

British Report on Category 6 - Ex-Traditional Workers

Stopped in their tracks

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Employment in manufacturing as a percentage of civilian employment

	1960	1974	1980	1985	Percentage change 1980-1990
USA	26.4	24.2	22.1	18.0	-19
Japan	21.3	27.2	24.7	24.1	-2
UK	38.4	34.6	30.2	22.5	-25
Germany	34.3	35.8	33.9	31.5	-2
France	27.3	28.3	25.8	21.3	-17
Italy	24.2	28.0	26.8	22.5	-16
Sweden	31.5	28.3	24.2	21.1	-9
Total OECD Europe	27.3	28.0	25.9	22.1	-15

Source: *OECD Historical Statistics 1960-1990* Table 2.11 cited Michie and Grieve Smith (1994: 64)

Introduction

Whether post war Britain suffered more from excessive shop floor power or from inefficient and self-seeking management, or from the corporatism of both parties, remains a point of dispute. Both these factors, the age of Britain's industrial plant, the historic reluctance of British finance capital to invest in home industry (given more lucrative opportunities elsewhere), and the state's failure to invest in research and development are all arguments used to explain the particular plight of the British industrial economy in the late 1970s: interviews with policy-makers and the long-term unemployed in Britain and elsewhere suggest the lines of argument of different social actors (see Clasen, Gould and Vincent 1998). The Thatcherite response is well known: ruthless marketisation and deregulatory destruction of the bastions of corporate power, a firm switch to finance and service industries, and subsequent encouragement of small businesses and self-employment. When Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, she took a series of measures which hit manufacturing businesses very hard; her political struggle to destroy working class resistance peaked very dramatically in the emblematic miners' strike of 1984. Picket line battles in some places assumed the character of civil war, and, with the strike's defeat, the power of the trade union movement as a whole was effectively broken. The subsequent more rapid, and also very violent, defeat of the 'Fleet Street' printer's union, around 1987, only sealed the general situation. The table above suggests the effectiveness of this policy: between 1980 and 1990, the UK percentage fell by 25% whereas in France (the country with the second largest fall) it fell only by 17% in the same time period.

As the above table suggests, the de-industrialisation of Britain, especially in the 1980s, was possibly a more brutal process than in any other European country - at least until the experience of Eastern Germany in 1990. In 1960, of the countries compared in the above list, the UK had the highest percentage -- close to 40%; by 1985, it had plummeted to just above the OECD European average of 22%..

The partially post-Fordist strategy of forcing wages down and making non-core jobs more insecure, less 'tenured', and letting unemployment and part-time insecure jobbing rise (see, for example, Kennett 1994) offered little support to de-industrialised areas and to workers rendered obsolescent by a change in technology or by a shift of their industry to cheaper locations inside or outside Western Europe. The low level of secondary education transmitted to those who would become manual workers, employers' lack of interest in 'training and retraining' such insufficiently-educated recruits, the state's concern with making it easy rather than expensive for employers to get rid of workers at times of economic downturn: these are 'features of Britain' discussed by White (1994)

The impact of redundancy in Britain is partly affected by the State system of redundancy payments and unemployment benefits. As regards formal redundancy payments, Mukherjee (1975) noted differences between Britain and other European countries: the British system emphasizes a relatively generous and absolute lump sum cash compensation (which is by no means always complied with) and then leaves the worker to his own devices, whereas "other countries in Europe have tried to build systems in which the maximum effort is put into getting him [sic] another job. Hence the contrast between Britain's expenditure of £381m spread over six years on individual cash compensation as opposed to £100m on adult retraining and public employment services for the dynamic process of redeployment (1975: 17)". As regards unemployment benefit, the disadvantageous position in Britain as compared to Germany and Sweden is summed up by Clasen, Gould and Vincent (1997: 6). At that time, in both Sweden and Germany, earnings-related insurance benefits represented the main form of support for most unemployed and even for many long-term unemployed people. This contrasted markedly with the situation in Britain. In Sweden... the level of benefit used to be 90%, [now] 80%. In Germany, the rates were 67-63%.... "All these exceed the flat rate unemployment insurance benefit in the UK which, on average, represents 23% of previous earnings, the lowest level in the EU" they wrote in 1997-- though means-tested top-ups raise the net replacement ratios for lower-paid workers. The interviews of Clasen, Gould and Vincent suggested that "the systems apparently cause different degrees of hardship: on the one hand, many respondents in Germany and Sweden described the difficulties of living on benefit, while in Britain respondents experienced real hardship. They 'could not manage' and had to choose between basic necessities (op cit 19)".

The interviews in this report reflect this context and these processes. Donald and Harold, now aged 50 and 37 respectively, were South Wales miners (see, eg, Harris 1987 for a discussion of redundancy and recession in that area). A skilled craftsman, passionately involved in the physical danger and challenge of underground work, for Donald the sacking has entailed paralysing back pain and mental distress, while Harold has moved on to a new professional field in social work. Barry, formerly a semi-skilled electrical worker, has by now been unemployed for eighteen years, following a ruthless 1980s challenge of going self-employed in an ailing industrial context. His case illustrates a parallel process of de-regulation and 'rationalisation' to that experienced by London Transport workers, which was discussed in the British Report on Early Retired People, *Sotris Working Paper 2*, and in subsequent articles by Mike Rustin (1997, 1998). As a 'cooling-out' process the 'assault' of self-employment which befell Barry was much less sophisticated and 'balanced' than that experienced by Tony at the hands of London Transport, and consequently more destructive. Both Anthony, a shipping radio officer, and Derek, a printer, were overtaken by globalisation and electronic automation in the early 1990s. Anthony, suddenly in 1994 could no longer find jobs, whereas until that time his labour had been keenly sought. Derek like the miners, experienced the collapse of an occupational structure which had been emblematic for union corporatism in post-war Britain.

