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Ewan Gibbs and Jim Phillips, 'Who owns a factory? Caterpillar Tractors in Uddingston, 1956 to 1987', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 39 (2018), pp. 111-137

[Final Author Version – correspondence to James.Phillips@glasgow.ac.uk]

*Abstract*

This case study of the Caterpillar earthmoving equipment factory at Uddingston in Lanarkshire from opening in 1956 to closure in 1987 contributes to debates about workforce resistance to deindustrialization by focusing on the question of ownership. The factory was the legal property of the US multinational's UK tractor manufacturing subsidiary, but this analysis demonstrates the manner in which workers and communities came to assert rights of ownership of a valued local resource. The factory, the largest single industrial unit in Scotland during the 1960s, was established with regional assistance, and built on the site of a former mining village. Workforce and community expectations of long-term employment sustainability were duly established. Policy-makers tacitly offered a viable future with more sustainable employment than coal mining. But this promise was violated, initially by the firm's anti-union production regime which the workers overturned with a successful strike for union recognition in the winter of 1960-61; and secondly when the closure of the factory was announced in 1987. Caterpillar workers responded to this news by challenging the right of their employer to dispose freely of material assets – the factory and its equipment – that had been developed with their efforts and the provision of public money. This resistance was mustered by a strong factory trade union organization that had been developed by the workers at Caterpillar, embedded in an extensive social infrastructure with powerful familial ties. Closure was opposed by a 103-day occupation and campaign from January to April 1987. Moral economy claims of communal ownership of the factory were asserted by the occupiers in the face of corporate power and private property rights. The occupation was unsuccessful but nevertheless represented an important attempt to resist the acceleration of deindustrialization in the 1980s.

On Wednesday 14 January 1987 local representatives of the US multinational Caterpillar announced the closure of its earthmoving equipment factory at Uddingston in Lanarkshire, transferring production to sites in Belgium and France. The plant's 1,300 workers were astonished. Although the company had recently recorded short-run financial losses, a major programme of investment at Uddingston had been agreed in September 1986, totalling £62.5 million. Associated with the introduction of a new model of bulldozer, the D6H, one-eighth of this proposed investment would come from UK government regional assistance grants. Conservative government ministers, especially Malcolm Rifkind, Secretary of State for Scotland, were embarrassed by Caterpillar's withdrawal, which exacerbated an already difficult employment situation in west central Scotland. An instant assessment in *The Guardian* emphasized Caterpillar's reputation as 'a brutal multinational with no interest in employees at its satellite factories' around the world, evidenced less than four years earlier when the firm had closed a plant at Birtley in Gateshead in 1983, with the loss of 1,000 jobs. The abandonment of Uddingston was yet another outrage in the flight of multinational capital from the UK since 1980. In this short period roughly one half of manufacturing capacity and employment had been lost.<sup>1</sup>

The workers resisted at Uddingston, occupying the factory and announcing their intention 'to carry on working'.<sup>2</sup> This drew explicitly on the perceived success of the famous work-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in 1971-2. Foster and Woolfson, whose study of UCS had recently been published in 1987, saw three parallels between the two struggles. First, there was the 'remote' nature of industrial disinvestment, with decisions taken at geographical and political remove. Second, there was a Conservative UK government committed to the free market and so rendered powerless to protect industrial employment. Third, resistance was marshalled by far-sighted shop-floor representatives, mobilizing a broader political movement in defence of working class economic security.<sup>3</sup> The two campaigns had diverging outcomes, however. On the Clyde three jobs in four were retained after the work-in ended in 1972. But at Uddingston neither the factory nor any of the jobs were preserved in 1987, although public pressure on the company achieved substantially improved redundancy terms.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. Cornelius, 'No notice or conscience: how Caterpillar bulldozed through its closure', *The Guardian*, 16 January 1987.

<sup>2</sup> J. Stead, 'Rifkind finds Caterpillar closure "extraordinary"', *The Guardian*, 15 January 1987.

<sup>3</sup> John Foster and Charles Woolfson, *The Politics of the UCS Work-In: class alliances and the right to work* (Lawrence & Wishart: 1986); Charles Woolfson and John Foster, *Track Record: the story of the Caterpillar occupation* (Verso: 1988).

<sup>4</sup> 'Caterpillar Employees to Report for Work Today', *Financial Times*, April 27, 1987, clipping, SEP 4/4574, National Records of Scotland (hereafter NRS).

This article provides a fresh analysis of the Caterpillar occupation, inspired in part by community-based thirtieth anniversary commemoration events in 2017. The Caterpillar Workers' Legacy Group organized workforce reunions and a number of its members were present at a Scottish Parliament debate to mark the occupation's anniversary. Ewan Gibbs assisted the Legacy Group in recording interviews with former Caterpillar workers and family members which contributed to exhibitions and films shown in Lanarkshire. The Legacy Group is keen to profile Caterpillar as an example of morally-enthused worker activism with much contemporary relevance. This was most readily visible in 2017 when several leaders from the occupation participated in a seminar organized by the University of the West of Scotland-Oxfam partnership. The former occupiers framed their recollections in terms of continuing retrenchment by manufacturing multinationals and contemporary struggles to organize workers in the service sector to attain the living wage and trade union recognition. These sentiments were also apparent in the Scottish Parliament debate, when Richard Leonard, a Central Region List Labour MSP, moved the motion commemorating the occupation. Leonard, who was elected leader of the Scottish Labour Party several months later, stated, 'I welcome to Parliament some of those working people who believed in themselves and made history in a small corner of Lanarkshire. In so doing, they lit a flame that still burns brightly and inspires and guides many of us three decades later.'<sup>5</sup>

This article utilizes the Legacy Group testimonies and UK government papers, unavailable, of course, to Woolfson and Foster when they published their study in 1988. Analysis is moved forward by positioning the occupation within the longer history of deindustrialization. In this sense the article has a broader aim, encouraging the greater use of the deindustrialization framework within historical examination of industrial relations from the late 1960s onwards, when manufacturing's share of employment in the UK peaked. The article therefore supports Tomlinson's argument that deindustrialization – and not economic 'decline' – was the key structural factor influencing a range of economic and social questions in the UK from the 1950s onwards.<sup>6</sup> Under-lying employment insecurity arising from the dwindling supply of relatively well-paid manual jobs in industrial sectors was a major contextual issue in the conduct of wage bargaining during the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> The industrial democracy debate, culminating in the Bullock Inquiry of 1975-77, was propelled by trade union

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<sup>5</sup> 'Policy Forum: 30 years after the Caterpillar Occupation: Trade Unions in Past, Present and Future', *University of the West of Scotland*, 2017, <https://hml.helix.uws.ac.uk/Play/12131>; The Scottish Parliament, *Official Report of Meeting of Parliament*, Thursday 18 January 2017, [http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10735&mode=html#iob\\_98510](http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10735&mode=html#iob_98510).

<sup>6</sup> J. Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization not decline. A new meta-narrative for post-war British history', *Twentieth Century British History* 27.1 (2016), pp. 76-99.

<sup>7</sup> J. Murden, 'Demands for Fair Wages and Pay Parity in the British Motor Industry in the 1960s and 1970s', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* (hereafter HSIR), 20 (2005), pp. 1-28.

ambitions for stronger voice in corporate decision-making, to arrest industrial disinvestment.<sup>8</sup> More specifically, within this broader debate the article contributes to the reinterpretation of workforce responses to industrial closures. There is a volatile contemporary literature from the 1970s and 1980s, which characterized work-ins and occupations in terms of class, community and corporate power.<sup>9</sup> Deindustrialization's explanatory power has emerged more recently in historical literature emphasizing longer-run processes and the development of working-class expectations that were offended by employment loss. The potential of this longer-historical approach has been illustrated in this journal, with recent articles on the strike at the Gardner diesel engines factory in Manchester in 1980, the occupations at Briant Colour Printing in London in 1972 and Imperial Typewriters in Hull in 1975, and the lengthy campaign in Treorchy, South Wales, against the closure of the Burberry-owned clothing factory in 2006-7, although in each case the presence and influence of deindustrialization is implied rather than made explicit.<sup>10</sup>

The pinnacle of manufacturing employment in Scotland in the late 1960s was preceded one decade earlier by the peak in coal, metals, shipbuilding and textiles. Caterpillar established its factory in 1956, consolidating the eclipse of coal in Lanarkshire and accelerating the growth of engineering. It was one of many US multinationals persuaded by policy-makers to establish operations in central Scotland and other parts of the UK deemed over-reliant on 'traditional' industry. The objectives of this restructuring were greater aggregate economic growth and enhanced living standards. This process was painful. Communities were persuaded to abandon economic activities which they valued. Colliery closures, for instance, were conceived as releasing workers and capital to nurture new and higher-growth industries. Public money was involved, in clearing established industrial sites for new development, and incentivizing the multinationals with rent-free factory premises plus grants and loans for capital equipment. These elements contributed to an important manual workers' moral economy in post-1945 Scotland that is gaining traction as a means of interpreting popular responses to deindustrialization.<sup>11</sup> Just as E. P. Thompson's eighteenth century crowd of plebeian workers and consumers acted from a sense of transgressed expectations

<sup>8</sup> J. Phillips, 'UK Business Power and Opposition to the Bullock Committee's 1977 Proposals on Worker Directors', *HSIR*, 31-32 (2011), pp. 1-30 with deindustrialization details at pp. 7-11.

