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"The Unfolding of Long Strikes"

An investigation of three twentieth century United Kingdom garment industry strikes.

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This thesis aims to find out why some strikes continue for a long time when most are over within a week or two. Many different sources were used and the main archives consulted were for the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, and the Wholesale Apparel Manufacturers' records at the Modern Records Centre in the University of Warwick. Other sources included local newspapers, film, Jewish Workers' oral history transcripts, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and one live interview.

The thesis analyses how workers' grievances, mobilisation and the interactions provoked between all the parties, generated each of these long strikes. The conclusion adds to understanding about strikes by identifying analogies between the three strikes and making some theoretical inferences. The methodology entailed producing a detailed time line for each strike and this provided the material about grievances and mobilisation. To find the most important interactions which affected the length of each dispute, a short summary was written showing how the main events were linked. This was informally tested and revised to find a plausible story which was supported by the evidence and explained how events were connected.

The study found some analogies which may aid understanding about long strikes. Grievances that posed a broad challenge to management and had wider economic resonance made settlement harder. Creating a sense of 'we can win' before the strike, and continuing successful mobilisation whilst failing to prevent company output prolonged these strikes but also generated tension between strikers and the union leaders. Employers prolonged each strike significantly, principally by organising ways around output restrictions, delaying negotiations, intimidating strikers and refusing to meet mediators. Outsiders were needed to end each strike and their intervention was accompanied by a withdrawal of mobilisation resources. The unfolding of each strike resulted from complex interaction between many parties, well beyond that of employers and strikers.

Four key theoretical issues then have arisen from these analogies and these appear to be additions to the existing literature. First, the nature of the grievance may have a continuing influence on the unfolding of a strike, either from the workers' employers' or other parties' perspectives. Second, mobilisation is pursued for different purposes in a strike. Third, the actions of all parties, including apparently remote social actors, can be important in the unfolding of the strike. Fourth, mediation occasions a reduction in mobilisation even when there is no requirement to do so.

Contents

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Thanks must also go to my husband Iain who regularly attended to computer quirks I did not understand, who advised on punctuation and absorbed my worries with customary calm. My son Neill grew up during the whole period of my studies and has always supportively accepted that the years of study entailed a substantial reduction in family income as I had previously worked full-time.

I spent some nine separate weeks at the Working Class Movement Library where Alain Kahan and his staff were always helpful and interested in my project and willingly gave of time and expertise to make best use of their magnificent collection. I also spent significant time at the Modern Record Centre where Christine Woodland and her staff always had a smile and some encouraging words for me, as well as an extremely efficient system for retrieving records. Two other record locations I made repeated visits to were the TUC Library in the University of North London and the British Newspaper library, and they too were helpful.

Abbreviations

The archive deposits are listed in full in the bibliography. Writing out each location in full, on each occasion would produce very cumbersome footnotes and so the first time an archive deposit is mentioned in each chapter, the address is given in full. The abbreviations are listed below.

British Film Institute: BFI.

British Newspaper Library, Colindale, north London: Colindale

Companies' House: Companies' House

London Metropolitan Archive: Lond Met.

London School of Economics Archive: LSE.

Manchester Jewish Museum: MJM

Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick: MRC

TUC Library, University of North London: TUC Lib

University of Southampton Archive: Soton

Winchester School of Art special collection: WSA

Working Class Movement Library: WCM Lib

People and Institutions

This is a list of main characters and the names of the institutions they were associated with.

The Rego Strike, 1928

Andrew Conley, general secretary of the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union (TGW).

Sam Elsbury, full time official of the TGW, and London Organiser.

Mr. Kay, national secretary of the Wholesale Garment Manufacturers' Federation, and of the Federation's London district. N.B. In 1928 the Wholesale Association was referred to as the Federation, but I have used 'association' for consistency throughout this thesis.

Richard Rossiter, owner of the Rego factory in Edmonton, north east London and at least one other factory in Leeds. Also vice chairman of the association's Northern district.

Bernard Sullivan, full time official of the TGW, and London secretary.

The Waterproof Workers' Strike, 1945

Mr. Henry, General Secretary of the Waterproof Garment Workers' Union

National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers (NUTGW – it changed from TGW to NUTGW after a merger in 1939).

Mr. Sheldon, Regional Industrial Relations Officer, (RIRO), Ministry of Labour and National Service.

Hyman Weinberg, Chairman of the Rubber Proofed Garment Manufacturers' Association (RPGMA).

The French Connection Strike, 1985

Ron Bales, full time NUTGW official with particular responsibility for Contracts Ltd, South Shields.

Tom Coburn, manager of Contracts Ltd.

Contracts Ltd, South Shields. The struck factory owned by French Connection.

Jane Kingsland, leading member of strike committee.

Stephen Marks, managing director, French Connection.

Mr. Chen, accounting director, French Connection.

Alec Smith, general secretary, NUTGW.

Chapter One: Introduction

This study examines and compares three long strikes in the UK garment industry. The purpose is to investigate why some strikes continued for a long time when most are over and done with in a week or two. Conclusions are drawn by identifying analogies in the way these strikes unfolded. The strikes selected are all in the twentieth century: the first being for three months at a men's suit factory in London in 1928; the second for six weeks, a multiple plant strike of waterproof garment workers in Manchester at the end of 1945; and the last for six months, in a ladies' wear factory owned by French Connection in South Shields, Tyneside in 1986.

Long strikes are an important area to study because they raise key issues of concern in the literature about strikes. They are a sustained challenge to the employers' power and this means significant strike mobilisation issues. Understanding what different forms of mobilisation are pursued, to what end, and with what outcome can explain much about how strikes unfold. Long strikes will generally involve more 'unfolding' simply because they are long. They also provide opportunity to revisit the debate in the literature about how to regard the workers' publicly expressed grievance.[1] Long strikes are rich sites of social interaction, much of it arising from mobilisation. There are many different actors and whilst the employers are obviously key actors, the actions of others can also have significant influence on the path of the strike. Thus long strikes provide a good opportunity to study the core issues underlying any strike: grievance, mobilisation and social interaction. Since these are important themes in the literature the study should be of interest to industrial relations and social protest authors, and labour historians.

Although the existing literature on strikes does cover these core issues, gaps are evident. First, to comprehend the challenge to employers' power, the different kinds of strike mobilisation need to be specified: is mobilisation aimed to keep pickets going, to persuade others to support, or to more generally put the case? Their different outcomes need to be investigated, but these elements do not appear to be explicitly

[1] I have used the term 'publicly expressed grievance' because the information about the grievances of each group of workers comes mostly, though not exclusively, from public expressions in the strike literature ephemera, and local newspapers.

covered in the literature. Single case studies do of course consider the range of mobilisation taken but in general do not seem to compare which aspects of mobilisation had most effect. Second, the existing literature has tended to box grievance into either a debate about how it connects to the macro-economic and political context, or to concentrate on how workers perceive or collectively understand their grievance, rather than viewing it as something that may affect the subsequent unfolding of the strike.

Third, most of the literature focussing on interaction is limited to a consideration of the employers as active agents. This study seeks to add to this by looking at how other active agents affect the strike. Fourth, the study draws together industrial relations and social movement theories which have, despite efforts by John Kelly, remained largely separate enterprises.[2]

Moreover there are very few qualitative strike comparisons, and the fact that this study has adopted a systematic and comparative methodology to examine these issues, within the category of long strikes, provides an unusual setting for such an exploration.

Taken as a whole, the existing industrial relations literature does not specify mobilisation and interaction as well as the social movement literature, but the latter is more concerned with other forms of popular protest, and does not deal so well with workplace grievance and employer relations. This study develops ideas from both these fields of enquiry to add to understanding about grievance, mobilisation and interaction.

Since long strikes are rich sites of social interaction, they are important to study because these interactions *will* change workplace relations between workers and employers, and between those workers supporting the action and those remaining at work for the strike duration. They *may* also change relations between union leaders, full-time officials and those on strike. They may well leave a much longer-term legacy of altered relations in both cases, and can also change domestic or neighbourly

[2] John Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations, Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*, (London, 1998).

relations. Long strikes incur huge costs and may alter company investment plans and will certainly lead to serious household debt for those on strike, and both these aspects may also have long-term consequences. They are very risky and open-ended ventures so that the paths they take are very unpredictable. They are also very unusual. These things also make the topic of interest to social scientists and to labour historians.

These three issues: grievance, mobilisation and interactions combine in a long strike in a way which provides opportunity, not only to add to understanding about the complex process of mobilisation and how the strike can touch other groups, but also to an understanding about how these issues combine together.

Moreover, mobilisation is not something which is limited to the workers in the strike. It has consequences for other actors and provokes them to act in ways which in turn impact on those on strike. These other actors will of course be the employers, but they will also include the local full-time officials who are intimately involved with the strike, the senior union leadership who will inevitably take more interest in a long strike than in a short one, and for the same reason, other parts of the labour movement, either locally or further a field. There may in addition be other actors who in some way were connected to the action. Studying a strike which is long provides opportunity to unravel these connections. Searching for analogies between these three strikes provides opportunity to derive some more general conclusions.

The core rationale for this study then is to better understand how these three issues: grievance, mobilisation and interactions, interlock in a long strike. This raises several questions. On grievance: how important is the grievance to the commitment to mobilise and to continue? Is the grievance a constant, or can it alter as a result of interactions? On mobilisation: if the overall purpose of workers' mobilisation is to exercise their power to challenge employers, how do the different types of mobilisation fulfil this, and how effective are they? Mobilising strikers for picket duty is a different activity with different consequences to mobilising in the wider labour movement or mobilising to embarrass the company. Which opportunities do workers (or employers) choose to exploit when they mobilise? How does workers' mobilisation come to an end? On interaction: how do employers deal with the strike and how does their interaction affect progress? How do those on strike interact with

local full-time union officials, with the senior union leadership or with other parties, and how does this affect the strike? These questions are followed through in the analysis.

There are additional reasons for undertaking a social-science history study of this kind. Social science studies of whole strike episodes are a limited field which peaked in the 1980s.[3] Therefore this study is a much more recent addition. Long strikes mean strike committees of some duration, and this can illuminate understanding about how the actions of all the parties, together with the broader and local contexts, inform these committees' decisions about what to do. This underpins the working assumption in the thesis that strike committee members' decisions about developing their campaign were taken in response to the real situation they were in at the time. Stinchcombe implies this in his statement "For the whole point is that people's definition of the situation they are in is powerfully determined by the situation they are in".[4]

Long strikes are rare. Durcan et al's quantitative study of post-war UK strikes found that of officially recorded stoppages, more than 90 per cent were over in 6 days, and stoppages in excess of 12 days accounted for less than 5 per cent of the total between 1946 and 1952.[5] Knowles' strike statistics shows that strikes of less than two weeks were just over 70 per cent of all strikes between 1911 and 1938. Strikes of less than four weeks were 83.21 per cent of all strikes.[6] Michael Jackson's comparative study includes data on Australia where there was an overall trend of decline in strikes over 4 weeks' length from 8.3% in 1926–30, to 2.3% in 1981–82.[7] Lane and Robert's analysis of the 1970 Pilkington Glass factory strike notes that a strike of 7 weeks was unusually long.[8] Card and Olson's study of strikes, wage outcomes and strike durations in the US in the 1880s found that the mean length was 20 days, and the

[3] Ibid. p. 7
[4] Arthur Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History,* (New York, 1978), p.118
[5] J. W. Durcan, W. E. J. McCarthy & C. P. Redman, *A study of stoppages of work due to industrial disputes 1946 – 73*, (Oxford, 1983), p.36.
[6] K. G. J. C. Knowles, *Strikes – A Study in industrial conflict with special reference to British experience between 1911 and 1947*, (Oxford, 1952), p257/9.
[7] Michael P. Jackson, *Strikes: Industrial Conflict in Britain, USA and Australia,* (Sussex, 1987), See Table 3.3, p. 36.
[8] Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons'*, (London, 1971), p.15.

median 9 days.[9] So it seems that long strikes are exceptional in many places and at many times.

My own research about the length of strikes in each of the case study years corroborates this. The data is taken from the Ministry of Labour monthly statistical gazette. Each month has a section entitled 'principal disputes' ('principal' was not defined), where the start and end date of each individual principal dispute is recorded. There appears to be no other way to obtain strike-length data from UK statistics. (Knowles confirms that aggregated figures on strike length were not kept beyond 1938.[10])

I used 10 days as the limit beyond which a strike might be counted as 'long': more than a week, but a little less than two weeks. I took the view that this was sufficient time for those on strike to consider the implications of their situation. Also ten days made it easy to count the days between the start date and end date of each strike listed as a principal strike – and to leave out those listed in the same category which included many people but were very short.

In 1928, the year of the first case study, there were 15 long strikes out of a total number of stoppages for the year of 302. There were 28 long strikes out of a total of 2,282 strikes in 1945, and 47 long strikes out of 813 total strikes in 1986.[11] The percentages are 4.9 per cent, 1.3 per cent, and 5.7 per cent. Clearly, when there are many short strikes the proportion of longer ones is far smaller, and this invites some quantitative analysis to flesh out the reasons, but such an exercise is beyond the scope of this study.

The idea for this study originated from my experience as a senior lay trade union officer. This role involved me in lengthy national strikes and in other sustained national campaigns. In the 1980s this activity coincided with a research project on our union undertaken by a team of academics from the University of Warwick. I became

[9] David Card and Craig. A. Olson, 'Bargaining Power, Strike Durations and Wage Outcomes: An analysis of strikes in the 1880s, *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 13, No.1, Jan 1995, pp. 32 – 61.
[10] K. G. J. C. Knowles, *Strikes – A Study in industrial conflict with special reference to British experience between 1911 and 1947*, (Oxford, 1952), p.256, note 1.
[11] Figures from the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, January 1929, p.30; April, 1946, p. 95 & the *Employment Gazette*, January, 1986, table 4.1.

deeply interested in the fundamental issue of how these campaigns had unfolded, how to sustain mobilisation, and how the actions of all the parties involved contributed to the 'history' of the campaign. Although these things happened some twenty years ago my interest in these matters remained, and when the opportunity to do this thesis arrived, I wanted to find a way to explore them more systematically.

The introduction next reviews the existing general strike literature which relates to the rationale and questions outlined above: namely the issues of grievance, mobilisation and interaction. It next considers some implications for the distinctive approach adopted here: a search for analogies between strikes occurring in different historical eras. The introduction ends with a brief synopsis of each chapter.

Approaches to studying strikes

Everyone agrees that studying strikes is challenging because of their complexity. Studying long strikes therefore presents a particular challenge. Alvin Gouldner wrote in his classic 1954 strike study, 'Wildcat Strike', "A strike is a social phenomenon of enormous complexity which, in its totality, is never susceptible to complete description, let alone complete explanation."[12] William Brown went even further to challenge would-be strike analysts when he depicted strikes as "appallingly difficult subjects to study".[13] Many writers over at least the last fifty years have corroborated the view that strikes are complex, dynamic, and difficult to study.[14]

The strikes studied here were very complex but they were a sustained challenge to employers' power simply because they were long. Whether or not they were an effective challenge is another issue. Different writers' views about how workers create this challenge seek to explain the problem that it does not happen very often but they stop short of considering just how the challenge is sustained – which is a key part

[12] Alvin Gouldner, *Wildcat Strike*, (New York, 1954), p.65.
[13] William Brown, *Piecework Bargaining,* (London, 1973), p.148.
[14] K.G.J.C. Knowles, *Strikes, a study in industrial conflict,* (Oxford, 1952); J. E. T. Eldridge, *Industrial Disputes: Essays in the Sociology of Industrial Relations,* (London, 1968); Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons,* (London, 1971); Eric Batstone, Ian Boraston, Stephen Frenkel, *The Social Organisation of Strikes,* (Oxford, 1978); Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike – France 1871 – 1890,* (Leamington Spa, 1987); Roberto Franzosi, *The Puzzle of Strikes: Class and State Strategies in post-war Italy,* (Cambridge, 1995); Karen Beckwith, 'Hinges in Collective Action: Strategic innovation in the Pittson coal strike', *Mobilisation: An International Journal,* (2000) Vol. 5, (2), pp. 179 - 199.

of this study. The idea that a strike is a conscious challenge to the power of management is embedded in the widely accepted definition of a strike which derives from the International Labour Organisation and is reproduced in Durcan, McCarthy and Redman.[15]

> "The basic unit – the case of the dispute – should be defined as a temporary stoppage of work wilfully effected by a group of workers or by one or more employees with a view to enforcing a demand. Disputes affecting several establishments should be considered as one case if they are organised or directed by one person or organisation."

The deliberate use in this definition of the term 'wilfully' and the phrase 'enforcing a demand' make clear that a strike is an attempt to use trade union power to challenge management power. However, workers' actions are conditioned by managements' power. Edwards and Scullion's 1982 study of conflict in seven factories, including two garment factories, supports the idea that management control of the whole work process is central to determining the type of conflict. They argue that it is what management actually do rather than what they think that counts. [16] Their finding means that the historical records used here are a reliable basis on which to construct the argument about the employers' role because they contain much more detail about what the employers actually did than about what they thought.

The idea that workplace control issues are the bedrock of any challenge leading to workplace conflict is accepted beyond those writers who explicitly identify themselves as Marxist, such as Vic Allen, Richard Hyman, and more recently, Dave Lyddon.[17] Colin Crouch also makes workplace control a central theme, suggesting that because UK unions have weak legal support, they have to rely more upon local strategies for workplace control. He argued that dispute goals which centre on control

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[15] J.W. Durcan, W. E. J. McCarthy, G. P. Redman, *Strikes in Post-War Britain: a study of stoppages of work due to industrial dispute, 1946 – 1973*, (London, 1983), p. 4.
[16] P. K. Edwards and Hugh Scullion, *The Social Organization of Industrial Conflict: Control and Resistance in the Workplace*, (Oxford, 1982). See Editor's forward.
[17] Vic Allen, *The Sociology of Industrial Relations*, (London, 1971) p. 9; Richard Hyman, *Strikes*, (London, 1984), chap 3 ; Dave Lyddon, 'Rediscovering the Past: Recent British Strike Tactics in Historical Perspective', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, (Spring, 1998), pp. 107 – 151.1998, p. 113.

issues will be more bitterly fought than those which mainly concern financial goals.[18] The three case studies here provide an opportunity to reconsider this idea.

Hugh Clegg, who considers himself a pluralist,[19] also accepts that powerlessness at work is a key element for strike motivation. He lists three main motives for a strike: to exert pressure on managers, employers, or government, to achieve a collective bargaining objective, and to express frustration at some aspect of the work situation.[20] He has introduced the notion of frustration to the discussion about how workers' challenge is created. Klandermans questions the frustration/aggression paradigm to explain workers' challenge and he suggests that cost/benefit explanations of strike participation have more to offer.[21]

The cost/benefit idea is taken up by Offe and Wiesenthal. They propose that only when workers count their costs and benefits differently, by understanding the value of collective interest, do they mount a challenge.[22] Their solution to the problem that this does not often happen is supplied by their claim that workers find it much harder to understand what their interests (and therefore their grievances) are than do owners and factory managers.[23] A different take on this is to suggest that workers do generally understand what their grievances are but usually see little to be gained by taking collective action.[24]

Offe and Wiesenthal set out a detailed theoretical argument to explore just how it is that workers find themselves so relatively powerless in the face of management control. They suggest that capitalists have three separate kinds of collective power open to them: the firm itself, informal co-operation between firms, and the business association. Moreover, it is easier for the firm to present a united face than it is for

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[18] Colin Crouch, *Trade Unions and the Logic of Collective Action,* (London, 1982), pp 138-9 & 146.
[19] Hugh Clegg, 'Pluralism in Industrial Relations', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 13, (1975), pp. 309-316.
[20] Hugh Clegg, *The Changing System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain,* (London, 1979), p. 269
[21] Bert Klandermans, 'Psychology and trade union participation: Joining, acting and quitting', *Journal of Occupational Psychology,* 1986, Vol 59, p. 197.
[22] Offe and Wiesenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action', in Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capital,* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 183.
[23] Offe and Wiesenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action', in Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capital,* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 202 - 205
[24] This latter explanation about why a challenge is infrequently mounted accords more with the author's experience than does the Offe and Wiesenthal proposal.

workers because so much of the power of the company derives from its products.[25] Certainly the employers are, as Smith argues, "active subjects". [26] This is added reason for the three case studies here to inquire about what owners and managers did.

Paul Smith takes the more general case about the primacy of workplace control one stage further by suggesting that workers' power comes from their capacity to organise collectively and their motivation to do this comes from the structured asymmetry in the power relationship at work. If workers are unsuccessful in organising collectively, then other forces, principally employers and the state, will define their aims for them. He regards unions as "secondary organizers" and this implies that the action workers take is to some degree in response to management.[27] From here it can be argued that workers' power is to a degree transitory, only realising its full capacity in response to some action by management, whereas the power of management is founded upon much more solid foundations: the physical assets, the sanctions available at management's disposal such as dismissal, and the authority vested in the management hierarchy. All reinforce the superiority of management's power at work.

Even though these several explanations share the shortcoming of failing to address how challenges to management power continue as opposed to start, they do clarify the issue. In sum the different authors all agree with the basic notion that workers have little effective power at work most of the time but that they may, from time to time, create enough power to challenge workplace control, either because their frustration gets the better of them, or that they come to see their real interests will be served by taking action, or that the nature of their grievance encourages a bitter conflict. These ideas surface in the three case studies presented here as part of the understanding why the strike challenges started. However the view expressed earlier by Stinchcombe, which suggests that people will determine what they do according to the actual situation they are in, offers a reliable way to understand how the challenges continued.

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[25] Offe and Wiesenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action', in Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capital,* (Cambridge, 1985), p.179. Offe and Wiesenthal consider this power to be derived from the unity of ownership of labour power and ownership of what they term 'dead labour', that is the surplus value of labour captured in the companys' products. The main point made is that capital will always be more powerful than labour.

[26] Paul Smith, *Unionization & Union Leadership: the road haulage industry,* (London, 2001), p.11

[27] Paul Smith, *Unionization & Union Leadership: the road haulage industry,* (London, 2001), p.8/9

Kelly considers that a strike does not start until there is a collectively understood idea about what the problem is and who is to blame for it.[28] It is argued here that this means the grievance and its public expression are both a response to management control *and* an act of collective mobilisation. This is the case even if the collective act of publicly expressing a grievance, such as in a motion at a union meeting or in a leaflet, first takes place a long time before any strike action is undertaken. The gap could be days, weeks, months or even years and it varies in the cases studied here. This also provides opportunities for the grievances to alter, another aspect of interest to this study.

Therefore the study will seek to clarify how far the publicly expressed grievance is an initial response to management control, and how far it affects the future strike. However the literature is divided about this. Moreover the issue in the literature is not framed in quite this way. Although all writers accept that grievance is necessary but not sufficient cause, some writers give prominence to the development of the actual grievance and its relationship to management decisions, and to the link between these decisions and the contemporary economic and political situation. Others are much more concerned with the process through which workers come to agree about the problem.

Older strike studies have tended to emphasise grievance as explanation of strike cause. Although they usually explore mobilisation, it is accepted as fact – something that happens in all strikes. Thus the reason for strike continuation has tended also to be bracketed with the reason for strike cause. A classic example is from the Lloyd Warner and Low study of a 1935 US, three-and-a-half week, multiple-plant shoe factory strike.[29] The question is asked, why did the strike happen – not why did it continue. Most of the book is given over to a detailed analysis of the development of the industry in the locality, going back some 400 years. Thus the whole weight of explanation is on the genesis of the grievance, and very little is concerned with the path of the strike itself.

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[28] John Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations, Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*, (London, 1998), pp. 24 – 30, see also Charles Tilly, *From Mobililzation to Revolution*, (New York, 1978), Ch. 3

[29] W. Lloyd-Warner and J. O. Low, *The Social System of the Modern Factory: The Strike: a social analysis*, (US/London, 1947)

Other, less extreme examples include the 1954 Alvin Gouldner study of a ten-day gypsum factory strike,[30] and the 1980 Friedman and Meredeen study of a three-week machinists' strike at Fords in 1968.[31] Gouldner goes to some length to show how a new management regime created grievances by disrupting workers' expectations across a range of work practices. Although these are old examples, the basic approach does have modern adherents. Darlington and Lyddon's 2001 study of several 1972 UK strikes highlights economic and political grievances as the main causes.[32] These studies, whilst giving attention to mobilisation, explain these strikes in terms of the accumulated grievances. The whole tenor of Hyman's 1972 theoretical book on strikes, especially Chapter Four, is to recognise the saliency of grievance, despite complications.[33]

Some quantitative studies also tackle the issue from a grievance angle by highlighting the connection between trade union militancy and macro-economic or political changes.[34] This type of quantitative approach is still current,[35] and the quantitative material does show a link between economic up and down swings and the propensity to strike, there being more strikes in economically favourable times. The macro-economic situations for the first and last cases here were very unfavourable, and this will have been taken into account as the people involved made their decisions about what to do. Some other quantitative studies count strikes and they have provided some of the evidence used here to justify a study of the category of long strikes.[36]

There has been growing scepticism of the reliance upon grievance and/or macro-economic/political factors as explanation for strike activity. Franzosi, a quantitative

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[30] Alvin Gouldner, *Wildcat Strike*, (New York, 1954).
[31] Henry Friedman and Sander Meredeen, *The Dynamics of Industrial Conflict*, (London, 1980).
[32] Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain in 1972*, (London, 2001) p.2: causes given include government incomes policy, dock containerisation and pay.
[33] Richard Hyman, *Strikes*, (London, 1972), Chap. 4.
[34] See Roberto Franzosi, , 'One hundred years of strike statistics: Methodolgical and theoretical issues in quantitative strike research', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, (1989), 42 (3), pp. 348 – 362, or Albert Rees, 'Industrial Conflict and Business Fluctuations', pp. 213 – 220, in A. Kornhauser, R. Dubin and A. Ross, *Industrial Conflict*, (New York, 1954). Interestingly this early study qualifies the relationship by stating that business fluctuations cannot be counted as strike cause. Rather that they create, or limit opportunities for action (p220).
[35] Derek H. Aldcroft and Michael J. Oliver, *Trade Unions and the Economy: 1870 – 2000*, (Aldershot, 2000)
[36] J. W. Durcan, W. E. J. McCarthy & C. P. Redman, *A study of stoppages of work due to industrial disputes 1946 – 73*, (Oxford, 1983), and, K. G. J. C. Knowles, *Strikes – A Study in industrial conflict with special reference to British Experience between 1911 and 1947*, (Oxford, 1952).

historian, commented in 1995 that this approach is only "partially right".[37] This was echoed more recently by Biggs in 2001 in relation to strike waves.[38] The problem is, that since a specific workplace grievance is often rooted in broader macro change, a similar situation may affect many workplaces at that point in time, yet only a few take action and even fewer take sustained action. Cronin puts this analytical dilemma well.

> "The norm for analysis in labour history has been to focus upon the accumulation of grievances, as if the relationship between the extent and character of opposition and the resistance to it was uniformly close and direct. By now, the sum of research on collective action showing the importance of strength and resources for mobilisation ought to allow us to modify that approach considerably, so that the key question becomes not, 'why did workers fight?', but rather, 'what allowed for or facilitated their translation of grievances into protest?"[39]

Some writers have answered this by paying most attention to the way the grievance comes to be accepted as the collective complaint for which a collective solution must be found. The problem is that this approach can seriously reduce the role of the actual grievance. Klandermans, for example, suggested that strike action did not arise from accumulated grievances, but from a redefinition of a situation, organised by stewards.[40] Snow, Rochford, Warden and Benford refine this by suggesting that it is not so much the grievance per se, as how it was interpreted that mattered, and that social movement activists construct their grievances in such a way as to provide good rationale for mobilisation.[41]

More recently, Miriam Golden's study of failed strikes to oppose job loss considers these strikes only make sense if they are viewed, not as strikes about job loss, but as strikes to protect union organisational maintenance.[42] Douglas Blackmur, in his

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[37] Roberto Franzosi, *The Puzzle of Strikes: Class and State Strategies in post-war Italy*, (Cambridge, 1995) p.346.
[38] Michael Biggs, 'Fractal Waves: Strikes as Forest Fires', paper 2001-04 at the 2002 European Social Science History Conference, p.2.
[39] James E Cronin, 'Strikes and Power in Britain', in Lex Heerma van Voss and Herman Diedericks ed. *Industrial Conflict, Papers Presented to the Fourth British-Dutch Conference on Labour History*, (Amsterdam, 1988), p.19.
[40] Bert Klandermans, 'Psychology and trade union participation: Joining, acting and quitting', *Journal of Occupational Psychology,* 1986, Vol 59, pp. 189 – 204.
[41] David. A. Snow, E. Burke-Rochford, Steven K. Worden and Robert Benford, 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilisation, and Movement Participation', *American Sociological Review,* 1986, Vol 51, pp. 464 – 481.
[42] Miriam Golden, *Heroic Defeats: The Politics of Job Loss*, (Cambridge, 1997), p.139.

discussion about combining social science with history, as his Australian strike studies seek to do, draws attention to the potential danger of suggesting that a strike is not actually about what the people on strike say it is about.[43] Nick Crossley reminds us that the argument can become circular in the sense that people seize the opportunity to mobilise because they are aggrieved.[44]

However neither of these ways of looking at grievance accommodates the need to also consider its role in future mobilisation, beyond the start of the strike, or its role in provoking future responses by the employer or other parties. My interpretation of a collectively and publicly expressed grievance is that it is both a response to management action (or inaction), *and* a part of continuing mobilisation and interaction.

Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel emphasise the importance to mobilisation of the vocabulary used in a strike.[45] The subject of the grievance, and the way it is expressed can help or hinder mobilisation of both those immediately involved, and those who may decide to lend support in some way. In this way my understanding of a collective grievance fits neither into those writers who give grievance prominence over mobilisation issues, nor does it quite fit into those writers who downgrade grievance to a matter of perception. My view of a collectively expressed grievance, both as a response to management control, and as a contribution to future mobilisation, borrows from both, and therefore provides opportunity for a fresh insight into just how the nature of the expressed grievance affects the unfolding of each strike.

Part of understanding why mobilisation was sustained involves the vexed question of why individuals do occasionally stay out on strike for a long time, incurring huge personal sacrifice. Some of the industrial relations writers with a psychology background have addressed this.[46]

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[43] Douglas Blackmur, *Strikes, Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, (Sidney, 1993), p.193.
[44] Nick Crossley, *Making Sense of Social Movements,* (Philadelphia, 2002), p.121.
[45] Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, *The Social Organisation of Strikes*, (Oxford, 1978).
[46] Jean Hartley and John Kelly, 'Psychology and Industrial Relations: From conflict to cooperation? *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 59, (1986), pp.161-176.

The 1986 Waddington study about a six-month brewery strike which ended in failure, concluded that the strikers misinterpreted what was essentially an un-winnable situation, to think they had the potential for victory.[47] This kind of misinterpretation may be pertinent to the French Connection study here. However, there is a sense in which this approach undermines the argument that it is the actual situation people find themselves in, which gives the analyst the best guide to understand why they take the decisions they do. As already indicated, this study leans more toward this than the Waddington explanation. Nevertheless the chance to revisit Waddington's idea is presented here – especially in the last case study.

Veenstra and Haslam identify what they refer to as 'stand and fight' people who appear to be predisposed to be willing to take action.[48] There are certainly individual people identified in the Rego and French Connection strikes who conform to a 'stand and fight' description. However, one should be wary of counting 'stand and fight' people as people who were also willing to take on active work to maintain the strikes. Winterton and Winterton (not from a social psychology viewpoint) found, in their study of the 1984 miners' strike, that only a minority of between 14 and 30 per cent of those on strike lent their active support by picketing.[49] This rather raises the question about what everyone else on strike was actually doing with their time.

These efforts from the psychological field of study to theorise an explanation for sustained action highlight the lack of theoretical rigour in much industrial relations writing. There is no coherent body of industrial relations theory with which to analyse strikes. Michael Poole's 1981 review of industrial relations theory was an attempt to pull together a series of disparate writings, and he comments that systematic theories of union action and behaviour were lacking at that time.[50]

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[47] David Waddington, 'The Ansells Brewery: A Social Cognitive approach to the study of strikes', *Journal of Occupational Psychology,* (1986), Vol. 59, p.234.
[48] Veenstra and Haslam, 'Willingness to participate in industrial protest: exploring social identification in context', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, (June, 2000), Vol. 39, Pt. 2, pp.153 – 172.
[49] Jonathon and Ruth Winterton, *Coal Crisis and Conflict. The 1984-5 Miners' Strike in Yorkshire*, (Manchester, 1989), pp.101.
[50] Michael Poole, *Theories of Trade Unionism: A Sociology of Industrial Relations*, (London, 1981) p.6.

This paucity of theoretical development is still commented upon. Perhaps the most recent trenchant comment comes from Roderick Martin: "The absence of an adequate theory of industrial relations, as well as the inadequate use of theory in industrial relations, have been lamented by scholars for at least 40 years."[51] Key Marxist writers such as John Kelly have expressed regret at the lack of industrial relations theory about how power is lost or gained in conflict.[52] He is also critical of the failure of theory based on economic rationality to explain lengthy strikes.[53] Tarrow criticised Marx for under-specifying the conditions under which mobilisation might take place.[54] Franzosi thought Marxist writers had generally failed to theorize strike behaviour.[55] As recently as the September 2002 Joint Conference between the Society for the Study of Labour History, and the *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations Journal*, a session was devoted to the problem of devising industrial relations theory. Because this study attempts to derive theoretical conclusions from empirical case studies, it at least has the capacity to further industrial relations theory in respect of long strikes.

As a consequence of this, the social movement field of study provides a better developed body of theory to answer the specific questions raised here about mobilisation. This is in spite of the fact that most social movement literature does not concern itself with strikes, but with other forms of social protest, and of course with revolution. It provides the opportunity to make the necessary enquiries about mobilisation such as what sorts of mobilisations took place, and how effective they were? That is, how effective were they in mobilising people to do things collectively, and how effective was the action actually taken in securing change. These are two different things. It is quite plausible to be very successful in involving everyone in the action, and to sustain it, without actually producing sufficient power to alter very much at work.

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[51] Roderick Martin, 'Mobilisation Theory: A new paradigm for Industrial Relations?' Review article for Rethinking Industrial Relations, *Human Relations*, (September, 1999), Vol. 52, No. 9, p. 1205.
[52] John Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations, Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*, (London, 1998), p.18 and note 14.
[53] Jean Hartley and John Kelly, 'Psychology and Industrial Relations: From conflict to cooperation', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 1986, Vol 59, pp. 161 – 176.
[54] S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement,* (Cambridge, 1998), p.13.
[55] Roberto Franzosi, *The Puzzle of Strikes: Class and State Strategies in post-war Italy*, (Cambridge, 1995), p.353.

Charles Tilly's 1978 study, 'From Mobilisation to Revolution', remains a core text in social movement theory and perhaps *the* core text in relation to the idea that mobilisation uses resources. His particular approach is known as 'Resource Mobilisation Theory' (RMT). Charles Tilly developed this from his thinking in the 1974 Tilly and Shorter study of strikes in France. He highlighted there the importance of good organization as "a pre-condition of large-scale collective action".[56] He also hinted at an aspect developed in this study, namely that mobilisation is for different purposes. He commented that the public displays which took place during the strikes he analysed: the marching up and down and banners, were not meant for the employers, but for the political powers.[57] His 1978 book on mobilisation views the strike as a creation of 'proletarianization' which in turn created the phenomenon of workers with little or no control over their working life.[58] These workers use the strike as the primary means to oppose loss of control at work.[59] Thus he too is centrally concerned with issues of power.

Tilly defines power (power as a result of mobilisation) as the extent to which the outcomes of interactions resulting from mobilisation favour the interests of the mobilised group over those of other interested groups: "acquisition of power is an increase in the favourability of such outcomes.[60] This is an important definition because the power is expressed in the outcome rather than the performing of the act (of mobilisation). He thus draws a distinction between action taken, and the effectiveness of such action.

Even so, Tilly's work is necessarily at a general level and so does not specify different forms of strike mobilisation. He emphasises the capacity to mobilise and choose the right opportunities, and highlights the need to consider actions by other parties such as management, unions and government.[61] He proposes an interactive model comprising shared interests, collective action, opportunity, organisation, and resources to sustain mobilisation. He argues that prior organisation, opportunity to mobilise and the

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[56] Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France*, (Cambridge, 1974), p.335.
[57] Ibid. p.343.
[58] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, (New York/London, 1978), p. 159.
[59] Ibid. p. 161.
[60] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, (London, 1978), p.55
[61] Ibid. p. 166.

available resources are all essential. [62] This connects to the second issue in mobilisation, how does de-mobilisation come about? When some of these things disappear, mobilisation will come to an end.[63]

Thus the RMT model provides space to ask those questions demanded by this study which differentiate between the different elements of workers' mobilisation, the different outcomes (results of interactions), and how it comes to an end. However, it does not explicitly incorporate the notion presented here of different kinds of mobilisation for different purposes, such as for picketing, for raising other support, or for embarrassing the company, and these may have different degrees of success.

Charles Tilly's work has been very influential. Church and Outram's 1998 investigation of mobilisation among UK miners claimed its academic origins to be in Tilly and Shorter's study.[64] Church and Outram found, from their detailed investigation of mining union historical records, that miners' exceptional solidarity was a myth, and that matters connected to resource mobilisation and good organisation were much more important factors. The present study also uses detailed historical records to understand the relationship between grievance, mobilisation and good organisation. This close attention to the record reduces the danger of relying upon less empirically definable concepts such as miners' solidarity, or in the 1928 and 1945 studies here, Jewish ethnic solidarity.

Sidney Tarrow added another dimension in his 1998 book, 'Power in Movement'. He regards opportunity as the most important ingredient for a successful mobilisation strategy. The opportunities arise out of the social interactions between the groups involved. [65] He put the issue adeptly: when collective action is taken it has to be explained why some people do when most others do not.[66] I make use of opportunity theory to aid explanation of the employers' as well as the workers' actions.

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[62] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, (London, 1978)
[63] Ibid. p.76
[64] Ray Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity, Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889 – 1966,* (Cambridge, 1998). Preface.
[65] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social movements and contentious politics*, (Cambridge, 1998 edition), see pp. 88 – 96, 99 & 162/3.
[66] Sydney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: social movement and contentious politics*, (Cambridge, 1998), pp 11 – 13 & 67 – 73.

Opportunities have to be seen to be taken up. That is, for the opportunity to be taken advantage of, the group must agree it is there and agree it is a good idea in their circumstances. There are links between this idea and John Kelly's view of a collective understanding of grievance.[67]

The last part of the thesis enquiry deals with how the various parties connected to the action interact to limit or prolong the strike. Clearly employers' actions will be a key element but by no means the only element. The local union full-time officials and the senior union leadership will also have a profound affect on the strike. Other, perhaps unexpected, groups may also have an impact. The interactive framework of social movement theory lends itself to an approach that includes all the parties, but there is one caveat.

Social movement theory more generally concerns itself with such diverse movements as the Green Movement, the Countryside Alliance or the French Revolution. It does not usually deal with strikes unless the action is a part of a strike wave, which then might more directly oppose the state. This means that the aspect of my question which relates to the mobilisation of employers is not covered by social movement literature. Since the thesis draws upon theory in both the industrial relations and social movement fields, it also has at least the capacity to extend the overlap between the two areas of study.

It is of course important to understand that employers do mobilise in response to strike action – and the longer the action continues, the more opportunity employers have to mobilise to circumvent the strike. Offe and Wiesenthal draw attention to the need to take into consideration employers' capacity to mobilise.[68] Franzosi has taken this insight another stage by focussing on strikes as sites of strategic interaction. He gives primacy to tactics and strategy. He worked from the assumption that in a strike, "it takes two to tango",[69] and thus brought squarely into focus the need to understand what the employers were doing, as well as what the workers were doing. His study

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[67] John Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilisation, Collectivism and Long Waves*, (London, 1998), p.29/30.
[68] Offe and Wiesenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action', in Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capital,* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 179, 184/5, & 191
[69] Roberto Franzosi, *The Puzzle of Strikes*, (Cambridge, 1995), preface.

was about the 1968 Italian strike wave. Biggs[70] added to this by applying Larry Griffin's[71] generalised software tool for event narrative analysis to a US strike wave in the 1880s. However, his quantitative analysis restricts itself to those two groups, although the abstract for the article accepts there are at least three groups interacting.[72] Beckwith recently extended the 'interactive' approach in her analysis of the US Pittson Coal strike by making an interactive link to another connected party, apart from the strikers and the employers. She concluded that interaction between those on strike and the law provoked the former to change their campaign strategy.[73] All of this marks a growing acceptance of the need to look at strike activity from an interactive standpoint and the attempt here to include all the possible connected parties in the analysis adds further to this trend.

Studying strikes inevitably throws up questions about the interactions between the senior union leadership and those on strike. This remains a controversial topic within the trade union movement, where it will commonly surface at union conferences as the suggestion that the senior union leadership are denying the opportunity to the rank and file to take a militant route. These issues surface in the empirical chapters of this thesis. The nub of it is the need for Marxists to confront the theoretical problem that workers show no signs of wanting to make revolution against capitalism as a whole.

Certainly theoretical writers such as Hyman, and Offe and Wiesenthal provide one kind of explanation. This may be a more sophisticated version of the argument that union leaders undermine members' militancy, but it does nevertheless form the conclusion that union leaderships will tend to limit militancy. The problem for this study is the core assumption underpinning their work. This is that union organisations have developed historically from small and militant groups to large organisations which then develop a bureaucracy that "undermines the organisation's ability to

[70] Michael Biggs, 'Strikes as Sequences of Interaction, the American Strike Wave of 1886', *Social Science History*, Vol 26. No.3 (2002).
[71] Larry J. Griffin, 'Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis and causal interpretation in Historical Sociology', *American Journal of Sociology,* (1993), Vol. 98, pp. 1094 – 1133.
[72] Michael Biggs, 'Strikes as Sequences of Interaction, the American Strike Wave of 1886', *Social Science History*, Vol 26. No.3 (2002), p. 584
[73] Karen Beckwith, 'Hinges in Collective Action: Strategic innovation in the Pittson coal strike', *Mobilisation: An International Journal*, (2000) Vol. 5, (2), pp. 179 – 199.

mobilise".[74] However, it is not at all clear that, historically, small unions were militant, or that large ones now are not, or that bureaucracy generates lack of militancy in either small or large unions.[75]

The notion includes the idea that trade union democracy operates under the constraint dictated by the need to exercise power for people, (i.e. bureaucratically), and the need for power to be exercised by people (i.e. through collective action such as strike action).[76] Almost all of Offe and Wiesenthal's empirical evidence comes from Germany whose industrial relations system bears little relation to that in the UK because so much grievance resolution is done in a court.

Other writers do explicitly confront, and reject, any notion that trade unions might have revolutionary potential (Offe and Wiesenthal do not appear to mention this).[77] For example Fransozi argues that "there are material bases for workers' consent" within capitalism.[78] The view is similarly put by Vic Allen: trade union members have no illusions about the capacity of trade unions to build a new society, and their support is conditional on the trade union ability to deliver improvements at work. Allen regards trade union bureaucracy as a neutral word after the meaning Weber attached to it. He considers large (and bureaucratic) unions are good at delivering improvements to working conditions. This is essentially a pragmatic approach to union bureaucracy, union action and union decision taking, and also to the relationship between senior union leaderships and rank-and-file members.

These are fundamentally different views between Marxists about how trade unions function. This thesis must necessarily form a view about the interaction between the people on strike and the senior leadership thereby renewing this aspect of debate. Two of the cases here involve conflict between the rank and file on strike and the senior union leadership, and thus this study provides opportunity to explore what other

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[74] Offe and Wiesenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action', in Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capital,* (Cambridge, 1985). See especially p.186.
[75] John Kelly, *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics*, (London, 1988), pp 149 – 153. Kelly provides a thorough discussion of the weaknesses in the bureaucratic thesis.
[76] Richard Hyman, *Industrial Relations, A Marxist Introduction*, (Basingstoke, 1975), chap.3
[77] Vic Allen, *Power in Trade Unions*, (London, 1954). Chapter 1 and Roberto Franzosi, *The Puzzle of Strikes: Class and State Strategies in post-war Italy*, (Cambridge, 1995), pp134/7 & 232/3
[78] Ibid. p.233

reasons there might be for the internal union conflict, other than the view offered by Hyman, and Offe and Wiesenthal.

As indicated in the foregoing, the view here is informed by the premise that the unions' normal role is to make gains for their members in whatever way they can. Compromise is inherent, and, in the situation of a one-factory strike, the interests of the whole union membership who are not on strike have to be set against the few who are, at any point in time. The decisions of the leadership are then pragmatic choices governed principally by the situation in which they find themselves, rather than theoretically determined by an assumption of conflict between senior leaders and the rank and file.

A relatively recent US paper may be interpreted to lend support to this pragmatic approach. It concluded that if the historical situation provided the opportunity, and there was a radical leadership, then the conservative tendency of union leaderships can be altered.[79] It does however add an important extra, namely the ideological orientation of the senior leadership. Campbell, Fishman and McIlroy agree, and also highlight the importance of union political factions in understanding union activity.[80]

The importance of ideological orientation is also supported by a 1994 study of full-time officers by Kelly and Heery. They questioned the 'bureaucratic model' with respect to full-time officials. They found there was insufficient evidence to support the idea that the primary orientation of these officials was to the union hierarchy, and that such a notion is "likely to produce misleading accounts of officer power and officer – member conflict". Instead they stressed the importance of full-time officials' ideological values. [81] It is a pity that there does not appear to be any study about how factions and ideology affect senior elected officials such as General Secretaries or executives. It is these people whose decisions had profound effects on the disputes covered here.

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[79] Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, 'Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union revitalization in the.American Labor Movement', *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol.106, no.2, (Sept 2000)
[80] Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman, John McIlroy, *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, the Post-War Compromise, 1945 – 1964,* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 11.
[81] John Kelly and Edmund Heery, *Working for the Union: British Trade Union Officers*, (Cambridge, 1994), p. 1, 7 and 24.

The vigorous election campaigns which take place for union general secretaries and the commonplace involvement of political factions in union executive elections also gives support to the need to preface the pragmatic choices with some ideological orientation. This is not to say that pragmatism rules ideology, or vice versa, but that both are to be taken into account in understanding the actions of the union leadership in the disputes considered here. Neither of these ideas is predicated on a view that conflict between the union leadership and the rank-and-file is inherent.

It is evident from the discussion about mobilisation and interactions that Charles Tilly's 1978 book, *From Mobilization to Revolution,* has provided much of the theoretical base for this thesis. In 2001 Charles Tilly was working on a new book, a development in thinking from his original.[82] The new book stressed how the actions of one group can shape the future actions of all the parties, thus shaping how the social movement 'moves'. It emphasised the similarity between all forms of protest and set out a framework which suggested key points or 'mechanisms' of transition in a protest.[83] These mechanisms were intended to highlight the interactions in a protest. So it seemed to be ideal to apply to this study. However the new book did not turn out to be helpful and, as it took up some considerable time before this was established, the reasons why this was so need explaining. [84]

The most problematic area was that, despite the authors' commitment to unpick the social interactions between all the actors, their three-stage model overwhelmingly concentrated upon the things happening to those involved in the social movement. Consequently it did not easily provide scope to show how the interactions between the two principal agents in a strike, namely the strikers and the employers, prolonged the strike, let alone the other actors I needed to account for, such as the union leadership, the press and on occasion, the employers' association. So whilst their model worked up to a point when analysing the interactions between strikers and union leadership, it

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[82] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *The Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge, 2001).
[83] Ibid. pp. 204 – 207.
[84] The reviews of this book were very mixed. Some were extremely critical such as that by Dilip Simeon, 'A unified theory for contention?', *International Review of Social History*, vol 49, (2004), pp.115-121, but even where the review was more positive, such as Knut Kjeldstadli's 'Mechanisms, Processes and Contexts', pp.104-114, in the same journal and volume, the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* were criticised for the complexity of their mechanisms and the inadequate guidance about applying them.

did not fit very well when looking at the strikers' interactions with their employers. In retrospect this is perhaps unsurprising because the book, like most other social movement literature, concentrated on social protest and not industrial protest, even though the book's authors saw their method as applicable to all kinds of protest including strikes.[85] After spending rather too long in an effort to apply the authors' thinking, I abandoned the idea.