As the Sotris report on early retirement (Sotris 1998) suggested, there is a blurring between early retirement and redundancy. Many of the same issues arise for ex-traditional workers, particularly the balancing of public and private lives, the personal and social meanings of work, and the biographical resources which can be drawn on in the family and informal sphere. Striking among the cases presented here is that only two have moved on to another career as a source of fulfilment and challenge. This may suggest that although skilled workers may have a greater range of capacities and 'objective' opportunities than semi-skilled, they may be particularly deeply tied in to occupational cultures and structures. In such cases the 'brutal' character of the collapse of traditional industries, and of the status and identity which they provided, has been particularly traumatising.

Donald

Born in 1944 in a Welsh mining family, Donald's childhood and young adulthood are structured by an upbringing in a close-knit community with strictly defined social roles, and by the ambivalent role his family of origin had within the community. This ambivalent status was caused by their membership in the Church of England in contrast to the majority of the village who attended the local chapel. The family was probably characterised by a sense of social superiority, strong moral beliefs, and, in order to avoid an outsider status, a strong commitment to the community. The mining strikes during the 1920s, the subsequent intervention of the army, and the consequent controversial question of joining the British army during the Second World War, as well as the nationalisation of the mining industry in 1947, were historical moments which probably made the ambivalent role of the family within the community more obvious. These events could also have strengthened the family's desire to stand up for their own opinion. But, by continuing the mining tradition in the family - all the boys of the family went into the mining industry - they stayed closely connected with the local community.

Leaving school at the age of 15 started a decisive phase in Donald's biography. The parents, and especially the mother strongly encouraged Donald to stay on at school. Probably through the church, and also his mother's ambitions, Donald had made friends with other boys in the village who continued their education, went to university and gained high managerial and technical positions. Donald might well have taken that path, even following on from his apprenticeship, given the strong emphasis on education in Welsh mining communities. He opted rather for the male working class physical world, beginning with an apprenticeship at the age of 16, first as a face worker and then in maintenance. This involved day release classes, which his mother encouraged, but which he then discontinued. Instead he greatly enjoyed the technical advances which were, by the 1960's, proceeding apace, thanks to postwar nationalisation. As he told us, 'money became my goal instead of education'. He was always ready to do overtime, and early on came into dispute with the union, because he was earning too much for his grade and age, an argument which he won.

Donald followed the working class tradition which gave physical work primacy but he also followed the family tradition of superiority by being a craftsman. His development over the following years shows that he managed to develop a role which allowed him to be part of the miner's community *and* at the same time to have a special role within the community: as a craftsman Donald was working closely with the coalface miners, but in a higher position. He also became a union activist where he often spoke out against union policy as he did not see the interests of the craftsmen being represented.

Both his marriage in 1969 to a 22 year-old librarian, and the birth of their only child in 1976 were preceded by serious work accidents, and perhaps these were periods when Donald paid more attention to home life. His wife interrupted her career for a few years when the child was little. After she returned to work she also started teaching training courses for librarians at a college part-time. Thus after modest beginnings the couple became more affluent. They moved into a bigger house, and they could afford holidays abroad. Donald's marriage to an educated woman did not threaten his identity or develop a need for further education. On the contrary, it consolidated Donald's special role within the community, as the social role of a librarian is also equally both within and outside a working class community. Donald had established a balance in his life: he compensated for problems at work with activities in his private life and extended trips on his motorbike - often with his wife in the sidecar - as well as journeys abroad which compensated for the hard work. For Donald mobility meant moving places without leaving his community.

From 1984 onwards, when most of the pits in Wales closed down, and because Donald's back had become troublesome, he moved to the surface as a maintenance worker. But neither the couple's standard of living nor Donald's commitment to the miner's community decreased. Only in 1994, when British Coal closed down the last pit was Donald made redundant, at the age of 50. Since then Donald has suffered from physical and mental health problems. Pains in his muscles and joints mean that he is sometimes not able to move at all. In addition he often feels depressed and suffers from panic attacks, especially in public. He takes psychiatric drugs and he began psychotherapy in 1997. Redundancy led to a breakdown of the balance Donald had gained through his working life; he became literally unbalanced and lost his ability to move.

Donald's biographical self-presentation in the interview: a 'love story'

Donald presented his life story from the perspective of his professional identity as a miner. Other themes of his life - his family and his leisure time activities - are not or scarcely mentioned. It is not unusual for men, when asked to tell their life history, to focus on their professional career. It is more surprising that Donald tells his life story in the form of a love story, from the perspective of somebody who has lost the love of his life, who is searching his life for the reasons of the failure of the love relationship, and who struggles to come to terms with his life afterwards, as the following quote illustrates:

'I was a good worker, you know, I'm not an admin person, OK, getting my hands dirty didn't-, didn't-, didn't-. I loved it, you know er it's my job. I wasn't interested in- I'm not interested in reading a book or I'm not good at writing letters and I'm the worlds worst speller, but I'm a good fitter, I'm a good mechanical fitter, I can work with my hands and I can, I've got good foresight in breaking and things like that. And I mean, I just loved it.'

Donald's self-presentation began with a description of the tough conditions when he started in the mines, suggesting a rather unhappy relationship at the beginning between himself and work. The argument with the union because he was working too much overtime brought him the special status he had striven. Now he was not just an ordinary

miner but somebody who stood up for his opinion: 'I had my rate and my life just took off then'. Donald's love relationship with mining was based on his fascination with technology. The danger of the work also contributed to his commitment, and the money he made gave him the reward for his physical and emotional investment. But, the most important part of his relationship was the comradeship he had experienced as a face worker, as he stated at the end of the interview: 'you know, it's er (2) wonderful, erm, friendship in the industry.' Donald was happy with his social relationships with his colleagues and with the physical character of his work:

'I just miss, I miss my mates. I miss being chased because I was (I used to be a bit wicked) you know in work and er (2) I miss being called you little (B) get out of the way or get off the phone and, go and do this or, pull your finger out, you miss going to bed, tired, physically tired though I mean.'

