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A Comparative Study Into Policy Responses by Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher to Industrial Disputes in the Coal Industry.

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September 2022

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Abstract

Margaret Thatcher and Ted Heath's premierships were mired with industrial disputes in the coal industry and a myriad of industrial relations reforms. The 1970s and early 1980s are years characterised by a growth in militant trade unionism, in turn industrial relations policy would define these two Prime Ministers. This thesis sets out to demonstrate that the personal and structural constraints faced by Heath prevented him from governing effectively, Thatcher learned the lessons from Heath's premiership and weakened the unions through economic means. I will also set out the coal industry's decline and the general trajectory of the coal unions from 1912, to give context and an explanation of events in the 1970s and 1980s. Throughout the thesis I use a predominately case study-based approach, but overall, the thesis uses mixed methods. The coal industry in decline section uses predominately a quantitative analysis. While the rest of the thesis uses qualitative and case study analysis. Overall Thatcher was able to prevail and reform the industrial relations system in the UK through economic reform, industrial relations legislation and defeating strikes. She was successful because she used a mixture of planning, pragmatism and the benefit of hindsight. Thatcher effectively planned for major strike action through the Ridley plan where Heath didn't. Knowing the industrial relations act (IRA) 1971 failed. Thatcher took a pragmatic approach and focused on enforceable legislation. All of this however could only be achieved through the benefit of hindsight.

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Introduction

This thesis compares the similarities and differences in how Margaret Thatcher and Edward Heath dealt with industrial disputes, with particular focus on the coal industry. I focus on the coal industry because of my family roots in the industry, but also because in the early 20th century it was one of the biggest industries in the UK. At its peak the industry stretched across the length and Breadth of the UK and employed 1.2 million miners mining nearly 300 million tonnes of coal. By 1990 production had dropped by over two thirds and employment was 49,000.¹ I demonstrate that there were many similarities and differences in the way Heath and Thatcher dealt with industrial disputes. But ultimately both Prime Ministers dealt with personal and structural constraint in differing ways, Thatcher was cautious and pragmatic. Heath was more decisive.

The breakdown in the post war consensus is a major theme though this thesis. My understanding on the post war consensus leans heavily on analysis from David Dutton and Dennis Kavanagh and Peter Morris. Dutton states after 1945 the political parties operated within a given framework, a set of generally accepted parameters in which certain key assumptions were shared and in which policy options were consequently limited. Disputes were less of absolutes than questions of ‘more’ or ‘less’² These Generally accepted parameters were including but not limited to policies on employment, welfare and industrial relations. Policy around industrial relations revolved around corporatism cooperation and voluntarism. Kavanagh and Morris add

Succeeding Conservative governments accepted many of the policies (of the Atlee settlement) on the grounds that full employment and state welfare were electorally popular and that the cooperation of major interests like business and the Trade Unions was necessary to govern the country.³

Whether the Conservatives agreed whole heartedly with every element of the Atlee settlement and the post war consensus is debatable, but what is certain is that in order to govern the country, trade unions and business were almost always required to give their consent to government policy in certain policy areas so that the government could govern

¹ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 22nd January 2022]

² David. Dutton, *British Politics since 1945: The Rise and Fall of Consensus*, (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1991), p.7

³ Dennis. Kavanagh and Peter. Morris, *Consensus Politics from Atlee to Thatcher: making contemporary Britain*, (insert place: Blackwells ,1989) ,p.6 page 6

effectively. Kavanagh and Morris introduce the idea of eras of change, the first being 1945 the beginning of the Atlee settlement and the birth of the post war consensus. They state;

“The second era of change has been that beginning in 1979 with the first of Mrs Thatcher’s election victories. This period has seen the triumph of the conservative party, the rejection of much of the Atlee settlement, and the assertion by policy makers of a number of free market ideas -in a word Thatcherism”⁴

In the rest of the thesis, I demonstrate that Thatcher’s victory in 1979 did signal a new era of change, but there is no doubt that the post war consensus corporatist model of industrial relations was under strain even before Edward Heath became prime minister in 1970.

Secondly, I wish to address explicitly why I have decided to compare Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher, firstly they are both Conservative prime ministers, who ascended to power at very tumultuous times, for similar reasons. Heath came to power when the post war consensus was under threat, due to industrial unrest. The coal industry specifically had been run down by successive governments and due to consensus politics, the leadership within the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) didn’t whole heartedly oppose restructuring within the industry. There is no doubt that at this time strains began to aper between the membership and leadership of the NUM. This resulted in an emergence of am more extreme element within the NUM lead by Arthur Scargill and others. Likewise, Thatcher came to power after the Winter of Discontent and when the extreme element of the NUM had more or less taken over the union. And there had been further run downs in the industry.

Importantly though these two prime ministers operated within some differing structures, for example the Yom Kippur war and the Oil crisis in 1973, which gave Heath little wiggle room. Whereas Thatcher could not have been in a better place to take on the miners in 1984-1985. Their agency is an important theme, Heath began his term in 1970 with a strong vision which he was determined to carry out. And due to his defeat in the 1972 coal strike he was forced into a series of u-turn and a change in vision. Thatcher on the other had entered Downing Street with a less clear vision and a more cautious attitude, but after victory in the steel strike 1980 and her comprehensive victory in the 1983 election over the socialist left, she became more emboldened and empowered.

⁴ Kavanagh and Morris, p.8

It is important to address methodologies used through this thesis. Overall, I use a mixed method approach supporting my analysis with primary material through the use of speeches and newspaper articles and using secondary material in critiquing and assessing what other scholars have stated. A case study-based approach seemed the best way to move forward in the thesis considering and analysing individual events and their significance. Having said this there are certain sections where I also lean heavily on quantitative analysis.

In the first section, I set the scene for the coal industry in general through the 20th century. I conclude that the coal industry was a shadow of its former self by 1990, the industry declined in employment consumption and production from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s, predominately because of declining consumption. Employment and production declined as a result of falling consumption. Falls in demand were the reason for industry's decline. For instance, when British rail phased out the use of steam engine on the railways and moved to diesel engines this negatively affected demand and consumption for coal in that industry. This case study is one that could be repeated throughout the industry. Cabinet papers from December 1958 reveal that there was an "embarrassing overproduction of coal" due to the fact that "demand for coal has fallen from a peak of 223 million tons in 1956 to less than 220 million tons this year, and is not likely to exceed 200 million tons in 1959."⁵ Andrew Taylor makes the point that the minister for fuels and power had identified, "the reduction in consumption is having an adverse effect on the financial position of the board".⁶ This analysis is important because without a proper understanding of the decline in the coal industry one can't begin to understand why government take policy stances when they do.

There is however one sector of the economy that did not decline in this period: energy. Coal historically had multiple buyers in industry, steel, gas, electricity, domestic and others. By the 1970s to some extent and certainly in the 1980s, the electricity market became a larger percentage of that overall consumption, and overall tonnage of coal used increased in electricity generation from 77.24 million tonnes in 1970 to 84.01 million tonnes in 1990.⁷ Meanwhile, coal usage was still declining in that sector because of other cheaper fuel sources. The coal industry was so reliant on the orders made by the electricity Board that when the board found other resources, this spelled disaster for the coal mining sector. Again, those same cabinet papers in December 1958 state. "Oil provided only 7 per cent, of our total fuel

⁵ The National Archive, Fuel and Policy problems, Memorandum by the Minister of Power 19th December 1958, CAB/129/95.

⁶ Andrew. Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Volume 1: 1944-1968* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. find this

⁷ ⁷ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 1st March 2022]

needs in 1938; by 1957 its share had grown to 15 per cent, and by 1965 it may be 24 per cent. Oil dominates transport, is essential to agriculture and is of growing importance in vital industries like iron and steel, and engineering.”⁸ I also conclude that coal imports had little to no effect on the decline in the coal industry up to 1990. Therefore, it was not an increase in coal imports, but rather the increased use of oil within electricity production that was the key reason for the decline in domestic coal demand in the 1970s and 1980s.

Through this second section, I use a mixed method approach using case studies to identify points of analysis and using quantitative analysis when breaking down figures within the industry. This analysis is important because without a proper understanding of the decline in the coal industry one can't begin to understand why government take policy stances when they do. It is also important to gain an adequate understanding of why the National union of mine workers were pursuing certain aims and objectives.

In the second section. I will move on to analysis of the trade union movement pre-1970. The coal industry was unique when it came to strikes through the 20th century, Derick Aldcroft and Michael Oliver analysis of the affect trade unions had on the economy and they establish that “Coal mining fell into a class of its own since it accounted for 18 % of all strike activity post war”⁹ I establish in the second section that strikes in the 1970s and 1980s didn't appear out of nowhere and that all the events of previous strikes ,particularly that of 1926 had an influence on events and legislation in the 1970s and 1980s. Although I identify 1956 as a key year in Coal mining that makes the start of the overall decline. Taylor identifies 1958 as somewhat of a watershed year, he states 1958 was the year that the first program of pit closures was announced.¹⁰It will be made clear in the thesis that from this point miners began to endure a drop in living standards as evidence by the Wilberforce enquiry in 1972 and the breakdown in consensus politics, at least in the coal industry. Previous strikes decline in miners living standards the general breakdown in the post-war consensus and in place of strife all contributed to events in the early 1970s

In the third section I analyse the first half of Heath's premiership 1970 and 1972; events of the previous 15 years such as in Place of Strife and the increase in pace of wildcat strikes in the coal industry contributed to Heath's pursuit of the Industrial Relations Act (IRA) Keith Laybourn makes that point that factory level industrial relations were beginning to undermine

⁸ The National Archive, CAB/129/95.

⁹ Derek H. Aldcroft, Michael J. Oliver, *Trade Unions and the Economy: 1870-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate,2000), p.97

¹⁰ Taylor, p.186

the formal consensus style industrial relations.¹¹ I conclude that for this reason in theory Heath was right to pass the 1971 Industrial Relations Act, but Heath paid little attention to what the unions might do if the law was passed. Ultimately the act made the union movement more political because while the government was consulting them on industrial and economic matters and asking for their assistance, the IRA was attacking the rights of ordinary Trade union members. This was a personal constraint on Heath. The proses of great politization started before the IRA but David Marsh makes the important point that while asking the union for greater co-operation on matter of industry and the economy both Labour and Conservative government argued that for industry to be run more effectively the government was required to intervene. This is short allowed the trade union to readily blame the government more and more.¹²

With unions more politicised and growing discontent in the coal fields, I will next analyse the 1972 coal strike. The effect the strike had on government was enormous, it signalled a change of tack by the government. It forced the introduction of statutory wage controls, which Heath had always vowed not to introduce. All this was symptomatic of the coal industry's wakening position in 1972. V.L Allen gives clear and compelling evidence in the miners favour, he argues that for years the miners living standards had fallen and dropped well below the average pay on the manufacturing industry.¹³ This section is crucial because it not only sets out Heath personal constraints in passing and implementing the IRA, but it also sets out his personal constraints around not predicting or planning for the miners' strike in 1972, and for understanding the context around the next section, in terms of how the IRA would come to affect the second half of Heaths premiership.

For forth section I go on to analyse events which led up to the miner strike 1974 and the fall of the Heath government. After the 1972 strike the government introduced statutory wage controls this was the beginning of the end for the Heath government, the Yom Kippur war of 1973 jolted the ensuing oil Crisis into pace, Michel Stewart analyses the Yom Kippur war and the oil crisis, his analysis demonstrates the stark reality of the oil crisis on the UK economy. He details how OPEC increased prises from \$3 to \$4.50 per barrel and the cut production by 5%.¹⁴ After this the miner's strike started but where Thatcher prepared Heath didn't, coal stock were quickly dwindling and the February 1974 election was called. I

¹¹ Keith, Laybourn, *British Trade Unionism c.1770-1990* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991), p.164

¹² David Marsh, *The New Politics of British Trade unionism: Union power and the Thatcher Legacy* (London: The Macmillan press,1992) p. 32

¹³ Vic L. Allen. *The Militancy of British Miners* (Shipley: The Moor Press, 1981), p.101

¹⁴ Stewart, Michael. *The Jekyll and Hyde years: Politics and Economic policy since 1964* (London: J.M Dent & Sons LTD,1977), p.173

conclude that for all Heaths faults during his Prime Ministership he should have understood the new found importance of the miners and Michel Stewart essentially argues that because of the oil crisis coal had become a much more important commodity and there for the miners that dug it out were the same.¹⁵ More importantly, this whole episode taught many Conservatives that they now could not reconcile full employment with government intervention and low inflation. Ultimately the events which I will analyse in more detail in this thesis would come to inform Thatcher's policy style and legislation. The section overall sets out that Heaths structural constraint in the latter half of his premiership spelt death for his premiership all of which were significant factors on his downfall. It is also important however to note that the personal constraints Heath had such as not preparing for the miners' strike in 1974 and also calling an election at a questionable time had an influence on his downfall. Heath personal and structural constraints would then go on to inform Thatcher's policy stances in 1979.

For the fifth section I will look at Thatcher from 1979 to 1983 and conclude that her trade union policy was cautious but pragmatic. Firstly, I analyse the formation of her trade union policy and where her policy came from, Taylor states it became clear to those around thatcher that union power would need reducing for Thatcher to achieve the transformation in the UK economy.¹⁶ Stepping Stones identified the problems and explained the solutions. Nevertheless, change didn't occur overnight and Thatcher's biggest strength when entering government was the Winter of Discontent. mainly because this allowed the conservatives to focus their policy agenda and ultimately created public attitude for change. Peter Dorey makes the crucial point that the stepping stones program was saved from oblivion by the trade unions because of the winter of discontent.¹⁷ Because from 1977 December 1978 the report had been effectively shelved because of a lack of overwhelming support in cabinet. Thatcher never adopted a slow and steady approach to union legislation she was well aware of the compliance issue and knew that any piece of legislation that passed required the unions to comply with it. Thatcher's Employment Act 1980 restricted picketing and introduced government funds for ballots for strike action. Thatcher dealt with a major strike less than a year into her tenure. Her pursuit of monetarism and fiscal restraint meant that the loss-making steel industry would have to make significant cut backs. Ultimately after three months all the steel workers went back to work, the government had prevailed over the steel unions.

¹⁵ Stewart, p.185

¹⁶ Taylor, Vol 2 p.113

¹⁷Pete. Dorey 'The Stepping stones program: The Conservative party struggle to develop a trade-union policy., 1975-1979', *Historical studies in Industrial Relations* 35 (2014),89-116 (p.112)

The coal strike that never was is a different story, when the National Coal Board announced a raft of pit closures in 1981 the miners balloted to strike. I have concluded that the whole situation was embarrassing for the government, as Thatcher had to back down and reverse the closures. However, it was also a pragmatic decision because the NCB and the government were not ready to enter a long-protracted industrial dispute. Andrew Gamble makes the crucial point that the Thatcher government only entered dispute where it could be assured of victory.¹⁸ The position of the steel and coal industries were a structural constraint that she was left with by previous government. The government were also cautious knowing what the NUM was capable of, so it is easy to see why Thatcher opted for a cautious approach, this was a major structural constraint on Thatcher. I conclude however that a major factor in weakening the unions was the economic policy of monetarism. Through strict fiscal restraint along with high interests' rates to combat inflation, deindustrialisation hit pace, the worse of this deindustrialisation was in the traditionally heavily unionised industrial areas. In 1983 the union membership and density had both shrunk significantly. This section overall concludes that Thatcher had multiple structural constraints when coming to power in 1979, but she was able to overcome these by using her personal leadership style her economic policy, significant structural constraints were the strength and power of the trade union movement and the NUM although they were weakened by the Winter of Discontent and the growth in monetarism though the early 1980s. Thatcher objective was never to destroy the trade union movement though economic or legislation, her aim was the rebalance the economy.

For the sixth and final section I will look at events after the 1983 election. Thatcher was buoyed by her victory in the general election of 1983, Thatcher herself states the General Election result was the “most devastating ever inflicted upon democratic socialism in Britain”¹⁹ After the election reform hit pace, with the 1984 Employment Act. After the election reducing the power and privileges was given a high priority.²⁰ Thatcher’s first move was to pass the trade union act 1984, which introduced greater democratisation into the trade unions. I then go on to discuss the 1984-85 miners’ strike, the events that caused the strike and the legacy of it. It was disastrous for the coal industry and for the NUM; it was that last major strike in the UK on this scale. David Marsh makes the point that, the victory for the government was very symbolic, Thatcher had succeeded where Heath had failed, this was

¹⁸ Andrew Gamble, *The Free economy and the strong state: The politics of Thatcherism* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 103

¹⁹ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years* (London: Harper Press, 1993), p.339

²⁰ Gamble, p.116

very important for those Conservatives who still felt humiliated by the 1973-1974 strike.²¹ Thatcher then continued her slow and steady approach passing the Trade Union Act 1985, as of the 1987 election compliance did not seem to be an issue for the government, largely because of government legislation and monetarist policies. The Employment Act 1987 and the Employment Act 1990, each piece of legislation building on the last. This section will conclude that her personal constraints had all but disappeared and her structural constraints had gone with the growth of monetarism. In defeating the Miners in 1985 she had removed the final structural constraint on her prime ministership. She never the less continued her pragmatic attitude to industrial policy with the 1984 1987 and 1990 trade union and employment acts.

I will overall conclude that the structural constraints Heath faced such as the Yom Kippur war, the oil crisis and the miners' strike that followed left him in an impossible position. To U-turn on his incomes policy, would have made him look inept and would have been a personal constraint. To do nothing would have led to an even deeper and longer fuel crisis and to call an election mean he would of ran the risk of losing. Heaths personal constricts led him to deeply underestimated the level at with the trade union movement would react to the industrial relations act, and his incomes policies. The trouble being he was in no position to oppose the trade unions and the NUM. This juxtaposed to Thatcher who after Heath's experience was well aware the trade unions would fight overtly anti-inflation anti-union policies and legislation. So she pragmatically weekend the unions gradually through legislation and although it was never a conscious choice weekend the unions through economic reforms in an effort to rebalance the economy.

The coal industry in decline.

In order to assess the similarities and difference between the way Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher dealt with trade union policy and partially with the National union of Mineworkers, it is also important to consider why the NUM was objecting to government policy but also why the government and the National Coal Board were perusing certain policies. Note at this stage that the NCB and the government were of course separate entities. Prior to 1970 the government largely allowed the NCB to run its own affairs without getting to involved. Heath and Thatcher would use the NCB as a switch board to deliver messages,

²¹ David. Marsh, *The New Politics of British Trade Unionism: Union's power and the Thatcher legacy* (London: The Macmillan press, 1992), p. p119

telling the NCB what policy to carry out. Industrial dispute, government policy and NCB policy must be placed into the contexts of a declining coal industry. Kathy O'Donnell's argues that', "an adequate understanding of the coal industry's fortunes since nationalisation needs to be grounded within a proper conceptualisation of government industry relations"²². In this section below I will demonstrate through empirical and quantitative analysis that the coal industry was in decline overall throughout the period 1945-1990 despite some promising figures from 1945-1960. When put simply the coal industry was declining because the market for coal was disappearing Jenkins offers an analysis of the declining market for coal; however, he relates it to the energy sector and offers more of an analysis of the early 1990s, he overall concludes that "British coal's major problem has not been the cost of operation but the disappearance of its markets"²³ The seeds of the coal industry's more or less collapse in the 1990s compared to 40 years earlier were sown through the post war period. Ultimately coal production fell because demand had fallen.

Fig one shows coal extraction hits its peak of 227.79 million tonnes in 1957, falling to 92.77 million tonnes in 1990.²⁴ Fig two shows domestic coal usage hit its peak of 218.08 million tonnes in 1956, dropping to 108.31 million tonnes by 1990.²⁵ Fig one demonstrates, overall usage and production had more or less halved from 1956 to 1990. Demand for coal in the economy dropped by just under half in 45 years coal had become much less needed in the British economy being replaced by cheaper fossil fuels or more efficient ones. I will further analysis this statement in later paragraphs in this section. In understanding the demise of British coal Jenkins is right that the market for British coal was disappearing ²⁶. It only follows that if demand for coal falls overall then the amount extracted must fall especially when the NCB was reliant on selling their goods to other nationalised or British industry.

British coal had naturally become costlier to extract, compared to other world powers, as the size of existing pits in the UK grew larger the faces got further away from the shafts. It was needed at the shafts to be taken up to the surface for transportation. As the pits went deeper the transportation costs grew hence the necessity open opencast mines to minimise costs. The most assessable coal was extracted first, meaning that the marginal costs of extracting the

²² Kathy. O'Donnell, 'Pit closures in the British Coal industry: a comparison of the 1960s and 1980s', Internal Review of Applied Economics, 2.1 (2007), 62-76 (p.64)

²³ Gilbert. Jenkins, 'British Coal, An historical perspective', Energy exploration and exploitation, 10.6 (1992), 437-449 (p.437)

²⁴ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 1st March 2022]

²⁵ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 1st March 2022]

²⁶ Jenkins, p. 437

coal that was left increased, this could not always be offset by technological growth. Another contributing cost increase was labour costs, of cores these are addressed thought the thesis, however later in this section we will look at productivity in pits and output per man shift improvements over time.

Figures two and three show declining coal usage sector by sector in the economy. This graph demonstrates that usage of Coal was declining over all sectors of the economy bar one; the coal board was increasing reliant on the electricity sector for the purchase of coal from 1970. Ultimately coal, as a primary sector good, is vulnerable to declining demand and output in other industries. This is what happened in the late 1960s and early 1970s with declines in industries across the UK economy. This happened with the steel industry when demand from coking works dropped by half from around 30 million tonnes in 1970 to 15 million tonnes in 1980.

The figures also show that thought out the 1950s and 60s there was a diverse buying market for coal; in other words, the Coal industry was not relying on one industry to purchase the vast majority of coal consumed, for instance in 1956 the Electric Board was buying 21.22 percent of coal produced, in 1970 it was 49.26, in 1980 it was 72 percent. Although pits were transporting more coal to power stations, monopolisation in buying or selling left the industry vulnerable to external market forces. This in conjunction with other industries dropping their usage of coal, such as the rail industry in the mid-1960s moving to diesel locomotives, weekend the industry substantially. It is true that the percentage simply shows that the percentage share was going up and is not an indicator that the Electricity Board were buying more coal. Figures from The Department for Business Energy and industrial Strategy²⁷ show that in 1956 28.57 million tonnes of coal was Imputed 0.38 million tonnes of oil equivalent was imputed while total of all fuels was 27.06 million tonnes. In 1970 coal rose to 43.07 million tonnes while oil rose to 13.27 million tonnes equivalent natural gas totalled 0.11 million tonnes equivalent. Out of a total of 53.84 million tonnes and it 1980 some figures rose again 51.01 million tonnes of coal, 0.42 million tonnes equivalent of natural gas, while oil dropped to 7.67 million tonnes equivalent out of a total of all 69.46 million tonnes. The report detailed figures year by year for all electricity sources, but these all the figures taken together show because of decreasing demand from other sectors the percentage of coal being sent the

²⁷ *Historical electricity data: 1920 to 2021* (2022) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-electricity-data>> [accessed 12/09/2022]

electricity sector increased; but also, the pure input figures show that the amount of coal used in the sector also increased.

Fig four shows energy consumption by sources, this demonstrates that coal's role in power stations decreased through the period in favour of firstly oil till 1972, then gas ate into both coal and oils share of the market. The opening of gas fields in 1964 and the opening of North Sea Oil in 1976 aided in the demise of coal. The oil crisis of 1973 did provide a problem for the industry, represented in a drop seen in fig two and three. Oil dropped from 50.46% in 1973 to 43.41% by the time of the second oil shock in 1979. However, by that point extraction of North Sea oil had hit pace, therefore not affecting domestic electricity generation.

