



Industrial Relations in the “Golden Age” in the UK and the USA, 1945–1980 36

Jim Phillips

Contents

Economy	825
Society	829
Workplaces and Authority	833
Conclusion	836
References	837

Abstract

The dominant interpretation of industrial relations in the UK and USA from 1945 to 1980 emphasizes the “power” of trade unions and manual workers, which narrowed the agency of employers and managers. This involves a linear “rise and fall” narrative, where stable economic growth provided trade unions with an advantage which they exploited and then squandered. Such narrative is shown in this chapter to be inaccurate. Many workers encountered substantial reversals in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1970s, by comparison, often characterized as beset by industrial and social chaos, was for many workers a decade of progress. Labor’s bargaining power was constrained by deindustrialization from the late 1950s onward. The linear narrative of general improvement is further qualified by the experiences of female and ethnic minority employees, who struggled to secure justice in the workplace. Class also remained a key fault line. Collective bargaining was retarded in most manual and many white-collar settings by employer objections to sharing control over the organization of work. Business power, not union power, was the chief characteristic of industrial relations in both the USA and the UK from 1945 to 1980.

J. Phillips (✉)

Economic and Social History, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

e-mail: James.Phillips@glasgow.ac.uk

Keywords

Industrial relations · Deindustrialization · Trade unions · Business power

“Industrial relations” has a variety of meanings and applications. In this chapter it is used to analyze two sets of relationships: those in the workplace, between employers and workers, and those within the broader realm of collective bargaining, where the wages and conditions of work were negotiated, generally between employers and the union representatives of employees, although state officials and government ministers were often involved too.

The chapter focuses on the UK and USA from 1945 to 1980. In each country industrial relations were dynamic and sometimes conflictual. The chapter takes issue with the dominant interpretation of industrial relations in this period in both historical literature and popular or politicized memory. This interpretation emphasizes the “power” of trade unions and manual workers, which supposedly narrowed the agency of employers and managers. It relies on a linear “rise and fall” narrative, where the unusual contingencies of the “golden age” of stable economic growth provided trade unions with an advantage which they exploited and then squandered. The “rise” from the 1940s to the 1970s of entrenched collective bargaining, stable employment, economic security, and growing real wages was followed in the 1980s and 1990s by the “fall” of declining union influence, lost industrial jobs, and employment precariousness (Phelps Brown 1986, pp. 1–23, 151–97). Such narrative is shown in this chapter to be inaccurate. Within a general pattern of economic improvement, many workers encountered substantial reversals in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1970s, by comparison, often characterized by “establishment” journalists and anti-trade union politicians as beset by industrial and social chaos (Marr 2008, pp. 337–40, 373–7; Thatcher 1995, pp. 397–403, 419–30), was for many workers a decade of welcome progress. The experiences of coal miners in the UK illustrate this alternative interpretation. They lost ground with their industry’s contraction in the 1950s and 1960s but regained it in the 1970s through concerted activism and coal’s improving competitive position in energy markets. In the 1980s miners then encountered a second and more profound reverse, targeted by a hostile UK government for political and industrial obliteration in the 1980s (Arnold 2016).

The chapter sets out the analysis of industrial relations in three parts. First, there is an examination of developments in the economy, where labor’s bargaining power was ostensibly strengthened by high levels of employment. In both the UK and the USA, there was substantial growth of real wages in the 1950s and 1960s. This was attained through union-negotiated improvements in pay, but progress was punctured by the periodically fractious nature of industrial relations. Strikes and other forms of industrial protest drew much political attention. Narratives of industrial decline developed in the UK, linking the falling share of global manufacturing and comparatively slow growth in international terms in the UK and USA with allegedly high levels of industrial unrest (Joseph 1975). There were similar critiques in the USA, accompanied by hostile Cold War claims that trade unions were unpatriotic and even

traitorous (Faue 2018, pp. 123–29). The emphasis on decline was, however, highly problematic and in more recent literature has been challenged by accounts that emphasize an alternative meta-narrative of deindustrialization. This was a major destabilizing factor in industrial relations in both countries from the 1950s onward, as the case of the UK miners indicates, belying the linear narrative of progress for all.

In the second part of the chapter, the impact on industrial relations of social change is examined, focusing on gender and race. Developments in these areas further qualify the linear progress narrative. One criticism of collective bargaining is that unions privileged their disproportionately white and male members in manual sectors. It would be unfair, however, and probably wrong, to portray unions in either the USA or the UK as institutionally racist and sexist. Women and minority workers were often highly critical of their unions, but positive improvements were secured through many collective actions that were designed to equip female and ethnic minority employees with greater justice in the workplace.

Class remained a key fault line, as the third and final section of the chapter demonstrates, exploring power and authority in workplaces. In the UK members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union wore badges – “buttons” in US vocabulary – bearing the three words “EDUCATE, ORGANISE, CONTROL.” The latter, arguably, was the keynote in many workplaces. Collective bargaining was retarded in most manual and many white-collar settings by employer objections to sharing control over the organization of work. In the USA employers seeking to strengthen such control lobbied for an increase in the “right to work,” a euphemism for the enforcement of non-union contracts with their employees. In the UK, in similar vein, employers resisted the introduction of union-channel worker directors in large manufacturing companies. In each country employers worked hard to prevent a broadening of the collective bargaining agenda, compelling unions to focus their bargaining effort on wages and other contractual issues.