When asked about experiences at work, Donald told a story which illustrates how much he valued the *physical contact* with his workmates:

I got dirty through fighting below ground, you know, ..., We used to fight, he's 6 foot 16 stone whereas me what 10, 11 stone 5 foot 4, he used to throw me on the engines and we was rolling in the dirt. We were like the black () coming out, ..., coming up the pit we'd start arguing, because I mean we were always arguing. He used to sit me on his lap, saying we looked like a ventriloquist type, ..., we used to physically fight, you know, like kicking and punching, he used to sit on me, sit in the coal dust. Oh, that was just one of the things.'

It is clear that Donald's personal identity is connected with physical work and his enjoyment of male physicality, which may well have had fuller licence in the enclosed and dangerous world of underground work. Donald was not only a miner because of his fascination with technology or for the good salary, but because he found it fun and a constant challenge. An important part of his identity could express itself at work. This brought not only a strong emotional bond to his mates but also a neglect of other comparable activities. Playing neither football nor rugby, Donald was a miner was a miner was a miner.

Being special within a homogenous group paralleled his family's position within the cultural tradition. Casting himself as 'special' also compounded the difficulty of leaving the mine. Having been so committed to his work, investing in it such a measure of his life force, he could not believe he would be rejected, even though physical problems had meant he had had to turn to surface work. Thus, even when, out of the remaining three in his category, he was not chosen to remain as part of the skeleton crew in the now closed mine, the shock was immense. ...quote?

Home life has never seemed a viable option for Donald or his wife. Whenever they were at home, Donald would be liable to be called out for emergencies, to which he instantly responded, including week-ends, Christmas and the New Year. The only alternative which he can imagine would be to take up travelling, preferably at speed and at great distances - the antithesis of the enclosed underground world. This is now doubly forestalled, by the fact that his wife is still enjoying her career, and his own back trouble, which frequently immobilises him. Because of his twin interests in work and travel, Donald has never been involved in community activities. He is a shareholder in the new system of joint ownership under which his colliery has exceptionally survived, and he has considerable talent and expertise in the stock market. But he rejects the idea of becoming more engaged 'as an outsider' as a board member.

Others who liked work in the mines because of their fascination with technology, or because of the good salary, could choose between a range of possibilities: working as a technician, engineer or in another industry were all options for them. For Donald however, the connection between his personal identity and the close physical contact with his colleagues in his work meant that there was no alternative for him in another industry. This is also the reason why education was never an option for Donald. Just as education was a threat in his life when he was a young man, it was just meaningless for him at the point at which the decline of the mining industry could have opened up a new path for re-training for him.

Harold

Born in 1960, Harold also entered the mine as an underground worker at the age of 16. Lacking any qualifications, his alternative would have been to join the army, which probably offered better prospects. But Harold was the school

bully, and did not think he could tolerate the discipline.

Social relations in the mine did much to repair the disturbed nature of much of Harold's childhood and adolescence, due to the death of his mother when he was eleven. She had been widowed, and had brought three children from her previous marriage to the new home with Harold's father, who was a miner. Harold was the second of the three boys they had together, and when the mother died he, together with his step-sister, became housekeepers, while the father fell into alcoholism and unemployment. About the time Harold entered the mines his father married again, to a woman with five older children and a girl the same age as Harold.

In the solidaristic and politicised structures of the mine Harold gained the stability he had lacked in the past few years. A serious accident at the face, caused in part by the hostility between two Polish workers of differing political allegiances, resulted in him working on the surface as a crane driver, and in learning the vital necessity of disciplined cooperation. He gained the positive male model he had lacked in his father, in a close attachment to a quasi-foster father, Len, who, for example, taught him how stand up to the manager. It was also Len, whose militancy led him to play a decisive local role in the 1984 strike, who taught him to recognise that 'there are two sides to every question, and some good in everybody'. Harold travelled quite widely, often with friends, one of whom worked with disabled children, and sometimes in connection with union health and safety matters. As the 'youth representative' on a welfare committee for retired miners, he enjoyed the case work of ensuring entitlements to coal and pensions. Already in his early 20s he made a relationship with a woman in an abusive marriage, who had a small child. They stayed together as a family, moved to a town which was not just dependent on mining - '*the best decision we ever made*', and eventually married in the 1990s.

After the defeat of the 1985 strike, Harold stayed on in the mining industry until the pit he had moved to was itself soon to close. Accepting redundancy, he then obtained a job as a mobile crane driver in the private sector. After a year of being an 'industrial gypsy', at the beck and call of three successive employers, by which time he was near to an 'emotional crisis', he had a severe accident playing rugby, received sickness benefit for the statutory six months, and was made redundant.

Within two weeks of this second redundancy and, in discussion with his partner, a firm rejection of the practices and values of the private sector, Harold took a job working with people with learning disabilities. Between 1991, when he was 31 and 1997, having taken several GCSE's and a Btec with distinction, he became a full-fledged community care officer, with plans to start a degree.

Harold's self-presentation: a 'Bildungsroman'

While Donald's interview took the form of a love story, told with speed and panache, Harold's was in the guise of a Bildungsroman, a personal development history, tracing through and reflecting on his experience of life, constantly switching between past and more recent perspectives. His interview begins with an acknowledgement of his own style:

"Obviously, when we're talking about my life-history there may be times when I may have to backtrack... I hope I'll try and be as precise as I possibly can.... there may be occasions when I may get slightly confused and think aha that's not quite right"

His account continually oscillates cause-periods and effect-periods, between his responses then and his judgements now, between moving forward in the story and going back to explain it. In this process the painful story of the eleven-year-old and the period between his mother's death and going into the mines only receive bare reporting, and the regression backwards is constantly forcing false starts on the attempt to go definitively forward. Indeed the first ten years of Harold's life (1960-1971) cannot be spoken about because that would require the prior discussion of the traumatic years of his adolescence (1971-76) which can only be reported with the detachment of the adult and the professional.

"The death of our err mother" is mainly spoken of from the standpoint of his father's "burden".