More important than price, was supply. Despite peaks and troughs in the oil and gas price thought the period oil and gas supplies were relatively constant vis-a-vis coal supply because of industrial action taken by the miners in 1969 1972 and 73 and 1984-85. This point is made by Ted Heath when he states, "We had built up coal stocks, but to great a portion of the coal was at the pithead and not at the power stations."²⁸ He then goes on to essentially state that Scargill's flying pickets were damaging supply to power stations ²⁹, this would also prove to be a major problem in 1974 and resulted in a three-day working week. The only major event to affect the oil supply was the Ocean Ranger oil disaster of the Canadian coast in 1982. Apart from this incident fuel input figures show supply of oil and Gas was consistent.³⁰ Oil also was a more efficient fuel source Jenkins points out in his table 3 that 1 ton of long coal produced 230 therms of electricity while the same amount of oil would produce 410 therms ³¹. The oil crisis of 1972 greatly affected the amount of oil that was burned to produce power; however by 1979 a regular delivery of north sea oil and Gas meant that the damage from the accident could be negated.

The raw cost of coal to the electricity sector was also a major reason for its declining use vis-a-vis oil and gas. Although oil and gas prices fluctuated the coal price consistently increased. Fig seven shows the price of coal from 1954 to 1990 with prices indexed to 1992 levels. This graph shows the price of coal more or less doubled from 1945 to 1982 and then halved again to 1990, It is only natural that if the price of coal was steadily increasing, coupled with overall cheaper gas and relatively stable oil prices (with the exception of the oil crisis), the use of coal in the economy will drop. In an attempt to produce cheaper coal open

²⁸ Edward. Heath, *The course of my life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993), p.350

²⁹ Heath, p.351

³⁰ *Historical electricity data: 1920 to 2021* (2022) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-electricity-data>> [accessed 20/02/2022]

³¹ Jenkins, p. 438

cast coal mines increased production. However, in 1970 only 10.51 million tons of coal were extracted from open cast mines while deep cast mines were 139.69 million tonnes.³² Open cast mining grew while the vast majority of deep cast coal mines were decreasing their output. In 1990 19.82 million tons of coal came from open cast mines while 72.9 million tonnes came from deep cast.

Wages were compressed in real terms from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, reflecting Coals declining use in the economy but also as a cost saving mechanism. Ted Heath himself even acknowledged that the miners had had a real term pay cut over those years. “The miners were aggrieved at having seen the real value of their pay fall in relation to that of other workers”.³³ Hence slower growth in prices in those years, however the 1970s was the era of particular high wage growth and inflation. The NUM demanded an over 50% wage increases for its surface workers in 1972.³⁴ Excessive pay increasing continued through the 1970s and into the early 1980s, the NCB was then forced to more or less double coal prices in those years. This in turn affected coals use in the economy.

Employment and closures of pits were both causal and symptomatic of the decline of the coal industry. Fig Eight shows employment in the coal industry 1945-1990. It shows employment in the industry hovering around 700,000 from 1945 till 1958; before falling sharply. From 1973 employment in the industry hovers around 240,000 until 1980, after when it plummets again until there was just 50,000 employed in the coal industry in the UK in 1990. O’Donnell analysis indicates that there were a few periods where there were big drops in employment in the industry and then pit closures followed. She notes that between 1947 and 1948 20,000 ‘Bevin boys’ were lost in the industry. The Bevin boys were men aged 18-25 who were conscripted to work in coal mines in order to increase coal production from 1943 to 1948. The lifting of the essential work order in 1950 saw an exit of 75,800 miners in the immediate years after.³⁵

She argues that 174 pits were closed between 1947 and 1957 due to lack of workers. The order was introduced in 1941 and required all skilled workers (including the coal industry) to stay in that industry, it would also prevent them in enlisting in the army navy or air force. Fig Two shows there was an increase in demand for coal overall in these years from 184.91 million tonnes in 1947 to 213.46 million tonnes in 1957. Largely because Britain was

³² Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 17th February 2022]

³³ Heath, p.350

³⁴ Heath, p.350

³⁵ O’Donnell, p. 66

transforming from a wartime economy to a peace time one. 1956 was the peak year for coal demand post war at 218 million tonnes coal production had reached its high in 1952 at 229 million tonnes and hovered around that level until 1957, and employment was at its post war peak in 1948 with 720,000 men employed but that two remained stable until 1958³⁶. Employment in the industry was in free fall from 1957 when it was 710,000 and kept falling until 1973 when it had dropped to 252,000. It then levelled out at that level until 1980. Between 1957 and 1973, just 16 years 458,000 lost their jobs in the industry, this was a fall of 64.5%. O'Donnell's analysis then jumps to the 1980s. She adds that the NCB had become more explicit about what it meant by economic, from the outset of the coal dispute in 1984. "A colliery was defined as unprofitable and hence uneconomic, whenever the cost of producing coal outweighed the proceeds generated by its sale."³⁷

Although the main reason for the pits being closed was the soaring costs O'Donnell fails to recognise that demand for coal had dropped over 10 million tonnes in the years between 1980 and 83, she also failed to recognise that demand for coal had dropped nearly 50 million tonnes between 1960 and 1970, as seen in fig four, it must be acknowledged that the fall in demand for coal between 1960 and 1980 also necessitated closure of pits, pits became uneconomic because their costs were increasing and they had exhausted their reserves, but also because there was no one to sell the coal to. Also, O'Donnell fails to recognise the trajectory of the coal industry overall it is useful to focus on small instances were small numbers of miners left the industry or retired but placed into a context of employment falling in the industry by 650,000 workers in 45 years 20,000 Bevin boys losing their jobs seems a small instance of the overall picture. The overall picture of employment in the coal industry was catastrophic and was more symptomatic rather than causal of the reasons why the coal industry had collapsed.

Productivity increases in the industry directly affected employment. The industry decline was a product of its own success. Fig Nine shows output per man shift improvements in the industry from 1951 to 1994, in making this graph I collated two sets of data the first from 1951 -1971 published by the NUM³⁸, they used CWT as a unit of measurement. A CWT is 112 pounds of weight, there is 2240 UK pounds in a UK tone there for the conversion from CWT to actual UK tones can be easily done. The next set of data from Andrew Glyn and

³⁶ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 17th February 2022]

³⁷ O'Donnell, p. 67

³⁸ John Hughes, Roy Moore, *A special Case: Social justice and the miners* (Middlesex: Penguin Books ,1972), p.40

Stephen Machins paper spans from 1982 to 1994 and is displayed in tonnes per man shift.³⁹ It can be seen from 1951 that output remained just over one ton per man shift, then in 10 years from 1959 to 1969 output per man shift doubled to just over two tonnes per man shift, with declining demand and an increase in productivity it is simply the case that workers were not needed in the numbers they once were. The problem with the data is that there is a gap of roughly 10 years however it is clear from the graph's trajectory that in those years output per man shift remained relatively stagnant. Output per man shift increased enormously in 10 years from 1984 -1994 in these years output per man shift increased by 6 tones. The pits that stayed open became more productive and the most unproductive and unprofitable pits closed.

V.L Allen argues that is coal imports were partly to blame for the collapse of the industry. He states, "At the same time the C.E.G.B [Central Electricity Generating Board] ,which had made secret coal import contracts which were hidden from even the secretary of state for energy ,increased its imports .The British steel corporation also increased its imports from Australia."⁴⁰Allen continues "The issue of coal imports was an obvious injustice"⁴¹. And goes on to raise a case study around the British steel corporation and states that raised their imports from 1.7 to 2.9 million tonnes in 1979, but fails to contextualise coal imports compared to overall production. Fig 10 demonstrates the levels of coal imports vis-a-vis Coal production in the UK, it shows that coal imports remained negligible through the period 1945-1989. The first year the UK imported coal was 1970, Coal production that year was 147.19 million tonnes and imports were 79,000 tonnes, this means only 0.053% of all coal used in the UK was imported. In 1980 130.10 million tonnes was produced and 7.33 million tonnes was imported representing 5.63%. In 1985 one of the high years for imported coal due to the miners' strike, 94.11 million tonnes were produced, and 12.73 million tonnes was imported, meaning that 13.5% of all coal in the UK was imported. Fuel input figures show that the vast majority of the short fall in electricity generation was made up by oil burning rather than imported coal, because of the political sensitivity around working miners. Oil burning jumped from 5.14 million tonnes of oil equivalent and 47.16 million tonnes of coal in 1983 to 22.80 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 1984 and 31.07 million tonnes in 1984⁴². In 1990 92.6 million tonnes was produced in the UK and 14.78 million tonnes was imported representing 15.9%, despite this slight increase, the decrease in UK production is far more

³⁹ Andrew Glyn, Stephen Machin 'Colliery Closures and the Decline of the UK coal industry', British Journal of Industrial Relations, 35:2 (1997), 197-214 (p.199)

⁴⁰Allen, p. 304

⁴¹Allen, p.306

⁴² *Historical electricity data: 1920 to 2021* (2022) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-electricity-data>> [accessed 20/02/2022]

substantial than the increase in imports. For example, there was a 54 million ton drop in UK production in coal from 1970 to 1990, and only a 15 ton increase in imported coal, it is certainly true that there was a trend in the UK Coal market for importing Coal but it wouldn't be till 2001 that imports of coal exceed UK production and again I make the point that even though there was an increase in imported coal there was an enormous decline in the amount of coal produced in the UK.⁴³

Coal exports was also a factor in the industries decline, the biggest year for coal exports was 1923, when the UK exported 99 million tonnes. The pre-second world war average exports year on year was 59.96 million tonnes. However, exports more less decline year on year till the second world war when export figures for the years were an average of 21.6 million tonnes. The biggest year for post war exports was 20 million tonnes in 1949, the post war average coal exports to 1990 were 7.04 million tonnes. The best year for coal exports in the 1970s was 3 million tonnes. The industry had a slight resurgence in exports in the early 1980s reaching 9 million tonnes in 1982 before slumping back down to two and three million tonnes from 1984-1990. Strikes negatively affected exports in the years 1921, 1926, 1972, 1974 and 1984-85.⁴⁴ A greater number of exports could indicate overproduction and a slack domestic market, especially in the context I have set out of a post war decline in the coal industry.

I have demonstrated that the fundamental reason for the Coal industry's demise in the UK was the disappearance of its markets, fig one demonstrates the starkness of the coal industry's problems in the post war period. One hundred million tonnes of UK coal was no longer demanded in the British because of the collapse of industry more generally the coal industry lost over 30 million tonnes of demand in 34 years, domestic use of coal fell in favour of other solid fuels like gas and as a result the coal industry lost 34 million tonnes of demand between 1956-1990. I have concluded that imports had little to no influence on the decline of the coal industry, imports never represented more that 15% of all coal in the UK with the exception of 1984-85, because of the miners' strike; Even when 20% of all coal in the UK was imported domestic output had dropped by just under 60%. Fuel input figures prove that imported coal didn't make up the short fall in domestic output. Although imports of coal grew and domestic production was shrinking one wasn't at the cost of the other, UK production dropped by just under 50 million tonnes while imports grew just under 15 million tonnes. Looking at the big

⁴³ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 17th February 2022]

⁴⁴ *Historical coal data: coal production, availability and consumption 1853 to 2021* (2022) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-coal-data-coal-production-availability-and-consumption>> [accessed 6th September 2022]

picture that still represents a 35 million ton drop in demand. The decline in exports thought the 20th century and a dramatic drop in the post war economy is yet another indication of global market forces and overproduction and a slack domestic market for coal. The fall in employment was in my view symptomatic not causal in the industry's relative collapse, although O'Donnell essentially states, employment was major factor in pit closures between 1947 and 57 she is right on one sense because demand remained high for coal at that point in the post war period. However, this argument in my view cannot be applied to the period after this. The whole debate must be framed around that fact that there was an enormous slump in demand overall through the post war period. The big picture must be seen when assessing the coal industry decline for the purposes of a study into industrial disputes. The link countless industrial disputes had on the Coal industry should not be lost either, ultimately these disputes disrupted supply to critical national infrastructure like power plants, it made the UK coal market less competitive though pushing for uneconomic pits to stay open , and continuous disputes affected supplies to export markets , ultimately the domestic and global market would lose hope in the UK Coal market ,because of its uncompetitive nature inflamed by years of under investment and countless industrial disputes and stoppages official and unofficial.

The mining unions and major strikes in the industry pre-1970.

In the last section we identified that the coal industry was at its high in the post-World War one pre-World War two time period, and we found that after the second world war the industry's decline hit pace with fall output demand and employment, there is no coincidence then that as the industry started to decline the union members began to show their displeasure with greater regularity. This is not to say however that mining union members did not show their displeasure before the industries relative decline after the second world war.

It is important to be clear that the industrial strife of the 1970s and 80s didn't emerge out of the blue. The miners had a long history of opposing pit closures and cuts in wages, the most contentious of occasions was 1926. Never the less there was also important strikes before 1926 such as 1912 and 1921. But I do not have adequate scope in this thesis to discuss these strike in detail. Never the less Laybourne argues there was a major shift in the attitude of governments particularly conservative ones after the first world war, they believed that wages and union power had to be reduced. the government passed the emergency powers act of 1920 in response to this.⁴⁵This act made permeant the powers of the war time defence of the realm act of 1914.

⁴⁵ Laybourn, p.133

This act would be particular use in the 1921 coal strikes known as black Friday. Although the strike ultimately ended in failure with the unions failing to secure pay increases and freezes until 1925 on what became known as 'red Friday'. The damage from the strike had already been done and the miners made their point. Nearly 86 million working days were lost during this strike⁴⁶, Coal production in 1921 dropped over 60 million tonnes on the previous year. It was a direct result of the strike as coal production jumped back up to it war production levels of 253 million tonnes in 1922 and 280 million tonnes in 1923⁴⁷. Employment in the industry also remained high at 1.08 million in 1922 jumping to 1.15 million in 1923. Laybourne argues the TUC general council was created as a result of this strike.⁴⁸

The general strike of 1926 proved very damaging for both unions, and government and was the biggest strike ever seen in the UK, there were 162 million working days lost in the strike⁴⁹, when some 1.6 million workers went on strike (called out by the TUC) for nine days, as a result of proposed wage reductions in the Coal industry. Coal stocks were exhausted in many cases due to heavy mining during the first world war, in a similar vein to the 1970s the coal had become more expensive to mine and output per man shift had been dropping since 1922. Clegg argues the miners had to deal with sharp levels or job losses in the industry due to renewed competition from the German market.⁵⁰ Indeed employment in the industry had dropped from its height in 1920 at 1.19 million to 1.08 million in 1925 and to 992,000 in 1927.⁵¹ The TUC proposed secondary strike action with other workers from the transport and heavy industry unions. The strike proved what the unions were capable of but is also proved that the government at its own discretion could defeat a strike. Coal production had dropped to 128.30 million tonnes in the year of the strike a fall on the previous year of 118.77 million tonnes; production was increased to above 1925 levels in 1927 to 255 million tonnes.⁵² Laybourn argues Although the General strike lasted only nine days the coal strike lasted

⁴⁶ Office for National Statistics, *The history of strikes in the UK* (2015) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/the-history-of-strikes-in-the-uk/2015-09-21>> [accessed 12th December 2021]

⁴⁷ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 14th December 2021]

⁴⁸ Laybourn, p. 134

⁴⁹ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 14th December 2021]

⁵⁰ Hugh A, Clegg, *A history of British trade unions since 1889 volume 2 1911-1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 384

⁵¹ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 14th January 2022]

⁵² Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 14th January 2022]

about six months.⁵³ There are certainly parallels between the coal industry in the 1920s and the coal industry in the 1970s and 80s.

After the General Strike the governments legislative response was aimed at preventing a strike on this scale again. The trade unions and trade disputes act of 1927 made secondary strike action illegal, The law also prevented mass picketing; prevented civil service trade unions from affiliating with the TUC and finally trade unions were mandated to give their members an opt out of the political levy. Post 1926 the Mining unions experienced a weakening of their movement, partly because of the trade union and trade disputes act, before it was repealed in 1947. Aldcroft and Oliver state “The weakness of the union movement in the 1920s and 1930s was reinforced by a slack labour market situation, so despite the industrial militancy of the early 1920s, after the General strike widespread industrial action more or less petered out”.⁵⁴ Clegg argues trade union membership peaked in, “1920 over three and a half times the 1909 figure. Density had risen from 14.2 % (in 1910) to 48%. Thereafter there was almost continuous decline, interrupted by brief and feeble recoveries in 1924 and 1929, to a low point in 1933 when membership was little above half of the 1920 figure and density had fallen to 22.9 percent”.⁵⁵

In all the MFGB had proved two things A that though its strike action it had influenced and indirectly changed government, and B had a leading role in uniting to the trade union movement in order to affect change. Never it less it had also exposed its poor organisational structure and highlighted the need for change after the second world war and nationalisation. I will assess this more in the next part of this section.

The successor the MFGB would be the NUM; different in many ways but would inform what the NUM would become post 1945. This section will discuss the formation of the NUM, how the two unions differed, were similar and ultimately how this informed trade union and government relations until 1970. The NUM was regarded as the most powerful trade union of the post war period. Baldwin states, “The federation was “probably the most powerful and most influential trade union in the industrial life of the country”⁵⁶ The federation had close to 950,000 members at its height in 1920.

⁵³ Laybourn, p. 134

⁵⁴ Aldcroft and Oliver, p.86

⁵⁵ Clegg, p. 542

⁵⁶ George B Baldwin, ‘structural reform in the British Miners union’, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* ,67.4 (1953),576-597 (p.579)

The defeat in the general and miners strikes laid bare the MFGBs problems within its organisation; unity between local federations was a particular problem. Allen states, “The county unions were autonomous... conscious of their identity, jealous of their traditions and suspicious of each other”⁵⁷ “The federation was powerless to compel any affiliated organisations to respect any policy it might recommend. The result was that districts often acted in their own interests in a way that could be reconciled with the wider interests of the federation.”⁵⁸ Baldwin states “district autonomy meant that the miners federation was something less than the sum of its parts.”⁵⁹ Additionally Taylor quotes Howell stating, “The consequence was that the federation often seemed more a collection of disparate unions than a national body. Frequently men sat on its executive or in its conference as ambassadors of the coal fields rather than as participants in a collective enterprise.”⁶⁰

When the NUM was formed, the situation was changed to allow the central union to control local associations. Primarily because the associations would become NUM local branches and not affiliated to the union. Baldwin also argues “When the MFGB was in the process of becoming the NUM in 1943-44, the national union had one full time official, three staff members, and an annual income about one-tenth of the £140,000 taken in by the Durham, miners association”.⁶¹ This suggests financial power and political power laid with the association, not the main union. It also suggests that the political framework and the union as an organisation was wholly incapable of properly co-ordinating the individual associations. This would be radically overhauled with the restructure and creation of the NUM at the Nottingham conference in 1944.

Baldwin states “This 1944 conference, ... is a landmark in the development of the NUM, for at it the reorganisation movement finally came to fruit”.⁶² The conference decided a whole raft of structural changes to be made. The conference decided that each member should pay £1 annual membership and that all financial liability would be placed on the central union and not upon the districts. The conference also agreed that the districts would pay union dues of 4 and a half pence per week to the central union. And the Executive council increased in size. Two members from each district would serve on the council as representative for their own

⁵⁷ Allen, p. 22

⁵⁸ Baldwin, p.580

⁵⁹ Baldwin, p. 580

⁶⁰ Taylor, voll. p.2

⁶¹ Baldwin, p.587

⁶² Baldwin, p.590

association. One of these representatives would be the president of the association. There would also be a president a vice president and a general secretary of the whole council.

Perhaps the biggest aid the biggest aid to creating a truly national and organised Coal union was the Second World War. Allen states, “The second world war created the conditions which facilitated both amalgamation between all 36 county unions and the transition to nationalisation”⁶³ During the Coal crisis of 1943 the wartime coalition government part nationalised the coal industry; overnight the government took a much more national approach to the coal industry. A national board was created to administer these pits (this would later become the NCB). The mining unions were expected to aid the board in the admiration on these pits. From this point on the mining unions were integrated into the state like they had never been before. Sir Jim Bowman, chairman of the NCB from 1956-1961 was vice president of the MFGB from 1939 till 1945 and became vice president of the NUM from 1945-1950. The MFGB were also required to take a similar national approach as the government was forced to. Allen argues the MFGB had considered attempting to merge the associations more formally in 1942.⁶⁴ Allen goes on, “The miners federation of Great Britain, then, acted as a national union after 1940 even though formally it was not one. It seemed logical to give it an organisational framework which made it formally what it was appearing to be in reality.”⁶⁵ Baldwin adds however, “It should be said at the outset that the development of a "National Union" from a "Mineworkers' Federation" had little or nothing to do with the nationalization of the industry itself. The Attlee government was not returned to office until nearly a year after the Special Conference in 1944”⁶⁶ he goes on to say. “The "nationalization" of the industry and of the union in the mid-1940's was coincidence, not cause and effect”.⁶⁷ It is important to note that although the NUM wasn't created directly because of nationalisation, it is only natural that after discussing forming the county unions into a stronger national union for many years prior to that NUMs creation. Then the part nationalisation of the coal industry in the war had some effect on their desire to increase the pace in attempting to create a national union.

An important thing to note was the peaks and troughs in strike action post 1926 general strike in 1926 and pre-1970, Aldcroft and Olives data shows number of working days lost in set periods, Between 1919 and 1921 average working days lost per year was 16,351,000 between

⁶³ Allen, p.25

⁶⁴ Allen, p.26

⁶⁵ Allen, p. 26

⁶⁶ Baldwin, p.576

⁶⁷ Baldwin, p.576

1922 and 32 the average was 763,000 between 1933 and 1939 the average was 242,000, between 1940 and 1944 the average was 454,000 and between 1945 and 1954 the average was 230,000.⁶⁸ Other data sets reveal that between 1955 and 1965 the average rose massively to 5,206,000, from 1960 to 1965 the average fell to 3,765,000. And the average from 1965 to 1970 was 6125.⁶⁹ Over all these data sets show that after working days lost hit their peak in 1919-1921, they consistently declined until 1954 when overall the number of working days lost began to increase exponentially.

The statistics above somewhat marries up with what Taylor states. He makes the point without saying it overtly that 1958 was somewhat of a watershed year for coal mining. He states, “The tensions between pit and union politics, present from the outset in 1944 grew under public ownership and exploded in reaction to accumulated frustrations caused by the rundown of the industry after 1957 and the mineworker’s treatment by the 1964-70 Labour government.”⁷⁰ In 1958 the NCB was being forced away from the position of expansion for the first time since 1946.⁷¹ Percy Mills minister for fuels and power told cabinet the reduction in consumption was having an adverse effect on the position of the board.⁷² This argument is consistent with the one I made in the first section. “In December 1958 the NCB announced its first program of closures. The closure of 36 short life pits would affect 13,000 mineworkers but as annual wastage was 60,000, redundancy was not likely to be a problem”⁷³ Taylor argues that the NUM largely allowed the pit closer and run down of the industry to go ahead without much resistance, because it was though a Conservative government would be even worse for the industry.⁷⁴ The greater point is however miners for a greater part of the post war period had been forced to endure a drop in living standards as pointed out by the Wilberforce enquiry and near constant threats of close and job losses. Kavanagh and Morris State that “The point about Britain is that both political and administrative elites accepted the desirability of working with rather than against the trade union leadership right up to 1979, with the single exception of the first two years of the Heath admiration”⁷⁵ My broader point here is that we can see the breakdown of the post war consensus evident in the events leading up to Heath’s election, not just in wider political economy but also within the NUM its self.

