Growing-Up in the Interregnum: Accounts from the South Yorkshire Coalfield

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Introduction

This chapter reflects on my perceptions of deindustrialisation growing up in the aftermath of pit closures in the 1990s in Grimethorpe, a former pit village near Barnsley. It draws upon archival research conducted for the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign in relation to the 1984–85 miners' strike, which sets the backdrop to changes in the socio-political psyche of coalfield communities and the cultural significance of the strike. It also draws upon data collected during my PhD research, an ethnographic account of the experiences of economic restructuring and the legacies of industrial closure, many of which can be attributed to the state (mis)management of closures and restructuring during the 1980s and 1990s, a process whereby communities were ostracised in the planned

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decline of the coalmining industry. It reflects my experiences working with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. The chapter pieces together these insights, whilst embarking on an exercise of conceptual clarification vis-à-vis considering the wider impact of pit closures on the social systems organised around a unique form of industrial life, and which formed an integral part of the fabric of coalmining communities. The chapter borrows the term *interregnum* from Antonio Gramsci (1971) to argue that the immediate aftermath of closure constituted a social and economic interregnum, in which every aspect of social, political and economic life was implicated, and in which social and civic organisations crumbled into the industrial void. Such an insight is important as it gives us the conceptual basis from which we can understand the 'crumbling cultures' of former industrial communities (Strangleman et al., 2013). The interregnum forms part of the experience of deindustrialisation and economic restructuring and it is from those experiences that spring the various socio-economic conditions that embody the 'half-life' of deindustrialisation (Linkon, 2018). The interregnum is in itself a distinct phase of deindustrialisation we must take into account when considering the vast socio-political changes that have occurred and which underpin—and continue to drive changes to—the political landscapes in Britain, the US and Europe. It is in this context, I suggest, where we can best understand the implications for "collectively incapacitated individualised individuals, struggling to protect themselves from looming accidents in their social and economic lives" as they negotiate the future (Streeck, 2016, p. 69).

The chapter begins from the premise that what we would traditionally call working-class communities, built on heavy industry, have transformed dramatically over recent decades. Accounts of this have been documented by scholars working in the field of deindustrialisation. Deindustrialisation is the long-term series of processes that is linked with capital mobility and flows from the flight of capital from a particular locale (Cowie, 1999). It is now a field of study within its own right (Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014), but requires an interdisciplinary approach to appreciate the scale of the challenges it presents for society more widely. High et al. (2017) brought together scholars—many of whom had lived through deindustrialisation themselves—to present

accounts of the transformative power that capital mobility has over individual communities, towns and regions, as well as the persisting effects. The implications are far-reaching and include health and disability (McIvor, 2017; Storey, 2017); the environment (MacKinnon, 2017); the experiences of young people (Parnaby, 2017); and class identities (Contrepois, 2017). It is increasingly clear that the politics of deindustrialisation have significant implications for contemporary political systems. Brexit, Trump and the rise of the right on the continent have refocussed attentions on the political consequences of economic changes in 'left behind' communities (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). The persisting effects of deindustrialisation are found in policy dialogues that seek to address regional economic imbalances and informed Trump's promise to 'Bring back jobs' (Burns et al., 2016) to America, as well as the UK government's promise to 'level up' British regions (UK Government, 2021). What this demonstrates is that the events that occurred decades ago—and the political management of those events—are as relevant today as they ever have been.

State Management of Economic Change

This section reflects on the state's role in managing economic transition, drawing on two particular instances. The first is the ongoing project by the European Union (EU) to assist carbon-intensive industrial communities affected by the European Green Deal, the overarching aim of which is to make Europe the first 'climate-neutral bloc in the world by 2050' (European Commission, 2021). Second is the experience of British coalfield communities during the 1980s and 1990s—and specifically their treatment by Conservative governments during those years. This comparison aims to draw out differences between two occasions where the state has, in response to political pressures, identified a requirement for the restructuring of economies and marshalled levers of state to initiate those changes. As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, restructuring is a process that, when unmitigated, can have immense consequences for the social and physical landscape of capital,

as businesses, communities and workers are forced to adapt to new political-economic realities.

