

Wool Textile Workers and Trade Union Organisation in  
the Post-war Woollen District of Yorkshire

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the level of trade union membership amongst wool textile workers in the Yorkshire woollen district after 1945. Trade union membership had always been low amongst wool textile workers, in comparison with similar industries such as the cotton textile industry. Although wool workers' low level of union membership has been referred to by eminent scholars of labour history such as David Howell and E. P. Thompson, no studies of significant length or scope have been undertaken on this topic. This thesis seeks to redress the balance away from other, better-organised groups of workers onto a workforce and an industry that have received little scholarly attention. Although the wool workforce had always been poorly organised collectively, the post-war period was chosen both because of the larger variety of sources available to historians, including oral sources, and because the industry's decline was occurring throughout this period. The thesis shows that decline – and the threat of jobs which accompanied it – was not enough to induce wool textile workers to join a trade union. The thesis draws on oral history sources with former wool textile workers, along with statistical information about the industry and the local population, government records, and the records of the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, as well as contemporary newspaper reports.

The thesis demonstrates that there were several factors that combined to limit the growth of collective organisation amongst wool textile workers. The most significant was the organisation of the industry into many small units of production, which not only posed practical difficulties of organisation, but also encouraged close relations between workers and employers that circumvented the need for trade unions. Additionally, there was no common 'wool worker' identity with which unions could mobilise potential members.

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### Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference has been made to the contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of York or any other institution.

## Introduction

Trade union organisation in the Yorkshire wool textile industry was weak in the post-war period. The industry's workers, based in the woollen district of the West Riding (and later West Yorkshire, mainly comprising the cities and towns of Bradford, Huddersfield, Batley, Dewsbury and Halifax), had never been active trade union members, and trade union membership was generally low; after 1945, as the industry contracted, this situation did not change. This thesis will investigate the key reasons why wool textile workers were poorly organised in the post-war period.

The wool textile industry in the twentieth century is relatively under-researched compared to other declining industries, such as cotton textiles and coal mining. This is curious, given the wool industry's once-important status in the British economy; it is possible that the industry's diminishing importance was matched by declining interest in its study, but wool textiles retained importance in the woollen district of Yorkshire. The 1961 census indicated that, in a ten per cent sample of workers in the West Riding, 796 people per 10,000 were employed in the wool textile industry, with a further 65 per 10,000 employed in textile engineering and 61 per 10,000 in carpet manufacture – a total of 922 per 10,000 employed in textiles and related trades.<sup>1</sup> This can be compared against a total of 714 per 10,000 people in the West Riding employed in coal mining and 456 per 10,000 in the iron and steel industries.<sup>2</sup> Despite the significance of wool for local employment, export shares declined throughout the twentieth century, and particularly sharply in the post-war years, with Britain's level of exports declining from 29 million kilograms in 1953-55 to 10.6 million kilograms in 1990. Italy's export output in 1953-55 was similar to Britain's at 27.7 million kilograms, but had grown to 51 million kilograms by 1990.<sup>3</sup>

The only research that directly addresses the question of low trade union membership in wool textiles is Tony Jowitt's chapter, 'The Retardation of Trade Unionism in the Yorkshire Worsted Textile Industry,' in a 1988 book edited by J. A. Jowitt and A. J. McIvor.<sup>4</sup> Other works on the wool industry alluded to poor trade union organisation but did not address it systematically. Ralph Fevre's *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* of 1984, an investigation into the reasons for employing immigrants from India and Pakistan in wool textiles and the experiences of immigrants in mills, has been useful to this study but only considered labour organisation superficially. B. G. Cohen and P. J. Jenner's 1968 article 'The Employment of Immigrants: a Case Study within the Wool Industry,' another study

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<sup>1</sup> Table 4, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report* (London, 1963), pp. 33-38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> David Jenkins, 'Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,' in David Jenkins (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 997.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Jowitt, 'The Retardation of Trade Unionism in the Yorkshire Worsted Textile Industry,' in J. A. Jowitt and A. J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries* (London, 1988), pp. 84-106.



into the reasons why mill managers hired increasing numbers of immigrant workers, did not refer to trade unionism at all.<sup>5</sup> Other texts not directly focused on trade unionism in wool textiles, such as E. P. Thompson's 'Homage to Tom Maguire' of 1960 and David Howell's *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party* of 1983, both about the formation of the Independent Labour Party, mentioned the low level of wool trade unionism.<sup>6</sup> Although Thompson stated that the wool industry was a 'notoriously dangerous field for generalisations' because of the high degree of local specialisation, he did argue that the particular circumstances of the district, such as a gulf between skilled and unskilled workers, meant that trade unionism could not spread.<sup>7</sup> Howell referred to the 'parlous state' of wool trade unionism in the later nineteenth century and suggested that this was a result of the particular organisation of the industry, the divisive and competitive nature of the industry and the employment of women and juvenile workers.<sup>8</sup> However, the wool textile industry was not explored at length by either Thompson or Howell. The thesis will address the issues they raised.

The key question to be addressed in this thesis is that of why wool textile workers did not join trade unions in large numbers. It should be noted that the industry was not selected due to any exceptionalism on its part but rather because it was an example of an under-organised industry, much like many others. It should also be noted that there is no underlying assumption that the workers of the wool industry – indeed, any industry – should have organised, merely that they could have done and did not, when some workforces did. The thesis does not contain a systematic comparative element with a better-organised workforce, such as the coal industry, although there are some passing references to cotton textiles owing to the greater volume of literature about this industry. It seemed more appropriate to keep the focus of the research on wool textiles: as an under-researched industry, there was much to discuss.

In addition to the primary research question of why the wool workforce was not a well-organised one, there are several sub-questions. A key theme running through the thesis is the post-war employment of immigrant workers from the Indian Subcontinent and Eastern Europe, which is addressed at various points in the text, asking whether or not this was significant. Chapter four assesses the role of immigrants within the hierarchy of power in the workplace, whilst chapter five discusses the range of immigrant identities in the woollen district and chapter six examines immigrant communities and their relationship to other

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<sup>5</sup> Ralph Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* (Aldershot, 1984), p. 6; B. G. Cohen and P. J. Jenner, 'The Employment of Immigrants: a Case Study within the Wool Industry,' *Race*, X (1) (1968), pp. 41-56.

<sup>6</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire,' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History: in Memory of G. D. H. Cole* (London, 1960), p. 285; David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906* (Manchester, 1983), p. 176, p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire,' pp. 283-285.

<sup>8</sup> Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 177.

communities of wool textile workers. Immigrant communities formed their own organisations that served their needs more effectively than trade unions could, an issue explored in chapter eight; this drew significant support away from established labour organisations.

Whilst less prominent, the importance of the employment of a large number of women is also discussed at various points. Women constituted roughly half the wool workforce throughout the post-1945 period. Although some scholars, such as Mike Savage, have noted the ways in which gender solidarity could be utilised by women to organise, others, such as Craig Calhoun, have argued that there were several reasons why women's employment could restrict the spread of trade union organisation within a workforce; these included women's marital status, skill levels and pay.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Tony Jowitt's list of reasons why the wool industry was so poorly organised was topped by the employment of women, supplemented by the large number of small firms in the industry retarding employer collaboration, the presence of juvenile workers, difficulties in common identification due to wage disparities, employer hostility to trade unions and traces of paternalism in some firms.<sup>10</sup> It is important, therefore, that the issue of women in wool should be addressed at several points throughout the thesis – in chapter four on the hierarchy of power in the mill, for example, as well as in the following chapter on wool textile workers' identities.

The remainder of this introduction will briefly discuss key texts in the history of labour and ethnicity, with a focus on those that played a significant role in shaping the theoretical framework of the thesis; an introduction to the primary sources used and the methodology devised to undertake the research; and an outline of the thesis's structure. The first three chapters outline contextual information that might usually be found in an introduction; instead of locating such a large amount of material based on primary sources in this introduction, it is given space for fuller discussion in the thesis's substantive chapters.

The literature on the wool textile industry is relatively scant and has tended to focus on broader economic issues rather than those related specifically to labour and industrial relations. Much of the literature on wool textiles is about the nineteenth century, with volumes such as D. T. Jenkins and K. G. Ponting's *The British Wool Textile Industry, 1770-1914* providing useful contextual information about the years leading up to the period of study for this thesis. Jenkins and Ponting's text is an overview of the wool textile industry from mechanisation to the First World War, giving information on issues such as the place of wool in the UK economy throughout this period and British wool's performance in global markets. The texts on the twentieth-century industry are few. David Jenkins' study, 'Wool

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: the Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 51-56; Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1982), p. 201.

<sup>10</sup> Jowitt, 'The Retardation of Trade Unionism in the Yorkshire Worsteds Textile Industry,' p. 85.

Textiles in the Twentieth Century,’ in the *Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, is an informative guide to the industry and focuses on Britain but also considers European markets, especially in terms of their competition with the British industry; it is more concerned with wool’s economic performance nationally and globally than the wool workforce.<sup>11</sup>

Like M. T. Wild’s ‘The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry,’ Jenkins’ piece provided useful contextual information on the fate of wool textiles in the twentieth century and its contraction, especially in comparison to European markets, highlighting the importance of the Italian wool industry in displacing British wool exports.<sup>12</sup> Wild’s article focused on Yorkshire and covered the pre-industrial period of wool production to the later twentieth century. Wild discussed some geographical details, such as the location of the industry within the West Riding and the concentration of mills in particular areas, but the material he provided on the post-war period is brief compared to his description of the industry in the period of mechanisation.<sup>13</sup> Neither Jenkins nor Wild discussed labour organisations. Jowitt’s study of the low level of trade union organisation in the worsted branch of the industry is of greater use to this research but has some problems: various reasons are given for the weakness of collective organisation among worsted workers (as noted earlier in the chapter) but none are explained in considerable detail.<sup>14</sup> Some of the reasons match those that come in for closer examination in this thesis, such as the large number of small firms in operation, the power structure in the workplace and wage differentials, all of which are discussed in chapter four but which Jowitt gives only brief consideration – indeed, his approach is to skim each topic briefly rather than examine any of them in depth.<sup>15</sup>

Works about the employment of immigrants in the wool textile industry have provided contextual information. B. G. Cohen and P. J. Jenner’s ‘The Employment of Immigrants: a Case Study within the Wool Industry’ is a study from 1968 of the increasing employment of immigrants in wool textiles with a particular focus on workers from Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> Cohen and Jenner’s research was the first of its kind on the wool textile industry.<sup>17</sup> The authors selected one town in the woollen district on which to conduct their research – ‘Wooltown’ – which was possibly Huddersfield or Bradford, but could have been any of the major wool settlements, and undertook interviews with senior managers of seventeen firms based in the

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<sup>11</sup> Jenkins, ‘Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,’ pp. 993-1023.

<sup>12</sup> M. T. Wild, ‘The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry,’ in J. Geraint Jones (ed.), *The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain* (London, 1972), pp. 185-234; Jenkins, ‘Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,’ p. 1012. Chapter one of this thesis contains a full literature review on the subject of the twentieth century wool textile industry.

<sup>13</sup> Wild, ‘The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry,’ pp. 186-187, p. 225, p. 230, pp. 228-233.

<sup>14</sup> Jowitt, ‘The Retardation of Trade Unionism in the Yorkshire Worsted Textile Industry,’ p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen and Jenner, ‘The Employment of Immigrants,’ p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42, p. 43, p. 48, p. 51.

town.<sup>18</sup> Although the authors did not consider the role of trade unions in the process of employing immigrants, this study has been immeasurably more useful to developing an understanding of the post-war wool industry than the texts cited above.

Another helpful text of this nature is Ralph Fevre's *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* of 1984, a book-length study that investigated the reasons for the employment of Asian workers in West Yorkshire wool mills.<sup>19</sup> Fevre's research aim was to establish who 'won' when black workers were discriminated against, choosing wool textiles as his focus of study because of the high concentration of Asian workers in the industry in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Fevre argued that the post-war shortage of white male labour in wool was a key reason for employing Asians, although male Asian workers filled jobs that both men and women usually held.<sup>21</sup> Fevre's work was useful in building a more comprehensive picture of the nature of work in wool textiles after 1945 as well as the wider issue of racial discrimination at work, a topic that was of interest to other writers on race and employment such as Ron Ramdin and Mark Duffield.<sup>22</sup> Although this thesis does not seek to be the definitive study of the employment of immigrant workers in wool textiles, these texts have been more valuable for understanding work in the wool industry than those solely focused on economic developments in wool as they comment extensively on employment and employment conditions. Although its subject matter is different, Steve Winyard's 1980 pamphlet *Trouble Looming: Low Pay in the Wool Textile Industry* – an examination by the Low Pay Unit of the poor pay that wool textile workers received in the later twentieth century – gave an overview of employment relations.<sup>23</sup> It also provided detailed statistical information.

Finally, several works of labour and industrial relations history have contributed to the framework of the thesis, especially those that have sought to reconstruct communities and associate them with labour organisations. Hester Barron, David Gilbert and Craig Calhoun have all looked to how community and collective action interacted, but it is dangerous to assume that what was the case for one community (or group of workpeople) would be the same for another.<sup>24</sup> As Roy Church and Quentin Outram noted, it is also problematic to

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

<sup>19</sup> Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination*, p. ix.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-59.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix; Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987); Mark Duffield, *Black Radicalism and the Politics of De-Industrialisation: the Hidden History of Indian Foundry Workers* (Aldershot, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Steve Winyard, *Trouble Looming: Low Pay in the Wool Textile Industry* (London, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields* (Oxford, 1992); Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1982).

assume that industrial solidarity is a natural by-product of homogeneous communities.<sup>25</sup> The study of community in this thesis, then, as seen in chapter six, is careful not to make assumptions about the consequences of homogeneity or heterogeneity, but is focused on the relationship between communities and trade union membership, particularly with reference to Lukes' theory of power. An important theory on communities and work is Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegal's theory of the isolated mass, in which the authors attempted to explain the reasons that some industries were strike-prone and others were not. Their theory focused on coal mining, with the authors arguing that coal miners lived in 'isolated masses' away from other types of worker, forming separate communities with distinctive social structures.<sup>26</sup> Many mining communities were relatively homogeneous, but as Barron pointed out in her study of the 1926 miners' lockout in County Durham, it was not the case that all miners lived in homogeneous communities or that there was a cohesive and uncomplicated identity available to miners.<sup>27</sup> It is also important to note that industrial solidarity may not be radical in nature, and that organised groups of workpeople may have the support of their employer. The isolated mass theory has been largely dismissed by modern labour historians – David Gilbert, for example, described the theory as 'a sociology without history' – but it has shaped what it was important for this thesis not to become: a theory of why workers in general did not join trade unions, rather than a specific investigation into the reasons wool textile workers were poorly organised.<sup>28</sup>

Obtaining sources to research the weakness of trade unionism amongst an industry's workforce is challenging. By both examining source material pertaining to the main wool trade union, the NUDBTW, and to wool textile workers, it has been possible to draw conclusions about the reasons for the low level of collective organisation in wool. There has been no one source of material that has dominated in this research, but the following discussion will elucidate some of the important materials used as well as some of the difficulties they presented. Each chapter of the thesis deals with the particular considerations of the sources used therein, and so this section of the introduction will remain brief.

Using trade union records in a study about the absence of trade unionism may seem curious, but examining the organisation that failed to attract significant levels of membership has provided a great deal of information about trade unionism in wool generally and has been suggestive of some of the reasons that collective organisation in wool failed to be successful.

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<sup>25</sup> Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1966* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 140.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Hester Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout: Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 8-11.

<sup>28</sup> Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegal, 'The Isolated Mass and the Integrated Individual: an International Analysis of the Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike,' (Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, 1952), <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/28722/bk0003s6s2h>, accessed 7 November 2010; David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p. 12.

Trade union papers were of more use than the papers of wool firms; many of the latter collections held at the Bradford and Huddersfield offices of West Yorkshire Archive Service do not contain relevant material because, unsurprisingly, they do not regularly refer to trade unions or, indeed, any of the factors the thesis considers to have had an impact on trade union, such as the size of firms and wool textile workers' identities. Furthermore, few wool firms have deposited their papers in local archives. Trade union records indicated some of the reasons why wool workers might not join such an organisation and gave information about the workers that were union members.

The NUDBTW's records are kept at the Bradford office of West Yorkshire Archive Service and, like the records of other trade unions, can be used to create an administrative history. The union's executive committee minute books have been particularly helpful in several ways: they gave a detailed account of the strike at William Denby & Sons of 1963-65 (examined fully in chapter seven), provided membership statistics and outlined concerns within the industry. The statistics were of great use in establishing a detailed contemporary picture of membership levels that could not be obtained elsewhere, but the use of these statistics has not been without problems. The primary problem is that the union was open to those outside the wool industry: other textile workers were members of the NUDBTW. It appears that the majority of members were wool workers – the head office was based in Bradford and the issues that arose in the minutes were almost solely related to wool and came from branches within the woollen district. There is no way of discerning the proportion of women and immigrant members because such statistics were not collected, presumably in an effort to recognise all members as trade unionists rather than, for example, women trade unionists or Asian trade unionists. This information would have been of use in ascertaining whether women and immigrants joined the NUDBTW in the same proportions as native white men.

Other trade union records have also been helpful, particularly those relating to collective bargaining. The papers of Christine Shepherd, a Huddersfield wool trade unionist, are deposited at the Huddersfield office of West Yorkshire Archive Service and contain useful information about collective bargaining and wage rates in the latter years of the twentieth century. They are complemented by the papers outlining the collective bargaining process of the National Association of Unions in the Textile Trades (NAUTT) at Bradford's West Yorkshire Archive Service office. The NAUTT was formed as a co-ordinating body for the large number of small wool unions that existed in the pre-war era and was involved in issues such as collective bargaining. In showing wage rates across the post-war period, these papers have assisted in outlining the hierarchy of skill in wool as well as the generally low wages received by the industry's workers. Collective agreements were of little use to the industry's workers as they went largely unenforced except by closed shops such as William Denby & Sons; nevertheless, they have provided useful information for this research.

The records of wool firms have not been utilised thoroughly in this thesis for two reasons: firstly, there are few such records on the post-1945 period, with the majority of archive deposits of this nature relating to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; secondly, those records that do exist contain little relevant information regarding workers' conditions and trade union activity. The records of Salt's of Saltaire, for example, at the Bradford branch of West Yorkshire Archive Service assisted in ascertaining the distance the workforce lived from the mill, but little else, and even the information on workers' residence was not systematically kept. Chapter seven examines a significant strike at the Baildon firm William Denby & Sons but the firm has never deposited its papers in an archive, which meant it was difficult to understand the reasoning behind the actions taken by the directors during the strike, and motivations had to be inferred from trade union records. As a result of the paucity of business records in wool, it was not possible to develop strong arguments about the rationale of employers and their attitudes to trade union organisation.

Several other types of record have been valuable. Statistical records such as census county reports and data collected by industry bodies on the wool industry have been used throughout the thesis to add further detail to the information gleaned from qualitative records such as oral history testimonies and trade union papers. Contemporaneous studies on the woollen district have added context to statistics, such as Kirklees Council's undated *A Profile of Kirklees* and Ron Barrowclough's *A Social Atlas of Kirklees* based on the 1971 census report for the West Riding, both of which discussed the social circumstances of Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Batley.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the papers of organisations such as the Indian Workers' Association (IWA) (kept at Birmingham Central Library) and the Asian Youth Movements (AYMs) (archived by Anandi Ramamurthy online) were of central importance to chapter eight, which surveys both of these groups.

Government records on the industry and the NUDBTW held at The National Archives, Kew (TNA) provided contextual information about post-war wool textiles and the relationship between the industry and government (not a topic for discussion in the thesis, but an under-researched issue). They were less useful in exploring the reasons for the low level of union membership. The records at TNA hold much of interest for scholars of the wool industry, but for this particular project they were of limited help.

Although there is a range of other sources that could be discussed at great length here, it seems appropriate to leave such discussions for the places where they are being utilised, in the following chapters. As a final note for this section, however, it is important to consider the use of oral history sources and methodology, and the problems and benefits associated

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<sup>29</sup> Kirklees Metropolitan Council, *A Profile of Kirklees* (no date or place of publication); Ron Barrowclough, *A Social Atlas of Kirklees. Patterns of Social Differentiation in a New Metropolitan District based on Evidence from the 1971 Census* (Huddersfield, 1975).

with them. Oral testimonies are used in the thesis in order to better understand the lives and motivations of post-war wool textile workers. The author conducted eight in-depth interviews but the majority of testimonies used derive from mid-1980s from projects in Bradford and Huddersfield, and are held in Bradford Central Library and Huddersfield Library. Eight hundred interviews were conducted for the Bradford project and four hundred in Huddersfield. The aim of these projects was not clear in the transcripts and tape recordings, but evidently they were attempts to collect the life stories of residents of each town. In both projects, the interviewers posed general 'life story' questions to participants; at both libraries they are subdivided, for example into sections based on nationality ('Polish,' 'Pakistani,' 'Caribbean') or occupation (both libraries' collections contain large 'Textile Worker' subdivisions). The interviews surveyed for the thesis were selected by looking at relevant categories; those which referred to trade union activity were all examined, and as were some which did not, but contained information about the nature of work in wool textiles. In total, eighteen interviews from Huddersfield and Bradford were used as sources for the thesis. The interviews varied in length but were generally between one and two hours' duration.

There has been debate surrounding the use of oral sources in historical research. Understanding about the usefulness of oral sources has developed as the field has grown. Penny Summerfield noted that there has often been a greater emphasis placed on truth rather than meaning in oral histories.<sup>30</sup> This view is exemplified in an article by Trevor Lummis, who wrote that 'the main concern for oral history is the degree to which accurate recall of the past is possible.'<sup>31</sup> Paul Thompson, a respected oral historian, also argued that obtaining 'significant historical information from an interview' was an important aspect of the purpose of oral history.<sup>32</sup> However, there are oral historians, following the lead of Italian oral historians such as Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini, whose interest was in learning what meaning historical events had for those they were interviewing.<sup>33</sup> Portelli's interest in oral history was in examining how events could be 'elaborated, changed and interpreted' through re-telling.<sup>34</sup> He interviewed people about an anti-NATO demonstration in the Italian city of Terni at which a steel worker, Luigi Trastulli, was shot dead, and found that many narrators recalling the event told him details about a later incident, the sacking of 2000 steel workers in Terni in 1953.<sup>35</sup> Portelli argued that we can understand historical events through

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<sup>30</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History,' in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Method* (London, 2000), p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> Trevor Lummis, 'Structure and Validity in Oral Evidence,' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998), p. 273.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, 1978), p. 166.

<sup>33</sup> Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the Subject,' p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1, p. 14.



the meaning given to them in oral history interviews, including the way some narrators may mis-remember facts and append them to other events. Luisa Passerini also asserted that using oral sources solely as ways of ascertaining facts was ‘not enough’, noting that oral history is ‘an expression and representation of culture’ and should be used as such.<sup>36</sup> Although this thesis uses interviews as a means of obtaining information about work in wool textiles that is unavailable elsewhere, it also uses them to understand the meanings workers conveyed on issues such as trade unions, work and class, especially in chapter five.

Two problems arose in using interviews especially conducted for this thesis. First, the participants’ ages did not cover the full range of the post-war period; all but one had worked in the wool textile industry in the latter thirty years of the twentieth century, and finding those who had worked in mills before the 1970s was difficult as many such workers are no longer living and memory problems beset some of those who are still alive. Additionally, participants were not easy to find: appeals in local newspapers went unanswered, so networks of family and friends had to be relied upon, which can also be problematic, particularly the participants giving the answer they thought the interviewer wanted because they had a personal relationship with that interviewer. The second problem of this approach was related to memory: many of those who participated in the archived 1980s interviews had more recent memories of working in wool textiles than those who could be interviewed now. There were participants who were in old age and had worked in textiles some time ago, but the potential problems of memory are offset by the need to include such testimony in order to create a fuller picture of post-war wool textiles – these older workers had been employed in mills immediately after the cessation of the Second World War. The range of textile workers interviewed was extensive in terms of age and ethnicity, which made them additionally helpful in building a picture of all wool textile workers.

Geoff Cubitt noted that the use of memory in history has been seen as problematic by some historians because memory is entirely subjective without any other point of reference than the personal consciousness of the person remembering something.<sup>37</sup> When considering personal motivations and personal understandings in history, however, oral sources are valuable. In this thesis, coupled with other types of source – statistical reports, notes of meetings, contemporary pamphlets on industry and many more – oral sources have assisted in reaching conclusions about the reasons for the low level of trade unionism in wool because they indicate what trade unions meant to wool textile workers. Oral historians such as Paul Thompson have advocated the use of oral sources and have noted that this is not a new practice: indeed, scholars from a variety of disciplines have utilised oral evidence for

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<sup>36</sup> Luisa Passerini, ‘Work Ideology and Consensus Under Italian Fascism,’ in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998), pp. 53-54.

<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, 2007), p. 33.

some time, and the role of orality in non-literate societies has been key in preserving these societies' histories.<sup>38</sup>

The issue of intersubjectivity – the relationship between interviewer and interviewee in oral history – has been commented upon by some oral historians, and is important for understanding why issues like those above arose. Mahua Sarkar described oral accounts as intersubjective – that is, the product of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, or the interviewee and their audience.<sup>39</sup> Alessandro Portelli expressed a similar view about the process of oral history resulting in an interview based on the relationship between interviewer and narrator.<sup>40</sup> Valerie Yow commented on how this relationship was significant to the interview, citing Sherna Gluck as stating that a difference in culture between interviewer and interviewee – including gender, ethnicity and class – could affect the interview.<sup>41</sup> Equally, Yow argued, interviewing members of one's own community can lead to changes in how the interview happens.<sup>42</sup> Mary Kay Quinlan commented on differences between interviewers, arguing that ethnicity can be a serious barrier in oral history interviews in the United States and that narrators could offer different accounts of the same event to interviewers from the same ethnicity as them as they had to interviewers of a different ethnicity.<sup>43</sup> The literature offers few solutions to the potential problems faced by those interviewing people from the same or different cultures. As noted above, some of the interviews conducted for this thesis were with people from the author's community, and so it is likely that there was some level of assumed knowledge on the part of both interviewer and narrator. In order to combat this, the author asked the narrator to explain some issues further, making the narrator's understanding of events clearer.

Related to this is the issue of silences in interviews. When asked questions about trade unions, many narrators had little to say. This is unsurprising given that trade unions had a diminished role in their lives. Passerini commented that in interviews with Italians who had lived under fascism, there were many silences surrounding the subject.<sup>44</sup> This could be for a myriad of reasons, including shame in the case of Italian fascism, but one reason can be if there is no public narrative or discourse of their situation to refer back to.<sup>45</sup> Summerfield referred to this in her article on 'composure,' or composing one's narrative, noting that if a

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, 2000, third edition) pp. 25-26.

<sup>39</sup> Mahua Sarkar, 'Between Craft and Method: Meaning and Inter-subjectivity in Oral History Analysis,' *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 25 (4), December 2012, p. 585.

<sup>40</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different,' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998), p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Valerie Yow, "'Do I Like Them Too Much?'" Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice Versa,' *The Oral History Review*, 24 (1), Summer 1997, p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Kay Quinlan, 'The Dynamics of Interviewing,' in Donald A. Ritchie (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford, 2011), p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Consensus Under Italian Fascism,' p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

narrator's experience deviates from social norms, it can be difficult to compose a narrative.<sup>46</sup> Although it was not socially deviant to be a trade unionist in post-war Britain, it was not a social norm adhered to by Yorkshire wool textile workers, and this may have contributed to their silences on the matter, along with their lack of experience in trade unions.

An influential theoretical text for the thesis has been Stephen Lukes' *Power: a Radical View*.<sup>47</sup> Lukes contended that whilst power is an 'essentially contested' concept, there are empirical applications for theories of power.<sup>48</sup> Lukes conceptualised three dimensions of power, theorising his own third dimension based on what he perceived as the failings of other scholars of power. The first face of power as described by theorists such as Robert Dahl can be described thus: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.'<sup>49</sup> This view holds that power is observable when exercised, or that we can only confidently say it has been exercised when we can observe it. The second face of power, a theory advanced by Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, incorporates acts of coercion and influence designed to keep issues from the agenda – the theory of the 'mobilisation of bias,' which, they argued, occurred over a period of time as a result of decisions taken by those in power – as they put it,

a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures ('rules of the game') that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others.<sup>50</sup>

Again this depends on the observation of conflict.<sup>51</sup> Lukes' theory of the third face of power removes the restriction that conflict must be observable: power can be exercised without conflict being observed and, rather than keeping issues from the agenda, power can operate to ensure these issues do not arise at all.<sup>52</sup> Lukes illustrated his theory with reference to Matthew Crenson's book *The Un-Politics of Air Pollution: A Study of Non-Decisionmaking in the Cities* (1971). Crenson's text analysed why some American cities were slower to deal with air pollution than others. Lukes argued that Crenson's methodology 'can be seen as lying on the borderline of the two-dimensional and three-dimensional views of power,' and stated that his example of US Steel's 'power reputation operating on anticipated reactions' prevented the city of Gary, Indiana from adopting clean-air policies sooner than the neighbouring city of East Chicago, Indiana.<sup>53</sup> Lukes asserted that one of the ways in which

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<sup>46</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews,' *Cultural and Social History*, 1(1), 2004, p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Lukes, *Power: a Radical View* (Basingstoke, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20; Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, 'Two Faces of Power,' *The American Political Science Review* 56 (4) December 1962, p. 949.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Lukes, *Power: a Radical View*, p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

Crenson moved towards using a third-dimension approach was by considering ‘ways in which demands are prevented, through the exercise of such power, from being raised.’<sup>54</sup> This is pertinent to the research for this thesis: how does one study what is not observable?<sup>55</sup> Lukes stated that just because something is difficult to substantiate does not mean it should not be studied.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, obtaining sources and deciding on areas of investigation for this thesis has involved a degree of creativity; researching the weakness of wool trade unionism has been difficult, and so a patchwork of sources had to be assembled in order to answer the question.

Mancur Olson Jr.’s *The Logic of Collective Action* was another useful work of theory that assisted in thinking through problems related to collectivity. In this text, Olson examined the purpose and operation of collective groups, focusing on those groups that aim to further the interests of their members such as trade unions.<sup>57</sup> He argued that there was no purpose in groups existing ‘when individual, unorganised action can serve the interests of the individual as well or better than an organisation.’<sup>58</sup> For a group to be successful, Olson proposed that ‘Only a *separate and “selective” incentive* will stimulate a rational individual in a latent group to act in a group-oriented way.’<sup>59</sup> Olson argued that if groups offered incentives that were only available to group members, then more people were likely to join. Conversely, Olson stressed the need to understand how far benefits could be obtained without the need to join an organisation, by ‘free riding’ – that is, gaining the benefits of group membership without joining the group.<sup>60</sup> The extent to which the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (NUDBTW) offered selective incentives will be examined in chapter three, where we will also see how far it was possible for wool textile workers to be ‘free riders’ – to enjoy the benefits of labour organisations without making a contribution of material resources.

The thesis is divided into three sections: an initial contextual part, a second which deals with the key themes of the research, and a third which contains two case studies. Chapter one discusses the context of the post-war wool textile industry in Yorkshire. The aim of the chapter is to set the rest of the thesis in context by providing information about the economic situation in wool after 1945. In particular, the chapter outlines the contraction of the British wool industry and the job losses that resulted from this decline. The relatively scant literature on post-war wool textiles is examined as well as literature interrogating the contemporary theme of ‘declinism,’ a theory which assumed a crisis of British values and of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 47.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> Mancur Olson Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 51. Original italics.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

British world standing. How far the language of decline was appropriate and the relationship it had to the decline of the wool industry is assessed. The problems facing the industry, and how they were addressed, are also examined.

Although the period under consideration for this thesis is 1945 to the end of the twentieth century, it is important to assess how far the immediate past shaped the course of wool trade unionism after the Second World War, and whether there was continuity or change before and after the War. As such, chapter two discusses the role of trade unions pre-1945: it comprises a case study of a prominent wool trade unionist of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Julia Varley, and in the examination of three strikes that occurred in 1875, 1890-91 and 1925. The cause of these strikes will be assessed in order to determine whether they were the product of a robust trade union movement, the result of weak organisation that led to unorganised activity or anomalous events. This will lead to broader conclusions about the state of the wool labour movement before 1945.

Chapter three continues the contextual theme by outlining the role of the main post-war wool trade union, the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers. The NUDBTW's recruitment methods – and the targets of these methods – will be examined, along with membership levels. The extent of the union's bargaining power in the industry and how far this affected a wool textile worker's motivation to join the union will be assessed. If the NUDBTW had little to offer its members in terms of collective bargaining agreements or other selective incentives, as Olson would describe them, there would be little obvious reason to join.

Chapters four, five and six are in-depth considerations of three of the key reasons that the membership of wool textile trade unions was low. Although chapters four and five examine different factors, they are linked by the theme of identity and are best explained together. Chapter four concentrates on the structure and organisation of the industry and how far these things restricted the ability of trade unions to organise, as well as the importance of the work-based identities of wool textile workers. The first part of the chapter will assess whether the wool industry's particular organisation was prohibitive to the spread of trade union organisation: the industry consisted of many small mills, many often employing fewer than fifty people. Furthermore, consideration will be made of the segregation of women and Asian men at work. The impact of these things upon trade unionism, along with the practical difficulties of organising in such a situation, will be fully assessed in chapter four along with a discussion of the role of work-based identities, which forms the second part of the chapter. Chapter five continues the examination of the identities of wool workers, this time focusing on their non-work identities, including ethnic and political identities. How far identities cohered or diverged, and the consequences of this for trade unionism, will be considered. Chapter six is an assessment of the relationship between local communities and wool trade

unionism. It will explore how the relative homogeneity or heterogeneity of the woollen district's communities related to trade union membership, making use of census statistics and oral testimonies to build a picture of community life.

Chapters seven and eight are case studies that test the arguments arising from the previous six chapters. Chapter seven is an examination of the eighteen-month-long strike at William Denby & Sons dyeworks of Baildon, near Bradford, which began in 1963 and was the longest wool strike of the post-war era. The Denby's plant was an exceptional workplace: with two hundred and fifty workers employed, it was significantly larger than most other mills, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the workforce was mainly white and male. The reasons that this strike occurred will be traced through the chapter, taking the organisation and structure of the mill, the identity of the firm's workers and the local community of Baildon into consideration.

The final substantive chapter will explore two important Asian community organisations: the mainly Sikh Indian Workers' Association (IWA), prominent from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, and the pan-Asian Asian Youth Movements (AYMs) which were active in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both IWA and AYM were national organisations with members across diverse employment, but the branches in the woollen district were popular with wool operatives. The role of these groups as possible analogues of trade unions will be considered, as well as the reasons for their success. Their inclusivity appealed to immigrant workers in a way that trade unions could not emulate.

## Chapter One: the Wool Textile Industry in the Post-war Period

### Introduction

In the post-war era, wool textiles occupied a position of reduced importance in the British economy. Imports of wool products from Europe and further afield were increasing, and the traditional products of the British wool industry were becoming less fashionable, replaced by clothing made from man-made fibres. As a result, wool mills began to close and workers were made redundant. This chapter will explore the position of the post-war wool textile industry in order to provide context for the rest of the thesis. The analysis will focus on the Yorkshire wool industry; Yorkshire's mills accounted for eighty per cent of the UK wool textile industry in 1976, and it is safe to assume that the majority of the industry's mills were based in Yorkshire throughout the post-war period.<sup>1</sup> The chapter begins with a brief discussion of secondary literature on the wool textile industry and moves onto a description of the industry before 1945. It will then examine the industry's decline, highlighting the problems the industry faced and describing the jobs market. We will see that the wool textile industry was in decline throughout the post-war period and although the industry faced problems such as labour shortages and poor training for its workers, solutions were not easily forthcoming. It will introduce some of the key arguments that will be fully expounded later in the thesis. There has been limited interest from scholars on the history of post-war wool workers; therefore, the chapter will also set out why this topic is a useful contribution to historical knowledge about workers in post-war British manufacturing and their relationship to trade unions.

The industry's gradual decline from 1945 and its decreasing importance in the national and local West Yorkshire economy is mirrored by the scholarly literature on wool textiles in the post-war period: it is thin on the ground, and especially in relation to its workforce. Surveys such as David Jenkins' 'Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century' and M. T. Wild's 'The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry' are helpful studies but do not go into detail about workers.<sup>2</sup> B. G. Cohen and P. J. Jenner's study, 'The Employment of Immigrants: a Case Study within the Wool Textile Industry,' published as an article in *Race* in 1968, is one of few pieces that looks at a key topic of this thesis.<sup>3</sup> Its aim was to 'assess the economic

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA), PJ 11/232, Industrial Democracy Committee records, Evidence from the Wool (and Allied) Textile Employers' Council to the Industrial Democracy Committee, April 1976.

<sup>2</sup> David Jenkins, 'Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,' in David Jenkins (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 29-1022; M. T. Wild, 'The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry,' in J. Geraint Jones (ed.), *The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain* (London, 1972), pp. 185-234.

<sup>3</sup> B. G. Cohen and P. J. Jenner, 'The Employment of Immigrants: a Case Study within the Wool Industry,' *Race X* (1), 1968, pp. 41- 56.

effects of immigration on the economy of this country' by providing 'hard factual information on what happens at the micro-level.'<sup>4</sup> It was the first study of its kind in examining the role of immigrants in wool textiles. Whilst it is a pioneering study, its focus on the mill owners and managers means the immigrant perspective on work in wool textiles is marginalised. In 1984, Ralph Fevre's *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* was published which went further in addressing the issue of immigrant labour in wool textiles but this too focused on employers, rather than black workers.<sup>5</sup> The study has been an important guiding source for this thesis in assessing managerial attitudes to immigrant workers but its limitations are similar to Cohen and Jenner's.

Contemporaneously-published pamphlets addressed some of the problems the wool textile industry faced, such as Nigel Moor and Paul Waddington's *From Rags to Ruins: Batley, Woollen Textiles and Industrial Change*, published in 1980, and Steve Winyard's *Trouble Looming: Low Pay in the Wool Textile Industry*, published in 1981 by the Low Pay Unit. Moor and Waddington assessed the position of Batley, a heavy woollen town, after the 'rapid decline' of wool textiles in the preceding decades.<sup>6</sup> Winyard's focus, as suggested by his title, was the low pay that was prevalent in wool textiles throughout its history, concentrating on the later post-war period.<sup>7</sup> He discussed women's pay but did not give women's employment any special attention.<sup>8</sup> Most significantly for this thesis, none of the works cited above give considerable space to the discussion of the low level of trade union organisation in wool textiles.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps wool workers' relative insignificance within the national trade union movement was the reason for this exclusion, or the difficulties of ascertaining the reasons behind poor industrial organisation. The lack of contemporary and historical accounts both of the wool textile industry and wool trade unionism suggest that these issues were not seen as important, but there is an important story to tell about how wool textile workers dealt with the problems the industry faced without the support of trade unions.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* (Aldershot, 1984), p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> Nigel Moor and Paul Waddington, *From Rags to Ruins: Batley, Woollen Textiles and Industrial Change* (Newcastle, 1980), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Winyard, *Trouble Looming: Low Pay in the Wool Textile Industry* (London, 1980), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Two articles by the author of this thesis have discussed the wool textile industry in the post-war period but without a focus on trade union organisation. Laura Price, "'Among Their Own Kind": Ethnicity and Community Relations in West Yorkshire's Woollen District, 1945-1985,' in Anne Baldwin, Chris Ellis, Stephen Etheridge, Keith Laybourn and Neil Pye (eds.), *Class, Culture and Community: New Perspectives in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century British Labour History* (Newcastle, 2012), pp. 55-72; Laura Price, 'Immigrants and Apprentices: Solutions to the Post-War Labour Shortage in the West Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry, 1945-1980,' *Textile History* 45 (1), May 2014, pp. 32-48.



### Precedents: the Wool Textile Industry before 1945

In the years leading up to 1945, the wool textile industry in Britain was coming to terms with its new status: although still a world leader of wool textile production, the industry's expansion in Britain had come to an end.<sup>10</sup> Although still buoyant in the years before 1945, the wool industry's dominance in the British economy had been replaced by cotton in 1803, the year in which the value of British cotton exports overtook those of British wool exports.<sup>11</sup> Prior to the First World War, Britain was still exporting huge amounts of yarn (with fifty-four per cent of the world share of wool exports between 1909 and 1913) and supplied the home market with the majority of the cloth it purchased.<sup>12</sup> The export trade had been an important feature of the industry in Britain since the eighteenth century and was to remain so for much of the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as Jenkins and Ponting noted of the early years of the twentieth century, 'the period was one of great prosperity for many branches of the trade with high profits and continuing success in new markets,' adding that between 1901 and 1912 the value of wool cloth and yarn exports had almost doubled.<sup>14</sup> Although profits in the industry varied year on year, for much of the first decade and a half of the twentieth century, business was seen as 'satisfactory.'<sup>15</sup> The First World War brought problems, such as the loss of skilled labour to the armed forces and the depreciation of plant and machinery, but there were still profits for many firms as a result of producing khaki on government contracts.<sup>16</sup>

After 1918, the industry's fortunes took a downturn. Export markets were lost and although the domestic market was strong, the industry never regained its pre-war levels of output.<sup>17</sup> Fashion changes such as the growing popularity of shorter skirts, dresses and coats meant that less cloth was needed, and with it, fewer workers: between 1919 and 1939, one third of weaving looms stopped production and spinning capacity declined by ten per cent.<sup>18</sup> Competition from European wool producers, such as Italy, became increasingly fierce as the export arm of the industry declined.<sup>19</sup> Wild stated that 1924 was the turning point for the British industry, with exports 'fall[ing] at a dramatic rate' from this year and the loss of

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<sup>10</sup> Jenkins, 'Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,' p. 993.

<sup>11</sup> D. T. Jenkins and K. G. Ponting, *The British Wool Textile Industry, 1770-1914* (London, 1982), p. 296.

<sup>12</sup> Jenkins, 'Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,' pp. 993-4.

<sup>13</sup> D. T. Jenkins, *The West Riding Wool Textile Industry, 1770-1835: a Study of Fixed Capital Formation* (Edington, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Jenkins and Ponting, *The British Wool Textile Industry*, p. 238.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>16</sup> Jenkins, 'Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,' p. 995.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 995.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 996.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 997.

markets in the Far East particularly damaging.<sup>20</sup> There was a slight recovery in the mid- to late-1930s but this, too, was ended by the onset of the Second World War.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the difficulties the industry faced in the interwar years, there were also moments of success. Chris Wrigley argued that ‘the war had brought a fragmented industry together’ and this was seen in the increased co-operation between employers and trade unions in the form of the Joint Industrial Council (JIC) that negotiated wage rates.<sup>22</sup> This venture will be explored more fully in chapter two when wool trade unions in the pre-1945 period will be discussed, but it is notable here as a positive feature of the interwar industry. Another success was what Sue Bowden and David Higgins described as the industry’s ability to withstand ‘shocks’ during the interwar period as a result of their prior investment decisions.<sup>23</sup> They argued that, comparative to the cotton textile industry, wool weathered the interwar storm far more effectively because it was not as laden with debt as cotton and this both fostered competition and encouraged the industry to pursue an aggressive marketing strategy.<sup>24</sup> By the end of the Second World War, however, there was less for wool manufacturers to be confident about.

#### ‘Decline’ in the Post-war Era

A prevalent theme of historical literature examining the post-war era is decline, a subject closely linked to the fate of the wool textile industry throughout the period. Jim Tomlinson has written much on this theme, assessing how far contemporaries and historians were accurate in describing post-war Britain as being in decline. He argued that fears about Britain’s declining importance and power were common from the late 1950s, and that Britain’s economic decline in comparison with Europe compounded this.<sup>25</sup> There were many facets to post-war Britain’s concern with decline, including linking the decline of the British Empire with relative economic decline, worries about Britain’s productivity in comparison with other European countries, anxiety about ‘restrictive’ shop-floor practices by trade unions hindering economic productivity and the ‘failed experiment’ of the public ownership of industries.<sup>26</sup> These narratives of decline, Tomlinson argued, were based on politicised

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<sup>20</sup> Wild, ‘The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry,’ p. 227.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>22</sup> Chris Wrigley, *Cosy Co-operation Under Strain: Industrial Relations in the Yorkshire Woollen Textile Industry, 1919-1930* (York, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Sue Bowden and David M Higgins, ‘Investment Decision-Making and Industrial Performance: the British Wool Industry during the Interwar Years,’ *Business History*, 56 (4), May 2014, online version, accessed at [www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1080/00076791.2014.898632](http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1080/00076791.2014.898632), accessed on 15 October 2014, no page numbers.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 9-10.

<sup>26</sup> Jim Tomlinson, ‘The Decline of Empire and the Economic “Decline” of Britain,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 14 (3) 2003, pp. 201-202; Jim Tomlinson, ‘The British “Productivity Problem” in the 1960s,’ *Past and Present*, no. 175, 2002, pp. 188-189; Nick Tiratsoo and Jim Tomlinson, ‘Restrictive Practices on the Shopfloor in Britain, 1945-60: Myth and Reality,’ *Business History*, 36 (2), 1994, p.

contemporary sources and distort our view of the post-war period; they should be 'laid to rest.'<sup>27</sup> Hugh Pemberton has agreed with the view that declinist accounts of the twentieth century have been given too much credence by historians, arguing that Britain's rapid growth in the period has been overlooked in favour of its relative decline.<sup>28</sup> The narrative of decline was repeated in areas outside of the economy after 1945. Lawrence Black noted that growing affluence 'resonated with the narratives of decline' in a cultural and societal sense; whilst private affluence grew, concerns were expressed about growing amount of rubbish produced by British households.<sup>29</sup>

Historians such as Tomlinson and Pemberton were clear in their view that the declinist narratives prevalent in the mid-twentieth century were exaggerated, but also noted that decline was happening and that relative decline should be considered seriously by historians.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that some British industries, wool among them, experienced continual decline in the twentieth century. John Singleton noted that managers in the cotton industry felt that decline was 'inevitable' in this period and Richard Croucher commented on declining trade union membership in the 1980s and 1990s as a consequence of the contraction of 'traditional union heartlands' such as coal mining and railway work.<sup>31</sup> This chapter will show that decline was a real and pressing issue for post-war wool manufacturers.

Decline was a critical issue in wool textiles throughout the whole of the post-war period. In 1950, 1,123 woollen and worsted mills were recorded in West Yorkshire; by 1967, this number had fallen to 825, and by 1988 to 705.<sup>32</sup> British wool exports also reduced throughout the period: in 1960, Britain exported 28.1 million kilograms of wool but by 1990 this had dropped to 10.6 million kilograms.<sup>33</sup> Britain had been overtaken by emerging wool markets such as Italy, which exported fifty one million kilograms in 1990, and West

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65; Jim Tomlinson, 'A "Failed Experiment"? Public Ownership and the Narratives of Post-War Britain,' *Labour History Review*, 73 (2), 2008, p. 228.

<sup>27</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied: "Declinism" as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 20 (2), 2009, pp. 227-228.

<sup>28</sup> Hugh Pemberton, 'Affluence, Relative Decline and the Treasury,' in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (eds.), *An Affluent Society? Britain's Post-War 'Golden Age' Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 107-108.

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence Black, 'The Impression of Affluence: Political Culture in the 1950s and 1960s,' in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (eds.), *An Affluent Society? Britain's Post-War 'Golden Age' Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 86-87.

<sup>30</sup> Pemberton, 'Affluence, Relative Decline and the Treasury,' p. 108; Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied,' p. 227.

<sup>31</sup> John Singleton, 'Showing the White Flag: the Lancashire Cotton Textile Industry, 1945-65,' *Business History* 32 (4), 1990, p. 129; Richard Croucher, 'Post-War British Trade Unionism: Telling It Like It Was,' *Labour History Review*, 74 (2), 2009, p. 199.

<sup>32</sup> Wild, 'The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry,' p. 229; Table 1, *Business Monitor: Report on the Census of Production 1988, Woollen and Worsted* (London, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Jenkins, 'Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,' p. 1014.

Germany, which exported nineteen million kilograms in the same year.<sup>34</sup> As a result of the loss of home and export markets, the number of wool textile workers fell throughout the period, from 164,350 in 1949 to 22,433 in 1990.<sup>35</sup> The records of the NUDBTW executive committee noted regular mill closures, especially from the late 1950s onwards, including large mills such as Mark Oldroyd's in Dewsbury which employed 460 workers and closed in October 1958 because it could not maintain a full order book.<sup>36</sup> Some firms issued press releases about their closure, including Kellett, Woodman and Company Ltd., a Bradford firm, in July 1975. In their press release, the directors stated that they had 'reluctantly been compelled to take this decision against a background trend of falling demand and the present position of a particularly low order book which only enables production to continue during the remainder of the summer.'<sup>37</sup> This shows that the firm felt it had to articulate the challenges it had faced to its workers and that their situation was difficult. Whilst discourses of decline may well have been over-exaggerated in some quarters, as Tomlinson argues, in the case of wool textiles, there was real decline occurring in rates of production, exports, workforce and number of mills, the effects of which for trade unionism are discussed in chapter three. The contraction of the industry was not the only problem the industry faced, as the following section will show.

#### Wool in the Post-war Economy: Problems and Solutions

The wool textile industry faced three major problems in the post-war period: first, demand was falling, due to cheap overseas competition, particularly from Europe but also further afield, and changes in fashion; second, from the end of the Second World War and despite continual contraction, the industry was chronically short of workers; third, training in the industry was poor, with mill owners and managers, trade unions and the government concerned at the state of apprenticeships and the qualifications of the workforce. Despite significant problems, the extent of government intervention was limited and, when implemented, was not always effective.

We have seen above that Britain's export strength in wool decreased throughout the post-war period, a particular blow for the industry given that exports were a large share of its

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 1014; The National Archives (TNA), FG 5/1685, National Economic Development Office records, Progress Report by Economic Development Committee for the Wool Textile Industry, undated but amongst papers from 1977.

<sup>35</sup> *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics – the Wool Textile Delegation, January 1950, no. 1 (relating to the month of November 1949), p. 6; *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics – the Confederation of British Wool Textiles Limited, no. 483 (statistics relating to the month of January 1990), no page numbers.

<sup>36</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/6, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers records, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 11 October 1958.

<sup>37</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB113/1, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers records, Press Release Regarding End of Worsted Production at Kellett, Woodman and Company Ltd, 16 July 1975.

market. Jenkins noted that on the eve of the First World War, Britain was still a world leader in wool textile output, holding a fifty-four per cent world share of exports in 1913.<sup>38</sup> By the interwar period, the export market was dramatically reduced, but a strong home market kept the industry afloat; by the mid-1960s, Italy had become the world's leading wool exporter, with Jenkins adding that this was 'primarily at Britain's cost,' and decline 'became very rapid' in the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> He pointed to issues such as slow technological innovation and the use of very old plant in explaining some of the decline, along with the increase in overseas competition.<sup>40</sup> He also noted that fashion changes were important in driving the decline of the British industry: dresses, skirts and coats were becoming shorter from the interwar period, requiring less cloth, there was a reduction in the use of linings, and demand rose for silk, artificial silk and man-made fibre products.<sup>41</sup>

Concerns about the future of the wool textile industry are to be found in papers of the Board of Trade. A Board of Trade memo from 1964 suggested that 'it may well be of course that before long the woollen industry will find itself swallowed by the m. m. f. [man-made fibres] python,' showing that it was thought possible that competition from newly-developed fibres could have a detrimental effect on consumption of wool.<sup>42</sup> Another memo from 1964 noted that smaller wool firms lacked the capital to invest in new plant: this was particularly problematic given the large number of small units in the wool industry, which will be discussed in chapter four.<sup>43</sup> Despite noting this problem, there was no suggestion that the Board of Trade or any other government department would make funds available to smaller firms in order for them to re-equip; indeed, attendees at a meeting of the Economic Development Committee for the Wool Textile Industry in May 1977 noted that there were few incentives for investing in new plant 'because the rewards for risk taking were inadequate.'<sup>44</sup>

Along with the problem of decline, the industry faced a shortage of labour in the immediate post-war years; men who had left the industry for the armed forces did not return in large

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<sup>38</sup> Jenkins, 'Wool Textiles in the Twentieth Century,' gp. 993.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 994, p. 1014, p. 1015.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 995, p. 1008.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 996.

