

WAR AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN AN
INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITY:
BARROW-IN-FURNESS 1914-1926

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ABSTRACT

A single industry town and an important munitions centre, Barrow-in-Furness experienced the full force of industrial mobilisation, government intervention, and mass unemployment in the years between 1914 and 1926. In analysing the responses to these events, the thesis will give insights into their impact on a town dependent on industries stimulated by war and crippled in the post-war economic climate.

The study comprises of two interrelated components. The first section establishes the socio-economic context at the outbreak of the war and examines the influence of war and depression on the occupational and social structure of the town, together with health trends and housing conditions. In doing so, the thesis will analyse the dual effects of higher wartime earnings and long term mass unemployment on popular health, and the role of housing reform in maintaining social stability.

Having established the context in which ideology and social attitudes developed, the second section will interpret the impact of war and depression in terms of the pressures placed on industry, the local authority and the wider population. This section will address three key themes, beginning with an examination of the divisive impact of left-wing ideology on the Labour Party, political allegiances and the composition of local authority bodies. Moving on, the study will assess the implications of these developments for local authority policy and the material well-being of the unemployed, giving particular attention to the distinctive response of Barrow's Board of Guardians and the application of the Poor Law. Thirdly the thesis examines the strategies adopted by the wider community to meet the demands of the depression, beginning with key local organisations, but focussing closely on methods of working class self-sufficiency.

The thesis will conclude by addressing three important questions which emerge from this study. Firstly, drawing the various themes together, the thesis will analyse the impact of war and depression on social perceptions and levels of social antagonism. In demonstrating that to focus on workplace militancy and 'class conflict' is to miss the thrust of local developments, the thesis will argue that the tensions, hardships and uncertainties of the period stimulated social cohesion rather than class conflict. Secondly, the thesis will examine the nature of the communal identity that emerged during these years, and finally, will determine whether Barrow, as a result of the town's

distinctive response to the post-war crisis, can be included among the 'Little Moscows' of the period.

By examining these salient themes, the thesis provides fresh insights into the nature of social relationships and levels of class antagonism throughout the period, and makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the impact of war and depression, and the social dynamics of distress.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ASLEF	Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
CWS	Co-operative Wholesale Society
EEF	Engineering Employers Association
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LEC	Local Employment Committee
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
MO	Medical Officer
NALGO	National Association of Local Government Officers
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers Movement
OMS	Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies
SEF	Shipbuilding Employers Association
TB	Tuberculosis
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UDAW	Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
UWM	Unemployed Workers Movement

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INTRODUCTION

The social impact of the First World War has been much debated and widely interpreted, and this study will examine the impact of the war and its aftermath on Barrow-in-Furness, a geographically compact and fertile area for study, dependent on traditional heavy industry and vulnerable to fluctuations in the trade cycle. The thesis argues that to focus on workplace militancy and 'class conflict' is to miss the thrust of local antagonisms, and that despite political upheaval, economic crisis and exceptionally high unemployment, Barrow society closed ranks and acted in unison against both the economic problems posed by war and depression, and the interventions of higher, centralised authority. Analysing the changing social and economic context of the period, the thesis will interpret the impact of war and depression in terms of the pressures placed on industry, the local authority and the wider population, giving particular attention to methods of working class self-sufficiency and the application of the Poor Law. This examination of the conditions of daily life will provide the context in which ideology and social attitudes evolved, and enable the analysis of their implications for political alignments, the composition of the local authorities and responses to the depression. Finally, these developments will be discussed in relation to the three key questions emerging from this study: the impact of war and depression on social relationships, the nature of the communal identity that emerged during these years, and whether Barrow, as a result of the town's distinctive response to the post-war crisis, can be included among the 'Little Moscows' of the period.

A single industry town and an important munitions centre, Barrow experienced the full force of industrial mobilisation, government intervention, and mass unemployment in the years between 1914 and 1926, and an analysis of the responses to these processes will give insights into their impact on a town dependent on industries stimulated by war and crippled in the post-war economic climate. Barrow, rated eighty third among the one hundred and thirteen 'large' towns of the 'country' during the inter-war period¹, owed its origins to the exploitation of the Furness peninsula's high quality haematite iron ore deposits in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the transition of the local economy from the export of primary raw materials to large-scale steel manufacture transformed Barrow from a small town of 3,135 persons in 1849 to a large industrial town with a population of 47,000 by 1881, increasing to 63,770 by 1922. The town gained the Parliamentary franchise in 1885 and County Borough status in 1889,

but whilst the predominantly working class population continued to expand, a broad ethnic mix from all over the United Kingdom, its level was unstable and fluctuating, and the rising figures concealed a steady rate of net out-migration². Furthermore, despite the construction of new docks in anticipation of continued growth, there was no immediate influx of shipping and few new industries were attracted to the town due to the inability to compete with Liverpool, the region's lack of natural resources and its geographic isolation. By the late nineteenth century the outlook seemed bleak, and although the expansion of the local shipbuilding and armaments industry halted this decline and superseded the iron and steel industry as the main employer, the town remained dependent on unstable industries. With regard to local government, although the town was initially ruled by an industrial elite with a greater interest in new industrial projects than welfare, representatives of middle class professional, trading and business interests had gradually filtered onto the town council³. Nevertheless, at the outbreak of the First World War, the prevailing attitudes remained those of the nineteenth century⁴, although the labour movement, strong and well-organised, was steadily increasing its municipal representation.

As a result of the town's high level of working class organisation, its wartime role and subsequent high unemployment, Barrow provides a valuable location in which to examine a number of debatable issues, particularly the effects of higher wartime earnings on working class health, and the role of housing reform in maintaining social stability. Additionally, conditions in Barrow are valuable for the analysis of social tensions arising from deprivation of the right to work, whilst the limited impact of the General Strike in the town is a particularly unexpected and interesting aspect of local developments during the inter-war years. However, whilst many studies of the period tend to examine the impact of the First World War and the depression as separate entities, this study extends beyond a context of wartime industrial mobilisation into the post-war transition period in order to gain more measured insights into the effect of the changes and tensions of the period on longer term economic, demographic and social trends. Although helping to establish how closely Barrow conforms to national trends and existing historiographical interpretations, such national level debates take little account of local circumstances, and a deeper analysis through regional case-studies is required to put existing interpretations to the test and provide a deeper and more convincing understanding of the war's impact. To facilitate this, a comparative analysis

with similar localities, based on secondary sources, will be applied to specific issues to emphasise the distinctive aspects of Barrow's development.

Middlesbrough is a particularly valuable comparator due to its many similarities with Barrow, which include its mid to late nineteenth century origins and industrial base, the quality and type of housing, high inter-war unemployment and the similar municipal strength of the Labour Party. Nelson too, although a less obvious choice for comparison due to its cotton-based economy, will nevertheless provide a valuable extra dimension for the analysis of political change with its well organised labour movement, militant trade union tradition and a predominantly working class population. Other important comparators are three 'Little Moscows' of the period, Mardy, Lumphinnians and the Vale of Leven, all of which were working class communities linked directly to one staple industry, geographically isolated, and demonstrating a high degree of occupational unity and social cohesion. Despite the fundamental similarities of these localities, the responses to unemployment were very different, and comparison will place Barrow's political and social developments into a clearer perspective.

The thesis is in two sections. The first, consisting of three chapters, will examine the socio-economic changes of the period and provide the context for the analysis of the responses to these changes across the community and their effects on the social dynamics of the period in the second half of this study. Chapter One establishes the social and economic context at the outbreak of the war and assesses the impact of war and depression on the demographic and occupational structure, together with an examination of income levels, to provide a workable definition of the town's socio-economic structure and a foundation for the later discussion of changing social attitudes. This will be followed by an examination of housing conditions throughout the period, the changing municipal role and the impact of post-war legislation. In examining the impact of the first attempts at state intervention in housing in Barrow, the second chapter will discuss the argument that housing reform acted as a counter-balance against social unrest, whilst taking account of local pressures which might either inhibit reform or re-shape attitudes. This, together with the previous analysis of income levels will provide the context for the examination of popular health issues in Chapter Three. In addition to a comparison of the health of Barrow with national trends from the immediate pre-war period to the late 1920s, the third chapter challenges established opinion on Barrow's high standards of working class health in the pre-war period,

derived from Elizabeth Roberts' study of living standards in the town⁵. This is essential in order to illustrate the significance of the changing pattern of Barrow's health in the years following the First World War, and combines with a comparison of health trends in Middlesbrough to provide a comparative perspective. Particularly valuable for this comparison is Katherine Nicholas' study of the effects of unemployment⁶ on working class diets, and her analysis of their calorific content provides keen insights into the effects of unemployment on health. These will be analysed in relation to existing historiographical debates relating to the conflicting effects of wartime gains and long-term unemployment on popular health. Together with the preceding two chapters, this completes the reconstruction of the living conditions of the period and provides the context within which political forces, policy, and social attitudes developed.

The fourth chapter serves as a link between the two main sections and examines the impact of left-wing ideology on the political fortunes of the Labour Party and municipal politics. In addition to comparing developments in Barrow with wider County Borough electoral trends, they will also be briefly compared to those in the other localities described above in order to illustrate the distinctive nature of Barrow's political developments. The comparison with Middlesbrough is particularly important at this point, and will combine with the comparison of health trends, to better inform the analysis of the administrative responses to unemployment in the following chapter.

Building on material conditions established in the first section, Chapter Five analyses the impact of political change on the composition of local authority bodies, and the implications for social policy and the material well-being of the large proportion of the town's population affected either directly or indirectly by mass unemployment. Particular attention will be paid to the distinctive response of the Board of Guardians, caught between the demands of the Ministry of Health and those of the unemployed. In a similar vein, Chapter Six examines the strategies adopted by key local organisations to meet the demands of the depression: Vickers, a major shipbuilding and engineering company and the town's main employer, the Co-operative Society, and Barrow's two largest trade union branches, the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Boilermakers. The responses of these organisations, central to the life of the community, together with an examination of changing working class self-sufficiency strategies in the final chapter, provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the depression on the wider community. Finally, this study resumes the analysis of Barrow

society, combining the income-based 'class' structure established in Chapter One with an analysis of influence of the war and long-term mass unemployment on changing social relationships and perceptions, and their influence on levels of social antagonism.

There are three significant omissions from this study however. Firstly, whilst drawing on Todd's comprehensive analysis of wartime industrial relations⁷, those of the inter-war period are not examined in any detail, the thesis focusing instead on the social and economic impact of two major industrial disputes of the period, the Engineering Strike of 1922 and the General Strike of 1926. Also significant for their absence are issues relating to religion and ethnicity, neither of which featured strongly in the sources of the period. The evidence suggests that they played a minimal role in local political and economic developments at this time.

An examination of the local press has shown key local issues of the period to include health, housing, poor relief and labour politics, and the abundant primary source material and published statistics are used in conjunction with other local studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of these developments. The Barrow Records Office holds diverse and extensive archive material on these issues, important local organisations and all aspects of local authority business, together with its extensive correspondence between the Ministry of Health and the Board of Guardians. In addition to the wealth of information contained in the published Corporation Accounts Books of the period, the statistics of the Chief Medical Officer provide comprehensive details of health and mortality levels. These, together with those of his Middlesbrough counterpart, enable the comparison of health trends in these localities, and are given an extra comparative dimension by Katherine Nicholas' study of the effects of unemployment in Middlesbrough.

Other important statistics are derived from a variety of sources, including trade union records held at the Modern Records Centre, Warwick, and unemployment statistics published in the Ministry of Labour Gazette. Although the statistical data is generally good, some problems do arise. For example, the Ministry of Labour statistics do not begin until 1923, at a point when Barrow's unemployment levels had already peaked, necessitating the compilation of the missing data from the Corporation's correspondence files. Other difficulties include the lack of detailed police records, and the inaccessibility of local Co-operative Society records from 1924, held in an archive

out-store and unavailable at the time this research was undertaken. Nevertheless, published Society statistics are available at the Co-operative Archive, Manchester, and enable a quantitative analysis of the depression's impact. A final difficulty is the conflicting accounts of the rate of out-migration from the area in the 1920s: whilst Griffiths asserts that Wigan had the highest rate of population loss of all Lancashire Boroughs in that decade, Bainbridge and the 1931 Census indicate that in fact, Barrow suffered the greatest loss.

In addition to Elizabeth Roberts' study of working class living standards, the previously unpublished material contained in the transcripts of her interviews with local residents is particularly significant, and provides unique insights into social perceptions and self-sufficiency strategies. Other important oral evidence is provided by the transcripts of J.D. Scott's interviews held in the 1950s with senior Vickers employees, and these will add a local dimension to his study of the responses of the Vickers Group to the depression⁸.

Also of considerable importance is Todd's study of the rise of Barrow's labour movement to 1920⁹, which provides a sound foundation for the analysis of its continued development into the post-war period. This, together with studies of other localities, particularly Hill's study of Nelson, a community in which the rise of Labour came to appear almost inevitable, and Turner's dissertation on poor relief and unemployment in Middlesbrough, will enable a comparative analysis of Barrow's political changes and the administrative response to unemployment. The latter is of central importance to the understanding of the significance of the impact of the depression in Barrow, and the analysis of political change, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health records held at the National Archives, Kew, will provide significant insights into the local administration of poor relief.

With regard to the wider historiography of the period, the social impact of the Great War has received considerable attention from historians and is subject to much debate, the diversity of British society making generalisations difficult to sustain. Whilst some assert the Great War changed everything it touched¹⁰, its greatest impact being on the working classes and their relationship to the rest of society, others maintain the war 'bolstered rather than undermined pre-war social forms'¹¹. Marwick, a leading proponent of war as a stimulus for social change, asserts that war serves to activate

certain processes and has the potential to transform some aspects of society, although not necessarily for the long-term and certainly not always in beneficial ways¹². According to this view, the disruptive and destructive impact of war can both stimulate rebuilding and generate new patterns of behaviour and attitudes, whilst testing a nation's institutions, which must adapt to meet the strains imposed upon them. Additionally Marwick argues that the greater the proportion of the population participating in the war effort, the greater the impetus for social reform and gains for hitherto under-privileged groups.

Reid supports this view, arguing that important legislative and political change resulted from the need for stable industrial relations, which strengthened the hand of organised labour and generated higher incomes, better living standards and improved health. Additionally, working class institutions were reinforced by the increased strength and bargaining power of the trade unions and also greater government intervention and consultation with the representative bodies of the working class. However, he maintains that the First World War generated less change than previously thought, much of its impact being only temporary. He argues that an assessment of the advances made through participation must take account of 'the relationship between what was offered by wartime governments and what was actually given by way of social reform in the changed context of the post-war period'¹³, and concludes that if emphasis is placed on working-class bargaining power, it becomes clear how wartime advance could be reversed in a changed economic climate.

In a different vein, Hinton analyses the impact of the First World War in terms of class struggle, the government and employers combining to strengthen their hand against the working-class and the labour movement¹⁴. According to this interpretation, social reform (which began before the war) was a means of increased state control, wartime legislation being an extension of repressive state activity and part of a full-scale offensive on working-class culture and autonomy, which culminated in the General Strike of 1926. However, Reid has described the 'social democratic view' of Marwick and the 'revolutionary model' of Hinton as being on opposite sides of the same historical coin, despite offering different assessments of the impact on power relations. He argues that both views are based on a common assumption of increased working-class homogeneity and an over-estimation of both the coherence and effectiveness of the response of the dominant political groups and the degree of co-operation between

employers and organised labour¹⁵. Offering a more cautious analysis of the war's economic and social impact, Reid concludes there was 'no simple overall impact of the First World War on the social and economic position of British workers for the forces in operation did not all act in the same direction'¹⁶.

These diverse and apparently contradictory interpretations, draw on the inter-relationships of key issues, particularly social class and attitudes, income levels, living conditions, social reform and industrial relations which inevitably create considerable regional variation. The complexity of these issues demonstrates the importance of analysing the inter-play of all these factors to provide an understanding of changing values, attitudes, and relationships within a given community. Whilst the term 'community' is widely used throughout this study, its definition can be problematic and involve complex theoretical debate¹⁷. However, as Calhoun argues, organisation is the crucial factor which turns a mere group of people into a community¹⁸, and this study will focus on 'concrete social relationships, more abstract forms of relations, and the social structure which orders them'¹⁹, within the Barrow-in-Furness County Borough boundary.

The concept of class is another problematic and much debated issue. For example, the Marxist model describing society as polarised into two conflicting classes determined by their relationship to the means of production is increasingly regarded as too simplistic. In addition to identifying other forms of polarisation such as between tenants and landlords, or the wealthy and the poor²⁰, Cannadine argues that Edwardian society continued to be perceived as divided into three broad economic groups and that these and traditional hierarchies survived and co-existed with the bi-polar. As a result, society remained organised on the basis of assumed inequality and subordination²¹. Indeed, contemporary accounts such as those of Robert Roberts²² reflect an awareness of complex and finely graded hierarchies, but with little reference to a perpetual class struggle between capital and labour.

Whilst the composition of society changed over time, Joyce maintains that this process did not over-ride existing attitudes and perceptions²³. Additionally, challenging the traditional economic interpretation of social hierarchies, he emphasises the importance of alternative factors which make a significant contribution to popular perceptions and the structuring of the social order, arguing that in addition to economic status, identities

are shaped by many factors, including roles within the family and community, leisure activities and the growth of nation-wide mass institutions²⁴. This more complex stratification is again illustrated in contemporary biographical sources, demonstrating an acute awareness of identity and status derived from a multiplicity of factors beyond the workplace, in addition to the distinct and clearly visible social divisions derived from income levels²⁵.

Interpretations of the extent and nature of change to both the class structure and social perceptions are diverse. McKibbin for example, asserts that middle class perceptions of the working classes were shaped by powerful and often hostile stereotypes²⁶, a view supported by Joyce and Mayne, who describe art, literature and the press as powerful formative influences²⁷. However, whilst Winter argues that middle-class assumptions about the poor, particularly that their condition was the product of weakness of character, was undermined by the visible effects of higher wartime earnings, McKibbin maintains that the severity of the middle class wartime experience simultaneously increased their hostility towards the more affluent working classes²⁸. This, together with Cannadine's assertion that the war undermined both the hierarchic view of society and working class deference²⁹ suggests the war was likely to have stimulated considerable social antagonism.

With regard to longer term social change, Kirk argues that whilst enduring divisions were created by wage differentials, there was a parallel tendency towards greater homogenisation as a result of the commercialisation of life and leisure patterns, strong attachments to family and neighbourhood networks, together with technological change within the workplace³⁰. However, whilst McKibbin argues that technical developments reduced the proportion of skilled workers to the semi-skilled³¹, Waites contends that change resulted in the emergence of new skills rather than a reduction in the number of skilled workers³².

A substantial body of opinion argues against greater working class homogenisation. Reid for example, claims the narrowing of pay differentials between skilled and unskilled, and the tendency towards social homogenisation have been exaggerated³³, a view supported by Cronin, who argues that distinctions were blurred³⁴ rather than reduced. Griffiths on the other hand goes further, and argues that internal working class

hierarchies were becoming increasingly important and the strength of influences outside the workplace was undiminished³⁵.

As regards the middle classes, these were broad and fluid, and expanded rapidly in the first decade of the twentieth century. Consequently analyses of their composition vary, and whilst McKibbin describes the expansion of the professional and management classes as being shaped by technological development and largely confined to industry³⁶, Perkin identifies a simultaneous, broader expansion of specialist career hierarchies and meritocracies³⁷.

The vast and varied lower middle classes also expanded rapidly with the growth of the clerical and distributive trades, and aspired to middle-class status despite low incomes. Additionally, whilst Cannadine describes the middle classes as becoming generally more defensive³⁸, Kirk argues that white collar workers were increasingly opposed to the labour movement³⁹. According to McKibbin the lower middle classes, despite viewing the working classes with great hostility, stood between the working classes and the middle class proper, and, in administering public policy, were caught in the front line of the class war⁴⁰. Consequently, he describes the 1920s as witnessing Britain's most severe period of class conflict⁴¹.

Long term mass unemployment also had a significant influence on popular perceptions. McKibbin describes the high public profile of the unemployed as fuelling the hostile middle class stereotype of the working classes as apathetic scroungers⁴², but this was not universal. For example, Vincent describes the middle classes in some areas as becoming more sympathetic, the support from the wider community encouraging the destitute to see themselves as members of a benevolent community rather than retreat into despondency and isolation⁴³. Additionally, Croucher argues that shared hardships and the levelling effect of unemployment, together with the absence of a permanent unemployed /worker divide encouraged the development of a common identity among the working classes, a view also⁴⁴ reflected in contemporary accounts⁴⁵.

Given the diversity of the responses to unemployment, Macintyre's study of three 'Little Moscows' of the period is particularly valuable in order to place the analysis of Barrow in perspective. Although there was never a typical 'Little Moscow', Macintyre asserts that such communities can be identified by their rejection of the stigma attached

to poor relief and their solidarity in support of their workless, with the result that morale remained remarkably high. A further important feature was the democratic thread that ran through these communities and the adoption of open and collective decision making, together with the willingness to override established institutional authority when the law was incompatible with basic human rights. However, one of the two key defining characteristics of 'Little Moscows' was not just the primacy given to human rights and the willingness to challenge authority, but that these ideals infused the lower echelons of that authority itself. Indeed, this attitude, combined with an unusually overt political standpoint and the attempt to enact a socialist lifestyle through fellowship, co-operation and mutual support is described as the second key characteristic of such communities⁴⁶.

Similarly, questions of political identity and allegiance, and the rise of the Left are also subject to diverse interpretations. Whilst some historians describe the rise of the Labour Party as the inevitable consequence of social and economic changes which began in the final quarter of the nineteenth century⁴⁷, others hold the war to be a significant influential factor. For example, Kirk describes the labour movement and its institutions as consolidated by the war⁴⁸, whilst others attribute the rise of the Labour Party to greater government liaison with the trade unions and their closer relationship with the Labour Party⁴⁹. Nevertheless, despite these developments, McKibbin argues that the war failed to overturn established political traditions⁵⁰, and with Marwick⁵¹, emphasises the continuity of Party leadership and policy into the post-war period. Davies and Morley describe the Labour Party as failing to build on wartime changes, and despite the widening of the franchise in 1918, Labour's municipal fortunes declined steadily after the initial successes of 1919. However, they identify a discernible trend of Labour gains from 1926 in County Boroughs with high unemployment, together with the increasingly confrontational and polarised nature of municipal politics, which they argue was expressed in the language of class and evident in the anti-socialist alliances of the period⁵². In contrast, Macintyre argues the working classes are better described as apolitical than polarised, and maintains that left-wing politics was not necessarily synonymous with class antagonism. Presenting an alternative to class identity, he argues that a shared financial interest and a common economic threat could stimulate the development of a cohesive communal identity⁵³ and the tendency of such communities to unite behind those best able to defend them.

Returning to the relationship between participation and social reform, housing, seen as an accurate indicator of levels of social deprivation, came to symbolise the entire issue⁵⁴. Marwick contends that in addition to intensifying existing problems of overcrowding and deteriorating conditions, the war changed the nature of the housing problem. The Clydeside rent strikes of 1915 signalled the fusion of industrial and housing issues, but the introduction of the Rent Restrictions Act in 1915 did little to reduce frictions. By 1917, the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest had identified the housing shortage, high rents and lack of repairs as a major source of industrial and social unrest. Consequently, the Ministry of Munitions housing programme introduced to defuse the crisis, is described by Pepper and Swenarton as a matter of compelling necessity rather than a welfare measure⁵⁵.

Abrams maintains that powerful forces worked against reform⁵⁶. Using post-war housing policy to challenge the participation concept, he argues that the unprecedented levels of popular participation should have stimulated radical change, particularly as government intervention in munitions workers' housing had generated an impetus for reform and created the machinery with which to implement it. One interpretation is provided by Swenarton, who asserts that a dynamic housing policy was judged to be the means to ensure a successful transition from war to peace, with housing becoming an instrument of public policy for the first time. Indeed, he describes the 'homes fit for heroes' campaign as a major political and ideological weapon of the state in the face of the threat posed by organised labour. However, with the onset of the depression in the autumn of 1920 which disarmed the labour movement, the balance of political forces was altered, and as a consequence, he argues that the 'insurance against revolution' was no longer needed, and the policy was abandoned as an unjustifiable expense⁵⁷.

Rather than a response to an immediate political crisis, Daunton describes the post-war housing programme as a 'temporary ad hoc response to post-war price distortion', an emergency measure intended to deal with wartime shortages until the private sector could recover⁵⁸. Indeed, Bowley identifies a significant weakness of the 1919 Housing Act as providing insufficient financial restraints on local authorities, and was therefore unsustainable in the deteriorating post-war economic climate⁵⁹, whilst Beattie attributes its collapse to a clash of interests between local and central government⁶⁰. With regards the second Housing Act of 1923, Bowley contends that, in addition to representing a return to financial orthodoxy, it was another short term expedient intended allow the

private sector time to recover rather than enable local authorities to become permanent providers of working class housing⁶¹.

As regards other facets of community welfare, Winter has demonstrated that an important effect of the First World War was the elimination of the worst aspects of urban poverty, as higher income levels and better diets resulted in improvements to civilian health, particularly at the lower end of the social scale⁶². Paradoxically however, despite a nation-wide improvement in health and life expectancy, Winter argues that deteriorating housing conditions created a parallel increase in respiratory disease⁶³. However, Bryder challenges many of the assumptions upon which Winter bases his analysis⁶⁴. In addition to a general rise in living standards, she stresses the importance of improvements in the quality and purity of food in raising standards of nutrition, and argues that Winter's assertion that nutrition had little influence on the incidence of TB should be regarded with suspicion.

Although valuable, studies such as Winter's do not extend into the post-war period when the erosion of war-time gains by mass unemployment had profound implications for living standards and popular health. Macintyre maintains that relief scales were insufficient to meet basic nutritional requirements, particularly during periods of prolonged unemployment, and 'while few starved to death, the effects of malnutrition were acute'⁶⁵, a conclusion supported by Nicholas' study of the diets of the unemployed. Consequently, Webster treats official figures which indicate a marked improvement in health standards throughout the depression with caution, and attributes favourable statistics to government attempts to minimise the effects of long-term unemployment on health⁶⁶.

Thus issues of poor relief are central to both the social history of the period and the material well-being of the unemployed. Although pauperism declined as a result of the war, by its end, the poor relief system with its overlapping of function and conflicting principles of administration, was in need of rationalisation. Although prospects for remodelling were favourable in the immediate post-war period⁶⁷, Vincent describes the ensuing legislation as a paradox, 'preceded by the most coherent planning exercise ever attempted', but 'dominated by improvisation and curtailed by expediency'⁶⁸. The inadequacies of the system are widely agreed among historians. In addition to a succession of weak governments which failed to pursue a consistent or firm line⁶⁹, the

experiences of the 1920s demonstrated the government had no appreciation of the needs of local communities⁷⁰. Additionally, despite frequent legislative changes, unemployment insurance schemes remained inadequate and never more than a supplement to the Poor Law⁷¹, whilst Vincent describes the Labour Party as pre-occupied with own electoral advance 'rather than the momentum of the attack on poverty'⁷².

However, unemployment and poor relief issues were of great significance for the working classes, and Liddington describes the crucial political battles of the period as being fought at a local level⁷³. Rose maintains that the Labour Party, boosted in many industrial towns by the extension of the franchise in 1918, pledged to support the unemployed at the expense of the ratepayer⁷⁴, although Thane argues that local conditions could be more influential than political persuasion in areas of high unemployment⁷⁵. Nevertheless, they concur that relatively generous relief scales were not confined to Labour controlled boroughs⁷⁶.

The impact of unemployment on attitudes was considerable. Thane maintains that the concept of the deserving and undeserving poor was extended to the unemployed, with the new 'deserving' poor being provided for by unemployment insurance. Indeed, Macintyre demonstrates that changes to the composition of a Board of Guardians could radically alter attitudes towards the unemployed, with a new hierarchy of the insured unemployed receiving better treatment and more respect than those on the parish⁷⁷. Croucher describes the inadequacies of the poor relief system, together with the rituals associated with the Labour Exchange, as pushing people together, fostering solidarity and favouring the organisation of the unemployed⁷⁸. Macintyre supports this view, and maintains that in localities where the unemployed fought to defend living standards, morale remained particularly high. Indeed, he describes a radical change of thinking during the inter-war period, the stigma attached to poor relief being superseded by a growing willingness to claim relief and the conviction that those thrown out of work still had a right to a basic standard of living⁷⁹.

Vincent identifies further consequences of the inadequacies of poor relief and state benefits. As a result of their failure to provide a sufficient level of maintenance, traditional self-sufficiency strategies remained central to working class life⁸⁰ and family and neighbourhood networks, pawnbrokers and credit remained important as ways of

coping with income shortfalls. He argues that the inadequacies of state benefits enabled private charity, stimulated in many areas by the scale of distress, to better focus its resources, enabling the more efficient distribution of aid in kind⁸¹. Indeed, he describes middle class charity as invading working class self-help networks, and in doing so, helping to discourage the unemployed from retreating into their neighbourhoods and isolation⁸².

Also of considerable local significance, the local Co-operative Society, an important working class institution, was an integral part of the local community. Strongest in areas of heavy industry⁸³, Co-operative Societies, together with the trade unions were movements established for the protection and extension of working class interests, but their goodwill and co-operation were strained by the economic impact of the depression⁸⁴. For example, Gurney describes the movement's difficulty in reconciling the interests of both worker and consumer⁸⁵, and in the harsh economic climate of the 1920s, the need to cut staff and wages created considerable conflict with the shop workers' union. The industrial disputes of the early 1920s also created tensions between the two movements, but interpretations vary. Whilst Southern maintains that despite increased friction, economic hardship and unfavourable government policies brought them closer together⁸⁶, Gurney takes a different view. Arguing that, in addition to increased tensions, the societies' relationship with the trade unions degenerated as a result of these disputes, he maintains that by the end of the decade the movement was increasingly sidelined by the Labour Party and trade unions⁸⁷.

Perhaps the most significant response to unemployment was the formation of the National Unemployed Workers Movement. Led by former shop stewards who saw the need to organise the unemployed in the militant defence of working class living standards⁸⁸, the movement fought the stigma attached to poor relief and encouraged the unemployed to claim what was their due⁸⁹. In addition to challenging Boards of Guardians and opposing evictions⁹⁰, the NUWM sought solidarity with the workers to prevent employers using the unemployed to undermine trade union standards⁹¹, although Vincent argues that the NUWM were often at odds with organised labour⁹².

Although industrial relations as a theme lies beyond the scope of this thesis, it is necessary to outline the broad trends with specific relevance to this case-study, but whilst there is a general consensus that industrial and community militancy were

intensified during the war and in its immediate aftermath, again, interpretations inevitably vary. Reid maintains that, with industrial relations as in social reform, 'participation' does not automatically generate social change. He argues that if change is a product of bargaining, then various outcomes are possible, and the improved working-class bargaining position must be balanced against the changing post-war context which weakened organised labour and helped ensure that any gains were only temporary⁹³. Hinton sees industrial relations in terms of class struggle, with industrial compulsion a clear indicator of the subordination of the workers' interests and an attempt to deflect the balance of power in the workshops away from the shop-floor and back to management. Thus the Munitions Act (1915), despite its presentation as a reciprocal agreement between employers and unions, was in reality a direct attack on organised labour which succeeded in reducing its protection and strength⁹⁴. Wrigley however, describes government intervention in the deadlock between employers and unions over the suspension of craft union core practices as a necessity, a means of finding a compromise and providing the unions with some safeguards in the face of extreme employer demands. However, he does concur with Hinton that government proposals involved a greater sacrifice from labour, and describes the Munitions Act as 'a one-sided piece of legislation... [that] was to prove explosive'⁹⁵, fuelling the growing distrust of large sections of the working-class for both the government and trade union officialdom.

Within the shipbuilding and engineering industries that dominated Barrow, industrial relations had been largely delegated to employers' organisations⁹⁶. McIvor describes these organisations as strengthening the employers' market position and negotiating power, and whilst collective bargaining benefited the trade unions, it necessitated their recognition of the employers' right to manage⁹⁷. The war increased these tensions, and whilst Scott describes wartime government intervention in the armaments industry as being confined to prices and profits, with no interference in management⁹⁸, McIvor contends that competition for labour, contracts and materials undermined the solidarity of employers' organisations and necessitated the adoption of a flexible, conciliatory and defensive policy⁹⁹.

Additionally, the dependency of the armaments industry on widely fluctuating market conditions, together with the government's non-interventionist policy which abandoned arms suppliers to their problems of over-capacity and trade slump is particularly

relevant to this study, as are the management strategies within the Vickers group.

Trebilcock describes the company, run by a talented Board of Directors with mutually enforcing spheres of expertise, as not fitting any contemporary entrepreneurial model¹⁰⁰.

Scott supports this view and asserts that Vickers, aided by the versatile entrepreneurial skills of its experts, was able to meet the periodic crises of the industry with advanced technological solutions and perhaps more significantly, were able to anticipate the economic downturn and over-capacity which would follow the Armistice.

Consequently, Vickers looked towards expansion into post-war markets unconnected with wartime products¹⁰¹ and entered the post-war period with confidence. He maintains that despite the increasingly serious problems of the depression, Vickers was able to fall back to prepared positions. However, the Vickers style of management had significant implications for industrial relations in the Barrow shipyard where militancy was well established. Todd argues that management determination to take full advantage of the Munitions Act to force the re-adjustment of the workforce to new methods and technology generated long-lasting trade union and employer confrontation, and throughout the war animosity continued to characterise industrial relations¹⁰².

With regard to organised labour, the co-operation and identification of the trade union leadership with both employers and the state, together with their conservatism and penchant for acting within narrow constitutional limits severely restricted the scope of industrial conflict. As a result, Hinton argues that the official leadership appeared to have failed to defend the interests of its rank and file in the face of tightening controls, becoming increasingly unrepresentative¹⁰³. The rift was heightened by government policy which sought to strengthen the leadership by refusing to negotiate with unofficial, local bodies. This ignored traditions of local collective bargaining and existing workshop organisation which had developed in some industries from the late nineteenth century. Hinton also argues that national (and some local) leadership sought to use collective bargaining to increase their own power and authority, becoming “peace agents and negotiators” rather than organisers and leaders, seeing rank and file militancy as a threat to that authority rather than a basis for their power.’¹⁰⁴.

Additionally, Cronin identifies a tendency for trade union leadership to become a caste in its own right, with vested interests, increasingly distrusted and unable to control the mounting unrest¹⁰⁵, stimulating the growth of an independent rank and file movement as the true representatives of labour interests under the leadership of the shop stewards.

Indeed Hyman describes the shop stewards as standing in the front line of resistance to

industrial compulsion as a result of the wartime extension of national collective bargaining and rank and file independence which drove the struggle for job control down to the workplace¹⁰⁶.

However, rank and file militancy assumed different characteristics according to local conditions. As regards Barrow, Hinton argues that an independent workers' committee failed to emerge there during the war, and as a consequence the revolutionary left lacked real leadership and remained relatively isolated and powerless. However, this pattern does not emerge in Todd's study of the development of Barrow's labour movement, and in addition to the existence of a shop stewards' movement pre-dating the war, he asserts they became a power of some significance during the war years¹⁰⁷. Nevertheless, peace provided the opportunity to dismiss the militants, signalling the end of the first shop stewards' movement and the transferring of their energies from the workplace to politics and the community.

Additionally, the mass unemployment of 1921 enabled the employers to force massive wage cuts and re-assert their right to manage, placing organised labour, and particularly the engineering unions, on the defensive¹⁰⁸. However, in addition to being a crisis of authority, Cronin describes the post-war explosion of unrest and class sentiments as too deep-rooted and potent to allow a return to normal political and industrial life¹⁰⁹. Consequently, the severity of the crisis demanded a more immediate political solution than a war of attrition between the unions and the employers, and the transitional condition of the post-war political system, together with the potentially revolutionary connotations of industrial disputes and state control of key industries ensured a turbulent transition period. Geary maintains that the crises of 1921 and 1926 took very different forms¹¹⁰. The intense and unusual class conflict of 1918-21, confirmed pre-war fears of organised labour, and represented a real threat of revolution justifying the creation of the governments' strike-breaking organisation. However, Cronin asserts that whilst a stable pattern had emerged by 1926, order and authority needed to be restored to the labour movement¹¹¹, and to this end, Geary maintains that in 1926 the idea of a labour threat and the concept of a constitutional struggle were deliberately fabricated to justify its use by a government seeking a final confrontation¹¹².

Beyond a government attempt to curb the unions, the General Strike is frequently interpreted in terms of class struggle, and against the background of industrial and

political uncertainty, Foster describes the General Strike as representing 'one of the crucial tests by which the balance of class forces in the inter-war years was established'¹¹³. However, whilst Farman describes those who responded to government appeals for volunteers and special constables to protect essential supplies and services as motivated by class instinct¹¹⁴, Phillips argues that many were drawn from the manual and clerical trades¹¹⁵.

Whilst Farman asserts that the regional variation of the effectiveness of the stoppage was a reflection of the strength or weakness of local labour movements¹¹⁶, interpretations of the response to the sudden capitulation vary, The far left for example, saw the outcome as a triumph of rank and file solidarity betrayed by the 'character of those labour leaders who chose to work within the limits of the constitution'¹¹⁷. In a similar vein, the failure of the General Strike is attributed to a lack of working-class unity and preparation in the face of a precise and ruthless government¹¹⁸, in a situation where 'every organ of local and central government, the police and army, radio and press, scabs, employers and fascists united as one instrument against the labour movement'¹¹⁹. However, an alternative interpretation describes the General Strike, as 'the echo rather than the voice of class war', a pale reflection of the threat posed in 1921¹²⁰, resulting in the taming of the trade union movement¹²¹. However, whilst there was evidence of great hostility among militants towards the TUC, the employers and the authorities, Phillips maintains that at a local level, rank and file displeasure was directed instead towards local trade union leadership, but was accompanied by an overwhelming pride in the levels of organisation, solidarity and sacrifice within the labour movement¹²².

Thus the years between 1914 and 1926 were a period of severe economic, industrial and political crisis, although interpretations of the effects of and responses to these changes vary considerably among historians. Difficulties are further compounded by 'the shape and pace of economic and social change, [which] differed markedly from one part of the country to another', the cross currents of these developments being best understood in terms of variations in local conditions¹²³. Thus with the aid of comparative analysis and by tracing the profound economic and political changes of the period, the impact of war and depression in Barrow will be interpreted in terms of the pressures placed on industry, the local authority and other key aspects of community life.

¹ T.H. Bainbridge, 'Barrow-in-Furness: A population study', *Economic Geography*, 15, 1939, 382. Bainbridge does not precisely define the 'country' covered by his study.

² *Ibid*, 381.

³ J.D. Marshall & J.K. Walton, *The Lake Counties from 1830 to the mid 20th Century* (Manchester, 1981), 129.

⁴ D. Stark, 'The origins and development of a single industry town: Barrow-in-Furness 1890-1910', MA dissertation, Lancaster, 1972, 16.

⁵ E. Roberts, 'Working class standards of living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 30 (1977), pp. 306-319.

⁶ K. Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment on Teesside, 1919-39* (Manchester, 1986).

⁷ N. Todd, 'A History of labour in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness c.1890-1920', M. Litt thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976.

⁸ Held at the University of Cambridge Historical Archive and comprising transcripts of interviews conducted by Scott with Vickers employees during the 1920s.

⁹ N. Todd, 'A History of labour'.

¹⁰ J.E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-79* (London, 1984), 19.

¹¹ R. Wall & J. Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work & Welfare in Europe 1914-18* (Cambridge, 1988), 3.

¹² A. Marwick (ed.), *Total War And Social Change* (Basingstoke, 1988), xiv.

¹³ A. Reid, 'World War One and the Working Class In Britain' in A. Marwick (ed.), *Total War And Social Change* (Basingstoke, 1988).

¹⁴ J. Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London, 1973), pp. 30-35.

¹⁵ A. Reid, 'The impact of the First World War on British workers' in R. Wall & J. Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War*, 222.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 227.

¹⁷ See for example, the debate between C. J. Calhoun, 'History, anthropology and the study of communities: some problems in Macfarlane's proposal', *Social History*, 3 (1978), pp. 363-373.; A. Macfarlane, 'History, anthropology and the study of communities' in *Social History*, 4-6 (1977), pp. 631-652.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 370.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 372.

²⁰ D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven, 1998), 113.

²¹ *Ibid*, 104.

²² R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Harmondsworth, 1971); *A Ragged Schooling* (Manchester, 1976).

²³ P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class* (Cambridge, 1994), 2.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

²⁵ Roberts, *Classic Slum*, 17-21; 39.

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- ²⁶ R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, Oxford University Press (Oxford, 1991), 271-4.
- ²⁷ Joyce, *Visions*, 330; A. Mayne, *The Imagined Slum* (Leicester, 1993), 163.
- ²⁸ R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), 56.
- ²⁹ Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 128.
- ³⁰ N. Kirk, *Labour and Society in Britain and the USA Vol. 2* (Aldershot, 1994), 50-51.
- ³¹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 106.
- ³² B. Waites, 'The effect of the First World War on class and status in England, 1910-20', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976), 38.
- ³³ Reid, 'World War One', 17.
- ³⁴ Cronin, *Labour and Society*, 23.
- ³⁵ T. Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes c. 1880-1930* (Oxford, 2001), 32.
- ³⁶ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 47-48.
- ³⁷ H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989), 2.
- ³⁸ Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 130.
- ³⁹ Kirk, *Labour and Society*, 289.
- ⁴⁰ McKibbin, *Classes & Cultures*, 45.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, 54.
- ⁴² McKibbin, *Ideologies*, 273.
- ⁴³ D. Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in 20th Century Britain* (London, 1987), 86.
- ⁴⁴ R. Croucher, *We Refuse To Starve In Silence* (London, 1987), 14.
- ⁴⁵ Roberts, *Classic Slum*, 237.
- ⁴⁶ S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London, 1980), 167-172.
- ⁴⁷ D. Butler & D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice* (London, 1969); G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England 1910-1914* (New York, 1961); H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900* (Oxford, 1965).
- ⁴⁸ Kirk, *Labour and Society*, 325.
- ⁴⁹ For example, R. McKibbin, *The Evolution Of The Labour Party 1910-1924* (Oxford, 1974), 241; C.J. Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement* (Brighton, 1976), 233.
- ⁵⁰ McKibbin, *The Evolution*, 240.
- ⁵¹ A. Marwick, 'The impact of the First World War on British society', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3, 1968, 60.
- ⁵² S. Davies & B. Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919-1938*, Vol. 1 (Aldershot, 1999), 651-53.

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- ⁵⁴ P. Abrams, 'The failure of social reform: 1918-1920', *Past And Present*, 24, 1963, 43
- ⁵⁵ S. Pepper & M. Swenarton, 'Home front: garden suburbs for munitions workers', *Architectural Review* (June 1978), 163, 366.
- ⁵⁶ Abrams, 'social reform', 43.
- ⁵⁷ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes* (London, 1981), 113.
- ⁵⁸ M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities 1919-39* (Leicester, 1984), 9-10.
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- ⁶² J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 1985), 115.
- ⁶³ Winter, *The Great War*, 125.
- ⁶⁴ L. Bryder, 'The First World War: healthy or hungry?', *Historical Workshop Journal* (1987), 24, pp.141-157.
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- ⁶⁶ C. Webster, 'Healthy or hungry thirties?', *History Workshop Journal*, 13 (1982), 112.
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- ⁷⁰ P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow, 1982), 188.
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- ⁷² Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 65.
- ⁷³ J. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper 1864-1946* (London, 1984), 342.
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- ⁷⁹ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 116; 125.
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- ⁸¹ *Ibid*, 4.

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- ⁸³ J. Southern, 'The Co-operative Movement in the North West of England, 1919-1939: Images and realities', PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1996, 85; 62.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 237; 248.
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- ⁸⁹ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 45; 125.
- ⁹⁰ Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles*, 51; 60; 70.
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- ⁹³ Reid, 'The impact of the First World War', 230.
- ⁹⁴ J. Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London, 1973), 31-35.
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- ⁹⁶ *The Shipbuilding Employers Federation and the Engineering Employers Federation*
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- ¹⁰¹ Scott, *Vickers*, 140.
- ¹⁰² Todd, 'A History of labour', 174.
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- ¹⁰⁶ R. Hyman, 'Rank and File Movements and Workplace Organisation 1914-1939' in C.J. Wrigley (ed.), *A History Of British Industrial Relations 1914-1939* (Aldershot, 1993), 132.
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- ¹⁰⁸ H.F. Gospel, 'Employers and Managers: Organisations and Strategy 1914-1939' in C.J. Wrigley (ed.), *A History Of British Industrial Relations 1914-1939* (Aldershot, 1993), 169.
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- ¹¹⁰ R. Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893 to 1985* (Cambridge, 1985), 61-63.

¹¹¹ Cronin, *Labour and Society*, 40.

¹¹² Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, 53.

¹¹³ J. Foster, 'British Imperialism and the Labour Aristocracy' in J. Skelley (ed.), *The General Strike* (London, 1976), 4.

¹¹⁴ C. Farman, *The General Strike* (London, 1974), 193.

¹¹⁵ G.A. Phillips, *The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict* (London, 1976), 155.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 156.

¹¹⁷ C. Farman, *The General Strike* (London, 1974), 3.

¹¹⁸ J.K. Klugmann, 'Marxism, Reformism and the General Strike' in J. Skelley (ed.), *The General Strike* (London, 1976).

¹¹⁹ J. Foster, "British Imperialism", 3.

¹²⁰ G.A. Phillips, *The General Strike*, 273.

¹²¹ J.E. Cronin, *Labour & Society*, 46.

¹²² Phillips, *The General Strike*, 262; 271.

¹²³ J. Hinton, 'The Rise of a Mass Labour Movement: growth & Limits' in C.J. Wrigley (ed.), *Industrial Relations*, 30.

DEMOGRAPHY, EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME DIFFERENTIALS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will analyse the demography of Barrow-in-Furness in terms of the size and composition of the population, the occupational structure, income levels and rates of unemployment from the outbreak of the First World War to the General Strike. Despite the valuable body of research that exists on the origins and development of Barrow, the growth of its labour movement, and the study of working class living standards¹ there has, as yet, been no dedicated analysis of the town's social and economic structure. Thus the initial aim of this chapter is to use these secondary sources to provide an understanding of the town's industrial and demographic background, whilst utilising census data and previously unpublished oral evidence contained in the transcripts of Elizabeth Roberts' research on Barrow and the papers of J.D. Scott², to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the town's socio-economic structure. The chapter will then investigate the impact of the war on incomes and population levels before moving on to the inter-war period and, with the aid of Ministry of Employment statistics, examining the extent and impact of unemployment locally. In bringing this evidence together for the first time this analysis will illustrate the main demographic and occupational changes during the period under study.

McKibbin has described England as 'a country of social classes into which the English freely categorised themselves'³, yet despite this acceptance of hierarchy, definition of the social structure remains extremely problematic. For example, both the social structure and perceptions of it were subject to considerable geographic variation, factors which inhibit generalisation and emphasise the importance of regional studies. In addition, the composition of the various social 'classes' was far from static, changing over time and complicated further by considerable mobility between the various social groups. However, social 'class' in the sense of hierarchic gradations or an individual's relationship to the means of production, should not be confused with what McKibbin describes as 'culture', which, when used broadly, includes ideals and ideas, and a way of life derived from work, income, family relations, housing and community⁴. In the context of this basic definition, this chapter is confined to the identification of Barrow's socio-economic 'class' structure, leaving the analysis of 'culture', and particularly social attitudes and relationships, to later in the thesis, when the composition of the

population, employment patterns and other factors influencing the community during the period have been established.

Class divisions and social relationships are the focus of extensive and on-going academic debate. The Marxist model, whereby society polarised into the two conflicting classes of capital and labour, to the point where it can be argued that, between 1911 and 1920, 'the capitalist-labour dichotomy came to serve, ... as a first point of reference in class discourse'⁵, is challenged by Cannadine as being too simplistic and reductionist. In addition to emphasising the point that social polarisation could take other forms, such as between the rich and the poor, landlords and tenants or peers and the people⁶, he argues that the bulk of the population rejected this broad division, and that despite its high profile, the rhetoric of class conflict did not always reflect people's perceptions of the social situation. He maintains that other social models co-existed with the dichotomous⁷. For example, the triadic view of society, less appealing and resonant than the bi-polar model, divided society into three broad classes, whilst traditional hierarchies not only survived, but both society and its institutions 'remained organised around the sound social principles of assumed inequality, ... deference and subordination'⁸.

The complexities involved are well illustrated in Robert Roberts' accounts of working class life in Salford at the turn of the twentieth century⁹, which, in addition to using all three models, employs a wide ranging vocabulary to describe the social strata. Consequently, 'his over-riding impression was a complex, finely graded hierarchy, in which people were deeply sensitive to the smallest nuance of status. They did not think of collective identities, locked in bitter, permanent, inevitable, struggle...'¹⁰. Joyce similarly emphasises alternatives to 'class' in popular perceptions, with factors such as neighbourhood, role within the family, housing and membership of churches, clubs or teams for example, all making positive contributions to the construction of identities. He maintains that 'class' is only one way of giving meaning to the social order, the concept evolving as the social structure changed over time, existing ideas and attitudes being incorporated rather than superseded¹¹.

Nevertheless, both income levels and their sources are an important factor determining life-styles and thus differentiating the various social strata, and whilst Waites agrees that 'social classes are not income groups', he maintains that 'they arise in the first instance

from the different relationships individuals enjoy vis-à-vis the capitalist market'¹². Waites uses D'Aeth's paper, 'Present Tendencies of Class Differentiation' of 1910, which was accepted by contemporaries as an accurate assessment of pre-war income and consumption patterns, to support this view. D'Aeth contends that the class structure was determined by differing standards of living, and suggested a seven-fold method of social classification based on income levels:

Table 1.1 Pre-war social classification according to D'Aeth

Group	Description	Approx. income
A, B, C	The broad strata of manual labour: the skilled, semi-skilled and casual	Up to £2 p.w.
D	The lower middle class, with varied occupations including clerks, shopkeepers and elementary school teachers.	£3 p.w.
E	Business, small manufacturers and lower professionals	£300 p.a.
F	The professional and administrative classes: heads of business and professional firms.	£500 p.a.
G	Simply designated 'the rich'	£2,000+ p.a.

B. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-18*, 76

Although this categorisation is a blunt instrument for social analysis and fails to take account of other influential factors such as attitudes, values and more subjective social identities, it is nevertheless useful as a broad guide to income differentials and provides manageable definitions of socio-economic groupings.

In general terms, the middle-classes were a large and heterogenous social group, and expanded rapidly in the Edwardian period. In addition to the pronounced growth of the professions and the emergence of a new plutocracy of very rich bankers, financiers and businessmen which could merge with the aristocracy, the lower middle-class expanded rapidly as a result of the growth of the clerical and distributive trades¹³. Additionally, manual workers who composed eighty per cent of paid labour in 1911¹⁴, were a large but gradually declining majority of the English population and equally difficult to classify. The working class were also divided, the wide gap in the earnings of the skilled and unskilled resulting in different life-styles, dress and bearing. Additionally, although not evident in D'Aeth's analysis, there was a gulf between the mainstream working class and what Waites describes as 'a pauper and slum proletariat', but although

commonly seen as the 'submerged tenth', the economic division between respectability and 'submersion' could be a narrow one¹⁵.

However, Edwardian middle and working class gradations became less distinct as changing employment patterns restructured the workforce. The vast and varied service sector was the most rapidly expanding sector of the Edwardian economy and recruited heavily, although not entirely, from amongst the semi-skilled. Although excluded from the middle class proper by income differentials, the lower middle class saw themselves, and were seen by others, as middle class by occupation, social aspirations and manners, and sought to distance themselves as far as possible from the working classes, although the financial gap between them was often narrow. Thus, distinct from both the middle and the working classes, the lower middle class acted as a buffer between the two¹⁶. In addition to the burgeoning service sector, the working class was further re-structured as a result of manufacturing and technological changes which resulted in a decline in the numbers of skilled men and stimulated the demand for the semi-skilled¹⁷. Whilst McKibbin asserts that these changes resulted in the redistribution of these categories, Waites contends that technological change created new skills, and that the skilled category did not decline as a proportion of the working class, 'but the location of the skilled category and the perquisites of skill were altered'¹⁸. Self-employment created further working class divisions, although the working class self-employed were distinguished from their middle class counterparts by the status derived from type of occupation and income levels. However, in general terms, the self-employed experienced a steady decline in numbers, whilst the complex system of subcontracting disrupted employer/employee divisions and made it difficult to distinguish an 'employer' class.

The composition of the middle classes was also subject to considerable change over the twentieth century. The increasing number of clerical and service sector workers was accompanied by the steady erosion of small businesses, together with the tendency for the middle classes to become salaried employees, and the expansion of the management class¹⁹. The 1911 census reveals that the majority of the 'higher' professions, such as the Church, medicine and law, were outside industry, but by 1931 change was clearly evident, and McKibbin describes the emphasis, for both the lower and higher professionals, as shifting towards the scientific and technical²⁰. However, Perkin argues that in addition to the expanding business classes, society was 'increasingly composed

of career hierarchies of specialised occupations, selected on merit and based on trained expertise'²¹. According to this analysis, these new professions encompassed a broader range of occupational activity than the science-based professions alone, and created a vertical division within the middle class between the business and professional classes.

However, comparison of the various census returns is unworkable, as the grouping of occupations under general headings was an arbitrary process and classification principles and job definitions changed over time²². Higgs describes clerks as a particularly problematic category²³, whilst the fast growing professions such as laboratory technicians and draughtsmen, were not recognised as categories in the 1911 census, making direct comparison impossible²⁴.

With regard to incomes, the Great War was a considerable temporary influence in the narrowing of working class divisions, virtually eliminating both unemployment and the worst aspects of urban poverty. In many sectors, money wages rose and out-paced inflation, with the unskilled making the greatest gains. As a result working class pay differentials narrowed, raising living standards and eradicating the residuum. In contrast, the war had a mixed impact on the middle classes. Small landlords' incomes, for example, were badly hit, and inflation transferred wealth from most lenders to borrowers, whilst stocks, such as in transport or public utilities, lost up to half their income potential. Although this affected a minority, McKibbin argues that this represents a redistribution of middle class wealth. Additionally, middle class salaried incomes tended to be fixed and thus wartime inflation created hardship, particularly for the lower middle class, whose incomes in real terms were significantly lower than 1914 levels. To the contemporary view, pauperisation was a distinct possibility, but McKibbin argues this is dependent on which section of the middle class is examined. He asserts that for the clerical grades and professional classes, although their income levels fell in real terms, 'for some of them the decline was measured not against the working class but in terms of narrowed differentials within their own class'. However, although badly affected up to 1921, middle class losses were largely recovered by 1923, when the cost of living had fallen to two thirds of the 1920 level. Thus it can be argued that, from this point, middle class incomes recovered in real terms, restoring the pre-war relationship between salaries and wages²⁵.

However, social composition, occupational structure and related income levels were subject to considerable regional variation. In general terms, working class affluence was short-lived as 'pervasive unemployment eliminated many of the comparative income gains the working class as a whole had made during and immediately after the war'²⁶. Kirk has argued, however, that in aggregate terms, real wages can be said to have improved during the period 1920-1926 as, despite continuing pay reductions, retail prices fell further, and continued to fall after 1927 when wage levels remained static²⁷. McKibbin supports this view, maintaining that for those in work, from 1923 the stabilisation of earnings 'preserved the mild redistribution of working class income downwards which had occurred during the First World War'²⁸. Nevertheless, it is income levels in the inter-war period that most highlight regional disparities. In regions of industrial growth, shorter working hours combined with improvements in health, education and employment provision, resulted in rising living standards for many, with increased scope for leisure and expenditure on non-essentials. In contrast, regions of traditional heavy industry were badly depressed, the varying economic activity of the different industries contributing to the geographic redistribution of the population, and being reflected in unemployment rates. For example, between 1923 and 1939 these averaged 19.6% in mining, 36.8% in shipbuilding, 20.7% in cotton, and 10% in vehicles²⁹, figures which indicate that shipbuilding, impeded by over-capacity, was among the main casualties of war³⁰. Thus regional specialisation created pockets of severe unemployment in which a large minority, which included the lower paid as well as the unemployed, experienced poverty and ill-health and for whom the inter-war years were 'marked by bitterness and fear, hunger, ill-health and desperation'³¹.

Thus life chances were significantly affected by industry and geography, which underscores the importance of regional studies. Barrow, a single industry town totally dependent on 'traditional' heavy industry, provides a particularly valuable case-study.

BARROW TO THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

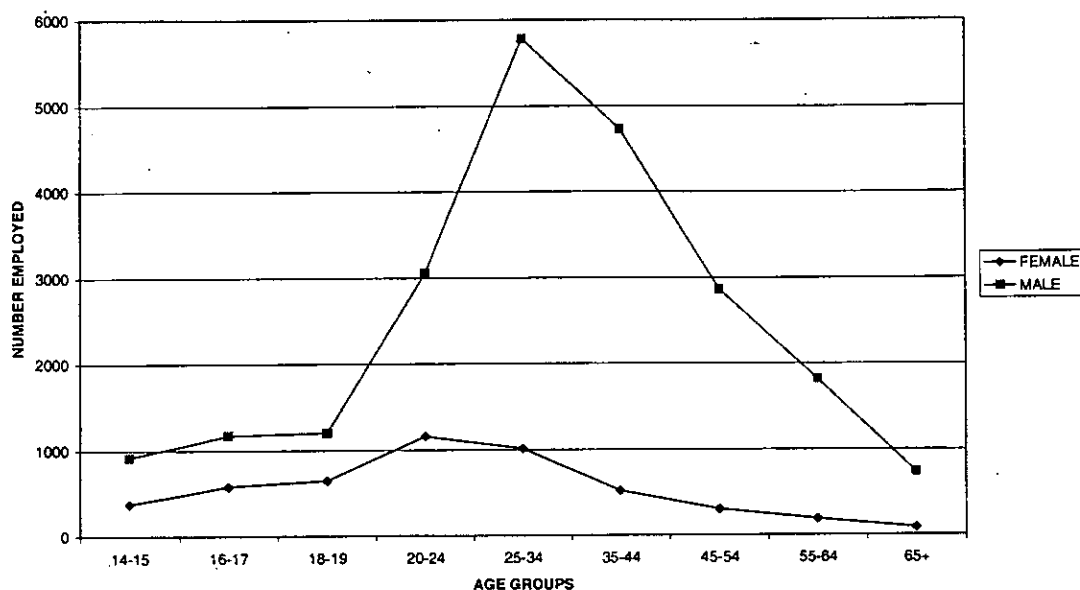
(i) Occupational Structure

By the twentieth century, Barrow's working classes still greatly outnumbered the small, 'loosely defined middle class' estimated by Stark to be around 828 persons in 1911³². Additionally, the region's natural resources had been exhausted, and the town, initially dependent on the fortunes of the iron and steel industry, economically unstable and facing increasingly severe competition, came to depend on the equally precarious shipbuilding and armaments industries.

Between 1903 and 1911, despite the shipyard experiencing periodic minor revivals, Barrow's economy was in recession³³. From 1911 however, the financial climate improved, the 1912 coal strike proving to be only a minor setback, and by the outbreak of war, the shipyard was busy, employment at the steelworks was expanding, and full time working was reinstated at the jute works, the pulp works and on the railway. The population continued to grow, reaching 63,770 by 1911³⁴. The age structure of the population is shown in greater detail in Chart 1.3, whilst the size and composition of the workforce is examined below. However, the 99 juveniles under fourteen years of age shown as employed in the 1911 census tables have been omitted from the calculations in order to facilitate a closer comparison with the 1921 and 1931 figures, leaving a working age population of 23,225 males and 20,688 females³⁵.

