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Labour Market in Crisis: The Moral Economy and Redundancy
on the Upper Clyde, 1969–72

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ABSTRACT

The Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) work-in of 1971–2 is examined here within a moral-economy analysis of the longer history of deindustrialisation. Working-class expectations of security and voice in Scotland were cultivated by the management of industrial job losses from the late 1950s onwards. Labour governments were more trusted custodians of this moral economy than Conservative governments. Edward Heath's Conservative government, elected in 1970, violated the moral economy by allowing unemployment to accelerate, with particularly punishing effects in Glasgow. A labour market crisis materialised in 1970 before UCS went into liquidation in 1971. This article revisits an academic survey of men who took voluntary redundancy from UCS in 1969 and 1970, before market conditions deteriorated. Their unexpected experience of downward occupational mobility transgressed the moral economy and was a previously-unremarked factor in the mobilisation of the work-in against further job losses. The episode widened the political gulf between Scotland and England. Conservative policy-makers were discredited in working-class communities in Scotland before Margaret Thatcher and her governments embarked on their reckless management of deindustrialisation from 1979.

In June 1971 Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in Glasgow and Clydebank was forced into liquidation by a shortage of working capital. UCS had debts of £28 million but a busy production schedule. Thirty ships worth an estimated £90 million were due for delivery over the next two years. This constituted 13% of the total order book for the shipbuilding industry in Britain. An operational profit was forecast for 1972.¹ Edward Heath's Conservative government nevertheless refused an urgent request from UCS for a credit loan of just £6 million. The impending redundancy of 8,400 workers from the firm's four yards imperilled economic security in Clydeside. The Joint Shop Stewards Committee (JSSC), representing workers across the four yards, responded with a novel form of resistance: the work-in. Regular hours and practices were observed. Ships already under construction were progressed towards completion. Communist politics and organisation were present, shaping the internal discipline of the JSSC, and the iteration and reiteration of a compelling explanatory narrative. Jimmy Reid and Jimmy Airlie, the most prominent members of the JSSC, engineering-union representatives and Communists both,² contrasted the 'responsibility' of the workforce with the 'immorality' of Westminster, where 'faceless' and 'wrecking' policy-makers were physically and socially distant from the communities threatened by liquidation and mass redundancy.³

¹ Alasdair Buchan, *The Right to Work: The story of the upper Clyde confrontation* (London, 1972), 134–5.

² W. W. Knox and A. McKinlay, *Jimmy Reid. A Clyde-built man* (Liverpool, 2019); Terry Pattinson, 'Obituary: Jimmy Airlie', *Independent*, 11 Mar. 1997.

³ John Foster and Charles Woolfson, 'How workers on the Clyde gained the capacity for class struggle: the upper Clyde shipbuilders' work-in, 1971–2', in John McIlroy, Nina Fishman

The JSSC's leadership kept a large workforce intact, enabling production to continue across the four yards. The official liquidator, Sir Robert Smith, was an unheralded ally, paying wages as well as creditors and suppliers,⁴ so that 7,149 workers were still officially employed at the end of 1971.⁵ The JSSC mobilised a broad alliance behind the longer-term maintenance of shipbuilding on the upper Clyde. This incorporated trade unions, local authorities, regional business representatives, and elected politicians. From outwith Scotland there was organisational solidarity from the British and international labour movement, plus moral and financial support from counter-culture figures and artists, notably Yoko Ono and John Lennon.⁶ A major policy reverse was forced. Heath's government granted further subsidy in 1972. The Glasgow yards were incorporated in a new firm, Govan Shipbuilders. The Clydebank yard was converted for oil-rig production and sold to the US-owned Marathon Corporation. Roughly three jobs in four were preserved.⁷

The work-in was analysed in two foundational histories, each published in 1972. Finlay Hart, veteran Clydebank communist and shipyard trade unionist,⁸ writing with fellow

and Alan Campbell (eds), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics. Vol. 2: The high tide of trade unionism, 1964–79* (Farnham, 1999), 297–325.

⁴ Knox and McKinlay, *Jimmy Reid*, 99–112, 119–20.

⁵ Glasgow, University of Glasgow Archives (UG), GB 248, ACCN 3613/1/5: Sir Robert Smith note, The UCS Work-in in perspective, n.d.

⁶ Jon Wiener, *Come Together. John Lennon in his time* (London, 1985), 167–8.

⁷ Willie Thompson and Finlay Hart, *The UCS Work-In* (London, 1972), 89–90.

⁸ Old Clydebank High School 1873, 'Finlay Hart, Provost of Clydebank' (2019; <http://www.oldchs.co.uk/everything/finlay-hart-provost-of-clydebank/>; accessed 14 Oct. 2020).

communist, Willie Thompson, emphasised the class and nation politics of the work-in. Scotland's leftwards shift in defence of working-class interests in the 1960s was counterpoised with the capitalist identities of the English politicians who shaped industrial policy in Heath's government. Reid wrote an approving foreword, emphasising the primacy of working-class agency, and paid tribute also to another 'excellent' book, authored by his friend, Alasdair Buchan.⁹ This framed the resistance in justice terms. The loss of skilled male employment was a moral outrage as well as an economic danger. Alasdair Buchan was the journalist son of Janey Buchan, who would become Labour regional councillor in Strathclyde from 1974 and then MEP for Glasgow, and Norman Buchan, Labour MP for West Renfrewshire since 1964.¹⁰ Buchan's book was introduced by Harold Wilson, leader of the Labour party and prime minister from 1964–70. Without endorsing the work-in strategy, Wilson commended the 'right to work' principle and the determined refusal by the men and their communities to accept defeat.¹¹

This article re-examines the core themes of these foundational histories: Scotland's distinct political trajectory in the UK, and the centrality of social justice to industrial struggle. In bringing these themes together the article provides an original contribution to the longer history of deindustrialisation from the 1950s to the 1980s, and a fresh analysis of the work-in itself. Social science accounts in the 1980s and subsequent historical literature commonly

⁹ Thompson and Hart, *UCS Work-In*, with details on Scotland's distinct political trajectory at 46–52, and Reid's foreword at 7–8.

¹⁰ Michael White, 'Janey Buchan: obituary', *Guardian*, 18 Jan. 2012 (<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/jan/18/janey-buchan>; accessed 14 Oct. 2020).

¹¹ Buchan, *Right to Work*, 9–10, 88–9.

tended to depict industrial job losses as a sudden eruption of catastrophe and closure.¹² There was a rapid acceleration of industrial job loss under the ‘adventurous’ economic management of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government elected in 1979.¹³ This indirectly influenced the best-known later account of the work-in, by John Foster and Charles Woolfson, published in 1986. *The Politics of the UCS Work-In* was based on hundreds of hours of audio recordings made by the authors of JSSC meetings in 1971–2. Foster and Woolfson emphasised the role of communist politics in the work-in but followed the foundational histories in accentuating both the right to work claims and the growing political distance between Scotland and England. These motifs appeared especially apt in the mid-1980s, amid a serious escalation of industrial closures, chronic economic insecurity and political crisis.¹⁴ Yet deindustrialisation, as the work-in demonstrated, was more than a sudden disaster in the 1980s: it was an incremental process with a lengthy pre-1979 history.¹⁵

The UCS case demonstrates that as a long-running phenomenon deindustrialisation had two chief effects in Scotland, closely related. First, there was declining electoral support

¹² Tony Dickson and David Judge (eds), *The Politics of Industrial Closure* (Basingstoke, 1987); T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation, 1700–2000* (London, 1999), 591–9; Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Twentieth-century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1998), 164.

¹³ Jim Tomlinson, ‘Mrs Thatcher’s macroeconomic adventurism, 1979–1981, and its political consequences’, *British Politics* 2 (2007) 3–19.