⁶⁸ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 78

⁶⁹ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 94

⁷⁰ Taylor, vol.1, p.11

⁷¹ Taylor, vol.1, p.184

⁷² Taylor, vol.1, p.184

⁷³ Taylor, vol.1, P.186

⁷⁴ Taylor, vol.1, p. 213

⁷⁵ Kavanagh and Morris, p.54

It is hardly surprising that by 1967 the left in the NUM were uniting behind one candidate in the general secretary elections. Their candidate was Lawrence Daly, His pamphlet 'the miners and the nation' advocated for more militant attitudes in defence of miner's interests including the use of gorilla strikes.⁷⁶ However once elected Daly was criticized for not being more militant. Taylor argues, by 1969 the miner patience was exhausted

They were not prepared to withhold their reasonable demands any longer ... The Board could not expect that loyalty to stretch any further. The miners had slipped to 19th place (thirteenth according to the NCB) in the wage league but between 1964-1970 productivity had increased 34.4%, the cost of living by 35.9%, but wages by 28.1%.⁷⁷

On top of this, Taylor points out that the Coals market position changed in the winter of 1969, the consensus up until then that pits would continue to close, Ezra (chairman of the NCB) however warned that the problem for the industry in the short term was not meeting demand.⁷⁸ With the coal markets position looking more positive years of consistent decline in the coal industry and the mine workers' pay and conditions, tempers boiled over in the wild cat strikes in 1969.

I will go on to analyse the IRA 1971 in the next section but it is worth discussing the origin of the act Wrigley, states the IRA drew on other conservative policy which had been evolved over the two previous decades. He argues that the IRA was built on what the Inns of Court conservative and unionist society had proposed in their pamphlet 'A Giants Strength' published in 1958. The society was a conservative affiliated group who membership consists of people in the legal profession. This policy document argued for legal restrictions on trade union power, measures against the closed shop, restrictive practices secondary strikes and demarcation disputes.⁷⁹ This society would ultimately report to The Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations (Donovan commission) in 1966 and argue for the banning of sympathy strikes, safeguarding the right of individuals to not be in a trade union and that agreed collective agreements should be bound by law and enforced by the creation of an industrial relations court. The Donovan report 1968 would be watered down. Nevertheless, Heath agreed with its findings, stating that, "The commission also pointed to the main shortcomings in procedure which were causing this epidemic (largely about excessive

⁷⁶ Andrew. Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics: Volume 2: 1969-1995* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.27

⁷⁷ Taylor, vol.2, p.37

⁷⁸ Taylor, vol.2, p.42

⁷⁹ Chris Wrigley, 'British Trade Unions since 1933', (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 69

number of strikes and loss of productivity), namely ‘the inadequacy of our collective bargaining system, and especially the lack of clear, speedy, comprehensive and effective procedures for the settlement of grievances’⁸⁰This would later become one of the main provisions under the IRA. Wrigley however fails to recognise the influence of *In Place of Strife* had on the industrial relations act. I am not arguing that the conservative government took inspiration from a white paper published by the Labour secretary of state for employment Barbra Castle, however David marsh demonstrates in place of strife bears a striking resemblance to the IRA.⁸¹ It is perfectly plausible that Castle demonstrates a willingness to deal with excessive numbers of strikes in Britain, and this in turn perhaps galvanised Heath to take action in the 1970 manifesto. Never the less Heath calls the ‘in place of strife’ and it’s handling a “debacle”.⁸²The Heath government was the first to try and wright such far reaching reforms in to an all-encompassing bill. The Trade union and disputes act 1927 did ban sympathy strikes and mass picketing. However, the country and the union movement had significantly progressed since 1927 and the act was repealed in 1947. Challenges that government faced in the late 1960s and early 1970s necessitated the reforms in the IRA 1971. I believe the origins of the IRA to be to some extent, because of the Donavan commission, in place of strife and development of Conservative policy its self through the inns of court society and Heath himself. All elements of these idea can be identified thought the industrial relations act, in short is one of its main problems.

In place of strife identified the problems hidden in the UKs industrial relations system. It was clear from the In Place of Strife fiasco that there was a willingness in some quarters of the labour party for reform, but this would be made unachievable because of the unions and their sponsored MPs, no less that 127 out of 363 at the 1966 election and 112 out of 287 at the 1970 election.⁸³The wild cat strikes in the Coal industry in 1969 only made things worse and laid bare the lack of control the unions had over their members. Indeed, Heath notes that “During the 1960s, the main locust of power within the trade unions had shifted away from the centre and towards the shop floor, so that trade union leaders could no longer be sure that nationally negotiated agreements would be respected locally”⁸⁴ This highlighted that there was a real split between the shop floor and the union officials. One of the reasons for the wildcat strikes was; at the NUM conference in 1968 the conference votes in favour of demanding a pay rise and a lowering of working hours for surface workers, but union

⁸⁰ Heath, p. 326

⁸¹Marsh, p. 7

⁸² Heath, p.326

⁸³ Marsh, p.37

⁸⁴ Heath, p.326

officials had not acted on that vote.⁸⁵ Allen states, “Delegate conference accepted the executive proposal and this was confirmed by a 48 to 9 vote amongst the branches .Yet by the 20th October there were 24 south Wales pits involving 16,000 miners on strikes; in some cases miners struck against the advice of their own branch officials”⁸⁶ He goes on to say that “The strike spread from Yorkshire ,its main base ,to Scotland , south Wales , Derbyshire ,Kent , Nottingham and the midlands until it involved 130,000 miners from 140 pits.”⁸⁷The strike was a total disaster in terms of working days lost, 6.8 Million working days were lost in 1969⁸⁸,95% of those through wildcat strikes⁸⁹.The NCB had lost 15 million pounds and 2.5 million tonnes in lost production.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Paul Routledge, *Scargill The unauthorised Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 58

⁸⁶ Allen, p.155

⁸⁷ Allen, p.156

⁸⁸ Wrigley, p.43

⁸⁹ Heath, p. 326

⁹⁰ Routledge, p. 59

Edward Heath 1970 -1972, and the Industrial Relations Act 1971.

In the last section we established that the events of Heath and Thatcher's premiership out of nowhere, there was a long history of government legislation to weaken the power of both union members and union bosses, and we established to some extent it worked with many years of relative industrial peace and no national strike action (with the exception of wild cat strike action in the 1960s). We also established that the NUM and MFGB have a long history of strike action. I also looked at the context the IRA and of Heath coming to power in 1970. In this section I first look at Heath major industrial legislation between 1970 and 1971, leaning on the analysis from the last section and analyse the miners' strike of 1972.

The reason for splitting Heath premiership into two parts is twofold, first there was a marked change in government industrial relations after the act was introduced and secondly ,as Moran states "defeat at the hands of the miners (in the 1972 miners' strike) was the catalyst which produced a change in government strategy"⁹¹. It is also true what Howell states "By the end of 1972 the IRA was being quietly ignored by the government in an effort to gain trade union cooperation for a new iteration of an incomes policy."⁹²In this vein it follows that the Miners killed of both the IRA and the government NI incomes policy. Heath had many structural constraints in his path which prevented the IRA from working as it should have these will be further identified in this section.

Heath identified two main reasons for the country's relative decline. Firstly, the lack of the investment in industry and the second being inflation, largely caused by wage settlements⁹³. Heath argues by July 1970 average wage settlements had reach 14%.⁹⁴ This was one of the main reasons the IRA was introduced, to make collective bargaining agreements legally binding. The act was a complete failure because the act was too broad and lacked cooperation and support from the TUC, support from the TUC would become necessary in this time frame because it had become so integrated into the policy making process. The First

⁹¹ Michael Moran, *Politics of Industrial Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.7

⁹² Chris. Howell, *Trade Unions and the state: The construction of industrial relations institutions in Britain, 1890-200* (Princeton: Princeton University press ,2007), p. 113

⁹³ Heath, p.125

⁹⁴ Heath, p.325

miners' strike of the Heath premiership in 1972, would ultimately come to define strike activity in the Heath area, it was the first national strike in over 55 years and resulted in the biggest loss of working days since the 1926 general strike. It would also change how Heath saw industrial relations and rewind the N1 voluntary incomes policy.

When Heath won the 1970 general election, he took 46.4% of the popular vote and 330 seats to Labour's 43.1% of the popular vote and 288 seats. This gave the conservatives a majority of 14 seats. Taylor notes

In the 1970 election there was no evidence of a swing against Labour in mining constituencies. An analysis of census data and electoral behaviour shows that the constituencies most likely to vote Labour in 1970 were the mining and heavy manufacturing of south Wales, the north east, west and south Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire and in the 50 most mining seats Labour voting held up.⁹⁵

Despite Heath's lack of a resounding victory, he was determined to push through a highly controversial IRA as set out in the conservative party manifesto. The conservative party manifesto states on the IRA. "We aim to strengthen the unions and their official leadership by providing some deterrent against irresponsible action by unofficial minorities. We seek to create conditions in which strikes become the means of last resort, not of first resort, as they now so often are."⁹⁶

The wild cat strikes of 1969 proved to Heath that collective bargaining agreements needed to be legally binding, at its peak of the unofficial strike in 1970 103,000 miners were on unofficial strike.⁹⁷ The balance of power needed to be shifted back to the executive. Laybourne states the commission on trade unions and employers sat between 1965-1968 "Suggested that there were two systems of industrial relations -the formal and the informal. It was argued that the informal system, which operated at factory level was undermining the formal arguments between national unions and employers".⁹⁸ Therefore there should also be an industrial relations court to arbitrate over legally binding agreements and enforce industrial law if broken. Indeed the 1970 conservative manifesto states, "We will introduce a comprehensive Industrial Relations Bill in the first Session of the new Parliament. It will provide a proper

⁹⁵ Taylor, vol.1, p.250

⁹⁶ 1970 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto (2001)

<<http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1970/1970-conservative-manifesto.shtml>> [accessed 12th March 2022]

⁹⁷ Taylor, vol.2, p.39

⁹⁸ Laybourne, p. 164

framework of law within which improved relationships between management, men and unions can develop.”⁹⁹ The bill was comprehensive and was a broad one.¹⁰⁰ As well as the creation of the industrial relations court and legally binding agreements, the IRA also required the Unions to register to be granted legal immunities, by applying the IRC the secretary of state could apply for compulsory ballot before strike or to defer strike action. It also placed major restrictions on the closed shop, restrictions on secondary strike action and improved rights for employees not to be forced to join a trade union when entering the work place.¹⁰¹

Because the bill was so broad, some parts of the legislation were supported, and others were not. One such controversial part was the compulsory register for trade unions. This meant that union had to register to be an official union and, when they were officialised, they enjoyed legal immunities in the industrial relations court. It is hard to gauge levels of support for different parts of the legislation. One would think that legally binding wage agreements would be popular with union management where on the other hand strengthening the hand of individual member not to be in a union would not. Consequently, the TUC campaigned heavily against the whole act. The ‘Kill the Bill protests’ were organised and hundreds of thousands of workers went on a one-day strikes (the TUC never supported the wild cat strike action). Heath argues that

“The 1971 Industrial Relations Act is still widely misunderstood. It was conserved not as a way of weakening trade unions, but as a means of legitimising them and bringing them within the remits of the law”

If this is the case then why was the act apposed so strongly by the TUC and ultimately used as a bargaining chip when it came to incomes policies? The incomes policy’s is a point I will return to later. The act was also confused in its aims and objectives, Weekes et al; have explored the reactions to and workability of the industrial relations court though a qualitative research data collection study. They found that,

“From its inception the Industrial Relations Act was a long and complicated piece of legislation. Its complications did hide a confusion of thought and a consideration of aims which experience revealed. A central contradiction was between the purported encouragement of collective bargaining and the right given to individual workers to

⁹⁹ 1970 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto (2001)

<<http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1970/1970-conservative-manifesto.shtml>> [accessed 12th March 2022]

¹⁰⁰ Marsh, p. 13

¹⁰¹ Marsh, p.14

join or not join a recognised union, and to use the law to seek recognition for rival unions”.¹⁰²

It is true that if the act was pushing for more collective bargaining and all trade unions and member to be brought under the law, then why strengthen the rights of individuals not to join a trade union. If the objective were to strengthen central trade union executive to negotiate legally binding incomes policy, this should have been done by increasing union membership not by attempting to curtail it. Another point of contention is the willingness to decrease strikes. The Conservative party 1970 manifesto makes clear the willingness to reduced strikes and firmly places the blame at labour door step for the number of strikes¹⁰³. If this is the case, and the Heath was committed to reducing all strikes and not just wildcat strikes, then it seems rather pointless to introduce a statutory ballot before strike action, considering the NUM had reduced the majority needed for strike action from 70 to 55 percent by 215 votes to 98,¹⁰⁴ in order to make strike action more likely at the end of 1972. It is true that the other theory behind compulsory strike ballots was to strengthen trade union leaders’ powers vis-a-vi the members (the theory being members were being pushed into strike action without a ballot) but, I have seen little evidence that union members either wanted or needed this power. All changing the rules over strike activity achieved was giving the unions a stronger hand in bargaining. This section of the act relied upon the assumption that members of trade unions didn’t want to go on strike when all evidence from the wildcat strikes pointed to the fact that they did. Weeks et.al states,

“From 1970 to 1973, strike figures came to be dominated by larger and longer disputes associated with incomes policy, particularly national and official disputes in the public sector. For these disputes the act had little relevance and the only use the government made of the emergency sanctions of the IR act underlined this”¹⁰⁵

There was little to no provision in the act to deal with strikes relating to the government incomes policy voted for by the workers.

There was the added problem that unionisation had grown over the post war period and in turn union strength. Firstly, there was less trade unions, Wrigley points out, in 1971 TUC general council issued a circular urging affiliated unions to consider merging, there main

¹⁰² Brian Weekes. Michael Mellish. Linda Dickens. John Lloyd, *Industrial Relations and the Limits of Law; The Industrial Effects of the Industrial Relations Act 1971* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), p.220

¹⁰³ 1970 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto (2001)

<<http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1970/1970-conservative-manifesto.shtml>>[accessed 16th March 2022]

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, vol.2, p.50

¹⁰⁵ Weeks et. al, p. 218

advantages being sighted were more rational union organisation and structure and improved finances.¹⁰⁶ By 1970 the unions were more powerful than they had ever been before. Not only because of their increased membership and density but this in turn improved their bargaining position. Aldcroft and Oliver state that,

“One way or another, therefore the unions had the power to damage the health of the economy, if their activities became too disruptive or their bargaining stance too intransigent, then they could adversely affect investment, innovation and productivity growth and the cost structure of industry, thereby weakening the country’s competitive strength”.¹⁰⁷

Although Thatcher was still facing a powerful TUC and NUM, they were significantly weakened from legislation better planning and high unemployment, this will be assessed in greater detail in future sections.

One of the main reasons the act was so apposed was the growing politicization of industrial policy and strikes. Marsh argues that Unions were increasingly incorporated into the policy making process through the post war consensus. The unions were being asked to co-operate in reducing economic problems. At the same time and in almost direct contradiction, governments concerns with growing economic problems led them to intervene more in matters which affected trade unions. In effect both labour and conservative governments argued that in order to make industry more effective and productive they needed to become increasingly involved in supply management in a way which threatened to restrict the autonomy of the unions. Such intervention inevitably led to antagonism between unions and government which in turn politicised the unions.¹⁰⁸

The IRA was seen as a political attack on trade unions, Marsh argues the TUC were only given a month to consult on the IRA and the eight pillars within it were non negotiable.¹⁰⁹ The ‘eight basic pillars’ were the founding principles set out in the Industrial relations bill. These were set out in a meeting between the TUC and the employment secretary Mr Carr. This meeting hardly gave the impression that the government wanted to work with and not against the trade unions. But at the same time the government was consulting the trade unions and asking for their help in controlling inflation and increasing productivity. Naturally the trade unions also became much more defensive after in place of strife and the IRA. It is only

¹⁰⁶ Wrigley, p.32

¹⁰⁷ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 92

¹⁰⁸ Marsh, p.32

¹⁰⁹ Marsh, p.12

naturally if the unions feel attacked by the government, then they will offer a political response. The government's policy seemed confused and lacklustre.

On top of this the trade union movement was more than willing to impress its dissatisfaction about political decisions. Marsh states, Before the 1970s it was common to distinguish between a political strike and an economic strike; between a strike against the government and its policy and a strike against an employer. The reasons these distinctions became blurred are twofold. Firstly, the Glasgow University media group explored the effects of tv news on political discourse although they do acknowledge their research is inherently biased they found two relevant findings. The first being, in the U.K, television is an industry that operates under government license. Stuart Hood, a former editor of BBC News, argues that the financial control that the government exercises is potent enough to force the BBC's policy into alignment with its general purposes. Government annually votes the proceeds of license fees to the BBC and retains the right to decide on the current size of that fee. Therefore, the overall ethos of the BBC is an impartiality skewed toward State policy.¹¹⁰The second being the TV media can choose and emphasize which events to focus on for a news bulletin and this in turn sways public opinion. Taylor argues

Newspapers are recognised as biased by their readers whilst television is required to be impartial and has a high level of 'believability' with its viewers but balance and impartiality are not neutral concepts because television depends for its effectiveness on the selection of images using a judgment about what is relevant and important.¹¹¹

Although in this statement is talking about the 1984-85 miners' strike these observations are still relevant. TV media choose to show emotive images at a time of national crisis there for adding to the politicization of the whole even and fuels political polarization. For instance, TV media like to focus on strikes as opposed to negotiations and therefore hype up the situation.¹¹² News media would add to a polarizing debate about the strike and not why there was a strike. Peter Dorey makes the point that

"During the 1960s and 1970s, political criticism of the trade unions oscillated between bemoaning the apparent inability or unwillingness of trade union leaders to

¹¹⁰ The Glasgow University media group 'Bad News' *Theory and Society*, 3.3 (1976), 339-363 (p.346)

¹¹¹ Taylor, vol.2, p.214

¹¹² The Glasgow University media group, p. 352

exercise authority over their rank and file membership, and berating the same union leaders for acting like bullies or feudal barons vis-a-vis their union members”¹¹³

The media was a big driver between this criticism of the trade union movement. Another reason for further politicisation of strikes was the government intervening constantly in wage bargaining through prices and incomes policies; a strike against an employer could quickly assume political significance”¹¹⁴ There was a constant necessity impressed on Heath's government to intervene in economic policy not only because nationalised industry had become so but Heath wasn't willing or couldn't countenance (though structural constraints, like a small majority or very powerful trade unions) a fall in unemployment.

When Rolls Royce fell into financial troubles in the early 1970s Heath raises the possibility of 80,000 people losing their jobs to justify its bailout.¹¹⁵ As well as those jobs being regional, a point which is also made about the Upper Clyde shipbuilders in 1972. This was a policy U-turn to waver the effects of regional unemployment and defence capabilities, in the early 1970s employment was still seen as an indicator of the health of the economy, this was no longer the case by the early 1980s. The politicisation of strikes and industrial policy also made policy making more difficult, especially when more or less constantly from 1970 till after the miners' strike Heath requested that the TUC help him bring down wages using a more or less voluntary incomes policy. Wrigley argues that, “Edward Heath's conservative government continued to consult the trade unions on the economy and, at first, did not introduce a statutory incomes policy, however its industrial relations act, 1971, undermined its relationship with the trade union movement”¹¹⁶ It ultimately became a lot more difficult to continue to ask the trade unions for co-operation when pushing through a policy that the unions vehemently opposed. In truth Heath had no choice but to ask for the unions' cooperation on his incomes policy because if he had introduced a statutory incomes policy at the rate needed to control inflation. The unions would quite simply have gone on strike against it like the miners would come to do in 1972. The ultimate ramifications of introducing a statutory incomes policy will be assessed in the next section. This is yet another structural constraint that Heath had in his path that Thatcher did not. In short, the unions became more political because the government began to intervene in areas of industry they historically hadn't and began to question union authority. Nothing like the scale of the IRA had been seen

¹¹³ Peter Dorey *Comrades in Conflict: Labour, the Trade Unions and 1969s In Place of Strife* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p.17

¹¹⁴ Marsh, p. 44

¹¹⁵ Heath, p. 340

¹¹⁶ Wrigley, p.59

before. But in intervening more in industrial policy in a way union did not deem favourable to them it would become impossible for them to co-operate in swathes of different policy areas.

Aldcroft and Oliver point out that “Coal mining fell into a class of its own since it accounted for 18 % of all strike activity post war (1945-2000)”¹¹⁷. In 1971 a year not particularly known for strikes in the coal industry 9.92% of all working days lost were lost in the coal industry and over 40% of the workforce was involved.

The 1972 miners’ strike was a defining moment in Heaths premiership , He states, “our serious troubles with the miners began in July 1971, when the conference of the NUM voted for an unrealistic 45% pay demand and also changed the unions rules lowering the majority needed to call industrial action from 66 percent to 55 percent.”¹¹⁸ Daly stated to the NUM conference in 1971 that “We must take advantage of the restoration of our bargaining power in this industry to ensure that mineworkers get decent wage rewards and conditions. This must be our primary objective in the cores of the coming 12 months”¹¹⁹ The miner’s case for a substantial pay rise in clear from both Allen, Hughes and Moore setting out the miner’s case to the Wilberforce enquiry. The enquiry was called in February 1972 as the strike was coming to an end to look in pay increases for the miners. It is true that “The average weekly earnings of miners were only 7.4 percent above the average for manufacturing industry in 1960, by 1970 miners were earning 3.1% less. From being the top of the wage league table after the war they had fallen to twelfth place in 1970. The miners relative earning power had fallen by more than 30% in that period.”¹²⁰. When NUM demand an average pay increase of 45% this could not be countenanced because of the need to control inflation, through the incomes policy. In addition to this “Over four years from June 1968 1972 average earning had risen by 50% representing 5% per year ahead of inflation”¹²¹

The strike of 1972 was the first national strike called in over 50 years, Heath was forced to call a state of emergency because of Scargill’s flying pickets which targeted strategically important sights such as Stanley coke works, where 15,000 picketers showed up.¹²²The flying pickets also stopped supply’s from reaching power station. “The use of flying pickets organised by Arthur Scargill took us unawares. they turned a serious situation into a truly

¹¹⁷ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 97

¹¹⁸ Heath, p. 341

¹¹⁹ Taylor, vol.2, p.50

¹²⁰Allen, p.101

¹²¹ Heath, p.411

¹²² Heath, p.351

grave one and the miners”.¹²³In terms of planning this would be a lesson that would be learned by Thatcher in the early 1980s and even Heath when preparing for the 1974 miners’ strike. The miners in this strike were intransigent and, changing the authority of the government, while I have seen little proof that the miners in this strike wanted to bring the government down.

The Wilberforce enquiry was called to look into the miners’ pay claims and the enquiry recommended a 20% pay increase, this was over 12% of the NCB original offer. The final offer from the government offered a 27% increase for surface workers 31% for underground workers and 15% for face workers. The strike was called off after 48 days. The government had been defeated. Allen states, “The strike was an historic one in important respects despite its rather inglorious ending. It had effectively destroyed the governments N1 incomes policy and was perceived as a defeat for the government”.¹²⁴Marsh states, “The miners’ strike of 1972 and the subsequent recommendations of the Wilberforce tribunal, was a major setback for the governments auntie inflation policy”.¹²⁵ Heath even states, the government were considering calling an election and introducing a statutory rather than voluntary incomes policy.¹²⁶ This is also an important point when we come to assess the 1974 strike and the ‘who governs Britain’ election. It shows that this narrative was begging to play out in 1972 two years before the election.

