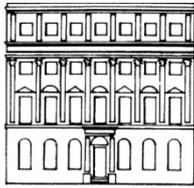


German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

Jörg Arnold:

*'De-Industrialization': A Research Project on the Societal History of
Economic Change in Britain (1970-90)*

German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 34, No. 2
(Nov 2012), pp34-60

Copyright © 2012 German Historical Institute London. All rights reserved.

**'DE-INDUSTRIALIZATION': A RESEARCH PROJECT
ON THE SOCIETAL HISTORY OF ECONOMIC
CHANGE IN BRITAIN (1970–90)**

JÖRG ARNOLD

Introduction

'If you seek for a monument, gaze around', ran the caption of a cartoon that was published in *The Independent* on 18 September 1987 (see illustration 1). The aphorism was borrowed (and somewhat clumsily translated into English) from the famous epitaph for Christopher Wren (1632–1723) in St Paul's Cathedral in London. It was at odds with the cartoon itself, which showed a well-dressed woman amidst a landscape of desolate wasteland. To contemporary observers, the person was easily recognizable as Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, whose immaculate appearance—the careful hairstyle, suit with handkerchief, high-heeled shoes, and handbag—contrasted sharply with the surrounding environment of overgrown weeds, heaps of rubble, and derelict industrial buildings. Yet the cartoonist, Nicholas Garland, did not merely convey the impression that someone had strayed into the area by mistake. Rather, the caption established a causal link between the Prime Minister and her surroundings. The cartoon compressed a photograph that had been taken during an official visit to Teesside the day before.¹ Not a brave new world, but dereliction and rubble was the lasting legacy of the 'conservative rev-

The following reflections have benefited enormously from a post-doctoral scholarship which I held at the German Historical Institute London in 2011–12. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Lehrstuhl für Neuere und Neueste Geschichte at the University of Freiburg, the GHIL, and the Workshop der Süddeutschen Lehrstühle. I should like to thank the GHIL for financial support; all members of staff for the cordial welcome and pleasant atmosphere in which I was privileged to work for six months; and all participants in the discussions for their valuable suggestions and criticism.

¹ The photograph has become famous as the 'wilderness picture'. For a reproduction see Trevor May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain 1760–1990* (2nd edn.; Harlow, 1996), 457.



FR 18 Sep 1987

Illustration 1. From *The Independent*, 18 Sept. 1987. Held in the British Cartoon Archive, NG3450, online at <www.cartoons.ac.uk>, accessed 14 Aug. 2012. The Latin inscription of the original cartoon reproduced here was changed into English for the published version by the newspaper's editor without the prior knowledge of the cartoonist. Reproduced by kind permission of Nicholas Garland.

Articles

olution' that Thatcher had set into motion since she had come to office in May 1979, or so the cartoon seemed to suggest.²

Any such claim, of course, would have been vigorously contested by her acolytes. To them, the 'walk in the wilderness' epitomized the Prime Minister's courage and determination. Like the prophets of old, she was leading her people out of the malaise of the recent past into the promised land of the future. Meanwhile, Thatcher herself responded in typically self-confident and belligerent fashion to the concerned questions of her staff as to why on earth she had allowed herself to be photographed among industrial dereliction such as this. Boosted by the Conservative Party's third General Election victory a few months earlier, she replied: 'Well, quite simple, because within four years I am going to be photographed on that site full of buildings and that will just show you what we can do in Teesside and what enterprise can do!'³

Whatever the verdict on Mrs Thatcher and her policies, there was no doubt that Teesside was caught up in a process of convulsive structural change, during which about 60,000 jobs in the steel and chemical industries had been lost since the mid 1970s. The conurbation around the town of Middlesbrough was considered an especially drastic example of a much broader socio-economic transformation to which many contemporaries attached the label of 'de-industrialization'. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the neologism was first used in 1882 when a newspaper, apparently in a spirit of pastoralism, recommended de-industrializing the population.⁴ A century later the term had not only become much more widespread, but its connotations had also changed. While 'de-industrialization' was initially used as a technical term in the context of a specific diagnosis of Britain's economic ills in the work of the economists Robert

² Dominik Geppert, *Thatchers konservative Revolution: Der Richtungswandel der britischen Tories 1975–1979* (Munich, 2002), also for the ideological foundations of Thatcherism. See also E. H. H. Green, *Thatcher* (London, 2006).

³ The Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 'Speech at Teesside Business in the Community reception', 6 June 1988, online at <www.margaretthatcher.org>, accessed 12 Aug. 2012.

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn. Oxford, 1989; online version June 2012), accessed 15 Aug. 2012.

Bacon and Walter Eltis,⁵ the term soon became a more general catchphrase that designated a worrying process of regressive development: the transformation of a great industrial power into a nation without a manufacturing base. At the end of this process was not a pastoral idyll, but a powerless, impoverished, and backward country in which, in the words of a much quoted historian, 'the illusions and dreams of 1945 would fade one by one—the Imperial and Commonwealth role, British industrial genius, and at the last, New Jerusalem itself, a dream turned to a dank reality of a segregated, subliterate, unskilled, unhealthy and institutionalised proletariat hanging on the nipple of state maternalism'.⁶

Contemporary economists disagreed about the causes of this 'illness' and about possible cures.⁷ At the same time, there was broad agreement that the label 'de-industrialization' subsumed three trends. First, there was a relative and an absolute decline in the number of workers employed in the industrial sector: absolute by comparison with the past and relative in relation to employment in the service sector. Secondly, there was the problem that the labour which had been shed could not be fully reintegrated into the economy, either in the industrial or service sector. Finally, British manufactures were not internationally competitive, resulting in a diminishing share of world trade and a serious deficit in the balance of payments.⁸

If these indicators were taken into consideration, contemporary economists and politicians agreed, then the British economy could be said to be caught up in a downward spiral. Indeed, the figures spoke for themselves. In the fifteen years between 1973 and 1988, the percentage of employees in the industrial sector as measured against overall employment declined from 42 per cent to less than 30 per cent. In the same period, the absolute number of industrial workers

⁵ Robert Bacon and Walter Eltis, *Britain's Economic Problems: Too Few Producers* (London, 1976). See also 'Budget Message to Mr Healey: Get More People into Factories', *Sunday Times*, 10 Nov. 1974; 'Restraint is the Right Course', *The Times*, 15 Apr. 1975.

⁶ Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London, 1986), 304.

⁷ Alec Cairncross, 'What is De-Industrialisation?', in Frank Blackaby (ed.), *De-Industrialisation*, National Institute of Economic and Social Research Economic Policy Papers, 2 (London, 1978), 5–17, at 5.

⁸ *Ibid.* 5–8.