In May 2021, the European Parliament adopted the Just Transition Fund (JTF) as part of the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM), a policy instrument created to mitigate industrial and sectoral transition in regions that will be severely affected by the European Green Deal. Member States are expected to work with partners across industrial zones dependent on carbon-intensive industries to prepare 'territorial just transition plans' that will help address the social and economic effects of the transition to a low-carbon economy. According to the trade union IndustriAll, which represents industrial workers in several countries across Europe, the critical challenge facing policymakers is providing the toolbox to help regions support a Just Transition that will deliver 'decarbonisation without deindustrialisation' (Barthès & Kirton-Darling, 2021). The path to achieving this, IndustriAll suggests, requires the provision of policy mechanisms, financial instruments *and* a legal framework that anticipates challenges that lie ahead, and which ensures no one is left behind.

The European Commission projects their targeted support will mobilise between €65 and €75 billion between 2021 and 2027—a combination of public and private sector funding which is hoped will smooth the process of economic transition for those affected (European Commission, 2021). For IndustriAll, the adoption of the JTF by the European institutions represents a significant victory for trade unionists that have been calling for resources to mitigate the socio-economic consequences of economic restructuring (Barthès & Kirton-Darling, 2021). It is a significant programme which could potentially demonstrate the value of soft politics—the power to convene—through a process of resource pooling and knowledge exchange that Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, claims is based on the principle of solidarity (Timmermans, 2021). The policy requires interventions across a whole range of policy areas, most obviously in environmental regulation; labour and employment; education and skills policy; business support; research and innovation; infrastructure upgrading; and transport and energy.

The programme is an example of where the EU is attempting to coordinate stakeholders to provide a framework able to manage change where the political and economic agenda—that of international commitments to tackling climate change—demands restructuring to face the challenges of the future, and it has the potential to manage that change by bringing those implicated onboard in an inclusive way. This is not to suggest that the situation in Europe is harmonious. On the contrary, the climate change agenda is in some quarters controversial, for instance in Poland where in 2021, thousands of trade unionists took to the streets to protest the shift away from coal production (Scislowska, 2021). Nonetheless, it is an example where, anticipating disharmony, the EU is working with communities to attempt to give them a sense of ownership over their futures.

This approach contrasts with that of the British state in its proactive, yet covert, micromanagement of the decline of the British coalmining industry during the 1980s and 1990s. Successive governments throughout those decades pursued pit closure programmes that resulted in the closure of most of Britain's deep coalmines. The closures followed the bitter, year-long dispute of the 1984–1985 miners' strike, fought out between the Conservative government and the NUM, which signalled the death knell for the tripartite system of industrial governance and transformed, seemingly irreversibly, British industrial relations. In direct contrast to the approach thirty-six years later by the EU, the British state was instrumental in a highly politicised rundown of the industry, with severe consequences for the communities affected, whilst, at the same time, engaging in a deliberate strategy of institutional, rule-based and preference-shaping de-politicisation (Flinders & Buller, 2006) in suggesting that closure was an unplanned, inevitable consequence of market forces.

For trade unionists, the dispute was crucial as it would set the scene for the following decades not only in terms of their ability to defend and represent workers' interests, but in terms of the kind of futures that coalfield communities would face. They believed that a dispute in the coal industry was inevitable, in that it had been meticulously planned by government over a number of years, a claim publicly denied. An analysis of cabinet papers covering this period, however, suggests that the

