

The Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields: Managing Deindustrialization under Nationalization c.1947–1983

EWAN GIBBS

This article examines conceptions of social justice and economic fairness with regard to employment. It does so through an analysis of the management of deindustrialization in the Scottish coalfields between the 1940s and 1980s. Emphasis is placed on the historical roots and social and political constitutions of labor market practices. The analysis is grounded within Karl Polanyi's *Great Transformation*; industrial relations within coal mining are conceived through an ongoing conflict between commodifying, liberalizing market forces and a "counter-movement" of worker and community resistance and state regulation, which works to embed markets within social and political priorities. E. P. Thompson's moral economy provides the basis for an understanding of the formulation of communal expectations and employment practices that acted to mitigate the disruption caused by pit closures. The analysis grounds the historical roots of the moral economy within Polanyi's counter-movement and illuminates the operation of specific practices of a Thompsonian character within the nationalized industry, which maintained individual and collective employment stability. This is constructed utilizing interviews with former mineworkers and members of mining families. These are supplemented by archival sources that include the minutes of Colliery Consultative Committee meetings, which took place before pit closures. They reveal the moral economy was fundamentally centered on the control of resources, collieries, and the employment they provided rather than simply

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elements of financial compensation for those suffering from labor market instability. Resultantly procedure centering on collective consultation was fundamental in legitimating colliery closures.

Introduction

This article examines conceptions of social justice and economic fairness regarding employment. It does so through an analysis of the management of deindustrialization in the Lanarkshire coalfield, in West Central Scotland, between the 1940s and 1980s. Emphasis is placed on the historical roots and social and political constitutions of labor market practices. It analyzes how the operation of labor markets, economic resources, and colliery employment were contested by the assertion of communitarian norms and values. These are implicated within Karl Polanyi's "double movement"; the operation of liberalized markets continually met opposition from coalitions of forces, including workers and state officials who sought to limit the encroachment of market forces on the "false commodities" of land, labor, and money. E. P. Thompson's moral economy provides the basis for an understanding of the formulation of communal expectations and employment practices, which acted to mitigate the disruption caused by pit closures. Through Thompson, an acknowledgement of historical specificity and the exercise of agency are inserted into the impersonal character of Polanyian approaches.¹ The analysis demonstrates the value of understanding the moral economy as an embodiment of the agents and practices that socially "embedded" the operation of labor markets in the coal industry during the mid-twentieth century. Coal was central to the experience of British industrial relations across the nineteenth century and twentieth century, and this article provides a contribution to an emergent historiography of the industry's contraction over the mid- and late twentieth century.

By focusing on Lanarkshire, shown on the map of Scotland in Figure 1, Phillips's previous work on the operation of a coalfield moral economy in Fife, on Scotland's east coast, is extended.² The origins of the moral economy's practices in colliery closures in eastern Lanarkshire during the late 1940s and early 1950s are foregrounded in the analysis that indicates Phillips's findings have a cross-Scotland coverage. Lanarkshire was Scotland's largest coalfield between the early nineteenth century and mid-twentieth century. Unlike Fife, it experienced major colliery closures from the onset of coal's

1. Bolton and Laaser, "Work," 514.

2. Phillips, "Moral Economy and Deindustrialization."

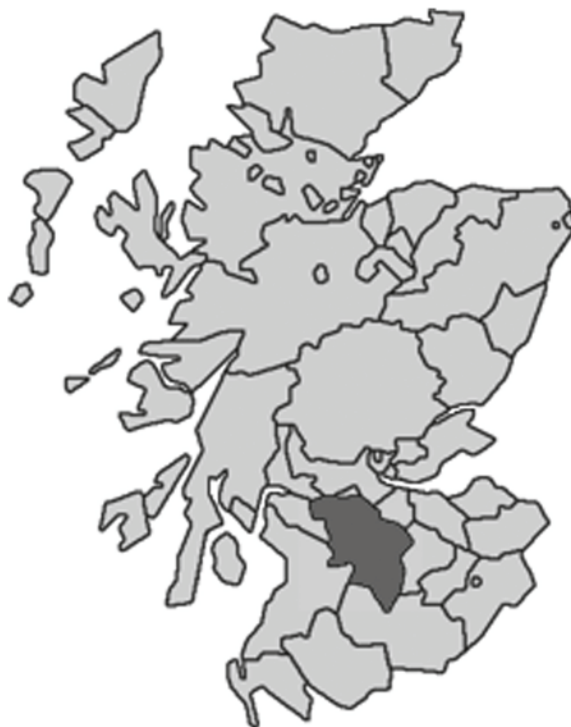


Figure 1 Lanarkshire.

Source: Undiscovered Scotland website, <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/index.html>

nationalization in 1947.³ These experiences were formative in establishing the perspective adopted by the National Union of Mineworkers' Scottish Area (NUMSA) in later closures. This article constructs an analysis of how socio-economic dislocation and injustices under the private industry of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century framed worker and community expectations of individual and collective security under public ownership. It then examines the practices of the coalfield moral economy under the nationalized industry. The analysis is based on doctoral research, including oral testimonies from former miners and members of mining families conducted in both life-story and focus group formats. These are supplemented by archival sources from the National Coal Board (NCB), including minutes of Colliery Consultative Committee (CCC) meetings between workforce representatives and management that took place during colliery closure proceedings. Within the minutes, the voices of working miners are heard alongside those of trade union leaders.

3. Duncan, *Mineworkers*, 206–207.

Conceptual Framework

There has been rising interest in Karl Polanyi from authors analyzing changes in employment and industrial relations, such as Guy Standing.⁴ Polanyi's 1944 work, *The Great Transformation*, argued the development of industrial capitalism imposed the logic of accumulation and the maximization of narrowly defined economic utility over the social values and political objectives that had directed preindustrial economies. However, this process was never complete. The economies of capitalist societies are not entirely disembodied from society, and this was paramount in the resistance to the marketization of "fictitious" commodities: labor, land, and money. These areas were the contested ground of the "double movement," as moves toward liberalization met continual opposition to commodification. This took the form of attempts to maintain the embeddedness of markets through the imposition of social and political priorities by workers' organizations in both confluence and conflict with the state, which came to full fruition in the social and political crises of the 1930s.⁵

Polanyi provides an important vantage point for a historically informed analysis of labor markets, giving a long-run perspective on the forces and institutions that have continually reshaped their operation. Strangleman's account of deindustrialization demonstrates the vitality of understanding the double movement as a process rather than an event. The disembodiment of the economy from society can be read as "a trend against which various groups reacted to during the early and later stages of industrialization."⁶ Polanyi's analysis has been criticized for tending toward an absolute reading of the disembodied market.⁷ This article adopts an approach influenced by Block's observation of the continually "ongoing" nature of the double movement, which recognizes "the always embedded economy."⁸ Looking to Block's and Laaser's sophisticated development of the double movement, it utilizes the concept of "marketness" to consider how the coal industry developed between "thin" and "thick" levels of embeddedness. Marketness relates to the extent to which the operation of markets is determined by profit motives, with either low ("thickly" embedded within social norms) or high ("thinly" embedded) possibilities.⁹ The reading in this case is broadly consistent with Dale's

4. Standing, *Work after Globalization*, 32, 58.

5. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 24.