Economy

In the golden age that followed the Second World War, there was stable economic growth in most advanced industrial countries, the UK and USA included. In the UK real wages grew at an annual average rate of 2.7 per cent from 1951 to 1973, meaning that living standards grew by almost 50 per cent in these 22 years (Gazely 2014, p. 153). In the USA real wages increased even faster, by 70 per cent from 1950 to 1970 (Zieger 1994, p. 138). Unemployment was measured in different ways in the USA and the UK, and precision in its measurement is difficult to establish. But by any measure it was historically low in each economy, although slowly growing before a marked acceleration from around 1980. In the UK out-of-work benefit-claimants represented less than 3 per cent of the economically active throughout the 1950s and 1960s, rising to between 4 and 6 per cent in the 1970s. In the new economic environment of the 1980s, this measure of unemployment jumped and was rarely below ten per cent per annum (Tomlinson 2017, p. 146). The same pattern was

observable in the USA, where unemployment from 1950 to 1969 averaged 4.8 per cent per annum but 6.7 per cent per annum from 1970 to 1993 (French 1997, p. 83).

Real wage improvements in the 1950s and 1960s resulted from trade union activism. In the USA “workplace contractualism” was embedded in many industrial sectors. Industrial relations were rules-based and predictable. Jobs were defined in writing, with corresponding wage rates negotiated and agreed. There were grievance procedures for either party to follow where disagreements arose. This stability suited employers and managers, as did the related spread of so-called pattern bargaining in automobile manufacturing, steel, coal mining, meat processing, rubber, electrical products, oil, and trucking. Pattern bargaining within a sector involved small- and medium-sized enterprises adopting the wages and conditions agreed by managers and union negotiators in leading firms. The economies of scale and reduced opportunity costs associated with this patterning suited labor representatives as well as employers (French 1997, pp. 98–99). Agreements in various industries followed the precedent established in automobile manufacturing, with cost of living agreements and annual improvement factors (Zieger 1994, pp. 147–48).

In the UK industrial relations were less predictable in the 1950s and 1960s. Harold Wilson’s Labour government elected in 1964 was concerned that instability in this area was damaging economic performance more broadly and established the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers’ Associations, chaired by Lord Donovan, an English high court judge. This concluded in 1968 that prolonged low unemployment had moved pay bargaining from industry level to workplace level. Inflationary pressures had developed because local deals often supplemented national agreements and were sometimes established only after unofficial strikes. Stronger workplace union organization was needed along with greater education to help employees understand the harmful aggregate effects of frequent stoppages (Ackers 2014). Business organizations and the Conservative opposition disagreed with Donovan’s emphasis on voluntary reforms, favoring statutory enforcement of agreements between employers and unions and making unofficial strikes illegal. The Labour government was pushed into proposing fines for unofficial strikers, membership ballots before official strikes, and government-imposed solutions to inter-union disputes that intermittently disrupted production, particularly in motor manufacturing. The relationship between the Labour Party and the trade unions in the UK was close. Unions helped to fund the party. This invited accusations that Labour was “controlled” by the unions. In fact the relationship between party and unions was more subtle than its critics admitted. A set of informal “rules” applied, meaning that unions rarely intervened in questions of Labour government policy where this did not directly bear on matters of employment. The draft reform of industrial relations breached these rules, however, encroaching on what unions considered to be their domain (Minkin 1992, pp. 114–16). Unions duly mobilized against the proposals, which were dropped. The issue of industrial relations had nevertheless become highly politicized (Smith 2011).

This politicization reflected a significant turn in debates about economic life in the 1950s and the 1960s. Despite rising living standards, the dominant tone emphasized regression. Growth was faster in other advanced economies, notably the Federal

Republic of Germany (FRG) and Italy. A political preoccupation with decline emerged in the UK, permeating and even dominating historical literature on economic life from the 1960s until well into the twenty-first century. The decline narrative was central to the election and governance of Margaret Thatcher, who became Prime Minister of the UK in 1979. A parallel discourse developed in the USA, with faithful adherents among followers of Ronald Reagan, elected in 1980 as President. “Declinism” encompassed significant blame apportionment. Social democratic policy-makers and consensus-seeking managers and business leaders attracted much criticism, but those deemed especially culpable were trade unionists and manual workers, who allegedly exploited unusually favorable labor market conditions to obtain wage increases that were not accompanied by commensurate productivity increases. This was a core tenet of the linear industrial relations narrative, shaping changes in the law instituted in the USA and UK in the 1980s to limit union freedoms, but it was based on an exaggerated reading of worker behavior, including the scale and impact of strikes. Annual average working days lost to strikes per thousand employees in the USA and the UK are midrange in the table of mature economies from the 1950s to the 1980s, higher than in the FRG but significantly lower than in Italy (van der Velden 2016), where economic growth and industrial production were expanding rapidly (Pizzolato 2013a, pp. 47–58).

These broader comparisons underline the growing impression that the emphasis on decline was and is misdirection. A more meaningful framework for understanding economic developments in both the UK and the USA is deindustrialization (Tomlinson 2016). In each of these national economies, there was a gradual move away from “traditional” industries – coal, metals, shipbuilding, and textiles – from the late 1950s onward, and into lighter manufacturing, with an emphasis on higher value-added consumer goods along with services which were seen as promoting faster growth. Coal miners in Kentucky migrated north in the 1950s to work in the consumer goods factories of Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, and Detroit (Portelli 2011, pp. 255–59). In the UK economic restructuring was managed at central government level. In Scotland employment in coal mining was reduced from a post-1945 peak of 86,000 in 1957 to 36,000 in 1967, at least in part to release workers for deployment in other sectors (Phillips 2013).

