

Apprentice strikes in twentieth century UK engineering and shipbuilding*

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Abstract

Between 1910 and 1970, apprentices in the engineering and shipbuilding industries launched nine strike movements, concentrated in Scotland and Lancashire. On average, the disputes lasted for more than five weeks, drawing in more than 15,000 young people for nearly two weeks apiece. Although the disputes were in essence unofficial, they complemented sector-wide negotiations by union officials. Two interpretations are considered: a political-social-cultural one, emphasising political motivation and youth socialisation, and an economics-industrial relations one, emphasising collective action and conflicting economic interests. Both interpretations prove relevant, with qualified priority to the economics-IR one. The apprentices' actions influenced economic outcomes, including pay structures and training incentives, and thereby contributed to the decline of apprenticeship.

‘Was it serious? I don’t know. It certainly had serious consequences.’

J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*¹

Introduction

The lead story in the *Manchester Evening News* on 29 April 1960, under the headline ‘Apprentices Storm Works: Singing 700 Hold Up Traffic,’ reported that 300 striking apprentices had just scaled the walls of the AEI factory in Trafford Park and brought out 200 younger colleagues from the firm’s apprentice school. The factory’s gates had been locked following a decision at a lunchtime meeting to join a strike that had started in Scotland nine days before. An apprentice delegate from Glasgow, one of two who had travelled south by motor-bike to gather support, denied that the march was ‘communist inspired’. He claimed that ‘the only time the apprentices get a rise is when they strike’. A 700-strong group, accounting for half the factory’s complement of apprentices, then marched off to raise support from nearby factories, sending two strikers on bicycles to do the same at the more distant Mather and Platt works.

Several attributes of these events are worthy of note. First, workplaces with so many apprentices, unknown nowadays, could still be found then. Second, the carnival-like atmosphere of the day evoked the historical apprentice traditions of larking about and rioting in public. Third, the political attributes of the strike movement were controversial. A Scottish cleric claimed that it had been organised by the Communist Party and supported by a ‘Trotskyist’ body.² Fourth, the 1960 movement was classed in terms of working days lost as the largest industrial dispute of the year. Finally, the dispute precipitated a substantial pay rise for all young males in the engineering and shipbuilding industries.

The 1960 dispute was far from unique. Nine strike movements were launched by engineering and shipbuilding apprentices between 1910 and 1970. They

¹ Vintage Books: 2000, p. 69.

² Rev. W. MacIntyre, organiser of industrial chaplaincies for the Church of Scotland, (Aberdeen) *Evening Express*, 20 April 1960.

typically started in engineering, in either Glasgow or Manchester, and then spread to shipbuilding and to the other city, subsequently to other northern metalworking centres, and occasionally to the Midlands and the South as well. They lasted on average around a month, drawing in many thousands of young people for an average of nearly two weeks apiece.

This apparently prominent feature of the industrial relations landscape has remained obscure. Although the movements form part of the official strike record, and particular ones have been discussed in detail, primarily by social historians,³ the attention paid to them in the literatures on industrial conflict and vocational training has remained marginal.⁴

³ N. Branson and M. Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: 1971), pp. 114-5; R. Croucher, *Engineers at War* (Merlin: 1982), pp. 45-57, 123-31, 230-9; J. E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain, 1918-79* (Batsford Academic and Educational: 1984), pp. 108-9; W. Knox, "Down with Lloyd George": the apprentices' strike of 1912', *Scottish Labour History Society Journal* 19 (1984), pp. 22-36; A. McKinlay, 'The 1937 Apprentices' Strike: Challenge "from an Unexpected Quarter"', *Scottish Labour History Society Journal* 20 (1985), pp. 14-32, and 'From Industrial Serf to Wage-Labourer: the 1937 Apprentice Revolt in Britain', *International Review of Social History* 32, Part 1 (1986), pp. 1-18; D. Fowler, *The First Teenagers: the Lifestyle of Young Wage-Earners in Interwar Britain* (Woburn Press: 1995), pp. 55-63; N. Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933-45* (Scolar Press, Aldershot: 1995), pp. 96-8, 231-2; see also J. Gollan, *Youth in British Industry* (Gollancz: 1937), pp. 311-7, and E. Frow and R. Frow, *Manchester's Big House in Trafford Park: Class Conflict and Collaboration at Metro-Vicks* (Working Class Movement Library, Manchester: 1983), pp. 31-8.

⁴ Studies of industrial conflict during the period that do not mention apprentice disputes are: K. G. J. C. Knowles, *Strikes. A Study in Industrial Conflict: with Special Reference to the British Experience 1911-47* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford: 1952); C. T. B. Smith, R. Clifton, P. Makeham, S. W. Creigh and R. V. Burn, *Strikes in Britain*, Manpower Paper 15, Department of Employment (HMSO: 1978); J. E. Cronin, *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain* (Croom Helm: 1979); E. L. Wigham, *Strikes and the Government, 1893-1981* (Macmillan: 1982); J. W. Durcan, W. E. J. McCarthy and G. P. Redman, *Strikes in Post-War Britain: a Study of Stoppages of Work due to Industrial Disputes, 1946-73* (George Allen & Unwin: 1983); A. Charlesworth, A. D. Gilbert, A. Randall, H. Southall and C. Wrigley (eds), *An Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain, 1750-1990* (Macmillan: 1996) and N. Fishman, "A Vital Element in British Industrial Relations": a Reassessment of Order 1305, 1940-51', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations (HSIR)* 8 (1999), pp. 43-86. Studies of vocational training showing the same omission are G. Williams, *Recruitment to the Skilled Trades* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1957) and K. Liepmann, *Apprenticeship: an Enquiry into its Adequacy under Modern Conditions* (Routledge: 1960). By contrast, apprentice strikes are discussed in some of the more general histories: H. M. D. Parker, *Manpower. A Study of War-Time Policy and Administration* (HMSO: 1957), pp. 459-66, H. A. Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, Volume 3: 1934-51* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1994), pp. 242-3, 249-51, and C. Wrigley, 'The Second World War and State Intervention in Industrial Disputes', in C. Wrigley (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1939-79* (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham: 1996), pp. 32-4, all three of whom discuss the wartime movements (1941 and 1944), and, notably, A. Tuckett, *The Blacksmiths' History* (Lawrence and Wishart: 1974), pp. 213, 252-3, 265 and 354-7, which covers the movements of 1921, 1937, 1939 and 1960.

This paper has three objectives: to view the movements as a whole, aiming at a more comprehensive and quantitative account than has been available in a literature confined largely to the qualitative attributes of individual disputes; to interpret the movements, in terms of the relative importance of social, political, economic and industrial relations factors; and to suggest reasons for their neglect in the literature.

The principal objective is the interpretative one. Two broad accounts, which have to date been distinguished only partially, are developed here. The first approach combines political, social and cultural factors. Political goals are seen as central to mobilization and militancy among young people and their adult supporters in an epoch of intense ideological conflict. From a sociological standpoint, the apprentice strikes represent outbursts of youth exuberance and indiscipline, part of the precarious socialization of young people, and a continuation of historical traditions of apprentice disorder. An interpretation that unites these two attributes might imply that a strike by apprentices should be viewed as akin more to one by students in full-time education than to one by regular employees. Apprentice strikes may therefore not even belong in the history of industrial conflict proper.

The second, 'economics-industrial relations', approach views apprentice strikes in terms of collective organization and economic conflict. The movements are taken to have involved organised discontent, economic damages for both strikers and employers, and serious implications for economic outcomes. In this view it is entirely appropriate to treat them as part of mainstream industrial conflict.

The two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Both prove relevant to an understanding, in that particular attributes of the strikes point to a distinct role for each of four factors – political, socio-cultural, economic and industrial relations. Although the evidence compiled to date does not determine clearly the relative importance of these factors, qualified priority is given here to the economics-IR interpretation.

The neglect of apprentice strikes in the literature also warrants discussion. Why would so salient a phenomenon have been so rarely and so narrowly

considered by social scientists,⁵ despite Richard Croucher's appeal for the consideration of the movements as a whole?⁶ One possibility is that only one set of factors really mattered. Thus, were political aspects the primary consideration, the volume and orientation of the existing literature might be considered appropriate. Alternatively, were social and cultural considerations predominant, apprentice strikes would matter only for the sociology of youth – though that literature too has paid surprisingly little attention to them.⁷ Both answers are undermined by evidence that political, social, industrial relations and economic factors all mattered. The key source of intellectual neglect is taken instead to have been the complexity of both apprenticeship and apprentice strikes: phenomena so multi-faceted are not readily assimilated and interpreted, requiring an interdisciplinary approach, which is hardly favoured in contemporary social science.

Evidence is derived here from published strike statistics, the archives of employers' associations and trade unions, and newspaper reports. The next section presents the statistical attributes of the strikes, making comparisons to strike patterns for other employees. An outline of the qualitative attributes of the movements follows, including their organization, procedural status, the demands put forward, and their course and outcomes. The evidence is then brought to bear on the two lines of interpretation, followed by the conclusions.

⁵ 'Narrowness' is represented by, firstly, consideration of typically only one or two movements, in isolation from the others, and, secondly, uni-dimensional interpretations. Thus Fowler's account of the second phase of the 1937 movement, in Manchester does not mention the important procedural outcomes of the year's movement as a whole: *The First Teenagers*, pp. 55-63. Croucher, *Engineers at War*, remains the broadest treatment to date, but even that account, confined to 1937-45, omits the 1939 movement.

⁶ 'A history of the apprentices' movement would be immensely valuable for the light it would throw on the historical situation of young workers generally': Croucher, *Engineers at War*, p. 131.

⁷ Notably F. Musgrove, *Youth and the Social Order* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1964), pp. 48-50, who does not refer to the movements, despite writing soon after one of the largest and delving into riots at public schools in the eighteenth century. Sociological studies of the school-to-work transition have also ignored apprentice strikes, despite widespread interest in youth resistance, group as well as individual, to established authority in working class schools – e.g., P. Rudd, 'From Socialisation to Postmodernity: a Review of Theoretical Perspectives on the School-to-Work Transition', *Journal of Education and Work* 10 (1997), pp. 257-79. See also T. Ferguson and J. Cunnison, *The Young Wage-Earner* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1951), T. Vaness, *School Leavers* (Methuen: 1962), M. Carter, *Into Work* (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1966), J. Maizels, *Adolescent Needs and the Transition from School to Work* (University of London Press: 1970).

Quantitative attributes

Between 1910 and 1970 the engineering and shipbuilding industries – henceforth ‘metalworking’⁸ – saw nine apprentice strike movements: i.e., an event classed in official statistics as a ‘principal dispute’,⁹ in which the primary or sole class of employee involved was ‘apprentices’ or ‘apprentices, boys and youths’, and which involved a sufficient number of employers and districts to be termed here a strike movement.¹⁰ They occurred in 1912, 1921, 1937, 1939, 1941, 1944, 1952, 1960 and 1964.¹¹ Table 1 shows that the average movement lasted more than five weeks, involved 18,000 young workers and caused the loss of 190,000 working days. The average striker stayed out for ten – not necessarily continuous – working days.

The movements varied in size. Four accounted for at least one-third of total working days lost in ‘principal disputes’ in the two sectors in the relevant year (Figure 1). Those of 1941, 1952 and 1960 constituted the year’s largest dispute, in terms of days lost, in the country as a whole; the other four for which data are available ranked within the ten largest disputes of the year (Table 1, column 10). In the biggest movements, those of 1937 and 1960, more than 30,000 apprentices participated and districts ranging geographically from Aberdeen to London became involved. In 1937, 406,000 working days were lost during a two-stage movement that spanned seven months and lasted thirteen weeks in all. By contrast, in 1939 and 1964, events were dominated by a single region (Glasgow and Manchester,

⁸ The sector is taken to include all metalworking manufacture, including vehicles, but to exclude metal manufacture. Employees and apprentices in occupations associated with engineering and shipbuilding (e.g., fitters, boilermakers) but employed in other sectors, including railway workshops and construction, are also excluded.

⁹ A ‘principal dispute’ came to be defined as one in which at least 5,000 working days were lost. Official statistics did not report days lost in individual disputes until 1925, but the number of strikers and the duration of the dispute almost certainly put the apprentice movements of 1912 and 1921 above the threshold.

¹⁰ A strike was included in official statistics when it lasted for at least one working day and involved at least ten workers, or involved the loss of at least 100 working days: Durcan et al., *Strikes in Post-War Britain*, pp. 3-7. As political strikes were in principle excluded, the 1944 movement, which attacked conscription into coal mining, is measured here using archival evidence. The reliability of official strike statistics is limited by the intrinsic difficulty of counting participants and days lost, intensified by the interest of both employers and strikers in estimating numbers so as to suit their own interests: R. Hyman, *Strikes*, 2nd ed (Fontana: 1977), pp. 17-19.

¹¹ Although the 1921, 1937 and 1941 disputes both had two distinct phases, each involving separate districts, there was sufficient continuity of issues for each to be treated as a single movement.

respectively), shorter-lived (two to three weeks) and smaller (a few thousand participants and the loss of less than 30,000 working days).

INSERT TABLE 1 AND FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

The movements centred on two sub-periods: rearmament and the Second World War, and the 1960s. All involved both engineering and shipbuilding, but little else.¹² The centre of gravity was typically the industrial districts of Scotland and the North of England, with either Glasgow or Manchester normally taking the lead, and with occasional spillage into the Midlands and the South of England. The larger ones proceeded in wave-like fashion, with new groups of apprentices, as defined variously by occupation, employer and district, joining the dispute while earlier ones returned to work.

As the class of employee involved, e.g., ‘apprentices in engineering and shipbuilding’, was indicated in official statistics only for ‘principal disputes’, this analysis is confined largely to that category. Within it, apprentice militancy involved, in addition to the nine movements, a further three, all at single establishments in the 1960s. The largest occurred at the Vickers shipyard in Barrow in 1968, when apprentices went in and out of work over a six month period.¹³ Various smaller apprentice disputes also occurred at works-level, including fifteen ‘youth only’ strikes in federated engineering between 1920 and 1951.¹⁴ Apprentices also participated at times in adult-related and general disputes.¹⁵

¹² Metal manufacture participated marginally in 1937 and 1952, and electrical contracting in 1941: files LAB 10/76 and 10/509, Public Record Office, Kew (PRO).

¹³ Details are provided in the Appendix.

¹⁴ EEF, *Strike Record from 1920* (undated typescript, formerly held at EEF headquarters) records for the period 1920 to 1951 57 strikes at individual firms over youth-related issues. Young workers acted alone in 15 and together with adults in 16, while adults acted alone in 26.

¹⁵ In the 1922 lockout, 17% of the apprentices employed by federated engineering employers – and more than 50% in some towns in the north of England – were on strike in the sixth week of the dispute: Engineering Employers’ Federation (EEF) Archive, file M19, Appendices 17, 25, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (MRC). Similarly, in the 1950s shipbuilding employers complained to union officials that apprentices frequently joined adult walk-outs: Shipbuilding Employers’ Federation (SEF) Archive, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (NMM), file SNRA/4946.

Youth-adult comparisons

The quantitative importance of apprentice strikes can be gauged from comparisons to disputes by other employees, both in metalworking and in the economy as a whole. Two strike series are potentially appropriate: ‘principal disputes’ and ‘all disputes.’ The former compares like with like, using the same category of disputes for apprentices and other employees. It potentially overstates relative apprentice activism, as ‘principal disputes’ probably constituted a larger share of strike activity for apprentices than for adults, given that safety was even more likely to lie in numbers for apprentices than for adults. Comparisons are therefore made to ‘all disputes’ as well, in order to view the militancy of apprentices in relation to industrial conflict as a whole.

Between 1919 and 1969, the period for which adequate official statistics are available, young manual males – the category that has to be used here as a proxy for apprentices¹⁶ – accounted for only a small share of the annual count of ‘principal disputes’ in metalworking (Figure 1).¹⁷ At the same time, the extent of industrial action among young manual males, as indicated by working days lost per thousand employees, stood comparison with its adult counterparts. Figure 2 shows that in 1937 and 1960 militancy among young manual males attained peaks exceeded after 1926 among other employees in metalworking only in 1957. The youth series exceeded its ‘other employee’ counterpart in five years: 1937, 1941, 1944, 1952 and 1960. In 1937 and 1941, young manual males accounted for the great majority of

¹⁶ As employment data are not available for apprentices alone, manual male youth employment has to be used as the denominator in indicators of apprentice strike intensity. The measure includes non-apprenticed manual male youth and excludes non-manual, female and over-age apprentices. The former distortion greatly exceeded the latter, particularly before the Second World War. In 1925-6, the number of ‘drawing office, over-21 and female’ apprentices amounted to only 0.9% of that of manual male apprentices aged less than 21 in metalworking industry: Ministry of Labour, *Report of an Inquiry into Apprenticeship and Training, 1925-6* (HMSO: 1928), vol. 6, pp. 11-12, 22, 37, 56, 60 and vol. 7, p. 155. By contrast, the number of non-apprenticed junior male employees in federated engineering firms was 87.4% of the number of apprentices in 1934: EEF, A(7)111, MRC. As apprentices are shown below to have been more prone to join the disputes than were other youths, Figure 2 understates industrial action among apprentices proper. Similarly, the low incidence of apprenticeship in light engineering reduces the index of youth strike propensity relative to one for shipbuilding and heavy engineering alone.

¹⁷ All youths, including apprentices, were treated in official strike statistics as employees, despite the residual legal differentiation of contracts of apprenticeship and employment or ‘service’: B. A. Hepple and P. O’Higgins, *Employment Law*, 2nd edn. (Sweet and Maxwell: 1981), pp. 169-70.

working days lost in ‘principal disputes’ in metalworking (Figure 1). Similar attributes characterise a comparison to strike indicators for the economy as a whole (Figure 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE

If the ability of apprentices to mount major strikes was comparable to that of adults, the timing of their actions differed. None of the apprentice movements occurred in the same year as an all-employee, sector-wide ‘principal dispute’. Nor did any occur during the wider upsurge of industrial conflict in the late 1960s. Statistical correlations between the time-series of youth and adult dispute indicators are insignificant, in contrast to the significant associations typically found between strike activity indicators across other leading categories of employee (e.g., by sector).¹⁸ Indeed, apprentices sometimes took action when adults were reluctant to do so. The 1937 movement helped to break the protracted post-1926 quiescence.¹⁹ The 1941 dispute was the first major challenge to the coalition government’s wartime ban on industrial action under Order 1305. The 1944 strike caused the government such concern that it extended the ban to cover incitement to strike.

