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Injustice, deindustrialisation and the 1984–1985 Miners’ Strike in Scotland

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ABSTRACT

The transition out of coal production in Scotland was managed carefully in the 1960s and 1970s, prioritising workforce voice and communal security. Under Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative governments in the 1980s, the position changed abruptly. Colliery closures and redundancies accelerated; miners and coal communities were subject to political attack. The criminalisation and victimisation of union officials and activists during the 1984–1985 strike against pit closures was disproportionately greater in Scotland than in England and Wales. The oral history testimony of strike veterans provides a powerful narrative of historical unfairness, imposed by a hostile anti-union government, National Coal Board officials, police officers and sheriffs. Their stories of injustice on picket lines and in communities nevertheless qualify a tendency in oral histories of deindustrialisation to pessimism and loss. Strike veterans spoke positively about the strike and its political meaning. Their memories constitute a usable past, present in subsequent campaigning. The Miners’ Strike (Pardons) Act, passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2022, was an important outcome, making provision for the collective and posthumous pardon of people with strike-related convictions from 1984–1985.

KEYWORDS

Justice; Miners’ Strike; deindustrialisation; Scottish Parliament

On 16 June 2022 the Scottish Parliament agreed to enact the Miners’ Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill, by 117 votes to nil. The Bill made provision for the collective and posthumous pardon of people convicted of selected public order offences in Scottish courts during the 1984–1985 Miners’ Strike against colliery closures. The strike, from 12 March 1984 to 3 March 1985, involved members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and associated unions. There were more than 800 convictions during the strike in Scottish courts for the offences selected in the 2022 Act: breach of the peace, breach of bail and police obstruction. Some strikers were convicted

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more than once. The Scottish government estimated, when publishing the Bill in October 2021, that between 200 and 400 former miners were liable for pardon.¹

The Pardons Bill followed a long campaign in the former coalfields of Scotland by ex-miners and family members, supported by elected Labour parliamentarians, at Holyrood and Westminster, along with past and present union officials plus community activists. Neil Findlay, Labour Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for Lothian from 2011 to 2021, and Alex Bennett, a Midlothian strike leader, were prominent figures.² The Scottish government, led since 2007 by the Scottish National Party (SNP), was persuaded in June 2018 to establish an Independent Review Group (IRG), chaired by John Scott QC, to examine the impact of policing on mining communities in Scotland during the strike. The IRG consulted retired police officers and trade unionists active in 1984–1985, gathered written submissions through online consultation, and held eight public meetings in former coal communities. The IRG made a single recommendation: those convicted of public order offences during the strike that were disposed of by fine ought to be pardoned, collectively and posthumously. The UK government's Armed Forces Act of 2006 was cited as precedent, where evidence of generalised unfairness in the punitive discipline of supposed deserters in the First World War was so overwhelming that consideration of individual cases was unnecessary.³

This article analyses the social injustices that gave rise to this policy intervention almost 40 years later. It shows that economic and social rupture in mining communities is remembered as unjust and oppressive. The targeting of strikers for arrest and prosecution permanently fractured public confidence in policing in coalfield areas, according to a recent authoritative history.⁴ The IRG spelt out the damaging consequences of this criminalisation. The harm of employment dismissal, experienced by 206 strikers in Scotland, resulted in loss of income and social esteem, contributing to financial hardship and a range of personal and family-relationship problems. Sacked miners lost pension entitlements. They were excluded from local and national labour markets by anti-union employers.⁵

This article uses oral history to examine individual and collective memories of the strike and its injustices. These memories directly influenced an important amendment to the Pardons Bill. The government's initial

¹Scottish Government, *Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill*, introduced by Keith Brown, Cabinet Secretary for Justice, 27 October 2021.

²N. Findlay, *If You Don't Run, They Can't Chase You: Stories from the front line of the fight for social justice* (Edinburgh, 2021), 76–83.

³*Independent Review – Impact on Communities of the Policing of the Miners' Strike. Final Report* (Edinburgh, 2020).

⁴L. Jackson, N. Davidson, L. Fleming, D. Smale and R. Sparks, *Police and Community in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2020), 212–13.

⁵*Independent Review – Final Report, op. cit.*, 23–27.

intention was that the pardon would apply only to convictions relating to actions on picket lines, demonstrations and ‘similar gatherings’. Convictions following incidents within communities would not meet these criteria.⁶ It has long been recognised that the strike was in defence of communities as well as jobs.⁷ This was likewise emphasised by strike veterans in oral history interviews examined in this article. They also spoke about the injustice of community-located arrests and subsequent employment dismissals. These memories were used in 2021–2022 to persuade the Scottish government and MSPs that excluding from pardon those whose offences were committed within communities was unjust. The Bill was duly amended to cover convictions that followed arrests in communities even where these were not directly connected to official union pickets and demonstrations.⁸

The remembered injustices were nevertheless only partly remedied. While removing the stigma of criminal conviction, the Miners’ Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Act did not provide financial amelioration of the specific injustice arising from employment dismissal. The Policy Memorandum accompanying the Bill in October 2021 was explicit on this point. The National Coal Board (NCB)’s legacy obligations were inherited by the UK government and not devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Furthermore, compensation would require scrutiny of individual cases that would be inconsistent with the the Bill’s ethos of collective pardon.⁹ The Cabinet Secretary for Justice in 2022, Keith Brown, resisted concerted lobbying effort from former miners and their supporters on this point, while restating the Scottish government’s argument for a ‘full UK public inquiry’ that would scrutinise compensation and other issues said to be non-devolved, including the UK government’s alleged control of policing during the strike.¹⁰ Such inquiry appeared unlikely in 2023, despite the UK Conservative government’s stated commitment to ‘levelling up’ in ex-industrial areas, including coal communities. The UK Home Office confirmed its long-standing opposition in 2021 to an inquiry on the basis that ‘the policing landscape’ had ‘changed fundamentally’ since the strike, characterising historical investigation of injustice as irrelevant unless revealing of specific *current* policy defects.¹¹

The article is organised in three parts. The first reviews the key injustices of the strike and coalfield deindustrialisation, exploring the moral economy

⁶Scottish Government, *Miners’ Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill, Policy Memorandum*, 27 October 2021, 3–4.

⁷J. Owens, (ed.), *Miners 1984–1994: A decade of endurance* (Edinburgh, 1994).

⁸The Scottish Parliament, Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, *Official Report*, 11 January 2022, 6–21; The Scottish Parliament, *Official Report: Meeting of the parliament (Hybrid)*, 16 June 2022 (Session 6), 80–142.

⁹Scottish Government, *Miners’ Bill, Policy Memorandum*, 11–13.

¹⁰Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, 31 March 2022, 85–87.

¹¹Press Association, ‘New calls for public inquiry into Battle of Orgreave’, *The National*, 29 October 2021.

of coal communities in Scotland and explaining the distinct pattern of criminalisation and victimisation experienced by Scottish strikers. The second part establishes the value of oral history in generating memories of unjust past transitions, reviewing perspectives gathered in the course of two separate research projects undertaken in Scottish coal communities, in 2009–2011 and then since 2021. The manner in which coalfield narratives of injustice were ‘made’ is explained and the memories of two miners from Fife are introduced. These are then examined in the final third of the article. There are two reasons for this detailed focus. First, Fife was the largest Scottish coal-producing area, with 40% of Scotland’s 15,000 strikers employed there in 1984. Second, the two miners spoke about the contrasting experiences of victimisation on official picket lines and in communities, while commonly identifying the need for continued campaigning in pursuit of collective justice. Their past was usable and affirmative, belying a tendency in some oral histories of deindustrialisation to individual melancholy and collective defeat.¹²

The Miners’ Strike as unjust transition

The strike from March 1984 to March 1985 involved a mobilisation of more than 200,000 miners across England, Wales and Scotland. It sought to prevent redundancies by stopping colliery closures on economic grounds. Most of Nottinghamshire’s 40,000 miners worked throughout.¹³ This weakened the strike, which was ultimately unsuccessful. There is an important literature on the political economy and industrial relations of the strike, including the peak-level personalities and orientations within Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government and the NUM,¹⁴ the strategies pursued by government and union,¹⁵ and the reciprocal solidarities that were built between strikers and social-movement supporters in urban areas beyond the coalfields.¹⁶

The emphasis in this article is different, however, with the strike positioned as an episode in the changing politics of deindustrialisation. The current-world vocabulary in the 2020s of just and unjust transitions is helpful in assessing the significance and implications of these changing

¹²A. Perchard, ‘“Broken Men” and “Thatcher’s Children”: memory and legacy in Scotland’s coalfields’, *International Labour and Working Class History*, 84 (2013), 78–98.

