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The UCS Work-in, Jimmy Airlie and Deindustrialisation in Scotland from the 1960s to the 1990s

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The workforce and trade resistance to closure at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in 1971-72 was highly unusual in format, neither a strike nor an occupation, but a *work-in*. Employees threatened with redundancy continued to report for work, moving ships under production on towards completion. Its highly positive outcome was likewise remarkable. Large-scale shipbuilding employment was preserved on the Upper Clyde. The shop stewards assembled and mobilised a broad-based coalition which pushed Edward Heath's Conservative government to recapitalise three of the threatened four yards. The work-in therefore tends to be understood either as a foundational moment, when workers effected a veto on industrial closure, or a highly singular phenomenon, where particularly courageous and class-conscious leadership emerged victorious. Subsequent struggles against industrial redundancies across the United Kingdom were often inspired by the UCS case but tended also to be measured unfavourably against it when unable to secure comparable mass support and winning results.¹

This article shows that the work-in was neither foundational nor singular as an exercise in working-class activism. It stemmed, in fact, from an established labour movement campaign in Scotland against economic insecurity arising from industrial job loss. The stewards articulated a moral-economy understanding of deindustrialisation that was influenced strongly by trade unionists in the coalfields. Miners had accepted pit closures in the late 1950s and 1960s, but only if their individual and communal futures were protected. This moral economy of deindustrialisation, which prioritised trade-union voice in policy-making and workplaces as best guarantor of collective security, extended into other sectors. It was present during the work-in, but even on the Upper Clyde there was a notable shipbuilding precedent, with the Labour government-supported Fairfield 'Experiment' of 1965-67 accommodating worker concessions on employment practices in exchange for increased security and voice.² The moral economy of deindustrialisation assumed different phases. In the late 1950s and 1960s there was a rapid contraction of employment in the staple industries, especially coal, but also in metals, shipbuilding and textiles. This was accompanied by marked growth in engineering generally and assembly goods manufacturing in particular. As this

¹ Michael Bailey, 'Changing Tides of Industrial Democracy: Red Clydeside and the UCS Work-in as Political Heritage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25.12 (2019), pp. 1319-1388; Alan Tuckman, 'After UCS: Workplace Occupation in the UK in the 1970s', *Labour History Review*, 86.1 (2021), pp. 7-35.

² James McGoldrick, 'Industrial Relations and the Division of Labour in the Shipbuilding Industry since the War', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 21.2 (1983), pp. 197-220, with detail at pp. 211-12.

stalled, in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was renewed emphasis in labour-movement campaigning and policy-making on the stabilisation of employment in coal, metals and shipbuilding. Hence the crisis of 1971-2 was resolved with a retained large-scale presence of shipbuilding on the Upper Clyde. The election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979 initiated a distinct third phase in the management of deindustrialisation. Thatcher and her ministers transgressed the moral-economy expectations of Scottish workers. Industrial job losses mounted rapidly. Unemployment escalated. Trade-union influence was curtailed through targeted employment and industrial relations legislation. It was not a failure of courage or ambition among labour-movement leaders that weakened the defence of industrial jobs in the 1980s and 1990s. The structural realities of the new environment, acutely hostile to trade-union organisation and working-class solidarity, made this task enormously difficult.

The fiftieth anniversary of the work-in in 2021 prompted various exercises in commemoration and reflection,³ some organised by the Jimmy Reid Foundation, which derives its name from the shop steward most strongly associated with the defence of the yards.⁴ This article traces the backwards and forwards connections from 1971-2 by focusing on 'the other Jimmy'. Reid's Communist and engineering union comrade, Jimmy Airlie, was arguably the work-in's chief strategic thinker. Airlie's working life commenced in the 1950s during the first phase of deindustrialisation. He was a shop steward at Fairfield before and during the Experiment. His activism at UCS and then at Govan Shipbuilders helped to maintain employment in the yards during the second phase of deindustrialisation. In 1979 he became a full-time official in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW). His subsequent career was spent in service of members whose working conditions were adversely affected, and their jobs threatened and lost, in the third phase of deindustrialisation. It is tempting to juxtapose Airlie as the heroic victor of 1971-2 with Airlie as the defeated compromiser in various later retreats, notably the closures of the Caterpillar plant at Uddingston in 1987 and Timex in Dundee in 1993. But this would be misdirection. Tim Strangleman, in his recent oral history of the Guinness brewery in Park Royal, West London, entreated us to 'be fair to the past'.⁵ Structure strongly influences agency. The distinct political and industrial conditions of the late 1960s and early 1970s enabled assertive working-class leadership to defend jobs and improve wages in various sectors, including engineering, mining and port transport

³ Mark Smith, "We don't build ships. We build men" [sic.]. A great speech. An inspiring struggle. But 50 years on, does the UCS work-in still matter?', *The Herald*, 17 July 2021. Jimmy Reid's often attributed sentence began, 'We don't *only* build ships'.

⁴ [Leadership and union struggles: lessons from Jimmy Reid and the UCS work-in, Thurs 25 March 7pm - The Jimmy Reid Foundation](#)

⁵ Tim Strangleman, *Voices of Guinness. An Oral History of the Park Royal Brewery* (Oxford, 2019), p. 92.

as well as shipbuilding.⁶ Airlie and other leaders of the work-in were part of this broader and empowered left in the labour movement in the first and second phases of deindustrialisation. In the rapidly altered industrial relations world of the third phase, in the 1980s and 1990s, union officials such as Airlie were greatly hampered in what they could achieve. The balance of class forces and labour-market conditions had been tilted by the Thatcher governments against them. They defended jobs and union voice in workplaces where they could; where they could not, the costs of redundancy and closure to employers, including runaway multinationals, were maximised. An assessment of Airlie's record as a union officer is not being attempted here. Nor is there ambition to author an account of the achievements of the engineering union more broadly, which operated in a highly varied matrix of industrial sectors. The aim is straightforward: to read Airlie's engagement in selected struggles from the 1960s to the 1990s as illustrating the phased nature of deindustrialisation, along with its profound but changing impact on working-class economic security, with the election of the Thatcher governments a major disruptor.

The article is composed of three parts. First, three authoritative accounts of the work-in, written in the 1970s and 1980s, are related to the changing outcomes of labour struggles in these decades. The *sui generis* interpretation of the work-in assumed greater force as labour-movement difficulties and defeats mounted, particularly after the 1984-85 miners' strike, but the value of embedding the Upper Clyde resistance within the longer history of deindustrialisation is emphasised. The distinct phases of deindustrialisation are explored in the second and third parts of the article, examining Airlie's activism in the shipyards and then in the engineering union. Evidence is taken from government, industry and union archives, interviews conducted with former industrial workers and union officials, and a transcript of an interview with Airlie conducted by the playwright John Carnegie in 1995. John's help in passing this to Valerie Wright, my friend and trusted colleague, and Val's vital contribution as interviewer, are gratefully acknowledged.

The UCS Work-in and Deindustrialisation

In June 1971 UCS faced a shortage of working capital. The crisis was political as well as industrial. UCS had a debt liability of £28 million, but an order book worth £87 million, with an operational profit forecast for 1972. Harold Wilson's Labour government before 1970 had established a mechanism to bridge gaps of this kind, where shipbuilders could request state credit. Heath's Conservative government refused such support in June 1971, pushing UCS into liquidation. Around

⁶ Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain, 1972* (London, 2001).