6. Strangleman, "Deindustrialization."

7. Lie, "Embedding," 222–223.

8. Block, "Karl Polanyi," 296.

9. Ibid; Laaser, "Moral Economy," 14, 85.

perspective of shifts toward a more thickly embedded labor market over the mid-twentieth century as national states took an increased responsibility for economic management, before a thinning as liberalized markets were asserted from the late 1970s.¹⁰ In accordance with Silver and Arrighi's critique,¹¹ the necessity of identifying specific experiences, ideologies, and mechanisms of the double movement are addressed. This extends to the analysis of the dissolution of the coalfield moral economy's practices via the NCB's provision of financial compensation through large redundancy payments. These developments were evidence of the "constraining influence of subordinate social forces" during the neoliberal era when states continued to exercise responsibility for social welfare.¹²

Historical analysis of the moral economy originates with E. P. Thompson's writings on the "crowd" of eighteenth-century plebeian consumers who opposed the commodification of foodstuffs by enforcing customary practices of open market selling through disciplined direct action.¹³ Thompson emphasized the role of "custom, culture and reason" with regard to methods deployed to protect communities from disruption by market forces.¹⁴ He later summarized the moral economy at a theoretical level, which centered on claims of "non-monetary rights" to resources, predicated on "community membership [that] supersedes price as a basis of entitlement."¹⁵ Thompson's conception has been deployed to study resistance to liberalized markets elsewhere. Examples include peasant studies from colonial South East Asia, in which varying methods were used to enforce customary rights to rice and other foodstuffs.¹⁶

The emergent historiography of coalfield deindustrialization in Scotland uses a Thompsonian approach, emphasizing how "customs and expectations" shaped the management of pit closures under the nationalized industry. Perchard and Phillips highlight requirements of consultation and the provision of alternative employment.¹⁷ Phillips has developed this perspective, emphasizing that, "Restructuring raised the expectations of Scottish workers, who anticipated a well-paid and stable future in return for relinquishing their jobs in established industries."¹⁸ Closures were accepted as a price of rationalizing coal

10. Dale, "Double Movements," 3.

11. Silver and Arrighi, "Polanyi's 'Double Movement.'"

12. *Ibid.*, 347.

13. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 67–72.

14. Thompson, "Moral Economy," 77–79, 95–96.

15. Thompson. *Customs in Common*, 338–339.

16. Wells, "E. P. Thompson," 284–289.

17. Perchard and Phillips, "Transgressing the Moral Economy," 389.

18. Phillips, "Moral Economy of Deindustrialization," 2.

through concentration into economically viable “super pits.” The acceptance of closures further related to industrial modernization by releasing labor into the higher value-added engineering sectors being brought to Scotland through regional policy. These developments promised safer work and higher living standards, partly through creating employment opportunities for women.¹⁹

This article extends analysis of the coalfield moral economy through theoretically and historically situating it and outlining specific practices enacted upon closure: transfers to pits within travel distance and finding workers employment at appropriate grades. These are placed within the Polanyian double movement and the nationalized industry’s system of industrial citizenship. Industrial citizenship embedded colliery employment by instilling rights and responsibilities held by workers and management. In moral economy terms, it underlined the social responsibilities of the NCB, especially its obligation to enter consultation with trade unions and the workforce over the future development of the industry. This represented a response to the economic and social dislocation of the interwar British coalfields, and the conceptualization of novel forms of industrial relations during the thickening of market embeddedness of the 1930s and 1940s. Emphasis is placed on workforce and community expectations of nationalization, which are understood as the products of historical experience, especially interwar unemployment, the victimization of trade unionists, and the neglect of health and safety.

Coalfield History

Coal’s strategic status as Britain’s prime energy source and the conditions of underground work conditioned early episodes of state intervention. Health and safety regulations during the nineteenth century included characteristic elements of the double movement. The assertion of norms and values into the market’s operations came via the “tangle of interests” Polanyi analyzed as typical of social reform.²⁰ Aristocratic politicians and state officials, alongside organized workers, were central in reforming mining conditions in line with prevailing moral standards. The 1842 Mines Act regulated the labor market by prohibiting all women and any boys under the age of ten from working underground. Parliamentary arguments in favor largely focused on the morality of women and children working in an

19. Phillips, “Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy,” 102–105.

20. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 101.

underground setting and mixing with the coarse culture of colliers.²¹ Legislation was gradually extended to health and safety and the length of the working day. The state set standards for minimum conditions, which were highly contested by coal owners and trade unions.²²

When British coal production peaked in 1913 at 287 million tons, one-third of which was exported, more than 1.1 million worked in the sector, which was 10 percent of the British male workforce.²³ The protracted decline that followed during the 1920s was associated with the inhibited attempts to reestablish liberal market norms following World War I, which Polanyi saw as the harbinger of social strife and the rise of fascism and autarky. The “complete destruction of the national institutions of nineteenth century society” was visible in counter-movements, which included protectionist barriers and the dislocation of free trade on which British industrial development had depended.²⁴ Within Britain, the challenge to the liberal order was marked by the depression in regions reliant on heavy industry and included two major episodes of coalfield class struggle: the miners’ lockouts of 1921 and 1926. These disputes involved more than one million workers and their families, and ultimately led to government interventions. Supple’s account of growing state involvement in coal mining during the 1930s, which reshaped industrial relations and business organization, indicates the thickening of embeddedness that cumulated in nationalization in 1947. Thus, coal was not only more than a crucial case in which “business and politics could not be kept apart” but also its experience was “a test case for the embryonic mixed economy.”²⁵

Fine’s critique of the operation of government intervention during the interwar period contends that price setting and control of investment amounted to a situation whereby conventionally understood “capitalist relations of production had been eroded.”²⁶ This related to the cushioning of unviable firms through the complex privately owned royalties system, which was a disincentive to investment necessary to take advantage of economies of scale.²⁷ Fine has been countered by Greasley, who argues: “British coalmining did not fail to reap substantial pit-level scale economies between the wars because these were unavailable.”²⁸ The potential for improvement lay in

21. Mills, *Regulating Health and Safety*, 56–66.

22. Church, “Employers,” 28; McIvor, *History of Work*, 133.

23. Supple, *History of the British Coal Industry*, 5–7.

24. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 29–32.