"er I think there were a lot of pressures on on my father indeed as there was the family and I think at such a young age of eleven even though I did consider myself and still do now consider myself a very mature eleven year old I had to grow up very quickly. (4) And I think that it taught me some it taught me a few things em my father did struggle quite a lot and I would describe him as turning into an alcoholic at at a stage not

long after em which was very difficult he was never never ever abusive he was not an abusive, alcoholic em I think what it was was that he was very depressed he saw more of the negatives rather than how can we move on from here”

Harold does not talk immediately about strong and painful events, but finds it easier to shift focus to the experience of others, taking the view of the carer concerned for others. Yet simultaneously, he is trying to tell the story of himself at the time. He represents himself as:

“having had to grow up very very quickly... I think it's just that I was kind of it it delayed my er development my em my educational development em by a number of years but I think from from maturity wise I think I'm far ahead of my er I was far ahead of myself”.

The difference between his step-mother’s previous family and the joint family of his dead mother’s children is spoken of in a strong argumentation which lays stress on difference and on the lack of bonding, but which also indicates the importance of and capacity for bridging differences, even if the denial of animosity may not be convincing:

“We have no kind of bonding there because we were never brought up as children that's not a problem we all get on very very well and I think that's vitally important.”

The painful pre-history of his early adolescence and of his mother’s death is a necessary ‘explanation’ of going into the mines, which is when he starts to narrativise beyond the bare reporting. The first day of going to the pits, standing at the bus-stop, that is when his history becomes re-experienceable: “*Never a dull moment, always an interesting day*”. He starts the story of his first day with a short condensed report of catching the bus with the aged men as saying “*no point in coming in the pits, lads, it'll be closed in twelve months time*”.

Despite its greater flow and narrativity, Harold’s intended linear progression within the period 1976-85 is always interrupted by an explanatory reference back towards the trauma of the mother’s death or a slip forwards towards the divided community in the aftermath of the miner’s strike in 1984/5, and his second disillusion. Thus what he thought then — “*at the time I thought you couldn’t come across better characters*”— is constantly compared with his post-strike position in which he developed “such a dislike for some people because of the deeds that they did”, and his realizing “*how naive I was and how people can be manipulated*”.

While family relationships remain marginal in Donald’s account, references to Harold’s past family life are integrated seamlessly into his life story. This continues in the account of the mining period, particularly through the key role of his mentor and quasi-foster father Len, who guides him in dealing with the colliery manager. Harold’s first personal encounter with this terrifying man arose when he needed a reference in order to get a visa to travel in America. The complication was that he had always refused to do overtime or work week-ends. Len’s advice concerned: “*remembering you’ve got your pride, don’t give him nothing, don’t take nothing off him, he’s no different to you*”. In the interview, Harold held his ground on not working overtime and not being intimidated, and got the visa support nonetheless:

“I could talk to him... we got to know each other quite well... we had a kind of love / hate relationship..... I’m sure he used to come down just to get a bit of therapy. He really did because I had this thing that I couldn’t give into him.”

From Len Harold gains a sense of family and community history, as through his sense of lineage with Len’s own mentor, an uncle who was excluded from mining jobs for 13 years after the 1926 strike and defied conscription in WW2. According to Len, Harold’s newspaper round included deliveries to the uncle, who also gave him 50p pocket money: “*I could remember him, but I can’t*”. Like the teacher who challenged Harold to question: “*how do you know those astronauts are really on the moon*”, Len stimulated Harold’s independence of mind, often by teasingly setting workmates against each other in argument. Travel greatly widened his horizons: “*after that first trip it em I had this em urge.. I needed to go I wanted to go other place I want to meet other people..... I wanted to go further.*”

At the same time, and again in contrast to Donald, Harold was energetically involved in rugby and community social life:

my social life was like very many others in the valleys and that was a hard drinking hard playing rugby training (1) and generally socialising you know in pubs and clubs ... in fact if you didn't participate in that kind of social behaviour then you would deem perhaps as being rather strange"

He speaks nostalgically of the kind of characters that were around then: "*I have to say that they're very few and far between and I personally miss them*".

The break in community life erupted "*overnight or certainly within a week*" with the scabbing during the miners' strike 12 years before. The "*social treachery*" still greatly exercises Harold's mind and impinges on his daily life and his professional work. His reaction if passing a 'scab' in the street 15 years later is to:

"keep on walking and that's my immediate thought I have no other interest in them whatsoever (1) again that that may seem rather cruel and rather hard but I think what went on during that dispute I think I'm well justified in doing so ... I think I was em I was deceived by many (1) they may say the same thing about me it has to be said there's always two sides to the story and I certainly wouldn't deny that ... I I still see it now you know and I (didn't) I honestly believe to the day I die you know I'll still maintain that not bitterness....you know I wouldn't wish them to walk down the street I wouldn't wish anything to happen to their family you knowI wouldn't care if it happened to them but I wouldn't wish it on them.'

In his current professionalism as a social worker he prides himself on managing to overcome these feelings. He tells the story of being sent to assess a former 'scab' who was "*physically and emotionally in a pitiful state*", offering him the choice of an alternative assessment officer, the man saying "*do your bloody job*", him doing a properly professional job, and the man's wife ringing up Harold some time later to thank him.

This is not the only difficulty Harold experiences in his current position. His emphasis on his 'luck' is a means of maintaining solidarity and identity with the former mining community, many of whom are now unemployed and in a very broken state. He also feels isolated in this new profession, regarded as "*a bit of a commie*". He misses an atmosphere of debate and challenge, finds social and medical workers 'fearful', constantly hiding behind their profession, and is worried that he himself may become less challenging. The 'jolt' of going into the mines forced values and practices of collectivism, but these are already lost in his daughter's generation. He also feels the precariousness of life: at any moment he or his wife could lose their job, and against that danger he regards education as an important resource.

Comparison between Donald and Harold

In Harold's eyes 'luck' has played a major role in enabling him to retrieve his past educational failure and emotional disturbance, and make a positive and fulfilling transition out of mining into a profession in which he can retain a sense of public responsibility and service. Yet in doing so he can deploy a much wider range of biographical resources than Donald, not least from his broad-based approach to life, the importance to him of family and wide-ranging social relationships, his openness to challenges and new experience, his forward looking determination to see "*how we can move on from here*" (in contrast to his father). Many of his social skills, such as his ability to meet and exercise authority and his confidence in tackling difficulties, derive from the collective environment of the mining industry and the mining union.