<sup>42</sup> The National Archives (TNA), BT 258/1718, Board of Trade Future of the Wool Textile Industry records, Memo from E. W. M. Magor to unknown recipient, 10 August 1964; The National Archives (TNA), BT 258/1718, Board of Trade Future of the Wool Textile Industry records, Economic Research Unit Proposal for an Enquiry into the Wool Textile Industry, undated research paper.

<sup>43</sup> The National Archives (TNA), BT 258/1718, Board of Trade Future of the Wool Textile Industry records, Memo on the Current State of the Wool Textile Industry, no author or recipient noted, 16 October 1964.

<sup>44</sup> The National Archives (TNA), FG 5/1685, National Economic Development Council records, Minutes of meeting of the Economic Development Committee for the Wool Textile Industry, 17 May 1977.

numbers, instead seeking work elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> Although contemporaneous research conducted by J. C. R. Dow and L. A. Dicks-Mireaux suggested that ‘the excess demand for labour was very moderate’ and that concern about labour shortage in textiles was ‘overstated,’ this was a real and significant problem for the industry’s owners and managers.<sup>46</sup> The 1951 Census of Production stated that in England and Wales, there were 171, 513 wool textile workers (this table is not broken down by region, so it not possible to ascertain what proportion worked in Yorkshire).<sup>47</sup> By 1963, this had decreased to 150, 030 and by 1976 to 88, 257.<sup>48</sup> Although the decline in personnel was in part due to the contraction of the industry, it is possible that the industry’s continued contraction was partly the result of the difficulty in hiring labour. It was raised in Parliament several times across the post-war period. In 1947, Sir Cyril Osborne, MP for Louth, asked the Minister of Labour, George Isaacs, ‘what further steps are being taken to attract labour’ in industries such as ‘wool, cotton, silk, hosiery and other textile trades.’<sup>49</sup> In the same year, Sir Stafford Cripps, then President of the Board of Trade, noted that ‘the worst [labour shortages], of course, are in the textiles industries.’<sup>50</sup>

These problems were not limited to the immediate post-war years: in 1973, Joan Hall, MP for Keighley in the woollen district, asked the Prime Minister Edward Heath what he suggested for ‘those regions where there is a shortage of labour, as in the West Riding, where the wool textile industry is doing extremely well and cannot get the labour it requires?’<sup>51</sup> Hall’s statement that the industry was doing ‘extremely well’ was, perhaps, an overstatement, but Heath’s response was less than helpful: he argued that the shortage could be alleviated by ‘some of those in the regions moving to places where excellent jobs await them,’ with no suggestion for the wool textile industry on what it could do to facilitate change.<sup>52</sup> The Economic Development Committee for the Wool Textile Industry noted in

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<sup>45</sup> For a more comprehensive survey of the post-war labour shortage in wool textiles, see Laura Price, ‘Immigrants and Apprentices: Solutions to the Post-War Labour Shortage in the West Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry, 1945-1980,’ *Textile History*, 45 (1), May 2014, pp. 32-48.

<sup>46</sup> J. C. R. Dow and L. A. Dicks-Mireaux, ‘The Excess Demand for Labour: a Study of Conditions in Great Britain, 1946-56,’ *Oxford Economic Papers*, new series, 10 (1), February 1958, p. 12, p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Table 22, *The Report on the Census of Production for 1951* (London, 1955), no page numbers.

<sup>48</sup> Table 3, *Report on the Census of Production 1963: Woollen and Worsted* (London, 1963), no page numbers; Table 4, *Business Monitor: Report on the Census of Production 1976: Woollen and Worsted* (London, 1976), p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> UK Parliament. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*. Textile Industry written answers, 20 February 1947. Accessed at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/search/wooltextileindustrylabourshortage> on 27 September 2012.

<sup>50</sup> UK Parliament. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*. Consumer Goods (Shortages), 26 June 1947. Accessed at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/search/wooltextileindustrylabourshortage> on 27 September 2012.

<sup>51</sup> UK Parliament. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*. Regional Policies, 8 March 1973. Accessed at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/search/wooltextileindustrylabourshortage> on 27 September 2012.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

1976 that the industry was ‘frequently short of manpower,’ suggesting that this was a problem the industry had to deal with regularly.<sup>53</sup>

The industry’s employers were also concerned about the labour shortage, as the minutes of the Wool and Allied Textile Employers’ Council (WATEC) attested: they show particular concern in finding ‘suitable school-leavers,’ describing such potential employees as ‘vital to the future of the industry’ as early as 1952.<sup>54</sup> The cheapest solution to the labour shortage was the employment of immigrant workers, a move Ralph Fevre argued was motivated by the need to reduce labour costs.<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to estimate the extent of immigrant labour in the industry as statistics collected by the Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics do not indicate ethnicity; however, we can confidently assume that immigrants were an increasingly important group in for wool textiles. Cohen and Jenner’s study showed that immigrants were employed in varying numbers at a majority of wool firms sampled in the mid-1960s.<sup>56</sup> Fevre noted that wool textiles had the highest concentration of Asian workers of all industries in Britain in the post-war period.<sup>57</sup>

Related to the labour-shortage crisis was the industry’s attempt to improve training and apprenticeships in order to attract more workers, especially young people. The concern with providing better training for young people was highlighted in the 1959 Crowther Report on education which referred to the ‘loss of potential technical skill’ resulting from fewer boys gaining apprenticeships with day-release college attendance attached.<sup>58</sup> David Finegold and David Soskice also commented on Britain’s failure to adequately train its workforce, citing it as ‘both a product and a cause’ of poor economic performance.<sup>59</sup> The Wool and Allied Textile Employers’ Council, the ‘central employers’ organisation in the wool textile industry,’ suggested changes to training in the industry in 1947 that would ‘ensure all young people receive thorough training.’<sup>60</sup> In addition, a ‘foremanship’ course was suggested in 1944 along with revamped apprenticeship schemes and a ‘learnership’ course for young

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<sup>53</sup> The National Archives (TNA), FG 5/1685, National Economic Development Council records, Report of the Economic Development Committee for the Wool Textile Industry, 21 May 1976.

<sup>54</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 3D86/20/9/1, Yorkshire Federation of Powerloom Overlookers records, Notes of Meeting between Wool and Allied Textile Employers’ Council, National Association of Unions in the Textile Trades and Youth Employment Officers, 27 May 1952.

<sup>55</sup> Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination*, p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen and Jenner, ‘The Employment of Immigrants,’ p. 43.

<sup>57</sup> Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination*, p. ix.

<sup>58</sup> The Crowther Report. *15 to 18: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)* (London, 1959). Accessed at [www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/crowther/crowther1-31.html](http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/crowther/crowther1-31.html) on 26 September 2012

<sup>59</sup> David Finegold and David Soskice, ‘The Failure of Training in Britain: Analysis and Prescription,’ *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 4 (3), 1988, p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> The National Archives (TNA), PJ 11/232, Industrial Democracy Committee records, Wool and Allied Textile Employers’ Council Evidence to Committee of Inquiry on Industrial Democracy, 6 April 1976; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 3D86/20/9/1, Yorkshire Federation of Powerloom Overlookers records, Suggested Training Scheme for Juvenile and Young Persons Entering the Wool Textile Industry at Operative Level, Wool and Allied Textile Employers’ Council, 1947.

people whose academic achievements were not of the standard required by apprenticeship, which was suggested in 1957.<sup>61</sup> The new schemes were set out in an undated Ministry of Labour booklet entitled 'Wool Textile Industry' that appears to have been produced in order to attract more workers to the industry.<sup>62</sup> However, there is little evidence that these schemes were successful in attracting younger workers to the industry and ultimately they did little to alleviate the labour shortage.

The government intervened in this issue, establishing the Wool Industry Training Board in June 1964 as a result of the Industrial Training Act of the same year.<sup>63</sup> Again, this was a generally unsuccessful exercise: the various reports that the Board produced do not refer to an uptake in training or an improvement in the labour shortage – indeed, the number of productive personnel in wool continued to decline from the Board's founding until the end of the twentieth century (although it is important to note that this was largely an effect of the industry's contraction). In May 1976, the Economic Development Committee for the Wool Textile Industry noted in a report that better training was needed to 'offset manpower shortages,' showing that the training that had been provided was not seen by all to be adequate in addressing the industry's problems.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, the employment of immigrants was the most successful solution to the labour shortage in that it enabled mills to continue production; immigrants and women were excluded from the training programmes established by the Board and by the Wool and Allied Textile Employers' Council, possibly because they were unskilled workers and deemed inappropriate for training for skilled work. This mirrored the course taken by the NUDBTW which will be discussed in chapter three, in which the recruitment of skilled white men was prioritised above that of women and immigrants.

Despite ongoing decline, government intervention in and knowledge of wool textiles was limited. Indeed, a Board of Trade civil servant, M. M. Ord-Johnstone, wrote to E. Atherton of the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Board of Trade office to ask his advice on dealing with wool employers in August 1964 because 'we down here know so little about the industry.'<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 3D86/20/5/31, Yorkshire Federation of Powerloom Overlookers records, Notes of Meeting of Yorkshire Council for Further Education County Advisory Committee: Textile Industries, 21 June 1944; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 3D86/20/5/43, Yorkshire Federation of Powerloom Overlookers records, Explanatory Note – Apprenticeship Arrangements, Wool and Allied Textile Employers' Council, 14 October 1957.

<sup>62</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 44/341, Ministry of Labour Wool Textile Industry records, 'Wool Textile Industry,' Industrial Information Series Number 9, Ministry of Labour, undated.

<sup>63</sup> Wool Industry Training Board. Report and Statement of Accounts for the Period Ended 31 March 1965, vol. xvii (London, 1965). Accessed at <http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk/fullrec/fullrec/do?id=1964-0531114&DurUrl=yes> on 21 June 2012.

<sup>64</sup> The National Archives (TNA), FG 5/1685, National Economic Development Council records, Report of the Economic Development Committee for the Wool Textile Industry, 21 May 1976.

<sup>65</sup> The National Archives (TNA), BT 258/1718, Board of Trade Future of the Wool Textile Industry records, Letter from M. M. Ord-Johnstone to E. Atherton, 7 August 1964.



This is perhaps one of the reasons for the paucity of government papers on the wool textile industry after 1945. Government assistance for the wool textile industry was mainly concentrated in the later part of the period: the Training Board was established in 1964 but more financial assistance was forthcoming in the late 1960s and early 1970s when loans totalling £24 million were given to firms to purchase new machinery, in order to replace the very old stock used in many mills.<sup>66</sup> However, the Wool Textile Delegation recorded complaints from employers in 1969 and 1970 about not receiving investment grants after applying for them.<sup>67</sup>

In 1974, the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) was introduced under the auspices of the General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs (GATT) to European Economic Community (EEC) countries to ‘achieve the progressive liberalisation of world trade in textile products’ as well as ‘ensuring the orderly development of this trade, and the avoidance of disruptive effects in individual markets and on individual products.’<sup>68</sup> The MFA had a key aim of encouraging textile industries in developing countries to grow through controlling exports from developed countries to the developing world.<sup>69</sup> Most importantly for the West Yorkshire wool industry, Articles 3 and 4 of the MFA made provisions for actual and possible market disruption: importing countries could agree voluntary quotas with exporting countries to protect their home markets, but should an agreement with the exporting country fail to be reached, the importing country could impose compulsory restrictions.<sup>70</sup> The MFA was renegotiated several times and remained in place for the rest of the twentieth century. The British government and other bodies such as the EEC did not appear to take a particular interest in British wool textiles and the problems it faced. As we saw above, wool’s apparent lack of importance to those in positions of power has been mirrored in the way historians and scholars have given little attention to it.

### Jobs in the Wool Textile Industry

Yorkshire was the base for the majority of wool textile production in Britain. For example, seventy-eight per cent of woollen and worsted spinning took place in the county, along with seventy-six per cent of woollen and worsted weaving.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, a significant percentage of the population of West Yorkshire were employed in wool textiles: in 1951, for example, 18 per cent of the county’s working population was engaged in wool textile

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<sup>66</sup> Z. A. Silberston, *The Multi-Fibre Arrangement and the UK Economy* (London, 1984), p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> The National Archives (TNA), BT 258/2426, Board of Trade Wool Textile Investment Incentives records, Letter from P Richardson of Wool Textile Delegation to Board of Trade on Investment Grants, 8 December 1969; The National Archives (TNA), BT 258/2426, Board of Trade Wool Textile Investment Incentives records, Board of Trade memo on the Wool Textile Delegation and investment grants, 20 January 1970.

<sup>68</sup> Silberston, *The Multi-Fibre Arrangement and the UK Economy*, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Wild, ‘The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry,’ p. 185.

production.<sup>72</sup> In the same year, the Report on the Census of Production noted that the overwhelming majority of wool and worsted mills were located in the East or West Ridings of Yorkshire, with 1,158 mills out of a national total of 1,502 (Scotland, the home of the next largest number of wool mills, had only 144 in 1951).<sup>73</sup> Women accounted for a large percentage of wool textile workers: this varied between different occupations but, on the whole, accounted for approximately fifty per cent of the whole workforce across the period, although this occasionally varied. For example, in 1951, the Census of Production recorded 86,519 male operatives and 104,211 females.<sup>74</sup> However, there was never a large majority of either male or female workers, and employment was generally split reasonably equally.

The wool textile industry had long comprised of a variety of occupations. Even as the period progressed and mills closed, a number of cogs were required to keep the factory wheel turning. Unskilled, lower-paid positions included warehouse labourers and packers, reclaimed material sorters and blanket menders, who in 1984 and 1985 were recommended a weekly rate of £67.02 per week by the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) Textiles Group pay negotiations with employers' associations.<sup>75</sup> These low-skill positions, with the exclusion of warehouse labourers, were often women. The next group up, whose pay was recommended to be £70.28 per week, included semi-skilled positions such as weavers in charge of a single, automatic loom, manual weavers, card room operatives (who disentangled cleaned wool), winders (who created large bobbins of wool from smaller units produced by spinners), woollen menders (who hand-mended faults in cloth) and worsted spinners.<sup>76</sup> Women also took this type of job – winders and menders were usually women. Further up the hierarchy were those assigned £77.31 per week, including worsted menders, weavers in charge of four or more looms, finishers (who ensured the desired quality of cloth) and dyers, with the top rung of the ladder earning a recommended £84.33 for mule spinners, Jacquard weavers and pattern weavers.<sup>77</sup> These wages were based on a system that was instituted in the 1980s but was roughly similar throughout the industry's history. Those who operated more simple machinery were lower down the scale, with those operating a number of frames as well as those whose skill extended to patterns and specialist materials earning more. Women were generally on the lower rungs of the skill hierarchy – for example, women weavers were less likely to operate four or more looms and dyers were almost always men. This meant that even after the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970, which made pay equal for women who were engaged in employment identical to men's, women were generally paid less in wool textiles as their job descriptions and skill levels were

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>73</sup> Table 5, *The Report on the Census of Production for 1951* (London, 1951), no page numbers.

<sup>74</sup> Table 13, *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), WYK1312/3/8, Christine Shepherd records, 'Wool Textiles Memoranda of Agreements, 1984-85,' Transport and General Workers' Union Textile Group.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

different. As immigrants began to join the industry, as will be discussed further in chapter four, they too occupied the lower ranks of mill work, often – but not always – doing jobs traditionally regarded as being held by women, and they worked the night shift, which women were not legally allowed to do.

The diversity of jobs available in the industry is likely to have contributed to the low level of trade union membership: wages and conditions were different for workers in different sections of the mill, especially up to the early 1970s, with some – for example, weavers – largely employed on piece rates, and others, for example spinners, paid by the hour. Chris Wrigley described the system of wage rates in the industry as ‘complex,’ with the interwar wool union leader Ben Turner commenting that it was a ‘mystery’ even to him.<sup>78</sup> Between 1973 and 1975, this complicated structure – based on eight different pay groups and fifty-five job descriptions – was simplified to a common rate for the majority of manual operatives, but the new system still involved eight pay groups differentiated by skill, and was not adopted by all firms.<sup>79</sup> By the mid-1980s, this had been revised down to four groups but the large number of job descriptions remained.<sup>80</sup> The lack of parity between workers could have been an issue for dispute, but it appears it merely stood in the way of greater cohesion in the workforce by creating a myriad of available occupational identities, an issue to be discussed more fully in chapter five. Although this was not a primary factor contributing to the low level of trade union organisation – especially given that other industries were also arranged in complicated and unequal ways – it was certainly an obstacle to greater union growth in the industry.

Furthermore, the structure of the industry (to be discussed in greater depth in chapter four) inhibited greater solidarity between occupation groups within the industry as well as in the workforce as a whole. In West Yorkshire, wool textiles was organised largely by product with strong geographical differentiation – for example, in Huddersfield, fine woollens was the primary product of the mills, whereas in Bradford, worsteds dominated and in Dewsbury and Batley, heavy woollens such as shoddy and mungo goods were manufactured.<sup>81</sup> By the post-war period, this arrangement had changed little in over three hundred years.<sup>82</sup> As a result, each town would be host to mills which employed workers of all possible wool occupations – carders, spinners, winders, weavers, menders and finishers, to name a few – all manufacturing one product, for example fine woollen suit cloth, a speciality of the Huddersfield industry, or carpets, Halifax’s key product. Mills would either specialise in one process or in a small number; Riverside Spinning Company in Slaithwaite, outside

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<sup>78</sup> Wrigley, *Cosy Co-operation Under Strain*, p. 1, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> Winyard, *Trouble Looming*, pp. 24-27.

<sup>80</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirkstiles), WYK1312/3/8, Christine Shepherd records, ‘Wool Textiles Memoranda of Agreements, 1984-85,’ Transport and General Workers’ Union Textile Group.

<sup>81</sup> Wild, ‘The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry,’ p. 204, p. 216.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Huddersfield, was a carding, spinning and winding firm, and was typical of many other wool textile companies.<sup>83</sup> The industry was organised geographically by product and, on a more local level, by process. Whilst identities and structures will be given a more thorough treatment later in the thesis, it is important to note for now that this highly fragmented structure was a significant contributor to the low level of trade union organisation in that it placed practical barriers in the way of meeting as a larger group, especially when wool firms were characterised by very small employee numbers, as well as barriers to a common 'wool textile worker' identity.<sup>84</sup>

### Conclusion

The post-war years for the wool textile industry were characterised by decline. The industry increasingly lost markets in Europe, Asia and the developing world, and also faced competition from these emerging markets at home. As well as this, new man-made fibres began to dominate the fashion industry, and changes in fashion trends meant that, where wool products were still desired, less cloth was needed.

As a result, mills were closing and jobs were lost as the period progressed. Despite this, the industry faced a labour shortage that became a major problem for wool manufacturers. Some efforts to address the shortage, such as improved training, were not extended to all sections of the workforce. There is little evidence that improved training schemes had an impact on the level of employment. Another scheme to recruit more workers to the mills was the employment of immigrants. This was relatively successful in keeping the industry afloat for slightly longer, as immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent and Eastern Europe seemed more willing to take on jobs in wool than the local white male population. Despite their growing importance to the industry, immigrant workers, along with the women who constituted around half of the workforce, were generally excluded from opportunities for advancement such as apprenticeship schemes. This reflected their low status in the industry's hierarchy of skill, which was dominated by white, native-born men.

The following chapters will address the research questions set out in the introduction more systematically, but some conclusions about the low level of wool trade unionism can be drawn from this chapter. The variety of jobs available in the wool industry was accompanied by a lack of parity between them: wages were variable based on occupation and skill level, and men and women did not earn similar amounts of money because women were always in unskilled positions whereas men could occupy a range of jobs in the mill. Furthermore, immigrant workers generally held unskilled jobs and were often segregated together onto nightshifts. This meant that there was little common feeling between workers engaged on

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<sup>83</sup> Wage records 1999-2000, Riverside Spinning Company, in author's possession.

<sup>84</sup> In the 1970s, half of all wool textile mills employed fewer than thirty people, with seventy-three per cent employing fewer than one hundred. Winyard, *Trouble Looming*, p. 6.

different jobs in the industry. A greater sense of identification with other wool textile workers could have led to a stronger basis for union organisation, a proposition explored in chapter five. The following chapter will show that this had also been the case before the Second World War.

## Chapter Two: Wool Trade Unions, Trade Unionists and Strikes before 1945

### Introduction

Trade union membership was low amongst wool textile workers in the post-war period. The aim of this thesis is to investigate why this was the case. The aim of the chapter is to establish how wool unions operated before the Second World War and whether the pre-war situation was similar to or different from post-war wool trade unionism. The chapter is divided into three parts: the first will survey the strength of pre-war wool textile trade unions; secondly, there will be a brief case study of a wool trade unionist, Julia Varley; finally, three strikes, in 1875, 1890-91 and 1925, will be discussed to establish whether they reveal union strength or, conversely, were isolated and insignificant incidents with no lasting effects. We will see that wool trade unionism was traditionally weak and wool textile workers had never been attracted in large numbers to any of the unions on offer, whether they were incredibly small craft unions or larger, general textile organisations. This was the case before and after the Second World War. It will become clear that trade unions had limited appeal to wool textile workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that wool trade unionism's weaknesses did not appear after 1945, but were present beforehand.

### The Politics of the Woollen District, c. 1890-1945

The pre-war political landscape of the woollen district was characterised by a move towards support for organised labour (although this was slower in some areas than in others). This section of the chapter will show that although wool textile workers were unlikely to join a trade union, they were open to labour politics. Growing support for the Independent Labour Party (ILP) at the turn of the century was followed by the election of Labour candidates in different parts of the district. The labour movement in the woollen district was largely restricted to the political sphere, with wool trade unions remaining small and relatively insignificant. The barriers to building strong and populous trade unions that existed in the wool textile industry were as evident in the early part of the twentieth century as they were in the latter.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of political labour in the woollen district could be seen partially as an outlet for wool textile workers' organisational ambitions as a result of the difficulties of creating effective trade unions; David Howell noted that the absence of strong trade unions in the woollen district deprived workers of a channel through which they could exert

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<sup>1</sup> These barriers – chiefly the structure of the industry and the identities of wool textile workers, along with fragmented woollen district communities – will be discussed fully in the following chapters of the thesis.

pressure, and this could have led to increased support for a political labour organisation.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, political labour could have taken precedence over workplace organisations, stifling wool workers' desire to join a union. Whilst the causality is hard to determine, it seems more likely that the former is the case, especially in the wake of the defeat of the Manningham Mills strike of 1890-91 (although to simplistically state that the strike was the key to the growth of labour politics in the district is problematic, as E. P. Thompson argued).<sup>3</sup> It is certain that there was support for the labour movement in the woollen district, albeit not necessarily for trade unions.

The election of Labour or ILP candidates in the woollen district occurred at an uneven rate. David Clark's work on the Colne Valley Labour Union shows that the Colne Valley, an area to the west of Huddersfield that was dominated by the wool industry, had the oldest de facto constituency Labour Party in England; its inaugural meeting was in July 1891.<sup>4</sup> Thompson further noted that the ILP's first council seat was won in the Colne Valley.<sup>5</sup> It was not until the early twentieth century, however, that Labour candidates began to win parliamentary elections. In 1906, Fred Jowett of the ILP won the Bradford West seat with 39.1 per cent of the vote, and held the seat in both elections of 1910 with an increased margin in December 1910 of 64 per cent of the vote.<sup>6</sup> Jowett's success was not immediately mirrored elsewhere. According to Howell, he was not a straightforwardly socialist candidate and fought the 1906 election on a platform of progressivism which gained support from some Liberal Party supporters, which perhaps explains some of his electoral success.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it was on account of this pragmatism that Howell explained early ILP successes.<sup>8</sup> Again, however, it must be stressed that Labour candidates did not win seats everywhere in the woollen district at such an early stage. In Bradford East, for example, there was no comparable pattern of Labour victory, despite it being the seat that Keir Hardie stood for in the 1896 by-election winning seventeen per cent of the vote.<sup>9</sup> Bradford Central offered no Labour candidates of any description between 1885 and the by-election of 1916, when other constituencies in the woollen district had begun to do so.<sup>10</sup> For example, there was an ILP candidate for Halifax in an 1893 by-election and for Huddersfield in 1895, although electoral victory was not yet within reach for Labour yet in those two constituencies.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the First World War, however, Labour candidates were elected in the woollen district – for example, in 1918, a

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<sup>2</sup> David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906* (Manchester, 1983), p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire,' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History: in Memory of G. D. H. Cole* (London, 1967), p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> David Clark, *Colne Valley: Radicalism to Socialism* (London, 1981), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire,' p. 277.

<sup>6</sup> F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918* (London, 1974), p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918*, p. 80.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116, p. 122.

Labour candidate won in Huddersfield, although this seat was lost to the Liberals at the next election in 1922 and regularly changed hands between the Liberals and Labour throughout the interwar period.<sup>12</sup>

Although Labour could not be said to dominate the election results of the woollen district until after the Second World War, the growth of the ILP in the region throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth suggests that there was significant support for progressive social policies amongst wool textile workers at this time. In his research on the ILP in Bradford, Keith Laybourn argued that its founding in that city and its early successes there, such as the election of Fred Jowett, was due to the support it gained from the trade union movement.<sup>13</sup> Although he acknowledged that trade unionism in the wool textile industry was weak, Laybourn noted that Bradford ILP had the support of local trade unionists and this contributed to its strength as a local group.<sup>14</sup> Martin Crick also argued in his research on the ILP in the heavy woollen district of Batley and Dewsbury that the support of the local Trades Council for independent labour representation was important in the formation of Batley ILP in January 1893, although he also noted that the ILP fared badly in this area.<sup>15</sup> Robert B. Perks asserted that the link between trade unionism and the ILP was also strong in Huddersfield.<sup>16</sup> Thompson clearly stated that the Manningham Mills strike of 1890-91 was an important push factor in the establishment of the ILP but that to focus too strongly on the role of the strike is to ignore the two key assertions he made about the reasons the ILP emerged: first, that a large number of men and women in Yorkshire took the decision to form a socialist political party, and second, that such a party coming into being was the result of years of work, and not a spontaneous event.<sup>17</sup> As such, although trade unionism and strikes played a role in supporting the ILP, in Thompson's view they should not be overstated. This view has not been refuted; it seems safe to conclude that the ILP branches in the woollen district could not have grown or won council or parliamentary seats on the basis of trade union support alone, given the primary industry's low level of trade unionism.

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<sup>12</sup> F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949* (Glasgow, 1969), p. 140, p. 149.

<sup>13</sup> Keith Laybourn, "'One of the Little Breezes Blowing Across Bradford: the Bradford Independent Labour Party and Trade Unionism, c. 1890-1914,' in Keith Laybourn and David James (eds.), *The Rising Sun of Socialism: the Independent Labour Party in the Textile District of the West Riding of Yorkshire between 1890 and 1914* (Hertford, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Crick, 'Labour Alliance or Socialist Unity? The Independent Labour Party in the Heavy Woollen Areas of West Yorkshire, c. 1893-1902,' in Keith Laybourn and David James (eds.), *The Rising Sun of Socialism: the Independent Labour Party in the Textile District of the West Riding of Yorkshire between 1890 and 1914* (Hertford, 1991), p. 31, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> Robert B. Perks, "'The Rising Sun of Socialism: Trade Unionism and the Emergence of the Independent Labour Party in Huddersfield,' in Keith Laybourn and David James (eds.), *The Rising Sun of Socialism: the Independent Labour Party in the Textile District of the West Riding of Yorkshire between 1890 and 1914* (Hertford, 1991), p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire,' p.279, p. 286.



Although this survey of politics in the West Riding before 1945 has been brief, and has focused on the role of Labour as a political movement at the expense of examining other aspects such as the persistence of allegiance to the Liberal Party in some parts of the woollen district, it has shown that there was a growing labour movement in the region that was not reliant upon trade unionism but instead focused on labour representation. Although its development was uneven, by the end of the First World War there were electoral successes in several woollen district constituencies, which Labour began to win more consistently after the Second World War. The wool textile industry may not have produced a strong trade union movement, but its workers' support for the wider labour movement in the years leading up to 1945 is clear.

### Pre-war Wool Trade Unions

Trade unionism in the wool textile industry had always been weak. In the years preceding the main period of study for this thesis, membership levels in wool trade unions were low. Obtaining statistics to support this proposition has been difficult; for most of the period between the later decades of the nineteenth century until 1945, wool unions were small and numerous, so calculating totals is difficult. Records of these unions are scant and their membership rolls cannot be utilised to build a more certain picture of the size of small wool unions. The dearth of published studies of wool trade unionism adds to this difficulty, although some of the published accounts have been useful in ascertaining the approximate level of trade union membership in the years leading up to 1945. Tony Jowitt listed thirty-one different wool unions in his examination of trade unionism in the Yorkshire worsted industry, including a handful of larger groups such as the Amalgamated Society of Dyers (with a membership of 10,538 in 1910) and many smaller unions, such as the Halifax and District Warp Dressers' Association (1910 membership of forty-two), the Bradford Stuff Makers' Up (120 members in 1910) and the Bradford and District Card Grinders and Setters (121 members in 1910).<sup>18</sup> Hugh Armstrong Clegg commented that there was a number of 'small sectional societies' in wool textiles in the second volume of his history of British trade unions covering the period 1911-1933, corroborating Jowitt's evidence.<sup>19</sup> Clegg also stated that there was low union density in wool textiles as compared to other industries in 1920: density was fifty-eight per cent in wool, with cotton at seventy-nine per cent and coal mining at ninety-two per cent in the same year.<sup>20</sup> This indicates that wool trade unionism was weaker than trade unionism in other industries of comparable importance to the British economy in the pre-1945 period.

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<sup>18</sup> Tony Jowitt, 'The Retardation of Trade Unionism in the Yorkshire Worsted Textile Industry,' in J. A. Jowitt and A. J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries* (London, 1988), pp. 88-89.

<sup>19</sup> Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1989. Volume II: 1911-1933* (Oxford, 1985), p. 86.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

The large number of small businesses proved a significant barrier to collective organisation. In practical terms, it was difficult to organise a disparate group of people across many hundreds of small firms. The structure of the industry also added to the problem of weak work-based collective identities; as Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern argued about the cotton industry, strong work-based identities provided the bonds on which organisation could have been based.<sup>21</sup> This structure was reflected in the organisation of wool trade unions: there were some large firms, such as Salts of Saltaire, and some large unions, such as the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (NUDBTW), but there were many more small firms and small unions. Many of these smaller unions were geographically based, such as the Cloth Pressers' Society and the Healders and Twisters' Trade and Friendly Society, both of Huddersfield, and the Yorkshire Association of Powerloom Overlookers, based in Bradford.<sup>22</sup> The proliferation of smaller unions is suggestive of larger unions' failure to effectively organise workers from a range of workplaces across the woollen district.

Wool historians have offered other explanations for the low level of union membership prior to the Second World War. Tony Jowitt suggested several reasons for what he described as 'the retardation of trade unionism;' whilst he stated that his research was on the worsted sector of the industry, rather than wool as a whole, the reasons he gave are generally transferrable to wool and, indeed, he appears to refer to both at several times. At the top of Jowitt's list was the employment of women and juveniles, but he also noted the structure of the industry, wage disparity (which created difficulties in common identification between workers), depression in the industry, employer hostility, the social exclusiveness of those in skilled roles and the power dynamics in mills and between workers, supervisors and employers.<sup>23</sup> Irene Magrath's research on wool employers' associations also cited the employment of women and juveniles as a significant explanation for weak wool trade unionism.<sup>24</sup> Neither Jowitt nor Magrath gave an adequate explanation as to why the high proportion of women's employment in wool should restrict its workforce's capacity to organise collectively. Whilst it is noted by Jowitt that trade unions were not interested in recruiting juvenile workers because of the likelihood that they would leave the industry on reaching adulthood, there is no comparable explanation for women, who, however, he

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<sup>21</sup> Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern, "'If We Depart from These Conditions...'" Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry, c. 1946-1952,' *Labour History Review*, 72 (2), August 2007, p. 136.

<sup>22</sup> Jack Eaton and Colin Gill, *The Trade Union Directory: a Guide to All TUC Unions* (London, 1981), p. 179, p. 181, p. 182.

<sup>23</sup> Jowitt, 'The Retardation of Trade Unionism in the Yorkshire Worsted Textile Industry,' p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Irene Magrath, 'Protecting the Interests of the Trade: Wool Textile Employers' Organisations in the 1920s,' in J. A. Jowitt and A. J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Wool Textile Industries* (London, 1988), p. 45.

insisted were ‘At the heart of the problem’ of weak organisation.<sup>25</sup> Women were employed in wool textiles after marriage as well as before, so there was a diminished expectation that they would leave at some point in the future compared to juvenile workers. We will see later in the thesis that women were not a priority for the NUDBTW in their recruitment campaigns after 1945 and that, generally, their particular problems were sidelined in favour of those of skilled white male workers.<sup>26</sup>

There is evidence of good relations between workers and employers in the wool industry before the Second World War, and particularly in the interwar period. Good relations between workers and employers could have proved a barrier to greater trade union organisation; if workers felt they could resolve their problems without recourse to legalistic procedures, it is possible that they would have preferred to take this less formal course of action, rendering the union less useful to potential members. A former wool textile operative interviewed for a Kirklees Libraries oral history project said, ‘I can’t speak too highly of Joshua Ellis’s’ [the firm he was employed at].<sup>27</sup> He said that the unnamed union he was a part of ‘didn’t win any battles and didn’t try to, I don’t think,’ noting that face-to-face relations with the employer was a more common way to assuage problems: ‘If you went with a proper tale and honest, they’d listen to you.’<sup>28</sup> There is more information on this practice in the post-war era in chapter four, but this interview shows that face-to-face relationships with managers and owners were a custom of the pre-war wool textile industry. It may well have been customary since the development of the factory system; Patrick Joyce indicated that this was the case in his research on the culture of the nineteenth-century factory and Clark stated that management within the wool textile industry was characterised by personal relationships between owners and workers.<sup>29</sup>

Good relationships between workers and managers can be observed in the history of the interwar Joint Industrial Council (JIC) in wool, a collaboration between employers and trade unions to regulate conditions in the industry (there were several JICs for different industries established around this time). Chris Wrigley’s study of the Council noted that it had strong support from the National Association of Unions in the Textile Trade (NAUTT), a confederation of the many wool trade unions, and from wool employers.<sup>30</sup> The Wool and Allied Textile Joint Industrial Council first met in 1919 and disbanded in 1930, but acted as

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<sup>25</sup> Jowitt, ‘The Retardation of Trade Unionism in the Yorkshire Worsted Textile Industry,’ p. 91, p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Laura Price, ‘Immigrants and Apprentices: Solutions to the Post-War Labour Shortage in the West Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry, 1945-1980,’ *Textile History*, 45 (1), May 2014, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 192, recorded 5 August 1986.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: the Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980), p. 100; Clark, *Colne Valley: Radicalism to Socialism*, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Chris Wrigley, *Cosy Co-operation Under Strain: Industrial Relations in the Yorkshire Woollen Textile Industry, 1919-1930* (York, 1987), p. 1.

a body to negotiate disputes so that they did not escalate.<sup>31</sup> This did not completely prevent strike action from taking place – as we shall see shortly, 1925 saw a significant strike in the industry – but, according to Wrigley, ‘gave the employers a safety valve for the grievances of their workpeople.’<sup>32</sup> The Joint Industrial Council for wool was seen as one of the most successful. Wrigley argues that this was because in other industries, there was a history of long established unions with collective bargaining procedures already in place, whereas wool lacked a strong tradition of collective bargaining and membership of trade unions was low.<sup>33</sup> The council was a forum for wage negotiations and worked well to appease employers and workers for a short time, although the occurrence of the 1925 strike suggests that, by this point, the JIC was less effective than it had been. Perhaps the fact that the wool JIC can be seen as successful at all was down to the generally good relations between employers and workers that allowed for civil negotiations to take place for a short period. It might have been thought that unions were of limited necessity in an industry where relationships between operatives and those in charge were cordial.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that wool trade unionism in the years preceding the Second World War was generally weak, with relatively low membership levels. This points to a tradition of poor collective organisation for the wool industry’s workers; as we will see in chapter three, the picture did not change significantly after 1945. Despite this, there were occasional pockets of trade unionism and militancy that appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, occasionally, people willing to act on behalf of their fellow wool textile operatives.

#### ‘You Live What You Preach:’ Julia Varley, Trade Union Activist

Julia Varley was a Bradford-born wool textile worker and trade unionist. Born in Horton in 1871, she began work as a half-timer, attending work and school for half a day each, as was the custom for many adolescents in the woollen district throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the majority of wool textile workers, she took up union activism with vigour, but moved away from the woollen district and wool trade unionism upon reaching adulthood in order to organise first women workers and then work in general unionism, as well as sitting on trade union advisory boards. Her case study is included here because it not only gives us valuable insight into the life of a wool trade unionist (and a rare case of a wool trade unionist who left behind enough papers to form a small case study), but also because Varley ultimately moved away from wool to pursue trade union work elsewhere. The reasons for her leaving the woollen district are not clear in either the fleeting comments about her life in

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Joyce Bellamy, Margaret ‘Espinasse and Eric Taylor, ‘Julia Varley,’ *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Volume 4 (London, 1977), p. 216; Mary E Sutherland, ‘Obituary,’ *Labour Woman*, January 1953, vol. XLI, number one, p. 8.

books and articles or in the collection of her papers, which includes the *Dictionary of Labour Biography's* (*DLB*) amassed research on her life, that are deposited at the Hull History Centre. It is possible – indeed, probable, given the weak state of wool trade unionism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – that she explored other, more fruitful avenues of trade union organisation because of difficulties in recruiting members to wool unions and the limited impact trade union actions such as collective bargaining had on wool firms.

It is difficult to establish some of the basic facts about Varley's life. The age that she commenced work is not agreed upon in the various available sources. The *DLB* stated that Varley was twelve at the time she began work, but the Labour Party's *Labour Woman* magazine stated that she was ten, in an obituary printed in January 1953.<sup>35</sup> On balance, the *DLB* is more likely to be correct, given the extensive research undertaken to produce the entry on Varley's life. There is similar disagreement in the sources on when exactly Varley took membership of the Weavers' and Textile Workers' Union; this is reflected in the *DLB's* omission of the date she joined and Jill Liddington's comment that Varley became 'active in the Weavers' Union' without an accompanying date.<sup>36</sup> The *Labour Woman* obituary stated that 'She took out her first trade union card 65 years ago,' but this would have her joining the Weavers' Union in 1888, aged seventeen, when the *DLB* entry commented on her becoming her branch's secretary at the age of fifteen, in 1886.<sup>37</sup> Sheila Lewenhak placed Varley's election to the union executive committee in 1901, 'aged thirteen,' although by then Varley was in fact thirty years old.<sup>38</sup>

The confusion surrounding these key episodes in Varley's life is likely the result of a dearth of biographical information in her papers; much of the archive material relates to her later trade union work away from the wool textile industry. This is itself revealing: it is possible that Varley herself thought that her time as a wool textile trade unionist was less significant than her work in women's and general unionism. Her work in the West Riding was glossed over in all the published sources about her life surveyed for this case study, strongly indicating that it was for her work elsewhere that she was remembered as one of 'that gallant band of women pioneers who were in the thick of the Trade Union struggle,' 'a sturdy and steady fighter' and 'fearless.'<sup>39</sup> Such extracts from articles about her life and work were

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<sup>35</sup> Bellamy, 'Espinasse and Taylor, 'Julia Varley,' p. 216; Mary E Sutherland, 'Obituary,' *Labour Woman*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Bellamy, 'Espinasse and Taylor, 'Julia Varley,' p. 216; Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (London, 2006), p. 350.

<sup>37</sup> Bellamy, 'Espinasse and Taylor, 'Julia Varley,' p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions: an Outline History of Women in the British Trade Union Movement* (London, 1977), p. 124.

<sup>39</sup> Mary E Sutherland, 'Obituary,' p. 8; Joan Woollcombe, 'Julia Varley: a Life-Long Campaigner,' *The Gateway*, volume 3, number 14, June 1930, p. 61; Hull History Centre, U/DJV/35, Julia Varley records, George Horwill, 'The Passing of a Great Pioneer: Julia Varley, OBE,' undated obituary.

indicative of the general high regard she was held in by many in the labour movement in the first half of the twentieth century, but it was as an imprisoned suffragette, organiser of workers in the West Midlands and member of the TUC General Council that she was more often remembered.

Several sources cite the reason for Varley's lifelong commitment to the labour movement as her family's radical heritage. An undated newspaper clipping (from an unknown newspaper in the *DLB* research file on Varley in Hull) describes her great-grandfather, Joseph B. Alderson, as 'a Bradfordian who was at Peterloo and imprisoned in the Hall Ings Court House for taking part in a workers' demonstration.'<sup>40</sup> Another, similar clipping describes him as 'one of the old Chartists.'<sup>41</sup> This was echoed in an open letter from Hannah Swaffen to Julia Varley on her retirement in 1935 published in *John Bull* magazine. In it, Swaffen wrote:

It all began when you, as a small child of five or six, heard your great-grandfather, who had suffered poverty because of his fight as a Chartist, had used the word 'democracy' which you did not understand, and how, when you asked him what it meant, he said that you were too young to know then but that, when you learned its meaning later on, you would perhaps 'work for the people, think for the people, live for the people, for they do not know how to do it themselves.'<sup>42</sup>

This, along with the other articles commenting on her family history, suggests that her involvement in trade unionism was a direct result of having a Chartist great-grandfather who was at Peterloo, and that radicalism was an inherited trait. However, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, political radicalism was not uncommon in the West Riding in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; indeed, at certain moments and among certain groups of people, radicalism was something of a popular movement in towns like Bradford and Huddersfield. Despite this, there was no large trade union movement in wool textiles, and, indeed, there is no reason to assume a link between radical politics and strong trade union organisation.

In their influential work on women's suffrage in Lancashire, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, Jill Liddington and Jill Norris commented on the family pressure exerted on girls and women in the cotton textile industry to join a trade union, although they noted that this pressure 'did not come exclusively from husbands and fathers, as has been suggested,' but that female

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<sup>40</sup> Hull History Centre, U/DLB/13/290, *Dictionary of Labour Biography* records, undated newspaper clipping.

<sup>41</sup> Hull History Centre, U/DLB/13/290, *Dictionary of Labour Biography* records, undated newspaper clipping.

<sup>42</sup> Hull History Centre, U/DLB/13/290, *Dictionary of Labour Biography* records, Hannah Swaffen, 'You Live What You Preach,' *John Bull*, 1 June 1935.

family members were also responsible for pressuring girls to take out union membership.<sup>43</sup> There is no evidence of comparable pressure amongst wool textile workers, despite similar patterns of family employment, largely due to the fact that union membership was so low in any case. Although the memory of her Chartist great-grandfather may have provided some inspiration for Varley, a heritage of radicalism in one's family was not sufficient to inspire the overwhelming majority of woollen workers to become active in the labour movement; indeed, it is not possible to suggest a clear link between involvement in political radicalism and trade union activism for wool textile workers or, perhaps, for any workers, although involvement in both was possible. According to June Hannam and Karen Hunt's *Socialist Women*, Varley was involved in the Bradford ILP, but this was not confirmed in other sources.<sup>44</sup> Varley's passion for trade unionism cannot be explained simply in terms of family heritage or involvement in radical politics. Rather, she can be seen as an anomaly amongst wool textile workers, many of whom could also claim Chartist or other radical heritage.

Varley's involvement in wool trade unionism was short-lived in comparison to her work in other areas of the labour movement. Although dating her involvement is difficult, all sources agree that Varley joined the Weavers' and Textile Workers' Union shortly after commencing mill work and became the Bradford branch secretary in her teens (at age fifteen, according to both the *DLB* and Joan Woollcombe's 1930 profile of Varley in *The Gateway*).<sup>45</sup> She represented her branch on Bradford Trades Council, where she was the first woman member, and was a member of the Executive Committee between 1899 and 1906.<sup>46</sup> In addition to labour movement work, she undertook civic duties, serving on Bradford Board of Guardians between 1904 and 1907 and conducting research into employment conditions and school meals for Bradford Corporation in 1903.<sup>47</sup> According to the *DLB*, she ceased working in wool textiles when her mother died (there is no date given for this) but continued her involvement in wool trade unionism.<sup>48</sup>

The *DLB* contains more information on her early life than other sources examined for the case study, although this too is somewhat scant in comparison to the description of her later life and work. One revealing part of the *DLB* entry is a quotation taken from the *Evening Despatch* of Birmingham in 1936, recounting her experiences organising woollen workers in Bradford in the 1880s, where she stated:

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<sup>43</sup> Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: the Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, new edition (London, 2000), p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London, 2002), p. 46.

<sup>45</sup> Bellamy, 'Espinasse and Taylor, 'Julia Varley,' p. 216; Woollcombe, 'Julia Varley: a Life-Long Campaigner,' p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Bellamy, 'Espinasse and Taylor, 'Julia Varley,' p. 216.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

It was a thankless task... I stood on a table in the square and argued the merits of trade unionism to a few children, two cats and an occasional passerby. While I was talking I heard a window being raised, and looking round, I saw a fat old woman leaning out of a bedroom window. She listened to me for a minute, then with a grunt of disgust, she said 'Silly bitch' and slammed down the window! That ended my speech.<sup>49</sup>

Given the poor membership of wool trade unions, it is likely that this was a fairly typical experience of attempting to induce wool textile operatives into a trade union, although the disgruntled old woman may have been a particular bonus for Varley on that day only. It is likely that such incidents were a large part of the reason why she moved away from the struggle to organise woollen workers: a lack of interest in her cause may have propelled her to organise elsewhere.

Her involvement in suffragette militancy gained her two prison sentences, although there is no record amongst the papers in Hull of what actions earned these; both, however, were in 1907.<sup>50</sup> The *DLB* stated that she worked with Mary Macarthur, a prominent advocate of women's trade unionism, for the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) and the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW). Macarthur was involved in the leadership of the WTUL and was a founder of the NFWW. At this time, Macarthur and Varley established an NFWW branch and organised a strike at Cradley Heath in the Midlands among women chainworkers, which Mary E. Sutherland described as 'an important milestone in the organisation of women workers.'<sup>51</sup> An undated leaflet amongst her papers for a talk Varley was to give at a bucket factory suggests that she was a popular speaker for women in the labour movement generally.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the enthusiasm with which she was received elsewhere, and the success she had in other areas, such as in the West Midlands where she organised the workers at Bourneville at the invitation of Edward Cadbury, was enough to keep her away from what must have seemed like a fruitless task organising wool workers.<sup>53</sup>

Varley's future work included organising for the Workers' Union (she moved from women's trade unionism towards general unionism later in her career), sitting on the Ministry of Labour's Labour Advisory Board and a long period of service to the Trade Unions Congress's General Council between 1921 and 1935, when she retired due to her failing eyesight.<sup>54</sup> She had a number of friendships with notable political figures, not limited to those in the Ministry of Labour and the TUC: the *DLB* referred to her friendship with Nancy

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217; Sutherland, 'Obituary,' p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Bellamy, 'Espinasse and Taylor, 'Julia Varley,' p. 217; Sutherland, 'Obituary,' p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Hull History Centre, U/DJV/29, Julia Varley records, Leaflet Advertising Julia Varley Speaking at a Meeting at Stevens' Bucket Factory, undated.

<sup>53</sup> Bellamy, 'Espinasse and Taylor, 'Julia Varley,' p. 217.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218; Sutherland, 'Obituary,' p. 8.



Astor MP, and George Horwill's obituary of Varley outlined her friendship with the Duke of York, with whom she continued to be on first-name terms after he became George VI in 1936.<sup>55</sup> Had she continued to work in the organisation of wool textile workers instead of moving into more fruitful endeavours, she may well have not achieved the successes – and made the friends – that she did.

We can learn much about wool trade unionism in the period before 1945 from Varley's example: a promising and gifted young organiser, her talents were wasted among workers who were difficult to organise. We will see in chapter three that, after 1945, the NUDBTW was an uninspiring union, and that throughout the twentieth century, wool unions could offer few benefits to their members due to the difficulty in enforcing collective bargaining agreements. However, it is clear that even with the benefit of a passionate leader in the pre-1945 period, woollen workers remained unmoved and did not rush to take up union membership. Varley's example has shown that the barriers to trade union organisation in wool seemed insurmountable even to the dedicated.

#### Three Strikes: 1875, 1890-91 and 1925

Whilst the work of activists such as Julia Varley was ultimately unsuccessful, and trade unionism in wool remained weak throughout the industry's existence, there were occasional pockets of strike activity that illuminate some of the key problems in organising the wool workforce. All three strikes were about proposed wage reductions, but each played out differently. These examples show that wool trade unions may have had occasional periods of activity, but were ultimately unable to sustain any strength in the long term.

In 1875, weavers in the heavy woollen district of the West Riding (Dewsbury, Batley and the surrounding areas) went on strike in response to revised piecework rates for weavers that had been drafted as a result of the 1874 depression in the heavy woollen sector of the industry.<sup>56</sup> According to the two scholars who studied the strike – Maria Bottomley and Melanie Reynolds – the stoppage was a challenge to the generalisations made about women workers and their capacity to organise and join trade unions, because this strike was led entirely by women.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Bottomley remarked that women in wool have been 'represented almost without exception as a liability and an obstacle to unionisation,' with labour historians often considering that women regarded work differently to men and

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<sup>55</sup> Bellamy, 'Espinasse and Taylor, 'Julia Varley,' p. 220; Hull History Centre, U/DJV/35, Julia Varley records, George Horwill, 'The Passing of a Great Pioneer: Julia Varley, OBE,' undated obituary.

<sup>56</sup> Maria Bottomley, 'Women and Industrial Militancy: the 1875 Heavy Woollen Dispute,' in J. A. Jowitt and A. J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries* (London, 1985), pp. 172-173.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171; Melanie Reynolds, "'A Man Who Won't Back a Woman is No Man At All': the 1875 Heavy Woollen Dispute and the Narrative of Women's Trade Unionism,' *Labour History Review*, 71 (2) August 2006, p. 187.

inferring that this would influence their attitude to trade unionism.<sup>58</sup> Of course, this position does not acknowledge the work of women like Julia Varley in wool textiles: this may have been generally unsuccessful, but her work proves that some women in wool were interested in collective organisation and that some were willing to take on an active role.