This shift in the distribution of employment greatly qualifies the linear narrative. The economic leverage of coal miners in the UK was diminished and only retrieved from the late 1960s. Various factors were involved in the miners’ fightback, but the emergence of a new generation of union leaders was important. Determined action in pursuit of wages included large-scale unofficial strikes in 1969 and 1970 in Scotland, Yorkshire, and South Wales. This activism then produced national strikes across the UK coalfields in 1972 and 1974 that went some way to restoring the relative position of miners’ wages in the “league table” of manual workers, which had fallen significantly as a result of deindustrialization. By the late 1960s, miners on average were earning 50 per cent less than workers employed in car assembly. It was this broader question, the fall in coal industry employment, which underpinned the miners’ mobilization. In Scotland the miners also secured a marked stabilization of employment from the late 1960s until the late 1970s, helped by the sudden escalation

in the price of oil, coal's main competitor (Phillips 2017). After cruel fortunes in the "high" golden age decades of the 1950s and the 1960s, coal miners in the UK duly experienced the 1970s as a period of optimism. Strong hopes for a better future were then confounded by large-scale pit closures and mass redundancies following defeat in the great but doomed strike for jobs in 1984–1985 (Arnold 2016).

Industrial change contributed to similar fluctuations in the USA. An instructive case is the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), which incrementally shifted manufacture of radio transmitters and receivers from Camden, New Jersey, in search of cheaper labor. In 1940 production of receiving equipment was transferred west, to a giant facility at Bloomington, Indiana, where in the early 1960s wage rates in electrical work were still 13 per cent below the US average. RCA was among hundreds of manufacturing firms that relocated across state and then international frontiers during the golden age. In RCA "green" workers in newly industrialized territories gradually acquired class consciousness from their engagement in assembly line manufacturing. Labor conditions were duly bargained upward over time, sometimes after recurrent strike action. But the linear narrative of progress is again qualified. Where workers gained enough organizational capacity to win a greater share of the value created by their labor, a further movement of capital often ensued. RCA retained a presence in Indiana but shifted a growing share of production to Memphis, Tennessee, in 1957 and then, from 1964, to Ciudad Juárez, just south of the international frontier in Mexico (Cowie 1999).

These developments were part of a broader trend, encouraged by "boosterism" in US southern and western "sunrise" states, where policy-makers sought economic diversification. Inward investment by industrial employers was stimulated by "business-friendly" measures such as low-tax incentives plus "right-to-work" laws. These made provision for the employment of non-union members, even in unionized workplaces. This accelerated deindustrialization in northern and eastern states and consolidated the southward and westward regional redistribution of industry. The process has been characterized as the "Dixification of America," with workers in the north and east obliged to temper their wage demands for fear of losing employment to start-up businesses in the south (Cummings 1998). Meat-packing in Chicago exemplified these trends, with job insecurity and falling real wages becoming the new labor "normal" for workers in Packingtown from the late 1950s onward as leading firms in the sector moved operations west and south (Halpern 1997). Dixification contributed to the loss of union membership across the USA. Among the nonfarm workforce, trade union density – union members as a portion of all employees – decreased after the Second World War from a 1945 peak of 35.5 per cent to 31.4 per cent in 1960. Union density then dropped to 27.4 per cent in 1970 and 24.7 per cent in 1980 (French 1997, pp. 94–5).

In the UK union density was jeopardized by deindustrialization. Employment in manufacturing peaked in the late 1960s, although in foreign-owned factories in Scotland not until 1975 (Hood and Young 1982, pp. 5–6, 30–7). At Timex in Dundee, the US-owned producer of watches and then sub-assembly electronics, average employment fell from over 6000 in 1975 to 4000 in 1982 before falling away to 2000 in 1983, 1000 in 1985, and 500 in 1991 before eventual closure in

1993 (Knox and McKinlay 2011). Union density across the UK nevertheless stabilized and then actually increased, exceeding 50 per cent only after the peak of industrial employment, around 1970, and rising to 54.5 per cent by 1980. Growth reflected a recruitment effort undertaken among tertiary sector workers, especially those in public services, meaning that union membership was growing faster among female than male employees. Union density among women workers rose from 31.2 per cent in 1970 to 39.9 per cent in 1980 (Wrigley 2002, pp. 18–19). This effort had lasting effects. In 2018 in the UK, union density overall was only around 23 per cent, but among public sector workers, it was just over 51 per cent (Roper 2018). Women and public sector workers in the 1970s were seeking union protection against government counter-inflationary pay controls which they considered unjust, especially when set against less restrictive measures on dividends and profits (Tomlinson 2017, pp. 189–90). The public sector was also the fastest area of union growth in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s. Female and ethnic minority employees likewise attained a greater share of overall membership. There was continued expansion of female union membership in private sector manufacturing too. Forty per cent of employees in the US automobile industry were women by the 1970s. Members of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) were central to the establishment of the Coalition of Labor Union Women in 1973, which promoted female voice in the labor movement (Faue 2018, pp. 146–48, 158–60).

Society

The growth of female union membership in the UK signaled the presence in industrial relations of broader social movements, where identities of race and gender intersected with class. Trade unions in both the USA and the UK are sometimes understood as being indifferent or even hostile to the interests of female and black workers. But unions were dynamic, slowly accommodating the interests of African Americans in the USA and African Caribbean, African, and Asian immigrants in the UK (Lunn 1999). Industrial bargaining was an important element in reducing inequalities of gender as well as race, perhaps having a greater impact even than the policy-based civil rights agenda which developed impetus in the 1960s. This tended to privilege individual rights, and the “equal pay for equal work” model, ignoring the structural barriers confronting women and minority workers collectively (Cowie 2010, pp. 68–72).