Conservative Party was planning to provoke a strike as part of a wide plan for the privatisation of nationalised industries. The document that most pertinently supports these claims is the *Final Report of the Nationalised Industries Policy Group*—widely known as the 'Ridley Plan' after Conservative MP Nicholas Ridley (Ridley, 1977). Prepared following the Heath Government's defeat by the NUM in 1974, the Ridley Plan set out the broad policy context required for "returning nationalised industries to the private sector", to be achieved "more or less by stealth" (p. 15). In order to be prepared for the challenge of 'countering the political threat', the report suggested five key policies. First, it suggests that government "design [their] return on capital figures to allow some scope…for paying a higher wage claim than the going rate" (p. 24), which would undermine solidarity by turning workers in different industries against each other. Second, the government "might try and provoke a battle in a non-vulnerable industry, where we can win…A victory on ground of our choosing would discourage an attack on more vulnerable ground" (p. 24). Third, it suggested government "must take every precaution possible to strengthen our defences against all-out attack in a highly vulnerable industry". It identified the 'most likely area [as] coal', recommending the stock piling of coal and contingency plans to "arrange for certain haulage companies to recruit in advance a core of non-union lorry drivers to help us move coal where necessary" (p. 25). Fourth, the report proposed that government 'cut off the supply of money to the strikers' and that such a policy should be "put into effect quickly and that it be sufficiently tough to act as a major deterrent" (p. 25). Finally, it suggested that government deal with picketing, by having a "large, mobile squad of police who are equipped and prepared to uphold the law" (p. 25). It concluded that the five policies would provide an integrated approach to 'provide a pretty strong defence' and "enable us to hold the fort until the long-term strategy of fragmentation can begin" (p. 26). The significance of the Ridley Plan cannot be overstated. The strike, as Shaw (2015) puts it, "was the defining industrial conflict of the post-war years in the UK. It began as a dual battle of revenge and replication as both factions, fuelled by their memories of their 1972/1974 struggles, sought to rectify or revive past results". It illustrates the determination of the Conservative

government to provoke a strike and win, and in doing so settle old scores with the unions which had brought down Heath in 1974.

In the run up to the 1984–1985 miners' strike, many in the industry believed the attitude of the National Coal Board (NCB) executive during negotiations was designed to lure the NUM into calling a national strike, against what transpired to be an employer backed by a well-prepared government. Mick Clapham, who was the NUM's head of industrial relations (1983–1992), and later served as a Labour MP, recalled a meeting with NCB deputy chairman, Jimmy Cowan, on 3 March 1983:

> He didn't go into a great deal of discussion…he made it quite plain that they were going to take out about 8.2 million tonnes [of coal from production] – that would be 20,000 jobs. Then the guy just folded his arms and sort of laid back in his chair with his eyes closed and started to rock himself back and forth…he did that for all the rest of the meeting, despite the fact that people from various areas was asking him in a proper manner, 'where are the jobs going to go?' We need to pass the news onto our men, so they can plan for them and their families. We need to be able to consider how we might move forward in the future. He just refused to answer. (Interview Data)

Clapham said such an attitude was prevalent in the dealings with senior NCB managers and was instrumental in strengthening the determination of workplace reps, union officials and rank and file members throughout the industry to resist closures. It was also believed that NCB plans existed that surpassed those disclosed, which formed part of a broader strategy to rundown the industry in preparation for its privatisation, a claim which was also publicly denied. Thatcher's (1993) memoirs confirmed this:

> During the autumn and winter of 1983-4 Ian MacGregor [NCB chairman] formulated his plans. At that time manpower in the industry was 202,000. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission had produced a report into the coal industry in 1983 which showed that some 75 percent of the pits were making a loss. Faced with this, Mr MacGregor began with the aim of bringing the industry to break-even by 1988. In September

> 1983 he told Government that he intended to cut the workforce by some 64,000 over three years, reducing capacity by 25 million tons. (p. 343)

The revelation in her memoirs rings true with the official record. A note of a meeting in Downing Street on 15 September 1983, chaired by Thatcher, records that the then Energy Secretary Peter Walker said:

> …which would reduce the workforce by some 55,000 and reduce capacity by some 20 million tonnes: and then a further 11, with manpower reductions of 9,000 and capacity reduction of a further 5 million tonnes. There should be no closure list, but a pit-by-pit procedure. The manpower at the end of that time in the industry would be down to 138,000 from its current level of 202,000.
>
> …there would be considerable problems in all this. The manpower reductions would bite heavily in particular areas: two-thirds of Welsh miners would become redundant, 35 percent of miners in Scotland, 48 percent in the North East, 50 percent in South Yorkshire and 46 percent in the South Midlands (which included the whole of the Kent coalfield). From end-1984 onwards it would not be possible to offer redundant miners' other employment in the mining industry. There would also be unfortunate effects on the mining equipment supply industry. (Scholar, 1983)

