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**Economic Direction and Generational Change in Twentieth Century Britain: The Case of the
Scottish Coalfields***

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Abstract

Changes in economic direction in Britain in the twentieth century were incremental, rarely permanent, and strongly contested, although related trends to deindustrialisation, widening inequality and the ostracism of trade unions from policy-making were clear by the mid-1980s. This followed the defeat of the striking miners in 1984-85, a decisive movement, certainly, in macro-economic direction. This case study of the Scottish coalfields uses generational analysis to illuminate the contested nature of these long-running economic changes. Three distinct trade union generations are identified, linked to successive ideal-types of economic unit. Each represented an ever larger economy of scale, and qualitative changes in coalfield employment: 'Village Pits', 'New Mines', and 'Cosmopolitan Collieries'. The evolving organisation of production, combined with other powerful experiences in early adulthood, formed different political goals for each successive generation. The first, born in the 1890s, won the primary goal of nationalisation in 1947; the second, born in the 1920s, secured important changes to the manner in which the nationalised industry operated in the 1960s, applying greater workforce control and securing enhanced communal economic security; the

* The author thanks colleagues at the University of Tübingen's Contemporary History Seminar, where he spoke on the theme of generation and Scottish coal mining in June 2015. This article also draws on a paper presented to the Economic History Society Annual Conference at Robinson College, Cambridge, in April 2016. He also thanks colleagues in Economic and Social History at the University of Glasgow, who discussed a draft of this paper at a Work in Progress seminar in November 2015.

third, born in the 1950s, attempted to defend the social democratic elements of the nationalised order in the 1980s against changing macro-economic strategy and micro-managerial operations which threatened pits, jobs and worker voice. Nationalisation, it is shown, was a success from the perspective of the workforce, but only because trade unions compelled the National Coal Board and the UK government to preserve economic security in the coalfields. These victories of the 1960s were over-turned, however, by the Conservative government in the 1980s, at massive cost to coalfield communities and workers.

It has long been assumed that there were two decisive changes in economic direction in Twentieth Century Britain. According to this interpretation, the 1945–51 Labour governments consolidated and extended developments set in train by Winston Churchill’s war-time coalition towards an enlarged state, with greater interventionist powers, which manipulated demand through fiscal policy. This path was followed, more or less, by all subsequent administrations until 1979, at which point the Conservative governments led by Margaret Thatcher initiated a radical and permanent reverse in policy, scaling back the state and abandoning Keynesian demand management.¹ This stark account of two periods of dramatic change has been refined in recent years by scholarship which, in examining the complex and contested nature of long-term change, has drawn attention to important continuities in government approaches. Thus governments in the 1930s made significant ‘corporatist’ interventions to stimulate aggregate demand, which anticipated the limited Keynesian ‘revolution’ that followed the Second World War.² In this sense, the Conservative Party’s adaptation to the post-1945 ‘mixed’ economy of greater state intervention and ‘full’ employment was not transformational. Nor was it wholesale.³ Meanwhile, the ‘neoliberal’ turn under Thatcher’s

¹ P. Hall, *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France* (Cambridge, 1986).

² A. Booth, ‘New Revisionists and the Keynesian Era: An Expanding Consensus?’, *Economic History Review*, lvi (2003), pp. 125–30.

³ J. Ramsden, ‘“A Party for Owners or a Party for Earners?” How Far Did the British Conservative Party Really Change after 1945?’, *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., xxxvii (1987), pp. 49–63.

leadership had long-established roots, nourished by contacts between elite Conservative Party activists, business leaders and economic thinkers from the 1950s onwards.⁴ Moreover, the changes from 1979 cannot be characterised as a completely permanent revolution in Britain's economic orientation: the Thatcher years were followed in the 1990s by interventionist and expansionist policies pursued by Conservative and then New Labour governments.⁵

For all the greater emphasis on continuity in recent scholarship, a clear shift in economic direction after 1979 can nevertheless be discerned if we focus on two related elements of economic management: income distribution and the commitment to maintaining high levels of employment. The Gini coefficient is a standard measure of income distribution, usually expressed as a figure between 0 and 1, rising as the scale of inequality increases. In Britain the Gini coefficient in 1938 was 0.42. After the Second World War it narrowed, to 0.24 in 1961 and 0.23 in 1977, but then jumped to 0.34 in 1987. It has subsequently plateaued at this upper level.⁶ Such a sharp widening of inequality was the direct result of government changes to fiscal, budgetary and social security policy, but also reflected the abandonment of the state's commitment to high levels of employment. The planned innovations of the 1940s, marking a clear dividing line from the inter-war years of persistent and heavy unemployment, had shaped Britain's economic direction from the 1950s to the 1970s, but were abandoned in the 1980s. A key development was deindustrialisation, slowly developing, if watchfully managed, in the 1960s and 1970s, but allowed to accelerate rapidly after 1979. The consequent loss of relatively well-paid manual jobs in industrial sectors was the largest single cause of the major increase in unemployment in the 1980s, and reinforced the sudden growth of income

⁴ B. Jackson, 'The Think-Tank Archipelago: Thatcherism and Neo-Liberalism', in B. Jackson and R. Saunders, eds., *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 43–61; N. Rollings, 'Cracks in the Post-War Keynesian Settlement? The Role of Organised Business in the Rise of Neoliberalism before Margaret Thatcher', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxiv (2013), pp. 637–59

⁵ J. Tomlinson, 'Tale of a Death Exaggerated: How Keynesian Policies Survived the 1970s', *Contemporary British History*, xxi (2007), pp. 429–48.

⁶ A.B. Atkinson, 'The Distribution of Income in the UK and OECD Countries in the Twentieth Century', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, xv (1999), pp. 56–75.

inequality. The state's pursuit of employment creation recommenced only very partially in the 1990s.⁷

The qualified picture of changes in economic direction in the 1940s and 1980s is illuminated by this case study of the Scottish coalfields, which covers two significant periods of reconstruction in the twentieth century. First, the privately-owned industrial order, where trade union influence was circumscribed by authoritarian management, gave way in the 1940s to a model of greater social partnership, with joint industrial regulation and public ownership. Second, in the 1980s there was re-ordering of a different kind, characterised by anti-trade union management practices, market liberalisation, deindustrialisation and privatisation. It will be shown that these changes were gradual rather than abrupt, although there was nevertheless a clear trajectory from liberal order to social democratic order in the middle of the century, followed by a reversion to liberalism in the 1980s. These changes were shaped by multiple macro factors. The ownership and operation of the coal industry in Scotland as in England and Wales was influenced profoundly by long-term movements in UK government ideology and policy, as well as by the domestic and international political economy of energy.⁸ But human agency and popular pressure were also important. The emphasis here is on the role that generational change played in advancing the social democratisation of the coalfields in the middle of the twentieth century and then in resisting the reversion to liberalism in the 1980s.

The process was long and contested, with fuzzy boundaries between the successive coalfield orders. An important staging-post was the nationalisation of coal in 1947. The Labour government elected in 1945 had a substantial trade union base. More than a quarter of its 393 MPs were sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which had been an advocate of public ownership since before the First World War; the government nationalised coal in accordance with its

⁷ J. Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization not Decline: A New Meta-Narrative for Post-War British History', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxvii (2016), pp. 76–99.

⁸ W. Ashworth, *The History of the British Coal Industry, V: 1946–1982. The Nationalised Industry* (Oxford, 1986); B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry, IV. 1913–1946: The Political Economy of Decline* (Oxford, 1987).

broader programme of progressive economic and social redistribution, with the result that income inequality narrowed markedly.⁹ The second reconstruction, in the 1980s, was structured by the Conservative governments' commitment to dismantling the 'world' of 1945: empowering private interests, and eroding trade union influence in workplaces and society more generally.¹⁰ Privatisation was a key expression of this distinct macro-economic approach. Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, claimed that nationalised industries and utilities were inefficiently and illegitimately organised around the interests of producers rather than consumers. Some scholarly analysis of the post-1945 public sector reflects this thinking. Nationalised enterprises have often been characterised as economic failures, absorbing capital and labour resources that could have been more productively invested in the private sector. According to this line of argument, privatisation, combined with the removal of the trade union 'veto' on economic policy, contributed to the establishment of a more competitive economic environment. This, in turn, ostensibly stimulated productivity and macro-economic growth.¹¹ There are, however, alternative perspectives. In the first instance, coal and other key strategic sectors were nationalised because of demonstrable market failure in the 1930s and 1940s, with the private sector proving to be incapable of supplying the necessary investment and scale economies in production.¹² Second, it has been suggested that privatisation in the 1980s and 1990s of various branches of the energy, transport and telecommunications industries in fact yielded minimal productivity gains,¹³ although this meagre improvement is explained in part by a drive to improved performance prior to sale.¹⁴ Meanwhile, although many private operators subsequently became highly profitable, the claim that consumer

⁹ Atkinson, 'Distribution of Income', pp. 59–60.

¹⁰ A. Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism* (Basingstoke, 1994); C. Howell, *Trade Unions and the State: The Construction of Industrial Relations Institutions in Britain, 1890–2000* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), pp. 131–73.