¹³D. Amos, *The Miners of Nottinghamshire, Volume 4: 1980–1985* (Mansfield, 2013) and H. Paterson, *Look Back in Anger: The Miners’ Strike in Nottinghamshire 30 years on* (Nottingham, 2014) present opposing perspectives.

¹⁴M. Adeney and J. Lloyd, *The Miners’ Strike, 1984–5: Loss without limit* (London, 1986); A. Richards, *Miners on Strike: Class solidarity and division in Britain* (Oxford, 1996); A. Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969–1995* (Aldershot, 2005).

¹⁵P. Ackers, ‘Gramsci at the Miners’ Strike: remembering the 1984–1985 eurocommunist alternative industrial relations strategy’, *Labour History*, 55, 2 (2015), 151–72; R. Vinen, ‘A war of position? The Thatcher government’s preparation for the 1984 Miners’ Strike’, *English Historical Review*, 134 (2019), 121–50.

¹⁶D. Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984–5 Miners’ Strike* (London and New York, 2021).

politics in the 1980s.¹⁷ Policymakers in Scotland frequently connected the past and the present in this manner. In 2018 the Scottish government appointed an advisory Just Transition Commission. Its 2021 report stated:

The story of how Scotland lost much of its heavy industry through the 70s and 80s is well known and an example of how not to manage structural change. There was little in the way of a ‘just transition’ for communities and families reliant on coal mining as pit closures swept the country.¹⁸

In the Scottish Parliament’s Stage 1 debate of the Pardons Bill, on 31 March 2022, Fiona Hyslop, MSP for Linlithgow and a former SNP Cabinet Secretary, made the link between the strike and transitional justice explicit. Approving the principle of collective pardon, she said the strike and its aftermath of coal closures had been an ‘unjust energy transition’.¹⁹

It is important to note, of course, that environmental concerns were absent from the motives of policymakers in running down coal production in the UK. On 5 August 2021, visiting the Moray East Offshore Windfarm in Northern Scotland, the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, made claims about earlier shifts in energy politics. He said that the closure of coal mines by the Conservative governments led by Margaret Thatcher from 1979 to 1990 had given Britain ‘a big early start’ in confronting climate change. The remarks caused predictable offence in Scotland, particularly in the ex-coalfields. Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, tweeted: ‘Lives & communities in Scotland were utterly devastated by Thatcher’s destruction of the coal industry (which had zero to do with any concern she had for the planet)’. The First Minister added that Johnson’s comments were ‘crass and insensitive’.²⁰

The Conservative government’s policy on the coal industry was in fact motivated by an ambition to reorder political and social authority. Thatcher and her ministers wanted decisions about colliery closures to be made by officials at the NCB, which managed the then publicly owned industry. Union powers of veto or delay to closures were to be removed and the industry’s social mission, in place since nationalisation in 1947, abandoned. The government’s Coal Industry Act of 1980 envisaged a sector operating without public subsidy by 1985. The government was also planning the privatisation of coal production. Eroding union voice would enable the more rapid closure of less monetisable pits.²¹

¹⁷T. Farnhall, ‘The characteristics of UK unions’ environmental activism and the agenda’s utility as a vehicle for union renewal’, *Global Labour Journal*, 7, 3 (2016), 257–78; Friends of the Earth Scotland, *Offshore: Oil and gas workers’ views on industry conditions and the energy transition* (FoE Scotland, 2020), <https://foe.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Oil-Gas-Workers-Report-Final.pdf>, accessed 31 October 2022.

¹⁸Just Transition Commission, *A National Mission for a Fairer, Greener Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2021), 22.

¹⁹The Scottish Parliament, *Official Report: Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)*, 31 March 2022 (Session 6), 97–99.

²⁰L. Brooks and J. Elgot, ‘Johnson makes “unbelievably crass” joke about Thatcher closing mines’, *The Guardian*, 5 August 2021.

²¹E. Gibbs, *Coal Country: The meaning and memory of deindustrialisation in post-war Scotland* (London, 2021), 49–54.

These aims were not openly or honestly stated, nor debated with those affected. The government recurrently denied the existence of plans for an accelerated rundown of coal, despite a small group of Cabinet ministers privately accepting an NCB strategy with exactly this aim in September 1983. Convened by Thatcher, this group comprised the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, the Secretary of State for Energy, Peter Walker, and the Secretary of State for Employment, Norman Tebbit. The details were limited but involved closure of 75 collieries within three years across England, Wales and Scotland. Some 60,000 miners would be made redundant, including 35% of the Scottish workforce. Thatcher and her colleagues acknowledged the damaging likely employment consequences. It ‘would not be possible’ to redeploy those who lost their jobs.²²

This accelerated process of restructuring was illegitimate, when benchmarked against the Scottish Just Transition Commission’s definitional criteria. These specified the need for consultation with those currently dependent on climate-threatening activity, involving them in developing an equitable post-carbon economic life. ‘People need to see and experience the transition as being fair; pushing ahead without giving attention to a just transition will see progress stalled’, the Commission observed in 2021.²³ Maggie Chapman, Green MSP for North East Scotland, supported a pardon for former strikers. She argued that the Conservative government had unfairly placed ‘markets before lives’ in the 1980s. Union voice in the industry had been silenced and economic security in mining communities dismantled:

Where was the rebuilding and the investment in those areas and their communities’ assets as the mines were closed? Where was the job creation and the retraining for people who were left on the industrial scrap heap? There was none. In fact, quite the opposite was the case – at the time, it was engineered so that many of the workers concerned would never work again.²⁴

Chapman was alluding to the covert bias that operated in the labour market against strike veterans, particularly those who had been sacked, in the 1980s and 1990s. Anti-trade union employers in the private sector refused their job applications on the basis of intelligence covertly compiled by the Economic League and then the Consulting Association. The extent of this malpractice was not fully uncovered until the 2010s. An important milestone was a hearing of the Scottish Affairs Committee in the House of

²²Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, Record of a Meeting held at No. 10 Downing Street on 15 September 1983, from The National Archives, PREM 19/1329, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/133121>, accessed 4 January 2023; see also N. Higham, ‘Cabinet papers reveal “secret coal pits closure plan”’, *BBC News*, 3 January 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25549596>, accessed 4 November 2021.

²³Just Transition Commission, *op. cit.*, 38.

²⁴Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, 31 March 2022, 102–04.

Commons on 28 November 2012, chaired by Ian Davidson, Labour and Cooperative MP for Glasgow South-West.²⁵

Chapman's 2022 intervention, emphasising the paucity of investment in the coalfields, was also a critique of the broader pattern of economic and social injustice associated with deindustrialisation. She was the Deputy Convenor of the parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, which, in scrutinising the Pardons Bill, underlined the 'lasting psychological and economic impact' of the strike.²⁶ In 2018 the combined population of ex-coal communities in Scotland was reckoned to be 468,000, larger than the cities of Aberdeen (228,000) and Dundee (149,000) combined, and only just smaller than the second largest Scottish city, Edinburgh (489,000), according to recent local authority area estimates. Seeing the Scottish coalfield as an enlarged metropole helps to conceptualise the full economic and social legacy of deindustrialisation. In 2018 there were 267 jobs per 1000 in the coalfield, as against 467 per 1000 across Scotland. The Social Value Lab, using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, calculated in 2020 that 31% of the coalfield population lived in the most deprived 20% of communities.²⁷

The injustice of deindustrialisation following the strike is even starker when measured against the careful management of the coal industry's contraction in the 1960s and 1970s. This was made necessary as the UK diversified its energy mix through greater use of gas, oil and nuclear.²⁸ The earlier transitional phase was relatively *just*. An operational moral economy was in place.²⁹ There was an insistence, expressed through trade union and elected political representatives, that restructuring had to be regulated, to protect communal security. This resembled the English crowd's resistance to liberalised market mechanisms in the eighteenth century, famously analysed by E.P. Thompson.³⁰ Thompson's moral economy was derived from historical specifics of class, culture and geography. He counselled against its general application.³¹ There is nevertheless value in adapting it to explain working-class responses to economic changes since 1945. Working-class moral conceptualisations of economic justice were present in what Karl Polanyi termed the 'countermovement': a coalition, primarily

²⁵House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, *Blacklisting in Employment: Interim Report, Ninth Report of Session 2012–13*, House of Commons 1071, 16 April 2013, and *Blacklisting in Employment: Final Report, Seventh Report of Session 2014–15*, House of Commons 272, 18 March 2015.

