Gibbs, E. (2018) The moral economy of the Scottish coalfields: managing deindustrialization under nationalization c.1947–1983. *Enterprise and Society*, 19(1), pp. 124-152.

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Deposited on: 18 February 2020

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The Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields: Managing Deindustrialization under Nationalisation

c.1947-1983

Introduction

This article examines conceptions of social justice and economic fairness with regards to employment. It does so through an analysis of the management of deindustrialization in the Lanarkshire coalfield, west-central Scotland, between the 1940s and 1980s. Emphasis is placed on the historical roots and social and political constitution of labour market practices. It analyses how the operation of labour markets and economic resources, colliery employment, were contested by the assertion of communitarian norms and values. These are implicated within Karl Polanyi's 'double movement'; the operation of liberalised markets continually met opposition from coalitions of forces including workers and state officials which sought to limit the encroachment of market forces on the 'false commodities' of land, labour and money. E.P. Thompson's moral economy provides the basis for an understanding of the formulation of communal expectations and employment practices which acted to mitigate the disruption caused by pit closures. Through Thompson, an acknowledgement of historical specificity and the exercise of agency is inserted into the impersonal character of Polanyian approaches.¹ The analysis demonstrates the value of understanding the moral economy as an embodiment of the agents and practices which socially 'embedded' the operation of labour markets in the coal industry during the mid-twentieth century. Coal was central to the experience of British industrial relations across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and this article provides a contribution to an emergent historiography of the industry's contraction over the mid and late twentieth century.

¹ Bolton and Laaser. 'Work', 514.

By focusing on Lanarkshire, Phillips' previous work on the operation of a coalfield moral economy in Fife, on Scotland's east coast, is extended.² The origins of the moral economy's practices in colliery closures in eastern Lanarkshire during the late 1940s and early 1950s are foregrounded in the analysis which indicates Phillips' findings have a cross-Scotland coverage. Lanarkshire was Scotland's largest coalfield between the early nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. Unlike Fife, it experienced major colliery closures from the onset of coal's nationalisation in 1947.³ These experiences were formative in establishing the perspective adopted by the National Union of Mineworkers' Scottish Area (NUMSA) in later closures. This article constructs an analysis of how socio-economic dislocation and injustices under the private industry of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century framed worker and community expectations of individual and collective security under public ownership. It then examines the practices of the coalfield moral economy under the nationalised industry. The analysis is based on doctoral research including oral testimonies from former miners and members of mining families conducted in both a life-story and focus group format. These are supplemented by archival sources from the National Coal Board (NCB), including minutes of Colliery Consultative Committee (CCC) meetings between workforce representatives and management which took place during colliery closure proceedings. Within the minutes, the voices of working miners are heard alongside those of trade union leaders.

² Phillips. 'The Moral Economy and Deindustrialization'.

³ Duncan. *The Mineworkers*, 206-7

Figure 1 'Lanarkshire' Source: *Leviticus* <http://www2.luventicus.org/maps/scotland/lanarkshire.gif>

Conceptual Framework

There has been rising interest in Karl Polanyi from authors analysing changes in employment and industrial relations such as Guy Standing.⁴ Polanyi's 1944 work, *The Great Transformation*, argued the development of industrial capitalism imposed the logic of accumulation and the maximisation of narrowly defined economic utility over the social values and political objectives which had directed pre-industrial economies. However, this process was never complete. The economies of capitalist societies are not entirely disembedded from society, and this was paramount in the resistance to the marketisation of "fictitious" commodities: labour, land and money. These areas were the contested ground of the "double movement" as moves towards liberalisation met continual opposition to commodification. This took the form of attempts to maintain the embeddedness of markets through the imposition of social and political priorities by workers' organisations in both confluence and conflict with the state, which came to full fruition in the social and political crises of the 1930s.⁵

⁴ Standing. *Work After Globalization*, 32, 58.

⁵ Polanyi. *The Great Transformation*, passim.

Polanyi provides an important vantage point for a historically informed analysis of labour markets, giving a long-run perspective on the forces and institutions which have continually reshaped their operation. Strangleman's account of deindustrialization demonstrates the vitality of understanding the double movement as a process rather than an event. The disembedding of the economy from society can be read as "a trend against which various groups reacted to during the early and later stages of industrialisation."⁶ Polanyi's analysis has been criticised for tending towards an absolute reading of the disembedded market.⁷ In place this article adopts an approach influenced by Block's observation of the continually "ongoing" nature of the double movement which recognises "the always embedded economy".⁸ Looking to Block and Lasser's sophisticated development of the double movement, it utilises the concept of "marketness" to consider how the coal industry developed between "thin" and "thick" levels of embeddedness. Marketness relates to the extent to which the operation of markets is determined by profit motives, with either low ('thickly' embedded within social norms) or high ('thinly' embedded) possibilities.⁹ The reading in this case is broadly consistent with Dale's perspective of shifts towards a more thickly embedded labour market over the mid-twentieth century as national states took an increased responsibility for economic management, before a thinning as liberalised markets were asserted from the late 1970s.¹⁰ In accordance with Silver and Arrighi's critique, the necessity of identifying specific experiences, ideologies, and mechanisms of the double movement are addressed. This extends to the analysis of the dissolution of the coalfield moral economy's practices via the NCB's provision of financial compensation through large redundancy payments. These developments were evidence of the

⁶ Strangleman. 'Deindustrialization'.

⁷ Lie. 'Embedding', 222-3.

⁸ Block. 'Karl Polanyi', 296.

⁹ Ibid; Laaser. 'The Moral Economy', 14, 85.

¹⁰ Dale. 'Double Movements', 3.