Chart 1.1 demonstrates that women comprised a small minority of the workforce and as such were less directly affected by changing economic conditions. Thus women's employment patterns will be discussed first, before focussing on the predominantly male workforce and the associated issues which dominated the town throughout the period. The census figures indicate that 23.5% of Barrow's female population of working age were in waged employment and represented 18% of the total workforce. This percentage falls far below the national level, where women comprised 29.7% of the total workforce in 1911, a proportion which changed little in the first half of the twentieth century³⁶. With regard to married women only a small minority (1.9%) were in paid employment, and comprised just 10.4% of the female workforce³⁷.

Chart 1.1 Composition of the workforce by age and gender 1911



Source: Census of England and Wales, Table 13, 1911

Additionally, women’s employment options were extremely limited, and Table 1.2 lists the main sources of female employment in 1911, together with the number employed, also shown as a percentage of the female workforce.

Table 1.2 Main employment categories for women 1911

Code	Description	Number employed	Percentage
IV	Domestic Offices & Services	1667	34.3
	(including: domestic service)	1233	25.4)
XIX	Dress	691	14.2
XVIII	Textiles (jute)	457	9.4
III	Professional	458	9.4
	(including: teaching)	318	6.5)
XX	Food	381	7.8
V	Commercial (including clerks)	90	1.8

Source: Census of England and Wales, Table 13, 1911

It can be seen that domestic service was by far the largest employer, followed by dressmaking and textiles, the jute works remaining the main source of women’s industrial employment. However, although the Commercial category includes business clerks, it is unfortunate that the census does not give any indication as to the numbers employed in more general clerical or shop work.

Table 1.3 lists the main male employment categories and demonstrates that traditional heavy industries, in the form of iron, steel, shipbuilding and engineering, remained the town's main employers in the decade immediately preceding the First World War, whilst the building trade was still relatively buoyant. However, whilst the professional category is shown to be very small, this census does not classify the workforce by employment status, and does not differentiate between employers, employees or self-employed. Thus it is impossible to gain even the most rudimentary impressions of the size of an employer class, and again there is no indication of the numbers in general clerical and retail employment.

Table 1.3 **Main employment categories for men 1911**

Code	Description	Number employed	Percentage
X	Metals	12,549	56.3
	(including: iron & steel production	1,485	6.7)
	general engineering	5,935	26.6)
	shipbuilding	4,297	19.3)
VI	Transport	2,305	10.3
XII	Building	1,248	5.6
	(including: house building	1,147	5.1)
V	Commercial (including clerks)	937	4.2
III	Professional	374	1.7

Source: Census of England and Wales, Table 13, 1911

(ii) Social and Economic Structure

Moreover, cyclical unemployment, unpaid holidays and short-time working make pre-war income levels difficult to pinpoint, particularly as wage increases negotiated when the order books were full, were followed by cuts as the local economy took one of its periodic downturns. Nevertheless, during the first decade of the twentieth century the pay of a skilled worker can be said to have averaged between 30/- to 36/- per 54 hour week, whilst labourers earned between 18/- to 20/- per week³⁸, bringing them close to the subsistence levels identified in Rowntree's survey of working class living standards³⁹.

What was judged to be an average labourer's weekly budget, excluding food and clothing, was published in the *Barrow News* in 1904⁴⁰:

Rent	5/6d
Fuel and light	2/-
Club	6d
Newspaper	3d
Tobacco	3d
<hr/>	
Total	8/6d

Whilst the outgoings of individual families would vary, the figures for rent (typical of Barrow's comparatively high rent levels), and fuel and light, can be taken as a reasonably representative estimate and illustrates the problems faced by low-income families. According to these calculations, from a basic wage of 19/-, a labourer would be left with approximately 10/6d per week to feed and clothe his family at a time when the cost of living was between 5% and 10% higher than other towns with similar wage levels, and rose by 11.6% between 1900-1914⁴¹. Additionally, due to the scarcity of waged employment for married women, most labourers needed overtime in order to survive⁴², a factor which undermines poverty line calculations that make the assumption that basic-rate earnings were normal or adequate. However, Elizabeth Roberts contends that married women could work on a casual, part-time basis, and although it is impossible to quantify these earnings, 'their financial contributions to their families could be of considerable significance'⁴³.

Oral evidence suggests that the working class saw themselves divided by income levels, and one respondent, the son of a coachman and a baker by trade, clearly identifies three broad groups. For example, he discusses 'the people of the ordinary working class', and is at pains to differentiate these from what he terms 'the rich' and 'the poor' among the working class⁴⁴. According to this respondent, the important people of Barrow were thought to be those with a good job and some money, a 'good job' being defined as a businessman, the head of a large company, or the owner of two or three houses. This raises an interesting point. Many craftsmen were able to save substantially, particularly between 1909 and 1914 when overtime was plentiful, and 'the object was to buy a house, and then gradually a row of houses'⁴⁵, letting them out, and as landlords, forming part of 'the rich' working class of the town. It is unlikely however, that house ownership alone would have classified them among the town's 'important' people as, according to contemporary accounts, artisans in their Sunday best could never be mistaken for

middle class⁴⁶. The evidence suggests significant income differentials within the working-class, the rents received by working class landlords elevating them to an income bracket above the levels of the 'ordinary' craftsmen.

Although Barrow's upper middle and professional class was small, income differentials created 'an immense distance between the work people and the lower paid office workers on the one hand, and the higher management on the other'⁴⁷.

Table 1.4 **Municipal Chief Officer Salary Levels**

Officer	Date	Annual Salary £
Town Clerk	1907	600
Borough Treasurer	1887	500
Treasurer's Chief Assistant	1904	250
Borough Surveyor	1899	600

Compiled from figures published in the Barrow News, 7 January 1922

Table 1.4 gives examples of the salaries of some of the Corporation's Chief Officers at around the turn of the century, and although these salaries were high, there were equally significant income differentials between those of the professional and upper middle class and those at the top of the Vickers hierarchy. For example, by December 1913, forty of those described as 'higher staff' at Vickers were paid an average of £1,054 per annum, a figure inclusive of bonuses⁴⁸.

Unfortunately very little evidence survives of the income levels of Barrow's lower and 'middling' middle classes, but the available information on local incomes does comply with D'Aeth's categorisation (Table 1.1). Skilled workers for example were unlikely to have earned over £2 per week, whilst the Corporation's Chief Officers salaries brought them into Group F. However, although extremely high, the salaries of Vickers' higher administrators would not categorise them among 'the rich' (Group G), but formed instead, an elite of Group F. Thus it seems reasonable to assume that D'Aeth's categories and income levels for the lower middle class, small businessmen and the lower professionals are a reasonable guide to those of their counterparts in Barrow.

THE WAR AND INCOME LEVELS

As an important munitions centre, the town's population was expanded considerably by the influx of munitions workers during the war years (see Table 1.5), and whilst the accuracy of these statistics and the consequences of the rapidly expanding population are examined in the next chapter, income levels are discussed below.

Table 1.5 **Estimated population size 1913-1919**

1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
65,257	68,523	75,368	83,179	83,179	83,179	73,627

Source: Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Account Books 1913-19

The wages of many of Barrow's workers rose during the war, particularly for those in the shipyard, and some examples of 1915 rates quoted by Todd include: coppersmiths 45 /-; turners 43 /-; fitters and blacksmiths 42 /-; machinists 39 /-; capstan hands 36 /- and drillers 35 /-. However, whilst female machinists earned 23/9d per week in 1916, some female fitters only earned 12 /-, contrasting sharply with a male fitter's wage of 38 /- per week, boosted by payments under the Premium Bonus Scheme and generally increasing a man's wage by 25%. Wage levels continued to rise, and by the end of the war the Engineering Joint Trades Committee asserted that the basic wage in the shell shop had increased from the 1914 level of 28 /- to 56/6d, together with an extra 2 to 3 shillings for skilled men⁴⁹.

Again, little is known of changes to the salaries of Vickers technical and clerical staff, but all staff were paid a cost of living bonus which exceeded that paid to workmen⁵⁰. Additionally, although information is sparse, the incomes of the management grades rose substantially, and an average annual salary of £940 in 1913, for example, had risen to £1,426 by the end of the war, an increase of 52%. However, for the 'higher staff', rising bonus rates and salaries combined to give an average annual salary of £1,822, an increase of around 73%. Turning to the Chief Officers of the Borough Council, in addition to salary increases from turn of the century levels shown in Table 1.4, they were also paid substantial war bonuses. Examples are given in Table 1.6.

Table 1.6 **Municipal Chief Officers' Salaries, 1922**

Position	Bonus £	Total annual salary £
Town Clerk	255	993
Borough Treasurer	247.5	907.5
Chief Medical Officer	240	840
Borough Engineer	240	840
Electrical Engineer	240	840
Director of Education	240	840
Chief Constable	----	800

Source: published in the Barrow News, 7 January 1922

It should be noted that these figures and those of Table 1.4 are compiled from a document leaked to the local press and published at a time when Chief Officer salary levels were a contentious issue. By virtue of not being intended for publication, these figures are likely to be reasonably accurate, and whilst other salary levels revealed as the issue was fought out in the local press over the following months provide useful insights, they should be treated with greater caution. They do suggest however, that other salaries came close to these levels. The Headmaster of the Municipal Secondary School, for example, is said to have received £800 per annum, whilst the Headmistress of the Girls' Secondary School earned £600 rising to £700 per annum⁵¹. Other figures illustrate the large differences between the incomes of Chief Officers and lesser local government officials. For example, whilst the Treasurer's Chief Assistant's annual salary had more than doubled from the 1904 level to £510⁵², the Chief Librarian's salary, including bonus, was a mere £385 by comparison, relegating him to the ranks of the lower professionals⁵³, demonstrating that although professional hierarchies were extending further down the social scale, they were far from equal in status or rewards⁵⁴. Although evidence of lower and middle middle class incomes is sparse, the same source reveals that, whilst Corporation workmen's wages had risen to 150% of their pre-war level, they were outstripped by the salaries of technical and clerical staff, which rose by 170%.

It is unlikely that war-time inflation had a detrimental impact on the living standards of this upper middle class of businessmen and senior administrators, whilst income differentials between them and the middle class proper, far from being eroded, were probably extended. For many of the working classes, rising wage levels, boosted further by payments under the Premium Bonus Scheme, generated unprecedented prosperity,

whilst the expansion of employment opportunities for women served to further raise the living standards of working class families. However, the payment of cost of living bonuses at a higher rate to clerical staff than to workmen by both Vickers and the Corporation, suggests that income differentials may not have been eroded to the extent that is generally accepted, although the lack of statistical data makes this impossible to explore further. However, the issues of the salaries of higher professionals in Vickers and the Corporation, and the financial strategies adopted by local employers to cope with the effects of the depression, will be dealt with at length in a later chapter.

THE INTER-WAR YEARS

The impact of the Armistice was immediate and profound. Thousands of munitions workers were discharged, but at such a rate that the rapidity with which the gun mounting shops emptied remained an enduring memory for one contemporary⁵⁵. Nevertheless there was considerable post-war optimism, with enough merchant shipbuilding work alone to provide jobs for the next ten years⁵⁶. However, depression set in rapidly and by late 1920 the steelworks were on an 'involuntary holiday'⁵⁷ and a total of 1,977 insured workers were registered as unemployed⁵⁸. Early in 1921 ship orders began to be cancelled, and by the end of the year very few men were left in the Engine Department, and all single men were on short-time. By 1922, apart from an oil tanker awaiting repair, a barge for the Furness Railway and the suspended work on the Cunard Line's *Servia*, there was no work in the shipyard⁵⁹ and lay-offs continued, to the point, 'probably in 1922 or 1923', where only one man was left in the Engine Shop⁶⁰.

(i) The Clerical and Retail Sectors

However, although industry, and manual workers in particular, are generally the main focus for studies of unemployment, sufficient evidence survives in Barrow to give some additional insights into the effects of depression on clerical and retail workers. Within Vickers for example, the technical and clerical staff were possibly as badly affected by unemployment as the workers themselves. By 1922 all the staff, even the married men in the Marine Engine Office were on short-time, and witnesses describe a time when there was no-one left in the Engine Drawing Office, recalling images of deserted offices where a man could stand and hear the town hall clock strike⁶¹. At this time the total workforce, including staff, was estimated to have fallen to 3,189⁶².

The effects of depression were also felt rapidly by Barrow's Co-Operative Society's retail staff, as indicated by Table 1.7.

Table 1.7 Barrow Co-operative Society Staffing Levels 1913-1926

	1913	1919	1922	1924	1926
Distribution	279	348	287	203	208
Production	89	154	132	79	55

Source: 'Co-operative Society Statistics', with thanks to Gillian Lonergan

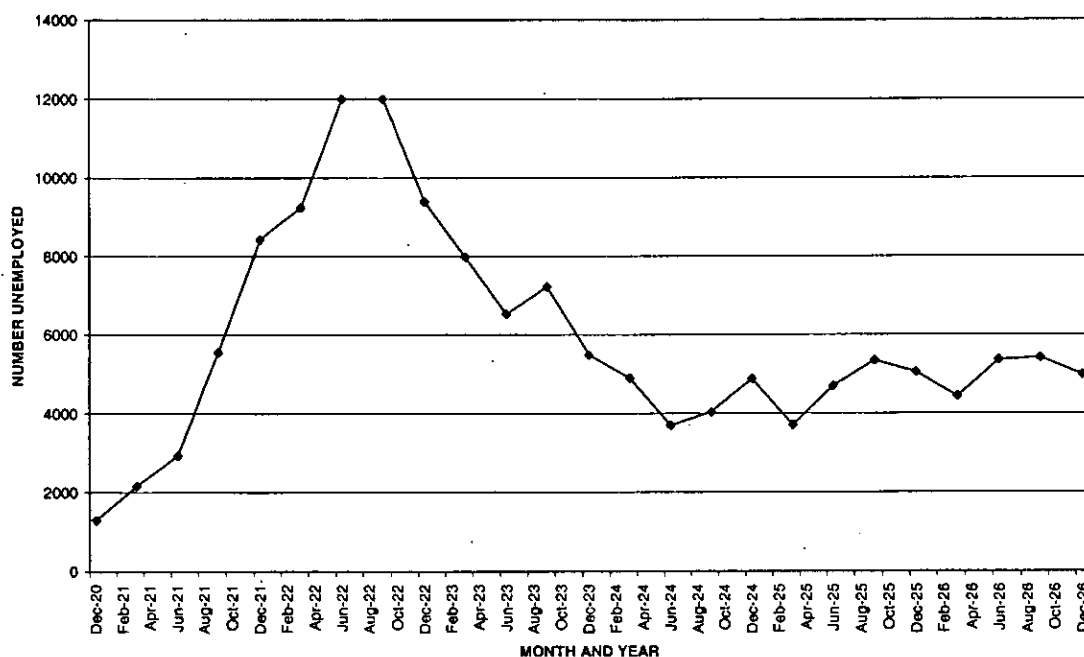
Short-time working was first introduced as early as September 1920 in the dressmaking department, but by April 1921 various departments began laying staff off for one week at a time. However, women bore the brunt of staff cuts at this point, all the female staff in the hosiery department for example, being laid off in order to avoid the suspension of the whole department. Throughout 1921 short-time working, staff and wage cuts continued, but suspensions were intensified in April 1922 and continued into 1923. By September 1923 all 'superfluous' employees were to be 'dispensed with'⁶³, and by 1924 staffing levels were reduced to 73% of the pre-war level.

Although such evidence of unemployment among retail and clerical staff is sparse, it does nevertheless indicate that two of the largest and most prosperous employers of the town, Vickers and the Co-op, had to shed a large proportion of their staff in order to survive the depression. It can thus be surmised that smaller businesses with fewer assets were compelled to adopt a similar policy, and although impossible to quantify, this evidence suggests that there was considerable unemployment among Barrow's lower and middle middle classes. This creates a situation somewhat at odds with McKibbin's assertion that throughout the inter-war years in general, but 'even at the very worst of the depression, unemployment [among this group] was very low'⁶⁴.

(ii) The Industrial Sector

Chart 1.2 shows unemployment levels among Barrow's insured male workers between 1920 and 1926.

Chart 1.2 Quarterly unemployment totals of insured men 1920-1926



The sources for these statistics are threefold. Although comprehensive statistics were published in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* from 1923, at this point the crisis in Barrow had already peaked. Vital figures for the earlier period can be found in documents compiled by the Corporation, the Board of Guardians and the Local Employment Committee as they prepared their case to appeal for Ministry of Health assistance. These statistics however have two major shortfalls. Firstly, they are for the insured unemployed only and omit the vast numbers of uninsured men out of work, in addition to which they do not provide details of unemployment levels for the second half of 1922. However, an impression of the full scale of unemployment between June and December 1922 can be gleaned from two sources. A press report of May 1922 estimates approximately 20,000 men were unemployed at that time, the total swollen by the five to six thousand men locked out of Vickers during the May engineering crisis⁶⁵. Significantly, this figure cannot be dismissed as sensationalism on the part of the press, as the same figure was quoted in a report from the Mayor and Town Clerk to the

Ministry of Health in December 1922. The report, which stated that unemployment was still rising, and of the 20,000 out of work, around 12,000 were skilled men⁶⁶, can be judged to be a reasonably accurate reflection of the situation at that time. The Corporation, whilst seeking to convey the urgency of the town's economic crisis, could ill-afford to over-state their case and thus lose credibility with the Ministries of Health and Labour, who were sceptical, well-informed and intent on minimising the crisis, and would seize on exaggerated figures as the opportunity to do so.

The Chart illustrates that unemployment rose rapidly from late 1920 and reached a peak in the second half of 1922. The figure of 20,000 quoted in the Corporation correspondence represented a staggering 73% of the town's total male working age population, and is comparable to the very worst experiences of the early 1930's. Although falling again nearly as rapidly during 1923, the rate fluctuated at a relatively high level throughout the rest of the period, averaging 4,654 men per month, or 17% of insured male workers at 1921 levels⁶⁷. Unemployment rates among women and juveniles do not show the same dramatic rise. The average monthly unemployment total peaked in 1922 at 677 for women and 605 for juveniles, but fell to an average of 199 per month for women and 241 for juveniles by 1926. However, these figures apply to the insured unemployed only, and reflect the result of discriminatory benefit entitlements rather than falling unemployment rates.

(iii) Occupational Structure

These statistics support Marshall's view that Barrow was in a desperate situation as a result of its dependence on a few insecure industries and its distance from materials and markets⁶⁸. Table 1.8 lists the occupational groups which employed over 5% of the male workforce between 1911 and 1931, and also the smaller professional groups. Direct comparison of the census tables, however, is impossible, as the general headings are not uniform and the grouping of occupations within them was an arbitrary process⁶⁹. The calculations are based on aggregating the occupation groups used in the 1921 census, with the exception of the sub-divisions of the metalworking industry, which were undifferentiated in that year.

Table 1.8 Main employment categories of men 1911-1931

Category	1911		1921		1931	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Metals	12,549	56.3	11,043	42.8	12,003	60.0
iron & steel	1,485	6.7	-	-	1,568	7.8
engineering	5,935	26.6	-	-	9,821	49.1
shipbuilding	4,297	19.3	-	-	-	-
Transport	2,305	10.3	2,029	7.9	1,828	9.1
Commercial/financial	937	4.2	1,422	5.5	2,167	10.8
Clerks/draughtsmen	-	-	1,287	5.0	-	-
Building	1,248	5.6	724	2.8	629	3.1
house building	1,147	5.1	-	-	-	-
Public admin/defence	-	-	368	1.4	875	4.4
Professional	374	1.7	318	1.2	217	1.1
Employers	-	-	589	2.2	-	-

Source: Census of England and Wales, Occupation Tables 1911, 1921, 1931

In addition to the absence of change in the principal employers and the very limited variation in the proportion of the population employed by them, the table demonstrates an absolute lack of diversification during the period. Despite efforts to attract new industry, the town's geographical situation and lack of natural resources militated against this. One major change is the apparent expansion of the commercial and financial sector, but this is attributable to changing job definitions and rules of classification within the census rather than economic growth. The only significant change was the collapse of the building industry, suggesting the war and depression were influential in this, although by 1931 the industry was showing signs of a minor upturn. Women's occupational groups pose similar analytical problems (Table 1.9).

Table 1.9 Main employment categories of women 1911-1931

Category	1911		1921		1931	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Domestic service	1,233	25.4	1,330	21.8	1,039	20.8
Shops	-	-	816	13.3	-	-
Professional	458	9.4	538	9.1	241	4.8
teaching	318	6.5	404	6.6	-	-
Clerks/typists	-	-	520	8.5	-	-
Textile goods	691	14.2	487	8.0	193	3.9
Textile manuf.	457	9.4	266	4.4	-	-
Food manufacture	381	7.8	219	3.6	218	4.4
Commercial/financial	90	1.8	-	-	1,245	24.5
Public admin/defence	-	-	76	1.2	539	10.8

Source: Census of England and Wales, Occupation Tables 1911, 1921, 1931

Again, there is very little change in the nature of women's employment patterns within this twenty year period. Domestic service, remarkably resilient, remained the main employer, but the most significant change was the loss of the local textile industry, such as it was. The problems inherent in categorisation are particularly evident, changes to major categories concealing trends in employment patterns, and prohibiting any assessment of changes in employment levels within the teaching profession, the clerical and retail or commercial and financial trades. It is possible however, to examine the proportion of women in paid employment (Table 1.10).

Table 1.10 Women as a percentage of the occupied workforce 1911-1931

	1911	1921	1931
Number employed	4,854	6,109	4,991
% of the total workforce	17.9	19.0	20.0
Married women as % of total workforce	1.9	2.1	n/a

Source: Census of England and Wales, Occupation Tables 1911, 1921, 1931

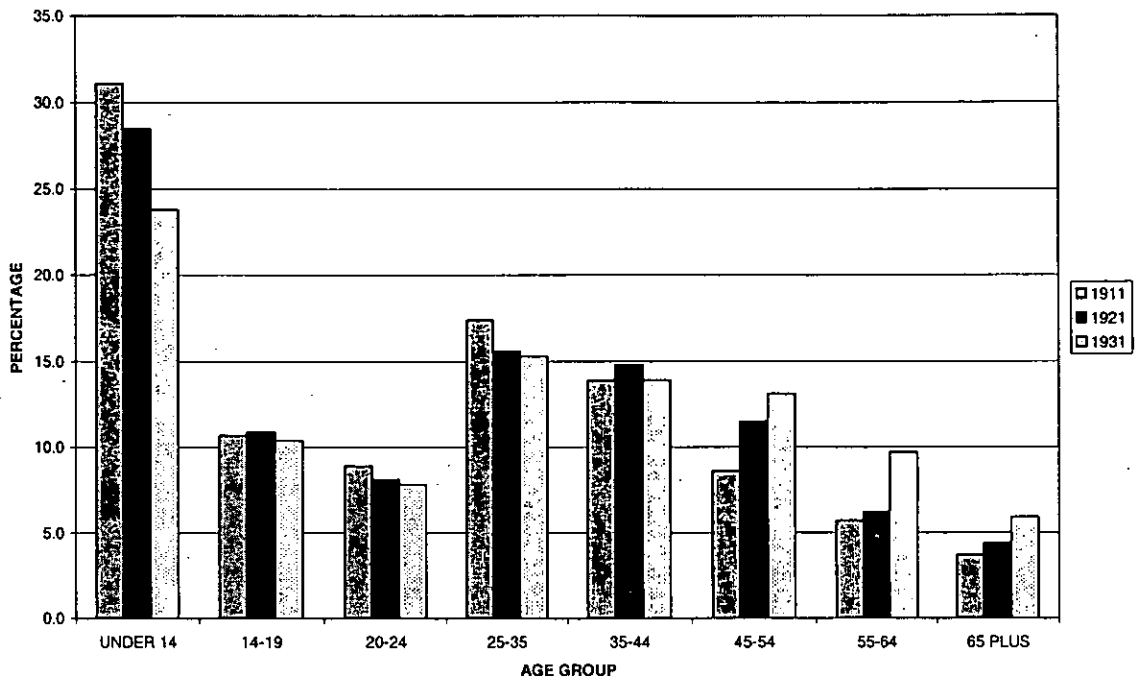
It would appear that during the immediate post-war period, employment prospects for women had improved slightly from their earlier level, but this was short-lived and thus overall the situation saw little change, and the percentage of working women in the town remained approximately 10% below the national average. Additionally, although the 1931 census does not differentiate between married and single women in waged employment, the percentage of married women is unlikely to have risen, given the prevailing economic climate and absence of new industries.

(iv) Demographic Change

The demographic impact of high unemployment was profound, and Barrow's population fell from 74,244 to 66,202 between 1921 and 1931, a decrease of 10.8%⁷⁰. The implications for the age structure of the population are indicated in Chart 1.3.

Chart 1.3

Age structure of Barrow's population 1911-1931



Source: Census of England and Wales, Occupation Tables 1911, 1921, 1931

In addition to an increasingly ageing population as a result of falling birth and death rates, the chart indicates both a collapse of in-migration and a degree of out-migration, particularly among young adults. Table 1.11 examines the statistics of these age groups in greater detail.

Table 1.11 The size of the population aged 15 to 44 years 1911-1931

	Age Group		
	15-24	25-34	35-44
1911	11,346	11,122	8,847
1921	11,376	11,576	10,956
1931	10,744	10,135	9,193

Source: Census of England and Wales, Occupation Tables 1911, 1921, 1931

The table indicates that the 25-34 cohort of 1921 had fallen by 2,383 in 1931, a massive 20.6% decrease. Similarly, but less dramatically, the 15-24 cohort of 1921 had fallen by 1,241, or 11%, in 1931. These statistics demonstrate that Barrow lost a considerable proportion of young adults and their families during the 1920's, and although it is

impossible to calculate how many later returned as economic conditions improved, oral evidence suggests the demographic impact was long lasting. For example, the policy of not taking on apprentices during the depression created an age gap in Vickers, noticeable until the late 1950's⁷¹, whilst Elizabeth Roberts' research identifies families that were permanently separated. Whilst Griffiths asserts that Wigan experienced the highest rate of population loss of all the Lancastrian County Boroughs in the 1920s⁷², this distinction does in fact belong to Barrow. Indeed, as a consequence of the town's enduring dependency on the notoriously unstable iron and steel, shipbuilding and engineering industries, the town experienced the third largest decrease of population in England and Wales between 1921 and 1931. Whilst the Rhondda encountered the highest rate of population loss at 13.1%, and Merthyr Tydfil occupied second place at 11.3%, Barrow came a close third⁷³ with a population loss of 10.8%⁷⁴.

CONCLUSION

To summarise these trends, from the late nineteenth century to the outbreak of the First World War the population of Barrow had increased steadily despite alternating periods of boom and slump and a steady rate of out-migration. As a result of the town's dependency on traditional heavy industries the population was predominantly working class, which appears to have been divided into three broad groups perceived as the 'poor', 'ordinary' and 'rich', the latter category including a group of relatively wealthy working class landlords. Thus income differentials within the working class could be considerable, particularly as the basic wages of most unskilled men were below subsistence levels during the pre-war period, necessitating overtime working to provide a barely adequate standard of living. Another important aspect of working class Barrow was the limited amount of waged employment open to women, and as a result, the proportion of women in the town's workforce remained small and approximately 10% below the national average. The dearth of work for married women further reduced the earning capacity of many working class families.

The middle and professional classes were dwarfed in comparison, and whilst little is known of income differentials between the lower middle classes and the middle class proper, there was a wide gulf between them and the small number of wealthy professionals and administrators who formed a distinct upper middle class. Thus

Barrow's pre-war socio-economic divisions appear to comply with D'Aeth's categorization, and reflect extremes of wealth and poverty.

The war boosted working class income levels, and created unprecedented employment opportunities for women, whilst virtually eliminating unemployment and raising the living standards of the majority of the population. Again there is little information on changes to middle class incomes. However, the payment of cost of living allowances to the technical and clerical staff of both Vickers and the Corporation at a higher rate than that paid to workmen, suggests that working and lower middle class differentials may not have been eroded to the extent generally accepted. However, the war boosted the incomes of the town's higher professionals, the salaries of those in Vickers rising by between 50% and 70%, whilst the Corporation's Chief Officers were paid substantial war bonuses. As a result, the income differentials between the higher professionals and the middle class proper were likely to have been extended rather than eroded.

The initial post-war optimism of 1920 was short-lived and depression struck and deepened with a rapidity unprecedented even in Barrow, where cyclic downturns were the norm. Accelerating unemployment had eroded the economic gains of the war years by the end of 1921, but the May engineering crisis of 1922 threw thousands more out of work and created the worst economic crisis in the town's history. Studies of unemployment tend to focus on manual workers, but it has been possible to challenge to some extent, the established opinion that the middle classes experienced less unemployment than their working class counterparts. Although impossible to quantify, the evidence from Vickers and the Co-operative Society suggests that those in the clerical and retail trades were perhaps proportionately, if not numerically, as badly affected as manual workers.

As a result of the depression, local industry was unable to diversify, and rather than attracting new industries, Barrow witnessed the demise of its textile industry and decline of the building trade. Consequently there was little change to the occupational structure of the town, heavy industries remained the main employers and women continued to represent a small minority of the workforce. Additionally, whilst in areas of some economic growth or solvency, technological improvements had influenced changes in the composition and structure of the working classes by reducing the demand for skilled workers and expanding the numbers of semi-skilled, the depression inhibited

these developments in Barrow. However, the nature of the census tables conceals changes in the composition of the middle social groups and the lower middle class in particular, giving no information on the teaching profession, or the clerical and retail trades, although it can be ascertained that the professional class remained small.

Thus Barrow is an example of a town in which specialisation in a few unstable industries generated unemployment figures of epic proportions. It should be stressed that an unemployment rate of 73% equals the very worse experiences of the 1930's and stimulated migration from the area at a level which gives Barrow the highest rate of population loss in England between 1921-1931. Moreover, the speed of the transition from the new-found prosperity of the war years to mass unemployment and distress was very rapid and possibly without parallel. Population pressure, the scale of unemployment and the speed with which it escalated exerted a massive influence on the economic, social and political life of the town, and the strategies and debates concerning how to deal with the crisis form an important part of this study, beginning with the examination of housing issues.

¹ J.D. Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution* (Barrow-in-Furness, 1981); N. Todd, 'A History of labour in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness c.1890-1920', M. Litt thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976; E. Roberts, 'Working class standards of living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 30 (1977), pp. 306-319.

² Held at the Cambridge University Archive, Cambridge.

³ R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), v.

⁴ *Ibid*, 1.

⁵ B. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-18* (Leamington Spa, 1987), 74.

⁶ D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven, 1998), 113.

⁷ *Ibid*, 106.

⁸ *Ibid*, 104.

⁹ R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Harmondsworth, 1971); *A Ragged Schooling* (Manchester, 1976).

¹⁰ D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven, 1998), 126.

¹¹ P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class* (Cambridge, 1994), 2.

¹² B. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-18* (Leamington Spa, 1987), 76.

¹³ Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 118.

¹⁴ N. Kirk, *Labour and Society in Britain and the USA Vol. 2* (Aldershot, 1994), 288.

¹⁵ B. Waites, 'The effect of the First World War on class and status in England, 1910-20', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976), 29, 30.

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- ¹⁶ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 44-45.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 106.
- ¹⁸ Waites, 'The effect of the First World War', 38.
- ¹⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 47-8.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, 47.
- ²¹ H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989), 2.
- ²² E. Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census* (HMSO, 1996), 156.
- ²³ *Ibid*, 161.
- ²⁴ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 46.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, 51-53.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, 115.
- ²⁷ Kirk, *Labour and Society*, 294.
- ²⁸ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 115.
- ²⁹ J.E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-79* (London, 1984), 53.
- ³⁰ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 106.
- ³¹ Cronin, *Labour and Society*, 53.
- ³² D. Stark, 'The origins and development of a single industry town: Barrow-in-Furness 1890-1910', MA dissertation, Lancaster, 1972, 11.
- ³³ N. Todd, 'A History of labour in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness c.1890-1920', M. Litt thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976, 130.
- ³⁴ Census of England and Wales, County of Lancaster, 1911.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*.
- ³⁶ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 111.
- ³⁷ Census of England and Wales, County of Lancaster, 1911.
- ³⁸ Todd, 'A History of labour', 132.
- ³⁹ Roberts, 'Working class standards of living', 310.
- ⁴⁰ Reproduced in Stark, 'origins and development', 19.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*.
- ⁴² Recollections of H. de C. Falle, 6 Nov 1957 on period 1899-1914, 'Histories of Barrow', Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD 581.
- ⁴³ Roberts, 'Working class standards of living', 311.

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- ⁴⁴ B1B, 29, 'Social History of Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster 1880-1930', E. Roberts Collection, Lancaster University, Lancaster.
- ⁴⁵ de C. Falle, 6 Nov 1957, CHA, VHD 581.
- ⁴⁶ Roberts, *Ragged Schooling*, 39.
- ⁴⁷ Interview with V.H. Crozier, Assistant Commercial Manager of Vickers, 1959, 'Barrow Interviews: sundry recollections for J. D. Scott', Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD597.
- ⁴⁸ Report by Messrs Atkinson & Dallow, 1923, 'Barrow Works Report 1923', Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD845.
- ⁴⁹ Todd, 'A History of labour', 169-70.
- ⁵⁰ Atkinson & Dallow, 'Barrow Works Report 1923', CHA, VHD845.
- ⁵¹ *Barrow News*, 4 March 1922, BRO.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*
- ⁵³ *Barrow News*, 7 January 1922, BRO.
- ⁵⁴ Perkin, *Professional Society*, 3.
- ⁵⁵ Interview with W. Parker, Deputy Chief of Armament Design, 'Barrow Interviews', CHA, VHD597.
- ⁵⁶ Interview with Mr. Rodger, 1959, 'Barrow Interviews', CHA, VHD597.
- ⁵⁷ Todd, 'A History of labour', 187.
- ⁵⁸ 'Financial and Employment Position, 1922', Barrow-in-Furness Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/42 BOX 46 F2.
- ⁵⁹ Notes from 'Peace products at Barrow' Minutes Books, 1917-25, Cambridge Historical Archive. VHD 582.
- ⁶⁰ Mr. Rodger, 1959, 'Barrow Interviews', CHA, VHD597.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² Hand written note 'a brief history of Vickers', for *Vickers News*, 19/9/1924, 'Histories of Barrow', Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD 581).
- ⁶³ Barrow Co-operative Society Minute Book 1920-24, September 1923, Barrow-in-Furness Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDB 24/1/1-34.
- ⁶⁴ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 112.
- ⁶⁵ *Barrow News*, 15 May 1922, BRO.
- ⁶⁶ Report of Mayor and Town Clerk to Ministry of Health, 1 December 1922, 'Barrow-in-Furness Union: overdrawn Treasurer's Account 1921-1923', National Archives, Kew, MH68/102.
- ⁶⁷ Calculated from the Census of England and Wales, 1921, Table 18.
- ⁶⁸ Marshall, *Furness*, 223.
- ⁶⁹ Higgs, *the Census*, 156.
- ⁷⁰ Census of England and Wales 1931, County of Lancaster (Part 1), Table 2.

⁷¹ W. Parker, 1959, 'Barrow Interviews', CHA, VHD597.

⁷² T. Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes c. 1880-1930* (Oxford, 2001), 5.

⁷³ T.H. Bainbridge, 'Barrow-in-Furness: A population study', *Economic Geography*, 15, 1939, 382.

⁷⁴ Census of England and Wales, County of Lancaster (Part 1) Table 2.

HOUSING AND THE IMPETUS FOR REFORM

INTRODUCTION

Housing was a key issue during the period under study, and this chapter will examine the impact of war and depression on the type and condition of Barrow's housing, together with patterns of ownership, rent levels, and degrees of homelessness. In addition to providing a background for the analysis of public health issues in the following chapter, this chapter will investigate the changing municipal role and the impact of legislation beyond the immediate post-war period through to 1926. By not confining the study to a context of wartime social unrest, this analysis will provide more measured insights into the first attempts at state intervention in housing, together with other local pressures which might inhibit reform and re-shape attitudes. This will begin with a discussion of general housing trends and debates to provide a context for the Barrow case-study.

Housing development was closely related to economic and social conditions. In addition to national trade and investment cycles, demand was shaped by local levels of unemployment, incomes and rents, together with family and migration patterns. Factors such as changing levels of need, regional housing traditions, costs, rents, patterns of ownership and employer building (and, increasingly, differing levels of local authority participation) generated considerable diversity of experience, and this emphasises the value of a local case-study. In areas heavily dependent on traditional heavy industry, the cyclic economy and fluctuating employment prospects created an ebb and flow of migration, which in turn was reflected in the housing market. The transformation of such areas into important wartime munitions centres exacerbated existing housing problems, with an intensification of overcrowding, rising rents and mounting levels of industrial and social unrest. The crisis continued into the post-war period, and was met by a series of housing experiments representing a radical departure from previous policy. This chapter will analyse the response to economic and social pressures, and the impact of legislation on housing policy in Barrow between 1914 and 1926.

Early industrialists had provided workers' housing to attract and retain a stable workforce, but by the mid-nineteenth century most company schemes represented an outlet for capital during times of expansion rather than a social obligation, with few

employers concerned with raising standards. In the absence of effective intervention in the market, the squalor, disease and overcrowding associated with urbanisation had raised concerns for social stability and also, by the early twentieth century, concerns for physical deterioration and national efficiency. Model housing represented one response to existing conditions, combining a practical solution to environmental problems with social awareness and the desire for instruction and improvement; but even in the new century, substantial and well-publicised initiatives like Port Sunlight or Bourneville remained exceptional. But less ambitious ideas about the improvement of basic norms through legislation, increasingly evident in mid-Victorian local bye-laws, were embodied at national level in the 1875 Public Health Act, and later incorporated in the model bye-laws produced as guidelines by the Local Government Board¹. By the first decade of the twentieth century minimum Government standards were enforced by legislation and upheld by financial penalties².

In general terms, by the beginning of the twentieth century the majority of house buyers were small-scale investors buying to let, and most accommodation was provided by private landlords. Typically, working-class housing was differentiated according to income levels, and the greater job security and higher earnings of skilled craftsmen gave access to better housing. In contrast, as a result of cyclical employment and casual work, many of the unskilled gravitated towards the worst housing and the 'doubling up' of families was a common necessity, conforming 'to a national picture of endemic poverty and insufficient income for good housing'³. On the other hand, the inability to increase rents to sustain a competitive rate of return, together with steadily rising interest rates undermined owners' profits, and investment in housing fell in favour of more attractive alternatives⁴. By the outbreak of the First World War the housing market was in decline as a result of diminishing returns, lack of investment and the high cost of materials. However, the outlook for areas of shipbuilding and heavy engineering such as Barrow or Clydeside, subject to earnings and job fluctuations and uncertain demand, was particularly bleak.

The war intensified existing housing problems, many areas experiencing severe overcrowding, whilst living conditions, particularly for tenants and lodgers, deteriorated further as scarce resources and inflated prices inhibited repairs. Additionally, the war radically changed the nature of the housing problem, supporting Marwick's assertion that participation in the war had enabled the working classes, and the more under-

privileged sections in particular, to press their demands and improve their living standards. The Clydeside rent strikes of 1915 for example, succeeded in fusing industrial and housing issues, and turned local dissatisfaction and unrest into a national campaign against both the state and the employers. The Rent Restrictions Act, 1915, illustrates the twin aspects of housing: as both a commodity in its own right and an essential investment to maintain a stable labour force. However, although freezing rents to 1914 levels, the Act did little on behalf of the poor and worst housed, and failed to quell housing unrest. Additionally, rent controls had little impact on major industrial and financial interests, but once housing was seen as contributing to a stable and efficient society, the small private landlord became vulnerable. Unable to develop a distinct political voice or apply national political pressure to protect their interests, this group was sacrificed by government policies which gave priority to tenants' rights and industrial stability⁵. Thus wartime rent controls redistributed income from landlord to tenant, but discouraged investment in housing.

Continuing industrial unrest and increasing discontent prompted the Government to set up a Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, and its report of June 1917 identified poor housing as an important factor contributing to mounting unrest. As a result, the Ministry of Munitions embarked on a housing programme to relieve pressure on housing stock and defuse the industrial and social crisis, but it 'was regarded less as a welfare measure than a compelling necessity'⁶. Initially, the solution was thought to lie in the provision of temporary housing, but this was quickly abandoned as uneconomical and a waste of resources. However, the building of permanent housing raised important policy questions. Building plans were inhibited by an anticipated post-war population fall in these centres, which would create a housing surplus and thus reduce rent and property values. As a result, the private sector was reluctant to invest in such areas and local authorities, wary of high costs and future falling values, sought financial protection. To meet this need, a number of subsidies were devised for local authorities, but the government was to pay the full cost of Ministry built schemes⁷.

Abrams argues that government intervention in munitions workers' housing both generated an impetus for reform and created the machinery with which to implement it and, coupled with the unprecedented level of popular participation, should have stimulated radical post-war change. However, whilst wartime building was restricted by lack of investment and high labour and materials costs, the economic consequences of

peace were almost as drastic, inhibiting reform and thus undermining the participation concept⁸.

Acute housing shortages and high inflation had necessitated the continuation of rent restrictions into the post-war period, when The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 (The Addison Act), represented a major turning point. Seen as the first experiment in the State provision of working-class housing, the Act encouraged local authorities to supply housing for the first time, and any losses above that which could be met by a 1d rate were to be borne by the Treasury. Although a radical departure from previous policies, the Act was never intended as a general rent subsidy, and was essentially a temporary measure intended to cope with the wartime housing shortage and inflated costs until the market recovered. Post-war housing policy, and the failure and legacy of the 1919 Act, are much debated and variously interpreted.

Swenarton contends for example, that housing became an instrument of public policy for the first time, and describes the 'homes fit for heroes' campaign as a major political and ideological weapon of the state. He asserts that a dynamic housing policy became the means to defuse the considerable unrest of 1919, of ensuring a successful transition from war to peace, and the restoration of both working class confidence in the government and social stability. Consequently the 1919 Housing Act proposed a large scale working class building programme at a standard previously reserved for the middle classes, to be financed by the state, with local authorities becoming major suppliers of working-class housing for the first time. However, as the depression disarmed the labour movement and altered the balance of political forces, 'the "insurance against revolution" was no longer needed', and the policy was abandoned as being an unjustifiable expense⁹.

In contrast, Bowley identified the separation of financial and administrative responsibility as a principal factor in the undermining of the 1919 Act. Although the government retained a powerful influence on planning which restricted local authority initiative, the Act provided no check on inefficient or extravagant local authorities¹⁰. Seen as too expensive in the economic climate of 1921, this first housing experiment ended with a panic-stricken rejection of financial innovation.

Beattie's interpretation¹¹ on the other hand, challenges the view that it was the loss of enthusiasm for building by many local authorities that led to the collapse of the Act, arguing that local authorities became converted to the need for municipal housing. He also asserts that the major legacy of the 1919 Act was the realisation that the private sector could not be relied upon to provide working class housing and that the shortage could not be met without state subsidies, necessitating the continued partnership of local authorities and central government. He maintains that the local authority willingness to build was an important factor in the shaping of subsequent legislation and the uneven nature of its consequences.

The 1923 Chamberlain Act represented another attempt to stimulate the private sector by offering subsidies to private builders and conformed to 'sound principles of conservative finance'¹². However, this second housing experiment was still essentially an emergency measure, based on the anticipation of a short-lived crisis and the assumption that house building would resume its pre-war pattern of private enterprise aided by a limited government subsidy. Bowley argues it represented a deliberate attempt to prevent local authorities from becoming permanent suppliers of working-class housing, whilst limited subsidies had the effect of putting new house rents beyond the means of the poorer families. It was not until the Labour Government and the Wheatley Act of 1924 that long-term planning become a reality, and local authorities gained, and retained, responsibility for supplying working-class housing¹³. Nevertheless, white collar and skilled workers were the main beneficiaries. The lowest paid remained unable to pay an economic rent and were thus reluctant to leave controlled properties, however bad the conditions, which in turn prevented filtering up and resulted in large numbers of families continuing to live in overcrowded and substandard housing.

However, in some areas the rate of house building continued to decline as many local authorities, claiming a heavy rate burden, remained reluctant to build. Additionally, despite government subsidies, 'no self-interested body would readily wish to invest in economically crippled areas ... where there were few prospects and where the high level of both local rates and rent arrears gave poor promise of security for a loan'. Thus local authorities were unable to raise housing loans in either the public or the private sectors¹⁴. Thus areas with high rates and low rateable values were forced to stop

building, with the result that subsidies became focussed on areas least in need of assistance¹⁵.

BARROW TO THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In the case of Barrow-in-Furness, the urban core of the town in 1914 consisted mainly of Victorian working-class terraced housing laid out in a grid pattern and although the streets were broad and paved, the houses opened directly on to the street with small back yards and narrow back alleys. However, they conformed to the minimum standards of model bye-laws, and were comparatively healthy and adequately built. Additionally, the tenement blocks of Barrow Island and Hindpool, four or five storeys high and built in the 1860s by the Furness Railway and the Barrow Hematite Steel Company, provided high-density working-class accommodation and suggest that the economical use of land outweighed environmental considerations in anticipation of a good return for investment. During this period, working class housing was hastily erected with varying standards of workmanship, and by the 1880s, employer philanthropy in the form of the provision of even the most basic civic amenities was virtually extinct¹⁶. Nevertheless, building was unable to keep pace with demand, with the result that overcrowding and sub-letting were endemic from the town's earliest days. The main industries of the town were established on the west and south west edge of the peninsula, and consequently the prevailing westerly winds blew fumes and smoke from the gas works, shipyard and iron and steel works indiscriminately over the main town which lay to their east. The 'better' residential areas, which lay to the north-east of the town, consisted of a few streets of semi-detached houses with gardens, which were owned or tenanted by clerks, draughtsmen and officials¹⁷. To the west, the town was protected from the sea by Walney Island, sparsely populated in Victorian times and accessible only by ferry or rowing boat.

Vickers' take-over of the Naval Construction Company in Barrow in 1897, signalled a new period of growth for shipbuilding in the town, and the need to attract and retain a stable labour force stimulated the second major phase of employer house building in Barrow. From the turn of the twentieth century, Vickers began to colonise Walney Island, building around 1,000 dwellings during 1900-01 to meet the needs of its own labour force, grading its provision to reinforce workplace hierarchies typical of shipbuilding regions¹⁸. As a result, Vickers, in addition to being the town's main

employer, became the largest local provider of working-class housing. Within a ten-year period, Vickers had created what was in effect a new town with every conceivable amenity, creating one of the most desirable residential areas, populated by Vickers workmen living in company-built houses. Unlike Lever or Cadbury however, Vickers had no enlightened schemes of profit sharing. Rents were deducted directly from wages, the company keeping financial control of all the buildings and amenities, and reaping substantial profits at every turn. Equally significant was the building of Walney Bridge, an expensive investment which provided the island with a permanent link to the mainland. However, in order to recoup the massive outlay, Vickers levied a toll on all persons crossing from either side, including the Company's own workmen who were compelled to pay on a daily basis when crossing to and from work. The company made no concessions, even following the toll riots of 1922 which are discussed later¹⁹.

Vickers houses, soundly built, well-maintained and free from industrial fumes, with flush toilets, running water and also the first area of town to have electricity, carried a high status despite the fact that amid the trappings of modernity, their ashpits were as infrequently scraped out as in the rest of the borough. In contrast Hindpool, on the opposite side of the channel, was consistently identified as the poorest area. Built originally to house the workers of the iron and steel works, its dwellings were frequently described as sub-standard, badly designed and poorly maintained, whilst the tenements were unpopular and generated many prejudices as a result of their forbidding appearance. Yet even in areas such as Hindpool and Barrow Island, some groups of streets were seen to be better than others, and other evidence, whilst testifying to the bad conditions in certain areas, saw poverty as being spread right across the borough with a mix of income groups in all housing areas²⁰, an unusual situation where, unlike Vickerstown, skilled and unskilled could live side by side and pay the same rents²¹.

Whilst many contemporaries blamed the tenant for the condition of the property, poorly maintained houses were common, and oral evidence reveals that many landlords avoided repairs and had no contact with their tenants²². The most commonly requested repairs were minor, such as window catches, toilet flushes, taps and so forth, but even these were avoided by a majority of landlords. Thus a common complaint was that the tenants found themselves 'paying money, money all the time, what do we get for it ... we've paid money all this time and nothing for it'. This respondent describes house ownership networks, which included some local Councillors who owned and let a string

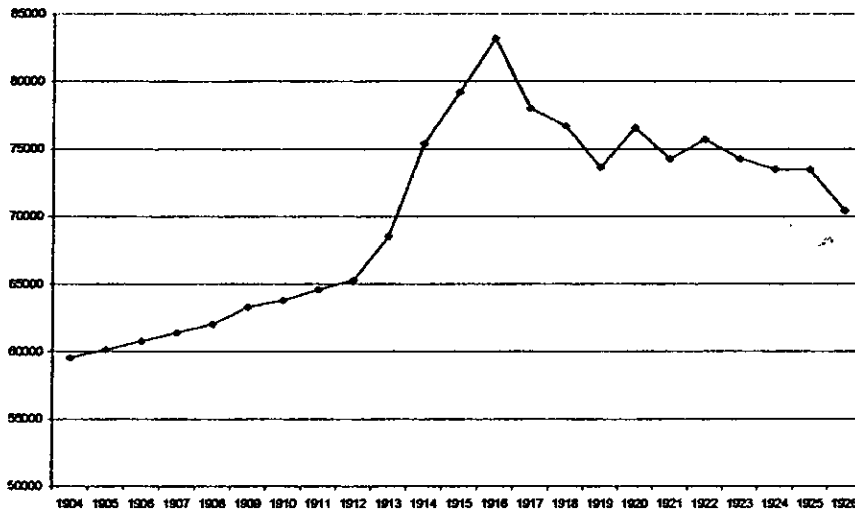
of houses. Among these, only Councillor Dockeray (an Independent) is accredited with frequent repairs, whilst doctors were listed among the worst offenders, owning 'some horrible houses'²³.

Despite poor conditions, rents were extremely high, aggravated by high land prices, rising building costs and the local authority's refusal to build working class housing. 'Beyond the provision of bare essentials, the municipal concerns of the [Council] were very limited and reflected the councillors' intentions to keep the rates low and leave as many spheres as possible – most notably housing – in the hands of private firms'²⁴. Average house rents during the pre-war period ranged from 4/6d to 7/6d per week, or expressed another way, were between 2/- and 2/6d a week higher than for similar houses in Liverpool or Manchester²⁵, whilst Vickerstown rents ranged between 5/- and 9/- per week. The combination of high rents and the housing shortage contributed to the two key features of housing in the borough: overcrowding, and a high incidence of working-class house ownership. For example, whilst a rent of 5/- per week was not uncommon before the war, if a deposit could be raised the cost of a mortgage compared favourably at around 12/- per month²⁶, making house ownership increasingly attractive to those who could raise the capital. In her study of pre-war Barrow, Elizabeth Roberts concluded that 'one of the most surprising pieces of evidence from respondents in Barrow is that of poor families placing such importance on housing that they managed to buy their own houses about the turn of the century'²⁷. However, given the economic uncertainties and lack of job security in the town, it is unlikely that a considerable proportion of the poorer working classes were either able to save or would have qualified for a loan, unlike craftsmen, many of whom were able to purchase one or more houses. A closer examination of Elizabeth Roberts' respondents tends to support this view, typical occupations of house buyers including a journeyman baker, a Vickers foreman and a boilermaker²⁸. Nevertheless, although there was a relatively high rate of working class owner-occupation owing to the high proportion of skilled workers in the town, the unskilled, the casually employed or the poor were unlikely to be included among the ranks of Barrow's home owners²⁹.

Sub-letting offered a profitable source of additional income and was also an economic necessity for some low-income families, and overcrowding remained a constant problem for the authorities. In 1913 for example, 62 cases were dealt with in the courts³⁰. Nevertheless, despite a steady rate of population growth (Table 2.1), Table 2.2

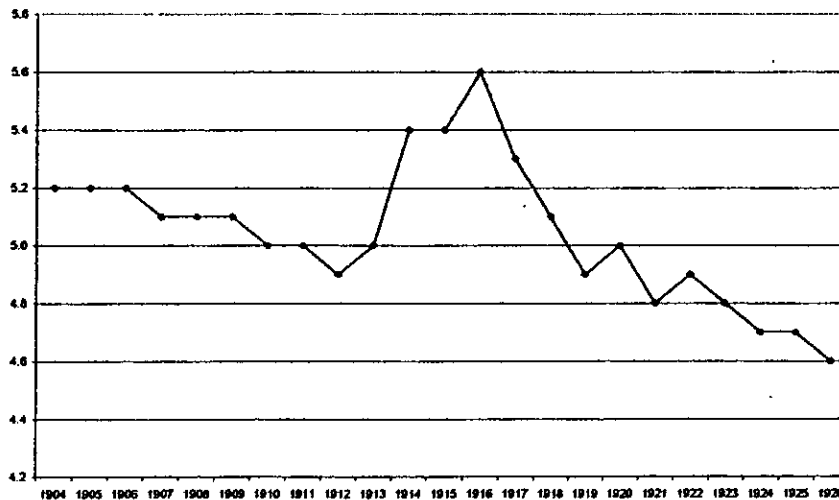
demonstrates that the number of people per dwelling was in fact steadily falling in the years prior to the war. However it should be noted that the continuation of this trend in the post-war period is not due to an increase in the housing stock (see Table 2.3), but to falling population levels, notably due to migration from the area.

Chart 2.1: Population of Barrow-in-Furness 1904-1926



Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Books, 1904-1927

Chart 2.2: Persons per dwelling 1904-1926



Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Books, 1904-1927

THE WAR: AN IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

The outbreak of hostilities reversed the earlier downward trend as munitions production brought a massive influx of workers into the town, placing the still overcrowded housing stock under intense pressure. Precise information on the size of the expanded workforce is not available, and whilst the sources average the number of female munitions workers at around 6,000, the total for the wartime workforce varies considerably. For example, whilst the number of pre-war Vickers workers is given as anything between 12,000 and 17,000³¹, the wartime maximum has been variously recorded as 31,319, 33,209 or 36,000³², giving a total increase ranging between 14,319 and 24,000 workers. A further disparity arises from the official population figures published by Barrow Corporation, which show an increase of only 14,600 by 1916, followed by a subsequent steep decline (Table 2.1). These figures however, are extremely suspect, and can possibly be interpreted more as a response to the findings of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, 1917, rather than an actual decline in the numbers of munitions workers, particularly as there is no other documentary evidence to support this reduction. Additionally, Ministry of Munitions figures, based on evidence from the town's Medical Officer, put the wartime population at approximately 100,000³³. This is very likely to be the more accurate figure, and represents an increase of 31,477, or 46%, over the 1913-1914 population level, and continued until the end of the war.

Whilst an unspecified number of workers were billeted in nearby towns, in the first two years of the war it was largely left to private enterprise to meet the increased demand for accommodation. Within two months of the outbreak of hostilities Vickers secured a War Office loan on favourable terms for the purchase of house-building land on Walney. By the summer of 1916 they had built a total of 610 three-bedroomed parlour houses, and subsidised the building of another 111 by private syndicates³⁴. In addition, the Salvation Army had opened a hostel for 250 munitions workers, and Trades Hostels Ltd had built a hostel for 230 men on Barrow Island. However, whilst these and other hostels provided temporary accommodation for some munitions workers³⁵, the vast majority had to find lodgings in an already overcrowded town, and it is the impact of the latter group on the borough's housing that will be the focus of this study.

An immediate response to the intensification of the housing shortage was the charging of famine rents. For example, the wartime cost of lodgings in Barrow ranged between eight and twelve shillings per week, exceeding the Billeting Board's allowance of 6 shillings³⁶, whilst the average rent of an artisan's house had increased to between eight and ten shillings per week by November 1918³⁷. The vast profits to be made from the letting of rooms stimulated the housing market, creating a rush to buy, and a spate of evictions. Although the Rent Restrictions Act froze rents and banned evictions, this was not extended to lodgings and an owner was able to take possession of the property, occupy a couple of rooms and let the rest. There was a growing body of opinion in the town that the law was operating unfairly in Barrow, 'people were buying houses to obtain possession, and it was practically defeating the objects for which the law was brought into effect.'³⁸ A typical example was that of a house previously rented for 9/6d per week, but after it was sold over the occupant's head, the same tenant rented a single room in the same dwelling for 6/6d per week³⁹. 'It was so bad in Barrow that everybody was buying houses and there was a long queue waiting to get possession'⁴⁰, resulting in rising numbers of evictions and overcrowding which reached chronic proportions.

Corporation records on wartime overcrowding are sparse, but disclose they could only 'get an idea' from figures obtained from Sanitary Inspectors' random checks, with the admission that only a census would provide comprehensive figures⁴¹. Information about wartime overcrowding levels is therefore patchy, and combined with suspect population statistics, must be viewed with caution.

One surviving but undated report from the war years recorded no overcrowding in the town's tenement blocks, and contained only a cursory examination of the numbers of persons per house in just four streets, (Table 2.3). Arithmetically inaccurate, it reveals little of housing conditions in the borough, but demonstrates the Corporation's poor recording procedures and further emphasises the problems arising from local statistics⁴². Another file dated June and July 1917, no doubt stimulated by the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, again examined overcrowding in four streets and contained the table shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.1 Corporation Estimate of Wartime Overcrowding

Street	No. persons per house	No. persons per room
Duke St.	4.2	1.9
Blake St.	4.2	2.1
Walney Rd.	4.7	2.0
Tay St.	4.1	2.0

*Housing Statistics 1914-1921, BA/H BOX11***Table 2.2 Corporation Estimate of Wartime Overcrowding, 1917**

Street	No. of Houses	No. with 2 or more families	No. with lodgers	No. of bedrooms
Melbourne St.	72	8	34	3
Adelaide St.	35	8	15	3
Exmouth St.	48	1	10	2 & 3
Howe St.	54	3	26	3

Housing Statistics 1914-1921, BA/H BOX11

Although providing greater statistical detail than its predecessor, giving details of the number of families, lodgers and bedrooms, the report still fails to provide any meaningful correlation of the figures with regard to the level of overcrowding in these properties. However, the report does list some individual examples, the worst being the conditions at 49 Melbourne Street, where 12 adults and seven children occupied a three-bedroomed house. Moreover, the report reveals a heavy reliance on 'alternative' forms of accommodation, and identified 79 caravans occupied as dwellings⁴³.

The reports contain no sense of urgency or concern for the deteriorating housing situation, and that the Council could find so little evidence of overcrowding is staggering in the light of the findings of the Commission of Enquiry Into Industrial Unrest 1917, which reported, 'The housing question is acute. The number of beds occupied by night and day on the Box and Cox principle is very high and runs into thousands.'⁴⁴ The Commission described living conditions in the borough as 'a terrible

indictment' against those in authority, an opinion underscored by the evidence put before the Commission, which revealed the Corporation's blindness to the situation, wilful or otherwise. Indeed, the Chief Medical Officer's report for 1917, published in the wake of the Commission's Report, attempts to mitigate on behalf of the Corporation, stating that:

'Considerable difficulty was experienced during the year [1917] in dealing with the housing of the extra immigration of males and females in the production of munitions of war. It was felt that action could only be taken in gross cases, and these were dealt with by serving notices to abate the nuisance of overcrowding. Many cases were overlooked on account of war conditions, which, under normal conditions, would have been dealt with.'⁴⁵

Nevertheless the report fails to conceal the Corporation's failure to grapple with the housing crisis.