²⁶The Scottish Parliament, *Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, Stage 1 Report on the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill*, 18 March 2022, *SP Paper 134*, 3rd Report, 2022 (Session 6), para. 126–39.

²⁷Social Value Lab, *The Scottish Coalfields in 2020: Report for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust* (Glasgow, 2020), 6–8, 19–20.

²⁸Gibbs, *Coal Country*, *op. cit.*, 29, 44–52.

²⁹E. Gibbs, 'The moral economy of the Scottish coalfields: managing deindustrialization under nationalization, c.1947–1983', *Enterprise and Society*, 19, 1 (2018), 124–52.

³⁰E.P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76–136.

³¹N. Gotz, "'Moral economy": its conceptual history and analytical prospects', *Journal of Global Ethics*, 11 (2015), 147–62, with specific details on Thompson at 152–54.

composed of trade unions, social-democratic politicians and Keynesian policymakers, which exerted moral and political controls over market forces.³²

Regional policy was the product of this reasoning and activism, especially under UK Labour governments in the 1960s. Manufacturing employment was stimulated, with new opportunities for women as well as men. This contributed to the narrowing of gender inequalities in coal communities, in England and Wales as well as Scotland.³³ In Lanarkshire and Fife, Scotland's largest historical mining territories, the number of industrial jobs overall remained stable from 1961 to 1971, despite coal employment being more than halved. In Fife, engineering became the largest industrial employer of women, with US-owned firms establishing assembly operations in and around coal settlements.³⁴

Transitional justice was not handed down to coal communities by policymakers in the 1960s. Miners and their elected political and union representatives had to fight for it. Generational changes in mining leadership were involved. Michael McGahey, born in 1926, was elected President of the NUM Scottish Area (NUMSA) in 1967. McGahey and others of his generation displayed greater proactivity than their predecessors in defending coalfield security, more willing where this was threatened to confront both NCB officialdom and UK governments.³⁵ The growth of new opportunities in manufacturing had stalled slightly in 1965–1966, redundancies in the coal industry were starting to threaten the jobs of younger men and localised transfers to surviving collieries were becoming harder to achieve. McGahey and his officials therefore refused to accept the NCB's planned closure in 1969–1970 of Cardowan and Bedlay, the last pits in Lanarkshire, because the employment alternatives for the 2500 men facing redundancy were inadequate.³⁶

Closures across Scotland were therefore minimal in the 1970s. Face workers, the highest paid, only moved where comparable jobs were open at the receiving collieries. In 1968 the NCB employed 36,000 miners in Scotland and projected a future workforce of 24,700 in 1971, 15,000 in 1974 and 8000 in 1980. Such decline was averted: 24,000 were still employed in 1975 and 20,000 in 1980. This was a result of the NUM enforcing the moral economy, partly through the UK-wide coal disputes of 1972 and 1973–1974,

³²K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (Boston, 1944).

³³F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and N. Thomlinson, 'Vernacular discourses of gender equality in the post-war British working class', *Past & Present*, 254, 1 (2022), 277–313.

³⁴J. Phillips, V. Wright and J. Tomlinson, *Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy in Scotland since 1955* (Edinburgh, 2021), 98.

³⁵J. Phillips, 'Economic direction and generational change in twentieth-century Britain: the case of the Scottish coalfields', *English Historical Review*, 132 (2017), 885–911.

³⁶The National Archives, Kew, COAL 89/103, K.S. Jefferies to W.V. Shepherd, NCB, 22 March 1971, and W.V.S. reply, 23 March 1971; NCB Scottish North Area, Minutes of Meeting with Trade Union representatives, Alloa, 28 June 1972.

which were reflective of job insecurities as well as wage discontent. The Labour government elected in 1974 agreed the *Plan For Coal* with the NCB and industry unions, which stabilised investment and employment, partly in moral economy terms, accepting that the industry had social obligations as well as energy-generation targets.³⁷

Under Thatcherism, to reiterate, the character of transition after 1979 became profoundly unjust. Economic management involved counter-inflationary increases in the exchange rate and borrowing costs. This contributed to the escalation of unemployment and industrial job loss.³⁸ As collieries closed, there were limited labour market alternatives for redundant miners. Seafield and Frances collieries in East Fife employed more than 2500 before the strike, drawn from numerous villages and towns. The employment rate of adult men in these localities dropped from 80.3% in 1981 to 66.4% in 1991.³⁹ This injustice was anticipated by miners opposing the closure of Comrie in West Fife in 1986. They warned that lost jobs would reduce expenditure in communities and add to the costs of social security while lowering tax revenue; furthermore, deteriorating physical and mental health would aggravate pressures within health service provision.⁴⁰ Women likewise experienced deindustrialisation in negative terms, a major element in the consolidation of economic and social disadvantage in the coalfields across England, Wales and Scotland.⁴¹ In Fife the female share of the falling market in manufacturing jobs fell from 36.5% in 1981 to 30.6% in 1991.⁴²

The Seafield and Frances miners were a sizeable contingent of about 6000 miners employed at five collieries in Fife at the start of 1984. There were another 4000 at two big collieries in Midlothian, with 1000 more at a single colliery in Clackmannanshire, connected to neighbouring West Fife units through the massive Longannet power station on the north shore of the Firth of Forth. Some 4000 miners were spread across communities in Stirlingshire, West Lothian, Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. These workers experienced an unjust erosion of their voice and security *before* the strike. Albert Wheeler, the NCB Area Director in Scotland, disrupted agreed customs and practices, defying workforce and community opposition. Wheeler closed what he judged to be uneconomic collieries in Ayrshire, West Lothian and Lanarkshire, including Bedlay in 1981 and Cardowan in 1983. He also compelled pit managers to lower production costs by

³⁷J. Phillips, *Scottish Coal Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, 2019), 207–20.

³⁸J. Tomlinson, 'Deindustrialisation and "Thatcherism": moral economy and unintended consequences', *Contemporary British History*, 35, 4 (2021), 620–42.

³⁹Registry General Scotland, *Census 1981 Scotland: Scottish Summary, Volume 1, Report for Fife Region* (Edinburgh, 1983); General Registry Office for Scotland, *1991 Census: Fife Region, Part 1* (Edinburgh, 1993).

⁴⁰Fife Federation of Trade Councils, *Comrie Colliery: The fight for the future!* (Rosyth, presumed 1986).

⁴¹M. Foden, S. Fothergill and T. Gore, *The State of the Coalfields: Economic and social conditions in the former mining communities of England, Scotland and Wales* (Sheffield, 2014), 13–26.

⁴²Phillips et al., *Deindustrialisation, op. cit.*, 96.

disregarding established working arrangements. Half of Scotland's miners were already in dispute with local NCB officials by March 1984.⁴³

This early onset of workplace injustice in the Scottish coalfields was accentuated during the strike. The IRG concluded that strikers encountered structural unfairness in their dealings with the police, the courts and the NCB.⁴⁴ Evidence presented by the NUMSA to the House of Commons Employment Committee in June 1985 indicated that in Scotland arrests per head were double the rate that applied in England and Wales, and that Scottish strikers were three times more likely to be sacked than English and Welsh strikers following entanglements with the law.⁴⁵ The union's data was broadly consistent with UK government answers to parliamentary questions on arrests and charges, assembled by Peter Wallington, an industrial law scholar, in 1985. The rate of arrests in Scotland was double that in England and Wales.⁴⁶ Only 80 of the 206 men sacked in Scotland were restored to NCB employment by the summer of 1986. Fifty men won Industrial Tribunal cases, proving unfair dismissal, but only two were taken back.⁴⁷

The level of offending in Scotland was relatively trivial, belying this pattern of heavy punishment. The MPs Merlyn Rees and Gordon Brown produced an internal Labour Party report on policing in the strike across Britain. This integrated data from the Home Office, police authority reports, sheriff courts and the NUM. Rees was a former Home Secretary. Brown was MP for Dunfermline East, a constituency that encompassed the mining villages of Central Fife. Rees and Brown showed there were 898 strike-related convictions in Scotland. Of these, 63.4% were for breach of the peace, 24.4% for police obstruction and 5.7% for breach of bail conditions.⁴⁸ These were the three offences specified in the 2021 Pardons Bill.⁴⁹ In England and Wales, by comparison, only around 64% of those charged had allegedly contravened comparable laws on public order (42%), police obstruction (16.2%) and obstruction of the highways (6.2%). One-third of charges related to criminal damage, assaulting police officers, 'occasioning actual bodily harm', theft, intimidation or besetting and riot.⁵⁰ Wallington's investigation confirmed these national differences in alleged offending. An aggregated 98% of charges in Scotland were for breach of the peace (678), police obstruction (249), breach of bail (53) and

⁴³J. Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984–85* (Manchester, 2012), 22, 53–80.