When the new price lists were posted at Taylor's mill and Stubble's mill, both in Batley, on 1 February 1875, the mainly non-union workers there struck, with other workers following them as the week progressed in mills in the area, including 300 workers at Oldroyd's in Dewsbury.<sup>59</sup> Reynolds placed the total on strike (some of whom were locked out) at 25,000, although it is not clear whether so many were on strike for the whole six-week duration or just for part of it.<sup>60</sup> From 1 February, women took the dominant role in the strike: a meeting took place between male and female workers at Taylor's and Stubble's. Some of the women present were dissatisfied with the decision taken at the meeting so formed their own strike committee in place of a trade union committee, from which an Executive Committee of twelve women was formed to meet with the employers' twelve-man committee.<sup>61</sup> Little is known about most of these women, but the strike committee president was Hannah Wood and its treasurer was Anne Ellis.<sup>62</sup> The strike ended apparently in victory for the workers: after numerous negotiations with employers, they struck a deal whereby they would accept lower pay on a type of cloth known as reversible if they gained better pay on easier types called devons and plains.<sup>63</sup> Throughout the strike, support had been given to the strikers by established wool trade unionists such as Ben Turner and Allen Gee. After the strike ended, the women went on to form a new union, the Dewsbury, Batley and Surrounding Districts Heavy Woollen Weavers' Association, which later amalgamated with Turner's Huddersfield-based Weavers' Union in 1883.<sup>64</sup>

The 1875 strike shows that women were capable of organising collectively and, indeed, leading organisations. Whilst the strike was mainly a success for the workers, it also demonstrated that such actions were often limited to one geographical area – in this case, the heavy woollen district of Batley and Dewsbury. As we will see in our next case study, and in chapter seven on a strike near Bradford in the 1960s, some strikes were limited to a single workplace. Furthermore, Bottomley argued that towards the end of the strike, male workers attempted to undermine women by publicly stating that the leaders were unable to successfully negotiate.<sup>65</sup> There appears to have been weak solidarity between the men and women on strike and, indeed, after the strike when the trade union was formed, women were

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<sup>58</sup> Bottomley, 'Women and Industrial Militancy,' p. 171.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>60</sup> Reynolds, "'A Man Who Won't Back a Woman is No Man At All,'" p. 192.

<sup>61</sup> Bottomley, 'Women and Industrial Militancy,' pp. 173-174.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

eventually edged out in favour of an all-male leadership.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, although the strike was an example of a short period of successful collective organisation, it is hard to argue that it demonstrates significantly different circumstances to those after 1945. Although a new trade union was formed as a result of the strike, it lacked longevity and soon merged with a longer-established union administered by men.

The Manningham Mills strike of 1890-91 was generally perceived as a resounding failure for trade unionism in textiles but as a victory for the labour movement. Although there has been much debate on the matter, some historians have attributed the founding of the Independent Labour Party to the failure of the strike; Thompson noted that it was 'customary' to do so.<sup>67</sup> The strike took place at Samuel Cunliffe Lister's works at Manningham in Bradford when the manager, Jose Reixach, posted notices of wage reductions for velvet plush workers.<sup>68</sup> Whilst worsteds were produced at Manningham, Lister had diversified into silk and velvet work – according to Derek Barker, Lister's mill was 'the largest silk mill in Europe.'<sup>69</sup> It is interesting to note that this strike was begun not by wool workers but by velvet workers, despite the common perception that it was a wool strike. However, it is very likely that the velvet workers had previously worked in worsted.<sup>70</sup> Mary Blewett argued that the strike at Manningham was a defence of women's skilled status, because to cut the piecework rates for velvet plush was tantamount to reducing their wages to those of ordinary, unskilled worsted workers.<sup>71</sup> Barker suggested that, as in the 1875 heavy woollen dispute, the majority of workers at Manningham were not unionised at the start of the strike.<sup>72</sup> The strike committee estimated that around 5000 workers took part in the strike, which lasted from December 1890 to April 1891.<sup>73</sup>

It is possible that the strike happened and lasted for several months because it took place in a large mill. Most wool firms were small – many with fewer than fifty workers – but Lister employed thousands of workers, an unusual occurrence in wool. It is very likely that the size of the workforce meant that communication between workers was easier than communication between workers from different mills, and this greater ease of communication could have resulted in larger numbers striking.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, larger

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>67</sup> Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire,' p. 278.

<sup>68</sup> Derek Barker, 'The Manningham Mills Strike, 1890-91: "Low Wages, Good Water, and No Unions,"' *Northern History*, 50 (1), March 2013, p. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Blewett, 'Diversities of Class and Gender Experience and the Shaping of Labor Politics: Yorkshire's Manningham Mills Strike, 1890-91 and the Independent Labour Party,' *Labor History*, 47 (4) October 2006, pp. 516-517.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 517. Chapter one and chapter four both give further information on skill in wool textiles.

<sup>72</sup> Barker, 'The Manningham Mills Strike, 1890-91,' p. 98.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>74</sup> See chapter four on the industry's structure and chapter seven on the strike at William Denby & Sons, 1963-64, for more discussion on the subject of workforce size and its relationship to trade unionism and strikes.

numbers of workers would have rendered face-to-face negotiations with managers very difficult. The Manningham Mills strike cannot be seen as an example of union strength – the workers were unsuccessful in upholding their claim for better wages.

By 1925, wool workers were still poorly organised on the whole, as shown by a strike of that year in which 150,000 workers were locked out on 25 July when unions rejected a pay reduction proposed by the employers.<sup>75</sup> Hugh Armstrong Clegg called the strike the biggest of the year, whilst J. A. Jowett and Keith Laybourn argued that the strike was ignored by historians in favour of disputes in coal mining in the same year and the 1926 General Strike.<sup>76</sup> The run-up to the strike saw negotiations take place via the JIC. In June, Ben Turner, acting on behalf of the NAUTT, rejected the employers' proposal to withdraw the ten per cent increase on basic wages that they had granted in 1919, and the matter was referred back to the JIC for further negotiation.<sup>77</sup> The following week, the NAUTT requested a five per cent increase on basic wage rates, which the employers rejected.<sup>78</sup> The trade journal *Wool Record and Textile World* noted that the employers' success in the matter would mean 'the abolition of all the post-war advances on basic rates which the wool textile operatives have secured through the Industrial Council.'<sup>79</sup>

By the eve of the strike, on 23 July, *Wool Record and Textile World* reported that, 'All efforts have failed to find a way out of the deadlock which has arisen in connection with the wages negotiation' and that 'there seems to be no alternative to a general strike – a two-edged weapon calculated to do more injury to Labour than to employers.'<sup>80</sup> The employers were seen to have played a less responsible role than the unions in the negotiations, with the usually Liberal *Huddersfield Examiner* stating on 25 July:

We deeply regret the action taken by the employers' federation. They may win this fight. They may succeed in imposing their demands on the operatives. If, however, they do so, we venture to find their triumph will be a Pyrrhic victory and that, setting loss against gain, they will have cause to regret the step which they have taken.<sup>81</sup>

It is likely that the employers felt this way at the strike's conclusion on 14 August 1925; their hands were forced into paying the old rates until a Ministry of Labour Court of Investigation had reported on what the outcome should be.<sup>82</sup> The Court of Investigation

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<sup>75</sup> Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions*, p. 385.

<sup>76</sup> J. A. Jowett and K. Laybourn, 'The Wool Textile Dispute of 1925,' *Journal of Local Studies*, 2 (1) 1982, p. 10.

<sup>77</sup> *Wool Record and Textile World*, Volume XXVII, 11 June 1925, p. 1762.

<sup>78</sup> *Wool Record and Textile World*, Volume XXVII, 18 June 1925, p. 1831.

<sup>79</sup> *Wool Record and Textile World*, Volume XXVII, 21 May 1925, p. 1546.

<sup>80</sup> *Wool Record and Textile World*, Volume XXVIII, 23 July 1925, p. 281.

<sup>81</sup> Keith Laybourn, *British Trade Unionism c.1770-1900: a Reader in History* (Stroud, 1991), p. 136.

<sup>82</sup> Jowett and Laybourn, 'The Wool Textile Dispute of 1925,' p. 19.

eventually found that the old rates from 1919 should continue to be paid and the JIC upheld this decision.<sup>83</sup> This was a rare example of union victory, but may not be evidence of union strength: the strike was won through the intervention of the state rather than through the union's power. There are few examples of state support for wool unions in the history of the post-war wool textile industry, and there are also few examples of union victories. This is strongly suggestive of wool unions' weakness as campaigning forces.

### Conclusion

The trade union movement in wool textiles was never as large as movements in other, similar industries, such as cotton. In the period preceding 1945, unions were weak. The available evidence suggests that membership of the various small unions and the few larger ones had always been relatively low; although the smaller unions receded and the larger organisations grew in the mid-twentieth century, there was little change in uptake of membership. Many of the problems that post-war unions faced were present before 1945. The strikes that occurred in the period were localised – sometimes to a single workplace – and reasonably short-lived, with varying results, and with any positive results lasting for a relatively short period. For a short time in the 1920s, the Joint Industrial Council for wool was successful in negotiating better wages for wool operatives, but after the 1925 strike, the partnership between workers and employers in the Council deteriorated. By 1930, it was defunct. Charismatic organisers were few; some, such as Julia Varley, left wool trade unionism to work in other fields of the labour movement, perhaps due to the frustration of attempting to organise a workforce that had long since proved difficult to unite. Overall, the circumstances of trade unions that will be examined in the following chapter were little different to those before the Second World War: the membership of wool trade unions was low, and the brand of trade unionism that wool textile workers produced was weak.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

## Chapter Three: The National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers and Textile Trade Unionism after 1945

### Introduction

Organising the wool textile workforce was problematic after the Second World War. This chapter will examine the role of the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (NUDBTW) – the largest wool trade union after 1945 – to assess the ineffectiveness of trade union organisation in wool. The aim of the chapter is to establish how far the NUDBTW was attractive to wool textile workers and whether the unions themselves had any role to play in limiting the growth of the wool trade union movement. It will be shown that membership of the NUDBTW was low throughout the post-war period, partly as a result of mill closures and the collapse of the industry in Yorkshire, but also because it had little to offer potential members. We will see that the NUDBTW appeared not to have rigorous recruitment plans to attract members, particularly women and immigrant workers, because of their low-skilled status in the workplace compared to native-born men.

The industry was structured into many small units of production which made organisation logistically difficult. The pattern of shift-working and part-time work meant arranging meetings for all to attend was extremely difficult, and creating a strong ‘wool textile worker’ identity based on work was problematic when mills were small and unity between workplaces was lacking.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the absence of a work- or industry-based identity for most operatives meant that other identities, such as ethnicity, were more significant.<sup>2</sup> Finally, an ethnically-mixed workforce further inhibited the creation of strong bonds between workers on which collective organisation could be based, especially given the climate of hostility towards immigrant workers and their subsequent formation of ethnically-based associations to serve their needs.<sup>3</sup> However, the role of trade unions – in particular, the NUDBTW – was also significant. The NUDBTW was largely ineffective in protecting its members’ interests, was unresponsive to members’ needs and paid little attention to large parts of the workforce – women and immigrants. It failed to recognise the potential strengths recruiting such members could bestow on their organisation and neglected the particular problems they faced at work, such as language-related difficulties for immigrants and the balance of paid work with unpaid domestic duties for women. It did not offer attractive selective incentives, as Mancur Olson Jr. would describe them – benefits that could only be

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter four discusses the structure of the industry and the role it played in limiting collective organisation. Chapter five explores the role of wool textile workers’ identities and how these contributed to the low level of trade union membership in wool.

<sup>2</sup> This argument is fully elucidated in chapter five on the identities of wool textile workers.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter eight gives details about some of the organisations immigrant wool workers built for themselves.

gained through paying membership subscriptions.<sup>4</sup> In all, the NUDBTW was unattractive to potential members and made only cursory attempts to recruit more widely.

There is a wide and extensive literature on British industrial relations in the post-war era. It cannot all be surveyed here due to the limitations of space, but before the chapter moves on to examining the NUDBTW, we will assess some key issues that emerged from this body of work which are pertinent to the following discussion, focusing on the theme of change. Jim Phillips argued that there was a limited reconstruction of British industrial relations in the 1970s, with one of the key changes being a change from industry-level to firm-level collective bargaining.<sup>5</sup> As we will see later in the chapter, collective bargaining in wool textiles was carried out by a federation of trade unions with an employer's association. This was at odds with the changes that had taken place in most of British industry, and appears to have been weakly enforced. Along with procedural changes within trade unions, Selina Todd suggested that there was 'a new assertiveness' amongst British workers in the 1960s and 1970s, with interest in trade unions spreading 'beyond male, skilled workers... to young and women workers, recent migrants and unskilled wage-earners.'<sup>6</sup> This change was not acted upon by the NUDBTW: as we will see in the first part of the thesis, their attitude towards immigrant and women wool workers was ambivalent.

Related to this change was the way in which trade unions were regarded throughout the period. Todd referred to 'politicians' attempts to undermine the collective economic and political strength of ordinary workers' from the mid-1960s onwards, typified by Labour Employment Secretary Barbara Castle's white paper *In Place of Strife*, which proposed changes to the legality of strikes and the voluntarist regulation of trade unions.<sup>7</sup> Although the white paper never became law, it exemplified changing attitudes to collective industrial organisation in the period. Phillips' research on the 1972 miners' strike corroborated this, arguing that mass picketing 'encouraged the view that trade unions generally were undemocratic institutions that wielded power irresponsibly.'<sup>8</sup> Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy noted in their survey of British industrial relations between 1945 and 1964 that there was widespread agreement as to the legitimacy of trade unions in high politics in the two decades following the Second World War, possibly as a result of the 'assertiveness' Todd claimed was growing.<sup>9</sup> In their survey of industrial politics in the second volume of

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<sup>4</sup> Mancur Olson Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Phillips, 'Business and the Limited Reconstruction of Industrial Relations in the UK in the 1970s,' *Business History*, 51 (6), November 2009, p. 803.

<sup>6</sup> Selina Todd, *The People: the Rise and fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (London, 2014), p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>8</sup> Jim Phillips, 'The 1972 Miners' Strike: Popular Agency and Industrial Politics in Britain,' *Contemporary British History*, 20 (2), August 2006, p. 189.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy, 'The Post-War Compromise: Mapping Industrial Politics,' in Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics. Volume One: the Post-War Compromise* (Aldershot, 1999), p.70.

their work on British trade unions, however, McIlroy and Campbell argued that the tide had turned, and that trade unions were now being implicated in economic decline and were facing challenges to their autonomy.<sup>10</sup> David Stewart argued that by the 1980s, this changing discourse on trade unions resulted in a different relationship between the Labour Party and trade unions.<sup>11</sup> He added that Margaret Thatcher backed a restriction on legal union action and union autonomy during her time as Prime Minister.<sup>12</sup> By the 1990s, trade union membership had declined to forty-eight per cent of the total British workforce.<sup>13</sup>

The chapter will continue with a closer analysis of the NUDBTW. It is divided into two parts. The first part will examine the NUDBTW's membership and approach in more detail. It will show that the NUDBTW was generally ineffective at recruiting members, providing services that would appeal to potential members and campaigning on issues that were of significance to wool textile workers. The second part of the chapter examines the NUDBTW's attitude to two key groups of wool textile workers – immigrants and women. Both groups were largely ignored in favour of skilled white male workers. Literature on the experiences of immigrants and women in trade unions will be considered alongside evidence about the NUDBTW. We will see that, whilst there were other reasons for the low level of wool trade union membership, the NUDBTW itself failed to reach out to a large part of the workforce it purported to represent. Furthermore, there was little reason to join the NUDBTW because it was not able to provide any substantial benefits to its members.

#### The NUDBTW after 1945: Membership and Decline

The NUDBTW had its headquarters at Sunbridge Road in Bradford and came into existence in 1936 as a result of an amalgamation between the National Union of Textile Workers, the Amalgamated Society of Dyers, Finishers and Kindred Trades and Operative Bleachers', Dyers' and Finishers' Association.<sup>14</sup> It covered a variety of different textile trades and not just wool, including the cotton, silk, flax and jute trades.<sup>15</sup> This was because its predecessor unions had covered different textile industries. The Yorkshire woollen district branches were organised as District 1 and District 2, with other districts covering different parts of the country.<sup>16</sup> The union's chief governing body was the General Council, which met annually

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<sup>10</sup> John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, 'The High Tide of Trade Unionism: Mapping Industrial Politics, 1964-1979,' in John McIlroy, Nina Fishman and Alan Campbell (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics. Volume Two: the High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964-79* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 94.

<sup>11</sup> David Stewart, 'Preserving the "Contentious Alliance"? The Labour Party, the Trade Unions and the Political Fund Ballots of 1985-1986,' *Labour History Review*, 76 (1), 2011, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Millward, Mark Stevens, David Smart and W. R. Hawes, *Workplace Industrial Relations in Transition: the ED/ESRC/PSI/ACAS Surveys* (Aldershot, 1992), p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Hugo Lemon, *How to Find Out About the Wool Textile Industry* (Oxford, 1968), p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>16</sup> The National Archives (TNA), NF 2/469, Registry of Trade Unions and Employers' Association records, Central Office Accounts and General Balance Sheet, 31 December 1971.



at an Annual General Council Meeting.<sup>17</sup> Branches and districts sent delegates to the General Council, and these delegates were required to have served on the union's Executive Committee, as Branch Officer or on a Branch Committee. In addition, an Executive Committee was composed of fifteen members nominated by the branches.<sup>18</sup> Nominees for the Executive Committee were also required to have either served previously on the Executive Committee, or as a Branch Officer or on the Branch Committee, and were also required to be employed in the textile trades.<sup>19</sup> Elections for the Executive Committee took place at the Annual General Council Meeting. The Executive Committee acted on behalf of the General Council to 'transact and overlook the general business of the union.'<sup>20</sup> At Annual General Council Meetings, branches were able to submit motions for discussion. It is clear from the records of these AGCMs that the woollen district branches sometimes suggested progressive policies: for example a call for 'working class unity' in the face of the growing threat of fascism from Bradford No. 1 Branch at the first AGCM in 1937.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, however, most of the business scheduled for discussion related more to the minutiae of the wool textile industry.

Jack Peel was perhaps the NUDBTW's best-known figure in the wider labour movement. After working as a railwayman and then studying at Ruskin College in Oxford, he became a full-time NUDBTW official in 1950, rising to assistant general secretary in 1957 and general secretary in 1966.<sup>22</sup> He served in this post until 1973, when he became Director of Industrial Affairs for the Social Affairs Directorate of the European Economic Council (EEC) Commission.<sup>23</sup> He also served on the Trade Union Congress (TUC) General Council. His pro-EEC views were seen as out of step with many in the trade union movement in the early 1970s, especially given the perceived threat that membership of the common market posed to the British wool industry.<sup>24</sup> Whilst Peel had strong views on this issue, it appears he was not a charismatic leader – indeed, the NUDBTW lacked any truly notable personalities. Whilst many other unions lacked a charismatic leader and were able to recruit members despite this, there is some possibility that such a figure could have improved membership levels amongst wool workers somewhat.

The statistics on NUDBTW members should be treated with some caution: the union organised in various textile trades, and not just wool, and the main membership figures

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<sup>17</sup> The National Archives (TNA), NF 2/469, Registry of Trade Unions and Employers' Association records, Rules of the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 1971.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/9/1, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Agenda for the First Annual General Council Meeting, 22-25 May 1937.

<sup>22</sup> *Independent*, 18 May 1993.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

reported in Executive Committee minutes take account of all members.<sup>25</sup> The union was based in Bradford and its papers suggest that many of its branches were in the Yorkshire woollen district. Furthermore, a record of NUDBTW membership from 1971 shows that a majority of members were based in the woollen district: 27,351 of a total membership of 51,991.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, although it is not possible to give exact figures for wool textile trade union membership in Yorkshire based on the statistics provided in their papers, we can confidently assume that most members were working in wool textiles in the West Riding.

The NUDBTW collected statistics on its members, presented below alongside the number of operatives working in wool textiles in the period after the Second World War based on the evidence of the Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics (who did not, unfortunately, record the number of operatives who were members of trade unions).<sup>27</sup> Again, these statistics do not reflect numbers purely within Yorkshire but the majority of the industry (and its workforce) was concentrated there – for example, the 1951 Census of Production states that of 1502 wool textile mills in the UK, 1158 were based in Yorkshire.<sup>28</sup> Whilst it is frustrating that there are no more precise statistics available, the table below gives a sound indication of both the declining number of operatives and the level of trade unionism in the industry. It does not go beyond 1981 because this is the year that the NUDBTW folded and merged with the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) Textiles Group.

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<sup>25</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/6, Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 2 April 1955.

<sup>26</sup> The National Archives (TNA), NF 2/469, Registry of Trade Unions and Employers' Association records, Central Office Accounts and General Balance Sheet, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 31 December 1971.

<sup>27</sup> Similarly, statistics from the Census of Production do not give any information on how many workers in a given industry were members of a trade union.

<sup>28</sup> Table 5, *The Report on the Census of Production for 1951* (London, 1955), no page numbers.

Table 1: Numbers Employed in Wool Textiles in UK and NUDBTW Membership

Year	Number of wool textile operatives in the UK <sup>29</sup>	Number of members of the NUDBTW <sup>30</sup>
1957	155,865	68,596
1958	144,738	65,835
1959	No figure available	62,014
1960	152,646	62,441
1961	147,538	58,060
1962	140,427	57,320
1963	137,413	58,177
1964	130,842	57,306
1965	126,360	No figure available
1966	119,126	No figure available
1967	110,569	No figure available
1968	109,433	No figure available
1969	No figure available	53,163
1970	No figure available	56,986
1971	No figure available	53,095
1972	80,059	53,049
1973	76,152	55,217
1974	66,651	55,324
1975	57,490	54,737
1976	58,722	58,756
1977	58,804	61,416
1978	54,755	58,803
1979	No figure available	56,843
1980	No figure available	45,759
1981	No figure available	37,152

The declining level of trade union membership in part reflects the decreasing number of jobs available in wool textiles but the statistics reveal an interesting relationship between total jobs in wool textiles and total trade union membership of the NUDBTW. They suggest that either a greater proportion of the wool textile workforce joined a trade union as the period progressed, or that levels of non-wool textile trade unionism remained constant but wool membership declined drastically. For example, in 1977 the number of members of the NUDBTW overtakes the number of wool textile operatives in the UK. The latter is the more

<sup>29</sup> *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics – the Wool Textile Delegation (hereafter *MBS*), January 1950, no. 1 (relating to the month of November 1949), p. 6; *MBS*, January 1960, no. 121 (relating to the month of November 1959), p. 7; *MBS*, January 1970, no. 241 (relating to the month of November 1969), p. 7; *MBS*, no. 363 (covering the month of January, 1980), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/6, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (hereafter NUDBTW Minutes), 13 September 1958; WYB123/1/4/1/7, NUDBTW Minutes, 11 March 1961; 10 March 1962; 9 March 1963; WYB123/1/4/1/8, NUDBTW Minutes, 7 March 1964; 26 September 1964; 20 March 1965; WYB123/1/4/1/10, NUDBTW Minutes, 13 March 1971; 25 February 1972; 15 February 1974; 13 February 1976; WYB123/1/4/1/12, NUDBTW Minutes, 11 February 1977; 24 February 1978; WYB123 /1/4/1/13, NUDBTW Minutes, 15 March 1979; 14 March 1980; 19 February 1982.

likely explanation given that other evidence (including reports commissioned by government and by universities and anecdotal oral evidence) suggests wool trade unionism remained low throughout the period, although it should be noted that jobs were also in decline in other textile industries. It is also possible that those trade unionists who had retired or were made redundant may have continued their union membership as a way of remaining connected to the social aspects of the organisation, which could account for the discrepancy in the figures, but this is unlikely given that the union provided no social facilities.

The membership levels of the NUDBTW appear to have been reasonably constant throughout the post-war period. Between 1957 and 1981, there was a loss of around 30,000 members, but the corresponding loss of jobs in wool textiles was around 100,000 in the same period. Again, this could be explained by retiring or redundant members continuing to pay their subs (although there is no evidence in the union's papers to suggest this), or the constancy of the figures could represent membership in other areas of textile production, such as cotton, which was a much better-organised industry than wool. Richard Croucher noted that in this period there was a decline in trade union membership in the 'traditional union heartlands such as mining, textiles and railways;' this general pattern of decline for some sectors of trade unionism may also have contributed to the falling number of NUDBTW members.<sup>31</sup>

However, there is evidence that union density in wool saw a slight increase in the 1960s, meaning that those who remained in wool were, at this time, more likely to be trade union members. George Sayers Bain and Robert Price's research on the growth of unions throughout the twentieth century demonstrated that, in their category 'Other Textiles' (as opposed to cotton, and including wool), there was an increase in union density from the mid-1960s, as shown in Table 2 below. This correlates with the slight increase in union membership seen from the mid-1970s in Table 1. It is clear that, although there was an increase in union density, union membership in wool was less common than in cotton, a better-organised workforce. Union density in wool remained around half that in cotton throughout the post-war period.

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Croucher, 'Post-War British Trade Unionism: Telling It Like It Was,' *Labour History Review*, 74 (2), August 2009, p. 199.

Table 2: Union Density in Cotton and Other Textiles in United Kingdom

Year	Union density in cotton (%) <sup>32</sup>	Union density in 'Other Textiles' (%) <sup>33</sup>
1948	78.3	39.3
1950	74.3	37.0
1955	74.8	34.0
1960	74.9	31.2
1965	81.3	32.3
1970	87.5	39.4
1974	101.0	45.2

The papers of the NUDBTW can contribute more to our understanding of the union. Like any institutional documents, they are somewhat formulaic and do not reveal the full extent and nature of the discussions minuted, but there is much to learn both from what is discussed and what is omitted. The papers suggest that there was little engagement between the executive committee and the branches, and the branch officers and the membership. Furthermore, they suggest that the union was generally ineffective in solving the problems that wool textile workers faced at this time, such as redundancy. John Singleton noted that a 'primary objective' of 'the trade unions' in cotton was to ensure that as many cotton jobs were retained as possible, along with 'the collective dignity' of the workforce.<sup>34</sup> It does not appear that such efforts were made by the NUDBTW on behalf of its wool members. Beyond the early 1960s, closures in Yorkshire wool firms were regularly noted.<sup>35</sup> However, after a minute from September 1960 that noted the 'extensive propaganda work' undertaken 'particularly in Yorkshire,' there appears to have been little work to recruit wool textile workers to the union.<sup>36</sup> It may have been thought that the historically low level of trade union membership in wool meant that it was unlikely that they would recruit large numbers of these workers, but there are certainly no more notes later on in the minutes that indicate any campaign of recruitment. It is possible that the NUDBTW thought that such efforts were largely futile and more attention should be paid to supporting existing members and recruiting from textile industries that were historically better-organised. Whatever the

<sup>32</sup> George Sayers Bain and Robert Price, *Profiles of Union Growth: A Comparative Statistical Portrait of Eight Countries* (Oxford, 1980), p. 51.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>34</sup> John Singleton, 'Showing the White Flag: the Lancashire Cotton Industry, 1945-65,' *Business History*, 32 (4), 1990, p. 129.

<sup>35</sup> For example, West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/10, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 27 August 1971; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/10, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 25 February 1972.

<sup>36</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/7, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 24 September 1960.

reasons, the union made little effort to attract new wool textile members for the majority of the post-war era.

### The Approach of the NUDBTW

The union's involvement in politics and with government appears to have been limited, perhaps suggesting its relatively low status in the national trade union hierarchy. The Executive Committee minutes were generally unconcerned with electoral politics, but an entry in April 1955 noted that the Committee was urged to spread support for the Labour Party in that year's general election.<sup>37</sup> Little mention of party politics was made between that time and 1982, when the minutes ceased due to the union's merger with the TGWU. From this, we can strongly infer that the Executive Committee did not concern itself with political matters or, for example, sponsor MPs as some other trade unions did (although David Howell has noted that there is no indication that sponsored MPs always followed union policies).<sup>38</sup> However, there are entries that suggest a concern with British membership of the EEC in the early 1960s and the implications this would have for textile industries. In November 1961, the union asked the TUC to hold a meeting about possible safeguards that could protect the British textile trade if Britain entered the EEC.<sup>39</sup> The TUC responded by saying that textiles was not the only industry that would be affected and it would be impractical for all such industries to meet.<sup>40</sup> Since it was clear that the TUC would not take further action, the Committee ceased to pursue it. There were obviously concerns about the effects EEC membership would have on textile workers but the Committee chose not to continue this particular campaign. In 1976, a related issue arose in a letter from the Huddersfield branch requesting for the union to raise concerns with the government about the importation of cheap suits from Europe.<sup>41</sup> The union had recently held a meeting with the Department of Trade and Industry, the Treasury and the Foreign Office on this matter and noted that they would prepare a press statement relating to it.<sup>42</sup> There was no indication of what occurred in the meeting or what the press statement would say, but it is likely that the union were told that no action could be taken. It seems that the union had little influence

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<sup>37</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/6, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 13 April 1955.

<sup>38</sup> David Howell, "Shut Your Gob!:" Trade Unions and the Labour Party, 1945-64,' in Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, volume one: the Post-War Compromise, 1945-1964* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 124

<sup>39</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/7, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 18 November 1961.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/10, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 24 September 1976.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

with the TUC or with government departments and, in addition, did little to pursue issues that would benefit their members with bodies such as this.

The serious decline of the industry is regularly mentioned in the minutes, especially from the late 1950s onwards. For example, in 1958, the minutes recorded the closure of Mark Oldroyd's, a Dewsbury firm that had strong trade union membership (three hundred trade union members from a workforce of four hundred and sixty).<sup>43</sup> The fact that the firm's workforce was largely organised was likely due to the long tradition of trade union membership there – the 1875 strike led by women workers discussed in chapter two helped somewhat to establish a union presence in the workplace. The minutes noted that after the closure of Oldroyd's, 'Efforts are being made to place as many members as possible with other firms, but in view of the employment situation in the area the numbers would be small.'<sup>44</sup> This role of placing unemployed members in new positions would be replicated at other times but due to the industry's continued contraction, actually finding work for such people was not an easy task. Furthermore, the NUDBTW does not appear to have acted decisively in response to the regular redundancies handed to its members. Ben Curtis argued that in the South Wales coalfield, external factors such as the threat of pit closures were most likely to influence a local lodge's outlook.<sup>45</sup> It seems that there was concern within the NUDBTW about issues such as the decline of the industry and job losses, but this concern did little to influence the union's policies and campaigns.

The only evidence of a clear campaign for the betterment of its members was the NUDBTW's work to improve holiday pay. The NUDBTW campaigned for two weeks' paid holiday for wool textile workers from the early 1950s.<sup>46</sup> Arbitration was carried out between the NAUTT, of which the NUDBTW was a member union, and the Wool and Allied Textile Employers' Council (WATEC) at an industrial tribunal in May 1952 and two weeks' paid holiday was granted to wool workers.<sup>47</sup> Whilst this is evidence of success for wool trade unionism, non-union members would also have benefitted from the increase in paid holidays. Mancur Olson Jr. posited the theory of the 'free rider,' the person who attempts to gain the benefits of group membership (or 'selective incentives') without paying for them.<sup>48</sup> Some wool textile workers may have thought it was more sensible to benefit from union

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<sup>43</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/6, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 13 April 1955.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ben Curtis, 'A Tradition of Radicalism: the Politics of the South Wales Miners, 1964-1985,' *Labour History Review*, 76 (1), April 2011, pp. 38-39.

<sup>46</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 83/1159, Ministry of Labour Statistics Branch records, 'Holidays with Pay – Textile Trade. Extract from Annual Report of 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of National Association of Unions in the Textile Trade,' August 1953.

<sup>47</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 83/1159, Ministry of Labour Statistics Branch records, Industrial Disputes Tribunal: Award Number 164, 26 May 1952.

<sup>48</sup> Mancur Olson Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action*, p. 21.

successes without paying membership subscriptions. However, the union's papers suggested that such successes were few and far between, and therefore wool workers may also have opted to remain out of the union because it offered no selective incentives to them. Olson's research on groups and collective action suggested that the purpose of groups was to further their members' interests: without this function, such groups would fail.<sup>49</sup> This was certainly the case with the NUDBTW, which merged with the TGWU in 1982 but, more broadly, failed to attract members because it did not attempt to secure benefits for them with any regularity.

Collective bargaining was not carried out by the NUDBTW but the NAUTT on behalf of its member unions.<sup>50</sup> Whilst it is clear that bargaining took place between the NAUTT and WATEC, and from 1982, between the TGWU Textiles Group and the Confederation of British Wool Textiles (CBWT), it seems that agreements were not widely enforced. The Donovan Commission on trade unions, which reported in 1968, found that there had been a decline in the extent to which industry-wide collective bargaining agreements had determined actual pay across all industries since the 1930s.<sup>51</sup> If the wage settlements were not enforced by a majority of workplaces, it is possible that wool textile workers felt there was little benefit to joining a union. The converse of this is, of course, that if more people joined a union, it would be more likely that bargaining agreements were adopted. Whilst there is no evidence, for example in oral testimony, to assert that wool workers did not join unions because of the generally poor application of wage settlements, it is certainly possible that this contributed to the feeling that wool unions did little for their members. If it was uncertain that the union could secure any particular benefits for its members in terms of wage agreements, it is very likely that many potential members would have felt it was pointless to join, as Olson's theory of groups as outlined above suggested.

Various documents about collective bargaining agreements exist in the papers of the NAUTT, often detailing the wage increases secured year on year: for example, in 1981-82, the wage increase stood at six per cent, and in 1982-83, a five and a half per cent increase was secured.<sup>52</sup> This pattern of increases had also been similar in the early post-war years,

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 44/341, Ministry of Labour Information Services records, 'Industrial Information Series Number 9: Wool Textile Industry,' Ministry of Labour pamphlet, undated, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, 1965-68. Chairman: the Rt. Hon. Lord Donovan. Report Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, (London, 1968), p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Huddersfield), WYK1312/2/1/1, Christine Shepherd records, Wages Settlement between the Confederation of British Wool Textiles Limited and the Transport and General Workers' Union Textile Group, 1981-82. West Yorkshire Archive Service (Huddersfield), WYK1312/2/1/1, Christine Shepherd records, Wages settlement between the Confederation of British Wool Textiles Limited and the Transport and General Workers' Union Textile Group, 1982-83.



with six per cent increases in 1953 and 1955.<sup>53</sup> However, there is no indication that firms broadly adopted these increases or complied with collective bargaining agreements at all. Ralph Fevre asserted that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, not all mills guaranteed to pay the rates agreed in collective bargaining, even some closed shops.<sup>54</sup> Without the ability to enforce collective bargaining agreements across the industry, the NAUTT and its member unions were deprived of a key function of trade unions. It is likely that this contributed to their unattractiveness to wool textile workers, along with their apparent lack of interest in important groups such as immigrants and women.

### Immigrants and Women: the Treatment of Key Groups in the Wool Workforce by the NUDBTW

Immigrants working in Britain in the post-war era faced many difficulties. In general, trade unions did little to support or attract immigrant members. This was certainly the case in wool textiles, where the NUDBTW was ineffective in responding to immigrant needs at work. Ron Ramdin commented that black workers were generally excluded from trade unions in the post-war period, arguing that ‘collaboration’ took place between white workers, trade unions and management to exclude black workers to this end.<sup>55</sup> Mark Duffield argued similarly with reference to immigrants working in West Midlands iron foundries.<sup>56</sup> It is not possible to generalise about the positions different managements in different industries took on trade unions and on immigrant workers, but there is little concrete evidence that collusion took place in the wool textile industry and the NUDBTW, especially given that union membership was generally low in any case. However, immigrants appear to have been ignored by the NUDBTW.

Many unions showed little vigour in recruiting black and Asian workers or in supporting them. The argument that Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern employed – that the relative absence of immigrants from trade unions in the cotton industry ‘resulted in a barrier to the creation of a common set of class interests between “native” and immigrant workers’ – is clearly relevant in the case of wool textiles.<sup>57</sup> Ramdin and Duffield were not alone in their assertions about trade unions and black workers: other scholars, such

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<sup>53</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/2/2/4/5, Transport and General Workers’ Union records, Memorandum of Agreement between National Association of Unions in the Textile Trades and Wool (and Allied) Textile Employers’ Council, 5 March 1953; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/2/2/4/7, Transport and General Workers’ Union records, Memorandum of Agreement between National Association of Unions in the Textile Trades and Wool (and Allied) Textile Employers’ Council, 27 June 1955.

<sup>54</sup> Ralph Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* (Aldershot, 1984), p. 32.

<sup>55</sup> Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987), p. 271.

<sup>56</sup> Mark Duffield, *Black Radicalism and the Politics of De-Industrialisation: the Hidden History of Indian Foundry Workers* (Aldershot, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern, ‘“If We Depart from These Conditions...”: Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry, c. 1946-1952,’ *Labour History Review*, 72 (2), August 2007, p. 136.

as Gary P. Freeman, argued that trade unions were ambivalent at best towards black and Asian workers.<sup>58</sup> Roger Ballard stated that the traditional trade union structure had little to offer Sikh workers in particular.<sup>59</sup> Ken Lunn, however, argued that the issue of racism in trade unions was more complex than often assumed and that not all of the labour movement was racist.<sup>60</sup> In making his argument, Lunn cited only fragmentary evidence of labour movement acceptance of immigrant workers, for example the acceptance of Poles in the Scottish coalfield, but in doing so he failed to acknowledge the different forms of racism experienced by black and white immigrants.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, he noted that relations were harmonious between immigrants and natives in the Scottish coalfield because Poles ‘agreed to accept and abide by the terms of that culture,’ suggesting that willingness to assimilate was the reason for good relations.<sup>62</sup> This may have been the case, but many immigrant groups – especially those who were not Christian and/or white – created their own religious and ethnic associations to fulfil functions that the host society was unable to provide.<sup>63</sup> The inference from Lunn is that, had more immigrant groups quietly assimilated, there would have been fewer incidents of racial tension at work and in society generally. Lunn steps on dangerous ground here, given that such arguments have often been employed by racists.

The post-war period was characterised by poor relations between the trade union movement and black and Asian workers. Lunn argued that trade union histories have often neglected issues of race and ethnicity, perhaps because of the approach taken by many trade unions on this subject.<sup>64</sup> Papers in the TUC archives clearly show this. A 1961 document on restricting the entry of black and Asian workers to the UK commented on racial prejudice, laying the blame with immigrants, stating that ‘difficulties do sometimes undoubtedly arise over coloured immigrants, who form a visibly distinct group containing elements with a social outlook and general behaviour which are markedly different from the rest of English society.’<sup>65</sup> It goes on to say, however, that difficulties immigrants faced in industry and in wider society were ‘marginal,’ suggesting that the TUC did not believe that immigrants’ problems were significant.<sup>66</sup> These statements show that the TUC, if not outwardly racist, at least held racial prejudices that influenced their approach to immigrant workers that went

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<sup>58</sup> Gary P. Freeman, *Immigrant Labor and Racial Conflict in Industrial Societies: the French and British Experience, 1945-1975* (Princeton, 1979), p. 216.

<sup>59</sup> Roger Ballard, ‘Differentiation and Disjunction among the Sikhs,’ in Roger Ballard (ed.), *Desh Pardesh: the South Asian Presence in Britain* (London, 1994), p. 106.

<sup>60</sup> Ken Lunn, ‘Complex Encounters: Trade Unions, Immigration and Racism,’ in John McIlroy, Nina Fishman and Alan Campbell (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, volume two: the High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964-79* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 71.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>63</sup> There is more information about ethnic associations in chapters six and eight. Chapter six discusses the different experiences of black and white immigrants to the woollen district.

<sup>64</sup> Lunn, ‘Complex Encounters,’ p. 70.

<sup>65</sup> Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS 292B/101.16/9, Trade Union Congress (TUC) records, ‘Conditions Governing Entry of Foreign Workers to UK,’ November 1961.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

beyond concerns about pressure on the availability of jobs for the British. Indeed, as Campbell, Fishman and McIlroy noted, the TUC took few positive steps to combat racism and, in the trade union movement generally, black workers were sometimes reprimanded for their ingratitude towards unions.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the Minister of Labour, Ray Gunter MP, wrote in a letter to Alice Bacon MP in September 1966 that ‘the official attitude of unions is unexceptionable in this matter [racial discrimination in the workplace] and that when there is open trouble the union’s official machinery does everything in its power to deal with it,’ adding that he felt the problems stemmed ‘at shop-floor level.’<sup>68</sup> This demonstrates that, contemporaneously, the TUC – and trade unions in general – were viewed as fair in matters of racial discrimination (although it should be noted that Gunter was a union man himself – he was the president of the Transport Salaried Staffs’ Association between 1956 and 1964 – and so may have felt duty bound to defend trade unions’ approach to race). Given that the TUC represented a large number of British trade unions, it is unsurprising that the NUDBTW showed little enthusiasm for recruiting and supporting immigrants. Indeed, the TUC papers contain correspondence from Len Sharp, general secretary of the NUDBTW, about his union’s opposition to the recruitment of Austrian and Italian workers to wool mills in 1961.<sup>69</sup>

By 1986, the TUC’s stance had changed somewhat, and it was willing to discuss issues relating to black and Asian workers, as set out in its pamphlet, *Trade Unions and Black Workers*.<sup>70</sup> Statistics included in the pamphlet show that an increasing number of black and Asian workers were becoming members of trade unions: for example, fifty-seven per cent of white male workers were members of trade unions at the time the pamphlet was published, and fifty-nine per cent of Asian male workers and sixty-four per cent of black male workers were trade union members.<sup>71</sup> Despite this, fewer black and Asian male workers held union office: three per cent and two per cent respectively, compared to six per cent of white male workers (interestingly, two per cent of female trade union members of all ethnicities held office).<sup>72</sup> The pamphlet stated that, ‘The TUC is unequivocal about the need to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms.’<sup>73</sup> However, it did not explicitly acknowledge racism within trade unions. The lack of appreciation of the scale of racism and the racism inherent in many trade unions by the trade union movement’s representative organisation may have discouraged some black and Asian workers from joining affiliate unions, including the NUDBTW. Faced with a choice between such an organisation and one formed by and for

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<sup>67</sup> Campbell, Fishman and McIlroy, ‘The Post-War Compromise: Mapping Industrial Politics,’ p. 93.

<sup>68</sup> The National Archives (TNA), HO 376/106, Home Office Racial Disadvantage records, Letter from Ray Gunter to Alice Bacon, 8 September 1966.

<sup>69</sup> Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS 292B/101.16/9, TUC records, Letter from Len Sharp to TUC, 6 November 1961.

<sup>70</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Trade Unions and Black Workers* (London, 1986).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

immigrants to work for their benefit, such as the Indian Workers' Association, immigrants opted for groups that would support, and not marginalise, their struggles.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the increasing number of immigrants working in the wool textile industry from the 1950s onwards, there was limited discussion of recruiting immigrants or of immigrant members' issues in the minutes of the NUDBTW Executive Committee. Indeed, immigrants only began to be mentioned in June 1974, when the Committee condemned the actions of a shop steward, Younis Chowdry, in speaking out against the union's attitude towards its immigrant members.<sup>75</sup> It is not possible to ascertain the number or proportion of immigrant workers in the union as this does not appear to have been monitored. However, it is clear that some immigrants were members of the NUDBTW and, according to a quote from Chowdry in the *Sunday Telegraph*, they were not receiving the level of service to which they were entitled.<sup>76</sup> Aside from their frustration that he should publicly condemn the union, little further was said on this matter until October of the same year, when a possible immigrant liaison officer was mooted.<sup>77</sup> Again, nothing further was noted about this, including the scope and duties of the role, suggesting that no such officer was ever appointed. This strongly suggests that the NUDBTW paid little serious attention to the issues of immigrant workers, who had specific concerns that were apparently going unheard, such as translation problems, the organisation of work under an immigrant supervisor (as discussed in chapter four) and possible immigration problems, given that some workers arrived in Britain without proper documentation.

The lacklustre approach to immigrant workers is also seen in an incident noted in the minutes from 1976, when a member wrote to the Committee to complain that he had been the victim of racial abuse from another member.<sup>78</sup> Although the tone of the minutes is hard to gauge, it appears that this incident was treated with disbelief, with the Committee insisting that they needed the names and addresses of any witnesses to the alleged abuse along with signed affidavits before they would agree to investigate the matter further.<sup>79</sup> Whilst thorough investigation is, of course, necessary for any serious accusation, it seems

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<sup>74</sup> There is more information on this later in the thesis: chapter five explores the identities of immigrant wool workers; chapter six discusses the communities immigrants built in the woollen district; and chapter eight contains case studies of two immigrant organisations, the Indian Workers' Association and the Asian Youth Movements.

<sup>75</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/10, Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 11 June 1974.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/10, Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 11 October 1974.

<sup>78</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/10, Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 24 September 1976.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

disproportionately heavy-handed of the committee to have asked for such materials before they would even begin to consider what had occurred, suggesting that the union had little time for immigrants' concerns. Fevre confirmed this view in his research on the role of immigrant labour in the wool textile industry, noting that the Commission for Racial Equality investigated the NUDBTW for an allegedly discriminatory labour supply agreement with a mill.<sup>80</sup> No date is given for this investigation and, unsurprisingly, no mention of it is made in the Executive Committee minutes.

Furthermore, the August/September 1982 edition of *Race Today* contains an article on immigrants in the wool textile industry which states that 'the union' was racist.<sup>81</sup> We can assume that this refers to the NUDBTW, since it was the largest union in the wool industry. Again, this suggests that the NUDBTW did not engage with their black grassroots members in any meaningful way. The poor attitude of the union towards its immigrant members, and potential immigrant recruits, is probably a reason why so few wool textile workers joined trade unions: if a proportion of the workforce was ignored by the union's leadership, it is not likely that they would be willing to pay subscriptions, regardless of how commonplace such attitudes were at the time.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, as chapter eight will show, alternative organisations for immigrants were growing and catered for the specific needs of different immigrant groups, which is likely to have been a far more attractive prospect for the average immigrant in a mill. It is possible that trade union membership could have been higher had the union made a concerted effort to appeal to this group of workers, but there was little interest from the executive committee in recruiting away from their traditional bases.

Contemporaneous articles from the *Guardian* have suggested that the NUDBTW made some limited attempts at providing services for immigrant members which were not recorded in the minute books. An article from 1965 described the work carried out by W. L. Jackson, an assistant district officer of the NUDBTW, to persuade mill owners in Dewsbury to set aside a room in which Muslim workers could pray in order to maintain productivity levels.<sup>83</sup> Although the welfare benefits to Muslim workers are clear, it is unlikely that such a facility would have been provided had it not been that productivity was affected by workers leaving the site to attend their mosque for prayers. An article from 1967 outlined a campaign started in Bradford to protect 'coloured workers from bearing the brunt of any redundancies if the wool textile industry goes into serious recession this winter.'<sup>84</sup> It noted that the NUDBTW had issued recruiting pamphlets in Urdu but that the few immigrants who joined let their membership lapse because they felt little was being done for them.<sup>85</sup> Jack Peel, the union's

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<sup>80</sup> Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination*, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Race Today*, August/September 1982, p. 217.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>83</sup> *Guardian*, 6 March 1965.

<sup>84</sup> *Guardian*, 21 August 1967.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

general secretary, responded by saying that recruiting immigrants was difficult due to poor literacy levels.<sup>86</sup> Despite the poor recognition of immigrant issues by the executive, some branch members appealed to the union to actively recruit and assist more immigrants, as detailed in an article from 1973.<sup>87</sup> Bradford Number Three branch was keen for ‘better liaison’ between the union and its immigrant members and the Milnsbridge branch called for a full-time liaison worker for immigrant members.<sup>88</sup> As noted above, discussions about this took place, but no full-time official was appointed. These small concessions to immigrant concerns were clearly not enough to induce large numbers of immigrant workers to join the NUDBTW.

Women were a significantly neglected group within the NUDBTW. In thirty years’ worth of Executive Committee minutes, they are mentioned rarely, and specific women’s issues, such as part-time work and the lower pay that women received even after the introduction of the Equal Pay Act 1970, were never mentioned. Although women constituted slightly more than half of the workforce in wool textiles (for example, in 1951, there were 86,519 male workers and 104,211 females), their particular needs and interests were roundly ignored by the union.<sup>89</sup> Given the culture of trade unionism in Britain in this period, this is unsurprising. Chris Wrigley asserted that trade unions adapted to women in the workforce ‘slowly, hesitantly and often very reluctantly’ which is true of the NUDBTW.<sup>90</sup> Cathy Hunt’s research on the methods used to recruit women to trade unions in the early twentieth century acknowledged that male trade union leaders were often content to ignore the specific problems of women’s work and that they were not consistently committed to organising women.<sup>91</sup> Hunt also outlined some of the problems women faced in joining trade unions, including the lack of money to pay subscriptions and having little discretionary time in which to attend meetings due to family and household duties.<sup>92</sup>

As noted in chapter two, Tony Jowitt suggested that women’s employment retarded trade unionism in the wool textile industry, but it is not clear that this was actually the case.<sup>93</sup> Todd noted that in the 1960s, trade union leaders argued that women were apathetic and this was the reason for their lack of participation in trade unions, along with their role as

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *Guardian*, 17 May 1973.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Table 13, *Report on the Census of Production for 1951*, no page numbers.

<sup>90</sup> Chris Wrigley, ‘Women in the Labour Market and in the Unions,’ in John McIlroy, Nina Fishman and Alan Campbell (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, volume two: the High Tide of Trade Unionism* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 43.

<sup>91</sup> Cathy Hunt, ‘Dancing and Days Out: the Role of Social Events in British Women’s Trade Unionism in the Early Twentieth Century,’ *Labour History Review*, 76 (2), 2011, p. 108.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>93</sup> Tony Jowitt, ‘The Retardation of Trade Unionism in the Yorkshire Worsteds Textile Industry,’ in J. A. Jowitt and A. J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries* (London, 1988), p. 85.

supplementary wage earners.<sup>94</sup> This view did not account for the structural barriers to women's involvement in trade unions as noted above, such as a lack of funds or time to spare. Mike Savage stressed the importance of appreciating local gender relations – the understanding of how gender was constructed in different localities.<sup>95</sup> Whilst many women in the woollen district worked, in the case of married women their wage was generally supplementary to their husband's due to the lower levels of pay that women received.<sup>96</sup> The Equal Pay Act 1970 did not change this. The Act allowed for equal pay for women should they be employed in the same work as men; this did not change women's pay in wool because of the way work was divided, with a large majority of women working in unskilled roles and in different sections of the industry to men. Mary Macarthur's summation of the problem was that 'Women are unorganised because they are badly paid and poorly paid because they are unorganised.'<sup>97</sup> Ian Gazeley commented that trade unions largely reinforced the segregation of women into low-paid work.<sup>98</sup>

As Table 3 shows, numbers of those working in cotton and wool textiles declined overall throughout the post-war period. More women than men were employed in both textile industries at the start of the period, but as it progressed, men overtook women in all aspects of cotton and wool manufacture. This may account for the increased union density in both industries seen in Table 2 in the later part of the post-war era. It is possible that women left the wool industry in order to take up better-paid employment elsewhere, although further research would be needed to verify this.

Table 3: Numbers Employed in Cotton and Wool in Great Britain (000s)

Year	Cotton spinning – men	Cotton spinning – women	Cotton weaving – men	Cotton weaving – women	Wool and worsted – men	Wool and worsted – women
1950 <sup>99</sup>	64.8	118.7	48.7	98.9	98.3	121.8
1963 <sup>100</sup>	40.9	68.4	44.9	63.1	89.7	101.6
1967 <sup>101</sup>	38.7	96.3	40.9	50.4	85.4	89.2
1973 <sup>102</sup>	36.7	31.3	28.0	22.9	63.3	51.3
1983 <sup>103</sup>	13.4	10.4	13.3	9.6	30.9	22.1

<sup>94</sup> Todd, *The People*, p. 288.

<sup>95</sup> Michael Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: the Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 56.

<sup>96</sup> Chapter one contains information about women's pay in wool textiles as compared to men's.

<sup>97</sup> Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions: an Outline History of Women in the British Trade Union Movement* (London and Tonbridge, 1977), p. 126.

<sup>98</sup> Ian Gazeley, 'Manual Work and Pay, 1900-70,' in Nicholas Crafts, Ian Gazeley and Andrew Newell (eds.), *Work and Pay in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2007), p. 61.

<sup>99</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, vol. LVIII, no. 4, April 1950, p. 131.

<sup>100</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, vol. LXXI, January-December 1963, p. 56.