8,500 workers across three yards in Glasgow – Fairfield, Stephen and Connell – plus John Brown in Clydebank anticipated redundancy, in a local labour market described by Frank Herron of the University of Glasgow as ‘in crisis’. Male unemployment in the city had risen sharply since Heath’s election, twelve months earlier, from 6.8 per cent in the first quarter of 1970 to 10.5 per cent in the third quarter of 1971. This was more than double the UK average.⁷ Meeting in emergency session, and with UCS stewards present by invitation, the STUC General Council lamented the government’s ‘outdated and totally irrelevant philosophy’ that privileged market forces and tolerated mass unemployment. The STUC committed itself to supporting workforce efforts to defend the yards.⁸

Closure could not practicably be opposed by a strike. The yards would be shut down. Gradually denuded of capital equipment, they would not reopen.⁹ The workers avoided this outcome by continuing their daily routines, completing ships already under construction. The stewards worked discreetly with the official liquidator, Robert Smith, who paid wages and procured supplies.¹⁰ This workplace defence of local autonomy and security intersected with a broader labour-movement campaign for enhanced working-class voice within Scotland. A call for political devolution with a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh was pushed initially in the later 1960s by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) Scottish Area. The Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) incrementally moved towards adopting this as official policy from 1968 onwards.¹¹ In 1972 it then convened an Assembly on Unemployment in Edinburgh’s Usher Hall in February 1972, where speakers from trade unions and political parties, including the Conservative and Unionist Party, spoke about Home Rule as a means of securing policy more finely attuned to Scottish economic and social conditions. From the podium Reid argued that the failings of UK policy-making were transparently clear on the Clyde, where workers were defending the interests of their communities and their class.¹² ‘The demand for the “right to work” coined by Mr. Jimmy Reid as a rallying call in the Upper Clyde Shipbuilding crisis showed signs yesterday of becoming a national slogan at the Scottish Assembly on Unemployment’, wrote John Kerr in *The Guardian*.¹³ The Assembly influenced the Heath government’s about-turn on UCS. Fearing an irreversible loss of support in Scotland for Conservativism and Unionism, ministers

⁷ Frank Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis: Redundancy at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders* (London, 1975), pp. 15-16.

⁸ Glasgow Caledonian University Archives (GCUA), STUC General Council, Minutes of Special Meeting, 15 June 1971.

⁹ University of Glasgow Archives (UG), GB 248, DC 65/1, *UCS – the fight for the right to work*, by Alex Murray, Secretary, Scottish Committee, Communist Party of Great Britain, no date, presumed 1971.

¹⁰ W. W. Knox and A. McKinlay, *Jimmy Reid. A Clyde-built man* (Liverpool, 2019), pp. 99-112, 119-20.

¹¹ STUC, *71st Annual Report*, The Beach Ballroom, Aberdeen, 16-19 April 1968 (Glasgow, 1968), pp. 398-409; STUC, *72nd Annual Report*, The Pavilion, Rothesay, 15-18 April 1969, pp. 230-35.

¹² GCUA, STUC General Council, Scottish Assembly on Unemployment, 14 February 1972, Charter of Proposals for the Scottish Assembly, and List of Speakers.

¹³ John Kerr, ‘Right to work call unites the Scots’, *The Guardian*, 15 February 1972, p. 6.

announced a new package of aid. A new consortium, Govan Shipbuilders, was supported with £17 million to clear debts. A further investment of £18 million enabled capital investment in the Glasgow yards and the sale of John Brown to the US-owned Marathon Corporation for conversion to oil-rig construction. About 6,000 jobs – three out of four – were saved.¹⁴

The work-in attracted a voluminous literature. Two important early histories were published in 1972: by Alasdair Buchan, journalist son of Janey Buchan, later a Labour regional councillor in Strathclyde and MEP for Glasgow, and Norman Buchan, Labour MP for West Renfrewshire; and by Willie Thompson and Finlay Hart, who shared membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) with Airlie, Reid and other stewards. Hart was a former Clydebank shipyard trade unionist. Schooled in the workplace and societal conflicts of the 1920s and 1930s, he commanded substantial working-class support across the Upper Clyde.¹⁵ Buchan and Thompson-Hart commonly positioned the work-in as a class struggle, with the outcome a victory for solidarity and justice, and a defeat for free marketeer policy-makers and industrialists.¹⁶ Many other books and pamphlets on UCS followed. The most detailed and authoritative came in 1986, from John Foster and Charles Woolfson. Based on hundreds of hours of tape-recorded steward meetings and interviews, this highlighted the role of working-class and Communist leadership. The stewards educated the wider public as well as the workers, via the twin languages of class struggle and national resistance encapsulated in Reid's speech to the 1972 Assembly. Defending the yards advanced the broader economic interests of Scotland, because multiple local and regional supply-chain firms were dependent on UCS. The work-in's success was based on this cross-sectional campaigning, which the Communist stewards cultivated and led.¹⁷

The timing of Foster and Woolfson's book was significant. Many readers in 1986 would contrast the work-in with the recently concluded miners' strike of 1984-85 across Scotland, Wales and England. On this occasion a Conservative government was unmoved by a trade-union mobilisation in protection of workplaces and jobs.¹⁸ Patrick Wintour of *The Guardian*, reviewing Foster and Woolfson, juxtaposed Heath's defeats in various labour-movement battles with the resolve shown by the Thatcher government since 1979. He related this to trade unionism losing 'some of the ability' shown by Reid and Airlie at UCS 'to think imaginatively and to act to win support

¹⁴ Willie Thompson and Finlay Hart, *The UCS Work-in* (London, 1972), pp. 89-90.

¹⁵ Knox and McKinlay, *Jimmy Reid*, pp. 71-2.

¹⁶ Alasdair Buchan, *The Right to Work: The Story of the Upper Clyde Confrontation* (London, 1972); Thompson and Finlay Hart, *UCS Work-in*.

¹⁷ John Foster and Charles Woolfson, *The Politics of the UCS Work-in: class alliances and the right to work* (London, 1986).

¹⁸ Ben Curtis, *The South Wales Miners, 1964-1985* (Cardiff, 2013); Jim Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984-85* (Manchester, 2012).

beyond their most immediate constituency'.¹⁹ The inability of the miners to secure broader-based support was an important and enduring theme in literature on the strike. Tensions between Arthur Scargill, NUM President, and the leaderships of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Labour Party, were emphasised in various accounts, including a 25th anniversary history by Francis Beckett and David Hencke.²⁰ Communists in the labour movement, among them miners, believed that strike strategy and tactics had obstructed the construction of a broader anti-Thatcher alliance. The deployment of large-scale physical picketing and the move into a national strike without a national ballot were subject to especially anguished review. Antonio Gramsci was an influential presence in this internal Communist dialogue, in the Italian Marxist's sense that the strike was a *war of position* as well as a *war of manoeuvre*. Thatcher's government and its media allies made various war of position assertions during the strike: coal production was unacceptably expensive; miners were over-paid and selfish; the NUM wielded power illegitimately in the nationalised structure of the industry; pickets intimidated miners who wanted to work. In an important point of departure from the UCS work-in, these claims resonated strongly with potential social allies as well as entrenched class opponents of the strikers.²¹

The government wove these anti-NUM stories into a larger positional narrative about the corrosive influence of trade union 'power', presented as a driver of Britain's alleged economic decline since the Second World War. The preoccupation with decline was highly politicised, ignoring important markers of working-class improvement, notably the 2.7 per cent average annual growth of real wages from 1951 to 1973, plus a marked reduction of inequality.²² Thatcherite narratives gained limited electorate purchase in Scotland,²³ but had considerable traction among voters in England. 'Declinism' as an ideology was used to rationalise a major redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich,²⁴ along with substantial legislative restrictions on union organisation and activity.²⁵ This accretion of anti-working class support for Thatcherism in England was aided by the unexpected

¹⁹ Patrick Wintour, 'Clyde-built ... Tory hatred of the U-turn', *The Guardian*, 24 July 1986, p. 22.

²⁰ Francis Beckett and David Hencke, *Marching to the Fault Line: The 1984 Miners' Strike and the Death of Industrial Britain* (London, 2009), pp. 122-9, 165-74.

²¹ Peter Ackers, 'Gramsci at the Miners' Strike: Remembering the 1984–1985 Eurocommunist Alternative Industrial Relations Strategy', *Labor History*, 55 (2015), pp. 151-72; Richard Vinen, 'A War of Position? The Thatcher Government's Preparation for the 1984 Miners' Strike', *English Historical Review*, 134 (2019), pp. 121-150.

²² Ian Gazely, 'Income and Living Standards, 1870-2010', in Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries and Paul Johnson, eds, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Vol. II, 1870 to the present* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 151-80, with details at pp. 153-63.

²³ Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled Upon A Thistle: Scotland Since 1880* (Edinburgh, 2010), pp. 289-319.