⁴⁴*Independent Review – Final Report*, 16–26.

⁴⁵British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), House of Commons, *Sixth Report from the Employment Committee, Session 1984–85: The Dismissal of National Coal Board Employees*, 416-i, Minutes of Evidence, NUM, 22 May 1985.

⁴⁶P. Wallington, 'Policing the Miners' Strike', *Industrial Law Journal*, 14, 3 (1985), 145–59, with details at 150–51.

⁴⁷Summary of meeting between Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) Energy Subcommittee and George McAlpine, Director, Scottish Area of the National Coal Board, 30 June 1986, in STUC, *Annual Report 1987* (Glasgow: STUC, 1987), 80.

⁴⁸G. Brown and M. Rees, *Labour Party Report*, submitted to Neil Kinnock, 9 May 1985, unpublished, 7–8, 60, 65–67.

⁴⁹*Independent Review – Final Report*, 16–17.

⁵⁰Brown and Rees, *op. cit.*, 7–8, 60, 65–67.

vandalism (30). In England and Wales, by contrast, ‘significant numbers of serious offences were charged’, including 509 cases of unlawful assembly, 139 of riot, 39 of grievous bodily harm, 21 of affray, 15 of arson and three of murder.⁵¹

Wheeler of the NCB claimed that dismissed strikers in Scotland were all engaged in gross industrial misconduct, seeking to prevent others from attending work. The low-level public-order nature of their convictions was irrelevant. The NUMSA argued that Wheeler’s true motives were revealed by the profile of the sacked men: 43% were union officials, generally at branch level; another 28% were strike activists, as measured by the modest per diem emoluments which they received from the union for picketing. The dismissals were intended to intimidate strikers and deprive them of leadership, preparing the ground for subsequent closures and intensified work effort at surviving collieries. The leading local union official, the delegate, was dismissed at both Midlothian collieries, Bilston Glen and Monktonhall, and at three pits in Fife: Castlehill, Comrie and Frances.⁵² The victimisation of local leadership softened workplace and community opposition to pit closures which accelerated after the strike. The industry was eventually privatised in 1994. By this point operations in Scotland were concentrated entirely on the Longannet complex in West Fife and Clackmannanshire.⁵³

Making memories of deindustrialisation

Oral history has been a valuable methodology in analyses of deindustrialisation and its injustices. Scholars have listened to those affected by shrinking industrial employment to interpret its economic, social and cultural effects. Steven High, a leader in the field with studies of Canada and neighbouring regions of the USA,⁵⁴ co-edited with Lachlan MacKinnon and Andrew Perchard a collection of oral history-informed essays in 2017. This explored the experiences of workers and communities across North America and Europe.⁵⁵ High authored a valuable historiographical survey in 2013,⁵⁶ which Christopher Lawson updated in 2020.⁵⁷ Much of the oral history literature has emphasised loss and ruination; there has been a tendency to

⁵¹Wallington, *op. cit.*, 150–51.

⁵²BPP, House of Commons, *Sixth Report from the Employment Committee, Dismissal of National Coal Board Employees*, Parliamentary Papers, 416-i, 3–5; 416-ii, Minutes of Evidence, NCB, 31–32, 39–40.

⁵³G. Hutton, *Fife: The mining kingdom* (Ochiltree, 1999), 6–10.

⁵⁴S. High, *Industrial Sunset: The making of North America’s rust belt, 1969–1984* (Toronto, 2003).

⁵⁵S. High, L. MacKinnon and A. Perchard (eds), *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting ruination in postindustrial places* (Vancouver, 2017).

⁵⁶S. High, ‘“The wounds of class”: a historiographical reflection on the study of deindustrialization, 1973–2013’, *History Compass*, 11, 11 (2013), 994–1007.

⁵⁷C. Lawson, ‘Making sense of the ruins: the historiography of deindustrialization and its continued relevance in neoliberal times’, *History Compass*, 18, 8 (2020), doi:10.1111/hic3.12619.

the mournful, elegiac and angry. This has arguably reflected what might be termed an ‘essentialist’ view of industrial employment. Its positive features – relatively good wages, predictable hours, decent health and safety conditions, beneficial union presence – have been implicitly presented as intrinsic to the character of labour performed in factories, mills, workshops and mines. Moving from employment in industry to services thereby involved immediate and then lasting degradation for manual workers. *The Shadow of the Mine*, Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson’s study of deindustrialisation in Durham and South Wales, used interviews with former miners to sustain their unambiguous emphasis on continuous economic and social decline since the shrinkage of coal jobs in the 1960s.⁵⁸

A less despairing account of deindustrialisation is Tim Strangleman’s oral history of the Guinness brewery in West London’s Park Royal district. Employment at Guinness was insecure in the 1930s, became stable and rewarding from the 1950s to the 1970s, and then made precarious again in the 1980s and 1990s. These oscillations reflected the influence of changing macro-economic and social conditions. Full employment after the Second World War provided unions and workers with a favourable bargaining position; buoyant sales enabled the company to fund rising wages and fringe benefits. Corporate overstretch after 1980, along with technological changes, exposed Guinness workers to deskilling and redundancy. Strangleman concentrated on the empowering nature of this emphasis on the political context of employment restructuring. Public policy, with stronger trade unions and greater social obligations on employers, could enable future work in slimmed-down industrial sectors or services to be just as rewarding in the future as it was for Guinness employees in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁹

Strangleman’s brewery workers in London might be viewed as too remote from the coal communities in Scotland for useful comparison. Their temporal and political experiences were closely aligned, however. The qualified views on the value of industrial employment that emerge in Scottish coalfield memories are similar to those that were present in the Guinness testimonies. The term ‘critical nostalgia’ was apt, Ewan Gibbs concluded, reflecting on interviews undertaken in the 2010s with Lanarkshire and Midlothian coalfield men and women. They remembered a society before the 1980s which contained flaws, but these were gradually being ameliorated through collective action.⁶⁰ The diminishing occupational hazards of mining illustrated this palpable if incomplete progress. Average annual death rates in Scotland’s mines were halved, comparing the privately owned and highly conflictual industry of the 1920s with the publicly

⁵⁸H. Beynon and R. Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the end of industrial Britain* (London, 2021).

⁵⁹T. Strangleman, *Voices of Guinness: An Oral History of the Park Royal Brewery* (Oxford, 2019).

⁶⁰Gibbs, *Coal Country*, *op. cit.*, 100–18.

owned and comparatively harmonious industry of the 1960s, where union voice was much stronger.⁶¹

Oral history analysis of coal's subsequently unjust transition, in the 1980s, is based here on two distinct projects of oral history. In the first project, from 2009 to 2011, I interviewed eight former union officials and workers about the 1984–1985 strike. Their memories were incorporated into a book that focused on the strike at workplace and community levels.⁶² The second project, starting in 2021, explored the theme of justice in the strike. Eighteen new interviews had been recorded by February 2022, a handful as online and telephone interviews owing to Covid-19 restrictions and other obstacles, but the majority face-to-face, in the homes of those giving testimony. I conducted six of these on my own and another six jointly with Robert Gildea of the University of Oxford, who was researching a book on the strike in England, Wales and Scotland. I helped Gildea to select Central Fife as the locus for his Scottish research and establish his interview contacts. He undertook the other six interviews on his own and shared the transcripts with me. Women as well as men featured in this second project.⁶³ The interviews have also been discussed in another article that focuses on the strategic nature of anti-trade union injustice in the strike, and form a key component of a forthcoming book.⁶⁴

Findings from these projects were shared with the Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, in an online evidence session on the Pardons Bill in January 2022 which I attended with Nicky Wilson, President of the NUMSA; Alex Bennett, former NUM delegate at Monktonhall; and Bob Young, former NUM branch chairman at Comrie.⁶⁵ We reminded the MSPs that the strike was a defence of communities as well as collieries and jobs. We spoke about the NCB introducing conflict in mining villages and housing estates in larger settlements with its Back to Work effort from June 1984. Individual workers were incentivised to return to the pits with bonus payments, transport and police protection but remained in communities where their neighbours were among the vast majority of miners still on strike. 'Spontaneous demonstrations' outside strike-breakers' homes were inevitable, said Wilson, given this abnormal social situation. Police interventions followed, with arrests and convictions generally targeted on strikers rather than strike-breakers. Using our vocabulary, the Committee respectfully emphasised in its report that the strike

⁶¹Phillips, *Scottish Coal Miners*, *op. cit.*, 82–94.