Apprentice strikes also differed in extent and duration from the wider dispute pattern in their sectors. The typical post-war strike in engineering and shipbuilding affected only a single establishment and was resolved within a matter of hours or days. Industry-wide, all-grades disputes occurred rarely and were mostly short-lived. Apprentice strikes tended by contrast to be multi-employer and multi-district (though not strictly industry-wide) and protracted rather than brief.

¹⁸ Cronin, *Industrial Conflict*, pp. 82-8. Pearson correlations between the six permutations of dispute categories and strike indicators for junior manual males and other employees are all negative and less than 0.09 (absolute magnitude). The divergence in timing between youth and adult disputes does not rule out all potential links between them. In 1921, the strikes against wage cuts paralleled adult actions. In 1960 and 1964, apprentice activism may have been fostered, albeit with a lag, by that of adults, as expressed in unofficial disputes over the implementation of recent national agreements.

¹⁹ The 1937 movement was ‘... a watershed between the dark years of the Depression and the growing strength and confidence evident in the months immediately preceding the war’: Croucher, *Engineers at War*, p. 47.

Apprentice participation

Large factories and shipyards featured prominently in the strike movements. Not only were they large works, they took on apprentices in numbers that lack modern equivalents. Leading cases included: Metropolitan-Vickers/AEI in Manchester, which employed around 2,000 apprentices in the late 1930s, 250 of whom struck in 1937, 700 in 1941, 800 in 1952, 700 in 1960 and 570 in 1964; John Brown & Co., Clydebank, a shipyard with 2,000 apprentices and boys in the late 1930s, and 812 apprentices in 1941, of whom 432 went on strike; Vickers-Armstrong in Barrow, the great majority of whose 2,000 apprentices struck in 1941; the two members of the Belfast Marine Engineering Employers' Association (EEA), which in 1941 employed 1,200 apprentices in engineering trades alone, almost all of whom stopped work; and Siemens, which saw 1,000 of the apprentices at its London plant strike in 1937.²⁰

Despite the prominent part played by large workplaces, only in 1937 and 1960 did more than 10% of young manual males employed in metalworking go on strike and was an average of at least one working day lost per potential striker. These averages were pulled down not only by a lower tendency to strike amongst non-apprenticed young employees, but also by limited apprentice participation, particularly in the Midlands and South. The involvement of Coventry and London apprentices was limited largely to the biggest movements, in 1937 and 1960, and then to short-lived episodes at a handful of firms. Apprentices from Birmingham, who in 1934 constituted the fifth largest district grouping in the Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF), never took part.²¹ Overall apprentice participation

²⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 September 1937 and 27 March 1952; PRO, LAB 10/140 and LAB 482/1952; (Glasgow) *Evening Citizen*, 19 May 1939; *Manchester Evening News*, 29 April 1960; March 1941 strike report, file TD241/12/242, Clyde Shipbuilders' Association (CSA) Archive, Mitchell Library Glasgow (MLG); EEF, Z64/69(52), MRC.

²¹ Federation records indicate 1,100 engineering apprentices in Birmingham in 1934, similar to Coventry's 1,300 and many fewer than the more than 3,000 in each of the North West (Glasgow), Manchester and North East Coast Associations, but many more than in such regular strike centres as Aberdeen, Dundee and, East Scotland (Edinburgh), which recorded less than 300 each: EEF, *1934 Survey of Apprentices* (file formerly available at EEF headquarters). Birmingham apprentices made a rare appearance in 1952, when a group of them requested the Manchester strike committee to send a delegate to explain the issues: *Manchester Guardian*, 26 March 1952.

was also constrained by the tendency of particular apprentice groups – as defined variously by occupation, works or employer – to divide internally over whether to strike or not.

The highest participation rates appear to have been attained in central Scotland, where that for apprentices reached 62% in federated engineering in 1952 (Table 2) and was estimated by the employers' association at around 90% in 1960.²² In Clyde shipyards, 57% of apprentices participated in 1941, but only 31% in 1964. Participation also varied greatly over time at works level. At John Brown's in 1939, only 10% of the yard's 2,000 apprentices were involved one week after the start of the strike, compared to 53% in 1941.²³ In Manchester in 1952, 73% of Metropolitan-Vickers/AEI apprentices went on strike, compared to only 15% in 1937.²⁴

INSERT TABLE 2 AROUND HERE

Participation patterns were closely associated with payment systems. Table 3 shows that nearly three-quarters of time-rated apprentices in shipbuilding joined the 1941 movement on the Clyde, whereas less than one-quarter of their piece-working counterparts did so. The earnings of apprentices who received incentive bonus payments were between one-eighth and one-quarter higher than those of their time-rated counterparts, according to sector and year in the post-war years, and the gap is unlikely to have been much different in 1941 (Table 4). Apprentice earning power may therefore have influenced willingness to take action, though its association with mode of payment may also reflect selection effects.²⁵ By contrast, occupational

²² Junior male participation rates of 50% were reported in 1952 for Aberdeen, 45% for Dundee, but only 27% for Manchester and 7% for Sheffield. In the same year, the 21% of central Scottish engineering employers affected by the initial token strike became 52% during the indefinite stoppage: EEF, A(7)275, MRC.

²³ In 1939, a sequence of lunchtime factory gate meetings persuaded various apprentice groups in the outfitting trades, including plumbing, joinery and engineering, to go out but did not induce any of the more numerous shipbuilding trades to join in: *Glasgow Evening News* and *Evening Times*, 26 May 1939; EEF, A(7)164, MRC; CSA, TD241/12/242, MLG.

²⁴ R. A. Leeson, *Strike. A Live History 1887-1971* (Allen & Unwin: 1973), p. 159; Frow and Frow, *Manchester's Big House*, pp. 21-37.

²⁵ Apprentices may have been selected, by their own or by employers' decisions, into payment mode according to personal traits associated with the propensity to collective action, such as individualism.

differences, notably those between shipyard trades proper and outfitting/engineering ones, were marginal in three of the hardest-hit Clyde yards in 1941 (Table 5).

INSERT TABLES 3,4, 5 AROUND HERE

Participation in the movements was often volatile, with individual strikers and groups of strikers going out and returning to work, and in some cases going out again, as the wider dispute unfolded. According to an official of the Manchester Engineering Employers' Association in 1952, 'everything is very fluid and no sooner do you get a number of lads back in one factory than another set of lads go on strike somewhere else'.²⁶ Such conditions appear to have been the norm: the average individual participant remained on strike for only one-third of the duration of the episode (Table 1). The major exception was the Clyde in 1937, when few apprentices returned to work, despite mounting hardship, until a mass meeting on 4 May decided to do so. The Ministry of Labour's local official was impressed by their 'rather astonishing ... solidarity'.²⁷

Strike constituency

'Apprentice strikes' were, as the term presumes, largely the preserve of apprentices.²⁸ Non-apprenticed young manual males, including learners, trainees, operatives and labourers, were less numerous than apprentices, though their numbers remained substantial until the Second World War²⁹ and many of them did join the movements. Their quantitative contribution to the strikes, like that of non-manual apprentices, who worked mostly in drawing offices, was however low. The lists of strikers circulated amongst federated engineering employers on the Clyde in the

²⁶ EEF, A(7)275.

²⁷ Minute sheet, entry for 16 April 1937, PRO, LAB 10/76.

²⁸ An 'apprentice' is taken here to be a young worker who could expect to be considered eligible by employers and unions to enter craft employment at age 21 as a result of having served his or her time.

²⁹ Data on the share of apprentices in youth employment are fragmentary. In 1939, 43% of 156,000 junior males employed by EEF members were apprentices, rising to 73% in 1949 and 78% in 1956, following the decline in non-apprenticed youth employment during the war: EEF, A(7)275.

early phase of the 1937 strike comprised overwhelmingly apprentices.³⁰ Table 6 reports a rare instance case for which comprehensive data are available, for federated engineering on the Clyde in 1952. Trade (manual craft) apprentices accounted for fully 97% of youth strikers. Only one in eight non-apprenticed manual male youths, and only one in fifty drawing office apprentices, took part – in contrast to two-thirds of manual apprentices. Non-apprenticed young males did play a greater part on other occasions,³¹ and apprentice militancy sometimes triggered separate activism among non-apprenticed youth.³² Nevertheless, ‘apprentice strike’ appears to be a valid characterization of these disputes

INSERT TABLE 6 AROUND HERE

Young females were not considered relevant when such statistics were compiled. Only a handful of the two sectors’ apprentices were female: primarily french polishers and drawing office tracers in shipbuilding.³³ Although female apprentices participated at least once,³⁴ they were too few to have made much difference. Moreover, male strikers were not necessarily prepared to accept female help: in 1937 two offers of assistance made by young females were turned down by the Glasgow strike committee.³⁵

³⁰ The only significant exception was the 46 ‘boys’ on strike at Mechams’ works: North West Engineering Trades Employers’ Association (NWETEA) Circular Letters, March-April 1937, MLG.

³¹ In 1939, 15% of youth strikers in the engineering departments of Clyde shipyards were non-apprenticed, as were 29% (of 656) at James Mackie & Sons in Belfast in 1937: EEF, A(7)164, A(7)137, MRC.

³² Thus rivet heaters at John Brown’s, Clydebank, struck in 1944 in sympathy with the apprentices and in support of their own claim for minimum daily earnings: CSA Minute Book, 30 March 1944, MLG.

³³ Ministry of Labour, *Report of an Inquiry*, vol 7, p. 155; NWETEA, Circular Letter 116, 22 March 1941, MLG.

³⁴ Ten female french polisher apprentices joined the 1941 strike at Denny and Bros, Dumbarton (NWETEA, *ibid.*).

³⁵ The sympathy action was offered by young female employees at Barr and Stroud in Glasgow, the financial support (in the shape of a postal order) by their counterparts in a Bristol factory. The local Ministry official reported concerning the former that the young women ‘were rather hurt when informed that they would be more of a hindrance than an aid, in view of the fact that they were not apprentices but only learners’ – an excuse that Croucher (*Engineers at War*, p. 51) plausibly discounts. The young women responded by joining the distributive workers’ union: PRO, report of 7 April 1937, LAB 10/76; *Evening Citizen*, 24 April 1937.

In sum, apprentices in metalworking industry constituted during the period what might be termed a strike-prone employee category. Their distinctiveness is underlined by the near total absence of apprentice strikes from the other sectors that employed substantial proportions of apprentices, notably building and printing.³⁶

Qualitative attributes

This section discusses the organization and conduct of the movements, their relationship to trade-unionism, the demands made on employers, and their outcomes.

Apprentice organization

The running of apprentice strikes depended primarily on district-level ad hoc committees set up by apprentice activists to run and extend the strike (Table 7, column 1). The strike committee typically used mass meetings, marches, leafleting and picketing, and sometimes a strike bulletin, to increase participation locally. Travelling emissaries were often used to spread the strike to other areas, and inter-district committees formed, particularly in Scotland. When the strike waned, the committee sought to rally support or, when that looked unpromising, to organise a coordinated return to work.

INSERT TABLE 7 AROUND HERE

The similarity of the titles of successive committees, particularly variants of the Clyde Apprentices' Committee (CAC), suggests considerable organizational continuity, though the evidence is fragmentary and suggestive more of ephemerality. The principal exception was 1937-42, when apprentice committees appear to have functioned fairly continuously at works and district levels in the Glasgow and

³⁶ The only 'principal dispute' recorded for apprentices (as opposed to other youth) in a different sector during the period was by 750 plumbing apprentices in Scotland in October 1941. Its timing suggests an influence for the 1941 movement in metalworking: *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, November 1941, p. 224.

Manchester areas and more intermittently at industry level. A national official of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) recalled having as an apprentice helped form a Manchester apprentices' committee in 1938, having been appointed treasurer of a national apprentices' committee in 1939, and having attended two conferences organised by the latter.³⁷ James Hunter, ex-Secretary of the CAC, told the Court of Inquiry into the 1941 movement in Scotland that the committee had continued in skeleton form after the 1939 strike and had organised a Scotland-wide conference in November 1940. Following the 1941 strike, the CAC continued to function and even tried to organise apprentices in Lancashire, but signs of life soon disappeared.³⁸

The strike committees chalked up major achievements in launching and organising the strike movements. When union premises were not available, meetings of strikers were organised variously at factory gates, on bombsites and in public parks, with Glasgow Green featuring frequently. Strike headquarters were established in the premises of trade unions (notably when district officials sympathised with the strikers, as in the Glasgow AEU in 1941), Trades Councils (particularly when district officials did not, as in Manchester in 1937), the Labour Party, and even (in Manchester in 1960) in a coffee bar. Mass picketing of factory gates and the verbal abuse of non-strikers were widely practised.³⁹

The strikes were typically spread by apprentices themselves, travelling within districts on foot, typically as columns of demonstrators, and by bicycle, and between districts by motorbike, by car (1960) and finally by airplane (from

³⁷ Interview with Bob Wright, Assistant General Secretary, AUEW/AEU, May 1985; PRO, LAB 10/509; EEF, A(7)111, A(7)186, MRC. I. Johnston, *Ships for a Nation* (Mitchell Public Library, Glasgow: 2000), p. 219.

³⁸ In May 1941, more than a month after the end of the strike, the CAC organised a victory ball, published a newsletter (*The Apprentice Mag*), and organised a conference of Scottish apprentices, which in turn founded an 'Engineering and Allied Trades National Apprentices and Youth Movement' and called its first national conference for 5 October in Manchester. In August, EEF officials warned Manchester officers that 'the [CAC] are busy again and they are busy in Lancashire, particularly in the Bolton and Bury districts, for the purposes of prevailing upon boys to attend a mass meeting of apprentices to be held in Glasgow on 9 August.' Reports of such activities then dried up – possibly in association with low attendance at CAC meetings, about which a correspondent had complained in the May newsletter: EEF, A(7)186, MRC.

³⁹ *Manchester Evening News*, 29 April 1960; Verbatim report of Proceedings of Court of Inquiry, pp.162-4, PRO, LAB 10/509; Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, p. 60. The role of mass meetings is illustrated by the reversal by the Edinburgh strikers in 1952, following a 'harangue' from a Glasgow apprentice at a 'stormy meeting', of their previous decision to return to work: *Daily Mail*, 24 March 1952.

Manchester to Glasgow in 1964).⁴⁰ The 1944 Tyneside strikers sent two deputations to London by train to lobby politicians.⁴¹ The coordination of activity across districts sometimes proved decisive. The concessions by employers that finally defused the protracted 1937 dispute were made after a national conference of apprentices on 10 October called for a national strike on 18 October.⁴²

The effectiveness of apprentice self-organization attracted some admiration. In the fourth week of first phase of the 1937 movement, a Ministry of Labour official observed that ‘it is quite clear that the apprentices must have a very perfect organization. They have a cycle corps of no less than 500 members and they have arranged a telephone system which enables their headquarters to keep in touch with practically every town in Scotland. Trade Union organisers admit that the perfection of the arrangements puts them to shame’.⁴³ During the 1960 dispute, the reborn CAC set up Finance, Propaganda and Demonstration sub-committees, staffed entirely by apprentices and taking impressive initiatives.⁴⁴

Apprentice organization tended to precede the strike itself. The 1937 strike followed ‘a widespread movement amongst apprentices for an advance of 2s. (10p) per week in wages’ across Scotland in 1936. The start of the 1941 dispute, in Edinburgh, followed two local mass meetings of apprentices over discontent about low pay.⁴⁵ The Tyne Apprentices’ Guild started up in 1942, well before it launched the 1944 strike.⁴⁶ The movements of 1952, 1960 and 1964 all started with a token strike whose intention was probably, and whose effect – fuelled by the punishment of participants by some employers – was clearly, to precipitate an indefinite strike. Such tactics indicated prior organization by apprentices.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ During apprentice strikes at three factories in 1960, the Coventy EEA reported that ‘the start of this was, of course, a visit of some lads from Clydeside’: EEF, A(7) 330, MRC.

⁴¹ PRO, LAB 10/451.

⁴² Croucher, *Engineers at War*, p. 56. The dispute continued until the end of the month in Coventry and London.

⁴³ Chief Conciliation Officer (CCO), Scotland Area, memo of 9 April 1937, PRO, LAB 10/76.

⁴⁴ Tuckett, *The Blacksmiths’ History*, p. 199.

⁴⁵ CCO memos of 3 September 1936 and 4 February 1941, PRO, LAB 10/76, LAB 10/422.

⁴⁶ *Times*, 3 April 1944.

⁴⁷ The Clyde Apprentices’ Committee was reborn early in February 1960, two months before the token strike, to pursue demands for increased apprentice pay: CSA Minute Book, 27 April 1960, MLG.

Apprentice self-organization did not always run smoothly. Continuity was hampered by the annual round of ‘coming out of their time’ among older apprentices, on whom strike committees largely relied. Some employers reported receiving unstable or incoherent demands from, and facing rapid membership turnover in, deputations of striking apprentices.⁴⁸ The 1941 Court of Inquiry heard how the activities of the CAC had been handicapped by limited record keeping, itself promoted by turnover among its ‘officers’.⁴⁹ The use of air travel to spread the strike from Manchester to Glasgow in 1964 was not accompanied by comparable organization on the ground, where the strike involved mis-located, leaderless and chaotic mass meetings – though the prior collapse of the strike in Manchester amidst political in-fighting promoted disorganization on the Clyde.⁵⁰

Procedural status

All apprentice strike movements were both unofficial and unconstitutional, in that they were launched with neither official union approval nor prior recourse to the two industries’ national disputes procedures.⁵¹ Moreover, the apprentice strike committees were never formally recognised by either employers or unions, and some movements continued, in their later stages at least, in defiance of official instructions by unions to apprentice members to return to work.

⁴⁸ e.g., at Blackburn Aircraft, Glasgow, in 1939: EEF, A(7)164, MRC.

⁴⁹ ‘I believe there is a minute book somewhere,’ said James Hunter, ex-secretary of the CAC, adding that there had been ‘about six minute secretaries within a period of three months ... after a while we stopped taking minutes for some reason or other. The apprentices are not so good at the official procedure’: PRO, *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*, p.151, LAB 10/509.

