attributable to Glaswegian incoming workers choosing to leave their new, modern homes in Armadale, Blackburn, and Bathgate, and instead return to Glasgow. He put this down to the strength and importance of family ties, but the AEU delegates argued that it was rather an additional indication of the level of dissatisfaction with the instability of work within the factory, and read out an extract from a letter written to BMC management by the wife of a Bathgate worker.

I am one of the many wives who moved here nearly four years ago and I am sorry I ever even heard of the Glasgow overspill plan. The houses we were allocated are satisfactory in every way but I am sick and tired of working conditions in the BMC Factory where we need to depend on our husband getting a full week's work, not overtime, just a full working week. My husband was sent home today again, this time he is not on strike; I cannot think why he had to come home but one thing I do know we will be hard up again this week.⁸⁴

This is a further indication of the close link that existed between pay and stability, and implies that any curtailment in working hours was enough to threaten household budgets and cause concern for the families of Bathgate workers. The complexities in the relationship between pay levels, working hours, and living conditions are similarly illustrated in a summary of the trade unions' position given by one of the AEU representatives to the inquiry.

About a year or five years ago when people were coming from Glasgow, they were queuing up for houses: now they are queuing up to get back to Glasgow. It is the reverse. There are various reasons for that but if you talk in terms of wages you won't be far wrong at all. It would also be true to say that instability and the question of the guarantee and 40 hour week and all the rest of it. You have people in here who came as Mr Rudd said from the mines and all the rest of it who actually have left here and have left for £2 and £3 less in their wages because it

⁸⁴ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

was a guaranteed 40 hour week that is the reason why they left. That is a very serious point.⁸⁵

This demonstrates the extent to which Bathgate's position as a branch plant situated on the periphery of the British motor industry contributed to the industrial relations difficulties which emerged in its first five years. The length of the supply line from the Midlands exacerbated the problem of material shortage implicit in an industry as tightly integrated as motor manufacturing, while the factory's location in and exploitation of an area with high unemployment and relatively low wage rates meant that the high wages which compensated Midland motor workers for irregular working hours as well as the monotony of assembly work were not consistently available. While many Bathgate workers demonstrated some of the attributes of the affluent worker in terms of prioritising pay, which was high in comparison to most local employers, and new housing over any intrinsic benefits of the work itself, the wages they were paid were not comparable with those enjoyed by the typically affluent car workers of the Midlands and South East of England.

Pay, Parity, and Insecurity

In the Goldthorpe analysis, the concern with 'income maximisation' as a means for improving the individual or the individual family's standard of living is perhaps manifested most clearly in the views shown towards trade unionism. The majority of workers involved in the *Affluent Worker* study became trade unionists simply out of a belief that 'union membership pays', rather than from any sense of moral conviction which, Goldthorpe writes, reflects the instrumental orientation taken by most of the workers towards their working lives in general.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the vast majority of semi-skilled workers attended branch meetings either 'rarely' or 'never', for reasons which arguably demonstrate the extent to which assembly line work alienated the individual from his fellow workers. One worker explained his lack of attendance saying 'I'm not really interested as long as they look after me in here. I'm prepared to let the other people go', while another stated explicitly that 'the only aspect of the union I'm interested in is what goes on

⁸⁵ MRC, MSS.178/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

⁸⁶ Goldthorpe *et al.*, *Industrial Attitudes*, p.98.

in this factory - what concerns me.⁸⁷ Moreover, several workers gave ‘home commitments’ as the main reason why they were unable to attend branch meetings. Perhaps most notably, one stated that ‘I went before I was married. I don’t get time now, with the family – and the television.’⁸⁸ It is worth reemphasising here that Turner, Clack, and Roberts’ estimate that over a quarter of all officially recorded strikes in the motor industry between 1949 and 1964 arose from disputes related to wages, while Chris Wrigley writes that 55 per cent of major strikes during the 1960s resulted from wage disputes.⁸⁹ Turner *et al.*’s contention that many of these pay demands resulted from the ‘very real expectation that wages should be fair in comparative terms’, and that the concept of ‘fair wages’ embodied a deeply held belief that work requiring equal effort should receive equal pay, forms the basis of Jon Murden’s study of ‘Demands for Fair Wages and Pay Parity in the British Motor Industry in the 1960s and 1970s’.⁹⁰ Murden writes that ‘wage comparability has a long historical pedigree as a common-place legitimatization of trade-union organization’, and goes on to describe the specific conditions which magnified its significance in the context of the motor industry. The prevalence of piecework in the industry is central to many studies of its industrial relations, including both Murden’s analysis and Dave Lyddon’s work on ‘Shop Stewards and Workplace Unionism’, and is closely linked to the development of multi-unionism discussed in Chapter Four and the consequent strength of the industry’s shop stewards. Lyddon argues that the relatively harmonious industrial relations seen at Vauxhall and depicted by Goldthorpe were the exception to an industry-wide rule better represented by the ‘continuous challenge’ which characterised the situation at Ford. Lyddon cites Alan Fox’s analysis of this pattern of management-employee relations, with ‘periods of uneasy armed truce as each side licks its wounds and watches the enemy for a weak spot in its defences’, and contends that the decade from 1964 to 1973 represented the high point of workers’ bargaining power as the rising wages and full employment conditions of the period not only increased their expectations of work but also allowed shop stewards to challenge their employers and push back the ‘frontier of control’.⁹¹ Furthermore, he notes the link which existed between the parallel unionism which characterised the relationship between the ‘unions proper’ and the workplace representation provided by shop stewards, and what has been variously termed ‘workplace unionism’ or

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.100.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.101.

⁸⁹ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.333; Wrigley, ‘Strikes in the Motor Car Manufacturing Industry’, p.202.

⁹⁰ Murden, ‘Demands for Fair Wages’, p.2.

⁹¹ Lyddon, ‘The Car Industry’, pp.187, 195.

‘factory patriotism’.⁹² In this analysis, the strength and ‘bottom up’ nature of shopfloor organisation in the motor industry distanced shop stewards from the concerns of their trade unions nationally and contributed to a sense that the collective interest of motor industry workers was restricted to the level of the individual plant.⁹³ Lyddon cites Huw Beynon, who portrays a ‘factory class consciousness’ at Ford Halewood driven more by a desire to challenge the authority of management than by broader political interests.⁹⁴ Turner *et al.* describe a similar phenomenon, arising from parallel unionism and informed by the ‘limited horizon of the workplace stewards’ committee’, which prioritised the issue of ‘fair pay’ over the national union leadership’s concern with the advance of wage-levels more generally.⁹⁵

Piecework rates were set on a factory-by-factory basis, with the result that wages for comparable work could vary widely between factories operated by the same company even within the tight labour market of the Midlands, where workers could expect to be paid between 25 per cent and 50 per cent more than those doing equivalent work elsewhere. Worker awareness of such pay disparity was raised by the work of groups such as the BMCJSSC, who issued regular questionnaires to shop stewards across the organisation in order to collate information on pay rates.⁹⁶ In 1958, workers at the Swindon factory of the Pressed Steel Company, who supplied body components to the BMC, responded to the knowledge that they were earning between £2 and £3 less each week than their counterparts at the company’s plant at Cowley in Oxford by going on strike for a month to challenge this differential. Murden highlights the impact of regional policy and its attempted geographical dispersal of motor manufacturing in exacerbating this situation, as employers took advantage of depressed local earnings by offering lower rates in the Development Areas than at their existing plants.⁹⁷ At Linwood, for example, Rootes signed the ‘Brabloch Agreement’, by which the company agreed to recognise five trade unions in the plant and, in return, would be able to negotiate wage rates locally, ‘having regard to the extra costs of manufacture and trading in Scotland and the rates and earnings already established in the district.’⁹⁸ Using statistics from the Department of Employment’s Labour Cost Survey, Stephen

⁹² Ibid, p.189.