⁶²Phillips, *Collieries, Communities*, *op. cit.*

⁶³R. Gildea, 'The Miners' Strike of 1984–5: an oral history', <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/miners-strike-1984-5-oral-history>, accessed 2 May 2022.

⁶⁴J. Phillips, 'Strategic injustice and the 1984–85 Miners' Strike in Scotland', *Industrial Law Journal*, (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/indlaw/dwac017>; and *Justice and the Miners' Strike of 1984–85 in Scotland*, book manuscript in progress.

⁶⁵Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, *Official Report*, 11 January 2022.

was in protection of communities. It was persuaded to recommend broadening the remit of the pardon, to include convictions arising from incidents in these communities as well as on official union pickets and demonstrations.⁶⁶ At the Bill's Stage 1 reading in the Scottish Parliament on 31 March, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Keith Brown, indicated his willingness to consider extending the scope of the pardon. He did so via amendments carried in the Stage 2 committee hearing of the Bill on 10 May.⁶⁷

Returning to the 'critical nostalgia' theme, interviewees in 2009–2011 and 2021–2022 commonly recalled that they entered the industry in the 1960s or 1970s only after weighing their family awareness and experience of illness, injury and fatality.⁶⁸ The intrinsic qualities of mining featured in their memories: individual physicality, collective endeavour and the application of technical skill to win coal in the face of challenging geological conditions.⁶⁹ There was also space within their stories, however, for discussion in highly affirmative terms of extrinsic elements: job security, union voice and rising wages.⁷⁰ Being a provider with a strong and publicly visible work ethic remained a central dimension of male identity in coal communities. This was a subtle companion and slight qualifier to the shift in gender relations that was otherwise taking effect in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷¹ The unjust transition of the 1980s involved the loss of these valued intrinsic and extrinsic employment attributes. The experiences were life-changing. Arrests, court appearances and criminal convictions had a lasting impact on the miners, their families and communities.⁷² Sudden redundancy and unemployment after the strike, coupled with reduced earning power, were wrenching moments with long-term negative consequences.⁷³

Individual and collective understanding of this troubling history were not easily arrived at. Composed memories of the transition were made in the long post-strike years of campaigning, community-based reminiscence groups and industry commemoration. The NUM remained present in former mining communities, playing an important role in focusing collective narratives of the strike and its injustices. The distinct politics of post-devolution Scotland arguably assisted this process of union-guided

⁶⁶Scottish Parliament, *Stage 1 Report on the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill*, para. 83–84.

⁶⁷*Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill*, Marshalled List of Amendments for Stage 2.

⁶⁸David Hamilton, Interview with Jim Phillips, Dalkeith, 30 September 2009; Jim Tierney, Interview with Jim Phillips, Zoom, 2 February 2022.

⁶⁹Alex Nicholson, Interview with Jim Phillips, Windygates, 8 March 2011; Sean Lee, Interview with Robert Gildea and Jim Phillips, Lochore, 21 June 2021; Billy Fraser, Interview with Jim Phillips, Sauchie, 16 August 2021.

⁷⁰Iain Chalmers, Interview with Jim Phillips, Cowdenbeath, 30 July 2009; Pat Egan, Interview with Robert Gildea, Glenrothes, 17 June 2021.

⁷¹Charlie Goodfellow, Interview with Jim Phillips, Whitburn, 12 August 2009; Carol and Rosco Ross, Interview with Robert Gildea and Jim Phillips, Cowdenbeath, 15 June 2021.

⁷²Michael Hogg, Interview with Jim Phillips, RMT office, Glasgow, 12 August 2021.

⁷³Alex Bennett, Telephone interview with Jim Phillips, 18 August 2021; Willie Doolan, comments in A. Kerr, 'Recovering community: After Auchengeich: resilience in a mining community', <https://gla.ac.uk/schools/socialpolitical/recoveringcommunitypodcast/podcastepisode1>, accessed 13 May 2022.

memory-making. SNP-led Scottish governments, which increasingly enjoyed electoral support in coalfield constituencies, regarded trade unions as social partners. This was emphasised in the 2014 White Paper on an Independent Scotland.⁷⁴ In 2015 the government established the Fair Work Convention, an advisory and research body that endorsed the value of workplace union voice.⁷⁵

Nicky Wilson and other NUM representatives were consulted by the Scottish government on the establishment of the IRG in 2018. They were prominent in the IRG meetings and invited to meet the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Humza Yousaf, prior to the publication of the Final Report which recommended collective pardon in 2020. Wilson continued to meet government ministers and officials by invitation during the passage of the Pardons Bill in 2021–2022. The Scottish government treated the NUM respectfully, as the legitimate representative of former miners and their communities. This plainly contrasted with the position in England, where the UK government's refusal to open an official investigation into the strike served as a reminder of its disregard for trade unionism. Promises for an Employment Bill made during the 2019 General Election, to protect workers' rights made more precarious through the UK's departure from the European Union, remain unfulfilled in 2023.⁷⁶

The general narrative in Scotland of the strike as systematically unjust was detailed in the memories of two ex-miners from Fife, each interviewed in June 2021. These men had distinct experiences in 1984–1985, which roughly reflected those of strike activists more generally. The first, Tom Adams, was arrested on a picket line at Perth harbour and admonished in court following a charge of breach of the peace. He narrowly evaded dismissal after subsequent close encounters with the law on picket lines, once at an open-cast mine and the other outside his own place of work, Frances Colliery. Adams's ordeals on official union pickets corresponded closely with the types of injustice that the Pardons Bill as initially published in 2021 was designed to remedy.⁷⁷ The second, Watty Watson, was arrested in his home village of Lochore after making a V-sign towards a transit van carrying two strike-breakers towards Seafield Colliery. Watson was convicted of breach of the peace hours later and sacked within three working days for gross industrial misconduct. His friend and neighbour, Doddy McShane, was arrested and convicted on the same day, after a different incident in Lochore. McShane was also sacked. Watson, setting out to picket

⁷⁴Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future: Your guide to an independent Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2013), 103–09.

⁷⁵Fair Work Convention, 'Effective voice', <https://www.fairworkconvention.scot/the-fair-work-framework/effective-voice>, accessed 24 April 2019.

⁷⁶J. Harris, 'The levelling up crusade lies withered and abandoned', *The Guardian Journal*, 2 May 2022, 1; S. Butler, 'Employment rights delay "will betray our lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers"', *The Guardian*, 6 May 2022, 35 (quotation from Frances O'Grady, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress).

⁷⁷Tom Adams, Interview with Robert Gildea and Jim Phillips, West Wemyss, 17 June 2021.

Seafield, was probably liable for pardon under the narrow terms originally set out in the Pardons Bill but McShane, who died in 2008, was not. Watson's memory therefore detailed the type of community-based injustice that was only pardoned in 2022 as a result of further and concerted lobbying by former strikers and their supporters.⁷⁸

The two Fife stories are also differentiated by life stage and subtleties of generational position. Each narrator was composed of idiosyncratic 'concrete', to use Karl Mannheim's conceptualisation of formative social and political experience.⁷⁹ Adams, born in 1956, was a mature adult in 1984, his story characterised by gendered concerns as a married breadwinner with two young children. This necessitated the exercise of discipline and restraint, to avoid criminalisation by police officers and victimisation by NCB officials. Watson was younger, born in 1965. Living at home with his parents, he entered the strike as a political novice. Becoming a striker was an important passage in his transition to independent adulthood. His sacking by the NCB threatened an emergent sense of self as a male wage earner. The sacking of McShane, a respected older man in the community, married with young adult children, was a further shock to Watson's sense of established order.