In conclusion the IRA was a disaster, its scope was too broad and confused “The confusion of aims, and in particular the orbit of fear created by the act provisions against industrial action, has been widely accepted as a reason for the acts failure to reform industrial relations”¹²⁷. The Act was rendered more or less useless by the end of 1972 , the government were ignoring it in order to galvanise trade unions support for a new iteration of an incomes policy¹²⁸ It failed to reduce strikes and failed to bring the unions under the control of the law because it was so roundly disregarded by the unions and employers refused to take unions to the industrial relations court for fear of further repercussions. The employment sectary Robert Carr didn’t invoke an emergency cooling off period for the 1972 miners’ strike.¹²⁹ There must however be a recognition of structural constraints that were in Heaths path at this time, one of which was of the overwhelming power of the unions, this is not only demonstrated by unionisation

¹²³ Heath, p.350

¹²⁴ Allen, p. 219

¹²⁵ Marsh, p. 13

¹²⁶ Heath, p. 401

¹²⁷ Weekes. et. al, p.223

¹²⁸ Howell, p. 100

¹²⁹ Routledge, p.78

of the workforce and trade union growth, but there increasing willingness to be more overtly political and defend their rights more than at any other time since 1945. The miners' strike of 1972 was also a demonstration of union power within the coal industry, despite Heath's best efforts to keep to an incomes policy of sorts the final pay out to the miners represented a major defeat for the Heath government and signals the start in a change of strategy going into the latter half of 1972. When Heath won the 1970 election he bounced into office expecting the unions to voluntarily agree to pay constraints which theoretically strengthening the union leadership through the industrial relations act, in contrast the IRA was taken as an attack on individual unions rights to defend their members. Likewise, he expected the miner's unions to accept a small pay rise when they had years of decreased living standards. In way it was a pragmatic move of Heath's to call the Wilberforce enquiry and accept the recommendations of the enquiry if not there is little evidence to suggest the strike would have ended quickly and it is possible that the series of unfortunate events that happened in 1973-74.

Edward Heath 1972-1974, and the miners' strike 1974.

In the last section we analysed the first half of Heath's premiership, but as ever the events of 1970 to 1972 would heavily inform the events in 1973 and 1974. At the end of the last section I found that the IRA had been more or less abandoned the miners' strike of 1972 left Heath battered and bruised and forced a change in strategy by the government.

In this section I will look at how the far left would gain considerable influence in the NUM at the end of 1972. How the oil crisis and the Yom Kippur war hurt Heath's growth strategy. But also, how it set of the chain of events that singled the beginning of the end for the Heath Government. The last thing the government needed at the time of the Yom Kippur war and ensuing oil crisis was a miner's overtime ban and subsequent strike. Because all these structural constraints added to the last and prevented Heath from governing affectively. I will also look at how the calling of the three-day week on the 1st January 1974 was called out of necessity but the political ramifications should be assessed. Following this the NUM called members out on strike, and the February 1974 election was called. An earlier election or no election would have been more politically prudent for Heath, Opinion polling regardless of a December 1973 or January or February 1974 were showing leads for the conservatives. I will assess the rational for calling the election when Heath did. I will also assess the reason behind Heath not recognising the importance of the miners and the coal they dug at the time of the oil crisis. These years would come to inform Thatcher's policy and ministry in the early 1980s, and result in the growth of the New Right in the conservative party. following this period, a consensus was emerging in the party that the party could no longer reconcile pay bargaining with union power while maintaining low inflation and full employment.

There were numerous personal and structural constraints, that contributed to Heath's downfall and a systematic break from the post war consensus. The First major structural constraints was the oil crisis that erupted in October 1973, the oil crisis was caused by OPEC (who produced 60% of the world's oil¹³⁰) either embargoing or severally reducing supply and hiking prices of their oil exports largely to western Europe. Michel Stuart argues that Arab producers were displeased at Americans unwillingness to force Israel's to give back territory's it had occupied during the six-day war of 1967. OPEC then met in Vienna in the middle of September 1973 and agreed to increase the oil price from \$3 to \$4.50 per barrel.¹³¹The situation only worsened with the outbreak of war and OPEC soon agreed to cut back on output by 5% a month until the Israelis had withdrawn from their territories. By November 1973 OPEC announced Britain and her allies would be subject to a further 25% cut in her oil supplies. By New Year's Day when the miners over time ban had reached its peak oil prices had quadrupled.¹³² Heath already struggling to control inflation which reached 8.8% by the end of 1973 was now also faced with an increase in the balance of payments

¹³⁰ Stewart, p. 173

¹³¹ Stewart, p. 173

¹³² Stewart, p. 174

deficit to 2.5 billion pounds.¹³³ The treasury was expecting this to rise to 3 billion pounds in 1974 even though exports had increased by 12% from the year ending October 1973.¹³⁴ The Yom Kippur war left in its wake “a world economic crisis, worse than anything that had been in peacetime since 1929”¹³⁵ In addition just as in 1969 the increase in coal prices strengthened the NUMs hand “The outbreak of the Yom Kippur war on 6th October and OPECs sharp increase in oil prices and restriction of supply suddenly transformed the NUM’S market position”.¹³⁶ The war greatly strengthened the had on the NUM in the upcoming pay negotiations. We will assess this more in late paragraphs. The Yom Kippur was an external structural constraint that harmed Heath and only by limiting consumption could Heath deal with the crisis. The war and the oil crisis however demonstrated that the perception of Britain being the ‘sick man of Europe’, was somewhat based in reality, and that Britain had exposed itself though economic mismanagement to be very susceptible to external economic forces.

As we established in the first section (see fig two) over 80% of electricity generated in 1973 was from coal and oil. In that year 35.12% came from coal and 50.4% from oil. At the same time as high demand from the electricity sector for oil and coal the oil crisis hit. Heath makes the point that after previous strikes lessons had been learned and that a billion pounds had been invested in the industry but more importantly coal stocks had been build up.¹³⁷ .¹³⁸However, from the Department for Business Energy and industrial strategy figures suggest that coal stock across in most industries were lower in 1974 than they were in 1968, demonstrating that through the period coal stocks had decreased. Colliery stocks had gone from 28 million tonnes in 1968 to 6 million tonnes in 1974, distributed stocks stayed the same from 1968 to 74 raising slightly to 19 million tonnes in 1972. Coke ovens stocked 29 million tonnes in 1968 and this fell to 22 million tonnes by 1974.¹³⁹ In effect coal stocks had been build up very little. Oil stocks were also running low because of higher-than-expected economic growth, there was only seven weeks of oil stock left when the crisis broke out.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Stewart, p. 176

¹³⁴ Heath, p.506

¹³⁵ Stewart, p.173

¹³⁶ Taylor, vol.2, p. 87

¹³⁷ Heath, p. 504

¹³⁸ Heath, p. 504

¹³⁹ *Historical coal data: coal production, availability and consumption 1853 to 2021 (2022)*

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-coal-data-coal-production-availability-and-consumption>> [accessed 1st September 2022]

¹⁴⁰ Heath, p. 504

The NUM called for an overtime ban in November 1973 following the breakdown of pay negotiations after the announcement of stage three on Heath's incomes policy on the 8th October. In stage three the government limited wage increases from the first of November to £2.25 per worker per week or 7% for a group of workers with a £350 annual per person, provisions were also made to fix anomalies that followed the first two stages.¹⁴¹ Holmes makes the point that the overtime ban was particularly harmful to the government because, although not much coal was extracted in overtime hours much of the maintenance for the pit was, and without the maintenance of the shafts and machinery work could not continue at the start of the following day.¹⁴²

Wrigley makes clear, "In the second half on 1972 Heath was unable to secure support for a voluntary incomes policy, so he went ahead with a statutory policy".¹⁴³ Stage two of that policy was announced in January 1973 and would run to November 1973 it ran with only small-scale disruption from gas workers and workers at Ford car plants. After stage two stage three would be introduced; I will return to this later. As a result of campaigns from the TUC Heath was forced to introduce a statutory incomes policy. With the oil crisis gaining pace and the announcement of the overtime ban the government faced the worse crisis since Suez in 1956.¹⁴⁴ Thatcher would never face a fuel crisis of this magnitude during her tenure as Prime Minister largely because of the development of regular deliveries from the North Sea oil. However, the miners overtime ban and subsequent strike was avoidable despite challenges to government authority from some quarters inside the NUM.

The NUM again like 1972 were asking for an over 40% pay increase for most of its workers. Unlike in 1972 no enquiry was called by the government to assess the pay claims of the NUM. Only a Pay Board report which will be assessed later in this section. What is important however is that yet again the NUM claimed they were entitled to a so called 'special case pay increase' because not only had their wages not levelled out in accordance with the rest of the manufacturing industry in the UK their economic importance had greatly improved due to the oil crisis, the miners exploited their relative economic position to increase their wage demands.

For all Heath's rhetoric, like in 1972 Heath would not be moved from offering a pay increase that wasn't inside the remit of N3 incomes policy. If the miners were truly a special case

¹⁴¹ Robert Taylor, 'The Heath Government and industrial relations: myth and reality', in *The Heath Government 1970-74*, ed. Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (London: Longman, 1996), pp.161-191 (p.183)

¹⁴² Martin Holmes, *The Failures of the Heath government* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 106

¹⁴³ Wrigley, p.59

¹⁴⁴ Holmes, p. 107

Heath would have offered them a pay rise outside the constraints of the incomes policy. Heath offered a maximum pay offer of 13% and in a tactical blunder the Coal Board offered this at the start of negotiations. Stewart sums up the arguments around the N3 incomes policy and the miners when he states,

“The laws of economics had not been repealed when the prices and income laws had been enacted and according to those laws, the quadrupling of the price of oil between October 1973 and January 1974 made Coal and the miners who dug it out of the ground much more valuable than they had been”.¹⁴⁵

Heath should have recognised the importance of the miners at the time of the fuel crisis and did all he could to stop the overtime ban and the strike that would follow in January 1974. However, it would have been political suicide for Heath to U-turn again and break his incomes policy having been reticent to introduce it in the first place. Plus Taylor essentially makes the point that Heath could not accept breaching stage three because the miners had already been made a special case by stage three, He believed in the national interest that the union should settle within the limits.¹⁴⁶

There is of course the argument that like that in 1972 the NUM simply wanted the government to fall, there for it was useless negotiating with the union in the first place, the NUM vowed to continued their strike till the day that Harold Wilson entered Downing Street after winning the February 1974 election.¹⁴⁷ This informed Thatcher's justification for not backing down against the miners in 1984-85. Certain individuals such as Arthur Scargill within the NUM had political ambitions and were determined to hurt the government while other more moderate members wanted Heath to recognise the new found economic importance the miners had.

Since 1972 the NUM had grown its membership and union density had increases. The far left gained more influence within the union after a series of at the end of 1972 due to more moderate member of the executive dying. Prominent communists Owen Briscoe and Mick McGahey were elected on to the executive as well and McGahey being elected vice present. Architect of flying pickets and leader of the Yorkshire area Scargill, was also elected to the executive. In essence the pressure was piling on Heath with a larger stronger and more extreme union movement and a fuel crisis. Indeed, Holmes states, “Following the miner's success in 1972 the miners realised that despite the relative decline of the coal industry in the

¹⁴⁵ Stewart, p. 185

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, vol.2, p. 88

¹⁴⁷ Routledge, p. 95

1960s they had enormous industrial strength, which given the levels of trade union militancy, they were expected and prepared to use”¹⁴⁸

After negotiations broke down Scargill and Communist Mick McGahey of the NUM pushed Joe Gormley into calling for a strike ballot. After significant negotiations a strike ballot was called, over 80% of members voted for strike action and the strike was set to start on 7th February.¹⁴⁹ Heath and cabinet made it clear that they believe more was at stake in the strike than just a pay rise. Not only was the upcoming election (which we will analyse in the next paragraph) framed as the ‘who governs Britain election?’ essentially asking whether the government or the unions did. Vernon Bogdanor states “One Conservative Cabinet Minister then said, “The miners have had their ballot. Perhaps we ought to have ours.”¹⁵⁰ But Heath also states, “It was obvious from the outset that more was at stake for militant miners’ leaders than glory prising a irrespirable pay increase out of a democratically elected government” He goes on to say Murrey and Gormley were not really in full control

“The people Making the running were the firebrands on the left. Mick McGahey, long standing communist member of the executive made it abundantly clear in a further meeting which was held on the 28th November. When I asked him what he really wanted, he proclaimed he wanted to bring down the government”¹⁵¹

Again, it is vital to understand the distinction between those radicals who wanted to see the government fall and those who simply wanted a pay rise; Allen seconds this.¹⁵² Allen also states, through the strike ballot in March 1973 the NUM members had showed themselves to be apolitical.¹⁵³ Members voted 63.38% not to strike, showing that at that moment in time the miners simply sought a pay rise; and aim they achieved. That is not to say that extreme elements in the NUM did not seek to bring the government down, demonstrated by the leadership calling for a strike ballot 10 months later.

I believe a more significant point to make however is one made by Allen when he stats that the strike was politicised by Heath, he states,

¹⁴⁸ Holmes, p,102

¹⁴⁹ Heath, p. 511

¹⁵⁰ Gresham Collage, *The General Election, February 1974 – Professor Vernon Bogdanor*, online video recording, YouTube, 28th January 2015, < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPz-UkFQTBA&t=21s> [accessed 26th September 2022]

¹⁵¹ Heath, p.505

¹⁵² V.L Allen, p. 236

¹⁵³ V.L Allen 229

“The strike was not a politically motivated one in the sense meant by Heath, but it was political. As I showed earlier in the political content of industrial action was the creation of government intervention rather than the changing political consciousness of the workers .”¹⁵⁴

Heath's government constantly intervened in state industry's despite so called 'lame duck' industry pledges in the 1970 manifesto.¹⁵⁵ Anthony King's overload thesis demonstrates well the levels to which the state had become responsible for so much, constantly intervening in industry and people's lives now meant that the electorate expected the state to intervene and solve any ills in the country whether it was to do with the state or not. ¹⁵⁶ He goes on to state a case study that after Labour and Conservative Party conferences were cancelled in Blackpool because of the October 1974 Election, the hotel that was set to host said conference petitioned the department of trade for their losses.¹⁵⁷

The Heath government was being seen to get involved in negotiations and setting statutory pay constraints, when miners demanded pay rises, they were getting into protracted debate with the government more than the NCB. In all Heath and previous governments intervening in state industries was a personal constraint on Heath, ultimately Thatcher would attempt to break from post war consensus area politics and not intervene in state industry, at least not the extent Heath did. She would however continue to intervene in certain state industries when strike occurred, like the 1981 steel strike and the 1984-85 miner's strike. But the growing influence and power of the far left in the NUM was a structural constraint that he could do little about. Holmes sums up well when he states, “Although there is evidence of the involvement of individual communists, a communist plot to bring down the state was conspicuous in its absence, the intricacies and rigidity of compulsory wage controls more than any communist influence had brought the government to such a state of crisis”.¹⁵⁸

After the announcement of a three-day week, work to rule by the NUM, and a strike ballot Heath felt he was left with no choice but to call an election. Which he duly did on the 7th of February, and polling day was to be February the 28th, a relatively short campaign by post war standards.

¹⁵⁴ V.L. Allen, p.243

¹⁵⁵ 1970 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto (2001)

<<http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1970/1970-conservative-manifesto.shtml>> [accessed 12th March 2022]

¹⁵⁶ King. Anthony., 'Overload: Problems of Governing in the 1970s', Political studies,23 (1975), 282-296, p .164

¹⁵⁷ King, p. 286

¹⁵⁸ Holmes, p. 113

Heath would go on television on the 7th February stating,

Do you want a strong Government which has clear authority for the future to take decisions which will be needed? Do you want Parliament and the elected Government to continue to fight strenuously against inflation? Or do you want them to abandon the struggle against rising prices under pressure from one particularly powerful group of workers ... This time of strife has got to stop.¹⁵⁹

It was clear from the timing of the election and this statement that this election in practice would be about the power of the trade unions or specifically the NUM. This argument is given even more credence considering the miners balloted to strike on 4th of February with an over 80% majority in favour of strike action and the strike was due to take place on the 7th of the same month.¹⁶⁰ Despite choosing to carry on the strike though the election camping, Taylor makes the point that the NUM had decided to be much more subdued in their strike activity “the conservatives would be given as little ammunition as possible”¹⁶¹ Taylor adds “The left recognised the need for restraint as the Tories were trying to use mass pickets as a lever on the British electorate to show how ferocious picketing was and that this was a complete breakdown of law and order”¹⁶²

Industrial relations and trade unions to presidency in the manifesto. It discusses protecting Britain from the ‘danger within’ and takes extensively about the NUM and industrial relations stating “It is a tragedy that the miners' leaders should have turned down this offer.” It goes on to say, “The action taken by the NUM has already caused great damage and threatens even greater damage for the future.”¹⁶³ Holmes states, unlike the 1970 manifesto the February 1974 manifesto ‘Firm action for Britain’ “was not a radical policy document. Whereas Labour’s ‘Let us work together Labour’s way out of the crisis’ was a much more radical document.¹⁶⁴ The manifesto clearly indicated that this would be a single-issue election. The election was subsequently coined in the press and public as the “who governs Britain election”? Allen states, “The difference about this election was that it was called as a means of solving the miners dispute.”¹⁶⁵ The point is this however, Heath was partly forced

¹⁵⁹ Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The way we were: Britain ,1970-1974* (London: Allen Lane,2015)

¹⁶⁰Heath, p. 511

¹⁶¹ Taylor, vol.2, p.99

¹⁶² Taylor, vol.2, p.99

¹⁶³ 1974 Conservative party manifesto (2001) < <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1974/Feb/february-1974-conservative-manifesto.shtml> > [accessed 18th April 2022]

¹⁶⁴ Holmes, p.115

¹⁶⁵ Allen, p. 243

into the election because of external structural factors such as the oil crisis and the miners' strike. The only other alternative to an election would have been breaking the N3 incomes policy and recognising the unique position the miners were in at that specific time.

There was much discussion in the cabinet about when to call the election, Taylor states, "There was no plan to fight an election in February 1974 but the entwined oil and coal crisis boxed in the government until all options were closed down by the refusal of the NUM and the government to modify their respective positions."¹⁶⁶ With the government seemingly boxed in by ensuing crisis's, some in cabinet and tory MPs were preparing for an election as early as December 1973, there was draft manifesto ready by the middle of December 1973 and rumours had begun to appear in the newspapers of a snap general election ¹⁶⁷ Heath raised the point that the conservatives lost a by-election at Berwick to the Liberals on the 8th November, and the risks of calling and losing the election were self-evident. It is true to say as multiple government ministers and back bench MPs did that if the election was called in late December or early January. Then the government would have only had to deal with an overtime ban and not a full strike. ¹⁶⁸ One backbench MP preferred an early election or no election, however these ministers and MPs are speaking with the benefit of hindsight and it is hard to know if they were criticising the decision to not take an early election at that time rather than after events had taken place. Never the less all opinion polls until the 13th of January 1974 had the Conservatives behind Labour. ¹⁶⁹ Heath also fails to mention that there were four by-elections on the 8th November 1973 Berwick upon tweed was a liberal gain from the conservatives but only by just over 50 votes. Edinburgh North was a conservative hold Glasgow Govan was an SNP gain from Labour, Hove was a conservative hold. In all it would seem Heath might have been too cautious. Heath goes on to say that "It was not immediately obvious how a general election could resolve and industrial dispute".¹⁷⁰ This however could also be said for calling the February 1974 election. Although Heath had a small but affective parliamentary majority, of 30 seats. It was enough to secure successive votes in the house of commons. Heath's reticence to call an earlier election than February 1974 might not have backfired as much as he feared because of the by-election and polls results detailed above. Hesitancy was a personal constraint of Heaths, who knows if the conservative would have won if the election was called early but there were numerous calls

¹⁶⁶ Taylor, vol.2, p.102

¹⁶⁷ Heath, p. 509

¹⁶⁸ Holmes, p. 114

¹⁶⁹ UK Polling report (2021) <<http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/vote-intention-1970-oct1974>>[accessed 20th April 2022]

¹⁷⁰ Heath, p. 509

from those around him insisting on an early election but his hesitancy meant he didn't want to call the election. The average life span of a government post war was around four years, therefore Heath's decision to call the election when he did should not be seen as a massive deviation of the normal cores of government.

The Pay Board report which was ironically announced the same day as the election was called by Willie Whitelaw the Secretary of state for employment. Heath stats that the publishing of this report would "throw the hole campaign off cores"¹⁷¹ The report was commissioned to look sensibly at the miners pay claims however the report was released just a week before polling day. The report detailed how the miners were actually £3 per week worse off than it had been initially though, which equates to nearly £23 per week today with inflation¹⁷². Heath makes the point that the miners benefited from, other benefits such as concessionary coal, these were not taken into account when making the calculation. However, he does not put a value on such benefits which would be a helpful addition. Opinion polling from the time indicates, no real change in public opinion, with only one poll done by Business Decisions (with the end date of the poll and before the election was held) out of 15 polls conducted showing the conservative behind labour.¹⁷³ Never the less Heath is right when he states, the press and opposition had a field day stating that the government had made a calculation bundle and claiming the whole 'farcical general election' as Wilson called it and stated that Heath had thrust the country into a needless pit strike.¹⁷⁴ Despite opinion polling it is hard to see how this fiasco was to help Heath in this election campaign but it does add to the long list of personal and structural constraints Heath had to deal with.

The final personal constraints Heath had, was his inability to trust the TUC when they gave him an olive branch, Holmes makes the point that on January 9th 1974 the TUC launched an initiative led by the TUC chairman Sid Greene who told senior government ministers that if ministers were to give an adequate pay rise to the NUM then other unions would not campaign for such pay rises for their members.¹⁷⁵ Holmes argues there were multiple problems with this deal, the first being that the proposal had not been agreed by the general council of the TUC therefor the agreement wasn't binding, and secondly when the TUC set out there reasons for making this offer the TUC conceded that pay problems in the coal

¹⁷¹ Heath, p. 513

¹⁷² Bank of England inflation, Inflation calculator (2022) <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>> [accessed 20th April 2022]

¹⁷³ UK Polling report (2021) <<http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/vote-intention-1970-oct1974>> [accessed 20th April 2022]

¹⁷⁴ Heath, p. 514

¹⁷⁵ Holmes, p.185

industry were not unique and that there was still potential trouble in the electricity generation sector, motor manufacturing and the ambulance service. It also still argued for pay rises outside of the constraints of stage three incomes policy, and showed no indication that affiliated unions could not ask for pay increases outside those constraints.¹⁷⁶ This is perhaps why Heath was sceptical of the offer and would never take it up. But also, Heath would have had no reason to trust the TUC after campaigning so vehemently against his government policy. The point still remains that Heath was offered an olive branch by the TUC and Heath could have negotiated on terms, which would guarantee that other unions would not ask for pay rises outside stage three and requested that the proposition be put to the general council. One would think that at a time of national crisis with a three-day week, a looming strike, and talk of an early general election, Heath might have taken them up on their offer.