⁵⁰ The mother of Barry Foxhall, the Manchester Dry Dock apprentice who toured factory gates on the Clyde in 1964 to little effect, told the press that ‘Barry is the only one on strike now. All the others went back to work after Barry left for Glasgow’: *Daily Record*, 20 November 1964; CSA, TD 241/12/359, MLG.

⁵¹ The post-1918 engineering and shipbuilding industries both featured industry-wide (‘national’) regulation of employment issues, involving an employers’ federation (EEF and SEF, respectively) and national trade unions, notably the AEU and a union federation – from 1936, the Confederation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Unions (CSEU). Both industries’ disputes procedures in principle channelled locally contested issues through a sequence of joint ‘conferences’ at works, district and national levels. Only in the event of failure to agree at all levels in succession did either side become free to take industrial action. These procedures represented ‘employer conciliation’: the presentation by unions of their case to a quasi-court of employer representatives: I. G. Sharp, *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration in Great Britain* (Allen and Unwin: 1950), ch. 4; A. Marsh, *Industrial Relations in Engineering* (Pergamon: 1965), pp. 112 seq.

Although unofficial and unconstitutional strikes became common in engineering from the late 1930s onwards,⁵² in the case of the apprentice movements those attributes reflected also factors specific to apprenticeship. Their unofficial status was promoted by weak links between trade unions and apprentices, few of whom were union members when the movements started. Until the Second World War, few apprentices were members of unions, not least because few unions made much effort to recruit them and some unions did not accept them at all.⁵³ The AEU estimated that only 20% of engineering apprentices participating in the 1937 dispute in Manchester were union members. Despite recruitment efforts by various unions, membership rates among apprentices appear to have been as low as 10% on Tyneside in 1944 and in Scotland in 1952.⁵⁴

The unconstitutional nature of apprentice strikes was promoted by the exclusion from the two industries' (post-1937) procedure agreements for young males of the standard adult option of recourse to shop stewards for handling individual grievances. Apprentices were required instead to approach either management or a district official in order to retain procedural legitimacy, which in turn encouraged them to ignore procedure.

The unofficial and unconstitutional attributes of apprentice strikes were both ambiguous. Some unions made the apprentice movements official, either as they went along, as did the engineering, pattern-making and foundry workers' unions on the Clyde in 1937, or after they were over, by granting strike benefit to prior members who had gone on strike, as did the AEU in 1952 and 1960. Some unions encouraged strikers to join up during the dispute by waiving the normal qualifying period for benefit eligibility, as did the woodworkers' union on the Clyde in 1937. These decisions indicated the wish of officials to use the strikes to increase

⁵² Croucher, *Engineers at War*, pp. 363 seq.; Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (Donovan), *Report*, Cmnd 3623 (1968), chapter 7.

⁵³ Apprentice membership in the AEU had long been restricted to those aged 18 and above: J. B. Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers 1800-1945* (Lawrence & Wishart: 1945), p. 137.

⁵⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 September 1937; CCO memo, 27 March 1944, and IRO phone call, 18 March 1952, PRO, LAB 10/451 and 482/1952.

membership,⁵⁵ but that was not necessarily an overriding consideration: the AEU refused to grant strike benefit, even retrospectively, in 1939, 1941 and 1964.⁵⁶

In terms of their constitutionality, apprentice strikes could strictly speaking be termed unconstitutional only after 1937-8, when the first procedure agreements for junior male employees were signed in the two industries. Even then, indentured apprentices, who, though in the minority, were still numerous,⁵⁷ were excluded from procedure until 1965. In every strike movement, therefore, some strikers did not act unconstitutionally, in that they did not violate any procedure agreement – as opposed to their indentures – in going on strike.

Not surprisingly, union officials – particularly at national level – for the most part objected to unofficial organizations and unconstitutional disputes. In the AEU, national officials of various political hues moved at some point to stop all of the movements from 1937 onwards. The same sometimes applied at district level. In Barrow in 1952, and Wigan and Halifax in 1960, district officials quickly instructed their apprentice members to return to work immediately.⁵⁸

Opposition to apprentice tactics was far from universal or unambiguous among union officials. District officials and district committees often favoured the strikers. In the AEU, the traditional autonomy of district committees permitted them to give effective support to the strikers, particularly in the crucial early phase of a movement. The most notable example was the Clyde in 1937, when the CSEU district committee not only asked the national executives of member unions to make the strike official and to pay strike benefit, but also organised a one-day strike and an indefinite overtime embargo in support of the apprentices and persisted with sympathy action despite the opposition of national officials. In both Manchester and Oldham in 1964, AEU district officials actively encouraged apprentices to strike.

⁵⁵ Fowler (*The First Teenagers*, p. 60) concludes from the second, Manchester-based, phase of the 1937 movement that union officials were 'preoccupied' with the recruitment issue.

⁵⁶ The unions cited are the AEU, United Patternmakers Association, National Union of Foundry Workers and Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers: AEU Executive Committee Minutes 20 April 1937, 20 September 1937, 27 June 1939, 23 April 1941, 22 April 1952, 25 April 1960, 8 December 1964, MSS 259/1/2/1-97, AEU Archive, MRC; CCO memo, 24 April 1937, PRO, LAB 10/76.

⁵⁷ In 1925, only 28.4% of apprentices in the two industries (23.3% and 50.5%, in engineering and shipbuilding respectively) served under an indenture or other written agreement: Ministry of Labour, *Report of an Inquiry ...*, vol. 6, pp. 12, 56.

⁵⁸ EEF, A(7)275, A(7)330, MRC.

AEU officials in Glasgow also proved sympathetic, albeit less overtly, in 1939 and 1952. The support of trades councils, with their greater independence from national union officials, could be particularly valuable, particularly with facilities for running the strike, as in Manchester in 1937 and Glasgow in 1939.⁵⁹

Further down the hierarchy, among shop stewards and journeymen, and even the public at large, support for apprentice strikers was often widespread. In 1952 and 1960 shop stewards undermined the efforts of union officials to secure a return to work on the Clyde.⁶⁰ Adult craft-workers got the credit in 1964: the Glasgow, Halifax and Sheffield associations reported that attempts by local officials to promote a return to work had been undermined by widespread sympathy for the strikers among adult workers.⁶¹

The opposition of union officials to apprentice strikes showed a fundamental ambiguity. National officials might formally oppose the strikes as unofficial and unconstitutional, but they also sought two benefits from them. The first was increased recruitment. Apprentice strikes saw many young people become members. In 1952, Jimmy Reid, then a 19-year old strike leader, claimed that a thousand young workers had joined a union during the strike.⁶² The second was an increase in union influence over youth employment and training. In most of the national negotiations occasioned by apprentice strikes, union officials urged on employers the potential benefits to both parties were the employers' association (until 1937) to recognise or (after 1937) to universalise the right of unions to represent apprentices, thereby allowing them to guide youth discontent into less damaging channels.⁶³

⁵⁹ PRO, LAB 10/76; EEF, A(7)164, A(7)275, A(7)330, Z64/69(52), MRC.

⁶⁰ In 1952, a regional Ministry official reported that '... naturally some elements are making the most of the dispute, and it is understood that militant shop stewards are attending the meetings of the Strike Committee on the pretence that they are encouraging them to return to work, while, in point of fact, their influence is being used in the opposite direction': memo, 13.3.52, PRO, LAB 482/1952. In 1960, the information given by CSEU officials to shop stewards was said by one employer 'to have acted more as an incentive than as a deterrent' to helping the strikers: RR letter, 29 April 1960, Scottish Engineering Employers' Association archive (SEEA), 60/81, MLG.

⁶¹ EEF, Z64/69(52), MRC.

⁶² *Daily Worker*, 21 March 1952.

⁶³ 'Some of the trade-union officials are very anxious to make use of this particular strike to overthrow the traditional attitude of the employers in refusing the trade-unions to represent apprentices ...': CCO Scotland, memo of 7 April 1937, PRO, LAB 10/76.

The strikes also prompted the largest union to improve its official links to apprentices. In the early 1940s the AEU set up official channels of representation for its young members, comprising district-level Junior Workers' Committees (JWCs) and an annual national Youth Conference, intended as an alternative to unofficial bodies for the expression of youth grievances.⁶⁴ The union's efforts intensified during the 1944 strike on the Tyne, when it successfully pressed the 19-year old secretary of the unofficial Tyne Apprentices' Guild, J. W. Davy, to abandon that body in favour of its own district JWC.⁶⁵ The creation of official youth institutions in the AUE did not however prevent the re-emergence of unofficial activism after the war. Indeed, by arranging for district-wide meetings of young workers while offering only limited scope for their activities,⁶⁶ the JWCs may actually have encouraged unofficial organization and militancy. The relationship between official and unofficial youth organizations could be fraught: the minutes of the 1961 AEU Youth Conference did not mention the recent strike movement, for example.⁶⁷

Strike demands

Apprentice disputes resembled their adult counterparts in the primacy of pay-related claims.⁶⁸ They differed however in the extent to which pay dominated. In eight of the nine strike movements higher pay for apprentices and other youth led the list. Only in the 1944 anti-conscription dispute did it fail to feature (Table 7, column 2). The other demands advanced by apprentice strikers included improved training, as in the demand for day release for all apprentices contained in both the Apprentice

⁶⁴ Jefferys, *Story of the Engineers*, p. 263; J. V. C. Wray, 'Trade Unions and Young Workers in Great Britain', *International Labour Review* 75 (1957), pp. 304-18.

⁶⁵ An EEF officer stated on 27 March 1944 that 'the AEU are doing everything possible to form a Youth Committee movement, and have told Davey [sic] that he must join one or the other': PRO, LAB 10/451.

⁶⁶ The functions formally allocated to the JWCs were limited to increasing the union's youth membership and cooperating with the district committee to promote social, educational and recreational activities for young members: memo by J. C. L., Ministry of Labour, 22.3.44, PRO, LAB 10/451.

⁶⁷ AEU, *Minutes of the 18th Annual Youth Conference held at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton* (AEU: 1961).

⁶⁸ Pay was the central issue in more than half (57%) the 'principal disputes' in the UK during 1946-73 (Durcan *et al.*, *Strikes in Post-War Britain*, Table 6.17).

Charter of 1937 and the Youth Charter of 1939. Formulated by the Clyde strike committee, the 1937 Charter called for higher pay, district-wide minimum age-wage scales, a right to part-time technical education during the working week, a 'reasonable' proportion of apprentices to journeymen, and the right to union representation.⁶⁹

Demands that employers recognise union rights to represent apprentices featured only before their attainment in 1937 for all but indentured apprentices. Thereafter unofficial apprentice committees did not join the national unions in giving priority to full representation rights for all young workers. Other apprentice demands – concerning conscription and the transition to journeyman status – proved ephemeral and marginal, respectively.⁷⁰

The dominance of pay within apprentice strike demands increased over time. The last three movements advanced exclusively pay-related claims, whereas their 1937, 1939 and 1941 predecessors had also included training-related ones. Although some apprentice groups showed interest in training issues after 1945, training-related issues featured regularly only in the motions submitted to annual AEU Youth Conferences – where they were typically blocked by the unwillingness of many representatives to see the use of piece-work restricted in order to improve training.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The formulation of these Charters may have been inspired by the Engineers' Charter, adopted by the AEU in 1929 (Jefferys, *Story of the Engineers*, pp. 238-9). The demands for higher pay and day release originated from the strike leaders themselves. Those concerning apprentice numbers and representation rights emerged after discussions with sympathetic adult unionists: Croucher, *Engineers at War*, p. 51; McKinlay, 'The 1937 Apprentices' Strike ...'. Although the appeal of apprentice charters dwindled after 1941, a National Conference of Apprentices (NCA) in Glasgow in 1952 adopted one with a more organizational orientation, including demands for apprentice closed shops, apprentice committees in all factories, a reduction in military service to one year and full recognition inside the CSEU: Clyde Apprentice and Youth Committee (CAYC), 'Youth in overalls unite!', undated leaflet (1952?).

⁷⁰ Demands involving conscription were not surprisingly confined to war conditions, incipient or actual, in 1939 and 1944. Claims concerning the transition to journeyman status featured twice: to abolish requirements that, firstly, time lost during an apprenticeship ('black time') be made up (in 1912) and, secondly, apprentices coming out of their time serve up to two more years on sub-craft pay as 'improvers' (in 1939). Both of these claims implicitly involved pay, given that both practices delayed the attainment by apprentices of the adult craft rate.

⁷¹ The decline of training-related demands characterised the official negotiating agenda at sector level too. The only claim related to training quality advanced nationally by engineering unions after 1940 came with the 1963 demand for compulsory day release on average earnings for apprentices aged less than 18: P. Ryan, 'The Embedding of Apprenticeship in Industrial Relations: British Engineering, 1925-65', in P. Ainley and H. Rainbird, eds, *Apprenticeship: Towards a New Paradigm of Learning* (Kogan Page: 1999), pp. 48, 54.

The priority given by national unions to pay over training in their apprenticeship-related demands has been attributed to the difficulty of enforcing training clauses in collective agreements, given the informational obstacles to the monitoring of work-based training by trade unions.⁷² The adoption of the same priority by the apprentice strikers may however have a simpler explanation. As a leader of the 1941 strike testified to the Court of Inquiry, the apprentices took a short-term view, preferring an immediate pay gain to more training and the associated benefit for their career prospects.⁷³ They were encouraged to do so by increasing task specialization, which jeopardised those career prospects.⁷⁴

Dispute outcomes

The movements at one level appear to have failed: most ended in a return to work on conditions prevailing prior to the dispute. Such results might suggest that the apprentices had gained nothing from their efforts (Table 7, column 3). In 1912, 1921, 1939 and 1944 that was essentially the case. The other five movements – 1937, 1941, 1952, 1960 and 1964 – were called off on the understanding, as conveyed from the employers' associations by the trade unions, that industry-wide negotiations on the apprentices' claims, which had been in progress before the strike, would be rapidly resumed after a return to work – and that concessions to the

⁷² Union efforts in the 1940s to improve apprentice training through joint regulation, in the form of sectoral Recruitment and Training of Juveniles agreements rather than through collective bargaining, are consistent with such an interpretation: P. Ryan, 'Training Quality and Trainee Exploitation', in R. Layard, K. Mayhew and G. Owen, eds, *Britain's Training Deficit* (Avebury, Aldershot: 1994), pp. 92-124; Ryan, 'The Embedding of Apprenticeship ...', pp. 41-60.

⁷³ Asked if receiving more training would have compensated the apprentice strikers for low pay, James Hunter, former CAC Secretary, stated, 'we just looked at the amount of work we were doing and found to our astonishment that we weren't being paid for the work we were doing ... The question of training was – not absolutely washed out, but when the committee came to the conclusion that the primary demand of the apprentices was a question of a wage increase, we concentrated on that': PRO, LAB 10/509, p.175.

⁷⁴ The priority that apprentices gave to higher pay, particularly in low-paid districts like Glasgow, had also been visible in 1939: the strike's flagging impetus revived when the apprentice committee shifted its demands from conscription issues to the Youth Charter, with higher pay as the leading objective: *The Bulletin*, 23 May 1939.

strikers' demands were to be anticipated. In all five cases, substantial concessions soon materialised.⁷⁵

Apprentice pay was governed, in federated firms in both engineering and shipbuilding, by age-wage scales that specified time-rated apprentice pay as a percentage of the adult craft rate in the same occupation. Those scales, initially imposed locally by employers' associations as *maximum* rates, were converted in the aftermath of the strikes of 1937 and 1941 into collectively negotiated, nationally uniform *minimum* rates. After 1937, union officials pursued claims for higher scale rates at national level, convoking the Special Conferences with the sectoral employers' association at which they were entitled to raise issues of industry-wide import.

Those negotiations led between 1937 and 1970 to an episodic sequence of step increases that broadly doubled the scale rates for apprentices in engineering (Figure 3). The timing of the pay increases aligns moderately closely with that of the disputes. The 1939 movement was not followed by a pay rise, nor did the scale increases of 1943 and 1969 follow a strike. However, five pay increases – those of 1937, 1941, 1952, 1960 and 1964 – did follow an apprentice movement (Figure 4).⁷⁶ Within a month of ending (on average), those movements were followed by a national agreement that increased pay scales for junior males, and in 1937 and 1941 also extended the trade unions' representation rights vis-à-vis apprentices (Table 8, column 7).

INSERT FIGURE 3, FIGURE 4 AND TABLE 8 AROUND HERE

The importance of apprentice strikes in precipitating those wage rises is underlined by the average of nearly four years and four national conferences that elapsed in engineering between the start of national negotiations on the unions'

⁷⁵ In 1937, the first, Scottish, phase of the strike had led to increases in apprentice pay scales at works and district level before the end of the stoppages: CCO memo, 18 May 1937, PRO, LAB 10/76.

⁷⁶ As the pay data refer to April, pay increases that occurred later in the year do not show up in Figures 3 and 4 until the year after.

claim for increased youth pay and the start of the movement (*ibid.*, columns 2, 4). In all five cases an apprentice strike released a log jam in national negotiations.

More generally, while the interests of apprentices and trade unions overlapped,⁷⁷ the overlap was not great enough to permit the apprentices to rely on union officials alone to promote their claims. The lack of results from national negotiations for higher age-wage scales in the years before the 1952 and 1960 strikes was widely attributed among apprentices to a low priority attached to that goal in official circles.

Other factors may also have contributed to the five pay increases. Although in all cases the EEF and the SEF sought to avoid making concessions, in some years some of their members favoured a pay increase. Such inclinations were particularly widespread in 1952, when the demand for youth labour was still strong and the youth population cohort was small. An EEF survey of local associations, conducted between the token strike and the indefinite strike, found that 33 out of 43 respondents favoured a pay increase whereas only seven opposed it.⁷⁸ Even on that occasion, it took a strike movement to break the resistance of the employers' federation.⁷⁹

The pattern of negotiations, strikes and agreements in engineering was followed closely in shipbuilding, whose national agreements on apprenticeship followed, with few exceptions, their engineering counterparts closely in both timing and content.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Trade unions are not generally expected to support a demand by a small minority of the membership (apprentices) for an increase in its pay relative to that of other members (journeymen). A convergence of interests was encouraged in the case of metalworking apprentices by, inter alia, the threat posed by their low paid unregulated status to the interests of adult members (P. Ryan, 'Trade Unionism and the Pay of Young Workers', in P. N. Junankar (ed.), *From School to Unemployment? The Labour Market for Young People* (Macmillan: 1987), pp. 119-42.