Adams and Watson were both involved in the making of coalfield memories after the strike. As a former union official at Frances Colliery in Dysart, and an elected Labour councillor in the 2000s and 2010s, Adams observed an annual ritual on the anniversary of the strike's outbreak. With the NUM branch banner, which he kept at home in nearby West Wemyss, Adams would stand at the Dysart roadside beside the colliery's surviving headframe.⁸⁰ Bob Young, the sacked NUM chairman at Comrie, was a friend of Adams's and likewise a Labour councillor. Both used the local press to circulate stories about oppressive policing and unfair employment dismissals during the strike.⁸¹

Strike memories briskly harvested by journalists can be different, however, from those unfolded in oral history encounters. Interviewed in June 2021, sitting in his living room, Adams spoke at length about his life, paid employment, family and community in East Fife. He did so in terms similar to the Guinness employees interviewed by Strangleman, emphasising how labour-movement action in the 1960s and 1970s had established good public services, decent employment conditions and a positive social environment. These were the collective goods attacked by Thatcherism. Future improvement in the 2020s and beyond was possible through

⁷⁸Watty Watson, Interview with Robert Gildea, Ballingry, 15 June 2021.

⁷⁹K. Mannheim, 'The problem of generations', in Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1952), 276–322.

⁸⁰C. Warrender, 'Fife ex-miner protests as calls grow for strike inquiry', *The Courier*, 14 March 2017; Neil Henderson, 'It started in Fife – miners' strike remembered 35 years on', *Fife Today*, 21 February 2019.

⁸¹C. Warrender, 'Blacklisted Fife miner hopes review will clear his name', *The Courier*, 10 September 2018.

renewed communal effort, involving the labour movement and government intervention. Adams engaged closely with the justice campaign, being photographed outside the parliament with the Dysart union banner on the day of the IRG's establishment in June 2018, and then submitting detailed testimony. He was in the public gallery of the parliament on 16 June 2022 when the bill attained its final Stage 3 hearing.⁸²

Similar reasoning was offered by Watson, at his home in Ballingry, one of four former mining villages in Central Fife that make up the conurbation of Benarty, the others being Lochore, Crosshill and Glenraig. He talked evocatively about his boyhood and early adult life in the 1970s and 1980s, then discussed the strike in detail. Towards the end of the interview, Watson conceded that Benarty still exhibited the negative long-term effects of colliery closures and the losses more broadly of industrial employment.

But we still feel . . . I still feel that it is a strong community. It's got its spirit. Definitely got its spirit. It's got good amenities that some communities and areas haven't got. And I'm a great believer in we'll fight through.⁸³

Watson invested heavily in the justice campaign. He was at the parliament with Adams and others in June 2018 and attended all eight of the IRG's public meetings. He was invited to meet Humza Yousaf in the Scottish Parliament on 18 February 2020. After Yousaf had announced the government's acceptance of the IRG's report in principle, on 28 October 2020,⁸⁴ he spoke to former miners gathered outside the parliament, which was closed to the public during the Covid-19 emergency. Watson was there. Yousaf urged him to tell his remarkable story to reporters gathered nearby.

In February 2022 Watson gave verbal evidence to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee and recalled his strike tribulations in two campaigning videos tweeted by Richard Leonard, Labour MSP for Central Scotland.⁸⁵ In one of these he was supporting his friend James McShane, recalling the mistreatment of his father, Doddy McShane. In March 2022 Watson persuaded Annabel Ewing of the SNP, his constituency MSP for Cowdenbeath, to express support in parliament for financial compensation and an extended pardon to cover McShane and others criminalised in communities.⁸⁶ Watson was in parliament for the Stage 2 committee hearing on 10 May, where the Pardons Bill was amended to extend eligibility to those convicted after arrest in communities. He was accompanied by his wife, Maureen Watson, sister Isobel Compton, and Doddy

⁸²C. Warrender, 'Fifers gather outside Parliament as review of policing during Scottish miners' strike announced', *The Courier*, 7 June 2018; Scottish Government, *Policing during the Miners' Strike – Adams Response*.

⁸³Watson Interview, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴The Scottish Parliament, *Official Report: Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)*, 28 October 2020 (Session 5), 28 October 2020, 22–26.

⁸⁵These and other interviews posted during the campaign by Richard Simcox on behalf of Richard Leonard are archived here: <https://www.facebook.com/RichardLeonardMSP/videos>, accessed 2 January 2023.

⁸⁶Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, 31 March 2022, 94–96.

McShane's daughter-in-law, Isobel McShane. Watty and Maureen Watson were back in parliament for the final Stage 3 hearings on 16 June, again with Isobel McShane, who was joined by her daughter, Megan McShane, and nephew Owen Flemming.

Neither Adams nor Watson believed that the Act would satisfy the demands for justice in mining communities, which required compensation for victimised strikers and their families. They were nevertheless matter of fact when articulating this view. As trade unionists they were accustomed to the art of negotiation and victories measured by increment. They would continue their pursuit of compensation: *we'll fight through*. The past as remembered by Adams and Watson was therefore usable as well as affirmative, although it contained some stories that were complex and difficult. Telling them involved careful 'memory work'. Arriving at a coherent understanding of the strike, and their roles within it, necessitated composure, a process of narrative reconstruction. Composure can involve a reworking of chronology, the insertion of false details, or conflation of distinct episodes.

'Unreliable' accounts concern those who are sceptical about oral history. To many practitioners, however, the reordering of events within memory actively demonstrates a core benefit of oral history. In the conduct of interviews, profound individual and communal understandings of the past are arrived at.⁸⁷ Alessandro Portelli's famous study of false recollection remains a valuable guide: 'errors, inventions and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meanings'.⁸⁸ The story told by Adams included a subtle reordering of chronology to reinforce an already substantial account of anti-union victimisation. The story told by Watson also contained valuable meaning-making. He presented his personal victimisation as an assault on the community which he was defending. This was in line with Adams's narrative of the strike as working-class protection of fragile economic resources.⁸⁹

Memories of picket line and community injustice from Fife

'I was born here, in West Wemyss', emphasised Tom Adams at the outset of his interview in 2021. He enlisted in the Royal Navy as a stoker aged 16, developing a loathing of social hierarchies and authority which informed his political outlook. In 1980 he joined the NCB, starting at Frances in Dysart, where he lived with his wife Karen and two young daughters. Adams was active in the Labour Party and the local NUM branch. His 'memory work'

⁸⁷L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, 2nd edition, 2016), 81–89.

⁸⁸A. Portelli, 'The death of Luigi Trastulli: memory and the event', in Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany, NY, 1991), 1–26, with detail at 2.

⁸⁹Adams Interview, *op. cit.*

involved explaining the repression encountered by strike leaders, and how he evaded victimisation while others did not. Personal discipline and suspicion of authority, attributes acquired through his naval experiences, were important. Avoiding dismissal during the strike allowed him afterwards to support his family as a wage earner and represent his workmates as a union official.

Three picket line incidents were stressed in the interview. Press reports suggest that Adams possibly transposed the sequence of two of these, although this does not change the fundamental integrity of his narrative: after narrowly escaping victimisation he generally avoided activities that might have resulted in dismissal. The first near-calamity was arrest at Perth harbour on 5 June. This was his 28th birthday, a detail which anchors the memory, but there is no reference to the event in the local newspaper, *The Courier*, on 6 June. *The Courier* reported disturbances at Perth a week later, on 12 June. Frances miners joined others in attempting to block coal from two West German-flagged vessels. Two miners were said to have been arrested.⁹⁰ This closely resembled Adams's account of 5 June when he and a Midlothian activist were targeted by officers as strike leaders. Their subsequent trial was botched. Police officers identified Adams as the Midlothian miner, and the Midlothian miner as Adams. The pair were nevertheless admonished, a conviction in Scots law albeit with no financial or custodial penalty. This outcome left Adams vulnerable.

Adams had already received warning with the second incident, a successful mass picket at Cartmore, a privately owned open-cast mine in Central Fife. A Lanarkshire haulage firm was dissuaded from removing coal, although 136 were arrested in securing this victory. Press accounts demonstrate that this took place over two days, on 6–7 June, possibly before Adams's Perth arrest.⁹¹ At Cartmore he narrowly evaded arrest while attempting to impede a lorry. Seized by two officers, he was 'marched' towards awaiting police vans: 'And just ... I was about halfway down. And one of my pals came running up and jumped on the two of them. He got lifted and I got away'. In Adams's ordered memory his friend, Peter Rafferty, acted because of the earlier event at Perth. A second arrest would have meant dismissal. Other union representatives were sacked after arrest at Cartmore, including Bob Young. Rafferty's courageous initiative, furthermore, came at limited personal cost. He had not been arrested previously; his £60 fine was paid by the union; he kept his job. The alternative chronology, with Cartmore before Perth, does not alter the story's essentials:

⁹⁰'FOUR ARRESTS IN PERTH', *The Courier & Advertiser*, Dundee edition, Wednesday 13 June 1984, 9.