¹¹ L. Hannah, 'A Failed Experiment: The State Ownership of Industry', in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, II: 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 84–111; N. Crafts, 'Economic Growth during the Long Twentieth Century', in *ibid.*, pp. 26–59.

¹² J. Tomlinson, *Democratic Socialism and Economic Policy: The Attlee Years, 1945–1951* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 97–103.

¹³ R. Millward, 'The Growth of the Public Sector', in Floud, Humphries and Johnson, eds., *Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, II*, pp. 387–415.

¹⁴ J. Foreman-Peck and R. Millward, *Public and Private Ownership of British Industry, 1820–1990* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 306–14, 323–8.

interests were advanced is highly uncertain.¹⁵ Applying broader economic and social criteria, nationalisation—particularly of coal and the railways—can, in fact, be seen as both warranted by historical circumstances and highly successful in practice. It was part of the broader policy matrix that narrowed income inequality and increased provision of stable employment from the 1940s to the 1970s. The National Coal Board (NCB) supplied energy in quantities required by domestic and commercial users at stable prices; it was a relatively progressive employer, balancing production with significant improvements in health and safety; and, during a period of radical contraction in the 1960s, it helped to ‘recycle’ hundreds of thousands of workers into the productive economy at minimal social cost.¹⁶

The analysis of the Scottish coalfields presented here shows that nationalisation and the general shift in economic direction in the middle of the twentieth century was nevertheless accompanied by only limited changes to everyday life in Britain, as experienced by working-class people. In *The Uses of Literacy*, published in 1957, Richard Hoggart famously examined the emergence of a classless mass culture, but noted also the distinct persistence of class-based inequalities and the related resilience of working-class identity.¹⁷ Recent literature reviewing the ‘Affluent Worker’ debate of the 1960s, initiated by the well-known study of manual employees in three Luton factories,¹⁸ has likewise emphasised the partial and contested nature of improvements to working-class life. Exploring the contemporary analyses of left intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s, Alexandre Campsie has stressed continuities: in workplaces there was no move to greater employee involvement in the organisation of production; and class structures and privileges were undisturbed even by the Labour governments’ move to an expanded state with significant welfare

¹⁵ J. Meek, *Private Island: Why Britain Now Belongs to Someone Else* (London, 2014).

¹⁶ J. Tomlinson, ‘A “Failed Experiment”? Public Ownership and the Narratives of Post-war Britain’, *Labour History Review*, lxxiii (2008), pp. 199–214.

¹⁷ R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1957).

¹⁸ J. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer and J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge, 1968); eid., *The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge, 1968); eid., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge, 1969).

improvements and the nationalisation of key industries.¹⁹ Affluence itself is, in any case, highly problematic in class terms. Mike Savage and others have shown that improvement for manual workers remained dependent on the modest growth of wages from strenuous labour, secured only through bargaining with sometimes reluctant employers who jealously protected their workplace sovereignty.²⁰ It will be shown here that progress for miners in Scotland was similarly circumscribed: nationalisation was a success, but only because trade union activism compelled the NCB and the UK government to make policy adjustments that preserved economic security in the coalfields. These developments highlighted the existence of a moral economy in the coalfields after 1947. This resembled that of E. P. Thompson's eighteenth century plebeian crowd, with an emphasis on communal security in a period of disruptive economic change.²¹ As established pits closed and job losses mounted, especially from the late 1950s, policy-makers were obliged to consult mineworkers' union and political representatives, and make provision for alternative economic activity: new mines were developed by the NCB and government-funded regional assistance stimulated the provision of different forms of industrial employment, most notably assembly manufacturing.²²

The analysis presented here relates the extent and manner of changes in economic direction to the formation and influence of three distinct trade union generations. The first, born in the 1890s, secured the miners' primary goal of nationalisation; the second, born in the 1920s, was alive to defects in the nationalised order that the first generation could not see, and incrementally secured greater workforce control over the management of the industry from the late 1950s onwards; the third, born in the 1950s, attempted to defend this revised order in the 1980s. The movement from the private and liberal order to social democratic order in the coalfields was the result of the

¹⁹ A. Campsie, 'Mass-Observation, Left Intellectuals and the Politics of Everyday Life', *English Historical Review*, cxxxi (2016), pp. 92–121.

²⁰ M. Savage, 'Working Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Studies', *Sociology*, xxxix (2005), pp. 929–46; S. Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class', *Contemporary British History*, xxii (2008), 501–18; R. Whiting, 'Affluence and Industrial Relations', *Contemporary British History*, xxii (2008), 519–36.

²¹ E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, I (1971), pp. 76–136.

²² J. Phillips, 'The Moral Economy and Deindustrialization in the Scottish Coalfields, 1947–1991', *International Labor and Working Class History*, lxxxiv (2013), pp. 99–115.

successive efforts of these generations. This generational approach is adapted from Karl Mannheim's theoretical model, first published in the 1920s, and draws on recent historical scholarship, including literature on coal miners in the Ruhr in the 1940s and 1950s.²³ The formation and activism of the three mining generations are linked to gradual, but discernible, changes in the structure and scale of coal industry workplaces, as well as to movements in macro-economic direction.

The argument has two parts. First, the initial operational difficulties of nationalisation in the Scottish coal industry are examined and related to the concept of generational change. The generational model itself is outlined and connected to the changing structures of the Scottish coal industry and mining workforce across the twentieth century. Second, the formative experiences of the distinct generations are scrutinised and the importance of industrial and workplace conditions is emphasised. The article brings together existing scholarly literature, employer and union records, including pit-level data from the 1950s to the 1980s, and miners' memoirs, as well as interviews conducted by the author with members of the youngest of the three identified generations.

[!]

The coal industry workforce did not secure unambiguous economic and social improvement by the act of nationalisation in 1947. This had to be fought for. The NCB emphasised its commitment to 'the health and safety of those they employ',²⁴ and there was significant progress in this area. From 1930 to 1939 the average annual rate of death arising from accidents in Scottish coal mines was 0.48 per

²³ K. Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations', in K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1952), pp. 276–322, especially pp. 288–303; M. Roseman, *Recasting the Ruhr, 1945–1958: Manpower, Economic Recovery and Labour Relations* (New York, 1992).

²⁴ National Coal Board, *Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31st December 1950*, British Parliamentary Papers [*hereafter* BPP], House of Commons Papers, 1950–51, no. 188, vol. x, p. 188, para. 43.

100,000 man shifts; from 1949 to 1958 the rate was 0.25.²⁵ Joint industrial regulation was vital in securing this benefit, but the move to greater mechanisation produced elevated levels of dust in the mines. The dangers of respiratory diseases, notably pneumoconiosis, had been wilfully obscured by private owners in the 1920s and 1930s,²⁶ and were only slowly acknowledged by the NCB after 1947.²⁷ Debates about safety were conducted at workplace level within a pattern of relations that remained fractious, not least because of the continuity of employment for managers and supervisors from the private regime. These frustrations, recently recalled by ex-miners from Durham and South Wales in Ken Loach's film, *The Spirit of '45*,²⁸ partly arose because the NUM leadership, steeped in the adversarial structures of the private industry, was uninterested in sharing the 'traditional' functions of management. NUM officials preferred instead to strengthen joint industrial bargaining and workplace consultation.²⁹ This was in keeping with the broader opposition of Labour Party and trade union leaders to the extension of worker involvement in the organisation and management of industry, which some left intellectuals, notably Michael Young, saw as protecting rather than challenging class inequalities.³⁰

The initial tensions and only limited concrete changes that followed nationalisation are illustrated by the experience in Scotland. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the NCB's early restructuring—seeking greater efficiencies in production—was conducted with minimal concern for the longer-term stability and collective interests of the localities and people affected by targeted disinvestment. Closures were first concentrated in the Shotts area of Lanarkshire, where a thousand

²⁵ Author calculations on data in J. N. Williamson, 'The Years of Safety Work in a Scottish Colliery Group', *Transactions of the Institution of Mining Engineers*, cvi (1946-47), 262; and National Coal Board, *Report and Accounts*, House of Commons, various years, 1950 to 1959.

²⁶ A. Perchard and K. Gildart, "'Buying Brains and Experts': British Coal Owners, Regulatory Capture and Miners' Health, 1918-1946", *Labor History*, lvi (2015), pp. 459-480.

²⁷ A. McIvor and R. Johnston, *Miners' Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (Aldershot, 2007).

²⁸ *The Spirit of '45*, dir. Ken Loach (Fly Film Company, Sixteen Films, British Film Institute and Channel Four Television, 2013) DVD release.

²⁹ R. Zahn, 'German Codetermination without Nationalization, and British Nationalization without Codetermination: Retelling the Story', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, xxvi (2015), pp. 1-28.