⁷⁸ Report, 'Association Views on Pay Increases for Apprentices, Boys and Youth', March 1952, following the survey distributed with Circular Letter 47, 5 March 1952, EEF, A(7)275, MRC. Employer support for a wage rise had probably been increased by the time of the survey by the return of apprentice militancy, in the shape of the token strike of 7 February and the mounting prospect of an indefinite stoppage.

⁷⁹ Williams (*Recruitment to the Skilled Trades*, pp. 155-6) attributed early post-war increases in apprentice relative pay to tight youth labour markets, without mentioning apprentice strikes. Her interpretation cannot account for further scale increases in the 1960s, when labour markets slackened as the supply of youth labour increased.

⁸⁰ The exceptions included 1941, when the SEF had recently signed with the CSEU a national agreement on apprentice pay that was quickly reopened as a result of the apprentices' strike, and 1969,

These increases in apprentice wage rates did not necessarily translate directly into higher relative earnings and payroll costs. Increases in ‘wage drift’ – i.e., the gap between negotiated wage rates and actual earnings, including incentive bonuses⁸¹ – benefited apprentices as well as adults, given that through the 1960s a substantial minority of apprentices in engineering, and a majority in shipbuilding, received output-related bonuses (Table 5).⁸² In engineering, adults gained more from the growth of bonus earnings than did apprentices. Relative apprentice earnings actually declined, albeit only marginally, between 1959 and 1968, notwithstanding the 1960 and 1964 scale increases. It took the large scale rises of 1969 and the abandonment of piecework by many employers around that time to move apprentice earnings strongly towards those of adults and for the efforts of the post-war apprentice strikers finally to bear fruit.⁸³

In sum, the apprentice striker and the union negotiator, the unofficial and the official, generated together a cumulatively large change in the training-related wage structure of metalworking industry between 1937 and 1970.

The interpretation of apprentice strikes

How should a strike movement among apprentices be understood? This section discusses four sets of factors – political, sociological, economic and industrial relations – in relation to the relevant attributes of the movements, informed by the economics of work-based training and bargaining. These factors are then grouped,

when, for once ‘the tail wagged the dog’, as an EEF committee had put it in 1960: the SEF’s acceptance of a reduction of the duration of apprenticeship from five to four years and of payment of the adult rate at age 20 forced the EEF to follow suit: Management Board Report, 27 November 1969, EEF: Z67/590(5); Meeting of Negotiating and Policy Committees, 20.7.60, EEF, A(7)330, MRC.

⁸¹ E. H. Phelps Brown, ‘Wage Drift’, *Economica* 29 (1962), pp. 339-56.

⁸² The gap between rates and earnings was reduced in the case of apprentices by the legal restrictions imposed by the Factory Acts on night shift and overtime work by young workers.

⁸³ The EEF’s surveys of its members put average apprentice hourly earnings (all ages) at 39.1% of those of journeymen in 1959 and 37.5% in 1968: sources as in Table 4. Unpublished data from the New Earnings Survey indicate 51.6% for 1974 (including non-federated employers, in mechanical and electrical engineering and shipbuilding only, and relative to all adult manual employees). The comparability of the EEF and NES estimates is limited, not least by the removal of 20 year olds from the apprenticeship category in 1970, but as that should have reduced the measured increase relative to the true one, the large increase between 1968 and 1974 is unlikely to have resulted from different definitions and coverage in the two surveys.

partly for heuristic purposes, into two broad interpretations: socio-political and economic-IR.

Politics

The first set of factors is associated with the period's politics, both industrial and national. The issue is the extent to which the strikers and, particularly, their leaders were motivated by left-wing political goals, usually involving social and political revolution – and to which those who did not share those goals were manipulated by those who did. The potential manipulators, in the accounts offered at the time by many employers, union officials, politicians and journalists, and by some apprentice leaders too, included the Communist Party (CP) and various Trotskyite groups.⁸⁴

Evidence of political influence is both fragmentary and potentially distorted by the tendency of contemporary commentators to misrepresent the situation to their own advantage, assigning either overwhelming or negligible importance to 'agitators' as the source of conflict.⁸⁵ The most readily available evidence is also the least reliable: statements made by the individuals involved, particularly their public utterances. Less readily accessible, but potentially more informative, are the political affiliations, policies and actions of strike leaders and supporters.

Allegations of the manipulation of young workers by far-left groups were widely levelled in public by employers in particular. In 1960 the manager of a Manchester factory, trying to keep his drawing office apprentices at work, told them ominously that the Glasgow apprentice representatives had travelled down, not on a motorbike, but 'in a big black saloon driven by a man over 21', adding ingenuously, 'I am not suggesting that this is the work of the Communist Party, but this all seems very well organised.'⁸⁶

⁸⁴ A new twist was provided by the suggestion by Belfast engineering employers in 1964 that the dispute had been spread to the city by two Young Socialist students from Liverpool University: letter, Northern Ireland EEA to EEF, 26 May 1965, EEF, Z64/69(52), MRC.

⁸⁵ R. Darlington, 'The agitator theory of strikes', presented to BUIRA conference, Nottingham, July 2004.

⁸⁶ *Manchester Evening News*, 29 April 1960.

The internal communications of employers offer potentially more reliable evidence. In 1937 the local engineering employers' association described the North East Campaign Committee, one of whose leaflets it forwarded to the EEF, as 'one of those communistic bodies of mushroom growth'.⁸⁷ A less conspiratorial view was offered in 1941 by a leading Clyde shipbuilder: 'practically all the agitation seems to be by the younger employees and although this element is commonly spoken of as "communistic", I am confident that it only means that natural agitators are taking advantage of this busy time for agitating for increases and improvements'.⁸⁸

Union officials also made similar allegations, sometimes with unintended effects. At a mass meeting of strikers in Edinburgh in 1941 that had been expected to decide to return to work, a district official made 'a very pointed attack on the Chairman of the Apprentices' Committee and criticised those "who were stupid enough" to be led away by the advice of the communists. The result was of course retaliation from the apprentices. Finally, peace was, more or less, restored, but a vote, on resumption pending negotiations, resulted in 132 for and 154 against'.⁸⁹

Apprentice strike committees sometimes went out of their way to deny political motives and connections – as when the Clyde delegates who sought to rally support in Manchester in 1960 claimed that 'this is definitely not communist inspired ... we just want a fair increase'.⁹⁰ Among the less plausible denials was the decision in 1944 by the Tyne Apprentices' Guild (TAG) to add the qualifier 'non-political' to its title, along with the claim by its leaders that it had turned down offers of help from the Militant Workers' Movement (MWM), a Trotskyite umbrella group.⁹¹ The latter statement was contradicted by evidence given at the trials of four non-apprentice leaders of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), an MWM affiliate, on charges of aiding and abetting an illegal strike by the TAG. The appeal

⁸⁷ North East Coast EA, letter to EEF, 8 May 1937, EEF, A(7)330, MRC.

⁸⁸ Letter from Sir Stephen Piggott, John Brown & Co., to Admiral Fraser, 5 March 1941, PRO, LAB 10/138.

⁸⁹ CO memo of 7 April 1941, PRO, LAB 10/422. Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour, famously denounced the Tyneside strike of 1944 as purely political: 'this is not an industrial dispute. It has been fomented by a few irresponsible mischief-makers and is flatly contrary to the advice of the trade unions. It is in short an attempt to use the strike weapon to coerce the Government at a critical moment of the war': statement of 29 March 1944, PRO, LAB 10/451.

⁹⁰ *Glasgow Evening Times*, 31 May 1939; *Manchester Evening News*, 29 April 1960.

⁹¹ CO memo of 14 February 1944, PRO, LAB 10/451; *Daily Herald*, 3 April 1944.

judge noted that all four defendants had effectively conceded having incited one – with which, ironically, they had not been charged. Two ex-leaders of the TAG stated that the four had provided advice, facilities and funds for the organization of the strike, and then tried to redirect the movement towards the RCP's campaign for the nationalization of the coal industry.⁹²

The limits to political motivation in apprentice strikes are suggested by the evasive actions taken on occasion by strike committees. The 1939 apprentice leadership on the Clyde decided not to go ahead with a proposal for demonstrations at Labour Exchanges, as it wanted 'not to be confused with the political demonstrations taking place at the same time'.⁹³

Secretive behaviour by apprentice leaders or adult supporters was often seen as evidence of far-left involvement. In Manchester in 1964, the press was excluded from a 'national' apprentice conference called by one of two rival strike committees, the Trotskyite-oriented Manchester Engineering Apprentices' Direct Action Committee (MEADEAC). At the ensuing press conference, Mike Hughes, MEADEAC's 19-year old organising secretary, appearing nervous, was assisted by an older man, aged around 30, who refused to give his name and fielded the 'sticky' questions.⁹⁴ The other strike committee, the Communist-oriented National Apprentices' Wages and Conditions Campaign Committee (NAWACC) behaved similarly. At a previous delegate meeting, its leader had refused to tell the press his name, but suggested that communications be addressed to a J. F. O'Shea at an address in Islington, London – which proved to be the details of a Communist Party candidate in a recent local council election.⁹⁵ These evasions could have reflected simply fear of misrepresentation in the press, but on that occasion they aligned with other evidence of left-wing political influence.

Further evidence is provided by the political affiliations of, and the statements made by, apprentice leaders. The leader of the 1937 Clyde strike

⁹² PRO, LAB 10/451; Law Report, *Times*, 26 September 1944; *Newcastle Journal & North Mail*, 1 April and 15 June 1944.

⁹³ *Evening Times*, 31 May 1939. In 1937 the Manchester strike committee had refused to seat any member of a 'political organisation': Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, p. 61.

⁹⁴ Confidential Manchester EEA report on MEADEAC national conference of 31 October: EEF, Z64/69(52), MRC; *Financial Times*, 2 November 1964.

⁹⁵ *The Week*, 8 October 1964.

committee, eight out of nine members of its 1941 successor, the CAC, the secretary of the TAG in 1944, and the secretary of the CAC in 1952 were members of Young Communist League (YCL).⁹⁶ In the first phase of the 1937 movement, YCL members encouraged the rejection by the Scottish strikers of calls by trade-union officials for an unconditional return to work; in the second phase, they promoted the unofficial national conference whose threat of a national apprentice strike precipitated victory.⁹⁷ Strike leaflets put out by the 1939 Clyde and 1944 Tyne strike committees included respectively wider political demands, for 'peace' (by which was meant the overthrow of the 'pro-Fascist' UK government and the adoption of a national alliance with the USSR) and coal nationalization, policies that the CP and the RCP respectively were promoting at the time.⁹⁸

Similar attributes and actions were sometimes visible among adult supporters. The spread of the 1944 strike within England to Huddersfield alone was associated with the presence of an Independent Labour Party (ILP) majority on the AEU district committee and a reputedly Trotskyite district secretary.⁹⁹ The strongest instance of the often-alleged political manipulation of youth by adults was the Tyneside strike of 1944, when the strikers faced opposition from the CP, given Britain's wartime alliance with the USSR,¹⁰⁰ but gained support from Trotskyites, who opposed the war. The secret services, the police and a Ministry of Labour investigator all concluded that the London-based leaders of the RCP had increased apprentice discontent on the Tyne by misrepresenting the ballot that was to allocate conscripts between the armed forces and the coal mines.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Croucher, *Engineers at War*, pp. 50, 130; Fishman, *The British Communist Party*, pp. 201 seq. The Economic League reported to the EEF in 1952 that Eric Park, Jimmy Reid's successor as secretary of the CAC, was an apprentice engineering draughtsman, the son of a long-time CP mother, a 'wearer of very powerful lensed glasses, indicating bad sight ...' and a YCL member: 'Eric Park', memo, 12 March 1952, EEF, A(7)275, MRC.

⁹⁷ McKinlay, 'The 1937 Apprentices' Strike ...', pp. 14-32.

⁹⁸ *Glasgow Evening News*, 18 May 1939; NWETE letter to EEF, 22 May 1939, EEF, A(7)164), MRC; Croucher, *Engineers at War*, pp. 235 seq.

⁹⁹ EEF memo to Ministry of Labour, 5 April 1944, PRO, LAB 10/451; Croucher, *Engineers at War*, loc.cit.

¹⁰⁰ The CP's North East District Committee called for a rapid return to work and denounced the MWF for exploiting 'genuine fears about the mines ballot schemes for other ends than those sought by the apprentices themselves': *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 1 April 1944.

¹⁰¹ PRO, LAB 10/451.

Political factors undoubtedly accounted also for the proliferation of youth and apprentice committees during the four movements in which the role of left-wing politics was particularly prominent: those of 1939, 1941, 1944 and 1964. The first of these saw, on the Clyde alone, activity by, *inter alia*, the Glasgow Youth Campaign Committee, the National Youth Campaign, the Youth Peace Council and the West Scotland Youth Pilgrimage for Peace and Freedom, in addition to the strike committee itself.¹⁰² The aftermath of the 1941 strike saw the creation in East Lancashire of several secretive local apprentice committees, associated, according to an engineering employers' official, with a 'Left Wing element ... very active in attacking our economic system and in supporting the Russians and Communists'.¹⁰³ The 1964 strike saw the Communist-oriented NAWCCC and the Trotskyite-oriented MEADAC fight it out for control of the movement. The NAWCCC, formed as a breakaway from the MEADAC, launched the indefinite strike on 2 November 1964. The MEADAC faction opposed the move, predicting a flop and advocating a postponement to March 1965 in order to increase support.¹⁰⁴

These rivalries and manoeuvres brought to the surface the mostly submerged attempts of left-wing organizations to promote and steer apprentice discontent. They also show the limitations of those efforts, which, as far as the effectiveness of the movements were concerned, rebounded at least partially on the four movements that showed the clearest political component. The most vivid case was the 1964 movement, when overt conflict between the two strike committees reduced support in both Manchester and Scotland.¹⁰⁵ At least one employer anticipated benefits from

¹⁰² EEF, A(7)164, MRC.

¹⁰³ Letter from EEF to Manchester EEA, 25 August 1941, EEF, A(7)186, MRC.

¹⁰⁴ MEADAC subsequently came up with only a poorly attended 'national conference,' at which plans to strike were postponed to May 1965, before subsequently being abandoned. MEADAC was described privately by local employer representatives as 'a purely political organisation' composed of 'Trotskyists'; the NAWACC was termed by AEU officials 'communist inspired': EEF, Z65/68(52), MRC.

¹⁰⁵ In Manchester, Mike Hughes, chairman of the MEADAC, used that group's own newsletter to denounce NAWACC's strike call for 2 November 1964, claiming that the call was 'made by a bogus committee set up by disgruntled apprentices, and others, who were removed from our committee two weeks ago ... these elements, members of the Communist Party and supporters of the Pabloite group [sic], refused to accept democratic decisions': *The Apprentice*, 7 September 1964. In Glasgow, Alex Ferry, secretary of an AEU district whose officials had hitherto invariably shown sympathy for the apprentice cause, attacked the apprentice who had flown from Manchester to bring out Glasgow apprentices as 'an agitator from England': *Daily Record*, 20 November 1964.

infighting on the left: the deputy director of the Manchester EEA asked the EEF, ‘do you think we can rely on support from union officials with communist leanings when we come to the Trotskyists’ effort next March?’¹⁰⁶ The extent of left-wing political motivation and factionalism may have been inversely associated with the movements’ scale and success. Of the four movements with the most salient political attributes – 1939, 1941, 1944 and 1964 – the first and last were the smallest, and the first and third among the least successful, of the nine movements (Tables 1, 7).

The geography of apprentice strikes suggests that the political stance of district union organization – a central issue in the AEU in particular¹⁰⁷ – also influenced strike activity by apprentices. At one pole stood Glasgow, whose presence in all nine movements, and whose leadership of most of them, aligned with its long-established left-wing politics, both industrial and municipal.¹⁰⁸ At the other pole stood Birmingham, another large engineering centre, with its centre-right labour politics, whose apprentices never featured in a strike movement. The prominence in the annals of apprentice militancy of Manchester before the 1950s and the low profile of London throughout are however less readily explained in terms of local industrial politics.¹⁰⁹

Finally, a significant role for political factors might be suggested by the ‘spontaneity’ of apprentice strikes. As unofficial actions by largely unorganised workers, the apprentice movements can be seen as purely spontaneous outbreaks, the manner and timing of whose occurrence was difficult to predict in advance and

¹⁰⁶ Letter, 16 November 1964, EEF, Z64/69(52), MRC. The extreme demands for apprentice pay and conditions that MEDEAC advanced, together with the weakening of the strike by political in-fighting, paralleled the tactics of the left-wing organizations, notably the Militant Tendency, Socialist Workers’ Party and RCP, that sought to harness youth discontent on the Youth Training Scheme in the 1980s: P. Ryan, ‘Trade Union Policies towards the Youth Training Scheme: Patterns and Causes’, *British Journal of Industrial Relations (BJIR)* 33 (1995), pp. 1-33.

¹⁰⁷ J. D. Edelstein and M. Warner, *Comparative Union Democracy* (Allen & Unwin: 1975), pp. 291-4; R. Undy, ‘The Electoral Influence of the Opposition Party in the A.U.E.W. Engineering Section’, *BJIR* 17, pp. 19-33.

¹⁰⁸ D. Gilbert, ‘Little Moscow and radical localities’, in A. Charlesworth, D. Gilbert, A. Randall, H. Southall and C. Wrigley, *An Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain* (Macmillan: 1996), pp. 151-7.