²⁴ Jim Tomlinson, *Managing the Economy, Managing the People. Narratives of Economic Life in Britain from Beveridge to Brexit* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 70-4.

²⁵ Paul Smith, 'Order in British Industrial Relations: From Donovan to Neoliberalism', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 31-2 (2011), pp. 115-54.

intervention of a working-class activist from Scotland during the strike. In a further important counter-point to 1971-2, Reid used his platform as a newspaper columnist to criticise NUM strategy. Setting aside the strikers' core defence of communal economic security, he stated baldly that the key issue at stake was trade-union democracy. Reid claimed that this was imperilled by the absence of a national ballot and Scargill's allegedly authoritarian governance of the NUM.²⁶ Pat Egan, an NUM activist in 1984-85, recently observed that Reid had an important following among potential supporters of the strike. His public criticism of Scargill therefore complicated the strikers' attempts to build effective alliances with trade unions and in society more broadly. This set Reid apart from others in the labour movement who were troubled by the strike but broached their worries privately, in more comradely and constructive fashion. These included Jimmy Airlie, who Egan later learned had spoken directly to Scargill by telephone on more than one occasion, advising him to seek strategic retreat. This would protect miners from further economic hardship and exposure to the harms of picket-line arrests and criminal convictions.²⁷

Reid was unable to see or acknowledge how closely the miners' struggle resembled the resistance which he had helped lead on the Upper Clyde. It was 'a just strike', observed Beynon and Hudson, evaluating the longer history of deindustrialisation in South Wales and Durham.²⁸ Women's leadership and community mobilisation were central elements of the strike,²⁹ which drew on a much wider constellation of supporters than Reid and other critics of the NUM leadership acknowledged. Striking miners developed bonds of mutual solidarity with union branches in various sectors and liberation activist groups responsible for organising women, Black workers and lesbians and gay men. Many of these links were established in the 1970s. London, still an important industrial centre, was a key focal point, with Labour-led local authorities in the city twinning with coalfield counterparts.³⁰ In Scotland miners in Fife had long-running ties with trade unionists in Dundee, while Lanarkshire miners had a comparable footing in Glasgow. These solidarities were consolidated during the strike.³¹ Labour-led regional councils –Fife, Lothian and Strathclyde – supported the miners in various ways; district councils did likewise, most importantly by deferring the rents of strikers who were council tenants.³² The work-in and the strike ought therefore to be viewed

²⁶ Jimmy Reid, 'Why Labour needs a pit ballot', *The Times*, 14 May 1984, p. 14.

²⁷ Pat Egan, Interview with author, Zoom Call, 2 March 2021.

²⁸ Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine. Coal and the End of Industrial Britain* (London, 2021), p. 122.

²⁹ Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Women's Activism During the Miners' Strike: Memories and Legacies', *Contemporary British History*, 32.1 (2018), pp. 78-100.

³⁰ Diarmaid Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity. London and the 1984-5 Miners' Strike* (London, 2021), especially pp. 21-47.

³¹ Willie Clarke, Interview with author, Ballingry, 13 November 2009.

³² Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland*, pp. 116-24.

commonly as social-movement struggles for the preservation of working-class economic security, each drawing on and generating substantial labour-movement and left-political solidarity.

The strike and the work-in were also both phenomena of deindustrialisation. By the mid-1980s the erosion of manual employment in industrial sectors had become identified as a social problem.³³ Only recently, however, has deindustrialisation as a deep-set historical phenomenon been recognised, developing from the 1950s with post-Second World War employment peaks in shipbuilding and coal, along with metals and textiles. Security, justice and working-class voice were core components of this long-running and highly-politicised process, which, with Valerie Wright and Jim Tomlinson, I have explained in terms of an operational moral economy.³⁴ This resembled the moral economy of the English crowd of the eighteenth century, as analysed by E. P. Thompson, but the specific expectations and customs were plainly those of the Scottish industrial working-class of the mid-twentieth century. The embedding of employment and economic activity more broadly in social relationships and imperatives also owed much to the impact of what Karl Polanyi termed in the 1940s as the ‘countermovement’: a coalition, primarily composed of trade unions along with social-democratic politicians and Keynesian policy-makers, which exerted significant control over market forces.³⁵

The phased nature of deindustrialisation and its moral economy was noted in the introduction. The shift out of the staple industries and into new forms of manufacturing in the 1950s, often multinational-owned, was encouraged by the countermovement. Specifically, under pressure from trade-union lobbying, the UK government offered regional policy subsidies to private-sector manufacturers which located in the regions of contracting staple industry. These subsidies were radically increased by Wilson’s Labour administration from 1964.³⁶ In this first phase, deindustrialisation was accepted in moral-economy terms by the workers and communities affected because their security was maintained. More varied employment in the coalfield areas offered increased living standards and improved working conditions, and trade-union and local-authority representation was embedded in the policy-making which framed this structural shift. Michael McGahey and Lawrence Daly, NUM Scottish Area President and General Secretary, insisted upon

³³ Tony Dickson and David Judge, eds, *The Politics of Industrial Closure* (Basingstoke, 1987).

³⁴ Jim Phillips, Valerie Wright and Jim Tomlinson, *Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy in Scotland since 1955* (Edinburgh, 2021).

³⁵ Ewan Gibbs, *Coal Country: The Meaning and Memory of Deindustrialisation in Post-war Scotland* (London, 2021), pp. 7-14.

³⁶ Peter Scott, ‘Regional development and policy’, in Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson, eds, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Volume III, Structural Change and Growth, 1939-2000* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 332-67.

meaningful labour-market alternatives as precondition for pit closures.³⁷ The peak of manufacturing employment in the later 1960s disrupted this process, marking the transition to the second phase of deindustrialisation which shaped the UCS crisis. Early signs of multinational disinvestment were recognised as dangerous by the labour-movement leadership. For this reason, McGahey blocked further closures in Lanarkshire from 1969 onwards. The STUC assumed an important activist role in the anti-deindustrialisation resistance. Jimmy Milne, Deputy General Secretary from 1969 until succeeding James Jack as General Secretary in 1975, and Alex Kitson, General Secretary of the Scottish Commercial Motormen's Union in 1959, which he led into a merger with the Transport & General Workers' Union (TGWU) in 1971, and an influential member of the STUC General Council, were important figures. Milne the Communist and Kitson the Labour Party member were part of a broader left leadership in the Scottish trade-union movement which mobilised against industrial job losses in the later 1960s and campaigned for a Scottish Parliament.³⁸ This was the industrial and political context in which Heath's government allowed liquidation of UCS. The outcome of the crisis in 1972, preserved employment in the shipyards, was mirrored elsewhere. After a further mobilisation in the coalfields, and parallel action by steelworkers, renewed investment by Labour governments from 1974-79 helped to slow the rate of employment loss in each sector.³⁹

Deindustrialisation therefore predated Thatcherism. What happened after 1979 was a third distinct phase in its political management. Two million jobs in industrial sectors across the UK were lost in the four years to 1983. In Scotland, 200,000 manufacturing jobs and 50,000 other industry jobs were lost in the decade to 1988.⁴⁰ This was not a deliberate policy aim but followed from the government's adventurerist experiments in countering inflation by reducing the money supply and aggregate demand.⁴¹ Higher borrowing costs and the related appreciation of sterling placed substantial pressure on UK producers. Manufacturing exports fell and imports increased.⁴² These structural changes nevertheless suited the Thatcherites' ideological agenda. Unemployment and insecure employment eroded working-class collective self-confidence. There was no meaningful government attempt to support alternative employment, although the Thatcherites hoped that their emphasis on a low-wage, non-union labour market might stimulate an enlarged sector of 'sunrise' industries, chiefly in electronics. Trade-union voice in policy-making was set aside and then attacked, incrementally, as the government shunted authority from workers to employers. Characterised by

³⁷ Jim Phillips, *Scottish Coal Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, 2019), pp. 199-209.

³⁸ Ian MacDougall, *Voices From Home and Work* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 1-67.

³⁹ Phillips, Wright and Tomlinson, *Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy*, pp. 43-69.

⁴⁰ *Scottish Abstract of Statistics*, 18 (Edinburgh, 1989), Tables 9.2 (a) and (b).