The Commission's Report illustrated the profits being made through sub-letting. A family of six for example, paid 7/- per week for one bedroom in a house that was leased for 4/6d. It described other cases where nine were found to live in one room, or sixteen in one small house. The Council was not required to give evidence, but Councillor Ellison J.P., in his capacity as a representative of the Labour Party and Trades Council, gave evidence of cases from his own personal knowledge, describing cases of women close to confinement being evicted onto the streets, and of women giving birth in one room which was home, not only for the entire family, but often for lodgers as well.

The report criticised central government for being remote, ignorant of local conditions and obstructive, but praised Vickers for its foresight and efforts to ease the housing shortage, describing the company's scheme as of great value to the town, although expressing some doubts as to the firm's motives. The report also placed the number of evictions in perspective, stating these were not excessive. Ejectment orders had only been granted in 42 cases out of 71, and in many of these the incoming occupant had been compelled to take in the outgoing tenant as a lodger, a policy which aided the homeless situation, but aggravated the problem of overcrowding. However, despite the Magistrates' humane interpretation of the law, which kept evictions to a minimum, and deferred ejectment orders in the County Court, unscrupulous property owners were turning to the High Court, where tenants were unable to fight due to the high costs⁴⁶. This action prompted local magistrates to send a deputation to the Ministry of Munitions to press for a change in the law and the building of 1,000 new houses as soon

as possible⁴⁷. Although further evidence is unavailable, this provides an early indication that severe social problems could stimulate new forms of response and solidarity of action, and is particularly interesting as the first working class representative did not appear on the magistrates' bench until 1919⁴⁸.

The Commission of Enquiry pointed the finger of blame squarely at the Corporation, and expressed the view that the housing problem in the borough was well recognised and 'ought to have been understood by the authorities'. The damning indictment, 'We cannot believe that the facts we propose to set down could so long have remained actual conditions of domestic life in England during the twentieth century', was to have significant and far-reaching repercussions. The impact on local politics and social attitudes will be dealt with in later chapters, whilst the administrative response to the rising crisis is examined below.

The Commission stressed the need for greater government awareness of the true conditions in Barrow which would 'naturally be the cause of serious unrest in the future'⁴⁹, recommending the formulation of an emergency housing scheme with full government backing, to be instigated immediately. Thus, as Swenarton contends, housing was clearly seen as a key factor in the rising levels of unrest and for the first time became an instrument of public policy in a bid to defuse the serious threat of social instability.

The Ministry of Munitions' plan, prior to the Commission's Report, to build 250 houses⁵⁰, was immediately considered to be insufficient, and on the strength of the Commission's Report, the Corporation demanded an extra 1,000. Vickers had refused any further financial assistance, but the Ministry doubted their ability to take up a scheme on that scale, and proceeded to undermine the Commission's findings and dilute the scale of the crisis. The Ministry claimed that although building had failed to keep pace with demand and extra accommodation was necessary, it anticipated a drastic post-war fall in population and a housing surplus, arguing that the need was not as great as the figures might suggest and that Barrow and district had been 'over-housed' in the pre-war period. Additionally the civil servants argued that the examples used by the Commission should not be taken as typical, and concluded that rented houses were in the minority, 'for the most part the working man here owns his own house'. The Ministry also claimed that the 'people prefer crowded conditions to unsuitable housing',

and even quoted an anonymous witness as saying 'where there is most overcrowding in Barrow, is where the working man prefers to go.' Such an attitude clearly supports the Commission's opinion on the gulf between central government and the regions, and enabled the Ministry to minimise the crisis, stating that overcrowding in Barrow was not as severe as in other industrial towns, and was not a priority owing to its temporary nature⁵¹. However, the ease with which the Ministry succeeded in limiting housing expenditure in Barrow undermines Swenarton's interpretation whereby housing provided an 'insurance against revolution'.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Munitions did recognise the need for more houses and sought to alleviate what it saw as the temporary problem of wartime overcrowding. The official Ministry scheme proposed 500 semi-permanent and 500 permanent houses to be built simultaneously and completed by March 1918. Additionally, Barrow was declared a special area under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), which prevented the eviction of munitions workers without Ministry of Munitions permission, as long as they had upheld the conditions of their tenancy agreements. Those already evicted were to be re-housed in unoccupied dwellings requisitioned under DORA, although there is no indication of where these 'unoccupied' dwellings were to be found⁵².

THE FAILURE OF RECONSTRUCTION

Seeking to avoid State ownership, the Ministry expected Vickers, private individuals or the Corporation (which had first refusal), to purchase the permanent houses after the war. The semi-permanent dwellings on the other hand, made from cast concrete, poorly constructed and badly situated, remained under Ministry control. It was never anticipated that permanent workers would want to live there, but they were seen as an adequate short-term expedient. However, class attitudes at the Ministry of Munitions are reflected in the selection of suitable sites. For example, the Salthouse Road area was described as having 'natural leanings ... towards a rough and unthrifty class of tenant' and bordered on the Raglan Street area where, apart from 'the tell-tale smell of dirt', 'the windows are broken and patched, and bear the usual marks of rough and low-class tenants'⁵³. Nevertheless, the site was considered suitable for the semi-permanent dwellings of the Roosecote Estate, whilst a green-field site was selected for the permanent housing of the Abbotsmead estate (See Appendix 1). However, by January 1918 the construction of the semi-permanent dwellings had been halted by a petition

from residents and property owners protesting against their erection in the vicinity of good property, and was to be abandoned following Corporation protests to the Ministry regarding the standard of the buildings, although the 202 that had been started were to be completed⁵⁴. The building of permanent housing at Abbotsmead was to continue, but again, 50% of these were delayed by a shortage of materials.

The Roosecote and Abbotsmead estates were problematic from the outset. The first area of contention was the Ministry of Munitions' unilateral attempts to fix rents at the extremely high figure of 17/- per week, which roused Corporation protests at both the figure and the lack of consultation. By virtue of being a Ministry funded scheme however, the question of rents was a matter of public policy⁵⁵, and whilst the Ministry insisted on the need to charge an economic rent to recoup the high building costs, the Corporation was adamant that it was unreasonable to expect a working man to pay such an amount. However, following the Corporation's refusal to accept even reduced rents of between 10/- and 12/- per week, and with over half of the proposed houses not built, the Ministry of Munitions announced an end to its building programme⁵⁶.

A further problem on the Abbotsmead Estate was the large numbers of properties standing empty despite the chronic housing shortage. Following the Corporation decision not to purchase the properties from the Ministry of Munitions, the houses were placed on the market. However, when the best offer of £620 failed to meet the average building cost of £1,200, the properties were withdrawn from sale in July 1919, and they were still unoccupied in the autumn of 1920. In response to pressure from the Labour Party and Trades Council urging the Corporation to take over some of the empty houses, the Corporation appealed to H.M. Office of Works in a letter which clearly illustrates, not only that the housing shortages were still chronic, but also the rising threat of direct popular action:

'in view of the acute shortage of housing accommodation in the borough, and the constant pressure of the Government on the Corporation to meet this shortage, [we] protest in the strongest possible manner against the action of the Department in keeping these houses empty; that the Corporation have on their books several hundred of applications for the houses which are being erected by them under their Housing Schemes, and that a large number of people are at present living in caravans and under most deplorable conditions, both as regards health and morality ... further, that it has been brought to the notice of the Committee that threats have been made that unless such empty houses are at once let, forcible possession of them will be taken'⁵⁷.

Despite some delay, consent was eventually given to let the houses, although the fixing of rent levels within the borough continued to be disputed with both the Ministry of Health and the Regional Housing Commission.

With a view to reconstruction, during the latter half of the war the government had requested local authorities to submit plans or at least state their intentions regarding the post-war provision of working-class housing. However, out of a possible 1806 local authorities, only 311 responded, Barrow being among the abstaining majority which required a more definite financial commitment from the government⁵⁸. Similarly in 1918, Barrow was among the 130 districts which again failed to respond to a further request from the government⁵⁹, the Corporation protesting against the vagueness of the financial proposals which gave no indication of the extent of local authority financial responsibility⁶⁰.

Nevertheless, the war had brought a major change to the Council's attitudes towards the provision of working-class housing, the Corporation acknowledging that 'it is the duty of local authorities to carry through a programme of housing for the working classes'⁶¹. However, following the demise of the Ministry of Munitions, the Corporation's decision to proceed with the building of the remaining 500 houses quickly ran into difficulties. With only 113 near completion, the Housing Commission rejected tenders for the remainder for being too high, and despite Council attempts to stimulate the building of working-class houses and limit non-essential work, construction was hindered by shortages of labour and materials, and the need to balance housing needs against the effects of the depression. However, the Council was fairly evenly divided on the housing issue. Some councillors were against the entire concept, while others believed building could not be justified, as local industry would never again be able to employ such a large population. Another view suggested building should be deferred until costs fell and rents could be reasonable. The pro-housing lobby supported building on the grounds of the borough's poor and insanitary conditions, whilst others argued for giving people 'decent places to live and not herding them like pigs'. On the other hand, there was a considerable body of opinion, both within the Corporation and from the general public, that it was the habits of the people themselves that were responsible for the bad conditions, and such arguments and their consequences will be examined fully in Chapter Seven.

Table 2.3 illustrates the rate of house building in Barrow throughout the period.

Table 2.3: Houses constructed in Barrow 1912-1926

Year	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
No. Houses	180	230	416	284	612	183	6	1	123
Year	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926			
No. Houses	191	149	6	5	1	0			

Source: Borough Surveyors Reports 1912-27

Clearly, despite some change of attitude, house building in the Borough fell away rapidly in the post-war period. Apart from those built by the Ministry of Munitions, the few subsidised, built and completed under the 1919 Act barely equalled the pre-war rate, and the table also indicates that the Acts of 1923 and 1924 had a negligible impact on local house building.

However, whilst the Corporation successfully influenced rent levels of new housing, it had no control over caravans, and the post-war period saw continued evictions, increasing numbers of houses standing empty and the expansion of 'alternative' forms of accommodation. The leasing of caravans was a profitable business and a landowner would pay rates for the land and lease vans, railway wagons and furniture vehicles, creating small colonies in which families lived under primitive conditions. In April 1919 for example, 28 adults and eleven children were living in railway wagons measuring 6'6" high, 6' wide and 10'6" long, at weekly rents of seven shillings per wagon, with just one toilet between them⁶². Rates were not payable on mobile homes and they were not affected by bye-laws, and this generated an assortment of structures, some with artificial wheels and others with wheels blatantly painted on as landowners sought to profit from the homeless. By 1925 such dwellings were leased for up to 15/- per week, but although housing pressure had forced a degree of official toleration, by this time the Corporation began to clamp down on what it saw as 'an objectionable state of affairs'⁶³.

Although the Corporation had taken steps to deal with the worst abuses, efforts proved futile in the face of increasing homelessness, but the post-war experience, unlike wartime evictions which took place in a climate of rising prosperity, was one of unemployment and increasing hardship. Pressure was mounting from the Labour Party

and Trades Council in June 1919, urging the Council to make every effort to ease the hardships caused by the housing shortage, and threatening grave industrial disorder unless the granting of ejectment orders stopped immediately⁶⁴. The magistrates refused to meet a Corporation deputation, stating that evictions involved the judicial function of the Justices, whose powers and duties were subject to legislation rather than negotiation. Nevertheless, the magistrates continued to interpret the law with humanity, some defendants winning their cases and others being deferred. As an illustration of the scale of the problem of rent arrears, of the 68 houses purchased by the corporation on Walney in November 1921, by August 1922 60 tenants were in arrears, yet the eviction of just one tenant who refused to respond to negotiation attempts was sought (successfully).

Whilst the Corporation began taking an active role in all aspects of working-class housing, the housing policy of Vickers also underwent change. The firm had sold off 30 of its Walney houses in order to raise capital for its wartime building scheme⁶⁵, and immediately after the war took the decision to sell off its Walney housing stock to employees in a bid to capitalise on the boom in property prices, on condition that if the purchasers decided to sell or left Vickers' employ, the Company were to re-purchase the property at no greater than the original selling price⁶⁶. However, post-war economic confidence was short-lived, and by March 1920 both the Corporation and local building societies had stopped giving loans. Undeterred, Vickers created its own building society in order to continue to reap the benefit of the still buoyant housing market. In 1920 a total of 48 houses were sold, and initially continued to sell at a rate of approximately one per week. Rents on the other hand, were a more delicate issue which the Company had to approach with great caution, particularly in view of agitation both nationally and locally and with no wish to provoke a local version of the Clydeside rent strikes. Whilst it was impossible to raise rents at this juncture, an alternative course of action was to give tenants responsibility for the payment of their own rates and water rates directly to the Council, ensuring any increases would fall directly on the tenant. This was a shrewd move as Vickers and the Walney Estate Company were to be badly hit by the effects of the depression.

Problems were encountered by the end of 1920 as increasing numbers of tenants and mortgagees were laid off. These trends continued, and a paradoxical situation developed during 1921, with company houses still selling steadily whilst rent arrears increased with rising unemployment. By December 1921, rent arrears of £2,300 were

compounded by the withdrawal of a £7 per house subsidy by the parent company, resulting in a revenue loss of over £8,000 by March 1922⁶⁷. Anticipating the situation would worsen, Vickers' Chairman had ruled as early as December 1920 that employees living in company housing 'should, *in the interests of the Housing Companies*⁶⁸, receive special consideration'⁶⁹. Consequently the Estates Company compiled lists 'of the men who have bought houses so that they may receive consideration when discharges are made'⁷⁰, and took the precaution of protecting all its properties with riot insurance⁷¹.

Vickers and the Estates Company liased to assist 'good workmen' who were discharged and unable to meet their liabilities, giving priority of employment to men with mortgages from the Company's building society, and temporarily employing tradesmen as labourers until a more suitable vacancy arose⁷². Nevertheless, by September 1922, the number of tenants with rent arrears peaked at over 800, and the financial report in December was grim. Whilst increasing numbers of houses were repurchased⁷³, the recovery of rent arrears had proved virtually impossible as the courts persistently adjourned the cases, compelling the Company to write off losses totalling over £9,000 in an effort to reduce their own income tax liabilities.

Whilst unemployed tenants and buyers continued to be given priority of work throughout the period, from 1923 the strategies on arrears became more severe. Vickers began providing lists of men likely to be laid off in the near future, enabling the Estates Company to take steps to evict any of the men thus identified who had rent arrears⁷⁴. Although unemployment gradually fell, the building society began to foreclose on those 'hopelessly in arrears' in November 1924. However, this was done surreptitiously, the society repossessing the properties in its own name and taking 'such steps as will altogether disassociate the houses from the Companies at Walney'⁷⁵. Action was also taken against rent arrears cases, but only in the instances where success was most likely. Despite taking these cases to the Police Court, which more readily granted vacant possession than the County Court, few ejectment orders were made and the court generally only ordered nominal repayments⁷⁶. Inevitably, such houses as did become vacant stood empty for the prescribed period to enable rent increases. Thus the Walney Estates Company went to great lengths to protect its position during the early 1920s, liasing closely with Vickers and creating a caste of workers with greater job security. However, no evidence has come to light, in either the minutes of the trade unions or the

Trades Council, or in the local press, to suggest that the public were aware of this collusion between the two companies and their manipulation of the labour crisis.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the housing situation in Barrow can be summarised as one of insufficient housing stock and deteriorating living conditions, resulting in increasing overcrowding, rent arrears and homelessness. The housing shortage kept rent levels high, and stimulated working-class house ownership, largely among skilled craftsmen, some of whom became landlords in their own right, letting a string of houses. There is evidence of firmly established spatial and social hierarchies, in addition to an element of sympathy and tolerance at an administrative level, such as the actions of the magistrates and the manner in which various 'abuses' were tolerated, particularly regarding the makeshift colonies of the homeless. These are important facets of local social attitudes.

In the pre-war period, the Corporation maintained a minimal role in the provision of civic amenities, relying on the private sector in order to keep the rates low, a lack of involvement demonstrated by the early attempts at overcrowding assessment. This attitude however, underwent considerable revision, the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest providing the catalyst for a break with the past, condemning the Corporation's passive acceptance of appalling living conditions. The Commission's report demonstrates that the housing issue was closely linked to rising industrial and social unrest, and Barrow can be said to have directly benefited by the response to the unrest on Clydeside. However, despite appearing to support Swenarton's contention that government intervention represented a defence against the threat of revolution, the practical response to this threat, particularly in Barrow, qualifies this interpretation. The ease with which the Ministry of Munitions succeeded in undermining perceptions of the scale of the crisis in Barrow suggests that social disorder was not seen as an imminent threat, whilst the scale of building was limited, even before industrial militancy was neutralised by high unemployment. With regard to the concept that popular participation stimulated social reform, the case-study fails to find evidence to suggest that ideology such as the 'Homes Fit For Heroes' campaign, or the reconstruction debate more generally, was influential at municipal level, but supports Abrams' contention that powerful, competing forces worked against reform.

One such factor operating in the Barrow context was the wartime building by the Ministry of Munitions which, by virtue of meeting, in theory at least, the anticipated need for working-class housing, reduced the impact of the Addison Act. Additionally, the setting of rent levels demonstrates a clash of interests between central government and the local authority, and reflects the need to attract the private sector through the charging of economic rents, whilst keeping rents to an affordable level in order to relieve the housing crisis. A second important factor operating against reform was the deteriorating economic climate in the immediate post-war period which greatly increased pressure on the rates and prohibited all house building, not just that designated for the working classes. As a result, the influence of subsequent housing legislation was negligible. Thus, Barrow in many ways reflects the problems typically associated with working-class housing but with some important idiosyncrasies, and fails to fit neatly into broad theories and debates, illustrating the diversity of local experience during these years.

¹ M. Gaskell, *Model Housing* (London, 1987), 50.

² *Ibid*, 10.

³ J. Melling (ed), *Housing, Social Policy and the State* (London, 1980), 143.

⁴ *Ibid* 20.

⁵ M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities 1919-39* (Leicester, 1984), 7-8.

⁶ S. Pepper & M. Swenarton, 'Home front: garden suburbs for munitions workers', *Architectural Review* (June 1978), 163, 366.

⁷ *Ibid* 367.

⁸ P. Abrams, 'The failure of social reform: 1918-1920', *Past And Present*, 24, 1963, pp. 43-64.

⁹ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes* (London, 1981), 113.

¹⁰ M. Bowley, *Housing and The State* (London, 1945), 21.

¹¹ D. Beattie, 'The Origins, implementation and legacy of the Addison Housing Act 1919, with special reference to Lancashire', PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1986.

¹² Bowley, *Housing and The State*, 36.

¹³ *Ibid* 37.

¹⁴ R. Ryder, 'Council House Building, County Durham' in Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, 55.

¹⁵ Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, 22.

¹⁶ N. Todd, 'A History of labour in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness c.1890-1920', M. Litt thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976, 14.

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- ¹⁷ Memoranda on housing scheme at Barrow Lancashire, November 1917, National Archives, Kew, MUN 5/96/346.2/4.
- ¹⁸ J. Melling 'Employers, industrial housing and the evolution of company welfare policies in Britain's heavy industry: West Scotland, 1870-1920, *International Review of Social History*, 26 (1981), 293.
- ¹⁹ See Chapter Six.
- ²⁰ S2B, 28, 'Social History of Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster 1880-1930', E. Roberts Collection, Lancaster University, Lancaster.
- ²¹ E. Roberts, 'Working class standards of living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 30 (1977), 318.
- ²² M1B, 77, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ²³ M8B, 19-20, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ²⁴ Todd, 'A History of labour', 21.
- ²⁵ Roberts, Working Class Standards of Living, 318; Todd, 'A History of labour', 16.
- ²⁶ M6B, 49, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ²⁷ Roberts, Working Class Standards of Living, 318.
- ²⁸ Mr F2B; Mrs M1B; Mr M5B, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ²⁹ Detailed figures are unavailable owing to the lack of rate-books that would enable owner-occupancy calculations.
- ³⁰ Chief Medical Officer's Report, 1913, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Account Books 1913-19, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ³¹ *Barrow News*, 27 July 1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness; statistics for *Vickers News*, 15/9/1924, 'Histories of Barrow', Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD 581.
- ³² Notes and statistics of unspecified origin, and notes on the history of Vickers dated 1922, 'Histories of Barrow', CHA, VHD 581; *Barrow News*, 27 July 1922, CRO.
- ³³ Barrow's Chief medical Officer, 28 July 1917, quoted in Ministry of Munitions History, National Archives, Kew, MUN 2/28.
- ³⁴ Memoranda on housing, 11, NA, MUN 5/96/346.2/4.
- ³⁵ No statistics are available.
- ³⁶ Memoranda on housing, 8, NA, MUN 5/96/346.2/4.
- ³⁷ General Purpose Committee Minutes, 25 November 1918, Barrow Corporation Minutes Book November 1918-October 1919, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ³⁸ No statistics are available
- ³⁹ *Barrow News*, 1 September 1917, CRO.
- ⁴⁰ B1B, 52, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁴¹ Housing Statistics 1914-1921, Cumbria Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/H BOX 11.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*

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- ⁴⁴ Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness District, Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest 1917, 32, National Archives, Kew, CD123.119.
- ⁴⁵ Chief Medical Officer's Report, 1917, Borough Account Books 1913-19, CRO.
- ⁴⁶ *Barrow News*, 1 September 1917, CRO.
- ⁴⁷ *Barrow News*, 15 September 1919, CRO.
- ⁴⁸ Increasing to two in 1920, and five in 1924.
- ⁴⁹ Commission of Enquiry, 34, NA, CD123.119.
- ⁵⁰ Letter from Ministry of Munitions, 12 February 1917, Health Committee Minutes, Barrow Corporation Minutes Book, CRO.
- ⁵¹ Memoranda on housing, November 1917, 8, NA, MUN 5/96/346.2/4.
- ⁵² 13 October, 1917, Ministry of Munitions History, NA, MUN 2/28.
- ⁵³ Memoranda on housing, November 1917, NA, MUN 5/96/346.2/4.
- ⁵⁴ General Purpose Committee Minutes, 19 February 1918, Barrow Corporation Minutes Book, CRO.
- ⁵⁵ Pepper & Swenarton, 'Home front: garden suburbs', 367.
- ⁵⁶ General Purpose Committee Minutes, April 1918, Barrow Corporation Minutes Book, CRO.
- ⁵⁷ Health Committee Minutes, 13 October 1920, Barrow Corporation Minutes Book, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ⁵⁸ Local Government Board letter to the Treasury, October 1917, Correspondence between LGB and Ministry of Reconstruction, National Archives, Kew RECO 1/471.
- ⁵⁹ Correspondence with the LGB and local authorities on the housing programme, National Archives, Kew, RECO 1/528.
- ⁶⁰ Health Committee Minutes, 24 April 1918, Barrow Corporation Minutes Book, CRO.
- ⁶¹ Health Committee Draft Minutes, 24 April 1918, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness. BA/C 1/1/1 Vol. 19.
- ⁶² *Barrow News*, 12 April 1919, CRO.
- ⁶³ *Barrow News*, 4 April 1925, CRO.
- ⁶⁴ Resolution to Barrow Corporation, 12 June 1919, Labour Party & Trades Council Industrial Committee Minutes Book, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 7/1.
- ⁶⁵ Memoranda on housing, November 1917, NA, MUN 5/96/346.2/4.
- ⁶⁶ 4 March 1920, Isle of Walney Estates Company Minutes Book, 1899-1951, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDY/69.
- ⁶⁷ *Barrow News*, 7 March 1922, CRO.
- ⁶⁸ Author's emphasis
- ⁶⁹ *Barrow News*, 31 December 1920, CRO.
- ⁷⁰ *Barrow News*, 4 April 1921, CRO.

⁷¹ *Barrow News*, 7 March 1922, CRO.

This proved expensive however, and was superseded by the Company's own Fire Insurance (19 February 1923, CRO, BDY/69).

⁷² *Barrow News*, 14 October 1921, CRO.

⁷³ *Barrow News*, 19 February 1923, CRO.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Barrow News*, 10 November 1924, CRO.

⁷⁶ *Barrow News*, 1 April 1925, CRO.

HEALTH TRENDS THROUGH WAR AND UNEMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the health of Barrow in relation to national trends from the immediate pre-war period to the late 1920s. Owing to immense regional variations of occupational structure, social composition and economic experience, local studies are central to the understanding of the dual impact of war and depression on the health of the community. Barrow's wartime role as an important munitions centre provides ideal conditions with which to test the assertion that the war produced significant health gains for the working classes as a result of higher earnings. Additionally, the analysis will be extended into the inter-war period, and using existing studies of working-class living standards, will make a longer-term appraisal and assess the extent to which any wartime gains may have been eroded by long-term unemployment. To facilitate this, the study includes a comparative analysis of Barrow and Middlesbrough. This comparison will provide additional context for the Barrow data and help to explain any exceptional features, and in conjunction with the preceding two chapters, will contribute to the reconstruction of the everyday living conditions which formed the backdrop against which social attitudes and political forces developed and operated.

To provide a context for the Barrow case-study, it is necessary to outline the general trends and debates relating to public health issues. An awareness of class was central to British society, and fixed, widely held assumptions permeated debates on population and health issues. Many social ills, including poverty itself, were thought by many to originate in weaknesses of character, whilst ignorance, particularly among working-class mothers, was seen as making a substantial contribution to poor standards of nutrition, health and childcare. However, by the late nineteenth century national health statistics were reflecting the benefits of improved sanitation and legislation directed towards the improvement of public health, housing and factory conditions, resulting in falling death rates for all age groups in England and Wales (with the exception of infants in the first year of life), and rising life expectancy¹.

However, lower death rates did not necessarily equate with better health. Social Darwinists argued that public health reforms, by contravening the laws of nature, created a 'new, sickly urban "type" which, thanks to sanitary science, survived to

perpetuate and so thus weaken the national stock'². Similarly, it was widely believed that the physical qualities of this new urban 'type', characteristically stunted, with little stamina and poor social and mental abilities, were passed on genetically from one generation to the next. Supporters of such hereditarian arguments refused to accept that better wages would provide higher standards of living and ultimately better health. Consequently, the falling birth rates among the 'better' classes and continuing expansion at the lower end of the social scale generated unease for the future prospects of 'a nation dominated numerically (if not politically) by the urban working-class', so often characterised as lazy, stupid and irresponsible³. Nevertheless, although many believed the claim that preventative medicine had weakened the nation, the case for public health reforms to counter the problem of physical weakness and urban debility proved more influential⁴. Such arguments were given additional impetus when the rejection of forty to sixty per cent of army recruits as unfit for military service during the Boer War⁵ roused fresh concerns for the health of the nation and the strength of the Empire.

Amid concerns for national health and efficiency, the environmentalists advocated the need for a living wage, better diets, and improved living and working conditions⁶, whilst the Commissions and Committees of inquiry preferred to alleviate the problems of the residuum by mitigating the effects of poverty. Thus the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration of 1903, although not ignoring the influence of the urban environment, focused its attentions on the alleviation of the consequences of poverty. 'What this amounted to was the acknowledgement that the standard of national health now depended on raising the nutritional standard and physical fitness of the next generation'⁷. The feeding of school children and their routine medical examination were among the demands made by the Committee, and were implemented in 1906 and 1907 respectively.

However, the most concerted efforts were directed towards the prevention and cure of tuberculosis. In addition to being a major killer, its infectious nature had evoked government intervention and a unique, state-financed system for its treatment and cure, superseding that previously provided by voluntary organisations and private charities. The National Insurance Act, 1911, contained clauses for sanatorium provision which were exceptional in that they provided treatment both for insured workers and their dependants. Local Authorities were to establish dispensaries for the diagnosis of TB and

to direct patients to the most appropriate form of treatment. These were to be managed by TB Officers appointed by the local authority. Additionally, voluntary 'care committees' were to be organised to support the work of the dispensaries, although their efforts were often insufficient to meet the demand as a result of lack of funds⁸. The system was extended in 1912 when local authorities became responsible for the provision of treatment for non-insured workers and their dependants, aided by a 50% government subsidy, and in 1913 compulsory notification was introduced. However, positive steps to fight TB, such as by the isolation of patients and control of the milk supply, received a half-hearted response, and vaccination was not seriously considered. The emphasis instead, was placed on 'raising the resistance of the individual naturally'⁹. Some saw the improvement of economic conditions as the key to this, whilst others placed the emphasis on individual responsibility, giving the working classes more information in preference to tackling poverty directly.

According to Rowntree's survey, at the turn of the century ten per cent of the population were unable to 'afford to buy enough food to ensure a minimum level of sufficiency'¹⁰. Additionally, routine medical inspections in schools identified malnutrition as a serious problem, with between 15% and 20% of schoolchildren suffering from dietary deficiencies at this time¹¹. Simultaneously however, long-term demographic trends over the period indicate a distinct decline in both birth and mortality rates from the start of the twentieth century, whilst infant mortality, traditionally high as a result of environmental conditions and the prevalence of infectious diseases, also fell sharply, particularly during the war years. However, poverty crippled as well as killed¹², and mortality statistics reveal little of underlying levels of ill-health and the incidence of minor ailments. In monitoring health levels, special importance has been attached to infant mortality rates, and it is widely agreed that these statistics, in relating to the most vulnerable section of the population, provide a useful indicator of general health and living standards. Additionally, many health problems, particularly maternal and infant health and the incidence of infectious diseases, are directly linked to levels of nutrition, and thus levels of malnutrition provide a reasonably good indication of the condition of national and regional health.

School medical examinations sought to identify levels of malnutrition, but Webster argues that they tended to under-estimate levels of ill health by failing to recognise conditions not identifiable by a cursory examination. Their anthropometric techniques

which compared a child's build, height and weight to a given standard could, at best, only provide unsatisfactory estimates of nutrition levels, whilst subjective clinical assessments based on the condition of the hair, eyes, mucous membrane, attitude and level of alertness are a further illustration of this problem. Thus, in the absence of objective criteria, a particular difficulty was a lack of uniformity of response and assessment, as a result of which the level of malnutrition among school children was likely to be under-reported¹³.

The war focussed attention on the problem of popular health as never before, as once again, a high proportion of working-class men were unfit for military service. Addison argued that the reports of the National Service Board 'demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt that widespread ill health was "a source of national weakness"'¹⁴, and contributed to the contemporary belief that civilian health deteriorated during the war. Winter challenges this view, and asserts that the youth of the 1914-18 war were the last generation to bear the effects of the scale of deprivation widespread in pre-war Britain, and that the war considerably improved civilian health and mortality rates¹⁵.

Whilst Winter stresses the primacy of improved nutrition in the wartime decline of mortality rates, particularly among young children, older adults, and (with some qualifications) women in childbirth, arguing that the incidence of diarrhoea related deaths provides 'a very sensitive indicator of nutrition levels'¹⁶, other interpretations provide a different emphasis. Linda Bryder for example, stresses the importance of the improved quality and purity of food rather than its nutritional value as a major contributory factor to the decline in infantile deaths¹⁷, whilst Nigel Morgan argues that high concentrations of urban horses and the related housefly population were major contributors to the spread of disease. Consequently death rates fell as motorised transport gradually superseded the urban horse, particularly with regard to diarrhoea and enteritis among infants¹⁸. Nevertheless, life expectancy among most sections of the civilian population increased, but the greatest gains were evident in the under five age group, and although infant mortality rates were declining steadily throughout the first thirty years of the century, they fell most rapidly during the war years, and decreased by 28% between 1918 and 1923¹⁹. Additionally, complications in pregnancy decreased by 30%, and diarrhoeal diseases, identified as the greatest single cause of nineteenth century infant deaths fell by 35%²⁰. However, although it is generally accepted that deaths from infectious diseases declined as higher wages improved nutrition and raised

resistance to infection²¹, tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases paradoxically moved against this trend. TB death rates for example, increasing nationally by 25% between 1913 and 1918²².

However, whilst Winter attributes the rise of TB and respiratory disease to the effects of overcrowding and deteriorating housing conditions and dismisses nutrition as a contributory factor, Bryder²³ stresses the complexity of epidemiology and the interaction of housing, nutrition, sanitation and working conditions. She argues that Winter over-states the value of infant mortality statistics as a reliable indicator of general health standards and grossly under-estimates the role of nutrition in the prevention of TB. Neither contemporaries nor modern epidemiologists dismiss malnutrition as a contributory factor, and the link between them continued to be debated throughout the inter-war period, although the relationship between health, nutrition and unemployment was increasingly played down, particularly in the 1930's²⁴. Bryder also stresses the danger of basing generalisations on higher wartime wage levels, emphasising the need to differentiate. The wages of those engaged in war work, such as engineering, coal, rail and agriculture for example, outpaced the level of inflation, but other sectors did not, the building trade being a case in point. For many such workers, income levels fell in real terms.

With regard to the inter-war period, Webster questions the impartiality of statistics relating to working class health, and official figures for the percentage incidence of malnutrition among school children showing a steep decline are a case in point. The 15%-20%, which was seen as a serious problem before the war, had fallen to less than 5% by 1925, which was attributed to improved Maternity and Child Care provision²⁵. However, although the routine inspection of school children had been much valued, the advent of more scientific methods in the 1930's emphasised the inadequacies of the earlier examination techniques, and it became increasingly 'difficult to stave off fears that ... the steady improvement in the nutritional state of school children rested on totally unsound foundations'²⁶. Amid increasing criticism of official figures and concern for the effects of long-term unemployment in distressed areas, the Ministry of Health mounted a survey of local evidence in 1932. The report concluded that 'health was poorer in depressed areas but not greatly worse than average' and black spots were attributed to 'chance' factors or ignorance rather than poverty. Throughout the depression, many Medical Officers' Reports have been described as falsely optimistic,

and the Ministry of Health used these to assure the nation that unemployment was not having a detrimental effect on health²⁷. Thus Webster argues that from the 1920's, unreliable examination techniques and the under-reporting of ill-health make it difficult to draw conclusions on health trends.

Beyond these problems, local statistics are additionally problematic. Whilst health issues in Barrow during the pre-war period lacked political connotations and the statistics can be approached with a reasonable degree of confidence, this may not be the case after 1917. The blatantly inaccurate population figures published by the Corporation after this date inevitably call into question the reliability of Barrow's medical statistics. However, Barrow's Medical Officer furnished the Ministry of Munitions with population figures far in excess of official estimates, suggesting his statistics can offer some degree of reliability, although the inflation of population statistics would have the effect of deflating mortality levels. Thus where possible, published statistics will be analysed in conjunction with other documentary evidence, and also used in a comparative analysis of health trends in Barrow and Middlesbrough. Such an analysis will help to highlight any apparent anomalies in Barrow's medical statistics, and discrepancies between the towns, in the form of major health gains or losses, can be assessed in relation to varying local health provision or differences in poor relief policies. Of particular value to the comparison of working-class health and living standards are the studies of Elizabeth Roberts on pre-war Barrow, and Katharine Nicholas on Middlesbrough in the inter-war period. Both works are based on oral evidence and provide valuable insights on diets and consumption patterns, whilst Nicholas's budgetary analysis illustrates the hardships of life on unemployment benefit and outdoor relief.

FACTORS INFLUENCING HEALTH

(i) The Environment

Despite Barrow's modernity, an absence of the slum areas that typified older industrial towns and cities, and a modern 'double sewer' sanitation system²⁸, the town was fraught with health hazards. In addition to deteriorating housing conditions and overcrowding that were increasingly giving cause for concern, raw sewage was pumped directly into Walney Channel. However, owing to the failure of tidal movements to wash it all out to sea, sewage was left rotting on the banks at low tide, creating a major health hazard, particularly for the residents of the east side of Walney, and Hindpool. The swarms of flies thus generated were increased by the popularity of pig keeping in the town centre, and together with the use of open ashpits and collection carts, suggests that urban horses (cf Morgan) were in fact just one aspect of the house fly problem. The impact of wartime manpower shortages, which reduced the frequency of waste collection, was perpetuated in the post-war years by lack of funds, with the result that ashpits were emptied just once every three or four weeks and posed a very real health threat²⁹. Oral evidence bears witness to the nuisance of flies coming directly off the middens and settling in food³⁰ and also more general environmental problems. For example, the open spaces around the tenements were described as 'kind of play holes. They were muddy and dirty, dead cats and all sorts of things. Pollution was terrible'³¹, whilst children swam in the warm water reservoir of the steelworks amid 'fetid slime' and drowned dogs³².

(ii) Incomes: War and Unemployment

In addition to an environment conducive to epidemics and general ill-health, family sizes were larger than the national average, whilst pre-war income levels among sections of the working classes could be close to subsistence levels. Additionally, living standards were affected by intermittent unemployment, and the scarcity of waged work for married women. This combined with high rents could have a severely detrimental impact on the family budget, and in turn, on the diets of the lower paid sections of the community. As a result, the working classes, and families living on low incomes in particular, were likely to be under-nourished in the pre-war period, which in turn affected their general health and ability to resist infection. However, although money

wages rose considerably during the war years, the working week was longer and the men under greater pressure, whilst inflation and high rents could counter-balance wage improvements. Although the relationship between wages, rents and prices is difficult to analyse due to lack of information, Todd asserts that evidence from the Commission of Enquiry, the Labour Party and Trades Council, and the local press suggest 'that a great many families did experience real hardship during the war'³³, reflecting Bryder's warning on the need to differentiate between the incomes of workers in different sectors, and also the difficulties experienced by servicemen's families trying to survive on army pay remittances.

However, any wartime gains were quickly eroded in the post-war economic climate, and in addition to falling wages, the high levels of unemployment experienced in both Middlesbrough and Barrow necessitated cuts in the scales of poor relief. By July 1921 the out-relief scale in Barrow had been reduced from 30/- to 26/- per couple, although the 4/- for each child remained unchanged³⁴, whilst from May 1921 the Middlesbrough scale was 20/- per couple, and 5/- for each child, to a maximum of 35/- per week³⁵. By 1923 both Poor Law Unions had been forced to reduce their relief scales even further:

Table 3.1: Out-door Relief scales 1923

Barrow	Middlesbrough
25/- per couple	20/- per couple
3/6d for the first child	3/- per child
2/6d the second	to a maximum of 35/-
2/- each of the rest	
to a maximum of 35/-	

Source: Internal minute, 14 February 1923, PRO, MH 68/102; K. Nicholas, The Social Effects of Unemployment, 45.

Thus throughout the period, most Barrow families with up to four children were considerably better off than their Middlesbrough counterparts, but from 1923, larger families were in a desperate situation in both towns.

(iii) Diet

Studies of working-class diets in Barrow and Middlesbrough over the period reveal a close similarity. A diet of home baked bread, stews and hot pots made from vegetables and cheap cuts of meat, dumplings, suet puddings and vegetable dishes, plus the use of margarine and condensed milk, was common, although in contrast to Barrow, the

Middlesbrough study does indicate the reliance of 'a substantial minority' of families on ready cooked foods³⁶. Thus with the possible exception of the war years, the work of Elizabeth Roberts and Katharine Nicholas suggests a continuity in the basic working-class diet in Middlesbrough and Barrow from the turn of the century to the 1930s. However, Elizabeth Roberts' view that there was 'no reliance on convenience food ... in Barrow'³⁷, with items such as fish and chips being an occasional treat, is challenged by John Walton. He argues that fish and chips provided a cheap and nutritious meal, and by the early twentieth century 'was becoming part of the mainstream family economy of the industrial working-class'³⁸, Barrow being no exception to this trend.

Elizabeth Roberts also argues that during the pre-war period, despite large families, low incomes and high rents, Barrow possessed 'a healthier than average population'³⁹, a factor she attributes to the skills of local housewives in selecting and cooking food that was both economical and nutritious⁴⁰. Whilst using oral evidence to support this view, she also quotes the School Medical Officer's figures⁴¹ based on a sample of 1,912 (15.7%) elementary school children and concludes 'these figures do not suggest a significant problem of malnutrition'⁴². However, the School Medical Officer drew further conclusions. Using anthropometric techniques based on the comparison of each child to a given height and weight standard in order to assess levels of nutrition, the report for 1912 revealed that *all* the children examined in the 6-7 year old age group failed to meet these standards. Whilst some of this was attributed to 'hereditary taint', most instances of malnutrition were blamed on poor standards of nutrition rather than insufficiency of feeding. Much of this was seen as preventable, and he believed the parents needed a better understanding of food values, 'especially the value of old-fashioned oat-meal porridge as bone and muscle former'⁴³.

Such medical evidence undermines Elizabeth Roberts' interpretation of the health of pre-war Barrow. She describes the consumption of porridge, beans, lentils, peas and pasta (macaroni) for example, as widely contributing to a healthy diet⁴⁴. Although she acknowledges the School Medical Officer's enthusiasm for these foods, in his report of 1913 he is clearly of the opinion that such enthusiasm was not shared by Barrow's working-classes as described, and he also fails to accredit the majority of Barrow's housewives with high culinary skills:

‘one is still confronted by the problems of unsuitable feeding and the sad lack of knowledge among the working-classes, of the value of such foods as lentils, peas, beans, cheeses, macaroni, oatmeal, margarine etc. If porridge and milk were substituted for the bread and tea which in too many cases are the staple constituents of breakfast, a big change would soon be evident amongst the children.’⁴⁵

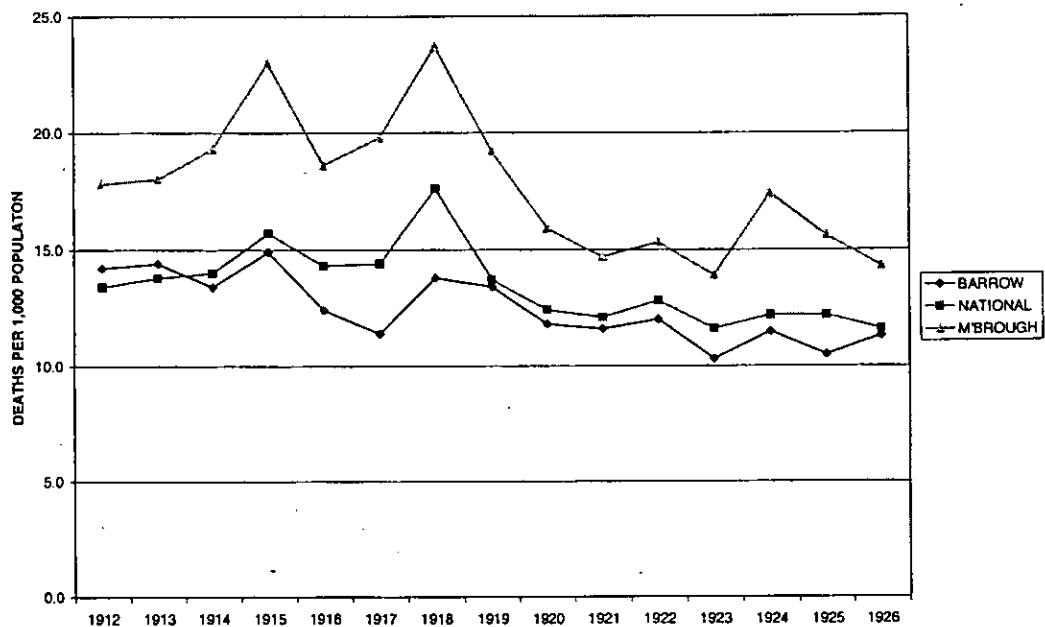
The 1913 report states that all the 2,171 children examined were underweight, and of nutritional levels in general he writes: ‘a fair proportion of children of all ages were below the normal standard of nutrition’. Oral evidence provides further examples of poor nutrition among sections of Barrow’s working classes, one respondent describing the youths of ‘rough’ areas as ‘good but half-starved’, many of whom, after leaving to join the Lancaster militia, ‘grew up like saplings’ after a couple of months on an army diet⁴⁶. Thus it appears that Elizabeth Roberts has tended to make broad generalisations based on a small sample, and a sample healthy enough to survive into old age. In contrast, the School Medical Officer’s reports are based on evidence seen at first hand, and although based on subjective clinical examinations open to personal interpretation, it can be argued that this very problem is itself likely to be indicative of under-reporting rather than exaggeration. It can thus be concluded there was a very real, if unquantifiable, element of under-nourishment, if not outright malnutrition, in Barrow in the years immediately preceding the First World War.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

(i) Birth and Death Rates

However, Winter has argued that ‘the Great War created conditions which helped eliminate some of the worst features of urban poverty which lay behind the high death rates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’⁴⁷, but when analysing the demographic impact of war and depression, it is necessary to identify the long term trends within which these changes occurred. At a national level, birth and death rates showed a steady decline in the first thirty years of the century, but this was more marked during the second decade, and the war years in particular.

Chart 3.1: Comparative Death Rates 1912-1926



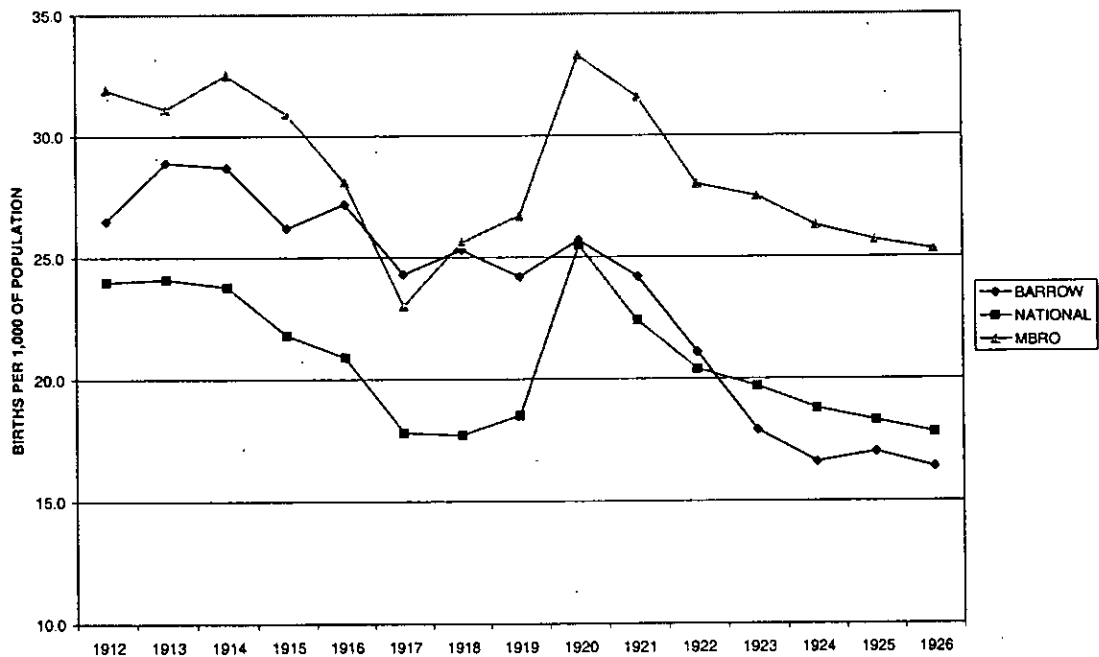
Source: Annual Reports of the Registrar General; Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officers of Barrow and Middlesbrough

A comparison of the crude death rates of Barrow and the national average (including all ages and occupation groups) (Chart 3.1) demonstrates that prior to the war, Barrow's death rate was higher than the national level, housing conditions and poor diets being a likely cause. However, the clear improvement during the war years, excluding 1915 which was a bad year nationally⁴⁸, and also 1918 with its flu epidemic, appears to support Winter's contention that the war played a significant role in increasing civilian life expectancy. It is also important to note that during the depression the crude death rate in Barrow did not return to the pre-war level and remained consistently below the national average. Death rates in Middlesbrough on the other hand, although more closely reflecting national trends, remained much higher, a pattern repeated by the town's birth rate. However, a comparative analysis of Barrow's birth rate is revealing (see Chart 3.2).

Although following the basic trend to decline, Barrow's birth rate was nevertheless higher than the national average and remained so until the end of the war. The absence of a post-war baby boom is indicative of the high number of men in reserved occupations, but the national baby boom of 1920 was the first time that the local and national birth rates coincided. What is significant is that from 1920 Barrow's birth rate plummeted, falling and remaining below the national average from 1923, demonstrating

that the inter-war years had the greatest influence on local demographic trends. Whilst it is possible that the poverty arising from long-term unemployment necessitated the conscious limitation of family size, it is impossible to quantify this. However, another important factor was migration, which resulted in a decennial reduction of the population by 17.4% by 1931⁴⁹, further emphasising the cataclysmic impact on local demography and the birth rate in particular.

Chart 3.2: Comparative Birth Rates 1912-1926



Source: Annual Reports of the Registrar General; Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officers of Barrow and Middlesbrough

(ii) Maternal and Infant Mortality

However, as already discussed, crude death rates are of limited value when analysing health trends, and infant and maternal mortality levels are generally accepted as more accurately reflecting the health of a community, high death rates here being 'indicative of a submerged mass of ill-health'⁵⁰.

Table 3.2: Maternal mortality rates per 1,000 live births registered 1912-1926

Year	Barrow	National	Middlesbrough
1911	1.2	1.0	2.7
1912	1.2	0.9	3.2
1913	2.1	0.9	6.0
1914	1.0	0.9	2.7
1915	0.0	1.1	3.9
1917	0.5	0.9	5.9
1919	1.1	1.9	2.3
1921	0.0	1.1	1.4
1923	0.0	1.0	3.2
1925	0.8	1.1	4.5
1926	0.9	1.0	5.3

Source: National: J. Campbell in J. Winter, The Great War and the British People, p.136

Barrow & Middlesbrough: Chief Medical Officers' Reports

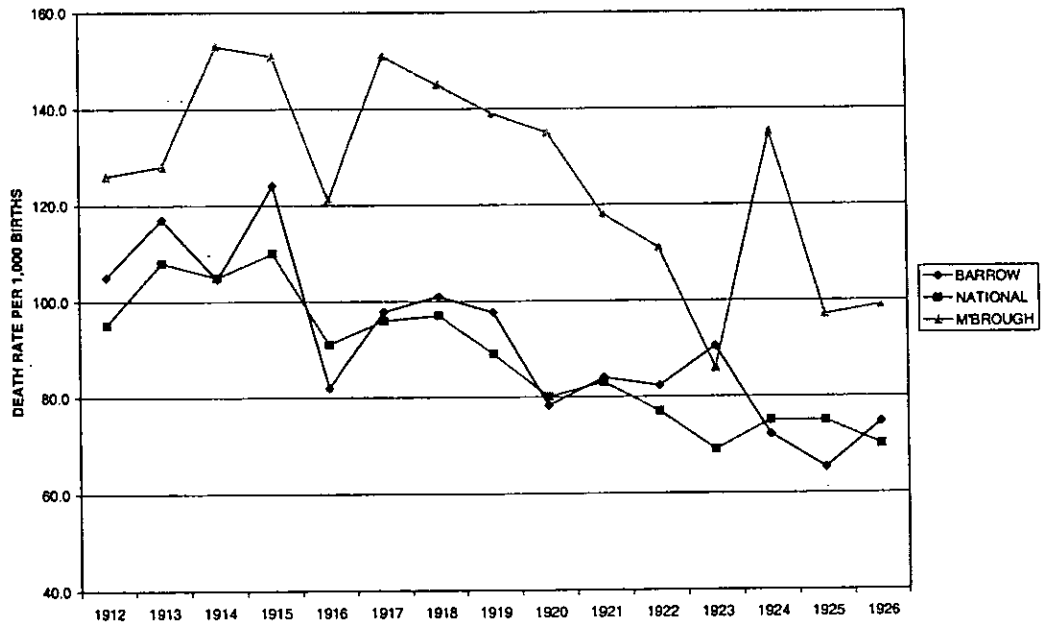
Beginning with maternal mortality, Table 3.2 illustrates that the rate in Barrow, with the exception of 1913, was slightly above the national average before the war. Nevertheless, the rate fell dramatically during the war years, and despite the sudden rise in 1919, the town could boast a 100% survival rate in the four years between 1921 and 1924.

Although rising again in 1925, the table provides a clear indication of sustained health gains in Barrow as maternal mortality remained below the national average. The health of Middlesbrough is a stark contrast, indicating enduring economic hardship and poor living conditions, a situation which is further reflected in the town's infant mortality figures.

Chart 3.3 demonstrates that whilst infantile mortality in both towns was higher than the national average, Middlesbrough's rate was exceptionally high, and despite plummeting in 1916, increased significantly throughout the war years. Nicholas attributes this rise to environmental conditions, the prevalence of infectious diseases, poor diets and a lack of education⁵¹. In Barrow however, as a result of a spate of epidemics in the first half of the year, the number of infantile deaths reached a peak in 1915. The fact that the rate fell to a record low in the following year raises the issue of the reliability of the statistics, particularly as they would have been compiled retrospectively, in the wake of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest. Nevertheless, the Medical Officer attributes this fall to increased health visiting and the work of the Voluntary Welfare Committee. However, these reductions were not consistent and infant mortality struggled to stay down throughout the inter-war period, pointing to an underlying trend

of ill-health that persisted despite apparent health gains in other spheres. Nevertheless, if the figures are reliable, although infantile deaths in Barrow continued to be erratic, after 1915 they never returned to the pre-war level. Middlesbrough on the other hand, with the exception of 1924, shows a more sustained fall over the same period.

Chart 3.3: Infant Mortality Rates 1912-1926



Source: Annual Reports of the Registrar General; Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officers of Barrow and Middlesbrough

THE ROLE OF THE DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT

Winter describes improved domestic environments and nutrition as the key to these gains, arguing that ‘the period points almost in one direction: towards environmental improvements during the war yielding increased survival chances not only for young children and mothers, but also for the bulk of the civilian population’⁵². However, prior to the war, much working-class housing in both Barrow and Middlesbrough was of poor quality and subject to overcrowding, and in both towns conditions deteriorated further as a result of lack of repair and intensification of the overcrowding problem during the war years. Although it is impossible to establish the level of wartime overcrowding, accurate data is provided by the 1921 census, and demonstrates that the percentage of the population of both towns living in cramped conditions is strikingly similar (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Percentage of the population in families of 3 or more persons living in one or two roomed accommodation, 1921

	Barrow	Middlesbrough
Living in 1 room:	1.6%	1.5%
Living in 2 rooms:	7.9%	6.7%
Total	9.5%	8.2%

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1921, Table 11

Thus both towns had a roughly equal proportion of the population living in one roomed accommodation, but a slightly higher percentage of large Barrow families had the marginal advantage of two rooms. However, Barrow did suffer from increasing homelessness in the inter-war period, and this is reflected in the numbers living in barns and other unsuitable structures. Whilst Middlesbrough in 1921 had only 72 persons or 0.05% of the total population living in makeshift structures, Barrow totalled 224, or 0.3% of the population, a proportion six times greater, which was to rise steadily as the number of evictions continued. Additionally, Middlesbrough had a more successful house building policy, 2,300 new houses being constructed by 1927⁵³, which had no parallel in Barrow (see Table 2.3).

Thus whilst infant and maternal mortality rates indicate that health levels did improve, this can scarcely be attributed to the domestic environment as housing conditions in both towns continued to deteriorate. Additionally, whilst Middlesbrough was to benefit from sanitation improvements from the mid 1920s (to be discussed later), Barrow's external environment remained unchanged, making it necessary to examine higher levels of nutrition as offering a more plausible explanation for these gains.

NUTRITION-LINKED MORTALITY

(i) Diarrhoeal Diseases

Turning to nutrition-linked mortality, diarrhoeal diseases fell nationally during the war, and Table 3.4 illustrates that deaths in both Barrow and Middlesbrough followed this trend, but again, these gains were considerably greater in Barrow.

Table 3.4: Deaths from diarrhoea per 1,000 population

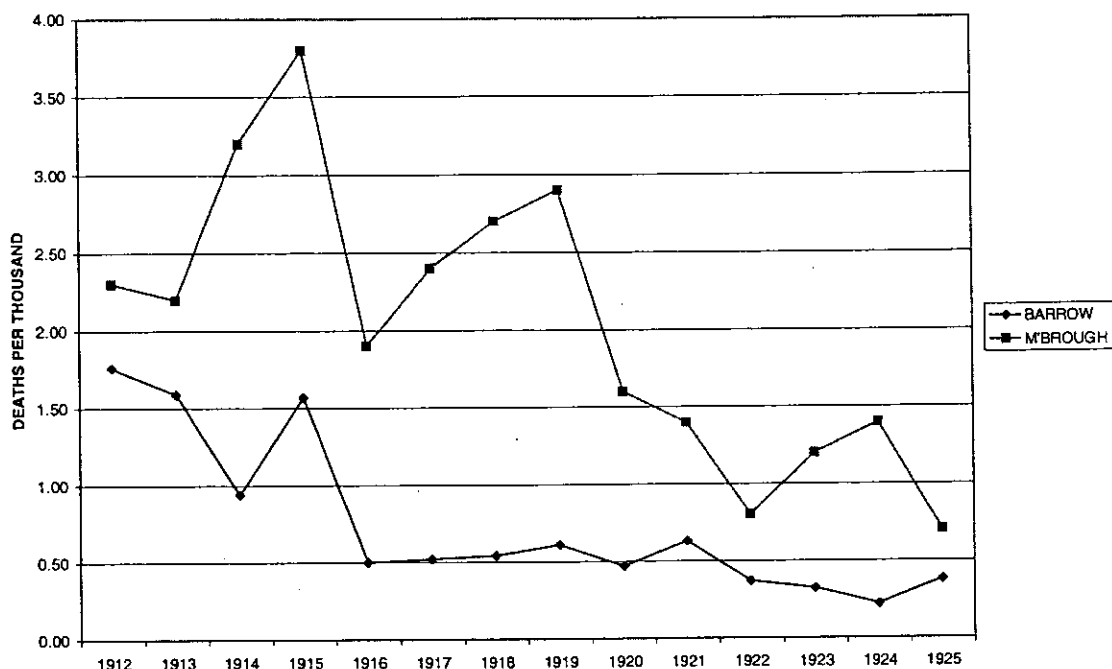
	Barrow	Middlesbrough
1913	0.4	1.1
1917	0.01	0.9
1921	0.1	0.9
1925	0.0	0.3

Source: Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officers of Barrow and Middlesbrough

(ii) Contagious Diseases

The prevalence of contagious diseases is also closely related to nutrition, but comparison is complicated by changes in diagnosis and reporting, and consequently it has not been possible to illustrate a national average in Chart 3.4. However, Middlesbrough's Medical Officer gives a national average of .99 deaths per thousand in 1910, a rate which continued to fall steadily, although infectious diseases (including respiratory TB) still accounted for approximately 20% of all deaths⁵⁴. Chart 3.4 demonstrates that Barrow's death rate fell dramatically during the war years, in line with Winter's assertion that improved nutrition raised resistance to infection. However, the radical and sustained improvement after 1916 requires explanation in light of potential problems with statistics and the effects of long-term unemployment on health. Comparison with Middlesbrough is particularly useful at this point, and there, death rates from contagious disease, although following a similar pattern, are nevertheless much higher and the decrease far less stable.

Chart 3.4: Death Rates from Contagious Diseases 1912-1926



Source: Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officers of Barrow and Middlesbrough

Convincing evidence of improving dietary levels in Barrow is provided by the School Medical Officer's reports, which demonstrate that the health and condition of elementary school children was radically altered during the war. From 1915 there was a dramatic change in the health of local children.