Articles

decreased by more than one-third.⁹ In the manufacturing sector in a narrow sense, 5 million jobs were lost within the space of thirty years.¹⁰ And, perhaps most illuminating of all, by 1995 the combined turnover of the one-time core industries of steel, coal, and shipbuilding was less than that of the 10,000 Indian restaurants in the country.¹¹

The broader underlying trends were not confined to the United Kingdom, but were symptoms of a much broader 'structural rupture' (*Strukturbruch*).¹² This arguably occurred earlier in Britain than elsewhere, but had ramifications for all Western societies in the last third of the twentieth century (and not just for Western societies). Between the mid 1970s and the year 2000, the Western world bade farewell to the age of 'high modernity' which had been a common signature for almost a century.¹³ The economic foundation of industrialism lost importance, as did the 'liberal consensus' of the post-war decades, which, with hindsight, appeared as a Golden Age of economic growth, prosperity, and welfarism.

Historiographical Overview

The structural transformation of the 1970s and 1980s was extensively discussed, documented, and interpreted by contemporaries themselves, especially in the United Kingdom where the 'scientization of the social' (*Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen*) goes back well into the nineteenth century.¹⁴ In the motherland of the Industrial Revolution,

⁹ Gerold Ambrosius, 'Ursachen der Deindustrialisierung Westeuropas', in Werner Abelshäuser (ed.), *Umweltgeschichte: Umweltverträgliches Wirtschaften in historischer Perspektive* (Göttingen, 1994), 191–221, at 194.

¹⁰ Stephen Bazan and Tony Thirlwall, *UK Industrialization and Deindustrialization* (3rd edn. London, 1997), 19.

¹¹ Paul Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 2010), 325.

¹² Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (3rd edn. Göttingen, 2012); the quotation is taken from the first edn. (2008), 11.

¹³ Ulrich Herbert, 'Europe in High Modernity: Reflections on a Theory of the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Modern European History*, 5/1 (2007), 5–21.

¹⁴ Lutz Raphael, 'Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen als methodische und konzeptionelle Herausforderung für eine Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 22 (1996), 165–93.

pioneers of social scientific research such as Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree had produced surveys of the social conditions of the working classes which soon enjoyed canonical status. Sociologists, social psychologists, and social geographers built on classics such as these as they began to map the social and cultural consequences of the transformation process in the second half of the twentieth century, one that seemed to affect Britain more severely than other Western nations because of its deep-seated structural economic problems.¹⁵ In addition, intellectuals, cultural critics, and journalists put forward influential interpretations of the transformation.¹⁶ Finally, artists, in particular, novelists, film directors, and musicians engaged extensively with economic change and its socio-cultural consequences.¹⁷ During the 1950s and 1960s, however, many social scientists were still troubled by quite a different problem. They asked whether the spread of affluence would lead to the *embourgeoisement* of industrial workers and the erosion of collective identities and traditional ways of life. In this respect, at least, the crises and class conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s seemed to have set the record straight again.¹⁸

For the historian, such a state of affairs offers benefits as well as pitfalls.¹⁹ On the one hand, historical scholarship can build on the

¹⁵ See e.g. Ken Coates and Richard Silburn, *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen* (4th edn. Nottingham, 1983); John Hayes and Peter Nutman, *Understanding the Unemployed: The Psychological Effects of Unemployment* (London, 1981); Sheila Allen, Alan Waton, Kate Purcell, and Stephen Wood (eds.), *The Experience of Unemployment* (London, 1986); Geoffrey Beattie, *Survivors of Steel City: A Portrait of Sheffield* (London, 1986); John Westergaard, Iain Noble, and Alan Walker, *After Redundancy: The Experience of Economic Insecurity* (Cambridge, 1989); Ian Taylor, Karen Evans, and Penny Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities: A Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London, 1996).

¹⁶ See e.g. Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, Jan. 1979, 14–20; Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?', *Marxism Today*, Sept. 1978, 279–86.

¹⁷ On cinematic representations see Cora Kaplan, 'The Death of the Working-Class Hero', *New Formations*, 52 (2004), 94–110.

¹⁸ See Chas Critcher, 'Sociology, Cultural Studies and the Post-War Working Class', in John Clarke, Chas Critcher, and Richard Johnson, *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (London, 1979), 13–40, at 15.

¹⁹ On the relationship between contemporary history and the social sciences more generally see Rüdiger Graf and Kim Christian Priemel, 'Zeitgeschichte

Articles

extensive empirical data that the social sciences have generated. It can also make use of contemporary explanations of structural change. On the other hand, the danger exists of underestimating the extent to which contemporary knowledge was produced within specific contexts and for specific purposes, and of merely 'retelling' the findings of contemporaries.²⁰

In Germany, two important essays have recently been published which, borrowing a notion from the social historian Hans Günter Hockerts, seek to conceptualize the decades 'after the boom' as a 'pre-history of contemporary problems' (*Vorgeschichte der Probleme der Gegenwart*).²¹ Both stress the nature of the 1970s and 1980s as a caesura and draw attention to the many political, social, and cultural repercussions of economic change. They argue that the structural rupture not only ushered in a new mode of production, but also brought in its wake 'revolutionary social change' (*sozialen Wandel von revolutionärer Qualität*), as Anselm Doering-Manteuffel und Lutz Raphael have put it.²² In addition, since the turn of the millennium a number of empirically dense monographs on the economic and social history of the transformation process have been published;²³ others are in the making.²⁴

in der Welt der Sozialwissenschaften: Legitimität und Originalität einer Disziplin', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 4 (2011), 479–508.

²⁰ Raphael, 'Verwissenschaftlichung', 189.

²¹ Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael, *Nach dem Boom*; see the multiple review in *sehpunkte*, 9/5 (2009); Konrad Jarausch, 'Verkannter Strukturwandel: Die siebziger Jahre als Vorgeschichte der Probleme der Gegenwart', in id. (ed.), *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte* (Göttingen, 2008), 9–26.

²² Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael, *Nach dem Boom*, 10.

²³ Götz Albert, *Wettbewerbsfähigkeit und Krise der deutschen Schiffbauindustrie: 1945–1990* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998); Christoph Nonn, *Die Ruhrbergbaukrise: Entindustrialisierung und Politik 1958–1969* (Göttingen, 2000); Stephan H. Lindner, *Den Faden verloren: Die westdeutsche und die französische Textilindustrie auf dem Rückzug (1930/45–1990)* (Munich, 2001); Stefan Goch, *Eine Region im Kampf mit dem Strukturwandel: Bewältigung von Strukturwandel und Strukturpolitik im Ruhrgebiet* (Essen, 2002).

²⁴ Above all the following collaborative research projects: 'Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft' at the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, online at <http://www.ifz-muenchen.de/krise_der_arbeitsgesellschaft.html>, accessed 14 Aug. 2012; 'Fortschrittskonkurrenz und Krisenkongruenz: Wirtschaftlicher und sozialer Wandel im geteilten Europa des letzten Drittels des

By and large, this body of work follows a sectorial approach, by either looking at specific industries, or investigating particular aspects of structural change, such as the crisis of the welfare state, the problem of mass unemployment, or urban redevelopment projects. Often, developments in the UK serve as point of comparison, but authors do not always pay enough attention to the peculiarities of the British case. There is no need to postulate a British 'special path' to recognize that, in certain important respects,²⁵ the British experience differed from developments on the Continent.