⁴¹ Jim Tomlinson, 'Mrs Thatcher's Economic Adventurism', *British Politics*, 2 (2007), pp. 3-19.

⁴² Martin Chick, *Changing Times. Economics, Policies, and Resource Allocation in Britain since 1951* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 324, 317-320.

Ralph Miliband as ‘class struggle from above’,⁴³ this ideological-cum-policy shift represented a serious assault on the working-class moral economy. Unemployment and insecurity for those in work likewise weakened the organisational and political capacities of the industrial and manual workforces, and of the broader labour movement. The significant moral and material support for the striking miners in 1984 has been emphasised, but they were still relatively isolated, industrially and politically, in ways that UCS workers in 1971 were not. Other groups of unionised workers could not risk strike action in solidarity with the miners.⁴⁴ The type of victory won on the Clyde in 1972 through wit, imagination and courage was unachievable in 1984-85. This was underlined by the giant scale of resource expended by the government in defeating the miners. ‘We couldnae win’, said Eric Clarke, NUM Scottish Area General Secretary during the strike, looking back in 2009: ‘how could we?’⁴⁵

Airlie in the Shipyards

Born in 1936, Jimmy Airlie served his engineering apprenticeship in the 1950s in Simons shipyard, Renfrew, on the south bank of the Upper Clyde.⁴⁶ Simons closed in 1964, by which point Airlie had completed his national service as a Military Policeman, and was working in Fairfield yard, Govan, as an elected union convenor. The skilled employment culture of shipbuilding was central to Airlie’s industrial attitudes and activism, according to Danny Carrigan, a fellow Clydeside engineer in the 1970s and national union official in the 1980s and 1990s. So much was this the case that in later years Airlie found it difficult to empathise with the distinct experiences and conditions of workers in other sectors.⁴⁷ The physical environment of the yards was harsh; class conflict was routinised; employment was precarious. Those who built the ships, the boilermakers, were vulnerable to redundancy once a ship was launched, as were the engineers and other craftsmen once fitting out was completed.⁴⁸ Airlie learned early the value of speaking directly and could offend, according to Pat Milligan, an administrative officer for TASS, the draughtsmen’s union, and a friendly comrade in the CPGB, which Airlie joined as a young man. By the early 1970s he was highly experienced, but also comparatively young, in his mid-thirties, marrying Anne shortly after the work-in.⁴⁹ Airlie was charismatic and, Carrigan emphasised, so influential that many supporters consciously or

⁴³ Ralph Miliband, *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 115-66.

⁴⁴ Kelliher, *Cultures of Solidarity*, pp. 54-65.

⁴⁵ Eric Clarke, Interview with author, National Mining Museum Scotland, Newtongrange, 25 August 2009.

⁴⁶ Terry Pattinson, ‘Jimmy Airlie: Obituary’, *The Independent*, 11 March 1997.

⁴⁷ Danny Carrigan, Interview with author, Zoom Call, 22 February 2021.

⁴⁸ Phillips, Wright and Tomlinson, *Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy*, pp. 117-23.

⁴⁹ Pat Milligan, Interview with author, Zoom Call, 8 March 2021.

subconsciously mirrored his patterns of speech and even his physical mannerisms.⁵⁰ He combined the personal and political attributes of ‘respectable militancy’, identified by Ewan Gibbs and Rory Scothorne as a salient feature of in the Scottish radical left of the late twentieth century. This involved the demonstration of restraint and dignity; an emphasis on collective discipline; and a willingness to lead action in breach of the law in pursuit of legitimate goals.⁵¹ Only on this latter point did Airlie diverge from the archetype. Acting unlawfully in the hostile legal environment of the 1980s and 1990s could cost his members their liberty as well as their jobs; it could also hurt the financial integrity of the union, as the sequestration of the NUM’s funds in England and Wales during the miners’ strike amply demonstrated.⁵²

Deindustrialisation was both an existential threat and formative influence for Airlie. The erosion of shipyard employment jeopardised the male, skilled and engineering culture that held a predominant position in the labour movement for much of the twentieth century. Resisting deindustrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s in this cultural sense therefore also involved defending the sectional privileges of skilled men. Tensions of gender as well as class were duly present in each half of Airlie’s career: in the shipyards, preserving male rights to apprenticeships and occupational earnings premiums; and in the engineering union when female members expressed impatience with male officialdom’s complicity in perpetuating unequal opportunities and rewards.⁵³ Airlie’s personal struggle against deindustrialisation commenced in earnest in October 1965, when the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited entered receivership with £5.5 million in liabilities despite an order book worth £32 million. This persuaded the Labour government to take a 50 per cent stake in a new firm, Fairfields (Glasgow) Limited, led by Sir Iain Stewart. Emphasising novelty in production and employment practices, the Fairfield Experiment involved closer partnership between management and workforce union representatives. Airlie viewed this with circumspection. ‘I had my doubts’, he said, in *The Bowler and The Bunnet*, the 1967 Scottish Television portrait of Fairfield, presented by Sean Connery, but ‘some of the things they’ve done have been quite good’, most pressingly the preservation of 3,000 skilled jobs. This was vital, as the first phase of deindustrialisation gave way to a second, the growth of alternatives to shipbuilding and the other staples stalling in the later 1960s. Unemployment in Scotland rose from 60,000 in August 1966 to 67,000 in September, 78,000 in November and then almost 89,000 in January 1967. The official

⁵⁰ Carrigan, Interview.

⁵¹ Ewan Gibbs and Rory Scothorne, ‘Accusers of Capitalism: Masculinity and Populism on the Scottish Radical Left in the Late Twentieth Century’, *Social History*, 45.2 (2020), pp. 218-245.

⁵² Pattinson, ‘Jimmy Airlie’.

⁵³ W. W. Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture and Society in Scotland, 1800-Present* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 282-6.

unemployment benefit claimant rate in Scotland topped 4 per cent, above the Great Britain average of 2.6 per cent.⁵⁴

The high value of shipyard work was further demonstrated after the formation of UCS in 1968. Civil servants at the Department for Economic Affairs noted how the new combine had inherited damaging levels of debt, especially from construction of the luxury passenger liner, *QE2*, at John Brown.⁵⁵ Liquidation was averted in 1969 after the STUC pushed the Labour government to proffer a grant of £3m but this came with a major caveat: UCS was obliged to reduce its workforce by around one-fifth. Two-thirds of those who left in the twelve months from August 1969 were craftsmen from the finishing trades: plumbers and painters, electricians, joiners and polishers, or engineers and fitters. This was the moral economy of deindustrialisation in action: trade-union representatives shared the confidence of UCS managers and Department of Employment officials that men with these skills would find other jobs, in construction and building maintenance especially.⁵⁶ David Torrance, then a young draughtsman in Fairfield, remembered Airlie accepting the redundancy programme in precisely these terms: secure employment for those who remained; different jobs for those who left.⁵⁷ There were grounds for such optimism. The employment crisis evident in 1968 had not been alleviated, but nor had it worsened. Among men the jobless rate across Glasgow, Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire combined was 4.3 per cent in October 1968 and 4.2 per cent in October 1969.⁵⁸

Moral-economy expectations of meaningful post-UCS alternatives were confounded, however, by the upward surge of unemployment from the summer of 1970, after the election of Heath's Conservative government. This had a damaging impact on the redundant UCS workers. Herron's study established a representative sample of 328 of these men. He found that they had been unemployed on average for 36.9 per cent of the time since redundancy. More than half had earned less in their post-UCS employment. Contrary to prior assumption, their skills were not appreciated by non-shipbuilding employers. Downward occupational mobility and unemployment were aggravated by age. This contributed significantly to the solidity in 1971 of the work-in, which drew in older men, those over 40 and 50, who saw a limited future beyond employment in the

⁵⁴ GCUA, STUC, For Information of General Council members, Unemployment in Scotland, 9 January 1967.

⁵⁵ The National Archives, Kew (TNA), EW 7/1456, A. J. Cody, DEA, Brief for Secretary of State, 28 February 1969.

⁵⁶ Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis*, pp. 12, 24.

⁵⁷ David Torrance, Interview with Valerie Wright, Old Kilpatrick, 4 October 2017.