There is one further issue not so far mentioned which arises naturally from the fact that the three case studies selected span some sixty years of history. Some writers suggest trade union protest is caught in a time capsule. Tarrow considers strikes had little new to offer for study because he regards them as institutionalised contention.[86] On the other hand, Beckwith,[87] Shostak[88], Juravich and Bronfenbrenner,[89] and Adler and Suarez,[90] all write about innovation in strategic interaction and mobilisation. The last quoted included a piece about the US garment industry. This study's selection of three strikes from different twentieth century eras provides opportunity to take a view on this issue.

Long strikes, a gap in the literature

The length of a strike is rarely dealt with as an explicit issue in strike studies. For example, Hyman's short classic, *Strike*, does not explicitly concern itself with length. Kelly and Hartley drew attention in 1986 to the need to understand why workers stay out at such cost to themselves in a lengthy strike.[91] Michael Biggs much more recently claimed that investigations about how strikes unfold over time have had little attention.[92] It is surprising that long strikes have not received attention as a specific category, since going on strike for two or three days is a very different matter from going on strike for two or three months.

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[85] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *The Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 342.
[86] S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, (Cambridge, 1998), p. 101.
[87] Karen Beckwith, 'Hinges in Collective Action: Strategic innovation in the Pittson coal strike', *Mobilisation: An International Journal*, (2000) Vol. 5, (2), pp. 179 – 199.
[88] Arthur B. Shostak, *Robust Unions: Innovations in the Labor Movement*, (New York, 1990)
[89] Tom Juravich and Kate Bronfenbrenner; *Ravenswood, the steelworkers' victory and the revivial of American labor*, (US/London, 1999)
[90] Glen Adler and Doris Suarez, ed. *Union Voices, Labor's Response to Crisis*, (New York, 1993)
[91] John Kelly and Jean Hartley, 'Psychology and Industrial relations: from conflict to co-operation?', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, (1986), Vol 59, pp. 161 – 176.
[92] Michael Biggs, 'Strikes as Sequences of Interaction, the American Strike Wave of 1886', *Social Science History*, Vol 26. No.3 (2002), p584.

The classic 1971, 7-week Pilkington glass factory strike is an exception. It does ask the question clearly in its conclusion, "why did the strike develop into a protracted struggle?", and the answer is given, "While each party had its own conception of what were the main issues, each also tended to refuse even to acknowledge the relevance of issues that were considered important by others."[93] Unusually, the authors of this study had the advantage of being on site for the duration of the strike and so their observations are valuable. In their concluding discussion about 'each party' it is clear they were more concerned with how the relationship between those on strike and the union leadership (and full-time officials) broke down than they were with the actions of the employer. They viewed the company role in the conflict's escalation as being "obliged to adopt the role of an almost passive but interested and injured bystander".[94] Thus their observations are relevant to the above more general discussion about the question of latent intra-union conflict. However, although the Pilkington study contains sections on strike organisation, picketing and publicity,[95] there is little sense of comparing the efficacy of these different activities in the book's overall conclusion.

There appear to be only two other studies which take more than a few lines discussing why some strikes go on for longer than the norm. These are Michelle Perrot's 1987 study of French strikes,[96] and David Card and Craig Olson's 1995 statistical article about bargaining power, strike durations, and wage outcomes, based on US data from the 1880s.[97] Perrot's study of 3,000 strikes in France 1871 to 1890 concentrates on the "unfolding of a strike".[98] Her aim was to produce a morphology of a strike, and because French strike statistics, unlike UK strike statistics, readily permitted investigation about strike length, she was also able to make some statements about strike length.

Perrot measured strike profiles, that is, the fluctuation in numbers on strike. There is sufficient data in the case study records here to consider the fluctuation in numbers on

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[93] Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, (London, 1971) Fontana, p. 236.
[94] Ibid. p.238.
[95] Ibid. pp167 - 176
[96] Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike: France, 1871 – 1890*, (Leamington Spa, 1987)
[97] David Card and Craig Olson, 'Bargaining Power, Strike Durations and Wage Outcomes: An analysis of strikes in the 1880s', *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (Jan 1995), pp. 32 – 61.
[98] Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike: France, 1871 – 1890*, (Leamington Spa, 1987), p.12

strike at the start and ends of each strike, and to consider what bearing this had on mobilisation. She found a considerable fluctuation in numbers staying out on strike, with people leaving and joining the strike at various times. She regarded a fluctuation of forty-nine per cent between the lowest and highest numbers on strike as an indication of good mobilisation, and she uses the term 'compact' to describe one such strike of some 55 days. Although she urges caution in interpreting these profiles, strike numbers would needed to have shrunk by a good deal more than half before the strike is considered to have collapsed.[99]

She found the start a strike was a liberating experience and this is corroborated by Friedman and Meredeen, and Lane and Roberts.[100] Indeed, Friedman and Meredeen went as far as saying that after a few weeks on strike, nobody wants to go back: that once the rhythm of life at work is broken, people don't want to return.[101] Another aspect to this is Beckwith's interpretation of a strike both as an action to achieve a goal, and a goal in itself, since once a strike starts, keeping it going becomes a goal in its own right.[102] This interpretation fits the activities of strike committees. They are geared to sustaining mobilisation rather than looking for solutions. This might suggest that the longer the strike goes on, the more 'permanent' become the various organisational arrangements to uphold mobilisation, and the harder it becomes to break the habit and go back to work. This might be especially the case for those closest to strike organisation.

Perrot also suggested that in a longer strike there were many and varied forms of mediation which intervened and pushed the parties toward the negotiating table.[103] Mediation occurred in all three cases here and their success in ending the strike is another factor in any explanation.

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[99] Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike: France, 1871 – 1890*, (Leamington Spa, 1987), pp. 99.
[100] Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike: France, 1871 – 1890*, (Leamington Spa, 1987), p. 140, and Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, (London, 1971) p. 167.
[101] Henry Friedman and Sander Meredeen, *The Dynamics of Industrial Conflict*,(London, 1980), p. 199
[102] Karen Beckwith, 'Hinges in Collective Action: Strategic innovation in the Pittson coal strike', *Mobilisation: An International Journal*, (2000) Vol. 5, (2), pp. 179 – 199.
[103] Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike: France, 1871 – 1890*, (Leamington Spa, 1987), pp,38 & 140,83,99,100,119,258.

The two most relevant aspects of Card and Olson's quantitative study are their findings that as the costs of delaying settlement grow on employers and workers, so does pressure to settle, and that a high proportion of employers hired replacement labour.[104] In connection with this, Beckwith shows the importance of people signalling their intention to remain on strike.[105] In Card and Olson's language this effectively increases employers' costs. Therefore expressions of intention to continue to mobilise, and actions that can signify that to employers, may be important contributors to employers' decisions to settle or not.

There are very few comparative studies of whole strikes.[106] There are two recent examples of books containing three strike narratives, but there is no attempt to compare the strikes. [107] Two recent comparative studies still leave plenty of room for this study's contribution. Douglas Blackmur compares two Australian strikes in the same era, 1946 and 1948, and Andrew Richards compares the 1972, 1974 and 1984/5 UK miners' strikes.[108] The former does not help coverage of UK strike literature, and the work is specifically concerned with the impact of the strikes on the Australian Labour government of the time. The latter is specifically concerned with the strikes from a mining industry perspective.

There also appears to be no general discussion about strike resolution, an important aspect of this study since by definition a long strike is one that was difficult to resolve, or put another way, encountered barriers to resolution.

Combining grievance, mobilisation and interaction

The study aims to increase understanding about what effect a grievance may have on a subsequent strike, how such a prolonged challenge to management authority is

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[104] David Card and Craig Olson, 'Bargaining Power, Strike Durations and Wage Outcomes: An analysis of strikes in the 1880s', *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (Jan 1995), pp. 33,39, 41,44,45,52.

[105] Karen Beckwith, 'Hinges in Collective Action: Strategic innovation in the Pittson coal strike', *Mobilisation: An International Journal*, (2000) Vol. 5, (2), pp. 179 – 199.

[106] Eldridge, *Industrial disputes: Essays in the Sociology of Industrial Relations,* (1968); Michael P. Hanagan, *The Logic of Solidarity*, (Chicago, 1980)

[107] Stephen Franklin, *Three Strikes: Labor's Heartland Loss and What They Mean For Working Americans,* (New York, 2001), and, Howard Zinn, Dana Frank, Robin D.G. Kelley, *Three Strike: Miners Musicians, Salesgirls, and the fighting spirit of Labor's last century,* (Boston, US, 2001)

[108] Douglas Blackmur, *Strikes, Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, (New South Wales, 1993) and Andrew J. Richards, *Miners on Strike,* (Oxford, 1996)

maintained, and how all connected parties interact in the unfolding of each strike. The introduction identified questions which are organised around the three interlocking concepts: grievance, mobilisation and interactions.

Although there is literature about each of these three aspects, in the main the literature about grievance stems from the industrial relations field, whilst the theoretical literature about mobilisation and interactions stems from the social movement field. The aim here is to add fresh insights about these three concepts by combining them in an interlocking whole, in a case study setting. Key questions have emerged from the foregoing discussion about these three elements.

These are necessary questions to investigate to fulfil the purpose of the thesis. They are: how far the collectively expressed grievance contributed to the unfolding of each strike; what different kinds of mobilisation were undertaken, for what purpose and how effective was the action; how did the actions of all the connected parties affect the strike; how did the action come to an end and what can be said of the relationship between union leaders and those on strike?

Case studies are an established academic tool to use in a search for analogies. Stinchcombe argues that "portraits of the facts, combined with an intellectual operation of carefully drawn analogies, are roads to generality."[109] He regards it as quite reasonable to find analogies, or even analogous sequences in different historical episodes. The Oxford dictionary gives as one of the meanings for the term analogy "agreement, similarity, (to, with, between)"[110]. In this way a search for analogies becomes the route to highlight generalities which may then lend themselves to more specific testing than can be achieved in a comparison of whole episodes.

Glaser and Strauss do not use the term 'analogy', but they do recommend using comparative, qualitative studies in sociology to generate theory from the data. They suggest such theories are conceptual categories which arise naturally from the process

[109] Arthur Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History, (Academic Press, New York, 1978),* p. 116.
[110] *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 6th edition, 1976, p.34

of research.[111] The thesis conclusion discusses the analogous events identified in the three case studies and attempts to generate some theory from the empirical evidence. This follows advice from Glaser and Strauss to "generate conceptual categories or their properties from the evidence".[112]

Stinchcombe emphasises that any discovered analogies are only meaningful if they apply to a segment of an episode, rather than to the whole episode. He gives a sequence of related events in the Russian revolution as one of his examples.[113] The cases here are broadly divided into the sequences of related events which make up the three segments: the pre-strike, strike and strike-ending. Inevitably a search for analogies will also find differences. These three strikes turned out to have differences and the fact that there are differences, even though the main parties do similar kinds of things, needs explaining. This is tackled in the conclusion. However the emphasis is on analogy since the study aims to find analogies with the potential to generalise, rather than to compare and contrast.

The following chapters: a brief guide

The methodology chapter explains the rationale for choosing historical case studies in the garment industry as the vehicle for this investigation. Possible alternative methods are mentioned briefly. It justifies the use of case studies as a tool to identify analogies, and it explains in detail how issues such as mobilisation and interactions between several parties are dealt with. The records used for each strike biography are described and evaluated so that the reader can appreciate their strengths and weaknesses. The strike case studies follow in chronological order. They each treat the analysis in broadly the same three segments as does the conclusion. Strict attention is paid to the chronology of the story for each case.

The 1928 strike biography emphasises the role of internal trade union politics. The dispute is also noteworthy because of the number of different groups involved and the success of its mobilisation. The 1928 strike is the only one which has been subject to

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[111] Barney G. Glaser, and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research,* (New York, 1999 ed.), see chap 2.
[112] Ibid. p23.
[113] Arthur Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History,* (Academic Press, New York, 1978), p.15.

another analysis, in 1956, which looked at the strike from a different perspective and this is explained in the chapter.

The 1945 strike biography is also unusual. It appears to have been between a very isolated group of employers and workers. It also had an especially long pre-strike period. Because it was a multi-site strike the inter-relations between strikers, leaders and employers were different to the other two strikes. The legal, political and economic frameworks of 1945 were particularly important influences on the course and outcome of this strike.

The 1985 to 1986 strike was an especially dogged dispute. The analytical emphasis is on the relations between the owners (French Connection) and the strikers, and between the full-time officer and the union leadership. Although other actors were involved, especially at the beginning and end, the key interactions in the course of the strike occurred directly between the strikers, their full-time official, the company and the union executive.

The conclusion compares these episodes to locate analogies about grievances, mobilisation and interactions. It is ordered in the same chronology as for each strike biography: that is the grievances, mobilisation and interactions are discussed in the pre-strike period; in the course of the strike; and at the ending of each strike. Discussion about the analogies is further developed to link them to the key questions summarised above and present some theoretical conclusions. Some thoughts about future work on long strikes follows and the conclusion ends with a study review.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The introduction explained the main analytical purpose of this research: to set out how each strike unfolded; to identify the interactions which started and prolonged each strike; and to facilitate a systematic search for analogies between them. Clearly the methodology selected must suit the main purpose. It must also distinguish between the foreground, where the interactions take place, and the background historical context which influences them.

The vehicle I chose to realise this objective was an historical three-strike comparison from the UK garment industry, and so much of the chapter is about the empirical issues concerned with historical analysis. Accordingly the chapter discusses my choice of past strikes, as opposed to more recent conflicts; of case study comparisons; and of the garment industry. Next it reviews the record deposits used and describes the material selected to understand the broader context. Finally, I explain how I determined the key interactive events.

There are alternative ways to investigate long strikes: for example a single case study, or lots of short case studies, or a recent, rather than historical study. These possibilities are evaluated in the relevant sections

The advantage of historical comparison

The initial choice of historical episodes was made because the intention in the first phase of research was to consider how taking strike action and the response to it had altered over the twentieth century. However, it became clear during the later phase of research, that either there had been little change or that the records I had collected did not contain that information. Nevertheless, a comparison of historical strike episodes does have several advantages.

Adopting an historical method encourages a study which connects the events in each strike to the 'big picture ', that is the broad changes in politics, economics and ideology and this means a "study (of) social process in its totality". [1] Nevertheless a method is needed to ensure the information collected is properly interrogated. E. P.

[1] E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, (London, 1995 ed., written in 1978), p.95.

Thompson sets out a scheme of interrogation which specifies the importance of chronological sequence. He states that evidence should be interrogated to show "links in a linear series of occurrences or contingent events". These links are "the ground of any objective notion of causation."[2] Tilly concurs in his discussion of social-science history, and he cites Stinchcombe to argue that the core of an effective historical analysis is in the construction of a sequence of facts....into a cumulative causal process in which each fact creates the conditions for the next one.[3] Since the chronology of each strike biography is so important in my study, it seems wise to choose historical narrative because it is designed to deal with chronology.

There is a growing field of comparative historical enquiry, which is defined by "a concern with causal analysis, emphasis on processes over time, and use of systematic and contextualised comparison".[4] The authors of that definition carefully specify two levels of comparative enquiry, the first of which is concerned with 'big' questions; the second is reserved for what they term, historically delimited enquiries. This study falls more properly into the second category. These authors recommend this approach because:

> "even though their insights (i.e. those of comparative historians) remain grounded in the histories examined and cannot be transposed literally to other contexts, comparative historical studies can yield more meaningful advice concerning contemporary choices and possibilities than studies that aim for universal truths but cannot grasp critical historical details."[5]

It would have been possible to have chosen contemporary strikes and collected evidence through field interviews. Looking at this option more closely reveals significant drawbacks. Perhaps most importantly, it might have resulted in very one-sided data, as employers, freshly recovering from the tensions of a strike, might well have felt sceptical about the role of a researcher. They may have consented to interview, to put their side of the story, but might not have wanted me to have access to pertinent documentation. A second problem is that it would be very unusual to capture a strike in progress as was the case in the Pilkington strike;[6] much more likely

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[2] E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, (London, 1995 ed., written in 1978), p.39.
[3] Charles Tilly, *As Sociology meets History* (1981), p.8.
[4] James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, ed. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge, 2003), p.3, 10 &14.
[5] Ibid. p.9.
[6] Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, (London, 1971).

to have relied upon ex-post oral data, and all the attendant problems of inaccurate recall and/or inaccessible key players.

The possibility of relying too heavily upon ex-post collected live interview is recognised in the literature. Stuart Svensen highlights this when he comments that "participants in a conflict tend to recall more facts and arguments that support their own position than facts and arguments that support other positions."[7] This disadvantage is perhaps why, despite their age, the Pilkington, and Friedman and Meredeen strike studies are still well regarded.[8] They both avoided this in different ways.

Choosing history means the different eras for each case provide a contrast in the context in which each strike took place. It is important to maximise difference, especially where the same industry was selected. A comparative historical study retains the common factor of the strike whilst much of the rest of the context will be different. Values, culture, politics, the law and the economy will be different for each strike.

Using historical cases means an expectation of difference, and so makes it easier to identify any analogies which do occur, and the conclusion to this study is constructed to delineate these analogies. A choice of contemporary case studies would have made this task harder because all the case studies would share the same broad political, economic and social context.

Industrial relations practices were different at different points in time for historical reasons. Hyman has suggested that the process and outcome of bargaining is profoundly influenced by the structure of industrial relations.[9] Thus in the 1928 and 1945/6 strike, the negotiations over settlement were with the employers' association, whereas in 1986 they were with the company. The two earlier strikes took place at a time when industrial relations were generally dealt with through employers'

[7] Stuart Svensen, *The Sinews of War; Hard Cash and the 1890 Maritime Strike*, (New South Wales, 1995), p. xiv.
[8] Henry Friedman and Sander Meredeen, *The Dynamics of Industrial Conflict*, (London, 1980), p.14 – the writers recognise this issue.
[9] Richard Hyman, Industrial Relations: *A Marxist Introduction*, (Basingstoke, 1975), chap. 4

associations; by 1984 the era of employer-association controlled bargaining had ended.[10] The 1945 dispute was a multiple-plant strike managed by a small, ethnic and craft-based union. This type of union no longer exists.

Labour market issues were different for historical reasons. Labour market issues affect the employers' willingness to reach a compromise. In the 1928 men's suit industry the labour supply was overwhelmingly female, in relatively short supply, seasonal and a mixture of local and not local. In 1945/6 labour was severely under supplied, very seasonal, very local, though probably not quite so female dominated. In 1986 labour was again overwhelmingly female, in moderately short supply, mostly local but probably not especially seasonal.

Product markets were different for historical reasons and this affected the employers' perception of risk. 1928 was a fiercely competitive boom time for the men's suit industry; in 1945/6 the utility clothing scheme and rationing secured an unadventurous, but safe market for the waterproof industry. By 1986 the UK product-market for ladies' wear was under siege from global production.

Finally the garment workers' union was not at all the same in 1928 as it was in 1985/6. Union structure can encourage or inhibit activity; this was the theme of the Warwick study of my own union in the 1980s. In 1928, in common with most unions, the Tailor and Garment Workers preferred to deal with the employers' association and tolerated many short unofficial strikes. By the 1980s it was the norm for strikes to be endorsed and financially supported. The local full-time officers' roles were much looser in 1928 than in 1985/6. In any case the union featured in the 1945/6 strike was the last specifically Jewish and local union for the industry. By 1986 the local and fairly independent waterproof industry was a thing of the past, as was the waterproof workers' union that organised the strike.

There are additional advantages in an historical choice. The records are not confidential, even if at some stage they were, as in the case of some of the records used in this study. This reinforces the point made earlier with respect to access to

[10] Howard Gospel, *Markets, Firms, and the Management of Labour in Modern Britain*, (Cambridge, 1992), chap 5

documentation that might have been denied in contemporary cases. For example, I cannot think it at all likely that the 1928 employers' association, had they existed now, would have shown me in their minutes how they circumvented the pickets, yet this information is now clearly available in the public archive.

Notwithstanding these arguments in support of an historical choice, there is a drawback. Historical evidence is never complete, and there is usually no-one to interview to ask, what actions taken by other people, influenced their decision to act. Reasons for actions taken, if not explicit in the record, must be deduced from the available evidence, and the method I developed to make plausible deductions is covered later in this chapter.

A difficult business for workers and owners

The main reason for choosing the garment industry was that I had investigated it in my M.A. and my M.Sc., and to some extent in my undergraduate dissertation. In the very first place my attraction to the industry was due to my desire to find out more about the kind of work my older relatives had done, and to distance myself from my own, white-collar civil service experience. To have chosen a different industry, or even three different industry case studies, would have meant time taken to familiarise myself with the industries which would have seriously compromised the time spent analysing the strikes themselves.

The garment industry also happens to be an industry which is not especially well covered by secondary material - most of the books being about the collapse of the industry in the 1980s. This is an advantage as it makes the research more unusual, but it is also a disadvantage because there appear to be no texts which discuss the effect of the industry structure on bargaining. My own conclusion is that the industry characteristics made union members' mobilisation, especially for a long strike, a formidable challenge, and made industrial relations problematic for employers.

It was problematic for employers because all sectors of the industry faced extreme competition. Profit margins were squeezed not only from the plethora of small workshops that were willing to undercut the factories, but also from the fashion stores, who demanded fast delivery, and frequently made fickle decisions to alter production.

Moreover, one consistent feature of the industry was that it was always labour intensive. These characteristics meant that issues concerning workplace control would have been especially important to employers. Al Rainnie summarises the competitive pressures upon garment industry employers as, "an inexorable and uncontrollable demand placed on each individual capitalist".[11]

Mobilisation was a formidable challenge for the workers because the industry was so fragmented.[12] Indeed, it is not really accurate to speak of it as one industry as it is made up of several sectors which, for most of the period in the study, operated separately. The cases here cover three parts: the 1928 case is about mens' suit manufacture; the 1945/46 case about waterproof clothing manufacture, and the 1986 case about ladies' wear. Other parts not covered here include the shirt, tie, bespoke and mantle (ladies' coats) sectors. This is not an exhaustive list. Certainly for the first two strike studies, each sector had its own employers' association, wages board and pay negotiations.

Separate sectors entailed separate unions. In 1915, when the first wave of union mergers occurred in the industry, there were eight different unions in the trade, not including Scotland.[13] Between 1915 and 1939 in England, there were separate unions for the old bespoke part of the trade; for the new menswear tailoring factories; for the (mainly Jewish), coat-making part of the trade, and for the waterproof garment part. In 1939, when the second wave of merger occurred, these were reduced to two: the Waterproof Garment Workers and the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers. It took until 1970 for this final merger to occur. Industry and union fragmentation led to a patchwork of union recruitment. It was good in some places and very bad in others. Union organisation was never taken as given and bad economic conditions quickly reduced membership.

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[11] A. F. Rainnie, 'Combined an uneven development in the clothing industry, the effects of competition on accumulation', *Capital and Class,* (1984), No. 22, p. 144

[12] Industry fragmentation is a consistent theme in the garment industry literature. See for example S. P. Dobbs, *The Clothing Workers of Great Britain*, (London, 1928), D. L. Mumby, *Industry and Planning in Stepney,* (Oxford, 1951), and J. T. Lambert, 'An Assessment of the effects of selective assistance under the Industry Act, 1972', *Government Economic Working Paper No.61, Clothing Industry Scheme,* (London, 1983)

[13] Anne J. Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors; Trades Unionism amongst the Tailors of London and Leeds, 1870 - 1939* (London, 1995).

Union organisation was a challenge too because sub-contracting to small workshops was endemic throughout all sectors. This meant that workers were constantly changing work location, hampering efforts at recruitment and this was exacerbated by a seasonal work cycle. Moreover work held up by pickets could easily be placed elsewhere.

The industry has one of the oldest trade union histories and this may have been a factor in the workers' favour. There is evidence from the mid-eighteenth century of tailors' combination to sustain strikes and overtime bans.[14] Some of this expertise may have filtered down the generations. Another factor, which may have favoured workers in a strike, was that because the industry has always been labour intensive, and the standard machinists' work very skilled; it was not generally feasible for an employer to go out and recruit skilled machinists when labour was suddenly removed. Of course the speedy recruitment of replacement labour was an obvious tactic for employers to try to use, to circumvent strike action, and this issue is discussed in the thesis.

An enduring industry characteristic has been the prevalence of piece-work payment schemes, a legacy of the craft roots of the industry. But they did not operate quite in the manner analysed by William Brown's study of engineering piece-work schemes. He portrays a picture of significant informal bargaining. [15] But whilst the engineering union operated a devolved system of bargaining, backed by a strong local steward structure, the garment unions had their piece-work rates ratified by the Wages Council (known pre-World War Two as the Wages Board), following joint national negotiations. There was only a poorly developed local steward scheme, and full-time officials routinely dealt with piece-work disputes. Nevertheless the piece-work payment tradition provided scope for manoeuvring and influencing the collective bargaining environment. This is especially evident in the 1945/6 strike.

The garment industry has an overwhelmingly female labour force, and is erratically organised and this offers a less common perspective since very many strike studies appear to draw much of their empirical data from highly unionised, male-dominated industries such as engineering, ship-building or mining. For much of the last century

[14] Margaret Stewart and Leslie Hunter, *The Needle is Threaded: the history of the industry,* (Southampton, 1964), p.19.
[15] William Brown, *Piecework Bargaining,* (London, 1973).

the numbers employed in the garment industry were at least comparable to these more commonly featured industries. These other industries consistently appear higher up the strike-by-industry comparisons in both the pre-war Knowles figures, and the post-war Durcan et al figures,[16]whereas the Knowles study regards the London pre-war clothing industry less liable to strike than any other industrial group[17] and the post-war Durcan, McCarthy and Redman study place clothing in the middle of a table of major strikes for 39 different industries.[18] The frequent use of examples from these other industries must give a slant to the material which needs to be corrected. Although other sectors of industry are now represented by a more substantial literature, the balance of UK industrial relations literature is still dominated in the manner described.

Choosing the garment industry has provided me with two complicating factors: gender and ethnicity.

The industry as a whole has been overwhelmingly female since at least the end of the First World War. This is an advantage because it contrasts with so much of the output of labour relations history and therefore helps to set this study apart from mainstream labour history works. But it was also a disadvantage as there does not appear to be literature about the question of women activists' behaviour as distinct from men's. There is literature celebrating women's activism in conjunction with ethnicity and sweatshop working,[19] but it did not have any relevant comment for this study. It was not my personal experience that women behaved especially differently from men in a strike, or were more, or less militant.

Of course there has been work written about women's ability to form effective support networks in times of stringency, but the records in the case studies here gave

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[16]K. G. J. C. Knowles, Strikes: *A Study in Industrial Conflict with special reference to the British Experience between 1911 and 1947*, (Oxford, 1952) and J. W. Durcan, W. E. J. McCarthy & C. P. Redman, *A study of stoppages of work due to industrial disputes 1946 – 73*, (Oxford, 1983).
[17] K. G. J. C. Knowles, Strikes: *A Study in Industrial Conflict with special reference to the British Experience between 1911 and 1947*, (Oxford, 1952), P. 181
[18] J.W. Durcan, W. E. J. McCarthy, G. P. Redman, *Strikes in Post-War Britain: a study of stoppages of work due to industrial dispute, 1946 – 1973*, (London, 1983), p.43
[19] Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, (Massachusetts, 2001) is an example of the former, and Jensen and Davidson ed. *A Needle, a bobbin, a strike: women needleworkers in America*, (US, (1984), or Edna Banacich and Richard P. Apelbaum, *Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry*, (California, 2000), are examples of the latter.

no hint of this.[20] Part of the reason for this was that most of the records, being institutional, were almost certainly male generated. For example, listings in committee minutes of 'those present' suggested that those attending were mostly, but not exclusively men. Letters were also generally written by men. Occasionally a woman is reported by name in the local press, as having said or done something. There is a little more information about the women in the 1986 strike, and it is clear they had a determining role in events, but in the other two strikes, women's voices do not surface. Because the existing records did not give clues about gender aspects, it was only possible to incorporate a fleeting recognition of the issues, and this is contained in the conclusion.

The situation on ethnicity was a little less stark as there were some signals in the records. The garment industry has had a long association with immigrant groups and the 1928 strikers were largely Jewish. In the 1945/6 case both workers and owners were Jewish, and in the 1986 case the owner was (is) Jewish. This aspect of the study might make it an interesting choice, but certainly an unrepresentative one. The historical records and literature on Jewish history are fairly compact, much more so than for gender, and so it was possible to take it on board. Some research suggests that Jewish workers were especially active in left politics in the inter-war era and in 1945/6.[21]

There were clear links to ethnicity issues in the institutional records. Thus I have introduced ethnicity issues in the studies, where there is evidence in the records to suggest it was a contributing factor to the behaviour, of either the strikers, or the employers, in each case.

As stated at the beginning of this section, choosing the garment industry was a pragmatic decision. However it turned out to be a helpful choice. The labour intensive production; fragmented industry structure; and intensely competitive market conditions, mean that workplace control issues were central to management strategies.

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[20] See especially, Jonathon and Ruth Winterton, *Coal Crisis and Conflict*, (Manchester, 1989).

[21] Elaine Smith in David Cesarani ed. (Oxford, 1990) *The Making of Modern Anglo Jewry*, p.151, and Percy S. Cohen, *Jewish Radicals and Radical Jews*, (London, 1980), the author is confident enough of the accepted connection to inscribe the fly-leaf with, "The connexion between Jews and radicalism has been strong for more than a century, to the point where Jews have been grossly over-represented in some left-wing movements."

This industrial relations literature, reviewed in the last chapter, emphasises this. At the same time, sustaining mobilisation was a challenge for union leaders, full time officials and rank and file activists. These facets make the industry an appropriate choice for a systematic study of strike length.

The case-study tool

As mentioned in the introduction, case studies are an established academic tool to use to search for analogies between different historical episodes. Douglas Blackmur, for example, gives a robust defence of using historical narrative in his two Australian case-study strikes.[22] Glaser and Strauss highlight comparative, qualitative research as often the most "adequate" and "efficient" way to obtain the information required.[23] They are adamant that allowing the theory to emerge from the data is preferable to choosing a theory to then verify by reference to data because it ensures that the theory which does emerge has the best chance of fitting the data.[24] But this is not to say that choosing a small number of case studies does not present other methodological difficulties, the most obvious being the assertion that no generalisable proposition can flow from such small numbers.

Dietrich Rueschemeyer has very recently addressed this criticism in an essay entitled "Can one or a few cases yield theoretical gains?." His answer builds on A. Stinchcombe's work mentioned in the introduction. Whilst he clearly acknowledges difficulties, he considers it is possible to obtain worthwhile insights, because a few cases can pay attention to historical complexity, in a way that a larger number study can never do. [25] He claims elsewhere in the book that part of the solution is to be found in an overtly systematic interrogation of the evidence. My first chapter highlights the priority given in this study to a systematic search for analogies in the three strikes. These are issues at the heart of how the collected evidence is worked upon, and they are considered in the next section.

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[22] Douglas Blackmur, *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, (New South Wales, 1993), see Chap.11.
[23] Barney G. Glaser, and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research,* (New York, 1999 ed.), pp. 9, 18.
[24] Ibid. p.37.
[25] James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, ed. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge, 2003). See Chap. 9, 'Can one or a few cases yield theoretical gains?'.

It might have been interesting to have pursued a rather different case study strategy and to have compared long and short strikes, but by their very nature, short strikes receive little coverage, certainly insufficient to unravel interactions. In the National Union of Garment Workers Executive Council minutes there were frequent notifications of very short stoppages but the information about them was simply a one-line note giving the company name.

Choosing three cases can provide enough data for reasonable insights into the roles of the primary actors and their interplay with each other and their context. Much depends on how the facts of evidence are interrogated, and that is the subject of the last section of this chapter.

The records: location, quantity and quality

To answer the questions set out in the introduction, the most essential information the records have to provide, is about what the strikers did; what the employers did; what the outsiders did, and what the union leadership did. As commented above the garment workers were not especially strike prone and the choice of these particular strikes was largely governed by the fact that they were covered by the fullest historical record. Other strikes were investigated: a 1950s strike in a Londonderry shirt factory; a 1960s strike in a Sheffield bra factory; and a 1986 strike in a Glasgow jeans factory. None of the records for these strikes was as full as for the three selected. Moreover the date of the Sheffield strike was too close to the South Shields strike and the Londonderry strike was intimately bound up with Irish politics and would have diverted interest from the main theme of this study.

The historical records were geographically widespread and this presented a significant information collection issue. Records consulted about the 1928 Rego strike came from the Working Class Movement Library in Salford; the TUC Library in the University of North London; the British Newspaper Library at Colindale; the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick; the Public Record Office at Kew; the Winchester School of Art special collections and the London School of Economics Archive Collection. Additionally I visited the Rose Lipman Library in Hackney, and the Jewish Museum in Finchley, North London, and contacted Queen Mary College, in a fruitless search for relevant, female oral archive and more information about the

Rego company. There was mention in the existing records of a long and detailed shorthand record of the meetings which ended this strike, but though I tried several avenues to locate this, thinking that in all probability more than one copy would have been made, it appears to be no longer in existence. Also the Public Record Office confirmed that the verbatim record of the court hearing in this case had been destroyed.

Records consulted about the 1945 Waterproof Garment Workers Union strike came from the Working Class Movement Library; the Manchester Jewish Museum; the London Metropolitan Archive; the University of Southampton Archive; the Winchester School of Art special collections; the British Newspaper Library, and the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. In addition I made enquiries to find trades council minutes to add to the Manchester and Salford Trades' Council annual report, but it seems these minutes no longer exist.

Records consulted about the 1986 French Connection, Contracts Ltd. strike came from the Working Class Movement Library; the British Newspaper Library; the British Film Institute in Central London, and Companies House. I also went to South Shields to interview Ron Bales, the full-time organiser involved with the strike. I made a number of telephone calls to try to locate Jane Kingsland, the strike leader, but these proved unsuccessful, as did efforts to reach Alec Smith, the NUTGW general secretary at the time of the strike, or Stephen Marks, the managing director of French Connection.

There was no shortage of records per-se, and the different sources are listed in the bibliography. The core consists of: union executive minutes, reports, letters, conference records and union journal issues; trades council minutes, reports and letters; employers' association minutes, letters and individual employer's letters; various less formal records such as strike committee or works committee minutes; strikers' accounts of their dispute; memos and scrap notes; newspaper reports; oral history transcripts; and one live interview recording. The records of the Board of Deputies of British Jews were consulted for the Waterproof workers strike study and the British Film Institute archive film was used in the French Connection strike study.

Formal committee minutes, especially from the union side, were terse in style. However, quite often the same issue was covered in different records, and this helped flesh out some of the committee minutes, as well as giving other perspectives about an issue. This was especially important in the case of the 1928 national union records, where the minutes were complete, but were especially terse, recording the issue and the decision without discussion. Not infrequently an issue would also be mentioned in the local newspaper and by the local trades council. Trades councils often commented about strikes they were asked to support. Local newspaper reports generally supplied good factual detail, though they covered the strikes in more detail at the beginning and end, than in the middle, where, not surprisingly in a long strike, a local paper would lose interest unless something happened. Generally there was good chronological cover and missing links seemed to arise more from a lack of detail in a record, than from a lack of records as such.

Choosing three case studies spread over sixty years meant that the records for each strike study presented different strengths and weaknesses, and this had implications not only for each study, but also for the task of comparing them.

There was more detail of the strike itself in the French Connection records. This was partly due to it being, at six months, the longest strike of the three, but also because the records contained the very detailed weekly letters about the strike's progress from the full time official to the general secretary. All this made it possible to build up a more detailed picture of what took place during the strike itself, and when. This has meant that the other two strike chapters appear, in comparison, to give less information to the reader about events actually during the strikes. However, the records for the other two strikes gave more scope for historical interpretation of how events before the strike may have shaped what occurred during the strike. This could be argued to be an overall disadvantage to an historical method since it may have been easier to ensure a balance of information between each strike story using recent strikes where taped interview complemented documentation.

Certain weaknesses are evident in the source material for all three studies.

There is no information about how family helped to financially sustain the strike, and very little specific information about local community help, beyond fund-raising social events. Yet given the information about the miners' 1984/5 support groups, and at least one article specifically addressing the issue of community support to sustain a strike[26], it seems likely that there was more community support. Where it was possible to adduce evidence to support this, I have done so. For example: leaflets advertising a dance in the local Miners' social club also indicated some community activity. A record of the 1986 French Connection strikers' home addresses in South Shields, meant I was at least able through using the 'multimap' facilities on the internet, to locate the streets and find they were close together, and so deduce added reason for a solidly supported strike.

There was very little information about the strikers themselves, and as already explained, this affected the choices I made about how I covered gender issues. It left questions unanswered regarding issues such as what those strikers who were not regularly on the picket line, or involved in other mobilising activity, were doing with their time. Nor was there any indication of any disagreement within each group, apart from the votes which ended the strikes. The Waterproof Union and French Connection strikes recorded significant minority votes against a return to work, indicating there was disagreement within the group of strikers. Michelle Perrot's study suggested disagreement usually occurred between strikers on a long strike, so it seems probable that there was disagreement between strikers, but there was not enough evidence in any of the three strike studies to explain possible disagreement.[27]

Unfortunately the lack of detail about the people on strike means there is no indication of how individual strikers felt about their action as these strikes developed. Most of the information about what people on strike thought has come from the strike literature which naturally gives no indication of any differences of view either about the progress of the strike, or the choices to be made about how mobilisation was pursued. Consequently inferences made about people's motivation in these strikes is

[26] Erik Nijhof and Peter Schrage, 'Behind the Picket Line: The Home Front of the Rotterdam Dockers in times of social warfare, 1900 – 1980' in, *Industrial Conflict, Papers presented to the Fourth British-Dutch Conference on Labour History*, ed. Lex Heerma van Voss and Herman Dierderiks, (Amsterdam, 1988).

[27] Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike – France 1871 – 1890*, (Leamington Spa, 1987) p.101.

more or less limited to what is contained in the strike literature and this will be bound to present an image of a well supported strike whose actions were making headway.

There is reference in some strike committee records to individual strikers leaving the strike to go to work elsewhere. As has already been pointed out, the industry structure meant people often switched from one factory to another, so to do so in a strike would probably not be unusual. It was a direct way out of the financial problems brought on by being on strike. Strike publicity literature could conveniently ignore such people as they had not conspicuously broken the strike by going back into the workplace. It is possible to gain some sense of this issue because the strike committees had to deal with it. It hints at a wealth of understanding about what people were doing and why which has been largely lost to the analysis here.

Occasionally, where a newspaper report suggested that an individual who had been on strike was critical of people still on strike, there were glimpses of the internal dynamic of the strikers, but they were only glimpses and insufficient to make into any argument.

It was not often the case that a piece of evidence about an event stated that 'x' decision was made due to 'y' previous event, although such connections were made clear in some of the most important episodes. Since my analytical frame relies on identifying interactions, and finding the connections between them, this was an issue. However it would be unlikely that any set of records would be set up in a way to suit a research need, since the records were created for institutional needs. This did mean that it was sometimes necessary to infer the likely causal sequence. How I determined the connecting interactions is dealt with in the last section of this chapter.

On the positive side, some of the internal institutional records were very good and likely to have been a reliable indication of what people actually felt. For example, the employer's federation minutes of their discussion about the Rego strike, read very much as a discussion between people who knew each other well enough to say what they thought. The ACAS officer in the French Connection case too, committed some very frank thoughts to paper by way of personal memos. Also on the positive side was the extensive local newspaper coverage for the Rego and French Connection strikes.

The political leanings of the local papers involved were not hard to deduce, but their coverage did supply very useful detail.

On the negative side, because these were historical records, there were some gaps in them. This was especially noticeable at the end of the Rego strike, and was a lesser issue for the Waterproof strike. There is no information in these two cases about how the strikers felt about the end of their strike, or what debate they had about whether or not they should return to work. This gap in the record also touches on the lack of detail about individual strikers.

This problem is compounded in the Rego strike because quite a lot of the information came from sources written well after the strike had ended. Therefore this is an appropriate point in this chapter, to turn to the strengths and weaknesses of the records used in each individual case study.

As mentioned above the Rego strike records were more problematic than the other two. The Rego strike led to the first communist breakaway union, as part of the UK Communist Party conversion to the so-called 'third period' of Soviet politics. The breakaway was also intimately bound up with the lives of London's East-End, Jewish community. A substantial part of the unions' and workers' records was written after the breakaway, and with the clear intent of reconstructing the story to fit one or other of the union or workers' view of the strike.

For example, Sam Elsbury, the Rego strike organiser, wrote a pamphlet called 'The Rego Revolt' after he had become General Secretary of the breakaway union which resulted from the strike. Other information includes articles in the 'Red Needle' revolutionary newspaper, also published after the strike. These ex-post records needed to be balanced with the fairly detailed reports from the local newspaper, as well as contemporary records produced by the London Trades Council and the employers' association. As already indicated, the 1928/9 union executive records were complete, but gave little detail. Because of this it was just as well that in this case study, material mentioned in the union minutes, was often fleshed out somewhere else, and as the bibliography shows, there were many different sources of record about this strike.

The Waterproof Union dispute archive contained no Trades Council records, apart from one annual report, which did not mention the strike. There was also almost no newspaper reporting, though the relevant newspapers were published during the strike, and indeed covered other strikes. This was strange given the very good local coverage in the other two cases. The newsprint paper shortage after the Second World War may have accounted for this lack of coverage. There was some, very low key, coverage in the Jewish Gazette, and so there may have been a desire not to publicise a community industrial conflict. On the other hand, the waterproof clothing workers' strike, was the only one for which a full set of strike committee minutes survived, and this gave a very good opportunity to see how the practical matter of maintaining solidarity was undertaken.

The main element missing from the French Connection strike was data from the company. They were approached, but refused. As they wrote only a few letters, I was faced with the issue of trying to deduce what triggered their actions. Fortunately, the union records were good, and did help fill a gap, but of course, these records gave a union view about why French Connection did, or did not do things. This was the only case study where it was possible to record a live interview. This was with the union full-time official and it was of value, though perhaps not as much as I had hoped. I was offered a well-digested version of the events, inevitably so given the passage of time, and though I have made some use of the taped interview, it suffered from some of the same problems as those revealed in the ex-post accounts of the Rego strike. There were, however some very rich record sources in this strike study. Some of the material was very frankly expressed. One such, an especially long document, was a shorthand record of an argument between the strike leader and the union general secretary, which showed very clearly, how their respective approaches to the strike differed.

Notwithstanding the wide range and large quantity of records, the main issue in interrogating them, was how to identify and connect the events, which caused these strikes to unfold in the way they did, whilst still maintaining their connection to the total historical context.

Selecting the interactions

Unravelling the paths of these three strikes meant paying scrupulously close attention to the chronology of events. In some cases even noting the time of day of an event was important to establish if it were caused by, or the cause of another, closely related event. So chronology had to be established. Four questions needed to be asked of the records. What were the important events and who was involved? What were the links between these events? How did all of this connect to the broader context? Lastly, what comparative insights might be drawn?

To take the last question first: I had been concerned that the conclusions should emerge from the narrative, that is, from the facts of each case. That is why the theory discussed in the introduction is applied as a tool with which to work on the data, and not an assumption which the data verifies.[28] This is also why, in the end, I abandoned using the theoretical labels in 'Dynamics of Contention' in any systematic way, as I felt they tended to push the facts into the 'theory' rather than the other way about.

The issue here is that, provided the right questions are asked, the historical records will reveal conclusions that are, to some extent, generalisable. Stinchcombe notes that any assertion of comparability between two instances immediately generates a class or concept leading to a generalisation.[29] Stinchcombe develops the idea that the facts are used to produce the generalisation and not the other way about.[30] He speaks of drawing deep analogies between historical events that are themselves captured in their historical time and place.

Clearly, in order to draw analogies the right questions have to be asked, and they must be questions that can tackle the time and place element, as well as the event itself. Some thirty years later, Mahoney and Rueschmeyer go into some detail about the kind of modern tools used, to interrogate historical records, to reveal such analogies.[31] They write: "Most basically, comparative historical researchers ask questions and

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[28] Barney G. Glaser, and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research,* (New York, 1999 ed.), p. 3. Glaser and Strauss stress that theory grounded in the facts of a case is much more likely to fit, and to be able to accommodate the empirical situation. (p.18).
[29] Arthur Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History,* (New York, 1978), p.123.
[30] Ibid. He develops these ideas in the book. See pp. 24, 115, 118, 120.
[31] James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, ed. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge, 2003).

formulate puzzles about specific sets of cases that exhibit sufficient similarity to be meaningfully compared one with another."[32] The tool they describe that comes the nearest to the method I actually used to determine the insights produced in the conclusion is called 'causal narrative in within-case chronologies':

> "the analyst attempts to validate aggregated cross-case associations by breaking apart variables into constituent sequences of disaggregated events, and comparing these disaggregated sequences across cases. The purpose of unpacking aggregated variables through narrative is not only to provide a contextualised description of cases; rather the goal is to support a cross-case argument at a more disaggregated level. This technique relies on historical narrative."[33]

This seems to me to be more or less similar to how I tackled the case studies and the conclusion.

Much of my approach to the writing of each case study borrowed E. P. Thompson's recommendations about interrogating historical records.[34] His first recommendation is about how one views the facts. Thompson reminds us that "there is a real and significant sense in which the facts are 'there' and that they are determining."[35]

Thompson urges the would-be analyst to be aware of the provenance of any facts.[36] This is particularly an issue concerning the Rego strike, where so much was committed to paper after the strike itself, and with the purpose either of justifying or condemning the new breakaway union. In this case there were contradictory explanations about the behaviour of management in the build up to the strike. In the chapter, the reader will see that I discuss these contradictory records, and make a judgment between them. Setting out possible contradictions in the evidence in this way, and then drawing plausible conclusions, seemed to be the most sensible approach.

Thompson recommends interrogating the records to clearly establish the order of events. I did this quite explicitly by searching every photo-copy and handwritten note,

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[32] Ibid. p.8.
[33] Ibid. p.365
[34] E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, (London, 1995 ed., written in 1978), pp.38/40.
[35] Ibid. p.41
[36] Ibid. p.38/9

to pull out the temporality, and to fit all the events, however apparently minor, and from whatever source, into a time line. Fortunately, almost all the records were dated. This produced time-line files for each strike.

Each strike study time-line was longer and more detailed than the last. This was because it became clear that a decision to leave an apparently innocuous event out of the time-line was often misplaced, because it gave clues about connections between events. I read the time-lines often to construct a plausible list of the most important events. Generally, important events recurred in the subsequent records. For example, in the French Connection strike, the factory occupation was mentioned in correspondence between the full-time official and the union leadership, mentioned in the newspaper, and mentioned in the memos left by ACAS.

But of course a list is not a sequence. Discovering how the interactions connected was a process of 'dialogue with the data', another of Thompson's ideas. [37] It meant asking about puzzles, but they were puzzles specific to each case. For example in the Rego strike: why did the London Trades Council Secretary decide to intervene to end the strike? In the lead up to the waterproof workers' strike: why did the employers' association take such a very long time to respond to the union, when they must have known it could provoke strike action? These questions need to be answered to supply the interactive element of the analysis. Answers were supplied by a sifting and resifting of the evidence for that part of each strike study, until an explanation emerged, which fitted the historical facts.

I decided to write a very short explanation for each strike to link together in chronological order, the events identified as important. This was no more than a page or two of script, and it provided the basis of argument on which to construct the chapter. The criterion was plausibility. It was an iterative process of 'fit' between the evidence and the events, testing which interactive explanation made the most sense. I did not go as far as Griffin recommended, of posing a counter-factual, but I derived

[37] E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, (London, 1995 ed., written in 1978), p. 52.

the idea of thinking of a connection between two events, and then testing it against the data, until a plausible fit is discovered, from his article.[38]

For example, the question about why the London Trades Council intervened to end the 1928 Rego strike proved an especially stubborn link to determine. It was either because of concern that a legal judgement was about to be made, or that the London Trades Council was worried about the implications of continuing to support the strike. I determined upon the latter because of the evidence which did exist, of London Trades Council members' concern, about their identification with the strike. Thus the plausible fit was arrived at through a process of dialogue between an idea about interpretation, and the actual evidence.