<sup>101</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, vol. LXXV, January-December 1967, p. 102.

<sup>102</sup> *Department of Employment Gazette*, vol. LXXXI, January-December 1973, p. 59.

<sup>103</sup> *Employment Gazette*, vol. 91, January-December 1983, p. 7.

Although the Donovan Commission reported on the poor access women had to training and skilled work, and despite the existence of a Wool Industry Training Board (as discussed in chapter one), the wool textile industry did little to promote equality of training and promotion opportunities for women throughout the post-war period.<sup>104</sup> The NUDBTW mirrored this stance and did not work towards improving women's employment in wool textiles. Sheila Lewenhak commented that despite a growing number of concessions granted to women at work in the 1960s and 1970s, they were still struggling for equal treatment in trade unions.<sup>105</sup> Sarah Boston argued that the government and the TUC actively worked to make it more difficult for women to work in the immediate post-war years with the closure of nurseries, practices which restricted women's involvement in the labour market including the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act of 1942 and their unwillingness to provide women with training or consider equal pay.<sup>106</sup> The general experience of women in work and trade unions after 1945 was one of struggle, not only for recognition but also for support. The NUDBTW was much like many other trade unions at this time in its relationship with women in failing to support gender equality. As in the case of immigrants, if the NUDBTW had placed greater emphasis on recruiting and working with women, it is possible that their membership would have increased, but its attitude to these two key groups in wool textiles was ambivalent.

### Conclusion

Despite the NUDBTW being the largest union organising wool textile workers after 1945, its poor grasp of the needs of all wool industry operatives – especially those of immigrants and women – was a significant reason for its weakness in recruiting members. In ignoring key demographic groups working in wool textiles, the union underestimated the potential benefits of organising such workers: as we will see in later chapters, immigrants formed strong associations based on ethnicity and many were effective community organisers.<sup>107</sup> Although the apparent problems of organising women were recognised by many in the labour movement, we have seen in the previous chapter that women in wool textiles such as the 1875 Dewsbury strikers and Julia Varley were expert organisers.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, in other industries, women's involvement in trade unions was both normal and expected, such as in the Lancashire cotton industry – similar to wool in both gender composition and the gendered division of work – suggesting that there was nothing inherently 'unorganisable' in

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<sup>104</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, 1965-68, pp. 90-91.

<sup>105</sup> Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions*, p. 247.

<sup>106</sup> Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement* (London, 1980), pp. 219-220.

<sup>107</sup> Chapters six and eight contain more information about immigrants organising collectively in their communities.

<sup>108</sup> Chapter two contains case studies on a strike organised by women weavers in 1875 and on Julia Varley, a wool trade unionist.



women.<sup>109</sup> Ultimately, the NUDBTW failed to harness the strength of women and immigrants, instead focusing on issues almost solely related to white men. This made it an unattractive prospect to a large number of wool textile workers. Its seeming inability to effect change was also off-putting: whilst mill closures were frequently reported in the Executive Committee's minutes, there was no effort to negotiate terms for redundancy that would have benefitted its members. Along with the structural problems in recruiting workers in wool textiles and the long history of poor engagement with collective organisation, the largest union was both exclusionary and ineffective. Furthermore, there appears to have been little point in paying union subscription fees for many wool textile workers because collective bargaining agreements were not adhered to by all employers and few selective incentives were offered to members. There were no material benefits of union membership in the wool textile industry and it is likely that this was an important reason for the generally low level of membership. As the thesis progresses, we will see that there were structural reasons for weak collective organisation, such as how the industry was organised geographically, and also how weak collective identities hindered the progress of greater union membership. These were undoubtedly the most important reasons for low union membership, but, as this chapter has shown, the role the NUDBTW itself played was also significant, in failing to provide services that appealed to potential members.

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<sup>109</sup>John Singleton, *Lancashire on the Scrapheap: the Cotton Industry, 1945-1970* (Oxford, 1991), p. 48; Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper, 1864-1946* (London, 1984), p. 26.

## Chapter Four: Structure, Power and Identity in the Workplace

### Introduction

The organisation of the wool industry in the post-war era (and since the earliest days of mechanisation) limited the spread of collective industrial organisation. This chapter examines three elements that produced an environment that made collective organisation difficult: the structure of the industry, the operation of power within the industry and woollen operatives' work identities. The woollen workforce had little time or space to create the bonds that could have formed the basis of collective action.

Contemporary reports, research and statistics have been particularly useful sources in examining both the wool industry's structure and the operation of power within it. The research of Cohen and Jenner in the late 1960s and Moor and Waddington in the late 1970s has provided vital information. Furthermore, the monthly bulletins of the Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics have helped to form an understanding of the rate of the industry's decline over the course of the post-war period. Studies commissioned by local councils and universities have also added to an understanding of skill and employment after 1945. They have helped to create a fuller picture of the post-war wool industry than would have been possible with oral accounts and mill records alone, especially as mill records were patchy and government sources were of limited value.

The wool industry's organisation and structures will be discussed initially. In 1951, one of the peak years of the post-war industry, the wool workforce for the whole of the United Kingdom totalled 192,353 operatives.<sup>1</sup> According to the 1951 Census of Production, seventy-eight per cent of this total worked in the East and West Ridings.<sup>2</sup> An undated information booklet aimed to encourage recruitment to the wool textile industry stated that over ninety per cent of the worsted industry was located in the West Riding.<sup>3</sup> However, the organisation of the industry into a large number of small mills meant that there was little feeling of unity within this large body of workers. For example, in 1951, there were 1,502 'large' wool establishments in the United Kingdom and 516 'small' firms ('small' was taken to mean employing fewer than ten people, and 'large' as employing more than ten people).<sup>4</sup> As the industry contracted throughout the twentieth century, resulting in a workforce of

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<sup>1</sup> Table 5, *The Report on the Census of Production for 1951* (London, 1955), no page numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. There is no distinction between the East and West Ridings in the Census of Production or the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* of the Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics, but we can safely assume that the overwhelming majority of mills were in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

<sup>3</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 44/341, Ministry of Labour Information Services records, 'Industrial Information Series Number 9: Wool Textile Industry,' Ministry of Labour pamphlet, undated, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Table 2, Table 5, *The Report on the Census of Production for 1951*, no page numbers.

22,433 in December 1990, workers were still geographically dispersed between many small mills.<sup>5</sup> The 1988 Census of Production shows that most wool workers were engaged in mills that employed very few workers: for example, 606 firms employed fewer than one hundred operatives (with 387 employing fewer than ten) but only ninety-nine firms had more than one hundred workers.<sup>6</sup> The large number of small units of production made collective organisation logistically difficult.

Secondly, power in the wool textile industry will be examined in order to further understand the extent to which wool workers were structurally prevented from forming successful trade unions and the agency woollen workers had regarding trade union membership. The balance of power within the mill – both between employers and employees and within the workforce itself – will be discussed along with the differing levels of power and agency that certain groups held. In his study of Pakistani migrants in post-war Oldham, Virinder S. Kalra criticised scholars whose approach and methodology limited the agency of migrant workers.<sup>7</sup> It cannot be denied that Asian wool workers had a considerable degree of agency in certain aspects of their lives; indeed, we will see in chapters six and eight that while they were the subjects of racism from the host community they established their own organisations and projects to protect their interests and improve their lives. However, this agency did not extend to the mill, where rigid hierarchies and the principles of family ownership discriminated against immigrants of all nationalities.

The operation of power in the industry is likely to have kept certain issues from arising at all. Stephen Lukes's conception of the third face of power can allow us to appreciate the way in which power excluded certain issues from the agenda. His theory described how power can operate not only to stop people airing their grievances but to prevent people from feeling aggrieved at all.<sup>8</sup> As such, arguments that wool workers did not wish to form trade unions at all because they never expressed such desires or because they were happy with the state of the industry can be challenged; Lukes asserted that the absence of grievance does not equal genuine consensus on any given matter.<sup>9</sup> Lukes built on more simplistic views of power, for example those that argued that power can operate to suppress conflict, by countering that conflict is not always observable and can be kept from arising.<sup>10</sup> John Gaventa's *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* applied Lukes's theory

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<sup>5</sup> *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics. Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics, the Confederation of British Wool Textiles Limited*, January 1990, no.483, no page numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Table 4, *Business Monitor: Report on the Census of Production. Woollen and worsted industry* (London, 1988), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Virinder S. Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour and Social Change* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Lukes, *Power: a Radical View* (Basingstoke, 2005, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 28. There is a more detailed explanation of Lukes's theory in the thesis's introduction.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

to 'the politics of inequality in a Central Appalachian Valley' and the history of coal miners' quiescence in that area.<sup>11</sup> Although Lukes's theory is not tested here in the way Gaventa applied it to his historical subjects, consideration of the third face of power will be made at several points in the chapter.

Finally, woollen work identities will be explored. The various identities wool workers possessed divided the workforce and contributed to a situation in which unity was difficult to foster.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, skill was a divisive force that favoured some white British men and gave them both higher status and pay, though it did not induce them to organise collectively. There was no common 'woollen worker' identity on which to base collective action, in part because the fragmented structure of the industry prevented feelings of occupational belonging. This provided a serious impediment to a successful wool trade union movement.

### Organisation and Structures of the Industry

Examining the woollen industry's structure demonstrates the difficulties potential trade unionists faced in organising collectively. Asa Briggs noted that in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Birmingham, there was a large number of small units of production across local industries, as well as a low level of trade union organisation.<sup>13</sup> Although this was not Briggs' primary line of research, others who have studied the wool textile industry have made similar observations. There is much evidence to support Keith Laybourn's observation that the woollen industry suffered from weak trade unionism because of its structure and organisation.<sup>14</sup> One of the key problems was the difficulty workers from the many small wool firms faced in joining to act collectively. Divisions within the workplace based on occupation added to this problem.

In their research on the woollen industry in Batley in the 1970s, Moor and Waddington suggested that the industry's structure hampered trade union organisation due to the large number of family-owned firms and also employment of considerable numbers of women.<sup>15</sup> There is little evidence that confirms that women's employment retarded the growth of trade unionism (although as we saw in chapter three, women were not a priority for wool trade unions) but the structure of the industry was a key factor. The organisation of the woollen workforce into small units, the segregation by ethnicity and gender that occurred at work and

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<sup>11</sup> John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana, 1980), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> This is the key contention of the following chapter, which explores wool workers' identities beyond the workplace.

<sup>13</sup> Asa Briggs, *History of Birmingham: Volume II, Borough and City, 1865-1938* (London, 1952), p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Laybourn, "'One of the Little Breezes Blowing Across Bradford": the Bradford Independent Labour Party and Trade Unionism c.1890-1914,' in Keith Laybourn and David James (eds.), *The Rising Sun of Socialism: the Independent Labour Party in the Textile District of the West Riding of Yorkshire between 1800 and 1914* (Herford, 1991), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Nigel Moor and Paul Waddington, *From Rags to Ruins: Batley, Woollen Textiles and Industrial Change* (Newcastle, 1980), p. 51.

the workplace environment will now be examined to demonstrate the impediments to collective organisation that wool textile workers faced.

A significant aspect of the industry's organisation was the small size and large number of woollen mills. Contemporaneous academic research provides good estimates of mill size and demonstrates that they were generally small, in addition to the Census of Production figures noted above. Cohen and Jenner found significant variation in their survey of seventeen firms in the 1960s: thirty-eight workers was the smallest number employed, 952 the largest, and 237 the mean.<sup>16</sup> Moor and Waddington's estimate for average workforce size in the 1970s was almost one hundred employees less, at 140.<sup>17</sup> This could be because of the different area studied – their area was Batley and Cohen and Jenner's was 'Wooltown,' almost certainly either Bradford or Huddersfield. It could alternatively be due to the passage of time and the concomitant decline of productive personnel. Table 4 shows the size of firms across the post-war period, based on Census of Production statistics. Whilst 1958 appears to be an anomalous year, generally the pattern was of a greater number of smaller firms than larger firms. Small mills was seen as a problem by some contemporary wool industrialists such as Sir Frank Kearton, chairman of the large textile enterprise Courtaulds Ltd, who thought that there 'were not enough really large ones [mills]' in February 1966.<sup>18</sup> A Board of Trade report from October 1964 also noted that 'the units are too small to possess the capital needed to re-equip themselves with expensive new machinery,' adding that it was for this reason that British wool exports were losing out to those of Japan.<sup>19</sup>

Table 4: Wool Textile Firms by Number of Employees in England

Year	Up to 49	50-99	100-199	200-299	300-399	400-499	500+	Total
1951 <sup>20</sup>	545	354	337	137	59	35	9	1476
1958 <sup>21</sup>	176	203	277	153	73	44	310	1236
1968 <sup>22</sup>	714	218	236	103	53	25	27	1376
1977 <sup>23</sup>	627	102	112	48	18	8	34	949
1988 <sup>24</sup>	539	67	43	23	12	5	16	705

<sup>16</sup> B. G. Cohen and P. J. Jenner, 'The Employment of Immigrants: a Case Study within the Wool Industry,' *Race* 10 (1) (1968), p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> Moor and Waddington, *From Rags to Ruins*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> The National Archives (TNA), BT 258/1718, Board of Trade Future of the Wool Textile Industry records, 'W-t capital structure "not very healthy" – Sir Frank Kearton,' *Wool Record*, 24 February 1966.

<sup>19</sup> The National Archives (TNA), BT 258/1718, Board of Trade Future of the Wool Textile Industry records, Reported headed 'The Wool Industry,' 16 October 1964.

<sup>20</sup> Table 4, *The Report on the Census of Production for 1951: Woollen and Worsted Industry*, no page numbers.

<sup>21</sup> Table 3, *The Report on the Census of Production for 1958: Woollen and Worsted Industry* (London, 1960), no page numbers.

<sup>22</sup> Table 2, *The Report on the Census of Production for 1968: Woollen and Worsted Industry* (London, 1971), no page numbers.

<sup>23</sup> Table 4, *Business Monitor: Report on the Census of Production, 1977: Woollen and Worsted Industry* (London, 1977), no page numbers.

Furthermore, the mill itself was divided into areas that carried out different wool processes. The sections of a mill also tended to be small, as demonstrated in the records of the spinning section at John Lockwood's in Milnsbridge. In 1962, there were only fourteen names in Lockwood's spinners' time book.<sup>25</sup> Sectional differences were not confined to the woollen industry – indeed, there were various branches of the cotton industry; Joseph L. White contended that 'differences among workers – even those in the same industry – can be deeply rooted in the workers' own experiences and lives.'<sup>26</sup> Although the cotton industry had some striking differences to the woollen industry, not least the greater collective organisation of its workers, White's research indicated the importance that sectional differences played in certain industries. Although a few wool workers in a particular section may have formed strong bonds, the segregation of the workforce into small groups prevented workers from forming common identities with colleagues outside of their section. The recruitment booklet produced by the Ministry of Labour cited above counted thirty-one different jobs available in the wool and worsted industries, and this may not have been an exhaustive list.<sup>27</sup> Although the figures from Lockwood's mill cannot be directly transposed onto the rest of the industry, they indicate that there were few bonds on which to base potential collective action within a mill or across the industry as a whole because of the large range of jobs available within one mill.

The segregation of the workplace by ethnicity and gender was another factor that contributed to the low level of collective action. Night shifts were usually staffed by male Asian workers, partly because women could not legally be employed during the night and some workers were required to operate machinery that was traditionally viewed as 'women's work.'<sup>28</sup> Contemporary newspaper reports indicate both the importance of foreign labour for the woollen industry's operation and the night shift in particular: a report in *The Guardian* from 1968, describing how vital immigrants were to industry, stated that over a third of all immigrants in West Yorkshire were employed in the wool textile industry, where they could comprise ninety per cent of the night shift.<sup>29</sup> In *The Observer*, two mill managers said in 1969 that their workforce was now one-third Pakistani and that these workers were vital to

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<sup>24</sup> Table 4, *Business Monitor: Report on the Census of Production, 1988: Woollen and Worsted Industry*, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Huddersfield), B/JL/35a, John Lockwood's records, Spinners' Time Book 1962-1970.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph L. White, *The Limits of Trade Union Militancy: the Lancashire Textile Workers, 1910-1914* (London, 1978), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 44/341, Ministry of Labour Information Services records, 'Industrial Information Series Number 9: Wool Textile Industry,' Ministry of Labour pamphlet, undated.

<sup>28</sup> Cohen and Jenner, 'The Employment of Immigrants,' p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> *The Guardian*, 25 April 1968.

the operation of their mills.<sup>30</sup> These new workers were seen as important by many industry leaders but their segregated employment was a hindrance to the development of trade unionism. The ethnic segregation of the woollen workforce prevented workers who would rarely mix socially from working together and forming bonds and shared identities that could have provided a basis for trade union growth.<sup>31</sup>

Gender segregation was also commonplace. The Ministry of Labour recruitment booklet noted that ‘The industry is particularly dependent on female labour.’<sup>32</sup> The proportion of men and women employed fluctuated regularly, but generally remained around fifty per cent: for example, the 1963 Census of Production found that forty-seven per cent of wool employees were male and fifty-three per cent female, whereas the 1968 Census of Production found that there were slightly more men than women employed, with male employees at fifty-two per cent and female at forty-eight.<sup>33</sup> In an oral history interview, a woman who had worked in the wool industry from the late 1980s to the early 2000s described the gendered division of labour, stating that ‘only women’ worked in the winding section of the mill, except for an older male overlooker and a younger man who did general labouring.<sup>34</sup> She also described how the carding and spinning sections of the mill were staffed exclusively by men.<sup>35</sup> Sexual divisions of labour in manufacturing industries were common, such as the metalworking industry as described by Laura Lee Downs.<sup>36</sup> A sexual division of labour did not always equal low trade union activity but certainly contributed to weak organisation in the woollen industry by preventing women and men from mixing at work, forming bonds and adopting a common identity based on work.

Wages were generally low in the wool industry which contributed to divisions in the workforce. A report commissioned by Kirklees Metropolitan Council in 1971 stated that wool workers earned around £3 less per week than other manual workers.<sup>37</sup> In 1973, the national average weekly wage for a male textile worker was £33.70, compared to an all-industry average wage of £41.90.<sup>38</sup> The pay gap between wool and other types of work was significant. Oral histories support this. A male narrator born in 1920 stated, ‘The working environments didn’t seem to be all that good... [it was] a scale of wages that really is not

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<sup>30</sup> *The Observer*, 16 March 1969.

<sup>31</sup> Chapter six explores this further in a discussion of the social lives of wool textile workers.

<sup>32</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 44/341, Ministry of Labour Information Services records, ‘Industrial Information Series Number 9: Wool Textile Industry,’ Ministry of Labour pamphlet, undated.

<sup>33</sup> Table 4, *Report on the Census of Production 1963: Woollen and worsted* (London, 1963), no page numbers; Table 3, *Report on the Census of Production 1968: Woollen and Worsted* (London, 1968), no page numbers.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with C.R. on 4 January 2010 conducted by author.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939* (Ithaca, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Table 3.11, ‘Median Gross Weekly Earnings for Men 1971,’ *A Profile of Kirklees*, no page numbers.

<sup>38</sup> Moor and Waddington, *From Rags to Ruins*, p. 17.

going to be too good when you've passed the age of twenty-one.<sup>39</sup> This man was speaking about the interwar era; he moved on from textiles to engineering in 1938, partly to increase his earning power. Furthermore, women's pay was significantly lower than men's in wool textiles – up to £12 per week less than men's in 1971 – which constituted a further impediment to unity between the genders in the mill.<sup>40</sup> Low pay is perhaps a key distinction between the wool and cotton industries, which experienced differences in levels of collective action: wages were poor for all in the wool industry, with a substantial gap between men and women's pay, whereas cotton weavers received pay that was generally comparable regardless of gender.<sup>41</sup> The large difference in pay between men and women wool operatives contributed to the segregation of men and women at work because it resulted in them having different interests and problems; this, in turn, meant that there was little common identification between male and female wool textile workers.

The physical environment of the wool mill was an added constraint to potential collective action. Brian Jackson's research on the industry cited noise as a barrier to conversation in the mill.<sup>42</sup> This meant that discussion was impossible to conduct outside of short meal breaks which created a further obstacle to trade union organisation. Indeed, when asked about aspects of the job that she disliked, a female woollen worker said that there was 'A lot of noise.'<sup>43</sup> Ralph Fevre noted the isolation of individual workers that resulted from the problem of noise, commenting that in quieter sections, such as the burling and mending departments, overlookers ensured that conversation was as limited as possible.<sup>44</sup> Lukes's theory of the third face of power can be applied to this situation: in stopping workers from having conversations which could have been about work and common problems, overlookers prevented grievances from arising.<sup>45</sup> Opportunities to discuss their concerns more freely – about management, pay, the labour process or other issues affecting their working lives – might have given wool workers an opportunity or the motivation to organise.

So far, we have seen that the structure of the wool textile industry into small units of production was a hindrance to the greater collective organisation of its workers. Organising meetings that workers from various firms could attend was likely to have been logistically

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<sup>39</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 187, recorded 16 July 1986.

<sup>40</sup> Table 3.12, 'Median Gross Weekly Earnings for Women in 1971,' *A Profile of Kirklees*, no page numbers.

<sup>41</sup> White, *The Limits of Trade Union Militancy*, p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community: Some General Notions Raised by a Series of Studies in Northern England*, (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with C.R. on 9 May 2008 conducted by author.

<sup>44</sup> Ralph Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* (Aldershot, 1984), p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> This could also be a facet of the second face of power, as discussed in the thesis introduction, which exemplifies the methodological difficulty in applying Lukes's theory and in distinguishing between observable conflict – in this case, overlookers enforcing rules about talking – and non-observable conflict – in this case, the culture of the mill and the power of the overlooker preventing discussions from taking place.



difficult (NUDBTW branches were organised geographically rather than by workplace, due to the very small number of employees at some firms). This was especially the case because of the importance of shift work, which meant some workers would not be able to attend early-evening meetings. Furthermore, workers were subdivided into different sections, partly based on gender and ethnicity, which rarely came into contact with one another at work. This meant that not only was there little opportunity to discuss work-based problems, but also that there was weak common identification between wool workers of different ethnicities and genders. This was particularly reinforced by the lower pay women received in comparison to men. Additionally, the environment of the mill was not conducive to discussion due to noise and the efforts of managers to prevent conversation from taking place. The next section of the chapter will examine how managers and owners exercised power at work and how far this had an impact on trade union organisation.

### Power and Management

The wool industry's organisation had a considerable effect on the operation of power within the mill; furthermore, power relations created a workplace culture which restricted the possibility of trade union organisation. Keith Laybourn asserted that the wool workforce around the turn of the twentieth century had little power or control over the labour process.<sup>46</sup> This appears to have continued throughout the century, with workers' agency severely limited by power structures which favoured face-to-face relations with the employer. Without representation by trade unions, workers had to negotiate with management themselves, which in turn increased the deferential bonds that workers felt towards their employers.<sup>47</sup> This further prevented the likelihood of collective organisation arising. The relationship between management and workers, the dimensions of power between workers of different ethnicities and the reach of paternalism into the twentieth century will now be examined to illustrate how the organisation of the industry, and the operation of power within it, restricted trade union growth.

Scholars of the wool textile industry and of factory work more generally have noted that the industry's organisation influenced the structures of power within. David Clark's observation that the majority of woollen mills around the turn of the twentieth century were small family businesses, and that management-employee relations were largely face-to-face, bears much resemblance to the situation of the post-war woollen industry – indeed, in Batley eighty-five per cent of mills at the end of the 1960s were small and privately owned.<sup>48</sup> Clark commented that this probably increased the difficulty of fostering greater trade union organisation; the evidence suggests that not only was this practice a problem in the late nineteenth century but

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<sup>46</sup> Laybourn, "One of the Little Breezes Blowing Across Bradford," p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> David Clark, *Colne Valley: Radicalism to Socialism* (London, 1981), p. 11.

also hindered collective action after 1945.<sup>49</sup> Patrick Joyce's research on the culture of the nineteenth-century factory found that some mill owners allowed their workers to bypass the normal system of making complaints to the overlooker to go directly to him to discuss problems.<sup>50</sup> Brian Jackson's research suggested that wool workers felt under surveillance by management and that the only area of the mill where they were able to relax their guard was in the toilets – and presumably, spending too much time in the toilets would cause problems for any worker as they could lose pay if working on piece rates or, at the very least, face accusations of not working hard enough.<sup>51</sup> The watchful eye of the overlooker compounded workers' relative powerlessness by inhibiting the possibility of grievances being expressed in the mill. It is possible that Lukes's third face of power came into play here, and that grievances were not felt by workers because the culture of surveillance and deference at work prevented them from arising.

Related to this was the personal loyalty that many woollen workers felt towards their employer, given that their employment was dependent upon the mill owner himself. A female wool worker born in 1962, whose father was the owner of the mill she worked in, described how her father and brother were the only people responsible for hiring new workers, despite employing a small number of overlookers.<sup>52</sup> Mill owners hiring workers personally fostered a bond that employees may have been reluctant to break and may have encouraged greater deference. It is likely that this personal bond also went some way to prevent grievances from arising at work in line with Lukes' third face of power. The treatment of different groups within the wool workforce also led to difficulties in creating a more successful collective movement.

### *Immigrants and Power Relations in the Mill*

The power relationship between mill managers and immigrant workers sometimes resembled colonial power relationships. Fevre commented on this, arguing that employers styled themselves as Asian workers' protectors, at the same time as describing them as 'docile,' 'servile,' 'like children' and 'unintelligent.'<sup>53</sup> This is resonant of Patrick Joyce's assertion that the employer in the nineteenth century factory was understood as the 'provider of all;' furthermore, he argued that deference was able to develop due to workers' dependence.<sup>54</sup> Mrinalini Sinha's research on gendered racial stereotypes in the Raj demonstrated how Bengali men were characterised as effeminate by colonial administrators

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: the Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980), p. 100.

<sup>51</sup> Jackson, *Working Class Community*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with C.R. on 4 January 2010 conducted by author; interview with B.W. on 11 May 2008 conducted by author; interview with C.R. on 9 May 2008 conducted by author.

<sup>53</sup> Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination*, p. 110.

<sup>54</sup> Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, p. 98.

in order to assert control over a potentially problematic group.<sup>55</sup> Whether or not Asian immigrants were likely to be problematic, Fevre's research highlighted that some mill managers felt that Asian workers could not cope in the mill without their guiding hand.<sup>56</sup>

Immigrants experienced a different power dynamic not only within the mill but also in the labour market more generally. Eastern and Central European immigrants who arrived in Britain at the end of the Second World War faced restrictions on their employment. A male Polish worker who came to Britain in 1946 said that he had 'no choice at all' about where to live or which jobs to take, and added, 'we had very little choice, we could go to textiles, fishery, mining and that's all.'<sup>57</sup> Other European migrants had similar experiences. An Austrian woman who arrived in Britain in 1950 described how she had arrived in the woollen district due to a government scheme:

There were a thing going, if you go, if you stop for two years, you got your free train fare and everything, so I came, and I finished up in Elland. We worked in a woollen mill in Elland... They put us all up, it were like a camp... We stopped there then you choose, they said five go there, five go somewhere else.<sup>58</sup>

This demonstrates a key difference between Eastern European workers and other immigrants: the restriction placed on their work prospects because they were not Commonwealth citizens. Although migrants from South Asia and the Caribbean faced prejudice based on their colour which barred them from many jobs, they faced no government restrictions on their employment.

The opportunities available to all immigrants tended to be in low-wage industries but Eastern Europeans lacked even the illusion of agency when it came to finding work.<sup>59</sup> Virinder S. Kalra argued that the approach of some Marxist historians and sociologists denied immigrants any agency at all.<sup>60</sup> At work in the wool industry, immigrants had severely limited agency but had a greater degree of agency when it came to their personal lives, with some founding formidable collective organisations.<sup>61</sup> However, there is no doubt that in the mills, immigrant workers had differing degrees of agency based on their nationality. In general, immigrants working in mills had very little power with which to bargain or to change their circumstances. Furthermore, the different routes into textile

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<sup>55</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 2-4.

<sup>56</sup> Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination*, p. 110.

<sup>57</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 031, recorded 5 February 1986.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with E.O. on 23 August 2010 conducted by author.

<sup>59</sup> Cohen and Jenner, 'The Employment of Immigrants,' p. 54.

<sup>60</sup> Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks*, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Chapter six and chapter eight discuss immigrants' social lives and the organisations they formed in the woollen district outside of work.

employment experienced by immigrants of differing nationalities may have created a barrier to common identification between them.

### *Residues of Paternalism*

Another aspect of the power relations within the wool textile industry was the paternalistic overtures of mill owners. The reach of paternalism in the post-war era was much diminished in comparison to the nineteenth century but there is evidence that some firms continued to deploy such strategies. Joyce argued that the personal relationship between employers and their workers was the key to paternalism in the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> Cyril Pearce asserted that the persistence of the family firm in woollen manufacture into the twentieth century meant that paternalistic aspects of management dominated employer-employee relations.<sup>63</sup> As we have seen, mill owners in the twentieth century cultivated a personal connection with their employees, for example by taking responsibility for their hiring. An undated Salt's of Saltaire employee handbook which probably dates from the post-war period described the 'spirit of loyal co-operation and mutual confidence between management and employees' that the firm had fostered since its foundation in 1853.<sup>64</sup> An undated pamphlet on the history of Saltaire produced by the firm sometime in the 1970s details the renowned paternalism of Titus Salt, describing how he built more than eight hundred houses and shops, forty-five almshouses, baths and washhouses, a school, a hospital, a temperance club and Methodist and Congregationalist chapels for the original village.<sup>65</sup> Although Salt's paternalism did not persist into the post-war period, the firm continued to use the language of paternalism. This suggests that even if the workers themselves were not deferential to their employers, the managing directors endeavoured to maintain a scaled-down version of such a relationship in order to assert their dominance.

William Denby & Sons of Baildon is another example of a firm that continued to use paternalistic language in its internal communications.<sup>66</sup> Traces of its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century paternalism survived into the 1960s, which was particularly apparent during the 1963-65 strike at the firm. The managing directors sent out a circular letter dismissing all the strikers in October 1963, in which they said they were 'greatly distressed' that their workers were 'no longer satisfied.' 'All we desire is peace, goodwill and happiness amongst our staff and workpeople alike,' they stressed.<sup>67</sup> In expressing an emotional

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<sup>62</sup> Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, p. 135.

<sup>63</sup> Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: the Story of an English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London, 2001), p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 9D94/1/4/17, Salt's Mill records, Salt's (Saltaire) Limited: Employee Handbook for Saltaire Mills.

<sup>65</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 9D94/1/11/56, Salt's Mill records, 'History of Saltaire.'

<sup>66</sup> Chapter seven is a case study of a strike that occurred at William Denby & Sons between 1963 and 1965. The chapter contains detailed information about the firm.

<sup>67</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers records, Circular Letter from William Denby & Sons, 30 October 1963.

response to the strike, the managing directors symbolised the importance of paternalism. An oral history narrator who had worked at the firm recalled how the Denby family had permeated local life in Baildon in the early twentieth century: ‘Miss Alice Denby took a big interest in the chapel... she took a big interest in local life... she arranged concerts and one thing and another, and if you were anything to do with the concern you were invited up at some future date to a bit of supper.’<sup>68</sup> It is clear that the memory of paternalism persisted in Baildon; for the strikers of the 1960s that we will encounter in chapter seven, the paternalistic bond was weak enough to be broken by industrial action, but the firm’s managers continued to speak to their workers in the language of paternalism.

Paternalism eroded the opportunity for the large-scale collective organisation of wool textile workers in the nineteenth century by developing deferential bonds between owners and employees. By the twentieth century, although paternalism had largely disappeared from the factory floor, there was no viable labour movement amongst wool workers in part because there was no historical precedent for action or compelling collective memory of organisation. Although an extensive examination of nineteenth-century wool textile workers would be needed in order to reach firm conclusions about the reasons why no large trade union movement developed then, paternalism probably played some role in limiting the spread of trade union membership. The remainder of the chapter will discuss the work-based identities of post-war wool textile workers to ascertain how far a ‘woollen worker’ identity existed and what role this played in workers’ relationships to trade unionism.

### Workplace Identities and Skill

In addition to structural constraints to collective action, the lack of a cohesive industry-wide identity which resulted from the atomised organisation of the industry meant that woollen workers lacked the bonds required to form successful groups based on occupation. The remainder of the chapter will examine the skill composition of the woollen workforce, how skill was constructed in the industry and the work-based identities of mill operatives to demonstrate the extent to which the lack of a common woollen industry identity further inhibited the spread of collective organisation. E.P. Thompson remarked in ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’ that during the late nineteenth century, a ‘gulf’ opened between skilled and unskilled workers.<sup>69</sup> This gulf continued to exist between men and women, and natives and immigrants, into the late twentieth century in wool textiles.

Wool workers’ skill levels varied according to gender, ethnicity and position in the mill. The relationship between skill and trade unionism has been much discussed by historians of labour, with debates beginning in the 1950s and continuing throughout the twentieth

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<sup>68</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0162, recorded 23 August 1985.

<sup>69</sup> E. P. Thompson, ‘Homage to Tom Maguire,’ in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History: in Memory of G. D. H. Cole* (London, 1967), pp. 284-285.

century.<sup>70</sup> Skill was perceived by Eric Hobsbawm to be central to nineteenth century workers' attitudes to politics and trade unionism. Skill is a useful factor to consider in this research. Skill divided the workforce along the lines of gender, age and ethnicity, contributing to a segregated culture in the workplace.<sup>71</sup>

Hobsbawm's research on the relatively non-revolutionary nature of the British working classes led to his theory of the mid-nineteenth century aristocracy of labour. This group of workers was identified by its level and regularity of pay – a criterion largely associated with skill level – along with its relations with strata above and below, its relationships at work and its living conditions.<sup>72</sup> Hobsbawm's writings on an elevated working-class stratum sparked debate. Critics included H. F. Moorhouse, who argued that the concept of a labour aristocracy has been used so broadly by historians that it has lost meaning.<sup>73</sup> John Foster asserted that one of the key controversies surrounding Hobsbawm's thesis was his use of pay differentials to establish the likely members of a labour aristocracy.<sup>74</sup> With this in mind, Robert Gray argued that labour aristocrats were also 'cultured' and possessed knowledge of social and political history. He further argued that the phrase 'labour aristocracy' was common in the mid-nineteenth century and that the literature of the period contained references to labour aristocrats being educated in the area of history and politics.<sup>75</sup>

The nature of Hobsbawm's research was different to the topic investigated in this thesis, but his highlighting of skill as a significant factor in exploring workers' approaches to organisation and action was useful to this research. Skill was important for woollen workers' low level of union membership because it contributed to a diverse range of identities that existed among the workforce in the post-war period, although there is no evidence that there was an aristocracy of labour of the type Hobsbawm described in wool textiles.

Examining the skill levels of wool workers – and how this may have contributed to their identities – is important. The census for 1961 contains some information on the skill levels of workers in the West Riding, but this is not listed by occupation or industry. Later works commissioned by Kirklees Council from the 1970s and 1980s also offer some insight into

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<sup>70</sup> For example, E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain,' in John Saville (ed.) *Democracy and the Labour Movement: essays in honour of Dona Torr* (London, 1954), pp. 201-239; H. F. Moorhouse, 'The Significance of the Labour Aristocracy,' *Social History*, vol. 6, no. 2, May 1981, pp. 229-233; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1984); Roger Penn, *Class, Power and Technology: Skilled Workers in Britain and America* (Cambridge, 1990); Mike Savage, 'Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study,' *Sociology*, 39 (5), 2005, pp. 929-946; John Foster, 'The Aristocracy of Labour and Working-Class Consciousness Revisited,' *Labour History Review*, vol. 75, no. 3, December 2010, pp. 245-62.

<sup>71</sup> Hobsbawm, 'The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain,' pp. 201-204.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202

<sup>73</sup> Moorhouse, 'The Significance of the Labour Aristocracy,' p.230

<sup>74</sup> Foster, 'The Aristocracy of Labour and Working-Class Consciousness Revisited,' p. 246

<sup>75</sup> Robert Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain, c.1850-1914* (London, 1981), p. 8

the skill levels of the population as a whole. It is possible to use this information to infer the probable occupational structure of the wool workforce given that the industry was the biggest employer in the region.

The 1961 census indicated that in the West Riding there were more skilled manual workers than semi-skilled and unskilled, but also that there was a mix of skill levels amongst the population as a whole.<sup>76</sup> The statistics on skill are part of a ten per cent sample in which the figures are listed as proportions per 1000. For the West Riding as a whole, 370 per 1000 were manual skilled workers, 176 were manual semi-skilled workers and 82 were unskilled workers.<sup>77</sup> This pattern was repeated across the smaller localities listed: for example, in Bradford 308 per 1000 were skilled, 230 semi-skilled and 81 unskilled. In Dewsbury, 347 per 1000 were skilled, 217 semi-skilled and 89 unskilled.<sup>78</sup> In all of the West Riding, there were more skilled manual workers than any other kind, but skilled workers did not outnumber semi-skilled and unskilled workers by huge margins. According to the same census, 13,280 people in a ten per cent sample were employed in the wool industry.<sup>79</sup> The Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics gave a figure of 147,538 employed in the woollen industry in 1961. Although this figure is for the whole of Britain rather than the West Riding, the numbers of woollen workers outside Yorkshire was small.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, research undertaken by Ron Barrowclough suggested that skilled workers in Kirklees, the area comprising Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Batley and the rural surrounding areas, were more numerous than unskilled or semi-skilled workers, but not significantly so.<sup>81</sup>

The census does not account for the gender of skilled workers. Research by Laura Price argued that, whilst men could occupy a range of skilled or unskilled positions in the wool textile industry, women were limited to unskilled work.<sup>82</sup> According to the records Riverside Spinning Company in Slaithwaite, near Huddersfield, women were paid on average a significantly lower wage than men.<sup>83</sup> A female worker at that mill, upon being shown the papers, commented that you could easily discern a woman in the records 'because they're paid less.'<sup>84</sup> This appeared to be a general feature of manual work in the post-war era: a report on Kirklees stated that in 1971 female manual workers earned on average £12 a week

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<sup>76</sup> Table 5, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report* (London, 1963), pp. 40-47

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-47

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-47

<sup>79</sup> Table 3, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report* (London, 1963), pp. 25-32

<sup>80</sup> Table 1, *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics: Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics – the Wool Textile Delegation*, 21 January 1970, no. 241 (relating to the month of November 1969), p. 7

<sup>81</sup> Ron Barrowclough, *A Social Atlas of Kirklees. Patterns of social Differentiation in a New Metropolitan District based on Evidence from the 1971 Census* (Huddersfield, 1975), p. 20

<sup>82</sup> Laura Price, 'Immigrants and Apprentices: Solutions to the Post-War Labour Shortage in the West Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry, 1945-1980,' *Textile History*, 45 (1), May 2014, p. 41.

<sup>83</sup> Riverside Spinning Company records (in author's possession), Wage Records for 1993.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 11 July 2008

less than men.<sup>85</sup> Laura Lee Downs asserted that women in manufacturing were victims of a ‘structure of inequality’ as a result of their low-skilled status.<sup>86</sup> Katrina Honeyman argued that a ‘clearly-structured hierarchy of work’ developed in the mid-nineteenth century which was still in evidence in the early twentieth century.<sup>87</sup> This certainly appears to have been true of women in wool textiles. Indeed, Steve Winyard argued that ‘women were almost completely excluded from the better-paying occupations in the [wool textile] industry’ in a report on low pay in wool textiles from the 1980s.<sup>88</sup> They were also largely excluded from apprenticeships according to the Ministry of Labour recruitment booklet, which noted that ‘Apprenticeship arrangements normally apply only to boys, but exceptionally girls may be accepted for apprenticeships in designing.’<sup>89</sup> Apprenticeship was a route to skilled work that, in wool textiles, was denied to most girls. This is an example of the third face of power at work: women appeared not to have challenged the status quo in wool because of a culture of acceptance of gender inequality that was the unintended result of the structuring of work.

Work in the woollen industry was heavily divided by gender with women employed only in certain sections and men only employed in others (although men were also employed in supervisory positions within the ‘women’s’ areas of a mill).<sup>90</sup> The fact that women were paid less than men, in particular after the Equal Pay Act of 1970, suggests that women’s work was not considered to be skilled. As Sheila Rowbotham noted, the Equal Pay Act only worked ‘where no material difference existed’ between men and women.<sup>91</sup> The gendering of work meant that the rigid inequalities between men and women’s pay could be maintained. Women’s work identities, therefore, are likely to have been unskilled, while men’s may have been either skilled or unskilled. The gendering of skill and labour in wool textiles is likely to have played a role in maintaining divisions between men and women workers by acting as a barrier to unity. This is likely to have contributed to the weakness of common identification between the genders in the workplace, which led to low levels of collective organisation.

The division of skill along ethnic lines is more difficult to discern in statistics and definitive conclusions cannot be drawn. However, given that we know that Asian men, for example, were often engaged in what was traditionally considered to be ‘women’s work’ on the night shift, we can assume that many Asian workers were unskilled. The position of Eastern

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<sup>85</sup> Table 3.11, Table 3.12, Kirklees Metropolitan Council, *A Profile of Kirklees* (undated, no page numbers)

<sup>86</sup> Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality*, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Katrina Honeyman, *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England, 1700-1870* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 52.

<sup>88</sup> Steve Winyard, *Trouble Looming: Low Pay in the Wool Textile Industry* (London, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 44/341, Ministry of Labour Information Services records, ‘Industrial Information Series Number 9: Wool Textile Industry,’ Ministry of Labour pamphlet, undated.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 04 January 2010

<sup>91</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: the History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London, 1997), p. 405.



European men is less clear and it is possible that they took up both skilled and unskilled roles across the industry, but there is little evidence to confirm this, especially as in oral histories most workers did not speak at length about their pay or skill level. Furthermore, as we have seen above, immigrant workers tended not to be employed in supervisory positions, suggesting that many did not achieve the high status associated with skilled work which may have led to promotion.

Immigrants suffered from the traditional patterns of promotion that reserved the best jobs for young male relatives of overlookers, managers and owners.<sup>92</sup> An oral history participant commented on this, saying that ‘textiles was... a family business. So really, to get anything, it was virtually impossible, because it was passed on from father to son and jobs were like that.’<sup>93</sup> Migrant workers’ agency was further eroded by this practice. Indeed, in his 1987 research on the position of black workers in the British working class, Ron Ramdin argued that black and Asian workers faced significant disadvantage in employment in general in this period.<sup>94</sup> The best that most outsiders in the wool textile industry – both immigrants and local whites – could hope for was an overlooker position, but this too was partly dependent on one’s relationship to management. Both oral histories and other research on the woollen industry have not revealed many instances of immigrants (white, black or Asian) gaining such status; as we saw above, when they did, it tended to be either an unofficial supervisory status or a position of less responsibility than a white counterpart would be given. A Pakistani worker was promoted to the position of night foreman – rather than a general foreman – at his mill in Rawdon.<sup>95</sup>

This was a national problem in the 1960s. In August 1966, Alice Bacon MP, herself from the West Riding, a Leeds MP and Home Office minister, wrote to Ray Gunter MP, the Minister of Labour and a recent president of his union, the Transport and Salaried Staffs’ Association. In the letter, Bacon urged Gunter that,

unless we can ensure that coloured people, especially those born and educated here, are able to get the work and the promotion to supervisory positions to which their qualifications entitle them, we may well find ourselves facing all the implications of an American-type situation in which an indigenous minority group is discriminated against solely on grounds of colour.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with D.R. conducted by author on 18 December 2010 discusses how the ‘best’ jobs in the mill were often taken by male relatives of those in positions of power.

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Noon, ‘A Reluctant Welcome? Poles in Britain in the 1940s,’ *Oral History* 24 (1) (1996), p. 83.

<sup>94</sup> Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987), p. 260.

<sup>95</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0123, recorded 8 September 1987.

<sup>96</sup> The National Archives (TNA), HO 376/106, Home Office Racial Disadvantage records, Letter from Alice Bacon MP to Ray Gunter MP, 19 August 1966.

This was exactly the situation many immigrants in wool textiles faced. Gunter's response, however, was far from enthusiastic. Whilst he noted that there were 'dangers of allowing frustration to develop,' he also wrote that there was 'a lack of concrete evidence of undesirable practices.'<sup>97</sup> Divisions between white, Asian and black workers were able to develop in wool because little action was taken to actively promote black and Asian workers into supervisory or skilled positions. This kept a distinction between white workers and others in the mills that prevented their common identification.

Occupational structures and pay differentials did not create the conditions for a work-based identity. Added to this, there was a large variety of jobs available in wool textiles as cited above which meant that there was no common task that wool workers were engaged on.<sup>98</sup> Whilst skill differentials and a variety of occupations were not exclusive to the wool textile industry, they compounded the problems of organisation inherent in the large number of small units that comprised the wool workforce by adding another layer of division and difference. As we shall see in the next chapter, the variety of other identities possessed by wool workers beyond the factory gates was also important in maintaining difference and contributed to the difficulties of collective organisation.

### Conclusion

The structure and organisation of mills is the one constant and consistent feature in the industry's history that contributed to the low level of trade union membership among the workforce. In establishing an industry that employed people in a large number of small units, the first mill owners inadvertently created an environment that was structured in a way that prevented the workforce from bonding as a large group. Organising such a workforce was problematic logistically: getting members or potential members to meetings that suited everyone was bound to be difficult when they not only worked different shifts but likely had different finishing times. Furthermore, individual mills were segregated, primarily by gender but to a certain extent by ethnicity and nationality. This added another dimension of division: operatives of different ethnicities were unlikely to meet and bond both at work and in social life, as we will see in chapter six. The segregation of work by gender and the disparity of skill and pay between men and women combined to prevent unity between the sexes on issues that affected all workers.

The balance of power within the mill also contributed to divisions within the workforce. The tendency in the industry for face-to-face managerial relations, rather than through the intermediary of a trade union or works representative, reinforced the bonds between mill owner and employee to the extent that there was apparently little need for a trade union.

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<sup>97</sup> The National Archives (TNA), HO 376/106, Home Office Racial Disadvantage records, Letter from Ray Gunter MP to Alice Bacon MP, 8 September 1966.

<sup>98</sup> Chapter one gives details of some of the many jobs available in wool textiles.

Lukes may have argued that this was the third face of power in operation: there was no large-scale observable conflict in most mills between owners and employees, and oral histories did not record a large number of grievances about work, suggesting that some wool textile workers may not have felt them. This was not the only way that power worked to limit potential trade union activism: the rigid inequalities that women and ethnic minorities experienced in society were replicated in the workplace, with little chance of promotion for anyone who was not a skilled white male and low pay for women in particular (which limited the amount they had to spend on non-essential items such as trade union subscription fees, as discussed in the previous chapter).

Finally, there is little evidence that there was a common 'woollen worker' identity that could have provided the bonds on which organisation could be based. This is unsurprising given the lack of cohesion in the workplace. Indeed, identities only served to perpetuate the divisions within the workforce. The next chapter will provide a fuller exploration of identities beyond the workplace in order to demonstrate that while some woollen workers prioritised certain identities above others, there was little commonality among them. In certain situations and at certain times, diverse groups of people are able to come together in order to work towards a desired aim. Woollen workers in the post-war era were not such a group; the organisation and structure of the woollen industry was a key contributor to continued segregation and diversity in its workforce.

## Chapter Five: Identities Beyond the Workplace

### Introduction

As we have seen in the previous chapter, wool textile workers did not have a distinctive work-based identity in the post-war period: this probably contributed to the low level of trade union membership as wool workers lacked the collective identity that could have provided a basis for organisation. This chapter will examine identities beyond the workplace to assess whether post-war wool textile workers' identities cohered, and whether a 'wool worker' identity existed outside of mills. The importance of identities related to class, gender, ethnicity, religion, respectability, and politics will be discussed in the chapter. Although this is not an exhaustive list of identities that wool textile workers were likely to lay claim to, it covers sufficient variety to establish whether or not there was a sense of common identification between workers in wool textiles after the Second World War.

Identity has been selected as an area of research for this thesis because of its potential importance in determining how woollen workers conceptualised their involvement or lack of involvement in trade union organisation. Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern highlighted the importance of common identification in building strong trade union organisation in their research on European immigrant workers in post-war cotton textiles, arguing that in the cotton industry there was 'a barrier to the creation of a common set of class interests between "native" and immigrant workers' due to the perpetuation of ideas about ethnic and national identities.<sup>1</sup> This is strongly suggestive that workers' self-identification was important in maintaining divisions within the workforce. Furthermore, David Gilbert argued that a strong sense of collective identity was an important basis for action on collective interests.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will examine how far this was the case in wool textiles, and will find that the variety of different identities held by wool workers was significant in creating a barrier to greater collective organisation.

This chapter will examine the various identities that wool textile workers held and how far these identities affected the formation of collective organisations by examining oral histories and contemporary journal and newspaper reports. Class, gender, ethnicity, religion, respectability and political affiliations were issues that former wool textile workers raised in oral history interviews. As interviewees marked these identities out in their recollections of life at work and in the community, it is very likely that they were important to them. Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern, "If We Depart from These Conditions...": Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry, c. 1946-1952,' *Labour History Review*, 72 (2), August 2007, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford, 1992), p. 255.

Alessandro Portelli argued that the purpose of oral history was to understanding what meaning events or issues had for historical figures, and in examining the identities that narrators cited, this chapter attempts to understand what identities had meaning for wool textile workers.<sup>3</sup>

Locating sources for this chapter was no easy task: to fully appreciate the identities held by one wool textile worker would be difficult, and to do so for a whole workforce was especially hard. However, through a detailed reading of oral history sources, it was possible to come closer to understanding how wool workers thought of themselves in the post-war period. Therefore, this chapter relies heavily on oral sources at the expense of the other types of source used elsewhere in the thesis (for example, archived papers of trade unions, mills and government departments). Whilst discussions of scholarly literature will run alongside the analysis of oral sources, the oral sources themselves will take centre-stage in this chapter, given that they are the only way we can learn how wool textile workers actually thought about themselves.

The chapter uses oral history sources to help construct a broad picture of wool workers' identities in the post-war era. The introduction of this thesis contains more extensive information on the provenance of these sources and on oral history methodology and its application to this research. Whilst some interviews were conducted by the author for this thesis and the MA research that the thesis is based on, the majority of oral sources are located at Bradford Central Library and Huddersfield Library.<sup>4</sup> They were recorded as part of separate projects at each library in the 1980s that aimed to capture oral testimony about various aspects of life in West Yorkshire. Many of the interviewees were former or current wool textile workers. These interviews revealed individual attitudes, and, as discussed above, are useful for this chapter because of the way in which narrators revealed what identities were significant to them. We should remember that the interviews were carried out in the 1980s and some interviewees were talking about their lives and attitudes up to sixty years earlier; this means that there was potential for their beliefs at the time to have clouded their memories and imposed their current values onto their past selves. However, this is a problem with the use of many oral history sources, and the potential difficulties caused by this do not outweigh their value. It is difficult to externally corroborate what oral history interviewees recalled, and in the case of discussing their identities it is almost impossible. Whilst the need to verify stories told in oral histories may be important in some research projects, when examining identity it is more importance to focus on the meanings conveyed in interviews rather than precise facts.

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<sup>3</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See the thesis introduction for more on the oral history sources used.

The chapter will continue with an examination of the identities that wool textile workers themselves deemed significant. This will help to establish how far wool textile workers could be said to have a common identity beyond the workplace. We will see that identities in the woollen district were many and various, and that the lack of a common, unifying identity contributed to the low level of collective organisations based on work.