¹⁴ John Foster and Charles Woolfson, *The Politics of the UCS Work-In: Class alliances and the right to work* (London, 1986).

¹⁵ Neil Hood and Stephen Young, *Multinationals in Retreat: the Scottish experience* (Edinburgh, 1982), 106–13.

for Conservative and Unionist candidates in UK general elections from the 1960s onwards, with Labour viewed as a better defender of industrial employment and working-class economic security. Second, the management of deindustrialisation in the 1960s cultivated expectations of collective security and improvement within working-class communities that were confounded by later high-profile shocks, of which the UCS liquidation became a prime example.¹⁶ The article illustrates these fundamentals of deindustrialisation by shifting the chronological analysis of the work-in back to 1969, when UCS avoided liquidation by negotiating a linked package of investment and redundancy with the Labour government and industry unions. Unions accepted a 20% manpower reduction in moral-economy terms: remaining employment would be secure, and workers leaving UCS would find comparably paid jobs elsewhere. These expectations were confounded, however, by the election of the Conservative government in June 1970. Heath and his ministers oversaw a significant expansion of unemployment, markedly worse in Scotland than in England, and especially acute in Clydeside. Michael Bailey recently positioned the work-in as a powerful ‘usable past’, an inspiration and model for later if less effective struggles against deindustrialisation.¹⁷ The specific conjunction of transgressed popular expectations of security, and a labour market in crisis, gave the work-in decisive impetus, and enabled it to occupy this historical space.

¹⁶ Jim Phillips, Valerie Wright and Jim Tomlinson, ‘Deindustrialization, the Linwood car plant and Scotland’s political divergence from England in the 1960s and 1970s’, *Twentieth Century British History* 30 (2019) 399–423.

¹⁷ Michael Bailey, ‘Changing tides of industrial democracy: red Clydeside and the UCS work-in as political heritage’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25 (2019) 1319–88.

The analysis is developed in three parts. The moral-economy framework is established first. This is related to Scotland's changing political direction after the 1959 UK general election, the 1969 crisis on the upper Clyde, and the deteriorating labour market situation in 1970. The department of employment, concerned about the unemployment position, commissioned a detailed survey on the UCS redundancies, directed by Frank Herron at the University of Glasgow. Herron's comprehensive findings were published in 1975 as *Labour Market in Crisis*, to which this article pays grateful tribute in title and content.¹⁸ Unpublished details collected by Herron are used to structure the second part of the article, on how the post-UCS experiences of redundant workers offended working-class moral-economy expectations. Broadly speaking, these men experienced deterioration in their working lives: lengthy spells of unemployment, lower pay, longer hours and further redundancies were commonly encountered. The third part of the article shows how these negative individual and collective experiences of redundancy were a factor in the work-in's success. They strengthened the resolve of the workers who remained and the mobilisation of support for the preservation of shipbuilding on the upper Clyde. Along with Herron's research materials, retained in the university of Glasgow's archives and special collections, the article is based on UK government files relating to the crises of 1969 and 1971, plus the UCS Board of Directors' files, along with trade-union perspectives drawn from the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) General Council papers.

The moral economy and redundancy at the UCS

¹⁸ Frank Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis: Redundancy at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders* (London, 1975).

Theoretical inspiration for the moral-economy framework used in this analysis comes from Karl Polanyi and E. P. Thompson. In *The Great Transformation*, published in 1944, Polanyi argued that marketised industrialisation from the late eighteenth century onwards loosened economic activity from its social bedrock. The emergence of trade unions and social reform movements in the late nineteenth century enabled the gradual although highly-contested re-embedding of economic activity in society in the twentieth century. Moral considerations offset and to some extent overrode market imperatives.¹⁹ Consolidated after 1945 in Britain with full employment and the extension of the welfare state, this process advanced through stronger trade-union organisation and the Labour Party's electoral successes. Thompson, writing in the 1960s and 1970s, did not engage directly with Polanyi,²⁰ but explored similar terrain. He examined how the plebeian English 'crowd' responded to marketisation in the eighteenth-century. Its collective action—whether food riots or machine-breaking—was in defence of pre-existing customs and expectations that were under assault as capitalist manufacturers and traders secured market liberalisation from a compliant parliament.²¹

¹⁹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (Boston, Mass., 1944).

²⁰ Tim Rogan, *The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism* (Princeton, N.J., 2017).

²¹ E. P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present* 50 (1971) 76–136.

Thompson's moral economy was tied to historical specifics of class, culture and geography. He was wary of universalising its application.²² There is, however, demonstrable value in using a modified moral-economy framework for analysing working-class responses to deindustrialisation in Scotland since 1945. Careful interpretation of the relevant temporal, economic and social contingencies is required. The expectations and customs in operation were plainly those of the industrial working class in mid-twentieth century Scotland. There was a popular insistence, expressed through trade-union and elected political representatives, that economic restructuring had to be regulated, with an emphasis on individual and collective security. This resembled the English crowd's resistance to the liberalisation of market mechanisms in the eighteenth century.²³ The working-class moral economy in Scotland was likewise a powerful element in what Polanyi termed the 'countermovement': a coalition, primarily composed of trade unions, social-democratic politicians and Keynesian policy-makers, which exerted significant control over market forces.²⁴ Where employment was threatened, Scottish industrial workers demanded rights of consultation. This was particularly evident in the coal industry. Union representatives delayed colliery closures until the economic security of the workers and communities affected was safeguarded. This was achieved through provision of employment alternatives, either at other mines or in new

²² Norbert Gotz, "'Moral economy": its conceptual history and analytical prospects', *Journal of Global Ethics* 11 (2015) 147–162 with specific details on Thompson at 152–4; thank you to a *SHR* referee for this.

²³ Jim Phillips, Valerie Wright and Jim Tomlinson, *Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy in Scotland since 1955* (Edinburgh, 2021).

²⁴ Ewan Gibbs, *Coal Country: The meaning and memory of deindustrialisation in post-war Scotland* (London, 2021), 7–14.

manufacturing enterprises, including those established through UK government regional policy. Customs of consultation were established, and expectations of security were cultivated: workers in Scotland accepted employment changes because these were negotiated and came with the promise of future economic improvement.²⁵

The working-class moral economy had an important influence on political change, contributing to the erosion of support in Scotland for Conservatism and Unionism from the 1960s onwards. Various factors were involved in this complex process. Conservative governance in the UK in the 1950s was too centralising and economically interventionist for some Unionist voters in Scotland, who turned in the 1960s to Liberals and Scottish Nationalists instead.²⁶ The Unionist Party's reformation in 1965 as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party, more enmeshed in UK structures, deterred or antagonised an additional segment of the electorate, further encouraging a trend towards the Scottish National Party (SNP).²⁷ The decomposition of social deference was also significant, with generally younger voters more receptive to anti-Conservative narratives, whether articulated by Scottish nationalists, or Labour modernisers, particularly Willie Ross, secretary of state for Scotland from 1964 to 1970 and again from 1974 to 1976.²⁸ Ross and the Labour governments which

²⁵ Jim Phillips, *Scottish Coal Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, 2019), 199–209.

²⁶ Malcolm Petrie, 'Anti-socialism, liberalism and individualism: rethinking the alignment of Scottish politics, 1945–1970', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28 (2018) 187–217.

²⁷ Catriona M. M. Macdonald, *Whaur Extremes Meet. Scotland's twentieth century* (Edinburgh, 2009), 222–3.