⁵⁸ GCUA, STUC Economic Committee, October Unemployment Figures, 14 November 1969; +Glasgow includes Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire.

yards.⁵⁹ Pat Milligan was on maternity leave in the summer of 1971, and with her baby daughter active in generating community support for the resistance. She spent time with UCS wives, women in their forties and fifties who were astonished by the abrupt rupture of their individual, family and collective security. They felt betrayed by policy-makers. The common experience of threatened redundancy across the yards and surrounding communities buttressed the unity of the action.⁶⁰

Airlie helped to articulate this anger, explaining the injustice of the position in moral and class terms. In Cinema Action's documentary, *UCS 1*, he is seen speaking to a large open-air crowd, contrasting the responsibility of the work-in with the fecklessness of Conservative policy-makers who viewed unemployment as the logical upshot of market forces.⁶¹ Pat Egan's memory of an 'inspiring orator' seemed fitting.⁶² Airlie was also the work-in's primary strategist and organiser, recognising the value of a pragmatic working relationship with Robert Smith, who other stewards had initially excluded from the yards.⁶³ The liquidator was still paying wages to 7,300 workers in December 1971 and 6,882 in June 1972, six months and then one year after UCS had collapsed.⁶⁴ The huge fund-raising effort, remarked upon in historical accounts, was required to sustain only a small fraction of the 8,400 employed in June 1971.⁶⁵ It was also Airlie who regularly led the well-documented discussions about the future of the yards, with government officials and ministers in Westminster, Downing Street and Glasgow.⁶⁶ Closure of the yards, Airlie told Heath in July 1971, would mean that 'the Government will not be able to govern Scotland'.⁶⁷ In this leading role Airlie often usurped the position of full-time union officials, notably Danny McGarvey, General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths and Structural Workers.⁶⁸

The formation in 1972 of Govan Shipbuilders and subsidised conversion of John Brown for sale to Marathon Corporation were moral-economy victories. The broad configuration of class politics and forces were important in helping the Upper Clyde workers reach this point. Heath and

⁵⁹ Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis*, pp. 56-57, 81, 94, 162-64; Frank Herron, 'Redundancy and Redeployment from UCS, 1969-1971', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 19.3 (1972), pp. 231-51, with details on non-industrial employers at pp. 233-6, 245, 248.

⁶⁰ Milligan, Interview.

⁶¹ *UCS 1* (Cinema Action, 1971), 22 minutes, black and white. This film is included in *Tales from the Shipyard. Britain's Shipbuilding Heritage on Film* (London, 2011).

⁶² Egan, Interview.

⁶³ UG, GB 248, ACCN 3613/1/5, clipping, Chris Baur, 'UCS: the men and the myths', *Weekend Scotsman*, 27 June 1981.

⁶⁴ TNA, LAB 108/17, UCS Labour Force, December 1971; UG, GB 248, ACCN 3613/1/5, Sir Robert Smith, The UCS Work-in In Perspective.

⁶⁵ Thomson and Hart, *UCS Work-in*, pp. 66-9.

⁶⁶ Buchan, *Right to Work*, pp. 123-9.

⁶⁷ TNA, PREM 15/1242, Note of a Meeting with UCS Shop Stewards held at the House of Commons on 28 July 1971.

⁶⁸ Foster and Woolfson, *Politics of the UCS*, pp. 340-79.

his ministers were keen to resolve the crisis, shaken as they had been by the outcome of the first official industry-wide strike in coal mining since nationalisation in 1947. In pursuing a national pay claim, and against government expectation, the NUM maintained a solid front for six weeks in January and February 1972. Power cuts resulted, contributing to short-time working and large-scale job lay-offs across the economy.⁶⁹ The miners' substantial pay victory was followed, and a resolution on the Upper Clyde further prefigured, by mass trade-union demonstrations in the summer of 1972 against the government's contentious Industrial Relations Act of 1971. This had contributed to the temporary although incendiary imprisonment of striking dock workers in London, members of the TGWU. They had been arrested after picketing inland cargo terminals in an attempt to resist redundancies arising from the widening application of containerisation, with the huge boxes 'stuffed and stripped' away from the ports by non-dock labour.⁷⁰ The Heath government retreated from labour activism on various fronts. The economy was reinflated, and regional investment in industrial activity substantially increased, with reduced unemployment an explicit goal. Dialogue with labour-movement representatives was intensified in an effort to lower class and industrial tensions.⁷¹

On the Upper Clyde the post-work-in situation was complicated, in class terms. Ground was arguably conceded by the boilermakers to their new employers in Govan and Clydebank, with greater flexibility established in working practices. There was innovative focus on the interchangeability of tradesmen. On the other hand, Communist stewards argued that the erosion of sectional distinctions was essential to the better cultivation of class solidarity, to bolster the power of labour in the conflict with capital.⁷² So much was this the case that Sammy Barr, one of the leading boilermaker stewards in Govan, was accused by Reid and others within the CPGB's Shipbuilding Branch as unduly championing the various distinct sectional interests of his members. Danny Carrigan was at the contentious branch meeting in November 1972, chaired by Airlie, which voted in support of Barr's expulsion from the party. Reid's verbal evisceration of Barr was brutal: excessive, some thought, and unwarranted in its tone.⁷³ Airlie criticised Barr but argued that attacking a trusted boilermaker voice in the yards would damage cross-occupational relations and reduce the party's influence.⁷⁴ This commitment to the solidarity of all shipbuilding craftsmen strengthened Airlie's standing in the yards. Young workers and apprentices starting in Govan

⁶⁹ Andrew Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics. Volume 2: 1969-1995* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 69-70.

⁷⁰ Fred Lindop, 'The Dockers and the 1971 Industrial Relations Act, Part 1: Shop Stewards and Containerization', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 5 (1998), pp. 33-72.

⁷¹ Robert Taylor, 'The Heath Government and Industrial Relations: Myth and Reality', in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, eds, *The Heath Government, 1970-1974: A Reappraisal* (London, 1996), pp. 161-190.

⁷² McGoldrick, 'Industrial Relations and the Division of Labour', pp. 211-14.

⁷³ Knox and McKinlay, *Jimmy Reid*, pp. 132-3.

⁷⁴ Carrigan, Interview.

Shipbuilders after the 1972 victory greatly admired him, including boilermakers. Benny McGoogan started as a plater in Fairfield in 1975, becoming a full-time shop steward in 1979. Interviewed in 2017, he emphasised the formational influence of Airlie who he spoke about, tellingly, in the present tense:

Ah, Big Jimmy's a great big guy. Brilliant ... brilliant, the guy. [...] I mean, you're only a young guy, twenty-five, and here's a guy in his forties ... you know, who's seen it, done it and bought the t-shirt. Come right through the UCS crisis ... Along wi Jimmy Reid and all the other people. So you're, kind of, looking up to these guys ... er, and wealth of experience. Worldly wise. Er, won't gie you bad advice. Only gie you good advice.⁷⁵

Shipbuilding was nationalised by the Labour government elected in 1974, consolidating the stabilisation of employment achieved through the work-in, but Airlie was required to deal with new difficulties. In 1977 the government demonstrated its commitment to industrial employment by negotiating a contract for the publicly-owned combine, British Shipbuilders, to produce 24 military vessels for the Polish government, worth £110 million.⁷⁶ Ten were allocated to Govan, seven to Swan Hunter on the Tyne and the remainder between Scott Lithgow on the Lower Clyde and Robb Caledon in Dundee.⁷⁷ Pre-nationalisation pay differentials across the sector had not been eradicated, and trade demarcation agreements also varied beyond Govan. This structured an unfolding dispute at Swan Hunter from late November 1977, when 1,700 outfitting workers embarked on an overtime ban, seeking parity with other yards. British Shipbuilders, fearing a damaging delay, proposed moving four of the Swan Hunter ships to Govan. *The Guardian's* correspondent, Peter Hetherington, emphasised that the Govan stewards and workers, led by Airlie, had negotiated elimination of multiple demarcation practices in order to help make nationalisation successful. This willingness to reform had a footing in the Fairfield Experiment as well as the more recent experiences within Govan Shipbuilders, and enabled the Govan division of British Shipbuilders to construct vessels more quickly.⁷⁸ Robert Taylor, visiting Govan for *The Observer* two months later, developed this theme. The head of British Shipbuilders, Mike Casey, viewed Fairfield as the 'jewel of the corporation'. The work-in had embedded a strong spirit of worker involvement in production which nationalisation

⁷⁵ Benny McGoogan, Interview with Valerie Wright, Fairfields Heritage Centre, 25 October 2017.