25. Supple, *History of the British Coal Industry*, 348–353.

26. Fine, *Coal Question* xi–xiii, 174.

27. Fine, “Economies of Scale,” 448.

28. Greasley, “Economies of Scale,” 158.

wholesale investment in mining systems, but that was not viable in the depressed conditions of the interwar period or in an industry that was, in reality, a complex multiplicity of industries and markets. Dintenfass's detailed account of four firms during the interwar period emphasizes the distinction between the export-oriented Northumberland coalfield, which suffered from foreign competition and protectionist trends, and Yorkshire's relatively privileged position in serving domestic power station markets.²⁹ Coalfield development was marked by shifting geographical patterns of colliery closures and new sinkings as profitable reserves were exhausted or found elsewhere. The concentration of investment in Yorkshire and the Midlands resulted in increased unemployment and community dislocation within the Scottish, Welsh, and North East of England coalfields. State intervention was spurred by the "severe social problem, its wounds raw and obvious" in regions highly dependent on contracting coalfields.³⁰

While coastal coalfields, such as Fife, prospered based on serving export markets, the inland Lanarkshire coalfield developed as the principal supplier for the county's steelworks. It was a key component of the heavy industrial nexus, which characterized West Central Scotland's economic development during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. This included integrated ownership structures that linked coal, steel, and shipbuilding. Lanarkshire firms such as Bairds and Colvilles were coal owners as well as steel magnates.³¹ Coal mining employment peaked at nearly sixty thousand in 1921, employing one in three men, after which this industrial structure entered drawn-out crises during the 1920s and 1930s.³² In the Lanarkshire context, it was "depression in the major coal-consuming industries at home," particularly marked in iron, steel, and shipbuilding, which contributed to a major fall in demand.³³ The coalfield was also suffering from heavy geological faulting; its decline was accepted by trade union representatives as well as mining engineers during the 1944 Scottish Coalfield Commission. This strategy was developed under the NCB, which focused investment and manpower on "super pits" in the most productive coalfields. Plans were drawn up to transfer labor from Lanarkshire to Scotland's more profitable eastern coalfields.³⁴ As demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2, Lanarkshire endured major workforce contraction from the onset of nationalization, before major closures

29. Dintenfass, *Managing Industrial Decline*, 416.

30. Supple, "Political Economy of Demoralization," 566–568.

31. Payne, *Growth and Contraction*, 17–26.

32. *Census of Scotland 1921, vol. 1*, part 22, County of Lanark, Table E, 1139.

33. Buxton, *Economic Development*, 173.

34. Halliday, *Disappearing Scottish Colliery*, 19–28.

Table 1 Lanarkshire coalfield employment

Year	Number of Men Employed
1951	20,225
1961	13,440
1966	6,610
1971	3,720
1981	1,060

Census 1951 Scotland, Table 13, 433–469; *Census 1961*, Table 3, 16–21; *Sample Census 1966*, Table 3, 33–44; *Census 1971*, Table 3; *Census 1981*, Table 3

took hold across Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, starting in the late 1950s.

The nationalization of coal mining in 1947 was part of the broader post-World War II thickening of labor markets; a heightened element of “social control was restored over the economy,” as the objective of full employment underpinned an enhanced role for state intervention.³⁵ The construction of an NCB structure based on union recognition and joint regulation at the workplace level and upward represented a developed variety of the industrial citizenship that Standing discusses as characterizing developed economies after World War II.³⁶ This shift toward “humanized” industrial relations emphasized consultation with workers and their trade unions over major decisions, including pit closures, which were discussed by consultative committees comprising management and workforce representatives.³⁷

Robson’s 1962 assessment of British nationalized industries featured a section on industrial relations largely focused on coal that underlined the benefits of public ownership. He discussed the desire to combine miners’ expectations of “better treatment in every respect from nationalized industries than they received under private enterprise” with the NCB’s aim of “inculcating all who work in the organizations with a spirit of public service.”³⁸ These values indicated not only the importance

Table 2 Scottish coalfield employment

Year	Number of Men Employed
1947	77,000
1957	82,000
1967	32,000
1977	21,000
1987	6,000

Source: Oglethorpe, *Scottish Collieries*, 20.

35. Polanyi Levitt, *From the Great Transformation*, 100.

36. Standing, *Work after Globalization*, 32.

37. Tomlinson. “Public Ownership,” 235–239.

38. Robson, *Nationalized Industry*, 319–320.

of social partnership in structuring moral economy understandings of colliery employment, but also the potential conflict between worker and colliery interests and those of the industry's economic targets and performance. This is discussed below in relation to Lanarkshire's experience of early closures when manpower and investment were diverted to more productive coalfields. Gildart's analysis of mining autobiographies from North Wales indicated nationalization was universally seen as "a defining moment" in achieving material improvements and a more democratic, "consensual" workplace culture. Gildart considers the role of written histories and public discourses in influencing miners' own perspective. As discussed below, these themes were present in the Lanarkshire testimonies. Within a Scottish setting, the NUMSA's institutional narrative emphasized both historical injustices and the achievements of the nationalized industry. This transmitted within community and workforce memory to shape expectations of public ownership and narratives of NCB employment.³⁹

Methodology

Much of the analysis in this article is based on oral testimonies from more than thirty men and women, in addition to two focus groups. The interviewees were recruited through a variety of methods, with most participants being found through "snowballing" via existing contacts, but some were also found through local press adverts.⁴⁰ Recruitment was biased toward former trade union activists, which was a product of the contact networks through which the snowballing was conducted. It also reflects the tendency of activists to retain social and emotional connections with movements in which they took part.⁴¹ However, narratives were also gathered from former miners who were not supporters of the NUMSA leadership's Communist-influenced politics, including individuals who had a history of involvement with Orange Order activities. This concurs with Campbell's understanding of the Lanarkshire coalfield as marked by left-wing trade union activities and a significant Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) presence, but also including significant sectarian divisions that formed the basis for opposition to socialist politics.⁴² Reference to the history of these divisions within the industrial struggles of the

39. Gildart, "Mining Memories," 144–145.

40. Knight, *Small-Scale Research*, 65.

41. Fielding and Thomas, "Qualitative Interviewing," 260; Stizia, "Telling Arthur's Story," 633–634; Kirk, *Class, Culture*, 163–165.