These ideas: the time-line, the short synopsis and the plausible fit approach were developed during the writing of the three data chapters. It became clear during this writing that much more preparation was required to sort out the mass of detail collected and make it into an accurate narrative explanation of what actually happened and why in each strike.

Thompson also gives guidance about linking events laterally to the context.
I was concerned to recognise that the interactions did not take place in isolation from their context, and so I sought, as far as the records permitted, to make links between the people and their context, rather than simply present the context as an inert backcloth to the strike story. To put this concretely: the French Connection strike took place in the aftermath of the miners' strike. I could see from the local newspaper that there were coal pits in the locality. It would have been helpful to have found some direct evidence linking some of the strikers to the miners' strike: for example, if any of the women were married to miners, but I did not uncover any. Even so, the fact that the miners' strike aftermath was so much part of the local newspapers' daily fare, was an important lateral linkage.

Local newspapers supplied many of the contextual elements. In particular, reports about other local strikes were covered in the press archive from the British Newspaper

[38] Larry J. Griffin, 'Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis and causal interpretation in Historical Sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, (1993), Vol. 98, p. 1999.

Library for all three case studies, and in all three cases there was evidence of other local action before, during and after the case studies. The British Film Institute archive footage about French Connection, placed the dispute alongside other local disputes involving women workers in South Shields. Newspapers also yielded anecdotal contextual information, such as the cold weather in 1945 and 1986 which may have contributed to difficulties in maintaining the picket-lines.

To obtain a better understanding about the other interests and concerns of those involved, I obtained local history books (South Shields and the Jewish East End); looked at the union journals; the minutes of the annual conferences; oral transcripts from the Manchester Jewish Museum; the Board of Deputies of British Jews; and the personal papers of one of the individual Deputies who had happened to be a leading person in the Waterproof Employers' Association. I also looked at the union journal and union executive minutes for six months on either side of the 1928 Rego strike, but this did not prove especially useful, and I did not repeat it for the other two strikes. There appeared to be only two union journal issues still in existence for the Waterproof Garment Union.

Generally this wider search corroborated arguments. For example: the Board of Deputies of British Jews' archive put the industry isolation into very sharp relief, and helped explain some of the actions of both employers and union. I also looked at a year of *Daily Herald* headlines for the first two strikes in order to understand other major events which might have influenced thinking. I did not make any specific use of this information, though I do think this helped me to have a better general understanding, of the whole context and atmosphere, in which these strikes took place.

Finally Thompson uses the term "structure bearing evidence": that embedded in the item of evidence is information about the power relations in which the action takes place.[39] For example, the existence of a highly complex price log in the Waterproof case tells us that the industrial relationship in that industry at that time, was much more craft-like than factory-like, and this had implications for the nature of the power

[39] E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, (London, 1995 ed., written in 1978), p. 40.

struggle in the bargaining relationship. Likewise the appearance of a national newspaper article eulogizing French Connections' entrepreneurship, tells of how aggressive workplace relations were prized at that point in time.

Thompson is explicit about the shortcomings of historical records: "historical knowledge must always fall short of positive proof", at least in part because the evidence from which the narrative is constructed, "must necessarily be incomplete and imperfect".[40] Thus my case study analyses are built up from the evidence and this is necessarily incomplete, both in terms of all the evidence that might have been available at the time of the event, and in terms of the totality of context in which these strikes took place. The above explanation about determining how events connected, also supplied credible inferences to deal with incomplete evidence.

I have not so far mentioned the process of identifying how strikers mobilised and sustained that mobilisation. It was the most straightforward part of the analysis. In the Rego strike, a combination of the histories compiled about the strike by those involved, with the very full local newspaper coverage, supplied information about what mobilisation took place. In the Waterproof clothing workers' strike, I was very fortunate to have what seemed to be a complete record of the strike committee minutes, and this gave a very good picture of mobilisation issues. In the French Connection strike, information about what strikers did to mobilise was well documented by the local newspaper, and also repeated in the full set of correspondence between the full time official and the union general secretary.

In sum, my strategy first created a time-line of events, before, during and after each strike, from all the historical sources. In this way I was no longer bounded by the specific archive the information had originated from. By questioning and re-questioning, I constructed a fit between the evidence and the connecting interactions. From this I wrote a short causal explanation, and this formed the basis of each chapter.

[40] Ibid, p. 54.

Chronology is such a key part of understanding interaction it seemed best to make the central organising theme for each case study a chronological narrative. Each chapter follows a similar pattern: setting the broader context for the era; then analysing in turn the pre-strike, strike start, strike middle and strike end. The analysis concentrates on what each group did: that is what actions were taken by the employers, workers and outsiders, and how the action (or inaction) of one group shaped the actions taken by the other groups. The union leadership were not really outsiders, but neither were they in the same situation as the strikers. In fact the analyses showed that they moved back and forth, sometimes being more on the 'inside', though of course never actual strike participants, and sometimes quite definitely on the outside.

Chapter Three: The Rego Strike, 1928

The Rego factory strike lasted from October 8th until December 27th, 1928, and involved around 600 women who made men's trousers in a modern factory in Edmonton, North East London. It was profoundly affected by the prevailing labour movement political schism between left and right. This was in turn profoundly affected by the outcome of the 1926 General Strike, and a severe membership haemorrhaging, following the equally severe depression in 1921. Clegg's table shows U.K. union membership to have peaked at 8.2 million in 1920, and then slumped to 4.7 million by 1928, and continuing in a downward trend.[1] Therefore membership recruitment was the key issue facing the whole union movement, and arguably at the heart of this strike.

Shirley Lerner's 1956 thesis, 'The History of the United Clothing Workers' Union: a case study of social disorganisation', is the only detailed study of this dispute. There are good reasons to revisit this episode here. Lerner's thesis is primarily concerned, as its title implies, with why a breakaway union (United Clothing Workers' Union) was set up shortly after this strike ended. My investigation concentrates on the strike itself. Lerner's study pays very detailed attention to the longer term historical background of Jewish workers, to their connection with the Communist Party,[2] to the main leader Sam Elsbury, and to the development of 'third period' politics, and I have no wish to add to this.

However she does not say much at all about the employers' association in general, nor the Rego company in particular, and it is necessary to include them in the strike dynamics to fully understand why it went on for three months. This is a pity because her research was done in the 1950s, and included interviews with two hundred people.[3] The employers were probably still alive and would have left a more rounded

[1] Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, Vol 2, 1911 – 1933, (Oxford, 1985), p. 568, Table 7.
[2] Other historians also note the connection between East End inter-war Jewry and the CP, for example Holmes, C, 1988, *John Bull's Island, Immigration and British Society, 1871 – 1971*, (Basingstoke, 1988), p.291.
[3] Shirley Lerner, 'The History of the United Clothing Workers' Union: a case study of social disorganization', PhD, University of London, 1956, introduction.

record of the strike itself. Moreover, there are no records now left of the company. It is also unfortunate that no record has been left of her interview notes.

The Rego firm had at least two factories, one in Leeds, and one that had just relocated from Shoreditch in London's East End, to Edmonton in the suburbs of north east London. The strike was in the London factory in protest against management's refusal to accept a one-hundred-per-cent membership agreement. The trouser department had achieved a one-hundred-per-cent union membership following a dispute about payment for a change to the trouser production process. When one woman left the union, the argument quickly became about workers calling on management to dismiss the woman, thereby retaining the one-hundred-per-cent shop. Management refused, and also refused to meet the local full time official to resolve things.

Thus the strike started on October 8th , 1928 and came quickly to be termed by the strikers as a recognition strike, by virtue of managements' refusal to meet the full time official. It soon extended to other parts of the factory involving some 800, almost exclusively female, workers. The strike was not endorsed by the union leadership and so was funded entirely by solidarity contributions. During the strike's progress, strikers and their leaders on one side, and the union executive and general secretary on the other, grew very hostile to each other.

It ended on December 27th, 1928 after the intervention of Alfred Wall, secretary of the London Trades Council, and a court case. Some 350 strikers returned to work. By the time it had ended it had become a symbol for the left in the labour movement of the failings of 'reformist' union leaderships and the particular work process grievances that had provoked it had fallen by the wayside. About ten weeks later in early March, Sam Elsbury, one of the two full time officials organising the strike, was dismissed by the union executive. He took most of the Rego ex-strikers with him into the breakaway union.

Clegg describes industrial relations during 1927, 1928 and the first half of 1929, as an era of unprecedented calm.[4] There were only 302 stoppages in 1928, of which 16,

[4] Clegg, H, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889,* Vol 2, 1911 – 1933, p.427.

including Rego, were more than 10 days.[5] Memories of the General Strike were still raw. The government had responded to the 1926 strike with the 1927 Trade Disputes Act, but it was not often invoked. Its major purpose was to stop strikes that could be construed as having a purpose other than in furtherance of a trade dispute, but its relevance here is in connection with section 3 of the Act, which made it an offence to attend at or near a place of work for the purpose of communicating information or intimidating people.[6] Its presence on the statute book was bitterly resented by the whole of the labour movement. In this case writs were issued under the terms of the Act which is an indication of the lengths to which the company director and the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Federation were prepared to go.[7]

The alteration to the trouser making process was arguably part of the contemporary method to achieve work intensification known as 'rationalisation'. A National Minority Movement pamphlet of the time considered that rationalisation "was increasingly prejudicial to the workers", and the 1928 National Minority Movement Conference declared that "the chief issue before the working class is to fight rationalisation".[8] The NMM was closely linked to the Communist Party and both were especially influential in London. Elsbury was an active, founder CP member and an NMM supporter. Several others who were on the London Committee and at least one known striker were similarly politically committed.[9] These political factors gave extra mobilisation to the strike.

The case put here is that the new trouser work process was a part of a management rationalisation strategy, and it provoked the initial mobilisation. But the strike became a cause for the left in the union because it was caught up in deep policy divisions within the union. The London Branch of the union who managed the strike, considered that militant action to achieve one-hundred-per-cent membership was the

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[5] *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, January 1929, p. 30, the 16 ten day or longer other strikes were derived by counting the start and end dates of the major disputes in 1928.
[6] See The Law Reports 1927, Statutes 17 and 18, GEO V, Trades Disputes Act 1927.
[7] At that time the employers' association was known as the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Federation. For ease of reference it is referred to here as the employers' association.
[8] TUC Lib., HD6350. C6, 1928 National Minority Movement booklet and the report of the NMM 5th Annual Conference.
[9] Mofshovitz, was a CP and or National Minority Movement member and on strike. Dave Gershon was CP and on the London Branch committee, though he was not on strike. TUC Lib., *The Red Needle*, March, 1929, p.7, and Shirley Lerner, *Breakaway Unions and the Small Union,* (London, 1961), p. 108.

best policy for the union, whereas the union executive preferred to negotiate a membership agreement with the employers' association. Discussions on the latter were in process and the employers' association threatened to end discussion unless the union leadership stopped the strike. However, since the strike was unofficial the executive were unable to end it.

These divisions became problems in the strike because the employers dealt with it at association level, instead of, as had been the case hitherto, at local factory level. In this way the strike became a symbol, and none of those directly involved made any effort to solve it for the first two months. During this period steadfast support from the London Trades Council meant the strike could be sustained entirely independently from the union HQ.

The employers responded to the strike by circumventing the impact on production, and intimidating the strikers. They made no attempt to resolve it for two months. Then there was a turning point. The employers' association carried out their threat and withdrew from the National Agreement discussions which provoked the executive to publicly denounce the strike.

This, together with unease about increased Communist Party involvement in the strike prompted the Trades Council secretary to intervene, and control of the strike began to pass to the union executive via the London Trades Council and a court case. The London Trades Council brokered a compromise, and everyone returned to work. However, relations within the union were so damaged that within a few weeks the union leadership had initiated disciplinary action against Elsbury which resulted in his dismissal two months later.

The rest of this chapter is in four parts. Part one explains why the strike was a particular challenge to the employers and to the union executive, and why it provided an opportunity for the union's London branch to press their policy preference for recruiting members through militancy. It covers the pre-strike period in some detail, exploring how the employers' desire to adopt rationalisation meshed with their political efforts to contain union expansion. The second part explains how opportunities for settlement were lost, when the factory managing director referred the

strike to the employers' association to deal with. The third part takes the reader to mid-November 1928. It explains how the strike was sustained and why the union executive changed its approach from ignoring the dispute to publicly denouncing it. The fourth part looks at the strike between November and the end of December. During this time it became increasingly identified with the Minority Movement and the Communist Party.

The making of a challenge

Richard Rossiter, Rego's managing director, was the Vice-Chairman of the employers' association's Northern Region. His Leeds factory was in the centre of the inter-war men's clothing industry which Katrina Honeyman characterised as experiencing a 'second wave' of entrepreneurialism.[10]

Although Leeds was the centre of the industry, London was second in importance. Therefore the employers' association London district's actions mattered. In 1930 a third of all clothing workers were in London[11] and in 1921, 194,000 people[12] worked in the London clothing industry out of a total London workforce of 2.25 million insured workers.[13] The industry was important to London, as London was important to the industry.

By 1928/9 the economy was in a minor and short-lived up-turn, and this presented some opportunity. Moreover the clothing industry seems to have had more economic stability in this period than many other industries.[14] The industry journal 'Menswear' made a confident reference about the trade. "Our own manufacturers fit the bill so adequately. I think any American who tried to develop the trade here would find they had a very difficult row to hoe." [15] The journal also published a scathing letter about the successful multiple men's suit manufacturers who sold their product through their own chain retail shops. Such a letter may have come from a small manufacturer. It underscores the particular success of factory suit output linked to retail outlets. The

[10] Honeyman, K *Well Suited, a history of the Leeds Clothing Industry, 1850 – 1990,* (Oxford, 2000), p.90.
[11] Llewellyn-Smith, *New Survey of London Life and Labour*, Vol 2 p.261.
[12] Ibid, p. 338.
[13] Despite the problems of only counting insured workers the point is made that the industry was important to London as London was important to the industry.
[14] Derek Aldcroft, *The Inter-War economy, 1919 – 1939,* (London, 1970), p. 48.
[15] Colindale, *Menswear*, Sept 1st, 1928 p.281.

journal referred to these as the "multiple menace" who had "managed to build up wonderfully profitable businesses in a comparatively few years without having to account to share holders"[16]. The number of multiple chain fashion stores increased from 24,713 in 1920 to 44,487 in 1939.[17] Rego owned eighty such retail outlets in London[18] and was quoted on the stock exchange. [19] Certainly the first Rego strike bulletin also considered the company to be successful as it made £70,463 profit in 1927[20] and paid a 63 per cent dividend to shareholders.[21]

Rego was also one of a number of rapidly changing companies. Early in the summer of 1928 it moved from Shoreditch to a large and well-appointed factory in Edmonton. It employed around 1,600 workers. [22] It seems likely Rossiter was open to contemporary management ideas; a few years later he adopted the Bedaux production system.[23] (Bedaux was an American time and motion scheme that was a further adaptation of a sub-divided work process.)[24] Other menswear companies such as Simpsons had similarly relocated from the East End of London to nearby Stoke Newington, and become public companies. [25]

Rationalisation was the new management tool to meet the rising demand for men's suits. This involved Taylorist techniques, breaking down garment making into many tiny parts paid by piece. Normally, a team of women worked continuously on one tiny part of each garment. Braverman, in discussing how Taylorist principles became widespread in western industry, especially selects mass-produced clothing in the US as an example of work intensification techniques.[26]

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[16] Colindale, *Menswear*, Oct 20th, 1928, p.79.
[17] E Ewing, *The History of Twentieth Century Fashion*, p. 137.
[18] WCM Lib., *Rego Revolt* booklet.
[19] TUC Lib., box HD 6661. C6.75, Rego Strike Bulletin No.1.
[20] TUC Lib., HD6661.C75, Rego Strike Bulletin No.1.
[21] Leeson, R, A, *Strike, a live history*, oral record from Mr. E Mofshovitz, Rego shop convener in 1928.
[22] WCM Lib., *Rego Revolt* booklet.
[23] MRC, MSS80, *Garment Workers' Leader* militant journal, May-June 1934.
[24] Miriam Glucksmann, *Women Assemble, Women Workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain*, (London, 1990), p. 191.
[25] Colindale, *Menswear*, September 22nd p. 390.
[26] Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital, the degradation of work in the twentieth century*, (New York, 1974), p. 211.

Workers employed on this type of production were known in the trade as the 'sub-divisionals'. Dobb's 1928[27] account of the industry spells out one small part of the production line for a coat: an edge-baster passed work to an edge-presser who passed it to an edge-stitcher who would pass it to a sleeving machinist and so on. Each individual task was performed over and over by an (often young) woman. They were known in the trade as "blind alley" jobs as they offered no possibility of career progression.

In the 1920s many of these tasks were being transferred to conveyor belt, in line with the rapidly expanding electrification of the inter-war garment industry. The automatic basting machine, the blind-stitching and belt loop machines are examples.[28] This combination of minutely sub-divided tasks, new machines and feminisation often led to frequent work re-organisation resulting in reduced pay, so the initial grievance at Rego resulted from a very ordinary occurrence.

It seems Rossiter enthusiastically embraced rationalised production. Workers in the factory were frequently re-organised, departments shut down and workers reshuffled to other parts of Rego throughout the 1920s. Another facet of rationalisation was the employment of junior labour. The London Rego factory was nicknamed 'the nursery' because a lot of the workforce was too young to pay national insurance contributions.[29] Lerner's work characterises the strike as one mainly consisting of young girls "The strikers, mainly young girls between sixteen and twenty-one..."[30] Glucksmann's study of inter-war women assembly line workers suggests that women workers were not likely to oppose the principle of this work intensification unless it was seen as a complete change to their work scheme, rather than an incremental change.[31] The young workers at the factory would have known no other way of working.

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[27] Winchester School of Art special collection, S. P. Dobbs, *The Clothing Workers of Great Britain* (1928), p. 21.
[28] Colindale, *Menswear*, 1928 p.409 and The Tailor and Cutter, 1933, July 14th.
[29] TUC Lib., *The Red Needle*, March, 1929, p.7.
[30] Shirley Lerner, *Breakaway Unions and the Small Union,* (London, 1961), p. 108.
[31] Miriam Glucksmann, *Women Assemble, women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain,* (London, 1990), p. 190.

However, there is a hint from the local paper that, contrary to Lerner's view many, if not most of the strikers were older women and that the young women lived locally, whereas the older ones travelled in from Bethnal Green each day. Rossiter told the local paper that "Most of the strikers live in the East End, the younger girls live locally".[32] This is corroborated by two different, surviving newspaper photographs[33] of the 'girls', who look older, and by the later death (by heart attack), of a former striker; the term 'girls' has long been used as a colloquial expression to describe women factory workers. It seems likely that there were older, more experienced women activists who helped to keep the strike going.

Modern factory managing directors like Rossiter were not only interested in production development. They sought political influence through their association to help them maintain the offensive toward the union. The association was one of many employers' organisations who wanted to toughen legislative labour control after the General Strike.[34] In 1927 the union's London branch wanted to create a 'fair list' that named certain firms who had good industrial relations. At the same time a local agreement was made with Stepney Council (at a stage when Elsbury was a councillor on Bethnal Green local council), that local authority contracts would only be given to companies on this fair list. Known nowadays as 'contract compliance' this incensed the employers' association to such an extent that it successfully lobbied government to add a paragraph to the new Trades Disputes Act to outlaw any such agreement. [35]

Kay, the association secretary, was also the secretary of the London employers. He was clearly an influential man. In addition to being secretary of these two committees, he was also secretary of six other manufacturers' organisations in different sectors of the trade. He attended Federation of British Industry conferences on industrial relations, and moved an unsuccessful amendment to oppose a legal minimum wage at an ILO conference in Geneva. He was also a member of the Retail Tailoring Trade Board set up to settle wages in the industry in an attempt to counteract sweating

[32] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 12th, 1928.
[33] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 12th, 1928, and at the TUC Lib., HD 6350. C., T*he Red Needle*, February, 1929.
[34] Fox, A, *The Social Origins of the British Industrial Relations System*, 1985, p.335.
[35] MRC, MSS222/CM/1/1/8, MSS222/LWC/1/1/4, January and May 1928.

practices. [36] In addition to his Northern District role, Rossiter became the association's nominee on the newly reconstituted Trade Board for the industry.[37] He is likely to have required Kays' endorsement for such an appointment which suggests Rossiter may have shared Kays' general outlook.

In March 1928, Elsbury had asked the union executive for authority to strike at Simpson's for one-hundred-per-cent membership, but did not obtain the endorsement he wanted.[38] Simpsons was another modern factory in north east London and Mr. Simpson was a member of the London district of the employers' association. The union general secretary had intervened and the strike was averted. However he did not involve the strikers in his negotiations and the agreement he made provoked 900 workers to quit the union.[39] As a direct result, and in keeping with contemporary trends, [40] the employers' association London district decided that all future strikes should be immediately referred to them for resolution instead of being dealt with by the firm in dispute; the Rego strike was the first test of these new arrangements. Relations between the London branch and the union leadership deteriorated.

As much as things were good for the modern men's suit factories, they were bad for the Tailor and Garment Workers in 1928. Membership loss was by far the most serious issue, having plummeted from around 70,000 in 1920 to around 40,000 in 1927, and continuing in a downward trend.[41]

Following branch consultations in December 1926, the union agreed to press where they could for negotiated factory agreements to gain one-hundred-per-cent union shops, and by June 1928 one or two factories in London had agreed and talks were in progress with the McIntyre, Marsh and Hogg factories.[42] The union executive decided in June 1928 to build on these activities by spending £3,000 on an organising

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[36] Colindale, *Menswear*, 1928, p.405 and *The Tailor and Cutter*, August 30th, 1928. Also MRC, MSS222/CM/1/1/8, July 1928.
[37] MRC, MSS222/CM/1/1/8 May, 1929.
[38] MRC, MSS 192/T Executive Board minutes, March 1928.
[39] MRC, MSS222/LWC/1/1/4, March 1928.
[40] Gospel, H, *Markets, firms, and the management of labour in modern Britain*, (Cambridge, 1992, Ch. 5.
[41] TUC Lib., HD6661 C6, Tailor and Garment Workers' Ninth Annual Report on membership.
[42] MRC, MSS 192/T, June 1928. See also MRC, MSS222/LWC/1/1/4, Federation minutes, May 1928 names the Lotery factory plus three other unnamed companies.

campaign. They were already pressing for an organisation clause in the National Agreement committing the employers to the opinion that "it is in the best interests of the trade that Employers and Operatives should be members of their respective Associations; and that a printed copy of the Agreement be posted or displayed in a prominent place in each factory or workshop."[43]

The employers' association were consistently negative towards the union's strategy so that it seems surprising the union executive felt this might be a plausible negotiating aim. During 1927 the association told the union executive firstly that, they "are unable to agree the variations proposed", and subsequently that, "there is no possibility of agreeing to the proposals made by you regarding organisation," and that "there is the strongest possible feeling against the members of the Federation using pressure of influence of any sort or kind to get their workers to join or abstain from joining the Trade Union."[44]

However, there was a groundswell of opposition to the existing agreement within the union and the executive cancelled it so as to negotiate another one that included a recognition paragraph. The executive gave notice to terminate the existing agreement and it had lapsed by the July 1928 conference. What should replace it, and how that should contribute to improving the membership levels, was therefore the main topic at the union's July conference.

Because of this background and because of the Simpson's fiasco, Andrew Conley, the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union General Secretary, viewed the recognition clause as a test of good industrial relations. He had tried and failed to persuade his Executive to adopt a clause already in use in the Boot and Shoe Industry agreement.[45] He knew strike action was the alternative and considered it a dangerous option, "I am one of those who recognises the value of National Agreements and believes in the danger, or recognises the danger of going into strike...."[46] He thought the old agreement had failed due to "the absence of necessary organisation on the part of both employers and

[43] WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, p. 103.
[44] WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, p.104.
[45] WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, p.191.
[46] WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, p. 140.

the union".[47] He blamed full time officers for spending insufficient time on recruitment organisation and too much time organising strikes.[48] He thought a united employers' association was the best protection to uphold agreements in most factories, and so he did not want conference to agree any policy which would divide the association and cause some to leave it. He twice speaks of the risk of pushing some employers out of the association, once in relation to some delegates' desire to have the recognition clause displayed on posters, and once on the issue of creating a fair list of good employers who agreed to one-hundred-per-cent union shops.[49] His fears were not altogether ungrounded, as after 1920 individual employers were more likely to secede from their national organisation.[50]

Quite why he was so committed to a negotiated recognition clause remains a puzzle in view of the association's sustained and robust opposition to it. The only clue to explain his optimism is that in September, only days before the Rego strike started, Kay proposed to the association three different possible wordings for a recognition paragraph though not including any provision for prominent display. One of these clauses was the same Boot and Shoe Industry paragraph that Conley had unsuccessfully floated with his executive. This idea did not see the light of day as the association turned it down.[51] However it is likely that Conley knew informally of this proposal a month or two earlier, and was therefore desperate for Conference endorsement of a new National Agreement.

The London sub-divisional branch disputed the value of a new National Agreement with the Federation. They considered that the old agreement had prevented taking direct action and quoted the Simpson's settlement as evidence.[52] The London Branch was not speaking of direct action in an unspecific sense, but to achieve the goal of recruitment under the strategic direction of the executive. This is an important difference because it can be inferred from this that it was not the London branch's nor

[47] WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, p. 102.
[48] WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, p. 60.
[49] WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, p. 232/3.
[50] Waddington, *The Politics of Bargaining: The Merger Process and British Trade Union Structural Development, 1892 – 1987,* (London, 1995), p. 115.
[51] MRC, MSS 222/CM/1/1/8, September 1928.
[52]WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, p. 47.

the two full-time officials' intention, to make or keep, the subsequent Rego strike unofficial.

The London sub-divisional branch was not an isolated voice when the issue was debated at union conference. Supporting contributions such as, "I believe our Executive should be in consultation with branches as to taking direct action where they have opportunities of creating a closed shop" or "the Executive Board give a lead to our officials and to our various people to call these people out, I should think that would be the best way to increase membership" or "where militant action can achieve 100 per cent membership, the Executive Board should permit it", came from the Glasgow, Leeds and the London Factory branch delegates.[53] In one particular contribution, a Mr. Freezdon alluded to his branch's willingness to take direct action even without the support of the executive; Elsbury commented prophetically that, "You would be sacked if you were a full time officer."[54]

This strategic disagreement unfolded at a particularly inopportune time for the union's coherence. The Tailor and Garment Workers was a product of several garment union amalgamations in 1916. Thus real policy disagreements were exacerbated by other, older divisions. Several of the merged unions derived from an earlier multiplicity of tiny, often Jewish unions, and often London based. This had been the case for the London sub-divisional workers who were in an earlier Jewish union called the London Tailors' Machiners' and Pressers' Union.

Additionally there was a more general trade union tendency toward union centralisation. Waddington cites the garment industry unions as an example of how changes in industry organisation, such as the widening of the trade boards in the industry after the First World War, encouraged a centralisation of union structure. [55] He also argues that union centralisation was the norm for the era because the growth of national bargaining machinery encouraged a centralised union structure. He gives

[53] WCM Lib.,1928 TGW Conference Minutes, pp. 211, 191 & 69.
[54]WCM Lib.,TGW 1928 annual conference minutes , p.62.
[55] Waddington, J, *The Politics of Bargaining*, 1995, pp. 94/96.

examples from the National Union of Gas Workers, in 1908, and the National Union of Farm Workers in 1920.[56] The TGW upheavals were therefore typical.

It is therefore unsurprising that the 1928 conference record suggests it was a highly contested period of redrawn boundaries between the executive, the branches and the full-time officers. A delegate at the July 1928 conference comments, "as we are travelling at the moment it seems we will soon reach a stage where we have to ask the Executive Board for permission to put a postage stamp on our letters."[57] Several other motions on the 1928 agenda testify to this: increasing rank and file proportions in national delegations, (carried) or an attempt to elect full time officials, (lost).[58] These debates give a clear message that during this period local autonomy was in question.

The 1928 conference was particularly shambolic. It had no effective standing orders. Elsbury was a member of the standing orders committee but he featured in debates as an elected delegate, a full-time officer and a member of the standing orders committee all at the same time! Conference spent a long time disputing procedural matters: for example, a row over whether the question should be put after or before the General Secretary had spoken, strays over several pages of the verbatim record.[59]

Such a situation lent itself to political faction formation,[60] and the evidence of political schisms in the union institution is substantial. During the conference an Executive speaker says, "we as an Executive have felt a certain impotence....we have been conscious of an organised opposition being set up to decisions arrived at by the Executive Board"[61]. At the end of the conference the chairman sums up his experience that week by saying, "I never anticipated going through an ordeal similar to what I have been through this past four days...I have never in my experience of

[56] Waddington, J, *The Politics of Bargaining*, 1995, p139. see also Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, Vol 2, 1911 – 1933*,(Oxford, 1985), p449/51.
[57] WCM Lib., TGW 1928 annual conference minutes, p. 537.
[58] TUC Lib., HD6661 C6.75, TGW 1928 conference agenda for several examples. See WCM Lib.,TGW 1928 annual conference minutes for the result of the debates on this.
[59] WCM Lib., TGW, 1928 annual conference minutes.
[60] Waddington builds on Lerner's book, *Breakaway Unions and the Small Trade Union*, 1961, to make a case for industrial re-organisation being an important mover to initiate breakaway factions/unions, but I think he under-states the impact of politics. See Waddington, J, *The Politics of Bargaining*, (1995), p. 149/150.
[61] WCM Lib., TGW, 1928 annual conference minutes, p. 461.

Executive work (he is the oldest Executive member) had such a gruelling (grilling?)[62] as whilst I have been Chairman of our conference."[63]

In addition to these institutional tensions it is clear that the London branch had a particular reputation. In the debate about the Mond-Turner discussions the General Secretary, Conley said, "Mr. Elsbury asks us not to look at the resolution in a biased or prejudiced way because it comes from London."[64]

These levels of institutional conflict were not just products of the union's immediate past, but also symptoms of labour movement self examination after the general strike. This included the division between the mainstream 'Mondists' like Citrine, who wanted to abandon the political aims of earlier years, and those in the Minority Movement, or otherwise on the left, such as A J Cook, the miners' leader who later allied himself with the Rego strike.

The international debate about the relationship between militant Communist Party workers and the mainstream trade union came to a head between August 1928 and about May 1929, with the resulting change in Comintern policy to favour the creation of alternative, revolutionary unions, the so-called 'third period'. Elsbury was involved in this policy re-orientation having made contact with the Russian Needle Workers in the summer of 1928.[65] He also attended the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in August 1928 which continued the debate on these issues.[66]

This debate coincided with the TUC reappraisal of its own objectives and, in 1927 the TUC decided to disaffiliate any trades council that refused to stand down elected

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[62] The word in the record is 'gruelling', but 'grilling' (from the conference delegates) makes much more sense of the quote.
[63] WCM Lib., TGW Conference Minutes, 1928, p. 620.
[64] WCM Lib., TGW Conference Minutes, 1928, p. 267
[65] MRC, MSS192/T. The TGW June 1928 executive board minutes record Elsbury requesting two weeks holiday to visit Russia, and being refused. The 'Garment Worker' for November and December 1928 refer to his contact with the Russian Needleworkers.
[66] Lerner regards this conference as the one where the new 'third period' policy was adopted. See Lerner, *Breakaway* (1961), p. 105. Martin, *Communism and the British Trade Unions,*(1969) views this conference as ambiguous, p.108. Whether it was, or was not the conference at which the change in policy was made is more important for Lerner's analysis than for mine. However, it does mean that, whilst acknowledging the important contribution to the strike of these international political debates, I have given more emphasis to the UK based differences within the TUC after the general strike, and within the union.

officers who were either Communist Party or National Minority Movement members. Elsbury was the chair of Bethnal Green Trades Council, which had recently been disaffiliated under this proscription, and he had had to withdraw his nomination for the executive of the London Trades Council. In September 1928 the TUC decisively rejected notions of militant overthrow of the capitalist system.[67] Although in practice the Minority Movement paid most attention to bread and butter issues, its founding statement called for the overthrow of capitalism.[68] Nevertheless, strikers adopted a high-profile minority political position in full support of the National Minority Movement.

As the strike progressed it mapped onto these other conflicts and came to present both a challenge and a test for the groups involved: for the union leaders the strike challenged their idea that negotiating a recognition clause was the best way to increase membership density; for the employers the strike tested their decision to deal with disputes at association level instead of factory level and it challenged their decision to reject a recognition clause in the new national agreement. For the London union branch the strike tested their preferred strategy to increase membership density through direct action; and for the Communist Party and National Minority Movement, it challenged the Mondism they despised. All this took place too when the international left were considering how best to advance Socialist aims.

A lost opportunity for settlement

The company had never exactly welcomed the trade union. In 1923 Conley himself had urged union members there to take action for recognition. The company did not formally withhold recognition but "they were gradually making it more difficult" [69](for Elsbury to deal with complaints). Elsbury maintained that Rossiter effectively de-recognised the local union branch by refusing to meet him over a period of several months, and his evidence does support this. In particular he re-prints two letters from Rossiter, sent on July 17th and 23rd, 1928. The first states, "Our managing director is not prepared to grant you an interview. If any of your members have a grievance, please instruct them to place same before our managing director, who will give the

[67] Taylor, R, '*The TUC; From the General Strike to new unionism*', (Basingstoke, 2000) p.46.
[68] Roderick Martin, *Communism and the British Trade Unions, 1924 – 1933, a study of the National Minority Movement,* (Oxford, 1969), p. 37.
[69] TUC Lib., HD 6350 C6, *Red Needle*, March 1929.

matter his attention." The second letter repeats the same sentiments in slightly different wording.[70] Rossiter's responses could be interpreted as a bid to bypass the union.

Mobilisation began in earnest after the change in the system for making trousers. "The discontent was brought to a head by the introduction of a new system of manufacture in the trousers department"[71] , and, "for some time there appears to have been much discontent amongst the workers culminating in a dispute in the trousers department where a new method of manufacture had been introduced involving a question of price".[72] The Rego Strike Bulletin Two also emphasised that workers were losing pay due to the new system for trouser manufacture.[73]

Elsbury recruited new members and the workers operated a 'stay-in-strike', that is they would not make trousers the new way unless they were paid more. This did not work and 130 people walked out on September 11th. They were threatened with being locked out. Rossiter began to make his own preparations. The director of the Simpsons factory, scene of the February altercation, was seen visiting the factory.[74]

The stay-in strike did persuade Rossiter to meet Elsbury, and the former agreed to pay more money for one month, and to meet again on October 4th.[75] During the month Elsbury recruited several hundred more members.[76] He was so successful in his recruitment that he achieved one hundred per cent union membership (about 800 to 1,000 people) in the trouser department which was one part of a sizeable workforce of some 1600 people.[77] It must have vindicated the line taken at the conference by the London District. All this gave grounds for optimism to the union members.

On October 2nd Elsbury wrote to Conley implying that there was a challenge to the one-hundred-per-cent union trouser-shop. "I have reports of one of our members, a

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[70] WCM Lib., *Rego Revolt*, p.17.
[71] WCM Lib., *Rego Revolt*, p.17.
[72] TUC Lib., JN1129Lon, September 1929 report on the Rego strike.
[73] TUC Lib., HD 6661 C6 75, Rego Strike Bulletin no 2 October 20th 1928.
[74] WCM Lib., *Rego Revolt*, p. 17.
[75] TUC Lib., HD6350.C6, *Red Needle*, February, 1929, p.4.
[76] TUC Lib., HD6350.C6, *Red Needle*, February, 1929, p.4.
[77] Colindale: The Sunday Worker, November 25th, 1928.

girl (Miss Gala) who refuses to pay her contributions. I have interviewed the firm, but have not received any satisfaction, and this girl remains defiant. This is a serious development as her department is one-hundred-per-cent trade union, and our members want to withdraw labour to compel her to remain in the union".

There is a suggestion that the company encouraged Miss Gala's resolve to be a non-union member. After the one interview Elsbury had with the firm, "this girl was called into the office by management and evidently something was said to her, which made her more stubborn, since her attitude to the union became even more defiant than before".[78] This is corroborated by a local newspaper report, in which strikers are reported as saying that, "several of us have been told by the firm that we need not remain in the union".[79]

Elsbury organised a mass meeting for the workers in Bethnal Green on October 3rd and a motion was carried to strike from October 8th , unless Rossiter agreed to a one-hundred-per-cent union shop at the factory.[80] It is noteworthy that the meeting was held in Bethnal Green, where the older workers lived. It seems that those involved in the strike were in the trouser department. The cutters, all men, bar one (Mofshovitz), who was on the London union committee, did not take action, though they did contribute money to the strike. This was not especially surprising as the cutters, though quite militant, tended to be inward looking, and had been in a separate union until 1916.[81] There is also no hint in the record that they were expected to join in.

The meeting scheduled for October 4th was never held.[82] On October 7th there was a further meeting of workers who, according to Elsbury, "howled him down"[83] when he suggested they should give a week's notice to Rossiter as per the executive's request. The meeting agreed "that the union must be recognised, or they would strike the next day".[84] The recognition issue stemmed from Rossiter's apparent refusal to meet Elsbury on October 4th, coupled with Rossiter's earlier letters suggesting that

[78] TUC Lib., HD 6661.C6.75, Rego Strike Bulletin no. 2, October 20th 1928.
[79] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 12th, 1928.
[80] WCM Lib.,*Rego Revolt*, p. 18.
[81] Shirley Lerner, *Breakaway Unions and the Small Union,* (London, 1961), p.90/91.
[82] TUC Lib., HD6350.C6, *Red Needle*, February, 1929, p.4.
[83] MRC, MSS 192/T *The Garment Worker*, November, 1928.
[84] TUC Lib., HD6661.C6.75, Rego Strike Bulletin No. 2.

grievances should be dealt with between himself and the workforce. It would seem likely that Rossiter regarded the many young women workers as easier to defeat in negotiation than Elsbury.

Strike organisers thought they would have official union backing. The executive met the whole London District Committee, including Elsbury and Bernard Sullivan (the second full time official), in London the same afternoon and decided to defer a decision about the strike.[85] Elsbury records that the chairman told him "Don't ask questions, carry on, good luck". Additional evidence supporting this view comes from Mofshovitz. "We had been led to believe (by the executive) that it would be recognised by the union within a week".[86] The executive's apparent initial positive response helped generate strong commitment to the strike from the workers.

The association's London district met the next day on October 8th and the events that day widened the strike's impact. At this stage Kay told the committee he thought the case "was mainly a question of one-hundred-per-cent membership at the Rego factory".[87] But there seems to have been some confusion in their minds, because at this juncture they agreed that the secretary, Kay (also the association national secretary) should "get in touch unofficially with Mr. Elsbury with a view to ascertaining exactly what the grievances of the workers and the union are".

They also agreed, in the event of the dispute not being settled by Wednesday morning 10th October, to look at how collective help could be given to Rego "in the way of manufacturing a proportion of their clothes." [88] That evening Kay "discovered"[89] an unnamed leading TGW official, who told him that the executive had deferred taking a decision about this strike. Kay took action towards enmeshing the dispute in the national agreement discussion by deciding to "seek an interview with this official rather than establish contact with Mr. Elsbury".[90]

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[85] MRC, MSS 192/T Tailor and Garment Workers' Executive Board minutes, October 7th, 1928.
[86] Leeson, R A, *Strike, a live history*, 1973. p 117.
[87] MRC, MSS 222/CM/1/1/8 Wholesale Federation minutes, October 23rd 1928.
[88] MRC, MSS 222/LWC/1/1/4, London District minutes, October 8th 1928.
[89] MRC, MSS 222/CM/1/1/8 Wholesale Federation minutes, October 23rd 1928.
[90] MRC, MSS 222/LWC/1/1/4, London District minutes, October 8th 1928.

October 8th had presented an opportunity to the Federation to resolve the dispute quickly. What they did achieved the opposite effect. Within a few days Rossiter further enmeshed the dispute with the National Agreement discussion by telling the local paper on October 12th, "There never was an agreement in [the National Agreement] that only trade union labour should be employed, and the manufacturers have declined to accept that principle in the new agreement either. So now the union are trying to take individual action against one or two firms."[91]

The possibility that the executive were behind the strike took hold in association circles. Given the rumours circulating that the union executive were going to support the strike, it is unsurprising that this possibility was discussed amongst the employers. It was likely to be another reason why Rossiter was unwilling to deal with the strike himself. The idea was repeated in the trade journal, *Menswear*, "The question is now being asked whether the action being taken at Edmonton is in the nature of a sniping operation intended to influence negotiations, or is simply due to the irresponsible actions of local officials."[92]

Rossiter could have resolved the dispute at this stage. The decision to deal with disputes at national level was a London district decision, taken because of the Simpson's affair. Rossiter was not a member of the London district though as an official of the Northern District, [93] he would probably have felt some moral obligation to abide by the agreement. Secondly, it is possible he shared the view that the strike was being used deliberately by the union executive to force national negotiations, in which case he will have wanted to protect the position of his factory in Leeds. Lastly, he may not have wanted to deal direct with Elsbury, who had, from Rossiters' point of view, made for difficulties in the factory.

One member of the London district, Polikoff (another factory owner) told Rossiter on the first day of the strike, "if he wished to settle the strike he should see Mr. Elsbury, as if he wanted to settle it through the Federation (association), it would take him a

[91] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 12th, 1928.
[92] Colindale, *Menswear*, October 13th, 1928, p. 44.
[93] MRC, MSS 222/LWC/1/1/4, October 8th, 1928. Notes that Rego were not members of the London District, though they were members of the Northern Clothing Manufacturers' Association and of the national Federation.

long time".[94] Polikoff was one of a handful of exceptions on the association committee who already operated a one-hundred-per cent union shop. So it appears Rossiter did have a choice in the matter, and he appears to have chosen not to compromise but instead leave the issue in the hands of the employers' association. He told the local newspaper on October 19th "We ourselves shall not negotiate and this must take place with the Wholesale Federation."[95] Had he have taken Polikoff's advice, things may have turned out differently and the dispute may not have become so embroiled with the national negotiations and would have resolved more quickly. It subsequently became clear that the employers' association were intent on withstanding the strike and were willing to take steps between them to circumvent it.

Solidarity, solidarity

Shirley Lerner ascribes the remarkable solidarity during the strike mostly to the Jewish cultural 'glue',[96] and to the wide support for the strike generated by the London Trades Council. There certainly is a sense in which the solidarity amongst those who joined the breakaway union in March 1929, can be taken as a proxy for the success holding the strike together during its three months. However, there may also be very practical reasons why solidarity seemed to be so secure at the start of the strike. Women from Bethnal Green were likely to have lived very near each other and close to the environs of the Rego Shoreditch factory. When the move to Edmonton took place it seems most likely these women will have travelled together on the same busses and trains to get to work everyday in Edmonton, giving them much opportunity to discuss issues at work and to share understanding about what should be done about it.

Lerner emphasises Elsbury's role and she devotes much of her chapter 5 to him. The analysis here avoids presenting Elsbury as the motivating force. There is a danger when discussing the strikers, of perhaps not entirely accurately describing them as young girls, and of giving too much credit to Elsbury for the organisation and sustaining of the strike. But the contribution he made to sustain the strike should not be overlooked. He was 44 years old and an experienced political activist. He had been

[94] MRC, MSS 222/LWC/1/1/4, October 8th, 1928.
[95] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 19th, 1928.
[96] Lerner, Shirley, 'The History of the United Clothing Workers' Union: a case study in social disorganization', PhD Thesis 1956, University of London. See especially Chapter 2.

arrested several times. He had worked as a tailor in Leeds, Sheffield, London and Dublin, and as a miner in a North Wales colliery. In 1928 he was on both the Communist Party and the National Minority Movement Executives, and was also an elected local councillor in Bethnal Green. Everywhere he went he organised campaigns and had several notable successes. He had a talent for effective and innovative publicity, and he was highly regarded by his supporters.[97] His past history suggests the sort of person who readily challenged authority and tested new approaches.

A particular feature of the Rego strike was the full time officers' ability to harness the support of the London labour movement. Arrangements were soon made for the strikers to meet without room hire charge, at first in Edmonton Town Hall and later in the London Co-op owned local cinema.[98]

Campaigning for 'recognition' was an essential part of building this alliance since union recognition is a principle which binds all trade unionists, left or right. It helped to assuage fears amongst would-be supporters about the overt political connections of leaders like Elsbury and some of the strikers. Mr Daly, of the very conservative Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses wrote on October 11th in the Tailor and Cutter, that the case "was promoted by a small clique of extremists" but that "the main point in the dispute was recognition of the union" and, "that there had been a change of policy with regard to recognition of the union and the firm had now refused to negotiate".[99]

'Recognition' persuaded the London Trades Council to agree to Sullivan's request and issue credentials on October 11th for affiliates to collect cash for the strike.[100] This was before the executive decided not to endorse the strike, but the fact that it was viewed as a recognition strike ensured that the London Trades Council continued to support it, even after it was declared unofficial.

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[97] Lerner, Shirley, 'The History of the United Clothing Workers Union: a case study in social disorganization' , 1956, University of London. See Chapter 5.
[98] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, Ocotber 12th, 1928
[99] Colindale, *Tailor and Cutter*, October 11th, 1928.
[100] TUC Lib., JN1129 Lon, delegates meeting, October 11th, 1928.

However there was some disagreement after the strike as to whether or not recognition could be legitimately claimed as a grievance. As we have seen, the employers' association understood the main issue to be the one-hundred-per-cent union shop. Rossiter also took this view telling the local paper "the strike has begun...simply because we refused to bring pressure to bear on Miss Gala to join the union".[101]

After the strike, the London Trades Council produced a report in June 1929 which asserted that Rossiter did not refuse to see Elsbury. They wrote, "Elsbury's plea that there was an agreement to meet on October 4th we are unable to accept", and "Neither can we find any corroboration of the further claim that the firm had refused to meet the union officials".[102] They felt they had been misled into regarding the strike as a recognition strike when it was really about a one-hundred-per-cent shop. June 1929 was after the breakaway had been set up and feelings in the London labour movement were still strong. In fact the Trades Council report was not agreed unanimously and had a minority report appended to it, though the minority report did not deal with the issue of recognition.

This contemporary disagreement presents a difficulty for this analysis. I have taken the view that Rossiter's letters which Elsbury reproduced in *Rego Revolt*, together with the other evidence from *The Red Needle* already cited[103] about union efforts to organise at the firm, showed that Rossiter did refuse to deal with Elsbury, and that therefore the claim for recognition for the right of the full-time officer to negotiate was justified.

However there was a distinct shift in the way the strike aims were articulated in the strike bulletins. Recognition became the only aim, the others simply being dropped. The first and third strike bulletins set out three clear aims in the following order: recognition, remedy of all grievances regarding wages and conditions, and one hundred per cent trade unionism. The fourth and fifth bulletins mention only recognition. The fourth bulletin says, "Force the firm to RECOGNISE THE UNION

[101] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 12th, 1928.
[102] TUC Lib., JN1129 Lon, Report on Rego June 25th, 1929
[103] TUC Lib., HD6350.C6, *Red Needle*, February, 1929, p.4.

and open up negotiations with the union organiser", and the fifth, "THE STRIKE IS FOR TRADE UNION RECOGNITION".[104] Moreover in the fifth bulletin, issued on November 12th, 1928, the term 'recognition' is not qualified to limit it to the full time official. It seems that the most appropriate way to read this particular sequence is to say there was a real problem of Rossiter refusing to see Elsbury, and it most probably was connected to the latter's political profile and negotiating expertise in recruiting every person in the trouser shop. The strike organisers legitimately included recognition in their aims. Having done so, and realising how it helped retain support when questions were asked about strikers' political allegiances, they decided to concentrate on recognition and to let drop the other issues.