⁷⁶ TNA, T 369/224, Eric Varley to Prime Minister, 28 November 1977.

⁷⁷ TNA, T 369/223, D. le B. Jones, Cabinet Office, to Chancellor of the Exchequer, 21 June 1977, and T 369/224, Department of Industry, Anglo-Polish Shipbuilding Deal, 26 September 1977.

⁷⁸ Peter Hetherington, 'The shipyard that abolished trouble', *The Guardian*, 1 December 1977, p. 17.

consolidated. Job barriers between boilermakers and skilled outfitters had been flattened, and wage parity between the two groups achieved. Where 57 bargaining units had existed across the yards before the work-in, there were now only four, eradicating pay leapfrogging as a hazard to labour solidarity and production costs. Airlie, pictured in characteristically determined fashion on the waterfront, told Taylor, ‘We can’t face the eighties with working methods that belong to the nineteenth century’.⁷⁹

Shop stewards on the Tyne in early December asked the Govan workers not to accept the contested ships. Airlie and other Clyde stewards travelled to Newcastle to discuss the problem face to face. Back in Govan, he addressed a meeting of 3,000 workers in the Lyceum Cinema. Alex Wright, then a young welder, remembered Airlie saying he had attempted to persuade the Tyne stewards to end their action: ‘You’re gonna have them [British Shipbuilders] make us an offer we can’t refuse’.⁸⁰ David Torrance, who attended the Newcastle talks, shared this recollection: fair warning of the intention to take the ships was given.⁸¹ With the Swan Hunter dispute unresolved, the Govan workers overwhelmingly supported Airlie’s recommendation to accept the ships.⁸² Press reports indicated that Airlie framed the dilemma in terms of the importance to *all* shipbuilding workers in Britain of the contract being fulfilled. This was no opportunistic defence of Govan alone: ‘it is our view that all the 24 vessels must and will be built in British yards. Any barriers or problems that jeopardise all or part of that order must be removed’.⁸³ He reiterated this view when the transfer was confirmed in late January.⁸⁴ This was a reprise in different times of the work-in’s emphasis on working-class responsibility, in a situation of social compromise which offered the workforce advantageous terms. As Airlie had cooperated closely with the liquidator in 1971-2, to secure the future basis of employment on the Clyde, now he worked within British Shipbuilders to protect the strategic victory of nationalisation.⁸⁵ By accepting the burden of the additional production, the Govan workers were demonstrating a committed defence of working-class economic security. Had they refused the work, the four ships would have been built outwith Britain, in West Germany or South Korea.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Robert Taylor, ‘How Govan has built a haven from the storm’, *The Observer*, 12 February 1978, p. 12.

⁸⁰ Alex Wright, Interview with Valerie Wright, Paisley, 29 August 2017.

⁸¹ Torrance, Interview.

⁸² Rosemary Collins, ‘Workers back decision to build ships’, *The Guardian*, 7 December 1977, p. 22.

⁸³ Rosemary Collins and Peter Hetherington, ‘Govan refuse to black Polish ship’, *The Guardian*, 6 December 1977, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Peter Hildrew, ‘Yard summit on Polish ships’, *The Guardian*, 28 January 1978, p. 26.

⁸⁵ McGoldrick, ‘Industrial Relations and the Division of Labour’, p. 215.

⁸⁶ Torrance, Interview.

Airlie as Engineering Union Official

Airlie unsuccessfully challenged Gavin Laird for the position of full-time AUEW regional official in Scotland in 1975. Laird won by 17,500 votes to 10,000 and later that year also defeated Reid in an election for the Scottish divisional seat on the union's national executive council.⁸⁷ This defeat pushed Reid towards a career outside trade unionism.⁸⁸ Airlie won his next attempt to win the Scottish regional position, in 1978,⁸⁹ and left the yards in July 1979.⁹⁰ In 1983 he joined the union's national executive, winning the Scottish divisional position made vacant when Laird was elected General Secretary. Press reports emphasised that with this victory – by 11,076 to Tom Dougan's 8,288 – Airlie broke the union right's monopoly on the seven-strong national executive.⁹¹

Airlie's defence of working-class economic security as a union official was structured by the new precariousness in manual employment. This reflected the substantial departure in the political management of deindustrialisation arising from the election of the Thatcher government in May 1979. Danny Carrigan believed that Airlie would have been more suited as an official to the battles of the 1950s or 1960s than those of the 1980s and 1990s, fighting multinationals for union recognition along with improved wages and working conditions in an expanding economy. In this connection it is important to note that his bargaining responsibilities did include two expanding but taxing sectors, atomic energy and the North Sea offshore oil industry. In the former, Airlie was stretched, adapting to the new demands of representing white collar employees. In the latter, he was fighting to assert workers' rights in an anti-trade union environment. He was also defending early advances secured by the AUEW in the 1970s, sometimes facing legitimate criticism from his members as well as representatives of other unions.⁹² This internal labour challenge intensified with a series of health and safety outrages. The 1988 Piper Alpha disaster, when 167 workers were killed in a North Sea oil-rig conflagration, stimulated the establishment of the Offshore Industrial Liaison Committee, which characterised Airlie and the engineering union as compromised in dealings with employers. Airlie was unsympathetic and unfair in his estimation of the OILC, which he saw as divisive and unlikely to attain concrete improvements for offshore workers.⁹³

⁸⁷ John Clare, 'Reid in clash with union moderates', *The Guardian*, 12 October 1975, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Knox and McKinlay, *Jimmy Reid*, pp. 159-63.

⁸⁹ 'Airlie seeks full-time union post', *Evening Times*, 31 October 1978, p. 4.

⁹⁰ Peter Hetherington, 'Clyde shipyard stewards ready for confrontation', *The Guardian*, 2 July 1979, p. 2.

⁹¹ Patrick Wintour, 'Clyde sit-in leader wins engineering union post', *The Guardian*, 4 May 1983, p. 2.

⁹² Carrigan, Interview.

⁹³ Charles Woolfson, John Foster and Matthias Beck, *Paying For the Piper: Capital and Labour in Britain's Offshore Oil Industry* (London, 1996), pp. 452-4, 458-61, 467-9.

Airlie encountered greater difficulties still, as Carrigan emphasised, in shrinking employment sectors, particularly in engineering, where firms were recurrently seeking to negotiate or impose cuts to their labour costs. Compulsory redundancies and plant closures were a constant threat. Some supporters wondered if traps had been set for Airlie within the union's dysfunctional right-left political struggle. While Airlie was manoeuvred into 'owning' unpopular bargaining outcomes, Gavin Laird and Bill Jordan, President from 1986, were strongly associating themselves with the union's key advance, the adoption across the broad engineering sector of a 37-hour working week. By September 1990, 1,034 separate agreements covering more than 400,000 workers were reached.⁹⁴ Airlie did not share the view that he was manipulated by the union right.⁹⁵ His sense of duty to the union and its membership was evident in 1987, when he negotiated and then defended a single union deal with Ford, to open an electronics components plant in Dundee.⁹⁶ This promised more than 1,000 jobs but was predictably opposed by other unions with an established presence in motor manufacturing, notably the TGWU. Airlie argued that the single union deal was the only way of bringing Ford to Scotland and generating activity in a city with high unemployment.⁹⁷ Pat Egan, looking back from 2021, saw mischief and even malice in Ford's intentions, dividing industry unions while holding limited genuine commitment to establishing a Dundee presence.⁹⁸ The STUC General Council's official record supports this argument. STUC officers sought agreement with Ford where Airlie's deal would not be used as template for single-union contracts elsewhere. The TUC was persuaded to accept this strategy, preparing the ground for the TGWU and other unions to withdraw their opposition to the Dundee plant, but Ford abandoned the proposal anyway in March 1988.⁹⁹

The Ford controversy was preceded in 1987 by the Caterpillar crisis. The earth-moving equipment factory in Uddingston, Lanarkshire encapsulated the longer history of deindustrialisation. It was built in the 1950s on the site of a mining village, cleared for the US multinational as local pits closed through agreement between the National Coal Board and the NUM. This pre-history shaped a strong ownership consciousness among Uddingston workers. Caterpillar was a serial recipient of UK government regional aid. Large-scale public investment in housing and local amenities had been central to the formation of a new industrial community around the plant, which remained an

⁹⁴ Alan McKinlay and Des McNulty, 'At the cutting edge of new realism: the engineers' 35 hour week campaign', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 23.3 (1992), pp. 205-213.