<sup>9</sup> T. Dickson and D. Judge (eds), *The Politics of Industrial Closure* (Macmillan: 1987) is an illustrative example of this approach; it includes valuable essays by Des McNulty, Huw Beynon, Cliff Lockyer and Lesley Baddon.

<sup>10</sup> S. Mustchin, 'Conflict, Mobilization and Deindustrialization: The 1980 Gardner Strike and Occupation', *HSIR*, 37 (2016), pp. 141-167; A. Tuckman and H. Knudsen, 'The Success and Failings of UK Work-Ins and Sit-Ins in the 1970s: Briant Colour Printing and Imperial Typewriters', *HSIR*, 37 (2016), pp. 113-139; J. Jenkins, 'Hands Not Wanted: Closure, and the Moral Economy of Protest, Treorchy, South Wales', *HSIR*, 38 (2017), pp. 1-36.

<sup>11</sup> E. Gibbs, 'The Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields: Managing Deindustrialization under Nationalization c. 1947-1983', *Enterprise and Society*, 19.1 (2018), pp. 124-152; J. Phillips, 'Deindustrialization and the moral economy of the Scottish coalfields, 1947 to 1991', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 84.1 (2013), pp. 99-115.

and customs,<sup>12</sup> so did coal miners and shipyard, engineering and consumer goods assembly workers in post-1945 Scotland come to understand their losses as unjust because established practices of consultation and promises from policy-makers of economic security were flouted.<sup>13</sup>

The title of this article might be seen as provocative. The Caterpillar workers at Uddington made no direct claim to own their factory in a legal sense. But the manual workers' moral economy challenged the right of private sector employers to exercise their property rights at the expense of the interests of employees and local communities. In this important if limited sense the Caterpillar workers laid claim to moral ownership of the factory at various points in its history, most forcefully when opposing closure in 1987. In part this was a 'frontier of control' question that was recognizable in class terms to those engaged in the crisis in 1987.<sup>14</sup> The skilled engineers exercised their knowledge and dexterity, building the factory's reputation for reliable vehicles. In the process they acquired a major stake in the factory's future. Their investment in the factory had also been deepened by the circumstances of Caterpillar's establishment in 1956, and the manner of the plant's subsequent extension, with local and central government assistance at significant financial cost. This is why situating the occupation within the longer and nuanced history of deindustrialization is important. Jobs in the coal industry and housing in established mining villages were forfeited to make way for the factory, raising the moral share held by Lanarkshire industrial communities. The company's US management did not understand this, nor see that in accepting local and national state support they also acquired obligations to the Lanarkshire communities which the closure violated in 1987. The firm's interest in Uddington was entirely pecuniary, although it was compelled in the early 1960s to accept a substantial degree of union influence within the plant, and so production was organized thereafter with an element of moral economy deliberation. The limited reach of the workers' moral economy claims was illustrated by the 1987 crisis. The occupation challenged corporate power and the Conservative government's approach to deindustrialization, which emphasized the right of management to manage, even where this resulted in serious economic dislocation. But Caterpillar's sovereign control of its private property was not overturned, nor was the government compelled to intervene in ways that would preserve large-scale industrial employment at Uddington.

<sup>12</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76-136.

<sup>13</sup> A. Clark, "'Stealing our Identity and Taking it Over To Ireland": Deindustrialization, Resistance and Gender in Scotland', in S. High, L. MacKinnon and A. Perchard (eds), *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places* (University of British Columbia Press: 2017), pp. 331-347; A. Perchard, "'Broken Men" and "Thatcher's Children": Memory and Legacy in Scotland's Coalfields', *International Labor and Working Class History*, 84 (2013), pp. 78-98.

<sup>14</sup> Woolfson and Foster, *Track Record*, pp. 11-12; C. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control* (Pluto Press: 1975; first published 1920), with foreword and additional notes by R. Hyman.

The analysis that follows consists of two parts. The workers' sense of ownership at Uddingston is examined first. Their moral economy of deindustrialization is explained, and related to policy-makers' management of structural economic change in Scotland after 1945. The broader pattern of industrial relations in US multinational factories in Scotland is summarized; how this chafed against the workers' moral economy is outlined. A shifting 'frontier of control' is made evident, with the workers securing and then strengthening union recognition, and expanding their moral stake in the factory. Discussion then moves to the company's decision to close the factory in 1987, and the occupation which followed, where the workers' moral claim to ownership of Caterpillar property was strongly asserted but ultimately frustrated.

### **Ownership and the Moral Economy at Caterpillar**

The Caterpillar workers' sense of moral ownership of the Uddingston factory was structured by the politics of industrial change in Scotland after the Second World War. Economic diversification was the key issue, with the 1945 Labour government initiating lasting changes in Scotland's industrial structure. Lower than UK-average economic activity and higher than UK-average levels of unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s were generally related to Scotland's relative dependency on a narrow range of industrial sectors: coal, metals, ships and textiles. Policy-makers in the 1940s – civil servants as well as Labour government ministers – favoured the stimulation of new employment through state aid to business, primarily in electrical engineering and consumer goods manufacturing. Caterpillar was one of many US firms which established operations in the late 1940s and early 1950s across the lowlands, accepting initial rent-free access to 'advance' factory premises plus start-up grants and loans to fund capital equipment and employee training.<sup>15</sup>

This restructuring was shaped by two distinctive forms of moral economy thinking. Developments were shaped from above by policy-makers and from below by workers. The policy-makers' 'solidaristic' moral economy was shared by social democrats and 'middle way' Conservatives from the 1940s to the 1960s, and emphasized the rights and responsibilities of workers.<sup>16</sup> A separate working class moral economy developed from the 1950s onwards. This resembled that of E. P. Thompson's eighteenth century English crowd, whose plebeian customs and expectations were

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<sup>15</sup> E. Gibbs and J. Tomlinson, 'Planning the new industrial nation: Scotland, 1931-1979', *Contemporary British History*, 30.4 (2016), pp. 585-606.

<sup>16</sup> D. Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom. An Essay on Britain, Now* (Allen Lane: 2014); J. Tomlinson, 'Re-inventing the Moral economy in post-war Britain', *Historical Research*, 84 (2011), pp. 356-373.

confounded by employers and traders in a period of rapid economic and social change.<sup>17</sup> The workers' moral economy from the 1950s had two essential elements: changes in industrial structure and employment were contingent on the maintenance of individual and communal security; and only legitimately arrived at through negotiation with the political and trade union representatives of the communities and workers involved. In this respect the workers' moral economy reflected the heightening of popular expectations after the Second World War, which had been inflated by the policy-makers' solidaristic moral economy. These two moral economies developed interactively, within the broader trend to greater state regulation of market forces that was taking place across capitalist societies in the mid-twentieth century. Understanding this general shift to greater social regulation of economic life was central to *The Great Transformation*, written by Karl Polanyi, and first published in 1944. Polanyi argued that industrialization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had been dehumanizing. Governments encouraged market mechanisms and competitive forces to over-ride social imperatives and cooperation. This produced a delayed reaction in the twentieth century, with economic actors seeking to protect themselves or their clients against market insecurity, through various forms of collective action, from government regulation to political and revolutionary movements, and trade union organizations.<sup>18</sup>

Polanyi termed this process – social action to minimize the damage of economic change – the 'double movement'. This underlined the tendency of economic liberalization to be met by 'counter-movement' coalitions including policy-makers and organized workers. In this connection a useful term is 'market-ness'. Industrialization induced higher market-ness, which was then lowered by social democracy in the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> The competing mid-twentieth century moral economies were part of the 'counter-movement' but articulated contrasting ends. Policy-makers were seeking to re-embed economic activity within a social framework, to subvert political action in pursuit of more progressive wealth redistribution.<sup>20</sup> Workers, on the other hand, were trying to influence political decisions about resources, and in this respect challenging the authority of both private sector employers and policy-makers.<sup>21</sup> The case of the coalfields illustrates the operation of the counter movement and the differing moral economies. The National Coal Board (NCB), responsible for managing the industry after nationalization in 1947, embarked on a planned

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, 'English Crowd'.