Keen the colliery closure plans should be kept secret, discussions were held at the beginning of meetings as to "how to arrange…meetings so that as little as possible of the more sensitive aspects is committed to paper", alongside the suggestion to ministers to give a 'short oral briefing' (Gregson, 1983, p. 1). Time and again during the strike, the existence of a plan for the closure of pits was denied by ministers, and the sanitisation of minutes makes it difficult to establish the nature of plans at any given stage. It is clear, however, from the minutes available in September 1983, six months before the strike, that plans existed to reduce the workforce by 64,000 men, far beyond the 20,000 repeatedly claimed the NCB. Thatcher personally approved a letter from the chairman of the NCB sent to all miners in June 1984, denying such plans:

> This is a strike which should never have happened. It is based on very serious misrepresentation and distortion of the facts. At great financial cost miners have supported the strike for fourteen weeks because your leaders have told you this...That the Coal Board is out to butcher the coal industry. That we plan to do away with 70,000 jobs. That we plan to close down around 86 pits, leaving only 100 working collieries. (MacGregor, 1984)

The letter claims that the NUM leadership had 'deliberately misled' miners into supporting the strike. There is also evidence that significant pressures were placed on the police and the judiciary to deal severely with cases arising from the dispute. Following complaints in the first few weeks of the strike from MacGregor that 'no arrests had been made' (Turnbull, 1984a), Thatcher intervened at a wider meeting of ministers that same day, directing that:

> It was essential to stiffen the resolve of Chief Constables to ensure that they fulfilled their duty to uphold the law. The Police were now well paid and well equipped and individual forces had good arrangements for mutual support. (Turnbull, 1984b)

Consequently, pressure was placed on the Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, to personally make interventions with police chiefs:

> …his department had alerted Police Chiefs earlier in the week on the extent of their powers, but he was not satisfied with the response…He had gone to the limit of what the Home Secretary could do while respecting the constitutional independence of Police Forces. (Turnbull, 1984b)

Summing up, Thatcher said:

> The meeting endorsed the action of the Home Secretary to ensure that Chief Constables carried out their duties fully. The matter should be discussed again at Cabinet when it would be clearer whether the Police were adopting the more vigorous interpretation of their duties which was being sought. (Turnbull, 1984b)

The papers showed that ministers put pressure on local magistrates to accelerate the rate of prosecutions—whilst also threatening local magistrates' court committees with the appointment of stipendiary magistrates without a request from individual court committees, outside the normal judicial appointment processes. Thatcher expressed frustration that violence was going undeterred (Cabinet, 1984), and the Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, told advisors that 'the cabinet were…concerned by the apparently light sentences in the cases which had been heard'. Though this summary represents a snapshot of the pressures placed on institutions such as the police and the courts, it demonstrates a plan that had been years in the making to dramatically reduce the size of the coal industry, and that despite the denials of government, they were responsible for micro-managing the dispute, including where that jeopardised the constitutional independence of the police and judicial process. The general point to be made here is that these were exceptional times in which the state was prepared to interfere in juridical processes in order to secure victory over a group of its own citizens, who it saw as a 'political threat' (Ridley, 1977, p. 28), and who Thatcher infamously branded 'the enemy within' (Thatcher, 1984).

Whilst it is not the intention here to rehearse each twist and turn of the strike, the papers referenced exemplify a government that utilised the vast resource of the state to clear the way for its economic reforms, and in doing so face down institutions that represented the interests of coalmining communities. The experience of striking miners, their families and other coalfield residents went far beyond losing an industrial dispute (High et al., 2017, p. 3). It was the beginning of the end of a form of industrial life that had built up over generations. No coalfield region went unaffected. In Nottinghamshire, some miners opposed the NUM leadership in its belief that the strike was necessary and in their handling of it. Recent research identified mutual support between the government and the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM) (Daniels, 2019). Daniels shows that the UDM received favourable treatment for fitting the 'Thatcherite model' of a 'moderate' trade union, but that support was removed in the late-1980s and early-1990s once the longer-term plans for the industry had set in.

Table 1 shows the scale of the closures between 1984 and 1994—the year the NCB was privatised and bought up by RJB mining—with 122 collieries closing during that period (BBC News, 2004). The consequences of pit closures and the lack of a clear plan from the UK government to provide effective support for communities to transition to a life beyond coal not only affected those miners, but others living in the British coalfields.