¹⁰⁹ The traditional conservatism of the Manchester AEU hampered the local apprentice strikers until the advent of Hugh Scanlon and Eddie Frow as district officials in the 1950s and 1960s: interview with Bob Wright, May 1985; Frow and Frow, *Manchester’s Big House*, pp. 33, 35. The marginal-to-zero role played by London apprentices throughout is perhaps surprising, given the growth of shop steward militancy in West London engineering factories from the mid-1930s on: Fishman, *The British Communist Party*, pp. 129 seq.

remains difficult to explain in retrospect. The ‘spontaneity’ attribute was emphasised by some strike leaders. John Moore, secretary of the CAC, asked by the Court of Inquiry when the 1941 strike had started, replied, ‘it is hard just to place when it actually happened ... [The apprentices] just seemed to be coming out here and there spontaneously.’ The specific events that precipitated some movements, such as the firing of an Edinburgh apprentice for stealing a bicycle in 1941, were indeed consistent with such an interpretation.¹¹⁰

Moore’s insistence on spontaneity is rendered unreliable by his position: viz., facing an official inquiry into an illegal strike that he admitted leading, and by the evidence of prior organization by ad hoc apprentice groups. The 1941 movement had been preceded in late 1940 in Edinburgh by two apprentice meetings called to discuss lack of progress in national official negotiations on junior male pay. Moore stated himself that the CAC had been in existence since 1937 and claimed that it had even restrained a district apprentice meeting from striking in January 1941, two months before the movement got under way.¹¹¹ An important role must therefore be attributed to leadership, and to the politically committed individuals who took that on, even in a strike movement as apparently ‘spontaneous’ as those by apprentices.¹¹²

The limits to the role of political factors in apprentice strikes are also visible in the predominance of the economic over the political in strike demands, and in the disappearance of the movements after 1964, despite the wider upsurge of left-wing politics and the continuing organizational strength of the CP in engineering.¹¹³

Social and cultural factors

¹¹⁰ Verbatim proceedings, Court of Inquiry, 15 March 1941, p. 26, PRO, LAB 10/509; CCO memo of 5 February 1941, PRO, LAB 10/422.

¹¹¹ James Bachelor, an Edinburgh strike leader, said apprentice representatives from Glasgow and Edinburgh had communicated over whether the pay demand should be 3d or 4d per hour: Verbatim Proceedings, Court of Inquiry, pp. 43, 109, PRO, LAB 10/509. Evidence of apprentice organization in the months before the strikes is also visible for 1937, 1944, 1952, 1960 and 1964. The token strikes that preceded last three of these movements also suggests prior organization.

¹¹² J. Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves* (Routledge: 1998), pp. 34 seq.; Darlington, ‘The Agitator Theory’.

¹¹³ J. Mellroy, “‘Every Factory our Fortress’: Communist Party Workplace Branches in a Time of Militancy, 1956-79, Part 1: History, Politics, Topography”, *HSIR*, 10 (2000), pp. 99-139.

An additional source of apprentice activism may be located in the socialising functions of apprenticeship. Ideally, apprenticeship ideally inserts young people into the adult world gradually rather than abruptly, while respecting their developmental needs.¹¹⁴ This function is less pronounced nowadays than it was during the period, when almost all apprenticeships began between 14 and 16 years of age, lasted five or more years, and ended on the apprentice's 21st birthday along with the attainment of the legal age of majority.¹¹⁵

The normative content of apprenticeship, as expressed traditionally in indentures, involved the exchange of obedience and loyalty by the apprentice for protection and training by the employer. Acting *in loco parentis*, employers resisted the intervention of third parties – notably trade unions – in their ‘privileged’ relationship with their apprentices.¹¹⁶ A corollary was the paternalism and even affection that some employers showed towards their apprentices, as well as the hostility that the apprentice strike, with its explicit disobedience, evoked in many employers, particularly when the strikers were indentured.

The socialization of the apprentice involved a further authority figure: the craft-worker, as organised by trade unionism. The relevant norms, valuing craft skill, collective organization and solidarity, diverged from those prized by employers. The journeymen alongside whom the apprentices worked, and on whom their learning typically depended, drew them into the community of adult craft-workers, using rituals that expressed the subordination of the apprentice to, and often involved the

¹¹⁴ Apprenticeship may be contrasted here both to full-time post-compulsory schooling, which segregates youth from the adult world, and to regular youth employment, which tends to ignore the developmental needs of youth. Musgrove (*Youth and the Social Order*), who prized the early assimilation of youth into adult life, might therefore have been expected to favour apprenticeship, but he viewed it instead as quasi-slavery and advocated early and unregulated youth employment instead. By contrast, Garonna and Ryan, in ‘The Regulation and Deregulation of Youth Economic Activity’, in P. Ryan, P. Garonna and R. C. Edwards (eds), *The Problem of Youth: the Regulation of Youth Employment and Training in Advanced Economies* (Macmillan: 1991), pp. 25-81, see apprenticeship as a potential vehicle for the ‘regulated inclusion’ of youth in the labour market.

¹¹⁵ In contemporary Britain, what is left of apprenticeship rarely lasts more than three years and no direct link remains between completion and attainment of the age of majority, which was reduced from 21 to 18 years in 1970.

¹¹⁶ ‘There should be no interference between the employer and the apprentice or boy which would detract from the sense of responsibility on the one hand and the sense of service and discipline on the other hand’: note of a Special General Meeting, 28 October 1937, NWETEA Minute Book, ML.

apprentice's humiliation by, the adult craft-worker.¹¹⁷ From this perspective, apprentice strikes appear as a form of self-socialization by youth, influenced by the values and practices of the labour movement. The executive committees, delegate conferences and mass meetings used by the apprentices resembled their counterparts in adult trade-unionism.¹¹⁸

The effectiveness of apprentice self-socialisation is suggested by the subsequent careers of several of the leaders of the movements. For all that, the process was far from smooth.¹¹⁹ In adult disputes, notably the 1922 lockout, apprentices faced competing claims on their loyalty from employers and trade unions.¹²⁰ The apprentice strikes themselves involved explicit disobedience towards adult authority, in the shape of the employer, and sometimes the trade union official too, when refusing instructions to return to work.

More specifically, they evoke misbehaviour by pre-industrial apprentices: specifically absence from work, skylarking and rioting on the Shrove Tuesday apprentice 'holiday'.¹²¹ The Shrove Tuesday tradition appears to have carried over to industrial apprenticeship in some districts, primarily in Lancashire. The efforts of employers to suppress it had had little success.¹²² Dick Nettleton, a leader of the 1941 strike recalled that 'in Manchester there was a habit among apprentices of leaving the factory on Shrove Tuesday each year to go home. It was regarded more

¹¹⁷ A third influence on the socialisation of the apprentice was parental authority. Many apprentices were the sons of metalworking journeymen, often employed at the same works. The vast majority of apprentices lived in the parental household. Many contributed their earnings to the household purse in return for pocket money. There is little evidence on the attitude of parents to apprentice strikes, including their responses to the competing claims of the employer, the trade union and the strike committee on their sons, and their own influence on their sons' actions.

¹¹⁸ The Clyde Apprentices' Committee may have been inspired by the unofficial Clyde Workers' Committee of the First World War: J. Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (Allen & Unwin: 1973), pp. 68, 80, *passim*.

¹¹⁹ The apprentice leaders who went on to prominence as adult leaders, mostly as trade union officials and left-wing political leaders, included Jimmy Reid and Alex Ferguson in Glasgow, and Eddie Frow and Bob Wright and Dick Nettleton in Manchester.

¹²⁰ EEF, M(19), MRC.

¹²¹ 'The day was usually kept as a holiday; games of football were common, together with throwing at cocks, and all sorts of horseplay took place in schools, universities and among apprentices': *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1970, Volume 20, p. 458. Absence from work on Shrove Tuesday had implicitly been licensed, to the extent that employers acquiesced in apprentice absence from work.

¹²² In 1905 the Manchester EEA printed for members' use a notice, headed 'Shrove Tuesday Holiday: Apprentices', stating that 'it has been decided ... that for the future the above holiday will not be allowed (sic) and that any apprentices or boys absenting themselves from these works on that day will render themselves liable to summary punishment': EEF, A(7)32, MRC.

or less as a lark. The management tried to stop it but not seriously, though, and the older workers egged us on.’¹²³ One of his peers linked apprentice horseplay in Manchester to the university student Rag Day: ‘there was the Shrove Tuesday tradition of walking out ... the craftsmen would hammer us [the apprentices] out ... we’d go and march against the students, taking oily rags with us ... it wasn’t “dear brothers” ... if they [the students] didn’t come out, we’d go and get them’.¹²⁴ Such practices were not confined to Manchester. In 1950, apprentices at a vehicles factory in Leyland, Lancashire, left work at 10 a.m. on Shrove Tuesday, accompanied by ritual teasing and ‘blacking’ by adult workers.¹²⁵

The continuation of Shrove Tuesday customs into post-war industrial Lancashire suggests that the ‘stripping away’ of the social functions of apprenticeship, which had been going on for over two hundred years, continued into the modern period.¹²⁶ The extent of these practices during the period, even in Lancashire, remains unclear.¹²⁷ No sign of them is visible for the Clyde, where the combination of Presbyterianism and left-wing politics may have left little space for pre-Lenten revelling. They may well have contributed to the genesis of apprentice strikes in Manchester. Dick Nettleton recalled ‘a general tradition of frivolity about

¹²³ Leeson, *Strike*, p. 159. The 1941 strike was termed a ‘holiday’ by the strikers in Manchester, probably to reduce the manifest threat of legal proceedings, but possibly also in cognisance of regional apprenticeship traditions.

¹²⁴ Interview with Bob Wright, May 1985. Manchester University students have held their Rag Day on Shrove Tuesday since at least the 1940s, which in conjunction with the apprentice ‘holiday’ meant an annual ‘afternoon of fun’ in the city: Mike Morris, e-mail of 7 February 2003, ‘Eng-Manchester-L Archives’ pages, RootsWeb.com web-site.

¹²⁵ The situation was revealed by an apprentice’s appeal against denial of National Insurance benefit for a finger injury. The NI Commissioner noted that ‘it is a custom long established, though in abeyance during the war years, for apprentices to run out from work at 10 o’clock in the morning on Shrove Tuesday and remain away for the rest of the day. It is a part of the custom that, before the apprentices run out, the older men tease them, and apparently “blacking” is included in the ritual. It seems that it is part of the custom for the apprentices to try to evade being blacked, and it was while endeavouring to escape this ordeal at about 9.50 am that the claimant fell and injured his finger ... He was skylarking, or at any rate he was the victim of skylarking by others.’ The Commissioner allowed the apprentice’s appeal, holding that his injury had indeed occurred while he was performing the job of an apprentice: PRO, PIN 62/348.

¹²⁶ The social functions of apprenticeship had previously included the curbing of youth marriage and fertility, and entitlement to poor relief: K. D. M. Snell, ‘The Apprenticeship System in British History: the Fragmentation of a Cultural Institution’, *History of Education* 25 (1996), pp. 303-21.

¹²⁷ An ex-apprentice who had participated in the 1964 strike at Metropolitan-Vickers (by then AEI) in Manchester recalled no such activities on Shrove Tuesday: interview with Brian Peat, 3 July 2004. Nor do such traditions feature in Roger Penn’s study of craft engineering in Rochdale: *Skilled Workers in the Class Structure* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1984).

apprentice strikes', which he linked directly to Shrove Tuesday antics.¹²⁸ The seasonality of apprentice strikes, which tended to start in late winter or spring, also suggests a link to Shrove Tuesday customs, but as none of the movements started on the day itself and as the number of movements was not large, no link can be inferred statistically.¹²⁹ The seasonal pattern may have reflected simply the release of hibernally suppressed youth energies.

A further attribute of the strike movements that suggests a role for social and cultural factors was the exuberance shown by participants, both within factories and in public. One leader in the Manchester area recalled the events of 1937-41: 'talk about flying pickets ... [It was] 'deputations'. We went by bicycle. I remember walking into the factory ... "we are the apprentices" ... we'd bring the lads out'.¹³⁰ Similarly, a participant in the 1964 strike at Metropolitan Vickers/AEI described the strikers as jumping across desks in the apprentice school and running through the factory, cheered on by adult workers as they called out other apprentices.¹³¹ Marches and rallies featured prominently, as in the events outside the same factory in 1960 that were described in the introduction. At the start of the 1937 movement on the Clyde, the press reported that 'the youths spent the time today in playing football and parading the streets'.¹³² In Sheffield in 1952, apprentices marched through the city centre chanting 'it's not a question of greed, £1 is what we need,' while their Glasgow counterparts paraded to the anthem 'one, two, three, four, we want one pound more.'¹³³

The public displays that characterised apprentice strikes resembled those during 'strikes' by schoolchildren in 1911 and university students in the 1960s and

¹²⁸ Leeson, *Strike*, p. 159.

¹²⁹ Five of the nine movements – those of 1937 and 1941-60 – started in late winter or spring, less than six weeks after Shrove Tuesday. The preliminary token strikes of 1952 and 1960 occurred two weeks and one week respectively before Shrove Tuesday. Three of the four movements that started at other times of the year were prompted by an exogenous shock: the introduction of national insurance contributions, post-war wage cuts, and the introduction of military conscription, in 1912, 1921 and 1939 respectively. Principal disputes involving adult employees showed by contrast little seasonality during 1946-73, beyond slight biases to both spring and autumn: Durcan et al., *Strikes in Post-War Britain*, p. 201.

¹³⁰ Interview with Bob Wright, May 1985.

¹³¹ Interview with Brian Peat, 3 July 2004. The actions of the adult workers resemble those in the Shrove Tuesday practices in the Leyland factory (above).

¹³² *Evening Citizen*, 31 March 1937.

¹³³ *Daily Worker*, 11 March 1952. Ministry of Labour memo, 17 March 1952, PRO, LAB 482/1952.

1970s.¹³⁴ There may be a deeper resemblance between the two types of ‘strike’: a lack of economic substance, in the sense of involving no credible threat of economic damage to one’s opponent. When employers invest in the skills of their apprentices, the value of the apprentices’ output during training (net of training costs) is by definition less than the payroll cost of their services to the employer. Any withdrawal of the apprentices’ services would then impose no immediate economic damage on the employer: profits would actually increase, in the short-term at least. An apprentice strike would, however, mean both an immediate loss of pay and reduced learning of skills for the strikers themselves.¹³⁵ Under such conditions, a strike threat by apprentices would not be economically credible. It would resemble one undertaken by full-time students against an educational institution in that, while it might cause disruption and undesirable publicity, it would impose no serious economic damage.¹³⁶ If so, the strike movements might be viewed as youth rampages, lacking significance for industrial relations or economics.

An interpretation of apprentice strikes in terms of ‘no economic damage’ is consistent under particular conditions with the economics of work-based training. In imperfectly competitive occupational labour markets for skilled workers, employers who possess market power as buyers of labour are predicted to finance, albeit only in part, as well as to provide, apprenticeship training.¹³⁷ Bargaining theory predicts

¹³⁴ D. Marson, *Children’s Strikes in 1911* (History Workshop, Oxford: 1973); D. Jacks, *Student Politics and Higher Education* (Lawrence and Wishart: 1975), pp. 86-96; D. L. Westby, *The Clouded Vision: the Student Movement in the United States in the 1960s* (Associated University Presses: 1976), pp. 136-53.

¹³⁵ The only damage that would face the employer would be a reduction in its skill supplies in the long-term, and then only to the extent that the strikers learn less or leave the firm as a result of the dispute.

¹³⁶ A. Muthoo, *Bargaining Theory* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1999), pp. 9-40. Student groups that seek to influence university policy have usually gone beyond simply boycotting lectures and classes, and used sit-ins, occupations and even violence in order to exert serious pressure on university administrators: Jacks, *Student Politics* and Westby, *The Clouded Vision*, loc. cit.

¹³⁷ M. Stevens ‘A Theoretical Model of On-the-Job Training with Imperfect Competition’, *Oxford Economic Papers* 46 (1994), pp. 537-62; D. Acemoglu and J.-S. Pischke, ‘Beyond Becker: Training in Imperfect Labour Markets’, *Economic Journal* 109 (1999), pp. F112-42. These models of monopsony power implicitly (but not necessarily plausibly) assume that labour markets for trainees and unskilled workers are more competitive than those for skilled workers. Models of perfectly competitive markets also predict that employers will provide apprenticeship training, but that they will refuse to finance it, even in part: G. S. Becker, *Human Capital* (University of Chicago Press, New York: 1964), ch. 2. As apprentice pay is then lower, an apprentice strike costs the apprentice less,

that the employer will then remain unmoved, on economic grounds at least, by any threatened suspension of the ‘services’ of its apprentices, as an apprentice strike would hurt the apprentice but not the employer, in the short-term at least.¹³⁸ In such circumstances apprentice strikes would be primarily non-economic phenomena. The resistance of employers to apprentice strikes might then result not from any anticipation of serious economic damage but rather from objecting to youth disloyalty and disobedience.

The evidence does indeed suggest that in particular respects and circumstances apprentice strikes did little or no damage to employers. In some cases the lack of damage to production was intrinsic: e.g., when the time lost would have been entirely spent off the job, in a company training school or a technical college – as in the case of the youngest apprentice strikers at Metropolitan-Vickers in 1964, who spent their first year in the firm’s apprentice school. Nor was the loss of the on-the-job services of younger apprentices, with their limited skills, likely to have affected output significantly. The brevity of participation by many apprentices also limited the effect on production. Even in the face of prolonged participation by older and more productive apprentices, employers might limit the damage by requiring adult journeymen to do the work that the apprentice strikers would otherwise have done.

An absence of serious damage from apprentice strikes was not be expected, according to a press report on the 1966 apprentice strike at the Fairfields shipyard on the Clyde: ‘neither the number of boys nor the sum of money is substantial. In most companies or industries a strike of 130 apprentices would provide more amusement

in terms of foregone pay, and reduces the employer’s payroll costs by less, than in the presence of monopsony power, but it still imposes no significant damage on the employer.

¹³⁸ The Nash solution to the standard bargaining problem, in which two agents negotiate the division of a joint surplus, defined in relation to their outcomes if they fail to agree (launch a dispute), sees each party’s share rise with how well off it would be in the event of failure to agree. Were an apprentice strike to impose no damage on an employer, the employer would then appropriate the entire surplus and the strike threat would be non-credible: Muthoo, *Bargaining Theory*, loc. cit. An apprentice strike might also involve little economic loss for apprentices themselves, to the extent that low pay and access to parental support cushions the effect on their incomes, but that would remain a secondary consideration were the economic effect on the employer negligible.

than concern. It would be excused as a youthful gesture and the company or industry would easily survive the young men's cat-calls and placard protests'.¹³⁹

The key issue is the effect of the strikes on production. Evidence on that unfortunately confined largely to qualitative observations, whose veracity is often undermined by the interested status of the observer.¹⁴⁰ A potential exception is the nuanced account provided by the Manchester district secretary of the AEU ten days into the 1952 strike: 'it is difficult to assess the effect of the strike on production ... In many firms the full effect would not be felt for some time ... Some of the strikers, who normally make small components, will not be seriously missed until existing stocks of the components are used up'.¹⁴¹ The age profile of the apprentice strikers was potentially important for the effect on production, as the damage done to the employer could be expected to rise with the apprentice's length of service. The evidence is particularly thin. Some reports claimed that it was the younger, and less productive, apprentices who were the more prone to take part, but those reports may have been filtered through the economic interests of the employers affected.¹⁴²

Limited economic damage is also suggested, paradoxically, by the long duration of the disputes. When serious damage is involved, the parties have an incentive to settle quickly. The fact that the average apprentice movement went on for more than seven weeks (Table 1, above) suggests that the economic pressure to settle was less than intense for both parties to the dispute. Most disputes involving adults proved shorter-lived.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, 18 November 1966. Ironically, the reporter went on to claim that in the company's precarious financial condition even an apprentice strike could cause serious damage.