When looking at Heath 1972-1974 and the February 1974 election it is evident there were more personal and structural constraints on his leadership in the second half of his ministry than the first. By the election in February 1974 the IRA seemed like only a fleeting memory “The conservative manifesto of 1974 made [just] a passing reference to the industrial relations act”¹⁷⁷ having been more or less killed off by the TUC. Additionally, The NUM exploited the Yom Kippur war and the ensuing oil crisis for their own political gain, there was little to nothing Heath could do about the ensuing oil crisis apart from cutting consumption which he did. But with the far left consolidating their position in the union and emboldened by their victory in 1972 and the ensuing oil crisis the NUM used that moment to exploit the nation's need for coal. What Heath failed to recognise was the new importance that coal, the coal industry and miners had gained since the beginning of the crisis, in accordance with capitalist market forces the miner's produced product was in high demand therefore their value to the economy increased. Heath's political miscalculations and personal constraints can also be seen with the TUC offer in January 1974. The election could have been avoided at least for a time if Heath would have recognised at least some of the NUMs pay claims. Heath was also fundamentally harmed by his consistent intervention in state industry, which allowed him to become a scapegoat from problems which are inherent in state owned industry, this also in turn politicised the trade union movement.

¹⁷⁶Holmes, p. 186

¹⁷⁷ Kavanagh and Morris, p.64

Thatcher 1979 -1983.

In the previous section, I concluded that Heath had multiple structural constraints that prevented him governing effectively. The Yom Kippur war was the first domino to fall that in the end would destroy the Heath government. But along with a strong and politically motivated NUM he was prevented from dealing those structural constraints. However, Heath also had multiple personal constricts such as allowing the NUM to become more political though the passing of the Industrial relations act.

In this section we will go on to look at Thatcher's economic and industrial policy 1979-1983. Thatcher ushered in a new paradigm and reshaped industrial relations in Britain. She governed the UK for over a decade and in that time faced multiple high profile strikes which we will analyse later in the section. By the time she left Downing Street in 1990, union power was much diminished compared to when she entered in 1979. Through unintentional economic mechanisms and a new more pragmatic approach to industrial relations legislation and through defeating a number of high-profile strikes, she weakened the trade union movement and created an industrial relations system much more akin to the one that exists today. In this section I will assess what effect the Winter of Discontent had on Thatcher's industrial relations and economic policy program, I will also assess to what extent Thatcher's economic policy had on decreasing trade union power and to what extent legislation had on this. I will also assess the Steel strike of 1980 and the miners' strike that never was 1981. And why these are significant mile stones in Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister. While discussing structural constraints on her tenure I will outline why I believe her policy above all else was pragmatic.

Keegan states, Heaths “removal was the proximate cause of the rise of Mrs Thatcher and her brand of economic evangelicals”.¹⁷⁸ Taylor also adds that, “what did matter was the perception that the NUM was capable of bringing down an elected government and this perception was to dominate British politics for the next 10 years.”¹⁷⁹ When Thatcher was elected as leader it did represent a break from what had historically been conservative party economic and industrial policy. More importantly though many Conservative politicians and thinkers began to see the trade unions as a major obstacle to achieving a new right economic evangelism which we will discuss more later in the thesis. Taylor points out the dilemma the Conservatives faced when dealing with union policy;

At the heart of this was the dilemma had had afflicted conservative policy on the unions since 1945: challenging the unions risked serious electoral consequences but to govern on their terms would not reverse relative decline. The objective was, therefore, to identify a strategy that would resolve this dilemma, a strategy of stepping stones.¹⁸⁰

The stepping stones report in 1977 written by policy adviser John Hoskyns and Norman Strauss, outlines the approaches the conservatives need to take towards the economy and trade unions. It states, “To show that if the union role does not change fundamentally, the economy cannot recover; that "avoiding confrontation" is not an available option to a government which is seriously thinking to solve our problems.”¹⁸¹ Not only does it detail how the unions need to change the report states,

“The unions are not the sole cause of the UK problem. Much union behaviour is a response to poor management and poor government. Thousands of companies with unions never have strikes. Our real concern is with the union leaders' long-term objectives.”¹⁸²

The report does not detail individual policy but instead shows the general direction the country needs to go in to get rid of its “sick man” status. It presents North Sea Oil as a

¹⁷⁸ William Keegan, *Mrs Thatcher's Economic experiment*, (Middlesex: Penguin books, 1984), p.33

¹⁷⁹ Taylor, vol.2, p.102

¹⁸⁰ Taylor, vol.2, p.117

¹⁸¹ John Hoskyns and Norman Strauss, *Stepping Stones Report* (Suffolk: The Conservative and Unionist Party, 1977), pp. 1-69 <<https://c59574e9047e61130f13-3f71d0fe2b653c4f00f32175760e96e7.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/5B6518B5823043FE9D7C54846CC7FE31.pdf>> [Accessed 1th May 2022]

¹⁸² Hoskyns, John, and Norman Strauss, *Stepping Stones Report* (Suffolk: The Conservative and Unionist Party, 1977), pp. 1-69 <<https://c59574e9047e61130f13-3f71d0fe2b653c4f00f32175760e96e7.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/5B6518B5823043FE9D7C54846CC7FE31.pdf>> [Accessed 14th May 2022]

possible answer to the nations questions in terms of preventing over reliance on coal as a way of weakening the unions. The point is however that this report set out a vision that the conservatives should stick to.

Dorey states the origins of the stepping stones report “can be traced back to the thinking that Hoskyns had developed and discussed with likeminded individuals from 1975 onwards”¹⁸³ However Taylor makes the point “The Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), created by Joseph and Thatcher inspiring 1974, was self-consciously designed to provide a counter weight to the conservative Research department”¹⁸⁴ It became increasingly clear that the CPS should focus on the growing power of the trade union , and how to reduce it as “[a] reduction of power was central to much of what Thatcher wanted to achieve, stepping stones offered a unifying theme but it required a reversal of direction and far from avoiding the union issue”¹⁸⁵ Not only this but Keith Joseph asserted “The most important issue at the next election may as well be the trade unions, for if their behaviour were left unchecked Britain would continue to become less competitive, less free, shabbier and poorer”¹⁸⁶ It was clear that those within the CPS and those around Thatcher saw the trade unions as a massive barrier to transforming Britain. They also had in there very recent memory the downfall of the Heath government and the IRA which they more or less entirely attributed to the NUM and the broader trade union movement. Dory quotes John Hoskyns stating ‘trade union power was the starting point for everything, it could and would be used to veto -if necessary, by physical force ant program sufficiently radical to reconstruct Britain political economy’.¹⁸⁷This statement is most defiantly true with regards to the IRA.

Despite the fourth rightness of statements above and actually the contents of the report, one should not be led to believe that the report did not advise caution. The purpose of the report was essentially about how the conservative could beat labour and the trade unions at the next general election. The report its self-states that,

The terms of reference for the stepping stones study can be reduced to two questions: ‘What are the essential components of a political communication program?’ and ‘What should the ingredients of each component look like, for the Tory party?’¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Dorey, 2014, p.93

¹⁸⁴ Taylor, p.112

¹⁸⁵ Taylor, p.113

¹⁸⁶ Dorey,2014, p. 96

¹⁸⁷ Dorey, 2014, p.96

¹⁸⁸ Centre for Policy Studies, Stepping stones report 14th November 1977

In this vein the report made a few important distinctions the first being, that there was a distinction between union leaders and members, and members could be split into three groups potential allies, economically confused and political opponents.¹⁸⁹ These distinctions were important as each group could be tackled in a different way , Dorey adds that “A core message of Stepping Stones was that the Conservatives had to achieve electoral success not despite growing public apathy towards the unions but by harnessing it to increase the party’s support and give a clear mandate for radical reform”¹⁹⁰ Additionally despite the views of the people who wrote the report, the report advised caution around the union issue Taylor states “Stepping stones did not place all the blame for national decline on the unions , but it identified them as a political threat to be overcome because of the negative power their ability to oppose and derail the turnaround policies”.¹⁹¹ Some members of the shadow cabinet like Prior and Tebbit and Fowler remained unconvinced even Howe wasn’t entire convinced and Lord Thorneycroft was so against she suggested that every copy of the stepping stones program should recalled to central office and burned.¹⁹² The point is that despite the reports robust attitude towards the trade unions, the authors as well as Thatcher were well aware that there would be discussions in the shadow cabinet about the report, there for it had to try and balance differing political views and avoid splits in the shadow cabinet as much as possible. There is little doubting that overall, the stepping tonnes report made a contribution to the debate around industrial policy within the Conservative Party and contributed to an air of change, and it certainly was an indication that the post war consensus yet again was under pressure.

It would be wrong to see her election as leader or the stepping stones report as a watershed moment for change in the party, change came a lot more gradually. Events led to policy change. One such watershed event was the Winter of Discontent. The winter strengthen the resolve of the conservative party to reform the unions, it hardened their proposals and increased support for such reform.¹⁹³ It also strengthened their resolve to reform the economy. Marsh states it was self-evident that one of the main causes of the winter was Callahan’s 5% incomes policy.¹⁹⁴ If Thatcher and the economic evangelicals had not been put of incomes policies by Heaths attempts then they certainly were after the winter of discontent. In short, the winter change the context around industrial relations in Britain. Even

¹⁸⁹ Dorey, 2014, p.100

¹⁹⁰ Dorey, 2014, p.102

¹⁹¹ Taylor, p.117

¹⁹² Dorey, 2014, p.104-105

¹⁹³ Marsh, p.59

¹⁹⁴ Marsh, p.61

those that served in the Heath government hardened their views. Jim Prior concurred ‘the Labour Government Winter of Discontent, it became clear that the unions were far exceeding their proper role’.¹⁹⁵ The winter also strengthened the conservative resolve to reform industrial relations, in January of 1979 Thatcher proposed a number of industrial reforms. These included, government funds to be provided for postal votes for strike ballots, the withdrawal of social security payments from strikers; impose new picketing laws and ban strikes in public utilities,¹⁹⁶ These proposals were set out in a partly political broadcast in early 1979.¹⁹⁷ Many of the proposals set out came from the Stepping Stones report, Dorey argues The WOD “made a hard-line stance by Thatcher and her supporters more appealing to angry or exasperated voters”¹⁹⁸ He goes on to say “The unions themselves inadvertently saved the stepping stones program from oblivion.”¹⁹⁹ It seemed that the stepping stones program was suddenly vindicated as a result of the overzealous behaviours of the trade unions in the WOD.

Most of these reforms would be in the manifesto of 1979, Marsh pointed out that the winter gave the conservatives industrial relations policy a focus; they could now claim as they did in the 1979 manifesto, that reform was essential to prevent a situation like the winter of discontent again.²⁰⁰ The Labour party’s response to the winter were clearly unpopular and the Conservatives’ proposals to avoid a situation like the winter arising again were clearly popular as, IPSOS opinion polls showed an average lead for the conservatives between June and November 1978 of 4.3%, after the winter between January and April 1979 this jumped to an average lead of 12.6%.²⁰¹

The winter vindicated many conservatives and their belief that incomes policies did not work, as Marsh essentially states Income’s policies were one of the main reasons for the winter of discontent because incomes policies take the primary functions of the trade unions, to negotiate pay settlements away from them. This in turn causes industrial disputes.²⁰² Homes states “It was Heath’s Herculean attempt to maintain statutory wage and price controls that convinces many conservatives it was no longer possible for the government to reconcile pay

¹⁹⁵ Marsh, p.62

¹⁹⁶ Marsh, p.62

¹⁹⁷ Thatchitescot, *Thatcher Election Broadcast 1979*, online video recording, YouTube, 11th May 2012, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcrO8SWZJFc>> [accessed 17th April 2022]

¹⁹⁸ Dorey, 2014, p.112

¹⁹⁹ Dorey, 2014, p.112

²⁰⁰ Marsh, p.63

²⁰¹ Ipsos, *Voting intentions in Great Britain 1976-1987*(2022) <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/voting-intentions-great-britain-1976-1987> [17th April 2022]

²⁰² Marsh, p.61

bargaining with low inflation and full employment.”²⁰³ As a result, the 1979 manifesto and subsequently in Government Thatcher would place emphasis on cash limits and inflation rather than incomes policies. I will draw all this out through the remaining sections.

There should be no doubting Thatcher’s mandate for change, Blake argues “The conservative had enjoyed a better swing in their favour than either of the principal parties since 1945”.²⁰⁴ He goes on to say that the conservatives increased their vote share in each region of the UK.²⁰⁵ However economic evangelicals wanted the proposal to be much harsher. Keegan point out that “The view put by Hoskyns and a number of other monetarist economists was that as long as the unions possessed monopolistic powers, they would tend to make the employment situation worse for any given level of demand. The aim of reducing union power was to make the supply side economy work better”.²⁰⁶ Keegan also argues the evangelicals “would have hardly volunteered to pen in sentences as a strong and responsible trade union movement could play a big part in our economic recovery”.²⁰⁷ Thatcher wanted to go further on union reform. But remembered what the NUM did to the Heath government in February 1974. But she was also very pragmatic, she was well aware that over 12 million members of the electorate were unionists and didn’t want to frighten these unionists off with fears that the government in waiting was about to unleash an unholy war.²⁰⁸ So the conservative fought the election committed to trade union reform but their proposals in this manifesto were not radical,²⁰⁹ partly because of Heaths legacy But also, because members of the shadow cabinet such as Jim prior as well as others had convinced Thatcher caution was the right way to proceed. They strongly believed in the voluntary collective view of industrial relations.²¹⁰ Perhaps most importantly however Aldcroft and Oliver state that “Industrial relations were not the first priority of the Thatcher government”.²¹¹ The economy and bringing down inflation was. The thought process of the economic evangelicals was the trade unions could be weekend through reforms to the economy and the use of monetary policy. I will assess this later in the section.

²⁰³ Holmes, p.190

²⁰⁴ Robert Blake, *The conservative party from Peel to Thatcher* (London: Fontana,1985) p.336

²⁰⁵ Blake, p. 337

²⁰⁶ Keegan, p.115

²⁰⁷ Keegan, p.113

²⁰⁸ Keegan, p.113

²⁰⁹ Aldcroft and Oliver, p.66

²¹⁰ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 66

²¹¹ Aldcroft and Oliver, p.66

In all it would be wrong to see the election as Thatcher as leader of the Conservative party as a watershed moment, change to policy developed much more slowly though Thatcher's time in opposition and government. When Thatcher was elected, she did not see industrial reform as a priority,²¹² Inflation was, this should be brought down by spending limits, and if necessary, an increase in unemployment. In an effort to control inflation Interest rates were pushed to 17%, this made the situation for British industry intolerable.²¹³ By 1982 unemployment had reached nearly 3 million.²¹⁴ It swelled from 5.0% in 1979 to a peak of 12.5% in 1983.²¹⁵ Unemployment at that time was being driven by full time male manual workers employed in large plants largely in the north and the midlands, losing their jobs. Historically this is where union strength was at its largest. In short even if Industrial relations was a priority for Thatcher, there was no need to rush through industrial relations legislation when the unions could be weakened by thought economic mechanisms. Marsh states, "The changes in economic structure and in particular the process of restructuring and deindustrialisation have played a crucial role in weakening the unions position."²¹⁶ Keegan add that "My own recollection of talking to hard monetarists at this time was that if unemployment had to go on rising until the unions saw sense or were smashed then their attitude was to shrug their shoulders and say that's to bad".²¹⁷ Thatcher would state that "unlike many of my colleagues, I never ceased to believe that, other things being equal, the level of unemployment was related to the extent of trade union power. The unions had priced many of their members out of jobs by demanding excessive wages for insufficient output"²¹⁸ There wasn't a grand strategy to harm the unions through economic non-intervention but as a by-product of economic reforms came a weaker trade union movement. I see little evidence that Thatcher wanted vindictively weaken the trade union movement rather her policy was to attempt to rebalance the economy.

The most obvious, tried and tested method of decreasing union power was through legislation. Thatcher however was determined to do things differently and proceed slowly with legislative reform her approach has been branded as step by step or ad-hoc²¹⁹ by Wrigley. I agree with this analysis, because Thatcher didn't introduce an IRA style piece of

²¹² Marsh, p.66

²¹³ Keegan, p.146

²¹⁴ BBC, *The Thatcher years in statistics* (2013) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22070491>>[accessed 10th May 2022]

²¹⁵ Marsh, p .168

²¹⁶ Marsh, p.188

²¹⁷ Keegan, p. 112

²¹⁸ Thatcher, p.272

²¹⁹ Wrigley, p. 78

legislation. She instead introduced smaller bills with less radical reform each building on the last. Marsh states, “Mrs Thatcher was able to learn from Heaths mistakes in particular, she was determined despite her own preference to proceed slowly”.²²⁰She proceeded slowly because as we have established the Winter of Discontent was a disaster for the country and had provided adequate political support for reforms. Marsh states there were two main problems the first being there the monetarists were still not fully in control of the cabinet and Jim Prior the employment secretary and Willie Whitelaw were strongly opposed to sweeping reforms, there was still the problem of compliance.²²¹Hence the need as Gamble states to pass decisions that could be easily implemented and cost little, abolishing public agencies was the best example of this.²²²

The issue of compliance was a big one, From Marshes figures we can see that in 1979 there were 13.3 million trade unionists, with union density at its historic high of 57.9% in 1980 this decreased slightly to 12.9 million members with a union density of 57.9%.²²³Union membership had grown exponentially, since the 1971 IRA, and the winter of discontent showed their willingness to fight policy that they didn't not agree with. The problem of compliance could be countered however with taking a step-by-step approach, Aldcroft and Oliver state that “The problem with compliance rescinded still further, no individual piece of legislation was sweeping; the emphasis remained on enforceable legislation”.²²⁴In this light the 1979 employment bill later the 1980 employment act was introduced and was the brain child of Jim Prior who had resisted sweeping reforms, this in its self is a good indication of Thatcher's intentions. Prior states, his purpose was to “Bring lasting change in attitude by changing the law gradually, with little resistance, and therefor as much stealth as possible”²²⁵ If Thatcher had decided to make Hoskyns the brain child of the Employment act, it would have been much more aggressively anti-trade union. “The 1980 employment act was a modest piece of legislation and could be interpreted as evidence that even after winning the 1979 election after the winter of discontent the Stepping Stones program was still struggling to win acceptance”²²⁶. It also shows that Hoskyns view was not entirely winning though.

²²⁰ Marsh, p. 64

²²¹ Marsh, p. 65

²²² Andrew Gamble, *The Free economy and the strong state: The politics of Thatcherism* (London: Macmillan,1988), p. 103

²²³ Marsh, p.28

²²⁴ Aldcroft and Oliver, p.71

²²⁵ Marsh, p.67

²²⁶ Dorey, 2014, p.114 stepping stones

The 1980 employment act would be seen as moderate compared to the 1971 Industrial Relations Act, the acts most notable achievement was to make most secondary picketing unlawful, members could only picket the workplace were the strike was concerned. There was also the removal of immunities for union members who organised secondary pickets.²²⁷ It also contained a whole raft of other legislation on unreasonable expulsion from trade unions, and dismissal from employment.²²⁸ Prior adds to his comments that “There was also the danger of having tougher legislation which employers in practice were afraid to use. It would be wrong to pass legislation which courts would not enforce, as had been the case with the 1971 act”.²²⁹ There was also the added bonus that there were arguable pro union clauses such as the government providing funds for ballots on strike action.

All of this meant that the TUC essentially allowed the 1980 employment act to pass without opposition, not only did they want to strengthen priors position, for want of avoiding even more radical legislation. Their position was weekend by the economic situation because of rising unemployment in industrialised and heavily unionised industries and all the TUC could muster was a day of action in March 1980.²³⁰ “day of action attracted little support and had no noticeable effect. The legislation was not particularly radical and was widely accepted by the public and many unionists.”²³¹

The employment bill was a modest measure and it was strongly criticised by some for not going further.²³² The passage of the act showed the effectiveness of passing legislation in a piecemeal fashion as it avoided a showdown with the trade unions, as had happened in 1971. In the background the government was also preparing for strikes through the Ridley plan which we will assess more later in this section. “After the passage of this legislation Thatcher increased her authority within her cabinet, and it was not surprising that more legislation ensued”.²³³ His confidence to press ahead with reform also grew. The cabinet reshuffle of January 1981 is infamous for ridding the cabinet of so-called wets or certainly demoting them, James prior who was responsible for the passing of the 1980 employment act was made Northern Ireland secretary, which was seen as a demotion, he was replaced by Norman Tebbit who was an arch Thatcherite. Marsh raises the point that “It became increasingly clear

²²⁷ Aldcroft and Oliver, p.146

²²⁸ *Employment Act 1980* (2011) <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/42/enacted>> [accessed 12 may 2022]

²²⁹ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 67

²³⁰ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 68

²³¹ Marsh, p.68

²³² Gamble, p.103

²³³ Marsh, p. 69

after 1981 that compliance was not a major problem, Mrs Thatcher's ideological aversion to unions coincided with her pragmatic political judgment. Unions could be successfully curbed which would in her terms, remove a crucial constraint upon the operation of the market."²³⁴ There was also another factor which contributed to Thatcher's confidence, this will be evaluated in the next paragraph.

The employment bill 1981 was much larger than the 1980 legislation and to a great extent built on the 1980 employment act. The 1980 employment act is 26 pages long and the 1982 employment act is 37 pages long. It gave government the power to issue compensation to those who were fired from their jobs under closed shop legislation under the last labour government.²³⁵ It put further restrictions on the closed shop, made industrial action against non-unionised companies illegal, narrowed the definition of trade disputes in order to avoid political strikes, and it removed blanket immunity from trade unions as distinct from trade unionists.²³⁶ The 1982 act went much further than the 1980 legislation and the unions responded by a new round of kill the bill protests and strikes. Arthur Scargill stated "There is only one response that this movement can give, faced with this legislation. We should say "We will defy the law".²³⁷ Although the bill was radical it didn't transform the outlook of industrial relations law, there was still more that could be done but as Thatcher states,

"There was continuing pressure to do something to prevent public sector strikes in essential services -pressure which always increased when there was a threat of public sector strikes, as happened frequently in 1982. But it would have not been practicable to deal with all these issues in one single bill; each raised the compliance question and we could not afford to make mistakes in this vital area."²³⁸

Even though the unions had been weakened by the employment act 1980 and economic factors had driven union membership down to 11.5 million and down to a density of 56.2%²³⁹, by 1982. Thatcher still showed political pragmatism and caution when taking on the unions. The

²³⁴ Marsh, p. 80

²³⁵ *Employment Act 1982* (2011) <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1982/46/contents/enacted>> [accessed 12th May 20

²³⁶ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 146

²³⁷ Wood, Alan, John Winder, and Gordon Wellman, "Overwhelming Vote To Defy 'Anti-Union Laws Source: <https://quotepark.com/quotes/1901636-Arthur-Scargill-We-Need-Action-Not-Words-For-The-First-Time-We-Are/>", *The Times*, 1982, p. 4

²³⁸ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years* (London: Harper Press, 1993) p.274

²³⁹ Marsh, p. 28

green paper Democracy in trade unions had more policy proposals but it was decided to shelve this till after the 1983 election to avoid criticism prior to the election.²⁴⁰

The government had already faced much industrial action 1979 to 1983. And “the 1980s strike statistics are dominated by two huge strikes, both attempting to resist government policy to reduce employment substantially. It is important to analyse the steel strike as this gives a good indication as to how Thatcher would deal with the miners’ strike in 1984 -85 and also along with the miners’ strike that never was 1981 shows Thatcher pragmatic attitude towards taking on large scale industrial action.