The employers settled down to withstand the strike. On October 10th , the association's London district agreed, according to their new arrangements, to share out Rego orders between 26 other factories.[105] On October 11th, the Daily Herald reported that an offer of (official?) arbitration was refused. [106]

The first week of the strike left no doubt that strikers were very committed. On October 12th the local paper described them as in "high spirits", and "singing popular songs". The same day Elsbury told the local paper, "we are making preparations for a long struggle if necessary". Thus by the time the union executive met on October 13th and unexpectedly decided not to endorse the strike as official, the networks of support for the strike were well under way.

As has already been discussed in the introduction, this was a time of rapid business expansion for people like Rossiter and Simpson and they were honing their sub-divisional work processes. All of this went hand in hand with the recruitment of more young workers who would never become skilled in the sense that the make-through machinist was, and who would always be easy to replace. The way in which they dealt with the whole strike supports the view that it was very important for the association that a strike for a one-hundred-per-cent union shop should not succeed. They may

[104] TUC Lib., HD6661 C6. 75, Rego Strike Bulletins No 4 & 5
[105] MRC, MSS 222/LWC/1/1/4, minutes of the London District of the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers Federation, October 10th, 1928.
[106] Colindale, *Daily Herald*, October 11th 1928.

have been aided in this by the confusion about the strike goal and its shift to recognition, away from the one-hundred-per-cent goal.

There is a sense in which the employers appear to have decided on their strategy early on in the dispute whereas the union executive reacted to events as they occurred. Once Rossiter had agreed to place the dispute in the association's hands the latter used it to threaten the executive. The union executive was is a weak position as it tried, and failed to keep the two issues separate.

The union executive had good reason to consider that the strike could scupper their national negotiations because on October 8th Kay of the Federation had written, "I cannot conceive of anything which would be more calculated to prejudice the possibilities of a new agreement being entered into, than the fact that while negotiations are still proceeding, there should be a dispute. I cannot help saying that if the moment of this dispute had been selected by your officials, nothing could have been more inopportune, that is, if your Executive are desirous, as we understand they are, of a new agreement being entered into by our respective organisations."[107]

Even so at this stage, although the executive had just decided not to give the strike official backing, they did try to resolve it. Immediately following their decision, Conley telephoned Kay on October 13th and a joint meeting took place. Unsurprisingly the association was unwilling to compromise and declared, in response to the union request that all parties should return to the status quo, that the workers on strike could not be absorbed back, as there was insufficient work for them, that anyone on strike involved in violence or intimidation would not be allowed back, and that the firm would not see the London Officials.[108] Relations between the parties then appear to have entered a period of uneasy stalemates as there is no record of further contact between any of the union executive, the strikers, Rossiter or Kay until the second half of December. Given that the association considered the executive could be held responsible for the strike, the hard line was an expected response. Thus the employers' association waited for the executive to control the strike which it could not do – and time passed.

[107] TUC Lib.,, HD 6661 C 75, Rego Revolt, p. 19.
[108] MRC, MSS 222/CM/1/1/8 Employers' Federation Minutes, October 23rd, 1928.

It is likely that 'insufficient work' was more an excuse, than a reason. As such it serves as an indication of the association's continuing determination not to permit one-hundred-per-cent union shop agreements. On September 28th, October 5th and October 12th, the Rego company placed an advertisement in the local paper, "Trouser and vest machinists wanted at once" – hardly an indication of insufficient work.[109] The first advert was placed before the strike, but after the first walk-out. Rossiter was determined from the outset that he would ride out a strike. It is also likely that such an advertisement in the local paper would attract young women which Rossiter may have seen as an opportunity to replace a militant workforce with a more compliant one.

Putting together the evidence pointing to significant numbers of very young workers who lived separately from the older, East End based women, and the fact that Rossiter did recruit new local, and presumably young workers at the start of the strike, suggests that although the strike was undoubtedly 'solid', it was perhaps not as solid as it was claimed to be, and that if production was thus circumvented, Rossiter would have been able to hold out.

Strike mobilisation continued apace. On October 14th one Miss Bessie Price "was given a great ovation by the strikers on leaving the court" (where she had been bound over to keep the peace for insulting behaviour). On October 19th their enthusiasm seems to have influenced a local radio factory to strike.[110]

To all intents it was the London Branch Committee that managed the strike. Individual activists of some experience seem to have been on both the London committee and on the strike committee. The strike committee was chaired by Cohen who was very experienced as he was a member of the union London District Committee and a member of the union executive.[111] Mofshovitz also seems was a

[109] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 5th, 1928.
[110] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, *The Worker*, and the *Daily Herald* on October 12th,14th, and 16th, 1928.
[111] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald,* November 9th, 1928 See Lerner, *Breakaway Unions and the Small Trade Union*, (London 1961), p.115, and p.106 for reference to the London Branch Committee that implies that it controlled the management of the strike.

member of the London Committee, and Rego convener, and was clearly involved in the strike.

Certainly the views of the London Committee were in accord with Elsbury: they had supported National Minority candidates for executive positions and asked their executive, and been refused, for money to send delegates to the Minority Movement Conference.[112] The London branch's close identification with the National Minority Movement underlay their division with the union HQ.

The strike leadership knew how to build upon the workers' commitment to the strike. From the start, high-profile street publicity was as important as the traditional picket duty. This made it very embarrassing for Rossiter. Everyone was involved in picketing because the stint was for nine people, two hours at a time, for a span of eleven hours daily.[113] Singing processions from a rallying point down to the factory, a round trip of four miles, were an almost daily feature.[114] Processions were also organised from Bethnal Green to Fleet Street[115] (also evidence that older women who were local to Bethnal Green, not Edmonton, were at the core of strike activity), and meetings were regularly addressed by high-profile activists such as Tom Mann, Helen Crawford and A J Cook.[116]

These efforts to maintain solidarity were successful because the women strikers resisted temptation to capitulate to management pressure. In mid-October some women strikers went into the factory to collect money owed to them from before the strike. Rossiter used the opportunity to try to dismiss them by handing them their insurance cards which they refused to take.[117] The Rego Strike Bulletin No. 2, reported on October 20th, that company representatives had visited women strikers at home in an unsuccessful effort to persuade them back to work. Rossiter had further offered to meet the strikers, so long as the union officials were excluded; the request was refused. Gospel suggests that such differentiation between workers and full-time

[112] MRC, MSS192/T Tailor and Garment Workers executive board minutes, July, 1928.
[113] TUC Lib., HD 6661 C 75, Rego Strike Bulletin No. 2, October 20th, 1928.
[114] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald* , October 19th 1928.
[115] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald* , October 26th, 1928.
[116] TUC Lib.,, HD 6661 C 75, Rego Strike Bulletin No. 3, October 26th, 1928.
[117] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald,* October 19th 1928.

officials was a typical employer response for the era[118] so that it was not entirely to be explained by strikers' connections with the CP. They told Rossiter they "would not meet him as a section, but only through the medium of their organisation". [119]

Towards the end of October, Rossiter tried again to dismiss his striking workers. He sent them by registered post, a letter which was reported as the lead item in the strike bulletin on October 30th , as stating that "they [Rego] assume that the recipient has left their employ and they are therefore returning health and unemployment cards."..... "steps are being taken to fill all vacancies".[120] Strikers responded by extended picketing to the eighty Rego retail shops scattered around London with the aim of "intensifying the struggle".[121] This entailed a "motor lorry with a band of 20 girls with a megaphone, posters and the slogan "Don't buy Rego clothes".[122]

By November 3rd interest in the strike had spread to the Leeds union branch which had written to the union executive to ask what would happen if they blacked relocated work and were locked out.[123] This may have encouraged Rossiter to take more provocative action with respect to those on strike.

There were also more high profile support rallies in Trafalgar Square, the City, an East End shopping area called 'Premierland', and outside the Albert Hall. All these events were noisy affairs needing confidence to carry them out and were embarrassing to the company. Strike Bulletin 6 notes "The firm is also very unhappy about the amount of publicity the strike is getting", [124] and in *Menswear* a report on the strike notes "he [Rossiter] complained chiefly of the handbills".[125]

Well-organised and frequent cash collections at bus depots and football matches among other places, generated a total of £4,000 cash[126] which kept the strikers

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[118] Gospel, H, *Markets, Firms and the management of labour in modern Britain,* 1992, p. 91.
[119] TUC Lib., HD 6661 C 75, Rego Strike Bulletin No. 3, October 26th, 1928.
[120] TUC Lib., HD6661 C6.75 Rego Strike Bulletin No. 4, October 30th, 1928.
[121] Ibid
[122] TUC Lib., HD6661 C6.75, Rego Strike Bulletin No. 5, November 12th, 1928
[123] MRC, MSS 192/T, TGW executive board minutes, November 3rd, 1928.
[124] TUC Lib., HD6661 C6.75, Rego Strike Bulletin No. 6, November 21st, 1928
[125] Colindale, *Menswear* December 29th, 1928, p. 434.
[126] MRC, MSS 192T *The Garment Worker*, January 1929, p.3 and Rego Strike Bulletins (TUC Lib., HD 6661 C 75).

financially afloat. These collections were so successful that strike pay was raised in mid October from £1 (men) and 10 shillings (women) to 25 shillings and 15 shillings. This strike pay could be a significant proportion of actual earnings which normally fluctuated and were between 13 shillings and 44 shillings weekly, according to the Rego Strike Bulletin.[127]

The strikers had a good relationship with the local community and this also maintained solidarity. In the first few days the town council permitted the strikers to use the town hall for their rallies. Later, the frequent rallies were held in the local cinema which was owned by the Co-op. The local paper reflected this positive climate of support for the strike as the following two local news comments show. "Inspector Goldie had an easy task. The temper of the leaders, pickets and the girls was in every sense admirable", and "Police marshal the girls and the procession is usually led by two smart looking young ladies".[128]

There is some evidence that tensions started to appear in this happy state of solidarity and this led to some misgivings to be voiced at the London Trades Council, though not enough to halt support. Opposition came from those who felt uneasy about the Communist connections of the strike. The strikers were open from the start about their links with the Minority Movement. The strike bulletin banner heading declared itself as "Issued by the Garment Workers Minority Movement". [129] However, as has been shown earlier in this chapter, mainstream tolerance of the Minority Movement and the Communist Party was fast disappearing.

On October 14th, *The Sunday Worker* reported that the shop assistants' trade union Executive had sacked a full time official and CP member, Mr. Poultney, for issuing leaflets to support the Rego strike without his union executive's permission. This had provoked the shop assistants to establish a "Member's Rights Committee". [130] On

[127] TUC Lib., HD 6661 C 75, Rego Strike Bulletin No. 1, October 16th, 1928.
[128] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 12th and 19th, 1928. Much of this detail is corroborated in other papers such as the strike bulletins and the London Trades Council Report. It is not clear whether the meetings facilities (and the lunches) were paid for by the strike committee or not. A later report, November 9th, in the *Herald* does say that the strike committee did fund the hire of these facilities. Even so the fact that they were permitted at all to use them does show a degree of community support.
[129] WCM Lib., Rego Strike Bulletins, Nos 1 – 6.
[130] Colindale, *The Worker*, October 14th, 1928.

October 19th the local Tottenham and Edmonton Herald reported that the Edmonton Unemployed Workers' Brass Band had refused to accompany the regular strike parades on account of "alleged communist tendencies". The local paper's editorial suggested the same week that the strike was called on a 'misunderstanding'.[131] By October 26th, a request by strikers to collect money at a gathering of London Labour local mayors was refused.[132]

By November the employers' association's attempt to deal centrally with the dispute had failed to squash it. Likewise the union executive's efforts to obtain a national recognition clause without recourse to industrial action had failed too. So too had the London branch's quest to gain a one-hundred-per-cent membership agreement by direct action. Tensions gathered momentum in early November.

A political symbol

Although the strike had so far failed to challenge the employers, it was starting to become a political symbol for those disenchanted with official labour movement policies. It was clear to the employers' association that the strike was not about to collapse. Their 'hard line' with the strikers had not worked. If anything it helped to cement support from London trade unionists, despite qualms about the strike's Minority Movement and CP connections. The association expected the union executive "to exercise some kind of control over your London officials".[133] They agreed on November 13th, supported by Rossiter, to discontinue the National Agreement discussions.[134] The association re-stated their position even more explicitly in a letter on November 19th. "We have come to the conclusion that we cannot very well proceed with our negotiations – whatever form they may take – while the dispute is in progress", and, "it might be interpreted as a means of trying to force our hands".[135]

This decision sealed together the two issues, the strike and the new national agreement that the union executive had taken such pains to keep apart. In effect the

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[131] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, October 19th, 1928 and November 9th, 1928
[132] TUC Lib., HD 6661 C6.75 Rego Strike Bulletin, No 3.
[133] MRC, MSS 192/T TGW Executive Board Minutes, December 2nd, 1928.
[134] MRC, MSS 222/1/1/8 minutes of Employers' Federation, November 13th, 1928.
[135] Ibid.

employers' association's action resulted in the executive changing its relationship from being, on the whole, on the outside of the strike, to being a directly involved party. The executive was unable to control the strike and instead denounced it in the November issue of 'The Garment Worker'. The opening lines in this article harked back to the underlying political differences at the union summer conference.

> "The strike is unofficial. The workers withdrew their labour without the sanction of the Executive Board, which is directly contrary to the Rules of the Union"... "Our considered view is that the Rego strike was entered into in opposition to the decision and instruction of our General Conference, and that it has interfered with and prejudiced the National negotiations."[136]

Denunciation such as this was exceptional. None of the twenty six unofficial strikes in London over the past two years had provoked this kind of action, and several resulted in strike pay in arrears.[137] There is no doubt that the strikers viewed their executive's repudiation, which was also given coverage in the Daily Herald,[138] as a key event. It provoked a spiral of actions, which polarised the union and marginalised the company. Sullivan refused to send the 'Garment Worker' to London members and instead issued a leaflet calling the executive "Strike breakers".[139] The executive responded by placing a notice in the 'Daily Herald' telling members where to obtain the magazine. Strident anti-communist politics entered the normally anodyne columns of the 'Garment Worker' in November, with an article headed "This is untrue" that condemned Elsbury's summer visit to the USSR.[140] Executive candidates began to separate on a slate of those in favour, and those opposed to the strike.[141] Other Tailor and Garment Worker Union branches took sides.

The event turned the strike into a symbol for the left of all they felt was wrong after the General Strike. On November 26th 1928, the Daily Herald reported Mr. J. Maxton M.P. telling a strike support meeting at Ilford skating rink that "the Rego strikers deserved the thanks of the working classes of Britain for having broken the deadly

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[136] MRC, MSS 192T, *The Garment Worker*, November 1928, pp. 7/8.
[137] WCM Lib., *Rego Revolt*, p.6.
[138] Colindale, *The Daily Herald*, November 27th, 1928, p. 6.
[139] Lerner, S, *Small Trade Unions and the Breakaway union*, 1961, p 112.
[140] MRC, MSS/192/T *The Garment Worker*, November, 1928.
[141] TUC Lib., HD6661.C6.75, Rego Strike Bulletin 6.

industrial peace which had hung over the country since the General Strike".[142] Harry Pollitt urged leading left-wingers to publicly ally themselves with the strike as A. J. Cook had done.[143]

The ending of the strike

The executive repudiation, prompted by the association's action, added to underlying concerns in the London labour movement about Minority Movement and Communist Party involvement. Delegates at the Trades Council on November 8th had voiced misgivings, and Sullivan secured their support only after Alfred Wall reassured them that "it might be true that a few of the girls were involved with one political party or another, but that the incident [strikers campaigning to support Elsbury's Communist Party candidature for Bethnal Green local council] should not be allowed to prejudice the case of the girls, who were fighting for trade union recognition."[144] These misgivings resurfaced at the Trades Council December meeting, after the repudiation, when questions were asked about a report in the *Sunday Worker* that the Trades Council banner would be displayed at a forthcoming Rego support rally in Trafalgar Square. [145] In early December, seven students were expelled from the Labour College for singing in a choir at a Workers' Movement Theatre Concert to raise funds for the strike. [146]

From mid November, newspaper reporting too had turned distinctly more negative. On November 9th the local paper headlined "Dead woman tormented by strikers". [147] This referred to an unfortunate incident where some pickets apparently shouted at a Mrs Harris, who then had a heart attack and died. The same story also ran in the *Daily Herald*. It is of note that the papers used the opportunity to attribute the reporting of the incident to Mrs. Violet Hutton, who was, apparently, a returned striker.[148]

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[142] Colindale, *The Daily Herald*, November 26th, 1928.
[143] Colindale, *Sunday Worker*, November 25th, 1928.
[144] TUC Lib., J 1129Lon, Minutes of meeting November 8th, 1928.
[145] TUC Lib., J 1129Lon, Minutes of meeting December 13th, 1928.
[146] Colindale, *Sunday Worker*, December 23rd, 1928.
[147] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, November 9th, 1928.
[148] Colindale, *The Daily Herald*, November 15th, 1928.

Nevertheless, it would not be true to suggest, that support for the strike significantly dropped at this time. More than 500 were still on strike pay in mid- November.[149] At the end of November, new support was still forthcoming: the Jewish Bakers' Union pledged sixpence per week per member. Strikers still commanded sufficient local community support to be permitted to meet in a local church hall. Moreover, although some 200 people out of the 600 to 800 at the start had found work elsewhere, very few had broken the strike by returning to Rego. [150] The equivalent figures from Rossiter were that 476 went on strike at the start, 98 returned to work, and the factory had recruited 166 new workers.[151] Even if Rossiter's figures are accepted, the 98 returnees is still a small number overall, and did not indicate that the strike was showing signs of collapsing.

Having at first threatened the executive with a withdrawal from the national negotiations because of the strike, and then carried out the threat, the employers' association continued to encourage union disagreement. They issued a leaflet which condemned Elsbury, and hinted at a willingness to negotiate with the union executive. [152] It is unclear whether this action was taken before, or after the union repudiation, and it may have been the prompt for the executive's move.

On November 27th, 1928, the same day that the union executive repudiation was printed in the *Daily Herald*, Alfred Wall, London Trades Council Secretary, had decided it was time to intervene, and he contacted Kay to suggest meetings to resolve the dispute. In fact he implicitly threatened Kay with an extension of the shop boycott.

> "My Council is receiving enquiries from all over the country with regard to the dispute, many of the enquiries are with regard to transporting goods presumed to be manufactured for the Rego clothiers and others with regard to a trade union boycott of Rego Retail shops...My Council is very anxious to avoid any action likely to extend or prolong the dispute...My Council, representing over 200,000 organised workers in London feels its responsibilities to be very great

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[149] Colindale, *Sunday Worker*, November 18th, 1928.
[150] Colindale; *Sunday Worker*, November 25th; and 'Daily Herald', November 26th, 1928.
[151] MRC, MSS 222.CM/1/1/8, Federation minutes, December/January 1928/9.
[152] WCMLib, Strike Bulletin No. 6., November 21st . This bulletin was issued after the association had withdrawn from the national talks, but possibly before the executive repudiation was published in the 'Garment Worker'. The repudiation is not specifically mentioned in the bulletin.

> when tendering advice...whilst desirous ...to bring the parties together, it rightly has a responsibility to the workers on strike..."[153]

The last strike bulletin in the archive was dated November 21st, 1928.[154] It may be that others were produced which are now missing, but it is also possible this was the last bulletin because after Wall's involvement, strike management was no longer wholly in the hands of the strike committee.

London Trades Council support was critical for the strike. It would not have been possible for the strike to continue to finance itself so successfully, without the status of the London Trades Council behind it. The Council was probably the largest and most influential in the country, stretching from Bexley through to Twickenham and Uxbridge, and with some 113,309 directly affiliated trade union branches from 113 different trade unions. [155]

This high status required Alfred Wall (and perhaps especially Alfred Wall because he had himself been a CP member[156]) to be particularly concerned about relations with the far left at this point in time and the need to identify the Trades Council with the official union movement. He did not want to risk the opprobrium of the TUC, by being seen to be bending the recently published guidelines about trade union relations with the Communist Party and the Minority Movement. He had also to preserve the unity of the Trades Council, which had only the previous year taken a tough line against CP members. He was now faced with growing dismay at the Trades Council meetings, about the direction of the Rego strike, and the response of the union executive. But he still viewed Trades Council support as necessary, stating in December that "it would be wrong of them to refuse them the means of obtaining bread, whilst they are fighting for what they believe to be Trade Union principles".[157]

Two days later, on November 29th, unable to stop the strike's damage to his company with threatened dismissals, and unable to make the union executive curtail the strike,

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[153]MRC, MSS 192, *The Garment Worker*, January, 1929, p. 3.
[154] TUC Lib., HD 6661.C6.75, 1928 Rego Strike Bulletin no. 6, November 21st, 1928
[155] University of London, TUC Library, JN1129 Lon, London Trades Council Annual Report, September 1929.
[156] WCM Lib.,*Rego Revolt*, p. 20, refers to Alfred Wall as 'the notorious renegade from the Communist Party'.
[157] MRC, MSS 192/T, *The Garment Worker*, January 1929, reprint of a letter from Wall to Conley.

Rossiter issued a writ against the Tailor and Garment Workers' union, to put an end to the picketing. This was under the terms of the new Trades Disputes Act which was universally condemned by the all the Trade Unions. [158] As Gerrish of the Federation put it to Rossiter, "he was fighting a case for the whole trade."[159] He also sacked 21 people including several cutters around this time. This may have been an indication that whilst the strike had not sufficiently impaired production to force a settlement, it had done some damage.

The union executive decided to make it clear they were not in control and agreed to call in the union solicitor to "obtain an adjournment" and to "make it clear the strike is unofficial and unauthorised".[160] When the case initially came to court, it was decided the writ was improperly joined because the TGW executive were not regarded as responsible for the strike and the case was postponed.[161]

On December 12th, Alfred Wall met the union national officers, but excluding Elsbury and Sullivan or anyone from the London District. They discussed the meeting due to take place with Kay that afternoon. Apparently Wall urged the union leaders to include the London Committee, but they refused – an indication of how bad relations were.[162] A return to work formula was agreed "to reinstate all workers as far as practicable at the earliest possible moment". [163] However, the strikers turned this down.

On December 20th, the court reconvened.[164] Elsbury and Sullivan undertook to end temporarily the shop picketing and leafleting, pending the outcome of the negotiations due to take place the next day under Alfred Wall's chairmanship. In this case the legal intervention appears to have benefited both strikers and Rossiter. The latter gave an undertaking to meet with Elsbury and Sullivan and attempt to resolve the strike and, if shop picketing were to be resumed, it would be with only two pickets per shop,

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[158] WCM Lib.,*Rego Revolt*, p.21.
[159] MRC, MSS 222/CM/1/1/8, December 12th, 1928.
[160] MRC, MSS 192/T Executive Board minutes, December 2nd, 1928
[161] Shirley Lerner, *Breakaway Unions and the Small Union,* (London, 1961), p. 111/2.
[162] Lerner, Shirley, 'The History of the United Clothing Workers' Union: a case study in social disorganization. PhD Thesis 1956, University of London p. 252.
[163] WCM Lib.,*Rego Revolt*, p. 21.
[164] Unfortunately affidavits for this period have been destroyed, but the local newspaper coverage gives a fair explanation of what took place.

their names were to be given to Rossiter, and they would remain at least six yards from the shop. On the other hand Elsbury had secured an undertaking from Rossiter to meet him, plus the right to resume some sort of shop picketing, if negotiations failed. When Rossiter protested about the prospect of resumed picketing, and asked for the right to submit a 48 hour injunction, the judge denied this to him. [165]

The judge had bolstered Wall's desire to involve the London officials at the same time as reducing the London branch's control of strike strategy. The joint conference reconvened the next day, December 21st and the London District Officials were invited.

It must have been clear to those on strike that the support of the London Trades Council would end, and that the strikers were expected to come to a deal. Elsbury seems to have been responsible for the negotiation on December 21st , of a stronger commitment from Rossiter to reinstate "the whole of the workers on strike without any victimisation, as and when work was available" and, importantly, a letter promising to negotiate with the London Officials in the future. This may also have been encouraged by the court settlement. The February edition of 'Red Needle' gives a little more substance to this promise, quoting from Rossiter in a verbatim record of the joint conference "I am looking at the picture as a whole, and when I said I will undertake to reinstate them in three weeks I was making up my mind that at least three hundred could be immediately absorbed, and that it would be in connection with the residue that the trouble might arise – the remaining 50. I do not anticipate trouble."[166]

It is impossible to say how much Elsbury's intervention altered the final package. Subsequently, the London Trades Council Strike Report disputed Elsbury's presentation of the story as the London branch's victory. It seemed enough for the strikers to accept this package. Unfortunately there is no information about how the

[165] Colindale, *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald,* December 21st, p.7. See also Men's Wear report of the case, December 29th, p.434.
[166] TUC Lib., HD 6350 C6, *Red Needle*, February, 1929. p. 5 The *Red Needle* and *Rego Revolt* mention this 117 page verbatim record but I have found no trace of it. I feel sure someone somewhere might have a copy because more than one copy will have been made. Lerner makes no use of it.

vote went. *Rego Revolt* records the settlement as a victory – which of course fits in with its ex-post account of the strike.

Thus the strikers returned to work on December 27th , in what seems to have been a good-humoured parade, led jointly by Elsbury, Sullivan, the London District Committee and Loughlin, the national President and where "representatives of the firm, the Union and the Federation." jointly addressed the returning workers at the factory.[167]

There is no information about whether Rossiter did in fact see Elsbury and Sullivan on union issues in the short period between the end of the strike, and the setting up of the breakaway union in March 1929, but this odd joint welcome back does suggest the strikers had won at least part of their recognition. It is unclear how much else of the initial grievances mentioned early in the dispute were dealt with. According to the 1929/30 London Trades Council Annual report, the London Branch officials "made no effort to deal with the real grievances of the Rego workers, or the piece rate question, with the result the workers were sent back on their old terms, and a valuable opportunity for improving their wage thrown away. Mr. Elsbury himself threw over the claim for one hundred per cent membership."[168] In February 1929, 34 ex-strikers were still asking for, and being denied, union victimisation pay because they had not been reinstated.[169] It was at best a temporary and qualified victory.

Rego Revolt records that "During the first weeks of 1929 it became known that the Executive Board of the Tailor and Garment Workers had decided to hold an enquiry into the conduct of the two London Branch officials."[170] It is plausible that Rossiter may have been aware of this when he agreed to write to confirm recognition for Elsbury, and therefore felt it to be only a temporary recognition. He was certainly aware of the internal union row because he pasted up the union's denunciation of the strike in his factory.[171]

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[167] MRC, MSS 192/T *The Garment Worker*, January 1929, p.5.
[168] TUC Lib., JN1129 Lon, London Trades Council Annual Report, 1929/30. p.40.
[169] MRC, MSS192/T, TGW Executive Board minutes, February, 1929.
[170] WCM Lib.,*Rego Revolt*, p. 1.
[171] Lerner, Shirley, 'The History of the United Clothing Workers' Union: a case study in social disorganization. PhD Thesis 1956, University of London p. 251.

On March 2nd 1929, the TGW Executive held a disciplinary interview for Sullivan and Elsbury about how they had conducted the strike. Elsbury was also accused of accepting nomination as Communist Party Parliamentary candidate for Bethnal Green West, and in this he had contravened union rules.[172] Sullivan was given a warning and Elsbury was sacked.

It seems likely that the real reason for dismissing Elsbury was his high CP profile rather than his active support for the unofficial Rego strike. After all, Sullivan's sin – issuing a leaflet to his London members that called the executive "strike-breakers" – was every bit as heinous as Elsbury's rule contravention in taking up Parliamentary candidature without permission. A precedent for dismissing CP full time officers had already been set by the Poultney affair in the Shopworkers' union, and the Boot and Shoe union had also taken action.[173] But the action taken against Elsbury precipitated the breakaway; it underscores how the story of this particular strike was so inextricably linked to the political divisions in the labour movement.

The new union was inaugurated a few days later with Elsbury as General Secretary. Many Rego strikers joined and that story is the substance of Shirley Lerner's thesis.

Conclusion

It seems clear that the strikers considered at the start that they had a good opportunity to win their claim for a one-hundred-per-cent shop. They viewed this as a solution to the many changes in work organisation, including the disputed trouser payment scheme, which Rossiter had implemented since the company's relocation to Edmonton. They had had plenty of opportunity in their daily journey to work to discuss how to deal with these issues. They expected union backing, knew they had an able local official, a local branch entirely committed to their aims and their recent experience of direct action had produced results. However, they had under-estimated the degree of resistance by Rossiter and the association to one-hundred-per-cent agreements and they had over-estimated their own economic power on strike. The

[172] Ibid. p.292.
[173] Roderick Martin, *Communism and the British Trade Unions 1924 – 1933, a study of the National Minority Movement*, (Oxford, 1969) p. 94/5.

organisers viewed the strike as an opportunity to demonstrate their superior strategy to that of the executive.

Strike energies were spent on mobilisation, built around the campaign aim of recognition and relegating, possibly deliberately, the call for a one-hundred-per-cent shop. Mobilisation was extremely successful in maintaining strike solidarity, broadening support and embarrassing Rossiter but appears to have been less successful restricting production. Crucially, the London Trades Council agreed to support because the workers were on strike for recognition. Rossiter, on the other hand, took every kind of measure to protect his interests, short of at this stage, invoking the new Trades Dispute Act. He diverted work to his association allies, to factories in Leeds, he recruited new staff and attempted to dismiss strikers. These actions provoked a broadening of picketing, involving workers in Leeds in the dispute. Rossiter may have felt morally obliged to let the association deal with the strike, but it was his choice, and, in making it he passed up opportunity for an early resolution.

Two other events were unfolding which were also to influence the course of this strike. The first was close to home and undoubtedly exacerbated any existing union policy differences. Discussions were going on between the union executive and the employers' association. The executive's aim was to achieve paragraphs in the National Agreement to encourage workers to join the union, and stem the collapse in membership since 1921. The negotiations were not going well and the executive viewed the strike as a threat to them, knowing the London branch favoured a militant approach instead. The association considered the strike might possibly be a deliberate ploy to bring pressure to bear in negotiations, and they decided quite early on to threaten the union executive with withdrawing from the negotiations unless the strike was ended. They expected the union executive to control the strike, which the latter could not do as they had had no part in mobilising it.

Accordingly, after some delay the association withdrew from the National Agreement discussions and this prompted the union executive to publicly condemn the strike. This brought to a head existing policy differences between the London branch and the

executive and added to the growing concerns amongst London Trades Council delegates with regard to their support for the strike.

The second event unfolding had a broader constituency. This was the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the official labour movement, and the National Minority Movement and Communist Party. Relations had never been good, but in 1927 and 1928, they took a decided turn for the worse. The strikers' very public identification with the NMM and CP began to undermine the support they had received from the London Trades Council.

These two events prompted Wall to become mediator. The Trades' Council's reputation was at risk by supporting such an overtly political strike and the risk increased once the union executive had so publicly denounced it. By this time Rossiter supported by the association, had concluded it was time to take offensive action and a writ was served on the union, using a clause from the Trade Disputes Act. However, his initiative did not end the strike quite in the way he expected.

The union rejected the implication that they were in any way responsible; all reference to the Trade Disputes Act was dropped. By the time the case came to court, mediation had started and, instead of making punitive judgements against the strike, the court settlement incorporated undertakings from Rossiter to meet with Elsbury, as well as undertakings from Elsbury and Sullivan to temporarily stop picketing and leafleting. This strengthened Wall's position.

The mediation discussions which followed did end the strike, though they did not resolve the dispute issues. Without promise of continued London trades unionists cash support, and without the wherewithal to effectively leaflet and picket, the strikers had no other choice other than to end the strike.

Chapter Four: The Waterproof Garment Workers' Strike, 1945

This strike was between the Manchester based, mostly, but not exclusively, Jewish union,[1] the Waterproof Garment Workers Union (WGWU), and the Rubber Proofed Garment Manufacturers Association (RPGMA), who were mostly Jewish owners of waterproof and rainwear factories. The strike, which was the shortest of the three cases, lasted for six weeks, starting on November 24th 1945, and ending on January 5th 1946. It involved about 1400 people in some 42 different waterproof garment factories in the Manchester and Salford area[2]. The union's stated claim was a shopping list including pay increases, hours, holidays and steward recognition; however the core issue was a renegotiation of a piece-work price-list made in 1934.

The immediate strike settlement went some way towards the pay and holiday claim and by March 1947, the union had also secured their hours claim. The employers insisted on creating an industry Wages Council as a requirement for settlement and this was agreed to at the strike's end, though it did not come to fruition until 1948, despite the fact that the legislation was passed in 1945.

The strike occurred a few months after the 1945 Labour Party election victory when labour was in very short supply. Therefore the political and economic environment (notwithstanding the formal illegality of strike action) was more favourable to the workers than in 1928 or 1986.[3]

By comparison with the other two strikes this was a 'short' long strike, and it happened when strikes were very frequent indeed during, and for a time after, the war. In 1945 there were 2,293 strikes of which only 12, including this one, were longer than 36 days. In terms of the strike pattern for 1945 it was a very exceptional strike.

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[1] Although one of the factories in Manchester is mysteriously called 'The London Waterproof Company', there do not appear to have been members of the union in London.
[2] Working Class Movement Library, Salford: other records, list showing how many ballot papers were issued to named factories.
[3] Derek H. Aldcroft and Michael J. Oliver, *Trade Unions and the Economy: 1870 -2000*, (Aldershot, 2000), p.77, notes that the second world war created a bargaining atmosphere.

Some 1,500 of these other strikes were settled in two days;[4] vast numbers were settled at arbitration.

This was a multi-employer strike. It was planned well in advance by the Waterproof Garment Workers' Union executive. Strike specific organisation, as distinct from more general mobilisation, was well under way before the strike started. Although people did not stop work until November 26th, the strike announcement altered relations between the employers and the union leadership after the executive gave notice of it to the RPGMA on October 20th, 1945. Prior investment in mobilisation organisation commits resources to the event[5] and therefore such investment is likely to be of value in a sustained strike.

The union was accustomed to long strikes. In 1921, 1927 and 1937 there were strikes of several weeks in the industry, and in 1935 the executive sustained a nine-month strike in a part of the Manchester industry. It was also accustomed to positive outcomes from direct action, even when the union had exhausted its funds, as was the case in 1921 and 1927. Increased recruitment was another positive outcome from previous direct action and after the long 1935 strike many new union shops were established.[6] So the union had an expectation that a long strike, even pursued to the point of bankruptcy, would pay dividends for union membership numbers, and for the point at dispute.

When organised labour frequently resorts to force, it may also be a sign of weakness in the industry. Erik Olin Wright[7] argues that the specific configuration of power and interests in a particular industrial relationship can influence whether real robust compromises are made or whether the union makes headway by brute-force. In this case the Waterproof Garment Workers' Union had the strategic skills to make headway, but the gains did not last because of the persistently divided and isolated configuration of the waterproof industry.

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[4] Ministry of Labour *Gazette*, April 1946, p.95.
[5] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, (New York, 1978), pp. 69 -79 for a discussion about the relationship between mobilisation and organising collective resources.
[6] Modern Records Centre University of Warwick: MSS 292/91/284; TUC Files 1925 – 36, TUC 'Report of the Committee of Enquiry' – all the data about the early strikes from this source.
[7] Wright, Erik, Olin, 'Working Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests and Class Compromise', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol 105, No 4, (January, 2000).

The roots of this strike were much, much deeper than for the other two cases. They started in 1934. In 1937 a four-week strike took place about the same core issue; the disputed 1934 piece-work price list. The issue was put on hold during the war. Therefore it makes sense to consider the story from 1934.

The suggestion put here is that the RPGMA took advantage of long term differences between the WGWU and NUTGW. These differences concerned the 'Manchester Agreement' which was between WGWU and the RPGMA and secured higher rates for WGWU members working in Manchester than rates paid to NUTGW workers for similar work beyond Manchester. Not surprisingly the RPGMA wanted to end this agreement. Opportunity to do so presented itself in the 1930s when the TUC recommended the two unions to amalgamate. The opportunity was not realised and negotiations to update the Manchester Agreement were caught up with discussions between the two unions about amalgamation.

In 1934 a grass roots challenge to WGWU leadership resulted in a new and confident leadership who were willing and able to take action to protect WGWU interests. Thus WGWU mobilisation was well organised, highly disciplined and well supported, but it was also self reliant and showed no signs of the usual activities to promote trade union solidarity support, and relations with the NUTGW continued to be poor throughout the strike. In the first half of the 1945 strike, desperately short labour supply gave the strikers some advantage and the union used this advantage to encourage division amongst the factory owners by offering them individual factory agreements, including the return of their workers. The union's peculiar self reliance and disciplined mobilisation allowed it to pursue this divisive strategy.

This attempt to divide the RPGMA did not spark the tide the union hoped for, and in the latter part of the strike, the RPGMA asserted control by refusing to meet with the union. After this mobilisation appeared to lose momentum and as the union had no external support, its ability to continue to resource the strike came to an abrupt end. This fortunately coincided with conciliation by the government official, who, in

keeping with the new post war labour relations compromise, [8] brought the strike to a broadly acceptable settlement.

Jewish ethnicity in the industry should also be taken into account because anti-Semitism was at a peak in the UK at that time. Kushner notes that the immediate post-war years were marked by the intensification of domestic anti-Semitism and that in 1947 there were riots against Jews in several major British cities.[9] It is difficult to assess just how this affected the industrial relationship; it may have contributed to the more general isolation felt by both sides of the industry and to a somewhat odd industrial relationship between the RPGMA and the WGWU where the RPGMA occasionally relied upon the union to use direct action to enforce agreements on defaulting employers. The situation was serious enough for the Board of Deputies of British Jews to commission a report in 1946 about economic discrimination.[10]

Part one sets the scene for the industry and its labour, emphasising the industry's internal divisions and its isolation from the mainstream. Part two explains a long spiral of events, from 1934 to 1945. These events though over a long period, explain the RPGMA's and the union leadership's approach to the dispute. Part three deals with the strike itself and emphasises how the union strategy deliberately targeted the RPGMA at its weakest point.

Divided employers, united workers

The rubber-proofed garment industry started in Manchester in the nineteenth century and by 1900 supplied 90 per cent of the world's rubber-proofed clothing. By 1946 there were 344,000 workers in the clothing industry[11] and around 10,000 in the waterproof garment sector, of whom some 6,000 worked in Manchester.[12] A 1958 history of the nineteenth century rubber industry (which barely mentions the

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[8] There are nuances of interpretation about just what the 'post-war compromise' meant. I am using the one described as Marxist in Campbell, Fishman and McIlroy as a compromise between capital and labour about how labour was managed – the point being that companies were less likely to resort to strong-arm tactics and this is borne out by the actions of the RPGMA in 1945/6. See Campbell, Fishman and McIlroy, 'Mapping Industrial Politics, 1945 – 64' in Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy, ed. *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics*, (Aldershot, 1999).

[9] Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, (Oxford, 1994), p.223.

[10] Soton: MS 116/159 AJ398/3 Trades Advisory Council Report, 1946.

[11] Stewart, M & Hunter, L, *The Needle is Threaded*, (Southampton, 1964), p.209.

[12] Winchester School of Art special collections, 'Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Garment Industry', (1947), p.7.

waterproof clothing part of it), notes that female labour predominated in footwear and clothing. [13] In the first half of the twentieth century the industry began to develop outside Manchester and the leading status of the old Manchester companies came into question. Other industry problems became evident. There appears to have been only one contemporary book, a Board of Trade report, about the water proofed clothing industry, and this was compiled with the help of the employers, the Waterproof Workers' Union, and the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union who were on the working party.[14] They were scathing in their criticism of their own industry. They called it the "Cinderella" of the clothing industry[15] and considered it to be isolated.[16] Michael Fidler, a leading employer and RPGMA member, proposed a whole new structure for the Wholesale Garment Manufacturers' Association that fully included the Waterproof section, to address the isolation problem.[17]

The report noted that owners were divided, belonging to different employers' associations, or to none. [18] In 1931, under pressure of the inter-war slump many employers had left the association. [19] In 1942, some firms agreed to cooperate in the war-time concentration exercise.[20] The aim of this was to concentrate workers in certain factories and release space in others in which munitions could be stored. There was so much disagreement between companies that one firm refused to give the authorities details in case another found out.[21]

Even the union had tried to improve things: in 1934 the union general secretary advocated a meeting of employers "both associated and unassociated, so that he might address them on the necessity of a stronger organisation of the industry", but "unfortunately, owing to the clash of business interests between one firm and another,

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[13] William Woodruff, *The Rise of the British Rubber Industry during the nineteenth century*, (Liverpool, 1958), p.119, note 3
[14] Winchester School of Art special collection: Board of Trade Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Clothing Industry, 1947.
[15] WSA: Board of Trade Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Clothing Industry, 1947, p.19
[16] Ibid p.9/10
[17] University of Southampton Archives: MS 290 A1001 Papers of Michael Fidler, Business Papers, Folder 3 1947 – 53.
[18] WSA: Board of Trade Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Clothing Industry, 1947, p.26
[19] MRC: MSS 292/91/284, 'TUC Report of the Committee of Enquiry.. to enquire into the internal difficulties of the Waterproof Garment Workers Trade Union,', 1934.
[20] See Stewart and Hunter, *The Needle is Threaded*, (1964), p. 208.
[21] WSA: Board of Trade Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Clothing Industry, 1947, p. 8

nothing very tangible has yet resulted" [22] The report also noted that seasonality was worse than in the rest of the garment industry, the busy season being about 60 hours weekly, from August to October, and the slack season, about 15 to 18 hours weekly, from December to February.[23] It concluded, probably accurately, that the industry was backward–looking in every sense, comprising small and tiny factories which were prone to sweating practices.

However the report also gives a sense of belief in the efficiency of large factory production and, since those writing the report on the employers' side were, by and large, the owners of the bigger factories, and since the union was strongest in the bigger factories, it is hardly surprising that the report endorsed a production development to suit those interests.[24]

The RPGMA was only one of some fifty different employers' associations in the garment industry as a whole at that time and manufacture ranged from beach-wear to nurses' uniforms.[25] Most of these associations were part of the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Association, but the Rubber-Proofed Garment Manufacturers' Association (RPGMA) was not, and though they did have contact, they appear to have had little real influence.

However, it seems that contact with government actually took place through the Rainwear sub-committee of the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Association rather than through the RPGMA. For example the former's 1943 Annual Report records that "The committee have also had under review questions affecting the production and sale of rubber-proofed garments and where necessary consultations with the Board of Trade have taken place thereon."

There was another, similar occurrence, where the Rainwear sub-committee met with the Board of Trade to discuss prices for certain de-mobilisation clothing made for

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[22] MRC: MSS 292/91/284, TUC Special Enquiry into the affairs of the Waterproof Garment Workers, 18th June 1934

[23] WSA: Board of Trade Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Clothing Industry, 1947, p. 9/10.

[24] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, The larger factories feature on the list of struck factories.

[25] Soton: MS 290 A1001 Papers of Michael Fidler, 1943 - 56, Business Papers, Folder 2

government contract.[26] Mr. Prax, company director of one of the largest waterproof employers, Greengate and Irwell, was present at the AGM, so there was a relationship, but there appeared to be no RPGMA representative on the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Association Rainwear sub-committee.

In a similar vein, in September 1945, the Rainwear sub-committee seems to have taken the initiative instead of the RPGMA when it recorded that "proposals had been formulated and submitted to the RPGMA, in whose opinion the prices were too low."[27] Certainly the RPGMA had a working relationship with the Wholesale Association, but it was one in which the RPGMA was very much the junior partner.

The RPGMA was also organisationally isolated from the mainstream clothing industry because it was a sub-section of the India Rubber Association.[28] But a brief look at the latter's trade journal revealed very few entries about waterproof and rainproof wear, the vast majority of information being about issues for rubber plantation owners. Moreover such books as I found about the rubber industry made only very passing reference to the waterproofing industry, concentrating upon tyres, shoe soles and the rubber plantations.[29] All this tends to confirm that the waterproofing industry was isolated and inward-looking.

There were vast differences between the leading players in the RPGMA and the rest. Whilst the leading companies in Manchester were not large, (only one employed more than one hundred workers in the waterproof section)[30], 51 of the 300 visited by the Board of Trade working party had fewer than 20 workers altogether[31]. The larger company owners tended also to be the Association leaders (for example Hyman Weinberg of 'Aquarock' as Association President, and Michael Fidler of Fidlers, Association Honorary Secretary and Vice President). They were the companies which agreed the pay rates with the WGWU.

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[26] MRC:, MSS222/CM/1/2/2, 1943 Annual Report, and minutes of 28th November, 1944
[27] Ibid.
[28] British Newspaper Library, Colindale, north London, The *'India-Rubber'* journal.
[29] See, William Woodruff, *The rise of the British Rubber Industry Industry during the nineteenth century*, (Liverpool, 1958), or a *Marketing Conference Report for the Rubber Industry*, NEDO, 1968 which appeared not to feature any consideration of the waterproof industry's activities
[30] WCM Lib: WGWU, Other records, list of factories to which strike ballot papers were issued
[31] Ibid. p. 7.

On the other hand the small companies generally played no part in the employers' association and were quite probably not even members. Small companies were under more pressure to cut costs and work very long hours; they were the most likely to obtain their orders from independent wholesalers who could often demand that an order be turned round in a few days, or even twenty-four hours.[32] But they could also react very speedily to a product-market change, and attract labour with short-term high cash, notwithstanding their often appalling physical environment.[33] Their existence was in some ways a threat to the larger firms. For all these reasons the waterproof industry was the kind of industry that Al Rainnie viewed as one where the many small operators had no choice other than to undercut larger factories.[34]

Nevertheless business had expanded during the war, and by 1945 it was a "sellers' market".[35] From the point of view of the established factories two trends were worrying. Firstly, more tiny companies were setting up business, even in buildings scheduled for demolition,[36] and these posed a threat to the established businesses.

Secondly, the trend for modern companies to set up outside Manchester and use modern US style production flow-lines, probably with a more overwhelmingly female workforce than in the older factories, meant that the old craft-based 'make-through' production based on piece-rates, which was the bedrock of the agreements with the union, was uncompetitive. There is a sense in which the union's constant vigilance over minute details of the agreed piece rates is more redolent of craft style bargaining.

The lead actors in the RPGMA had modern factories, often with substantial staff facilities such as rest rooms and canteens.[37] It is clear from the working party report

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[32] WSA: Board of Trade Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Clothing Industry, 1947, p. 7.
[33] See Andrew Godley, 'Immigrant Entrepreneurs and the Emergence of London's East End as an Industrial District', *The London Journal*, No.21 1996, about the case for small companies having the flexibility for fast response to a changing market environment.
[34] Al F. Rainnie, 'Combined and uneven development in the clothing industry; the effects of competition on accumulation', *Capital and Class* no 22, 1984, pp. 141 – 156.
[35] WSA: Board of Trade Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Clothing Industry, 1947, p. 20.
[36] WSA: Board of Trade Working Party Report on the Rubber Proofed Clothing Industry, 1947, p. 18.
[37] Names such as Aquarock, Fidler, Greengate &Irwell, Meeks and several others were regular signatories to union agreements, or selected and praised by individual workers –see for example Jewish Museum oral archive – inter-war undated ref J279 Diane Glantz: or listed as members of the Board of Trade Working Party.

that they saw their future in enlarging and modernising their factories to successfully compete with the out-of-Manchester factories. They most probably viewed maintaining separate pay negotiations, outside of a Wages Council as detrimental to their future modernisation. Their aim from at least the mid 1930s to the strike was to have wages determined by a Wages Council. It may be that the modernisation issue was also linked to a desire, on the part of the modern factory owners, to employ more women, thus reducing their labour costs at the same time as adopting modern techniques.