<sup>18</sup> K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: the political and economic origins of our time* (Boston, Beacon Press: 1944).

<sup>19</sup> Gibbs, 'Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields'.

<sup>20</sup> G. Standing, *Work After Globalization. Building Occupational Citizenship* (Edward Elgar, 2009), pp. 1-9.

<sup>21</sup> G. G. Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil. The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1939-1945* (Oxford University Press: 2011), pp. 79-128, 299-334.

redevelopment in pursuit of industrial efficiencies in Scotland.<sup>22</sup> Financial and social incentives, including new local authority housing, were used to persuade more than 7,000 miners and their families to leave Lanarkshire between 1947 and 1954, mainly for Fife but also to the Lothians.<sup>23</sup> The NCB portrayed this positively, but there were significant tensions with extended family separation and community abandonment.<sup>24</sup> Lanarkshire's changing labour market structure illustrates the overall impact of this restructuring. Coal contracted from 15.5 per cent of male employment in 1951 to 2.8 per cent in 1971, but UK government regional incentives helped engineering to increase its share of male employment from 9.9 per cent in 1951 to 25.6 per cent in 1971. So, the male employment share of engineering plus coal in Lanarkshire *increased* across this twenty-year period from 25.4 to 28.4 per cent.<sup>25</sup>

The Caterpillar plant embodied this process. It was built on the site of an ex-coal village, Tannochside,<sup>26</sup> and opened in 1956, the mid-point of a protracted wave of pit closures in the surrounding Blantyre-Cambuslang-Hamilton-Uddingston conurbation, where 3,200 miners were made redundant between 1950 and 1964.<sup>27</sup> The new premises covered sixty-five acres, constituting the largest single industrial unit in Scotland in the 1960s. Caterpillar's presence partly offset local coal job losses, with employment peaking at around 2,500 in 1968.<sup>28</sup> The firm received the Queen's Award for export achievements in 1966, with sales of its high-value product in 80 countries around the world. Across Scotland US-owned firms exported 60 per cent of their sales, an average exceeded by Caterpillar with 70 per cent.<sup>29</sup> This successful export-based strategy correlated closely with the policy goals of Wilson's Labour government from 1964 to 1970 as it sought a positive trade balance.<sup>30</sup> Caterpillar also exemplified the broader shifts globally, as one of a series of 'capital moves' in the second half of the twentieth century, as US-owned firms relocated across regions and nations, with disinvestment in some areas and sectors and investment in others. In the USA, according to Cowie's case study of RCA, which incrementally moved production from New Jersey to

<sup>22</sup> 'Replanning a Coalfield', *Mining Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year, No. 10 (1949), directed by Peter Pickering, produced for Data Film Productions, sponsored by the National Coal Board (hereafter NCB), commentary by John Slater. The film features on the DVD, *National Coal Board Collection, Volume One, Portrait of a Miner* (London, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> NCB Scottish Division, *Scotland's Coal Plan* (Edinburgh, NCB, 1955), pp. 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> H. Heughan, *Pit Closures at Shotts and the Migration of Miners* (Edinburgh University Press: 1953).

<sup>25</sup> Gibbs, 'Confronting Deindustrialization'.

<sup>26</sup> Scottish Home Department, Note for Under Secretary of State, Note on Company and Tannochside Project, August 21, 1959, DD 10/380, NRS.

<sup>27</sup> These calculations are based on the employment peaks and closure dates of five collieries: Blantyreferme 1 and 2 (1), Blantyreferme 3 (2), Hamilton Palace (3), Thankerton (4), and Bothwell Castle (5). This information is detailed in M.K. Oglethorpe, *Scottish Collieries: An Inventory of the Scottish Coal Industry in the Nationalised Era* (Edinburgh, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland: 2006).

<sup>28</sup> 'Strike by 1100 at Tannochside', *Glasgow Herald*, 12 June 1968, SEP 2/49, NRS.

<sup>29</sup> 'Caterpillar Win Award to Industry', *The Scotsman*, 2 July 1966, clipping, SEP 2/49, NRS.

<sup>30</sup> J. Tomlinson, *The Labour governments, 1964-1970. Volume 3, Economic policy* (Manchester University Press: 2004), pp. 12-17, 78-9.

Indiana and then Tennessee and Mexico in search of lower labour costs, workers in newly industrialized territories sometimes expressed initial gratitude to incoming employers, but over time shifted attitudinally to a sense of ‘possessing’ their jobs. This conditioned their response to capital flight and subsequent plant closures, often seen as corporate theft of communal assets.<sup>31</sup> A similar sense of localized ownership and raised collective expectations was present at Uddington. In 2017 former workers remembered Caterpillar as an employer offering terms and conditions that were superior to those available in ‘traditional’ industrial jobs and comparable Scottish-owned engineering firms. But a less positive remembered element of Caterpillar’s history was also emphasized: the firm’s refusal to accept wider obligations to the community. These arose in large part from rehousing developments associated with the factory. Local authority homes were built at public cost to accommodate Caterpillar’s workforce. John Slaven’s family was one of many that moved to the area on the promise of more secure and better-paid employment, in his case from Glasgow. His father worked on the shop floor as an engineer from the late 1950s and his mother joined the firm later as an administrator, around 1970, after the children started school.<sup>32</sup> Helen Knight and her husband, David Knight, who was nightshift convenor at the time of the 1987 occupation, likewise remembered living in ‘a Caterpillar house in Viewpark’, near the factory.<sup>33</sup>

The factory itself was legally owned by Caterpillar, which provided most of the capital for the physical construction. But in addition to providing new housing, the local authority had also undertaken the demolition of the old mining housing at Tannochside, making way for the new plant.<sup>34</sup> The move from coal industry to engineering and consumer goods manufacturing employment was accepted as necessary in Lanarkshire, in that it apparently strengthened local economic resilience. It was nevertheless a matter of considerable individual, household and social regret. In 2017 coal jobs and collieries were remembered within the Legacy Group as valuable communal resources that were reluctantly traded on the promise of a better future. Janet Burrows spoke about her brick-layer and ‘trade union minded’ father who found the experience of overseeing the closure of collieries painful. Her husband, Bob Burrows, a shop steward during the occupation, was influenced by his father’s experiences of employment in Lanarkshire’s steel industry, shrinking along with coal from the late 1950s onwards.<sup>35</sup> The legacy of heavy industry was

<sup>31</sup> J. Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press: 1999), pp. 41–72.

<sup>32</sup> John Slaven, Interview with Ewan Gibbs (EG), Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) Offices, Woodlands, Glasgow, 5 June 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Helen Knight, Interview with EG, Tannochside Miners’ Welfare, 20 January 2017.

<sup>34</sup> ‘US Tractor Firm Picks Lanarkshire Site. Employment for 1500 Workers’, *The Scotsman*, 16 January 1956, clipping, DD 10/380, NRS.