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 204-205.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.204; Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p.230; Gilmour, ‘The trouble with Linwood’, p.92.

⁹⁵ Turner *et al.*, *Labour Relations*, p.343.

⁹⁶ Murden, ‘Demands for Fair Wages’, p.5.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.6.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p.7.

Rosevear has estimated that the labour cost savings made by motor manufacturers at their regional policy plants more than compensated them for the increase in transport costs associated with their relative geographical isolation.⁹⁹ As the data in Table 5:1 illustrates, the plant at Bathgate saved the BMC over £1.2 million per year in labour costs over a Midland location.

Table 5:1 - Annual labour cost differentials by plant, decentralised versus traditional areas (1972 prices, in pounds)

| | Number of workers | Saving re. Midlands | Saving re. South East |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Halewood | 12,949 | 1,626,265 | 3,685,026 |
| Ellesmere Port | 11,490 | 1,443,029 | 3,269,824 |
| Speke | 4,000 | 502,360 | 1,138,320 |
| Linwood | 8,000 | 2,151,360 | 3,423,360 |
| Bathgate | 4,485 | 1,206,106 | 1,919,221 |

(Source: S. Rosevear, 'Regional policy and the British motor vehicle industry 1945-64: a study in selective intervention and the economics of industrial location', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1998, p.220)

However, as Rosevear makes clear, the Labour Cost Survey figures do not take into account costs arising from stoppages, disruption, and lost production – issues of key concern to the motor firms – and nor do they allow for variations in labour productivity between plants.¹⁰⁰ Rosevear writes that Rootes, the BMC and Vauxhall, all of whom reported difficulty in recruiting and training suitable labour, initially 'traded-off labour inefficiency against lower wages'.¹⁰¹ At Linwood, production operatives earned around 5s less per hour than their counterparts at Ryton outside Coventry, but were told by the company that they could expect their rates to rise as their productivity increased. This concern with relative productivity caused unrest among workers whose attitude was one of 'money first, productivity later', and led to 49 separate wage claims making comparison with the Coventry rates between the plant's establishment in 1963 and March 1966.¹⁰² Evidence from the testimony of Jim McCulloch, a driver at Bathgate, suggests that BMC workers held similar views, and that the company initially took an innovative

⁹⁹ S. Rosevear, 'Regional policy and the British motor vehicle industry 1945-64: a study in selective intervention and the economics of industrial location', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1998, pp.220-222.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.222.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.238.

¹⁰² Ibid, pp.7-8.

approach to their emergent demands for pay parity with Birmingham, demonstrating the differences in skill and productivity between Midland workforces and their relatively inexperienced counterparts in the regional policy plants.

It was only running for a few months and some of the workmen on the assembly line got it into their heads that they're getting bigger money in Birmingham than we're getting here, and that's us now putting out twenty trucks a day, we should have more money. So they went outside and had a meeting, and said we're wanting more money because we've proved that we've got the skills that they have in Birmingham, we've now got them. So they came back into the factory, on the assembly line, and the superintendent, very shrewd guy, so what he does is put left-hand drive vehicles on to the line, and it just ground to a halt, 'cos they didn't have the skills for left-hand drive, they hadn't done them before. But they were getting into their heads that because they were putting out twenty trucks a day they had the same skills as Birmingham. They didn't, so he was just letting them know they hadn't. Some of the things they did with the left-hand drive... As they came off the assembly line at the end, there was a big space to the wall and the door going out, and the lorries that came off, the accelerator pedal was in the middle, and the first two that came off hit the back wall. So again, [the superintendent] said to them, where's your skills? And of course the first ten, they were sent down to Grangemouth docks, and they got to the bridge, I don't know if you know the Avon bridge going down to Falkirk, you go down the hill, go round and there's a narrow bridge, then back up. They all came back up with the front ends damaged where they'd hit the, with the left-hand drive. So this was the argument between the workmen saying we've got the skills, and the management saying no you've not.¹⁰³

Harry Bradley remembers company management explaining the wage differential in terms of the costs associated with transporting components to Bathgate from the Midlands; a sign, perhaps, of the extent to which the BMC's labour costs at Bathgate were shaped by the plant's industrial relations and relatively low productivity.

¹⁰³ Jim McCulloch, interview with the author, 2nd February 2012.

I think the main thing was, because the Leyland workers in England were getting paid higher than what they were us up in Scotland, and the trade unions were fighting to get a parity with doon in England, but they, they kept getting the same story flown in their face, excuse me, we've to transport all the components up from England and youse have to build them, then we put the trucks back doon tae England again to put them abroad or sell them or whatever. So all this to-ing and fro-ing was always flung in the trade unions' face.¹⁰⁴

Although this is not supported by Rosevear's argument that labour cost savings in the regional policy plants more than off-set any additional transport costs, it is notable that in 1972 it was estimated by Lord Stokes, then Chairman of the BLMC, that the cost of transporting components to Bathgate added £18 to the cost of a BLMC truck.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, a year later in 1973, BLMC included in evidence submitted to parliament unaudited and unsubstantiated estimates of 'manpower efficiency losses', according to which extra training and stoppages had together cost the company an additional £1.4 million each year both at Bathgate and on Merseyside.¹⁰⁶

The issue of pay parity was, however, of only minor importance to the 1966 Scamp inquiry into production at the plant. One trade union representative drew a link between the issue of parity and that of lay-offs and short-time, claiming that 'if we enjoyed the wages they enjoy in the Midlands perhaps we would not take short time working so much to heart.'¹⁰⁷ A second delegate, from the TGWU, also highlighted the question of parity and claimed that it was the source of considerable resentment, suggesting that, although there had at this stage been only one strike related to pay in the plant's history, disquiet over the issue was beginning to emerge.

Although it has been pointed out there has been very little dispute regarding wages, there is a tremendous amount of resentment in so far as the level of earnings are concerned. This is not just in the factory, this is in the public at large. It is of importance to know that we are all well below the levels of wage earnings

¹⁰⁴ WEA, interview with Harry Bradley.

¹⁰⁵ D. Keeble, *Industrial Location and Planning in the United Kingdom* (London: Methuen, 1976), p.191.

¹⁰⁶ Rosevear, 'Regional policy and the British motor vehicle industry', p.261.

¹⁰⁷ MRC, MSS.189/15, proceedings of court of inquiry.

in factories where similar circumstances operate in the Midlands and the Welsh areas and this is one of the problems.¹⁰⁸

In Murden's analysis, the formation of BL in 1968, and the sheer scale of the new organisation, 'immediately intensified the problem of regional differentials'.¹⁰⁹ Chapter Two discussed the new imperative which the creation of BL placed on rationalisation of both assembly and the wider supply chain, but here it should be reemphasised that the new company had 80 separate factories, each with its own pay scale, and that, in the words of one union member cited by Murden, 'the differential between factories in the group is as wide as it is between quite different companies.'¹¹⁰

Table 5:2 Wage rates, in pounds and shillings, at factories of the BLMC and some of its subsidiaries, August 1970

| | Pressed Steel Fisher Cowley | Standard Triumph Coventry | Morris Engines Coventry | Alvis Coventry | Albion Glasgow | Crompton Leyland Tredegar | West Yorks. Foundries Leeds | BMC Bathgate |
|---|--|--|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|--|-------------------------|
| Toolroom | 30,15 | 39,00 | 37,00 | 37,16 | 31,00 | | 24,50 | 15,80 |
| Fitters | | 37,10 | 26,70 | 44,00 | 28,00 | 24,00 | | 14,90 |
| Skilled machinist | 30,13 | 37,10 | 34,00 | 39,00 | 28,14 | | 30,00 | |
| Semi-skilled machinist | 29,12 | 36,10 | 33,10 | 35,00 | | | 30,00 | 14,40 |
| Average piecework earnings | 40,00 | | | 42,00 | 29,14 | | 34,00 | |

(Source: MRC, MSS.228/14, British Motor Corporation Wages and Conditions, 1968-1976)

The British Leyland Trade Union Committee (BLTUC), which succeeded the BMCJSSC, continued to collect information about the wage rates offered across the organisation, and in 1969 it was reported that BL's workers in Coventry, Oxford, and Birmingham typically earned between £5 and £10 a week more than those at the truck and bus plant at Leyland in Lancashire,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.82.