Donald is also an outstandingly knowledgeable, skilled and authoritative figure. In meeting emergency situations in underground conditions he has exercised ingenuity and versatility, as well as engineering and social skills. His shareholding and travelling skills may well use similar talents. 'Objectively' he has plenty of capacities to equip him to find a new orientation in life, and maybe he will in time. Currently, however, he is 'paralysed' by his subjective attachment to the mines, to which he has given 'his life' and identity. The irony is, that Donald, the ultimately dedicated worker, who at the age of 16 had far wider choices than Harold, has become 'tunnelled' by his years in the mine. Harold, who kept work within firm bounds, used his job as a means of personal and social development, and kept a more integrated relationship between public and private spheres.

Both feel bitterly betrayed, Donald by the employers, Harold by the scabs. Harold is still seething with anger and perplexity, yet he is simultaneously able to move on and negotiate particular situations, just as in his youth he learnt from his emotional difficulties. Donald's more practical skills do not provide a basis for such proactive subjective work.

One difference is, of course that Donald's sacking of four years ago is more recent, he having clung to the job to the last minute. He is thus still in the moratorium period of readjustment which Harold dispatched more quickly nine years ago in the six months sickness leave following his well-timed rugby accident. The process is undoubtedly much more difficult for Donald. He is regularly engaged in therapy, however, and it seems likely that he will gradually become involved in community affairs. One possibility, arising from the situation of his mother, might be arena of residential care homes, and the wider legal, financial and issues which arise within elder and dementia care, such as incarceration and the obligatory selling up of people's homes.

Derek

Derek was born in 1944 and is now in his mid fifties. Born and raised in South-West London, he went to secondary modern school and also was brought by his mother to join a Christian youth movement, the Boys Brigade, attached to the local United Reform Church. In 1959, he left school at the age of 15 without any qualifications; his uncle who was a compositor employed by a local printing firm helped him find a place with that firm and, after a written exam and a medical exam, Derek was accepted for a six-year apprenticeship into the printing industry. After the end of his apprenticeship, he married a young woman who had been in the Girls Brigade attached to the same United Reform Church, and they were to raise two children. For some 20 years, he continued in the printing industry — first as a general printer and then as a Fleet Street 'casual'. In 1984, first his wife and then about three weeks later himself became 'born-again Christians': she left her job in a bank to work in a voluntary capacity in a church. He continued to work as a Fleet Street 'casual' until the Wapping strike in 1987, during which he managed to maintain some income by working as a mini-cab driver. Around this time, he decided that God wanted him to work full time for Him: after the strike, they sold their house for a good price, managing to pay off their debts and, after moving to a cheaper house, just outside London, learning to live on a lower income. During the following nine years, Derek pursued the goal of becoming a full-time minister for the United Reform Church, a goal which was difficult to achieve for somebody without any initial qualifications but which he eventually achieved. At the time of the interview, he has been a full-time minister of the church for three years and his wife also works for the church.

His initial narrative sets the theme by starting:

Well, I've spent all of my life in London, erm I was born and brought up in south-west London first of all.... and then when we got married, my wife and I moved only a mile and a half, two miles, up the road..... we both grew up in the same area 'cos she was always there, apart from a little short time, and we met each other through the church through the Boys Brigade and the Girls Brigade.... but at that time I was, yeah, part of the church but not not a Christian...

What is clear from Derek 's self-presentation is the importance of locality and family. His family was to become important in orienting him towards, and enabling him to obtain a position in, the printing industry at the time. His mother's father had already died before Derek was born but Derek makes a point of noting that this grandfather had been a machine manager in the printing trade, and that Derek 's surviving uncle — a compositor — had suggested he apply to the uncle 's employer to find a position. For this unqualified school leaver, the family tradition of printing and informal relationships were crucial in finding a first position.

Second only in importance to his family of origin, from his initial narrative, it is clear that the local non-conformist church and its girls and boys brigades played a crucial role both in his development and for most of his and his wife 's adult life. For a considerable period of time, together with his union activity, he was also captain of the Boys Brigade of which he had been a member and as a result of which he met his future wife and to which he sent his son. Although, after becoming a born-again Christian he resigned from the Labour Party, 'not because I had any ideological differences with it but simply because, life had become different when I became a Christian and I felt it wasn't right to support one particular party', nonetheless 'I would never dream of voting for any other party and my allegiances and my thoughts and everything else are still driven that way, I'm very socialistic, very socialist'. The importance of the family and of the Church and its brigades is in sharp contrast to the role of school. All he obtained from the under-equipped secondary modern school he attended was a hostility to injustice which led him to join both his particular craft union and the Labour Party at the age of 18, to become prominent as Father of the Chapel first of his group of apprentices and then in more than one of the large printing works that he was successively involved in,

to become a regional councillor for his union. While his children were at school, he became a parent-governor, quite prepared to 'have a go' at local authority, headteacher or teacher if he felt that they were not doing their job by the children properly. He does not attribute this 'activism' to family or religious traditions, though these cannot be ruled out as influences.

In his concern for activity within the printing craft union, where he rises quite high in the hierarchy as regional councillor and as delegate, he is rather like another of our cases, Harold the ex-miner, for whom union activity was an important component of his life and builder of his eventual capacity to cope with industrial change. Although it includes quite a long discussion of changing print technology, Derek's presentation does not suggest that 'every day was different and challenging' in the way that the Harold and Donald felt that mining was. In respect of the actual printing work that he did, he refers to 'quite a lot of rubbish work' and he defines himself as having not been sufficiently skilled to do the really high quality printing work, in one firm that he briefly worked for. Though he worked in one printing shop for seven years and another for five years, and though he stresses that the 'closed shop' made for an easy 'finding of connections' in any London printing works he found himself in, he did move from printing shop to printing shop in a way that miners did not move from colliery to colliery: together with the lack of interest in much of the actual printing work that he did, this mobility ensured that he would not -- as happened in the case of Donald -- become emotionally hyper-invested in his work and a very small number of workmates.

