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Scottish Trade Unions and Nationalisation, 1945 - 1955.

A Case Study of the Coal Industry

Submitted to the University of Glasgow in fulfilment of the requirements for a Ph.D.

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September 1999

Abstract

This thesis contends that the historiographical boundaries and focus of labour history, political history, of policy making and nationalisation have resulted in an incomplete understanding of trade unions attitudes towards, and influence upon, post-war British economic policy. In particular, the predominant concern of labour historians with strike patterns and their causes, particularly within the coal industry, has been at the expense of other forms of trade union activity. Whilst the more general historiography of the period and that of policy making address these issues, they do not tend to do so below the peak level organisation of the TUC and of Whitehall and Westminster. This has led to miners unions being portrayed as a somewhat monolithic organisation predominantly concerned with disputes, strike prone with poor industrial relations, but politically conservative and generally supportive of the Labour Party and Government policy.

In taking a multi-level analysis, with particular emphasis on Scotland, and examining the evidence from the NUM's interaction with Government, party, National Coal Board and the industry's conciliation and consultative machinery, this thesis argues that a more diverse pattern of trade union attitudes and influence existed. It is suggested that the TUC had a relatively minor role to play in the development of coal nationalisation policy after 1947. Furthermore, the national level of the NUM was unable to adapt fully to its new role under nationalisation because areas such as Scotland continued to exercise considerable power and influence. In this it is demonstrated that Scotland could take a divergent attitude to the national level of the

union, particularly over wages, and ultimately meet with some success. The Scottish Area of the NUM also displayed poorer industrial relations to the national and local levels. In particular, the evidence from colliery level consultation demonstrates that there was a more positive and constructive side to local union activity within the nationalised industry than the focus on disputes hitherto suggested.

Therefore, this thesis concludes that there is sufficient evidence from the experience of the NUM to suggest that a more complex and diverse pattern of trade union behaviour existed between 1945 and 1955 in the nationalised coal industry.

However, this pattern is not so rooted in any Scottish cultural explanation, or contradictory to existing interpretations, as to preclude its broader applicability to other areas of the coal industry or unions in other nationalised industries.

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Abbreviations

AACP	Anglo-American Council on Productivity
Acc.	Accession (in the NLS)
BACM	British Association of Colliery Managers
BEC	British Employers Confederation
CINA	Coal Industry Nationalisation Act, 1946
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
DEC	Dollar Export Council
Dep.	Deposit (in the NLS)
EPB	Economic Planning Board
FBI	Federation of British Industry
GC	General Council
JNNC	Joint National Negotiating Committee
LPA	Labour Party Archive
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MLH	Museum of Labour History
MRC	Modern Records Centre
NACM	National Association of Colliery Managers
NACODS	National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers
NCB	National Coal Board
NEC	National Executive Committee
NFRB	New Fabian Research Bureau
NJAC	National Joint Advisory Committee
NLS	National Library of Scotland

NPACI	National Production Advisory Council for Industry
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area
NUSMW	National Union of Scottish Mine Workers
OMS	Output per Manshift
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PRO	Public Record Office
RD	Research Department (of the Labour Party)
SDB	Scottish Divisional Board (of the NCB)
SRO	Scottish Record Office
SSIP	Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda
STUC	Scottish Trades Union Congress
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UMS	United Mineworkers of Scotland

Introduction

Nationalised industries have had a prominent place in the history of post-war Britain. The political, economic and social significance of fuel and power, transport, communications and iron and steel has left an indelible impression. Perhaps more than any other industry, coal and the miners have come to epitomise the nationalised industries as a whole.¹ Its reputation for inefficiency, poor industrial relations, militant workers and laterly adversarial relationship with the state are common totems of the bankruptcy of public ownership and trade union power.² However, at the end of the Second World War it was the private ownership of these industries that was the bankrupt ideology.³ Nationalisation was seen as a remedy for the perceived failure of private owners to invest, manage and develop these industries. It was also one of the longest standing objectives of many trade unions, a significant component of post-war economic policy and an embodiment of the labour movements' socialist credentials. Nationalisation was also the one area of economic policy that most

¹ General histories of the 20th century coal industry are; Court, W.H.B. *Coal*, HMSO and Longmans Green, London, 1951. Berkovitch, I. *Coal on the Switchback: The Coal Industry since Nationalization*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1977. Kirby, M.W. *The British Coalmining Industry, 1870-1946: a Political and Economic History*, Macmillan, London, 1977. Buxton, N.K. *The Economic Development of the British Coal Industry: From Industrial Revolution to the present day*, Batsford, London, 1978. Ashworth, W. *The History of the British Coal Industry*, Vol. 5, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986. Supple, B. *The History of the British Coal Industry*, Vol. IV, 1913-1946: *The Political Economy of Decline*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987.

² For example Fine, B. *The Coal Question: Political economy and industrial change from the nineteenth century to the present day*, Routledge, London, 1990, chapter nine and Buxton, N. K. *The Economic Development of the British Coal Industry: From Industrial Revolution to the present day*, Batsford, London, 1978 Chapter ten.

³ Greasley, D. 'The Coal Industry; Images and Realities on the Road to Nationalisation', in Millward, R. & Singleton, J. (eds.) *The Political Economy of Nationalisation*, CUP, Cambridge, 1995 and Chick, M. *Industrial policy in Britain, 1945-1951 : economic planning, nationalisation, and the Labour governments*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

distinguished the Labour Party from the Conservatives and Liberals. Although the coal industry today is a pale imitation of its former self, in 1947 it employed over 700,000 people, supplied 90% of Britain's energy requirements and upon nationalisation became the largest enterprise in the world.

The nationalisation programme of 1947-1951 was not only an indication of trade unions' industrial and political strength, but a manifestation of their entrance into the realms of the state. Trade unions provided six Cabinet members, sponsored 120 MPs (almost one third of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP)) and their financial and block voting power continued to exercise great influence within the Labour Party.⁴ Allied to this, trade unions were consulted on a wide range of issues by both Labour and Conservative peacetime Governments. Trade unionists achieved parity with employers on tripartite bodies such as the National Joint Advisory Council (NJAC), National Production Advisory Council for Industry (NPACI), the Economic Planning Board (EPB), the Dollar Export Council (DEC) and the Anglo-American Council on Productivity (AACP). Former trade unionists were also appointed to the Boards of the new nationalised industries, numerous labour relations posts and a myriad of other regional and local bodies. As Weiner has pointed out,

In the post-war period the British trade union movement also entered a new phase of development in which it was called upon to play a role very different from that in the past. Its new political and institutional power which was readily recognized in the community, unlike 25 years before, represented a change in the balance of forces in British society.

Having succeeded in developing 'workers control' into a powerful general influence penetrating the economy, the British trade union movement assumed responsibilities involving the future of the entire nation. It had to act with the consciousness of an 'estate of the realm', apart from the fact that the scope of its interests meant that many of its actions cut more than one way.⁵

Therefore, nationalisation was more than a solution to a particular set of industrial problems, it was a confluence of political, economic and social objectives and values. The consultation of trade unions about nationalisation and the appointment of trade unionists to the Boards of nationalised industries were indications of their increased status and influence.

As nationalisation represented a complex embodiment of many of the changes in post-war Britain historians have tended to approach to the subject from narrower, conventional historiographical fields. For example, labour historians have predominantly focused on the mineworkers' propensity for industrial disputes and strikes, portraying their militancy, adversarial relations and trade union solidarity as definitive characteristics.⁶ Later studies have attempted to set this industrial relations pattern in a broader context and take account of local and regional factors in

⁴ Martin, R.M. *TUC, the Growth of a Pressure Group*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1980, p 296.

⁵ Weiner, H. E. *British Labour and Public Ownership*, Stevens and Sons, London, 1960, p 81.

⁶ *Ibid*, and Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation. The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1955.

disputes.⁷ Whilst these studies help overcome the problems of local specificity and general assumptions they retain their primary focus on strikes and other visible forms of disputes.

These features of the coalmining industrial relations historiography are a reflection of the broader debate between 'rank and filist' and 'new institutional' theories in labour history. Zeitlin characterises the former approach as a focus towards the workplace and the community in search of the 'authentic' working-class experience and away from political parties and trade unions. 'Rank and filists' argue for a broader, more class based approach and assume that there is a fundamental division between unions' leadership and its membership. The leadership being seen as having an inherent interest in compromising with capital, whilst the membership had a fundamental opposition to capital and a desire to usurp it.⁸ Zeitlin questioned this assumption of a division between the leadership and the membership, and argued that 'relationships...at the workplace were shaped less by informal groups or spontaneous social and economic processes than by institutional forces...and by the rules and procedures governing their interaction.'⁹ In response the advocates of 'rank and filism' have questioned if there was ever a 'rank and filism' model and argue that

⁷ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I.M. *Industrial Relationships and Nationalization in the South Wales Coalmining Industry*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity Hall, Cambridge, 1990. Church, R. and Outram, Q. *Strikes and Solidarity. Coalfield Conflict in Britain 1889-1966*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

⁸ Zeitlin, J. 'Rank and Filism in British Labour History: A Critique', in *International Review of Social History*, 34, 1989, pp 42-61. For an example of the 'rank and filism' Zeitlin alleges see Cronin, J. 'Coping with Labour, 1918-26' in Cronin, J. & Shneer, J. (eds.) *Social Conflict and the Political Order in Modern Britain*, Croom Helm, London, 1982, pp 113-45.

⁹ Zeitlin, J. 'From Labour History to the History of Industrial Relations', in *Economic History Review* 2nd series, 40, 1987, p 160.

Zeitlin grossly over simplified the case in suggesting that it was an all-encompassing theoretical approach.¹⁰

Considering that between 1945 and 1955 the majority of pits were dispute free, there were no official strikes and the majority of disputes were handled by new conciliation machinery, what seems to require more explanation is what these features, rather than the cause of disputes, indicate about miners' attitudes to nationalisation. This thesis does not seek to avoid the importance of disputes but rather to reinterpret the evidence of disputes in terms of process and outcomes, rather than causes, and considers them along side a wider range of activities, particularly consultation, that reflect unions changed role in post-war Britain. Therefore, the case for studying miners' activities away from the causes of high profile strikes becomes more compelling. This is dealt with in Chapters Five and Six. However, in adopting this methodology, the institutional setting of conciliation and consultation provides a framework for analysis, not the analysis in itself. It is not the intention here to assess explicitly the influence of institutional factors, but use the evidence that this framework provides to explore the possibility of alternative views of miners, their union and nationalisation. Neither does this approach preclude the discovery of 'authentic' or 'workplace' experiences as this study includes examination of the machinery of conciliation and consultation at the local level.

¹⁰ Price, R. 'What's in a Name? Workplace History and 'Rank and File', *International Review of Social History*, 34, 1989, pp 62-77. Cronin, J. 'The 'Rank and File' and the Social History of the Working Class', *International Review of Social History*, 34, 1989, pp 78-88. Hyman, R. 'The Sound of One Hand Clapping: A Comment on the 'Rank and File' Debate', *International Review of Social History*, 34, 1989, pp 309-326.

Whilst the evidence is not complete, the nationalised industries provide a unique opportunity to examine workplace attitudes. Hinton's work has demonstrated that whilst the study of workplace trade unionism is a useful line of enquiry the evidence from the private sector is often insufficient to support the weight of the conclusions¹¹. The local level of conciliation and consultation in the nationalised coal industry included the involvement of 'ordinary' trade union members (as opposed to trade union officials). Although essentially 'institutional' it provides a useful forum from which to garner evidence of sections of the trade union movement that have, as the 'rank and filists' contended, lacked a voice in the historiography.

The more recent studies of coalmining disputes addressed some of the assumptions and generalisations about trade union behaviour¹², but labour history in general, and coal mining in particular, has remained dispute focused with other aspects of trade union activity and institutional factors under-examined. There are many works that deal with trade unions¹³, and a number that do so below the level of the TUC¹⁴, but

¹¹ Hinton, J. *Shop Floor Citizens: Engineering Democracy in 1940s Britain*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1994.

¹² In particular Church, R. and Outram, Q. *Strikes and Solidarity. Coalfield Conflict in Britain 1889-1966*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

¹³ Barou, N. *British Trade Unions*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1947. Cole, G.D.H. *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, 1789-1947*, London, 1948. Flanders, A. *Trade Unions*, 7th ed, Hutchinson, London, 1968. Lovell, J. & Roberts, B.C. *A Short History of the T.U.C.*, Macmillan, London, 1968. Martin, R.M. *TUC, the Growth of a Pressure Group*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1980. Wigham, E.L. *Trade Unions*, 2nd ed, OUP, Oxford, 1969.

there has been little systematic study that integrates the trade union movement with the issues addressed in other studies of post-war Britain. The study of the TUC, individual unions or trade unionists by labour historians have generally portrayed them as predominately concerned with their own internal organisation and development, sectional interests and material struggles¹⁵. As Laybourn notes,

Historians have almost universally acknowledged the rising importance of trade unions between the 1940s and the 1960s. On the whole they have not sought to explain their growth but have accepted that the wartime and post-war consensus created the opportunity for trade union development.¹⁶

This tendency to consider trade unionism and Government as discrete areas belies the increase in trade union influence during and immediately after the Second World War. However, some studies have clearly indicated trade unions' broader interests after the Second World War.¹⁷ Unfortunately, institutional histories of miners and

¹⁴ Allen, V.L. *The Militancy of the British Miners*, Shipley, Moor, 1981. Arnot, R.P. *The Miners: One Union, One Industry*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1979. Hughes, J. & Pollins H. *Trade Unions in Great Britain*, David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1973. Muller, W. D. *The Kept Men? The First Century of Trade Union Representation in the British House of Commons, 1874-1975*, Harvester Press, Hassocks, 1977. Pimlott, B. & Cook, C. (eds.) *Trade Unions in British Politics*, Longman, London, 1982. Taylor, R. *The Trade Union Question in British Politics*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993.

¹⁵ For example, the following display this tendency. Barou, N. *British Trade Unions*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1947. Wigham, E. L. *Trade Unions*, OUP, Oxford, 1969.

¹⁶ Laybourn, K. *A History of British Trade Unionism c. 1770-1990*, Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1992.

¹⁷ Studies such as Whiteside, N. 'Creating the Welfare State in Britain, 1945-1960' in, *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 25, Part 1, April 1996 and 'Industrial relations and social welfare' in Wrigley, C. (ed.) *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1939-79*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 1996, have demonstrated that trade unions were concerned with a wider range of economic and social issues than industrial relations.

their unions tend to lose any broader implications of their role outside industrial relations in their generally eulogistic interpretations.¹⁸

Another aspect of labour history that this thesis seeks to address is the general absence of the employers' side. Studies of labour history provide accounts of management's negotiating position or counter claim in disputes, but the majority of National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) business was not conducted in this way. Whilst this is not a study of the coal industry's management, the majority of NUM business was conducted in formal, face to face meetings with the National Coal Board (NCB) at all levels of the industry. Studying the NUM in this way provides a valuable additional source for the NUM's attitude towards nationalisation. Furthermore, it was often in meetings with the NCB that important aspects of policy were decided and hence a measure of the NUM's influence can be gained. The NUM's position *vis a vis* the NCB also provides a useful alternative benchmark by which to judge the NUM's approach. This is particularly the case as key positions within the NCB, particularly labour relations posts, were held by recent NUM officials.

Trade union dealings with management, as a measure of their attitudes and influence is not something dealt with in the literature outside labour history, although this does

¹⁸ Nowhere is this better illustrated than the miners' 'official historian', see Arnot, R.P. *The Miners: One Union, One Industry*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1979 and for Scotland Arnot, R. P. *A History of the Scottish Miners. From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1955.

take account of the broader interests of trade unions and the greater involvement and influence they exercised in Government. However, in so doing they focus almost exclusively at the peak level of the movement, in the TUC, and at the Westminster and Whitehall policy-making apparatus. This is evident whether the work is a general survey of the period¹⁹, is concerned with one or other of the two main parties²⁰ or deals with a particular policy or theme²¹. This is feature arises irrespective of the author's opinion of the Government of the time. Whilst Morgan gives Labour a sympathetic treatment, others criticise the Labour Government from the right and the left, for example Barnett and Saville.²²

One would not expect such works to contain detailed regional or local case studies. But the absence of a body of research on the lower levels of the trade union movement has left the interpretation of accommodating Labour and Conservative Governments and largely compliant and co-operative trade unions substantially

¹⁹ Morgan, K. *Labour in Power 1945-51*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1984. Gourvish, T & O'Day, A. (eds.) *Britain Since 1945*, Macmillan, London, 1991.

²⁰ Beer, S.H. *Modern British Politics*, Faber, London, 1982. Eatwell, R. *The 1945-1951 Labour Governments*, Batsford, London, 1979. Hoffman, S. *The Conservative Party in Opposition*, McGibbon & Kee, London, 1964. Jeffreys, K. *The Attlee Government 1945-1951*, Longman, London, 1992. Pelling, H. *The Labour Governments, 1945-51*, London, Macmillan, 1984. Pritt, D.N. *The Labour Government*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1963.

²¹ Tomlinson, J. *Government and the Enterprise since 1900*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1994. Rogow, A.A. *The Labour Government and British Industry*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1955. Cairncross, A. *Years of Recovery. British Economic Policy 1945-51*, Methuen, London, 1985. Addison, P. *The Road to 1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1975. Middlemas, K. *Power, Competition and the State, Vol. 1: Britain in Search of Balance 1940-61*, Macmillan, London, 1986.

²² Morgan, K. *Labour in Power 1945-51*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1984. Barnett, C. *The Audit of War*, Macmillan, London, 1986. Saville, R. 'Commanding Heights: the Nationalisation Programme' in, Fyrth, J. (ed.) *Labour's High Noon. The Government and the Economy 1945-51*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1993.

unchallenged. This may not necessarily be reflected outside the TUC. For example
Jeffreys comments that,

the Attlee years were - with a few important exceptions - to be characterised by strong leadership and by a high degree of unity at all levels of the Labour movement [and] the relationship between Government and unions continued to be harmonious and effective.²³

In the same vein Morgan states that,

The Attlee years from 1945 to 1951, however, are something of an exception. More than at any other time in the party's stormy history, the dominant mood was one of unity. This extended from Downing Street to the humblest of party workers in the constituencies, down the pit and on the shop floor.²⁴

And this 'mood of unity' has extended to nationalisation itself,

The unions appeared content with their subsidiary role, satisfied that, under a Labour Government, a nationalized industrial sector, however it was run, would ensure economic advance and social justice for the wage earner and his family.²⁵

If labour historiography has demonstrated one thing, despite its narrower focus, it was that there was a diversity of experience, particularly at the local level. This

²³ Jeffreys, K. *The Attlee Government 1945-1951*, Longman, London, 1992, pp 7-13. See also Coates, K. 'The Vagaries of Participation 1945-1960', in Pimlott, B. & Cook, C. (eds.) *Trade Unions in British Politics*, Longman, London, 1982.

²⁴ Morgan, K. *Labour in Power 1945-51*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1984, p 45.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p 98.

focus on peak level organisations, and the impression of unity that this provides, has been taken up in more specific studies²⁶. For example, Tiratsoo has commented that most of the literature about the Attlee Government has been concerned with high politics and that the 'study of Labour has often been the study of Westminster'.²⁷ Tomlinson recognises that the historiography generally paints a picture of compliant trade unions, eager to support 'their' Government through thick and thin. He has argued that there were problems amongst certain union members over wage restraint and collective bargaining²⁸ and Beer has suggested that the trade unions were suspicious of the 'planned economy'.²⁹ Also the unofficial action of certain trade unions was a problematic area in some Government and trade union relations.³⁰

These studies have demonstrated that the relationships between Governments and unions can be tense and sometimes confrontational and a more complex picture even existed at the highest levels of policy-making. This suggests that a consideration of a trade union at the national, regional and local level on such a central issue as nationalisation may reveal an even more differentiated picture. This possibility has

²⁶ See Addison, P. *The Road to 1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1975. Miliband, R. *The State in Capitalist Society*, Quartet, London, 1978. Cairncross, A. *Years of Recovery. British Economic Policy 1945-51*, Methuen, London, 1985. Middlemas, K. *Power, Competition and the State, Vol. 1: Britain in Search of Balance 1940-61*, Macmillan, London, 1986. Tiratsoo, N. (ed.). *The Attlee Years*, Pinter, London, 1991. Mercer, H. Tomlinson, J. and Rollings, N. (eds.). *Labour Governments and Private Industry*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992. Kavanagh, D & Morris, P. *Consensus Politics from Attlee to Major*, 2nd ed. Blackwell, Oxford, 1994.

²⁷ Tiratsoo, N. (ed.) *The Attlee Years*, Pinter, London, 1991, p 3.

²⁸ Tomlinson, J. 'The Labour Government and the Trade Unions' in Tiratsoo, N. (ed.) *The Attlee Years*, Pinter, London, 1991, pp 90-102

²⁹ Beer, S. *Modern British Politics*, 1982, pp 214-16.

been recognised by a number of historians, even if the amount of research remains relatively limited. Where regional issues have been examined there is evidence that there were complex and often competing interests between unions, parties and Governments.³¹ In order to examine this systematically each chapter of this thesis deals with a different level of organisation, Chapter Two examines the TUC and STUC, Chapter Three the NUM National Executive, Chapters Four and Five the NUMSA and Chapter Six the colliery level.

Another historiographical trend to be addressed is the lack of work on the post-war Conservative administrations,³² compared to the attention the Labour Governments have received. As Seldon notes 'despite the party's record it has been much less studied by historians and political analysts than its less successful rival, the Labour Party...many areas of major interest to an understanding of the Conservative Party either have not been investigated, or remain under-researched'.³³ By covering the period 1945 to 1955 this thesis is able to consider the NUM and nationalisation under both the Labour and Conservative Governments and examine the extent to which their attitude and influence altered. In particular, the Conservative administration

³⁰ Phillips, J. 'Decasualization and disruption: industrial relations in the docks, 1945-79' in, Wrigley, C. *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1939-1979*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 1996. Whiteside, N. 'Creating the Welfare State in Britain, 1945-1960', *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 25, Part 1, April 1996.

³¹ Alexander, K. 'Lessons from Scotland' in, Fyrrh, J. (ed.) *Labour's High Noon. The Government and the Economy 1945-51*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1993.

³² Some exceptions are Gamble, A. *The Conservative Nation*, Routledge, London, 1974. Hoffman, S. *The Conservative Party in Opposition*, McGibbon & Kee, London, 1964. Hogg, Q. *The Case for Conservatism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1974. Seldon, A. *Churchill's Indian Summer*, Hodder and Stroughton, London, 1981.

³³ Seldon, A. 'The Conservative Party since 1945' in Gourvish, T. & O'Day, A. (eds.), *Britain Since 1945*, Macmillan, London, 1991, p 233.

made an explicit attempt to continue the 'working relationship' with unions established under Labour, with the appointment of the conciliatory Walter Monkton as Minister of Labour.³⁴

One important debate that includes trade unions' involvement in policy making under Governments of both persuasions, is that of corporatism. Perhaps corporatism's greatest advocate in the British case is Middlemas.³⁵ Building on his earlier work,³⁶ he charts how labour and industrial organisations continued to take increasing shares in the running of the state. Middlemas identifies 'corporate bias' as coming to fruition during the Second World War when 'this (wartime economic organisation) involved an unprecedented extension in the power of organised labour, almost to the point of equivalence with management, and an integration of both into the wartime state through their central and regional organisations.'³⁷ It should be noted that for Middlemas this was not a spontaneous embrace of organised labour, but the extension of a trend that began, with fluctuations, from the First World War,

although in no sense the dominant trend - for the vastly enlarged, post-1914 state was obviously not captured by either capital or labour - corporate bias had nevertheless become an essential element in the extended political system before 1940.³⁸

³⁴ Smith, Justin. D. *The Attlee and Churchill Administrations and Industrial Unrest, 1945-55*, Pinter, London, 1990.

³⁵ Middlemas, K. *Power, Competition and the State. Vol. 1 Britain in Search of Balance 1940-61*, Macmillan, London, 1986.

³⁶ Middlemas, K. *Politics in Industrial Society*, Deutsch, London, 1979.

³⁷ Middlemas, K. *Power, Competition and the State*, Macmillan, London, 1986, p 7.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p 6.

However, like the more general historiography of the period, Middlemas neglects lower levels of the trade union movement and any regional dimension. He states that 'the activities of the branch or membership appear only infrequently. That is not to say that they are unimportant. They are clearly one of the main conditioning factors in institutional behaviour'³⁹. Clearly for Middlemas however much these levels 'condition' they do not do so sufficiently to warrant a place alongside peak level organisations in his analysis. In adopting this approach he condemns lower levels of trade union organisations only to conditioning and excludes the possibility of them actually influencing. As Middlemas himself notes,

Admission [to the state] depends on the factors which define their power: size, coherence and activity of membership, possession of rare skills, expertise or specialised functions, popularity or some other general weighting with the general public. In addition it requires a degree of recognition by Government and the other competitors.⁴⁰

It will be contended in this thesis that the TUC was not alone in possessing these characteristics of a 'governing institution'. Various levels of the NUM were able to influence aspects of nationalisation policy that the TUC were not. Moreover, the formal incorporation of the NUM into the structure of the NCB further extended their influence. It is not claimed that the NUM replaced the TUC, rather that they were able to compete with the TUC so that they weakened and undermined its position as a 'governing institution' in practice. Furthermore, neither the NUM nor the NCB

³⁹ *Ibid*, p 11.

were monolithic organisations and there is considerable scope for varying opinions and influence within these organisations as much as between them.

Middlemas also mentions another avenue by which the hegemony of peak level organisations may be challenged;

some definition of the national interest will take place. Because that is formulated by individuals, at various levels of membership and leadership, and filtered through an intellectual membrane composed of the self-interest of all members, past as well as present, no one institution's version can be exactly congruent with any other, although it may contain elements common to some or many.⁴¹

Therefore, diversity of opinion at different levels of a trade union may threaten the position of an organisation such as the TUC because it is unable to represent a unified concept of its 'national interest'. With its own structure of consultation and conciliation in the nationalised coal industry an 'intellectual membrane' outside the TUC's structure arose. Therefore, did different concepts of the 'national interest' arise amongst the trade unionists involved in nationalised industry compared to the TUC, the NCB or the Government?

Neither can one assume that different levels within a union would automatically accept a peak levels' interpretation of an inappropriate 'national interest' or refrain from presenting their own version. This again has implications for the extent and

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid*.

strength of the TUC's position as a 'governing institution' because it was only those who compete at the 'altruistic level of the national interest, who enter the environs of the state. Those that do not, remain outside an invisible boundary, as self-interested, single issue bodies, lobbies or pressure groups.'⁴²

One organisation that may have been able to compete at the level of national interest, and offer an alternative to the TUC, was the STUC. Whilst the TUC based its legitimacy upon the claim that it represented all workers, unionised or not, the STUC was at the same time trying to establish itself as the sole representative of Scottish labour⁴³. If the state, or part of it, accepted this claim and individual unions used it as a channel of influence, then this posed a threat to the legitimacy of the TUC. The extent to which the STUC influenced nationalisation policy compared to the TUC is discussed in Chapter Two.

Whilst not dealing with the development of the TUC explicitly in terms of corporatism, Martin's work⁴⁴ identifies a similar ascendancy in direct consultation and acceptance into Government circles as Middlemas. This he argues is in preference to trade union sponsored MPs and the Parliamentary Labour Party. However, both books prompt the question as to whether direct meetings of a trade union elite accommodated all of the needs of trade unions. The role of sponsored

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Tuckett, A. *The Scottish Trade Union Congress: The First Eighty Years 1897-1977*, Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1986, p 322.

⁴⁴ Martin, R. M. *TUC, Growth of a Pressure Group, 1868-1976*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1980.

MPs may have declined⁴⁵ but it did not disappear altogether and the PLP cannot be disregarded as an outlet of opinion, even if its actual influence may not have been as great as alternative means.

Another strand to the corporatism issue is raised by Barry Supple, who in discussing the public ownership of coal royalties by the Conservatives in the 1938 Coal Act says 'what is striking is how much of this had been brought about not by 'corporatism' but by 'industrial politics' - that is by confrontation and (occasionally compromise) - rather than by the creation of harmonious institutions incorporating the state, labour and capital'.⁴⁶ This raises the possibility that 'industrial politics' could continue as a method of influence outwith the new corporatist structures of post-war Britain. Furthermore, was trade unions' new found influence secure enough, within the nationalised coal industry or elsewhere, when the Conservatives were returned to power in 1951? This is a point raised by Kavanagh and Morris. They point out that the maintenance of union power does not necessarily mean that they would maintain their position as political agents.⁴⁷ Conservatives, trade unions and nationalisation were not natural bedfellows. For example, at several times during the war Churchill had ruled out any repeal of the hated 1927 Trades Disputes Act, and the hard-line attitude of Conservative back-benchers continued after the

⁴⁵ This point is supported by Muller, W. D. *The Kept Men? The First Century of Trade Union Representation in the British House of Commons, 1874-1975*, Harvester Press, Hassocks, 1977.

⁴⁶ Supple, B. 'Ideology or Pragmatism? The Nationalisation of Coal, 1919-46', in McKendrick, N. & Outhwaite, R.B. *Business Life and Public Policy*, CUP, Cambridge, 1986, p 239

⁴⁷ Kavanagh, D. & Morris, P. *Consensus Politics from Attlee to Major*, 2nd ed, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, p 54.

war, even though the repeal of the act was one of the first measures of the new Labour administration.⁴⁸

However, when one is talking about nationalisation in regard to the Conservative Government, one needs to go beyond the conflicting rhetoric of adversarial politics that Pimlott has used⁴⁹ and the mere fact of the continuance of the majority of the nationalised industries. As Freedon points out there is a tendency 'to assume that an act of public policy is a manifestation of a single clear idea, rather than a composite of multiple and parallel motives and notions. The same act can be located in entirely different ideological contexts and hence acquire completely different import within each of them'.⁵⁰ This need to explore nationalisation in these terms applies as much to the trade unions and the Labour Party as it does to the Conservatives in Government. For whilst the continuance of a large publicly owned sector may appear incongruous under the Conservative Government, there was also a debate within the trade union movement and Labour Party over the nationalised industries. For example, in the Keep Left group, 'disaffected back benchers criticised the whole concept of consolidation, and argued - contrary to ministerial wishes - in favour of industrial democracy within a greatly expanded nationalisation programme'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Jeffreys, K. *The Attlee Government 1945-51*, Longman, London, 1992, p 20.

⁴⁹ Pimlott, B. 'The Myth of Consensus', in Smith, L.M. (ed.) *The Making of Britain: Echoes of Greatness*, Macmillan, London, 1988.

⁵⁰ Freedon, M. 'Stranger at the Feast, Ideology and Public Policy in Twentieth Century Britain', in *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 1, No 1, 1990, p 31.

⁵¹ Jeffreys, K. *The Attlee Government 1945-51*, Longman, London, 1992, p 55.

Minkin stresses the tensions between the TUC and the party, in particular the union right and the political left, although he pays greater attention to the 1960s than the period under consideration here.⁵² These tensions perhaps suggest that the harmonious impression of union and party relations disguised deeper and more fundamental divisions between the TUC and party and in the wider labour movement as a whole. Certainly the Bevanite divisions in the party in the later 1950s gives weight to the idea of earlier and deeper divisions within the party, and it is entirely possible that the trade unions themselves displayed earlier signs of discontent than has hitherto been supposed. These questions will be addressed in Chapter Two.

This thesis also seeks to examine another aspect of corporatism, which is the tendency to only consider policy up to the point it reaches the statute book. Although this is the crucial phase, as this thesis demonstrates significant elements are developed after the legislative stage and others are subject to significant modification. In the nationalised industries, and coal in particular, policies were open to a wide degree of development, modification and interpretation as the legislation was very loosely phrased and the National Boards given a large degree of autonomy. Indeed, the coal nationalisation legislation did not so much establish policy as provide a framework within which policy was developed. Perhaps the clearest case where such issues arose was the submission of the 1946 Miners Charter to the Minister of Fuel and Power outlining the miners' demands that they believed

⁵² Minkin, L. *The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, EUP, Edinburgh, 1991.

would ensure adequate recruitment.⁵³ This episode will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Three.

As nationalisation was an important element of economic policy in which trade unions were intimately involved, and coal played a significant part in the national and Scottish economy, it seems the enquiry proposed here can contribute to our understanding of trade unions complex role in post-war Britain. This is not something that has been explored to any great extent in the literature on the nationalised industries.

There has been a vast amount published concerning the nationalised industries and this work can be seen in a number of ways; as political history,⁵⁴ as administrative history,⁵⁵ as an analysis of economic performance⁵⁶ and of individual industries.⁵⁷ The bulk of this work is dominated by studies of the ideology of the nationalised industries, their organisation and structure or economic performance. One cannot expect such studies to give a prominent place to trade unions, although there are

⁵³ Chester, N. *The Nationalisation of British Industry 1945-51*, HMSO, London, 1975, pp 796-810.

⁵⁴ Barry, E. E. *Nationalisation in British Politics*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1965.

⁵⁵ Chester, R. N. *The Nationalisation of British Industry 1945-51*, HMSO, London, 1975.

⁵⁶ Brech, M. J. 'Nationalised Industries', in Morris, D. (ed.) *The Economic System in the UK*, Oxford, 1985. Pryke, R. *Public Enterprise in Practice*, MacGibbon & Key, London, 1971.

⁵⁷ Reid, G.L., Allen, K., Harris, D.J. *The Nationalised Fuel Industries*, Heinemann, London, 1973. Lewis, B. *British Planning and Nationalisation*, George, Allen & Unwin, London, 1952. Supple, B. 'Ideology or Pragmatism? The Nationalisation of Coal, 1919-46', in McKendrick, N. & Outhwaite, R.B. *Business Life and Public Policy*, CUP, Cambridge, 1986. Ashworth, W. *The History of the British Coal Industry*, Vol. 5, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986. Chick, M. 'The Political Economy of Nationalisation: the Electricity Industry', in Millward, R. & Singleton, J. (eds.) *The Political Economy of Nationalisation*, CUP, Cambridge, 1995. Hannah, L. *Engineers, Managers and Politicians: the First Fifteen Years of Nationalised Electricity Supply in Britain*, Macmillan, London, 1982.

exceptions,⁵⁸ but nevertheless they provide an important contribution to this study. They are particularly useful for providing an insight to trade union and Board relations and the pattern of negotiations and the broader debates about the function and direction of nationalisation. For example, Greasley covers the inter-war and war-time development of thinking on nationalisation and emphasises the increasingly 'practical' reasons used to justify nationalisation.⁵⁹ Whilst definitions such as those offered by Brech,⁶⁰ are not particularly useful for this study, others provide valuable contextual material. For instance, Pryke, quoting Lord Beeching, succinctly outlines the different purpose nationalised industries had from their private counterparts,

The Nationalised industries are expected to meet some need for goods or services, the nature of the need being judged, in part at least, not by them but by the Government. They are expected to meet that need in a manner which is judged to be socially desirable, and which is specified, in relation to the various aspects of their business, by the Government, but not always consistently so. At the same time they are expected to pay their way by renumeration their capital, taking one year with another. In effect, therefore, the making of an adequate profit is not a primary objective, but it is a condition which they are nevertheless expected to satisfy after doing a number of other obligatory things. The primary objective of any company in the

⁵⁸ See for instance Clegg, H. *Industrial Democracy and Nationalisation*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1951 and Hanson, A. H. (ed.) *Nationalisation: A Book of Readings*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1963.

⁵⁹ Greasley, D. 'The Coal Industry; Images and Realities on the Road to Nationalisation', in Millward, R. & Singleton, J. (eds.) *The Political Economy of Nationalisation*, CUP, Cambridge, 1995.

⁶⁰ Brech, M. J. 'Nationalised Industries', in Morris, D. (ed.). *The Economic System in the UK*, Oxford, 1985, p 772.

private sector, on the other hand, is to make the best possible return on the capital provided by the shareholders.⁶¹

These different social and economic objectives of nationalisation, and the element of dual control between the Boards and Government is of some importance to this study. For trade unions 'dual role' extended beyond greater participation through conciliation and consultation. It also brought with it more complex considerations than employee/employer relations under private ownership. Any participation by employees in an industry implies adopting some responsibility, even if this is no more than a greater consideration of the other sides' position. However, under nationalisation the coal industry not only had to be financially viable, but achieve social objectives such as a quantity, quality and price for coal that was in the 'national interest'. However, this 'national interest' was not determined mainly by the National Coal Board and miners, but by the Government. Potentially this put the miners union in a conflicting position. One of the social objectives of nationalisation was to improve the material position of miners, but should this take precedence over other objectives such as the price, quantity, quality of coal or the financial performance of the industry? If there was a conflict between these objectives could the NUM accept the responsibility of moderating their demands, that greater participation and nationalisation brought? To do so would strike at the primary function of trade unions - to defend and improve the interests of their members.

⁶¹ 'The Public and Private Sectors: Similarities and Contrasts', unpublished paper to LSE Seminar on Problems in Industrial Administration 21 February 1967, pp 2- 6, quoted in Pryke, R. *Public Enterprise in Practice*, MacGibbon & Key, London, 1971, p 460.

Moreover, acceptance or rejection of this responsibility may be brought into question by different levels within the union, the region or branch or different elements within the organisation, such as officials and members. For example, Scotland may differ from the national level of the union if it had different values and traditions, and hence alternative concepts of what a nationalised industry meant, what objectives it should pursue or in what priority. In other words a clash between the degree of responsibility acceptable to the Scottish area of the NUM and the national level. Alternatively the ministry or Board could lay down objectives such as holding down prices to industry, which may clash with union objectives of increasing wages, or ensuring adequate finances for investment, or to subsidise prices to domestic consumers. Therefore, what may be objectives in keeping with the 'public' or 'national' interest may not be those that accord with a union's own sectional interests. The increased responsibility that this implies heightens the importance of a study of the NUM that moves away from a purely strike-based focus.

However, this thesis suggests that these issues had some generic importance for unions in nationalised industries. Therefore, the selection of the coal industry requires justification. Given the time available for this thesis it would be impossible to study all of the nationalised industries. This would involve examining a huge range of activities, involving the Bank of England, Civil Aviation, Coal, Electricity, Gas, Transport, Iron and Steel, Cable and Wireless, Colonial Development, Overseas Food Corporations and the Raw Cotton Commission.

In selecting the coal industry a number of factors were taken into consideration. Naturally, the industry should have a significant presence in Scotland, a factor that would rule out the Bank of England, Civil Aviation, Cable and Wireless, Colonial Development, the Food Commission and the Cotton Commission. Equally, in examining questions involving trade unions' attitude and influence and 'national interest' in post-war Britain it was appropriate that the industry had some national significance.

The justification for the inclusion of the coal industry is perhaps the strongest of all. If there was ever an industry that epitomised nationalisation it was coal. Output had been falling since 1940, yet demand for coal was increasing rapidly, as the economy adjusted to peacetime operations. Whilst all industries were suffering from a lack of maintenance and new investment from the war, the coal industry had the additional burden of almost twenty years of neglect prior to this and the task to re-equip and mechanise the mines was vast. The coal industry also had the longest tradition of demands for its nationalisation, not just from the trade unions or the Labour Party, but official enquiries such as the 1919 Sankey Commission and the 1945 Reid Report advocated nationalisation in one form or another. So the coal industry represented not only the greatest challenge of nationalisation, bringing together some 1,400 collieries into a cohesive whole whilst improving output, productivity, and modernisation and tackling the worst record of labour relations of any British industry. Coal also encompassed all of nationalisation's aspirations, that order and direction could be given where previously there had been none, that the industry could be run efficiently as one unit, for the benefit of the whole community and that the employees should secure reasonable pay and conditions. To an extent these

factors make coal exceptional, however, in posing one of the hardest challenges for nationalisation, the coal industry provides an excellent case study for trade unions response and influence.

The unions within nationalised industries were also a factor in selecting the industry to study. The NUM is a relatively rare case of an industrial union in Britain. That is it was the only union for representing the majority of workers in the industry.⁶² The majority of Britain's unions represented grades across different industries, such as the Transport and General Workers Union. Therefore, the workforce in other nationalised industries may be represented by three or four unions. However, the NUM itself was a recent creation, established in 1945 from the various district or area miners unions, and one cannot assume that it immediately became a monolithic organisation devoid of competing interests either between geographic areas or different grades of workmen.

One industry that appears to match many of the features of coal was iron and steel. In the immediate post-war years the supplies of both commodities were the most crucial factors in production along with labour. However, steel was not the most appropriate candidate for inclusion in this study. Whilst it is undoubtedly an interesting case to examine the issue of the boundaries of nationalisation, it is the

⁶² The only other significant union was the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS). Although these were largely manual occupations they were considered as the first rungs of management, equivalent to supervisor or foreman in manufacturing industry. Neither did NACODS have a monopoly on the recruitment of these grades.

purpose here to examine not just the creation of nationalised industries but the development of that policy through the operation and development of those industries. By this measure the steel industry was simply not in public ownership long enough for any meaningful analysis to take place. Although the Iron and Steel Act received its royal ascent in November 1949, the vesting date for the take-over of the industry was not until February 1951 and within a year the Conservatives had been re-elected and the industry denationalised. A further complicating factor in this regard is the unavailability of the records for the Scottish area of the industry. Whilst these records have been deposited in the Scottish Record Office they are currently being reclassified and will not be available to the public until at least the year 2000.

Of the other industries nationalised, transport stands out as another economically significant sector. The largest industry taken into public ownership, and one of obvious importance to Britain's infrastructure. It incorporated not only the railways but also inland waterways and long distance road haulage. The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) was also a similar industrial union to the NUM, that is they dominated the workforce, with a union density of over 80%. However, the time frame for the nationalised transport industries is shorter than coal. Furthermore, the records for the nationalised transport industries, even the railways, are not as comprehensive as those that survive for coal, especially in Scotland. Another important consideration is that consultation and conciliation were combined activities on the railways, which would have complicated discerning the one from the other even more than when the two functions were carried out separately. Therefore, the coal industry was an appropriate choice both for reasons of practicality and principle.

Regional aspects have already been mentioned above, but regionalism itself is a helpful focus because it also emerged as a primary organising principle in the nationalised industries. As can be seen from the issues above, many of the questions relating to trade unions and the nationalised industries have a regional dimension. Scotland provides an excellent area in which to explore these further. In many cases Scottish mines operated under different geological conditions from English and Welsh coalfields, which in turn varied a great deal from one another. Seams tended to be narrower and wetter, with greater faulting and there was a higher level of mechanical coal cutting than elsewhere. This produced different traditions and practices, even if the basic methods of working were the same.

Within labour historiography regional studies of British miners have been well represented geographically. Throughout this century studies have been carried out on all of Britain's major coalfields by historians, geographers and miners themselves. These studies have reflected the strong regional identities of Britain's miners and their communities. A large body of work has been built up covering the old established coalfields of South Wales⁶³, Northumberland and Durham⁶⁴ and the

⁶³ Evans, E.W. *The Miners of South Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1961. Arnot, R.P. *South Wales Miners: Glowyr de Cymru: A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation (1898-1914)*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1967 and *South Wales Miners: Glowyr de Cymru: A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation (1914-1926)*, Cymric Federation Press, Cardiff, 1975. Francis, H. and Smith, D. *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980.

⁶⁴ Garside, W. R. *The Durham Miners 1919-60*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1971. Davison, J. *Northumberland Miners, 1919-1939*, National Union of Mineworkers, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1973.

newer, more productive fields of the East and West Midlands⁶⁵ and Yorkshire⁶⁶. A number of more recent studies have also filled gaps covering Britain's smaller coalfields such as the North West⁶⁷. Within this historiography the Scottish coalfield has also been well represented. Studies have covered both the industry and the miners' unions as a whole as well as major coal producing regions such as Lanarkshire and Fife⁶⁸.

Although the geographic representation of British coalfields and their miners is comprehensive their chronological and thematic coverage is less complete. Whilst the nineteenth century, pre-war and inter-war periods are well covered the post-war years are less so. With the exception of Arnot's history that ends in 1955, there are no monographs of Scotland's post-war mining industry and surprisingly few biographies or autobiographies.⁶⁹ The same pattern is found for other regions, where

⁶⁵ Griffin, A. R. *Mining in the East Midlands 1550-1947*, Frank Cass, London, 1971. Williams, J. E. *The Derbyshire Miners: A Study in Industrial and Social History*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1962. Griffin, C. P. *The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Miners. Vol. 1. 1840-1914*, National Union of Mineworkers (Leicester Area), Coalville, 1982. Waller, R. J. *The Dukeries Transformed: The Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983.

⁶⁶ Benson, J. and Neville, R. G. (eds.) *Studies in the Yorkshire Coal Industry*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1976. Taylor, A. *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, Croom Helm, London, 1984. Baylies, C. *The History of the Yorkshire Miners 1881-1918*, Routledge, London, 1993.

⁶⁷ Challinor, R. *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*, Frank Graham, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1972.

⁶⁸ Arnot, R. P. *A History of the Scottish Miners. From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1955. Duckham, B. F. *A History of the Scottish Coal Industry, Vol. 1. 1700-1815*, Newton Abbot, 1970. Campbell, Alan, B. *The Lanarkshire Miners: A Social History of their Trade Unions, 1775-1874*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979. Slaven, A. 'Earnings and Productivity in the Scottish Coal-mining Industry during the 19th Century: The Dixon Enterprises' in *Studies in Scottish Business History*, Payne, P. L. (ed) 1967. McNeil, J. 'The Fife Coal Industry, 1947-1967' in *Scottish Geographical Magazine LXXXIX*, 1973. Duncan, R. *Bothwellhaugh: A Lanarkshire Mining Community, 1884-1965*, Workers' Educational Association, Bothwellhaugh, 1986.

⁶⁹ Abe Moffat's *My Life with the Miners*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1965 is the exception in Scotland.

even relatively recent work does not tend to extend past World War Two.⁷⁰ Another problem arises with the literatures' thematic coverage. The pattern of union organisation, disputes and bargaining is well documented. However, outside of the traditional official histories of miners' unions the full scope of research has not been covered. In particular, the political history of miners, especially after nationalisation, has been inadequately investigated.⁷¹ In Scotland and South Wales the influence of the Communist Party has attracted attention, but little work has been done beyond miners' electoral behaviour and party affiliations as explanations for industrial disputes.⁷²

As one significant feature of both nationalisation and the NUM was an extension of centralised, national control over an industry and union that had traditionally exercised control at or close to the colliery, there is ample justification for adopting a regional approach. Would the Scottish miners find solutions at the national level or have to look towards a particularly Scottish answer?

⁷⁰ For example Davison, J. *Northumberland Miners, 1919-39*, NUM, Newcastle, 1973. Griffin, A. R. *The Miners of Nottinghamshire 1914-1944. A History of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Union*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1962. Griffin, C. P. *The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Miners, Vol. 1, 1840-1914*, NUM (Leicester Area), Coalville, 1982.

⁷¹ Hopefully Andrew Taylor's *The National Union of Mineworkers and British Politics 1944-1995*, Sutton Publishing, will go some way to redressing this when it is released in February 2000.

⁷² Campbell, A. B. 'Communism and trade union militancy in the Scottish coalfields', in Tenfelds, K. (ed.) *Towards a Social History of Mining in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Papers Presented to the International Mining History Congress Bochum, Federal Republic of Germany, September 3rd-7th, 1989*, Verlag C. H. Beck, Munich, 1992, pp 85-104 and 'The Communist Party in the Scots coalfield in the inter-war period', in Andrews, Geoff. Fishman, Nina and Morgan (eds.) *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism*, Pluto Press, London, 1995, pp 44-63.

This issue of increasing state economic control had an added political significance for trade unions in Scotland. That is the increasing concern over the threat Scottish nationalism posed. The wartime (1941-45) Secretary of State for Scotland Tom Johnston, who became chairman of the North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board, warned 'that there was a strong nationalist movement in Scotland and that it could be a potential danger if it grew through lack of attention to Scottish interests'.⁷³ As well as the national and Scottish levels of the NCB and NUM there were alternative avenues available to those trade unionists wishing to assert Scottish interest about the nationalised coal industry. As Abe Moffat (leader of the Scottish miners) pointed out 'the Scottish miners found many ways - through deputations, lobbying of Coal Board and MPs, public meetings, publicity of all kinds - to make known the justice of the miners' claims.'⁷⁴ However, did these various ways represent a search for a Scottish or a national solution?

There has certainly been considerable historical and contemporary concern over Scotland's dependence on declining heavy industries whilst being unable to secure their proportion of new industries. As Gollan, a leading light in the CPGB, notes 'the war intensified Scotland's dependence on the heavy industries' and in surveying Scotland's industrial base how 'the real electrical engineering industry is conspicuously *absent*'.⁷⁵ This begs the question of whether coal nationalisation, with ultimate responsibility resting in London, increased or reduced coal as a political

⁷³ Harvie, C. 'Labour and Scottish Government: The Age of Tom Johnston' in *Bulletin of Scottish Politics*. No. 2, Spring 1981, p 3.

⁷⁴ Moffat, A. *My Life with the Miners*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1965, p 96.

issue in Scotland. This point is relevant because if the NUMSA tried to pursue alternative avenues of influence in Scotland they may have had to address a different and challenging set of issues in order to secure the influence they desired.

For the NUMSA there was also the tension between defending Scottish miners' interests as part of a national union, supporting the STUC and participating in what were supposed to be industries operating in the 'national interest'. As Tuckett has noted, after the war the STUC sought to establish itself as the sole representative of Scotland's organised workforce as distinct from the TUC and furthermore there rapidly developed a feeling that Scotland had not been getting its 'fair share' as far as state assistance for industry was concerned.⁷⁶ This created a tension between supporting the Labour Party and Government, yet ensuring that Government dealt with Scotland's particular problems and interests. As Saville has commented,

Scotland had a strong left-wing political presence which embraced many organisations, and these had a tradition of active support within the trade union movement. There is evidence to suggest that the political activities of the groups involved, and the spread of socialist ideas on nationalisation and state planning caused concern to the industrial circles involved in the Scottish Development Council and also to Government departments.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Gollan, J. *Scottish Prospect*, Caledonian Books, Glasgow, 1948, p 10 and p 23.

⁷⁶ Tuckett, Angela. *The Scottish Trade Union Congress: The First Eighty Years 1897-1977*, Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1986, p 322.

⁷⁷ Saville, R. *The Economic Development of Modern Scotland 1950-1980*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1985, p 12.

This raises the issue of Scottish unions in general operating on a different agenda than their English counterparts, perhaps through their Scottish branches and via the STUC or Scottish Office rather than through the TUC or Government.

Of all the issues that have been dealt with above: the possibility of a less disputes orientated interpretation of the NUM, countervailing regional and intra-union interests, the implications this has for ideas about corporatism and the ways in which unions exercised influence, none sprung fountain-like upon the election of a Labour Government in 1945. Above all the development of the labour movements' thinking on nationalisation has had a long and complex history. Different and sometimes conflicting trends and opinions emerged over the whole question of nationalisation many decades before the Labour Party was able to enact its first measures. The ideology behind nationalisation, the industries to be nationalised and the form they should take has a long history that involves important contributions from the trade unions. The fortunes of the industries themselves have also played a part in shaping the formulation of nationalisation policy. To understand the interests, opinions and actions of those involved in nationalisation after 1945, one must consider the process that brought them there. It is to this history that we now turn to in next chapter, the development of nationalisation policy and the history of the industries within it.

CHAPTER ONE

The Development of Nationalisation Policy to 1945

I

Introduction

This chapter examines the development of nationalisation policy in the Trade Union Congress (TUC), Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) and Labour Party from the first nationalisation proposals in the 1890's to 1945. During this period, particularly during the inter-war years, the nationalisation policy as it was enacted from 1945 developed. The justifications for nationalisation, the industries to be nationalised, their form, the role of trade unionists and the principle of compensation were established. However, detailed plans and administrative arrangements remained outstanding issues. This meant that the interest groups involved in shaping nationalisation policy could still invest in the policy their own ideas and aspirations. It is these ideas and aspirations, with their potential for future misunderstandings and conflict that this chapter seeks to explore.

The first Bill to nationalise the coal mines had been promoted through the TUC in 1892 by the Scottish miners William Small and Robert Smillie. It was presented in the House of Commons by Keir Hardie, the Scottish socialist (as MP for West Ham), in November 1893, yet it was to be another 52 years before the miners' aim was realised. In the 1890s the concept of nationalising the mines, as opposed to just the

mineral royalties, was still something of a novelty and by no means commanded the support of the whole trade union movement. In the intervening years proposals for nationalisation of various assets and in various forms came and went as policy slowly developed within the trade union movement and the Labour Party. It was not until the 1930s, when the two wings of the labour movement sought closer co-operation in the aftermath of the General Strike and minority Labour Government defeats, that the policy recognisable in 1945 took shape. This policy development was drawn out and sometimes contentious but it has the potential to help understand aspects of trade unions post 1945 attitude towards nationalisation.

That the trade union movement and the Labour Party have at times had differences is not altogether surprising. The Labour Party was established to achieve through parliamentary action what the trade union movement could not do through industrial action. At a fundamental level this different *modus operandi* helps explain the broad 'labourism' of the trade union movement compared to the 'socialism' of the Labour Party.¹ Furthermore, during the 1920s the Labour Party's minority Government defeat, the trade unions' involvement in the General Strike and the Mond-Turner talks pulled both organisations in different directions at different times. This, however, does not mean that the two are or were, mutually exclusive. Their relationship, and the values that bound and separated them, were complex and have fluctuated over time, but the umbilical chord between the two remained. Evidence of this link were trade union sponsored MPs, numerous joint committees' and strong

¹ Pelling, H. *A Short History of the Labour Party*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1991, p 10.

representation at each other's annual congresses. Yet it is clear that the Labour Party and the trade union movement were not the left and right arm of the same body, but rather sibling and parent with the same complexities and difficulties that this relationship entails. The long and frequent debates, reports, and sometimes acrimonious exchanges examined below are testimony to genuine differences in attitudes and values.

During the 1930s and early 1940s the trade union movement and the Labour Party advocated different policy options regarding nationalisation. As Durbin argues in her book on the development of social democratic economics in the Labour Party there 'are three main sources for differences in opinions about economic policy, those which raise theoretical questions, those related to empirical judgements and, finally, those which reflect different policy goals.'² In the STUC, TUC and Labour Party Conference reports considered below, there is evidence of the debate on nationalisation being conducted on all three levels, but above all it is the extent to which policy differences are the expression of different goals that is the crucial factor.

In attempting to establish the extent and nature of the differences between the trade union movement and the Labour Party a number of key themes that shaped nationalisation policy are revealed; attitudes to capitalism and capitalists, the working class, the nature of democracy and socialism. Nationalisation policy had the

potential to be Labour's most distinctively 'socialist' policy, an issue that inevitably raised questions over the nature and goals of the Labour Party's economic policy. Did nationalisation herald a new relationship between management and labour, freed of the constraints of bargaining with capitalist employers? Nationalisation also raised the possibility of a new industrial structure, unique in its ability to embody the aspirations of the trade union movement, such as formalised industrial relations, job security, pay and welfare improvements, a role in economic affairs and, an issue that will receive particular attention here - workers participation. In addition, nationalisation policy had many implications for issues such as the role of the government, management and trade unions in economic policy, the extent and nature of trade unions participation in industry, the relationship between the private and public sector, the planned economy and the scope of the public sector. This meant that the Labour Party and the trade unions could not formulate nationalisation policy without touching on issues that went to the heart of their values and beliefs. The long history of demands for nationalisation assists in identifying core values and not just those associated with a short term, populist or knee jerk policy or pressing, but temporary, political, economic or social events.

In order to assist in establishing these core values, computerised textual analysis has been used alongside traditional readings that bring a number of advantages. Whilst traditional interpretations of texts can readily establish the principal viewpoints of those involved it is very difficult to quantify these impressions or accurately read the

² Durbin, E.F. *New Jerusalems*, Routledge & Keegan Paul, London, 1985, pp 16-17.

sub-text. Computerised textual analysis allows this to be done. Furthermore, the computerised textual analysis itself, particularly of word associations, can reveal new patterns that would be hidden were traditional methods alone used. This is particularly important when one is attempting to penetrate the rhetoric and structures of formal speeches. Technical details of the textbases created for this analysis and the debates used can be found in Appendix One.

The separate consideration of the STUC from the British TUC is an important feature of this chapter. Although Labour Party policy was decided at a national level, the Scottish focus of this study requires an exploration of the extent to which a distinctive Scottish element was apparent in the development of nationalisation policy. That this may have occurred is provided by the very first STUC Congress, where resolutions were carried on the common ownership of the means of production and parliamentary representation of working men, well ahead of the Labour Party and the TUC.³ As the first STUC Congress President, Duncan McPherson said in 1897 'we believe that if we want anything well done, we have got to do it ourselves...there are many questions which affect Scotland particularly to which our English fellow trade unionists cannot be expected to devote the necessary amount of time and attention they deserve'.⁴ The STUC's prominent role in the campaign for nationalisation allows the Scottish trade unionists to be compared with the TUC for the possibility of different policy goals for nationalisation. By its very nature,

³ Craigen, J. 'The Scottish T.U.C.- Scotland's Assembly of Labour' in *Forward! Labour Politics in Scotland 1888-1988*, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1989, p 130.

nationalisation implies a uniform policy for the whole country and the extent of pre-nationalisation differences between Scottish trade unionists and their comrades south of the border is an important factor. This is particularly so as pre-nationalisation attitudes may help explain post nationalisation differences.

Congress and conference reports have their strengths and weaknesses as sources.

One has to be aware that a desire to show a public face of unity or for one faction or group to press a particular, and unrelated agenda, may provide an inherently biased picture of the trade union movement and the Labour Party. However, no other sources provide the necessary breadth and volume of evidence to enable the detailed consideration of the labour movement in general. The possibility also arises that speakers invariably talk from a personal point of view. In both these cases the use of computerised textual analysis also helps in penetrating what may appear to be no more than rhetoric or personal views.

II

Nationalisation Policy in the 1920s

The 1920s were a critical time for the Labour Party and trade union movement, and something of a watershed for both in terms of strategy and policy formation. The collapse of the 1924 minority Labour Government, to be repeated in 1931, and the

⁴ Tuckett, A. *The Scottish Trade Union Congress: The First Eighty Years*, Mainstream, Edinburgh, Footnotes continued on following page.

defeat of the 1926 General Strike provided salutary lessons for the labour movement, '[i]t may well be understood that the consequences [of the General Strike] affected every aspect of the life and activity of the labour movement throughout Britain, both for good and ill, for many years to come, and perhaps for longer than we can yet judge.'⁵ The bitter experiences of the 1920s eventually gave both the political and industrial wings of the labour movement new resolve but it was by no means clear that the society the Labour Party wanted, or the means of achieving it, was shared by the trade union movement.