Racism was a major problem in the UK from the 1950s to the 1970s. Authoritative studies in the late 1960s illuminated the discrimination encountered by workers from African Caribbean, African, and South Asian immigrant traditions. African Caribbean workers often found themselves in employment of lower status than their pre-migration education and experience warranted (Daniel 1968). South Asian workers also faced entrenched difficulties. An illuminating case is that of Sikh bus drivers in the English Midlands city of Wolverhampton. One of these workers in 1967 was sent home for wearing a turban, contravening a dress code agreed by the employer and the local trade union. The driver was supported by other Sikhs. Local

Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) officials and non-Sikh colleagues were initially unsympathetic. Sikh community leaders and Labour Party members pushed the TGWU to support a lengthy community-based campaign that eventually produced a change of policy in 1969, allowing bus company employees to wear turbans while on duty. The victimized bus driver had relatives who worked at the large Goodyear tyre factory in Wolverhampton. Their mobilization of factory work-mates intensified the campaign (Seifert and Hambler 2016).

The confluence of class and community in labor struggles was frequently evident also in the USA. The broader dynamics of social change and the emergent civil rights agenda were prominent too. African Americans were plainly discriminated against in the labor market. Unemployment among black men averaged 8.5 per cent per annum and among black women averaged 8.8 per cent between 1950 and 1969, almost twice the whole economy average (French 1997, p. 83). African Americans in employment also tended to occupy lower-status positions. Labor organization coalesced with civil rights activism to fight against this injustice. A key episode was the 1968 action by sanitation workers in Memphis. Garbage in the city was collected more or less entirely by African American male workers, who sought alleviation of dangerous and dehumanizing conditions through Local 133 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). The authorities, marshaled by the mayor of Memphis, Henry Loeb, refused to recognize the union. Two workers were killed in February 1968, crushed when sheltering inside a garbage truck during torrential rain. About 1300 sanitation workers responded by pushing the AFSCME into citywide strike action. Pickets demonstrated with placards stating "I AM A MAN," these words freighted with enormous meaning in southern US society emerging fitfully and violently from racial segregation. The strikers were supported by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, including its president, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who addressed three separate strike rallies. On 3 April Dr. King delivered one of his best-known speeches, "I have been to the Mountaintop," at one of these rallies, to a big crowd of strikers, trade unionists, and civil rights activists. He was assassinated in Memphis by a white supremacist sniper the following evening. Mayor Loeb had declared the strike illegal, but the city's position shifted because of the furious uprising of African American youth that followed Dr. King's murder. Union recognition was conceded, and further struggles by the garbage collectors produced significant improvements in wages and working conditions (Cosgrove 2017, pp. 39–47, 98–100, 161).

The flavor of social justice combined with the politics of class and race was also evident in the waterfront activism of dock workers in San Francisco from the 1950s to the 1970s. Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) showcased the determination of African American workers to improve their position through collective action and defend the rights of other exploited black workers. Paul Robeson, the African American singer, union campaigner, and civil rights activist, was an honorary member of Local 10, and so was Dr. King. Action included expressions of international solidarity. The Local organized recurrent boycotts of ships carrying goods from and to South Africa. These raised awareness about the

racist nature of the Apartheid regime. Black trade unionists in South Africa drew moral strength from these boycotts and communicated their thanks to the San Francisco longshoremen. This transmission of international solidarity was two-way, with the San Francisco workers further emboldened to act in defense of themselves and others by contacts with their union brothers in South Africa. Local 10 maintained boycotts of South African ships in the 1980s. In 1978 it also refused to load military equipment onto a vessel bound for Chile, where the military dictator Augusto Pinochet had killed thousands of trade unionists along with communists, socialists, liberals, and other opponents since seizing power in 1973 (Cole 2013).

Movements involving the intersection of class with gender were likewise increasingly observable from the 1960s. A notable point of departure in the UK was the 3-week strike at the Ford car plant in Dagenham, Essex, by 187 female sewing machinists in the summer of 1968. Their action was joined by 195 female sewing machinists at Ford's other major works in England, Halewood, Merseyside, and led to the temporary laying-off of 9000 or so other workers across the company (Torode 1968). Union representatives constructed the sewing machinists' grievances in gender and equal pay terms, in negotiations with Ford and then, as the action gradually shut down the entire plant, with Barbara Castle, the Labour government's secretary of state for employment. But for the machinists, gender pay inequality was not the real issue. They were disputing their pay-grading in class terms by calling for a recalibration exercise, seeking acknowledgment of the skill and value embedded in their work. The interpretation of their demands in the language of equal pay obscured the class connotations of the dispute, as the women challenged the authority of their multinational employer by calling its occupational grading scheme into question (Cohen 2012).

The legal environment changed after the Ford strike in the UK. Castle introduced the 1970 Equal Pay Act, and this was followed in 1975 by the Sex Discrimination Act. The shifting legal terrain was illustrated by a further important dispute involving female employees in car manufacturing. Trico Folberth was a US multinational, producing windscreen wipers and other accessories in Brentford, West London. Castle's legislative pursuit of equal pay for equal work was complicated by practices in most workplaces that made it difficult to compare the value of different tasks undertaken by female and male employees. At Trico men generally worked on nightshifts and women on day shifts. But after short notice cancellation of a night shift in the spring of 1976, a small number of men were redeployed on day shift. This exposed the injustice of the firm's rewards system to the 400 women who worked in the factory. After a strike lasting 21 weeks, they won equal pay on the basis of the illegitimacy and possible illegality of their employer's practices under the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts (Groves and Merritt 2018). Wider economic and social factors influenced this positive outcome. As with the sewing machinists' action at Ford in 1968, the strike of the Trico women interrupted a complex supply chain, triggering a wider cessation of production which placed their employer in a difficult position. And as with Ford, the Trico strike was founded on a strong sense of working class consciousness: the women were demanding equality of treatment as workers (Stevenson 2016).