“constraining influence of subordinate social forces” during the neoliberal era when states continued to exercise responsibility for social welfare.¹¹

Historical analysis of the moral economy originates with E.P. Thompson’s writings on the “crowd” of eighteenth century plebeian consumers who opposed the commodification of foodstuffs by enforcing customary practices of open market selling through disciplined direct action.¹² Thompson emphasised the role of “custom, culture and reason” with regard to methods deployed to protect communities from disruption by market forces.¹³ He later summarised the moral economy at a theoretical level, which centred on claims of “non-monetary rights” to resources, predicated on “community membership [which] supersedes price as a basis of entitlement.”¹⁴ Thompson’s conception has been deployed to study resistance to liberalised markets elsewhere. Examples include peasant studies from colonial South East Asia where varying methods were used to enforce customary rights to rice and other foodstuffs.¹⁵

The emergent historiography of coalfield deindustrialization in Scotland uses a Thompsonian approach, emphasising how “customs and expectations” shaped the management of pit closures under the nationalised industry. Perchard and Phillips highlight requirements of consultation and the provision of alternative employment.¹⁶ Phillips has developed this perspective, emphasising that “restructuring raised the expectations of Scottish workers, who anticipated a well-paid and stable future in return for relinquishing their jobs in established industries.”¹⁷ Closures were accepted as a price of rationalising coal through concentration into economically viable ‘super pits’. The acceptance of closures further related to industrial modernisation by releasing labour into the higher value-added engineering sectors being brought to Scotland through regional policy. These

¹¹ Silver and Arrighi. ‘Polanyi’s “Double Movement”’, 347.

¹² Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class*, 67-72.

¹³ Thompson. ‘The Moral Economy’, 77-79, 95-6.

¹⁴ Thompson. *Customs in Common*, 338-9.

¹⁵ Wells. ‘E.P. Thompson’, 284-289.

¹⁶ Perchard and Phillips. ‘Transgressing the Moral Economy’, 389.

¹⁷ Phillips. ‘The Moral Economy of Deindustrialization’, 2.

developments promised safer work and higher living standards, partly through creating employment opportunities for women.¹⁸

This paper extends analysis of the coalfield moral economy through theoretically and historically situating it and outlining specific practices enacted upon closure: transfers to pits within travel distance, and finding workers employment at appropriate grades. These are placed within the Polanyian double movement and the nationalised industry's system of industrial citizenship.. Industrial citizenship embedded colliery employment by instilling rights and responsibilities held by workers and management. In moral economy terms, it underlined the social responsibilities of the NCB, especially its obligation to enter consultation with trade unions and the workforce over the future development of the industry. This represented a response to the economic and social dislocation of the interwar British coalfields, and the conceptualising of novel forms of industrial relations during the thickening of market embeddedness of the 1930s and 1940s. Emphasis is placed upon workforce and community expectations of nationalisation which are understood as the product of historical experience, especially interwar unemployment, the victimisation of trade unionists, and the neglect of health and safety.

Coalfield History

Coal's strategic status as Britain's prime energy source and the conditions of underground work conditioned early episodes of state intervention. Health and safety regulation during the nineteenth century included characteristic elements of the double movement. The assertion of norms and values into the market's operations came via the "tangle of interests" Polanyi analysed as typical of social reform.¹⁹ Aristocratic politicians and state officials, alongside organised workers, were central

¹⁸ Phillips. 'Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy', 102-105.

¹⁹ Polanyi. *The Great Transformation*, 101.

in reforming mining conditions in line with prevailing moral standards. The 1842 Mines Act regulated the labour market by prohibiting women and boys under the age of ten from working underground. Parliamentary arguments in favour largely focused around the morality of women and children working in underground setting and mixing with the coarse culture of colliers.²⁰ Legislation was gradually extended to health and safety and the length of the working day. The state set standards for minimum conditions which were highly contested by coal owners and trade unions.²¹

When British coal production peaked in 1913 at 287 million tons, one third of which was exported, over 1.1 million worked in the sector, 10% of the British male workforce.²² The protracted decline that followed during the 1920s was associated with the inhibited attempts to re-establish liberal market norms following the First World War which Polanyi saw as the harbinger of social strife and the rise of fascism and autarky. The “complete destruction of the national institutions of nineteenth century society”, were visible in counter-movements which included protectionist barriers and the dislocation of free trade which British industrial development had depended on.²³ Within Britain, the challenge to the liberal order was marked by the depression in regions reliant on heavy industry and included two major episodes of coalfield class struggle: the miners’ lockouts of 1921 and 1926. These major disputes involved over a million workers and their families, and ultimately led to government interventions. Supple’s account of growing state involvement in coal mining during the 1930s, which reshaped industrial relations and business organisation, indicates the thickening of embeddedness which cumulated in nationalisation in 1947. Thus, coal not only amounts to more than a crucial case where “business and politics could not be kept apart”, its experience was “a test case for the embryonic mixed economy”.²⁴

²⁰ Mills. *Regulating Health and Safety*, 56-66.

²¹ Church. ‘Employers’, 28; McIvor, *A History of Work*, 133.

²² Supple. *The History of the British Coal Industry*, 5-7.

²³ Polanyi. *The Great Transformation*, 29-32.

²⁴ Supple. *The History of the British Coal Industry*, 348-353.

Fine's critique of the operation of government intervention during the interwar period contends that price setting, and control of investment, amounted to a situation whereby conventionally understood "capitalist relations of production had been eroded."²⁵ This related to the cushioning of unviable firms through the complex privately owned royalties system which was a disincentive to investment necessary to take advantage of economies of scale.²⁶ Fine has been countered by Greasley who argues, "British coalmining did not fail to reap substantial pit-level scale economies between the wars because these were unavailable."²⁷ The potential for improvement lay in wholesale investment in mining systems which was not viable in the depressed conditions of the interwar period, or in an industry which was in reality a complex multiplicity of industries and markets. Dintenfass' detailed account of four firms during the interwar period emphasises the distinction between the export-oriented Northumberland coalfield, which suffered from foreign competition and protectionist trends, and Yorkshire's relatively privileged position in serving domestic power station markets.²⁸ Coalfield development was marked by shifting geographical patterns of colliery closures and new sinkings as profitable reserves were exhausted or found elsewhere. Unemployment and community dislocation within the Scottish, Welsh and North East of England coalfields were resultantly increased by the concentration of investment within South Yorkshire and the English Midlands. State intervention was spurred by the "severe social problem, its wounds raw and obvious" in regions highly dependent on contracting coalfields.²⁹

Whilst coastal coalfields, such as Fife, prospered based on serving export markets, the inland Lanarkshire coalfield developed as the principal supplier for the county's steelworks. It was a key component of the heavy industrial nexus which characterised West-Central Scotland's economic development during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This included integrated ownership

²⁵ Fine. *The Coal Question* xi-xiii, 174.