³⁰ Campsie, 'Politics of Everyday Life', pp. 113-18.

jobs were lost between 1949 and 1953.³¹ The NCB helped miners and their families to relocate elsewhere in the coalfield, mainly in Fife. Community abandonment was implicit in this restructuring,³² but the genuine social and civic worries which arose were characterised by the NCB as the pessimism of ‘industrial psychologists and social science students’.³³ Union as well as NCB officials were then startled by the scale and ferocity of workplace opposition to a second and longer phase of contraction after employment peaked in 1957. Resistance began in 1959 at Devon Colliery in Clackmannan, which the NCB decided to close on economic grounds. Devon workers attempted to resist this eventuality through strike action, picketing pits in Lanarkshire, West Lothian and Fife as well as Clackmannan.³⁴ Within days the unofficial strike action involved 25,000 miners, a third of the total Scottish mining workforce. Abe Moffat, NUM Scottish Area (NUMSA) President, claimed in his memoir to have faced his members’ rebellion calmly, persuading the strikers to resume work in return for talks with the NCB’s Scottish directorate, thus establishing the miners’ right to consultation prior to closure.³⁵ Devon remained open until the workforce could be transferred together to nearby Glenochil in 1960,³⁶ but Moffat’s laconic account conceals the private consternation of the NUMSA executive, angered by the unofficial as well as large-scale nature of the anti-closure protest. Some executive members argued that the strike should have been ended without employment guarantee, so strong was their objection to the unofficial nature of the Devon workers’ resistance. This was seen as a breach of union discipline that would weaken the NUM’s broader and official campaign against closures.³⁷

³¹ The National Archives, Kew (*hereafter* TNA), POWE 37/481, National Coal Board Scottish Division (NCBSD), List of Pits closed, 1949-1959.

³² H. Heughan, *Pit Closures at Shotts and the Migration of Miners* (Edinburgh, 1953).

³³ NCB Scottish Division, *Scotland’s Coal Plan* (Edinburgh, 1955), pp. 29–30.

³⁴ TNA, POWE 37/481, Ministry of Power Coal Division, Note on the strike at Devon Pit, 24 June 1959.

³⁵ A. Moffat, *My Life With the Miners* (London, 1965), pp. 185–6.

³⁶ Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland (*hereafter* NRS), CB 276/14, L.R. Milligan, Industrial Relations Director, NCBSD, to K. G. Smith, Secretary, NCBSD, 17 June 1959, and William Summers, Alloa Area General Manager, NCBSD, to K. G. Smith, Secretary, NCBSD, 15 Mar. 1960; Newtongrange, National Mining Museum of Scotland (*hereafter* NMMS), National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area (NUMSA), Executive Committee (EC), 21 Mar. 1960.

³⁷ NMMS, NUMSA, EC, 29 June 1959; *The Times*, 26 June 1959; *The Guardian*, 24 and 27 June 1959.

The crisis arising from the Devon closure highlights the connections between historical and generational change. Most generational accounts privilege the importance of formative experience, usually in the early years of adulthood. This is the approach adopted here, influenced in part by Mannheim's model, well-known but still relevant, which identified generation and social class as twin elements in the construction of social identity. Mannheim argued that generations acquire their distinct identity from shared 'concrete experience', especially in the years of youth. These bonds are strengthened by experience of common social crisis or transformation, such as revolution, war or adapting this thinking to coal mining a major industrial 'shock' such as rapid economic restructuring and deindustrialisation.³⁸ More recent historical scholarship has refreshed the value of generation as an analytical category. Two case-studies from the US illustrate this in different ways. In the first, Claudia Goldin adapted the concept of generation, using birth cohorts, to explain the limited elimination of gender-based inequalities in the US labour market over the course of the twentieth century. Education and family size were among the important factors that varied by birth cohort, and women matured 'in different social climates' as the century progressed: 'These attributes are then carried with the cohort through time and distinguish it from the others with which it coexists'.³⁹ In the second, William Lyons and Robert Alexander also used generation to examine a long-run trend, the falling level of voting in US Presidential Elections. They showed that citizens born before 1932, whose 'primary socialization' occurred during the New Deal and the Second World War, formed stronger party loyalties and 'partisan thinking' than those born after 1932, and were more likely to vote as a result.⁴⁰ War and reconstruction as formative experience also feature in Mark Roseman's study of coal mining in the Ruhr from 1945 to 1958. Post-Nazi economic order in the Ruhr was influenced by inter-generational tensions between younger miners and older union

³⁸ S. Aprile, M. de Oliveira and B. Touchelay, 'Introduction', in S. Aprile, M. de Oliveira, B. Touchelay and K. Hoin, eds., *Les Houillères entre l'état, le marché et la société: Les Territoires de la résilience XVIII–XXI siècles* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2015), p. 17.

³⁹ C. Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 5, 16–41, 138–57; quote at p. 138.

⁴⁰ W. Lyons and R. Alexander, 'A Tale of Two Electorates: Generational Replacement and the Decline of Voting in Presidential Elections', *Journal of Politics*, lxi (2000), pp. 1,014–1,034.

officials, industry managers and policy-makers. Younger men, shaped by the various tribulations and traumas of military service and occupation, resisted authoritarian managerial entreaties to work harder for limited wages and rations, but were also pragmatic and less open to radical left politics than employers feared. They ‘had had enough shouting’, and contributed greatly to the incremental establishment of social partnership and workplace co-determination in the Ruhr, a key facet, it is widely accepted, in the Federal Republic of Germany’s economic ‘miracle’ of the later 1950s and 1960s.⁴¹

The confluence of political and industrial contingency in building the Ruhr’s ‘new’ generation after 1945, and the importance in the US case studies of differential socialisation experience in structuring generational expectations and ‘partisan thinking’, have ready parallels in the twentieth-century Scottish coalfields. Moffat was born in 1896 and joined the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1922. He was elected NUMSA President in 1945,⁴² and belonged to a generation of union officials across the coalfields—in England and Wales as well as Scotland—who were shaped as young men by the First World War and the industrial struggles of the 1920s. This cohort included Communists from South Wales, notably Arthur Horner (b. 1894) and Will Paynter (b. 1903), whose memoir, fittingly, was called *My Generation*.⁴³ It also numbered important Labour figures from England, such as Will Lawther in Northumberland (b. 1889), and Sam Watson in Durham (b. 1898). These miners welcomed nationalisation in 1947 as an unambiguous victory. It was their ‘utopia’, according to David Hopper, General Secretary of the surviving Durham Miners’ Association in an interview recorded in the 2010s,⁴⁴ and they were disinclined to articulate criticisms of ‘“their” industry’ after nationalisation, as Ben Curtis has recently put it when writing of South Wales.⁴⁵ These miners were national figures in the labour movement in the 1940s and 1950s. Communist and

⁴¹ Roseman, *Recasting the Ruhr*, p. 325; M. Roseman, ‘The Generation Conflict that Never Was: Young Labour in the Ruhr Mining Industry, 1945–1957’, in M. Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770–1968* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 269–89.

⁴² R. Page Arnot, *A History of the Scottish Miners* (London, 1955), pp. 271–9.

⁴³ W. Paynter, *My Generation* (London, 1972).

⁴⁴ Loach, interview with David Hopper, Inky Thomson and Stan Pearce, *Spirit of ’45* (DVD, Extras).

⁴⁵ B. Curtis, *The South Wales Miners, 1964–1985* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 72.

Labour alike, they vigorously cajoled union members to strive for ever-greater productivity, condemning unofficial strikes and absenteeism.⁴⁶ In Scotland, a second generation of union leaders can be identified, born in the 1920s, with different formative experiences and political expectations, which was willing to criticise the nationalised industry more forcefully. It was this pressure that secured improvements in the manner in which restructuring affected the workers, as well as winning enhanced benefits for union members, including better wages. A third generation, born in the late 1940s and early 1950s, carried another set of distinct experiences, attitudes and ambitions. As we shall see, members of this generation were quicker than the second generation to recognise the threats to the miners' social democratic gains that were posed by Conservative policy and managerial anti-union initiatives in the 1980s. The strike of 1984–5, to protect union workplace rights as well as jobs and collieries, is presented within this framework of changing economic order as a movement shaped by generation as well as by class.

'Generation' has been the approach used by Alan Campbell to examine 'ideal types of orientation to trade unionism' in Scottish coal mining, from the 'independent collier', born in the 1820s, to the 'bureaucratic reformist', born in the late 1850s, and then the 'militant miner', born around 1900.⁴⁷ Campbell focuses on the pre-1939 period. Generation, as conceptualised in Table 1, explains the bridge from 1939 to 1947, from private to public ownership, and the important changes within the nationalised regime that followed from the 1950s to the 1970s, before the radical change of direction in the coalfields and broader economy in the 1980s. Table 1 introduces a further innovative feature of this analysis: the linking of trade union generations to distinct forms of economic unit. These over-lapped and co-existed, in chronological terms, but each represented an ideal-type in form when it first emerged. Taken together they illuminate the qualified changes in state macro-economic direction that were outlined in the introduction. Each of these ideal-type units represented an ever larger economy of scale, and substantial qualitative changes in coalfield

⁴⁶ H. Beynon and T. Austrin, 'The Performance of Power: Sam Watson a Miners' Leader on Many Stages', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, xxviii (2015), pp. 458–90.