²⁸ Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled Upon A Thistle: Scotland since 1880* (Edinburgh, 2010), 266–7; James Mitchell, *The Scottish Question* (Oxford, 2014), 141–55.

he served in were especially vigilant on the question of economic security through industrial employment. This underscores the value of identifying the correlation between falling employment in the staple industries and declining electoral support for the Unionist party and then the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party. The numbers working in coal, metals, shipbuilding and textiles drifted downwards from the late 1950s.²⁹ This was accompanied by a significant and lasting movement away from the Unionist and then the Conservative and Unionist Party, which won 50.1% of the votes cast in Scotland in the 1955 general election and 47.2% in 1959, but just 40.6% in 1964 and only 37.7% in 1966. Labour's vote share remained stable, increasing slightly from 46.7% in 1959 to 48.7% in 1964 and 49.9% in 1966, when it won 46 of Scotland's 71 constituencies.³⁰ In government Labour consolidated at least its manual-worker support by defending industrial employment, diversifying Scotland's economy, and managing the process of deindustrialisation carefully. Scottish Gross Domestic Product per capita increased from 87.7% of the UK level in 1962 to 91.1% in 1966–73 and then 96.0 in 1973–9.³¹ A high-profile venture in the key growth sector of engineering, the car plant at Linwood in Renfrewshire, was initiated within a limited plan of diversification pursued by Harold Macmillan's Conservative government. It was then

²⁹ Phillips, Wright and Tomlinson, *Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy*, 85–9.

³⁰ Steven Kendrick and David McCrone, 'Politics in a cold climate: the Conservative decline in Scotland', *Political Studies* 37 (1989) 589–603.

³¹ 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), 332–67, at 338.

substantially expanded and stabilised through various interventions by Labour governments in the later 1960s and mid-1970s.³²

The process of industrial restructuring in the 1960s and 1970s had gendered qualities. The growth of lighter engineering and assembly-goods manufacturing provided new opportunities for women. In Lanarkshire, the number of women in engineering doubled from 4,226 in 1951 to 8,548 in 1961, and then near-doubled again to 15,920 in 1971.³³ There was a parallel contraction of coal mining and shipbuilding. These two heavy-industrial sectors absorbed 7% of all employment in Scotland in 1961 but only 3.4% in 1971.³⁴ Coal and shipbuilding were male-monopoly sectors. Even during the pronounced labour shortages of the second world war the male grip on shipyard employment had not been disturbed.³⁵ These parallel tendencies—shrinking number of heavy-industry jobs for men; no loosening of male privilege in heavy-industry employment—are important to emphasise when assessing the resistance to deindustrialisation on the upper Clyde. Reid’s often recounted and telling phrase was, ‘We don’t only build ships on the Clyde; we also build men’.³⁶ Defending jobs in the yards meant protecting the distinct intersectional privileges of the skilled-male Clydesider.

³² Phillips, Wright and Tomlinson, ‘Scotland’s political divergence’.

³³ Gibbs, *Coal Country*, Table 1.2.

³⁴ George T. Murray, *Scotland: The new future* (Glasgow, 1973), 50–1.

³⁵ Hugh Murphy, “‘From the Crinoline to the Boilersuit’: women workers in British shipbuilding during the second world war’, *Contemporary British History* 13 (1999) 82–104.

³⁶ Buchan, *Right to Work*, 15.

Class and gender were entwined in this identity, which emphasised autonomy from managerial supervision and employer control as well as craft knowledge.³⁷

The privileges of skilled men on the upper Clyde were threatened twice in the 1960s. On each occasion workforce and trade-union activism persuaded Wilson's Labour government to intervene positively. First came the Fairfield 'Experiment', from 1965 to 1967. This was a reconstituted venture in the largest Govan shipyard, when the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited, overwhelmed by various historic liabilities, entered receivership. The Labour government invested in a 50% stake in the new firm, Fairfields (Glasgow) Limited. This was no reckless gamble. The yard had recently been modernised, held a £32 million order book and a skilled workforce numbering close to 3,000.³⁸ The Experiment involved a managerial emphasis on workforce consultation. Security of employment was explicitly designed to incentivise productivity improvements.³⁹ The Experiment ended when Fairfield joined the UCS combine in 1967 with John Brown of Clydebank, Connells and Yarrows, both of Scotstoun, and Stephens of Linthouse. Yarrows, which built to orders from the admiralty, was an uneasy addition to the consortium. The Conservative government allowed it to withdraw from UCS in February 1971. This timing

³⁷ Jim Phillips, Valerie Wright and Jim Tomlinson, 'Being a 'Clydesider' in the age of deindustrialisation: skilled male identity and economic restructuring in the west of Scotland since the 1960s', *Labor History* 61 (2020) 151–69.

³⁸ London, The National Archives [TNA], EW 27/118: Note of meeting in chancellor of the exchequer's room, Treasury, 29 Oct. 1965, and Conclusions of a meeting in first secretary's room, Department of Economic Affairs, 6 Dec. 1965.

³⁹ Kenneth Alexander and Carson L. Jenkins, *Fairfields: A study of industrial change* (London, 1970).

was significant, according to Thompson and Hart, ensuring that naval construction would be undisturbed when the premeditated decision to deprive UCS of additional support was confirmed.⁴⁰ Buchan pointedly contrasted the Conservative government's support for Yarrows, building frigates in 1971 for export sale to the apartheid state of South Africa, with its abandonment of the civilian yards.⁴¹ The establishment of UCS in 1968 was within the Labour government's broader strategy for shipbuilding, geared to securing a more globally competitive industry through scale economies of production and efficiencies in labour utilisation.⁴²

The government's second intervention followed shortly afterwards. Grouping inadvertently weakened the Glasgow yards. UCS acquired damaging legacy losses, none more so than the liability incurred at John Brown in building the *QE2* for Cunard.⁴³ Liquidation was only averted in 1969 by the outcome of negotiations involving cabinet ministers, industry and workplace union representatives, local Unionist and Labour MPs and the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC).⁴⁴ Shipbuilding policy was steered by Anthony Wedgwood Benn, minister of technology, before he re-styled himself politically and personally in 1970 as Tony Benn. Wedgwood Benn opposed the core trade-union demand of

⁴⁰ Thompson and Hart, *UCS Work-in*, 15.

⁴¹ Buchan, *Right to Work*, 52, 138.

⁴² HMSO, *Shipbuilding Inquiry Committee, 1965–1977. Report*, Cmnd 2937 (London, 1966).

⁴³ TNA, EW 7/1456: A. J. Cody, Department for Economic Affairs [DEA], Brief for secretary of state, 28 Feb. 1969.

⁴⁴ Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University Archives (GCUA), STUC General Council, Special meeting, 7 May 1969.

nationalisation,⁴⁵ but invested time in difficult discussions with STUC officials and workplace representatives in Glasgow. ‘They know you know the problems and they don’t get so intense’, he noted.⁴⁶ Officials from the department of economic affairs projected in February 1969 that liquidation would increase male unemployment in the Glasgow area from 6.1% to 8.5%.⁴⁷ Wedgwood Benn was persuaded that this was unacceptable in social as well as electoral terms.⁴⁸ Willie Ross was a forceful influence, arguing that all four civilian yards had to be defended.⁴⁹ The government agreed to a grant of £3 million in June 1969.⁵⁰ This was conditional, however, on UCS reducing its labour commitments by one-fifth.⁵¹ Along with natural wastage, a phased programme of redundancy reduced the four civilian yards’ workforce from 10,800 in August 1969 to 8,400 by June 1971.⁵² This was presented by government and management as enabling a stable future for those who remained. The men who left believed employment alternatives were available, and union representatives saw the

⁴⁵ TNA, EW 7/1456: UCS, Memo by Wedgwood Benn, 29 Apr. 1969.

⁴⁶ Tony Benn, *Office Without Power: Diaries 1968–1972* (London, 1988), 154–5.

⁴⁷ TNA, EW 7/1456: D. M. O’Brien, UCS background notes for Economic Policy Committee, 5 May 1969.