¹⁰⁹ Murden, 'Demands for Fair Wages', p.10.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p.10.

and that a female toilet cleaner at the Castle Bromwich plant in Birmingham could expect to earn the same as a skilled male worker at Leyland.¹¹¹ The data in Table 5:2 is taken from factory reports submitted to the BLTUC in 1970, and highlights the extent to which wage rates varied across the organisation, even for skilled production workers. Although it should be noted that the Bathgate rates were recorded in a document which also included slightly lower rates than those reported elsewhere for a number of other BLMC factories, the discrepancy between the rates paid in the Midlands and those paid at the company's peripheral plants – in South Wales and Yorkshire as well as Scotland – was marked. This is particularly notable in the case of Bathgate where, not only were wage rates significantly lower than elsewhere, but productivity was, by this time, high. Workers at Bathgate received an incentive bonus on top of their rates which, at the time of the survey, amounted to an additional £2 11s, as productivity at the plant had reached 97 per cent of the Midlands level; a notable increase from the 60 per cent reported by Scamp in 1966.

Ian Tennant, who worked in production planning at Bathgate and was a member of DATA, visited Longbridge regularly to participate in his union's national wage negotiations. His description of these meetings is notable for highlighting the 'factory patriotism' engendered by the strength of shop steward organisation in the industry, and the extent to which the issue of pay parity could cause conflict between shop stewards operating at plant level, and national trade union policy.

I cannae mind how I quite got involved, I think they were looking for a rep in the department, I got talked into it and then I finished off as what was called the corresponding member, so I was the guy who took the union dues and made sure they got sent down, and corresponded with the union. Part of that, ehm, you were involved in, I finished up involved in wage negotiations in Longbridge, I was flown down from Edinburgh airport into Birmingham at vast expense, and flown back again, and sat at the side of these meetings with all these big people from Personnel and higher, and that was really interesting. Went to a task meeting, and at that time the union was run by Ken Gill who was a Communist, and really draughtsmen are conservative with a small c, you know, engineers are fairly

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.11.

conservative people and we could never understand how this Communist got to run it, and I remember being at a conference in Birmingham and asking why is the wages in Bathgate allowed to be different from everywhere else, and he didn't like these questions you know, the union didn't like these questions.¹¹²

The issue was not, however, straightforward, and indeed the low wages paid at the peripheral plants exacerbated the concerns, discussed in Chapter Two, which had been expressed by shop stewards in the Midlands at the time of Bathgate's establishment over the threat to their own job security posed by the regional policy plants undercutting their wages. This contributed to a wave of strike action across the BL organisation which began in 1969 when 8,500 workers in Lancashire went on strike demanding 'parity with the Midlands'.¹¹³ This strike was supported by the BLTUC, who threatened further strike action in the Midlands if the parity issue was not settled, and ended after three weeks with an increase in piece rates which was taken by the shop stewards' convenor at Leyland as a 'foundation from which to achieve parity'.¹¹⁴ Murden writes that 'this relative success by workers at Leyland encouraged other claims within the company', with strikes taking place at the regional policy plant at Speke on Merseyside in August 1969, followed by Bathgate in January 1970. Shop stewards at Bathgate were claiming a £10 per week increase in order to bring their wages into line with the Midlands, but eventually settled on the same offer of £2 10s which had been accepted at Speke, with the prospect of future increases related to productivity.¹¹⁵ The issue of parity across the BL organisation was further complicated by the piecemeal introduction of a system of MDW in place of the piece rates which had traditionally predominated across the British motor industry. This had only limited direct impact at Bathgate, where 35 per cent of production workers had been on MDW since the plant's establishment and demarcation lines were not as deeply entrenched as in the Midlands, but opposition to the new system and the consequently high wages which were the cost of 'buying out' piecework did provoke the longest strike in the plant's history, referred to by one former shop steward as 'the big strike'.¹¹⁶

¹¹² WEA, interview with Ian Tennant.

¹¹³ Murden, 'Demands for Fair Wages', pp.7, 12.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.12.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.14.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.14; WEA, interview with John Moore; MRC, MSS.178/15, report of initial visit by A.S. Kerr, February 1965.

The strike broke out in January 1972, when it was discovered through the work of the BLTUC that, while production workers at Bathgate were earning £5.76 for a day's work, their counterparts at the company's Morris car plant at Cowley in Oxford could earn £6.72 even when laid off.¹¹⁷ Bathgate's shop stewards, recognising the unease in the Midlands over the potential for undercutting, argued that it was 'in the interest of no one in the combine to have work done so cheaply at Bathgate', and were given considerable support by the BLTUC who threatened action across the organisation should the company attempt to carry out its threat to close Bathgate if the strike continued.¹¹⁸ The strike ended after nine weeks and, largely as a result of the prospect of unrest spreading to other plants, resulted in a pay increase of £4 per week for all Bathgate workers. According to Chris Bett, a senior shop steward in the AEU at the plant, '[the workers] were delighted. They'd had it hard, had it hard – nine weeks.'¹¹⁹ For both Bett and Jim Swan, who went on to become convenor of shop stewards at the plant, the strike marked a real 'breakthrough', and Swan remembers the impact that its success had in terms of encouraging trade union membership.

Well, before I became a shop steward there was a big strike, 1972, that lasted something like eight weeks, and we, it was commonly known as the strike for parity, because the English people were getting paid a lot more than they were in Scotland, and eh, it's probably the biggest percentage rise we ever got, that I ever got, it amounted to nearly, it must have been four pounds, and we were getting eighteen pounds, so about twenty five per cent an increase which was a huge jump, and everybody got, because it was across the board, so everybody on the shopfloor got a four pound rise, and it was a huge success, and it was during that strike that just about everybody was in the union by the end of it, although there was other strikes after that.¹²⁰

For John Moore, an AEU shop steward and night shift convenor, the strike marked a 'real watershed' in terms of both pay and conditions, as it moved the plant towards parity with the Midlands and secured a further annual increment in wages. Most importantly, it led to an

¹¹⁷ Murden, 'Demands for Fair Wages', p.16.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.16.

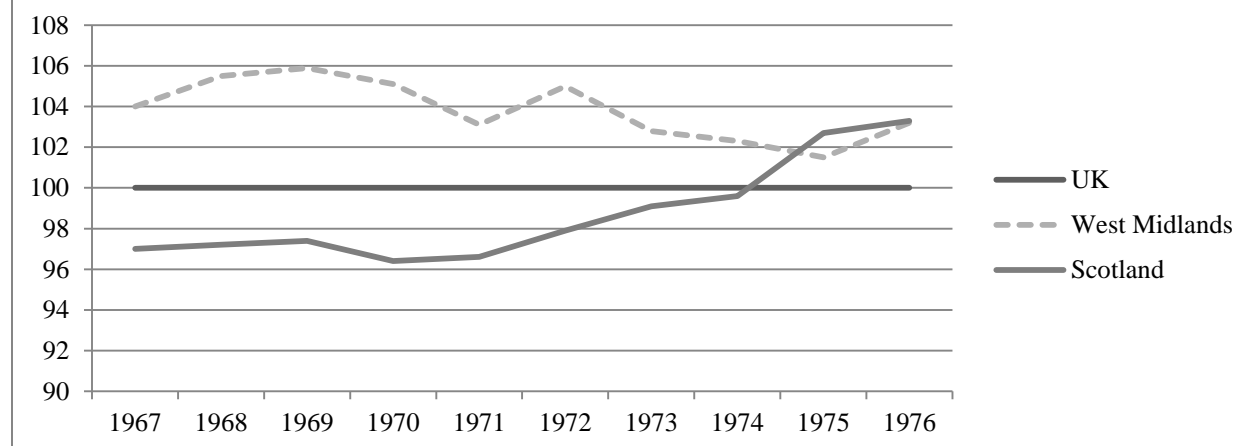
¹¹⁹ WEA, interview with Chris Bett.