The existing Trade Boards (which became Wages Councils after the war) gave legal backing to minimum wage and conditions agreements negotiated between the National Union of Tailoring and Garment Workers and the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Association. Although in practice the Trade Boards had a chequered reputation due to insufficient inspectors, a tendency to set lower rates than expected, and very complex negotiations, they were welcomed by the NUTGW, who saw them as protection for the lowest paid, most disorganised, and least protected parts of the mainstream garment industry.[38] The Boards covered the garment industry except for the waterproof industry, most probably because the WGWU did not want one. [39]

It seems likely that the WGWU considered a Wages Council for their industry to be a threat to their Manchester Agreement. This is not such an unusual response, as Smith's study of the small, ethnically Irish, Liverpool and District Carters' Union showed. They too had misgivings about the Wages Council established in their industry, seeing it as a threat to their autonomy.[40] In the strike the RPGMA tried to exploit this policy difference between the WGWU and the NUTGW. The new legislation to convert Trade Boards into Wages Councils reached its third reading during the strike and became law in 1945. It ensured the Wages Council could only be established with the agreement of both the employers and the union. From the

[38] Stewart and Hunter, *The Needle is Threaded,* (1964), p.219, 229.
[39] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letter July 10th, 1939 refers to WGWTU disagreement ith TGW on the Trade Board issue, and MRC: MSS 292/85/127, TUC Disputes Committee Case No 116, 5th Feb 1936 refers to the divergent policies in both unions on the piece-rate/time rate issue.
[40] Paul Smith, 'A Proud Liverpool Union. The Liverpool and District Carters' and Motormen's Union, 1889 – 1946: Ethnicity, Class and Trade Unionism', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, No.16, (Autumn, 2003) p. 30 – 31.

RPGMA point of view, the WGWU attitude to the Wages Council was an impediment.

Some time earlier a new constitution for the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Association had been under debate[41] and it contained clauses that linked voting powers to having wages settled by a Trade Board. If a factory owner wanted to have an influential role in the new Wholesale Association, which Michael Fidler clearly did, it was necessary for them to settle wages through a Wages Council.

Hence there were good reasons why establishing a Wages Council was a key aim for the RPGMA: to lower wage costs in Manchester relative to producers elsewhere; to encourage the NUTGW at the expense of the WGWU; to curtail undercutting; and to have influence in the Wholesale Association.

The WGWU as its name suggests, only organised the water proof sector so that many companies which also made raincoats, had to deal with NUTGW and WGWU members in the same factory. The union was very small, probably about 2,000.[42] They were also isolated. They complained about not being invited to participate in a Board of Trade Working Party.[43] It is likely this was the same working party which produced the report quoted earlier, so on that occasion their complaint was dealt with. However, the fact that they were initially left out of an official working party which included the leading manufacturers and the NUTGW, underscores their isolation. It also suggests careful consideration of just how they were able, from such an apparently weak position, to exert bargaining strength. They also complained to the TUC that "We feel we are being treated as a small union without a voice on the General Council."[44] They had two attempts at amalgamation with the NUTGW, in 1915 (NUTGW predecessor), and in 1939, both of which failed.

The WGWU knew well how to exploit the RPGMA's weakness especially where labour was in short supply. The union maintained commitment to the labour-intensive,

[41] Soton: MS290 A1001 Papers of Michael Fidler, Business Papers, Folder 2.
[42] Some 1500 ballot papers were distributed for the 1945 strike and this must have represented the bulk of members at that time – a drop compared to the size of the NUTGW.
[43] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letter 6th June, 1946.
[44] Ibid, letter 10th August, 1937

craft-based 'make-through' that was paid by piece-rate. Different piece-rates were agreed with the union for each different operation in the making of each type of garment. They were listed in a 'log' that would be periodically revised between the RPGMA and the union. Hundreds of different prices made up the log and it provided endless opportunities for companies to undercut or overpay, and for the union to claim that the log had not been adhered to.

This gave them more workplace control than with the contemporary modern mass-production schemes, and it favoured a tightly disciplined union. Even the employers' association recognized that the union ran a disciplined ship as they wrote that they "are fully acquainted with the discipline that your Union can and does exert on its members." [45] It was not uncommon practice for the union to fine or expel people for disobeying union rules.[46]

Intense seasonality and labour-intensive production provided the union with powerful but erratic bargaining leverage. This may have accounted for the fact that bouts of militancy paid off with membership and monetary gains, but that these gains were not sustained.

On the other hand, undercutting agreed rates was the bedrock of disagreements between the WGWU and other unions, especially the NUTGW. The more directly relevant of these disagreements are covered later in this chapter, but the point made here is that these types of disagreement were characteristic of the difficult relations the WGWU had with other unions. For example, in 1940 they complained to the NUTGW regional office that the latter union's members at the Radcliffe factory were undercutting WGWU agreed rates. They complained a few months later to the National Union of General and Municipal Workers about a similar situation about pay

[45] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letter January 30th, 1946.
[46] WCM Lib: WGWU, executive minutes,n March 9th , 1946 the EC dismissed a steward for not collecting/remitting dues, and on April 13th they fined a worker ten shillings and sixpence for working on a Sunday against union rules. They seem also to have shared this highly disciplined approach with the Liverpool Carter's union mentioned above, p22.

rates for silk parachutes in the Mandleburg factory. In 1944 and in 1948 they complained to the NUTGW about incidents in Yorkshire and Glasgow.[47]

Other factors such as the union's size, homogeneity, local base and immediate past history also favoured a tightly disciplined organisation. Therefore they had good resources for mobilisation of which they made regular use. An important feature of this particular strike was that the union mobilisation was self-reliant.

It does seem clear that the union was confident enough of its own position to resist a TUC amalgamation initiative. A delegate at the 1945 NUTGW conference noted "..many attempts have been made, so far unsuccessfully, to bring the Waterproof Garment Union into our ranks. The reason it has been unsuccessful is not very interesting, but we, on our part, can say it has not been our fault. We have not got a very healthy position in Manchester. We have only about 7,000 members".[48]

The WGWU responded to their isolation by tightening up their discipline, and this was especially clear during the strike. Such a union was unlikely to make the kind of wider alliances that would have provided opportunity for the strike to change direction or for the executive to lose control.

The social environment in which WGWU members and leaders worked is also likely to have cemented rather than divided the union, giving it a leading edge of unity over the RPGMA. The union's behaviour conforms to some extent to the 'isolated mass' idea proposed by Kerr and Siegel in 1954.[49] They argued that mineworkers had a propensity for solidarity which was mostly derived from their tight knit communities and close location to the place of work. Outram and Church have argued recently that, although the idea is now well criticised, it does still have some validity provided it is not used to exclude the importance of mobilisation.[50] In this case it is interesting to

[47] WCM Lib: WGWU, Microfilm, Reel 2, Section, 'Correspondence and other papers (general) of WGTU, 1934 – 1975.
[48] WCM Lib: NUTGW records, 1945 Annual Conference minutes, p231/2.
[49] Kerr, Clark and Siegel, 'The interindustry propensity to strike – an international comparison', in Arthur, M. ed. *Industrial Conflict*, (New York, 1954).
[50] Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: coalfield conflict in Britain, 1889 – 1966*, (Cambridge, 1998), p.142/3.

note that because of their ability to mobilise, the WGWU were able to harness their isolation to good effect.

It appears that the waterproof industry workers were in tight knit communities and close to their work. Workers sometimes had a close relationship with their factory. Diane Glantz, explained that in the difficult times of the 1930s "One boss let her go on the dole, she would pick up the money on Thursday, and he used to borrow it for his wife to make Shabbos, and give it her back, Friday night, when he'd got money off the bank". It seems workers also often lived in very close proximity to their factory "lived in little street called Melbourne Place. One half was little teeny houses and the other half was a big factory called Glassbergs" [51].

They were in close contact too with neighbours: they "never closed front doors, anyone could come in, never locked up at night. Everybody's key fitted everyone else's front door". There were also many trade union representatives which meant members had easy access to their representatives. At the 1944 Annual Conference there were 32 delegates and 9 executive members,[52] i.e. the executive comprised nearly thirty per cent of delegates and the executive and delegates combined comprised about 2.7 per cent of the membership. A more normal sized union of 100,000 members would have needed 2,700 delegates at an annual conference to achieve a similar level of representation!

There was quite a close connection between the leaders of the industry and the Board of Deputies of British Jews and given the likelihood of business discrimination, the RPGMA leaders would have been alert to the issues. Hyman Weinberg for example took the trouble to express his written approval of the Deputies' new Trades Advisory bulletins.[53] Michael Fidler became a Deputy some years later. So it is likely that these two established leaders of the RPGMA would have paid attention to the Deputies' ideas.

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[51] Manchester Jewish Museum: Diane Glantz oral history tape no. J279.
[52] WCM Lib: WGWU, Annual Conference Minutes, July 1944.
[53] London Metropolitan Archive: British Board of Deputies, ref ACC/3121/C13/3/7/36, correspondence from the Deputies Trades Advisory sub-committee.

The Board had a history of intervention in industrial disputes between Jewish workers and bosses, and more generally in trading issues. They certainly intervened in the waterproof industry during 1935. [54] The Board had a standing committee, the Trades Advisory Committee, which was quite active in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1939 the committee's activities increased with the objective of removing from the public domain, certain kinds of business conflicts that involved Jews. They proposed the Advisory Committee should have "facilities for arbitration in certain cases between Jews which are more suited for arbitration than the Public Courts".[55] Its guiding light in policy was to preserve the good name of the community, and the following is a typical illustration of why they preferred to keep certain things out of the courts: "there are certain aspects of this matter (about poor business dealings at Messrs Goldman of Houndsditch) which appear likely to affect the good name of the community." [56]

For example between November 1945 and February 1946, broadly the period of our strike, they heard 24 cases of which five were noted as between Jew and Jew. In the two years 1945 to 1946 they dealt with 270 cases of which two were specifically trade union disputes and one was with the tailoring union in the Sterling Rubber Company.[57]

One particular aspect of all of this that is relevant here was how best to deal with the allegation that Jewish employers were 'bad' employers. Commonplace ideas were that Jewish business regularly undercut non-Jewish business and they used sweated labour. So when the Deputies found evidence they tried to stop it. In the correspondence files for 1938 a letter from the Plumbers' and Glaziers' Union sent to the Board a list of Jewish owned companies who paid glaziers "at a rate lower than that recognized by the Trade Union concerned". In 1936 a Mr. Lindler, a retired furniture dealer in London's East End, "thinks that Jews are much maligned down

[54] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letter, April 27th 1936: from NUTGW to TUC refers to a meeting that had taken place between the RPGMA and the Board of Deputies.
[55] Lond Met: Board of Deputies, ref, ACC/3121/E/03/074/1 Arbitration and Conciliation Correspondence, 1936 – 1940, letter 16th June, 1939.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Sterling Rubber was one of the factories involved in the 1945 strike.

there and is willing to pay a substantial sum to any charity Mr. Laski wishes to name if he can give him an example of a Jewish sweatshop".[58]

This concern is also evident about the rubber-proofed industry in Manchester. A 1937 report headed "Matters which have been the subject of complaint against Jews", had as the lead item, "Conditions of employment in the waterproof trade in Manchester", and we are told that there was sweating, and that "the matter was adjusted after prolonged negotiations, but that the trouble has recently broken out again".[59] All this resulted in the owners of the leading factories in the RPGMA, on the one hand wanting to be recognised as good, modern employers, whilst on the other to always be under pressure from small companies undercutting them. This was added reason for the RPGMA to establish a regulatory framework with a Wages Council.

Notwithstanding these issues, the political framework provided the WGWU with opportunity for improvement. Though strikes were illegal by Defence Order 1305 there were few prosecutions as Fishman notes, "The Order's provisions which made striking a criminal offence, were not intended to be used."[60] Disputes were obliged to go to the National Arbitration Tribunal and, whilst this often did not endorse a union case, it did seem to be regarded as a worthwhile venture for the WGWU. War time, tri-partite 'Production Committees' gave unions a sense of importance and an expectation of consultation. The utility clothing scheme provided more secure employment and Essential Work Orders controlled the labour market. From the union point of view, if strikes had reaped benefit in the depression years, how much more opportune was it from the perspective of the summer of 1945. The European war had only just ended in May, and the 1945 election landslide was actually on July 5th.

There were also economic opportunities. At the end of the war employers were constrained by serious labour shortages in essential industries. The waterproof

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[58] Lond Met: Board of Deputies,ref, ACC/3121/E/03/074/1 Arbitration and Conciliation Correspondence, 1936 – 1940, letter from Plumbing and Glaziers Union, June 27th , 1938 and note, November 16th, 1936.

[59] Lond Met: Board of Deputies,ref, ACC/3121/E/03/074/1 Arbitration and Conciliation Correspondence, 1936 – 1940, report, January 27th, 1937.

[60] See Nina Fishman, 'A vital element in British Industrial Relations: A Reassessment of Order 1305, 1940 -51, p. 44. Also, James A. Jaffe, 'The Ambiguities of Compulsory Arbitration and the wartime experience of Order 1305, p.10 in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* in no. 8,(1999), and no. 15, (2003).

industry was an essential industry due to its role supplying military clothing. Other unions were pushing limits too. Clegg refers to 1944 as a mini strike-wave.[61] A national gas strike, which was also supported in Manchester, ran concurrently with the waterproof strike and was well reported.[62] This buoyant mood was backed up by the fact that during the war, many people's wages did increase faster than inflation.[63] It was also a time of generally increasing union density.[64]

A long gestation

In 1934 a new Price List was agreed with the union which provoked such opposition amongst the membership against the then leadership that a rank and file 'Provisional Executive Committee' was formed. This price list apparently abolished some significant bonuses paid to machinists and finishers and according to the union, resulted in people losing pay.[65] The provisional committee was in existence at least from May until November 1934, and the upshot was a new leadership and a new union constitution.[66] The new executive reduced the pay of the then general secretary, Mr. Fogarty, from £8 weekly to £5 weekly.[67] The cumulative outcome of this event was increased self confidence within the union to act independently and to challenge the RPGMA. The union established a solid tradition of sustained mobilisation and a tenacious opposition to any attempt, from factory owners or from other unions, to undercut agreed rates. Thus the foundations for the 1945/6 strike were laid.

A complex of events followed between 1935 and 1937. The new leadership supported a nine month strike at a few factories whose owners undercut even the despised 1934 agreement. Although the strike did not obtain payment of these rates, the union regarded the disputes as a victory because its membership doubled and the number of

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[61] Clegg, H, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, Vol 3, 1934 – 1951, p.256
[62] Colindale: *Manchester Evening News*, November 29th 1945. p.2. Centre-page piece headed 'Why are they striking?' Gas, docks and waterproof workers are mentioned.
[63] Taylor, R, *The Trade Union Question in British Politics*, (Oxford, 1993), p.20.
[64] Cronin, J, E, *Labour and Society in Britain*, 1918 – 1979', (London, 1984), p.116.
[65] MRC: MSS 222/WG/3/1, April 1937 – October 1952, memorandum to NAT No.72, 15th Jan 1941.
[66] Various documents through light on this event. See: MRC: MSS292/91/934, TUC files 1925 – 1936, a TUC report about it June 1934; WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, Communist Party Leaflet pledging support for the Provisional Committee; and Jewish Museum Manchester, Waterproof *Garment Workers Bulletin* published by the Provisional Committee in November 1934.
[67] MRC: MSS292/91/934, TUC files 1925 – 1936, letter from Mr.Fogarty to TUC 27th February 1936

factories that were union shops, increased from 13 to 60.[68] As a result, undercutting emerged as a key mobilising issue.

This long strike exacerbated the divisions amongst the employers. Mr. Satinoff of The London Waterproof Company, one of the struck factories, decided to take on the union and tried to set up a rival manufacturers' association. At the same time another manufacturer sacked its WGWU members. This was Moxons, described by the RPGMA as "one of their chief competitors"[69], and with a reputation as far as the waterproof union was concerned, of "always known in the trade to be paying low wages".[70]

Rather than have no union members at Moxon, the WGWU agreed that Moxon workers could join the NUTGW on condition they were paid the 1934 List rates. However the WGWU declared that the Moxon's workers were paid less than the List rate and a TUC disputes hearing ensued. This resulted in the TUC urging NUTGW to "assure themselves that they are abiding by good trade union practice in not undercutting recognised Trade Union standards operated in a district by the majority of reputable employers"[71]. Relations between the two unions deteriorated.

Later in 1935, it transpired that the NUTGW had recruited London Waterproof Company workers who had been expelled from the WGWU because they had broken the strike there. Another TUC disputes hearing determined "negotiations between the two organisations which shall take place within two months of the date of this award for the purpose of examining the closest possible measure of unity."[72]

The record is not quite clear as to what action the NUTGW took, but what is clear is that the WGWU were not satisfied. In 1937 they told the NUTGW that, "no further progress can be made on the question of amalgamation".[73] They quoted the NUTGW failure to abide by the terms of the 1936 TUC Dispute Committee decision as their reason.

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[68] WCM Lib: WGWU executive minutes, General Meeting, July, 1935.
[69] MRC: MSS 292/85/121- 2,7
[70] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, 'TUC Enquiry, June 19th, 1935.
[71] MRC:: MSS 292/85/121- 2,7, TUC Disputes Committee Case no.111, July 8th, 1935
[72] MRC:: MSS 292/85/127,TUC Disputes Committee Case no.116, February 5th,1936
[73] MRC: MSS 292/82.40/2 Letter from WGWTU to NUTGW, 10th August, 1937.

These events did not go unnoticed by the employers' association. At first the RPGMA regarded the episode as an opportunity to switch their collective bargaining partners from the WGWU to the NUTGW. Hyman Weinberg, the RPGMA chairman, wrote to the WGWU complaining that the union had not been able to prevent Moxon's undercutting agreed rates,[74] but that the workers there had nevertheless "been able to secure Trade Union protection and its implications on a basis of wages considerably lower (per capita) than those insisted on by your union". They went on to threaten that "they (RPGMA) should have the choice of employing members in the lower paid union".[75]

Once the amalgamation discussions were under way the RPGMA chose to delay negotiations with the WGWU in the hope they could avoid any agreement that bound them to the Manchester Agreement. So started a very long trail of delay that produced so much union frustration, it was cited by the union as a major reason for the 1945 strike.

Following their withdrawal in 1937 from the amalgamation discussions, the WGWU submitted a confident claim to replace the 1934 price list. This was rejected in 1937, provoking a four week strike which resulted in a 12 and a half percent increase on the 1934 rates. A condition of settlement was that "a Joint Negotiating Committee shall be set up immediately to adjust and settle the details of a new Price List".[76] However more delay ensued and in March 1938 the RPGMA agreed to record that the Joint Negotiation Committee set up in 1937 "shall make every effort to complete and agree by October 31st 1938 the new price list". [77]

The amalgamation discussions restarted in 1939, only to founder again. The WGWU would not advance the amalgamation discussions unless they cleared up "certain difficulties" in completing negotiation (with the RPGMA) of the new price list before

[74] This is an example of the odd relationship referred to earlier in this chapter where it appears that the RPGMA expect WGWU to use leverage to enforce agreements where RPGMA cannot.
[75] MRC: MSS 292/85/121- 2,7, letter March 15th, 1935.
[76] MRC: MSS 222/WG/3/1, Memorandum on union case, 15th January, 1941.
[77] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letter, March 16th, 1938.

the amalgamation.[78] The RPGMA would not advance the new price list negotiations stating that they were "agreeable to a new agreement and Price List being negotiated subsequent to the amalgamation of your union with the TGWU" .[79] In March 1939 some of the factories in the RPGMA agreed to complete negotiations within another twelve months, but of course all this was interrupted by the war.

The amalgamation, had it taken place, would have provided the employers' association with the opportunity to establish a Wages Council in the industry thus giving them more clout with their own members and with government. By 1945 this issue was much more pressing because of the need to re-establish export markets. It would also have provided the NUTGW with several thousand new members and removed what must have been, judging from the inter-union correspondence, a thorn in its side. The losers would be the WGWU. Their organisation, their long protected rights to very detailed debate with employers over exactly what work was done,[80] and how much pay each part was worth, and their 'Manchester Agreement' were all in jeopardy.

During the war, legislation such as the minimum guarantee in the Essential Work Orders, plus layers of bonus payments for extra government orders for military waterproof clothing, and payments for cost of living, effectively strengthened the 'Manchester Agreement'. This meant that where workers were concentrated in a particular factory under the 'concentration' scheme discussed above, they were paid legally enforced rates based on existing agreements and could not leave, or be sacked without permission from the Ministry of Labour. It seems plausible that a number of the companies in the RPGMA were concentrated and were unable to alter the pay conditions of labour. Stewart and Hunter record that the NUTGW made bargaining gains during the war keeping pace with other industries and with inflation,[81] and it would seem likely that the same would have been the case for WGWU. The effect of concentration and essential work orders was likely to have increased WGWU

[78] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letter , January 11th, 1939.
[79] MRC: MSS 222/WG/3/1, letter, 6th March 1939.
[80] WCM Lib: WGWU, executive records, committee minutes May 11th, 1946 refers to the union having discussions with a company where they were not recognised and state that they would not interfere in the 'methods of manufacture', nor restrict the use of certain machines.
[81] Stewart and Hunter, *The Needle is Threaded,* (1964), p. 210.

commitment to their agreement whilst decreasing RPGMA commitment to it and this was likely to make any strike more difficult to resolve.

The WGWU continued to complain about undercutting in the trade, and the NUTGW responded by pointing to Tribunal cases they had taken to establish parity with the waterproof workers' union in 1943.[82] However in both cases the Tribunal ruled that paying Manchester rates outside the Manchester environs flouted the Fair Wages Resolution.

In this way an opportunity arose for the RPGMA to unhook itself from the 'Manchester Agreement'. The next undercutting case to surface in the row between the two unions was at Gill & Co of Bradford. The Gill case is interesting because Gill was a member of the RPGMA, and the latter supported the company in its claim *not* to pay the Manchester rates.

In March 1944 the WGWU complained[83] that NUTGW waterproof workers were being paid less than the agreed rates at Gill & Co of Bradford. In characteristic response their May conference considered that the RPGMA were in "flagrant breach" of the joint agreement to which it was a signatory.[84] In accordance with the first TUC disputes committee mandate, the NUTGW took Gill to a Tribunal. The RPGMA presented a vigorous case at the National Arbitration Tribunal that not only was the Manchester rate thoroughly excessive, but that very few employers paid it. They gave evidence to show significant differences in production costs as between Gill & Co, and those firms in the Manchester Agreement. The labour cost for a seamen's exposure suit was 2s–8d in Gill's at Bradford, and 4s-10d according to the Manchester Agreement, and for an overall flying suit, 6s–8d in Bradford and 9s under the Agreement.[85] These are stark differences and may have been exaggerated to make the point that Manchester employers were expected to pay unfairly high rates.

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[82] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, NAT Awards 428 and 429 (brought by the TGW) deny Scottish workers parity with Manchester.
[83] WCM Lib: WGWU, Microfilm, letter WGWU to TUC, 27th March 1944 to complain about TGW members working at Gill & Co for less than the Manchester agreed rates.
[84] WCM Lib: WGWU, Annual Conference Minutes, July 1944.
[85] WCM Lib: WGWU, Microrofilm, letter TGW to WGWU, 13th January, 1944.

The same item of evidence notes that the RPGMA told the tribunal it had 104 members of whom (they claimed)[86] only 23 paid the agreed union rate. Unsurprisingly the Tribunal decided on August 9th 1944 in the RPGMA's favour, on the basis that the Manchester agreement applied only to Manchester.[87] Not wishing to confront the WGWU directly, RPGMA used this opportunity to undermine their agreement. They made this aim quite clear, "...Association desire uniformity through a Trade Board not necessarily that of Manchester".[88] The Gill case was the last significant exchange between all three parties - WGWU, NUTGW, and the RPGMA - before the 1945 strike. It was felt keenly by WGWU members who passed motions at their 1944 conference condemning the Arbitration ruling and calling again for a new piece and time rate agreement.[89]

The heart of the Gill case was the fundamental issue of uneven pay rates in the industry. The WGWU read the case as a reason to enforce the Price List, the RPGMA saw it as a reason to abandon the List in favour of a Wages Board. These two issues were also at the heart of the six week strike.

The Gill case tribunal decision was in early August, 1944 and the RPGMA tried again to exploit differences between the two unions to establish a Wages Council. By September 9th, 1944 the WGWU executive records that it had been invited by the RPGMA to attend a joint conference to discuss setting up a Trade Board. Reference in the minute to a letter from the NUTGW about the event suggests they were also to be involved. The WGWU executive agree to attend, but with extreme caution, "without committing itself to the principle of a Trade Board."[90] By September 21st there were further complaints from WGWU to NUTGW of the latter's members doing work for less than the WGWU agreed rate.[91] On October 7th, 1944 the WGWU executive agree

[86] The Waterproof union disagreed these figures. WCM Lib: Microfilm, letters September 11th, October 5th and October 10th between RPGMA, WGWU and TGW.
[87] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, National Arbitration Award No 610, August 9th 1944.
[88] WCM Lib: WGWU, Microfilm, letter TGW to WGWTU 10th October 1944, quoting from a telegram presented to the Gill & Co Tribunal hearing.
[89] WCM Lib., WGWU Conference minutes, July 1st, 1944.
[90] WCM Lib: WGWU executive minutes, September 9th, 1944.
[91] WCM Lib: WGWU microfilm, Reel Two, 'Correspondence and other papers (general) of WGWU, 1934 – 1975', letter WGWU to TGW, September 21st, 1944.

to submit another pay claim. This is submitted in November, but evinces no response from the RPGMA until March 1945 when it was almost entirely rejected.[92]

There seems to have been a trail here whereby the RPGMA used the Gill case to pressure WGWU to accept a Trade Board. The NUTGW seem also to have been willing to accept this initiative, not surprisingly as they would gain from it. WGWU responded as before, putting their own pay claim in for "amendment of anomalies in the standard (1934) Price List", [93] and expecting, but not getting negotiations on it. However, by 1945 the political and economic landscape, especially the labour shortage, created new opportunities for WGWU to make progress.

The WGWU leadership's next strategy was to win the support of a Mr. Sheldon. He was a Regional Industrial Relations Officer working from the Manchester office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service. He was part of a team of government conciliators set up by the 1919 Industrial Courts Act which incorporated the 1896 Conciliation Act. [94]

In February 1945, after Mr. Sheldon had intervened, the union were invited by the RPGMA to submit an "alternative" claim. The union submitted an additional claim the same month rather than what might be interpreted as an alternative. It included time and female rates of pay. [95] Both this and the November 1944 claim went to arbitration, resulting in some improvement to the female rate. But the key issue of the 1934 price list amendment was referred back by the Arbitration Tribunal in May 1945, to "be settled by negotiation between the parties".[96] The Arbitration award had re-enforced the July 1937 agreement to jointly renegotiate the 1934 pay agreement.

Between February and October 1945, the employers' association responses to these several claims created a climate of delay and confusion that generated more hostility. In February 1945, the union record that "although mandated to refuse the claim, they,

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[92] WCM Lib: WGWU executive minutes, October 7th, 1944, and 12th March, 1945.
[93] WCM Lib: WGWU, executive minutes, Feb 10th 1945.
[94] Ian G. Sharp, *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration in Great Britain,* (London, 1950), p. 367/8.
[95] WCM Lib: WGWU, executive minutes, Feb 10th 1945.
[96] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, NAT Award 734.

(the RPGMA), were prepared to take the matter back for review".[97] In June they agreed to meet the union and then, according to the union record, refused to discuss the one issue the union expected the meeting to be about.[98]

By mid-July union patience was running out and the leadership turned again to Sheldon, seemingly regarding him as a resource to be used. This attitude was not surprising given the way in which the war time essential orders had tended to support the Manchester Agreement, at least within Manchester, if not beyond. They appealed to him to confirm the May Tribunal decision to refer the Price List issues back to the two parties, and he obliged.[99] Their phraseology in a letter to the RPGMA on July 17th hinted at direct action. They referred to "discontent in the factories"; "a feeling of soreness at the fact that your Association twice arranged joint meetings to negotiate the List of items tabled, and then flatly refused to open negotiations on the List"; and the RPGMA's "persistent unwillingness...to voluntarily concede anything".[100]

The union considered that the RPGMA had not tried to negotiate on the November 1944 claim, neither had they progressed the anomalies as instructed by the Tribunal in May, 1945. It appears from the correspondence that the National Arbitration Tribunal confirmed that the RPGMA were expected to have regard to the November 1944 claim in their deliberations about a new price list and, as a result of this outside pressure, RPGMA wrote on August 1st to say they would prepare a new price list, although they did not say by when.[101] This prompted WGWU to set a deadline of the end of September which appears to have been endorsed by Sheldon as his office asked the union to be "kept informed about the September deadline".[102] The RPGMA finally produced the list on October 18th; it received short shrift from the union and was rejected the next day. Plans were put in hand for strike action.

On October 20th the union executive made a new claim that set a popular, mobilising agenda. It incorporated many factory branch motions carried at the July 1945

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[97] WCM Lib: WGWU, executive minutes, 10th February, 1945.
[98] WCM Lib: WGWU, executive minutes, June 30th, 1945
[99] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letters between WGWTU and RIRO, July 11th and July 13th, 1945.
[100] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letters 17th July 1945.
[101] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letters 13th July, 1st August, 1945.
[102] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter 22nd August 1945.

conference including a 25 percent increase on basic piece and time rates; reduction of the working week from 47 to 44 hours; and more beneficial overtime and tea-break payments. The union leadership recognised the need to maintain its democratic credentials with its activist members. This was important for sustaining mobilisation. Accordingly they included in the claim, a demand for recognition of factory steward committees, following in the footsteps of the rather better organised sectors, such as engineering.[103] They demanded a response from the employers by the end of October, i.e. a few days later, writing in a militant mood on October 22nd, "I am directed to inform you that the deliberate procrastination on your part in regard to the earlier claim and the nature of the counter-offer you have tabled, dispenses this Trade Union from any obligation under clause 10 of the joint agreement 16th March, 1939."[104]

The 1945/6 strike

The WGWU were good at sustaining mobilisation. When members flagged, the strike committee introduced coercive measures to keep up the pressure. The executive's principal strategy was to conclude return-to-work agreements for those factories whose owners were willing to concede the entire union claim, and it did persuade a number of factory owners to capitulate, but it did not produce the hoped for flood of capitulations, neither did it appear to have much influence on the RPGMA's actions. However, union persistence in the strike did ensure Sheldon again became involved, and eventually a reasonable settlement was reached.

Arrangements to mobilise for a strike started in earnest. The WGWU wrote to their solicitors the same day to seek advice about the possible penalties to officers, to strikers and to union funds.[105] Then they sent out letters to all their stewards. These letters were a clever piece of mobilising propaganda. First they announced an all-members' meeting and chose to have this in the middle of the week at peak production time, mid-morning, no doubt to cause maximum disruption to production and to encourage a militant attitude from members. It was on Wednesday, November

[103] Alan McKinley and Joseph Melling, ' The Shop Floor Politics of Productivity: Work, Power and Authority relations in British engineering, 1945 -57' in Allan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy ed. *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics* (Aldershot, 1999).
[104] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter 22nd October, 1945.
[105] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter 22nd October, 1945 to Messrs Charles Howard and Co.

7th at 10.30 a.m.[106] They set up arrangements for stewards to distribute hand bills; they generated a positive approach to the forthcoming action by drawing attention to a recent negotiating success about tea-breaks. Next they reminded stewards about a particular work rule which was to be adhered to, to stiffen resolve pending the strike: "In such cases, where garments have to be marked by the Machinists or Makers, this should not be done unless the firm agrees to the payment of 1d per garment". [107] These were the actions of a union expecting a sustained, widespread strike.

However it was evident from the start that the WGWU paid a price for their isolation. Whereas the other two strikes studied here were offered premises for strikers' and strike committees to meet in, the WGWU paid one guinea per day for use of the British Legion as a strike committee HQ, and £11 for the hire of the main hall for strike rallies.[108]

The RPGMA's response to the possibility of action was one of apparent shock. They commented about the time limit, "for some inscrutable reason you give a time limit to these demands which you know would exclude my Association from consultations with its member firms".[109] They knew their disunited state would make any coordinated response a long process. This was followed on October 30th with another letter which clearly articulated their broader aim to end the Manchester Agreement. "It is wrong to expect a small number of employers, through an agreement with you, to be obliged to pay rates that are not obligatory to other manufacturers, and particularly where such an agreement is regarded as only being of a local character."[110]

The RPGMA set their terms of negotiation: "We have asked for your support in making approaches for the rates and conditions which exist between us to be made the subject of a Minimum Trade Board Act, and until such is the case, my members at the general meeting expressed their determination to resist all and any claim which will

[106] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, union circular to stewards, November 2nd, 1945.
[107] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, union circular to stewards, November 2nd, 1945.
[108] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letters from the British Legion and Houndsworth Hall confirming booking fees, November 19th, 1945.
[109] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, RPGMA letter, October 24th, 1945.
[110] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, RPGMA letter, October 30th, 1945.

impose a disadvantage on what perhaps is a minority of manufacturers, measured by a national scale.[111]

The employers were under pressure in the market for government de-mob contracts and their obligation to the Manchester Agreement probably resulted in some orders going to those factories outside of Manchester, operating with lower labour costs. Gill and Co were just such an example.

The union meeting on November 7th was a success. This was also a mobilising meeting. A show-of-hands vote was taken and the union general secretary, Mr. Henry, was able to tell the RPGMA that there were only two dissenting voices. A strike committee (which included a few women) was elected comprising at least one executive member and one trustee. Pickets were organised and two other meetings fixed for the Friday and Saturday of the same week.[112]

The WGWU also explained to the RPGMA in a long letter on October 31st why they were going on strike. Three extracts are reproduced here. Frustration with the delays generated the perception that the RPGMA were not sincere in their desire to resolve the long outstanding issue of the 1934 price list, and that the only reason they had bothered to meet the union, was the insistence of the Regional Industrial Relations Officer.

> (1)"I have had to draw your Executive's attention to the weeks and months delay in dealing with matters raised by this Trade Union and have stated that the inference drawn is that labour questions are of no consequence to your Association such matters being treated with apparent contempt".
>
> (2)"your Association has not been willing to co-operate in matters which would normally be expected to be of mutual concern", and the Association, "resisted putting into operation the terms of the award, until, after months of abortive discussion, writs were about to be issued in order to force the implementation of the award".

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[111] Ibid.

[112] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, handwritten note on the back of a handbill for the November meeting records the names of those on the strike committee and its' immediate tasks. Cross checking the names against those recorded as present on the minutes of union Executive committee meetings showed a couple of names repeated, one of which was annotated as trustee.

(3)"...it was only after persistent pressure by the Industrial Relations Officer that a meeting was held on January 11th".[113]

At this stage the union seem to have been in control of timing. They took from November 7th to November 14th to organise a factory based ballot which endorsed the strike. It should not be supposed that there was no opposition to action. The strike ballot issued 1,497 ballot papers. 1,478 were returned of which 1,091 were in favour and 283 against. 92 were returned blank and 12 were spoiled. That is nearly twenty per cent in opposition – a significant minority.[114]

The union had had positive signals before the strike started. On November 13th one of the local firms that had been balloted for strike, Hutchinson Weatherproof, wrote to the union offering to "operate the terms of your claim in its entirety".[115] On November 14th and 16th , the RPGMA met the union under the auspices of Sheldon and according to the union record, after first asserting they could not improve their offer, doubled it from 5 to 10 per cent for piece rates two days later on November 16th.[116] As a result of Hutchinson's action, the executive agreed to take the unusual step of permitting the Hutchinson's workers to return to work [117] because, as they later explained to the strike committee, "they wanted to raise a scare among the employers about loss of labour."[118] Around this time essential work orders were in the process of being rescinded and it is possible that the WGWU leadership considered this might threaten their terms and conditions and may have been an added reason to secure individual company agreements to their claim.[119]

However, the RPGMA did not appear to be scared enough about the loss of labour to improve their offer again and on November 21st they wrote to the union setting out the terms of the November 16th offer.

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[113] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter October 31st, 1945.
[114] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter, Clerks Ltd who counted the ballot, 14th November, 1945.
[115] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter, Hutchinson Weatherproof, November 13th, 1945.
[116] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, Executive minutes, 17th November, 1945
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Colindale: Daily Worker, December 14th, 1945, p.4, refers to many EWO's being rescinded at this time.

A day before the strike had started, on November 23rd, the RPGMA posted up threatening notices in all the factories drawing attention to the strike's illegality. There are two conflicting reports about these notices. A copy of one fairly mild notice was sent by the RPGMA to the union as information about what had been sent out to all member firms. It set out the offer, drew attention to fact that the strike would be illegal, but said nothing about possible punishments.[120]

The second notice is only referred to in the Manchester Evening News, where it was reported that "The notices say that on summary conviction those concerned could be imprisoned for three months, or fined £100; and on conviction on indictment they would be liable to 2 years imprisonment or a £500 fine". [121] It may have been two different notices, the more provocative notice displayed by those factory owners who had all along taken a more robust line, such as The London Waterproof, or it may have been misrepresentation of one notice by the newspaper. It seems more likely to have been two different notices, if this was the case, it is more evidence of divisions amongst the employers over how to deal with the union.

The notices did not intimidate for at an evening meeting the same day, November 23rd, members rejected the new offer and attached their own condition that they "were not prepared to consider any offer which excluded the time rate workers".[122] The strike committee was set up from this meeting and a few days later some five days after the offer on November 26th, 1945, Henry formalised the members' rejection of it in a letter to the RPGMA. He did not mince words either, "no further proposals must be entertained which did not include both piece workers and time workers."[123]

Things continued to go well for the union. The strike committee met twice in a few days and enthusiastically organised picketing. On November 23rd, the first strike day another company Lang and Co, agreed to union terms, and the union sent its members back to work there too. [124] By November 28th , another two companies, Salkie and

[120] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter, from RPGMA to WGWU attaching notice, 22nd November, 1945.
[121] Colindale, *Manchester Evening News*, November 23rd, p.4.
[122] WCM Lib: WGWU executive note of members' meeting, November 23rd, 1945.
[123] WCM Lib: WGWU to RPGMA, November 26th, 1945.
[124] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter Lang and Co to Henry, November 23rd, 1945, and Henry's reply of the same date.

Stark Brothers had agreed, and similar deals were made with them. [125] There is minimal information about these employers. Lang and Co were not part of the RPGMA, however they were part of another linked association[126] as they indicated in their letter, "We are in complete sympathy with your demands, but we would not like this letter to prejudice our position with the Rubber Proofed Garment Manufacturers' Association, or the North West Association of which we are members. We trust this letter will be treated in strictest confidence."[127] Stark Bros appears as signatory to the agreements between the RPGMA and the WGWU.[128]

Most of these companies put a caveat in their memorandum of agreement to say "It is understood, that in the event of the final settlement between your union and the Employers' Association being inferior to the foregoing, this firm shall be entitled to review the foregoing rates and conditions accordingly",[129] implying they were not agreeing to a permanent change. The most obvious explanation for these companies' behaviour is that they felt little obligation to the RPGMA position, even where they were either members of it, or allied to its agreements as in two cases. It also indicates their willingness to out-compete other companies by promising faster delivery in the rush to secure government contracts.

Although the union appeared to have none of the usual solidarity support from other unions a private individual, of whom no other details are known, Robert Pearson, [130] loaned the union use of his car from November 30th , to deal with the problem of transporting the cash for strike pay around the forty or more factories.[131] They arranged to pay strike pay in a full rota, which took them to Newton Heath, Stalybridge, Hyde, Ardwick, Pendleton and Salford, as well as two locations in central Manchester. It is however, another indication of their isolation; what solidarity was in evidence came from an individual, not an institutional source.

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[125] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letters L. A. Salkie, November 27th, and Stark Brothers, November 28th, 1945, to Henry.
[126] MRC: MSS222/WG/3/1, a note appended to an agreement with the Waterproof Union in 1937 states that the agreement also covers firms in the North West Association.
[127] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter, from B Lang and Co, November 23rd, 1945.
[128] MRC: MSS222/WG/3/1, the archive file contains several copies of agreements between the association and the union between 1937 and 1952.
[129] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, this particular wording was to be found on the correspondence from Hutchinson and Barlow.
[130] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letter from Mr. Henry, 30th November, 1945.
[131] WCM Lib: other records, list of struck factories and strike-pay rota , 28th November, 1945.

Some 155 NUTGW members did join the strike. [132] There is no indication as to why; it made the relationship between the two unions worse because the NUTGW expected it would lead to their inclusion in negotiations, but the WGWU would not agree. A few months prior to the strike the NUTGW and the RPGMA were negotiating an agreement to cover these members in the industry, and it seems from the record that these discussions were still ongoing when WGWU strike was looming. [133] It is possible that in these circumstances the NUTGW was especially keen to be involved in the strike negotiations. They were careful to first obtain explicit agreement from the RPGMA (and Sheldon) before writing to the WGWU "I have written on similar lines to the RPGMA...who see no objection to this course (inclusion in negotiations) being adopted."[134]

Around this time, that is the end of the first week of strike, some concerns began to emerge on the union side. Eventually, as no more companies came forward to capitulate, and the RPGMA made no further offer, these concerns gathered momentum. At first they were mere hints alongside an optimistic outlook. The second and third strike committee meetings on November 26th and 28th, and the full steward council meeting on November 27th, whilst congratulating themselves on solid support and well organised pickets, raised the concern that "Hutchinson have sub-contracted from union shops and are suspected of still doing this" and the consideration "will the union penalise those strikers who were able but failed to do their picket duty." Henry answered the concern that "as long as any firm pays the rate we ask for,...it was acceptable to us". [135] Both the concern and the consideration were repeated as the strike lengthened.

The first week of the strike ended in a stand-off. The RPGMA appeared to be unmoved by the new company capitulations. Like the WGWU they also delayed, waiting until November 28th to answer Henry's November 21st letter. The RPGMA made no mention of the union reference to time rates and instead drove home the

[132] MRC: MSS192/T NUTGW Executive Board minutes, December 20th, 1945.
[133] MRC: MSS192/T NUTGW Executive Board minutes, March, April and May 1945.
[134] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letters between NUTGW and WGWU, November 26th, 27th, and 30th, 1945.
[135] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, November 26th, 28th, and Steward Council minutes, November 26th, 1945.

importance of verbal conditions to their November 16th offer. The RPGMA were very explicit.

> "The Association are not prepared to discuss any alteration of rates, unless the trade union is prepared to give an undertaking that it will be an equal and joint partner with our Association, in an approach to the appropriate Department for the establishment of a Wages Council, or such other instrument whose purpose is to make wage rates and conditions agreed upon in an industry, operative and obligatory in that industry, throughout the country."[136]

Nevertheless they still gave some room for optimism in that they also undertook to "to complete a new (Price) list, the ultimate list being an agreed list".[137] In this they were offering no more than had already been secured from them in 1937, and re-enforced by the recent NAT Award. However they also effectively broke off the immediate possibility of discussion "we see no useful purpose at the moment in continuing correspondence on this matter." The WGWU responded in kind, taking the view the current situation was "the result of a regular exhibition during the past three years by your Association, of utter contempt and disregard to negotiations on labour relations."[138] Their frustration had now crystallized into a more general critique of RPGMA industrial relations.

As the strike continued into December, the strike committee again voiced its concerns and consideration. Strike committee minutes on November 29th, December 3rd and December 4th, repeated the view that strikers who failed to picket should be punished, and that the firms where people had been directed back to work were taking in struck work. Decisions taken in respect of striking members appear heavy-handed. By December 4th, the strike committee had affirmed its decision to deny strike pay to strikers who failed picket duty; asked the steward council to replace people who missed two consecutive strike committee meetings; criticised the fact that "odd haphazard reports (from stewards) were made in a casual way"; determined that reports should be submitted daily by 11.00a.m.; felt stewards should take "some share of the strike activity", "stewards should sign in daily" and, that "not all stewards were

[136] WCM Lib: other records, letter from RPGMA to the WGWU, November 21st, 1945.
[137] Ibid.
[138] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, Letters from RPGMA to WGWU and vice versa, November 28th, 1945.

taking part in the various jobs". Finally they expressed concern about "strikers who thought they could find other jobs while on strike."[139] A litany of worries!

Despite all the obvious divisions amongst strikers caused by the unusual executive policy to settle with individual firms, the strategy still appeared to be effective; three more companies declared their willingness to settle the entire union claim in the first week of December.[140] The WGWU felt their strategy to be working and they told the Manchester Guardian on December 6th "An official of the union was hopeful that other firms would follow suit later today".[141] Appearances however, could be deceiving for the capitulations seemed to make no difference to the RPGMA who wrote to the union on December 5th , stating "...a resumption of work by all your members must therefore precede any further negotiations."[142]

Despite the increasing stalemate, it was not the case that people drifted back to work; a members' meeting on December 10th registered only 3 votes in opposition to the strike, though we are not told how many were there.[143] The dispute was bringing in new members and new union shops, and the policy of permitting certain factories to work allowed a much needed weekly levy of 10s (for men), and 7-6d (for women), to be collected.

However, there does seem to have been some reduction in union confidence as the second week of December became the third. The heavy handed approach to strikers became more obviously coercive. Having agreed to punish strikers who failed to picket, a notice was sent out to stewards on December 5th, the opening paragraph of which asked stewards "to keep a written rota of members failing to fulfill picket duty...Members should be warned that failure to participate in picket duty may result in their loss of dispute benefit."[144] The same notice also hinted at worries about picket

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[139] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, November 29th, December 3rd and 4th, 1945.
[140] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, Jacobs, Barlow and Alexander on December 3rd, 5th, the last is undated.
[141] Colindale, *Manchester Evening News*, December 6th, 1945, p. 4. N.B. I understand there was a shortage of newsprint paper at this time and this may partly explain the poor news coverage of this strike compared to the other two.
[142] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, letter RPGMA to WGWU, December 5th, 1945.
[143] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, meeting record, December 10th, 1945.
[144] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, Notice to Stewards, December 5th, 1945.

line behaviour. Pickets "must not molest even as far as putting a 'friendly' hand on the shoulder of a person, nor must they use the term 'blackleg'. They may peacefully persuade by walking alongside the person whom they wish to desist from striking."[145] The threat to non picketing strikers was repeated in a further notice on December 17th.[146]

Executive strategy, initially prompted by the opportunity presented to them when Hutchinsons first capitulated, was bound to generate divisions within the strike. The only way the strike committee could deal with this, and maintain mobilisation, was to use coercion. By the December 12th strike committee meeting, one non-picketing striker had been summonsed to interview to explain himself "...if the picket at Bye's fails in (to) turn up on Thursday, he be invited to this committee to explain".[147] There were more complaints on the committee about the "lack of reporting of stewards"... and "laxity of stewards". By this stage there appeared to be some tension between the committee and others, possibly due to their decision to fine non picketers. They wanted to prevent others knowing who had said what on the strike committee and unanimously agreed, "in presenting reports either outside or on this committee, committee members' names should not be mentioned."[148]

Lack of progress with the RPGMA meant the strike committee grew more uneasy about the effectiveness of the executive strategy to send certain people back to work. Rumours persisted that Hutchinsons were in cohorts with other struck companies to process blacked work. Another company who had signed the agreement letter, Jacobs, was also mentioned in this connection. Langs, who also had union permission to work, had poached all bar one of the employees at a struck firm, Victory Works.

This may have exacerbated labour shortage, but it also undermined the strike. The strike committee decided to "ask the EC to reconsider decision to allow work from shops on dispute to be made by our members in those shops which have signed."[149] This did not give them the response they desired and at their December 17th meeting,

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[145] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, union circular, 5th December, 1945.
[146] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, union circular, 17th December, 1945.
[147] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, December 12th, 1945.
[148] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, December 11th and 12th, 1945.
[149] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, December 12th, 1945.

they decided to "discuss with the EC all outstanding points of disagreement."[150] They received an energetic put-down by Henry, who told them at their meeting on December 19th that "Union policy was not part of the Strike Committee's business, but that the EC wanted harmonious relations with this committee"[151] and that they "had no evidence from the strike committee that shops which had accepted the union's terms were making up work of shops in dispute". [152]

The union appeared not to approach any other unions for the usual solidarity hardship fund collections and it must be assumed that once on strike, official strike-pay was all people received. Except for the 155 NUTGW workers who had joined the strike, there is no other record of institutional solidarity. This imposed a heavy cost on union resources. There is no record of the dispute in the Manchester and Salford District Trades Council Annual Report for 1945 or 1946. There was no mention of the dispute in 'Labour's Northern Voice' for December 1945 though it mentioned several other groups of workers, nor in the Daily Worker, notwithstanding that some executive members and the full time organiser were active CP members.[153] There are no news reports of mass meetings attended by other unions' public speakers, of solidarity cash collections, of motions of support from elsewhere or of street rallies - all the usual ingredients of a strike. It is unclear why this was the case and it seems to be more likely that it was the WGWU choice, rather than that unions in dispute in 1945 did not generally put their case to the public.