Whilst experiences of industrial decline vary between regions, legacies of industrial closure are a common and prevalent feature of Britain's former coalfield communities. Research for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust showed that on almost every socio-economic indicator coalfield communities lagged behind other regions of the UK (Foden et al., 2014). It found that job density (the ratio between jobs within a particular area and the number of residents of working age); employment rates; and business formation rates are all below national averages. They also found that "coalfield residents in work are more likely to be employed in lower-grade or manual occupations, and the coalfield workforce is more likely to lack higher grade qualifications" (p. 5). In addition, it found that the proportion of residents suffering from ill-health is double that in South-East England as evidenced by rates of residents claiming Disability Living Allowance. A combination of these factors resulted in one in seven working-age adults unemployed and receiving benefits. This picture was only 'marginally widened' by the 2008 recession, with deprivation and disadvantage being "deep-seated rather than rooted in the 2008-post recession" (pp. 35–36). In sum, Foden et al. (2014) stated that evidence provided a "compelling case that most of the coalfield communities of England, Scotland and Wales require support. The miners' strike of 1984–1985 may be receding into history but the job losses that followed in its wake are still part of the everyday economic reality of most mining communities" (p. 37). A more recent report found that although coalfield communities had benefited from the economic upturn, progress was still hampered by weaknesses in local economies, evident by the persisting "extent of economic and social disadvantage, and the incidence of ill health" (Beatty et al., 2019, p. 7). It shows that despite a significant passage of time since the miners' strike, political decisions taken during those years, which bypassed the communities affected by pit closures, left

Table 1 Colliery closures between March 1984 and 1994

1984, March Onwards		
Bearpark, Co Durham	**Cronton**, Merseyside	
1985		
Aberpergwm, South Wales	**Abertillery**, South Wales	**Ackton** Hall, Yorkshire
Bedwas, South Wales	**Bold**, Merseyside	**Brenkley**, Tyne and Wear
Brookhouse, Yorkshire	**Cortonwood**, Yorkshire	**Emley** Moor, Yorkshire
Fryston, Yorkshire	**Garw**, South Wales	**Haig**, Cumbria
Herrington, Co Durham	**Margam**, South Wales	**MoorGreen**, Nottinghamshire
Penrhiwceiber, South Wales	**Pye Hill**, Nottinghamshire	**Sacriston**, Co Durham
St Johns, South Wales	**Savile**, Yorkshire	**Treforgan**, South Wales
Wolstanton, Staffordshire	**Yorkshire Main**, Yorkshire	
1986		
Babbington, Nottinghamshire	**Bates**, Northumberland	**Bersham**, North Wales
Birch Coppice, Warwickshire	**Cadeby**, Yorkshire	**Comrie**, Fife
Cwm, South Wales	**Eppleton**, Co Durham	**Glasshoughton**, Yorkshire
Horden, Co Durham	**Kinsley**, Yorkshire	**Ledston Luck**, Yorkshire
Nantgarw/Winsor, South Wales	**Polkemmet**, West Lothian	**Tilmanstone**, Kent
Whitwell, Nottinghamshire	**Whitwick/South Leicester**, Leicestershire	
1987		
Newstead, Nottinghamshire	**Nostell**, Yorkshire	**Polmaise 3/4**, Stirling
Snowdown, Kent	**Wheldale**, Yorkshire	**Whittal**, Co Durham
Woolley, Yorkshire	**Silverwood**, Yorkshire	
1988		
Abernant, South Wales	**Arkwright**, Derbyshire	**Ashington**, Northumberland
Cadley Hill, Derbyshire	**Lady Winsor/Abercynon**, South Wales	**Linby**, Nottinghamshire
Mansfield, Nottinghamshire	**Manvers Complex**, Yorkshire	**Seafield/Francis**, Fife
South Kirkby/Riddings, Yorkshire		