Just as in Germany, in English-speaking countries, too, the 1970s and 1980s have been subjected to a first wave of historical enquiry.²⁶ In Britain, the perception of the Thatcher years as marking a radical rupture contributed to the establishment of the 'field of British contemporary history after 1945' in the first place.²⁷ Here, too, there is a noticeable tendency to lighten up the prevailing 'dark view' of the

20. Jahrhunderts' at the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung in Potsdam, online at <<http://www.zzf-pdm.de/site/534/default.aspx>> , accessed 14 Aug. 2012; and 'Nach dem Boom', a collaboration between the Seminar für Zeitgeschichte Tübingen and the Fachbereich Neuere und Neueste Geschichte at the University of Trier, online at <<http://www.nach-dem-boom.uni-tuebingen.de>>, accessed 14 Aug. 2012.

²⁵ Bernd Weisbrod, 'Der englische "Sonderweg" in der neueren Geschichte', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 16 (1990), 233–52.

²⁶ See the following recent general histories of the period: Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy: The Story of Politics, Society and Popular Culture in Britain since 1975* (London, 2007); Alwyn W. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London, 2008); id., *Rejoice, Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s* (London, 2010); Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London, 2009); Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the Thatcher Era* (London, 2009); Addison, *No turning back*; Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role? The United Kingdom 1970–1990* (Oxford 2010); Andy McSmith, *No such Thing as Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London, 2011); Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974–1979* (London, 2012).

²⁷ See Dominik Geppert, 'Großbritannien seit 1979: Politik und Gesellschaft', *Neue Politische Literatur*, 54/1 (2009), 61–86, at 62. See also the review article by Kerstin Brückweh and Martina Steber, 'Aufregende Zeiten: Ein Forschungsbericht zu Neuansätzen der britischen Zeitgeschichte des Politischen', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 50 (2010), 671–701.

Articles

'crisis decade' of the 1970s.²⁸ 'If Britain was so sickly in the seventies, where did people get the money at the time to buy so many records and bold pairs of trousers?', asks Andy Beckett in his monograph, *When the Lights Went Out*.²⁹

Overall, the English-language historiography is still dominated by an emphasis on politics, despite a recent tendency to open up the field of enquiry towards social historical and cultural historical approaches.³⁰ The literature shows a tendency to refigure the controversies and battles of the Thatcher years rather than to historicize them, a temptation which is undoubtedly reinforced by the fact that many authors lived through the decades that they are analysing historically. The dual effects of this close connection between lived experience and historical subject matter appear to be first, to take knowledge of the societal reverberations of structural change for granted, and secondly, to focus mainly on political causes and consequences.³¹

The research project that will be presented in the following pages builds on the methodological reflections and empirical findings of the German- and English-language research on contemporary history. In contrast to the present-centred and/or sectorial approaches of much current research, however, the project seeks to develop a holistic approach to investigating the broader repercussions of structural economic change. It aims to produce a history of departures from the age of high modernity by analysing structural change through the prism of de-industrialization.

Towards a Societal History of Departures

The use of the contemporary term 'de-industrialization' as an analytical category is not without dangers, but it offers a chance to focus the

²⁸ Hartmut Kaelble, *The 1970s in Europe: A Period of Disillusionment or Promise?* (London, 2010), 7.

²⁹ Beckett, *When the Lights went Out*, 3.

³⁰ See Brückweh and Steber, 'Aufregende Zeiten'.

³¹ See e.g. Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain*, 1: 'I remember where I was when it began . . . I remember with equal clarity where I was when it ended.' See also Dominik Geppert, 'Der Thatcher-Konsens: Der Einsturz der britischen Nachkriegsordnung in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9/2 (2011), 170–93, at 187.

direction of the inquiry and historicize the subject matter. To write the history of structural change as a history of de-industrialization means to concentrate on what is lost, rather than on what replaces it. At the centre stands the moment of departure, not of arrival. This perspective does not entail accepting contemporary predictions about the future which were often shrill and sometimes verging on the apocalyptic. After all, even in the 'post-industrial' world of the twenty-first century, the industrial sector retained an important place.³² But it does mean that the project is primarily interested in the vanishing of the old rather than in the emergence of the new.

To write the history of structural change as a history of de-industrialization, moreover, means to view the secular process of transformation not from the perspective of our present, as a 'pre-history of today's problems' (*Vorgeschichte gegenwärtiger Problemkonstellationen*), but to reconstruct the experiences and expectations of contemporaries themselves, that is, to recapture the transformation in its open-endedness.³³ There are pragmatic reasons for this as well as more general considerations. By putting a deliberate distance between ourselves and the period under investigation it should be possible to treat the 1970s and 1980s – two decades which, after all, are just one generation removed from the present – as a 'foreign country' and thereby throw their distinctness and otherness into sharp relief. Moreover, since the global financial crisis of 2007–9 the ground has been shifting so rapidly that any attempt to write the history of the 1970s and 1980s as a 'pre-history of today's problems' looks like a very hazardous undertaking indeed. In Germany whole industrial sectors which, until a few years ago, were considered a sign of back-

³² See Herbert's critique of the label 'post-industrial', in id., 'Europe in High Modernity', 19; Jarausch, 'Verkannter Strukturwandel', 22 places a similar emphasis.

³³ The phrase goes back to Hans Günter Hockerts, 'Zeitgeschichte in Deutschland: Begriffe, Methoden, Themenfelder', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 113/1 (1993), 98–127, at 124; id. 'Einführung', in id. (ed.), *Koordinaten deutscher Geschichte in der Epoche des Ost-West-Konflikts* (Munich, 2004), pp. vii–xv, at viii. The phrase is taken as a starting point by Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael, *Nach dem Boom*, 7; Jarausch, 'Verkannter Strukturwandel'; and Winfried Süß and Dietmar Süß, 'Zeitgeschichte der Arbeit: Beobachtungen und Perspektiven', in Knud Andresen, Ursula Bitzegeio, and Jürgen Mittag (eds.), *Nach dem Strukturbruch? Kontinuität und Wandel von Arbeitswelten* (Bonn, 2011), 345–65, at 346.

Articles

ward-minded traditionalism have been rediscovered as being of pre-eminent importance to the economic well-being of the nation as a whole. As the sociologist Stephan Lessenich has pointedly remarked: 'the industrial world, to which pundits had already bid their farewells, apparently has a life after death.'³⁴ Not least, the idea that a post-industrial UK might be considered 'thoroughly modern' and held up as a shining example to the industrial economies of 'old' Continental Europe, very widespread during the early 2000s,³⁵ has recently lost much of its appeal under the combined impact of economic crisis and inner-city riots.