²⁶ Fine. 'Economies of Scale', 448.

²⁷ Greasley. 'Economies of Scale in British Coalmining', 158.

²⁸ Dintenfass. *Managing Industrial Decline*, 416.

²⁹ Supple. 'The Political Economy of Demoralization', 566-568.

structures which linked coal, steel and shipbuilding. Lanarkshire firms such as Bairds and Colvilles were coal owners as well as steel magnates.³⁰ Coal mining employment peaked at nearly 60,000 in 1921, one in three employed men, after which this industrial structure entered drawn out crisis during the 1920s and 1930s.³¹ In the Lanarkshire context it was “depression in the major coal-consuming industries at home”, that was particularly marked in iron and steel and shipbuilding, which contributed to a major fall in demand.³² The coalfield was also suffering from heavy geological faulting and its decline was accepted by trade union representatives as well as mining engineers during the 1944 Scottish Coalfield Commission. This strategy was developed under the NCB, which focused investment and manpower upon ‘super pits’ in the most productive coalfields. Plans were drawn up to transfer labour from Lanarkshire to Scotland’s more productive eastern coalfields.³³ As demonstrated in tables one and two, Lanarkshire endured major workforce contraction from the onset of nationalisation before major closures took hold across Scotland, and the rest of the UK, from the late 1950s.

Table 1 Lanarkshire Coalfield Employment

Year	Mining
1951	20225
1961	13440
1966	6610
1971	3720
1981	1060

³⁰ Payne. *Growth and Contraction*, 17-26

³¹ Census of Scotland 1921 vol.1 part 22 County of Lanark Table E 1139.

³²Buxton. *The Economic Development of the British Coal Industry*, 173.

³³ Halliday. *The Disappearing Scottish Colliery*, 19-28.

Sources: *Census 1951 Scotland Vol. iv Occupation and Industries* Table 13 433-469; *Census 1961 Scotland Occupation and Industry County Tables Glasgow and Lanark Leaflet No.15* table 3 16-21; *Sample Census 1966 Scotland Economic Activity County Tables Leaflet No.3 Glasgow and Lanark* Table 3 33-44; *Census 1971 Scotland Economic Activity County Tables Part 2* Table 3; *Census 1981 Scotland Economic Activity 10% Strathclyde Region* Table 3

Table 2 Scottish Coalfield Employment

Year	Employment (thousands)
1947	77
1957	82
1967	32
1977	21
1987	6

Source: Oglethorpe. *Scottish Collieries*, p. 20.

The nationalisation of coal mining in 1947 was part of the broader post-Second World War thickening of labour markets; a heightened element of “social control was restored over the economy”, as the objective of full employment underpinned an enhanced role for state intervention.³⁴ The construction of an NCB structure based on union recognition and joint regulation at workplace level upwards represented a developed variety of the industrial citizenship Standing discusses as characterising developed economies after the Second World War.³⁵ This shift towards “humanised” industrial relations emphasised consultation with workers and their trade unions over major decisions including pit closures, which were discussed by consultative committees made up of management and workforce representatives.³⁶

³⁴ Polanyi Levitt. *From the Great Transformation*, 100.

³⁵ Standing. *Work After Globalization* 32.

³⁶ Tomlinson. ‘A ‘Failed Experiment’’, 235-239.

Robson's 1962 assessment of British nationalised industries features a section on industrial relations largely focused on coal that underlines the benefits of public ownership. He discussed the desire to combine miners' expectations of "better treatment in every respect from nationalized industries than they received under private enterprise" with the NCB's aim of "inculcating all who work in the organizations with a spirit of public service".³⁷ These values indicate the importance of social partnership in structuring moral economy understandings of colliery employment, but also the potential conflict between worker and colliery interests and those of the industry's economic targets and performance. This is discussed below in relation to Lanarkshire's experience of early closures as manpower and investment were diverted to other more productive coalfields. Gildart's analysis of mining autobiographies from North Wales indicated nationalisation was universally seen as "a defining moment" in achieving material improvements and a more democratic, "consensual", workplace culture. Gildart considers the role of written histories and public discourses in influencing miners' own perspective. As is discussed below, these themes were present in the Lanarkshire testimonies. Within a Scottish setting the NUMSA's institutional narrative emphasised both historical injustices and the achievements of the nationalised industry. This transmitted within community and workforce memory to shape expectations of public ownership and narratives of NCB employment.³⁸

Methodology

Much of the analysis in this article is based on oral testimonies from over thirty men and women with the addition of two focus groups. The interviewees were recruited through a variety of methods, with most participants being found through 'snowballing' via existing contacts, but some were also found through local press adverts.³⁹ Recruitment was biased towards former trade union

³⁷ Robson. *Nationalized Industry*, 319-20.

³⁸ Gildart. 'Mining Memories', 144-5.

³⁹ Knight. *Small-Scale Research*, 65.

activists, which was a product of the contact networks that snowballing was conducted through. It also reflects the tendency of activists to retain social and emotional connections with movements they took part in.⁴⁰ However, narratives were also gathered from former miners who were not supporters of the NUMSA leadership's Communist-influenced politics, including individuals who had a history of involvement with Orange Order activities. This concurs with Campbell's understanding of the Lanarkshire coalfield as marked by left-wing trade union activities and a significant Communist presence, but also including significant sectarian divisions which formed the basis for opposition to socialist politics.⁴¹ Reference to the history of these divisions within the industrial struggles of the private industry is made below, as is testament that moral economy sentiment was shared across them.

The cultural circuit was developed by oral historians to conceptualise the non-linear relationship between personal experience and public historical narratives. Recollection involves an "interactive construction"; testimonies entail an act of cultural production shaped by hegemonic versions of historical memory.⁴² Oral history theory emphasises how a circuit's "conceptual and definitional effects" have shaped memories in line with dominant accounts. Summerfield's account of women's experiences of labour and civil defence during the Second World War related to "general-public forms" that demarked the need for national unity but differentiated women's domestic role from male military heroism.⁴³ Similarly, Alistair Thomson stresses that for Australian First World War veterans, "memories were entangled with the myth" of the ANZAC 'Diggers' which retains nation-building significance. However, noting the possibilities for subaltern perspectives to express themselves and contest hegemonic recollections, Thomson also asserted that counter-hegemonic

⁴⁰ Fielding and Thomas. 'Qualitative Interviewing', 260; Stizia. 'Telling Arthur's Story', 633-4; Kirk, *Class, Culture*, 163-5.