¹²⁰ WEA, interview with Jim Swan.

increase in lay-off pay from 70 per cent to nearly 100 per cent of earnings, which ‘helped for a better environment in the factory’, and marked the beginning of a period of improved industrial relations that was to last, in Moore’s view, until it became clear that the plant would close.¹²¹

Figure 5:2 - Average weekly earnings of male manual workers in manufacturing industries in Scotland and the West Midlands as percentage of UK average, 1967-1976

Source: Department of Employment, *British Labour Statistics Yearbook* (London: HMSO, 1967-1976)



Furthermore, it is notable that the strike took place in the context of a general improvement in wages in Scotland relative to the rest of the UK. Figure 5:2 shows the average weekly earnings of male manual workers in the manufacturing industries in Scotland and the West Midlands – again included as a pertinent comparator due to the concentration of motor manufacturing in the region – as a percentage of the UK average, and illustrates the extent to which the position of Scotland’s manufacturing workers improved during the mid-1970s. The data presented in Table 5:3 shows a similar improvement for workers in Scotland’s engineering and metal manufacturing industries: indeed, in 1975, the industry-wide average wage was higher in Scotland than the West Midlands for both pieceworkers and time-workers (i.e. those on MDW or similar systems).

¹²¹ WEA, interview with John Moore.

Table 5:3 – Average weekly earnings of full-time male semi-skilled manual workers in engineering and metal-working industries, in Scotland and the West Midlands, 1970-1976

| | Scotland | | West Midlands | |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Time-workers | Pieceworkers | Time-workers | Pieceworkers |
| 1970 | 22.04 | 23.01 | 25.36 | 28.86 |
| 1971 | 40.33 | 28.64 | 30.14 | 34.15 |
| 1972 | 44.56 | 33.54 | 34.69 | 37.22 |
| 1973 | 40.82 | 39.64 | 40.33 | 41.71 |
| 1974 | 42.61 | 44.39 | 44.56 | 45.57 |
| 1975 | 56.50 | 54.78 | 51.21 | 51.40 |
| 1976 | 63.82 | 61.41 | 61.50 | 62.09 |

(Source: HMSO, British Labour Statistics Year Book, Department of Employment, 1969-1976.)

Given this marked improvement in relative rates of pay across Scottish industry, and the importance attributed separately by Murden and by senior shop stewards to the 1972 strike in securing increased wages and improved conditions at Bathgate, it is notable that the strike and its consequences do not feature prominently in many of the oral history testimonies. Indeed, a significant number of former workers don't mention the strike at all, even when asked about their experiences of trade unionism and strike activity at the plant. Harry Bradley is one of the few who does refer to it explicitly, but for him its success was negated by the concurrent regrading of the workforce as part of the company's introduction of MDW across the factory, examined in Chapter Four. The system of gradings that this entailed encouraged fragmented bargaining thereafter, heightening inter-union difficulties and sharpening differences between different occupational groups. Indeed it could be argued that both the long parity strike and the growing prominence of sectional disputes during the 1970s indicate that, by this time, the exceptionality of Bathgate's industrial relations had receded somewhat, and the plant and its workforce had moved further in line with industry-wide trends. While evidence from company papers, discussed in Chapter Four, suggests that the plant's industrial relations were relatively stable following the Scamp inquiry, both of these developments imply that what little strike activity did occur was increasingly concerned with wages, rather than with the instability of work. Furthermore, there is no mention of labour turnover after 1966, which can perhaps be

taken as a sign that the degree of discontent experienced by the workforce in the plant's first five years resulted primarily from the unfamiliarity of motor industry working practice, possibly exacerbated by the attitude of the company to its new branch plant, and that this too receded as the factory became better established, and rates of pay gradually converged with Midland levels. Prior to the appointment of Michael Edwardes in 1977, investment in the Bathgate extension project and the expectation that new models would be introduced contributed to a sense of 'boom' in the plant, and the increase in lay-off pay and move towards parity with the Midlands, secured by the 1972 strike, went some way to remove the sense that Bathgate workers were the ill-treated 'country cousins' of their Midland counterparts. In the latter part of the period, it is possible that deindustrialisation provided an additional factor in the increasing stability of the workforce, as labour turnover was positively affected by the gradual erosion of local labour market alternatives in the later 1970s and early 1980s. Conversely, however, it was the relative prosperity and stability of the mid-1970s which improved the bargaining position of the Bathgate workforce, even in the context of a persistently slack local labour market, and afforded its workers greater confidence in their own positions and in the future of motor manufacturing in West Lothian.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the paradox of the affluent motor worker in Scotland. Evidence from the 1966 Scamp inquiry suggests that the plant's industrial relations in its first five years especially were notable for an exceptionally high rate of labour turnover, and for an unusual record of strike causation. These peculiarities reinforce the sense that a degree of unrest arose from the difficulties associated with establishing a new factory on a green field site. That is not to say, however, that these problems were the inevitable outcome of introducing semi-skilled assembly work to an area with a strong craft tradition and a history of employment in the heavy industries. Indeed, as Chapter Three shows, the work itself was not particularly problematic, and it seems that most strikes arose instead from the frequency of lay-offs and short-time working. Material shortage was a common, structural feature of motor industry work, the effects of which were magnified at Bathgate by the transport difficulties caused by the factory's lack of

embeddedness in the local economy and its continued reliance on supplies transported by road from the Midlands. While the company itself insisted that supply shortages were no more common at Bathgate than elsewhere, the image of trucks stuck in snow and unable to reach the factory contributed to a narrative which seems to have informed the memories of a number of former workers, and which, perhaps, also exacerbated the idea of the plant as the isolated 'country cousin' of the Midland motor industry, established only with great reluctance on the part of the BMC. Lay-offs and short-time working did, however, cause hardship for Bathgate's workers, contributing to the number of workers choosing to leave the plant, including migrants from Glasgow, who returned to their native city. The relationship between pay, housing, and stability of employment is complex, and, while the experience of unemployment seems to have informed the importance placed by Bathgate's workers on stability and security, the key consideration here was in fact pay parity. The company's exploitation of West Lothian's loose labour market meant that the wages paid at Bathgate were not sufficient compensation for unstable employment, leading to its high rate of labour turnover and, later, the major strike for parity with the Midlands. In this context, then, the location of the plant held back the wage rates paid to its workers and arguably hindered the development of a typically 'affluent' workforce, but the increasing concern with parity, and with sectional disputes, during the early 1970s suggests that the plant's workers were taking a more instrumentalist approach to their employment, and in this respect its industrial relations were convergent with industry-wide trends.