¹⁴⁰ Thus the Clyde shipbuilders' responses to the 1941 strike simultaneously downplayed and emphasised the gravity of the situation. One of its press statements announced that 'the majority of those apprentices involved are junior boys, not eligible for military service', while also claiming 'their stoppage very seriously impairs important war production.' Members were encouraged to telegraph the Admiralty to state that the strikes were holding up war production: CSA Circular Letter 98, 8 March 1941 and Minute Book, 13 March 1941, MLG.

¹⁴¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 March 1952.

¹⁴² When 200 plus apprentices walked out at a Teeside yard in April 1944, those who stayed at work were said to be 'the older, more responsible type of apprentice': *Newcastle Journal & North Mail*, 1 April 1944.

¹⁴³ More than three-quarters of principal disputes in the economy as a whole ended within the 38 calendar day average duration of an apprentice movement (Durcan et al., *Strikes in Post-War Britain*, p. 208).

Finally, there is the indulgence with which some employers responded to the strikes. Managers frequently referred paternally to the strikers as ‘lads’ and ‘boys’.¹⁴⁴ Some of their actions evinced the same spirit. At Metropolitan-Vickers in 1937, following a parade inside the factory by 1,200 apprentices, reluctant to go out for fear of breaking their indentures, the factory manager led them to an impromptu event in the canteen, comprising refreshments and a ‘sing song’, ‘preferring not to send the boys back into the workshops in their excited frame of mind’.¹⁴⁵ Even the decision in 1952 by the management of Rollo and Grayson, a Birkenhead ship-repairer, to turn its fire hoses onto a column of apprentice strikers from other firms can be viewed in such terms.¹⁴⁶ These responses suggest that an apprentice strike could fail to provoke managerial concern, on economic grounds at least.

These attributes indicate the importance of social and cultural factors in the generation of apprentice activism. Together with its political attributes, they suggest a socio-political interpretation, with the movements, like student strikes, viewed as outbursts of political motivation and youthful exuberance – put crudely, as politics and fun. The implication would then be that the apprentice movements, instead of being treated as part of the history of industrial conflict, should be excluded from it, as are student strikes.

Collective organization and economic damage

The second interpretation unites industrial relations and economic aspects. The movements are viewed in terms of collective organization, industrial conflict and divergent economic interests. The evidence in its favour of such an interpretation starts with the qualitative attributes of the strikes – their organization, procedural status, and outcomes – as outlined in the previous section.

A key issue is the potential emptiness of an apprentice strike from the economic standpoint, which was cited above as consistent with the socio-political

¹⁴⁴ Thus a Greenock shipbuilder reported during the 1921 movement that, ‘with the exception of a few lads’, all of its strikers had returned to work: NWETEA Circular Letter 21-408, 11 October 1921, MLG.

¹⁴⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 September 1937; Leeson, *Strike*, p. 159.

¹⁴⁶ *Daily Worker*, 18 March 1952.

interpretation. The property is not universal. It does not apply when the role of the apprentice is closer to that of the production worker than that of the full-time student, and in particular when employers exploit apprentices, paying them less than the value of their net output at the margin (marginal value product).¹⁴⁷ Sufficient conditions for that outcome are, firstly, that employers possess market (monopsony) power over apprentices and, secondly, that they possess more market power over apprentices than over skilled employees.¹⁴⁸ Employers then have an incentive to substitute productive work for learning during the apprenticeship – e.g. by specialising apprentices on particular production tasks rather than giving them an all-round training. Unit labour costs (payroll costs per unit of output) are then lower for apprentices than for other employees, including skilled adults. Apprentices then appeal to employers as ‘cheap labour’. The apprentice strike threat becomes economically credible, as a prospective source of economic damage to employers.¹⁴⁹

Such an interpretation was advanced by the leaders of the 1937 movement, who insisted that ‘in many cases the workshops are run by the employment of a greater number of apprentices than journeymen ... we frequently find ourselves unable to get secure or permanent employment on completion of our apprenticeship. When we finish our apprenticeship and qualify for a higher rate of pay we are too

¹⁴⁷ Exploitation is defined here in neoclassical rather than in Marxist terms. As Marxist analysis sees all wage labour as exploited, it offers no insight into the specific position of apprentices.

¹⁴⁸ The potential sources of monopsony power over apprentices include involuntary unemployment, employer collusion, asymmetric information about training content, and low collective organization and bargaining coverage: Ryan, ‘Training Quality and Trainee Exploitation’; J. M. Malcomson, J. W. Maw and B. McCormick, ‘General Training by Firms, Apprentice Contracts and Public Policy’, *European Economic Review* 47 (2003), pp. 197-227. Although models of monopsony power and work-based training mostly assume that buyer power applies only to skilled workers, the assumption is potentially more relevant to trainees.

¹⁴⁹ The ‘exploitation’ of apprentice labour may be seen as applying not to the apprenticeship contract as a whole but only to its later stages, i.e., to senior apprentices, whose pay is held below their output value in order for the apprentice to repay within the contract period the employer’s investment in training during its early stages: M. Stevens, ‘The Economic Analysis of Apprenticeship’, paper presented to Colloquium on Skills and Training, Centre for History and Economics, King’s College Cambridge, July 1994; R. A. Hart, ‘General Human Capital and Employment Adjustment in the Great Depression: Apprentices and Journeymen in UK Engineering’: *Oxford Economic Papers*, forthcoming. The difference between the two interpretations is not important for this analysis. Both view senior apprentices as being paid less than the value of their marginal output, and a strike threat by them at least as having economic leverage.

often dismissed and replaced by juniors. The employers use this method to obtain cheap labour ... this is exploitation of boy labour'.¹⁵⁰

Several attributes of apprenticeship training and apprentice strikes suggest the relevance of such an interpretation to inter-war metalworking: the prevalence of informal contracts of apprenticeship, of training programmes limited to informal on-the-job training in practical skills, of high apprentice-journeyman ratios in many firms and districts,¹⁵¹ and of piecework bonus systems that paid apprentices less than journeymen for given output, not just less pay for less output. Some metalworking employers laid on high quality training, investing in rather than exploiting their apprentices, but they were in the minority. In 1925, only 11% of metalworking firms employed apprentices and gave them paid time off for technical education, and only 2% had a works training centre or offered technical courses to apprentices at the workplace.¹⁵² Most employers opted to deskill craft work and cheapen labour where possible, with apprenticeship as a convenient vehicle.¹⁵³ The substance of the 'cheap labour' charge was even conceded privately by some employers.¹⁵⁴

Labour market conditions between the wars were consistent with widespread power for buyers of apprentice labour. Until 1937 apprentice wage rates were determined locally and unilaterally by employers. In both sectors, local employers' associations recommended maximum apprentice age-wage scales. The scale rates were not only low; many firms paid their apprentices less – notably on Clydeside,

¹⁵⁰ *The Clyde Apprentice*, no. 1, undated, 1937, EEF, A(7)111, MRC.

¹⁵¹ MacFarlane Engineering Co, Cathcart, which refused to take back 30 of its 60 striking apprentices after the 1937 strike, had previously employed 102 apprentices for only 25 journeymen. The trade unions' concern to ensure the reinstatement of the apprentice strikers proved correspondingly muted in this instance: CO and CCO memos of 6, 11 and 19 May 1937, PRO, LAB 10/76.

¹⁵² Ministry of Labour, *Report of an Inquiry*, vol. 6, pp.9, 56 and vol 7, pp.108, 110. As such practices were more common in large than small firms, the share of apprentices covered by them was undoubtedly higher than the share of employers offering them.

¹⁵³ J. Zeitlin, 'The Labour Strategies of British Engineering Employers, 1890-1922', in H. Gospel and C. Littler (eds), *Management Strategies and Industrial Relations* (Heinemann: 1983), pp. 25-54, and 'The Triumph of Adversarial Bargaining: Industrial Relations in British Engineering, 1880-1939', *Politics and Society* 18 (1990), pp. 405-26.

¹⁵⁴ According to the manager of a Birkenhead marine engineering firm, 'many employers are using apprentices as a form of cheap labour at the present time, evading all responsibility in respect of the boys' training': Subcommittee on Apprentices and Young Persons, verbatim report of meeting of 7 December 1933, p. 4, EEF, A(12)1, MRC.

despite its potentially competitive youth labour market.¹⁵⁵ Local associations reduced competition for apprentice labour still further by discouraging members from recruiting each other's apprentices.¹⁵⁶

In war and post-war years, the scope for the exploitation of apprentice labour fell, with the arrival of full employment, collectively bargained floors to apprentice pay and the extension of day-release for technical education.¹⁵⁷ Piecework payment remained widespread particularly for senior apprentices (Table 4, above). Trade unions attacked the associated incentive to exploit apprentice labour,¹⁵⁸ which retained its appeal to many employers until the Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) improved standards in on-the-job training after 1964.¹⁵⁹

Turning to the strikes themselves, the evidence suggests that they imposed economic damage on employers, but only in particular respects and under particular conditions. Although no firm appears to have been shut down by a strike by apprentices alone, there is evidence of damage to output and profits, particularly

¹⁵⁵ The CSA adopted in March 1921 maximum apprentice time rates 'beyond which firms were not to go but firms were free to arrange lower rates if they so desired.' Its 1924 survey found that 'a large majority of firms were paying below the maximum rates recommended'; its 1933 successor showed little change. In March 1937, just before the start of the strike movement, the average rate paid to third year apprentice shipwrights by nine CSA members was 5s 9d. (28.6%) less than the maximum rate of £1.0.0¾ per week: CSA, TD 241/12/231, MLG.

¹⁵⁶ Just before the start of the 1937 movement, the NWETEA, following normal practice, circulated the names of two apprentice welders who 'have left the employment of the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company without completing their apprenticeship', asking members: 'kindly keep the names prominently before you in the event of any of the apprentices applying to you for employment': NWETEA Circular Letter 44, 10 March 1937, MLG. The practice was initially applied to apprentices who walked out, but then discontinued in view of the large numbers involved.

¹⁵⁷ Under the 1947 Recruitment and Training of Juveniles for the Engineering Industry agreement, the EEF recommended that member firms give paid release for one day of technical education a week to apprentices aged less than 18. By 1953-4, 46.2% of male apprentices and employees aged less than 18 in metalworking and metal manufacture received day-release or block-release: *Technical Education*, Cmnd 9703 (HMSO: 1956), pp. 18, 29.

¹⁵⁸ Shipbuilding unions complained regularly to the SEF in the 1950s that piece-working apprentices were paid lower piece prices than were adults – i.e. that apprentices earned less than adults not just because they produced less, but also because they earned less even when producing the same output – which encouraged employers to favour apprentice over adult labour on tasks that both could perform. The national negotiations associated with the 1960 movement saw union officials attack the deductions from standard piecework prices that were applied to apprentices as 'very largely reimburs[ing] employers for the whole cost of training those apprentices'. They threatened to press for their abolition unless the SEF gave a pay increase to piece-working as well as time-rated apprentices: SEF, Circular Letter 112/60, 17 June 1960, SNRA/4831(a6), NMM.

¹⁵⁹ P. Senker, *Training in a Cold Climate* (Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex: 1991), D. W. Marsden and P. Ryan, 'Initial Training, Labour Market Structure and Public Policy: Intermediate Skills in British and German industry', in P. Ryan, ed., *International Comparisons of Vocational Education and Training for Intermediate Skills* (Falmer Press: 1991), pp. 251-85.

when senior apprentices were involved and when the strikers enjoyed active support from adult craft-workers. The Manchester AEU District Secretary cited above also noted the ways in which he expected the 1952 strike to hurt employers: ‘one immediate result ... was that adult engineers in many cases would have to be paid a man’s wage for doing an apprentice’s work ... The absence of older apprentices, whose work is often vital to production, will be felt more acutely ... Some strikers claim that the men at their works are refusing to do apprentices’ tasks as an indirect way of supporting the strike’.¹⁶⁰

Adverse effects on output appear to have been particularly marked in the 1941 and 1944 disputes, two large-scale events that held up urgent war production and galvanised Government intervention – in 1941 with a Court of Inquiry, whose institution in the face of employer opposition was justified by the government with the claim that ‘essential government work was delayed by these stoppages’.¹⁶¹ Less dramatic but still substantial effects were reported for some of the peacetime movements. In 1937, Babcock and Wilcox, Dumbarton, stated to their local association, without any obvious reason to exaggerate, that ‘the output from their West Factory had suffered materially on account of the absence of the apprentices on strike and had now become entirely unbalanced; that it was useless to continue working the men on overtime and piling up components while no corresponding components were being produced by the apprentices’ and that the firm had stopped all overtime working ‘until the apprentices changed their attitude or production became balanced’.¹⁶²

In some cases, the effect of the strike on production was reported to have grown as it progressed. On the sixteenth and last day of the 1939 strike the Manchester press reported that ‘the absence of apprentice labour was beginning to have its effect on the output of various establishments’; on the tenth day of the 1952 strike, that ‘the effect of the strike is now gradually being felt in north-west arms and export factories, where processes, often highly skilled, which are done by

¹⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 March 1952.

¹⁶¹ *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, June 1941, p. 117.

¹⁶² NWETEA Minute Book, 7 May 1937, MLG.

apprentices, are being neglected'.¹⁶³ By contrast, Clyde employers reported declining effects on production during the 1937 strike, as work was progressively reorganised and sympathetic blacking by adults waned.¹⁶⁴

The participation of older apprentices, whose unit labour costs may be taken to be the lowest (i.e., output highest relative to pay) among apprentices, was particularly damaging to employers. The AEU district secretary's assertion of the particular importance of the older apprentices in Manchester in 1952 (above) had probably applied in 1941 as well, when the strongest sense of grievance was reported for the older apprentices, many of whom were required at the time to supervise and train dilutee workers who were being paid more than they were.¹⁶⁵

As the AEU official suggested, the damage done to employers by an apprentice strike appears to have depended on the reactions of adult employees, whose services employers often sought to use to offset the strike's effects on production. The outstanding case of adult support was the district-wide one-day adult sympathy strike on the Clyde on 16 April 1937, and the indefinite overtime ban that accompanied it. The sympathy strike was supported by only one half the district's adult metalworking workforce but even that tally indicated considerable support for the apprentices' cause among adult workers.¹⁶⁶ Sympathy action by adults raised the possibility of shutting down a factory, thereby increasing leverage on the employer. In Glasgow in both 1952 and 1960, the disciplining of apprentices who had joined the initial token strike induced some adults to strike in sympathy. In 1952 one firm shut down as a result. and the press.¹⁶⁷

Adult employees might also resist instructions to take over apprentice work. 'Apprentice work' was often blacked at works level, with the encouragement of

¹⁶³ *Manchester Evening News*, 3 June 1939 and 20 March 1952.

¹⁶⁴ McKinlay, 'From Industrial Serf to Wage Labourer'.

¹⁶⁵ According to Sir Stephen Piggott of John Brown & Co, Clydebank, 'the discontent among the apprentices appears to arise through women, after a few weeks' training, receiving the full tradesman's rates, whereas the most advanced apprentices, such as the fifth year, receive approximately half the tradesman's rate ...': letter to Admiral Fraser, 5 March 1941, PRO, LAB 10/138.

¹⁶⁶ The sympathy strikers accounted for 58% of adult employment in the district in engineering and 47% in shipbuilding: EEF, A(7)138, MRC; CSA Minute Book, 22 April 1937, MLG.

¹⁶⁷ In 1952, adult walk-outs occurred at two firms; in 1960, at six shipyards and the Singer works: *Evening Citizen*, 8 February 1952; Tuckett, *Blacksmiths' History*, p. 354.

shop stewards and even district officials. Such actions threatened to widen the dispute should the employer punish those involved.¹⁶⁸ Following the call in 1937 by the Clyde district committee of the CSEU for the blacking of apprentice work, ‘several firms ... reported that their journeymen engineers had refused to undertake work which normally would have been done by apprentices and that the shop stewards had intimated that if any man was dismissed in consequence of a refusal to do such work, all the men in the shop would be taken out’.¹⁶⁹

Further adult options for the support of striking apprentices included pressing blackleg apprentices to join the strike,¹⁷⁰ and either imposing levies on union members or holding collections, in aid of the apprentice strike fund, as in Manchester in 1952.¹⁷¹

The economic effects of an apprentice strike depended on the employers’ responses. Strong reactions might have been expected, given the historical willingness of the EEF to lock out entire categories of employee and the affront posed by apprentice indiscipline. In practice, although individual employers often reacted dismissively to apprentice strike threats, once an apprentice movement got under way, employers’ associations proceeded cautiously, fearful of extending it, and in particular of provoking sympathy action by adults. They typically advised members to write to the apprentices’ parents, making ominous but imprecise threats, to refuse to pay the strikers for any time spent at technical college during the dispute, and to extend periods of service to reflect time lost on strike – but to go no further. In particular, members were asked not fire any strikers.¹⁷² The few employers who

¹⁶⁸ For example, apprentice work was blacked in at least one firm in Aberdeen in 1952 and 1960, Glasgow in 1952 and Manchester in 1964; non-striking apprentices were blacked in Oldham in 1952 and Aberdeen and Sheffield in 1960: EEF, A(7)275, A(7)330, Z64/69(52), MRC. Three works-level strikes by adult employees in response to instructions by their employers to do the work of striking apprentices were reported in Clydeside engineering in 1952: *Daily Worker*, 22 March 1952.

¹⁶⁹ NWETEA Minute Book, 21 April 1937, MLG.

¹⁷⁰ In 1960, Hall Russell & Co, Aberdeen, 83% of whose 206 apprentices were on strike, reported that an attempt by an apprentice caulker to restart work had been defeated by journeymen boilermakers, who had either blacked his work or gone on strike themselves until he went out again. Pressed by a shop steward, the apprentice did not return after lunch that day: EEF A(7)330, MRC. Adults also struck against blackleg apprentices at a Scottish firm in 1952: *Daily Worker*, 17 March 1952.