⁴¹ Campbell. *The Scottish Miners*, 277-289. The Orange Order is a closed Protestant and Loyalist organisation.

⁴² Popular Memory Group. 'Popular Memory', p.44; Abrams. *Oral History Theory*, 18.

⁴³ Summerfield. *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 14.

narratives can be sustained by appeals to the memory of “particular publics”.⁴⁴ Perchard exemplifies this through his analysis of the “deep cultural scars of deindustrialization” within narratives of colliery closures in the Fife coalfield. These have extrapolated individual and collective experiences of deindustrialization and community decline to a Scottish national narrative of unjustly imposed industrial contraction.⁴⁵

The cultural circuit of coalfield memory developed based on the collective memory of mining communities. It had a powerful basis in family histories and communal recollections of industrial conflict and mass unemployment. The cultural circuit was also shaped by the NUMSA’s institutional narrative which placed the union within a long history of miners’ struggles against injustice. R. Page Arnot, a Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) activist and sometime NUM official, published *A History of the Scottish Miners* in 1955. This accorded with the perspective of the NUMSA’s leadership which included prominent CPGB figures and influence from its foundation in 1945. Arnot’s account made the predominant understanding of coalfield history within the NUMSA explicit and codified within a written volume. His sentiments were reproduced within the testimonies, indicating that his perspective was placed within the perspective view of the NUMSA. Arnot’s book was recommended by some interviewees, and his emphasis on miners’ “record of suffering and of heroic struggle against the soulless mine-owner”, was shared by many respondents. Arnot detailed the conditions of the early industrial revolution period, using quotations from the 1840 Children’s Employment Commission to recreate the horrific conditions in which children as young as seven years old worked up to thirteen hours per day.⁴⁶ In line with the dominant perspective within the NUMSA, he went on to profile the achievement of trade union consultation within the NCB’s social democratic infrastructure. An understanding of the legacy of struggle over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and of the meaning of nationalisation, was crucial to shaping the operation of the moral

⁴⁴ Thomson. ‘Anzac Memories’, 301-2.

⁴⁵ Perchard. “Broken Men”, 79-80.

⁴⁶ Arnot. *A History of the Scottish Miners*, p.12, 20-28.

economy's customs. In Arnot's account the wartime construction of a Scotland-wide and then subsequently Britain-wide miners' union during the 1940s was presented as a key achievement of "men who were not prepared to be put off by the difficulties and obstacles that had baffled their predecessors", and as an accompaniment to nationalisation.⁴⁷

The testimonies are supplemented by reflections from a focus group conducted among a retired miners' group in Moodiesburn, North Lanarkshire, with dialogue largely revolving around experiences of industrial relations and colliery closure. A second focus group was conducted in Shotts, North Lanarkshire, comprising of a local history group whose members came from coal mining backgrounds. Neither of these groups were dominated by former activists. The dialogue was more fragmentary than the life-story interviews and focused upon shared elements of social life in a community and workplace setting. The benefit of this came from 'generative' content. Participant interaction driving dialogue and demonstrated the links and connections through which the cultural circuit operates.⁴⁸

Where possible the narratives have been linked with relevant archival materials to verify their accuracy. This was achievable in discussions of colliery closures through the details of CCC minutes. However, as Portelli has stated, oral history "tells us less about events than about their meaning."⁴⁹ The focus of the analysis centres on how closures have been absorbed within the cultural circuit and shaped collective conceptions of fairness and social justice. Elements of nostalgia, defined by Davis as a sense of "ostensibly lost values, the sense of some ineffable spirit of worth or goodness having escaped time", are apparent from the recollections of the nationalised coal industry.⁵⁰ However, these are tempered by "critical nostalgia". Bonnett has theorised that critical forms of nostalgia are

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp.252-3.

⁴⁸ Finch and Lewis. 'Focus Groups', 10.

⁴⁹ Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different', 36.

⁵⁰ Davis. *Yearning*, 13.

necessary in critical reflection which identifies what has been lost in historical transition. This allows for the “radical imagination” to conceptualise a grounded perspective on historical experiences, which is particularly apparent in memories of closure and job loss.⁵¹ Thus, the reflection of the narratives is tempered by the details of the archives, but they also reveal the construction of history, powerfully shaped by collective memory, was central in understandings of the nationalised industry and perceptions of the NCB’s social responsibility in overseeing closures.

Foundations of the Moral Economy An understanding of the importance of coal was articulated in the testimonies. Billy Maxwell from Muirhead in North Lanarkshire, who worked at Cardowan colliery between the 1957 and 1979, stated during the Moodiesburn focus group that, “miners for centuries as I said to you before were fuelling the industry ae Great Britain. They were the most important ingredient in the making of wealth.” He also claimed “deep mining in the industrial revolution financed the world we have today”, and underlined this was “at the cost ae a lot of miners.” An awareness of the true ‘price of coal’, juxtaposing arguments relating to financial costs to that of lost miners’ lives, was compounded by the claim that miners did not abuse their power: “the miners could ae held the country to ransom at that time [, during the 1950s] and didnae dae it cause they were too decent a people.”⁵² As well as relaying his own experience, Billy had undertaken research into local mining experiences and pit disasters during the nineteenth century. His perspective was framed by the cultural circuit’s emphasis on the long experience of injustice and collective mobilisation of miners. A sense of the social and economic importance of coal was combined with an awareness of the dangers endured by the workforce. This furthered a moral economy perspective based on the obligation of the state as an employer to reciprocate the miners’ “decent” conduct.

⁵¹ Bonnet. *Left in the Past*, 1-3.

⁵² Moodiesburn Focus Group.