<sup>35</sup> Janet Burrows, Interview with EG, Tannochside Miners’ Welfare, 20 January 2017.

present in the testimonies of the occupation leaders. John Brannan, convenor of Caterpillar's engineering shop stewards and chair of the joint stewards' occupation committee in 1987, cited the personal and political influence of his father, a Lanarkshire coal miner.<sup>36</sup> Bill McCabe, a Caterpillar shop steward before his twentieth birthday, was also from a mining background, although as a young man he followed his father, uncle and brothers into the engineering plant.<sup>37</sup> Familial linkages were present in the stories told by other protagonists. Mick Ward was a production line worker when the factory's closure was announced. By 1987 Mick's father had been promoted to management having spent nearly thirty years working at Caterpillar, while Mick's older brother worked in the factory's metallurgy section.<sup>38</sup>

Moral economy feeling, stimulated by familial and community connections, was transgressed by the firm's production and labour regime. Caterpillar's Uddingston publication, *The Earthmover*, presented the firm as a model employer in Scotland, emphasizing a commitment to safety, training, and welfare.<sup>39</sup> This was a problematic claim. In common with other US inward investor firms in Scotland, Caterpillar did not accept wider obligations to their employees or host communities, beyond the payment of relatively good wages in a comparatively superior physical work environment. In their analysis of the encounters between US inward investing companies and their Scottish employees Knox and McKinlay emphasize a 'culture clash', which was partly the result of class conflict and mismatched expectations. US employers, locating in Scotland to reduce labour costs and access Western European consumer markets, anticipated a compliant workforce. They attempted to avoid trade union recognition agreements in their Scottish operations, to consolidate the cost advantage of locating in Scotland. This offended Scottish workers, particularly in the engineering trades, with their mutually-reinforcing traditions of skilled labour and trade union autonomy.<sup>40</sup> Jim McRobbie, who worked as an electrician at the factory and served as a shop steward, stated in 2017 that the 'Americans have a different way of thinking from us', and mentioned the practice of effort rationing. Jim was also adamant about the centrality of trade unionism and adversarial bargaining, underlining that 'you need to fight for what you get'.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 'Policy Forum: 30 years after the Caterpillar Occupation: Trade Unions in Past, Present and Future', *University of the West of Scotland*, 2017, <https://hml.helix.uws.ac.uk/Play/12131>.

<sup>37</sup> Bill McCabe, Interview with EG, Tannochside Miners' Welfare, 20 January 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Mick Ward, Interview with EG, University of the West of Scotland Hamilton Campus, 5 July 2017.

<sup>39</sup> *The Earthmover: A Monthly Newspaper for Caterpillar People at the Glasgow Plant*, 10, 2 (1957), SEP 2/49, NRS.

<sup>40</sup> W. W. Knox and A. McKinlay, 'Working For the Yankee Dollar: American Inward Investment and Scottish Labour, 1945-1970', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 7 (1999), pp. 1-26.

<sup>41</sup> Jim McRobbie, Interview with EG, Viewpark Community Centre, 12 December 2016.

These concerns shaped local union action at Caterpillar in pursuit of recognition from the employer. When the firm dismissed two Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) activists, Alexander Cumming and William Selkirk, a nine-week recognition strike ensued, starting on 2 November 1960 and ending on 6 January 1961. In late December AEU national officials intervened, with the President, William Carron, expressing regret that the union, having won the battle for recognition with British-owned engineering firms, was now fighting the battle over again with US employers. He demanded talks with Caterpillar's US President, Louis B. Neumiller, called union members at the firm's Birtley factory in Gateshead to join the strike, asked the Ministry of Labour to investigate the dispute, and complained to the US ambassador. 'For the normally peace-loving AEU to fight a battle on this scale is a rare occurrence', commented *The Guardian's Industrial Staff*.<sup>42</sup> The firm attempted a partial retreat, seeking to recognise AEU full-time officers but not workplace stewards. This was unsuccessful: the stewards incrementally 'shifted the frontier of control', and exerted a foothold in the factory, securing bargaining rights on a variety of organizational questions.<sup>43</sup> The recognition strike entered the memory of the factory as a key episode, its importance passed through family connections within the workforce, their fathers' involvement remembered by both McRobbie and McCabe in 2017.<sup>44</sup> Brannan explicitly linked the recognition strike, which took place several years before he began working at the factory, with the 1987 occupation:

What had happened is that they had a [lengthy] strike to get union representation. ... Right though the Christmas period. And again the community supported them. The same community that supported us supported them. And they got recognition for a union.<sup>45</sup>

The Caterpillar recognition victory was part of the labour movement's broader advance in Scotland in the late 1950s and 1960s. Few US firms were able to withstand calls for collective bargaining in Scotland. IBM at Greenock, notorious or renowned in this respect, depending on interpretation, was a decided outlier.<sup>46</sup> But the Caterpillar case shows that this progress was not

<sup>42</sup> 'AEU Challenge to US Firm', *The Guardian*, 21 December 1960, and 'Tractor Men win fight for union recognition', *The Guardian*, 7 January 1961.

<sup>43</sup> W. W. Knox and A. McKinlay, "Organizing the unorganized": union recruitment strategies in American transnationals, c. 1945-1977', in G. Gall, *Union Organizing: Campaigning for trade union recognition* (Routledge: 2003), pp. 19-38 with Caterpillar material at pp. 30-33.

<sup>44</sup> McRobbie and McCabe, Interviews.

<sup>45</sup> John Brannan, Interview with EG at University of the West of Scotland Hamilton campus, 21 February 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Knox and McKinlay, "Organizing the unorganized", pp. 21-29; P. Dimitratos, I. Liouka, D. Ross and S. Young, 'The multinational enterprise and subsidiary evolution', *Business History*, 51 (2009), pp. 401-25

straightforward. The firm continually reasserted its sovereignty over the factory, resisting workforce claims that wider social obligations arose from its acceptance of public money. The struggle over the ‘frontier of control’ at Uddington was relentless. In June 1968, for instance, the dismissal of a shop steward was resisted by strike action involving 1,100 dayshift and 650 night shift workers.<sup>47</sup> This episode followed a major expansion by the firm in the mid-1960s, which had lifted employment above 2,000,<sup>48</sup> and shaped the future of the plant’s industrial relations. Brannan, his deputy John Gillen, future nightshift convenor David Knight, and John Kane, another of the senior stewards, all started in 1966.<sup>49</sup> According to Gillen this was part of a generational shift in union personnel and control in the factory as the younger men incrementally acquired standing:

How you learned to be a shop steward was the day to day battles. The guy that wasn’t on his top rate, the guy that was being pulled up for various things. That’s what made you a shop steward, that’s what gave you the confidence you know to argue, and argue your way up through the rank. John [Brannan], it took him years and years to get the steward’s job and then to get the nightshift convenor’s job. Because there was always opposition to these daft young boys. That was us.<sup>50</sup>

The generational transfer of power in Scottish coalfield trade union leadership in the 1960s has recently been emphasized. Miners who entered the industry as young men in the 1940s and 1950s were more determined advocates of resisting deindustrialization and managerial prerogative than their elders. The moral economy of the coalfields emphasized communal security and the necessity of trade union agreement before pit closures could be effected, and this was enforced more proactively by younger than older miners in the 1950s and 1960s. Members of the younger generation pressurized workplace representatives and full-time trade union officials deemed insufficiently adversarial in their attitude towards the NCB. The narrative of coalfield generational change, which included rising expectations of future security among younger workers,<sup>51</sup> is mirrored in the memories of former Caterpillar stewards. Brannan remembered that the ‘daft young boys’ gradually superseded the cadre of older trade unionists who he characterized as reaching too close an

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Strike by 1100 at Tannochside’, *Glasgow Herald*, 12 June 1968, clipping, SEP 2/49, NRS.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Caterpillar to Expand Again’, *The Scotsman*, 19 August 1964, clipping, DD10/380, NRS.

<sup>49</sup> John Gillen Interview with EG, University of the West of Scotland Hamilton campus, 21st February 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Gillen, Interview.

<sup>51</sup> J. Phillips, ‘Economic Direction and Generational Change in Twentieth Century Britain: The Case of the Scottish Coalfields’, *English Historical Review*, 132 (2017), pp. 885-911

accommodation with the company after the 1960-61 strike. The younger generation operated through factory-wide meetings, and with suspicion of full-time officials who were regarded as having been ‘wined and dined’ – and thereby compromised – by Caterpillar.<sup>52</sup> This foreshadowed the tensions that would arise between engineering union officials and the occupiers in 1987. Gillen remembered multiple examples of shop-floor contestation from the late 1960s and 1970s. These varied from pay and work-organization disputes to elements of an autonomously organized social life, including a bookmaking operation in the factory. There were carnivalesque events such as a cream cracker-eating competition staged across the plant’s massive expanse. Despite management objections wagers were laid, with the participants accompanied by a worker playing a guitar.<sup>53</sup> This was a display of autonomy with many echoes in the parallel motor manufacturing industry, where workers across the UK, Italy and the USA asserted control over their factories through various novel strategies geared to limiting managerial sovereignty.<sup>54</sup>

Other workers with a less senior standing on the shop floor shared the perception of growing but contested union influence in the workplace. Bill McCabe asserted that the union organization at Caterpillar by 1987 had developed ‘a decent industrial relations situation. And we were also proud ae the fact that we always defended oor guys y’know as long as they were able tae be defended.’<sup>55</sup> Mick Ward similarly felt Caterpillar had ‘A strong union. Eh, and we had a voice in the factory, we would be able to listen to people’s complaints and concerns.’<sup>56</sup> Both Gillen and Brannan were keen to identify an objection to ‘sectionalist’ or occupational disputes, an approach which was also shared by some craft workers such as Jim McRobbie. As with the ‘factory consciousness’ discussed by Beynon at Ford’s Halewood plant in Merseyside, this perspective incorporated suspicion towards both organized political groupings and trade union officialdom.<sup>57</sup> So a strategy of shop-floor control, manual workforce unity and shop steward leadership was developed over two decades of trade union activity, within the generational shift of influence at the factory. This was pivotal to sustaining the lengthy occupation in 1987.