1989		
Baddersley, Warwickshire	**Barnburgh**, Yorkshire	**Barony**, Ayrshire
Betteshanger, Kent	**Bilston Glen**, Mid Lothian	**Blidworth**, Nottinghamshire
Cynheidre, South Wales	**Holditch**, Staffordshire	**Marine/Six Bells**, South Wales
Merthyr Vale, South Wales	**Oakdale**, South Wales	**Renishaw Park**, Yorkshire
Royston, Yorkshire	**Sutton**, Nottinghamshire	**Trelewis**, South Wales
Warsop, Nottinghamshire		
1990		
Agecroft, Lancashire	**Ellistown**, Leicestershire	**Lea Hall**, Staffordshire
Littleton, Staffordshire	**Shireoaks/Steetley**, Nottinghamshire	**Treeton**, Yorkshire
Donnisthorpe/Rawdon, Leicestershire	**Florence**, Cumbria	
1991		
Askern, Yorkshire	**Bagworth**, Leicestershire	**Barnsley Main**, Yorkshire
Creswell, Derbyshire	**Dawdon**, Co Durham	**Dearne Valley**, Yorkshire
Deep Navigation, South Wales	**Denby Grange**, Yorkshire	**Dinnington**, Yorkshire
Gedling, Nottinghamshire	**Murton**, Co Durham	**Penallta**, South Wales
Sutton Manor, Merseyside	**Thurcroft**, Yorkshire	
1992		
Allerton Bywater, Yorkshire	**Bickershaw Complex**, Lancashire	**Cotgrave**, Nottinghamshire
Sherwood, Nottinghamshire	**Shirebrook**, Derbyshire	**Silverhill**, Nottinghamshire
1993		
Bentley, Yorkshire	**Bolsover**, Derbyshire	**Easington**, Co Durham
Frickley/South Elmsall, Yorkshire	**Grimethorpe**, Yorkshire	**Houghton/Darfield**, Yorkshire
Parkside, Merseyside	**Rufford**, Nottinghamshire	**Sharlston**, Yorkshire
Taff Merthyr, South Wales	**Vane Tempest/Seaham**, Co Durham	**Westoe**, Tyne and Wear
Goldthorpe/Hickleton, Yorkshire	**Kiveton Park**, Yorkshire	**Markham**, Derbyshire
Manton, Nottinghamshire	**Ollerton**, Nottinghamshire	**Wearmouth**, Co Durham

(*Source* BBC News, 2004)

legacies on coalfield communities that continue to affect everyday life in such locales.

An Economic Interregnum

Industrial closure had a dramatic impact on the physical and psychic landscape of mining towns as communities faced a future without the industry they were built on. Turner (1995) noted of Grimethorpe that:

> [The] physical structure and appearance of the place diminished considerably. Petty crime increased dramatically. The employers that remained talked of pulling out…demoralisation on this scale is hardly conductive to the 'dynamism' widely perceived to be a prerequisite of economic success in the 1990s. (p. 27)

In 1994, two years after the closure of Grimethorpe Colliery, the Coalfield Communities Campaign found that 44 per cent of former Grimethorpe miners were out of work, and that only a small proportion of those that had found employment since leaving the pit were earning a similar wage or more than the average miners' wage (Guy, 1994). Grimethorpe was identified in 1994 as the most deprived village in Britain and the fourth most deprived in Europe (Charlesworth, 2003). Steve Houghton, leader of Barnsley Council, said that the deterioration of Grimethorpe led to discussions about:

> [W]hether we should just flatten it – flatten the lot – you'll never recover it, just flatten in, move it out and turn it into grass. These kinds of serious discussions were going on – what do we do here? How do we turn these places around? (Interview Data)

Similar challenges were faced in communities nearby also suffering from the decline of economic infrastructure associated with the collieries. Thurnscoe and Goldthorpe, and South Kirkby and South Elmsall, for example, formed geographical clusters of former mining villages whose defining characteristics had been their industrial homogeneity, and geographical isolation faced severe socio-economic decline. The

only viable way out of the situation was to create conditions for long-term inward investment and, in the short term, to arrest the decline, or as Steve Houghton said, 'stop the rot'. But pit closure went much deeper than this—the closure of collieries and their associated infrastructure in coalfield communities represented a moment of rupture, whereby old cultures, traditions and social systems became obsolete to the new economic landscape. It deeply penetrated socially and culturally engrained rhythms and ways of being that had embedded within community life over generations.