During 1920s the Labour Party's achievements in practice were a disappointment, certainly compared to their promises and rhetoric. Their 1918 programme, *Labour and the New Social Order*, was the first collective manifestation of the party's socialist convictions. Galvanised by working class agitation engendered by the First World War the party publicly committed itself to a socialist manifesto. As Durbin points out, whilst this 'helped to distinguish the Labour Party's goals from the Liberals, it offered nothing in the way of specific plans or legislative priorities.'⁶ This was to prove to be an increasingly important problem for the Party during the 1920s. 1918 was also the year in which the Labour Party constitutionally committed itself to public ownership with the adoption of Clause IV in its constitution. However, the failure during the 1920s to develop how public ownership of the means

1986, p 32.

⁵ *Ibid*, p 223.

⁶ Durbin, E. *New Jerusalems*, Routledge & Keegan Paul, London, 1985, p 47.

of production would be achieved was indicative of the policy-making failings during this period. The Labour Party's 1918 election manifesto simply pledged that

In industry, Labour demands the immediate nationalisation and democratic control of vital public services, such as mines, railways, shipping, armaments, and electric power.

By 1922, only a commitment to mines and railways remained, in 1923 roads, canals and electricity had been added, but roads and railways had been dropped by 1924. As well as these inconsistencies, there was never any priority given to the order of nationalisation, how it could be achieved or the form these industries should take.

Despite these failings the party reiterated its desire to replace the capitalist economy with a Socialist Commonwealth, even if it was unclear exactly what this meant. The Party's 1924 election manifesto *Labour and the New Social Order* stated that: 'We, of the Labour Party, whether in opposition or in due time called upon to form an Administration, will certainly lend no hand in its [capitalism's] revival. On the contrary we shall do our utmost to see that it is buried with the millions whom it has done to death.'⁷ This election manifesto maintained the beacon of a socialist society tempered with gradualism.

We refuse to believe that there is nothing to be done but conserve the present order, which is disorder; or that the misery, the demoralisation and the ruin that it causes to innocent men and women and children

⁷ Quoted in Coates D. *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1975, p 14.

can be remedied by the perpetual repetition of the abstract principles of Individualism.

We appeal to the People to support us in our steadfast march - taking each step only after careful examination, making sure of each advance as we go, and using each success as the beginning of further achievements towards a really Socialist Commonwealth.⁸

The second paragraph of the above quotation illustrates the gradualist approach, but here lies the crux of Labour Party's problem in the 1920s. The gradualist approach had the danger of ameliorating the worst effects of capitalism and hence helping to preserve the system they were pledged to replace. The Labour Party programme did not yet have a means of mitigating the worst effects of economic depression and mass unemployment or advance towards the common ownership of the means of production. It could be argued that if the 1920s represented the nadir of capitalism then the Labour Party should have exploited the situation and appropriated the means of production as they collapsed. However, whilst the Labour Party rejected *laissez faire* capitalism they also rejected Marxism, and were committed to lawful, democratic parliamentary means, as well as sound and responsible public finance. This precluded any possibility of de-stabilising capitalism, which in turn would threaten the security and stability of the state, or attempting to take possession of industry without appropriate compensation to their owners. Labour's faith in sound finance and economic orthodoxy restricted both their policy options and thinking. Justifiably or not, their belief in sound finance was an attitude shared by many trade

⁸ The Labour Party General Election Manifesto of 1924 in Craig F.W.S. *British General Election Manifesto's 1900-1959*, London, 1972.

unionists, evident in their faith in 'thrift' and the co-operative movement. Certainly, the Labour Party's Chancellor, Philip Snowden, was the exemplar of a 'safe pair of hands'. His 1924 budget was 'from a Liberal standpoint, unimpeachable: he cut taxes for both rich and poor.'⁹

Another factor limiting the Labour Party's scope for more radical action was their reliance on Liberal support in both their 1924 and 1929 - 31 administrations. They also ran into resistance in the Conservative dominated House of Lords. However, even if one accepts the Labour Party's gradualist approach, they lacked well defined, short-term policy steps to ensure what Webb called 'the inevitability of gradualism'. What the Labour Party faced in the 1920s was eternal gradualism, that is, without an alternative 'middle way' between orthodox neo-classical economics and revolutionary socialism the Labour Party could never achieve its goals.

The Labour Party's weakness in economic theory, that is weakness in anything other than orthodox, classical 'Treasury View' economics was exposed most noticeably through their leader Ramsay MacDonald. MacDonald had consolidated his position through the improved internal discipline of the party, which included the expulsion of communists and the increasing marginalism of ILP members. However, despite this improved discipline and electoral success, the domestic policies of both Labour administrations were singularly unsuccessful. To a certain extent this is due to MacDonald's pre-occupation with foreign policy, but both his and Snowden's

⁹ Pelling, H. *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 9th ed, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991, p 57.

economic dogmatism was to prove telling. However, in the mid to late twenties, not even Keynes had fully developed his deficit spending theory and Labour Party's reliance on orthodox economics as it tried to project itself as a credible electoral alternative, is not altogether surprising.

Nevertheless, from the mid-twenties signs of the tensions that were eventually to cumulate in the 1931 split of the Party were evident. Whilst many in the Party still shared Snowden's and MacDonald's vision of a socialist utopia, their moralistic basis for running the country's finances like a thrifty householder was coming under strain. There may not have been an immediate palliative to Britain's economic plight, particularly unemployment, but sections of the Party and labour movement were beginning to realise that there were other options. The militant Clydeside MPs of the Independent Labour Party began to challenge the gradualism of Snowden and MacDonald with specific and radical proposals, such as family allowances through direct taxation and nationalising the Bank of England to control credit.¹⁰ Of greater significance was the increasing disquiet of some trade unions, which had been the bedrock of MacDonald and Snowden's support. In particular Ernest Bevin was one of the first to grasp the implications of the return to gold and the deflationary effects on unemployment and wage levels.¹¹

¹⁰ Durbin, E. *New Jerusalems*, Routledge & Keegan Paul, London, 1985, p 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The extent of the differences between MacDonald and Snowden and the rest of the labour movement was evident in the events of the 1931 financial collapse. Most telling was MacDonald's handling of the crisis. With unprecedented drains on Britain's gold reserves following the collapse of Credit Anstalt, in MacDonald's opinion he was faced with either coming off the Gold Standard or implementing cuts in employment benefit to enable new loans to be raised on the international markets. In the end he could not persuade either his cabinet without a serious split, or crucially, the General Council of the TUC, of the necessity of the cuts and on his resignation he accepted a commission from the King to form a new 'National Government' with Liberals and Conservatives. Ironically, the new administration came off gold, something that was unthinkable to MacDonald just seven months previously. The 1931 crisis and the split with MacDonald proved how unrepresentative he and Snowden had become, even of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and was to be a watershed for the Party. Although emasculated in parliament they had rid themselves of the 'old guard' but were faced with new challenges, both in terms of re-establishing their electoral credibility and developing the policies to do this. Another outcome of the crisis was a new found solidarity with the trade union movement, particularly the TUC, who themselves had come to pay far closer attention to parliamentary affairs following the failure of the General Strike.

In fact, until the failure of the General Strike, and the collapse of the Labour Party after the 1931 crisis, the trade unions had played a somewhat ambivalent role in the party's affairs. Whilst the trade union supported MPs were in relative decline compared to those supported by local Labour Parties, they still gave unfettered and significantly, unquestioned support to MacDonald. However, in the long-term it was

the quality of the trade union MPs and the attitude of trade unions towards them that was decisive. As Pelling points out, it became rare for a secretary of a large trade union to sit in the House of Commons and, at least as far as the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU.) were concerned this was a convenient place to deposit retired officials.¹² This did nothing to improve communications between the Labour Party and the trade union movement, particularly with MacDonald tending to take trade union support for granted and becoming increasingly out of touch.

This trend, and the 1926 General Strike, must not be interpreted as trade union disenchantment with parliamentary methods and a new found faith in direct action. Rather, with the increased representation of MPs from local parties trade union members were becoming relatively less important anyway. Couple this with trade union's pre-occupation with falling numbers, finances, amalgamations and employers pressure for wage reductions and rationalisation their priorities shifted, perhaps unconsciously, away from parliamentary activity to concentrate on what can narrowly be termed 'industrial' issues. Indeed the lack of planning and co-ordination before and during the General Strike supports the view that this was not a positive commitment to direct action as an alternative to parliamentary methods, but one brought on by economic circumstances.

Nevertheless, despite the scare the strike gave employers and Government alike, the unions emerged after only nine days completely defeated, with only the miners

¹² Pelling, H. *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 9th ed, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991.

struggling on, albeit to defeat themselves. The sense of defeat was magnified by internal disputes and recriminations for the 'failure' of the strike and this only served to intensify the belief that the only way to win permanent redress against the employers was through parliamentary action, in other words the Labour Party. The immediate catalyst that brought the political and industrial wings of the labour movement together was the 1927 Trade Dispute and Trade Union Act. The hostile nature of this act; illegal sympathetic strikes and 'contracting in' had the serious implications for trade unions and Labour Party. It was vigorously attacked by the PLP and 'the somewhat battered relationship between the unions and the Labour Party was strengthened by their resolve.'¹³

However, the truism that it is easier to be united in defeat than in victory was proved during the 1929 - 1931 Labour Government. As has already been mentioned above, the crucial event was the 1931 financial crisis. With MacDonald's frequent disregard for trade union's sensibilities and Snowden's economic orthodoxy, the writing was on the wall in the face of a worsening depression and rising unemployment. In fact tensions between the Labour leadership and the unions had already surfaced over purely industrial matters before the 1931 crisis overwhelmed the administration. The Yorkshire woollen strike, the failure to reduce the miners' working day to seven hours and guarantee them minimum wages and the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance were all contributing factors.

¹³ Pelling, H *A History of British trade unionism*, 4th ed, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1987, p 190.

Whilst the General Council of the TUC, aided by the energetic Bevin, were able to rally the bulk of the Parliamentary Labour Party in opposition to MacDonald,¹⁴ their actions give a clue to the tensions that would remain even after the two had been expelled from the Labour Party. Firstly, whilst the TUC General Council promoted unity, this was motivated by their sectional interests, not in the interests of Labour Party unity or the national interest. The prospect of increasing unemployment threatened unions' membership and finances and benefit cuts undermined their position in wage bargaining. Whilst unions were concerned that the unemployed should receive a decent minimum standard, should such issues clash with their own interests in the future, it was by no means clear on which side they would come down on. This raises the question of the extent to which sectional interests would motivate future union actions. Trade unions may have reverted to political means but this was still for industrial ends. Indeed, not even the General Strike had revealed any wider political aims and it remained to be seen if these were part of the trade union agenda. Secondly, the Labour Party tended to remain neutral in industrial disputes and it was not clear how committed they were to fulfilling any industrial agenda proposed by the unions. Thirdly, the wider goals of both the Labour Party and the trade unions were in something of a state of flux at the beginning of the 1930s. The Labour Party, for all its socialist rhetoric, had found itself wanting in terms of a credible alternative economic theory whilst the trade unions had found their limited (in political terms) industrial agenda frustrated. Therefore the picture post MacDonald was of a seriously weakened Labour Party that was still searching for a credible economic

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 196.

alternative and a trade union movement suffering from the economic climate and defeated in its industrial tactics and turning towards the Labour Party for a solution.

III

Nationalisation Policy in the 1930s

There were signs of these trends in the early 1930s. The Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda (SSIP.) was founded in early 1931, with Bevin in the chair,¹⁵ with the aim of promoting practical socialist policies and thinking. The group largely promoted the work of the New Fabian Research Bureau (NFRB.) which included rising Labour stars such as Attlee, Durbin and Gaitskill. It is this group that has been credited with introducing Keynesian policies into the Labour Party.¹⁶ No less significant of the changing outlook of the Labour Party was the XYZ club, which was founded by Labour sympathisers in the City and came to advise Dalton on financial policy and through him came into contact with Bevin.¹⁷

There were also signs of a new perspective from trade unions. The TUC had already reorganised its structure after the General Strike to incorporate an economic committee, which under Bevin was to have a powerful voice both in the trade unions and the Labour Party. Meanwhile the lessons of poor communication between the Labour Party and the trade unions under MacDonald were remedied by institutional

¹⁵ Durbin, E. *New Jerusalem*, Routledge & Keegan Paul, London, 1985, p 79.

¹⁶ Ben Pimlott quoted in *Ibid*, pp 80-81.

¹⁷ Durbin, E. *New Jerusalem*, Routledge & Keegan Paul, London, 1985, p 82.

changes. These involved the co-opting of two members of Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) to the TUC's economic committee and the National Joint Council was resurrected where members and executives of the PLP, Labour Party and the TUC's General Council were to meet monthly.¹⁸

The trade union movement and the Labour Party appeared to be on a converging path in terms of their organisational structures and their political commitments to each other. However, it was too soon to talk about a permanent realignment between the two for their paths crossed rather than united. Furthermore, one can not begin to talk about any national trend without considering the position of the Scottish trade unions.

If the Scottish trade unions have been notable by their absence so far this is no reflection of their importance. Their experiences, whilst in many ways similar to their English counterparts, were not so closely entwined with those of the Labour Party. Scottish trade unions felt the impact of the depression as much, if not more, than their English counterparts. Scotland also had a disproportionate concentration of heavy, staple, export oriented industries which were hit hardest by the collapse in trade, particularly after Britain came off the Gold Standard. Whilst this intensified the need for reorganisation and amalgamation there was still a strong desire to retain craft based unions, which were often small and local, and which it was argued made them more responsive to their members needs. This view was strongly supported by

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p 78.

the trades councils who held a stronger constitutional position within the STUC than their English counterparts.

Although there was an obvious need for trade union amalgamation and reorganisation on a national scale, should this nation be the Scottish or the British? The debate was intensified by the spread of the national general unions, who posed a threat to many Scottish based unions, such as the TGWU to the Scottish Horse and Motor Men. There was also the feeling that Scottish unions, in particular the STUC, was handicapped by operating under instructions from the TUC in major industrial disputes rather than having a free hand. A delegate at the 1922 Congress is quoted as saying, 'there would have been no Triple Alliance failure north of the Tweed if the Scottish Workers had been free to act by themselves.'¹⁹ Therefore, during the 1920s it became evident to some trade unionists that Scottish unions had to deal with issues that necessitated a uniquely Scottish response. To complicate matters further there was the vexed question of Scottish Home Rule. Whilst this was not an active topic of debate in either the Scottish trade unions or the Labour Party, one consequence of Scottish trade unions asserting their independence could be a demand for greater Scottish independence from Westminster.

The feeling that Scotland had been let down by their English comrades peaked immediately after the General Strike. At first there were conflicting responses, some

¹⁹ Tuckett, A. *The Scottish Trade Union Congress: The First Eighty Years*, Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1986, p 174.

delegates at the 1927 Congress, notably from Scottish divisions of British unions and Communists, called for the STUC to dissolve itself and become simply an Advisory Council of the TUC,²⁰ as all it did was parody the decisions of the TUC. However, Scotland had had a far longer tradition of direct action in industrial disputes than England and there was little doubt that the STUC would weather the storm. Indeed, in the end the STUC would be strengthened by dissatisfaction with its treatment by the TUC, relations with which had never been entirely satisfactory. In the meantime it continued to be racked by recriminations, the shift of the trades councils to the left and the problems of dealing with the National Minority Movement. This was a CPGB initiative to build alternative unions in opposition to traditional union leadership that lasted (with limited success) until 1935. In addition, whilst the STUC had a Parliamentary Committee they lacked the industrial clout and block voting power of their English counterparts to enable them to establish a direct link with the Labour Party as the TUC had done. Equally, whilst Scotland had consistently provided the backbone of Labour representation in the House of Commons, the Scottish Council of the Labour Party was an emasculated body.

So the Scottish unions entered the 1930s with many of the experiences and problems of their English counterparts, but further removed from an influential position, they were dependant on the STUC becoming clearly recognised as the sole representative of Scottish labour and the influence this would bring. Considering their weaker position, more left wing composition and their greater faith in the benefits of direct

²⁰ *Ibid*, p 224.

action the STUC provides a different set of circumstances to the deliberations of the British labour movement in the 1930s.

Therefore, during the 1930s there were a number of unresolved issues and potentially conflicting interests. As far as the Labour Party are concerned it remained to be seen if they could develop concrete, short-term policies with a legislative priority as definite steps to achieving their goal of a democratic socialist society. Indeed, whether such policies precluded having a wider, utopian goal will be examined below. But this is a two way process, and it was not clear what the nature and extent of the trade unions' agenda would be. By examining the underlying values of the TUC and STUC an indication of their compatibility with the goals and policies of the Labour Party should be gained. Finally, the problem of how Scottish trade unions' contributed to nationalisation and the implications this had for a truly 'national' nationalisation and Scottish-Anglo labour relations will be studied.

IV

Values and Views on Nationalisation: The Labour Party and TUC

In the debates on nationalisation during the 1930s a number of issues occupied the minds of the labour movement in relation to nationalisation policy. The theme of class and society, in particular capitalism, capitalists, and the working class, is a useful starting point in beginning to understand the labour movements beliefs, attitudes and values. What is apparent from the debates on nationalisation was that

the Labour Party and the TUC had distinct views on the nature of capitalism.

Because nationalisation was intended to replace part of the capitalist system, what they thought the failings of capitalism were provides an impression of their expectations for nationalisation.

A feature the annual debates concerning nationalisation was the different ways in which the TUC and Labour Party viewed capitalism and capitalists. Both had negative opinions of capitalism and capitalists, often considering them as anarchic or restrictive. At the TUC for example;

the utter anarchy and chaos arising from capitalist production and distribution in this country have given rise to such a crisis...²¹

it is time to reaffirm our faith in socialism and our unchanging hostility to the capitalist system.²²

Capitalism is broken in Europe and we should not rehabilitate it here in Britain.²³

A similar picture is provided from Labour Party conference debates, as in 1933 when a speaker said '[w]hat it means in effect is that the capitalist system is breaking down under its own weight.'²⁴ At the 1944 Party Conference a delegate said '[e]verybody now can see that anarchic capitalism means unemployment, degradation,

²¹ Locomotive Engineers and Fireman, 1931 TUC Congress.

²² General and Municipal Workers Union, 1934 TUC Congress.

²³ Chemical Workers Union, 1945 TUC Congress.

²⁴ Labour Party Annual Conference Report, 1933.

malnutrition and misery'²⁵ and in 1945 '[a]re we to allow demobilisation to occur under a chaotic and anarchic capitalist system without any control exercised by the Government.'

However, this consistent and mutual dislike of capitalism did not extend as far as shared opinions on the worst aspects of capitalism. In particular the Labour Party saw capitalism as institutional and used analogies such as citadel, fortress and stronghold, for instance:

Suppose...we have not broken down the capitalist stronghold....²⁶

The tide is flowing from the point of view of those great forces that are undermining the stronghold of capitalism...²⁷

They failed to use their power because they allowed the great citadels of capitalism to remain...in exactly the same way as socialism cannot make terms with capitalist institutions.²⁸

Meanwhile, the TUC associated capitalism with individuals or groups. For example, references include:

And what did he say? (Cries of 'Name.')

Oh, yes, I am coming to *his* name - the most interesting name on earth. We call *him* Owen D. Young, of the Federal Reserve Bank. Believe me, *he* is the king of the

²⁵ Labour Party Annual Conference Report, 1944.

²⁶ Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, 1933 Labour Party Conference.

²⁷ Divisional Labour Party, 1945 Labour Party Conference.

²⁸ Divisional Labour Party, 1933 Labour Party Conference.

globe. *They* intend to apply the resources in *their* possession to make it [the capitalist system] work as *they* want it, and neither you nor I will be able to work under other conditions than *they* determine. *They* have said so.²⁹

...put the financiers and capitalist *group* of this country in greater difficulty than they have ever been in before.³⁰

...capitalism does not find a single defender even amongst the ranks of the most ardent *individualist*...³¹

Let me remind them of Hooley, of Mr. Newton who has written the revelations in the 'Mr. A' case, and of Hatry. These *persons* are only typical of many *others*.³²

Trade unionists took a personalised view of capitalism, seeing individuals or groups as the system, whereas the Labour Party saw capitalism more as a detached, economic model. This meant the Labour Party desired to change aspects of the model, i.e., *capitalism*, whilst the TUC focused on the need to change individuals or a class within the model, i.e., the *capitalist*. This may appear to be a tenuous point, but it is an important difference. Should nationalisation, in the trade unions' eyes, fail to remove or restrict the individuals with which they associated so many economic problems, even if the balance in the economy changed then disenchantment, if not conflict was possible.

²⁹ General and Municipal Workers Union at the 1931 T.U.C. Congress, my italics.

³⁰ Miners Federation, 1931 T.U.C. Congress, my italics.

³¹ General and Municipal Workers Union, 1934 T.U.C. Congress, my italics.

³² Patternmakers Association, 1931 T.U.C. Congress, my italics.

Another feature associated with this issue was the stronger class-consciousness in the TUC. The TUC's frequent use of these terms indicates that they saw issues regarding nationalisation far more in terms of class than the Labour Party did. For example the TUC referred to class, classes, working-class and ruling-class 46 times in nationalisation debates compared to 28 occurrences in Labour Party debates.

Not only did the TUC use these words more frequently but also a significant number of the occurrences Labour Party debates were accounted for by trade unionists. If one removes these occurrences from the Labour Party frequencies, then non-unionist members of the Labour Party only referred to class based terms 13 times. This indicates that a large part of the Labour Party's conception, or rhetoric, on class was brought to it by trade unionists. Not only did not the Labour Party view the defects of capitalism the same way, they did not see class in general as such a defining issue.

The trade unions and the Labour Party also had different perceptions of the nature of the working class. The TUC debates reveal that trade unions viewed the working class as a coherent and concrete group, whilst the Labour Party saw them as a more fluid and less consistent body. The TUC described the working class largely in terms of specific nouns, for example standpoint, policy, aim and movement, whereas the Labour Party used verbs and adjectives such as gradually, strength, avail and efforts. The quotations below illustrate this point;

...from the standpoint of the working-class, outlining a policy in which we say a number of things. (TUC, 1931).

Whereas the Labour Party said 'There were other sections of the working-class movement all gradually gathering strength.'

These quotations illustrate that trade unions saw that there *was* a clear working class standpoint, whilst the Labour Party saw the working class as being divided, less coherent and unified. This had implications for the issue of workers' control in nationalisation policy, for if the Labour Party did not view the working class as strong and unified as the trade unions, it was far less likely that they would consider workers control as being a practical proposition.

This impression is supported by the Labour Party's different views on the aims of the working class and their interests. Firstly, the Labour Party did not identify 'working-class aims' or policies in their own right, whereas the trade unions did. For example, a speaker at the 1931 TUC Congress said;

This so-called tendency is merely the old policy which modern capitalism is following, of restricting production to existing consumption. Our policy, the *working class policy*, will aim at extending consumption to keep pace with production; and between those two things there is a whole pole of difference which cannot be reconciled.

A good example of the Labour Party attitude, at least by 1945, was this quote 'this Party must not go on being almost entirely an industrial political Party, it has to be representative of all sections of the community and of all types of constituencies.'

The evidence suggests that whilst trade unions shared the same negative impressions about the economic system as the Labour Party, they identified the source of those

problems in different areas. The trade unions identified the problems more with individuals or individual elements within the capitalist system, than the system itself, unlike the Labour Party who saw it in more abstract terms. That is the Labour Party associated the symptoms with particular institutional features of capitalism. Furthermore, the examination of the issue of class and society appears to show that the trade unions had a stronger conception of class identity, certainly with the working class. This does not imply that the Labour Party had no class identity or conceptions of it, simply that it was not as strong as the trade unions. Here there appears to be an important distinction in the views of the trade union movement. That is, they had a collectivist view of the working class, yet an individualistic one of the capitalist class.

Whilst the differences with the Labour Party over working class identity was more one of extent, the differences over the nature of capitalism and capitalists were more fundamental, certainly in its implications for nationalisation. For if the trade unions identified the core problems of capitalism with individuals, notwithstanding their bargaining with employers organisations, they were less likely to be satisfied with a mere change in ownership, if the control and power remained in the hands of the same individuals. Therefore, a change in ownership needed to be combined with a demonstrable change in the nature of managerial control. For trade unions this most often took the form of demands for various degrees of workers' control or representation backed by statutory guarantees. If similar differences are repeated over other issues, there is strong possibility for establishing a causal link between these values and policy differences on nationalisation.

At first sight the differences over the nature of capitalism, its problems and the degree of class consciousness did not translate into differences over the solution. Both the Labour Party and the TUC expressed similar zeal towards socialism, as can be seen in the collocates, or word associations, in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: TUC and Labour Party Collocate of Socialism and Socialist

Labour Collocate	Z-Score	TUC Collocate	Z-Score
Commonwealth	14.5	Faith	16.2
Goal	10.6	Gift	14.3
Solution	7.5	Legislative	11.6
Unionism	6.5	Purpose	9.1

The Z-Score is a statistical measure of the strength of an association, the higher the score the stronger the association.

In the debates themselves the Labour Party National Executive stated 'We want the maximum of socialism in the minimum of time'³³ and trade unionists spoke of '...exploding the whole idea of the peaceful transformation from capitalism into socialism.'³⁴ But there was a rapid transformation within the Labour Party away from such ambitious and sweeping statements. This was marked by the increasingly frequent use of the term 'Socialist Commonwealth', which accounts for

³³ National Executive Committee, 1933 Labour Party Conference.

³⁴ Miners Federation, 1931 T.U.C Congress.

commonwealth's high z-score in Table 1.1 above. The term was first used in this context in Labour Party debates in 1937 'I appeal to this great Conference that we make a determined, united effort towards the great goal of the Socialist Commonwealth', although it dates back at least to the Webbs and possibly Morris. This terminology was in part due to the Popular Front, towards which the party was firmly opposed, but there were other more permanent signs of a re-focusing of the Party's socialist aims. The Labour Party broadened its view of socialism 'beyond this movement we want the mass of our fellow citizens...'³⁵ and as something that was not the sole preserve or instrument of trade unions '...we have got to get to the bottom of this to-day and come to a considered decision in the interests of Socialism - not trade unionism.' Indeed by 1945 the dominant characteristic of the Labour Party's view of socialism was its caution 'The Labour Party has never believed that you can leave off work on Friday or Saturday under a capitalist system and go to work on Monday under the socialist commonwealth of Great Britain. Anybody who believes that is living in a very unreal world.'³⁶

The Labour Party's broader and more pragmatic view of socialism had a marked impact on policy. This point is illustrated particularly well regarding nationalisation and workers control. 'They [the trade unions] believe they could furnish the talent. No doubt they could, and it need not be a minority share, but a major share, but where does your socialism come in?' whilst the trade unions argued that 'I want us to be careful not to make the mistake, first of supporting co-partnership, second, of

³⁵ National Executive Committee, 1940 Labour Party Conference.

believing that we are not capable of running industry, and third, of referring to State Capitalism as Socialism, the latter being, to my judgement a very important matter.'³⁷ The Labour Party's inclusive view of socialism and the trade union's more class and sectional based view mirrors their attitudes towards capitalism and class discussed above.

However, by 1945, the General Council of the TUC, was espousing similar caution towards socialist goals as the Labour Party. For example in 1945 the General Council stated the importance of '...evolutionary socialism - the maintenance and development of social conditions in this country.' Nevertheless, there remained significant differences within non-executive representatives at the 1945 Congress, for example the Chemical Workers Union speech in the same debate said 'It is our view that the situation in this country, in Europe and in the rest of the world demands something big, something fundamental, something challenging.'³⁸ Whilst this could be interpreted as being as inclusive and broad based as the Labour Party's view of socialism it certainly did not envisage the sort of pragmatic, gradual policy espoused by the Labour Party.

Another feature was that despite the frequency with which the Labour Party referred to word socialist (it used the word socialist 96 times compared to 12 times for the TUC between 1930 and 1945) and their more cautious approach, they did not link it

³⁶ National Executive Committee, 1945 Labour Party Conference.

³⁷ Furnishing Trades Association, 1934 T.U.C Congress.

to any specific goals. Their goals may have become more pragmatic but they were no more focused than before. For nowhere in the debates can 'socialist' be linked to anything other than the vaguest statements. For example '[o]ur solution is the solution of socialism...there is no solution so far as our problems are concerned except the socialist solution.'³⁹ The closest one can get to deciphering these somewhat axiomatic statements is a quote in 1942; '[c]omrade Pakenham said that we had not said anything about Socialism. Somebody else said, we talk about socialisation, not Socialism. Socialisation means the full application of socialist policy, and indeed it goes far beyond what is usually meant by nationalisation of industry.' The use of the word socialisation, instead of nationalisation, was not merely rhetorical. Although socialisation had been used to describe many things in the past it was increasingly used during the 1930s and 40s to mean several forms of collective ownership or state control.

Significantly it could mean something far less than nationalisation, for example a National Board of control or planning, rather than the actual transfer of ownership. Increasingly socialisation became a convenient tag 'to paper over the cracks, for everyone could agree that what they wanted was more socialisation.'⁴⁰ The vagueness of the Labour Party in regards to socialism clearly contrasts with specific legislative purpose that trade unions associate with it 'it was self evident and beyond controversy that the purpose of a Socialist Government in its legislative enactment

³⁸ Chemical Workers Union, 1945 T.U.C Congress.

³⁹ National Executive Committee, 1933 Labour Party Conference.

⁴⁰ Barry, E *Nationalisation in British Politics*, Johnathan Cape, London, 1965, p 303.

should be to secure the transfer of economic power to the workers through their trade unions, and that legislation should be so drafted that in the end they secured economic democracy. It must also set them in on the road whereby the workers could order their ever-day operations, whether in industry or commerce. Unless that was the spirit and purpose of any so-called Socialist Government, its legislation would not be in keeping with the spirit and purpose of the Socialist movement.⁴¹

There were also signs of tension over specific policy commitments between the executive and the membership of the Labour Party, although not to the same extent as in the TUC. In 1944 a Divisional Labour Party delegate said '[w]e have been told nothing whatever about what is to be done with the vast amount of capital assets and other publicly owned industries which have come into being since the outbreak of war.' In the same year another delegate asked for 'a very much more detailed programme setting out with completeness the aims to be accomplished when a Socialist Government is returned to power.'

This reinforces the impression that the Labour Party, or at least its policy makers, saw socialism as an overall goal and solution to be worked towards, but not something linked to specific legislative commitments, and particularly not in the sense that trade unions linked socialism. The Labour Party and the TUC may have shared the 'spirit' of the socialist movement, but they appeared less compatible over its 'purpose'. As for nationalisation, this evidence gives further weight to the view

⁴¹ Shop Assistants, 1933 T.U.C Congress.

that the trade unions were operating from different view points and beliefs. Not only did they have a different target for nationalisation (capitalists), but they had a different view of the nature of socialism, that it was the purpose of socialism to deliver specific legislative goals such as workers' control in nationalised industries. It would appear reasonable to suggest that the length and acrimonious nature of the debates can in part be accounted for by these differences. Equally, the Labour Party's reluctance to make specific policy commitments and the TUC's General Council's compromises, appeared to cause something of a split in opinion within both movements. Such a difference could have serious repercussions should either side feel short-changed by the outcome of nationalisation.

Potentially the greatest source of future difficulties was trade unionists advocacy of workers' control, or some form of statutory representation in nationalised industry. This issue was one of the most hotly contested throughout the period and one which provides further evidence on the nature of the different values in the Labour Party and trade unions. It is also an area which contemporaries of the nationalisation programme identified as problematic: 'the confusion revealed by a study of recent thought in the Labour and trade union movement on the position which workers should hold in the nationalised industries is important as a symptom of a deeper confusion.'⁴²

⁴² White, E. *Workers Control?* Fabian Tract 271, Fabian Society and Victor Gollancz, London, 1951, p 3.

The debates concerning workers control display differences between the trade unions and the Labour Party on this issue. In particular their differences over workers control and participation appear to be based on different concepts of democracy. One of the most striking features was the number of times that the Labour Party used the words democracy and democratic (59 and 28 times respectively), compared to the TUC (18 and 5 respectively). The frequency of use closely matches the pattern for the use of socialism and socialist and the way in which the concept of democracy was expressed through workers control indicate similar differences as indicated in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Trade Union and Labour Party Collocates of Democracy.

Labour Collocates	Z-Score	TUC Collocates	Z-Score
Dynamic	16.6	Prevail	11.8
Collectivism	15.8	Machinery	5.9
Achievement	10.9	Expressing	18.1

Of particular note was the use of term collectivism by the Labour Party mirroring their use of commonwealth in relation to socialist, and the use of dynamic where the trade unions use machinery. This again suggests that the trade unions saw democracy as being a particular way to achieve their goals whereas the Labour Party again saw it in terms of a more abstract and collectivist method, not linked to specific policies. The following examples provide some evidence to support this view. The Labour Party NEC said in 1940 of democracy, '[v]ictory in this conflict depends on

our power to recover the dynamic of democracy...It is a Socialist map, and it is a Socialist method.⁴³ That is they associated democracy as a socialist method, but not with a specific policy, in other words socialist policy appeared to mean democracy. Therefore the way to bring about socialism again appeared to be through collectivism '...only by democratic collectivism can we effectively organise the nation for the purpose of the well-being of the people.'⁴⁴ This again suggests that collective, political democracy is a component of wider social change, that in some way would develop socialism, in an unspecified, organic manner, alongside a growth in democracy. However, trade unions took the view that to get wider social change they actively had to use the existing political structure to extend the institutions of democracy for specific groups. '[i]f the principle of democracy were to prevail, the unions must have the right beyond question to elect the people that they consider fit to sit upon the controlling Boards of socialised industries.'⁴⁵ The evidence above suggests that the Labour Party felt democracy was an on-going, dynamic, collectivist force that would inexorably lead to a more just society whereas trade unions saw it as an instrument to be implemented in order to achieve further democracy. The implications for workers' control or representation in nationalised industries was clear. The Labour Party did not see trade unionists as having a greater right than anyone else to representation and their fitness for this would develop in time. However, trade unionists saw their representation as a right that had been denied and one which should be imposed by legislation on nationalised industries. The

⁴³ Labour Party Annual Conference Report, 1940.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Patternmakers Association, 1933 T.U.C Congress.

difference between democracy as a force and an instrument could have serious repercussions if nationalisation legislation did not satisfy trade unionists aspirations in this respect.

Whilst it is always easier to highlight differences between two bodies, particularly in the artificial atmosphere of annual conferences, different approaches to issues associated with nationalisation do appear to be based on fundamental, if small, differences in core beliefs and values. The TUC and the Labour Party shared views on the effects of capitalism and the non-revolutionary path for socialism, and this inevitably bound the two together stronger than any differences. However, they identified the root of the problems with capitalism in different areas, and this associated with the trade unions' stronger sense of class identity and conflict is reflected in their differences over the purpose of socialism. As far as the trade unions were concerned socialism meant a more fundamental change, and a change targeted more specifically at the focus of their animosity - capitalist personnel. For them socialism meant empowerment, control and representation in industry. For the Labour Party it was the capitalist system that was the problem, and their priority was to effect a change in the economic basis of production, but because they had a wider, more progressive and consensual view of socialism, this was not to mean institutionalising a new set of interests, including that of the unions. Socialism to them was a way to bring equality, unity and prosperity to society as a whole, not just one sector of it. It could well be argued that the trade unions had a more individualist view of capitalism because day-to-day they were in contact with representatives of that group, in the factory and over the negotiating table. Equally, they were more likely than the Labour Party to have had a sense of working-class

identity and unity, accurate or not, because they were part of large organisations whose purpose was to foster the impression of common interest and strength. However, from the evidence related to democracy, one cannot assert that trade unions' desire for workers' control and representation was entirely to self interest. The did demand was not linked to employment, pay and conditions, but a view that representation was their right, and that democracy and socialism were the tools to deliver it. This does not imply any greater or lesser value to the trade unions' advocacy of different policies to the Labour Party's. Rather, there were genuine differences in values, beliefs and perceptions and these differences were real enough to those at the time, irrespective of whether they were justified or not. These differences provide at least some indication as to why the trade unions' advocated different policies regarding nationalisation, in particular over workers control.

V

Values and Views on Nationalisation: The STUC

Although Scottish trade unionists played a part in the deliberations of the TUC and the Labour Party their relatively small numbers makes it difficult to identify any distinct input to nationalisation policy. This in itself could be justification for ignoring any particular Scottish distinctions as the TUC and the Labour Party were the dominant figures in shaping nationalisation policy. However, this would be to ignore the legacy of Scottish trade unionists in promoting early nationalisation schemes and to underestimate the influence a regional voice could have in post 1945 nationalised industries. Nevertheless one cannot ignore the different circumstances

in which the STUC operated compared to their English counterpart. Not only were they further removed from the centre of power both geographically and numerically, but the STUC was struggling to find its own voice and assert its independence from the TUC. Yet at the same time policies such as nationalisation could render such attempts futile. Large, centralised, nationally operated industries could pull the rug from under any nascent Scottish labourism, but at the same time the creation of such industries could make the need for a strong Scottish union voice all the more important.

Therefore in what terms did the STUC express its values, views and beliefs regarding nationalisation, and what, if anything, was distinctive about these views and what implications did these have for nationalisation? Did the STUC see nationalisation as solving any particularly Scottish problems? Did the STUC nationalisation debates represent a sense of Scottish identity, a desire that the Scottish labour's voice should be heard?

The answer to these questions at one level must be an unequivocal no. There were few explicit references to Scotland or Scottish compared to British or Britain in the STUC debates between 1932 and 1945, as can be seen in Table 1.3 below. At first sight this would suggest a lack of Scottish identity, or at least this identity was not associated with nationalisation.

Table 1.3: STUC Occurrences of Lexical Stems of Scotland and Britain.

Word	Frequency
Scottish	5
Scotland	5
British	13
Britain	12

There is, however, a more complex pattern submerged beneath the bare figures. If one looks at when they occurred, then one finds that references to Scotland and Scottish did not occur until 1938. For example 'the wages of the miners in Scotland were inadequate to keep a wife and family in any degree of comfort.'⁴⁶ whereas references to Britain remained fairly evenly distributed throughout the years, 'the British miners' wages of 2 pounds 15s. 5d a week hardly covered the cost of living.'⁴⁷ Perhaps more significantly it was the General Council of the STUC that referred to Britain whilst references to Scotland came from individual trade unions. Whilst it would be stretching a point to read too much into this it may represent the beginnings of a trend towards a more distinctly Scottish outlook. For example in 1945 there was the first comparative reference between Scotland and England, and with this a sense of uniquely Scottish problems, for example 'the Scottish owners

⁴⁶ National Union of Scottish Mineworkers, 1938 STUC Congress.

attitude to mechanisation was that the miners working American machines should be paid 10/- less than the rate being paid in England but with this the miners could not agree.⁴⁸ This does not transfer into a desire for a distinct Scottish nationalisation, rather the Scottish unions desired a uniform British solution, '[w]e cannot conceive a solution through a Scottish Board nor through duality of control by the Government...the only solution can be nationalisation.'⁴⁹ It is clear that there was support for *nationalisation*, but also that this was to solve particular Scottish grievances.

Additional evidence for this comes from the strength of the STUC's sense of class identity. The words working class occurs 26 times, class 13 times and capitalist class 10 times. This compares to 18 occurrences of working class in the TUC and class 20 times in what were longer and more frequent debates. In fact it may have been the STUC's particularly strong sense of class consciousness that defined part of its 'Scottishness'. Neither did this class consciousness did not appear to contain the contradictions that the TUC's view of capitalists entailed, for example:

They were asked to struggle to maintain full rights for all in communal affairs, but the capitalist class owned the banks, factories, fields and mines, all the resources of wealth production. That being so, how

⁴⁷ General Council, 1938 STUC Congress.

⁴⁸ National Union of Scottish Mineworkers, 1945 STUC Congress.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

could the class they represented in that Congress have equal rights with those people?⁵⁰

and in 1941:

...which would mean the expropriation of the capitalist class.⁵¹

In all that had followed since 1919 the selfish interests of the employers had triumphed not only over the interests of the miners but over those of the community as a whole.⁵²

In fact the Scottish trade unions conception of class appeared to combine both characteristics of the Labour Party's and TUC's view. The combination of the TUC's view of class being strong, unified sections in society, with the Labour Party's view that the disadvantages of class have to be overcome to the advantage of society as a whole. This in itself did not necessarily mean that Scottish unions would be any more satisfied with Labour's nationalisation policy than their English counterparts.

Another similar feature of the Scottish unions is their strong identity of class with democracy. There is hardly a reference to working-class, without a reference to democracy, furthermore the type of democracy to which they refer implies the sort of workers control that is unlikely to be satisfied by the Labour Party. For example;

⁵⁰ National Union of Vehicle Builders, 1934 STUC Congress.

⁵¹ Edinburgh Trades Council, 1941 STUC Congress.

⁵² General Council, 1938 STUC Congress.

...there were two kinds of democracy, capitalist-class democracy and working-class democracy.⁵³

Capitalism was the very negation of democracy, and one could not speak of political democracy divorced from economic and social democracy.⁵⁴

That was why he felt that the new units had to be industrial units [of democracy], and why democracy could only be preserved through the activities of their trade unions. They had to give a content to what they meant by democracy, not just by counting noses or heads, but by devoting their democratic machinery to an efficient social life.⁵⁵

It will be noticed that the STUC presented the same sort of mechanistic view of democracy as the TUC, and that the STUC clearly equated democracy with industrial self-control, i.e. workers' control. Indeed it may be the case that this represented a syndicalist tradition, which in the TUC had, by the 1930s petered out. Either way, it is clear that these democratic beliefs of the Scottish trade unions were unlikely to be reciprocated by the Labour Party in its nationalisation policy. So Scottish trade unions, like those in the TUC, were unlikely to be satisfied with ill-defined or inadequate representation. Their different views on the nature and purpose of democracy was not one which could be easily reconciled with that of the Labour Party.

⁵³ National Union of Vehicle Builders, 1934 STUC Congress.

⁵⁴ National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, 1934 STUC Congress.

⁵⁵ Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen, 1934 STUC Congress.

By 1945 Scottish trade unions had a growing sense of Scottish industrial problems even if this had not developed into a uniquely Scottish solution for them. The STUC did however, have a different number of views and beliefs compared to their English counterparts, in particular their stronger class identity and its closer association with industrial democracy. This at least constitutes a distinct Scottish outlook, the reasons for which are many and complex. The more left wing nature of Scottish labour is perhaps not surprising when one considers that it was Scotland that gave the Labour Party its pioneer socialist MPs and Clydeside was the centre of the wartime shop-stewards movement. Clydeside was also the principle constituency of the Independent Labour Party and Scottish trade unions also possessed a larger number of Communist activists and Party members, particularly amongst the Scottish mineworkers.

This background of Scottish trade unions and the differences apparent with both the Labour Party and TUC raises the question of how compatible nationalisation would be to this Scottish tradition and how satisfied Scottish trade unions would be with its outcome. Potentially this posed a greater threat to the Labour Party because many Scottish trade unionists were outwith their formal structure or sphere of influence. Should Scottish unions become disenchanted and begin to articulate Scottish problems more vocally they would have greater freedom as a 'loose cannon' than would many unions in the TUC.

VI

Conclusion

Whilst a great deal has been talked of the potential for dissension in nationalised industries, what prospect was there for this in the Labour Party's nationalisation policy by 1945? Although nationalisation remained a distinctive Labour Party policy in other respects the nationalisation programme was pragmatic, moderate and realistic. A definite group of industries had been selected for the first round of nationalisation, a legislative priority had been established, full compensation was to be paid to the owners and shareholders, ultimate responsibility was to rest with the respective minister and under him there was to be a National Board of control. The organisational model was based on Morrison's Public Corporation, the principals of which had long been established in the London Passenger Transport Board.

Considering the trend by the late 1920s and early 1930s for practical policies to bring about social change the Labour Party seemed to have been carried the day, but precisely because of this there remained potential areas of conflict with the trade unions. Although the TUC General Council may have been in agreement with nationalisation policy and satisfied with the Labour Party's assurances on the many grey areas, one can not take for granted that other trade unionists were.

The trade unions had managed to secure statutory representation on the National Boards, but there remained many unresolved problems. Not least of which was the fact that the statutory representation did not include a set number of representatives and these were to be at the minister's discretion, not elected by the trade unions.

Bearing in mind the Labour Party's concern over the ability of the working class to furnish managerial positions, and their view that this was incompatible with their view of socialism the prospects for disagreement were ominous. The portents were not aided by the Party's inclusive view of class, democracy and socialism which also implied equal rights to representation for those in control of the pre-nationalised industries.

Another potentially worrying trend for the trade unions was the emerging differences between the executive and the membership. Although clearly the TUC, through their closer co-operation with the executive of the Labour Party, had been able to influence policy, their close association with it could have serious repercussions if it does not deliver in practice the benefits the rank and file anticipate. The potential damage that unofficial action may have on a Labour administration should the workers feel betrayed by their labour and political leaders by the operation of the nationalised industries would be severe. However, a great deal of the regional, divisional and plant level structure and representation had not been defined. This was a concern for trade unionists, but the opportunity remained to influence policy, even after it had become legislation. It remains to be seen in subsequent chapters the extent to which sub-national organisations satisfied Scottish trade unionists, but these levels of organisation, even if they were satisfactory in themselves could act as a focus for discontent over national issues over which trade unions had less influence.

The potential for the STUC to become the sole voice of Scottish labour also remained unfulfilled by 1945. With Scotland's preponderance of nationalised

industries, particularly coal, iron and steel and shipbuilding any failure of nationalisation in practice, or a sense of Scottish injustice, could either galvanise or wither the STUC

A final consideration is that the differences in values, beliefs and attitudes that have been identified do not appear to stem just from a functional motivation of the respective organisations. The policy differences that their deep seated values produced has additional value in the analysis of the role of trade unions in nationalisation policy in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two

Nationalisation Policy 1945 - 1955

I

Introduction

This chapter examines the extent to which the TUC, particularly the General Council, was able to influence developments in nationalisation policy. The extent of this influence had implications for the NUM's opportunity to affect policy at various levels, either independently or through the TUC. As the TUC was the peak level organisation for British labour, any influence they exercised upon nationalisation, may have been in competition with the NUM. For example, although Middlemas does not go so far as to suggest Britain was a fully fledged corporate state he sees the TUC as one of the 'governing institutions' and a symbol of Britain's corporate bias.¹ Kavanagh and Morris question whether the TUC's very closeness to the Attlee Government allowed them to be a 'governing institution' but they do support the idea that trade unions were part of the post-war political order and remained part of the political consensus.² Both Marsh and Beer view post-war Government-producer group relations in a less formal manner than Middlemas, but nevertheless recognise

¹ Middlemas, K. *Politics in Industrial Society*, Deutsch, London, 1979 and *Power, Competition and the State*, Vol 1, Macmillan, London, 1986.

the TUC significant influence in interest group politics.³ Martin, in his analysis of the TUC's development also accords them a predominant role in the post-war Government.⁴ A number of other authors, although critical of the TUC's role to varying degrees, also grant the TUC a significant place in Government post-war policy-making.⁵ If such influence on coal nationalisation policy was the case it may have restricted the NUM's ability to influence policy independently, either at the national or Scottish level. Alternatively, the NUM may have recognised the status of the TUC and used this as a means of influencing policy. Therefore, it is important to understand the TUC's influence in order to be able to compare and contrast it with that of the different levels of the NUM. Furthermore, as the previous chapter has indicated there were subtle, but important differences, between the trade union movement and the labour party. As nationalisation was also an ongoing area of policy formation, it is useful to assess these developments to see if converging or diverging trends were evident. The debate over future nationalisation policy is also useful in providing a broader intellectual context for understanding the environment in which the NUM operated.

² Kavanagh, D & Morris, P. *Consensus Politics from Attlee to Major*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, pp 53-54.

³ Marsh, D. *Policy Networks in British Government*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992 and Beer, S. *British Politics in the Collectivist Age*, Knopf, New York, 1965.

⁴ Martin, R. M. *TUC, Growth of a Pressure Group, 1868 - 1976*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980.

⁵ Pelling, H. *A History of British Trade Unionism*, London, Macmillan, 1976 and *The Labour Governments, 1945 - 51*, Macmillan, London, 1984. Flanders, A. *Trade Unions*, Hutchinson, London, 1968. Beer, S. *Modern British Politics*, Faber, London, 1982. Simpson, B. *Labour, the Unions and the Party*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1973. Lovell, J and Roberts, B. C. *A Short History of the TUC*, Macmillan, London, 1968. Pimlott, B and Cook, C. *Trade Unions in British Politics*, Longman, London, 1991.

The analysis below suggests that the TUC's primary concern was acquiring the right to be consulted, rather than exercising it, in relation to the post 1945 programme of nationalisation. It will be argued that the TUC, although concerned with aspects of the nationalised industries, exercised relatively little influence over on-going policy for those industries from 1945. This suggests that the focus on the TUC's peak level influence on policy-making is exaggerated, at least as far as nationalisation was concerned.

The TUC had more influence over the Labour Party's development of future programmes of nationalisation, but in the ideological struggles to develop policy, its contribution was no more positive than its influence on existing nationalisation policy. Here again, the traditional picture of a traditionally loyal and supportive institution backing the centre-right of the Labour Party is slightly at odds with the evidence below. Minkin and Flanders, amongst others, recognise that in the immediate post-war years the TUC were in a defensive mode. In their interpretation the unions were satisfied with their own position and the Labour Governments' achievements and so did not seek major new political programmes.⁶ However, both seem to underestimate how restrictive the TUC's defensive mode was and how even right wing members of the Labour Party desired a future nationalisation programme beyond what the TUC were prepared to endorse. It will be suggested that even when both the General Council and NEC included more left wing members in the early

⁶ Minkin, L. *The Contentious Alliance*, EUP, Edinburgh, 1991, p 77 and Flanders, A. *Management and Unions*, 1971, pp 35-36.

fifties the General Council continued to act as a brake on the more ambitious nationalisation plans of the Labour Party.

Throughout this chapter the test of the TUC's influence is not the amount of time or paper they devoted to particular issues, something they did a great deal of in many cases, but specific commitments or policy outcomes. Whilst there are problem with trying to relate policy decisions wholly or largely to one group, it is these decisions that must form the basis of any real measure of influence.

The election of a Labour Government in July 1945 saw the expansion of developments in the field of nationalisation policy and new opportunities for trade unions to be involved in this process. Whilst the Labour Government undertook the programme of nationalisation outlined in its 1945 manifesto the Labour Party paid attention to developing a nationalisation policy for future manifestos. Therefore, the TUC had an opportunity to influence both these aspects of nationalisation policy.

Although one might expect a functional division between the party's policy-making role and the Government's implementation of existing policy, in practice this was less clear cut. In both wings of the labour movement there were overlaps in the people involved and a correlation between the experience of the existing nationalised industries and future policy-making. In most cases the personnel on party policy committees were the same Government Ministers who were implementing existing policy. On the trade union side the TUC's constituent unions were involved in nationalised industries, whilst also having a policy-making role via the Labour Party

and TUC annual conferences and through joint TUC and Labour Party policy committees. This raises the question of how trade unions', party and government's experience of nationalisation informed their thinking towards future plans. It is argued below that the nationalisation programme of 1945 - 1951 influenced trade unions in different ways from the Labour Party.

In the TUC's consultation with trade unions the NUM had a potentially important role. Not only was the NUM a large and powerful union in its own right, it also had the first and longest experience of working in a major nationalised industry. This placed it in a unique position to offer advice to the TUC on its experience of nationalisation. Nevertheless, the NUM was but one constituent of the TUC and by no means the most powerful or influential. Therefore, the TUC provides a useful forum for comparing different unions' attitudes towards nationalisation policy. This gives some indication of the relative importance of the NUM in the TUC's deliberations and vice-versa.

In considering the TUC General Council's attitude towards nationalisation three periods can be identified. In the first period between 1945 and 1947 the General Council was energetic in trying to establish their right to consultation regarding the existing nationalised industries. In the second period from 1947 to 1951 they became increasingly concerned about the existing nationalised industries but the General Council were not particularly pro-active on these issues except where their own particular, limited interests coincided. During this and the third period, between 1951 and 1955, the TUC General Council displayed a defensive attitude towards

future programmes of nationalisation. This contrasts with the Labour Party's greater enthusiasm for further programmes of nationalisation.

II

The TUC and Existing Nationalisation Policy

Between 1945 and 1947 the predominant concern of both the Government and unions was implementing the existing programme of nationalisation. In particular, legislation for the nationalisation of coal, which, as the first major industry, would set precedents for the rest, needed to be developed. This process also raised questions of access and influence both for the TUC and NUM, that would also help set the pattern throughout the period of the Labour Government and beyond. The wartime years had seen an increase in Governments' willingness to consult trade unions and a corresponding growth in their influence. However, the extent to which this co-operation would continue in peacetime was by no means certain.

On the initiative of the NUM Executive in March 1945 a joint TUC, Labour Party and NUM committee was established with Emmanuel Shinwell as chair to work out

a scheme for coal nationalisation.⁷ By June 1945 this Nationalisation of the Coalmining Industry Joint Committee had produced a report on the constitution and functions of a National Coal Corporation.⁸ Whilst this was a broad document it did cover the main operating and organisational principles of what was to become the National Coal Board. The report established that a National Coal Corporation should administer and develop the coalmining industry, its members should be appointed by the Minister of Fuel and Power on the basis of their ability to conduct industry, financial affairs or the organisation of workpeople. The Coal Corporation would have operational responsibility, subject to the overriding authority of the Minister, who in turn would be responsible to parliament. As well as the National Board there would be regional Boards, constituted on the same basis, and district and pit level administrative machinery. Machinery for joint consultation and conciliation would be retained or developed at all levels. The industry would be taken over on the basis of fair compensation to the previous owners and workpeople whose position worsened as a result of nationalisation.

In this report there was nothing surprising or contentious, it took current thinking of the labour movement on nationalisation in general and applied it specifically to the coal industry. But the committee appeared to work quickly, thoughtfully and

⁷ Initially the committee appeared to have been composed of Emmanuel Shinwell, Labour Party, as chair, Chester, Woodcock and Bullock of the TUC General Council, Morgan Phillips of the Labour Party and Lawther, Bowman, Jones and Horner of the NUM. Modern Records Centre (MRC) Warwick. MSS 292/603.41/4 Mining Industry Nationalisation Joint Committee, 1st meeting 4th May 1945. Brown of the TUC General Council, Young of the Labour Party's Research Department and Edwards and Hall of the NUM appear in the minutes later. National Museum of Labour History (MLH). Labour Party Archives (LPA), GS/Fuel/17ii, Jt. Ctee: Nat Coalmining Industry 4/1 to 7/1, June to August 1945.

amicably. This seemed to bode well for the future of joint consultation between Labour, the TUC and NUM even though the committee had been established on the initiative of the NUM, not the Labour Party.

However, this joint party and union committee was overtaken by events and the TUC General Council found that the principle of joint consultation was not automatically adopted by the Labour Government. The election of a Labour Government and Shinwell's appointment as Minister of Fuel and Power prompted his resignation as chair of the committee. The NUM President William Lawther took over as chair and the committee decided to produce its final report as quickly as possible. This was completed in August 1945 and the *Amended Document on Public Ownership of Coalmining Industry* expanded on the previous version in a number of areas.⁹ The principle of co-ordination of all fuel and power industries was re-stated. Emphasis was placed on the urgent need for technical re-organisation and new technical surveys of each pit and that reorganisation should be part funded by a direct grant from central Government. The report also argued that to meet domestic and export demand in conditions of full employment, output per manshift would need to increase 25% in the short term and that pit production committees should be strengthened. The report also stressed the importance of maximum efficiency, interpreted as more and cheaper coal, improvement of wages and conditions, planned production and distribution, and revenue to cover costs and charges.

⁸ MLH. LPA, GS/Fuel/16i, Jt. Ctee: Nat Coalmining Industry 4/1, 14th June 1945.

⁹ MLH. LPA, GS/Fuel/19i, Jt. Ctee: Nat Coalmining Industry 7/1, 30th August 1945.

The report expanded on the previous version and in its emphasis on efficiency and re-organisation reflected the pragmatic justification of nationalisation for largely economic rather than social, or socialist reasons. This report was not a detailed legislative plan but it does contradict Shinwell's view that 'There was far too little detailed preparation in the formulation of schemes of nationalisation, and in consequence we found ourselves with legislation that had to be completed without the necessary blueprints'.¹⁰ Although with hindsight there perhaps should have been more detailed preparation, Shinwell's comment suggests that he did not see the committee's work as a significant contribution to the task in hand. This seems to have been born out, for in spite of the timely production of the report the committee was not incorporated into consultation with the new Government and its work ceased. Shortly after Shinwell took up office he did invite the TUC to form a small advisory committee, the Fuel and Power Advisory Committee, in October 1945. William Lawther was again chair, but unlike the previous party joint committee there was no other NUM representation.¹¹ The Fuel and Power Advisory Committee did not meet Shinwell until 4 January 1946, nor did they meet independently before this date.¹² This also suggests that the TUC advisory committee was unwilling to take the initiative or responsibility in relation to fuel and power policy. After all, when the first meeting took place a draft Coal Nationalisation Bill had already been

¹⁰ Cairncross, A. *Years of Recovery*, Methuen, London, 1985, p 464.

¹¹ The advisory committee consisted of seven TUC General Council members: Bussey, Chester, Deakin, Dukes, Evans, Gallie and Lawther.

¹² Modern Records Centre (MRC). MSS 292/603.7/1, Fuel and Power Advisory Committee, meeting 1/1 4 January 1946.

produced. It could be argued that in establishing this committee Shinwell had taken the initiative in continuing the pattern of consultation into the post-war Government. But the fact that there was no discussion about what form this consultation should take, and that the new committee was emaciated compared to its recent predecessor all suggest that it would be premature to talk of an uninterrupted transition from war-time patterns of consultation.

The advisory committee was in general agreement with the draft Bill but raised three issues of concern for discussion with the Minister.¹³ The first was the lack of statutory appointment of workers representatives to the Board, which was in accordance with Labour Party and NUM policy and the TUC's *Interim Report on Post-War Reconstruction*.¹⁴ The second point was the absence of provision for consultative machinery. The committee understood that the Minister did not want to specify the form of consultation but nevertheless they wanted assurances that it was his intention to establish such machinery. They also pointed out that this had been a recommendation of the Joint Committee *Report on the Public Ownership of the Coal Industry*. The final issue for the TUC advisory committee was the absence of provisions for compensation to displaced workpeople. The committee wanted a clause at least as favourable as that in the 1933 London Passenger Transport Act.

¹³ MRC. MSS 292/603.7/1, Fuel and Power Advisory Committee, meeting 1/1 4 January 1946.

¹⁴ TUC, *Interim Report on Post-War Reconstruction*, 1944.