⁹⁵ Milligan, Interview.

⁹⁶ Pattinson, 'Jimmy Airlie'.

⁹⁷ Patrick Wintour, 'Engineers firm on single union deal', *The Guardian*, 21 October 1987, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Egan, Interview.

⁹⁹ GCUA, STUC General Council Report, 6 April 1988.

important local marker of place and history thirty years after production ended in 1987.¹⁰⁰ In September 1986 Caterpillar announced investment in a new model at Uddingston. One-eighth of the funding would come from the UK government. This reinforced community and workforce fury when the multinational abruptly announced the plant's closure four months later, in January 1987. Two-thirds of the 1,300 threatened workers were AUEW members; the remainder were members of two white-collar-unions.¹⁰¹ In conscious emulation of the UCS work-in, Caterpillar stewards, led by their convenor, John Brannan, resolved to resist redundancy through occupying the factory. Production continued with existing materials and equipment. The UCS parallels were detailed in a vivid account by Woolfson and Foster, with Airlie a discomfiting personal connection, this time cast as the older union official in political and generational conflict with the younger and unyielding leadership of the occupation.¹⁰²

By March 1987 it was clear that no alternative buyer for the plant would be found. The white-collar unions had incrementally accepted redundancy and left the occupation. Caterpillar obtained an interim interdict in the High Court in Edinburgh, requiring the 800 engineers to leave the premises.¹⁰³ Jimmy Reid appeared on Scottish Television News, saying the resistance had to end because the workforce was no longer united. Airlie delivered the same message to the stewards at the plant in early April. Here was the carefully-defined imprint of Airlie's 'responsible militancy'.¹⁰⁴ Continuation would expose the union to ruinous financial penalties and deprive the workers of redundancy rights and benefits. He told the STUC General Council that the union would henceforth support the workers' resistance 'as a strike rather an occupation'.¹⁰⁵ This was an inversion of 1971 when the UCS stewards recognised that a strike against closure would be futile. Ending the Uddingston occupation would enable Caterpillar to remove its capital equipment, crucial leverage for the workers in the dispute. Maintaining the occupation could nevertheless not alter the difficult reality: Thatcher's government supported the company's right to close the factory and remove the

¹⁰⁰ Ewan Gibbs, "'It's Not a Load of Boring Old Gits Sitting Talking about the Good Old Days': The Heritage and Legacy of the 1987 Caterpillar Occupation in Uddingston, Scotland', *Labour History Review*, 86.1 (2021), pp. 117-43.

¹⁰¹ Ewan Gibbs and Jim Phillips, 'Who Owns a Factory? Caterpillar Tractors in Uddingston', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 39 (2018), pp. 111-137.

¹⁰² Charles Woolfson and John Foster, *Track Record. The Story of the Caterpillar Occupation* (London, 1988), pp. 263-8 especially.

¹⁰³ Jean Stead, 'Caterpillar talks call', *The Guardian*, 27 March 1987, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Gibbs and Scothorne, 'Accusers of Capitalism'.

¹⁰⁵ GCUA, STUC General Council, 1 April 1987.

machinery and tools required to build bulldozers. Caterpillar was adamant that the site would not be repurposed as a rival facility.¹⁰⁶

Danny Carrigan pointed out in 2021 that the AUEW was intensely hierarchical, and Airlie was reluctant to cede authority to workplace representatives, particularly where the finances and functional integrity of the union were jeopardised.¹⁰⁷ Airlie antagonised many of those involved. Some regarded him as doing the work of Caterpillar bosses, puncturing a radical moment; others felt he was a ‘fall guy’, compelled by the union’s national leadership to end the occupation.¹⁰⁸ Being ‘fair to the past’, Airlie despised Caterpillar management and had no interest in furthering its ambitions to leave Uddingston. Nor is it likely that he was being pushed to act against his will by others in the union. The STUC leadership, with Campbell Christie as General Secretary playing an energetic and imaginative role, pushed Caterpillar and supported Airlie to arrive at improved exit terms after the occupation ended in late April. Caterpillar had threatened immediate dismissal; now redundancy was deferred for six months and came with enhanced financial provisions.¹⁰⁹ A well-provisioned private-public retraining initiative was put in place, coordinated by Strathclyde Regional Council, with Brannan involved,¹¹⁰ and Caterpillar compelled to contribute in financially-significant terms. Alternatives were not readily available. By June 1988, nine months after closure, just less than half of the redundant men had found another job.¹¹¹ Some ex-workers interviewed by Ewan Gibbs in the 2010s nevertheless emphasised that their union could not realistically have secured a more propitious ending. Retraining helped workers into other branches of employment where they were able to retain an involvement in labour-movement activism.¹¹²

The difficulties of defending working-class security were likewise evident at Timex in Dundee in 1993. As with Caterpillar, the ending at Timex is best understood within a longer reading of deindustrialisation. The US-owned firm started marking wristwatches in Dundee in 1947. Expansion in the later 1950s and 1960s was supported by growing consumer markets, and substantial public investment in factory premises and capital equipment. Employment peaked in 1974 at around 6,000 across three main sites.¹¹³ Contraction and gradual diversification into sub-contracted electronics

¹⁰⁶ National Records of Scotland (NRS), SEP 4/4571, Peter McKinlay, IDS, Brief for Secretary of State’s meeting with Reps from Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers at Caterpillar, 4 March 1987.

¹⁰⁷ Carrigan, Interview.

¹⁰⁸ Gibbs and Phillips, ‘Who Owns a Factory?’, pp. 132-3.

¹⁰⁹ CGUA, STUC General Council, 1 April and 6 May 1987.

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

¹¹¹ GCUA, STUC General Council papers, Strathclyde Regional Council Economic and Industrial Committee, Caterpillar Working Party, Report by Chief Executive, 17 June 1988.

¹¹² Gibbs, *Coal Country*, pp. 246-7.

¹¹³ Jim Tomlinson, ‘City of Discovery: Dundee since the 1980s’, in Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A. Whatley, eds, *Jute No More: Transforming Dundee* (Dundee, 2011), pp. 291-314, with detail at p. 293.

manufacturing followed, until a sudden rupture in 1983, when watchmaking was abandoned. About 2,000 of the firm's 3,800 Dundee employees were threatened with redundancy, including men engaged in component manufacturing and repair. The engineering workshops at Milton of Craigie were occupied: placed 'under new management' according to a banner mounted above the entrance, alongside others proclaiming the 'right to work'. This conscious reference to the moral-economy demands of the UCS work-in was significant. The occupation secured improved exit terms for the engineers, and several hundred won transfer to the assembly plant at Camperdown where electronics production was concentrated.¹¹⁴ The shift into sub-contracted electronics manufacturing was still damaging. Airlie told John Carnegie in 1995 that without its own products Timex placed itself 'at the mercy o' the major contractor', which was IBM. The Dundee operation was competing on cost with mainly non-union firms.¹¹⁵ Employment fell to 1,000 in 1985, 580 in 1990 and 340 at the beginning of 1993, the majority of whom were women. At this point, with delayed IBM orders, Timex attempted to force through a radical package of labour cost-savings, including temporary redundancies, a one-year wage freeze and reduced fringe benefits. 170 workers were immediately laid off, including union stewards and activists.¹¹⁶

A strike was started but ended abruptly to accommodate negotiations. These involved the stewards and Harry McLevy, a trusted ally of Airlie, area officer of the newly-integrated Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU). A six-month wage freeze was conceded but the union argued for a share in organising the lay-offs, to prevent compulsory redundancy. In written evidence to the House of Commons Employment Committee, investigating Timex later that spring, the AEEU observed that Airlie and McLeavy had an established rotational lay-off deal in place which was unilaterally set aside by the factory's new director, Peter Hall. Airlie and Timex stewards told the Employment Committee at Westminster on 28 April that Hall was intent on union derecognition. MPs then questioned Hall, who admitted that he had wanted a free hand in selecting who to dismiss and who to retain.¹¹⁷ In February he had ignored union attempts at compromise, determined to impose his programme of lay-offs plus a twelve-month wage freeze and a 15 per cent cut in fringe benefits.¹¹⁸ The workforce accepted this, to preserve their jobs. But the 170 laid off in January were

¹¹⁴ Valerie Wright, Jim Phillips and Jim Tomlinson, 'Defending the right to work: the 1983 Timex workers' occupation in Dundee', *Labour History Review*, 86.1 (2021), pp.63-90.