⁴⁷ A. Campbell, *The Scottish Miners, 1874–1939, II: Trade Unions and Politics* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 5–8.

employment. ‘Village Pits’, a designation adopted here, opened in the late nineteenth century, employed more than 500 miners on one site and were larger than most of their predecessors. Many survived for much of the twentieth century, but their relative importance was superseded in the 1920s and 1930s by ‘New Mines’ a term adapted from an industry publicity film, discussed below, which employed more than a thousand miners. These were surpassed in importance from the late 1950s by ‘Cosmopolitan Collieries’, each consisting of two thousand workers or more.

‘Cosmopolitan’ was a term with spatial connotations used elsewhere in the UK coalfields. In South Wales it described pits which brought together a mix of workers who transferred in as other mines closed in the 1960s.⁴⁸ In Scotland the term likewise implied an amalgamation of miners with very different geographical backgrounds and, at times, with highly differentiated prior experience in geological conditions and production methods. In this analysis it also refers to vintage and scale: Cosmopolitan Collieries opened after the peak of coal industry employment, generally in the 1960s, and were larger than New Mines.

The connection between trade union generation and colliery type illustrates the importance of ‘primary socialisation’, to refer back to the study of US Presidential Election voting by Lyons and Alexander.⁴⁹ The Rhondda, Will Payner wrote, was ‘the oven which moulded me into the kind of man I was to become’.⁵⁰ Changes in the organisation of production shaped different patterns of industrial relations and political goals from one generation to the next. Just as successive cohorts of US women bore ‘attributes’ formed in early life that framed their later understanding and experience,⁵¹ members of these Scottish mining generations made sense of developments as they aged on the basis of their initial adult experience. The construction of these formative experiences is summarised in Table 1. The political goal for each generation is treated as the sum of production regime plus transitional experience plus employment crisis. The table also includes the names of individual trade

⁴⁸ Curtis, *South Wales Miners*, pp. 49–50.

⁴⁹ Lyons and Alexander, ‘A Tale of Two Electorates’.

⁵⁰ Paynter, *My Generation*, p. 15.

⁵¹ Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap*.

unionists who were employed as young men in particular named units, each of which represents the changing ideal-types of the industry: the Moffats at Lumphinnans 11 and 12 in the 1920s, Michael McGahey at Cardowan in the 1940s, David Hamilton at Monktonhall and Iain Chalmers at Seafield in the 1970s.

Table 1, Three Trade Union Generations in Scottish Coal Mining

Generation <i>Ideal-Typical Units and Trade Unionists</i>	Production Regime	Transitional Experience	Employment Crisis	Political Goal
Village Pit, 1890s <i>Lumphinnans 11&12, Bothwell Castle 3&4; Abe Moffat, Willie Allan</i>	Industrial concentration, private owners, employing 500- 1000	First World War and October Revolution	Lockouts of 1921 and 1926	Nationalisation: achieved 1947
New Mine, 1920s <i>Comrie, Cardowan; Michael McGahey, Lawrence Daly</i>	Fuller mechanisation, improved welfare, employing 1000+	Second World War, transition to nationalisation	Pit closures of 1950s	Enhanced union 'voice' in the Nationalised Industry
Cosmopolitan Colliery, 1950s <i>Monktonhall, Seafield; David Hamilton, Iain Chalmers</i>	Big reserves, power loading, employing 2000+	Closure of 'local' pits in 1960s	Victorious National Pay disputes, 1972 and 1974	Defence of union 'voice' and social democratic gains

The three trade union generations operated within a cross-generational working-class movement in the Scottish coalfields. Union officials and activists at all times represented miners whose ages spanned four or five decades. This reinforces the importance of continuities over time. Just as in Roseman's account of the Ruhr, in Scotland's coalfields the workforce was recurrently 'recast' with younger men who interacted with older men. The average age profile duly shows evidence of significant change from one generation to the next. This can be surmised from NCB personnel records, detailing the changing age profile of the workforce after nationalisation,

particularly when those records are read in conjunction with the figures charting changing employment levels shown in Table 2.

Table 2, Employment in Deep Coal Mining in Scotland and the UK (Thousands), Selected Years, 1925-1987

Year	Scotland	UK	Scotland as % of Total
1925	126.0	1078	11.7
1932	82.3	796	10.3
1947	77	707	10.9
1957	82	710	11.5
1967	32	390	8.2
1977	21	248	8.5
1987	6	75	8

Sources: Alan Campbell, *The Scottish Miners, 1874-1939. Volume One: Work, Industry and Community* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 22-3, 26; Department of Energy and Climate Change, *Historical Coal Data: Coal Production, 1853 to 2014* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-coal-data-coal-production-availability-and-consumption-1853-to-2011>, accessed 20 November 2015); W. Ashworth, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Volume Five, 1946–1982: the nationalised industry* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 672-5; Miles K. Oglethorpe, *Scottish Collieries. An Inventory of the Scottish Coal Industry in the Nationalised Era* (Edinburgh, 2006), p. 20.

This data shows that the coal industry workforce in Scotland shrank by a third from the 1920s to the 1930s, grew slightly in the 1940s and early 1950s, and then contracted: rapidly in the 1960s, slowly in the 1970s, and quickly again following the strike in 1984–5. NCB average age data, from William Ashworth’s official history, shows a correlation between falling overall employment and rising average age, until the 1970s.⁵² This data was not disaggregated by region, although it might be surmised that the average age in Scotland was generally slightly higher than in the rest of the UK

⁵² Ashworth, *British Coal Industry*, p. 250.

coalfield, given the correlation between falling employment and rising average age, and the slightly faster rate of job loss in Scottish mines than elsewhere after 1957. Across the NCB the average age was 39.7 years in 1948 and 40.5 years in 1957. At this point, the 'average age miner' was born in the mid-1910s and had been working in the industry since the mid-1930s. He, the 'average age miner', was just a few years older than the New Mine union generation which pushed for a more vigorous collective response to closures. As employment in the industry contracted, the average age gradually increased to 42.1 years in 1965, and peaked at 44.2 years in 1973–4. The trend then reversed, markedly, to 40.6 in 1978–9 and 38.7 in 1982–3.⁵³ This reflected a concerted effort by the NCB to reduce its manpower through enhanced redundancy terms, in order to align production with demand, according to Ned Smith, its Director of Industrial Relations. This effort was concentrated on older miners, and relatively few men over the age of fifty were still employed by 1984. The younger age profile of the workforce was a crucial factor, Smith believed, in the strikers' subsequent endurance.⁵⁴ The 'average age miner' by this stage had been working for no more than twenty years, with his formative experiences coming in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the New Mine union generation had pressed the NCB successfully to bring the programme of closures and job cuts of that period to a halt, and had led successful collective action for improved wages in the 1972 and 1974 national strikes.⁵⁵ The average age miner was now just slightly older than the Cosmopolitan Colliery union generation, which compelled the New Mine generation to construct a collective response to the closures and job losses after 1979, and led the strike at workplace and community level in 1984–5.

⁵³ Ashworth, *British Coal Industry*, Table A1 and commentary on pp. 163, 250, 298.

⁵⁴ N. Smith, *The 1984 Miners' Strike: The Actual Account* (Whitstable, 1997), pp. 12–15.

⁵⁵ J. Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution: Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 117–45.

[II]

The three union generations central to this analysis were formed by a mixture of experiences in early adulthood. In the case of the first of these generations, Abe Moffat and his brother Alex (b. 1903) lived in the Fife village of Lumphinnans, connecting Cowdenbeath to the west and Lochgelly to the east. In this conurbation, roughly three in four occupied men in the 1920s were employed by the Fife Coal Company, including the Moffats at Lumphinnans 11 and 12. The Moffats were sons of a coal miner, but as young men entered an industry which, in terms of its business organisation and production scale, differed from that of their father's youth. Like others in the sector, notably the Alloa Coal Company, the Lothian Coal Company and the Wemyss Coal Company, the Fife Coal Company had in the 1890s and 1900s become connected to the larger worlds of Scottish, British and imperial capital through inter-locking directorships and commercial activity.⁵⁶ Its Chairman from 1923, Sir Adam Nimmo, was a former President of the Mining Association of Great Britain.⁵⁷ This changing structural position had a major bearing on the formation of the Village Pit generation: expanding firms, larger units, and greater mechanisation reduced divisions between workers, who were stimulated to greater collective action on wages, conditions and the broader organisation of industry and society. Lumphinnans was one of three 'Little Moscows' identified in Stuart Macintyre's analysis of inter-war working class militancy in Britain,⁵⁸ and appears in a more recent survey of 'Small-Place Communism' across Western Europe, comparable with Sallaumines in the Pas-de-Calais and Penzberg in Bavaria.⁵⁹ In his memoirs, Abe Moffat attributed his personal radicalisation to village politics, the industrial culture and dangerous working conditions of the pits, and what he and many others who witnessed it as infantrymen saw as the purposeless slaughter of workers on the Western

⁵⁶ A. Campbell, *The Scottish Miners, 1874–1939, I: Work, Industry and Community* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 26, 34, 38, 44; M.K. Oglethorpe, *Scottish Collieries: An Inventory of the Scottish Coal Industry in the Nationalised Era* (Edinburgh, 2006), p. 309.