Conclusion

The announcement, in May 1984, that Leyland Bathgate was to close with the loss of all remaining 1,800 jobs, was reported in the *FT* under the headline ‘They’re not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate’. This was a quotation from Jim Swan, the plant’s ‘affable’ trade union convenor, who went on to state that ‘the men are angry. They’ve nowhere else to go.’¹²²

Leyland Bathgate for sale following its closure, 1986



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According to this article, unemployment in the Bathgate region, including the relatively prosperous new town of Livingston, stood at 19.3 per cent, and male unemployment would, following the closure, rise to nearly 50 per cent. Furthermore, it was predicted that the loss of an important customer would have a severely negative impact on the Ravenscraig steelworks,

¹²² ‘They’re not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate’, *FT*, 23rd May 1984.

particularly as the Linwood car plant had already closed, in 1981. Elsewhere, the newspaper reported on the ‘uproar in the Commons’ which had greeted Norman Tebbit, the Secretary of State for Industry, as he announced BL’s plans, and quoted Dr Gavin Strang, the Labour MP for Edinburgh East, who described the closure as ‘industrial sabotage’, and ‘a criminal and vindictive attack on Scotland’s industrial base’.¹²³ Similar sentiments were expressed by the STUC, and the plant was the subject of an emergency motion at Congress calling for the trade union movement to ‘maximise support’ for the Bathgate workforce in its struggle against closure and a potential repeat of the ‘Linwood catastrophe’, whereby one year after the plant shut, fifty per cent of its former workforce remained unemployed.¹²⁴ The political context of the miners’ strike, and fears over the ‘decimation of industry’ in Scotland strengthened the union response, with a National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) delegate promising to send pickets to Bathgate should the company attempt to move any plant or equipment away, and a member of the General Council, in summing up, stating that:

The Secretary of State for Scotland does not seem to be interested in the future of a major industry in Scotland. But we have come to expect this from our Scottish Secretary. The Government and particularly the Prime Minister, has an apparent disregard for the people of Scotland as shown by their lack of effort in protecting basic industries since they came to power in 1979.¹²⁵

This was an articulation of the idea, discussed in Chapters Two and Four of this thesis, that the closure of the plant formed part of a wider attack by the Thatcher government on nationalised industry, and nationalised industry in Scotland in particular. For the *FT*, however, the closure of Bathgate was not a deliberate assault on Scottish manufacturing, but rather an example of ‘the sad fate of regional policy’ which, following so soon after the closure of Linwood, demonstrated the failure of government attempts to provide jobs and absorb unemployment in industrial Scotland.¹²⁶ Certainly, the contrast between an unemployment rate of 19 per cent at the time of closure, and the seven per cent at the time of the plant’s establishment cited by the *FT*, is stark, and the article paints a bleak picture of life in a town suffering from a loss of employment and,

¹²³ ‘Political row erupts over Bathgate closure with 1,770 jobs cut’, *FT*, 23rd May 1984.

¹²⁴ STUC archive, GCAL; eighty-seventh annual report of the STUC, 1984, p.576.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p.576-577

¹²⁶ ‘They’re not saving Leyland Vehicles at the expense of Bathgate’, *FT*, 23rd May 1984.

consequently, retail revenue. However, it also points to developments in Livingston, where two major electronics firms had recently opened, and in the Scottish economy more widely. According to the article, 40,000 jobs had been created by electronics firms in Scotland, and 64 per cent of the Scottish workforce was employed in service industries, which had taken over from manufacturing and construction as the largest employment sector.¹²⁷ While the closure of Leyland Bathgate undoubtedly had a devastating impact on its workers and on life in the town more generally, the context outlined in the *FT* was indicative of the continuous nature of economic development, and the extent to which electronics had come to replace motor manufacturing as the latest ‘panacea’ for the Scottish economy.¹²⁸

This was explored in Chapter One, which began with a discussion of the campaign against the closure of both Leyland Bathgate and the nearby Plessey engineering works, and the manner in which this campaign represented a community response to deindustrialisation. Emphasising the centrality of industrial employment to life in West Lothian, the analysis considered the impact of the regional policy intervention as a response to a previous wave of industrial closure which mitigated the effects of the rundown of heavy industries across Central Scotland, but had the effect of prolonging the area’s dependence on manufacturing employment. However, the scale and modernity of the BMC plant, and the opportunities expected of motor industry work, marked a new stage in the county’s development. This was reflected in the construction of new housing in Bathgate, and the old mining villages of Blackburn and Whitburn, which modernised the urban environment of West Lothian and acted as an important ‘pull factor’ for workers from Glasgow and its conurbation, attracted to the plant primarily by the opportunity it afforded them to move from cramped accommodation in city tenements to new, spacious houses. This contributed to an increase particularly in the population of young couples and families, creating a sense of Bathgate as a dynamic and relatively prosperous ‘boom town’. The growth from 1962 of Livingston arguably ‘crowded out’ West Lothian’s older industrial settlements, diverting investment away from the motor industry and into electronics in particular, placing limits on the development of Bathgate as a commercial and administrative centre. The contrasting experiences of Bathgate and Livingston perhaps encapsulate the competing and sometimes contradictory aims of post-war regional policy, which sought to provide jobs in areas of high unemployment while promoting the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.255.

development of New Towns as growth-points which could alleviate inflationary pressures in the congested South-East of England especially.¹²⁹ BMC Bathgate was not, however, established solely as a short-term response to unemployment, and it had been envisaged that, alongside the concurrent developments at Ravenscraig and Linwood, it would provide an anchor for further motor industry development in Scotland. The assumption that the dispersal of motor manufacturing to the peripheral Development Areas (renamed Development Districts from 1960) would attract ancillary industries and encourage existing Scottish engineering firms to diversify into the manufacture of vehicle components was, however, incorrect,¹³⁰ and the consequences of the subsequent isolation of Bathgate and Linwood have been central to analyses of regional policy in Scotland which have stressed its role in the development of what has been termed ‘branch plant syndrome’.¹³¹

Chapter Two, which discussed the establishment of Bathgate in the context of the longer-term development of motor manufacturing in Britain, considered the explanations for this apparent failure to develop a viable Scottish motor industry, and some of the implications of this for production at the plant. The company’s reluctance to move out of the Midlands was reflected in an unwillingness to engage effectively with Scottish engineering firms, while Midlands-based component makers, requiring no additional capacity in order to meet the supply demands of Bathgate and Linwood, had no reason to move production to Scotland. For motor manufacturers including Ford, Vauxhall, and Standard-Triumph, each of which intended to expand and would have to move to the Development Areas in order to do so, Merseyside offered a more economically viable alternative to Scotland, primarily because of its comparative ease of access to suppliers and markets in the Midlands and South-East of England. At Linwood, 78 per cent of total externally purchased parts were supplied by firms located 250 miles or more away from the plant, and in 1972 it was estimated by Lord Stokes, the Chairman of what was then the British Leyland Motor Corporation (BLMC), that the cost of transporting components to Bathgate added £18 to the cost of a BLMC truck.¹³² As 75 per cent of the plant’s output was sold in southern England, most trucks then incurred an additional transport cost of £40, making a total cost penalty of £58 per vehicle, or between three and four per cent of the normal selling price of an average

¹²⁹ Scott, ‘Dispersion versus Decentralization’, p.588.

¹³⁰ Young and Hood, ‘The Linwood Experience’, p.124

¹³¹ Peden, ‘The Managed Economy’, p.246; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.249.

¹³² Keeble, *Industrial Location and Planning*, p.191.

five-ton truck.¹³³ As well as this apparent increase in production costs – which it should be noted has been qualified by Stephen Rosevear – the relative isolation in motor industry terms of both Bathgate and Linwood exacerbated the impact of the supply problems endemic in the British motor industry, and caused concern over the instability of motor industry work in Scotland. The length of the supply chain increased the potential for disruption, and frequent instances of lay-offs and short-time working as a result of supply shortages contributed to high levels of unofficial strike action in Bathgate's first five years especially. While the evidence suggests that this situation improved with the opening of the M6 motorway and with the management decision, taken in the wake of the 1966 Scamp inquiry into the productivity and strike activity at the plant, to increase the level of supplies held on site, the image of truckloads of components struggling to reach an isolated factory has had some effect in terms of shaping the memories of the plant's former workers. This has arguably been magnified by the attitude of the company, which made no secret of its reluctance to move to Scotland, and of those of their Midland colleagues who demonstrated their resentment of Bathgate's relatively under-paid 'tartan scabs' by writing abusive graffiti on components sent to the plant for assembly.¹³⁴

The reaction of Midland motor workers to the regional policy plants reflects their own loss of security in what was, from the mid-1970s, an industry experiencing growing challenges, particularly as vehicle imports increased markedly following the UK's accession to the EEC in 1973. Indeed, the shift in the focus of regional policy priorities in Scotland from motor manufacturing to electronics reflected both the difficulties associated with attracting further motor industry investment, and a response to the emergent problems facing Britain's motor manufacturers. While the imperative placed on motor industry development in Scotland had grown out of the success of the industry in driving the growth and affluence experienced in the Midlands especially, weaknesses in that region's economy and its dependence on motor manufacturing were beginning to appear in a period which saw profound changes in the structure of the industry and its supply chain. The rationalisation of BL in particular accelerated following the 1977 appointment of Michael Edwardes as chairman and managing director, and indeed the Bathgate closure must be considered in the context of the restructuring of both BL and the British motor industry more broadly. The mid-1970s had, in fact, seen something of a boom in

¹³³ Ibid, p.191; Foreman-Peck *et al.*, *The British Motor Industry*, p.205.