Billy's moral argumentation is indicative of how historical memory shaped understandings of public ownership's regulated, thickened, labour markets. Interwar experiences of social dislocation, especially unemployment, the victimisation of trade unionists, neglectful health and safety, and the treatment of disabled miners, conditioned expectations of the nationalised industry. Jessie Clark is from Douglas Water, South Lanarkshire. She was the daughter and wife of Communist miners, and an active party member herself when she worked in Douglas colliery's canteen during the 1940s. Jessie recalled that within the village during the 1930s the Coltness Iron Company victimised trade unionists and attempted to divide the community through discriminatory employment practices which favoured members of the Masons, a protestant secret society:

My father was a union man and during the '30s when I was growing up my father was unemployed quite a lot, you know it was a question of first out you know last in. And I have no doubt I have no doubt, eh, there were people who, eh, I'm afraid there's two things that, the enemies, that my father always talked about was the likes of the landowners and the Masonic Lodge.⁵³

Jessie summarised nationalisation as social justice, underlining the importance of workplace participation and consultation: "getting rid of the coal owners and there was going to be a bit more democracy you know within the, the, eh working area."⁵⁴

Memories of the private industry's injustices were mentioned by respondents who lack Jessie's direct connection with the interwar period. This was indicative that NUMSA's institutional narrative and the historical perspective, encapsulated by Arnot, transmitted inter-generationally. Mick McGahey, a third-generation Communist miner, and the son of the trade union leader of the same

⁵³ Jessie Clark, interview.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

name, recalled that victimisation uprooted his family and prevented them from settling stably elsewhere. In line with the constellation of industrial relations and geological and investment factors pointed to above, these circumstances led to Mick's family leaving the declining Lanarkshire coalfield to the expanding Kent coalfield in the south of England:

My father was born in Shotts, my family was born in Shotts, and once eh they moved fae pit tae pit cause miners were like gypsies at that time the pits were owned by coal owners, werenae nationalised. So in my grandfather's day eh y'know they moved when they were victimised. My grandfather was involved in the 1926 general strike, he got sent to jail, he did six month in the jail. My grandmother got evicted, family oot the pit owner's hoose, and they ended up in Kent and they moved aboot the coalfields in England and eventually came back to Scotland and settled in Cambuslang [South Lanarkshire].⁵⁵

Mick's testimony exemplifies Campbell's "genealogies of victimisation and radicalism" which reinforced the moral economy view of coalfield employment as a community resource struggled for in decades of mobilisation. His father was victimised when involved in a strike at Gateside, Cambuslang, in 1943, and Mick himself was sacked during the 1984-5 miners' strike.⁵⁶

However, these recollections were not exclusive to Communists. The impact of injury and unemployment was emphasised during the Moodiesburn focus group by Peter Downie. Peter's political stance was influenced by a history of involvement in Orange Order activities and his narrative included a deferential view towards the royal family. Yet, Peter framed his own experience within the cultural circuit's emphasis of injustice and the struggle for nationalisation. Peter's father was involved in an accident at Bedlay colliery, North Lanarkshire, in 1938 and not provided with

⁵⁵ Mick McGahey. interview.

⁵⁶ Mick McGahey, interview; Campbell. 'Scotland', 184-5; McIlroy and Campbell. 'Beyond Betteshanger 2', 74-5.

either adequate social security or work to suit his condition. His family grew up in poverty and he was “raised on the parish”. In Peter’s view this was part of a longer history of economic insecurity:

When you go and take your history from the 1840s, the 1840s, onwards they were living in deprivation. The miners were living in deprivation because the situation was that they couldnae feed the weans that they haved and they were living in wooden shackles shacks, stane flares, and the weans had rickets born weakness and the people who helped them was very very little. The coal owners gave them nothing.

He summed this up in another discussion by stating that “up to 1947 the men were living in deprivation”.⁵⁷

Practice and Dissolution of the Moral Economy: Lanarkshire, 1947-1983

The NCB’s structures of industrial citizenship were shaped by a commitment to the joint regulation of the industry with workforce representatives, as well as through efforts to maintain secure long-term employment, and improve both remuneration and conditions. Industrial citizenship was enthused by a moral ethos of workforce engagement which instilled the joint responsibilities that workers and management held to build a successful nationalised industry. Peter Mansell-Mullen, who worked in NCB management from the early 1950s, and became Director for Manpower in 1971, recalled the perceived centrality of coal and the importance ascribed to its transformation under public ownership. However, in his view the variety of workforce consultation within the nationalised industry was shaped from the beginning by the fact unions continued to operate as organisations that represented worker interests vis a vis management. Thus, consultation was always qualified and never full “socialisation” or ‘workers’ control’:

⁵⁷ Moodiesburn Focus Group. ‘Weans’ is West of Scotland dialect meaning children.

The idea was that if they all came together and nationalised and they ran up flags and things this would be a new attitude and a new hope. Ehm, and it was terribly important at the time. Ernie Bevin said things like “if I had another ten million tons of coal a year it would change my foreign policy.” Things like this. So, eh the place was ripe for change, and it needed capital, and it needed confidence. Eh, there had been a lot of discussion beforehand as to where the miners fitted in in terms of management. Which is a, this is the difference some people make between nationalisation and socialisation. Ehm, the unions on the whole take the view that they wanted to go on being unions.⁵⁸

As is elaborated below, these distinctions became important as unions continued to assert distinct workforce interests against the NCB’s perception of the industry’s requirement of rationalisation during colliery closures.

Discussion within the focus group in Shotts, a former coal mining centre in North Lanarkshire, demonstrated the association between public ownership and both improved pay and health and safety standards was fundamental in shaping mineworkers’ attitude towards nationalisation:

Ewan Gibbs: How did nationalisation change things?

Betty Turnwood: The Coal Board.

⁵⁸ Peter Mansell-Mullen, interview. Ernest Bevin was Foreign Secretary in the Labour governments between 1945 and 1951.

Willie Hamilton: It improved the miners' conditions tremendously y'know. As I say it was practically slavish y'know wi the private owners then you had a bit of independence after that. The money wisnae great mind you it could have been better but eh but eh I think.

Ella Muir: Did you have more security?

Willie Hamilton: Very much more. And as I said they opened new pits and that the miners moved away.

Bill Paris: It became safer as well.