Derek's focus seems to have been the neighbourhood community of church-and-Brigade in South-West London where his family of origin and his and his wife's own family lived until their respective children became adults themselves. His family-centredness can be seen in one of his chief reasons he gives for deciding to become a Fleet Street 'casual' was that he could easily decide him to not -work during school holidays and so have time to spend with his children.

When, while he was attending a theological college some distance from London to become a full-time minister, he had to divide his time and his thoughts between work-and-family in London and theological training-and-studying elsewhere, he had a very stressful time. Since then, and for the three years prior to our interview, his ministry has been in East London. His general statement *I've spent all of my life in London* does not fully square with his and his wife's actual move to a town to the north of London after 1987, but does show the subjective importance to him of location as a Londoner all his life.

Crucial to his self-presentation as can be seen from his opening remarks of his initial narration is his shift from being an ordinary church-member to 'becoming a Christian' at a particular time on a particular day in April 1984 when he became 'filled with the Holy Spirit' and soon after which he felt that God was calling him to a full-time ministry. However, this conversion experience and his subsequent nine year struggle to become such a minister was a discontinuity in a life which appears to have a strong continuity: his wife had become a 'born-again Christian' three weeks before he 'converted' and, while finances permitted, she also shifted from a secular to a church 'occupation'; he retains his early-period 'very socialistic' ideas, even though he sees that his experience of ministry has changed his ideas in some respect:

At the age of 18... a sense of wanting to make the world better.... a sense of injustice at school... and its still today wanting the best for people. The only difference now is that I realize that in many respects its politicians and policies and schemes and things don't actually change things, the only thing that will change them is Jesus..... but I'm still driven by the desire that people get the best, so in this sort of area I will always try and help, you know, if people have got bad housing or bad jobs or whatever. I've learnt over the years not to step in and take over from them which is what I would do—would have done, erm, now I try to help them to help themselves much more.... I've only learnt that over the last couple of years...

The strong sense of identity and community provided by the United Reform Church and its youth organizations for boys and girls, together with the practice in craft unionism in a closed shop industry during Derek's early life, provided Derek and his wife with a strong set of beliefs and relationships of a trans-generational sort which meant that the violent destruction of the craft printing unions forced much economic adjustment but did not create a malignant existential crisis. Derek and his wife had previously had a spiritual conversion and had 'become Christians' and, although it may not be by chance that it was around the period of the Wapping picket that Derek came to experience himself as called to work full-time for God, it is around the epiphany of his conversion that his present time perspective is organized. Although it is clear that the nine-years uphill struggle to become a full-time

minister involved moments of serious stress and difficulty for Derek, and he remarks that those with qualifications had a much easier time -- a friend did in nine months what it took him nine years to achieve -- his capacity to sustain his project and achieve his training at the theological college despite obstacles, and his success in finding a ministry-post in London, mean that these moments of very painful difficulty are not seen as equivalent turning points. However, his concern that others might be turned away from the vocation of the ministry by opposition and bureaucracy suggests that the successful pursuit of vocation was and is by no means guaranteed:

I'm just frightened they're turning away people whom they should welcome in... I think for me, I mean it its driven me for or it drove me for nine years, and ok I mean I'm stubborn enough and awkward enough and everything else to sort of if I get a if I got a vision like that that's it, you know... I go for it, nothing gets in the way, but I know for a lot of people if they had difficulties put in their way, they'll think well perhaps I've got it wrong perhaps it's not God calling me in this direction or whatever, and that worries me....."

His grounding in, and the stability of, his family-and-neighbourhood church, together with the development of his self-confidence by being a union activist for some 20 years, enabled him, after the defeat of the printing unions, to build a successful (religious) alternative career within a strong couple-relationship where even the spouses' religious conversions happened within a month of each other. Rather like Harold, he never 'lived to work' and a general orientation towards his family and towards 'helping people' meant that the impact of the defeat of the printing unions did not destroy a personal identity.

Barry

This next case is very different. Unlike Donald, Harold and Derek, Barry has never benefitted from the identity-building structures and social capital of a strong occupational and community collectivism. Like Harold, though at a later stage in his life, he has been involved in family caring. But while Harold's early caring laid the basis for an alternative professional life, for Barry home responsibilities compounded the factors excluding him from the labour market, and trapped him in poverty and a constant struggle to manage on benefits. His own health problems - back problems, blood pressure, angina - are also an impediment to employment, though whether they are a cause or a result of his difficulties is not clear.

So, while from the point of view of the labour market Barry's story reads as one of a loser, as a family carer he could be seen as something of a hero, struggling against innumerable difficulties and misfortunes, but also playing a valuable role in his community. It may well be that the implicit employment-centred framing of the interview, which despite asking for his life story approached him as an 'ex-traditional worker', reinforced a negative view of himself, and an underplaying of his home and community based achievements. It is also likely that in the gender-divided world of London's East End culture it is quite hard for a man to feel proud of a life which is centred in the private sphere.

Barry was born in 1938 in a town to the north of London, where his father was a gas worker. The youngest of four children, like Donald and Harold he left school early, becoming a car mechanic at the age of fifteen. Within a few weeks he injured an elbow, though the employer accommodated to him by getting him a left-hand broom and moving him to stores. At eighteen he did national service, narrowly escaping death twice. The first time was because of a mistaken identity number: his counterpart was shot on arrival in Aden. The second time was a car accident on black ice, in which the car was only saved from a precipice by a tree. Perhaps these incidents strengthened a sense of fate in Barry rather than a sense of agency. They moved him deeply, as he recounts in an extended narrative about the lengths he went to contact the 'never-should-have-been' widow, who appreciated his efforts but did not stay in touch.

Leaving the army in the late 1950s Barry had no difficulty in getting work and he frequently changed jobs as an engine cleaner with the fireman on the railways, and then as an electrician, in the car industry, in the large gas works in East London, where his father got him a job, and then as a neon sign-maker, which he remained for 15 years or so. His account of these shifts in jobs in his initial narrative, which is in the style of bald reporting interwoven with brief argumentation, emphasises external factors such as untoward changes in management, or shift systems, always more difficult without a phone or a car. He makes no mention of a search for long-term job security, though the

move to the London gas works may have been such an attempt. This accompanied his move to London on marrying his first wife, who was from the East End and an only daughter. The gas works closed by the late 1960s, however, and in any case he disliked working constant nights.