¹³⁴ WEA, interview with Guthrie Aiken.

production at Bathgate, and, following the Ryder Report in 1974, considerable investment was made in the construction of the B Block extension as part of a drive to increase production at both Bathgate and Albion Motors in Glasgow. However, Edwardes' rejection of Ryder's expansionist recommendations, and his insistence that the only way to save the company was 'to restructure, de-man, modernise, and drive through the product plan', implied that plant closures and redundancies would be necessary, while his belief that government intervention in the motor industry had contributed to its over-capacity threatened the future of the regional policy plants specifically. The evidence suggests that the performance of Bathgate was affected more by design and engineering problems than by strike action and other forms of worker protest, but Edwardes was able to draw on the prevailing narrative of low productivity and labour culpability in order to close first the regional policy plant at Speke on Merseyside – described by Edwardes as 'a prime candidate for closure' in part because of the transport costs conferred by its location – and then Bathgate.¹³⁵

Indeed, the plant's industrial relations were, from the late 1960s until the appointment of Edwardes, apparently notably stable, and its Joint Shop Stewards' Committee (JSSC) relatively moderate. In this respect the experience of the plant contrasts sharply with branch plant analyses which have emphasised Linwood's reputation for militancy, and the labour difficulties associated with adapting previously skilled workers to assembly line production methods.¹³⁶ This has been closely linked to the idea that branch plants, such as Bathgate, have provided only low level assembly work, and contributed to the deskilling of the Scottish industrial workforce. Chapter Three explored the nature of the work provided at Bathgate and, while it is certainly true that the majority of those employed at the plant were in semi-skilled roles, it is important to note that this reflected the nature of work in the motor industry more generally. Indeed, Chapter Three highlighted the paradoxical position of the affluent motor worker in Scotland and the unrealistic contemporary expectations of motor assembly work which, although relatively clean and well-paid, was overwhelmingly semi-skilled, and renowned for its monotony. The STUC and SCDI had both stressed the importance to Scotland's future prosperity of attracting motor industry development, in part because of the industry's role in supporting the full employment and

¹³⁵ Edwardes, *Back from the Brink*, pp.42, 69-70.

¹³⁶ Gilmour, 'The Trouble with Linwood', p.771; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.290; Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.151; Young and Hood, 'The Linwood Experience', p.125.

increasing affluence seen in the Midlands and South-East, but the STUC in particular would later express concern over the nature of the work offered by the motor industry branch plants, and the lack of opportunity for young people especially to find more skilled work. These concerns anticipated later branch plant analyses, overlooking the nature of most motor industry work and the extent to which the high wages paid in the industry represented a ‘pay-off’ for the loss of autonomy associated with the moving assembly line. This idea is central to major contemporary studies of work in the industry, most notably the Goldthorpe *Affluent Worker* analysis, and Huw Beynon’s work on Ford, which also emphasises the contested nature of assembly line production and the ways in which workers responded to its monotony by seeking to alleviate their boredom, and control their time and effort. While former Bathgate assembly line workers are under-represented in the WEA oral history testimony, there is evidence that the experience of work at the plant was shaped by these features of production on a moving track, and particularly the centrality of camaraderie and ‘having a laugh’ for those on the assembly line.

It is clear, then, that the semi-skilled nature of most work at Bathgate resembled conditions in the motor industry more generally, and was not a function of its position as a peripheral branch plant. Peter Scott’s distinction between industrial policy in the Development Areas and that in the London New Towns (LNTs) does, though, seem relevant, emphasising the extent to which the decision to disperse motor manufacturing to the Development Areas grew out of the social imperative of providing jobs, rather than more economic concerns. In Scott’s analysis, labour intensive mass assembly industries were directed to areas of high unemployment and relatively low skill, whereas the more advantageous conditions of the South-East of England encouraged the growth of more high-tech, capital intensive firms in and around the LNTs.¹³⁷ This reflects Scott’s contention that regional policy in the Development Areas was driven primarily by the need to create jobs in the short-term, and the perception of the peripheral regions as low-wage areas, ‘suitable mainly for labour-intensive or overspill branch-plant production’.¹³⁸ As discussed above, however, Bathgate was not envisaged solely in terms of job creation, and was expected to function alongside Linwood and Ravensraig in providing the foundation for a Scottish motor industry which would modernise the Scottish industrial base and provide what the STUC

¹³⁷ Scott, ‘Dispersion versus Decentralization’, pp.591-592.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p.595.

described as ‘the right kind of work’ in a growing and prosperous industry.¹³⁹ While the overwhelmingly semi-skilled variety of motor industry work disappointed the STUC’s expectations, there are indications in the oral history testimony of the esteem in which work at the plant was held, and of the opportunities it provided for workers to gain additional skills and experience. Although the majority of training provided to its workers was on-the-job – a further reflection of industry-wide norms – the apprenticeship programme, run in conjunction with the newly established Bathgate College, provided local school leavers with the opportunity to develop engineering, technical, and secretarial skills, and, by the late 1970s, was available to both men and women. For those employed in semi-skilled roles on the assembly lines, work was well-paid relative to other local employers and, certainly in comparison to the conditions in coal mines, shale pits, or iron foundries, clean and safe. Scott’s emphasis on the low pay, by South-East standards, which prevailed in the Development Areas is, however, important, reflecting the extent to which companies investing in and moving production to these areas were able to take advantage of local labour market conditions in offering lower wages than were paid elsewhere. This had significant implications for Bathgate, particularly as the plant became better established and its industrial relations converged with industry-wide trends.

Chapter Four considered union representation and shopfloor organisation at the plant, and suggested the limitations of branch plant analyses which stress the fractious industrial relations seen at Linwood in particular, and the extent to which such problems resulted from the plant’s position in an area with little experience of light engineering and a tradition of labour militancy.¹⁴⁰ In fact, industrial relations at Bathgate were, for much of the plant’s lifetime, largely unremarkable. Structural features of motor industry trade unionism, including the presence of a number of unions and the strength of its shop steward organisation, were reflected at the plant, and evidence from the oral history testimony suggests that much of the strike action which did occur reflected the industry-wide trend for very short stoppages, often over relatively minor sectional disputes. Only in terms of its strike causation and high level of labour turnover does its experience seem exceptional, and these are both issues which seem to have receded following the Scamp inquiry of 1966. Scamp found that the majority of the unofficial strike action seen at the

¹³⁹ STUC, GCAL, Seventy-Fourth Annual Report of the STUC, 1969, p.267.