Although minutes do not tend to convey much emotion, it was clear that the TUC were not entirely content with the outcome of the meeting. The Fuel and Power Advisory Committee received only verbal assurances from Shinwell and the lack of statutory provisions concerned the General Council.¹⁵ When the General Council discussed the Fuel and Power Advisory Committee on 23 January the concern over the lack of statutory provisions in the Coal Bill was raised. In particular, the absence of statutory provision offered no protection against a future change in policy by a different minister, even if the practice was established. Gallie, of the Railway Clerks Association, moved that the committee interview the Minister of Fuel and Power again to express the dissatisfaction of the General Council but the motion was defeated by 16 votes to 4.¹⁶

These three demands all raised the common issue of statutory provision that established the status of workers or their representatives. This was to be a recurring theme in the TUC's relationship with Government. The meeting also raises the question of the adequacy of consultation, both on the Bill and with the TUC generally. Although this aspect was not immediately grasped by the TUC, there was a danger of them being bypassed by the Ministry. This could occur for two reasons. Firstly, the status and influence of the individual unions involved in nationalised industries would be enhanced by nationalisation itself. Secondly, Minister's intention to have a 'hands off' managerial approach would leave many issues to be

¹⁵ MRC. MSS 292/20/30, TUC General Council Minutes, 1945 - 46, 23 January 1946 pp 35 - 36 and 17 April 1946 pp 157 - 158.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp 35 - 36.

resolved in the industries themselves. These factors meant that the decisions the TUC was lobbying for could be left to the management and unions concerned. If the TUC was to retain its position as the representative organisation of labour it had a narrow window of opportunity in which to act. This was emphasised by the fact that the NUM had its own delegation to meet the Minister a short time later.

When the NUM met Shinwell ten days later they fared little better than their TUC counterparts had. On the 14 January a ten-man NUM delegation met Shinwell and covered similar ground to the earlier TUC Advisory Committee meeting. The NUM had submitted 9 points in advance to which Shinwell responded at the meeting. Again, all Shinwell was prepared to offer were verbal reassurances. However, unlike the TUC the NUM were more willing to accept these assurances. In June 1945 as part of the joint coalmining nationalisation committee it was the NUM and the Labour Party who did not wish to impose a statutory obligation on the Minister regarding the appointment of workers representatives to the Boards. This was in spite of the fact that statutory provision for workers representatives was then part of Labour Party and TUC policy. Although the NUM received no more guarantees than the TUC they did not to press the matter.

That the NUM were more satisfied than the TUC to the same response from Shinwell was perhaps a reflection of different objectives. It seems unlikely that either the NUM or TUC actually doubted Shinwell's word, but that the NUM had more limited objectives. So long as their objectives for the coal industry were met, the NUM would be satisfied, even if they had to negotiate with the NCB on details. The TUC,

on the other hand, represented interests from a number of industries that were to be nationalised. If statutory provisions were not established in the coal industry this could set precedents which would ultimately undermine their authority. If each nationalised industry was left to work out its own arrangements, particularly for workers representation, under a general ministerial assurance, then TUC's influence on issues that affected industry in general would be limited.

Shinwell's non-committal attitude and less than enthusiastic approach to consultation would also suggest he did not accord relations with trade unions a high priority.

However, the Labour Government was pledged to govern in the 'national interest' and was sensitive to allegations of undue favouritism towards the trade unions.

Statutory provisions concerning workers representation on Boards, joint consultation and compensation could easily be interpreted as just such favouritism. Shinwell may also have felt that the TUC and NUM had already made a major contribution via the party's joint committee on coal nationalisation and further extensive consultation was not required.

By the time the Coal Industry Nationalisation Bill received its second reading at the end of January it included provision for establishing joint consultative machinery, but there was still no provision for union representation on Boards or for workers' compensation. Furthermore, the type of consultative machinery to be established was to be left to negotiations between the NUM and NCB. In this, as in so many respects, coal nationalisation set the pattern for future nationalisation. As Chester notes, in mid 1946 the transport unions were involved in the same issues of

consultation and compensation. Again, in spite of the existence of the TUC Transport Consultative Committee no automatic right to consultation was ceded to them or the transport unions. For example, on the clause compelling the establishment of Joint Consultative Committees in the Civil Aviation Bill the unions were not consulted.¹⁷

These events were to spur the TUC into further action. On 7 March the TUC sent a deputation to meet the Prime Minister to raise their concerns over the lack of consultation and their demands for statutory provisions.¹⁸ Shinwell had already told the TUC that their claims for workmen's compensation other than for dismissal was included in the wide powers of clause 35 in the Coal Nationalisation Bill and that specific regulations were a matter for negotiation between the unions and NCB. However, Attlee did not reply to the TUC until 16 June and supported the stance taken by Shinwell. By this time any amendments would also have delayed the Coal Nationalisation Bill. This rebuff strengthened the TUC's resolve. When the General Council discussed the provision for consultation in the Civil Aviation Bill the opinion was expressed that 'the time had arrived when the General Council should discuss their relationship with the Government as employers, rather than seek protection of their interests by some form of legislation.'¹⁹

¹⁷ Chester, D. N, *The Nationalisation of British Industry 1945 - 52*, HMSO, London, 1975 pp 80 - 81.

¹⁸ MRC. MSS 292/20/30, TUC GC Minutes 1945 - 46, 10 March 1946, p 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 3 July 1946 pp 87 - 88.

By this stage the NUM seemed to be reasonably satisfied with their position. They did not need the TUC to gain access to Shinwell and the Coal Industry Nationalisation Bill provided them with consultation at all levels of the NCB. Even though Shinwell's lack of commitment on issues such as workmen's compensation was not ideal from their point of view, they knew these were issues they could take up with the NCB. The TUC on the other hand could not do this, and if it was to retain its position of representing the interests of all workers had to find some way of securing influence over nationalisation policy. The TUC wrote to the Prime Minister in June protesting again at the lack of consultation. Attlee apologised and appeared to concede to the TUC when he said that in any future extension of nationalisation policy the TUC and the unions concerned would be consulted about any clause affecting industrial relationships. However, it soon became apparent that what the TUC considered were industrial relationship issues which warranted its consultation were different from the Government's.

On the 11 July Shinwell had promised to consider the question of consulting the TUC Fuel and Power Advisory Committee on workmen's compensation regulations. He replied at the end of the month that he supported the Prime Minister's view expressed in June that these were matters for consultation with the unions concerned and the NCB, not the TUC. The key feature in Shinwell's response was that he considered the issue of workmen's compensation to be one of regulation, not legislation. Until the TUC could make a convincing case to the contrary, they seemed destined to be left on the sidelines.

The TUC General Council tried again to persuade the Prime Minister and other Ministers in the winter of 1946. They protested again to Attlee in October and met with him and other Ministers in November without the Government altering its position. For example when the TUC met the Prime Minister in October they said that 'in regard to the Rationing and Prices Committee and all other consultative committees, the General Council were anxious to afford to the Government the fullest possible assistance, but it should be understood that there must be complete reciprocity in that respect.'²⁰ By January 1947 the TUC's tone was less cordial. They stated that they could have influence over regulations anyway because unions could consult the TUC, therefore there would be better relations with the Government if they recognised this fact by consulting with the TUC. On this issue the Government conceded and agreed to consult with the TUC where regulations were likely to have repercussions beyond the particular industry in question.

Having belatedly realised that they would have to be more pro-active in securing the right to be consulted, at least on issues that affected industry in general, the TUC were left with a compromise solution. There was no joint committee covering all nationalised industries or even nationalised industries in one sector. By taking a reactive position the TUC were in no position to establish ground rules, negotiate terms of reference or establish remits. It was not clear by whom or how consultation would be initiated or who would decide whether a regulation had implications beyond the industry concerned. Indeed, the TUC's concern about having its right to

²⁰ *Ibid*, p 138.

consultation recognised seemed to preclude consideration of whether the form of consultation would allow them to actually influence the policy and regulations of nationalised industries in a meaningful way.

Nationalisation was always going to enhance the role of individual unions in important aspects of industrial policy but the TUC seemed slow to grasp this fact. This was not helped by Ministers unwillingness to openly confront the situation. In the end the TUC seemed willing to accept a solution that gave them the appearance of greater influence than they were actually able or prepared to exercise. As the rest of this chapter reveals, in practice the TUC was rarely involved in consultations with Government about regulations in nationalised industries. Although the TUC consulted unions about a number of issues in nationalised industries, particularly workers participation, they rarely acted on this information by initiating discussions with the Government. Above all their enquiries and reports about nationalised industries informed their thinking towards future nationalisation programmes proposed by the Labour Party, but were unwilling to become involved in its development or committed to the outcomes.

III

The TUC and Future Nationalisation Policy

In 1947 the Labour Party began to consider the scope and nature of any future nationalisation programme for forthcoming elections. As early as January the party

produced a broad discussion document, 'Public Ownership: the Next Step' for the Party's Policy Committee meeting on 20 January.²¹ It outlined three background propositions for future nationalisation and five criteria that should be applied to each industry. The document did not recommend specific industries for nationalisation or their form. However, 'Public Ownership: the Next Step' recognised that future public ownership could take the form of public Boards or mixed public/private enterprise and not solely public corporations. This mixed approach was thought necessary because the advantages of nationalisation could only be judged in relation to the efficiency of public control. This 'efficiency test' was based on five criteria; did it put necessary power in the hands of the people, did it secure greater industrial efficiency, did it help maintain full employment, did it ensure observance of priorities of need and does it promote industrial democracy. In these five tests the trend within the Labour Party to see nationalisation, as a rational, efficient solution to certain industrial problems was to the fore. Although the power test would appear more social, the presumption for the transfer to public ownership was that of monopoly or inefficiency. Both industrial efficiency and full employment were also fundamentally economic arguments. Only the priority of needs test was clearly social, and the industrial democracy test the only one that had a clear tinge of socialism about it.

Considering that these five criteria were the basis of the Party's future nationalisation policy the TUC did not appear to accord them much significance. In contrast the

²¹ MLH. LPA, Research Series 1947, Labour Party Research Department, RD 38 'Public Ownership: Footnotes continued on following page.

TUC treated the document for information rather than discussion.²² By failing to engage in the discussions over future policy at this stage the General Council were limiting their room for manoeuvre. As the previous chapter demonstrated the trade union movement had a different view as to the purpose of nationalisation to the Labour Party. Their greater emphasis on the more personalised, social and qualitative aspects of nationalisation contrasted with the Labour Party's more abstract, economic and quantitative view. Now that the Labour Party was setting out a more pragmatic and efficiency orientated approach the TUC were not engaged in the debate. Instead, the TUC concentrated on the present rather than future nationalised industries. As has been noted above, the TUC expended much of their energies in 1946 and 1947 in trying to establish their right to consultation over clauses in the coal, electricity and transport Bills.²³ Furthermore, resolutions from the 1947 Congress at Southport were remitted to the General Council for them to consider the structure and conduct of nationalised industries. There was particular reference to the appointment of trade unionists, workers participation in management and educational opportunities. Accordingly the Economic Committee produced a report in August 1948 'Structure and Conduct of Nationalised Industries' that reaffirmed their previous policy outlined in the *Interim Report on Post-War Reconstruction* of 1944.²⁴ Although the TUC surveyed the legislative provision for other industries this report was partly based on information supplied by the NUM. In November 1947 the NUM had begun an investigation of the NCB, although only five

The Next Step', January 1947.

²² MRC. MSS 292/574/1, [TUC Nationalisation 1926 – 48] 'Public Ownership: The Next Step' (RD 38) Labour Party Research Department, January 1947.

²³ TUC Annual Congress Reports, 1946 & 1947, Transport House, London.

areas (out of 48) had replied to the NUM's questionnaire, the results were made available to the TUC and were summarised in their report. In a six and one quarter page report a page was devoted to the NUM's survey. This survey revealed that some NUM areas felt that some NCB Areas were too small and over-staffed. One might have expected the NUM to be critical of union employer relations but areas reported that consultation was working satisfactorily, but relations from the Divisional Coal Boards down to the pit were defective.²⁵ This they alleged was due to the power of pit a manager being reduced and labour officers being subordinated to production departments.

The general impression of the NUM's survey that arrangements in the nationalised industries were satisfactory but that certain practices could be improved was reflected in the TUC's report. The TUC expressed themselves generally satisfied with the legislative provisions passed so far for trade union participation. The only area where the TUC General Council expressed dissatisfaction and acted upon it was where their interests were concerned. Again, this was over appointments to the Boards of nationalised industries. Here the TUC felt that part-time trade union appointments should not be merely 'labour advisers', that there had not been enough consultation with the trade union movement over certain appointments and that dissatisfaction had been expressed at some non-trade union appointments.²⁶ There was also some concern expressed about the adequacy of consumer representation,

²⁴ MRC. MSS 292/574.9/2, Economic Committee 10/1, 11 August 1948, p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 4 - 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

but it was hoped that the consumer councils would play an important part in exercising vigilance on behalf of consumers.²⁷

These deliberations by the TUC and Labour Party suggest that the TUC were concerned with the problems of the recently nationalised industries, whilst the Labour Party were more concerned with future plans. In part this reflected the fact that it was the Labour Government, rather than Party, who had responsibility for current nationalisation, even though the distinction in personnel was not always apparent.²⁸

What distinguished the TUC from the Labour Party was the way in which opinions on current nationalised industry influenced considerations of future policy. A month after the TUC produced its *status quo* 'Structure and Conduct of Nationalised Industries' report the Labour Party set up a sub-committee on Industries for Nationalisation, composed of Morrison (chair), Bevan, Dalton, Foot, Griffiths, Knight, Laski, Shinwell, Phillips, Young and later Jay.²⁹ The creation of this sub-committee, and the high status of the members, indicated the Labour Party's desire to push ahead with a policy for future nationalisation. In this respect the composition of this committee was also significant. Bevan, Shinwell, Laski and Foot were to the left

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ In particular serving Labour ministers and MPs were heavily involved in Party policy.

of the party whilst Morrison, Dalton, Griffiths and Phillips were of the centre and right. One might assume that these different political persuasions would represent the dividing line on nationalisation policy. Those on the left arguing for greater and more 'socialist' nationalisation against the more cautious and pragmatic right, who were inevitably supported by the dependable TUC General Council.

Martin Francis has, amongst others, recognised that union pressure frequently restricted the options of Labour's socialist policy makers.³⁰ He also suggests that Labour's lack of enthusiasm for extending public ownership was also a reflection of policy-makers ideological problem in agreeing what the purpose of nationalisation was. Minkin has interpreted the period between 1948 and the late 1950's as time when the 'rules' that governed the relationship between unions and the party were most settled, the key being trade unions' defensive mode; defence of free collective bargaining, consultation, the post-war settlement, the party, the TUC and democracy.³¹ However, Minkin also identifies threats to the relationship between the party in union. In particular he identifies Labour's policy of wage restraint in 1948 as contradicting the union's sacrosanct right to free collective bargaining.³² Although this clash between planning and voluntarism produced a split between left and right

²⁹ Herbert Morrison was Lord President of the Council, Aneurin Bevan Minister of Health, Hugh Dalton Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foot and Griffiths were members of the NEC, Harold Laski was a member of the NEC and a leading intellectual of Labour's left, Shinwell Minister of Fuel and Power, Morgan Phillips Party Secretary, Michael Young Secretary of the Party's Research Dept and Douglas Jay Economic Secretary to the Treasury.

³⁰ Francis, M. *Ideas and policies under Labour, 1945 - 51*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, pp 7 - 8.

³¹ Minkin, L. *The Contentious Alliance*, Edinburgh University Press, 1992, p77.

³² *Ibid*, p 80.

in trade unions, if anything it strengthened the trade union right in its support of party and government. Therefore, Minkin concludes that in general during the 1950s the consensual outlook of party and unions was maintained, based on the post-war achievements of the movement, corporate consultation and Communism as the common enemy.³³ However, the analysis below suggests that the relationship between the party and unions may not have been as settled as Minkin suggests. Certainly the TUC was in defensive mode, but over nationalisation policy at least, this defence undermined and limited the party's agenda more than support it. In this the TUC frustrated even the right within the party and hence left/right differences appear less important than union/party ones.

At first the different approaches of the two organisations was not immediately apparent. A joint TUC and Labour Party meeting to discuss the administration of nationalised industries in December 1948 did not reveal many differences of opinion.³⁴ This was perhaps because the meeting outlined the points the Labour Party were considering, rather than any detailed discussion. For the Labour Party Herbert Morrison made the largest contribution and covered topics such as a Department or Board to run nationalised industries, the extent of decentralisation and co-ordination, introduction of efficiency units, the composition of the Boards, workers participation and financial policy.³⁵ Both sides agreed that the issue of decentralisation raised difficult problems in industries such as coal where extensive

³³ *Ibid*, p 90.

³⁴ MRC. MSS 292/574/2, [TUC Nationalisation 1948 – 50] Meeting between the TUC Economic Committee and Labour Party NEC Sub-Committee in Economic Committee 2/2, 8 December 1948.

initial technical reorganisation was required.³⁶ For the TUC Sir George Chester said that the TUC's consideration was not finalised and therefore there should be further meetings to produce a report for the 1949 Conference and Congress.³⁷ The only other comment the TUC had to make was their frequent complaint about the mechanism of consultation. In this case that unions outside of a particular industry were sometimes approached without consulting the unions directly concerned and this caused resentment.³⁸

Just as the Labour Government were one step ahead of the TUC over consultation and regulations in existing nationalisation policy, so the Labour Party were ahead regarding future policy. Prior to the 8 December meeting with the TUC the Labour Party had already crossed the motor industry, oil distribution, aircraft and the United Africa Co. from their list of potential nationalisation candidates. Arriving late for the party did not help the TUC in engaging in a constructive debate, the terms on which future policy would be determined had already been established by the Labour Party in January 1947. But between the December meeting and the TUC's response in February further meetings highlighted the extent of the differences between the Labour Party and the TUC on future nationalisation.³⁹

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp 1-2.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 2.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 3.

Even before the next round of meetings the TUC Economic Committee had made it clear that it would only invite appropriate unions on the condition that it did not commit the TUC or the trade unions involved to any particular policy. The meetings on 10, 12, 14, 18 and 19 January discussed the trade unions' attitude towards the Labour Party's proposals to nationalise water, sugar refining and processing, chemicals, commercial insurance and shipbuilding.⁴⁰ The Labour Party's proposals were discussed and individual unions invited to submit their observations. As the 1947 report *Public Ownership: The Next Step* had suggested, the Labour Party advocated the nationalisation of each industry in terms of specific advantages connected with that industry, for example curbing private monopoly, rather than as means of advancing the party's 'socialist' programme.⁴¹ The unions consulted were broadly in favour of the principle of nationalisation for water and sugar but divided over chemicals and commercial insurance. As for shipbuilding the Confederation of Shipbuilding Engineering Unions were in favour in principle, but the majority of constituent unions did not think it was possible to nationalise shipbuilding without nationalising marine engineering and shipping. This raised complex organisational problems to which they did not have an answer.⁴²

³⁹ MRC. MSS 292/574/2. For the summary of five meetings with the Labour Party on specific industries see Economic Committee 4/1, 25 January 1949. The Relevant Labour Party Research Department Papers are RD 241, RD 242, RD 244, RD 247 and RD 248 respectively.

⁴⁰ The unions consulted were: Water supply – NUAW, NUGMW, NUPE, T & GWU. Sugar Refining and Processing – NUAW, NUGMW, T & GWU. Chemical Industry – AEU, CWU, NFBTO, NUGMW, T & GWU, USDAW. Commercial Insurance – GIO, NAULAW, NFIW, NUCISE, USDAW (CISA Branch), Shipbuilding – CSEU.

⁴¹ MRC. MSS 292/574/2, TUC Economic Committee 4/1, 25 January 1949, pp. 1 - 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*

One revealing feature of these meetings was that the unions consulted considered the case for nationalisation in even more narrow and pragmatic terms than the Labour Party. Although by the 1945 Election nationalisation was being advocated on a more pragmatic basis by both the Labour Party and TUC, the continued discussion of nationalisation in these terms is in contrast to the grand ideological approach that characterised much of the inter-war formation of nationalisation policy. Both the trade unions and Labour Party may still hold strong ideological visions for Britain, but it was far less certain what part nationalisation could or should play in this.

Over the sugar refining industry unions expressed the view that costs were unlikely to be reduced by nationalisation and in chemicals that ICI was already highly efficient. Discussions concerning other industries were even more detailed. For instance, in discussions on the water industry the points considered were whether local authorities could retain control and how the costs of piping water to rural areas should be spread. In commercial insurance the concern was over redundancy and compensation payments. The trade unions case by case approach was also revealed by the general unions with members in more than one industry. For example the National Union of General and Municipal Workers were broadly supportive of the proposals for water and sugar nationalisation, but disapproving of those for chemicals. Whilst the Transport and General Workers Union were supportive of water nationalisation but against sugar refining. This approach may also suggest that the trade unions were cherry picking, simply selecting those industries where their members would gain most advantage from nationalisation. Workers in the water industry probably would benefit from nationalisation more than those in ICI, or at

least have less to lose, but this would be an overly cynical interpretation. For example, there was no desire for nationalisation in a particular industry simply to enhance the status of workers through joint consultation. Union leaders primary concern did seem to be what benefits nationalisation could bring to their industry and the economy as a whole.

It has usually been argued that the TUC's attitude during this period was due to changes in personnel on the General Council. A number of commentators have emphasised the impact that changes on the General Council had on the TUC's outlook. Lewis Minkin has argued that the dominant trade union leaders of the late 1940s had a restrictive set of priorities, were defensive and non-initiating on policy issues.⁴³ Clegg has also argued that the political importance of the trade union movement declined in the post-war years⁴⁴. Clegg attributes part of this 'decline' in influence to personnel changes. Bevin's appointment to the Foreign Office in 1945 did deprive the TUC of a valuable ally at the Ministry of Labour, although he was replaced by the equally union friendly George Isaacs, who was himself briefed by Bevin on many labour issues. In 1946 Walter Citrine resigned as General Secretary to join the National Coal Board and Clegg does not consider his replacement, Vincent Tewson, to be of the same calibre, a view shared by Pelling.⁴⁵ Whilst this might explain the lack of initiative, it does not explain the General Council's lack of

⁴³ Minkin, L. *The contentious alliance: trade unions and the Labour Party*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991, pp 83 - 84.

⁴⁴ Martin R. M. *TUC. The growth of a pressure group*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, p 318.

enthusiasm for the Party's proposals. A possible explanation is that the trade unions had had a more chastening experience of existing nationalisation than the Labour Party. The TUC's earlier investigation into the structure and conduct of nationalised industries had not revealed any widespread or vocal discontent, but neither had it yet transformed the social relations within the industries that unions had expected. By 1949 the TUC's 'wait and see' verdict was fundamentally unchanged. Therefore, whilst the Labour Party adopted a policy of learning from the experience to consider new forms and methods of nationalisation, the TUC's inclination remained one of not extending the process unless it could be sure that problems would not be repeated. The TUC maintained its commitment to the principle of nationalisation, but in practice the underwhelming support of unions in each industry meant they saw few opportunities for extending this principle.

At a special meeting on 25 January the TUC Economic Committee wanted the General Council's opinion so their representatives could be briefed for the Labour Party Policy Committee.⁴⁶ It was at this stage some of the tensions inherent in the different approaches of the TUC and Labour Party were expressed by General Council members. For example Baty stated that 'it should not be concluded that there was entire satisfaction in the industries that were already nationalised'.⁴⁷ However, Openshaw replied that 'the General Council should not commit themselves

⁴⁵ Pelling, H. *A History of British trade unionism*, Macmillan, London, 1976, p 214. Paynter, W. *British trade unions and the problems of change*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1970, p 84. Martin R. M. *TUC. The growth of a pressure group*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980, p 338.

⁴⁶ MRC. MSS 292/20/33, [TUC GC Minutes 1948 – 49] 26 January 1949.

to a lesser degree of nationalisation than that which the [Labour] Party would put before its own Conference'.⁴⁸ Later on the 25th the Economic Committee adopted the General Council's cautious approach, commenting on the Labour Party's nationalisation programme that

[O]n the whole the Committee thought that basic services e.g. water supply, might appropriately be brought within such a programme. On the other hand, the Committee had reservations about proceeding at the present stage with plans for the nationalisation of industries and services of a less routine and more competitive character; policy for such industries required maturer consideration and should be allowed to evolve in step with demonstration of the success of those industries already nationalised.⁴⁹

In spite of these reservations the General Council minutes reveal that the Economic Committee accepted the principle of limited discussions with the Labour Party, but were not averse to a widening the scope of discussion by increasing the number of trade unionists involved.⁵⁰

A fuller explanation for the TUC's on-going caution emerges in relation to the practical problems individual unions reported in industries such as coal. The TUC Economic Committee aired some of these at a meeting with the Labour Party on 9 February 1949. It was at this meeting that the TUC responded to the Labour Party's

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p 46. Baty was a representative of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p 47. Openshaw was from the Amalgamated Engineering Union

⁴⁹ MRC. MSS 292/574/2. Economic Committee 4 (Special), 25 January 1949, p 2.

report on the *Administration of Nationalised Industries*.⁵¹ Although this meeting did not discuss future nationalisation policy there still emerged some differences of opinion between the Labour Party and TUC. On decentralisation and co-ordination the TUC expressed some apprehension that too much decentralisation might lead to undesirable competition between local units, which would put pressure on working conditions. This was a thinly veiled reference to the coal industry, where the NUM feared that decentralisation would lead to the reintroduction of district bargaining, weakening national pay negotiations. The TUC recognised that there was an appropriate degree of decentralisation for each nationalised industry but that no general rule could be laid down.⁵² The TUC also agreed with Bevan on the need for an efficiency unit, suggesting both internal and external operations.⁵³

On the composition of Boards there was a greater degree of difference. This had been an ongoing bone of contention and the TUC said that 'it was becoming a matter of increasing concern to the Trade Union Movement that a belief in the policy of nationalisation should be recognised as a pre-requisite of efficient and enthusiastic service'. For the Labour Party Herbert Morrison responded that there were not enough suitable people with a thoroughgoing socialist view and Hugh Gaitskell said it was not necessarily wrong to appoint people who had opposed nationalisation

⁵⁰ MRC. MSS 292/20/33. [TUC GC Minutes 1948 – 49] 26 January 1949, p 44.

⁵¹ MRC. MSS 292/574/2. Economic Committee 5/4, 9 February 1949, pp 1–2.

⁵² *Ibid*, p 2.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

policy because in some cases these people were secretly in favour.⁵⁴ On the issue of part-time appointments to Boards of nationalised industries the TUC were still firmly opposed on the grounds that such appointments would create a conflict of interest and dual responsibility.⁵⁵ Although these questions were not discussed in relation to future nationalisation policy, these differences of opinion did not bode well for such discussions.

The TUC's and Labour Party's attitude towards future nationalisation was further revealed in discussions between the TUC and Labour Party in February and March 1949. During these meetings they discussed a series of specific industries; flour milling, meat processing and wholesaling and cement.⁵⁶ Like the discussions in January on water, sugar, chemicals, insurance and shipbuilding the overwhelming impression was one of the TUC's unwillingness to engage in detailed debate, let alone commit to a particular policy, and the uncertainty of the unions involved in particular industries about the wisdom of nationalisation. This was most marked regarding cement, where the unions involved expressed a variety of concerns. These covered the burden of compensation, the knock on effect on brick-making and

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 2 – 3. Gaitskell may have been thinking of Sir Charles Reid, former Production Director of the National Coal Board and private colliery director. In the Reid report he had recommended publicly supervised reconstruction of the coal industry, but carried out by the private owners. However, since nationalisation he stated that he had come round to the idea that public ownership was the only feasible way of reconstructing the industry. He resigned from the NCB in May 1948 and since then had made a series of public criticisms of the NCB's conduct.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ MRC. MSS 292/574/2, Economic Committee, 8 February 1949 Flour Milling (LPA, Research Series 1948 – 49, Labour Party Research Department, RD 257), 9 February 1949 Meat Processing and Wholesaling (LPA, Research Series 1948 – 49, Labour Party Research Department, RD 261), 22 March 1949 Cement Industry (LPA, Research Series 1948 – 49, Labour Party Research Department, RD 285).

ancillary trades, the large proportion of profits earned from overseas operations and although they accepted the price was fixed they claimed it had not risen as sharply as other building materials.⁵⁷ Concerns were also being voiced closer to home. James Bowman of the NUM told his fellow General Council members that

It was not possible for the NUM to obtain details of the workings of the various collieries and the industry was rapidly drifting into two sections - the National Union of Mineworkers merely representing the day-to-day interests of the miners in relation to working conditions and wages and playing a less important part as a Trade Union in a nationalised industry.⁵⁸

In other words, the unions in both the existing nationalised industries and those proposed for nationalisation, upon which the TUC based its approach to Labour Party policy, were again divided or uncertain over the benefits of nationalisation. On future nationalisation there was no convergence of the Labour Party's expansionist view and the TUC's cautious approach.

The TUC's circumspection was borne out in June 1949 when the TUC were able to produce a summary of replies to a TUC questionnaire on the Structure and Conduct of Nationalised Industries.⁵⁹ The 27 unions surveyed were all involved in nationalised industries and the results grouped according to each industry; transport, electricity supply, civil aviation, coal, national health service, Bank of England,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 March 1949 Cement Industry.

⁵⁸ MRC. MSS 292/20/33, TUC GC Minutes, 23 February 1949, p 56.

Cable and Wireless, Post Office and building workers in nationalised industries were also included. The questionnaire concentrated on joint consultation, training and education and promotion and advancement. It is clear from the statements made that on the whole unions felt that any difficulties could be settled within the existing or proposed arrangements within their industry. However, it was equally clear that to overcome these difficulties within existing arrangements, a greater appreciation of the contribution workers could make to success was required by management. That this had not yet happened indicated that greater time was needed before any categorical statements about the success of nationalisation could be made. Considering that the NUM had the longest experience of nationalisation it was surprising that it received the least attention in the TUC's report. The NUM's response was restricted to a five line summary of a general nature.⁶⁰ This may be because the TUC already had a good idea of the NUM's attitude and wanted to concentrate on more recent nationalisations, however, as many of these were still developing their policies for joint consultation, training and education and promotion, they could give few concrete answers. As a result it was still the NUM who gave the clearest warning that dissatisfaction with joint consultation remained and that the goodwill built up since Vesting Date was being replaced by cynicism.⁶¹

⁵⁹ MRC. MSS 292/574.9/3, Economic Committee 'Structure and Conduct of Nationalised Industries – Summary of Replies Received to Statement and Questionnaire' 28 June 1949.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, and the NUM's full submission 'Interim Report Presented by the National Union of Mineworkers' undated in MRC. MSS 292/574.8/3, Economic Committee 1949.

The intervention of the General Election in February 1950 meant there was little further activity regarding nationalisation policy until May when the Economic Committee returned to considering the public control of industry. In their review of public control of industry the Economic Committee decided to pay more attention to the objectives of public ownership, for example prices, service and full employment. There should also be more emphasis on making a success of existing nationalised industries.⁶² Again the Economic Committee 'felt very strongly that the Government should make a success of existing nationalised industries before embarking upon further nationalisation', a view not contested by the General Council.⁶³ This more explicit caution may well have been due to Labour's significantly reduced majority and a desire by the TUC to see existing gains consolidated. A month later in their second review of public control of industry the Economic Committee felt that consideration should also be given to a Board of Control, similar to the former Iron and Steel Board as an alternative to Development Councils.⁶⁴ In suggesting this line of enquiry the TUC were moving further away from the alternative forms of public ownership being considered by the Labour Party, indeed this was not a form of ownership at all.

On the 7 July the Economic Committee considered points for discussion with the Labour Party Policy Sub-Committee on Nationalisation. They had already requested the General Council's advice concerning the Labour Party's next General Election

⁶² MRC. MSS 292/574/2, Economic Committee 7/1, 10 May 1950.

⁶³ MRC. MSS 292/20/34, TUC GC Minutes 1949 – 50, 24 May 1950, p 69.

⁶⁴ MRC. MSS 292/574/2, Economic Committee 8/2, 21 June 1950.

policy. The General Council hoped that 'the form of consultation between the three wings of the Movement would be closer than at the preceding election'.⁶⁵ This may have reflected the TUC's greater willingness to participate in policy formation with the Labour Party, but it was they, not the Labour Party who had been guilty of dragging their heels. For the TUC there was two clear lines of thought on nationalisation policy, either the extension of nationalisation or making a success of those industries already nationalised. The TUC considered these policies as alternative, not complementary, and tended towards the latter, with the possible exception of certain competitive public ownership ventures.⁶⁶ For its part the Economic Committee decided to raise three points. First, to concentrate on existing nationalised industries with the possible exception of water and competitive public ownership. Secondly, the use of Development Councils and other alternative forms of public control, particularly the suggestion of a statutory Board because of current industrial resistance to Development Councils. If these were not made compulsory the committee feared that they might be ineffective. Thirdly, that policy should pay more attention to wholesale and retail distribution and recent Labour Party proposals in this sector were very sketchy.⁶⁷

All these elements of TUC policy were expressed in a July 1950 report 'The Public Control of Industry', produced by the Economic Committee.⁶⁸ This statement

⁶⁵ MRC. MSS 292/20/34, TUC GC Minutes 1949 – 50, 28 June 1950, p 77.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ MRC. MSS 292/574/2, Economic Committee 8/2, 7 July 1950.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Economic Committee 9/1, 'The Public Control of Industry', 12 July 1950.

developed the views expressed in 1949. In terms of the purposes of public ownership the TUC's position showed the familiar mix of economic and social objectives. The report listed six objectives, the best possible service at the least real cost, improving standards of wages and conditions for work people in the industry, a more equitable standard of living, increased public control over the economic system, the maintenance of full and stable employment and increased industrial democracy.⁶⁹ In evaluating the success of public ownership the TUC recognised that it had to be judged on the above criteria and financial terms. Although the TUC retained its opinion that many of the results could not yet be assessed they decided 'firmly that there should be no further major nationalisation measures at the present time and until the success of the present schemes has been demonstrated.'⁷⁰ Although the TUC had been reluctant to commit to any further nationalisation measures, this is the first time they categorically stated this view.

In other aspects the document also represent an evolution of the TUC's thinking on nationalisation:

Before deciding on future policy it would be necessary to consider not only whether forms of public control other than nationalisation will achieve the same objectives...but also whether there might not be advantages to be gained from other variants of public or collective ownership, such as competitive public ownership and co-operation.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p 2-3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p 12.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p 6.

The TUC went on to state that it did not generally believe that controls such as those on raw materials, utility schemes or price controls had been particularly effective and that their future effectiveness was diminishing – ‘An ordered relaxation may therefore be all that is possible’.⁷² Neither were the TUC impressed with the influence of the Monopolies Commission or Development Councils.⁷³ As for fiscal policy generally and direct control of investment the TUC felt that whilst these worked up to a point they would not be adequate measures by themselves.⁷⁴ The TUC considered that a number of forms of public control were more appropriate alternatives to nationalisation. They suggested extending co-operative production, Development Councils, public control boards and competitive public ownership. Above all of these *Public Control of Industry* concluded that:

In all the circumstances it may be that in important cases a more practical means of public control, alternative to both public ownership and Development Councils, would be the statutory Board of Control, on the line of the former Iron and Steel Board but with certain additional powers.⁷⁵

Therefore, by mid 1950 the TUC had consolidated practical objections to nationalising specific industries, into a general objection to further nationalisations, and had considered a range of alternatives. An indication of the distance between the TUC and the Labour Party on nationalisation was that at this time the nationalisation

⁷² *Ibid*, p 8–9.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p 9–10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p 7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p 12.

of iron and steel was taking place but the TUC was suggesting that an enhanced form of the previous form of control, under private ownership, was the preferable option.

When the 'The Public Control of Industry' was presented to the Labour Party for discussion in the Joint Publicity and Policy Committee on the 11 July 1950 the anxiety of the Labour Party NEC was clear. For the TUC Lincoln Evans said that 'they had reached one broad conclusion, viz., that it would be a mistake to include in the future programme any further schemes of public ownership before they had solved some of the problems of the present schemes.'⁷⁶ These problems included the relationship of prices to costs, particularly in the coal and railway industries, joint consultation, education and training needed close attention and the economies of integration had yet to come to fruition. This was the opposite of what the Labour Party was proposing and Bevan felt that if the TUC were to publish 'The Public Control of Industry' it would be a 'source of fundamental embarrassment.'⁷⁷ Sir Vincent Tewson attempted to be conciliatory on behalf of the TUC by suggesting that there was 'considerable agreement, the difference was in the details.'⁷⁸ This statement seems to be rather at odds with the TUC's proposals, and even though the TUC had not rejected the principle of nationalisation outright, they had for the foreseeable future. Both Greenwood and Bevan felt that the TUC's document implied nationalisation had been a failure.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, Report of the meeting between the TUC Economic Committee and the Labour Party Publicity and Policy Sub-Committee on 7 July 1950 in Economic Committee 9/4, 12 July 1950, p 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

The differences between the two sides were not reconciled at the meeting on the 11 July, although they agreed to have further discussions and to inform each other before any statement was made. Nevertheless the purpose of the meetings had clearly changed from forming a joint policy to minimising the potential embarrassment to the Labour Party by the TUC.

In correspondence with the TUC in August 1950 the Labour Party Secretary Morgan Phillips expressed concern that the TUC and Labour Party documents would appear too dissimilar. This was especially so regarding the impression that the TUC was solely concerned with concentrating on improving existing nationalised industries to the exclusion of advancement in new industries.⁸⁰ The problem was that this was exactly what the TUC was concerned with, the only advancement it considered was the water industry. Herbert Morrison suggested adding a reference to the positive help nationalisation gave to improving efficiency in both the public and private sectors and that the consumer interest was also a worker interest. Neither was Morrison happy about the reference to an efficiency audit or the Iron and Steel Board.⁸¹ Tom Driberg felt that the practical as well as the social and ethical benefits of public rather than private ownership should be stressed. He also felt that the TUC's 'lukewarm' attitude about future nationalisation would be outweighed by the

⁸⁰ MRC. MSS 292/574/2, Correspondence between the Labour Party and TUC regarding the General Council's statement on the 'Public Control of Industry'.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p 1. Morrison was keen on an efficiency unit of some kind, not necessarily an audit, but was unable to get the heads of nationalised industries to agree.

benefits.⁸² Whilst all of these comments may have been helpful in reconciling the TUC and Labour Party positions they were essentially trying to paper over the cracks in their approaches.

There does not appear to have been any further correspondence or meetings on the subject after August 1950 and the Labour Party's blushes seem to have been spared because *The Public Control of Industry* was not published. However, neither did the TUC produce a revised version in the light of the Labour Party's comments. The TUC's hope that consultation would be closer was fulfilled but it did not produce any closer agreement. If anything the differences between the two were greater in 1950 than they had been in 1947. Ultimately the Labour Party's defeat in the 1951 General Election overtook events and the two sides did not return to consider nationalisation policy jointly until 1953.

Perhaps because of their experience in 1950 the TUC were reluctant about further collaboration with the Labour Party on nationalisation policy. In December 1952 when the Labour Party first suggested that the General Council appoint representatives to their working parties the TUC were extremely cautious.⁸³ A debate occurred in early January 1953 at a joint meeting between the General Council and National Executive of the Labour Party. Despite the overtures for closer co-operation in nationalisation policy a clear distinction remained. The General

⁸² *Ibid*, p 3.

⁸³ MRC. MSS 292/20/37, [TUC GC Minutes 1952 – 53] 17 December 1952, p 26.

Council wanted private industry brought into the realm of public accountability, for example ICI, whereas the Labour Party was considering nationalising the chemicals giant.⁸⁴

The General Council's concerns were expressed again at a meeting with the Labour Party's NEC in late January. The Labour Party intended to establish four working parties, each to consider the practical implications of nationalising a particular industry, chemicals, engineering and aircraft manufacture, textile machinery and shipbuilding, ship repairing and marine engineering. The Labour Party wanted the benefit of the TUC's practical experience.⁸⁵

Initially one of the General Council's objections was the six week time limit of the working parties, which they felt was too short for an adequate study, and would not allow General Council members time to participate considering their high level of commitments.⁸⁶ However, a more fundamental objection emerged during the discussion, that if General Council members served on the Labour Party's working parties they would be committing the TUC to a particular policy. The TUC wished to maintain their independence regarding policy formation and did not feel it would be appropriate to become involved in the early stages of Labour Party policy without

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, Account of TUC/Labour Party joint meeting, 8 January 1953 in GC Minutes of 28 January 1953. What form 'public accountability' for an industry such as ICI was not made clear, but it would appear that the TUC had in mind a statutory board of control.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 29A – D: 'General Council and NEC meeting 28 January 1953' p 2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p 3.

the authority of Congress.⁸⁷ The Labour Party were not able to allay these fears in spite of their insistence that the working parties were not policy forming bodies and the General Council's participation would not commit the TUC or the NEC to a particular policy. The General Council also feared that if they did not participate they would be by-passed by the Labour Party consulting with unions directly. The Labour Party also feared, more than the TUC, that they would each produce different reports to their conferences.⁸⁸

The TUC's reluctance was understandable because the remit of the working parties was not to consider whether these industries should be nationalised, but what the problems would be in nationalising them. The Labour Party had already made the assumption that the TUC did not object to this. In fact, the affiliated unions concerned with chemicals, shipbuilding and engineering had already expressed doubts about public ownership of these industries, dating back to 1948-9. Furthermore the TUC were also embarking on the process of examining public ownership for their 1953 Congress. For the TUC Lincoln Evans of the Iron and Steel Trades Federation, said that there was no virtue in nationalisation itself and stated three criteria that were even narrower than before to apply to industries; was the industry efficient, were the conditions and standards good, were the prices satisfactory.⁸⁹ These criteria may not have been official TUC policy, but apart from incensing Aneurin Bevan, they elicited no adverse comments from any other

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p 3-4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p 4.

General Council member. The TUC favoured the working parties forming an outline policy that could then be presented to the General Council for comment.

Considering the trouble that this method had caused in 1950 the Labour Party were understandably reluctant to repeat the process.

The shortlisted industries were a continuation of Labour Party policy, but the manner of their promotion reveals the increasing division over nationalisation within the Party at this time. In 1949 and 1950 it was Morrison who had led the discussions and although more revisionist members such as Gaitskell, Jay and Durbin questioned the centrality of public ownership to socialism, they did not dissent from the proposals put forward by the Party.⁹⁰ In 1953 it was Bevan who was the most vocal advocate for the nationalisation of these industries, mainly on the grounds that Britain required new capital formation that private enterprise was not able to provide. He argued that the questions should be why industry should not be nationalised, not the other way round.⁹¹ Bevan also emphasised the need to be able to go to conference and say what new socialist enterprises were going to be set up.⁹² However, other members of the NEC were not in agreement with Bevan's views. Some of these tensions were evident when Edith Summerskill 'deplored Aneurin

⁹⁰ Francis, M. *Ideas and policies under Labour, 1945 - 1951*, MUP, Manchester, 1997, p 91.

⁹¹ MRC. MSS 292/20/37, [TUC GC Minutes 1952 – 53] pp. 29A – D: 'General Council and NEC meeting 28 January 1953', pp 4-5.

⁹² Tension between the Bevanites and the trade union leaders had increased significantly following the Labour Party Conference in Morecambe in 1952.

Bevan's attitude which did not reflect the attitude of the National Executive Council as a whole'.⁹³

The meeting adjourned without any agreement, but the General Council remained behind to discuss procedure and agreed to put at the disposal of the working parties the services, for consultation, of the Economic Committee.⁹⁴ It does not appear that these services were utilised a great deal there being no evidence of joint meetings or correspondence over the six-week period. Individual unions appear to have been contacted but it is not clear if this was through the TUC or not. On 11 March the Economic Committee did receive the working parties' four papers, which were on slightly different topics than first proposed, aircraft manufacture, machine tools, coal mining machinery and shipbuilding.⁹⁵ The Economic Committee minutes do not make clear what the conclusions of the working parties were, except that the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions would prefer to allow the NCB to develop its own coal mining machinery business than purchase any existing firms.⁹⁶ The reports were noted but do not appear to have been passed up to the General Council for comment or any response sent to the Labour Party.

This reluctance to become involved with the Labour Party over future nationalisation policy continued during 1953. Neither the TUC nor the Labour Party made any

⁹³ *Ibid*, p 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pp 30–31.

⁹⁵ MRC. MSS 292/574/3, TUC Economic Committee 6/5, 11 March 1953.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p 1.

approach to the other side to discuss future plans. In part this was perhaps because with the Bevanite stars in decline and Gaitskell in the ascendancy the party's commitment to nationalisation became increasingly vague. By the end of 1955 the Labour Party had abandoned a specific list of industries to nationalise and would only consider ad hoc public ownership. This was still more forward looking than the TUC's resolutely conservative policy but it avoided the most glaring differences that had arisen in the previous eight years. It appears that by 1955 the TUC was even more conservative about future public ownership than the Labour Party's modest commitment. An Economic Committee document stated 'it seemed neither necessary nor desirable to establish a Development Council or Statutory Board for the Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Industries'.⁹⁷ However, as there was reference to only one industry it would be exaggerating the evidence to suggest that the TUC were shying away from public control as well as public ownership.

It could be argued that the TUC and Labour Party had a fairly similar policy, the only difference being in emphasis, indeed this was how the two policies were presented. There was agreement by both on the principle of nationalisation, but the Labour Party was advocating its expansion at a quicker rate than the TUC. However, this would be a superficial interpretation. Whilst on paper the two policies may have appeared complementary, beneath this, the two different perspectives within the Labour movement were clear. The TUC was acutely aware of the growing dissatisfaction of its affiliated unions' members in certain nationalised sectors,

⁹⁷ MRC. MSS 292/20/39, [TUC GC Minutes] 23 March 1955, p 43.

particularly the railways and electricity. They also detected no great enthusiasm for public ownership from unions in sectors such as shipping, chemicals, engineering and cement. As representative of trade unions the TUC's first priority was the welfare of its members. If these members had yet to reap the benefits expected of nationalisation, the TUC was unlikely to advocate a policy that would increase the number of workers experiencing these problems. In 1953 George Woodcock of the TUC summarised the position clearly

It is impossible for the Trade Unions to be airy-fairy and highfalutin for proposals for public ownership. They must be severely practical because if a mistake is made it is they and not the Parliamentary Party which will suffer the consequences...we cannot say that nationalisation has been one hundred per cent unqualified success and thus we must approach the future with caution.⁹⁸

It is evident that this caution extended beyond future policy itself but to joint consultation with the Labour Party on nationalisation. In 1950 consultation had come too late to avoid a potentially embarrassing difference in policy. In 1953 attempts to consult with the TUC at an early stage, even with assurances that they would not be committing themselves, failed to overcome the TUC's determination to remain independent of the Labour Party in developing its own policy. As far as nationalisation was concerned it would appear that consultation was neither an institutionalised feature nor a particularly successful one.

⁹⁸ MRC. MSS 292/574/4, [TUC Nationalisation 1954 – 60] 'A Trade Unionists View of Nationalisation' by G. Woodcock, 20 October 1953, p 7.

As for the Labour Party, authors such as Minkin, have suggested that the Labour Party became increasingly cautious over future nationalisation from 1947 'retreat was shown also in the hesitations of some Labour Ministers, led by Herbert Morrison, over their future purpose, particularly a new nationalisation programme.'⁹⁹ However, the evidence presented above suggests that although there was ideological reassessment of nationalisation, this affected the criteria on which industries were to be nationalised more than the principle of nationalisation itself. Furthermore, the Labour Party's more pragmatic and quantitative approach was nothing as compared the TUC's reassessment. Up until 1950 this programme's most consistent and vocal advocate was Herbert Morrison. By the mid 1950s the prominence of Bevan exaggerated ideological differences between left and right but he was able to command less support across the party than Morrison.

The reduction in Labour Party/TUC consultation during the 1950s was not a sign of the TUC's reduced interest in nationalisation. In fact the opposite occurred, but the TUC's enquiries became more specific. With a Conservative Government in office without any commitment to further nationalisation the TUC were left to consider the operation of those industries already in the public sector. However, there remained the question of the TUC's approach to the new Government and its reaction to their plans to denationalise iron and steel and certain sectors of road transport.

⁹⁹ Minkin, L. 'Radicalism and Reconstruction: the British Experience' in *Europa*. Vol. 5, No 2 (1982) p 205.

Superficially the TUC's attitude towards the new Conservative administration was one of 'business as usual'. In October 1951 the General Council issued a statement on their approach; 'to work amicably with whatever Government is in power and through consultation jointly with Ministers and with the other side of industry to find practical solutions to the social and economic problems facing this country'.¹⁰⁰ The TUC General Council also expected the Government to maintain the principle and practice of consultation secured under the Labour Government.¹⁰¹

This commitment to work with the new Government faced its first test the following month. A letter from the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Supply, on behalf of the Minister, asked for the General Council's comments on specific points regarding iron and steel denationalisation, recognising that there was a general difference of opinion.¹⁰² This question split the General Council, some members' felt that to answer the question would help, or be seen to help, the Government's denationalisation. Other members, whilst not opposed to the principle of consultation, thought the time to express an opinion was when the Bill was in draft. Still other members' felt it was incumbent upon them to give their views on the specific points 'the TUC's responsibilities to their members continued whether a Labour Government was in power or opposition'.¹⁰³ Eventually the General Council

¹⁰⁰ MRC. MSS 292/20/36, [TUC GC Minutes 1951 – 52] 31 October 1951, pp 13–14.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 28 November 1951, p 21.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

reiterated its opposition to denationalisation and referred the implications of the letter to the Economic Committee and the representatives of the unions concerned.

The following month the General Council drafted its reply to the Ministry of Supply. They stated that they felt they could not respond to the points raised because they were a series of questions, not a statement of proposals and the General Council would want information on the Government's own views on the future organisation and control of the industry. The General Council concluded by saying that they would give further consideration when they received some positive information.¹⁰⁴

Whilst this approach seems to contradict the TUC's aim of working 'amicably' with the Conservative Government, it is in practice, little different to their approach to the Labour Party. Again the TUC were reluctant to commit to, or comment on, a policy until it had been fully developed and not without first canvassing the attitude of those unions involved. Not surprisingly the denationalisation of iron and steel provoked debate and correspondence but the denationalisation of sectors of road transport barely warranted a mention by the TUC General Council. This suggests that the TUC General Council were less concerned with the principle of nationalisation (or de-nationalisation) than they were about the principle of trade union consultation and participation.

The dilemma of iron and steel denationalisation returned to trouble the TUC in June 1953. In place of the previous public corporation the Conservative Government,

whilst returning the industry to private ownership, reinstated the Iron and Steel Board as a public co-ordinating committee. Seven trade unions had written to the TUC complaining of trade unionists accepting positions on the Iron and Steel Board. Sir Lincoln Evans, of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, and member of the General Council said that his organisation felt that it was essential that the trade unions concerned with the industry were represented on the Board.¹⁰⁵ Messrs Lawther, Geddes, Deakin, Williamson and Yates all spoke in support of this position; ‘[t]he trade union movement was not an adjunct of the political movement’.¹⁰⁶ In opposition to this Hill, Openshaw, Willis, Campbell, Baty and Birch expressed the opinion that the Tory Government would regard these appointments as a major political victory.¹⁰⁷ Naismith said he regarded the position as being no different form that of the Development Councils.¹⁰⁸ At the end of the discussion the General Council passed a motion by 20 votes to 6 that the Iron and Steel Board was no exception to the TUC’s general policy of insisting on trade union representation. It was understood with the Labour Party Executive and the Parliamentary Labour Party that trade unionists would sit on the Board.¹⁰⁹

The acceptance by the TUC of positions on the Iron and Steel Board confirmed their willingness to work ‘amicably’ with the Conservative Government and reinforced

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 19 December 1951, p 28a.

¹⁰⁵ MRC. MSS 292/20/37, [TUC GC Minutes 1952 – 53] 24 June 1953, p 78.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p 79.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p 78.

their desire to maintain a permanent consultative position. Nevertheless, it is clear that a significant minority felt uneasy about the relationship, particularly its political consequences. What was equally clear was that the TUC's relationship with the Conservative Government was not the same as that with the Labour administration. One has to raise the question as to the extent to which TUC opposition to steel denationalisation was politically, rather than practically, motivated. The TUC had already made it clear to the Labour Party on the eve of iron and steel nationalisation that they tended towards a strengthened form of the previous method of control – the public board. By the same token in January 1953 the TUC were reconfirming their preference for public control, rather than public ownership, to the Labour Party. This suggests that despite the soul searching evident amongst some General Council members, the majority were as concerned about the trade union movement maintaining its representation within the industry as denationalisation itself. There was certainly political opposition because the Conservatives were denationalising the industry, but bearing in mind the TUC's views on future nationalisation expressed to the Labour Party at this time, it seems questionable that the TUC would have advocated its re-nationalisation on the public corporation format.

IV

The STUC and Nationalisation Policy

Considering the TUC's relative lack of influence on coal nationalisation policy, either on its own initiative or that of the NUM, one possible alternative, at least for the Scottish miners was the STUC. The STUC could prove a useful channel for the

Scottish miners as the TUC was not necessarily the appropriate body through which to press particular Scottish claims. Furthermore, as the previous chapter has demonstrated Scottish trade unions had a different view towards nationalisation than their English counterparts and the potential for a different approach to future nationalisation programmes arises.

On the eve of nationalisation the STUC did not display any remarkably different approach to the TUC. Their resolutions and comments on nationalisation were indistinguishable from those of the TUC. For example in February 1945 the Congress Organising Committee simply stated that 'The only way in which the development of the [coal] industry in the national interest can be secured is by the nationalisation of the industry.'¹¹⁰ Even the 1945 Congress's decision on consultation with workers in industry was entirely innocuous, 'That this Congress instructs the General Council to press for legislation which will result in an increasing consultation with workers in industry.'¹¹¹

What did contrast with the TUC was the next phase of STUC activity. As a result of the 1945 Congress in Aberdeen, on the initiative of the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area (NUMSA), a joint committee was established between the union, STUC and Labour Party.¹¹² The committee was called the Joint Committee on the Nationalisation of the Mining Industry and had three objectives.

¹¹⁰ STUC, General Council Minutes, Congress Organisation Committee, 1945, p 159.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Firstly, to hold a series of meetings on the NUMSA's current productivity campaign, secondly, a more general campaign of four conferences in support of nationalisation by trade union, Labour Party and trades council delegates and thirdly for local Labour Party and trades councils to prepare local public meetings with speakers from the joint committee. Rather than concern themselves with the detail of legislation the STUC adopted a campaigning approach to nationalisation with the NUMSA.

However, almost as soon as arrangements had been put in place problems arose. At first the Scottish party executive questioned whether such meetings were the business of the Labour Party and a few days later Shinwell, who had been asked to speak but was unavailable, questioned the value of the meetings.¹¹³ Then, just prior to the four main conferences organised by the joint committee, the Labour Party withdrew its speakers. The Labour Party's objection was to MPs speaking on the same platform as Communist Party speakers.¹¹⁴ The STUC and NUMSA protested that speakers were representative of the bodies that made up the joint committee and had been accepted as such, but to no avail, and Labour Party speakers were forced to withdraw.¹¹⁵

This episode may seem to display an unwarranted degree of political sensitivity on the part of the Labour Party. Although this did not appear to be an attempt to hijack

¹¹² STUC, General Council Minutes, 26 Sept 1945, p 66.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 17 Oct 1945 and report of General Secretary's meeting with Shinwell, 19 Oct on 25 Oct 1945.

¹¹⁴ STUC, General Council Minutes, 14 Feb 1946, p 154.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 22 Feb 1946, p 159 and 28 Feb 1946, p 165.

the committee for Communist Party objectives, the Labour Party's anti-communist sensitivities had been increased after the CPGB's attempt to affiliate at the 1945 Labour Party Conference. Nevertheless, communist NUMSA members, such as the President Abe Moffat, *were* received by the Labour Government as representatives of the NUMSA. Furthermore, Abe Moffat was one person being canvassed for appointment as Labour Director for the NCB in Scotland. Even taking into account the Labour Party's increased sensitivity to attempts at communist infiltration it seems perverse that the likes of Abe Moffat were acceptable government appointed positions, but not to share a platform with Labour MPs. Although the Labour Party withdrew their speakers, the four main conferences went ahead as planned and do not appear to have proposed anything that would have cause alarm in the Labour Party. The motion for each of the conferences simply stated 'That this Conference, welcoming the Coal Industry Nationalisation Bill, congratulates the Government upon the presentation of the measure so soon after their assuming office.'¹¹⁶ The Labour Party may have been right in that these meetings did not have a great deal of value, but they were hardly detrimental to nationalisation either, and did demonstrate a willingness promote a better understanding of coal nationalisation within and outwith the labour movement.

However beneficial the Joint Committee on the Nationalisation of the Mining Industry may have been, it certainly did not set a precedent for joint campaigning or action. The outstanding feature about the STUC was that after their March 1946

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 28 Feb 1946, p 166.

Conference they did not take action on the nationalised industries, either alone or in conjunction with the NUMSA or Labour Party,. Indeed, the STUC appeared to adopt a very different agenda to the TUC. Above all the STUC threw its energies into the newly formed Scottish Council (Development and Industry). This was a tripartite body whose aims were to survey industrial trends and promote the economic development of Scotland, to advise the Secretary of State for Scotland on industrial, commercial and economic problems and recommend action to safeguard Scotland's position and arrange such enquiries and research as required.¹¹⁷ Within this remit their appeared scope for the consideration of nationalised industries, but throughout this period the STUC and the Scottish Council was concerned with the location of industry and securing a fair proportion of new industries for Scotland. The only association that these activities had with coal nationalisation was a desire to see new industries locate in those areas where the traditional heavy industries were declining. Even consultation over the appointments to the boards of nationalised industries, which so agitated the TUC, did not register in the STUC General Council. At no stage do the STUC express a desire to be consulted, nor were they approached by the Minister of Fuel and Power. The only occasion when the appointments issue raised its head was a brief note recording that the General Secretary had accepted a position on the Scottish Area Gas Board.¹¹⁸

This lack of activity on nationalised industries cannot be explained by any lack of influence on the part of the STUC. Through the Scottish Council they could and did,

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, Memorandum of Association of the Scottish Council, 3 June 1946, p 12.

meet with the Secretary of State for Scotland, and it was a regular occurrence after Annual Congress to correspond or meet with government Ministers to discuss the resolutions passed. Nor were the NUMSA lacking representation in the STUC, in only one year did the NUMSA fail to have a representative on the General Council. Rather, once the NCB had been established, the STUC appeared perfectly content to leave coal nationalisation policy to the NUMSA and concentrate instead on broader economic issues facing Scotland. For the NUMSA's part, they appeared to have a relationship with the STUC that mirrored the NUM's with the TUC, one of engagement but not to further their own ends.