The Trico strike overlapped with a longer dispute at the Grunwick photo-processing plant just several miles to the north in London's outer urban-industrial belt. A large majority of Grunwick's 450 workers were women of South Asian origin. Earnings across the Grunwick workforce were well below the London average rates for manual employment. The action started as a protest in the hot summer of 1976 against compulsory overtime and morphed into a 2-year campaign for union recognition. The strikers did not win their case, and most were sacked. The strike was important nevertheless in signaling the greater confluence in industrial relations of race, gender, and class. Like the Sikh bus drivers' action in Wolverhampton, the Grunwick strikers challenged the union movement to pursue workplace justice for all workers, irrespective of ethnic and racial origin (McDowell et al. 2014). They also challenged the gender and class authority of their male employer, demanding greater voice in the workplace. There were also periodic picket-line confrontations as a replacement workforce was bussed through a blockade mounted by the sacked Grunwick employees and their trade unionist supporters from many other workplaces, including coal miners from Scotland and South Wales as well as Yorkshire (McGowan 2008).

The Grunwick strike, incubating tensions of class and social authority, duly contributed to the further politicization of industrial relations in the UK, strengthening the emergent Thatcherite anti-union narrative. Legal and policy changes followed in the 1980s, designed to curtail union privileges and restore the "right of management to manage" (Dorey 2014). The anti-union narrative developed traction during the 1978–1979 "Winter of Discontent," when the Labour government's anti-inflationary strategy of wage controls was challenged by strikes involving manual workers in public services and private sector manufacturing. Hostile critiques of workers and unions developed "in real time" and were central to the election of Thatcher's Conservative government in May 1979. Forgotten in this dominant anti-union narrative is the extreme low pay which public sector employees, many of them women, were seeking to improve (Martin 2009). Thatcherites unjustly "othered" the low paid as a subversive and illegitimate menace to society and wilfully exaggerated the impact of their strikes (Hay 2015).

There was a parallel rise of anti-union politics in the USA in the 1970s. This involved lobbying organizations like Business Roundtable, founded in 1972, claiming that workers' pay demands were the main source of inflation and economic slowdown. Democrats in the House of Representatives and Senate attempted to introduce a Full Employment Bill in the mid-1970s. One of its advocates, Representative Augustus Hawkins of California, an African American, argued that civil rights were meaningless unless accompanied by the right to work. It was the duty of the Federal government to provide citizens with employment where the market failed to do so. The Bill was remorselessly criticized by business campaigners and orthodox financial thinkers, including Alan Greenspan, future head of the US Federal Reserve and then chair of the President's Council of Economic Advisers. Legislation eventually passed in 1978 was an expression of aspiration rather than a concrete economic and social project. Instead, greater labor market discipline was accepted as the central policy goal by both Republicans and Democrats. De-recognition of unions was called for, and the

movement of capital to union-free labor markets in southern states was further promoted (Cowie 2010, pp. 224–36, 266–84). The process intensified with the election of Reagan as President in 1980, which was followed by a nationwide strike of 13,000 air traffic controllers in 1981. Their union, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization, was ostracized from the civil aviation industry, and the strikers barred for life from future federal employment (Zieger 1994, pp. 194–98).

Workplaces and Authority

The anti-union activism of Business Roundtable in the USA qualified the linear progress narrative. It was also a reminder of the structural influence of class conflict on industrial relations. The English sociologist Alan Fox examined this question in a research paper for the Donovan Royal Commission in 1966. Fox argued that perceptions of industrial relations were shaped by the frame of reference adopted. Most employers and managers rejected a pluralist conceptualization of their firms as coalitions of competing interests. They saw businesses instead in unitary terms, with members bound by shared values and goals. The participation of employers in collective bargaining was compatible with their unitary frame of reference because of a vital distinction between *market relations*, defined by Fox as the “terms and conditions on which labour is hired,” and *managerial relations*, “what management seeks to do with its labour having hired it.” Employers generally accepted the legitimacy of settling market relations collectively rather than individually but still opposed trade union influence in managerial relations (Fox 1966).

The broad rejection by UK employers of pluralism in workplaces was illustrated by their opposition in the 1970s to union-channel worker directors in manufacturing firms with 2000 or more employees. This innovation was recommended in 1977 by a commission of inquiry established by the Labour government in 1975, chaired by Alan Bullock of the University of Oxford, and was already an embedded feature of corporate governance in the Federal Republic of Germany. Many unions favored worker directors as a means of arresting disinvestment and deindustrialization. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI), representing small- and medium-sized businesses, and the major multinationals of Courtaulds, ICI, Shell UK, Unilever, and United Biscuits united with Conservative politicians to resist the initiative, even threatening an investment “strike” that would greatly have destabilized economic life in the UK. The episode indicated that real power in industrial relations during the golden age resided with employers and their organizations rather than with workers and trade unions. Their victory consolidated managerial sovereignty over workplaces and also incentivized pay conflict in the years that followed, including that of the 1978–1979 Winter of Discontent. Unions were compelled to defend their members on the terrain of cash outcomes rather than the design of production (Phillips 2011).