What this constitutes is a form of *interregnum*—a period in which the economic order around which the entire social systems were organised crumbled into the void left by the closure of industry. It is within this discontinuity of economic order that the totality of community life, the cultures, norms and values, and the institutions that developed within it, begin to crumble. Although initially associated with the reign of monarchs, Gramsci wrote in his prison diaries that the "crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci, quoted in Streeck, 2016). This point about crisis holds salience in coalmining communities, particularly where levels of economic diversification were low, as industrial closure saw a loss of purpose and represented an existential crisis for those communities. The concept of the *interregnum* suggests that there is a time-lag between closure and economic reconstruction, and a period plagued by uncertainty, decline and social desperation. Communities that had historically been self-policing witnessed problems never before experienced, such as drug abuse and high levels of crime (Turner, 1996). As one local councillor explained, there was a sense of desperation about the place:

> No chance of a job, no sense of going anywhere, falling into drugs, falling into drink, falling into worklessness and you're just on a downward spiral. So, you've got to stop that somehow. So, a lot of community work going on with young people trying to arrest the decline…you're not necessarily going to make it any better but you're trying to stop it getting worse and growing beyond what it already was. (Interview Data)

These were the costs associated with the decline of the social and civic organisations that gave a sense of purpose, discipline and respect to community life outside the workplace.

The impact of closure on those organisations and the role they played within the community is an important dynamic that determines whether those communities pull together or fall apart. The NUM, for instance, which historically played a central role in the life of the community, was wiped out as an effective political force. As current General Secretary Chris Kitchen said:

> …it wa' power that was based at the pit that gave you the influence in the community and it was how important the pit was to that community and to people's lives. When you lost the pit, you lost the power and the influence. (Interview Data)

Aside from the political power that the union had, there was a respect forged between miners and their union representatives that solidified the role of the union and its officials:

> …you'd got natural leaders that people respected underground but it didn't stop when you left the pit gates…they still had that respect and authority within the community and because you'd got that hierarchy it kept people…their behaviour…within tolerable levels. (Interview Data)

Whether the union was able to maintain links to particular areas and continue to provide support to former miners and the wider community following the closure of pits depended on whether strong links existed previously, and whether able and willing union representatives lived in those communities.

During a focus group with four former miners at Houghton Main Miners Welfare Sports and Social Club in Middlecliffe, one former miner said that there was a distinct loss of the collective that permeated every aspect of community relations:

> People got a bit more hedonistic…it was every man for himself…I mean Thatcher brought the council house sales in…that's another topic in itself like…we've lost a massive amount of social housing haven't we to private

> sector…and I don't know…everybody…where I grew up…ourselves and half a dozen people around us used to walk into each other's houses…-doors were open and there was no thieving…but after that, it seemed to be a gear shift in society and people…a lot more navel gazing and looking after number one. (Houghton Main, Focus Group)

Bauman's (2001) liquid modernity offers some explanation for the difficulties communities faced in organising collective responses to their predicament. He argued that in a society that changes so rapidly, constant and solid structures no longer stand, and the uncertainty individual's experience serves as a 'powerful *individualising* force' (p.24). The period after the closure of the coalmining industry marked a retreat from communitarianism, where there was an 'intrinsic dignity to manual labour' and where "workers drew much value and meaning from the toil that provided their livelihoods" (McIvor, 2017, p. 25), to an environment that many wanted to escape. During the Houghton Main focus group, one former miner explained his decision to emigrate to New Zealand:

> It just turned into a shit hole mate…it was my kids more than anything…New Zealand is a great place to bring kids up…there's the same problems but it's on a smaller scale…I used to live in Thurnscoe and I used to walk my daughter in the pram…round to the local playground and there were needles and stuff all over place…it's not a good place to bring kids up. (Houghton Main, Focus Group)

Scott, who grew up in Grimethorpe, recalled a sense pride that his family had played a role in the political struggle but felt lucky that no one in his household lost their livelihoods when the pit closed:

> '92 pit shut…I was born that year…quite fortunate that my dad was a bricklayer my Grandad worked in pit…he was the union leader for Grimey…he walked them out and walked them back in…so I'm obviously quite aware and quite proud…but my dad was from Cudworth and he was a bricklayer…I was quite lucky in that respect. (Interview Data)

The effect of the interregnum was, nevertheless, unavoidable and almost normalised as an everyday part of life:

> I remember walking down village…old seaside estate…they were building down back of there and it's where all druggies used to go and I remember seeing people laid out took too much and gone to sleep…that was normal…you weren't scared by that because a lot of people saw it…ten-years-old…you'd just kick the ball at his head and keep walking…you weren't scared…it was just normal…you'd see it most days. (Interview Data)

Scott recalled instances from his childhood where the effects of social deprivation stood out as moments that at the time seemed insignificant but with the passage of time and reflection, brought to bear a powerful illustration of a social condition that was palpable throughout everyday life:

> When I looked at my friends whose dads did work down the pit…no I wasn't aware at the time how bad things were…not until I look back now because that's all we knew…your mate coming into school with two left shoes on…coming into reception class with two left shoes on…'he's got two left shoes on…different trainers'…now you look back and think 'how did that happen?' These kids had such chaotic homelives, but they were our mates…didn't notice at time 'cos it was just normal, but they just weren't as lucky as me, I guess. (Interview Data)

Whilst experiences of deindustrialisation differ, the most negative effects can be traced back to that temporal moment of closure and the socio-economic decline that flowed from it. From the interregnum flow the disintegration of community life and the retreat of labour as a collective category that held meaning outside the workplace as well as within. These conditions were all symptomatic of a community struggling to come to terms with a future beyond industry. Tragedy was that it was an interregnum with no transitional plan. The condition of communities like Grimethorpe in the years following closure was heightened by other factors. These included an over-reliance on a single industry, the geographic isolation, and a form of patriarchal labourism in which

communities depended on the social and civic institutions, such as trade unions, to bring political expression to their lives and exercise their political agency. Most significantly, there is a very real intergenerational sense that the fate of such places was not inevitable, but a political destruction forced on communities. Thus, rather than being the 'creative destruction' of a form of capital, this period marked a form of *enforced* destruction by the state, which had become the political form of capital.

A New Form of Social Rule?

The regeneration of coalfield communities—to which the EU was a critical ally—came when the tapestry of industry, community and various institutions that underpinned them had been destroyed. This created a void in which processes of decline significantly disrupted community life—the physical, the aesthetic, the social, cultural, economic and, eventually, the political. Within the interregnum grew an identity that draws its character from both the past and present in terms of the struggle and experience of economic alienation. Emerging from the interregnum required concerted effort, predominantly from local authorities, but also from communities themselves. Interviews with council leaders and policymakers illustrated the scale of the challenge, with a wide ranging and long-term series of policy interventions. These were aimed in the short term at addressing social problems and stopping further decline, whilst in the longer term creating the conditions for inward investment, through large-scale infrastructure projects such as clearing old colliery sites and building new link roads to develop new business sites. This eventually attracted inward investment. New jobs in warehousing and distribution centres such as ASOS are, however, largely subject to agency working, 'flexible' contracts and workplaces where there are concerted efforts from management to supress worker voice.

The legacies of pit closures mean communities in places like Barnsley are coming from a low economic base, which continues to raise significant challenges for local authorities. Strategies such as the 'More and Better Jobs' strategy (BMBC, 2016) show that significant challenges remain in building conditions for higher-skilled, better paid jobs. Such

strategies are a reminder that 'recovery' from deindustrialisation has largely been built on low-pay jobs in warehousing, manufacturing and distribution. In 2017, the Resolution Foundation identified Sheffield City Region as the low-pay centre of Britain, with Barnsley the worst of all (Clarke, 2017). Whilst the interregnum might be over, many of its effects still form a significant part of everyday life in coalfield communities. As Steve Houghton describes:

> Young people who do well at college and school…they leave – great! We used to have a saying about our young people, which was 'the very least we can do is give them the means to get out. The very most we can do is give them a reason so stay'. That's what we're trying to do. (Interview Data)

The JTM and JTF potentially provides an opportunity for communities in Europe to avoid the negative experiences of economic transition that occurred in Britain's coalmining communities. As the project develops, it may provide further opportunities to conduct research with industrial communities undergoing change. For those who grew up in the aftermath of pit closures, the consequences of the interregnum were normalised as part of belonging to a coalfield community. Perhaps the most enduring consequence of the interregnum is that such locales are now largely hubs of low-pay, low-skilled work where organisations seek to advance the position of workers who struggle to organise and function effectively.

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