<sup>52</sup> Brannan, Interview.

<sup>53</sup> Gillen, Interview.

<sup>54</sup> A. Gilmour, ‘The Trouble with Linwood: Compliance and Coercion in the Car Plant, 1963-1981’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 27 (2007), pp. 75-93; R. Darlington, ‘Workplace Union Militancy on Merseyside since the 1960s: extent, nature, causes, and decline’, *HSIR*, 19 (2005), pp. 132-152 N. Pizzolato, *Challenging Global Capitalism: Labor Migration, Radical Struggle and Urban Change in Detroit and Turin* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan: 2013); S. Meyer, ‘Work, Play and Power: Masculine Culture on the Automotive Shop Floor, 1930-1960’, in R. Horowitz (ed.), *Boys and Their Toys: Masculinity, Technology and Class in America* (New York, Routledge: 2001) pp.13-32.

<sup>55</sup> McCabe, Interview.

<sup>56</sup> Ward, Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Huw Beynon, *Working for Ford* second edition (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books: 1984) p. 114.

## Closure and Resistance

In September 1986 the UK government agreed a new package of regional assistance with Caterpillar, to develop a new model, the D6H. Government support of around £3 million was already available and now the company accepted a further offer amounting to another £5 million. With this public backing the firm announced an overall programme of investment of £62.5 million, promising employment of the factory's 1,300 workers until 1991.<sup>58</sup> But on Friday 9 January representatives of the Industry Department for Scotland (IDS) at the Scottish Office were contacted by Uddingston management and told that Caterpillar executives in Illinois had decided to close the plant, along with two others in the USA.<sup>59</sup> Caterpillar's global capacity exceeded demand. Work undertaken at Uddingston could be accommodated within Caterpillar factories in Belgium and France, but the opposite was not true, a deciding factor in closing the Scottish site.<sup>60</sup> The decision was made public the following Wednesday, 14 January. Local Caterpillar management communicated the news via a press conference.<sup>61</sup>

The intensification of deindustrialization and the rapid increase of job loss in Scotland since 1980 influenced the workers' response. In 2017 John Brannan remembered that 'we were in a climate of high unemployment, quite a lot of factories closing down. And when the news came to us it was totally abhorrent, completely unacceptable and we had to do something.'<sup>62</sup> Brannan and other engineering stewards had been warned of possible closure shortly beforehand by a journalist, and revised plans for an occupation initially discussed the previous year, when closure was mooted before the investment package was agreed.<sup>63</sup> Around two-thirds of the factory's employees were members of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW), successor body to the AEU. The remaining third were members of three white collar unions: Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX); Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section (TASS); and Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS). In the short-run these manual and white-collar workers were united in opposition to closure. Occupation of the factory was agreed as the first necessary step. The stewards rationalized this initiative with moral economy arguments, stressing Caterpillar's obligations to local communities and to the people of Scotland and Britain, given the accumulated receipt of regional assistance since the 1950s. The purpose of the occupation was to prevent Caterpillar from removing plant and machinery, regarded as belonging to

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<sup>58</sup> Secretary of State's Visit to Caterpillar, 19 September 1986, SEP 4/4693, NRS.

<sup>59</sup> G. R. Wilson, IDS, 9 January 1987, SEP 4/4693, NRS.

<sup>60</sup> Woolfson and Foster, *Track Record*, p. 41.

<sup>61</sup> Stead, 'Rifkind finds Caterpillar closure "extraordinary"'.

<sup>62</sup> Brannan, Interview.

<sup>63</sup> Gillen, Interview.

the community rather than the firm. Brannan told government officials that Caterpillar had no right to withdraw these assets, which the community needed to sustain its economic future.<sup>64</sup>

Brannan, speaking later in 1987, with the occupation over and the factory closed, reasserted the moral economy basis of the resistance. Echoing the respectable working class and production-emphasizing language of the UCS work-in,<sup>65</sup> he said that his shop-floor colleagues had been ‘responsible workers’, with a daily output of thirteen bulldozers when the factory was in ‘its heyday’.<sup>66</sup> Tam Anderson, who played a major role in the occupation’s entertainment committee which organized several significant fundraising concerts, related the occupation in similar moral economy terms in 2017. Workers had fulfilled their obligation to produce high-quality and competitive products while the company reneged on a promise of economic security. He underlined the case made in 1987 for the plant’s retention in terms of profitability and the quality of production at the factory:

I think it [the occupation] was worth it because my opinion at the time we cannae let these people roll over us. We were making money, we were one of the best at doing what we done, making tractors. A skilled workforce. And then because of the size of the plant was a different size from one in other countries that they were closing. It wasnae anything to do with how good Caterpillar Glasgow was. It was the right size, the right acreage to be closed.<sup>67</sup>

Anderson’s comments about the value and quality of work undertaken at Uddingston echo the objections articulated by US assembly workers to ‘downsizing’ by profitable multinationals, including RCA in Indiana, a case noted already in this article, and KEMET in North Carolina.<sup>68</sup> But in the US cases these were arguably rhetorical strategies deployed as sources of dignity for workers compelled to accept redundancy. At Uddingston this production-emphasizing consciousness stimulated the workforce to occupy their plant and shaped the framing of the occupation as a disciplined defence of economic security. James Agnew recalled the group effort required to preserve the factory’s high-

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<sup>64</sup> I. D. Brown, Industry Department Scotland (hereafter IDS), Note of meeting of IDS and Scottish Development Agency officials with workforce and sit-in representatives, 27 February 1987, SEP 4/4570, NRS.

<sup>65</sup> J. Foster and C. Woolfson, ‘How Workers on the Clyde Gained the Capacity for Class Struggle: the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders’ Work-In, 1971-2’, in J. McIlroy, N. Fishman and A. Campbell (eds), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics. Volume Two: The High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964-79* (Aldershot, Ashgate: 1999), pp. 297-325.

<sup>66</sup> R. Lang, ‘When Caterpillar Closes Its Doors Tomorrow The Men Will Remember the Pride and Passion of John Brennan’, *Evening Times*, 5 November 1987, clipping, SEP 4/4925, NRS.

<sup>67</sup> Tam Anderson, Interview with EG at Tannochside Miners’ Welfare, 20 January 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Cowie, *Capital Moves*, pp.9-10; Steve May and Laura Morrison, ‘Making Sense of Restructuring: Narratives of Accommodation among Downsized Workers’ in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* ed. by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003) p.260.

tech machinery in ‘spick and span’ condition. He counterpoised this memory with the firm’s claim that the occupation was irresponsible.<sup>69</sup> The occupation’s claimed defence of the community was supported by the children of the workers involved, who petitioned Queen Elizabeth to intervene to keep the factory open. ‘We Need a Future’ this read, signed by 61 youngsters with addresses from several Lanarkshire settlements, described by the lead petitioner, Joanne Farrell, aged 14, as ‘a mere fraction of the total dependent children’. Farrell and four of her friends later wrote to the Prime Minister, with the same request for action to safeguard the factory and their generation’s economic future.<sup>70</sup>