'No serious cases of malnutrition were observed and the great number of cases of slight malnutrition were due to improper feeding rather than to insufficiency. This improvement can no doubt be accounted for by the lack of unemployment, and higher wages earned by the working classes in the Borough. There is no doubt that higher wages are benefiting the children as regards their general physical condition.'⁵⁵

Visible health gains continued throughout the war. In 1916 'no cases of malnutrition due to insufficiency of food were noted', and by 1917 'the children are well clothed, well-fed and present a generally healthy appearance', clearly demonstrating that the war resulted in major health gains for the working classes. However, as Chart 3.4 indicates, the opposite was true of Middlesbrough, where 'the war had a debilitating effect upon the health of children and adults, and produced a higher mortality rate from diseases than would have occurred in normal times'⁵⁶.

(iii) Comparative Perspectives

The disparity between the towns continued into the inter-war period. Middlesbrough's Medical Officer wrote that in 1920 the town's health looked 'noticeably favourable' with a large decrease in infectious disease, a trend which continued despite high levels of unemployment and housing problems. In Barrow on the other hand, wartime health gains were short-lived, and the School MO's reports give a clear picture of both wartime gains and the impact of depression. By 1919 the School MO, reporting on a large sample of 6,667 school children, concluded that 'there were ... indications during the autumn, that a considerable number of children were not obtaining sufficiency of food, due to bad economic conditions in the homes on account of Labour troubles' (1919). This may account for the slight increase in deaths from contagious diseases in that year. Into the 1920s, his reports illustrate a steady decline in the condition of the children examined, as they became increasingly dirty and verminous, with a parallel deterioration in the condition of their clothing. However, despite the immediate impact of worsening economic conditions in the borough, the low death rate for these diseases continued throughout the period, and it is significant that these reports do not describe increasing malnutrition in these years.

As previously stated, working-class diets in both towns were strikingly similar, as was the scale of out-relief received after February 1923, with the result that large families on maximum relief experienced the greatest hardships, which inevitably impinged on diets. Following the reconstruction of an average working-class family budget of the 1930's⁵⁷, Nicholas enlisted the help of dieticians from North Teesside General Hospital to analyse its nutritional value. Whilst most categories of adults were judged to have consumed sufficient calories, a significant minority did not, particularly expectant and nursing mothers, active men and teenage boys⁵⁸. Thus Nicholas is able to conclude that a significant number of Teesside people who lived on the standard unemployed budget were likely to be underfed, although she differentiates between the two decades:

'Whereas it was possible for the unemployed of the thirties to manage, for most of the time, to provide a reasonably good diet for all but special categories of people, this was clearly not the case in the twenties. The cost of living index shows that the unemployed of the twenties must have been able to buy much less food than those of the thirties, and therefore they will have been less well nourished'⁵⁹.

She goes on to expand this statement, arguing that rather than eating a fundamentally different diet during the twenties, 'people simply ate less, with a greater emphasis on bread and less animal protein'⁶⁰. As a result, the diets of the poor in the 1920s were likely to be quantitatively and qualitatively inferior.

In the light of the close economic similarities between the two towns, it seems reasonable to apply the same analysis to Barrow, and conclude that sections of Barrow population were suffering dietary deficiencies both before and after the First World War. Further insights into inter-war nutrition levels in Barrow are provided by an examination of the bankruptcy register. Between the years of 1914 and 1926, 29% of the total number of bankruptcies in the town were of food retailers, including grocers, butchers and bakers⁶¹. Additionally, four fish fryers were declared bankrupt between 1920 and 1924, suggesting that the depression hit the trade hard. These figures indicate that a significant proportion of the population were forced to economise on basic foodstuffs during the depression, which clearly would have had serious implications for the borough's health. These conclusions however, call into question the other evidence for improved health in post-war Barrow, and it is important to identify the factors influencing this.

In Middlesbrough, although health improved, the Medical Officer did not debate the links between health and long-term unemployment. It appears that 'poverty was an accepted feature of the town, and the members of the health department felt no need to regard it as anything but an unfortunate ever present difficulty'⁶². Free school meals had been introduced in the immediate post-war period, the figure rising from 250 in April 1921 to 2,300 by June, but falling to an average of 1,000 per month by the end of the year. However, a systematic purge was begun early in 1922 to ensure that free school meals did not supplement poor relief. As a result, only 30 children, medically certificated as suffering from malnutrition, received school meals, but this was totally suspended in 1925 and not re-introduced until the 1930s, despite the claim of the town's Labour MP that a large number of Middlesbrough's children were undernourished. Although the MO accepted that some diseases arose as a result of malnutrition, he did not feel free school meals were necessary, denying that a large proportion of the population were ill-fed despite widespread poverty.

In Barrow, free school meals were also introduced in 1919 in response to the economic downturn, and between 19 November and 31 December of that year provided 18,858 dinners for necessitous children, an average of 510 daily at a cost of 5d per meal⁶³. By 1921 conditions had deteriorated further, (again reflected in an upturn in the contagious disease death rate), and out of a sample of 4,379 children examined, as many as 21.9% were found to be under-nourished. In contrast to Middlesbrough, this prompted a thorough investigation of child poverty in the town, which involved the Corporation, the Education Committee, the Labour Party and Trades Council and head teachers (see Chapter Seven). As a result of the inquiry, school meals provision was extended from six to seven days a week, and was to include breakfasts as well as dinners (see Table 3.5), although provision declined sharply from 1923 as a result of falling unemployment (Chart 1.2). However, between 1921 and 1926 Barrow's School MO was able to report an absence of serious cases of malnutrition, which he directly attributed to the continued provision of free school meals.

Table 3.5: Total number of free school meals provided in Barrow 1921-1926

Year	No. meals	Average no. children
1921	997,000	2,231
1922	1,259,000	2,419
1923	630,136	1,153
1924	223,168	411
1925	183,499	335
1926	172,415	308

Source: Barrow School Medical Officer's Reports

Another important welfare measure was the supply of free or reduced price milk to expectant and nursing mothers and young children. However, in 1921, as a result of the excessive expenditure incurred by many local authorities, the Ministry of Health revoked the 1919 Milk (Mothers and Children) Order and compelled local authorities to apply for Ministry sanction before supplying milk, to enable more effective control of expenditure. Entitlement was means-tested and the price calculated on a sliding scale, but the interviewing of new applicants and the monthly re-assessment of all cases became expensive and unwieldy to administer, whilst the MO believed the milk to be of little benefit to the recipients. Nevertheless, despite tightened Ministry of Health control, 67% and 73% of the milk was supplied free in 1921 and 1922 respectively, which provides an indication of the extent of hardship at that time, although figures are unavailable for subsequent years.

Table 3.6: Number of milk orders issued in Barrow 1921-1926

1921	1,401	1924	1,571
1922	2,514	1925	1,758
1923	2,481	1926	2,312

Source: Barrow Medical Officer's Reports

Table 3.7 places Barrow Corporation's expenditure on milk and free school meals into perspective by presenting it in relation to other expenditure generated by unemployment for the financial years ending 31 March 1923 and 1924:

Table 3.7: Barrow Corporation expenditure on unemployment to 1924

	1923	1924
	£	£
Direct relief works	26,813	26,813
Feeding necessitous school children	21,533	25,384
Annual loan charges on Relief Works	6,722	16,403
Milk to expectant and nursing mothers	1,253	1,602
Bridge tolls for the unemployed	1,088	1,538

Source: Borough Treasurer's Memoranda, Unemployment Correspondence 1923-24,

BA/C 5/1/46 BOX 51 F2

Whilst the cost of milk was a moderate proportion of Barrow Corporation's annual unemployment relief budget, the benefits to the recipients, despite the Medical Officer's opinion, would have been tangible nonetheless. However, free school meals were the second highest item of expenditure to 1924 and indicate that the health of the borough's school children was given a high priority, constituting an important facet of local efforts to minimise as far as possible the impact of the depression. These efforts on behalf of the children of the destitute would also have had a significant impact on the health of their families, enabling a greater proportion of unemployment benefit or out-relief to be directed towards the needs of other family members than would otherwise have been possible.

It can thus be argued that local authority intervention and the directing of welfare policies towards the needs of these two particularly vulnerable groups during the depression played an important role in sustaining Barrow's wartime health gains. This argument is further supported by comparison with Middlesbrough, where there appears to be a greater acceptance of poverty. The charts comparing infant mortality, contagious diseases, bronchitis and TB mortality rates indicate a general decline in Middlesbrough's health from 1922, when supplementary welfare provision was

abandoned, culminating in the high death rates of 1924. Although the death rates for contagious disease and infant mortality had improved by 1926, these gains have been accredited to improvements in the town's sanitation system⁶⁴. Thus there is a significant contrast in the welfare provision of the two towns, and Barrow's poor relief struggles and changing attitudes towards poverty, an important facet of this study, will be dealt with in detail in later chapters.

RESPIRATORY DISEASES

(i) Pulmonary Tuberculosis

Turning to tuberculosis, from September 1915 Barrow Corporation leased a number of beds at High Carley, a sanatorium some five miles distant, administered by Lancashire County Council. In addition, a dispensary was opened in Barrow in 1917, whilst the Devonshire Road pavilion was used as an isolation hospital for acute and advanced cases, and by March 1918 steps were taken for the compulsory removal of cases which could not be isolated at home. However, there were no local facilities for children, and although they could be treated at the dispensary, success was often undermined by home conditions, whilst the premature return of patients to their old environment would often result in a relapse. Indeed, environmental factors were given serious consideration in Barrow. As a result, from October 1916 the Local Insurance Committee pressed for the establishment of farm colonies to provide after-care facilities, and in June 1917 requested the Corporation to investigate the housing and sanitary conditions in Hindpool and Ramsden wards where, despite not pre-dating the rest of the borough and being only fifty years old, there was a higher than average incidence of TB.

Unfortunately, the wartime manpower shortage prevented this and attempts to establish an open-air school and farm colonies made little headway during the war. Additionally, although the immediate post-war climate favoured the expansion of the service, this was short-lived, and after 1921 the government did not consider new schemes owing to the need for retrenchment.

The retention of patients at the Sanatorium could be problematic despite the combination of fresh air, good food, systematic rest and supervised exercise. Patients were apt to discharge themselves for a variety of reasons; including the draconian discipline, too much spare time or complaints about bad food, particularly in the hot

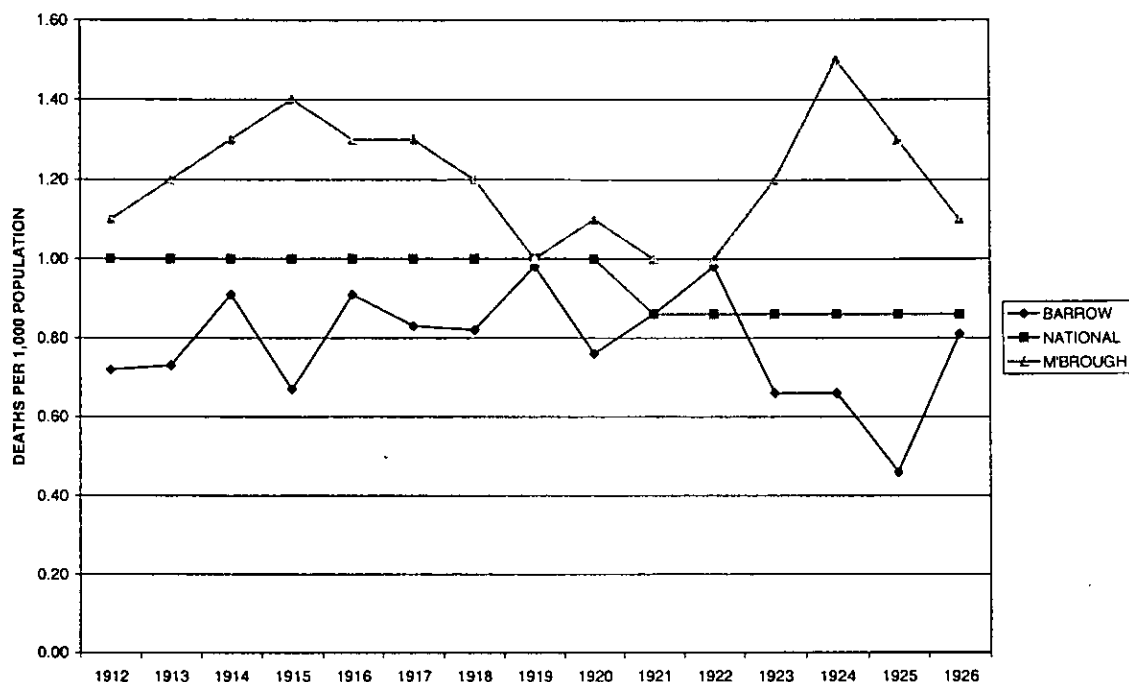
summer of 1916. More significant however, are the letters from working-class consumptives declining sanatorium treatment for economic reasons. For example, worry over the family left to survive on 10/- per week Insurance Benefit could compel a man to discharge himself in order to find light work to support his family⁶⁵. Additionally, others were unable to supply the clothing required for admission, and so declined treatment. The list was so extensive as to be beyond the means of many working class patients, a problem which became even more acute inter-war, when poverty drove many families to pawn clothing, bedding and other essentials in order to survive. To address this, the local Insurance Committee was allowed to provide these items for insured patients if necessary, whilst the Council was urged to do the same for the uninsured.

Chart 3.5 compares deaths from pulmonary tuberculosis in Barrow and Middlesbrough. Throughout the period, Barrow's TB death rate was remarkably stable despite the harsh conditions, and it should be noted that the figures were not artificially lowered by deaths in sanatoria outside the area. However, in an unpublished report of 1919, Barrow's MO expressed his doubts as to the value of sanatorium treatment, believing:

‘that the beginning was made at the wrong end, that is, at the curative end, instead of at the preventable end of the problem. I am strongly of the opinion that actual treatment will be futile until better housing conditions are provided, and consequent excuses for overcrowding eliminated, a better standard of living, improved hygienic conditions in workshops and factories, every encouragement given for healthy recreation in the open air and a higher standard of personal hygiene taught by vigorous educational campaign’⁶⁶.

Thus, privately, the MO saw nothing short of a radical reform of working-class living and working conditions as capable of reducing the prevalence of the disease. By 1925 however, TB deaths had been halved and compared favourably with the national rate, which averaged 0.858 per 1,000 in England and Wales between 1921 and 1926⁶⁷. The MO attributed this fall to successful intervention by the health authorities over a five-year period, in the form of the constant supervision of patients and the cumulative effects of treatment⁶⁸, whilst the economic conditions of 1926 were seen as responsible for the sharp increase in deaths that year⁶⁹.

Chart 3.5: Pulmonary Tuberculosis Death Rates 1912-1926



Sources: *Annual reports of the Chief Medical Officers of Barrow-in-Furness and Middlesbrough.*
 The national average for 1912-1920: *McKeown, The Modern Rise of Population, p.93.*
 The national average from 1921 *Bryder 'The First World War: healthy of hungry?', 148.*

In contrast, with the exception of 1919 and 1922, TB death rates in Middlesbrough were considerably higher. The town's TB Officer believed most of his problems were caused by the depression, attributing the high death rate of 1924 to 'the cumulative effect of almost four years of unemployment and the consequent poverty among the working-classes [which] are unquestionably the immediate cause of increased mortality'⁷⁰. Overcrowding combined with the increasing death rate to give an additional cause for concern, as TB sufferers in many families were unable to be isolated, and continued to share bedrooms and beds with other family members⁷¹. However, Middlesbrough Council, whilst acknowledging the need to focus on the treatment and prevention of TB and improve housing conditions, was badly restricted by the inter-war economic climate. Between 1923 and 1926, the Corporation built few new houses and private building was aimed at the owner-occupier. Although TB death rates fell on the new estates, it was the better off that lived there, the rents for the new houses being beyond the reach of the poor. Thus overcrowding and insanitary conditions, particularly in the north of the town, were left virtually untouched, and as in Barrow, bad health and high death rates were endemic to certain areas. St Hilda's ward is a good example, where traditionally poor environmental conditions, population density and proximity to

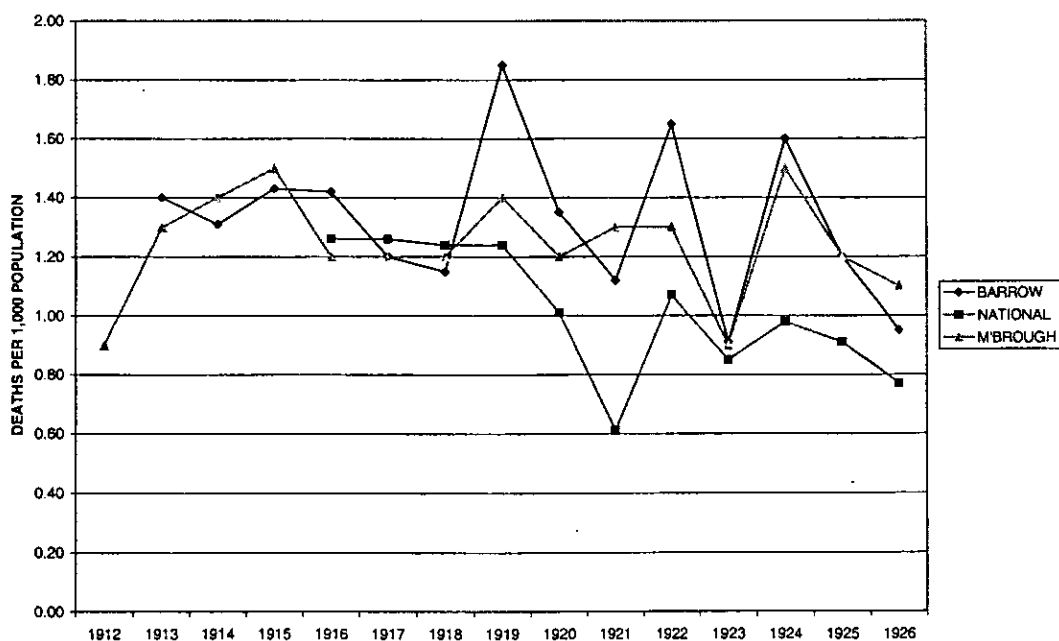
works⁷² bore close resemblance to Barrow's Hindpool. Thus in both towns, efforts to treat TB were continually undermined by the inability to substantially improve housing conditions. However, the lower death rate in Barrow, which remained steady throughout both war and depression, suggests that overcrowding and deteriorating housing conditions, contrary to Winter's view, were less influential than levels of nutrition.

(ii) Pneumonia and Bronchitis

Similar conclusions can be drawn for other respiratory diseases, and a brief examination indicates that instead of increasing as a result of housing problems during the war years, deaths from both bronchitis and pneumonia actually fell in Barrow during 1917.

However, as Chart 3.6 demonstrates, the bronchitis death rate rose after 1918 and then became wildly erratic, but at a time when pressure on housing decreased, thus pointing away from housing conditions as a major contributory factor. Uncharacteristically, bronchitis was far less of a problem in Middlesbrough, although deaths in both towns in the inter-war period were above the national average.

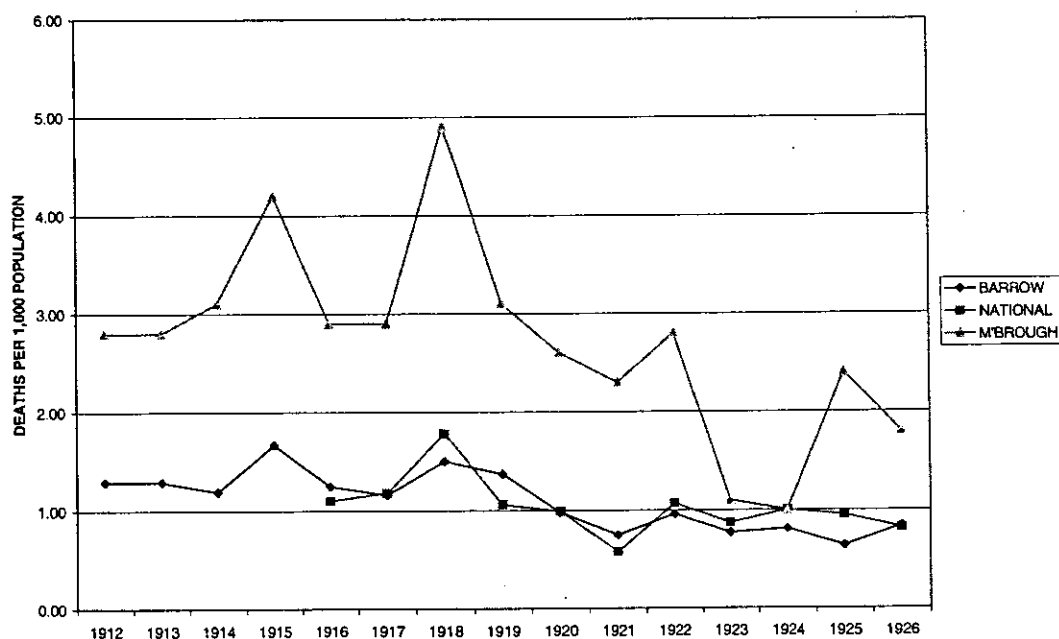
Chart 3.6: Bronchitis Death Rates 1912-1926



Source: Annual Reports of the Registrar General; Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officers of Barrow and Middlesbrough

However, the death rate from pneumonia (Chart 3.7) in Middlesbrough was extremely high, the town having the highest death rate of all north east towns and also the second highest for all respiratory diseases⁷³. In contrast, Barrow compares very favourably to the national average and, with the exception of 1915 and 1918, never exceeded pre-war levels, despite the town's housing conditions. Thus this comparison fails to support the assertion that war generated an increase in deaths from TB and other respiratory diseases, whilst the situation in Barrow suggests overcrowding was less influential than deteriorating economic conditions, and their corollary of poorer nutrition.

Chart 3.7: Pneumonia Death Rates 1912-1926



Source: Annual Reports of the Registrar General; Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officers of Barrow and Middlesbrough

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the health of Barrow's population in the years between 1914 and 1926 has called into question the established interpretation of the town's health in the pre-war period. The evidence that levels of malnutrition among local schoolchildren was comparable to levels giving cause for concern nationally, combined with a crude death rate and infant and maternal mortality levels above the national average, demonstrate

the assertion that the population was 'healthier than average' to be untenable. However, Medical Officer's Reports and statistics reveal considerable health gains during the war years, the result of the higher earnings of a large proportion of the workforce engaged in war-related industries. There is little doubt that in Barrow better wages resulted in improved nutrition, which in turn increased resistance to disease, supporting Winter's contention that the war generated major health gains for the working classes. This was not the case for Middlesbrough however.

The charts indicate that Barrow's crude death rate broadly follows the national pattern, although falling, and remaining, below the national average after 1914. However, infant mortality levels, less stable than other statistics and struggling to stay down, indicate that the young remained vulnerable, and although pointing to underlying levels of ill-health, the overall trend was downward, and mortality never returned to pre-war levels. However, the study fails to support Winter's argument that overcrowding and deteriorating housing conditions resulted in an increase in deaths from tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, whilst the combination of low death rates and poor housing conditions demonstrates that nutrition played a key role.

The importance of analysing the health of the borough over the whole period rather than artificially segregating the impact of war and depression is most clearly indicated by the birth rate and deaths from contagious disease. The birth rate, drastically and irrevocably reduced by migration from the area and, quite possibly, affected for the first time by the planned limitation of family size by the working classes, demonstrates that the depression had a far more significant demographic impact than the war. The low incidence of contagious diseases throughout the inter-war period raises important issues, such as the validity of the statistics and why Barrow's health gains were not eroded by long-term mass unemployment. The comparative analysis of Barrow and Middlesbrough reveals contrasting health levels despite similar rates of unemployment, out-relief and housing problems, and suggests that in Barrow, other forces were coming into play to sustain these gains in the post-war period. Whilst Middlesbrough's smaller and less stable health gains have been attributed to environmental improvements⁷⁴, the comparison reveals very different attitudes towards poverty. Although poverty was accepted as the norm in Middlesbrough, Barrow sources indicate that during the post-war period, the raising of working-class living standards was regarded as an essential precondition to better health, particularly with regard to TB. This had an important

influence on poor relief and welfare policies in Barrow. The efforts to mitigate the worst effects of poverty were substantial enough to make a considerable contribution to the health of the borough and thus validate the statistics, but such a radical change in attitudes and responses to social problems necessitates thorough investigation in itself. Thus the comparison of these two towns demonstrates the problems inherent in attempts to generalise on a national scale, and the importance of individual case studies to ascertain the true impact of war and depression. This comparative analysis demonstrates that, despite fundamental similarities between two towns with similar histories and employment structures, the interplay of so many variables can result in widely differing experiences.

¹ A. Wohl, *Endangered Lives* (London, 1984), 329-30.

² *Ibid*, 331.

³ J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 1985), 11.

⁴ Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 335.

⁵ J.M. Winter, 'Military fitness and civilian health in Britain during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15 (1980), 209.

⁶ Winter, *The Great War*, 18.

⁷ Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 338.

⁸ L. Bryder, *Below The Magic Mountain* (Oxford, 1988), 87.

⁹ *Ibid*, 143.

¹⁰ Winter, *The Great War*, 18.

¹¹ C. Webster, 'Healthy or hungry thirties?', *History Workshop Journal*, 13 (1982), 112.

¹² Winter, *The Great War*, 10.

¹³ Webster, 'Healthy or hungry', 119.

¹⁴ Winter, 'Military fitness', 213.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 237.

¹⁶ Winter, *The Great War*, 123.

¹⁷ L. Bryder, 'The First World War: healthy or hungry?', *Historical Workshop Journal* (1987), 24, 144.

¹⁸ N. Morgan, 'Infant mortality, flies and horses in later-nineteenth century towns: a case study of Preston', *Continuity and Change*, 17 (2002), pp. 97-132.

¹⁹ Webster, 'Healthy or hungry', 123.

²⁰ Morgan, 'Infant mortality', 99.

²¹ Winter, *The Great War*, 123.

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- ²² Bryder, *Magic Mountain*, 109.
- ²³ Bryder, 'The First World War.
- ²⁴ Bryder, *Magic Mountain*, 112.
- ²⁵ Webster, 'Healthy or hungry', 112.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, 119.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 113-15.
- ²⁸ J.D. Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution* (Barrow-in-Furness, 1981), 370.
- ²⁹ *Barrow Leader*, May 1925, Mowat Papers, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDX 93/4.
- ³⁰ A3B, 41, 'Social History of Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster 1880-1930', E. Roberts Collection, Lancaster University, Lancaster.
- ³¹ H2B, 25, 'Social History of Barrow', ILU
- ³² *Northern Beacon*, 5 June 1919, Mowat Papers, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDX/93/2.
- ³³ N. Todd, 'A History of labour in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness c.1890-1920', M. Litt thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976, 171.
- ³⁴ Barrow Board of Guardians to Ministry of Health, 23 January 1922, Barrow-in-Furness Union: overdrawn Treasurer's Account 1921-1923, National Archives, Kew, MH 68/102.
- ³⁵ J.J. Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment in Middlesbrough 1919-26', MA Dissertation, University of Teesside, 1982, 21.
- ³⁶ E. Roberts, 'Working class standards of living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 30 (1977), 314; Nicholas, *Social Effects of Unemployment*, 54.
- ³⁷ Roberts, 'Working class standards of living', 314.
- ³⁸ J.K. Walton, *Fish & Chips and the British working class 1870-1940* (Leicester, 1992), 140.
- ³⁹ Roberts, 'Working class standards of living', 311.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 315.
- ⁴¹ School examinations introduced in Barrow in 1910.
- ⁴² Roberts, 'Working class standards of living', 310.
- ⁴³ School Medical Officer's report, 1912, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ⁴⁴ Roberts, 'Working class standards of living', 313-14.
- ⁴⁵ School Medical Officer's report, 1913, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book, CRO.
- ⁴⁶ F3B, 2, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁴⁷ Winter, *The Great War*, 140.
- ⁴⁸ Winter, *The Great War*, 134.

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- ⁴⁹ Census of England and Wales 1931, County of Lancaster (Part 1), Table 2.
- ⁵⁰ Webster, 'Healthy or hungry', 118.
- ⁵¹ K. Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment on Teesside, 1919-39* (Manchester, 1986), 77.
- ⁵² Winter, *The Great War*, 153.
- ⁵³ Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment', 68.
- ⁵⁴ A. Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Disease and the Rise of Preventative Medicine* (Oxford, 1993).
- ⁵⁵ School Medical Officer's report, 1915, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book, CRO.
- ⁵⁶ Chief Medical Officer's Report, Middlesbrough, 1918, Middlesbrough C.B. Accounts Book, Cleveland County Records Office, Middlesbrough.
- ⁵⁷ Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment*, 53-59.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 64.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 68-69.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 69.
- ⁶¹ Bankruptcy Register, County Court, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/CC.
- ⁶² Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment*, 81.
- ⁶³ Medical Officer's report, 1919, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book, CRO.
- ⁶⁴ Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment*, 70.
- ⁶⁵ Letter from Gilbert Northall, 1 September 1916, TB 1915, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/35 Box 35 F1.
- ⁶⁶ Medical Officer's Report 14 April 1919, TB 1915, CRO, BA/C 5/1/35 BOX 51 F1.
- ⁶⁷ Bryder, 'The First World War', 148.
- ⁶⁸ Medical Officer's report, 1925, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book, CRO.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 1926.
- ⁷⁰ Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment*, 82.
- ⁷¹ Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment', 73.
- ⁷² Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment*, 84.
- ⁷³ *Ibid*, 82.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 80; Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment', 72.

THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE POLITICS OF DISTRESS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the influence of war and mass unemployment on municipal politics and the labour movement in Barrow between 1914 and 1926, building on and developing in new directions Todd's detailed analysis of the growth of the town's labour movement from 1890 to 1920¹. The period was one of considerable upheaval for local politics, and the examination of recurring left-wing divisions, in raising the most important and distinctive issues, will provide the chapter's analytical framework.

The previous chapter has demonstrated the problems inherent in generalisation across regions and localities, and national patterns of political change are at best aggregates which obscure the diversity of working class politics. The analysis of local factors through regional case-studies is central to a greater understanding of political developments, and in addition to determining how closely Barrow conforms to broader national trends and existing historiographical interpretations, the chapter will compare the town's political developments to those in other localities. The value of Middlesbrough in a comparative study with Barrow has already been discussed, and its inclusion here will provide an additional facet to this analysis, whilst the similarity of Barrow's background to that of 'Red' Nelson, with its well organised and active labour movement and a tradition of militant trade unionism, will provide further useful insights. Additionally, the close similarity of Barrow to other localities dubbed 'Little Moscows', with their predominantly working class populations, close family and recreational ties, and close links between work and residence, also warrants closer analysis.

Similarly, the tentative conclusions drawn by Davies and Morley in their studies of county borough elections will enable Barrow's political experience to be viewed in the wider context of municipal trends, which will further illustrate the distinctive aspects of Barrow's political developments. However, the data available for such studies are problematic as the recording, analysis and publication of electoral results was limited. Each local authority was responsible for recording its own results and they were published only in the local press, and in varying detail². An additional problem is the difficulty of identifying the political persuasion of individuals owing to the lack of

detailed evidence, particularly at a time when political divisions and party allegiances were fluid. This is reflected in the discrepancy between the number of seats per party reported in the local press, the statistics used by Davies and Morley, and consequently the conclusions within this chapter. This being equally true of both councillors and aldermen, it proves difficult to determine precisely which party was in control or held the balance of power. Given the fluidity of political divisions, another important aspect of this chapter is therefore an examination of the influence of socialist ideology on Labour Party unity, political affiliation and the polarisation of local politics. Additionally, the chapter will begin to trace the emergence of a communal identity which the competing factions sought to mobilise, a strand of enquiry developed further in subsequent chapters.

The rise of the Labour Party has been the subject of much debate, and whilst some historians describe this as an almost inevitable consequence of social and economic change in the thirty years preceding the First World War, others describe the war itself as the significant influence. Within the former body of opinion, the formation of political identity and allegiance has been variously attributed to the expression of class identity³, the political mentality derived from shared work experiences⁴, to responses to political and industrial crises⁵, and, in particular contexts, the impact of economic and social change more generally⁶. Other historians have described the profound social and economic repercussions of the war as the significant factors behind political change⁷, particularly as a result of the changed relationship between the trade unions and the state, and increasing ties between the Labour Party and the trade union movement⁸. An alternative view however, argues that for many, the war was seen as an interruption, and the desire to return to the social and economic conditions of 1914 is equally applicable to politics⁹. Additionally, Labour's limited success in the 1920s has been attributed to its failure to build on the foundations laid during the war¹⁰, whilst regional variation inhibited Labour's attempts to adapt to local cultural and political traditions¹¹.

The extent of working class politicisation is also subject to interpretation. For example, whilst Macintyre describes the majority of the British working classes as apolitical, Kirk argues that the strength of the labour movement and the wide variety of social and political institutions on which it was founded was consolidated by the war¹². Cronin goes further however, and describes the working class militancy of 1917-20 as transcending wages, inflation and dilution, to become 'a mobilisation of the workers as

a class and of their institutions and neighbourhoods'¹³. In a similar vein, though from a contrasting political perspective, McKibbin describes the Labour Party's perception of its function as 'the political mobilisation of an already industrial class consciousness'¹⁴, but seeking to exploit the 'diffuse, but intense, social conscience of its adherents with a policy which was not much more than a collection of shrewdly contrived slogans attached to the deeper and more subtle calls upon class loyalty'¹⁵. Drawing on the class conflict model, such interpretations relate to the organised and largely masculine working class, and in the wider community, Davies and Morley assert that the polarisation of 'the often fiercely expressed language of class that dominated the discourse of municipal politics' was formally manifest in the municipal anti-socialist alliances of the period¹⁶. Despite the considerable successes of 1919, they describe Labour's municipal fortunes as declining in the County Boroughs between 1920-25, but improving from 1926 in strong Labour boroughs where unemployment was high. In such boroughs, unemployment was a political issue which Labour could use to advantage¹⁷, which suggests that class polarisation was an important influential factor.

However, Macintyre argues that radical left-wing politics was not necessarily synonymous with class antagonism. He concurs with Davies and Morley that left-wing gains on local authority bodies stimulated the middle class ruling elite to organise on the same lines as the militants, and that 'political differentiation can be clarified by looking at how these two competing groups identified themselves and defined their relationship to the community'¹⁸. By this analysis, the ruling group in such areas, calling themselves Moderates, defined community in terms of a shared financial interest, for example as ratepayers, creating a common identity regardless of occupation and place in the social hierarchy. The Communists, identified with the under-dog, and in some close-knit, militant working class communities, were accepted as part of the Labour Party¹⁹. However, despite tendencies towards political polarisation, Macintyre argues that in times of crisis, people turn to those best able to defend them²⁰. Thus, as the inter-war crisis deepened and affected all social groups, the Communists, in areas where they were able to identify with community interests, were able to draw on the residents' willingness to unite against an external threat, gaining influence because they spoke for and defended a 'mutually-dependent community that was threatened by economic collapse'²¹. An important and distinctive feature of these 'Little Moscovs' was 'the democratic thread that ran through the life of [these] communities', particularly the preference for open and collective decision making. In such localities, the elected

representatives of the labour movement 'were seen as delegates who should be responsible to those who had elected them, and the limited size of the localities strengthened the preference for direct, face-to-face democracy'²².

On a national scale, Communism was to have significant implications for labour politics, widening the gulf between the political and industrial wings of the first Labour government²³, brought down in 1924 through increasing fears of Communist influence. Additionally, following the government's intervention in the coal dispute, the General Strike of 1926 had a significant effect on the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party. The Communist Party, together with some Labour Party politicians believed it impossible to separate industrial and political objectives²⁴, and saw the strike as inherently political, whilst the government turned the confrontation into a constitutional issue in an attempt to rally the nation behind the government as defenders of Parliamentary democracy. The surrender of the TUC General Council however, demonstrates the absence of political motives on the part of the labour leadership²⁵, but whilst their capitulation was seen as a betrayal and further boosted Communist Party membership, the unions remained more concerned for their own internal organisation and discipline than for long-term political and social reconstruction²⁶.

THE RISE OF LABOUR TO THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Returning to the pre-war period, Todd has demonstrated that Barrow's labour movement was typically rooted in diverse political, industrial and consumer organisations, which, by the late nineteenth century, included strong trade unions, Co-operative and Fabian Societies, the Trades Council and the Independent Labour Party (ILP). These institutions provided a firm base for popular support, and were to be influential in the growth of the Labour and Socialist Parties, the latter being described as the driving force behind efforts to build an independent and cohesive working class movement, crucial in a political climate where the attitudes of the middle class ruling elite remained rooted in an earlier epoch. This is not to suggest however, that the labour movement was without its tensions at the turn of the century. In addition to focussing on Parliamentary politics, the ILP also channelled its energies into organising the unemployed and unskilled. These strong links with the general unions conflicted with the strong craft union presence on the Trades Council and generated considerable antagonism between these two bodies. However, by the early twentieth century, an

integrated labour movement had developed from the piecemeal collection of disparate working class organisations²⁷, and relaxing tensions within the Trades Council, together with its greater co-operation with the ILP, contributed to the development of independent labour representation in Barrow. From this point, Todd asserts that Barrow's labour movement entered its political phase²⁸.

Barrow's Labour Representation Committee (LRC) was founded in 1903 and from the outset was an independent body to which other organisations, notably the ILP and the Trades Council, affiliated. However, Barrow's Co-operative Society was 'probably not connected with the LRC', and remained unaffiliated, despite the wider Co-operative movement's increasing alignment with working class interests during the war²⁹. Indeed, following the proposed national affiliation of the Co-op to the Labour Party in 1917, the Barrow Society did not follow the trend to field candidates for municipal election. Additionally, as the leftward movement lost its impetus in the early twenties, the distinctive apolitical stance of the Barrow Society was confirmed in minutes which state that 'the Committee had no intention at the present time of taking any active part in any political action or of delegating power to any other body to do so'³⁰, whilst the use of their buildings for political meetings by any political organisation was prohibited³¹.

Barrow's labour movement achieved considerable political success in the pre-war period. Charles Duncan, Labour's first Parliamentary candidate and 'a man with very cautious views'³², drew considerable support from both trade union Conservatives and also the Liberal Party. However, the Liberals were weak and easily eliminated by Labour's advances, encouraging Labour to regard themselves as the real opposition to the Conservatives³³. During this period, Barrow became a model Labour Party constituency, organised on a ward basis, with an efficient registration system and fee paying membership³⁴, gaining the Parliamentary seat in 1906, and holding it in three successive General Elections until 1918.

With regard to municipal politics, 1905 witnessed the first Labour candidate's success, and the start of a trend towards greater Labour representation, culminating in a group of eight Labour councillors by 1914. Labour candidates were particularly successful on the Board of Guardians, beginning in 1904 with the election of six candidates. As the only organised group within that body, Labour was able to gain and maintain control, until the organisation of an anti-Labour group in 1910. Nevertheless, these gains testify to the

strength of Barrow's labour movement on the eve of the First World War, and 'behind these impressive advances was ranged a body of workers and their families organised in a fairly united framework of trade unions, political parties, social and educational organisations and women's groups'³⁵.

Picking up on the comparative theme, we begin with Middlesbrough. Despite its similar industrial base and predominantly working class population, the town's pre-war labour movement was less cohesive, with many of its larger branches remaining aloof from the Trades Council, a moderate body content with Liberalism. Indeed, the Liberal Party remained strong through to the immediate post-war period. However, whilst Middlesbrough had only once returned a Labour MP (in 1892), there were eight Labour councillors (out of a total of thirty three) on the Corporation by 1914. Similarly, throughout the pre-war period there were 'a handful' of Labour members on the Board of Guardians, and as in Barrow, Guardians' elections raised little public interest³⁶.

In contrast, Hill describes Nelson as a locality which supports the concept of the inevitable rise of Labour³⁷. In addition to a deeply embedded radical, progressive culture, the town's labour movement was broad-based and cohesive whilst the considerable involvement of women in both the workforce and the political arena contributed to its distinctive character. Labour first gained control of the council in 1905, but was ousted in 1909 by an anti-labour alliance opposed to rate increases and arguing for the replacement of Labour councillors by men with business experience, and Labour were unable to regain control. Although some contemporaries described this election as being fought on a class basis of capital versus labour, other factors were also influential, such as religion and competing ideologies within the labour movement itself³⁸. However, as already demonstrated, Barrow Corporation did not share Nelson's commitment to progressive municipal policies in the pre-war period.

THE WAR YEARS 1914-1919

The combination of the report of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, 1917, which condemned Barrow Corporation's lack of provision of even basic amenities, and wartime hardships had considerable implications for labour activity at a time when Labour organisations were becoming increasingly intolerant of deteriorating social and working conditions. Additionally, the Shop Stewards' movement, boosted by

the influx of workers and ideas from other centres, gained influence as both trade union and Labour Party leadership, restricted by the Defence of the Realm Act, lost the confidence of a large proportion of the rank and file. Thus Barrow's tradition of rank and file independence was reinforced, whilst the shop stewards, increasingly disillusioned with the labour movement leadership and stimulated by the Russian Revolution, turned to Marxism for new perspectives, combining 'revolutionary socialist politics [and] industrial organisation'³⁹. The Shop Stewards were further strengthened by support from the ILP and those unions similarly opposed to the war, and by its end, the stewards were able to extend their influence to the Labour Party, changing its composition and replacing old-style officials in the process. Thus the war strengthened the left-wing of Barrow's labour movement, but whilst Todd credits the Shop Stewards' movement as laying the foundation for a strong socialist movement, he asserts that the Labour Party remained Barrow's most important working class organisation into the post-war period, gaining strength as its membership and the number of affiliations grew⁴⁰.

However, the issue of the war deeply divided the Party into two rival factions: the far-left 'pacifists', who in this context were those sympathising with Russian and German workers and opposed to British imperialism, and the supporters of the war, who included Charles Duncan, Barrow's Labour MP. It was the avowed intention of the shop stewards to oust Duncan owing to his pro-war stance, and the strength of their influence within Barrow's Labour Party is demonstrated by its refusal to support his candidature in 1918, but whilst the National Labour Party's order to reinstate him was ignored, the anti-Duncan group withdrew their alternative candidates⁴¹. Thus Duncan was forced to stand as the 'National Labour Party and Trade Union Candidate', without the backing of the local Party. Tensions ran increasingly high, to the point where in-fighting over the choice of Parliamentary candidate eclipsed all other considerations and prevented Labour from offering an effective challenge to the Unionist version of a post-war Utopia.

As a result, Labour lost its Parliamentary seat to the Unionists, a defeat which Duncan attributed directly to Labour divisions and commented: 'it does seem to me to be a disgrace to a great Labour constituency like this, where probably you have a better organised band of trade unionists than almost any other part of the country, to throw over the Labour representative and turn back to 1906 and return a Tory ship-owner'⁴².

Thus increasing Socialist influence and attitudes towards the war, divided Barrow's Labour Party and brought the once 'well-oiled machine' of a 'model' constituency⁴³ to division and defeat. But although increasing conflict provided an early indication of potentially serious divisions simmering within the Left, they did not, as yet, appear to have damaged external perceptions. Similar trends were evident in Nelson. The Labour Party's moderation contributed to increasing tensions with the ILP, and the war had deepened existing ideological divisions between the two bodies. As in Barrow, the ILP's anti-war stance generated frictions concerning the choice of Parliamentary candidate, but unlike Barrow, despite considerable in-fighting, Labour's strength held and their victory in 1918 'neatly encapsulated' the long term political trends⁴⁴.

However, although there was a marked shift towards the Left among Barrow's organised working class, this should not be overstated to the exclusion of the vast body of the apolitical and non-committed waverers. During the war there was little evidence of socialist ideology beyond the workplace, and any evidence of anti-capitalist rhetoric was largely confined to the Labour Party and Trades Council minutes. Even there, a resolution that the Labour Party should focus on food control issues and the nationalisation of key industries rather than act as recruiting agents for the capitalist class, although mild, was immediately diluted to an expression of disappointment in the government's lack of attention to essentials such as food, fuel and wages⁴⁵, suggesting that at that time, the Labour Party and Trades Council handled ideology with caution.

In the immediate post-war period, left-wing ideology was equally low key, and in the Labour Party newspaper of 1919, *The Northern Beacon*, ideology and class rhetoric were generally minimal. Two examples will make the point. The Labour Party manifesto for the 1919 Board of Guardians election called for the replacement of the Poor Law with a more humane system, the transfer of the care of the needy to the relevant local authority committee and the prevention rather than the amelioration of poverty⁴⁶. Yet although radical in its content for its day, it was nevertheless non-confrontational in its delivery. Similarly, another article expounded the consequences of middle class control of the council and its inevitable failure to meet the needs of *all* citizens, particularly with regard to the provision of adequate health and education for the working classes. Yet although emphasising social divisions and stressing that 'the cure is with ourselves'⁴⁷ the ideology is again non-confrontational and there is no

rhetoric of class struggle. Instead the emphasis was placed on the need for non-violent change by ballot and industrial action.

But neither such articles nor the damning indictment of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest were able to politicise the town's working classes. Contrary to broader national trends⁴⁸, Labour failed to gain a Corporation majority in 1919, suggesting that Barrow's working classes were not particularly susceptible to ideology. Indeed, there is evidence of frustration with the populace as a whole, who were increasingly criticised for apathy, indifference and of having 'as much imagination as a grasshopper'⁴⁹. Such insults would not endear the Left to its readership, and despite stressing the importance of the working class press, the paper was short-lived.

Both Middlesbrough and Nelson were similarly out of step with national trends. In Middlesbrough, although Labour gained three more seats in 1919, rising unemployment did not increase their support and despite a greater degree of organisation, they made no further gains until 1927. The same is true of Nelson, where the anticipated breakthrough of 1919 failed to materialise despite the strength of the labour movement, and again, Labour were unable to regain control until 1927.

LABOUR DIVIDED: 1920-1926

(i) The First Labour Council

In Barrow however, municipal politics was to prove far more volatile in the period to 1926. Communist ideology was becoming more influential, and in the bye-elections of February 1920, Communist candidates won two of the three wards contested. This represented a massive leap forward for the far left⁵⁰ and was attributed by Alfred Barrow (Conservative Mayor between 1913-19), to electoral apathy and a lack of alternative organisation. In addition to demonstrating that frustration with the electorate was not confined to the left and the existence of a large body of moderate opinion that both sides needed to court, Alfred Barrow realised the need for a parallel level of organisation to prevent a left-wing majority, which he believed would leave local government 'in the lap of the gods'⁵¹. Thus the Citizen's League was formed, an early anti-socialist alliance which has escaped the scrutiny of Davies and Morley.

The League's objectives were straightforwardly presented: to promote sane and reasonable local government, which would function in 'the proper manner' and pursue policies for the benefit of the majority. However, the ex-Mayor emphasised that whilst he had no objection to Labour representation of the working man, he was uneasy about the development of 'a compact, energetic and highly organised body, who were there, as far as he could judge, not for the benefit of the whole town, but only a certain section of it'⁵². This claim was endorsed by the opposition to Labour, and the initiative supports Macintyre's observation that the traditional elite would begin to organise on similar lines to the radicals.

In the run-up to the 1920 municipal election, political tensions continued to mount, and by October, public meetings would end with the simultaneous singing of the National Anthem and the Red Flag⁵³. Excluding the Aldermen, Labour gained their first municipal majority of 14 seats to 10, and the turnout of 75%, far in excess of the national figure of 50%, contradicts all allegations of apathy. Additionally, the result was contrary to wider trends whereby Labour's share of the vote fell to its lowest point during the inter-war years⁵⁴. Significantly, although it is difficult to pinpoint the political stance of individuals owing to a lack of evidence, these councillors included at least five with strong Communist sympathies⁵⁵.

However, following the elevation of three Labour Councillors to the Aldermanic Bench, Labour lost three seats in the bye-elections of late November, but, contrary to Davies and Morley's conclusions⁵⁶, as a result of their Aldermanic strength, the Labour group were able to sustain their influence. Nevertheless, although in control for the first time, the Labour group proceeded with caution, aware of sending out mixed messages by a refusal to wear their robes of office or to stand as a demonstration of respect for the ex-Mayor. Thus they were careful to suppress radical imagery and issued the statement that, although not prepared to maintain meaningless customs, they would nevertheless uphold the highest possible traditions of civic duties. Additionally, the first Labour Mayor made an important innovation. In view of the abnormal economic situation, he saw the need for abnormal procedures, and introduced the full reporting of council proceedings in the press, in an attempt to show openness and build confidence. This represents the first step towards the development of the public democracy that was to be a definitive feature of Macintyre's 'Little Moscows'. Although an unprecedented step and not universally approved, this remained an important feature of local administration

throughout the period, and as a result of verbatim reporting, the press became both a decisive political influence and a valuable source of information.

Other evidence supports the impression that radical zeal and municipal authority were not thought to mix, and although the new Labour council lost no time in using its authority to act on earlier Trades Council resolutions, it did so with caution. For example, a Corporation resolution sent to the Prime Minister and Minister of Labour asserting that unemployment was a national problem and demanding immediate legislation to provide every citizen with either work or sufficient maintenance, despite being a direct quote from the original Trades Council resolution of the previous year, took care to omit the many references to the failure of capitalism and the prediction of revolution if the government failed to take responsibility for unemployment⁵⁷.

(ii) Schism: 1921-1922

Despite their gains, by 1921 divisions within the Left, growing throughout the war and evident in the 1918 General Election, were coming to a head. Communist ideology was increasingly debated at public meetings and fully reported in the press, and the rhetoric of class conflict was becoming more evident as left-wing speakers argued against British imperialism and capitalist exploitation, describing the capitalist class as a threat to trade unionism.

The chain of events that was to finally rupture Barrow's labour movement began in April 1921. As on Clydeside and in Nelson, Barrow's Communists, still within the ILP, supported the adoption of certain points set out in the Third International, but this was over-ruled at the ILP national conference and the Communist groups were defeated. However, unlike Clydeside where the Communists were increasingly marginalised⁵⁸, the left wing of Barrow's ILP called a special meeting to discuss their secession from the ILP and the formation of a Barrow branch of the Communist Party. Only a select 140 out of a total membership of 400 were informed of the meeting, enabling the vote to secede to be carried by 88 votes to 53⁵⁹. The second vote, taken after the moderates had walked out, was carried unanimously. In contrast, the far left of Nelson's ILP did not defect to the Communist Party in 1921⁶⁰.

Although the vote to sever was illegal as the required seven days notice of the meeting had not been given and the ILP constitution could only be amended at an AGM, the Communists seized the entire assets of the ILP, including furniture, membership and accounts books and cash, changing the locks and occupying the premises owned by the ILP. These events were given a high profile in the local press, as were the resulting court cases starting in June of that year, and created considerable rumour and interest. Both sides spoke little and with caution. The ILP played down the effects of the coup and announced that their principles were opposed to those of the Communists, pledging to continue their historic mission of converting the masses to socialism. The defectors, for their part, maintained the legality of the vote and asserted the Communist Party was now in legitimate possession and control, but stressed that defecting councillors would continue to perform their civic duties⁶¹. The judge described the case as difficult and novel, but particularly interesting as there was no legal precedent, the only similar case, before the Manchester Judges of the Chancery Division, having been adjourned. He ultimately ruled in favour of the ILP who repossessed their property and assets, thus discrediting the Communists whose coup, although short-lived, was to have far-reaching consequences for local politics.

This was perhaps the first time that many Barrovians became aware of the ideological conflict within the local Labour movement, whilst the illegality of the Communists' actions created an impression of devious, under-hand left-wing manoeuvrings, whose practitioners (who included several Labour Councillors and an Alderman) appeared ill-suited to handling the current climate of fast rising unemployment and depression. The political repercussions of the rift were immediate and unequivocal. In response to this and further left-wing bye-election gains, the Citizen's League re-doubled its efforts to broaden its base and mount an effective, unified opposition, emphasising that it was a non-party, non-sectarian organisation open to all⁶². Additionally, the Communists remained closely aligned to Labour, and despite the events of April their representatives fought the local elections as Labour Party candidates.

An examination of Labour Party election pamphlets⁶³ demonstrates the tensions and issues of the early twenties' electoral campaigns, and indicates that defection from the Party began early. For example, C. Mycock, a member of the Barrow Labour Party Executive Committee and a barrister by profession, campaigned in 1920 as a Labour candidate and active Citizen's League member. However, by 1921, the divisions had

hardened and Labour pamphlets clearly indicate that the Party identified such defectors as the main enemy. Ignoring the Conservatives, Labour publications focussed on these new 'Independents', attempting to discredit them as having failed the people, accusing them of being Conservative controlled and of supporting an anti-socialist alliance dominated by vested interests⁶⁴.

Thus the two sides were drawn up for the 1921 municipal elections in November, but whilst Labour candidates were organised with military precision, the Citizen's League, despite membership boosted by recent events and now including many Independents, still lacked an efficient organisation. At this point the press, progressing from the reporting of council business, began to take an important partisan role in the campaign, where every ward was contested. As candidates seldom canvassed, the paper asked questions on key issues such as council expenditure, the state of the local economy and significantly, whether they would follow their own judgements or a dictated party line. Of a total of seventeen candidates, the answers of only seven 'safe' candidates were published, effectively denying the left wing a voice⁶⁵. However, the election brought no numerical change. Labour and Independent councillors still numbered 11 and 13 respectively, whilst each group had four Aldermen, but Labour's loss of the Mayoralty suggests the Independents had a marginally greater claim to control⁶⁶.

However, although the loss of the Mayoralty was a setback, this pales into insignificance in comparison to what followed in the Board of Guardians election of April 1922. By this time the Labour Party was divided between moderates on one hand and its radical and Communist members on the other, who advocated the adoption of the National Relief Scale as demanded by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. According to this scale, out-relief would include the payment of 36/- a week for a couple, and 5/- a week for each child, bringing relief levels to well above local labourers' wage rates, but a very dangerous policy at a time when unemployment was approaching 73% and the Board of Guardians were already on the brink of bankruptcy when paying out-relief at a rate of 26/- a week per couple.

This is the crucial point where Communist ideology confronted the people, transforming the issue from an ideological debate among a minority to one that affected the entire population. A comparison with the 1919 situation will put the impact into context. The proposed National Relief Scale represented a radical change from the 1919

policy, in addition to which the Communist controlled Labour Party voted to force all Guardians opposed to the National Relief Scale to resign from the Board⁶⁷. This and the belief that the policy of the far left would be fatal for the economic health of the town stimulated a flood of defections from the Labour Party, polarising local politics, as politicians of all persuasions buried their differences to mount a unified opposition against a local Labour Party controlled by Communists and radicals. Thus a distinctive aspect of Barrow's politics during these years was an anti-socialist alliance that recruited directly from the Labour Party.

As regards the election itself, in 1919, the last Board had sat for 5 years, so a considerable change of personnel was expected. However, relief had never been a contentious issue and the elections were low-key affairs, and although only a quarter of the electorate voted, they returned eleven Labour candidates to a total of sixteen places⁶⁸. In contrast, in 1922, the election generated an abnormal amount of energy and interest, and was bitterly fought on the key issues of anti-Communism and the National Relief Scale. Again, the press played a key role, making a public appeal to the electorate to return Guardians who would act in 'common sense and justice', with responsibility towards *both* the ratepayers and the needy, publishing a list of 'safe' candidates and urging everyone to vote and keep out the Communists⁶⁹.

The situation demonstrates the level of support and the unusual strength of the radical left, which needed the combined efforts of the other contenders to constrain it.

Following the most bitterly contested election campaign in the town's history (and unheard of for the Board of Guardians), Labour lost control of the Board in a massive landslide away from the Left, with only one Labour Guardian returned and the majority of the other seats going to Labour Party defectors in various guises. The returning Chairman, a Labour defector who fought the election as an 'Anti-Communist', declared the result clearly demonstrated that the electorate endorsed the Board's policies of stringent administration and control of expenditure⁷⁰. This outcome could have severe implications for poor relief policies and the material well-being of the unemployed.

The November municipal election confirmed the April verdict. Press reports stated that the 'striking figures', a total majority of 2,800 votes and defeats in six out of eight wards, 'demonstrate the people of Barrow are not prepared to put control of the municipal machinery into the hands of the so-called Labour Party', and heralded the

result as 'a great moral victory'. However, the high turnout of 79% and the even distribution of seats, with Conservatives and Labour having fourteen each, and the Independents holding the balance with four⁷¹, suggests that from 1922 Barrow became a community with two competing identities, making it possible to offer two different interpretations. On one hand the political situation supports the concept of a community identity based on shared financial interests, but rather than being the product of class antagonisms as suggested by Davies and Morley, it can be argued that many of Barrow's working classes were in fact ratepayers, and from this standpoint, the threatened community can be said to have closed ranks and rallied in self-defence. Crucially however, this was led by 'moderates'. Conversely, the radical left, together with its advocacy of the National Relief Scale, might be thought unable to identify with the interests of a considerable proportion of the populace. However, the far left was powerful and able to mobilise a considerable body of support, arguably rooted in a class-based identity derived from unemployment and the demand for work or sufficient maintenance. These diverse interpretations demonstrate the importance of looking beyond politics into the wider social and economic arena to fully inform a discussion on the politics and social dynamics of distress, and these issues are discussed further in subsequent chapters.

(iii) Aftermath: 1923-1926

From this point Barrow's politics entered a new phase. The Board of Guardians elections returned to being low-key affairs, and Labour did not risk contesting the 1923 elections, focussing instead on attacks on defectors and regaining their influence on Corporation committees. From 1923, whilst the Ministry of Health continued to be the focus of the Board of Guardians' struggles, municipal politics became the key battleground. Labour's obsession with 'party' continued to interfere with council business as every question, resolution and vote was dubbed as 'electioneering' or a 'party' move. Given the economic condition of the town, Alderman Ellison, to the right of Labour at this point and soon to become the town's only Independent, warned that 'there was never a time ... when it was so necessary to drop, or lay aside, our political differences, and all pull together for the common good, as today ... To me it is appalling that we should be bickering over municipal politics, while there is every danger of the whole civic structure collapsing about our heads.'⁷² However, Labour persisted with its relentless infighting, comprehensively reported in the press, and thus

continued to undermine its own credibility to the detriment of the Party's municipal prospects. This was sufficient to maintain the balance of power between the parties, and the Citizen's League, having fulfilled its function, gradually faded into the background, enabling traditional party identities to reappear. Additionally, although the expulsion of all Communists from the Labour Party in 1924, helped heal the rift within the Barrow Party, the distinction between Labour and Independent remained a fine one. As late as 1926 for example, the Labour Party expelled two elected councillors and fought them at the municipal elections later that year with two other Labour candidates, demonstrating continuing tensions. But despite fighting hard and making significant gains in 1925, Labour failed to regain control of the council and was unable to equal the number of Conservative councillors until 1926. Thus whilst Barrow reflects wider long-term municipal electoral trends, not only do Labour's gains fail to correlate with periods of high unemployment, their severe reversal of fortune occurred when unemployment peaked in 1922. Similarly, by 1926 the employment crisis had lessened, but Labour's gains from this date reflect its breach with the Communists and a more stable political climate. Additionally, Labour did not achieve parity with the Conservatives on the Board of Guardians until 1925, when each had seven members, with the balance of power in the hands of the one Liberal and one Independent member⁷³.