The steel strike was the first major strike in the steel industry in 50 years.²⁴¹ Charlie McGuire states,

The steelworker’s strike was a major social and political, as well as industrial, event. Involving over 100,000 workers, it resulted in almost nine million strike days, it was at the time, the longest national strike in post 1945-era and the first major conflict between the trade union movement and the new conservative government.²⁴²

The steel industry like many other industries at the time was oversized and under productive “It took BSC (British Steel Corporation) nearly twice as many man hours to produce a tonne of steel as its major European competitors”.²⁴³ “Over the five years to 1979 -80 more than 3 billion pounds on public money had gone into BSC which amounted to £220 per house hold”.²⁴⁴ When the conservatives came to power Keith Joseph , arch Thatcherite and monetarist stated that there would be no subsidy for British steel losses beyond march 1980. He announced that steel production would be cut from 21 million to 15 million tonnes and that 52,000 or roughly a third of total steel jobs in the UK would have to go at plants across the UK.²⁴⁵ Thatcher and Joseph stated however that they were willing to finance BSC redundancy and investment program but they would not finance excessive wage costs. By November the 29th 1979 the BSC had announced a £146 million pound half year loss and it had abandoned its break even targets for March 1980, ”A crisis was fast approaching”²⁴⁶ This

²⁴⁰ Thatcher, p. 275

²⁴¹ Gamble, p. 103

²⁴² Charlie McGuire, ‘Going for the Jugular’: The Steelworkers Banner and the 1980 National Steelworkers Strike in Britain’, *Historical studies in Industrial Relations* ,38.(2017), 97-128 p. 98

²⁴³ Thatcher, p. 109

²⁴⁴ Thatcher, p. 109

²⁴⁵ McGuire, p. 97

²⁴⁶ Thatcher, p.109

loss is made even more poignant, when accounting for inflation in 2022 that loss would be over 820 million pounds.

Having already committed to job cuts on the basis of BSC losing so much money it is hardly surprising that when the steel unions made their pay demands in January 1980 of 8% plus 5% based on local productivity based on the miners and ford workers receiving over 20% pay increases in December 1979, negotiations quickly collapsed and on the 9th January 1980 a strike was called. The strike spread from steel union to steel union until there was a complete walk out with the exception of The Steel Industry Management Association.²⁴⁷ It was clear from around the 18th January that the strike was going to fail; industrial production had only fallen by 2% on the previous week and there was enough steel stocks to last for another four to six weeks.²⁴⁸ Because steel production was so high and steel demand so low the BSC was able to build up substantial stocks before the strike had started. Thatcher took on the steel unions because of the strike and that she knew she could win. Gamble states “The government only picked quarrels when it could be assured of victory”²⁴⁹ In all The Thatcher government viewed the steel industry in 1980 like that Heath government viewed the coal industry in 1972 , it was the “archetypal example of everything that was wrong with British industry”²⁵⁰ The government view was that the steel industry was oversized unproductive and over subsidised, and because Thatcher could be assured of victory in this strike it was a union she could pitch battle against and win. After the months the strikers went back to work and agreed to a pay offer well above what BCS had offered but well below what the ISTC had demanded.²⁵¹ This was widely seen as a victory for the government.

Ian McGregor was appointed the new chairman of the BSC, McGregor was later appointed chairman of the National Coal Board in 1983 and was chairman during the 1984-85 strike. He became an enforcing sergeant for Thatcher’s economic outlook for the industry. Taylor states, MacGregor’s appointment was “a clear signal that ministers were moving towards finding a final solution for coal.”²⁵² Similarly, to the steel industry the coal industry had been given 2.5 billion pounds since 1974 to help investment, productivity in the newly opened pits was high. Thatcher believed a slimmed down competitive coal industry could have produced employees with good well-paid jobs but that was only possible if uneconomic pits (pits that were making

²⁴⁷ McGuire, p.112

²⁴⁸ Thatcher, p.111

²⁴⁹ Gamble, p.103

²⁵⁰ McGuire, p.125

²⁵¹ Thatcher, p.113

²⁵² Taylor, vol2, p.181

a loss) were closed.²⁵³ The NCB plan from 1980 largely involved closing 50 pits at a minimum but the deal would include increased redundancy payments as a concession, Thatcher claims that the Board and the union took the same view that imports should be reduced before closing pits.²⁵⁴ As we established coal imports were incredibly low and had minimal impact on coal usage in the UK. I suspect that this was provided as a concession by the NCB to try and please the NUM as the Coal Board must have known coal imports were negligible at this time. Either way the NCB had entered a battle with the NUM it could not win. While it is true coal stocks were relatively high, they were stuck at the pit head and not enough coal was at power stations where it was needed. Although the data from the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy figures indicate coal was stocked and made available to power stations these figures show the stats for the years ending.²⁵⁵ There for they do not show discrepancies and supply issues within those years. The tripartite talks between the government NUM and NCB resulted in the list of 50 or 60 pits then it was reduced to 23 and then the NCB withdrew the closure program all together, as well as promising to decrease coal imports even further and improved the redundancy packages for miners.²⁵⁶

This hole fiasco was seen as an embarrassing defeat for the government. Thatcher would state to NCB official that “there is no point embarking on a battle unless you are reasonably confident you can win. Defeat in a coal strike would have been disastrous”.²⁵⁷ Thatcher’s pragmatic attitude would prevent a disaster on the scale of 1974 all over again, she was well aware of the repercussion if the government had pitched battle and lost. The consequence of this climb down by the government is significant because when the 1984-85 strike would come. Thatcher learned lessons, took a much more personal interest in dealing with the strike and insisting the Ridley plan was adhered to by the letter.

In conclusion Thatcher’s policy and response to events was pragmatic, her policy platform was developed through the stepping stones plan and the Winter of Discontent was the biggest single event to confirm what many conservatives already through. The Stepping Stones report made an important contribution to the debate that was then vindicated in the Winter of Discontent. Both these also contributed to a further breaking down of the post war consensus.

²⁵³ Thatcher, p. 139

²⁵⁴ Thatcher, p.140

²⁵⁵ *Historical coal data: coal production, availability and consumption 1853 to 2021 (2022)*

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-coal-data-coal-production-availability-and-consumption>> [accessed 16th May 2022]

²⁵⁶ Thatcher, p. 141

²⁵⁷ Thatcher, p. 141

Kavanagh and Morris argue “it was only after 1979, however, that the breakup of the old consensus became apparent, as a result of the sheer scale of change that has occurred since Mrs Thatcher became prime minister.”²⁵⁸ Although I have argued that the breakdown and change in policy was more gradual than a single event there is little doubt that after Thatcher's election victory it was clear that consensus was about to break down even further. The Winter of Discontent also gave industrial and economic policy focus and added ammunition to the monetarist gun that was due to go off in 1980 when unemployment and interest rates started to sky rocketed. Through rebalancing the economy, monetarism led to a curbing union power though decreasing money supply and increasing interest rates to curb inflation. The by-product however was an intolerable position for unproductive and over subsidised nationalised British industry. As a by-product unemployment increases 4-fold in heavy industry and plants with large work forces, these environments were ones of traditionally high union density. “She, Norman Tebbit and other conservatives on the right saw trade unions as a serious impediment to a free market economy, adding to the cost of goods and services and contributing to uncooperativeness and unemployment”.²⁵⁹ There is little evidence that there was a grand strategy to weaken the unions though economic means it was simply a consequence of actions taken. Similarly, “The conservative legislation was not meticulously planned in opposition and pushed through in power as part of a grand Thatcherite strategy.”²⁶⁰ Legislation was developed overtime. The 1982 employment act built on the 1980 act. Thatcher's pragmatism led her to not introduce an industrial relations style bill when she first came to office, she knew the issue of compliance would be a big one and there would be little point introducing legislation that the unions would not comply with. The Coal strike that never was 1981 showed that Thatcher again was pragmatic in the way she handled strikes, it showed that she could concede to the unions if she wasn't ready to fight the strike. But it also provides fuel to the auntie NUM and Scargill sentiment in the conservative party which would explode in 1984. The steel strike shows that if there was a battle Thatcher could win against the unions she would and she wasn't afraid to challenge the status quo.

²⁵⁸ Kavanagh and Morris, p. 115-116

²⁵⁹ Wrigley, p.74

²⁶⁰ Marsh, p. 80

Thatcher 1983-1990 and the miners' strike 1984-85.

In the last section we concluded that above all else Thatcher's policy was pragmatic and risk averse. Her policy was developed over many years and the Winter of Discontent was the single biggest event that cemented Thatcher industrial and economic policy outlook. It wasn't a strategy to use monetarism to curb union power but as levels of investment plummeted and inflation and unemployment increased this weakened trade union movement. Work places with high union density were affected the most by high level of deindustrialisation.

Thatcher's legislative program was not carefully conceived in opposition but it evolved over time as she tried to balance different factions in the conservative party, a powerful union movement and Thatcher's desire to rebalance the economy.

In this section I will assess the events on Thatcher's tenure after her election victory in 1983. If Thatcher 1979 -1983 was cautious somewhat risk averse, then her victory in 1983 signalled a true sea change in her tenure. I will pay attention to the decline in the strength of the trade union movement post 1983, I will also look at how the legislation of this period differed from 1979-1983 and how it was much more overtly anti trade unionist and pro employee against the union. Over all Thatcher continued her slow and steady approach to legislation.

When the 1983 election was called the government was in a favourable position, Thatcher rode a patriotic wave following the British victory in the Falkland's war defeating the fascist military junta .1983 was the first-year inflation had dipped below 5% in Thatcher's premiership after reaching the dizzying heights of over 20% in 1980.²⁶¹ GDP was on the rise at just under 4%. Unemployment was still high at 3.1 million.²⁶² Thatcher was confident entering the election that this would not harm her chances of re-election. Blake states, "It was obvious the conservatives would win from the start".²⁶³ The victory was total and decisive, at the close of poll. The poll was low only 72.5%, the conservatives won 397 seats with 42.4% of voters in support. ²⁶⁴ Although the conservative vote share declined by 1.5 percentage points under first past the post political power is derived from the majority won and with a majority of 144 seats²⁶⁵ Thatcher had received a big mandate to govern. She states, "The 1983 General election result was the single most devastating defeat ever inflicted upon democratic socialism in Britain".²⁶⁶

Blake states, "The conservative manifesto, written by Ferdinand Mount, Head of Thatcher's policy unit, and published on the 18th May, contained no surprises"²⁶⁷ The policy platform that was developed 1979 -1983 was carried through to the 1983 manifesto. It states that,

"They (the trade unions) can be powerful instruments for good or harm, to promote progress or hinder change, to create new jobs or to destroy existing ones. All of us

²⁶¹ BBC, *The Thatcher years in statistics* (2013) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22070491>> [accessed 17th June 2022]

²⁶² BBC, *The Thatcher years in statistics* (2013) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22070491>> [accessed 17th June 2022]

²⁶³ Blake, p.355

²⁶⁴ Blake, p. 355

²⁶⁵ Julian Haveland, 'Thatcher Cabinet reshuffle expected tonight', *The times*, 11th June 1983

²⁶⁶ Thatcher, p.339

²⁶⁷ Blake, p.354

have a vital interest in ensuring that this power is used democratically and responsibly.”²⁶⁸

The manifesto also committed to, “hold ballots for the election of governing bodies of trade unions; decide periodically whether their unions should have party political funds.”²⁶⁹ It also talk about commitments made in the 1982 Green paper Democracy in trade unions. Which talks about trade union governance to a great extent it is no surprise then that this features heavily in the manifesto. An important point about energy is made in the manifesto and will became more pressing when discussing the coal strike later in this section.

“Britain has come from nowhere to be the world's fifth largest oil producer. In the next Parliament, the interests of the whole country require Britain's massive coal industry, on which we depend for the overwhelming bulk of our electricity generation, to return to economic viability. We shall press ahead with the development of safe nuclear power.”²⁷⁰

After delaying the proposals made in Democracy in trade unions in 1982 one of the governments first major tasks was to push forward with proposals made in this green paper. “Reducing union power and privileges was given a very high priority in the second phase of the Thatcher government.” ²⁷¹ Although this statement is about the conservative passing the 1982 and 1984 legislation, it is easily applicable to this context. The Green paper suggested that a high proportion of trade unionist in certain trade unions were not informed as to what the political levy was and didn’t actually know they giving money to the Labour party. This became particularly problematic because the paper suggested a high proportion of trade unionist actually voted conservative.²⁷² The 1984 act would put a stop to this. The theory behind this piece of the act was to give members the choice as to whether they wanted to support the political activity of the unions or just the trade union’s role in protecting their rights and being a repetition of the workers to the business or the nationalised industry. Marsh states, “The governments overall strategy in the 1984 act was clear. They wished to

²⁶⁸ Margaret Thatcher Foundation, *Conservative General election manifesto 1983* (2022) < <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110859> > [accessed 11th June 2022] (The Thatcher archives)

²⁶⁹ Margaret Thatcher Foundation, *Conservative General election manifesto 1983* (2022) < <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110859> > [accessed 11th June 2022] (The Thatcher archives)

²⁷⁰ Margaret Thatcher Foundation, *Conservative General election manifesto 1983* (2022) < <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110859> > [accessed 11th June 2022] (The Thatcher archives)

²⁷¹ Gamble, p. 116

²⁷² Marsh, p. 115

depoliticise the trade union movement; to weaken its links to the labour party and to force it to concentrate on economic not political activity”.²⁷³

Another big part of this Act was the democracy part, although many trade unions espoused the idea of democracy many fell short. Previous to this part of the act trade unions were not obliged to hold pre strike ballots and it became obvious that members were being dragged into strike action against their will. Wrigley states,

“Before 1984 unions held pre-strike ballots, in line with their rule books. Many did not. The trade union act 1984 made such ballots obligatory, otherwise trade unions calling strikes without such democratic endorsements lost their legal immunities for breeches or contract.”²⁷⁴

This piece of the trade union act would become particularly important when talking about the miners’ strike later in this section.

By in large trade union members supported the changes in the act. In direct opposition with the union leadership. Marsh draws attention to a poll that was conducted by MORI in 1983 which gauges the attitude of trade unionists. The members polled were from different unions. When asked “Do you think that trade union members should or should not be regularly asked whether or not the union should have a political fund? The results were as follows, should 63% should not 18% don’t know 18%. When asked, do you believe your unions main national decision-making body should or should not be elected by secret ballot? The results were should 58% should not 28% Don’t know 15%. They were then asked, before there is a strike, do you think they should not be a secret ballot of members? The results were should 69% should not 17% Don’t know 14%. Do you think your union should or should not be affiliated to the Labour party? should 36% should not 53% don’t know 11%.²⁷⁵ Over all this shows strong support amongst trade unions for the reforms made in the Trade union act 1984. This is why the reforms passed with relative ease compared to the 1971 IRA. The problem of compliance was particularly acute 1979-1983 but by 1984 this problem had receded still further. Overall union membership decreased from 11,593,000 in 1982 to 11,086,000 in 1984 meaning an over half a million drop in members in just two years. And density had fallen from 56.2% in 1982 to 53% in 1984.²⁷⁶ In short, the unions were still losing hundreds of

²⁷³ Marsh, p.115

²⁷⁴ Wrigley, p. 53

²⁷⁵ Marsh, p.148

²⁷⁶ Marsh, p.28

thousands of members per year and the unions were in retreat as the monetarist policies of Thatcher continued.

The trends for trade union decline that started in 1980 continued through the decade. Aldcroft and explain this decline. They cite a number of reasons for this, they state that, “The 1980s and early 1990s were simply not conducive to fostering sustained union growth as a combination of negative factors stymied recruitment in the newly expanding job territory’s which were traditionally difficult to unionise”²⁷⁷ They point out that “During the period of growing and high unemployment between 1979 and 1986, several academics have claimed that unemployment effect combined with real increases in wages, does account for a major part of the fall in union membership”²⁷⁸ They also point out that Elsheikh and Bain conclude that the decline in big manufacturing plants was another reason for decline. The percentage of employees working in large manufacturing plants (500+ employees) declined from 54.1% to 42.7% over the course of the 1980s.²⁷⁹ Undy et al. has pointed out that between 1986 and 1989 there was an increase of 1.4 million employed, but union membership continued to decline. They comment that perhaps the post 1986 decline in density was largely due to the composition effect, as the increase in employment was predominately in areas of low union density.²⁸⁰ Despite drops in unemployment to 2. Million in 1990 from 3.3% in 1984.²⁸¹ And despite industrial output (measured by the Index of UK industrial production) increasing from 80 in 1981 to 102 in 1990 ²⁸² and the average growth in output per person employed in manufacturing from 1981 -1988 being 5.8% employment in industry continued to decline through the 1980s affecting those heavily unionised manufacturing industries.

In 1984 the union movement although decreasing in strength was still a force to be reckoned with in particular the NUM. This strike was the single biggest strike post war and continues to be that. It is also vital to this thesis because the miners’ strike of 1974 contributed to a series of events that led to the downfall of the Heath government. Thatcher unquestionably kept this event and the 1981 strike that never was in mind when dealing with the 1984-85 strike. Tylor quotes Walker who states in his memoir,

²⁷⁷ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 140

²⁷⁸ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 141

²⁷⁹ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 142

²⁸⁰ Aldcroft and Oliver, p 141

²⁸¹ BBC, *The Thatcher years in statistics* (2013) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22070491>> [accessed 20th June 2022]

²⁸² Tejvan Pettinger, *UK Economy in the 1980s* (2017)

<<https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/630/economics/economy-in-1980s/>> [accessed 20th June 2022]

“1974 and 1981 were ‘scorched on her mined’ and that she was convinced it was only a matter of time before the clash came and believed walker ‘would have to political knowledge and the communication skills to explained the government case to the public. This was essential in a major conflict of this kind’”²⁸³

He also states, “The conservative victory in the general election of 1983 was an important factor in the run up to the dispute”²⁸⁴ This strike was the culmination of events from the previous 10 or even 12 years.

The NUM delegate conference on the 21st October 1983 voted in favour of an overtime ban because of the proposed 5:2 pay offer.²⁸⁵ However the Cortonwood affair was the straw that broke the camel’s back. The strike was flared by the announcement of the closure of Cortonwood colliery near Rotherham in South Yorkshire in March 1984. Ian Macgregor was appointed Chairman of the NCB made effective on the 1st of September 1983,²⁸⁶ He had been appointed by Thatcher to get the NCB to break even by 1988, like he had with BSC, as I spoke of in previous sections. MacGregor stated he need to reduce employment in the industry by 44,000 over the next two years to Bring the board to breakeven by 1988.²⁸⁷ The NCB had told George Haynes the chair of the south Yorkshire area of the NCB to reduce production by 500,000 tonnes.²⁸⁸ “Shutting this one loss making pit with its annual output of 280,000 tonnes would get him most of the way there”.²⁸⁹ The 839 men who worked at the pit had been told 11 months prior that Cortonwood had enough coal reserves to remain open another 5 years and had just received £1 million worth of investment.²⁹⁰ Macgregor lobbied the government to increase the redundancy scheme to men under the age of 50 and grant £1,000 of each year of the man’s service.²⁹¹ On top of this the industry had received £1.4 billion in 1983-1984.²⁹² On this basis it is easy to see why the NCB were eager to press ahead with pit closures, especially because no pits had been closed since the government climb down in 1981.²⁹³ Marsh quotes Adney and Lloyd, they state;

²⁸³ Taylor, vol.2, p.180 -181

²⁸⁴ Taylor v2, p.180

²⁸⁵ Thatcher, p. 324

²⁸⁶ Thatcher, p. 339

²⁸⁷ Thatcher, p. 343

²⁸⁸ Routledge, p. 138

²⁸⁹ Routledge, p. 138

²⁹⁰ Routledge, p. 138

²⁹¹ Thatcher, p. 343

²⁹² Thatcher, p. 343

²⁹³ Routledge, p.139

“The NUM was lured into a strike in could not win; in the spring of 1984 the government deliberately closed a Yorkshire pit citronwood colliery, at a time when there were high coal stocks and a falling world price. The government overall strategy was informed by the Ridley report prepared in 1978.”²⁹⁴

It is true that the governments overall strategy was informed by the Ridly report, but I believe it misleading to say the NUM was lured into the strike. The Monopolies and merges commission report highlighted that 75% of all pits in the UK were making losses.²⁹⁵ Thatcher through the Ridley report had prepared the NCB to take on a strike at any point in the future by moving coal away from the pit had to the power stations, which Heath failed to do, Thatcher had installed dule fuel oil and coal devises at power stations meaning if the coal ran out oil could be burned to produce power.

Thatcher makes the point that if Cortowood hadn’t been closed the NUM had agreed to protest the closure of every pit unless it was exhausted.²⁹⁶When Scargill was called to give evidence before a select committee he was asked, is there any level of loss you could contemplate, he replied “as far as I am concerned the loss is without limit”.²⁹⁷

A strike ballot was held on 8th March 1983 but strike action was rejected by 61% of NUM members.²⁹⁸Having failed to reach the 55% threshold needed to call a national strike, Scargill and the NUM executive enacted rule 41 meaning that individual area could go on strike,²⁹⁹ Yorkshire and Scottish area NUM branches were the first to walk out but by 6th March all branches were on strike making an effective national strike. On the first day of the strikes 83 pits were working and 81 were not, 10 of these were closed due to picketing. The following day the number of pits not working has quickly risen to 100.³⁰⁰The tactics Scargill had adopted and honed in 1972 were used again. Flying pickets caused kayos and the police were losing control. The Wednesday after the strike was called there was only 29 pits working.³⁰¹ Nottinghamshire miners held their own strike ballot, of over 70,000 miners balloted 50,000 voted against the strike action.³⁰²The government’s response to the strike in the early days was somewhat lacklustre and reminiscent of the Heath government, so Thatcher took the

²⁹⁴ Marsh, p.120

²⁹⁵ Thatcher, p. 343

²⁹⁶ Thatcher, p. 344

²⁹⁷ Thatcher, p. 343

²⁹⁸ Routledge, p. 140

²⁹⁹ Thatcher, p. 345

³⁰⁰ Thatcher, p. 345

³⁰¹ Thatcher, p. 346

³⁰² Thatcher, p. 346

decision to set up a strike committee and took an intensely personal role in dealing with the strike. The national reporting center also helped co-ordinate the police response. In Thatcher meticulous planning she had assumed that no coal would be dug out the ground at all, rather surprisingly large sections of the workforce were not supporting Scargill's strike so coal was still being mined.³⁰³ Power station workers had agreed not to go on strike which helped the government get continuous energy supply. There was not such help for Heath in either 1972 or 1974. If supplies of coal from Nottingham and other working areas were maintained the CEGB believed they could keep powered stations running till November 1985.³⁰⁴

The problem was however at the coking works, as in 1972-74 the NUM weren't just picketing mines, they were picketing coking works, Scunthorpe and red car were badly affected, Ravenscraig steel plant needed coal quickly because the steel furnaces there could not be shut down without irreversible damage. If coal not get there the plant would have to be closed permanently.³⁰⁵ Because of planning and police deployment coking coal was able to get through to the plants in the end.

Thatcher claims there were three events that changes the course of the strike, the first being the NACODS executive agreed not to strike, these were dockworkers who could have stopped imports of coal. Secondly as a result of the two Yorkshire miners' case where two miners had taken the NUM to court over damages cause to them. Scargill was fined £1,000 and the NUM £200,000 for contempt of court. The NUM refused to pay and assets were sequestered to that value. On the 28th October Sunday Times revealed that NUM official had visited Libya to make a personal appeal to Colonel Gaddafi for financial support. They received donations from a dodgy source in Afghanistan and from soviet communist miners.³⁰⁶ Weather all the allegations were true or not is largely irrelevant, the point being irreversible damage was done to the NUM because of these allegations.