42. Campbell, *Scottish Miners*, 277–289. The Orange Order is a closed Protestant and Loyalist organization.

private industry is made below, as is testament that moral economy sentiment was shared across them.

The cultural circuit was developed by oral historians to conceptualize the nonlinear relationship between personal experience and public historical narratives. Recollection involves an “interactive construction”; testimonies entail an act of cultural production shaped by hegemonic versions of historical memory.⁴³ Oral history theory emphasizes how a circuit’s “conceptual and definitional effects” have shaped memories in line with dominant accounts. Summerfield’s account of women’s experiences of labor and civil defense during World War II related to “general-public forms” that demarked the need for national unity but differentiated women’s domestic role from male military heroism.⁴⁴ Similarly, Alistair Thomson stresses that for Australian World War I veterans, “memories were entangled with the myth” of the ANZAC “Diggers,” which retains nation-building significance. However, noting the possibilities for subaltern perspectives to express themselves and contest hegemonic recollections, Thomson also asserted that counter-hegemonic narratives can be sustained by appeals to the memory of “particular publics.”⁴⁵ Perchard exemplifies this through his analysis of the “deep cultural scars of deindustrialization” within narratives of colliery closures in the Fife coalfield. These have extrapolated individual and collective experiences of deindustrialization and community decline to a Scottish national narrative of unjustly imposed industrial contraction.⁴⁶

The cultural circuit of coalfield memory was developed based on the collective memory of mining communities. It had a powerful basis in family histories and communal recollections of industrial conflict and mass unemployment. The cultural circuit was also shaped by the NUMSA’s institutional narrative, which placed the union within a long history of miners’ struggles against injustice. R. Page Arnot, a CPGB activist and sometime National Union of Mineworkers official, published *A History of the Scottish Miners* in 1955. This accorded with the perspective of the NUMSA’s leadership, which included prominent CPGB figures and influence from its foundation in 1945. Arnot’s account made the predominant understanding of coalfield history within the NUMSA explicit and codified within a written volume. Arnot’s sentiments were reproduced within the testimonies, indicating that his account was placed within the perspective view of the NUMSA.

43. Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory,” 44; Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 18.

44. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives*, 14.

45. Thomson, “Anzac Memories,” 301–302.

46. Perchard, “Memory and Legacy,” 79–80.

Some interviewees recommended Arnot's book, and many shared his emphasis on miners' "record of suffering and of heroic struggle against the soulless mine-owner."⁴⁷ Arnot detailed the conditions of the early Industrial Revolution period, using quotations from the 1840 Children's Employment Commission to recreate the horrific conditions under which children as young as seven years old worked up to thirteen hours per day.⁴⁸ In line with the dominant perspective within the NUMSA, he went on to profile the achievement of trade union consultation in the NCB's social-democratic infrastructure. An understanding of the legacy of struggle over the nineteenth century and twentieth century, and of the meaning of nationalization, was crucial to shaping the operation of the moral economy's customs. In Arnot's account, the wartime construction of a Scotland-wide and then subsequently Britain-wide miners' union during the 1940s was presented as a key achievement of "men who were not prepared to be put off by the difficulties and obstacles that had baffled their predecessors," and as an accompaniment to nationalization.⁴⁹

The testimonies are supplemented by reflections from a focus group conducted among a retired miners' group in Moodiesburn, North Lanarkshire, with dialogue largely revolving around experiences of industrial relations and colliery closure. A second focus group was conducted in Shotts, North Lanarkshire, comprising a local history group whose members came from coal-mining backgrounds. Neither group was dominated by former activists. The dialogue was more fragmentary than the life-story interviews and focused on shared elements of social life in community and workplace settings. The benefit of this came from "generative" content. Participant interaction drove the dialogue and demonstrated the links and connections through which the cultural circuit operates.⁵⁰

Where possible, the narratives have been linked with relevant archival materials to verify their accuracy. This was achievable in discussions of colliery closures through the details of CCC minutes. However, as Portelli has stated, oral history "tells us less about events than about their meaning."⁵¹ The focus of the analysis centers on how closures were absorbed within the cultural circuit and how they shaped collective conceptions of fairness and social justice. Elements of nostalgia, defined by Davis as a sense of "ostensibly lost values, the sense of some ineffable spirit of worth or goodness having escaped time,"

47. Arnot, *History of the Scottish Miners*, 12.

48. *Ibid.*, 20–28.

49. *Ibid.*, 252–253.

50. Finch and Lewis, "Focus Groups," 10.

51. Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?," 36.

are apparent from the recollections of the nationalized coal industry.⁵² However, these are tempered by “critical nostalgia.”⁵³ Bonnett has theorized that critical forms of nostalgia are necessary in critical reflections that identify what has been lost in historical transition. This allows for the “radical imagination” to conceptualize a grounded perspective on historical experiences, which is particularly apparent in memories of closure and job loss.⁵⁴ Thus, the reflection of the narratives is tempered not only by the details of the archives but also by the construction of history, which is powerfully shaped by a collective memory that is central in understandings of the nationalized industry and perceptions of the NCB’s social responsibility in overseeing closures.

Foundations of the Moral Economy

An understanding of the importance of coal was articulated in the testimonies. Billy Maxwell, from Muirhead, in North Lanarkshire, who worked at Cardowan colliery between 1957 and 1979, stated during the Moodiesburn focus group: “Miners for centuries, as I said to you before, were fuelling the industry ae (of) Great Britain. They were the most important ingredient in the making of wealth.” He also claimed that “deep mining in the Industrial Revolution financed the world we have today,” and he underlined that this was “at the cost ae a lot of miners.” An awareness of the true “price of coal,” juxtaposing arguments relating to financial costs to that of lost miners’ lives, was compounded by the claim that miners did not abuse their power: “The miners could ae held the country to ransom at that time [during the 1950s] and didnae dae (did not do) it cause they were too decent a people.”⁵⁵ As well as relaying his own experience, Billy had undertaken research into local mining experiences and pit disasters during the nineteenth century. His perspective was framed by the cultural circuit’s emphasis on the long endurance of injustice and collective mobilization by miners. A sense of the social and economic importance of coal was combined with an awareness of the dangers endured by the workforce. This furthered a moral economy perspective based on the obligation of the state as an employer to reciprocate the miners’ “decent” conduct.