The UK government was compromised by Caterpillar’s decision. An additional £5 million in support – on top of the £8 million already pledged – was offered to reverse the closure announcement. Malcolm Rifkind, Secretary of State for Scotland, was extremely angry, and initially favoured a tough line, arguing that the government should ‘launch a public attack on the company for its disgraceful behaviour’ in accepting regional assistance, promising growth, and then suddenly abandoning Scottish operations. Rifkind also hoped that Caterpillar, a seller in a competitive purchasers’ market, would be ‘sensitive to government criticism’.<sup>71</sup> He put these complaints to Peter Donis, President of Caterpillar Inc. and number two in the firm’s global hierarchy only to George Schaefer, the Chairman, in a meeting on 20 January. Donis was loathed by the occupiers, who made play of his name in a way that encapsulated their betrayal. ‘He peed on us’, they said.<sup>72</sup> Rifkind said to Donis that the closure was ‘deplored’ by workers, the national media in Scotland and the UK government. Donis insisted that there was no alternative to closure. Thatcher had written to Schaefer on 11 January, and now wrote to him again. Direct interventions by the Prime Minister in cases of industrial closure were ‘almost unprecedented’, Rifkind told Donis, but neither her letters nor the proposed extra public investment had any impact on the company’s position.<sup>73</sup>

Rifkind and Thatcher feared the closure’s political consequences. Support for the Conservative Party in Scotland had been eroding as a result of deindustrialization’s acceleration since 1980. Scottish opposition to both Thatcherism and deindustrialization was couched in terms of

<sup>69</sup> James Agnew, interview with EG, View Park Community Centre, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016. See also Woolfson and Foster, *Track Record*, pp.56-57.

<sup>70</sup> ‘A Petition From Caterpillar Worker Children’, no date but probably March 1987, SEP 4/4573, NRS; Jacqueline Donnelly (13), Denise Donnelly (15), Joanne Farrell (14), Wendy McAuley (14) and Julie Moore (13) to Mrs Thatcher, no date but probably April 1987, SEP 4/4574, NRS.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Gordon, Private Secretary to Secretary of State, to G. R. Wilson, IDS, January 9, 1987, SEP4/4673, NRS.

<sup>72</sup> Woolfson and Foster, *Track Record*, p. 60.

<sup>73</sup> Gareth Heffernan, Scottish Development Agency – Chicago office, to G. A. Schaefer, 13 January 1987, and Robert Gordon, Private Secretary, Scottish Office, ‘Caterpillar’, 21 January 1987, SEP 4/5298, NRS; Prime Minister to Schaefer, 11 January 1987, SEP 4/4673, and Thatcher to Schaefer, 22 January 1987, SEP 4/5298, NRS.

class and nation.<sup>74</sup> The Caterpillar case underlined this. Representatives of the older political and industrial elite in Scotland protested privately to ministers about the closure and called for more dynamic action than the government would prove willing to take. Viscount Weir, of the Weir Group of industries, wrote to Rifkind, ‘horrified’ by the closure. ‘In my view’, he detailed, ‘there is only one kind of talk which these people would understand’: no Caterpillar equipment should be bought by the government nor used in completion of any public contracts. In a further echo of the UCS crisis, the Caterpillar closure was exerting substantial negative pressure on local capital. The owner of one of many Caterpillar suppliers, Bryan Grieve Sales Co., advised his Conservative MP in Stirling, Michael Forsyth, that the employment of some 5,000 workers across Scotland was dependent on orders from Uddingston.<sup>75</sup>

The crisis compounded the political effects of deindustrialization, which were demonstrated at the general election held in June 1987. While re-elected across the United Kingdom with a majority in the House of Commons of 102, the Conservative government lost eleven of its 21 seats in Scotland.<sup>76</sup> Michael Hirst, one of the defeated Conservative MPs, losing to Labour in Strathkelvin and Bearsden, had been a vocal critic of Caterpillar following the closure announcement. He even spoke at a rally in Uddingston organized by the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) on the last Saturday in February, along with representatives of the churches, trade unions, the SNP, the Labour Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Liberals. But Hirst’s position is remembered by some of the former occupiers as an exceptional lingering expression of middle way Tory thinking.<sup>77</sup> Other Conservatives in Scotland certainly took an alternative line. Forsyth, re-elected in 1987 as MP for Stirling, and a more trenchant supporter of the Prime Minister and the broader ideology of Thatcherism than Rifkind and Hirst, endorsed the company’s right to disinvest at Uddingston and referred to the occupiers as ‘dinosaurs’.<sup>78</sup>

In the House of Commons Rifkind said the closure was ‘extraordinary’, but the public critique was muted and contrasted with his private anger and initial call for a punitive response. Conservative ministers were compromised in discussing the crisis by the government’s commitment to market forces and the autonomy of private capital.<sup>79</sup> This worldview encompassed ‘market

<sup>74</sup> J. Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union. A Study of Conservative Party Attitudes to the Union* (Edinburgh University Press: 1990), pp. 117-21; J. Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution: Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s* (Manchester University Press: 2008), pp. 178-83.

<sup>75</sup> Viscount Weir to Rifkind, 22 January 1987, and Bryan Grieve to Michael Forsythe (sic.), 19 January 1987, SEP 4/4570, NRS.

<sup>76</sup> E. Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle. Scotland Since 1880* (Edinburgh University Press: 2010), pp. 320-40.

<sup>77</sup> Bill McCabe, Interview with EG at Tannochside Miners’ Welfare, 20th January 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Woolfson and Foster, *Track Record*, pp. 95-6, 163.

<sup>79</sup> A. Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism* (Basingstoke, Macmillan: 1994).

'fundamentalist' arguments about the duties of individuals,<sup>80</sup> and some argue even amounted to an alternative policy-making moral economy, superseding the 'solidaristic' model of the mid-century, for in highly judgemental terms it annulled a multiplicity of collective customs and obliged individuals to modify their behaviour.<sup>81</sup> This Thatcherite turn has been characterized as neoliberal. Strong public expenditure commitments, however, especially in health, welfare, defence and policing, meant that there was no significant 'rolling back of the state'.<sup>82</sup> Economic and social policy, moreover, while clearly heightening 'market-ness', was often enforced through coercive state action, and the effects of deindustrialization were mitigated by the state's administration of welfare policy. Ex-industrial workers were incentivized with enhanced social security benefits to remove themselves from economic activity, obscuring the 'real' level of unemployment.<sup>83</sup> The Thatcherite approach to industrial relations reinforces the impression that neoliberal thinking was accompanied by strong state action. Trade union voice was deliberately constrained, with employment and industrial relations reforms reinforced by selected government attacks, most notably on coal miners, which were highly politicized and amounted to an ideological 'war' against the organized working class.<sup>84</sup> Pursuing the right of management to manage, unchallenged by authoritative trade union voice, was clearly one of Thatcherism's core aims, of higher strategic importance than market liberalization. This was recognized early by some astute labour correspondents, notably Martin Adeney and John Lloyd. Business leaders, they wrote, were frustrated in the early 1980s by Thatcher's economic management, especially the high cost of borrowing, but as a body they welcomed the 'creation of a climate where being the boss counted for something'.<sup>85</sup>

The Caterpillar case demonstrated the right of private capital to act autonomously, in the face of government strategy or social and community priorities. Corporate power, conjoined with property rights, would confound the occupiers, whose moral economy claims were utterly rejected by Caterpillar. In order to strip capacity from the global industry, the firm's US leadership blocked attempts to sell the factory to alternative earthmoving equipment manufacturers.<sup>86</sup> The government was repeatedly advised by the company in these terms, as ministers, accepting the fact of

<sup>80</sup> A. Beckett, *Promised You a Miracle. Why 1980-82 Made Modern Britain* (Allen Lane: 2015), especially Part Four, 'Revolution in the Head', pp. 183-288.

<sup>81</sup> Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom*.

<sup>82</sup> J. Tomlinson, *Managing the Economy, Managing the People: narratives of economic life in Britain from Beveridge to Brexit* (Oxford University Press: 2017), pp. 74-80, 229-30

<sup>83</sup> C. Beatty and S. Fothergill. 'Labour Market Adjustment in Areas of Chronic Industrial Decline: The Case of the UK Coalfields'. *Regional Studies*, 30.7 (1996), pp. 627-40.

<sup>84</sup> J. Phillips, 'Containing, Isolating and Defeating the Miners: the UK Cabinet Ministerial Group on Coal and the three phases of the 1984-5 Strike', *HSIR*, 35 (2014), 117-41.

<sup>85</sup> M. Adeney and J. Lloyd, *The Miners' Strike, 1984-5: Loss Without Limit* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1986), pp. 3-4.