⁵⁷ M.W. Kirby and S. Hamilton, 'Sir Adam Nimmo', in A. Slaven and S. Checkland, eds., *Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography, I: The Staple Industries* (Aberdeen, 1986), pp. 57–9.

⁵⁸ S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London, 1980), pp. 48–78.

⁵⁹ A. Knotter, 'Little Moscows' in Western Europe: The Ecology of Small-Place Communism', *International Review of Social History*, lvi (2011), pp. 475–510.

Front in the First World War.⁶⁰ Moffat's action in joining the CPGB in 1922 reflected the local impact of the 1917 October Revolution, the anniversary of which was marked each year by the town council in nearby Cowdenbeath flying the Red Flag.⁶¹

In Lanarkshire, Willie Allan (b. 1900) was Alan Campbell's archetypal 'militant miner'.⁶² His working life started in 1914 at Baird & Co.'s Craighead Colliery in Blantyre, near Hamilton. Allan was also radicalised by the war, by workplace and community experience, and by attendance at John Maclean's Scottish Labour College classes in Glasgow, sponsored by the Lanarkshire Mineworkers' Union. Allan joined the CPGB in 1923.⁶³ Allan, the Moffats and others of the Village Pit generation were critical of older union leaders, calling for more combative negotiations with private owners.⁶⁴ The private coalfield order had been subjected to some state controls in the First World War, with the introduction of minimum national wage levels. In August 1918 the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), to which the Scottish district unions were affiliated, restated a pre-war demand for nationalisation, along with enhanced workplace representation and a standard fixed price for coal, with the aim of removing the destabilising effects of market forces on production and labour.⁶⁵ This proposed transformation was resisted by the owners, shaping the conduct and outcomes of three major crises: a threatened strike in 1919, and then two lockouts, in 1921 and 1926. The owners avoided nationalisation in 1919, consolidated private ownership and managerial sovereignty in 1921, and secured a return to market-driven wages in 1926.⁶⁶ During the lockouts, employers imposed substantial costs on their employees, with wage-rate cuts and longer working hours. Workers responded with forceful crowd actions, attacking mine property. Allan and the Moffat brothers were

⁶⁰ P. Long, 'Abe Moffat, the Fife Mineworkers and the United Mineworkers of Scotland: Transcript of a 1974 Interview', *Scottish Labour History*, xvii (1982), pp. 5–18.

⁶¹ Moffat, *My Life*, 9–16, 26, 28–33; P. Geoghegan, *The People's Referendum: Why Scotland Will Never Be the Same Again* (Edinburgh, 2015), p. 47.

⁶² Campbell, *Scottish Miners*, II, pp. 5–8.

⁶³ A. Campbell and J. McIlroy, 'Reflections on the Communist Party's Third Period in Scotland: The Case of Willie Allan', *Scottish Labour History*, xxxv (2000), pp. 35–54, especially p. 37.

⁶⁴ Campbell, *Scottish Miners*, II, pp. 161–7.

⁶⁵ Page Arnot, *Scottish Miners*, p. 144.

⁶⁶ Kirby and Hamilton, 'Sir Adam Nimmo', pp. 57–9; K. Laybourn, 'Revisiting the General Strike', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, xxi (2006), pp. 109–20.

among many arrested in 1926: Willie Allan was found not guilty of offences under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act; Abe was convicted and fined for leading 'a riotous mob'; and Alex was imprisoned for two months under the government's Emergency Regulations. Union activists were victimised afterwards, sacked by their employers and 'blacklisted' by other firms. Allan experienced this in 1921 and the Moffats in 1926. All three became checkweighers, elected and in effect employed by workers under Coal Mines legislation. When the Moffats led a local strike in 1929, with such involvement being beyond their checkweighers' purview, the Fife Coal Company successfully applied legal measures to have them removed. Abe did not work again in the coal industry until 1938.⁶⁷

The transition in the coalfields from Village Pit to New Mine in the 1930s was shaped by the crises of the 1910s and 1920s and the change in broader economic direction arising from the incremental growth of state action. While retaining control over their workplaces and workforces, mine owners—especially those in larger firms—responded to the changing competitive environment and new technological possibilities by establishing bigger units with greater mechanisation and new amenities for workers. The unintended consequences were enhanced worker solidarity, with further diminution of occupational hierarchies, and greater collective self-confidence arising from the improved environment. This trend was encouraged by government intervention, itself an indication of the type of gradual adjustment to macro-economic direction that blurs the boundaries between the inter-war liberal order and the post-1945 social democratic order. The 1926 Mining Industry Act, which can be seen as a response to the crises of 1921 and 1926, promoted larger aggregations of capital to secure more productive efficiency, and, through a levy on coal royalties, established the employers' obligation to finance 'accommodation and facilities for workmen taking baths and drying clothes'.⁶⁸ More than fifty pithead baths in Scotland were established within a decade.⁶⁹ Village Pits were redeveloped, and larger pits—the New Mines—were established with an innovative emphasis

⁶⁷ Moffat, *My Life*, pp. 49–51.

⁶⁸ Mining Industry Act 1926, s. 17.

⁶⁹ C. McKean, *The Scottish Thirties: An Architectural Introduction* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 116–17.

on scale and welfare. The Fife Coal Company's largest initiative was Comrie, opened in west Fife in 1936. *The New Mine*, produced by Gaumont British Instructional Films in collaboration with the company, presented Comrie as an exemplar of a new emphasis on 'safety, efficiency and economy', with rigorous testing for firedamp, technologically-advanced cutting machinery and semi-mechanised loading. The rural location was emphasised. Distant from housing, it was presented as a contribution to better living conditions, with workers being delivered to their workplace by bus. Amenities included showers, canteen and first aid room. The New Mine duly offered workers clear social improvement and greater esteem, to paraphrase Ross McKibbin.⁷⁰ On a visit to Comrie in 1946, Herbert Morrison, Labour's Deputy Prime Minister, saw it as embodying a new society: 'a painting of fifty years hence under nationalisation'.⁷¹

Michael McGahey, NUMSA President from 1967 to 1987, was born in 1925, the son of Jimmy McGahey, a Communist who was imprisoned and sacked in 1926 for activities during the lockout.⁷² Michael followed his father into the Lanarkshire pits and the CPGB, but an early act of generational independence was inspired by Cardowan, the largest New Mine in Lanarkshire, part owned by Nimmo of the Fife Coal Company.⁷³ Employed at Gateside Colliery in Cambuslang, McGahey led an unofficial strike in September 1943 in solidarity with thirty-four Cardowan men who had been imprisoned after refusing to pay fines for illegal work stoppages under war-time emergency regulations. The Cardowan miners, like others in Scotland, were fighting their employer on a broad range of issues, including work allocation, bonus payments and safety questions.⁷⁴ Workers elsewhere joined the Cardowan and Gateside men and for several days between 7,000 and 10,000 miners across Lanarkshire, Stirlingshire and Dunbartonshire were on strike. The action ended after

⁷⁰ *The New Mine*, dir. Irene Wilson (Gaumont British Instructional Films, 1945), film, <http://film.britishcouncil.org/the-new-mine>; R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1999), p. 161.

⁷¹ NRS, CB 65/21, *Comrie Colliery 1940–1980: 40 Years of Coal*, preface by T. Clark, Colliery General Manager.

⁷² J. McLroy and A. Campbell, 'McGahey, Michael (Mick), (1925–1999)', in K. Gildart and D. Howell, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (Basingstoke, 2010), xiii. 242–51.

⁷³ Oglethorpe, *Scottish Collieries*, pp. 183–4.

⁷⁴ J. McLroy and A. Campbell, 'Beyond Betteshanger: Order 1305 in the Scottish Coalfields during the Second World War, Part 1: Politics, Prosecutions and Protest', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, xv (2003), pp. 27–72..

union officials visited the apprehended miners in Barlinnie Prison in Glasgow, and arranged for their fines to be paid.⁷⁵ This contrasted markedly with the famous strike one year earlier at Betteshanger in Kent, where mining union officials also negotiated the release of workers imprisoned under emergency regulations, but—unlike the Scottish officials—compelled the authorities to rescind the fines.⁷⁶ Sacked for his role in the illegal strike action, McGahey was blacklisted by Lanarkshire employers and found work in the Lothians before returning ‘home’, after the war and nationalisation, to Cardowan.⁷⁷ Memories of the 1920s conditioned the Village Pit generation’s view that nationalisation was a decisive victory. But McGahey, despite advancing through the NUMSA and the CPGB in the 1950s and working closely with Abe Moffat, developed a sharper critique of the nationalised industry, along with others of his generation, notably Lawrence Daly. Born in 1924, Daly was the son of a central Fife Communist miner, Jimmy, who had also been sacked in 1926. Daly joined the CPGB and worked at Glenraig, the largest surviving central Fife pit in the 1950s, where he was the NUM delegate. He expressed his generational independence by leaving the CPGB in 1956, shortly before the Soviet suppression of the popular uprising in Hungary, forming the Fife Socialist League and associating with the broader UK New Left before joining the Labour Party.⁷⁸

The role of the New Left in the Scottish coalfields should not be exaggerated. The CPGB retained the support of many leading union officials. But the critique of the NCB strategy and operations offered by the New Mine generation resembled the New Left dissatisfaction with the trajectory of public policy in post-1945 Britain: moderate wealth redistribution was not accompanied by any meaningful erosion of class privileges and inequalities.⁷⁹ The ‘voice’ of manual workers, to

⁷⁵ ‘Scottish Strike Spreading: 7,000 Miners Idle’, *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Sept. 1943; ‘Miners Released: Scottish Strike Ending’, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct. 1943.