### Class

Like many other identities, understanding and expression of one's class is personal and may not accord to established definitions. This was certainly the case in oral testimonies of former wool textile workers, but an understanding of how they felt they fit into the class system is important. The woollen workers interviewed who discussed their class identities described themselves as working class. James Hinton argued that, in Mass-Observation directives on class, 'Hardly anyone proved unable to think in the language of class.'<sup>5</sup> However, what this meant for each person discussing it may not have been the same.

Class can be understood in a variety of ways: economic categories are often alluded to but this belies the experiential quality of class. Raymond Williams referred to 'social divisions' which, again, does not account fully for differences of experience.<sup>6</sup> Cultural attributes, according to Mike Savage, were the focus of new scholars researching class in the 1990s, whose interest was in aspects such as leisure and consumption more than the work- and community-based identities that earlier historians and sociologists examined.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it is most worthwhile to consider all such attributes – cultural and structural – when assessing the class identities of a particular group. Although this would be a considerable undertaking and, indeed, the subject of a great deal of further research, such an approach will be adopted for the purposes of this chapter in order to take account of the various ways in which woollen workers may have constructed their class identities.

It perhaps seems obvious that the overwhelming majority of woollen workers in the post-war period could be considered as working class but, as Mike Savage discussed in his article on John Goldthorpe's affluent worker studies of the late 1960s, there was considerable contemporary debate about the changing nature of the working class, not least its supposed embourgeoisement.<sup>8</sup> Goldthorpe's conclusions suggested that class identities in post-war

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<sup>5</sup> James Hinton, "'The 'Class' Complex": Mass-Observation and Cultural Distinction in Pre-War Britain,' *Past and Present*, no. 199, (May 2008), p. 208.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow, 1976), p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Mike Savage, 'Working Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study,' *Sociology*, 39 (5), 2005, p. 930.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 930-931.

Britain were still present despite the increased affluence of many groups; those woollen workers who did express a class identity were clear that they belonged to the working class.<sup>9</sup>

Savage argued that the nature of historical working-class consciousness is difficult to ascertain and that there has been too much inference of working-class consciousness based on records left behind by an articulate minority.<sup>10</sup> Identifying the class consciousness of wool textile workers based on a small sample of interviews is not possible, but the interviews do provide a sense of how some wool operatives conceptualised their class. They were not all the articulate minority to which Savage referred; at least one narrator told of his illiteracy.<sup>11</sup> It is unlikely that a large number of those interviewed were illiterate, but neither could they be thought of as an elite in any sense. There is no record of the methodology of selection for the archived interviews but there is also no indication that the group of workers interviewed were all skilled or well-educated; they appear to be relatively representative of the wool workforce as a whole.

Class was not discussed by all, or even a majority, of wool textile workers interviewed for the Bradford and Huddersfield oral history projects. Some were asked about their class, such as a man who responded, 'Oh yes, yes' when he was asked if he had a sense of being working class.<sup>12</sup> Another woman, seemingly unprompted, told the interviewer, 'We were working class.'<sup>13</sup> Despite these declarations, it is difficult to appreciate whether there was a sense of common class identity amongst post-war wool textile workers. There are methodological problems of ascertaining this information, based partly on the personally-defined nature of class. It is possible that the interviewees' class identity was so obvious to them that they did not feel it needed further explanation. Additionally, it is possible that, in line with Savage's findings on the Affluent Worker Studies of the 1960s, many people felt that they were 'ordinary' in their class identity and, therefore, did not need to discuss it at length unless prompted, which they appear not to have been in the archived interviews.<sup>14</sup> An alternative interpretation is that the silences on class in many oral history interviews conveys that class identities lacked meaning for many wool textile workers. Alessandro Portelli noted that silences in interviews often reveal meaning about what is important to the narrator.<sup>15</sup> It is not possible to resolve which interpretation is correct based on the relatively small sample size used for this thesis, but it is an area that merits further investigation. The only certainty is that many wool textile workers did not discuss class in great detail in their interviews.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 931

<sup>10</sup> Michael Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: the Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0024, recorded 4 January 1984.

<sup>12</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording unit, Interview A0008, undated.

<sup>13</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0005, recorded 22 November 1983.

<sup>14</sup> Savage, 'Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study,' p. 929.

<sup>15</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different,' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998), p. 69.

A close examination of oral histories has presented narrators' understandings of class identity and the extent to which it was important. Notions of social mobility, for example, were discussed by several narrators: 'I think they [narrator's parents] thought you were born into a strata and you stopped in that strata, you know.'<sup>16</sup> This suggests that some woollen workers felt their class was immovable and fixed, although, of course, it is impossible to know whether this was a widely-held belief. The fact that the narrator flagged this as her parents' belief indicates that it was not necessarily hers.

Other narrators discussed social mobility through their educational achievements, highlighting that a belief in a fixed class position was not held by all wool textile workers. A male Polish narrator spoke of his attendance at college:

I got a grant to go to Nottingham and District University College to study er dyeing and finishing textiles... I was there three years and finished that, got my diploma.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, a female Polish narrator referred to her university education before migrating to Britain:

I finished university in Poznan...I was an agricultural engineer [and] I was sent out to do all the inspections.<sup>18</sup>

Both Polish narrators worked in the woollen industry on arrival in Britain; their qualifications did not enable them to escape traditionally working-class occupations, although they may have experienced greater respect in the community as a result of their learning. There were few similar recollections in the oral testimonies of white British workers; it appears that educational social mobility was more limited for this group of wool textile workers. Whether university-educated, socially mobile or not, there is no evidence that wool textile workers associated their class identities with trade union organisation – the two subjects were not discussed alongside one another in oral histories.

Therefore, whilst it seems that wool workers would generally describe themselves as 'working class,' it is difficult to ascertain how far this led to strong common identification between them. Indeed, it is likely that the majority of workers engaged in manufacturing industries would describe themselves as 'working class' and so class identities were unlikely to be the basis of a unique common bond that wool textile workers could rally around. As we shall see as the thesis progresses, some identities – especially ethnic identities – were the basis of organisations. However, there were few identities that could truly unite wool textile workers and act as a foundation for greater trade union organisation. Since class identities

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<sup>16</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0008, undated.

<sup>17</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 031, recorded 5 February 1986.

<sup>18</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 020, recorded 15 January 1986.



were likely to be significant to many people, a common working class bond was unlikely to provide a distinctive identity that was unique to wool textile workers.

### Ethnicity

Ethnic and national groups had a greater ability to build collective groups in the post-war woollen district because of the bonds that shared identity created. It would be misleading to state that all members of ethnic groups felt a bond of unity – indeed, as Pnina Werbner argued, a myth of ethnic unity often obscured internal divisions and these should not be ignored.<sup>19</sup> Oral testimony, however, has indicated the strong ethnic and cultural unity that many woollen workers felt, most particularly immigrants and their descendents, expressed through the creation of community or political groups. Immigrant communities had common bonds based on shared identity that the woollen workforce as a whole lacked. It is possible to link the specific ethnic identities of wool textile workers with class-based identities, as the organisations immigrant workers formed (as explored more fully in chapter eight) were specifically for working-class migrants (indeed, a prominent organisation was the Indian Workers' Association). If the wool workforce had had a common identity, it is possible that the bonds that this provided could have been used to create larger collective organisations.

Many immigrant oral history narrators discussed their involvement in community groups. A first-generation Pakistani narrator described his participation in a Pakistani Community Centre, outlining the different types of support offered through this service: 'We help them [immigrants] in their applications for social security. Immigration cases we handle, we also do play schemes.'<sup>20</sup> Another Pakistani migrant told of his role in assisting his fellow countrymen on arrival in Britain. Although this was outside of an official community group, it points to the informal arrangements that were in place in some immigrant communities in the woollen district: 'I used to be called upon... translator, interpreter...'<sup>21</sup>

Such statements are reasonably common in the narratives of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, despite Werbner's argument about understanding the internal divisions within many ethnic groups, it appears that a sizeable proportion of South Asian immigrants in the woollen district were keen to unite in order to better tackle the various problems they faced. Whilst such groups may not have represented all in the community, their role in extending help to those most in need suggests that some community leaders were able to overcome divisions. It is also important to remember that common class identification may have made community groups stronger, as they were wholly focused on issues pertaining to working-class migrants. A first-generation Indian narrator living in Huddersfield

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<sup>19</sup> Pnina Werbner, 'The Fiction of Unity in Ethnic Politics: Aspects of Representation and the State among British Pakistanis,' in Pnina Werbner and Muhammad Anwar (eds.), *Black and Ethnic Leaderships in Britain: the Cultural Dimensions of Political Action* (London, 1991), p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0123, recorded on 8 September 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0104, recorded on 14 April 1987.

exemplified this in his description of involvement in establishing a local branch of the Indian Workers' Association, a group that will be discussed at greater length in chapter eight:

They [immigrant workers] wanted to talk when they came back after work, they wanted to talk to some of their friends, and the only place at that time to get together was pubs...so we set up the Indian Workers' Association to work in the interests of our people against discrimination... there were lots of people coming who couldn't speak English, and they had some problems finding jobs, they didn't know they had the right to benefits...<sup>22</sup>

Contemporary publications such as *Race Today* expressed similar sentiments about the desire of immigrants to work for self-improvement and social equity. It should be noted that only those who were most active were likely to have gained attention and that many immigrant workers – like white British workers – were largely uninvolved in community or political groups. However, oral testimonies along with articles in *Race Today* and local newspapers have indicated that there was great commitment from many working-class Asian migrants to such groups and causes. For example, the May 1969 edition of *Race Today* described a Pakistani Immigrants Association established in Bradford, an immigrant youth club catering for Asian boys in Dewsbury two nights per week, and complaints from Abdullah Patel, a local community leader, about the lack of Asian representation on Bradford Community Relations Council.<sup>23</sup>

Woollen workers often owed allegiance to identities other than those based on work: for migrant workers, it may have been an ethnic or religious identity, and indeed such collective identities were often strong and were the basis for several successful community and campaigning groups. The work identity of mill operatives was not strong enough to support the potential for collective action. The size of groups involved may have been important in the success of forming collective organisations. In Bradford in 1961, there was a total of 1512 Indian migrants and 3457 Pakistani migrants, for example.<sup>24</sup> It is possible that smaller groups were more able to exploit the common bonds that resulted from shared identity and use them for forming successful organisations. Frederik Barth argued that ethnic boundaries were significant in understanding the social lives of ethnic groups; the limits that were imposed by the boundaries of the ethnic groups could have been the explanation for the success of immigrant groups in the woollen district.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 'Facing discrimination at work and in the pubs,' Interview with Mohan Sokhal for Asian Voices project, accessed at <http://asianvoices.hud.ac.uk/audios/viewtranscript/176> on 20 March 2010.

<sup>23</sup> *Race Today*, May 1969, pp. iii-iv, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Table 8, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report* (London, 1963), p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Frederik Barth, 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,' in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity* (Oxford, 1996), p. 79.

Benedict Anderson's theory of the 'imagined community' is that 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.'<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the 'imagined community' of wool textile workers contained people too different to share identities. On the other hand, other, smaller groups within the woollen district, such as religious organisations, were successful in attracting members and maintaining collective organisations, and this may have been because of the greater common ethnic and class identification of the members of these 'imagined communities.'<sup>27</sup> However, it is possible that the smaller size of ethnic groups, and the greater potential for common bonds based on personal relationships that this brought, could have been a reason for the success of groups such as those established by immigrants.

There was clearly some success among ethnic groups in establishing collective organisations in the post-war woollen district. Additional to this, the portrayal of immigrants in the media reflected deep anxieties that further hindered the possibility of woollen workers' unity. David R. Roediger's research on the construction of white racial identities in nineteenth century America argued that blacks were often characterised by their otherness: '... embodying the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed for.'<sup>28</sup> Although Roediger referred specifically to white American anxieties about newly-freed black workers, similar fears were expressed in the press about immigrants to the woollen district. Asian migrants were more usually the targets, but white immigrants were not exempt from attack. Although *Race Today* argued that such anxieties were based on colour rather than 'foreign-ness,' the reception that Irish workers, for example, received in the woollen district prior to the post-war period is indicative of attitudes about migrants and the supposed ills they brought to their destination.<sup>29</sup> Such attitudes were counter-productive to the cause of fostering unity among woollen workers and, although Asian immigrants bore the brunt of prejudice, they were not the sole recipients of racial abuse.

Sensationalist articles such as that in the *Yorkshire Post* in January 1973 asking whether there would be a 'race war' in West Yorkshire and the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* headline that proclaimed 'Race relations at lowest ebb' in July 1976 were far from uncommon.<sup>30</sup> As woollen workers read these local newspapers, it is unsurprising that they felt little desire to join together with their new workmates to fight for better pay and job

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Without membership figures for various types of group, it is not possible to say how widespread and popular they were – however, oral testimonies suggest that membership of or involvement in ethnic community groups and churches, chapels, mosques and temples was fairly common in the post-war woollen district.

<sup>28</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Race Today*, July 1969, p. 90.

<sup>30</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 26 January 1973; *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 24 July 1976.

security: the immigrants depicted in newspaper reports were too alien for white British workers to bond with, despite sharing class identities. The informal social segregation that existed within the community, which will be discussed more fully in chapter six, in addition to separation at work due to the common practice of Asian men working the night shift, resulted in a workforce that felt it had too little in common to form a viable collective organisation.

#### Generational Differences between Immigrant Wool Textile Workers

Although there was significantly more unity between members of ethnic groups in the post-war woollen district than between wool textile workers, it would be problematic to suggest that ethnic groups were without some divisions. Divergence in generational experience among Asian woollen workers is particularly illustrative of the differing interests and identities in the woollen workforce. A first generation Pakistani migrant who arrived in England in 1961 described the stance of many other immigrants of the time:

I think we were all aware of our obligations, that's why we had to work that much harder and that much longer, in order to earn enough money to send back to Pakistan as well as for our upkeep in this country... Also you'll find that the Asian workers then never used to complain about anything... never used to once complain about the conditions or anything.<sup>31</sup>

This was a typical statement about the way first-generation migrants coped with the hostility of their new home; indeed, such sentiments were part of Muhammad Anwar's thesis of a myth of return, whereby the Pakistani workers he studied in Rochdale were willing to accept certain poor conditions because they believed their stay in Britain would be temporary.<sup>32</sup> By the time the second generation had come of age, however, attitudes had changed significantly, particularly for young Asian men who, in some cases, struggled against the injustices they faced in work and society. One older migrant observed to a younger, second generation interviewer:

Our own conception was geared to accept so much, or ignore the existence of it... I mean your generation picks on discrimination and tried to fight it out, well we never looked for it, we knew and ignored it.<sup>33</sup>

That this man claimed that people of his generation 'knew and ignored' discrimination may go some way in explaining why more immigrants did not join trade unions. As we have seen in chapter three, unions such as the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers were not proactive in recruiting immigrant members, but this testimony suggests that at least

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<sup>31</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0123, recorded 8 September 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (London, 1979), p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0104, recorded 14 April 1987.

some first-generation immigrants were not interested in trying to ‘fight it out.’ Whilst this attitude cannot be transposed onto all first-generation migrants, it is interesting that one narrator felt that the fight against discrimination was not for them. This could have meant that the fight against injustice at work was also not of particular concern to this man and to others like him.

This attitude was not held by many young Asian men in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One such was Tariq Mehmood, author of the semi-autobiographical novel *Hand on the Sun* and one of the Bradford Twelve, a group of Asian men whose creation and possession of petrol bombs in 1981 led to their arrest and ‘the trial of the decade’ according to *Race Today*.<sup>34</sup> His novel portrayed the tensions present in Bradford at the turn of the decade through the lens of Jalib, a politically radical, unemployed Muslim who felt, along with his friends, disdain for their elders’ acceptance of poor conditions and prejudice. An example from the novel came after Jalib’s house was raided by immigration officials: ‘Jalib was angry with his father for the way he had accepted the raid as the natural order of things.’<sup>35</sup>

Mehmood’s experiences of racism and opposition to the National Front were reflected in the novel and demonstrated the abilities of young Asian men – many of whom were woollen workers, both in his novel and in reality – to organise collectively. For this group, their direct experience of racism and their difficulties in gaining good employment (or any employment at all) provided a collective identity to supplement their ethnic identity. Furthermore, they defined themselves against the passivity of their parents who seemed unwilling or unable to resist the prejudice they faced. The vital factor that woollen workers collectively lacked was the strong identity that young men such as Mehmood possessed; they were able to use their identity as a basis for creating bonds and building an organisation.

### Gender

The wool textile industry employed a roughly even split of men and women throughout the post-war period; there was no one dominant gender identity amongst wool textile workers. The number of women in wool textiles might not have a deleterious effect on trade union organisation – the cotton industry in neighbouring Lancashire is proof that men and women could organise together effectively – but the stark differences between men and women within the industry and the community acted as a barrier to the formation of collective organisations, despite the broadly common class identities of wool textile workers.<sup>36</sup> This

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<sup>34</sup> *Race Today*, August/September 1982, p. 124. This is discussed in more detail in chapter eight.

<sup>35</sup> Tariq Mehmood, *Hand on the Sun* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: the Rise of the Women’s Suffrage Movement* (London, 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 1; Jill Liddington described women cotton workers’ involvement in trade union activity in Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper, 1864-1946* (London, 1984), p. 52.

was mostly based in differences at work, as discussed in chapter four, but inequalities of pay and status at work were echoed in domestic life for women. Female narrators referred to their roles as helpmeets as well as workers: 'We was all [the girls of the family] made to do, you know, part of the housework.'<sup>37</sup> The burden of domestic chores was not discussed by male oral history narrators in their testimonies, suggesting that they did not participate in housework to the same extent as their wives. Female woollen workers also discussed their role as mothers and their balancing of work and caring duties: 'I worked there for... er... eight years, and then I did go, then I left, when I had my eldest son, and then I went back later on an evening shift I did for a couple of years.'<sup>38</sup>

Other women told of their experience of returning to work part-time in the mill after having children, such as the narrator who worked as a secretary for her father's firm:

Then I had my first daughter, Laura, and I didn't go back to work full time, but I used to work for my dad, doing his typing and... then I had my second daughter, Rebecca, and I did more and more paperwork for the mill. Twelve months after that, after she were born, me first husband died. So I did a bit more paperwork but it always – so that – usually I did it from home, so that I was here for the children. Then as they got older me mum was always here if I had to go – go into work. And then I just did a bit more and a bit more and I started to learn how to use the machines.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps one reason for women's comparatively low status in the woollen workplace was their need to combine paid work with unpaid domestic chores including raising children, which necessitated part-time hours for many of the women interviewed. Part-time work resulted in a lower wage and likely restricted women from entering the more skilled roles in the industry. In any case, it is certain that men and women had unequal status within the workplace, and as a result work-based identities were gendered. Similarly, women's identities in the home were based in part on the performance of domestic tasks and childcare duties. Although the Lancashire cotton workers provide an example of how men and women united despite difference in gender identities, it appears that they were more anomalous than typical, certainly compared to West Riding wool workers. Differences in gender identity amongst wool textile workers were important in perpetuating inequalities between men and women at work and at home. The difference in experiences between men and women that we will see in the section on religious and leisure pursuits confirms that gender identities were a barrier to greater unity between wool textile workers both in and out of the workplace.

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<sup>37</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 011, recorded 5 December 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with P.L. conducted by author on 14 January 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 4 January 2010.

## Religion and Leisure Pursuits

Common identification through religion and leisure was discussed by several oral history narrators. As we will see in chapter six, there were few opportunities for wool textile workers to socialise in spaces exclusively for the use of their workmates, and this lack of physical space meant that there were few opportunities for wool workers to gather together outside of work and discuss their common problems. This meant that identities based on religious belief or leisure pursuits were generally occupationally heterogeneous in the woollen district. This was, of course, the case for many groups of workers who did not have their own exclusive social clubs. Although it was not a primary factor in preventing greater common identification between wool textile workers, it contributed to the lack of bonds between them.

Reference to attendance at church or chapel was fairly common among older narrators. Eric Hobsbawm argued that in nineteenth-century Britain, there were close links between nonconformist Protestantism and the labour movement.<sup>40</sup> Alun Howkins devoted a chapter of his monograph on rural labourers and radicalism in Norfolk to the role of nonconformist chapels in fostering political radicalism, asserting, like Hobsbawm, that radicalism and nonconformity were linked.<sup>41</sup> There is a variety of evidence from oral histories that wool textile workers attended nonconformist chapels but there is little indication that this influenced their attitudes to trade unionism. Perhaps, by the mid-twentieth century, the relationship between radicalism and nonconformity had run its course, although Callum Brown argued that religious sentiment among the populace at large was far from dead at this time.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the radicalism discussed by Hobsbawm and Howkins may have been mainly of a political variety, rather than related to radicalism in the workplace, although Howkins does discuss radicalism and strikes amongst Norfolk farm labourers.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of other scholars' framing of the relationship between radicalism and nonconformity, it is clear that in the post-war woollen district, attendance at chapel did not equate to membership of a trade union.

There were several oral history testimonies that discussed church and chapel attendance:<sup>44</sup>

I was brought up at Sunbridge Road Mission. That's where we all went, all of us... still packed today every Sunday night.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester, 1959), p. 128.

<sup>41</sup> Alun Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk, 1872-1923* (London, 1985), p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London, 2001), p. 170.

<sup>43</sup> Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0024, recorded 4 January 1984.

<sup>45</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0003, recorded 16 November 1983.

My mother and father used to read a lot of religious books. My father was the superintendent at the Sunday School... My mother used to go speaking to women's meetings and things like that... She'd go to the different churches and chapels where they had the women's meetings you see.<sup>46</sup>

Religious identities and attendance at chapel may have provided a common bond between some woollen workers. However, despite Brown's argument that religious decline did not occur as early as some have believed, there is little evidence in oral histories that younger woollen workers were in regular attendance at chapel. Furthermore, the employment of immigrants in the wool textile industry meant that religious belief was not homogeneous: among the new arrivals were Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, and Polish textile workers were more likely to be Catholic than nonconformist. Oral histories of Polish textile workers show that, in Huddersfield at least, a Polish Church catered for Poles' devotional needs.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, whilst some wool textile workers may have been religious, there is no evidence that religious identities provided a basis for a common bond between them, and even less evidence that this related to trade union organisation.

Religious spaces provided an opportunity for wool textile workers to meet and converse, as did social spaces such as pubs and working men's clubs. Oral history narrators discussed their attendance at such venues fairly frequently in interviews but, again, there is little evidence that identities based on social and leisure pursuits had a significant impact on trade union organisation. Without the workplace bonds described in chapter four to bolster wool textile workers, identities beyond the workplace were unlikely to result in greater common identification that could have led to more widespread wool trade unionism based on a feeling of shared problems and identities.

Social space in the woollen district was generally not demarcated by occupation. Brian Jackson noted that working men's clubs were popular in the woollen district in the 1960s, stating that in 1965, there were seventy clubs affiliated to the Club and Institute Union in Huddersfield alone.<sup>48</sup> The *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* ran a series throughout the 1970s which featured a different working men's club each week, suggesting that socialising in clubs remained popular into the later twentieth century. The series often reported healthy membership levels – for example, in 1972 the Polish Parish Club had 900 members and the Shipley Engineers' Social Club had 1000 members.<sup>49</sup> One of the few clubs that catered for woollen workers, the Warp Dyers' Social Club, was still popular after being initially formed

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<sup>46</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0005, recorded 22 November 1983.

<sup>47</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 020, recorded 15 January 1986.

<sup>48</sup> Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community: Some General Notions Raised by a Series of Studies in Northern England* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 8 May 1972; *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 17 January 1972.



in 1886, demonstrating continued patronage of such venues.<sup>50</sup> However, clubs like the Warp Dyers' Social Club were uncommon. Although many well-unionised workforces socialised on similar lines to wool textile workers, and in similar venues, the lack of social space that catered exclusively for woollen workers was a contributing factor to the low level of trade union organisation, as we shall see in the following chapter on communities. Social spaces were not places in which common bonds between wool textile workers could be fostered because of the range of different people who attended them.

Furthermore, working men's clubs were largely exclusive of immigrant patronage, leaving a sizeable portion of the workforce unable to mix with their white British colleagues.<sup>51</sup> When immigrants arrived in the woollen district, many of them established their own social venues. The *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* reported that new clubs were opening as late as 1979 to cater for groups such as the West Indian Community and Cultural Association's club for working-class Caribbeans.<sup>52</sup> Oral history narrators from Poland commented on the range of social organisations formed in the wake of immigration to Britain, as this male narrator recounted:

... there was a Polish White Eagle Club here and so we could meet there and then er... There was a restaurant there and a bar and we could – and a library – Polish library, so we can borrow the books, you can drink, talk, er have a meal... I've been a member of the Polish Ex-Combatants' Association from the beginning... as long as I've been here in Huddersfield.<sup>53</sup>

The range of facilities available suggests that there was sufficient demand for them and that at least some Polish residents of Huddersfield opted to spend their social time in the company of other Poles. It appears that there was strong common identification between Polish wool textile workers which resulted in the establishment of various social (and religious) amenities exclusively for them. It is likely that such services were developed as a result of the social barriers between white British and immigrant workers described in Laura Price's research on ethnic patterns of socialising in the post-war woollen district.<sup>54</sup> Illegal 'colour bars' operated in some pubs and clubs in the woollen district in the 1960s, barring immigrant patronage.<sup>55</sup> Ethnically separate socialising prevented the development of

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<sup>50</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 11 January 1972.

<sup>51</sup> Laura Price, "'Among Their Own Kind:’ Ethnicity and Community Relations in West Yorkshire's Woollen District, 1945-1985,' in Anne Baldwin, Chris Ellis, Stephen Etheridge, Keith Laybourn and Neil Pye (eds.), *Class, Culture and Community: New Perspectives in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century British Labour History* (Newcastle, 2012), p. 58. Chapter six and chapter eight also contain further information about the social spaces created by immigrant wool textile workers.

<sup>52</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 23 March 1979.

<sup>53</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 031, recorded 5 February 1986.

<sup>54</sup> Price, "'Among Their Own Kind,'" p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

common bonds and identification between woollen workers outside the factory gates. In turn, this contributed to the low level of trade union organisation in wool textiles.

Social experiences were also different for women in the woollen district throughout the post-war period. A Sikh woman discussed the social activities that she was involved in:

I go to the temple a lot because my dad likes us going, and not only that, it's because I like going and I like meeting all my friends there... The woman isn't allowed to go to pubs or discos, things like that.<sup>56</sup>

If this narrator was not allowed to go out to pubs or social discos, it is possible that she would not have been allowed to attend union meetings either: whilst union meetings were different in character to pubs and discos, social norms that forbade women from socialising in mixed company without a chaperone would likely have extended to union meetings too. Furthermore, some unions held their meetings in pubs, which would effectively exclude those who were unable to attend them due to colour bars and social rules from other cultures that forbade the drinking of alcohol or socialising with members of the opposite sex.

Another Sikh narrator told of the differences she had seen between growing up in Southall, West London and moving to Bradford as a teenager:

Southall was very, very, well, it's mainly Sikh people who live there, and there were a lot of women who used to work there... A lot of white kids in Bradford, they can go to youth clubs in the evening, and our kids, of course, can't go, especially girls, for a number of reasons... so me and a few other women decided we'd run groups that could, em, that would be held after school...it was more of an opportunity for the girls to talk about what it's like growing up...<sup>57</sup>

Asian women were not alone in the social restrictions they faced: white women too told of the social norms that dictated women should behave respectably. This was particularly related to drinking alcohol. One woman was asked about women patronising local pubs in the 1970s:

No, women didn't do that sort of thing. So she [the narrator's mother] wasn't brought up to do that, to go to the pub, not like a young woman would now. I'd say [it was] more a male thing. But it was becoming popular with the younger people. Younger women.<sup>58</sup>

Another narrator was asked whether women of a younger generation visited pubs and responded that although they did, there were restrictions placed on their social activities:

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<sup>56</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0079, recorded 11 September 1986.

<sup>57</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0057, recorded 4 March 1986.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 4 January 2010.

Yeah, yeah, perhaps not as much as men, but perhaps Saturday night out women went out with their husbands, perhaps not in the week.<sup>59</sup>

Both narrators stated that attitudes about women going into pubs were increasingly liberal as the period went on, but even in the later twentieth century certain rules about going to the pub – such as with one’s husband – prevailed. The restricted parameters of women’s social lives are reflected in the limited research carried out on women’s leisure pursuits described by Claire Langhamer.<sup>60</sup> Langhamer argued that historians have prioritised working-class men’s leisure for their research, with comparatively little research undertaken on working-class women’s leisure.<sup>61</sup>

Socialising in the woollen district was, for the most part, governed by ethnicity and gender as well as class. Wool textile workers reported in oral histories that there were separate patterns of socialising for immigrants and women that diverged from the patterns of working-class white British men. This contributed to weak common identification between wool textile workers that originated in the workplace, as seen in chapter four. Without strong interpersonal bonds, or common identities, trade unions had little with which to build their organisations.

#### Political Affiliations

Political affiliations were rarely expressed in the testimonies collected by the Bradford and Huddersfield oral history projects. Whilst it is possible to imagine a link between political allegiances and trade unions in terms of the broader labour movement, there is little in the oral testimonies to suggest that political beliefs and trade union membership were linked in the woollen district. As with the other identities discussed, it is possible that if political identities had been stronger, they could have provided the common bonds needed for more widespread trade union membership. However, wool textile workers appear to have been similar to many others in the post-war period, in that many did not have strong political identities. Furthermore, political identities were not exclusive to wool textile workers, but open to all in the region, and so there is little reason to think they could have provided any significant support to trade unions.

It is likely that the political beliefs of woollen workers were similar to other residents of the woollen district and of the West Riding as a whole. The majority of narrators who referred to their political beliefs stated membership of or affiliation to the Labour Party. In the post-war era, the woollen district was largely represented by Labour Members of Parliament. Some areas, such as Bradford, Dewsbury and Huddersfield East voted more decisively for Labour

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with P.L. conducted by author on 14 January 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England, 1920-1960* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 1-2.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

than other areas, such as Halifax, where the seat passed between Labour and the Conservatives throughout the period, and Huddersfield West, where Labour were slow to attain dominance over the Liberals.<sup>62</sup> Overall, however, the region was becoming increasingly represented by the Labour Party which was reflected in oral testimony:

So, whatever night it was...I went to this meeting. It happened to be the Annual General Meeting of the local Labour Party. Believe it or not, I came away Vice Chairman!<sup>63</sup>

I do remember that I've always been in the Labour Party and I'm still in the Labour Party.<sup>64</sup>

Oh he was a Labour man was my father. He used to say, "You cannot vote Conservative if you've nothing to conserve" and we'd nothing.<sup>65</sup>

These extracts are typical of many of the statements made about politics in the interviews examined, with only one oral history narrator expressing support for the Conservative Party.<sup>66</sup> However, for the most part, those who expressed their political views were involved in political organisations only to a minor extent, with few workers holding office locally or acting as organisers within the local party.

Gidon Cohen, Andrew Flinn and Lewis Mates' research on political culture in the South Lewisham Constituency Labour Party in the immediate post-war era found that membership was consistently low and 'low attendances, inactivity and apathy' plagued the party.<sup>67</sup> Whilst local political views were generally affiliated with the Labour Party, a strong political identity does not appear to have existed for the majority of post-war woollen workers. Although political identities were unlikely to have been as significant as other identities, such as those based on occupation, in fostering more robust trade unionism in wool, more common identification between woollen workers on a variety of subjects could have been the key to more successful collective organisation.

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<sup>62</sup> F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1950-1970* (Chichester, 1971), pp. 92-93, p. 129, p. 152, pp. 165-166.

<sup>63</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0025, recorded 5 January 1984.

<sup>64</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0003, recorded 16 November 1983.

<sup>65</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0011, undated.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 9 May 2008. It is notable that this female narrator was the daughter of the owner of a small spinning business. She had worked in the wool textile industry but not exclusively in production – she had also worked as an administrator. This may go some way in explaining her political affiliations, as well as the fact that her father was also a Conservative voter, and she believed her father had influenced her political views.

<sup>67</sup> Gidon Cohen, Andrew Flinn and Lewis Mates, 'Political Culture and the Post-War Labour Party: Values, Practices and Activism in South Lewisham, 1948-71,' *Socialist History* 32, 2009, p. 60.

## Conclusion

Woollen workers were able to form social and campaigning groups based on the strong bonds that a collective identity provided where they existed. Such an identity did not exist for the woollen workforce as a whole: work identities were not strong in the industry, as we saw in chapter four, and appeared to be of far less importance to mill operatives than, for example, ethnic identities. Asian migrants demonstrated the strongest collective identities in the woollen district through their formation of organisations that worked, in the early period of migration, to assist working-class migrants in attaining social equity, and in the later period, to actively combat the racism that Asians faced daily. As the period progressed and the second generation became frustrated with their parents' quiescence, identities were further strengthened through the creation of movements that sought to fight racism.

The woollen workforce as a whole lacked the collective identity that allowed ethnic groups to build such organisations. Oral histories suggested that woollen workers owed allegiance to a variety of other identities which took precedence over work. These identities were many and various, and the range of them could not be covered in one thesis chapter. Those that appear to have been important to wool textile workers as well as ethnic identities were those based on gender, religious affiliation, social and community pursuits and political belief. Class identities may also have been important to wool workers, but they were infrequently discussed in oral history interviews, perhaps because of the apparent obviousness of the significance of this identity to them. Other workforces have, of course, played host to a variety of identities and have still managed to form large and successful trade unions. However, the wool workforce also lacked a coherent work identity, as we saw in the previous chapter – identities in wool mills were based on the divisions created by the skill levels of workers. Again, other workforces have united despite differences in skill levels, but in the case of wool textile workers, they lacked common identification on many levels and in many different ways. Along with the practical problems of organisation that resulted from the fragmented structure of the workforce, the lack of action on the part of the NUDBTW and the history of poor trade union organisation in the industry, the lack of a common 'woollen worker' identity both inside and outside of work was a key factor in the low level of trade union organisation in wool textiles.

### Introduction

In post-war Britain, as white male labour left the wool textile industry in search of better paid jobs, newly arrived Pakistanis were taking taxis from Heathrow up the M1 to Yorkshire to find work in the mills.<sup>1</sup> Polish ex-servicemen were choosing from a future life of mining, fishing or textile work and were transported around the country accordingly.<sup>2</sup> Those white British workers whose job choices were limited stayed in the mills, working in an industry in decline, with the threat of short-time working and lay-offs to come. Meanwhile, the combination of white workers and immigrants that staffed the wool mills was continuing with long-established traditions: trade union membership was still not widespread.<sup>3</sup> Historical and sociological studies have sometimes looked at community bonds when assessing the characteristics of trade unionism in a particular industry or locality.<sup>4</sup> This chapter examines communities in the wool textile district and interrogates the importance of communities for trade unionism and for collective identities. We will see that, just as there was little cohesion at work within the diverse range of wool textile workers, there was also little cohesion in the community.

It is difficult to determine whether diverse communities were a result or a cause of weak trade unionism. On the one hand, trade unions could provide the necessary identities that helped to establish cohesive communities despite the presence of other, competing identities in the workforce, as Hester Barron noted of the Durham miners in the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> On the other, it is possible that stronger community identification – based, perhaps, on a strong work-based identity – could have provided a springboard for trade union organisers and an identity which they could utilise to mobilise their potential membership. Craig Calhoun, for example, argued that the radicals of the Industrial Revolution were ‘deeply rooted in many cases in traditional communities’ and that ‘They acted on this social basis, not on the wider one of class; they thought in these terms.’<sup>6</sup> David Gilbert echoed Calhoun’s arguments in stating that ‘Collective interests could be acted upon only where there was a clear sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0104, recorded 14 April 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 031, recorded 5 February 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter two gives full details on the role of trade unionism in wool textiles before 1945.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal is our Life: an analysis of a Yorkshire mining community* (London, 1956); Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1982); David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford, 1992); Roger Fagge, *Power, Culture and Conflict in the Coalfields: West Virginia and South Wales, 1900-22* (Manchester, 1996); Hester Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout: Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield* (Oxford, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. xi.

collective identity.<sup>7</sup> He went on to argue that strong communities provided a strong local identity.<sup>8</sup>

Establishing this relationship for wool textiles is a difficult task. Barron was able to use sources which gave a clearer indication of the Durham miners' identities in her impressive study, such as a range of miners' autobiographies and general writings. However, there is no similar collection of writings by wool textile workers that can be used. Oral histories are used in this chapter and throughout the thesis but references to identities are slim and inferences about the role of trade unions are difficult to discern in comments on communities. Barron used a range of oral histories in her research and appears to have had access to a larger volume of recordings than exists for this project. Furthermore, ex-miners that were interviewed for the oral history projects Barron surveyed appear to have discussed work and trade unions more fully than those interviewed for the Huddersfield and Bradford oral history project recordings used for this research. This is likely because miners in the North East had a stronger work identity to draw upon and, of course, actually belonged to trade unions. In the case of the Huddersfield and Bradford recordings, mill workers did not talk about trade unions at length because they did not belong to them.

Despite the difficulty in proving the relationship, if any, between communities and wool trade unionism, it is important to include an evaluation of communities in this thesis. This is not only because other scholars of labour and workforces have used community as a category for consideration, but also because an examination of the communities wool workers lived in gives us wider insights into their lives. As we saw in the previous chapter, the various and competing identities woollen workers possessed meant that it was difficult for a strong, work-based sense of belonging to form. This chapter will show that the lack of community cohesion added to the lack of a wool textile industry identity and that the workforce had few common bonds. It is not possible to say whether this lack of cohesion was caused by the absence of trade unionism, or whether such divided communities meant it was more difficult for trade union organisers to mobilise the wool workforce, but the various identities present in the community were reflected in the workplace with no common identity to unite the workforce. Whilst lines of causation are difficult to establish, it is evident that divisions within the community were a problem for trade unionism in the woollen district.

The chapter will begin with a discussion of the concept of community with the aim of establishing a working definition that can be applied to the woollen district. An assessment of the characteristics of wool communities will show that the woollen district could be considered heterogeneous; the implications of this for trade unionism will be examined. Data

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<sup>7</sup> Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p. 255.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

from the census from 1951 to 1991, along with oral histories and newspaper reports, will reveal the ethnic composition of the district, the settlement of immigrants within it and what this meant for collective organisation. The social aspects of community will also be constructed using oral history narrations and newspaper reports to explore how woollen workers acted and interacted collectively, and the implications of this for trade unions. We will see that there were many opportunities for collective action within communities, as detailed more fully in a case study of the Indian Workers' Association and Asian Youth Movements in chapter eight, but these were not harnessed for work-based issues, and other types of organisation flourished in the woollen district instead.

### Definitions of Community

Community has been examined in this thesis because of the importance of understanding wool textile workers' relationships with collective organisation and action; a collective unit like community is an appropriate category to interrogate to further our understanding of wool workers' relationships with trade unions. Other scholars have looked to other social units: for instance, Michael Savage's examination of the experiences of Preston cotton workers included an analysis of family bonds.<sup>9</sup> While this could indicate much of interest, the focus of the thesis is on collective action, and so community, based in collective action, is the category of study. Most importantly, the woollen workers contributing to oral histories of the district made reference to community, indicating its significance in the consciousness of the population. Scholars such as Brian Jackson have also pointed to the utility of community in research of this kind. Jackson's 1968 study of Huddersfield interrogated the voices of community precisely because they fall outside the family circle, giving us insight into both intimate and social lives.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Calhoun, Gilbert and Barron argued in their respective research that community is a vital source of mobilisation for collective action.<sup>11</sup>

Community is a difficult concept to define; it has different meanings to different people, so any definition should acknowledge and incorporate the subject's own use of the term wherever possible. The working definition of community that I will utilise combines the notions of shared geography, shared identities and a shared imagining of what community constitutes (although it should be noted that these understandings may be contested, given the diverse nature of the population and the multiple identities that some woollen workers would feel allegiance to, as discussed in chapter five).

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics: the Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 72-74.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community: Some General Notions Raised by a Series of Studies in Northern England* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 195; Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*, p. 1; Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p. 14.



The contributions of historians and sociologists have aided the formulation of a working definition. Raymond Williams discussed several meanings of community that encompassed descriptions of a social group and a type of relationship, the most significant of which for this research indicated the sense of common identity that may accompany a population in a locality.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Calhoun acknowledged the importance of personal bonds for community, insisting that class identifiers alone are insufficient to explain community bonds, and social relations should be considered.<sup>13</sup> Gilbert added to this definition to suggest that shared understandings of the past and local traditions play a key role in the way communities are formed.<sup>14</sup> Personal relationships based on face to face interactions, family, leisure and work, and the common understandings that these bring, are important factors to consider within a definition and are of much use in this thesis. Historians such as Calhoun, Gilbert and Barron used definitions of community that are linked with shared identities, which is also of particular importance in this research.

The size of a community also requires definition. In this thesis, a community could take the form of a street, village, suburb or small town. A large town, however, may be stretching the definition too far; the towns and cities under consideration had populations too large to be considered a coherent community unit because of the diversity of shared histories and memories that would accumulate in the many districts of a large area.<sup>15</sup> Not all historians have felt that towns are too large a unit for consideration as a community – for example, Savage applied his definition of community to the whole of Preston.<sup>16</sup> Understanding the boundaries of a community is important. Frederik Barth asserted that the boundaries of ethnic groups are a primary tool for understanding them, and this could also be said of communities more generally.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Joanna Bourke argued that communities excluded minorities.<sup>18</sup> Understanding where communities end and who they include and exclude is important in creating a working definition, and so, for this thesis, the size of a community is more limited than in others' work. However, Benedict Anderson argued, '...all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined,' demonstrating that size, in a sense, is less important than notions of common identity and agreed boundaries.<sup>19</sup> The imagined communities that Anderson posited

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<sup>12</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow, 1965), p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 150.

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> In 1961, the populations of Bradford and Huddersfield were thus: Bradford, 292,403; Huddersfield, 129,095. *West Riding County Report: Census 1961* (London, 1963).

<sup>16</sup> Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>17</sup> Frederik Barth, 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,' in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity* (Oxford, 1996), p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London, 1994), p. 151.

<sup>19</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), p. 15

can transcend geographical ties, especially in relation to the religious communities of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus who found a home in the West Riding from the 1950s onwards.

Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel's theory of the 'isolated mass' of 1952 posited that when groups of workers are relatively isolated from other groups, they will be more strike-prone than those who live in heterogeneous communities.<sup>20</sup> They argued that in communities comprised of workers employed in a variety of industries, workers' grievances are subsumed and diluted amongst the grievances of all workers. Conversely, an 'isolated mass' of homogeneous workers who are socially and geographically distinct from wider society is more likely to strike than workers who do not live in an 'isolated mass'.<sup>21</sup> Their account is most forceful in describing various coal mining communities but cannot be applied to all, as certain mining communities, such as those in Nottinghamshire in 1984-85, were not as strike prone as others.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, it is important to consider that Kerr and Siegel's assessment was of an industry's workers' propensity to strike, not the likelihood of workers' involvement in trade unions. Kerr and Siegel's theory has been largely discredited, for example by Gilbert, who described it as 'a sociology that ignored history.'<sup>23</sup> The examination of the wool workforce's history and traditions has been fundamental to better understanding the historical development of low trade union membership in the West Riding's mills. Roy Church and Quentin Outram said they 'consider[ed] the hypothesis crude and over-simple,' but noted that, for them, it was 'still of sufficient attractiveness to warrant detailed consideration and systematic empirical testing.'<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in a study of coalmining such as Church and Outram's, it is clear that there remains merit in testing the theory against empirical evidence, but for textile workers, it is difficult to discern its usefulness. Kerr and Siegel foregrounded textile workers' propensity to strike as 'medium,' and asserted that 'textile workers' often formed 'isolated masses'.<sup>25</sup> As such, their theory should be approached with caution when examining the textile workers of the Yorkshire woollen district: despite their supposed international focus, Kerr and Siegel's description of textile workers is not recognisable to the student of the British textile industries.

The most useful definitions of community that scholars have formulated are those which foreground shared experiences and identities as well as geographical proximity. Those suggested by historians of labour such as Calhoun, Gilbert and Barron are specific to the

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<sup>20</sup> Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, 'The Isolated Mass and the Integrated Individual: An International Analysis of the Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike,' (Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, 1952), p. 17, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/28722/bk0003s6s2h>, accessed 7 November 2010.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> Robert J. Waller, *The Dukeries Transformed: the Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield* (Oxford, 1983), p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1966* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 139.

<sup>25</sup> Kerr and Siegel, 'The Isolated Mass and the Integrated Individual,' p. 17.

particular regions they researched, and have provided a more useful model for this thesis than those which attempt to transcend localities such as the model proposed by Kerr and Siegel. The specific circumstances of the woollen district are important; the aim of this research is to provide explanations for the absence of trade unionism in a specific industry and location.

### Community Composition

The arrival of immigrants to post-war Britain changed many regions. Eric Hobsbawm argued that mass migration from the former Empire was a ‘significant’ challenge to the strength of organised labour in Britain because of the different national and ethnic identities that were able to compete with work- and class-based identities.<sup>26</sup> The wool textile industry had never played host to a vigorous trade union movement and so explaining the low level of union membership with primary reference to immigrant workers would be incorrect, but Hobsbawm’s wider point about the identities of workers – and, we can infer, the communities built around these identities – is an important one. We will see in this section of the chapter that the woollen district was becoming home to an ever-expanding range of identities, as we saw in detail in the previous chapter, and that communities based on those identities were beginning to form.

The woollen district was a destination for migrants from all over the Commonwealth and Europe, who came to work in a densely-populated area with increased employment opportunities. The workforces of woollen mills became increasingly multicultural, as did those of the transport services and two other main local employers, engineering works and chemical process plants. The aim of this chapter is to explore the relationship between communities and trade unions in the woollen district: as such, it is necessary to establish how the communities under consideration were composed. Using data from the censuses for the West Riding from 1951-1991, one can discern the ethnic composition of woollen communities and, notably, the differences between them. The occupational diversity of the West Riding is recorded but it is not possible to make assertive claims about how this differed between woollen communities, since the statistics relate to the whole of the county and not the woollen district specifically. What emerges from the census is a strong indication that the region’s towns were becoming increasingly fragmented and diverse after the Second World War, observations supported by oral history sources. Records from the Home Office are also able to illuminate the general public’s response to immigration and related issues, and this can shed significant light on oral history narrators’ attitudes and comments.

There are, however, some difficulties in constructing an accurate picture of the woollen district’s communities and the attitudes and feelings of those within them. While there are

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<sup>26</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, in Martin Jacques and Francis Mulhern (eds.), *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (Worcester, 1981), p. 11.

plentiful census records which can describe the composition of woollen communities and the West Riding as a whole, we have no sure way of knowing how many people in each community were employed by the woollen industry. Given that trade unionism was so weak, the records of the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (NUDBTW), used elsewhere in the thesis, are of little use in determining exactly where woollen workers lived. Accident books and sick records from mills give a better indication of woollen workers and where they lived, but these again are incomplete. General personnel records have either been lost or were never kept: small as most mills were in this period, a formalised file of workers' addresses was probably deemed unnecessary by many mill owners. Moreover, some immigrants were likely to have been working illegally for cash, so an official staff list would not reveal them. Furthermore, if immigrant workers were listed in official records, in this period factors such as ethnicity or country of birth were not noted as a matter of course in either business or trade union files. However, despite the paucity of records, oral history accounts and census statistics are sufficiently rich to construct an accurate picture.

The West Riding's population level remained largely stable during the post-war era at around two million.<sup>27</sup> There are few examples of drastic population change after 1945. Bradford, for example, was home to 292,403 inhabitants in 1951, 295,922 in 1961 and 294,177 in 1971.<sup>28</sup> The figures from 1981 onwards reflect boundary changes and new administrative organisation: West Yorkshire became split roughly between five large metropolitan areas with councils to represent them, meaning that the figures for cities such as Bradford increased drastically as they began to include other smaller towns like Keighley and Shipley. As such, by 1981 the population of the Bradford metropolitan area had expanded to 457,500.<sup>29</sup> This means that consideration of smaller woollen areas ends with the 1971 census, when the populations of such towns were recorded for the last time. Even so, the statistics for the smaller towns only indicated population size; ethnic breakdowns were reserved for the larger towns, as were occupational groups. A comprehensive analysis of these factors can only be completed for settlements that are too large to be considered communities; however, they may indicate the nature of communities that existed within them.

Huddersfield will be used as a brief case study to illustrate ethnic and occupational diversity because it became home to a broad range of national groups and industries; it can then be compared against Halifax, a more homogeneous woollen town. There is no clear and consistent way of ascertaining whether trade unionism was stronger in Huddersfield or

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<sup>27</sup> Table 8, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report* (London, 1963) p. 47; Table B, *Census 1991: West Riding County Report*, (London, 1993) p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Table 2, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report*, (London, 1963) p. 2; Table 2, *Census 1971: West Riding County Report*, (London, 1973) p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Table A, *Census 1981: West Riding Country Report*, (London, 1982) p. xvi.

Halifax, but some fragmentary evidence suggests that there were more NUDBTW members in Halifax than Huddersfield. Union records from 1971 indicate that the NUDBTW's 'districts,' the key organisational unit, were very large: for example, Number 1 District comprised a large variety of towns, including Bradford, Halifax, Brighouse, Keighley, Shipley and Yeadon along, confusingly, with Durham towns such as Darlington, Peterlee and Spennymoor.<sup>30</sup> The 1971 breakdown shows that in Halifax there was a combined total of 871 union members whereas in Huddersfield the total was 777 members (although if outlying districts such as Honley and Holmfirth are added, the total rises to 1,550).<sup>31</sup> This suggests that trade unionism was more successful in a more homogeneous area like Halifax than in the more diverse Huddersfield, but as it has not been possible to locate similar records for other years, we cannot know whether this was an established pattern across the later twentieth century. Furthermore, even though Huddersfield's total was larger when outlying areas were added, it is interesting to note that Honley and Holmfirth were home to almost an equal number of wool trade unionists (773) as Huddersfield despite being far less populous. This may have been because they were less diverse areas.

Huddersfield in 1961 was a town whose traditional industry was still employing significant numbers of workers and was attracting yet more people to work in its mills. It was becoming increasingly ethnically diverse as a result but traditional gender roles remained in the workplace with slightly more women than men in the wool industry. The population of Huddersfield stood at 130,652 and remained fairly stable as the period progressed.<sup>32</sup> West Indians were the largest immigrant group in 1961 at 1,695 persons, with groups of Poles, Pakistanis and Indians much smaller by comparison.<sup>33</sup> In all cases, men outnumbered women; this is because, often, men would migrate ahead of their wives and families to secure work before sending for them. By 1971, the tables had turned: Indian and Pakistani workers overtook West Indians, the former two nationalities increasing and the latter decreasing, perhaps as a result of migration to other regions. Indian and Pakistani men still outnumbered women by half, but this evened out later as their wives and families joined them in Britain.<sup>34</sup> Despite the growth of communities from the Indian subcontinent in Huddersfield, Bradford remained the primary destination for this group, containing in the early 1960s the 'greatest concentration' of Pakistanis in Britain.<sup>35</sup> In 1969, 166 children were born in Huddersfield of Indian or Pakistani mothers, compared with 498 in Bradford;<sup>36</sup> in

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<sup>30</sup> The National Archives (TNA), NF 2/469, Registry of Trade Unions and Employers' Association records, Central Office Accounts and General Balance Sheet, 31 December 1971.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Table 2, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report*, (London, 1963) p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Table 10, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report*, (London, 1963) p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Table 13, *Census 1971: West Yorkshire County Report*, (London, 1973) p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> Maurice Spiers, 'Bradford,' in Nicholas Deakin (ed.), *Colour and the British Electorate 1964* (London, 1965), p. 120.