Finally, underlying the approach is the more general concern to give a voice to the 'casualties of history', to the people uprooted by the transformation process, whose perceptions and visions are all too easily dismissed by contemporary historians as being 'trapped in a time wrap' or offering 'little more than a better yesterday'.³⁶ In doing so, the project deliberately adopts a perspective which E. P. Thompson famously expressed as follows in the introduction to his classic, *The Making of the English Working Class*:

I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been dying. Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not.³⁷

³⁴ Stephan Lessenich, review of Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael, *Nach dem Boom*, in *sehpunkte*, 9/5 (2009), at <<http://www.sehpunkte.de/2009/05/15521.html>>, accessed 16 Aug. 2012.

³⁵ Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, *Geschichte Großbritanniens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2010), 12. See also Dominik Geppert, 'The Crisis of the Welfare State: Thatcherism as a Model for German Christian Democracy?', in Arnd Bauerkämper and Christiane Eisenberg, *Britain as a Model of German Society? German Views* (Augsburg, 2006), 168–83, at 179.

³⁶ Addison, *No Turning Back*, 288, with reference to 'union militants'; Harrison, *Finding a Role?*, 530, with reference to 'Thatcher's widely scattered critics'.

³⁷ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1st edn. 1963; London, 1991), 12.

By the end of the 1980s, de-industrialization seemed to have lost much of the disturbing, not to say apocalyptic, potential which had characterized the debate in the UK between the mid 1970s and the early 1980s. This was in part due to a modest process of re-industrialization after the deep recession of the early Thatcher years, but it was mainly because structural change had brought in its wake not a general deterioration in living standards, but a sharpening of social inequality between the haves and the have-nots. While prosperity continued to rise for the majority of the population, a large minority of several million people saw their real incomes substantially reduced.³⁸ Whereas the Conservatives had spoken in their General Election Manifesto of 1983 of an economic transformation ‘from the age of the smokestack to the age of the microchip’, allegedly made all the more convulsive by the obstructionism of the trade unions,³⁹ four years later they claimed to have ushered in moral renewal and to have led the way to a prosperous, service-oriented future: ‘We have encouraged growth in these crucial areas of new enterprise which provide the foundation for the jobs of the future – self-employment, small firms, the creation of new enterprise, the expanding service sector – in particular tourism and leisure – and new technology.’⁴⁰ In the early 1990s Bill Rubinstein published an influential monograph in which he sought to demonstrate that Britain’s economic strength had always been based primarily on trade and services.⁴¹ In a more subtle version of this argument, Stephen Broadberry has attempted to show that the failure of Fordism in Britain opened up new opportunities for British manufacturing by allowing it to return to older traditions of craftsmanship.⁴²

³⁸ Addison, *No Turning Back*, 315–40; Harrison, *Finding a Role?*, 175–87.

³⁹ ‘Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1983’, in Iain Dale (ed.), *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos, 1900–1997* (London, 2000), 283–310, at 286, 290.

⁴⁰ ‘The Next Moves Forward: Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1987’, *ibid.* 313–51, at 327.

⁴¹ W. D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture, and Decline in Britain 1750–1990* (London, 1993).

⁴² Stephen Broadberry, ‘The Performance of Manufacturing’, in Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, iii. *Structural Change and Growth* (Cambridge, 2004), 57–83, at 83.

Articles

It did not escape the attention of contemporary observers that the social and cultural repercussions of structural change were stratified regionally and according to sector. Across Europe and North America de-industrialization developed its own geography.⁴³ Affected were above all the 'old' industries which had formed the backbone of nineteenth-century industrialism—coal, iron and steel, textiles, shipbuilding—but also, and especially in Britain, the 'new' industries of the inter-war period—mechanical engineering, car manufacturing, the aviation industry—and, alongside these, those regions that during the period of high modernity had been considered the 'heartlands' of their respective economies. In order to map the dimensions of the economic change of the last third of the twentieth century and to investigate the myriad repercussions on the lives of contemporaries as fully as possible, the project adopts a regional approach. In so doing, it hopes to do justice to the demand that the history of the structural rupture should not be written from a single 'epicentre' but must aim 'to take into consideration connections and reciprocal relations between functionally different fields'.⁴⁴

The project focuses on the North of Britain in the two decades between 1970 and 1990.⁴⁵ 'The North' is taken as both a specific locality and a social idea.⁴⁶ Indeed, it is remarkable how in contemporary debates 'the North' tended to extend ever further southwards until it comprised almost all of Britain's standard regions, with the exception of the South West, the South East, East Anglia, and the East Midlands.⁴⁷ For the purposes of the present research project, 'the

⁴³ Ron Martin and Bob Rowthorn, *The Geography of De-Industrialisation* (Basingstoke, 1986); Alan R. H. Baker and Mark Billinge, *Geographies of England: The North-South Divide, Material and Imagined* (Cambridge, 2004). See also Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945* (4th edn. London, 2003), 243–60.

⁴⁴ Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael, *Nach dem Boom*, 92.

⁴⁵ On the regional structure of the United Kingdom see Christopher M. Law, *British Regional Development Since World War I* (London, 1980), 13–31.

⁴⁶ See also Steven High's reflections on the invention of the North American 'rust belt' in his *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1964–1984* (Toronto, 2003), 19.

⁴⁷ See Harvey Armstrong and David Riley, 'The "North-South" Controversy and Britain's Regional Problems', *Local Economy*, 2 (1987), 93–105; Ron Martin, 'Thatcherism and Britain's Industrial Landscape', in Martin and Rowthorn, *The Geography of De-Industrialisation*, 238–90.

North' is wherever structural change led to socio-economic convulsions: the coal-mining and steel districts of South Wales and the shipyards on Clydeside as much as the 'manufacturing heartlands' of the Midlands and the heavy industrial centres of Northern England. Such a broad regional approach offers distinct advantages over the prevailing sectorial approach. It guards against the dangers of losing sight of the industrial workers once the industries have shut down and the workforce has been made redundant, and of neglecting the impact on the larger communities in which they live.⁴⁸

Context: Three Time Periods

The societal history of de-industrialization cannot be written without some knowledge of the historical spaces of experience (*Erfahrungsräume*) which influenced contemporary attempts to make sense of what was happening.⁴⁹ For those living in the 1970s and 1980s, three partly overlapping time periods were crucial.

First, there was the experience of accelerated social change from the 1890s, the beginnings of which predated the personal experience of almost everyone except the very old, but whose consequences were still ubiquitous. The modern world – industrial, urban, and mobile; disenchanting, mechanized, and democratized – had come into being at the turn of the century, not exactly at the same time or in an ideal-typical form everywhere, but to such an extent that we can speak of a qualitative change by comparison with the preceding period.⁵⁰

The second period was characterized by the vulnerability of the industrialized world to crises in the 1920s and 1930s. For cohorts over the age of 50, this period formed part of their lived experience. These crises had not only destroyed the hopes of social participation and

⁴⁸ See Martin Geyer's criticism of a still dominant 'structural history without any people'. Martin H. Geyer, 'Auf der Suche nach der Gegenwart: Neue Arbeiten zur Geschichte der 1970er und 1980er Jahre', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 50 (2010), 643–69, at 648.