⁹¹'FIFE VIOLENCE: 57 PICKETS ARRESTED', *The Courier & Advertiser*, Dundee edition, Thursday 7 June 1984, 13; 'Pupils "strike" in support of coal pickets', *The Courier & Advertiser*, Dundee edition, Friday 8 June 1984, 5; 'Pickets claim victory as drivers back down', *The Courier & Advertiser*, Dundee edition, Saturday 9 June 1984, 4.

Adams, a union activist, was in trouble; Rafferty's intervention was a self-sacrificing act of working-class solidarity.

Adams emerged from the strike with his family-provider and union-representative roles intact. Minutes of the first post-strike meeting of the Frances Colliery Consultative Committee, a forum for joint management-worker dialogue, show him pushing immediately for managerial vigilance on safety.⁹² He remained in the industry until 2002, when the final mine in Scotland at Longannet was flooded beyond recovery. As a Labour Councillor and strike veteran he kept the justice issue in the public domain, not least through his annual demonstrations on the anniversary of the strike. Under the Pardons Bill he was eligible for pardon, with his picket line admonishment for breach of the peace at Perth. But for Adams real justice required two further developments: a UK-wide inquiry, examining allegations of state misconduct against strikers in England and Wales as well as Scotland; and financial compensation for those sacked after entanglements with the law.

This latter view was influenced by the injustice visited on other local activists, most notably John Mitchell, NUM delegate at Frances. Adams witnessed this victimisation at close hand, during the third picketing incident which he talked about in the interview. This was a mass picket at Frances Colliery in October 1984 which demonstrated the close collaboration between NCB officials and police officers. Adams had broken his self-imposed withdrawal from picketing to protect his own workplace, as a small number of strike-breakers sought to enter the colliery. Frances was close to Fife Constabulary's local command centre.

That was the day when you really knew that you were getting watched as a union organiser cause that's something that's etched in my mind. Bearing in mind the Frances was right next to Fife Police Headquarters and they had a bit of grass and everything right next to the road as you're going down towards the pit. And there were, oh, about 30 or 40 bloody bigwigs – police – all standing there. You had maybe a couple of hundred police.

Adams, standing near the pit gates, realised that the senior officers, the 'big wigs', were studying documents on tables before them, periodically pointing at the gathering crowd of strikers. It dawned on him that the documents in question must be NCB personnel photographs: 'they were going, "There, he is there", and they were pointing at everybody'. Understanding the implications, Adams warned those around them to flee. 'I'm no getting arrested here the day lads', Adams remembered saying, melting into the crowd as a bus arrived with the strike-breakers.

In a written submission to the IRG, Mitchell, the NUM delegate, recalled being commanded earlier that morning by a senior police officer to keep the

⁹²National Records of Scotland, CB 297/03/2, Frances Colliery Consultative Committee, 3 July 1985.

road clear. As the surge began, Mitchell attempted to follow this instruction. He moved across the road, between police officers and the strikers. At this point he heard the cry, ‘Take prisoners!’, from another senior officer. He was arrested, along with five other local union leaders. They were taken to Dunfermline police station and charged with police obstruction or breach of the peace, accounts from Adams and Mitchell varying on this point. The six men were convicted and fined at Kirkcaldy Sheriff Court on 5 December. Adams and other activists were in the public gallery.

And the judge was . . . they were reading out all the charges. And we were all shouting in the back going, that’s terrible, that never happened. That’s a lot of lies. The judge just went . . . slammed his hammer down, if you want a pantomime, there’s one across the road [in the Adam Smith Theatre] . . . now get out of my court. We all got put out. Put us out the court.

More severe punishment followed the very next day, underlining the tightly coordinated nature of police and NCB action against union representatives in Fife. Mitchell and the other five strike leaders convicted at Kirkcaldy Sheriff Court were dismissed for gross industrial misconduct. ‘It was an absolute set-up’, Adams concluded: ‘that whole day’, meaning the police operation at Frances, ‘was to do that’.

The victimisation of union leadership lowered collective resistance to redundancies and the ending of production at Frances. Three out of four miners signed up to leave the industry on the first day back, according to Adams.⁹³ Mitchell lost between two and three years of wages plus the £26,000 that he would have received if still employed and liable for redundancy when production ended in 1987.⁹⁴ In 2018 he told the IRG that in addition to being criminalised and victimised, he had been covertly barred from employment in other industrial sectors because of his trade unionism.⁹⁵ He supported his family through self-employed construction work, which was exhausting and stressful. Mitchell and his wife, Cathy Mitchell, remained committed to the campaign for personal and collective justice. ‘We’ll keep fighting’, she emphasised in a campaign video tweeted by Richard Leonard in February 2022. ‘We’ll keep fighting’, she repeated, supporting a widening of the scope for pardon and meaningful financial compensation.

Andrew Watty Watson was born in Melbourne a few months after his Fife parents had joined the emigration trail to Australia. The family returned home in December 1969 with young ‘Drew’ and Isobel, his elder sister, to Benarty. Early life fed Watson’s powerful sense of place. Glenraig and Mary, the last collieries in Benarty, closed in 1966, but coal still dominated

⁹³ Adams Interview, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ C. Warrender, ‘Former Fife miners convicted during 80s strike welcome pardon – but vow to fight for compensation’, *The Courier*, 29 October 2020.

⁹⁵ Scottish Government, *Policing during the Miners’ Strike – Mitchell Response*.

male employment. Several double-decker buses left each day for pits in West Fife and East Fife. Watson started in mining in 1982 and in March 1984 was working at Comrie. He accepted the need to resist closures although he was not directly involved until the strike physically arrived in Benarty, with the disturbances at nearby Cartmore. When talking about this picket, Watson slowed down and repeated a telling phrase, highlighting his remembered astonishment that a stable world had exploded. This brings to mind Portelli's advice to consider the *orality* of oral history, including changes of pace and repetition.⁹⁶ 'I couldn't believe it', Watson said. 'I could *not* believe it'. The dangerously speeding lorries; the fierce struggle; the presence of workmates, friends and neighbours; the police targeting local leaders and activists for arrest. These elements guided Watson to a new understanding of the strike as class conflict. He became a regular picketer.

The NCB's Back to Work movement then imposed new tensions in Watson's community. Two Benarty residents, an engineer at the NCB workshops in Cowdenbeath and a miner at Seafield, were entreated to break the strike. Their status as strike-breakers, under constant police protection in a community where the overwhelming majority felt besieged, framed the criminalisation and victimisation of both Watson and his friend Doddy McShane. The events unfolded on Friday 16 November, a week after Watson's nineteenth birthday. He left home at 4.50 a.m., to meet transport for a picket at Seafield at the miners' institute in Lochore. Passing the strike-breaking engineer's house, Watson saw that a downstairs window had been smashed. The police officer guarding the property said the breakage had occurred a few hours earlier. Moments later Watson was outside the institute. He became aware of a convoy coming towards him: two police cars with a transit van in between, taking strike-breakers towards Seafield. He stood on the pavement and waved two fingers. The rear police car came to an immediate halt and an officer jumped out of the front passenger seat. He pushed Watson roughly into the back of the car, returned to the front passenger seat and commanded the other officer to drive up to the convoy, now halted at the strike-breaking miner's house. Watson did not know the front-seat passenger but knew the driver, having delivered milk to his house as a boy. This second officer reassured Watson that he would shortly be released. Instead, the first officer spoke to the strike-breakers in the transit van before climbing back into the police car and saying, 'no. He's going in, we're committed now'. Again, Watson slowed in the telling of his story, using repetition to stress the calamity of this moment. 'That was his actual words. "We're committed now. We. Are. Committed. Now"'.⁹⁶

⁹⁶A. Portelli, 'What makes oral history different', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 3rd edition, 2016), 48–58, with details at 50–51.