V

Conclusion

Having fought in the early year of the nationalisation programme to gain the right to be consulted by Government the TUC were reluctant to take the next step and accept responsibility for policy formation. This reluctance to become involved in policy-making was also apparent in their relationship with the Labour Party. In both these areas of policy-making the TUC seemed to adopt a position with an inherent dichotomy. On the one hand they wanted status and recognition through consultation, but the access to policy formation that this brought was not seized. Policy formation remained the responsibility of the Government and party, not the

¹¹⁸ STUC, General Council Minutes, 4 Feb 1949, p 202.

TUC. In relation to the Labour Party the TUC did develop its own attitude towards future public ownership, but it sought to do this as independently as possible. As a result the ideological reassessment within the Labour Party appears ultimately less significant than the reluctance of the TUC to support even modest future programmes of nationalisation.

The TUC were persistent regarding issues such as appointments to National Boards and the status of these appointments, but were essentially reactionary to other elements of regulation. For all their emphasis on making the existing nationalised industries work, particularly regarding joint consultation, education and training, they did not produce any proposals on how to achieve this. This has important implications for the role of those trade unions within the nationalised industries. If the TUC was content with a high profile, but relatively un-involved role in nationalisation policy after the legislative stage, the significance of individual unions is automatically raised. How did former trade unionists on national and regional boards act when they were in the minority? Even if the TUC was pressing to ensure they were full time positions, this would hardly redress unions minority representation. A similar question arises regarding joint consultation. If, as the TUC suggests, this aspect was underdeveloped, what were trade union representatives attitude to the new machinery? Add to these issues those of wages, industrial relations, manpower, investment, pensions and productivity that affected the nationalised industries and it becomes clear that individual trade unions had a far greater role in shaping nationalisation policy than the prevailing focus on the TUC would suggest.

Neither, in Scotland's case at least, do other national trade union organisations, such as the STUC, appear to have played an alternative role to the TUC. Whatever particular aspirations may have existed amongst Scottish miners and their union, they were not expressed through the STUC, apart from the brief campaign in support of coal nationalisation in 1946.

Chapter Three

The NUM National Executive, NCB and Government

I

Introduction

The previous chapter suggested that the TUC General Council was concerned with influencing future nationalisation policy, but largely independently of the Labour Party and in a restrictive manner. In this respect the experience of the existing nationalised industries was influential, but in a largely negative way, as indicated by the 1953 'Interim Report on Public Ownership'. Furthermore, once the issue of the General Council's right to be consulted about nationalisation policy was resolved, this right was mainly exercised over the appointment of trade unionists to the Boards of nationalised industries. In spite of the large amount of information collected from trade unions in nationalised industries, including the NUM, and the presence of NUM representatives, the General Council was largely a silent partner in coal nationalisation policy.

Therefore, to understand trade unions' attitude towards the nationalised coal industry and the influence they exerted, the analysis must shift to the industry itself, the National Union of Mineworkers and look beyond the mere formation of policy, to its implementation and development. This chapter focuses on the NUM National Executive Committee and their relationship with the National Board of the NCB and Government. It will be suggested that although the NUM National Executive was

the key organisation for negotiating policy, the characteristics of policy were largely determined at lower levels of the NUM and NCB.

Irrespective of the TUC's involvement in coal nationalisation the NUM would have had a significant role. No union was more closely associated with nationalisation than the NUM¹ and with the prospect of a Coal Industry Nationalisation Act so close the NUM were unlikely to accept a subsidiary role in its development. Furthermore, although NUM policy no longer demanded direct workers control their desire to participate in the running of the industry was embodied in the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act (CINA). The Act required the NCB to establish joint machinery for settling wages and conditions and for joint consultation.² An additional factor that raised the importance of the NUM in coal nationalisation policy was CINA's overriding concern with establishing the mechanism for transfer of ownership, financial and otherwise, rather than detailed policy for running the industry itself. In part this was a result of time pressure but also reflected a desire that the Act should only lay down 'guiding principles' and the NCB should be free from ministerial interference. Therefore, there was a wide scope for the NUM to influence coal nationalisation policy, both in the formation of the legislation and particularly its implementation. Bearing in mind the relative unimportance of the TUC General Council the role of NUM National Executive Committee gains added significance.

¹ See Chapters One and Two.

² Coal Industry Nationalisation Act, 1946, Section 1 (4)(a), (b) and 46.

The historiography of both the coal industry and labour history is dominated by studies of trade unions' traditional sphere of industrial relations, particularly in the coal industry. Considering the NUM's importance to an understanding of trade unions' role in the nationalised coal industry relatively little study has been made of what the NUM's activity, in industrial relations or elsewhere, indicated about their broader attitude and influence on coal nationalisation policy.

In the historiography of the coal industry the predominant concern has been with issues of organisation, management, output, financial performance, prices and patterns of industrial relations.³ Whilst this approach reflects important issues in the post-nationalisation coal industry it has the drawback of limiting the role of the NUM to areas such as the effects of disputes and wage claims. Whilst these industrial relations issues are a major concern of the NUM, and a major feature of the post-nationalisation coal industry, there has been little attempt to interpret them other than as straightforward industrial relations issues. For example, Ashworth's comprehensive study of the nationalised coal industry provides a detailed account of the NUM's role in launching the nationalised industry.⁴ However, Ashworth deals with the further contribution of the NUM almost entirely in terms of the adequacy of

³ Cole, G.D.H. *The National Coal Board: its tasks, its organisation, and its prospects*, Fabian Publications & Gollancz, London, 1948. Robson, W.A. *Nationalized Industry and Public Ownership*, 2nd ed, George, Allen and Unwin, London, 1962. Platt, J. *British Coal. A Review of the Industry, its Organisation and Management*, Lyon Grant and Green, London, 1968. Kelly D. M. and Forsyth, D. J.C. *Studies in the British Coal Industry*, Pergamon Press, London, 1969. Buxton, N.K. *The economic development of the British coal industry: from Industrial Revolution to the present day*, Batsford, London, 1978. Allen, K. 'The Coal Industry' in Reid, G.L, Allen, K and Harris, D. J. *The Nationalized Fuel Industries*, Heinman, London, 1973.

⁴ Ashworth, W. *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 5. 1946-1982: The Nationalized Industry*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, Ch 4.

the conciliation machinery and its operation.⁵ The interpretation offered by Ashworth is one of generally harmonious relations between the NUM Executive and the NCB Board: 'At the official national level the relations between the NCB and the unions worked well most of the time' and that 'in all that could be done centrally and nationally, the personal influences were strongly helpful, on balance, to the conduct of industrial relations.'⁶ However, as this chapter demonstrates, good personal relations at the national level do not necessarily mean that the NUM's approach to nationalisation was the same as the Board's, that this approach was not always positive and co-operative or that the NUM National Executive was able to fulfil the commitments they entered into.

One long-running field of enquiry in its own right is the coal industry's industrial relations. In particular the new industrial relations machinery established under nationalisation and the persistence of a high level of disputes has proved a rich field of enquiry. Early studies such as Baldwin's concentrated on the industrial relations machinery, recruitment, wage levels and organisation.⁷ In particular Baldwin emphasised the influence of technical conditions, especially at the coal face, and the changing role of the NUM from 'protest unionism' to 'administrative unionism'.⁸

What this study recognised the importance of local circumstances what was absent, and explicitly so, was consideration of the social and political dimensions of

⁵ Ibid, pp 593-612.

⁶ Ibid, p 600 and p 603.

⁷ Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation. The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1955.

nationalisation.⁹ Therefore, although this study recognised the variety of factors that influenced industrial relations it left many of these unexplored.

Later studies have sought to address this issue by seeking fuller explanations for the industry's industrial relations problems in the broader political, social and community aspects of the coal industry, its unions and the mineworkers.¹⁰ These studies took a multi-disciplinary approach and combined local, regional and national perspectives but industrial relations remained their principal focus. This study does not take the multi-disciplinary approach to the same degree, especially the sociological aspects, but it does seek to emulate the multi-level methodology.

However, where this and subsequent chapters differ most significantly is that they seek to explain the NUM's attitude and influence on nationalisation policy by analysing the broader field of industrial relations rather than a narrow focus on strike activity and its causes.

Once again these studies portray relations at the national level as good, '[i]ndustrial relations at the higher echelons of the NUM and NCB hierarchies were, indeed,

⁸ Ibid, p 51.

⁹ Ibid, p xxi.

¹⁰ Campbell, A., Fishman, N. and Howell, D. (eds) *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-47*, Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1996. Kelly, D.M. and Forsyth, D.J.C. (eds) *Studies in the British Coal Industry*, Pergamon Press, London, 1969 and *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry*, Macmillan, London, 1979. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I.M. *Industrial Relationships and Nationalization in the South Wales Coalmining Industry*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity Hall Cambridge, 1990. Church, R. and Outram, Q. *Strikes and Solidarity. Coalfield Conflict in Britain 1889-1966*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

cordial and harmonious after nationalization'¹¹ even if the continued high level of unofficial disputes indicates that established patterns of industrial relations continued almost unchanged at lower levels. This begs the question of whether a similar regional and local diversity was displayed regarding nationalisation policy as a whole and not just industrial relations? If so, the questions then arises of whether, irrespective of what was agreed at the national level, one can talk of 'a' nationalisation policy or 'a' NUM nationalisation policy if significant diversity exists at each level of the organisation.

The literature on the NUM itself has not adequately answered this question or filled this gap in the historiography. The NUM's official historian, Arnot, does not extend his coverage past 1946 and deals almost exclusively with the legislative passage of the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act. Furthermore, in this treatment it is the class antagonisms of representatives in both houses of parliament that captures Arnot's attention, rather than the MFGB or NUM.¹² More recent work has attempted to draw out the NUM's contribution to nationalisation beyond the confined patterns of industrial relations and disputes and the immediate legislative period.¹³ However, this has been on a rather limited scale and has not applied the same multi-level methodology as studies of industrial relations have attempted.

¹¹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I.M. *Industrial Relationships and Nationalization in the South Wales Coalmining Industry*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity Hall Cambridge, 1990, p 211.

¹² Page Arnot, R. *The Miners: One Union, One Industry. A History of the National Union of Mineworkers 1939-46*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1979.

Collectively these studies suggest the importance of accounting for the diversity and inter-relation within the different levels of the NUM and NCB and to understand their behaviour within the broader political, economic and social context. This is what this and subsequent chapters attempt to do.

II

The NUM and the Challenge of Nationalisation

The absence of research on the NUM's broader political rather than industrial role within the coal industry is all the more surprising considering the challenges, both political and industrial, that nationalisation presented.

The first challenge that the miners faced was creating the NUM itself. Until 1945 there had been a multitude of craft and district unions approximating to Britain's various coalfields. These district unions had negotiated wages and conditions with local coal owners and their agreements reflected the variety of conditions and practices that prevailed in the industry. The district unions had only been loosely organised nationally in the MFGB since 1889. Previous attempts to create a unified,

¹³ Allen, V.L. *The Militancy of British Miners*, Shipley, Moor, 1981. Fishman, N. 'Coal: owned and managed on behalf of the people', in Fyrth, J. (ed) *Labour's High Noon: The Government and the Economy 1945-51*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993 and 'The beginning of the beginning: the National Union of Mineworkers and nationalisation' in Campbell, A., Fishman, N. and Howell, D. (eds) *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-47*, Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1996.

national union had foundered on competing and often conflicting district interests, whether these were from the left or the right.¹⁴ Inter-war attempts at creating a national union had been further complicated by low morale following the 1926 strike defeat, depressed conditions in the industry and by breakaway unions of the left, 'company unions' on the right and areas of non-unionism.¹⁵

It was only under the conditions of the war-time economy, with the economic status of coal raised and Government control of the industry from 1942 that conditions became conducive to national organisation. The securing of national wage agreements and the increased prospect of nationalisation focused delegates minds, not just on the desirability of a national union, but its necessity to meet fundamentally different post-war circumstances; one industry, one union.¹⁶

However, the ten to one majority in favour of creating the NUM at the founding conference in 1944 belies the compromises required to create the new union. These compromises had a significant bearing on the way the NUM conducted its affairs. Fifteen geographical and six occupational areas were created as administrative units of the NUM with the wages of area's officials paid nationally. Whilst negotiations on wages and conditions would be conducted nationally, the only major national agreements in existence in 1945 were those governing safety, the weekly minimum

¹⁴ Francis, H. 'Learning from bitter experience: the making of the NUM' pp 256 - 261 in Campbell, A., Fishman, N. and Howell, D. (eds). *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-47*, Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1996.

¹⁵ Ibid.

and hours of work. Important though these were, much of what the national level of the NUM would be responsible for had yet to be created. Therefore, the various districts and their branches retained a significant amount of influence, as well as their various contribution levels and benefits.

This arrangement had many advantages. The NUM was a rare example of an 'industrial' union in Britain with the enhanced power and influence that this structure brought. Districts could no longer be played off against each other and there was now a structure in place to better secure national agreements. The distribution of power between the national level and the areas and branches could also be a strength, combining the unity of a national union with strong coalfield identity. However, with so much of the transfer of power to the national level being on paper, the new national executive had its work cut out to deliver what the district organisations had been unable to secure. Furthermore, if the new organisation was to prove credible to employers as well as to members, the national executive would have to enforce their side of any agreements.

In retrospect creating the NUM was the easiest obstacle the miners overcame, even if the question of internal discipline would frequently raise its head. They not only had to secure the establishment of a nationalised industry, but in so doing they raised fundamental questions that not only had implications for the role of their own union, but the success of their industry and the economic well being of the country as a

¹⁶ Ibid, pp 264-267.

whole. The most important issue that nationalisation raised was the competition between the miners' sectional interests and those of the coal industry and economy. These were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Mineworkers obviously had an interest in the long-term performance of their industry, ultimately their jobs, wages and conditions depended upon the success of the coal industry. This much was no different from private ownership, but nationalisation brought with it a more complicated set of circumstances than the simple employer/employee relations of private industry. As part of the long campaign for nationalisation miners had desired a greater say in the conduct of the coal industry. Although they had by and large shied away from a desire for any form of direct control, joint conciliation, consultation and the appointment of trade unionists to positions within the NCB all implied a degree of responsibility as well as participation. This responsibility not only involved the implementation of agreements, but potentially the suppression of short term demands for long term objectives and the modification of demands, not only to suit the financial position of the industry, but in accordance with Coal Board or Government policy, that the miners themselves may have had some part in shaping. Furthermore, this responsibility had the potential for different and conflicting objectives between the national leadership, area leaders and the mineworkers themselves. The range of policies that this conflict between national and sectional interests could arise was wide. Not only over the traditional issues of wages, conditions and welfare, but conciliation and consultation, Government relations, output and recruitment. It will be over this range of issues that the National Executive's role in shaping nationalisation policy will be analysed in this chapter.

III

Creating a Nationalised Industry

The most immediate and important challenge for the new NUM National Executive was delivering the long hoped for nationalisation of the coal industry. The election of the Labour Government and the inclusion of nationalisation proposals in the King's speech of 15 August 1945 made this a certainty. When ten representatives of the NUM National Executive met Shinwell on the 21 February 1946 to discuss the coal industry, the nationalisation legislation was already in the process of its second reading. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that, compared to the TUC General Council, the NUM Executive was more satisfied with the Minister's verbal assurances about trade union appointments and joint consultation. However, this apparently sanguine attitude of the NUM Executive was less to do with the NUM's faith in ministerial assurances than obtaining support for the Miners' Charter. The Miners' Charter was ostensibly produced in response to Shinwell's appeal to the miners leaders for support in a joint recruitment campaign. The Charter listed 12 demands of the union in respect of members' conditions.¹⁷ But these demands were less a list of immediate short-term measures for increasing recruitment than a long-term wish list of future conditions and benefits for their members. For example, the first demand on the charter was for modernisation of existing pits and the sinking of new ones, a laudable aim, but not one which was going to have an immediate effect on recruitment. Other demands continued in a similar vein; youth training and a

¹⁷ NLS, NUM Executive Committee, 10 January 1946.

clear promotion scheme, new safety laws, injury and fatality compensation, supplementary pensions, building new towns and villages, re-organisation of health and welfare services and compulsory medical examinations. The remaining demands could be considered as having a more immediate effect on recruitment, if implemented, but still represented the traditional aspirations of the miners. For example, that wages should not fall below those of any other British industry, a 7 hour day for underground workers and 40 hour week for surface workers, a 5 day week without loss of pay, continuation of the guaranteed weekly wage and payment for two weeks consecutive holiday and six statutory holidays. The Charter asked that the Minister of Fuel and Power give guarantees that these demands would be effected according to a time-table and plan. Shinwell gave somewhat vague blanket assurances, that the miners could read into it what they wanted. In his response Shinwell said that the reforms contained in the Charter were one of the principal objectives of nationalisation, however, he went on to say that they should be achieved by negotiation with the National Coal Board.¹⁸

This episode was significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it suggested that the NUM were more concerned about establishing their claim for improved conditions in the future than they were about immediate recruitment problems or the details of coal nationalisation legislation. It is significant that the Miners' Charter did not contain any demands regarding the appointment of trade unionists to the NCB or for the consultation of workers, concerns that exercised the TUC. This would also suggest

¹⁸ NLS, Letter from Emmanuel Shinwell to the NUM National Executive, 21 February 1946.

that, at this stage, the NUM Executive in responding to a call that implied some sacrifice of sectional to national interests did in fact take the opportunity to push their particular interests forward. This does not mean that the NUM Executive were entirely self interested. Few could argue against the humane conditions set out in the Charter. Furthermore, the NUM had responded to an appeal by Shinwell in August for increased production by appointing executive member, Arthur Horner, as a National Production Officer as well as a Production Officer in each area. The NUM taking such action was an encouraging step, but the Production Officers had no responsibility for output and appears to have acted mainly as a channel for information.¹⁹ Neither did the appointment of Production Officers infringe on any of the unions' interests, even though it was an encouraging sign. This feature aside, the promotion of the Miners' Charter during the passage of nationalisation legislation was the NUM National Executive placing a marker for how they expected to benefit from nationalisation. Moreover, in seeking the Minister's approval, in principle at least, to their demands requires some further explanation.

On the one hand the NUM would have known that it was not in Shinwell's power to implement their demands, these would have to be negotiated with the owners, be they public or private. At the same time, whilst the form of nationalisation was unknown, the details yet to be settled and appointments of trade unionists unmade, having prior Government blessing for their basic demands for conditions of employment and welfare would be a useful bargaining chip to have in hand. Seeking

¹⁹ A sample of a Production Officers Report is provided in Appendix Two.

Shinwell's approval for the Miners' Charter also had the effect, intentional or not, of drawing the Government into the bargaining process. Last, but not least, it would also give the new NUM Executive a degree of credibility amongst the members for having gotten such demands 'on the table'.

Before the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act had received its royal assent work was underway on the industry's new organisation. Shinwell announced the members of the National Coal Board in March. The chairman was Lord Hyndley, a former managing director of the Powell Duffryn coal company, he had administered the wartime coal controls as Controller-General in the Ministry of Fuel and Power and was reported as being respected and well liked.²⁰ The deputy chairman was the civil servant Sir Arthur Street who had experience of public corporations through his involvement in the agricultural marketing boards and BOAC.²¹ The two production members were Sir Charles Reid and T.E.B. Young. Sir Charles was a mining engineer and had been a director of the Fife Coal Company. Since 1942 he had been the Production Director of the Ministry of Fuel and Power, chairing the committee of investigation into the technical re-organisation of the coal industry and lending the report its popular name - the Reid Report. Young was also a mining engineer and managing director of the Bolsover Colliery Co. and had also served in the production directorate of the Ministry of Fuel and Power.²² The finance member was Lionel Lowe of the accounting firm Thomson, McLintock. He also had experience in the

²⁰ Ashworth, W. *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 5. 1946-1982: The Nationalized Industry*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, p 122.

²¹ Ibid.

Ministries of Food and Fuel and Power. The marketing member was J.C. Grindley of Powell Duffryn and the scientific member Sir Charles Ellis, professor of physics at King's College London.²³ Although not a Board member until 1948, Sir Geoffrey Vickers, the Board's legal adviser, attended all meetings on the same terms as other members. He was a part-time member of the London Passenger Transport Board and during the war had been in charge of economic intelligence in the Ministry of Economic Warfare.²⁴ However, it was the remaining two Board members, those for manpower and welfare and industrial relations, that were of most significance for the NUM.

The member for manpower and welfare was Sir Walter Citrine. He had been General Secretary of the TUC for the preceding twenty years and had proved to be an able administrator and policy maker. The labour relations member was Ebby Edwards, the then General Secretary of the NUM who had occupied the same position in the MFGB since 1932. In both cases there was some reluctance to accept the appointments. Citrine did not wish to sever his connection with the TUC (all Board members were required to be 'independent' to avoid dual loyalties) although some General Council members wanted him to accept on these conditions. The TUC got round the problem by giving Citrine 12 months leave of absence and appointing a *proterm* General Secretary, but only after another representation by Shinwell.²⁵ In

²² Ibid, p 123.

²³ Ibid, p 124.

²⁴ Ibid, p 125.

²⁵ MRC. MSS 292/20/30, TUC GC Minutes 1945 - 46. Special Meeting 19 February 1946, pp 38-39 and GC Meeting 27 February 1946, p 50.

hindsight it seems unlikely that a man of Citrine's ego and ambition would have actually refused the post out right. His desire to remain attached to the TUC was in little evidence when he departed the Coal Board in May 1947 to become Chairman of the British Electricity Authority.

Ebby Edwards was far more reluctant to accept his appointment. He telegraphed Shinwell three times saying no, before being forced to accept the appointment by a decision of the NUM Executive.²⁶ Apart from the examples above of reluctance of some individuals to accept appointments, the NUM was co-operative in putting forward names for labour relations appointments in the NCB. Yet the appointment of trade unionists to the NCB raises an important issue. As was the intention of both the Government and the unions, the appointment of trade unionists was to ensure that those with experience of working men were represented on the Boards. However, these appointments were not 'representative' as they had to sever their links with their unions, a principle held as strongly in the unions as the Government.

Furthermore, the Board members accepted collective responsibility and were to run the industry according to the national interest. Therefore, the danger that the poachers would turn gamekeepers seemed all too real. Indeed the accusation that the members of the NCB were unsympathetic to nationalisation was a recurring feature from rank and file members at annual conferences and one shared by some members

²⁶ Page Arnot, R. *The Miners: One Union, One Industry. A History of the National Union of Mineworkers 1939-46*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1979, p 189.

of the Executive.²⁷ As subsequent sections of this chapter will demonstrate, negotiations between the union and the Board, frequently displayed a divergent view of the objectives of nationalisation.

Leaving these future problems aside, the NUM in general displayed goodwill towards the NCB. At their annual conference in 1946 the resolution was passed that;

in view of the early Nationalisation of the Coal Mining Industry, it be an instruction to the National Coal Board, as soon as the Bill is passed and becomes law, to organise Area meetings in all areas of the Union, to which should be invited both the workmen and the management in order to bring before them their joint responsibility under the new ownership, and to seek their full co-operation in safety, efficiency and production and to stress the need for a new industrial morality to secure friendly discipline in the industry.²⁸

Not long after the Act received Royal Assent and the Board members had been formally appointed the NCB (or NCB Organising Committee as they were calling themselves) requested a meeting with the NUM Executive Committee.²⁹ At this meeting on 23 July the NCB explained the proposed structure and organisation of the industry under nationalisation. The main units of management were to be 48 areas and above these eight divisions, based on the major coalfields, with Boards appointed along similar lines to the National Board. None of these developments

²⁷ Moffat, A. *My Life with the Miners*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1965, p 86. Moffat was President of the Scottish Area of the NUM.

²⁸ Report of the NUM Annual Conference, July 1946, Bridlington.

²⁹ Public Record Office (PRO) COAL 26/83, NCB Industrial Relations Dept, Preparatory Discussions, 23 July 1946 and COAL 21/1 NCB Minute Book 1, 2 August, 1946, p 27.

were remarkable or elicited any debate. In the second reading of the CINA Shinwell had said that he envisaged a regional structure based on the composition of the National Board and the area as the main unit of management had been established by the Reid Report.

The other main organisational feature with which the NUM were concerned prior to vesting date was machinery for conciliation and consultation. Section 46 of the CINA placed a statutory obligation on the Board to establish joint machinery for the settlement not only of wages and conditions, but also consultation on the conduct of the industry itself. The conciliation machinery was an adaptation of that already existing in the industry. The Joint National Negotiating Committee was retained as was the National Reference Tribunal, these two bodies were known as the National Conciliation Board. District conciliation schemes were also carried over and modified to match the national model where necessary.³⁰ Reference to the tribunal was not compulsory, but was binding on both sides if either one decided to refer a question to arbitration, as were the Tribunal's decisions.

The new element in conciliation was the extension of the machinery to the pit level. Any initial dispute was to be discussed between the men or man and the immediate official of the pit, usually the overman or undermanager. If no agreement was reached in three days the men would then discuss the dispute with the manager.

³⁰ The agreement for the national and district conciliation machinery was signed on the 5 December 1946 and is known as the 'take-over agreement'.

Only if no agreement was reached at this stage had the workmen to report the dispute to the trade union official. If the dispute was not settled within three days either the union branch secretary or manager could call a pit meeting. This had to be held within five days of the request. If a second pit meeting was required this had to be held within four days. Should fourteen days from the first pit meeting lapse without agreement the dispute was to be referred to the District Conciliation Board. They could refer it back to the pit or up to the divisional level Joint Disputes Committee. If there was still no agreement the dispute would go to the District Reference Tribunal whose decision was final. Both the Divisional Disputes Committee and the District Reference Tribunal could refer disputes to the national level if national or divisional principles were involved.³¹

Of the two parts of the conciliation machinery, it was that at the national level that the NUM had the greatest differences with the NCB. Although the NUM and NCB agreed on the value of maintaining the conciliation machinery in being,³² there were disagreements about its detailed operation. Firstly, the NUM wanted verbatim minutes to be kept, something that both Edwards and Citrine successfully resisted on the grounds that it would encourage all members to make a point or speak just for the record.³³ A more serious objection was raised by the NUM over quorate membership of the JNNC. The NUM's side could be up to fourteen and the NCB's the full eight member Board. The NCB proposed a quorum of three from their side

³¹ The Conciliation Agreement was signed on 1 January 1947. *NCB Annual Report, 1947*, pp 15-17.

³² PRO. COAL 21/1, NCB Minute Book 1, 6 September, 1946, p 79.

³³ *Ibid*, 18 October, 1946, p 159.

which the NUM felt did not recognise the importance of the committee. In addition the NUM wanted the chair to alternate and the secretary to be the Board secretary, not that of the Labour Relations Department. Edwards said that '[h]e was disappointed with the atmosphere of the meeting, which had not shown the change [in the NUM's attitude] he hoped for.'³⁴ These status orientated objections recall those of the TUC's in relation to Government consultation. The NUM wanted their importance reflected in the new apparatus but their willingness to accept their share of responsibility for its operation was unproved. At a meeting on the 13 November the two sides agreed for Horner and Edwards to be joint secretaries and to have joint chairmen. By the 3 December the NUM and NCB had agreed on a quorum of three for each side, but only after the NUM had pressed for the three to be Board members not Board officials.³⁵

Thus by the January 1947 the coal industry had, in theory at least, a watertight conciliation scheme to eliminate the need for strikes. Arnot interprets this as the NUM abandoning the right to strike.³⁶ Although in theory this would be the case so long as one side referred a dispute to the National Tribunal, the NUM retained its right to strike on a two thirds majority ballot. Arthur Horner, the NUM General Secretary was also at pains to dispel this myth, pointing out to *The Times* that the NUM were completely free and independent.³⁷ In practice, although there were no

³⁴ *Ibid*, 1 November, 1946, pp 185-186.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 29 November, 1946, p 238 and 3 December, 1946, p, 248.

³⁶ Page Arnot, R. *The Miners: One Union, One Industry. A History of the National Union of Mineworkers 1939-46*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1979, p 195.

³⁷ *The Times*, 3 January 1947, p 3 col. 2.

official strikes between 1947 and 1955, unofficial stoppages were an ongoing problem for the industry.

The consultative machinery established was a more innovative measure with which the NUM were involved. Again the CINA had included a statutory provision for the NCB to consult the workforce on 'matters of safety, health or welfare' and on 'the organisation and conduct of the operations in which they are employed.'³⁸ Apart from the somewhat patchy performance of the wartime Pit Production Committees³⁹ there was no established system of consultation for the NCB to adopt. Firstly a Joint National Consultative Council was established with nine representative from the NUM, six from the NCB, nine from the National Association of Colliery Managers, plus three from the Deputies organisation NACODS.⁴⁰ The NCB chairman was chairman of the National Consultative Council. This preliminary meeting set the agenda for the first formal meeting where the main business was to establish divisional, area and pit level consultative machinery. This first meeting was held on 27 November and Citrine then drafted a scheme and model constitution which he put to the full Board on 9 December.⁴¹ The scheme provided for divisional, area and pit consultative committees. The divisional councils were established along the same lines as the national council, but they had the discretionary power over establishing area councils. The Colliery Consultative Committees were chaired by the manager,

³⁸ Coal Industry Nationalisation Act, 1946, sec. 1 and 46. Somewhat ironically these provisions were included through amendments passed by the Conservative peer, Lord Cherwell, not Labour members or NUM sponsored MPs.

³⁹ Court, W.H.B. *Coal*, HMSO and Longmans Green, London, 1951, pp 322-323.

⁴⁰ PRO. COAL 21/1 NCB Minute Book 1, 8 November 1946, p 202.

and he nominated three other officials, two underground and one surface official. The NUM lodge secretary, area agent and NCB agent were all ex officio members. One Deputy was elected by Deputies by secret ballot. Six other workmen's representatives were also elected by secret ballot; two face workers, and one each from underground haulage workers, non-face contractors, surface workers and craftsmen.

Thus two major administrative features of nationalisation were established relatively easily through co-operation between the NUM National Executive and the NCB. However, as subsequent sections of this chapter reveal, the NUM Executive were not slow in pressing a number of other claims which were far less easily resolved and represent a more accurate picture of the NUM's attitude towards nationalisation.

IV

The Five Day Week

The establishment of a five day week was one of the first and most troublesome conditions of the Miners' Charter promoted by the NUM. The NCB had passed the NUM's original memo to the Government of the 15 January in anticipation of the union raising these issues.⁴² Initially Board members were concerned over what priority the NUM would give to their various claims under the Miners' Charter but

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 9 December, 1946, p 263. For Model Constitution COAL 26/68, Memo MAN/WEL (46) 11.

negotiations soon revealed significant differences between the Board, union and Government.

At the first meeting between the NCB and NUM National Executive on 23 July the NUM were quick to press their claim. Lord Hyndley for the NCB said they had to make the industry pay and work in the interests of the nation and all concerned. He then referred to the serious fuel crisis emerging and that he was certain some industries and public utilities would shut down this winter through lack of fuel and asked what the Board or NUM could do.⁴³ For the NUM, the President, William Lawther assured the Board of their whole hearted co-operation and said they had to overcome the innate conservatism of the industry. He then asked when they could discuss the five day week and admitted that this was a problem handed to the NCB by the Minister. At the same time the question of paid holidays and modification of the wages stability clause were raised.⁴⁴ That these negotiations could prove difficult was indicated by the presence of Ebby Edwards, who five days earlier had still been the NUM General Secretary, when he questioned whether the Minister had actually agreed to the five day week.⁴⁵

Although the reforms proposed by the NUM would have some beneficial impact on ensuring industrial harmony and retaining and attracting workers, it is difficult to

⁴² *Ibid*, 2 August, 1946, p 27.

⁴³ PRO. COAL 26/83, NCB Industrial Relations Department, Preparatory Discussions, 23 July 1946, pp 1-4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp 4-7. Holidays and Wages are dealt with below.

argue that they would have any impact on coal output in the coming months. They also had the effect of diverting the time and attention of the NUM and NCB from securing an immediate increase in output. Forecasts were that coal output would fall below demand, and current stocks for power, industrial and domestic consumers were inadequate to meet the shortfall. Therefore, the first possibility in averting a winter 'fuel crisis' was an immediate increase in coal output. It has been argued, with some justification that Shinwell was too complacent in handling the looming crisis and should have planned the allocation of fuel allowances much sooner. Nevertheless, it was to the nascent NCB and NUM that Ministerial attention first turned.

For the NUM the position was clear, they wanted a five day week without loss of pay (in other words six days pay for five days work), the Minister and Government had agreed to this and it was simply a matter of agreeing the conditions for its introduction.⁴⁶ As Edwards reported to the Board 'whatever the terms and whatever the cost involved, they [the NUM] were insisting they should have the 5 day week'.⁴⁷ For the Board the issue was not so clear cut. They argued that they would have to work out the cost implications and consult the Government and their divisions on the issue. Also, bearing in mind the serious position of coal, they would have to consider conditions to ensure output was maintained.⁴⁸ Both Reid and Edwards felt the Government should take responsibility by giving the Board a direction and they

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p 11.

⁴⁶ PRO. COAL 26/24, NCB Industrial Relations Department, JNNC 46/3 & 4, 3 December 1946, p 1.

⁴⁷ PRO. COAL 21/1, NCB Minute Book 1. 3 December 1946, p 249.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p 2 and COAL 26/24, NCB Industrial Relations Department, JNNC 46/3 & 4, 3 December 1946, p 1.

would then negotiate suitable conditions. Vickers thought conceding a 5 day week with conditions would be better than the effects of refusing it, whilst Citrine was in favour of the Board taking responsibility. Citrine went as far as requesting that his dissent be recorded and didn't think the argument of cost should prevent the men getting the five day week. Apart from Citrine there was general concern about the impact on costs and output and Vickers, Reid and Ellis wanted any announcement postponed, a decision Citrine felt would be 'psychologically wrong'.⁴⁹

It seems likely that the Board would have held off any decision on the introduction of the five day week until the summer of 1947 because of cost and output considerations, but their hand was forced by Shinwell. Hyndley met the Minister on 16 December and he told the Board on the 17th that Shinwell had reported that the NUM wanted to make an announcement on the introduction of the five day week to their delegate conference on the 20 December. Hyndley proposed asking for written conditions and assurances from the NUM for maintenance of output, going to arbitration on any disagreement on conditions and announcing a date (provisionally 1 May) for introduction by the end of February. Reid and Ellis were still concerned about costs and that the Board were being pushed by the Minister. Citrine felt that they were 'merely wasting two months in getting information.'⁵⁰ Later that day at the Joint National Negotiating Committee (JNNC) the NUM agreed that conditions would apply and the NUM were able to announce at their delegate conference that

⁴⁹ PRO. COAL 21/1 NCB, Minute Book 1. 3 December 1946, p 249 and 10 December 1946, p 267.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 17 December 1947, pp 280-283.

the five day week would be introduced on 1 May 1947. However, negotiations on the conditions themselves dragged on.

There was disagreement on the weekly output to be achieved. The differences between the NUM and NCB figures was some 163,000 tons and Edwards was increasingly irritated by the unions' claim to have established the five day week under the Government. In return Horner argued that the miners were not convinced of the necessity of conditions and felt these made them 'whipping boys for all that was wrong in the industry.'⁵¹ Negotiations on the qualification of the bonus shift were particularly protracted. The NCB insisted that payment of the 'sixth shift' be on condition of attendance for the previous five. A particular sticking point in regard to this was if 'involuntary' absence would be grounds for exclusion and NCB attempts to gain prior NUM approval for dismissing a man for absenteeism. Horner argued that 'the function of the Union is not to dismiss the men; it is to defend the men who are wrongly dismissed.'⁵² The NCB and NUM also had a fundamental disagreement on the application of the five day week. The Board wanted it restricted to underground workers, whilst the union wanted it applicable to surface workers as well.⁵³

⁵¹ PRO. COAL 26/24, NCB Industrial Relations Department, JNNC (47) 1, 6 February 1947, pp 7-9 and 13 February 1947, pp 1-6.

⁵² *Ibid*, JNNC (47) 4, 21 February 1947, pp 2 - 18 and JNNC (47) 6, 6 March 1947, p 2.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

Rather than a new spirit of co-operation entering the industry the negotiations resembled a typical employer/employee relationship with the added ingredient of the NUM playing the Board off against the Government. Whilst the five day week may have been top of the NUM's list of priorities it was not the most pressing concern of the Board or the country, which was for more coal. The NUM's insistence on immediate negotiations for the five day week could have been seen in a more favourable light had they linked their demands to arguments about increasing recruitment, improving morale and fostering co-operation. These justifications may not have had much impact on immediate production but they would have given the NUM's claims greater legitimacy. However, such arguments were largely absent from the NUM's negotiating position, the five day week was a right that the NCB were obliged to deliver. As Edwards reported to the Board 'he did not anticipate that they would put forward any conditions for the maintenance or improvement of output. They regarded that as an obligation on the Board and not an obligation on the NUM.'⁵⁴

By 4 March a number of major issues were still in dispute with the NUM over the five day week. These were hours of workers, the amount of bonus, overtime, minimum wage for broken weeks, consecutive shifts, qualification for the bonus, shifts and bonus lost through accidents and industrial disease, penalties for restriction of output and absence on trade union business.⁵⁵ Once again the role of the Government in the negotiations was raised. In particular Reid and Grindley felt they

⁵⁴ PRO. COAL 21/2, NCB Minute Book 2, 14 February 1947, p 89.

were not able to take a firmer negotiating stance with the NUM because of the Government's approval of the five day week without specifying conditions. They both felt that as the five day week would have an adverse effect on the country they should ask the Government to say that they had conceded a five day week of seven and a half hours per day so the Board did not carry the responsibility.⁵⁶

Conditions were eventually agreed in March. On the 13th the NUM agreed that they would not go to arbitration on the conditions to be attached and assured the Board that they would co-operate whole-heartedly on all points. These points included co-operation in up-grading workers, re-organisation of tasks, lengthening stints, transfer of labour and increased mechanisation. Attendance was encouraged by payment of the bonus shift only to those who had worked the previous five shifts. Surface workers' hours were increased to make a working week of 42½ hours.

Piecedworkers received a 16% bonus to encourage increased production and following Government authorisation in a letter from Shinwell on 27 March underground hours were set at 7½ a day.⁵⁷

On paper the agreement for the five day week appeared quite equitable, even considering the NCB's reluctance. Measures for improving attendance had been included and co-operation pledged on reforming a whole range of labour practices to

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 4 March 1947, pp 127-131.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 11 March 1947, p 860.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 28 March 1947, pp 169-170 and PRO. COAL 26/24, NCB Industrial Relations Department, JNNC (47) 9 13 March 1947, p 2.

boost production. For the NUM, their principal aim of securing a five day week for all workers without loss of pay had been secured. Initially the results were promising. Within the first week in almost all divisions output increased and absenteeism declined.⁵⁸ At the JNNC Edwards expressed himself pleased with the splendid effort made in the first week of the five day week.⁵⁹ However, it soon became apparent that the increase in production was not lasting.

There is no question of the NUM Executive entering into the agreement on conditions for the five day week in bad faith. However, both they and the Board overestimated the ability of the Executive to enforce the conditions. All of the conditions were essentially local matters. For example re-assessment of tasks was for negotiation between the individual workman or men and the colliery management. This was an early complaint of the two production members of the Board, Reid and Young, but the NUM Executive had no sanction to enforce compliance.⁶⁰ The only route open to the Board was for colliery managers to take cases to arbitration or refer cases to headquarters.⁶¹ A similar situation prevailed regarding absenteeism. As absenteeism rates began to increase in late 1947 it was clear that loss of the bonus was an insufficient sanction. However, there was as yet no alternative method or machinery for getting the workforce to co-operate.

⁵⁸ PRO. COAL 21/2, NCB Minute Book 2, 9 May 1947, pp 270-271. Absenteeism declined from 15% in March and April to 9% in May and June. However, as the number of shifts from which a man could be absent had also declined, part of this reduction is statistical, NCB Annual Report 1947.

⁵⁹ PRO. COAL 26/24, NCB Industrial Relations Department, JNNC (47) 11, 13 May 1947, p 2.

⁶⁰ PRO. COAL 21/2, NCB Minute Book 2, 17 June 1947, pp 353-354.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

V

Holidays with Pay

Another early demand of the NUM that was contained in the Miners' Charter was for holidays with pay. This they also raised at the first meeting with the NCB and said it needed urgent attention as school leavers were going to industries with two weeks paid holidays rather than the coal industry.⁶² The Executives' mention of two weeks holiday was something of a diversion for what they were concerned with was payment for statutory holidays. In this case they were making a clearer case in relation to recruitment but still employed the tactic of citing Government agreement.

The Board had wanted the condition of attendance that had applied to the paid August bank holiday in 1946 applied. In particular Reid and Young were concerned that miners who had been absent would gain the benefit.⁶³ Hyndley said that the same conditions would have to apply, otherwise the matter would be referred to Shinwell. In response the union stated that Shinwell had said the conditions for the August bank holiday were without prejudice. Reluctantly the Board conceded to the

⁶² PRO. COAL 26/83, NCB Industrial Relations Department, Preparatory Discussions, 23 July 1946, pp 5-7.

⁶³ PRO. COAL 21/1, NCB Minute Book 1, 15 November 1946, p 214.

unions' demands, but the board's negotiating position had been compromised by the Government.⁶⁴

The agreement was signed on the 21 November accompanied by pledges of support from the union. Horner said that 'they would do all they could to impress upon the men the need for responding fully to the gesture of the Board and would arrange for a communication to be sent to all District Associations explaining fully the responsibilities which fall on the Union.'⁶⁵ Although a less serious issue than the five day week the NUM were again unwilling to accept conditions that the Board felt were in the broader interests of the industry and country and could offer pledges but not guarantees or sanctions should there be adverse effects.

VI

Conclusion

In his autobiography Horner reflecting on the Miners' Charter said '[w]e were not presenting an ultimatum; we were simply setting on record the conditions which must obtain in the mines, if the men were to be there to dig the coal.'⁶⁶ This may well have been true, but the speed with which they pressed their demands and their reliance on the Government rather than compromise with the NCB spoke more of the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ PRO. COAL 26/24, NCB Labour Relations Department, JNNC (46) 2, pp 3-4.

NUM pressing home their traditional bargaining advantage in a period of labour shortages. The conditions attending to the five day week did display a willingness for the NUM to help improve attendance and secure an increased output of coal. However, their inability to enforce these conditions raises questions over their ability to help establish a productive industry. Horner's speech to the NUM delegate conference in December 1946 summed up the NUM's new role:

It is quite clear, too, that in relation to us the Coal Board is an employer, but a different kind of employer - an employer with whom we share certain responsibilities, yet in the last analysis this National Union of Mineworkers remains a free and independent organisation whose main concern is the advancement and protection of the interests of its members.⁶⁷

By May 1947 the NUM Executive had certainly advanced the interests of its members, the extent to which it was able to share certain responsibilities was unclear.

⁶⁶ Horner, A. *Incorrigible Rebel*, London, 1960, p 176.

⁶⁷ NUM Special Delegate Conference, 20 December 1946, reprinted in NUM Annual Conference Report, London, 1947.

Chapter Four

The National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area and National Policy.

I

Introduction

Under nationalisation the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area (NUMSA) found itself, like other NUM areas, in a potentially influential position. As the previous chapter indicated, the NUM National Executive found itself unable to ensure compliance with its side of agreements, and to a large extent relied on their on their area organisations for this function. Therefore area organisations, with representatives on the National Executive, were fully versed in national issues, participated in policy-making and were responsible for implementing national policy within their area. But NUM areas also had a role in determining national policy through their representation on the National Executive and their own Area Conferences and policy-making machinery. These were potentially conflicting demands and if the NUM as a whole was to fulfil their new ‘dual responsibility’ the area organisations would have to share in this responsibility. Potential problems could then arise if the implementation of national policy ran counter to local customs and traditions.

This chapter aims to identify, contrast and explain the Scottish Area of the NUM’s approach to major policy issues with that of the national level. In particular this chapter examines the extent to which the Scottish Area of the NUM was able to influence national wages policy. This policy not only involved the Scottish NUM

with the NUM National Executive and the NCB, but also the TUC and Labour Governments. Furthermore, the Scottish NUM's involvement in wages policy indicates a different attitude from these other bodies and a different approach to nationalisation.

This analysis also reveals the various pressures, restraints, strengths and weaknesses that shaped the Scottish NUM's attitude towards nationalisation and affected their ability to influence policy-making. What were also in evidence were the methods Scottish Area of the NUM used to influence policy. A variety of these emerge which suggest a dynamic and influential organisation, capable in their own right of shaping national policy. This inevitably raises questions over the extent to which any understanding of coal nationalisation can rely solely on the evidence of national level organisations. Considering the potential importance of area organisations to understanding the NUM's role in nationalisation, however, thus far, this potential has been relatively unfulfilled within the historiography.

Although regional studies of British miners and mining are well represented geographically, including the Scottish coalfield, the chronological and thematic coverage is less adequate. Whilst the nineteenth century, pre-war and inter-war periods are well covered the post-war years are less so. Apart from Arnot's work

that ends in 1955, there are no other monographs of Scotland's post-war mining industry and surprisingly few biographies or autobiographies.¹

A further problem arises with the literatures' thematic coverage. Whilst the pattern of union organisation, disputes and bargaining is well documented the political history of miners, especially after nationalisation, has been inadequately investigated.² In Scotland and South Wales the influence of the Communist Party has attracted attention, but little work has been done beyond miners' electoral behaviour and party affiliations as explanations for industrial disputes.³ For example, Arnot covers the Scottish miners' role in wage negotiations, but fails to draw out the political implications of this for nationalisation.⁴

Initially the Scottish NUM did not display a markedly different attitude towards nationalisation compared to the national level. This can be seen by examining the items in the Miners' Charter that were pressed in the early months of nationalisation.

¹ Abe Moffat's *My Life with the Miners*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1965, is the exception in Scotland.

² Hopefully Andrew Taylor's *The National Union of Mineworkers and British Politics 1944-1995*, Sutton Publishing, will go some way to redressing this when it is published in February 2000.

³ Campbell, A. B. 'Communism and trade union militancy in the Scottish coalfields', in Tenfelds, K. (ed.), *Towards a Social History of Mining in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Papers Presented to the International Mining History Congress Bochum, Federal Republic of Germany, September 3rd-7th, 1989*, Verlag C. H. Beck, Munich, 1992, pp 85-104 and 'The Communist Party in the Scots coalfield in the inter-war period', in Andrews, Geoff. Fishman, Nina. and Morgan (eds.) *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism*, Pluto Press, London, 1995, pp 44-63.

⁴ Arnot, R. P. *A History of the Scottish Miners. From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1955, pp 301-321.

II

The NUMSA and the Miners' Charter

In the period between the election of the Labour Government and Vesting Day on 1 January 1947, the NUMSA displayed a similar attitude towards nationalisation as the NUM as a whole. The NUMSA Executive made the same sort of optimistic pronouncements in relation to the Miners' Charter as at the national level. At the NUMSA Conference in 1946, Abe Moffat, the NUMSA President, said that they (the National Executive) believed that the charter could revive the mining industry. He went on to say the introduction of the five-day week would ensure

greater regularity of work, continuity in production, adequate attention to repairs of roads and machinery, reduction of absenteeism, and the elimination of early lousing and unofficial stoppages, all of which would play an important part in coal production...Above all, it would win the confidence of both miners and management, which is so vitally necessary for the future development of the industry under nationalisation.⁵

These claimed benefits were more specific than those mentioned in the national negotiations, but reflected the general optimism felt about the onset of nationalisation. The Scottish Area of the NUM also expressed similar commitments to those given at the national level. At a special conference convened in March 1947 to endorse the five-day week agreement the Secretary, William Pearson, said

⁵ NUMSA, *Annual Conference Report*, Edinburgh, 1946.

That this Conference, having discussed the terms of agreement on the five-day week, agrees to accept these terms. We pledge ourselves to take every step possible to maintain output at the highest level.

Conference calls on the Scottish miners to ensure the success of the five-day week and nationalisation by working every available shift, preventing unofficial stoppages, and by making the utmost use of the pit machinery to obtain maximum output.⁶

[and he]paid tribute to the part played by the Minister of Fuel and Power in the achieving of the agreement, and emphasised that the working people had put the Labour Government into power and unless the miners were prepared to support that Government by carrying out the spirit as well as the letter of the agreement and produce the coal so necessary to maintain the economic life of the country, they would be stabbing that Government in the back. There must be no attempt to dodge the implication of the agreement.⁷

It is interesting to note that the Scottish NUM, in contrast to the national NUM, expressed their commitment to the five-day week agreement explicitly in terms of their loyalty to the Government rather than the NCB. It did not appear that the NUMSA were undertaking their side of the agreement out of any sense of a shared responsibility with the NCB. This raises the question as to the ability of the NCB to inspire the loyalty of the Scottish miners and, *ipso facto*, made Scottish miners loyalty dependent on the vagaries of Government economic policy. The short-lived

⁶ NUMSA, *Special Area Conference*, Edinburgh, 1947.

⁷ NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA, *Special Area Conference*, 27.4.47, p 15.

implementation of the five-day week and the growing economic crises by the end of 1947 was to begin to test this loyalty.

Emergency American and Canadian loans had tided Britain over in the immediate post-war years, but a condition of the American Loan Agreement of December 1945 was an early return to sterling convertibility.⁸ The Chancellor Hugh Dalton, the Bank of England and many commentators did not express any great fears over the prospect of convertibility on the 15 July 1947 but the exercise was suspended on the 17 August.⁹ Although the convertibility crisis did not have a direct relationship to the level of wages, the drain on gold and currency reserves placed an even greater emphasis on the need to increase exports, of which coal supplies were a major bottleneck.

In July 1947 the miners' representatives had already been asked by cabinet members to revert to an eight-hour day, as the five-day week had not maintained the previous levels of output. As part of the negotiations with the Government and NCB the NUMSA preferred to offer a return to Saturday working than an extra half-hour on

⁸ Sterling convertibility allowed foreign countries to exchange their sterling balances in London for other currencies, namely the dollar. This meant Britain had to earn sufficient dollars to allow foreign holders of sterling to exchange it, if insufficient dollars were earned exchanges would have to be made out of the reserves.

⁹ Cairncross, A. *Years of Recovery*, Methuen, London, 1985, pp 129-130.

each shift.¹⁰ This matter was not resolved until a Scottish Area Conference on 20th October 1947 that endorsed the policy of working an eleven-day fortnight.¹¹

Although intended as a temporary measure, the Saturday working (or Extension of Hours Agreement - EHA), effectively meant the end of the five day week so recently won. This decision occurred only four months after Shinwell had told the Scottish Executive Committee that 'its [the five-day week] operation was not only inevitable but desirable for psychological and other reasons and now that it had come it must stay.'¹² The EHA agreement was also continually renewed at the national level, much to the chagrin of the Scottish Area of the NUM. However, the majority with which the proposition was endorsed at the time, only four votes were cast against it at the Area Conference, is some indication of the Scottish miners willingness to make sacrifices in the interests of economic recovery. This again suggests that the miners were willing to co-operate and make concessions to the Labour Government, and that the Government could expect such co-operation from the miners. However, this was not an open-ended commitment on behalf of the miners and the limits to this were to emerge, in Scotland at least, in the autumn of 1947. Growing economic problems created by the convertibility crisis began to overshadow the immediate problems of increased coal production. Part of the Government's response was the development of a policy of wage restraint. The implications of this policy went to the heart of the function of a trade unions, to defend its members interests, and raised important

¹⁰ NLS. Dep. 258.37, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 4.8.47, pp 24-25.

¹¹ *Ibid*, Area Minute Conference, 20.10.47, p 143.

¹² *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 27.6.47, p 12.

questions over the extent to which the miners goodwill towards increasing coal production could extend to a policy that more directly threatened their interests.

III

The NUMSA and National Wages Policy

The policy of wage restraint developed as part of a range of policies designed to tackle the problems facing Britain's post-war economic recovery. However, wage restraint was not a legislative programme or a component of planning. Neither was it an end in itself, but developed because of concerns over full employment, productivity, planning, inflation and currency reserves. These issues may at first seem far removed from the concerns of the Scottish Area of the NUM but an examination of their role in wages policy demonstrates the extent to which a subsidiary organisation can influence national level policy.

The need for wage restraint first emerged during World War II, when the shortage of labour placed the trade unions in a strong bargaining position. With the coalition Government operating controls over a wide range of economic factors, such as prices, investment and profits, unfettered wage claims could pose a serious threat to the Government's ability to manage the war economy. The logical step might have been to extend Government direction to include wages. However, the issue of controlling wages automatically raises dichotomies between socialism's belief in state intervention and attraction towards planning and trade unions' faith in

voluntarist, free collective bargaining. Trade union's right to free collective bargaining was perhaps their most strongly defended belief. No matter how willing unions may have been to accept controls in other areas, such as direction of labour and compulsory arbitration, no Government could risk the disruption that might arise from state intervention in wages. As a result a system of voluntary restraint developed, backed by appeals from the Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin, who was the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

The post-war years represented new challenges to the system of free collective bargaining. The White Paper on *Employment Policy* (Cmd. 6527) of 1944 called for wage restraint, for if the Government was going to have any possibility of delivering the high and stable level of employment to which it was committed, this would be a necessary element. If restraint was not exercised under these conditions there was a danger of wage driven price inflation. Similarly, if wage awards were to outstrip productivity gains Britain's competitive advantage would be eroded with a subsequent threat to exports and the balance of payments.

Although the balance of payments returned to equilibrium relatively quickly, the key problem was the shortage of dollars, which remained a constant threat to Britain's post-war recovery. Another reason wage restraint was envisaged was in the conversion to a peacetime economy. A considerable amount of redistribution of labour would be required and it was by no means certain that without resort to compulsion it would go to those areas where it was most needed. This aspect is particularly relevant to this study because even during the war, with mining classified

as a reserved occupation and miners' wages returning towards the top of those for industrial workers, manpower had steadily declined since 1943. Furthermore, the need to attract more labour, particularly youths, was a continual problem during the first ten years of nationalisation and the problem of labour recruitment formed a regular feature of wage negotiations.

Although the level of wages was a factor that could affect a range of policies, the Government did not adopt a particularly aggressive or interventionist wages policy in the immediate post-war years. At the ministerial level Shinwell and Aneurin Bevan (Minister for Health) felt that minimum wage levels and recommendations to individual industries was the way forward.¹³ Meanwhile, in the Economic Section of the Cabinet Office, James Meade and others believed that the problem of wages was best addressed by tackling general inflationary pressure to ensure a greater balance between supply and demand.¹⁴ Alternatively, George Isaac at the Ministry of Labour espoused a policy of exhortation and education to employers and trade unionists for moderate wage bargaining. It was the latter of these options that prevailed, the principal result of which was *A Statement on the Economic Considerations Affecting Relations between Employers and Workers* (Cmd. 7018) released in January 1947. This policy of exhortation was accompanied by Hugh Dalton's budget of November 1947, that whilst not strictly deflationary, certainly tried to restrain the inflationary pressures of consumption.¹⁵

¹³ Jones, R. *Wages and Employment Policy 1936-1985*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1987, p 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Cairncross, A. *Years of Recovery*, Methuen, London, 1985, p 423.

By 1948 more explicit calls for wage restraint were made in the *Statement on Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices*. As Minkin notes, this should have produced a major clash with the unions, in particular the union right defenders of free collective bargaining.¹⁶ Yet, grateful for the achievements of the Labour government and sharing a common enemy in Communist infiltration of the movement, the majority of trade unions supported wage restraint, albeit temporarily. The about turn of left and right within the trade union movement was completed by left wing unions and leaders, including the NUMSA, opposing wage restraint. Traditionally the stronger supporters of more socialism and greater state intervention, one might have expected support, or at least acquiescence, from left wing unions on wage restraint. However logical in ideological terms wage restraint may have been it was interpreted by left wing unions as an attack on the living standards of the working class. If trade unions in general were in a defensive mode under Labour, wage restraint was one of the few issues where a clear dividing line within the movement emerged.

It was within this policy of appeals, consultation and accommodation that the Scottish Area of the NUM conducted its wages campaigns. However, on the election of the Labour Government the NUMSA had expressed similar good wishes and promises of co-operation as the national organisation. On the election of a Labour Government Abe Moffat said to the Scottish Executive; 'The election results are only the beginning not the end. We must call for a greater degree of discipline and loyalty

on the part of our members if the Labour Government is to be a success.¹⁷ And at a Scottish Executive meeting with Shinwell in 1946 he assured the Minister that he would receive the loyal co-operation of the miners to make the industry a success.¹⁸

In August 1946 members of the Scottish Executive had met Shinwell to discuss, amongst other things, the question of wages. In particular they emphasised the low level of average wages in Scotland, which were due, according to the union, to low rates to piece and face workers. However, the Executive agreed that in a memorandum to the Minister they would not argue that wages throughout the industry should be raised, but rather that these particular grades should be levelled with other parts of the country.¹⁹ In this respect the NUMSA adopted the same tactics as the national NUM in putting forward their demands to the Minister prior to the creation of the NCB. That there were no repercussions when no progress was made on Scottish and British differentials was indicative that they did not expect much progress until the NCB was appointed. Indeed the Scottish NUM were aware that they would have to await the formal commencement of the National Coal Board before their claims could be addressed. When Arthur Horner addressed the Scottish Executive regarding the 'Miners' Charter' he [Emanuel Shinwell] had expressed willingness to encourage the Coal Board to introduce reforms, but on the question of the five-day week, holidays with pay and the guaranteed wage no definite answer

¹⁶ Minkin, L. *The Contentious Alliance*, Edinburgh University Press, 1992, pp 79 - 80.

¹⁷ NLS. Dep. 227.101, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 6.8.45, p 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 17.1.46, p 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 19.8.46, p 3.

had been received, and it was felt that the responsibility for these was going to be left on the shoulders of the Coal Board.²⁰

Scottish miners could have anticipated some progress with the new Coal Board because the NCB had agreed not to hold the NUM to Clause 4 of the 1944 Agreement that no changes in wages or conditions could be made until summer 1948. Although the question of differentials had not been addressed, the Scottish NUM shared in the other improvements during 1947 discussed in the previous chapter. However, this did not prevent claims for increased wages arising quickly in Scotland.