Initially, the Labour Party fared little better in the Parliamentary elections. John Bromley had replaced Duncan as the Labour candidate, but his approach to the campaign appeared to be half-hearted, and in 1922 he was absent from two campaign meetings, speaking instead in Lancaster, on behalf of another candidate. The press again played an active role and their coverage of the Parliamentary election campaign was equally partisan. Whilst press reports suggested that Bromley had little to offer in the way of coherent policy, the paper also published the candidates' replies to a questionnaire presented by Barrow's Chamber of Trade. The answers of D.G. Somerville, the Conservative candidate, were printed first, and were lengthy and well reasoned, whilst Bromley's appear ruthlessly edited, often comprising of a little more than short sentences or a single word⁷⁴. The disparity was marked, and in 1922 Somerville polled a record majority of 1,927 votes⁷⁵. However, by 1923 press coverage of political debates and public meetings was becoming increasingly impartial⁷⁶, but in the General Election that returned the first Labour Government, Barrow's Labour Party was denied victory. The first Liberal candidate for twenty-eight years had split the vote, but had reduced Somerville's majority to just 420.

In contrast, Labour regained the Parliamentary seat in 1924, with a 110 vote majority⁷⁷, again indicating Barrow was out of step with national trends⁷⁸. Yet whilst the national turnout, at 77.7%, was the highest since the war⁷⁹, a massive 89.9% of Barrow's electorate voted. The result was announced to a vast crowd amid scenes of 'wild pandemonium'. 'Never has such a deafening roar rent the air in Barrow. The crowd went well nigh frantic'. Barrow's electorate evidently had different criteria for national and local government eligibility, and although Bromley could assert 'the workers in this great industrial constituency have shown their faith, in spite of the "Red Plot", in the integrity of the Labour Government'⁸⁰, it is likely the expulsion of the Communists from the Labour Party was a decisive factor.

In addition to dividing the Labour Party, Communist ideology similarly affected the wider labour movement. Returning to 1921, although the majority of unions affiliated to the Trades Council supported Communist affiliation at that time, a significant minority did not⁸¹. The issue became increasingly contentious, reflecting the current political situation, and by March 1923, the Communists had lost control of the Trades Council, which had voted to sever its links with the still Communist controlled Labour Party⁸². However, this decision was modified, and from April 1924, whilst both bodies would continue to hold separate meetings, and have separate Executive Committees and Secretaries, all funds would remain centralised⁸³. However, whilst reflecting the wider trend whereby unions increasingly ignored the Labour Party without severing their connections⁸⁴, Barrow's Communists still wielded considerable influence.

However, whilst this suggests attempts to separate political and industrial objectives, analysis is limited by lack of detailed evidence, and following the expulsion of the Communists from the Labour Party, relations within Barrow's labour movement became increasingly complex. In order to maintain their links with local industry, Barrow's Labour Party initially proposed the formation of an Association of Trade Union Secretaries as a parallel organisation to the Trades Council⁸⁵, but later opted to infiltrate the existing Trades Council with Communist Labour Party representatives⁸⁶. Additionally, Barrow's Labour Party had been overwhelmingly in favour of Communist affiliation, and it is unclear how far or how soon they complied with the National Executive's expulsion order as Minutes make few references to their working relationships. However, unlike the Rhondda Borough Labour Party, which was disaffiliated by the Labour Party Executive for refusing to expel its Communist

delegates in 1927⁸⁷, by 1926 the break between the Barrow Labour Party and the Communists was complete. The complexity of these events is demonstrated by the Trades Council, which, despite earlier attempts to sever its links with the Communists, became their last foothold.

The General Strike had little political impact in Barrow, but in its aftermath, tensions ran high between the political and industrial wings of the labour movement. The bitter, recriminatory battles in the local labour press indicate that the divisions of 1921/22 had hardened, the intense animosity reaching its peak when the Trades Council invited A.J. Cook to speak in Barrow. However, this had little significance beyond the leadership of the official labour movement, and the issues, given the condition of the town, could be said to be trivial. For example, in addition to the factions meting out responsibility for undermining the unity of the town's labour movement, the ILP was accused of attempting to sabotage A.J. Cook's speech by refusing to lend chairs to the Trades Council⁸⁸. A letter from the Barrow branch of ASLEF possibly spoke for the majority of the rank and file, suggesting there were lessons to be learned from the General Strike, but it was time that 'all this back-biting and slandering of various trade union leaders and others ceased', calling for co-operation and the re-organisation of the various trade unions⁸⁹. In addition to suggesting that nothing had been learned from 1922, this supports Phillips's contention that the unions remained more concerned for internal discipline and organisation than long term political and social reconstruction⁹⁰.

Thus left-wing ideology proved equally divisive for the industrial wing of Barrow's labour movement. Although the evidence is sparse, it appears that no compromise was possible between the factions, and their struggles were also genuine battles for control. However, whilst this is true of the leadership, it is probable that a significant proportion of the rank and file were moderate, creating further divisions during a period of great economic uncertainty when labour unity was essential.

CONCLUSION

The period 1914-1926 was one of transition from strength, through disaster, to partial recovery for the political wing of Barrow's labour movement. As might be expected in a town dominated by traditional heavy industry and an important munitions centre, the war accelerated the trend towards closer links between the trade unions and the Labour

Party, whilst the wartime growth of Socialist ideology was instrumental in the shaping of political attitudes. Consequently the influence of older socialist organisations, and notably the ILP, declined as a result, and the militant shop stewards' movement became increasingly influential within the Labour Party. However, despite the discernible growth of left wing radicalism among the organised working class, Barrow supports McKibbin's assertion that existing political traditions were far from overturned, the wider population remaining largely unaffected, and thus the shift towards the left should not be over-emphasised in the immediate post-war period. Indeed, working class enfranchisement failed to bring the expected gains for Labour, and the Parliamentary defeat of 1918 under-scores the impact of left-wing ideology which reversed Labour's pre-war position and brought the once well organised party to division and defeat.

Despite being a strong Labour borough, Barrow did not conform to the County Borough electoral trends identified by Davies and Morley, as wider Labour gains of 1919 were not reflected in Barrow until 1920. Additionally, Barrow contradicts the assertion that Labour's municipal fortunes reflected levels of unemployment. The extraordinarily high unemployment in the town, which peaked in 1922, failed to give Labour municipal ascendancy, whilst Labour's gains from 1926, when unemployment was considerably lower, suggests the primacy of other factors, notably the rapid growth of Communism and the polarisation of municipal politics.

The influence of unemployment was also limited in Middlesbrough, where Labour remained the smallest single party, despite unemployment climbing to 33% in 1921⁹¹. Thus Labour failed to increase its representation on the various local authority bodies, whose elected members were 'in no way characterised by radicalism'⁹². Nelson however, presents a different scenario. Although Labour did not control the Council during this period, the Party remained an established force in local government, and the outstanding contrast with Barrow at this time was its greater political stability. This was due in part to the town's established tradition of progressive municipal policies which remained independent of 'party'⁹³, but another key factor was unemployment, which remained mild in comparison to Barrow, ranging from 6% in January 1919 to 30% in 1930⁹⁴. Indeed, under-employment rather than unemployment was to become the most inflammatory issue.

In Barrow however, the influence of left-wing ideology, the division of the Labour Party and its close association with the Communists contributed to the distinctive and volatile nature of Barrow's politics during this period. Although unemployment did not result in Labour gains, its influence was nevertheless profound, and it is impossible to ascertain whether unemployment or ideology provided the greater stimulus for the expansion of Barrow's Communist Party. However, whilst Macintyre asserts that the Communists tended to increase their influence at the expense of the Labour Party, in Barrow the two parties remained closely affiliated, to the point where it is impossible to differentiate between them. Unfortunately, due to the absence of Communist Party records the size of the membership is unknown, and whilst they made significant gains on the Corporation, their reason for fielding candidates under the Labour Party banner remains obscure.

A distinctive characteristic of Barrow at this time was the formation of an anti-socialist alliance, and there is little doubt that left wing gains stimulated the moderates to organise on the same lines as the militants. However, Davies and Morley argue that such anti-socialist alliances were the product of 'relatively small groups [which could] only achieve their political interests by the fiction of non-partisan politics ... in the interests of all ratepayers', enabling combined efforts by providing a non-political label to rally wider support and avoiding the stigma of Toryism⁹⁵. However, the Citizen's League made little headway until Communist control of the Board of Guardians and the economic consequences of the National Relief Scale became a real possibility. From this point it can be argued that the conflict between ideology and economic reality created a polarity between the radical left and a cross-party anti-socialist alliance whose sole aim was to keep the far Left out of local government and out of the public purse. Consequently, municipal elections in Barrow were genuine battles for control of the council, but the distinctive aspect of this alliance was its ability to recruit from the Labour Party itself. Furthermore, the population, previously not particularly susceptible to ideology, became both increasingly politicised and polarised, adopting two conflicting identities. However, whether these identities were a class-based response to high unemployment or, as Macintyre suggests, were an assertive means of defence for a mutually dependent community threatened by collapse, cannot be ascertained by political evidence alone and must be examined in the wider social context.

The brief comparison with other localities demonstrates the problems inherent in attempts to generalise, even across localities with similar backgrounds and economic or political situations. In Middlesbrough for example, the Communist Party remained weak and there was little evidence of working class militancy, despite rising unemployment. In Nelson on the other hand, short-time working and the introduction of more looms created intense industrial unrest, and it was the fusion of industrial and political conflicts in the late 1920's and early 1930's that earned Nelson the title of 'Little Moscow'⁹⁶. However, the title is misleading, implying a strong commitment to left-wing politics, mainly represented by the Communist Party and based on strong working class solidarity; yet despite a strong labour movement, the Communist influence here remained limited. However, Hill asserts that Nelson can be validly described as a centre of 'Red' politics by virtue of its 'progressive, socialist ideas and policies' and Labour domination⁹⁷. As regards comparison to other 'Little Moscows', despite their comparative strength, Barrow's Communists were denied control of the local authorities. Nevertheless, a distinctive feature of local government in Barrow at this time was the introduction of direct, face-to-face democracy by the first Labour Council, equally significant for its continuity throughout the period. However, whilst this enabled local policy to be debated and formulated in the public eye, it is not sufficient reason to include Barrow in their ranks.

Indeed, from 1923 anti-Communism remained a key factor in local politics. Radical ideology continued to divide the Labour Party, alienating the electorate and isolating the Left, both politically and industrially. This is further demonstrated by the steady improvement in the Labour Party's fortunes following the official expulsion of the Communists in 1924 and the regaining of the Parliamentary seat. By 1926, the local political situation had stabilised considerably, and the General Strike was a low-key affair, having little political impact outside the official labour movement. By this time, industrial and political objectives appear to have been separated, the Strike serving only to fuel further faction fighting within the labour movement, further marginalise the Communists and distance the trade union rank and file from their leadership.

It can be argued that radical ideology and a crippled economy were the main agents of political change in Barrow during the post-war transition period, over-riding the effects of franchise reform and high unemployment, and serving to rupture rather than consolidate the town's labour movement. However, this analysis has raised three

important questions: the nature of the identities adopted by the polarised electorate, the implications of the exclusion of the radical left for poor relief policies and the living standards of the unemployed, and also the reasons behind the limited impact of the General Strike. Additionally, the significance of the newly instigated public democracy also requires closer examination. These issues and themes will be analysed and developed further in subsequent chapters dealing with the wider social and administrative context.

¹ N. Todd, 'A History of Labour in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness c. 1890-1920', M. Litt thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976.

² S. Davies & B. Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919-1938*, Vol. 1 (Aldershot, 1999), 3.

³ D. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice* (London, 1969).

⁴ R. McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class* (Oxford, 1991).

⁵ G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England 1910-1914* (New York, 1961).

⁶ H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900* (Oxford, 1965).

⁷ A. Marwick, 'The impact of the First World War on British society', *Journal of Contemporary History* (1968), pp. 51; J.E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1979* (London, 1984).

⁸ R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party* (Oxford, 1974); B. Waites, *A Class Society at War 1914-1918* (Leamington Spa, 1987); C.J. Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement* (Brighton, 1976).

⁹ C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (London, 1955).

¹⁰ C. Howard, 'Expectations born to death: local Labour party expansion in the 1920s', in J. Winter (ed.), *The Working Class in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 1983).

¹¹ M. Pugh, 'The rise of Labour and the political culture of Conservatism, 1890-1945', *History*, 87 (2002), pp. 514-37.

¹² N. Kirk, *Labour and Society in Britain and the USA Vol. 2* (Aldershot, 1994), 325.

¹³ J.E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-79* (London, 1984), 31.

¹⁴ McKibbin, *Evolution*, 246.

¹⁵ R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford, 1991), 95-96.

¹⁶ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections*, 653.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 651.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 189-90.

¹⁹ S. Macintyre, *Little Moscovs: Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London, 1980), 33.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 60.

²¹ *Ibid*, 191.

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- ²² *Ibid*, 172.
- ²³ C. Farman, *The General Strike* (London, 1974), 30.
- ²⁴ G.A. Phillips, *The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict* (London, 1976), 272.
- ²⁵ H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (third edition) (Harmondsworth, 1976), 180.
- ²⁶ Phillips, *The General Strike*, 293.
- ²⁷ Todd, 'A History of Labour', 128.
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, 89.
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, 144; 186.
- ³⁰ 22 June 1921, Barrow Co-operative Society Minutes Books 1920-1924, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDB 24/1/1-34.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, February 1923.
- ³² Todd, 'A History of Labour', 149.
- ³³ *Ibid*, 69.
- ³⁴ McKibbin, *Evolution*, 8.
- ³⁵ Todd, 'A History of Labour', 148-50.
- ³⁶ J.J. Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment in Middlesbrough 1919-26', MA Dissertation, Teesside Polytechnic, 1982, 96-98.
- ³⁷ J. Hill, *Nelson: Politics, Economy and Community* (Edinburgh, 1977), 55.
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, 65.
- ³⁹ Todd, 'A History of Labour', 179.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 180-81.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, 181.
- ⁴² *Barrow News*, 4 January 1919, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ⁴³ McKibbin, *Evolution*, 8.
- ⁴⁴ Hill, *Nelson*, 70.
- ⁴⁵ 11 February 1915, Labour Party & Trades Council Industrial Committee Minutes Book, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 7/1.
- ⁴⁶ *Northern Beacon*, 27 March 1919, Mowat Papers, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDX/93/2.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 24 July 1919.
- ⁴⁸ See Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections*.
- ⁴⁹ *Northern Beacon*, 15 May 1919, CRO.
- ⁵⁰ *Barrow News*, 21 February 1920, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.

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- ⁵¹ *Ibid*, 20 March 1920.
- ⁵² *Barrow News*, 20 March 1920, CRO.
- ⁵³ *Ibid*, 23 October 1920.
- ⁵⁴ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections*, 646.
- ⁵⁵ There is no surviving evidence of Communist Party membership figures.
- ⁵⁶ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections*, 60.
- ⁵⁷ 4 January 1921, Unemployment Correspondence File, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ⁵⁸ I.S. McLean, 'The Labour Movement in Clydeside politics 1914-22', DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1971-2, 217.
- ⁵⁹ *Barrow News*, 4 June 1921, CRO.
- ⁶⁰ J. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper 1864-1946* (London, 1984), 305-6.
- ⁶¹ *Barrow News*, 16 April 1921, CRO.
- ⁶² *Ibid*, 9 July 1921.
- ⁶³ Jack Mowat papers, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDX 93/27.
- ⁶⁴ No Citizen's League or Conservative election material survives.
- ⁶⁵ The paper had previously supported the moderate Duncan, and the motivation behind this action remains obscure.
- ⁶⁶ *Barrow News*, 5 November 1921, CRO.
- ⁶⁷ 9 March 1922, Barrow Labour Party and Trades Council, General Meetings Minutes Books 1919-1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 7/2-4.
- ⁶⁸ *Barrow News*, 12 April 1919, CRO.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 23 March 1922.
- ⁷⁰ *Barrow Guardian*, 8 April 1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ⁷¹ *Barrow News*, 4 November 1922, CRO.
- ⁷² *Ibid*, 3 November, 1923.
- ⁷³ *Ibid*, 11 April 1925.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 11 November 1922.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 18 November 1922.
- ⁷⁶ For example, the publication of a series of debates between the candidates in 1923.
- ⁷⁷ *Barrow News*, 1 November 1924, CRO.
- ⁷⁸ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections*, 646.

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- ⁷⁹ A. Thorpe, *Britain in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London, 1994).
- ⁸⁰ *Barrow News*, 1 November 1924, CRO.
- ⁸¹ 26 May 1921, Labour Party and Trades Council, General Meetings, CRO, BDSO 7/2-4.
- ⁸² 22 March 1923, Labour Party & Trades Council Industrial Committee, CRO , BDSO 7/1.
- ⁸³ 8 April, 1924, Barrow Trades Council Minutes Books, from 1924, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 15.
- ⁸⁴ Farman, *The General Strike*, 31.
- ⁸⁵ 12 June 1924, Trades Council Minutes Books, from 1924, CRO, BDSO 15.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 23 July 1924.
- ⁸⁷ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 35.
- ⁸⁸ Letter from the Secretary, Barrow Trades Council to the ILP, 5 March 1927, *Barrow Leader*, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDX/93/4.
- ⁸⁹ Letter from ASLEF, March 1927, *Barrow Leader*, CRO, BDX/93/4.
- ⁹⁰ Phillips *The General Strike*, 293.
- ⁹¹ K. Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment on Teesside, 1919-39* (Manchester, 1986), 25.
- ⁹² Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment', 126.
- ⁹³ Hill, *Nelson*, 105.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 74.
- ⁹⁵ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections*, 62.
- ⁹⁶ Hill, *Nelson*, 81.
- ⁹⁷ Hill, *Nelson*, 86.

THE RESPONSE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO UNEMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

In order to illustrate the full significance of political developments it is essential to examine their implications for the material well-being of the large proportion of the town's population affected either directly or indirectly by the depression and mass unemployment. This and the following chapters will complete this analysis, beginning with the responses of the local authorities, in the form of the Corporation and Board of Guardians. It is in their administration that the significance of the new public democracy, touched on in the previous chapter, becomes apparent, especially as regards local taxation, relief work schemes and poor relief. Additionally, as strategy and policy decisions were in the hands of moderates, an important facet of this chapter is the examination of the relationship of the Barrow Board of Guardians with the Ministry of Health, and the comparison of the Board's distinctive handling of the crisis with that of other unions, both moderate and radical. Thus the comparison with Middlesbrough will be continued to provide a context for the implications of Barrow's political developments at this time. However, the administration of poor relief in Nelson was under the control of the Burnley Union, which brought together representatives from other neighbouring but politically contrasting East Lancashire towns as well as Nelson itself, and this lack of autonomy makes direct comparison impossible. In addition to the strategies of the Board of Guardians, the responses of the Corporation, together with its working relationship with the Board, will also be examined.

The chapter will be divided into three sections, beginning with an examination of the Corporation's attempts to mitigate the effects of unemployment between 1919 and late 1923. This will be followed by an analysis of the strategies adopted by the Board of Guardians, which bore the brunt of the poor relief burden, at the peak of the crisis between 1921 and 1923. The final section focuses on the period from late 1923 to 1927, when unemployment began to fall and steadied at an average of 17%, enabling local bodies to focus on the recovery of rate arrears, whilst the Ministry of Health sought to widen its powers over recalcitrant Boards. Although the Guardians' minute books have not survived, there is ample evidence within the Corporation and Ministry of Health

files, together with verbatim press reports of important meetings, to provide a detailed analysis of poor relief policies and issues.

Unlike issues related to housing, health and politics, the historiography and debates surrounding unemployment and poor relief are relatively uncontentious. The Poor Law of 1834 was part of the tripartite strategy of workhouse, charity and self-help intended to encourage private initiative, thrift and responsibility, and discourage the habits that were believed to contribute to poverty. The image of the undeserving poor was powerful, and the terms under which poor relief was offered provided a deterrent to the voluntarily idle. As a result, few able-bodied unemployed resorted to outdoor relief, which was paid in return for test-work. However, as a result of the high unemployment and concerns for national efficiency which followed the Boer War, poverty came to be seen as a threat to society as a whole rather than to the individual. This raised the problem of reconciling the need for state intervention in the maintenance of adequate living standards whilst retaining 'the capacity to reform or punish the ever-present residuum'¹. Faced by rising unemployment but unwilling to amend Poor Law principles, the Conservative Government passed the Unemployed Workman's Act in 1905. Although doing little for the unemployed, the Act did sanction the finance of relief work schemes from the rates and created the machinery to co-ordinate the efforts of Boards of Guardians, councils and charities.

The system was extended by the 1911 Insurance Act, which introduced compulsory unemployment insurance to a limited number of unstable industries, including shipbuilding, iron founding and the construction industries. Under the Act, insured workers, but not their dependants, were eligible for 10/- per week sickness benefit, payable for a maximum of 13 weeks². In addition, the Liberal Government introduced a wide range of social reforms between 1906 and 1914, but rather than representing a coherent reform policy, these were 'undermined by the combination of confusion and expediency which characterised each instalment'³, and by the outbreak of the war, only a quarter of the workforce was covered by insurance.

The 1911 Act was extended to cover all munitions workers in 1916, and although the war had demonstrated the need to co-ordinate social provision there was no consensus on either the extent or the form that reform might take. Many believed this would not be possible under the Local Government Board and would necessitate the dismantling of

the Poor Law, and the Maclean Report of 1918 asserted the entire system was in need of rationalisation⁴. The Report identified inefficient overlapping of function, lack of uniformity and conflicting principles of administration, and advocated the abolition of the Boards of Guardians, the end of the principle of 'less eligibility', and the establishment of specialised provision based on types of need within a nationally uniform structure⁵.

The prospects for reform looked favourable in the immediate post-war period, and in 1919 the LGB was abolished and replaced by a new Ministry of Health, which became the central authority for Poor Law purposes. It was assumed that the post-war extension of unemployment insurance would reduce the pressure on local authorities, and the need for the Poor Law was expected to decrease in the optimism of the immediate post-war period. However, in the deteriorating economic climate reconstruction plans were quickly abandoned, whilst the Ministry of Health failed to give the expected leadership. Given the lack of enthusiasm for change at the centre, 'there was little likelihood of powerful vested interests like the Boards of Guardians being disbanded'⁶.

The payment of Unemployment Donation was introduced in November 1918 in anticipation of rising unemployment as wartime production levels fell. Although withdrawn for civilians in November 1919 and for ex-servicemen in March 1921 this, combined with the wartime payment of Separation Allowances for servicemen's families, had created the important precedent of benefit payments irrespective of contributions. Additionally, the Insurance Acts of 1911 and 1916 were repealed in 1920, and a new Act extended compulsory unemployment insurance to twenty million workers. However, the 1920 Act was not intended to provide sufficient maintenance but rather to supplement savings, six weeks of contributions being required to qualify for one week's benefit, payable at a rate of 15/- per week for a maximum of 15 weeks per year. The 'one-in-six' rule provided an in-built check against abuse of the scheme but was unworkable at a time of mass unemployment⁷, and was quickly abandoned in the face of the threat of severe unrest. The Act's successor, of March 1921 made benefit payable for 26 weeks in each insurance year for those normally in insured employment, genuinely seeking work and with a minimum of twenty weeks contributions. After 26 weeks a claimant was eligible for uncovenanted benefit for a further 22 weeks in each insurance period, theoretically in advance of future contributions. However, this

arrangement left a four-week 'gap' during which time the unemployed had to turn to the Guardians for assistance.

During the course of the 1920s, over twenty Acts relating to unemployment insurance were introduced in efforts to adapt to changing political and economic conditions, but although 'governments expanded the National Insurance scheme, [they] did so whilst trying to balance the books'⁸. As a result, these schemes, never intended to be more than a supplement to the Poor Law system, were always inadequate and suited no-one. Throughout the period, the uninsured, those who had exhausted their contributions or who were caught between periods of eligibility for uncovenanted benefit, were thrown on to the poor relief system, the main focus of this chapter.

Boards of Guardians were ill-equipped and ill-prepared for the scale of post-war unemployment, and were beset by many problems. The Merthyr Tydfil Judgement of 1900, for example, did not permit Guardians to supply relief to those unemployed as a result of strike action or lock-outs, although they were permitted to support the families of such men. Thus the strike wave of 1918-21, the 1922 engineering strike and the General Strike of 1926 created further problems. Additionally, due to the local basis of relief administration, Boards of Guardians 'were faced by relatively compact and cohesive working class communities in most towns, where housing, lack of transport and poverty pushed people together'⁹. Thus the Boards were open to pressure from local groups, which could influence relief rates, attitudes and policies, and consequently 'the old Poor Law system and the entire paternalistic philosophy which underlay it was being challenged in a radical fashion and on a national scale'¹⁰. Additionally, in certain close-knit localities where Communists were influential, there evolved a 'direct, face-to-face democracy' and a preference for open and collective decision making. In such communities, authority and legitimacy were drawn 'from resolutions passed at public meetings and ... administered by elected delegates representing the community at large', who were seen to be directly accountable to those they served¹¹.

Problems were exacerbated by the growing willingness of the unemployed to apply for out-relief and the pressures arising from increased Labour representation following the 1918 Representation of the People Act which ended pauper disenfranchisement. 'Such members were pledged to deal generously with the unemployed and their families whatever the cost to the ratepayer'¹², the most famous example being Socialist

dominated Poplar. A poor borough supporting a high number of unemployed from the rates, its Labour Guardians were jailed in 1921 for their refusal to contribute to general LCC expenditure, arguing that poorer boroughs and unions supporting large numbers of unemployed should be subsidised by richer boroughs. The outcome was a compromise whereby the cost of out-relief was to be met from the Metropolitan Common Law Fund, an arrangement confined to the Metropolitan area and leaving rate equalisation a contentious issue elsewhere, whilst the union continued to defy the government and pay a high rate of relief¹³.

Although 'it was on the local Boards of Guardians that many of the most crucial political battles were now being fought'¹⁴, the responses and attitudes of the various Poor Law Unions varied considerably. Whilst some officials believed they faced a conspiracy to subvert the Poor Law, and 'felt justified in pursuing stringent policies on the grounds that the "deserving" unemployed were provided for by unemployment insurance'¹⁵, others adopted a more liberal approach. Rose emphasises the point that the generous payment of out-relief was not confined to Labour controlled Unions, and cites Manchester, West Derby (Liverpool), and Sheffield as examples¹⁶. Thane supports this view and asserts that the Boards 'were influenced less by the political inclinations of their members than by local conditions'¹⁷, concluding that Guardians in distressed areas were generally more liberal in their application of the law. The Ministry of Health for its part, provided little help or leadership, urging economy and reiterating the 1834 formula of 'less eligibility'¹⁸. However, it was impossible for most Boards to observe both this and the regulation that out relief must be sufficient to meet basic needs. As a result, 'many Guardians in the mid-1920s felt trapped by the conflicting pressures from the poor to increase relief and from the central government to reduce it'¹⁹.

Inevitably, the Guardians' financial problems strengthened the hand of the Ministry of Health. The Goschen Committee was established to supervise the grant of loans to insolvent unions, whilst the Ministry attempted to control over-generous Boards by refusing to sanction loans or overdrafts to supplement rate income. Inevitably the Ministry's powers were most often exercised against those Unions with low rate incomes and higher numbers of unemployed to support, intensifying the debate on rate equalisation and demands for the funding of poor relief from national taxes and not local rates²⁰.

'The experience of the 1920s had shown that local needs were more vividly appreciated at the local level than by central government, and that ... the unemployed had in many areas won the sympathy of the Poor Law administrators who had gone as far as they were able to help them'²¹. However, the government eventually won the battle of outdoor relief. The 1926 Board of Guardians (Default) Act gave the Ministry of Health the power to dismiss persistently 'extravagant' Boards and replace them with commissioners. Although a few boards were suspended under this Act, for example West Ham and Chester-le-Street, most were brought under control without the need for commissioners. In 1927, the Poor Law Act consolidated over one hundred Poor Law statutes, but in 1928 the Local Government Act abolished the Boards of Guardians and replaced them with Public Assistance Committees administered by local authorities.

Public works schemes provided the other major source of unemployment relief during the period: Although funded by the Ministry of Transport and the Unemployment Grants Committee, the onus was on the local authority to provide a considerable proportion of any costs, borrowing being regulated by the Ministry of Health. The aim was to provide work, paid at a rate below local wage levels, for men ineligible for unemployment benefit, and negotiated between councils and Boards of Guardians. However, the high cost of relief works restricted their use, their accumulative financial burden combined with falling rate incomes limiting the ability of depressed areas to finance them, with the effect that 'relief through public works burdened local communities without appreciably easing unemployment'²².

BARROW CORPORATION AND RELIEF WORKS 1919-1923

With regard to Barrow, Chapter One has illustrated the cyclical nature of the town's economy and the problem of intermittent unemployment, and during such periods the unemployed had traditionally lived on their own resources or by applying to the Corporation for relief work.²³ Applications for out-relief in the pre-war period were unusual, and in the bad slump of 1907, for example, no applications were made, emphasising the effectiveness of the deterrent principle. Although the war brought full employment and unprecedented levels of working class prosperity, optimism in Barrow was particularly short-lived. As early as 1919, concerns about the economic backlash of the war were mounting as a result of falling production levels, rising unemployment and the withdrawal of out-of-work donation for civilians.

From January 1919 the Ministry of Labour, the Corporation and Barrow's Employment Exchange liaised to establish relief work schemes, but these were small scale enterprises which could employ only a limited number of men. Simultaneously, the growing numbers of unemployed were organising, marching and petitioning both the local authority and central government, declaring that unemployment was a government responsibility, and demanding national unemployment schemes and a 100% increase in unemployment donation²⁴. The Corporation needed little convincing, and supported the demands of the unemployed. The Corporation called on the government to provide work or a sufficient level of maintenance for those 'thrown out of work through no fault of their own'²⁵, and warned of the distress and unrest that would result from the discontinuation of out-of-work donation²⁶. However, the Government dismissed these concerns, asserting that the November unemployment figure of 2,266 men was not abnormal and did not warrant special attention, particularly as 1,800 of them were covered by the National Insurance Acts²⁷.

As unemployment rose during 1920 (see Chart 1.2), the Corporation came under increasing pressure to provide the customary relief works but was restricted by lack of money and the shortage of suitable schemes. Slum clearance and sanitation improvements were unnecessary due to the town's modernity, and the major schemes were restricted to the construction of a coastal road to Barrow, the draining of marshland on Walney and the provision of a lake for the local park. In response to the Corporation's repeated calls for assistance, the government maintained that 'the relief of destitution in England is, by law, a local charge, and this is one of the cardinal points of Local Government. The whole system ... will break down if people who are responsible for local expenditure are not also made responsible for raising and spending the necessary money'²⁸. Thus from the outset, whilst the Corporation and the unemployed were of one mind, no compromise was possible between the Government and the Local Authority.

Specific relief works schemes will not be examined in any detail, however the Unemployment Grants Committee were to pay a percentage of the total wage bill²⁹ at a maximum rate of 75% of the local authority's rate for unskilled labour³⁰. Significantly, the Corporation echoed the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) in protesting unsuccessfully against this low rate³¹. Additionally, as the terms of each scheme were negotiated separately with no guarantees that grants would be made, their

future was precarious, and they made little impact on unemployment. For example, in February 1921 the schemes provided work for just 300 men out of a total of 2,300, and by October, as unemployment approached 73% (see Chart 1.2), they provided just two days work per week for 270 single men, and three days work per week for 1,130 married men, for a maximum period of three weeks³².

The Corporation was ‘utterly unable to cope with the volume of unemployment’³³ and the cost was disproportionate to any benefits. It continually pressed the Government for aid, having ‘practically exhausted its ability to find schemes for work’³⁴. For example, a joint deputation from the Corporation, Board of Guardians and LEC to the Ministries of Health and Labour in May 1922, presented Barrow’s increasingly desperate financial and unemployment situation, emphasising that the 12,000 registered unemployed included neither the large numbers of uninsured men without work, nor the 6,000 idle due to the May engineering strike. However, the Government, although expressing a reluctance to burden ratepayers, stated it ‘could not be helped, it was the result of the war ... [and] it was now absolutely essential to some extent to mortgage the future to meet the present needs, however undesirable it may be’³⁵.

Table 5.1 illustrates the high cost of relief work schemes, and the severity of the financial burden on the local authority. The Table also demonstrates the inability of the rates to meet this demand, and the consequent heavy reliance on loans which, despite a government contribution, would remain a significant burden on the town for at least the next decade.

Table 5.1 **Cost of Relief Work Schemes to June 1923**

Estimated cost of relief works	£250,118
Met by:	
government grant	66,371
from current rates	26,813
from loans	156,934
Estimated annual loan charges	14,440
Government contribution	4,170
Annual charge on the rates (for 10 to 15 years)	10,270

Borough Treasurer’s Report, 30 June 1923, BA/C 5/1/46 Box 51 F2

To finance the rising expenditure on unemployment the Corporation, including the Labour council of 1920-21, had increased the Borough and Poor Rates on three occasions between 1919 and 1922 (Table 5.2). However, from 1922 it had become 'impossible to levy and collect heavier rates when practically the whole of a working class [was] unemployed'³⁶.

Table 5.2 The Borough and Poor Rates 1920-1923

Year	Borough Rate in £	Poor Rate in £	Total in £
Pre-war	7/-	10d	7/10d
1920-21	10/6d	1/6d	12/-
1921-22	11/-	2/6d	13/6d
1922-23	12/6d	2/6d	15/-

24 May 1922, BA/C 5/1/42 Box 46 F2

In addition to the impossibility of further rate increases, the Corporation's problems were compounded by falling rate incomes. Table 5.3 illustrates the rapidity with which arrears mounted at the peak of the crisis in 1922-23, and perhaps more significantly, shows that this figure more than trebled the following year.

Table 5.3 Domestic Rate Arrears 1921-1924

Year	Borough Rate £	Poor Rate £	Total £
1921-22	848	0	848
1922-23	13,600	1,600	15,200
1923-24	42,443	5,807	48,250

Sources: 1921-23: 24 May 1922, BA/C 5/1/42 Box 46 F2

1923-1924: Borough Treasurer's Memoranda, BA/C 5/1/46 BOX 51 F2

Rising unemployment simultaneously reduced the value of industrial rates, which were in part assessed according to the number of employees. That this amounted to a considerable sum is indicated by Table 5.4, which illustrates the loss of rate income from the town's three largest employers during 1922 alone, a situation compounded by the closure of increasing numbers of shops and boarding houses.

Table 5.4 **Loss in Industrial Rates 1922-1923**

	Borough Rate	Poor Rate	Total
	£	£	£
Vickers:	18,526	3,725	22,251
Steelworks	2,790	558	3,348
Furness Railway	6,314	2,011	8,325
Total			34,024 (<i>sic</i>) (Actually 33,924)

Source: Borough Treasurer's Memoranda, BA/C 5/1/46 BOX 51 F2

The above tables demonstrate the accumulative financial burden of unemployment and the May 1922 deputation warned the Government that, if all the money had to be found from the local rates 'the burden will be so serious as to ruin the town and prevent any prospect of recovery'³⁷. After assessing the situation, the government responded with better terms from the Unemployment Grants Committee, an undertaking to attract a Cunard order for the shipyard, and the less positive suggestions of sending the town's juveniles to the Dominions and urging action against ratepayers in arrears³⁸.

Nevertheless, these measures were ineffectual and the estimated rate arrears for 1923-24 (Table 5.3) were quickly exceeded. By July 1923 Borough Rate arrears had risen to £60,000, whilst Poor Rate arrears had increased on a pro rata basis, the proportion of ratepayers in arrears almost doubling, from 20.2% in March 1922, to 39.8% in March 1923³⁹.

The Corporation was caught between pressures from the unemployed and an impassive government. The Mayor, presented with a 2,000 signature petition strongly condemning the inadequate grants made by the Board of Guardians and the failure of the Council to provide relief works for the unemployed, declared he was 'sick and tired of going to London with ... cap in hand and begging for help' which was never forthcoming⁴⁰. By July 1923, the Corporation stated that 'it is impossible to further mortgage the Rates of the Borough for the relief of unemployment', and again insisted that 'the problem with which the Local Authorities are faced is one that cannot possibly be dealt with by them alone and that unless the government come to their aid immediately the consequences may be very serious'⁴¹. The government remained unmoved however, and following the loss of 1,500-1,800 jobs at the steelworks, another joint deputation was sent to the Ministries of Health and Labour in October 1923. The Ministries were berated for their empty aid promises and crippling loans, the Corporation arguing that relief work

schemes were uneconomic and ineffectual, and that the worsening economic conditions were driving the town to bankruptcy.

This marked the end of attempts to provide large-scale relief works, and Ministers pledged themselves to attracting work for the town. However, 'no self-interested body would readily wish to invest in economically crippled areas ... where there were few prospects and where the high level of both local rates and rent arrears gave poor promise of security for a loan'⁴². Consequently, unlike Middlesbrough and Nelson, Barrow's industry was unable to diversify, and the Corporation and the Board of Guardians remained under intense pressure.

Table 5.5 illustrates where expenditure cuts were made. Significantly, whilst the education budget was drastically reduced, the Corporation simultaneously directed substantial sums towards the most vulnerable sections of the community, the amount spent on the feeding of the Borough's school children for example, being exceeded only by expenditure on relief works (see Table 3.7).

Table 5.5 Cuts in Corporation Expenditure 1922-1923

	1922-23	1923-24
Total Economies	£19,327	£38,572
% Saved From:		
Education	34.1	52.5
Health	9.4	3.8
Highways	29.5	30.0

Source: Borough Treasurer's Memoranda, BA/C 5/1/46 BOX 51 F2

This demonstrates that the attitude of the local authority had changed significantly since the Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest of 1917, and by the early 1920s Barrow compared favourably to the more 'progressive' Nelson. Nelson's council 'seemed determined that, as an elected body, it should exercise as much responsibility as possible over the welfare of its citizens'⁴³, and provided leisure activities for the unemployed, together with reading rooms and reduced admission costs for public baths. Barrow's Corporation, despite the exclusion of the far left, introduced similar measures, including a weekly rates payment system⁴⁴, and free permits to enable the unemployed to use the toll bridge connecting Walney Island to the mainland (see Table 3.7). These

permits were a necessity in the interests of civic harmony, given the unwillingness of Vickers to waive its tolls and the refusal of the unemployed to accept a credit system and repay the tolls at a later date⁴⁵. However, despite the Corporation's efforts, this remained a contentious issue and was to spill into riots in May 1922 (see Chapter Six).

THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS AND POOR RELIEF 1921-1923

(i) Towards Crisis

With mounting social tensions and the economy in disarray, the main burden of poor relief and the task of compensating for the inadequacies of the insurance system fell to the Board of Guardians. This section will analyse the strategies adopted by the Barrow Board at the peak of the crisis between 1921 and 1923.

The Labour Party had predominated on the Barrow Board from 1904 and had maintained an efficient administrative system, interviewing individual applicants and visiting homes. However, working class self-sufficiency had ensured that staffing levels and expenditure remained minimal, and comprised one Relieving Officer and his assistant with a weekly out-relief budget of between £40 and £50 during the pre-war period. Consequently, poor relief was an uncontroversial issue and aroused little interest at this time.

However, unemployment rose rapidly from 1919, and despite the widening of the National Insurance system, the 600 receiving out-relief in 1920 had increased to 3,669 by September 1921, whilst the workhouse was full⁴⁶ (see also Table 5.6). The cost also multiplied, and despite a reduction in the relief scale in April 1921 (see Chapter Three), by October out-relief payments averaged £1,030 per week. Ministry of Health records begin in October 1921, with the Guardians' initial request for the authority to raise a £20,000 loan, and another if necessary, drawing attention to the increase of the Poor Rate in April 1920 and reduced relief scales. The Ministry replied that they were not in a position to give any assistance and, interestingly, that it was not their function to approve or disapprove relief scales. The Guardians continued to press for a loan and a five-year repayment period, and ultimately the Ministry modified its hard line and sanctioned a £15,000 overdraft to be repaid within two years.

The money was quickly exhausted, and by January 1922 the Guardians were requesting the extension of their overdraft and a minimum five-year repayment period, stressing the difficulty of raising sufficient relief revenue from the rates, particularly as business rate income, which normally provided a third of the rates, was drastically reduced⁴⁷. However, although the Ministry 'fully appreciate[d] the grounds for treating Barrow as generously as possible', they took a very different view of Barrow's financial problems and possible options. Their preference for rate rises and the two year repayment period made it 'difficult to meet [the Barrow Board] even half way', and the Ministry refused to sanction the overdraft⁴⁸. Ultimately, a Guardians' deputation in February 1922 convinced the Ministry that the relief burden was too great for the town to sustain, and the overdraft was sanctioned, but again, with a two year repayment period.

Throughout 1922 the number of applications to the Guardians increased (see Table 5.6), and weekly out-relief payments, at around £2,200, were almost equivalent to the total annual pre-war out-relief bill. Under increasing pressure, the Guardians approached the Ministry for a further overdraft in April, arguing that 'unless the sanction is given, the Guardians' cheques will be dishonoured at the bank and the position will become very serious'. They insisted that 'the bulk of the ratepayers have no income out of which rates can be paid'⁴⁹, local traders were facing bankruptcy, and that the extension of the repayment period to ten years was as essential as the overdraft itself. Regarding Barrow as one of the hardest hit unions by this point, the Ministry sanctioned the overdraft and allowed a five year repayment period⁵⁰.

Table 5.6 Specimen figures for out-relief applications to May 1922

Date		Number of cases
December	1919	587
December	1920	680
December	1921	3,429
January	1922	4,880
February	1922	5,117
March	1922	6,357
April	1922	9,363
May	1922	11,000+

Source: Barrow News, 26 August 1922

The Guardians however, were fighting on two fronts, and faced considerable pressure from the local unemployed. The Guardians sympathetically received the Communist-led

deputations, and although these became increasingly unruly, the Board, still Labour controlled at this point, remained remarkably tolerant. However, the Chairman ultimately ruled: 'we cannot, as a public body, continue to go along like this. It is not a case of disrespect, but absolutely setting us up to contempt and defiance', and from December 1921 delegations led by extremists were no longer received⁵¹.

The strengthening of the moderate section of the Board and the mounting agitation had not escaped Ministry attention, and the Ministry sought to take advantage of the situation as the crisis approached its peak in 1922. As stated above, following the Joint Deputation in May, the Ministry sent two representatives to Barrow to assess the situation, but it proved impossible to estimate the sums needed. Whilst the Guardians suggested a figure of £500,000 if the shipyard closed, the Ministry more conservatively estimated a minimum of £100,000, but realised that the half crown Poor Rate would not raise £50,000, even if it could all be collected. On the other hand, Barrow's 9% rate of pauperism was low compared to the 19% in some Unions⁵², whilst the municipal rates, at 15/- in the £, were also comparatively low (see Table 5.7). Whilst high unemployment prohibited rate increases, the Ministry suspected the Guardians were not repaying as much as they could, and were trying to shift the entire burden onto the future⁵³ (although they had advised the Corporation to do just that only five months earlier). The Ministry turned to relief scales, which, although not extravagant, were supplemented by free school meals, war pensions and trade union superannuation benefit. However, whilst the Ministry privately agreed to the 'utmost concession' towards the town⁵⁴, it continued to press for a reduction in the relief scale and to delay its decision on a ten-year repayment period.

Table 5.7 Comparison of rates in four industrial towns at February 1923

Town	Poor Rate in the £	Total Rate in the £	Weekly Out-Relief	
			Per couple	Maximum
Barrow	2/6d	15/-	25/-	35/-
Sheffield	10/2d	21/10d	25/-	50/-
Middlesbrough	6/5d	19/5d	20/-	35/-
W. Hartlepool	4/7d	17/4d	20/-	35/-

Source: February 1923 PRO, MH 68/102

With funds due to run out within weeks, the Guardians believed they were not getting 'the sympathy and aid which they have a right to expect in view of the difficult position

they have to face', and informed the Ministry that they were 'contemplating resigning in a body and leaving to the government the duty and responsibility of affording relief to the unemployed of Barrow'⁵⁵. The banks had refused to extend the Guardians' overdraft, but the Ministry, confident after the April election, declined to meet a deputation in July, advising the Board to arrange a loan as already sanctioned, and if unsuccessful to approach to the Goschen Committee. The Guardians stressed that the

'sanction of an extension of the Guardians' borrowing powers does not meet the difficulty. It is not right that this town should have to bear the consequences of Government cessation of armament work and maintain for an indefinite period a mass of men now unemployed as a result of that cessation. When the principle was established that each parish should maintain its own poor it was never contemplated that the whole of a large town might be unemployed and with no income coming in the town should still have to maintain its unemployed. Unless the Guardians take a stand now, the burden will be such that there can be no recovery. The rates will prevent it. The problem is a national and not a local one'⁵⁶.

Again they spelt out the situation. There were no funds, no possibility of a loan and no relief, and the consequences were unimaginable, leaving resignation as their only realistic option.

Local tensions were also mounting, and at the Guardians meeting on 2 August, an UWM deputation occupied the hall until relief scales were increased. The Guardians explained the impossibility of increased scales when there were insufficient funds to pay relief at the current rate, and that funds would be exhausted by next Saturday (12th). Unless the Government approved a £90,000 loan and a fifteen year repayment period at the meeting on the 11th, the Barrow Guardians would cease to function⁵⁷. They then departed, leaving the stunned deputation in occupation of the empty building.

Throughout the period, poor relief issues were debated and UWM deputations received at public meetings, and these, together with the outcomes of Guardians' deputations to London, were comprehensively reported in the press. As Macintyre suggests, this openness bolstered the authority and legitimacy of the Barrow Board at a time of considerable uncertainty and unrest. If the UWM frequently expressed their distrust of the Board, the Chairman believed it had the support of the majority of the unemployed⁵⁸. There was further evidence of a developing communal solidarity. The Ratepayers and Property Owners Association had long been lobbying the Ministry in an

effort to prevent further rate increases⁵⁹, and the Guardians were also supported by a letter from the bank which had refused a further overdraft. A director of the bank advised the Ministry that it would be extremely difficult for the Guardians to raise a loan on the open market and drew attention to 'the unique position of Barrow even amongst other industrial towns', emphasising that in times of national crisis the town was a national asset and it was the Government's duty to assist. Crucially, the Government was unmoved, and ignoring the evidence before them, suggested the Guardians raise a £60,000 loan on the open market. The Board debated the offer but the Chairman proposed they inform the Ministry that their 'proposals were utterly inadequate to meet the position, and that failing other more reasonable proposals, they [the Guardians] cease to function in a fortnight'. The lack of funds made continuation for any length of time impossible. Others argued that 'if we cease to function the Government will have to step in, because the unemployed of the town will make them put their studying cap on and toe the line. We ought to cease to function at once'. By nine votes to five, it was moved 'that unless the Government improve their offer, the Board will cease to function next Wednesday [16 August]'⁶⁰, in effect removing themselves as a buffer between the government and the unemployed.

The Ministry however, had made contingency plans. Prohibited from direct intervention, they requested the Mayor take over the Guardians' administration in the event of their resignation⁶¹, but significantly, prepared to make the money available immediately on favourable terms, extending the loan repayment period to the legal maximum, stressing that 'in no other case has so long a period been allowed'⁶².

Whilst the mayor, who had no knowledge of the Guardians' administration, prayed for a settlement, in a flurry of telegrams at the eleventh hour the Guardians were offered £15,000, personally delivered by Snowden⁶³, as a temporary measure, pending further negotiations. At a special (and public) meeting on 15 August, the still militant Guardians debated the offer. Needing grants not loans, they believed that 'to ask the Guardians to go on as they were doing, to go on creating debt for the future generation, was not right. Parliament should have been forced to face the issue before now'. On the other hand, the Mayor anticipated a major breach of the peace, whilst the unemployed and the Guardians feared the Government would take control using the Mayor as a screen, and it was suggested that the Corporation go on strike to prevent this. Ultimately the vote, to resign or accept the loan pending the outcome of a conference, was equally

divided, but the Chairman used his casting vote to accept the proposals, temporarily averting the crisis⁶⁴.

It is clear from the Ministry's report on that meeting that the Guardians had the upper hand. Ministry negotiators were advised that, 'the Guardians ... are unreasonable, and it would be unwise to appear to concede to a threat of a strike what could not be granted by persuasion'⁶⁵. Eventually, although they were 'a most difficult lot'⁶⁶, an agreement was reached. The Goschen Committee was to advance £60,000 to clear the overdraft, with a 5% interest rate and a ten year repayment period commencing in September 1924, whilst the Government undertook to supply future relief funds as necessary⁶⁷. A major triumph for the Barrow Board, it was a source of Ministry unease for the future: 'The fact that there is now a more or less definite split on the Board and that they have once withdrawn their resolution [to resign] makes me hope they will not really mean to resign again – but I am not quite confident'⁶⁸.

(ii) Comparative Perspectives

It becomes evident that the political battles fought out on the local Boards could take very different forms. For example, although Nelson's Labour Guardians were outnumbered by a Conservative majority on the Burnley Board, encouraged by Poplar's example in 1921 they were able to reverse the Board's decision not to pay relief to cotton strikers⁶⁹. Whilst Hill describes them as adopting a 'distinctive truculent stance'⁷⁰, the Burnley Board was dominated by factional disputes⁷¹, whilst Poplar provides an example of conflict between a left-wing Board and the government. In contrast was Middlesbrough's Corporation and Board of Guardians' orthodox approach, and 'it must be remembered that neither the Guardians nor the Town Councils of Teesside were essentially political bodies. Guardians were not elected on any political ticket, and many councillors were not either'⁷². Indeed, the Middlesbrough response was markedly different. The Guardians accepted 'poor law wisdom and submerged principles', and 'given its current indebtedness and desperate need to borrow further, the Union was forced to comply with the Ministry's wishes'. Scales were cut in return for loans⁷³, whilst existing claims were investigated for economies, and all income was taken into account when assessing claims. However, despite their orthodoxy, they were not always unsympathetic, and in 1922 ex-servicemen's disability pensions were disregarded in relief calculations⁷⁴. Nevertheless, 'the [Middlesbrough] Guardians'

capitulation was complete by the end of 1922 and policy decisions were ... increasingly made on the basis of what was financially and administratively expedient, with applications being assessed less and less ... on the basis of need'⁷⁵. In contrast, following the decisive election of April 1922, the exclusion of the radical left and the elimination of faction, the Barrow Board could focus exclusively on conflict with the Ministry of Health. From this point there was a marked shift in the relationship between the Board of Guardians and the Ministry, and the struggles of the Barrow Union began to assume their distinctive characteristics.

(iii) The Struggle Resumes

Within a month, changes in unemployment benefit legislation increased the 'gap' in periods of unemployment benefit to eight weeks and negated any benefits the Guardians had derived from the recent negotiations. The Guardians' refusal to sign any more loan documentation until the issue was settled frustrated the Ministry, who described the Barrow Board as 'kicking over the rails again on the pretence that men may cease to draw benefit for more than a single week's "gap" is in breach of the agreement made with them'⁷⁶ (*sic*).

The recent victory encouraged the Guardians' confrontational stance, whilst the Ministry began to take a harder line. The Ministry privately acknowledged that the relief scale was insufficient to meet the needs of the long-term unemployed, as well as the great hardships experienced by shopkeepers and property owners, mounting rent and rate arrears, and the rising numbers of bankruptcies. But whilst stating 'the position here really does seem pretty hopeless', they were convinced there was 'nothing approaching starvation in the town', and whilst 'the unemployed are getting into a state of despair', they did not believe they were altogether dissatisfied with the present scale, but were trying to forestall its reduction⁷⁷. Additionally, the Ministry believed that the Guardians over-stated the threat of the UWM, but following accusations of being 'murderers', the Barrow Board finally closed their doors to their deputations in March 1923⁷⁸. The Ministry's real concern however, was the increasing numbers of influential moderate men, such as George Basterfield, the (previously Labour but now Independent) ex-Mayor, and Tyson, the AEU District Secretary, joining the UWM and calling for the National Relief Scale. The Ministry took this far more seriously, as the backing of a

large number of moderates legitimised the demands of the UWM⁷⁹, and they began to regard Barrow as 'a somewhat dangerous Board'⁸⁰.

In an effort to restore control, the Ministry demanded rate increases and the elimination of overlapping sources of relief, the high cost of free school meals making them a priority. The Guardians conceded to these demands and reduced the relief scale. However, unlike Middlesbrough, where consultations between local bodies resulted in a list of children receiving free school meals being passed to Middlesbrough Guardians and the scales adjusted accordingly⁸¹, similar efforts in Barrow collapsed. Frictions between local bodies restricted these co-ordination initiatives, and they were simply abandoned. As a result, no uniform scale or means of avoiding overlapping were agreed and the Guardians remained detached from the school meals issue⁸². More significantly, once the loan was finalised, the original relief scale was reinstated⁸³, a tactic first adopted in October 1922 when the scale for single men in lodgings was reduced, but returned to the previous level once the loan was finalised⁸⁴. Thus the Guardians stood in open defiance of the Government, and from this point the conflict broadened to include relief scales and municipal rates.

RATES, RELIEF AND LOAN REPAYMENTS 1923-1926

During 1924 the economic condition of the town improved and attention turned to the repayment of out-relief, rate arrears and the Guardians' loans. Beginning with out-relief, any out-relief paid to the able-bodied unemployed was officially regarded as a loan which had to be repaid by the recipient on return to employment, and inevitably, as men gradually returned to work, the issue became increasingly contentious. It also created friction between the Corporation and the Board as many ratepayers would be unable to repay rate arrears and out-relief simultaneously⁸⁵.

Somerville, the town's Conservative MP, supported the deterrent principle and stated that the Guardians 'must, in order to demonstrate that the recovery of relief ... is an enforceable regulation, insist that when the position of the recipient of relief improves, the man must recognise that he has incurred obligations, and must ... make some effort to meet them'⁸⁶. Significantly, he was ousted by a Labour MP in the General Election two months later, but the issue reveals considerable divisions among left-wing

moderates. A section of the Board stressed the importance of maintaining the repayment principle, and argued that to wait for the borough rate to be repaid would weaken their ability to collect⁸⁷. However, the Corporation argued that the Guardians had never previously attempted to reclaim relief, even if it was officially 'on loan', and queried the introduction of new procedures for over 6,000 'very much more deserving cases'. Others pointed out that men returning to work had amassed considerable debts, and to rush into the collection of arrears would give the government the impression that the Guardians were able to collect, and set an unfortunate precedent.

At a meeting with the Ministry in September 1924, the Guardians argued that work which brought a crippling burden of debt repayment had a bad psychological effect⁸⁸. They were supported by local trade unions, who wrote to the Ministry describing 'the tragic hopelessness of the individuals who after two, three or four years unemployment, at last secure a job, which in all too many cases only yields sufficient money to obtain the bare necessities of life, and still the burden of repayment of relief money hangs heavily upon them'. The diversity of this support is significant, and included appeals from craft unions such as the AEU, general unions such as the National Amalgamated Union of Labour, and the white-collar union, the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks⁸⁹. This support strengthened the resolve of the Board, who introduced an ingenious repayment policy. No repayments were due until a man had been employed for a minimum of six months and paid off all his rate arrears, whilst those earning less than 40/- per week, or who had one or more children were exempt⁹⁰.

With regard to the Guardians' own loans, Ministry records indicate that the Guardians repeatedly used Ministry loans to pay off their bank overdraft, thus keeping interest at commercial rates minimal whilst accruing large debts with the government on more favourable terms. As the Ministry observed, 'Barrow, whilst undoubtedly hit very hard, has shown considerable commercial instinct in the uses made of her adversity and seems now likely to reap ... the fruits of that commercial sagacity'. Nevertheless, the Ministry was anxious that the loan repayments, due to begin in 1925, should be introduced as smoothly as possible, but it was also aware that this would force municipal rates up. The Guardians still needed considerable financial support, and the Ministry sought to prepare the ground by making future relief loans dependent on rate increases. However, the Corporation maintained that it was impractical to increase the

rates so soon after three years of severe unemployment, and the Guardians and Corporation out-maneuvred the Ministry by proposing to reduce the rates in an effort to collect some arrears. This proved surprisingly successful, and the Ministry continued to advance loans on condition that existing rate levels were maintained⁹¹.

Nevertheless the anxiety in some quarters to begin repayments and demonstrate their good faith to the Government suggests that again, the Board had begun to falter. Some urged they take 'advantage of the psychological moment with the [Labour] Government in power at the present time ... and say ... you have preached for years that unemployment of this kind ought not to hamper a Town – put it into practice now'. Others argued that not only was it unfair not to repay the money, it amounted to 'a matter of the restoration of the moral standard of citizenship'. However, Alderman Ellison stressed that the collection of this money would negate both the Guardians' 'great moral victory' of 1922 and the concessions they had since wrung from the Government. Councillors argued that repayment details had never been finalised and it was unclear whether the government would require repayment or not. Again they emphasised that to collect some arrears would give the government a good case for collecting the rest, whilst the repayment of the £173,000 borrowed by the Guardians could finish the town off, concluding that 'if the Government press for money the best thing you can tell them is to come and do the job themselves'⁹².

With the support of the Corporation, the Barrow Board continued to press the Ministry to waive its loans. The Ministry had to consider Barrow's situation in relation to Unions in a similar position, some of whom had begun or nearly finished their repayments, and any concessions would have considerable repercussions. It also proved difficult to present the town as a special case, particularly as Barrow had always had better terms than the rest and its economic prospects were improving. The Ministry maintained that it was the Guardians' duty to recover the sums spent on relieving the destitute for the benefit of the ratepayers where this could reasonably be done and was not likely to create hardship for those returning to work⁹³.

Commander Craven, Director of Vickers, also supported the Guardians on this issue, asserting that the position of Vickers as the main employer was of central importance to the fate of the town, and being geared to arms production, should have government support. High taxation, both locally and nationally, reduced the firm's competitiveness,

and any additional local tax would be crippling, whilst any additional burdens placed on the town to repay loans could only create further stagnation of trade. He argued that rather than pay 'dead money' by way of relief, the government should subsidise its industries to bolster their international competitiveness⁹⁴. Additionally, Mayor Fairbairn (an Independent), held in 'considerable respect' by the Ministry, advised delaying definite steps for repayment as unemployment was still high, and that 'too firm a handling of the debt repayment problem would ... have very evil results, as there are extremely awkward elements both on the Town Council and the Board of Guardians'⁹⁵. Although the Guardians pressed for the loan to be deferred for another ten years, the Ministry delayed the repayments until 1927.

Despite anticipating the present Poor Rate would cover Barrow's needs, rising unemployment necessitated the sanctioning of temporary overdrafts throughout 1925. However, in December the Guardians' application for a loan met a different response. Ministry records describe the Guardians' repeated requests for loans, delayed payments and 2/6d Poor Rate as 'wholly unreasonable, as indeed the attitude of Barrow has ... been for a long period'⁹⁶. However, whilst the Ministry could see no justification for further concessions, the relief scale could not be considered extravagant, and a further overdraft was sanctioned.

Although the General Strike had little impact on poor relief issues, 1926 witnessed a significant change of attitudes. The Ministry felt that 'the town has been spoon-fed long enough', having 'received exceptionally favourable terms as a result of their threat in 1922 to throw up their administration', which had been repeated whenever pressure was brought to bear⁹⁷. Additionally, local organisations presented a united front and opposed the Ministry at every turn. For example, when the Ministry tried to force a rate rise, the Manager of the Midland Bank stepped in, describing 'the average circumstances of the people of this town [as] worse than at any period during the twenty five years of my managerial experience in Barrow', and emphasising the constant drain on the resources of the thrifty. Similarly, the Chamber of Trade described traders as 'being crushed out of existence by the weight of adverse circumstances', and joined with the Ratepayers and Property Owners Association in their insistence that the rates be reduced⁹⁸.