After eight years of marriage his wife, who was much younger than him, died following several rapid heart attacks. His father had died the year before. Older than many of his wife's friends, he felt isolated in London, especially since he was soon cut off by his mother-in-law, which echoed a childhood family rift, when his grandfather's new wife would not have children in her house, particularly 'hating boys'. Barry married again within a year, in 1974, and soon had two children. But the second, a boy, was very premature, and spent a year in a hospital in Central London, during which time Barry's wife's father and then mother also died. The consequence for her was a nervous breakdown, for which she was hospitalised.

Five years later, in 1979, Barry lost his car licence after a drunk driving charge, (which arose from another driver's swerving badly on mistaking a turning) and therewith his job. The ban was for one year but he was debarred from insurance for a further three years. By 1985 when his employer finally asked him to return, employment conditions were markedly worse. The condition was that he went self-employed, covering his own costs of van hire, ladders, petrol. He was offered a fifteen-year old boy who became giddy on the scaffolding, causing the sign to crash down in a gust of wind. The 'slave-driver' employer tried to cut corners, leaving rather than replacing rotten fascias, and kept no respect for reasonable lunch or working hours:

"He had a go at me had a go at me so I went forget the job I said I've had enough now I'm going home. And I ain't been in work since (laughs), you know, but I'm not gonna I am not going to kill myself for no guvnor."

Such intransigence, which has probably caused Barry to leave many jobs in the past, which may all along have debarred him developing a more positive and proactive strategy towards his own working career, and which may even now debar Barry from employment opportunities, is also a moral strength. Rooted in British working class culture, it has fortified him against the worst abuses of the welfare system and labour market. Thus his account, which is in many senses a depressed story of victimhood, repeatedly bursts out in protest and defiance, as in a story about benefit giros being late:

"I said what happens you're working and your governor walks up and says we're not gonna pay you this week ... I says you'll go up in the air and you'd come out on strike I said I've gone up in the air but I can't go on strike, but he said oh don't be silly you're looking in the wrong (unclear) I said I'm not (I) I'm looking at the same way you must look at it"

So apart from an eighteen month period in the mid-80's Barry has been unemployed for eighteen years. He has repeatedly applied for jobs, but invariably been told at interviews that he is too old (he is now 62) or too sick. He particularly objects to being told he is too old by eighteen to twenty year old girls, as happened when he applied to a hospital to work on a ward with elderly people:

"she went oh sorry but you're too old for the job (I) and she said in the next breath that I can go in and do it voluntary, you know, and I thought to meself if I'm too old I said if I'm too old for the job, I'm too old to do it voluntary."

Meanwhile, however, he has cared for his wife and brought up his two children, arming and protecting them against the humiliations of poverty, encouraging their education and training, persevering in keeping his son, who has also had ongoing medical problems, out of crime.

His one line of support from his family of origin is his sister, a disabled widow, who lends him her taxed car and bought them a washing machine. Otherwise his support lies in the church, which offered a holiday and then regular weekly help when his wife was ill. The holiday, which involved the seaside and horse riding, was such a success that his wife signed herself out of the hospital on her return. And from the sensitively encouraging weekly visits by church members to his wife, Barry began himself to make visits to elderly people and to provide informal advice to others who were unemployed.

As he puts it:

"God said to me he said I got work for you to you to you're too old in Man's eyes but you're not too old in mine to do any work... I used to have people phone me up can I come and talk to somebody you know and er I ben out to been out to meetings I spoke at meetings".

Without these things he feels he would have been '*in the nut house*'. In the two periods of several months in which he has had to cut out all such activities following blackouts he has badly missed the involvement.

Barry's case highlights the worst aspects of the benefit system, together with the total deficiency of social and health services in terms of personal support. The interview itself shows how he responds to the affirmation of personal interest: while the initial narrative is rather bald and depressive, he responds to the follow-up questions with much more detail and spiritedness. The church stands out in its support and the quality of relationships it offers, but on the side of statutory services no significant relationships emerge at all. He is a classic case of the poverty trap, in which benefits outrun low earnings opportunities, and in which bureaucratic procedures act as a disincentive to irregular working opportunities, even though are the best way to regain employment. Benefits are also so low and bus fares are so high, especially when they involve changes, that they discourage socialising and even good neighbourly work, such as decorating.

Anthony

We came in touch with Anthony through a colleague who is involved in East London research. The interview took place in a home for seamen, situated in the old East End. The home was once founded for seamen who stayed in London for a few days until theirs ship left the docks again. Nowadays it is mainly a place for unemployed seamen.

Anthony represents another part of the economy which has deeply changed through the last decades due to processes of globalisation and further automation. Anthony has been working as a radio officer, work that is now done through electronic communication.

Anthony was born in an Irish village in 1944. His father was an engineer, and Anthony has two brothers and one sister. Though one of the brothers became an engineer who is currently working in a shipyard in Glasgow Anthony denied that there was any seagoing family tradition.

Anthony spoke easily and in considerable detail about his professional career but he refused to speak about his family of origin, and especially when asked about his sister Anthonia, or about his future plans either. The interview took altogether about 3 hours.

Anthony's professional training started in 1962 when he joined the Liverpool Technical College. He became a radio officer and from 1967 worked continuously as a free lance radio officer, changing shipping companies about once or twice a year. Anthony said that many Irish men worked as free lance radio officers like him. He spoke at length about life on board, and especially of feeling lonely among a crew of Greeks who did not speak English.

This life went on until 1994 when Anthony left his last job. By then technology had made radio officers obsolete, the morse code had disappeared and communication was done via satellites. Up to that point finding a new job had been easy: as soon as he left a ship he immediately got a phone call from the shipping agency offering a new job. But by the time Anthony left sea life it had also changed a lot. Once there had been 40 people working on a ship, compared with only 12 people in the 1990s. Today there is 'no social life at sea anymore', and consequently no personal life. Such arguments were accompanied by resentful remarks about Filipinos: 'working with falsified certificates', 'cheap but incompetent', and resulting in 'no atmosphere, no drinks, no cigarettes, no women'.