¹⁷¹ *Daily Worker*, 18 March 1952.

¹⁷² In 1960 the EEF suggested that members write to apprentices and their parents to remind them that ‘participation in the strike is a breach of the Apprenticeship Agreement, rendering the Agreement liable to termination ... [but] in relation to the present dispute ... no obstacles should be placed in the

took a hard line, e.g. by suspending or firing strikers, tended to prolong the dispute and increase the damage to other employers.¹⁷³

Another attribute that suggests that taken as a whole the movements caused economic damage to employers was the willingness of the EEF on the biggest occasions (1937 and 1960) to allow members to claim compensation along standard lines from its Indemnity Fund for damages caused by the strike.¹⁷⁴

Finally, the outcomes of apprentice strikes also suggest significant economic content. As noted above, five of the eight movements that set out to increase apprentice pay achieved substantial successes. Serious results need not indicate serious intentions and activities but tend to be associated with them.

In sum, an economics-IR interpretation of the strike movements receives support both from the economics of training, given the conditions and practices prevailing during the period, and from evidence that under particular conditions (notably wartime) and in particular respects (participation by senior apprentices and sympathy action by adults) they reduced output and imposed serious costs on firms.

Conclusions

The nine strike movements that apprentices in engineering and shipbuilding launched between 1912 and 1964 are a neglected feature of the history of industrial relations. Although the movements spanned an era of major change in both markets and national politics, they show sufficient continuity of purpose and method to be

way of a return to work and that, upon return, there should not be any retaliatory action, e.g. suspension of apprentices or termination of Apprenticeship Agreements by the employers. Time lost on account of the stoppage, however, may be required to be made up.' The Scottish EEA gave yet more cautious advice, urging member firms not to allocate 'apprentice work' to adult employees during the dispute nor even to discipline apprentices when they returned to work: EEF Circular Letter 119, 9 May 1960, A(7)330, MRC.

¹⁷³ The 1952 dispute was prolonged in Manchester by the sacking and replacement by R. Broadbent & Son of the seven of its eight apprentices who had gone on strike. The local strike committee refused to recommend a return to work until the firm had reinstated all of the strikers. One week later, following discussions with union officials, the company allowed the dismissed strikers to apply individually for reinstatement, stating that their cases would 'be considered favourably'. The strikers voted the following day to return: *Manchester Evening News*, 19, 20, 27 and 28 March 1952; IR Officer memo, 27 March 1952, PRO, LAB 482/1952. Allegations of victimization also delayed the return to work on the Clyde in 1937 and 1944: PRO, LAB 10/76, 10/451.

¹⁷⁴ EEF, Circular Letters 265, 18 December 1937, and 179, 21 July 1960, MRC.

taken as a whole. Comparable in scale to their adult counterparts, they blended spontaneity with organization and on occasion gave the lead to wider industrial militancy.

The apprentices' movements are of interest from the standpoint of politics, sociology, industrial relations and economics alike. Left-wing politics influenced their genesis and course throughout. The strikers continued historical traditions of apprentice exuberance and misbehaviour. They demonstrated an impressive capacity for collective action in complicated situations. Although under some conditions and in some respects the strikes caused little economic damage, they did exert sufficient economic leverage, in conjunction with sympathy action by adults and national negotiations by trade unions, to elicit substantial concessions from employers.

The bounds to the incidence of apprentice strikes across time and place are themselves potentially informative. In metalworking itself, apprentice strikes disappeared in the late 1960s. The AEU/AUEW President, Hugh Scanlon, threatened the EEF with an apprentice strike in 1969, but the threat appears to have had little effect and no strike materialised.¹⁷⁵ The disappearance of apprentice strikes is taken as evidence that the apprentice strike had become a victim of its own success. In conjunction with the raising of training standards by the ITBs, the cumulative increase in apprentices' relative pay raised training costs and ended the exploitation of apprentice labour. Employers who recruited apprentices during the 1970s obliged to invest significantly in them. The apprentice strike had lost its economic leverage.

The near-total absence of apprentice strikes from other apprenticeship-intensive sectors, notably construction and printing, but also others that also trained engineering apprentices, notably public utilities and railway workshops, is also potentially informative. It is unlikely to have meant the absence of low pay and exploitation for apprentices, particularly in printing. Metalworking apprenticeship stood out during the period for the continuous deskilling of craft work, to the detriment of the prospect of secure skilled employment that might have induced apprentices to accept low pay. On the rare occasion when apprentice representatives

¹⁷⁵ Policy Committee report, 18 November 1969, EEF, Z67/590(5), MRC.

spoke on the record, at the 1941 Court of Inquiry, they expressed dissatisfaction on that score.¹⁷⁶

The evidence to date does not determine definitively the relative importance of two lines of interpretation, an economics-industrial relations one and a socio-political one. Each approach is relevant to some aspects of the movements. To some extent the interpretations are complementary: the economic leverage of the movements could be increased when political, social and cultural factors lent direction and momentum.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, pride of place goes to the economics-IR interpretation. The disappearance of the movements after 1964 is more readily explained in economic than in social or political terms. The movements involved collective organization and action, conflicting economic interests and had serious consequences. They transferred the regulation of apprenticeship from unilateral employer control to collective bargaining. They compressed training-related wage differentials. They increased the payroll cost of training, which contributed to the trend reduction of apprentice intakes that set in at the end of the period, closing off any option for a 'low pay, high volume, high quality' apprenticeship system, such as developed in post-war Germany.¹⁷⁸

The limited attention that has been paid to apprentice strikes in histories of industrial relations, vocational training and youth in society is not appropriate, even if their neglect can be understood in terms of their heterogeneity and complexity. Some attributes suggest that they be viewed as akin to student strikes, and even that they be excluded from the history of industrial conflict. The importance of productive labour, wage earning and exploitation in apprenticeship warrants the continued inclusion of the movements in the history of industrial relations, while recognising their idiosyncrasies as instances of industrial conflict.

The importance of apprentice activism was recognised, as its heyday drew to a close, by a right-wing trade union leader, who otherwise showed it little sympathy.

¹⁷⁶ PRO, LAB 10/509.

¹⁷⁷ The point is reflected in a participant's recollection of the 1960 movement: 'it is doubtful if Clydeside has ever seen anything as amusingly funny, yet at times so grimly determined, as some of the demonstrations organised before and during the strike': Tuckett, *The Blacksmiths' History*, p. 199.

¹⁷⁸ Marsden and Ryan, 'Initial Training ...'; H. Gospel, 'The Decline of Apprenticeship Training in Britain', *BJIR* 26 (1995), pp. 32-45, P. Ryan and L. Unwin, 'Apprenticeship in the British "Training Market"', *National Institute Economic Review* 178 (2001), pp. 99-114.

Sir William Carron, AEU President, remarked in 1963, during renewed national negotiations with the EEF for higher apprentice pay scales, that ‘it might be a coincidence, or it might not be a coincidence, but on each and every occasion, so far as we can recall, when apprentices have felt themselves impelled to take this course, something has been done about the problem which was not done prior to this kind of thing happening’.¹⁷⁹ His guarded choice of words suggests discomfort over apprentice activism on both sides of the table, but his tribute rang true.

INSERT APPENDIX HERE

¹⁷⁹ EEF, *Minutes of Central and Special Conferences*, 31 October 1963, MRC.

Table 1: Attributes of apprentice strike movements, UK, 1910-70

Year	Period	Districts involved ^a		Duration Days ^b	Number of strikers ^c	Working days lost ^c		
		Outbreak	Participation			Total	p.c. ^d	Rank ^e
1912	6 August - 5 October	Dundee	Central Scot NE Coast Manchester	70	14,600	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1921	21 June - 20 July 10 August - 13 October	Manchester; Blackburn	Manchester, Lincoln, Clyde	33	6,500	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1937	18 March - 5 June; 6 Sept - 30 October	Clyde; Manchester	Scot, N.Ire N&NE Eng; Cov, London	94	32,500	406,000	12	3
1939	18 May - 5 June	Clyde	Clyde	16	2,200	19,000	9	7
1941	5 Feb - 5 April	Edinburgh	Central Scot N.Ire, S.Lancs,	62	25,100	220,000	9	1
1944	28 Mar – 12 April	NE Eng	Clyde Huddersfield S.Wales	16	17,000	150,000	9	4
1952	7 February ^f ; 10 March - 2 April	Clyde	Scotland N.England N.Ireland	24	16,400	194,000	12	1
1960	24 February ^f , 20 April ^f ; 25 April-16 May	Aberdeen	Scotland N.Eng, N.Ire Cov, London	27	36,900	347,000	9	1
1964	7 September ^f 2 - 25 November	Manchester	N.Eng Central Scot London	23	6,000	26,000	4	9
Average ^g				38	17,500	187,000	10	

Sources: *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, various issues (summaries of principal disputes); Knox, 'Down with Lloyd George', pp. 22-36; Croucher, *Engineers at War*; EEF, 1921 Circular Letter #194 and A(7)164, 275, 330, Z64/69 (52), MRC; SEF, SNRA/4946, NMM. Where sources differ, archive evidence is preferred.

Notes: n.a.: not available. The sympathy strike by adults on Clydeside on 16.4.37 is excluded.

a. Clyde: Glasgow region. Central Scot: same, plus Edinburgh and Dundee; Scot(land): same, plus Aberdeen; N.Eng(land): industrial districts of Lancs and Yorks; NE Eng: Tyne, Wear and Tees districts; N.Ire: Northern Ireland.

b. Calendar days

c. Includes indirectly involved employees (put out of work by the dispute at same workplace as strikers)

d. Per striker ('Working days lost' divided by 'Number of strikers')

e. In all disputes that year

f. Token strike(s)

g. Unweighted arithmetic mean (days lost: 1937-64 only)

Table 2: Apprentice participation in apprentice strikes in federated firms by industry and district

	Industry	Districts	Date	Days into dispute ^a	No. of employers replying	Apprentices employed	Participation rate %
1941	Shipbuilding	Clydeside	10-12 March	11-13	23	2828	57.2
1952	Engineering	Central Scotland	7 Feb ^b	(1)	174	8138	32.5
		"	14 March	4	198	8642	61.6
		Sheffield	17 March	7	9	644	43.8
1964	Shipbuilding	Clydeside	24 Nov	22	22	1781	31.0

Sources: CSA, TD 241/12/242, TD 241/12/359, MLG; EEF, A(7)275, MRC; PRO, LAB 482/1952

Note: Questionnaires were distributed to all members of the Association; data exclude non-apprentice strikers, where separately identified (1952)

a. Calendar days since start of indefinite strike movement in first district involved

b. Initial token strike

Table 3: Apprentice employment and strikers by method of payment, federated Clyde shipyards, March 1941

	Employment		Strikers		
	Number	Share %	Number	Share of strikers %	Participation rate %
Timework	1886	66.7	1398	86.3	74.1
Piecework	942	33.3	221	13.7	23.5
All	2828	100.0	1619	100.0	57.2

Source: CSA, TD 241/12/242, MLG

Notes: aggregated data for 23 shipyards affiliated to the CSA, ca. 13-20th March. Three incomplete responses are excluded, as are 26 strikers who had already returned to work.

Table 4: Employment share and relative earnings of apprentices receiving incentive bonuses, by sector and strike movement

			Age category	Number of apprentices	Bonus recipients as share of apprentice employment ^a (%)	Relative pay of apprentices receiving bonuses ^b (%)
Engineering	1948	16-20		n.a.	n.a.	118.6
	1950	16-20		n.a.	n.a.	121.6
	1959	19		15161	43.2	112.1
	1960	19		11829	46.7	115.0
	1968	19		10016	28.3	112.9
Shipbuilding	1952	16-20		11503	57.8	125.7
	1960	16-20		n.a.	75.6	n.a.

Sources: EEF, A(7)270, A(7)330, Z67(590), MRC; SEF, SNRA/4831, SNRA 3912/1, NMM

Notes: Apprentices employed by federated firms only

a. Apprentices paid under payment by results (engineering) or piecework, payment by results or lieu rates (shipbuilding), as opposed to by plain time rates, as percentage of all apprentices

b. Weekly (1968: hourly) earnings of apprentices receiving incentive bonuses as percentage of those of time-paid apprentices

Table 5: Apprentice employment and strikers by trade in three Clyde shipyards, 10 March 1941

Trade group	Employment		Strikers		
	Number	Share	Number	Share of all strikers	Participation rate
		%		%	%
Shipyard ^a	271	45.0	237	47.3	87.5
Other ^b	331	55.0	264	52.7	80.0
All	602	100.0	501	100.0	82.3

Source: CSA file TD 241/12/242, MLG

Notes: aggregated data for Barclay Curle (Elderslie), Alex Stephen & Sons, Connell (Scotstoun); apprentices who had already returned to work are not counted as strikers

a. Platers, sheet iron workers, shipwrights, caulkers

b. Engineers, welders, electricians, carpenters, joiners, painters, plumbers

Table 6: Participation in 1952 strike movement in federated engineering firms in Glasgow district by category of youth

	Strikers	All employees	Participation rate (%)	Share of all strikers (%)
Apprentices: manual	5,311	7,895	67.3	97.1
Apprentices: drawing office	12	747	1.6	0.2
Non-apprentices: manual ^a	147	1,222	12.0	2.7
All	5470	9864	55.5	100.0

Source: SEEA letter to EEF, 14.3.52, EEF A(7)275, MRC

Notes: a. 'Boys and youth'

Table 7: Apprentice strike movements: organizations, demands and outcomes

	Unofficial strike organizations ^a	Strike demands	Outcomes: immediate (subsequent)
1912	Edinburgh & Leith Apprentice Engineers' Union	Exemption from national insurance contributions; pay increase; abolition of making up of time not worked ('black time') ^c	Conditions before strike; tightening of indenture clauses; 'certain advances' in a minority of works
1921	n.a.	Withdrawal of impending apprentice pay cuts (withdrawal of War Bonuses)	Conditions before strike
1937	(Clyde and Manchester strike committees) ^b North East Campaign Committee	Apprentices' Charter: pay rise, district age-pay scales, day release rights, limits to apprentice numbers, union representation	(5.37) Increased pay scales in some districts (10.37) Return to work pending official negotiations; (national age-wage scales for pay advances; youth procedure agreement)
1939	Clyde Advisory Committee of Apprentices	Military service to count for apprenticeship; Youth Charter (pay rise, day release, paid holidays); end of improverships	Six months' credit towards apprenticeship service for military training; other conditions as before strike
1941	Edinburgh, Clyde, Barrow and Scottish Apprentices' Committees; Engineering and Allied Trades National Youth Movement	Pay increase: grant AEU national youth pay claim; day release; all round factory training; revisions to agreement of 26.3.41	Court of Inquiry; prosecution of strike leaders; (national age-wage scale for junior males; revised youth procedure agreement)
1944	Tyneside Apprentices' Guild; Clydeside Apprentices' Committee	Apprentice exemption from conscription into coal mining	Conditions before strike; prosecution of external supporters associated with Revolutionary Communist Party
1952	Clyde Apprentice and Youth Committee, Aberdeen Apprentices' Committee; Manchester Apprentices' Strike Committee	CSEU national claim for £1 increase in pay for young males	Return to work pending renewal of official negotiations; (age-graded pay increases for young males)
1960	Clyde Apprentices' Committee; Scottish Apprentices' Committee	CSEU national claim for pay increases for young males	Return to work pending renewal of official negotiations; (age-graded pay increases for young males)
1964	Manchester Engineering Apprentices' Direct Action Committee; National Apprentices' Wages and Conditions Campaign Committee, Clydeside Apprentices' Committee	Apprentice Youth Charter: increased apprentice pay; 35 hour week; 4 weeks paid holiday; full sick pay	Conditions before strike; (increase in age-wage scales; national procedure agreement for all young males)

Sources: *The Apprentice Strikers' Bulletin*, no. 3, April/May 1937; Croucher, *Engineers at War*, loc.cit.; Knox, 'Down with Lloyd George', pp. 22-36, McKinlay, 'The 1937 Apprentices' Strike', pp. 14-32, and 'From Industrial Serf to Wage-Labourer', pp. 1-18; Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, pp. 55-63.

Notes: Most details apply to both engineering and shipbuilding; in cases of divergence, details refer to engineering only.

a. Leading ones only; b. These committees appear not to have adopted formal titles; c. The requirement that apprentices make up at the end of their contract all time lost during it.