⁴⁸ TNA, EW 7/1456, UCS, Memo by Wedgwood Benn, 29 Apr. 1969.

⁴⁹ TNA, EW 7/1456: Ross to Wedgwood Benn, 30 Apr. 1969.

⁵⁰ TNA, EW 7/1456: Cabinet ministerial committee on economic policy, 6 May 1969.

⁵¹ UG, UCS 5/1/2: Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, minutes of meetings of UCS directors, 6 and 11 Jun. 1969.

⁵² Frank Herron, ‘Redundancy and redeployment from UCS, 1969–1971’, *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 19 (1972) 231–51, at 233.

situation in moral-economy terms. STUC officials believed they had secured a commitment from the government to defend UCS and broader economic security across Clydeside.⁵³

External shock followed. Edward Heath's Conservative government, elected in June 1970, abandoned the British state's moral-economy compact with the upper Clyde. The new government was committed to withdrawing aid for so-called 'lame ducks'. Under Labour's Shipbuilding Industry Act, purchasers of vessels were incentivised with government credit. From October 1970 to February 1971 John Davies, secretary of state for trade and industry, blocked credit to purchasers from UCS. This had a major bearing on the eventual crisis in June 1971, the shortfall in orders and income pushing UCS into deeper financial difficulty.⁵⁴ Gordon Campbell, secretary of state for Scotland, offered no criticism of this policy switch.⁵⁵ Davies was director-general of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) from 1965 until 1969, after a business career in the oil industry and banking. This shaped his indifference to workers facing redundancy, according to Buchan as well as Thompson and Hart.⁵⁶ Job losses were now tolerated with no government effort to stimulate alternatives. Unemployment across the UK increased from 2.7% in June 1970 to more than 4% twelve months later.⁵⁷ The situation was more difficult in Glasgow, where male unemployment climbed from 6.8% in

⁵³ GCUA, STUC, General Council, Report of a meeting with the Rt Hon. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, minister of technology, and the Rt Hon. William Ross, secretary of state for Scotland, board of trade offices, Glasgow, 12 Jan. 1970.

⁵⁴ Buchan, *Right to Work*, 49–54.

⁵⁵ TNA, PREM 15/697: Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, 21 Dec. 1970.

⁵⁶ Thompson and Hart, *UCS Work-In*, 11–13.

⁵⁷ Jim Tomlinson, *Managing the Economy, Managing the People. Narratives of economic life in Britain from Beveridge to Brexit* (Oxford, 2017), 145–8.

the first quarter of 1970 to 10.5% in the third quarter of 1971. At the end of 1969 there were 3,000 job openings available for 21,000 unemployed males in Glasgow. By June 1971 there were only 642 vacancies with 35,000 men out of work.⁵⁸ The department of employment and productivity, concerned about the particularly acute position on the Clyde, commissioned an investigation of how communities dependent on ‘declining industries’ could be better supported, perhaps through redesigned regional policy. Frank Herron of the University of Glasgow’s department of economic and social research was appointed to direct this research, funded by the social science research council.⁵⁹

The labour market in crisis

Herron constructed a sample of 400 of the 2,000 workers made redundant in 1969 and 1970, using UCS occupational categories and employment records. From this sample, 328 men answered questions from a lengthy schedule, in home interviews conducted by researchers from a large private-sector firm with offices in Glasgow and other cities in the UK. The method of data gathering presents a question that cannot be resolved: were the words recorded literally those of the interviewee, or rephrased and inadvertently given different meaning by the interviewer? Mike Savage, revisiting the famous ‘Affluent Worker’ project, warned in 2005 that interactions between academic or professional researchers and manual

⁵⁸ Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis*, 16.

⁵⁹ TNA, LAB 110/33: Dept. of employment, UCS redundancy: research university of Glasgow, S. J. Pickford, 24 May 1973, and A. B. Martin, 25 Jun. 1973.

workers in the 1960s were fraught in class terms. Verbal misunderstandings abounded, possibly distorting interpretation of working-class perspectives on social identity.⁶⁰

The transcribed words of the redundant UCS workers are therefore subject to important qualification. Their broad tenor is nevertheless unmistakable. When made redundant the men had expectations which were unsatisfied by subsequent labour-market experience. The timing of the field work was significant. UCS entered liquidation on 14 June 1971.⁶¹ The interviews commenced the previous week, beginning 7 June, and continued over the next month. Each of the fifteen referred to in this article took place *before* the work-in began at the end of July. This was a distinct period, between the apparent ending of shipbuilding on the Upper Clyde and the intensified collective effort to secure its preservation. Within this liminal space the pessimism articulated by many of the redundant men was possibly accentuated. Perhaps they constructed what oral historians have come to term ‘composed’ narratives, positioning and thereby tolerating discomfiting personal experience within a broader social story of communal setback.⁶² Many had chosen to leave ‘early’ as an act of insurance, assuming this would provide labour market advantage should further unexpected employment shocks at UCS materialise. By June 1971, the men were generally downbeat: few spoke optimistically about shipbuilding’s future on the Clyde.⁶³ The shift from confidence to anxiety was encapsulated in the evidence presented by an engineer

⁶⁰ Mike Savage, ‘Working class identities in the 1960s: revisiting the Affluent Worker studies’, *Sociology* 34 (2005) 929–46.

⁶¹ UG, GB 248, ACCN 3613/1/1: Sir Robert Smith Diary, 15 Jun. 1971.

⁶² Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (2nd ed., Abingdon, 2016), 40–2, 66–70.

⁶³ UG, GB 248, Social and Economic Research (SER), Box 15, Labourer, #254, interviewed 15 June 1971.

who left John Brown in 1970. Aged forty-two, married, and with one of his two young daughters present at the interview, the engineer said he had thought it would be ‘easy’ to find another job. His post-redundancy experience had included a spell of unemployment and two unsatisfying jobs earning less money, in one case unable to utilise his engineering trade skills.⁶⁴

The ex-John Brown engineer was slightly unusual in one important respect. Most of the redundant men were under the age of forty. The redundancy programme had concentrated first on workers with two years or less continuous service, and then on those with five years or less. Within Herron’s interviewed sample, 31% were below the age of thirty and another 22% were between thirty and thirty-nine. Among those employed at UCS in June 1971 only 16% were younger than thirty with another 19% between thirty and thirty-nine. Redundancy in 1969 and 1970 ‘aged’ the UCS workforce. This was a significant moral-economy driver of support for the work-in, for Herron showed that the likelihood of alternative comparable employment fell steeply in correlation with rising age. Some 12.5% of the redundant men had been continuously unemployed since leaving UCS. This was the experience of only 3% of those aged twenty-nine or less and 6% of those aged 30–39, but 11% of those aged 40–49, 29% of those aged 50–59 and 42% of those aged sixty and over.⁶⁵

The ex-John Brown engineer was more typical of the interviewed sample in terms of occupational profile. Two-thirds were finishing tradesmen: plumbers and painters, electricians, joiners and polishers, or engineers and fitters. Only 6% were shipbuilding tradesmen: shipwrights, drillers, platers, welders, coppersmiths, tinsmiths and others. There were two explanations for this bias, given that 38% of the UCS workforce in June 1971 were

⁶⁴ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 15, Engineer #266, interviewed 7 June 1971.