<sup>86</sup> D. Gow, 'Caterpillar rebels face pressure', *The Guardian*, 23 April 1987.

Caterpillar's withdrawal, sought an alternative operator. Donis told Rifkind that there would be no cooperation from Caterpillar with this aim in mind while the 'illegal occupation' was allowed to continue, and IDS personnel at the Scottish Office recognized that the 'major, sophisticated plant installed in 1984 and 1985' had to be returned to the company.<sup>87</sup> Rifkind had already admitted in discussion with Donis that the government was ultimately committed to free enterprise and the right of companies to make decisions in what they perceived as their best commercial interests.<sup>88</sup> Brannan and the shop stewards were told by IDS officials that Caterpillar was 'the legal owner' of the factory, its machinery and plant, and that there was no prospect of financial assistance to enable the workers to continue production until a new owner could be found. Public ownership, favoured by the workers, was likewise out of the question.<sup>89</sup>

The occupation nevertheless remained a challenge to the Thatcher government and its anti-trade union agenda as well as Caterpillar's corporate strategy. The insistence on continued working underlined the collective commitment to industrial activity and relatively well-paid manual labour, the latter an increasingly valuable resource in Lanarkshire. Mick Ward articulated this feeling in 2017, noting that while 'the likes of the electricians, the people who were qualified the sparks, the plumbers and that ... know they could get another job', fear of unemployment motivated assembly workers.<sup>90</sup> In this climate the occupation was supported morally and financially by the broader labour movement, which recognized its place in resisting a generalized process of manufacturing contraction. Representatives of the STUC General Council, led by Campbell Christie, General Secretary, visited the occupation on Monday 19 January 1987. Three days later the STUC issued a press statement which asserted national as well as class solidarity with the occupiers. 'The whole of Scotland is on your side', this proclaimed. Further talks between the STUC and the stewards produced a publicity campaign. This would involve offering the only bulldozer the occupation had materials to assemble to Bob Geldof, the Live Aid political activist associated with economic development ventures in the African continent.<sup>91</sup> The bulldozer was completed in February and painted pink to distinguish it from Caterpillar's yellow vehicles. Nick-named the Pink Panther, it was offered eventually to War on Want, chaired by George Galloway, a labour movement supporter of the occupation, and intended for use in Nicaragua, although legal hurdles ultimately prevented

<sup>87</sup> Donis to Rifkind, 12 March 1987, and Peter McKinlay, IDS, Caterpillar (UK) Ltd., 18 March 1987, SEP 4/4571, NRS.

<sup>88</sup> Gordon, 'Caterpillar', 21 January 1987, SEP 4/5298, NRS.

<sup>89</sup> Peter McKinlay, IDS, Brief for Secretary of State's meeting with Reps from Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers at Caterpillar, 4 March 1987, SEP 4/4571, NRS.

<sup>90</sup> Mick Ward, Interview.

<sup>91</sup> STUC, Press Statement, 'Caterpillar Tractor Work-In', 22 January 1987, and Report of a Meeting With Caterpillar Shop Stewards, 26 January 1987, Glasgow Caledonian University Archives (GCUA).

export and it was later seized by the company. For a while the bulldozer was parked in George Square, outside Glasgow City Chambers, an STUC-supported publicity coup.<sup>92</sup>

The STUC and its political allies also sought to generate pressure on the government and Caterpillar. There were shades, once more, of the mixture of class and nation arguments that supported the defence of UCS in 1971-72. Rifkind was compelled to meet the Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, Donald Dewar, and the Shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, John Smith, along with other Labour MPs from west central Scotland, in mid-February. Smith stated that Caterpillar had a moral obligation to Lanarkshire, and should be compelled at the very least to support its employees in securing alternative employment or new skills.<sup>93</sup> The STUC organized a second big rally on Saturday 28 March 1987, this time in Glasgow, attended by 4,000 supporters. This featured a ‘big tent’ panel of speakers, including the entertainer Elaine C. Smith, who had family connections to Uddingston, along with Norman Willis, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, John Smith, John Brannan, Jimmy Airlie, AUEW national officer, Lawrence McGarry of Strathclyde Regional Council and Pat Lally of Glasgow City District Council, plus the Reverend Maxwell Craig of the Church of Scotland. Allan Stewart, Tory MP for Eastwood, invited to put the government’s case, was jeered.<sup>94</sup>

A special STUC General Council meeting followed the rally. This faced the substantial sectional and political splits which had emerged within the occupation and among its supporters. These had skilfully been opened by the company, early in February, following its confirmation that the factory would definitely close. The TASS and ASTMS members were telephoned at home by Caterpillar management, and offered additional cash incentives to incentivize redundancy and support with retraining, in return for abandoning the occupation. Around 150 of these employees withdrew from the occupation on 12 February 1987. The APEX members left the next day. Woolfson and Foster state that the white-collar employees’ primary identification was with Caterpillar, whereas the AUEW members owed stronger loyalty to their union, community and class.<sup>95</sup> John Gillen confirmed this in 2017 with reference to white-collar employees as ‘Tannochside Yanks’, but some non-manual workers, including John Slaven’s mother, maintained their support for the occupation to the end.<sup>96</sup> The AUEW’s full-time officers initially supported the occupation, but were nervous about the legal difficulties involved. From the fourth week of the occupation Caterpillar was

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<sup>92</sup> J. Stead, ‘Caterpillar bosses threaten legal action’, *The Guardian*, 7 March 1987.

<sup>93</sup> Robert Gordon, Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Scotland, Note of Rifkind’s meeting with Labour MPs, 19 February 1987, SEP 4 4570, NRS.

<sup>94</sup> STUC, Press Statement, Caterpillar occupation, 25 March 1987, GCUA; clipping, ‘MP jeered at Caterpillar rally’, *The Scotsman*, 30 March 1987, SEP 4/4572, NRS; and STUC General Council, 4 March 1987, GCUA.

<sup>95</sup> Woolfson and Foster, *Track Record*, pp. 67-78.

<sup>96</sup> Gillen and Slaven, Interviews.

threatening legal action. The emphasis by Donis in discussion with Rifkind on the ‘illegal’ nature of the occupation has been noted. AUEW national offers were keenly aware of the company’s position. Legal action would jeopardize the union’s financial stability, and compromise the effort to secure an alternative operator. Legal action was eventually taken nine weeks in, and the company obtained an eviction order in the Court of Session in Edinburgh from Lord Clyde.<sup>97</sup> Following Lord Clyde’s ruling and in the context of growing division within the manual workforce, John Gillen articulated the occupiers’ moral economy by directly juxtaposing moral ownership to legal property rights: ‘I feel some disappointment at the court decision. It appears it was the most reluctantly granted interim interdict ever because the law is in direct opposition to the morality of this matter.’<sup>98</sup>

By early April 1987 moral as well as legal pressure was mounting on the occupiers. Caterpillar had set a deadline of 23 March, the day of Lord Clyde’s ruling, for the workers to leave the premises. In return, closure would be deferred for twelve months. AUEW members voted to continue the occupation by a majority of 418 to 322 on the factory floor.<sup>99</sup> A few days later there was a tense meeting between Caterpillar stewards and Jimmy Airlie, their national officer, who had been one of the leaders of the 1971-2 UCS work-in. Now he was fretting about the difficulty of supporting the occupation at Uddingston while remaining within the law. He told the special STUC General Council that the union could only pledge continued ‘support for the struggle as a strike rather than an occupation’. This meant the workers would have to leave the factory, diminishing the effectiveness of any continued action to preserve capital equipment at Uddingston.<sup>100</sup> Jimmy Reid, Airlie’s old comrade from the shipyards and the work-in, and by 1987 primarily operating as a media commentator, told reporters that the occupation could not continue because of the softening of support among AUEW members in the plant.<sup>101</sup>

Tam Anderson remembered being ‘one of the angry ones’ amongst the workers present at the factory on the day that Airlie visited to argue that the union could not sustain support for the occupation.<sup>102</sup> John Gillen described Airlie as a ‘fall guy’, compelled to act on behalf of the AEUW officialdom which was being squeezed by the Engineering Employers Federation and fear of sequestration of funds.<sup>103</sup> This was no abstract concern, with the recent precedent from 1984-85,

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<sup>97</sup> J. Stead, ‘Caterpillar seeks eviction order to end plant sit-in’, *The Guardian*, 24 March 1987, and ‘Caterpillar workers defy court’, *The Guardian*, 31 March 1987.