For example, in February the Ministry pressed for a 6d in the £ Poor Rate increase, but this tougher line roused local popular opinion. The press argued the people were being

penalised for their economy and efforts to keep rates low. Unlike some notorious Boards, the stringent administration had deterred many, and had they acted like West Ham or Poplar, they would be looked at differently. 'The people of Barrow had been too conscientious. Their scale had been on the low side and the Ministry were not appreciating it'. In view of the strong representations from local bodies, the Ministry backed down. It firmly believed that funds could be raised locally, but feared the response to an enforced rate rise⁹⁹.

Meanwhile, the requests for overdrafts continued, and Ministry records note that 'perhaps it is only to be expected that Barrow should write in this strain, calmly assuming that we will give them anything they choose to mention', but again sanctioned the overdraft¹⁰⁰. The Board's increasingly cavalier attitude is demonstrated by their response to the Ministry's later request for a reduction in the married couples' scale. The Board's Chairwoman, Mrs Ward, advised they make a mild protest rather than give a flat ultimatum, 'after all, they did not wish to kill the goose that laid the golden egg'¹⁰¹. Despite Ministry insistence, the Guardians twice refused to cut the scale for married couples and a Ministry memo notes: 'having given us as much trouble as possible in the matter, the Guardians now admit, what we knew all the time, that they, as ever, did not intend to take any notice of our suggestions. I suppose we wait for their next request for funds and then make them swallow the lead'¹⁰².

The Board of Guardians (Default) Act of 1926 changed the situation radically. In response to the Guardians' request for funds in December, the Ministry announced it would provide no more money. All relief was to be financed solely from the local rates, which might have to rise to 20/10d in the £, and any further defiance would result in the arrival of Commissioners in Barrow to take over the Guardians' administration. This, and the Commissioners in particular, was a potent threat. Mrs Ward argued that the Guardians had to consider the thousands of ratepayers who were just above destitution level, as well as the destitute themselves. She urged they accept the inevitable and moved 'that with great protest agrees to accept the decision of the Ministry'. Although divided, the Board remained defiant and the motion was lost by seven votes to eight. In a very grave and uncertain atmosphere, the motion to apply for another loan was carried¹⁰³, whilst a joint meeting of the Guardians, the Corporation and the Labour Party and Trades Council voted to oppose any reduction in the relief scale¹⁰⁴. Fighting to the end, Barrow's Guardians sent a deputation to the Ministry of Health in January,

accompanied by the town's MP, John Bromley, and the Mayor. In a long meeting, where the Guardians withdrew frequently for discussions, they presented evidence of the town's situation, but received a terse reminder that no good purpose could be served by prolonging the discussion, but help could still be forthcoming if conditions, including a considerable increase in the Poor Rate, were complied with. Although the idea was mooted, Commissioners had made resignation an ineffectual threat and the best the deputation could hope for was a moderate rate increase. Thus they accepted the Ministry's offer under protest, reducing the scale to 23/- per couple and introducing a graduated scale for the number of children, giving a maximum per family of 38/- per week, while agreeing to increase the Poor Rate by the still relatively low figure of 9d. Mrs Ward however, warned of the importance of not unnecessarily antagonising the Ministry as there was still the question of loan repayments to consider. Far from seeing the Guardians' capitulation as a total defeat, many believed they were lucky to get 'off as light as they did'¹⁰⁵ and significantly, they were congratulated 'on their stand in opposing the reduction of the scale' by local branches of the AEU, the Co-op and the Trades Council¹⁰⁶.

At the AGM of the Barrow Board of Guardians in April 1927, the Board appraised its achievements over recent years, which had amounted to considerably more than poor relief and employment related issues. Wider use had been made of the infirmary, which now admitted needy cases other than the destitute, in addition to the opening of an out-patient centre and the re-organisation of the mental wards. Additionally, tennis courts for staff and a bowling green for the convalescent and the elderly had been provided through relief work schemes, whilst the Cottage Homes had considerable success in fostering children. Given the economic condition of the town, these were substantial successes. With regards to poor relief, Mrs Ward saw their great achievement as the maintenance of a balance 'between the claim of the individual and the claim of the community'. Although the future was uncertain due to the pending abolition of the Boards of Guardians, 'whatever may take place, it is certain that destitution will have to be defined afresh ... the present system has outlived its usefulness.' 'The maintaining of numbers of able-bodied men without return is breeding disaster ... The Poor Law cannot remain the panacea for all industrial ills: it can only bear the burden of assistance – not maintenance. A rate will never meet the needs'¹⁰⁷.

CONCLUSION

In many ways the crisis in Barrow was typical of industrial areas in the 1920s and illustrates the inadequacy of traditional poor relief methods in the face of long-term mass unemployment. Local authority relief work schemes required a substantial financial outlay and proved increasingly difficult to finance as rate income fell, and coupled with the limited number of suitable projects, were ineffectual in relieving unemployment. The burden therefore, fell on the Board of Guardians. However, if the general pattern was typical, the response of the Barrow Board was not.

The historiography suggests that Boards were influenced more by local conditions than the political inclinations of their members, and in distressed areas tended to be more sympathetic to the unemployed and more liberal in their application of the law. Barrow's case-study however, broadens this debate further and it becomes apparent that whilst generous relief scales were not confined to left-wing Boards, neither was defiance of the government.

Barrow provides an example of a moderate Board attempting to function in a volatile political climate and facing pressures from the unemployed to increase the scales and from central government to reduce them. Although the Board refused to tolerate the excesses of the UWM, Barrow's working class society was cohesive and organised, and the Guardians faced mounting pressure from many local bodies, but the Board's authority and legitimacy was bolstered throughout by the openness of the decision making process. Beginning with the unemployed, the Ratepayers and Property Owners Association and grocers, these pressure groups eventually included powerful and 'respectable' bodies such as Banks, Vickers and the Chamber of Trade. Significantly, these disparate groups supported the Corporation and Board of Guardians, and united in a collective defence against an external threat. Ministry records confirm that this was an influential factor in the success of the various deputations and repeated Ministry capitulations.

The Guardians employed a variety of tactics. Although providing a buffer between the unemployed and the Ministry, the threat of resignation effectively removed the Board from that equation at a time when the Ministry was not empowered to take over at a local level. Indeed, over the next four years, resignation was to prove an effective

weapon in the fight to force the government to take responsibility for poor relief, and created a pattern of Ministry and Guardian relations which would continue until the passing of the Board of Guardians (Default) Act of 1926. The settlement of the loan repayment issue however, and the introduction of Public Assistance Committees, are beyond the range of this thesis¹⁰⁸.

The threat of resignation, which rendered the Ministry powerless, was the cornerstone of the Guardians' successful defiance, but although they had the upper hand from that point, they nevertheless proceeded with caution. The Board's moderate politics, stringency and efficient administration restricted the Ministry's opportunities for counter-attacks, and in addition to resignation, the Board's tactics included the temporary reduction of scales until loans were finalised, and the threat to reduce the municipal rates. Ministry records also acknowledge the commercial sagacity of the Barrow Board and reveal their distrust of them. Events also demonstrate that the Ministry had scope to be considerably more generous than it appeared, and concessions could be made if local opposition was determined enough. Furthermore, in addition to indicating the government's ignorance of local conditions and needs, it is clear from this case-study that the government actively ignored evidence placed before it by professional and independent bodies such as the banks.

The diversity of responses at a local level becomes evident even within this brief comparison and raises some interesting questions. For example, if a moderate Board such as Barrow could successfully defy the Ministry of Health with such apparent ease, why did other badly hit Unions, such as Middlesbrough, bow to Ministry dictates? This case-study also demonstrates that a Board's attitude must be measured by factors other than relief scales alone. It could be argued for example, that Barrow's relief scales, which were not generous, coupled with the battle to keep the rates low, suggests that the Board favoured ratepayers above the unemployed. On the other hand it can be argued that this was a response to extremely high unemployment among ratepayers, many of whom, whether tenants or owner-occupiers, were from the working classes, coupled with concern for the future economic condition of the town. Nevertheless, although the scale was far from extravagant, Ministry demands for a reduction were strenuously resisted, in addition to which, other income such as pensions and superannuation was ignored throughout. This was also true of relief in kind, particularly free school meals, and whilst a comparison of relief scales in Barrow and Middlesbrough shows Barrow's

to be slightly better, the comparative health of the two towns clearly demonstrates the beneficial effects of Barrow's refusal to take account of other sources of income. The handling of the relief repayment issue was equally significant, and although appearing to take steps for the recovery of relief on loan, the criteria adopted effectively excluded the majority of the town's working population.

However, the Guardians' support for the unemployed encompassed more than the various forms of out-relief. In the tense political atmosphere of 1922, the anti-Communist and anti-far-left Board supported the local unemployed on the national Hunger March to London. Indeed, Ministry of Health Intelligence Reports create a far more radical picture of this 'moderate' Board, which was described as encouraging the march to support their own efforts to get the burden of relief moved from the rates to taxes. Additionally, the Barrow Union was one of the few unions to perform the illegal act of providing boots and clothes for the marchers, and in addition to feeding and accommodating a contingent from Govan, allowed them to collect money in the town¹⁰⁹.

Although more local studies are needed in order to put Barrow's experience into a better perspective, the Barrow Board was neither radical nor orthodox, but was perceived as particularly dangerous because it had found, and fully exploited, an area of Ministry of Health vulnerability. The fluidity of local political divisions, the exclusion of the radical left and increasing divisions among the moderates, clearly supports the argument that political label was less influential than local circumstances in a crisis of this magnitude. However, although unemployment and relief scales generated considerable local tension, the principal conflict was between local and central government. The Barrow Board relentlessly opposed the Ministry whilst attempting to balance the needs of the distressed and the ratepayer, and the evidence, particularly the praise for the Board from the Trades Council, suggests the evolution of communal solidarity, and cohesion rather than antagonism¹¹⁰. Public democracy also played an important role, and this, together with social attitudes, will be examined further in later chapters.

¹ D. Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in 20th Century Britain* (London, 1987), 24.

² P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow, 1982), 85.

³ Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 37.

⁴ M.E. Rose, *The English Poor Law* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 288-90.

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- ⁵ Thane, *Welfare State*, 140.
- ⁶ Rose, *Poor Law*, 291.
- ⁷ A. Briggs & J. Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923* (London, 1971), 13-14.
- ⁸ R. Croucher, *We Refuse To Starve In Silence* (London, 1987), 19.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.
- ¹¹ S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London, 1980), 172.
- ¹² Rose, *Poor Law*, 292.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 293.
- ¹⁴ J. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper 1864-1946* (London, 1984), 342.
- ¹⁵ Thane, *Welfare State*, 187.
- ¹⁶ Rose, *Poor Law*, 294.
- ¹⁷ Thane, *Welfare State*, 186.
- ¹⁸ Rose, *Poor Law*, 292.
- ¹⁹ Thane, *Welfare State*, 187.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 188.
- ²² R. Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area 1920-1938* (Preston: University of Central Lancashire, Harris Paper No. 3), 52.
- ²³ Extract of Ministry of Health report on Barrow, July 1922, Barrow-in-Furness Union: overdrawn Treasurer's Account 1921-1923., 23/1/22, National Archives, Kew, MH 68/102.
- ²⁴ Telegram from Mayor to Lloyd George, 19 November 1919, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ²⁵ Letter from the Distress Sub-Committee to the Prime Minister & the Minister of Labour, 8 December 1919, Distress Sub-Committee Minutes Book 1905-1921, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 1/3/1.
- ²⁶ Letter from Mayor to Prime Minister, 1 December 1919, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ²⁷ Letter from Ministry of Labour to the Mayor, 5 December 1919, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ²⁸ Poor Law Authorities to Prime Minister, 6 December 1921, Relief of Necessitous Areas 1925, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/46 Box 51 F3.
- ²⁹ The percentage was subject to negotiation, but stood at 60% in the first half of 1921.
- ³⁰ Letter to the Prime Minister, & Ministries of Health and Labour, 18 October, 1921, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.

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- ³¹ W. Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936* (London, 1977), 60.
- ³² Corporation to Unemployment Grants Committee, 2 February 1921; Town Clerk to Labour Exchange, 10 October 1922, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ³³ Letter to the Prime Minister, & Ministries of Health and Labour, 18 October, 1921, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ³⁴ Letter from Board of Guardians to Ministry of Health, 22 May 1922, Financial and Unemployment Position 1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/42 Box 46 F2.
- ³⁵ Snowden, Ministry of Health Inspector, first official visit to Barrow, *Barrow News*, 10 December 1921, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ³⁶ Letter from Board of Guardians to Ministry of Health, 22 May 1922, Financial and Unemployment Position 1922, CRO, BA/C 5/1/42 Box 46 F2.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Ministry of Health Report, 3 August 1922, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ³⁹ Borough Treasurer's Memoranda, 30 July 1923, Unemployment 1923-1924, CRO, BA/C 5/1/46 BOX 51 F2.
- ⁴⁰ Letter to Mayor from Joint Committee UWM, Labour Party & Trades Council, 5 March 1923; Mayor at meeting with Labour Party & Trades Council, 9 March 1923, Unemployment 1923-24, CRO, BA/C 5/1/46 BOX 51 F2.
- ⁴¹ Letters from Town Clerk to Unemployment Grants Committee 31 July 1923 & 17 August 1923, Unemployment 1923-1924, CRO, BA/C 5/1/46 Box 51 F2.
- ⁴² Ryder, 'Council House Building, County Durham' in Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, 55.
- ⁴³ J. Hill, *Nelson: Politics, Economy and Community* (Edinburgh, 1977), 94.
- ⁴⁴ Collection of Rates by Instalments file, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/41 BOX 44 F1.
- ⁴⁵ Letter from Town Clerk to UWC, 14 March 1922, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ⁴⁶ Internal memorandum, Ministry of Health, 1 November 1921, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁴⁷ Letter from Barrow Guardians to Ministry of Health, 12 January 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁴⁸ Internal memorandum, Ministry of Health, 27 January 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁴⁹ Letter from Barrow Guardians to Ministry of Health, 22 April 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁵⁰ Internal memorandum, Ministry of Health, 3 May 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁵¹ *Barrow News*, 10 December 1921, CRO.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 30 May 1922.

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- ⁵³ Internal memorandum, Ministry of Health, 27 May 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁵⁴ Ministry of Health Report, July 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁵⁵ Letter from Barrow Guardians to Ministry of Health, 6 July 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁵⁶ Letter from Barrow Guardians to Ministry of Health, 28 July 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁵⁷ *Barrow News*, 5 August 1922, CRO.
- ⁵⁸ *Barrow News*, 5 August 1922; 10 December 1921, CRO.
- ⁵⁹ See for example, 26 July 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923 NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁶⁰ *Barrow News*, 12 August 1922, CRO.
- ⁶¹ Internal letter from Francis to Snowden, 10 August 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁶² Draft Response of Ministry of Health, August 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁶³ Ministry of Health Inspector.
- ⁶⁴ *Barrow News*, 19 August 1922, CRO.
- ⁶⁵ Report by Snowden on his meeting with the Barrow Guardians, 16 August 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁶⁶ Snowden briefing Aubrey Symmonds in preparation for conference with the Barrow Guardians, 18 August 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁶⁷ Ministry of Health Conference with the Barrow Guardians, 24 August 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102; *Barrow News*, 26 August 1922, CRO.
- ⁶⁸ Report by Snowden on his meeting with the Barrow Guardians, 16 August 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁶⁹ J. Liddington, *Respectable Rebel*, 340.
- ⁷⁰ Hill, *Nelson*, 92.
- ⁷¹ Liddington, *Respectable Rebel*, 341.
- ⁷² K. Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment on Teesside*, 1919-39 (Manchester, 1986), 168.
- ⁷³ J.J. Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment in Middlesbrough 1919-26', MA Dissertation, Teesside Polytechnic, 1982, 20; 25.
- ⁷⁴ Nicholas, *Unemployment on Teesside*, 158.
- ⁷⁵ Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment', 25.
- ⁷⁶ Letters from Barrow Guardians to Ministry of Health, 31 August 1922 & 14 September 1922; Letter from Barrow Employment Exchange to Ministry of Health, 11 September 1922; Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 18 September 1922, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁷⁷ Report by Snowden on Barrow Corporation Finance Committee meeting of 12 February 1923 dated 13 February 1923, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁷⁸ *Barrow News*, 31 March 1923, CRO.

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- ⁷⁹ Letter from Barrow Guardians to Ministry of Health, 7 February 1923, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁸⁰ Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 14 February 1923, Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁸¹ Turner, 'Poor relief and unemployment', 27.
- ⁸² 30 May 1923, Co-ordination of Relief – feeding Necessitous School Children 1923, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/44 Box 49 F2.
- ⁸³ Letter from Board of Guardians to Ministry of Health, 30 May 1923, Barrow-in-Furness Union: overdrawn Treasurer's Account 1923-1926, National Archives, Kew, MH 68/103.
- ⁸⁴ Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 1 November 1922 Barrow Union: 1921-1923, NA, MH 68/102.
- ⁸⁵ Town Clerk to Board of Guardians October 1923, Recovery of Rate Arrears 1923, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/45 Box 50 F3.
- ⁸⁶ Press cutting from an unspecified paper, 6 September 1924, Press Cuttings Scrap Book 1924-1925, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C Vol. 24.
- ⁸⁷ Discussion between Barrow Corporation and the Board of Guardians, 12 May 1924, Recovery of Rate Arrears 1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/45 Box 50 F3.
- ⁸⁸ Guardians' request to send deputation to Ministry of Health, September 1924, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁸⁹ National Union of Vehicle Builders to the Ministry of Health *et al*, 16 July 1924; AEU Branches, 5 August 1924, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹⁰ Statistics, September 1924, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹¹ Ministry of Health internal memoranda, 10 December 1925; 15 February 1924; 5 February 1924; 29 February 1924; 1 March 1924, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹² Report of loan repayments debate, Recovery of Rate Arrears 1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/45 Box 50 F3.
- ⁹³ Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 5 August 1924, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹⁴ Letter from Commander Craven to Ministry of Health, 8 September 1924, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹⁵ Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 12 November 1924, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹⁶ ⁹⁶ Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 10 December 1925, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹⁷ Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 25 January 1926, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹⁸ Letters to Ministry of Health from Midland Bank, 21 January 1926; Barrow Chamber of Trade, 3 February 1926; Barrow Ratepayers' Association, 2 February 1926, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.
- ⁹⁹ *Barrow News*, 27 February 1926, CRO.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 23 March 1926, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.

¹⁰¹ *Barrow News*, 3 July 1926, CRO.

¹⁰² Ministry of Health internal memorandum, 28 October 1926, Barrow Union: 1923-1926, NA, MH 68/103.

¹⁰³ *Barrow News*, 11 December 1926, CRO.

¹⁰⁴ 13 December 1926, Barrow Labour Party and Trades Council Minutes, Executive Committee Meetings 1919-1931, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 7 10-16.

¹⁰⁵ *Barrow News*, 27 January 1927, CRO.

¹⁰⁶ 26 January 1927, Barrow Labour Party and Trades Council Minutes, Executive Committee Meetings 1919-1931, CRO, BDSO 7 10-16.

¹⁰⁷ *Barrow News*, 23 April 1927, CRO.

¹⁰⁸ The Local Government Bill, 1928, proposed a generous settlement to the Guardians' debts, waiving interest payments for Ministry loans and extending the repayment period to fifteen years. In September 1929 it was proposed that the County take over Guardians' assets and liabilities.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Health Intelligence Reports, 27 November 1922; 29 November 1922, Poor relief and unemployed marches 1922-1923, National Archives, Kew, MH 57/105.

¹¹⁰ Despite the Board's continuing efforts to support both ratepayers and the unemployed, increases in the Poor Rate and cuts to relief scales necessitated by the Board of Guardians (Default) Act, 1926, put these social relationships under increasing strain.

WEATHERING THE DEPRESSION: VICKERS, THE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY AND THE TRADE UNIONS

INTRODUCTION

Building on the earlier analysis of the role of the local authorities during the depression, this chapter will continue with an examination of the responses of three other important local organisations: the Vickers shipyard, Barrow's Co-operative Society and the trade unions. Whilst Vickers was the town's major employer, the Co-op fulfilled a threefold role, being a major retail organisation, a large employer, and an important working class self-help institution. Additionally, with its membership accounting for 88% of Barrow households in 1913 (assuming one member per household), the Co-op was an organisation of considerable local significance. The chapter will be in two sections and begin with an examination of changing management strategies adopted by these organisations throughout the period, followed by the implications of these changes for Barrow's labour movement during periods of intense industrial unrest. Industrial relations will not be examined in any detail, but the chapter will build on the small but useful body of existing research¹, and examine the membership of the two largest local unions, the AEU and the Boilermakers, between 1920 and 1926. Their relationship with both the NUWM and the Co-operative Society will also be examined, together with sources of local friction and methods of control. This analysis of what are arguably the most important bodies in local life will provide a multi-faceted view of the impact of the depression on both the nature of these organisations and their inter-relationships. The examination of changing self-help and informal mutual assistance strategies is consigned to the following chapter.

To provide the background and context for these organisations, we begin with the Co-operative Society. Late nineteenth century Co-operative ideology sought to organise the working classes as consumers rather than producers, and transform capitalist society into one of mutual co-operation, but the 'ideology of consumption' was not a theory of social change based on the concept of class. Instead, by re-investing its profits in other financial investments and education, it was anticipated that the Co-operative Commonwealth of knowledge and trade would gradual diffuse through society and swallow up capitalism². This was an overwhelmingly working class movement, based on locally-run societies with democratic structures and a great deal of autonomy, with its largest membership in regions of heavy industry³. Local Co-ops, like other shops,

provided a meeting place, but they also fulfilled many wider functions. Local societies often owned and rented out terraced houses, and provided a range of valuable social services including child welfare, libraries and cultural activities, discussion groups (including the Women's Guild which gave a voice to working-class women on their own terms), the distribution of food aid and donations to local charities: multiple roles which demonstrate that Co-operative Societies were integral parts of their local communities. Additionally, local societies would lend their halls to other working class organisations such as trade unions⁴, many of whom banked with the Co-operative Wholesale Society, receiving competitive rates of interest and secure in the knowledge that the Co-op could not be pressured by employers into withholding strike funds⁵.

Both the Co-operative Society and trade unions were conceived as democratic movements for the protection of working class interests. Nevertheless, although the Co-op sought to maintain close links with both the Labour Party and trade unions, the voluntary goodwill was not sustained in the face of economic adversity⁶. In the downturn of the early 1920s, the wage cuts and economies imposed by many societies were opposed by the militant leadership of the Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (UDAW), culminating in the bitter conflict of 1925 which centred in the north-west. The dispute exposed the inner contradictions of the Co-op ethos and 'the overriding lessons ... were clear: the interests of the workers as producers and consumers were not easily reconciled, especially in a hostile economic climate'⁷. Gurney's view that the national industrial disputes of the early 1920s exacerbated these divisions is not shared by Southern, who argues that economic hardship and unfavourable government policies compounded existing inter-dependencies and brought the movements closer together. Whilst acknowledging significant differences and often strained relations, she asserts that the close Co-op and trade union relationship during the Railway Strike of 1919, the Coal Strike of 1921 and the General Strike of 1926 demonstrates 'the pervasive nature of Co-op support both over time and over a range of industries'⁸. Gurney argues, however, that the Co-op / trade union relationship continued to degenerate in the wake of the 1921 Miners' Strike, with unpaid loans being a continual source of friction, and that by the late 1920's the Co-operative Movement was increasingly side-lined by both the Labour Party and a defensive trade union movement⁹.

Vickers, by far the largest Barrow employer, was another important institutional influence in the town. The Vickers group of companies took over Barrow's Naval Construction Company in 1897 and by the first decade of the twentieth century over 80% of the Barrow yard's turnover was allocated to naval work, a specialisation which inhibited attempts to diversify into commercial shipbuilding. The Vickers group's dependence on international tensions left the firm vulnerable to harsher and more unpredictable market swings than experienced by civilian industries, a problem exacerbated by the restricted number of potential customers and a dependency on the British government for two thirds of its contracts. This, combined with erratic demand and fluctuating profits, demanded highly developed financial control and market management skills, together with technological innovation, modern machinery and production methods. An unconventional firm, by 1914 the Vickers group did not fit any entrepreneurial model¹⁰, but was run by a talented Board of Directors of varied social origins and areas of expertise. Trebilcock describes the 'different but mutually reinforcing talents'¹¹ of the Board as the key feature of Vickers' evolution, enabling the firm to meet pressures with bold and innovative responses, with the emphasis on technological leadership of the domestic and military markets¹².

The war brought armaments firms under government control, but regulation was confined to prices and profits, and 'it was specifically agreed that there should be no government 'interference' in direction or management'¹³. However, severe post-war problems were anticipated, not least because the Board was weaker than previously and accounts audits were years in arrears, but in common with many British companies, Vickers entered the post-war period in a 'buoyant and expansive mood'. Anticipating that peace would require boldness and ingenuity, and foreseeing the need to diversify, peace products were discussed during the war, but diversification varied considerably across the group. The sudden slump and the high cost of materials, heavy taxes, and disordered foreign exchanges, coupled with labour unrest and disrupted production, created increasingly serious problems for the company. As a result the Board suspended the shareholders' dividend in 1920, and in 1923-24 the Company's reserves were reduced twice, although Scott contends that this 'falling back to prepared positions' was carried out under good control. Nevertheless, Vickers' problems continued as a result of bad debts, foreign competition and a slump in shipbuilding, and in June 1925 experts were consulted to advise on the Company's position. The report, described by Scott as 'a clear-sighted glance at the future', advised splitting the firm into four groups to

redistribute shares and identify the most profitable, and also the reorganisation of management¹⁴.

An outline of the broad trends of wartime industrial relations that were of particular significance for Barrow's post-war transition period must emphasise high levels of conflict. Industrial unrest, and particularly the militancy of the engineers and their concerns over dilution, (i.e. the de-skilling of the engineering trades), pre-dated the war, as did the superior organisation of the employers. Despite strong views, Vickers' main Board left industrial relations to the discretion of local management. However, 'because the management was so directly concerned with technical developments ... the process of conducting industrial relations was almost contracted out to the officials of the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation (SEF) and the Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF)',¹⁵. Although competition made collaboration difficult, employers' organisations represented the collective interests of capital, and despite varying in function and structure, characteristically combined industrial relations with trade regulation and political activities, with the aim of maximising members' profits. The real significance of these organisations lay in the way they bolstered the employers' power within the labour market and provided access to the organisations' strike breaking machinery. Although collective bargaining had advantages for the trade unions, it came at the price of their recognition of the employers' right to manage, the enforcement of which became a key management strategy¹⁶.

'During the First World War all the stresses inherent in this position were vastly increased',¹⁷, as rising prices and the shortages of labour and materials necessitated industrial co-operation and the regulation of men and resources, which in turn had a profound impact on working practices and conditions. The consequent competition for labour, materials and government contracts undermined the solidarity of the employers' organisations, whilst the unprecedented level of government intervention, particularly in the engineering industry, resulted in 'a diminution of managerial rights and the adoption of a flexible, conciliatory ... defensive policy by the EEF',¹⁸. Paradoxically however, the pressure placed on employers by government intervention and the great surge in trade union membership and militancy, increased their capacity for co-operation and collective action between 1914 and 1920, and was reflected in the growth of the membership of their associations¹⁹.

The war also had a considerable impact on the British trade union movement. The steady but uneven growth of union membership from the 1890s accelerated dramatically in the decade from 1910, expanding from 2.6 million to 8.3 million by 1920, whilst the existing trend towards amalgamation among the larger unions was stimulated. The war also accelerated the evolution of a pattern of national bargaining²⁰, but although this established a framework of district and national negotiating machinery, the key negotiating body in most areas remained the District Committee, which allowed local activists a degree of influence.

Hinton analyses wartime industrial relations in terms of class struggle, with the government and employers uniting to strengthen their hand against the working classes and the labour movement. He asserts that 'nowhere was the subordination of workers' to employers' interests or the wartime intervention of the state more decisively illustrated than in the steps taken towards industrial compulsion'²¹. Hinton argues that the suppression of basic civil liberties by the Defence of the Realm Act, and the Munitions Act, which 'provided a framework for industrial slavery'²², represented a fundamental threat to the economic security of the engineering craftsman. Consequently nearly a third of all wartime strikes were in the engineering and shipbuilding industries, of which most were illegal and unsupported by the trade union leadership.

Although reinforcing management's right to manage, the effect of wartime legislation was not as one-sided as Hinton suggests, as in addition to greater trade union recognition by employers, the position of the movement's leadership was enhanced by their greater involvement in national policy and planning decisions²³. Nevertheless, the balance of power remained with the employers²⁴, and as a result of their collaboration, the trade union leadership lost the confidence of the rapidly expanding activist rank and file, dividing the movement and generating a rapid upsurge in independent organisation led by the Shop Stewards Movement.

Shop steward organisation in the shipbuilding and construction industries had begun during the late nineteenth century, and was mainly concerned with defending workshop standards against employer encroachments, reporting to the District Committees and acting as communicators rather than negotiators. However, the extension of national collective bargaining and the rank and file repudiation of the official leadership

transformed the shop stewards' role, 'driving the struggle for job control down to the workplace', and bringing them into the front line of resistance to industrial compulsion. Hyman describes the stewards as providing a more immediate response to local demands and a safety valve which prevented the accumulation of explosive grievances²⁵, their major victory, according to Hinton, being the maintenance of the right to strike²⁶.

Although unable to suppress the shop stewards, management and trade union officials were anxious to curb them, and peace provided the opportunity for the dismissal of the militants. Additionally, from 1920, the depression shifted the balance of power and changed the employers' strategy from co-operation to confrontation²⁷, placing the trade unions, particularly in the engineering industry, on the defensive. By 1921 unemployment had reached 2 million and the engineering industry was virtually at a standstill. 'It was a sign for the employers to resume the offensive. In one industry after another during 1921 and 1922, the workers found themselves fighting losing battles. The gains of 1918-1920 disappeared overnight'²⁸. Taking advantage of the high unemployment of 1921-22 to force the deepest wage cuts ever, in April 1921 the EEF informed the engineering unions they would initiate a nation wide lock-out unless the unions ended all embargoes on overtime, dropped their claim to be consulted on the issue and recognised the employers' right to manage. The AEU, determined to resist this return to 1898 principles and not betray the unemployed, rejected these demands.

The Lock-Out began on 11 March 1922, supported by 98.5% of the EEF²⁹, but most firms were still able to function. However, at the end of March the AEU called out its apprentices whilst the EEF confronted the other unions, demanding they declare their position on management prerogatives. From an employers' standpoint, economic conditions were ideal for a complete stoppage, and following the refusal of the other unions to accept the EEF terms, the lock-out became total. Despite the solidarity of the strikers and the support of the unemployed, the unions faced 'insuperable difficulties'³⁰, the lock-out rapidly draining funds and forcing the men back to work. Defeated, the best the unions could hope for were employers' concessions that would allow the men to return to work with dignity. Following the return to work, 70,000 AEU members remained unemployed nationally³¹, but although union membership levels fell considerably, the figure never fell below the pre-war maximum³². In contrast, membership of employers' associations was sustained during the slump³³.

As stated above, peace also marked the end of the first Shop Stewards' Movement. With no choice but to organise outside the workplace, the sacked shop stewards, now the unemployed skilled elite, channelled their energies and organising experience into building the National Unemployed Workers Movement and the Communist Party of Great Britain³⁴. 'It was soon a wry joke that the shop stewards' leaders of the war had become the unemployed leaders of the 1920s'³⁵.

Wartime inequality of sacrifice and rewards had created considerable tensions between workers and ex-servicemen, 'but it is crucial to understand that deeper feelings of class and community solidarity had survived the war, and largely overcame these sentiments'. Many, faced with eviction and hunger, were driven by 'sheer anger ... to direct and often violent action'³⁶, generally taking the form of demonstrations, looting, squatting and the picketing of Guardians' houses. The local unemployed committees sought to channel this unrest into co-ordinated action and organised protest³⁷, recognising the need to organise the unemployed, 'not on charitable lines, but on the basis of a militant working class policy'³⁸. Despite attracting a cross-section of support, the movement's organisation was initially patchy, comprising a loose federation of local bodies generally lacking good bases or meeting places, and although its central organisation, based in London, tended to be Communist, locally this was less so³⁹.

Although intent on maintaining close links with the trade unions and the labour movement, the organisation failed to attract the support of the Labour Party or the TUC, and thus the NUWM developed as an independent body, becoming a national network in 1921. The NUWM held its first national conference in Manchester in November 1921, declaring its aims as the promotion of unity between workers and the unemployed⁴⁰, and demanding 'Work or Maintenance' at union rates and the introduction of the National Relief Scale.

Despite its solid support for the AEU during the 1922 Lock-Out, the relationship between the NUWM and the trade unions could be hostile. In the Lancashire weaving area for example, the NUWM was seen as a rival working class organisation although it did not pose much of a threat, given its small membership and activities generally confined to organising demonstrations and social functions on behalf of the unemployed⁴¹. Nationally however, the movement was more successful, particularly in its representations on behalf of the unemployed, fighting evictions and organising

hunger marches. The 1922 National Hunger March represented the high point of the movement's success in its early years, its discipline upholding the dignity of the workless against an image of criminality and degeneracy⁴². Croucher argues that as a result of this march the government formed a special committee to examine the problems of the unemployed, which 'probably' headed off attacks on their living standards, but despite this success, the NUWM gained only limited recognition from the TUC, which rejected its affiliation request⁴³. Between 1923 and 1927, having made no lasting achievements, the NUWM became increasingly passive, its membership fell and the organisation existed in little more than name. Its major period of growth from 1929 onwards lies outside the scope of this study, and this chapter will examine the relationship between the NUWM and the trade unions up to 1926, leaving its role in the wider community to the following chapter.

The final major industrial dispute of the period was the General Strike of May 1926, its origins lying in the severe problems faced by the coal industry in the wake of the First World War. The mine-owners' demands for longer hours and lower wages to maintain profit levels were strenuously resisted by the miners, who had the backing of the TUC, intent on upholding the right of unions to support each other with sympathetic strikes⁴⁴. Fearing an embargo on the transport of coal, the government appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the problems of the industry, and subsidised miners' wages for the duration of the enquiry. Ultimately, the findings of the Commission, unacceptable to both sides and unsupported by the Government, ensured that no compromise was possible⁴⁵, and following the miners' rejection of the owners' final offer, the General Strike began. However, by presenting the issue as a constitutional struggle⁴⁶, the government appeared as the defender of Parliamentary democracy against the political power of the combined trade unions, thus providing the justification for the use of the government's strike breaking machinery⁴⁷ and the opportunity for a final confrontation with the unions.

During the nine month enquiry, the Government had embarked on detailed emergency planning and sought to demonstrate the futility of mass action, tame the unions and strengthen the authority of their leadership⁴⁸. The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) was an important part of government policy, its role to protect essential services in the event of a total stoppage, and appeals for citizen volunteers for the OMS and to enrol as special constables met with a good response. Consequently, the General

Strike is frequently discussed in terms of class struggle, and described as a crucial determinant of the balance of class forces in inter-war Britain⁴⁹. However, interpretations differ considerably, and whilst Farman argues that the volunteers were stimulated by 'a class instinct as powerful as that which motivated the strikers'⁵⁰, Phillips contends that, although it was generally believed that volunteers were from middle and upper class groups, 'it is probable that a large proportion ... [were] drawn from clerical and manual labour'⁵¹, particularly in the industrial north.

In contrast to the government's detailed planning, the labour movement made no preparations at all. When the TUC General Council finally announced its instructions for co-ordinated action on 30th April 1926 their ambiguity created confusion and considerable problems of organisation and interpretation⁵², and 'for all practical purposes, the [Trades] Councils were ... suddenly asked to take on a new and urgent task, without any but the vaguest suggestion of how they should carry it out'⁵³. Trades Councils were ordered not to act on their own initiative but to await instructions from local union officials, yet for local strike action to be effective, Trades Councils needed to be the nucleus of organisation, and in the event, most did take the lead⁵⁴. Another ambiguity was the absence of instructions regarding liaison with Co-operative Societies, and whilst the size, vigour and commitment of local Societies varied, lack of sympathy was evident on both sides at a national level⁵⁵. Similarly the effectiveness of the strike was also subject to considerable regional variation⁵⁶, but although there was a lack of co-operation between the unions and the Councils of Action in some areas, the majority of Trades Councils co-ordinated the strike, their committees sitting in continuous session⁵⁷.

Strike Committee activities were wide ranging and included the issuing of travel permits, the organisation of picketing, entertainment, communications, while some also formed Workers' Defence Corps. The publication of strike bulletins was another important role, and in addition to bolstering morale and emphasising the importance of calm and non-violence, provided updates of developments and a counter to government propaganda⁵⁸. The strike began on the 4th May, and was to be in two waves, indicating that a long stoppage was anticipated. The first, which included the printing and transport unions, despite safeguarding essential services, seriously disrupted transport as a result of the solidarity of rank and file support. The second wave, intended to tighten the hold of the strike and scheduled for 11th May, included the engineering and shipbuilding

unions. Farman describes this tactic as generating considerable rank and file dissatisfaction by delaying their participation in the strike, whilst giving the government time to consolidate its position⁵⁹. However, although the second wave had been instructed to strike on the 11th, the announcement of the sudden and unconditional capitulation of the General Council on the 12th was seen as a betrayal. The rank and file, more resolute than its leadership, refused to accept the new terms and rejected them without waiting for instructions from the TUC or their own executives, with the result that 100,000 extra men were on strike on the Thursday. Militant workers were hostile towards both the TUC and the employers, and briefly 'it looked like the end of the strike might be the beginning of the revolution', with the greatest tensions centring on the north⁶⁰. The miners however, with their dispute unresolved, held out alone until forced to accept defeat in November.

Interpretations of the consequences of the General Strike vary considerably. Phillips argues, for example, that despite widespread condemnation of the General Council's action, local allegiance to the TUC remained strong, and displeasure was increasingly directed towards local trade unions⁶¹, whilst Farman asserts that the regional variation of the effectiveness of the stoppage reflects the strength of local labour movements⁶². From within the labour movement however, the General Strike was seen as a triumph of solidarity and organisation⁶³, as the rank and file, taking pride in their unselfishness and high level of organisation, rallied behind their leaders. From a left-wing perspective, many saw the strike as inherently political, believing the General Council had mistakenly assumed it was possible to separate industrial and political objectives, whilst a ruthless government, together with the police, army, media and employers united as a class to crush organised labour⁶⁴. Conversely, Phillips describes the General Strike as 'the echo rather than the voice of class war'⁶⁵, a receding memory of the employers' offensive and industrial alliances of the early 1920s. Finally, although the continuing miners' strike increased unemployment and weakened the unions by continuing to inflict financial damage and membership loss, with the exception of the mining industry, the stoppage resulted in only a slight decrease in working class living standards⁶⁶, and the events and significance of the General Strike in Barrow will be discussed later in this chapter.

THE BARROW CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

Moving on to an examination of developments in Barrow in relation to these broad trends, we begin with business strategies and the role of the Co-op. Founded in the 1860's, the Barrow Society was predominantly a retail organisation, but its educational and social facilities were expanded in 1919 with the foundation of a Collective Life Assurance Scheme and an Education Committee⁶⁷. The Society prospered during the war, its profits peaking at £95,716 in 1919, but Table 6.1 illustrates the rapid and substantial decline of the 1920s.

Table 6.1: Barrow Co-operative Society 1913-1926

Year	Membership	Nett profits £	Profits as % of pre-war level	Average dividend
1913	12,015	61,829		2s 10 ½d
1919	16,169	95,716	154.8	1s 5 ½d
1922	14,654	12,239	19.8	6 ¼d
1924	13,255	12,199	19.7	5 ¼ d
1926	14,152	26,552	42.9	1s 3d

Compiled from 'Co-operative Statistics', 1913-26

Despite severe financial difficulties, the Co-op continued to pass falling prices on to the customer, and adopted strategies to protect the interests of the Society and its members. By May 1921, several departments were making losses as a result of falling sales, which left stock levels stubbornly high; thus stock buying was kept to a minimum, and market trends were closely monitored. For example, local surveys were conducted, the Co-op buying a range of goods from local traders in order to compare quality and prices⁶⁸, and sending out canvassers to conduct local opinion polls⁶⁹. However, a proposal to open a shop specifically selling cheap goods was rejected on the principle that the Co-op was not prepared to operate two different business systems, and they had 'done their best to meet customers who desired cheaper classes of goods, and ... to purchase any small quantities'⁷⁰.

An effective strategy was to offer customers a choice between discount or dividend. In selected shops for example, certain goods were sold at only slightly above cost, but without earning a dividend, and similarly, when purchasing goods with Guardians' vouchers, members were allowed a 5% cash discount if no dividend was required⁷¹. The

Society similarly supported small traders, for example, supplying bread to small shops at 6d per dozen less than the Co-op retail price, and allowing 2½% discount on cash payments if accounts were settled within seven days, but again, with no dividend.

Whilst it is not possible to ascertain how unusual these strategies were, nationally, the question of paying dividends on Guardians' relief tickets was to become increasingly contentious⁷², and suggests that the other practices adopted by Barrow's Co-op could have been equally so.

From November 1921 the Society permitted unemployed members to withdraw all their share capital, with the exception of one shilling, and in December agreed to pay unemployed members a dividend of 9d in the £, an amount above the standard rate (see Table 6.1). Again in July 1922, the Society agreed to pay such members an interim dividend of 6d in the pound, with any balance to be paid later. However, the suspension of the Dividend in October demonstrates the unexpected speed with which the crisis deepened during 1922.

These concessions and reductions in retail prices had to be compensated for, and inevitably, the staff bore the brunt of the economies. Staff cuts have been outlined in Chapter One, but other strategies included short-time working and the re-distribution of staff among branches to match sales levels. Throughout the period, cuts, suspensions and short-time working continued, but there is little evidence of militancy. The Society had refused to negotiate with the union on the issue of short-time working, but most wage cuts were voluntarily accepted. In addition to sales staff, this included heads of departments and the Master Bakers' Federation, which agreed both to wage cuts and the working of a limited amount of overtime at the ordinary rate. Further substantial savings were made by the replacement of horses with bicycles⁷³. Horses were a particularly expensive overhead: their initial cost, plus harnesses, carts, feed and stabling required a significant annual outlay in addition to the driver's wages⁷⁴.

But despite making significant economies, these measures failed to avert the severe financial crisis of September 1923. The decision to cut all wages by 10% and dismiss all superfluous employees was opposed by the union, but despite stressing the necessity of these reductions, the Society, on this occasion, was prepared to negotiate, and ultimately a compromise was agreed⁷⁵. More serious was the decision to suspend the repayment of withdrawable share capital deposited before September 15th 1923 as a result of constant

and heavy withdrawals by unemployed members living on their savings. This was so severe that the Society feared it would be left with no liquid capital, which had been reduced from around £100,000 to £15,000⁷⁶. Although members leaving the area were exempted from this rule, and unemployed members were permitted to withdraw a maximum of £1 per week for household expenses, this measure, and also the suspension of the Dividend, caused considerable dissatisfaction among members. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Barrow's Co-operative Society took every conceivable step to protect the interests of the working class consumer while making few concessions to the trade unions, and membership remained above the pre-war level (see Table 6.1).

VICKERS MANAGEMENT

implications for employees. As previously stated, despite initial post We now move on from Barrow's largest retailer to its dominant industrial employer, with an analysis of Vickers' strategies for coping with the depression, and their -war optimism, full order books and plans for diversification, the Vickers group was badly hit by the sudden economic downturn. Incomes and unemployment levels have been examined in Chapter One, but the depression also had a profound impact on Vickers' management and organisation. Despite the attention given to peace products⁷⁷, there is little evidence of forward planning with regard to the Barrow yard. In 1918, although considering cargo and passenger vessels, the shipyard attracted little work until securing a liner order in 1922. After than date there is no further mention of Barrow Shipbuilding in the Peace Products Minute Books⁷⁸, and Barrow Engineering fared little better. Although branching into loco work, estimates were too high to be competitive and the work finished after 1920. Barrow Engineering is not discussed again in the Peace Products Minute Books until 1922 and 1925, in brief reports which show little activity, providing scant evidence of diversification in the Barrow shipyard.

The strain is demonstrated by Sir James McKechnie's⁷⁹ verbal instructions to Senior Management in November 1922 regarding the recent contract for the P & O liner *Orient*. In a ferociously competitive market, Vickers had to undercut ten other firms chasing the same order, and consequently, 'the order has been taken at a price which is so low that it might involve a considerable sacrifice to the firm. It has been taken in order to keep the Works going, to keep the key members of the Staff together and

especially our old and experienced hands'⁸⁰. As McKechnie stressed, there was neither margin for error nor wastage, and speed and co-operation were vital.

These were traditionally lacking however. Although well-suited to the demands of his position up to 1918, Sir James McKechnie, with a lavish life-style and absolute power, was 'dreaded for what he could do to people'⁸¹. Under his management, rivalries between the shipyard and the engineers caused considerable problems, each blaming the other for delays and difficulties. Additionally, in the drawing offices, his frequent absenteeism resulted in poor discipline and slow work, a situation compounded by poor communication between departments⁸². McKechnie's management style was unsuited to the post-war climate, and Commander Charles Craven was appointed his deputy in April 1923, to take full control of the Works in his absence, and intended ultimately to replace him⁸³.

The extensive correspondence between Craven and the London Board reveals considerable frictions between the two men. Resenting Craven's appointment, McKechnie began to take a greater interest in the running of the yard and refused to delegate. Despite having the full support of the Directors, Craven was excluded from all management processes and McKechnie refused to settle Craven's salary or give him an office. Additionally, any Senior Managers colluding with Craven incurred the full force of McKechnie's displeasure. Craven consequently spent much time in the workshops and offices, becoming familiar with staffing levels, work practices and conditions, but more significantly, with the men themselves. The Barrow yard was unable to tender competitively⁸⁴, but within a month of his appointment Craven presented a rationalisation plan to the Board promoting standardisation, economy and greater efficiency, together with the reorganisation of workshops, offices and staff hierarchies.

Although Craven's position prevented the immediate implementation of these proposals, a Works Investigation Report was commissioned and recommended similar far-reaching changes⁸⁵. The measures included closer liaison between departments to better monitor costs and expenditure, together with the rationalisation of estimating and tendering procedures. In addition to criticism of the high salaries of senior staff, staffing levels and bonus payments (see Chapter One), the report identified other wastes and abuses, including lax building maintenance which resulted in unnecessarily high repair bills, compounded by too many men allocated to one job, leaving many standing idle.

Although describing travelling expenses as unnecessarily high and identifying 'certain officials now being carried who are really redundant', the report was particularly critical of McKechnie's spending habits, such as three bearskin rugs purchased for his London apartment and paid for by the Company. The opinion that 'such a state of things is iniquitous and, moreover, could not have come about *without connivance*'⁸⁶, implies the need of a thorough purge of higher management, as such blatant abuse of privileges had become indefensible and unsustainable in the harsh inter-war economic climate.

Adopted in their entirety, these measures resulted in the restructuring and streamlining of the Barrow Company at all levels and pre-dated the 1925 restructuring described by Scott⁸⁷. Thus despite Vickers' reputation for innovation, expertise and modern management, the Barrow yard appeared badly run and mismanaged. However, the adoption of these proposals and the replacement of McKechnie by Craven in September 1923 signalled the beginning of a new era. The old-style, autocratic management had been indifferent to the well-being of the workers, and to the town itself. For example, the firm was employing men from outside the area as unemployment approached its peak in 1922, but the Corporation's protest received a terse reply, stating unequivocally that 'the question is a matter in which [the Mayor] cannot interfere'⁸⁸. Additionally, oral evidence asserts that there was 'no attempt to create any kind of family atmosphere', but this changed under the new regime. The view that Craven 'really cared ... about what happened to everybody' is well supported: he is described as 'wonderfully good at mixing with everybody ... including the men in the shops, the old foremen, the staff and the outside people who visited Barrow', and he gained the respect and trust of staff and workers alike. His introduction of amenities such as sports facilities were important, and were 'symptomatic of the new found interest in its work people, [which] brought about a great change in the atmosphere in Barrow'. All the interviewees paid tribute to Craven's inter-personal skills, social attitude and shrewd management. He is also accredited with achieving a marked reconciliation of traditional rivalries, and it was 'commonly considered that the recovery of 1923-24 owed much to Craven's initiative'⁸⁹. For example, unlike McKechnie, Craven was prepared to search for work, and within a month of his appointment had secured several, albeit small, orders⁹⁰, while his approaches to the Ministry of Health have already been outlined

THE ORGANISED LABOUR MOVEMENT

(i) The Shop Stewards' Movement

With regard to the trade unions within the shipyard, the Boilermakers' union dominated the shipbuilding side and the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), the engineering. Traditionally there was considerable friction between them, whilst the large number of individual unions and the representation of some trades by more than one union, further fragmented Barrow's trade union movement⁹¹. Additionally, the AEU, the largest union in the town, with eleven branches by 1920, created considerable inter-union friction through its growing tendency to dominate collective bargaining⁹². However, Calderwood's assertion that collective bargaining restricted local militancy⁹³ is untenable. Todd demonstrates the militancy of local trade unionism, the militant tradition of the ASE for example, frequently leading the local District Committee into clashes with both the employers and its own National Executive. Significantly however, despite considerable inter-union tensions, local unions could unite to protect common interests, a solidarity which again brought the AEU into conflict with its own Executive, and created what was 'almost a tradition of local dissent against official decisions' which pre-dated the war⁹⁴.

Inevitably, the responses to wartime compulsion varied, and McIvor points out that, unlike on the Clyde, dilution generally caused little trouble in the north west of England, and 'a more openly co-operative relationship prevailed'⁹⁵. This did not extend to Barrow however, as Vickers, taking unscrupulous advantage of the Munitions Act, brought industrial relations to an all time low⁹⁶. Whilst industrial militancy intensified, the lack of authority of Barrow's trade union leaders was exacerbated, particularly during the strikes over dilution in 1916 and the Premium Bonus System in 1917. Their inability to satisfy rank and file demands, combined with the growing belief that the trade union movement had failed, widened the gulf between the leadership and the rank and file, boosting the influence of the shop stewards⁹⁷.

Elected from as early as 1897, shop stewards were not new to the shipyard, but had been closely controlled by the District Committee, which did not delegate negotiating rights to the stewards. Vickers also refused to recognise them, and this was to have considerable implications for the wartime shop stewards' movement. Hinton argues that

an independent rank and file movement did not emerge in Barrow because the necessary precondition of recognised workshop organisation was never established. As a result, no Shop Stewards' organisation could rival the authority of the District Committee, which was able to contain the pressures for a workshop organisation in a single industry town dominated by a single large company. Craft unions therefore took a particularly centralised form, whilst the direct relationship between Vickers and the District Committee inhibited the development of the workshop democracy that was so explosive elsewhere. Consequently Barrow was one of three munitions centres where the shop stewards' movement failed to evolve into a permanent and effective organisation, and 'strong local Workers' Committees, based directly in the workshops and able to act independently of the local official trade union structures did not emerge'⁹⁸.

According to this interpretation, Barrow's revolutionaries remained isolated and the Shop Stewards Movement never achieved a position of mass leadership. However, other sources reveal a considerably more complex situation and suggest their influence should not be underestimated. Whilst Hinton focuses primarily on the engineering unions, a wider view of local shipbuilding suggests that, rather than being by-passed by the local District Committees, 'it is likely that the shop stewards were represented on the District Committees; certainly the Boilermakers' Shop Stewards were'⁹⁹. Although the position of Barrow's shop stewards would benefit from further research, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, it appears that the shop stewards became a power of some significance, and if Vickers never recognised them, the Government did. For example, Lynden Macassy negotiated directly with the stewards during the major wartime disputes, and they were also required to give evidence before the Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest of 1917¹⁰⁰.

Whatever the true status of Barrow's shop stewards, the movement collapsed after the war as many militants returned to their home towns and local radicals were dismissed. In addition to focusing their attentions on local politics and the foundation of Barrow's branch of the Communist Party, the former stewards were influential in the formation of other organisations. These included the revival of the Labour press in the form of the *Northern Beacon*, the founding of Barrow's labour college, and significantly, the local Unemployed Workers Movement¹⁰¹ which, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, was Communist-led.

(ii) The Engineering Strike of May 1922

The Engineering strike of May 1922 was to have the most significant impact of any of the national strikes of the period. In response to the massive wage cuts demanded by the employers, the Trades Council called for the solidarity of the labour movement and a co-ordinated effort to defend working class living standards. Preparing for the Lock-out, a Workers' Council composed of both the employed and the unemployed was formed in March¹⁰², and the Trades Council organised a Committee to co-ordinate the activities of the forty seven unions involved, which included two representatives from the UWM¹⁰³. Initially however, the AEU formed its own Lock-out Committee, which did not affiliate with the Co-ordination Committee until April¹⁰⁴.

Tensions were high from the outset. 'Fearing a raid by the unemployed', Vickers introduced night patrols, some of whom were AEU members, armed with hammer shafts, torches and police whistles. Additionally, some workers armed themselves with cudgels, and thus the spasmodic outbursts of violence between men and pickets could become serious. However, hardship forced growing numbers of men back to work, and the traditionally strict discipline of the AEU was imposed at an increasing number of disciplinary hearings. This generally took the form of fines and exclusions. Additionally, there was a considerable amount of abuse, threats and the vandalism of blacklegs' homes by the rank and file¹⁰⁵.

However, intimidation served to divide rather than consolidate, and some men took a defiant stance at their disciplinary hearings. For example, one man 'complained of the demonstration that had been round his house and stated that if we call that trade unionism he was finished with it and stating that he was going to continue at work'. Another with similar grievances, in addition to giving the names of his intimidators to the police, declared that 'he was going to await his chances to get at them'¹⁰⁶. Despite a barely suppressed undercurrent of violence, it was believed that many were trying to pluck up the courage to return to work, and influential men, such as Councillor Jamieson, also an AEU member, expressed the view that 'any man who wanted to go to work should be allowed to do so'¹⁰⁷.

The Lock-Out Committee felt that the pickets could do more to prevent men working and introduced mass picketing from 6th May¹⁰⁸. This further increased tensions and the

situation deteriorated rapidly as groups of men marched around the town, their military aspect having a significant psychological impact on the police and bystanders. The need to give each group a police escort ensured that the under-staffed local force was stretched to the limit, further hampered by the fact that if horse patrols were needed, the constabulary had to commandeer cab horses. This coincided with three days of serious violence which began on May 5th and necessitated imported reinforcements of between thirty and forty foot and ten mounted officers. The violence continued to escalate as men were pulled from railway carriages and assaulted, and thousands assembled outside Vickers, 'marching along in military formation carrying banners and otherwise deporting themselves in a threatening manner'. Groups of women were also active and attacked blacklegs arriving for work, on one occasion leaving two injured, a third seriously, whilst a fourth man escaped by hiding under the seat of a tram. Additionally, the demonstrators were faced by 'certain constables ... prepared as individuals to meet any two members of the Unemployed Committee and knock them both out', and the police themselves were accused of initiating a disturbance on Walney on the 5th with an unwarranted baton charge¹⁰⁹.

Previous chapters have referred to the bridge spanning Walney Channel and the unpopularity of the tolls, which became a long-term point of contention. As tensions increased during 1922, the bridge became the focus of working class discontent. In February for example, an UWM demonstration crossed without payment, and finding the gates locked against them on the return crossing, forced their way across, again without payment¹¹⁰. Inevitably, the Bridge provided one flash point in May, whilst the location of the shipyard made it a focal point and vulnerable to siege (See Appendix One).

Negotiations between the trade unions and the Chief Constable relating to picketing and demonstrations had progressed well, but without warning the police took the unilateral decision to cordon off the High Level Bridge and to question men crossing Walney Bridge, ostensibly to protect the men attempting to work. This unwarranted and provocative action tended 'to bring about that which the Chief Constable was anxious to avoid, that is, collision between the Police and the demonstrators'¹¹¹. On 8th May, a crowd of 3,000 retaliated and stormed Walney bridge, but at the simultaneous demonstration outside Vickers' main gate involving thousands more men, women and children, according to one eyewitness, it was 'the women who had got out of hand,

knowing that they bore the brunt of the wage cuts. It was the police response that ignited the reaction from the crowd'¹¹².

In response, Vickers' solicitor wrote to the Chief Constable, demanding police protection and intending to hold the Corporation responsible for any damage or loss, but stood alone in heartily supporting the use of the mounted police'¹¹³. Both the AEU and the Labour Party complained about the indiscriminate use of batons on pickets and bystanders alike, whilst Barrow Island Co-op Guild demanded an inquiry regarding 'the action of the police and especially the action of those in command', and asserted that 'the conduct of the police was a direct incitement to riot and nothing but the common sense of the crowd of disciplined men saved the town from disaster'¹¹⁴.

Despite the many complaints¹¹⁵, the calls for a public enquiry were narrowly defeated by a Corporation vote of ten votes to fifteen¹¹⁶. The Chief Constable maintained that the local police could ill afford antagonistic or provocative behaviour as they were so heavily outnumbered by protesters, but in the circumstances had no alternative but to act. However, the local authorities emphasised their shared dislike of the imported police, not least because they could ill-afford to accommodate and pay for them¹¹⁷. In the subsequent negotiations, all parties strove towards a finding an acceptable solution. Ultimately, the term 'mass picketing' was defined, and agreements reached on a means of identifying pickets and the maximum number to be deployed. The final consensus was that if the mass demonstrations and processions were to stop, then the imported police would be withdrawn, whilst the Corporation brought the NUWM to order by threatening to cancel their free permits to cross the bridge.

Tensions within the trade unions were not reduced however, and in addition to continuing verbal exchanges, violence between AEU members erupted on to the streets, and the old frictions between the shipyard and the engineers surfaced within the organising committees themselves¹¹⁸. In contrast, the support of the UWM for the strikers was solid. In the post-riot negotiations, the Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee emphasised that there were two elements active in the dispute, the employed and the unemployed, equally involved in the dispute and equally affected by the outcome, stressing that the UWM should not be blamed for the disturbances¹¹⁹. Despite this solidarity, the UWM affiliation to the Trades Council in July 1922 was opposed, but did take place in March 1923, after which the UWM sent two representatives to the

Trades Council¹²⁰. However, the defeat of the AEU represented a crushing defeat for the labour movement, and the relative absence of strikes after 1922 provided less opportunity for the UWM to show its solidarity with the unions.

(iii) Trade union membership

Union membership levels were badly affected throughout the period, and in the case of the AEU fell by 42% between December 1921 and December 1926¹²¹. Unemployment levels (discussed in Chapter One) were a key factor, and Table 6.2 illustrates how this was reflected in the membership figures of Barrow's two largest unions. In March 1920, unemployed members had accounted for just 2% of the Boilermakers' Union¹²², and the table illustrates the severe impact of the depression on both the Boilermakers and the AEU. Although unemployment levels within these unions to May 1922 were relatively similar, there was a marked disparity after that date as a result of the Boilermakers' lock-out of 1923. Whilst unemployment within the AEU is shown to be far higher in Barrow than the national average, it is interesting that this was reversed following the General Strike. Unemployment levels in the shipbuilding trades however, remained critical.