⁴⁹ On the concept of *Erfahrungsraum* see Reinhart Koselleck, "'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont': Zwei historische Kategorien', in id., *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 349–75.

⁵⁰ See Herbert, 'Europe in High Modernity', 10–11.

Articles

inclusion associated with the end of the First World War but, in the form of mass unemployment, had also made the nightmare of social impoverishment a reality.

The third period, finally, was a thirty-year-long economic boom which, from the early 1960s at the latest, brought historically unprecedented material prosperity even for ordinary workers. Prosperity and security were accompanied by processes of cultural change and liberalization which placed a question mark over traditional patterns of orientation. Not least through the expansion of the university sector, they allowed social participation to appear desirable and within reach even for those from classes which had not traditionally taken advantage of education.⁵¹

The three periods outlined here provide the experience underlying perceptions of the crises since the mid 1970s. It is remarkable how often, in the English-language literature, we find expressions such as: 'For the first time since the 1930s . . .'. The 1970s and 1980s are treated as a recurrence of a period which, it was thought, had been overcome.⁵²

Peculiarities of British Developments

The structural economic changes of the 1970s and 1980s affected the whole of Europe (and North America). If we look closely, however, it is possible to discern national peculiarities which gave these changes a specific profile, especially in Britain as the motherland of the Industrial Revolution. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the technological lead it enjoyed had given Britain worldwide supremacy in classical industrial production. But only a few decades later, this had already given way to anxiety that Britain would not be able to hold its lead. Thus for Britain, the first of the spaces of experience

⁵¹ See Lutz Raphael, 'Transformations of Industrial Labour in Western Europe: Intergenerational Change of Life Cycles, Occupation and Mobility 1970–2000', *German History*, 30/1 (2012), 100–19, at 100.

⁵² Addison, *No Turning Back*, 326; also at 314, 336. On the re-evaluation of the 'devil's decade' of the 1930s in the 1980s, see John Baxendale and Christopher Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties. A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (Basingstoke, 1996), 140–67; Roger Bromley, *Lost Narratives: Popular Fictions, Politics and Recent History* (London, 1988).

outlined above, based on Ulrich Herbert's model of high modernity, must be extended further back in time. It is no coincidence that a recent survey of modern British history starts in 1851, the year in which Queen Victoria opened the first World Exhibition in Hyde Park.⁵³

The position Britain had achieved went along with a fear of decline, especially when it transpired that the country's lead in important areas of industrial production was indeed shrinking. Discussion of Britain's real or supposed decline became a leitmotiv of social communication in the twentieth century.⁵⁴ Of course, Britain also experienced a Golden Age of unprecedented economic growth between 1950 and 1973.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, from the point of view of the 1970s and 1980s, looking back was bitter, especially for the neo-liberals around Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher who were struggling for political and cultural hegemony. 'Against our better judgement, we competed with the Socialists in offering to perform what is in fact beyond the power of government', we read in a Conservative Research Department Discussion Paper by Keith Joseph and Angus Maude in 1975. It looked back to the Heath government, but also further back to the Conservative governments of the 1950s and 1960s, and even to those of the pre-war period. 'The trouble began probably over a century ago when our lead and our national initiative began to falter. We made things worse when, after the war, we chose the path of consensus . . . We have intensified the very evils which we believed, with the best of intentions, that we could wipe away.'⁵⁶

⁵³ Jeremy Black, *A Brief History of Britain*, iv. *A Nation Transformed 1851–2010* (London, 2010).

⁵⁴ Andrew Gamble, 'Theories and Explanations of British Decline', in Richard English and Michael Kenny, *Rethinking British Decline* (Houndmills, 2000), 1–22, at 4; Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (Harlow, 2001); Philippa Levine, 'Decline and Vitality: The Contradictions and Complexities of Twentieth-Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 21/3 (2010), 396–404, at 398.

⁵⁵ Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, 'Introduction: The Uses (and Abuses) of Affluence', in eid., *An Affluent Society? Britain's 'Golden Age' Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), 1–14.

⁵⁶ The Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 464K: 'Shadow Cabinet: Circulated Paper (Joseph, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Policy')', 4 Apr. 1975, available online at <www.margarethatcher.org>, accessed 14 Aug. 2012. The

Articles

On the other hand, during the long boom period economic decline was relative, not absolute. It was not by chance that in 1959 the Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had fought the election under the slogan: 'You've never had it so good.'⁵⁷ This was true, yet attentive observers had not missed the fact that Britain's economic growth was clearly lagging behind that of the Continental economies. In the early 1970s, British unemployment for the first time reached a million again, and by 1975 inflation had risen to 27 per cent.⁵⁸ Working hours lost to strikes reached levels last seen in the 1920s. In 1979, in the face of the wave of strikes during the 'winter of discontent', Isaac Kramnick posed the concerned question: 'Is Britain Dying?'.⁵⁹ Of course, he was not entirely serious, but the alarmist rhetoric showed the path which the country had taken since Harold Macmillan's complacent election slogan twenty years earlier.

In the face of structural economic change, the all-party post-war consensus broke down. This had seen a mixed economy, anti-cyclical economic policy, and the welfare state as guarantees for full employment, prosperity, and social peace. While this consensus had already started to crumble in industrial relations since the 1960s, allowing contemporary observers to speak of the 'English disease', it continued to draw a great deal of legitimacy from memories of the Second World War, when the whole nation, according to a potent myth, had come together to repel German aggression in a common effort, thus laying the foundations for a New Jerusalem.⁶⁰

paper gave rise to controversial internal discussions. See Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *Keith Joseph* (Chesham, Bucks., 2001), 287–9.

⁵⁷ The slogan was taken from a speech that Macmillan had already given on 20 July 1957. There he had said: 'Indeed, let's be frank about it; most of our people have never had it so good. Go around the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms, and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in a lifetime.' The speech is printed in Merle Tönnies and Claus-Ulrich Viol, *British Political Speeches: From Churchill to Blair* (Stuttgart, 2001), 32–62, at 51. See also 'Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1959', in Dale (ed.), *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos*, 127–39.

⁵⁸ Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, 152.

⁵⁹ Isaac Kramnick (ed.), *Is Britain Dying? Perspectives on the Current Crisis* (Ithaca, NY, 1979).

⁶⁰ See Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory* (London, 2000); Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties*, 116–67.

Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government distanced itself clearly from this ethos of the nation as a community of solidarity in both its rhetoric and its practical policies.⁶¹ 'Who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families', the Iron Lady declared in a notorious interview in the autumn of 1987.⁶² As early as 1981, her Secretary of State for Employment, Norman Tebbit, had urged the unemployed in the crisis-ridden industrial regions of the North to get on their bikes and look for work elsewhere.⁶³

While it can be said that for the United Kingdom as a whole, the Golden Age was less in evidence than in many of the states of Continental Europe, this applied even more to the areas north of the line linking Bristol, Oxford, and Cambridge. To some extent, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the North of England, the North West, Wales, and parts of Yorkshire had been problem regions since the economic crisis of the inter-war period, marked by the decline of traditional industries, structural unemployment, and social conflict.

During the Golden Age, the discrepancy between a stagnating North and prospering South had at least been contained, though not resolved, by a targeted structural policy. Under the changed economic conditions of the period after the boom, however, it re-emerged, with the West Midlands, centre of the automotive industry, now also being sucked into the downwards spiral.⁶⁴ Especially during the deep recession of the early 1980s, the stagnating traditional industries were exposed to a storm of destruction,⁶⁵ which in Eric Hobsbawm's view had nothing creative about it. Rather, he suggested, it resembled an 'industrial holocaust'.⁶⁶

⁶¹ On the relationship between political rhetoric and government practice see Dominik Geppert, 'Thatcher-Konsens', 192.

⁶² The Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 'Interview for *Woman's Own*', 23 Sept. 1987, available online at <www.margaretthatcher.org>, accessed 14 Aug. 2012.

⁶³ May, *An Economic and Social History*, 478–9.

⁶⁴ See Peter Scott, 'Regional Development and Policy', in Floud and Johnson (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History*, iii. 333–67.

⁶⁵ Ronald L. Martin, 'The Contemporary Debate over the North–South Divide: Images and Realities of Regional Inequality in Late Twentieth-Century Britain', in Baker and Billinge (eds.), *Geographies of England*, 15–43, at 29.

⁶⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London, 1994), 304.

Articles

Research Design

The research project presented here commences by investigating the development of important traditional and 'new' industries during the structural rupture of the 1970s and 1980s, concentrating on iron and steel,⁶⁷ mining,⁶⁸ shipbuilding, and the automotive industries.⁶⁹ The reason for this is not only the economic weight that these industries still, in part, possessed, but also because they were of outstanding historical and thus identity-creating significance for the North.

Beyond this, comparing a number of classic industries with a 'new' one makes it possible to link the investigation with the findings of contemporary industrial sociology. Since the 1960s, this had been working on creating a typology of the British working class in which employment was linked with world view and life worlds. In a widely discussed article, David Lockwood distinguished three ideal types and assigned them to specific branches of industry:⁷⁰ the 'traditional proletarian' who worked in mining, shipbuilding, or on the docks, lived in an 'occupational community', and typically displayed a dichotomous world view; the 'deferential worker' who Lockwood saw as economically active in rural family businesses and who had a hierarchical view of society; and, finally, the 'privatised worker' who worked in new industries such as the automotive or chemical industries, was largely detached from the context of collective living, and for whom work was a 'necessary evil' mainly required to satisfy a need for increased consumption. A few years later, a large study of the industrial workforce of the boom town of Luton described this type as 'the affluent worker'.⁷¹

⁶⁷ See Yves Mény and Vincent Wright (eds.), *The Politics of Steel: Western Europe and the Steel Industry in the Crisis Years (1974–1984)* (Berlin, 1987).

⁶⁸ On developments up to 1982 see William Ashworth, *The History of the British Coal Industry, v. 1946–1982: The Nationalized Industry* (Oxford, 1986).

⁶⁹ Broadberry, 'The Performance of Manufacturing', 66–70.

⁷⁰ David Lockwood, 'Sources of Variation in Working-Class Images of Society', in Martin Bulmer (ed.), *Working-Class Images of Society* (Aldershot, 1994), 16–31; first published in *Sociological Review*, 14/3 (1966), 16–31.

⁷¹ John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer, and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge, 1968); *eid.*,

Part one of the research project takes an economic and political history approach. It asks about the economic causes of the structural change and especially political attempts to shape it. Why did all the industries studied here go through crises, some of which were life-threatening? What impact did the change in government of May 1979 have on the specific course of industrial development in the period under investigation?

The Thatcher government's confrontational industrial policy was described as counter-productive and potentially catastrophic as early as summer 1979, not only by members of the Opposition, but also by critics within the Conservative Party. Criticism was directed less at the Prime Minister herself than at her Secretary of State for Industry, the monetarist Sir Keith Joseph. During a single House of Commons debate in the summer of 1979, the Opposition described him as a 'medieval alchemist', a 'back-street bruiser', and an 'angel of death'.⁷² In contrast to these accusations, apologists for the new course claimed that after years of self-delusion they were at last facing up to harsh realities and proposing a realistic industrial policy. They were not angels of death, they said, but grave diggers for a long defunct industrial culture who were preparing the way for a competitive industry of the future.

The study will examine to what extent the Thatcher government's conviction that it only had this one chance to halt the decline of a once great nation exacerbated the crisis-ridden structural change in Britain. '[We must be] cruel to be kind, instead of killing the country with kindness', as the influential political adviser John Hoskyns put it in a memorandum on the steelworkers' strike of 1980. To stay firm and not to give in was the recurrent neo-Conservative mantra of the early 1980s. 'You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning.'⁷³ To think the unthinkable: letting British Leyland, the state-owned car manufacturer, go bankrupt; allowing Liverpool and Merseyside to

The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour (Cambridge, 1968); eid., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge, 1969).

⁷² House of Commons, Hansard, Fifth Series, vol. 970, Commons Sitting of 17 July 1979, cols. 1328-89 (Shotton steelworks).

⁷³ The Margaret Thatcher Foundation, Speech to Conservative Party Conference, 10 Oct. 1980, fo. 11. This speech is available online at <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104431>>, accessed 15 Aug. 2012.

Articles

decay.⁷⁴ Appeals and mind-games such as these repeatedly turn up in government documents. The project will also look much more generally, however, at whether contemporaries overestimated the extent to which politics could influence secular processes of transformation—a trend, incidentally, that the historiography, which occasionally seems to be blinded by Margaret Thatcher’s charisma, appears to be continuing.

While part one looks at the crisis of industrialism in Britain from the perspective of economic and political history, part two takes a social and cultural history approach. What repercussions did the change have for the life path and self-image of industrial workers and their families? How can the findings of contemporary social sciences be historicized?

For many of the predominantly male workers, the structural break meant primarily, and in concrete terms, the loss of their jobs. This not only made the financial basis on which their lives and those of their families were built insecure, but also unsettled the hierarchies and patterns of identity which were constitutive for many working-class families.⁷⁵ The identity of producers who, organized in trade unions, had considerable economic and socio-political bargaining power, was radically called into question. The project will ask how attractive workers found the neo-liberal alternatives, which tried to take workers out of their collective contexts and to present them as independent and responsible consumers,⁷⁶ especially in a welfare regime that, in the case of loss of employment, guaranteed not to maintain social status, but mere subsistence.⁷⁷ In other words, unemployment as an experience has a cultural dimension as well as a social one.⁷⁸ The involuntary loss of a job, which in many cases was followed by a long period of unemployment, premature retirement from working life,

⁷⁴ The National Archives, PREM 19/576, Peter Cropper, ‘CPRS Report on Merseyside’, 19 June 1981.