Anthony continued his autobiographical reconstruction by a detailed report on all the shipping companies he had worked for, including a story of being fired by a drunk captain in a situation where he could not prove the truth. However, such an experience had not posed such a problem as he could so easily find another job.

Only when directly asked by the interviewer did Anthony mention that he had never married. He found a marriage 'not fair' for the wife, given that he would be away all the time.

Since 1994 Anthony had a few “odd jobs”. Among others he was in Aberdeen laying pipes but he missed the chance to work on an oil platform.

In Anthony’ biographical self-reconstruction elements of anger and resentment were intertwined in such remarks as “I don’t get on with English captains” or “young people don’t want to stay at sea”. He mentioned that he had never bothered about further training and other certificates, without clarifying whether he had had the opportunity or not, or whether he since regretted his absence of qualifications. His only admitted mistake was to have become a radio officer, rather than an engineer or captain. Regarding his current situation Anthony spoke resentfully about the job centre, whose courses are ‘a farce’. He sees himself as ‘stuck in a rut’.

Concluding Comparisons

As always in case study methods, the cases gain in comparison with each other, the sum of the parts enhancing our insights into social processes more than the separate cases. The different positioning and strategies of the cases presented here towards individualism and collectivism, towards work, towards gender relations and family life, and towards past and future prospects spell different destinies in a common, but also quite varied process of industrial transformation. In comparing these experiences of traumatic social transformations, the interplay between public and private lives is highlighted, the fitting and unfitting of ‘old/modern’ industrial work and family habits in the context of more marketised conditions, the toll in illness and physical damage, and the formal and informal social capital which can help the transition to post-industrial situations.

The cases also highlight the very radical nature of the economic transformations which have been experienced - as by Barry in his sudden confrontation with self-employment as a condition for maintaining his job. His case illustrates the accounting and benefit (given the low and insecure returns), not to mention administrative and organisational nightmare of switching from wage labour to self-employment, a switch which is demanded of him without any preparation, without any discussion let alone support for the skills and time which would be involved. Harold’s year long experience as an ‘industrial gypsy’ doing crane-driving in the private sector was similarly traumatising, totally at odds with the rights-based and regulative corporatism of a strongly unionised and nationalised industry.

Many of the themes which have been mentioned within this report echo work on other social categories within the SOSTRIS project, although they also add complexity to those ideas. One such theme has been the importance of resources in the private sector in cushioning the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. The British Report on early retirement suggested that corporatist forms of collectivism could provide sociability and status, including for individuals who had made little investment in their home life, and may even have been damaged by family disconnection. Among these cases Anthony is the most extreme case of disregard for the private sphere, and Donald is a close second. Life on board ship seems to have been the sum of ‘life’ for Anthony, and it began to be eroded by crew reductions and globalisation before he lost it completely by automation. The most animated part of Anthony’s interview concerned details of ships; neither his family past nor his future perspectives figured in his self-presentation. Donald, having invested such a degree of personal meaning and identity in mining is unable to consider alternatives, though he is by no means lacking in objective skills. He is also only now, and painfully, realising what it meant to his wife to live with such a husband, and for such domestic power relations to be reversed. Harold represents an opposite case, someone for whom skills learned in the solidaristic and responsible corporate culture of the mines provided a good base for diversification. In contrast to Anthony or Donald, he steadfastly refused to do overtime or weekends, always maintaining an active sphere of sociability and interest beyond work itself. His communication and caring skills provided a good basis for an occupational transition. To a lesser extent, Derek’s experience in the closed shop and strong networks of ‘London printing’ including active work as a trade unionist also developed skills and self-confidence. A religious conversion some three years before the violent attack on the printing unions of both him and his wife meant that emotionally Derek was already oriented elsewhere. A favourable house-sale and the heterogeneity of the London as opposed to the South Wales economy were material conditions which helped him, after very hard work, to develop his current second career as a minister. Barry, by contrast had moved almost fully into the private and informal sphere. But his valuable social role is experienced with resentment and anger, not least because of the tedious and restrictive poverty which it entails, but also perhaps reflecting negative attitudes towards home-based roles for men in a gender-divided and employment-centred society.

The negative effects of the residualism of the British welfare system are apparent in the cases. Harold and Derek

were exceptions: Harold benefitted from his own welfare experience in union case work, and from his friends who were themselves social professionals - he got his community care job by the classic means of the informal network. Derek was another exception: his second career as a minister would not have been conceivable, it seems to us, without his rootedness in the church community of himself and his wife. None of the others, for whom re-orientation has been slower and more traumatic, have received meaningful personal support from welfare services, nor from occupational unions and associations, as we found among the cases of early retirement. Barry's case provides a particularly graphic and detailed example of the failure of the benefit system to integrate with and build on resources and activities in the informal sphere, instead cementing the poverty trap. Neither Anthony nor Barry have found the employment office helpful.

The cases also amplify SOSTRIS findings concerning the amount of biographical work which is involved in changing deep-rooted personal meanings and social positionings. Donald's immobility and psychic problems may well be acting as a moratorium, since he is already actively thinking about and working on his reactions and the reasons for them. Anthony, while not 'ill', seems more blocked in anger and resentment, and more lacking in support; indeed he has not immediate family or household to support him in such work. It is not clear in Barry's case that illness has provided a moratorium in which a personal re-orientation has taken place. Whether the meaning of illness, which is so widespread in Barry's family, would become clearer through a fuller interpretation of the interview is not known - most likely the perspectives of other members of the family would be necessary. On the other hand the church has clearly succeeded in promoting and validating his community role, and this has been helpful in coming to terms with his 'non-identity' in unemployment. The importance of the church community in providing a 'spine' for Derek's family and children, for his epiphany experience which luckily occurred well before the Wapping strike, and for his second career, should also not be overlooked.

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Notes