<sup>36</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 March 1970

1970, eleven per cent of school children in Bradford were born of Commonwealth immigrants.<sup>37</sup>

Migrants went to Huddersfield to find work, primarily in the wool textile industry. In the 1961 census, a ten per cent sample reported that 1,468 people worked in the woollen and worsted industries in Huddersfield; 151 people in the sample were employed in textile engineering and 19 in carpet making, yielding a total of 1,638 working in the textile and allied industries, which we can assume represented ten per cent of the local population. Workers in the chemicals and dyes trade totalled 549 and this was also allied with the wool industry, producing dyes to treat locally-produced wool products as well as other chemicals.<sup>38</sup> These numbers suggest that, at this time, most employed people in Huddersfield were working in the woollen and related industries. A report in *The Guardian* in 1968 asserted that ‘over one third of all immigrants in West Yorkshire are employed in the woollen industry,’ and another in 1969 reported the view of a Keighley mill manager that his factory would cease to function without immigrant operatives.<sup>39</sup> How far this level of immigrant employment was maintained (or grew) as the period progressed is unclear, but as immigrants tended to staff the low-paid, unskilled industries throughout the period, staying on when white workers left, it is likely that the proportion ten or twenty years later was similar.<sup>40</sup>

A much different picture to Huddersfield can be seen in Halifax, a town whose population was decreasing with each passing census, seeing a drop from 98,404 in 1951 to 91,272 in 1971.<sup>41</sup> Russian migrants were the most numerous non-British group in 1951 at 590 persons with Polish immigrants following close behind at 500; Indian and Pakistani residents numbered 128 and 199 respectively.<sup>42</sup> This had changed by 1971 when the Russian and Polish communities had shrunk slightly and the Pakistani community rocketed to 1,655, catching up with Huddersfield but never containing the same diversity as its neighbour.<sup>43</sup> It is unclear why migrants did not settle in Halifax in numbers as great as in Huddersfield and Bradford; it is possible that patterns of chain migration meant that the availability of family and community networks in certain areas was as attractive to immigrants as the availability of work. Muhammad Anwar noted in his study of Pakistanis in Rochdale that kinship networks or *biraderi* played an important role in determining the residence of migrants.<sup>44</sup> If

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<sup>37</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 8 April 1970

<sup>38</sup> Table 3, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report*, (London, 1963) pp. 25-32.

<sup>39</sup> *The Guardian*, 25 April 1968; *The Guardian*, 16 March 1969

<sup>40</sup> Laura Price, ‘Immigrants and Apprentices: Solutions to the Post-War Labour Shortage in the West Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry, 1945-1980,’ *Textile History*, 45 (1) May 2014, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Table 2, *Census 1961: West Riding County Report*, (London, 1963) p. 2; Table 2, *Census 1971: West Riding County Report*, (London, 1973) p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>43</sup> Table 13, *Census 1971: West Yorkshire County Report*, (London, 1973) p.125.

<sup>44</sup> Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (London, 1979), p. 64.

such patterns also applied to the woollen district, this could be a reason why Asian migration to Halifax was limited in comparison to the migration of the same group to towns like Bradford and Huddersfield. However, other scholars, such as Virinder S. Kalra, have argued that the concept of chain migration is problematic and does not apply to all places equally: he argued that, whilst chain migration was useful to understanding migration to places like Birmingham and Bradford, it did not occur in all places that Asians settled, and that Asian migrants were often keenly aware of the local labour market and adjusted their settlement accordingly.<sup>45</sup> A combination of work opportunities and community support may have led Asian migrants to settle in the bigger towns of the woollen district, but there is little evidence to support this assertion.

Ethnic diversity was growing in the post-war woollen district, albeit unevenly, leading to a more heterogeneous region. Whilst we cannot say that this was a direct cause of the low level of trade union membership among wool textile workers, it compounded the ethnic segregation in the workplace, which meant that workers from diverse ethnic backgrounds were unlikely to form relationships and bonds based on work or on community membership. The implication of this for trade unionism was that there were few opportunities for wool workers of different cultural backgrounds to meet and discuss their work-related problems.

#### Wool Workers' Understanding of Community

In order to better understand wool communities and how they related to trade unionism, it is necessary to understand how wool workers thought and felt about the communities they lived in. Oral history narratives provide an excellent indicator of the attitudes of wool textile operatives. The use of individualised narratives can afford us a rich and personal understanding of the meanings of community that support the statistics provided by the census. This section of the chapter will explore wool workers' own understandings of community to assess what functions they felt communities had and how far these related to collective organisation and trade unionism.

When asked about what she thought community meant, a white British woman born in the 1940s who had worked in wool textiles for much of her adult life said:

Well people who do try to get together and help one another, and they do put things on to make life better for each other. To be community spirit is where you help all that you can, meaning that in times of trouble that you do, but like if you can help somebody whether they're elderly or whoever they are, if they need your help, I

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<sup>45</sup> Virinder S. Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour and Social Change* (Ashgate, 2000), p. 103.

think that's what community spirit is about... I don't think it's as obvious as it used to be.<sup>46</sup>

Another white woman, born in the 1960s, who had worked in textiles in her late twenties and thirties, noted:

I think we're more of a community. Whereas everybody else [outside Yorkshire] sort of lives their own lives and everybody pulls together in Yorkshire and helps each other... If you need help, there's always somebody there that'll give you a hand.<sup>47</sup>

Community, for these two women, was associated with help and mutual support. This was highlighted by both because the feeling of community spirit manifested more obviously in times of crisis, when help was needed and the community 'pull[s] things on.'<sup>48</sup> However, one of the women felt that the feeling of belonging to a community was no longer 'as obvious as it used to be;' she did not give reasons for why this may be, but suggested that she felt that levels of mutual support had waned throughout her lifetime.<sup>49</sup> Both women commented that community spirit no longer took precedence in many people's lives, adding:

Of course like anywhere it's getting more and more built up as the years go on so it's not... not the tight knit community it was, it's... people don't know... it isn't as if people know one another the same anymore.<sup>50</sup>

In Kirkheaton, all the old Kirkheaton people are friendly and they all know you, and the new ones just drive around in their cars.<sup>51</sup>

The idea of 'incomers' diluting a traditional sense of community was not uncommon in the smaller and more remote villages of the woollen district. Whilst there is no evidence that their feelings about the decline of community sentiment were linked to the coming of immigrants, it is possible that the changing dynamics of communities throughout the woollen district resulted in a decreased sense of shared history and tradition among those who had resided in certain areas for a significant period of time. These women were from Kirkheaton, a semi-rural village on the outskirts of Huddersfield which was not a key destination for immigrant settlers; however, the narrators clearly felt that people from 'outside' were moving into their community and the result was a change in the way people related to one another. Robin Pearson argued that a sense of the past was central to the

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with P.L. conducted by author on 14 January 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 4 January 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with P.L. conducted by author on 14 January 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with P.L. conducted by author on 14 January 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 04 January 2010.



conceptual imagining of community, which newcomers to a locality would find difficult to access, resulting in them possibly staying on the peripheries of the community.<sup>52</sup>

It is possible that the apparently reduced importance of community spirit was linked to the concurrent decline in the wool textile industry in communities where the local mill had played a significant role in community life. One of the female narrators from Kirkheaton said:

I think the heart of it's [the village] gone. Which was the mill and they pulled the mill down last year so they've changed Kirkheaton forever. I think it was because when you came into Kirkheaton it was there and it stood out and you saw it and it's not there anymore, and I do feel that's quite sad that it has gone.<sup>53</sup>

This comment suggests that some wool textile workers felt that there was a link between mill buildings and the communities they were located in. As such, it follows that the physical destruction of mills, often focal points for a neighbourhood, could deal a serious blow to community morale. This effect is difficult to evidence but is nonetheless important to how people thought about their communities. Indeed, Patrick Joyce remarked that factory and neighbourhood were closely related in the popular imagination in the nineteenth century, and some oral history evidence has suggested that this continued to be the case in the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Whilst evidence about thoughts and feelings is difficult to obtain beyond oral histories, it is very likely that wool workers felt that there was a connection between their community and the mill that provided employment to its residents.

### Residential Communities in the Woollen District

The issue of a workers' residential proximity to their mill had implications for understanding the occupational homogeneity of communities. Barron researched the distance miners in Durham travelled to work in the 1920s to establish how far 'the stereotype of each pit having its own colliery village within which all members shared lives and leisure' was true.<sup>55</sup> She found that a considerable number – up to 70 per cent in some areas – travelled two or more miles to work each day, disproving the myth that all miners lived and worked within the same community. Although no surveys of textile workers exist like the survey that Barron was able to draw upon, oral histories show that, whilst in some areas people lived in close proximity to their workplace, many more travelled across the woollen district. This suggests a fracture between residential communities and the workplace for most wool textile workers.

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<sup>52</sup> Robin Pearson, 'Knowing One's Place: Perceptions of Community in the Industrial Suburbs of Leeds, 1790-1890,' *Journal of Social History*, 27 (2), 1998, p. 221.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with P.L. conducted by author on 14 January 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: the Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980), p. 111.

<sup>55</sup> Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*, p. 53.

Oral history narrators have provided some interesting detail about how far wool workers lived from their workplace and whether they worked in their residential community. A white British woman from Kirkheaton, on the outskirts of Huddersfield, explained that during this period, she travelled across Huddersfield to work in Slaithwaite in the Colne Valley (a journey of eight miles); however, she judged that approximately fifty per cent of the workers at the local mill lived in the village and could walk to work, with still others working at a small mill in a rural area just outside the village.<sup>56</sup> She said:

People – people usually worked in the area the mill was, because we used to have a mill in Kirkheaton and the majority of the people who worked there lived in Kirkheaton. Very few came from outside. We also had a little mill at Whitley. At Whitley Willows, it was called. And a lot of people from Kirkheaton, because there were no bus route – there was a bus but very very rare – when I was little, and I was going to school, you used to see everybody, and a coach used to pick them up and take them to the little mill and then bring them home when it was time to come home. So a lot of people worked there as well. But they lived in the village, which was one of the nearest villages to where the mill was.<sup>57</sup>

However, this is only one example. Other oral history narrators told of living a sizeable distance away from the workplace, with Dewsbury residents commuting to Pudsey, for instance, a journey of around eleven miles.<sup>58</sup> The accident book of a firm in Milnsbridge shows that residents came to work there from across Huddersfield and the Colne Valley, one travelling fifteen miles from Mossley in Lancashire.<sup>59</sup> A file of job applications for a Milnsbridge firm includes an application from a carding engineer resident in Kirkheaton, five miles away, whose current workplace was in Pudsey, around a forty-five minute commute.<sup>60</sup> This suggests that there were a number of workers who lived a substantial distance from their mill. Any potential for community and workplace relationships to be concentrated in one geographical area was largely unrealised in the post-war period.

The evidence on how immigrants settled and formed residential communities in the woollen district is much more conclusive. Most migrants in the woollen district lived in separate

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 4 January 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0123, recorded on 8 September 1987.

<sup>59</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Huddersfield), B/JL/442, John Lockwood records, Accident Book of Firm.

<sup>60</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Huddersfield), B/JL/488, John Lockwood records, File of Job Applications.

areas from white British residents, following national patterns of settlement.<sup>61</sup> While the ‘problems’ associated with this appear to have been more pronounced in the West Midlands, fears of ghettoisation were also aired in the local Yorkshire press.<sup>62</sup> Anxieties relating to immigrant settlement in particular areas, and especially the potential stresses this would have on local services such as schools, were expressed in a Home Office report called ‘General Problems’ on the impact of immigration written around 1969; the title of the report suggests how immigrant settlement was viewed by some in government and the civil service.<sup>63</sup> The pressure on local services was a national issue which also affected the woollen district. In a geographical study of racial segregation in 1978, T. P. Jones and D. McEvoy contended that the segregation of Asians in Huddersfield was comparable with that of contemporaneous African Americans, and was more serious than many commentators believed.<sup>64</sup> F. W. Boal suggested that such segregation was reasonable on the part of the migrants and was largely due to the threat they felt from the host population, arguing that migrants had agency in the decision of where to live.<sup>65</sup> The separate settlement of migrants in the woollen district mirrored a segregated workforce.

Oral histories indicated ethnic separation in many parts of the woollen district, with some areas becoming increasingly dominated by settlers of different ethnicities. The memories of ethnic diversity shared by narrators are telling of the different communities’ attitudes towards not only multi-ethnic social mixing but also the extent to which it occurred. A white British narrator from a semi-rural area recalled the first Asian person she ever met:

And this girl came and as I say she was called Vaneeta, and I was thrilled to bits that I was sat next to a black girl in school, and we became friends. But then as we went to high school, you sort of split up, but at high school, she was still the only black girl. I’ve noticed more in the last maybe four or five years, more people from different cultures have moved into the village.<sup>66</sup>

This happened when the narrator was aged nine or ten, in the early 1970s. She also noted that, as she lived in a largely white area, she did not realise that Huddersfield was home to actual communities of black and Asian migrants until later in her life: ‘I might’ve been

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<sup>61</sup> Ceri Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain: a Social Geography* (London, 1968), p. 83.

<sup>62</sup> *The Times*, 2 March 1963; John Rex and Robert Moore, *Race, Community and Conflict: a Study of Sparkbrook* (London, 1967), p. 20; Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain*, p. 83; *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 12 May 1977.

<sup>63</sup> The National Archives (TNA), HO 376/159, Home Office Racial Disadvantage records, ‘General Problems’ (an undated report on immigration).

<sup>64</sup> T. P. Jones and D. McEvoy, ‘Race and Space in Cloud-Cuckoo Land,’ *Area*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1978, p. 165.

<sup>65</sup> F. W. Boal, ‘The Urban Residential Sub-Community – a Conflict Interpretation,’ *Area*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1972), p. 164. Chapter eight contains a fuller discussion on the agency of immigrants to the woollen district.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 4 January 2010.

sixteen or seventeen.<sup>67</sup> This is indicative of the level of segregation present in Huddersfield throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and corroborates Jones and McEvoy's argument, although it should be borne in mind that Nicholas Deakin's research for the Institute of Race Relations argued that beliefs about segregation were generally 'exaggerated.'<sup>68</sup>

Another white British narrator from a semi-rural village related a similar story that had happened around ten years earlier, in the early 1960s:

There was the half caste family who lived down by the doctors and I don't think we ever thought of them in that way at all, as we grew up with them and went to school with them... They were the only family that I remember.<sup>69</sup>

These narrators had little to say about the treatment they felt these solitary black families faced in the community but presented an assimilationist narrative in which the families became part of the village with relative ease, which is largely at odds with the media reports and scholarly literature of the period.<sup>70</sup> This likely a result of their own lack of experience and knowledge of more immigrant families (exemplified by language such as 'half-caste' and comments about thinking 'about them in *that way*'), and suggests the fracture between natives and migrants in the woollen district throughout the post-war era.<sup>71</sup> Although these comments show no evidence of hostility or racism, they exemplify the lack of understanding that generally appears to have been present between wool workers from different cultures. This further suggests that there was an absence of solid relationships between diverse wool workers.

A narrator from the West Indian community in Huddersfield described her experiences with white people very differently to those described by white British narrators. She lived in the Sheepridge area of Huddersfield where there was a sizeable community of Caribbean migrants. She related:

They [white people] used to cut our washing lines and stuff like that and our milk, you know, drink half the milk and leave it.<sup>72</sup>

She stated that at her primary school, black and white children mixed and did not socialise in ethnically segregated groups, but this feeling of friendship clearly did not extend to everyone

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with C.R. conducted by author on 4 January 2010.

<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Deakin with Brian Cohen and Julia McNeal, *Colour, Citizenship and British Society: Based on the Institute of Race Relations Report* (London, 1970), p. 62.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with P.L. conducted by author on 14 January 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain*, p. 84; Rex and Moore, *Race, Community and Conflict*, p. 31; Boal, 'The Urban Residential Sub-Community,' p. 165; Jones and McEvoy, 'Race and Space in Cloud-Cuckoo Land,' p. 162; *The Times*, 14 December 1954; *The Times*, 7 November 1963.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with P.L. conducted by author on 14 January 2010.

<sup>72</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 014, recorded 12 December 1985

in her community.<sup>73</sup> Hostility may have been based partly on economic factors: as Virinder Kalra pointed out, migrants may have been seen as economic competition in a time of contraction for the dominant local industry.<sup>74</sup> Whilst this narrator relates no direct evidence that this was the reason for her neighbours' hostility, should Kalra's assertion have been the case for wool textile workers, it would have placed a barrier in the way of collective organisation.

Polish and Eastern European workers also settled in the woollen district to find work in the mills. In oral testimonies used by Andrew Noon, many confirmed that they formed their own, separate communities:<sup>75</sup>

I didn't specially stick with English people.<sup>76</sup>

I have to admit that when we arrived we sort of stuck together, all Poles, even at – in place of work or in our... activities or entertainment and so on.<sup>77</sup>

This may have been in order to preserve Polish traditions within their new communities and to socialise with people they felt they had more in common with. The formation of separate communities by ethnic or national groups such as Poles helped to maintain specific identities but also weakened the possibility for greater understanding between woollen workers of different cultures. Additionally, it could be argued that had trade unionism been stronger in the woollen district, there could have been greater understanding between workers of different ethnicities and nationalities.

Poles were not the only national or ethnic group to begin to form their own residential communities. An Asian narrator from Bradford told of how Asian communities began to form in the early 1960s:

As time progressed the men that I was sharing the house with decided to bring their wives over... they began to buy houses further along the street. And once the families did come over ... the tendency was that they used to have very, very loud music booming out the doors... And I don't think this went down well with the English neighbours, so they began to sell their houses slowly.<sup>78</sup>

Another Asian narrator from Bradford discussed the inhabitants of his local area in similar terms:

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks*, p. 93.

<sup>75</sup> A Noon, 'A Reluctant Welcome? Poles in Britain in the 1940s,' *Oral History*, 24 (1) (1996), p. 85.

<sup>76</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 020, recorded 15 January 1986.

<sup>77</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 031, recorded 5 February 1986.

<sup>78</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0123, recorded 8 September 1987.

I've got a cousin, two cousins across the road now... The man from village who has got that shop across the road, from same village [in Pakistan] actually.<sup>79</sup>

This confirms the findings of Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla on the transfer of large swathes of Punjabi villages to areas of Gravesend, Leicester and Coventry, which is likely to have occurred in West Yorkshire as well due to patterns of chain migration that were in place in several communities in the district.<sup>80</sup> Immigrants to the woollen district appear to have largely chosen to settle separately from white British people. The remainder of the chapter will demonstrate the impact of this on other, non-residential aspects of communities.

### The Social and Other Aspects of Communities

The demography of communities tended to reflect the workforce of wool textile mills: containing people from diverse ethnicities but with little interaction between people from different ethnic groups. This part of the chapter will scrutinise ethnic mixing in the community as well as how far community and social spaces were gendered. Community groups identified by oral history narrators will be discussed so that broader points about collective organisation in the woollen district can be made. We will see that there were many active community groups in the woollen district, and that wool textile workers were capable of forming organisations, but trade unions were not matters of priority for them.

Little evidence from oral histories has been found of the efforts of ethnic groups to mix socially and few narrators expressed concern at this, although this does not mean that all were entirely happy with the situation. John Barr wrote of a generally harmonious Bradford in 1964, painting a picture of tolerant locals that immigrants may not recognise.<sup>81</sup> Media articles also suggested that West Yorkshire was a much more tolerant place than other areas of immigrant settlement.<sup>82</sup> The oral histories tell of friendly co-operation and racial prejudice, although many of those interviewed referred more to the social separation of ethnic groups. It is important to recognise that it is problematic to consider the ethnic groups discussed below as cohesive. John Eade, Pnina Werbner and Verity Saifullah Khan have all, in separate studies, noted the fragmentation of South Asian communities in Britain.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0104, recorded 14 April 1987.

<sup>80</sup> Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla, *Sikhs in Britain: the Making of a Community* (London, 2006), p.40.

<sup>81</sup> John Barr, 'Pakistanis in Bradford,' *New Society*, 19 November 1964.

<sup>82</sup> *Guardian*, 13 August 1966; *Guardian*, 23 April 1968; *The Times*, 26 June 1968; *The Times*, 5 July 1974.

<sup>83</sup> Verity Saifullah Khan, 'Pakistanis in Britain: perceptions of a population,' *New Society*, 5 (3), 1976, pp. 222-229; John Eade, 'The Political Construction of Class and Community: Bangladeshi Political Leadership in Tower Hamlets, East London,' in Pnina Werbner and Muhammad Anwar (eds.), *Black and Ethnic Leaderships in Britain: the Cultural Dimensions of Political Action* (London, 1991), pp. 84-109; Pnina Werbner, 'The Fiction of Unity in Ethnic Politics: Aspects of Representation and the State

Some oral history narrators gave an impression of limited involvement in community social groups, such as a woman from Bradford who said, 'I went to the Girls' Friendly Society, and that were about all I went to.'<sup>84</sup> This suggests that for some wool textile workers, involvement in community organisations was limited to those undertaken in childhood. However, others commented on the greater involvement of family members in social groups:

My father was the Superintendent in the Sunday School... My mother used to go speaking to women's meetings and things like that... I used to go and teach first aid to the Cubs.<sup>85</sup>

I've always been in the Labour Party... My father believed in unions. When I was about eleven years old, he took me to the Warp Dyers Club... Albert [her husband] was a life member there [Laisterdyke Labour Club] and when he died they sent a big wreath.<sup>86</sup>

For some, there were family patterns of involvement, for example in membership of political parties and their associated social spaces. Although the above narrator commented that her father 'believed in unions,' in the oral histories surveyed there were few references to involvement in political groups and in the few social spaces that were reserved exclusively for wool textile workers' use.<sup>87</sup> Although the sample of oral histories examined was not comparable to the size of the wool workforce in this period, it was representative of different ethnic groups, genders and ages, so we can assume that there was limited involvement from wool textile workers in such organisations. However, the three narrators above were white; the oral histories give significantly more information on the social activities of immigrants to the woollen district, perhaps because immigrants felt a more pressing need to establish their own social spaces in light of widespread racial prejudice and incidents of hostility.

The interaction between workers of different ethnicities was limited in the workplace and opportunities to mix socially outside of work were also limited.<sup>88</sup> This was not least because of the operation of illegal colour bars against some national groups in some pubs. The Race Relations Act outlawed such practices in 1965 but they continued.<sup>89</sup> Colour bars were a particularly hot topic in the wool town of Batley in 1968: the Batley Trades and Friendly Club, a venue known throughout the region for its draw of big-name entertainers, began

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among British Pakistanis,' in Prina Werbner and Muhammad Anwar (eds.), *Black and Ethnic Leaderships in Britain: the Cultural Dimensions of Political Action* (London, 1991), pp. 113-145.

<sup>84</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0002, recorded 16 November 1983.

<sup>85</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0005, recorded 22 November 1983.

<sup>86</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0003, recorded 16 November 1983.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Laura Price, "'Among their Own Kind:": Ethnicity and Community Relations in West Yorkshire's Woollen District, 1945-1985,' in Anne Baldwin, Chris Ellis, Stephen Etheridge, Keith Laybourn and Neil Pye (eds.), *Class, Culture and Community: New Perspectives in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century British Labour History* (Newcastle, 2012), p. 55.

<sup>89</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 031, recorded 5 February 1986.

operating a colour bar against black patrons and performers when an application for membership from a black man compounded fears about racial violence, with the club's committee voting eighty-eight against eight in favour of the ban.<sup>90</sup> The club secretary opined:

A man has the choice of deciding with whom he shall spend his leisure time. Our members felt that they would prefer to spend that among *their own kind*. This ban was better than allowing coloured men in and then finding there was a lot of unpleasantness in the club.<sup>91</sup>

There was anxiety about mixing with immigrants in the woollen district, along with outright racial prejudice. Alice Ritscherle's research highlighted similar themes regarding colour bars nationwide, with publicans barring black and Asian migrants as a preventative measure against violent hostility in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>92</sup> Anxiety continued into the 1970s, with the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* running an article with the headline, 'Race relations at "lowest ebb"' in 1976, detailing a recent National Front march through the city.<sup>93</sup> It is unsurprising that Yorkshire's migrant workers continued to socialise in largely ethnically-separate groups throughout the post-war period. If white British and immigrant wool textile workers did not meet at work or at leisure, the opportunities for them to discuss their common work experiences were severely limited.

The practice of ethnically-separate socialising is exemplified by the range of organisations formed by migrants in the aftermath of their arrival; these reflected the different conceptions of community held by the various groups.<sup>94</sup> In Huddersfield and Bradford, branches of the Indian Workers' Association were formed by Sikhs to protect the interests of Indian workers in mills and in trade unions, which operated right until the end of the period.<sup>95</sup> Churches and clubs for various groups of Eastern Europeans began to appear from the late 1940s, as well as language schools where parents would send second-generation children to learn their mother tongue.<sup>96</sup> Caribbean migrants' social life was slightly different, as they attended the same churches as local whites and often drank in the same pubs. This group lacked the language barrier that was to separate Asian and Eastern European groups from English-speaking society, but Caribbean culture spilled into the streets of the woollen district with

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<sup>90</sup> *The Times*, 2 September 1968.

<sup>91</sup> *The Times*, 2 September 1968. My italics.

<sup>92</sup> A M Ritscherle, 'Opting Out of Utopia: Race and Working-Class Political Culture in Britain in the Age of Decolonization, 1948-1968,' (Unpublished University of Michigan thesis, 2005), pp. 146-153

<sup>93</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 24 July 1976

<sup>94</sup> Chapter eight discusses two such organisations extensively: the Indian Workers' Association and the Asian Youth Movements. More information about them is given there.

<sup>95</sup> Rashmi Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain* (London, 1963), p. 102; Mohan Sokhal, 'Facing Discrimination at Work and in the Pubs,' *Asian Voices* interview, accessed on 20 March 2010 at <http://asianvoices.hud.ac.uk/audios/viewtranscript/176>.

<sup>96</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 020, recorded 15 January 1986; Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 031, recorded 5 February 1986.



annual carnivals across the region, such as in Huddersfield. Separate community events strongly suggest that wool communities were far from united and that ethnic difference played an important role in maintaining divisions between wool workers. These divisions were mirrored in the workplace; as we saw in chapter four, workers of different ethnicities tended not to mix at work and were kept on separate shifts.

Different ethnic groups found expression in community in different ways. Caribbean narrators commented on the social aspects of community, remarking, for instance:

Activities, discos, you name it they had it there. You could take part... almost every evening we used to go the [youth] club... Every Friday my dad would go out on his own, but every Saturday night my mum and dad, you know, would go out – if they could afford it.<sup>97</sup>

Sheila Patterson argued that social pursuits were an important aspect of West Indian community formation when migrants from the Caribbean first arrived in Britain.<sup>98</sup> It is not clear whether the youth club mentioned by the above narrator was open to all in the community or was for the exclusive use of Caribbean youths; reports in the *Yorkshire Post* from 1973 suggested that multi-ethnic youth clubs existed in Leeds, such as the Primrose Hill Youth Club, but this may have been reported in the press due to its anomalous nature.<sup>99</sup> Caribbean oral history narrators reported fewer instances of separate socialising than migrants from Eastern Europe and the Indian Subcontinent. This may have been because Caribbean immigrants spoke English and were able to access British leisure pursuits as a result, although, as seen above, racial prejudice meant that Caribbean immigrants were not welcome at all social venues in the woollen district.

For Eastern European narrators, interaction outside work was important but was often based on nationality; an exclusive social community was based on a cultural identity. Eastern European immigrants' acquisition of social space and creation of exclusive leisure activities represented a clear challenge to the government policy of assimilation of Poles and European Voluntary Workers.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the use of separate social spaces meant that Eastern European migrants in the woollen district – clearly adept at collective organisation – were unlikely to use their organisational skills to build other organisations, such as a trade union movement with their colleagues of different nationalities.

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<sup>97</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 011, recorded 5 December 1985.

<sup>98</sup> Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: a Study of West Indians in London* (Harmondsworth, 1965), pp. 307-308.

<sup>99</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 26 January 1973.

<sup>100</sup> Diana Kay and Robert Miles, *Refugees or Migrant Workers? European Volunteer Workers in Britain, 1946-1951* (London, 1992) pp. 121-123.

A significant number of Eastern European immigrants to Britain worked in the textile industries. Kathleen Paul stated that around ninety per cent of female European Volunteer Workers (EVWs) were sent into either textiles or domestic service. Eastern European migrants were more likely to mix at work with native British workers than Asian immigrants, but oral history narrators made it clear that there was little mixing outside the mill gates:<sup>101</sup>

I never invited any English people to my home, you know, I didn't really have anything in common with them.<sup>102</sup>

Polish organisations which sprung up afterwards used St Patrick's hall – for their dances... those dances would only be for Polish people... I've been member of Polish Ex-Combatants Association from the beginning... this only club we had till we bought our own church.<sup>103</sup>

It is likely that Eastern Europeans continued to socialise separately into the 1970s and 1980s. Polish clubs and churches still operated in the later part of the twentieth century: the Bradford Polish Parish Club had 900 members in 1972, which represented around half of the Polish community in the city at the time, suggesting that socialising based on national identity was still popular after the first generation of immigrants arrived in the woollen district.<sup>104</sup>

South Asian workers differed further in their patterns of social and community involvement: organisations such as the Indian Workers' Association were political and fought for equal rights at work, but they also campaigned on community issues and provided services such as helping migrants apply for passports.<sup>105</sup> There is significant evidence that Asian immigrants to the woollen district were active in forming community and campaigning organisations, as we shall see further in chapter eight which outlines the activities of two such groups, the Indian Workers' Association and the Asian Youth Movements. However, scholarship on Asian migrants to Britain has suggested that they accepted poor conditions and failed to challenge injustices. This was a popular contemporary view about Asian immigrants. For example, Ron Ramdin referred to evidence from the 1970s that suggested that black and Asian workers were more likely to accept a low status job.<sup>106</sup> Deakin's 1970 report based on research by the Institute of Race Relations stated: 'The Pakistani sacrifices material comfort

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<sup>101</sup> Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (London, 1997), p. 80.

<sup>102</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 020, recorded 15 January 1986.

<sup>103</sup> Kirklees Oral History Sound Archive, Interview no. 031, recorded 5 February 1986.

<sup>104</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 8 May 1972

<sup>105</sup> Chapter eight contains fuller details of the IWA's functions and campaigns, both nationally and in the woollen district.

<sup>106</sup> Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987), p. 266.

to pursue his economic objectives.’<sup>107</sup> Anwar suggested that the acceptance of inferior conditions related to initial Pakistani migrants’ beliefs that their time in Britain was temporary and that they would soon return home.<sup>108</sup> This vein of scholarship not only failed to recognise the efforts Asian immigrants went to in building organisations, but it also tends to ignore structural factors based in institutional racism and prejudice that prevented them from progressing at work.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, it failed to acknowledge the attitudes of the second generation, who appear to have been reluctant to accept ‘the subordinate role their parents may have accepted,’ as we shall see in chapter eight.<sup>110</sup> As such, it is important to acknowledge the many efforts Asian immigrants in the woollen district made in creating community groups.

A strong religious element prevailed in many Asian communities in the woollen district, mainly based around Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism:

Before we had the mosques the children were taught in somebody’s house... we decided to buy a few houses and these were converted later into mosques.<sup>111</sup>

My wife came to this country in ’67. By that time there was mosques and other clubs and religious activities.<sup>112</sup>

I go to the temple a lot because my dad likes us going, and not only that, it’s because I like going and I like meeting all my friends there because all my friends go... my dad’s in the committee there as well.<sup>113</sup>

There’s the Asian Women’s Centre where we are now. I do a bit of voluntary work here and, and just also come here... to meet other Asian women.<sup>114</sup>

Migrants arrived in the woollen district with various religious beliefs, and this gave some another focus for their social lives. For some migrants, as we saw in the previous chapter, religious belief gave them a particular identity around which to organise their community activities. A similar identity for wool textile workers – and a community that accompanied it – did not materialise in the post-war period.

Wool mills employed workers from various ethnic and national groups and the workplace was the only space in which there was the potential for significant interaction between them; however, this was not realised due to the way work was organised, as seen in chapter four.

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<sup>107</sup> Deakin et al, *Colour, Citizenship and British Society*, p. 293.

<sup>108</sup> Anwar, *The Myth of Return*, p. 21.

<sup>109</sup> Laura Price, ‘Immigrants and Apprentices,’ p. 36.

<sup>110</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 26 January 1973

<sup>111</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0123, recorded 8 September 1987.

<sup>112</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0104, recorded 14 April 1987.

<sup>113</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0079, recorded 11 September 1986.

<sup>114</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview C0057, recorded 4 March 1986.

The lack of woollen-only leisure space for most workers in the industry compounded this problem. Most wool textile workers did not have access to a dedicated space either for their particular workplace or for wool workers in general in which concerns specific to the wool industry could be discussed and workers from different ethnic and national groups could meet. This contrasts with the experience of other workers in the district: engineering works such as David Brown's of Huddersfield hosted sports teams, and ICI, also in Huddersfield, had a social club available for its hundreds of workers to use.<sup>115</sup> Similar opportunities for wool workers were limited: Bradford was home to some textile-based working men's clubs, such as the Warp Dyers' Club, founded in 1886, and Bradford's biggest wool social space was the Textile Hall, but access to the Hall was for NUDBTW members only, meaning the majority of wool textile workers could not use it.<sup>116</sup> The provision of such a facility was clearly not enough of an inducement for most wool workers to join the NUDBTW.<sup>117</sup> Wool textile workers did not socialise in occupationally-specific venues but spent their leisure time in more diverse spaces. This diversity, however, did not extend to ethnicity. Whilst mills were ethnically diverse overall, the different sections of mills tended to be ethnically segregated, meaning that there were few opportunities at work and at leisure for wool workers to mix.

### Conclusion

This chapter has interrogated the link between wool textile workers' capacity to organise collectively and the communities they lived in. By examining both the composition and social aspects of communities in the woollen district, their fragmentation is instantly apparent. The arrival of immigrants from Europe and the Commonwealth after 1945 created great diversity in the mills and the district, which increased as the century progressed and families joined migrants in Britain. Despite the large number of immigrants employed in the wool industry, there were few opportunities for workers from different ethnic groups to meet at work, as they often worked in different sections and on different shifts. Added to this, they rarely met during their leisure time; opportunities for wool textile workers to meet and discuss their common work-based problems were rare. Immigrant communities in the woollen district quickly established their own, separate organisations that catered exclusively for the different needs of these groups, such as Pakistani Welfare Associations that dealt with language difficulties and Polish Ex-Combatants Clubs that provided old comrades with support and camaraderie. These groups gave a sense of common identification and shared interest to members and, in some cases, provided services that mediated with employers.

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<sup>115</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 24 November 2010

<sup>116</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 11 December 1972

<sup>117</sup> See chapter three for more information on the NUDBTW and its appeal to the wool workforce.

It is not clear whether the absence of trade unionism was a cause or a result of divided communities in the woollen district. Evidence from the NUDBTW files reveals that wool trade unionism was more widespread in Halifax, a more ethnically homogeneous town, than in Huddersfield, which was more diverse. This suggests that there was more scope to organise in a town in which the wool workforce was not as divided by a myriad of identities. Communities and wool textile workers may have been more united had there been a stronger union presence providing a common identity based on work. Barron found that, in Durham mining communities in the 1920s, a diverse range of workers was united by the Durham Miners' Association, and it is possible that weak common identification in woollen communities was a result of weak trade unionism. It is very difficult to confirm the direction of causation: the sources that Barron used to investigate miners' identities – autobiographical and other writings – do not exist for wool textile workers. Furthermore, given the relative absence of trade union membership in the industry, most wool textile workers did not feel moved to discuss the issue in oral histories, whereas the interviewees in the oral history projects Barron surveyed had much more to say about unions because unions had been a part of their lives.

Communities in the woollen district were certainly divided. As we saw in chapter five, there was a range of different and competing identities available to wool textile workers, but work-based identities were generally weak and underdeveloped. The communities of the woollen district also reflected the fragmented structure of the industry and the diverse nature of the workforce.

Introduction

In October 1963, a workforce of two hundred and fifty at William Denby and Sons, a dyeworks in Baildon, near Shipley, spontaneously went on strike in response to a management breach of union rules; workers did not consult their union, the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (NUDBTW).<sup>1</sup> The next day, the union announced their support of the strike but the workers were sacked and the management declared that the works would not be a closed shop any more – workers would no longer be required to take out union membership in order to work there. The dispute lasted for eighteen months and was the only industrial relations incident of any note in the wool textile industry's history after the Second World War. Despite this, no academic studies of the lock-out exist and, indeed, although the dispute was widely commented upon in the local and national press, it was not thought significant at the time by many in positions of power: there was no discussion of the lock-out in Parliament. Union records and press reports provide the materials for this study of the strike. In August 2009, an article in the *Telegraph and Argus*, Bradford's local newspaper (and, by extension, Baildon's) included an appeal for former workers to contact the newspaper with memories of the lock-out so that they could be included in this thesis: only one reply was received by a former Denby's staff man who was not in the union, and the *Telegraph and Argus* printed one response which referred to an earlier 1937 strike (which contained no new information).<sup>2</sup> Although the sources available are limited in nature, the contrast between the union's portrayal of the lock-out and that of local and national newspapers is sufficient to create a balanced view of events. The lack of material available from management means that it is only possible to make inferences about the reasons behind their decisions.

In focusing on a rare occurrence of trade union action, this chapter will test the arguments set out in the rest of the thesis, most particularly those about the structure and organisation of the industry in chapter four and the identities of wool textile workers in chapter five. The chapter will explore the background to the dispute, including a discussion about the 1937 strike that happened at Denby's. Industrial relations in the period will also be briefly outlined. The lock-out will be discussed in detail, and the aftermath of the dispute, including the problems faced by blackleg workers who wanted to join the NUDBTW in the 1970s, will be considered. It is important to consider why the lock-out occurred in an industry that was generally not strike-prone.

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<sup>1</sup> An overview of the NUDBTW in the post-war period can be found in chapter three.

<sup>2</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 28 August 2009; *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 2 October 2009; email correspondence between author and S.K., 2 October 2009.

This chapter demonstrates that many of the conditions that hampered trade union organisation in much of the industry were absent at Denby's: the firm employed a larger-than-average workforce, and due to the larger numbers of workers, face-to-face relations with employers was not a significant feature of life at the firm. Additionally, the workforce had previously engaged in industrial action in the 1930s, with trade union membership also dating to this decade, so a collective tradition existed at the firm. These factors were significant in creating an environment in which trade union membership – and industrial disputes – were possible. Therefore, whilst the lock-out is an example of rare industrial action in post-war wool textiles, it can also be seen as consistent with the argument presented in this thesis: that workplaces which were small in size were less likely to produce workers who joined trade unions and that disputes were, in part, uncommon because of the relationship between owners and workers.

### Industrial Relations in the 1960s

It is important to preface the discussion on the Denby's case with contextual information that may account for the way managers at Denby's handled the lock-out and how the dispute was portrayed in the press. Public attitudes towards trade unions in the 1960s have been well documented by labour historians. Keith Laybourn argued that 'there was clearly a wartime consensus between employers, the state and unions that appears to have lasted at least until the late 1960s,' although he acknowledged that there had been some debate regarding how far a post-war consensus existed at all.<sup>3</sup> He went on to say that there was growing uncertainty amongst Labour government ministers in the Wilson administration as to the role of trade unions in hampering the economy, not least because of the increasing amount of strikes occurring each year throughout the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Jim Tomlinson pointed to concerns in the period about national economic productivity, commenting that in the 1960s a belief that there was a 'productivity problem' was central to public debates on the economy.<sup>5</sup> This related to the research he conducted with Nick Tiratsoo about restrictive practices, which highlighted the common contemporary view that workers and trade unions were to blame for economic problems in the post-war era.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that Denby's managers shared this view; although there is no indication that the firm was struggling financially, it was clear to all in the period that the wool textile industry was in decline and fears about the apparent power of trade unions may have contributed to the managers' general stance in the course of the strike.

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<sup>3</sup> Keith Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism c. 1770-1990* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 157-158.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'The British "Productivity Problem" in the 1960s,' *Past and Present* (no. 175), May 2002, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> Nick Tiratsoo and Jim Tomlinson, 'Restrictive Practices on the Shopfloor in Britain: Myth and Reality,' *Business History*, 36 (2), April 1994, p. 65.

Tiratsoo and Tomlinson were not alone in highlighting this: Alan Booth also commented on the ‘British disease,’ and Chris Wrigley discussed the perception that trade unions had too much power in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Catriona MacDonald referred to management frustration due to poor productivity at the British Motor Corporation’s Bathgate plant which resulted in ‘deep distrust’ between the workforce and management.<sup>8</sup> Although distrust was not evident in all areas of the wool textile industry in the post-war era, we shall see later in the chapter that there was a poor relationship between managers and workers at Denby’s which contributed to the dispute’s longevity. The government was also concerned about the relationship between trade unions and the economy: the wide discussion of issues such as productivity and restrictive practices prompted a Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers’ Associations which reported in 1968, known as the Donovan Commission, in order to investigate possible areas for reform.<sup>9</sup> The Donovan Commission reported that union leaders were ‘out of touch’ and that shops stewards were gaining increasing power in the workplace.<sup>10</sup> The Employment Minister, Barbara Castle, produced a white paper loosely based on the Donovan report entitled *In Place of Strife*, proposing procedures which would make it more difficult for workers to go on strike.<sup>11</sup> It was never passed into law, but its proposal shows that the Wilson government was concerned with the number of strikes occurring and the power of trade unions. Although the Denby’s lock-out was small scale compared to others that had occurred in the 1960s, it was part of the tide of industrial action which contributed to growing public disquiet about union power.

#### William Denby & Sons: Background to the 1963-65 Dispute

The 1963 dispute was the first official industrial action in the wool textile industry since the end of the Second World War and began on Wednesday 30 October when a manager operated machinery during a lunch break, a contravention of union rules in Yorkshire and

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Booth, *The British Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 123; Chris Wrigley, ‘Industrial Relations,’ in Nicholas Crafts, Ian Gazeley and Andrew Newell (eds.), *Work and Pay in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2007), p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> Catriona Louise MacDonald, ‘Affluent Workers in a Proletarian Nation? Work and Labour Relations at BMC Bathgate, 1961-1986,’ in Anne Baldwin, Chris Ellis, Stephen Etheridge, Keith Laybourn and Neil Pye (eds.), *Class, Culture and Community: New Perspectives in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Labour History* (Newcastle, 2012), pp. 78-79.

<sup>9</sup> Chris Wrigley, ‘Industrial Relations,’ p. 205; John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, ‘The High Tide of Trade Unionism: Mapping Industrial Politics, 1964-79,’ in John McIlroy, Nina Fishman and Alan Campbell (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, volume two: the High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964-79* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 94; Jim Phillips, ‘Industrial Relations, Historical Contingencies and Political Economy: Britain in the 1960s and 1970s,’ *Labour History Review*, 72 (3), December 2007, p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers’ Associations, 1965-68. Chairman: the Rt. Hon. Lord Donovan. Report Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, (London, 1968), p. 29, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (London, 2014), p. 295.



Lancashire finishing shops that forbade ‘staff’ men from working on machinery.<sup>12</sup> The men usually engaged on the machine struck immediately; by the end of the day, the whole of the firm’s workforce of two hundred and fifty had joined them.<sup>13</sup> They would never regain their jobs at Denby’s. The same day, the secretary of the board, Charles Spencer, issued a circular letter to all those on strike dismissing them immediately under orders from the managing director, Philip Wright.<sup>14</sup> This was the beginning of a lock-out that would end on 20 February 1965 in defeat for the workers.<sup>15</sup> The lock-out was remarkable not only for its longevity – described by the *Observer* as ‘one of the longest – and oddest – disputes that the trade union movement has ever known,’ perhaps due to the stalemate that characterised discussions between management and the union – but also for its occurrence.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the dispute was an uncommon occurrence of trade union action in an industry characterised by inaction: Denby’s was a closed shop in an industrial landscape of low trade union membership, picketing turned violent and the local community was divided by the actions of strikers and directors alike. When considering the occurrence of action of this magnitude, it is also important to discuss why the NUDBTW gained a foothold at Denby’s that was almost unheard of in wool textiles.

The mill was located in Baildon, near Shipley and five miles from Bradford, in an area on the edge of moorland and near the River Aire. At the time of the strike, the population of Baildon was around 12,000.<sup>17</sup> From the medieval period, the area was home to a coal mine, but as the grade of coal was poor the local mine closed in 1863.<sup>18</sup> By the 1960s, a guide to the area produced by Baildon Urban District Council noted that, ‘wool and wool processing is still important in Baildon but is not, by any means, the only industry.’<sup>19</sup> Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel’s theory of the isolated mass – whereby a workforce is geographically isolated from workers in other industries, leading to the workforce being more strike prone – certainly does not apply here due to the mixed nature of employment, despite Baildon’s

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<sup>12</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/8, Transport and General Workers’ Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 9 November 1963; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, ‘Confidential: the Denby Dispute,’ anonymous, undated; *Guardian*, 2 November 1963.

<sup>13</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/8, Transport and General Workers’ Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 9 November 1963.

<sup>14</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Circular Letter from William Denby & Sons, 30 October 1963.

<sup>15</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 20 February 1965.

<sup>16</sup> *Observer*, 20 September 1964

<sup>17</sup> Baildon Urban District Council, *Baildon, Yorks.: the Official Guide* (Cheltenham and London, c. 1965), p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

isolated location.<sup>20</sup> Another guide book to Baildon gave an indication of the historical tradition of industrial action, however, stating that Thomas Gill, the owner of the mill at Tong Park that would later become the property of William Denby & Sons, ‘had trouble with operatives’ who ‘opposed the introduction of [combing] machinery’ leading to his request for ‘military protection.’<sup>21</sup> Gill acquired the Tong Park works in 1804; it is likely that the incident referred to was a part of the Luddite disturbances although this is not explicitly stated. In any case, it indicates that the area’s wool textile workers had a tradition of action dating to the early nineteenth century. Of course, many other wool settlements were involved in the Luddite uprisings and did not see any further industrial action after that, but in the case of Baildon it marked the beginning of periodic disturbances within the area’s staple industry.

The Denby family acquired the Tong Park mills in 1849 following persuasion from Samuel Lister, possibly the most famous wool magnate of the area following Sir Titus Salt.<sup>22</sup> They also purchased two hundred acres of land surrounding the mill and built another works on this site.<sup>23</sup> The company’s articles of association from 1935 listed extensive property in the local area, including two mills, as well as sheds, dyehouses and garages making up the site known as Tong Park Mills, along with extensive company housing, a Co-op Store, a Reading Room and an Institute.<sup>24</sup>

There was nothing particularly significant about Baildon that produced a workforce more prepared to organise and to strike than elsewhere in the region. Its location between an urban area and moorland was similar to many other parts of the woollen district, such as the Colne Valley near Huddersfield, but these other areas produced no significantly organised workforces and no strikes of any note in the twentieth century. Its population was also typical of the woollen district: primarily engaged in wool mills but with a proportion working in other industries.<sup>25</sup> The presence of a paternalistic owner set the area apart from

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<sup>20</sup> Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, ‘The Isolated Mass and the Integrated Individual: an International Analysis of the Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike’ (Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, 1952), <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/28722/bk003s6s2h> accessed 7 November 2010, p. 17. Kerr and Siegel’s theory, and its application to the wool textile industry, is discussed in chapter six of this thesis. It has been refuted by other scholars including David Gilbert, who described the theory as ‘a sociology without history’ and Roy Church and Quentin Outram, who argued that studies such as Kerr and Siegel’s ‘see social and industrial solidarity as an unproblematic outcome of social, economic and occupational homogeneity.’ David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford, 1992), p. 12; Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1966* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 140.

<sup>21</sup> John La Page, *The Story of Baildon* (Bradford, 1951), p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter six for a fuller discussion of the occupational make-up of the woollen district based on census data.

many other woollen district locales, especially into the twentieth century (as shall be seen shortly), but it seems far more likely that relations with a paternalistic owner would lead to passivity due to the overarching control they had over their workers' lives.<sup>26</sup> As many mills employed a very small number of workers, face-to-face relations with the employer were common in wool: Patrick Joyce noted that as early as the nineteenth century, it was a common practice for workers to take their concerns and grievances directly to the owner himself rather than an overlooker or manager; indeed, Joyce's assertion was that deference developed due to 'dependence' on paternalists in later Victorian factories.<sup>27</sup> Cyril Pearce asserted that this face-to-face relationship persisted into the twentieth century in Huddersfield wool textile firms.<sup>28</sup> It is difficult to argue that the presence of a paternalist owner would lead to greater organisation of the workforce and more incidences of industrial action.

With around two hundred and fifty workers, Denby's had a larger workforce than the majority of wool textile mills of this period, with fifty-two per cent of the industry's workers employed in mills of ninety or fewer operatives in the 1960s.<sup>29</sup> Such firms numbered eight hundred and fifty, as against ninety firms employing around six hundred workers.<sup>30</sup> This was the major difference between Denby's and most other wool textile mills: with such a large workforce, face-to-face relations with the management would be difficult to maintain so recourse to more formal procedures would be commonplace. Furthermore, a larger workforce was easier to organise in terms of recruiting members, holding meetings and general communication of union issues. Maintaining organisation between workers across very small workplaces is likely to have been very difficult, due to the practicalities of organising meetings at a time convenient to people with different working hours and creating a union-based identity. In larger workplaces, there were fewer practical difficulties of organisation which allowed for more effective communication between the union, its members and its potential members. This is the most significant reason why the Denby's workforce was organised. Somewhat less importantly, the firm was dominated by white men, as most dyeworks were. The relative absence of women and immigrant workers at the mill could have allowed for the creation of more solid bonds between the men at the works

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<sup>26</sup> Paternalism in wool textiles is discussed at greater length in chapter four.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: the Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980), pp. 98-100.

<sup>28</sup> Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: the Story of an English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London, 2001), p. 37. The issue of face-to-face relations between mill owners and workers is explored in chapter four.

<sup>29</sup> Steve Winyard, *Trouble Looming: Low Pay in the Wool Textile Industry* (London, 1980), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

and a stronger work-based identity which could have been the basis of trade union organisation.<sup>31</sup>

The firm's history also played a role in workers' relationships with trade unions and willingness to strike, although one of lesser importance than the size of the workforce. According to the handwritten notes of Mike Lawson, a former Denby's employee, a strike for union recognition had happened at the firm between February and May 1937.<sup>32</sup> A tradition of industrial action set Denby's apart from most other wool textile firms; the action of 1937 probably acted as a reference point in the collective memory of the workforce, a tradition that many other firms lacked. Previous action at the firm is one of the distinctive traits of the Denby's workforce, along with its larger-than-usual size and the related lack of face-to-face relations with managers that existed in many other mills. In the months leading up to the 1937 strike, the NUDBTW, which was recently formed from several other textile-worker unions, accepted around eighty applications for membership from workers at Denby's, leading to what Lawson described as a 'strong reaction' from the management of the firm.<sup>33</sup> The new union members were concerned about the operation of overtime at the firm, as those working overtime were not paid the rates that were routinely available to those in other wool textile mills.<sup>34</sup> Two men who challenged management for union recognition were dismissed, with the firm asserting that it had operated for a hundred and twenty years without a union presence and were not now prepared to accept union representatives negotiating the conditions of labour.<sup>35</sup> When the union conveyed this message to its new members at the firm, they ceased work.<sup>36</sup>

A war of words in the Bradford newspaper the *Telegraph and Argus* ensued, with the directors continuing to advertise for more workers paid at 'union rates' and the union countering with an advert of their own calling for local dyers, finishers and scourers to resist the call from Denby's due to the ongoing dispute.<sup>37</sup> On 29 May 1937, the union announced that the strike was over; the firm was clearly uninterested in negotiating and the strikers, who had been paid £1 per week in strike pay, were all left unemployed (which, in turn, left an estimated half of the residents of Tong Park without work).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See chapter four and chapter five for more discussion on the role of gender and ethnic identities in relation to trade union organisation. Chapter three discusses the NUDBTW's sluggishness in recruiting women and immigrant workers, focusing instead on skilled white men as their primary constituency. This, too, may have had an impact on closed shops such as Denby's.