The several references to money related issues in the second half of the strike strongly suggest that by this stage financing the continuation of the strike was now an issue. Strike committee minutes on December 14th and 17th complain "several strikers who paid the 5d contribution had received full strike pay", and by the next committee meeting it was agreed to ask the executive "to devise a system of paying strike pay which would cut out possible abuses." By December 19th, the last recorded strike

[150] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, December 17th, 1945.
[151] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, December 19th, 1945.
[152] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, December 12th, 1945.
[153] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, 'Pamphlets and leaflets of the CP, 1934 -- 1942', The name C. I. Harrison occurs in these records at CP events, and on WGWU strike committee minutes. Another name, M Lewis, is given as a WGWU delegate at the 1944 union conference.

committee minute, one view was that "an appeal to strikers be made to forgo strike pay if able to do so". It was defeated.[154]

It is difficult to gain a sense of the value of the 18 shilling weekly strike-pay as it was vastly more valuable to women on strike, than to men. [155] Weekly piece-rate earnings were around £5–4s–8d for men, and £3–4s–2d for women.[156] Also it does appear from the strike committee discussion, that there were different rates of union contribution, though it does not inform us whether these were different rates for women and men. However, it is quite likely they were, as differential rates based on gender, were commonplace at the time.

An absence of solidarity cash support probably increased the incentive to abandon the strike, or to seek alternative employment during the strike. This in turn increased the need for a coercive strike control policy to maintain support and, as strike progress faltered in mid-December, may have helped foreshorten the strike.

On December 20th 1945, Sheldon arranged a joint meeting that he chaired, and things began to move. The union executive noted that the meeting had taken place "due to the external intervention".[157] The strike was entering its fifth week and Sheldon was most probably concerned about the fact that it was continuing to so publicly flout Defence Regulation 1305, and that the production of waterproof, de-mob outfits was continuing to be interrupted in the winter time.

Things moved very quickly. On January 2nd the RPGMA met the union again and, according to the report made by Henry, the RPGMA "intimated that they had been instructed by a full members' meeting to adhere to their original offer."[158] There was no evidence of any involvement of the strike committee at these final negotiations, nor of them being given the opportunity to discuss the final offer before it was put to a members meeting. Their role seems to have ended.

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[154] WCM Lib: WGWU, other records, strike committee minutes, December 17th and 19th, 1945.
[155] Colindale: *Manchester Evening News*, December 6th, 1945, p.4.
[156] Colindale: *Manchester Evening News*, November 23rd, 1945, p.4.
[157] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm copy of a handwritten note of the General Secretary's statement to the members' meeting on January 4th, 1946.
[158] Ibid.

On the same day (January 2nd), Sheldon stated according to the union record, that "he was not prepared to see this dispute drag on indefinitely".[159] The Manchester Guardian duly reported the next day, in what seems to have been a rare press release from the union, that "deadlock continues at about 45 firms" and "2,200 still out on strike". Whilst this may have been an exaggeration, it does suggest there were still a lot of people on strike. The report also said that "Although the strike is illegal and notices were posted by employers, there were no prosecutions". [160] The report does not quote the union as its source, but it does seem likely that a report of this kind, seemingly aimed to threaten more action, would have been likely to have originated from the union.

The very next day a new offer was made, rather like the situation in mid-November. It met the union condition that there should be an increase in time rates (from no increase to 5s weekly for men and to 2s-6d weekly for women). The piece-rate offer increased from the 10 percent mid-strike offer to 12 and a half per cent. The union claim for six additional days' paid statutory holiday was accepted. The employers still insisted on union commitment to a joint approach to establish a wages council.[161]

The new Wages Council Bill had had its third reading in December 1945, and where the amalgamation had failed to provide the Association with an opportunity to link to the Trade Board schemes, this Act, brought in by the Labour Government, and supported by the TUC, would be a lot harder for the WGWU to ignore. As noted earlier, Sheldon was likely to have endorsed the idea, and have seen it as opportunity for compromise.

There is no direct evidence to explain why the RPGMA changed their minds from January 2nd to January 3rd. It cannot have been the extra impact of the strike. Certainly the RPGMA negotiators had strayed beyond their mandate in making the offer, for they openly told the union leaders that "there was not unanimity in making this offer

[159] Ibid.
[160] Colindale: *Manchester Evening News*, January 3rd, 1946, p. 5.
[161] WCM Lib: WGWU executive minutes 4th January, 1946.

which violated the terms of their mandate, and upon which agreement was to be sought from their members at a meeting on Tuesday, Jan 8th."[162]

A plausible explanation is that Sheldon leaned on both parties because he was embarrassed by the very public declaration in the newspaper that the strike was continuing with impunity, in spite of its clear illegality. Sheldon's comment about not letting the dispute drag on was made the same day as the newspaper report. In this situation he was faced either with bringing a prosecution, very much against the trend, and the chance the strike still continued, with all the detrimental affect on de-mob production which that entailed, or with encouraging an acceptable compromise.

It seems plausible that under pressure from Sheldon agreement was reached whereby WGWU accepted the wages council and the RPGMA paid some extra cash. This secured for the RPGMA a long held aim. It seems most likely that WGWU agreed to this because they knew they had run out of money to fund the strike.

On January 4th the union executive had exhausted all strike pay. They put this to members, leaving it to the strikers to decide what to do. They asked that members should "carefully consider the present offer", but added that "The EC feels that it must not influence a decision for or against the acceptance of the present offer, having regard to all the circumstances, particularly in view of the suspension of Dispute Benefit." Members decided to end the strike by 666 votes to 261 – a significant minority willing to take the risk to continue. [163] Thus 927 people voted at the end, compared to the 1,478 in the November ballot.[164] Even taking into account that some had quite clearly left the strike, and using Michelle Perrot's strike profiles as a guide, this seems to have been a strike with good solidarity throughout.[165]

So far as one can tell, the strike strategy paid some organisational dividends to the union. It continued to expand the number of union shops. Between the end of the

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[162] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm copy of a handwritten note of the General Secretaries statement to the members' meeting on January 4th, 1946.
[163] WCM Lib: WGWU, executive minutes, January 4th and members' meeting, also Jan 4th, 1946.
[164] WCM Lib: WGWU, executive minutes of members'meeting on Jan 4th, 1946.
[165] Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike – France 1871 – 1890*, (Leamington Spa, 1987), pp.99 – 101, see introduction for discussion about strike profiles.

strike and the end of 1946 a total of twelve new union shops were established.[166] In the first few days back at work in January, the WGWU complained about underpayment at the Fidler factory and at least some of it was acknowledged and put right.[167]

It took until June 1946 to finalise the new agreement, but the delays this time were mostly on the union side. Two issues had to be resolved. One arose from the Victory Works incident and is another example of the continuing weakness on the RPGMA's side. The association asked the union to persuade its members to leave the two factories they had joined during the strike (which had conceded the claim), and return to Victory works. The union did make contact but, bearing in mind their strategy during the strike to maximise the labour loss to those struck firms, it was not in their interests to pursue it. The workers themselves refused to go back to Victory Works and the factories they had joined were certainly not going to encourage them to leave.

As a result the RPGMA was still faced with the same problem of competing rates for labour. It responded by rewording the heading of the new agreement to restrict its application to only those companies present at the joint conference held by Sheldon at the strike's end. It was a de-facto recognition of their inability to oblige member companies to abide by the agreed rates.

Relations between the WGWU and the NUTGW continued as frosty as before. In the archive from 1949/50 is yet more evidence of rows – the WGWU proposed a formal agreement on demarcation and the NUTGW refused to consider it. The union did not finally amalgamate with the NUTGW until 1970.

Conclusion

WGWU cited the RPGMA's delay in renegotiating the 1934 pay agreement as their core grievance. This rationale worked to maintain strike solidarity but its complex and long-term development made it unlikely to contribute towards generating broader support. Between 1937 and 1939 the delay arose as part of a three-way interaction

[166] WCM Lib: WGWU, Executive minutes; see June, September & November 1946.
[167] WCM Lib: WGWU, microfilm, letters between WGWTU, RPGMA and Hyman Weinberg, Jan 7th, 11th & 22nd, 1946.

between the RPGMA, the NUTGW and the WGWU. WGWU would not discuss amalgamation with NUTGW until the RPGMA had concluded a new pay agreement, and the RPGMA delayed these negotiations pending the amalgamation negotiations. Stalemate ensued. RPGMA hoped the amalgamation would lead to the setting up of a Wages Council in the industry, this being their long term aim. This strategy was evident between 1937 and 1939 when the RPGMA had promised to renegotiate the agreement after strike action in 1937, but consistently delayed responses until interrupted by the war, and evident again when they made a dilatory and negative response to the November 1944 claim on the same broad issue. By the time they had finally settled down in August 1945, after prodding by the conciliation officer, to produce a new price list for negotiation, union patience was at an end.

From the WGWU viewpoint, militancy had paid dividends in the past, why not then in 1945, when the economic and political situation was vastly more favourable to them. They also felt vindicated by Sheldon's support.

They set about organising the strike with skill and gusto and were evidently well supported by members. However they did not stray beyond the more limited aim of halting production. They took their time: they first submitted another claim in October 1945 with a popular mobilising agenda constructed from the July 1945 annual conference; they set a very short timescale for the RPGMA to respond to this claim and, when the response came, rejected it and put in hand organisation for a strike. They took their time between the strike notice to the employers and the ballot, and between the ballot and the strike. They took their time too in responding to the first offer, confidently asserting their own conditions for time rates. They were of course pleased that 155 NUTGW members joined them, but how far this was solidarity, and how far lay-off is impossible to say. The WGWU felt so confident in their own ability to continue that they could turn their backs on the NUTGW request for inclusion in negotiations, thereby ensuring the RPGMA would have to deal with them alone.

The Hutchinson company capitulation to union demands a few days before the strike prompted the WGWU to attack the RPGMA at its weakest point by making a single factory agreement with Hutchinson which included people going back to work. In this way they aimed to encourage other companies to do the same and thus split the

employers. However it was insufficient to pay the dividends hoped for as the RPGMA were not moved by the capitulation of fellow factory owners. It was a source of tension within the union but the WGWU tradition of tight union discipline overcame this.

From Sheldon's point of view something had to be done after five weeks of strike and no sign of resolution, and he became directly involved in conciliation in mid-December after which no further strike bulletin was issued. The political reality of Defence Order 1305 ruled out prosecution and the local newspaper had made embarrassingly public the gap between what the law said, and what was done about it. It was important too to government contract production to restart. The only real choice left to Sheldon was to lean on both parties and it seems likely that the last RPGMA offer was made in the knowledge of the quid-pro-quo of WGWU agreement to a Wages Council. At the same time WGWU had exhausted its funds and with none of the traditional trade union sources of support available, further mobilisation was difficult. It therefore seems likely this predicament influenced the WGWU decision to accept the final offer and foreshortened the strike.

Card and Olson draw attention to the importance of strike costs – that is costs to the employer and to those on strike.[168] It is plausible to argue that the capitulation of these few companies had the effect of lowering costs for both the WGWU and the RPGMA, thereby extending strike duration. The WGWU's costs were lowered because they collected levy from the workers and if even a small amount of production was sub-contracted to these companies, as claimed by the strike committee, it will have lowered the costs to those companies most closely connected to the RPGMA.

[168] David Card and Craig, A. Olson, 'Bargaining Power, Strike Durations, and Wage Outcomes: An Analysis of Strikes in the 1880s', *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 13, No.1. (January, 1995).

Chapter Five: The French Connection Strike, 1985 - 1986

The last strike in this analysis was at the Contracts Ltd. factory in South Shields, Tyneside, which was an area in severe economic depression during the 1980s. It had been purchased from local owners by the global design house, French Connection, some eighteen months prior to the dispute, and had been a union organised factory which French Connection de-recognised. One hundred and seventy workers started the strike, out of a total workforce of around two hundred people, and ninety workers were still on strike at the end. The strike started on September 19th, 1985, with the aim of reinstating full recognition. It gained official union endorsement from the NUTGW from September 27th , and continued until March 24th 1986.

It was regularly featured in the local press, which at first supported it, but latterly vilified it as the actions of extremists. It was eventually resolved through the intervention of ACAS which brokered a settlement that set up a company works committee with some shop steward presence on it, alongside non-union representatives. However, this settlement was not accepted by the strikers, and bitter recriminations ensued towards the union and full-time officer who had dealt with the strike.

The French Connection dispute took place when strikes were at their lowest level since the inter-war era.[1] At six months in length it was an exceedingly long dispute, one of the few categorised as exceptional by the Gazette figures for the 1985/6 period, and twice as long as the Rego strike. Although some employers did take advantage of the new harsh political and economic climate, most did not go as far as de-recognition.[2]. However, as Alvin Gouldner's 1954 study of a US gypsum factory strike found, change of management can be a significant reason for a breakdown in workplace relations. This was the case too in the News International strike, also in 1985/6 where union input was drastically reduced. Lastly, it was a more violent affair than strikes in general, and the

[1] Howard Gospel and G. Palmer, *British Industrial Relations*, (London, 1993), fig. 9.1 source Dep. *Employment Gazette.*

[2] Neil Milward and Mark Stevens, *British Workplace Industrial Relations, 1980 – 1984, The Department of Employment, ESRC, PSI, ACAS surveys*, (Aldershot, 1986), and, Howard Gospel and G. Palmer, *British Industrial Relations*, (London, 1993), p.217.

Rego and Waterproof workers in particular. In some respects there were notable similarities between this and the 1928 strike. Both used a similar repertoire of action, the labour-capital conflict in both generated other conflicts, and the full-time officer in both lost status.

It will be argued in this case analysis that the company generated much of the delay which occurred because their activity was evasive and changeable. Company behaviour was more hostile to workers than in either of the other two strike studies and this was a product of the era. As time went by strikers came to regard factory closure an acceptable end to their struggle and this encouraged more militant tactics which worried the leadership who were also worried about the Workers' Revolutionary Party activities. ACAS's intervention did little more than implement the company offer, thus contributing to the conditions for a split between the union leadership and those on strike and the strike came to an end when it became obvious to strikers that the resources to continue were no longer available.

The general contemporary political and economic landscape is first sketched, followed by a more detailed look at how the local context related to it. The pre-strike analysis comes next and it includes a portrait of Stephen Marks, French Connection's managing director. The strike analysis and conclusion follow.

Trade union shock[3] and industrial crisis

The strike took place in a geographical region renowned for its labour values because it was part of the UK industrial heartland.[4] In the mid-1980s the 'official' labour movement

[3] I have chosen the term 'shock', as that is what it felt like at the time. There was an outpouring of writing about the Labour Movement and a debate about whether or not it had reached the end of its life, or if it were capable of renewal. The debate was world wide and I have selected a handful of international works that represent the 'renewal' school of thought: Glen Adler and Doris Suarez, ed. *Union Voices, Labor's responses to crisis*, (New York, 1993); Marino Regini, ed. *The Future of Labour Movements,* (London, 1992); Magnus Sverke, ed. *The Future of Trade Unions: International Perspectives on Emerging Trade Union Structures,* (Aldershot, 1997); Arthur B Shostak, *Innovations in the Labour Movement*,(New York, 1990); David Peetz, *Unions in a Contrary World,* (Cambridge, 1998).

[4] R. Coles and B Lancaster, ed. *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism,* (Edinburgh, 1992); David Clark, *We do not want the Earth, the history of South Shields Labour Party,* (Tyne and Wear, 1992); John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: early industrial capitalism in three English towns,* (London, 1974).

was in a state of shock about several new legislative restrictions on trade union activity.[5] The 1980 to 1990 decade was also the longest ever sustained era of trade union membership loss due to a combination of a profound economic restructuring away from traditional manufacturing, a low point in the business cycle, and the harsh legal environment.[6]

The 1980s was also a time of industrial and social divisions. Concurrent with the dispute was the much-publicised London News International dispute, complete with national news coverage, violence and entrenched positions. The long-running 'Silentnight' mattress company strike in Liverpool was also news amongst labour activists at the time, even though it did not feature in the headlines, and the bitter national 1984/5 miners' strike had finished a few months earlier. Social division was marked by riots in inner cities in 1985 and 1986.

Wrigley summarises the thinking behind the 1980s' Conservative trade union legislation as tilting the industrial relations balance in favour of the employers; as cutting out trade unions from their traditional forum of government consultation; as reducing protection for the weakest in the labour market, and of championing the situation of the worker as an individual at work, detached from collective identity.[7]

The legislative vehicles for this thinking were the Employment Act 1980, which withdrew legal immunity from secondary action and limited the activities of local full-time officials; the Employment Act 1982, which required a minimum majority of not less than eighty per cent of those entitled to vote in a ballot, to set up a pre-entry closed shop; and the Trade Union Act 1984 which enforced a ballot prior to strike action. Therefore the French Connection strike took place at a time when employers' power at work was very much strengthened by the law.

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[5] Robert Taylor, *The Trade Union Question in British Politics: Government and Unions since 1945*, (Oxford, 1993).
[6] David Metcalf, 'British Unions: Dissolution or Resurgence?', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, Vol 7, No. 1, (1991), pp. 18 – 32.
[7] Chris J. Wrigley, ed. *British Trade Unions, 1945 – 1995*, (Manchester, 1997) p. 169.

This batch of hostile trade union legislation shocked the post-war labour movement. Events like the 1984 GCHQ de-recognition were unexpected. The trade union movement was also alarmed about future legislation proposing the abolition of the Wages Councils, the means through which the tailoring unions had obtained legal minimum status for their negotiated wage awards since the end of the First World War.

South Shields and its environs had a very long tradition as a labour and organised trade union stronghold. Because it was in the heartland of the industrial North East, 1980s economic restructuring was especially profound here. South Shields is only two miles down river from Newcastle. Sea-borne trade in coal to London, coal mining and ship-building dominated its economic history.[8] These were all industries with a long tradition of (male) trade union organisation. Because it is a port it has long had communities from other places, most notably from the Yemen and, more recently, from Bangladesh.

South Shields had had one of the worst records for bad housing and poor health although this had improved by the 1980s. However, as the old heavy industrial base collapsed, unemployment in that decade reached twenty per cent plus. The political landscape was one of moderate Labourism committed to organised labour, South Shields had consistently returned a Labour MP since 1935, and consistently elected a Labour majority on the town council. The local TUC had operated a joint committee with the local Labour Party until 1970.[9]

Coles and Lancaster argue that the local economy had had a profound effect on the people of South Shields. They suggest that the dominant, heavy industrial male workforce generated a male industrial trade union culture that left an enduring legacy even though by the 1980s, the towns' workforce had the national average percentage of women workers.

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[8] R. Coles and B Lancaster, ed. *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism,* (Edinburgh, 1992); David Clark, *We do not want the Earth, the history of South Shields Labour Party,* (Tyne and Wear, 1992); John Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: early industrial capitalism in three English towns, (London, 1974).

[9] David Clark, *We do not want the Earth, the history of South Shields Labour Party,* (Tyne and Wear, 1992), p.101.

Women's share of the local labour force had grown at least in part because of manufacturing companies like Contracts Ltd. Ron Bales, the NUTGW full time officer who had responsibility for Contracts, records that the NUTGW union density in the area was very high, 75%: "the reason was we had very big multiple factories". But he also said there was "a lot of history of local bargaining in this area so whatever was agreed at national level, we used to get a top-up, an improvement, and increase over and above."[10] The strikers' sense of grievance and the righteousness of their cause were reinforced by both the historical local consensus for labour and unions and the intensity of local economic restructuring. The garment industry was also undergoing its own national, or rather international, economic restructuring and the strains this imposed have been variously described as a crisis, a radical re-organisation, and a re-structuring.[11]

The crisis was attributed to the phenomenal growth in imports and the concentration of the UK clothing industry in the hands of a few giant retailers. In fact a closer look shows that the women and girls fashion sector of the industry, the sector occupied by French Connection at their Contracts Ltd South Shields factory, was the most affected by import penetration. By 1991, imports in this market sector had reached 63.4 per cent of sales, and between 1983 and 1991 clothing imports had grown by 88.69 per cent. The big-name retailers such as Marks and Spencer, Next, Richard Shops and Principles also operated mainly in the women and girls fashion sector, and after the 1970s spate of mergers and concentration, accounted for over 30 per cent of all retail sales between them. They represented the most concentrated national clothing industry in Europe[12] and made exacting demands on the factories which produced for them.

Work intensification, and a relative increase in unregulated, sub-contracted home-working, was a key response to this crisis.[13] A. F. Rainnie takes these institutional

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[10] Bales interview transcript .
[11] Ian M Taplin and Jonathon Winterton, ed. *Restructuring in a Labour Intensive Industry*, (Aldershot, 1996) pp. 26, 59 and 44.
[12]Ibid. p.25 - 26.
[13] Taplin and Winterton ed. (1996); Swasti Mitter, 'Industrial Restructuring and manufacturing homework: immigrant women in the UK clothing industry', *Capital and Class*, No. 27 (Winter, 1986), pp. 37 – 80.

characteristics one stage further, arguing that the nature of clothing production, being labour intensive and difficult to automate and the structure of the fashion industry, resulted in an inevitable squeeze on labour productivity.[14] Garment industry globalisation accelerated in the 1980s, and was marked by a reduction in welfare rights, decreased job security, much more part-time work, and a flexible approach to labelling where some of the work was sub-contracted.[15]

The available evidence about Contracts Ltd. fits this picture. The strikers had complained that the company had 'label switched' at the factory, presumably to suggest items were made entirely in England, when they had in fact been made partially or wholly elsewhere.[16] Moreover one of the weekly letters to union HQ about the strike mentions "work which is being made up outside and then despatched from South Shields".[17] Although these were not new issues to the industry, the scale of change in the 1980s was new. Thus workers in French Connection's South Shields factory were in a weak position to assert their collective power when faced with this accumulation of industrial change and political onslaught.

Work intensification came in several forms: production organisation, bonus pay, technology, design changes, and the growth of the industry's unregulated sector. The removal of certain protective legislation in the Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982 facilitated this. There were opportunities in each of these aspects to intensify output, thereby strengthening company control of the labour process.

After the 1970s the old two-season design calendar changed, and it became common for the retail companies to order several design changes in one season.[18] Shorter production runs, 'just-in-time' techniques, and rapid response procedures were typical of the

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[14] A F Rainnie, 'Combined and uneven development in the clothing industry: the effects of competition on accumulation', *Capital and Class*, No.22, (1984), pp. 141 – 156.
[15] Edna Bonavich and Richard. A. Appelbaum, *Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel industry*, (California, 2000), see p. 28 reference to labelling.
[16] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, *Daily Mirror*, December 5th, 1985.
[17] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Letter Bales to Smith, 18th October, 1985.
[18] Jonathon Zeitlin, 'The Clothing Industry in Transition: International Trends and the British response', *Textile History*, No 19(2) (1988), p. 217.

production changes made to cope with this.[19] All of this intensified output; small fashion design changes to a garment had always had a negative impact on the pay of skilled machinists. A fast machinist could turn a low piece rate and bonus scheme into a respectable weekly wage, simply by working very fast, but each design change impeded speed-skill acquisition for a particular garment. In the 1980s clothing was amongst the lowest paid manufacturing work in the UK, and piece or bonus pay made up a larger part of overall earnings.[20] Thus bonus schemes for enhanced output, one of the key triggers for this strike, were very important to workers. It also seems that many of those on strike were single mothers – even more of a reason to be vigilant about attempts to reduce bonus or increase time.[21]

Safety continued to be at risk, for example when employers wanted to set new piece rates they routinely left the needle guards off sewing machines so as to obtain a faster bench-mark. This led to minor accidents such as needles going through fingers and nails.[22]

Finally, although the industry labour force in the UK was contracting, the large and middle-sized firms were contracting faster than the unregulated and small firms sector, so that after 1983 this latter category grew from 52 per cent to 70 per cent of the industry's businesses.[23] This development was encouraged by the government's preference for a deregulated industry as espoused in the 1986 White Paper, *Building businesses not Barriers - Lifting the Burden*.[24] The re-emergence of a significant unregulated sector also put pressure on workers in organised, middle sized factories such as Contracts Ltd.

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[19] Ian M Taplin and Jonathon Winterton, ed. *Restructuring in a Labour Intensive Industry*, (Aldershot, 1996), p. 55.
[20] London School of Economics Pamphlet collection, 'The Future for Textiles and Clothing: International Trade and the MFA', TUC document, (1991), p. 5.
[21] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Strike Bulletin, undated but probably around early November 1985.
[22] WCM Lib: NTGW 1985 Conference minutes, p.327.
[23] Ian M Taplin and Jonathon Winterton, ed. *Restructuring in a Labour Intensive Industry*, (Aldershot, 1996), p. 56.
[24] Cmnd 9794.

French Connection upset local expectations

French Connection took over Contracts Ltd. from the previous owners S. Newmans in August 1984[25] . Industrial relations with Newmans had been "pretty good, we had a fairly healthy membership, the company recognised the union, gave us all the facilities we required" and they were "prepared to discuss anything with us". Newmans was an "old Jewish company, and they had a long relationship with the NUTGW. The relationship was generally very, very good."[26] The high union density in the region suggests Newmans were not especially unusual, rather that it was the new Contracts Ltd. management who altered the expected status quo.

By 1986 French Connection was a success story. By 1985 it had 1,500 outlets in 25 countries, and within a year of its 1983 flotation, "had seen the value of its share holding soar to £40 million."[27] Variety seems to have been its keynote.[28] It used a variety of production structures, in part ordering from sub-contractors, as in the case of some of its Asian factories, in part owning its own production units, as in the case of Contracts Ltd., in part making for retail chains such as Richard Shops and Mothercare, and in part making for its own chain, 'French Connection'. Contracts Ltd. appears to have been the only UK factory owned by French Connection.[29]

It comprised a variety of industrial structures too. It had a successful design house, and operated franchised retail outlets from within older department stores, as well as from directly owned shops on the High Street. Therefore it was not subject to quite the same kind of uncontrollable external pressures as the archetypal small garment manufacturer bullied by retail giants who formed the bulk of the industry in the 1980s. Therefore it did have some choice as to the kind of management style it adopted.

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[25]British Newspaper Library, Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , October 11th, 1985, p.14.
[26] Bales interview transcript.
[27] *The Times*, p10, September 24th, 1985, 'Spectrum' series on UK entrepreneurs.
[28] The information about French Connection was built up from their web-site, and from information gained from a print-out from Companies House plus the authors own conclusions from seeing FC merchandise. It was a pity that Stephen Marks declined to respond to my letter asking for an interview because it could have given a much better idea about FC marketing strategy.
[29] Dun and Broadstreet, *Who owns Whom: United Kingdom and Ireland*, listings under French Connection Group PLC, (1992).

It became a publicly quoted company in 1983 and by 1985 owned factories in the UK, US, Japan, Turkey, Hong Kong and India, and retailed in the US, UK and Japan. Just before the strike, French Connection shares were only a few points below the FT all-shares average and during the strike, especially in December and January, dropped to roughly half the all-shares value, reducing from 94.4 in September 1985, to 53.7 at the lowest point in January, 1986.[30] There were no specific data on the financial impact of the strike on the South Shields factory and, given the overall size of French Connection's operations, the dispute may not have had much impact. However it is plausible to conclude from these share figures that although French Connection was a financial success story, its future was by no means secure. It may have been that the contemporary industry crisis described above threatened the share performance even of successful companies like French Connection. This sort of industry insecurity was likely to have increased company resistance to any reduction of their workplace power. The carrot for them to open a factory in South Shields was a Regional Selective Aid package of £85,000, administered by the Tyne and Wear regional authority.

Although Contracts Ltd. made only ladies' fashion garments and sportswear, French Connection as a whole had diversified across the fashion industry, being a design house and making men's outer-wear, shirts and children's wear, as well as sportswear. They made their initial capital in the Hong-Kong shirt trade of the 1970s.

One insight we have about Stephen Marks the man, was a book written in 1985 by William Kay which eulogised some six modern entrepreneurs, of whom Marks was one.[31] The book was aimed at an audience who would be impressed by bullish behaviour, and its portrait of Stephen Marks is strongly suggestive of someone with no desire to deal with, and no experience of, trade union institutions. The publicity about the book was followed up with an article in The Times.[32]

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[30] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, handwritten, undated note taken of share values using 19/9/85 as equal to a hundred.
[31] William Kay, *Tycoons*, (London, 1985), p.125.
[32] *The Times*, 24th September, 1985.

Marks' father ran a coat-making business and a hairdressing salon, both industries where unions barely featured, if at all. His early employment was on the road as a fashion salesman, and in Kay's book he records "loving it", doing 14 hours daily. Comments such as, "he likes to compare himself with the editor of a newspaper", or "I believe in dictatorship...too many cooks spoil the broth. You have got to move very quickly.", all give a sense of someone who likes to be entirely in charge. He regarded low cost and delivery on time as the key to success in meeting retail need, and it was also clear that he recognised this meant no room for compassion. "It's best not to understand too much about how things are made because then you have sympathy....If you can be cold-blooded you get a much better price", (referring to negotiating orders in India).[33]

Stephen Marks's background history is unlikely to have brought him in contact with trade unions. His recent experience and approach in Hong Kong and India continued this isolation from formal industrial relations machinery at the same time teaching him the business advantages of work intensification that demanded fast delivery, whilst ignoring the working conditions necessary for its achievement.

The workers at Newmans' had not been an especially active group of NUTGW members and it did not take long before French Connection's aggressive management style upset things. Bales commented that the Newmans' workforce were "Not as active as some of the factories that I used to look after. Certainly the shop steward would attend the branch meetings on a regular basis and would be involved, but it wasn't a place we had any major problem with, let's put it that way, under Newmans."[34] Later in the summer after French Connection had taken over, Bales recruited many new members in the factory. It is probable that, although Newmans were good employers and fully recognised the union, recruitment had become somewhat slack. Thus in August 1984 Contracts Ltd. workers had a long way to go to create sufficient mobilisation to sustain a six-month strike.

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[33] Kay (1985), p.118, 123, 125, 119 and 121 respectively.
[34] Bales interview transcript.

Things changed rapidly. French Connection adopted a provocative strategy to increase work output. The Contracts factory supplied ladies' garments to Mothercare, Richard Shops and Principles, and also made some sportswear. It is very likely they were in the midst of the restructuring described above. The old manager, John Beaumont left in November 1984, and a new manager, Tom Coburn, was appointed. Bales, the NUTGW local full-time union officer, commented that "Tom Coburn had a history of being anti-union and he had managed a factory called Mark Curtis in Whitley Bay which I had looked after so I knew the guy's pedigree".[35] Tom Coburn's role was to see that production was intensified. The opportunities he used to do just that provided the normally quiescent workforce with enough of a sense of grievance, to contemplate direct action.

A striker recorded that once the new management was installed, "things went from bad to worse", that overtime became "compulsory", there were no allowances in the bonus scheme, the company used its discretion whether or not to pay full basic pay and, that "no-one can earn the bonus no matter how hard they work"[36]. One of the machinists, Valerie Bell, commented to some documentary film makers in July 1985 "There is sweatshops – well this is not far behind. I've worked in many factories and it's the worst factory I've ever worked in an' I've worked for non-union firms an' they've been bad – I'd say that this is the worst place I've ever worked in for conditions".[37]

French Connection set up a new works committee which they considered a suitable medium for worker consultation. One or two stewards were on this committee, but it had no proper recognition status, and was regarded by Gladys Carlisle, the steward at the time, as a management run body with no real power.[38] This scepticism influenced strikers' views about the works committee offered as the basis for settling the strike; the second committee being only marginally different from this committee.

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[35] Bales interview transcript.
[36] WCM Lib: NUTGW Contract Ltd. box, undated unsigned, handwritten note from worker.
[37] British Film Institute, *From the inside: the Unions,* broadcast 26th January, 1986 (filmed in June/July 1985).
[38] BFI, *From the inside: the Unions,* broadcast 26th January, 1986 (filmed in June/July 1985).

Many everyday issues of workplace control came under scrutiny. The works committee minutes just before the strike say of tea breaks, "Vera Ford raised the point that tea breaks should be paid by the company. Contracts was said to be the only company not paying for tea breaks. It was explained that when Contracts opened, employees were asked to work a full 39-hour week for their money. On the next pay round payment for tea-breaks will be negotiated." [39] This recorded debate gives an insight into why the women did not consider the committee a useful forum. In fact what took place was that the worker raised the issue, and the employer's reason was given as fact, not for debate. Therefore resolving the grievance was simply deferred to some unspecified future date.

Other issues referred to problems in the bonus operation, and the need for more work study engineers. The company also introduced a timekeeping bonus to ensure punctuality. Indeed a review of the contents of the works committee meeting shows much of the debate to be concerned with different aspects of work timing and bonuses - all facets of work intensification.

Evidence accumulated of a sustained deterioration of relations at work. In February 1985, Tom Coburn introduced a new bonus pay scheme which was universally opposed by the workforce, which claimed it resulted in a £12 weekly reduction. A sense of grievance had developed in the workforce and enough people felt the new management were to blame for seventy people to walk out for one day.[40] This in its turn prompted the company to send out sacking notices, though these were rapidly withdrawn. But the robust solidarity which was later to sustain the strike for so many months was not yet apparent. Seventy people constituted less than half those who eventually did strike and in March 1985, an overtime ban quickly collapsed through lack of support. [41] There seems little doubt that

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[39] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Works Committee Meeting, 28th August, 1985.

[40] This is an example of how grievance and mobilisation are intertwined. It has long been accepted by both social movement and industrial relations writers that in order to make mobilisation a success, people must share a view both about what is wrong and whom to blame for it. See Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution,* (New York, 1978), Chap.3, and John Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations,* (London, 1998) pp. 27 – 30.

[41] BFI, *From the inside: the Unions,* Black Rod Productions,broadcast 26th January, 1986 (filmed in June/July 1985).

French Connection had embarked on a strategy of imposed work intensification at Contracts Ltd. In these circumstances obtaining full recognition became more urgent.

The earliest paper record of the attempt to peacefully negotiate recognition was in February 1985 when Geoff Bowen, one of the union's senior regional officials, attempted to negotiate a standard recognition agreement. By this stage the impending recognition problem had become apparent. An undated, unsigned paper from a striker records that no stewards were allowed in the factory (after the February walk-out). [42] Marks told Bowen,

> "At the outset, and at regular intervals during the discussions, I stressed that the company does not recognise your union and that you and your colleagues were present as individuals and not as recognised trade unionists".[43]

Undeterred, Bowen gave his word at this February meeting that he would "not advise the employees of the company to take industrial action" (over recognition).[44] However, Stephen Marks reinforces his view in another letter, "It is our management's established practice that we do not discuss internal matters with outsiders nor do we make our premises and facilities available for purposes other than work."[45]. There could hardly have been a clearer signal about the company's intention. The subsequent events suggest that Stephen Marks's flat refusal to negotiate a recognition agreement prompted the local NUTGW full time officials to offer the French Connection dispute to a Channel Four film crew wanting to feature women union activists in the North East.

Certainly by the union's May conference, the leadership were well aware of the need to promote activism. At conference in May 1985 they had wanted to encourage activism[46]– adding certain responsibilities to shop stewards, and changing the responsibilities of some of the committees. Alec Smith, the NUTGW general secretary, was not opposed to

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[42] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box,, ACAS folder.
[43] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box,, letter from Stephen Marks to Bowen, 13th February, 1985.
[44] Ibid.
[45] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box,, letter from Stephen Marks to Bowen, 20th May, 1985.
[46] WCM Lib: NTGW Conference Minutes, p.9. The Executive initiates a substantial debate to revise the union structure to encourage activism.

militancy as he had told conference only a few months earlier, he wished he could "get our 78,000 members out on strike tomorrow"[47].

The leadership were keenly aware of the national problems they faced to which they had found no solution, and Alec Smith told the May 1985 conference, "It's no fun to be GS of an outfit that is spiralling downwards numerically, amassing big cash reserves, and dying because we have not found a way to respond to the challenges that confront us in the changing industrial and social climate".[48] It was certainly spiralling downward. Bales told the conference that in 1979 the North East area of the union had 19,000 members that by 1985 had reduced to 12,000.[49] Another speaker told the conference that national union membership had contracted from 117,000 members in 1979, to 76,000 in 1984.[50]

The TV film crew arrived in July. Their documentary, *From the inside,* featured industrial disputes at several North East workplaces.[51] Characteristically Stephen Marks refused to be interviewed. Workers in two other workplaces featured in the film had already taken direct action (NUPE contract cleaners and Wills Cigarette factory), both with some initial degree of success, and both overwhelmingly women. The film encouraged the Contracts women to speak about the possibility of action. In the broadcast the previous shop steward, Gladys Carlisle, spoke of the necessity of joining the union to win recognition, and one of the experienced machinists, Irene Brown, voiced the opinion, "you've got to stay and fight". [52] Although it is possible these women tried to sound more militant for the TV film than they were feeling, nevertheless it does appear that the TV experience did help to strengthen the confidence to take action.

All this was happening as the local newspaper headlined a big shipyard dispute and occupation of the Swan Hunter South Shields shipyards. The strike involved 3,000

[47] WCM Lib: NTGW 1985 Conference minutes, p. 200.
[48] WCM Lib: NTGW 1985 Conference minutes, p.120.
[49] WCM Lib: NTGW 1985 Conference minutes, p.279.
[50] WCM Lib: NTGW 1985 Conference minutes, p.266.
[51] BFI video, *From the inside: the Unions: The Unions.*
[52] Ibid.

workers for several weeks, during the 1985 summer and beyond.[53] Several authors have recently commented upon the tendency for trade union action to diffuse through a locality.[54] The TV programme and the other action taken in the town acted as a catalyst to build upon the mobilisation which the February walk-out had generated.

During the summer the union embarked on a recruitment drive, apparently recruiting 168 new members. [55] Obtaining recognition had become the union focus. Many strikers had not been union members for very long. This is corroborated by the press comment, "many of whom had never been in a union before".[56] Shortly after the film was shot, the existing shop steward stepped down and Jane Kingsland, who seems to have had some prior experience organising action,[57] took over.[58] The company's actions seem to have turned what was a sleepy, organised factory workforce, into militant trade unionists.

In this pre-strike period either Tom Coburn or Stephen Marks could easily have taken the heat out of the dispute. They could have dealt with Bowen's model recognition agreement. Even stalled negotiations would have deflated things more than a straight refusal to meet. They could have met the union as requested to discuss the disputed bonus scheme. They steadfastly declined all these opportunities.

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[53] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , October 14th, p19.
[54] Bertrand M Roehner and Tony Syme, *Pattern and Repertoire in History*, (Massachusetts, 2002), Chap. Five on 'mushroom strikes', and Michael Biggs, *Fractal Waves, Strikes as Forest Fires*, paper presented to the European Social Science History Conference, 2002.
[55] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, undated note from Bales.
[56] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , Feb 28th, 1986, p.1.
[57] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, an unnamed scrap of photocopied newspaper for March 13th, 1980 records Jane Kingsland's involvement in another factory strike in 1980, but I did not find this in the South Shields Gazette of that date. It must have been in another newspaper.
[58] BFI, *From the inside: the Unions*. I am a little sceptical about just how well organised Newmans was beforehand and think it most likely that the real situation at Newmans was that although the company did have very good industrial relations, membership density had been allowed to slip, and therefore when French Connection started the new hostile regime, the union membership was in fact in a very weak position. If the reader accepts this point, the workers' mobilisation to sustain the six month strike is all the more important.

The strike

Workers' mobilisation was sufficiently advanced by September 1986 for them to agree to stage another one-day walk-out over recognition, with the proviso that "if anyone was dismissed they would all stick together and walk out."[59] That is just what happened. The young men working as casual labourers in the Bukta[60] sportswear packing and despatch department joined in the strike, and were promptly sacked. The next day, September 19th, everyone walked out and the long strike had begun through an act of solidarity. A strike ballot was held and 144 people voted, all for the strike. 172 came out on strike[61]. This was an unusual level of solidarity that the union executive supported unanimously by declaring it an official stoppage, on September 27th 1985.

Thus at the start of the strike the union leadership, the strikers and Bales were in unanimity. The company's strategy is best described as a 'do nothing' approach, or at least, do very little. As time passed it became apparent that strikers needed to undertake, and to expect others to undertake on their behalf, illegal secondary action to increase pressure on the company. As this became clear, tensions between the strikers and the union leadership developed. Bales was caught in the middle.

However it would be wrong to suppose that the withdrawal of 172 workers, most of whom were skilled women machinists, had no impact upon the company. At the start of the strike Contracts Ltd. advertised for machinists, but Bales commented they had problems recruiting due to the specific labour shortage of skilled machinists, notwithstanding the generally high levels of unemployment.[62] There were several other garment factories in the locality also competing for staff. JJ Fashions, Nortex and Barbour advertised from time to time[63] The Barbour factory advertisement specified, "Previous applicants need not re-apply".

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[59] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, ACAS folder, minutes of South Shields Branch Committee, 16th September, 1985.
[60] Bukta was a subsidiary of French Connection.
[61] WCM Lib: NUTGW Contract Ltd. Box, undated note.
[62] WCM Lib: NUTGW Contract Ltd. Box, Letter Bales to GS, October 15th.
[63] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , JJ Fashions (Sept 24th, p.4, 1986) and Barbour (Sept 26th, p.19).

Having failed to bring in new staff, in mid-October the company sent out 'please come back' letters to strikers which were, given the circumstances, softly worded and unthreatening. These letters started with a plea, "I would like you to come back to work", went on to reiterate that the "Company does not recognise the union", but had nevertheless agreed to collect union dues, repeated their commitment to the existing works committee, and ended with the platitude, "Commitment and participation by everyone in making the decisions affecting the welfare of the factory are the only way we can achieve happy working conditions". [64]

All this suggests that recruiting highly skilled machinists was very problematic. French Connection had behaved quite differently toward the young, male unskilled Bukta despatch labourers dismissed at the start of the strike – presumably they foresaw no problem filling those vacancies.

The company's proposed works committee 'solution' instead of recognition never wavered. It was going to be a hard struggle. It would be expected for Jane Kingsland, the strike leader to put her press statements in fighting words and her initial comment, "Well the feeling is very strong, they're definitely not going in there without recognition", reflects this. [65]

However, there are hints that strikers were slow to mobilise at the start, a reflection of their relative inexperience. Bales encouraged the workers to take action: "the impetus and encouragement for action came from Ron Bales initially...". [66]

In a letter dated October 15th, Bales commented to Smith that the advertisement for staff should "galvanise them (the strikers) into stronger picketing". He found it necessary to press them to turn out earlier on the picket line, though he also states in the same letter

[64] WCM Lib: NUTGW Contract Ltd. Box undated but referred to in another archive item 44, dated Nov 1st, 1985.
[65] BFI, *From the inside: the Unions*.
[66] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Item 6, Report from South Shields Trades Council on strike, March 28th, 1986.

that "there is still a good turn-out for picketing duties". [67] It may well have been that the early picketing shift was hampered by the fact that many of the women had child care responsibilities and were single parents.[68] However it seems that Jane Kingsland left it until October 31st to write to Smith, to ask the Executive to arrange for other union branches to contribute to a hardship fund.[69]

By mid-October, strikers' attention was focussed on mobilising strikers to continue, and on mobilising support beyond those on strike. On October 15th they protested outside a company that hired out vans to French Connection. On October 18th they picketed a department store in Newcastle because it sold French Connection goods. Both these actions provoked Bales to reassure Smith that "this type of activity will not be a regular feature of this dispute because of the possibility of arrest and the threat of court injunctions". Nevertheless, he made it clear to Smith that such activity, "did give us the coverage required."[70] He understood that the leadership were unlikely to approve. Other unions responded in solidarity. The Mineworkers loaned their social club for strike social functions, and the National Union of Seamen made available to the strike committee an office at their regional HQ in South Shields.[71]

At this stage, other than providing official support and of course strike-pay, the union leadership adopted a low profile role. The Executive's initial approach to the strike was defined by one of their senior officials as "low key".[72] Smith referred to it as "your strike", when speaking to Bales about it, as if it was not really connected to the rest of the union.[73] The Executive kept some distance from the strike; it is not explained why but it certainly upset the strikers, who criticised them more than once for not visiting the picket

[67] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, letter from Bales to Smith, Ocotber 15th, 1985.
[68] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, strikers leaflet, 'Fighting for recognition', undated.
[69] WCM Lib: Contract Ltd. Box, letter, October 31st, 1985.
[70] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Letter from Bales to Smith, October 18th, 1985.
[71] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Letter from South Shields Trades Council to Bales about the NUS meeting facilities and information from Bales about the NUM hall.
[72] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Letter from Bowen to Smith, the General Sec, October 4th, 1985.
[73] Interview Bales, April 11th, 2003.

line.[74] This and Bales's unease over the legal risks of militancy were presentiments of tensions that were to develop as no progress was achieved with the company.

It was one whole month before French Connection agreed to meet the workers on October 24th, an early indication of a 'do nothing' strategy. On that occasion Jane Kingsland handed to Mike Chen,[75] French Connection's accounting director, a copy of the union's model recognition agreement for information, and he pointedly returned it to her at the end of the meeting, unread.[76] However, at the meeting the union side considered that Chen offered to reinstate the Bukta workers, though the company later denied this.

A second meeting on October 30th was held under the auspices of Tyneside Council and the company proposed a negotiating committee (works council) that would contain eight representatives of the workforce as a whole. The record of this meeting is the strikers' record of what took place and it reflects the unbridgeable gap between the strikers and the company. French Connection were reported as saying, "recognition would not be discussed by the employers at any time, and would not be included in any agenda for discussion"[77]. The strikers' response was equally stark. They required the company to agree that, "the terms of reference of the negotiating committee would have to include the negotiation of a recognition agreement."[78] When a Tyneside Councillor suggested bringing in ACAS, the French Connection director is reported to have said "that there would be no dealings with ACAS".[79]

Bales's recollection of the same meeting highlighted one possible weakness in French Connection's position. He commented that Tom Coburn had said, "that he did not wish

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[74] Feb 5th minutes of South Shields NUTGW branch in NUTGW Contract Ltd. South Shields box at WCM Lib: , the local branch passed a motion regretting that no senior official had come to visit and they had had no reply to their suggestion of the issue going forward to TUC. See also Item 9 p.5, "Three weeks into this strike Mr. Bales was standing on our picket line and you (Smith) were in JJ Fashions" (note: JJ Fashions was a union organised company in South Shields).
[75] Some of the records refer to him as Mike Shen, and some as Mike Chen.
[76] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Minutes of joint meeting on 24th October 1985.
[77] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Minutes of Joint meeting on October 30th, 1985.
[78] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, meeting record, October 30th, 1985
[79] Ibid.

this dispute to damage the company's good name".[80] Later Coburn asked that the leafleting stop – which was refused.[81] Bales commented "that adverse propaganda to this company is its "Achilles' heel".[82] There are interesting parallels between French Connection and Rego over concern about adverse publicity. They suggest that a company may be more troubled by adverse publicity, than by factory gate picketing.

It took French Connection another ten days to follow up the meeting in writing on November 8th , and suggest that all the factory workers including the shop stewards, should meet and elect ten representatives by secret ballot. This group would meet management "to discuss and to draft a written agreement" which was to include among other things, "procedures for dealing with grievances". "Once the written draft agreement is accepted, the worker representatives should then canvas for an immediate return to work."[83] This last sentence implied French Connection taking some strategic control over the final length of the strike. The proposal did not of course mention recognition, and the works committee was structured in such a way as to exclude the union in any formal sense.[84] It was rejected. After nearly two months of strike there was clearly no intention on either side to compromise.