A narrow focus in on market relations also contributed to unstable collective bargaining in US car manufacturing. The UAW tried unsuccessfully to widen the scope of dialogue with employers to encompass “entry into the realm of managerial

prerogative relating to planning of production” (Zieger 1994, p. 148). Rebuffed, the union concentrated instead on maximizing monetary returns, including wages, benefits, pensions, and holiday entitlements. In exchange management insisted on the ever-tighter maintenance of an unappetizing labor regime which required endless routine and repetition. This was classic Fordism, but entering its “twilight” by the late 1960s (Pizzolato 2013b), its legitimacy weakened in part by generational change. Younger workers had increased expectations arising from improved living standards and the extension of education which clashed with the physical and mental tortures of the assembly line (Cowie 2010, pp. 44–49). The evolving civil rights struggle also held weight. Younger working class African Americans had a distinct critique of the alienating labor regime as they experienced it. They resented the limited opportunities for promotion and their supervision by older white employees. They likened auto-assembly factories to the slavery-era cotton plantations. In 1968, a year of global revolutions of class, race, gender, and youth, African American workers formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) in Chrysler’s largest factory in Detroit. DRUM members established contacts with protagonists in other car factories, in the steel industry, and in the postal service. A pan-industry alliance, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, had a short but eventful existence with an influential legacy in the subsequent development of African American activism (Pizzolato 2013a, pp. 144–60).

Social authority was also contested in UK workplaces. A key structural element was the shift in the distribution of industrial employment noted in the first part of this chapter. The value of government regional aid was substantially increased from the late 1950s, with more grants and loans persuading private firms to locate their businesses in areas of shrinking “traditional” industry where there was surplus labor. Many inward investors, including US firms across engineering and other manufacturing sectors, seized these opportunities (Gibbs and Tomlinson 2016). The UK location provided access to markets in the European Free Trade Area and then in the European Economic Community, which the UK joined in 1973. Workplace industrial relations in the regional aid districts were often tense. The existence of a “culture clash” was identified by employers and employees alike, and resentments were multilayered. Employers expected disciplined workers, willing to accept wages above local market rates but below national industry averages. US firms in particular wanted to capitalize on the cost advantage of moving production from their higher-wage home environment by minimizing union influence in their new factories. Employees accepted their transfer from established local industry – coal, metals, and ships – but in Scotland at least only on the promise of greater economic security and employment stability. Disputes were triggered where union and skilled traditions were offended by the US production regime (Knox and McKinlay 1999).

A typical Scottish case was the earthmoving equipment factory owned and operated by the US multinational Caterpillar, at Uddingston in Lanarkshire. This opened in 1956 on the cleared site of a mining village, Tannochside, and was Scotland’s largest single factory in the 1960s and 1970s. The premises covered 65 acres, with employment peaking at around 2500 in 1968. Caterpillar initially resisted union recognition, which the workers won after a 9-week strike in the winter

of 1960–1961. Caterpillar fought a rearguard action, accepting the presence of full-time union officers but not workplace stewards. This was unsuccessful. Emboldened, the stewards incrementally exerted a foothold in the factory, securing bargaining rights on a variety of organizational questions (Knox and McKinlay 2003). The victorious recognition strike was long remembered by workers as an indicator of the employer’s hostility to collective bargaining and the fundamental importance of activism in pursuit of trade union voice and improved working conditions (Gibbs and Phillips 2018).

A second instructive Scottish case is the car plant at Linwood in Renfrewshire, 10 miles west of Glasgow. This was one of several motor industry initiatives funded by the UK government as a means of diversifying regional economies in South Wales, Merseyside, and Central Scotland. Linwood opened in 1963, initially owned and operated by Rootes and then from 1967 by Chrysler. The labor regime ran counter to the experiences of workers drawn to Linwood from marine engineering, shipbuilding, and coal mining backgrounds. There were frequent short stoppages in the 1960s, followed in the 1970s by major confrontations where control of production was a larger issue than wages. Managers were under mounting pressure to exert control of costs in an increasingly competitive global market. In trying to assert authority, they merely alienated many employees. In 1975 Chrysler obtained fresh investment from the Labour government in return for establishing a form of industrial partnership across its English and Scottish holdings. But the firm’s commitment to employee involvement was superficial. The promised introduction in 1976 of new models at Linwood was abandoned, and Chrysler sold its UK operations altogether in 1978 to Peugeot-Citroen, without consulting the workforce. Popular understanding of these various issues at Linwood – including lost local influence over economic and industrial assets – contributed to the longer-term growth of support in Scotland for political-constitutional changes, including “Home Rule” within the UK and then independence (Phillips et al. 2019).

These details of conflict and insecurity are important. Car manufacturing is associated with the “affluent worker,” a significant theme in debates about golden age economic improvement in the UK, identified and developed in a sequence of sociological studies in the 1960s (Goldthorpe et al. 1969). Recent re-evaluation has emphasized the extent to which working class affluence was highly conditional, qualified for some by long and arduous hours, and for others by the opposite difficulty of intermittent redundancy and unemployment. Material gains in many sectors had to be squeezed from the hands of grudging employers (Savage 2005; Todd 2008). A pioneering study of car assembly workers at Ford’s Halewood factory included two important findings that are relevant here. First, large corporate employers in the industry cultivated competition between their employees at different factories. Internal working class divisions resulted, undermining union efforts to enhance pay and conditions across the industry. Second, the labor process was strenuous and alienating. “Affluent” workers did not easily come by their earnings (Beynon 1973). At Linwood cyclical employment peaks of 9000 were interspersed with heavy redundancies: more than 2000 were “released” in 1975 alone (Phillips et al. 2019). This aggravated industrial relations in a way that strongly qualifies the

linear progress narrative. Workers at Linwood and many other industrial sites were protecting their economic security rather than imposing their will illegitimately on society, as political critics of trade unions often claim (Whiting 2008).