⁶⁵ Herron, ‘Redundancy and redeployment’, 237.

shipbuilding tradesmen. First, UCS was moving towards greater standardisation of ship design, to reduce the reliance on craft labour associated with bespoke fitting-out operations. Second, UCS managers, policy-makers and the researchers commonly hypothesised that finishing tradesmen were better equipped than shipbuilding tradesmen to adapt to occupational change.⁶⁶ A study of Swan Hunter shipyard in Wallsend on the Tyne, undertaken in 1967–8, had expressed caution on this question. Shipyard workers with ostensibly transferable skills were reluctant to seek employment in other sectors.⁶⁷ Different attitudes apparently prevailed on the upper Clyde. Many of the redundant UCS men endorsed the hypothesis of aspirant occupational mobility, telling researchers that they were interested in applying their skills in different environments. This might be interpreted as internalisation of entreaties that were often articulated by policy-makers for workers to be flexible. The Wilson government's *National Plan* of 1965, and its adjunct for Scotland, *The Scottish Economy*, promoted value-added manufacturing production and employment. This would deliver more rapid growth and higher living standards but required the movement of labour resources from the slower-yielding staples, such as shipbuilding, to emergent and more dynamic manufacturing sectors.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis*, 12, 24.

⁶⁷ R. K. Brown, P. Brannen, J. M. Cousins and M. L. Samphier, 'The contours of solidarity: social stratification and industrial relations in shipbuilding', *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 10 (1972) 12–41, at 20.

⁶⁸ Department of Economic Affairs, *The National Plan*, Cmnd. 2764 (London, 1965); The Scottish Office, *The Scottish Economy, 1965 to 1970: A plan for expansion*, Cmnd. 2864 (Edinburgh, 1966).

The ex-engineer from John Brown said he ‘didn’t mind where I worked [after UCS], as long as the money was as good’, but then raised an issue that would resonate widely in Herron’s findings. There was a ‘stigma’ attached to shipbuilding workers.⁶⁹ Two-thirds of the sample reported that they faced ‘special disadvantages’ when seeking work outwith the shipyards, where employers did not recognise the extent of their skills.⁷⁰ ‘You get typed’, said a thirty-four year-old machine-fitter, ‘and this sticks to you’. After a lengthy search, this man found a job on the Hillington Industrial Estate, a mile from the Fairfield yard. He was paid £22 for a forty-hour week, less than the £30 earned from a forty-eight-hour week with overtime at UCS.⁷¹ An ex-John Brown plumber, born in 1945 and living with his parents and adult sister in Dumbarton, explained how his skills were not valued in construction work or home- and office-maintenance. He had taken a job as a warehouse labourer in a distillery. This paid less than his skilled job in UCS but was more rewarding financially than domestic plumbing.⁷² Painters also emphasised the gap between shipbuilding and domestic construction or maintenance. An ex-Fairfield man was pleased to be employed with a painter-decorator firm in Coatbridge, but the adjustment had been difficult, involving significant re-training and lost earnings.⁷³ An electrician who left Fairfield in August 1970 observed that transition away from shipbuilding was not easy in his trade either: equipment was used differently, employers were sceptical about his abilities, and pay appreciably lower. Like the

⁶⁹ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 15: Engineer #266.

⁷⁰ Herron, ‘Redundancy and redeployment’, 233–6, 245, 248.

⁷¹ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 8: Machine-Fitter #301, interviewed 25 Jun. 1971.

⁷² UG, GB 248, SER, Box 9: Plumber #39, interviewed 16 Jun. 1971.

⁷³ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 9: Painter #19, interviewed 14 Jun. 1971.

Hillington machine-fitter, his aggregate earnings were down by a quarter, from £24 at UCS to £18 with an electrical contractor in Barrhead.⁷⁴

Lower wages were a general feature of UCS redundancy. Almost a quarter earned at least £6 a week less in their first post-UCS job; another 9% earned between £4 and £6 a week less, 13% between £2 and £4 a week less, and 5% under £2 a week less. More than half the sample therefore experienced reduced earnings. Only a third earned more. Herron generalised a broader pattern of ‘downward occupational mobility’: more than a quarter found less skilled work after UCS.⁷⁵ There were positive outcomes for some. Admiralty contracts provided more stable experience at Yarrows, sanctuary for one ex-Fairfield plumber, and the Faslane nuclear submarine base further down the Clyde, where an engineer fitter from John Brown appreciated the enhanced security.⁷⁶ Shipbuilding on the Lower Clyde, at the Scott-Lithgow yards between Greenock and Glasgow, was another haven, located by an ex-Fairfield electrician born in 1941. But there were complications. The electrician lived in Drumchapel. His daily commute to Fairfield and back totalled no more than twenty-five minutes. Now he was travelling for 105 minutes every day, from Drumchapel to Scott-Lithgow and back. UCS had also been a better employer, with superior working conditions and provision of overalls and gloves.⁷⁷ Other workers moved even further away to retain employment in shipbuilding. A fitter born in 1927, whose working life of twenty-eight years had been spent entirely in the

⁷⁴ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 11: Electrician #65, interviewed 9 Jun. 1971.

⁷⁵ Herron, ‘Redundancy and redeployment’, 245.

⁷⁶ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 11: Plumber #41, interviewed 10 Jun. 1971 and Box 15, Engineer-Fitter #257, interviewed 16 Jun. 1971.

⁷⁷ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 11: Electrician #79, interviewed 8 Jun. 1971.

industry, left Fairfield for a ship-repairing job on Merseyside. Family disruption resulted: his wife and son, age seventeen, had not moved from Glasgow.⁷⁸

Another post-UCS difficulty was a longer working week. This was illustrated by the case of a thirty year-old married electrician with a young son and baby daughter. The electrician left Fairfield after fifteen years in the yard. The family moved from a one-room apartment with kitchen and outside toilet near the yard to the New Town of Livingston, with the major incentive of a local-authority house. This was a common but nevertheless bold step taken in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly by young nuclear families confronting the housing shortage in Glasgow.⁷⁹ The electrician was upbeat about his prospects and had found work initially on a Livingston industrial estate before taking a job with an electrical contractor in Edinburgh. He reported an increase in wages, from a weekly £26.50 at UCS to £36. But for this premium his hours of work had nearly doubled, to eighty-two per week.⁸⁰ This New Town dweller, hunting for material improvement, perhaps fitted the profile of the ‘Affluent Worker’ identified in the famous study by Goldthorpe et al.⁸¹ But it might be helpful to understand his experience as also corroborating Selina Todd’s compelling argument that

⁷⁸ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 8: Fitter #304, interviewed 25 Jun. 1971.

⁷⁹ Lynn Abrams, Barry Hazley, Valerie Wright and Ade Kearns, ‘Aspiration, agency, and the production of new selves in a Scottish New Town, c.1947–c.2016’, *Twentieth Century British History* 29 (2018) 576–604.

⁸⁰ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 14: Electrician #352, interviewed 13 Jul. 1971.

⁸¹ John Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial attitudes and behaviour* (Cambridge, 1968).

‘affluence’ among manual workers in Britain from the 1950s to the 1970s was generally attained only through extensive commitment to intensive physical labour.⁸²

The greatest difficulties confronting the redundant men were intermittent employment, or no employment at all. This was the crux of a local labour market in crisis. On average, a former UCS worker was unemployed for 36.9% of the time between redundancy and interview. Age, to reiterate an important truth, aggravated exposure to this hazard. Those aged 40–49 had been unemployed for 40.8% of the period; those aged 50–59 for 51.8%, and those aged over sixty for 56.4%. Within the sample, 57% had experienced at least one period of unemployment and 31% were unemployed on the day of interview. Employment followed by another redundancy was commonly reported. In the interviewed sample 141—almost 43%—had left their first post-UCS job. Those who left post-UCS jobs in industrial sectors were even more likely to have done so because of redundancy: 56% of those departing post-UCS jobs in shipbuilding, 50% in engineering, and 62% in other manufacturing. The precarity of jobs in these sectors, where manual pay and conditions were more likely to be more comparable to those at UCS than in non-industrial sectors, was an unexpected and damaging disappointment. A significant portion were then made redundant from a second post-UCS job. More than one-third had encountered two or more spells of unemployment. Herron reckoned that 68 of the interviewed sample—that is, one in five—had experienced redundancy *three times* in less than thirteen months.⁸³

The transcribed interviews provide telling human details of these insecurities. A red leader from Dalmuir, born in 1915, whose work involved applying anti-corrosive paint to exterior surfaces, had been out of work twice and for a total of 38 weeks in the preceding 22 months: 41% of the time. This was below average for his mid-forties age group, but he was hardly in a fortunate situation. Unable to find employment outwith shipbuilding, he had been taken on for limited spells of six months back at John Brown and then four months at Fairfield. He had financial worries, with unpaid electricity bills, and was unemployed when

⁸² Selina Todd, ‘Affluence, class and Crown Street: reinvestigating the post-war working class’, *Contemporary British History* 22 (2008) 501–18.