⁷⁵ See Raphael, ‘Transformations of Industrial Labour’, 104, 115–18.

⁷⁶ See Avner Offer, ‘British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers’, *Contemporary British History*, 22/4 (2008), 537–71, at 540, 546.

⁷⁷ See Hans Günter Hockerts and Winfried Süß (eds.), *Soziale Ungleichheit im Sozialstaat: Deutschland und Großbritannien im Vergleich* (Munich, 2010).

⁷⁸ See Thomas Raithel and Thomas Schlemmer (eds.), *Die Rückkehr der Arbeitslosigkeit: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im europäischen Kontext 1973 bis 1989* (Munich, 2009).

or, at best, employment in one of the new service sector jobs, undermined not only the social status of those affected, but also the way in which they saw themselves.⁷⁹

If we look through the extensive contemporary literature on the subject, three features stand out in a historical perspective.⁸⁰ First, there was a tension between the claim to scientific objectivity on the one hand, and taking sides in the contemporary ideological and political confrontations on the other. Many authors did not conceal their disapproval of Thatcherism, but still considered that their work adhered to strict scholarly standards. Secondly, the constant references to the 1930s stand out. Essentially, investigations of the individual and collective consequences of structural mass unemployment came to the same conclusions as Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Hans Zeisel in their famous 1932 study of Marienthal,⁸¹ namely, that unemployment offers no opportunities, but in the long term leads to an 'atrophy in expressions of life', as the Marienthal study put it.⁸² Unemployment does not liberate people but impoverishes them – materially, socially, and psychologically. Thirdly, there was a new awareness of what unemployment meant for relations between the sexes. Here, too, the result was sobering: 'His unemployment, her problem', as a pioneering study put it.⁸³ Male unemployment does

⁷⁹ See Westergaard, Noble, and Walker, *After Redundancy*; Christopher Johnson, *The Economy under Mrs Thatcher 1979–1990* (London, 1991), 245.

⁸⁰ See, among others, Hayes and Nutman, *Understanding the Unemployed*; Bryan Roberts, Ruth Finnegan, and Duncan Gallie (eds.), *New Approaches to Economic Life. Economic Restructuring: Unemployment and the Social Division of Labour* (Manchester, 1985); Allen, Waton, Purcell, and Wood (eds.), *The Experience of Unemployment*; Westergaard, Noble, and Walker, *After Redundancy*; Paul Bagguley, 'Protest, Acquiescence and the Unemployed: A Comparative Analysis of the 1930s and 1980s', *British Journal of Sociology*, 43/3 (1992), 443–61; Andrew Clark, Richard Layard, and Marcus Rubin, *UK Unemployment* (3rd. edn. Oxford, 1997).

⁸¹ Marie Jahoda, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and Hans Zeisel, *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal: Ein soziographischer Versuch* (1st edn. 1933; Frankfurt, 1975); cf. Matthew Cole, 'Re-Thinking Unemployment: A Challenge to the Legacy of Jahoda et.al.', *Sociology*, 41/6 (2007), 1133–49.

⁸² Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, and Zeisel, *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal*, 57.

⁸³ Lorna McKee and Colin Bell, 'His Unemployment, Her Problem: The Domestic and Marital Consequences of Male Unemployment', in Allen, Waton, Purcell, and Wood (eds.), *Experience of Unemployment*, 134–49.

Articles

not break down patriarchal role models but cements them, at least in the short term.

All three features are found in a travel report which the feminist socialist, Beatrix Campbell published in 1984 under the title *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s*.⁸⁴ While the title of Campbell's book alludes to George Orwell's famous social study of 1937,⁸⁵ her commentary on a photograph taken by Val Wilmer shows how questionable traditional role models, especially as applied to the 'traditional proletarian', had become in this study.⁸⁶ The image shows a retired miner and his wife, surrounded by modest domestic comfort (see illustration 2). While the man in the foreground is dressed in a suit and tie and sits in a leather armchair, turning towards the camera with his forefinger extended, the woman standing in the background is wearing an apron. At the moment when the picture was taken, she was clearly occupied with dusting something. 'Miners have a special place in the cult of the working class. They are the archetypal proletarians', the caption informs us. 'But who is the proletarian here?', is the scathing question asked, to be followed immediately with an unmistakable answer: 'Friedrich Engels said that within the working class the men were the bourgeoisie and the women the proletariat.' If we contrast this caption with that of another image, published in December 1984 in the journal of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC), the largest steelworkers' union, then we can see how large the gap had become between the role models within the New Left on the one hand, and the traditional industrial workforce on the other.⁸⁷ '[Bill] got something he hadn't bargained for!', reads the caption of a scurrilous photograph taken on the occasion of the retirement of the long serving Secretary General, Bill Sirs. It depicts Sirs, smiling broadly into the camera from the middle of the picture, and two women in suspenders and corset. He has

⁸⁴ Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s* (London, 1984); see also Beryl Bainbridge, *English Journey or the Road to Milton Keynes* (London, 1984).

⁸⁵ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London, 1937).

⁸⁶ Campbell, *Wigan Pier*, after p. 114.

⁸⁷ 'Bill falls for the "Scunthorpe Sting"', *ISTC Journal* (Dec. 1984). The basic text for the New Left in Britain is Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Post-war Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, 1997), esp. 192–205 on the 'new British feminism'.