The NCB announced that those who returned to work before Christmas 1984 would receive a Christmas bonus. That week 2,223 miners returned to work the week after it was over 6,000³⁰⁷, this trend continued till mid-January when 75,000 members of the NUM were not

³⁰³ Thatcher, p. 349

³⁰⁴ Thatcher, p. 358

³⁰⁵ Thatcher, p. 361

³⁰⁶ Thatcher, p. 369

³⁰⁷ Thatcher, p. 369

on strike and the return rate from then on was 2,500 per week.³⁰⁸ As of the 27th February over half of the NUM were back at work and on the 3rd March, delegates voted to call off the strike against the advice of Scargill.³⁰⁹

Like in 1972-1974. Heath and Thatcher were face with a far-left extremist leader of the NUM that in the case of 1984-85 was willing to call strike action without ballot in order to challenge government authority. I believe Adeney and Lloyds are correct in their assessment that Marsh points out, the management merely wanted to manage. The government wished to make the coal industry more efficient. whereas the NUM and Scargill was willing to use the miner's power to challenge the democratically elected government.³¹⁰ There is little doubt in my mind that Scargill challenged the government not only to save pit that he thought were still economical but also be a factor in why the Heath government fell in 1974.

Thatcher argues "Within a month of the 1983 election Mr Scargill was saying openly that he did not accept that we are landed for the next four years with this government".³¹¹ The reason for this is clear, as stated in previous sections the NUM leadership and some member were galvanised by their victories in 1972 and 1974, Scargill probably thought they could bring down this government as they had the last. Additionally, Scargill wrote in the morning star on the 8th May 1984 "The NUM is engaged in a social and industrial battle for Britain, what urgently needed is the rapid and total mobilisation of the trade union and Labour movement".³¹² The one thing Adeney and Lloyd miss however is that while challenging the democratic authority of the government the NUM and Scargill were striking against pit closures first and foremost, and defending the previously existing post war consensus model of politics. Marsh goes states, "It is misguided to see Scargill as some sort of authoritarian leading the NUM into the industrial equivalent of the valley of Death. He was elected by an overwhelming majority and he remained popular in and after the strike".³¹³ Although "The membership had shrunk to about 65,000 and employment in the industry has fallen from 187,000 in 1983 to 85,000 in 1989".³¹⁴ Disruption in the industry continued, not to the scale of the strike the number of disputes in the coal industry has risen steadily since March 1985. In 1986 the number of days lost per 1000 workers was 1200 and in 1987 2212, this compares with 1840 and 3160 in 1982 and 1983 respectively" These were due to pit level

³⁰⁸ Thatcher, p. 374

³⁰⁹ Thatcher, p. 376

³¹⁰ Marsh, p. 121

³¹¹ Thatcher, p. 339

³¹² Thatcher, p. 350

³¹³ Marsh, p. 122

³¹⁴ Marsh, p. 124

disputes.³¹⁵ certainly the national NUM were weakened by the strike but the local branches although smaller in number seemed more determined than ever after 1985. There is no doubting Scargill's popularity amongst rank and file striking member of the NUM, after all there were 5,000 miners who answered his call to picket Stanley coke works.³¹⁶

What is unclear however is how popular he was with NUM members that weren't on strike ordinary rank and file miners who were members of other unions such as the Democratic union of mine workers, or mine workers that weren't members of a union. There is not adequate time to assess this properly but the only evidence I have is that Scargill refused to call a strike on the basis he couldn't reach the 55% required to call a national strike, and as stated previously above when Nottinghamshire miners were voluntarily balloted, 50,000 out of 70,000 voted not to strike. But also, how many strikes were striking because they wanted to? How many were subjected to the well documented cases of mass intimidation tactics? So, I do not believe it is wrong to see Scargill as an authoritarian.

The 1984-85 miners' strike was the biggest strike post war and would lead to over 80 million tonnes of lost production ³¹⁷ and a loss of 26 million working days and marked the end of coal mining being a major feature in strike statistics".³¹⁸ But perhaps more importantly "The confrontation with the miners was an important symbolic event for the conservative government; Mrs Thatcher succeeded where Mr Heath had failed, a very important contrast for those who felt humiliated by the outcome of the 73-74 miners' strike"³¹⁹ After the strike Thatcher proved her pragmatic leadership ones again, even after the strike coal and oil stocks were built up again, ³²⁰It is only with the benefit of hindsight that we see the 1984-85 strike as the last major industrial dispute to the present day. After this the next most notable event that is relevant to this study was the 1987 election.

The 1987 manifesto committed to introduce legislation to, empower individual members to stop their unions calling them out on strike without first holding a secret ballot of members; protect individual members from disciplinary action if they refuse to join a strike; ensure that all members of trade union governing bodies are elected by secret ballot at least once every five years; make independently supervised postal ballots compulsory for such elections; limit further the abuse of the closed shop by providing protection against unfair dismissal for all

³¹⁵ Marsh, p. 124

³¹⁶ Routledge, p. 151

³¹⁷ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 6^h July 2022]

³¹⁸ Wrigley, p.46

³¹⁹ Marsh, p.119

³²⁰ Thatcher, p. 377

non-union employees, and removing any legal immunity from industrial action to establish or enforce a closed shop; provide new safeguards on the use of union funds; establish a new trade union commissioner with the power to help individual trade unionists to enforce their fundamental rights.³²¹ These announcements were not unexpected and naturally built upon previous trade union and Employment acts. At the close of poll on the 11th June 1987 the conservatives won 376 seats, a fall of 21 from the last election and labour won 229 with an increase of 20 seats, the Conservatives won 42.2% of the vote a fall of 0.2% and Labour won 30.8% an increase of 3.2%. despite Labour gains the Conservatives still enjoyed a landslide victory and held a majority of 50 in the House of Commons.³²²

With the compliance issue more or less gone with Thatcher's third consecutive election victory. And the unions weakened with years of consecutive monetarism and legislation, naturally the 1988 employment act focused on strengthening union members rights. The 1988 employment act Gave union member the right to work or cross a picket line during a strike, it established the office of commissioner for the rights of Trade Union Members to assist them to enforce their rights, it tighten up balloting procedures and removed all legal protection for post-entry closed shops.³²³The 1990 Employment act was more radical, its most notable points were ,making all secondary action unlawful effectively making the possibility of another miners strike, with mass secondary picketing illegal, and it also made unions responsible for unofficial strikes. Meaning unions were liable to legal action if their members went on unofficial strike action.³²⁴All these reforms combined made sure that there was not to be a strike on the scale of the miners' strike again.

In conclusion when Thatcher was forced to step down as Prime Minister on 28th November 1990, she left Britain a much more industrially harmonious nation, the Growth and acceleration of monetarism after her 1983 election victory combined with a pragmatic and cautious approach to trade union legislation combined to weaken the trade union movement a great deal by 1990.By 1990 trade union membership overall was 9,947,000 with a density of 43.9%³²⁵ That is a fall of over 1.4 million members and a drop in density of 10.7% since

³²¹ 1987 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto Conservative party manifesto (2001) <<http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1987/1987-conservative-manifesto.shtml>>[accessed 10th July 2022]

³²² House of Commons, 1989. *General Election Results ,11 June 1987*. [online] London: House of Commons, pp.1-16. Available at: <<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-information-office/m11.pdf>> [Accessed 11 July 2022].

³²³ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 146

³²⁴ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 146

³²⁵ Aldcroft and Oliver, p. 136

1983. From 1983 -1987 union legislation was a major part of Thatcher's appeal and mission, to Marsh,

“Mrs Thatcher's ideological aversion to unions coincided with her pragmatic political judgment. Unions could be successfully cured which would in her terms, remove a crucial constraint on the operation of the market. In addition, the curbing of union power could be portrayed as evidence of conservative governing competence, while at the same time, proving electorally popular.”³²⁶

The unions and Heath's own aversion to unemployment stood in the way of Heath being able to unleash the power of the Market and dismissing lame duck industries. Thatcher however having embraced monetarism and finding high unemployment wasn't electorally unpopular, could push ahead with her evidently popular legislative reforms. After pushing ahead with the 1984 trade union act, which both attacked what Thatcher saw as the far-left militant leader of some trade unions, and strengthened ordinary moderate members of the unions. The 1984-1985 miners' strike was the biggest constraints on Thatcher and the biggest challenge for Thatcher in her 11 years as Prime minister, however with pragmatic planning and with use of multiple different arms of the state such as the police the government was able to defeat the strike. Gamble states, “By crushing the miners, the government was able to demonstrate to the whole labour movement that nothing was to be allowed to stand in the way of restructuring industries to make them profitable again and internationally competitive”³²⁷

³²⁶ Marsh, p. 80

³²⁷ Gamble, p. 116

Conclusion

To assess the similarities and difference to Thatcher and Heaths responses to industrial disputes, I must first return to the central point of the coal industries general decline from 1945-1990. The coal industry was reduced to a shadow of its former self due to decreasing market demand, and a decline in exports. The highest year for UK output, was 1913, output was 292.03 million tonnes, the highest year for exports was 1923 with 99 million tonnes exported. By 1957 UK exports had decreased to 8 million tonnes and remained in single figures ever since. While UK output even in 1990 was just shy of 100 million tonnes. The decline in UK exports forced domestic buyers to buy more coal or production would have to be cut. Just as UK exports had hit their lowest point, this was combined with the massively decreasing domestic demand. On top of this the energy sector was beginning to switch to cheaper forms of electricity generation such as North Sea oil and gas.

I have demonstrated that the industrial strife of the 1970s and 1980s didn't emerge out of the blue. The NUMS predecessor the MFGB had proven it was willing to show its displeasure with wage cuts and government legislation. Following the 1926 coal strike there was years of relative industrial harmony as trade union strength receded up till the second world war. There was also a period of relative industrial harmony from 1945 to the mid-1960s The NUM formed out of the MFGB out of necessity, the newly nationalised coal industry after the second world war demanded a national coordinated union response. The newly emerging consensus area post war politics required by nature monopoly trade unions negotiating with monopoly nationalised industries, working on collective bargaining agreements to improve working conditions and productivity. As a result of pre-war union decline and post war consensus politics there was no major strikes in the coal industry for nearly 50 years. However, union bosses began to separate them self from shop floor industrial relations. As a result, disgruntled union members would often go on local and national wild cat strikes, this

threatened consensus era politics as the members were undermining their masters in central trade union offices. Wild cat strike action came to a head in 1969 when 16,000 miners went on wild cat action because the central NUM, despite voting for a substantial pay rise did not negotiate a settlement and ignored the will of the members.

On entering office Heath was dealing with the breakdown of consensus era politics driven in large part by the Breakdown of trade union executive member relations, the Donovan commission and in place of strife had gone some way to identifying the problem in British industrial relations and the wildcat strike of 1969 placed these into the spotlight. Upon entering Downing Street industrial relations was a priority for Heath. In contrast when Thatcher entered Downing Street, her priority was reform of the economy, however the fall of the Heath government, the stepping stones program and the Winter of Discontent all contributed to Thatcher's policy outlook. In contrast For Thatcher the problem was not with members overruling union leaders and threatening consensus era politics, that was long gone. The problem was as she saw and monetarists saw it powerful trade union holding Britain to ransom and preventing innovation and economic growth. Nevertheless, both these Prime Ministers used these events to justify their reforms.

Heath won the 1970 election gaining 77 seats and securing a majority of 14 seats. Thatcher won the 1979 election, gaining 62 seats and securing a majority of 21. Heath secured 46.4% of the total vote share while Thatcher secured 43.9%. The lack of majority Thatcher received contributed to an air of caution from 1979-1982, until certain events would increase her confidence to reform and in government. Heath however ran into office proposing massive changes to the industrial relations system. The 1970 manifesto proposed the introduction of a whole sale sweeping Industrial Relations Act, it provided a frame work of law which the trade unions should operate in, and industrial relations court to audit and enforce cases of rule breaking and created a trade union registry. It strengthened the union executives' power over its member to avoid wild cat strikes, and it included safeguard to protect union members against unfair dismissal from within the trade union. The Heath manifesto also espoused free market economics vowing not to invest in dying industries. The 1979 manifesto committed to manifestos commit to restrictions on picketing and the closed shop, but importantly committed to transforming the economy into a low tax high wage economy and also espoused principals of free market economics and monetarism. The 1970 manifesto was the far more radical of the two. In 1970 the union movements were at its strongest it had been since 1926, union density was high as was overall membership. In 1979 the union was even more powerful density had increased to its highest point ever as had membership, this

unquestionably contributed to Thatcher reluctance to mount a full scale attack in 1979 as Heath did in 1970-1971 but these facts were unquestionably structural constraints on both Heath and Thatcher.

The promises made in the manifesto were carried through and the union movement responded in kind. The IRA passed parliament relatively easily however the TUC put up a strong fight against the act, mainly because of the trade union register. Compliance was the major issue in these cases, the vast majority of trade unions just didn't abide by the new law and employers feared repercussions from the unions if there were to take them to the industrial relations court. Passing this massive act was a personal constraint on Heath as he didn't see the opposition coming. Thatcher made true on her promises in the 1979 manifesto but in a marked juxtaposition the TUC mounted a relatively small campaign to stop the bill which was unsuccessful, largely because Thatcher hadn't given the union anything to place their pin on because the 1980 Employment Bill was so modest, but also after the Winter of Discontent there was an appetite for change in the country. Thatcher saw the problem of secondary picketing in the winter of discontent and consequently outlawed most secondary picketing in 1980, her policy of seeing a specific problem and solving it was very pragmatic. She continued to slow and steady approach to legislation in the rest of her tenure as Prime Minister gradually weakening the unions step by step, passing the 1984 Trade union act based on the Democracy in Trade unions Green Paper. Then passing the employment acts 1988 and 1990 each building on the last. Thatcher saw the issue of compliance and to get round it didn't introduce revisionary reform, the 1984 act was perhaps the most strident forcing unions to democratise. The emphasis on the Thatcher legislation was enforceability, Gamble argues "There was no disposition at first to confront union power directly for fear of presenting the union with the kind of issue around what they could rally an effective protest, as had happened with the Heath governments industrial relations act".³²⁸ Overall Heath's proposals were well thought out but little time was given to compliance and enforceability of the legislation this would come to hurt him later in his premiership.

Coal strikes were of course a major problem for both of these Prime Ministers Heath dealt with his first in 1972, when the NUM called their members out on strike in January 1972 over a disputed pay rise. The government and NCB refused the demanded nearly 50% pay increase. Heath called the Wilberforce enquiry and agreed to the recommended 20% pay increase. The problem Heath had spanned from his voluntary incomes policy to try and get inflation down,

³²⁸ Gamble, p. 103

and despite Heath's rhetoric about lame duck industries, he has bailed out Rolls Royce in 1971 and others. On both fronts these situations made the government look incoherent. This miners' strike was a personal and structural constrict on Heath. The same could be said for the steel strike in 1980. The steel strike was the first major industrial dispute Thatcher faced and was the first major national strike in the steel industry for over 50 years. It started because of dramatic job losses and run downs in steel production by BSC in late 1979. Following this the unions demanded a 5% pay rise plus 8% for local productivity. Thatcher's willingness to defeat the 6-month strike was steadfast and the steel workers returned to work after achieving very little. The strike wasn't defeated because of meticulous planning by BSC and Thatcher it was beaten because demand for steel was so low and production of steel had been so high there was substantial steel stocks waiting to be used. Although Thatcher would defeat this strike it wasn't long till the NUM were threatening strike action due to proposed pit closures in 1981, after multiple smaller strikes broke out, just before a major strike was called Thatcher and the government backed down against the NUM. Thatcher pragmatically backed down against the NUM when the NCB and the government wasn't ready and couldn't beat a strike. However, this was a policy U-turn for Thatcher and did damage her politically, but she pragmatically entered into battels she could win.

Going into the second half of Heaths tenure as Prime minister the personal and structural constraints went from bad to worse, by the end of 1972 the IRA was largely being ignored by the government in attempt to get the TUC on board for incomes policy. More importantly when the oil crisis and the Yom Kippur started the last thing the government needed was the NUM to call a work to rule and then a strike. Heath refused to bend and give the NUM the pay rise they were asking for. Heath failed to recognise the importance of the miners and the coal they dug out the ground. Heath called the three-day week and lost the February 1974 election. The Yom Kippur war the oil crisis were structural unforeseen constraints that Heath could do nothing to avoid. Heath however could have seen the importance of the miners at that time and came to a compromise. It was widely seen in the conservative party that the miners had made the Heath government in 1974 fall. This then contrasts with Thatcher exploiting North Sea oil and gas which was used as an alternative to coal. Thatcher was less reliant upon coal miners than Heath was.

Again, Thatcher would keep this in the for front of her mind when in government. There was also the added structural constraint that Heath and Thatcher both face and extremally powerful and trade union movement and an increasingly militant NUM. After the 1972 coal

strike the far left gained considerable influence in the NUM. The trade union movement generally was more willing to announce their displeasure at a certain policy the government might take because they were being increasingly incorporated into the policy making process. Through the IRA Heath did a great deal to politicise the trade union movement. Thatcher however put a stop to this in 1979 and refused to allow the TUC to hold sway over decisions made by the democratically elected government.

The next strike Thatcher dealt with was the 1984-85 miners' strike, significantly Thatcher had won an election in 1983 increasing her majority to 71 seats this gave her confidence to take on the trade union movement should the moment arise. Heath was given no such opportunity. At this stage the view of the government was that the balance of power had shifted heavily towards trade union leadership, many of whom including the NUM were seen as militant and extreme. The 1984-85 strike was the embodiment of this.

The government stuck to the Ridley plan by the letter, the Thatcher government was well aware what the NUM were capable of and by the time the NCB announced that mines needed to be shut to reduce output the government was ready to take on a strike. One major benefit Thatcher had over Heath was the ability to create dual fuel coal and oil power generation so, oil could plug the gap in the energy shortage at coal fired power stations if coal could not get through picket lines. Thatcher's strategy was much more direct than Heath, while Heath engaged with the NUM and the TUC, degree Thatcher didn't. The miners' strike was the biggest strike in the post war period and thanks to Thatcher's steadfastness and pragmatic planning the strike was beaten after just over a year. As a result of the strike the national NUM and the whole trade union movement was weakened.

In all Thatcher and, Heath espoused the same free market economic outlook but only Thatcher carried it through, Heath was unable to do this because of personal and structural constraints. Both were dealing with a powerful NUM that was more willing to show its dissatisfaction with government policy, Heath's aim was to strengthen collective bargaining agreements, and union management to avoid wild cat strikes and make the trade unions liable for their members' actions in law. Thatcher's industrial policy was much the same as her social outlook, which was about the growth of individualism. Thatcher's aims were to strengthen the individual in the trade union against at times militant and heavily political trade unions. In all the coal industry's decline was total by 1990 in comparison to where it was in 1970. In 1970 the NUM was a powerful trade union and by 1990 due to the 1984/85 miners' strike Thatcher's economic policy and the declining use of Coal in the UK economy.

By the time Thatcher was forced to step down it was clear that through planning, hindsight and pragmatist that Thatcher had prevailed in reforming the UKs industrial relations system where Heath had failed.

Appendix

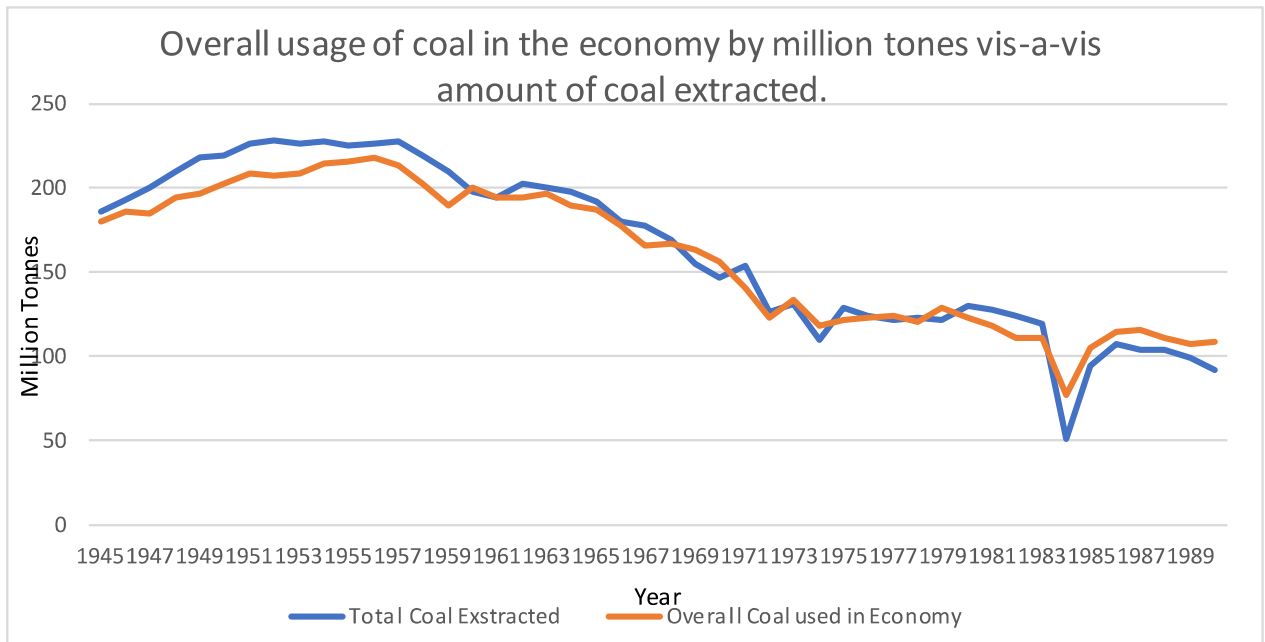
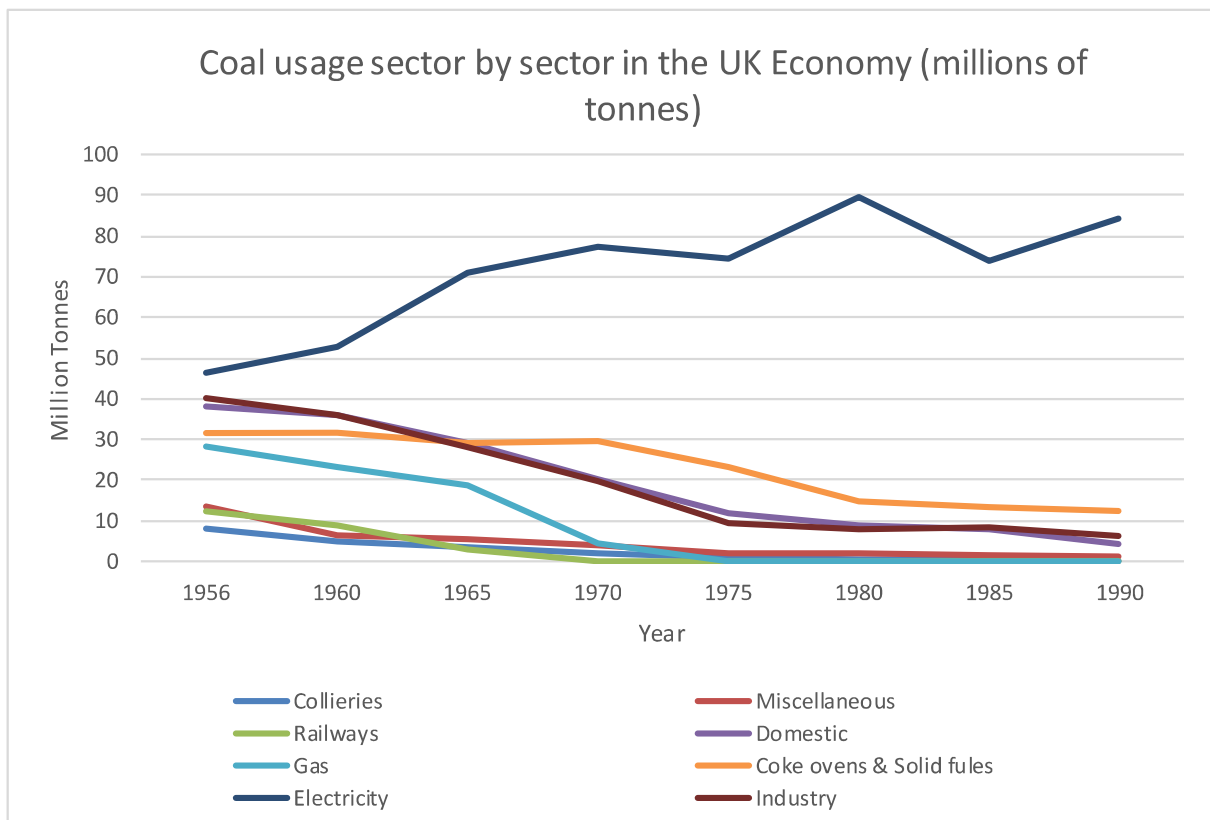