¹⁴⁰ Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.151; Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, p.277; Church, *The Rise and Decline*, p.60.

plant in its first five years resulted primarily from discontent caused by the frequency of lay-offs and short-time working; issues which can be characterised as ‘teething troubles’, improving markedly as the factory, its workforce, and its supply lines, became more settled. It is notable that the inquiry praised the Bathgate shop stewards for their role in a marked improvement in the plant’s industrial relations, and the behaviour of the plant’s shop stewards both at the time of the inquiry and into the 1970s seems to have been in line with the Donovan Commission’s analysis of motor industry stewards as ‘more of a lubricant than an irritant’.¹⁴¹ There is very little suggestion of any politically motivated strike action at the plant, and, while some former workers have expressed anti-trade union views and criticism of the behaviour of the stewards, former shop stewards themselves have stressed their role in resolving disputes before they could reach management level or result in strike action. The shop stewards played an important role also as community activists, arranging events and contributing to local fundraising efforts which helped to embed the factory in the wider social life of the town and its surrounding area, and were instrumental in tackling health and safety problems such as the use of asbestos and lunchtime drinking. Furthermore, even those former workers with little knowledge of or interest in its work, either in the factory or in the community, have acknowledged the success of the JSSC in improving pay and conditions for the Bathgate workforce.

Chapter Five analysed the issue of pay parity, which emerged from an increasing awareness of the discrepancy between the wages paid at Bathgate and those which the company paid its workers in the Midlands and South-East, and contributed to a sense that the plant’s workers were the ‘country cousins’ of their Midland colleagues. The company’s attitude to its Bathgate branch plant, and its expectation that labour in the Development Areas would be cheaper than in the Midlands, had some effect in shaping the culture of work at the plant, and explains the frequency and character of discontent expressed during its first five years in both strike action and its exceptionally high level of labour turnover. As wages at Bathgate remained relatively low, its workers did not benefit from the ‘pay-off’ which ameliorated the monotony and instability of motor industry work for those in higher-wage areas. While the concern over the stability of working hours was reflected elsewhere in the industry, at Bathgate it was informed primarily by the experience of unemployment and continued scarcity of alternative work in the area rather than

¹⁴¹ *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations*, paragraph 110.

the desire to maximise income seen amongst the Ford workers studied by Beynon, and Goldthorpe's affluent workers in Luton. As the plant became better established, its working hours and conditions more stable, and its productivity closer to the company-wide level, the issue of parity grew in importance, demonstrating the extent to which the behaviour and attitudes of the Bathgate workforce were converging with motor industry-wide trends, as, during the 1970s, strike activity increasingly resulted from wage disputes rather than dissatisfaction with lay-offs and short-time working. While the 'privatism' which marked the development of the affluent working class in England remained notably absent, it is arguable that the attraction of the modern housing constructed for Bathgate's incoming workers, as well as the growing visibility of pay disputes during the 1970s, reflected an increasing instrumentalism amongst the plant's workers. The strength of its shop stewards movement, however, and the role of the shop stewards as community as well as workplace activists, suggests that, in spite of this shift in orientations to work, organised labour retained its importance and, it seems, its influence. This was most apparent during the campaign against closure in 1982, when the Leyland shop stewards, working alongside their counterparts at nearby Plessey, were able to build considerable community support for their respective occupations and, in the case of Plessey, had some success in extending the life of the plant.

Shop stewards and skilled workers are over-represented in the WEA sample, reflecting their own positive experiences of work at the plant, and the extent of their engagement with industrial relations issues and the labour movement more broadly. The relative absence of assembly line workers is, perhaps, telling, and any future, independent oral history project might seek to overcome this limitation. This is particularly important as much of the branch plant literature concentrates on the 'newness' and unfamiliarity of mass production techniques in Scotland, and the difficulties associated with adapting a previously skilled workforce to monotonous assembly line processes. While the testimony of those assembly workers included in the sample, such as John Hastings and Tommy Morrison, suggests that the work was not considered particularly problematic and that the plant was generally a good place to work, the absence of assembly workers from the project and the initially high levels of labour turnover and absenteeism indicate considerable dissatisfaction and low morale amongst its semi-skilled workforce. Furthermore, although the community-based nature of the campaigns at Plessey and Leyland, and the press reaction to the announcement that the motor plant would close, demonstrate the social

embeddedness of each factory in the town, they also illustrate the continued centrality of industrial employment to the economy of West Lothian. Indeed, the establishment of the plant, in part a short-term response to high unemployment, actually magnified the effects of its eventual closure by reasserting the sense of 'industrial permanence' which surrounded manufacturing employment in Scotland during the twentieth century: the reindustrialisation of West Lothian during the 1960s meant that, by the 1980s, the area remained disproportionately reliant on manufacturing and, to a lesser extent, coal extraction. The real pain and distress which the loss of such an important employer caused for its workers should not be underestimated and, again, could be considered in more detail than the WEA sample of relatively highly skilled and therefore comparatively employable former workers allows. However, it should also be recognised that the closure of the plant, and its impact on the local economy, has shaped popular perceptions of its role over the previous quarter of a century and has undoubtedly influenced interpretations of regional policy in Scotland more generally.

By considering the testimonies of some of the plant's former workers, this thesis has contributed a new perspective to this literature, which has illuminated the way in which regional policy was experienced on the shopfloor, and engaged with a range of key debates in the historiography of Scotland and Britain since 1945. The role of regional policy in shaping broader economic and social development has emerged from the oral history testimonies of workers for whom the plant was an example of 'social engineering done in the right way' which brought significant benefits to the town of Bathgate and, for many, provided a very positive experience of work over a period of 25 years. This was not, however, universal, and it is important not to overlook the production and industrial relations difficulties which arose at the plant, and reflected the problems facing British motor manufacturing more generally. Indeed, many of these problems were experienced in exaggerated form at Bathgate, magnified by the length of the supply chain from the Midlands and the specialist skill and material requirements of commercial vehicle manufacturing. The location of the plant in an area of high unemployment on the periphery of the UK motor industry undoubtedly contributed to these difficulties, creating uncertainty over the stability of work and, in the plant's first few years especially, holding back wages relative to the Midlands. However, the plant brought with it real social improvements in terms of new housing and relatively clean and safe work which, by the mid-1970s, was also well paid. This relative prosperity shaped the attitudes and behaviour of Bathgate workers, whose increasingly instrumentalist approach to

work was reflected in the growing prevalence of wage disputes throughout the 1970s. While this arguably signifies the development of a more typically 'affluent' workforce, it is the complexity of the relationship between pay, housing, and the security of employment which emerges from the testimony of former Bathgate workers. Wages between Bathgate and the West Midlands were converging in the 1970s, but employment insecurity remained a greater worry or preoccupation in Scotland. Recurrent threats to the survival of the plant; unemployment and under-employment; the general context of economic slowdown and deindustrialisation; the importance of collective action as a means to pursue individual goals; each of these factors, significant at Bathgate in the 1960s and 1970s, highlights the limited salience of the affluent worker model in Scotland and, in turn, adds nuance to our understanding of motor workers in Britain as well as in Scotland since 1945.

Bibliography

Oral history interviews

McAndrew, Robert and Christine, interviewed by Catriona Macdonald at their home in Grangemouth, 5th April 2011. Robert was a maintenance worker at the plant from 1961 until 1970. Christine worked in the drawing office for around eighteen months. They moved to Bathgate from the Grangemouth area, and left following Robert's decision to take redundancy from the plant. Robert was vice-convenor and social convenor of the AEU during his time at Bathgate.

McCulloch, Jim, interviewed by Catriona Macdonald at his home in Whitburn, 2nd February 2012. Jim was a driver at the plant – the first hourly paid worker to be taken on. He lived in Fauldhouse, and worked at Bathgate until 1968 when he left to take up a job at Ravensraig. He chose not to be involved in the trade union movement as he felt his father, a coal-miner and committed socialist, had been persecuted for his union activity.