Marks' refusal to accept ACAS was rooted in his objection to any outsiders intervening in the conduct of his business. It was consistent with his objection to dealing with union officials, his refusal to speak to the Channel Four TV crew in July, and his refusal to speak to the local paper, the South Shields Gazette who commented "Management at Contracts Ltd. refused to comment – as they have done throughout the strike".[85] All of these things made it unlikely that Stephen Marks would capitulate following the economic pressure of withdrawn labour and puts the company's deliberately slow responses in context.

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[80] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Bales to Smith, November 1st, 1985.
[81] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, letter from Bales to Smith, November 11th, 1985.
[82] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Bales to Smith, November 1st, 1985.
[83] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, Tom Coburn to strike committee, November 8th, 1985.
[84] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, letter, Tom Coburn to striker, Billy Edwards, 8th November, 1985.
[85] British Newspaper Library, Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , January 24th, p. 17.

Slowly the strikers' tactics diverged from what the union leadership regarded as acceptable. In early November the strikers passed a motion asking their Executive to place on the agenda of the next TUC General Council meeting, a declaration of full support, a recommendation to USDAW to ask their members not to handle French Connection goods, and a boycott of all imports and exports of any garment or textiles made by French Connection.[86] There is no record on the Executive Board minutes of this issue ever being formally discussed. However an undated note from Smith records, "we would be in difficulty if we asked our members not to do work for FC". He was referring to the legal difficulties of secondary action.

Strike committee activity concentrated on sustaining mobilisation. Support for the strike was still solid, and on November 11th , Bales reported that 152 people received strike-pay that week, and none had crossed the picket line.[87] Strikers had set up a fund collection network and acquired a mini-bus supplied by a London trade union support group. This probably followed shortly after a successful London rally where they apparently distributed 10,000 stickers, and 3,000 leaflets.[88] The same group was collecting nearly £2,000 weekly toward funding the strike.[89] In this way strikers had begun to make themselves less financially dependent upon their own union.

Despite Bales's earlier assurance to Smith that secondary picketing would not happen, at the end of October he was quoted in the local paper saying that secondary picketing was "fine by us", and that it was the "only way we can win".[90] It seems that after he realised how much the company disliked bad publicity he agreed, despite the earlier assurances he had given Smith, to encourage further bad publicity. Accordingly on November 7th 1985, several groups of strikers protested and handed out leaflets outside department stores in Darlington, South Shields and Sunderland. The protest outside retail shops appeared to have some affect and French Connection met with the strike leaders on November 26th 1985. This meeting constituted the most significant advance in the strike. The 'offer' had

[86] WCM Lib: Contract Ltd. Box letter from Bales to Smith.
[87] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Bales to Smith, November 11th, 1985
[88] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letter from Bales to Smith, November 1st, 1985
[89] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, undated note, 'London support for Contracts'.
[90] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , October 28th, 1985, p.4.

barely altered by the following March but ACAS would now to become involved. Strikers were also regularly picketing SDM Fashions, a non union factory which was producing French Connection work – an illegal act of secondary picketing. After picketing outside the factory for a few weeks with little success, some twenty people (apparently not actual strikers) attempted a forced entry, and police were called to resolve it, although no arrests were made.[91] Although there was an opportunity here for Marks to prosecute, nothing happened which in some sense passed up an opportunity for a provocative end to the strike.

Bales suggested that perhaps the reason the company changed its mind about ACAS was "that the company found they were getting pressure from Members of Parliament and other institutional bodies to resolve this matter."[92] On December 5th 1985, the *Daily Mirror* featured an article alleging that Contracts Ltd. had engaged in 'label switching'. In fact the company accepted that this had happened, and the person concerned had left.[93] This is important because an early part of strike strategy was to ask the MP to raise this issue in the House of Commons, and had this happened, it would have seriously added to the accumulating bad publicity. The author has searched *Hansard*, but could find no record of David Clark M.P. raising a question, or a debate actually taking place, and no reference to an actual debate in the strike archive. A note records "They have got David Clark, pressurising him because he has never gone public on the issue of the company switching labels".[94] It would seem that the company paid more attention to bad publicity than it did to attempts by pickets to restrict production.

It is just possible that a 'quid-pro-quo' was reached whereby the MP did not raise the issue, the company accepted liability as per the *Mirror* article, and accepted that ACAS would intervene in the dispute. It would not be unknown for such an arrangement. In the 1976/7 Grunwick recognition strike, the Union of Postal Workers agreed to halt blacking

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[91] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette*, Dec 3rd, p.13, and WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letter, Bales to Smith, December 9th, 1985.
[92] Bales interview transcript.
[93] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Daily Mirror photocopy, December 5th.
[94] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, unsigned note written the day following the factory occupation, i.e. January 18th, that is after ACAS were involved.

Grunwick work in return for the company's undertaking to co-operate with ACAS.[95] It is also plausible that the economic pressure on the company as a result of the strike, while clearly insufficient to cause capitulation, nevertheless did influence them. However, given their earlier trenchant opposition to ACAS, their new conversion was unlikely to have been enthusiastic, and this is borne out by more prevarication.

The new offer gave two shop stewards the right to sit on the works committee. It was not immediately rejected and ACAS began to discuss the arrangements to elect the works committee, which would then have the task of producing a grievance procedure. However, strikers were very sceptical because the offer did not include discussion of recognition and did not confirm reinstatement for the Bukta workers.[96] Unfortunately, the strikers considered that the company had reneged on an earlier, verbal offer to reinstate the nine young lads. "Although Mr. Chen has twice before offered reinstatement to these people both on Thursday 24th October at the Crest Hotel, and on Wednesday 30th October at the Tyne and Wear offices – the union records that he refused to reinstate these workers in the Bukta department and denied that he had ever agreed to reinstate these people at the previous meetings." [97] Even so, the message to the strikers from this activity was that militancy, especially militancy that produced bad publicity, worked.

The message to the union leadership was to search more urgently for a way out of the strike. Smith began to consider the strike to be un-winnable. In March the following year he said that he had felt as far back as November 1985, following the first attempt at negotiation, that the dispute was un-winnable "in my view we would be better to go back with no agreement - that was my view before Christmas".[98] He was uneasy about unlawful action, hardly surprising given the recent sequestration of the National Union of Mineworkers' funds. He thought the long time lapse between meetings gave opportunity to the company "...the longer you give the company, the longer you're giving them to

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[95] Jack Dromey and Graham Taylor, *Grunwick, the workers' story*, (London, 1978), p.9/10.
[96] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd.. Box, unsigned NUTGW note of November offer.
[97] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Union report of the meeting on November 26th with French Connection.
[98] WCM Lib: NUTGW Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed record (from shorthand) of meeting at union HQ between Smith and Jane Kingsland on March 11th, 1986, , p.9.

wriggle and shift the goal-posts".[99] All of this predisposed Smith and his executive to look for a way out of the strike. Moreover, he was worried by some union publicity and told Bales that he should accept responsibility for all leaflets about the dispute.[100] Some of the strike publicity was not produced in the union office.[101]

By this stage the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP) were reporting the strike in their paper 'The Workers' Press'. The strike presented an opportunity for them to characterise it as rank and file opposition to the union full-time official.[102] Their active presence raising money and visiting the picket-line increased the growing distance between the union leadership and the strikers. On November 15th, Bales found it necessary to write to Smith to categorically deny "rumours about this dispute being taken over or used by some organisation outside of this union".[103]

Distrust between Bales and Smith grew as Bales was truly caught in the middle. Both men came into conflict about strike tactics. The General Secretary warned Bales about secondary picketing, saying he was "exceeding your (his) authority". [104] Bales's response to this reprimand was, "I have said to you that to win this dispute, we at some stage may be forced to take secondary action, such as picketing of non-union factories doing sub-contract work, or protesting outside shops selling French Connection garments."[105]

Unusually for the 1980s NUTGW full-time organisers were also branch officers. Thus Bales was the South Shields Branch Secretary and chairperson of the strike committee. One of his letters implies he used his network of local contacts to obtain strike committee rooms at the National Union of Seamen regional HQ among other things.[106] It was also

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[99] Ibid.
[100] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Smith to Bales, November, 13th, 1985.
[101] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, A leaflet, which had been distributed in late February, with the NUTGW logo cut and pasted onto it had written across the bottom, "This was not printed or published by the Sunderland office".
[102] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Workers' Press, 22nd February, 1986.
[103] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Bales to Smith, November 15th, 1985.
[104] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Letters from Smith to Bales on November 13th, and Bales to Smith on November 15th, 1985.
[105] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Letter Bales to Smith, 15th November, 1985.
[106] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letter, Bales to Smith, November 15th, 1985.

his role to distribute strike pay. Kelly and Heery's analysis of full-time officials underscores the two-way relationships they have with workers and with the union leadership.[107] But because Bales was actually the Branch Officer, his conflict of loyalties was indeed acute. As time passed and the action failed to resolve the issue, he found himself having to present the case for settlement which led to a breakdown in his relationship with the strikers.

November 26th was a turning point in the strike. There were still 141 people receiving strike pay[108] and things became more complicated. ACAS did not try to broker a compromise; instead they took on the role of implementing the company offer. Although ACAS still had on paper the same powers to recommend recognition that had been given them when they were established, the possibility of ACAS coercing French Connection into recognition was unlikely since the House of Lords 1976 ruling against an ACAS recognition recommendation in the Grunwick case.[109]

ACAS involvement gave the union leadership a way out. In effect the strike committee began to lose control of the strike: to ACAS; to the union leadership; and also to French Connection. An unsigned note dated December 3rd, days after ACAS became involved, indicates the extent to which the union leadership expected ACAS to implement the offer made on November 26th. It says, "ACAS will try and get clarification on the nine (sacked male Bukta) workers." and "ACAS will be asked to organise the election (of the works committee)", and that ACAS will clarify the grievance policy.[110]

By accepting the offer framework, ACAS also allied themselves to the company's time table. French Connection continued to procrastinate, but they had also insisted upon a clause that specified there would be no return to work until the works committee had completed its deliberations. This in-built delay was first mentioned on November 8th as

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[107] John Kelly and Edmund Heery, *Working for the Union: British Trade Union Officers*, (Cambridge, 1994).
[108] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letter Bales to Smith, December 9th, 1985.
[109] In the Grunwick photo processing company recognition dispute, ACAS recommended there should be recognition; the company took ACAS to court and eventually the House of Lords ruled the ACAS recommendation invalid.
[110] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Note of telephone conversation with Bowen, 3rd December, 1985.

"Once the written draft agreement is accepted, the worker representatives should then canvass for a return to work."[111] clarified in the November 26th offer as "When works committee has been elected, they and the two stewards will meet with the manager before a return to work to discuss disciplinary and grievance procedures"[112] and, subsequently repeated by the company around mid-December.[113] These repetitions strengthen the interpretation that the 'do nothing or very little' approach was an intended French Connection policy towards the strike, even that they were finding ways of extending it.

However the very first thing ACAS needed to achieve was an assurance from French Connection of their intention to reinstate the nine young lads. It appears the reinstatements were now given a very high priority by strikers. They and the dismissed strikers had met French Connection on December 2nd where according to the union record, French Connection "refused to reinstate any of the dismissed people into the Bukta section of the factory as they maintained it was a separate Company."[114] Interestingly the incident at SDM Fashions happened on the morning of December 3rd. It is of course possible that the incident was an example of frustration about the apparent company about-turn on the reinstatement matter. Bales records that "at a meeting at ACAS on Tuesday December 3rd both myself and Bowen and five members of the strike committee hammered home the point to the ACAS representative that until there is reinstatement of the nine people, there cannot be any development to the company's proposal." This issue was now an additional impediment to resolution and it appears to have been a product of the direct interaction between the French Connection and strikers at the various meetings where it was discussed.

ACAS was unable to speed up the company response time and it took them until December 11th to achieve the reinstatement. The company accountant, Chen, stated in a Telemessage on that date, "I told you and the nine former Bukta employees face to face

[111] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Tom Coburn to Billy Edwards (on strike committee), November 8th, 1985.
[112] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, NUTGW report of the November 26th offer.
[113] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letter, Bales to Smith, December 19th, 1985, emphasises that the discussions on the Works Committee would be "prior to a return to work as previously stated by the company."
[114] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letter, Bales to Smith, December 9th, 1985.

that the principle of the reinstatement as employees of Contracts Ltd is accepted. The details of the reinstatement should be dealt with by the ten elected worker representatives and the local management."[115] Leaving controversial 'details' to some other time, and the fact that this was a tele-message when what had clearly been requested was a formal written response, can be seen as a deliberately provocative reply. ACAS met the company again on December 16th but they reported, "it seemed quite obvious that the company were not prepared to put anything in writing."[116]

It was not surprising that the strikers felt little enthusiasm for the proposals and Bales found himself putting a much more conciliatory line. He knew that the December Executive meeting accepted that the November 26th offer was "a basis for settlement which should be explored".[117]

As ACAS work progressed, the rift between strikers and union leadership grew. Bales recorded that at a strike meeting on December 17th "it was quite clear that they (the strikers) were unhappy with any thought of participating in a works committee."[118] He found himself putting the case for discussion with the company, telling the unconvinced strikers "that we had to break the deadlock and talk to the employer".[119] On January 20th 1986, another unsigned note records that "Ron changed his tune somewhat, trying now to take the union line".[120] Bales may have had good reason because he was also aware that in January more strikers had left the strike than in any previous month. Between January 3rd and January 10th 1986, those on strike dropped from 131 to 115.[121] The local paper began to highlight the division between those at work and those still on strike, especially where they could pit ex-striker against continuing striker "-with five coming back yesterday – and the workers believe more would like to follow... 'There is a

[115] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Telemessage, December 11th from French Connection to Jane Kingsland.
[116] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, See letter, Bales to Smith, December 19th, 1985.
[117] WCM Lib: Executive Board minutes, meeting December 11th/12th, 1985.
[118] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, See letter, Bales to Smith, December 19th, 1985.
[119] Ibid.
[120] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, unsigned note, January 20th, 1986.
[121] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Bales to Smith, Jan 14th, 1986. However not many people actually went back to work at Contracts, many left the strike to find alternative employment – see Bales interview transcript .

majority who would like to come back, but they are frightened' said supervisor Mrs Maureen Elliott."[122]

Undoubtedly, a large part of the reason why those strikers who chose to stay with the strike, turned to more strident campaigning was that the company had done so little and ACAS had not significantly altered that. But for a strike of this exceptional length, real hardship becomes an issue. Winterton and Winterton point out in their study of the 1984–1985 miners' strike that, months of strike means problems finding clothes and shoes for growing children and huge fuel and rent bills.[123] Unfortunately there is little information about how the women in this strike overcame these issues, just the odd strike leaflet in the archive which mentions, "We feel real hardship", and benefit concerts organised in miners' halls entitled "Rock for Recognition". [124] The energy needed to keep these things at bay helped to keep the strike going because the systems of collection and distribution feed into and are fed by the solidarity networks which sustain the strike. In this way a long strike becomes an end in itself.

Bales and the union leadership were hopeful that the ballot for the works committee would take place on January 6th,[125] but it did not happen until January 30th. The company had been vague about the ballot, and strikers assumed they would be able to put up candidates for all ten positions and that strikers could cast ten votes, thus ensuring a de-facto union side to the works committee. However on January 8th 1986, the company told ACAS they were not willing to agree to the ballot unless strikers had only one vote each and the strike committee put up only six, not ten, candidates. They also decided to insist there would be no nominations prior to the ballot, and said they were unwilling to agree to a ballot unless all workers voted together, at the same time and place. The strikers were not willing to vote alongside those they viewed as scabs. [126]

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[122] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette*, January 28th, p.2.
[123] J Winterton and R Winterton, *Coal, crisis and conflict, the 1984 – 1985 Miners' strike in Yorkshire*, (Manchester, 1989), Chap 4 see especially pp 141 – 143.
[124] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, undated strike leaflets.
[125] WCM Lib: NUTGW Contracts Ltd. Box, letter, Bales to Smith, 19th December, 1985.
[126] Ibid.

These were bullish tactics to control the ballot and it is hardly surprising that it resulted in the strikers rejecting the offer on January 10th. [127] This was the second turning point in the strike. The next day Jane Kingsland made an attempt to wrest back control of strike strategy by telephoning Stephen Marks direct and it is noteworthy that ACAS chose to comment, "it was quite obvious that her suggestion was not acceptable to the company".[128] The company's new demands for the ballot had altered strikers' intentions. Those remaining on strike into January and beyond were more determined not to return to work, even if it meant they lost their job as a result.[129] The idea began to emerge that shutting the factory was a legitimate outcome to the strike.

In November, French Connection made one of their rare press releases and suggested that the factory would shut.[130] It appears around this time Chen had said that "...closure has always been a possibility in line with the pressure and publicity we are receiving."[131] The company did not pursue the idea at the time but it was repeated in the press as a possibility on December 3rd and December 19th.[132] But in mid-January the idea that shutting the factory was something for the strikers to aim at, was floated: "a Councillor was cheered when he said he would rather see a strike-hit factory close than the strikers go back without the fight resolved."[133] In February, in an article in *The Workers' Press*, one striker was quoted as saying, "I would rather see the factory close down. If we cannot work we should make sure the scabs can't work either."[134] Ron Bales supports this with his interview comment "by December their attitude hardened and the view was very strongly that if the factory closed down, that would be a good result."[135]

For the strike committee, factory closure meant their militant efforts were damaging the company and so if, despite the bad publicity and damage to production, the company

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[127] WCM Lib: , NUTGW Contracts Ltd. Box, letter, Bales to Smith, 14th January, 1986.
[128] Ibid.
[129] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letters, Bales to Smith on January 14th and 21st record 131 and 115 people still in receipt of strike pay.
[130] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , Nov 21st, p.9.
[131] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, unsigned memo to unspecified recipient, 21st November, 1985.
[132] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , Dec 3rd, p.13 & Dec 19th, p.6.
[133] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , Jan 23rd, p.6.
[134] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. box, Photocopy of Worker's Press article, February 22nd, 1986.
[135] Bales tape transcript.

would not give way to recognition, enforcing closure becomes an alternative goal. However, as became clear at the end of the strike, the union executive could not countenance such an end.

Life on the strike-front took a decidedly more violent turn. Non-strikers took some revenge and a caravan used as a rest hut for pickets 'mysteriously' disappeared in January.[136] According to Bales it was thrown over the cliff into the Tyne by blackleg workers.[137] By January there was violence around the picket line: a young girl striker was knocked down by a car; people fought, spat at each other, let car tyres down and pasted excrement on the factory doors.[138] Relations between strikers and workers changed from unusually good during a dispute,[139] to unusually bad. On the evening of January 16th, Jane Kingsland and a few other strikers forced entry to the factory and occupied it for several hours. The local paper reported a plan to picket more French Connection shops and to press for other NUTGW members to take a day strike or participate in a mass picket.[140]

The WRP appeared to take a more prominent role. A note records, "The crowd that Ron is with are now in full control of it. ...20 people, nothing to do with the strike, on the picket line".[141] This archive note does not specify the WRP and there is no proof, but given the earlier concerns, and given WRP perspectives on this kind of dispute, it is a plausible conclusion that the reference was to the WRP. Another more explicit note, dated January 20th ,1986 referred to a telephone call from the then M.P. who had had some information from a "reliable source" that the WRP were supplying "something like £3,000 per week" towards the strike.[142] This is supplemented by implications in the

[136] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, strike leaflet, March 3rd, 1986.
[137] Bales tape transcript.
[138] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, strike leaflet, March 3rd, 1986 and Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* Jan 28th, 1986.
[139] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, ACAS folder, an unsigned note November 21st 1985, most probably a comment from ACAS records the unusually friendly relationships between strikers and workers.
[140] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , January 23rd, 1986.
[141] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, unsigned note, January 17th, 1986.
[142] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, unsigned note, January 20th , 1986.

ACAS records that the strike leaders discussed the final negotiations with outside groups and these are detailed later.

Bales was unnerved by the new direction taken by the strike and he increased his efforts to produce a compromise. Several references around this time indicate this. Immediately following the factory break-in, in a discussion record between Bales and, probably either a senior union official or Smith, it is noted, "Bales said yesterday he was a worried man and asked me what we could do. We sat down and I said, we are going to have to say what the position is and somehow you have to get a committee".[143] In his weekly report to Smith he emphasised how he "is in constant touch with ACAS", and how he "once again put forward the recommendation (for the ballot) strongly", and arranged for ACAS to meet the whole strike committee, "to ram home our difficult situation".[144]

ACAS agreed with Bales that it was necessary to take more control over the strikers, and with this in mind, they agreed to meet the whole strike committee as their comment on January 20th shows: "the purpose of this (meeting the whole strike committee), certain element of the Strike Committee who do not agree with the committee in any case, hoping we can swing it because we have no axe to grind".[145]

The strikers' more militant stance did not go unnoticed by the local press which used the opportunity to frame the strikers as something outside of the mainstream (moderate) union. In this way the newspaper coverage eased in the process whereby the strikers' relations with their leadership broke down. Headlines such as, "Scuffles and aggro threats in strike fury"; "Angry clothing strikers force way into works"; "Striking workers occupy factory and names taken" and, "Union man is quizzed over masked raid"[146] established a new 'outsider' identity for the strikers. This paved the way for later press publicity alleging the Workers' Revolutionary Party had infiltrated the strike.

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[143] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, unsigned note, January 17th, 1986.
[144] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letter, Bales to Smith, 21st January 1986.
[145] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, ACAS file, January 20th, 1986.
[146] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette*, Nov 7th, p.13; Dec 3rd, p.13, 1985; and Jan 17th, p.9, 1986.

The ballot for the works committee took place on January 30th and six strikers were elected to join the two shop stewards. Strikers agreed by a two-to-one majority to give the works committee idea a try[147]. ACAS chaired all the seven or eight works committee meetings which took place between February 4th and February 28th, 1986. Throughout discussions the company rejected any symbols of recognition that would distinguish stewards from non-union representatives. Any facilities such as access to telephones or time off to deal with grievances were to apply to all works committee members, thus denying the stewards any symbolic recognition. Each time one of these issues was discussed, no agreement was made. ACAS made no attempt to help the strikers' representatives achieve any of these recognition markers. It appears the works committee met on the understanding its deliberations would not be publicised. This was however, contrary to the way in which the strike had been organised and is an indication of how control over mobilisation passes away from the strike organisers as mediation takes over. French Connection complained at the first meeting about a newspaper report by one of the strike committee, and ACAS later complained about another press report.[148]

It is rather difficult to judge exactly how far strike leaders still believed they would gain recognition if only they continued the strike, and how far they were really pursuing the aim of shutting the factory. Clearly most of their rhetoric stuck to the recognition agenda. It does not seem to have been an either/or. There seems to have been a genuine refusal to accept the real situation with respect to recognition, with an underlying feeling that closing the factory was a better alternative than going back in defeat. This is consistent with a negative response to the works committee discussions. The ACAS representative records,

> "I went to them (the strikers) and I said we have been down this road before, the company has said all along no time off for trade union training, did you expect any other answer, they said no, then do you accept it, they said they will have to go back to our members on this. I said surely they have been informed there is no mileage in that. They had to go back. ...Really where we go from here I don't

[147] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , Jan 31st, p.19.
[148] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd Box, ACAS Folder, minutes of the Works Committee meetings, Feb 4th, and Feb 24th, 1986.

know....I had to be brutally blunt, if you are looking for recognition either implied or otherwise you are not going to get it..."

By this stage, there were very bad relations between those on strike, and those who had returned to work, or who had not struck in the first place. This weakened the strikers' bargaining position. For example, works committee members who were not strikers wanted a bigger works committee to reduce the impact of the two stewards.[149] Strikers came to view the works committee meetings in a very negative light; they had no means of influencing their progress, other than to withdraw from them.

This is, effectively what they threatened to do in February when they redefined in more militant terms, their January 10th rejection of the company offer to, "On Friday January 10th our members decided not to continue any more talks with this company and to continue the strike indefinitely until we win union recognition".[150]

However despite these frustrations the talks did continue and the works committee moved on to discuss the final item on its agenda, the return-to-work agreement. The company insisted upon a phased return to work over several months, as and when work became available.[151] The leadership accepted the company case for a phased return to work because that was what usually happened; strikers wanted a return to work *en-masse* on one day. The conflict polarised the leadership and Bales from the strikers. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly suggest that an effect of polarisation is to fill "even the most concrete of issues with ideological content which can block their resolution".[152] This is exactly what happened to the return-to-work agreement where strikers felt that a phased return to work harmed their unity.

Issues about the steward facilities mentioned above surfaced time and again at the works committee meetings. The ACAS representative recorded their frustration. "Long

[149] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, ACAS Folder, minutes of the Works Committee meetings.
[150] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, undated strike leaflet, received in NUTGW Leeds office on February 17th, 1986 and presumably issued a few days earlier.
[151] WCM Lib: Contracts Box, ACAS Folder, minutes of February 20th 1986, works committee meetings.
[152] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention,* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 322.

discussions, going back to time off and the telephone facilities brought up again this week, we talked and talked, and talked, after about a couple of hours it just dies out". The spokesperson implied the WRP were contributing to the delay, "Definitely outside people advising the strike people... what is apparent...is that when we adjourn, things are discussed outside, and at the start of the next day, matters are brought up which you thought had been cleared before." ..."If there was no outside force we might get things going...It will be a long grind, two steps forward, three quarters of a step back"[153]

Allegations about far left involvement in militant action are commonplace. There is a line between collecting money or supporting pickets, and actively taking over strike strategy, and is it not really possible to say from the evidence here whether or not that line was crossed. It is enough to suggest that there does seem to have been WRP involvement and that, in all probability, it stiffened strikers' resolve, financially and ideologically, and most probably added to strike duration.

The final 'offer' with its phased return to work emerged on February 28th . The strike committee refused to recommend it to the strike meeting and it was rejected by 56 votes to 34.[154] Smith regarded company proposals for a phased return to work as a matter of routine, not of principle: "the history of nearly every strike is a phased return to work".[155] But strikers were convinced that a phased return would undermine opportunities to retain a union presence in the factory. They felt "the return to work was so important for the union to keep together"[156]. It became the symbol of the solidarity that was so central to their conception of what the strike was about.

Solidarity or settlement

Events in the final month of strike almost spiralled out of control. The trigger was the Executive Board meeting on February 17th . This was the third turning point in the strike.

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[153] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, ACAS Records about the February 7th works committee meeting.
[154]WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Union circular, March 7th 1986, Anne Spencer to all full-time officers.
[155] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. box, shorthand record of a meeting between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.13.
[156] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.4.

At this meeting the leadership decided to call off the strike at the beginning of March,[157] following advice from Bales that sufficient progress had been made at the works committee meetings. It was news the leadership wanted to hear. They decided that Bales should henceforward report to the regional office and local financial appeals and all leafleting should cease. The only correspondence to be sent was to acknowledge donations. The National HQ was to circulate all NUTGW branches to inform them. Although factory picketing was to be maintained for the meantime, these actions wrested control of mobilisation from the strike committee, especially since Bales had chaired the strike committee.[158]

"If it cost £100,000 or a million, the money is not the thing, it is the chance of winning it" [159] declared Smith in March 1986. He and the Executive had concluded that the strikers could not achieve what they had struck for and saving jobs was the proper alternative. He (and the Executive) still viewed the offer as an opportunity to build on from inside the factory once everyone was back at work. One archive document records at least nine occasions where he states this view.[160] Two such are, "the way you will achieve recognition is to return to work and build from the inside"[161] and, "Going back on those conditions ensures a job for every member of the Strike Committee, every shop steward, they get them all back to work for as long as Contracts continues as a company. It gives us a chance to operate the Union from the inside".[162]

On February 27th strikers prepared a petition that set out their anguish about the rush to settle the strike, and called on their full time officers to continue support.[163] It seems the strike committee had agreed to recommend the offer to the general meeting the next day

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[157] WCM Lib: Executive Board minutes, February 17th, 1986.
[158] Ibid.
[159] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.4.
[160] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.1,3,4,5,8,9,10 & 14.
[161] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.9.
[162] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.10.
[163] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Strike Committee leaflet, 'Contracts Ltd. Strike Committee Petition'.

but in the event did not,[164] and the union roundly condemned them for changing their minds. Strikers thought Bales had failed to inform them their leadership had already decided to call off the strike. They claimed to have found out about it only a few hours before they met to vote on the final offer on February 28th, from a non-striker at the factory who knew because the Executive had informed Tom Coburn at Contracts Ltd.[165] If one accepts their account, their anger is unsurprising.

The following day March 1st, the *South Shields Gazette* created further dissension by alleging with the headline "Red Connection", that the strike was controlled by the Workers' Revolutionary Party. The previous day the Gazette had quoted the full-time union officers alleging WRP involvement "The WRP is trying to set strikers against the union and we are not happy about that" and, "They are involved in prolonging and aggravating this dispute".[166] Both Bales and Bowen were quoted in the paper as accepting this analysis with comments such as, "Naïve minds (referring to the strikers) will be snared".[167] This further enraged strikers who also distanced themselves from the 'red' label, but in a way that did not undermine those WRP people who had supported the dispute.[168]

A welter of public statements and counter-statements followed from strikers and the union hierarchy at the end of February and beginning of March. Several accusatory public leaflets were issued with comments such as "our own union has ditched us" or "the role performed by some of our full-time officers is in part squalid, seedy and double dealing".[169] However, the 'Red Connection' story appeared not to have succeeded in isolating the strikers for on March 6th, despite these accusations, and despite the

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[164] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, pp. 2 &13.
[165] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.14.
[166] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , February 28th, 1986, p.1.
[167] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , March 1st, 1986, p.3.
[168] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , March 1st, 1986, p.1. See also item 14, strike leaflet issued March 3rd, 1986.
[169] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Strike Committee leaflets issued in March.

NUTGW decision to end its official support, the South Shields Trades Council agreed unanimously to continue to support the strike.[170]

By March the difference in view between the union leadership and Bales on the one hand, and the strikers on the other, is neatly summed up in the following exchange between Jane Kingsland and Smith.

> "My aim in this dispute is to get everybody back (to work)" General Secretary. Jane Kingsland replies, "I am trying to get recognition".[171]

This was a serious though short-lived breach. The worst of it was over shortly after March 11th 1986. At one stage Smith considered asking ACAS to mediate between the leadership and the strikers.[172] Strikers publicly accused Bales and the other full-time officers of deliberately planting the Red Connection story: "Worst of all, the Divisional Officer and Area Officer of the union deliberately instigated an anti-communist witch hunt in the local press".[173]

Why did this spiral fizzle out? The people here held no deep political convictions that could claim allegiances and deepen differences. The WRP involvement was very much from the outside. The breach was located within the confines of the French Connection strike. No-one on the union side was satisfied with the outcome. Smith had distinct qualms about accepting the company offer as the following quote shows,

> "I think that the agreement arrived at is bloody awful and I can't help feeling we should have nothing to do with it. But I didn't know what else can be done. If we could be sure that the company would give in then I'd say sod it and let the strike continue".[174]

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[170] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , March 7th, 1986, p.19.
[171] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.10.
[172] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.5.
[173] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Strike leaflet, about March 7th, 1986.
[174] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Handwritten note on a pink scrap of paper, dated 17th Feb 1986 and signed by Smith, General Sec.

Jane Kingsland's history was of a loyal activist since at least 1980. There was no desire on either her part, or that of the strikers as a whole, to operate long-term outside the 'official' labour movement boundaries.[175] Her desire was still to be within the NUTGW as she said in March to Smith: "I want to stay with this union the members want to stay with the union."[176] The language used in the strike leaflets clearly distinguished them from the WRP, viz: "Suddenly we were the dupes of Trotskyist infiltrators", or "political smoothies of the far left".[177]

As it became that clear recognition was not an achievable aim the strikers began to think that if they could not go back in victory, then it would be better to close the factory and prevent the 'scabs' from working. Bales made several references to this such as, "The strike committee said to me a number of times that if they could have got the factory to close, that would have been a good result."[178] It also appears they were unwilling to abandon the recognition goal. But once ACAS was involved, the strike committee gradually lost control of their campaign.

On March 19th , strikers reconsidered this company offer and voted for acceptance, this time as recommended by the strike committee and in the presence of Smith. About ninety people returned to work all together on March 24th 1986,[179] just before Easter, were subsequently laid off, and phased back to work until June 1986, as per the terms of the agreement reached on the new works committee.

There is a puzzle to explain why the strikers changed their minds about the offer between February and March. Bales suggested in interview that it was because strikers came to realise they could not continue to resource the strike as an 'unofficial' dispute and because Smith brought a considerable sum of cash to the March meeting as strike-pay

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[175] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Strike Leaflet, February 28th, 1986, "We have never thought of abandoning our union: why is our union set to desert us?" .
[176] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p. 5.
[177] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, strike leaflet, March 3rd, 1986.
[178] Bales tape transcript.
[179] Colindale: *South Shields Gazette* , March 24th, 1986, p. 9.

and hardship pay for outstanding personal debts such as telephone and fuel bills. [180] This is supported by Jane Kingsland telling Smith on March 12th that "now the dispute is unofficial the strike will crumble."[181] Paying strike pay in March could be seen as a compromise on the position taken by the executive in February. Moreover it is likely that the South Shields Trades Council did not have the organisational wherewithal to continue to adequately resource the strike.

What of the outcome of this long and many-sided conflict? Reconciliation seems to be the most apt description. Even so, feelings within the union were still very much on the surface with significant membership losses accruing.[182]

At the factory the works committee managed to do with business, even to have discussions about day-to-day matters, though there was little sense of dealing with basic issues. Low performance in "a lot of operations" was an issue, suggesting that the company did not establish the work intensification it had desired. There still seems to have been a problem over bonus payment: "one girl makes a bonus another does not"; and there were unresolved conflicts over management's determination to insist that all returned strikers went on a one month trial. Indeed this issue was pushed up the new grievance procedure to the next level. On the other hand, there was evidence of discussion and agreement: for example, Coburn agreed to an individual retaining a bonus payment where a fault in the cutting of a garment had made it impossible to earn the bonus, and also agreed to employee representatives having paid time with a worker whose performance was under question.[183] Coburn soon left and the company recruited a more amenable manager who invited Bales in from time to time, to discuss industrial relations issues, even though formal recognition was never granted.

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[180] Bales tape transcript.
[181] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, Typed, shorthand record of conversation between Smith and Jane Kingsland at union HQ on March 11th, 1986, p.13.
[182] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, letter 17th June, 1986, Bales to Smith.
[183] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. Box, works committee meeting, April, 24th 1986 for all the evidence in this paragraph.

The most serious outcome was for Bales. On April 2nd he wrote a thank-you letter to the local Trades Councils and trade union branches that had supported the strike. In the letter he criticised the leadership for withdrawing from the dispute. When this came to their notice he was summoned to a disciplinary hearing in June 1986. It resulted in a warning though it could have been worse as the leadership agreed to give the warning as a last written warning before dismissal. [184] Thus he very nearly met the same fate experienced by Elsbury in 1929.

Conclusion

The Contracts Ltd. strikers had a strong support base with which to sustain this strike: the unanimous support of those who had voted in the strike ballot, the unanimous support of the union executive, full local community support and the positive experience of the TV filming behind them. However, they had no basis to think that French Connection would change their minds.

The firm gave out unmistakeable signals from well before the strike started that union recognition was off their agenda. Although de-recognition was not common at the time, a combination of a hostile legal, political and economic climate made it an appealing choice for the company. Nothing that French Connection did in the early weeks of the strike could possibly have been interpreted otherwise. Yet strikers stayed out for six months. They were certainly unwilling to contemplate the works council idea in the first few months of the strike, although this was the basis of the eventual settlement.

Why were they convinced that their action was likely to persuade Marks to change his mind? It is possible that, as a relatively inexperienced group of militant trade unionists, they simply failed to take into account the impossibility of forcing Marks to give in. This type of over-confidence was highlighted in Waddington's view that workers in the long Ansell's Brewery strike misinterpreted their situation. Golden, and Winterton and Winterton[185] also comment in a similar vein about union attitudes in the year long 1984

[184] WCM Lib: Contracts Ltd. South Shields box, undated record of the disciplinary hearing.
[185] David Waddington, 'The Ansells Brewery: A Social Cognitive approach to the study of strikes', *Journal of Occupational Psychology,* (1986), Vol. 59, p.234, and Miriam Golden, *Heroic Defeats: The Politics of*

miners' strike. However it is also arguable that, looked at from the strikers' position, their mobilisation to keep people out had worked, their support from the union hierarchy was reliable until the last part of the strike, their support from other people was also to be relied upon. They cannot have known how much effect the strike was having on Contracts Ltd and in these circumstances continuing may have appeared much the best plan.

Accepting the works council offer at the end of November would have required the strikers to capitulate on their central aim and by the end of November they had already been on strike for some ten or eleven weeks, well long enough to have become entrenched in the task of continuing mobilisation.

French Connection tried, it seems unsuccessfully, to recruit staff. They also sub-contracted work, though it is unclear how far they succeeded and it did prompt strikers to retaliate. The company did not do very much else, they did not need to. They did not turn to the law, even where they had opportunity with regard to the high street shop pickets, and certainly the factory occupation. They appear to have wanted to avoid publicity of any kind. They delayed things with dilatory responses early in the strike and later appeared to strikers to renege on understandings and this undermined what little confidence existed in negotiations. Their insisted that all the details of the grievance procedure were finalised before any return to work and this certainly did nothing to shorten the strike.

Strikers got on with the job of mobilising. They garnered support through the rally in London and the picketing of Newcastle city centre shops, among more local actions, They accepted help offered from the WRP. As the strike continued actions grew more intense, culminating in the January factory occupation. As they came to realise the potential of bad publicity, they increased this type of action. Preserving the unity built into those who remained on strike was at the heart of their opposition to a phased return

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Job Loss, (Cambridge, 1997), p. 140/1. See also J Winterton and R Winterton, *Coal, crisis and conflict, the 1984 – 1985 Miners' strike in Yorkshire*, (Manchester, 1989), p.57.

to work. Closing the factory was consistent with that. They gradually separated from the union officials who saw win-ability as the criterion to continue.

The question of whether the WRP did protract the strike, as the union leadership and ACAS appear to have believed, remains open. However Workers' Revolutionary Party members' actions in supporting the picket line and possibly helping to finance the strike will have helped extend it by enhancing mobilising resources. It is also possible that if the WRP were involved to the extent suggested by ACAS, that this also added to strike length.

Once ACAS was involved, the union leadership took a much more active role to look for a solution. The executive decision to end the strike and the manner by which this news reached the strikers, did influence their decision to reject the final offer, and this delayed settlement almost another month. But eventually it was clear that without 'official' support, the strikers could not effectively mobilise, and so the strike came to an end, very much on company terms.

Chapter Six: Thesis Conclusion

The introduction argued that in order to understand the phenomena of long strikes, it was necessary to examine the three interlocking themes: grievance, mobilisation and social interaction. Although there is a broad literature covering labour strikes, there were certain areas which could benefit from more detailed attention, namely: what impact, if any, did the publicly expressed grievance have on the subsequent strike; what sorts of mobilisation did occur, what were the outcomes and how did this affect how each strike unfolded? Finally, what was the nature of the social interaction between any of the social actors and how did that affect the strike? The introduction also showed that there do not appear to be any recent, systematic qualitative strike comparisons.

To enhance understanding of strikes and to fill these gaps this conclusion offers a systematic comparison of the detailed strike biographies using the three core concepts of grievance, mobilisation and interactions in an interlocking whole. In this way the conclusion aims to highlight analogies in the way the events impeded or facilitated strike resolution, and to suggest what additional theoretical insights may be drawn.

The study has used whole strike episodes which, as pointed out in the introduction is a different method to Stinchcombe's recommendation, which is to compare only segments of episodes.[1] McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly did accept the need to review the whole chronology of an episode but recommend narrowing it down by selecting some of the conceptual 'mechanisms' of protest change they offer in their study.[2] The method here goes beyond that in that it draws comparisons across the whole of each episode. It is however necessary to divide up the task of comparison and it seems sensible to deal with the comparison in the order of grievance, mobilisation and interaction within each chronological segment.

The section entitled '*Some analogies and their theoretical implications*' clarifies how the main findings of this study strengthen understanding about strikes and add to the

[1] Arthur Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History,* (Academic Press, New York, 1978), p.15.
[2] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention,* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 309 – 315.

existing literature. It derives some theoretical conclusions from the evidence of analogies and it revisits two other theoretical issues in the literature: strikers' relations with their leaders, plus how far they misinterpreted their situation (Waddington).[3] Lastly, the conclusion considers fruitful new avenues of research and reviews the study.

Pre-strike

Grievances

The Rego and French Connection collective grievances were more of a broad challenge to management than was the case for the WGWU pay claim. The quest for a one-hundred-per-cent membership agreement in the first case, and for full recognition in the second, challenged workplace control over a potentially unlimited range of topics and for an unlimited time in the future. They were bound to be resisted by Rossiter and Marks. Although these were procedural goals as defined by Crouch, they were also distinctive by their breadth of challenge. After all, a procedural goal could be about a minor element of procedure, which is acknowledged by Crouch.[4]

However, it is best not to apply this dichotomy too rigidly. Grievances are hard to categorise and the WGWU pay claim incorporated their aim to protect the Manchester Agreement which was more about procedure than finance. However, the WGWU strike call was made to members upon the basis of the unmet November pay-and-conditions claim and so when this was met, as it was by certain individual factories, the issue was resolved until the next pay round. In this way it presented less of a challenge to the employers. In the Rego and French Connection cases granting recognition presented a much wider opportunity for as yet unspecified future claims. So it seems likely that the nature of the collective grievance did have a bearing on the length of each strike, both of which were notably longer than the six-week WGWU strike. Furthermore, a 'national' pay claim, which was, in effect, what the WGWU claim was, could not emanate from a single factory. Its long germination and the relationship of the different parties to it were bound to be different.

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[3] David Waddington, 'The Ansells Brewery: A Social Cognitive approach to the study of strikes', *Journal of Occupational Psychology,* (1986), Vol. 59.
[4] Colin Crouch, *Trade Unions and the Logic of Collective Action,* (London, 1982), pp 138-9, 146 & 158.

The 1928 and 1985 strike grievances were more closely connected to a broader context beyond the workplace. The Rego grievance was intimately linked to wider union policy differences about how to reverse union membership decline, including differences voiced by the National Minority Movement and Communist Party. Both Rossiter's and Marks' determination to introduce work intensification was connected to wider economic strategies, and Marks' complete refusal to countenance recognition was aided by a hostile legal and political framework. This situation discouraged Marks from making a compromise. However, it may also have made it easier for the strikers to obtain resources with which to sustain the strike from other trade unions because the strike grievance resonated with other workers. The WGWU was so isolated that its grievance about the delay replacing the 1934 pay agreement, and especially the failure to negotiate on the November 1944 claim, had little resonance beyond itself, and this will have discouraged wider support, weakening the strike's potential impact. This is not to say that the WGWU strike was not as a whole affected by the broader context as it clearly was, but that the grievances were not especially rooted in a wide context.

The WGWU and French Connection grievances remained essentially the same. The pay claim and the claim for recognition were the key goals, although French Connection strikers altered how they interpreted this. However, the Rego strike goal lacked clarity in its early phase because there was confusion as to whether it was about one-hundred-per-cent-membership, or about recognition. There was also some question about how far the trouser dispute was a symptom, and how far a contributory cause. When Rossiter decided not to talk to Elsbury to sort it out, a clear opportunity for early resolution was lost. To this extent lack of clarity about the grievance at the start of the Rego strike was a factor preventing an early resolution.

There do not appear to be any analogies affecting strike length in the pre-strike period which hold across all three cases. But analogies do emerge for two cases. There are two analogies between Rego and French Connection. First, in terms of the breadth of challenge the grievances posed to the owners, and second, in how the grievances were so firmly rooted in a broader political and economic context. Breadth of challenge appears to have an effect on the unfolding of the strike, because it provided a reason

for both sides to hold fast. Furthermore, it seems that the extent to which the expressed grievance resonated with potential supporters (on both sides of the conflict) also had an impact on the unfolding of these strikes, because it provided a reason to lend support.

Mobilisation

People mobilised in similar ways before each strike, but this is more marked in the Rego and French Connection cases. The Rego trouser dispute prompted a 'sit-in' strike and a one- day walk out a few weeks before the main strike, and the French Connection bonus dispute prompted a one-day strike several months before the main strike. Rapid expansion of membership accompanied both episodes, and the habit of collective mobilisation began to be formed.

Additional factors may have helped the process at the Rego factory. In all probability the women workers from Bethnal Green, who most likely would have already known each other in the Shoreditch factory, travelled to Edmonton to work together. They had plenty of opportunity on the buses and trains to talk about the issues that concerned them and to agree what needed to be done. Sometimes too, mobilisation took a step backwards as with the unsuccessful attempt at an overtime ban in the French Connection factory prior to the strike.

Although the WGWU actions in 1935 and 1937 occurred a long time before the 1945 strike, they also experienced the benefit of a spurt in membership. Additionally the WGWU executive took some trouble to mobilise members once the 1945 strike was called. They set out a mobilising agenda for the immediate strike claim. They deliberately called the members' meeting on November 7th in working time and mid-week, and they organised stewards and set up a strike committee and generally rallied people to commit to the idea that the strike was winnable.

Thus in all three cases an analogous process was underway. People were thinking and acting collectively and were beginning to form the habit of effective mobilisation in a way that would contribute to sustaining the strikes. This stage of mobilisation was intended to generate solidarity amongst the workers and it was successful. No doubt the close-knit, labour-value orientated communities in each case aided this process.

However this was not all that happened before the strike to encourage mobilisation. The interactions which took place at this juncture also had a bearing on strikers' confidence in the efficacy of their action.

Interactions

Interaction between would-be strikers and others encouraged the former to be confident about their cause, thus enhancing their ability to sustain action. Rossiter in 1928, and the RPGMA in 1945, gave the workers more encouragement by their responses to the initial direct action. Rossiter agreed to some increase in pay rates for making trousers and to further talks. The RPGMA, after stating they could not increase their offer, then did so. Additionally, the first company to agree the union claim did so a week before the strike, and the second company, on the first day of strike. French Connection was the exception. They made it abundantly clear after the February one-day strike, by their attempt to dismiss strikers in February and their subsequent correspondence with Bowen in May, that they were not willing to countenance recognition. However it seems likely that the French Connection workers did not read these signs. There were other interactions in their case to boost confidence – in particular the arrival of the TV film crew.

Interactions at the time of the strike's outbreak also may have strengthened the employers' situation and therefore acted to prolong the strikes. In 1928, Rossiter's choice to put the whole matter in the association's hands resulted in it becoming embroiled in the wider negotiations, and in a formal arrangement to share out Rego production. Both moves added length to the strike. In 1985, French Connection's immediate action in dismissing the young men in the Bukta department added another grievance to the dispute, which had to be resolved before work could recommence.

Sometimes interactions produced the opposite result. The long three-way interaction between the RPGMA, WGWU and the NUTGW about amalgamation, the Manchester Agreement and the wages council, so soured relations between the two unions that it prevented WGWU from expecting any financial or other resources from the NUTGW, even though some of their members went on strike. The WGWU reliance upon their resources was part of the reason why the strike was limited to six weeks.

However, in all three cases, interaction with the full-time officials and/or senior union leadership enhanced workers' confidence, strengthening a 'we can win' attitude. The WGWU leadership achieved this through mobilisation immediately before the strike. In the Rego and French Connection cases the full-time officials intentionally encouraged a 'we can win' approach. Elsbury and Bales were responsible for the recruitment successes before both strikes, and Bales encouraged workers to think in terms of direct action. This is in keeping with the Kelly and Heery finding that full-time officials often encourage action.[5] The initially positive reaction of the 1928 executive, the consequent support lent by the London Trades Council, and the unanimous support of the 1985 NUTGW executive in the first days of the strike, all helped to convey confidence in the efficacy of the action strikers had chosen to undertake.