Conclusion

Industrial relations in the USA and the UK in the golden age were not characterized by high levels of trade union power. This chapter has shown that there was no linear narrative either in the conduct of collective bargaining. There was a significant growth of real wages in both countries in the 1950s and 1960s arising from two related factors: the relatively low levels, historically, of unemployment, which provided labor with an unusual degree of market advantage, and the ability of trade union negotiators to secure improved terms through bargaining with employers who could afford to meet demands in an era of continuous expansion.

Union power was nevertheless highly circumscribed by structural economic change in both the USA and the UK. From the late 1950s onward, there was a marked shrinkage of industrial sectors where union density had been comparatively high: in coal mining, metals, heavy engineering, and shipbuilding. In the UK this was by government design, with the aim of growing the economy more quickly by shifting capital resources and labor into consumer goods manufacturing. This contributed to improved living standards generally, but union bargaining strength was diminished in the shrinking sectors. The fall in coal industry employment, for example, eroded the relative position of miners' earnings in the manual wages league. Deindustrialization is often assumed to have commenced no earlier than the late 1960s, after the peak of employment in all manufacturing sectors. But in the coalfields and elsewhere, it was a basic fact of economic life from the 1950s onward, conditioning worker dissatisfaction and slowly preparing the ground for the miners' fightback in the 1970s. "Early-onset" deindustrialization indicates that the fruits of economic progress and collective bargaining were not shared equally by all workers.

The partial and nonlinear nature of progress is additionally demonstrated by the contested nature of industrial relations on gender and ethnic lines. In the UK immigrant workers from African Caribbean, African, and South Asian countries experienced discrimination in encounters with employers, unions, and white workmates. The same was true, with even greater force, of African American workers in the USA. In both countries there were serious barriers to the advancement of women. Protests in the sphere of industrial relations by female and ethnic minority workers challenged the authority of employers and sometimes trade union officialdom also. These workers were asserting their right to access greater justice and did so partly in class terms. Unions were slow to recognize the distinct problems of gender and race. But collective action, usually through established labor organizations, helped to narrow inequalities of this type along with changes in the law.

Workers and their unions were ultimately less influential than their employers, even in the unusual circumstances of low unemployment and stable growth. This is clear from the capacity of employers to prevent wider scope collective bargaining

after the Second World War in both the USA and the UK. They accepted dialogue on “market relations” issues such as wages, hours, overtime, breaks, and holidays but refused to discuss “managerial relations” questions like investment, product development, and the organization of work. This business opposition to broader scope dialogue was arguably dysfunctional. It incentivized wage conflict because in bargaining terms employees and unions were given no alternative other than to focus on extracting greater financial reward from the employment relationship. The problem was fundamentally ideological: employers were over-committed to protecting their own workplace and organizational sovereignty. The blocking of worker company directors by UK employers in the 1970s demonstrates the power of this ideology, as does the US Business Roundtable’s promotion of union-free work environments while vetoing effective full employment legislation. Business power, not union power, was the chief characteristic of industrial relations in both the USA and the UK from 1945 to 1980.

References

- Ackers P (2014) Game changer: Hugh Clegg’s role in drafting the 1968 Donovan report and redefining the British industrial relations policy-problem. *Hist Stud Ind Relat* 35:63–88
- Arnold J (2016) Vom Verlierer zum Gewinner – und zurück. Der Coal Miners als Schlüsselfigur der Britischen Zeitgeschichte. *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 42:266–297
- Beynon H (1973) Working for Ford: men, masculinity, mass production and militancy. Allen Lane, London
- Cohen S (2012) Equal pay – or what? Economics, politics and the 1968 Ford sewing machinists’ strike. *Lab Hist* 53(1):51–68
- Cole P (2013) No justice, no ships get loaded: political boycotts on the San Francisco and Durban waterfronts. *Int Rev Soc Hist* 58:185–217
- Cosgrove S (2017) Memphis 68: the tragedy of Southern Soul. Polygon, Edinburgh
- Cowie J (1999) Capital moves: RCA’s seventy-year quest for cheap labor. Cornell University Press, Ithaca
- Cowie J (2010) Stayin’ alive: the 1970s and the last days of the working class. The New Press, New York/London
- Cummings SD (1998) The dixification of America: The American Odyssey into the conservative economic trap. Praeger, Westport
- Daniel WW (1968) Racial discrimination in England: based on the PEP report. Penguin, Harmondsworth
- Dorey P (2014) The stepping stones programme: the conservative party’s struggle to develop a trade union policy, 1975–79. *Hist Stud Ind Relat* 35:89–116
- Faue E (2018) Rethinking the American labor movement. Routledge, New York/London
- Fox A (1966) Industrial sociology and industrial relations. Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers’ Associations, Research Paper 3. HMSO, London
- French MJ (1997) US economic history since 1945. Manchester University Press, Manchester
- Gazely I (2014) Income and living standards, 1870–2010. In: Floud R, Humphries J, Johnson P (eds) The Cambridge economic history of modern Britain, Vol. II, 1870 to the present. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp 151–180
- Gibbs E, Phillips J (2018) Who owns a factory?: Caterpillar Tractors in Uddingston, 1956–1987. *Hist Stud Ind Relat* 39:111–138
- Gibbs E, Tomlinson J (2016) Planning the new industrial nation: Scotland, 1931–1979. *Contemp Br Hist* 30(4):585–606