The Annual Conference of the Scottish Area of the NUM in June 1947 had unanimously approved a resolution from the Coaltown of Wemyss delegate calling for the TUC to develop a national wages policy:

That Conference, in view of the many recent strikes regarding wages, which are having disastrous results on the economy of this country, calls on the TUC to formulate a national wages policy, embodying basic minimum rates of pay for all classes of workers employed in essential industries, keeping in mind the necessity of improving the standards of those industries such as mining, cotton and agriculture, which are having great difficulty in attracting manpower. This policy should then be submitted to the Government for approval and adoption for a period of at least three years, with the proviso that they will strive

²⁰ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 18.4.46, p 7.

to stabilise prices of consumer goods and cost of living. In addition to this, we urge the TUC and the Government to reach agreement that all classes of workers in these industries should have the opportunity to earn additional wages on a payment by results basis, in order to stimulate these workers to give the necessary impetus to production, which in turn will give the working class people of this country a better standard of living and, more important still, see us through the financial crisis which threatens to destroy all our dreams of socialism.²¹

This resolution was essentially a composite of the issues that would pre-occupy the NUMSA's future wage claims. A national wages policy, in this case embracing a national wages structure for the coal industry, minimum rates to attract manpower and a desire to see the cost of living index controlled. Implicit in the latter proposal was that minimum rates could not be held if the cost of living increased. In subsequent years these issues became interrelated aspects of the NUMSA's wage claims. In particular, nationalisation proved to be something of a double edged sword for the Scottish NUM. On the one hand nationalisation provided an opportunity for the Scottish NUM. Issues such as lower Scottish wages could be addressed and the prospects of wages keeping pace with the cost of living stood a better chance of success by being part of a national industry. However, the shortage of coal, the industry's strategic economic position and external economic pressures brought different and frequently conflicting demands on wages. Therefore, whether they liked it or not the miners particular industrial wage claims were also part of wider national wages questions.

²¹ NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA, Annual Conference Report, 11/12/13.6.47, p 48.

Although the above resolution was suited to the economic crisis that enveloped the country in the autumn of 1947, it was an alternative resolution that the Executive of the Scottish Area pursued in practice. The inflationary pressures brought about by convertibility, the coal shortage and the recruitment problems of the industry could not await the development of a national wages policy or a national wages structure for the coal industry, however laudable these aims were. Instead, the NUMSA focused on increases in the minimum wage as a more realisable goal. Scottish Representatives on the National Executive Committee of the NUM proposed an increase of £2 per week on the minimum of £5, based on a resolution passed at the NUM Annual Conference 'to endeavour to obtain a substantial increase in the minimum rates and to press for such rates to apply to all workmen of 18 years of age and over.'²² The NUM National Executive Committee moderated the claim to a £1 increase. By the end of November 1947 an Agreement was put to an Area Conference for an increase of 2s 6d per shift for underground workers and 1s 8d for surface workers, in other words 12s 6d per week extra for the former and 8s 4d for the latter. The Scottish Conference accepted the Agreement by 156 votes to 8.²³

On these demands, the whole of the NUM, Scotland included, appeared willing to accept a compromise, settling for 27s 6d less for underground workers and 31s 8d less for surface workers than the original claim of £2. Despite the reduced amount of

²² NLS. Dep. 258.37, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 19.9.47, p 86.

²³ *Ibid*, Scottish Area Delegate Conference, 24.11.47, pp 216-217.

the award Moffat, at the Area Minute Conference of 24th November 1947, emphasised that the award would take them from 8th to 1st on the industrial wages list (they had been 83rd in 1939).²⁴ He went on to say that 'under the old Coal Owners such a favourable position could never have existed' and that £60,285,000 worth of advances had been made in the past six months.²⁵

Moffat also noted that this was the highest ever increase negotiated by the miners 'during a period when the Government, whether or not one agreed with the point, was stating that there must be a freezing of wages to combat inflation.'²⁶ Wage freezing certainly was not the national wages policy envisaged in the 1947 Conference resolution, but Moffat's comment suggests that, within the NUMSA at least, the view prevailed that their wage claims could proceed in the face of the Government's wages policy. Whilst there were exceptional circumstances in the coal industry, one might have expected a union in a nationalised industry to follow the spirit as well as the letter of a Labour Government policy. However, as external shocks to the British economy continued, and the NCB's output, manpower and finances remained under-target, the Scottish Area's wage claims were brought into increasing conflict with the wishes of the Government, TUC and the National Executive of the NUM.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p 214.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p 215. This figure includes welfare, baths, national insurance, 5 day week, piece rate increases, statutory holidays, extension of hours agreement and the present wage increase.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p214.

Government efforts to keep inflation in check by encouraging wage restraint continued early in 1948. Both the Lord Presidents' Committee, a 'Working Party on the Stabilization of Wages' and the Cabinet discussed the problem at length resulting in a *Statement on Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices* (Cmd. 7321) by Attlee.²⁷ This Prime Ministerial appeal followed a similar line to those of the previous *Statement*, by imploring workers to refrain from pressing wage increases, saying that 'in present conditions...there is no justification for any general increase in wages'.²⁸ Again, intervention in the bargaining process had been ruled out, either by a wage freeze, by making the National Joint Advisory Council responsible for wage claims or by appointing a Government representative to major wage negotiations.²⁹ Neither is there evidence of a consideration of wage restraint in the nationalised industries in particular even though this was the one industrial sector over which the Government had most control. Although a distinct policy for nationalised industries was not developed, as agencies of the state, responsible to a minister and parliament, no National Board would risk flouting Government policy.

Despite the failure to consult both the National Joint Advisory Council and the TUC about the *Statement on Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices*, the TUC, at a Conference of Union Executives in March endorsed the principle of wage restraint. There were exceptions imposed by the TUC, that low paid workers could make a claim and established differentials maintained. In addition the Government allowed

²⁷ Cairncross, A. *Years of Recovery*, Methuen, London, 1985, pp 403-404.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p 404.

²⁹ Jones, R. *Wages and Employment Policy 1936-1985*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1987, p 36.

exceptions to many essential industries, pledged itself to control prices and persuaded the Federation of British Industry to accept voluntary dividend restraint. These concessions wrung by the TUC should not be underestimated, because, in practice they could allow virtually all workers to make a claim. Despite the potential for widespread wage claims, if not necessarily large ones, the policy has been regarded as a qualified success.³⁰ As Jones points out 'by the spring of 1948 the Labour movement had committed itself for the first time to a policy that was in many ways contrary to its *raison d'être*.'³¹ This was a view shared by the NUMSA.

However, in endorsing such a policy a significant weakness was highlighted. Although the TUC depended on the agreement of its constituent unions for its authority it had no powers of compulsion or sanction over them. This weakness in the TUC was recognised at the time and by subsequent commentators, but the implications it had for an organisation such as the NUMSA has perhaps been underestimated. As the following section demonstrates, even a subsidiary organisation such as the NUMSA could extend its reach beyond the coal industry and influence aspects of national economic policy.

Prior to the March TUC Conference the issue of wage restraint had arisen at a NUM Scottish Area Delegate Conference on 9th February. Although the resolution to be debated from the Kelty Branch was in support of the Government's policy,

³⁰ *Ibid*, p 37 and Cairncross, A. *Years of Recovery*, Methuen, London, 1985, p 405.

³¹ Jones, R., *Wages and Employment Policy 1936-1985*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1987, p 37.

opposition to the resolution was the predominant feature of the Conference. Abe Moffat said:

On the question of the pegging of wages, the Trade Union movement in this country had not committed itself to such a policy and if it did so it would be abdicating so far as representing the interests of its members was concerned. No delegate in the Conference stating that he supported the policy of freezing wages could justify that to the members whom he represents...The policy of freezing wages had been announced by the Government without consultation with the Unions. Did the delegates support that policy 100 per cent?

Our conditions as Trade Unionists under this policy would be worse in two ways: (1) By a direct attack on wages, reducing the standard of living; and (2) by freezing wages and allowing prices to rise, as they were doing....To accept the motion would be to tie ourselves to a policy of reducing the standard of living not only of the miners but of the whole working class.³²

On a delegate raising the exceptions to the wage freeze that had been announced, Moffat replied:

it seemed that Mr. McCann was in favour of freezing the wages of other workers, provided there was a loophole by which this would not apply to his own industry. ..The Delegates had to bear in mind that negotiations for a national wage structure were on foot. If, in the previous circumstances, it had been difficult to obtain the increase of

³² NLS. Dep. 258.37, NUMSA, Scottish Area Delegate Conference, 9.2.48, pp 309-310.

10s, obviously they would get even less with this Government policy in operation.³³

It could be argued that Moffat's particular opposition to wage restraint should be interpreted in the context of a Cold War that was well underway, with communism in the UK under renewed attack and any notions of a peace-time popular front well and truly buried. However, when the vote was taken it was clearly evident that Moffat was not just reflecting a personal opinion for the motion supporting the Labour Government's policy was rejected by 68 votes to 30. Nor could it be argued that this result was due to the greater number of communists within the NUMSA, particularly in Fife, for the majority was greater than could be accounted for by this area alone.

The mining industry was certainly undermanned and the NUMSA could also have exploited differentials effectively, with thousands of different grades and rates for what were frequently similar or identical jobs. In addition, although the industry as a whole could not be considered as low paid, as the previous chapter demonstrates there was a great strength of feeling that compared to the rest of the country's miners, the Scots were low paid. If nationalisation fostered a sense of common aims amongst miners in various divisions, including a desire not to see one division competing against another in wage claims, (a problem the NUM was created to resolve), this would be one explanation of the NUMSA's desire to stand behind a common policy of all miners, but not their desire to see united opposition to wage

³³ *Ibid*, pp 314-315.

restraint amongst all workers. A sense of united opposition to wage restraint is one area where one might argue the communist influence within the NUMSA was evident. Communist union members were generally more active trade unionists than other members, or Moffat may simply have taken a stronger lead on this issue. However, it is almost impossible to correlate any relationship between communist activity in the NUMSA and the strength of feeling that wage restraint needed to be fought not just within the NUMSA or NUM, but across the whole of the trade union movement.

Here Moffat's and the NUMSA's response to the Government's wages policy and the TUC's proposed exceptions is revealing. Faced with the miners wages claims being overtaken by Government policy, the boundaries of the NUMSA's 'dual responsibility' and loyalty had been reached. Whilst they had agreed to the erosion of conditions such as the Extended Hours Agreement, on the central issue of wages the NUMSA was not prepared to accept responsibility. However, they did not agree with wage restraint just because of their own particular claim, but because they saw such a policy as anathema to the role of a trade union and detrimental to working people as a whole. Although the Labour Government was prepared to accept the responsibility of such a policy the NUMSA were not.

This response also recalls the Scottish trade unions original objectives of nationalisation discussed in Chapter One. Here nationalisation was seen as bringing social justice not just to the miners, but to the economy as a whole through 'socialisation'. What distinguished the trade unions from the Labour Party in this

regard was the more direct nature by which this was to be achieved, namely by removing the private owners the worst aspects of capitalism would also be removed. For the miners one of the worst aspects had been the long erosion of their wages following the 1926 strike. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that the Scottish miners should decide to resist such a policy again, even when it was proposed by a Labour Government.

It would be tempting to suggest that the communist influence within the Scottish Executive and parts of the membership would account for this display of solidarity. However, this alone would be a superficial explanation. Whilst class conscientiousness may have been greater within the Scottish Area of the NUM there is no evidence of union policy being determined by communist ideology. There is the danger that the rhetoric of the Scottish NUM leaders displayed a greater left wing influence than was actually the case, but the general agreement with which their speeches and resolutions were met indicates that the principals they were espousing were not out of line with those of their members.

A more plausible explanation can be found in Moffat's criticism of wage restraint policy in response to Mr. McCann. Here, Moffat clearly stated that he did not believe, even with exceptions, that the miners would have been able to make any significant advance. Whilst they could have tried to exploit the exceptions themselves, the power to obtain any significant increase could only be pursued through a national wage claim. As the next chapter demonstrates the Scottish Divisional Coal Board were unwilling to grant increases in piece rates to significantly

reduce the difference between average Scottish Miners wages and the British average. So long as changes in piece rates remained linked to changed conditions or reassessment of tasks at the divisional level the anomaly could only be rectified by a national wages structure. In the meantime, if the miners wanted to advance wages, it was insufficient just for the NUMSA to oppose wage restraint, the whole of the NUM had to.

When the Scottish Executive next convened on 16th February they unanimously endorsed a resolution from Elphinstone Branch that '...deplored the attitude of the Government in deserting their election pledges. We protest very strongly against the peg-wages policy announced by the Prime Minister in Parliament. We resent most strongly the imposition of this policy on the working class of this our country, while there is no serious attempt to control rents, interest and profits'³⁴ There was, however, a rare moment of dissent in the Scottish Executive on this resolution, in spite of its unanimous endorsement. Although Mr. McKendrick thought the motion should be endorsed 'since he felt there was a trend in the TUC towards committing the movement to support the policy of pegging wages', Messrs Fairney and Miller thought it best to wait until the April budget 'our members on the General Council of the TUC would be aware of what was going on and we would get a lead from our own people as to the approach to be adopted.'³⁵ The concerns of these two committee members was shared by one of the miners sponsored MPs at a Scottish Executive Committee meeting on 1 March 1948, 'Mr. Watson dealt critically at some

³⁴ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 16.2.48, p 328.

length with the resolution (from Elphinstone Branch and endorsed by the Executive) and stated that he considered the charge against the Government unfounded and thought that the branch had passed the resolution without a full examination of the Government's White Paper.³⁶ Despite this criticism of their policy from one of 'their own' MPs the NUMSA's approach remained unchanged.

Therefore, at the meeting of the NUM National Executive the Scottish representatives, with the mandate from the delegate conference, strongly opposed the TUC's policy of support for wage restraint. Abe Moffat proposed referring the matter back to the districts but was defeated by 17 votes to 8 and the majority of the NEC voted to support the TUC policy.³⁷ In his report to the Scottish Executive, Moffat said '...he personally was not prepared to accept the situation that miners in Scotland should continue to work for an average day wage of 3s to 4s less than miners in England, or for average piece rates 7s to 10s a shift less than in other districts in England.'³⁸ The Secretary went on to reiterate the position stated at the Area Conference in 1947 that 'it was obvious certain members (on the NUM National Executive Committee), while willing to tie the workers to the freezing of wages, were doing so with the reservation that they could still proceed with claims for increases on behalf of their own particular group' and the Vice-President added that 'in the name of the Scottish Miners, the Committee should state that they are not

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Executive Committee Meeting, 1.3.48, p 351.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Executive Committee Meeting, 15.3.48, p 366.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

prepared to drop the claim for a national wages structure and intend to endeavour to obtain a level of wages comparable with the wages operating over the rest of Britain.³⁹

Again the Scottish miners justified their claim by associating it with wider a national issue. To a certain extent the NUMSA had little choice but to do this. With the National Executive supporting the TUC over wage restraint there was no hope of an industry level agreement until general support for the wage restraint was overturned. However, the NUMSA's opposition to wage restraint arose prior to the National Executive's and TUC's official support, indicating that this was not purely a tactical decision.

At the NUMSA's 1948 Annual Conference the union continued to press for increased wages on two levels and on two fronts. On the one hand there was the development of a national wages structure and a demand for an immediate increase to keep pace with the cost of living. On the other hand the NUMSA had to carry this fight within the NUM and the TUC. On the former, Moffat said in his Presidential Address, 'in order, therefore, to create the necessary incentives to bring this country out of its economic crisis, for which increased coal output is essential, we urge our National Executive to press the immediate formulation of a new wages structure and for the full implementation of the miners' charter.'⁴⁰ But he also said 'let us be quite

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp 367-368.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p 521.

frank on this - that the main obstacle [to a national wages structure] is conservatism within our own ranks', specifically the fear of the higher paid regions that any national wages structure would level them down, rather than levelling others up.⁴¹ This union obstacle, and the sheer scale of the task in setting up a new wage structure, meant that it could not be expected to produce a solution in the short term. Therefore, the pressure for an immediate increase was maintained. On this question Moffat repeated the NUMSA's resistance to wage restraint 'that this Conference protests vigorously against the Government's policy of freezing wages at a time when the majority of workers urgently require increased wages to meet the high cost of living resulting from the scandalous soaring of prices and profits.'⁴²

It should be pointed out that the association of the wage claim with the cost of living was the only association the NUMSA made between their claims and the social wage.⁴³ They did not moderate their claim because of these benefits, but sought the Government to control prices through food subsidies. This was the only indication that the NUMSA took account of external benefits in the formulation of its wage claims.

In addition to the difficulty of persuading the NUM, let alone the TUC, of the validity of the NUMSA's claim, the union also had to contend with continued

⁴¹ NLS. Dep. 258.38, NUMSA, Annual Conference, 8/9/10.6.48, p 499.

⁴² *Ibid*, p 520.

⁴³ Whiteside, N. 'Industrial Relations and Social Welfare' in Wrigley, C. (ed) *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1939-79*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 1996.

resistance in the Labour Government. In this case another Scottish Miners' MP, Mr. Pryde, spoke against the resolution calling for an increase to keep pace with prices, calling it 'ill advised and ill founded' and saying they could negotiate for low paid workers through the disputes and conciliation machinery⁴⁴, an exercise subsequent chapters shown was not particularly speedy or fruitful, and hence an effective way of delaying and limiting wage increases.

Although the Scottish Area of the NUM had been unable to alter the TUC's support for wage restraint, or that of its own National Executive, their pressure for a wage increases continued. The War Additions Agreement of 1940 gave the miners a right to a claim for a wage increase in correspondence with the cost of living index. Since the summer of 1947 when a new index had been introduced prices had continued to rise. From a base of 100 the index had already risen to 103 by the end of 1947 and 112 by 1949. Although the objectives of this claim remained the same (to increase wages for lower paid workers), its link with a particular agreement and the cost of living index was a new tactical development. By making the claim in this way the NUM could disassociate the claim from its internal politics over a national wages structure and hopefully avoid the problems of Government wages restraint that a 'new' claim for lower paid workers would involve. However, the outcome would still be an increase for the lower paid workers.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p 521.

When this question was raised in the autumn of 1948 it was met with stony resistance from the Coal Board. Lord Hyndley, the NCB Chairman, mindful of the Government's policy also felt that the 1940 Agreement had lapsed, and wage increases since the new index in 1947 had taken into account increases in the cost of living. In addition Hyndley raised questions of absenteeism, unofficial stoppages, early finishing, production and costs.⁴⁵ It is worth noting that in these claims the NUM does not make any attempt to relate them to the ability of the NCB to pay for them. In no instance do the NUM claim make a claim on the basis of profits, output, attendance or any of the factors Hyndley mentions.

In Scotland, the NUMSA tried to avoid these issues because they felt that the differentials between Scottish wages and the British average should be eliminated in a nationalised industry. Although the Scottish Division did not make a profit after 1949, the NUMSA could maintain this basis for their wage demands because other Divisions that were not profitable, such as Northern (Northumberland & Durham), had higher wages. As Baldwin points out, the average underground wages in Scotland and Durham were well below the British average in 1947, but Durham's had moved above the average by 1953, whilst Scotland's remained below. If higher wages could be sustained in other loss making Divisions why not in Scotland?⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 17.9.48, p 172.

⁴⁶ Baldwin, George, B. *Beyond Nationalisation The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1955, pp 148-150.

Another factor that did not help the claim was a change in the Minister of Fuel and Power. In the summer of 1947 Emanuel Shinwell had been moved to the Ministry of Defence, principally because of his handling of the coal crisis, to be replaced by Hugh Gaitskell. On Shinwell's original appointment Moffat had said 'I think we will all agree that the appointment of the Minister of Fuel and Power, Mr. Shinwell is a happy one, as he is a man of courage and initiative and should prove a success in that department.'⁴⁷ No such endorsement was received on the appointment of Gaitskell, and in his autobiography Moffat says 'Shinwell was made a scapegoat...and this made room for Mr. Attlee's blue-eyed boy, Hugh Gaitskell' and 'The Scottish miners passed a resolution in support of Shinwell, and expressed their appreciation for the services he had rendered during his period in office. That was more than his successor ever got'.⁴⁸ Also, Arnot comments that Shinwell had worked well with the miners' union and 'the statements of Mr. Gaitskell, the new Minister of Fuel and Power, were felt to be very frigid towards any improvement in miners' conditions.'⁴⁹ Indeed Gaitskell had predicted just such a reaction when wage restraint was first announced by the Chancellor, fearing that it would strengthen the Communists in the unions and hence would cause trouble in the coal industry.⁵⁰

The Scottish Area of the NUM had been frustrated in their wage claims in 1948, and in the process the potential for disunity, both within the NUM and with the TUC, had

⁴⁷ NLS. Dep. 227.101, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 6.8.45, p 2.

⁴⁸ Moffat, A. *My Life with the Miners*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1965, p 97.

⁴⁹ Arnot, R. P. *A History of the Scottish Miners*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1955, p 307.

⁵⁰ Williams, P. (ed), *The Diary of Hugh Gaitskell 1945-1956*, Johnathan Cape, London, 1983, p 58.

been shown in their attitude towards wage restraint. In 1948 the NUMSA had maintained their demands for a wage increase and a national wages structure whilst accepting the majority verdict of their own union and the TUC, even if they did so reluctantly. However, 1949 proved to be a somewhat different experience.

By 1949 Britain was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain its reserves to pay for dollar imports. The pressure on the reserves was increased by a depression in the United States that reduced the ability of Britain's exporters, and those of other Sterling countries, to earn dollars. Furthermore, widespread speculation both at home and abroad that devaluation of sterling was sooner or later 'inevitable' discouraged foreign banks to hold sterling.⁵¹ The implications of devaluation for wages were serious. Whilst a devaluation of sterling would make Britain's exports more profitable, and hence boost dollar earnings, this advantage would be cancelled if wage increases outstripped productivity gains and annulled any competitive cost advantage. Equally, devaluation would raise the relative cost of Britain's imports, in a country so heavily import dependent, particularly for foodstuffs, there would inevitably be a rise in the cost of basic commodities that would in turn fuel demands for comparable wage increases. Considering that the NUMSA had previously tried to base a wage claim upon the cost of living index, a failure to keep this under control would provide the miners with a stronger basis for a wage increase. If these temptations were not resisted any advantage Britain would gain from devaluation could be quickly wiped out.

⁵¹ Cairncross, A. *Years of Recovery*, Methuen, London, 1985, pp 167-168.

Following the announcement of devaluation in September 1949, the Chancellor, Stafford Cripps, and Ernest Bevin, made another approach to the TUC urging wage restraint. In fact a working party had been established in August to consider how wages could be used to maintain the relative cost advantage derived from devaluation. This rejected Cripps' suggestion that wages, prices and profits be frozen for three months, in favour of the traditional appeal to trade unionists' self restraint.⁵²

In November the General Council of the TUC announced its policy of a one year wage standstill and suspension of cost of living agreements provided the cost of living index did not rise more than 5 points. However, prior to this announcement discontent had already emerged in Scotland over wage rates. The Scottish Area of the NUM had put forward a resolution to the July 1949 NUM Annual Conference calling for a substantial increase for all lower paid workers based on the cost of living. It was on this resolution that the tensions between the NUM leadership and the rest of the union emerged, even before the devaluation announcement. Abe Moffat reported the events to the Scottish Executive:

The wages resolution calling for an increase to all lower paid workers received the unanimous support of the National Executive Committee and when put to the conference, was accepted unanimously also, despite the speech delivered by the President, Sir William Lawther, to the effect that the miners, at this time, should not put forward a demand for a wages increase and that the matter should be referred

back to the Executive Committee which was in contradiction both to Union policy and National Executive policy.⁵³

Moffat pointed out,

that when the NUM opened up negotiations with the Coal Board for an increase in wages for the lower paid workers, one of the arguments which would be used against them, and used effectively, would be the statement made by the National President, and the only way to combat this would be to invite the President to speak at meetings in the coalfield and from the prevailing mood of the miners which he would find at these meetings, he would publicly withdraw his statement in view of the information he had obtained.⁵⁴

Concern over the implications of the National President's remarks and his conduct was also voiced by other members of the Scottish Executive and they unanimously resolved to send a protest on his attitude and to request him to attend a series of meetings in the Scottish coalfield on the question of wages.⁵⁵ Scotland was the only NUM Area to take such action.

Meanwhile, Scotland had already had a strike of day-wage workers who were dissatisfied at their level of wages and the action of William Lawther. During August 1949 the Scottish Executive received resolutions from two branches protesting at the delay in introducing a national wages structure, calling for an

⁵² Jones, R. *Wages and Employment Policy 1936-1985*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1987, pp 37-38.

⁵³ NLS. Dep. 227.103, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 11.7.49, pp 40-41.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p 41.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p 41-42.

increase for all low paid workers and from another two complaining that the industry was being hampered by a deficit of £22.8 million which included £15.25 million of interim payments per annum to the former coal owners, requesting that these payments should cease until the industry could afford them.⁵⁶

Indeed, this particular wage claim demonstrated a far greater degree of comment and suggestions from the branches than on previous occasions. The strength of feeling in the coalfield was not lost on the Scottish Executive. By September there was a widespread and growing series of unofficial stoppages and the Scottish Executive minutes record that

'...the actions of the miners and the resolutions now before the Committee indicated clearly that the members were in favour of the Pawthcawl decision (the NUM Annual Conference claim for low paid workers) and against wage freezing, whether suggested by the employers, the Government or the TUC.'⁵⁷

Whilst this support may have galvanised the NUMSA they were equally aware of the difficulties that they faced. For although wage restraint policy left room for a claim by lower paid workers, recent decisions in other industries clearly indicated that the miners were unlikely to be considered low paid compared to other workers, even if there were significant and justifiable grievances over relative wage levels within the industry. The Executive Committee minutes went on to record that

⁵⁶ NLS. Dep. 227.103, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 8 & 22.8.49, p 67 & p 91.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 20.9.49, p 118.

'...while the Union was committed to a claim for increased wages, it was going to be very difficult to achieve this because, although it had been understood at the TUC that the Government's policy on wages left provision for increases for lower paid workers, the fact could not be ignored that the decision with regard to the railway workers' claim meant in fact that £4 15s per week was considered sufficient to maintain a worker and his family.'⁵⁸

These factors, combined with a delay in negotiating a wage increase as contained in the Annual Conference resolution, led to a large unofficial stoppage of between seventy and eighty collieries in Scotland.

Immediately following the devaluation announcement the Scottish Executive received protests and letters of objection from branches as well as letters on the wages claim, the following are an example from Crosshouse/Dreghorn Branch, Polmaise 1 / 2 Branch, Hamilton Palace and Glenraig Branch: 'We are of the opinion that this tension has been deliberately planned by the Tory-minded Coal Board officials with a view to bringing about the downfall of the Labour Government'. Letters from Kames, Kingshill No 2, Manor Powis , Lindsay/Oakfield and Duntilland Branches read: 'We also consider Sir Wm. Lawther as mainly responsible for the conditions of the lower paid workers in light of statements made at the TUC conference and in his lack of interest in not taking this very urgent problem to the National Coal Board long ago.' Additionally, Lothian and Central East Fleets Colliery stated: 'We declare Sir Wm. Lawther's attitude is a betrayal of

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p 116. The Tribunal on the railway workers recent wage claim had judged the £4 15s
Footnotes continued on following page.

the traditions of our great trade union movement, knowing a trade union's first functions is to defend the wages of its members against those who are conspiring to extend their power of exploitation.' And from Kingshill No 2 Branch: '...we deeply deplore and roundly condemn the statements of our National President, Sir Wm. Lawther, at the Pawthcawl Conference and at the TUC, when he called all workers 'criminals' who dared to ask for increased wages to meet the rising cost of living.'⁵⁹

It was in these circumstances that William Lawther addressed a Scottish Area Conference on 15th October 1949. This Conference was significant because it highlighted the disenchantment in the Scottish coalfield, not only with Lawther personally, but with the general wages position, just prior to the TUC's announcement. An announcement the nature of which Lawther must have been aware as one of the NUM's representatives on the TUC's General Council.

Before Lawther addressed the Conference Moffat spoke of the £4 ½ million profit in the first two years of nationalisation and the fact that in June 1949 average Scottish wages were 1s 9d below the British average and face workers' wages 3s 3d below.⁶⁰ It was then that Lawther suggested that the current wage claim was the quickest yet formulated, although a gap of three months between its discussion by the workmen's side of the Joint National Negotiating Committee and its submission to the next

minimum to be adequate.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp 155-158.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, Area Minute Conference, 15.10.49, p 172.

National Executive Meeting in November was not particularly quick progress.⁶¹ He then went on to deal with changes that had occurred since the Annual Conference, perhaps trying to lay the ground for the forthcoming TUC decision, saying '...that the Union could not separate itself from the outside world. Discussions had taken place in parliament as a result of devaluation and regard must be paid to this situation. Within a few months we would be faced again with the responsibility of deciding whether to pursue the pathway taken over the last four years or to go back to a period of reaction.'⁶² He went on to say that wage freezing was never a term used in the Government's White Paper or by the TUC, and that he had intervened at the Annual Conference because of the 'tone and tenor' of the speeches.⁶³ This appeared more like rhetorical contortion than a reasonable justification.

In response a branch delegate said 'His branch, ...was very attentive to the role paid [sic] by the President and if he was to retain their support he would have to come closer to their aspirations and desires' and Mr. Alex Moffat (a Scottish Executive Committee member and brother of Abe Moffat) said 'that the Conference was intended to deal with the wages demands of the miners, particularly with regard to the lower paid workers, but the President's speech had given no encouragement regarding their position.'⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p 173.

⁶² *Ibid*, p 174.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p 177.

Comments from the floor continued in this vein, for example: 'Mr Brannan, Kingshill No 2, said he had to compliment the President on the manner in which he had skated on thin ice, dealing fully with the economic situation and skirting the essential problem which Conference was here to discuss...In conclusion Mr Brannan suggested that unless something very concrete emerged from the negotiations pending, no power on earth would stop the Scottish miners from coming out on strike. In the recent series of strikes he had only been able to control his men by the promise that in the future something would be gained from the impending negotiations.'⁶⁵ Considering that both delegates and Executive Committee members expressed such sentiments it is not surprising that the Scottish Area offered strong resistance to the TUC's policy on wages. However, unlike previous years the Scottish Area was less willing to accept the decisions of those in consultation with the Government.

On 28th November Moffat outlined the implications of the TUC decision to the Scottish Executive: 'Clause 4, the President explained, would mean the dropping of the miners' present claim for lower paid workers, which was based on a cost of living agreement.'⁶⁶ He also said it was necessary to take into account other factors;

1. Lower paid workers had had no increase since November 1947 although the index had risen 12 points since then. The wage of £5 15s was now worth £5 3s and wage of £5 only £4 9s.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p 179.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 28.11.49, p 279.

2. Acceptance of the TUC policy would mean no further progress with the claim for an extra weeks holiday.

3. If an increase for lower wage earners on the basis of a legal right under the cost of living agreement could not be claimed there was no possibility of proceeding with negotiation for a pension scheme which would cost £20 or £30 million.

4. Most importantly for the Scottish Area because of their unfair position in relation to wages of other coalfields, the possibility of negotiations on a national wage structure would be ruled out at least until 1951.⁶⁷

Another Executive Committee member, Mr. McArthur, said that 'he had always been opposed to wage freezing, which he considered an aggravation of the country's economic difficulties. The Scottish Area was clear on its attitude on this question and he therefore moved that the Executive should reaffirm the decision made on many occasions to press for the wage claim now tabled and advise the NEC accordingly. Mr Fairnie seconded this motion, pointing out that the Annual Conference of the Scottish Area had decided in favour of a wage claim for lower paid workers which had subsequently been accepted by the British Annual Conference.'⁶⁸ Several members endorsed this view and the motion was accepted unanimously.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Following the TUC's announcement the Scottish Area held a Conference to discuss the issue. Having outlined the TUC's document Abe Moffat went on to make the following observations:

at the last National Executive meeting another attempt was made to get us to postpone our claim. It was put forward by the Vice-President, who happens to be a member of the General Council of the TUC.

I want to say on this matter that we have reached a very vital stage in the history of our Union. You must understand that there is going to be a big fight in this organisation.

To operate such a policy would be a condemnation of all the traditions and fighting spirit of the miners in the days gone by, and would be gross betrayal of the lower paid workers in this industry, because we have created the impression right from the beginning that no matter what policy was operated nationally or in the country as a whole we would still fight to defend the low paid workers in this industry particularly.

It was a sorry pass when it was not even the employers but our own Trade Union movement which was giving the lead to prevent an increase for our lower paid workers.⁶⁹

The continued strength and depth of feeling amongst the Scottish miners against wage restraint was reflected when the resolution and addendum below were unanimously adopted:

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, Area Conference, 12.12.49, pp 309-313.

That this Conference of Scottish Miners, having discussed the TUC report calling for a rigorous restraint on all wages and suspension of claims under cost of living agreements, emphatically declares its strongest opposition to such a policy. Any attempt to suspend negotiations on the present claim for lower paid workers in the mining industry, as decided at Annual Conference, will have serious repercussions in the coalfield. We instruct our delegates attending the Special Conference⁷⁰ on 11th January 1950, to press for the claim on behalf of the lower paid workers; to call upon the National Executive Committee to speed up the negotiations; and to call for a ballot of the whole coalfield to determine the attitude of the members.⁷¹

The significance of the tactical change the Scottish representatives secured at the National Executive Meeting on 15 December should not be underestimated. They had asked why the Special Delegate Conference arranged for 16 December had been postponed until 11 January, the day before the Conference of Trade Union Executives was to vote on the TUC's policy. The explanation was given that they were not in receipt of the TUC document. This would mean that there would be no time for a membership ballot to endorse the National Executives policy. Bearing in mind the strength of feeling expressed by the Scottish membership, and Moffat's failure in 1948 to have the question of wage restraint referred back, it was imperative that the opportunity of the membership in Scotland expressing their views was not lost again. Therefore, Moffat moved that the Special Executive meeting of the NUM should be held on the 28 December and the Special Delegate Conference on the 29 December. This would permit the reference back to the districts to vote on the

⁷⁰ The Special Conference was a national conference of NUM delegates called to vote on the NUM National Executives policy of supporting the TUC's call for wage restraint.

resolution before the TUC Union Executive Conference on 11 January and the suggestion was narrowly accepted.⁷² Therefore, the possibility that delegates may vote in favour of the NUM Executive supporting the TUC's policy, contrary to their member's views, was avoided. Even if the outcome from the district votes was still in favour of wage restraint, Moffat would at least be able to claim that the decision had been based on the views of the entire membership and Scotland had had a fair say.

Although a majority of the NUM Executive had endorsed the policy of wage restraint in December, the outcome of the coalfield vote was very different from that of 1948. The Executive decision was reversed on the basis of the coalfield vote. The National NUM vote was overwhelmingly in opposition to the TUC wages policy with 518,000 against and 147,000 in favour, with not one of the Scottish branches voting in favour of the TUC policy. Therefore the miners' vote was cast in opposition to wage restraint at the conference of TUC Executives. However, the TUC policy was endorsed by the narrowest of margins, 4,243,000 in favour and 3,606,000 against, a ratio of only seven to six. By the time of the TUC Annual Conference in September a narrow majority in favour of wage restraint had been turned into a narrow majority against it. A resolutions calling for a modified form of wage restraint was defeated by 3,949,000 votes to 3,727,000.⁷³

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p 314.

⁷² NLS. Dep. 227.103, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 19.12.49, pp 325-326.

The miners crucial role in the January vote and the controversy it generated was reported by Moffat to his Executive 'at the conference a vicious attack had been made on the miners by Mr Arthur Deakin and Mr Tom Williamson, with reference to the high wages being paid in the mining industry. Their attention was drawn, however, to the fact that there was still no rush of new entrants to the industry.'⁷⁴ The Scottish miners' role was reiterated at an Area Conference in April

If the NUMSA had not insisted that acceptance of the TUC policy would violate the 1949 Annual Conference decision and demanded a branch vote, the NUM delegate conference would have been held on the day prior to the Conference of Trade Union Executives and the NUM vote cast in favour of wage restraint. ...the Scottish Area in particular, which was unanimous on this question, could claim credit for leading the fight within the British NUM.⁷⁵

In fact, if it had not been for the action of the Scottish Area, and the miners' votes had been cast in favour of the TUC's policy, the margin of victory would have been a more comfortable 6 to 4. This may still not have been sufficient to ensure an endorsement of wage restraint at the TUC Annual Congress, but NUM support would have markedly improved its chances. Of more significance for the Scottish miners, a consequence of their Area's insistence on a ballot was that the NUM Executive was compelled to proceed with the wage claim from the 1949 Annual Conference, irrespective of William Lawther's reluctance.

⁷³ TUC, *Annual Congress Report*, 1950.

⁷⁴ NLS. Dep. 227.103, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 23.1.50, p 376.

What was not immediately clear was whether the NUMSA's challenge to wage restraint in 1949 was influenced by the fact that the industry was nationalised. Judging by the large number of votes against wage restraint in the Union Executive and TUC Congress votes, opposition was not confined to nationalised industries. It would appear that opposition to wage restraint was not a feature of nationalisation *per se*. However, the particular wage claim that threatened wage restraint, gives some indication that the NUMSA at least felt that their position within a nationalised industry justified persisting with the claim. If one goes back to the Scottish Area Minute Conference of 15 October 1949 Abe Moffat makes a clear link between the claim and nationalisation. This was that in the first year of nationalisation the Scottish Area had contributed £1.5 million profit and in the second year over £3 million, yet average wages in Scotland were 1s 9d per shift below the British average and face workers were 3s 3d below the British level.⁷⁶ The implication of this was that, if Scottish miners were contributing to this national profit, why should the rewards from it be unevenly distributed nationally? Although this line of argument was not pursued at this stage, and the principle basis of the claim remained comparisons with the cost of living, there were other indications that the fact they were in a nationalised industry had an effect.

At the same conference a number of delegates raised questions over the compensation paid to the former owners. However, this was not a line Moffat appeared willing to pursue at this stage, albeit as much for political reasons as any

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, Area Conference, 3.4.50, p 522.

other. In response to a delegate who asked why changed conditions from 1947 did not justify the suspension of compensation payments in order to give the miners a better wage, Moffat replied that 'in his opinion the worst possible time to change the policy with regard to compensation would be just before a general election, because it would give the enemies of socialism the opportunity to say that the Government was in favour of confiscation and the wrong construction would be placed on it. In addition, legislation would be required and the Government was already committed to the Steel Bill and the future of the House of Lords in this session.'⁷⁷

One could also argue that in challenging the policy of wage restraint and continuing their pay demand through the national NUM and the TUC the NUMSA were, *ipso facto*, recognising they were now in a national industry, subject to national policy decisions and had to operate accordingly. But it must not be forgotten that the Scottish miners did not only have to come to terms with a new national industry, but also a new national union. It would appear a more reasonable proposition that in this case that it was the new national structure of the union, rather than the nationalisation of the industry, that determined the actions of the NUMSA. There is evidence of this in a Scottish Executive meeting in September 1949, when Moffat reported 'a dangerous policy being advocated in connection with the oncost strike had been received - firstly, that this area of the Union should take action on its own, or secondly, that the Scottish Area should disaffiliate from the NUM. Such a policy was in support of the Tories of this country, who wanted a reversion to the old

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, Area Minute Conference, 15.10.49, p 173.

district basis of dividing the coalfield up and preventing the national unity of miners. In the present circumstances the main object was to get recognition within the NUM of the feeling existing among the Scottish miners.⁷⁸

However, despite these indications that nationalisation played some part in NUMSA thinking on their wage claim and hence the basis of their resistance to wage restraint, one can only conclude that wider economic issues, particularly the cost of living, had a stronger influence. Equally, the principle of wage restraint from a Labour Government and the TUC seemed anathema to the Scottish miners, irrespective of their employment in a nationalised industry. Nationalisation was not something that bound the Scottish miners closer to Government policy, rather it provided them with greater opportunity for challenging it.

The July 1949 claim took until October 1950 to be settled, then the National Tribunal only awarded an increase of 6s after the miners had claimed 10s. The length of time it took to settle the claim could be considered as a success for both the Government and the TUC, but the price was to ferment further discontent within the Scottish coalfield.

One expression of this discontent was a new demand that demonstrated the NUMSA was increasingly focusing on the consequences of nationalisation itself in wage

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p 176.

demands. When the claim from 1949 was eventually settled in October 1950, it had gone to the National Tribunal under the system of compulsory arbitration. Although the tribunal's award was £1.25 million above the Board's offer, at £3.5 million, it was awarded as global sum for the Joint National Negotiating Committee to distribute, and was considered as derisory by the NUMSA. The consequence of this was for the NUMSA to adopt a motion calling for a change in the conciliation machinery,

While the decision of the Tribunal, according to the Conciliation machinery, is binding on both sides, it must be clearly understood that the global sum of £3.5 million will on no way provide an adequate wage for lower paid workers and, despite the greatest decline in manpower in living memory, will tend to drive more miners away from the industry...the Scottish Executive in this motion called upon the National Executive to consider the advisability of making a change in the conciliation machinery to provide that when national negotiations with the Board were exhausted the miners should have the democratic right to decide whether the matter should be referred to the Tribunal or whether they would use the power and strength of the Union in some other way to enforce their claim.⁷⁹

Therefore, in two ways the NUMSA was making a connection with nationalisation, on the one hand with the problem of attracting manpower, which was one of the most pressing problems of the industry and one which nationalisation had failed to solve, and secondly with the structure of conciliation which had been adopted following nationalisation.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p 119.

Under the Conservative administration from 1951 the path of NUMSA wage claims did not alter substantially and neither was there a significant change in government labour policy. Perhaps wary of his previous 'union bashing' reputation Chrichill appointed the conciliatory Walter Monkton as Minister of Labour. Under Monkton the Labour Government's policy of consensus was maintained and there were no legislative changes in trade union or industrial relations. Relations between the Minister and trade union leaders may not have been as close or as frequent as under Labour, but a number of cordial relations were established, with William Lawther amongst them.

There is also evidence that nationalisation itself continued to play a big part when wage claims came to be formulated, even if the Conservative Government was not ideologically committed to it. For example in September 1951 the NUM National Executive unanimously endorsed a procedure to negotiate for a £7 10s minimum weekly wage for underground workers, a 15% increase for all day wage workers and a 3s per week flat rate increase for all piece-rate workers.⁸⁰ When this was presented to the Board they said they would not make an offer until a number of conditions were met first. The NUM rejected this proposal and Moffat said 'this was a very

⁷⁹ NLS. Dep. 227.104, NUMSA, Special Area Conference, 30.10.50, pp 236-238.

⁸⁰ NLS. Dep. 227.105, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 25.9.51, p 124.

good indication within the Union and we certainly should not be ready to give a Tory Government what we had never been prepared to give to a Labour Government.⁸¹

The attempts by the Government to restrain wages by appeals through the TUC was part of a broader policy of consulting with trade unions and including them in the policy-making process to try to establish more inclusive, harmonious and stable economic environment. On this basis the result of the attempts at wage restraint was a bitter and divisive legacy of the struggle that had taken place and one which had serious implication for the ability of union leaders to maintain discipline and control within their unions.

Not only did the NUM continue to make annual wage demands, often at the instigation of the Scottish Area, but the National President, William Lawther, could no longer deliver the miners' support for any policy of wage restraint to the General Council of the TUC, whether under a Labour or Conservative Government.

Furthermore, Lawther's actions had left an indelible impression upon the Scottish Area and the NUM as a whole, who increasingly viewed his actions with suspicion; 'it was apparently all right for the Chairman of the TUC to send goodwill messages to Churchill and the President of the NUM to attend his birthday party.'⁸² In effect Lawther was unable to influence on the decisions of his own union. It is clear that he shared the attitudes of the Government of the day, as one might expect of a man in

⁸¹ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 19.11.51, p 226.

⁸² NLS. Dep. 227.106, NUMSA, Special Area Delegate Conference, 2.2.53, p 434.

his position on a 'governing institution' such as the TUC, but crucially he had been unable to convince his union of adopting the same course.

Although wage claims were the most continuous thread throughout the period it would be unrepresentative to give the impression that this was the only matter with which the Scottish Area of the NUM were concerned, or that it alone can provide a representative view of the unions attitude towards nationalisation, or their role within it. After all, wage claims were likely to be the most contentious item of union and employer relations irrespective of the form of ownership. When one considers other items, such as production, unofficial stoppages, absenteeism and re-organisation a more rounded picture emerges.

IV

Production, Organisation and Tactics

If the Scottish Area of the NUM was less than enthusiastic in responding to Government appeals for wage restraint they were more amenable to appeals for increases in production. Throughout this period there was a persistent shortage of coal, and year on year the Scottish miners increased production, frequently against a background of declining manpower. One indication of their commitment was that although the National NUM decided to abandon the post of a union Production

Officer, the Scottish Area had wanted to retain the position.⁸³ Even once the position had been terminated in April 1945 the former Production Officer continued to supply production, manpower, absenteeism, unofficial stoppage, breakdown, accident and output per man and per manshift figures to the Executive Committee on a monthly basis and once the NCB had been established the Union requested the same information from them.⁸⁴ An example of the type of information supplied by the Union's Production Officer is given in Appendix One, and it should be noted that this information was far more comprehensive than that considered by the Divisional Coal Board at their Executive meetings.

In spite of this willingness to tackle production problems the Scottish Area continued to suffer from the worst rate of unofficial stoppages in the country, a factor which was continually brought to the Union's attention. For example, a message from Shinwell in December 1945 drew the Union's attention to the position that the Union had printed as a poster and sent to the collieries.⁸⁵ However, the action of the Union on the question of unofficial stoppages went further than mere publicity. In consultation with the Minister of Fuel and Power they agreed that where there were persistent unofficial stoppages and output was low they would issue a notice that on the next stoppage the colliery would be permanently closed. Unfortunately, although the Union was prepared to adopt a strong line those in the Ministry failed to back them up. When a notice warning of closure was posted at Southfield Colliery the

⁸³ NLS. Dep. 227.100, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 15.4.46, p 3.

⁸⁴ NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 20.1.47, p 5.

⁸⁵ NLS. Dep. 227.101, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 10.12.45, p 4.

Executive Committee 'unanimously declared itself in agreement with the action proposed by the Regional Controller of posting up a notice at Southfield Colliery to the effect that the colliery would be closed if further stoppages take place.'⁸⁶ However, by the next Executive Meeting the Regional Controller had decided to adopt a policy of dismissing the men involved instead of closing the whole pit, Mr. James Tennyson, the Agent responsible for Southfield 'considered that the Ministry had shown weakness in not closing the colliery and condemned the foolish action of the men.'⁸⁷ This also had the unfortunate consequence that it appeared that the Union was advocating closure while the Ministry of Fuel and Power was trying to keep the pit open.

On another occasion in December 1950 at a meeting with the Divisional Coal Board to deal with the question of production, William Reid (the NCB Scotland's Production Director) said 'that this was a problem for the Union to deal with and that he did not think the NUM was giving the leadership necessary, especially at the pits. Some of the local officials, he said, lacked courage and backbone...'⁸⁸ Although there is undoubtedly some truth in Reid's accusation, Moffat's reply seemed the more reasoned and plausible. First of all he challenged the Board's record of planning, for 1949 they had aimed for 25 million tons with 84,000 workers, of which 45% were to be on the face, in all three the Board had failed. Again in 1950, Moffat said the Board had aimed for between 25 and 26 million tons, 82,400 workers (which the

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 18.2.46, p 7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 4.4.46, p 3.

⁸⁸ NLS. Dep. 227.104, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 4.12.50, p 325.

NUM did not accept) and 45% of these on the face - 'Again none of these targets had been achieved or was likely to be achieved.'⁸⁹ Moffat also enquired about the amount of face room available, to which he said he received no satisfactory reply, and 'these matters...were even more serious in their effect on production than any unofficial stoppage.'⁹⁰ He also said that they were not getting the benefit of concentration because in those areas that had received men, output per manshift at the coalface had declined, but it had gone up where pits had closed. In response the Board had made no proposals.⁹¹

Possibly the best example of the positive suggestions that could emerge from the Scottish Area of the NUM was their comments on the National Coal Board's 1950 'Plan for Coal'. Although some of the comments could be interpreted as being purely self interested, such as those pointing out the absence of favourable plans for pay and conditions, others are positive and astute assessments of the way in which the industry was being planned. For example, on finance, the Union expressed concern at the sum of £635 million over 15 years for investment, or £40 million a year, being a sole charge against the industry and the additional amounts that would have to be charged against depreciation.⁹² Considering their concern of the effect of existing charges, particularly compensation, on the industry, their concern that this would be an intolerable drain is understandable. On output the Scottish Area of the NUM said

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p 326.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Executive Committee Meeting, 18.12.50, Appendix IV, p 370.

'Table 1, page 10, gives the divisional and British outputs planned at the end of fifteen years showing a total production of 240 million tons. We consider this part of the plan to be unrealistic.'⁹³ Moffat pointed out some years later that by 1965 the target had been reduced to 200 million tons, vindicating the earlier criticism.⁹⁴ The comments went on to say that, although the Board intended to spend capital over five year periods, 'nothing is said about five year periods in the planning of coal outputs. To accept this would mean a leap in the dark and that only at the end of fifteen years would we find out whether the plan had failed or succeeded. Surely in any plan...there should have been intermediate stages in order that a proper check might be made on the achievement of the plan.'⁹⁵ Furthermore on the question of manpower 'the plan makes no reference to the proportion of faceworkers to non-producers. It is amazing to find ignored this question which is the test of any planning in the mining industry and the solution to the problem of increasing coal production. Unless this question is dealt with and solved it is impossible to increase coal production to any great degree.'⁹⁶ These comments show that the NUMSA was not only concerned with the industry in a narrow way, such as how to immediately increase coal, but also the long-term development of the industry under nationalisation.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p 371.

⁹⁴ Moffat, A. *My Life with the Miners*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1965, p 102.

⁹⁵ NLS. Dep. 227.104, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 18.12.50, Appendix IV, p 371.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

These are by no means the only areas of nationalisation in which the Scottish Area of the NUM was concerned. Whilst the above are fairly representative examples, there are a number of other areas that are worth emphasising because they regularly occurred as a topic of discussion. One such topic was the structure of the National Coal Board itself. However, contrary to suggestions by those such as Baldwin that the NUM, amongst others, incorrectly focused on organisational rather than administrative centralisation,⁹⁷ the Scottish Area of the NUM appears to have had a firm grasp of where the problem of over-centralisation lay. From the very inception of the NCB Moffat had raised the question of managerial authority and anticipated what was to be a recurring complaint, that managers had too little authority and continually had to refer questions upwards, particularly concerning disputes '...giving his own opinion on the question of disputes, the President considered that the main issue to eliminate friction was the speeding up of the settlements at the colliery. Our objective should be 1) to give more power to the managers to settle disputes, and 2) to secure effective pit machinery for arbitration if settlement is not reached, so that finality might be obtained in a matter of days, to prevent the present delay involved in disputes reaching the Area Committee and then being referred to the Independent Chairman or Regional Controller for decision.'⁹⁸

That this question of authority continued to be of concern is reflected in an October 1951 NUMSA Executive Committee Meeting. 'Branches had complained that lack

⁹⁷ Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation: the Labour Problems of British Coal*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1955, pp 30-31.

⁹⁸ NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 14.10.46, pp 3-4.

of authority to colliery managers was the cause of much discontent and frustration' this matter was then discussed on the Divisional Consultative Council and the NCB had produced a memo for the Council in the beginning of October, outlining the responsibilities of lower officials, 'the President pointed out that this document in effect restricted the authority of managers, agents and labour relations officers to an even greater degree than had been anticipated by the Union.'⁹⁹ Rather perversely at the same time, the NUMSA Executive was voicing alarm at the Conservative Government's plans for decentralisation in the Coal industry. Although the policy of decentralisation was intended to give the man on the spot more power the Union feared that this power would descend no further than the divisional level, with the result that the Coal Board would be able to play one division off against another, eroding wages and conditions.¹⁰⁰

It was not until 1952 that the fullest expression of the Union's opinion on the Coal Board's administration occurred in a letter forwarded to NUM Headquarters on behalf of the Scottish Executive. The letter said, 'In our opinion the policy and composition of the Board is of greater importance than the number of heads and the staffing organisation.' The letter went on that 'it is quite evident, therefore, that their (the NCB's) approach to nationalisation is entirely different from that of the Trade Union Movement since they are practically all loyal supporters of private enterprise, which benefits considerably from the use of coal, even apart from the selling price of coal at the pit heads, which bears no relation to the real profit extracted from coal by

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 8.10.51, pp 149-150.

private enterprise.' Apart from this complaint about the composition and outlook of the NCB the letter also criticised the level of capital investment, quoting figures of £177 million in gas and electricity compared to £28 million in coal and only 0.01% of revenue was spent on technical research (£500,000 out of £456 million). In concluding the letter said 'from this we draw the conclusion that it is the policy which is the real threat to nationalisation and not the organisation and staff they have created.'¹⁰¹ What impact such criticisms had is difficult to determine as there does not appear to be a response from the NCB or reports of any further developments.

In pursuit of these various interests the Scottish Area of the NUM did not rely solely on their national organisation. In practice a remarkable diversity of tactics were employed. These varied from marches and demonstrations to Radio Broadcasts.

For example in March 1946 a meeting with the Scottish miners' MPs was held where it 'was agreed that contact between the Miners' MPs and the Union was weak, and had welcomed the move to establish closer relations. In order to ensure this the following had been recommended: 1) That the MPs should appoint one of themselves to act as liaison officer with the Union; 2) that the miners' MPs should receive a copy of all minutes and general circulars being sent out from the Scottish Area; and 3) that a meeting of the Officials and the four Miners' MPs should be held

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p 151.

¹⁰¹ NLS. Dep. 227.105, NUMSA, Special Executive Committee Meeting, 7.4.52, Appendix I, pp 523-524.

once a quarter to discuss the problems in the coalfield.¹⁰² Although nothing appears to have come of this last suggestion the Miners MPs were used on a number of occasions to raise questions in the House on matters concerning the Scottish Executive. However, this as much to publicise a particular issue than to have any real legislative effect.

Another frequent tactic was to hold coalfield conferences, where the Union, MPs, Councillors, Coal Board, Clergy and independent experts were often present. These were a particular feature in Lanarkshire, due to the greater number of pit closures and various branch based campaigns to de-water the coalfield and establish a coal distillation plant.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the way in which the Scottish Area of the NUM conducted its campaigns was that it was able on a number of occasions to hold meetings with the Minister of Fuel and Power, often with the Minister Travelling to visit the Union and also to have frequent contact with many senior Coal Board officials without recourse to the national NUM. Some of these visits were part of a tour of the coal regions but on other occasions the visit was specifically to discuss Scottish issues and did not involve national officials.

¹⁰² NLS. Dep. 227.101, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 18.4.46, p 3.

These other concerns of the Scottish Area reflect, more so than the wages issue, the diversity of tactics employed by the Union in their various campaigns. This also raises questions over the validity of corporatism. The wages issue highlights the ability of a subsidiary level of the union to challenge national policy. Furthermore, the other activities of the Scottish Area demonstrate that irrespective of the progress or otherwise of wage claims the Scottish Area did not view their own union or the NCB as the only means of influence. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that even if the Scottish Area of the NUM had been in accordance with the NUM national leadership and the TUC on wages policy, it would be problematic to justify the view that the national NUM was the sole representative of miners' opinion in Britain when the Scottish Area of the NUM had enough authority to influence the national level in its own right.

Jones has argued that the roots of the breakdown of the corporatist model can be traced to Labour's period in office.¹⁰³ The evidence on wage restraint above would suggest that this was the case, but for the Scottish miners the system did not survive past 1948. Furthermore, continued pressure by organisation like the Scottish miners made the system of appeals and consultation largely ineffectual by 1950.

¹⁰³ Jones, R. *Wages and Employment Policy 1936-1985*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1987, p 46.

Conclusion

The evidence in this chapter indicates that the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area provided a significant degree of policy initiative, modification and amendment to the national level. This ability was most clearly displayed in the challenge of the Scottish Area's wage claims to the policy of wage restraint. In so doing they also displayed a significantly different attitude towards nationalisation to that of the National Executive. Their immediate opposition to wage restraint and persistent wage claims shows that they did not share the responsibility felt by the National Executive for supporting the Government's policy or the NCB's attempts to comply with it. Whilst nationalisation provided an opportunity and a justification for addressing Scottish wage claims, the NUMSA could not accept the limitations that being part of a nationalised industry brought. In particular their expectation that nationalisation would not just bring material benefit to the miners, but wider benefits to the working class, could not be reconciled with the realities of Britain's precarious post-war economic position.

Nevertheless, the ability of the NUMSA to influence policy upwards to the national level was only part of their role in nationalisation. As the previous chapter indicated a significant feature at the national level was the NUM's reliance on their Area organisations to implement the NUM's side of agreements. Therefore, another measure of the NUMSA's attitude towards and influence upon nationalisation was their ability to fulfil this and their relations with the Scottish Divisional Board. Just

as at the national level NUMSA relations with the Scottish Divisional Board are crucial to understanding the NUM's role in nationalisation. Production, absenteeism, unofficial stoppages, conciliation, consultation and reorganisation were all areas of responsibility for Divisional Boards. Considering the NUMSA's ability to affect outcomes at the national level, one would expect their relationship with the Scottish Board to provide further insights to their attitude towards nationalisation and to influence policy.

Chapter Five

The National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area

I

Introduction

Considering the inability of the national level to provide a complete explanation for the pattern and characteristics of coal nationalisation the potential of regional influences to offer an explanation becomes significant.

Despite the historiographical inadequacies of regional coalmining studies some aspects of Scottish miners under nationalisation can be established. Church and Outram, in their comprehensive study of mining disputes, do seek to explain regional disparities, particularly Scotland's and South Wales's high propensity for strikes. One theory they dismiss is that of a 'Celtic cultural' explanation for strikes. They argue that although there was a language difference in strike prone areas of South Wales and religious tensions between catholic and protestant in the Lanarkshire coal field, there is not sufficient evidence of a positive correlation between the two. In particular, other industries in these regions did not show a similarly high propensity to strike, and even within the coal industry strike propensity varied between

collieries.¹ They then suggest that it is common local, colliery level factors, that explain dispute levels rather any regional characteristics.²

Whilst this and the next chapter do not take issue with the predominance of local factors in strike activity, this does not mean that there was not an important regional dimension to the nationalised coal industry. Strikes may have been local in origin and devoid of any cultural symbolism, but what were the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area (NUMSA) Executive's attitude towards these strikes? To what extent did the NUMSA share strikers objectives or were willing and able to control them? Another important question was the NUMSA's relationship with the Scottish Coal Board on these issues. What was the attitude of NUMSA appointees to the Scottish Coal Board, did these differ from the NUMSA and were they able to co-operate?

Furthermore, NUMSA influence and attitude towards nationalisation could exist beyond the narrow confines of unofficial disputes. The challenges facing the Scottish coal industry went beyond the traditional sphere of industrial relations, even though they were negotiated in this context. The challenges of increasing production, raising productivity through mechanisation, reorganisation and reconstruction and the responsibilities of joint consultation fell as much on the area unions as it did on the national executive.

¹ Church, R. and Outram, Q. *Strikes and Solidarity: coalfield conflict in Britain 1889-1966*, CUP, Cambridge, 1998, pp 52-58.

Chapter One of this thesis indicated that Scottish trade unions, including the NUM and its predecessor the National Union of Scottish Mineworkers (NUSM), had somewhat different views of nationalisation compared to their English and Welsh counterparts. Throughout the inter-war and war-time years Scottish trade unions expressed a stronger ideological aspect to their belief in nationalisation, that is the extent to which it would bring about a 'socialist' society and form part of planned economic policy. In the latter years of World War Two Scottish trade unions did not emphasise the 'practical' benefits of nationalisation to the same degree as their English counterparts or the Labour Party. Therefore, one question to be addressed in this chapter is the extent to which this attitude persisted, was modified or new attitudes developed under nationalisation. This concept of a Scottish perspective is particularly important in regard to nationalisation, which by its very nature brought about, and aimed for, a degree of centralisation and uniformity.