Analogous interactions with employers, with union full-time officers, with executive leaderships, and occasionally with outsiders such as the London Trades Council in 1928, and the TV film crew in 1985, all created a sense of 'we can win' on the part of those about to embark on the risky strategy of an all-out strike. Early set-backs such as the failed overtime ban or dismissal notices, and the sheer isolation of WGWU, were not deterrents to action.

During the strikes

Mobilisation

Providing resources for mobilisation includes many things. Strike pay is the most obvious but raising support costs money: printing leaflets, travelling to other trade union groups, strike committee meeting rooms, and protection from bad weather for pickets. The introduction drew attention to the importance of organising and resourcing mobilisation.[6] Perrot, Lane and Roberts, and Friedman and Meredeen write of how strikers found being on strike a liberating experience which can make it

[5] John Kelly and Edmund Heery, *Working for the Union: British Trade Union Officers*, (Cambridge, 1994), p. 1, 7.
[6] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, (New York/London, 1978)

difficult to persuade them to end.[7] Beckwith proposed that sustaining the action becomes the goal of the action.[8]

All this suggests that the combination of unwillingness to return to normal work, and the effort of organising mobilisation, increases commitment to the cause as time passes – provided of course that the mobilisation is succeeding in keeping people away from the workplace, even if it is not so successful in halting the employers' production. It is logical to suggest that the more people invest in time, effort and personal sacrifice to a campaign, the less likely they will be to give it up in the face of an obdurate employer.

A close look at the mobilising actions in these strikes suggests, for the 1928 and 1985 strikes, a broad life-cycle starting with factory-gate picketing, widening to extend support amongst other trades unionists, and finally turning to riskier action as it becomes apparent the action is not persuading the employer to settle. The exception to this is the WGWU action which does not appear to have gone beyond factory-gate pickets.

The purpose of WGWU mobilisation was to maintain strike solidarity and to this end it implemented tight union discipline, even to the point of imposing penalties for poor commitment. There is no real evidence to suggest this approach back-fired and therefore it seems likely that this style of mobilisation did work. In addition, high ratios of representation and the 1930s grass-roots revolt had fashioned a union in close touch with its members, whose executive could adopt punitive discipline and a divisive strike tactic without too much risk of internal dissension. Although the tactic did cause some tension, it did not escalate.

Rego and French Connection mobilisation started with factory-gate picketing and local rallies, and soon incorporated collecting cash from other union members, holding concerts, picketing shops and mounting highly visible central-London rallies.

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[7] Perrot, (1987), p. 140, Henry Friedman and Sander Meredeen, *The Dynamics of Industrial Conflict*, (London, 1980), p. 199, and Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, (London, 1971) p. 167.

[8] Karen Beckwith, 'Hinges in Collective Action: Strategic innovation in the Pittson coal strike', *Mobilisation: An International Journal*, (2000) Vol. 5, (2), pp. 179 – 199.

The fact that so much similarity exists in the type of mobilisation undertaken between the 1928 and 1985 strike does support Tarrow's view that there is little innovation in the collective repertoire of strike action.[9]

Despite full support for the strikes and sustained factory picketing, it was clear that neither Rego nor French Connection production were damaged enough to wrench concession. Consequently, a higher-risk mobilisation strategy was adopted including shop picketing, blacking tactics (Rego), and the picketing of a factory suspected of taking in work (French Connection). Particular emphasis was given to negative publicity about both companies and the evidence from each chapter shows that the strike organisers believed the publicity to be having an effect. Certainly this seems to have been the case since it led to Rossiter going to court, and appears to have influenced Marks to agree to work with ACAS. Interestingly, Juravich and Bronfenbrenner emphasise that union tactics to generate bad publicity for the Ravenswood company directors was a significant and successful element in that strike strategy.[10] Therefore it appears that when mobilisation focuses on embarrassing the employer via publicity, it can help to shorten the strike because it may provoke responses whose outcomes lead towards the return to work.

Collecting cash to resource a strike functions as a mobilising activity because it reinforces the commitment of those collecting and of those giving. Rego strikers collected cash directly to pay their strike pay thus giving the activity a powerful mobilising function. Even in 1945 and 1985 when strike pay came from the union central funds, it was collectively dispersed. Collecting cash for hardship and other expenses extends the life of the strike pay kitty. Trade unionists who offer free facilities such as printing, telephones, or meeting rooms will also extend the life of the strike pay kitty. Income derived from individual sources, such as a drift into other jobs, breaks down collective dependence. So the less cash obtained from collective sources, the more may be obtained from individual sources and the greater the danger to sustaining mobilisation.

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[9] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social movements and contentious politics*, (Cambridge, 1998 edition), p.101.

[10] Tom Juravich and Kate Bronfenbrenner, *Ravenswood, the steelworkers' victory and the revival of American Labor*, (Ithaca, 1999).

The financing of long strikes does not appear to have received much attention in the literature. This is a pity as it raises several issues including the relationship between money for strike-pay and campaign costs, and the effect of 'jobs-on-the-side'.

Thus mobilisation, started before strike action and continued during it, will impede strike resolution if it succeeds in keeping people out of the workplace but fails to halt company production enough to enforce settlement. There were discernable differences in the types of mobilisation. All three strike organisers were good at mobilising members for action; Rego and French Connection organisers were also very successful at broadening support and making bad publicity for their employers. These different tactics were quite intentional. But they were not so good at impeding production in any of the strikes.

Employers' efforts to circumvent strike action are discussed in the next section, but the continuing commitment of strikers is evident from the three meetings where votes to continue the strike were taken: in 1928 a few days before settlement, in 1945 about half way through the strike, and in 1986 about a month before settlement. Certainly a number of people left these strikes, but not many went back into the same workplace and those who did, did not seriously dent the commitment of those remaining.

The activities of the three strike committees deserve a little more attention because it is the one area where there may be a case to make for long-term change. Each strike committee was differently structured and this probably affected strikers' relationship with their leaders and their union. These differences may be explained by change over time in the role of strike committees. A study of strike committees using evidence gathered over a significant block of historical time would elucidate this.

The 1928 strike committee appears to have been so directly connected to the London Branch committee as most likely to have been a sub-committee of it. However it certainly had at least one striker on it (Mofshovitz) and, of course, Elsbury. The decisions of the strike committee were never mentioned in the records, at least not as strike committee decisions as such. Taking the view that the strike committee was most probably a sub-committee of the London Branch helps explain the depth of

division between the strikers and the union leadership. The strike was identified entirely with the London branch, and its known differences with the union executive.

Winterton and Winterton suggested that where pickets and informal leaders were not involved in a union branch strike committee, the strike committee was the weaker for it.[11] In the Rego case, the strike committee's close relationship with the London branch was a factor explaining their success. Winterton and Winterton also suggest that there is a tension between the need for autonomy (of a strike committee) and the need for control (by the union).[12] In the 1928 case, it seems likely that the strike committee was a part of the London branch, but that there were enough people on the committee who were intimately involved in the strike to offer clear direction, making the national union leadership all the more ineffective in asserting control.

The 1945 strike committee was created at the behest of the union executive, and it was made clear to the committee, when it tried to assert its autonomy, that authority was vested in the union leadership. At least one union executive member and a national trustee were on the strike committee, and the rest were likely to have been steward activists on strike. Thus the 1945 strike committee was a hybrid affair which had clear links upward to union control, and downward to activism. Perhaps this, in addition to the leaderships' accessibility, also helped to limit the opportunity for the development of tensions in the strike.

There are no records of the 1985 strike committee. Although Bales clearly had a very influential role, he did not seem to have as much influence as Elsbury. This strike committee appears to have behaved with much more autonomy: in challenging the union over secondary picketing, in negotiating directly with Stephen Marks and with ACAS, in speaking directly to the press, in making decisions to stay out indefinitely, and in relations with the local trades council.

The 1986 strikers were women, apart from the nine young Bukta men. The two key leaders were women. The impression from the records is that these women had a more

[11] Jonathon Winterton and Ruth Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict, the 1984/5 mines' strike in Yorkshire*, (Manchester, 1989), p. 95
[12] Ibid. p. 79

influential role in strike management than in the Rego case. It is however impossible to draw even the hint of a conclusion since in the latter case the women's voices are lost, suggesting no-one at the time thought their contribution significant enough to record, even if this were not in fact the case.

There is just enough evidence here to suggest that the 1985/6 strike committee had more autonomy from union and branch structure than either the 1928 or 1945/6 strikes. There is only sufficient evidence about gender to raise questions about whether women's roles in strike management have altered in any way. There is enough evidence about differences between these three strike committees to pinpoint a study of strike committees as a useful topic.

Interactions

There were many interactive responses to these strikes. This section will identify which responses added to strike length or impeded settlement, and why. Some responses seem to have had little effect and some eventually led to strike resolution. So the key questions turn on who responded, why, and what effect it had on strike length.

At least eight parties are involved: the employers, the strikers, the union full-time officers, the union executives, political groups, the press, the law and mediators (taken in the next section). Although most of the action was between the strike leaders and the employers (in the WGWU case the strike leaders being the union executive), any of these parties could respond to any other party's action in a way which then led or contributed to subsequent events.

It is because the strikes were such complex and dynamic events that there are big opportunities for a different mix of interactions in the course of each, and identifying analogies between them is much less straightforward than in the beginning or end of each strike. They were very distinct episodes: different in length, and in the configuration of the bargaining relationship. The 1928 strike involved a multi-employer committee and one factory; the 1945 strike, a multi-employer committee and a union executive; the 1985 strike, a single employer and a single factory.

The first thing *all* the employers did was to add directly to strike length by delaying discussion of the core union grievances. Mostly they achieved this by the simple expedient of failing to meet the union side. Of course this is also something one would expect to happen in a long strike, but it is worth highlighting just how much this added to the strikes. In 1928 the employers met with the union executive in the first few days, but made no other move to discuss the issue for nearly three months, even with the union executive. In 1945 too, the employers wrote stating they saw no point in continuing correspondence, and only met with the union again after about a month, when the government conciliation officer was involved. In 1985, French Connection met strikers several times, but there were long gaps between meetings and written responses and these are detailed in the chapter.

They all also sub-contracted work out to other factories. This action added to strike length, not only because it permitted production to continue (where it was successful), but also because, unsurprisingly, when strikers discovered re-located work, they took action. In 1928 Rossiter shared work out in other London factories. They also tried to relocate work to their Leeds factory. The result was that the Leeds workers formed a relationship directly with the strike, because they blacked the incoming work. In 1945 some of the companies which had capitulated were accused by the WGWU strike committee of taking in struck work. The WGWU executive denied this. If it were true it would have reflected badly on their decision to permit those workers back to work. This caused a breach between the strike committee and the union executive.

Although WGWU regarded these capitulations as indications of its success, it is far from clear that it made much difference to the RPGMA. In 1985, French Connection's attempt to sub-contract to SDM Fashions led to strikers picketing that company, and to a minor incident which was featured in the local newspaper in a manner intended to undermine support for the strike, causing some concern at the union HQ. However the evidence that Marks did consider closing the factory does suggest that the strike's economic impact here was more substantial, though this has to be seen alongside the more apparent success of bad publicity. Since Marks was actually owner of many factories and shops all over the world, it would be safe to conclude that the international character of the Marks business seriously limited the economic impact of any single-factory strike.

It is commonplace for an employer to attempt to relocate work in this way during a strike, but as can be seen, it is not merely an issue of prolonging the dispute by easing the economic pressure on the firm (decreasing its costs, as Card and Olson would put it),[13] but also that it sets in train interactions which, of themselves, prolong the strike because they take up time. Where extra action is taken, as was the case in 1928 and 1986, this reinforces mobilisation, thus strengthening the strike.

All three employers attempted to punish or threaten strikers. However the net effect of this type of behaviour, which is not in quite the same category as action taken to circumvent reduced production, appears only to have escalated mobilisation, thereby extending the strike – presumably the opposite effect to that intended!

After about a month Rossiter tried to sack those on strike, and this provoked the strikers to broaden their picketing to noisy demonstrations outside the company's retail shops. In 1945 the employers' association displayed threatening notices in their factories about the illegality of the action. The only impact this appears to have had was to prompt a press article, most likely generated by the union leadership, which pointedly drew attention to the fact that no prosecutions had been made. When French Connection sacked nine young workers at the start of the strike, and then told them and the strike leaders on December 2rd that they would not re-instate, having apparently earlier indicated a willingness to do so, it was followed the very next day by the incident at the entrance to SDM Fashions. In each case the strikers' or union response had more of a sense of defiance than intimidation. Thus it seems that when mobilisation is secure, intimidation of this kind only serves to prolong the strike.

Rossiter and Marks also tried to recruit staff but this did not appear to provoke much reaction on the part of the strikers. Nevertheless where it was successful recruitment, as seems to have been the case in 1928, it will have added to strike length simply because it recharged production.

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[13] David Card and Craig Olson, 'Bargaining Power, Strike Durations and Wage Outcomes: An analysis of strikes in the 1880s', *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (Jan 1995), pp. 32 – 61.

Rossiter and Marks had to be persuaded to accept mediation and it appears that a deliberate mobilising strategy of negative publicity encouraged them. Had the mediators become involved earlier, the strikes might have ended earlier. The situation is more difficult to judge for the RPGMA because they really had little alternative under the still operative, war-time conflict resolution arrangements. Nevertheless, the sense of that strike's history is that it was the union which enlisted Sheldon's help, not the RPGMA.

None of the employers were quick to use the law. Although Rossiter did eventually, this was some two months into the strike, and his decision had unexpected consequences for him. The RPGMA could have made use of the law since the strike was clearly illegal. Marks certainly could have pressed charges after the January occupation, and probably also in response to the city-centre shop pickets. It seems, that for a variety of reasons at the time, the employers, while unwilling to concede, and unwilling to work with mediators, preferred not to invoke the law. It is arguable that this impeded the ending of the strikes, though it would have done nothing to resolve the grievances.

It is inviting to consider this apparent reluctance. Perhaps they did not want to lose control of the conflict and have an unwanted solution foisted on them. Such an interpretation fits with their equal reluctance to involve mediators, and with, in Rossiter's case, his eventual decision to go to court when no other option, apart from conceding some part of the grievance, appeared available to him.

In 1928 the employers' association strategically exploited existing union divisions when they withdrew from the national agreement negotiations. Their action led directly to the executive repudiating the strike, which in turn pushed the two union sides so far apart that Conley was unwilling to have Elsbury in the same meeting room with him and the employers. Nothing like this action occurred in the other two strikes, although the RPGMA had strategically exploited divisions between the NUTGW and the WGWU before the strike. It would not have been possible for the employers in 1945 or 1985 to have behaved in the same way as the opportunity was not there, and there was no significant internal dissension in the union. In this sense the advantages open to the 1928 employers' association were atypical.

Much of the way the employers interacted with the strikers' mobilisation had the effect of prolonging the strikes. They delayed addressing the grievances, they circumvented output reductions, they avoided using mediators and recourse to the law although they did intimidate and this appeared to strengthen mobilisation. As a whole the employers' responses to the strikes impeded settlement.

Strikers responded to the continuing delay by sustaining and/or escalating mobilisation. Publicity action taken by Rego and French Connection strikers provoked more response than action taken to restrict production and made some contribution towards ending these strikes. The WGWU decision to send some people back to work was prompted by the small group of companies that capitulated. The most likely outcome of this interaction was to boost union confidence and cash resources, thus extending the strike. It did not appear to alter the RPGMA approach although it may have given them additional opportunity to sub-contract.

During the 1928 and 1985 strikes, interaction with political groups heightened: with the Communist Party in 1928, and the Workers' Revolutionary Party in 1986. This began to undermine support for the Rego strike and, although this is less true of the French Connection strike, the 'Red Connection' newspaper story was intended to damage strike support. Increasing the political profile may be an impediment to resolution. Many writers about strikes do not engage with the idea that political groups may influence the course of a strike. [14] Perhaps this is because the press will usually be quick to attribute militancy to a malign, external political influence, as happened in the French Connection strike. Kelly however confronts this issue head-on in his discussion of strike-waves, suggesting that high CP membership around the time of the 1915–1922 was certainly a factor aiding the development of working-class political consciousness.[15]

In the Rego and French Connection strikes the CP and the WRP were involved. However, this was not a problem for those on strike. Help was accepted, but there is

[14] Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, (London, 1971), p.176; Henry Friedman and Sander Meredeen, *The Dynamics of Industrial Conflict*, (London, 1980), p. 60; Douglas Blackmur, *Strikes, Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, (Sidney, 1993), p. 203.
[15] John Kelly, *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics*, (London, 1988), pp. 97/98.

no suggestion from the strikers that control was ceded to left-wing political groups. Even so, Conley in 1928, and ACAS in 1986, certainly did feel the strike was influenced by these outside groups.

In 1928 there were experienced Communist Party members on strike and in leading roles organising the strike.[16] It would seem inconceivable that they would not have applied their considerable political experience to aid mobilisation. There is no reason why such influence should be considered malign. In 1985/6 WRP activists were, as far as one can tell, much more on the outside of the strike. One either accepts or rejects the ACAS official's belief that there were briefings between the WRP and the strikers which directly impeded settlement. My view is that the WRP did try to influence the ACAS discussions with the aim of continuing the strike, but it was the strikers themselves who made the sacrifice and the decisions were theirs.

Strikers of course interacted among themselves and those who returned to work before the strike was over had an impact beyond that of their detraction from the strike's economic effect. The methodology chapter commented on the absence of records about individual strikers' views: the matter of strikers who either returned to work or left the dispute for other work is an example where it is not possible to recover their reasons. It would seem possible that Winterton and Winterton's finding that only a minority of strikers regularly picketed could also be applied to these three strikes. Certainly there is evidence in the record of the 1945 strike that the strike leaders were not satisfied with the level of picketing. It may be that in these strikes a number found other ways of making at least some income, and that was how they spent their time.[17]

However some other things can be said. As has already been argued, employers appeared to overcome output reduction in these strikes and so the economic impact of each strike was limited. It is debatable how far returnees weaken a strike's economic

[16] Shirley Lerner, 'The History of the United Clothing Workers' Union: a case study of social disorganization', PhD, University of London, 1956, p.239/40.
[17] Jonathon Winterton and Ruth Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict, the 1984/5 mines' strike in Yorkshire,* (Manchester, 1989), p.134. Winterton and Winterton comment on the variety of ways in which income is supplemented in a strikers' household.

impact when it is already weak. In the 1945 case people were deliberately sent back to work to exacerbate labour shortages and to raise funds for furthering the strike.

Naturally their return angers those left, but may not necessarily reduce their commitment. It could be argued that, as only the most committed remain, it becomes harder for them to accept defeat. It is also clear from the 1928 and 1985 strikes that the press used returnees to divide the union. Therefore people who return to work during a strike may have a contradictory impact on strike length. Studying the effect on a strike of returnees would be of interest, but it is hard to see how such a topic could be effectively researched.

There is no consistent feature in the interactions between strikers and their full-time officials in the 1928 and 1986 cases. The relationships are different and complex in each strike. Elsbury, Sullivan and Bales quite clearly helped these two strikes to continue to mobilise. They were instrumental in tapping into the network of support. After the 1928 executive repudiation, Elsbury (and Sullivan) continued to aid mobilisation, whereas Bales concentrated on searching for a solution with ACAS. However, his search produced the opposite to what he had intended, as it reinforced strike solidarity among those left. Kelly and Heery argued that the values of a full-time officer were much the more important indicators of behaviour than the structural properties of unions.[18] The difference in behaviour between Elsbury and Bales appears to bear out their claim. It could be argued that the continued trust between Elsbury and the strikers in 1928, and the breakdown of trust between Bales and the strikers in 1985/6, rather perversely had a similar outcome in that both resulted in strike continuation.

Both the 1928 and 1985 union executives remained uninvolved in these strikes for some weeks and, although this was a disappointment to those on strike, it does not appear to have had any other effect. However, when the 1928 union executive repudiated the strike in November, and the 1985 executive decided to withdraw support in February 1986, strikers swiftly turned on their executives. Paradoxically,

[18] John Kelly and Edmund Heery, *Working for the Union: British Trade Union Officers*, (1994), p.6.

this event in 1928 may have contributed towards Alfred Wall's decision to mediate and begin the process of ending the strike.

Although relations between the 1945 strike committee and union executive were nothing like as strained, there was a degree of tension about sending people back to work. It has been argued here that there were several factors which accounted for the ability of the WGWU executive to control the strike and strike committee while at the same time enjoy a good response to mobilisation. These included the relative accessibility of leading union officers, the high levels of representation, the advanced planning of the strike and the tradition of disciplined action in a tight-knit community.

In both the 1928 and 1985 cases, strikers' interactions with their executives were characterised by disappointment followed by a breakdown in trust. The decisions to reject the offers in the first December meeting in 1928, and the February 28th meeting in 1986 were directly influenced by this breakdown in trust and impeded resolution of the strike in the short term. It does appear that in a long strike the relationship between the executive and those on strike and organising it will come under strain, but particular circumstances will determine how the strain affects each strike.

At first sight it seems that the union executives in the 1928 and 1986 strikes did exhibit bureaucratic incorporation.[19] After all, both executives were very uneasy about the militancy in their midst. But Alec Smith's handwritten note, regretting the necessity of the decision to cease support for the strike, and his discussion with Jane Kingsland at the end of the strike, make it clear that the core issue in that case was a judgement about the likelihood of success. The 1928 executive made a judgement early in the strike not to support it. Although they later came to denounce it, this took them more than two months and they appear to have made a strategic decision not to back it in the hope it would quickly succeed on an unofficial basis. The WGWU executive controlled their own strike and, as the record showed, far from backing away, they did their best to encourage it. Moreover, their controversial decision to

[19] Richard Hyman, *Industrial Relations, A Marxist Introduction*, (Basingstoke, 1975), p.67. See also Offe and Wiesenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action', in Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capital*, (Cambridge, 1985), p.186.

send some people back to work was taken because they thought it would be easier to win that way.

In 1928 and 1986 the strike committees made use of the press to publicise their strikes and, taken as a whole, the majority of the coverage given was sympathetic. Thus it appears that, for most of both these strikes, the news coverage helped to spread the message and reinforce mobilisation. However at the end, when union leaders made rather different use of the press, news coverage aided the breakdown in trust. In 1928 the publicity given to the executive repudiation may have contributed toward Wall's decision to mediate and, in 1986, the 'red connection' feature probably helped to defer the strikers' final decision to accept the settlement. It is of note that the employers made little use of the press. It could be of interest to consider how different groups within a union have used the press during a dispute or strike.

So far the grievance, mobilising and interactive events recounted here have tended to impede strike resolution. Issues such as the desire for recognition, the commitment to the strike or a breakdown in trust do not disappear and so the question must be addressed as to how it was that these strikes came to an end.

Ending the strikes and returning to work

Grievance

How far did the packages offered meet strikers' goals? There are grounds to view the settlements in 1928 and 1945 as analogous to the extent that they partially met the declared goals, although what was promised in the immediate end may not have been what was eventually delivered. The ending of the Rego strike delivered on paper at least the goal of recognising the full-time officials and reinstatement of all those on strike. However there was no mention of the issue of pay rates for trousers. In 1945 the RPGMA made a shift to the union claim in granting time-rates and agreeing a further increase on piece-rates, but the quid-pro-quo was, contrary to union policy, a commitment to a wages council. There were some grounds for settlement here too, though a significant minority still rejected the offer. However, the French Connection works committee package did not come near to recognition. All the demands for steward facilities, which were so bitterly argued for in the February discussions, were

lost. It would appear that these long strikes were as likely to score some success as not to. Card and Olson found that strike length did appear to be negatively co-related with success, and Perrot found that a tendency for strikes over one month to be less successful than those which were still sustained, but for less than a month.[20] Since both these studies were of nineteenth-century strikes, it would seem worthwhile to revisit the relationship between length and success, notwithstanding the difficulties in defining success.

Mobilisation

Solidarity was not under serious threat in these case studies, and their levels of fall-off, although high, are within Perrot's view of a solidly supported strike.[21] Strike management committees were occupied with sustaining mobilisation and were unlikely to end their strike themselves. There had been some drift away from all these strikes, but the 1928 strike still had around 400 people out at the end. The 1945 strike too, in a rare report in the press, claimed (probably exaggerated) that more than 2,000 were still on strike in the last week of the strike, and in 1985/6, a significant core of around 90 people showed no desire to return to work.

The 1928 strike relied on the London Trades' Council's network to raise cash and this only came to an end when the L.T.C. settled the strike. It would not have been possible for strikers to mobilise sufficient alternative sources at that juncture. The ending of the 1945 strike presented a similar situation. The union's traditional isolation prevented it from establishing alternative sources of strike pay. Consequently, when the executive ran out of money, there was no alternative collective income. The 1985 strike had followed more traditional lines, with official strike pay constantly supplemented by other trades unionists' solidarity. When the executive threatened to end strike pay, there was, for a while, the expectation that these existing solidarity networks would fill the gap. Consequently, several weeks passed during which strikers believed it was possible to continue on their own.

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[20] David Card and Craig Olson, 'Bargaining Power, Strike Durations and Wage Outcomes: An analysis of strikes in the 1880s', *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (Jan 1995), p. 51, and Michelle Perrot, *Workers on strike - France, 1871 – 1890*, (Leamington Spa, 1987), p. 258.
[21] Ibid. pp. 99 – 101.

Each strike showed that mobilisation needed practical resources. These were a concrete expression of the solidarity ethic. In the 1928 and 1985 strikes, other parts of the labour movement did respond with meeting halls, print facilities etc. The relative isolation of the waterproof clothing workers meant that they did not have this support, and therefore when the executive did exhaust their cash resources the strike was more at risk.

The one common analogy to be identified in the way each of these strikes demobilised was that the withdrawal of these resources precipitated the vote to end the strikes, and not the other way around. The denial of resources for mobilisation was initiated by the response of other parties to the continuing strikes and left a return to work as the only rational option.

Interactions

Alfred Wall's involvement spelt an end to the London Trades' Council's support for the 1928 strike, and the access it had hitherto provided to raise cash from London trade unionists. He was under pressure from London Trades Council delegates to distance the Council from the strike after the very public association of the strike with the Communist Party. It is plausible to suggest that the strike bulletin on November 21st was the last because of Wall's involvement. On December 20th, the two full-time officials undertook in court to temporarily stop picketing and leafleting. However the legal settlement seems to have benefited both strikers and the factory owner, and should not be seen as a repressive instrument in this particular case.

In the 1945 strike, Sheldon, the government conciliator, involved himself in the waterproof workers' strike after five weeks. He arranged for the union leadership and the employers to meet. It is not known how long it took him to organise the meeting on December 20th 1945, but it is noteworthy that the last strike committee minute had been issued a week earlier. The strike committee appear to have taken no role after this point, and since the union was ending strike pay, and there was no ability to raise cash elsewhere in this case, there was little alternative other than the strikers voting for settlement.

It is possible that the main reason the WGWU leaders accepted that they had to give in to the RPGMA condition for a joint request to set up a wages council was that they knew they had exhausted funds for the strike. This case was different in kind to the other two because there was no more money, whereas in 1928 and 1986 money and other resources were still available, but those advancing it chose to stop.

In December 1986, the union executive willingly handed over their authority to ACAS and, as the shape of the final offer emerged but before it was voted on, the union determined that there would be no more picketing, no more leafleting and no more strike pay. Once ACAS were involved, the strikers found they could no longer choose how to publicise their strike. Although they initially rejected the final offer, in the hope they would find enough support from the wider labour movement to continue as an 'unofficial' strike, the strikers changed their minds a few weeks later. Without the ability to picket, leaflet or finance the strike, the probability that the South Shields Trades Council could not make up the difference, and the financial incentives Smith proposed, strikers had little other choice than to accept the ACAS deal.

In each strike, demobilisation accompanied interactions with the mediators. In 1928 about a month passed between outside intervention and the end of the strike, in 1945 about two weeks, and in 1986 around six weeks. In all cases there was evidence of a reduction in resources for mobilisation. Tilly's 1978 study places mobilising resources as one important element. Here it appears to be a very important aspect of why mobilisation ended.[22]

Some analogies and their theoretical implications

The summary below takes into account analogies that exist between only two of the strikes, as well as between all three. It draws out the several factors from the case study strikes which appear to have contributed to their exceptional length.

Pre-strike

The grievances in the Rego and French Connection strikes were rooted in broader issues which may have made them more difficult to resolve. Resolution required the employers to behave in a way that was contrary to the general flow; at the same time

[22] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, (New York/London, 1978).

workers' grievances resonated with other contemporary workers' experiences, thus providing common ground for wider mobilisation. Grievances about one-hundred-per-cent member shops or recognition are also clear challenges to the right to manage, not just about one aspect of control, but about the whole range of employers' power, and are therefore more likely to be difficult to resolve. This is a modification of Colin Crouch's typology.[23] Strike mobilisation created a sense of 'we can win' through interactions with all connected parties to the disputes and this was important to the subsequent sustaining of each strike.

During the strikes

Continued success in mobilisation in all three strikes in a context of failure to significantly restrict employers' output inevitably impeded resolution. However, this combination encouraged riskier action in the Rego and French Connection strikes, which raised their profiles and created internal tension, resulting in a breakdown of trust that impeded any resolution in the short term. Paradoxically, the riskier action included embarrassing publicity for the employer which, being more successful than attempts to restrict output, contributed to strike resolution. The Rego and French Connection strikers were good at raising help from diverse sources and this was a significant factor in sustaining these two strikes. Its absence was also significant in curtailing the WGWU strike. The employers' refusal to negotiate the grievances, intimidation, frequent delay tactics and initial refusal to meet mediators were significant impediments to resolution.

Ending the strikes and returning to work

Outside mediators were needed in all three cases to end the strike. Although they were successful in ending the strikes, their success in resolving the grievances was more limited. Their involvement was accompanied by a withdrawal of mobilising resources and this was under way before the votes were taken to end the strikes in all three cases. This was a crucial element in bringing mobilisation, and therefore the strikes, to an end.

It is necessary to pick out the most significant factors. Creating a sense of 'we can win' before the strike, and continuing successful mobilisation while failing to prevent

[23] Colin Crouch, Trade Unions and the Logic of Collective Action, (London, 1982), pp 138-9 & 146.

company output, prolonged these strikes and generated tension between strikers and union leaders. Employers prolonged each strike significantly, principally by organising ways round output restrictions, delaying negotiations, intimidating strikers, and refusing to meet mediators. Mediators were needed to end each strike and their intervention was accompanied by a withdrawal of mobilisation resources. The unfolding of each strike resulted from complex interactions between many parties, well beyond that of employers and strikers.

Theoretical implications

The existing literature has tended to explain the local grievance either by reference to the macro-economic and political circumstances, or by reference to how workers perceive their situation. In neither case is grievance understood as something which can affect the subsequent unfolding of the strike. Gouldner's argument that grievance indicates a disruption to workers' expectations is still used.[24] Such a representation views the grievance mainly as a reaction. Both Hyman and Kelly use Gouldner's argument but they do not go on to recognise that the grievance may well affect the future shape of the strike.[25] Whilst Cronin does take the argument forward, he has still presented grievance as a separate matter from mobilisation.[26] However, looking at grievance in terms of its breadth of challenge and the way it resonates with other workers' experiences allows the grievance to be considered as a dynamic in the strike.

The grievances in the Rego and French Connection cases did present a broad challenge to management authority. Once recognition is granted the union has the potential, from the management's point of view, to 'make a nuisance' of itself over a potentially unlimited range of topics for an unlimited time in the future. Where management have indicated opposition at an early stage, any move to take action is likely to be interpreted as a broad challenge to their authority that it will be strongly resisted. This of course means that this kind of grievance is likely to result in a long strike once the action is decided upon.

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[24] Alvin Gouldner, *Wildcat Strike,* (New York, 1954), p.28/30
[25] Richard Hyman, *Strikes*, (London, 1972), p.115, & John Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations*, (London, 1998), p.29
[26] James E Cronin, 'Strikes and Power in Britain', in Lex Heerma van Voss and Herman Diedericks ed. *Industrial Conflict, Papers Presented to the Fourth British-Dutch Conference on Labour History*, (Amsterdam, 1988), p.19.

Looking at grievance in terms of the breadth of challenge also helps to distinguish procedural claims which management may nevertheless decide to meet, perhaps because they were very self-contained, from those which posed a broader reach of threat if granted.

In the Rego and French Connection cases, grievances about basic trade union issues such as recognition had a powerful resonance with other workers and this had significant effect mobilising support and resources for the strike. This extended beyond those immediately involved, contributing towards sustaining the action. In both cases too the grievance was in opposition to a broader technological change of work intensification. The evidence from the close-knit community of the London menswear manufacturers was that this signalled to them the need to collectively withstand the strike, which also prolonged it.

The literature that emphasises the political and economic roots of a grievance tends to present it as something there already, which precipitates the strike and then has no further role to play. The Lloyd-Warner and Low study is an extreme example of how the grievance is treated as quite a separate entity from the process of the strike.[27] However, viewing a publicly expressed grievance as a dynamic that can affect the subsequent unfolding of the strike allows full consideration of the broader political and economic contexts, whilst at the same time accepting the importance of the manner in which the grievance is perceived.

Social movement theory provides the main contribution to an understanding of mobilisation, highlighting the need to consider outcomes. However, social movement writers tend not to specify the different sorts of mobilisation that might take place. At the general level of the theory, although there are clearly expectations that different sorts of mobilisation are pursued for different ends, it goes no further. For example: McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly revisit mobilisation theory in their latest book and advise mobilisation analysts to "explain what sorts of actors engage in contention, what

[27] W. Lloyd-Warner and J. O. Low, *The Social System of the Modern Factory: The Strike: a social analysis*, (US/London, 1947)

identities they assume, and what forms of interaction they produce".[28] Their last phrase does incorporate the probability of different outcomes arising from the different elements of mobilisation. Crossley also hints at the need to understand how different kinds of mobilisation have different outcomes in his discussion of differential opportunity structures. However because the discussion is about opportunity structures, it does not consider the range of different actions which those mobilised actually take in a campaign.[29]

This study shows that mobilisation is pursued for at least four different purposes with different expectations as to outcome: to broaden popular support, to regenerate strike solidarity, to embarrass the employers and to curtail production. In fact mobilisation was fairly successful in all these ventures in the cases here except for the last category, where the outcome was unknown. It is always very hard for strikers to assess the success of their efforts to curtail production as they had limited access to relevant information due to the asymmetric power relations to which Paul Smith has referred.[30]

It is easy to understand why these strikes continued despite little gain from management given that the outcomes to three parts of the activity were seen to be successful, and the fourth was an unknown. The feedback to workers for most of what they were doing to progress the strike would have given them a sense of 'we can win', even though their attempts to prevent production appear to have been more limited. Gaining production information was difficult even whilst they were not on strike, and obtaining it from out-with the factories during a conflict, very unlikely. Therefore analysing mobilisation as several different activities can perhaps aid understanding about long strikes.

Franzosi and Biggs both underscore the need to take more account of how other actors affect a strike, but Biggs has tended to limit his analysis to the employers as the 'other' actor, and Franzosi is more concerned with his case that the people in a strike-

[28] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *The Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge, 2001), p.34.
[29] Nick Crossley, *Making Sense of Social Movements,* (Philadelphia, 2002), p.110/111.
[30] Paul Smith, *Unionization and Union Leadership*, (London, 2001), p.8.

wave together constitute an independent social actor.[31] More generally social movement theory writers are primarily concerned with other sorts of popular protest, and do not deal in depth with strike mobilisation. Indeed Tarrow considers that strikes do not involve many actors and he appears to imply that strikes are intrinsically less interesting than other forms of protest when he claims, in reference to other public protest, that "Unlike strikes which required some relationship to the withholding of labour or of a product to attract supporters, demonstrations could spread rapidly from place to place and combine many social actors."[32] The implication here is that strikes are unlikely to produce much of interest to social movement theorists because they do not incorporate many social actors.

The systematic scheme of analysis adopted by this study meant that interactions between all the social actors who came into contact with each of these strikes were considered. Whilst it is true that most of the 'action' happened between the employers and the workers, other groups, and sometimes unexpected other actors, did interact. It is apparent from the cases in this study that many actors impinge on the unfolding of a strike, sometimes in quite unexpected ways. For example: the TV film crew in the French Connection dispute appeared to have created the opportunity for a more militant steward to emerge; the judge in the Rego case effectively lent authority to Alfred Wall to resolve the dispute.

The tension generated in the Rego and French Connection strikes re-opens Hyman, and Offe and Wiesenthal's idea, discussed in the thesis introduction, that union leaderships are inherently drawn into conflict with the rank-and-file in militant episodes. Lane and Roberts also take this approach. They emphasise how the bureaucratic structure of GMWU strangles rank and file democracy and they liken the union leaders' behaviour to that of management.[33] Zeitlin rejects this approach.[34] Kelly too rejects the bureaucratic thesis as a whole, and acknowledges the importance

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[31] Roberto Franzosi, *The Puzzle of Strikes: Class and State Strategies in post-war Italy*, (Cambridge, 1995); Michael Biggs, 'Strikes as Sequences of Interaction, the American Strike Wave of 1886', *Social Science History*, Vol 26. No.3 (2002).
[32] S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement,* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 100.
[33] Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons'*, (London, 1971), pp.48 -54.
[34] Jonathon Zeitlin, 'From Labour History to the History of Industrial Relations', *Economic History Review*, (1987, XL, 2), pp. 159 – 184.

of the particular historical circumstances. [35] Explanations such as Allen's that focus on pragmatic judgements about the likelihood of success seem more appropriate.[36]

The introduction also suggested that the political orientation of senior leaders contributed to the level of support they may give to a strike. The evidence presented in the Rego chapter suggested that Andrew Conley's support for the national agreement was a key factor in his feelings about the strike. This contrasts with Smith's and the NUTGW's six-month support for the French Connection strike. Their support outweighs the friction at the end of this strike. The 1986 NUTGW attitude to the French Connection strike is in no way comparable to that of the GMWU in the Pilkington episode, where David Basnett called for a return to work in the first week.[37] Indeed, Lane and Roberts acknowledge that the 'moderate' ideology of the GMWU differed from TGWU policies of the era.[38] It would seem, therefore, that differences in the union's internal relationships are best understood as a combination of pragmatic judgments and political orientation.

Zeitlin argues that in practice it is arbitrary to decide who the rank and file and the bureaucracy are, and that is certainly the case here. Are Elsbury, Sullivan and even the London Committee activists to be counted as rank and file? Are the TGW in the Rego strike and its successor the NUTGW in the French Connection strike to be counted as large and bureaucratic? Both unions ranked as very small in terms of the big UK general unions. Moreover the WGWU rank-and-file revolt in the 1930s was a very serious and prolonged internal union division, but it happened in a tiny union which had few rules and little bureaucratic structure. The cases studied here do show tension generated between the senior leadership and local strike organisers, but an historical explanation fits best. I suggest that the key issue when senior union leaders consider continuing support for a local strike is a pragmatic judgement between the interests of the whole membership on the one hand and the likelihood of success on the other. [39] Decisions are made in their historical context by leaders whose political orientation matters.

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[35] John Kelly, *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics*, (London, 1988), see pp.149 – 183.
[36] Vic Allen, *Power in Trade Unions,* (London, 1954), Ch 1.
[37] Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons'*, (London, 1971), p.97.
[38] Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons'*, (London, 1971), p. 53.
[39] Ibid. p301. Kelly discusses the idea that workers will choose to do what they think will succeed.

Does it also follow that strikers' decisions are also more likely based upon the actual situation in which they find themselves as Stinchcombe's argument implies,[40] or upon a misreading of their position and a false assessment of their chances of success as Waddington[41] suggests? The most testing case is the French Connection strike. The evidence of the historical situation in which these people found themselves does not appear to offer much prospect of success, so why should they have continued?

There is an alternative to Waddington's view. The case is already made that treating mobilisation as a differentiated activity helps our understanding of a strike. People can be expected to act upon the feedback they have of the outcome of their action. In the case of French Connection there was plenty of positive feedback to show the strike was holding solid. There was also plenty of feedback to show that it had generated a wide network of support in the South Shields labour movement, and from the union executive. The latter did not query their support for many months. There were also signals that embarrassing publicity had pushed the company into some response, and it was surprising that the company always stopped short of involving the law, even when it had good grounds to. Even the news that the strike might force the company to close suggested effective picketing at local level. It was much more difficult for the strikers to know what, if any impact their strike had on the company as a whole.

Thus it is possible to look at the whole situation and suggest that where information about the outcome of a particular type of campaigning was known, it was positive. There is also the question of the cost of giving up. This resonates with Offe and Wiesenthal's comment that workers count their costs differently.[42] In the French Connection factories the cost of giving up could be measured since Tom Coburn's actions were common knowledge. Whilst it is also true that the mounting debt for strikers was also a cost that could be counted, when these two costs are put alongside the positive feedback from the different types of mobilisation undertaken, it is

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[40] Arthur Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History*, (Academic Press, New York, 1978).
[41] David Waddington, 'The Ansells Brewery: A Social Cognitive approach to the study of strikes', *Journal of Occupational Psychology,* (1986), Vol. 59.
[42] Offe and Wiesenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action', in Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capital,* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 183.

reasonable to suggest that these people had a real basis for thinking there might be some gain from their action.

It is a pity that the existing literature appears not to theorise how strikes end. However, the finding that mediators occasioned the reduction of mobilisation is of interest, and this is not the same as saying that it was made a condition of their intervention. Rather it seems that a reduction in mobilisation is an inevitable product of mediation.

Four key generalised issues then have arisen from these analogies that can contribute to existing understanding about strikes. First, the nature of the grievance may have a continuing influence on the unfolding of a strike, either from the workers' employers' or other parties' perspectives. Second, mobilisation is a differentiated process. Third, the actions of all parties, including apparently remote social actors, can be important in the unfolding of the strike. Fourth, mediation occasions a reduction in mobilisation even when there is no requirement to do so. Furthermore the evidence here about the tension between those on strike and the union executive leadership suggests a much more complex and historically contingent explanation is best. Research on this would be helpful. The evidence here about the relationships with the full-time officials supports Kelly and Heery's work which gives primacy to the full-time officials' values over their commitment to the institution which employs them.

Other avenues of research

Because long strikes are a new category for explicit study, there are many opportunities for further research. This section highlights some of those uncovered in this conclusion.

There may be a connection between the breadth of challenge in a particular grievance and length of strike which may be of interest to explore. Each of the strikes also combined successful mobilisation with less successful attempts to restrict production output. At least two issues arise from this: how far this is connected to strike length and how commonplace is the pattern of escalation into riskier action. The WGWU strike raises its own issues since it is very unusual for a strike to be organised with so little traditional trade union solidarity, yet it was a strategy which produced some

results. Other similarly small and isolated unions may too have had positive experiences despite relative isolation. There is a relationship between strike pay and resources for strike mobilisation, and a deeper understanding would be helpful. Linked to this is more detailed consideration about how long strikes do come to an end.

Other issues which may merit further enquiry may include a separate study of how strike pay or strike committees have changed. Much work has already been undertaken about how the press report strikes, but it would also be interesting to explore how the union uses the press. Is it commonplace for tensions to be generated between strikers and the union executive? This is supported by evidence from Lane and Roberts, and from Waddington.[43] How conditional is the union executive's relationship with strikers and strike committees, and how does it alter? How does a nationally organised, executive committee managed strike differ in its interactions, in strike management, and in outcomes?

Study review

The motive for this study was to capture how the actions of all the parties to a conflict contributed to its unfolding. The study hoped to achieve this: firstly, by discovering how workers' grievances, their mobilisation and the interactions amongst all connected parties produced each long strike; and, secondly, to add to the literature by drawing some theoretical conclusions from the analogies between each strike. The methodology proposed writing a history of each strike, highlighting the grievances, their context, how mobilisation started and was pursued, and how all of this provoked interactions between all the parties which caused each strike to last as long as it did.

Highlighting the interactions was not straightforward. Undoubtedly asking people directly, as the Lane and Roberts study was able to do,[44] would have been an easier way to gain the reasons for actions. Why, for example, did a committee decide on a particular course of action, what had influenced them, and to whom were they

[43] Tension was generated both in the Pilkington and Anselm strikes. See Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons'*, (London, 1971), and David Waddington, 'The Ansells Brewery: A Social Cognitive approach to the study of strikes', *Journal of Occupational Psychology,* (1986), Vol. 59.

[44] Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons,* (1971).

reacting? Individual members would give their own gloss on the argument, but by interviewing several people one could glean the different motives at play. This is not possible from a collective historical record such as committee minutes.

The reasons why the 1928 union executive turned so viciously on their own people was explained in the historical record. But other turning points, such as when Sheldon became involved in the 1945 strike, whilst the fact of it was clearly in the record, the explanation needed to be worked out, and this implied a degree of inference. This issue is discussed in the methodology. It would be rare indeed for a historical record to be completely explicit. Capturing a sense of motivation from a collective decision is hard.

Even so, people did take their decisions about what to do next collectively, mostly in the formal setting of a committee (even though policy options are often aired informally). In this mode of decision making, it is most likely that the actions of other closely involved parties will be scrutinised, to help reach a decision. This is supported by my own direct experience in managing campaigns and strike action.

Highlighting the grievances, their context and development was relatively straightforward. So too was highlighting what mobilisation occurred. These elements could be reasonably easily identified in the historical record. However, the task of comparing them to identify the analogies showed the inherent difficulty in comparing different historical episodes. Important analogies and theoretical insights have surfaced, and are worthy of further research, but their presence is stronger in the beginnings and endings of these strikes than in the middles. At one level this is a surprise since, as already commented by some literature, and found here, by and large the people most directly involved: that is the workers and the employers did the same kind of things. Workers picketed, leafleted, held rallies (with the apparent exception on the last two counts of the 1945 strike); employers circumvented production loss, delayed and intimidated.

Yet on a deeper level it is not surprising. These were very complex and dynamic events with almost infinite capacity for changes in direction. Moreover, the making of a *collective* decision, which was the case here, for the union side and strike

committees, and for the employers' association in 1928 and 1945, entailed many motives from several people. In these circumstances it is unsurprising that the different histories of these episodes have been most apparent in the middles of these strikes.

I was hopeful at the outset to the study that since, as Tarrow and Lyddon have argued,[45] not much of significance has changed in the way strikes are managed, there would be rather clearer and simpler analogies than there have turned out to be. It was reasonable to expect the 1945 strike to be different. The relative difference between the WGWU strike, and the Rego and French Connection strikes invites further consideration. It is not apparent that the explanation for the difference is the structural difference: that is between an executive-managed multi-site strike and a local factory strike.

The differences in the unfolding of the WGWU strike can be summarised as: a politically and economically favourable environment; grievances that permitted more room for manoeuvre; fewer mobilising resources and no opportunity to form wider alliances; many more people on strike; no escalation, and very limited tension between the strikers and the union leaders. The strike was a 'short' long strike in comparison with the other two. How did these factors affect duration, if at all? The chapter emphasises the importance of the limited resources, and limited opportunity to make external alliances in the labour movement. This appears to have been a significant factor foreshortening the strike. I would suggest that the kind of grievance pursued, and the employers' association's aim permitted more opportunity for a constructive compromise than in the other two cases. This also favoured a shorter, long strike. Finally, the economic and political climate did help. It does not appear that the fact there were more people on strike, or that it did not escalate, or even that it failed to produce much tension had much bearing on the strike duration.

These three strikes turned out to be very different from each other. The analogies were not at all obvious, except at the very superficial level of routine strike activity, and

[45] Dave Lyddon, 'Rediscovering the Past: Recent British Strike Tactics in Historical Perspective', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, (Spring, 1998), pp. 107 – 151.1998 Sydney Tarrow, *Power in Movement,* (Cambridge, 1998), p.102.

routine employer actions. But the fact that these activities occur so routinely in strikes must mean that there should be some recurring patterns of action and response. The study showed that some patterns and some additional theoretical insights can indeed be identified, and that any attempt to compare strikes must take account of all the parties involved, and not just the employers and the workers.

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