¹¹⁵ Jimmy Airlie, Interview with John Carnegie, AEEU Offices, Glasgow, 18 January 1995, Transcript.

¹¹⁶ Graeme Martin and Martin Dowling, Managing Change, 'Human Resource Management and Timex', *Journal of Strategic Change*, 4 (1995), pp. 77-94, with details at pp. 84-5.

¹¹⁷ Employment Committee, *The operation of employment legislation governing industrial disputes*, House of Commons, Session 1992-1993, 638-i, Memo from the AEEU, pp. 1-2, and *Minutes of Evidence*, 28 April 1993, pp. 12-15, 28-9.

¹¹⁸ Timex History Group, Douglas Community Centre, Dundee (THG), Green Box, Gordon Samson's Note, Invercarse Hotel, Timex, 10 February 1993.

not taken back and the remainder who had gone on strike in protest were sacked for alleged breach of contract. A non-union workforce was in place by the end of February, bussed into the plant each day with pickets held back by a police cordon.¹¹⁹ Airlie told Carnegie that if the original management proposals had been accepted immediately, before the strike in January, then Lenin's maxim, one step back for two steps forward, might have applied, with a potential future for Timex and the union in Dundee. This he qualified in two ways: Hall was 'completely untrustworthy'; and the multinational was run by 'a dirty shower ae bastards'. Moreover, once the lock-out was underway and the 'scabs' recruited, 'the plant was doomed'. The replacements were untrained and could not produce to the quality required by customers; there was no prospect of the pickets being withdrawn; but nor would the company re-engage the unionised workers. His job was to negotiate the best possible redundancy, and in characteristically direct manner: 'There's no gentle way tae tell workers they're fuckin beat. Cos that's the harsh reality. You've lost yer fuckin jobs.'¹²⁰

This brought him into direct conflict with the strikers, who collectively were reluctant to accept the factory was lost.¹²¹ Hall resigned in June, but Timex confirmed the closure in August.¹²² Tensions of hierarchy within the union remained evident. The strikers sought labour-movement support for a boycott of Timex products; Airlie saw this as a barrier to settling the dispute, his overriding priority, to provide redundancy terms for his members. This was eventually reached in October 1993 after a very angry meeting at the Marryat Hall in City Square, where a leading steward, John Kydd, accused Airlie of blackmail: compelling members to accept terms or have legal support and weekly strike pay withdrawn. 'You can't breathe life into a corpse', Airlie reputedly replied, while telling reporters he fully understood the anger of his members. They received a week's pay for each year of service on top of a minimum of £500, with long servers – 30 years or more – securing between £3,000 and £4,000.¹²³ This was a modest outcome, Airlie concluded, 'but if ye've got nothin, it's better than nothin, isn't it?'¹²⁴

Conclusion

¹¹⁹ Peter Hetherington, 'Timex job fight turns clock back to 1980s', *The Guardian*, 3 March 1993, p. 7.

¹²⁰ Airlie, Interview.

¹²¹ THG, Green Box, *Timex Workers' Bulletin*, No. 1, April 1993; *Scottish Socialist Movement*, Bulletin No. 9, June/July 1993.

¹²² Seamus Milne and Edward Pilkington, 'Timex workers vote for fight to continue', *The Guardian*, 4 June 1993, p. 3; and Erlend Clouston, 'Timex closes dispute factory ahead of schedule', *The Guardian*, 30 August 1993, p. 3.

¹²³ Erlend Clouston, 'Timex staff vote to accept redundancy', *The Guardian*, 15 October 1993, p. 5.

¹²⁴ Airlie, Interview.

Airlie died in February 1997, shortly after retirement. His career as a trade-union activist and official spanned the four decades and three phases of deindustrialisation in Scotland examined in this article. As a young apprentice engineer, he saw at first hand the contraction of employment in the shipyards from the late 1950s onwards. In this first phase of deindustrialisation losses in shipbuilding, along with coal mining, metals and textiles were offset by the regional policy-stimulated growth of alternative work in engineering workshops and factories until the late 1960s. In the second phase of deindustrialisation the creation of these new jobs slowed. Downward occupational mobility, including periods of prolonged unemployment, was experienced by workers made redundant from the UCS shipyards in 1969 and 1970. This strengthened the resistance against liquidation in 1971, in which Airlie played an important leadership role, using moral-economy language. Redundancy defied expectations of security; the social costs of unemployment were irrational as well as unjust; the 'right to work' was emphasised. A broad political-social coalition was constructed and mobilised. In a Gramscian register, the stewards and the wider labour movement in Scotland emerged victorious from both the war of position and the war of manoeuvre against Heath's government. Ministers were forced to reinvest, preserving the Govan yards for shipbuilding, converting John Brown in Clydebank for oil-rig production, and saving three jobs out of four on the Upper Clyde.

The work-in was no isolated expression of working-class resistance in this second phase of deindustrialisation. It was neither a singular event nor a foundational struggle but drew upon earlier labour-movement action against industrial job insecurity. Inspiration from the coalfields was vital, where Michael McGahey and other NUM officials blocked closures unless provision was made for alternative employment, either transfers to adjacent pits, or in regional-policy factories. The miners played an important role in the labour movement's mobilisation for working-class security more generally in Scotland during the second phase of deindustrialisation. Marshalled through the STUC, this activism then underpinned the broader social support for the work-in in 1971-2. The Labour government elected in 1974 acknowledged the generalised threat to working-class economic security and prioritised the stabilisation of industrial employment. The nationalisation of shipbuilding was a key component of this policy effort, consolidating the UCS victory. Airlie and the stewards worked hard to make public ownership a success. The Polish ships episode in 1977 showed that this was not easy. Govan accepted the construction of four vessels originally earmarked for Swan Hunter on the Tyne because workers there were in dispute with the nationalised corporate employer. Airlie argued that bringing the ships to the Clyde would advance working-class security in Govan and safeguard the integrity of the nationalised industry more broadly. He argued the case

directly with stewards at Swan Hunter, giving notice of the intention to accept the work on behalf of British Shipbuilders.

Airlie left the yards for a full-time official role in the AUEW, just months after the election of Thatcher's government in 1979. This initiated a third distinct phase in the political management of deindustrialisation. Industrial job loss rapidly accelerated. The crisis surprised the Thatcherites but advanced one of their core objectives, reducing the influence of trade unions in workplaces and policy-making. The outcome of the miners' strike in 1984-85 consolidated the government's war of position and manoeuvre against the labour movement, deepening the problems confronting Airlie and other union officials. Their scope for agency in defending workers' interests was subject to new legal as well as economic constraints. This is vital to understanding Airlie's role in the Caterpillar and Timex disputes. In moral economy terms the closures and redundancies were unjust and resisted on that basis by workers at each plant. Airlie understood and accepted that workforce anger was with union officialdom as well the employers, but these and the many other closures and redundancies in the 1980s and 1990s were not a failure of labour-movement leadership. In this third phase of deindustrialisation Airlie was compelled to accept difficult realities: factories were closing; jobs could not be saved; a dignified exit, maximising the costs to the employer and the compensation to the workers, was often the only realistic means of protecting working-class interests.