⁷⁶ A. Mak, ‘Spheres of Justice in the 1942 Betteshanger Miners’ Strike: An Essay in Historiographical Ethnography’, *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, xxxvi (2015), pp. 29–57.

⁷⁷ J. McIlroy and A. Campbell, ‘Beyond Betteshanger: Order 1305 in the Scottish Coalfields during the Second World War, Part 2: The Cardowan Story’, *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, xvi (2003), pp. 39–80, especially pp. 52–3 and 74–5.

⁷⁸ *The Guardian*, 30 May 2009, J. McCrindle, ‘Obituary, Lawrence Daly’; L. Daly, ‘Fife Socialist League’, *New Left Review*, i, no. 4 (1960), pp. 69–70; C. Efstathiou, ‘E.P. Thompson, the Early New Left and the Fife Socialist League’, *Labour History Review*, lxxxi (2016), pp. 25–48.

⁷⁹ Campsie, ‘Politics of Everyday Life’.

paraphrase Albert Hirschmann, was heard by policy-makers and employers on a narrow range of material questions only.⁸⁰ In pursuit of greater communal security the New Mine generation articulated moral economy arguments more sharply than the Village Pit generation, and made particularly forceful representations at workplace level to enhance union voice in the nationalised industry. In large part this was a direct response to the NCB's insensitive handling of closures in the early 1950s, and the Village Pit generation's ineffectual opposition to this process. The New Mine generation's moral economy framework comprised two core features: pit closures and job losses had to be negotiated with union representatives rather than imposed; and the loss of pits and employment could only be tolerated where the NCB invested in new pits, or alternative industrial employment in the coalfields was established by UK government regional assistance to private-sector manufacturing firms.⁸¹ While the Village Pit generation accepted pit closures and only slow improvements in real wages, the New Mine Generation found them intolerable. More robust local responses to the second wave of closures were led by McGahey, who extracted greater concessions from NCB officials. Typical is the case of Hamilton Palace, closed in 1959, where analysis of redeployment records shows that 99 per cent of workers received job offers at other Lanarkshire collieries within three months of production ending.⁸² Enhanced redundancy terms incentivised older miners to leave the industry, preserving opportunities for younger men. In 1963 around 950 men in Lanarkshire were paid off in this manner: A. Campbell, born on 31 December 1899, left Cardowan with £165 in July, and William Potter, born on 30 October 1898, left nearby Wester Auchengeich in May with £180.⁸³

⁸⁰ A.O. Hirschmann, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States* (Cambridge, MA, 1970).

⁸¹ Phillips, 'Deindustrialization in the Scottish Coalfields'.

⁸² NRS, CB 313/14/1, NCB Scottish Division (NCBSD), Central West Area, Note on Proceedings of Meeting to discuss the closure of Hamilton Palace Colliery, 18 Mar. 1959; CB 313/19/1, NCBSD, Manpower Deployment, Hamilton Palace, May 1959.

⁸³ NRS, CB 99/24/10, Lanarkshire Redundancies, 1963.

A similar pattern developed in central Fife, where the workforce had contracted from 11,000 in 1956 to around 3,500 by 1965,⁸⁴ at which point NCB officials sought to close the five remaining pits, including Lumpinnans 11 and 12, and Glenraig.⁸⁵ Led by Lawrence Daly, union representatives resisted, stating the core prerequisites for closure: comprehensive, local redeployment,⁸⁶ or comparable jobs in other industries.⁸⁷ The NCB complied, working with UK government ministers and officials. First, the Labour government's 1965 *National Plan* pledged enhanced regional assistance to stimulate manufacturing in the coalfields.⁸⁸ The Scottish Development Department advised the Scottish Economic Planning Council that alternative industrial employment would be built up in the coalfields.⁸⁹ Ministry of Labour officials indicated to the NCB that 6,400 additional jobs could follow in Fife in the next three years, 2,300 of these explicitly 'for males'. Second, the NCB accelerated the development of Cosmopolitan Collieries. Seafield to the east, along with Solsgirth, Castlehill and Bogside to the west, servicing a massive coal-burning power station at Longannet, were to accommodate redundant miners seeking transfer.⁹⁰

This policy effort, stimulated by pressure from below, produced new work in engineering sectors and contributed to the overall stabilisation of industrial employment in the coalfields in the 1960s, despite the significant net loss of coal jobs.⁹¹ Deindustrialisation was a managed process in these years, with policy-makers guiding new industrial employers to areas of significant job loss. The interventions of the 1964–70 Labour governments were particularly valuable, increasing markedly the state's regional aid commitment. The consequence in Lanarkshire, for example, was a stabilisation of the combined share of male employment in coal, metals and engineering: 44.9 per

⁸⁴ NRS, SEP 14/1894, Scottish Development Department note relating phone call from Ronald Parker, NCB Scottish Divisional Chairman, 26 Mar. 1965.

⁸⁵ NRS, CB 305/5/1, NCBSD, Closure of Glenraig, no date, presumed March 1966.

⁸⁶ NMMS, NUMSA, EC, 9 May 1966.

⁸⁷ NRS, CB 305/5/1, Note of proceedings at the Meeting between representatives of the NCBSD and the NUMSA and SCEBTA [tradesmen's union], 18 Jan. 1966, and Minute of Meeting on the Proposed Closure of Glenraig Colliery, 11 Mar. 1966.

⁸⁸ *The National Plan*, BPP 1965, Cmnd. 2764, pp. 97, 100.

⁸⁹ NRS, SEP 14/1894, Scottish Development Department note, 7 Oct. 1965.

⁹⁰ NRS, CB 305/5/1, NCBSD, Colliery Closures—Glenraig, Note of a meeting between representatives of the NCB and the NUM, 27 Apr. 1966; NMMS, NUMSA, EC, 30 May 1966.

⁹¹ Phillips, 'Deindustrialization in the Scottish Coalfields', pp. 106–9.

cent in 1961, and 44.6 per cent in 1971. Coal's share of this employment fell from 9.3 per cent to 2.8 per cent, but, boosted by regional aid start-ups, engineering's share increased from 19.4 per cent to 25.6 per cent.⁹² Furthermore, Table 2 shows that the loss of coal industry employment across Scotland decelerated in the decade from 1967. There was one highly contentious closure: the NCB decided not to continue with production at Michael, in east Fife, then Scotland's largest colliery, after an underground fire killed nine miners and caused severe damage to tunnels and coal-faces in 1967.⁹³ But even in this unusual case employment considerations were prioritised. The Labour government made localised regional policy adjustments that within a year attracted a major new employer, the Distillers Company Limited.⁹⁴

Coal job losses after 1967 were stemmed by three factors. First, the NCB had achieved its goal of greater mechanisation, with power-loaded production increasing from 39.6 per cent in 1961 to 78.4 per cent in 1966, and consolidated to 85.9 per cent in 1971 and 90.1 per cent in 1974.⁹⁵ Second, employment alternatives to coal were dwindling as industrial diversification also stalled. This shaped the third factor—even sterner union opposition to closures, structured by a further act of generational power transfer within the NUMSA. Alex Moffat had succeeded Abe as President in 1961. Shortly before retiring in March 1967, he persuaded an NUMSA Delegate Conference that additional closures on economic grounds would safeguard a smaller but more viable industry. Within three months, under the direction of Michael McGahey, the NUMSA abandoned this position, pledging to protect remaining coalfield employment on social as well as economic grounds.⁹⁶ As late as November 1968 the NCB was privately advising officials at the Department of Economic Affairs that employment in Scotland's pits would be dropping from around 36,000 to 24,700 by March

⁹² E. Gibbs, 'Confronting Deindustrialization: Economic Change and Cultural Identities in the Scottish Coalfields c.1940s–1980s', paper presented at the Economic History Society Annual Conference, Robinson College, Cambridge, 2016.

⁹³ NRS, CB 260/14/1, NCB, Michael Colliery, Press Statement, 11.30 a.m., 21 Nov. 1967.

⁹⁴ J. Phillips, 'The Closure of Michael Colliery in 1967 and the Politics of Deindustrialization in Scotland', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxvi (2015), pp. 551–72.

⁹⁵ The Scottish Office, *Scottish Abstract of Statistics, No. 9/1980* (Edinburgh, 1980), Table 12.9, 'NCB Mines: Employment and Productivity'.