⁸³ Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis*, 56–7, 81, 94, 162–4.

interviewed.⁸⁴ A plumber from Clydebank, born in 1921, married and with three primary school-aged children, volunteered for redundancy from John Brown. This, he felt, would help create a more secure environment where younger men were better able to keep their jobs. Unemployed continuously for nine months, he finally got a start with a Clydebank firm making industrial washing machines in March 1971.⁸⁵ A fitter born in 1943, married with two pre-school age sons, who left John Brown voluntarily, was out of work for ten weeks before employment as a plant installer. The new position involved a significant extension of the working week that resembled the experience of the Livingston electrician: from fifty-two hours with overtime at UCS to earn £28, to seventy-three hours with overtime to earn £33.⁸⁶

Personal details were used sparingly by Herron, to capture the key dimensions of the labour market in crisis: lost disposable income, the indignity of redundancy and unemployment; the gendered shame of struggling to fulfil the role of family provider; and the bias against finishing tradesmen among non-shipbuilding employers. One man's grim account, referenced tersely by Herron, is set out here in greater detail. This was an ex-fitter, born in 1928 and married with six children: three boys and three girls, aged between six and fifteen. The fitter accepted voluntary exit in May 1970 after just ten months at Fairfield, where he had worked after redundancy from a position as an aircraft engine inspector for Rolls Royce at nearby Hillington. His four weeks' redundancy from UCS comprised a lump sum of £100. Unemployment for thirty-two weeks was broken by a three-month stint at Yarrows, but this was ended by a spell of personal illness. He remained out of work on the day of interview, 21 June, one week after UCS entered liquidation. He had been unemployed

⁸⁴ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 9: Electrician #9, interviewed 14 Jun. 1971.

⁸⁵ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 9: Plumber #21, interviewed 16 Jun. 1971.

⁸⁶ UG, GB 248, SER, Box 8: Fitter #307, interviewed 22 Jun. 1971.

for 60% of the time since redundancy, above the average of 40.8% for his age group. The fitter was thinking about moving his family to one of the New Towns, Livingston perhaps, or Irvine in Ayrshire. 'I must think of my boys', he was recorded as saying, although surely he was considering also the future facing his daughters. 'Soon they'll be looking for work and Glasgow is dying as far as industry is concerned'.⁸⁷ Herron quoted the fitter's response to a question about his experience of redundancy: 'It has shattered my plans'. He had traded in his car, using a bicycle instead, and miserably reliant on social security benefits to pay for his children's shoes.⁸⁸

The moral economy and the work-in

The experiences captured by Herron and his researchers encapsulate the social indignity and material hardship arising from industrial redundancy on the upper Clyde. The Labour government's moral-economy offer to the UCS workforce was withdrawn by its Conservative successor. Although Herron's preliminary findings were not published until 1972,⁸⁹ the social costs of redundancy were painfully clear by the mid-summer of 1971, *before* UCS entered liquidation. The leaders of the work-in did not have to ask men in the shipyards to imagine what life could be like if UCS was made to disappear. Such hardships were already apparent in Clydebank, Govan and neighbouring communities.⁹⁰ To reiterate an important point, the 1969–70 redundancies removed from UCS hundreds of those workers thought most likely to adapt to employment elsewhere: finishing tradesmen and those who

⁸⁷ UG, SER, Box 8: Fitter #305, interviewed 21 Jun. 1971.

⁸⁸ Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis*, 177.

⁸⁹ Herron, 'Redundancy and redeployment'.

⁹⁰ Polly Toynbee, 'Takeover? No, it's a work-in, say Clydesiders', *Observer*, 1 Aug. 1971, 2.

were generally younger. More than half of those who remained were at least forty, and 30% were at least fifty. The poverty of job alternatives—the *Labour Market in Crisis*—increased the value of employment at UCS, and the determination of the workforce to resist closure of the yards.⁹¹

The Conservative government was aware that closing the yards would inflict large social costs on Clydeside. In June 1971 the cabinet secretary, Burke Trend, warned Heath that liquidation of UCS would ‘incontestably add to the problems of the area, and will be a blow to confidence’.⁹² Contingency planning by various departments, coordinated by the Scottish office, reckoned 2,500 UCS men *might* find work at Scott-Lithgow and Yarrow. But this was based ‘on optimistic assumptions’. Around 6,000 UCS men, at minimum, would be unemployed, along with 3,000 other workers in local and regional supply chains.⁹³ Frank Field of the Child Poverty Action Group ventured that up to 30,000 jobs could be lost if the entire UCS operation ended. This would mean an additional social security cost of £20 million over three years. Field’s findings were published by the Institute of Workers’ Control as part of a ‘Social Audit’. This critiqued in moral-economy terms the financial criteria applied by the government when establishing the ‘viability’ of an industrial enterprise.⁹⁴ The UCS stewards argued that the government’s adherence to market forces was illogical as well

⁹¹ Herron, *Labour Market in Crisis*, 22, 58–9.

⁹² TNA, PREM 15/697: Burke Trend to the prime minister, 9 Jun. and 12 Jun. 1971.

⁹³ Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland [NRS], SEP 4/3870: UCS Contingency Planning, note of meeting, St Andrew’s House, 19 Jul. 1971.

⁹⁴ UG, DC 65/50: *UCS: The Social Audit. A special report by the Institute for Workers’ Control*, pamphlet number 26 (Nottingham, n.d., probably 1971).

as unjust, given the healthy order book: ‘We refuse to accept the philosophy that economics control men’, Jimmy Reid argued; ‘men must and shall control economics’.⁹⁵

UCS entered liquidation on 14 June 1971. The STUC general council met in emergency session the following day, committing itself to fight for the protection of the ‘full operation’ of all four yards, and with UCS stewards present and involved in the discussions.⁹⁶ The stewards obtained a direct hearing with Heath in Downing Street on 16 June, supported in Whitehall and Westminster by four hundred UCS workers who travelled by train from Glasgow. Reid told Heath that the workforce had to be retained intact with all four yards kept open.⁹⁷ Drawing attention to the national question as well as the employment crisis, Jimmy Milne and Alex Kitson of the STUC general council told Heath on 21 June that ‘in Scotland’ the ‘breaking up of the UCS complex’ would not be tolerated.⁹⁸ Then there was a hiatus. Davies appointed a committee of four business leaders to examine the future of UCS. The ‘Four Wise Men’, as they were lampooned on Clydeside, advocated closing John Brown and Connells, with immediate redundancy for 4,000, alongside an effort to find a purchaser for Fairfield and Stephens. Davies accepted this course of action on 29 July,⁹⁹ a day after the

⁹⁵ Cinema Action, *UCS 1* (1971), available on *Tales From the Shipyard. Britain’s Shipbuilding Heritage on Film* (British Film Institute, 2011).

⁹⁶ Glasgow Caledonian University Archives (GCUA), STUC general council, minutes of special meeting, 15 Jun. 1971.