<sup>98</sup> *Bellshill Speaker*, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1987, clipping, North Lanarkshire Heritage Centre, Motherwell, Caterpillar Workers’ Legacy Group, Box 1, item 44.

<sup>99</sup> Stead, ‘Caterpillar seeks eviction order’.

<sup>100</sup> STUC General Council, 1 April 1987, CGUA.

<sup>101</sup> Woolfson and Foster, *Track Record*, pp. 197-8.

<sup>102</sup> Anderson, Interview.

<sup>103</sup> Gillen, Interview.

when National Union of Mineworkers funds were sequestered across England and Wales after legal action taken in the name of working miners against the strike.<sup>104</sup> Airlie reprised his position from the special STUC General Council: the occupation should be ended and an official strike commenced in its place. Workers at the meeting verbally assaulted him, on the grounds that this would allow the company to close the site. Airlie encountered further indignity after the meeting, lampooned at a press conference by a journalist asking him rhetorically how it felt to be ‘doing the management’s job for them’.<sup>105</sup> Brannan conceded in 2017 that Airlie’s intervention nevertheless shifted the ground slightly.<sup>106</sup> A further ballot on 30 March 1987 secured a much narrower majority for continuation, 369 to 363.<sup>107</sup> The STUC remained active in support of occupation, but from this point there was a lowering of collective expectations. The loss of some jobs was being accepted as inevitable, and the legal impracticability of insisting that the company leave its capital equipment behind was being conceded.<sup>108</sup> Airlie, attending the STUC annual conference in Perth in the fourth week of April, invited the stewards to a prolonged discussion in search of a settlement. STUC officers, who had been negotiating with Caterpillar through the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), were involved in this dialogue, which resulted in the end of the occupation, announced with immediate effect after a final meeting of AUEW members at Uddingston on Sunday 26 April.<sup>109</sup>

This was a defeat for the occupiers, and the broader moral economy which their action had sought to defend. The company had regained control of the factory and was free to remove the capital equipment which the workers had claimed as property of the community. But the ACAS talks at least produced improved redundancy terms. The occupation ended with a six month guarantee of employment. The workers had been facing the prospect of immediate redundancy.<sup>110</sup> For some of the occupiers these company concessions led to a positive post-Caterpillar future. As a result of the retraining Bill McCabe secured work on North Sea oil-rigs and this later led him into the insurance industry, where he was still employed in 2017:

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<sup>104</sup> J. Winterton and R. Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict: The 1984-5 Miners' Strike in Yorkshire* (Manchester University Press: 1989), p. 300.

<sup>105</sup> Gillen, Interview.

<sup>106</sup> John Brannan, interview, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Stead, ‘Caterpillar workers defy court’.

<sup>108</sup> STUC General Council, 6 May 1987, GCUA.

<sup>109</sup> D. Gow, ‘Caterpillar rebels face pressure’, *The Guardian*, 23 April 1987; K. Harper, ‘Caterpillar sit-in comes to an end’, *The Guardian*, 27 April 1987; ‘Caterpillar Employees to Report for Work Today’, *Financial Times*, 27 April 1987, SEP 4/4574, NRS.

<sup>110</sup> G. R. Wilson, IDS, Note for Secretary of State for Scotland, 21 April 1987, SEP 4 4574, NRS.

I got trained for the oil-rigs as a result of the occupation. No because of Caterpillar's benevolence. Because Caterpillar was under the microscope after we returned to work. Because everything they didnae do was in the press. And we would say 'we need this and we need that' and they knew they had to be forthcoming with bringing people in tae help us to retrain. Teach us how to write for jobs. Offer us certificates. Whereas when it was done at first, [immediate redundancy,] that would never have happened.<sup>111</sup>

The STUC established a working group with representatives of various government branches, the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland, small business suppliers to Caterpillar and the stewards, to identify an alternative buyer for the factory and a market for its products. When pursuit of this objective proved fruitless, the working group shifted its focus to establishing a Special Job Centre, to coordinate training and employment-searching for the redundant workers. One potential stakeholder was conspicuously absent. With some understatement IDS personnel noted that Caterpillar had not 'yet been persuaded to make an appropriate cash contribution'. Caterpillar was still seeking to evade its moral obligations to the community which it had depended upon for three decades.<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

The Caterpillar case examined in this article demonstrates that deindustrialization strongly influenced the conduct of workplace and industrial relations in central Scotland, especially after the peak of employment in the 'traditional' industries of coal, metals, shipbuilding and textiles during the late 1950s. It likewise structured workforce opposition to the closing of mines, shipyards, mills and factories in the 1980s. The Caterpillar case also highlights the development of moral economy thinking among Scottish manual workers, influenced by the policy-driven process of industrial diversification that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, and illustrated vividly by the occupation of the plant in an attempt to resist its closure in 1987. The moral economy basis of this occupation has significant wider implications for understanding of workforce resistance to industrial closures across mature economies in the closing quarter of the twentieth century. Contemporary analyses of closures in the 1980s, chiefly written from critical industrial relations and political economy perspectives, tended to emphasize the organizing force of class identity and conflict. The

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<sup>111</sup> Bill McCabe, Interview.

<sup>112</sup> IDS, Speaking Note, 19 November 1987, SEP 4/4925, NRS.

deindustrialization framework deployed in this moral economy analysis deepens understanding through more nuanced and longer-running historical perspective. Class was important, but underpinned in closure-affected localities by a shared sense of economic production and social sacrifice that had evolved across generations. Structural economic changes in the 1950s conditioned workforce and community activism in the 1980s. Caterpillar had arrived in Lanarkshire in 1956, persuaded by policy-makers to establish manufacturing in Uddingston as a means of both mitigating and further advancing the contraction of the coal industry in Lanarkshire. Significant investments during the 1960s and 1980s were facilitated by further local and national government support, which in the eyes of the workforce and community cemented the multinational's obligations to Lanarkshire. Moral economy feeling was cultivated and intensified by the exchange of industrial employment which had taken place, stimulated by the operation of a policy-maker moral economy. This premised enhanced economic security and improved living standards on workers accepting the need for occupational mobility and productive industrial performance. Coal mining and steelmaking communities in Lanarkshire were offered improved living standards along with ostensibly more secure employment at Caterpillar in exchange for accepting the contraction of traditional industries. Enticements included workers and their families moving into publicly-funded housing, in new schemes built specially for the factory workforce.

Contested ownership was a fundamental feature of the Caterpillar history in Lanarkshire. The Uddingston factory was the legal property of the US multinational, which rejected the workers' moral economy proposition that as an employer it had obligations in Lanarkshire which extended beyond the provision of paid employment. In the company's terms, supported by property rights, it was free to close the factory whenever it chose. But in the workers' moral economy register the factory was a social resource which had been nurtured by the employees and the communities that had developed around it since 1956. The sense of localized ownership was strengthened by the struggle for trade union recognition in a long strike during the winter of 1960-61, and deepened through the gradual accretion of union shop-floor control in the decades that followed. Workers achieved a high degree of involvement in the life of the plant. Their representatives secured consultation rights on key questions relating to workforce discipline and the organization of production. Shop stewards, at the forefront of these initiatives, were attentive to the plant's industrial performance, emphasizing the vital workforce role in making high-quality goods which enjoyed substantial international sales and reputation. A culture of rank and file trade unionism was constructed, laying the basis for the sustained occupation led from within the factory when the closure was announced in 1987. The workforce's moral economy thinking was resolutely articulated during the occupation in the context of sustained deindustrialization. This broader climate of

employment loss and insecurity, widely perceived in Scotland as socially unjust and economically dangerous, contributed to the support which the occupation earned from the wider trade union movement and political representatives. Conservative government ministers were horrified by the closure, which came just four months after a major programme of investment in the factory had been agreed, with substantial public money involved. But the government's ideological commitment to heightened market-ness meant that there was no prospect of ministers challenging Caterpillar's exercise of legal property rights. The firm was allowed to close the factory and remove its publicly-funded assets from the community. Although the occupation was defeated it secured material gains that enabled some of those involved to move into other employment. In historical memory in Lanarkshire it is remembered as an honourable example of resistance to corporate power and a valuable attempted defence of local economic security. The recollections of former occupiers at Uddingston are structured by the workers' moral economy of deindustrialization. Caterpillar owned the factory, but it belonged to the workers and their communities.