Willie Hamilton: The safety side aw the mines was greatly improved, especially the support in the roofs and so forth. With the private owner he skimped on the material used to support the roof but when the Coal Board come in they upgraded everything.⁵⁹

Elements of nostalgia for communal pasts and working lives were apparent in this discussion. Other respondents also emphasised the self-worth and cohesiveness the NCB granted. For instance, Pat Egan, from Twechar, North Lanarkshire, followed his father and grandfather by starting work at Bedlay colliery during the late 1970s. Pat recalled employment being found for men with physical and learning disabilities who "were always looked after".⁶⁰ However, interviewees also indicated a capacity for critical nostalgia which noted the impact of nationalisation in less positive tones. During the broadly favourable account of nationalisation within the Shotts focus group Bobby Flemming recalled major colliery closures as investment and manpower were concentrated on more profitable coalfields:

⁵⁹ Shotts Focus Group. For details on the NCB's health and safety performance see McIvor and Johnston, *Miners Lung*, 203-221.

⁶⁰ Pat Egan, interview.

After nationalisation they more or less they started shuttin the Shotts pits. Nationalisation wisnae good for the Shotts pits because they had worked their butts off for the war effort. It got to the stage at the end of the war the pits were aw exhausted, it wisnae a good area. The nationalised industries were looking for big pits where they took out high volumes.⁶¹

The Shotts experience was a formative period for the moral economy which conditioned the more sensitive management of redundancy and transfer in future closures. Tension between the NCB's economic priorities and community cohesion were summed up in 1950 by the NUMSA President, Abe Moffat, responding to the proposed closure of Baton colliery when he stated: "the Board should realise that they were not discussing a Mining Engineer's opinion but the social life of a mining village."⁶² The NCB's strategy centred on encouraging labour mobility, and was signified by W. Drylie, the Area Industrial Relations Officer, who upon the closure of Longlea colliery in 1949 advised "local men, particularly young men", to seek transfers within Scotland.⁶³ Baldwin's 1955 appraisal of industrial relations within the NCB singled out the early experience of colliery closures in Lanarkshire as a major "test" of the nationalised industry. This pivotally related to closures which were "dictated by economics and not by nature." Baldwin emphasised that the NUMSA were rhetorically committed to support coalfield rationalisation, as the unions had been during the 1944 Coal Commission. However, before its headquarters moved from Glasgow to Edinburgh during the late 1940s, the NUMSA tended to tolerate local opposition to closures in the face of significant pressure.⁶⁴ The

⁶¹ Shotts Focus Group.

⁶² National Records of Scotland (hereafter NRS)/National Coal Board (hereafter CB)/222/14/1/21A Notes of Proceedings Between the Scottish Divisional Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers (Scottish Area) Regarding the Proposed Closure of Baton Colliery held at no.58 Palmerston lace Edinburgh, on Monday 8th May, 1950.

⁶³ NRS/CB/295/14/1/1E Fortisat CCC Thursday 27th January 1949; NRS/CB/295/14/1 Fortistat Colliery CC Minutes of Meeting Held in Colliery Office 15th February 1949.

⁶⁴ Baldwin. *Beyond Nationalization*, 249-257.

findings from archival research detailed below suggest that there was an early contestation over principles governing investment policy within the nationalised industry.

The contested debate about investment during closures during the early nationalised period indicates an absence of consensus over the responsibilities of the NCB, as well as differences over the extent to which joint regulation merited worker and community control over the industry's development and assets. J. Todd, the NUM pit delegate at Baton summed up the moral economy argument stating that, "If the NCB are making profits, surely they can spend some to save a district getting derelict. The profitable pits should help the others not doing so well".⁶⁵ However, the NUMSA's grievances during the Shotts closures tended towards mechanics and procedure. Between the late 1940s and early 1950s the coalfield moral economy's operation was constructed in relation to securing employment for workers through transfer to appropriate work and the legitimisation of closure through consultation with worker representatives. This was visible through episodes that sparked disagreement. In 1948, having provided 70 houses for transferees in Fife, the NCB began redundancies at Broomside colliery, North Lanarkshire, before closure was agreed. Abe Moffat saw these actions as pre-emptive. He argued it went against stipulation as closure had not yet been sanctioned by trade unions.⁶⁶ During the closure of Baton grievances centred on moves towards closure without transfers to stated graded positions at other collieries, which the NCB acted to ameliorate after Moffat raised problems arising from recent closures.⁶⁷

A sense of policy-maker social responsibility was evident in August 1948, when H.S. Phillips, the Board of Trade researcher for Scotland, commenting on Shotts, argued that "the transfer method is only an additional and short term method of reducing male unemployment." This related to social

⁶⁵ NRS/CB/222/14/1/5C Baton CCC minutes of meeting 24th January 1950.

⁶⁶ NRS/CB/483/24/1/6A Divisional Consultative Committee point 127 Broomside Colliery (1948).

⁶⁷ NRS/CB/222/14/1/29A Note of proceedings between the Scottish Divisional Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers (Scottish Area) Regarding the Proposed Closure of Baton Colliery Held at No.58 Palmerston Place Edinburgh on Thursday 18th May 1950.

circumstances: “quite a high proportion of unemployed persons are not prepared, or able, to move more than a short distance.” Phillips argued that the situation in Shotts justified a “take work to the workers” policy.⁶⁸ Two years later a Board of Trade research team studied Shotts and concluded that although some emigration was desirable, limited success had already been attained in attracting light industry and that further developments were necessary “to preserve and balance the community on a smaller scale.”⁶⁹ These conclusions were further supported by a study conducted by Hazel E. Heughan of Edinburgh University in 1953. Heughan documented a reluctance to migrate despite promises of better living conditions and more secure employment in Fife, underlining that Shotts miners “shrunk from uprooting themselves because of the fear of loneliness in exchanging their friendly social life for one in which they are thrown upon their own devices.”⁷⁰

The failure of the NCB to secure the anticipated large-scale redeployment of miners across coalfields, and policy-maker acceptance of responsibility to provide employment, established the broad practice for colliery closures between the 1950s and early 1980s across Scotland outlined in the existing literature. Closures were ameliorated through consultation and by offers of transfer to appropriate graded positions within commuting distance of existing homes. Furthermore, labour market security was ensured through regional policy that directed manufacturing inward investment towards contracting coalfields.⁷¹ The moral economy was constructed within the broader Polanyian context of social embeddedness, but also had a basis in the specific moral economy practices of negotiation and securing alternative employment. Demands for the maintenance of joint regulation were constant across the closure process, and their breach was pivotal in the collapse of the moral

⁶⁸ NRS/SEP/4/762 H.S. Phillips, ‘Research Studies: Geographical Movement of Labour’ date.9th August 1948.