Table 6.2 Percentage of trade union members unemployed 1921-1926

Date	% Boilermakers ¹²³	% AEU Barrow	% AEU Nation-wide
Mar 1921	18.0	12.6	-
Dec 1921	33.5	38.0	-
May 1922	67.6	68.0	47.3
Dec 1922	69.2	61.3	22.7
Dec 1923	51.2	21.8	14.6
Dec 1924	35.4	12.0	8.0
Dec 1925	40.0	12.3	8.1
Dec 1926	53.1	3.0	12.3

Source: Boilermakers' Monthly Journals, MRC, MSS.192/BM/4/1/47-52; AEU Monthly Journals, MRC, MSS,259/4/14/35-40

Another important contributory factor to falling AEU membership was its draconian discipline and high subscriptions, which alienated members, many of whom defected to the National Union of Railwaymen, attracted by its lower subscriptions and greater tolerance¹²⁴. However, whilst at a national level, the AEU attempted to reclaim lost members by relaxing the penalties imposed on men who returned to work and

introducing more favourable terms for those in arrears with contributions¹²⁵, the Barrow District Committee believed it 'unlikely' that defectors would be allowed to return, an attitude reflected in the continuing low membership levels of the period.

Considerable frictions were also evident between the AEU and Barrow's Co-operative Society. The District Committee resolved that negotiations with the Co-op for an agreement to guarantee food vouchers to locked-out members should be placed on the agenda for the National Conference. This came too late for inclusion however, but the Co-operative Bank's decision not to grant loans to locked-out members was considered 'most unsatisfactory and ... excited keen disappointment and bitterness'¹²⁶. The attempt to negotiate such loans at a local level also failed and was strongly criticised by the AEU, but from the Co-op's standpoint, given the prevailing economic conditions it was 'an unwise business step to further reduce the Society's available liquid cash by allowing credit on the lines proposed'¹²⁷. The AEU responded by urging its members to vote in the forthcoming Co-op Management Committee elections to ensure 'that the administrative affairs of the Co-op were placed in the hands of true co-operators'¹²⁸. This tends to support Gurney's view that economic hardship exacerbated frictions between the two movements, rather than compounding their inter-dependencies as Southern suggests.

THE GENERAL STRIKE

(i) Labour movement preparation

In contrast to 1922, the General Strike of 1926 assumed remarkably different characteristics. There is little evidence of union preparation for the stoppage, and with the exception of repeatedly postponing a discussion on forming a Workers Defence Force¹²⁹, Trades Council minutes were dominated by routine business. Similarly, apart from organising a bowling competition, AEU minutes were equally mundane but they do disclose the Trades Council formed a Central Strike Committee in April. However, the instruction that no notes were to be taken at meetings suggests a perceived need to leave no evidence for the police¹³⁰.

Inevitably, the level of co-operation within Trades Councils varied. Barrow's Trades Council, with the affiliation of a high number of the local unions, was the central co-ordinating body of the local labour movement, but its relationship with the local Co-operative Society is unclear. Unlike many Trades Councils, Barrow did not return a questionnaire outlining local organisation and events, but some insights are available in the contribution from Ulverston, a small market town some eight miles distant. It appears that, too disorganised to stand alone, Ulverston trade unions affiliated to the Barrow Strike Committee, and although arrangements with the Co-op are mentioned, mainly relating to coal, it is unclear whether this refers to the Ulverston or Barrow Co-operative Society¹³¹.

(ii) Local authority preparation

Whilst there is no further information on labour movement organisation, the Ministry of Health Circular detailing the responsibilities of local authorities in the event of a General Strike was set out in the local press. The Corporation was responsible for the maintenance of utility services and co-operation with the national organisation of local transport for the distribution of coal and essential supplies, but Councillors shared the anxiety of the townspeople over the impact of a shipbuilding and engineering strike¹³². Mayor Ellison adopted a position of strict neutrality and announced the intention of taking steps to mitigate any hardship that might arise as a result of the dispute. As Chief Magistrate he was also responsible for public order, but believed Barrow would remain a peaceful town, while warning that strict action would be taken against anyone taking advantage of the situation. Whilst Alderman Basterfield (Labour Mayor 1920-21) declared for the miners he also maintained that the best interests of the town's citizens were of prime importance. 'He was sure there was not a man or woman in the town who desired that the strike should go on. If it did, they hoped it would be short. There was no desire to interfere with industrial troubles. He was sure the people of Barrow would accept the statement he was making, that he was absolutely non-political'¹³³. Other Labour Councillors expressed concern that in addition to the distribution of supplies, the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies was geared to defeat the aims of the working classes. They were assured by Alderman Fairbain however (an Independent and Mayor, 1921-24), Chairman of the local OMS, that it was not set up as a strike breaking organisation but imposed on Barrow, and in order to allay public suspicions, he invited two trade union representatives to sit on the committee.

A considerable number of special constables and volunteer workers were enrolled during the first week, but whilst the *Barrow News* asserts 'there was small demand for their services', Trades Council bulletins indicate that the OMS were operating their own courier service and handling supplies, doubtless assisting in the incident free unloading of a food ship which docked on Tuesday 11th 134. The Corporation also rationed coal to one hundredweight per household per week (except to necessitous cases and those with no alternative but to cook on an open fire), and this was strictly enforced. Although all local industries sought to keep their coal stocks for production, by the end of May, Vickers and the Steelworks were required to sell quantities of coal to the Corporation. However, local stocks were exhausted by June, compelling the Corporation to purchase supplies at inflated prices elsewhere. This continued for the duration of the miners' strike, but by November, the coal ration was increased, and all restrictions were lifted by the end of the month, following the capitulation of the miners¹³⁵.

(iii) Events

With regard to the labour movement, during the nine day stoppage two independent strike Bulletins were published in Barrow: the *Furness Strike Bulletin* published by the Central Strike Committee, and also the *Workers Bulletin* published by the Communist Party, both of which testify to the solidarity of the strike. It is impossible ascertain how many issues of the *Furness Strike Bulletin* were published but two issues survive, dated 10th and 11th May¹³⁶. These stress the importance of good order, discipline and the avoidance of confrontation with the police, together with a message from the Mayor commending the hitherto good conduct of the strikers. A clear sense of distrust is also evident, and the bulletin urges caution regarding whom strikers gave information to, and reveals that AEU post had been tampered with. Interestingly, they also express a growing, if ultimately misplaced, confidence in the TUC General Council. Four issues of the Communist *Workers Bulletin* were published, three of which survive for 10th, 11th and 12th of May, and apart from a long article expounding the political meaning of the General Strike, were very similar in content to their rival.

Beyond the bulletins and in the absence of any Trades Council records, it falls to the local press to provide details of local events for the duration of the stoppage, and in comparison to 1922, these were mundane. The paper reports an absence of incidents and no shortages of food or fuel, claiming the public experienced little inconvenience, with

much business continuing as usual and essential services maintained. On the other hand it also reports the disruption of postal services, newspaper publication and particularly transport, although privately owned buses continued to run. The absence of trains, Corporation buses and trams proved a considerable nuisance for Vickers workers, still at work and waiting for the second wave of strikes to begin, but although Vickers continued to work, the effect on industry was nevertheless severe as thousands were thrown idle.

Following the announcement that all AEU members were to be called out on the Wednesday, a Royal Navy destroyer appeared overnight and berthed by the High Level Bridge linking Barrow Island, and therefore the shipyard, to the mainland (see Appendix 1). Whilst the AEU was resolute and determined to fight to the end¹³⁷, Vickers announced its intention not to close and promised to safeguard all men returning to work. Despite an absence of picketing the solidarity of the AEU was confirmed by Vickers, although many semi-skilled and unskilled labourers turned in. The over-riding reaction to the announcement that the strike was over was one of 'great enthusiasm and thankfulness in the town when the news was made known'¹³⁸, and despite some AEU discontent towards the TUC, the Trades Council accepted the General Council circular on the calling off of the Strike¹³⁹.

CONCLUSION

To pull together the various strands examined in this chapter, it is evident that the first concern of Vickers and the Co-op was their own economic survival. With regard to Vickers, it becomes apparent that management in Barrow was not as efficient and forward thinking as suggested by Trebilcock or Scott, and there was no positive policy regarding peacetime diversification. However, a radical metamorphosis took place from September 1923, evident in the changing attitude towards the abuse of privilege. This is also reflected, more importantly, in the re-organisation of management systems and departments, the restructuring of staff hierarchies and, inevitably, wage levels. Perhaps more significant however, given the tensions in the town, were the positive changes in the relationship between the management and the workforce. Also badly hit by the depression, the Co-operative Society strove to support its members as far as possible, albeit at the expense of employees. Additionally, the severity of the Society's financial

position prevented it from providing financial assistance to the unions in 1922, increasing the frictions within the labour movement.

It appears however, that these frictions centred largely on the AEU and in addition to the Co-op, were reflected in its relationships with other unions¹⁴⁰, and its own members. The solidarity and determination of the strikers should not be underestimated however, and workers and unemployed presented a united front to both the employers and the authorities. This is significant given the high unemployment and hardships experienced by these men and their families, although by 1926, Barrow's NUWM appears largely inactive.

The contrasting responses to the 1922 Engineering Dispute and the General Strike of 1926, together with the limited impact of the latter, are striking, and a number of factors combined to bring local industrial and social unrest to a head in 1922. The rapid onset of the depression had two significant effects, providing the opportunity for Vickers' management to re-assert their prerogatives and bring the unions to order, whilst unprecedented levels of unemployment brought mass distress in a stark contrast to wartime prosperity. However, the crisis was far greater than a defence of working class living standards and the right to work. In addition to the political turmoil arising from the rupture of the political wing of the town's labour movement (Chapter Four), the local authorities were themselves driven to the verge of bankruptcy by the levels of distress they sought to relieve, and drawn into a protracted battle with the government. Although a national dispute, its outcome, combined with the effects of the depression, were of considerable consequence locally, and the entire community struggled for economic, social and political stability.

In a town already stabilised after the post-war crisis, the situation in 1926 was very different, and although local unions dutifully rallied behind their leadership in support of the miners, the General Strike appears to have had little popular support. In the four years separating these disputes, Barrow had made a slow and painful economic recovery as illustrated by Co-op profits in Table 6.1. However, although nett profits and the average dividend were more than double the 1922 level, Barrow's economy remained vulnerable due to the nature of its economic base, and continuing high unemployment. Thus the workforce and townspeople were reluctant to be drawn into a national struggle of little relevance locally, which would jeopardise this limited recovery and risk a return

to the distressed and unsettled conditions of 1922. The Strike's impact was further restricted by its short duration and the consignment of a large and militant section of the town's workforce to the second wave of strikes.

It can also be argued that, rather than reflecting social antagonisms or class conflict, the success of OMS recruitment was indicative of an attempt to limit the economic consequences of a protracted stoppage. Further evidence of the primacy of co-operation and trust rather than social conflict is provided by the recruitment of trade union representatives to the local OMS Committee, the emphasis on the political neutrality of local officials and the influence of changing Vickers policies under Craven's regime. However, the simultaneous publication of two strike bulletins demonstrates that left-wing political divisions, still in their infancy in 1922, were fully developed four years on. The inability of the factions to unite or share scant resources demonstrates little regard for the wider labour movement and the absence of a common cause. It is perhaps in the fuelling of the left-wing recriminations outlined in Chapter Four that the General Strike had its greatest impact locally. Unlike the events of 1922 and their aftermath, the General Strike had little perceptible influence on social attitudes and these, together with changing working-class self-help strategies, are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

¹ N. Todd, 'A History of labour in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness c.1890-1920', M. Litt thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976; G. Calderwood, 'Shipbuilding and the Power to Manage: Vickers' Naval Construction Yard at Barrow-in-Furness 1897-1918', MSc dissertation, University of London, 1991; P. Rushworth, 'The Boilermakers in Barrow 1915-1924', short dissertation, Oxford University, 1986.

² P. Gurney, *Co-operation, Culture and the Politics of Consumption* (Manchester, 1996), 53.

³ J. Southern, 'The Co-operative Movement in the North West of England, 1919-1939: Images and realities', PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1996, 62.

⁴ *Ibid*, 80-85.

⁵ *Ibid*, 249.

⁶ *Ibid*, 237-48.

⁷ Gurney, *Co-operation*, 227.

⁸ Southern, 'The Co-operative Movement', 250-61.

⁹ Gurney, *Co-operation*, 226-229.

¹⁰ W. Trebilcock, *The Vickers Brothers* (London, 1977), 21-26.

¹¹ *Ibid*, xxvi.

¹² *Ibid*, 27.

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- ¹³ For Vickers under government control: J.D. Scott, *Vickers: A History* (London, 1961), 126-36.
- ¹⁴ For Vickers post-war policy and planning: Scott, *Vickers*, 137-57.
- ¹⁵ G. Calderwood, 'Shipbuilding and the power to manage: Vickers' Naval Construction Yard at Barrow-in-Furness 1897-1918', MSc dissertation, University of London, 1991, 52.
- ¹⁶ A.J. McIvor, *Organised Capital* (Cambridge, 1996), 16-17.
- ¹⁷ I.S. McLean, 'The Labour Movement in Clydeside politics 1914-22', DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1971-2, 9.
- ¹⁸ McIvor, *Organised Capital*, 146.
- ¹⁹ H.F. Gospel, 'Employers and Managers: Organisations and Strategy 1914-1939' in C.J. Wrigley (ed.), *A History Of British Industrial Relations 1914-1939* (Aldershot, 1993), 169.
- ²⁰ R. Hyman, 'Rank and File Movements and Workplace Organisation 1914-1939' in C.J. Wrigley (ed.), *A History Of British Industrial Relations 1914-1939* (Aldershot, 1993), 131.
- ²¹ J. Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London, 1973), 31.
- ²² *Ibid*, 42-44.
- ²³ Gospel, 'Employers and Managers', 167-8.
- ²⁴ Hinton, *Shop Stewards' Movement*, 36.
- ²⁵ Hyman, 'Rank and File Movements', 132-33.
- ²⁶ Hinton, *Shop Stewards' Movement*, 45.
- ²⁷ Gospel, 'Employers and Managers', 169.
- ²⁸ J.B. Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers* (London, 1945), 27.
- ²⁹ McIvor, *Organised Capital*, 242.
- ³⁰ Jefferys, *Engineers*, 224.
- ³¹ McIvor, *Organised Capital*, 245.
- ³² Hyman, 'Rank and File Movements', 130.
- ³³ McIvor, *Organised Capital*, 235.
- ³⁴ Hinton, *Shop Stewards' Movement*, 14.
- ³⁵ Hyman, 'Rank and File Movements', 136.
- ³⁶ R. Croucher, *We Refuse To Starve In Silence* (London, 1987), 26-28.
- ³⁷ *Ibid*, 43.
- ³⁸ W. Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936* (London, 1977), 15.
- ³⁹ Croucher, *We Refuse To Starve*, 41.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 48.
- ⁴¹ R.Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area 1920-1938* (Preston: University of Central Lancashire, Harris Paper No. 3), 89.

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- ⁴² Croucher, *We Refuse To Starve*, 43.
- ⁴³ *Ibid*, 54.
- ⁴⁴ C. Farman, *The General Strike* (London, 1974), 32.
- ⁴⁵ Phillips, *The General Strike*, 72.
- ⁴⁶ Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, 53.
- ⁴⁷ Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, 53.
- ⁴⁸ J.E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-79* (London, 1984), 41.
- ⁴⁹ J. Foster, 'British Imperialism and the Labour Aristocracy' in J. Skelley (ed.), *The General Strike* (London, 1976), 4.
- ⁵⁰ C. Farman, *The General Strike* (London, 1974), 193.
- ⁵¹ G.A. Phillips, *The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict* (London, 1976), 155.
- ⁵² Farman, *The General Strike*, 120.
- ⁵³ E. Burns (ed.), *The General Strike: Trades Councils in Action* (London, 1926), 11.
- ⁵⁴ Farman, *The General Strike*, 151-52.
- ⁵⁵ Burns, *Trades Councils in Action*, 55.
- ⁵⁶ Phillips, *The General Strike*, 216.
- ⁵⁷ Burns, *Trades Councils in Action*, 14; 21.
- ⁵⁸ Farman, *The General Strike*, 155-58.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 120.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 238-40.
- ⁶¹ Phillips, *The General Strike*, 262.
- ⁶² Farman, *The General Strike*, 156.
- ⁶³ *Ibid*, 271.
- ⁶⁴ J. Foster, 'British Imperialism', 3.
- ⁶⁵ Phillips, *The General Strike*, 272; 249; 273.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 273.
- ⁶⁷ Todd, 'A History of labour', 186.
- ⁶⁸ May 1921, Barrow Co-operative Society Minutes Books 1920-1924, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDB 24/1/1-34.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*, February 1923.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 22 June 1921.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid*, 26 September, 1921.

⁷² Southern, 'The Co-operative Movement', 83.

⁷³ April 1922; 21 November 1921; 10 October 1921; March 1922, Co-operative Society Minutes, CRO, BDB 24/1/1-34.

⁷⁴ N. Morgan, 'Infant mortality, flies and horses in later-nineteenth century towns: a case study of Preston', *Continuity and Change*, 17 (2002), 123.

⁷⁵ Whilst there is little evidence of militancy, it has not been possible to extend this study to 1925, when, as Southern suggests, tensions were coming to a head, owing to the inaccessibility of these records at the present time.

⁷⁶ *Yorkshire Post*, 22 September 1923, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.

⁷⁷ Scott, *Vickers*, 138.

⁷⁸ Peace Products at Barrow, Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD 582. (Minutes books of meetings discussing peacetime diversification across the Vickers group of companies).

⁷⁹ Head of the Barrow yard.

⁸⁰ Sir James McKechnie Papers, Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD 583.

⁸¹ Interview with Mr. Pickup *et al*, 'Barrow Interviews: sundry recollections for J. D. Scott', Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD597.

⁸² Barrow Works Investigation Report by Messrs Atkinson & Dallow, 1923, 'Barrow Works Report 1923', Cambridge Historical Archive, Cambridge, VHD 845.

⁸³ Interview with Mr. Lancaster, 'Barrow Interviews', CHA, VHD597.

⁸⁴ Letter from Craven to Sadler, London Board, 19 June 1923, 'Barrow Works Report', CHA, VHD 845.

⁸⁵ 'Barrow Works Report 1923', CHA, VHD845.

⁸⁶ Original emphasis.

⁸⁷ Scott, *Vickers*, 157.

⁸⁸ Letter from Mayor to Vickers, 6 June 1922; Vickers reply to Mayor, 10 July 1922, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.

⁸⁹ Interviews with Crozier, Lancaster, Pickup *et al*, 'Barrow Interviews', CHA, VHD597.

⁹⁰ 26 April 1923, 'Barrow Works Report 1923', CHA, VHD845.

⁹¹ Interview with Lancaster, 'Barrow Interviews', CHA, VHD597; Calderwood, 'Shipbuilding and the Power to Manage', 37.

⁹² Todd, 'A History of labour', 133-36.

⁹³ Calderwood, 'Shipbuilding and the Power to Manage', 52.

⁹⁴ Todd, 'A History of labour', 136-37.

⁹⁵ McIvor, *Organised Capital*, 150.

⁹⁶ Todd, 'A History of labour', 174; Calderwood, 'Shipbuilding and the Power to Manage', 33.

⁹⁷ Todd, 'A History of labour', 176-77.

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- ⁹⁸ Hinton, *Shop Stewards' Movement*, 178-89.
- ⁹⁹ Rushworth, 'The Boilermakers in Barrow', 14.
- ¹⁰⁰ Rushworth, 'The Boilermakers in Barrow', 14; Todd, 'A History of labour', 178-79.
- ¹⁰¹ Todd, 'A History of labour', 182.
- ¹⁰² March 1922, Trades Council Minutes from 1919, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 7/1.
- ¹⁰³ 2 May 1922, AEU Lock-Out Committee Minutes 1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 57/12/3.
- ¹⁰⁴ 12 April, 1922, AEU District Council Minutes Book 1920-1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 57/2/2/1-2.
- ¹⁰⁵ March to April, AEU DC Minutes, CRO, BDSO 57/2/2/1-2.
- ¹⁰⁶ 5 May 1922, AEU Lock-Out Committee, CRO, BDSO 57/12/3.
- ¹⁰⁷ 17 May 1922, AEU DC Minutes, CRO, BDSO 57/2/2/1-2.
- ¹⁰⁸ 6 May 1922, AEU Lock-Out Committee, CRO, BDSO 57/12/3.
- ¹⁰⁹ Letter from Vickers' Solicitor to Chief Constable, 9 May 1922; notes on meeting between the Co-ordinating Committee and the Watch Committee, 12 May 1922, Engineering Crisis 1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BAC/5/1/42 Box 46 F2.
- ¹¹⁰ 14 March 1922, Unemployment Correspondence, CRO, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ¹¹¹ 12 May 1922, Meeting between the Co-ordinating & Watch Committees, Engineering Crisis 1922, CRO, BAC/5/1/42 Box 46 F2.
- ¹¹² Alderman Brown, speaking at a public meeting, 3 June 1922, *Barrow Guardian*, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ¹¹³ Letter from Vickers' Solicitor to Chief Constable, 9 May 1922, Engineering Crisis 1922, CRO, BAC/5/1/42 Box 46 F2.
- ¹¹⁴ Letter from Barrow Island Co-operative Guild to the Chairman of the Watch Committee, 11 May 1922, Engineering Crisis 1922, CRO, BAC/5/1/42 Box 46 F2.
- ¹¹⁵ Despite its severity, there are no official records of either the events or the policing of this incident. There are no police records for this period.
- ¹¹⁶ *Barrow Guardian*, 3 June 1922, CRO.
- ¹¹⁷ 12 May 1922, Engineering Crisis 1922, CRO, BAC/5/1/42 Box 46 F2.
- ¹¹⁸ 18 May 1922, AEU Lock-Out Committee, CRO, BDSO 57/12/3.
- ¹¹⁹ 12 May 1922, Engineering Crisis 1922, CRO, BAC/5/1/42 Box 46 F2.
- ¹²⁰ 10 July 1922; 22 March 1923, Barrow Labour Party and Trades Council Minutes, Executive Committee Meetings 1919-1931, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 7 10-16.
- ¹²¹ Calculated from AEU Monthly Journals, 1921-1926, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS,259/4/14/35-40.

¹²² Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths and Structural Workers Monthly Reports, 1920, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.192/BM/4/1/47.

¹²³ Statistics for the Boilermakers in May 1922 are unavailable, therefore the figure quoted is the June level.

¹²⁴ 1 June 1922, AEU DC Minutes, CRO, BDSO 57/2/2/1-2.

¹²⁵ Jefferys, *Engineers*, 228.

¹²⁶ 31 May 1922; 6 June 1922, AEU DC Minutes, CRO, BDSO 57/2/2/1-2.

¹²⁷ May 1922, Co-operative Society Minutes, CRO, BDB 24/1/1-34.

¹²⁸ 7 June 1922, AEU DC Minutes, CRO, BDSO 57/2/2/1-2.

In the event, this had little impact.

¹²⁹ 11 March 1926; 8 April 1926, Barrow Trades Council Minutes Books, from 1924, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 15.

¹³⁰ 8 April 1926; 8 May 1926, AEU District Council Minutes Book 1925-1928, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 57/2/2/5.

¹³¹ Burns, *Trades Councils in Action*, 182.

¹³² *Barrow News*, 28 November 1925; 15 May 1926 (at a meeting on 3 May), CRO.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 15 May 1926.

¹³⁴ *Barrow News*, 15 May 1926, CRO; 10 May 1926, *Workers' Bulletin*, Jack Mowat papers, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDX 93/16; 10 May 1926, *Furness Strike Bulletin*, Jack Mowat papers, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDX 93/15.

¹³⁵ 12 May 1926 to 26 November 1926, Coal Emergency Min Books 1926, 5/5/26, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 1/3/1.

¹³⁶ *Workers' Bulletin*, Mowat papers, CRO, BDX 93/16; *Furness Strike Bulletin*, Mowat papers CRO, BDX 93/15.

¹³⁷ 12 May 1926, AEU D.C. Minutes, CRO, BDSO 57/2/2/5.

¹³⁸ *Barrow News*, 15 May 1926, CRO.

¹³⁹ 19 May 1926, AEU D.C. Minutes, CRO, BDSO 57/2/2/5; 7 July 1926, Trades Council Minutes, CRO, BDSO 15.

¹⁴⁰ : See Rushworth for a more detailed account.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF DISTRESS

INTRODUCTION

The final chapter will return to the analysis of Barrow society, combining the income-based 'class' structure established in Chapter One with an analysis of the more subjective aspects of social identity, with particular reference to changing social relationships and perceptions during the post-war transition period. No research has hitherto been undertaken into social attitudes and the human impact of mass unemployment in Barrow during the 1920s. However, although not the main focus of her study, the evidence contained in the transcripts of Elizabeth Roberts' interviews provides valuable insights and will form an important basis for this analysis. These, together with records of local organisations and the press, will be used to assess the influence of war and the hardships of the depression on stereotyped images of Barrow's poor and the extent to which the town conforms to existing debates surrounding social relationships. The analysis will focus both on working class cohesion and on levels of friction between the various socio-economic groups, together with an examination of working class self-help and mutual aid strategies in the form of the effectiveness of support from their institutions, methods of self-sufficiency and changing attitudes to relief. The study will also compare Barrow's responses to mass distress to those communities that were dubbed 'Little Moscows' as a result of the radicalism of their own strategies.

Chapter One described the socio-economic structure of Barrow's population and adopted a seven-fold method of classification based on income levels, but acknowledged that such an analysis is only one way to give meaning to the social order, identities being shaped by many additional factors beyond the workplace. Inevitably therefore, 'class' and 'social' identities overlap and make precise definition impossible, whilst the heterogeneity of social groups makes the development of 'class consciousness', with its implication of uniformity of belief, values and behaviour, an even more problematic concept. Additionally, many outside observers were often unaware of, or misunderstood, the richness of working class culture, networks and mentality, and Joyce stresses the importance of art, popular ballads and literature in shaping popular perceptions by promoting powerful stereotyped images. In a similar vein, Mayne asserts that the sensationalism of the nineteenth century press and fiction

writers made a particularly influential contribution to the formulation of stereotyped images of slums and the working class poor, and generated a fear of ill-health, crime, vice and drunkenness¹. However, Winter asserts that 'middle-class assumptions about the poor were among the casualties of the Great War'² as a result of the visible changes wrought by higher incomes and manifest in better clothing and adequate diets. This metamorphosis demonstrated the importance of environmental factors in determining the condition of social groups and helped to undermine both popular stereotypes and hereditarian assumptions about the working classes.

However, whilst most historians concur that the First World War had a considerable impact on social relationships and perceptions, the nature of these changes is widely debated. Cronin asserts that although the working classes did not become more homogeneous, they did become less sharply divided as a result of collective action and the unionisation of the unskilled, and also more culturally distinct from middle and upper class society³. Alternatively, Cannadine argues that one of the most pronounced consequences of the War was that 'ordinary people no longer saw their society hierarchically, nor their place in it deferentially'. The growing belief that traditional society no longer applied had particular appeal for the middle classes, who increasingly saw themselves as socially important and the setters of social standards. Other interpretations put the middle classes on the defensive. Cannadine himself asserts, for example, that in the war's inflationary aftermath 'the middle classes felt threatened on all sides by high taxing governments, by militant trade unionists, and by Bolsheviks abroad and Communist agitators at home'⁴. McKibbin identifies even greater tensions, and describes the rapidly the expanding lower middle classes as having no collective sense of class or identity, and although fairly well aware of where they stood on the social ladder, were 'disorganised, over-disciplined and isolated both from each other and the outside world', and fraught with status anxieties⁵.

Additionally, the lower middle classes sought to distance themselves from the working classes, and thus most white-collar workers 'stood outside, and often in opposition to, the inter-war labour movement'. Middle and working class divisions were evident in differences of status, life-style, family background and connections⁶, but whilst existing class attitudes and divisions continued into the post-war period⁷, awareness of them was intensified by the obvious inequalities of the depression⁸. Changing residential patterns were also influential⁹. Property related identities such as 'owner-occupier' or 'ratepayer'

had traditionally emphasised the distinctions between the middle and working classes¹⁰, but new municipal housing estates enhanced working-class feelings of segregation and a growing sense of 'a single working class bound together in a community of fate irrespective of its internal differences'¹¹.

Other factors have been identified as influential in bolstering working class cohesion. Macintyre argues that, whilst the workforce was not an undifferentiated mass, the divisions 'never presented an insuperable barrier to unity, and that they diminished in importance between the wars'¹². Kirk supports this view, arguing that 'during the 1920s, [working class] differences and divisions tended to be overshadowed by common or similar experiences and attachments'. Thus industrial conflict, sacrifice and generosity among workers, family and neighbourhood loyalties, together with shared experiences of insecurity and survival further promoted a growing sense of working class unity¹³. Furthermore, in addition to there being no permanent employed / unemployed divide¹⁴, the shared experience of unemployment also had a significant levelling effect. The narrowing of income differentials by the payment of a flat benefit rate 'undermined an age-long class barrier that had divided artisan from labourer'¹⁵.

Poor relief and state unemployment benefits have already been discussed, but other sources of support were also available to the destitute. Working class institutions such as trade unions, Co-operative and Friendly Societies had traditionally supported their members and their families during intermittent periods of unemployment and industrial action, but mass unemployment rapidly exhausted funds, forcing the suspension of benefit payments.

Middle class charity was another long-standing source of relief, but was generally only directed towards the 'deserving' poor, and was traditionally slow and unreliable, and based on an unequal relationship¹⁶. For contemporaries, the struggles of the poor and their 'endless innovation and adjustment in order to cope with external forces they had no hope of controlling'¹⁷, often appeared incoherent and created a middle class view of the poor as having neither concept of time nor ability to organise. Although middle class charity was stimulated by the depression, it was unequal to the scale of the crisis, but the existence of insurance benefits enabled a more efficient concentration of resources, and enabled private charity to provide an important supplement in the form of free boots, clothing, meals and clubs for example.

However poor relief, charity, and state and trade union benefits were generally insufficient to provide a minimum standard of living and, as ever, it fell to the poor and the unemployed to provide their own last line of defence, these strategies being significant for their continuity throughout the period despite state interventions¹⁸. Self-sufficiency was central to the concept of working class respectability and 'the ways in which money was raised and used were determined as much by social convention as by market forces and bodily needs'. Consequently, 'families became poor when they could no longer keep their stories private'¹⁹, and the various strategies adopted sought to conceal family hardships as far as possible. The importance of the extended family and working class neighbourhood support networks is well documented²⁰, but whilst the family remained an individual's first resort, neighbourhood support, dependent on reciprocal relationships, was used more sparingly²¹. Consequently, such close neighbourhood involvement could create friction as well as solidarity²². Alternatively, poor relief was available to the destitute, but at the expense of the recipient's social standing. Consequently pawnbrokers were favoured over the Board of Guardians, and although this also revealed much about a family's financial condition, it was considered the less stigmatising option. The use of credit was another important means of coping with economic fluctuations which also left shopkeepers in a vulnerable and unstable situation²³, and in common with some other self-help strategies, was merely a short-term expedient which increased a family's long-term poverty.

Mass unemployment had a significant impact on social attitudes, but inevitably, interpretations vary considerably. A public phenomenon, the unemployed were highly visible on street corners, in libraries, cinemas and outside football matches. McKibbin argues this image of idleness and apathy confirmed the hostile middle class view of the working class as scroungers²⁴. Conversely, Macintyre describes middle class attitudes as sympathetic, and Vincent also identifies a significant change of attitude. Describing middle class charity as an invasion of traditional self-help structures, he argues that 'rather than retreating into their neighbourhoods and its organisations, the victims of *the* Depression were to be encouraged to see themselves as dependent but valued members of a benevolent national community'²⁵.

Mass unemployment was also a localised phenomenon, and could envelope whole communities. The worst hit areas tended to be centres of traditional heavy industry with well-organised labour movements, and Cronin argues that in such localities, home and

family generally remained stable and community spirit strong²⁶. Croucher asserts that a significant contributory factor towards greater working class solidarity was the development of a 'Labour Exchange sub-culture' as a result of the need of the unemployed to register and sign on regularly. 'The fact that the system pushed people together created a framework within which the unemployed could organise themselves'²⁷. Macintyre however, identifies more radical communities where particularly close ties of work and residence among the predominantly working class populations were important factors in the development of an 'extraordinary mentality' and a determination to unite and defend their living standards as best they could²⁸.

The formation of the NUWM was an important working class response to the pressures of the depression, playing a key role in encouraging the unemployed to claim benefits and out-relief, and as a result 'the change in consciousness among the recipients of relief was commonly acknowledged'. The intensity of the depression was such that the morality of work, thrift and self-reliance could no longer be sustained, and in a significant change of attitudes it became accepted that a wage earner thrown out of work still had a moral right to a basic standard of living. Although relief remained at a minimal level and the deterrent principle was maintained, the concept of the deserving and non-deserving poor was radically altered²⁹.

A principal aim of the NUWM was solidarity between workers and the unemployed³⁰, but Vincent asserts that the NUWM was often at odds with organised labour and that these divisions were exacerbated by differing attitudes to authority. He argues that the perceived abandonment of the housing programme and other social expenditure cuts roused little trade union protest, and 'thereafter the varied incidence of conflict with the law by those directly affected by poverty legislation or its absence, served to confirm the detachment of the [official] labour movement from the interests of the poor'³¹. For others however, the definition of what constituted legitimate authority was radically transformed. In his study of 'Little Moscows', Macintyre argues that a feature of these localities was the 'deep-rooted character of the oppositional culture ... Over and over again in their brushes with the legally constituted authority we encounter the conviction that when the law is inconsistent with basic human rights, it should be disregarded'³².

This attitude had significant implication for the psychological impact of the depression. Contemporary observers feared that mass unemployment would lead to isolation and

demoralisation, and at a national level, despite considerable sympathy, the public activities of the unemployed were restricted and their self-esteem reduced. Consequently, 'many of the long-term unemployed retreated into isolation and passivity'³³, but despite this demoralisation, there was only a slight increase in suicides and no consistent link between crime and unemployment³⁴. However, although the more radical 'Little Moscovs' also witnessed the human effects of unemployment, they are distinguished by their rejection of stigma and the securing of limited advances in relief. Macintyre argues that such communities never surrendered to their condition, and that the marches, the fighting of evictions and continuity of organisation 'all testified to a much higher level of morale than was the case elsewhere'³⁵.

SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS TO THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

As regards Barrow, previous chapters have demonstrated that income levels and housing were major factors in social differentiation, and oral evidence reveals much on contemporary social attitudes. Beginning with housing, Chapter Two has discussed the poor housing conditions in the town and established that, although there was a mix of income groups in various housing areas³⁶, some groups of streets were judged to be better than others. Despite widespread neglect by landlords, tenants were commonly blamed for the condition of the property. In the poorer areas, the bad conditions were often attributed to the residents not having any pride 'and consequently they just went from bad to worse and with nobody prepared to put money into them and make them more habitable. Over the years they were sub-standard families that went in them'³⁷. Another interviewee describes them as 'that type of tenant. They mucked [the property] up and nobody bothered'³⁸. However, even in Vickerstown, which housed a handpicked labour elite, hierarchies of residential status reflected the labour hierarchies of the shipyard. Consequently 'rougher areas' were soon identified in the eyes of contemporaries, not as a result of deficiencies of building or design, but through the social status derived from the occupations of the occupants and behaviour not meeting prescribed standards of the consensually respectable³⁹.

At the bottom of the housing scale, Barrow Island and Hindpool, with their forbidding tenements, generated powerful prejudices against the poor. For example, one interviewee describes Hindpool men as earning the highest wages but always the first in

the soup kitchens⁴⁰, and alcohol was automatically judged to be the root cause of secondary poverty and poor housing. One interviewee describes some Hindpool residents employed on the same job, some of whom might afford to buy their own home, whilst the children of others were going to school barefoot, their fathers 'had ... money but they used to drink it'⁴¹. Such images frequently appear in the oral evidence. For example, a great number of the poor are described as 'drinkers and fighters'⁴², the violence often involving women, whether on the streets or confined to the home⁴³. However, whilst these perceptions of urban degeneracy and of slum dwellers as a different type of humanity represent the typical assumptions about the poor described by Mayne⁴⁴, broader social attitudes were also in evidence. Less judgemental descriptions of the poor included 'rough but good' and 'rough but genuine', but the appellation of 'good respectable ruffians' goes further and eradicates the boundary between the rough and respectable⁴⁵. A baker's son, pressed on his perceptions of his own social class replied 'we were as good as anyone else', and when asked whether his family considered themselves as middle or working class replied, 'I don't think we ever thought about it ... It wasn't worth thinking about because we couldn't do anything about it'⁴⁶, indicating an acceptance of the social order.

However, the image of run-down housing, drunkenness, neglected children and violence conformed to the stereotypical image of the slum and its inhabitants and these perceptions, being shared by those in authority, were influential. Interestingly, the reports of Barrow's Medical Officer of Health demonstrate that the stereotype worked in another way. Prior to the war, he reported that 'the houses and tenements of the Borough being of modern construction, are on the whole in a satisfactory condition. There are no slums in the sense of back to back houses in blind alleys. The streets are wide and windswept, anything resembling a slum area is due to the dirty habits of the householders'⁴⁷. Thus the town compared favourably with the stereotyped image of the slum, and the use of that image as a yardstick in this way was influential in shaping official attitudes and policy decisions in the pre-war period. As a consequence, there was no impetus for reform and improvement, whilst the town's modernity fuelled judgements of those inhabitants who failed to live up to these standards.

THE INFLUENCE OF WAR

The war brought radical change in the form of better standards of health, cleanliness and dress, and reduced alcohol consumption, among the working classes and should have undermined the stereotyped image. However, there is evidence to suggest that working class wartime affluence roused hostility in some quarters. Being a munitions town, the working class population greatly increased and the majority were in reserved occupations, stimulating much bitterness and a sense of injustice. A lengthy middle class obituary to a friend killed in action delivers a bitter attack on the injustices of the system. Barrow is described on a typical Saturday afternoon when hundreds of healthy and well-paid young (working class) men are shopping, watching a series of boxing bouts or flooding down Holker Street after a football match. 'There seems to be something wrong with a condition of things which allows all those young, irresponsible young men to riot in careless and unstinted living while a man of middle age, and a father of a family – a man who had honourably filled an important official position ... should offer up the ultimate sacrifice'⁴⁸. However, although this is a clear indication of hostility towards working class affluence and a resentment of the disruption of the established order, it is not possible to ascertain how widespread such attitudes were.

Of greater consequence were the findings of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest of 1917. As stated in Chapter Two, the Commission heard evidence from all classes on the overcrowded condition of the town's housing and commented that 'no decent person who understands the condition of housing in Barrow could do anything but condemn them'⁴⁹. Faced by this damning indictment the Mayor, Alfred Barrow (knighted in 1921), was anxious to absolve the Council from any responsibility and put the Corporation's case before the people. He argued that whilst the Commission heard evidence from all social groups, 'the Corporation were never formally asked to appear before the Commission'⁵⁰. He thus claimed that the Commission's findings were based largely upon one-sided statements of minority groups, each pursuing their own agenda, and he was anxious to restore the balance. In a lengthy speech he denied that pre-war overcrowding was sufficient to warrant a municipal building programme and believed that private enterprise could have met the demand, stating the Corporation was not prepared to saddle the town with a huge building debt for wartime overcrowding which he saw as a temporary problem. He also argued that in addition to the wartime scarcity of manpower and materials, Vickers had commandeered the entire brick supply of the

district. In further efforts to lay the blame elsewhere, he argued that the Commission was to blame for suggesting the Corporation was negligent, the government was the guilty party and Barrow's housing scandal was a fabrication.

In a single blow, the Commission had undermined any claim to civic pride and municipal authority by stating unequivocally that the conditions to which the working classes were subjected were unacceptable and unjustifiable. This caused considerable ferment and Labour Councillors seized on this issue, stating 'The Corporation was responsible for having failed to realise its duty in the provision of adequate housing for the people'⁵¹. In a long speech, Councillor Ellison emphasised the need for pressing the issue and finding strength through numbers and unity. He argued that 'until the common people were prepared to organise politically to the same extent as they had organised industrially they would always be oppressed ...'. Significantly however, rather than blame the Corporation, he rhetorically 'blamed the working classes of Barrow for allowing these people to sit on the Council'⁵². However, despite the potency of the issue, housing reform was to lose its impetus and the attempt to radicalise the working classes was unsuccessful.

Additionally, contrary to Winter's assertion, there is evidence to suggest that a prevailing middle class view of the working class as inherently inferior survived the war. In discussion of the first draft of a 1919 Corporation resolution to press the government for relief or maintenance for the unemployed for example, the word 'citizens' was deleted and replaced by 'inhabitants'⁵³. Even publicly, in a debate on the construction of working class houses in 1922, although some councillors spoke in favour of giving the people decent places to live, Sir Alfred Barrow (Mayor 1913-19) still firmly maintained that such conditions were due to the habits of the occupants, claiming that if Buckingham Palace was let into tenements 'they would probably not be fit to live in within twelve months'⁵⁴. Whilst the angry cries of resentment from the public gallery were indicative of social tensions and suggest an erosion of working class deference, the war appeared to have done little to reduce social divisions or reform middle class perceptions of their inferiors.

Thus, as regards pre-war social divisions and attitudes little changed and there was no impetus for reform. Wartime affluence was rapidly followed by mass unemployment. Chapter Five has illustrated the inadequacies of both the Poor Law system and the

government's Unemployment Insurance legislation, leaving the working classes to their own resources. The rest of this chapter will examine the strategies adopted to cope with the crisis, together with the influence of these and mass unemployment on social attitudes and perceptions.

DEPRESSION AND MASS UNEMPLOYMENT

(i) Support from Working Class Institutions

Working class institutions had traditionally supported their members and each other, but only brief local insights are available owing to the limitations of the sources. As regards the trade unions, the depression had destroyed the carefully prepared calculations which formed the basis of members' weekly contributions towards union unemployment and other benefits, and the financial strain of the 1922 Engineering Lock-Out was crippling. With many members on short-time working, even the large and powerful AEU was unable to raise the levy to compensate, and thus the lock-out rapidly depleted funds, and by 27 May the union was forced to suspend all benefits, except to sick and superannuated members⁵⁵. Table 7.1 illustrates how the financial strain of the depression, and the 1922 crisis in particular, was reflected among Barrow's AEU branches, and the gradual and limited extent of the recovery up to 1926.

Table 7.1: Average half-yearly balance of Barrow AEU branches 1919-1926⁵⁶

Year	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926
Balance £	566	342	294	16	39	92	82	72

Source: AEU half-yearly reports, MRC

Whilst the Co-op had proved incapable of providing support for the AEU in either cash or kind, some smaller unions had made loans available to them, but 'the difficulty was that the majority of the unions were not in a flourishing condition which would warrant them in assisting us materially'. The extent to which the AEU was overwhelmed by the crisis is demonstrated by the balance of the Distress Fund, which was reduced to a mere £45 by August 1922. Nevertheless, this was distributed evenly among the branches, to

be shared as they saw fit for the best advantage of distressed members, a pitiful amount given the scale of unemployment at this time⁵⁷.

Although records are sparse, similar difficulties were experienced by Barrow's Co-operative Society and Workingmen's Club. The Co-op frequently gave financial assistance to members during times of crisis, but exercised considerable selectivity in this. For example, whilst sums were frequently granted to enable members to attend convalescent homes and hospitals, one member was refused assistance with the burial of his dead child⁵⁸, possibly reflecting the expectation that burial club subscriptions would be maintained. With regard to unemployment, increasing requests for relief from unemployed members led to the formation of a Relief Committee in February 1921, and notices were placed in Co-op shop windows announcing, 'The Committee are prepared to consider applications from Members of the Society who are unemployed and in genuine distress'⁵⁹. Although no information has survived relating to the number of applications or the amounts awarded, the demand was such that within seven months, long before the crisis had peaked, the fund was closed⁶⁰ and not re-opened. However, Griffiths asserts that attachment to Co-operative and Friendly Societies was largely inspired by financial return for the individual rather than broader mutual ideals, and illustrates the selfishness and materialism at the heart of working class culture⁶¹. Significantly however, despite diminishing returns (see also Chapter Six), membership in Barrow remained high (Table 6.1), suggesting that this was not solely based on materialistic considerations.

Support for members of Barrow Workingmen's Club was similarly short-lived. The minutes indicate that rising unemployment was making an impact by February 1919, and requests for assistance were assessed on their merits and the amount paid left to the discretion of the committee. This also continued into 1921, and although subscriptions were increased to ten shillings per year to cope with the demand in February 1921⁶², the issue of relief disappears from the minutes at this point. Owing to the lack of research into Workingmen's Clubs it is not possible to ascertain how widespread this practice was among local branches, although national relief funds were periodically established, particularly after 1926⁶³.

Although relief payments to distressed members were short-lived, both of these organisations continued to make donations to various charities. Frequent recipients of

Barrow Workingmen's Club donations included the Sailors' Home, North Lonsdale Hospital and Barrow Nursing Association throughout the period. The Co-op however, made regular quarterly donations to both local and national charities, and available minutes indicate that generally over half of these donations were to organisations outside the area. By October 1922 however, donations were made to just two local causes, the Board of Guardians' Christmas Fund and North Lonsdale Hospital, and by October 1923 when the Society was itself in severe financial difficulty, all donations were suspended. Unfortunately, owing to the inaccessibility of later minute books, no information on the resumption of donations is available. As a result of the inability of formal working class organisations to relieve the effects of unemployment, self-sufficiency strategies and family and neighbourhood networks became increasingly important.

(ii) Self-Sufficiency Strategies

Due to Barrow's location, typical self-sufficiency strategies included foraging, rabbiting, fishing and collecting shellfish, together with scavenging for firewood on the shore and raking through the large Vickers' tip on Barrow Island⁶⁴. These were bolstered by neighbourhood networks which provided a vital means of working class support, and Elizabeth Roberts has described these in some detail. In her study of Barrow, Lancaster and Preston she argues that the effects of migration, unemployment and insecurity 'seemed in some cases to break long-established customs and neighbourhood links', whilst the conflict between the work ethic and unemployment raised suspicions and prejudices towards the unemployed. As a consequence, the old solidarity was eroded, and she asserts that 'the oral evidence for this breakdown is most common in Barrow where the economic slump was the most sudden'⁶⁵. However, most of her evidence for neighbourhood changes⁶⁶ is drawn from Lancaster and Preston, and of the two Barrow interviewees quoted, one describes the tensions within a small village which bears little resemblance to the Barrow environment⁶⁷. Nevertheless, although she maintains that much of the old neighbourliness did survive, 'even in Barrow'⁶⁸, the breakdown of solidarity is over-stated. For example, whilst one interviewee describes being aware of more bad feeling, people would nevertheless give what they could, and another describes neighbours as not always friendly, but prepared to rally round in a crisis. Additionally, there is a considerable body of interview evidence to suggest that Barrow's neighbourhood support networks were stimulated, because 'comradeship is

greater when you're depressed and you're starving, you all try to help one another and that is the way they tried to do it'. Mutual support networks could take many forms and aid was more often in kind than in cash. For example, the unemployed men of one family invested in a cross-cut saw to fell trees for firewood, and did this for other families, whilst other examples range from individuals such as John Whinnerah, a Labour Alderman, who grew vegetables in his own garden for the unemployed, to the generosity of local shops and farmers⁶⁹.

Although many would live a hand to mouth existence rather than borrow, and never take a free meal or have anything given despite entitlement⁷⁰, for others, credit was an important means of supplementing a limited budget. As early as 1921, many Barrow grocers had depleted their capital supporting regular customers suffering the indirect effects of the miners' strike⁷¹, but as the depression deepened, the increasing numbers of customers resorting to credit added to the problems of local shopkeepers. In addition to running up credit in corner shops and taking Guardians' relief tickets to the 'multiples', customers were frequently unable to repay more than half of their debt each week⁷², and these debts continued to accumulate. Consequently many shopkeepers were themselves forced to resort to credit, and by the end of 1921 the Board of Guardians reported that at least 75% of local shopkeepers 'were outside the Bankruptcy Court simply by the kindness of their creditors'⁷³. Inevitably, the number of annual bankruptcies increased significantly during the 1920s, rising from three in 1914 and peaking at twenty seven in 1922. Although still high at seventeen in 1925, the number fell dramatically to four in 1926. It is significant that 27% of these cases between 1920 and 1926 were food retailers, in addition to vendors of a wide range of essential goods and services⁷⁴.

(iii) Revised Strategies and the Fighting of Stigma

Charity was another long established source of relief, and like credit, its nature was to undergo a transition. The traditional soup kitchens and private charities of the pre-war period were unequal to the scale of distress, and successive mayors introduced co-ordinated methods of relief. The fund opened by Mayor Basterfield to provide children's footwear was superseded in December 1921 by a committee which widened its scope, and sought to avoid duplication of investigation and distribution of relief. Rather than provide only new footwear, Mayor Fairbain's scheme introduced a clog repair service and was expanded to include donations in kind to enable the distribution

of second hand clothing. It was to be an apolitical, multi-agency venture, those pledging assistance including the press, the Shipyard Band, the Choral Society and various local societies running fund raising schemes. Additionally, the banks had agreed to act as collectors, whilst ladies' working parties were formed to make and repair garments. However, although the Committee was representative of all sections of the community, including the Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM), the Chamber of Trade, the Co-op, Trades Council, Friendly Societies and many others⁷⁵, any form of charity faced the twin obstacles of generating adequate donations in a depressed town, and social stigma.

As regards donations, large subscriptions were not expected 'because they know the conditions not merely of the working classes, but also the professional and trading classes'. However, although the effects of the depression were widespread, the confidence that all would pull together was well founded. The various organisations actively sought donations. The Chamber of Trade, for example, although acknowledging that economic conditions were difficult, declared 'some of the cases were very painful, and it behoved the members of the Chamber to do all they could to relieve the distress in the town'⁷⁶. Whilst claimants were to register and distribution was not indiscriminate, demands were heavy, and by November 1922 the fund had distributed 10,000 garments among 2,800 families, and footwear to 2,700 children⁷⁷. However, by February 1923 donations had decreased and no longer met expenditure. A fresh appeal again acknowledged that everyone was hard hit, but asked 'the moderately poor man to help the very poor man – the man who is employed to help the children of the man who is unemployed; the man with some to help those who have none; ... [and] to remember that there are thousands in Barrow today who haven't got [the] primitive material conditions of life'⁷⁸. By the end of Mayor Fairbain's period in office in 1924, his fund had raised £5,500, distributed over 19,000 garments, 5,590 maternity parcels, 6,170 items of footwear, and provided fuel for the destitute⁷⁹. It represented a major success in harnessing the resources of the wider community.

However, the real significance of these measures lay in distribution and the efforts to overcome the deeply ingrained stigma attached to the receipt of aid. Access to any form of relief came at the expense of privacy, and oral evidence indicates the extent to which poverty was concealed. For example, 'nobody knew how poor we were, we never showed it', and consequently Barrow had its share of those who never went to the

Guardians because 'you had to go and sit in a room ... and everybody heard your business, all sitting in rows'⁸⁰. Aware 'that there were a large number of people in the town suffering in silence' and receiving no assistance, the Mayor sought to ensure 'there is no man, woman or child going to bed at night not having had proper and sufficient food during the day' and that every household had sufficient fuel. Utilising the direct, face-to-face democracy that typified radical communities⁸¹, the new scheme was organised at packed public meetings with full press coverage. Continually emphasising his scheme was not a charity, the Mayor 'hoped that no man who might receive anything from the fund would feel he was losing his self-respect or anything of that kind'⁸². That it was no easy task to overcome the stigma and identify need is demonstrated by the attempts to extend free school meals provision.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the provision of free school meals was extended from six to seven days and was to include breakfasts as well as dinners. The Committee had requested head teachers to supply information on the number of needy cases in their schools, but twenty two replied that there were no such cases, and seventeen others claimed that whilst there was some need, the cases were generally very few. Councillors, personally aware of dire cases of poverty, believed these figures only touched on the fringes of distress, and the School Medical Officer's reports confirm the extent to which poverty was concealed. He asserted that 'the condition of the outer clothing was no index as to the general condition of the underclothing, which in all cases was clean but very much worn', and the deterioration of clothing and lack of warm underwear was widespread among the 4,176 children examined in 1922⁸³. Again with the aid of public meetings and the press, it was made clear that free school meals were not a charity but permitted by State legislation, and the pre-war mentality of sending school children home with food parcels on Saturdays to prevent 'them from coming out on the Sunday and parading their poverty' had gone. Food parcels for breakfasts and Sundays would still be sent home, but to preserve privacy and comply with the preference of mothers to feed their own children⁸⁴, it was emphasised that the Board of Guardians would not be involved and no records kept, and the system administered by the Education Committee to avoid stigma. The overwhelming success of these measures is demonstrated by the level of demand and evidence of continuing good health within the Borough (see Chapter Three).

Crime can be described as another form of self-help, particularly during times of economic hardship. The over-riding impression derived from the oral evidence suggests that 'people were very honest round here. They were very poor but I don't think they would do anything they shouldn't have done'⁸⁵. This is supported by the Chief Constable's report for 1923, which acknowledged 'the uniformly good conduct of almost the whole of the inhabitants of the Borough throughout a year when many of them must have been sorely tried. During such a period of want and distress ... the prevalence of petty thefts might at least have been expected, but ... the increase is slight indeed'⁸⁶. Barrow's crime rate also compares favourably to national figures. Whilst the national rate for indictable offences averaged around 2.4 per thousand of the population, the figure for Barrow stood at 2.2 per thousand.⁸⁷ However, oral evidence suggests there was a fine line between casual opportunism and organised theft, and whilst the acquisition of stray sheep or those caught in the tide and picked up by boat might be deemed legitimate, they were also taken off the moors⁸⁸. An insignificant testimony in isolation, this takes on a new dimension when combined with the theft of cows from the Co-op farm. That the cows and the culprits remained undetected despite a £10 reward⁸⁹ suggests this was a well planned and co-ordinated venture, although it is impossible to ascertain how common this might have been given the absence of detailed police records.

The most significant working class response to unemployment however, was the formation of Barrow's branch of the NUWM⁹⁰. The minutes of both the Trades Council and the trade unions illustrate the impotency of organised labour, and testify to the importance of the UWM, which became the active arm of the labour movement. According to a former wartime shop steward and a founder member of Barrow's UWM, the unemployed fought harder because they were free from employer victimisation and had nothing to lose, and he describes them as bringing greater unity to a labour movement traditionally weakened by sectionalism⁹¹.

Barrow's UWM, confident in the knowledge they outnumbered the police by around five thousand to ninety, could resort to direct action with impunity. The Board of Guardians was frequently the focus of such action, and in addition to occupying the Guardians' building as described in Chapter Five, on other occasions, by taking the keys or hammering wedges underneath the doors, the UWM would lock themselves and the Guardians inside as a means of pressing their own agenda⁹². Another important NUWM

activity was the fighting of evictions⁹³, and the Barrow branch was no exception. These were a serious problem in Barrow and a typical example is provided by an ex-serviceman and his wife, living in a 'structure' five feet high and evicted whilst out shopping. After they returned to find the locks changed and a new family in residence, a group of one hundred UWM members forcibly re-established the status quo⁹⁴.

A distinctive aspect of Barrow's UWM was its attitude towards relief work. Hannington asserts that the movement generally conducted a relentless fight against a rate of pay below union rates, and by simple acts of sabotage succeeded in defeating this 'in nearly every place where it was attempted'⁹⁵. However, the Barrow branch adopted a different strategy, asking the Corporation for 'leave to be allowed to contract for all relief work given out by the Barrow Corporation'⁹⁶. Although the Corporation agreed to consider this, the related documentation has not been found. Additionally, the UWM applied pressure for a wide range of concessions for the unemployed, including reduced prices for various goods and amenities, which always received a sympathetic hearing, and more importantly, never a flat refusal. However, many contemporaries see fish supplies as the UWM's greatest achievement. Over a two year period they hired a trawler, and rented a shop and market stall staffed by voluntary helpers. The catch, averaging about two tons per week, was sold to the unemployed at cost, but although of great benefit to consumers, greatly increased the pressures on local fishmongers⁹⁷.

However, the issue of municipal water supplies demonstrates that radical self-help or defiance was not confined to the UWM. This was a problematic issue for the Corporation, which sought to balance humanitarian and health arguments with the need to disconnect water supplies to prevent an organised effort to avoid water rate payments⁹⁸. To combat disconnection, the *Barrow Leader* advised asking 'a friendly moulder or brass fitter' to make a new key to reconnect the supply. This was an easy and popular option, but to inhibit future disconnection, it was prudent to then fill the hole with concrete⁹⁹. Only a minority of Barrow's unemployed were persistent non-payers, and Corporation tolerance is demonstrated by the debate surrounding sanctions for one such offender. This family with eleven children had defied the Corporation for three years and reconnected their own water five times. Although the Corporation did not want to establish a dangerous precedent, the principle that it was 'dangerous to kick a man when he was down' prevailed, and on this occasion, two councillors paid the £1

reconnection fee out of their own pocket, 'to give the man a chance and to prove his manhood'¹⁰⁰.

Macintyre argues that whilst resistance to authority provides evidence of an advanced political consciousness, the militants nevertheless represented a small minority¹⁰¹, and oral evidence provides insights into how Barrow's UWM were perceived by more moderate members of the working class community. One witness describes them as 'not comprised of the best type of people', of being noisy and loud, and always demonstrating and demanding something. Consequently, 'they did more harm ... than they did good'. However, oral evidence also reveals that groups other than the UWM, which included this man, actively opposed evictions¹⁰², and demonstrates that in Barrow, challenges to authority in defence of basic humanitarian rights were seen as legitimate by moderates and radicals alike.

Furthermore, despite disapproval of direct action in some quarters, the worst fears of the Ministry of Health were realised as increasing numbers of Barrow's moderates joined the UWM, bolstering its legitimacy, broadening its support base and increasing solidarity. The most influential recruit was Alderman Basterfield, who apologised for his late association with the movement, attributing this to his belief that the depression would be briefer. But now he sought to 'do something for the cause of the town', arguing that 'long unemployment was a danger to the morality of the town; it meant silent suffering among women; it demoralised youth, and was a menace to children. Today there was murder being committed by mothers because they realised that if these children were born what they would come into. And the Churches kept silent ...'. Demonstrating the changing response to unemployment and the rejection of stigma, he emphasised that 'for a man or woman to starve behind clean curtains was cowardly. It was finer for such a man or woman to come out and state the grievance'¹⁰³. Again, as in Macintyre's 'Little Moscows', relief was seen as a moral right, not a disgrace¹⁰⁴.

(iv) Conflict or Cohesion?

The Barrow interviews indicate that the images of unemployment were potent, and the overriding response was one of pity and not moralisation. They describe the sudden change from wartime affluence to unemployment, and the area of the town renamed the 'Scrap Heap' because the unemployed would congregate there¹⁰⁵. Whilst some felt it

was pitiful to see men standing about idling their time away¹⁰⁶, the dole queue presented a forbidding image. One interviewee describes men queuing outside the Labour Exchange from 8.30 am to sign on. Unable to risk the loss of a day's money if they were absent when their name was called, they had to stand outside in all weathers, often all day. According to one local baker, the condition of the unemployed made him feel important, he 'wasn't making a lot but ... was never that far down'. However, rather than condemn them for their lack of work, he noted that 'they were half-starved and hadn't much food and not much clothing ... Some of them fainted while they stood against the wall'. Such images generated a positive response. For example, the Salvation Army would provide soup, and Arran's, a market trader, would supply the dole queue with items of food such as broken biscuits. To illustrate the increasingly reciprocal nature of Barrow society at this time, some of these men would get a shilling together and spend it at Arran's¹⁰⁷.