Table 8: Timing of apprentice pay-related strikes, official negotiations and national agreements in federated engineering, 1937-64

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Dates of preceding conferences on apprentice pay claims advanced by trade unions	Start of apprentice strike	Time between first conference and start of indefinite strike (months) (3) - (2)	Time between last conference and start of indefinite strike (months) (3) - (2)	End of apprentice strike	Subsequent national pay settlement	Time between end of strike and national settlement (months) (6) - (5)
1937	5.5.36 ^a	27.3.37	n.a.	10.7	30.10.37	23.12.37 ^c	1.7
1939	26.5.38, 15.2.39	18.5.39	3.1	3.1	3.6.39	none	n.a.
1941	25.7.39, 5.10.39, 26.1.40, 28.2.41	28.2.41	18.2	0	5.4.41	21.3.41	-0.5 ^b
1952	24.9.41, 27.1.42, 14.5.42, 23.11.44, 14.6.45, 4.10.45, 14.8.46, 17.12.47, 26.7.49, 14.2.52	7.2.52, token 10.3.52, indefinite	113.5	0.8	2.4.52	17.4.52	0.5
1960	22.1.53, 18.6.53, 20.5.54, 21.10.54, 4.4.56, 20.2.58, 20.4.60	24.2.60, token 20.4.60, token 25.4.60, indefinite	87.1	0	16.5.60	20.7.60	2.1
1964	31.10.63	7.9.64, token 2.11.64, indefinite	12.1	12.1	25.11.64	22.12.64	0.9
Average	4		46.8 ^c	5.3			0.9 ^d

Sources: EEF, *Minutes of Central and Special Conferences* and A(12)20, MRC

Notes: Claims lodged at Central Conference with EEF by engineering unions (variously AEU, NEJTM and CSEU) concerning the pay of apprentices (excluding general pay claims that also covered apprentices); n.a. not applicable

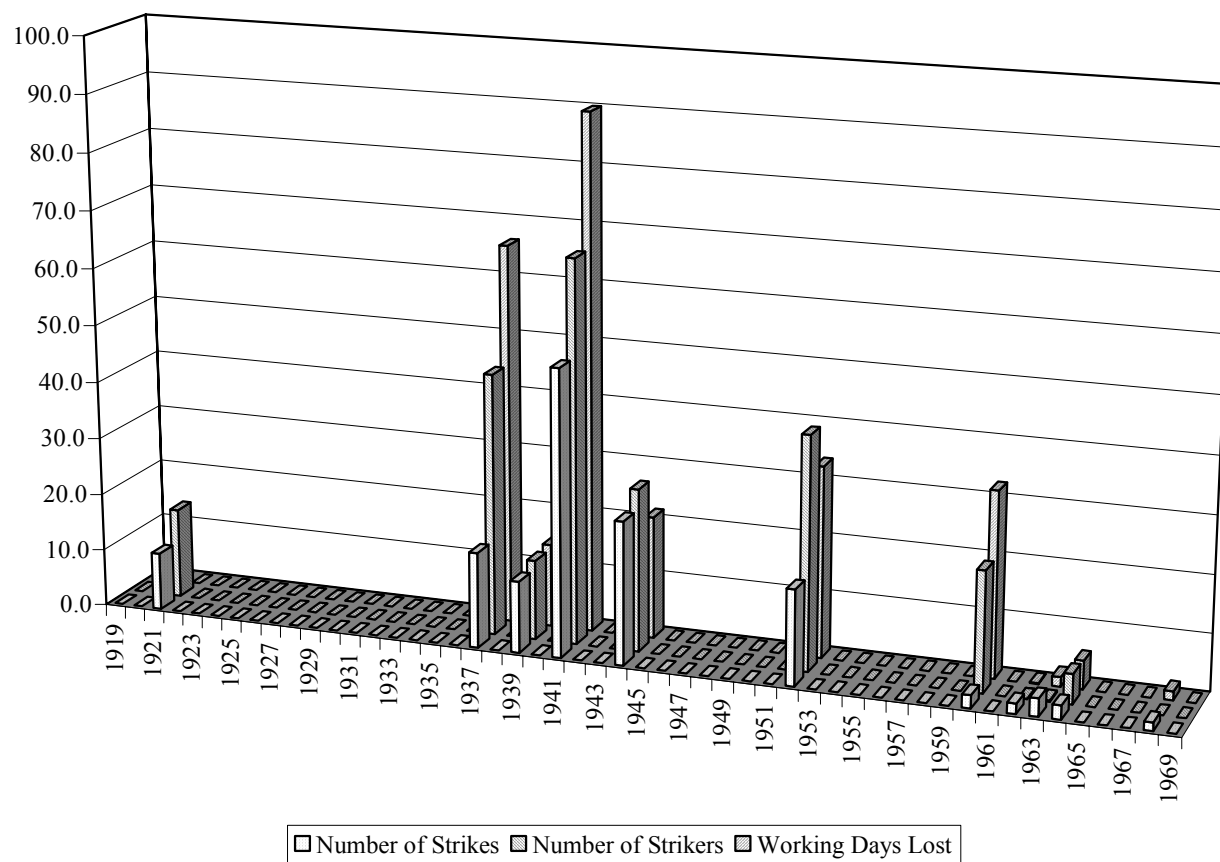
a. Claim for trade union right to represent junior males, as required for pay claims to be negotiated on their behalf

b. Strike continued after the national agreement was signed, owing to discontent in the Manchester area over its content

c. Excluding 1937

d. Excluding 1939

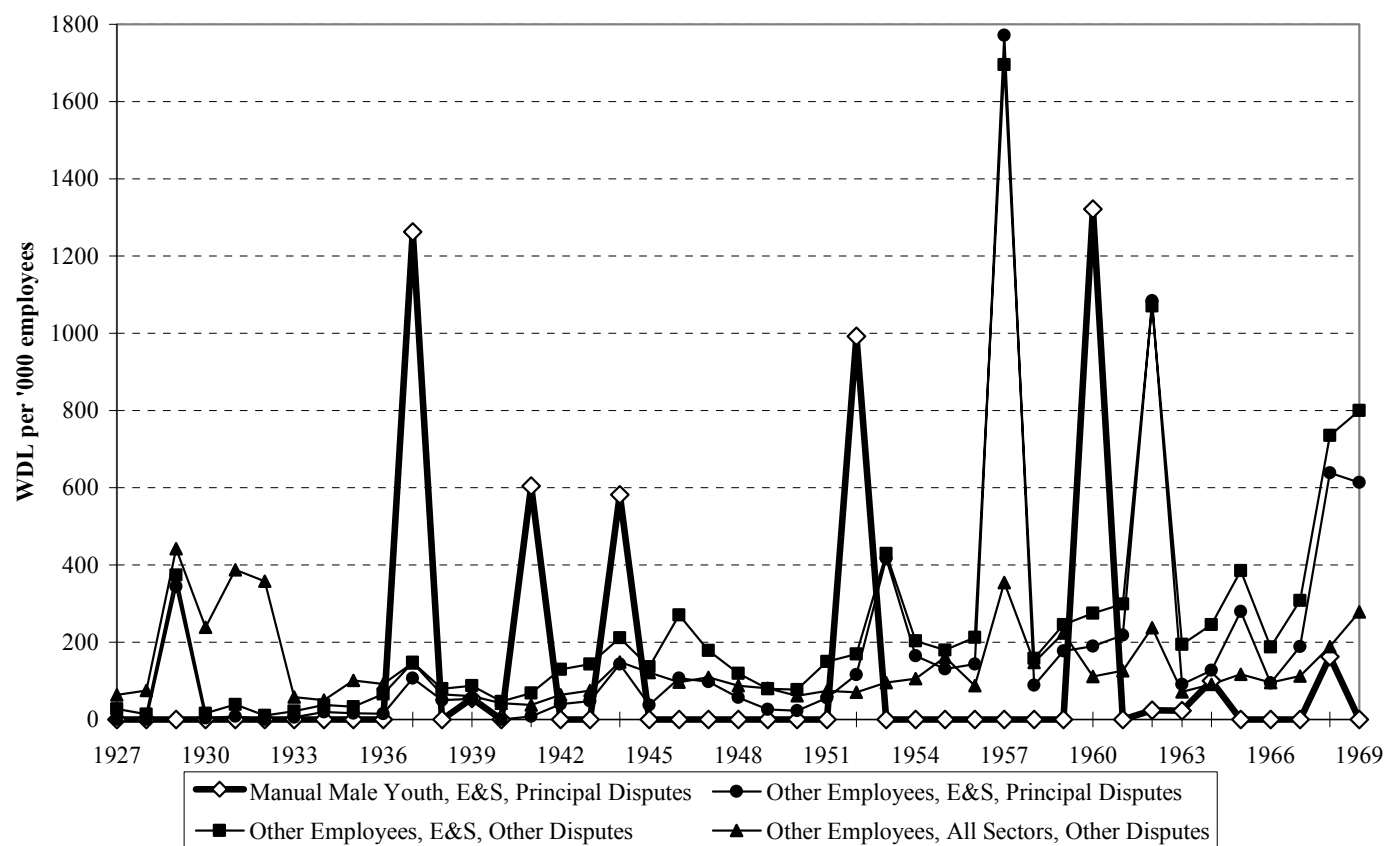
Figure 1: Young manual male share of 'principal disputes' in engineering and shipbuilding, UK 1919-69 (%)



Source: *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, monthly reports (1919-24) and annual summaries (1925-69)

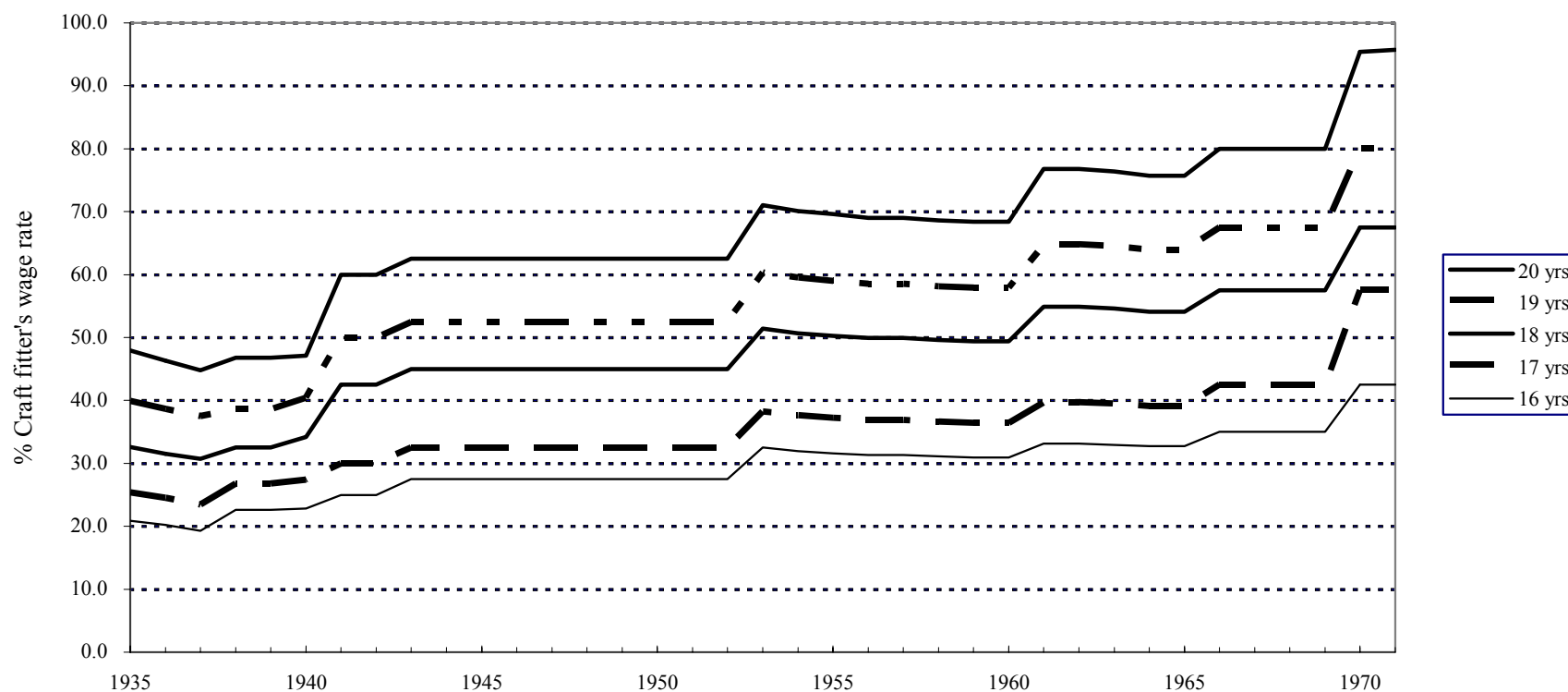
Note: 'Number of Strikers' and 'Working Days Lost' include the relevant part of disputes in progress that had started in the previous year; 'Number of Strikes' is confined to strikes that started in the current year.

Figure 2: Working days lost by category of employee, sector and dispute, UK, 1927-69



Sources. Strikes: Figure 1. Employment series (junior manual males and all) constructed from: Department of Employment and Productivity, *British Labour Statistics: Historical Abstract 1886-1968* (HMSO: 1971), Tables 114, 132; Central Statistical Office, *Statistical Digest of the War* (HMSO: 1951), Tables 19-21; *Department of Employment Gazette*, various issues, 1968-71, E. Wigham, *The Power to Manage* (Macmillan: 1973), Appendix J. The ratio of employment in two series constructed for different definitions of the same variable (by sector, age group, territory, labour market status) in the years in which the series overlap is assumed to have remained constant across time. The estimates are available from the author.

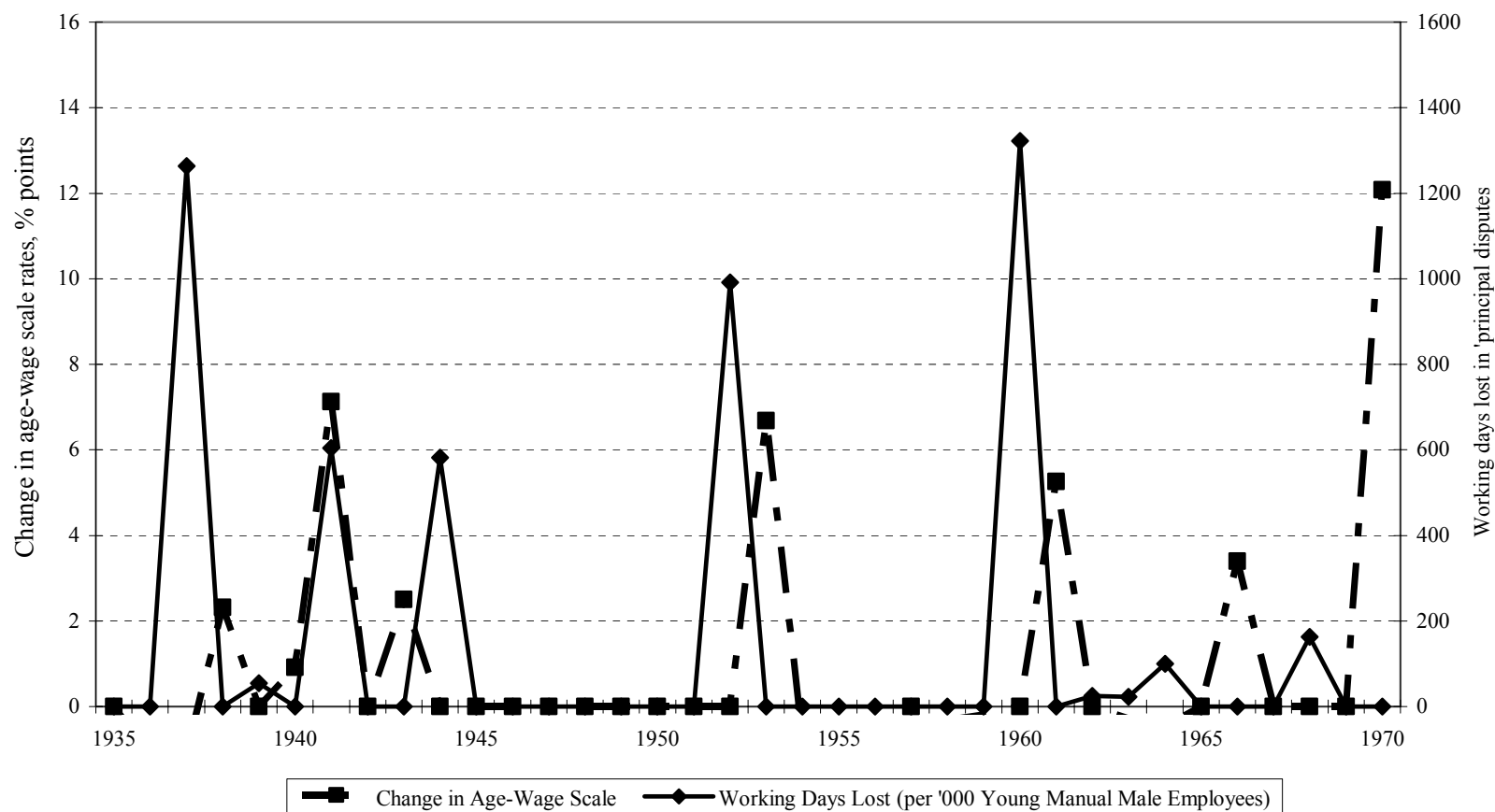
Figure 3: Apprentice age-wage scale rates, federated engineering firms, UK, 1935-71



Sources: Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Time Rates of Wages and Hours of Labour*, annual. EEF file, 'Wages of Apprentices, Boys and Youths', undated, ca. 1948, MRC.

Note: Basic weekly time rates of pay of time-rated apprentice fitters in EEF member firms as percentage of district basic weekly minimum consolidated time rates of craft fitters (except foundry). Craft rates for 1951-67 are the unweighted average of minimum rates for large districts (Manchester, Birmingham, etc.); for 1968-70, minimum national rate for fitters. Apprentice scale rates for 1935-41 are the locally recommended apprentice rates in five large EEF Associations (NE Coast, North West, Manchester, Birmingham and London); for 1941-50, apprentice scale rates in the 1941 and 1943 EEF/AEU national wage agreements; for 1951-70, age-wage scales for mechanical engineering. For 1952-64, the flat-rate component of apprentice pay is factored in pro rata.

Figure 4: Changes in age-wage scale rates (federated engineering) and working days lost by young manual males in 'principal disputes' (engineering and shipbuilding), UK, 1935-70



Sources: Figures 2, 3

Notes: 'Change in Age-Wage Scale' is unweighted mean of percentage point changes across the five age groups in Figure 3

Appendix. Large single-employer apprentice strikes in engineering and shipbuilding, 1919-69

Year	Period ^a	District and sector	Number of strikers	Working days lost	'principal dispute'	Issue	Outcome
1922	27 July - 15 August	Southport vehicles	208	n.a.	No	Proposed pay cut	Failure: pay cut imposed
1942	18-19 June 22-23 June	Northern Ireland engineering	1,000	n.a.	No	Apprentice pay rise	Failure: unconditional return to work
1942	2-21 November	Dundee shipyard	480	n.a.	No	Earnings guarantee for pieceworking apprentices	Open: return to work pending negotiations
1962	31 May - 15 June	Belfast textile engineering	880	6,500	Yes	Suspension of apprentice who forgot check-in disk	Work resumed without change
1963	11-25 Sept	Glasgow shipyard	195	6,000 ^b	Yes	Claim to bonus payments for specific tasks	Open: return to work pending negotiations
1966	6 June - 17 November	Glasgow shipyard (Fairfields)	n.a.	2,700	No	Inclusion in productivity bargaining agreement	Inclusion on terms less favourable than demanded
1968	5 June - 3 December	Barrow shipyard	420	39,800	Yes	Revised pay structure with reduced earnings	Change accepted pending arbitration

Sources: *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, passim; K. Alexander and C. Jenkins, *Fairfields: a Study of Industrial Change* (Allan Lane: 1970), pp. 149-151.

Notes: a. Covers the entire period of repeated walkouts, where relevant

b. Includes adult strikers.