⁶⁹ NRS/SEP/4/762 Research Team “‘Geographical Movement of Labour’-Research Section Board of Trade (Scotland)’ date.4th August 1950.

⁷⁰ Heughan, *Pit Closures*, 12.

⁷¹ Perchard and Phillips. ‘Transgressing the Moral Economy’, 93; Jim Phillips, ‘Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy’.

economy's operation during the 1980s. However, there was also a major shift in the character of pit transfer over the period as the definition of the locale was radically altered by the shrinking of the industry and rising travel to work distances.

Figure 2 'Map of Peter Downie's Travel to Work' source *Google Maps* [accessed 9/12/2014].

Following the Shotts experience, for the most part, migration was turned down in favour of extended travelling distances, either to larger pits such as Cardowan and Bedlay, or to other industries. This acted to maintain residential communities but came at the cost of longer daily commutes. The extension of travelling to work was an incremental process with waves of closures increasing distances. The map above demonstrates Peter Downie's trajectory of employment in the Scottish coalfields. He started working in his local village pit of Glentore during the 1950s before transferring to the adjacent Grayhill and then the somewhat longer commute of around 9 miles to Bedlay. Following the closure of Bedlay in 1982 he transferred further afield, to Polkemmet in West Lothian, 17 miles from his home in Greengairs. Peter ended his working life at the Solsgirth mine,

part of the Longannet complex in Clackmannan, which involved a daily commute of nearly 30 miles across central Scotland, amounting to a round trip of almost 60 miles.⁷²

The NCB was restructured when coal employment's decline accelerated during the 1960s, as detailed in table one. Growing authority passed to its London based headquarters, Hobart House.⁷³ Increasingly capital-intensive production methods bolstered pressures to concentrate investment and manpower in the most productive coalfields in the English Midlands. Along with falling demand for coal, this accelerated the rundown of the Scottish coalfield.⁷⁴ This stretched the legitimacy of consultation. At proceedings before the closure of Gartshore 9/11, North Lanarkshire, in 1968, a Colliery Officials and Staff Association representative articulated his discontent at the growing remoteness of control. Emergent geographical and social distances questioned the value of commitments to regulation by the customs of industrial citizenship, and therefore threatened the embedding the industry's operation within workforce and community conceptions of social justice:

It used to be that the Colliery Manager had to plan out his own Pit, then Area officials took control of this and now we find that the planning for the Pit is done 500 miles away.

Handouts were all right, if unavoidable, but men wanted to work.⁷⁵

Perchard's research suggests these feelings were shared by the lower rungs of management. At colliery level the imposition of centralised control increased from the late 1950s onwards as the industry entered contradiction and more stringent financial and output targets were imposed.⁷⁶ The moral economy's basis in local community bonds was also implicated by Lord Robens' account of his

⁷² Moodiesburn Focus Group.

⁷³ Halliday. *The Disappearing Scottish Colliery*, 107-8.

⁷⁴ Ashworth. *The History of the British Coal*, 87-102, 264-5.

⁷⁵ NRS/CB/300/14/1/Minutes of Special Consultative Committee Meeting of Gartshore 9/11 Colliery Consultative Committee Held in Grayhill Office on Thursday 18th January, 1968.

⁷⁶ Perchard. *The Mine Management Professions*, 180-184.

chairmanship of the NCB from 1961 to 1971. Robens referred to “a Scottish pit with a very limited life” where “a solid alliance of local management backed up by the local unions” resisted transfer schemes to the English Midlands.⁷⁷

Joint regulation and the organising of transfers were fundamental factors in the final dissolution of the moral economy. The closure of Bedlay colliery in 1982 was the last moral economy closure in Scotland. After extensive discussions with trade unions over “several months”, and a “joint examination of all possible areas of reserves” closure was agreed due to “insurmountable geological conditions.”⁷⁸ Employment at other Scottish collieries was found for those in the workforce who did not wish to retire. Although the NCB undertook these costs its accountants objected to a net loss of £3.3 million through redundancy, transfer and pension payments, but most of all were concerned at taking on 340 extra workers without increasing production and prescribed a solution of an additional 340 redundancies.⁷⁹ This is indicative of the economic disembedding associated with neoliberal restructuring which included the imposition of unitarist industrial relations practices and the abandonment of an economic policy of full employment. Within the NCB this had greater resonance following the Coal Industry Act 1980. Ashworth concluded that its removal of subsidies and disavowal of long-term energy policy and coalfield investment planning meant it has been “drawn so as to make it almost impossible to operate the industry in the way it had been operating until then.”⁸⁰ Thus, the coal industry moved towards a thinned market and removal from the social norms in which its employment practices had been embedded under nationalisation.

⁷⁷ Robens. *Ten Year Stint*, 103-6.

⁷⁸ NRS/CB/223/14/3/ P.M. Moullin Deputy Secretary NCB, London, to P. McPake, Bedlay, Glenboig date.30th November 1981.

⁷⁹ NRS/CB/223/14/3/Memorandum from Area Chief Accountant to Area Director subject Closure of Bedlay date.4th November 1981.

⁸⁰ Ashworth. *The History of the British Coal Industry*, 352.

The NCB accountants' mentality at Bedlay preceded a more aggressive management style at the closure of Lanarkshire's last colliery, Cardowan, in 1983. It took place on economic grounds, a far more contentious basis than exhaustion, and was a key episode preceding the outbreak of the 1984-5 miners' strike.⁸¹ In 2014 Nicky Wilson, a former electrician at Cardowan and presently Scottish President of the NUM, echoed NUMSA President Mick McGahey's comments from a consultative committee meeting both attended in 1983. Cardowan's "high grade coking coal" lost British Steel Corporation's contract to supply the nearby Ravenscraig steelworks, which followed thinning market logic by switching to imports during the early 1980s. This resulted in a situation where the NCB had to "mix it wi a lotta rubbish" for lower value power station use.⁸² However, the fundamental contention was the subversion of joint regulation. Albert Wheeler, the NCB's Scottish Area Director, made this clear at the same Consultative Committee meeting when he stated that "he wanted the opinion of the 1090 men employed at the colliery and not just the few who attended branch meetings."