⁹⁶ NMMS, NUMSA, Special Delegate Conferences, 27 Mar. and 14–16 June 1967; thanks to Ewan Gibbs for this reference.

1971.⁹⁷ New Mine generation pressure then compelled the government and the NCB to stabilise production. Measures adopted included the establishment of Longannet, along with other large coal-fired power stations in central and eastern Scotland.⁹⁸ Jobs were lost in Scottish coal at less than half the overall NCB rate from 1969 to 1972, when almost 30,000 miners were still employed in Scotland.⁹⁹

The new units of the 1960s, the Cosmopolitan Collieries, shaped the formation of another distinct union generation. Its members attained maturity in the acute crisis of the early 1970s: the national wage disputes, the resultant improvement in miners' earnings, and coal's stronger relative position within the wider energy mix. In a longer historical perspective, these victories, involving confrontation between the NUM and Edward Heath's Conservative government, are generally seen as an important preface to the year-long strike of 1984–5.¹⁰⁰ But they should also be understood as a coda to the restructuring of the late 1950s and 1960s, which provided a more stable employment position and boosted the miners' future confidence.¹⁰¹ This was the experience of Iain Chalmers of Cowdenbeath (b. 1952). After leaving school he worked at Seafield, a Cosmopolitan Colliery in Kirkcaldy in Fife, which opened in 1966, travelling daily with men transferred from the older pits that had closed. The Little Moscows culture survived in this new environment, shaping the solidarity of the 1972 and 1974 victories and a pattern of relatively stable workplace relations between miners and managers. Chalmers, a Communist in the 1970s and 1980s, saw the political effects of Seafield's enlarged scale as complicated. When reflecting on the strike of 1984–5 in an interview conducted in 2009, Chalmers contended that those who came from communities of mixed occupations were less committed to industrial action than those from the older central Fife settlements.¹⁰² The effects of

⁹⁷ TNA, EW 7/826, Department of Economic Affairs, Brief for Secretary of State, Colliery Closures, November 1968.

⁹⁸ R.S. Halliday, *The Disappearing Scottish Colliery* (Edinburgh 1990), pp. 142–54.

⁹⁹ NCB, *Report and Accounts for 1971-2*, House of Commons 445 (HMSO, 1972), p. 31

¹⁰⁰ A. Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics, II: 1969–1995* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 49–102, 111–14.

¹⁰¹ J. Arnold, 'Vom Verlierer zum Gewinner—und zurück. Der Coal Miners als Schlüsselfigure der Britischen Zeitgeschichte', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, xlii (2016), 266–97.

¹⁰² Iain Chalmers, Interview with Author, Cowdenbeath, 30 July 2009.

the movement away from local pits were experienced by trade unionists elsewhere. In joining the industry, familial connection was as important to the Cosmopolitan Colliery generation as it had been to the Village Pit and New Mine generations. In Midlothian, David Hamilton left school in 1965, aged fifteen. He became a miner, like his father and two elder brothers. The four men initially worked at different pits, spreading the family risk of accident and unemployment. When David's workplace closed, he moved to the Nottinghamshire coalfield, but he disliked the social hierarchies where miners addressed overseers as 'sir'. In his 'composed' narrative,¹⁰³ articulated some forty years later, Hamilton contrasted what he remembered as the deferential social relations of Nottinghamshire, where 90 per cent of miners worked throughout the 1984–5 strike,¹⁰⁴ with the ostensibly more egalitarian relations of the Scottish coalfields. These relations were part of the social democratic order that Hamilton re-entered as a young adult on returning to Scotland after a year in Nottinghamshire, and sought to defend in 1984–5. He worked at Monktonhall, a Cosmopolitan Colliery south-east of Edinburgh, participating as a union branch committee member in the victories of 1972 and 1974, having joined the CPGB. In 1976 he became NUM delegate at Monktonhall, where generational change was strongly evident. The union branch committee was referred to as 'the Young Team', and by 1984 the delegate of the craftsmen's union, Scottish Colliery, Enginemen, Boilermen and Tradesmen's Association (SCEBTA), was Rab Amos (b. 1948), another Communist.¹⁰⁵ Amos had worked at the Village Pit of Easthouses, which opened in 1909 and closed in 1969, starting at Monktonhall in 1966. Hamilton and Amos represented miners drawn from a large crescent-shaped area around the southern and eastern perimeter of Edinburgh, from 'the Hills' of Midlothian to the inland and waterfront villages of East Lothian.¹⁰⁶

The lost local pits and subsequent spatial mix of workers in enlarged units were important to the formation of the Cosmopolitan Colliery generation. Its members had entered the world of

¹⁰³ A. Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia', in R. Perks and A. Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998), pp. 300–310.

¹⁰⁴ C. Griffin, "'Notts. Have Some Very Peculiar History": Understanding the Reaction of the Nottinghamshire Miners to the 1984–85 Strike', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, xix (2005), pp. 63–99.

¹⁰⁵ David Hamilton, Interview with Author, Parliamentary Advice Office, Dalkeith, 30 Sept. 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Rab Amos, Interview with Author, Roslin, 23 Feb. 2011.

mining during a period of major transformation: substantial closures and job losses, but within the framework of joint industrial agreements and broader economic security. This generation, boosted also by the victories of 1972 and 1974, was therefore confident about the future, accustomed to employment in large pits with substantial workable reserves, but also wary, given the lost pits and jobs which had been traded for the seven Cosmopolitan Collieries that had been established across Scotland. Each of these employed more than 2,000 miners, and collectively they produced 75 per cent of Scottish output by 1982.¹⁰⁷

At this point, however, there was an important anti-union turn in the Scottish coalfields, as NCB managers responded aggressively to changes initiated by the UK government. The coalfield order was being reconstructed once more. Margaret Thatcher's government was seeking cheaper electricity, pressing the publicly-owned generating companies to secure lower costs through increasing the share of oil, gas, nuclear power and imported coal within the broader energy mix, while forcing down the price of NCB supply. The government had introduced the 1980 Coal Industry Act, which established the goal of withdrawing the NCB's public subsidy by 1984.¹⁰⁸ This was accompanied by a further important strategic shift in economic direction: the government's ambition to erode labour power.¹⁰⁹ The new macro-economic environment influenced the micro-managerial approach from 1981 of the NCB's Scottish Area Director, Albert Wheeler, who incrementally destabilised the social democratic order with a powerful emphasis on individual pit-level performance. He chaired quarterly accountability meetings, requiring pit managers to explain a range of economic indicators: saleable output, productivity, costs of materials and electricity, and manpower.¹¹⁰ Union workplace representatives were targeted as obstacles to achieving production targets, rather than being seen as partners in a shared industrial enterprise. Workers were

¹⁰⁷ Monopolies and Mergers Commission, *National Coal Board: A Report on the Efficiency and Costs in the Development, Production and Supply of Coal by the National Coal Board*, II, BPP 1983, Cmnd. 8920, Appendix 3.5 (a).

¹⁰⁸ M. Adeney and J. Lloyd, *The Miners' Strike, 1984–5: Loss Without Limit* (London, 1986), pp. 15–20.

¹⁰⁹ J. Phillips, 'Containing, Isolating and Defeating the Miners: The UK Cabinet Ministerial Group on Coal and the Three Phases of the 1984–5 Strike', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, xxxv (2014), pp. 117–41.

¹¹⁰ NRS, CB 212/4, NCB Scottish Area, Minutes of the Accountability Meeting, 24 Feb. 1981; CB 121/6, NCB Scottish Area, Minutes of the Accountability Meeting, 24 June 1981.

demoralised as investment in new coal faces was cut or abandoned; joint industrial practices—allowing unions a share in the organisation of production—were unilaterally jettisoned, literally torn up in front of David Hamilton, and thrown into a wastepaper basket by his colliery manager.¹¹¹

Full-time union officials of the New Mine generation area, including McGahey, were keenly aware of the dangers to their members of the Thatcher government's economic strategy, but initially at least were surprised by the NCB's anti-union turn. Willie Clarke, an NUM branch official at Seafield, remembers that he and other workplace representatives had to persuade McGahey and the union's Scottish leadership that Wheeler's changes in themselves represented a serious industrial relations emergency.¹¹² Pits closed despite local opposition for the first time since the 1960s. These included Cardowan, the Lanarkshire New Mine of the 1920s, in 1983, where over 1,400 were employed.¹¹³ The average age of this pit's workforce was 39, matching the national trend. Problems at Cardowan were symptomatic of the unfolding broader crisis. Nicky Wilson, a member of the Cosmopolitan Colliery generation, was Cardowan's SCEBTA delegate and recalls the anger of the younger men. With few local job alternatives, as the new economic strategy accelerated deindustrialisation, the Cardowan workers were offered transfer to the Longannet complex, a distance from home to work of between thirty and forty miles for most of the pit's employees. The alternative was unemployment.¹¹⁴ Members of the Cosmopolitan Colliery generation in 1984–5 compelled their elders to act—just as the New Mine generation had pushed the Village Pit officials three decades earlier—and to seek the protection of pits and jobs through strike action. This was, therefore, a movement of youth, as well as class, in defence of the industry's social democratic features.¹¹⁵ Margaret Thatcher's characterisation of the strike, 'Mr Scargill's Insurrection',¹¹⁶ was

¹¹¹ David Hamilton, Interview with Author, Dalkeith, 30 Sept. 2009.