<sup>32</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

The paternalistic traits of the Denby family at this time were discussed in an interview with the child of a former Denby's worker, and a Baildon resident, by the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit in 1985. He commented that,

... everything around there was centred on Denby's... it was almost as though you were servants of them really because the property and everything belonged to Denby's.<sup>39</sup>

The man, born in 1900, lived on Denby's property in the Tong Park area of Baildon and his father and brother both worked in positions of seniority at the firm: his father was 'in charge of the piece room where the pieces came up from the looms, and the burlers and menders,' and his brother 'eventually rose to a director and secretary at Denby's.'<sup>40</sup> His testimony is likely to have been coloured by close association with supervisory and management staff, but the interview remains a useful source as one of the few personal accounts of the firm and the Denby family available. Despite his observation that those living on Denby's property were like 'servants' of the family, he praised the family, stating,

They were very good you know, but it was different in those days. They considered themselves and even the people who lived there considered that they were far above them socially. There was no mixing, but they were a good family really.<sup>41</sup>

He described the actions of the family in local life, alluding to a paternalism that had died out in many other areas by the early twentieth century:

... they did enter very well into village life, particularly Miss Alice Denby took a big interest in the chapel. Those days it was Wesleyan, it wasn't Methodist, it was Wesleyan Methodist... she took a big interest in local life... she arranged concerts and one thing and another, and if you were anything to do with the concert you were invited up at some future date to a bit of supper or something, you know.<sup>42</sup>

It is unclear who among the workforce would have had access to involvement in organising concerts with the daughter of the family but their influence in local life is obvious from this excerpt of the interview. Furthermore, he had much to say about the conduct of the firm during the 1963-65 lock-out, describing it as a 'nasty business' and making pains to note that 'I had nothing to do with it.'<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it seems that the dispute caused some problems within his family; by this time, his brother 'was secretary and treasurer there, and he had the wretched job of having to send everyone their dismissal notices' but he also had a sister

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<sup>39</sup> Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, Interview A0162, 23 August 1985.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

there who was ‘a burler and mender...she was a striker,’ which ‘was a bit awkward!’<sup>44</sup> He adds that his family remained on speaking terms despite the fact that his brother dismissed his sister from her job, but that ‘there were families at Tong Park that were split up from top to bottom’ by the lock-out.<sup>45</sup>

The matter of how the firm came to be a closed shop has proven difficult to ascertain with certainty. According to Mike Lawson, the firm’s papers are not deposited at any archive, and when the firm was taken over by Bodycote he reported that they ‘had no interest in their history;’ he is also unaware of any private or family collection of papers, noting ‘I do not like to think what was lost.’<sup>46</sup> Additionally, there is no mention of the issue in the minutes of the NUDBTW executive committee. A newspaper report from November 1963 states that Denby’s had been a closed shop since 1941.<sup>47</sup> This roughly coincides with the time the Denby family handed control of the firm to managing director Maurice Wright. It is possible that Wright may have, initially, been willing to allow a closed shop. It is also possible that the closed shop was operated on the union’s terms only: as we shall see, Wright and his successors (also members of his family) were as enamoured of trade unions as their predecessors, and it may be that the NUDBTW imposed a closed-shop policy without the full support of the board of directors.

The 1937 strike was the start of a collective tradition of action at the works and had implications for the 1963 lock-out, including violence on the part of the workers. This is difficult to prove, especially given the few oral history interviews with Denby’s workers present in the Bradford Library collection and the general unwillingness of those involved in the dispute to come forward with information. However, it is probable that workers in the 1960s were aware of the 1937 strike, especially since it is possible that some workers who had been employed at the time of the earlier dispute were still working at the firm. Furthermore, the children and relatives of the 1937 strikers may also have followed their families into the mill. There are several similarities between the two disputes, as will be seen in the coming pages. Lawson reported that twenty-three strikers in 1937 appeared at Otley Police Court on charges of using violence and intimidation against non-strikers; this was something to be repeated in the 1960s.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, the firm’s unwillingness to engage with union representatives was mirrored almost exactly by the directors in the 1960s. The bitterness of the 1937 strike was repeated and multiplied in the mid-1960s and both incidents ended similarly. Indeed, without the 1937 strike, it is possible that the actions of the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Correspondence between author and Mike Lawson, 7 September 2009.

<sup>47</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 9 November 1963.

<sup>48</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

company directors would have been different in the 1960s, but the workers were not alone in their creation of a tradition of action and the later lock-out followed many patterns that had emerged in the 1930s. Most importantly, any tradition of action that may have existed in collective memory was communicated amongst a large workforce that was also easier for the union to organise.

#### The Industrial Action of 1963-65

After downing tools on 30 October 1963, the strikers at Denby's were issued with a letter from the firm's secretary, Charles Spencer, dismissing them from their jobs. The letter detailed the board's attitude to the strike, claiming that,

Neither your wage nor the company's conditions of employment under which you were originally engaged have been altered or deviated in the slightest degree.<sup>49</sup>

It went on to say that the firm was 'greatly distressed' that the workers were 'no longer satisfied' with their employment, which gave the firm 'no alternative but to terminate our part of the contract too.'<sup>50</sup> Enclosed with the letter were employees' Employment and Insurance Cards 'to enable you to obtain other employment with the minimum of delay.'<sup>51</sup> However unequivocal this sounds, there was a further message: if the strikers were 'prepared to alter [their] decision,' the firm would be 'ready and willing to consider your reinstatement under exactly the same conditions and wage rates as before but no longer under union domination,' ending by saying that 'All we desire is peace, goodwill and happiness' and that they 'look forward to a happier future as an open shop.'<sup>52</sup> This was the message, then: you may return to work if you are prepared to no longer work in a closed shop. The benefits of having an 'open' shop to the management were largely related to pay, in that they would be able to dictate rates of pay and would not have to abide by any union settlements. Additionally, they would not be bound by union customs. Their reference to 'union domination' speaks clearly about their relationship with the NUDBTW and suggests that they felt an 'open' shop would allow for the management to make their own decisions free of union involvement.

The symbolic links with the 1937 strike are clear and, despite the change in the family dominating the firm's board, the directors remained against the principle of a closed shop. Indeed, Philip Wright, the managing director, commented in an interview with the local Bradford newspaper, the *Telegraph and Argus*, that

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<sup>49</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Circular Letter from William Denby & Sons, 30 October 1963.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

It is most regretful to us that all our employees are obliged to follow blindly the dictates of their labour union... The union has of late failed to control its members, failed to understand the problems of the 60s, failed to realise that we are not in business for its sole benefit, failed to curtail the activities of agitators, and above all failed to co-operate with the management of our company.<sup>53</sup>

Clearly Wright felt that the lock-out was the latest in a long list of problems the firm had had with the union, and indeed may have taken the opportunity of the strike to clamp down on what he felt was a situation spiralling out of control with regards to the union's power in the workplace. Mike Lawson's notes echoed the sentiment that Wright expressed, believing that the reason the management took such strong action against the strikers was that there had been an 'uneasy' peace in the workplace leading up to the strike and that there was strong anti-union feeling among the management, who felt that the NUDBTW refused to co-operate with them, although he did not note what they would not comply with.<sup>54</sup> A report in the *Telegraph and Argus* also referred to 'an undercurrent of trouble regarding dyeworks practices.'<sup>55</sup>

The union considered the strike to be a lock-out, and that it was an attempt to deny the workers their right to union representation; it is not clear whether or not the directors would ban union membership among its workforce, but the many references to an 'open shop' make it obvious that the closed-shop arrangement had come to an end.<sup>56</sup> Legally, the firm's right to lock out its workers was enshrined in law: Bryn Perrins noted that 'Strikes, lockouts, and so forth are to be seen as a legitimate means to the end of achieving a bargain' for both unions and employers.<sup>57</sup> He added that employees had the legal right to join a trade union.<sup>58</sup> As such, Denby's would have broken the law had they outright denied their workers to join a union. Since there is no indication that there were any legal implications of the lock-out, we can assume that the firm did not ban its members from union membership but changed the conditions of their employment with regards to the closed-shop agreement.

The union's Executive Committee minute books are dominated by the dispute between the first meeting of the Committee after its occurrence, on 9 November 1963, and the lock-out's end in February 1965. Talks about the lock-out began on 1 November between the firm,

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<sup>53</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 30 October 1963.

<sup>54</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

<sup>55</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 30 October 1963.

<sup>56</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/8, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 9 November 1963.

<sup>57</sup> Bryn Perrins, *Trade Union Law* (London, 1985), p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 234.



Leonard Sharp, General Secretary of the NUDBTW, and a representative of the Textile Finishers Trades Federation, of which Denby's was a member.<sup>59</sup> Talks with the Ministry of Labour's Industrial Relations Officer were held on 4 November but with no resolution.<sup>60</sup> This was the beginning of a series of talks between the union and the management of the firm, sometimes with the presence of Ministry of Labour and trade association officials, which were ultimately fruitless and brought about very little progress. Indeed, union minutes referred to the 'complete deadlock' that characterised the talks as early as 14 December 1963, just two months into the fifteen-month lock-out, noting that each side would offer deals that the other side would not accept.<sup>61</sup> With this in mind, Sharp had contacted the Trades Union Congress's General Council to refer the dispute.<sup>62</sup>

Sharp also sought the support of other trade unions, especially those connected with the firm. On 24 November 1963, the union held a public meeting in Shipley where support was given by 'other unions' but this largely appears to have been the beginning and end of the wider trade union movement's support for the lock-out.<sup>63</sup> The union's branches appeared to be broadly supportive of the dispute, with the minutes noting that Bradford Number 1 branch, as well as branches in Greetland, Halifax, Horsforth, Shipley and Yeadon, had written to the Executive Committee suggesting strike pay be increased from the current amount of £5 per week for men and £3/10 per week for women to £10 per week for all workers.<sup>64</sup> The Committee took the decision to raise strike pay to £6 per week for men and £4 per week for women based on the strength of feeling in the branches.<sup>65</sup> A letter from the union's Number 1 District branch, in Bradford, sent out to branch members in August 1964, stated that, to date, £43,000 had been distributed to locked-out workers from union funds and a further £10,209 had been raised in voluntary donations.<sup>66</sup> The letter solicited for further donations from its members to support the locked-out workers.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

<sup>60</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/8, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 9 November 1963.

<sup>61</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 14 December 1963.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/8, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 9 November 1963.

<sup>65</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 14 December 1963.

<sup>66</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Letter from Number 1 Branch to Members, 1 August 1964.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

However, despite apparent support for Denby's workers from branches, the locked-out workers themselves felt frustrated by the way the Executive Committee was handling the dispute. In a document titled, 'How can we win at this stage?', Les Hird, the strike committee chairman, enumerated several suggestions for the union's members to take to the Executive Committee. The first was to press the Executive for 'more vigorous action' with other unions, as he felt routine procedures were not enough at this stage, and that letters should be sent to the Committee from branches to ask what steps were being taken; furthermore, he suggested pressing the Committee for more financial aid for locked-out workers and for the payment of their National Insurance stamps.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, he called for all members of the National Association of Unions in the Textile Trades (NAUTT), a confederation of textile unions, to be called out on strike in support of the Denby's workers.<sup>69</sup> Hird concluded the letter by saying, 'We have fought for seven months, it is a cheerless task made worse by having to constantly badger the executive.'<sup>70</sup>

The locked-out workers were not alone in their discontent. In an anonymous, undated document circulated 'to all delegates,' presumably at the union's annual conference, there were further calls to involve other trade unions to strengthen the dispute as the 'Executive have not been tough enough.'<sup>71</sup> The document stated that only the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) had fully supported the strike, with members of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) continuing deliveries to the works and the National Union of Miners (NUM) continuing to supply the firm with coal.<sup>72</sup> The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) had refused to deliver goods to the factory but this made little difference when TGWU and NUM members continued to operate as usual.<sup>73</sup> Even more damaging, the NAUTT had not pressed their member unions to support the locked-out workers; the Pressers' Union had five members working at Denby's who did not support these workers but the Executive Committee did not call a meeting with the NAUTT to discuss matters.<sup>74</sup> Bill Tudor, secretary of the Power Group of the TGWU, said that the NUDBTW should 'not try to humiliate organisations that have tried to work with them.'<sup>75</sup> The document is likely to have been circulated at the 1964 annual conference where representatives of the strikers – Hird presumably among them – responded to Len Sharp with 'bitter attacks' on the Executive Committee's apparent lack of vigour.<sup>76</sup> The NUDBTW

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<sup>68</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Les Hird, 'How can we win at this stage?' undated.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, 'Confidential: the Denby Dispute,' anonymous, undated;

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Guardian*, 7 September 1965.

<sup>76</sup> *Guardian*, 1 June 1964.

responded to pressure from the locked-out workers and branches to call for other dyers and finishers to strike, calling out 30,000 such workers in January 1965, but the call was not taken up.<sup>77</sup> The document's anonymous author opined that, 'this is a test case for textiles,' which, if lost, would result in a drop in membership, widespread disillusionment among textile workers and increased confidence among mill owners to break the principle of the closed shop.<sup>78</sup> Although closed shops in wool textiles were rare and trade union membership was low, it is clear that there was strong feeling from some quarters about how the dispute was being managed by the union. This was not helped by the continuing stalemate between the union and the firm's management.

The deadlock continued as the firm refused to accept the union's proposals to reinstate the sacked workers in meetings in December 1963 and January 1964. By this point of the dispute, Mike Lawson noted that those within the industry regarded the incident as the most serious dispute in the dyeing and finishing industry for thirty years.<sup>79</sup> At a meeting on 8 January 1964, the union suggested that the firm should give the union full recognition (by which they presumably meant a retention of the closed shop), take back forty of the locked-out men immediately and others as work became available, and dismiss twenty of the non-union workers employed since the beginning of the dispute, with no victimisation of employees who were union members.<sup>80</sup> The firm flatly rejected this offer, maintaining that they wished to continue business as an 'open' shop. However, Gerald Wright, a director of the firm, had visited locked-out workers' homes in January 1964 offering them their jobs back on a non-union basis.<sup>81</sup> This appeal demonstrated that, despite claims to the contrary, the firm was feeling considerable pressure to maintain its previous output, but there is no record of any workers returning as a result of these visits. By February, the firm had sixty non-union workers filling the places of the locked-out workers, and claimed that they could carry on production with ease, despite Gerald Wright's efforts to entice back those who were

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<sup>77</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

<sup>78</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, 'Confidential: the Denby Dispute,' anonymous, undated.

<sup>79</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

<sup>80</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 11 January 1964.

<sup>81</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

locked-out.<sup>82</sup> That the firm was sticking to its original plan of maintaining an ‘open’ shop was clear, yet the union continued to call meetings with them. These ended in stalemate.

The Executive Committee meeting minutes of 22 February 1964 noted that the firm no longer wanted to negotiate with the union, with the Industrial Relations Officer of the Ministry of Labour adding that the firm was taking a decisive stand so there could no longer be any Ministry involvement.<sup>83</sup> Despite this, later in 1964, Len Sharp approached William Whitelaw, then the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, asking him to look into conciliation once more. Whitelaw replied to him in May 1964 saying that as the Regional Industrial Relations Officer, a Mr Duncalf, had had his attempts at settlement rebuffed by the firm, there was ‘no further action which the Ministry of Labour can usefully take at the present time.’<sup>84</sup>

At the NUDBTW Executive Committee meeting on 7 March 1964, the decision was taken to ‘black’ Denby’s – to ban their members from working at the firm and to deny membership to anyone within the firm.<sup>85</sup> This appears not to have been the union’s original strategy but a response to the firm’s stance in negotiations. Any member of the NUDBTW found to take employment at the firm would be liable to expulsion. This move was taken in the context of the firm’s complete unwillingness to negotiate; furthermore, the union began to take steps to place the locked-out workers in new employment.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, the union expelled thirty-two members of the Shipley branch for continuing to work at the firm during the lock-out.<sup>87</sup>

In September 1964, Philip Wright declared that the firm was ‘happier than ever before’ in the company’s annual report, noting that ‘The fears and threats of yesteryear are gone and co-operation reigns where disruption ruled before.’<sup>88</sup> He stated that he didn’t want ‘agitators and troublemakers’ back at work, adding that ‘Our men now earn more than ever before’ and that ‘The restrictive practices have been swept away.’<sup>89</sup> The details of what the restrictive practices he referred to constituted are unclear. A note on a Ministry of Labour file on the strike stated that ‘the firm are managing quite well and are in no mood for compromise with

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<sup>82</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 8 February 1964.

<sup>83</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 22 February 1964.

<sup>84</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 43/73, Ministry of Labour Department of Employment Private Office records, Letter from William Whitelaw to Leonard Sharp, 20 May 1964.

<sup>85</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 7 March 1964.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, 15 September 1964.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

the union.’<sup>90</sup> Len Sharp questioned Wright’s cheerfulness, however, describing his report of his workers’ happiness as ‘exaggerated nonsense.’<sup>91</sup> This was not the only war of words that Wright and Sharp had. Indeed, earlier in the dispute their sparring took a Biblical turn. On learning that Wright had taken inspiration from St Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians when deciding to lock out the striking workers – with Wright presumably associating ‘the wiles of the Devil’ with the trade union movement – Sharp responded by quoting Matthew 5:9 (‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God’) to a protest rally in Shipley in November 1963.<sup>92</sup>

The dispute took another curious turn when Ken Atkinson, secretary of the Number 1 branch of the union in Bradford, bought shares in Denby’s so that he could influence policy from within. At a meeting with thirty-two other shareholders on 7 October 1964, he asked them to give guidance to the directors on how they felt about the lock-out; however, his bold request backfired when the other shareholders expressed their unanimous support for the directors’ conduct during the dispute.<sup>93</sup> A Mr Bottomley, another shareholder, noted that the workers had walked out ‘in a flare of temper’ and that the directors could have taken no other action in response.<sup>94</sup> Philip Wright told Atkinson that he was ‘out of order’ in attempting to subvert the meeting.<sup>95</sup>

For the rest of the lock-out, until February 1965, the union minutes recorded the slow but increasing number of strikers placed in new employment with the union’s assistance – by April, twenty-two men had found new work (with two strikers giving up their union membership to return to Denby’s).<sup>96</sup> In May, a further twelve workers were placed in jobs with forty-two others obtaining employment for themselves within textiles or other industries; however, 141 strikers were still unemployed and in receipt of strike pay.<sup>97</sup> Most local workers were employed in textiles but if other nearby mills were experiencing a ‘slack’ period with little work, there would be only limited chances of securing employment within them. Furthermore, as we saw in chapter one, the industry was in decline throughout the post-war period, and so job opportunities were vanishing with every passing year. Seven

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<sup>90</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 43/73, Ministry of Labour Department of Employment Private Office records, File Note on Denby’s Strike, 11 May 1964.

<sup>91</sup> *The Times*, 16 September 1964.

<sup>92</sup> *Guardian*, 25 November 1964.

<sup>93</sup> *Guardian*, 7 October 1964.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 4 April 1964.

<sup>97</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 2 May 1964.

more members were expelled in these two months for continuing to work at Denby's.<sup>98</sup> In July, Philip Wright, the firm's managing director, refused any further meetings and said that he was happy for the firm to remain 'black,' since he wanted to operate a non-union shop.<sup>99</sup>

From this point, the union came under pressure from its branches to end the dispute, with letters to the committee stating that since it was clear the firm would not back down, and since the union had tried to resolve the dispute as best they could, it was now time to 'admit defeat.'<sup>100</sup> By February 1965, after fifteen months of the dispute, the Executive Committee decided that, 'No useful purpose could be served by continuing the dispute in its present form.'<sup>101</sup> They also decided to retain Denby's status as a 'blackened' company, effectively barring any NUDBTW member from working there and from any Denby's employee gaining NUDBTW membership.<sup>102</sup> The focus in the coming months was to place the locked-out workers in new employment and they were all advised to register at their local Employment Exchange.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, it was announced that no other dyeworks would officially join the dispute.<sup>104</sup> The dispute ended in the total defeat of the locked-out workers and of the union. Denby's remained 'blackened' until the union merged with the TGWU in 1982.

### Reactions to the Dispute

The dispute was not discussed in Parliament and, indeed, appears to have had limited impact on those sitting in the Commons and the Lords. In February 1966, a year after the lock-out's end, Arthur Tiley, MP for Bradford West, a constituency only a few miles from Baildon, stated in the Commons during a debate on wool textile industry levies:

In Bradford, it is over 50 years since there was *a strike of any sort* in the industry, and that has been due to the two matters which the Minister mentioned. First, we

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<sup>98</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 4 April 1964; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 2 May 1964.

<sup>99</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 25 July 1964.

<sup>100</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 28 November 1964.

<sup>101</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D82/1/3, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 20 February 1965.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), 5D84/7, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Bradford No. 1 Branch records, Handwritten Notes about William Denby & Sons by Mike Lawson, undated.

have been blessed with wise trade union leadership for more than half a century. Secondly, because small firms—hundreds of them—together with the big ones, take part in this great industry, and we have had the tradition of the employer knowing almost everybody on his staff by name, and knowing their family troubles. I have experienced this tradition of friendship all my life. I was born in Bradford, and the Wool Textile Delegation, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Bradford, South has its head office in the centre of the city.<sup>105</sup>

Whilst the Denby's dispute was not actually in Bradford, it was very nearby; furthermore, the last serious strike to take place across the wool textile industry was in 1930, involving workers from all areas of the woollen district and involving 120,000 workers with 3258 days lost to the strike, only thirty-six years prior to this statement.<sup>106</sup> Its apparent unimportance was made clear in this statement: either Tiley was unaware of its occurrence, which is unlikely given his constituency's close location to Baildon, or it was not deemed worthy of mention due to the relatively small numbers involved. His comment on 'wise trade union leadership' is particularly interesting when juxtaposed both with contemporary debates on trade unionism and the leadership of the NUDBTW who had very recently committed themselves to a lock-out that seemed difficult to win due to the management's clearly stated position. Tiley's statement suggests that even woollen district MPs were not well informed about key issues affecting the industry, particularly its industrial relations.

Tiley was not the only politician with limited knowledge of industrial relations in the wool textile industry. In a debate on the Industrial Relations Bill in May 1971, Lord Delacourt-Smith discussed the industrial relations record in wool textiles:

There has not been a major strike in this section of the industry [finishing] since the inception of these arrangements 24 years ago. The record of industrial peace goes back to 1929, apart from a very small number of local stoppages.<sup>107</sup>

Clearly, despite his tenure as General Secretary of the Post Office Engineering Union since 1953, Lord Delacourt-Smith was unaware of the 1930 strike and he did not view an eighteen-month-long dispute in dyeing, part of the finishing section of the industry, as 'major.' Although the Denby's lock-out did not involve a large number of workers, it was significant enough to warrant regular newspaper coverage in national as well as local

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<sup>105</sup> UK Parliament. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*. Wool textile industry (levies), 22 February 1966. Accessed at [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1966/feb/22/wool-textile-industry-levies#S5CV0725PO\\_19660222\\_HOC\\_423](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1966/feb/22/wool-textile-industry-levies#S5CV0725PO_19660222_HOC_423) on 18 March 2014. My italics.

<sup>106</sup> David Butler and Anne Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1975*, fourth edition (London and Basingstoke, 1975), p. 297.

<sup>107</sup> UK Parliament. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*. Industrial Relations Bill, 11 May 1971. Accessed at [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1971/may/11/industrial-relations-bill-1#S5LV0318PO\\_19710511\\_HOL\\_487](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1971/may/11/industrial-relations-bill-1#S5LV0318PO_19710511_HOL_487) on 18 March 2014.

newspapers. Whilst the comments of two people cannot represent the general views of those in power, it is interesting to note that these were some of the very few statements made on industrial relations in wool textiles in *Hansard* in the whole of the post-war period and convey the view that relations were harmonious. Whilst this appears to have been the case generally, it is not possible to say for certain that the industry was free of discord. As we have seen in the introduction and chapter four, Stephen Lukes' theory of the third face of power is that conflict does not have to be observable to be present, and so to describe relations in wool as 'harmonious' in the post-war period may not be correct.<sup>108</sup>

Although the lock-out was not discussed in Parliament, the Ministry of Labour had been involved in arbitration between the NUDBTW and the firm and their records show that the union continued to pursue matters relating to Denby's after the dispute had ended. For example, in August 1965 a note placed on a file relating to the union's claim that Denby's had breached the Fair Wages Resolution referred to the 'exceptionally bitter and protracted dispute' between the firm and the union.<sup>109</sup> The note suggested that the union was being vindictive in the matter, stating that the NUDBTW 'obviously expect some sort of punitive action to be taken' and that 'The Union, therefore, will be disappointed to learn that the Government does not propose to take any retrospective action' against the firm.<sup>110</sup> Jack Peel, general secretary of the NUDBTW at this point, was still writing to the Ministry of Labour about relations with Denby's in 1967, writing that 'the position still remains most unsatisfactory' and that he would consider 'making enquiries in other directions' in order to gain a resolution (presumably, action against the firm).<sup>111</sup> The issue had developed into a complaint regarding the allegation that Denby's broke an industry-wide agreement prohibiting working on Saturdays and Sundays.<sup>112</sup> Although Peel stated that 'I have no wish to be vindictive,' he also suggested an unannounced inspection of the Denby's works in order to verify his claim.<sup>113</sup> An inspection was not carried out. Whilst the dispute was officially over, the NUDBTW had not forgotten the actions of the Denby's directors.

A key issue that arose during the lock-out, and mirrored the 1937 dispute, was the use of violence by some strikers against company directors, those who did not strike at the firm and non-union labour that joined the firm in response to adverts placed in the local press. The occurrence of violence may have been a motivating factor for the directors in their decision

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<sup>108</sup> Stephen Lukes, *Power: a Radical View* (Basingstoke, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2005), p. 28. There is a fuller discussion of Lukes's theory in the introduction of this thesis.

<sup>109</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 10/2383, Ministry of Labour Department of Employment Industrial Relations records, File Note regarding Fair Wages Resolution, 20 August 1965.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 10/2383, Ministry of Labour Department of Employment Industrial Relations records, Letter from Jack Peel to Mr R. L. Foot, 12 September 1967.

<sup>112</sup> The National Archives (TNA), LAB 10/2383, Ministry of Labour Department of Employment Industrial Relations records, Letter from Jack Peel to Mr W. A. Thomas, 3 February 1975.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*



to withdraw from negotiations with the NUDBTW, given that both directors and new staff at the firm were subjected to it. Although violence was not directed by the union, its occurrence exemplifies the union's lack of control over its members in this matter, suggesting that the leadership was weak. That it was widely reported in the local and national press demonstrated not only the seriousness with which the violence was taken, but also contemporary discourse about trade unions which would become more critical of trade union actions in the 1970s.

NUDBTW minutes played the violence down but the details emerged in the press. In January 1964 the national press reported on allegations of violence which included 'the ambushing of a company director's car' by a 'group of men' who threw stones at the windscreen and tried to overturn it.<sup>114</sup> The director was Philip Wright, managing director of the company. This resulted in police with dogs patrolling the factory site.<sup>115</sup> The *Guardian* described this as a descent into 'indiscipline' amongst the picketers, commenting that 'the continued presence of a full-time, responsible official' was needed on the picket line.<sup>116</sup> In March 1964, a locked-out Denby's worker called Willie O'Donnell was fined £5 for the damage done to Wright's car, although he denied that he had done so.<sup>117</sup> The *Guardian* also reported that Geoffrey Wright, a director of the firm, was threatened by a group of strikers whilst out walking his dog, whereupon 'he retreated to his house, locked the door, got out his shotgun and called the police.'<sup>118</sup> Len Sharp warned against pickets using violence, stating that he 'deplored acts of violence or unlawfulness,' but his call went unheard.<sup>119</sup> The union's inability to control its membership suggests a general weakness in or lack of respect for its leadership.

#### The Aftermath of the Dispute into the 1970s

Such strength of feeling was to continue into the 1970s when workers considered 'black' as a result of working at Denby's (during the lock-out and after) attempted to join the NUDBTW. The minutes of the NUDBTW Executive Committee noted that in July 1976, a former Denby's employee asked to be reinstated to the union.<sup>120</sup> He had worked at Denby's for six weeks and said he had not known the implications of working there for union membership when he initially took the job. The decision was taken not to reinstate him, but there is no record of the discussions held to reach this conclusion.<sup>121</sup> Later in the year, the

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<sup>114</sup> *The Times*, 8 January 1964.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Guardian*, 4 January 1964.

<sup>117</sup> *Guardian*, 3 March 1964.

<sup>118</sup> *Guardian*, 4 January 1964.

<sup>119</sup> *Guardian*, 3 January 1964.

<sup>120</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/10, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 23 July 1976.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

minutes stated that, despite correspondence from the TUC on the matter, the union would not recruit members employed at Denby's or any of its subsidiary companies.<sup>122</sup> The union intended to stay firm on the issue of 'blacking' and would not back down, much as Denby's management had refused to back down on allowing an official union presence back into its works. Furthermore, the secretary noted that 'it was hoped that no other union would accept them into membership.'<sup>123</sup> Despite signs of apparent weakness during the lock-out related to leadership, this later incident is more suggestive of the union's strength – although admittedly only within the union itself, rather than in national industrial relations or in relations with firms. This was particularly apposite, as twenty men working at Denby Laminates, a Denby's subsidiary, had joined the TGWU but were later expelled due to pressure from the NUDBTW.<sup>124</sup> Marcus Fox, the Conservative MP for Shipley, commented that, 'The situation is absolutely crackers.'<sup>125</sup> It is likely that Fox's involvement in the case propelled the NUDBTW back into national press headlines.

The matter continued to trouble the union. In February 1977, the TUC summoned members of the Executive Committee to a hearing about the refusal to accept Philip Howard Wilson for membership due to his previous employment at Denby's.<sup>126</sup> The date of the hearing was not recorded but it was noted that the union would be forced to accept whatever the TUC decided, again suggesting that the NUDBTW could only be considered strong amongst its own membership (and potential membership).<sup>127</sup> Problems related to Denby's were also occurring at the union's Yeadon branch, where former Denby's employees were using 'shady methods of entry to the Union' despite the branch employing a thorough vetting procedure for all membership applications.<sup>128</sup> By December 1977, the TUC hearing had concluded that, although Mr Wilson now worked in motorcycle sales, should he wish to gain employment in the textile industry and seek membership of the NUDBTW, his case should be looked upon 'sympathetically.'<sup>129</sup>

Wilson's case was not the only one to make the headlines: in December 1978, the *Sun* featured an article on Joe Thompson, who had worked at Denby's during the 1963-65 dispute before going on to work at another firm, Naylor Jennings, for four years, where he

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<sup>122</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/12, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 11 February 1977.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 1976.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), WYB123/1/4/1/12, Transport and General Workers' Union records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, 11 February 1977.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

had been a member of the NUDBTW.<sup>130</sup> As he worked in a closed shop, he was sacked when the firm learned that he had blacklegged during the Denby's dispute, with a company spokesman saying, 'We had no option but to terminate his employment. We operate a closed shop policy with the Dyers' Union.'<sup>131</sup> Thompson's defence was that he was only seventeen when he took the job at Denby's and didn't know that what he was doing was 'wrong.'<sup>132</sup> His appeal to the NUDBTW was rejected, with the union saying, 'The matter is now closed' – another incidence of union firmness with regards it membership.<sup>133</sup> This is unsurprising: Jack Peel, the union's general secretary between 1966 and 1973, had argued vociferously for closed-shop arrangements to cover the whole of the wool textile industry.<sup>134</sup> It is likely that the union's stance in 1978 was a legacy of Peel's beliefs. The matter gained widespread coverage in the local and national press, with articles in the *Liverpool Echo*, *Yorkshire Evening Post* and *Daily Mirror*, among others, on 2 December 1978 all reiterating the same message: that such action was poor form on the part of the union, and, in the words of the *Leicester Mercury*, that 'No further argument is needed against the iniquity of the closed shop.'<sup>135</sup> Articles continued to appear in the local and national press throughout December 1978 condemning the NUDBTW. The press coverage of this matter was far more vitriolic than the articles about the 1963-65 dispute had been, pointing to the change in sentiments towards the labour movement in the intervening thirteen years and the strength of feeling about union dominance in the workplace. It also signifies that the Denby's dispute took a long time to fade in local and national memory; the bitterness that characterised the lock-out was still present into the late 1970s.

### Conclusion

The lock-out at William Denby & Sons was anomalous, but can also be seen as characteristic of industrial relations in the wool textile industry. The industry's workforce was more disposed to bear perceived injustices and rule-breaks either silently or by taking complaints to overlookers and, in some cases, direct to the management.<sup>136</sup> Strike action was rare, and a dispute of this scale was atypical.<sup>137</sup> Several factors account for the lock-out. Historic relations between workforce and management at Denby's created a tradition of collective action. Baildon, whilst on the periphery of the woollen district, was not exceptional in its demography or location, although the large number of Denby's workers

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<sup>130</sup> *Sun*, 2 December 1978.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Journal*, 2 December 1978.

<sup>134</sup> *Independent*, 18 May 1993.

<sup>135</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 2 December 1978.

<sup>136</sup> This process is discussed fully in chapter four.

<sup>137</sup> This does not mean that grievances were not felt by workers: see the introduction of the thesis for a discussion of Lukes's theory of the three faces of power which demonstrates that even in a situation where there is no observable conflict, it is possible that power is operating to suppress conflict.

who lived locally to the mill may have created a stronger bond based on local identities on which they could base collective organisation.<sup>138</sup> The organisation of the mill, however, was distinctive. A larger workforce allowed not only for the formation of bonds between workers that could lead to a supportive environment for action, but also made collective organisation feasible. The relative absence of women and immigrant men in the workforce may also have promoted better relations based on common identification between the white men at the works.<sup>139</sup> The poor relations between management and operatives was very likely to have prompted the initial strikers in 1963 to down tools rather than attempt to negotiate: despite the end of the Denby family's management of the firm in 1938, the Wright family largely followed the Denby pattern of industrial relations and maintained a hostile attitude towards trade unions. This is also the likely reason for the lock-out: rather than initially negotiating with the strikers, the directors sacked everyone and declared the firm an 'open' shop.

The strike was a rare occurrence of trade union action in an industry that was not strike-prone. Factors prohibitive to trade union organisation that were present in other wool textile mills were absent here, such as a small workforce and a workforce mixed in gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, the traditional process of dealing with problems face-to-face with managers and overlookers was less important at Denby's due to the scale of the workforce which further compounded the uneasy relationship between management and workers and gave formal negotiations a more significant role.

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<sup>138</sup> See chapter six for a wider discussion of this.

<sup>139</sup> This issue is also discussed in chapters four, five and six.

## Chapter Eight: Immigrant Organisations: the Indian Workers' Association and Asian Youth Movements in the Woollen District, c.1950-1985

### Introduction

On arrival in the woollen district, Asian immigrants began to form communities. Ethnically-based self-help organisations, such as the Indian Workers' Association (IWA) and Asian Youth Movements (AYMs), were important parts of these communities. Although the IWA and the AYM were formed by different generations of Asian workers and often aimed to achieve different goals by different means, both groups show that immigrants desired their own organisations distinctive from those whose members were generally white British. The formation of self-help groups also indicates that some immigrants were adept at organisation, a skill that would have been useful to the wool textile trade union movement, and that immigrants were willing to work towards the betterment of workers. That they decided to form their own groups is suggestive of the weakness of textile trade unionism in effectively recruiting and organising the growing number of immigrant workers. It also indicates the lack of services for immigrants within unions like the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (NUDBTW), and perhaps the labour movement's concern with treating workers as 'workers' rather than 'Asian workers' in the interests of creating solidarity within the movement.

Ethnic organisations created a barrier between immigrant and native British workers. Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern commented that, in the nearby cotton textile industry, hostility to European immigrants within cotton mills and the unions associated with them 'resulted in a barrier to the creation of a common set of class interests between "native" and immigrant workers.'<sup>1</sup> This was also true of the wool textile industry, where a common 'woollen worker' identity was absent. This meant that not only did wool trade unions lack a common occupational identity which they could utilise to recruit members, but that there was no common work identity between workers of different ethnicities. Immigrant workers were often members of religious or ethnic communities based around places of worship or, indeed, groups like the IWA that provided social facilities to their members. The IWA and AYM were able to build on the foundations provided by ethnic communities, utilise community networks and appeal to the ethnic identities of their membership to attract new recruits. As discussed in chapter six, it is also possible that they went some way to shaping ethnic communities by providing structures that Asian immigrants could access and identify with. In oral history interviews, Asian workers more regularly reported membership of an ethnically-based organisation than a trade union.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern, "'If We Depart from These Conditions...': Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry, c. 1946-1952,' *Labour History Review*, 72 (2) (2007), p. 136.

Although membership of an ethnically-based group and a trade union was a possibility, it was unlikely that low-paid workers would be able to afford subscription fees to two groups. Ethnically-based groups won out when faced with competition from trade unions.

The IWA's formation is a disputed matter that will be discussed further in the main body of the chapter; this led to various splits on political and geographical grounds. The Bradford and Huddersfield branches opened in the early 1960s, when other IWA branches were also being established. The IWA worked to improve the situations of its Indian members by supporting them at work and in society more broadly, for example by helping illegal immigrants negotiate the process of applying for citizenship and helping the illiterate or those who could not speak English to fill in official forms. They had a social function, with many local branches owning a range of literature in Indian languages and some owning Indian films that would be shown communally (the IWA (Southall) owned its own cinema, the Dominion, which was used as a meeting place as well as to show films). They also campaigned for immigrants on issues such as strikes and disputes in the workplace.<sup>2</sup>

For second-generation immigrants in West Yorkshire, the AYMs provided an outlet for political and social dissatisfaction as well as community defence against racist attacks from groups like the National Front (NF) and individuals. Like the IWA, the AYMs attracted committed support from wool textile workers and others. However, unemployed young men who were victims of the closure of mills through deindustrialisation, particularly in Bradford, were recruited in large numbers. Unlike the IWA, the AYMs' tactics sometimes involved the use of violence as a defence against violence from racists. The members of the AYMs in the woollen district faced a much less certain future than the first generation of immigrants had because the increasingly rapid contraction of the wool textile industry meant that jobs were now more difficult to come by; their use of violent tactics could be explained as a result of the uncertainties that deindustrialisation brought. The AYMs disbanded in the 1980s and no longer exist. Anandi Ramamurthy's recently-published *Black Star* examines the AYMs in depth but Ramamurthy remains the only scholar who has seriously researched them to date.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will consider the role of immigrant organisations in the woollen district and the impact they had on wool textile trade unionism. After briefly examining key debates in the

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<sup>2</sup> In Huddersfield, the IWA branch still exists today, and has adapted to the age of its membership, now focusing on social events to prevent the alienation of older people. Its activities are often reported on in the local newspaper, the *Examiner*, and some members have achieved high civic office, such as Cllr Mohan Sokhal, a bus driver and local councillor who was also the Mayor of Kirklees.

<sup>3</sup> Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements* (London, 2013); Anandi Ramamurthy, 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements,' *Race and Class* 48 (2), 2006, pp. 39-60.

scholarly literature on immigrant organisations, the IWAs in their various formations will be discussed, in particular their aims and methods and their role in the woollen district and nationally. The IWA's papers, held at Birmingham Central Library, will be used in this part of the chapter. The files on the woollen district branches were slim, but newspaper reports and secondary literature on the IWA will supplement them. The aims and methods of the second-generation AYMs will then be examined. The online AYM archive that Anandi Ramamurthy curates contains many useful documents that form the basis of this part of the chapter, particularly the oral histories conducted with former AYM members. The conclusion will assess the impact of ethnic groups on wool textile trade unionism, noting that such groups, whilst not universally followed by Asian immigrants, drew support away from trade unions.

#### Agency and Oppression: Scholarly Approaches to Studying Immigrants and Work in Britain

Scholarship on immigration to Britain has focused on themes of the agency and oppression.<sup>4</sup> Research for this thesis on immigrant organisations in the woollen district after 1945 shows that these two strands were often both present in the lives of ordinary immigrants. In forming associations based on shared ethnicity but directed towards other aims, such as recognition at work or protest against racism, immigrant wool textile workers demonstrated a considerable degree of agency. However, it is important to remember that many such organisations were formed as a result of oppression by white British society – for example, in marginalising the concerns of immigrant workers, trade unions gave the originators of the IWA the impetus to establish their own group that would represent the specific needs of Indians.

In his study of Asian cotton mill workers in Oldham, Virinder S. Kalra highlighted a key trend in scholarly work on immigrants: early research focused on issues of deprivation and oppression whereas later work examined success and agency.<sup>5</sup> Kalra stated that his research moved away from this dichotomisation of experience to offer a 'historically-grounded analysis.'<sup>6</sup> In the case of the IWA and AYMs, it is of utmost importance to consider both the problems immigrants faced – including those posed by the host society in the form of racism – and how they overcame such problems. Chris Waters commented on racism and the importance of perceptions of racial difference in Britain after the Second World War, arguing that 'Articulation of racial difference played a crucial role in reworking the dominant narratives of nation and national belonging in early post-war Britain,' focusing on

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Ron Ramdin's *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987) examined the multiple oppressions faced by black and Asian immigrants to Britain, whereas Virinder S. Kalra's *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour and Social Change* (Aldershot, 2000) outlined the successes of Asian migrants.

<sup>5</sup> Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the apparent problems caused by immigration.<sup>7</sup> Other issues discussed by scholars included Asian workers taking low-paid, low-status jobs on arrival in Britain. Scholars such as Avtar Brah commented that Asians tended to occupy the least desirable jobs.<sup>8</sup> Ron Ramdin also discussed racial disadvantage in employment in terms of pay, skill level and general status in Britain.<sup>9</sup> However, others have argued that this was not always so straightforward. Paul Gilroy argued that blacks should not be represented only as ‘problems’ or ‘victims’ in historical and sociological analyses, a tendency of some studies (for example, as victims of prejudice in the job market leading them to have access only to lower-paid jobs).<sup>10</sup> One aim of this chapter is to consider Asian wool textile workers as actors responding to the challenges they faced on arrival in Britain and later into the twentieth century.

Ralph Fevre noted that in wool textiles, Asian workers rarely undercut the prevailing wage rates of white men, suggesting that in terms of pay, there was little disparity between migrants and ‘native workers,’ although it is worth adding that this was generally only the case when Asians and white men were performing the same jobs – white men were more likely to be in higher-status, more skilled roles within the workplace which came with a better rate of pay.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Kalra argued that in cotton textiles, Asians often worked shorter shifts of eight hours than the twelve-hour shifts prevalent in wool textiles, suggesting that Asians in cotton made an informed decision about which type of work was more attractive, demonstrating their agency in job matters.<sup>12</sup> However, it is important to note that some Asian immigrants moved to places where they had kinship networks rather than where they knew the conditions of work were better, as discussed in Muhammad Anwar’s work.<sup>13</sup> Kalra’s analysis was informed by Anwar’s research on Pakistanis in Rochdale in which Anwar argued that Pakistanis often took poorly-paid, low-status jobs because they did not intend to stay in Britain for any significant length of time, and therefore did not need to build a ‘career’ but earn money to send home to family before returning themselves.<sup>14</sup> Anwar’s thesis both recognised the status of Pakistanis as low and denoted a degree of agency to migrants by partially explaining work status in terms of choice. This argument is more convincing for first-generation migrants than their children and grandchildren, who presumably were less likely to harbour dreams of ‘return’ given that they were born in Britain.

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<sup>7</sup> Chris Waters, “‘Dark Strangers’ in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963,” *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (2) (1997), p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> Avtar Brah, ‘The “Asian” in Britain,’ in N. Ali, V. S. Kalra and S. Sayyid (eds.), *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain* (London, 2006), p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, p. 260.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London, 1987), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ralph Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* (Aldershot, 1984), p. 69. See chapter one for more details on job roles, skill and pay in the wool textile industry.

<sup>12</sup> Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (London, 1979), pp. 64-65.

<sup>14</sup> Anwar, *The Myth of Return*, p. 115.



Another important issue to consider is the relationship between literature on race and literature on labour and the labour movement. Ken Lunn noted that there has often been very little examination of the two together, arguing that ‘it is vital that issues of race and immigration are part of any overall re-evaluation’ of the labour movement.<sup>15</sup> Whilst there had been studies that examined both, such as Ramdin’s *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (1987) and Mark Duffield’s *Black Radicalism and the Politics of De-Industrialisation: the Hidden History of Indian Foundry Workers* (1988), and research has been undertaken since Lunn’s publication in 1999, such as Kalra’s *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks* (2000) and Laura Price’s ‘Immigrants and Apprentices: Solutions to the Post-War Labour Shortage in the West Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry, 1945-1980’ (2014), the area of immigrants and trade unions remains under-researched.<sup>16</sup> There is comparatively more research on immigrants and work, such as that undertaken by Ramdin and Duffield, although there remains considerable scope for research in this area too.<sup>17</sup> Much of the research on immigrants, trade unions and work was carried out at least two decades ago and recent research is particularly hard to find.

Scholarship on immigrant organisations has also been particularly helpful for this chapter. John Solomos, for example, wrote about the ‘noticeable growth’ in political involvement amongst black and Asian people since the early 1970s, further noting the diversity of involvement in politics from formal political parties to community groups and issue-oriented campaigning groups.<sup>18</sup> Maurice Spiers stated that this phenomenon was beginning even earlier in some places, with Pakistani immigrants standing in municipal elections in Bradford in 1963.<sup>19</sup> The range of organisations immigrants formed are discussed in more detail in chapter five on identity and chapter six on community, but it should be noted here that immigrants established a range of groups and organisations to suit their needs in Britain. For example, Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla discussed the growth of Sikh gurdwaras as the foundation of British Sikh communities.<sup>20</sup> Looking away from religious groups, L. A. Dove described children in London in the early 1970s attending racially-segregated youth clubs, which may appear to be negative in preventing mixing between

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<sup>15</sup> Ken Lunn, ‘Complex Encounters: Trade Unions, Immigration and Racism’ in John McIlroy, Nina Fishman and Alan Campbell (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, volume two: the High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964-1979* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*; Mark Duffield, *Black Radicalism and the Politics of De-Industrialisation: the Hidden History of Indian Foundry Workers* (Aldershot, 1988); Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks*; Laura Price, ‘Immigrants and Apprentices: Solutions to the Post-War Labour Shortage in the West Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry, 1945-1980,’ *Textile History* 45 (1) (May 2014), pp. 32-48.

<sup>17</sup> Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*; Duffield, *Black Radicalism and the Politics of De-Industrialisation*.

<sup>18</sup> John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke, 1989), pp. 146-148.

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Spiers, ‘Bradford,’ in Nicholas Deakin (ed.), *Colour and the British Electorate, 1964* (London, 1965), p. 120.

<sup>20</sup> Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla, *Sikhs in Britain: the Making of a Community* (London, 2006), p. 69.

ethnic groups but was also the only way some immigrant youths would have been allowed to attend them.<sup>21</sup> Other groups, such as the Pak Social Club in Bradford which John Barr referred to, the National Federation of Pakistani Associations as mentioned by Verity Saifullah Khan and the Polish social clubs discussed by Andrew Noon, were established as soon as immigrants arrived after the Second World War and were sustained throughout the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Such groups were based on a shared ethnic or national identity. Communities of immigrants grew and immigrant organisations became important parts of a community.

The growth of immigrant political participation may have been a result of both the increasing confidence of first-generation settlers in becoming involved in political life and also a reaction to currents in both mainstream and fringe politics, such as the founding of the National Front in 1967 and Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in April 1968. What Sivanandan described as the 'rebellious second generation' was also a factor in increased immigrant involvement in politics: as we will see later in the chapter, second-generation groups such as the AYMs were angry about their status in society – possibly in part due to difficulties in finding work as a result of deindustrialisation – and were willing to take to the streets to defend their people.<sup>23</sup> 'Political blackness,' however, a concept discussed by Tariq Modood, is contested and, as time has progressed, 'black' as a political label has been replaced by several more specific terms, especially given that 'black' is, in Modood's view, harmful to Asians in that it masks their identity and homogenises it alongside the identity of African Caribbeans.<sup>24</sup> In light of this, the chapter will use the contemporary terms with which the members of the IWA and AYMs described themselves – generally 'Asian' but also 'Indian,' 'Sikh' and 'Muslim' where appropriate. The remainder of the chapter will look at the IWA and AYMs in detail to assess their relationship with wool textile trade unionism.

### The Indian Workers' Association, 1950s-present

#### *The National IWA*

There are various problems regarding the existing literature on the IWA. It appears that there is still much to be learned about it, in particular the branches outside of Southall and the West Midlands, which have been the focus of the academic works probably because these areas had active branches. Much of the literature focuses on differences between the factions and the causation of the several splits, rather than on the work that the IWA carried out. This

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<sup>21</sup> L. A. Dove, 'Racial Awareness among Adolescents in London Comprehensive Schools,' *New Community* 3 (3) (1974), p. 255.

<sup>22</sup> John Barr, 'Pakistanis in Bradford,' *New Society*, 19 November 1989, p. 6; Verity Saifullah Khan, 'Pakistanis in Britain: Perceptions of a Population,' *New Community* 5 (3) (1976), p. 225; Andrew Noon, 'A Reluctant Welcome? Poles in Britain in the 1940s,' *Oral History* (Spring 1996), p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> A Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London, 1982), p. 101.

<sup>24</sup> Tariq Modood, 'Political Blackness and British Asians,' *Sociology* 28 (4) (1994), p.859, pp. 861-862.

is a significant weakness for understanding the interaction between IWA branches and trade unions. Furthermore, the existing histories of the IWA are largely institutional and give little voice to the wider membership. This is a problem for the historian seeking to discover the importance of the IWA in an ordinary immigrant worker's life. The remainder of this section of the chapter will examine the IWA's aims, methods and campaigns, both nationally and in Huddersfield and Bradford, in order to establish how far IWA membership drew Indian workers away from trade union membership and to assess the attraction of the IWA to immigrant mill operatives. It will be established that the IWA could draw on a sense of Indian (Sikh) identity and on close community ties in order to organise successfully, two things that wool trade unions lacked.

The exact origins of the IWA have been disputed by historians and, indeed, IWA members and leaders themselves. John King argued that the different IWA factions that emerged adopted different understandings of how and when the IWA was formed.<sup>25</sup> Ramdin stated that the IWA of the late 1950s was based on another organisation called the Indian Workers' Association, formed in 1938, but that there was no continuity between the two groups.<sup>26</sup> Sasha Josephides took a more cautious approach when evaluating the IWA's origins; in discussing the view that the IWA was formed by Udham Singh, the trade unionist who shot dead Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Governor of the Punjab during the Amritsar Massacre of 1919, she stated that there is much conflicting evidence and it is not possible to ascertain whether or not this is true.<sup>27</sup> She noted, however, that despite the disputed veracity of this idea, the fact that Udham Singh had been appropriated by some IWA members is significant as it highlights a link that some IWA members felt between their organisation and freedom fighting.<sup>28</sup> The place of the IWA's establishment is also far from certain, with some, such as Josephides, giving Coventry as the IWA's birthplace, and others, such as Desai, citing London as the IWA's first home.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the truth of the matter of the IWA's establishment, it is clear that branches were being formed in towns and cities with a significant number of Asian residents from the late 1950s and into the 1960s.