Billy’s moral argumentation is indicative of how historical memory shaped understandings of public ownership’s regulated, thickened labor markets. Interwar experiences of social dislocation—especially

52. Davis, *Yearning*, 13.

53. Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, 1.

54. *Ibid.*, 1–3.

55. Moodiesburn focus group.

unemployment, the victimization of trade unionists, neglectful health and safety, and the treatment of disabled miners—conditioned expectations of the nationalized industry. Jessie Clark is from Douglas Water, South Lanarkshire. The daughter and wife of Communist miners, she was an active Party member herself when she worked in the Douglas colliery's canteen during the 1940s. Jessie recalled that within the village during the 1930s, the Coltness Iron Company victimized trade unionists and attempted to divide the community through discriminatory employment practices, which favored members of the Masons, a Protestant secret society:

My father was a union man and during the '30s when I was growing up [and] my father was unemployed quite a lot, you know, it was a question of first out, you know, last in. And I have no doubt, I have no doubt, eh, there were people who, eh, I'm afraid there's two things that, the enemies, that my father always talked about was the likes of the landowners and the Masonic Lodge.⁵⁶

Jessie summarized nationalization as social justice, underlining the importance of workplace participation and consultation: "Getting rid of the coal owners and there was going to be a bit more democracy, you know, within the, the, eh, working area."⁵⁷

Respondents who lacked Jessie's direct connection with the inter-war period still mentioned memories of the private industry's injustices. This was indicative that the NUMSA's institutional narrative and historical perspective, encapsulated by Arnot, transmitted inter-generationally. Mick McGahey, a third-generation Communist miner, and the son of the trade union leader of the same name, recalled that victimization uprooted his family and prevented them from settling stably elsewhere. In line with the constellation of industrial relations and geological and investment factors pointed to above, these circumstances led Mick's family to leave the declining Lanarkshire coalfield for the expanding Kent coalfield in the south of England:

My father was born in Shotts, my family was born in Shotts, and once, eh, they moved fae pit tae pit (from pit to pit) 'cause miners were like Gypsies at that time, the pits were owned by coal owners, werena (were not) nationalised. So in my grandfather's day, eh, y'know, they moved when they were victimised. My grandfather was involved in the 1926 general strike, he got sent to jail, he did six month in the jail. My grandmother got evicted, family oot (out of) the pit owner's hoose (housing), and they ended up in Kent and

56. Jessie Clark, interview.

57. *Ibid.*

they moved about (about) the coalfields in England, and eventually came back to Scotland and settled in Cambuslang [in South Lanarkshire].⁵⁸

Mick's testimony exemplifies Campbell's "genealogies of victimization and radicalism"⁵⁹ that reinforced the moral economy view of coalfield employment as a community resource that was struggled for through decades of mobilization. His father was victimized in 1943 when involved in a strike at Gateside, in Cambuslang, and Mick himself was sacked during the 1984–1985 miners' strike.⁶⁰

However, these recollections were not exclusive to Communists. Peter Downie, during the Moodiesburn focus group, emphasized the impact of injury and unemployment. Peter's political stance was influenced by a history of involvement in Orange Order activities, and his narrative included a deferential view toward the royal family. Nevertheless, Peter framed his own experience within the cultural circuit's emphasis of injustice and the struggle for nationalization. Peter's father was involved in an accident in 1938 at the Bedlay colliery, in North Lanarkshire, and was not provided with either adequate social security or work to suit his condition. His family grew up in poverty and he was "raised on the parish." In Peter's view, this was part of a longer history of economic insecurity:

When you go and take your history from the 1840s, the 1840s, onwards, they were living in deprivation. The miners were living in deprivation because the situation was that they couldnae (could not) feed the weans (children) that they haved (had) and they were living in wooden shackles (in wooden shacks), stane flares (with stone floors), and the weans had rickets-born weakness and the people who helped them was very, very little. The coal owners gave them nothing.

He summed this up in another discussion by stating: "Up to 1947, the men were living in deprivation."⁶¹

Practice and Dissolution of the Moral Economy: Lanarkshire, 1947–1983

The NCB's structures of industrial citizenship were shaped by a commitment to the joint regulation of the industry with workforce

58. Mick McGahey, interview.

59. Campbell, "Scotland," 184–185.

60. Mick McGahey, interview; McIlroy and Campbell, "Beyond Betteshanger 2," 74–75.

61. Peter Downie, Moodiesburn focus group.

representatives, as well as through efforts to maintain secure long-term employment and to improve both remuneration and conditions. Industrial citizenship was enthused by a moral ethos of workforce engagement that instilled the joint responsibilities that workers and management held to build a successful nationalized industry. Peter Mansell-Mullen, who worked in NCB management starting in the early 1950s, and became director for Manpower in 1971, recalled the perceived centrality of coal and the importance ascribed to its transformation under public ownership. However, in his view, the variety of workforce consultation within the nationalized industry was shaped from the beginning by the fact that unions continued to operate as organizations that represented worker interests vis-à-vis management. Thus, consultation was always qualified and never amounted to full *socialization* or *workers' control*:

The idea was that if they all came together and nationalized and they ran up flags and things this would be a new attitude and a new hope. Ehm, and it was terribly important at the time. Ernie Bevin said things like, "If I had another ten million tons of coal a year, it would change my foreign policy." Things like this. So, eh, the place was ripe for change, and it needed capital, and it needed confidence. Eh, there had been a lot of discussion beforehand as to where the miners fitted in in terms of management. Which is, a, this is the difference some people make between nationalization and socialisation. Ehm, the unions on the whole take the view that they wanted to go on being unions.⁶²

As elaborated below, these distinctions became important as unions continued to assert distinct workforce interests against the NCB's perception of the industry's requirement of rationalization during colliery closures.

Discussion within the focus group in Shotts, a former coal-mining center in North Lanarkshire, demonstrated the association between public ownership and both improved pay and health and safety standards as fundamental in shaping mineworkers' attitude toward nationalization:

Ewan Gibbs: How did nationalization change things?