Figure 1 Overall Usage of Coal in the Economy (million tonnes) 329

Figure 2 Coal Usage in UK economy (millions of tonnes)³²⁹



³²⁹ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 6^h July 2022]

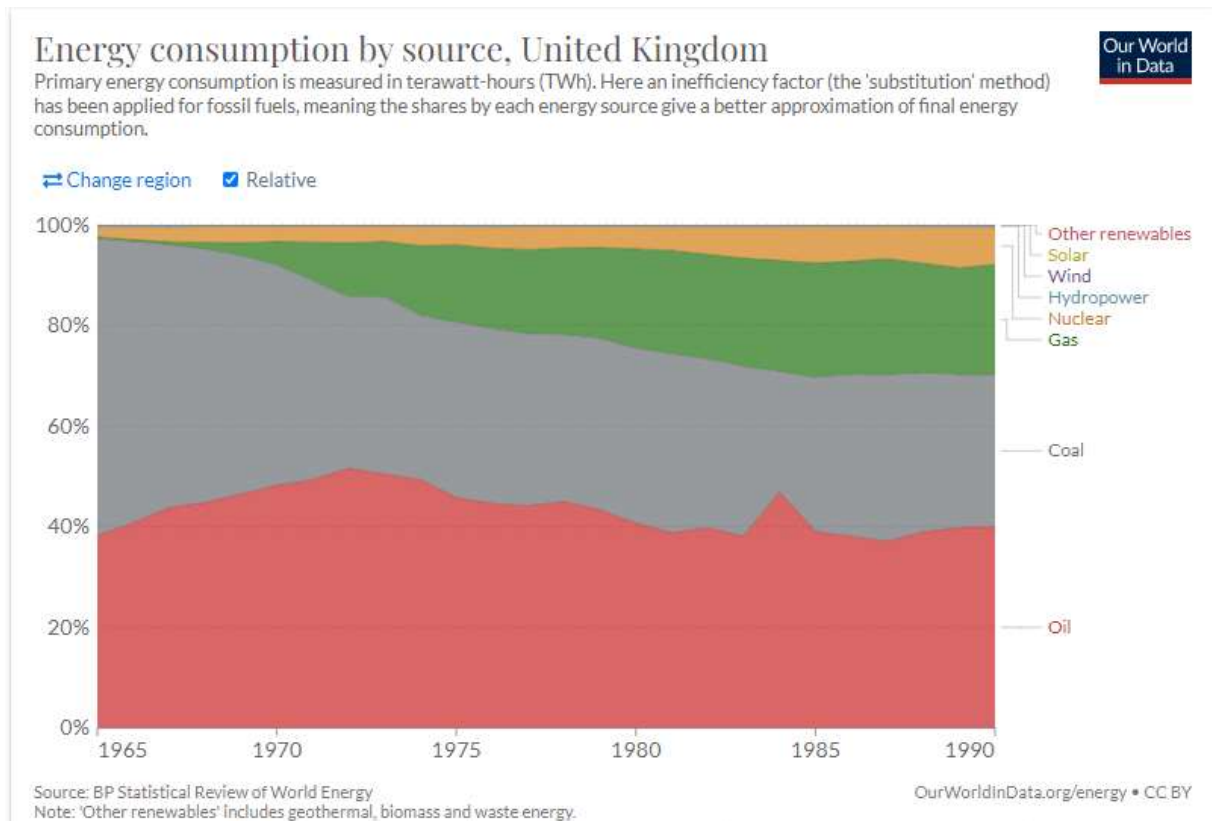


Figure 3 Energy Consumption by Source ³³⁰

³³⁰ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 6^h July 2022]

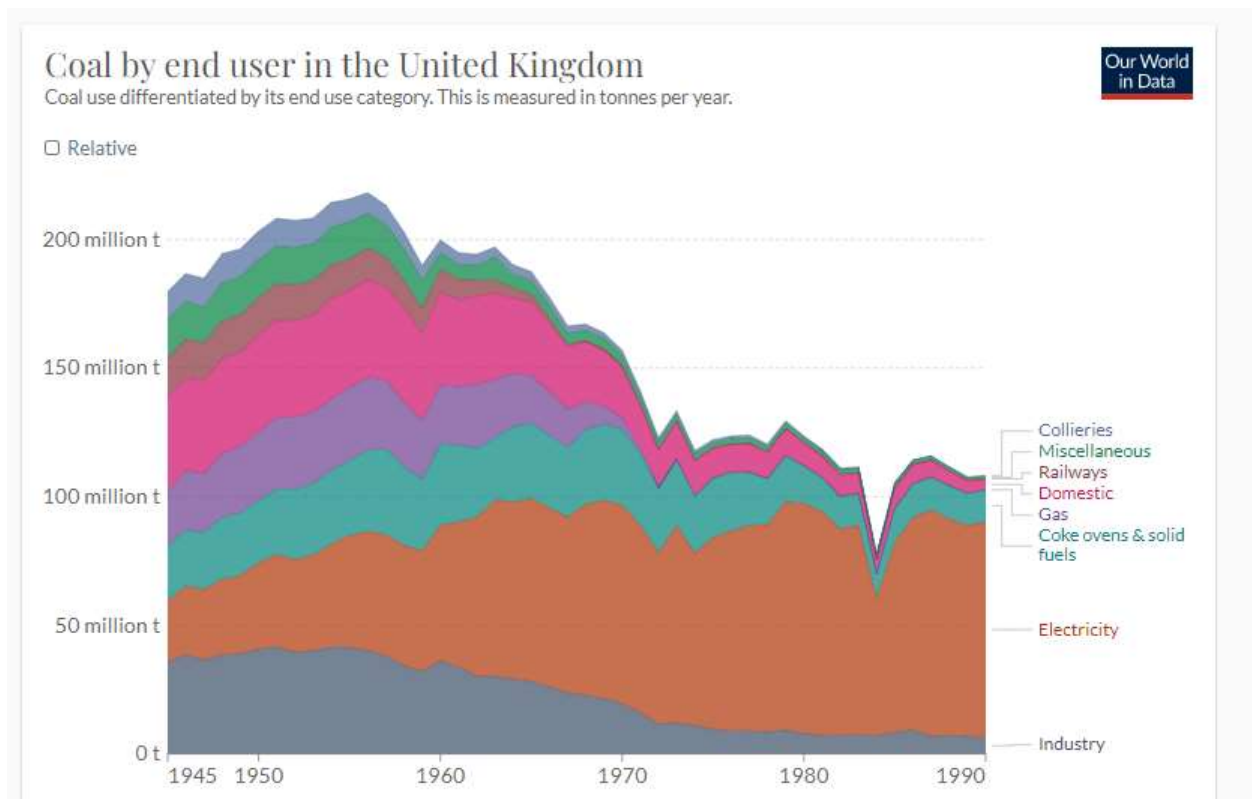


Figure 4 Coal by End User in the United Kingdom³³¹

³³¹ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coa>> [accessed 6^h July 2022]

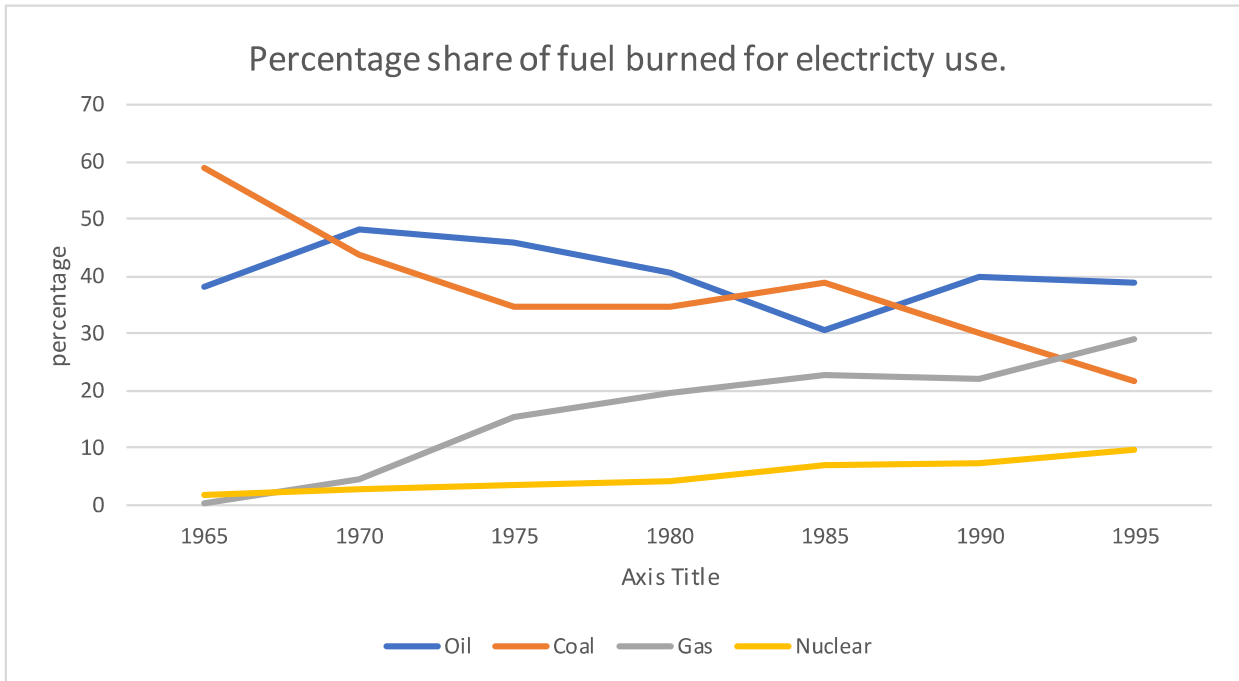


Figure 5 Percentage share of Fuel Burned for Electricity use ³³²

³³² Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 6^h July 2022]

Figure 6 UK Coal Price 1945-1989 ³³³

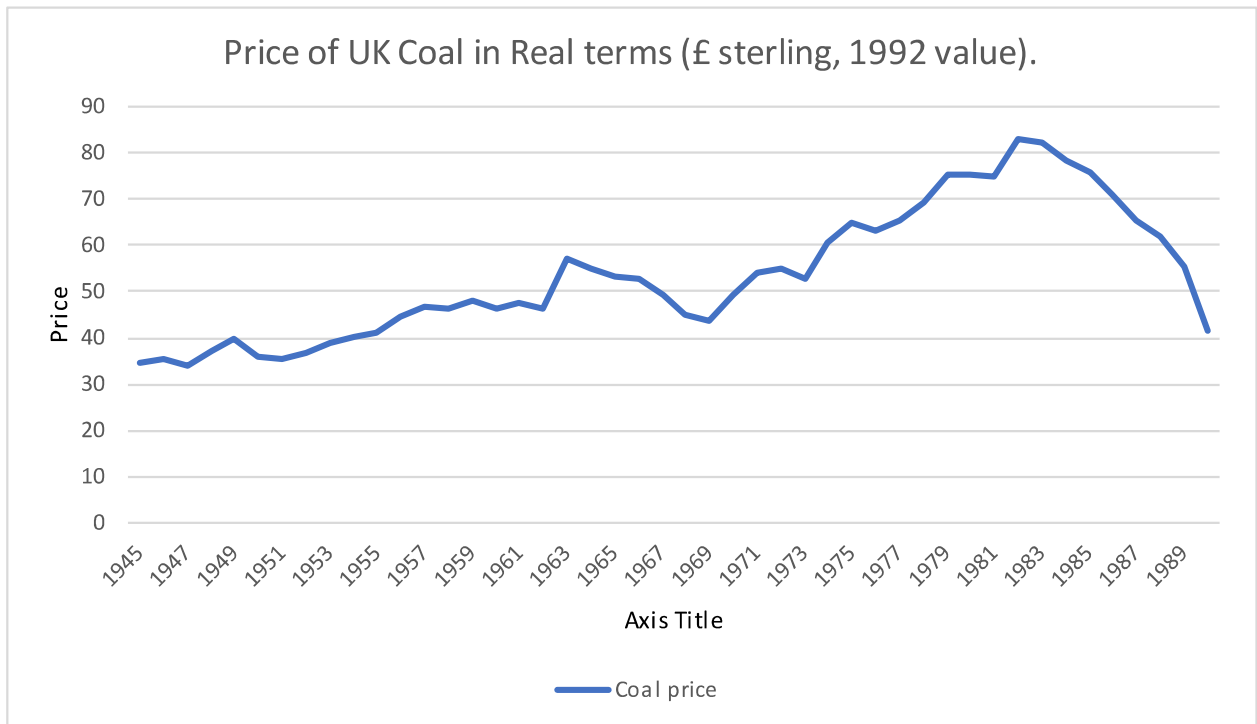
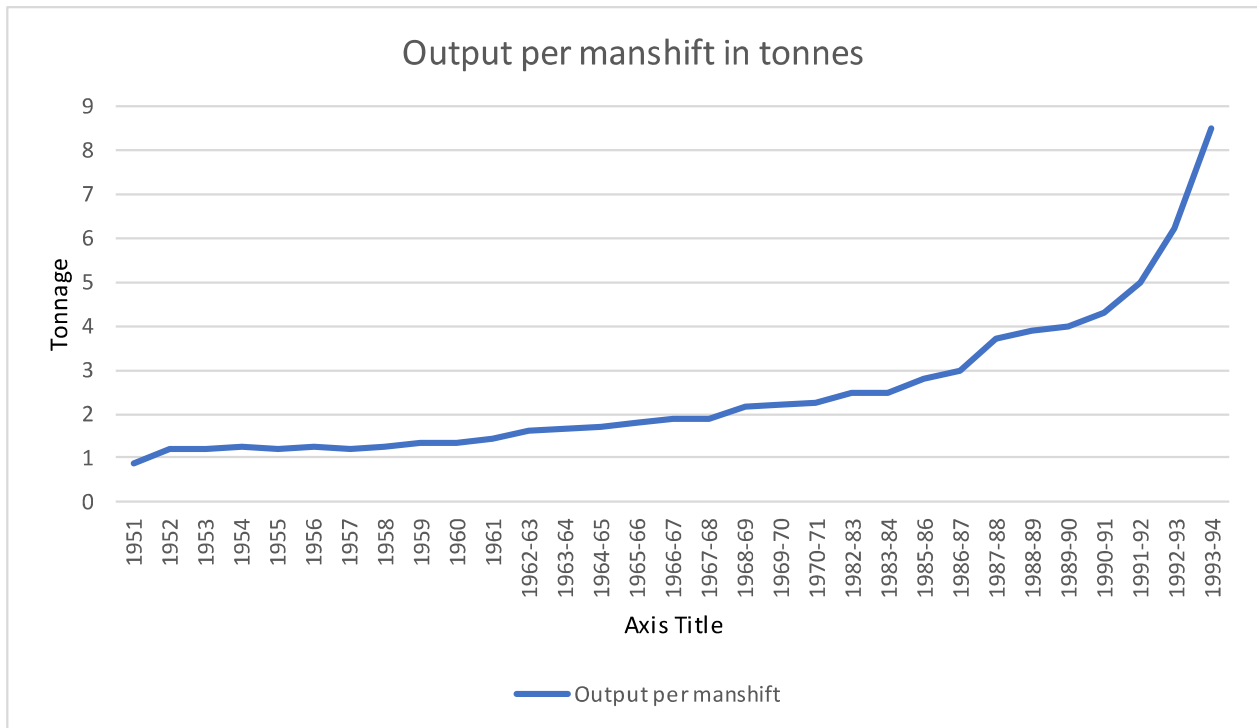


Figure 7 Output per Manshift in Tonnes, 1951-1994³³⁴



³³³ Glyn and Machin, p.199

³³⁴ Hughes and Moor, p.40;

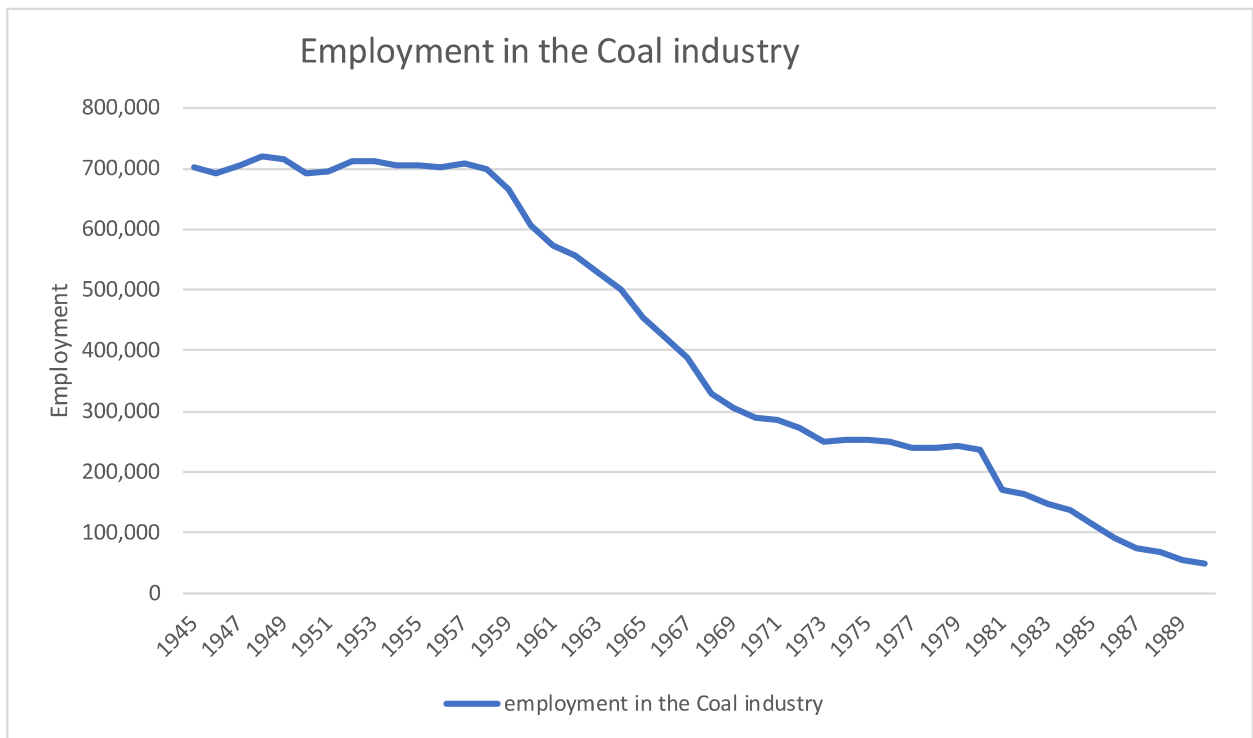
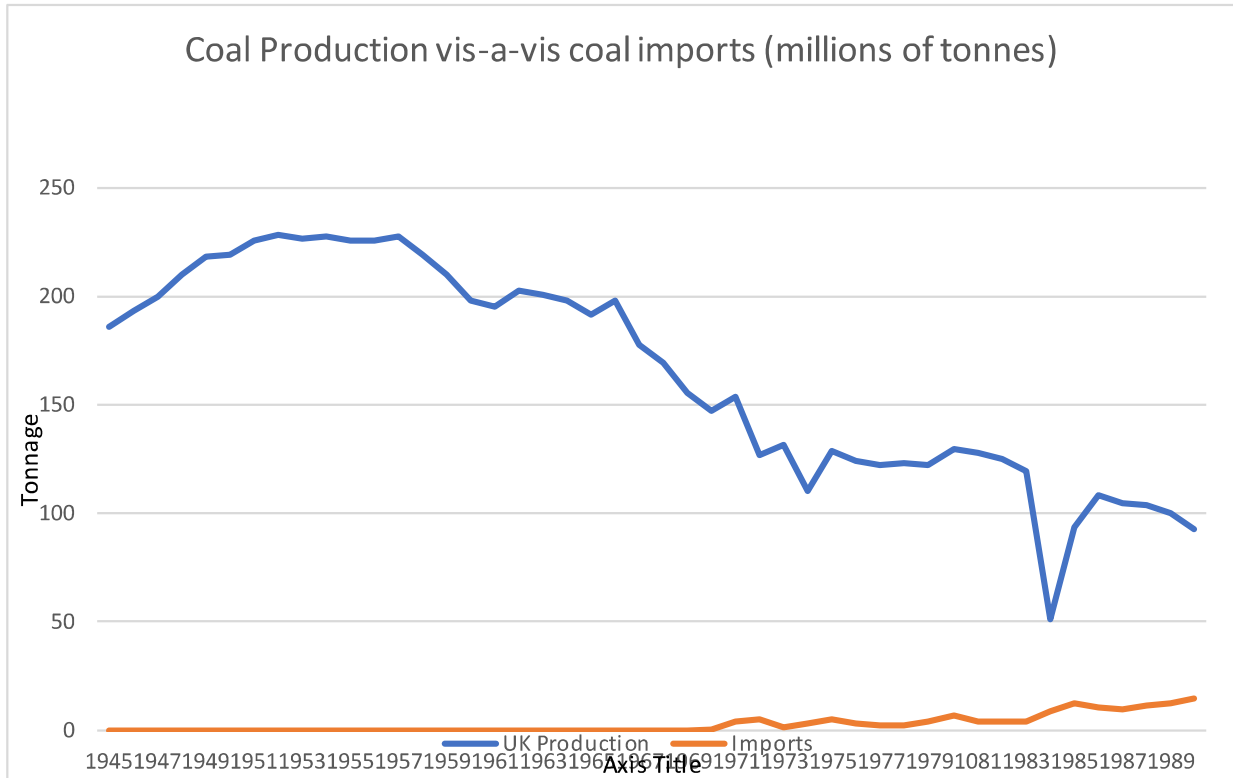


Figure 8 Employment in the Coal Industry 1945-1989 ³³⁵

³³⁵ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 6^h July 2022]



³³⁶ Figure 9 Coal production vis-à-vis coal imports (million tonnes)

³³⁶ Hannah Ritchie, *Our World in Data* (2019) <<https://ourworldindata.org/death-uk-coal>> [accessed 6^h July 2022]

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