⁹⁷ TNA, PREM 15/697: Note for the record. The minister for industry’s meeting with shop stewards from UCS, 14 Jun. 1971, and Note for the record, 16 Jun. 1971.

⁹⁸ TNA, PREM 15/697: Note for the record. Prime minister’s meeting with STUC delegation, 21 Jun. 1971.

⁹⁹ Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., vol. 822, cols 791–801, 29 Jul. 1971.

stewards had met the prime minister again, Reid and Airlie highlighting the political and constitutional dimensions of the crisis. There ‘was a need’, Reid claimed, ‘for tangible, practical help for Scotland’. Airlie, prophetically, said that closure of even two yards would be so politically damaging that the Conservatives would ‘not be able to govern Scotland’.¹⁰⁰

The work-in began less than forty-eight hours later, on the morning of Friday 30 July. The idea of a strike had been dismissed: redundancy ‘could not be resisted from the Govan Road’, outside the yards, which would close and possibly never reopen.¹⁰¹ The joint shop stewards committee exercised visible control, monitoring physical access for people and goods at the gates. There was an initial confrontation on Friday 30 July when stewards at Stephens told Robert Smith, the liquidator, that his presence was not welcome. David McNee, chief constable of the city of Glasgow police, advised Smith that he should only re-enter the yard if accompanied by police officers. Smith, correctly, believed this would be unnecessary as well as inflammatory, and later learned that his return on the following Monday 2 August, was smoothed by Airlie. The Stephens stewards apologised and made every effort to facilitate his activities.¹⁰² This underlined the commitment of the UCS stewards to the ‘responsible’ defence of working-class security while preserving public

¹⁰⁰ TNA, PREM 15/1242: Note of a meeting with UCS shop stewards held at the house of commons on 28 Jul. 1971.

¹⁰¹ UG, GB 248, DC 65/1: Alex Murray (Secretary, Scottish Committee, Communist Party of Great Britain), *UCS—the fight for the right to work* (n.d., presumed 1971).

¹⁰² UG, GB 248, ACCN 3613/1/1: Sir Robert Smith Diary, 30 Jul. to 2 Aug. 1971; and ACCN 3613/1/5: clipping, Chris Baur, ‘UCS: the men and the myths’, *Weekend Scotsman*, 27 Jun. 1981.

order.¹⁰³ Gibbs and Scothorne have related this approach to the construction and performance of counter-hegemonic working-class masculinity in Scotland. Derived from the radical-cum-revolutionary strands of Red Clydeside tradition, this identity had three core elements in the later twentieth century: personal restraint and dignity; collective political and social discipline; and ‘respectable militancy’, a willingness to challenge the law in pursuit of legitimate goals. These moralised qualities were highly evident at the work-in, embodied in the leadership rhetoric and style of Reid.¹⁰⁴ When Harold Wilson arrived by motorcade at the Clydebank yard’s gates in August, Reid refused admission to the police motorcycle outriders. ‘There are no hooligans in this yard’, he asserted.¹⁰⁵

The moral authority of this leadership featured strongly in memories of former Fairfield workers interviewed about their employment experiences in the late 2010s. Alan Glover started as an apprentice welder in 1973. The righteous and disciplined struggle of 1971–2 was central to his family and personal history. Glover’s father, also a Fairfield welder, was in London on 16 June:

they were all marching down towards Downing Street, and there was agitators there, they were getting hussled, and shoved, et cetera. And Tony Benn, and Jimmy Reid, and that, says, keep the order, lads, keep the order. And they kept the order. And my dad said, as we rounded round to Downing Street, there was about twenty black marias, big police vans. Because that's what they're hoping for ... they're hoping for

¹⁰³ Thompson and Hart, *UCS Work-in*, 94.

¹⁰⁴ Ewan Gibbs and Rory Scothorne, ‘Accusers of capitalism: masculinity and populism on the Scottish radical left in the late twentieth century’, *Social History* 45 (2020) 218–45.

¹⁰⁵ Buchan, *Right to Work*, 88.

people to riot, create disorder, then they can point the finger and say, look at these working-class scum, right. And they're not working-class scum.¹⁰⁶

A cross-class campaign was constructed and mobilised against redundancy. Business and Conservative-Unionist leaders on Clydeside joined this indirectly by publicly criticising the government. Davies visited Glasgow on 3 August 1971, attending a meeting in the City Chambers convened by Sir Donald Liddle, textiles manufacturer, anti-Labour 'progressive' councillor for Dennistoun, and lord provost.¹⁰⁷ Liddle voiced disapproval of the government's opposition to credit for the four yards. J. McMichael of Glasgow chamber of commerce, a management consultant, and Hamish Grant of CBI Scotland made equally sharp observations from the floor, emphasising the damaging employment consequences of liquidation, and the government's obligation to protect economic security.¹⁰⁸ Grant's intervention, a 'rebuke to his former boss', meaning Davies at the CBI, was highlighted by Buchan, who also outlined McMichael's vision for a government-supported and phased rundown of the Clydebank and Scotstoun yards, with retraining and redeployment of skilled workers across other sectors.¹⁰⁹ Labour-movement contributions to the campaign were distinguished by linking the work-in to arguments about the value of constitutional reform. A

¹⁰⁶ Alan Glover, interview with Valerie Wright (VW), East Kilbride, 23 Sep. 2017.

¹⁰⁷ John MacCalman, 'Death of Sir Donald Liddle', *Glasgow Herald*, 14 Nov. 1989 (<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/11966063.death-of-sir-donald-liddle/>; accessed 4 Nov. 2020).

¹⁰⁸ NRS, SEP4/3870: P. H. Twyman, department for trade and industry, confidential note for the record: Shipbuilding on the Clyde, 4 Aug. 1971.

¹⁰⁹ Buchan, *Right to Work*, 85, 93–5.

parliament in Edinburgh would be more sensitive to labour-market problems in Scotland than the government in Westminster-Whitehall.¹¹⁰ At a march in Glasgow on 18 August 1971, joined by an estimated 80,000 men, women and children, Reid said that ‘we started fighting for jobs, and in a matter of days we knew we were fighting for Scotland and the British working-class movement’.¹¹¹

Heath’s government incrementally succumbed to this cross-class campaign. At the end of September, the outline of a post-UCS firm emerged, Govan Shipbuilders, to be supported with hefty state investment. Negotiations about working conditions and production methods were underway between new management personnel and national trade-union officials, consulting with the UCS stewards.¹¹² This new consortium was formalised in February 1972, incorporating Fairfield, Stephens and Connells. Government financial support of £17 million would make good legacy losses, with £18 million more for capital investment. State subsidy would enable the sale of John Brown for conversion to oil-rig construction.¹¹³ Across the four yards it was reckoned that three out of four jobs would be retained. The work-in officially ended in October 1972 when negotiations over the acquisition of John Brown by Marathon Corporation were completed.¹¹⁴ The preservation of large-scale shipbuilding employment on the Upper Clyde was a significant victory for the working-class moral economy. The largest of the yards, Fairfield, remained open fifty years later, providing

¹¹⁰ Jim Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution. Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s* (Manchester, 2008), 101–6.

¹¹¹ Thompson and Hart, *UCS Work-in*, 55.

¹¹² Buchan, *Right to Work*, 123–30.

¹¹³ Thompson and Hart, *UCS Work-in*, 89–90.