Betty Turnwood: The Coal Board.

Willie Hamilton: It improved the miners' conditions tremendously, y'know. As I say, it was practically slavish, y'know wi (with) the private owners, then you had a bit of

62. Peter Mansell-Mullen, interview. Ernest Bevin was foreign secretary in the Labour government between 1945 and 1951.

independence after that. The money wisnae (was not) great, mind you, it could have been better, but, eh, but, eh, I think.

Ella Muir: Did you have more security?

Willie Hamilton: Very much more. And, as I said, they opened new pits and that the miners moved away.

Bill Paris: It became safer as well.

Willie Hamilton: The safety side aw (saw) the mines was greatly improved, especially the support in the roofs and so forth. With the private owner, he skimped on the material used to support the roof, but when the Coal Board come in, they upgraded everything.⁶³

Elements of nostalgia for communal pasts and working lives were apparent in this discussion. Other respondents also emphasized the self-worth and cohesiveness the NCB granted. For instance, Pat Egan, from Twechar, in North Lanarkshire, followed his father and grandfather by starting to work at the Bedlay colliery in the late 1970s. Pat recalled employment being found for men with physical or learning disabilities, who “were always looked after.”⁶⁴ However, interviewees also indicated a capacity for critical nostalgia that noted the impact of nationalization in less positive tones. During the broadly favorable account of nationalization within the Shotts focus group, Bobby Flemming recalled major colliery closures when investment and manpower were concentrated on more profitable coalfields:

After nationalization, they, more or less, they started shuttin’ the Shotts pits. Nationalization wisnae (was not) good for the Shotts pits because they had worked their butts off for the war effort. It got to the stage, at the end of the war, the pits were aw (all) exhausted, it wisnae a good area. The nationalized industries were looking for big pits where they took out high volumes.⁶⁵

The Shotts experience was a formative period for the moral economy, which conditioned the more sensitive management of redundancy and transfer in future closures. Tension between the NCB’s economic priorities and community cohesion were summed up in 1950 by NUMSA President Abe Moffat, who responded to the proposed closure of Baton colliery by stating: “The Board should realize that they were not discussing a Mining Engineer’s opinion but the

63. Shotts focus group. For details on the NCB’s health and safety performance, see McIvor and Johnston, *Miners Lung*, 203–221.

64. Pat Egan, interview.

65. Bobby Flemming, Shotts focus group.

social life of a mining village.”⁶⁶ The NCB’s strategy centered on encouraging labor mobility, and was signified by W. Drylie, the area industrial relations officer, who, upon the closure of Longlea colliery in 1949, advised “local men, particularly young men” to seek transfers within Scotland.⁶⁷ Baldwin’s 1955 appraisal of industrial relations within the NCB singled out the early experience of colliery closures in Lanarkshire as a major “test” of the nationalized industry. This pivotally related to closures that were “dictated by economics and not by nature.”⁶⁸ Baldwin emphasized that the NUMSA was rhetorically committed to support coalfield rationalization, as the unions had been during the 1944 Coal Commission. However, before its headquarters moved from Glasgow to Edinburgh during the late 1940s, the NUMSA tended to tolerate local opposition to closures in the face of significant pressure.⁶⁹ The findings from archival research detailed below suggest that there was an early contestation over principles governing investment policy within the nationalized industry.

The debate over investment during closures during the early nationalized period indicates an absence of consensus over the responsibilities of the NCB, as well as differences over the extent to which joint regulation merited worker and community control over the industry’s development and assets. J. Todd, the NUM pit delegate at Baton, summed up the moral economy argument: “If the NCB are making profits, surely they can spend some to save a district getting derelict. The profitable pits should help the others not doing so well.”⁷⁰ However, the NUMSA’s grievances during the Shotts closures tended toward mechanics and procedure. Between the late 1940s and early 1950s, the coalfield moral economy’s operation was constructed in relation to securing employment for workers through transfer to appropriate work and the legitimization of closure through consultation with worker representatives. This was visible through episodes that sparked disagreement. In 1948, having provided seventy houses for transferees in Fife, the NCB began redundancies at Broomside colliery, in North Lanarkshire, before closure was agreed. Abe Moffat saw these actions as preemptive. He argued it went against stipulation, as closure had

66. National Coal Board (hereafter CB)/222/14/1/21A, Notes of Proceedings Between the Scottish Divisional Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers (Scottish Area) Regarding the Proposed Closure of Baton Colliery held at no. 58 Palmerston Place Edinburgh on Monday 8 May, 1950, National Records of Scotland (hereafter, NRS), Edinburgh.

67. CB/295/14/1/1E Fortissat CCC Thursday 27 January 1949, NRS; CB/295/14/1 Fortissat CCC Minutes of Meeting Held in Colliery Office 15 February 1949, NRS.

68. Baldwin, *Beyond Nationalization*, 249.

69. *Ibid.*, 249–257.

70. CB/222/14/1/5C Baton CCC minutes of meeting 24 January 1950, NRS.

not yet been sanctioned by the trade unions.⁷¹ During the closure of Baton, grievances centered on moves toward closure without transfers to stated graded positions at other collieries, which the NCB acted to ameliorate after Moffat raised problems arising from recent closures.⁷²

A sense of policy-maker social responsibility was evident in August 1948, when H. S. Phillips, the Board of Trade researcher for Scotland, commenting on Shotts, argued: “The transfer method is only an additional and short term method of reducing male unemployment.” This related to social circumstances: “Quite a high proportion of unemployed persons are not prepared, or able, to move more than a short distance.” Phillips argued that the situation in Shotts justified a “take work to the workers” policy.⁷³ Two years later, a Board of Trade research team studied Shotts and concluded that, although some emigration was desirable, limited success had already been attained in attracting light industry and that further developments were necessary “to preserve and balance the community on a smaller scale.”⁷⁴ These conclusions were further supported by a 1953 study conducted by Hazel E. Heughan, of Edinburgh University. Heughan documented a reluctance to migrate despite promises of better living conditions and more secure employment in Fife, underlining that Shotts miners “shrunk from uprooting themselves because of the fear of loneliness in exchanging their friendly social life for one in which they are thrown upon their own devices.”⁷⁵

The failure of the NCB to secure the anticipated large-scale redeployment of miners across coalfields, and policy-maker acceptance of responsibility to provide employment, established the broad practice for colliery closures between the 1950s and early 1980s across Scotland that is outlined in the existing literature. Closures were ameliorated through consultation and by offers of transfer to appropriately graded positions within commuting distance of existing homes. Furthermore, labor market security was ensured through regional policy that directed manufacturing inward investment toward contracting coalfields.⁷⁶ The moral economy was constructed within the broader Polanyian context of social embeddedness, but it also had a basis in the

71. CB/483/24/1/6A Divisional Consultative Committee Point 127 Broomside Colliery (1948), NRS.

72. CB/222/14/1/29A Note of proceedings between the Scottish Divisional Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers (Scottish Area) Regarding the Proposed Closure of Baton Colliery Held at No. 58 Palmerston Place Edinburgh on Thursday 18 May 1950, NRS.