A related question is the extent to which the NUMSA, whatever their attitude towards nationalisation, was able to influence policy, either through the National Coal Board Scottish Division (NCBSD)³ or NUM. The ability of the NUMSA to influence nationalisation was dependent on three factors; their own strength and organisation, their relative strength within the NUM and their relations with the Scottish Divisional Board. As the previous chapter indicated the NUM was created

² *Ibid*, pp-74-94.

on top of the existing district union organisations. These district unions, of which the NUSM was one, retained their own organisation, officers and finances. Their officers salaries were now paid by the national NUM and a levy was charged to fund the national organisation, but contributions themselves were not standardised. The NUMSA still held their own conferences, at which branches and the executive could move resolutions, and if carried these were then submitted to the NUM annual conference. Therefore, there was also scope for Scottish miners to influence the policy within the union.

The NUMSA also found itself, like other union areas, in a potentially influential position within the NCB. As the Chapter Three indicated, the NUM National Executive found itself unable, and at times unwilling, to impose discipline on subordinate levels of the organisation. Therefore area organisations, with representatives on the National Executive and former members appointed to the NCBSA, were fully versed in national issues, participated in policy-making and were responsible for implementing this policy within their area. NUM areas were also the union level which considered and represented the local organisations and ordinary members. These were potentially conflicting demands and if the NUM as a whole was to fulfil their new 'dual responsibility' the area organisations would have to play a key role in mediating between the national and local levels. However, one should not presume that the persistence of unofficial disputes and discipline problems reported at the national level meant that the area organisations failed in this role. For

³ The National Coal Board Scottish Division was the official title, hereafter they will be referred to as
Footnotes continued on following page.

example, Scotland's poor reputation for industrial relations does not necessarily mean that the NUMSA were not implementing national policy or fostering local, rather than national, loyalties. The NUMSA may have been mediating and diffusing a far larger number of total disputes than elsewhere. Alternatively, the very implementation of national policy could cause problems if it ran counter to local customs and traditions.

Therefore, the issue as to the extent that these appointments would reflect a trade union position occurred at the divisional level, just as it did at the national one. Furthermore, the Scottish Board had policy-making powers in relation to Scotland. It also had to go through the same process of setting up its organisation and ensuring a smooth transition to nationalisation as the national level. It is these early stages of development that are dealt with first.

II

The Scottish Divisional Coal Board and the NUMSA

The relationship between the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Coal Board was crucial. If the Coal Board and miners' union were unable to establish a co-operative and mutually productive relationship, and overcome the worst elements of mistrust and hostility of private ownership, there would be little prospect of

the Scottish Divisional Board or Scottish Board.

consensus or either the Board's or the union's aims for nationalisation being achieved. In particular by examining the minutes of the Divisional Disputes Committee a measure of the ability of the Divisional Coal Board and the NUM to work together is provided. Although disputes are by their nature always going to be a contentious and difficult area, they were also the basic and most fundamental problem facing the industry. If it was not possible to resolve these in a constructive manner, the potential to achieve further development, by either the Board of the union was likely to be compromised. Therefore, the atmosphere and relations between the Board and union are an important factor in analysing the NUMSA in relation to nationalisation.

It was the embryonic National Board, or Organising Committee as they had called themselves, that was responsible for the establishment of the Scottish Divisional Board (SDB). The Organising Committee had visited the various coalfields to explain their immediate plans and canvas possible appointments to the Divisional Boards. By 12 September 1946 the Scottish Board had been appointed on the same basis as the other Divisional Boards and consisted of a Chairman, Deputy Chairman, and four functional directors - Labour, Production, Finance and Marketing.⁴ By Vesting Day most of the Regional Boards were up and running, but by no means all the area personnel and administration had been established.

⁴ For further details of the structure of the NCB, including the Divisional Boards see Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. 1955, pp 20-21.

The first meeting of the Scottish Divisional Board took place on 25 September 1946, 13 days after their appointments had been confirmed.⁵ The haste with which many of the Boards had been established was reflected in the fact that the Board did not have premises of its own in Edinburgh. The first series of meetings took place in the North British Station Hotel. The members of the SDB were the Earl of Balfour (also known as Lord Balfour), Chairman; Captain T.H. Thorneycroft, Deputy Chairman; Mr. James. Barbour OBE, Labour Director; Mr. W.H. Craig, Marketing Director; Mr. R.W. Parker, Finance Director and Mr. W. Reid, Production Director. The Earl of Balfour had been the war-time Coal Controller for Scotland, Captain Thorneycroft had been a director of the Lothian Coal Co. and William Reid was a director of the Fife Coal Co. and son of Sir William Reid of the Reid Report. Of most interest was James Barbour. Barbour was the 'union' man on the SDB, having been both the Vice-President and President (from May 1940) of the National Union of Scottish Mineworkers (NUSM) and represented the Scottish miners on the Executive of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB). In 1942 he had sat on the Committee that produced the report on the Scottish Coalfields⁶ and in mid August 1942 he resigned his union position to become Regional Director of Labour for Scotland.

However, when canvassed for possible appointments to this position, Barbour was the NUMSA's fourth choice. It was only after the President Abe Moffat and two other Executive members had refused, that the NUMSA Executive agreed to support

⁵ Scottish Record Office (SRO), CB 45/1, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 1st meeting, 25.9.46, p. 1.

⁶ *Scottish Coalfields*, Cmd. 6575, Scottish Home Department, 1944.

Barbour's appointment.⁷ In hindsight Moffat was also scathing of those former trade unionists who took up appointments in the NCB, complaining that they lost touch with the miners and the union and adopted too much of the Board's outlook.⁸ This attitude did not bode well for relations between the chief representative of the NUMSA and the man who was responsible for Labour Relations on the SDB.

Barbour's prior experience is not untypical of the former trade unionists appointed by the National Coal Board. Many prominent and experienced trade union officers had undertaken administrative work during the war, usually in the labour field or in the industry with which they were closely associated.⁹ This again raises problem of how representative officials such as Barbour were of their former trade union's opinion. On taking up his appointment Barbour was required to relinquish any position with his old union, not even being allowed honorary membership, and was on a salary of between £2000 and £5000 pounds.¹⁰ It may prove that these circumstances were not conducive to the Labour Director empathising with position of miners, or his position may have constrained him in supporting the miners as much or as openly as he would have liked.

Despite these inauspicious circumstances, Shinwell had given the NUM and TUC assurances that the Labour Directors on the National and Divisional Boards were to

⁷ NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 7.10.46, p 2.

⁸ Moffat, A. *My Life with the Miners*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1965, p 86.

⁹ Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. 1955, pp 30-31.

be 'their' men. However, in maintaining their independence by not having direct representation, or even control over the appointment, the NUM were placing Labour Directors in an ambiguous position. If they anticipated the role of the Labour Director as defending the miners' interests in the higher, policy-making, echelons of the NCB this was not necessarily the role expected of the Labour Director by the rest of the Board, and they could claim no right to expect him to do so. It would not seem unreasonable for the other Board members to want the Labour Director to provide assistance on labour matters to the production and finance officers, the very people whom the miners may have expected to defend their interests against. These questions relate to the general question of how the various elements that went to make up a nationalised industry perceived its shape and the roles each would play within it. The question of the role of the Labour Director, from the miners' perspective at least, can be considered in three ways. Firstly, did Barbour clearly advocate or defend the miners interests? Secondly, was he in agreement with the rest of the Divisional Board's policy? And thirdly, was he a neutral figure, not clearly identifying with either the Board's or the union's position? These three alternatives raise a number of questions. Did he advocate the same position as the other Board members? What characterised his relationship with the other Board members? Did he disagree on questions of policy or was there usually a consensus? How did Barbour see the position of the Labour Department in relation to other departments? These questions raise the issue of how important individuals such as Barbour were, but also provide a useful measure of the NUMSA's attitude.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 30.

III

The NUM and SDB Relations

At least a partial answer to some of these questions can be gleaned from the recorded minutes of the Scottish Divisional Board operating both as a Policy Board and an Executive Board. Another source for these relationships are the Divisional Disputes Committee (DDC) minutes, where executive level representatives from the SDB and Scottish Area of the NUM met to try to resolve disputes referred to them by the pits as part of the District Conciliation Scheme. Records of the NUMSA Executive can also shed some light on areas untouched by other sources.

It should be emphasised that in considering the role of Barbour, the functional organisation of the SDB lent itself to an advocacy of policy in terms of the interests for which each functional director was responsible. That is, if there had been a non-Executive Board in charge without specific responsibility for any particular aspect of the business it may have been expected that they could reach decisions without each member having to concern themselves with the particular implications each decision would have on their departments. It was inevitable that certain policy issues would raise questions of priority, with four out of the six Board members having responsibility for a particular department, and this is reflected in the records. For instance, should the interests of production take precedence over labour, finance and marketing? In this context the role of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman became more important because they were in the position to mediate between the sometimes

competing interests of the other Board members. Therefore, in considering the occasions where Barbour differed with other Board members, differences with the Chairman or Deputy Chairman become more significant than differences of opinion between different functional Board members arising simply from their different briefs.

Over the period 1945 to 1955 Barbour did not often disagree with the opinion of the rest of the SDB. However, he was the only Board member throughout this period who disagreed at all with his colleagues and requested that the fact should be included in the minutes of the meeting. Furthermore, on the occasions that Barbour did disagree with his colleagues it was always over a major point of policy, not a small administrative matter.

The first such occasion occurred in April 1947 over the refusal of the NUM Scottish Area (NUMSA) to agree to the formation of Area Consultative Councils (ACCs) when the rest of the Board resolved to press for their formation in Scotland.¹¹ It is not clear from the Board minutes what the basis of the NUMSA's objections were or those of Barbour. Neither do the Divisional Disputes Committee minutes shed any light on the matter. Unfortunately the NUMSA Executive minutes do not reveal much more about their position. All that the Scottish Executive Committee minutes revealed was that 'disagreement had arisen on the question of Area Consultative Committees, the Divisional Coal Board, the Colliery Managers Association and the

Fireman's union being in favour of such committees. In accordance with the Executive committee decision [it is not clear when or what this decision was], the Union had opposed the setting up of an Area Consultative Committees and the matter stood in abeyance meantime.¹² However, it may have been that the NUMSA were against an additional layer of consultation between the pit and the Division because this would inevitably have delayed decisions. This was certainly the case when they argued against the establishment of extra conciliation committees at the area level, and it would not seem unreasonable to suggest that the same reasoning lay behind their objections to Area Consultative Committees. In October 1946 '...the President considered that the main issue to eliminate friction was the speeding up of settlements at the colliery...so that finality might be obtained in a matter of days, to prevent the present delay involved in disputes reaching the Area Committee and then being referred to the Independent Chairman or Regional Controller for decision.'¹³ Whether such objections were shared by Barbour is, unfortunately, unknown. However, it appears that other Divisions were experiencing similar problems in the establishment of ACCs, although Lord Hyndley at NCB Headquarters in London insisted that there had to be very strong local reasons not to establish ACCs because the policy had been approved at national level.¹⁴ At the meeting on 29 July it was decided to press ahead with the ACCs despite the Chairman reminding the Board that Barbour did not share their view. A copy of a letter that had been sent to the Minister

¹¹ SRO. CB 45/1, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 35th meeting, 8.4.47, p 240.

¹² NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 14.4.47, p 3.

¹³ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 14.9.46, pp 3-4.

¹⁴ SRO. CB 45/1, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 37th meeting, 22.4.47, p 267 and 44th meeting, 29.7.47, p 354.

of Fuel and Power complaining of the lack of consultation at area level was also read to the meeting by the Production Director and this may well have prompted the Board to take action in spite of Barbour's reservations.

The second, and more fundamental difference between Barbour and the rest of the Board began in March 1950, when plans for the re-organisation of the Scottish Division were first put forward.¹⁵ These involved creating more but smaller areas and bringing production staff together, this it was hoped would reduce the burden on Area General Managers and reduce the number of links in the management chain, speeding up decisions and their implementation.¹⁶ On 23 May 1950 Barbour said that:

at Vesting Date matters in the Scottish Division were chaotic but they were now of some shape although whether they were adequate or inadequate for the purpose was under discussion. He did not think this reorganisation should be carried out in piecemeal fashion but should be carefully planned, surveyed with the personnel placed in position, and the whole scheme costed. It was his opinion that a large organisation such as the Coal Board could not afford to carry out schemes in a piecemeal manner and he would prefer that the scheme in its entirety should be placed on the table. The Chairman said... he took the opposite view.¹⁷

¹⁵ SRO. CB 45/3, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 104th meeting, 21.3.50, p 187 and Memo SDB/P (50) 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 105th meeting, 18.4.50, p 195 and Memos SDB/P (50) 40, SDB/P (50) 79, SDB/P (50) 113.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 106th meeting, 23.5.50, pp 203-6.

At the meeting on 25 July it was decided to go ahead with a piecemeal reorganisation as an experiment with the creation of a new Alloa Area.¹⁸ However, it was not until the next meeting on 15 August that the exact nature of the Labour Director's objections was revealed when he argued that the Fife Area should be split and considered as part of the new Alloa Area at this stage and not later: 'he felt the Board had forgotten that the Fife Area was the primary problem in the Scottish Division.'¹⁹ Then again on 24 October Barbour disagreed with the rest of the Scottish Divisional Board, when he wanted ten areas to be created not eight, although at this stage the Chairman expressed the view that he did not think that there was too much difference between himself and the Labour Director on the ultimate set-up.²⁰ This may well have been the case, but Barbour still displayed a more far-reaching outlook than his counterparts concerning the organisation of the Division. This question of the size of the basic managerial unit, the area, was part of a wide-ranging and general criticism of the organisation of the Coal Board at the time, from both the NUM and certain managers.²¹ In particular the question of over-centralisation arose as a common criticism, often expressed by the NUM as a dislike of bureaucracy, that is an over staffed, expensive administration.²² In this case the NUMSA did not appear to have made any contribution to the reorganisation or comments upon it. However, the real problem was administrative rather than structural centralisation. Whether Barbour envisaged applying a more precise definition of responsibility to the new areas was

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 108th meeting, 25.7.50, p 227.

¹⁹ The Fife Area was making heavy losses and output was below target. SRO. CB45/3, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 109th meeting, 15.8.50, pp 235-6.

²⁰ SRO. CB 45/3, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 112th meeting, 24.10.50, p 258.

²¹ Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation: The Labour Problems of British Coal*,: Harvard University Press, 1955, pp 22-24.

unclear. For some time before this, the Scottish Area of the NUM had expressed similar, if not identical, criticisms. Almost from the foundation of the National Coal Board the NUMSA had complained of lack of managerial authority at the pit level and had suggested administrative, rather than structural, decentralisation.²³

Therefore the NUMSA's lack of input to the Divisional Board's particular restructuring proposals may reflect a belief that this was not one of their responsibilities. It is possible that Barbour's desire for a more far-reaching reorganisation resulted from his experience as a Deputy Coal Controller in Scotland, but as the Chairman had been the Coal Controller one might have expected that they would reach the same conclusions.

It could simply be that Barbour, with past experience of 'both sides' of the coal industry, had a better grasp of the depth of the problems facing the division and realised that more fundamental action was required. However, what is striking is that in general terms both Barbour and the NUMSA had a desire to see greater reform and development of the organisation and structure of the Divisional Coal Board than the Board itself. The specific proposals of Barbour and the NUMSA did not display any direct link, and there is no evidence to support the idea of one influencing the other, but the thrust of their proposals remained the same. Therefore, it can be argued that Barbour did display some 'trade union' attitudes as Labour Director, however, these were not directly influenced by the NUMSA. Rather, he appeared to

²² *Ibid*, pp 25.

²³ NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA: Executive Committee Meeting, 14.10.46, pp 3-4 and Dep227. 105, NUMSA: Executive Committee Meeting, 7.4.52, Appendix I, pp 523-524.

share an attitude with the NUMSA that saw the need for nationalisation to be a far more radical and ongoing process than the piecemeal and cautious approach of the Divisional Coal Board.

The third instance where the Labour Director disagreed with the other members of the Board had more to do with the role and status of the Labour Department itself, although this also raised a policy issue. This issue was the status and responsibility of Labour Officers in relation to their production counterparts. The question had first raised its head in the early days of the SDB when the future policy regarding concentrations (closures) was being considered. Barbour preferred that Area Executives, including the Area Labour Officer (ALO), should determine whether a colliery should be closed instead of production staff as suggested in a memorandum before the Board by the Production Department.²⁴ The Production Director pointed out that Area Labour Officers had nothing to do with the production at the colliery and it should be left entirely to the production staff to say whether a colliery should be closed or not. The Chairman, in smoothing ruffled feathers considered that each Executive had the right to voice their opinion over any particular point to the Area General Managers (AGMs) but the responsibility for initiating the investigation should be left to the responsibility of the Area General Managers. This is significant because the AGMs were production staff, so ultimately the Chairman supported the idea of them retaining their authority. The issue of demarcation and authority between the Labour and Production Departments did not arise for a number of years.

However, considering the possibility of conflicting views as to the role of the Labour Director and his department it was not surprising that the issue should come up again.

In April 1950 when the minutes of the Area Heads of Department were being considered, Barbour objected to Sub-Area Production Managers being considered as the senior official, although the rest of the Board did not agree.²⁵ In October 1951 the Labour Director wanted Labour Officers in Scotland to have sole responsibility for dealing with disputes as in the other divisions, but the rest of the Board did not want to split responsibility from other Board representatives.²⁶ The issue of whether Labour Department staff defended the miners' interests, or at least maintained their consideration on an equal status to production and finance, or as a managerial aid to the execution of production and finance policy came to a head in 1952. At both the Executive and Policy Board meetings the Labour Director objected to the subordination of his staff to production personnel. Whilst considering a 'Directive to Assist Area General Managers in the Administration of their Areas' Barbour asked that his dissent be recorded in the minutes over the alteration of a clause dealing with the responsibilities of Area Labour Directors which he said subordinated an Area Head of Department to another.²⁷ The other Board members, including the Chairman (who significantly was now W. Reid the former Production Director)

²⁴ SRO. CB 45/1, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 39th meeting, 20.5.47, min 128, p 289 and Memos SDB/P (47) 37 and 42.

²⁵ SRO. CB 42/3, SDB, Executive Board Minutes, 43rd meeting, 25.4.50, min 321, pp 464-5.

²⁶ SRO. CB 42/4, SDB, Executive Board Minutes, 91st meeting, 2.10.51, min 687, p 279.

agreed to the change but this point marked the start of an ongoing battle over the responsibilities and status of Labour Department officers.²⁸

At an Executive meeting in March 1952 the Chairman proposed the appointment of two full-time Conciliation Officers to the Disputes Committee of the District Conciliation Scheme. Although no decision was made at this stage, it showed a desire to professionalise aspects of the Labour Department.²⁹

The question of Negotiating Officers arose again in April 1954. Rather like the question of reorganising the Scottish areas the Labour Director did not seem averse to change but objected to its nature and scope. He said that:

he could not see how the appointments would lower the level of cases coming through the Disputes Committee or ease the burden on Agents. He said a negotiating officer's scheme must have great and well-defined powers and the proposed scheme in Scotland was ill-defined.³⁰

Barbour favoured a scheme that had been adopted in Northumberland where Agents examined the case and gave their advice, but questions were remitted to two representatives from the Labour Department who had the last word on behalf of the Board. This scheme had the advantage of streamlining the disputes procedure whilst

²⁷ *Ibid*, Policy Board Minutes, 133rd meeting, 15.1.52, min 11, pp 7-8 and CB 42/4., Executive Board Minutes, 99th meeting, 8.1.52, min 10, pp 4-5.

²⁸ See Chapter Three for comments on the challenges facing nationalisation

²⁹ *Ibid*, Executive Board Minutes, 104th meeting, 4.3.52, min 146, p 67.

³⁰ SRO. CB 42/5, SDB: Executive Board Minutes, 160th meeting, 6.4.54, min 169, pp 4-5 and Memo ECB/P (54) 72.

retaining the authority of Labour Department staff. After 'considerable discussion' Barbour said he would be prepared to take responsibility for trying out his scheme, although both the Production Director and Marketing Director were both in favour of the Negotiating Officers' alternative. Barbour was taking a risk by accepting sole responsibility for this scheme and it is the first instance where a scheme was put into practice without reaching a consensus, or at least majority approval, on the Board.

This episode in particular raises again the question of whether Barbour was trying to maintain his ability to communicate the miners' interests or if he was simply trying to maintain his own and his department's administrative prestige. One can consider Barbour's attitude towards the NUM over the ten year period to give some indication as to which seems more likely. Barbour's attitude was not unrelentingly hostile towards the NUMSA but neither was it overly supportive. Indeed his attitude seems to reflect his ambiguous position and the competing influences upon him and may be explained by Barbour's own background in the miners' union.

IV

The NUMSA and the SDB

Barbour's relationship with the NUMSA may be considered by both collective Board statements and decisions, and cases where statements in the minutes of the Scottish Divisional Board can be directly attributed to him. This does not necessarily mean that Barbour differed from his colleagues, simply that particular statements or comments can be directly attributed to him rather than as part of a collective

statement.³¹ Another potentially revealing source on this aspect are the minutes of the Divisional Disputes Committee, where the Board and Union came face to face. Unfortunately, although Barbour was present at most of the meetings as one of the Joint Secretaries, he made relatively little comment that was recorded. Rather, whoever was in the Joint Chair from the Board's side conducted the majority of the negotiation, this was usually the current Chairman of the Board. This should not suggest that Barbour was overly reticent at these meetings, for when other Board members were present they made even less contribution than Barbour, rather it appears to be a result of the nature of the negotiations.

It would appear that in instances where Barbour's views were made explicit in the Board minutes his relationship with the NUMSA Executive was not particularly good and deteriorated over the years. The first such occurrence was in February 1947 when Barbour reported to the Board that William Pearson, the General Secretary of the NUMSA, had created difficulties with regard to the employment of Polish labour by informing the Board that there were in Scotland approximately 200 unemployed mineworkers, which was not in accordance with the facts.³² It was agreed that Barbour should endeavour to influence Pearson to correct his statement. But the problem of the employment of foreign labour, Poles in particular, was a major friction point between Barbour and the NUMSA. At the Policy Board Meeting on 18 February Barbour reported continuing difficulties on the part of the

³¹ In practice this means the difference between the minutes recording 'the Labour Director said...' and 'the Board expressed the opinion that...'

³² SRO. CB 45/1, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 26th meeting, 4.2.47, min 31, p 165.

NUM nationally in facilitating the employment of Poles³³ and again on 18 March. In this case the Scottish Area of the NUM were insisting on 'screening' the Poles by both the NUMSA President and Labour Director as to their suitability for employment. Barbour, betraying his impatience with the NUMSA Executive, said that '500 men were now awaiting Mr. Moffat's pleasure'.³⁴ It was resolved that in view of the urgent need for manpower that the Chairman should bring to the attention of Lord Hyndley the Board's disappointment with the arrangements and press that he clear up the position with the NUM.³⁵ The position was resolved by the next Board meeting on 25 March by the NUM agreeing to substitutes when their representatives could not attend.³⁶

However, this was not the end of Barbour's difficulties with senior NUMSA officers. In July 1947 reporting on a meeting between himself and Moffat and Pearson regarding the placement of Poles, Barbour had submitted plans to place 482 men in a six week programme. At this Moffat took strong exception because Durham were not taking their fair share and placed other difficulties in the way by insisting that Union Branches had to accept Polish miners before they were placed in the pits. Barbour succeeded in getting Pearson to write to the branches telling them that they

³³ *Ibid.*, 28th meeting, 18.2.47, min 12, p 186.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32nd meeting, 18.3.47, min 25, p 211.

³⁵ *Ibid.* (Lord Hyndley was the NCB Chairman)

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33rd meeting, 25.3.47, min 9, p 222.

must not object unless there was positive proof of British workmen being available, but he still felt that the latest Scottish position should be reported to Lord Hyndley.³⁷

These specific difficulties with the Union Executive must be balanced by Barbour's and the Board's co-operation with the union over illegal stoppages, at least in the early years. Already by January 1947 the NUMSA had complained to the Board that the management at Cardowan Colliery had not taken steps that they (the union) considered necessary to provide work for men who had presented themselves at the colliery when other workmen were on unofficial strike.³⁸ The Board and Barbour were on the whole favourable to supporting the NUMSA in imposing discipline. The only caveat was the expense of providing such work, the Chairman stating that:

If the Board's policy in giving work to these men, when they turned out during a strike, helped to break the strike, then the policy more than justified itself,³⁹

and the view was also expressed that:

by allowing men to work during the stoppage, further idle time would probably have been avoided. The last strike was definitely anti-union, and if the Board had refused to allow men to work, the union would have contended that the Board were making matters difficult for them in their efforts to get the men back to work.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Ibid*, 43rd meeting, 15.7.47, min 253, p 343.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 24th meeting, 21.1.47, min 15, p 138.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 53rd meeting, 28.10.47, min 590, p 481.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

An interesting feature of this early period of nationalisation was the interpretation of illegal stoppages as anti-union. In theory all illegal stoppages were anti-union because they did not use the approved disputes mechanism agreed by the union. However, certain illegal stoppages were characterised as anti-union because the dispute was led by non-unionists or explicitly in defiance of local union officials, even if the cause (or pretext) of the dispute was the same as other stoppages.

At a subsequent meeting Barbour reiterated the Board's position regarding work during a strike when he said:

that finding work for those who turned out during a strike would have a psychological effect on those actually on strike and might bring them back to work earlier if they saw that a big number of their fellow workers were not supporting them.⁴¹

A sentiment with which the Board whole-heartedly agreed.

This comment came after a dispute raised by Moffat at the DDC for an *ex-gratia* payment to workers who had turned out during a strike at Auchengeich Colliery:

Mr. Moffat said that he had to admit that this claim could not be supported in terms of any National or District Agreement. There was, however, a limit to what the Union could do in urging men who had taken part in an unofficial strike to return to work. The Union, in urging the men to return, expected the utmost support from the Board,

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 56th meeting, 9.12.47, min 635, p 502.

but if men turned out for work and were sent home, the position of the Union in the future would be weakened.

Mr. Moffat said he would support the Management if those who turned out were offered alternative work, but in the event of it being really impossible to place all the men or that they refused the alternative work offered to them, he would not be a party to supporting their claims.⁴²

Barbour's and the Board's co-operation with the NUMSA over unofficial strikes was not confined to the employment of unofficial strike breakers. In February 1948 when illegal stoppages were under discussion the question of prosecution arose. Whilst it was felt that men on day contracts were impossible to prosecute Barbour referred to periodic stoppages at Auchencruive 4/5 Colliery and said that the Area Labour Officer was 'pressing for the dismissal of these 8 or 9 men with whom the Union had no control.' It was decided that the Labour Director was to put forward three pits troubled by periodic strikes and which had a low output so that steps could be taken to warn them that unless the output improved the Collieries would be shut down.⁴³

Later in the month Barbour suggested two pits where output was low and seriously affected by illegal stoppages, Bothwell Castle 3/4 (Priory) and Auchencruive 4/5. At Priory it was decided to ask the NUM to issue warnings that if strike action was resorted to again the Board would take disciplinary action. This was to take the form

⁴² National Library of Scotland (NLS), Accession (Acc) 4311.103, Divisional Disputes Committee (DDC), 15th meeting, 5.12.47, p 3.

⁴³ SRO. CB 45/2, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 59th meeting, 3.2.48, min 98, p 564.

of giving seven days notice to close the colliery. At Auchencruive an alternative strategy was employed where it was decided to try to identify the leaders of the trouble with a view to their dismissal.⁴⁴

However, despite the trouble at Auchencruive 4/5 being a matter of NUM discipline, in Barbour's words the 'workmen's representatives made strong attacks against the leaders of the Union', Moffat was opposed to closing the pit and reticent regarding the sacking of 'the five delinquents'.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, just over one month later whilst Moffat was still perturbed at the prospect of closure he did favour the prosecution of the workmen for breach of contract. Moffat felt that if the Board prosecuted, the men would presumably ask the Union for help, and this 'would give the Union an opportunity of asserting their authority'.⁴⁶ A notice was duly posted on 18 May saying 19 unofficial stoppages had occurred in 1948. The Divisional Board could not allow this complete disregard for the terms of employment and any workmen taking part in an unofficial stoppage would be held to have breached his contract and sued for damages by the NCB. A strike then took place on the 25 May and Moffat was informed that the men would be sued for £10 damages. If the men made representation to compromise they were to be told that negotiations should take place through the Union Executive.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 61st meeting, 17.2.48, min 143, p 583 and Memo SDB/P (48) 51.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 64th meeting, 30.3.48, min 259, p 632 and Memo SDB/P (48) 108.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 68th meeting, 11.5.48, min 358, p 667.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 69th meeting, 25.5.48, min 393, p 689.

Meanwhile the man responsible for the strike at Priory Colliery was a non-unionist and whilst only four men had gone out on the first day this had subsequently risen to fifty seven. A notice had been posted to close the colliery if further action took place. It was proposed to dismiss the men concerned for breach of contract and if this resulted in a further batch of workmen striking a notice of closure was to be posted immediately.⁴⁸ However, the DDC minutes reveal that although the outcome of this action was more satisfactory than at Auchencruive, the Board had encountered problems with the Union over this case as well. Moffat had complained that although the management had agreed to appoint assessors and that any grievances would be dealt with speedily once work resumed the management reneged on the agreement claiming that because a strike had taken place, the decision no longer applied. On behalf of the Board Lord Balfour had to reassure the Union that:

He had indicated to the Management his view that their attitude had been mistaken and had informed them (and he wished it to be accepted as a principle for guidance in the future) that if negotiations were suspended on account of a strike, they must accede to the Union's request for an immediate resumption of negotiations when the men returned.⁴⁹

However, the reservoir of goodwill that had existed between the Board, Barbour and the NUMSA Executive appeared from this point to run rapidly dry. Whilst the policy at Priory was successful, strikes continued at Auchencruive 4/5 and elsewhere and the Board, Barbour included, felt they had no alternative but to issue summonses

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, min 423, p 700.

⁴⁹ NLS. Acc. 4311.103, DDC, 20th meeting, 5.3.48, p 5.

for breach of contract,⁵⁰ although Moffat, in Barbour's words, 'was reluctant to deal firmly with the matter of posting notices at collieries where strikes were prevalent'.⁵¹ Attempts to spread the strike from Auchencruive 4/5 failed, but the Board decided to press ahead with the summonses and, unless the men returned to work, the pit was to be closed for an indefinite period.⁵²

As has been noted above, the Board, and Barbour, were voicing great dissatisfaction with the NUMSA and the Board's somewhat draconian policy towards unofficial strikes was to continue with or without the Union's co-operation. However, Barbour's antipathy towards the NUMSA does not appear to be as all pervading as that of other Board members. Indeed, what the subsequent years emphasise was that Barbour's poor relationship appeared to be with the NUMSA Executive, and not the miners or their demands *per se*. This can be seen in Barbour's continued role in unofficial strike policy, but a notable absence in other questions of manpower.

For example, in November 1950 Barbour produced a paper on strikes policy at a special Board meeting where he said that:

where persistent strike action took place at collieries that were economically unsound warning of closure should be given and rigorously put into action if there was any recurrence of the trouble.

⁵⁰ SRO. CB 45/2, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 74th meeting, 4.8.48, min 595, p 773.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 76th meeting, 25.8.48, min 617, p 782-3.

⁵² *Ibid*, 81st meeting, 2.11.48, min 816, p 862.

At other collieries where trouble was persistent, the ring leaders should be sedulously sought and instantly dismissed.⁵³

This highlights the strong line Barbour took regarding unofficial stoppages and by implication Union discipline. He also said that the fear the Board faced of the consequences of firm action was predominant in the pit manager because he was afraid to do something lest his pit became idle and he appeared that he could not handle the situation. This empathy with the predicament of a pit manager would perhaps suggest that, former miners leader or not, Barbour's loyalties were not divided by his past and present employment.

However, it was the personal nature of Barbour's disenchantment with the NUMSA's Executive that was again highlighted in 1951 when a ca' canny (go slow) dispute occurred at Polkemmet Colliery and he said 'he was not satisfied that Mr. Abe Moffat was doing everything possible to bring the dispute to an end and had not shown the same concern over this matter as on previous occasions.'⁵⁴ Similarly, a month later when unofficial strikes and ca' canny were again on the agenda, Barbour referred to the recent wage award and the agreement signed by the Union that every endeavour would be made to stop unofficial strikes. He said Mr. Moffat was a party to this agreement and he should be brought face to face with his obligations.⁵⁵ Again in November 1951 the Labour Director emphasised the attitude of the NUMSA's

⁵³ SRO. CB 45/3, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 113th meeting, 4.11.50, min 194, pp 262-5 and SDB/P (50) 114 for Barbour's paper.

⁵⁴ SRO. CB 45/4, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 123rd meeting, 15.5.51, min 114, p 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 125th meeting, 19.6.51, min 159, p 65.

Executive when he said he thought that Moffat was encouraging ca' canny by basing the claim for guaranteed wages at Wester Auchengeich Colliery on one agreement and ignoring others.⁵⁶ During the same discussion the Chairman also said that 'Mr. Moffat appeared to be making a mountain out of a molehill. In his view Mr. Moffat desired to glorify himself in front of his whole Executive.' This impatience with the NUMSA Executive over discipline appears to result from frustration over what Barbour perceives as a slacker line being taken within the union compared to the early years of nationalisation. Certainly it could be interpreted from Barbour's perspective that the NUMSA used the Scottish Division to eliminate anti-union disciplinary problems, but were less willing to clamp down on illegal stoppages that had a more 'legitimate' cause.

Matters proceeded in a similar vein in 1952. Barbour had prepared three cases of disciplinary action to go before Moffat but the procedure was not working because of the attitude of the NUM Agents and Moffat had asked that the question of disciplinary action should not be pressed openly with the Union.⁵⁷ When stoppages again occurred in 1954 Barbour said there was no justification for them and some were due to differences within the branch membership.⁵⁸ Although there was a reduction of items concerning unofficial action between 1953 and 1955, the relationship of the Board does not appear to have improved. This was revealed in 1954 by the Production Director when discussing the DCC. He said that at the last

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 131st meeting, 20.11.51, min 291, pp 123-5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 140th meeting, 19.8.52, min 157, p 71.

⁵⁸ SRO. CB 45/5, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 161st meeting, 27.4.54, min 96, p 1.

meeting the NUM representatives had taken every opportunity of criticising the Board and 'it was the worst meeting he had attended...he felt that this was very distressing because there did not appear to be any sign of co-operation from the NUM representatives' and the Deputy Chairman said that the same tone prevailed at the Divisional Disputes Committee 'and it was very difficult for the Board's representatives to avoid an open break with the Union.'⁵⁹

However, as has already been mentioned, Barbour's disenchantment with the NUMSA was not as all pervading as that of the rest of the Board. In other aspects of the Board's relations with the NUMSA it appears from the minutes that Barbour did not contribute directly on these issues such as wages, piecerates, tasks and hours. It should not be taken that this automatically means he was supportive of the Union's position but nevertheless, compared to other Board members was quietly sympathetic to the miners' position.

One such instance was in early 1947 when the policy to be adopted in dealing with claims for increased rates for pieceworkers was under discussion. This seems remarkable for an issue that was surely a central part of the Labour Director's remit. The central issue here was that there were a number of pits where the wages were comparatively high and the tasks not satisfactory and vice versa. The Board anticipated that the Union would take cases to the conciliation machinery and that would result in an all round rise in piecerates, but Barbour had no input to these

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 165th meeting, 21.9.54, min 158, p 3.

discussions.⁶⁰ In 1949 a similar situation occurred when a manpower review was undertaken after persistent requests from Moffat for a statement. Even more so than the question of wage levels, the number of men required in the industry was one of central concern to the Labour Department. Yet again it was other Board members, in this case the Finance and Production Directors and the Deputy Chairman who led the discussion. On the required manpower level they concluded that Moffat should be told that the present manpower should be able to produce a much higher output because they had been able to do so pre-war.⁶¹ If Barbour was going to defend the miners in any way, surely he would have pointed out that the average age of miners had increased, that there had been negligible investment in new machinery and maintenance cut to the bone, that pits were becoming exhausted and the coal more difficult to work, therefore, after six long years of war, was it not unreasonable to expect the miners to maintain the pre-war level of output?

Considering Barbour's vigorous defence of his status mentioned earlier it seems unlikely he would willingly concede authority on this important issue and it must be remembered that he had not hesitated in being critical of the Union on other issues at this time.

Certainly the above were not isolated incidents. In 1950 when an increased wage claim was made by the NUM through the Joint National Negotiation Committee for

⁶⁰ SRO. CB 45/1, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 43rd meeting, 15.7.47, min 249, p 341.

⁶¹ SRO. CB 45/3, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 101st meeting, 20.12.49, min 354, p 154.

an increase in day wage, weekly minimum and juvenile rates, Barbour did not object to Captain Thorneycroft's statement that this would be disastrous.⁶² Equally, when a major meeting with the NUM in 1952 was being discussed at length by the Board (it covered 5 pages of minutes) not once did Barbour make any contribution despite such crucial policy issues as Saturday working, wages, hours, ca' canny and strikes being under discussion.⁶³ Again during 1953 when issues arose that one would have expected to find the Labour Director's input, there was none. For example, in discussing negotiations with the NUM on the employment of men after absence,⁶⁴ the wages policy to control piecework earnings⁶⁵ or even coal face training where the NUM were demanding to choose who would operate new machines.⁶⁶ Similarly no input from Barbour was recorded when the Board were endeavouring to get an agreement with the NUM over the transfer of trained face workers between collieries in 1954⁶⁷ or in a discussion of estimated future output and manpower requirements in November of 1954.⁶⁸ Neither did Barbour respond to Thorneycroft's statement in 1955 that 'he had the feeling that there was antagonism between the management at the pit and the local NUM representatives. Agents and managers must be tired of the persistent claim for increased wages, a great many of which were unjustified.'⁶⁹

⁶² *Ibid*, 107th meeting, 20.6.50, min 112, pp 221-2.

⁶³ SRO. CB 45/4, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 143rd meeting, 11.12.52, min 210, pp 100-4

⁶⁴ SRO. CB 45/5, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 148th meeting, 17.3.53, min 39, p 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, min 40, p 25.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 156th meeting, 22.12.53, min 153, p 91.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 158th meeting, 26.1.54, min 14, p 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 167th meeting, 4.11.54, min 185, pp 1-9.

⁶⁹ SRO. CB 45/6, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 178th meeting, 27.9.55, min 104, pp 2-3.

It might have been expected that the Divisional Disputes Committee minutes would reveal something of Barbour's relationship with Abe Moffat. However, as was mentioned at the beginning there are few statements that can be directly attributed to Barbour and his silence is almost as conspicuous. However, there were a number of occasions when Barbour occupied the Chair for the Board's side on the DDC. At 9 out of 19 meetings during 1952 Barbour occupied the Chair for the Board's side and this period perhaps reveals a more conciliatory or sympathetic attitude towards the miners' disputes. There was for example, an increase in the percentage of compromise decisions from 14.89% in 1951 to 26.11% in 1952, this figure then declined again to 21.26% in 1953. However, it is difficult to establish to what extent this was due to Barbour because 1952 was the period of the wages freeze and the total number of disputes was relatively low. What is perhaps a better guide was 1955, when Barbour was again in the Chair on 14 occasions out of 24. This year resulted in the highest proportion of compromise decisions, at 32%, despite the highest number of cases, although the overall pressure on wages was also somewhat less. This does not necessarily mean that Barbour was more sympathetic to the miners than other Board members, it could be that his prior Union experience simply made him a better able to reach a compromise.

Should Barbour's silence then be considered as tacit support of the miners, or as an attempt to appear neutral? It will be recalled that at times Barbour had co-operated with the Union Executive, particularly on issues that would help the union maintain internal discipline, but also that he had made criticisms of the same Executive over other issues. The most likely explanation was that Barbour was critical of the Union Executive, in particular Abe Moffat, over the way in which the NUMSA handled

disputes and wage claims, rather than the claims themselves. In other words, he may have been generally sympathetic to the miners in spite of his disagreements with Moffat.

This explanation seems the more likely when one considers the turbulent years of the miners' unions before they were incorporated into the then new NUM in 1945. As will be recalled from above, Barbour had been Vice-President and then President of the National Union of Scottish Mineworkers until 1942. However, the NUSM only became a national union in practice in 1944, just one year before it became part of the NUM. Prior to this there had been a number of rival unions in Scotland. The most significant of these was the United Mineworkers of Scotland or the UMS. The UMS had a far more left-wing tradition than the NUSM, and was born out of the CPGB's Minority Movement of the late twenties and early thirties. Not surprisingly its membership consisted of many communists and its greatest strength was in the Fife coalfield. For example, in 1931 the UMS led a strike of 15,000 men, many from other unions, against the 'illegal' eight hour day, whilst the NUSM were advising their members to continue working. From 1933 onwards the UMS made repeated attempts at joint action with the Fife county union of the NUSM. However, these advances were rebuffed each time, despite interventions by the MFGB. However, by 1936 as the Comintern's (and hence CPGB) policy shifted from minority action to an anti-fascist, democratic Popular Front and the UMS having failed at attempts at unity and joint action took the ultimate step of dissolving its own organisation and advising its members to join the NUSM. The man who had led them since 1930 to this historic decision was Abe Moffat. However, whilst the NUSM accepted the membership of the UMS, the leaders, Moffat included, were rejected. There were

strong objections particularly from Fife to accept former leaders of the UMS and a majority of the Scottish Executive refused to budge.

Nevertheless Moffat eventually managed to join the Fife and Clackmannan Miners' Association in 1939, whose constitution could not prevent him from becoming a member of the NUSM. By 1940 Moffat had become the Fife delegate and in 1942 succeeded Barbour as Union President. Perhaps here lies an explanation for Barbour's difficult relationship with Moffat despite his sympathy with the miners' cause. Moffat had led an alternative, competing union to Barbour's NUSM, whose ideology and tactics were anathema to many traditional trade unionists at a time when the employment, pay and conditions of miners were under systematic erosion. Furthermore, Barbour's generation of NUSM leaders had consistently tried to exclude Moffat and other UMS leaders from re-joining the NUSM. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suppose that poor relations between Barbour and many of the post-war NUMSA executive had been established prior to nationalisation, an experience that did little to alter Barbour's opinion.

V

Disputes

As well as the relationship between the NUMSA and the NCBSD, on both a collective and personal level, Divisional Disputes Committee provide further

evidence of the NUMSA's attitude to nationalisation and co-operation with the Scottish Divisional Board from late 1948. The minutes reveal a general increase in tension as the stakes were raised by both sides. Two meetings, one in September and one in October provide examples of this trend. On 17 September 1948 the two sides argued for longer than usual over the conciliation procedure even before any disputes were dealt with, Moffat stating:

that in the course of negotiations between the parties since Vesting Date, it had been the Divisional Board that had, on the two relevant occasions, referred matters to the Umpire to determine whether or not they were pit questions. It seemed that the Divisional Board having established a procedure, were desirous of departing therefrom by reason of its inconvenience to them.⁷⁰

This was significant because arguing over such a fundamental point of procedure, over one year into the conciliation machinery, indicated that the basis for dealing with certain disputes was not even recognised between the two sides. Later in the meeting Moffat said that the Union had despatched to the Board formal notice to terminate the Seven Days Notice Agreement, an arrangement that ensured there was time for negotiation and conciliation.⁷¹

Furthermore, on 1 October Moffat raised the issue of the Scottish miners' wages in general for the first time, claiming that where re-assessment of task took place it should be on the basis of the average Great Britain piecerate and not the present 30/-.

⁷⁰ NLS. Acc. 4311.103, DDC, 31st meeting, 17.9.48, pp 1-3.

The Board responded that this was unacceptable because it was tantamount to raising the general level of piece rates in Scotland, with Moffat retaliating by saying that:

if it was not possible to reach agreement then they would require to discuss each case on its merits: his side had no desire to create chaos, but when cases were submitted, his side would not be bound by a wage of 30/-⁷²

Despite this decline in relations with the NUMSA the two sides did appear to come back from the brink. As a result of the strikes at Auchencruive 4/5 a joint NCB/NUM committee produced a report which contained three methods of response to unofficial disputes. Firstly, those that required consideration and action by the NCB alone, secondly those which could be dealt with by the NUM and thirdly, those that required joint consideration and action.⁷³ At this stage the Board decided to withdraw the summonses and for a time the fence mending seemed to have resulted in a truce.

Indeed this pattern was reflected in the Disputes Committee minutes during 1947 and 1948. An early degree of co-operation and cordiality had declined considerably by 1949. Table 5.1 shows the number of disputes that were settled by mutual compromise as a percentage of total disputes between 1947 and 1955.⁷⁴ This is one

⁷¹ *Ibid*, pp 3-4.

⁷² NLS. Acc. 4311.103, DDC, 32nd meeting, 1.10.48, pp 5-7.

⁷³ SRO. CB 45/2, SDB: Policy Board Minutes, 82nd meeting, 23.11.48, min 890, p 904.

⁷⁴ Compromise is defined as a decision which is neither on the NUM's nor the NCB's initial claim, but a negotiated settlement between the two positions, without recourse to the umpire.

available measure of the general health of the relationship between the SDB and the NUMSA.

Table 5.1. Compromises Reached Between the SDB and NUMSA as a Percentage of Total Disputes Brought before the Divisional Disputes Committee

YEAR	TOTAL DISPUTES	TOTAL COMPROMISE	PERCENTAGE
1947	64	11	17.19
1948	216	51	23.61
1949	162	32	19.75
1950	190	28	14.74
1951	225	33	14.67
1952	129	34	26.36
1953	230	49	21.30
1954	228	39	17.11
1955	352	113	32.10

Source: NLS Acc.. 4311.103, Acc.. 4311.111 and Acc. 4311.114.

The extent to which the figures are liable to deviation can be seen in Tables 5.2 and 5.3 below.⁷⁵

Table 5.2. Statistical Measures of Total Disputes before the Divisional Disputes Committee by Year

YEAR	TOTAL RANGE Per Month	DISPUTES MEAN	MEAN AB DEV	STD DEV
1947	9 - 17	12.80	2.96	3.56
1948	1 - 20	12.71	3.75	5.12
1949	4 - 38	11.57	5.73	8.78
1950	2 - 17	10.00	3.52	4.68
1951	2 - 24	10.23	4.53	5.85
1952	3 - 19	6.79	3.94	4.83
1953	4 - 24	11.50	4.65	5.66
1954	1 - 27	12.67	5.66	7.10
1955	5 - 31	14.67	5.13	6.36

⁷⁵ Standard deviation (STD DEV) means that the figures could deviate by this amount each side of the mean, for example by 3.56 around 12.80 for 1947 total disputes. However, whilst the standard deviation is the most significant measure in purely statistical terms, there are problems with this measurement. Because standard deviation calculations involve the square of differences between any particular figure and the mean for the set, just one particularly large figure in any one series can have a disproportionately large effect on the overall standard deviation. This effect is most obvious in the figures for 1949 in Table 5.2, where one meeting which dealt with 38 disputes (RANGE field) distorts the standard deviation, the same phenomenon can also be seen to a lesser extent in the figures for 1954 and 1955. To counter this effect the mean absolute deviations (MEAN AB DEV field) have also been calculated. This measurement still provides an accurate description of deviance, but avoids distortion by occasionally high figures because it does not include a square in its formula. The mean absolute deviation has the disadvantage that it cannot be used for any further statistical operations, but

Footnotes continued on following page.

Table 5.3. Statistical Measures of Total Compromises before the Divisional Disputes

Committee by Year

YEAR	TOTAL RANGE Per Month	COMPROMISES MEAN	MEAN AB DEV	STD DEV
1947	0 - 7	3.67	2.80	3.06
1948	0 - 5	3.00	1.41	1.77
1949	0 - 8	2.29	2.26	2.70
1950	0 - 6	1.47	0.91	1.35
1951	0 - 4	1.50	1.13	1.37
1952	0 - 7	1.79	1.50	2.02
1953	0 - 6	2.45	1.29	1.61
1954	0 - 6	4.71	2.69	1.82
1955	0 - 11	2.17	3.22	3.18

The mean absolute deviations in Table 5.2 demonstrate that although the deviations can be quite large, for total disputes they are at least relatively consistent for each year. The deviations for total compromises in Table 5.3 are more problematic. The deviations, although low, are in most cases almost equal to or greater than the mean. This is because we are dealing with relatively low values and narrow ranges. This could mean that some figure could deviate by over 100%, such as 1955. As a result, although the percentages in Table 5.1 *may* illustrate a trend, they cannot stand alone as evidence of this.

it does provide for the best descriptive measurement of deviation. However, the standard deviation should be considered for the Spearman's *rho* calculations shown in Table 5.4 .

One final aspect that needs to be explored to support the figures in Table 5.1 and elsewhere was the possibility that the aggregated yearly figures disguised certain seasonal or monthly trends. As a check for this figures for quarterly total disputes and total compromises were calculated over rolling quarterly periods. These revealed a seasonal trend in both the number of disputes and the number of compromises. However, what is most important to note is that both disputes and compromises follow the same pattern of peaks in the spring and autumn each year. The significance of this is that as union militancy (the number of disputes) increases, this does not have the effect of reducing compromise. In other words as the volume of disputes increases the Board does not appear to take any kind of retaliatory action by adopting a harder line.

The percentage column in Table 5.1 showed that from 1948 the SDB and the NUMSA were increasingly unable to reach mutually satisfactory compromise decisions on the disputes before them, the figure declining from 23.61% in 1948 to 14.67% in 1951.⁷⁶ The strength of this decline is reflected in the calculation of Spearman's *roh* correlation figures for the period. Spearman's *roh* provides a statistical measure of the relationship between two variables, in this case the number of disputes and the number of compromise decisions reached. In calculating these figures it is not the intention to suggest that the number of disputes was the cause of the decline in compromise decisions, but simply to quantify the extent of the apparent decline. The figures can be seen below in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4. Spearman's Roh Correlation of Disputes and Compromises for the

Divisional Disputes Committee

YEAR	SPEARMAN'S rho
1948	0.692
1949	0.663
1950	0.219
1951	0.715
1952	0.463
1953	0.703
1954	0.692
1955	0.706

77

On the whole the figures in Table 5.4 follow the pattern of those in Table 5.1. That is the strength of the relationship between the number of disputes and the number of compromise decisions declines from 1948, although the decline in Table 5.4 is not as sharp between 1948 and 1949 as that in Table 5.1. Spearman's *rho* always gives a figure between 1 and -1, the closer the figure to either of these the stronger the relationship, 1 being a perfect positive correlation and -1 a perfect negative correlation.

⁷⁶ The figures for 1947 should not be taken as early difficulties between the Board and the Union as the first meeting did not take place until April and only 5 of the 16 minutes were available.

⁷⁷ Figures for 1947 have not been calculated because the totals available were so low.

As Table 5.4 demonstrates there is always a positive correlation, that is an increase in the number of disputes produces an increase in the number of compromise decisions, but the strength of that correlation declines considerably from 0.692 in 1948 to 0.219 in 1950. These equate to a significance value of 0.01 for 1948 to no significance for 1951.⁷⁸ However, as can be seen above a Spearman's *rho* value of 0.715 for 1951 somewhat distorts the picture of a declining relationship from 1948 which does not recover until 1953. This does not mean that there was a burst of co-operation in 1951, nor that the figures in Table 5.1 are misleading. Although Spearman's *rho* is a more sophisticated measurement than simple percentages, the result for 1951 highlights the difficulty of using such calculations for relatively small data sets. Because Spearman's *rho* calculates the correlation between the ranks of two variables rather than the variables themselves, where the values of the variables are low, or values are shared, one can achieve a disproportionately strong correlation. This is the case in 1951 where of the 22 pairs of variables one half of seven pairs shares the same value of 1, this results in 1 being given the rank of 10, seven times.⁷⁹ So although in fact the relationship between the SDB and the NUMSA is particularly bad in 1951, the figures would suggest an improved relationship. Whilst these figures must be used with caution, and in particular attention should be paid to figures which are a statistical contrivance, Spearman's *rho* provides the best available statistical measure of the relationship between the SDB and the NUMSA during the course of the Divisional Disputes Committee. Whilst both the percentage and Spearman's *rho* figures show a declining relationship from 1948 as far as mutual compromise was

⁷⁸ See Appendix One for a complete table of critical values and significance for Spearman's *rho*.

concerned, by three times according to the *roh* correlations, there was also important evidence of changes in the nature of the relationship in the minutes themselves.

The picture of initial goodwill between the Scottish Divisional Board and the National Union of Miners Scottish Area available from the Board minutes is reflected in the minutes of the Divisional Disputes Committee (DDC). For example in early December 1947 Abe Moffat brought a dispute over rates at Beoch No.3 Mine back to the Committee for the third time because he felt that the previous agreement had proved impracticable. In response Lord Balfour said 'the statement by Mr. Moffat was perfectly reasonable: it was just possible, on occasion, for the Committee to make a mistake and, under these circumstances, it would only be right to say so and have the case re-opened.'⁸⁰ This spirit of co-operation was reiterated by Moffat on the last meeting of the Committee in 1947 when he said:

he felt that there was room for congratulations that so many of the disputes had been settled in a spirit of co-operation and he expressed to the Board's Representatives on his own behalf and on behalf of the Workmen's Representatives, their best wishes for 1948 and also expressed the hope that the results achieved in the coming year would surpass those of 1947 - the first year of nationalisation. Lord Balfour reciprocated Mr. Moffat's good wishes.⁸¹

It may be tempting to dismiss such end of year exchanges as mere formality, to which no significance could be attached. However, in 1951 Moffat used the

⁷⁹ See Appendix Two for the Spearman's *rho* calculations for 1951.

⁸⁰ NLS. Acc. 4311.103, Divisional Disputes Committee (DDC), 15th meeting, 5.12.47, p 2.

occasion to voice 'the hope that 1952 would see the removal of the anomaly on Scottish miners' wages'⁸² and in 1952 and 1953 the seasons greetings were notable by their absence.⁸³ The relationship still appeared cordial and the disputes machinery functioning well in mid 1948. In July 1948 Moffat said 'that it was gratifying to record that there was only one case on the agenda for the meeting that day and was evidence that the conciliation machinery was operating fairly effectively.'⁸⁴ However, Moffat may have been tempting fate for it is over the next few months that the first signs of strain between the Board and Union emerge.

This early goodwill and subsequent decline is evident in other areas. If one takes other measures of the outcomes of the Divisional Disputes Committee a consistent pattern is evident. The decline in the percentage of compromise decisions whilst the most significant measure is supported by the trends in the other decisions of the DDC. For example Table 5.5 shows the percentage of disputes that the Scottish Divisional Board conceded to the Union. If the relationship between the two bodies was deteriorating one would expect to find the proportion of dispute cases the Board was willing to concede declining. As can be seen below the percentage of cases conceded by the Board did decline significantly from 21.76% in 1948 to a low of 9.30% in 1952, before rising to between 10 and 11% by 1955.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 16th meeting, 26.12.47, p 6.

⁸² NLS. Acc. 4311.111, DDC, 108th meeting, 27.12.51, p 8.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 131st meeting, 27.12.52, p. 11, and Acc. 4311.113, DDC, 153rd meeting, 25.12.53, p 8.

⁸⁴ NLS. Acc. 4311.103, DDC, 28th meeting, 16.7.48, p 3.

Table 5.5. Percentage of Disputes Conceded by the SDB in the Divisional Disputes

Committee

YEAR	TOTAL DISPUTES	TOTAL CONCEDED	PERCENTAGE
1947	64	14	21.88
1948	216	47	21.76
1949	162	23	14.20
1950	190	24	12.63
1951	225	27	12.00
1952	129	12	9.30
1953	230	26	11.30
1954	228	13	5.70
1955	352	37	10.51

Source: NLS, Acc. 4311.103, Acc. 4311.111 and Acc. 4311.114.

A similar pattern is evident in Tables 5.6 and 5.7 to that in Table 5.5 which gives the figures for the proportion of disputes that were referred back to the pit, either to the Pit Committee itself or to local Assessors and those referred to the Umpire.⁸⁵ The percentage figures below in Table 5.6 again show an increasing inability of the SDB and the NUMSA, at least at this peak level, to reach satisfactory conclusions over the disputes before them. There is an almost inexorable rise in the percentage of cases that are referred back to the pits from which they originated. As the Divisional Disputes Committee was established for the explicit purpose of dealing with disputes that could not be resolved locally through the conciliation machinery, the fact that over 50% of cases were referred back for a period of five years, shows a failing of

⁸⁵ The Umpire was an independent arbitrator to which either side could submit a dispute if no agreement was reached. The decisions of the Umpire were binding on both sides.

either the disputes machinery at the local level or a failure between the parties at divisional level. The rise in the number of cases referred to the Umpire also supports this interpretation, although the increase fluctuated in Table 5.7 more so than the number of cases in Table 5.6, it remains at a relatively high level.

Table 5.6. Percentage of Disputes Referred Locally from the Divisional Disputes Committee

YEAR	TOTAL DISPUTES	TOTAL REFERRED LOCALLY	PERCENTAGE
1947	64	8	12.50
1948	216	75	34.72
1949	162	78	48.15
1950	190	97	51.05
1951	225	128	56.89
1952	129	71	55.04
1953	230	132	57.39
1954	228	145	63.60
1955	352	151	42.90

Source: NLS, Acc. 4311.103, Acc. 4311.111 and Acc. 4311.114

Table 5.7. Percentage of Disputes Referred to the Umpire from the Divisional

Disputes Committee

YEAR	TOTAL DISPUTES	TOTAL UMPIRE	PERCENTAGE
1947	64	15	23.44
1948	216	7	3.24
1949	162	24	14.81
1950	190	73	38.42
1951	225	59	26.22
1952	129	27	20.93
1953	230	62	26.96
1954	228	60	26.32
1955	352	87	24.72

Source: NLS, Acc. 4311.103, Acc. 4311.111 and Acc. 4311.11486

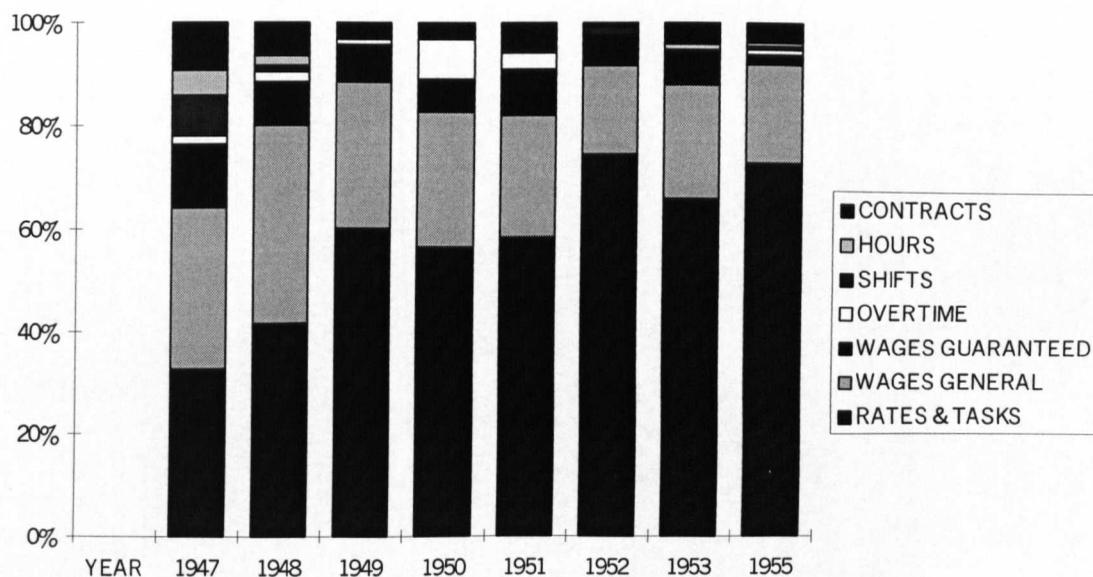
In practice the failure to resolve disputes at divisional level tended to increase the difficulties of the disputes machinery at the local level, and vice versa, so the longer the difficulties continued, the problems of one perpetuated the problems of the other.