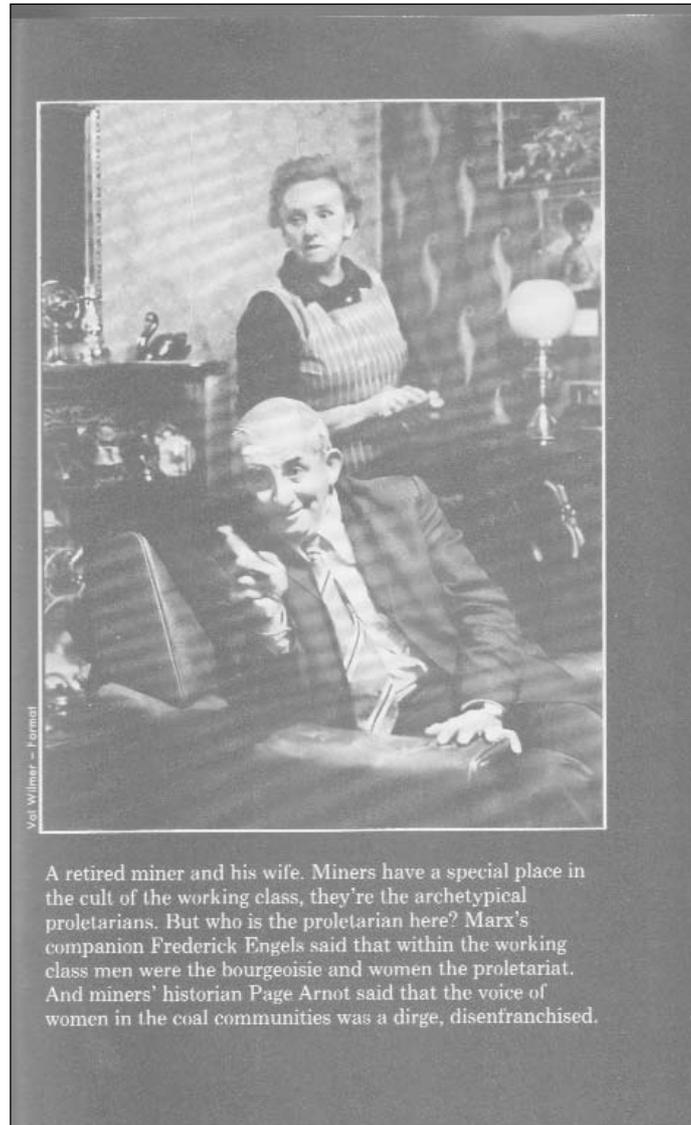


Illustration 2. The New Left revisits the 'traditional proletarian'. Taken from Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s* (London, 1984). Reproduced by kind permission of Valerie Wilmer.

Articles

an arm around each one, thanking them for presenting his farewell present.

While part two of this research project looks at the workers and their families who were directly affected by change, the third part focuses on the communities and the built environment within which the structural break occurred. The structural change confronted communities with considerable problems. Tax revenues dropped and social spending rose; unemployment and impoverishment posed a threat to social peace. Plant closures left behind wasteland and empty buildings which were a great challenge to town and landscape planning. The increasing pressure was accompanied by a problem of collective identity. If the steel industry in Sheffield, which called itself the City of Steel, collapsed, what was left to give the city its identity?⁸⁸ To the problems of the present was added the question of dealing with the past. What had it actually meant to live in an industrial city like Sheffield, which, fifty years earlier, George Orwell, with his characteristic openness, had described as follows: 'Sheffield, I suppose, could justly claim to be called the ugliest town in the Old World.'⁸⁹ Did the heavy industrial past, with all its noise and dirt, constitute a tradition that was worth remembering at all?

The difficult economic conditions were compounded by political conflicts between local councils, which were often dominated by the Labour Party, and the Conservative central government.⁹⁰ In my research project I will take the examples of Sheffield,⁹¹ Liverpool,⁹²

⁸⁸ See Taylor, Evans, and Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

⁸⁹ Quoted from Sylvia Pybus (ed.), *'Damned Bad Place, Sheffield': An Anthology of Writing about Sheffield Through the Ages* (Sheffield, 1994).

⁹⁰ As an introduction see Addison, *No Turning Back*, 306–12; Eric J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (2nd edn. London, 2004), 60–1.

⁹¹ See Patrick Seyd, 'The Political Management of Decline 1973–1993', in Clyde Binfield et al. (eds.), *The History of The City of Sheffield 1843–1993*, 3 vols. (Sheffield, 1993), i. *Politics*, 151–85; Paul Lawless, 'The Conversion of an English City: From Production to Consumption? Sheffield, U.K. 1978–1998', paper no. UR27, Centre for Regional and Economic Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University (Oct. 1998); David Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers: Rebels and Radicals in Sheffield History* (Chichester, 2008), 149–60.

⁹² John Murden, ' "City of Change and Challenge": Liverpool Since 1945', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History* (Liverpool, 2006), 393–485.

Bradford,⁹³ Coventry, and Barnsley to investigate how local decision-makers and publics dealt with these multiple challenges. Did they manage to develop any idea of life 'after the boom', to re-invent the city or region?⁹⁴

Cities as collective subjects can regenerate themselves, but whether this also applies to the individual districts in which communities who were especially hard hit by the changes lived is another question. In the early 1980s riots, in some cases lasting several days, broke out in London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Bristol, and later in Bradford as well.⁹⁵ Many contemporaries saw the 'summer of the fire bombs' as a direct expression of the crisis-ridden process of transformation.

If we accept this connection, then studying youth and youth cultures on the one hand, and ethnic minorities on the other, promises to deliver valuable insights about the social and cultural dimensions of economic change. How did young people deal with a situation in which the lives previously mapped out no longer counted? Did free spaces open up beyond conventional employment histories, for example, in underground youth cultures? Or was it a common behavioural response to try to escape the pain as quickly as possible by taking the next 'runaway train' out and seeking one's fortune in the relatively prosperous South?

And, perhaps even more seriously, how did the end of Fordist production change the life worlds and views of the future, the perceptions of self and others of those who had only been settled in this country for a few decades, and who were proportionately overrepresented among the ranks of skilled and semi-skilled workers who did the hard physical work which had now largely become obsolete?⁹⁶

The project's final chapter will investigate representations of change in the media and literary sources. It will ask who adopted this theme, and why. Can recurring motifs and topoi be identified? How effective were these approaches? Here the argument found in the literature that films in the tradition of social realism which evoked sym-

⁹³ Dave Russell, 'Selling Bradford: Tourism and Northern Image in the Late Twentieth Century', *Contemporary British History*, 17/2 (2003), 49–68.

⁹⁴ For suggestions see Taylor, Evans, and Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

⁹⁵ See Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, 229–30. The basic work is Lord Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10–12 April 1981* (London, 1981).

⁹⁶ Harrison, *Finding a Role?*, 187–208.

Articles

pathy, such as *Brassed Off* (1996), *The Full Monty* (1997), and *Billy Elliot* (2000), had a lasting impact on the middle-class view of structural change and contributed significantly to the victory of New Labour will be subjected to critical examination.⁹⁷

Conclusion

The structural change of the 1970s and 1980s was closely documented, discussed, and interpreted by contemporaries. Since then, historical research has also addressed the 'crisis of capitalism'⁹⁸ during these two decades. The studies already published and those still in the making as a rule concentrate on individual industries or partial areas of the transformation process. The project presented here, by contrast, takes a holistic approach. Using the example of the British North, it investigates the complexity of structural change as a societal history of departures from the age of high modernity.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 168.

⁹⁸ Charles S. Maier, '“Malaise”: The Crisis of Capitalism in the 1970s', in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 25–48.

JÖRG ARNOLD holds the post of *Akademischer Rat* at the University of Freiburg; in 2011–12 he was awarded a post-doctoral scholarship at the GHIL. His main publications are *The Allied Air War and Urban Memory: The Legacy of Strategic Bombing in Germany* (2012); and, as co-editor, *Luftkrieg: Erinnerungen in Deutschland und Europa* (2009).