73. SEP/4/762 H. S. Phillips, “Research Studies: Geographical Movement of Labour,” dated 9 August 1948.

74. SEP/4/762 Research Team, “‘Geographical Movement of Labour’—Research Section Board of Trade (Scotland),” dated 4 August 1950.

75. Heughan, *Pit Closures*, 12.

76. Perchard and Phillips, “Transgressing the Moral Economy,” 93; Phillips, “Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy.”

specific moral economy practices of negotiation and securing alternative employment. Demands for the maintenance of joint regulation were constant across the closure process, and their breach was pivotal in the collapse of the moral economy's operation during the 1980s. However, there was also a major shift in the character of pit transfer over the period, as the definition of *local* radically altered through the shrinking of the industry and rising travel to work distances.

Following the Shotts experience, for the most part, migration was turned down in favor of extended travelling distances, either to larger pits, such as Cardowan and Bedlay, or to other industries. This acted to maintain residential communities but it came at the cost of longer daily commutes. The extension of traveling to work was an incremental process with waves of closures increasing distances. Figure 2 demonstrates this through the example of an individual miner, Peter Downie. His travel to work distance increased through a series of closures and transfers from employment at Glentore, a village pit adjacent to his home in Greengairs, North Lanarkshire, to a sixty-mile daily commute across central Scotland to Solsgirth colliery, in Clackmannan.⁷⁷

The NCB was restructured when coal employment's decline accelerated during the 1960s, as detailed in Table 1. Growing authority passed to its London-based headquarters, Hobart House.⁷⁸ Increasingly capital-intensive production methods bolstered pressure to concentrate investment and manpower in the most productive coalfields in the English Midlands. Along with falling demand for coal, this accelerated the rundown of the Scottish coalfield.⁷⁹ This stretched the legitimacy of consultation. At proceedings in 1968 before the closure of Gartshore 9/11, in North Lanarkshire, a Colliery Officials and Staff Association representative articulated his discontent at the growing remoteness of control. Emergent geographical and social distances questioned the value of commitments to regulation by the customs of industrial citizenship, and therefore threatened the embedding of the industry's operation within workforce and community conceptions of social justice: "It used to be that the Colliery Manager had to plan out his own Pit, then Area officials took control of this and now we find that the planning for the Pit is done 500 miles away. Handouts were all right, if unavoidable, but men wanted to work."⁸⁰

77. Peter Downie, Moodiesburn focus group. His journey to work went from minimal at Glentore and Grayshill, to nine miles to Bedlay in the 1960s, to seventeen miles to Polkemmet in West Lothian in 1982, and then around thirty miles to Solsgirth. All mileage was one way.

78. Halliday, *Disappearing Scottish Colliery*, 107–108.

79. Ashworth, *History of the British Coal Industry*, 87–102, 264–265.

80. CB/300/14/1/Minutes of Special Consultative Committee Meeting of Gartshore 9/11 CCC Held in Grayshill Office on Thursday 18 January 1968, NRS.



Figure 2 Peter Downie's journey to work.

Source: Google Maps.

Perchard's research suggests that lower rungs of management shared these feelings. At colliery level, the imposition of centralized control increased from the late 1950s onward as the industry entered a period of contradiction and more stringent financial and output targets were imposed.⁸¹ The moral economy's basis in local community bonds was also implicated by Lord Robens's account of his chairmanship of the NCB from 1961 to 1971. He referred to "a Scottish pit with a very limited life" in which "a solid alliance of local management backed up by the local unions" resisted transfer schemes to the English Midlands.⁸²

Joint regulation and the organizing of transfers were fundamental factors in the final dissolution of the moral economy. The closure of Bedlay colliery in 1982 was the last moral economy closure in Scotland. After extensive discussions with trade unions over "several months" and a "joint examination of all possible areas of reserves," closure was agreed due to "insurmountable geological conditions."⁸³

81. Perchard, *Mine Management Professions*, 180–184.

82. Robens, *Ten Year Stint*, 103–106.

83. CB/223/14/3/ P. M. Moullin Deputy Secretary NCB, London, to P. McPake, Bedlay, Glenboig, dated 30 November 1981, NRS.

Employment at other Scottish collieries was found for those in the workforce who did not wish to retire. Although the NCB undertook these costs, its accountants objected to a net loss of £3.3 million through redundancy, transfer, and pension payments, but their graver concerns were at taking on 340 extra workers without increasing production, thus they prescribed solution of an additional 340 redundancies.⁸⁴ This is indicative of the economic disembedding associated with neoliberal restructuring, which included the imposition of unitary industrial relations practices and the abandonment of an economic policy of full employment. Within the NCB, this had greater resonance following the Coal Industry Act 1980. Ashworth concluded that its removal of subsidies and disavowal of long-term energy policy and coalfield investment planning meant it has been “drawn so as to make it almost impossible to operate the industry in the way it had been operating until then.”⁸⁵ Thus, the coal industry moved toward a thinned market and removal from the social norms in which its employment practices had been embedded under nationalization.