Workers' Education Association 'Bathgate Once More' oral history project – recordings held at West Lothian Archives Service, Linlithgow

Aitken, Guthrie, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at Bathgate Volunteer Centre, 9th November 2010. Guthrie was born in Blackridge and started work at the BMC in 1962. He worked in the stores in the tractor plant, became a superintendent, and then moved into senior management. He was initially a member of the NUVB. He left the plant in 1973 when he was offered a job that would give him a company car.

Bett, Chris, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at the Bennie Museum, 26th May 2011. Chris was a member of the AEU and vice-convenor of the shop stewards, and along with Tommy Morrison, represented the JSSC at national, company-wide meetings of shop stewards. He

was also an active member of the Communist Party, and was once sacked for campaigning on company premises. He stayed at the plant until closure.

Bradley, Harry, interviewed by Harry Cartmill at the Bennie Museum, 12th December 2011.

Harry went to school in Blackridge and worked at a steel foundry before moving to the factory in 1972. He worked in fly wheel production, and then in the stores until he was made redundant in 1986. He was an AEU shop steward.

Brogan (nee Love), Joyce, interviewed by Helen Jeffery at her home in Armadale, 15th March 2011.

Joyce grew up in Armadale and worked in the planning office from 1967 until shortly before the closure. She was a member of a trade union and attended union meetings, but doesn't remember which one.

Cooper, John, interviewed by Helen Jeffery at the Bennie Museum, 24th February 2011.

John grew up in Longridge, near Whitburn. He joined the BMC in 1962 and worked on the engine assembly line until he was made redundant in 1984. He was a member of the AEU, and then ASTMS following his promotion to foreman, but was not involved with the JSSC.

Davies, Bruce, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at the Bennie Museum, 20th December 2011.

Bruce was born in Port Talbot and took a job with the company after graduating in mechanical engineering from the University of Manchester in 1969. He agreed to move to Bathgate, which he thought was a suburb of Birmingham, and worked as a design engineer at the plant until 1975. He was a member of DATA, and decided to leave the plant as he had concerns over the design of the tractors it was producing.

Duncan, John, interviewed by Helen Jeffery at his home in Armadale, 24th May 2011.

John was born in Pittulie, Aberdeenshire, and worked initially as an ironmonger. He moved to Bathgate in 1961 and took a job in the BMC as a tool buyer. He was promoted to chief store keeper in the tool store, and was among the last to leave the plant as he was responsible for organising the transfer of tools to other BL factories in Coventry. He doesn't remember which union he belonged to.

Harvey (nee Swan), Elaine, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at the Bennie Museum, 23rd May 2011.

Elaine is the daughter of Jim Swan. She grew up in Whitburn and, in 1981, became

the first female engineering apprentice at the plant. She left in 1985, three months short of finishing her apprenticeship, but was able to qualify as a jig and tool designer with Terex Equipment in Newhouse, Lanarkshire.

Hastings, John, interviewed by Helen Jeffery and Catriona Macdonald at the Bennie Museum, 25th February 2011. John grew up in Whitburn. He worked on the tractor assembly line from 1971 until 1982, when he was made redundant. He was a member of the TGWU, but was not involved with the JSSC.

Hunter, Andy, interviewed by Harry Cartmill at the Bennie Museum, 13th December 2011. Andy was born in Armadale and worked in a clay pit before moving to the factory in 1972. He worked on the main truck assembly line before taking redundancy in 1980. He was a shop steward in the NUVB and a member of the JSSC.

Marr, Alan, interviewed by Helen Jeffery at his home in Livingston, 2nd May 2011. Alan was born in Bathgate and joined the plant as an engineering apprentice, around 1970. He then worked in maintenance, until he left the plant in 1983 following the closure of the tractor plant. He was a member of the AEU but was not active in the union.

McCulloch, Jim, interviewed by Helen Jeffery at his home in Whitburn, 23rd May 2011. See above.

McKay, Harry and Cecilia, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at their home in Armadale, 17th May 2011. Harry grew up in Armadale and was an apprentice moulder in a steel foundry before moving to the BMC in 1961. He worked as a foreman in the pre-pack section, preparing KD and CKD kits for export, and was a member of ASTMS. He left the plant in 1981 when he realised it would close, and emigrated to South Africa where he worked for Nissan.

Miller, Dougie, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan and Catriona Macdonald at the Bennie Museum, 27th July 2011. Dougie was born in Cessnock, New South Wales, to parents who had emigrated from West Lothian. They moved back to Whitburn in 1946, and Dougie started work at the BMC in 1963. He was a pipe fitter and convenor of shop stewards in the PTU. He left the plant due to illness in 1983.

Mitchell, Hugh, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at his home in Bathgate, 19th May 2011. Hugh was born in the Dennistoun area of Glasgow. He worked as a grocer and a chimney sweep, before moving first to Honeywell Controls in Motherwell and then, in 1961, to the BMC. He worked as a tool setter in the milling section.

Moore, John, interviewed by Helen Jeffery and Catriona Macdonald at the Bennie Museum, Bathgate, 10th February 2011. John was born in the Gorbals area of Glasgow and moved to Whitburn with his family to take up a job with the BMC in 1965. He was an inspector in the truck and tractor detail section, and stayed at the plant until 1984. John was a shop steward in the AEU and then ASTMS, and was involved in the campaign against closure.

Moore, Vince, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan and Catriona Macdonald at his workplace in Glasgow, 25th July 2011. Vince was brought up in Armadale and joined BL as an engineering apprentice in 1979. He then worked in the tool room until 1984 when it became clear that the plant would close. He wasn't involved with the shop stewards movement, but thinks he was a member of the GMB.

Morrison, Tommy, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at the Bennie Museum, 27th May 2011. Tommy grew up in Armadale, where he worked initially in a steel foundry. He was made redundant in 1961, and started work on the cab assembly line at the BMC where he stayed until the plant closed. He was a shop steward in the TGWU and active member of the JSSC, and was involved in the campaign against closure.

Paton, Kenny, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan and Catriona Macdonald at the Bennie Museum, 28th July 2011. Kenny was born in the Gorbals and moved to Whitburn in 1972. He started as an assembly worker at the BMC in 1975, and then became a welder in the maintenance department. He was vice-convenor of the Boilermakers' union and was very active in the JSSC and the campaign against closure. He was made redundant in 1986.

Raine, Bill, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at his home in Westfield, 18th November 2011. Bill was born in County Durham and grew up in Birmingham, where he worked for Austin at Longbridge. He moved to Bathgate in 1962 as a foreman, and worked as a superintendent in the machine shop until 1982. He was not involved with a trade union, and is critical of the JSSC.

Swan, Jim, interviewed by Harry Cartmill and Catriona Macdonald at his home in Whitburn, 8th June 2011. Jim grew up in Harthill and was in the merchant navy before joining the BMC in 1965 where he worked as a tool room fitter. He was an AEU shop steward, and became convenor of the JSSC. He was heavily involved in the campaign against closure, appearing on television news bulletins and in the newspapers, and is now well-known in West Lothian as a Labour councillor.

Tennant, Ian, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at the Bennie Museum, 12th October 2011. Ian was born in Whitburn and did his apprenticeship with an engineering firm in Motherwell. He moved to the BMC in 1965 and worked in the planning department until he was made redundant in 1980. He was active in DATA and TASS.

Walker, Lenny, interviewed by Helen Jeffery and Catriona Macdonald at his home in Bathgate, 11th February 2011. Lenny grew up in Gartcosh, Lanarkshire, and moved to Bathgate in 1964. He began as an assembly line worker, and became a skilled grinder. He stayed at the plant until its closure. Lenny was a shop steward in the AEU, and was involved in the campaign against closure.

Weir, John, interviewed by Elizabeth Bryan at the Bennie Museum, 30th May 2011. John was born at Mossie Farm, Bathgate, where his parents worked as farm labourers, and the plant would later be built. He started as an engineering apprentice in 1964 and became a planning engineer. He was a member of TASS, and left the plant shortly before its closure.

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