Watson was taken to Cowdenbeath police station. In the corridor outside the cells, he was taken aback by the unmistakable sight of Doddy McShane's shoes. This footwear was more than incidental. 'Doddy's shoes', black leather, were a touching personal detail, signifying the close friendship between two men. McShane always seemed to be wearing them: walking around Benarty; socialising in the Miners' Institute; even on fishing excursions. Watson and McShane were then brought together in a police van which took them to Dunfermline Sheriff Court. Now the significance of the missing windowpane became clear. McShane told Watson he was among a group of men passing the strike-breaking engineer's house when the damage had been done. The police officer recognised him, and no one else. Hence his arrest a short while later. In passing, McShane added that he had not broken the window but there was no question of his revealing the true culprit's identity. The Sheriff at Dunfermline, William Reid, found McShane guilty of both breach of the peace and breach of bail, the latter owing to a previous court appearance following arrest at Cartmore in June. Reid deferred sentence pending social inquiry reports, and remanded McShane to custody at Saughton prison in Edinburgh until 6 December, three weeks away.

The court-assigned lawyer advised Watson that he would also go to Saughton unless he pleaded guilty to breach of the peace. The V-sign had been interpreted by the officers as a throwing gesture. They claimed to have been alarmed by the perceived projection of a missile in their direction. Watson agreed to plead guilty, fearing three weeks of incarceration and knowing the NUM would pay his fine, which the lawyer thought might be £50.⁹⁷ This was a frequent scenario in the strike. Guilty pleas were often proffered not as admission of wrongdoing, but to end cases quickly, enabling miners to return swiftly to the strike.⁹⁸ Reid passed sentence, but with a fine of £150, adding that if Watson had thrown a missile he would probably have been sentenced to prison. The second and harsher punishment was dealt the following Tuesday, 20 November. Watson received a letter from Davie Seath, Comrie's colliery manager. This stated that he had been dismissed from employment for gross industrial misconduct.

McShane shared a cell in Saughton with men facing serious criminal charges, one for attempted murder and the other for bank robbery. This was degrading and frightening, his daughter Janet Carson and son James McShane said, when interviewed in June 2021. In Richard Leonard's campaign video posted in March 2022, James McShane recalled the family's severe emotional upset when visiting his father in Saughton. McShane was returned to court and his case dispensed by fine just before Christmas. He

⁹⁷Newspaper clippings in possession of Watty Watson: 'Broke working miner's window', *Courier & Advertiser*, 17 November 1984, and 'No excuses', *Central Fife Times*, 22 November 1984.

⁹⁸Scottish Government, *Policing*, Response 129037577, 'DH'.

was sacked shortly into the New Year, 1985. Janet Carson and James McShane shared Watson's memory of injustice as personally humiliating but also as collective stigma: while miners were being victimised, their whole community was being criminalised.⁹⁹ In written submission to the Scottish government's 2021 consultation on whether convicted striking miners should be pardoned, Watson wrote this: 'As a sacked miner at 19 year old and arrested on my village street I know I was wrongly arrested and sacked'. The emphasis on locality and belonging, *my village street*, was important. His victimisation was perpetrated within the home confines of Benarty. The officer who arrested Watson was a stranger to this community.¹⁰⁰

Watson was preparing for an Industrial Tribunal when he was surprisingly taken back at Comrie in December 1985. After Comrie closed in 1986, he worked briefly at Seafield, then moved around the Longannet complex, employed as a power-loader winning the coal and then as a deputy, responsible for safety. Watson has enjoyed a happy family life, with his wife Maureen and three children grown to independent adulthood and living nearby. After the flooding at Longannet ended his mining career in 2002, Watson joined the railway industry, becoming a driver and driver instructor. He retained his commitment to miners and the campaign for justice, motivated by the passing of McShane and other victimised strikers. Watson was pleased with the IRG report but, like Adams, saw this as provisional. The victory would not be completed until miners in England and Wales had likewise been pardoned – and compensated. In the winter of 2021–2022 he was uncertain about the Pardons Bill. He could see that his own case, arrested before travelling to a picket, possibly met the pardon criteria, but McShane's did not, involving an incident outside a strike-breaker's house. He committed himself to battling on, his activism helping to secure the amendments to the Bill which applied the pardon to cases like McShane's. The outcome in June 2022 was vindication: for the Watsons, the McShanes and many other families affected by their criminalisation during the strike in communities as well as on picket lines.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Deindustrialisation in the coalfields of Scotland was managed carefully in the 1960s and 1970s. The UK's transition to a mixed-fuel economy involved serious job losses in the coal industry, but these were largely offset by the stimulation of alternatives in assembly manufacturing. This was the moral economy in operation. Mining communities became more sustainable and less unequal in gender

⁹⁹Janet Carson and James McShane, interview with Robert Gildea and Jim Phillips, Lochore, 22 June 2021.

¹⁰⁰Scottish Government, *Miners' Strike 1984/85 Pardon: Consultation*, 4 June 2021, Submission 1027930465, Watty Watson.

¹⁰¹Watty Watson, Telephone conversation with Jim Phillips, 12 November 2021; Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, 16 June 2022, 80–142.

terms, with greater economic and social opportunities for women. The subsequent acceleration in the 1980s of the transition out of coal was wholly different. The moral economy was violated. Miners were not consulted about the terms of this transition. Nor was the economic security of their communities protected. The UK government was not open about its plans for pit closures and large-scale redundancies. Thatcher and her ministers misdirected the political narrative, focusing on the alleged illegitimacy of the NUM's strike in 1984–1985. Deindustrialisation in Scottish coal communities in the 1980s was therefore experienced as an unjust transition. It involved the removal of union voice and economic security in highly coercive circumstances. During the strike against pit closures in 1984–1985, the criminalisation and victimisation of union officials and activists was disproportionately severe in Scotland. The rate of arrests was double the UK average and the rate of sackings more than three times the UK average.

Individual and collective memory of the strike and its injustices was retained in mining communities. A long campaign resulted in the Scottish government appointing an Independent Review Group under John Scott QC to examine the policing of the strike in 2018. The IRG respectfully listened to union, workforce and community memories of injustice. Its recommendation in 2020 of collective and posthumous pardon for strikers convicted of public order offences was followed by the Scottish government's 2021 Pardons Bill. Campaigners maintained their pressure as the Bill moved through parliament. Two contrasting stories from Fife, analysed in this article, illustrated the issues in detail. Tom Adams spoke about being watched on picket lines and the punishment of union activists. The injustices that he recalled were partly remedied by the Scottish government's original proposals for pardon in 2021, focusing on convictions arising from arrests on official union pickets and demonstrations. Watty Watson recalled the rapid transformation of his social status, with conviction on a trumped-up charge followed by the hammer blow of dismissal. The story of his friend Doddy McShane was even more egregious; he was falsely convicted and sacked after an incident at a strike-breaker's house. Pardons for those convicted following incidents in communities were only secured unambiguously after the Scottish government and MSPs were persuaded to make the necessary amendments to the Pardons Bill in 2022.

Oral history had an important role in this policy intervention. Evidence of injustice gathered in 2009–2011 and in 2021–2022, presented in this article, was heard by MSPs on the Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee. The committee recognised that conflict in mining villages and housing estates in larger towns was created by the NCB's Back to Work initiative. The committee recommended a broadening of the scope of the pardon to cover cases relating to disorder in communities. Oral history analysis was also important in interpreting the positive legacies of the strike. Adams shuffled his chronology slightly, accentuating the constraints on union activism

which arose from police surveillance and the threat of dismissal. Personal discipline and the help of others nevertheless allowed him to emerge from the strike as family provider and political organiser. Watson spoke about a community that withstood the strike's economic and political difficulties. Each of these stories therefore qualified a general tendency in deindustrialisation literature to pessimism and loss. The 'mining spirit' remained in the 2020s, providing ex-coalfield citizens with confidence in future collective action for social improvement. This would extend to continued campaigning, demanding justice from the UK government for ex-strikers in England and Wales as well as Scotland, including financial remedy for those who were sacked in the unjust transition out of coal mining.

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Data availability statement

Recordings and transcripts of the interviews conducted by Gildea or jointly with Gildea will be available in the National Life Stories Archive of the British Library from September 2023. Participant agreements with other interviewees do not enable the recordings and transcripts of other interviews to be made available. A digital copy of the Labour Party report on policing in the strike, authored by Merlyn Rees and Gordon Brown, can be obtained from the author. All other data cited in the article is in the public domain, either published in hard copy or online, or available in UK and Scottish government archive deposits.