As King suggested, the disputed origins of the IWA reflects the factionalism within it. Different branches supported different Indian political parties and groups. The major split within the IWA was between the IWA (Southall) and the IWA (GB), based in Coventry.<sup>30</sup> Josephides cited the burgeoning Communist influence within the IWA as a key reason for the split: Southall wanted the organisation to remain non-sectarian, whereas several of the

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<sup>25</sup> John King, *Three Asian Associations in Britain* (Coventry, 1994), p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, p. 397.

<sup>27</sup> Sasha Josephides, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* (Coventry, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> Josephides, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association*, p. 1; Duffield, *Black Radicalism and the Politics of De-Industrialisation*, p. 74; Rashmi Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain* (London, 1963), p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> Josephides, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association*, p. 16.

officials of the IWA (GB) were Communists.<sup>31</sup> The IWA (GB) had a more militant approach and a grounding in industrial relations: their belief was that this was the best way to combat racial oppression and was a way to gain the support of their white working-class comrades.<sup>32</sup> Further splits within the IWA (GB) led to the formation of other factional groups, which Josephides named the IWA (GB A Jouhal), the IWA (GB P Singh) and the IWA (GB N Noor) after their leaders.<sup>33</sup> These distinctions are not clear in all accounts of the IWA.

The aims of the IWA as a national body, as set out in 1958, were largely dedicated to the improvement of life and working conditions for its members (who were primarily Sikhs although the organisation was open to Indians of all religions). Desai stated that the IWA's immediate goal was to obtain Indian or British passports for all of its members who lacked them and who entered Britain on false papers.<sup>34</sup> Some of its aims were stated in general terms – such as the improvement of conditions for ‘immigrants’ (with no definition of who they meant by ‘immigrant’ specifically), fighting discrimination ‘based on race, colour, creed or sex,’ and to provide social, welfare and cultural activities.<sup>35</sup> Others, however, were more specific, such as working in co-operation with the Indian High Commission, keeping members in touch with political developments in India and promoting co-operation with the British trade union and labour movement.<sup>36</sup> Desai highlighted the social and cultural aspects of the IWA's work, arguing that they aimed to monopolise the showing of Indian films and use this as a source of revenue, although his evidence for this is not clear and may not be applicable to all IWA branches.<sup>37</sup> Selina Todd argued that the function of the IWA was to provide ‘social facilities and friendship;’ whilst this was an important aspect of IWA branches, it is a very limited view of the organisation's work in the labour movement and in promoting the understanding of Indian politics amongst its members.<sup>38</sup>

As well as providing a social function, branches often advised on work issues. On the national level, the IWA campaigned on issues related to the labour movement and, increasingly, racism. General perceptions of immigrant apathy towards trade unions meant that their work in the labour movement was particularly important. *The Times* reported in August 1977 that ‘Ethnic minority groups seem to think unions have little relevance for them and are more the preserve of white workers.’<sup>39</sup> The report went on to say that ‘in general, they [immigrants] did seem to be more apathetic towards the unions “because

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>34</sup> Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain*, p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup> Selina Todd, *The People: the Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (London, 2014), p. 291.

<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 1 August 1977.

managers ignored racism,” consciously or otherwise.<sup>40</sup> The IWA promoted trade unionism and supported the labour movement, suggesting that the argument put forward by *The Times* was simplistic and based on scant research. In December 1965, Jagmohan Joshi of the IWA (GB) in Coventry announced an inquiry into racial discrimination in industry after learning that immigrants found it hard to obtain apprenticeships.<sup>41</sup> In August 1967, the Wolverhampton branch called on local MPs to support the case of a Sikh bus driver who was ‘banned from work for wearing a beard and a turban’ after the local Transport and General Workers’ Union (TGWU) branch refused to ‘take sides in the dispute,’ again showing the IWA was concerned with workers’ rights.<sup>42</sup>

Into the 1970s, the IWA became more concerned about racism and racial violence at a time when both were becoming significant problems for all immigrant groups. In May 1970, the Wolverhampton branch advised its one thousand members ‘to observe a voluntary curfew from 6pm after fighting early today between skinheads and Asians.’<sup>43</sup> Skinheads had attacked cars that Indians were driving and in response the local Indian community set up an ‘injury fund’ ‘to compensate any of their countrymen hurt in attacks during the [bank] holiday period.’<sup>44</sup> The police responded by saying, ‘The Indians take these attacks as a personal affront and someone could get killed.’<sup>45</sup> The lack of support from the police is another important reason that ethnically-based groups such as the IWA were popular with immigrants: they provided collective support and protection that official institutions sometimes did not. As we will see later in the chapter, this was a key reason for the establishment of Asian Youth Movements in the late 1970s.

Indeed, in July 1978, at the time the Asian Youth Movements were forming, the IWA Southall issued a joint statement with the Federation of Pakistani Organisations and the Federation of Bangladeshi Organisations calling for immigrants to act in their own defence ‘in the face of increasing violence, much of it from white racist groups.’<sup>46</sup> *The Times* reported that ‘Scotland Yard has said repeatedly that it does not favour the formation of vigilante groups’ but the IWA Southall’s joint statement argued that self-defence was a necessity as a result of ‘considerable apathy of the supposed forces of law and order.’<sup>47</sup> In terms of attracting support and membership, campaigns such as this were particularly important in a period of heightened racial tensions and, at times, violence which characterised the late 1970s and early 1980s (more of which will be discussed later in the chapter). Again, many trade unions did not campaign on issues around race. Whilst this may

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *The Times*, 1 December 1965.

<sup>42</sup> *The Times*, 15 August 1967.

<sup>43</sup> *The Times*, 25 May 1970.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 15 July 1978.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

not have made trade unions unattractive to immigrants, groups like the IWA who campaigned for workers' rights as well as an end to racial violence were likely to have gained more support because of the several functions they performed. As the IWA was an organisation that asked for subscription fees, membership of two fee-paying groups was probably too heavy a financial burden for many workers, particularly in low-paid industries like wool, meaning that some immigrants had to decide which group to be a member of. As the next section will show, the work of the Huddersfield IWA branch was particularly attractive to many Indian workers in the wool industry.

### *The Bradford and Huddersfield Branches of the IWA*

The extent to which the Bradford branch of the IWA followed and adopted the aims set out by Desai (above, in the section 'The National IWA') is unclear. A branch was established in June 1964 by Sarwan Singh Kang but its activity appears to have been much more limited than that of the branch that was to be established the following year in Huddersfield.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the file on the Bradford branch in the IWA collection at Birmingham Central Library contains very few documents, suggesting the limited, and also perhaps short-lived, scope of their work. The nature of the link between the Bradford branch and the IWA (GB) was tenuous; whilst the branch was officially affiliated, and Joshi had offered to help all he could in setting the branch up, some correspondence suggests a strain between the branch and the centre. A letter from 6 October 1964 from Joshi to Kang asked the chairman of the branch to 'consider the Membership dues to the Centre also,' adding, 'I did raise this point with you (that of affiliation to the Central IWA) when I was with you in Bradford.'<sup>49</sup> Kang replied the next day saying the branch could only afford to send £5 for affiliation that year even though the affiliation fee was meant to be one third of total branch funds.<sup>50</sup> The correspondence contained in the Bradford branch's file is limited to small disputes and wrangling of this nature; there is very little discussion of branch activities, although an undated leaflet advertised a celebration of Indian Independence Day in August, hosted by the Bradford branch.<sup>51</sup> There is no note of social activities, campaigns or support for workers in these papers. The Bradford branch was probably short-lived: the papers begin in 1964 and end in 1965. It is possible that this was because of the lack of facilities for members that were provided in other branches, such as Huddersfield and Southall. Indeed, there is no mention of the wider membership of the group in their papers. Like wool trade unions, the organisation apparently offered little to its members by way of support, representation or

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<sup>48</sup> Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/8/3/1, Indian Workers' Association records, Letter from Jagmohan Joshi to Sarwan Singh Kang, 7 June 1964.

<sup>49</sup> Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/8/3/2, Indian Workers' Association records, Letter from Jagmohan Joshi to Sarwan Singh Kang, 6 October 1964.

<sup>50</sup> Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/8/3/3, Indian Workers' Association records, Letter from Sarwan Singh Kang to Jagmohan Joshi, 7 October 1964.

<sup>51</sup> Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/8/3/9, Indian Workers' Association records, Leaflet Advertising Indian Independence Day Celebration, undated.

benefits – the ‘selective incentives’ referred to by Mancur Olson Jr. that he posited were a reason for collective organisations’ success.<sup>52</sup> A key reason for the IWA’s success nationally was the benefits membership bestowed, such as access to reading rooms and cinemas as well as support in practical and work matters. As the Bradford branch did not offer these functions, it foundered, as did wool trade unions that were unable to offer much to their members.

The Huddersfield branch was, by contrast, a success.<sup>53</sup> Although the papers in Birmingham Central Library are sparse, and do not contain membership data, there is evidence that the IWA Huddersfield flourished. The Huddersfield branch was formed by Som Kaushik in August 1965 and was affiliated to IWA (GB).<sup>54</sup> Papers on this branch show that it was both more active than Bradford and acted more in line with the aims of the IWA as stated by Desai. A letter in February 1969 from Som Kaushik to the IWA (GB)’s secretary (who is not named) said,

Recent climate in the country against the immigrants has reached the disturbing stage. My organisation feel it is time to forget our differences created by political and individual factionalism and unite and reorganise the Indian community and hence the IWA under one organisation... Ours is a small organisation but we are proud that we have succeeded in keeping every divisive factor out of our affairs and we work harmoniously with every shade of political, religious and communal elements. I don’t see why we Indians can’t unite on the national basis as a unit and work for our welfare and the welfare of other peoples.<sup>55</sup>

Although clearly commenting on the factionalism within the IWA, the letter stressed the need for unity and to work for the welfare of its members, an original aim of the organisation.

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<sup>52</sup> Mancur Olson Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> The success of the Huddersfield branch can be seen in its longevity: it is still operational today, although the work it does is now somewhat different to that it undertook in the 1960s. For example, in 2009, the branch built new wheelchair-accessible toilets at their headquarters so that the now-elderly membership could spend more time at the building in comfort. The branch’s website gives information on what services it provides now and provided in the past. It says, ‘Its original aim was to support immigrant Indian workers – helping them write letters, communicate with trade unions and generally settle into life in the UK.’ The services it lists now include helping the elderly make telephone calls, providing a space for the elderly to ‘meet, read newspapers, converse, watch television,’ provide support and information on visa and passport enquiries, an English translation service ‘helping the Indian community to overcome language barrier difficulties’ and ‘an elderly/disabled project for men.’ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 9 July 2009; Indian Workers’ Association Huddersfield website, accessed 27 May 2014 at [www.iwahudds.com/About\\_Us.html](http://www.iwahudds.com/About_Us.html)

<sup>54</sup> Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/8/8, Indian Workers’ Association records, Letter from Huddersfield Branch to Jagmohan Joshi, 1 September 1965.

<sup>55</sup> Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/8/8, Indian Workers’ Association records, Letter from Som Kaushik to General Secretary of IWA (GB), 27 February 1969.

The Huddersfield branch was also supportive of immigrant strikers, again adhering to the aim of working with the labour and trade union movement for the benefit of immigrant workers. A letter from Kaushik to an unnamed 'friend' from May 1967 set out 'Our full and complete moral support... for the strikers at the Coneygre Foundry Ltd., Tipton.'<sup>56</sup> No further details of the strike, or any support they gave, are noted, and it is not clear if the IWA Huddersfield worked with other parts of the labour movement in this matter, but we can see at least an interest in labour movement issues within the branch from this letter.

There are documents showing the IWA's interest in political issues such as proposals to restrict immigration to Britain. A letter was sent from Kaushik to James Callaghan MP, then the Labour Home Secretary, in February 1968 about 'the proposed strengthening of the restrictions on non-English... immigrants into the country' at a time when Kenyan Asians were leaving for Britain due to restrictions on their ability to work in Kenya.<sup>57</sup> He went on to write,

We ask you very strongly to stop this racist and discriminatory legislation. All the immigrants throughout the country feel to be second-class citizens. We object to such a policy.<sup>58</sup>

The Huddersfield branch campaigned on issues such as strikes and anti-immigration policy that appealed to its membership. This is likely to be a reason that the branch was successful because its members felt represented on issues of importance to them. Mohan Sokhal, a former Mayor of Kirklees and local councillor, was also involved in establishing the Huddersfield branch and commented in an interview that,

... we set up the Indian Workers' Association to work in the interests of our people against this discrimination... it's still going on, and I was for many years the general secretary... there were lots of people coming, who couldn't speak English, and they had some problems finding jobs, they didn't know they had the right to benefits and other things... It was a very democratic association, every two years an election took place.<sup>59</sup>

He had also said that a key influence for setting up an IWA branch was discrimination in social spaces, commenting that,

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<sup>56</sup> Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/8/8, Indian Workers' Association records, Letter from Som Kaushik to Unnamed Correspondent, 16 May 1967.

<sup>57</sup> Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/8/8, Indian Workers' Association records, Letter from Som Kaushik to James Callaghan MP, 28 February 1968.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> 'Facing Discrimination at Work and in the Pubs,' *Asian Voices* interview with Mohan Sokhal, accessed on 20 March 2010 at <http://asianvoices.hud.ac.uk/audios/viewtranscript/176>



When I started going to pubs, there was a lot of discrimination... If we tried to go in their room, they'd say no, you can't go in there, it's only for English people.<sup>60</sup>

Sokhal showed that the aims of the founders were both to provide welfare support to Indians and provide alternative social spaces to those facing discrimination. Again, such facilities were likely to be appreciated by immigrants and made the IWA an attractive organisation to join. Conversely, wool trade unions such as the NUDBTW made few efforts to attract immigrants and provide benefits that would encourage them to become members – indeed, they did not provide benefits such as social spaces to any of their members (although not all unions provided these facilities). As well as providing benefits to members, the IWA Huddersfield was able to appeal to Indian identity in order to attract members: as an exclusively Indian (and, in some branches, an exclusively Sikh) organisation, the IWA was able to build on both a sense of identity between fellow countrymen and a community network of Indians in Huddersfield as a basis for their branch. Ramdin and Roger Ballard have commented on the IWA's popularity amongst Sikhs: Ballard stated that the IWA was as committed to Sikhism as it was to socialism which, although debatable, goes some way to explain the IWA's popularity in Sikh communities.<sup>61</sup> Ramdin argued that as around ninety per cent of Sikhs in Britain were of the same caste, they had common interests and problems as a group.<sup>62</sup> This strong sense of identity and community was something that the NUDBTW lacked: there was no common woollen worker identity that could be used to appeal to potential members and woollen workers tended not to live in geographically close communities that could have made the organisation of trade unionism easier in practical terms.

#### The Second Generation: Asian Youth Movements, c.1975-85

Sivanandan described the second generation of immigrants as 'rebellious' in his writings on black resistance; the case of the AYMs certainly suggests this was so.<sup>63</sup> The AYMs have not been subject to wide scholarly treatment – indeed, the only scholar who has seriously studied them is Ramamurthy, who as well as writing an article and a book on the AYMs curates the Tandana archive of materials she and others have collected on the AYMs. Writing on black and Asian youth in Britain is an area that has received little attention from scholars in general but interrogating how the second generation responded to the challenges it faced is important for our understanding of ethnic minorities in Britain after the Second World War. In the case of this thesis, it is important to examine not only the first wave of immigrants that took up work in the wool textile industry between 1945 and the late 1960s, but also their

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Roger Ballard, 'Differentiation and Disjunction among the Sikhs,' in Roger Ballard (ed.), *Desh Pardesh: the South Asian Presence in Britain* (London, 1994), p. 108.

<sup>62</sup> Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, p. 400.

<sup>63</sup> Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger*, p. 101.

children and grandchildren, some of whom were also employed in textiles, and some of whom were unemployed as a result of the closure of mills that became increasingly rapid from the late 1970s onwards. The rest of the chapter will consider the literature on the second generation of Asian immigrants and the aims and methods of the AYMS. We will see that whilst a sense of community remained important to the second generation, as it had to the first, there were subtle changes to the conceptualisation of Asian identity in West Yorkshire from the mid- to late-1970s and significant changes in the methods used to protect and preserve communities from the growing threat of organised far-right groups. We will see that the second generation had little time for the traditional labour movement (which is unsurprising, given that many of them were unemployed, unlike their parents) and favoured self-organisation even more than their forebears had.

### Literature on Asian Youth

Ramamurthy's work on the Asian Youth Movements is significant in examining young Asians specifically – much literature on immigrants and ethnic minorities in Britain has treated ethnic groups as a homogeneous mass. Ramamurthy argued that, although the second generation would not have been able to organise effectively without the groundwork laid by the first generation, the AYMs differed to earlier groups: they were influenced by black politics more than politics in the mother country and aimed for unity in diversity rather than basing organisations on particular religious or ethnic identities.<sup>64</sup> She added that the AYMs were influenced by the IWA's organisation on class rather than religious lines but it is important to note that the majority of IWA members appear to have been Sikh and their leadership was exclusively Sikh.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the members of the AYMs differed to first generation immigrants in their relationship to work: first generation immigrants had been able to find work with relative ease in industry, an option that was quickly becoming obsolete for younger people. Although the IWA (GB) was clearly interested in class politics, it failed to unite a diverse range of immigrants, perhaps because the word 'Indian' was in the group's title, effectively excluding other immigrants. The AYM in Bradford – the first such group to form – began life as the Indian Progressive Youth Association in 1977 but dissolved in 1978 and reformed under the name Asian Youth Movement in order to include Pakistani and Bangladeshi youths and stressed unity with African and Caribbean youths.<sup>66</sup>

A small number of other scholars have also researched the experiences of young Asians in the second generation. Steven Vertovec examined young Muslims in Keighley and argued that the young people he studied were not 'caught between two cultures' as some have said of the second generation but had their own specific identity that incorporated their ethnic

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<sup>64</sup> Ramamurthy, 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements,' p. 39.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43, p. 45.

heritage, their religion and their residence in Britain.<sup>67</sup> However, much of the article focused issues of religious identity, particularly in relation to burning copies of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and demonstrations against the book by young Muslims in Keighley in 1989.<sup>68</sup> Ramamurthy commented that, 'The primary identity with which South Asians are framed in Britain today is a religious one,' and this is reflected in much research on British Asians, with 'its varied political traditions rarely recalled.'<sup>69</sup>

In contrast, Sallie Westwood is one of the few scholars who examined the political activities of Asian youth in her article on the Red Star Youth Project in Leicester. She argued that the activism of black (including Asian) youth in the late 1970s was a 'politics of opposition' to the NF and racism generally, class exploitation and the power of older men.<sup>70</sup> The growth of the NF from the early 1970s was troubling to many black and Asian people; in 1974, the NF had thirty branches and fifty-four groups.<sup>71</sup> Although the majority of these were concentrated in the South East of England and Greater London, the growth of the NF was a considerable concern to Asian communities in the woollen district.<sup>72</sup> In 1973, the *Yorkshire Post* asked whether there would be a 'race war' in Yorkshire, and an oral history narrator commented that as a child in the 1970s 'We were warned in assemblies [at school about the NF].'<sup>73</sup> Indeed, race riots were still occurring in West Yorkshire into the late 1980s: in June 1989, the *Yorkshire Post* reported on violence in Dewsbury following a rally of the British National Party (BNP) at Dewsbury Town Hall.<sup>74</sup> Opposition to far-right groups such as the NF and BNP was a rallying-point for the growth of the AYMs along with a desire to build organisations that represented the diversity of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. Although the members were of different religious and national backgrounds, shared Asian ethnic identity was important in forming a basis for the groups.

#### *Community and Identity in the Aims and Methods of the AYMs*

First generation groups such as the IWA had set a precedent in campaigning against racial inequality, particularly in the workplace, but as the *Yorkshire Post* warned in January 1973, 'Young people... are not content with the subordinate role their parents may have

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<sup>67</sup> Steven Vertovec, 'Young Muslims in Keighley, West Yorkshire: Cultural Identity, Context and "Community,"' in Steven Vertovec and Alisdair Rogers (eds.), *Muslim European Youth: Reproducing Ethnicity, Religion, Culture* (Ashgate, 1998), p. 87.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>69</sup> Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Sallie Westwood, 'Red Star over Leicester: Racism, the Politics of Identity and Black Youth in Britain,' in Pnina Werbner and Muhammad Anwar (eds.), *Black and Ethnic Leaderships in Britain: the Cultural Dimensions of Political Action* (London, 1991), pp. 146-147.

<sup>71</sup> Alan Sykes, *The Radical Right in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 107.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>73</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 26 January 1973; Interview C0029, recorded 30 July 1985, Bradford Heritage Recording Unit.

<sup>74</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 26 June 1989.

accepted.<sup>75</sup> The actions of the AYMs are testament to this. Racism was a key issue for the AYMs, as it had been for the IWA and other first generation immigrant organisations, but the second generation saw a move away from work-based campaigns and association with the traditional labour movement. This may be because so many of the second generation in the woollen district were unemployed as wool firms were starting to close in large numbers. Tariq Mehmood, a member of Bradford AYM, wrote in his 1983 novel *Hand on the Sun*,

The dark and satanic mills, about which children sing hymns at morning school assemblies, could be seen in every direction. Tall, ugly chimneys sending endless messages to the heavens. Ageing mills, whose profitability had depended on the introduction of cheap labour. Now many of the ‘cheap’ workers sat around idly killing the hours on the dole.<sup>76</sup>

Whilst there was both continuity and change between first and second generation groups such as the IWA and the AYMs, it is notable that by the second generation, ties with the traditional labour movement had been cut and immigrants had moved closer to self-organisation than in the 1960s. This meant that the few young Asians who managed to find jobs in the wool textile industry would be even more unlikely to join a trade union than their fathers: should they wish to be part of an organisation, an ethnically-based group such as an AYM would likely be far more attractive than a trade union that offered all of its members, but blacks and Asians particularly, little for its subscription fee, and was not open to those not working in a given industry. Groups like the AYMs were based on a broad conception of Asian ethnic identity which appears to have been more appealing to Asian youths than organisations based on work, especially given the weak work-based identity shared by wool textile workers and the absence of a work identity for some young Asians. Furthermore, issues such as community protection and preservation were of significant concern to young Asians in West Yorkshire in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of racial violence from groups like the NF, so the AYMs were again more attractive than other collective organisations because they aimed to defend communities from the threat of violence.

The AYMs had two key concerns: protecting their communities from the threat of violence from racists and campaigning against immigration laws that stopped families from being united in the UK. Ramamurthy argued that campaigns against immigration laws were part of the AYM’s broader strategy of protesting against police and state discrimination towards black and Asian people.<sup>77</sup> These campaigns were not always for Asians – for example in 1983, Josephine Thomas, a Grenadian woman from Huddersfield, was supported by the AYM Bradford when she was threatened with deportation to Grenada but her children were

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<sup>75</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 26 January 1973.

<sup>76</sup> Tariq Mehmood, *Hand on the Sun* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 77.

<sup>77</sup> Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 97.

not.<sup>78</sup> This demonstrates the AYMs' stance of supporting all 'black' people in their struggles against racism or perceived racism, although their membership was Asian rather than mixed. However, protection of communities against violence is what gained AYMs some degree of notoriety in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

One such case was the murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar. He was murdered on 4 June 1976 outside the IWA's Dominion Cinema in Southall.<sup>79</sup> It was widely believed that this was a racist attack possibly carried out by NF members; Ramamurthy noted that 'youth in Southall saw no alternative but to organise' against the threat of violence against their community.<sup>80</sup> In a letter to the *Guardian* in April 1979, a correspondent wrote,

It is all too easy for those who are not immediately threatened to argue that the National Front should be ignored. But Southall is a community which still remembers the racist killing of Gurdip Singh Chaggar: can we really expect them to allow the Front to organise in their midst with the sole intention of hurling inflammatory abuse at the local population?<sup>81</sup>

As a result of Singh Chaggar's murder, the Southall Youth Movement was formed and, according to the *Guardian*, had over 600 members by July 1980.<sup>82</sup> Balraj Purewal of Southall Youth Movement said that the group aimed to stand up to the 'so-called leaders of the Southall Asian community' because the older generation 'has failed to provide the political ideas which will enable the communities to survive a hostile climate.'<sup>83</sup> In Purewal's view, the first generation – presumably including the IWA, who had long had a presence in Southall – had not stood up to racism enough, which created the 'hostile climate' in which young Asians were regular victims of racist abuse.

In interviews recorded by Ramamurthy with members of the AYMs, this galvanising effect of racism is apparent. Tariq Mehmood said of his school days, 'We were attacked as we were going on buses, we were attacked when we got off buses.'<sup>84</sup> Bhopinder Bassi added that 'the only direct racism I had actually was from the institutions, the educational institutions,' although Nilofer Shaikh stated that 'I know we faced quite a lot of racism, even the ones born in this country 'cos there was some girls who didn't want to sit next to us,

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<sup>78</sup> Tandana Archive, SC12, Asian Youth Movements records, Letter to Mobilise Support for Josephine Thomas, 1983, accessed on 17 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/search.html](http://www.tandana.org/search.html); Tandana Archive, SC13, Asian Youth Movements records, Leaflet to Mobilise Support for Josephine Thomas's immigration appeal, November 1983, accessed 17 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/search.html](http://www.tandana.org/search.html).

<sup>79</sup> Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>81</sup> *Guardian*, 30 April 1979.

<sup>82</sup> *Guardian*, 1 July 1980.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Tandana Oral Histories, Interview between Anandi Ramamurthy and Tariq Mehmood, recorded 2007, accessed 4 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf](http://www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf), p. 11.

things like that.’<sup>85</sup> Tariq Mehmood said in his interview that the racism he faced as a child, the history of colonialism and the formation of the AYM Bradford were directly linked:

I began to understand that the world I lived in was really fundamentally unfair. I began to understand that this country was rich because we were poor and I also began to understand that we were here because they were there [India] and I really believed in that.<sup>86</sup>

The stories of hostility extended further in Jani Rashid’s interview when he discussed the first riot he had seen in Bradford. He said:

That was my first recollection of a riot in Bradford basically, you know, where police cars were turned over, paint was thrown at them and being chased by police on horseback, you know, and that was basically because they’d allowed the National Front...to hold a meeting in a school in Bradford...that was, I suppose the first real campaign that I can recollect of any kind which was about defending our homes and our community basically, because that’s where most of us lived.<sup>87</sup>

Rashid’s recollection demonstrates that for some young Asian men, issues of community protection were of greater importance than those related to work, which first generation groups like the IWA had campaigned for; this is unsurprising at a time of deindustrialisation and youth unemployment. The defence of Asian communities made the Bradford AYM famous in 1981 when twelve members of the United Black Youth League (UBYL), an AYM off-shoot, and the AYM were arrested on suspicion of conspiracy after a cache of petrol bombs was found at an address in Manningham, Bradford.<sup>88</sup> Saeed Hussain, one of the twelve arrested men, explained why the petrol bombs had been made:

The previous weekend Southall, sort of, other cities had been attacked and it was clear from the police response in those cities that the Asian communities really in the end had to defend themselves. And we took the decision that we would not let a similar situation arise in Bradford where fascists would walk in and actually destroy part of Bradford where black communities lived.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Tandana Oral Histories, Interview between Anandi Ramamurthy and Bhopinder Bassi, recorded 2007, accessed 4 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf](http://www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf), p. 12; Tandana Oral Histories, Interview between Anandi Ramamurthy and Nilofer Shaikh, recorded 2007, accessed 4 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf](http://www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf), p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Tandana Oral Histories, Interview between Anandi Ramamurthy and Tariq Mehmood, recorded 2007, accessed 4 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf](http://www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf) p. 14.

<sup>87</sup> Tandana Oral Histories, Interview between Anandi Ramamurthy and Jani Rashid, recorded 2007, accessed 4 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf](http://www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf), pp. 14-15.

<sup>88</sup> *Observer*, 27 September 1981.

<sup>89</sup> Tandana Oral Histories, Interview between Anandi Ramamurthy and Saeed Hussain, recorded 2007, accessed 4 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf](http://www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf), p. 23.

The word 'community' is used several times in interviews with members of Bradford AYM and UBYL and with those arrested after the planned NF march on 11 July 1981, a summer when other areas of the UK including Southall, Brixton and Toxteth also saw racial violence. Material in the Tandana archive suggests that this was common: a leaflet produced by the July 11 Action Committee, a support group for the men who came to be known as the Bradford 12, stated that 'the United Black Youth League was formed to advance the struggle of the black community.'<sup>90</sup> Tarlochan Gata-Aura, another Bradford 12 defendant, said after he was acquitted with the other eleven men, 'I feared that death could have been a consequence of a skinhead attack on Bradford...My personal experience is that the police have never defended our community.'<sup>91</sup> Ethnically-based self-help and self-defence groups appealed to young Asian men at this time because of the threat of violence certain communities faced. Although it was possible for men involved in groups like the AYMs to also be involved in trade unions, it is clear that for those who contributed to oral history projects on such groups, that ethnic self-protection was prioritised above other kinds of organisation for many.

Whilst it is not possible to say that all AYM members, and indeed all Asian youths, were keenly aware of community issues, it is clear that prominent members of the Bradford AYM and the UBYL were willing to act in the defence of their community and that community had meaning for them. This contrasts with the IWA who did not refer to 'community' that often; although the first generation endured racism, it was the second generation who came to fear violent attack based on their ethnicity as a result of growing racial violence. This perhaps explains why the notion of community was so important to the leadership of the AYMs and similar second generation groups – to them, community was something to defend against outside attack. Additionally, their identities owed little to work or the workplace, as a result of widespread youth unemployment.

Whilst the IWA worked to support its members by helping them navigate the mysterious world of officialdom and provide practical advice about matters including work, the second generation were more concerned with preserving their communities through self-defence. For them, 'white' institutions such as trade unions appear to have had less appeal. As Mohsin Zulfiqar said in an oral history interview, 'unions were mainly led by white workers who saw us as a threat.'<sup>92</sup> Mukhtar Dar added that when young Asians did support strikes and trade union campaigns, they were treated poorly: 'When the miners' dispute [of 1984-85] happened we were very, very involved, you know, we used to go along to Orgreave to

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<sup>90</sup> Tandana Archive, JA12, Asian Youth Movements records, Leaflet Produced by July 11 Action Committee, 1981, accessed on 17 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/search.html](http://www.tandana.org/search.html).

<sup>91</sup> Tandana Archive, JA11, Asian Youth Movements records, Leaflet Celebrating the Acquittal of the Bradford 12, undated, accessed on 17 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/search.html](http://www.tandana.org/search.html).

<sup>92</sup> Tandana Oral Histories, Interview between Anandi Ramamurthy and Mohsin Zulfiqar, recorded 2007, accessed on 4 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf](http://www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf), p. 27.

the miners' picket lines...one of the miners turned around and said, "What the hell are these Pakis doing here?"<sup>93</sup>

Asian youths of the second generation were reluctant to form links with the labour movement because some trade unionists treated them with contempt. There is also evidence, for example from Mehmood's *Hand on the Sun*, that many young Asians in the woollen district were unemployed, so links with the labour movement may not have been seen as important. Furthermore, involvement with one collective organisation was likely to take up the majority of a young Asian person's time, leaving them little time for involvement with another. Groups like AYMs appealed directly to young Asians' ethnic identities and to their interest in protecting their community; trade unions, on the other hand, paid little attention to black and Asian members' specific concerns, and did not represent large numbers of young immigrants.

### Conclusion

There are some caveats that must be considered when discussing the IWA and AYMs in the woollen district. The papers of both the IWA and the AYMs do not contain information about membership numbers and it is not possible to say for certain how many members the branches had, and how this compared to trade union membership. Oral history interviews suggest that ethnically-based organisations were significantly more popular than trade unions among Asians, but, again, it is hard to verify levels of membership based on such a small sample. It would be a stretch to say that groups like the IWA and AYMs were universally popular in their communities; there is no statistical evidence to support this, and, like people of other ethnic groups, some Asian woollen workers would not have belonged to any sort of collective organisation. However, it is clear from the continued existence of the IWA Huddersfield and the passion with which the AYMs pursued their goals that ethnically-based organisations were significant in the lives of some Asians. These groups probably enjoyed greater popularity than trade unions amongst Asians. They based their appeal on ethnic communities and ethnic identities, which appear to have resonated with Asians more than work identities. Furthermore, the IWA and AYMs campaigned on issues that appealed to their members. The IWA mounted several campaigns around working conditions in the 1960s as well as providing social facilities. The AYMs campaigned for an end to racial violence and actively defended their communities against attack. The campaigns and services of both groups were more attractive than those of the NUDBTW, who offered comparatively little to their members and particularly their immigrant members.

Whilst the IWA did not frequently use the language of 'community,' it is clear that IWA branches were formed with specific ethnic and religious communities in mind: Indian Sikhs

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<sup>93</sup> Tandana Oral Histories, Interview between Anandi Ramamurthy and Mukhtar Dar, recorded 2007, accessed on 4 June 2014 at [www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf](http://www.tandana.org/kalatara2000.pdf), pp. 27-28.



were their overwhelming constituency and, whilst issues such as religion were not of prime importance to the IWA, community links are likely to have been useful in recruiting new members. The AYMs were more explicit in their concern with the concept of community and their key aim was to defend the communities they lived in against attack from racists. Prominent members of the AYMs used community as a mobilising concept to encourage other young Asians to fight.

The link to community is something that wool trade unions like the NUDBTW lacked. Wool textile workers tended not to live in geographically-based communities but were spread out across the woollen district making organisation more difficult on a practical level (for example, meaning some union members would have to travel by bus or car to meetings rather than being able to walk). In addition, whilst residents of some areas of the district reported a sense of community in the places they lived, this was not related to the wool textile industry or local mills. Asians in the woollen district, on the other hand, were able to draw on religious and ethnic community networks for recruitment.

Both the IWA and the AYMs organised around ethnic identities. Whilst the IWA's appeal was largely to Sikhs, the AYMs were open to Asians of all nationalities and religions, and no one national or religious group appeared to dominate the organisations, based as they were on the concept of unity in diversity. This was another reason that both groups were successful in their own ways and across generations of Asians in Britain: the organisations were based on ethnicity which many Asian immigrants identified with. Again, this is something that the NUDBTW were not able to harness to recruit members. It is not possible to discern a 'woollen worker' identity that could have been used to appeal to potential trade union members. There were, however, specific identities that the IWA and AYMs could appeal to, and it is likely that their organisational success was largely down to this, especially in the case of the IWAs which were more formally organised than the AYMs and appealed to Sikhs for the most part.

Timing was important: soon after arrival in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, Sikh workers looked for fellowship and support among those of their own religion. By the time the second generation came of age, from the mid-1970s until a decade later, religious differences had become less important and identification as a British Asian, rather than a Pakistani or a Hindu, was significant.<sup>94</sup> The success of ethnically-based organisations among Asians in the woollen district was not only a result of hard work and good organisational skills amongst the leaderships; leaders were able to invoke the concepts of community and identity.

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<sup>94</sup> Beyond the mid-1980s, it is possible to argue that religious identities for some groups regained their significance. The publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 was met with outrage by some Muslims, and book-burnings occurred in Bradford. Moving on into the twenty-first century, the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the USA has seen a resurgence in specifically Muslim identity in Britain.

## Conclusion

The key contention of this thesis is that a combination of both work- and union-based and external (outside the world of work) factors determined low rates of union organisation in wool textiles. The structure and organisation of the wool textile industry into many small units of production – with some firms employing fewer than fifty workers – meant that there were practical difficulties of organisation; this led to a workforce without a strong sense of occupational identity from which collective action could have flourished. Wool textile workers also lacked significant bonds outside the workplace: their non-work identities were diverse, as were the communities they lived in, which added to the practical difficulties of organisation and, again, left wool workers without the links that could have been helpful in building a successful trade union movement. Added to this, the main post-war wool union, the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (NUDBTW), was generally ineffective at recruitment. Furthermore, collective bargaining agreements were often not implemented and the union offered little else to its members – the selective incentives that Mancur Olson Jr. referred to in *The Logic of Collective Action*.<sup>1</sup> Other organisations, such as the Indian Workers' Association (IWA) and Asian Youth Movements (AYMs) were more attractive to immigrant workers because they catered to specific needs and offered selective incentives such as mutual self-protection and more tangible services such as translation services and libraries. Conclusions can be drawn both about the key research question of the thesis – that of why wool textile workers did not join trade unions in large numbers – and also about the sub-questions relating to the significance of the employment of women and immigrants.

The structure of the industry into many small units of production, as discussed at length in chapter four, was a practical hindrance to union organisers unable to visit each and every mill in the woollen district. This was briefly commented upon but not fully explored by Keith Laybourn in an article on the Independent Labour Party in Bradford.<sup>2</sup> The regional organisation of the industry was a further obstacle to overcome, especially in relation to the creation of work-specific identities (as considered fully in chapter four): the industry was organised geographically by product type: Huddersfield produced fine woollens, Bradford produced worsted, Batley and Dewsbury produced the rougher products known as heavy woollens and Halifax mainly manufactured carpets. This meant that in any one wool town, its workers would be engaged in diverse processes: combing, carding, spinning and weaving

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<sup>1</sup> Mancur Olson Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Laybourn, "'One of the Little Breezes Blowing Across Bradford': the Bradford Independent Labour Party and Trade Unionism c.1890-1914," in Keith Laybourn and David James (eds.), *The Rising Sun of Socialism: the Independent Labour Party in the Textile District of the West Riding of Yorkshire between 1800 and 1914* (Herford, 1991), p. 4.

to name a few. This was in contrast to the cotton industry – an industry with far greater union density – which was organised by process, with whole towns engaged in weaving or spinning, for example. It is likely that such an arrangement in cotton led to a stronger sense of a work-based identity that wool workers lacked due to their diverse employment, which, in turn, could have led to a greater sense of solidarity and common-feeling that could have spurred collective action.

Within the mill, the segregation of work by gender and ethnicity created a further barrier to workforce cohesion and the potential creation of a work-based identity, as Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michele Abendstern argued in their research on immigrants in the cotton industry.<sup>3</sup> Immigrant-only nightshifts meant that Asian and Polish workers found it difficult to bond with their white British colleagues;<sup>4</sup> this was particularly significant given that workers of different nationalities and ethnicities were unlikely to mix socially outside of work.<sup>5</sup> Keeping women and immigrants largely separate from white British men further cemented the skill hierarchy in the mill, which placed white British men at the top, and created barriers to a common identity. This gulf between workers was referred to by E. P. Thompson in ‘Homage to Tom Maguire,’ as chapter four demonstrated, there was divergence in the wool workforce.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, face-to-face relations with managerial staff meant that many wool workers felt a sense of personal loyalty to their employer that joining a union might have betrayed. Also, this system of conflict resolution was an established custom in the mill and workers were able to resolve problems informally, leaving little room for trade unions. Finally, whilst it is possible to suggest that wool workers had no reason to join a trade union because they had no major grievances that a union could resolve, Stephen Lukes’ theory of the third face of power challenges this assumption. Lukes argued that power can operate not only to keep issues from the agenda and to stifle grievances, but also to prevent grievances from arising at all.<sup>7</sup> For Lukes, a lack of observable conflict did not mean there was genuine consensus on any issue. Therefore, whilst the wool workforce was generally quiescent and not strike-prone, this does not mean that they accepted or supported managerial decisions.

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett and Michelle Abendstern, “‘If We Depart from These Conditions...:’ Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry, c. 1946-1952,’ *Labour History Review* 72 (2) August 2007, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon has been commented upon by sociologists such as T. P. Jones and D. McEvoy in their paper ‘Race and Space in Cloud-Cuckoo Land,’ *Area*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1978, p. 165 and also in oral history interviews, such as in Andrew Noon’s research on Poles in Huddersfield: ‘A Reluctant Welcome? Poles in Britain in the 1940s,’ *Oral History*, 24 (1), p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> As noted in an oral history interview undertaken for this thesis: Interview with D.R. by Laura Price, 18 December 2010.

<sup>6</sup> E. P. Thompson, ‘Homage to Tom Maguire,’ in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History: in Memory of G. D. H. Cole* (London, 1960), pp. 283-285.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Lukes, *Power: a Radical View* ((Basingstoke, 2005, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed), pp. 26-28.

The other significant work- and union-based factor that contributed to the low level of trade union organisation was the appeal of the NUDBTW, as examined in chapter three. The largest wool trade union was ineffective in recruiting members, most particularly women and immigrants, both large proportions of the wool workforce. Opportunities were generally aimed at native-born white men – either already in skilled roles or those who had the potential to become skilled workers. This suggests that, as with other unions of the time, skilled white male workers were the union's chief priority, pointing again to the division that Thompson highlighted; whilst there is little evidence suggesting outright hostility to women and immigrants, their exclusion points to an underlying prejudice. A key methodological difficulty here was determining the numbers of women and immigrants in the NUDBTW: the union's statistics on membership as noted in their Executive Committee papers do not refer to gender or ethnicity, as there was no prevailing need to do so. Although there is no reason to assume that women and immigrants were not union members, the minute books of the NUDBTW make it clear that women and immigrants held no positions of power within the union. Women and immigrants had little power within unions generally; the NUDBTW was no exception.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the NUDBTW had little to offer all of its members: its bargaining power was poor given that many mills refused to adhere to pay agreements and, as there were few benefits of membership such as access to social and sporting clubs, there was little other reason to join – no selective incentives that were only available to members were offered. This had also been the case for earlier wool unions: a continuity of low union membership between the pre- and post-war periods is apparent. Whilst there were differences between the workforces of the pre- and post-war eras, especially the increased number of Asian and Eastern European mill workers after 1945, there was little change in the status of trade unions and in their relationship to the wool workforce as a whole.

Conclusions can also be drawn about the importance of factors external to the wool textile industry in shaping the low level of union membership. The thesis has considered the role of wool workers' identities at length, such as in chapter five. It was found that where a cohesive identity existed, wool workers were able to form social and campaigning groups based on the strong bonds that such a collective identity provided. This was particularly evident in the different ethnic groups that made the woollen district their home after 1945, many of whom built solid organisations and institutions that persist to this day (such as the Indian Workers' Association, the subject of chapter eight). The longevity of such groups demonstrates that wool textile workers were able to build strong organisations when a shared bond and a strong will existed. Identities were contested and challenged, for example by the

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<sup>8</sup> Laura Price noted in her research on the post-war labour shortage in wool textiles that women and immigrants were generally excluded from opportunities for advancement within the wool industry. The thesis has seen that this was also generally the case for women and immigrants in the NUDBTW. Laura Price, 'Immigrants and Apprentices: the Post-War Labour Shortage in the West Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry, 1945-1980,' *Textile History*, 45 (1) May 2014, p. 32.

second generation of Asian immigrants whose self-perception differed greatly from that of their parents; this resulted in different types of organisation, such as the Asian Youth Movements – groups more political and radical than the IWA (the AYMs are also discussed at length in chapter eight), reflecting the changed identities of the second generation and their experiences of life in a sometimes hostile Britain. It is important to note that identities were contested within generations and organisations too, but the strong will to work together – usually to improve a group’s situation – seems to have largely overridden these differences in the cases of the various woollen district ethnic organisations. The success of ethnic groups – often with fewer material and social resources than white wool workers – suggests that there was no organisational deficiency in the wool workforce, but that there was no sense of common purpose based on a shared identity to unite this increasingly disparate group. Had a stronger common identity existed, it is likely that union organisation would have been an easier task.

Significant debate has taken place amongst historians about the relationship between communities and collective action, another external factor investigated in the thesis in chapter six. In the woollen district, communities were generally heterogeneous, with a range of ethnicities, occupations and other identities represented within residential areas. The extent to which this was a cause or a result of weak trade unionism is difficult to determine. Some scholars, such as Craig Calhoun, have argued that, in the Industrial Revolution, communities were the basis of collective action for radical political actors.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Hester Barron demonstrated in her study of the Durham miners in the 1926 lock-out that identities and communities in the Durham coalfield were diverse, but trade union organisation provided the necessary bonds to form effective collective organisations.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that the presence of a strong trade union in the woollen district could have shaped communities, but it is also possible that stronger community bonds could have made collective action more widespread, as Calhoun suggested. This thesis has been unable to resolve this debate. As seen in chapter six, fragmentary evidence suggested that more wool textile workers from Halifax were members of trade unions than in Huddersfield, and the census demonstrated that Halifax was a more ethnically homogeneous town than Huddersfield. This is suggestive that workers who came from communities where workers were more able to identify with one another were more likely to join a trade union, but definitive proof is difficult to find.

The decline of the British wool industry was examined in chapter one. The industry was in decline throughout the period and significant job losses were sustained; as a result, wool

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<sup>9</sup> Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1982), p. xi.

<sup>10</sup> Hester Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout: Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 10-11.

trade union membership declined as fewer people were employed in wool mills, but membership remained low amongst those remaining in the industry – there was no attempt by the NUDBTW or the workforce to organise against looming closures and redundancies.<sup>11</sup> This could be the result of a ‘declinist’ sentiment that some historians, such as Jim Tomlinson, have argued was prevalent at the time: according to this theory, Britain was in the grips of terminal decline in moral, economic, social and political matters, among others, exemplified by the loss of the Empire following the end of the war and into the 1960s, growing economic competition from elsewhere in the world and the lax morals of British youth.<sup>12</sup> This collective mood could explain why wool textile workers did little to fight against their fate, possibly seeing it as inevitable. What was much clearer was that the poor treatment and low wages of certain key groups that worked in the industry – women and immigrant men – suggested their comparative lack of importance to mill managers and owners despite their large numbers.<sup>13</sup> White male workers were prized above all others for skilled work, training initiatives and promotion by mill managers and owners. Although this does not explain the low level of trade union membership across the whole industry, it describes the hierarchy of skill that was present in mills, something that was also important to the NUDBTW and its predecessor unions.<sup>14</sup>

Related to this, the thesis examined the role of women in the industry at several points; women’s relationship to wool trade union organisation was posited by David Howell as a reason for the generally low level of trade union membership.<sup>15</sup> Although they represented roughly half of the wool workforce throughout the post-war period, women did not share equal status with men: their pay was lower even after the passing of the Equal Pay Act because men and women were engaged in different types of work. It is not possible to make assertions about the number of women who joined the NUDBTW as compared to the number of men because the union did not keep records of members’ gender. Therefore, it is not possible to say that the large number of women workers not taking out union

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<sup>11</sup> Table one in chapter three contains the statistics on NUDBTW membership levels across the post-war period.

<sup>12</sup> The work of Jim Tomlinson, as discussed in chapter one, investigates this current in twentieth-century public discourse. Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 9-10; Jim Tomlinson, ‘The Decline of Empire and the Economic “Decline” of Britain,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 14 (3) 2003, pp. 201-202; Jim Tomlinson, ‘The British “Productivity Problem” in the 1960s,’ *Past and Present*, no. 175, 2002, pp. 188-189; Nick Tiratsoo and Jim Tomlinson, ‘Restrictive Practices on the Shopfloor in Britain, 1945-60: Myth and Reality,’ *Business History*, 36 (2), 1994, p. 65; Jim Tomlinson, ‘A “Failed Experiment”? Public Ownership and the Narratives of Post-War Britain,’ *Labour History Review*, 73 (2), 2008, p. 228; Jim Tomlinson, ‘Thrice Denied: “Declinism” as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 20 (2), 2009, pp. 227-228.

<sup>13</sup> See chapter four on the structure of the industry and chapter one for the wider context of post-war British wool textiles for more information on pay differentials.

<sup>14</sup> The hierarchy of skill in the wool workplace is discussed in chapter four on the structure of the industry.

<sup>15</sup> David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906* (Manchester, 1983), p. 177.

membership was a reason for the weak spread of collective organisation in wool. However, the lack of parity between men and women at work in the mill meant there was a fracture between the genders that contributed to wool workers' poor common identification. Although it is not possible to say that this was a primary cause of the lack of a 'woollen worker' identity, it certainly played a part.

Finally, two case studies (chapters seven and eight) explored the wider themes of the thesis with reference to particular events and groups. Chapter seven explored the strike at William Denby & Sons that started in 1963 and ended eighteen months later in defeat for the NUDBTW: the firm refused to employ members of the union during the strike and at its cessation, and the NUDBTW could not persuade them otherwise. This was the only wool strike of any significance in the period and yet only 250 operatives were involved, a small number proportionate to the UK's total wool workforce of 137,413, most of whom were based in the West Riding.<sup>16</sup> What started as a show of union strength against perceived underhand management practices (managers operating machinery during lunch breaks, which was against the rules of the closed shop) ended in an attempt to find work for those still locked out by Denby's, who resolutely refused to let any union member back to work unless they tore up their membership card. The firm was certainly stronger in its resolve and, although the NUDBTW 'blacked' the firm at the end of the strike, this appears to have been a desperate last act of an organisation with nowhere left to go. Denby's was large, employing 250 workers, significantly more than many wool firms, meaning it was practically easier to organise the workforce – word could spread once a group of workers had taken out membership far more easily to other workers. The workforce was also more homogeneous than at many mills: the majority were employed in dyeing – the only traditionally well-organised sector of wool textiles – and the majority were white British men, although some women also worked there. There was, accordingly, a greater sense of common identification between the workers at Tong Park than at most mills, which afforded greater ease of organisation. Overall, the case study showed that even at a closed shop, the NUDBTW was ultimately too weak to bring the strike to a successful conclusion for its members in the face of a determined management.

Chapter eight was a case study of two immigrant groups that had success in the woollen district, the IWA and the AYMs, and reached conclusions about the role of immigrants in the wool workforce. Their successes differed: the IWA still exists in Huddersfield and is an important resource for the elderly Sikhs of the town, whereas the AYM burned brightly but briefly, winning a court case using the slogan 'Self defence is no offence' and highlighting the structural prejudices of the British justice system – all this despite being a group of generally poorly-educated Asian youths no older than their early twenties. Although good

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<sup>16</sup> *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, Wool Industry Bureau of Statistics – the Wool Textile Delegation, January 1970, no. 241 (relating to the month of November 1969), p. 7.

leadership and clear benefits to members were important in securing success for both groups, they were also able to draw on resources the weak wool trade union movement did not have: a strong sense of common identification and community networks. Whilst we must note that the IWA and AYM did not appeal to all of their respective target audiences, and that neither group recruited textile workers exclusively, they highlight the ability of the wool textile workers who were members of these organisations to organise when they had the resources to do so.

Overall, the thesis has shown that a combination of work- and union-based and external factors contributed to the low level of trade union organisation amongst wool textile workers. The structure of the industry and the identities of wool textile workers were the most significant reasons for weak trade union membership, but all factors examined had a role to play. Structural constraints within the industry and poor common identification between wool textile workers limited the spread of trade union membership in the post-war period, aided by a history of weak organisation since trade unions first existed and a generally ineffective union, the NUDBTW, which offered little to its members in the way of benefits and protection at work. Although other workforces surmounted some of these problems to build significant labour movements, this particular combination of factors proved too much for wool workers to overcome: in a time of decline and contraction, wool workers did not organise collectively to protect themselves against the growing tide of redundancies and mill closures. The fragmented nature of the industry and its regional organisation were the most significant factors in limiting union membership owing to the practical implications of organising and the resulting difficulty in fostering a common woollen worker identity on which bonds and networks could have been forged.



## Abbreviations

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AYMs	Asian Youth Movements
BNP	British National Party
CBWT	Confederation of British Wool Textiles
<i>DLB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Labour Biography</i>
EEC	European Economic Community
EVW	European Volunteer Worker
ILP	Independent Labour Party
GATT	General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs
IWA	Indian Workers' Association
JIC	Joint Industrial Council
<i>MBS</i>	<i>Monthly Bulletin of Statistics</i>
MFA	Multi-Fibre Arrangement
NAUTT	National Association of Unions in the Textile Trades
NF	National Front
NFWW	National Federation of Women Workers
NUDBTW	National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TNA	The National Archives
TUC	Trade Unions Congress
UBYL	United Black Youth League
WATEC	Wool and Allied Textile Employers' Council
WTUL	Women's Trade Union League

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