¹¹⁴ Foster and Woolfson, ‘How workers on the Clyde gained the capacity for class struggle’.

relatively high-volume industrial employment in the early 2020s. Benny McGoogan joined Fairfield as a plater in 1975, becoming a full-time shop steward in 1979. When interviewed in 2017, McGoogan characterised employment in the yard as a communal resource which the work-in had safeguarded:

we'd one focus and the focus was to keep this shipyard open. Because we all looked on it at ... every job we've got in here ... my job as a plater, it wasn't my job. I was only holding that temporarily until I decided that I wasn't wanting to hold that job and it was not my own but to pass it on to the generation coming behind me.¹¹⁵

In framing access to industrial employment in terms of communal security and justice, the work-in contributed substantial impetus to Scotland's distinct political trajectory. The STUC—a key player in mobilising support for the work-in—convened a Scottish assembly on unemployment at the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, on 14 February 1972. Several hundred representatives of mainstream political parties, local authorities and business organisations were present, along with trade-union officials and activists. The assembly supported the STUC's call for a Scottish parliament, seen as means of promoting industrial activity, working-class economic security and social justice through a more advanced regional policy effort. With other labour-movement leaders, notably Michael McGahey of the National Union of Mineworkers, Reid used his speech to defend the working-class moral economy. He endorsed the argument that the failings of UK policy-making—abundantly

¹¹⁵ Benny McGoogan, Interview with VW, Fairfields Heritage Centre, 25 Oct. 2017.

evident on the Clyde—could be corrected through a Scottish parliament.¹¹⁶ Reports in the UK print media acknowledged the connection between the work-in and the assembly's economic-cum-constitutional demands.

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*.¹¹⁷

The shifting political terrain in Scotland in the early 1970s included a robust and growing SNP, with its highly effective campaigning on the issue of North Sea oil. In fiscal terms oil held transformational potential, neutralising the argument that independence would automatically reduce aggregate wealth and average standards of living in Scotland. This challenged fundamental assumptions that Scotland was a net beneficiary of the Union.¹¹⁸ The SNP also campaigned effectively on the issue of insecurity in industrial employment arising from the alleged indifference of UK governments. In November 1973 Margo MacDonald narrowly defeated Labour to win a by-election for the SNP. Fittingly, perhaps, this was in Govan, home to the Fairfield yard so recently threatened by alleged shortcomings in UK policy-making. The Conservative government had violated the tenets of the working-class

¹¹⁶ GCUA, STUC General Council, Scottish Assembly on Unemployment, 14 Feb. 1972, charter of proposals for the Scottish assembly, and list of speakers.

¹¹⁷ John Kerr, 'Right to work call unites the Scots', *Guardian*, 15 Feb. 1972, 6.

¹¹⁸ Martin Chick, *Changing Times: Economics, policies, and resource allocation in Britain since 1951* (Oxford, 2020), 331–5.

moral economy, security and voice, which the SNP appeared to defend. MacDonald was unable to retain Govan in the general election of February 1974, regained by Labour, but the SNP nevertheless surged, increasing its vote share from 11.4% in 1970 to 21.%, and winning seven seats. In the general election that followed in October 1974, the SNP vote share jumped again to 30.6%. Winning eleven seats, mainly from Conservative and Unionists and Liberals, the SNP also made progress in urban constituencies in central Scotland, coming second in thirty seats to Labour.¹¹⁹

The 1974–9 Labour governments contained the SNP's advance, largely by following the moral-economy policy agenda of the 1972 assembly. This encompassed the nationalisation of shipbuilding, stabilised employment in coal mining, a 'rescue' of Chrysler UK, preserving Linwood, and the establishment of the Scottish Development Agency, which channelled a new wave of inward investment in manufacturing. Labour also legislated for a Scottish parliament, although this was sabotaged by a backbench amendment requiring approval in a referendum by 40% of the entire electorate.¹²⁰ Labour was admittedly less popular in Scotland in the late 1970s than it had been in the mid-1960s, but, in contrast to the position in England, it was gaining ground. Labour's vote share in Scotland in the 1979 UK general election was 41.%, up significantly from 36% in October 1974. The SNP lost nine of its seats with a vote share down to 17.3 per cent. The Conservative and Unionist party vote share of 31.7% was 10% behind Labour. Thatcher's House of Commons majority of fifty was

¹¹⁹ Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled Upon A Thistle*, 289–319.

¹²⁰ Henry Drucker and Gordon Brown, *The Politics of Nationalism and Devolution* (London, 1980), 120–1.

therefore based on seats won in England.¹²¹ Political divergence between Scotland and England then widened further. Thatcher's governments undermined the pillars of the working-class moral economy: communal security, and trade-union voice. The rapid acceleration of deindustrialisation, involving a large increase in unemployment, was accompanied by rhetorical and policy attacks on the value of public service. The dis-embedding of economic life, to return to Polanyi's model, alienated middle-class professionals and manual workers alike.¹²²

Conclusion

This article recast the history of the 1971–2 UCS work-in as an episode in the moral economy of deindustrialisation in Scotland. Two foundational histories, by Alasdair Buchan, and Willie Thompson and Finlay Hart, were revisited for their important insights: resistance to closure of the shipyards was both moral and material; and the work-in widened the already appreciable political distance between Scotland and England. Working-class expectations of security and voice were cultivated by the management of industrial job losses from the late 1950s onwards. Working-class and trade-union campaigning extracted major regional policy investment in new industry as the price for allowing the contraction of older industry. Labour governments were more trusted custodians of this moral economy than Conservative governments in urban and industrial constituencies. This was a substantial factor in Scotland's long-run political divergence from England. Moral-economy reasoning on the upper Clyde was reinforced when Wilson's Labour government was compelled to intervene

¹²¹ John Foster, 'The twentieth century, 1914–1979', in R. A. Houston and W. W. J. Knox (eds), *The New Penguin History of Scotland* (London, 2001), 417–93, at 481–8.

¹²² Phillips, Wright and Tomlinson, *Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy*, 61–80.

twice, in 1965 and then 1969, to prevent mass employment loss. On the second of these occasions, the UCS reconstruction, redundancy of 2,000 workers was accepted on the promise of future stability for those who remained and viable alternatives for those who left.

This moral-economy compact was violated by Edward Heath's Conservative government, which allowed unemployment to escalate. There were particularly punishing effects in Glasgow, where the male rate of joblessness by the third quarter of 1971 exceeded the UK average by a factor of roughly 2.5. The character and extent of this labour market crisis was detailed in Frank Herron's analysis of the deteriorating labour market experiences of men made redundant from UCS in 1969–70. Revisiting Herron's research data, this article amplified in qualitative terms three issues that Herron identified as strongly evident in quantitative terms: workers who moved from shipbuilding into other sectors typically earned less per hour laboured; in part this was because employers in other sectors placed a lower premium on the trade skills of engineers and other finishing workers from the shipyards than policy-makers had anticipated; and unemployment or subsequent further redundancy was commonplace. These various worries, exaggerated by age, were a significant factor in the 1971 mobilisation against closure of the yards. Jobs at UCS increased in value with the worsening of the labour market after 1970, entrenching the commitment of the workforce to defend the yards.

Resistance followed the Conservative government's further transgressions of the moral-economy: starving UCS customers of credit in the winter of 1970–1; and then forcing UCS into liquidation by refusing requested capital support in June 1971, despite the substantial order book. The work-in was a moral-economy struggle, structured by the working-class expectations of security and voice which had been encouraged since the late 1950s, and reinforced by the promises implicit in the 1969–70 redundancy measures at UCS. The outcome in 1972—the preservation of three jobs in four and a robust industry on the

Upper Clyde which partly remained fifty years later—was a moral-economy victory. The work-in influenced the STUC-convened Assembly in February 1972, which in turn shaped the policy agenda of the Labour government elected in 1974. This prioritised working-class economic security and helped Labour win an improved vote share in Scotland in 1979. The work-in persuaded many Scottish citizens that Heath and his ministers were unfeeling, careless of the problems created in industrial communities by the decisions which they made. Conservative policy-makers were discredited in industrial and working-class communities in Scotland even before Margaret Thatcher and her governments embarked on their reckless mismanagement of deindustrialisation from 1979.