The NCB accountants’ mentality at Bedlay preceded a more aggressive management style at the closure of Lanarkshire’s last colliery in 1983, Cardowan. It took place on economic grounds, a far more contentious basis than exhaustion, and was a key episode preceding the outbreak of the 1984–1985 miners’ strike.⁸⁶ In 2014 Nicky Wilson, a former electrician at Cardowan and current Scottish president of the NUM, echoed NUMSA President Mick McGahey’s comments from a consultative committee meeting both attended in 1983. Cardowan’s “high grade coking coal” lost British Steel Corporation’s contract to supply the nearby Ravenscraig steelworks, which followed thinning market logic by switching to imports during the early 1980s. This resulted in a situation in which the NCB had to “mix it wi (with) a lotta rubbish” for lower value power station use.⁸⁷ However, the fundamental contention was the subversion of joint regulation. Albert Wheeler, the NCB’s Scottish area director, made this clear at the same Consultative Committee meeting when he stated that he “wanted the opinion of the 1090 men employed at the colliery and not just the few who attended branch meetings.”⁸⁸

84. CB/223/14/3/Memorandum from Area Chief Accountant to Area Director, Subject: Closure of Bedlay, dated 4 November 1981, NRS.

85. Ashworth, *History of the British Coal Industry*, 352.

86. Phillips, “Energy and Industrial,” 56–57.

87. Nicky Wilson, interview.

88. FC/3/2/3/2/Appendix 1 Special Extended CCC Meeting held in the Parochial Hall, Stepps, Friday 13 May 1983, National Mining Museum Scotland Archives (hereafter, NMM), Newtongrange.

In place of negotiation with trade union representatives, he made an “offer” of redundancy payments, including a lump sum payment of up to £20,000, and pensions of up to £100 a week for men over the age of 50, and promised protected earnings and transfer allowances for younger men.⁸⁹ Wilson’s comments on the quality of Cardowan’s product underline that joint regulation was stimulated by occupational pride and recognition of the vital role coal played in sustaining the British economy. Cardowan’s closure disavowed industrial citizenship as joint regulation and was jettisoned in favor of aggressive anti-trade unionism. Compensation was provided to individual workers for transfers and redundancies in return for the acceptance of managerial prerogative. This confirms the moral economy amounted to more than redress for those suffering from the impact of labor market instability. The moral economy was defined by assertions of community control of resources, collieries and the employment they provided, and conferring legitimacy on decision making within the NCB through dialogue with worker representatives and trade unions.

By the time of the trade unions’ appeal against closure in September 1983, three hundred men had already left Cardowan, which both Mick McGahey and Arthur Scargill (national NUM president) argued went against closure procedure. Transfers were used to undermine workforce solidarity and collective agreements across the Scottish coalfields, leading to far greater incidents of inter-workforce disputes than the tensions unearthed at previous transfers over access to skilled positions. Grievances centered on the undermining of joint regulation, with strikes following the entrance of unnegotiated transferees.⁹⁰ The most serious moral economy transgression took place at Polmaise, in Stirlingshire, where Cardowan men were transferred in June 1983 while the pit was undergoing reconstruction. This breached promises to local miners, who had been assured of first refusal on employment at the redeveloped colliery and led to the NUM branch pursuing a policy of noncooperation with unnegotiated transferees, which contributed to a lockout at the pit.⁹¹

Conclusion

The development of industrial relations in the Scottish coal industry was strongly shaped by conceptions of social justice and economic fairness.

89. *Ibid.*

90. FC/3/2/3/2/Background Brief for National Appeal Meeting on Cardowan Colliery, NMM.

91. Brotherstone, “Energy Workers,” 144.

This article places the management of colliery closures within a Polanyian frame. It demonstrates the vitality of the double movement as developed by both Block and Laasser. Commodifying market forces and a counter-movement by organized workers and state officials continually contested industrial relations and management of the industry's development. Both these elements of the countermovement coalition were instrumental in socially embedding coal employment within the consultative structures of the nationalized industry, before liberalizing pressures asserted an increased marketness during the 1980s. Polanyi provides a means to analyze the long-term historical trends and ongoing contradictions within which the nationalized industry developed. A Thompsonian moral economy analysis illuminates the specific practices and agents of embeddedness and its connection to conceptions of social justice defined by experience and reflection. The inclusion of both archival sources and oral testimonies demonstrates the importance of thick description and considers historical memory through the transmission of the cultural circuit, which is central in framing the development of industrial relations customs and expectations.

This extends the existing work on the Scottish coalfield moral economy, pioneered by Phillips and Perchard, through illuminating the importance of historical reflection to the moral economy. Its practices were strongly influenced by the history of coalfield communities, especially the dislocation and class conflicts of the interwar period. Through the operation of a powerful cultural circuit, these transmitted across generations and shaped expectations of the nationalized industry. This was lent institutional support by the NUMSA, and attained influence over miners who were not supportive of the Communist orthodoxies that broadly predominated within the union's structures. The findings of this article extend Phillips's analysis of the moral economy in Fife with a perspective of its operation in Lanarkshire, Scotland's largest coalfield on the NCB's vesting. It points to the origins of moral economy practices in the initially disputed process of colliery closures and the failure of large-scale coalfield migration schemes within the Shotts area. These experiences conferred the NCB's later policy of offering miners transfers within traveling distance of their homes upon closures. In this sense, the Polanyian framework offers a valuable insight to the dynamic process of ongoing conflict between commodifying and de-commodifying forces. Rather than simply a product of the consultative structures emphasized in Ashworth's official history of the Coal Board, the "humanized relations" of the nationalized industry discussed by Tomlinson were the result of processes of social embedding that continued to develop after 1947. These findings assert the importance

of historical specificity and consciousness to the conceptions of social justice that structured the NCB's operation of joint industrial regulation and its management of closure. Guy Standing's metaphor of the industrial citizen not only remains valuable but it is also vital to reflect on the specific histories and distinct elements of consciousness that structured the social embedding of industrial economies after 1945.

These concerns demonstrate the vitality in generalizing Laasser's and Bolton and Laaser's approaches to supplement an analysis of the Polanyian structural contradictions between social stability and market liberalization with an emphasis on Thompsonian workforce conceptions of social justice. Colliery closure was socially embedded through practices that aimed at preserving community cohesion through the provision of transfers to nearby collieries and the bolstering of local labor markets via the operation of manufacturing investment secured by regional policy. Legitimacy was conferred on closures through consultation and the exercise of the worker "voice," which remained paramount between the 1940s and 1980s. This was confirmed in the dissolution of the moral economy during the 1980s, when the thinning of the coal industry's embeddedness entailed the destruction of the NCB's structures of joint regulation but the maintenance of financial compensation for workers through redundancy and transfer payments. The workforce's response to these changes, which were instrumental in stimulating the yearlong 1984–1985 miners' strike, demonstrates that the moral economy entailed far more than compensation for labor market displacement. It pivoted on key questions of the exercise of "voice" and industrial governance.

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