An examination of the nature of the disputes cases before the DDC perhaps gives a clue as to why so many cases were referred back to the pit. A breakdown of the disputes cases before the Committee can be seen below in Graph 5.1.

⁸⁶ There is an element of double counting within the Umpire table from 1949. This was because cases were increasingly referred back to the locality before being referred to the Umpire, rather than to the Umpire direct. Therefore any particular case maybe counted as being referred to the pit and the same case counted again at a subsequent meeting because it was eventually referred to the Umpire.

Graph 5.1. Types of Disputes before the Divisional Disputes Committee by

Percentage



Source: NLS, Acc. 4311.103, Acc. 4311.111 and Acc. 4311.114. ⁸⁷

As can be seen from Graph 5.1 there is a steady, if small increase in the number of disputes involving Rates and Tasks. The majority of Scottish miners earned piecerates, that is earnings related to output for a specified job, or task. So for example a face stripper might earn 28/- for stripping a face of 8 yards. Other workers might be paid by the ton, cubic yard or feet, or fathom, depending on the job. Most often Rates and Tasks were negotiated for a small group of workers at a time taking into account various conditions that pertained in their particular working.

For example 12 strippers on a particular shift in a particular seam at a particular pit, incorporating in the task and rate the gradient, size of working, mechanisation, power tools, hardness of the coal and loading. Other payments, for deficiencies such as water, dust, mud, uneven roofs and floors tend to be negotiated separately and applied throughout the pit. All of these Rate and Task negotiations took place at the pit in the first instance. Considering the variety in conditions and working practices between pits, even within the same pit, this was the only practicable method. It was only when the parties locally, usually the pit manager and branch union representatives, failed to reach agreement that a dispute was referred to the divisional level. However, if a dispute could not be settled at the divisional level this did not mean that it was automatically referred to the national level. Disputes could only be referred from the division to the national level if it was considered that the particular case raised a question of national principle, i.e. the circumstances that caused the dispute pertained throughout all the pits in Great Britain, not just locally. Should the Divisional Disputes Committee fail to resolve a dispute they had a number of options. In practice the committee referred few cases to the national level and the union only conceded once. The most frequently used methods were to refer the case back to the locality, either to the pit or locally appointed assessors, and refer it to the independent umpire for arbitration.

⁸⁷ The categories reflect as accurately as possible the description of the disputes given in the minutes, obviously many disputes have been aggregated. A full description of each category of dispute is available in Appendix Three.

Negotiating such Rates and Tasks even under the most auspicious circumstances was a complex and sometimes lengthy process. It will be recalled that it was such cases that from late 1948 were proving to be such a thorn in the side of the Scottish Divisional Board. The NUMSA stated that it was not going to be bound by a 30/- limit to piecerates, whilst the SDB had been told by NCB Headquarters and Lord Hyndley that they should do everything to hold wages to this level.⁸⁸ However, this was something of a chicken and egg situation. Was the increase in cases concerning Rates and Tasks a cause of the worsening relationship or does the worsening relationship result in more of these cases being referred back to the locality?

In practice the two are intertwined. The more Rate and Task cases the Board felt unable to compromise upon, particularly above 30/-, the more Union representatives became frustrated and inflexible, and the more disillusioned the miners became at the apparent failure of the DDC. This had the result that unofficial action increased, especially ca' canny, and hence the Board became more reluctant to deal with cases involving ca' canny, or to improve upon their offers. The minutes of the Divisional Disputes Committee from 1949 read like a catalogue of ever hardening attitudes and more intractable standpoints.

⁸⁸ NLS. Acc. 4311.103, DDC, 32nd meeting, 1.10.48, pp 5-7.

VI

Wages

Whilst the instances of disagreement in 1948 could be considered as isolated cases the evidence from 1949 onwards is one of a clear pattern of long-term and fundamental disagreement between the Scottish Divisional Board and the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area. The examples below are primarily concerned with the wages questions and raise the question of how the NUMSA viewed nationalisation, particularly their own role and that of the Scottish Board in relation to their parent organisations, the NUM and NCB. The NUMSA clearly believed that it was the responsibility of the SDB to end the anomaly of the Scottish wages position, but the SDB were under instructions from NCB Headquarters that this issue should await the introduction of a national wages structure. The question arises as to why the NUMSA so firmly believed that it should be the SDB that dealt with the problem. Both the NCB and NUM agreed that the problem could only be finally resolved by a new wages structure but this was an enormous and time consuming task. In the meantime the federated sub-structure of the NUM mean that constituent areas retained sufficient power to negotiate on terms and conditions that were not covered by national policy.

The minutes of the Divisional Disputes Committee (DDC) reveal that the NUMSA persistently sought to have a particular Scottish problem resolved in Scotland, even though the principal argument that they used involved national comparisons. The Scottish wages question also raises the prospect that the NUMSA held a different

view of their role and responsibilities under nationalisation compared to those of the National and Divisional Boards and possibly the NUM National Executive.

Although there is no evidence that the NUMSA's claims reflected any Scottish 'cultural identity' there was still a distinct Scottish position towards wages questions.

A meeting in March 1949 amply demonstrates the problems facing the two sides on the DDC. In a discussion over piecework earnings Moffat said that:

He desired that it should be recorded in the Minutes that his side made an emphatic declaration that they would not be bound to negotiate piece rates on the basis that they would limit piece work earnings to, say, 28/- a shift irrespective of the task being performed.

Furthermore, that in negotiations with the NCB and Government two entirely different basis were being used to justify and deny the claim,

There followed a brief reference to the recent consultations between the Minister for Fuel and Power, Lord Hyndley and Mr. Moffat in regard to Scottish miners' wages and Mr. Moffat went on to say that despite the Divisional Board's claim that there had been a greater percentage increase in piecework earnings in Scotland, as compared to the rest of Great Britain - which he did not dispute - there had been no improvement in the average wage of the Scottish miner, compared with the average wage for Great Britain over the last year.⁸⁹

The differential between Scottish and British wages was a recurring theme, and a claim which the NUMSA was obviously pressing at the highest level. However, it

was not until December 1949 that the differences between the Board and union became completely clear. During a disputes case over stripping rates in the Tourha Seam at Warmix Colliery the following discussion took place:

Mr. Moffat said that when the Union made an application to raise wages at low wage pits, they were informed that this could not be done until a new wages structure had been introduced. If, therefore, the reverse was the case and the Board wished to reduce wages at what was recognised as a high wage pit, then the Union could but reply in the same vein.

Lord Balfour assured Mr. Moffat that the Board as a matter of policy had not attempted to bring down wages in a high wage pit. At the same time they would combat any attempt to raise wages beyond the established level. The attention of the Scottish Divisional Board had been drawn by the NCB Headquarters to the fact that there had been increases in the wage costs in this Division which were disproportionate to the average of the British Coalfield and he admitted that the Divisional Board had in view of this urged Areas to do everything in their power to hold wage costs.⁹⁰

The Board minutes during 1949 reflect this state of relations with the NUMSA, although they do not do so as obviously as the minutes of the DDC. Rumbings of discontent could be detected at the end of 1948 when the NUMSA tried to withdraw

⁸⁹ NLS. Acc. 4311.103, DDC, 43rd meeting, 4.3.49, p 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 61st meeting, 9.12.49, p 3.

from the seven days notice agreement and then backtracked.⁹¹ There was also friction over the NUMSA's allegation that 'screening' of transferred workers was being used for political reasons to weed out troublemakers, an allegation denied by Barbour.⁹² Neither were the Board enamoured by the NUMSA Executive's decision to allow the Burghlee Branch to give seven days notice of withdrawal of labour over non-unionism. This decision had repercussions on the Board; because Moffat acknowledged that the Union had no dispute with the Board he couldn't see how it could go through the conciliation machinery, yet withdrawal of labour obviously had a direct impact on the Board's operations, they in turn considered the action a breach of Order 1305, which prohibited strikes.⁹³ Unfortunately during this crucial period it is impossible to judge Barbour's relationship with the NUMSA because from April to October he was absent through illness. Upon his return Barbour's first major contribution was the most open and critical attack on the NUMSA Executive.

At the meeting on 25 October Barbour referred to the last two meetings of the Divisional Consultative Council (DCC) and said that:

the manner in which Mr. Moffat treated the Chairman and the members of the Board at the commencement of these meetings should not be allowed to continue. The Board were being humbled before the other members of the Council and he felt that the Chairman should

⁹¹ The seven days agreement established that no termination of employment could take place by either side without seven days notice. This agreement was important in allowing time for consultation. SRO. CB 45/2, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 83rd meeting, 7.12.48, min 905, p. 912 and 85th meeting 14.12.48, min 929, pp. 921-3.

⁹² SRO. CB 45/3, SDB, Policy Board Minutes, 92nd meeting, 1.3.49, min 139, pp 58-9.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 98th meeting, 16.8.49, min 290, p 117.

take this matter up with Mr. Moffat or alternatively that the Board should officially protest at the way the Union were approaching these matters. The Chairman had at all times been polite and courteous in his conduct in the Chair and the Board should demand politeness as well.⁹⁴

The Production Director felt that this was a deliberate policy of the Union and Lord Balfour said that if it occurred again he would have no choice but to adjourn the meeting, in the meantime he would have a private talk with Moffat prior to the next meeting. By the end of 1949 the relationship of the Board and the NUMSA had not improved. When discussing operating results Lord Balfour considered that 'there was no other Division in Great Britain where lack of co-operation from the NUM was so apparent as in Scotland' and Captain Thorneycroft, who by now was a part-time director, said he thought some of the change from the second quarter results (reduced output and deteriorating finances) of 1948 came about with the deterioration in the relations with the NUM.⁹⁵ At this time Barbour's somewhat on/off relationship with the NUMSA was again highlighted, rather like his co-operation with the NUMSA Executive over unofficial strikes, yet dissatisfaction with them over the employment of Polish labour.

However, the DDC for 1950 reveals a more fundamental decline in relations between the Board and the Union, than Barbour's relationship alone would suggest. Over

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 99th meeting, 25.10.49, min 318, p 128.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 101st meeting, 20.12.49, min 357, p 157.

another stripping rate dispute, this time in the 40 Fathoms Seam at Lugar Mine, Mr. Reid for the Board raised the issue of ca' canny at the mine and said that:

The Board took very strong exception to the attitude of the men, and his Side was reluctant to consider the merits of the dispute until the men resumed normal working.

The Union in turn wished to lodge a strong protest at the proposals of the Management which in effect, it was alleged, provided that the men would not be able to earn the average piecerate earnings of the colliery on the agreed task but only if they undertook an extended task beyond that agreed as reasonable.⁹⁶

This meeting demonstrated the hardening of both sides' attitude and the increase in tit for tat exchanges that was making the consideration of each case more protracted and increasing the length of the minutes for each meeting from five or six pages to ten or eleven. The next meeting displayed the increasingly drastic threats to which the Union resorted. Mr. Wood, the General Secretary, suggested that the union might have to consider a boycott of Thinacres Mine over the relatively minor issue of one man's pay being 1/- a week below his co-workers.⁹⁷ The problems facing both sides were recognised by Moffat in March 1950 when he said that he 'Deprecated the attitude of both parties in that there was a disinclination apparent from the joint submissions to endeavour to reach compromise, each side standing firmly on the original proposals.'⁹⁸ However, little attention seems to have been paid to this

⁹⁶ NLS. Acc. 4311.103, DDC, 63rd meeting, 13.1.50, p 6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 64th meeting, 27.1.50, p 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 68th meeting, 24.3.50, p 8.

observation by either side. By late 1950 the difficulties between the two sides over wages had permeated all the deliberations of the Disputes Committee. When Barbour appealed in the spirit of co-operation for the Union to accept the National Overtime Agreement rather than the more advantageous local arrangement in an effort to make a pit threatened with closure economic, Moffat replied that 'if the Board felt that the pit was still uneconomic there was nothing to prevent them from putting forward further proposals' and that the 'Union had gone a long way to make the pit economic but would never agree to keep the pit going by violating Union principles.'⁹⁹ At the next meeting Moffat made a long speech, again emphasising the disparity between the Scottish and British average wages and said he was:

impelled to remind the Board that he had never committed the Union to acceptance of a particular wage laid down by the Divisional Board. This was because he considered it unfair for the Scottish miner to have to work for a considerably lower average wage than that in the British Coalfield.¹⁰⁰

The relationship between the NUMSA and the SDB continued to deteriorate through 1951, with ever increasing acrimony. In March comments for the first time 'were off the record'¹⁰¹ and in May Moffat complained again of the conciliation procedure saying:

that in the issuing of a circular to the coalfield regarding the implementation of the conciliation machinery, he observed that a message of that sort might be better directed to the Disputes

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 79th meeting, 22.9.50, pp 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 80th meeting, 6.10.50, pp 5-6.

Committee because this Committee was, if anything, creating a sense of frustration by dilatory handling of disputes submitted for settlement. It was futile in those circumstances to anticipate any success from an appeal to the people in the coalfields.¹⁰²

In the same meeting Mr. Wood of the Union complained that the attitude of the Board 'was reminiscent of the policy of the old owners that the men should be held to a lower level and not all raised to the higher.'¹⁰³ Later in 1951 Moffat complained of the trend already mentioned of cases being referred back to the locality, enquiring 'if this case was also to be submitted to Assessors since that appeared to be the mechanistic attitude to disputes.'¹⁰⁴

At the next meeting Balfour attempted to explain the Board's predicament but to little avail. He 'acknowledged of course that the Union considered that the Scottish wage on the average was low and he did not blame them, but they were not entitled to blame the Divisional Board whose instructions from National Headquarters were that they should not vary wages,' adding that 'the Divisional Board's instructions...had been to hold wages at a static level pending a new wages structure. They could not object to the Union opposing that view but it was well to recognise the position of the Divisional Board. These were the instructions which they had received and they intended to carry them out.' The Union side countered that if it was acknowledged that the Scottish wages were lower than the British average that 'it

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 90th meeting, 23.3.51, p 8.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 93rd meeting, 18.5.51, pp 1-2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p 4.

was equally the task of the Divisional Board to raise wages in the Division.' Balfour in reply affirmed his belief that 'there was no possibility of eliminating strikes until a recognised national wages structure was obtained. That, however, was the job of the National and not the Divisional Coal Board.'¹⁰⁵

Despite this frank exchange of views (which one might have expected to result in at least a stalemate) the antagonism between the Board and Union over the Scottish wages question continued. In October the Union stated that they were forced to claim higher wages in order to obtain some advance from either the Disputes Committee or the Umpire and accused the Board of being entirely responsible for ca' canny 'by asking men to perform tasks higher than they had ever done in their lives for wages lower than they had ever had.'¹⁰⁶ Temperatures were certainly running high and finally boiled over on 9 November. During a discussion over a claim for guaranteed wages at Wester Auchengeich Colliery the Union claimed that Mr. Reid had accused them of condoning ca' canny and Moffat asked him to withdraw his statement, 'on Mr. Reid declining to withdraw and stating that he had not used the word condoning Mr. Moffat intimated that there would be no more discussion at this meeting until the statement that the Union were condoning ca' canny was withdrawn.'¹⁰⁷ At this point the Union side retired and the meeting terminated.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 99th meeting, 17.8.51, p 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 100th meeting, 30.8.51, pp 7-8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 103rd meeting, 12.10.51, pp 7-8.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 105th meeting, 9.11.51, pp 9-13.

Although the minutes do not actually refer to Reid using the precise phrase 'condoning' he did say that the Union were 'not entitled to bring forward cases in support of restrictive practices'¹⁰⁸ and 'the Union were encouraging ca' canny by bringing this case'¹⁰⁹ after Moffat had said right at the beginning of the discussion of the case that 'ca' canny was not condoned by the Trade Union.'¹¹⁰ In these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that the Union took such an affront and the Disputes Committee experienced its first complete break down. However, the break was not long-standing and the next meeting took place as scheduled and the atmosphere does not appear to have been particularly frosty. There is no record of an official withdrawal or apology from Reid, but the case that had caused the split was settled by the Board making an ex-gratia lump sum payment. Whilst this did not admit the claim for guaranteed wages, the outcome would appear more a victory for the Union than an equitable compromise.

In 1952 there was a change in tactics by the Union, away from the head-on collision course adopted in the previous years towards a more considered and calculated approach. This change was brought about by the provisions of the Second Increase in Wages Agreement (1951). Barbour observed from this Agreement that the fact that a case involved a change of conditions or methods of working did not, ipso facto, constitute grounds for an increase in pay. On the other hand Moffat differed in his interpretation. He desired it to be recorded that, so far as the National Agreement

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p 12.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 9.

was concerned, in relation to piece rates where there was no change in conditions existing piece rates would continue for 12 months. But where there was a change in conditions or methods of working there was no such thing as a freezing of wages; 'the door was wide open for negotiations.'¹¹¹ This raises the questions of whether the NUMSA then tried to claim changes of conditions in order to secure an increase in wages, if this was the only method by which they were able to do so. A test of this possible change in tactics is to see if in the rates disputes before the DDC in 1952 it was the 'facts' of the case that were in dispute rather what the appropriate rate itself should be. In other words, were they arguing over whether or not there had been a change in condition rather than if the rate claimed was justified? Equally did the Board insist in more cases that there was no change in conditions in order for the dispute to fall within the terms of the wage freeze?

During 1952 there were 19 clear cut cases where the principal disagreement was over whether there were changed conditions. Although this is not a particularly high figure it represents almost 20% of the 96 Rate and Task disputes arising in 1952. Rather than swamping the Committee with claims of this nature the Union appears to have taken a restrained approach, but it is significant to note that these 19 cases represent about the same annual percentage increase for Rate and Task disputes in 1952 over 1951, as can be seen in Graph 5.1. So although the general tone of the meetings during 1952 was more restrained the Union were maintaining the pressure on the Board over the wages issue. In part this restraint may have been due to more

¹¹¹ NLS. Acc. 4311.111, DDC, 110th meeting, 25.1.52, p 4.

widespread concern in the Conservative Government about inflation, and trade unions to be less sympathetic about wage claims. This is not to say that 1952 was without incident, in March Moffat said the 'Board was not being fair in the negotiations and by this attitude would stultify any possibility of the men agreeing to increased tasks' and accused the Board of trying to stick to the old 30/- wage level which he said both Reid and Barbour had denounced.¹¹² In December Mr. Wood for the Union again criticised the Conciliation Procedure which he said the workmen, 'rightly or wrongly were beginning to think was breaking down' and emphasised the need for disputes to be settled at the pit.¹¹³

However, the final meeting of 1952 heralded a return to familiar arguments and tactics. This was because the agreement that had frozen wages had expired and Moffat said that the Union was exercising discretion as to the strengths of cases under these circumstances but if the Board claimed the wage was reasonable irrespective of the merits there 'would be a spate of cases and the conciliation machinery would break down.'¹¹⁴ Such thinly veiled threats continued at this meeting when Mr. Smith of the Union said:

They were all workers under the same employer, but the Scottish miner was getting lower earnings for comparative effort. If the Union could not redress that anomaly constitutionally there would be but one

¹¹² *Ibid*, 113th meeting, 7.3.52, p 3.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 130th meeting, 12.12.52, pp 8-9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 131st meeting, 26.12.52, pp 5-7.

reaction from the men and that was that as the Union could not handle it effectively they would have to do so themselves.¹¹⁵

Such threats as a breakdown in the negotiating machinery or the threat of unofficial action continued throughout 1953, without any noticeable effect on the Board's continued hard line, although it should be noted that Moffat's threat of a spate of cases did not materialise. Fewer Rate and Task disputes occurred than in 1952, but there was a return to the 1951 level of total disputes. The Union's threats earlier in 1953 to withdraw from the DDC materialised in November 1953 although the Board handed the opportunity to Moffat on a plate, the occasion does seem somewhat contrived. The occasion was a dispute over Stripping Rates at Polkemmet Colliery which centred around the payment for waiting time. In explaining the waiting time payment the Board said:

The reason for this was that the rate at which the men filled was higher than the rate at which the coal could be wound and that the men were doing this to earn extra money.

The Union side protested vigorously at this statement suggesting that it meant that the Coal Board was actually wanting the men to go slow and that there was something very wrong with the organisation and technical administration at the Colliery. There could be no need for modern mechanisation if the men could outstrip the machines.

Moffat said the Board's reasons;

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p 11.

amounted to slander of workmen who should have been congratulated for their efforts and he was not prepared to accept it in respect of his members.¹¹⁶

The Board's comment did appear rather foolhardy, or insensitive at the least but equally Moffat did seem to over react, although this was probably the opportunity he had been waiting for in order to withdraw the Union side. In the end at the resumption of the adjourned meeting on 2 December the Board's statement was withdrawn and the business concluded.

By 1955 a number of features are evident from the DDC minutes that first began to emerge in 1954. Firstly, by 1955 dealings between the Board and Union were on a more cordial footing but the relationship was not as co-operative or close as that evident in 1947 or for most of 1948. In general 1954 seemed to be characterised by protracted, pedantic discussions of the details in each and every case with little or no progress being made to resolve them. For example in November 1954 a case involved the payment for 1 yard, at rate of 3/2d to a stripper, the minutes recorded:

Observing that the amount of money was small, Mr. Moffat said that nevertheless an important point of principle was at stake because the Board had no right to alter the workman's contract without seven days notice and by putting in another man before the end of the shift and without the claimant's consent the Board had, in the opinion of the Union's side, been guilty of breach of contract. He thought little good could emerge from a protracted discussion because, in his opinion, the

¹¹⁶ NLS. Acc. 4311.113, DDC, 151st meeting, 27.11.53, p. 8.

incident was a product of strained relationships for which blame attached to both sides.¹¹⁷

It is perhaps significant that Moffat acknowledged the poor relations between the two sides, and part responsibility for it, because matters appear to have continued to improve in 1955, even if the nature of the relationship was now different. Barbour felt able to say at the end of 1955 that he 'expressed the hope that the cordial relationships which had pervaded this meeting would continue throughout 1956 and they would always seek to resolve their differences in a friendly way.'¹¹⁸ Another feature was the high level of disputes the Committee were dealing with, 352 compared with 230 in 1953, but when one considers that the long awaited wages structure did not arrive until the following year this is perhaps less surprising. Also, true to form, Moffat was still complaining about the disputes machinery, saying that 'it would be a failure if both sides mechanically adhered to the proposals submitted from the Management and the Union locally.'¹¹⁹ A third feature that was firmly established was that when cases were referred back to the locality this was predominantly to local assessors and not to the pit committee. This trend was increasingly evident from 1950 and perhaps suggests that the bitter wrangling between 1949 and 1953 did serious damage to the status of the Divisional Disputes Committee as an effective forum to resolve disputes conclusively arising from the pits.

¹¹⁷ NLS. Acc. 4311.114, DDC, 175th meeting, 19.11.54, p 9.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 202nd meeting, 22.12.55, p 4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 181st meeting, 28.2.55, p 2.

VII

Conclusion

It seems clear that the poor relations during this period permanently precluded the close co-operation of management and union of which there were tantalising glimpses during the early years of nationalisation. Indeed it may be argued that the speed with which the industry was nationalised, with so many fundamental policy issues unresolved, such as the wages structure, was a cause of the rapid return to poor industrial relations. There is one caveat to these suggestions, and that is that the evidence for the above come from the Disputes Committee, a forum which by its very nature would be unlikely to show the NUMSA and SDB in the best light. It may be possible that a thread of goodwill and co-operation between the two ran through the consultation machinery, or that the picture at the pit level was better than that at the Division.

Other issues raised by this chapter include how the NUMSA saw their divisional bargaining in relation to both local and national negotiations. In particular, why the NUMSA persisted in trying to persuade the SDB to remedy the 'wages anomaly', when the SDB had made it clear that this was a national question. It seems that although the NUMSA recognised that this was ultimately a national question, their strong bargaining position and ability to negotiate independently of the national union, meant the 'wages anomaly' took on a distinctive Scottish aspect.

Regarding industrial relations, the aims of a harmonious and co-operative relationship between the NUMSA and SDB had by 1955 largely evaporated. Whilst the DDC was always going to show relations between the Board and the Union in their worst light, the co-operation evident in 1947 and 1948 in resolving disputes, and the mutual support given to each other, indicated that there was a window of opportunity for better industrial relations. That the pressures and circumstances of the coal industry in post-war Britains overwhelmed them was perhaps inevitable. Even those with the most optimistic outlook for the nationalised coal industry knew that it would not be transformed overnight.

Of most significance, was that the NUMSA did not have much more success in reducing the levels of disputes than the National Executive. The persistence of these disputes indicates that whatever the intentions or influence of the National or Area levels of the NUM, it was at the local level that the significant characteristics of coal nationalisation were determined.

Chapter Six

The NUM at local level

I

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that the Scottish Divisional conciliation machinery had failings both in terms of eliminating unofficial stoppages and settling disputes.

Chapter Four also indicated that relations between the NUMSA and SDB were not always good or conducted in the manner expected under nationalisation. As the divisional level conciliation machinery dealt with disputes arising from the pit level, the question arises if colliery conciliation meetings displayed similarly poor relations and difficulties in settling disputes. However, colliery level records are also available for some consultative committees. This is an important source for broadening the analysis of local level union attitudes towards nationalisation.

Although the NUM membership of the conciliation and consultation machinery considered here are a select section, they also come closest to representing the majority of union members. The Colliery Conciliation Committees, which dealt with disputes, are examined first. This helps establish the extent to which their experience mirrored that of the Divisional Disputes Committee and whether the generally picture of poor industrial relations suggested by unofficial disputes was a characteristic of the 'official' disputes machinery. Secondly, this chapter evaluates the evidence of the Colliery Consultative Committees. Colliery Consultative Committees are particularly important for they were established as a forum for the

discussion of non-dispute issues between management and men. Therefore, these committees provide a valuable additional source for examining local NUM members' attitudes towards nationalisation away from the traditional focus of industrial disputes. This raises the possibility of an alternative picture of 'workplace experience' to that provided by conciliation and disputes. This evidence is also important because the evidence for the equivalent divisional and national levels is unavailable. This adds a new dimension, both to the evidence of Colliery Conciliation Committees and to the overall analysis of the NUM's attitude towards nationalisation. In so doing these colliery level studies also contribute to the debate on joint consultation and the history of disputes in the British coal industry.

With some exceptions, joint consultation has not been viewed as a success either in the public or private sector. One of the aims of this chapter is to establish whether the experience in the Scottish coal industry confirms or contradicts these interpretations. In general, interpretations of plant level joint consultation have been unenthusiastic, particularly in the private sector.¹ Management hostility or indifference, unrealistic union expectations and an apathetic response by the workforce have been cited as common problems. These factors combined with a Government policy of exhortation, not compulsion, meant that apart from a brief

¹ Tomlinson, J. 'Productivity, joint consultation and human relations in post-war Britain: the Attlee Government and the workplace' in Melling, J and McKinlay, A. (Eds.) *Management, Labour and industrial politics in modern Europe*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 1996. Rogow, A. A and Shore, P. *The Labour Government and British Industry*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1955. Tomlinson, J. 'Labour and the Trade Unions, 1945-51' in Tiratsoo, N (ed.). *The Attlee Years*, Pinter, London, 1991. Hinton, J. *Shop Floor Citizens: Engineering Democracy in 1940's Britain*, Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1994 is more positive about this aspect of private industry.

flurry during the export drive of 1947, Joint Production Committees² soon withered on the vine. Interpretations of joint consultation in the public sector have fared little better. On the positive side joint consultation's statutory basis in nationalised industries meant its widespread adoption. However, their performance has come in for similar criticism to those in private industry. Partly this is because the expectations for joint consultation were greater, that it would transform industrial relationships and usher in a period of worker and management co-operation. Nevertheless, the threat to managerial prerogatives, the failure to communicate the work of the committees, different concepts of the scope of consultation between management and union and failure to integrate joint consultation into existing management/worker and management/union relations have all been cited as negative features.³ Considering the poor industrial relations at the divisional level and the high level of local disputes one might expect this picture be confirmed in the Scottish coal industry. However, the available evidence from Scotland provides a contrasting and sometimes conflicting view to this interpretation.

Less questionable was the coal industry's poor record of disputes, with Scotland having a particularly poor record. Whilst coalmining strikes have attracted a great deal of interest, only recently have attempts been made to understand these disputes

² Joint Production Committees were the equivalent of Colliery Consultative Committees in private industry.

³ Cole, G.D.H. *Consultation or Joint Management: A Contribution to the Discussion of Industrial Democracy*, Fabian Tract No. 277, London, 1949. Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation: The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1955. Ashworth, W. *History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 5, 1946-1982*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986. Arnot, R.P. *A History of the Scottish Miners*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1955, p 274 only mentions the statutory provision for consultation.

in their broader local context.⁴ Whilst these studies have shed new light on the causes of local disputes under nationalisation, there have still been relatively few attempts to consider these disputes in conjunction with the conciliation and consultation machinery or what this indicated about local attitudes towards nationalisation. Church and Outram have emphasised that even in areas such as Scotland where disputes were frequent, they remained short-lived, with declining participation even as strike prevalence and distribution increased.⁵ They argued that it was the persistence of pre-nationalisation characteristics that produced the high incidence of disputes in these pits.⁶ The analysis below largely confirms this interpretation; however, nationalisation did bring institutional changes at the local level in the form of the conciliation and consultative committees. Therefore, did the local characteristics suggested by the disputes pattern carry over into the performance of these committees? Furthermore, one feature of the NUMSA was their identification of particular local grievances with broader national campaigns. This raises the question of whether local miners also related their activity to broader national issues. Finally, what did this indicate about rank and file miners' attitudes towards nationalisation compared to their regional and national officials?

⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I.M. *Industrial Relations and Nationalisation in the South Wales Coalmining Industry*, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1990. Church, R and Outram Q. *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield conflict in Britain 1889-1966*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

⁵ Church, R and Outram Q. *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield conflict in Britain 1889-1966*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, tables 12.2, 12.3 and 12.4.

⁶ *Ibid*, pp 260-261.

Unfortunately the evidence to answer these questions is incomplete. Records survive for 23 collieries in this period, which represented 12% of Scottish pits in 1947, and within these there are some chronological gaps. Furthermore, the majority of the material relates to the Fife Area of the NUM. This represents 56% of collieries in the area. Therefore, in examining the records of Colliery Conciliation Committees it has not been possible to undertake the same analysis as for the Divisional Disputes Committee. This analysis demonstrated that even small gaps in the records could have a serious affect on statistical calculations, producing high standard deviations, which reduce the reliability of quantitative analysis. In this case where the gaps can run into months or years, and different months or years for different pits, to attempt an analysis as in the previous chapter would have been futile.

But the reliance on records largely from one area also raises a qualitative problem. Could the Fife Conciliation or Consultative Committees be significantly unrepresentative of those elsewhere? Ultimately, without significant comparative evidence this question is impossible to answer. However, there are a number of reasons which would suggest Fife was not so different as to make it atypical. As envisaged by the Scottish Coalfields Report, Fife was an expanding coalfield. However, this was largely due to new sinkings, none of which were productive by 1955. The only existing pit with prospects for substantial increases in production was Comrie.⁷ Furthermore, Fife was not the only coalfield with prospects for increased production. Both East and West Lothian and Ayrshire and Dumfries had

as good, if not better prospects.⁸ Therefore, although Fife's prospects under nationalisation were better than those of the declining, and dispute prone, Lanarkshire fields, it was not unrepresentative of the prospects for Scottish coalfields. Fife was also one of the most mechanised coalfields at the outset of nationalisation but the surviving records provide a variety of collieries in terms of output, manpower, life expectancy and mechanisation. Although Fife was considered an expanding area the Fife Area of the NUM covered a wider area than the Fife Area of the NCB and included a number of pits that were facing closure. As will be seen collieries in this area were not immune from unofficial disputes. Whilst containing many pits around the productive Dunfermline, Cowdenbeath and Glethrothes coalfields, the Fife NUM area also included less productive areas north-east towards Cupar and St Andrews and westwards to Stirling and Bannockburn. Lastly, the Colliery Conciliation Committees provide the only available insight into the workings of the pit level disputes scheme. Similarly, Colliery Consultative Committees remain the only source available to examine issues between management and men not related to disputes. If any meaningful analysis of the NUM at the local level is to be undertaken, this evidence, however imperfect must be utilised.

It should be emphasised that it would be surprising if bodies such as the Colliery Consultative Committees discussed identical issues as the Executive Committee of

⁷ Scottish Home Department, *The Report of the Scottish Coalfields Committee, 1944*, Cmd 6535, pp 82-83.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp 89-97.

the NUM or the Divisional Disputes Committee. Their evidence must be considered in the context for which they were established. Nevertheless, the discussion of what may appear to be mundane topics can reveal as much, if not more, about nationalisation than discussions at the executive level. This was particularly the case in the coal industry because the pit, frequently remote from higher levels of management, was the primary unit of production. If nationalisation was to be a success it had to take place at the level of the individual pit. Similarly, whatever actions may have been taken by the area or national levels of the NUM and NCB, would be undermined if they did not meet with at least the tacit approval of the local members or harness their views and suggestions. Therefore, the activities of NUM members at the local level perhaps take on a greater significance than in other nationalised industries.

One way in which these activities can be examined was the way miners responded to the coal production crisis, a response that depended entirely on those at the pit level. Whatever the good intentions of the NUM or NCB, the appeals and exhortations from management, union leaders and politicians for increased output largely depended upon the co-operation and goodwill of the local miners and management. Intimately linked to this question of production were industrial relations. In these circumstances the efforts that were made to reform the industry's industrial relations structure at the pit level are worthy of particular attention.

II

Colliery Conciliation and Consultation: The Background

Colliery Conciliation Committees were something of an innovation under nationalisation and it is necessary to consider their aims, constitution and intended role. The 1946 Coal Industry Nationalisation Act placed a statutory obligation on the Coal Board to establish joint machinery to resolve the terms and conditions of employment, but the establishment of this machinery at the colliery level was a creation of the NUM and NCB.⁹ The Joint National Negotiating Committee and the National Reference Tribunal were a modification of a scheme established between the unions and employers in 1943 and carried over in 1946.¹⁰ Similarly, district conciliation schemes had existed in the pre-nationalised coal industry. In Scotland the NUM and NCB did not continue the old district disputes committees. However, the new development under nationalisation, the Colliery Conciliation Committees, were established.¹¹

These committees had a fairly loose structure, the quorum being as little as two people, one from management and one worker. They did however, have a highly defined procedure, but one that was supposed to be flexible enough to embrace the many vagaries of pit level disputes. Initially, the question in dispute was to be

⁹ Coal Industry Nationalisation Act (1946), Section 46.

¹⁰ NCB/NUM Agreement of 5 December 1946 (known as the 'take-over agreement').

discussed by the man or men with the immediate official in the pit, usually the overman or undermanager. If no agreement was reached the matter was then reported to the trade union official responsible, usually the union delegate in Scotland, it was only at this second stage that the trade union became formally involved. The union official could negotiate informally with the local management within three days or immediately request a 'pit meeting'. This request could also be made if settlement was not reached after three days. Both the manager and the union official had the right to call a pit meeting, but had to notify their opposite number in writing and the meeting had to take place within five days of the notification. At this stage either side could have higher officials in attendance.¹² The national Pit Conciliation Scheme then stated that if a dispute was unsettled after 14 days it must be jointly referred by the union official and manager to the appropriate disputes committee.¹³

Unlike the Colliery Conciliation Committees the proposals for joint Colliery Consultative Committees had a wartime precedent in the Pit Production Committees. However, these committees had largely lapsed at the end of the war and the ambitions for their peace-time successors were far more ambitious. Wartime Pit Production Committees had been established with the sole intention of boosting

¹¹ NCB/NUM Pit Conciliation Agreement, 1 January 1947.

¹² It was a condition of the conciliation scheme that jointly agreed minutes were kept but no record exists from any earlier contact between parties in dispute. It is difficult to estimate the extent to which jointly agreed minutes exaggerated or reduced differences, but as they were used in any referral of the dispute to higher levels, one can suggest that points of difference were most emphasised.

production. The 1946 Coal Industry Nationalisation Act again provided for the statutory existence of joint consultation but provides a broader framework than the war-time Pit Production Committees.¹⁴ As well as issues such as health, safety and welfare the board was obliged to consult on 'the organisation and conduct of the operations and other matters of mutual interest.'¹⁵ This was to be done in respect to the operations in which the workers were employed. In the post-war years with recruitment difficulties in the coal industry, material shortages and increased demand for coal, it was hoped that there would be a 'psychological effect' from joint consultation. By establishing formal meetings between representatives of the workforce and management it was hoped to foster a sense of mutual understanding, co-operation and trust that would lead to increased production.

The post-war revival of Pit Production Committees from 1947 was different to their wartime predecessors. In the private sector joint consultation¹⁶ was entirely voluntary, although encouraged with varying degrees of enthusiasm by the Labour Government, TUC and employers organisations. On the other hand all of the nationalisation acts required statutory joint consultation, although the exact form of this was not laid down in the legislation. However, compulsion itself does not ensure successful consultation even if succeeds in widespread adoption. Neither was joint

¹³ Scotland had only one disputes committee, the Divisional Disputes Committee, although some divisions had more than one to deal with different types of dispute. For more details of the regional differences in conciliation procedure see Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation: The Labour Problems of British Coal*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass, 1955, pp 68-72.

¹⁴ Coal Industry Nationalisation Act (1946), Section 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

consultation intended to embrace just production, although it could be argued that the particular encouragement in 1947 was motivated by the winter coal crisis and a desire to boost the export drive. It was intended that through providing the workforce with greater participation and improved communications between management and men an element of 'democracy' would be brought to the industry. It was hoped that the 'psychological' effect of breaking down traditional hostilities would in turn reduce disputes and increase production. However, this was not the same 'democracy' as envisaged by those supporters of workers' control, guild socialism or syndicalism of the inter-war period. Such thinking had lost much of its influence, even within the labour movement, during the 1930s and by the end of the war had manifested itself not as a desire to directly manage, but to contribute to and be informed about management decisions, whilst retaining union independence.

If two of the principal outcomes of colliery conciliation and consultation were supposed to be reduced unofficial stoppages and increased production, the statistics on the Scottish coal industry from 1946 to 1955 give the impression of only partial success. As can be seen in Table 6.1 Scottish output of deep-mined coal peaked in 1949 and by 1955 was below the 1946 level. Over the same period Scotland's share of British output declined continually from 12.5% in 1946 to 10.4% in 1955. As one of the principal benefits of Colliery Consultative Committees was supposed to be increased production the results suggest a limited success confined to the late 1940s.

¹⁶ Commonly referred to as Joint Production Committees, these were the equivalent of Pit Production Committees.

However, these national figures can disguise improvements in output per manshift in individual pits or even particular seams.

An even less auspicious pattern is revealed when one considers the tonnage lost to disputes. As Table 6.2 indicates, only in 1948 was the figure below 200,000 tons and from 1951 rose steadily to a record figure of 449,000 tons in 1955. Furthermore, Scottish output lost by disputes as a percentage of British output lost by disputes averaged over 30% for the period. Although this figure varied year to year, largely depending on the level of British disputes, an average of 30% was high compared to the average Scottish share of British output over the same period of 11%.

Table 6.1 Scottish and British Output of Saleable Deep-Mined Coal

Year	Scottish Output	British Output	Scottish Output as a % of British
1946	22,510,700	179,796,000	12.52
1947	22,185,063	184,748,211	12.01
1948	23,146,334	196,721,609	11.77
1949	23,427,092	200,694,603	11.67
1950	22,948,069	202,262,598	11.35
1951	23,247,114	209,893,972	11.08
1952	22,985,184	212,215,721	10.83
1953	22,467,389	210,469,279	10.68
1954	22,214,165	211,812,706	10.49
1955	21,696,463	212,163,429	10.37

Source: NCB Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, 1947 - 1955

Table 6.2. Scottish and British Saleable Tonnage Lost by Disputes

Year	Scottish Tonnage Lost by Disputes	Scottish Saleable Output	Scottish Tonnage Lost as a % of Output	British Tonnage Lost by Disputes	Scottish Tonnage Lost as a % of British Lost
1946	217,000	22,510,700	0.96	769,800	28.19
1947	375,000	22,185,063	1.69	1,643,500	22.82
1948	199,000	23,146,334	0.86	899,900	22.11
1949	275,000	23,427,092	1.17	1,266,200	21.72
1950	499,000	22,948,069	2.18	852,700	58.52
1951	253,000	23,247,114	1.08	803,000	31.51
1952	375,000	22,985,184	1.63	1,388,000	27.02
1953	372,000	22,467,389	1.66	939,000	39.62
1954	426,000	22,214,165	1.92	1,221,000	34.89
1955	449,000	21,696,463	2.10	2,688,000	16.70

Disputes are all unofficial disputes. Tonnage lost based on average daily tonnage output for on that day. Source: NCB Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, 1947 - 1955

However, this poor record of disputes does not necessarily mean that conciliation or consultation was a failure. To militate against Scotland's poor unofficial disputes record pits tended to be older, smaller, with almost universally poorer geological conditions than other coalfields, and hence less adaptable to mechanisation and Scottish wages were on average less than their British counterparts.

The nationally poor figures for tonnage lost by disputes was noted by contemporary observers. Baldwin, writing in 1955, noted that between 1938 and 1953 the tonnage lost through disputes in each year since nationalisation was higher than in all but two

of the pre-nationalisation years.¹⁷ This suggests that the new conciliation machinery was unable to reduce, or even contain, the level of unofficial stoppages. He also noted that although this was less than one percent of output, in a period when every ton counted, any loss of output was serious. Certainly the NCB's view that 'if...everyone concerned keeps to the rules laid down, there should never be any need for a strike' seemed wildly optimistic, and Ashworth comments 'that would have been a miracle and the miracle did not happen'.¹⁸

Neither has the literature on post-war joint consultation viewed consultation as either a success in boosting production or having a positive psychological effect. Indeed Tomlinson has called into question the whole validity of a link between a psychological improvement and productivity.¹⁹ He has argued that 'the norms of worker/employer suspicion for the most part defeated the official union attempts to make increased production part of the political task of support for a Labour Government' and employers 'were strongly resistant to the view that productivity was largely a function of such structures, and worried by the potential such a link had for challenging management prerogatives'.²⁰ Furthermore, Joint Production Committees

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p 73.

¹⁸ NCB Annual Report, 1947, p 15-17 quoted in Ashworth, W. *History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 5, 1946-1982*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, p 144.

¹⁹ Tomlinson, J. 'Labour and the Trade Unions, 1945-51' in Tiratsoo, N (ed.). *The Attlee Years*, Pinter, London, 1991, p 96.

²⁰ Tomlinson, J. 'Productivity, Joint Consultation and Human Relations in post-war Britain: the Attlee Government and the Workplace' in Melling, J and McKinlay, A. (Eds.) *Management, Labour and Industrial Politics in Modern Europe*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 1996, pp 37-38.

expansion 'seems to have been largely limited by employer resistance.'²¹ Other commentators have also viewed joint consultation in the private sector with mixed results. For example Rogow and Shore concluded that employers saw consultation as a bulwark against socialism and nationalisation rather than a positive development in its own right.²² Criticism was not limited to the private sector either. When considering the nationalised coal industry both Ashworth and Baldwin viewed colliery consultation as having limited and patchy results based on their examination of selected Colliery Consultative Committees.²³ Church and Outram commented that 'changes in ownership, structure and organization left the fundamental dynamics of the industry almost untouched at the local level.'²⁴ One of the few positive interpretations of joint consultation comes from Hinton's work on private sector engineering works. However, even here the trade unions involved ultimately become frustrated and bitter at the stonewalling management tactics.²⁵

²¹ Tomlinson, J. 'Labour and the trade Unions, 1945-51' in Tiratsoo, N (ed.). *The Attlee Years*, Pinter, London, 1991, p 97.

²² Rogow, A. A and Shore, P. *The Labour Government and British Industry*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1955, pp 107-11.

²³ Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation: The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1955, p 109 and Ashworth, W. *History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 5, 1946-1982*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, p 145.

²⁴ Church, R. and Outram, Q. *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain 1889-1966*, CUP, Cambridge, 1998, p 221.

²⁵ Hinton, J. *Shop Floor Citizens: Engineering Democracy in 1940s Britain*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1994.

III

Colliery Conciliation: The Evidence from Scotland

At first sight it would appear that the NCB and NUM had devised a watertight scheme with clearly defined stages and procedures for processing disputes and included time limits to ensure speedy redress. There was flexibility for minor matters to be dealt with 'on the spot' without the need to convene a formal meeting, and when this was necessary to include as few or as many people as required. However, the question remains as to how well this scheme worked in practice at the colliery level. The records of the Divisional Disputes Committee, Divisional Coal Board and NUM Executive made frequent references to unofficial stoppages, 'canny' and delays in the conciliation procedure. This does suggest that the pit level conciliation scheme was not working as smoothly as its designers had intended.

The 'miracle' of no strikes, hoped for by the NCB, certainly did not materialise. Whether this sentiment was purely rhetoric or a genuine expectation of the new conciliation procedure, it was somewhat naive. During the war miners' position had fallen in the table of industrial earnings. This heightened expectations surrounding nationalisation, justified or not, of a 'new deal' for coal miners including improved pay and conditions. Add to this heady mix of pent up demand and heightened expectation that the increased demand for coal could only be met in the short term by increased effort and manpower, which would involve job reassessment and new working patterns, and the potential for conflict was great.

Bearing in mind these less favourable circumstances, the dispute statistics and the apparently poor relationship over disputes at divisional level, the question remains as to what the colliery conciliation committees reveal about their members' attitude towards nationalisation. We know already that the NUM Scottish Executive pursued a policy of opposing unofficial stoppages and would not negotiate on behalf of men involved in such a dispute. In December 1946 when the draft Pit Conciliation Scheme was considered at a delegate conference in London the Scottish Executive moved the following resolution 'Both management and workmen must utilise this machinery in all pit disputes, and it shall be a condition of these regulations that negotiations under the machinery are not permitted during the period of any unofficial stoppage of work.'²⁶ In October 1946 Abe Moffat had expressed the opinion that the main objective of the Union regarding pit disputes should be to give 'more power to the managers to settle disputes, and to secure effective pit machinery for arbitration if settlement is not reached, so that finality might be obtained in a matter of days.'²⁷ The establishment of conciliation machinery at pit level and the incorporation of time limits appeared to fulfil these objectives. On the general relationship between workmen and management the Scottish Executive had said 'we pledge ourselves to co-operate with the new Divisional Coal Board to overcome any obstacles which may arise. We also call upon all mineworkers to carry out this co-

²⁶ NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 9.12.46, p 3. N.B. The records of Colliery Committees and other material deposited with them have not been sorted or re-classified by the National Library of Scotland. The catalogue numbers have simply been assigned to the boxes as deposited. As these boxes can contain a number of different files *Ibid*, as used below, simply refers to the same box and where a box contains more than one different file a fuller description follows where necessary.

²⁷ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 14.10.46, pp 3-4.

operation at every colliery to ensure continuity of production and to establish good relations between management and workmen.²⁸

Considering the poor, and deteriorating record of disputes in Scotland, one might expect the hopes expressed above to be unfulfilled. However, the majority of conciliation committees where evidence is available achieved a positive outcome, that is a mutually agreed settlement that did not result in a stoppage. Of course a high level of disputes in Scotland originating from certain pits and successful conciliation in others are not mutually exclusive. However, the analysis demonstrates that there was another side to industrial relations under nationalisation than that indicated by bare disputes figures alone.

However, the pits under consideration do not neatly divide into those with good and bad records in settling disputes. At some time most pits displayed difficulty in settling disputes, but there does not appear to be any deterioration during the period. In none of the available cases did the system break down or relationships sour to the same extent as at the divisional level. The atmosphere in general at conciliation meetings was business like and appeared devoid of personal recriminations. However, by their nature the records of conciliation meetings aimed to record the 'facts' of the case in question which limits the extent to which they represent the atmosphere of the meetings. Neither were they the final clearing house for colliery disputes and difficult cases would be referred upwards rather than thrashed out at the

²⁸ *Ibid*, Executive Committee Meeting, 25.11.46, p 11.

colliery level. This again limits the extent to which the minutes of colliery conciliation minutes represent any hostility between the two sides. However, a number of cases were referred back to the colliery level and the records of the Divisional Disputes Committee have demonstrated that they can reveal confrontational attitudes. Instant settlement of disputes was scarce, but mutual respect appeared to permeate enough meetings to suggest that relationships were less likely to be derailed by occasional unofficial action. By their nature unofficial strikes did not go through the conciliation procedure, so it is difficult to establish the proportion of disputes in a pit that were 'failed' by the conciliation scheme. In the pits considered here once a dispute was taken to conciliation the same dispute did not seem to produce a stoppage. However, as the Scottish dispute record shows, the problem was getting workmen to take disputes through the conciliation scheme in the first place.

Bearing in mind the frequent chronological gaps in the evidence one of the most representative examples of colliery conciliation meetings come from Comrie Colliery between 1948 and 1950. In two years there were nine cases of mutual agreement at the pit and both sides deplored the few cases of strike action that occurred, and in these circumstances the dispute tended to be referred to the Divisional Disputes Committee.²⁹ In total there were four cases referred to the Divisional Disputes Committee and in only one of these was there any disagreement. This was a rate and task case where the management had wanted postponement for investigation but the

²⁹ NLS. Acc. 4311.77, NUMSA, Fife Area Pit Meeting Minutes, 1948 - 51, Comrie Colliery, 10.2.48.

Union insisted on sending it to the Divisional Disputes Committee. Generally, the NUM seemed keener to send cases to the Disputes Committee than management, because any settlement would be outwith the managers' control. For example, a settlement reached by the Divisional Disputes Committee or Independent Umpire was binding, and as wages were the largest production cost, this could burden the manager with creeping costs and he had no power to adjust pit head prices accordingly. The Divisional Disputes Committee's settlements tended to fall between the proposals from pit management and union, rather than settle on one or the other. This meant management tended not to move from their first proposal at pit meetings for fear that if the case was referred to the Divisional Disputes Committee they would end up with an even higher settlement. This had the effect of making it more difficult to settle at pit meetings because of the reluctance of each side to move from their first negotiating position, hence increasing frustrations with the ability of pit meetings to settle disputes. Although this was not a widespread trend it did appear to be one of the few characteristics that developed in Colliery Conciliation Committees over the period.

In contrast to this creeping caution in conciliation there were cases, at Comrie Colliery for example, where the NUM representative readily accepted the management's figures over task and rates³⁰ and on another rate and task case the management accepted the union's suggestions for incentive payments. Mr Buchanan, colliery manager;

³⁰ *Ibid*, NUMSA, Fife Area Pit Meeting Minutes, 1948 - 51, Comrie Colliery, 4.2.50.

agreed to incentive payments if there was any future in it and he would do anything to foster feelings of security for men on Shortwall work. He asked both workers and management 'to consider any system which would create incentives for men employed on mechanical loading and he was prepared to meet them on that subject.'³¹

Another aspect of pit conciliation at Comrie was indicative of the union's approach. On cases that were referred back to the pit from the Divisional Disputes Committee the NUM representatives did not automatically accept the remit. A rate and task case came back with a remit from Abe Moffat, NUM Scottish Area President no less, suggesting a straight through yardage rate within a range of 20 to 25 yards. But John Wood, the NUM Fife Area representative, rejected this saying that all he had to do, according to the remit, was reach a satisfactory agreement with a saving for the Board in plant maintenance. To reach a settlement the management agreed to abandon the remit and make a settlement on the original alternative of a basic wage plus bonus.³² This case also displays the tendency for some disputes referred back to the pit to yo-yo between pit and division. Although the original terms of the case were settled, the NUM was insisting on a water allowance and, as this could not be agreed upon, this part of the case was sent back to the Divisional Disputes Committee.

³¹ *Ibid*, Comrie Colliery Pit Meeting, 20.3.48.

³² *Ibid*, Comrie Colliery Pit Meeting, 23.9.48.

At Comrie Colliery seven cases were adjourned but most of these were settled within the next couple of meetings of the conciliation committee.³³ However, some of them were settled without any further discussion at the pit level. This was due to the 'informal' negotiating that Ashworth mentions. Although there were no district conciliation committees in Scotland it was common for difficult cases from the pit to be taken out of the formal conciliation procedure. This should not necessarily be interpreted negatively as it demonstrated a flexible attitude on behalf of both union and management to settle disputes. Most often the union's area secretary and one of the NCB's area production staff met to settle the case. For example, at Comrie Colliery in August 1948 the Area Production Officer and the NUM's Area Secretary settled a dispute over rate and task for stone mine drivage that the pit meeting had been unable to resolve.³⁴ Other examples of such cases occurred at Blair Colliery.³⁵ Another area where higher officials were called upon to intervene, in Fife at least, were unofficial stoppages. Most evidence of this comes from pit correspondence where the Fife Area Labour Relations Officer, Mr Henderson, wrote to Peter Ness, NUM Area Secretary, calling upon him to intervene in unofficial stoppages. All he seemed able to do was to speak to local officials to try to get assurances that they would abide by union rules.³⁶ Although the higher officials worked within the strict remits of each individual case both sides seemed less constrained in their negotiations.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ NLS. Acc. 4311.73, NUMSA, Fife Area Pit Meeting Minutes, 1948, Comrie Colliery, 24.8.48.

³⁵ NLS. Dep. 258.15, NUMSA, Fife Area Pit Meeting Minutes, 1955 - 67, Blair Colliery, 6.6.55.

³⁶ NLS. Acc. 4311.32, NUMSA, Fife Area Pit Correspondence, Dora Colliery 12.4.51, Comrie Colliery 16.3.51 and Valleyfield Colliery 9.1.52.

There are examples where both procedure and approach to disputes was not what the NUM and NCB might have expected. At almost every pit in Fife there were cases where time limits were ignored. In particular, where settlement was not reached at the first attempt, cases were not automatically referred to the Divisional Disputes Committee after 14 days.³⁷ However, in some cases this was a positive step, for example to adjourn the case to enable fact finding on the dispute, as at Comrie Colliery, which then led to a settlement at a future meeting.³⁸ This tactic worked best where the problem was over some physical characteristic, for example the extent of water, faulting, or to consult previous pay lines or seam outputs. Unfortunately in other cases the delay arose because there was disagreement over how a dispute began. These cases tended to be ones where a workman or group of workmen were asked to undertake a different job, change their working methods, or work in a different section from usual, perhaps due to absenteeism or unofficial stoppage by another group of workmen. This situation usually resulted in arguments over a whole range of minor aspects. Whether the men were promised their usual pay or the going rate for the new work, whether the person giving the instructions was entitled to do so, if they were entitled to refuse the work, were they told before or after winding time, would they would get walking time, were other more suitable men available or did less suitable men get preference. This resulted in a situation in pit meetings where the manager and the union official often had two conflicting

³⁷ NLS. Acc. 4311.67 & Acc.. 4311.69, NUMSA, Fife Area Pit Meeting Minutes.

³⁸ NLS. Acc. 4311.77, NUMSA Fife Area, Pit Correspondence and Pit Conciliation Committee Minutes 1948-1951, Comrie Colliery.

accounts, which were based simply on the word of one man against that of another. In these circumstances it was almost impossible to reconcile the two in order to have jointly agreed terms of reference on which to consider the dispute.³⁹ The delays involved in trying to substantiate one side or another naturally increased the frustration of those involved and did nothing to enhance the reputation of the conciliation scheme itself. These problems were ably summed up in a letter from a miner to Abe Moffat contained in pit correspondence files for Stirlingshire:

I am 56 years of age and 43 of them have been spent underground. My education was rather sketchy and I no doubt come under the heading of just being an 'Ignorant Old Miner', but I have enough sense to know that a lot of trouble in the coalfields could be avoided if the men were given a quick decision instead of being pushed aside for weeks at a time.⁴⁰

One result of these delays was that men simply downed tools or embarked on 'canny' when a dispute arose, rather than reporting it to the union official. There are frequent occurrences of these situations in the records and the frustration of officials is evident. The comments from the Beoch delegate in Ayrshire provide a typical example, the 'delegate does not approve of the attitude of the men in the High Coal Section coming up the pit when no grievance had been lodged with him. The delegate thinks the men should follow the proper procedure on future occasions.'⁴¹ One month later the 'delegate again deplored [the] attitude of men in going home first

³⁹ NLS. Acc. 4311.77 NUMSA Fife Area, Pit Correspondence and Pit Conciliation Committee Minutes - 73 (Lumphinans II), 76 (Plean), 77 (Meta), 80 (Bannockburn), 83 (Comrie), 88 & 90 (Valleyfield) and Dep. 258.15, Minutes of Pit Meetings, Blair Colliery, 1955.

⁴⁰ NLS. Acc. 4311.11, Pit Correspondence, Stirlingshire (Fife Area) 1947-1953. Letter undated, probably 1950.

without reporting grievance to him'. The following month two complaints of unofficial stoppages were reported and the delegate complained that by failing to use the conciliation machinery the men might prejudice their case.⁴² It is also worth noting that in this pit the number of unofficial disputes increased from one or two per month reported by the delegate in 1949 to four or five per month by 1952. Although this evidence comes from only one colliery the figures from the NCB Annual Reports on the level of disputes in Scottish Areas suggests that unofficial disputes were difficult to arrest and unofficial action become an increasing reaction to disputes.