¹¹² Willie Clarke, Interview with Author, Ballingry, 13 Nov. 2009.

¹¹³ TNA, COAL 89/103, NCB Central Secretariat, Colliery Closures, 13 May 1983, and Public Relations Department, NCB Scottish Area, Closure Cardowan, 13 May 1983.

¹¹⁴ Nicky Wilson, Interview with Author, Scottish Miners' Convalescent Home, Blair Castle, Culross, 18 Aug. 2009.

¹¹⁵ Curtis, *South Wales Miners*, pp. 198–249; K. Gildart, *North Wales Miners: A Fragile Unity* (Cardiff, 2001); J. Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984–85* (Manchester, 2012).

¹¹⁶ M. Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London, 1993), pp. 339–78.

misdirected. The core issue, as Raymond Williams put it, was the character of ‘social order’ in Britain.¹¹⁷ In seeking the elimination of the union voice from strategic decisions about investment, jobs and pit closures, the government understood this.¹¹⁸ The year-long dispute, experienced by many in the Scottish coalfields as an extended and disastrous act of violence, inflicted by hostile external forces, resulted in defeat for the strikers.¹¹⁹ The trend to authoritarian management and deindustrialisation that triggered the strike was confirmed emphatically in its aftermath. At Comrie, Fife’s single surviving New Mine, only one miner broke the strike between March 1984 and February 1985.¹²⁰ Production ended there in September 1986.¹²¹ There were only three collieries working in Scotland after 1990; by 2002 there were none. This rundown was imposed by managerial fiat, with limited alternative economic activity and employment available in the coalfields, and no attempt by government—as there had been from the 1950s to 1970s—to balance job losses with regional policy-assisted alternatives. Instead, the social security system was used to incentivise older miners to withdraw from economic activity altogether on grounds of disability, obscuring the ‘real’ level of unemployment in ex-coal localities, which was often double the official figure given for unemployment benefit claimants.¹²² This perhaps cushioned slightly the material impact of deindustrialisation on older former miners, but the long-term consequence of heavy employment losses in the coalfields was unambiguous: ingrained economic and social deprivation.¹²³ David Hamilton was sacked by the NCB in 1985, one of 200 or so Scottish miners, mainly younger men, who were victimised in this manner.¹²⁴ These included Michael McGahey’s son, also Michael

¹¹⁷ R. Williams, ‘Mining the Meaning: Key Words in the Miners’ Strike’, in Robin Gable, ed., *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London, 1989), pp. 120–27.

¹¹⁸ Phillips, ‘Containing, Isolating and Defeating the Miners’.

¹¹⁹ A. Perchard, ‘“Broken Men” and “Thatcher’s Children”: Memory and Legacy in Scotland’s Coalfields’, *International Labor and Working Class History*, lxxxiv (2013), pp. 78–98.

¹²⁰ NRS, SEP 4/6029, Scottish Office Situation Report, 4 Feb. 1985.

¹²¹ NRS, CB 267/14/1, J. E. Addison, NCB, circular to industry unions, 2 Oct. 1986.

¹²² C. Beatty and S. Fothergill, ‘Labour Market Adjustment in Areas of Chronic Industrial Decline: The Case of the UK Coalfields’, *Regional Studies*, xxx (1996), pp. 627–40.

¹²³ M. Foden, S. Fothergill and T. Gore, *The State of the Coalfields: Economic and Social Conditions in the Former Mining Communities of England, Scotland and Wales* (Sheffield, 2014).

¹²⁴ Hamilton, Interview.

McGahey, a miner at Midlothian's other Cosmopolitan Colliery, Bilston Glen.¹²⁵ Like the Village Pit and New Mine generations before them, the Cosmopolitan Colliery men who led the strike in 1984–5 were blacklisted by industrial employers in the years that followed.¹²⁶

[III]

Changes in economic direction were incremental across the twentieth century in Britain, and seldom absolute. But broad trends can be discerned: there was a movement away from liberalism and towards social democracy from the 1940s to the 1970s; and back from social democracy in the direction of liberalism once more in the 1980s. Inequality narrowed in the middle decades of the twentieth century, in the context of the social democratic turn, but then grew rapidly in the 1980s, partly by policy design, and largely also as a consequence of a marked change in the management of deindustrialisation. The extent of these changes, and the manner in which they occurred, have been examined in this case-study of Scottish coal. Nationalisation in 1947 was prefigured to some extent by a shift towards industrial concentration and corporatist government intervention in the 1920s and 1930s. The success of nationalisation was not immediate in the 1940s; nor did it flow in a straightforward manner from the legislative and institutional structures established by the 1945 Labour government. Nationalisation was a dynamic process, with three identifiable phases: the early years of restructuring, with substantial closures and job losses in the 1950s; the effort made by mining unions to construct communal security in the 1960s, compelling NCB investment in the Cosmopolitan Collieries and state-assisted industrial diversification; and the defence of this new position in the 1970s and early 1980s. The strikers' defeat in 1984–5 marked an important, perhaps even decisive, movement in Britain's economic direction. The trend to deindustrialisation—visible from the peak of employment in coal in 1957—rapidly accelerated, but without the policy measures

¹²⁵ M. McGahey, in Joe Owens, ed., *Miners, 1984–1994: A Decade of Endurance* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 82–3.

¹²⁶ D. Smith and P. Chamberlain, *Blacklisted: The Secret War between Big Business and Union Activists* (London, 2015).

applied in the 1960s and 1970s to direct alternative industrial jobs to the coalfields. This was partly because trade unions, which in the 1960s and 1970s had been influential in persuading the government to direct industry to areas of heightened unemployment, were no longer recognised by the state as a legitimate partner in policy-making. A significant fall in industrial employment resulted in the 1980s, a powerful stimulus to the rapid growth of inequality in income distribution.

The analysis presented here links this process of contested economic development to generational change in the coalfields. Three distinct generations were formed by, and operated within, dynamic and sometimes highly conflictual material worlds: of class, gender and family; of workplace, neighbourhood and social network; and of political campaigning and economic activity. Predominant types of industrial unit in the coalfields played a key role: the evolution of ownership, scale, and methods of production all contributed to the emergence across time of three recognisably different generations of coal miners and union representatives. The Village Pit generation, born in the 1890s, encountered acute class conflict in early adult life in the 1910s and 1920s. This conditioned a commitment to industrial transformation, to the removal of private employers and to the establishment of public ownership, thereby enabling the workers to share the regulation of their mines with management. The Village Pit generation saw nationalisation as a great victory, and only gradually recognised its shortcomings. The New Mine generation, born in the 1920s with childhood memories of the lockouts and victimisations that followed, experienced the disappointments of nationalisation far more acutely as young adults. This strengthened an ambition to secure a more stable economic future and a guarantee of consultation in instances when pit closures and job losses were being considered. The New Mine generation attained leadership of the NUMSA in the mid-1960s: there were no closures in the face of workforce opposition after Michael shut in 1967 until the early 1980s. The Cosmopolitan Colliery generation, born in the 1950s, began its working life in mines that opened in the 1960s or had been substantially redeveloped by the NCB since the 1950s. These facilities represented resources that the youngest of the three generations believed to be

sustainable—and therefore defensible—when the UK government sought in the 1980s to transform the coalfield order once more, within a more general change of economic direction.

There were continuities, clearly, from one generation to the next. All three generations operated within a cross-generational working-class movement, and engaged in similar struggles to express a meaningful trade union voice and obtain justice in the workplace. The Moffats were sacked and victimised in the 1920s, as was Michael McGahey in the 1940s and David Hamilton in the 1980s. Yet the detailed circumstances surrounding these ostensibly similar experiences reinforce the value of thinking about the changing order of the Scottish coalfields—and shifts in the economic direction of Britain more broadly—in generational terms. The Moffats were forced out of the coal industry by the Fife Coal Company. Their employer was a prominent capitalist enterprise, seeking to maximise profits in a period of intense competition by controlling the costs of production.. For the company, this effort involved excluding union influence from the workplace. McGahey was exiled from Lanarkshire during the transition from private to public ownership. His actions in defence of the workplace right to strike transgressed the Second World War compact between the state, the employers and his own union, which, following the election of the Labour government in 1945, contributed to the nationalisation of coal in 1947. Hamilton's career in the coal industry was ended by the Conservative government's anti-trade union turn of the 1980s, a vital element in the strategic shrinking of the state's economic commitments. This decisive change in macro-economic direction led to the dismantling of the social democratic coalfield order that McGahey's generation had constructed on the basis of the public ownership secured by the Moffats' generation. Evidence from the Scottish coalfields thus illustrates the rich value of generational analysis in enhancing understanding of the contested nature of macro-economic change in Britain from the 1920s to the 1980s.