In place of negotiation with trade union representatives he made an "offer" of redundancy payments, including a lump sum payment of up to £20,000, and pensions of up to £100 a week for men over the age of 50, and promised protected earnings and transfer allowances for younger men.⁸³ Nicky's comments on the quality of Cardowan's product underline that joint regulation was stimulated by occupational pride and recognition of the vital role coal played in sustaining the British economy. Cardowan's closure disavowed industrial citizenship as joint regulation was jettisoned in favour of aggressive anti-trade unionism. Compensation was provided to individual workers for transfers and redundancies in return for the acceptance of managerial prerogative. This confirms the moral economy amounted to more than redress for those suffering from the impact of labour

⁸¹ Phillips. 'Energy and Industrial', 56-7.

⁸² Nicky Wilson, interview; National Mining Museum Scotland Archives (hereafter NMM)/FC/3/2/3/2/Appendix 1 Special Extended Colliery Consultative Committee Meeting held in the Parochial Hall, Stepps, Firday 13th May 1983.

⁸³ Ibid.

market instability. The moral economy was defined by assertions of community control of resources, collieries and the employment they provided, and conferring legitimacy on decision making within the NCB through dialogue with worker representatives and trade unions.

By the time of the trade unions' appeal against closure in September 1983 300 men had already left Cardowan, which both McGahey and Arthur Scargill, national NUM President, argued went against closure procedure. Transfers were used to undermine workforce solidarity and collective agreements across the Scottish coalfields, leading to far greater incidents of inter-workforce disputes than the tensions unearthed at previous transfers over access to skilled positions. Grievances centred on the undermining of joint regulation, with strikes following the entrance of unnegotiated transferees.⁸⁴ The most serious moral economy transgression took place at Polmaise in Stirlingshire where Cardowan men were transferred in June 1983 whilst the pit was undergoing reconstruction. This breached promises to local miners who had been assured of first refusal on employment at the redeveloped colliery and led to the NUM branch pursuing a policy of non-cooperation with unnegotiated transferees, which contributed to a lockout at the pit.⁸⁵

Conclusion

The development of industrial relations in the Scottish coal industry was strongly shaped by conceptions of social justice and economic fairness. This article places the management of colliery closures within a Polanyian frame. It demonstrates the vitality of the double movement as developed by Block and Lasser. Industrial relations and the management of the industry's development were continually contested by the pressures of commodifying market forces and a counter-movement of organised workers and state officials. The latter were behind the coal

⁸⁴ NMM/FC/3/2/3/2/Background Brief for National Appeal Meeting on Cardowan Colliery.

⁸⁵ Brotherstone. 'Energy Workers', 144.

industry's embeddedness during mid-twentieth century before liberalising pressures asserted an increased marketness during the 1980s. Polanyi provides a means to analyse the long-term historical trends, and ongoing contradictions, within which the nationalised industry developed. A Thompsonian moral economy analysis illuminates the specific practices and agents of embeddedness, and its connection to conceptions of social justice defined by experience and reflection. The inclusion of both archival sources and oral testimonies demonstrate the importance of thick description and considering historical memory through the transmission of the cultural circuit which was central in framing the development of industrial relations customs and expectations.

This extends the existing work on the Scottish coalfield moral economy which has been pioneered by Phillips and Perchard by illuminating the importance of historical reflection to the moral economy. Its practices were strongly influenced by the history of coalfield communities, especially the dislocation and class conflicts of the interwar period. Through the operation of a powerful cultural circuit these transmitted across generations and shaped expectations of the nationalised industry. This was lent institutional support by the NUMSA, and attained influence over miners who were not supportive of the Communist orthodoxies which broadly predominated within the union's structures. The findings of this article extend Phillips' analysis of the moral economy in Fife with a perspective of its operation in Lanarkshire, Scotland's largest coalfield on the NCB's vesting. It points to the origins of moral economy practices in the initially disputed process of colliery closures and the failure of large-scale coalfield migration schemes within the Shotts area. These experiences conferred the NCB's later policy of offering miners transfers within travelling distance of their homes upon closures. In this sense the Polanyian framework offers a valuable insight to the dynamic process of ongoing conflict between commodifying and decommodifying forces. Rather than simply a product of the consultative structures emphasised in Ashworth's official history of the Coal Board, the "humanised relations" of the nationalised industry discussed by Tomlinson were the result of

processes of social embedding that continued to develop after 1947. These findings assert the importance of historical specificity and consciousness to the conceptions of social justice that structured the NCB's operation of joint industrial regulation, and specifically its management of closure. Whilst Guy Standing's metaphor of the industrial citizen remains valuable it is thus also key to reflect on the particular histories and distinct elements of consciousness that structured the social embedding of industrial economies after 1945.

These concerns demonstrate the vitality in generalising Lasser and Bolton's approach of supplementing an analysis of the Polanyian structural contradictions between social stability and market liberalisation with an emphasis on Thompsonian workforce conceptions of social justice. Colliery closure was socially embedded through practices which aimed at preserving community cohesion through the provision of transfers to nearby collieries and the bolstering of local labour markets via the operation of manufacturing investment secured by regional policy. Legitimacy was conferred on closures through consultation and the exercise of worker 'voice', which remained paramount between the 1940s and 1980s. This was confirmed in the dissolution of the moral economy during the 1980s, when the thinning of the coal industry's embeddedness entailed the destruction of the NCB's structures of joint regulation but the maintenance of financial compensation for workers through redundancy and transfer payments. The workforce's response to these changes, which were instrumental in stimulating the year-long 1984-5 miners' strike, demonstrates that the moral economy entailed far more than compensation for labour market displacement. It was pivoted on key questions of the exercise of 'voice' and industrial governance.

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