At the other end of the income scale, the Corporation came under considerable pressure throughout the period on the issue of Chief Officers' salaries from ratepayers demanding economy, but also from clerical staff demanding greater equality. Councillor Doyle maintained that Chief Officers' salary levels were 'out of all proportion to the present rate of living', and it was 'only humane and proper' that these officials should consider a reduction given the levels of distress in the town¹⁰⁸. The Chief Officers were obliged to defend their salaries in the local press¹⁰⁹, their arguments including low pre-war salaries made adequate by war bonuses, but remaining below the national average due to the Corporation's non-implementation of the last Civil Service pay award. These arguments continued throughout the period, and despite demands that in the interests of fair play, workmen and Chief Officers alike should lose their bonuses, the Corporation consistently delayed tackling the issue.

However, it was claimed that clerical staff were paid above the national average, and therefore were asked to accept a 5% salary deduction for a twelve month period¹¹⁰. Interestingly, against the advice of their leadership, NALGO members voted unanimously to accept this reduction given the economic conditions of the Borough, *but only* 'on the condition that a similar sacrifice is asked for and accepted by the other branches of the municipal service in Barrow whose post-war percentage exceeds that of the members of [NALGO]'¹¹¹. Again, the Mayor failed to put this to other municipal

branches and the issue was side-stepped. Similarly, a proposed 10% cut for all grades in June 1926 got nowhere and the situation remained unchanged.

This issue suggests that there was considerable antagonism between Barrow's salaried clerical workers and their superiors, in contrast to the sympathy for the unemployed apparent in the oral evidence. Indeed, unemployment had a significant levelling effect and all skills and occupations were treated alike. 'Foremen, chargehands, craftsmen, labourers, were all rubbing shoulders one with another, waiting to be interviewed by the Guardians before the pittance was doled out'¹¹². However, the high levels of middle class unemployment, the problems faced by shopkeepers and the number of bankruptcies indicate that economic hardship was not confined to the working classes, but was a common experience which contributed to the development of a cross-class communal identity and a sense of unity, emphasised further by the municipal failure to make economies on pay and thus widening the gulf between the upper middle classes and the overwhelming majority of the population.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be argued that despite considerable improvements to working class living standards and levels of sobriety, the First World War failed to undermine the stereotyped images of poverty and its causes. As McKibbin suggests, working class affluence tended instead, to fuel middle class antagonisms. The most significant impact of the war was the official confirmation that the conditions to which the working classes were subjected were unacceptable, and although it is not possible to ascertain the impact of these observations, it is likely to have been considerable. Certainly, the working classes appeared less deferential in the post-war period.

In contrast, the impact of the depression was significant. The scale of unemployment, although limiting any trend towards greater working class homogenisation through workplace changes, had a profound levelling effect, and social relationships underwent a considerable transformation. Although traditional sources of working class support such as benefits from trade unions, the Co-op and other clubs and societies were rapidly exhausted as the crisis deepened, it can be argued that the depression stimulated neighbourhood networks despite the increase in inter-personal frictions in some quarters revealed by oral evidence. Indeed, oral testimony used in conjunction with other sources

indicates the extension of a great many means of support. Charity is a prime example, but in addition to being rationalised, better organised and co-ordinated, it is the fundamental change in underlying attitudes that was significant. As Vincent suggests, the victims of the depression were encouraged to see themselves as part of a benevolent community, and all agencies encouraged the rejection of the stigma attached to the receipt of relief. For example, in addition to the efforts of the UWM, the Corporation and the Board of Guardians defiantly informed the government that 'our people will not accept the stigma of pauperism'¹¹³, whilst going to considerable lengths to overcome the ingrained resistance to aid and to ensure that relief reached the destitute.

The scale of unemployment ensured that the unemployed were highly visible, but there is scant evidence of hostility or the suspicion and prejudices towards the unemployed described by Roberts. Furthermore, the severe class conflict between the working and middle classes described by McKibbin failed to materialise in Barrow during the 1920s. In addition to conforming more closely to Kirk's analysis, whereby working class unity increased as a result of shared hardships and insecurity, generosity, family and neighbourhood loyalties, the Barrow experience goes beyond this. The economic problems faced by the middle classes (and the lower middle classes in particular), together with the already blurred social distinctions arising from the close residential proximity of all grades of labour and also the middle classes, the high incidence of working class owner occupation and lack of suburbanisation, enabled the lower middle classes to identify more readily with the working classes. The greater unity between these hitherto disparate social groups is demonstrated by the responses to charity and the broadening base of the UWM, whilst the antagonism between the lower and upper middle classes provides the only evidence of a form of class conflict in Barrow during the period of this study.

It is impossible to pin-point precisely when established attitudes began to change, but the disappearance of the old stereotyped images and the concept of the deserving and undeserving poor from public discourse during the 1920s is significant. There is also little evidence of isolation and passivity among the long-term unemployed, and in addition to the UWM being highly active, their strategies were both innovative and successful. The unemployed of Barrow, as in Macintyre's 'Little Moscows', 'never surrendered to their condition'¹¹⁴, and consequently morale remained high, whilst the willingness to challenge authority in defence of basic rights and the determination to

unite and fight the effects of the depression was evident among most sections of the population. The similarity between Barrow and other radical communities is further suggested by the collective decision making at public meetings, together with the close ties of work and residence which were important contributory factors in the development of the town's 'extraordinary mentality'. Thus, with the exception of the upper middle classes, who became increasingly distanced from the bulk of the population, it can be argued that the shared hardships and economic uncertainties generated communal solidarity rather than selfishness and materialism, and social cohesion rather than conflict. However, the issue of whether Barrow can assume the status of 'Little Moscow' will now be examined in greater depth, as the concluding chapter pulls together and assesses the significance of the various aspects of change in Barrow between 1914 and 1926.

¹ Cronin, *Labour and Society*, 70; P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class* (Cambridge, 1994), 330; A. Mayne, *The Imagined Slum* (Leicester, 1993), 163.

² J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 1985), 20.

³ Cronin, *Labour and Society*, 23.

⁴ D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven, 1998), 128-30.

⁵ R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford, 1991), 4.

⁶ Kirk, *Labour and Society*, 289.

⁷ *Ibid*, 305.

⁸ Cronin, *Labour and Society*, 71.

⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

¹⁰ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 98.

¹¹ Kirk, *Labour and Society*, 51.

¹² S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London, 1980), 116.

¹³ Kirk, *Labour and Society*, 305.

¹⁴ R. Croucher, *We Refuse To Starve In Silence* (London, 1987), 14.

¹⁵ R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Harmondsworth, 1971), 237.

¹⁶ D. Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in 20th Century Britain* (London, 1987), 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁸ See for example Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 37; 91-99.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 3-4.

²⁰ For Example: R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum: A Ragged Schooling* (Manchester, 1976); E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place* (Oxford, 1984); A. Davies & S. Fielding, *Workers' Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Salford and Manchester 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1992).

²¹ Griffiths, *Lancashire Working Classes*, 265.

²² Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 15.

²³ *Ibid*, 11.

²⁴ McKibbin, *Ideologies*, 273.

²⁵ Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 86.

²⁶ Cronin, *Labour and Society*, 81.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 20.

²⁸ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 45.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 119-25.

³⁰ Croucher, *We Refuse To Starve*, 48; W. Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936* (London, 1977), 25.

³¹ Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 56-57.

³² Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 168.

³³ *Ibid*, 116.

³⁴ Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 99.

³⁵ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 129.

³⁶ S2B, 28, 'Social History of Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster 1880-1930', E. Roberts Collection, Lancaster University, Lancaster.

³⁷ A2B, 23, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.

³⁸ M3B, 22, *Ibid*.

³⁹ W1B,42, *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ M3B,16 *Ibid*.

⁴¹ B1B, 73 *Ibid*.

⁴² H2b, 33; H1B, 7, *Ibid*.

⁴³ C1B, 39; A2B, 74, *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ Mayne, *Imagined Slum*, 189.

⁴⁵ F3B, 2; H2B, 32; Mrs H2B, 29, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.

⁴⁶ H2B, 160, *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ Chief Medical Officer's Report, 1912, Barrow-in-Furness Accounts Book 1912-13, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.

⁴⁸ *Barrow News*, 23 December 1916, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.

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- ⁴⁹ Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness District, Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest 1917, 32, National Archives, Kew, CD123.119.
- ⁵⁰ *Barrow News*, 8 September 1917, CRO.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 15 September, 1917.
- ⁵³ 8 December 1919, Distress Sub-Committee Minutes 1905-21, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 1/3/1.
- ⁵⁴ *Barrow Guardian*, 3 June 1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ⁵⁵ J.B. Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers* (London, 1945), 225.
- ⁵⁶ All figures for June, except 1919 & 1920, which quote the December figures.
- ⁵⁷ 6 June 1922; 16 August 1922, AEU District Council Minute Book 1920-1922, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness BDSO 57/2/2/1-2.
- ⁵⁸ April 1922, Barrow Co-operative Society Minutes Books 1920-1924, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDB 24/1/1-34.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 February 1921.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 September 1921.
- ⁶¹ Griffiths, *Lancashire Working Classes*, 220; 326.
- ⁶² 10 February 1921, Barrow Workingmen's Club Books 1915-1923, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 85/1/5.
- ⁶³ G. Tremlett, *Clubmen* (London, 1987), 154.
- ⁶⁴ P4B, 3; S1B, 33, 12, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁶⁵ E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place* (Oxford, 1984), 199-200.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 194-201.
- ⁶⁷ See D1B, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁶⁸ Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, 200.
- ⁶⁹ W1B, 89; B1B, 29; M6B, 95; B1b, 29; A3B, 50; M6B, 95, 42, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁷⁰ A2B, 60, 64; W1B, 13, 'Social History of Barrow'.
- ⁷¹ *Barrow News*, 14 May 1921, CRO.
- ⁷² M8B, 20, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁷³ Meeting with Board of Guardians & the Ministry of Health in Barrow, December 1921, *Barrow-News*, 3 December 1921, CRO.
- ⁷⁴ Bankruptcy Register, County Court, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/CC.
- ⁷⁵ *Barrow-News*, 3 December 1921, CRO.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 January 1922.

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- ⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 11 November 1922.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 24 February 1923.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 18 October 1924.
- ⁸⁰ S2B, 4, 33, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁸¹ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 173.
- ⁸² *Barrow-News*, 3 December 1921, CRO.
- ⁸³ School Medical Officer's Report, 1922, Borough of Barrow-in-Furness Account Books, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness.
- ⁸⁴ *Barrow-News*, 14 April 1921, CRO.
- ⁸⁵ A2B, 60, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁸⁶ *Barrow-News*, 20 September 1924, CRO.
- ⁸⁷ House of Commons Library, Research Paper 99/111, dated 21/12/1999, 'A Century of Change: Trends in UK Statistics since 1900', www.parliament.uk/commons, accessed December 2003), in Barrow this averaged 2.2 per thousand (calculated from C. Constable's statistics, Barrow Accounts Books, CRO).
- ⁸⁸ M6B, 42, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁸⁹ 22 June 1921, Co-operative Society Minutes, CRO, BDB 24/1/1-34.
- ⁹⁰ The growing numbers of unemployed were organised and active by November 1919, (19/11/1919, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48), but there are no records with which to trace the formation of Barrow's UWM. The size and composition of the membership remain unknown.
- ⁹¹ M6B, 76-77, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁹² *Barrow-News*, 7 January 1922, CRO; M6B, 96, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ⁹³ Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles*, 70.
- ⁹⁴ *Barrow-News*, 29 October 1921, CRO.
- ⁹⁵ Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles*, 60.
- ⁹⁶ 20 February 1922, Unemployment Correspondence 1919-1923, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/44 BOX 48.
- ⁹⁷ 14 February, 1924, *Barrow Leader*, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDX/93/4; M6B, 94, 'Social History of Barrow'.
- ⁹⁸ *Barrow-News*, 8 December 1923, CRO.
- ⁹⁹ April, 1924, *Barrow Leader*, CRO, BDX/93/4; M6B, 41, 'Social History of Barrow'.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Barrow-News*, 9 February 1924, CRO.
- ¹⁰¹ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 173.
- ¹⁰² H1B, 23, 11, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.
- ¹⁰³ *Barrow-News*, 31 March 1923, CRO.

¹⁰⁴ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 125.

¹⁰⁵ H1B, 24; L2B, 1, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.

¹⁰⁶ H3B, 1, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ B1B, 57-58, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Barrow-News*, 14 January 1922, CRO.

¹⁰⁹ See for example *Barrow-News*, March 1922, CRO.

¹¹⁰ 11 September 1925, NALGO Executive Committee Minutes 1923-1956, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BDSO 14.

¹¹¹ *Barrow-News*, 24 October 1925, CRO.

¹¹² H1B, 10, 'Social History of Barrow', LU.

¹¹³ Report of joint meeting with Barrow Corporation & Barrow Board of Guardians with the Ministries of Health and Labour, London, 11 October 1923, Unemployment 1923-1924, Cumbria Records Office, Barrow-in-Furness, BA/C 5/1/46 BOX 51 F2.

¹¹⁴ Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 129.

CONCLUSION

In order to draw together and assess the significance of the various strands of change and continuity in Barrow between 1914 and 1926, this concluding chapter will begin with a review of the changing demographic and occupational structure, housing conditions and popular health, factors which provided the conditions of everyday life and the context in which ideology, policy and social attitudes developed. This will be followed by an examination of these evolving concepts, together with their significance for political alignments, the composition of local authority bodies and their responses to the demands of the depression. Finally, the implications of these developments together with the responses of other important local organisations will be discussed in relation to three key questions emerging from this study: the impact of war and depression on social attitudes, the nature of the communal identity that developed during these years, and whether Barrow can, in fact, be included among the ranks of the 'Little Moscows' of the inter-war period.

Beginning with an examination of the occupational structure of the Borough, this changed little throughout the period and was characterised by an enduring dependency on the unstable shipbuilding, engineering and steel industries, and a dearth of waged employment for married women. The social structure, with its large working class and small middle class, inevitably reflected this dependency, with a small elite of high salaried managers and professionals forming a distinct upper middle class.

Whilst there is little evidence relating to middle class incomes prior to the First World War, those of their working class counterparts had traditionally reflected the booms and slumps of the trade cycle, with considerable distinctions between the wages of the skilled and unskilled. However, whilst the wages of the latter could be below Rowntree's definition of the poverty line¹, and overtime working was often necessary to provide a basic standard of living, in contrast there was a relatively wealthy group of working class landlords. However, due to periodic downturns of the town's unstable economy, it is extremely unlikely that 'the poor' or the low paid, could have managed to save a deposit or secure a loan as described by Elizabeth Roberts². It is more probable that such landlords were drawn from among the better paid skilled workers, using craft wages as a means of further material advancement. As a result of the income differentials created by the receipt of rents, these landlords displaced the skilled worker

at the top of the working-class socio-economic hierarchy, creating a distinctive variation of the 'labour aristocracy' theme.

The impact of war and depression was out of all proportion to anything previously experienced by the town's fluctuating economy. In addition to full employment, the war brought unprecedented work opportunities for women and also increased the earnings of many male workers, which together with the benefit of a wife's wage, brought a new affluence to many working class families. Whilst there is little information on middle class incomes generally, or the effects of wartime inflation which reduced them in real terms, the records of Vickers and Barrow Corporation enable an assessment of the extent to which middle and working class income differentials were eroded. Whilst the manual, clerical and administrative workers of both Vickers and the Corporation all received substantial war bonuses, the higher bonus rates paid to white collar workers in both organisations suggests that income differentials between the lower middle and working classes may not have been eroded to the extent generally accepted³. Similarly, the narrowing middle class income differentials described by McKibbin⁴ do not appear to be reflected in Barrow, the massive bonuses paid to both the senior managers of Vickers and the Corporation's Chief Officers extending rather than reducing the gulf between them and the mainstream middle class.

In the post-war period the position of Barrow's middle classes was again out of step with wider national trends. A distinctive feature of Barrow during these years was the rapidity of the transition from that brief period of affluence to mass unemployment, and whilst the speed was possibly without parallel, the unemployment rate at 73% by 1922 was comparable to the very worst experiences of the early 1930s. However, although mass unemployment is generally associated with the working classes, in the local context this case study is able to challenge McKibbin's assertion that unemployment amongst the middle classes was comparatively low⁵ and, as the evidence from Vickers and Barrow's Co-operative Society demonstrates, design, clerical and retail staff were more seriously affected than has previously been assumed. Furthermore, the reduction of the earning capacity of such a large percentage of the population inevitably had a profound effect on consumption patterns and therefore, in such a self-contained and isolated community, had a particularly adverse affect on the livelihood of other sections of the population. Thus there can be little doubt that smaller businesses were forced to

shed their employees at a similar rate, although it has not been possible to ascertain the numbers.

With regard to income levels, whilst some historians assert that both middle and working class incomes in many areas improved in real terms during the 1920s⁶, Cronin describes pockets of severe unemployment in which the decade represented a period of pronounced and prolonged hardship⁷. Although the argument refers specifically to the working classes, in Barrow where unemployment was particularly severe, the reduced spending capacity of the working classes ensured that Barrow's middle classes, and particularly small businessmen and trades people, also failed to experience any improvements in real incomes during the decade.

A further distinctive aspect of the town at this time was the failure to attract new industries or investment as a result of the depressed economy, the town's location and lack of natural resources. Consequently local industry was unable to diversify, and whilst it has been argued that middle and working class gradations generally became less distinct as changing employment patterns restructured the workforce, this was not reflected in Barrow's occupational structure. For example, the shortage of capital restricted technological development, preventing the emergence of new skills⁸, with no appreciable increase in the numbers of semi-skilled workers as might have been precipitated by manufacturing and technological change⁹. Thus Barrow's male working class did not become more homogeneous as a result of reduced skill differentials. Additionally, with the exception of the war years, women's employment patterns were unaltered in the twenty years to 1931, and domestic service remained the main employer. Consequently, the proportion of women in the local workforce remained unchanged, representing 18% of the total workforce, in contrast to the national figure of nearly 30%.

Middle class employment patterns are particularly difficult to quantify due to the changing definition and classification of occupations in the census returns¹⁰. Thus it is not possible to ascertain the extent to which the growth of Barrow's clerical and service sectors or the expansion and composition of the management class¹¹ reflected wider trends. Changes within teaching, clerical and retail occupations are also obscured by the lack of consistent data, but there is little doubt that the apparent expansion of the commercial and financial sector was due to classification changes rather than economic

growth. Barrow does however, reflect the wider trend of the erosion of small businesses described by McKibbin, but this was the product of bankruptcy rather than economic development.

Whilst Barrow's occupational and social structure changed little during these years, the demographic impact of war and depression was profound. An ebb and flow of the population had been an established feature of the town as a result of the unstable economy, but the scale of the influx of wartime munitions workers was unprecedented and placed the infrastructure of the town under severe pressure. However, the estimated figures vary considerably and suggest that the authorities had little conception of actual numbers, although the Chief Medical Officer's figures, possibly the most reliable, suggest a wartime increase of 46%.

However, the dramatic decline of the population in the post-war period is not solely attributable to the exodus of the thousands of munitions workers, and the exceptionally high rate of out-migration was a significant and distinctive aspect of Barrow's demographic development. However, whilst Griffiths asserts that Wigan experienced the highest rate of population loss amongst Lancastrian County Boroughs during the 1920s¹², census tables reveal that in fact this distinction belongs to Barrow. Indeed, Bainbridge contends that Barrow's 10.8% decrease was exceeded only by Merthyr Tydfil and the Rhondda during the 1920s¹³, an inverted accolade which gives Barrow the highest population loss in England during the period. Additionally, a closer analysis of the statistics reveals the greatest loss was among young adults and their families, a loss which caused the birth rate, considerably higher than the national average during the pre-war period, to plummet. Equally significant however, was its failure to return to pre-war levels, remaining persistently below the national average. As with mass unemployment, out-migration is another phenomenon that tends to be more widely associated with manual workers, but there is no reason to assume that the middle classes were excluded from the 1920s exodus. Although the lack of detailed statistical evidence makes this impossible to quantify, the scale of population loss, together with the permanent reversal of the traditionally high birth rate, clearly illustrates the cataclysmic impact of the depression.

With regard to housing, although the majority of the town's housing stock was no more than fifty years old at the outbreak of the First World War, working class housing

conditions were characteristically poor, and high rents, sub-letting and overcrowding were endemic. However as a result of the town's modernity and its favourable comparison to the stereotyped image of what constituted a slum¹⁴, the prevailing conditions were regarded as acceptable by the authorities, and together with the intention of minimising municipal expenditure to keep the rates low, provided no impetus for reform.

Inevitably, the wartime influx of munitions workers had a profound effect on levels of overcrowding, but whilst the Rent Restrictions Act pegged rents at 1914 levels, it offered no protection for the thousands of lodgers in the town. Consequently sub-letting became extremely profitable and stimulated the eviction of sitting tenants and the sub-letting of rooms at famine rents. The Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest Supplemental Report for Barrow-in-Furness, 1917, demonstrates the nature of the housing problem and the tensions created by the fusion of industrial and social issues. Thus whilst Abrams describes housing as traditionally providing a reliable indicator of levels of deprivation¹⁵, in Barrow at this time, the housing issue had come to represent levels of social tension, and this, together with the high degree of popular participation, should have provided an impetus for reform.

Indeed, the merging of housing and industrial issues and the very real threat of unrest emphasised the need for urgent measures to maintain stability. Thus the introduction of a Ministry of Munitions building programme represents, as Pepper and Swenarton suggest, a political response to the crisis, but was clearly seen as a practical necessity rather than a welfare measure¹⁶. However, despite the urgency of the situation, the Ministry successfully reduced the number of houses to be constructed on the grounds of the temporary nature of the demand, the anticipated post-war population fall and the unjustifiable expense. Thus whilst Marwick asserts that change stimulated by participation could be temporary¹⁷, in Barrow, the impetus for reform was particularly short-lived, and following the demise of the Ministry of Munitions, the building programme was abandoned, with 50% of the houses unbuilt. The ability of the Ministry to minimise the crisis in this way, together with the absence of popular protest, undermines arguments that housing reform was provided as a counter to revolution.

In the post-war years, Abrams contends that although the wartime crisis generated both a powerful impetus for reform and created the machinery with which to implement it,

powerful forces worked against reform¹⁸. In Barrow, the number of houses built under the Addison Act of 1919, failed to equal the pre-war building rate, whilst the impact of the 1923 and 1924 Housing Acts was negligible, with the construction of just twelve houses in the Borough between 1923 and 1926. However, arguments which describe the 1919 and 1923 Housing Acts as short term measures to allow the private sector to recover¹⁹, or attribute their failure, for example, to a rejection of financial innovation²⁰ or a clash of interests between local and central government²¹ have no bearing on the situation in Barrow where the financial effects of the depression overrode all other considerations and prohibited any possibility of housing reform.

Consequently living standards failed to improve, and the poor conditions and high levels of overcrowding continued as the depression deepened. Despite continued rent controls, there was again no protection for lodgers or caravan dwellers, and repossessions and evictions continued. This presented a particularly acute problem in Barrow, and although magistrates adopted a humanitarian policy, compelling the new owners to accommodate the outgoing tenant, thus reducing the levels of homelessness and the number of families living in makeshift structures, the problems of overcrowding inevitably increased.

The situation in Vickerstown was somewhat different from the rest of Barrow. The readiness of many tenants to buy their homes in the immediate post-war period reflects both the working class affluence of the war years and the popularity of home ownership. Nevertheless, with the depression, the rapidly mounting rent and mortgage arrears resulted in rising numbers of houses repurchased by the Walney Island Estates Company. In order to avoid a repetition of events on Clydeside, Vickers had adopted discreet, self-protective strategies throughout the period to avoid rent strikes and industrial action. Consequently, employees resident in company houses were given special consideration throughout the depression in the form of favourable terms and priority of employment, not out of humanitarian concerns, but in the interests of stable industrial relations and the solvency of its Estates Company. It appears therefore, that with regard to company housing, the threat of industrial unrest necessitated the adoption of a cautious policy by the employer, until the weakening of the trade unions after the Engineering Dispute of 1922 removed the threat of industrial unrest and enabled Vickers to take an increasingly hard line against its tenants. This was in marked contrast to the humanitarian approach adopted by the magistracy, and also the levels of

toleration displayed by the Corporation, particularly with regards mounting rent and rate arrears and the expanding colonies of makeshift housing.

The Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest of 1917, by holding the Corporation responsible for the appalling conditions and identifying housing as an important contributory factor to levels of unrest, should have represented an important milestone. However, whilst there is some evidence of a change of attitudes, with some councillors readily accepting local authority responsibility for the provision of working class housing, the near bankruptcy of the borough's finances prevented this from becoming a contentious issue. Indeed, the striking feature of living conditions throughout the period was their continuity, and bad conditions and high rents remained a perennial problem. What did change however, were the underlying causes of these conditions, which moved from the disregard of the governing elite, through the pressures of war, and finally, depression and the high rate burden. Significantly however, despite the town's tradition of industrial militancy, housing conditions had never given cause for concern in the pre-war period and there is no evidence to suggest that housing, despite the deteriorating conditions, was considered to be a contributory factor to inter-war unrest. It could be argued that the perceived need of a wartime building programme lends itself to the interpretation of the use of a progressive housing policy as a counterbalance to revolution²². On the other hand, the ease with which the wartime housing crisis was minimised and the building programme abandoned, together with the passive response of the town's inhabitants both before and after the war, suggests that with the exception of company provided housing, the link between housing conditions and social unrest was a tenuous one, long before the depression disarmed the organised labour movement.

Thus, with the exception of the war years, the lives of many Barrovians were characterised by financial hardship and deteriorating living conditions, outstanding for their continuity and with considerable implications for the health of the population. However, the Borough's health trends are distinctive and demonstrate that poor housing and the extraordinarily high levels of unemployment did not result in a deterioration of health. This provides the first indication of significant changes in Barrow during the inter-war years.

In order to illustrate the full significance of the impact of war and depression on health, it is essential to re-appraise established opinion of the high nutritional standards and prevailing good health of the town during the pre-war period. Elizabeth Roberts maintains that the high culinary standards of Barrovian women were a major contributory factor to the town's 'healthier than average population'²³, and that the statistics of the School Medical Officer of Health do not suggest a significant problem of malnutrition²⁴. However, his reports draw attention to the poor nutritional standards evident in a majority of the school children examined, and he had little confidence in either the culinary skills of working class mothers or their understanding of nutrition. This was inevitably reflected in the condition of the children, the height and weight of the majority of those examined being under the national average. The statistics of the town's Chief Medical Officer also reveal nutritional deficiencies amongst the wider population. For example, infant and maternal mortality levels, generally accepted as reliable indicators of underlying levels of ill-health²⁵, were slightly above the national average, whilst the death rates from contagious disease, also closely linked to nutrition, provide more conclusive evidence. Although the national death rate from contagious disease declined over the period and the average is difficult to calculate, Barrow's mortality rate was appreciably higher than the national figure of .99 per thousand in 1910 quoted by Middlesbrough's Chief Medical Officer²⁶.

The health of the borough improved dramatically during the war years, which clearly demonstrates the close correlation between income levels and health. Local health trends support Winter's contention that working class health improved as a result of higher incomes and better diets²⁷, although the effects of purer food and a reduction in the house fly population should not be discounted²⁸. Winter also asserts that as a result of wartime overcrowding and deteriorating housing conditions, TB and other respiratory diseases moved against this trend²⁹, although Bryder points out that other bodies of opinion maintain that nutrition remained an important factor³⁰. However, despite the often appalling living conditions, TB mortality rates in Barrow remained persistently below the national level, and in the period between 1912 and 1926, exceeded it only once. Barrow's death rates from other respiratory diseases were equally favourable and demonstrate that, despite the prevailing conditions in the town, housing conditions were not a major detriment to health.

Of major significance however, was the sustaining of Barrow's wartime health gains during the depression, and mortality levels for both contagious and respiratory diseases continued to fall despite the drastic reductions in incomes, poorer diets and deteriorating living conditions. This apparent anomaly emphasises the importance of the analysis of health trends across the entire period, and inevitably calls into question the validity of local health statistics. This is a particularly pertinent point, given that the population statistics published by the Corporation in the wake of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, 1917, are not an accurate reflection of the numbers resident in the town in the final years of the war. Additionally, Webster and Bryder describe the relationship between health, nutrition and unemployment as increasingly played down throughout the inter-war period³¹, and it is possible therefore, that local statistics reflect an attempt by the local authority to conceal deteriorating health standards, initially in the wake of the Commission of Enquiry of 1917, and later in an effort to down-play the effects of long-term unemployment. Consequently, comparative analysis provides an important means of validation, and Middlesbrough, with its steadily rising (if less severe) unemployment levels, similar relief scales and deteriorating living conditions provides a particularly useful comparator. Additionally, the studies of Elizabeth Roberts and Katherine Nicholas³², which reveal the similarity of working class diets in the two towns, provide a valuable adjunct to this analysis.

As regards Middlesbrough, Nicholas argues that during the 1920s, the unemployed could afford less food and families therefore ate less, and her analysis of the calorific value of these diets is invaluable. She demonstrates that nutrition levels among certain sections of the population were insufficient to sustain good health, and it is reasonable to assume that this analysis is equally applicable to Barrow, given the close similarity of diets and income levels amongst the unemployed. This casts further doubt on the validity of Barrow's published health statistics, particularly as Barrow's official death rate from contagious diseases, with their close relationship to nutrition levels, was significantly lower than in Middlesbrough, despite the comparable living standards of their populations. A large discrepancy is also evident in the death rates from respiratory diseases, particularly TB and pneumonia, and as might be expected, Middlesbrough's Medical Officer attributed these high death rates to unemployment, poverty, overcrowding and inadequate facilities. His Barrow counterpart however, attributed the relatively low incidence of respiratory disease, despite similarly poor housing, to local health initiatives, and indeed, Barrow's facilities for the treatment of TB certainly

surpassed those of Middlesbrough. However, throughout the period, Barrow's vital statistics frequently go against national trends and illustrate levels of good health that are remarkable given the prevailing economic conditions. It is therefore necessary to look beyond incomes and living conditions and examine the impact of war and unemployment on other aspects of life if a satisfactory explanation for these changes, other than the manipulation of the statistics, is to be found.

As part of this wider analysis, an examination of political change provides insights into the ideological undercurrents of the period. Although identified as a strong Labour borough and a model Labour Party constituency by the outbreak of the First World War³³, poor material conditions together with working class enfranchisement failed to bring the anticipated post-war gains for Barrow's Labour Party. Indeed, the wartime growth of Socialist ideology coupled with the extension of the shop stewards' influence within the Party itself, proved particularly divisive and culminated in the loss of the Parliamentary seat in the 1918 General Election. Whilst these divisions turned the attentions of the Labour Party inward and set the pattern for left-wing politics for the rest of the period, it was municipal politics that provided the main arena for the political struggles of these years.

With regard to general municipal trends, the Labour Party's failure to gain control of the Corporation in 1919 was out of step with the wider Labour successes of that year. Although this was achieved the following year, Barrow's Labour Party nevertheless shared the general decline of the party's municipal fortunes between 1920 and 1926. However, whilst Davis and Morley describe unemployment as a major factor in the steady gains of Labour from 1926³⁴, this was not the case in Barrow, where the reversal of the Labour Party's fortunes coincided with record levels of unemployment. Instead, the major influence on local politics in these years was the growth of the radical left and the rallying of forces to oppose them.

The composition of the 1920 council reflects the rapid growth of Barrow's Communist Party, and whilst it is difficult to identify the political persuasion of many councillors, the indicators are that at least five were Communist. Indeed, as in some other close-knit communities, steady Communist gains were not at the expense of the Labour Party³⁵, and the two remained closely affiliated, although the Communist attack on the ILP in 1921 illustrates the severity of the ideological divisions within the Left.

However, a distinctive and significant innovation by this first Labour council was the introduction of direct, face-to-face democracy in an effort to cultivate the trust and confidence of the populace. Equally significant for its continuity throughout the period, this innovation was to be of inestimable value in many aspect of local life, and was particularly important given the increasingly volatile nature of municipal politics. Ironically however, it also provided a yardstick by which to judge the Communist actions of 1921, which, together with the ensuing litigation, created an impression of underhand and illegal left-wing manoeuvrings, which were brought into sharp relief by the new openness of local government.

Simultaneously, the growing strength of the radical Left had stimulated the formation of an early anti-socialist alliance not identified in Davies and Morley's study, but although Labour lost control of the Council in 1921, the Citizen's League made little headway. To this point, the divisive influence of Socialist ideology remained confined to the labour movement and had few implications for municipal politics. Indeed, neither the growth of the Communist Party nor its dramatic schism from the ILP was the source of local political tensions. It was not until Communist control of the Board of Guardians and the economic consequences of the adoption of the National Relief Scale became a distinct possibility that the electorate was politicised. The conflict between ideology and economic reality polarised local politics, and the Citizen's League, distinctive for its ability to recruit from the Labour Party, became a true cross-party alliance intent on blocking the political advance of the far Left and denying them access to the public purse. Consequently, local elections became genuine battles for control.

Davies and Morley describe the polarisation of local politics as expressed in the language of class and manifest in the anti-socialist alliances of the period³⁶. They also describe these alliances as comprised of relatively small groups needing the fiction of non-party politics in the interests of the ratepayer to rally wider support³⁷. Whilst Macintyre agrees left-wing gains could stimulate middle class elites, identifying themselves as moderates, to organise on the same lines as the radicals, he maintains that a tendency towards polarisation did not necessarily reflect class antagonisms. He argues that in some localities, the moderates' definition of community in terms of a shared financial interest, such as that of ratepayer for example, encompassed all, regardless of occupation or social position³⁸. Thus the political polarisation in Barrow at this time is

significant, and the question of the identity of Barrow's competing groups is an important one. However, whether these identities were indicative of class antagonism, or were a defensive response of a mutually dependent community threatened by collapse, cannot be established by politics alone, and requires examination in the wider context of local authority policies and the strategies adopted across the wider community.

For much of the period, left-wing politics continued to be characterised by attacks on Labour Party defectors and appeared to take precedence over the formulation of social policy. Additionally, despite the expulsion of the Communists from the national Labour Party in 1924, the continued close links between Barrow's Communist and Labour Parties, together with Labour's public obsession with its own internal discipline, continued to undermine public confidence and prevented Labour from regaining municipal ascendancy until 1926. However, as Farman contends, Communism had other significant implications for labour politics, and whilst local politics had stabilised by 1926, the gulf between the political and industrial wings of the local labour movement had widened³⁹. Thus apart from re-kindling the antagonisms between local factions and emphasising these divisions, the political impact of the General Strike was limited in Barrow, and whilst the far-left feeling of betrayal reflected the wider animosity of the militants towards the TUC⁴⁰, local unions remained more concerned for their own internal organisation and discipline than long term political objectives⁴¹.

Comparative analysis with other localities emphasises the distinctive nature of Barrow's politics in the post-war transition period, and illustrates the problems of attempts to generalise, even between fundamentally similar localities. In Middlesbrough for example, despite its similar industrial base and growing levels of working class representation on local authority bodies, there was little evidence of militancy, and Labour made no advances until 1927, despite steadily rising unemployment. Similarly in Nelson, despite being described by Hill as reflecting the inevitable rise of Labour and a centre of 'Red' politics due to the fusion of industrial and political conflicts in the late 1920s⁴², the Labour Party were denied control of the council, again until 1927. Additionally, whilst the town experienced a similar rift between the Communist Party and the ILP, Communist influence remained limited in Nelson⁴³, and socialism proved a less destructive force with the result that the town's politics was characterised by a degree of stability altogether lacking in Barrow.

The substantial gains of the far Left in Barrow more closely reflect the political situation in the three 'Little Moscows' of Macintyre's study, although the absence of a typical 'Little Moscow' and considerable variation in levels of representation make direct comparison difficult⁴⁴. For example, whilst the Communists in the Vale of Leven held two wards, success in Lumphinnians and Mardy tended to be greater in the miners' Lodge than in local politics. Additionally in these two localities, Communist municipal gains have been attributed to the personality of individuals and the absence of a Labour candidate of equal stature⁴⁵, a position somewhat at odds with the Barrow situation and the apparently seamless relationship between the two parties. However, whilst Barrow's Communists were excluded from the Board of Guardians and were denied control of the Corporation, they were nevertheless strongly represented on the latter, and of the three localities examined by Macintyre, only in Lumphinnians were the Communist and Labour Parties in the majority, controlling the Board of Guardians between 1922 and 1926. It can be argued that although Communism proved to be a divisive force in Barrow, the radical Left were as strong and influential as in these localities, and the combined strength of the other contenders was necessary to contain its growth. A further important characteristic Barrow shared with the 'Little Moscows' of the period was the introduction of public, face-to-face democracy, and as in Macintyre's examples, elected representatives were seen as directly responsible to their electorate⁴⁶. The new openness of local government was to have significant implications for many other aspects of community life throughout the period.

The local authority's response to mass unemployment demonstrates the importance of this innovation, and helps establish the nature of the communal identity that emerged in Barrow during these years. As a result of the accumulative effects of long-term unemployment, the Corporation faced severe financial difficulties, income from domestic and industrial rates being drastically reduced as rateable values plummeted and the numbers with rent and rate arrears mounted. The situation was compounded by the Corporation's attempt to provide the customary relief work schemes, which inevitably proved ineffective and substantially increased the borough's long-term debts, and ultimately they were abandoned.

Although budgetary cuts were introduced in an attempt to reduce the deficit, the Corporation did much to relieve the condition of the unemployed. Despite there being a

moderate majority on the Corporation, the strategies adopted represent a radical departure from the nineteenth century attitudes prevalent in the pre-war period, and were comparable to those in 'progressive' Nelson. The provision of free school meals for necessitous schoolchildren and permits to enable the unemployed to cross Walney Bridge were particularly significant, and although they placed the local authority budget under considerable strain, they made a crucial contribution to the health and the stability of the town. Equally significant however, was the discussion and planning of public policy at open meetings, particularly discussions about the recovery of arrears, and the efforts to co-ordinate and maximise the benefits of free school meals and local charity. The unparalleled success of these measures owes much to the newly instigated public democracy, through which the new ethos surrounding relief was clearly evident. The emphasis given to the immorality of concealing poverty played a crucial role in both the identification of need and the increasing willingness of the destitute to accept aid, and in keeping with the Little Moscows of the period, reflects a radical change in attitudes towards relief.

However, it was on the Boards of Guardians that the most crucial battles of the period were to be fought⁴⁷. A moderate Board in a volatile political climate, the Barrow Board faced a severe economic crisis and was caught between the pressures of a strong and well-organised labour movement and the government. As in many depressed areas, the Board had reduced scales twice by 1922, but the combination of Ministry of Health pressure, high unemployment and its crippling financial burden brought the situation to a head. However, whilst the crisis and issues were typical, the response was not.

The Ministry refusal of further assistance represents an opportunist attack, carefully timed to take advantage of the Moderate Board and the severe financial crisis and force a reduction in relief scales. However, whilst the Ministry believed the Board, on the brink of bankruptcy, had no option but to comply, the Board instead resigned en masse. The full significance of the response of the Barrow Guardians is demonstrated by a comparison with other Boards. At one extreme, Middlesbrough provides an example of a Union which offered no resistance to Ministry demands, and its capitulation was complete by 1922⁴⁸. As a consequence, Turner describes relief scales as reflecting Ministry dictates rather than a response to local levels of need, the effects of which, it can be argued, contributed to the poor health of that town. However, despite the Barrow Board's resistance, its members were in no way characterised by radicalism, and would

never have opted for prison like the militant Poplar Board⁴⁹. Instead, by seeing resignation as their only option, this moderate Board unwittingly stumbled across an effective weapon, and their position of rebellion by default rapidly developed into a shrewd policy of open defiance, which fully exploited Ministry weakness. Thus this moderate Board was perceived as being particularly dangerous by the Ministry of Health, whilst its stringent administration and modest relief scales prevented a Ministry counter-attack. Thus in addition to illustrating the need to assess the work of Boards of Guardians on more than relief scales alone, this study of the Barrow Union has demonstrated that defiance was not confined to left-wing Boards.

An important aspect of this struggle was the response of a vast array of disparate local organisations. This was a particularly significant aspect of Barrow's inter-war experience in that, although the prime concern of these organisations was to protect their own interests, this did not generate frictions between them. Instead, their attentions were focused on the Board of Guardians, who succeeded in co-ordinating this pressure, and directing it towards the government. This returns to the debate on the question of the identity of these competing groups, particularly given the intense political divisions of the period. Although it is possible to interpret Barrow's political polarisation as the product of class conflict between the unemployed and the ratepayers⁵⁰, this view is too simplistic, particularly given that the majority of Barrow's working classes had become ratepayers, and a large proportion of them were unemployed. A more feasible interpretation, given Barrow's geographic isolation and dependency on a single industry, is that high unemployment served instead to emphasise the inter-dependency of the community.

Thus rather than class conflict, the overwhelming impression is one of solidarity, local tensions being co-ordinated and directed towards a common threat, in this case, the government. Furthermore, this solidarity was to gradually broaden and gain momentum throughout the period, and there is little doubt that this united effort, which ultimately combined the Unemployed Workers Movement, the Ratepayers' Association, local banks, the Chamber of Trade and the Directors of Vickers among many others, played an important part in forcing the Ministry to moderate its demands, particularly regarding the loans repayment issue. Furthermore, the praise of the Trades Council for the efforts of the Board of Guardians in those critical years provides irrefutable evidence that class

conflict was minimal, and points instead towards the existence of a common communal identity and shared struggle.

Local authority policies and poor relief have considerable bearing on the question of whether Barrow can be classified as a Little Moscow, and Barrow demonstrates several key characteristics of such localities. As demonstrated, a significant feature of local government in these years was the introduction of direct, fact-to-face democracy⁵¹. Indeed, the importance of public debate and decision making cannot be overestimated during this period when political upheaval coincided with unemployment running at 73%, the near bankruptcy of the Guardians and the distinct possibility of the suspension of out-relief payments. Crucially, the effect of this public democracy was to underscore the legitimacy, and therefore the authority, of both the Barrow Board and the Corporation, and was a major factor in maintaining social stability at a time of considerable tension and uncertainty. It can be argued that it also had a significant influence on voting patterns. Election results indicate that through the Board's public defiance of the government and its ability to balance the needs of the ratepayer and the destitute, the threatened community perceived the moderates rather than the radicals as offering the best form of defence. Thus local conditions proved more influential than political persuasion in Barrow, and in addition to the strong conviction that the unemployed were entitled to a sufficient level of maintenance, there was no distinction made between the deserving and undeserving unemployed⁵². However, whilst Macintyre describes most localities as having little chance of influencing central authority⁵³, Barrow is among the minority that achieved some success in this.

The impact and responses to the depression across the wider community were equally profound but were not without tensions. Industrial relations were particularly volatile and described as being brought to an all time low in the war years, as Vickers exploited the Munitions Act to the full⁵⁴. Whilst the war strengthened the local shop stewards movement, interpretations of the extent of their powers vary considerably⁵⁵.

Nevertheless, as in many industrial centres, although the movement collapsed after the war, the shop stewards' influence was transferred from the workplace to politics and the wider community⁵⁶, and in Barrow had a significant influence on the policies and composition of the Labour Party. They were also a major force in the founding of Barrow's Communist Party and Unemployed Workers Movement, and therefore were of considerable importance during the inter-war period.

Whilst it has been argued that the intense class conflict between 1918 and 1921 confirmed pre-war fears about the power of the organised labour movement⁵⁷, the new revolutionary connotations of post-war disputes and state control of key industries ensured a turbulent transition period⁵⁸. However, whilst the 1921 and 1926 miners' disputes were of major importance nationally, the 1922 Engineering Strike was the most serious industrial dispute in Barrow during the 1920s. When the shipbuilding and engineering unions' stand in opposition to the employers' aggressive reassertion of their prerogatives is placed in its context of political turmoil, extraordinarily high unemployment, the devastating effect on the local economy and the imminent bankruptcy of the Board of Guardians, the primacy of this dispute becomes evident⁵⁹.

Whilst in some areas there were frictions between the UWM and the trade unions⁶⁰, this dispute provides an example of solidarity between these organisations⁶¹, together with remarkable levels of trade union discipline and loyalty. Nevertheless, there were considerable tensions between union members supporting the strike and those wanting to return to work, accompanied by a strong undercurrent of violence which ran through the community and erupted into the worst civil disturbances in the town's history. The strike ultimately accelerated the post-war trend of falling trade union membership and the depletion of their funds, and was to have long term implications, severely weakening the unions, which were able to make only a limited recovery by 1926.

Thus as Cronin argues, by 1926 a stable pattern had emerged⁶². However, whilst the 1922 Engineering Strike involved the defence of the town's staple industry and the livelihood of thousands, the issues of the General Strike had little significance locally. Although support for the strike was solid, the large, militant shipbuilding and engineering unions were confined to the short-lived second wave, and thus, unlike 1922, the effects were significantly curtailed. Additionally, there was no wish to jeopardise the town's limited recovery and risk a return to the hardships and uncertainties of 1922, and thus the majority hoped to avoid a protracted struggle. Consequently, the overwhelming reaction in the town to the decision to call off the strike was one of relief, and the sense of betrayal appeared largely confined to the radical left.

However, the true significance of the General Strike in Barrow lies in the preparations of the Corporation, which, as had become the norm, were debated and planned in the

public domain. In addition to providing another significant example of the value of public democracy in underscoring the legitimacy and authority of the Corporation and maintaining the confidence and trust of the people, it also provides further vital insights into the social attitudes of the period. Whilst it had been argued that many of those recruited to the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies were motivated by class instinct⁶³, and the General Strike has been described as the crucial test by which the balance of class forces was established⁶⁴, the situation in Barrow was particularly distinctive. In addition to the Councillors' declaration of their own neutrality, the invitation for trade union representatives to sit on the local OMS committee provides firm evidence of social co-operation rather than conflict in the town, tensions and divisions being largely confined to the organised labour movement.

Moving beyond the labour movement and looking at Vickers from a management perspective, there is also evidence of considerable change. The attention paid to peace products in Barrow appeared minimal, leaving post-war planning woefully inadequate⁶⁵, and thus the Barrow yard struggled to compete in the harsh inter-war financial climate. In this sense, the Barrow yard does not appear to share the progressive qualities of the Vickers group described by Scott, certainly up to 1923. Nevertheless, there is evidence of significant changes, particularly the struggle for control among senior management, which heralded a new era in shipyard management. The old autocratic management of the pre-war period was superseded, with concern for the welfare of the workforce gradually becoming more evident, and whilst staff hierarchies and salary structures were rationalised, more significantly, the abuse of management privilege had become unacceptable and indefensible in the inter-war economic climate.

Another important local organisation, Barrow's Co-operative Society was an integral part of the local community, but struggled to reconcile the interests of worker and consumer⁶⁶. Although the strategies adopted during the period were innovative and diverse, they supported the interests of the consumer and the Society's own economic survival at the expense of employees. However, although Griffiths asserts that attachment to working class institutions such as the Co-op was inspired more by financial return than ideals of mutuality⁶⁷, membership levels of the Barrow Society showed remarkable resilience despite the adoption of sometimes unpopular strategies and the high rate of migration from the area. Thus it can be concluded that, although sometimes unpopular, the strategies adopted to weather the depression engendered a

considerable degree of confidence and loyalty among the Society's members and employees.

Finally, an examination of changing social attitudes and methods of self-sufficiency provide important insights into the impact of war and depression. In pre-war Barrow, although there is evidence that for some people the concepts of poverty and respectability were not mutually exclusive terms, social perceptions generally reflected those described in the historiography of the period. For many, the working classes were characterised by drunkenness, degeneracy and violence, with areas of the town designated 'rough' according to the habits or occupational status of their residents. In addition to failing to undermine these stereotypical images, middle class antagonisms were fuelled by working class affluence and the inequality of sacrifice⁶⁸.

The continuity of the occupational structure and established residential patterns, together with limited change within the workplace would suggest the stimulus for change was restricted, and even the 1917 Report of the Commission of Enquiry and its damning indictment of the Corporation, although providing a severe blow to civic pride, failed to radicalise the electorate. Nevertheless, the old stereotypical images disappeared from public discourse during the 1920s and social attitudes underwent a marked transformation, and an examination of changing support strategies provides considerable insights into these changes. Inevitably, traditional methods of working class self-sufficiency proved totally inadequate given the scale of unemployment, and support from the relief funds of organisations such as the Co-op and the trade unions was rapidly exhausted. Additionally, although neighbourhood networks were active and the town's geographic location offered considerable scope for foraging⁶⁹, the natural environment would have provided little support for the families of up to 20,000 men, and it is reasonable to assume that these two long established means of support could offer only limited relief. Additionally, the widespread use of credit created debts for consumers and shopkeepers alike, and although providing evidence of mutual support, amounted to a short-term expedient with serious long-term financial implications.

However, whilst the more traditional support strategies had proved inadequate, they were supplemented by highly successful innovations, the most significant working class response to unemployment being the innovative and highly successful strategies of the UWM. The combination of having nothing to lose and heavily outnumbering the police

enabled them to take direct action with impunity, but significantly, not all their tactics were oppositional. For example, unlike most branches, they sought permission to tender for relief work contracts rather than sabotage them⁷⁰, and the highly successful fish initiative was an important benefit to the destitute and was seen by many as their finest achievement.

There is little evidence of isolation and passivity amongst Barrow's unemployed, and as in 'Little Moscows', it can be argued that a strong sense of morality underpinned direct action and the defiance of authority. However, whilst the activities of the UWM were not universally approved in the town, it is significant that despite their disapproval of the UWM, some were nevertheless prepared to take direct action themselves, particularly against evictions. This is an important aspect of changing local attitudes and indicates that, as in 'Little Moscows', direct action and the challenge to legitimate authority in defence of what were considered to be basic human rights, was considered legitimate by moderates and radicals alike⁷¹.

However, whilst the defiance of authority was not confined to 'Little Moscows', Macintyre argues that these radical communities were distinctive in that this defiance infused the lower ranks of that authority⁷². Barrow has significant examples of this. Local magistrates for example, in addition to adopting a liberal and humanitarian interpretation of the law, particularly regarding evictions, also sent a deputation to Whitehall to press for a change in that law. The Corporation too, took a defiant stance on key issues, particularly regarding loan repayments, their attempts to increase the rate of pay for relief works schemes and the tolerant approach to those with rent and rates arrears. And the defiance of the Board of Guardians was exceptional. These activities, together with the open and public debate of public policy, bolstered the legitimacy and authority of the Corporation and Board of Guardians and points to the existence of a particularly high level of consciousness in the town.

Whilst local strategies reveal much about social attitudes, it is difficult to pinpoint when they began to change, but the crisis of 1922 represents an important turning point. Whilst the unemployed were highly visible, the potent imagery created sympathy rather than hostility, and no evidence has come to light to suggest they were regarded as scroungers or that a distinction was made between the deserving and undeserving unemployed⁷³. Indeed, unemployment had a profound levelling effect on both the

hierarchies of skill within the working class, and also the differentials between them and the hard-pressed lower-middle classes. Thus it can be argued that whilst in some areas white collar workers have been described as standing outside and in opposition to the labour movement⁷⁴, the close residential proximity of these social groups in Barrow, together with their common struggles and uncertainties, created a much closer relationship. This is further supported by the wide variety of groups and organisations involved in both charity and the wider struggles of the period, and illustrates the extent to which the community was prepared to work together.

That is not to suggest however, that social and institutional relationships were without frictions. Whilst significant levels of antagonism between the middle and working classes have been identified at a national level, in the local context the only evidence of class conflict appears to have been between the lower and upper middle classes. However, there were considerable tensions between various groups and organisations. For example, in addition to the divisive political impact of left-wing ideology, the various local authority bodies and committees jealously guarded their own spheres of influence. There were also considerable frictions within the labour movement, many of which were centred on the AEU, which was at odds with other unions, its own rank and file and also the local Co-operative Society, the Co-op's inability to support the trade unions in 1922 inhibiting closer liaison between the two movements⁷⁵. Indeed, the civil unrest of 1922 illustrates the severity of local tensions and the inflammatory combination of industrial relations, political tensions and economic hardship.

Nevertheless, the level of solidarity that evolved in the town during these years was outstanding. The success of UWM initiatives and the desperate situation of the town attracted influential and respected moderates to their ranks. In addition to further bolstering the legitimacy of the organisation, the broadening base of its membership further demonstrates that shared hardships and a common struggle created a strong sense of unity and purpose within the community. It can be argued that a shared economic threat stimulated the development of a cohesive communal identity, and the actions of the Board of Guardians in particular demonstrate that Barrow shared the tendency of radical communities to unite behind those best able to defend them against a common enemy.

Thus the levels of stability and order were remarkable and demonstrate the degree of cohesion within Barrow society at this time, in addition to which Barrow has significant similarities with 'Little Moscows'. The people of the town never surrendered to their condition, and as a result of the rejection of the stigma attached to poor relief and solidarity in support of their workless, morale remained much higher than in many other hard-pressed localities. In addition to the strength of the radical Left, another important characteristic was the democratic thread that ran through these communities, the adoption of open and collective decision making, and a willingness to challenge authority in defence of basic rights which infused the local authorities themselves. Finally, Macintyre argues that the attempt to enact a socialist lifestyle through fellowship, co-operation and mutual support is a major defining characteristic of such communities. However, given the exclusion of the radical Left and Moderate control of local authority bodies, this might appear unlikely in Barrow. On the other hand, a majority of Barrow's Moderates were in fact Labour Party defectors and the original left-wing of the town's militant labour movement. It can therefore be argued that these Moderates did not abandon their socialist ideals when they left the Labour Party. Certainly, the forces of anti-Communism were not the forces of working class oppression in Barrow.

The radical metamorphosis which took place in Barrow during these years is further emphasised by comparison with Middlesbrough, which despite its similar social structure and industrial base, was the political antithesis of Barrow. Middlesbrough's lack of militancy was evident throughout the community, from the labour movement to the local authorities, and the absence of a determination to fight was evident in the passive response to Ministry of Health dictates and the increasingly impoverished conditions of the unemployed. This was clearly reflected in the poor health of the Borough, which contrasts dramatically with the position in Barrow. Indeed, the good health of the Borough throughout the 1920s can be seen as the tangible result of the policies of the Corporation and the Board of Guardians. These, together with the success of charity, the strategies of the Co-op and the work of the UWM, combined to supplement basic incomes and were sufficient to sustain the health improvements of the war years.

To summarise the changes in Barrow between 1914 and 1926, despite perennially poor housing conditions and little change to the occupational structure, the town nevertheless

experienced radical change, social attitudes in the Barrow of 1926 being far removed from those of 1914. The impact of war was confined to an intensification of the housing problem alongside a temporary boost to the incomes of much of the working class, which was reflected in new consumption patterns. But whilst this affluence proved transient, the considerable health gains of the war were sustained throughout the depressed years of the 1920s. Indeed, although the war had fuelled antagonisms within the middle class, the depression had the greater and more far reaching impact, and the 1920s were characterised by the evolution of reciprocal relationships and a common identity based on a shared struggle rather than class conflict.

Barrow's outstanding achievements – political and social stability, its stand against the government, the degree of social cohesion and co-operation, and particularly the evolution of the town's extraordinary mentality, place Barrow firmly among the ranks of the 'Little Moscows' of the period. However, these developments go beyond abstract concepts and academic debate, and as the health trends demonstrate, resulted in tangible benefits for the population, a quantifiable reality that enables the direct comparison with other localities. In addition to illustrating the distinctive nature of Barrow's post-war experiences, this case-study provides important insights and contributes to the better understanding of the impact of war and mass unemployment on the economy and social dynamics of a single industry town.

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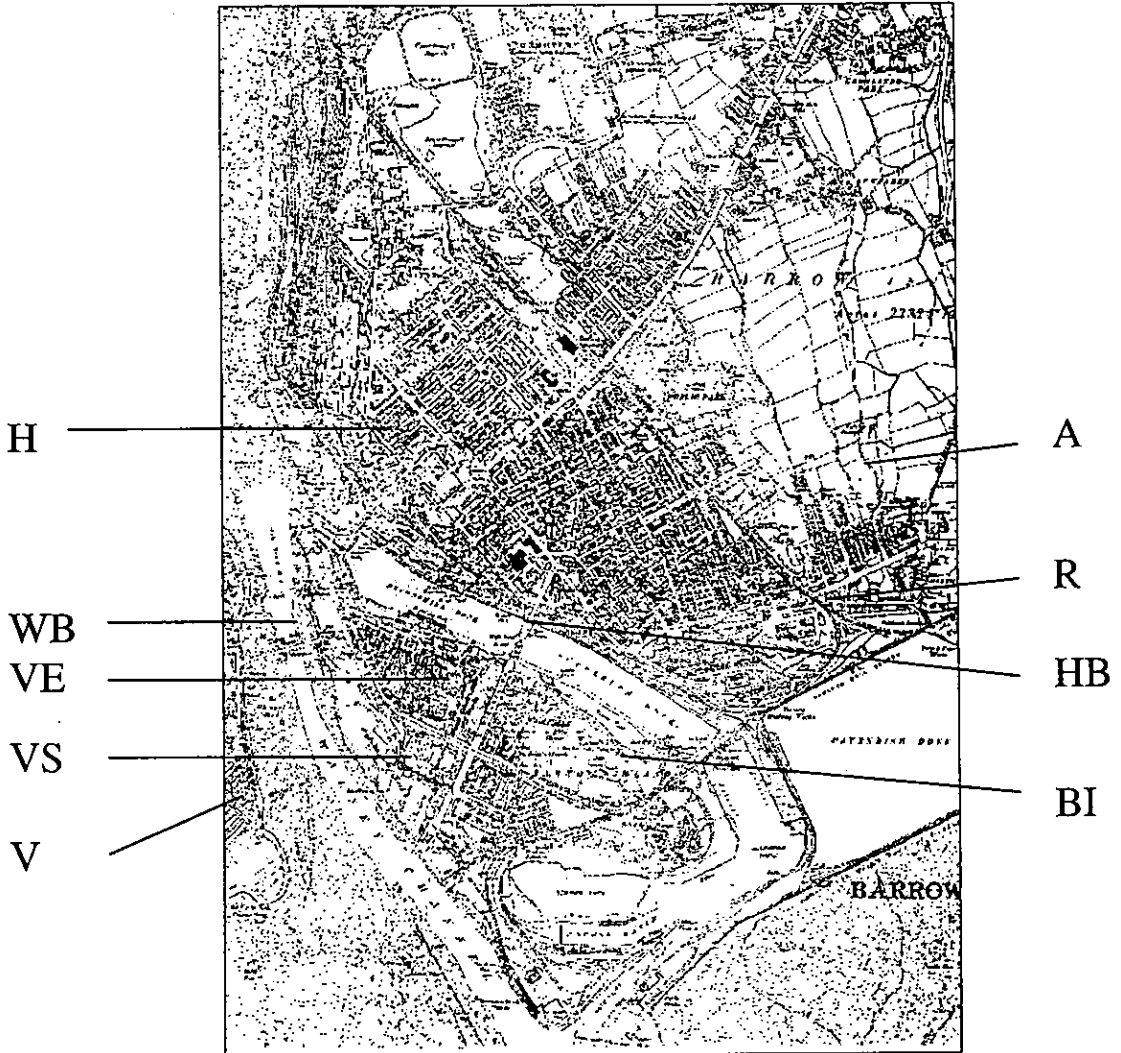
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APPENDIX ONE

BARROW-IN-FURNESS 1916



Source: Ordnance Survey, Lancashire Sheet XXI N.E.
Approximate scale: 3 inches to 1 mile

KEY

- A Site of Abbotsmead estate
- BI Barrow Island
- H Hindpool
- HB High Level Bridge
- R Site of Roosecote estate
- V Vickerstown
- VE Vickers Engineering Works
- VS Vickers Shipbuilding
- WB Walney Bridge

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