- Goldthorpe J, Lockwood D, Bechhofer F, Platt J (1969) *The affluent worker: industrial attitudes and behaviour*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Groves S, Merritt V (2018) *Trico: the longest equal pay strike*. Lawrence & Wishart, London
- Halpern R (1997) *Down on the killing floor. Black and white workers in Chicago's packinghouses, 1904–54*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana/Chicago
- Hay C (2015) The trade unions and the “winter of discontent”: a case of myth-taken identity. *Hist Stud Ind Relat* 36:181–203
- Hood N, Young S (1982) *Multinationals in retreat: the Scottish experience*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh
- Joseph K (1975) *Reversing the trend*. Barry Rose Law Publishers, London
- Knox WW, McKinlay A (1999) Working For the Yankee Dollar: American inward investment and Scottish labour, 1945–1970. *Hist Stud Ind Relat* 7:1–26
- Knox WW, McKinlay A (2003) “Organizing the unorganized”: union recruitment strategies in American transnationals, c. 1945–1977. In: Gall G (ed) *Union organizing: campaigning for trade union recognition*. Routledge, London, pp 19–38
- Knox WW, McKinlay A (2011) The union makes us strong? Work and trade unionism in Timex, 1946–83. In: Tomlinson J, Whatley CA (eds) *Jute no more: transforming Dundee*. University of Dundee Press, Dundee, pp 266–290
- Lunn K (1999) Complex encounters: trade unions, immigration and racism. In: Campbell A, Fishman N, McIlroy J (eds) *British trade unions and industrial politics, Vol. Two: the high tide of trade unionism, 1964–79*. Ashgate, Aldershot, pp 70–90
- Marr A (2008) *A history of modern Britain*. Pan, London
- Martin T (2009) The beginning of labour's end? Britain's “winter of discontent” and working-class women's activism. *Int Lab Work Class Hist* 75(1):49–67
- McDowell L, Sundari A, Pearson R (2014) *Striking narratives: class, gender and ethnicity in the “Great Grunwick Strike”*, London, UK, 1976–1978. *Women's Hist Rev* 23(4):595–619
- McGowan J (2008) “Dispute”, “Battle”, “Siege”, “Farce”? – Grunwick 30 years on. *Contemp Br Hist* 22:383–406
- Minkin L (1992) *The contentious alliance. Trade unions and the labour party*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh
- Phelps Brown H (1986) *The origins of trade union power*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Phillips J (2011) UK business power and opposition to the bullock committee's 1977 proposals for worker directors. *Hist Stud Ind Relat* 31(32):1–30
- Phillips J (2013) The moral economy and deindustrialization in the Scottish coalfields, 1947–1991. *Int Lab Work Class Hist* 84:99–115
- Phillips J (2017) Economic direction and generational change in twentieth century Britain: the case of the Scottish coalfields. *Engl Hist Rev* 132:885–911
- Phillips J, Wright V, Tomlinson J (2019) *Industrial restructuring, the Linwood car plant and Scotland's political divergence from England in the 1960s and 1970s*. *Twentieth Century British History*, forthcoming
- Pizzolato N (2013a) *Challenging global capitalism: labor migration, radical struggle, and urban change in Detroit and Turin*. Palgrave Macmillan, London
- Pizzolato N (2013b) The American worker and the Forze Nuove: Detroit and Turin at the twilight of fordism. *Viewpoint Magazine*, 25 Sept 2013
- Portelli A (2011) *They say in Harlan county*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Roper, C. (2018) ‘Trade union membership is growing, but there's still work to do.’, *Trades Union Congress Blog*, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/trade-union-membership-growing-there's-still-work-to-do>; Accessed 4 Jan 2019
- Savage M (2005) Working class identities in the 1960s: revisiting the affluent worker studies. *Sociology* 34:929–96
- Seifert R, Hambler A (2016) ‘Wearing the Turban: the 1967–1969 Sikh bus drivers’ dispute in Wolverhampton. *Hist Stud Ind Relat* 37:83–111

- Smith P (2011) Order in British industrial relations: from Donovan to neoliberalism. *Hist Stud Ind Relat* 31–32:115–154
- Stevenson G (2016) The forgotten strike: equality, gender, and class in the trico equal pay strike. *Lab Hist Rev* 81(2):141–168
- Thatcher M (1995) *The path to power*. Harper Collins, London
- Todd S (2008) Affluence, class and crown street: reinvestigating the post-war working class. *Contemp Br Hist* 22:501–518
- Tomlinson J (2016) De-industrialization not decline: a new meta-narrative for post-war British history. *Twentieth Century Br Hist* 27(1):76–99
- Tomlinson J (2017) *Managing the economy, managing the people. Narratives of economic life in Britain from Beveridge to Brexit*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Torode J (1968) Ford women machinists go back to work on a promise. *The Guardian*, 1 July 1968, p. 16
- van der Velden S (2016) Global conflicts dataverse. International Institute of Social History. <https://datasets.socialhistory.org/dataverse/labourconflicts>. Accessed 4 Jan 2019
- Whiting R (2008) Affluence and industrial relations. *Contemp Br Hist* 22:519–536
- Wrigley C (2002) *British trade unions since 1933*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Zieger RH (1994) *American workers, American Unions*, 2nd edn. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London