An example of how the conciliation procedure could breakdown occurred in East Fife. Mr. Henderson, the Area Labour Relations Officer (and former trade union official) wrote to Peter Ness the NUM's District Secretary on the 15 September 1952, to complain about the actions of local officials in East Fife in getting the men to strike on the 6 & 7 September over the refusal of the 30/- (national) wage claim. According to Henderson's letter a special meeting of the Wellesley Branch, one of the largest pits in Scotland, had taken place where the members had replaced the Secretary and Chairman 'who had tried to uphold the constitution of the NUM, the conciliation scheme and argued on behalf of the extended hours agreement.'⁴³ Henderson also included a pamphlet published by the 'NUM - East Fife Joint

⁴¹ NLS. Dep. 258.10, NUMSA, Ayrshire Branch Minutes, 7.10.51, p 2.

⁴² *Ibid*, 4.11.5, p 1 & 2.12.51, p 3.

⁴³ NLS. Acc. 4311.32, NUMSA, Fife Area Pit Correspondence, Peter Henderson's File (Area Labour Relations Officer), 15.9.52.

Branches' calling for miners to attend a mass rally and meeting, the main points of which were:

Fight now for the 30/- per Week increase.

End the Tory Policy on Wage Freeze.

The National Coal Board, at the instruction of the Tory Government, has rejected our 30/- wage claim. Let us unite now and fight for this 30/- and not a penny less.

Fight the Coal Board and the Tories.

Show them we can still fight with the spirit of 1926.

Speakers include Tom Hubbard MP & John McArthur Miners Leader
In the name of Michael, Wellesley, Frances, Cameron, Rosie,
Wellsgreen Branches.

This case demonstrates that local branches were capable of challenging national policy in their own way. Moreover, it shows the difficulties the conciliation machinery had in containing disputes. This case was triggered by a national issue, and could only be resolved at this level, but the men had to be brought back to work at the local level. In taking this action the men at these collieries were resorting to traditional methods of protest, but over issues that neither the conciliation machinery nor their own union could accommodate. The recurrence of unofficial stoppages and ca' canny at Bowhill, Glenraig, Lumphinans, Valleyfield, Cowdenbeath, Jenny Gray and Kinglassie Collieries in 1954 indicates that such problems were not confined to the branches in East Fife mentioned above.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, Correspondence between Mr Lessels, Area Labour Relations Officer to Mr Ness, NUM District Secretary, from 11.8.54 to 2.9.54.

Moreover, in the troubled pits in East Fife, such as Wellesley, there was not a particularly good pre-nationalisation record of industrial relations.⁴⁵ Equally, in the most dispute prone area of the Scottish Coalfield at Shotts, a deputation in February 1945 reported that 'all pits in Shotts district idle that day in protest against Shotts Company violating long standing practices and agreements. Discussion indicated dissatisfaction against the encroachment of the company in general and the apparent slowness of machinery for settlement of disputes in particular.'⁴⁶ This indicates that complaints about delays in conciliation occurred under private ownership and were not a unique feature of the nationalisation scheme. Furthermore, the high level of disputes in Shotts under nationalisation, was a continuation of a pre-nationalisation trend.

It is also noteworthy that in the Shotts area the cause of the widespread 1945 dispute was the violation of long standing practices and agreements. This might go some way to explaining the area's continued industrial relations problem under nationalisation. The Shotts area was the main focus of the Scottish Area of the NCB's pit closure and re-organisation programme. The NUMSA did not consider the NCB's programme a 'violation', and indeed co-operated on reassessment of tasks and the transfer of men. But so long as there was a shortage of manpower and machinery

⁴⁵ NLS. Acc. 4311.63, National Union of Scottish Mine Workers (NUSMW), Fife Area Correspondence, 1945.

⁴⁶ NLS. Dep. 227.80, NUSMW, Lanark Area Sub Committee Minutes, 1944-46, 92.45, p 186.

the only way in the meantime to increase production would be to alter long standing practices and agreements throughout the coalfield.

The effect of these changes on the men at the face would feel no different from those that occurred under private ownership. Mineworkers were again being asked to perform more work, with less manpower, combined with the frustrations over both national and local pay negotiations and the delays in the conciliation procedure, this provides the most likely explanation for the generally indifferent and sometimes hostile attitude towards the pit conciliation scheme. However, strictly speaking this was a production problem, although one which had consequences indirectly for nationalisation. If production pressure and discontent with pay negotiations reduced local conciliation's ability to eliminate unofficial stoppages were the conciliation meetings that did take place similarly affected? In other words was the high level of unofficial stoppages symptomatic of a wider malaise in conciliation and not just confined to a minority of persistent strikers?

For all the failings of the pit conciliation scheme there was little evidence of the rank and file, or their union representatives, seizing the opportunity, slim as it may have been, to overcome the industry's long standing problem of industrial disputes. It could be argued that the delays in the conciliation machinery exacerbated the tendency for unofficial stoppages. On the other hand, certain sections of the workforce's apparent willingness to resort to this tactic suggest that a significant minority viewed colliery conciliation with contempt. This was in spite of the fact that there was no evidence that unofficial stoppages resulted in either a quicker or higher settlement. Considering that at the area and branch level, union officials

supported the conciliation machinery, this would also imply a certain contempt for the authority of the union.

Equally, despite the frustrations expressed by both officials and the rank and file there was no evidence of any proposals to modify the conciliation scheme. Officials certainly appealed to the men to use the existing system, but a minority of them continued to respond by taking unofficial action. Although the evidence is partial and fragmentary, it seems safe to conclude that at least the Colliery Conciliation Scheme did not exacerbate disputes to any great extent, even if it failed to reduce them. There was frustration at the length of time certain disputes took to be settled but to what extent this contributed to the overall level of disputes is difficult to estimate. Bearing in mind, the frustrations evident over national wage negotiations and the 'wage freeze', delays in establishing a national wages structure, local rate and task levels, pressure for higher output with declining manpower and patchy modernisation, perhaps the surprising feature was that pit level disputes did not rise higher.

The percentage of tonnage lost in Scotland reveal that the conciliation machinery failed in its primary objective of eliminating unofficial stoppages. Whilst one would not expect the prevention of every unofficial stoppage the Scottish disputes figures remained higher than the national average. Therefore, was there something unique in Scottish mineworker's attitudes towards nationalisation to account for this, or was it a result of the persistently poorer position of the Scottish industry compared to other divisions, particularly regarding wages? It does not seem likely that dissatisfaction with delays in the conciliation procedure alone could account for the higher number

of unofficial disputes in Scotland. It seems more probable, bearing in mind that the majority of unofficial disputes concerned rates and tasks, that it was dissatisfaction with the Scottish wages position that accounts for the higher level of disputes. What though, does this tell us about nationalisation? Certainly the dissatisfaction expressed about the delays in the conciliation machinery could be attributed to a criticism of nationalisation policy, but only a limited aspect of it. Whilst it might be tempting to attribute the bulk of unofficial disputes in Scotland to the NCB's output and financial position, over which nationalisation could have relatively little effect in the short-term, this would be premature. It cannot be assumed that mineworkers, their union representatives, or even management made the distinction between problems due to nationalisation itself and those that arose inevitably from the state of the industry, irrespective of the form of ownership.

That this distinction was not made, or not made clearly or frequently, suggests that at the local level mineworkers' perception was that issues of dispute, if not caused by nationalisation, was the responsibility of it. The National Coal Board may not have been the cause of the problem, such as low wages or under-manning, but now as sole owners they were, *de facto*, responsible for its solution. Considering the incompleteness of the Colliery Conciliation Committee records such a conclusion must be very tentative. Additionally, disputes had to be discussed in the narrow terms of each particular case; this naturally limits the extent to which one can speculate about what the conciliation committees reveal about local attitudes. Therefore, whilst the conclusion is tentative, it can form part of a broader conclusion about local NUM members attitudes and it is important to consider evidence from other local sources to add to any conclusion about local opinion.

IV

Colliery Consultation: The Evidence from Scotland

The possibilities provided by the conciliation minutes can be confirmed or rejected, to a certain extent, by the evidence of the Colliery Consultative Committees. The evidence they provide is limited by the same factors that constrain the conciliation minutes, that is their scarce and fragmentary nature. Nevertheless, these restrictions notwithstanding, one can suggest a solution to the tentative conclusions suggested by the conciliation committees. If the higher level of unofficial stoppages in Scotland were a result of dissatisfaction with nationalisation itself, one would expect mineworkers to have displayed a negative attitude towards other aspects of nationalisation. In particular, when unofficial stoppages were largely concerned with local issues one would not expect miners to be enthusiastic about reforming local production questions. If the nationalised industry could not provide them with what miners considered a reasonable reward for a reasonable amount of work why would they co-operate further in reforming their work practices? Equally, if Scottish mineworkers felt that irrespective of the cause of the problem it was now the responsibility of nationalisation policy to solve it, one would expect to find some of the frustrations and dissatisfaction of the conciliation committees to spill over into the consultative committees. The potential for this could be high, as the Colliery Manager was Chairman of the Colliery Consultative Committee and the union representative who dealt with disputes was frequently a member as well.

Considering the coal industry's poor record of industrial relations, the persistent unofficial stoppages in Scotland and the unimpressive performance of the conciliation machinery, one might expect the evidence of the Colliery Consultative Committees to confirm the largely unimpressive picture of joint consultation in both the public and private sector. However, on the evidence available, the Fife Area offers a contrast to this picture, particularly when one considers some of the potential problems that lay in the road to establishing Colliery Consultative Committees.

The boundaries between conciliation and consultation were not immediately clear and it is worthwhile considering on what basis Colliery Consultative Committees were established. The 1946 Coal Industry Nationalisation Act provided for statutory consultation on 'safety, health, and welfare and the organisation and conduct of the operations... and other matters of mutual interest.'⁴⁷ Unfortunately this definition does not address either the exact issues to be discussed or, more crucially, the question of authority. The 'conduct of the operations and matters of mutual interest' is a vague and potentially problematic term, implying anything from finance, capital formation, investment and price of coal to baths' cleanliness, boot repairs and bus services. In practice the model constitution drawn up by the NCB gave some guidelines. Collieries were to discuss operational matters relating to the level in which they worked, but financial matters were not to be disclosed to the Consultative Committees, unless the pit was in severe financial difficulty or facing closure. They were also barred from discussing questions that would normally be dealt with by the

⁴⁷ Coal Industry Nationalisation Act (1946), Section 46.

trade union, such as membership, adherence to trade union rules, payment of union dues etc.

Even though there was a constitutional separation of consultation and conciliation there could not be a separation of personnel. The exact format of the committees will be discussed below, but in this particular regard the colliery manager was always the chairman and frequently, though not always, the union delegate and/or branch secretary were also members. These were the very people who were most frequently involved in conciliation discussions, and as the earlier part of this chapter has demonstrated these were far from successful on many occasions. This raises the question of how readily these individuals could adopt the attitude the Coal Board and NUM expected in the Colliery Consultative Committees. If the two committees did not overlap in agendas they may have still done so in atmosphere.

Another important element was the nature of the 'democracy' to be introduced to the industry. The Colliery Consultative Committees were not quasi-workers' councils or guilds. Equally, there was little evidence of such a desire being expressed within the trade union movement prior to nationalisation. Even in the Communist influenced Scottish Area of the NUM the few references that there are to 'workers' control' only extends as far as equal union participation in deciding appointments to the Divisional and National Coal Boards or rotating chairmen.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it was clear that the role of workmen in the Colliery Consultative Committees was to go beyond what

would be achieved through collective bargaining or the conciliation committee. The results of consultation would not go as far as a binding agreement, joint responsibility or executive decisions, but the discussions would enter areas previously out of bounds. Without any executive powers the consultative committee would have to take on trust the colliery manager's verbal assurances. On this basis the only way to judge the tangible results of the committees is by the acceptance of members that a matter was resolved, for example the manger reporting that equipment was now ordered and the issue not arising again. However, a successful committee would not always produce a tangible result. The aims of the committees also embraced a 'psychological' affect, to improve communications and foster a sense of joint responsibility. To judge the results of this one can examine production, absenteeism figures, workers' suggestions etc. but one also has to interpret the tone, conduct and general atmosphere of the meetings. This is somewhat easier than with the conciliation committee evidence. Although the minutes are not verbatim, they are not concerned with recording 'facts', but suggestions and opinions. As these tend to be rather fuller, and need to record the response from management and unions, it is easier to identify the manner in which the meetings took place.

A final point to bear in mind was that any workplace joint committee implicitly involves the sharing, if not sacrificing of certain prerogatives, as well as added responsibility. Whilst both management and men may have been prepared to do this to a certain extent in wartime, it was not necessarily the case that either side would

⁴⁸ NLS. Dep. 227.102, NUMSA, Executive Committee Meeting, 17.3.47, p 4.

accept the situation in peacetime, even if the need for coal production was even greater. Although under the nationalisation scheme the manager retained operational responsibility for the pit, indeed this was a requirement of the 1930 Coal Mines Act, the fact that issues such as production, mechanisation, shift patterns and development could be discussed at these consultative committees had the potential to undermine his position. Similarly the discussion of such questions as staffing, promotion, absenteeism and discipline could have a similar effect on the authority of the local trade union delegate or workmen's representative on the committee. Considering the long history of dire industrial relations in the industry it was by no means certain that either side would approach the Consultative Committees with the spirit that their superiors desired.

Nevertheless, the intentions coming from the Scottish Area of the NUM were certainly encouraging:

That with the introduction of nationalisation, Conference recognises the need for the miners and their Trade Union to take a special interest in the development of all phases of the mining industry. We pledge ourselves to encourage and develop all the reorganisation proposals necessary and the scientific and technical measures necessary for the reorganisation of the mining industry.⁴⁹

Did miners then develop an interest in such issues through the medium of the Consultative Committees? Did the Consultative Committees provide a less volatile

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p 3.

atmosphere than conciliation meetings where the 'genuine' attitude of miners to nationalisation was revealed?

Against the optimistic intentions from the NUM both contemporary and recent commentators have made a modest interpretation of consultation and of what 'good' consultation consisted. Baldwin defines it as 'good largely because it was not a clear failure - because the men around the table respected each other, and because the approach to problems was not tactical and partisan but open-minded and problem-centred...A well conducted meeting is surely a necessary condition of successful consultation; but, equally surely, it is not a sufficient condition.'⁵⁰ He also points out that in the cases he examined there was no discussion of financial results, of future developments, of possible new machines to install, new methods of lighting, or why a particular face had done well.⁵¹ Ashworth is slightly more generous but not dramatically so in his interpretation:

the nature and purpose of Colliery Consultative Committees were not always clearly understood by the workers, and their early reception was mixed. Some met only apathy, some were used almost entirely for verbal sniping, some were initially welcomed and then resented when it was realised that they were purely consultative and had no executive authority. But others were useful in promoting understanding (which often led to co-operation, though not always) by early notice and

⁵⁰ Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation: The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1955, p 109.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

explanation of proposed changes in workplaces or practices, or more far reaching changes as colliery mergers.⁵²

This interpretation suggests that at best they were a good form of communication. This also implies a flow of information from management to men, as management was more likely to have access to internal sources of information. Ashworth does not suggest a strong participatory ethic developed amongst the workers or a sense of joint responsibility.

The Colliery Consultative Committee's membership was outlined within the *Model Constitution* supplied to all collieries by the NCB. The colliery manager was the Chairman and he nominated three other members, two of whom needed to be underground officials and one surface. The NCB mining agent, NUM area agent and local branch secretary were *ex officio* members. Seven other members were elected by secret ballot: one deputy and six others representative of the main grades of colliery workers, made up of two face workers, one underground haulage worker, one underground contract worker (not on the face), one surface worker and one tradesman. The qualification for nomination was that a man had been employed for one year and was a member of a recognised trade union. Each miner was given six votes, one vote for each for the six classifications of workers represented on the committee. Therefore miners did not just vote for their own grade of workmen.

⁵² Ashworth, W. *History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 5, 1946-1982*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, p 145.

As well as membership the model constitution also suggested details such as frequency of meetings, procedure, agenda and minutes. This had the effect of imposing a surprising uniformity on the appearance of the Consultative Committee minutes. For example in only one case examined here were the minutes hand written rather than typed and the majority consisted of a list of those present, the date and time, and an itemised list of the proceedings, often identical in structure.⁵³ However, whilst this uniformity is an advantage in terms of ease of interpretation it should not be mistaken for uniformity of content, style, conduct and atmosphere of the meetings.

Considering that both Baldwin and Ashworth damned the Colliery Consultative Committees with faint praise the most striking feature about the 23 committees considered here was the almost universally 'good' approach of the workmen's representatives to the meetings.⁵⁴ If one takes Baldwin's criterion, as necessary minimum standards to be expected, then virtually all of the committees examined reached this standard. The committees met between once and twice a fortnight. The members were respectful to one another, the meetings focused on problems, and both the workmen's representatives and the management appeared open-minded and unpartisan. The meetings were never less than business like and attendance throughout the period was good with only occasional absences. Furthermore, many

⁵³ The exception was Pirmhall Colliery. NLS. Acc. 4311.68, NUMSA Fife Area, Colliery Consultative Minutes. Minutes were taken by the Committee Secretary, who was usually the colliery clerk, and approved at subsequent meetings.

of the minutes include start and finish times, which reveal that even though the minutes tended to be brief, at one to two sides of A4, the meeting usually lasted at least one and a half hours. This suggests that even when the minutes give the impression of speeding through the agenda time was taken for discussion.⁵⁵

Even the poorest Consultative Committee at King O'Muirs Colliery, did not descend to the worst criteria of threats, wrangling and points scoring Baldwin mentions.⁵⁶ At this Colliery the worst that can be said was that the workmen's representatives, one member in particular, seemed to use the committee to air his own personal complaints about his workplace. For example 'G. Grindley complained about needing a longer drill for splint section' and 'G. Grindley complained about Redd being left at side of *his* road.'⁵⁷ In general this committee seems to have been a poor example of consultation, the whole attitude appearing apathetic. The meetings were short, the minutes amounting to no more than half a page of A4 with no structure or agenda, and although they improved by the middle of 1951, becoming more detailed, the nature of the meetings did not show a similar improvement.⁵⁸ Another telling feature of this committee was the items that were not discussed, which was in stark contrast to the better committees reviewed below. For example there was no

⁵⁴ The Colliery Consultative Committees considered here were: Valleyfield, Meta, Lumphinans I, XI and XII, Comrie, King O'Muirs, Forthbank, Brucefield, Dollar, Devon, Burghlee, Polmaise 3/4, Bannockburn, Policy (Callendar), Carriden, Redding, Kinneil, Manor Powis, Plean, Polmaise 1/2, Pirnhall and South Bantaskine.

⁵⁵ The relevant files for the Colliery Consultative Committees are: NLS. Acc. 4311.66, 67, 68, 69 and Dep. 258.15.

⁵⁶ Baldwin, G. B. *Beyond Nationalisation: The Labour Problems of British Coal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1955, p 109.

⁵⁷ NLS. Acc. 4311.67, NUMSA, Fife Area Colliery Consultative Committees, King O'Muirs Colliery Consultative Committee, 22.12.49 and 26.1.50.

production, absenteeism or accident statistics, housing questions or any positive suggestions from the workmen's representatives, or from the management.

Of the remaining Colliery Consultative Committees, all attained at least Baldwin's necessary minimum standards. The meetings were conducted in an amicable atmosphere, they diligently considered all manner of questions pertaining to the pit, genuine attempts were made to solve problems and all viewpoints considered. In general, neither the workmen nor the manager showed signs of feeling that their prerogatives were threatened, nor the managers' authority undermined. What is particularly noteworthy was that there did not appear to be any overlap, either in subject or attitude, from conciliation meetings. For the pits with consultative committee records, their corresponding conciliation minutes were examined where these were available. Only at King O'Muir's Colliery is it possible to argue that personal grievances in conciliation may explain the rather poor consultative meetings mentioned above.⁵⁹

In the remainder of the pits, when there were difficult conciliation meetings, this does not seem to have had an effect on the conduct of consultative meetings. For example at Valleyfield Colliery in September 1950 a dispute arose regarding a case of intimidation, one of the men reported 'The Fireman, seemingly unsatisfied with his intervention in the [pit] bottom, approached some of the men intimidating and

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

threatening them if they didn't carry in the Sylvester [a large piece of mining equipment] they wouldn't be on the job, this I expect goes with nationalisation and the good relations that we hear so much about.⁶⁰ However, the Consultative Committee at this time displays no signs of tension or confrontation between individuals on the committee. Of course this could be a very isolated incident, but it is unusual for discontent on the face not to have some wider effect, because it was face disruption that would have the greatest effect on production. Earlier in 1950, an unofficial stoppage had occurred but the discussion in the corresponding Consultative Committee did not turn into accusations and recriminations. In fact the pit stoppage was 'discussed at considerable length...the extent to which consultation might go before bridging to conciliation, and finally decided for an effort to be made to arrange an informal meeting of the NCB officials and the men's representatives.'⁶¹ This can only be interpreted as a rational, positive and constructive approach. Initially this would suggest that in spite of the poor impression of workmen's attitudes through conciliation committees this did not have a direct influence on their attitude in the consultative committee.

The other areas covered by consultation, even the limited ones included in Baldwin's analysis, show a positive attitude overall. One of the most striking features was the consideration of output, losses and manpower. All but one of the collieries examined

⁵⁹ NLS. Acc. 4311.77, NUMSA, Fife Area Colliery Conciliation Minutes, King O'Muirs Colliery, 1949 - 1950.

⁶⁰ NLS. Acc. 4311.90, NUMSA, Fife Area Pit Conciliation Minutes, Valleyfield Colliery, 24.9.50, p 4.

considered these issues in some form, the exception again being King O'Muir's Colliery. In some cases it was simply the manager reporting to the committee that production was up or down⁶², but in most others the minutes included detailed weekly figures. The amount of detail and presentation of these figures varied from colliery to colliery but the overall standard was very high. Most pits provided weekly outputs in gross and/or saleable tonnage, output per manshift (OMS), absenteeism (usually split between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary') and these figures were often broken down further by seam or section. A breakdown would also be provided of absenteeism figures by surface, underground, faceworkers and sometimes trainees. Although the fortnightly presentation of such detailed figures of the pits' operations gives some indication of the responsibility felt by the committee it was how these figures were considered that is crucial. Simply presenting the figures without discussion would not be a positive indication of the attitudes of the workmen's representatives.

It is in this area, amongst others, that a majority of collieries comfortably exceed the 'minimum' standards that Baldwin considers necessary but not sufficient. Most pits considered the weekly output figures in a similar manner to Lumphinans No XI & XII Colliery, 'statistics for the past few weeks considered and compared with figures

⁶¹ NLS. Acc. 4311.67, NUMSA, Fife Area Colliery Consultative Committees, Valleyfield Colliery, 16.5.50, p 2.

⁶² NLS. Acc. 4311.66, NUMSA Fife Area, Colliery Consultative Committee Minutes, Kinneil Colliery.

of a year ago. Reduction in Output, due to Five Day Week noted⁶³ and 'fall in output only in week ending 28/7/51 from 4022 to 3167 tons, and the latter figure in line with previous months fluctuations.'⁶⁴ On output per manshift 'the rise in output was discussed and noted that this was in spite of increased absenteeism.'⁶⁵

It is also evident that pits such as Lumphinans, and the majority of collieries examined, not only reached this minimum standard of having production items on the agenda, but also comfortably exceeded them. Aspects that Baldwin considered should have been discussed, but often were not, such as why a particular seam did poorly, new machinery or methods and future developments, were deliberated in all but four pits.

For example, at Comrie Colliery workers made suggestions on improved methods of moving plant. It was alleged that this held up production because it was not being done at the weekend following the introduction of the five-day week.⁶⁶ At the same colliery, suggestions from the workmen's suggestions box included improved ventilation, double shift working of plant, steel salvage and belt building on non-producing shifts, to aid production.⁶⁷ Although the initial enthusiasm of workmen's suggestions waned somewhat by November 1947, they continued to come forward.

⁶³ NLS. Acc. 4311.67, NUMSA Fife Area, Colliery Consultative Committee Minutes, Lumphinans XI & XII, 5.7.51.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 2.8.51.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 14.9.51.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, Comrie Colliery, 21.5.47.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 18.6.47.

For example in March 1948 suggestions included new dummy roads, power loading on the face, improved chocking and a contract system for oncost workers, what is most noteworthy about these suggestions is that power loading and a contract system would both entail a reduction in manpower.⁶⁸ Furthermore, this pit also provides an example of two other areas Baldwin thought should be discussed - new machinery and lighting. In 1950 a workmen's representative, a Mr. Sharp, said he felt that 'there must be places in the Division where Meco-Moore cutter loaders could be installed...and fluorescent lighting on the face.'⁶⁹ This evidence suggests a decidedly non-partisan approach to workers' participation in their industry under nationalisation, for both these suggestions had stimulated resistance in the past.

Such incidences were not confined to one colliery. Examples of discussing seam problems also indicate the generally positive and constructive attitude of workmen and management to consultation. At Valleyfield Colliery the Consultative Committee noted that the 'mining target [was] not met due to faults and mechanical breakdowns'⁷⁰ and because of the rise in water levels, short supplies of timber and a new method of erecting props.⁷¹ At Fallin (Polmaise 3/4) Colliery the conditions in each seam were quoted alongside the output figures, for example, 'normal, trouble with belts etc.'⁷²

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 24.3.48.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 20.9.50.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, Valleyfield Colliery, 18.10.49.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 12.8.51.

⁷² NLS. Acc. 4311.68, NUMSA Fife Area, Colliery Consultative and Pit Minutes, 1954, Fallin Colliery.

Evidence of positive suggestions to increase production, or consideration of factors impeding it, were considered at virtually every meeting, throughout the period. This occurred at Meta, Devon, Forthbank and Brucefield Colliery consultative Committees.⁷³ Even at Bannockburn Colliery, which was troubled by severe financial losses, and where the first few months of nationalisation went by without the presentation or discussion of production issues, a more positive attitude was evident by December 1947. For example a faceworker called Daly made eight suggestions:

more strippers could be accommodated on the Main Coal Face Line and the OMS figure supported this, Steam Coal was improperly developed so what were the short and long term policies for this, loss of coal because of dirty hutches (tubs), don't transfer men from Main Coal Section because there was coal in abundance, don't develop Steam Coal but other, trouble free run, if the road [was] properly maintained it could draw 600 hutches a shift instead of present 400, 180 feet of pipe to the 3 throw pump would save one pumper's wages and a conveyor in Bank Hall section would save 8 men's wages.⁷⁴

If the incidence of disputes suggested a self-interested and unco-operative attitude the evidence of the consultative committees indicate that miners were prepared to make positive suggestions that adversely affected their own position in the interests of production.

⁷³ NLS. Acc. 4311.67 & 68, NUMSA Fife Area Colliery Consultative and Pit Minutes.

⁷⁴ NLS. Acc. 4322.66, NUMSA Fife Area Colliery Consultative Committee Minutes, Bannockburn Colliery, 8.12.47, p 2.

Other pits that also fulfilled at least the 'minimum' standard of good consultation, and often exceeded it in a similar fashion to that above were Callendar, South Bantaskine, Carriden, Redding, Kinneil, Greencraig, Lochend, Maddison, Manor Powis and Polmaise 1/2.⁷⁵ Although the overall sample is small the performance of Colliery Consultative Committees was almost universally good in the sense of positive suggestions, put forward in a non partisan constructive manner, in an atmosphere of co-operation, trust and respect.

It should also be recognised that these suggestions were being made against a background of a severe shortage of materials. There appeared to be a universal shortage of tubs, wooden pit props and steel straps, with some pits still waiting for pre-war orders to be delivered.⁷⁶ These were the essential day-to-day consumables necessary to ensure continuity of production. There were also shortages of even the most basic equipment including boots, overalls, shovels, pick axe handles, lamps, drill bits, ropes, electric cables, glass, paint and spare parts. That members of consultative committees did not become bogged down with such problems and continued to make substantive suggestions for improvements to their colliery emphasises the constructive atmosphere that prevailed at most pits.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

How far some consultation committees went in consideration of production issues and future developments is indicated by the half dozen pits that each year convened special meetings to discuss the Coal Board's Annual Report. These meetings did not amount to one, brief, extra session but four or five meetings over several months that discussed a different chapter at each, for example production the first week, mechanisation the second, safety the third etc.⁷⁷

It could be argued that positive aspects of consultation were not unique to the nationalised coal industry in Scotland, given the evidence provided by Hinton. However, what appears to differentiate the experience of the Scottish coal industry was the remarkably small amount of change during the period in the quality of the consultative meetings. Whilst Hinton's engineering workers became disenchanted by the management's obstructions, there was no similar occurrence in the Fife Area of the NUM. With the advent of a Conservative Government in 1951, and as the immediate pressure on production began to ease from about 1952, one might have expected the positive suggestions of workmen's representatives to diminish. The political fall out from failing to co-operate in increasing production would be of less concern under a Conservative Government than Labour. When the energy position became less critical and the industry was able to concentrate on more long-term developments one might have expected mineworkers to be less co-operative until some of their long running grievances, particularly over pay, were settled. In fact, the only change that can be identified with any confidence between 1947 and 1955

⁷⁷ NLS. Acc. 4311.67 & 68, NUMSA Fife Area Colliery Consultative and Pit Minutes.

was that although suggestions for small improvements diminished, mineworkers representatives took as much interest in the larger scale developments, such as mechanisation, that began to come on stream towards the mid 1950s. For example, in 1954 at Redding Colliery the minutes record that the 'current and future working of the colliery was fully discussed and questions were asked and answered by the Manager' and at Kinneil Colliery the pros and cons of using longwall or power loading method for a new section were discussed.⁷⁸

Another sign of the co-operation that the consultation committees engendered was the manner in which absentees were dealt with. In a dozen pits the committees adopted the tactic of bringing persistent offenders before them. Of course the committees had no power to sanction any worker, ultimately the power of dismissal rested with the manager, but this was a tricky area regarding prerogatives. The manager was the one person ultimately responsible for discipline and the consultation committee becoming involved in this activity could have threatened his authority. Similarly, the union was ultimately responsible for defending their members and their involvement in dealing with their fellow workmen could have opened up a serious conflict of interest. However, in practice this method seems to have been uncontroversial, even if its actual effectiveness can be questioned. For example at Plean Colliery it was the workers who 'suggested adopting the interview

⁷⁸ Acc. 4311.68, NUMSA Fife Area, Colliery Consultative and Pit Minutes, Redding Colliery, 5.5.54 and Kinneil Colliery, 30.3.54.

technique to reduce absenteeism⁷⁹ but at Kinniel Colliery where the technique had already been adopted the committee commented that calling offenders before it was 'rather futile and little improvement could be effected.'⁸⁰ Nevertheless, this colliery as well as a majority of others continued to interview persistent absentees. In contrast to the divisional and national levels where union leaders made promises over such disciplinary issues, the local level actually seemed to deliver action not words.

In only one case does the frustration and resentment that Ashworth mentions occur, that is at Bannockburn Colliery. The problem came to a head in September 1947 over how wet conditions were defined. One of the workmen's representatives alleged that the manager would only consider a man as wet when he had fallen into the sump, and he appealed for greater co-operation and initiative from the manager. At this point a representative of the NCB's Area Labour Relations Department intervened to 'stress the fact that these Committees had an important function to perform in the mining industry. It was true to say that they should act only in advisory capacity.'⁸¹ Another workmen's representative then responded, referring

to the ability of the Committee to vote to reach decision and that he welcomed Mr. Waugh's interpretation of the Constitution, as he had felt for him to sit on any Committee which was subject to the dictates of one man was an insult to his intelligence and that he had seriously considered walking out of the Committee and asking the other

⁷⁹ NLS. Acc. 4311.68, NUMSA Fife Area, Colliery Consultative and Pit Minutes, Plean Colliery, 26.1.49.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, Kinneil Colliery, 24.10.49.

⁸¹ NLS. Acc. 4322.66, NUMSA Fife Area Colliery Consultative Committee Minutes, Bannockburn Colliery, 12.9.47.

members to follow suit. He also said that the dominating feeling of the Committee had been a sense of frustration and absence of co-operation on the Chairman's part.⁸²

Even here, this problem seems to have been due to a mixture of misunderstanding over the purpose of consultation, a clash of personalities and early teething troubles. After all it was this pit that by December produced the large list of suggestions to increase production mentioned above.

There were other incidents of problems in the running the committees but it would be unrealistic for even the best committees to be entirely trouble free. For example, at Burghlee Colliery in 1948 a Mr. Cornet 'took exception to the men generally being blamed for the majority of the things that happen in the colliery, the Chairman stating in reply if it was the fault of the management he would accept responsibility but, equally so if the fault lay with the men they also would require to share responsibility.'⁸³ Whilst such incidents cropped up elsewhere there is no evidence here, or in any other case, that they represented the general atmosphere of the committees or had a permanent affect on them. At Burghlee two weeks later there was no sign of any tension or confrontation.

Considering the criticisms of the management, that they were not co-operative and blamed them men too often, it is illuminating to compare these attitudes to that of the

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid*, Burghlee Colliery, 12.5.48, p 2.

management side towards the miners on the consultative committees. If these were not isolated incidents one might expect similar complaints from the management side, particularly outside of the committees, when they might be expected to voice their opinions more openly.

One example that provides this perspective comes from a change of manager at Comrie Colliery, the outgoing manager 'intimated that this would be his last meeting with this committee and thanked the members for their co-operation and help and hoped that the same assistance would be extended to his successor.'⁸⁴ Similar sentiments were also expressed at Valleyfield Colliery: 'Mr. Richardson stated that this would be his last meeting at the Colliery and that while there had been differences of opinion occasionally, and many long discussions, he had thoroughly enjoyed them and he thanked the committee for their co-operation. In reply, Mr. McDade said that Mr. McArthur had something to live up to when following Mr. Richardson and that in his opinion Mr. Richardson had been one of the finest managers at Valleyfield.'⁸⁵ At Burghlee Colliery the manager replied to the NCB's Education Officer's question as to the benefits of consultation that 'the Colliery Consultative Committee was of assistance to him, recommendations being forwarded and discussed by the men, who represented practically every grade of work in the colliery and who therefore tackled the problems from different viewpoints; from the

⁸⁴ NLS. Acc. 4311.67, NUMSA Fife Area, Colliery Consultative Committee Minutes, Comrie Colliery, 29.10.47, p 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, Valleyfield Colliery, 9.8.47.

whole it was often possible to find the easiest, best and most practicable solution of the problem.⁸⁶

It is not the suggestion here that such sentiments were universal, but that there is sufficient evidence to propose that there was a significant number of pits where the managers, who had most to lose by consultation, found the experience both rewarding and constructive. This can only reflect positively on the attitude of the workmen's representatives towards their participation under nationalisation. Furthermore, to endorse this opinion comes the comments of a Mr. Milligan who was President of the National Association of Colliery Managers in 1949 - 50 and a manager of a Scottish pit. When their Annual Conference was held in Edinburgh in May 1950 he said of the Colliery Consultative Committees, 'These have revealed a quality in miners which has, of recent years, been latent, namely a pride and concern of their own pit.'⁸⁷ It would be difficult to find better corroboration of miners' generally positive attitude in consultation than the opinion of the 'other side'.

V

Conclusion

The evidence of the Colliery Consultative Committees suggests that the sceptical conclusions, such as Baldwin and Ashworth, towards joint consultation were not

⁸⁶ NLS. Acc. 4322.66, NUMSA Fife Area Colliery Consultative Committee Minutes, Burghlee Colliery, 12.11.47, p 2.

entirely justified. In the context of the disappointing disputes figures the achievements of consultation do not reverse the picture. However, even in the evidence of the conciliation committees positive outcomes can be identified that suggest the pattern of unofficial disputes does not tell the whole picture. The overriding impression from the Colliery Consultative Committees, at least in Fife, was of workmen's representatives who were committed and positive about both the ideals and practice of joint consultation. They did not appear limited by sectional interests or adversely affected by poor conciliation. Although the initial enthusiasm waned it did not decline into apathy and throughout the period positive and constructive suggestions to improve the operation of individual pits continued to be made by both management and men. In this respect there did appear to be a 'psychological' effect in the co-operation that was evident. Whilst this effect is difficult to link directly with production figures, particularly with the problems of manpower shortages, lack of materials and the slow progress of mechanisation, reorganisation and new sinkings, output did increase from 1947 to 1949 and again in 1951. During these years there was also a decrease in the tonnage lost due to disputes, but this is not enough to account for the increased output. As there were also a number of pit closures and no new developments coming on stream this does suggest that a 'psychological' effect may be a more likely explanation than any other for the, admittedly modest, output improvements. Indeed it could be argued that if it were not for the combined effects of conciliation, and particularly consultation, output would have been lower than it was. Tomlinson may be right to question the

⁸⁷ NLS. Acc. 4311.32, NUMSA Fife Area, Pit Correspondence, copy of Presidential Address to NACM, 1950, p 11.

principle of a link between 'psychology' and production, but in the Scottish coal industry, it would seem premature to suggest that joint consultation failed to increase output above the level it would have otherwise been.

On the evidence available from Fife it would appear that members at the pit level of the Scottish Area of the NUM responded positively to joint consultation in a manner that was different from that found to date by other historians. Considering that the substantive difference in this case, from the majority of other studies, was the industry was publicly owned, one could perhaps suggest that nationalisation did foster a different a more positive and co-operative attitude at the local level, expressed through consultation. Additionally, the main distinction in this case from previous work on the NCB was the Scottish dimension. Therefore, one can perhaps provisionally suggest that at least certain sections with the NUMSA had a different attitude towards nationalisation from those elsewhere in the country. An attitude that in spite of the difficulties evident from conciliation records, *may* have embraced the public service, and hence non-partisan, strand of nationalisation. It is difficult from the available evidence to identify any direct cause for this attitude in any distinctly 'Scottish' cultural attitude. However, Scottish miners and trade unionists had always expressed their desire for nationalisation in broader terms of a social change, one important aspect of which was greater workers participation. The eventual form that this took may have fallen well short of the original syndicalist or guild socialist ideals but something of that original ethos may explain the positive experience of consultation in spite of the generally poorer record of disputes.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to reflect the different circumstances in which the NUM operated under nationalisation and in Britain's post-war economic and political situation. It has tried to move away from a focus on the causes of strikes and compare and contrast the broader industrial relations activity at different levels of the union organisation, rather than just the peak level. In so doing, it presents diverse attitudes towards nationalisation policy and contrasting levels of influence. However, these differences are not so disparate as to prevent conclusions that are more general.

It is difficult to estimate exactly how applicable the conclusions reached in this thesis are to the whole of the coal industry. The extractive nature of the coal means no two coalfields are alike. Nevertheless, the output of the Scottish coalfield, the size and dispersion of pits, labour force and type of coal produced was not atypical. On the eve of nationalisation Scottish mines were more mechanised than elsewhere, but faced similar challenges as other older coalfields in increasing the use of face machinery. Scotland also possessed a mixture of declining and expanding areas. Its medium and long-term prospects of a moderate increase in production, but a shift in its location, were not dramatically different from many other coalfields. Neither does the organisation of NUMSA suggest anything in particular that would make their experience markedly different from those elsewhere. The Scottish NUM's predecessor the NUSMW competed during the inter-war years with non-unionism and rival unions in much the same way as other area unions. Both pre and post-

nationalisation Scottish unions had active Communist Party members, but this was not unique to Scotland, particularly in the South Wales coalfield. After the formation of the NUM the Scottish Area retained significant autonomy, but this was no more or less than other former area unions. Neither was the Scottish organisation of President, Secretary, Executive Committee, agents and branch officials any different from other area unions of the NUM. Therefore, although aspects of Scotland's intra-coalfield diversity may have been more or less pronounced than elsewhere, its inter-coalfield diversity was not exceptional.

The most significant feature revealed in this thesis was the remarkably good and uniform experience of colliery level consultation. This suggests that at least this aspect of mining industrial relations can not be explained purely by distinctive local or colliery conditions. Previous analyses of industrial relations have emphasised the variety of militancy and strike patterns at the local level, and correlated these to colliery performance. In this analysis almost universally good consultation existed amongst the collieries studied. Furthermore, this pattern prevailed even where other aspects of industrial relations, particularly the functioning of the conciliation machinery, did not always perform well. This suggests that whilst colliery performance may have been the determining factor for the prevalence of militancy and strikes, this was not the determining factor in consultation. The pattern of disputes, whether in or out of the conciliation machinery, did not appear to influence the operation of consultation. Other evidence gives further credence to the idea that a more common factor was at work, for even where the disputes machinery revealed poor relations between management and men, this did not appear to affect the

atmosphere in which consultation was conducted. At first sight these two patterns may appear contradictory but explanation for their co-existence is possible.

Trade unionists in general, and miners in particular, had long expressed a desire for greater participation in their industry, almost as long as demands for nationalisation had existed. Furthermore, trade unions had expressed their desire for nationalisation partly in terms of removing the ill effects of the owning class. That NUM members should then wish to demonstrate that they could make a useful contribution through joint consultation that the old owners had denied them does not seem entirely surprising. The more varied experience of disputes and conciliation was clearly rooted in specific colliery conditions, particularly piece rates and tasks. Although the colliery level conciliation machinery was a new development under nationalisation, and met with some success, ultimately it could not limit or contain disputes with specific local causes, expressed in a traditional manner. On the other hand the colliery consultative machinery, although it had a war-time precedent, was attempting to create something new, not control an existing problem. In aiming to establish a sense of a shared purpose between management men and an atmosphere of co-operation, the colliery consultative committees can be considered a success.

This conclusion contrasts with existing interpretations of joint consultation and disputes and suggests that the view of miners unions as dispute prone and adversarial is not the complete picture. This was but one side of their behaviour and not necessarily the predominant one at any particular point in time. In local joint consultation they demonstrated a willingness to co-operate without sectional interest and showed a positive contribution to nationalisation. This conclusion must be qualified by the fact that colliery consultative committees are not entirely

representative of the whole mining community. Although not composed solely of union office bearers there is inevitably an element of self-selection. One must also bear in mind that the committees analysed were skewed towards one particular area, even though there are not sufficient reasons to consider it unrepresentative.

Unfortunately, the absence of divisional level consultation records makes a similar interpretation at the Scottish Executive level very difficult. However, it is possible to suggest that the poor relations demonstrated by the Divisional Disputes Committee were but one representation of the NUMSA. Even without the consultative evidence there are some indications that NUMSA's attitude towards the Coal Board and nationalisation was not entirely as bad as the disputes material suggest. The NUMSA Executive was co-operative over issues such as unofficial stoppages and absenteeism, particularly in the early years, and in some instances advocated policies beyond those contemplated by the SDB. However, the NUMSA's suggestions regarding improved discipline were not entirely without self-interest, any improvement would benefit the unions authority as much as the Coal Boards. On other factors a more altruistic attitude was in evidence. In particular the NUMSA's co-operation in pit closures and transfer of labour represent a willingness to accept change and contribute to the development of the industry. This approach was further in evidence in their constructive criticism of the Plan for Coal. On the other hand, the NUMSA's half-hearted support for employing foreign workers brings into question the extent to which they were prepared to subsume their sectional interests.

However, this evidence is not sufficient to alter the impression provided by the divisional conciliation machinery. Although the disputes brought before it were by their very nature the more intractable ones, the low number of decisions reached through compromise indicates that any level of co-operation and shared purpose that may have existed did not extend this far. This could also be said of the colliery level conciliation, where consultation revealed a different perspective. However, the acrimonious and sometimes hostile relationship between the NUMSA and SDB over disputes suggests that even if the positive aspects of the NUMSA Executive were representative of the outcomes of consultation, it seems unlikely that the atmosphere and spirit of these meetings would be as positive. Neither do the few anecdotal references to consultation at this level suggest that the atmosphere at these meetings was any better than those for conciliation. There is little evidence of the NUMSA Executive bringing to nationalisation much sense of co-operation or unity of purpose. Where this does occur, such as pit closures, it had to be bargained for and did not represent a precedent in the NUMSA's attitude. Pit closures may seem to infringe a great deal on the NUMSA's sectional interests but closures during this period were relatively limited and occurred after a redundancy scheme and favourable terms for transfer of labour had been negotiated. Overall, there appeared more evidence of the persistence of old attitudes and hostilities, even if there were glimpses of a new approach under nationalisation in the late 1940s.

Neither does the NUMSA's approach to wages indicate a very different attitude. Throughout the period the NUMSA were opposed to both Government and NCB attempts at wage restraint. However, in their opposition to the Labour Government's policy they differed from the more accommodating attitude of the TUC and NUM,

particularly the National Executive. In their opposition, the NUMSA associated their industrial claims, particularly for the lower paid workers, with a broader national issue. In this they demonstrated an ability to influence policy at the national level. Although they alone could not successfully resist national wage restraint, they played the essential role in securing the NUM's later opposition to the policy. This in turn played a significant part in the demise of Government sponsored wage restraint.

At the national level a somewhat different attitude and influence was evident. Although the evidence from joint consultation is again absent, relations with the National Board did not deteriorate in the same manner as those at the Scottish Executive level. Rather than direct confrontation there developed a pattern of relations with the NCB where the NUM National Executive would invoke ministerial assurances as a means of putting pressure on the Board to implement policies from the Miners' Charter. Whilst this was quite effective it had the result of undermining the possibility of establishing co-operative relations and mutual trust. This was further undermined by the NUM National Executive's inability to deliver their side of agreements in many cases. There is no indication that the Executive entered these agreements in bad faith, simply that the power to deliver reduced towards the top of the NUM organisation. Therefore, although the NUM Executive had many good intentions about their new 'dual responsibility' they found this difficult to adopt in practice.

On the other hand their strong bargaining position and incorporation into the policy making procedures of the NCB meant they had considerable influence in determining

many of the features of coal nationalisation policy. The national schemes for injury and death compensation, supplementary pensions and redundancy are testimony to their influence, particularly as they were settled largely on their terms. These schemes did contribute towards the industry's reputation for good conditions of service and set a precedent for other industries, whether public or private. What is more questionable is the extent to which they contributed to the performance of the nationalised coal industry. It is safe to conclude that without them more miners would have left the industry and output would have been worse than it was. Nevertheless, it was specific, public appeals by high profile figures such as the Minister for Fuel and Power or Prime Minister that were required to motivate the miners to increase output. Ultimately the improved conditions won by the NUM at the national level had the benefit of aiding the 'managed decline' of the coal industry. Unfortunately these, and other schemes, such as the five-day week and holidays with pay, also contributed to this decline. Output just about kept up with inland demand, but the slow increase in productivity and the shortages of surpluses for export meant the coal industry found it difficult to exploit its favourable market conditions, not withstanding successive Governments price controls. Furthermore, the financial cost of improved terms and conditions placed a burden on the Coal Board that the NUM rarely took into account. The NUM Executive may have been correct in arguing that more labour was the only short term solution to increased production, what was more doubtful was that better pay and conditions was going to attract sufficient numbers. Moreover this argument seemed to be less important to the NUM Executive than their belief that better pay and conditions were a duty the NCB were obliged to fulfil. This pattern indicates that at the national level the NUM Executive had a different concept of the 'national interest' to that of the NCB and Government. There was

mutual agreement that the nation required maximum coal production, but on exactly how much and how it was to be got, opinion diverged. The NUM wanted to, and did produce enough coal, to prevent the country from standstill, with the exception of 1947. However, they felt that output should almost be at any price, even if this meant increasing the price of coal to cover their demands. The NCB were also primarily concerned with meeting domestic requirements, but were also concerned about creating a surplus, both in coal and financially. They too were frustrated at Government control of coal prices but recognised that they had to balance the books within the existing price structure. Therefore, how extra output was achieved bore more importance for them than the NUM. They were certainly less convinced of the simple equation of improved pay and conditions equals more miners equals more coal of the NUM. The Governments' conception of the national interest lay somewhere between that of the NUM and NCB. Naturally, maximum output was a priority and they shared the NUM's belief that nationalisation should bring material benefits to the miners. However, particularly under Gaitskell, the Government appeared to take greater account of the NCB's concerns than the NUM. For example, more attention was paid towards the cost of a pension scheme and its implications beyond the coal industry and the policy wage restraint was less welcome in the NUM than the NCB.

It was one of the aims of this study to consider nationalisation under the Conservative Government as well as Labour. The main conclusion from this is how little changes between administrations. In part, this was due to the reduction in fuel crises that necessitated Government action after 1951. However, given the Conservatives rhetoric about over-centralisation in the industry one might have

expected some action to be taken. In practice, relations with the NCB carried on much as before. Apart from the TUC's brief flurry of concern over iron, steel and road transport denationalisation there appeared to have been little or no impact on the NUM.

One of the clearest results from this study was the TUC's role in developing future nationalisation policy, rather than that for the existing nationalised industries. In this the TUC were extremely cautious, to the extent of ruling out all but the most limited extensions of public ownership by 1953. This position was a result both of trade unions mixed response to proposals to nationalise their industries and the TUC's assessment that existing nationalised industries had yet to prove themselves. The NUM's contribution to this thinking, that coal nationalisation was working reasonably well and that any difficulties could be worked out, did not alter the TUC's attitude. Another aspect of the TUC and nationalisation policy was the absence of NUM interest in using them as a means of influence.

On policy for those industries nationalised between 1947 and 1951 the TUC had a limited role. Although the TUC was active in the early legislative stages of nationalisation policy, this was a product of their concern over recognition and consultation, rights that the Labour Government was reluctant to grant. During this period the NUM National Executive had at least as much access to Government as the TUC and exercised more influence on coal nationalisation policy. They were able to do this because they did not have to negotiate with Government over access in the same way as the TUC. They were also more willing to accept verbal

assurances from Shinwell. The limited impact the TUC had on coal nationalisation validates this thesis's contention that trade union's role in policy making needs to incorporate bodies below the peak level. Westminster and Whitehall were still involved but on the trade union side it was with the National Executive and even the Scottish level, as much as the TUC. Furthermore, the majority of NUM influence was exercised in relation to the NCB. It was only when there was an impasse that Government became directly involved. Although these interventions were less frequent than NUM and NCB negotiations, they had increased significance because they occurred at crucial times. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that, for the coal industry at least, existing models of corporatism need to take some account of the lower levels of trade unions and the employee/employer relationship. Whether this interpretation is applicable to other nationalised industries is difficult to estimate. However, given that all nationalised industries adopted the public corporation format and instituted similar schemes of joint conciliation and consultation, the framework for similar experiences as coal existed. The other nationalised industries did not have the same industrial union organisation as the NUM, so the pattern of influence may be different, nevertheless there seems reasonable grounds for supposing that the actual centre of influence shifted in a similar manner.

One aspect that was evident in contrast to the TUC was that the STUC did not provide an alternative focus for either existing or future nationalisation policy. Not only did the NUMSA not appear to utilise the STUC as means of influencing either the NCB or Government; the STUC paid little attention to nationalised industries. Indeed the STUC were working to a completely different agenda. Above all they were concerned with the location of industry and attracting new types of industry that

were under-represented in the Scottish economy. This is not to say that the STUC lacked influence or were unrepresentative of the interests of Scottish unions. The information they received and the contacts they had with Government and the TUC indicate that they were in the policy 'loop'.

The evidence from the local consultative committees and the ability of the NUMSA to challenge national wages policy justifies this thesis's argument that a complete understanding of the NUM's role in nationalisation policy requires an analysis of all levels of the organisation. Furthermore, it has demonstrated the value of considering not just the introduction of policy but its subsequent development and implementation to gain a complete and nuanced understanding. It is somewhat more difficult to establish the extent to which the features mentioned above were uniquely Scottish, that is they were rooted in a Celtic cultural explanation. Scottish trade unions had displayed a different attitude towards nationalisation than their British counterparts, but these did not appear to be nationalistic and were not as great as the differences with the Labour Party. Neither do the differences between Scottish unions and those in the rest of the Britain preclude similar differences occurring in other regions, be they in Yorkshire or South Wales. Nor were any of the nationalisation issues with which the NUMSA were involved expressed in a uniquely Scottish way or particularly Scottish solutions sought. In fact, the NUMSA's response to the challenges and opportunities of nationalisation was to look towards solutions as part of a national industry, not specific Scottish ones. This raises the possibility that Scottish miners' positive contribution to consultation and resistance to wage restraint may be a more general feature of the NUM that can be found in other regions.

This thesis has attempted to consider Scottish unions and nationalisation beyond a concern with the frequency and distribution of disputes or a local case study. In so doing it was hoped to provide a more complete understanding of the mineworkers' union and its attitude towards and influence upon this important aspect of post-war economic policy. It has revealed diverse attitudes and influences upon coal nationalisation policy that do not allow for simple conclusions. Nevertheless, it is hoped that it has demonstrated that such a multi-level analysis was worthwhile and can make a modest contribution to broadening the field of study on the post-war labour movement, industrial relations and nationalisation.

Appendices

Appendix One: Textbases

Technical aspects of the textbases

Below is a section from the TUC textbase which shows the features of the coding (or mark-up) used to analyse the text. This simply involved tagging (the insertions in angle brackets) the beginning of the text, the year, place and each of the various organisations (the codes for each organisation are provided below). Spelling errors were corrected and the layout, fonts and spacing were standardised. Other than the above points the textbases represent the originals in their entirety.

<TEXT>

<YEAR 1931>

TUC CONGRESS, SEPTEMBER 1931, BRISTOL

PLANNED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

<ORG GC>

Mr. A. Pugh (General Council) proposed the following resolution:-- 'This Congress, being in accord with the traditional policy of the trade union movement, welcome the present tendency towards a planned and regulated economy in our national life....

The debates were selected solely on the basis that they discussed nationalisation and issues associated with it. This sampling technique confers distinct advantages. Not least of which is that the integrity of the original sources were preserved along with their narrative flow, structure and context. This would not have been the case with any system of random sampling, by debate or paragraph for example, where debates are of varying length, on different aspects of nationalisation and over a 15 year period. One could end up with a sample skewed towards all the short debates, or all those concerned with coal, or all those in the latter part of the period.

The samples chosen also reflect the fact that the Labour Party and the trade union movement debated these issues at different lengths. The different lengths of debate were not due to different priorities, there are roughly the same *number* of debates¹, as to the organisations different sizes. Although not superior numerically the Labour Party Conferences were larger because they were composed of more elements (Constituency Labour Parties, County Associations, affiliated societies and trade unions amongst others). Therefore, more time in each debate had to be provided to allow these bodies to speak.

The Labour Party did not hold an annual conference in 1938 because it changed the time of its meeting from September or October to May at the 1937 conference and as a result decided not to hold a conference in spring 1938. The textbases contain debates from the following years:

The Labour Party 1933, 1937, 1940, 1942, 1944 and 1945.

The TUC 1931, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1942, 1943 and 1945.

The STUC 1932, 1934, 1937, 1938, 1941, 1942, 1944 and 1945.

¹The Labour Party conducted 15 debates, the TUC 16.

Organisation codes for textbases

ACW	Association of Scientific Workers
AESD	Association of Engineering & Shipbuilding Draughtsmen
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ASW	Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers
ATC	Aberdeen Trades Council
B	Boilermakers
BLP	Borough Labour Party
BMM	Brass & Metal Mechanics
BSO	Boot & Shoe Operatives
CAW	Clerks & Administrative Workers
CEU	Constructional Engineering Union
CHR	Chairman
CWU	Chemical Workers Union
DEL	Delegate (at any Congress/Conference)
DLP	District Labour Party
ETC	Edinburgh Trades Council
ETU	Electrical Trades Union
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
FD	Federation (Labour Party)
FS	Fabian Society
FTA	Furnishing Trades Association
GC	General Council (of the STUC. or TUC)
GMU	General and Municipal Workers Union
GS	General Secretary (of the STUC. or TUC)
GTC	Glasgow Trades Council
HL	House of Lords

ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
LEF	Locomotive Engineers & Firemen
LSC	London Society of Compositors
LP	Labour Party
MF	Miners Federation
MP	Member of Parliament
MTC	Motherwell Trades Council
NEC	National Executive Committee (of the Labour Party)
NSES	National Society of Electrotypers & Stereotypers
NUDAW	National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
NUDBTW	National Union of Dyers, Bleachers & Textile Workers
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUPBPW	National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUSM	National Union of Scottish Mineworkers
NUVB	National Union of Vehicle Builders
PA	Patternmakers Association
PEU	Public Employees Union
PPC	Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (Labour Party)
PRES	President (of Congress/Conference)
PZJ	Poale-Zion-Jewish Labour Party
RCA	Railway Clerks Association
REP	Reporter (official Congress/Conference reporter)
SA	Shop Assistants
SBA	Scottish Bankers Association
SFSS	Scottish Farm Servants Section
SHM	Scottish Horse & Motormen

SL	Socialist League
SPA	Scottish Painters Association
SUB	Scottish Union of Bakers
TC	Trades Council (at Labour Party Conferences)
TGWU	Transport & General Workers Union

Appendix of Critical values and levels of significance for Spearman's rho

Level of significance for a two tailed test				
N	0.1	0.05	0.02	0.01
5	0.9	1	1	
6	0.829	0.886	0.943	1
7	0.714	0.786	0.893	0.929
8	0.643	0.738	0.833	0.881
9	0.6	0.683	0.783	0.833
10	0.564	0.648	0.746	0.794
12	0.506	0.591	0.712	0.777
14	0.456	0.544	0.645	0.715
16	0.425	0.506	0.601	0.665
18	0.399	0.475	0.564	0.625
20	0.377	0.45	0.534	0.591
22	0.359	0.428	0.508	0.562
24	0.343	0.409	0.485	0.537
26	0.329	0.392	0.465	0.515
28	0.317	0.377	0.448	0.496
30	0.306	0.364	0.432	0.478

From Clegg, Frances. Simple Statistics. CUP, 1982.

Spearman's rho correlation calculation for disputes/compromise 1951

A	B	Ra (rank of A)	Rb (rank of B)	D (Ra - Rb)	D2 (D x D)
2	0	1	3.5	-2.5	6.25
11	1	15	10	5	25
13	1	16.5	10	6.5	42.25
9	1	12	10	2	4
9	3	12	18.5	-6.5	42.25
24	4	22	21	1	1
7	0	7.5	3.5	4	16
3	0	2	3.5	-1.5	2.25
5	1	4	10	-6	36
8	3	9.5	18.5	-9	81
6	0	5.5	3.5	2	4
15	4	18	21	-3	9
10	2	14	15.5	-1.5	2.25
4	0	3	3.5	-0.5	0.25
9	1	12	10	2	4
8	1	9.5	10	-0.5	0.25
18	1	20	10	10	100
16	2	19	15.5	3.5	12.25
13	2	16.5	15.5	1	1
7	0	7.5	3.5	4	16
22	4	21	21	0	0
6	2	5.5	15.5	-10	100
Number of paired scores multiplied twice and then subtracted once					
Total values of column D2 = 505					
Total of D2 x 6 and ÷ by 10626 = 0.28515					
1 - 0.28515 = 0.71485 ∴ Null Hypothesis Can be Rejected					

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MSS 292/20/38 - 1953-54

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